"The Incident Replay" – A Proposed Ethics Learning Activity for Business Students

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Ethics education is featured as one of the important elements of general education. Wouters, van Nimwegen, van Oostendorp, and van der Spek (2013) mentioned that serious games are more effective than conventional instruction methods in terms of learning and retention. This explorative study adopts qualitative method to investigate students' perspectives on some games elements for constructing an ethics learning game. This study reveals several findings from the pilot interviews. First, there are evidences supporting that game activity can increase students' interests in learning ethics. Second, findings support the use of the key elements in the game such as role-taking group discussion, anonymous response and computer-generated possible consequences. Third, the game with above mentioned elements may help enhancing students' considerations on stakeholders' perspectives.

Keywords: Ethics education, ethics games, ethics learning activity, stakeholders' perspectives

Introduction

Ethics education has been widely discussed in the past years. Existing literature and studies cover themes on understanding students' attitudes and ethics awareness, pedagogical methodologies for ethics education, and effectiveness of ethics education (see for example, Lowry 2003; Spain, Engle & Thompson, 2005; Turban 2012; Schrier 2015). In spite of the well documented discussion on this important dimension of education, existing literature poses quest for further discussion on enhancing the effectiveness of ethics education.

Understanding students' attitudes and ethics awareness

Kohlberg' moral development model (1973) has been widely discussed in ethics education over the past few decades. According to Kohlberg (1973), there are three main levels of moral stages: preconventional, conventional, and post-conventional (autonomous or principled level). The first level (preconventional) consists of two stages which are "punishment and obedience orientation" (stage 1) as well as "instrumental relativist orientation" (stage 2). At the second level (conventional), orientations turn towards "interpersonal concordance" or being a nice person (stage 3) and behaviors conforming to fixed rules and authority which is the "law and order" orientation (stage 4). In other words, at this level, individuals have more considerations on expectations from family, group or nation. Moving up to the third level (post-conventional), moral stages are featured as the "social-contract legalistic orientation generally with utilitarian overtones" (stage 5) and the "universal ethical principle orientation (stage 6). At this level, right actions tend to be defined by individual rights, justice, human right and respects for human being. Kohlberg (1973) suggested that moral education should adopt the approach that stimulates students' development through a sequential progression to later stages of the moral development model. As mentioned in Lowry's study (2003), approximate half of the students were staying at the preconventional level of the ethic development model (Weber and Green, 1991). This suggests that there are rooms for educators to facilitate students to move up from preconventional level to conventional level of the moral development model. Furthermore, existing literature also covers discussion on the development of the stakeholder approach and the connections among business, social responsibility and stakeholders (see for example, Freeman, 2004).

Pedagogical Methodologies & Effectiveness

Educators have attempted different methodologies to enhance students' awareness on ethics over the past years, such as scenario, experiential activity, reflections and games (McWilliams & Nahavandi, 2006; Sadowski, Seager, Selinger, Spierre, & Whyte, 2013; Slocum, Rohlfer, & Gonzalez-Canton, 2014; Schrier, 2015). Turban (2012), for example, studied the effectiveness of introducing expert panel comments and opinions on students' responses to ethical situations. In Turban's research (2012), medical students were asked to participate in multiple-choice options for some ethical scenarios of ethical dilemma before and after the session of expert panel comments. It was found that students answered "more correctly" for some clear-cut situations such as patient abandonment, whereas they had more struggles over issues such as accidental access to restricted course materials. In general, Turban (2012) found that the expert panel comments did not lead to significant changes in the number of correct answers given by students.

Scholars have tried other methods beyond traditional teaching. Goby and Nickerson (2012) introduced the concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR) to undergraduate students by adopting an experiential exercise of website communication. In their study, students were required to participate in literature searching and website analysis with focus on CSR elements found on corporate websites. The experiential exercise did have positive impact on raising students' awareness on corporate social responsibility (Goby & Nickerson, 2012). Likewise, Lowry (2003) used scenario setting to study the students' level of moral awareness and the potential impact of age, year of study, placement year on moral awareness. In Lowry's study, two cohorts of students were included in samples (year-2 students who had not yet received the business ethics module education and the final year students who just had completed a stand-alone business ethics module). Under the scenario settings, students were asked to indicate responses which were then converted to awareness scores. Surprisingly, those year-2 students indicated relatively higher moral awareness scores than the final year students. Though there are several possible reasons for explaining the situation, this finding justifies further research to study the effectiveness of stand-alone business ethics module and integrated approach of ethics education. As cited by Lowry (2003), framing the issue using moral terms may help to increase moral awareness (Butterfield,

Klebe-Trevino & Weaver, 2000). Lowry (2003) also constructed a scenario using moral terms as to test the issue-framing factor, and the study supported that moral language imposes positive influence on moral awareness.

