

CASE STUDY

Kantian ethics applied to Apple Inc.

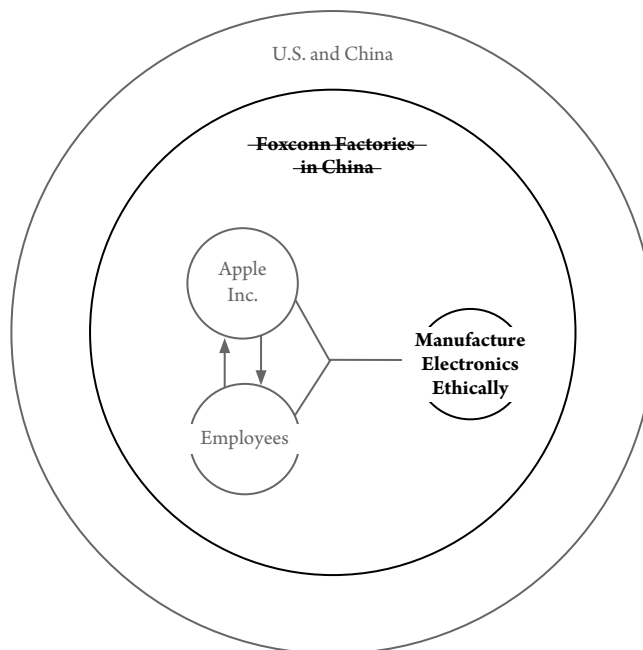
Organizations like the Human Rights Watch, Human Rights First, International Federation for Human Rights, Global Rights and the UN Human Rights Committee are committed to monitoring and protecting the rights of individuals around the globe. One organization, in particular, has led the charge in this endeavor. Since 1961 Amnesty International has existed to 'protect people wherever justice, freedom, truth and dignity are denied.'²⁴ Their objective is to expose human rights violations and to educate the public on the ethical treatment of persons. The importance of their work has not gone unnoticed. In 1977 the organization received the Nobel Peace Prize for its groundbreaking work on behalf of human rights.

The most widely accepted document on the subject of human rights is the UN Declaration of Human Rights. (We will examine this document a bit more closely in Chapter 6.) The declaration outlines 30 foundational rights. These rights are said to belong to individuals in virtue of their humanity. No leader or state, government or corporation ought to have the power to violate the inherent dignity of human beings. In particular, Article 23 addresses the individual's right to work. It states that 'Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, *to just and favourable conditions of work.* . .' (emphasis mine). The UN Declaration of Human Rights was published in 1948. Nevertheless, serious human rights violations committed by leaders and their multinational corporations persist to this day.

Fortunately, the labor practices of many multinational corporations have been increasingly scrutinized in recent years. Companies such as Nike, Walmart, Apple, Samsung, Dell and others have each come under fire for their apparent human rights violations in offshore factories.²⁵ As recently as 2016, Amnesty International documented 'hazardous conditions in which artisanal miners, including thousands of children, mine cobalt in the Democratic Republic of the Congo' in order to supply technology companies like Apple, Samsung and Microsoft with raw materials to power their 'mobile phones, laptop computers, and other portable electronic devices.'²⁶ To their credit, some companies, like Apple, tried to right their wrongs.

CASE STUDY (continued)

Figure 2.3 The Five Components of Leadership Model applied to the Apple case study



In 2005, Apple created a Supplier Code of Conduct to ensure that the 'working conditions in Apple's supply chain are safe, that workers are treated with respect and dignity, and that manufacturing processes are environmentally responsible.' The code developed by Apple's top executives (including Steve Jobs and Tim Cook) maintained that 'Apple's suppliers are obligated, in all of their activities, to operate in full compliance with the laws, rules and regulations of the countries in which they operate. This Supplier Code of Conduct goes further, drawing upon internationally recognized standards, in order to advance social and environmental responsibility.' The code went on to say that, 'Apple suppliers must uphold the human rights of workers, to treat them with dignity and respect as understood by the international community' and that 'suppliers must be committed to creating safe working conditions and a healthy work environment for all of their workers.' In short, Apple boasted that its company was 'committed to the highest standards of ethical conduct when dealing with workers, suppliers, and customers.'²⁷ Above you can find a modified version of the Five Components of Leadership Model to illustrate the leadership process in relationship to our case study.