THE CASE METHOD AND MYTHS

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Abstract

To better explore the teaching and learning of professional ethics, the authors unite cases and myths in a synergistic manner. This article shares the experience with a specific case in relationship to a reflection based on a myth.

KEY WORDS: Case method, professional ethics, myth

INTRODUCTION

The goal of this article is to teach professional ethics by using the case method and myth. On one hand, the case introduces the student to the realities of the workplace; on the other hand, a myth can be useful in interpreting the reality of the modern world from another point of view. The authors include the following perspectives in their analysis: the decision the student makes in relation to the ethical dilemma presented by the case and the justification of his or her decision [Mauffette, L., Leenders, M. and Erskine, J., 2001a, 2001b 2001c], and the reflection that arises from the myth.

The case method in the course Professional Ethics allows the professor to prepare the student with the rational tools necessary to manage ethical challenges in professional life. In the traditional method, the student relies on the professor and expects him or her to provide the correct answers. In contrast, through the case method, the student and future professional must respond to the reality which is presented by making decisions and assuming responsibility for them, as seen in the methodology referred to in [Barnes L., Christensen, R. y Hansen, A., 1994]. In sum, the case method prepares the student for life [Christensen, R., 1991]. The authors believe that by discussing cases, the student can reflect upon the realities of professional life in a rational way, and through myths the student can find a new way to interpret these realities.

The myth permits another interpretation based not on rationality, but rather on imagination, thus leading to the development of more meaningful interpretations that in turn, lead to meaningful learning. The authors refer as meaningful learning to the process of self-discovery through which the individual is able to achieve self-knowledge and to become responsible for his or her life. This is achieved by focusing on oneself as a complete person, by resolving unfinished business and by developing intuition [Lafarga and Gómez, 1994, pp. 62].

Likewise, Zaragoza [1826, pp. 3] explains that the origin of mythology arises out of the need to express the lack of rationality in mankind, this criminal deviation led to the creation of other laws and other Gods, on a whim without consulting reason, but rather their weaknesses, their stupidity and their concupiscence: this is the origin of idolatry and the science which we now call mythology. According to Zaragoza [1826. pp. 4], mythology reflects the passions of mankind, when rationality is forgotten, which is common. Bossuet, quoted by Zaragoza [1826, pp. 5] explains that as men depart from their principles, they confuse the ideas which they had received from their elders; the brutish human sense could no longer uplift him. Men not wanting to adore what they could not see gave power to idolatry, and this spread all over the Universe, viewing everything that was powerful as divine, and feeling himself dragged
toward vice by an irresistible force. Myth represents the imagination seen through irrationality, thus offering new ways to interpret reality.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Is it possible for the student to learn through rational reflection (the case) and through imagination (the myth)?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

According to López Valero et al. [2003], through myths it is possible to contrast knowledge of reality and broaden horizons by accessing knowledge, which may not be possible to acquire directly, but rather through the imagination. This personal interpretation includes a complex process of uniting ideas, creativity and imagination.

Myths such as the story of Icarus offer an irrational, but valuable interpretation of reality. The myth can also include the metaphor, which comes from the Greek words “meta”, meaning “farther”, and “phorein” meaning “pass, take”. In other words, it consists of using a word with a different meaning or in a different context than usual for which the word acquires a particular meaning.

Thanks to a myth, it is possible to approach a complex reality in order to find new meanings in it. Human beings, by reflecting on myths, can transcend the ordinary and achieve a more intense vision. For this reason, the authors believe that myths offer much applicability.

The myth enables the student to go beyond the explicit, in order to analyze what occurs in diverse contexts such as the workplace, but with greater depth. It offers answers to what cannot be explained rationally, thus reducing the uncertainty of what is difficult to understand. The figure of divinity in a myth is related to a human being, and a human who tries to become divine and forgets his human nature becomes the object of discussion.

Next, the authors present a summary of the VULCAN 2900 case and an example of an analysis of this case, as well as a summary of the myth of ICARUS and an example of an analysis of this myth. Both analyses are carried out in the session ETHICS AND PROFESSIONAL LIFE which is part of the course Professional Ethics.

