

MANAGEMENT & ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Teaching to the Mission: Exploring the Role of Jesuit Values in the Experience of Work

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Acknowledgements

I am blessed to work at a University and within a College that is guided by strong core values and facilitates the incorporation of these values into the classroom and our lives. I am grateful for the opportunity that the Ignatian Mentoring Program has provided as well as for the efforts and expertise of my program mentor, Tori Zascavage.

Impetus

The Jesuit ideal gives serious attention to profound questions about the meaning of life; work, of course, plays a large role in many individuals' lives. With the assignment described below, I hoped to give students an opportunity to explore the role that work plays in individuals' lives and how Jesuit values might be integrated into that experience. Many students will be managers and leaders of others and their work in the future. I hoped to encourage students to open their minds and hearts to understand experiences other than their own. In previous semesters, class discussions had brought to the surface assumptions on the part of some of the students that I found to be disturbing, for example, that the phenomenon of intrinsic motivation (i.e., behavior performed for its own sake, engendering enjoyment, accomplishment, pride, etc.) was limited to those who were college-educated and/or in professional-level roles rather than those without a college education and/or in low-skill jobs. My expectation was that understanding individuals' experiences of work would 1) facilitate students' understanding of and respect for others and their work, and 2) shape their thinking about how the Ignatian and Jesuit values so critical to their formation at Xavier can also inform their work experience as well as leadership philosophy and behaviors.

Managerial Behavior Course Overview

Managerial Behavior (MGMT 300) provides an introduction to the theory, policies, and practices of management within organizations. Effective management practices include those that not only serve the interests of the organization, but also meet the needs of the people working in that organization. Management means getting things done through others; thus, a key role for students as managers will be to create the environment and conditions that engage others in accomplishing the organization's goals. Ideally, they are able to enhance the lives of employees and at the same time obtain the best possible results for the organization. Topics addressed include: the role of a manager, history of management thought, managing ethics, decision making, motivation, managing teams, leadership, organizational culture, and organizational change.

Managerial Behavior (MGMT 300) is a business core course required for every business major. It also fulfills social science credits within the broader University core. Students generally take the course as sophomores or juniors.

The Assignment: Meaning of Work Analysis Paper¹

This assignment was intended to help students understand the meaning of work for individuals (i.e., a person's experience of something meaningful—something of value—that work provides) and work-related issues that many Americans face in their jobs. It also served as a vehicle through which to explore the role of Ignatian spirituality and Jesuit values in the experience of work. Students worked with a partner to complete this assignment to allow for varying backgrounds and perspectives to contribute to the richness of the analysis.

Students drew from several sources to complete the assignment.

- Bowe, Bowe, & Streeter's (2001) *Gig*. This book contains approximately 125 essays based on interviews with American workers in a wide range of jobs, including UPS driver, slaughterhouse human resource director, florist, sports agent, escort, labor support doula, prison guard, city planner, nurse, and funeral home director. *Gig* is a modern update of Studs Terkel's (1974) *Working*. Students selected 10 interviews to read and analyze.
- Live interview. Students conducted a live interview with someone about his or her job.
- Rev. Traub's *Do You Speak Ignatian?* This booklet provides a glossary of terms used in Ignatian and Jesuit circles.
- Discernment Group II Ignatian Values and Traditions "Wheel." This "wheel," part of Appendix A-1 in Discernment Group II's 2012 Final Report, depicts six Ignatian values and examples of what those values look like as concrete actions.

The latter two sources were provided as resources in integrating Jesuit values (e.g., *Cura Personalis*, *Discernment*, *Finding God in All Things*, *Magis*, *Solidarity and Kinship/Men and Women for Others*, *Reflection*, *Service Rooted in Justice and Love*) in their analyses.

