Lawrence Kohlberg's Moral Dilemma and Ubuntu Philosophy: An African Discourse of an Entrepreneur's Product Pricing and Social Responsibility.

by

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Abstract.

In his attempt to study the process of moral development in individuals Lawrence Kohlberg came up with a story to demonstrate a reality we are sure to come across at a time in our lives and this he called Moral dilemma. A time when we are faced with the temptation to do something we perceive to be wrong and also faced with a negative consequence if we refuse to do the wrong we know. Kohlberg's story can best be summarized as the story of Mr. Heinz, a customer who desires a product for his dying wife but cannot afford it because the pharmacist an entrepreneur will not consider his challenge and sell to him. So much as been said about what Heinz is expected to do as a customer to be seen to act right with little being said about the Pharmacist the classical entrepreneur. This paper is a diversion from the norm as it focuses on the entrepreneur to suggest to him what society's expectations are from him if he must go business in the community. And this is being discussed within the frame of an African ethical philosophical thought referred to as Ubuntu.

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Introduction:

One continent that seems to be on news global news channels and for unpleasant reasons is Africa. This reality we cannot run from as most of the discussion are based on issues that are real to us such as poverty, hunger, conflicts, illiteracy, diseases and bad governance. These have taken center stage not because it is what is desirable but because as a people we continue to seat and discuss these issue with the hope of findings solutions but there seem to be little progress. The search for solution has resulted in the conceptualization and pursuit of what is today known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by most governments in African with support from foreign development agencies and governments (outside the African continent). The pursuit of these goals has no doubt recorded successes even though small measure. One benefit is the promotion of entrepreneurship and the development of enterprises of all sizes all focused on meeting the action points that the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) covers. But the question is at what cost is it getting to the individuals it is intended to service? As we single out the millennium development goal centered on raising a healthy society at what price are hospitals and pharmaceutical companies offering their products and services to the customers.

The reality we are now faced with is one where entrepreneurs in Africa seem to have imbibed other culture that is foreign to African and that culture is one that makes them individualistic in the design of their business models and the concept of profit maximization seems to be the overriding motivation. In the past it was a usual practice for a sick person to be rushed to the nearest hospital from his home and get treatment (even when his family has no money). Our health insurance policy as a people was built around our humanness as Africans. Today the reverse is the case as no private hospital will allow you a bed without meeting their financial demands even in the face of their Hippocratic Oath. This paper seeks to take us back to the

principles of humanness African societies where know for where individuals in a community were more of a family than individuals. To drive this philosophical concept until it is appreciated an attempt is made to clearly demonstrate its relevance when an individual is faced with a moral dilemma around profit maximization, respect of life and social conventions. To do this we will discuss this paper around Lawrence Kohlberg's work on moral dilemma.

Lawrence Kohlberg's Moral Dilemma

To bring alive our discussion on the challenge that can arise when there is a clash between profit maximization and acting socially responsibly we will rely on Lawrence Kohlberg's popular example of a moral dilemma. In his research on moral development Kohlberg tells a story of a woman who had cancer and was near death but whose life doctors thought could be saved by a form of radium discovered by a pharmacist in the same community as the sick woman. The drug was being sold for $4000 (a price which was ten times its' production cost of $400) directly to consumers from the pharmacist outlet. Mr. Heinz who happens to be a member of the community heard of this innovative product and prompted by the desire to see his wife recover he approached the pharmacist with the sum of $2000 which was all he could get to procure the drug for his dying wife. The druggist would not sell to him and advised him to go and source for more funds to pay the full price. Heinz was said to have appealed to the pharmacist to sell the drug to him at a cheaper rate to him as his wife was dying or accept the $2000 as a part payment with a promise to pay the balance on a later date. The pharmacist determined to maximize his profit refused to sell the drug to Heinz for less than the asking fixed price of $4000. Out of his desperation to save the life of his wife Mr. Heinz considered breaking into the pharmacy to steal the drug for his wife. The question that begged for answer was should Heinz carry out his thoughts?

