
Literature and insights Editorial

Editorial

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What is your perspective?

To state the obvious, commerce is value-ridden. Different stakeholders decide what comprises the most desirable ethics of a business organisation according to their own interests. For instance, we might look at dredging that is intended to deepen a mining-related shipping port. There would be competing expectations and hopes regarding any plan to dump the resulting sludge onto or near Australia's Great Barrier Reef, a natural wonder already suffering enormous stress. Would the plan be good or bad?

Maybe you already think that I have presented a skewed picture, trying to tip you towards a particular point of view. That depends on your perspective, does not it?

Such dumping is presumably good for the company that has been authorised to pollute in this way (there is a value term already) given that it externalises or, at least, reduces a major cost (and there is another one). It also means that bigger ships can take away the mine's output, increasing operational efficiency. More profit means it is good for the company's shareholders too. The dumping is good for employees who might otherwise have no jobs, and workers' unions could come out on the side of mining activities if employment and union membership increases, despite degradation of the environment. Politicians might be happy with being able to report higher levels of employment and industrial activity.

On the other side, it is bad from the point of view of those with concerns for the environment. You saw that one coming. Some would say that it is bad if the increased profits flow overseas rather than being used for the benefit of the country where the dumping occurs: a kind of "you can have my pollution and I can have the money" deal. Maybe it is seen as bad, too, for those who scrutinise government and quasi-government organisations and hope for more transparent and responsible decision processes. Others will say it is bad if one thinks that the very authority charged with caring for the Great Barrier Reef would approve such action, and without apparent accountability except to public opinion, which may count for nought in the end.

We all watch from different places and with different sets of standards, sometimes competing ones that require hard decisions and even compromise. It is a mixed, ongoing churn of varying perspectives, some less noble than others, and one aspect can dominate for a while before being subsumed in another or overturned. Mostly, it seems, profit wins, and that means the dominance of accruing monetary wealth.

This sense of competition is clear in Ifeoluwa Tobi Popoola's timely "Unethical Pro-Organisational Behaviour", a poem about conflict between the interests of employees' and external stakeholders. Social benefit is at the centre of the argument depicted in this piece.

Accountability is not just about numbers. In her very lyrical poem, "Praise poem [...] in praise of an accountant", Lelys Maddock respects the importance of information and those who keep it for others, its place and usefulness in a community. At its heart is a revolving group of questions about the ethics of a people and how choices that they make so dramatically affect the lives of others.

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