Students analyzed their interviews with respect to the following questions and wrote an eight- to ten-page paper describing the results of their analyses:

- How does the meaning of work differ among the individuals interviewed?
- What similarities exist in regard to the meaning of work among the individuals interviewed?
- After analyzing the interviews, what do you feel most people expect, want, and need from their jobs?
- What indication of Ignatian spirituality or Jesuit values do you see in the individuals' work experiences? What opportunities do you see for individuals or organizations to integrate such values into their work?
- What did you learn about work from reading the interviews in Bowe, Bowe, & Streeter's *Gig*, conducting your own interview and contemplating work through the lens of Jesuit values?

Students' Knowledge of Ignatian Spirituality and Jesuit Values

Prior to the project, I wanted to understand students' current level of knowledge with respect to Ignatian Spirituality and Jesuit Values specified in the assignment instructions: *Cura Personalis*,

¹ The assignment is adapted from Cox, P. L. (2004). The meaning of work: Studs Terkel's *Working* as a teaching tool. *Journal of Management Education*, 28, 757-769.

Discernment, Finding God in All Things, Magis, Solidarity and Kinship (Men and Women for Others), Reflection, and Service Rooted in Justice and Love. Thus, students completed a brief, informal survey.

Students had the strongest knowledge of the values of *Reflection* and *Finding God in All Things*. Most had a basic idea of what these values were and some had a strong enough knowledge base such that they felt equipped to participate in a discussion on these ideas or integrate them into their lives. On average, students had a basic understanding of the values of *Solidarity and Kinship (Men and Women for Others)* and *Service Rooted in Justice and Love*. Although students had seen the terms *Discernment, Cura Personalis, and Magis*, on average they did not really know what these terms meant.

Students estimated that approximately one third of their coursework at Xavier had incorporated at least some of the above values, whether through class discussion, experiences, or assignments. This integration occurred most often in Theology and Philosophy courses, although students also mentioned incorporation of these values in English/Literature, Management, Accounting, Marketing, Economics, Strategic Human Resource Management, and Science.

Post-assignment, students completed the same brief, informal survey regarding their knowledge of the Jesuit values. On average, for those values about which students already had basic or solid knowledge prior to the assignment, their understanding increased, but only slightly. However, for those values for which students recognized the terms but did not know what they meant—*Discernment, Cura Personalis, and Magis*—students expressed an increased understanding of these values, conveying that they now had either a basic idea or good knowledge of these values, with some now feeling equipped to discuss these ideas or apply them to their lives.

Ignatian Spirituality and Jesuit Values in the Experience of Work

Using the *Gig* interviews as well as their live interview, students were able to see the Jesuit values come to life in people's work. For example, one pair of students portrayed movie director Tamara Jenkins as "showing solidarity because she uses her skill and talents to serve others." They noted that she makes "movies, such as *Slums of Beverly Hills*, which inspire people by telling societal truths and opening people's eyes to the struggles of others around them." They highlighted Jenkin's willingness to learn from fellow director Francis Ford Coppola in order to better use her talents to put her vision into movies as further evidence of *solidarity and kinship*. They also presented U.S. Congressman Barney Frank as exemplifying *service rooted in justice and love* based on the injustices (e.g., McCarthy hearings and Emmett Till's murder) that motivated him to go into politics; he wanted to change things. They characterized Frank as *magis* in action because "he used politics as a way of responding generously to the needs of others." Lastly, in their live interview of a Xavier employee who manages students, they noted that she "models the Ignatian value of *cura personalis* because...she truly views all of the students she interacts with as unique people and cares for all aspects of them, seeing them as more than an employee." They described her concern if students are sick and willingness to talk with students about anything happening in their lives, characterizing this individual as a "second mother."

