Giving Voices to Values:  
Responsible Management as Facilitation of Ethical Voice

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Carsten Tams and Mary C. Gentile

Abstract

This paper uses the Giving Voice to Values (GVV) methodology as a lens to specify what responsible management means as it relates to managing for organizational ethics. We start by specifying three assumptions at the heart of GVV about the role of stakeholders in organizational governance. GVV emphasizes, first, that people are more than risk factors; they are moral agents who can contribute to organizational governance. Second, GVV is based on the premise that most people struggle less with reasoning about right and wrong and more with translating ethical insights into transformative action. Thirdly, GVV is based on the premise that organizational governance improves as a shared, reciprocal practice, where stakeholders at all levels can exert ethical influence in any direction.

Next, we discuss three implications of these assumptions for the practice of managing for ethics. First, we define the central problem of managing for ethics as harnessing stakeholders’ moral agency. Second, we argue that responsible managers structure governance as a shared and co-creative process that invites broad stakeholder participation. Third, we propose that managers’ distinct role in this process is that of a platform manager; rather than producing and enforcing shared values, they cultivate the infrastructure (deliberative forums, norms, skills) stakeholders need to contribute to the production and maintenance of shared values.

The chapter concludes with suggestions for developing the theory of responsible management, for empirically testing the link between stakeholder voice and organizations’ ethical performance, and driving innovation in the field of ethics management through evidence-based management practices.

Keywords: co-creation, ethics management, Giving Voice to Values, moral agency, platform management, responsible management, shared leadership
1. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is conceptual in nature. We consider the meaning of responsible management through the lens of the Giving Voice to Values framework (GVV; Gentile, 2010). Among the three domains of responsible management – sustainability, responsibility, and ethics (SRE) – we will focus our attention on the latter (although the GVV approach is relevant for all three). We ask: What does the practice of managing for organizational ethics look like using GVV as a conceptual lens?

GVV is a methodology that supports individuals in affirming their values effectively. It is not a management theory as such. At its core, however, are three assumptions, discussed in the second section, that represent pivots from assumptions commonly encountered in the theory and practice of organizational ethics. These are assumptions about the role of stakeholders in organizational ethics. First, GVV pivots from a deficit-based view of stakeholders to a strength-based perspective. Stakeholders are viewed as moral agent, rather than compliance risks. Second, organizational ethics is not simply the result of sound judgement about right and wrong. Ethics cannot arise unless sound judgement translates into sound action. Third, GVV rejects the view that describes ethical influencing as a linear trickle-down process. Ethical influence is better understood as a distributed and reciprocal practice.

As the third section discusses, these three heuristic pivots are consequential for the practice of managing organizational ethics. First, the problem at the center of managing for ethics is flipped on its head. Rather than constraining delinquency, the focus of ethics management shifts to supporting and harnessing the stock of moral agency that is distributed across organizational constituents. Second, to strengthen the ethical resilience of their organizations, managers structure the governance process as a shared and co-creative influencing practice. Managers encourage ethical influence to originate from any level and to flow in any direction, resulting in a denser network of reciprocal ethical influence. They open the entire governance value chain to stakeholder participation. Lastly, the proposed pivots redirect managers’ activities. Where before they devised mechanisms for constraining malfeasance (rules, monitoring, sanctions), managers’ new role is to provide platforms that expand stakeholders’ opportunities for normative voice. They do so by providing forums, norms, and skills for giving voice to values. Managers’ fundamental modus operandi vis-à-vis to stakeholders is supportive in nature.

Our discussion contributes to the responsible management construct in two ways. Laasch (2018) proposed that responsible management moves the unit of analysis from the organizational, enterprise level to the level of ‘normal’ managers. While our propositions have strong implications for managers of governance functions at the organizational level, we seek to illuminate how line managers at any level contribute to organizational ethics by facilitating normative deliberation as part of their daily management practice. Secondly, Laasch and Conaway (2015) argue that responsible management requires competences distinct to those associated with mainstream management practices. Building on this argument, this chapter specifies distinct competences responsible managers need for managing ethics.

2. Giving Voice to Values: a primer

Invariably, people encounter values conflicts in their work lives, situations where one’s own values conflict with the expectations of by bosses, peers, clients, or shareholders. We may find ourselves in situations where

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1 When using the term “stakeholder” in this chapter, we often have employees in mind. The applicability of our propositions is, however, not limited to employees, but can often be extended to any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives (Freeman 1984). We sometimes use the term “constituent” interchangeably.
something that is said or done stands in contrast to what we believe to be good and right. We may witness a colleague lie to a customer, put workers’ safety at risk by ignoring safety protocols, or make a discriminatory comment about a co-worker. Whether we are directly affected or simply observe such behavior as a bystander, these situations put our convictions to the test. Giving voice to our values in these situations can appear daunting, in particular when we feel pressured to do the opposite. Do we possess the skills and the confidence to affirm our values skillfully and effectively? Or does the situation leave us dumbfounded, overwhelmed, silent?

