

Achieving High Ethical Standards, Social Responsibility, and
Focus on Exceptional Quality in
the Corporate Environment

by

Dinah Richartz

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Kari Dahl

The Graduate School
University of Wisconsin-Stout

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**The Graduate School
University of Wisconsin-Stout
Menomonie, WI**

Author: Richartz, Dinah L

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to examine one organization that has incorporated the People Process Culture (PPC) philosophy into their workplace. This study will be the second in a series developed through the People Process Culture Department at the University of Wisconsin-Stout. The findings of this case study will be used in comparison with results of future company case studies to determine common qualities.

The qualitative case study was based on KRM Information Services Inc.. An interview was done with the owner, founder and president of KRM Information Services. The purpose of this study is to provide an example of how one company has established ethical standards, social responsibility and exceptional quality in the face of present day challenges. Data and results obtained from KRM will be compared against the themes found in the Good Work project. (Gardner, Csikszentmihalyi & Damon, 2001).

The Graduate School
University of Wisconsin Stout

Menomonie, WI

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Chapter I: Introduction

This case study was developed to provide an example of how a company has incorporated high ethical standards and social responsibility along with exceptional quality in the face of present day challenges. The company selected for this case study was KRM Information Services Inc. in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. KRM Information Services was chosen based on the company's dedication to the People Process Culture (PPC) philosophy. A company incorporating PPC in their organizational culture creates an environment with a high level of belief in their employees utilizing both sociology, and psychology, while focusing on performance and profit (<http://www.uwstout.edu/ctem/ppc/ppcmission.html>).

A qualitative interview was done with the owner, co-founder, and CEO, Richard (Rick) Olson to uncover specific techniques used in order to infuse the company with the qualities of high ethical standards, social responsibility, and exceptional quality in the ever changing business world.

This case study was based on previous research done by the Good Work Project (Gardner, Csikszentmihalyi & Damon, 2001). The main objective of the project was to define what good work entails as well as what motivates individuals to accomplish it. "Good Work" is formally defined by the three principal investigators of the Good Work Project as work that is of high quality, socially responsible, and meaningful to the worker" (Gardner, Csikszentmihalyi & Damon, 2006). Extensive in-depth interviews were done with professionals from a wide array of professions. The goal was to discover trends, goals, and missions that the successful professionals had in common.

Statement of the Problem

How does KRM Information Services Inc. achieve work with high ethical standards, social responsibility, and a focus on exceptional quality in the face of present day challenges and threats?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine one organization that has incorporated the people process culture philosophy into their workplace. This case study will be the first in a series developed through the People Process Culture Department at the University of Wisconsin-Stout. The findings of this case study will be used in comparison with results of future company case studies to determine common qualities.

Assumptions of the Study

Throughout the research process and qualitative interview it was assumed that all information shared was true and honest. It was also assumed that all information that was used will identify how one company has incorporated the People Process philosophy into their organization. Based on these assumptions the information collected in this research project will be used to recognize themes and common qualities that can be transferred and incorporated into other organizations.

Definition of Terms

Core Values: “the deeply ingrained principles that guide all of a company’s actions; they serve as the cultural cornerstones” (Lencioni, 2002, p.114).

Business Ethics: “The rules, standards, principles, or codes that give guidelines for morally right behavior and truthfulness in specific (business) situations”, (Beu, Buckley, & Harvey, 2003, p. 89).

Ethics: “the ‘rules or principles that define right and wrong conduct”, (Sims, 1994, p. 5).

Good Work: “‘Good Work’ is formally defined by the three principal investigators of the Good Work Project as work that is of high quality, socially responsible, and meaningful to the worker” (Gardner, Csikszentmihalyi & Damon, 2006, p.4).

Integrity: “firm adherence to a code of especially moral or artistic values”, Retrieved December 18, 2007, from Merriam-Webster Online website: <http://www.m-w.com/dictionary/integrity>.

Motivate: “to provide with a motive”, Retrieved December 18, 2007, from Merriam-Webster Online website: <http://www.m-w.com/dictionary/motivate>.

People Process Culture: “A people process culture is an organization environment that creates a strong, positive belief in people and sustains a high level of performance and profit over an extended period of time.” Retrieved November 10, 2007, from University of Wisconsin – Stout People Process Culture website: <http://www.uwstout.edu/ctem/ppc/ppcmission.html>.

Corporate Social responsibility: “also called sustainability or citizenship, contributes to sustainable development by working to improve quality of life with employees, their families, the local community and stakeholders up and down the supply chain” (Fox, 2008, p. 27).

Limitations of Study

The limitations of this case study are:

- Interviewer skills are limited.
- The case study interview was scheduled in advance so time with interviewee was restricted.
- The interview was not conducted at a neutral location; the interview took place in Mr. Olson's office.
- The data collected was self-reported and was the interviewee's perception. The interview was based on trusting that all information shared was accurate, and truthful.
- Results from data collected were not reviewed by other employee's at the organization to confirm accuracy.
- This is the first case study in a series, so comparison and common themes have not yet been determined. Results of this case study will be analyzed and compared to future case studies in a series developed through the People Process Culture Department.

Methodology

In chapter two the researcher reviewed current literature relating to ethical standards, social responsibility, and exceptional quality in business today. The information gathered assisted in the methodology of the case study. Chapter three provides a detailed description of the research methods used in this project, such as; subject selection and description, instrumentation, data collection procedures, data analysis, and limitations. Chapter four discusses survey results from the qualitative case

study in detail. Chapter five compares the findings from the literature review with the survey data of the qualitative case study to determine common themes and recommendations for future research.

Chapter II: Literature Review

This case study was developed to provide an example of how a company has instituted high ethical standards and social responsibility along with exceptional quality in the face of present day challenges. The company selected was KRM Information Services Inc. in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. KRM Information Services was chosen based on the company's dedication to the People Process Culture (PPC) philosophy. A company incorporating PPC in their organizational culture creates an environment with a high level of belief in their people utilizing both sociology, and psychology, while focusing on performance and profit (<http://www.uwstout.edu/ctem/ppc/ppcmission.html>).

The review of literature is intended to discuss multiple references through the exploration of previous research. This chapter will be broken into three subsections including; ethical standards, social responsibility, and exceptional quality.

Statement of the Problem

How does KRM Information Services Inc. achieve work with high ethical standards, social responsibility, and a focus on exceptional quality in the face of present day challenges and threats?

Ethical Standards

“If we know that being ethical will help business, what is the problem?” (Bucaro, 2007 p.6). Great leaders know the importance of ethics in good business; however, it is difficult to remain committed. Courageous leaders must put forth the time and effort to ensure that the company conducts themselves ethically. The process of developing an ethical organization is not easy, but it will ultimately determine the success or failure of your business (Bucaro, 2007).

“Communicating the vision and motivating people to support the vision are essential for leaders” (Dowd, Morse Houghtson, & Snyder, 1994 p.83). Employees will see the importance and take an interest when they believe the vision is worthwhile. Reinforcing beliefs through simple communication can help people understand goals. Dowd, et al., (1994), state “if they believe the vision is important and worthwhile, many of them will want to be involved with it, even if they don’t understand all the details” (p.83).

Communication will bridge the gaps that formed in relationships helping employees to stay in touch, build trust, and share the company vision. Communication can also help clarify the vision and promote participative employee relationships within the corporation. Actions are the best way to communicate the institutions values to the employees (DePree, 2004). The following steps are intended to help communicate the importance of incorporating ethics into business.

1. “Develop a code of ethics:” (Bucaro, 2007 p.6). The clarity that a code of ethics provides an example of what is acceptable. Early introduction of the code in the employment process is critical. Continual reinforcement is also important, this illustrates that the code of ethics is not just a statement. It proves that the company abides, believes in, and sees the code in action on a regular basis.
2. “Design an ongoing ethics training program:” (Bucaro, 2007 p.6). The program would provide an ongoing approach to training employees on ethical decision-making and the company’s ethical culture.

3. “Support and reward ethical behavior in the workplace:” (Bucaro, 2007 p.7)

Have a simple process established throughout the company to report any unethical conduct. Also acknowledge ethical behaviors, which in turn will support the code of ethics.

According to Vallance (1995) a code of corporate ethics should not be overlooked. Focusing on clear and ethical actions can influence individuals’ attitudes in the organization. Encouraging proper behavior and discouraging unwanted behavior leads to personal responsibility for actions at work (Vallance, 1995). The ultimate goal is to “...make doing the right thing the easiest thing to do” (Vallance p.179).

Core Values

Lencioni (2002) describes core values as the “deeply ingrained principles that guide all of a company’s actions and they serve as the cultural cornerstones” (p. 114). According to Wilson (2007) a firm’s organizational or core values are what direct the leadership team and assist the staff when making daily decisions. The language is intended to present the intrinsically valued behaviors and the qualities that you believe are desirable and important. Wilson (2007) states “your values signal to others what your organization holds dear, and what you are committed to be known for and uphold” (p.29).

