

Food Justice, Management Learning, and the Common Good in Jesuit Business Education

Traditional management education often emphasizes organizational effectiveness, performance, and decision making, yet in Jesuit business education these aims are joined to a broader concern for justice, human dignity, and the common good. This perspective invites students to see management as a practice with consequences for workers, communities, and broader social systems, rather than simply as a set of tools for efficiency and optimization. One especially rich context for this kind of management learning is food justice. Food justice is deeply rooted in Catholic Social Teaching and the biblical tradition, where food is understood as connected to our relationship to creation and the earth, human dignity, shared responsibility, right relationships, and the social conditions under which people produce, distribute, and access what is needed for life. Using food justice as a context for management education highlights the importance of management itself, as managerial decisions influence the systems, relationships, and organizational practices through which food justice is either advanced or undermined. In this paper we describe an undergraduate management capstone course that uses food justice as the context for management learning and examine students' learning experiences within an Ignatian pedagogical framework emphasizing experience, reflection, and action.

In this course, students integrate learning about management and leadership and consider its relevance to the larger social issue of food justice. Through texts by food justice scholars, including Gottlieb and Joshi (2013), we introduce food justice as a conceptual framework and invite students to consider how food justice spans multiple levels of analysis, from individual practices and local communities to global histories, systems of production, and patterns of inequality. Across several iterations of the course, students engaged in applied inquiry into real

organizations in the food sector through interviews, observations, and secondary research. In some iterations, this inquiry is deepened through more immersive contexts, including travel components focused on sustainable food production in Costa Rica and the Slow Food movement in Italy, as well as local partnerships with organizations such as Everytable, the Los Angeles Food Policy Council, Food Forward, and Farm Habits. In other cases, students move through a guided process to propose and justify their own sites of inquiry, explaining how the site connects to management and leadership issues; these sites have included farmers markets, restaurants, and small family farms. Across all versions of the course, students engage in a structured process of identifying and articulating a meaningful management insight, effectively structuring an initially unstructured problem and making explicit the connection between organizational context and management concepts. These experiences help students analyze management and leadership practices, connect course concepts to organizational realities, and reflect on broader questions of justice, leadership, and professional responsibility.

The course design is grounded primarily in the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm (ICAJE, 1993), with its emphasis on context, experience, reflection, action, and evaluation. This framework is especially helpful in a management course centered on food justice because it encourages students not only to understand concepts, but also to encounter those concepts in lived organizational and social realities and to reflect on their meaning for responsible action. The course also resonates with broader traditions of experiential and justice-oriented learning, including Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle and the Catholic social tradition of see–judge–act, which invites learners to attend closely to lived social realities, interpret them critically and ethically, and discern appropriate forms of response. Within this pedagogical approach, students are asked to move from complex, open-ended realities toward focused

management insight by structuring initially unstructured problems and identifying the organizational questions and practices most worth analyzing. Together, these approaches support a pedagogy in which students attend carefully to complexity, interpret what they see through management concepts and ethical reflection, and consider how management practice can serve justice and the common good. Through this, students develop judgment about what constitutes a meaningful management problem.

As a next step in the project, we are collecting student feedback through an end-of-course survey designed to explore how students engage with the food justice context, connect management and leadership concepts to practice, and experience the Ignatian pedagogical elements embedded in the course design. The planned survey includes both Likert-scale and open-ended questions about perceived learning, engagement, leadership and professional development, and students' reflections on the role of food justice in shaping their understanding of management. We have received IRB approval for this phase of the project, and we expect to be able to discuss the data at the conference as part of our ongoing reflection on a justice-oriented approach to management education in a Jesuit context.

The anticipated contribution of this paper is to contribute to ongoing conversations in Jesuit business education about how management curriculum can integrate disciplinary learning, ethical reflection, and formation for the common good. It suggests that food justice can serve as a particularly rich context for this work because it makes visible the relationship between organizational decisions and broader questions of labor, access, inequality, sustainability, and human well-being. More broadly, the paper offers one model for how business educators might move beyond teaching management solely through the lenses of efficiency and performance and

instead invite students to consider management as a practice grounded in justice, right relationships, and the common good through engagement with complex real-world contexts.

References

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