

Biblical Best Practices: The Call for Christian Excellence

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Abstract

Today's business climate often demands extraordinary performance and maximum outcomes. One approach to those demands is via best practices, developing or emulating behaviors that are considered "best-in-class." While such an approach may afford an opportunity to reap monetary benefits, there is, for those attempting to integrate biblical principles into their vocation practices, another dimension that must be considered. Motive is, from a biblical point of view, as important as the business action itself. The business practitioner should consider whether the intended practice is consistent with God's character, is being done for the proper motives, and brings the high level of performance desired by the enterprise.

Introduction

The Total Quality Management (TQM) philosophy has spanned numerous programs all promising economic gains for the firm. In addition, continuous improvement (kaizen) has goaded innumerable firms into actions attempting to modify procedures with the promise of reducing cost and increasing revenue. The improvement process has even taken a martial arts prospective since one may become a "black belt" in the Six Sigma© approach to quality. Present-day managerial literature and publications are replete with various proposals to aid the manager struggling to survive in a competitive market arena. A quick search of the Internet will locate a wealth of "best practices" web sites offering help on the subject.

A core tenet in the focus on quality is the task of "benchmarking," a practice that compares the performance of the firm to a reference standard. The practice draws its conceptual foundations from the field of engineering and metrology. The firm will measure its products, services, and practices against tough competitors or industry leaders (Rothman, 1992). In benchmarking, managers search for practices that are superior to their own firm's operations (Walleck and Leader, 1991).

British scientist Lord Kelvin (William Thomson 1824-1907) is quoted from his lecture to the Institution of Civil Engineers, May 3, 1883..."I often say that when you can measure what you are speaking about and express it in numbers you know something about it; but when you cannot express it in numbers your knowledge is a meager and unsatisfactory kind; it may be the beginning of knowledge but you have scarcely, in your thoughts, advanced to the stage of science, whatever the matter may be."

In this context, operating devices are measured against an external standard. This type of objective measure is beneficial since conformance to pre-set standards essentially eliminates subjective evaluation. "Benchmarking," as it is applied to business operations, is the practice of comparing the firm's operations to an external reference. This is typically a market leader, a firm whose practices are considered as the "best-in-class" or, in other words, "best practices."

There are many firms offering help today. One such enterprise, Best Practices, LLC®, states on its website,

To us, "best practices" are documented strategies and tactics employed by highly admired companies. These companies are not "best-in-class" in every area - such a company does not exist. But due to the nature of

competition and their drive for excellence, the profiled practices have been implemented and honed to help place their practitioners as *the most admired, the most profitable, and the keenest competitors in business*. (emphasis added.)

Unfortunately, not all business decision-making and actions are operational in nature. There are far more qualitative actions in such areas as marketing, finance, and human resources. Furthermore, should the goal of business practice improvement be solely on the basis of being admired, profitable, and most competitive? Are world-class organizations who, according to Hodgetts, Luthans, and Lee (1994), strive to be the best in the world at what they do, the appropriate measurement standard? As we grapple with that question, the pages of Scripture provide a critical framework for understanding many human endeavors including improving business practices.

Actions and Motives

Consider an event described in the life of Jesus in which he observed a poor widow whose actions were no different than those of the crowd in the temple area.

Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny. Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything--all she had to live on." Mark 12:41-44 (NIV)

Many were depositing money into a receptacle for offerings on this particular day. But notice that Jesus focused not only on the action of the individual but also on the motive. And the motive of this woman was remarkably different. Jesus points out to the disciples that her motive was one of faith because she sacrificed her own well being in giving her few, precious coins. The lesson is seems quite clear. The actions were similar but the motivation was different. Jesus emphasizes the fact that thoughts and motives were just as important as one's actions.

This story illustrates a critical facet I will use to develop the concept of "biblical best practices," i.e., it is important to examine both the motives of the decision maker as well as the actions. To illustrate this framework, we will examine a number of incidents in Scripture that provide an opportunity to investigate both the action and motive of the decision maker. In addition, we will attempt to discern the consequences of actions.