Jack Welch the former CEO of General Electric believed that:

Clarity around values and behaviors is not much good unless it is backed up. To make values really mean something, companies have to reward the people who exhibit them and “punish” those who don’t. Believe me, it will make winning easier. I say that because every time we asked one of our high-performing managers to leave because he didn’t demonstrate the values - and we said as much

publicly - the organization responded incredibly well. In annual surveys over a decade, employees would tell us that we were a company that increasingly lived its values. That made people even more committed to living them too. And as our employee satisfaction results improved, so did our financial results. (Covey, 2006 p. 111)

According to Lencioni (2002) a company that has embedded values into their organization should encourage the values at every turn. Executives should repeat the values every chance that they get due to the cynicism that surrounds values. Berenbeim (2006) identified that companies now recognize the advantages of embedding ethical reasoning into their decision-making processes and the risks of failing to do so.

Make no mistake: living by stated corporate values is difficult. After all, it's much harder to be clear and unapologetic for what you stand for than to cave in to politically correct pressures. And for organizations trying to repair the damage caused by bad value programs, the work is even harder. (Berenbeim, p. 200)

Social Responsibility

Fox (2008) defines corporate social responsibility as “sustainable development by working to improve quality of life with employees, their families, the local community and stakeholders up and down the supply chain.” (p. 75) According to Sullivan (2008) corporate social responsibility is fueled by many factors including: concerns over climate change, activism by non-governmental organizations, and global business deals. Socially responsible organizations give back to the communities in which they serve, ensure their employees find the appropriate work life balance, adhere to environmental standards and implement ethical corporate policies (Kroll, 2008).

Corporate social responsibility has been on the rise as companies are thriving to be both profitable and responsible. According to Fox (2006) experts in the field of corporate social responsibility agree that the following characteristics must be present for a company to incorporate social responsibility. First it is important to have management and employees understand the importance and respect the ideas. Collaboration is essential to bring together new ideas from all areas of the company. After the ideas are prepared it is imperative that the people understand that corporate social responsibility is worth the effort. Incorporating social responsibility into business requires thinking outside the box, and finding new opportunities. Finally employees need a vision to help them understand how and why incorporating social responsibility into the organization is worthwhile (Fox, 2006).” Organizations play a huge role meeting the basic human needs of employees; including financial security as well as the desire to work for a worthwhile purpose” (Badaracco & Ellsworth p. 66-67).

Exceptional Quality

For decades, economists have been trying to determine what elements “truly great” companies have embedded in them (Goffee & Jones, 1998). Ironically, given the fact that it has been economists doing the looking, the answers have basically turned out to be about the “soft” stuff. In fact, today it is increasingly recognized that one element matters the most: the nature of relationships within the organization – the way people act toward each other, the “social capital” of the organization (Goffe & Jones, 1998). This is the element that makes the whole system hard to imitate. Badaracco & Ellsworth (1989) stated “managers know what an ideal organization is. Its goals are clear, it innovates, attracts high caliber talent, challenges them with high standards, and promotes on the

basis of merit. The ideal organization is immune to bureaucracy. It is ethical and inspiring. Its economic performance is outstanding” (Badaracco & Ellsworth, 1989, p 66-67).

Saunders (2007), speaker and trainer specializing in personal empowerment and leadership development, states “people will not give their best for money alone, but they will work harder and with more passion, for recognition and a bit of appreciation” (p. 6). An appreciated staff is a more motivated staff which in turn creates a more productive staff. Showing employees that hard work and dedication is appreciated will motivate them to continue good work for your business (Saunders, 2007).

Respect, loyalty, security, dignity – old fashioned qualities for a new-fashioned economy. Earlier this century machines helped liberate our ancestors from the toil of the fields. In this generation, wondrous technology has freed us from the drudgery of the assembly line and enabled us to speed new products to far-off markets. As we approach the millennium, it is the people who will carry us forward. In an economy built on service, the extent to which we prosper will depend on our ability to educate, entertain, empower, and ennoble ourselves – and each other. (Dinkmeyer, & Eckstein, 1996, p.13)

“Leadership that utilizes encouragement begins with encouraging yourself first” (Dinkmeyer, & Eckstein, 1996, p.13). No one is perfect and encouragement requires commitment and practice. Ongoing coaching and feedback are essential in dedicating to continuous improvement.

Chapter III: Methodology

This case study was developed to provide an example of how a company can institute high ethical standards and social responsibility along with exceptional quality in the face of present day challenges. The company selected was KRM Information Services Inc. in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. KRM Information Services was chosen based on the company's dedication to the People Process Culture (PPC) philosophy. A company incorporating PPC in their organizational culture creates an environment with a high level of belief in their people utilizing both sociology, and psychology, while focusing on performance and profit. (<http://www.uwstout.edu/ctem/ppc/ppcmission.html>.)

A qualitative interview was done with the owner, co-founder, and CEO, Rick Olson to uncover specific techniques used in order to infuse the company with the qualities of high ethical standards, social responsibility, and exceptional quality in the ever changing business world.

This chapter will review the subject selection and description, instrumentation, data collection procedures, data analysis, and limitations.

Subject Selection and Description

This case study was based on KRM Information Services Inc. A focused one on one interview was done with Mr. Rick Olson, the co-owner, founder, president and CEO of the company in order to provide an example of how one company has established ethical standards, social responsibility along with exceptional quality in the face of present day challenges.

Mr. Olson of KRM Information Services was chosen for the purpose of this study based on his personal achievements and contributions to his local community. Mr. Olson's awards, achievements and dedication to social responsibility are as follows.

Awards and Achievements

- Greater Washington Society of Association Executives' Chairman's Award for 2001 to 2002.
- Friend of Education Award from the Eau Claire (Wisconsin) Association of Educators on May 19, 1998.
- Chair's Cup on two occasions from the Chair of the American Bar Association – Section of Family Law for the years 1993 to 1994 and for the years 1996 – 1997.

Work with Community, Charitable, and Civic Organizations

- Chippewa Valley Montessori Charter School Board member from 2004 to present. Vice President and a member of the Executive Committee.
- Eau Claire (WI) Area Economic Development Corporation – 2003 to present. Member of Board of Directors, Member of the Executive Committee, currently President.
- Eau Claire Chamber of Commerce 1995 to 2000, member of the Board of Directors and Executive Committee.

Instrumentation

The instrument consisted of an introduction letter which outlined the purpose and intent of the study, and included a letter of consent which explained confidentiality and stated that the interview was strictly voluntary and consented to waive confidentiality. The questions were originally selected from a previous study done by the Good Work

Project (Gardner, Csikszentmihalyi & Damon, 2001). Please see Appendix C. The researcher revised the instrument based on the review of literature and purpose of the study. Please see Appendix B. The survey instrument was broken into three selections: ethical standard, social responsibility, and exceptional quality.

Data Collection Procedures

An initial phone call was placed by the researcher's advisor, Kari Dahl, in order to introduce the project and inquire about potential participation. The researcher sent an e-mail to Mr. Olson, of KRM Information Services Inc. to introduce the project and confirm his participation in the case study. Through e-mail, an initial meeting was arranged for the researcher and interviewee to build rapport and tour KRM Information Services on August 9, 2007. During this meeting the researcher and interviewee arranged the date, place, and time for the case study interview. The final survey instrument was e-mailed to the interviewee one week before the interview for review.

The interview took place on September 13, 2007 at the KRM Information Services Inc. Headquarters in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. The instrument consisted of an introduction letter which explained the purpose and intent of the interview, and included a letter of consent which was discussed before the interview. Mr. Olson signed the consent to participate and agreed that his name and company name can be used in the case study (Appendix A). The informed consent will be kept with all of the other documents completed with this project. The questions were originally selected from a previous study done by the Good Work Project (Gardner, Csikszentmihalyi & Damon, 2001). Please see Appendix C. The researcher revised the instrument based on the review of literature and purpose of the study. Please see Appendix B. The survey instrument was

broken into three selections: ethical standards, social responsibility, and exceptional quality (Appendix B).

The interview was approximately one hour in length and was recorded using a digital voice recorder. All verbal material that was gathered from the interview was tape recorded, transcribed, and stored. All transcribed data collected was sent via e-mail to the interviewee for review one week after the completion of the interview to analyze and verify the data and results.

Data Analysis

To verify data collected in the interview, once the case study was transcribed, the results were shared with the owner of KRM to insure accurate representation. Mr. Olson was allowed to edit the results with the researcher and signed a permission to publish form. Data and results obtained from KRM were measured against the themes found in the Good Work projects to find similarities and differences. The result of the case study will be analyzed and compared to future case studies in the series. Further analysis of data can be reviewed in Chapter IV Results. Discussion of the data is revealed in Chapter V Results.