GVV seeks to raise the odds that people choose voice over silence by providing a methodology they can use to hone the skills they need to affirm their values effectively, even under pressure. GVV is not about persuading people what their ethical choice should be. Rather, it starts from the premise that, often, people intuitively can recognize observed behavior as problematic and genuinely want to do something about it. The path forward, however, can seem mired in obstacles. What people often experience as challenging in these situations is not distinguishing right from wrong; it is how to act, skillfully and effectively, when they know what is right and what is wrong.

GVV’s pedagogy interweaves reflection and action in the pursuit of a transformative intent. At the center of its pedagogy is reflecting about, strategizing, and rehearsing how we can voice our values under adverse circumstances. “Voice” in this context is a metaphor for a variety of communicative actions – verbal expressions of ethically-based positions, but also written statements. As part of the GVV curriculum, participants bolster their capacity to address values conflicts by envisioning in advance diverse scenarios where their values might come under pressure, imagining how the discussion might unfold, and pre-scripting and rehearsing what they might say – out loud – to shape the course of the conversation. GVV involves developing effective arguments, by gathering overlooked data and presenting it compellingly. Affirming values effectively involves anticipating rationalizations and objections and crafting effective responses. It requires framing issues so as to better capture listeners’ attention, minimize the risks they may experience if they entertain a new proposition, and allow listeners to hear without feeling shamed or disrespected. Giving voice to values requires ensuring that different perspectives are included in a deliberative process, identifying and enlisting allies, and working through others who may have more credibility, expertise or formal authority.

The purpose of such a practice is to re-wire the emotion-driven reflex (Haidt, 2001) we experience when encountering a values conflict and to habituate skillful affirmation of our own values. Through repeated enactment, learners can consolidate a repertoire of behavioral strategies into their long-term memory. Then, when confronted with a real-life values conflict, coming up with an effective response strategy will demand less cognitive effort, reducing the risk that people feel overwhelmed by anxiety and stall. Carrying a few tested response strategies in one’s quiver frees up cognitive capacity and allows a person to be actively present as a challenging situation unfolds.

GVV builds on the conviction that both individuals and organizations benefit as people’s capabilities to give voice to their values expand (Morrison, 2014). Whether people address values conflicts they encounter can have a significant bearing on their well-being. Failure to address and resolve such conflicts can result in dissatisfaction, stress, lack of focus, cynicism, or reduced productivity. On the flipside, being able to give voice to one’s concerns can have beneficial effects, such as sense of control and feeling that one is valued. Voice also promotes positive organizational outcomes. Voice is associated with improved work processes, learning, innovation, or the curtailment of illegal or immoral behavior. A culture of employee silence, on the contrary, is frequently implicated as a primary contributor to large-scale organizational failures.
3. Reframing stakeholders’ role in organizational ethics

GVV challenges three assumptions about the role of stakeholders in the production of organizational ethics commonly expressed or implied in theories and practices of organizational governance. GVV construes people and their moral agency as valuable governance resources rather than as risk factors. Rather than focusing only on stakeholders’ capacity for ethical reasoning, GVV emphasizes the importance of translating ethical insights into transformative action. Instead of describing ethical influence as a hierarchical trickle-down process, GVV asserts that governance is improved when ethical influence can originate from any stakeholder and flow in any direction. In the following three sections, we will develop each of these propositions.

3.1. From people as risk factors to people as moral agents

GVV’s first pivot is an anthropological one. Within theory and practice of organizational governance, people are frequently viewed through a deficit lens and construed as risk factors (Miller, 2012). Attention is focused on delinquency. This bias towards deviance has a long tradition in governance thought. In the seventeenth century, Thomas Hobbes argued that people are unable to govern themselves, due to their selfish nature. People could only co-exist peacefully if they surrender their sovereignty to an all-powerful governing authority, the Leviathan, who sets and enforces the law (Hobbes, 2017). Agency theory (Jensen & Meckling, 1976), the dominant theory of corporate governance today, starts with the assumption that managers are selfish utility maximizers who will abuse the discretion delegated to them by shareholders when the latter cannot fully observe managers’ behavior. The primary remedies proposed for mitigating this problem include enhanced monitoring and financial incentives. The literature on behavioral ethics demonstrates a similar delinquency bias, as it is primarily preoccupied with revealing the many ways in which biases lead otherwise good people to behave unethically (Prentice, 2014). This deficit framing has programmatic consequences. If we view stakeholders simply as risk factors, without a capacity for self-governance, then we need to subject them to an authority that constrains their deviant tendencies. Indeed, many of the governance practices that regulatory frameworks prescribe and organizations implement aim at inhibiting wrongdoing. Examples of such practices include prohibitive norms, instructions, monitoring, or sanctions (e.g., U.S. Sentencing Commission, Guidelines Manual, 2018).

