

REFLECTIONS ON MANAGEMENT

WITH TOM GALVIN

AUDIO TRANSCRIPT



The Meaning of Duty, Member Responsibility, and Loyalty (Social Contract, Part 6)

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Please note: This transcript has been edited for clarity.

In part 5 of the series on the Social Contract, I concluded with three principles that should be the basis of conversations about what everyone should expect from their collectives, be they societies or organizations. I talked about what is just, or what is considered appropriate, for the collective to provide. I talked about what is equitable such that all should have the same access to a particular service. And I also talked about what is fair since that all had the same experience of receiving the service. But these are not the only three. There are more. We want to now consider the perspective of the member towards the collective.

My name is Tom Galvin and these are my Reflections on Management.

One way to think about what I talked about in the previous episode is what really is the ideal collective or the ideal behavior of a collective in society, whether that's the society as a whole, any subcomponent of the society, or any organization within the society--such as a work organization, church group, a volunteer organization, a business, any of that. All of those collectives should exercise justice, equality, and fairness towards the members. So it's an entirely internal focus. Now, what I want to do is I want to turn it around the other way and now think about the ideal individual, the ideal member. And I say ideal member, because obviously, just as with the ideal organization or the ideal collective, the principles that I'm going to describe are ones that we would want to have more of.

But the ideal, the pure ideal is not impossible, but it's certainly very, very difficult. The reason being is, is because ... it asks so much of either the collective or the individual that they almost [have to take risk] ... To exercise these principles to their fullest. So, the ideal member. I want to start by acknowledging the long literature that has been around about what we call to the ideal 'commitment' to the organization. The individual commitment is typically described as the sum of the three different things. One is affect, one is obligation, and one is a cost benefit analysis, one we consider to be effectively, "I like it here. I like being part of this organization." It's also kind of attachment to the members of the group wanting to be among them. I mean, it's everything about being comfortable or happy or satisfied with physically being in the collective environment. Obligation is pretty straightforward. What is the individual member feel they owe the organization? Cost benefit analysis is a similar thing. Is the grass greener on the other side? Are we talking about greater pay, greater

benefits, flexible work hours? You know, all the sorts of things that people weigh when they decide to change jobs.

Now, the traditional approach, I believe, has tended to talk about commitment from the member's perspective. And what I haven't seen as much covered in the literature is the leader's perspective. Leader commitment to the organization, I will argue, is going to have a very, very similar construct. But when we think about the character of leader commitment as opposed to member commitment, there are some important differences. For example, the leader has a greater obligation not just to the organization as a whole on the virtue of being either a supervisor or a manager, but also has an obligation to the members under their charge. The cost benefits, although the costs may not necessarily be greater per say, the calculus is definitely more intense because one of the things that has to be weighed is the signal that a leader may send if the organization becomes aware that the leader is weighing the costs and benefits of remaining a member. And affect is another one where it's kind of different because there's the potential for being honored or proud to hold a leadership position, [or] to like being in charge, [or] to enjoy or being proud of the authorities and responsibilities held. The same elements of commitment apply just in different ways. So we almost have to put a little bit more of a moral dimension into this.

And this is because, you know, when we're starting to talk about a serious social issue, whether that's internal to the organization or external to the organization, the notion of commitment, I think, is a good starting point. But it doesn't tell the whole story. I don't think it really tells the story of an individual's roles within the organization. And in the previous episode, I made a point to say that loyalty, for example, is something that is taken in very, very different ways, in different kinds of organizations. For example, an individual can be very loyal to the organization and follow it blindly, just submit utterly to the collective will, or that the cost benefit analysis is such that they have no choice but to stay in the organization and the fear of being removed could very well silence them. And then there's another form of loyalty in which an individual decides to become a whistleblower and speak out against an improper practice, thereby exposing potentially a negative practice that's being done by the organization that the organization itself may not wish to have exposed. The organization's leaders may just simply cover their ears and refuse to listen because the the pain or the burden of having to act could very well be greater than they're willing to undertake. When we put the moral dimension onto it, just the pure elements of the construct of commitment just doesn't say everything.

The kinds of things that we're talking about in the social contract, which involve the ability of the organization to act or to treat its members fairly, to be able to provide opportunities for advancement. There is an impact on commitment, but yet again, commitment doesn't answer everything. So what I want to do is I want to bring it up to more of a principle level as before, and offer three principles that I think are very important for understanding what we view to be the ideals of what we want members to be and do for their collectives. I'm going to characterize them as following 'duty,' 'member responsibility,' and 'loyalty,' and I'm saying member responsibility, because there's another form of responsibility that's going to be discussed in the next episode. One more thing about these three is that I need to talk to them about them a little bit differently between, say, the ordinary member and the leader. This is important because just as with commitment, what these words mean to a leader, by

virtue of taking on special duties and responsibilities at a level within the organization by which they make their decisions have greater impact than that of the ordinary member. I think that the difference has to be discussed.