Limitations

The limitations of this case study are:

- Interviewer skills are limited.
- The case study interview was scheduled in advance so time with interviewee was restricted.
- The interview was not conducted at a neutral location; the interview took place in the interviewee's office.

- The data collected was self-reported and was the interviewee's perception. The interview was based on trusting that all information shared was accurate, and truthful.
- Results from data collected were not reviewed by other employees at the organization to confirm accuracy.
- This is the second case study in a series, so comparison and common themes have not yet been determined. Results of this case study will be analyzed and compared to future case studies in a series developed through the People Process Culture Department.

Summary

This qualitative case study was designed to examine one organization that has incorporated the people process culture philosophy into their organization. The case study will be the second in a series developed through the People Process Culture Department at the University of Wisconsin-Stout. The findings of this case study will be used in comparison with results of future company case studies to determine common qualities.

Chapter IV: Results

This case study was developed to provide an example of how a company has instituted high ethical standards and social responsibility along with a focus on exceptional quality in the face of present day challenges. The company selected was KRM Information Services Inc. in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. KRM Information Services was chosen based on the company's dedication to the People Process Culture (PPC) philosophy. A company incorporating PPC in their organizational culture creates an environment with a high level of belief in their people utilizing both sociology, and psychology, while focusing on performance and profit (<http://www.uwstout.edu/ctem/ppc/ppcmision.html>).

A qualitative interview was done with the owner, co-founder, and CEO, Mr. Olson to uncover specific techniques used in order to infuse the company with the qualities of high ethical standards, social responsibility, and exceptional quality in the ever changing business world.

The results of the data collected through the interview and observations are as follows.

Mr. Olson and the researcher set up an appointment to build rapport and tour KRM two weeks prior to the case study interview. The researcher walked into KRM Information Services she was immediately greeted by Mr. Olson, wearing a Hawaiian print shirt and a big smile. Upon entering KRM the first observation was the open and inviting company layout. Mr. Olson then took the researcher on a brief tour of the company. While passing through the KRM, group pictures hang on the wall of the staff from work gatherings, and a bookshelf full dedicated to scrapbooks full of pictures from

holiday parties. As the tour continued the next observation was that each cubical had the individual employee's MBTI type on a poster. Mr. Olson explained that each employee brings a table tent with their MBTI type on it to staff meetings. As the tour came to an end Mr. Olson and the researcher scheduled an appointment to conduct the case study interview.

The case study interview began with Mr. Olson greeting the researcher at the door. Mr. Olson made the researcher feel at home by offering coffee or a beverage. The interview took place in Mr. Olson's office at KRM. Mr. Olson was professionally dressed wearing black dress pants, a white button up shirt with a bow tie. After a bit of small talk the interview began. The researcher had technical difficulties with the digital voice recorder. Luckily Mr. Olson laughed and was all right with the setback. The interview began a second time.

Item Analysis

The results from the case study interview were taped recorded and transcribed. Data collected from the interview are transcribed below.

1. What attracted you initially to business/ this field?

I had a business before that was mass marketed to hundreds of thousands of customers. We had 60, 000 customer transactions a year, so I was never able to pay much attention to any individual's needs. Then we have a printing company on the other hand, that had a limited number of clients that they could "fluff and buff" to really take care of them and there individual needs. So I wanted to create a business that was in the seminar world but had a few enough clients that we could actually provide an outstanding service

to each of them. This would create the sort of barrier to entry or a moat around to protect us from competitors.

2. What still appeals to you about it?

I think it is the same thing, high service level and really distinguishing us from the competition by being the best at this. We really are the best; world class.

3. How do you think you differ from your peers who choose other professions (e.g.: law or medicine)?

I am entrepreneurial and I think most of them are not. I like risk and, I'm really motivated and passionate about coming up with an idea and then making it happen in reality. I really get a kick out of that. So I think that most of them are not that way, risk adverse, do the job. I am probably being too negative, but they are not entrepreneurs.

4. How about peers working in business and industry?

I think that we are not that different; if they are entrepreneurs then I am not really different from them at all. I am pretty standard in that way. If someone goes to work for a big company or a company that is not entrepreneurial then they would be different from me.

5. In lay terms, what kind of things are you trying to accomplish in your work right now?

Well, we're trying to create more barriers to entry. We're trying to create more unique services. We're trying to innovate beyond the competition. We've come under a lot of attack by the commoditization of our business, which is what you hope doesn't happen to you. A lot of competitors have come into our space and tried to do it cheaper, but not better. So what we are trying to do is innovate beyond them and maintain our really high quality standards.

6. What are you hoping will be the greatest impact of the work you are currently doing?

I think democratization of information, and making information available through distance learning and live interactive with some of the greatest minds in the world to anybody in the world, whether they are in New York City, which is where you hear them face to face or Eau Claire Wisconsin, where they never come.

7. What were the most important factors you considered when starting an organization?

I think we spent a lot of time establishing our values and writing them down, and really getting to understand what they are. So then we understood what's important to us. So our employees know how they should act given the values that we have. So I think that was probably the most important thing that we did.

8. Would you say that there are any personal beliefs or core values that guide your work?

Oh absolutely. Those core beliefs are a couple things; in writing we have our core values, which are really our beliefs. Everything we do must be ethical, it must be fair, and it must be respectful. And ethical is pretty easy to do actually. Fair is sort of a higher standard than ethical, because you can be ethical but not fair to somebody. And then the respect really has to do with the work life balance, respecting each individual here. The other things that I personally have that infect the company is that - what goes around comes around. So we always try to treat everyone by applying the golden rule. Because if you try to take advantage of people, you will always looking over your shoulder. So better to take the high road and take the long view. We figure that everyone that we work with is going to be a career client, and every person that comes to work at KRM is going to be here their entire career. If you do this, your thinking changes as to what you can afford to invest in those relationships. Of course that's not always what happens, but we

find it easier and our treatment of clients and employees more consistent by taking that view.

9. What experiences or influences were most important, in forming these beliefs/ values?

My influences were my parents and I know that is a pretty standard answer, but growing up I saw how they did things. But my experiences when I practiced law, I was a divorce lawyer, and I found out early on that the more games you play the more difficult it became for you as a lawyer. So the more open and honest you were about things the faster things went and the better they went. So I think that had a big impact on me, my law practice.

10. How do these personal values or beliefs determine the type of projects with which you get involved?

I don't know that they have, there are things we won't do, I suppose, because we aren't going to play games with people. For example we wouldn't bring a client in at a low price and then jack up the price on them. We have standardized pricing. I really can't say that our values/beliefs have had a big impact on projects that we get involve with. I suppose there are, but I can't think of any off hand were projects would be impacted. If anything was shady or unethical or unfair, I mean we are really serious about our values so we would not do those.

11. Are these values the same or different than the values of colleagues and others in your field? (If in conflict)

I know we have competitors who say that they are the same as us in terms of quality and service level. But part of that is just a competitor who is boasting. We tell clients immediately if there is a problem or if we fall short of our own standards. We are

very quick to respond, and that is very different from what we see our competitors doing. You know there are people that play games in business and who are ruthless and don't care about their people. There are business people who kind of treat their employees as drones to be worked to death and then replace them. I have actually known of a guy who talks about the drone theory of management. People are just fungible, so what if they are gone. That is counter to everything we believe.

I think our open book management is very different. We tell everyone all of the finances here in the company. We don't have to, of course. It's just part of our transparency at KRM.

12. What effect does this have, if any, on pursuit of your goals?

It has profound impact. You don't worry about maximizing every dollar. There's this idea of "theory of abundance" vs. "theory of scarcity." The theory of abundance goes like this: if you get a dollar that's great, that means there will be more dollars for everybody; good for you. The theory of scarcity is: you got a dollar, that's a dollar I'm not going to get, you shouldn't have gotten that dollar, I resent that. We are proponents of the theory of abundance. And that's very different from a lot of business people. They sort of want every penny, and we are willing to sacrifice the dollar today to make a hundred dollars in the future. Also different is that we are an ESOP company [employee stock ownership plan]. For KRM that means that 20% of the company is owned by the employees. We wanted all "KRMites" (as we call ourselves) to not only feel like owners, but to be owners in fact.

13. Is there a tension between your beliefs and values and those individuals in your organization? If yes, how do you deal with it?

I suppose there might be, it is one of those questions where I am probably the worst one to ask, but we make such a big deal about our values and we talk in terms of the “bus” metaphor. We ask: “Does the person belong on the KRM bus.” And that really is asking the question: do they have our value set and beliefs? And then we ask: “Do they belong in a seat on the bus?” And that is asking: can they do their job? We don’t care how good they are in their seat, if they don’t belong on the bus they can’t stay at KRM. Most people who leave this organization we have asked them to leave, because of the bus fit. We actually have a severance package designed for that. Because it is our attitude that it is our fault that they didn’t make it, and so we have a pretty generous severance package. We want to launch them back out into the world in a way which is as dignified as possible and allows them to get another job somewhere. We are dead serious about our values and culture.