I believe it is helpful at this point to incorporate a thought from Clouser (2003) relating to the relationship between business and Scripture. To truly integrate faith with learning, the practice of business requires a perspective that is more than simply taking current socially accepted business practices and adding some religious jargon. There is a critical presupposition which underpins the whole understanding of the field. As the Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinth church;

For in him [Jesus Christ] you have been enriched in every way--in all your speaking and in all your knowledge...I Corinthians 1:5 (NIV)

Our knowledge and the associated understanding of that knowledge are dependent on our faith relationship with Christ. Outside of that relationship, we are limited in our ability to understand the world in which we live in general and of business in particular.

What are “good” actions?

It is critical to construct a framework to consider when developing a standard for behavior in this postmodern age in which we live. What is a “good” decision or motive? To what may we compare or “benchmark” behaviors and motives to know if they are “good”?

To answer that question we must first reflect on the nature of God. One foundational truth is the nature of God’s character. Jesus referred to God as “good,” *agathos* in the Greek. The term means being good in its character or constitution, and is beneficial in its effect. Vine (1940) notes that God is essentially, absolutely, and consummately good. God gives good things (Matthew 7:11, Luke 1:53, Hebrews 9:11, James 1:17), has a will that is good (Romans 12:2), destined humanity for good works (Ephesians 2:10, Philippians 1:6, Hebrews 13:21), and gives good hope to those who believe (II Thessalonians 2:16).

If we explore a little deeper, we note that those who seek to follow Christ by faith are also called to be good (*agathos*). Christ-followers are to cling to that which is good (Romans 12:9, I Thessalonians 5:15), to do good for others (Romans 15:2, Galatians 6:10), to be evaluated based on behavior (II Corinthians 5:10), and to do good works (II Corinthians 9:8, Ephesians 2:10, Ephesians 4:29, Colossians 1:10, II Thessalonians 2:17, II Timothy 3:17, Titus 3:1, I Peter 3:11, III John 1:11).

It should be readily apparent from these references in Scripture that goodness is not simply an abstract concept. Goodness is inseparably connected with actions, with some type of behavior. Goodness involves not only right behavior but also avoiding evil behavior (Elwell, 1996). And it is this choice that humanity must confront in all aspects of life.

Admittedly, the Bible is not a vocational reference manual. It is invaluable, however, for providing guidance to all aspects of life and a foundation on which a measurement system may be constructed. What should be the measurement instrument for evaluating human actions? That same question was asked by a wealthy, young man two millennia ago. In that encounter, the young man asked Jesus about eternal life. In other words, he was seeking a measurement standard for his own behaviors and actions. Jesus responded to his question by asking another question, “What does the law say”? This first century aristocrat correctly identified two relevant passages from the Old Testament Law.

And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. Deuteronomy 6:5 (NIV)

Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD. Leviticus 19:18 (NIV)

Jesus commends him for his answer. These words clearly point out the preeminent importance of our relationship with God and, secondarily, our relationship with our fellow humans. We may infer that these passages form the foundation for ethical behavior in our day. As such, we must, when making decisions, consider whether the action is in accord with our relationship with God and with our neighbor. If so, then we may deem it as good.

But what of motivation? How does it affect the actions and decisions that humans make? Motivation is defined as some inner drive, impulse, intention, etc. that causes a person to do something or act in a certain way (Webster, 1968). It is generally accepted that humans are driven or guided by some inner force often called a conscience or will. Scripture calls this force the “heart.” It was viewed as the center of the emotional, intellectual, and moral mechanisms. And as such, we learn a great deal about this “heart” when we examine the Scriptures.

This internal entity, the “heart,” was viewed as the driver of the individual, the whole being. It was the seat of planning, decision-making, desire, even intellectual understanding. Jesus confronted some religious leaders, “Why are you thinking evil in your hearts?” (Matthew 9:4) And Mary, following Jesus’ birth (Luke 2:19), “pondered [everything she had heard and seen] in her heart.”

