

Doing Business the ‘Jesuit’ Way

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In his 1989 article in *Boston College Magazine* on the five traits of Jesuit education, Robert Mitchell, S.J. (1989) states that one of the key tenants of education is an emphasis on both personal and professional ethics. Father Mitchell goes on to explain how this unfolds: “Jesuit institutions today feel compelled by their tradition to raise these questions for their students, not through sloganeering and political maneuvering, but in a way that is proper for higher education: through learning, research, reflection and imagination.” In my managerial behavior classes, I attempt to do just this, using stories and scenarios that prompt reflection and discussion among my students. But I have never asked students to reflect on their own journey in developing their morality and how engaging in learning at a Jesuit institution might inform their view of ethical issues, particularly in a business context. The purpose of this paper is to reveal my journey and findings when I asked my business students the question “What does it mean to do business the ‘Jesuit’ way?”

Research Method and Participants

The nature of my inquiry requires that I use a qualitative method to address my research question. I chose a grounded theory approach (Locke, 2002) to avoid preconceived notions and remain open to any themes that participants might offer in response to my research question (RQ). To collect data addressing my RQ, I created a survey of open-ended questions requiring students to reflect both generally on their experience of Jesuit education and specifically on how such an education can impact conducting business ethically. I chose to administer the survey at the beginning of my two managerial behavior classes on the day following a guest lecture on ethics by Dr. Joanne Ciulla, a renowned ethical leadership scholar. Dr. Ciulla presented ethical topics within the context of short cases, some from real-life experiences and some from fiction. In her presentation, she engaged students to imagine the feelings they would have experienced as managers or decision-makers in these cases. Students appeared engaged in the discussion and offered several thoughtful comments and ethical reasoning.

It is important to note that Dr. Ciulla did not specifically mention any Jesuit tradition or overtly refer to Jesuit values. Therefore, students were not primed to think in terms of applying Jesuit views to ethical issues. Having just discussed ethical issues in the previous class, however, did make the request to reflect on the connection between a Jesuit education and ethical decision-making a logical one for the students.

On the day the survey was administered, I began class by asking students to think about their learning experiences at Xavier University regarding ethical and moral behavior, either in the classroom or in other activities. I then asked students to anonymously answer the following questions:

1. In a few sentences, describe what it means to do business the “Jesuit” way?
2. What are words that come to mind when you think about a Jesuit education?
3. How have you experienced Jesuit ethics at play during your Xavier experience? This could be a particular situation you encountered, a particularly meaningful class assignment, anything that has impacted you.

4. Has your thinking regarding making ethical decisions at work changed as a result of your Jesuit education? If yes, how?
5. How long have you been a student at Xavier?
6. What is your major?

Students willing to complete the survey were asked to place it in a large envelope at the front of the room when completed. There were 47 students who returned completed surveys.

Participants represented the following majors: Accounting, Business Analytics, Business Undecided, Digital Media, Finance, German, Health Services Administration, International Business, Management, Marketing, Natural Sciences, Occupational Therapy, Sports Management, and Theater Education. Participants included Freshmen (1), Sophomores (32), Juniors (9) and Seniors (3) and NA (2)

Analysis and Findings

To analyze the qualitative data captured in questions 1-4, I began by reviewing participant responses from five random surveys, looking for themes to emerge in response to each question. A few general themes emerged quickly for questions 1 and 4, but responses to questions 2 and 3 varied widely and I was unable to compress these to a set of consistent themes after reviewing five sets of data. As survey question 1 directly addressed my RQ, I applied a more robust qualitative analysis method referred to as open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) in order to confirm my initial findings and look for additional emergent themes. Open coding requires creating a “dictionary” of already identified themes and then coding participant responses to either match these themes or add new themes to the dictionary (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This process can add depth and nuance to existing theme definitions and as well as identify new themes.

The analysis process revealed several interesting findings addressed at doing business the Jesuit way, as well as participants’ experiences of being members of a Jesuit institution. Below, I discuss these findings in order of survey questions presented to participants.

1. In a few sentences, describe what it means to do business the “Jesuit” way?

After reviewing the initial five survey responses, three themes emerged: Doing work with quality, having personal integrity, and satisfying customers. After coding and reviewing all responses, these themes were expanded to the final three emergent themes:

- a. Performing quality work, often by thinking thoroughly and critically about tasks and decisions. One participant wrote “*Business the ‘Jesuit’ way means to be intellectually competent and open to growth.*” Another said “*Doing it the right way is making sure you think (through) every opportunity and scenarios are thought out.*”
- b. Acting with personal integrity, especially fairness. As an illustration, one participant wrote “*To do business the ‘Jesuit’ way means to treat others in business with transparency, fairness, and justice. To be equal and honest in all transactions.*”
- c. Thinking of and benefiting others, not just oneself. This could include customers, communities, and the world in general. The following quotes illustrates this thinking: “*...it is the understanding that the consequences of you doing business will impact somebody, whether it is positively or negatively.*” “*Doing business the Jesuit way means treating everyone with the same love. Thinking of all the people your decision affects and making*

sure everyone is considered in the decision. ‘All for one, one for all’ still applies in the business world.”