14. Do these values contribute to your achievements? (If so, how?)

Absolutely, they really do. How they do, taking the high road and doing the right thing, going above and beyond what people expect and really surprising them with your generous spirit has been a great we get so much good press for that and we have such good word of mouth in the industry and it is because of that. So absolutely, it’s very important.

15. Have you had any beliefs or values that have hindered your achievements or goals?

If you look in business and think that “achievement” means that you make as much money as possible, then probably I have because we haven’t been driven so much by that. I have ownership in three companies, and they are all run very differently. One of them is run very autocratically, top down, “I’m the boss damn it” kind of thing and it is

very profitable. I think KRM might be more profitable if I ran the business that way. But that is not in my nature.

We actually had people come in from outside, some very sophisticated people, MBA-types from Harvard who have worked closely with us and say KRM gets more done in a half a day than most organizations get done in two days. I believe it's because we have this open communication and spirit of cooperation where we are all in alignment.

16. What kinds of work, or which business leaders do you admire? Why do you admire them?

The one I admire the most is Warren Buffett, the "oracle of Omaha", because of his clear thinking and his ability to describe things thoroughly and to see through all the clutter and get right to the heart of the matter. He has sat down and bought billion dollar companies in 90 minutes. Obviously he has done a lot of homework ahead of time. But that is kind of unheard of. I think Jack Welch, who was the chairman and CEO of GE, now retired, is an excellent leader. Jeffrey Immelt, GE's current chairman and CEO, is also outstanding. And I have some people that I admire who you would have never heard of. They are actually younger than me, a lot younger, maybe 20 years younger than me. Yet, I admire them also for their clear thinking and values.

17. Do you have ethical concerns about your area of work, things that you worry about?

No, because it is such an important focus of our business. So I don't really worry about that.

18. Are there things that you would not do in your business, even though they would be legal and profitable?

Absolutely, I can't think of any off hand. But if/when people ask us to give kick backs, we would never do it, we would rather not have the business. Because it will haunt you and you will never get away from that mistake.

19. Have you ever been put into a position where you stood by your principles to your own detriment?

Yes. I think that if you don't do that then your principles don't mean much. There have been times when it has been painful to stand by our values and high quality/service level, but I remind KRMites (and myself) that this is our opportunity to really show our commitment to our values.

20. What would you not compromise? Is there a line you would not cross?

There are a lot of grays I suppose, but I wouldn't compromise on our value set, I couldn't. I wouldn't be allowed to, my management team would string me up, but I wouldn't anyway. There are lots of lines I wouldn't cross, we won't violate those values. We just won't do it, because if I did it then they would mean nothing.

21. Have you ever been involved in a situation that violated your ethical sensibility (right or wrong)?

I am going to sound like Polly Anna here, like I am unreal, but I can't really think of any.

22. Have you ever been torn between conflicting responsibilities in your work? (I.e.: personal vs. institutional, profit vs. professional integrity.) Please describe.

How do you resolve the conflict?

I don't think I have. I think were I get conflicted, not in the sense of ethical kind of things, but more in my own resources and personal time and energy. I can't do as much

as I would like to do and I seem to be asked to do a lot of things that I can't quite get to all of them. Family is a big one, my wife could probably answer this better than me, but I am pretty driven to business and I don't really have any other hobbies. That's probably where I have the most conflict is my personal life. It is not such a big deal anymore since my kids are all grown now, so that makes it a little easier, but I get so excited about what I am doing. I tend to get lost in it, and I will look up and it will be 6:30 or 7:00 at night and I should be home. So that's kind of a conflict.

23. In your work thus far, is there an overarching purpose or goal that gives meaning to what you do that is essential to making your work worth while? What is it? (If unclear, probe for: self vs. other orientation; Universalism vs. particularize.)

Yes. I think it really is that whole idea of creating a great place to work that is profitable. I am on a mission to show that you can run a place and really care about your people, treat them well, and still be very profitable. The problem with that is at sometimes I run into is we focus too much on our culture and not enough on the business and clients. The last couple of years we have had to refocus ourselves on the business. I think that is where we have gone off the track a little bit.

24. Are there certain tactics to techniques that have helped you achieve your goals in your day to day work? (Probe for strategies)

Transparency. Basically, we try to be open about everything. There is a big cry to be transparent these days because of ethical problems in the government and business. We should all know what is going on all the time about everything. We try to do that here. We try to communicate our strategy. The open book (all of our financials), non-management participating in our management meetings every week, meeting minutes we

take and publish to everybody in the company; etc. We are not perfect, but we are real good at it. Those are techniques we use to accomplish this. It is a great place to work. It is for me and most KRMites, but we realize that it may not be for some people though.

25. What experiences or influences were most important, in forming this goal?

The transparency and keeping everyone aware of what's going on comes from this principle that I operate from: if you leave a void of information people often will fill up the void with the worse case scenario. You are better off telling them everything, because it can't be as bad as what they are thinking. So keeping people in the dark is not very helpful, plus then they don't know how to help you improve things. My experience in life has been that if you don't tell people everything and be transparent and open, the they just guess what is going on and they often guess negative things.

26. How do you know whether you are on track / making progress toward this goal?

We live so openly that everyone knows what is going on and, therefore, we reduce the amount anxiety. We have had times where we have had terrible year. By that I mean our profit line was going straight down. I could show you on our financial map that is posted in the conference room. We told people that we may have to have some cut backs in staff costs. First we would ask people to take time off without pay, then we are going to cut back everyone's salary the same percent, and then we are going to do layoffs. We are going to tell you every step of the way what we are doing. Fortunately we never had to do any of that stuff, but no one seemed to panic, even when we first told them we might have to do these things. I know the culture is working when through the grapevine I hear that everyone is okay and understands what we are doing. Once they know everything they can make plans and feel more comfortable.

27. How would you describe an ideal culture within an organization? How would one go about creating this kind of culture?

I think that we have close to an ideal one. The ideal is open, honest; people treat each other with respect. They are focused on the task not on gossip and complaining. I think those are signs of a healthy organization. We live by a couple of principles here that we learned from Don Baughman, Ph.D., professor psychology at UW-Stout. Don taught us that you should always assume good intentions. A really healthy organization has people that assume everyone else is working with the good intentions. When people assume good intentions they get curious when they see something that they don't understand, rather than getting angry. It is a very different reaction to wonder why someone is doing some thing vs. getting angry and wondering why someone is doing wrong. It forces you to explore and ask, rather than accuse and get angry. That is a sign of an ideal culture in my mind. The other one would be that there is no blaming. I guess that would be like having the goals of achieving world peace or ending world hunger. But if an organization can get close to the idea that no one is to blame, everyone is responsible for what is, they can do remarkable things. When no one is at fault, and everyone is responsible, it's much easier to focus on fixing things. The third thing is communication. If you have a good handle on those three things then I think you have close to an ideal culture.

28. Do you see any conflict between the traditional business goal of making money and any of your other personal goals ?(probe extensively on this one, with lots of counter suggestions and challenges such a “Is that realistic?” or “Doesn’t it ever come down to a flat-out choice between making a profit and promoting (x) goal?”)

I think there is a balance between the culture and the strategy. If you have a wonderful company that makes buggy whips, but you probably won’t be in business for long. So I don’t think it is so much a conflict, it is more about the focus of your attention. I think it is a lot of work to run an organization that pays a lot of attention to its internal culture and its people and, at the same time, is able to put that attention towards the business strategy and sales. As I said earlier, I think KRM got off track a little bit by focusing so much attention internally and not enough externally and not paying enough attention to the big marketplace. I don’t think there is an inherent conflict between the two. It just requires a lot of effort. It is easier to be a dictator than have a democracy. I think it is better to have the values because you will see the return when you go through difficult times or when you go through a lot of growth.

29. Do you share all formal information with your staff?

Yes. We already covered that.

30. Have your goals changed over the years? (If so), how have they changed? What caused them to change?

Actually they have. There are two things. The culture side has changed dramatically over the years as we have gotten more involved with Don Baughman and Charley Krueger, and the Leadership Academy at UW - Stout. We started becoming a lot more aware of our culture and how we wanted to learn how to communicate openly and use

transparency. We actually changed so profoundly that several people had to leave. They didn't like it here anymore, it was too "touchy feely and hand holding." They wanted business to be business. They didn't understand why we were spending our time and resources on this so they left. So that changed over the years.