While the “heart” is not directly discernable to humans, it is entirely open to God. It is in plain sight of God (1 Samuel 16:7), “...but the Lord looks at the heart.” Not only does God see the heart but He also dispenses justice and grace based on what He observes. From the prophet Jeremiah, we learn something of God’s evaluation.

“I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give to each man according to his ways, according to the results of his deeds.” Jeremiah 17:10 (NIV)

Solomon observed in Proverbs 16:2 “All the ways of a man are clean in his own sight, but the Lord weighs the motives (literally, spirit).” Here Solomon points out that as individuals we often believe that our actions are good (clean), but God looks beyond our actions to our motives. From these verses, it is clear that God examines both the motive and action.

With such an integral role, understanding the “heart” is difficult but necessary. It is clear from Scripture that while we may not be able to directly assess it, we can indirectly assess it by looking for other evidence. Jesus noted that a person’s speech is a particularly good barometer of the condition of the “heart.” He spoke to the Pharisees saying, “For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart” (Matthew 12:34). Solomon noted, “The heart of the wise teaches his mouth” (Proverbs 16:23).

Examples and Illustrations

Let’s consider some combinations of actions and motivations. Hopefully, these examples will provide some help as we think about what we do and why we do it. As a clarifying point, the labels in Figure 1 use the word “right” in lieu of “good” based on the definition found in most dictionaries. Right is defined as being in accordance with what is just, good, or proper (Merriam-Webster, 2004).

		Motives	
		Right	Wrong
Actions	Right	Right Action/ Right Motive [example: Zacchaeus]	Right Action/ Wrong Motive [example: Jewish Contemporaries of Paul]
	Wrong	Wrong Action/ Right Motive [example: Uzzah]	Wrong Action/ Wrong Motive [example: Adam and Eve]

Figure 1 Action and Motive Matrix

Right Action/Right Motive

There are innumerable examples of situations where an action was indeed good and done for the right motive. The example used here focuses on a Jewish man who collected taxes for a living. This man’s name was Zacchaeus (whose name ironically means “pure” in Hebrew). He was the highest ranking of the tax collectors (*architelones*: a chief of tax collectors, chief publican). This man belonged to the vocational class of tax or toll collectors, detested not only by the Jews, but also by other nations. This hatred resulted from their form of employment and the harshness, greed, and deception, with which they did their job.

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way. When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a ‘sinner.’" But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount." Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham." Luke 19:1-9 (NIV)

Based on this encounter with Jesus, we see a man changed in his behavior and doing something good. Zacchaeus displays a visible sign of an invisible change by saying that if he has falsely

accused (*sukophanteo*: to accuse wrongfully, to exact money wrongfully, or to extort from, defraud) anyone, he will repay four times the amount.

In addition, Zacchaeus shows that he is willing to redress his relationship with his neighbors. Scripture is replete with admonitions to care for those in society who are less fortunate. He also announces that he will donate part of his wealth to the less fortunate and correct injustice done to his neighbors in the past as well.

We can certainly see that Zacchaeus' behavior was good. He has experienced salvation and restoration with God. He did something good for others, his neighbors, by offering financial restitution. But what were his motives? There are several clues as to the nature of his motivation. When Jesus entered Zacchaeus' house, we are told that Jesus was received "gladly." That word is *chairo*, which means to be cheerful, joyful, rejoicing. The English word, grace, is derived from that word. Zacchaeus' attitude strongly suggests an appropriate motivation. In addition, based on Jesus' comment, Zacchaeus' motive appears to be right. Jesus says that "salvation has come to this house," indicating that Zacchaeus' behavior is a result of that faith experience. As evidence that this was not simply a flippant statement, Jesus remarks that Zacchaeus is motivated by salvation that has come to him and his house.

Right Action/Wrong Motive

In this example, the Apostle Paul describes a situation in which certain unidentified individuals were preaching about Jesus the Christ. There was a significant difference, however, in the motivation of these individuals.

