

Chapter 11

In Case You Didn't Know: Recommendations for Case- Based Ethics Training

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ABSTRACT

The case-based approach to learning and instruction has been employed across multiple disciplines, including ethics education, and advocated for its effectiveness. Despite the widespread use of cases, there remain questions regarding optimal methods for case construction and presentation in order to facilitate knowledge acquisition, ethical decision making (EDM), and the transfer of learned material. Several empirical studies were conducted over the course of three years (2010-2013) in an attempt to shed some light on these topics. This chapter's purpose is three-fold. First, it provides a brief overview of the literature regarding case development. Second, it describes the new studies in this arena with respect to ethics case construction. Third, the chapter culminates in specific recommendations for case-based ethics training for young scholars and professionals in light of the new evidence.

INTRODUCTION¹

The growing number of ethical transgressions worldwide, coupled with violations that might generate severe consequences of unethical be-

havior (e.g., loss of trust by stakeholders, loss of funding, fines, and even imprisonment under the “white collar crimes acts or legislations”, etc.) demonstrate the importance of ethics training (Ferrell, Fraedrich, & Ferrell, 2012). Additionally,

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-7419-6.ch011

in-depth media coverage of major business ethics violations has made misconduct more evident to the general public, resulting in decreased public trust (Leonidou, Kvasova, Leonidou, & Chari, 2013). Ethics training, therefore, is a vital route to potential reparation of public trust. Organizational leaders are increasingly concerned with institutionalizing business ethics programs and providing viable options for ethics instruction in the workplace. Although several choices exist, case-based training has proven especially useful in promoting and improving ethical decision making (EDM) in trainees (Brock et al., 2008). Despite the success of case-based training in an ethics context, empirical evidence seems to be very limited regarding the content elements most useful for case construction or the activities that need to accompany cases to allow critical assessment and active processing of case material (Kim, Phillips, Pinsky, Brock, Phillips, & Keary, 2006). It is clear that what is needed are practical recommendations for case design, including how to enrich case content to promote learning and transfer of training information, as well as active learning techniques to facilitate EDM. Thus, here we attempt to fill this need by describing a series of studies completed over the course of three years at a large Midwestern University in the USA to inform ethics case development and presentation. Furthermore, we employ findings from these empirical studies to provide specific recommendations for case-based ethics training design and materials development.

BACKGROUND

Teaching and training students, as well as professionals, with cases or case studies (i.e., real or fictional narrative descriptions of particular events or problems) is the method behind case-based pedagogy (Aamodt & Plaza, 1994; Kolodner, 1992). Throughout this chapter we will use the terms cases and case studies interchangeably.

According to Kolodner, Owensby, and Guzdial (2004), use of case studies helps learners to “interpret, reflect on, and apply experiences – their own or those of someone else – in such a way that valuable learning takes place” (p. 829). It is a method that has long been touted across multiple disciplines as effective for presenting material and facilitating learning, among them medicine (Kim et al., 2006), law (Rippin, Booth, Bowie, & Jordan, 2002; Williams, 1992), social sciences (Mayo, 2002, 2004), nursing and health care (Dowd & Davidhizar, 1999; Mills et al., 2014; Popil, 2011; Thomas, O'Connor, Albert, Boutain, & Brandt, 2001), dental education (McKenzie, 2013), as well as business (Falkenberg & Woiceshyn, 2008; Laditka & Houck, 2006). Case-based learning is regarded as exceptionally useful because it allows an individual to gain knowledge vicariously, thus making it especially valuable for novices in their respective fields (Harkrider et al., 2013a). Case-based reasoning is the underlying mechanism of case-based learning and refers to “reasoning based on remembering previous experiences” (Kolodner, 1992, p. 4). More specifically, individuals apply their experiences (cases) to new situations, which allows them to “suggest solutions to problems, to point out potential problems with a solution being computed, to interpret a new situation and make predictions about what might happen, or to create arguments justifying some conclusion” (Kolodner, 1992, p. 1).

It is important to note that case-based reasoning is greatly bolstered by sensemaking (Bagdasarov et al., 2013b; Mumford et al., 2008), so facilitating the sensemaking process when training individuals ultimately promotes decision making. Sensemaking is a complex cognitive process that aids individuals when navigating particularly ambiguous and dynamic situations (Sonenshein, 2007; Weick, 1995) such as those characterizing creative problem solving (Mumford, Hester, & Robledo, 2012; Drazin, Glynn, & Kazanjian, 1999; Reiter-Palmon, Mumford, O'Connor Boes, & Runco, 1997), leader decision making (Thiel,

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