The other thing that changed is the business strategy. I would say that KRM was a lifestyle company, and by that I mean that for a long time we spent all our time on creating the culture and not so much on revenue growth and profit. We have had to change that. We have increased the pressure on ourselves to be more profitable and get more sales. In part we did this because we were being attacked by competitors who were commoditizing our business. So we had to become more creative. Our goals have changed over the last couple of years to being a growing and profitable business.

31. What direction do you see for the future of your own career?

Well, you are kind of catching me at the end of it. I'm 58 years old so I am trying to figure out how many more years I want to do this. I think what I have expressed to people at KRM is that I will be here for about seven more years. I am not sure what the end game is, whether we will sell the company to a third party or if the Employee Stock Ownership Plan might buy us out. So during the remainder of time that I am here I will work on something for succession and exiting.

32. How will you know when you've "made it?"

When I have left behind an organization that is run well, with a great culture, and that is profitable with a solid future then I will have "made it."

33. How do you measure success?

When you look at whether people are happy to come to work, the employee turnover rate, that we are profitable, and KRM has a good solid future. It's really nice because every minute that you are working here you are impacted by the culture.

34. What, if anything, would make you decide to leave the profession?

It is a lot of work to run a company day-to-day. I enjoy it very much but eventually I think I am going to want more flexibility with my time. I don't mind being involved with business, I really like it, but eventually I don't want to be the person in charge day-to-day.

35. Do you have particular hopes or requirements about your (personal) income flow?

Oh yes, I work with a financial planner. I have a certain amount that I want to have coming in when I stop work. I am part owner of three businesses, and they are all pretty successful. So I don't think it is going to be a big problem. I monitor it and think about it.

36. What do you think is the primary goal of business?

The primary goal is to be profitable, because without profit you can't invest in your people, or send them off to training, you are unable to invest in your info structure, and you can't have benefits. So I think that is the primary goal, it is the life blood, but it is not the reason to be in business. That should be the result of how you run the company, so if you run it right, focus on your people, your internal growth and deliver value to your customer that will all lead to a good financial result. Those are all goals of a good business.

37. What challenges that goal?

Scarcity of resources. I think you only have so much money and time to do anything. So you have to prioritize and you have to pick what will have the greatest impact. I guess those are challenges to reaching the goal. All of the things in life that get in your way can challenge your goals. Employee turnover, sickness, market changes, competition, they can all be challenges.

38. Are your beliefs and values aligned with this?

Absolutely, they percolate up from that.

39. What are some of the things that are helping you to pursue your goals?

The nine weeks that I spent at Harvard Business School in the executive education program had a profound impact on me. Harvard Business School is a client of ours, and I wanted to get closer to them. It helped me come up with new ways of thinking. I also learned a lot about strategy and about how to align the entire company to the strategy. Being exposed to 120 incredibly bright and successful people from throughout the world was very interesting. That course has had the most impact on me over the last ten years.

40. Are there specific qualities that have contributed to your achievements?

I learned hard work on the farm growing up. I like to work and it is important to me. Honestly, integrity, taking the long view, and all of the belief systems I have really contributed to my achievements. I think that I am creative, and I have a talent for seeing opportunities where others don't.

41. What about qualities that have held you back or made it harder to pursue your goals?

I think that strengths can also be seen as a weakness, so the downside of what I just said is that I need to stay focused on the strategy. That is why we have implemented strategy maps. When I was younger I had the problem that everything looked like an opportunity so I wanted to pursue everything. I was so “everywhere” all the time that I couldn’t focus. So that was a problem and weakness, and probably my biggest one.

42. What keeps you going or sustains your commitment to your company?

I think it is largely a reflection of who I am, so I really want to see it succeed and I really like all the people here. I think that we have a great thing going here and I really want to see it work. I was really pumped after coming out of the Harvard program, I guess you could say “I drank all of the kool aid” and I really believe in what they say. So I really want this place to grow now and still be a great place to work.

43. How would you define exceptional quality?

Exceptional quality to me comes from the organization. I think of quality in terms of being the best at what you do, but you still make mistakes. A quality organization recognizes mistakes quickly without blame and recover immediately. Also, the idea of transparency that I mentioned before. To me that is quality and KRM has polices and practices to support that.

44. Do you have a particular philosophy, which guide your overall business approach? If so, how did you come to acquire this philosophy?

It goes back to transparency, being open and honest with people. And those three things of taking responsibility without blame, assuming good intentions, and the core values.

45. What are some examples of how you have employed this philosophy in your career?

The whole place speaks of it. From the open book management, and we try to tell everyone everything.

46. Which of your accomplishments are you most proud of?

Well I have three companies and I can't take credit for everything, but I am real proud of the fact that we were able to start the whole seminar industry here in Eau Claire, which is the seminar capital of the United States, and we were the first to do it. There are eight or nine seminar businesses in town and we were the first. I think that is a great source of pride. I am very proud of the companies we have and the people that work for us. KRM is sort of the capstone for me; I think it is just a great company.

47. To what do you attribute your success in this endeavor?

Perseverance; showing up to work, and being there day-after-day have attributed to whatever success I may have had. Sticking to the business, and continuing to work toward the goals.

48. What strategies did you use to accomplish this achievement?

Well, I get up every morning. I think it is just being there and knowing that some days are tough and you just have to work through them. Not losing faith and being willing to change. I think those are the things that helped me accomplish it.

49. How did you learn these strategies yourself?

I learned them by watching a lot of other successful people and the realities of life. You know these guys that start businesses in their 20's and they are billionaires like the guys from Google that is a fantasy thing. For most of us it is just hard work and determination. Living the values through the tough times.

50. What makes it difficult for you to pursue your goals?

If the goal is creating a great place to work that is profitable then ultimately it is the alignment of the values and realizing that no one is perfect. It is difficult to remind each other that we have to live the values and when you fall off get right back on and take responsibility. The external stuff would be focusing on your strategy and carry it out. I think that we are really good on the culture side of things, and we are getting better at executing on our strategy.

51. (If appropriate) Any difficulties from colleagues, your organization?

I think we slip up every once and awhile, but nothing too serious.

52. Can you tell me about a specific situation that you found discouraging or especially hard?

I think whenever I see a person being treated poorly by another person and assuming bad intentions or blaming. I think that is a problem and it is very discouraging, but we are all human and we have to learn from it.

53. How do you go about dealing with these difficulties and pressures? How did you come to deal with them in this way?

Talk it out.

54. What is your work environment like; is it generally supportive or constraining?

Very open, supportive, and nurturing even.

55. Do you offer any employee development programs or training?

We have Don Baughman in all the time to train us on using healthy communication skills. Everyone goes through 14 hours of communication and MBTI (Myers-Briggs Type Indicator) training with Don. Don tells us that we have the deepest understanding of

Myers Briggs of any company that he has worked with. Within this 14 years, everyone gets four hours of training on MBTI. We produce a type chart with everyone's results. So we all know each others type. Moreover, we give everyone two books on MBTI to use as a reference. That way we can look at and read up on another's profile before meeting. And then in our company meetings we sometimes use table tents that show our MBTI profile on them. We also put committees together based on types. It is quite deep in the organization, we use it a lot. We do not use it as part of our hiring tool; we only do it after you are hired. It works well.

We send people off to training programs all the time and all of our management team goes to the UW- Stout Leadership Academy. We encourage people to go to different seminars, and we underwrite some people's education programs, including classes that lead to an MBA or BA/BS degree. We will pay some of their tuition and give them scheduling flexibility to take the courses.

56. How important is communication in your working environment?

It is everything. The 14 hours of training is all about communication and we learn how to talk to each other in a positive and constructive way. That is everything here. We are all humans just trying to get along, so everything we do is about communication. We share everything; it also goes back to transparency.

57. In your work experiences, what kind of work is rewarded? What kind of work is discouraged?

We don't do individual bonuses; we do profit sharing at the end of the year for everyone (except me). Some of the artifacts of our culture is we have a picnic every year for our employees and their families at my house. We usually have a holiday party; we

often cater in food for lunch. We celebrate when someone is having their first baby or weddings; we have a potluck and buy gifts for them. When we have a new employee we have a welcome lunch for them.

58. Anything you would like to add?

I wish that you could have looked at the survey that we used to do with Charley Krueger, our organization used to score quite high on that, but he is retired now. Also if you had more time, it would be interesting for you to talk to more people in the company or people that have worked here to get a sense of what this place is like from their perspective. Because I think it really is different, and I think it is different in a good way. We do have healthy communication coaches, but we do really expect people to resolve their own conflicts.

Chapter V: Discussion

This case study was developed to provide an example of how companies can institute ethical standards and social responsibility along with exceptional quality in the face of present day challenges. The company selected was KRM Information Services Inc. in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. KRM Information Services was chosen based on the company's dedication to the People Process Culture (PPC) philosophy. A company incorporating PPC in their organizational culture creates an environment with a high level of belief in their people utilizing both sociology, and psychology, while focusing on performance and profit (<http://www.uwstout.edu/ctem/ppc/ppcmission.html>).