It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. The latter do so in love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. Philippians 1:15-17 (NIV)

From the narrative, we learn that several individuals were preaching the gospel of Christ but with different "agendas." The preaching of Christ and the gospel certainly represents a good action for Paul.

After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that *God had called us to preach the gospel* to them. Acts 16:10 (NIV) (emphasis added)

Let us focus our attention on those who are motivated by selfish ambition. Their goal was to create some type of difficulty or trouble for Paul. Paul clearly identifies these wrong motives. Which leads to the question, what are the outcomes in this situation? Interestingly, Paul reports that he rejoices in it. He does so because Christ was being preached despite the wrong motives. While the outcome is good from a biblical perspective, those with their self-centered motives will be accountable to God for them.

Wrong Action/Right Motive

A common thought reoccurs throughout our present-day culture. That thought is that anything done for a good motive must be all right. After all, some argue, their intentions were good and honorable. Unfortunately, this is not necessarily true. There are situations where "good

intentions” have some serious consequences. An event in the history of Israel provides a rather extreme illustration as well as providing some thought-provoking insights.

So David assembled all the Israelites, from the Shihor River in Egypt to Lebo Hamath, to bring the ark of God from Kiriath Jearim. David and all the Israelites with him went to Baalah of Judah (Kiriath Jearim) to bring up from there the ark of God the LORD, who is enthroned between the cherubim--the ark that is called by the Name. They moved the ark of God from Abinadab's house on a new cart, with Uzzah and Ahio guiding it. David and all the Israelites were celebrating with all their might before God, with songs and with harps, lyres, tambourines, cymbals and trumpets. When they came to the threshing floor of Kidon, Uzzah reached out his hand to steady the ark, because the oxen stumbled. The LORD's anger burned against Uzzah, and he struck him down because he had put his hand on the ark. So he died there before God. I Chronicles 13:5-10 (NIV)

To properly understand this event, we must consider several significant facts leading up to the event itself. The Ark of the Covenant was a very sacred object as it was a symbol of God's presence with the nation of Israel for generations. God's presence had inhabited the place between the carved cherubim from the giving of the law to Moses until this event. God provided specific instructions for the handling of the ark. Only the priests were authorized to handle it (Numbers 3:32). It was to be covered for travel (Numbers 4:5-14). It was to be carried by humans using specific equipment, i.e., rings and poles (Exodus 25:14). And the Ark, along with the other sacred objects, was not to be touched on penalty of death (Numbers 4:15).

As we closely consider the details provided in the narrative, several facts become obvious. It appears that there was no priest in charge of the transportation process. The individual identified as Uzzah was in fact from the Tribe of Levi, the tribe charged with priestly duties. But the text does not specifically describe Uzzah as a priest. The ark was being carried in the open and on a cart pulled by animals. In short, it was being transported as any ordinary piece of cargo.

In defense of Uzzah, it appears that he was simply acting in an instinctive manner, attempting to protect the ark. The text tells us that the ark was in danger of falling off the cart. Uzzah does something any of us would do. So why does God strike him dead? It almost seems that God is overbearing and cruel. After all, protecting a sacred object from ruin is a good thing and Uzzah appears to have a good motive driving his action.

But the reality is that while the motivation may have been good, the action is still incorrect. Uzzah was either deliberately disobeying the directives provided by God or he was ignorant of those directives. And in the latter case God does not tolerate ignorance. If Uzzah had not learned the directives concerning the handling and transporting the ark, God does not hold him guiltless. While Uzzah's actions appear understandable from a human perspective, those actions violated God's character, i.e., his holiness.

Wrong Action/Wrong Motive

The final category to consider is that of a wrong action being done with the wrong motive. Although an innumerable number of examples exist, the most significant is the fall of humanity in the Garden of Eden.

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?" The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'"

"You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?" He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid." And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?" The man said, "The woman you put here with me--she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it." Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." Genesis 3:1-13 (NIV)

This event is where humanity was forever changed due to a single human act. God created man and woman and placed them in a perfect location, the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve experienced something unknown to us today, direct communication with the Creator of the universe. Yet despite this perfect situation, humanity chose to do the wrong thing for the wrong motive. Adam and Eve chose to disobey the directive that God had given to them so that they could "be like God."

