

A MORAL DEVELOPMENT UNIT FOR BUSINESS COURSES

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ABSTRACT

One of the reasons why many of today's business leaders are unethical, corrupt, and corruptible is that values transmitted (implicitly) by university business education helps to influence students to ignore ethics. This paper advocates the argument that to help future business leaders become more ethical, business school implicit values should reflect a more ethical direction and encourage students to become more morally mature. The present paper describes an experiential pedagogy designed help students to develop morally. It does so by asking students to 1) participate in exercises sensitizing them to moral development issues, 2) reflect on their own ethical values and decisions they've made that either mirror or contradict those values, 3) read about and understand moral development models, and 4) self-assess in terms of stages of their own moral development, as portrayed in the models.

Keywords: moral development, teaching ethics experientially, values exploration.

INTRODUCTION

Tyler and Tyler (2006) define moral development as the progress towards behavior that includes ethical sensitivity in the decision making process, the cognitive ability to integrate information to a world view that includes prioritizing ethical values, and the ability to solve problems while incorporating an ethical perspective. Narvaez and Rest (1995) believe that moral behavior involves sequenced multiple attitudes and skills. For these authors, moral behavior includes 1) moral sensitivity, which involves the receptivity of the sensory/perceptual system to social situations and the interpretation of situations in terms of what actions are possible and the consequences of such actions, all with a moral perspective, 2) moral judgment, which involves deciding which of the possible actions are moral, 3) moral motivation, which implies that the person gives priority to moral values above all other values, and 4) implementation, which combines the ego strength with the social and psychological skills necessary to carry out moral actions. Given Narvaez and Rest's classification and a typical college lecture-discussion class, it should be feasible to help student improve their sensitivity to moral stimuli and improve their moral judgment, but less feasible to change their moral motivation or help them implement moral decisions.

The construct moral development presumes a hierarchy, in that some moral behaviors and decisions are more developed or mature than others. Two widely known and well-established

(Dean and Beggs, 2006) conceptualizations of Moral Development, authored by Kohlberg (1981) and the Rest group (Rest et al., 1999; Narvaez and Bock, 2002) are similar in that both feature progressive stages. In both, behaviors classified as belonging to the earlier less developed stages are less sensitive and relatively self-centered, while behavior in the advanced stages is less selfish, more other-centered and more likely to be guided by ethical values. There are differences between the models, but both as well as the majority of those who write about moral development accept the notions that moral ideas and behavior vary among individuals, that some stages are more advanced than others, that most people advance with time and experience, and that cognitive complexity, other-centeredness, and ethical principles characterize the advancement.

This paper presumes that if there are stages and that some are more advanced than others, then it might be possible to help people progress from the less to the more advanced. As Weber (2007) suggests, values and ethical sophistication can advance over time with maturity, experience and education, and ethics training can play an important role in that moral advancement process. This training according to Weber (2007) will help the manager take more 'other oriented' factors into consideration in determining what is right. We also believe that some of this training can begin while these managers are still in college, that business education can lay the groundwork for students to become ethical agents over the course of their careers (Trevino and Brown, 2004; Taft and White 2007). If these students indeed become ethical agents, then ideally they would become catalysts to more ethically grounded corporate activity (Cornelius, Wallace, and Tassabehji, 2007).

BACKGROUND

The recent well-known scandals among American businesses have provoked criticism of American Business Schools. These critiques argue that one of the reasons for the scandals is that business education has failed to train future business leaders to attend to responsibilities beyond profit maximization (Cornelius, Wallace, and Tassabehji, 2007; Giacalone, 2004; Ghoshal, 2003; Kohn, 2005; and Pfeffer; 2005). For example, Ghoshal (2005) points out that business schools have actively freed their students from any sense of moral responsibility by propagating an ideologically inspired amoral philosophy, which characterizes man as rational, utility-maximizing, and opportunistic and prioritizes profits while minimizing the importance of morality.

If businesses are going to become more socially and ethically responsible, they must be managed by persons who understand that profit aspirations must be integrated with generativity (Erickson, 1963) and mutuality, and Giacalone (2004) points out that wealth creation and transcendent concerns are not inherently incompatible. Many argue that Business Schools have a responsibility to provide future practitioners with training with an increased emphasis in ethics (Cornelius, Wallace, and Tassabehji, 2007; Giacalone, 2004; James and Smith, 2007, Koehn, 2005; Pfeffer and Fong, 2004; Ricci and Markulis, 1992; Taft and White, 2007; and Teach, Christensen and Schwartz, 2005) leading to a more informed and sensitive workplace, so such practitioners can more easily make principled decisions and prevent corporate scandals.

