A Case Study in Ethics

Prostitution

• I began this project after a bit of a challenge: previous students had talked about it, but nobody had the chutzpah to do it
• People quickly became upset that I was engaging in this behavior
• They were offended when they thought I was joking, and mortified when they realized I wasn’t
• I found these reactions fascinating
• Morals – will be discussed in the ethics section

“Everything’s got a moral, if only you can find it.” - The Duchess
~Lewis Carroll

Case Study: BunnyRanch

• I initially contacted Dennis Hof (owner) to setup a meeting to discuss a school project
• I met with the Madame (Suzanne) on the day of our meeting (Saturday at 3PM)
• She asked if I needed a tour to write about – I explained I was looking to do a project to help their organization
• She was uninterested, but I suggested that we should discuss potential ways for me to be helpful without disrupting
• I then took a ‘tour’ from the perspective of a consumer (john)

Being a John...

• As I walked in the door, a semi-circle of scantily-clad women appeared, posing as prettily as possible
• One was chosen for me, and I accompanied her on the tour of the property
• After this, we ended up in her room, she closed the door and had me sit on her bed
• This is where price and product negotiation occurs

Negotiation and Payment

• Once the door is closed, the bunny is allowed to then discuss prices with the john
• Each bunny is a 1099 contractor and can set prices as she chooses. The house gets 50% of this.
• After arriving at a price, the john and bunny exit the room, walk down the hall and payment is made at the “hooker booker” (cashier) – details are not discussed, just the amount of payment

The Act

• The bunny and john then retire to the room and services begin (“the party”)
• At the end of the “party” – the john is asked if he’d like to rebook for another, and if so, a date/time is set
• At this point, one transaction has been completed
Other Tidbits...

- There are several things on premise to make extra money:
  - VIP Rooms/Bungalows
  - 2 Love Toy Cases/Shops
  - Cash Bar
  - Souvenir Shop

Safety Issues

- When people think of prostitution, they tend to think of two things regarding safety
  - Sexually Transmitted Diseases
  - Violence against prostitutes (including rape)

Safeguards

- Sexually Transmitted Diseases
  - Weekly mandated STD tests (since 1986, 0 instances)
  - Mandatory condom usage during “parties” (even on toys)
- Violence against Workers
  - Being in a licensed location protects workers more than if they were street walking [on-site security, safe location, etc.]

OBM Options

- Behavior Based Safety
- Increase Product Viability
- Increase Work Performance
- Improve Work Conditions
- Improve Sales Revenue
- Improve Public Relations (Advertising)

Behavior Based Safety

- Not really needed
- 0 Instances of unsafe outcomes noted
- Strong contingencies surrounding safe behavior

Other Options

- Product Quality:
  - Add to current products being offered
  - Enhance quality of products being offered
- Increase Work Performance
  - Increase number of “parties” per worker
  - Decrease time per “party”
  - Increase number of johns per “party”
Other Options

- Improve Sales Revenue
  - Increase number of sales
  - Increase negotiated cost of “parties”
  - Increase re-books
  - Turnover souvenir sales to “party” sales
- Improve Public Relations (advertising)
  - Drive more johns into the organization
  - Reduce public stigma

Improving Work Environment

- Enhance Training Opportunities for Girls
- Increase Perks available to girls
- Provide incentives such as percentage shifts
- Provide vacation and holidays

Before I intervene...

- I need to deal with the fallout occurring around me
- People react so strongly to sex
- Specifically sex for sale
- Should I intervene in an organization that peddles flesh?

Is it Wrong?

- Some objections that I ran into:
  - Selling Sex is Wrong (monogamy/religion)
  - Prostitutes are trapped (overgeneralization)
  - Prostitutes can’t get a better job (Argumentum ad Misericordiam)
  - It’s dangerous for Prostitutes (ditto)
  - It degrades the power of women (same argument for any wage-labor)
  - It degrades the moral fiber of the community (As does any power differential to some extent)

Is it Wrong?

- Is selling sex is, in and of itself, wrong?
- I accept that it is culturally taboo
- I recognize that rarely are people able to pull themselves outside of the stream of culture to examine these things
- Ignoring any of these aforementioned observations could be quite damaging.
- Publishing an article titled “Increasing Performance of Prostitutes in a Local Brothel” could have detrimental effects to an aspiring academician’s career

Ethics

During this journey – I became interested in exactly what type of work was acceptable for an OBM consultant to do:

So – I looked to the Book of Ethics in Organizational Behavior Management

“Read the directions and directly you will be directed in the right direction.” - Doorknob

But there wasn’t one!
Directionless

- I found that the current status of ethical guidance in OBM consultation left most folks with no direction.
- I couldn’t find any guidance from the OBM Network, nor was “Ethics” found on the two sample OBM courses.
- The ethics chapter in Handbook of Organizational Performance: Behavior Analysis and Management wasn’t very helpful for a ‘handbook’.

