Ethics Education & Polytechnic Universities

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You Might Be Wondering....
Objectives

• To explore ethics content and pedagogy in business schools in polytech settings
• To evaluate the business ethics literature for values-centered leadership and virtue ethics frameworks
• To make recommendations for future business ethics curriculum based on values-centered leadership and virtue ethics
Let’s think of a current situation:
Business Ethics and the 99 versus 1% discourse?

'The economy needs ethics':

“The conviction that the economy must be autonomous, that it must be shielded from 'influences' of a moral character, has led man to abuse the economic process in a thoroughly destructive way... In the long term, these convictions have led to economic, social and political systems that trample upon personal and social freedom, and are therefore unable to deliver the justice that they promise.”

- Just 147 companies control 40% of global wealth
- This is an injustice we, as a society, as a planet, can all fight against.
- The Romans used to say that courage is not the only virtue, but it's the only one that makes the other virtues possible.
- 25 major corporations paid their CEOs more than they paid in taxes in 2010
What is Unique in the Polytech Setting?

• Career focused
• Applied learning
• Collaboration
• Proximity to “real-world” people and situations
  – Does this still hold true?
Methods

• Direct solicitation of syllabi and business ethics content in the Polytechnic Institutes of Technology Organizations in New Zealand

• Content analysis of syllabi
  – Future research
    • Comparative analysis of polytechs in US
    • Discourse analysis of ongoing social movements critiquing business (OWS, for example)
Codes of Ethics

• Professional Codes of Ethics embody the morality and spirit of a profession.
• Some controversy regarding the utility and power of a Code
• Are they enforceable? Are they practical? Are they substantive?
• Generally they define relationships to other stakeholders and society
• There are professional codes and institutional/organizational codes to consider
Straw Poll?

• Social Responsibility
  – Are recent business school graduates helping business take social responsibility more seriously than in the past?
    • Yes, business schools have supplied recent graduates with greater ethical context
    • No, business schools have maintained the same mentality in regard to teaching ethics
    • No, though graduates leave with a greater awareness of social responsibility, “real world” forces soon cause them to forget
Potential Conflicts

• Professional associations
• Institutions
• Funding agencies/accreditation bodies
  – May have different policies, procedures, codes, guidelines. Ethical decision making must take all into consideration.
Common Curriculum?

• Justification and ethical theories
  – Debates exist around teaching primary ethical theory versus secondary principles; many advocate starting with concept and examples versus theory

• Ethics and employment relations

• Ethics and the role of business

• Ethical responsibilities of companies
Values-Centered Leadership

• Soul of an organization

• Sustained performance & employee engagement

• Social entrepreneur (B. Drayton)
  – Change the world!
  – Engineers not poets
  – Attentive listeners
  – Highly realistic
  – Ability to move people
  – Give at the highest level
Evidence Shows:

• Across disciplines, instructors feel uneasy with ethics/values in their classrooms because:
  – Typically, they are not trained in ethics and do not know:
    • What ethics content to teach
    • How to teach ethics
    • Think that ethics is “personal opinion,” versus systematic reasoning
Content (What?)

• Hartigan & Elkington – “The Power of Unreasonable People”
  – Lessons for tomorrow’s leaders
    • Focus on scalable, entrepreneurial solutions
    • Tackle apparently insoluble problems
    • Prepare to fail & learn from it
    • Experiment with new business models
    • Close the pay gap
    • Join forces
Recommendations for Content

- Microfinancing
- Sustainability
- Coops
- Service Learning/Community Engagement
- Short-term non-profit work
  - Some advocate for all MBA degree students spend two-three weeks in service learning, non-profit, coop settings to instill systemic change in business ethics mindsets
Pedagogical Strategies

- Two Minute Challenge
  - 2MCs promotes experiential, interactive learning, engaging learners in realistic situations each may encounter in research or professional life (see Gunsales, 2011)

- Think/Pair/Share
  - Allow students to think first independently on a topic, pair, allow them to engage in discussion, then share their thoughts to the entire group (Lymna, 1981)

- Role Playing
  - Provides simulated experiential learning

- Journaling
  - Be sure to provide parameters for reflection

- Writing Ethics Statements

- Case Studies
  - Ensure you use a range of cases, not just “extremes” or hot button issues
Writing an Ethics Statement

• With what values do you want your students to leave your class/program/university?

• What is your world view? Your philosophical stance in general?
  – Views on nature of humanity, reality, meaning

• What are your professional practice values?
  – Teaching/learning methods/theories
  – Relationship to others
Why Write an Ethics Statement?

1. A philosophy promotes an understanding of human relationships

2. A philosophy sensitizes you to the various needs associated with positive human interactions

3. A philosophy provides a framework for distinguishing, separating, and understanding personal values

4. A philosophy promotes flexibility and consistency in working with adult learners (Hiemstra, 1988)
Case Studies

• “Popular instrument of provoking students to grapple with complicated moral problems and quandries...The most significant benefit of using the case study method is that it engages students and requires them to become active participants rather than passive observers” (Spinello, 1997)

• The art and craft of discussion leadership
  – listening to others and having your ideas heard
Summary

• Moving forward – your thoughts...
  – Polytechnic focus?
  – Common curriculum?
    • Ethics statement?
  – Content?
    • Short term service learning requirement?