

Chapter 60

Improving Moral Behaviour in the Business Use of ICT: The Potential of Positive Psychology

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ABSTRACT

The 21st century has seen a much-increased focus on the importance of ethical behaviour in business, driven by major scandals, calls for stricter regulation and increased demands for improved governance and reporting. In parallel, there are calls for the incorporation of moral and ethical elements in business education and university accreditation bodies and schools are responding. In particular, the explosion of technology change, particularly Internet, social media and beyond have raised many challenges for individuals, organizations and legislators. However, educational responses are varied and little has been done to determine the effectiveness of what has been done. Most responses to this need to provide ethical education follow a cognitive, rule-based approach, often using case-based techniques. This can improve knowledge and understanding of ethical issues, but it may have limited influence on actual behaviour. A relatively new field – Positive Psychology -- provides an alternate perspective, focusing on what is good rather than what is poor behaviour. One Positive Psychology approach, that of Appreciative Inquiry, which has not previously been used in ICT ethics education, offers a promising technique to develop improved moral attitudes and behaviour. This paper reports on a large-scale pedagogical research project that: (1) examines ethical perspectives from philosophy, psychology and pedagogy in the context of ICT professional education; (2) describes the development and multistage implementation of an ethics course in an undergraduate business ICT program delivered to more than 1,200 students; (3) discusses the formal evaluation of changes in moral attitude following a Positive Psychology intervention in the education of some 300 Business ICT students using the Defining Issues Test, Version 2 (DIT2) and the IMIS Survey developed at the Centre for Computing and Social Responsibility. The project results demonstrate that a well-designed applied ICT ethics course produces measureable positive changes in the ethical stances of participants and that the use of Appreciative Inquiry increases the impact of these changes. In addition to the relevance of the findings for educators they can provide guidance to those in organisations responsible for the ethical behaviour of their ICT employees.

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INTRODUCTION

The Challenge

The 21st century has seen a much-increased focus on the importance of ethical behaviour in business. Major scandals such as Enron, WorldCom, Global Crossing and Tyco, followed by the banking-driven recession of 2007-2009 and the emergence of corporate social responsibility as a key concern have brought calls for stricter regulation. Government oversight bodies, such as the U.S. Security and Exchange Commission (SEC) (Gray, 2005), have reacted by putting governance and reporting structures in place along with guidelines to employees on how to report improprieties. In parallel, there are calls for the incorporation of moral and ethical elements to business education. The emergence of the digital economy is challenging many of the social values and legislative protections related to intellectual property

Business success in today's global economy is heavily reliant on the use of Information and Communication and Technology (ICT). ICT provides quick and easy access to information, quick and easy access to an individual's knowledge and expertise and the ability to reduce costs and improve quality through the automation of business processes. The ICT field is experiencing a rapidly changing world, with Internet, digital media, and mobile technologies leading to new business models that are rapidly changing the way in which ICT is used in business and society.

Despite its increasing importance, business does not often consider the ethical issues in the use of ICT and, when it does, the focus tends to be on topics such as privacy, security, intellectual property and cybercrime (for example, some 57% of the World's personal computer users admit to "pirating" software (Business Software Alliance, 2012)); but new areas such as impact on environment, change in the length of the workday, the increased impact of anonymity and lack of visibility can create as much harm.

Across the world, most societies have developed legislation to govern corporate and individual behaviour in business activities. However, in the fast evolving use of technology that is now pervasive in both corporate and personal activities, laws are certainly not all encompassing and often behind the current times.

The Role of Education in Influencing Ethical and Moral Behaviour

According to Kohlberg (1969) and others, moral development continues into adulthood and education can have an impact on the development of moral behaviour. Rest (1994) suggests that there are four components that affect moral behaviour and the first two -- moral sensitivity and moral judgment -- identify an ability to recognise the consequences of our actions on others and the ethical implications and, secondly, the ability to make good decisions on the best course of action. Carroll (1987) suggests that there are three types of behaviour, moral amoral and immoral. Amoral behaviour results when individuals don't recognize that their actions have ethical implications or don't think it is their responsibility. Immoral behaviour results when an individual knowingly acts against their moral values.

It seems appropriate to consider how education can be used to raise awareness, provide suggested alternatives, analyse the impact on stakeholders (Freeman et al, 2012) and develop argumentation to support one's position. The educational intervention can be used to address the development of moral attitudes, namely moral sensitivity and moral judgment at all levels of decision makers.

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