Ethical Guidelines for OBM

- I consulted several sources that did speak about different components of ethics in OBM:

Philosophical and Ethical Aspects of Organizational Behavior Management:

- “Good” in organizations is relative to one’s vantage point.
- OBM (and I/O in a larger sense) has been accused of taking a one-sided approach:
  - Ratio Stretching
  - No necessary relation b/w performance and satisfaction

Handbook of Organizational Performance

- Tried to answer “what are ethical principles?”
  - Ended up with “Ethical principles look beyond what is, and ask what should be” (p416)
- Suggested that OBMers consult with various ethical guidelines:
  - APA
  - I/O Psychologists (APA division)
- Concluded that it might be time to devise a set of ethical standards; but there seems to be little evidence of unethical behavior by OBMers (based on the fact that OBM is inherently ethical)

Handbook of Organizational Behavior Modification

- They describe the attack on Skinner’s image and the inherent problem OBM will have by association.
- Asks three important questions:
  - Does behavior modification belong in human resource management?
  - To what ends will managers use behavior modification as a means?
  - Who will control the controllers?

Industrial Behavior Modification

- This is one of the better treatments I’ve found of ethics in OBM
- They pose 6 recommendations to be most ethical:
  1) Use relatively routine procedures that emphasize positive types of control
  2) Assure that all participants are aware of procedures/goals and consent
  3) Begin any program by questioning whether there is a clearly established need for using it
  4) Specify all reasonable alternatives and reach consensus that a given alternative is best
  5) Increase the ability of practitioners to analyze ethical questions inherent in applications
  6) Be sensitive to how programs advance and support personal and social ideals
BACB Guidelines: 6.0 BA and Workplace

The behavior analyst adheres to job commitments, assesses employee interactions before intervention, works within his/her scope of training, develops interventions that benefit employees, and resolves conflicts within these Guidelines.

6.01 Job Commitments.
The behavior analyst adheres to job commitments made to the employing organization.

6.02 Assessing Employee Interactions.
The behavior analyst assesses the behavior-environment interactions of the employees before designing behavior analytic programs.

6.03 Preparing for Consultation.
The behavior analyst implements or consults on behavior management programs for which the behavior analyst has been adequately prepared.

6.04 Employees Interventions.
The behavior analyst develops interventions that benefit the employees as well as management.

6.05 Employee Health and Well Being.
The behavior analyst develops interventions that enhance the health and well being of the employees.

6.06 Conflicts with Organizations.
If the demands of an organization with which behavior analysts are affiliated conflict with these Guidelines, behavior analysts clarify the nature of the conflict, make known their commitment to these Guidelines, and to the extent feasible, seek to resolve the conflict in a way that permits the fullest adherence to these Guidelines.

Ethics at Work

• Lattal & Clark provide a book on ethics in the workplace
• Unique combination of the viewpoints and expertise of an ethics philosopher and a CEO of an organizational behavior management company
• Touted as a comprehensive guide to ethics
• Suggested that the ethics should be implemented as practice

While this book did in fact provide managers and supervisors a much better guide to ethical behavior
• It didn’t provide as much help for the OBM consultant
• Espouses moral pluralism

...let’s take a look at that

Moral Pluralism

• While there are many varieties – Lattal and Clark defined their version as follows:
• It required balancing four guiding values:
  – Individual Rights
  – Justice
  – The Common Good
  – Self-interest

Individual Rights

• All people are fundamentally equal
• Their value inheres in their humanity
• The ethical corporation will protect the individuality of its employees
  – Not just the protection of their rights
  – Protection of their individual expression as much as possible too!
Justice

- Provides assistance in proportion to need
- This balances the individual rights by ensuring that everyone doesn’t receive the exact same treatment, but rather an ethical manager considers the relative need of each individual
- “Help the most those who most need help” (p 126)

The Common Good

- This value provides balance to that of justice
- If a single individual’s need becomes so great that meeting it will cause detriment to the remainder of employees – it is not ethical to do so
- This value requires an analysis of various unit sizes – from smaller to larger; individual to organization

Self Interest

- At some points, we must put our own needs first
- If we become just one of the crowd, we may subvert our own needs to that of the common good
- The value of self interest requires that we be aware of our interest, and balance it along with that of the common good

The NEW Ethical OBM Guidelines

- Ok – so I’ve criticized, but what’s the solution?
- I’m going to take some of these ideas and merge them
- But first – I want to map out how I visualize the OBM world as compared to the individual-level BA world

“If you don’t know where you are going, any road will take you there.” –Cheshire Cat

~Lewis Carroll

OBM adds a new layer…

- Ethics within behavior analysis are almost entirely about the organism for whom behavior change interventions are being programmed
- OBM, however, has more than one “organism” whose “behavior” is being modified
- Loosely, OBM’s “organisms” tend to be classes or groups of people

OBM adds a new layer…

- With a sweeping generalization, I will describe these groups in most organizations:
  - Upper Management
  - Front Line Workers
  - Consumers
  - Society
- You may be thinking “Society!? OBMers don’t contract with society; nor is society in an organization! ”
Ethical Smörgåsbord

- In Behavior Analysis, the ethical considerations are somewhat uni-dimensional.
- In OBM, I am proposing we consider a three-dimensional ethical approach. In it, we should balance the benefits and costs across all dimensions.
- Consider an equilateral triangle, at each corner, are the consumers, upper management, and front-line workers.

