

Can moral judgement and ethical behaviour be learned?

A review of the literature

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Education is the best means of developing good ethical behaviour in the modern business environment

Introduction

Writings on theory of moral or ethical judgement and behaviour have been undertaken intermittently by philosophers throughout recorded time. The twentieth century has, however, provided for a raft of research based literature on the subject, much generated within the field of psychology, and commencing with the writings of Piaget in the 1930s. Building on the philosophical writings of eighteenth-century philosopher Emanuel Kant, Piaget traced the development of morality in children from respect for rules to respect for the person(s) originating those rules. Piaget's theory is reflected in his two-stage, heteronomy-autonomy typology proposed in his monograph "The moral judgement of a child"[1,2].

Following from the theories of Piaget is Lawrence Kohlberg's 1950s study of the progressive increase in moral autonomy in early adolescence. The theory developed by Kohlberg from this and his later studies has formed the basis for most of the work subsequently undertaken in the field of moral development.

This article aims to consider literature published in the field of adult moral and ethics education in order to establish whether ethics and morals can be learnt as a result of the education process, and if so, to identify from the literature those forms of delivery that best facilitate adult student learning of morals and ethics. Providing proof that the link between teaching and learning ethics exists should be of primary interest to educators, practitioners and managers, particularly given the perception that education is the best means of developing good ethical behaviour in the modern business environment. Education in the business environment is

seen as a process which should lead to improved management quality.

In contemplating advancement of moral judgement, the writer considers that a link should exist between learning and moral advancement, and therefore also seeks to find some justification of this link in the literature.

Although ancillary to the focus of this article, it is considered appropriate to commence with a brief summary of the development of moral theory in the twentieth century, noting particularly the writings of Kohlberg, and including a note on the measure developed by Rest, which is common to many studies subsequently undertaken in the field of adult moral and ethics education. Following this, a number of papers specific to the research questions raised above will be reviewed. Some of these highlight weaknesses evident in Kohlberg's theory, and others its strengths.

Foundation theory

Although it is reported that Kohlberg in his original thesis had set out only to expand on and study the development of adolescents within the framework of Piaget's autonomy stage, what emerged was a six-stage model within which only two, stages one and three, approximate to Piaget's original two stages. Kohlberg's theory evolved from a longitudinal study of the development of adolescent males and became known as Kohlberg's theory of cognitive moral development (CMD)[1].

Kohlberg's six stages of moral development can be grouped into three levels, the pre-conventional level (stages 1 and 2), conventional level (stages 3 and 4), and post-conventional level (stages 5 and 6). People are assumed to progress through the stages as a result of personal development (ageing) and interaction with the outside world, particularly through the social environment. The

stages are hierarchical and sequenced but progression is not guaranteed. At the pre-conventional level, rules and social expectations are external to people. At the conventional level, the self has identified with, or internalized the rules and expectations of others, especially with authority. Most adults are found to have reached this level. At post-conventional level, people differentiate their self-esteem from the rules and expectations of others and define personal values in terms of self-chosen principles. Kohlberg perceives progression to the post-conventional level as ideal.

Kohlberg developed structural issues scoring methodology to measure an individual's level of moral development. This measure was undertaken by interview conducted after the individual had been exposed to specially developed stories which contained ethical dilemmas.

In the years that have followed his thesis, Kohlberg has worked to test and develop his theory further, as have a number of other researchers. Many subsequent studies have found favour with the theory and others have been critical, but none has provided a substantive alternative. One of the most questioned areas of Kohlberg's theory is the assumption that progression to the post-conventional level (stages 5 and 6) of moral development is possible. Many researchers have found that, although in western society some people may achieve stage five, there is little unambiguous evidence of stage five subjects in other cultures. Snarey's study[3] reviewed in this article offers evidence in support of this view.

Although Kohlberg's research has contributed significantly to the literature on moral and ethical judgement, it has done little to identify how best to enhance individual moral development or learning outside the natural environment. Kohlberg has acknowledged the perceived importance of education as a variable[4] in the moral development process, but there is considerable scope for research directed at identifying the environmental and education media that are most efficient at enhancing advancement, and the learning that presumably accompanies it.

Concerning the relationship between learning and Kohlberg's theory, the weakening of the higher development stages which has resulted from the findings of subsequent research[3,5] has ramifications for the adoption of the theory from an education perspective. Of importance with respect to education has been the discussion generated about the link Kohlberg claims exists between moral judgement and moral behaviour, particularly when intervening variables such as experience and motivation are considered. Although this link has been questioned in several papers, such as [6], only one offering support for the claim that the link may exist has been found and included in this discussion[7].