A qualitative interview was done with the owner, co-founder, and CEO, Mr. Olson to uncover specific techniques used in order to infuse the company with the qualities of high ethical standards, social responsibility, and exceptional quality in the ever changing business world.

Limitations

The limitations of this case study are:

- Interviewer skills are limited.
- The case study interview was scheduled in advance so time with interviewee was restricted.
- The interview was not conducted at a neutral location; the interview took place in the interviewee's office.
- The data collected was self-reported and was the interviewee's perception. The interview was based on trusting that all information shared was accurate, and truthful.

- Results from data collected were not reviewed by other employee's at the organization to confirm accuracy.
- This is the first case study in a series, so comparison and common themes have not yet been determined. Results of this case study will be analyzed and compared to future case studies in a series developed through the People Process Culture Department.

KRM Information Services Inc.

KRM Information Services Inc. was founded in 1994 when Rick Olson and Mark Helland were looking for a new and innovative way to transform the traditional seminar world. The new business partners recognized the need of virtual events in the seminar market and thus the company was formed. The company name "KRM" was chosen from the initials of the two original owners ("K R" comes from Kenneth Richard (Rick) Olson and the "M" from Mark Helland.

Understanding KRM's Values

Early on in the company development, Mr. Olson recognized the need to create a business that was focused on providing exceptional quality services to their clients, vendors and all that they would come in contact with during their business lives. Additionally Mr. Olson whole heartedly wanted KRM to be a great place to work. The most important aspect of KRM during development was the formation of the company core values.

KRM is serious about their core values. Core values are the foundation of the company and are followed on a daily basis. The company requires that each employee at KRM to live in the spirit of the values. Living in the spirit of these values is a condition

of employment and those who are unable to do so are asked to leave KRM. This is not a personal attack to the employee; the values are that important to the company.

The core values were selected at a company wide retreat in early 1999. At this retreat, Charlie Krueger, Ph.D., then a professor at UW – Stout helped the company determine what their core values would be. These values would determine how the company would conduct business decisions and actions. The three core values that KRM lives by are as follows.

Act Ethically- To act ethically in all that they do. This is defined as doing what is morally right.

Act Fairly- This value is described as not taking advantage of people. They want to view people as an end in themselves not a means to one's end.

Be Respectful- This value speaks to their desire to hold others in high esteem. All jobs and all people are important

Biography of Mr. Olson

Mr. Olson is the co-founder, president, and CEO of KRM Information Services, Inc. in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. KRM provides distance education services to organizations that wish to provide live, interactive seminars delivered directly to their offices. Mr. Olson received his BA in 1971 from Luther College in Decorah, Iowa. He then continued his education with a law degree (JD) from Valparaiso University School of Law, Valparaiso, Indiana in 1974. Rick is also a current graduate of the nine week Owner/President Manager Program (OPM 36) at the Harvard Business School Executive Education (2007). He has been actively involved in the management and ownership of various publishing, printing and seminar companies for 30 years.

Mr. Olson was selected for the purpose of this study based on his achievements and contributions to both KRM and also to his local community. Mr. Olson's awards, achievements and dedication to his community are listed below.

Awards and Achievements

- Greater Washington Society of Association Executives' Chairman's Award for 2001-2002.
- Friend of Education Award from the Eau Claire (Wisconsin) Association of Educators on May 19, 1998.
- Chair's Cup on two occasions from the Chair of the American Bar Association – Section of Family Law for the years 1993 – 1994 and for the years 1996 – 1997.

Work with Community, Charitable, and Civic Organizations

- Chippewa Valley Montessori Charter School Board member from 2004 to present. Currently Vice President and a member of the Executive Committee.
- Eau Claire (WI) Area Economic Development Corporation – 2003 – present. Member of Board of Directors, Member of the Executive Committee, currently President.
- Eau Claire Chamber of Commerce 1995 to 2000, member of the Board of Directors and Executive Committee.

Mr. Olson's personal dedication to the company and the core values that they live by show in everything that he does. Upon meeting Mr. Olson, the researcher could see how different KRM. Some companies have the core values hanging on the wall, but never mention them. This is not the case with KRM. They recognize the importance of

the values to the culture of their company, the employees that work there, and most of all the customers that they serve.

The researcher was taken back because she was expecting to feel intimidated by such a great business man, but it was a good surprise to find out Mr. Olson was a down to earth person. The researcher was immediately shocked that the entire staff knew about the MBTI, but much more stunned that they use it on a daily basis. Both Mr. Olson and the researcher were excited to start the interview. This suggests how important good healthy communication is to KRM.

Conclusions

The researcher has developed concluding points based on the purpose of this study. Using the literature reviewed on high ethical standards, social responsibility, and exceptional quality compared to the survey data from KRM Information Services, the researcher has determined similarities and differences.

The first area of study was high ethical standards and the importance of core values in business. As referenced in the literature review, Lencioni (2002) describes core values as “the deeply ingrained principles that guide all of a company’s actions and they serve as the cultural cornerstones.” (p. 114) Comparatively KRM believes that core values are the foundation of their company. They require all employees to live in the spirit of the values. The core values ultimately determine how they conduct business and can be seen in all of their decisions and actions. The three core values of KRM are: act ethically, act fairly, and be respectful. When Mr. Olson was asked if there are any personal beliefs or core values that guide his work his reply was: “Oh, absolutely. Those core beliefs are a couple things; in writing we have our core values, which are really our

beliefs. Everything we do must be ethical, it must be fair, and it must be respectful. And ethical is pretty easy to do actually. Fair is sort of a higher standard than ethical, because you can be ethical but not fair to somebody. And then the respect really has to do with the work life balance, respecting each individual here.” This statement signifies the importance of core values to KRM and Mr. Olson. As suggested in the review of literature the three core values are the glue that holds KRM together and makes their company culture thrive.

Through the review of the survey data, Mr. Olson makes several remarks that support the importance of core values within the company culture. Therefore, the researcher concludes that the owner, co-founder, and CEO of KRM Information Services, believes that core values are the foundation of a healthy and successful organization.

The second area of study was social responsibility. As referenced in the literature review, Fox (2008) defines corporate social responsibility as “sustainable development by working to improve quality of life with employees, their families, the local community and stakeholders up and down the supply chain.” Mr. Olson was selected for this qualitative case study based on his achievements, contributions, and his community involvement. Throughout the survey data Mr. Olson focused on the overall wellbeing of the company and the employees. When asked if there was an overarching purpose or goal of the company, Mr. Olson replied “Yes. I think it really is that whole idea of creating a great place to work that is profitable. I am on a mission to show that you can run a place and really care about your people, treat them well, and still be very profitable.” Mr. Olson cares about the wellbeing of his business and never forgets about the employees.

The third area of study was a focus on exceptional quality. As cited in the literature review Badaracco & Ellsworth (1989) stated that managers know what an ideal organization is. Its goals are clear, it innovates, attracts high caliber talent, challenges them with high standards, and promotes on the basis of merit. The ideal organization is immune to bureaucracy. It is ethical and inspiring. Its economic performance is outstanding. When Mr. Olson was asked about the primary goal of business he similarly focused on the importance of employees. He stated “the primary goal is to be profitable, because without profit you can’t invest in your people, or send them off to training, you are unable to invest in your info structure, and you can’t have benefits. So I think that is the primary goal, it is the life blood, but it is not the reason to be in business. That should be the result of how you run the company, so if you run it right, focus on your people, your internal growth and deliver value to your customer that will all lead to a good financial result. Those are all goals of a good business.” Mr. Olson also stated in the survey data “I think our open book management is very different. We tell everyone all of the finances here in the company. We don’t have to, of course. It’s just part of our transparency at KRM.” He also stated that “non-management participating in our management meetings every week, meeting minutes are published to everybody in the company.” Similar to the research findings Mr. Olson believes that inspiring employees to do their best will aid in the economic performance of the company and determine its success.

Throughout the survey data Mr. Olson focused on the overall wellbeing of the company. When asked if there was an overarching purpose or goal of the company, Mr. Olson replied “Yes. I think it really is that whole idea of creating a great place to work

that is profitable. I am on a mission to show that you can run a place and really care about your people, treat them well, and still be very profitable.” Mr. Olson cares about the wellbeing of his business and never forgets about the importance of the company core values. The researcher found it fascinating to review the similarities between the literature review and the survey data.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the literature review and qualitative case study the researcher recommends business and industry leaders to understand the importance of incorporating ethical standards, social responsibility, and exceptional quality regardless of their industry (Gardner, Csikszentmihalyi & Damon, 2001).