The study included a review of 147 reports from 5 different groups in the course of Professional Ethics. With this, the authors confirmed that 100% of the students were able to link the case with the myth, and the differences found were in level of depth in the analysis. Next, the article includes an example of an analysis done by one of the students and the way he/she relates the case with the myth.

SUMMARY OF THE CASE: “VULCAN 2900”

Gilberto and Sandra Cavazos, the owners of the company DuctoAcero, S.A. de C.V. are faced with a dilemma. The technicians Juan Pablo and Alejandro, both undergraduate students in Industrial Engineering Program, were trained to use the Vulcan 2900 machine. These two employees of DuctoAcero also worked secretly for another company, which was a competitor [Hojalatera del Norte] and filled orders for this company from clients of DuctoAcero. Taking advantage of their positions in DuctoAcero, both technicians had taken this company’s clients to the other company. What should the Cavazos do with the two technicians and how can they meet their commitments with their clients?

REFLECTIONS OF A STUDENT ON THE VULCAN 2900 CASE

What would you do in the case of the Cavazos?
Although Alejandro and Juan Pablo were apprentices, they had surely signed a contract, and for this reason the Cavazos could oblige them to train new technicians and then fire them. In addition, they should advise all of their clients of this situation, explaining them that DuctoAcero is not processing their current work orders. In fact, the clients could even accuse the technicians of
giving false information. In the end, their clients will surely reward the loyalty and honesty of the Cavazos. Finally, the Cavazos could speak to the owners of the other company to advise them of the situation, as they may not be aware of it.

Propose at least three alternatives and explain your decision.

- Just fire the technicians.
- Fire them, but oblige them to train new technicians.
- Fire them, oblige them to reconsider their actions and admit their fault to those involved.

Why? Justify your response, considering the different people affected and the values involved.

I think the best option is the third, because in this way the Cavazos would not be accomplices to the unethical behavior of the apprentices, and in addition, the apprentices would comply with their social responsibility by admitting to everyone what they had done. Finally, in order to avoid being affected more than they already are, forcing the apprentices to train someone else assures the Cavazos that at least they will not have to spend money to train someone new.

Where did the company go wrong?

Perhaps they were wrong to give so much responsibility to the apprentices, whose loyalty to the company was almost non-existent. It is not that one should be distrustful of people, but risking so much by placing that much trust in the apprentices was not very cautious. In addition, there is no mentioning that they explained to the apprentices that they were committed to the company.

Do you think that the educational level has a direct relationship to a person’s integrity? If a person commits an unethical act, can he or she learn not to do it again? Should people be given a second chance?

One would think that the more education, the more integrity one has; however, this is unfortunately not so. Integrity is a personal characteristic and is the result of everything from family education to college education. There are people who are illiterate who value their own integrity more, since it is something they can offer as persons. I don’t doubt that people can learn from their mistakes, if they have the humility to recognize they did wrong and are willing to change. In this case, it would be appropriate to give the apprentices a second chance.

SUMMARY OF THE MYTH

The myth of Icarus describes the desire of man to always go farther, even at the risk of having to find himself face to face with the limits of his human condition. Icarus’ father Daedalus builds his son some artificial wings made of wax so that he can escape from the island where they are held prisoners. Daedalus warns him not to approach the sun or the water, so that his wings will not be destroyed. Icarus takes off, but forgets the advice of his father and tries to reach the sun whose rays fascinate him. The sun’s light blinds him. He forgets his father’s advice and his wings of wax melt. Unable to sustain flight, he falls into the sea and drowns. Icarus is the modern man who seeks to attain paradise, which we relates to the concept of professional success.