GVV, by contrast, assumes a strength-based perspective of actors. It views stakeholders as moral agents (Bandura, 2002, 2006). Moral agency refers to people’s capacity to monitor their conduct, judge it in relation to their personal identity and moral standards, and regulate their behavior through self-sanctions. People can refrain from violating their moral standards because such conduct would bring personal distress and self-condemnation. Acting in accordance with one’s moral standards gives people satisfaction and a sense of self-worth. Moral agents commit themselves to social obligations and virtuous causes, they consider the moral implications of the choices they face, and they accept some measure of responsibility for the choices they make. Moral agency is not exhausted by the mere observance of rules. It has a dual aspect. The inhibitive aspect of moral agency is expressed in the power to refrain from harmful acts (as reflected in the Hippocratic Oath taken by physicians – first, do no harm). The second aspect of moral agency is promotive. It refers to people’s ability to enact prosocial behavior.

Affirming one’s values is an elemental manifestation of promotive moral agency. GVV provides a hands-on methodology to support individuals in actualizing their capacity for moral agency more fully. Voicing values can take many forms and occur along the full spectrum of the governance process. A person may voice concerns about risks involved in business practices, propose changes to the organization’s policies, inject ethical considerations into decision-making processes, or express dissent in response to problematic business proposals. A person may express encouragement, support, or praise to others engaging in moral agency. A person may escalate a concern about unethical behavior to a supervisor or someone in the Ethics & Compliance function. All these voicing behaviors are different facets of promotive moral agency.
GVV does not deny that human beings can be susceptible to selfish, biased or otherwise fallible behavior. It does, however, insist that most people have values and are inclined to act on them if they feel they have a choice. Most of us can think of times when we acted in accordance with our values or when we objected to others about behavior that contradicted our values. Many of us can also recall instances when we behaved in ways that compromised our personal values or when we failed to defend our values. GVV asserts that the option to act on our values exists. We have the power to choose. GVV strengthens the confidence in our ability to choose voice over silence through the process of pre-scripting, action planning, rehearsal, and peer coaching.

3.2. From ethics as reasoning to ethics as action

GVV’s second pivot emphasizes the role of action in producing ethical outcomes. Ethics education often challenges learners to reason about and choose between right and wrong. This focus on ethical reasoning has a long and illustrious tradition. The history of moral philosophy is, in large part, a preoccupation with moral reasoning (Gewirth, 1978; Nielsen, 1988). Two dominant strains of moral philosophy, utilitarianism and deontology, are both concerned with developing criteria for determining right and wrong choices. Across colleges and business schools, it is popular to begin ethics courses by describing a famous ethical dilemma, the so-called “Trolley Problem,” and inviting students to determine the most ethical option. Similarly, employees participating in ethics training will often find themselves confronted with hypothetical scenarios where an ethical choice must be made. In all these cases, the problem of ethics is construed mainly as issue spotting. Often, however, people intuitively recognize observed behavior as problematic without difficulty. They witness how a co-worker inflates an invoice to a client, offers a bribe to a buyer, inappropriately touches a colleague, or hires an unqualified relative over more qualified applicants. Often, issue spotting is not the problem. Rather, they struggle with responding in an effective manner. The challenge of translating ethical insights into action is often far from trivial and can feel debilitating. People may wonder if they will be believed if they speak up or fear retaliation. Often this calculus occurs automatically via “pre-emptive rationalization”, as an emotional response which GVV strives to re-wire. GVV helps individuals to be better prepared for these moments. It provides tools to figure out the nuts and bolts of translating an ethical choice, once made, into transformative action.

There are several good reasons to emphasize the importance of ethical action. The first one relates to the ethical status of our reasoning about right and wrong. Such reasoning only becomes ethical once it translates into transformative action. Realizing what is ethically right but not acting on it, by contrasts, incurs an ethical liability. Thinking is for doing (Fiske, 1992), and likewise, reasoning about right and wrong is for ethical doing. A complete theory and practice of ethics management must link critical consciousness and transformative action.

The second reason to prioritize action is pedagogical. Action should occupy a central place in theory and practice of ethics because learning to do something is supported by doing it. One of the first to place action and habit at the center of learning was Aristotle. He argues that moral goodness is the result of habit. Like actions produce like dispositions. People become just by performing just acts, self-controlled by doing self-controlled acts, and brave by doing brave acts. Moral excellence, then, is not an act but a habit. We are what we repeatedly do. (Aristotle, 2004) Just as people become good at guitar playing by playing the guitar, they learn to be ethical by giving voice to their values. Nothing builds confidence in our future ability to perform a behavior as past experiences of successful performance (Bandura, 1997, 2008). Aristotle further argues that people can only gain practical wisdom (phronesis) through the cumulative experience of applying abstract principles to the specific requirements of real-life situations.