Based on the findings of the qualitative case study the researcher suggests the following information to future participants in the series of People Process Culture case studies. The researcher would like to emphasize the importance of reviewing previous research done by the Good Work Project (Gardner, Csikszentmihalyi & Damon, 2001). To ensure understanding the common qualities that successful companies share.

The researcher did not conduct a test interview on a subject matter expert before the interview. Although the interview went smoothly, it would have been nice to have gone through the steps and been more familiar with the possible questions that arise during the interviewing process. Also the researcher would suggest using all recording equipment at least two days prior to the interview, to ensure all equipment is in working order. And to help prevent any possible technical problems that may arise.

The final recommendation is to have all information gathered through the interview shared with employees at the selected company to insure verification of the study and self reported data.

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Appendix A: Letter of Consent

Consent to Participate in UW-Stout Approved Research

Title: Achieving High Ethical Standards, Social Responsibility, and Focus on Exceptional Quality in the Corporate Environment.

Investigator: Dinah Richartz
(715)505-9313
richartzd@uwstout.edu

Research Advisor: Kari Dahl
(715)232-1145
dahlkar@uwstout.edu

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to examine one organization to determine how companies can institute ethical standards and social responsibility along with exceptional quality in the face of present day challenges. This case study will be the first in a series developed through the People Process Culture Department at UW-Stout. The findings of this case study will be used in comparison with results of future company case studies to determine common qualities. The questions for the survey instrument were selected from a previous study done by the Good Work Project (Gardner, Csikszentmihalyi & Damon, 2001).

The benefits of this research involve providing an example of how this company has instituted ethical standards and social responsibility along with exceptional quality in the face of present day challenges. This case study will benefit the comparison of future case studies in the series to determine common qualities. The risks include discussing potentially sensitive private information.

The interview will take approximately four hours to complete, and it will be completed during work hours.

Any verbal material that is gathered from the interview will be recorded, transcribed and stored. You will have the right to clarify and analyze the interview results after they are transcribed and the material will remain confidential until your approval.

Your name may be included on documents, unless you state otherwise. This informed consent will not be kept with any of the other documents completed with this project

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may choose not to participate without any adverse consequences to you. Should you choose to participate and later wish to withdraw from the study, you may discontinue your participation at this time without incurring adverse consequences.

This study has been reviewed and approved by The University of Wisconsin-Stout's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB has determined that this study meets the ethical obligations required by federal law and University policies. If you have questions or concerns regarding this study please contact the Investigator or Advisor. If you have any questions, concerns, or reports regarding your rights as a research subject, please contact the IRB Administrator.

Investigator:

Dinah Richartz
(715)505-9313
richartzd@uwstout.edu

Advisor:

Kari Dahl
(715)232-1145
dahlkar@uwstout.edu

IRB Administrator:

Sue Foxwell, Director, Research Services
152 Vocational Rehabilitation Bldg.
UW-Stout
Menomonie, WI 54751
715-232-2477
foxwells@uwstout.edu

Statement of Consent:

By signing this consent form you agree to participate in the Achieving High Ethical Standards, Social Responsibility, and Focus on Exceptional Quality in the Corporate Environment research project and allow us to use your name and company name.

Signature

Date

Appendix B: Survey Instrument

This research has been approved by the UW-Stout IRB as required by the Code of Federal Regulations Title 45 Part 46.

Achieving High Ethical Standards, Social Responsibility, and Focus on Exceptional Quality in the Corporate Environment

Survey Instrument

Questions were selected from a previous study done by the Good Work Project. (Gardner Csikszentmihalyi, & Damon, 2001)

Introduction:

1. What attracted you initially to business/ this field?
 - a. What still appeals to you about it?
 - b. How do you think you differ from your peers who choose other professions (e.g.: law or medicine)?
 - c. How about peers working in business and industry?

2. In lay terms, what kind of things are you trying to accomplish in your work right now?
 - a. What are you hoping will be the greatest impact of the work you are currently doing?

3. What were the most important factors you considered when starting an organization?

Ethical Standards:

A. Values and Beliefs

1. Would you say that there are any personal beliefs or core values that guide your work?
 - a. What experiences or influences were most important, in forming these beliefs/ values?
 - b. How do these personal values or beliefs determine the type of projects with which you get involved?

2. Are these values the same or different than the values of colleagues and others in your field?
(If in conflict)
 - a. What effect does this have, if any, on pursuit of your goals?
 - b. Is there a tension between your beliefs and values and those individuals in your organization? If yes, how do you deal with it?

3. Do these values contribute to your achievements?
 - a. If so, how?
 - b. Have you had any beliefs or values that have hindered your achievements or goals?
4. What kinds of work, or which business leaders do you admire?
 - a. Why do you admire them?

B. Ethical Issues in Work

1. Do you have ethical concerns about your area of work, things that you worry about?
 - a. Are your concerns shared by others? (e.g.: public, other organizations, your colleagues)
 - b. How would you like to see them handled?
2. Are there things that you would not do in your business, even though they would be legal and profitable?
 - a. Have you ever been put into a position where you stood by your principles to your own detriment?
 - b. What would you not compromise? Is there a line you would not cross?
3. Have you ever been involved in a situation that violated your ethical sensibility (right or wrong)?
 - a. Why did you see this as wrong?
 - b. Where did these beliefs come from?
 - c. Have you perceived a change in the availability of opportunities to work in business that you consider to be responsible and ethical?

Social Responsibility:

C. Goals and Responsibilities

1. Have you ever been torn between conflicting responsibilities in your work? (I.e: personal vs. institutional, profit vs. professional integrity.)
 - a. Please describe.
 - b. How do you resolve the conflict?
2. In your work thus far, is there an overarching purpose or goal that gives Meaning to what you do that is essential to making your work worth while? What is it? (If unclear, probe for: self vs. other orientation; Universalism vs. particularize.)
 - a. (if unclear) How does this connect to your day to day work?

- b. Are there certain tactics or techniques that have helped you achieve your goals in your day to day work? (probe for strategies)
 - c. What experiences or influences were most important, in forming this goal?
 - d. How do you know whether you are on track / making progress toward this goal?
 - e. How would you describe an ideal culture within an organization? How would one go about creating this kind of culture?
3. Do you see any conflict between the traditional business goal of making money and any of your other personal goals? (probe extensively on this one, with lots of counter suggestions and challenges such a “Is that realistic?” or “Doesn’t it ever come down to a flat-out choice between making a profit and promoting (x) goal?”)
 4. Do you share all formal information with your staff?
 5. Have your goals changed over the years? (If so), how have they changed? What caused them to change?
 6. What direction do you see for the future of your own career?
 - a. How will you know when you’ve “made it?”
 - b. How do you measure success?
 - c. What, if anything, would make you decide to leave the profession?
 - d. Do you have particular hopes or requirements about your income flow?
 7. What do you think is the primary goal of business?
 - a. What challenges that goal?
 - b. Are your beliefs and values aligned with this?

D. Opportunities and Support

1. What are some of the things that are helping you to pursue your goals?
2. Are there specific qualities that have contributed to your achievements?
 - a. What about qualities that have held you back or made it harder to pursue your goals?
3. What keeps you going or sustains your commitment to your company?

Exceptional Quality:**E. The Work Process**

1. How would you define exceptional quality?
2. Do you have a particular philosophy, which guide your overall business approach?
 - a. If so, how did you come to acquire this philosophy?
 - b. What are some examples of how you have employed this philosophy in your career?
3. Which of your accomplishments are you most proud of?
 - a. To what do you attribute your success in this endeavor?
 - b. What strategies did you use to accomplish this achievement?
 - c. How did you learn these strategies yourself?

F. Obstacles, Pressures, and Rewards

1. What makes it difficult for you to pursue your goals?
 - a. (if appropriate) Any difficulties from colleagues, your organization?
 - b. Can you tell me about a specific situation that you found discouraging or especially hard?
2. How do you go about dealing with these difficulties and pressures?
 - a. How did you come to deal with them in this way?
3. What is your work environment like; is it generally supportive or constraining?
4. Do you offer any employee development programs or training?
5. How important is communication in your working environment?
6. In your work experiences, what kind of work is rewarded? What kind of work is discouraged?

***** We are coming to the end of our interview, is there anything you would like to add?**

Check notes for things I left out.

May I follow up with you in the future?

Appendix C: Original Survey Instrument

* Indicates which questions must be asked

A. Introduction

- *1. What attracted you initially to business? Your subfield?
 - a. Is that still what appeals to you about it?
 - b. If you were not doing this, what might you be doing instead?
 - c. How do you think you differ from your peers who choose other professions like law or medicine? How about peers working in large business organizations?

- 2. In lay terms, what kinds of things are you trying to accomplish in your work right now?
 - a. (if needed) What are you hoping will be the greater impact of the work you are doing currently?

