

Ethical Dimension in the Education of Future Managers

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Abstract. The paper focuses on the basics of business ethics teaching and the way it is taught at the Faculty of Informatics and Management, University of Hradec Kralove, Czech Republic in the study programmes of Financial Management and Management of Travel and Tourism. The theoretical basis consists mainly of the philosophical disciplines, whose applied output business ethics is. In addition to the theoretical knowledge, practical lessons and problems related to managerial competencies are included in the course. Based on the frequency analysis of the essential motifs, the student's seminar papers looking into the hypothetical imperative in the manager's activities and the casuistic real situations are examined. In these situations, decision-making and behaviour of the manager are captured and evaluated by students and sometimes also confronted with students' dissenting opinions and their proposals of more suitable solutions. The student's opinion, both agreeing and disagreeing, is justified. It has been shown that students understand the manager's asymmetric responsibility, and one of the most important motifs is the emphasis on linking the professional competence and ethical approach of the manager. The most frequently mentioned values are fairness and decency in the manager's behaviour and actions. The seminar topic "Ethical Audit" is based on the results students' case studies. This contribution contains three case studies illustrating the type of student texts we worked with.

Keywords: Business Ethics, Education, Case Studies, Hypothetical Imperative, Frequency Analysis.

1 Introduction

Philosophy and professional ethics are reflected in ethical codes of professions, companies, institutions and organizations. Requirements placed on employees and their superiors as well as a particular management style are an integral part of ethical codes of conduct. Unfortunately, even though ethical codes of conduct have become common, there have been a lot of examples of corporate scandals and unethical things happening in business organizations (see e.g. [4] or [2]). As a result, most universities offering business courses have implemented into their curricula courses of business ethics. Some authors, for example [4], suggest that ethics education can and does improve students' ethical awareness, sensitivity as well as their moral reasoning. It therefore matters whether there are business ethics courses or not.

Other authors, e.g. [2], claim that universities, in particular their business study programs, do little to help students develop morally, which contributes to the some managers' amoral decision making leading to corporate ethical scandals. [6] conclude that there are no significant differences between students who have taken a course of business ethics and those who have not.

Consequently, it is relevant to ask, like e.g. [5] do, what should be changed in ethics education. [2] believe that students must be encouraged to practise problem solving instead of receiving ready-made solutions to moral issues. [1] suggest and develop an alternative intuitive, reflective, identity-based approach to teaching business ethics, which requires students to write a series of reflective exercises, and maintain that their approach helps strengthen their students' moral judgement much better than the traditional rule-based approach.

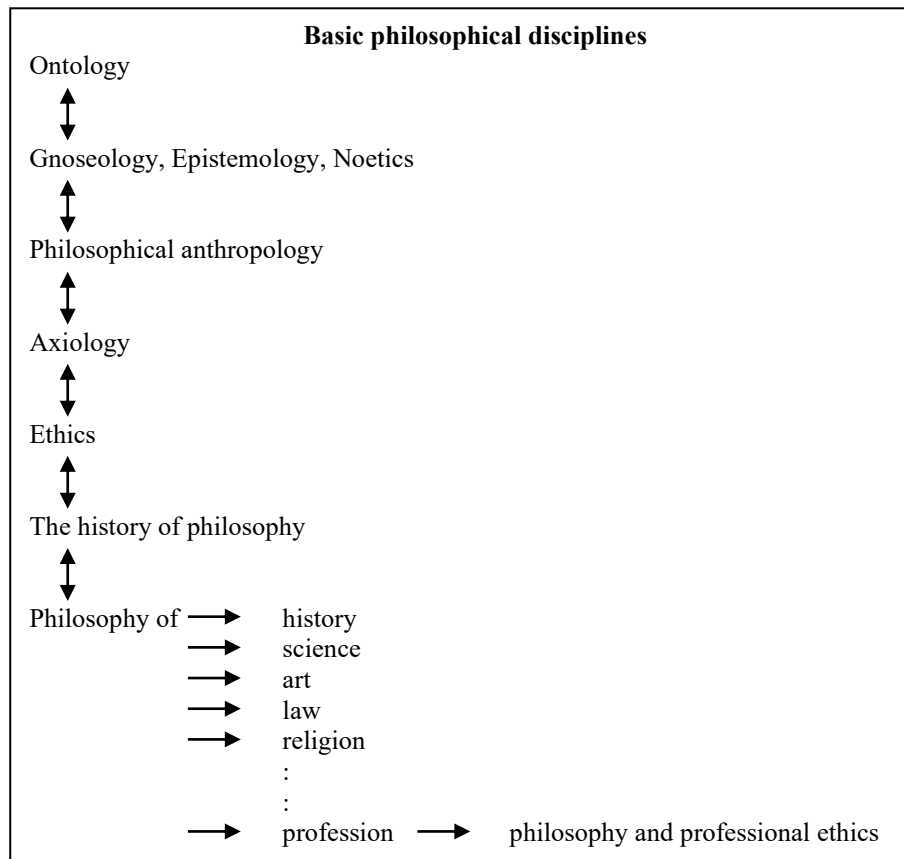


Fig. 1. Philosophy and professional ethics

The authors of this contribution are responsible for teaching business ethics at the Faculty of Informatics and Management (FIM), University of Hradec Kralove (UHK), the Czech Republic. The study programmes of Financial Management and

Management of Travel and Tourism at FIM UHK include a course of business ethics. This course is based on the theoretical foundations of ethics as a philosophical discipline and show a logical connection with other philosophical disciplines, as shown in Fig. 1. For further details it is possible to see e.g. [3] and [8].