Some Proposed Ethical Guidelines

- What’s the goal? Ask whether intervention is necessary or appropriate.
- Assess for effects on *all* involved if you do not intervene.
- Conduct a cost-benefit analysis for *all* involved, including the employer, employee, and consumer.
- Assess for potential changes in externalities due to your work.
- Do no harm to an organization for which you’re hired.
- Make all contingencies known and require consent for all employees involved.
- Attempt to use positive first approaches.
- Assess employee satisfaction as well as the satisfaction of those who hired you.

Ethical Examination

- So – how would these new guidelines interact with my assessment of the BunnyRanch.
- We’ll be working with some very limited information [I switched my project into an exploration of ethics mid-stream], so I may make up some hypothetical data to suggest how these guidelines could be followed in practical settings.

Ask whether intervention is necessary or appropriate

- At the BunnyRanch, are any of the interventions necessary or appropriate?
- Goal is to increase profit:
  - Behavior Based Safety
  - Increase Product Viability
  - Increase Work Performance
  - Improve Work Conditions
  - Improve Sales Revenue
  - Improve Public Relations (Advertising)

Assess for effects on *all* involved if you do not intervene

- Effect of increased profit on:
  - Consumer: more spending, potentially more services
  - Worker: more income, more work
  - Management: more income
  - Society: more services used; more income spent on product
Conduct a cost-benefit analysis for*all* involved, including the employer, employee, and consumer

• For this, let’s take one aspect – increasing upselling:
  - Consumer: spending more money on additional services (pro: more services that they enjoy; con: additional financial cost and maybe on services they didn’t necessarily want)
  - Worker: increased income and workload (pro: more money coming in; con: more work required)
  - Owner: more income coming in (pro: more profit; con: none noted)
  - Society: more spending in this trade (pro: potential health & wellness benefits; cons: potentially negative effects due to societal norms)

• Unless there is an additional benefit for the consumer (increased health and wellness, marital success, etc.) unbalanced intervention: it benefits management and workers, not consumer.
  • However: if prices don’t inflate, may not be too unbalanced.

Assess for potential changes in externalities due to your work

• Externalities should be assessed to determine if this balance is adequate to be ethical, or whether it will increase externalities (unethical)
  • Change in Externalities due to intervention:
    • more spending in this trade (pro: potential health & wellness benefits; cons: potentially negative effects due to societal norms)

What do you do if it is unbalanced?

• So – you examine the effects, and decide: This is unethical!
  • Now what do you do?
  • For instance, if I decided that prostitution was a profession wrong...
  • What is my obligation?

Do no harm to an organization for which you’re hired

• If I determine working here would be unethical, I tell them what I would do that would help them and be ethical (for me)
• I don’t compromise their company from within (even if it would have positive effects on reducing harmful externalities)
• I can – however – tell them that I disagree with certain components, and attempt to advocate for whomever necessary post-consultation (outside of their organization)

Make all contingencies known and require consent for all employees involved

• If I do decide that intervention is ethical, I make clear the contingencies involved
• If I were to do a pay for performance intervention:
  - Take weekly baseline sales, set a goal, that if beat increases take-home split on any sales thereafter
  - Make certain all workers are aware of this contingency and have the choice to participate
Attempt to use positive first approaches

- Use antecedent manipulations and reinforcement-based approaches when possible to change behavior
  - Choose to reinforce more sales with a better house-split instead of choosing to punish sales below weekly goals

Assess employee satisfaction as well as the satisfaction of those who hired you

- Determine an indicator for job satisfaction (surveys, questionnaires, implicit attitudes, and other measures)
- Measure it before intervention and continuously throughout
- Regularly ask for feedback regarding progress with those who hired you

Externalities

- Some examples of “good” outcomes and their potential externalities:
  - Outcome: Increased upselling in fast-food
    • Externality: increased obesity
  - Outcome: Increased profit in sweatshop
    • Externality: better economy (workers earning more)
  - Outcome: Increased productivity of workers
    • Externality: fewer workers needed, increased lay-offs; decreased economy

Conclusion

- I think that it is time to create official ethical guidelines for OBM consultants
- That is a sign of professionalization, and distinguishes the group from others (I/O psychologists, etc.)
- As the science of behavior grows ever more sophisticated, issues of an ethical nature are bound to turn up
- I suggest pro-active planning over against reaction to problems in society (what we did as behavior analysts)