- *3. What were the most important factors you considered in starting an organization?

- 4. What do you like about your work? Dislike?

B. Beliefs and Values

- *1. Would you say that there are any personal beliefs or core values that guide your work? (Beliefs = world view: e.g. belief in truth, justice, fairness)
 - a. What experiences or influences were most important, in forming these beliefs/values?
 - b. How do these personal values or beliefs determine the types of projects with which you get involved?

- *2. Are these values the same or different than the values of colleagues and others in your field?
 - a. (if in conflict) What effect does this have, if any, on pursuit of your goals?
 - b. Does this degree of consistency have any relation to the reasons that you chose to start your own company?
 - c. Would it [degree of consistency] be different if you were working in another industry?
 - d. Is there a tension between your beliefs and values and those of individuals in your organization? If yes, how do you deal with it?

- 3. Do these values contribute to your achievements?
 - a. (If so), how?
 - b. Have you had any beliefs or values that have hindered your achievements or goals?

- 4. What kinds of work, or which business leaders do you admire? Why do you admire them?
 - a. Do you admire leaders who give away a large portion of their money (e.g. Gates or Rockefeller)? Does philanthropic work play a part in who you admire?
 - b. Religious/Spiritual Practices

*1. Do religious or spiritual concerns play an important role in your life?

2. Do you employ any particular methods or practices to help you gain or maintain perspective, insight, and balance in your life? (e.g. prayer, meditation, reflective practices)

a. In what ways do these methods or practices help you in your decision-making?

D. Goals and Responsibilities

*1. In your work, to whom or what do you feel most responsible?

*2. Have you ever been torn between conflicting responsibilities (divided loyalties), in your work? [e.g.: personal vs. institutional, profit or professional integrity]

a. Please describe.

b. How do you resolve the conflict?

*3. In your work thus far, is there an overarching purpose or goal that gives meaning to what you do that is essential to making your work worthwhile? What is it? [If unclear, probe for: self vs. other orientation; universalism vs. particularism.]

a. (if unclear) How does this connect to your day to day work?

b. Are there certain tactics or techniques that have helped you achieve your goals in your day to day work? [probe for strategies]

c. What experiences or influences were most important, in forming this goal?

d. How do you know whether you are on track / making progress toward this goal?

e. How would you describe an ideal culture within an organization? How would one go about creating this kind of culture?

*4. Do you see any conflict between the traditional business goal of making money and any of your other personal goals? [probe extensively on this one, with lots of counter suggestions and challenges such as "Is that realistic?" or "Doesn't it ever come down to a flat-out choice between making a profit and promoting (x) goal?"]

5. Have your goals changed over the years? (If so), how have they changed? What caused them to change?

*6. What direction do you see for the future of your own career?

*a. How will you know when you've "made it?"

*b. How do you measure success?

*c. What, if anything, would make you decide to leave the profession?

*d. Do you have particular hopes or requirements about your income flow?

7. What do you think is the primary goal of business?

a. What challenges that goal?

b. Are your beliefs and values aligned with this?

E. The Work Process

*1. Do you have a particular philosophy, or perhaps rules or aphorisms, which guide your overall business approach?

- a. If so, how did you come to acquire this philosophy?
- b. What are some examples of how you have employed this philosophy in your career?
- c. To what degree does this philosophy reflect your approach to life in general?

*2. Which of your accomplishments are you most proud of?

- a. To what do you attribute your success in this endeavor?
- b. What strategies did you use to accomplish this achievement?
- c. How did you learn these strategies yourself?

F. Opportunities and Supports

*1. What are some of the things that are helping you to pursue your goals? [Probe for: most important opportunities or supports]

*2. Are there specific qualities that have contributed to your achievements? (Qualities = attributes: e.g., determination, persistence)

- a. What about qualities that have held you back or made it harder to pursue your goals?

*3. What keeps you going or sustains your commitment to your company?

G. Obstacles, Pressures, and Rewards

*1. What makes it difficult for you to pursue your goals?

- a. [if appropriate] Any difficulties from colleagues, your organization?
- *b. [Probe, if S mentions difficulty balancing work & private life.]
- *c. Can you tell us about a specific situation that you found discouraging or especially hard?

2. How do you go about dealing with these difficulties and pressures? [Probe for type of strategy (domain mission, etc.; proactive, reactive, etc.).]

- a. How did you come to deal with them in this way? [Probe for: learned/devised]

4. What is your work environment like; is it generally supportive or constraining?

[Probe for: collegiality, competition, autonomy, dispersion of resources]

5. In your work experiences, what kind of work is rewarded? What kind of work is discouraged?

- a. Is innovation/creativity rewarded?

6. What, if any, would make you give up your company? Would you give up business all together? If so, what would you do?

H. Formative Background

*1. Reflecting on your formative years as a child or adolescent, what influences do you view as most salient to the way you approach your work?

[Note: influences on values and goals may have been described earlier]

a. How has your family background influenced the way you approach your work?

*b. How did you spend your time as a child? / What would a person have seen if they shadowed you for a day when you were a child?

c. As a child, were you intensely involved in one or more activities? Which ones?

**If the question was not adequately answered at the start of the interview: What attracted you initially to your area of work? Your subfield?

*2. Who has had the greatest influence on your approach to work and/or how you have made crucial decisions in your career thus far?

*a. Were there any particular people who attracted you to business?

*b. Would you consider any of them mentors?

How did they affect you? What did you learn from them?

*c. Any "anti-mentors"? How did they affect you

d. An influential book, movie or someone you didn't know personally?

*3. Would you say that there has been an experience, opportunity, or project, either your youth or more recently that was transformative or has had an important effect on your life or career?

4. Can you recall instances of events in your youth that were early indications of your business acumen or entrepreneurial inclinations? Do you recall what motivated you to initiate each of those endeavors?

I. Training the Next Generation

*1. Describe the training you've received: in what ways has it been adequate? In what ways has it been inadequate?

a. Did undergraduate training adequately prepare you for work in the business domain?

2. In your opinion, is it necessary to attend one of the top graduate business schools in order to succeed in business?

a. If so, what is it that one gets out of business school that one would not get otherwise?

3. How well has your area of work trained you to have the qualities that you think are important? How could your training have been improved?

*4. How would you advise someone who is thinking about starting their own business?

a. What about in terms of preparation for an MBA program?

J. Ethical Issues in the Area of Work

*1. Do you have ethical concerns about your area of work—things that you worry about?

*a. Are your concerns shared by others? [e.g.: the public, other organizations, your colleagues]

*b. How would you like to see them handled?

*2. Are there things that you would not do in your business, even though they would be legal and profitable?

*a. Have you ever been put into a position where you stood by your principles to your own detriment?

*b. What would you not compromise? Is there a line that you will not cross? Probe for profit vs. limited aesthetic value.)

c. What are you willing to compromise?

*3. Have you ever been involved in a situation that violated your ethical sensibility (sense of right and wrong)?

a. Why did you see this as wrong?

b. How did you frame the problem and your solution to it? (How did it become clear to you what to do?)

c. (If unclear) Did the solution come immediately?

d. Where did these beliefs come from?

e. IF NO, can you tell me about an incident in your area of work where you weren't sure about the right course of action?

*4. Have you perceived a change in the availability of opportunities to work in business that you consider to be responsible and ethical?

K. Conditions of the Domain/Field: Present, Past, Future

*1. What changes do you anticipate in your business and do you like or dislike these changes?

a. (if appropriate) If you could, how would you do things differently?

*b. Thinking about work that you respect, what are the common denominators? Common denominators of work that you don't respect?

2. What direction do you see for the future of your area of work?

*3. When you think about the future of business, what are your hopes? Fears?

4. Right now business seems like an exciting area under what circumstances would it cease to be, for you?

I. Perspectives on the Business World

*1. What does business enterprise do well? Not so well?

*2. How would you respond to those who criticize business or the market model as being amoral and in need of being accountable to values beyond the bottom line?

*3. In general, does work in business serve the public well? When does it and when doesn't it?

*a. How important is it for you personally?

- *b. If you do this, how do you serve the public?
- c. If not monetarily, do you contribute in other ways?

*4. With respect to moral and ethical standards, do you think that conduct in the business world is getting better or worse?

*a. One observer of business recently said that, in the old days, CEO's tried to build their companies to last whereas now they try to build them to sell. Do you agree? If this is the case, does the trend detract from the moral climate of business in any way?

*b. How would you analyze the impacts, either positive or negative, of the increasing globalization of business?

*c. What about new technologies or other forms of innovation—Should the current pace of technological innovation cause us any more or less concern regarding ethical implications than before?

*d. Are there any recent trends that you feel threaten the integrity or moral commitment of people working in business?

***We are coming to the end of our interview, is there anything you would like to add?

- a. Check notes for things left out.
- b. May I follow up with you in the future?