The notion that learning, to be effective, has to be experiential, involve action, and be situated in communities of practice, is firmly embedded in leading contemporary educational models (Hutton, 1980; Kolb, 1984; Laasch & Gherardi, 2019; Laasch, Moosmayer & Arp, 2018; Manidis & Addo, 2017; Revans, 1980; Wenger, 2000). GVV
as a methodology supports learners in translating their values into action, thereby further enhancing their skills and confidence in their capacity to participate competently in the process of shaping and sustaining social norms.

3.3. From ethics as a cascade to ethics as a shared practice

Our third pivot relates to the question of where ethical influence originates and how it flows through organizations. The multi-tiered, cascading fountain has been used as a metaphor to illustrate the flow of ethical influence in organizations (Mayer et al, 2009). The water springs up from the fountainhead, falls into a circular basin below, from where it spills into a larger basin the next level down. According to this metaphor, senior leadership defines and communicates a set of core values. Middle managers are tasked with feeding these values deeper into the organizations to workers at the lower ranks of the organization. This model of ethical influence permeates many governance theories and practices. Concepts of “tone from the top” or “tone from the middle” attest to this idea (Emett et al, 2012). In business writing, formulations such as “instilling values,” “inculcating mind-sets,” “driving values through the organization,” or “changing hearts and minds” testify to the same idea. In sum, ethical influence is construed as a unidirectional, trickle-down process (Bass, 1990; Bass et al, 1987).

By contrast, we contend that senior leaders are not the sole purveyors of normative orientation; rather, all stakeholders have values, many of which they share. No positive correlation exists between a person’s hierarchical status and their ethical qualification; rather, research indicates that high-power status can undermine a person’s ethicality (Hogeveen et al, 2014; Kleef et al, 2008), and large power differentials can weaken ethical behavior in organizations (Lam & Xu, 2018). Shared values are not the result of leaders inculcating their values into followers; rather, efforts to impose values on others can result in oppositional defiance (Brehm, 1966; Deci & Ryan, 1985). Ethical behavior is not simply a faculty of individuals at the top; rather, it is largely distributed across groups and occurring as a cooperative practice (Raelin, 2011).

GVV aligns with theories that model shared values as the result of a social construction process that is largely communicative in nature (Blumer, 2009; Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Giddens, 1997; Mead, 1925; Shove et al, 2012). Social norms come into existence and persist only within and through social dynamics. While social norms can be enshrined in various forms, people learn about them primarily through social interaction and observation in every-day life. People observe how their social environment responds to their own behavior or that of others, with acceptance, indifference, or rejection. People learn and internalize many of the social norms they encounter and operate within their confines. By acting in conformity with existing rules, people reinforce these same rules. Even as a passive bystander, they participate in the social reproduction of norms. If a person litters and bystanders do not raise objections, their inaction signals that littering is socially acceptable. At the same time, people can act generatively on social norms. A person picking up litter from a sidewalk may send the signal that residents care about maintaining an orderly neighborhood. People can transform existing social norms by skirting or transgressing the boundaries drawn by social norms. In this manner, social norms are negotiated in daily practices, by stakeholders enacting their own values and responding to others enacting theirs. Ethical voice is not the only, but a central medium in this process. People engage in ethical behavior and become ethical mostly by talking to each other. This, in simple brushstrokes, is the intersubjective construction process that, using constituents’ pluralistic values as building blocks, gives rise to a shared understanding of the norms that are deemed socially acceptable or objectionable. The totality of social interactions forms a normative riverbed that constrains and channels social interaction. Various contributions conceptualize organizational ethics in line with a social-constructionist understanding but remain, as of yet, at the fringes of mainstream ethics management (Deetz, 1995; French & Granrose, 1995; Steinmann & Löhr, 1996; Ulrich, 1987; Willmott, 1997).

The process outlined above describes normative influence as reciprocal. Seminal theorists of governance (Aristotle, 1962; Montesquieu, 1962; Hamilton et al, 2012) have proposed that governance is improved when it is reciprocal. Any one-sided system of governance, according all governance responsibility to one party and
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none to the other, is weak and prone to abuse and corruption. To the extent that ethical influence can originate anywhere and flow in any direction, a shared practice of moral reflexivity is enabled (Cunliffe, 2004; Cunliffe, 2009; Hibbert & Cunliffe, 2013). People can critically evaluate their normative positions based on their self-reflection and the reflection they receive from others. Putnam demonstrates that civic virtue is most powerful when embedded in a dense network of reciprocal social relations (Putnam, 2001). Correspondingly, we argue that an organization’s ethical resilience increases to the extent that ethical influence can originate from anywhere within the organizational structure and flow in any direction, down, up, or sideways, resulting in a denser network of reciprocal ethical influence.