The authors of this contribution claim that teaching business ethics to future managers is important. On the other hand, they favour problem-based and reflective approach to solving ethical problems. That is not to say that the traditional ruled-based approach is not used at all. FIM students are supposed to know the basics of ethical theory but at the same time they are required to be able to discuss about and/or reflect on real ethical problems they may and do encounter in their everyday life. The text below is based on their reflective written exercises.

2 Methodology

Students in their individual reflective written exercises formulate ideas and insights into the constitution of ethics as a philosophical discipline. The most successful results include the formulation of hypothetical imperatives (Immanuel Kant) for entrepreneurs and case studies describing their experience either from either their permanent employment (students of the combined form of study) or from their part-time jobs. The results of the empirical survey were obtained in the academic year 2017/2018 (82 individual works were evaluated) and in the academic year 2018/2019 (20 works have been evaluated so far). Based on frequency analysis, individual motifs were assigned to typical formulations. Most works contained more than one motif.

3 Results

Students' wording of hypothetical imperatives clearly demonstrates that they fully understand and capable of applying ethical theory. Students also seem to have fully understood the importance of reciprocity and responsibility. It can be concluded that they also understand the issue of asymmetric accountability. We think it is no coincidence that student determine as the most substantial motifs fairness, respect, and justice. As it is shown in Table 1, students seem to realize the importance of entrepreneurs' ability to behave ethically themselves in the first place. Only then can they expect others, i.e. their employees, to do the same.

Table 1. Hypothetical imperatives for entrepreneurs - the most typical answers.

| | |
|---|----|
| If you want employees to work well, create a favourable working environment. | 81 |
| If you want people to behave to you decently, you have to be decent to them. | 81 |
| If you require fair behaviour in your company, you have to act fairly. | 79 |
| If you want others to listen to you, you have to listen to them, too. | 65 |
| If you want to be successful, you have to set goals you want to achieve. | 44 |
| If you want to have an active and reliable team, then you have to motivate workers. | 42 |

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|--|----|
| If you want to achieve business goals, you must develop determination, creativity, self-confidence, and pursue honesty and justice. | 40 |
| If you want to have satisfied customers, you have to care for their satisfaction. | 37 |
| If you want to lure customers, your company must have a good reputation. | 37 |
| If you want to attract customers, you have to invest in PR. | 28 |
| If you want your company to have a good reputation, you have to deal with customers duly. | 25 |
| The success of the company requires that the work done is fairly rewarded, and therefore you cannot prioritize employees, over- or underestimate them. | 25 |
| If you want the economic environment for business to be favourable, behave fairly also in relation to competition. | 19 |
| If you want other people to treat you with respect, you have to treat them in this way, too. | 16 |
| If you want to get respect, you cannot act arrogantly, you cannot bully employees, you cannot act as a racist or sexist. | 15 |
| If you want your employees to be involved in the best possible performance, you have to explain them clearly why their good work is important. | 12 |
| If you want to succeed in business and team management, you have to be able and willing to take responsibility and the risk of decision making. | 9 |
| If you want to be a benefit to your company and yourself, you must be able to sum up the results and the part you played in getting them. | 3 |

In analysing 102 case studies, Table 2 shows the following ten types of situations arose as the greatest problems in senior management:

Table 2. The evaluation of case studies.

| | |
|--|----|
| The abuse of power by superior officers in relation to their subordinates (see case study 1). | 89 |
| The lack of respect for the possibilities and responsibilities of employees in relation to the organization of work (see case study 2). | 87 |
| Unfair evaluation of employees, not just in respect to their financial rewards. | 87 |
| Poor or inadequate internal communication. | 72 |
| Bullying at the workplace. | 69 |
| Manifestations of disrespect to employees, arrogance, vulgar speech. | 65 |
| Deficiencies in the development of corporate education in the field of professional ethics and appropriate behaviour in relation to colleagues and customers (see case study 3). | 53 |
| Lack of self-reflection and self-criticism in superiors. | 47 |
| Preferring personal interests and relationships over fair dealing in the company, giving preference to friends. | 35 |
| Ageism - specifically unfavourable manifestations in relation to young workers who have not yet had enough experience – e.g. humiliation, exploitation, abuse. | 27 |

All case studies reflected the issue of justice. The students are very sensitive to injustice, and therefore lessons of Business Ethics deal with the issues of justice in theoretical context, especially in relation to Rawls: "Social and economic inequality must be adjusted to expand to all positions and ranks." [7].