We also believe that college students in general are amenable to developing morally and that college courses can help them do that. These premises are augmented by Kohlberg's work (Kohlberg, 1984), which suggests that a person's moral development changes for the better as he matures, and is further supported by studies by Acevedo (2001), Glenn (1992), and Stead & Miller (1988) showing that ethical attitudes change with academic exposure or training, beyond that which takes place from age alone.

PEDAGOGICAL CONCERNS

So we should teach to enhance student moral development, but how? The literature points to a number of potential pedagogies. Pfeffer and Fong (2004) advocate a framework akin to traditional professional education, with clear statements of professional values, responsibilities, and sanctions for violations. James and Smith (2007) advocate and use cases plus six ethical decision making strategies, such as the categorical imperative, legalism, and light of day. By applying these strategies to cases, these authors contend that students will have a better understanding of their own and others' decision making strategies. Meisel and Fearon (2006) support the inclusion of critical thinking in helping students develop morally. For them, critical thinking is a way of analyzing objectively given subjective information and believe that it is a valuable tool to help decision makers sift through competing ideas and conflicting personal and organizational agendas.

Many authors including Dean and Beggs (2007), Dewey (1938), Kolb (1984), Marturano (2005), and Taft and White (2007) argue for active values exploration on the part of students, with a direct connection between the ethical material and the student's self. Taft and White (2007) contend that because efforts to teach ethics must rely to a considerable extent on the values and principles that students bring to their education and because moral development parallels the development of self, faculty need to incorporate those values into students' learning paradigms. Values exploration includes having students examine their own values and identifying and questioning their own ethical base (Taft and White, 2007), and working through ethical conflicts, which improves ones ability to solve ethics related problems and helps the decision maker gain conscious awareness of the impact of her decisions (Glass and Bonnici, 1997). Exploring student values in the classroom has been found to have positive effects. Trocchia, Swanson, and Orlitzky

(2007) found that after participating in a class-sponsored interviewing exercise, students clearly felt that values exploration affected their decision-making behavior. Also, there is some evidence to support the idea that values exploration impacts moral development. Grob (1995) analyzed factors that affected environmentally supportive behavior and found that personal-philosophical values were the strongest contributor. Ferris (1996) found that students taking a course in moral philosophy, which included developing their own ethics codes, reported improved ethical behavior and refined ethical systems nine months after course completion, and Weber and Gillespie (1998) found that ethical intent affected real behavioral choice, while suggesting that the intent could be influenced by ethical education.

It is likely that values exploration alone will not result in the kind of comprehensive self-understanding that will affect future behavior and decisions. We believe that learners should also understand the etiology of their values, the role that the situation plays in ethical decision-making, and theoretical contexts analyzing the way people think about ethics related behavior. The etiology of values includes parental teaching, the influence of religion, and cultural norms (Jackson, 2006; Stablein, 2003; Weber and Wasieleski, 2001). The fact that the context or the decision situation influences ethics-related behavior and decisions means that many ethics-related decisions are likely to be, and according to Jackson (2006) and Stablein (2003) should be, situation specific. It also means, according to Dean and Beggs (2007), that predicting ethical compliance or violation in any given case may be difficult because reasoning for decisions will be influenced by how the decision maker frames the situation.

If the goal is to help students better understand their own values and how their values compare with the values of others, then placing these values in the context of accepted moral development theory is also desirable (Dean and Beggs, 2006; James and Smith, 2007; Taft and White 2007) because students will have a context for their beliefs. Taft and White (2007) want their students to begin values exploration and then link those values with the philosophical ethical frameworks to provide a coherent and moral ideal as a foundation for action.

Values exploration is a type of experiential learning in that it comes from the learner's real experience. Many if not most of those who write about educating learners to develop morally advocate experiential pedagogies and criticize the use of teaching methodologies that are not experiential. For example Dean and Beggs (2007) argue that focusing on the legal aspects of ethics requires receiving, attending to, and being made aware that a concept exists, which according to Krathwohl et al's taxonomy (Krathwohl et al., 1984) is the lowest level of learning, a level which does not facilitate behavior change and is the kind of learning which is almost always temporary (Dean and Beggs, 2007). This passive kind of learning limits the lasting effects of ethics education according to educational theorists such as Dewey (1938), Kolb (1984), and Epstein (1994), in that there is no connection between the material and the self. These scholars have argued for active and experiential paradigms, where the participant's role is to be responsible for his own learning and to be an active and constructive contributor to the moral enhancement process (Weber, 2006).