As we evaluate the act, it is painfully obvious that it was a direct violation of God's specific instructions to Adam and Eve. But more importantly, our scrutiny of the event reveals something of the motive of the man and woman. They desired something that God had forbidden them to have, the knowledge of good and evil. This knowledge was something that set them apart from God. The serpent correctly told them, "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

That motive, to be like or equivalent to God, violates the command to love God with everything we possess and obey His commands. And, as a result of the action and the motive, God executes judgment on Adam and Eve as well as the rest of humanity.

What do we learn from these examples? A number of outcomes emerge from these illustrations. First, doing the right action for the right reason will nearly always bring about good outcomes. While we can find exceptions to that

heuristic, we accept it as universally true. Second, wrong actions done for the wrong motives will repeatedly result in bad outcomes. Thirdly, doing the right thing, a good action, with the wrong motive may have a good outcome but will still be ultimately evaluated by God. And, finally, doing the wrong action with the right motivations may bring devastating results. As we attempt to apply these lessons to our practice of business, it is imperative that we consider both the practice and the motive for that practice.

Biblical Best Practices

Improving business practices is something that seems to be universally viewed as desirable, if not essential. In fact, becoming more efficient and effective is a clear indicator of good management or stewardship, a trait that is very compatible with Scripture. So the issue is not the need for improving the quality of the enterprise but rather the means for that improvement. Those means must be evaluated in light of both the actions themselves and the motives driving them.

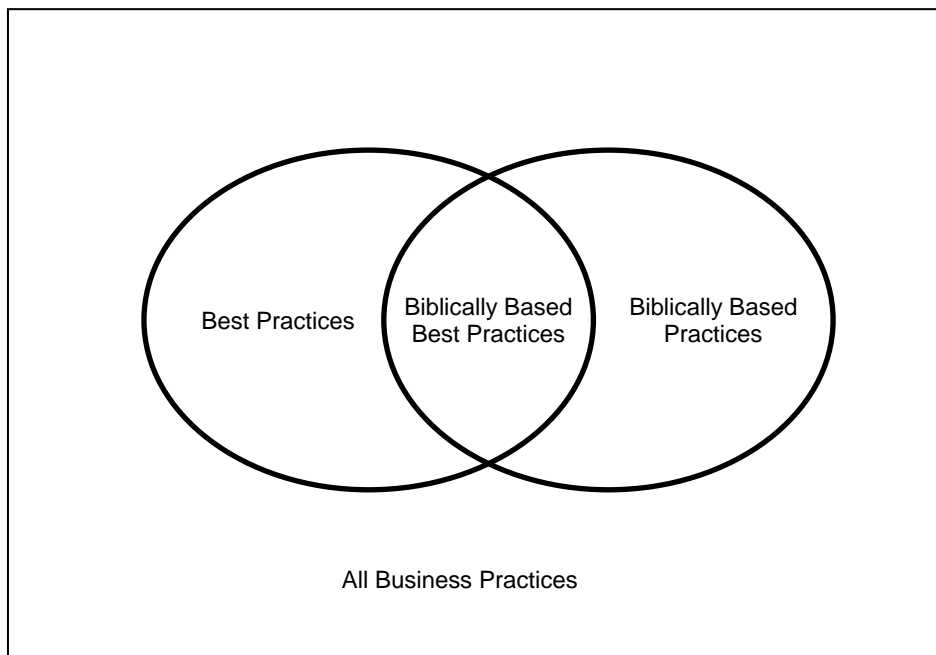


Figure 2 Business Practices Model

As we consider the realm of business practices, it is obvious that not all practices lead to superior performance by companies and organizations. Consider the model in Figure 2. Everything performed in business operations, noted here as “All Business Practices,” are simply typical processes that are necessary and routinely done. Examples include operations, customer service, human resources, management, sales and marketing, to name a few. These practices may or may not lead to superior performance for the organization.