Before answering the question put forth in the story above it is important we understand that it is not only the morality of the customer (Mr. Heinz) that is being questioned but that of the pharmacist being an entrepreneur also. That the pharmacist is an entrepreneur is not in doubt as he has manifested his ability to perceive opportunities; be creative and turn that into an innovation; source and allocate resources to exploit the identified opportunity and make entrepreneurial profit out of his activities (Timmons and Spinelli 2009; Kuratko and Hodgetts 2004; Kirby 2003; Drucker 1997; Gibb 1996; Ricketts 1994; Timmons 1989; Herbert and Link 1988; Sobel and Sicilia 1986). In carrying out his business as an entrepreneur we will notice that the pharmacist has shown no respect for social convention transacting with Heinz for the sole aim of maximizing profit. This is contrary to Casson (2003) position that trade is not purely an economic activity but also a social one which is guided by that part of society's culture which relates to the behaviour of people one towards the other.

What is Ubuntu Philosophy about?

The word Ubuntu is an Isixhosa or Zulu word meaning humanity or humanness which is a contraction of the Zulu Idiom '*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*" which is translated '*a person is a person through their relationship to other people'* (Swanson 2009; Swartz 2006). The truth in this Zulu saying is communicated in Khomba and Vermaak (2012) who talk about Africans being seen as social beings in constant communion with one another as they see their survival as dependent on other people and on society at large. Ones humanness is therefore judged by the quality of relationship with others, that is how you respond to their needs, your acts of compassion and promotion of the dignity of life.

Swanson (2009) refers Ubuntu as an indigenous African philosophy of humanism that links an individual to a collective of brotherhood or sisterhood as the grooming of a child to adulthood is seen as the responsibility of all members of society and not the parents alone. Ubuntu according to Ramose (2002) is the central concept underlying the formation of social and political organisation in African philosophy. Ubuntu as an African philosophy also elicits unselfish and collective responsibility, embodies one's capacity to express compassion, reciprocity, dignity and humanity (Gianan 2010), sharing and caring for one another (Ramose 2002; Broodryk 2002), empathy and generosity (Swanson 2009), being willing to go the extra mile for the sake of others. Ubuntu is also seen to serve as a rule of conduct, an African social ethic (Prinsloo 1998) which aims for common or public good of all humans, non-discrimination, promotes responsibility, mutuality of good purpose and intension, mutuality in the interest of building and maintaining communities with justice and mutual caring (Gianan 2010; Khoza 2006; Luhabe 2002)

Ubuntu as the foundation of African society reflects the essence of community and communality (Gianan 2010) ensures supportiveness, cooperation, communalism (Mangena and Chitando 2010), happy and qualitative human community life in a spirit of family (Broodryk 1997; Broodryk 2002). Under Ubuntu every member of a society is treated as an extended family member or as a sibling.

Nussbaum (2003) captures the essence of Ubuntu by describing it as the consciousness of our natural desire to affirm our fellow human, to work and act towards each other in the interconnectedness of our common humanity and responsibility for each other with a communal goal in the fore front of our minds. Ubuntu as an African philosophy states that no one can be

self-sufficient and that interdependence is a must for all. This guides the African society's call upon everyone in the world to listen to and affirm others, accept, believe and feel the pains of others as their, see the salvation of others as their salvation, handle their wealth as the wealth of others by making basic services accessible and visible to all members of society. Anything to the contrary is disrespect for social convention as it will be against the spirit of family the African society holds as sacrosanct.

Product Pricing by Entrepreneurs

In view of the cry around rising prices even when their seem to be no supporting explanation as cost most time cannot be matched against price, the question then arises to the entrepreneur and it is, at what price should an entrepreneur sell his or her product? This is a question that many writers have not seem to agree on but they all agree that whatever price is charged it should be one that ensures recovery of cost of the product and a margin that will ensure the continuous survival of the business. This task is not an easy one. Schindehutte, Morris and Pitt (2009) made this clear when they describe the pricing function as the most challenging task entrepreneurs contend with. It is also a function in the marketing mix that has been described as the most important function any entrepreneur or firm performs as it has ability to sustain patronage, it is a major yardstick used by customers to judge quality in the absence of information and the only function that does not entail spending but ensures inflow of revenue and profit (Agbonifoh 2006; Ferrell and Hartline 2005). The pricing function is not just about attaching a number to a product it is about determining how much a product should be sold, when to sell it, where to sell and how it is to be paid for (Schindehutte, Morris and Pitt 2009).