REFLECTIONS OF A STUDENT ON THE MYTH OF ICARUS


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<tr>
<th>Activity of Icarus</th>
<th>Personal Reflections</th>
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<tr>
<td>The painting <em>Individual</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>What do you observe in the painting?</td>
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<td>Who are they? Are they angels? Are they humans? What is happening with each one? Where are they? What does this painting say to you?</td>
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<td><a href="http://www.island-ikaria.com/multimedia/art48.htm">http://www.island-ikaria.com/multimedia/art48.htm</a></td>
<td>In the painting one can observe two angels. However, in my opinion, one of them appears to be falling from heaven to earth, as if, in some way it stops being an angel, while the other watches over his descent. This makes me think that in some way it is a punishment of the angel, and the other is the guardian.</td>
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<td>Activity of Icarus</td>
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<td>The story <em>Individual and Group</em></td>
<td>The perspective that I have of the painting after reading the story is very different from my first impression. As the story says, the angel that I had perceived as falling was none other than Icarus, who after ignoring his father’s advice, flew too high, causing his wings to melt, thus his fall. At his side, I no longer see a guardian angel, but his father, who is worried and sad because of what happened to his son.</td>
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<td>Read the story and observe the painting again. What does it tell you this time?</td>
<td>Contextualizing: In the modern world <em>Individual and Group</em> How does Icarus relate to modern man inserted into professional life? Who is the new Daedalus? What are the islands to which youth have become slaves? Who are the gods they fear? What are the rays of the sun, which bedazzle them in their professional life? What are the seas they must cross in order to find true success?</td>
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<td>The relationship, which Icarus has with modern man, is that nowadays, men are always trying to rise, obtain power, wellbeing, glory, etc., regardless of the means used and the risks taken in order to arrive at that position. In our case, we could relate Daedalus to the Tecnológico, which gives us the means [the wings] in order to reach other lands and improve our position in life; likewise, it gives us the necessary recommendations for using those wings [for example in this course]; however, in the end, the decision to use those suggestions will depend on us [Icarus]. I consider that the principal rays of sun, which bedazzle Icarus, are money and power. These rays prevent Icarus from seeing the sea that must be crossed in order to achieve success. And they attract them so that they finally make him lose everything he could have had if he had crossed the sea, which is the recognition of having succeeded as a result of his own effort.</td>
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<td>Internal reflection: Icarus and I <em>Individual and Group [voluntary]</em> How do I relate Icarus to my professional future? Who is Daedalus for me? What is my island? In which seas have I fallen or could I fall? What has encouraged me or can encourage me to take flight again? What can I learn from this story?</td>
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<td>At this moment I am like an Icarus about to receive his wings, which will help me, cross the sea of professional development. As I mentioned before, Daedalus is in some way the Tecnológico University, which will give me the necessary wings in order to fly. likewise, the advice of my family, friends and loved ones complete the scheme of Daedalus. For this reason it is extremely necessary to keep in mind the true goal, which I want to achieve with my wings. It is definitely not heaven, as this place is reserved for the gods, and although for a moment the illusions of the sun’s rays make us think we can reach God in our mortal state Finally, nature will do its part in making us fall, and it will be very difficult to rise again from that fall. For that reason, it is better to keep one’s eyes on the earth, to which we can arrive after having used our wings and where we can find satisfaction, recognition, and professional development. And finally, if we are good enough, we will help other people build wings in order to arrive at the island of their goal.</td>
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**LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE VULCAN 2900 CASE AND THE MYTH OF ICARUS**

The apprentices in the case were like Icarus; they were blinded by the sun’s rays, thinking that being trained to use that machine made them better than others. However, they didn’t realize that what they did, converted them into untrustworthy people. Surely their new employers will not be able to trust them.
Likewise, they did not realize that they were learning a lot and being given a lot of advantages in the Cavazos Company. Finally, their behavior showed that they lacked integrity.

CONCLUSION

This example shows that it is possible to combine the rationality of the case method with the imaginative analysis of myth.

The following is a summary of the two approaches:

Stage 1: The student makes judgments about the case and proposes alternative solutions in response to the problem presented by the case.

Stage 2: The student analyzes a painting and the associated myth.

Stage 3. The student establishes a relationship between the problems presented by the case and the story presented in the myth.

Stage 4. The student integrates the two worlds – the outside world of reality and the inner world, of self-discovery. This process of reflection and association leads the student to transfer meaningful knowledge to his own life, and invites him to make changes in his life.

The authors hope that this article can be useful to professors who wish to experiment with new ways of approaching the realities of the outside professional world and the internal realities of the human being.

The case method can be combined with other pedagogies such as the development of human imagination. The use of imagination develops creativity, which leads to the modification of paradigms and invites the student not to fear change. When a student participates in a reflection exercise, he commits to his own learning.

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