To the extent that people participate in the process of constructing social norms, they acquire a better understanding of these norms and are more likely to internalize, feel responsible for, and defend these norms. To the degree that diverse stakeholders’ can express divergent perspectives and are heard, decision-making process are better informed and light is shed on ethically problematic aspects of a proposal. Where ethical voice is empowered, those that transgress ethical lines are more likely to encounter resistance. The mere act of submitting an ethical concern for consideration alters the decision-making equation. Once a well-founded ethical concern has been pronounced, those who ignore it gratuitously do so at their own peril. The mere prospect of social scrutiny is likely to have a curative effect, compelling individuals to privilege strategies that are ethically tolerable in the court of stakeholder opinion.

From this social-constructionist point of view, organizational compliance breakdowns are not simply the result of individual malfeasance. Rather, they indicate an organizational culture where stakeholder voice and, as a result, the reciprocal process of normative influence are weak. By strengthening stakeholders’ capabilities in affirming their normative voice, GVV helps invigorate this process. GVV is designed as a mechanism to enable stakeholders’ moral agency, to empower them to translate moral reasoning into moral action, and, in so doing, activate and stimulate the social practice of generating and maintaining shared social norms.

To summarize, GVV is built on three assumptions about stakeholders and their role in the production and maintenance of organizational values:

- First, we do not view stakeholders merely as risk factors, as “ticking time bombs” waiting to set off a compliance meltdown unless they are constrained. All stakeholders’ have values. GVV directs our attention to the possibility that almost everyone has a capacity to govern their own behavior and contribute to upholding shared values. Stakeholders’ combined moral agency represents a stock of human capital that is valuable for organizations’ governance efforts.

- Second, GVV posits that stakeholders often recognize problematic conduct intuitively, but struggle with responding effectively to the situation. Rather than focusing only on stakeholders’ capacity for ethical reasoning, GVV helps stakeholders translate their ethical insights into transformative action.

- Third, GVV challenges the notion that ethics management is a top-down process. At its center is the belief that every person can exert ethical influence in every direction, down, up, or sideways. Governance improves when the ethical influencing process is structured in a reciprocal fashion.

4. Ethics management as facilitation of stakeholder voice

The three pivots proposed in the previous section about stakeholders’ role in the production of organizational values have in turn three implications for managers’ role in the same process. It changes the nature of the problem managers have to solve when managing for ethics, their relationship with stakeholders, and what it is managers do when managing for ethics.
4.1. The management problem: harnessing moral agency

If managers view stakeholders as risk factors, then the problem they face in assuring organizational ethics is finding ways to contain these risks. If instead, managers shift from a deficit-based to a strength-based view of stakeholders, the management problem is fundamentally transformed. Based on the assumption that a capacity for moral agency is vastly distributed across stakeholders, the problem managers face is how they can tap into and mobilize this moral human capital for the purpose of producing and sustaining organizational values. The focus is no longer on inculcating stakeholders with values or constraining malfeasance. Instead, their focus shifts toward drawing out the values that are already there. Looked at through the lens of moral agency, new questions become pressing for managers: How can they empower and support stakeholders to fully actualize their potential for moral agency? How can managers expand stakeholders’ opportunities to contribute their capacity for moral agency to the governance process? What supports do stakeholders need to effectively affirm their values? What barriers inhibit stakeholders ability to enact moral agency?

4.2. The leadership model: shared and co-creative

If we assume that the capacity for moral agency is distributed across constituents independent of their hierarchical status in the organization, then the idea that the ethical influencing process is adequately represented as a cascade from higher-ranked managers to their subordinates is no longer satisfying. Transformative or transactional models of leadership that ascribe agency only to persons in one-up positions are no longer sufficient (Bass, 1960; Burns, 1978). We have to reconsider how the process of ethical influencing needs to be restructured to make better use of the available human capital. The theories of co-creation and shared leadership present useful models for re-imagining how ethical influence flows in organizations.

Shared leadership

The shared leadership model starts out with the observation that today’s workplaces are increasingly knowledge intensive. In this environment, project success depends on intensive collaboration among multiple specialized contributors, combining heterogenous and advanced skills for solving complex problems. Teams boundaries can be highly fluid, with team members rotating in and out of teams frequently and individual team members working on multiple projects simultaneously. In such settings, vertical leadership arrangements, that concentrate decision-making authority in the hands of one formal team leader, can become overwhelmed quickly. In a highly dynamic and complex environment, a formal team leader may be lacking sufficient expertise to provide timely and effective guidance to team members. Under these circumstances, team performance may improve if contributors are empowered to perform themselves many of the functions that were traditionally centralized in the hands of a formal team leader (Hoegl & Muethel, 2016).

