# Chapter 5
# Developing Reflection on Values as a Foundation for a Business Career

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## ABSTRACT

*Students can learn to analyse questions of ethics from the philosophical perspectives of duties, consequences and virtues. This includes the development of empathy and moral courage. Our brains respond to the experiences of others using 'empathy neurons'; we are 'hard-wired' for empathy. Developing moral courage can be linked to the development of empathy, drawing on 'ethics of care' theories. Graduates who express empathy for their colleagues and care for themselves are better equipped to act ethically. The authors show how learning experiences can enable students to develop problem-solving responses as an alternative to 'fight or flight' reactions to ethical problems. They can help students to develop expertise in ethics by providing them with more opportunities to engage rationally and empathically with ethical problems, through active learning experiences followed by critical reflective processes. Discussing moral exemplars in active learning helps to avoid a cynical view that unethical behaviour is normal. Critical reflection encourages students to make more use of their rational and empathic capacities. The theory of cognitive dissonance helps students to become aware of how we tend to seek information that confirms our decisions while avoiding information that would alert us to ethical hazards.*

## INTRODUCTION

We are all affected by unethical behaviour in business and management. Bribery to secure contracts means that the most competitive, efficient provider is denied the contract. Nepotism in procurement produces poor value for the purchasing organisation or poor quality components. The rounding up of their hours by professionals unjustifiably increases the cost of their services. Corruption in public officials risks buildings and systems which do not meet accepted safety standards, resulting in risk of death, injury and enormous cost, normally met by the insurance industry which passes

that cost on to the community at large. There are winners. They tend to be the already relatively wealthy unethical players. The losers are the ordinary members of the community, to whom these unnecessary costs are ultimately passed in the pricing of goods and services. They tend to be amongst the less wealthy in our societies. Other losers may be the ethical businesses.

Not only is unethical behaviour costly, it violates our concept of justice. It is corrosive of the reputation of the business community.

Businesses which are concerned to behave ethically need to recognise the inherent dangers created by a highly-competitive commercial environment. They will wish to recruit and reward people of ideas and initiative, people who are willing to take risks. In order to maximise their chances of achieving their ethical goals they need to plan and develop on a number of fronts. They must address their organisational structures and recruitment policies. They must be careful about their mission statements, the achievements for which employees are rewarded and how they protect whistleblowers. They need to develop effective continuing professional development and ensure that senior management model the standards they seek their employees to emulate (Brytting, Minogue and Morino, 2011). But, in addition to these organisational responses, they need the support of those working in universities and institutions of higher education who can prepare people for entry into business and management careers. This chapter focuses on that aspect of the struggle against corruption and unethical practice.

The authors' experience is in working with law students on both academic and professional programmes. The firms our students go to work in are themselves businesses in a highly competitive environment. Much of their work is undertaken for the local and international business community. They work in a highly commercial environment. They face similar ethical challenges to business and management students although they also face the challenges of advising and representing individuals caught up in litigation processes. In

developing our students' learning experiences we have come to conclusions which we are confident will be of value to those teaching business and management students.

The purpose of this chapter is to present recent findings of neuroscientists and evolutionary psychologists in understanding how the brain works when faced with decisions and dilemmas. In particular, we identify the significance of individuals' capacity for empathy and for moral courage when faced with a challenging situation. This provides us with lessons for the structuring of our programmes. It leads us to propose ways of providing our students with experiences and of exposing them to the experiences of others in such a way as to develop reflection on their own values. In so doing we do not seek to mould them to any particular set of moral values or beliefs. Our goal is to help them to develop the character, knowledge and understanding of their own values, to be able to approach life in a principled way. As such, they should be assets to employers seeking to develop ethical business practice.

## APPROACHES TO ETHICAL BEHAVIOUR

Preparing students for the responsibilities of management and business can be approached from a number of different potentially competing perspectives. This is not the place for a thorough account of the different approaches which may be adopted. For the purposes of this chapter it will suffice to recognise that there are at least two fundamental approaches which are widely considered when the codes by which professional behaviour is tested are devised. Both approaches are inherently attractive, but may lead to different outcomes when applied. There are many nuanced approaches within each and others would recognise further distinct approaches.

One fundamental approach is rooted in the concept of duty. Duty may be identified in many ways. It may be based on long-standing cultural

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