Another pair of students also saw evidence of *cura personalis* in action in the work Wendy Day, who founded a non-profit organization that helps rap artists, for instance, advising them on contracts or defending their First Amendment rights with respect to their lyrics. They noted that “she respected the dignity of every individual, and valued the diversity and difference amongst the people she worked with.” And although she defends rappers’ First Amendment rights, she also has built trust with the artists and has blunt conversations with them about lyrics that she finds inappropriate. They saw *discernment* manifested in multiple individuals. For example, FBI agent Allison Mourad deals with cases of child pornography, including often posing as a young child in chat rooms. The students noted that Mourad “was able to manage emotions and react appropriately to the emotions of others.” Particularly when posing as a child, she excelled at “keeping herself calm and responding appropriately” in order to get her work done. Similarly, effective management of emotions was critical for Kim K, who is a surveillance officer in a casino. Various incidents of suicide had taken place at the casino; the students observed that “dealing with incidents of suicide can be very difficult, but Kim K had the value of discernment and was able to manage her emotions as well as react appropriately to those incidents.”

Lastly, one pair of students noted that “simply by participating in the Gig interviews, the participants are portraying Ignatian spirituality as they *reflect* upon their work and aspirations.” These students suggested that “managers could integrate reflections into career planning so that their employees could see where they are now, know where they want to go, and take steps to reach their aspirations.”

Student Reactions to Assignment

In the informal survey completed post-assignment, students were asked three open-ended questions regarding what they had learned and the value of the assignment:

1. Comment about your learnings from the assignment regarding *the meaning of work* for individuals.
2. Comment about your learnings from the assignment regarding *Ignatian spirituality and Jesuit values* (more broadly) and/or specifically how they relate to work.
3. Would you recommend this assignment (or something similar) be used in a future course? Why or why not?

Selected responses to these questions (italicized) are below.

Question #1: Learnings regarding the Meaning of Work

Students learned about the various motivations people have to work and seemed to gain an appreciation for others’ work. They also gained life lessons they could apply to their own careers:

I learned that people’s jobs aren’t always what they seem. Often times, I think that people are what their job title indicates, but the people that work in these positions are just like me and others I know in my life; living with their jobs as only one aspect.

I learned of the many differences of work in our world and society and that, no matter how I view someone's job or position, that work means something to them and potentially something that is not visible from the outside looking in.

Even in professions where morality and ethics aren't readily apparent, this assignment helped to see why people found their jobs rewarding.

I appreciated learning about why people work (more than money), and why they work so hard.

I learned that no matter what field you enter, you should find what you love in that field.

People are motivated by all kinds of reasons to work. The meaning of work to each person is very different.

...to get the most out of work, it has to match one's lifestyle and values.

I learned so much from this assignment, mainly that life truly is what you make it no matter the career you chose.

The meaning of work assignment opened my eyes to the many different ways in which people fit into society and contribute to it. Not all of them seemed to have a truly positive impact, but I was able to see why they chose to do what they did.

Question #2: Learnings regarding Ignatian Spirituality and Jesuit Values

Many students found that the assignment helped them to better understand Jesuit values, what they might look like in the real world, and/or the effects of integrating them into one's life:

Through the assignment I learned about the specific terms listed (in the assignment instructions) but overall the readings gave me a context about why this University believes in educating the whole person.

...the individuals who incorporated (Jesuit values) into their lives were more content with their job.

The values that I carry and how they influence other co-workers. I also, believe it or not, was able to learn more and more about Xavier's identity and what they stand for.

Through the extra handouts and readings, my knowledge of Ignatian spirituality and Jesuit values was broadened immensely.

Of course, some were disappointed with what they found:

This assignment revealed a lack of Ignatian Spirituality and Jesuit Values in the lives of common Americans. If they are present, it is a weak example of them. It's hard to live them out in real life, and that is a sad fact.

Others found the emphasis on Ignatian Spirituality and Jesuit Values in the assignment to be overly challenging or lacking relevance:

I had a tough time with them because most of my classes don't work with them and, as a non-Catholic, they aren't significant to me.

I am not religious. I consider myself an atheist. I feel that us having to incorporate this into an academic paper takes away from the academic quality.

I found the connection between Ignatian spirituality and Jesuit values to be difficult to connect to each individual story, as we do not really learn much about these concepts.