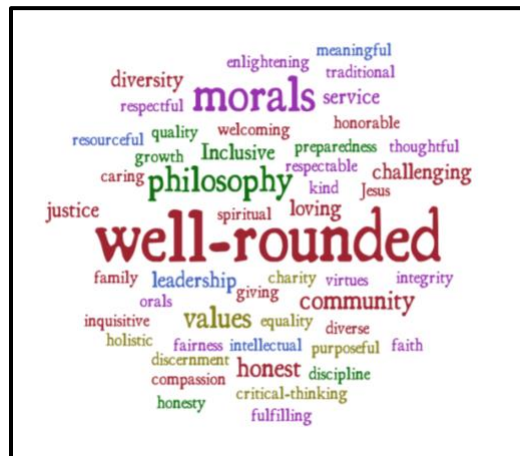
In multiple responses, participants saw themes a and c above as intertwined and working together. Participants recognized that making the best informed decisions and producing high quality work would in turn help others. The following quote illustrates this understanding:

“What it means to do business the “Jesuit” way is to care about the impact of your actions on other individuals and on nature. It means to deeply analyze a situation and find the best way to deal with it after reflecting and comparing the good outcomes for others. It means to be able to discern in our everyday life and be open to help and be available for others.”

2. *What are words that come to mind when you think about a Jesuit education?*

To analyze this data, I created a word cloud, which is a visual representation of how frequently each word appears in responses. Figure 1 shows the word cloud.

Figure 1 – Responses to “What are words that come to mind when you think about a Jesuit education?”



This data shows a few common themes, such as a well-rounded education fostering personal morals and values like honesty and charity. The data also demonstrates that students draw different meanings from such an education, supported by the variety of responses. One phrase that appeared several times in various forms, but I was not able to include in the word cloud for technical reasons, is “All for One, One for All.” This aspect of Xavier’s culture specifically has come to symbolize Jesuit education for many participants.

3. *How have you experienced Jesuit ethics at play during your Xavier experience? This could be a particular situation you encountered, a particularly meaningful class assignment, anything that has impacted you.*

As with question 2, the responses collected from this question varied widely. To understand the full magnitude, Table 1 contains all unique responses.

Table 1 – Unique responses to “How have you experienced Jesuit ethics at play during your Xavier experience?”

Philosophy class	Info Systems class	Father B. in the dining hall
BLAW class	Morality Literature class	Volunteering (also blood donations)
Service	Xavier Motto	Family feeling on campus
Full process followed on policy issue violations	Biodiversity and the Greater Good class	Community engagement (also specifically Norwood)
Advisors	Theology class with Dr. Mescher	Alternative Breaks
Manresa	Professors helping students	1 st year seminar
Learning about different cultures	Helping international students	Xavier Expeditions
Peace service last year	Working with non-profits	As an RA
Clubs doing fundraisers for charity	Everyone holds the door for others	Father Graham stated his position on ending DACA
Doing good things in secret		

As the data indicates, participants reported a wide range of experiences throughout their tenures at Xavier that pointed to the Jesuit influence.

4. *Has your thinking regarding making ethical decisions at work changed as a result of your Jesuit education? If yes, how?*

Due to a lack of meaningful comments in response to this question, I analyzed the data with a simple count. Of the 47 participants, 36% (17 students) clearly reported thinking differently about ethical decisions in light of their Jesuit education. A few of these participants mentioned that their Jesuit education began before attending Xavier.

Discussion

I began my research by asking the question “What does it mean to do business the ‘Jesuit’ way?” Through analyzing responses to four student survey questions, I found some common themes among respondents. The first is that students have internalized the Jesuit concept of being men and women for others. This theme jumps from the question 1 data where students consistently reported considering business impacts on other entities, such as customers, community, and society at large as imperative to doing business within a Jesuit orientation. Again, the theme appears in several words to describe Jesuit education (question 2), such as service and compassion. Lastly, participants reported multiple behaviors they witnessed around campus that pointed to serving others (question 3), such as the simple act of holding the door for others. Participants are making the connection between these behaviors and the Jesuit education they are receiving.

Another common theme related to the first and appearing in the data consistently was the idea of community as crucial to Jesuit business and values. In response to question 1, one participant stated that doing business the Jesuit way “*is about reaching success as a team rather than individually.*” This is echoed in words like *diversity* and *inclusive* that appear in the word cloud, and also in behaviors like community engagement in Norwood. Again, participants connect these community-building aspects of Xavier life to its Jesuit values.

Although not a major theme present in the data, analysis did reveal that not all students acknowledge being positively impacted by a Jesuit education. For example, in response to question 1 regarding doing business the Jesuit way, one participant responded “*I have no idea – not even sure what a Jesuit is.*” Another wrote “*Doesn’t make me think of business any differently, honestly. I’ve always thought business is business and doing business the ‘Jesuit’ way does not change my way of thinking.*” These minor, but not insignificant, findings suggest that there is room for additional application of Jesuit values to our business learning.

I am deeply encouraged by what I found in studying my research question. My data suggest that students are significantly internalizing the Jesuit values that they are learning and experiencing at Xavier. They report that not only are they hearing the message of the Jesuit way in classes and on walls, but they are seeing it played out in a myriad of ways on and off campus by Xavier students and staff. This “lived” experience of Jesuit values, I believe, will follow them as they move beyond Xavier’s campus to shape our world.

References

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