Some practices do conform to the guiding principles from Scripture. These practices are “good,” incorporating justice and other biblical characteristics in their implementation. These are described in the model as “Biblically Based

Practices.” Some of these activities will lead to superior financial performance while others will not.

A third set of business activities is labeled “Best Practices.” These are those practices described earlier as delivering performance excellence and financial rewards. Not all of these practices, however, can be described as good. And, of course, there are some business practices that enable companies to be out-perform competitors and qualify as consistent with biblical principles. These are indicated with the label, “Biblically Based Best Practices.” It is this category that we wish to examine.

Practices that are consistent with Scriptural principles and result in superior business performance should be the goal of business professionals who are seeking to integrate their faith with their vocation. The real question often arises as to how can biblical best practices be identified and implemented. One approach involves an evaluation process, a means to determine whether the practice satisfies the criteria for being considered a biblical best practice. A model illustrating this process is shown in Figure 3. Notice the model is circular in design indicating that it is a continuous process and has no real starting or ending point.

Let us start with the goodness test. How does the practice relate to the principle of doing good (*agathos*), i.e., being compatible with God and His character? The focus here is on whether the practice is intrinsically good and beneficial. Is the practice founded on the qualities of honesty, justice, integrity, etc.? Does the practice have a benevolent effect on the concept of “neighbor”?

The second measure, the motives test, examines the motive for the action. Is the motive prompting the practice good as evaluated against the principle of “*agathos*?” It is at this stage where we scrutinize our rationale for using the particular practice we intend to enact. In other words, why are we pursuing this particular business practice?

The final assessment involves the probable outcome of the strategy or tactic from a business performance perspective. That is, will the practice enable the firm to improve performance or, better yet, achieve superior performance than its competitors? In this evaluation, the superior performance test, the goal is measuring the outcome or result of the practice using business-related measures.

Some “real-world” examples

Consider a company struggling with profitability. The product the company produces and sells is of average quality and is priced at a comparable rate. To reduce costs, the firm is pursuing a plan to reduce the size of its staff. The director of human resources advises the sales manager that it is necessary to eliminate a number of sales positions. To avoid a potential liability or lawsuit, the human resource director schools the sales manager on a process known as “managing out,” a way to nudge an employee out the door while also minimizing legal exposure (Holt, 2004). The sales manager informs one employee that a new “performance program” is in effect. This program has a workload and sales

quotas that are essentially impossible to meet. Ultimately, the employee will likely quit, discerning that the failure to meet the performance expectations will result in his or her dismissal.