To fix price for a product it has been suggested that the following factors be taken into consideration production cost, marketing cost, market mechanism, purchasing power of customers, effective demand, competition, quality of product, perceived value of product to customers, regulations and objective of the firm for the product (Agbonifoh 2006). For Schindehutte et al (2009) the fixing of price for a product should be determined by the guiding philosophy around the firms pricing behaviour. This approach which is all encompassing they referred to as Pricing Orientation and it is what guides the entrepreneur in making and implementing price related decisions including all underlying attitudes and assumptions. Schindehutte et al (2009) in their work on pricing orientation enumerated four dimensions of this construct and they are:

1. Cost based versus Market based pricing orientation: the cost based orientation is one that sees the firm focus on the covering of its cost plus a margin which represents an expected rate of return on investment. The market based pricing orientation suggest that price is fixed to reflect the value the customer is perceived to be getting and it is usually higher than the cost based price.

2. Risk aversive or Risk assumptive: the risk aversive orientation is also interested in covering cost but avoids fixing a price that will make it lose revenue due to lack of patronage so its price is fixed at a level close to that of its' competitors. For the firm with the risk assumptive orientation pricing is done in a novel and untested way that could result in negative consequences such as revenue loss and customer alienation where expectation are at a negative variance with actual..

3. Reactive or Proactive pricing orientation: for the reactive firm price is fixed in response to competition or customer reaction to its product or changes in the external environment. The proactive firm on the other hand plays a leadership role in fixing price to reflect a new opportunity it has carved out for itself.

4. Standardized versus Flexible pricing orientation: for a firm following the standardization path price is uniform irrespective of difference in circumstance while for the firm with the flexible pricing orientation price varies based on market segment, demand, time and location.

In concluding their analysis of the various dimensions of the pricing orientation as given above they suggested that for firms who want to be successful in their industry a pricing approach that combines market based, risk assumptive, proactive and flexible pricing orientation is preferred. This combination of orientations which is opportunistic in outlook they call entrepreneurial pricing.

Social Responsibility

The concept of social responsibility is one that has generated divergent view in the past with many speaking for and against it practice by profit making businesses. Today the stakeholder model has made businesses embrace the concept as a necessity if they are going to remain in business. The concept is better understood in action even though it has been defined differently in many African societies. In the Niger Delta region of Nigeria for example it has been given a wider scope that being socially responsible seem to suggest companies taking over government neglected responsibility and the socioeconomic empowerment of host communities.

What then is social responsibility? It has been defines as the obligation a company takes upon itself to be concerned about the social and environmental impact of its operation and management; a commitment to promote the well-being of community, environment and people as part of its ongoing operations (Abrams 2012). For these business intensions to be consider as being socially responsible they are expected to transcend the pursuit of profit (Robbins and Coulter 2009; Bovec and Thill 2005; Davis 2001), economic, technical or legal requirements of the firm (Davis 2001).

Social responsibility requires that businesses must pursue policies, make decision and take actions that impact favourable on the social system in which they operate in a manner that will ensure the derivation and accumulation of social benefit (Bone and Kurtz 2005; Williams 2005; Davis 2001).

Williams (2005) and Schermerhorn (2004) suggest that for corporations to be seen to be socially responsible their activities should seek to satisfy all stakeholders with emphasis on the customer (which is also the focus of the paper). In line with their submission Boone and Kurtz (2005) advised that businesses should give serious consideration to customer satisfaction and society's well-being as members of the society (as potential customers) are the most crucial stakeholders any business has because it is their patronage of the business products or services that sustains the business. To ensure this patronage continues customers must be given opportunity to give feedback, have necessary information to help them make decision about choice, the quality of the product must be good, product must be safe to consume and sold at a fair price (Jones and George 2009; Bovec and Thill 2005). The concept of fairness in price will be brought to light as

we review the answers from the responses received after telling the Mr. Heinz moral dilemma story.