Project of multiple pedagogical methodologies is another approach to attempt the challenge of ethics education. Spain, Engle, and Thompson (2005) explained an integrated project "Ethics Awareness Week" that consisted of assignments, in-class discussions, case studies and Oxford-style debates. The implementation of this Ethics Awareness Week was highly publicized by promotion in student newspaper, posters placed all over the campus and promotion on the university television network and local radio channel. Spain et al. (2005) reported that this integrated project helps students to further understand and recognize the ethical and social responsibilities.

Among different methods of ethics education, using games to teach ethics is considered as one of the effective strategies (Schrier, 2014). Wouters, van Nimwegen, van Oostendorp, and van der Spek (2013) mentioned that games are potentially more effective than other methods of instructions in ethics education. Schrier (2015) proposed the framework, "Ethics Practice and Implementation Categorization Framework". It summarized 12 possible game strategies such as role-taking, modelling, choice and consequences, social interaction, deliberation and dialogues, application to real-world issues, procedural exploration, nudges and other game strategies. Schrier (2015) provided a framework for matching the games activities with the intended education goals including enhancing ethical awareness, emotional intelligence, practice of empathy-related skills, reasoning, ethical reflection, character education, and cultivating facility with major ethics issues and approaches.

As described in the above sections, past studies described that significant number of students were adopting self-centered thinking (Lowry, 2003; Weber & Green, 1991). This finding justifies the need to further explore more ethics education pedagogies for developing students from preconventional level to conventional level of the moral development model. Several studies suggest the importance of experience (Goby & Nickerson, 2012), discussion (Spain et al., 2005) and reflections and empathy-related skills (Schrier, 2015) during the ethics education process.

Though ethics education has been discussed over years, existence of several gaps justify further studies on this topic in different areas such as the intended goals, pedagogical methodologies with consideration on students' background and level of interests. This paper aims to propose an ethics education activity for tertiary education students in business programmes. The proposed activity integrates some games elements covered in existing literature (see for example, Lowy, 2003; Turban, 2012; Schrier, 2015) with focus on nurturing reflections and considerations on impact on stakeholders in the ethical decision process.

Methodology

This pilot study aims to investigate students' perception on key elements for designing an ethics learning activity for tertiary business students. This explorative study mainly adopts semi-structured interview approach (Streubert & Carpenter, 1995). A list of questions was designed for the interviews, and free-flow discussions were also facilitated. The study was conducted with two stages of face-to-face individual interviews in which three tertiary students from year 1 or year 2 in business domains of accounting, management, and finance were invited to share their views from their personal perspectives on the key elements for constructing an ethics game activity. They were sampled purposefully since the interviewees sample includes both male and female students with interests in different business domains. After the first pilot interview, the question set was refined and adopted in the other two interviews. The interview content and participants' responses collected from the three pilot interviews were audio-recorded and analyzed by both interviewers with phenomenological perspective (Colaizzi, 1978).

The interview contents include general understanding on students' perception on using learning activity for ethics education, and students' views on the key elements for constructing a proposed framework for ethics learning activity. For the activity content, different types of cases or situations such as real-life context, simulated situations or stories are found in the different game strategies (Schrier, 2015). However, as mentioned by Schrier (2015), Schrier's Ethics Practice and Implementation Categorization Framework (2015) and the games examples provided in the framework have not been tested for efficacy for enhancing ethics for the participants. Hence, pilot interviews are conducted to know more about the

perceptions of target participants on ethics games design elements.   This pilot study mainly covers the following three parts.

(Part 1).   Do students have any experience of learning ethics through games or other learning activities? Do students think educational game (or learning activity) help them learn more?

This part mainly collects students' perception on using game or learning activity for ethics education.   It aims to obtain general understanding on students' view on different forms of ethics education.   This part also helps to explore other key elements of a successful activity through semi-structured interview approach.

(Part 2).   How do students perceive the use of real-life cases or simulated situations or stories in ethics games?   What are their preferences on the content among business setting, school setting or daily life?

Based on existing practices, different forms of cases or scenarios could be used in ethics education. Options include real-life cases, simulated situations or even fictions. Besides, this part also helps to find out more about students' preferences among cases with school context, workplace scenarios, or daily life contents.

(Part 3).   What are students' views on the use of game elements such as anonymous poll, role-taking group discussion, interactive computing program showing possible outcomes?

Apart from the nature of the case adopted for the learning activity, several approaches can be used to invite students' participation in addition to the traditional teaching method.   Approaches adopted in the proposed activity framework include anonymous poll, role-taking discussion, interactive computing program showing possible outcomes.   Pilot interviews can provide more information about students' preferences on these approaches.