Furthermore, we examine compensatory justice, procedural justice and distributive justice. In particular, procedural justice, which identifies correct decision-making procedures, practices and agreements, and distributive justice - affecting the distribution of benefits, rights and obligations, legislation and ethical codes - are in the centre of attention. Based on particular case studies, we focus on principles and values as non-objective challenges of specific ethical codes and draw conclusions for managerial decision-making. The above mentioned theoretical basis is then used in the final essay, which is a reflection on oneself as a future manager.

3.1 Case Study 1

This summer, I started to work as a shop assistant in a shop selling video games at a local business centre. Originally I was supposed to act as a part-timer, that is as an employee who only sells. Later the situation changed and I was considered a full-fledged employee.

The work is very demanding on multitasking and the tasks the employee has to perform during the day are many. I was at work almost every day, sometimes on a twelve-hour shift. My supervisor originally promised me that I would only make six-hour shifts to sell the goods and get the hourly wage. The situation changed after a few weeks, and work began to increase as money dwindled. The supervisor began to abuse his powers and forced me to do more work, which I was not familiar with (complaints, orders, support), under the threats of not paying my salary. I was not only me, but also my full-time colleagues.

Another issue is breaking promises of the organization concerning sales and holiday bonuses.

I would like to draw attention to the behaviour of this organization, which is not able to pay its employees properly and constantly, and exerts pressure on managers who reach the goals of the corporation by bullying their subordinates. Such behaviour has discouraged me not only as a part-time employee but also as a potential customer.

I personally see this behaviour as unacceptable. To treat employees in a way that changes their employment and pay terms without proper notice or after agreement, just as it suits the organization, seems to me to be unfair. In most cases, it was a violation of a work contract by the employer. The company should deeply reflect on its approach to its employees.

3.2 Case Study 2

As a topic of my case study on Business Ethics, I chose an example from my own experience. It will discuss the unethical behaviour of a supervisor, specifically a manager, when I was working as a part-timer.

As I have already mentioned, I would like to describe the situation that happened to me when I worked as a part-timer for a cinema. I was looking for a part-time job at the beginning of this year as I wanted to earn some extra money during my university studies. I was thrilled when I was selected after an interview in the cinema as a messenger, later cashier and bartender. As it is usual in new jobs, whether full-time or part-time, I had to undergo the initial training and everything looked rosy for a month or so. Later, I realised that it is not as great as I had thought, particularly when it comes to the behaviour of managers.

The shifts were registered electronically, we checked our time options and the manager was to fairly divide the shifts. Suddenly I started to receive text messages, especially in the evenings, asking me to come to work the next day, because some colleague could not come for an unspecified reason. This lasted several months. In the case of my refusal, I was threatened to be dismissed, which I could not afford. This practice is clearly unethical to the employee. When I decided to challenge the manager with the fact that it was not proper to send text messages around midnight, I was told that I was there only as a part-timer and that they could find someone else. When I came to work the next day, I had to do both my usual job and the work of the colleague, who could not come to work. The work was double, but it was not appreciated. I was just blamed for not doing anything.

I would deal with this very differently if I were a manager. I would approach people with respect. I would ask my subordinates in a reasonable afternoon hour, whether or not they could come the next day. I would motivate them by a financial reward for overtime. They would also be rewarded by the good feeling that we helped someone in need. I would never threaten anyone with sacking, when they do not arrive at an unplanned shift. It looks as if the managers did not think we could have some private life and some plans for the day off.

3.3 Case Study 3

The situation that I would like to describe here happened to me about a week ago when I was buying shoes in a shoe shop. The first thing that struck me when I arrived at the shop was the staff who were talking together in a rather inappropriate, even vulgar way, and no one seemed to notice that a new customer had arrived. I needed advice on the choice of shoes, but I did not dare to disturb their fun in a closed circle. Finally, I picked a pair of shoes by myself and went to the cash desk. I waited there for a few minutes before one employee noticed that I would like to pay. When she came to the cash desk, I was shocked as the lady was wearing red contact lenses, which looked rather scary and left me astonished. Just for clarification, it was a well-known brand, whose outlets are located in almost every shopping centre. Therefore, I expected a somewhat more professional approach. In the end, the shop assistant annoyed me even more by the way she was trying to sell me a shoe cleanser. I had to refuse buying it at least three times.

All in all, it was a really unpleasant purchase and, in my opinion, an inappropriate behaviour towards the customer through and through. From my point of view, the shop assistant should not have worn red contact lenses as it was really frightening.

Moreover, her and her colleagues' approach to me as their customer was far from pleasant.

4 Conclusion

Discussions on the creation of hypothetical imperatives and on frequency analysis of case studies in seminars have shown that students understand the interdependence of social, economic, psychological and ethical facets involved in managerial positions. At the same time, we were able to follow these discussions up with the issue of ethical audit and then we formulated essential criteria for positive perception and evaluation of the company, enterprise, institution. Once again, justice, fairness, responsibility and decency were dominant features.

Business Ethics is part of the training of entrepreneurs and managers. Economic considerations cannot be reduced to the way of thinking that only lead us to short-term profits. The success of the company is supported by its ethical conduct and is based on the responsible conduct of qualified and motivated personnel.

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