THE PEDAGOGY FOR THE PRESENT MORAL DEVELOPMENT UNIT

Our moral development unit is in four parts. While some parts of it have been offered in eight sections of three separate courses since 1998, the entire unit with the explicit purpose of developing students morally has only been offered once, in the fall of 2007. This unit in its entirety is designed to be taught in our Social Responsibility course, offered in both our BBA and MBA programs. Beginning in the 2008-2009 school year, the undergraduate course was one of four courses, of which three are required to be taken by undergraduate General Management Majors, and it is an elective for all business majors and many business minors. It is 3 units and usually offered for 75 minutes twice a week. The MBA course is 2 units and required for all MBA's. It is offered for half a semester for 200 minutes per week either once a week at night or twice a week during the day.

In the following paragraphs we will describe how we have taught each part of the unit and why. We will conclude with a discussion of how to improve the whole unit given our experience teaching it.

PART 1: ESTABLISHING ETHICS

The first part focuses on the students' present lives and values. It asks the students to define ethics for themselves, identify important ethics impacted issues and discuss how ethics affects both their lives and the experiences important to them. This part of the unit is designed to help stress the importance of ethics to the students in their present lives and somewhat implicitly asks students take into account the moral perspective as they live their lives. Its content is guided by the students' values, experiences, and interests. It is free flowing and almost always exciting. One of us has done this with Freshman (three times totaling about 45 students) and upper classmen in a Social Responsibility class (once with 29 students), and only once has even a part of this unit not been very exciting. To our knowledge, this kind exercise/discussion has not previously been described in the literature.

When asked what ethics mean to students, they have almost always mentioned honesty, the golden rule, belief in G-d, loving, respectful and loyal relationships, and being true to one's self. When asked which kinds of situations they find themselves in with ethical implications, romantic relationships, drugs and alcohol, and cheating in school almost always top the list. Binge drinking and getting drunk are seen as unethical because these are mind wasting and put pressure on others to be helpful when they may not want to be. Most agree that cheating on a romantic partner is dishonest, but students almost always argue whether flirting or spending time with members of the opposite sex (presuming that the romantic relationship is heterosexual) is unethical. Almost always these sorts of arguments result in discussions about the value of communicating between romantic partners. Cheating in school is usually seen as taking unfair advantage, and even letting others copy is perceived as unfair and wrong. In one class, though, students said that professors who tested for trivia were partly responsible for the cheating.

PART 2: WORK RELATED VALUES EXPLORATION

Part 2 consists of exercises in which students either assess the ethics of or propose actions for a protagonist or indicate what they believe they would or should do given an particular situation, for example whether as a salesperson they would hide a non-quality-threatening flaw in a product to a potential customer. For us this type of exercise continues to legitimize ethics as important to attend to in all areas of life especially those associated with work. It also introduces the idea that those who manage organizations are responsible for more than just financial results and that their responsibilities can include fairness, integrity, and protecting stakeholders from harm. Both of us have used this kind of exercise, twice in social responsibility classes and once in an Organizational Behavior Class. In the particular exercise used in these classes, students were asked for their beliefs towards nine frequently occurring situations (Cherrington and Cherrington, 1992). They were asked for example, whether they would exaggerate (or have exaggerated) positive attributes and experiences in a job interview and what they thought of padding expense accounts. Judging from the experiential learning literature, many business ethics and many organizational behavior classes use this kind of exercise.

PART 3: VALUES-ETHICAL DILEMMA ASSIGNMENT

The assignment for part 3 is proposed to reinforce the ideas that ethics permeates many important dilemmas we face and that our ethical values influence many of the decisions we make. We want our students to be aware of their values and how they play out in their own decisions, with the hope that by working through ethical conflicts, the students will improve their abilities to solve ethics related problems and gain conscious awareness of the impact of their decisions (Glass and Bonnici, 1997). We further hope that for the long term doing this assignment will help them seriously consider the ethical aspects of their decisions and enhance future managerial decision making in a socially responsible direction.

The assignment is for the student to express her deeply held values, describe an ethical dilemma she faces (either at work or school), how it was resolved, and discuss clearly how the deeply held personal values influenced the resolution. The exercise itself was to be written and done outside of class, and graded. It has been assigned in six classes, three OB classes, one taught by one of the authors and two taught by a departmental colleague and three SR classes, two taught by one of the authors and one taught by a different departmental colleague. The grade on the assignment was worth 5 % of the class grade in the OB classes and 7 % in the two author taught SR classes and extra credit in the colleague taught SR class. The grade was not based on the content of responses, but on the ability to: 1) clearly articulate core personal values; 2) thoroughly and clearly explain the ethical dilemma the student faced and how it was resolved; and 3) and discuss clearly how personal values affected dilemma resolution. The assignment was graded to encourage students to take personal values exploration seriously, and the assignment was to be written partially because it is easier to grade papers than presentations and because the main purpose for the exercise was for students to explore their values, rather than share them.