As a result, the field of leadership theory is increasingly shifting away from dyadic leader/follower models (Pearce & Sims, 2000; Scully & Segal, 2002; Senge et al, 2001; Spillane et al, 2001). The shared leadership model starts by emphasizing the distributed nature of human capabilities. Groups are made up of individuals who each hold unique capabilities that allow them to contribute to and shape the influencing process referred to as leadership (Benne & Sheats, 2010). These capabilities include group members’ unique experiences, knowledge, specialized technical as well as general problem solving skills, and their social networks.

In the first instance, shared leadership means self-leadership. Presuming agentic capabilities, people do not need to be other-directed in their activities under normal circumstances (Manz & Sims, 1980). Group members are able to exert reciprocal influence, regardless of how they relate to each other hierarchically. Leadership is multidirectional, because the influencing process can involve lateral, upward or downward influence (Pearce & Conger, 2003). Individuals may influence a superior, a peer or a subordinate, simply by presenting a compelling
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argument. Over the life of a project, different group members may take turns leading and being led, based on the best match between their respective qualifications and the demands of the situation (Follett, 2013; Carson et al, 2007). Leadership is interdependent and collaborative because group members can augment their chance of success by pairing their complementary agentic capabilities to attain goals that lie beyond any one individual (Spender, 2008). As such, the shared leadership model describes leadership as a dynamic, interactive influencing process within a dense network of reciprocal relations, with the objective to lead one another to the achievement of a shared goal (Pearce & Sims, 2000). It shifts the focus from leadership as the heroic achievement of an individual toward a focus on collective achievement, shared responsibility, and the importance of teamwork (Fletcher & Käufer, 2003).

Co-creation

Co-creation is another helpful framework for rethinking the structure of ethical influence (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2000; Ramaswamy & Gouillart, 2010). Co-creation challenges the company-centric model of value creation according to which the enterprise controls where, when, and how value is added in the value chain all the way to the point of purchase. Customers are seen as outside the domain of the value chain. Their role is confined to that of the consumer. The moment of purchase is the single point of exchange where value is extracted from the customer.

The rise of the Internet and social technologies is expanding opportunities for broader engagement of customers in the value creation process, reflected in heightened customer expectations for greater involvement. In response, companies increasingly re-design their system of value-creation. To engage customers more broadly, organizations are challenged to look at their process of value creation and consider how they can make it customer-centric and open for participation.

This means, first, that companies must deepen their understanding of customers’ diverse needs and create differentiated offerings corresponding to these needs. The customer-centric view also implies an appreciation of customers’ capabilities. Customers are viewed as agents with a variety of resources (e.g., intellectual, social, physical, financial) that can be employed in the process of value creation, provided this process is designed openly. Customers help Lego design, select, and market the toys the company sells. Airbnb taps into consumers’ private homes and labor to provide hospitality services. Vans offers a process that lets customers put their own artwork on the canvas of the shoes the company sells. Co-creation allows companies to leverage third-party assets to fuel its growth and profitability. And it creates a superior customer experience along the way. Not only are customers willing to invest their personal resources into the creation of value, they may also be more loyal customers, willing to pay a premium for a product they helped create.

Both frameworks, co-creation and shared leadership, provide a language for reformulating the structure of ethical influence. Allowing ethical influence to flow only from the top to the bottom represents an inefficient use of the ethical capital distributed throughout organizations. Limiting stakeholders’ contribution to passively complying with preordained standards no longer seems a sufficient use of people’s capabilities. In designing governance solutions, managers should consider leadership capabilities available at all levels of the organization and consider how they can draw out these latent capabilities, combine and channel them to produce desired objectives. The concept of co-creation compels managers to map out the process by which governance is produced and then to consider how they can expand the opportunities for stakeholders to participate actively in all phases of this process, from risk assessment and prevention to intervention and remediation. Managers can increase the total flow of ethical influence by encouraging it to originate from any level and to flow in any direction, resulting in a denser network of reciprocal ethical influence.
4.3. Managers’ role: platform management

After redefining the problem and structure of ethics management, this section now asks what activities managing for ethics entails. We propose that managers will be effective if they envision their role as that of a platform manager providing forums, norms and skills that facilitates ethical deliberation.

If managers view the problem of ethics management through a risk-based lens, then their activities will focus on reducing these risks. The instruments they choose for this purpose will be mostly inhibitive in nature, involving prohibitive norms, monitoring, and sanctions. If, by contrast, we define the problem of ethics management as helping stakeholders actualize their capacity for moral agency, then inhibitive instruments no longer fit the purpose. To support moral agency, managers need a different, purpose-built set of management practices and tools.