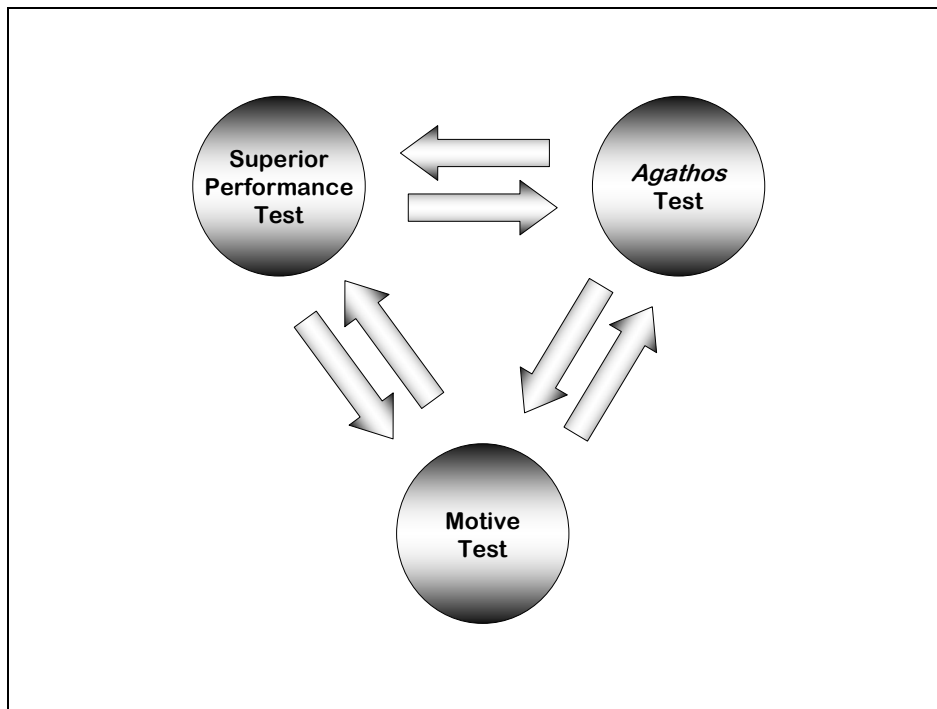


Figure 3 Evaluating Business Practices

How does this practice fare when evaluated against our biblical best practices model? Admittedly, staff sizes do need to change as the economics of the market changes. Oversupply and reduced demand often require a firm to shrink to maintain profitability and remain a viable company. In addition, the management of a firm has a number of different stakeholders whose demands on the firm are often conflicting. Owners require a financial return on their investment, customers want value in the exchange process, and employees insist on satisfactory compensation for their labor. So let's evaluate the "managing out" practice advocated by the human resources director.

Since we can start at any test in our "benchmarking" evaluation, we will use the business performance test first. Will the elimination of staff improve business performance? To the extent that the action does not adversely affect the sales and service of its products and reduces costs, thereby increasing profits, the "managing out" practice passes the business performance test. On to the next test; does the practice of "managing out" pass the *agathos* test? Is the practice based on factors such as honesty, justice, and integrity? Here the practice fails to measure up. Since in this illustration the performance plan is not universally applied, management has been unjust in dealing with the particular sales representative. But what of the final test, evaluating the motives of the action? Here, too, the practice falls short in light of the fact that the reason for the action was to manipulate the employee to quit in order to avoid legal risk and a poor image in the press.

Consider another example. Suppose a retail store notifies its sales associates that there will be an “unadvertised” in-store sale next week on a certain line of products. In addition, the manager informs the associates that the information is not for public knowledge. One of those sales associates, Mary, sees her friend, Karen, shopping later that day. Karen, trying to “stretch her budget,” complains about the price of one of the products that will be marked down next week. Karen asks Mary, the sales associate, if the product she is interested in will be going on sale any time soon. Mary hesitates to answer.

Let’s evaluate the pricing tactic being practiced here by the retail store beginning with a quick “benchmark” check relating to the motive of the manager. Let’s assume that there does not appear to be any indication of wrong motives. We can next examine the business outcome test. Reducing the price of a product may be beneficial from a business perspective subject to the elasticity of the particular product as well as other strategic issues. A small change in price may prompt a larger change in quantity demanded thereby increasing revenue to the retail store. Assuming that is the case, the “unadvertised” sale would pass the business outcome test. The *agathos* test, however, is a different matter. With the practice of marking down the price on the goods with an unadvertised sale, the store management has placed its sales associates in a compromising situation. If Mary tells her friend, Karen, that the product will not be going on sale, Mary is forced to lie. On the other hand, if Mary does not lie, she has violated a directive from her boss. In either event, Mary has been placed in a situation where an action would result in something that is not good.

The manager of the retail store could modify the practice and alleviate the facet of the action which is wrong. He or she should refrain from disclosing the fact that the product would be going on sale in the future. By doing so, the boss avoids creating a situation in which the sales associate must lie or disobey.

Conclusion

There is universal acceptance of the need to improve business performance. That improvement often takes both a process and an outcome approach to accomplish the desired goal. Doing the right thing, whether that is quality improvement, best-in-class practices, or something similar is certainly necessary. But that is not sufficient. The reason the action is performed is paramount. We should attempt to be sure we are doing the right thing for the right reason. Today’s business world may overlook the motives of best practices. God doesn’t.

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