While authors such as Taft and White (2007) report that they have emphasized values exploration in their classes, we are not aware of any scholarly effort describing a graded assignment combining values exploration and how ethical dilemmas were resolved.

We have categorized the content of 94 student papers from four of the six classes. Of the 94, 88 made value statements and 82 of the statements reflected personal moral values. The ones that did not included statements such as make money, flexibility, don't get caught, and determine right and wrong. Many students listed more than one moral value. Honesty was the most frequently expressed (N=51), with the relationship devotion and loyalty (N=27), the golden rule (N=21), do not harm (N=15) and religious devotion (N=13) also being frequently mentioned.

All the students were able to describe an ethical situation that they had faced, but some of the situations were not really dilemmas in that they presented a easy choice for the student. For example a boss suspected a coworker of the report writer to be stealing. The reporter hadn't seen anything and said so. The most frequently described (N=23) dilemma involved being exposed to co-worker unethical behavior, and the dilemma was whether to confront, report, or do nothing. The plurality (N=11) reported the event, but seven confronted the co-worker and five did nothing. Twenty-one students described dilemmas involving pressure from peers to do something unethical, and the dilemma was whether to resist or succumb to the pressure or leave the field. The majority resisted, but in one of the classes three of the four who reported such a dilemma succumbed (with expressed regret by the way). Seventeen reported being tempted to do something unethical, and a majority (N=11) resisted. Five students faced unethical behavior on the part of their immediate boss, and four of the five did something about it, three reporting the behavior to higher authorities. Four students faced pressure from their employer to behave unethically, a phenomenon employees often experience (Thompson, Strickland and Gamble, 2007). No one succumbed.

Taft and White (2007) suggest five criteria for assessing learning in a values centered learning unit. Three are relevant here, in that the two authors of this paper established these as learning goals for the values-dilemma assignment. The first criteria suggested by Taft and White was understanding the difference between ethics and related concepts. The vast majority of the assignments reflected that the students did. Although greed, achievement, following the law were mentioned values by many students, more than two thirds used such terms as fairness, justice, honesty, and not hurting others, clearly morality related values. Taft and White's second criteria was learning about their own value systems and the sources of those beliefs. The student responses reflected an understanding of their own values and while not an explicitly required part of the assignment, many explained the source of their values. Taft and White's third criteria was that students should appreciate the rising complexity of the pressures associated with using ethical beliefs in the context of groups and organizations. Again students were not explicitly asked in the assignment to articulate the complexity of the pressures associated with acting on their values, but since many described dilemmas where such pressures existed, it is safe to say that at least some of the students became more aware of those pressures. In addition by describing one, virtually all of the students reflected an understanding what an

ethical dilemma was and that such dilemmas involved decisions with potentially hurtful consequences. There were other indicators that this assignment did what we hoped it would do. The vast majority linked their stated personal values to a concrete ethical dilemma, and virtually all described a situation (or dilemma) where contrasting ethical choices existed. Finally there was anecdotal feedback from the students in three of the classes that they had taken this assignment seriously and thought it was valuable.

PART 4: APPLYING MORAL DEVELOPMENT THEORY

In this part, we expose students to frameworks of moral thinking and ask them to apply these frameworks to their values and decisions they've made in the face of ethical dilemmas. This theory application was the second part of the values dilemma assignment and to be done after the initial part was finished and returned. The idea was for students to perform the first part of the exercise without theory, obtain feedback that they did it correctly, and then apply the theory. Applying theory to academic exercises is hardly unusual. Perhaps the most obvious example of an academic discipline that requires students to perform practical exercises representing theory is Chemistry. While many ethical scholars, including Matherne et. al (2006) and Taft and White (2007) advocate combining theory and values articulation, we are not aware of anything in the literature indicating a graded assignment for students to apply theory to ethical dilemmas they've experienced.

There are at least four purposes to this part of the unit. The most important is to help students organize their thinking about values and ethics. The second is to expose them to the prominent ways to think about ethical issues. The third is to expose them to the idea of moral development, that there is a progression of responses to ethical issues, that some ethical responses are more mature and 'better' for the people affected than others. The final purpose is academic. We want students to be exposed to scholarly ways of thinking and know about and be able to apply ethical and moral development theory, and having students apply academic material makes grading more credible.