Platform thinking provides a good metaphor for re-envisioning managers’ role in promoting organizational ethics (Parker et al, 2017). Platforms provide an open, participative infrastructure that expands opportunities for joint value creation. Platforms derive much of their potency by uncovering vast new sources of supply. They unlock and harness formerly idle capacity that is owned or controlled not by the platform operator, but by the community of users (e.g., users’ private real estate, cars, intellectual capital, social network). Airbnb provides a website that enables anyone with a spare room to run their own Bed & Breakfast. Ride sharing platforms such as Lyft or Wingz enable people with a car to provide transportation services. Etsy offers an online marketplace enabling trades between micro-producers and buyers of handmade and vintage goods.

The role of platform developers is instructive for rethinking managers’ role in supporting co-creative governance. Platform developers are not producers of any goods or services. Rather, they are systems architects, responsible for creating and optimizing an infrastructure that empowers others to engage in shared value creation. Platform managers continuously engage with users to understand their needs and objectives and adapt the platform to provide for a satisfactory experience that results in iterative use. In other words, platform managers provide an optimal playing field, but let users do the playing.

This job description provides a useful template for re-formulating managers’ role in managing for ethics. For ethical voice to flourish, stakeholders must be given meaningful and realistic opportunities to exercise it. The role of platform managers is to expand these opportunities. They make ethics management stakeholder-centric. Stakeholders are seen as an end in themselves. Platform managers continuously engage with stakeholders to learn about their needs as effective moral agents and support these needs. They focus on making desired behaviors easier, not mandatory. Platform managers ensure that all stakeholders have the infrastructure they need to engage in normative deliberation, repeatedly and with the greatest possible ease. Their modus operandi is support, not control. When focusing on moral capabilities, verbs such as “encourage,” “empower,” “nurture,” “facilitate,” or “expand” gain in currency for describing managers’ role. It is important that managers add their own voice to this deliberative process, but they share the responsibility of normative voice with all other organizational constituents. What sets managers’ contribution apart is that they enable others to practice normative voice, by acting as skillful enablers, catalysts, and facilitators. This is the essence of ethics management as platform management.

To enable ethical deliberation, platforms must provide three essential resources to stakeholders: a forum for deliberation, a set of norms of civic debate, and skills for deliberation. Any human interaction can be turned into an impromptu forum for normative deliberation. Managers create a forum simply by posing problems, asking questions and facilitating an inclusive discussion for the purpose of shedding light from multiple perspectives on the ethical implications of a business matter. Managers can systematically embed opportunities for normative voice into any stakeholder-related practices (e.g., onboarding, training, exit interviews) or leverage technology to
create a forum for normative deliberation (e.g. internet-based reporting systems, online allegation escrows, or ethics surveys). Second, a successful platform for normative deliberation requires norms of civil debate. Civil debate places requirements on both the speaker and the listener (Fishkin & Luskin, 2005; Gutmann & Thompson, 2004; Habermas, 1995). Of speakers, it requires a commitment to speaking with courage and candor, not knowingly making false statements, and not needlessly speaking in disrespectful or incendiary ways. Of listeners, civil debate requires a commitment to upholding stakeholders’ equal right to voice, inviting divergent perspectives, listening attentively, seeking to understand others’ perspective, evaluating arguments based on their merits, being openminded, and not penalizing anyone for expressing their point of view. The third requirement for platforms’ effective functioning is that community members are sufficiently equipped with the skills needed to sustain civil deliberation about potentially contested normative issues. Platform managers make sure deliberative skills occupy a central place in their organizations’ learning and development priorities. Their aim is to support stakeholders in developing their deliberative mastery by offering continuous opportunities to learn about and apply deliberative methods.

5. Discussion and Future Research
The goal of this chapter is to sketch out what it means to manage for ethics, using GVV as a lens. The major outlines of this framework can be summarized in six propositions. The first three propositions concern how managers define the role of stakeholders in the governance process:

- Stakeholders cannot be reduced to risk factors. People have moral values. As moral agents, they are capable to regulate their own behavior and partake in producing and maintaining shared values. This make stakeholders valuable assets for developing strong organizational governance.
- Often, people recognize problematic conduct promptly and intuitively. Their primary challenge lies not in ethical reasoning, but in translating ethical insights into effective transformative action.
- Governance is a team sport. Ethical influence is best viewed as a highly distributed, collaborative, and reciprocal process to which all stakeholders can make a meaningful contribution.

