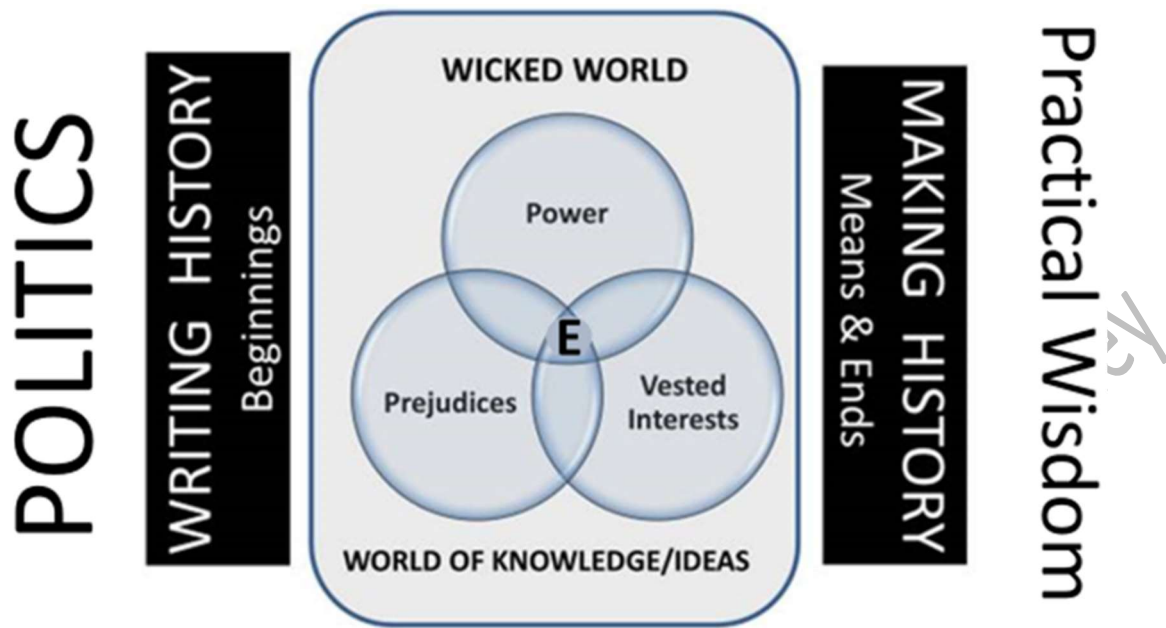


## Ethicality & Mindfulness

*Mindfulness Matters - as it is only Conduct that Counts*



Managing/Leading is the political power-infused wicked-world practice of melding divergent interests & clashing perspectives in collective purposeful endeavour. It is a practice where the choices are **ethical** in character, as they are most frequently choices as to what **ends**/purposes/goals we should have, and what **means**/methods we should use to achieve them.

### Ethicality

To my mind, though many philosophers have attempted to give us a 'science' of ethical choice none of these attempts survive serious scrutiny. There have been two such approaches – deontological & utilitarian. The former deems that the morality of an action should be based on whether that action itself is right or wrong under a series of rules/principles – '*deont*' in Ancient Greek means 'it is right'. The latter approach attempts, sometimes almost algebraically, to enable a moral choice to be made on the basis of the projected consequences of that choice – and their position on scales, in many dimensions, of good-to-bad outcomes.

The moral thought experiment below, the trolley problem as it is known, represents well, in a classic ethical dilemma, the distinction and conflict of the two schools of moral thought above.

*There is a runaway train barrelling down some railway tracks. Ahead, on the tracks, there are five people tied up and unable to move. The train is headed straight for them. You are standing on a bridge; there is a fat man standing close to its edge. The fall would kill him, but you could easily push the man off the bridge - he would drop onto the points below and the train would switch to a different set of tracks. Given how close the train is you only have two options:*

- 1. Do nothing, and allow the train to kill the five people on the main track.*
- 2. Push the fat man off the bridge to his death.*

*What is the 'right' thing to do?*

The rules say we must not murder people, and not doing so is the learned behaviour of most humans on the planet. But, in this case, given the negative collateral impact of following the rule, maybe we should 'bend the rule' and break our 'good' habit. Should we listen to Machiavelli? - *the ends justify*

*the means if the ends are the 'greater good'.* But what is the greater good, and who gets to decide? We, also, do not know what we do not know – the unknown unknowns as Rumsfeld called them – for all we know that man on the bridge, if he lives, could discover a universal cure for cancer – and many more lives would be saved in the longer run, and who knows why these five have been tied to the track anyway – the 'beginnings' are equivocal and the 'greater good' elusive. It is truly a wicked circumstance that we face.

