

The screwtape letters and subjective relativism

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The Screwtape letters was written by C. S. Lewis in 1942. In this book, C. S. Lewis used 31 letters from a senior devil, Screwtape, to his nephew to describe how to corrupt a person's soul. The most important idea is that when lower the standard of self-regulation step by step with subjective relativism, the self-regulation will be too low without any awareness, which means the victim does not even know his spirit was corrupted and he always think what he did is right. The key point is that subjective relativism, view that an action is morally right if a person approves of it, would be dangerous.

When comparing this theory with the management environment in workplace, the situations are surprisingly similar. If a manager controls a big company or organization with subjective relativism-“ all depends on the situation with settings”-the standard of the company or organization would be lowered step by step and finally out of control. As a result, managers don't like a relativism management environment; they always use universalism or even absolutism to manage the systems. Subjective relativism is considered dangerous for a management system, and other people's money, anonymity, and subjective relativism is a deadly combination.

However, subjective relativism is not the core reason that makes the management system fail. Sometimes, it can benefit the management system. A New Examination of boiling frogs: we know where we are The boiling frog is a wide known story which is also very similar with the story of Screwtape. When putting a frog in a pot with boiling water in it, the frog will jump out of the pot immediately. However, when it was put in a pot of cold water and the pot was slowly heated, the frog would be boiled alive and die in the pot.

However, this story is proved not true recently. According to Fast Company (2006), J. Debra Hofman did a new examination of the boiling frogs. " We placed Frog A into a pot of cold water and applied moderate heat. At 4. 20 seconds, it safely exited the pot with a leap of 24 centimeters. We then placed Frog B into a pot of lukewarm water and applied moderate heat. At 1. 57 seconds, it safely exited the pot with a leap of 57 centimeters. " Hofman commented, " The change myth assumes a very narrow view of people.

If frogs can do it, people definitely can. " Just like the story of boiling frogs, the system doesn't really out of control with subjective relativism. Relativism holds that there are no absolute moral principles, but the rules that truly guide them in each situation are to be " determined by their relation to something else: the willing of customs or culture of the group, or the desires of the workmates. " Gibb, J. R. (1991). Subjectivism means that " the sole source of knowledge or authority is in the perception of the individual. (Lisa Newton, 1995) When combining subjectivism and relativism, each person is his/her own authority in the business life, and is the source of his/her own guide. On this reasoning, each person has the right to decide on all matters of what is right and wrong. Subjective relativism can only lead people to do as they want, and the rules which guide them is depends on the environment, which means the relationships with others around them are the core reason why they change. For instance, in the story of Screwtape letters, the true way of corrupting a person's soul is the so called " influence of others", not subjective relativism.

Self-awareness can't be lowed, what is changing is relationship with others. According to subjective relativism, what's right for the employees may not

be necessarily right for the company. However, the feeling of right or wrong is directly linked to the feeling of right or wrong from the group he/she lived in. As a result, when a manager is able to affect the employees by delivering his/her idea and value to the workplace (a group where employees are in), subjective relativism can benefit the company. Universalism vs.

Relativism: Small business is perfectly fitful for relativism system Another quite different judgment system is universalism. Universalism and relativism are always compared in a national view point. " Universalism holds that more " primitive" cultures will eventually evolve to have the same system of law and rights as Western cultures. Cultural relativists hold an opposite, but similarly rigid viewpoint, that a traditional culture is unchangeable. In universalism, an individual is a social unit, possessing inalienable rights, and driven by the pursuit of self-interest.

In the cultural relativist model, a community is the basic social unit. Concepts such as individualism, freedom of choice, and equality are absent. It is recognized that the community always comes first. "(Clemens N. Nathan, 2009) however, when talking about business systems, these concepts are a little bit different. Universalism refers to a system with " common rules with similar settings", which means the system has the exactly same rules for all the employees. Looking at the top 100 multinational corporations, they are all using universalism. Universalism is needed today more than ever, especially in multinational corporations. "(David C. Wyld, 2011) As the world is becoming a smaller place because of globalization and Internet, universalism makes more sense in dealing with multinational issues. It can help the company to develop not only the standard of work environment, but

also the reputation of the corporations. However, when focus on the most rapidly developing type of companies, small businesses, universalism seems too general and unfriendly to the employees. Even though subjective relativism has great problems and has a potential for abuse the employees, universalism in its current state is not the ideal solution” Wole Soyinka (2008). Subjective Relativism can help the employees to be more interested in the work and maximize the innovation of them. Besides, managers are able to control the company since it just have relatively small amount of employees that they won't be abused. Subjective Relativism in New Economy The new economy is commonly believed to start from the late 1990s, as computer and Internet was developing worldwide. Companies in the new economy are heavily involved in the internet and biotech industries, but the ripple effects of new technologies has spread out to all other industries as well”(Investopedia, 2012) The networked organizations need a different kind of control. Employees are highly empowered. They can get access to as many works and customers as they can. Besides, employees are highly educated today, sometime they have really good ideas about what companies should do to improve. In this way, managers should be more careful when controlling the management system, and common rules with similar settings are not enough.

Subjective relativism is more powerful in encouraging employees. The system gives the employees to be able to choose what they think is right to do, and the rules are relatively different but fit for each employee. “ There is no logical connection between what you have a right to do and the right thing to do; but there is a psychological temptation to move from one to the

other. Let's say that again: In logic, there is no connection between " You have the right to think what you like," and " Anything you happen to like to think is right. You have the right, after all, to contradict yourself; you have all the right in the world to think that " $2+2= 5$. " That doesn't make it correct. But psychologically, once you have told me that no one has the right to correct me when I claim certain sorts of opinions; you certainly seem to have told me that any such opinions are right, or at least as right as opinions can be. " As Lisa Newton (1998) said, with subjective relativism, empowered employees are able to show their opinions and discuss those opinions together with out shame. Meanwhile, managers can communicate with his group much better and active.

However, a big concern is that subjective relativism really has a potential for abuse the employees, so it would be a big challenge for managers to use this method. One suggestion is to combine the subjective relativism with universalism. That is, using the universalism in the company or corporation, but authorizes some division managers to use subjective relativism among the most excellent groups. In this way, companies can not only gain the benefit from universalism system, but also maximize the efficiency of the most excellent employees. References David C.

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