Let me first start with duty. We would all tend to agree that the sense of duty is important and it's, you know, by its nature, it is commonplace. It's basically of common importance, regardless of where one sits in the organization. The fulfillment of duty is an ideal. It is the total completion of one's obligations for the organization. We would consider that to be a largely universal good. Otherwise, we have to ask ourselves, what are we asking our members to do? ... This is a lot more complicated than it sounds, and that's because duty, taken the wrong way, can be viewed as submission. Or the imposition of undue or improper obligations upon a member should be considered morally wrong. If an individual is basically being asked to do things that are beyond their capabilities, that's a problem. Then we start violating justice and potentially start violating fairness, especially if these obligations are not distributed appropriately across the organization. You know, this is where more resources may be required or a redefinition of the mission. When we look at duty from the member's standpoint, it is the member's duty to fulfill all obligations that are assigned justly, equitably and fairly. And then from the perspective of the leaders, the leaders ensure that the members have the appropriate resources and the appropriate opportunities to fulfill the assigned duties and to ensure that the distribution of requirements is just equitable and fair, where we fall short on the ideal.

And this is where the negotiation for the social contract comes into play, [in] that the tensions that members face are: to what extent do the members have to balance multiple sets of obligations among their various personal and professional lives? This is where work-family balance comes into play. If the organization attempts to overwhelm or control through obligations onto the member that are unreasonable or are unjust, that could be tolerated for short periods of time under extreme conditions, but certainly wouldn't be accepted over a longer period of time. You see how members and leaders have different considerations when trying to enact this particular principle and that the the principles can very well be the subject of negotiation. How much is considered to be appropriate? What is a proper obligation? Or what does the collective need to do in order to provide the ability for the members to fulfill those obligations?

The second one, member responsibility, is oriented on to what extent are members empowered to bring about change? You can see the duty as being sort of like the formal aspect of obligation to the organization and member responsibility is more of the informal, or perhaps a better word is 'normative.' So if one is going to be the member of a collective, then one has obligations to follow and one has a responsibility to improve the organization or to posture the organization better, or to be an active participant in collective matters.

What's important here is that the members feel like they have the ability to make things better, that they have a voice that they are allowed to use so long as there's some due consideration to the impact that exercising that voice has on the collective. And that leaders encourage members to be active participants. So the leader should also take on additional informal responsibilities as, say for example, being an advocate or to be to provide a climate that not only allows members the autonomy

and the freedom to make things better for the organization, but also that the leaders themselves are change agents within their organization and that they don't try to take all the credit themselves. Or in the case of what I said before about whistleblowers, that they refuse to listen to bad news. Now, the tension here is to what extent does the power to change become a disruption to the organization's mission? Change--obviously, especially when we're talking about social change--social change is by its nature potentially disruptive to the way that organizations feel about themselves. Or [how] the members feel about themselves, who we welcome in as members, all of those sorts of things. And so that becomes an important part of the nature of the negotiation. And I think that by characterizing it in terms of member responsibility is helpful and constructive because it provides a bit of a purpose by which we grant autonomy to members and leaders to make decisions and to do things. If it's all about trying to hamstring either leaders or members, then I don't know that that necessarily accomplishes very much. So that's member responsibility.

And then the third one is a bit more the individual aspect of affect. We'll talk about 'loyalty.' And what I see is about loyalty in terms of belonging to the collective. It is an emotion. It's a feeling manifested in one's words and actions. And what I want to say is that what we want is members and leaders alike to show loyalty when they promote the good of the organization. There are also loyal when they engage outwardly through their networks, through other organizations, whatever, to promote the good of the collective and as appropriate, acknowledge and act upon the bad by exercising, coming back to the organization, exercising member responsibility to make things better. The tension here is the extent to which the members are asked to carry the organization's message and believe in it. And it's not necessarily "more is better." There are ways to handle disagreements or variance in the way that the message is carried by members and leaders alike. [They] have different identities, different connections to other organizations.

There has to be a certain amount of allowance for variation in the message. Less variation in the message can be a good thing, but so can more [variation]. Variation in the message depends on how much the organization requires the control in order for the organization or the collective to continue to function well. We don't want is suppression of views. When we want to do is we want to ensure that the members have the ability to use the voice that they're given.

So duty, member responsibility and loyalty are principles that should govern basically how we ideally think about the individual's commitment to the organization. And it also provides a way of thinking about the tensions that exist between individual members and the collective to which they belong, under which many of the social issues that we're discussing nowadays can in fact be discussed. There is not enough of a social penalty or the wrong social penalties are being applied upon individuals who are trying to uphold their commitment to the organization through the exercise of their duties, the exercise of their informal responsibilities. And their show of loyalty. For example, the organization is asking too much or trying to exercise too much control over the member. If the organization is refusing to allow individuals to voice their opinions on matters of importance to the organization or treating as disloyal failure or departure from toeing the collective line. Those are all things in which we should be concerned about how it may, in the short term, address a particular discomfoting or disconcerting message that an organization has to contend with.

But ultimately, in the long run, those those sorts of breakdowns can lead to distrust, can lead to less morale, and can also change the level of member commitment to the organization. We want to have some kind of a social penalty that discourages the failure to uphold one's duties to the collective or the failure to exercise one's responsibilities or show loyalty while at the same time not encourage leaders of a collective to make things so difficult or so restrictive on members that they cannot function otherwise. We don't ever want to encourage cheating, and we don't want leaders who see themselves as being above the members to the extent that their use of power becomes misuse. So this is how I think we can frame the principles that apply from the individual's perspective to the collective. And so in the next episode, I'm going to then shift my focus on these principles from the collective outward to the broader environment. And I hope you'll join me.

... And that's all for now. The views expressed are my own and do not necessary reflect the United States Army War College, the United States Army or the Department of Defense. Thank you for listening and have a great day.

ALL THE BEST!
TOM GALVIN