Question #3: Recommendation regarding Assignment

Many students found the assignment to be of value and would recommend it going forward:

I personally would not change a thing to this assignment...the knowledge I gained as a result of the research I did helped me fully understand that the Jesuit ideals are like a code to live by, if you use and exhibit these behaviors, then satisfaction will result.

Yes! Although at first I was thinking it'd be a useless burden of work, I was excited to find out how much I enjoyed reading the interviews and making observations; it helped me get more out of them than just surface entertainment. It was also nice to get to use ideas of Ignatian spirituality in a class other than Theology since our education is saturated with these ideas. We don't get enough interaction with this spirituality (especially in business classes)!

I would use it in the future. It was rewarding to be reminded of the Jesuit values through this assignment.

Yes, it was interesting, informative, and relevant.

Yes, because it helps me to understand how to find God in any line of work.

Yes, I would definitely recommend this assignment. It was really interesting and practical to us as college students figuring out what our career will be.

Yes, this assignment allowed me to reflect on my lifestyle and what career would be best for me. I also got to learn about other people's experience in the workplace.

Yes, I learned a lot about life in the job world and learned about the Jesuit values.

Others seemed to like the assignment, but had more specific feedback to consider in revising it for future use:

I would provide some material that shows an example of actual Ignatian spirituality and Jesuit values being lived out fully. That way we can see their benefits and have something to compare to when reading through Gig.

I think people need to be more educated on Jesuit values in order to complete this assignment to get its full effect.

My only criticism is that I couldn't find the connection to management or leadership.

Others had differing reactions, particularly to the Jesuit values portion, requesting that it be made more inclusive or eliminated altogether, whether based on their personal beliefs or other reasons:

The assignment overall was valuable. Integrating Jesuit values isn't totally necessary, but it seems like a good experience to have at a Jesuit University.

I would, though I don't think the Jesuit part is too critical.

I would, but the Jesuit values are something that can be omitted to be replaced with something else. Although it was nice to connect the ideas, I don't think people got a lot out of it.

Yes! I liked reading and writing the Gig part (not so hot on the Jesuit values part). Maybe something to incorporate other faith traditions?

The book was very enjoyable and I have learned a lot based off of these interviews. I do understand how being a private Jesuit school would want to elevate its values and create an assignment rooted in this, but I still felt bombarded with religion, especially when I have no rapport with Xavier's definition of "God."

Conclusion

In general, I was pleased with the assignment. Students' analyses of what work means to people, how Jesuit values are manifested in people's work, and where there are opportunities to integrate such values were thoughtful and insightful. I delighted in reading their papers. Students' reactions to the assignment indicated that they generally enjoyed the assignment and felt it was worthwhile in terms of their learning. In perhaps the ultimate indication of enjoyment, several students mentioned that they would not be selling the *Gig* book back at the end of the semester!

However, I am also left with thoughts to ponder in terms of offering this or a similar assignment in the future. Pre-assignment, students seemed to have very different levels of exposure to and knowledge of the Jesuit values. Although I provided the students resources, perhaps additional in-class time devoted to education in this area would be advised. In addition, in the post-assignment survey, several students seemed disinterested in Jesuit values altogether, whether based on their personal beliefs or other reasons not stated. Although the Jesuit values are based in the Catholic faith tradition, I had not perceived them as exclusive based on my perception that serving others or taking time to reflect, for example, are values found in a multitude of faith traditions and even among those with no faith tradition. However, several students seemed to

feel excluded by this aspect of the assignment, and I will need to contemplate if there is anything I can do to increase the inclusivity of the assignment in the future.

I do plan to continue to integrate Ignatian Spirituality and Jesuit Values in my courses going forward. As one student mentioned in his or her reaction, they “don’t get enough interaction with this spirituality (especially in business classes!).” I think it is important that students realize that the Jesuit values are not ideas limited to Theology classes, but rather, living, breathing, ideals that are relevant to their lives and their future careers in business.