You can probably see what is coming, other than the train! Standing on the bridge we have to act – doing nothing is an act. The issue is whether we choose to choose, do not simply act in habit or by rule, judge what is 'for the best', take responsibility, and act accordingly. **To judge is to own the choice** made. Those who choose to choose, whatever their choice, have Ethicality – the courage to take responsibility for their choices. **To judge is to be ethical**, it is to have the courage to 'hesitate' and choose to choose – even if the judgement is simply to act in habit or by rule. The wise one does not 'pass the buck' in any direction, and judges what is right or wrong no matter the wickedness of the circumstances.

In our managerial lives we rarely face dilemmas like the trolley one – but whether we should 'tell the truth' and 'say what we think' is an ethical question that we will often face – you saw my personal example in an earlier reading. If one has **Metis** one is mindful of vested interests and one's self-interest, and judges in that light how to act. '**Metisless**' compliance with expectations, adherence to rules & principles and un-reflexive habitual responses can have serious consequences.

*To whom to lie about what, when, where & how is your choice, and a choice of immense importance*

Metis is an amoral tool, like a knife – you can kill with it, or carve a beautiful sculpture – you have the option of how to use it. You are minded to take account of the interests in play, and are mindful of your own self-interest – it heightens your sensitivity to these aspects of the world. This awareness might lead you to judge that it would be 'for the best' to lie in a certain circumstance – it is for you to take responsibility for your action, and for others to judge your justifications.

## Mindfulness

### McMindfulness

The mindfulness movement seems to offer us a method for helping us cope with almost every area of our lives. Frequently now, we hear reports of scientific studies that enumerate the many benefits to our well-being of mindfulness meditation, and how it effects neurological changes in the brain. Mindfulness meditation has become mainstream, making its way into almost all aspects of our lives – prisons, schools, corporations etc.

Millions of people are receiving manifest benefits from their mindfulness practice: less stress, better concentration, perhaps a little more empathy. Needless to say, this is to be welcomed – and its success in the arena of cognitive behavioural therapy is great news. But these successes have a shadow – the 'true' meaning of Mindfulness has been lost.

The rush to commodify mindfulness into a marketable product may be leading to an unfortunate denaturing of this ancient practice, which was intended for far more than relieving a headache, reducing blood pressure, or helping executives cope with the executive life!

Meditating will not make you Mindful but being Mindful might make you meditate!

Mindfulness@Lenney

I am an attempting Theravada Buddhist and an atheist – the two go together. At the very core of this way of living is the tenet that one must take responsibility for one's choices of conduct – there is no paranormal being to which to pass the buck, nor any rules you must follow.

Mindfulness is not focused on 'living in the moment' in the McMindful sense, but focused on 'living in the moment' in its real sense; that is being – present & attentive - engaged. Mindfulness is not a pursuit of peace through dis-engagement - it is, in fact, the 'opposite' – it is being at peace with no peace! A Mindful Manager does not dis-engage, but engages with 'the world as it is' - deals with 'the world as it is' and is at peace with there being no peace. A useful attribute in the wicked world we face.

**Mindfulness** is more usefully viewed as more akin to the 'original' Mindfulness conception – sati – a Sanskrit word derived from the verb to remember - that has been translated as Mindfulness. But it is much more than 'memory', much more than simply recalling – it is an **experiential learning that has become embedded in 'our way of being in the world'** – our way of conducting ourselves. It is **'Right Remembering'** – it is an ever present understanding that influences every moment of our conduct.

To choose the 'right' conduct we must be properly engaged in the immediate circumstance. We must live in the moment – we must be focussed; we must concentrate; we must seek understanding, and most crucially we must strive for a 'naked receptivity' – a 'bare awareness' - if we are to let the circumstance that confronts us reveal itself to us in all its possibilities & potentialities. We must strive to be reflexive. We must have an imbued habit of challenging our habits!

The target of Mindfulness practice is **Right Thought, Right Talk, Right Action at Right Time** – 'right' meaning 'appropriate'. When Mindful we choose the 'right' conduct almost without choosing – it is just how/who we are – we have developed powerful productive habits – we always **'hesitate'** - we have **'a certain 'way of being'** – the ancient Greeks may have said **we have a certain 'character'**.

Peter Lenney- Mindful Manager