Chapter 41
Ethics Perception:
Learning and Teaching of Ethics

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ABSTRACT

Education is one of the most consistent and powerful correlates to the development of moral judgment in individuals. Education builds theoretical and some practical basics for making more effective ethical decisions. Educators influence students in their learning about business ethics, but ethics can be considered as continuous knowledge, which could be taught and learned in ways different from teaching traditional sciences. However, teaching of ethics is possible because the aim is to create certain skills and build the basics for promising wise thinking for proper decision making. Building ethical awareness in a diverse society implies building awareness in schools and universities by having ethics as a university requirement. Teaching of ethics must start from early school stages and must engage parents actively. Integration of a code of ethics in the curriculum is brought to life by addressing real life stories of unethical behavior. This chapter explores the learning and teaching of ethics.

INTRODUCTION

Is it too late to start teaching ethics at Universities? Education opens the minds of students to considering ethics in every detail of their business career. Education validates, reforms, and expands the individuals' perceptions and beliefs since there are various sources of knowledge for dilemmas. Students are captivated with huge values, that can't be changed. Ethics is not like science or math to be taught and learned, it is designed since the early stages of our life. Also, because at certain situations some people don't see ethical problems as others do.

Reasons why we need business ethics education include:

1. Global companies recognize that ethics is the essence of business hence it is crucial to integrate ethical values in their businesses;
2. Companies cannot survive in isolation, the need to act socially;

3. Companies are no longer just competing for profit but also for reputation hence most of them are recruiting and training ethical employees.

BACKGROUND: CAN ETHICS BE TAUGHT OR LEARNED?

Reaching uniformity in ethics so that there is only one opinion about how to behave in certain dilemma is impossible, but at least removing the clear misconceptions and common mistakes that people mainly fall in should be well known to be avoided. Hence, we should always have someone to teach us how we should think and take effective decisions, reform and explain for us why doing so and so could be wrong and bad to the community. No one is familiar with everything. We need sometimes the teaching or assistance from more experienced individual than us, who have passed through similar dilemmas and have become knowledgeable about them in order to make us aware of certain hidden truths. Particularly in dilemmas we are not dealing with two clear positions, one is good and the other bad. On the other hand it is between two extremes that could both be good, or both are bad. Therefore teaching of ethics will provide decision making rationale for different kinds of real life situations, which make it easier for learning and taking the correct decisions. Also, being negligent about unethical consequences of actions does not justify improper behavior. Thus, teaching of ethical thinking will remove ignorance and make people more socially responsible for their actions and decisions.

Education's Role in Behaving Ethically

The major source of attaining, reforming, and testing our knowledge and perception is education (McCabe et al., 1991). Education is one of the most consistent and powerful correlates to the development of moral judgment in individuals. Starting from the elementary classes at schools to the undergraduate and post- graduate studies at the universities, education provides fertile grounds through carefully designed stages to grasp unlimited knowledge. In the university stage, undergraduates start experiencing the real life and its drifts, and in the former the child starts building perceptions and personality. This long journey will be expressed in the business filed especially when the individual faces complicated decisions and ethical dilemmas. Perhaps what the individual faces during their education is simpler than what he/she is going to face in real life. Education builds the theoretical and practical basics of the sciences and skills, while it also builds similar basics for taking more effective ethical decisions. "Educators influence students in their learning about business. Therefore, higher education faculty members should be able to influence students in their learning about ethics as well" (Gloria, 2002). Education makes the minds of the students opened on considering ethics in every detail of their business career. For example, teaching the student to succeed with high academic integrity, he/she will not cook the accounting books to show that their company is highly successful. Also, giving examples and always reminding marketing students about the dangers and unethical consequences of untrue advertising will at least make them think before acting. Moreover, since there are other sources of knowledge, and given the variety of dilemmas, stakeholders, consequences, business executives are in need for ethics education to validate, reform, or discuss and expand their perceptions and beliefs. For example, the framework of ethical thinking that consist of seven steps, with practice and application to multiple case studies at all the education stages, will lead later to high volume processing of wisdom while dealing with complicated problems. Kohlberg (1981) found that a person's ability to deal with moral issues is formed in stages of the pre-conventional,

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