We have exposed students to two major theoretical approaches to moral development theory, Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Development (Kohlberg, 1984) and The University of Minnesota group's approach to post conventional moral thinking (Narvaez and Bock, 2002; Rest et al., 1999) often referred to as the Defining Issues Test or DIT. One of us has done this once, frankly with poor results. About half of the students in the class did not apply the theoretical approaches (and received a lower grade as a result) and close to a quarter of the fourteen students who tried to apply the theory did a fair to poor job.

WHAT DID WE LEARN AND WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE DIFFERENTLY

As a whole, then, we feel that the unit accomplished the major goal of sensitizing students to the facts that ethical issues inevitably arise in their lives, these issues have important consequences, some choices are more ethical than others, and values can play a role in guiding choices. However

improvements are clearly warranted. The theory application part of this unit was a failure in that the majority of students either did not apply theory or did a relatively poor job. With hindsight, the reasons seem clear. The instructor simply did not emphasize the importance of applying the theory enough and competently. The theory and how to apply it was explained in 15 minutes with no concrete and comprehensive examples. Students could get a B on the assignment without applying the theory (and thus not reading the material). The due date for the written assignment was three weeks after the assignment was made. The instructor conveyed a laissez faire attitude toward that part of the assignment, and the outcomes reflected that.

Then the major deficiency was the poor handling of the application of theory. We plan to do six things differently. First we will follow James and Smith (2007), Matherne et al. (2006) and Taft and White, (2007) by introducing appropriate and applicable theory early in the course, well before the Moral Development Unit. We will use the six ethical decision making approaches offered by James and Smith (2007), which are relatively simple can easily applied to any ethical dilemma whether instructor initiated or one experienced by a student. We will have students apply these to cases or vignettes as early as the first class of the term, and require students to apply them to the values-dilemma assignment. Second while we will not assign Kohlberg and the DIT until just before the Applying Moral Development Theory part of the unit, we will do so more thoroughly than previously with demonstrations of how to apply these models to ethical dilemmas, using dilemmas the instructor has faced as examples. Third we will make the assignment comprehensive and encourage thoroughness by following Taft and White (2007) who require students to explain the origin of the values that influenced them in resolving their ethical dilemma, and we will not limit the number of ethical dilemmas that students can describe. Fourth while we will continue to separate the theory application part of the assignment from values-ethical dilemma part, it will be clear ahead time that the two parts need to be integrated and that a poor grade will result from an inaccurate understanding of theory application. Fifth the instructor will grade (with feedback) and return the values-ethical dilemma part of assignment within three days after it is due and require the theory application to be handed in one week after the first part is returned. Finally the overall assignment will be worth a higher proportion of the course grade.

In general we want to make the entire unit more formal. Above it is clear that we will be more specific as to what is required of graded assignments and that we will explain more clearly how to apply the theory we assign. More will be expected and the grade will count more. In addition the whole unit will be explained, including the kind of classroom climate expected and the possible contradiction between loose, laissez faire discussions on one hand and serious theory application and rigorous grading criteria for written assignments on the other.

We see no need to make major revisions in any of the other parts of the unit. There's no reason to change part 1 of the unit, as it establishes the importance and relevance of ethics to the students' lives. It also establishes an open climate to discuss the topic, as the climate validates that the idea that there are no (with only statements implying the possibility of violent acts as exceptions) wrong answers. Part 2 also generated values-related

discussions, but it did not elicit the intensity of discussion that part 1 elicited. We might change the specific exercise to increase the complexity of the issues presented to students or to enhance the excitement level of discussions. We will devote less time to both parts 1 and 2, in the graduate class, because there is less time available and because many of these students, especially those with work experience, probably have already been exposed to the issues.

Part 3 seemed more successful than expected, but improvements are possible. It will be introduced with more explanation as to what kinds of papers might and might not be acceptable and also with concrete examples either from past students or from the instructor's life. We also plan to have a post assignment discussion focusing on the kinds of dilemmas students described in their papers. We think this will be valuable as students should get a sense of the kinds of issues others faced and how protagonists handled those dilemmas. To prevent suppression of disclosure, topics will be presented by the instructor without ascription to the author. and students can ask that their dilemma not be presented. One of the reasons why we will present dilemmas anonymously is we've already tried to have a post assignment discussion, with only limited success because only two of the class's 13 students volunteered to share their experience.

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