Methodology and Findings

To get the mindset of individuals in a purely African setting where Ubuntu as a philosophy still holds sway even in the midst of mixed cultural experience a set of 209 students in an ethics and social responsibility class were made to provide answers to predetermined question solicited from a previous research on Morality, Moral dilemma and entrepreneurship. The Mr. Heinz story was told to a class of 209 students between the ages of 30 and 50 years, on a weekend undergraduate conversion programme for individuals working in Nigeria's banking sector and below are our findings from the answers giving to Lawrence Kohlberg's Moral Dilemma.

1. When they were asked to take a position on Mr. Heinz thought of going to steal the drug for his wife a total of 155 students (74.16 percent) were in support of Heinz stealing the drug for his wife. The 54 students who did not support Heinz stealing were made to re-evaluate their position after they were asked to imagine their child at the point of death and this drug was required for their child's recovery would they steal if they found themselves in the same situation as Mr. Heinz. In line with Omoregbe (2005) postulations that feelings and sentiments take precedence over abstraction in the African way of life 35 out of the 54 students changed their position and agree that it was okay for Heinz to steal to save life. Only 19 (0.09 percent) maintained their position that he should not steal and their reasons were hinged on their religious beliefs that stealing was not right in whatever circumstance one finds himself.

2. The students were then asked to freely comment in writing their thoughts on the position of the pharmacist in view of Mr. Heinz request to him and the responses from the students are summarized under two headings as follows:

   - **Selling Price**: 206 (98.56 percent) of the students wrote that the price of $4000 charged by the pharmacist was too high. The 3 students who didn't think so said business is all about maximizing your profit and that the only reason others felt it was high was because they were informed of the cost of production in the story. 107 (51.19 percent) wrote that he should have sold at $2000 since his was still making a good profit at that offer from Mr. Heinz. For 95 (45.45 percent) of the students the pharmacist should have given Mr. Heinz the credit he asked for since he was willing to pay the balance on a later date. Four students did not think credit was necessary the $2000 was more than enough. An interesting group in the survey comprise of three students (0.01 percent) who had said the price was right said he should not give Heinz credit as they suspect the reason Heinz could not raise more than $2000 was because he was not credit worthy so extending credit to him would only increase his debts. These three (3) students seem to have had a discussion as their seat numbers as written on the submitted write up showed they sat one after the other on a row. 203 of the students felt the Pharmacist did not have respect for life and was not fit to be in society for him to have insisted on getting a full price before selling, given that Heinz wife was dying and Heinz was willing to pay the balance on a later date.

- **Personality of the Pharmacist (Entrepreneur):** all 209 (100 percent) of the students irrespective of their position on price felt it was wrong for the pharmacist not to have sold the drug to Mr. Heinz as life was very important and that his actions was capable of putting him in bad light; that his action is likely to encourage competition and when this happens he is likely going to lose patronage. Some felt that as member of the same society his business would do better if he was seen to show compassion above the desire to maximize profit.

3. As fallout of the comment made by the three students (that the reason people said the price was too high was because they were told the production cost), we asked the student if their opinion will change if they did not know the cost price. Out of the 206 students who had initially said the price was too high 192 (93.2 percent) of them said they would not complain of high price but would ask that Heinz be given credit. 14 students found it difficult to express a different opinion as they were also finding it difficult to erase the fact that they had been told the cost of producing the drug. Some of the students at this point suggested that such a product should be classified as a necessity and legislation be put in place to fix the price or patent for the product be paid for by government and the drug sold to patients at a subsidized and affordable price irrespective of its cost of production.