Findings and Discussion

Based on the pilot interviews, respondents received ethics education in various forms in the past.   Some forms of ethics education include using examples in lectures,

discussion and cases studies. Besides, respondents also shared their experience on joining mini exhibition and videos with ethics-related theme in the past. In general, ethics games or other ethics learning activity are not considered as common form of ethics education based on interviewees' experience. The interviewees were asked to share their perceptions on the use of games for ethics education, and positive feedbacks were received from the three student respondents. Respondents also suggested some elements for successful educational games, including activity atmosphere, competition elements, clear instructions, suitable control on the game or activity process, appropriate activity duration and group size. Apart from the general perception on the use of games for learning ethics, interviewees also shared their views on the key elements for constructing a framework for ethics learning activity in the following sections. Key elements include nature and context of the cases, role-taking discussion, use of anonymous poll and computed generated outcome possibilities.

Different forms of cases and scenarios could be used by educators for facilitating students' discussion on ethical values. Real-life cases, simulated settings (or constructed scenarios) or stories are options to be adopted in ethics discussion (see for example, Turban, 2012; Shrier, 2015). This pilot interview approach aims to explore whether students have strong preference on a particular type of case. Besides, interviewees were also asked to select options of school setting or workplace or daily life scenarios as their preferred context for the case adopted in the ethics learning activity. Results indicated that there are no common views by respondents in this aspect. However, the relevance of the case is the common element based on their responses. One of the respondents preferred local case as the setting is more relevant and familiar to students. Another respondent selected workplace setting for the case as this respondent believed that students may face more challenges in workplace in the future in view of the longer time horizon that a person needs to spend on career as compared with time spent in school. The other respondent also pointed out that workplace setting allows more opportunities for students to discuss ethical values. Accordingly to this respondent's rationale, students might make conclusion in short period of time without going through a longer process of consideration for the cases with school setting as they are already familiar with school

setting. One of the interviewees commented that using daily life examples are also helpful to educate some general ethical values.

As mentioned in an earlier section, this paper aims to propose an ethical learning activity with emphasis on stakeholders' perspectives. Element of role-taking has been adopted in some of the existing games to facilitate thinking from different perspectives (Schrier, 2015). In order to enhance a person to take more considerations on stakeholders, role-taking group discussion is proposed to be included in the activity framework. This pilot study helps to solicit students' views on the format of the grouping. Interviewees were asked to comment on two types of grouping. The first option is to form group with members taking different roles (or characters) in the case, whereas the second format is to group with members who take the same role in the case. One interview respondent supported the first option (grouping with members with different roles) as this setting may reflect the reality that a person needs to co-work with people with different roles. However, the other two interviewees supported the second format (grouping with members with the same role) because this format may lead to more interesting discussion if there are different perspectives from members even though they are taking the same role. During the pilot interview, suggestion was made that there could be discussion among different groups in addition to the discussion within the group. In general, there are feedbacks from interviewees that role-taking discussion can help to increase students' awareness on stakeholders' perspectives when facing ethical issues.

According to Schrier (2015), decisions and related consequences are possible game strategies to promote ethics. Use of anonymous multiple-choice response options has also been used in other research (see for example, Turban, 2012). To further explore students' perception on games design element, the pilot interviews also cover questions that collect students' views on using anonymous indication (poll for the decision made by the assigned role in the case) and computer-generated outcome possibilities (consequences) based on participants' anonymous poll. It is found that interviewees perceive these activity elements interesting and attractive. Anonymous indication for the assigned role's decision can help participants make decision without peer pressure effect. After participants' poll for the decisions, the facilitator can

input participants' poll, and the corresponding pre-designed outcome will be generated by the computer programming. Based on the interview findings, interviewees find this activity element interesting and useful as participants can see the impact of their decisions. Participants could be invited to make anonymous indication in two rounds which are made before and after the role-taking group discussion respectively. The two rounds of indication may help participants to reflect their reasoning and possibly change their mind if they take more considerations on others' views into account during the role-taking discussion step. In other words, they can "replay" the incident and see the possibly different outcomes based on their decisions.

The facilitator should also state clearly that the generated outcomes are shown only as some of the possible (hypothetical) outcomes for discussion purpose instead of making them as conclusion or recommendations for the decision dilemmas. In other words, the key purpose of the activity is to encourage discussion, consideration and reflection. The facilitator can debrief the participants by referring to Kohlberg's model (1973) regarding the importance of concerning views from family, group, nation and social order at the conventional level. The activity aims to enhance participants' reflection and experience of reasoning. Besides, the activity may help participants develop empathy-related skills (Schrier, 2015).

Conclusion

The pilot interviews aim to study business students' perception on some of the key elements for constructing ethics learning activity. First, interviewees' responses support the use of scenarios setting, role taking group discussion, anonymous poll on response options and computer-generated possible consequences for designing ethics game or learning activity. Second, the activity framework with the above mentioned elements may enhance students' awareness on stakeholders' perspectives. In general, the pilot interviews suggest that the use of game approach may help to increase students' interests in learning ethics. In view of the limited responses collected in this study, more studies need to be conducted for further investigation on the appropriateness and effectiveness of the use of different games design elements.

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