Based on these assumptions, the second triplet of propositions redefines the role of managers in the governance process:

- The fundamental problem of managing for ethics consist in harnessing and making effective use of the stock of moral agency that is distributed across organizational constituents.
- Managers structure governance as a distributed, shared, and reciprocal influencing process. They consider how they can open the entire governance value chain to stakeholder participation.
- Managers role vis a vis to stakeholders is supportive in nature. They provide platforms that expand stakeholders’ opportunities for normative voice. They do so by providing forums, norms, and skills for normative deliberation.

Such a reframing of ethics management underscores and extends tenets of the responsible management concept. It agrees emphatically with the impetus to make the study and practice of responsible management less top-heavy, expanding the focus of analysis beyond procedures and systems primarily compartmentalized in specialized functions at the corporate level, emphasizing instead the need to embed ethics management in the every-day practice of any and all managers (Laasch, 2018). While our propositions have implications for organizations’ specialized governance practices, this chapter contributes to an understanding of what managing for ethics entails as an integral part of management practice writ large.

Our conceptualization of ethics management also confirms the proposition that responsible managers require an additional set of competences distinct to the competences hitherto emphasized in mainstream management
(Laasch & Conaway, 2015). Our exploration in this chapter suggests that this learning challenge includes but extends beyond the acquisition of instrumental skills (e.g., group facilitation skills) (Ennals, 2014). Rather, the learning challenge calls on managers to examine the implied mental models that guide their practice, such as their beliefs about human capabilities (held by a few or dispersed), about how to best configure the flow of influence in organizations (top-down or reciprocal), and about managers’ own role in the governance process (control or support).

Reframing ethics management along these lines, provides, we believe, fertile ground for research and practice of responsible management. Extrapolating from our conceptualization of ethics management, we propose that responsible management and responsible management education need to include a positive, strength-based orientation. People’s agentic moral capacities and their contribution to responsible management deserve explicit attention. While the field of organizational governance has accorded ample attention to the importance of inhibitive measures for constraining malfeasance, the question of how organizations can positively engage stakeholders and harness their capacity for moral agency to strengthen governance has yet to receive adequate consideration. All too often, management theories fail to explicate their anthropological presuppositions. Assumptions about human deficiency operate as the taken-for-granted, potentially pernicious subtext for management theories and practices (Ghoshal, 2005). We propose that a coherent theory and practice of responsible management cannot be generated out of an economistic anthropology that conceives actors as self-interested, amoral utility maximizers. Rooting responsible management in a fuller appreciation of human needs and capabilities is a worthwhile theoretical undertaking. Such an effort can draw on the humanistic management discussion (e.g. Dierksmeier, 2016; Pirson & Lawrence, 2010) and motivational theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Another fruitful area of exploration is empirical testing. We hope to see more empirical research on the relationship between organizational support for moral agency, specifically ethical voice, and relevant indicators of organizations’ ethical resilience. We posit a positive relationship between these variables. Organizations where normative voice is vibrant are much more likely to deter, detect and correct egregious conduct and avoid compliance breakdowns compared to organizations where normative silence reigns. Specifically, we expect that greater perceived managerial support for ethical voice and other forms of promotive moral agency will improve stakeholders’ confidence in management’s commitment to ethics and their perception of the Ethics & Compliance function (e.g., competence, trust, support). It will also improve stakeholders’ self-efficacy and motivation with regard to ethical voice or other forms of moral agency. Stakeholders will perceive a lower fear of retaliation, translating into more active stakeholder engagement in governance, as indicated by the number of inquiries and reports of observed misconduct that stakeholders direct to the Ethics & Compliance or other governance functions.

Demonstrating the importance of stakeholder’s agency for organizational ethics will require a contribution from managers. They can do so at low risk and cost by integrating simple evaluation protocols (Haynes et al, 2012) into their work-streams and instruments (e.g., training, codes of conduct, ethics homepages, incident reporting websites). This type of evidence-based practice will provide managers with robust empirical evidence to expand the application of their interventions to larger populations, demonstrate the effectiveness of their work, and justify funding. By sharing their evidenced-backed success stories via professional journals and conferences, they can support the diffusion of their innovations. By systematically embedding evaluation protocols into their ethics management workstreams, organizations demonstrate their commitment to ongoing evaluation, learning, and improvement (Treviño et al, 2017).

Lastly, we want to propose that the strengthening of deliberative practice within organizations produces positive externalities to society at large. Various thinkers have proposed that a positive link exists between people’s work experience and their engagement as public citizens. Adam Smith argued in Wealth of Nations that dull jobs make for dull citizens (Smith, 1937). If it is true, as many claim, that a crisis of civil discourse stands in the way
of addressing and solving today’s most pressing social issues (Boatright et al, 2019), than managers might not only make their organizations ethically more resilient by supporting stakeholders’ capacity for civil discourse, they might also, incidentally, make an indispensable contribution toward solving societies’ greatest challenges.
References