4. On the provision of credit to Heinz the students were asked two additional questions. The first was what their opinion will be if Heinz had no deposit for the drug, should the credit requested be extended to him. The second was what percentage of the selling price should be accepted as initial payment for this drug to be sold under credit terms. For the

first question the 206 students did not change their positions as they said the drug should be sold to Heinz as his wife's life was important, they also saw an advertisement value for the drug in Heinz wife's recovery. It was also mentioned that giving a situation where another person buys the drug for $4000 then the profit made was sufficient to cover the cost of selling the drug to Heinz for $2000. On the second question the students were of the opinion that the most ideal deposit should be one that covers the cost of goods (that is production plus selling cost) since it will be a no loss or profit position where the customers extended credit is unable to pay his debt.

5. For the 206 student who felt the profit was too high they were told to suggest an ideal profit margin and 186 (90.29 percent) of the students suggested a margin of between 20-30 percent, 17 (0.08 percent) students were okay with 40 – 50 percent, and 3 (0.01 percent) students said 100 percent profit margin was okay for a start. Those who proposed margins more that 30 percent defended their position by saying it was necessary at the startup point of the business to maximize profit and later bring down the margin. After further discussion on the profit margin, a 30 percent margin was considered appropriate.

6. An attempt was made to compare a situation where the item being sold was not a necessity and the students were asked to comment. In unionism they all opposed any attempt to steal a product because one cannot afford it, did not support credit except it was necessary to enhance the entrepreneur's liquidity, since it was not a necessity they had no problem with any price charged so profit margin could be any percent.

Conclusion and recommendation:

From the responses received it is clear that Ubuntu is well and alive in most African societies, that even in the face of poverty and crisis the humanness necessary to live communally and seek others benefit exist. In line Casson (2003) it is a truism that opportunism which seem to be one attribute of entrepreneurship is abhorred by many culture especially when the entrepreneur is seen to be making profit out of the potential misfortunes of others. It is therefore important that in fixing prices for essential products or services a flexible pricing orientation be adopted. As also suggested by Donaldson (2003) that the moral threshold for all business should look at context, respect core human values and local tradition. Entrepreneurs who offer essential products and services should ensure that clients who come to them with peculiar challenges should be attended to and their limitations taken care of within the concept of Ubuntu as philanthropy will not hurt the business given the pooling of profit from sales made to others.

It is also imperative that the price being charged by an entrepreneur is not perceived to be unfair. Considering the innovation in the entrepreneur's product or service his actions tends to be very public and easy to scrutinize and where his price suggest he is taking undue advantage protest from customers and society may demand he be punished for violating social convention and this may be done through restrictive legislation, special taxes, outlaw or the entrepreneur is made to pay compensation for abuse of market power. It is in the interest of the entrepreneur that this does not happen as he may lose his business in the process.

Since there is said to be no close relationship between margins and cost that it is competition that establishes a fair margin in a long run it is important that entrepreneurs don't set very high margins on their product as it may have the tendency to promote completion when they do a cost

analysis and see there is a wide margin between cost and price. To remain competitive and ensure brand loyalty entrepreneurs should focus more on a pricing strategy that will encourage repeat purchase.

In line with social conventions which demands the offer and reciprocity of hospitality and dictates that certain goods and services must be offered free entrepreneurs must as part of their social responsibility function set aside their products or services to be given out at no cost to those who cannot afford it. This is important for entrepreneurs operating small business as many seem to assume that only major corporations are involved is social responsibility.

Giving that most of the respondent did not see the price as high if they were not privy to the cost of production it is important that entrepreneur must maintain secrecy if they wants to have competitive edge, increase market share, and ensure the terms under which he contracts are favourable to him (Casson, 2003) and make entrepreneurial Profit (Ricketts, 1994).

In conclusion I like to suggest to researchers who continue to rely on Lawrence Kohlberg's moral dilemma story to make postulation on moral reasoning or development to repeated there research without informing the respondent of the cost of producing the drug as the margin between cost and price seem to have been a major reason many felt the pharmacist was not moral in his dealings.

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