Chapter 8
Defining Integrity for Individuals and Organizations:
A Cognitive–Linguistic Modeling Approach

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ABSTRACT

Business schools thus have an obligation to teach students to engage with ethical complexity as part of preparing them for their future roles as decision makers in complex environments. The recommended approach in this chapter is the development by each student of a Personal Reflective Ethical Perspective (PREP), a definitional and visual model of the student's conception of the relationships among ethics, morals, beliefs, integrity, and the law. This provides students with a clear, chosen concretization of their own views to take with them into the corporate world, where their own perspective will, invariably, come into conflict with other personal, professional, and organizational perspectives. Supported by explicit training in identifying, reasoning, challenging, and defending ethical stances, the exercise has an overarching goal to help students develop the following attributes: ethical alertness, ethical ear, ethical credibility, ethical voice, ethical clarity, and ethical confidence. Students find the exercise difficult but useful.

INTRODUCTION

Business schools have become a focal point for discussion of ethical behavior in business. For some observers, business schools are, at least in part, to blame for recent examples of ethics failures and unbridled corporate greed, from Tyco, WorldCom, and Enron to the financial-instrument-fueled economic collapse. These critics implicate the tool-based, utilitarian methods and limited theories that have dominated the business school educational model for more than fifty years in creating soulless gamesmen or jungle fighters, out for the rush of winning, which often means making money at others' expense (Kochan, 2002; Mitroff, 2004; Ghoshal, 2005; Maccoby, 1976). Others argue that there is no evidence that business schools are responsible, and even that business school students are no more likely to think or act

immorally than other students (Neubaum, Pagell, Drexler, McKee-Ryan & Larson, 2009).

Regardless of where one comes down, however, calls for greater attention to ethics in business schools are growing. AACSB International, the primary accrediting agent for business schools, has urged schools to strengthen ethics education and not to assume that students are adequately prepared for dealing with complex ethical situations; similarly, a survey of business school deans found that 89% of respondents agreed, the majority strongly, that ethics should be an important part of AACSB school missions (AACSB, 2004; Evans & Marcal, 2005). Employers and the business community concur, emphasizing the need for ethical leadership (Business Roundtable Institute for Corporate Ethics, 2007; AACU/Hart Research Associates, 2010). Business schools may not be directly responsible for ethics failure in corporate life, but there is little doubt that levels of distrust, and questions about stewardship–both intimately connected to ethical decision making and action– are widespread (Kochan, 2002; Caldwell, Hayes & Long, 2010). Considering the reputedly sorry ethical state of corporate America (or, perhaps, the corporate *world*), might business schools actually be able to *help?*

This is a good question, because at the same time the finger-pointing debate goes on, there is also considerable debate about whether ethics training, or education on ethics, works. There are two ways of thinking about this question: likelihood of success, and treatment effects. A strong theoretical case can be made that, by the time students enter business school, their ethical perspectives are fully formed; some will have reached a stage linked to principled behavior, others will not (Kohlberg, 1976). While there is no evidence that moral behavior is linked to IQ, there *is* some evidence suggesting it is tied to verbal skill, and that females, whose verbal skills tend to be higher than those of males, more readily see moral complexity (Wilson, Williams & Sugarman, 1967; Wilson, 1973; Johnson, J.

L., Insley, R., Motwani, J. & Zbib, I., 1993). A pessimistic conclusion of this would be that, in the male-dominated business school, where the quantitative score counts disproportionally for admission, there is little hope for developing students' moral perspectives (we could talk about the recruiting model for business school, but that is another topic).

Aside from the question of potential for development, there is considerable research that has tried to look at ethics education's effects. Here, there is evidence to support polar extremes: on the one hand, that ethics education is useless, and on the other, that ethics education is beneficial, even essential (Lau, 2010; Wright, 1995; Delaney & Sockell, 1992). In the useless camp, ethics training often falls into the category of compliance–i.e., it is to fulfill a requirement rather than provided out of moral commitment, and there may be no evidence of behavior change; in these settings, ethics training may be seen as a form of lip service (Delaney, et al., 1992; Kohls, Chapman & Mathieu, 1989). In the useful camp, ethics training is seen as raising consciousness and the ability to address ethical problems; even short exposure to ethical decision making results in improved reasoning abilities (Jones, 2008; Mirvis, 2008).

While increasingly more sophisticated research, in partnership with more sophisticated development methods, is shifting the weight of evidence over to the side of "yes, ethics education is beneficial," at least in terms of improved reasoning or understanding of ethics terms and issues, we do not have any evidence that, over the long term, it makes a difference to behavior–i.e., the question of whether ethics education has an impact in a corporate setting, even if we might see some short term benefit in the school setting, remains largely inconclusive (Coughlan, 2005; Wright, 1995). This is similar to the situation we find ourselves in with the instrumental arguments for corporate social responsibility (CSR): we know that companies engaging in CSR practices or who manage from a stakeholder perspective do as well

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