Chapter 1
Reflections on Teaching Business Ethics

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ABSTRACT

The start of the twenty-first century witnessed a number of company scandals and ethical breaches that have brought to the forefront community feelings of anguish and disgust towards large companies in addition to spawning more legislation aimed at avoiding a repeat of these collapses. The question that arises is whether the past measures (including legislation) have worked, given the recent Global Financial Crisis (GFC) as it has raised more questions than it has answered. Against this backdrop, we need to consider whether business ethics can be taught to a person irrespective of their age? Should we as community members, customers, shareholders of today give up on the current senior managers who are mostly representatives of the baby boomers and concentrate on increasing ethical awareness of our current undergraduate students (at least of Generation Y and Z)? If we proceed with this argument as being both valuable and also possible, the next step is to consider the ways by which to teach business ethics to a group of students and this aim is the focus of the chapter.

INTRODUCTION

At the start of the 21st century, we have witnessed numerous company scandals and ethical breaches being splashed over the front pages of newspapers, magazines and other media around the globe. Company collapses such as Enron, Arthur Andersen, and WorldCom have brought to the forefront, once again, community feelings of anguish and disgust towards large companies as well as spawning more legislation aimed at avoiding further such collapses. As the scandals that have occurred in just the first

decade of the 21st century are revisited, one needs to question whether past measures put in place to prevent further disasters have worked. From the author's perspective, the answer is a resounding "NO", especially when looking at examples of the actions of board members and ongoing company downturns following the recent occurrence of the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) (for instance, Goldman Sachs). The GFC seems to have raised more questions than it answers, as again we are aghast at the behaviour of company executives and their callous disregard for the general good.

Against this backdrop, we need to consider seriously whether a person can really be taught business ethics, irrespective of their age. Should we make an assumption that as our current undergraduate students (at least of Generations Y and Z) are still young and impressionable, the least we can do is strive to expose them to the philosophies and nuances of business ethics? If we proceed with this argument as being possible, the next step is to consider the best ways to teach business ethics to groups of students.

Before considering some of the ways to teach business ethics, a brief reflection on the environmental factors impacting the higher education sector is timely (see, for example, Zutshi and Creed, 2010). Similar to any organisation, universities are continuously being affected by external environmental factors such as changes in the economic situation (for example, currency fluctuations); political stability; social and demographic factors (that is, population trends, age of population). External accreditation by professional associations in disciplines such as accounting and finance, and information systems, has also focused the spotlight onto the area of ethics. For example, Business Schools need to demonstrate the inclusion of ethics as part of their curriculum if they wish to pursue accreditation to the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) (Oddo, 1997; Sims and Felton, 2006). These factors have gained more prominence in the last few decades with a resurgence of emphasis on the internationalisation of education, which has been made possible by a combination of factors including the ease and variety of transportation modes, cheaper travel, globalisation and digitalisation.

Coming back to the idea of internationalisation, importance is now also being placed on what is termed the "internationalisation of the curriculum". The latter is gaining momentum, with higher education becoming a "booming business" in a number of regions including Europe (van Dijk and Meijer, 1997) and Australia (Blackmore, 2002; Coleman, 2003; Hicks et al., 2001; Nachmias and Shany, 2002). Internationalisation can be defined as the "process of integrating an international/intercultural dimension into the teaching, research and service functions of the institution" (Knight, 1997, p. 8). Examples of some of the activities which can be classed as internationalisation are the recruitment of international students; developing and teaching international courses; offering programs off-shore and conducting cross-border research (Olson, 2005).

Aspects of internationalisation (such as undertaking study Tours or Exchange programs as part of the university course) are being supported by employers these days given the cross-border, cross-cultural and demographic mix of their business, employees, and customers. Accordingly, a flow-on effect has been experienced by students completing degrees, especially within business faculties. For instance, many students now study in overseas universities, away from their family and friends, for a combination of reasons. Their reasons include a desire to gain a specific, professional credential; to develop proficiency in English; to build business and social contacts amongst the local people; to live in a safe country, and the intention to gain permanent residence (University of Otago, 2011; Li, 2004).

The faces of faculties have also changed within universities. Faculties are now comprised of both local and international academics, who come to a university with different, and sometimes markedly divergent, world views from the predominant cultural values of the society in which they now live and

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