James Rest is widely recognized as another who has contributed to the foundation theory of moral and ethical behaviour. Rest is widely quoted for his Defining Issues Test (DIT) which he developed as a measure of moral judgement based on Kohlberg's CMD theory[8].

The DIT utilizes Kohlberg's story dilemmas accompanied by a range of prototypic statements, which set out to define the issues at the heart of each dilemma. Subjects to whom the test is administered are required to rank the four most important issues in order of importance from their perspective. Each issue statement has a corresponding score which can be coded and the scores aligned to a specific stage in Kohlberg's model. Despite this being its primary use, there has been criticism of the ability of the DIT to grade subjects adequately according to the stages in Kohlberg's theory. The test has attracted a wide following for measuring the effects of a moral or ethics-based experiment on a before-and-after basis. This appears to be due to the ease with which the DIT can be administered and coded, in contrast to Kohlberg's own open-ended, interview-based, structural issues scoring methodology, which is considered complex to administer and score.

Recent theoretical developments

Cross-cultural issues

Although many of the following papers which built on Kohlberg's foundation theory do not directly address adult learning of ethics or moral behaviour, most raise issues that should be considered when addressing the subject question. Snarey in his 1985 paper[3] addresses a shortcoming in Kohlberg's theory relating to its claimed cross-cultural universality. In the study, Snarey tests the universality claim along with a number of other cross-cultural issues defined in five hypotheses.

The methodology adopted by Snarey involved the comprehensive review of 45 studies of moral development undertaken in 27 countries under the umbrella of Kohlberg's CMD theory. The issues investigated were effectively identified from the literature to address only the stated hypotheses. The conclusions varied. Reasonable support was found for the first hypothesis that Kohlberg's theory has cultural universality, and for the second, that the dilemmas outlined in Kohlberg's stories are reasonably culturally fair if adapted for the specific culture and administered in the native language. Support was also found for the hypothesis that Kohlberg's stages are upwardly sequential and invariant, but little support was found for Kohlberg's claim that the full range of stages would be present in all cultures as no stage 5 subjects were evident in some cultures. The final hypothesis of conformity of moral judgement across cultures also found little support with a number of unique

moral judgements, not accommodated by Kohlberg's theory, recorded in some cultural studies.

Snarey's study does not attempt to identify efficient media for the advancement of moral development, but highlights a difficulty with the facilitation of ethics or moral education. This results from its failure to find support for the hypothesis that all observed instances of moral reasoning across cultures will conform to one of the finite models of moral reasoning described by Kohlberg. That difficulty involves the identification of the relevant, to use Kohlberg's terminology, models of moral reasoning for particular cultures and adopting education media to suit. It seems reasonable in the light of this finding that differences exist between cultures, that facilitation of learning in a mixed cultural setting is additionally further complicated for the facilitator.

Gender issues

Carol Gilligan in her paper "Woman's place in man's life cycle"[5] quotes an excerpt from Chekhov's play, *The Cherry Orchard*, as an introduction to the paper, to highlight the differences or discrepancies in judgement between men and women. This example reinforces the focus of the study, to highlight the enshrinement of male views on the psychological theories of human development (including moral development theory). This, it is claimed, reflects a consistent, observational and evaluative bias of gender differences.

Gilligan's paper traces the literature through childhood and adolescent development theory noting the conclusions of male writers with respect to female development and querying the comparisons made to the male "norm". Throughout her review, Gilligan questions the appropriateness of this comparison which is especially an issue when gender differences have been noted in past studies but despite this, the resultant theories focused only on the male perspective. The explanations which theorists have offered for some of these differences also appear to have been questionable at times. This trend is well summed up in Gilligan's statement:

when women do not conform to the (male) standards of psychological expectation, the conclusion has been that the female behaviour is some kind of deviation from the norm or that there is something wrong with the woman[5, p. 438].

In response to this trend, Gilligan is critical of the desire to create single scales for development, claiming that under a scale system it is difficult to accommodate "different", without saying better or worse. Kohlberg's theory suffers the greatest audit in Gilligan's review of the literature, as the all-male longitudinal sample which formed the basis for the development of his theory renders its claimed universality suspect in Gilligan's opinion. Gilligan claims that deriving a development construct commencing with women will result in a different conception of development which can also be

traced through stages, as demonstrated in an earlier (1977) study of Gilligan's cited in [5]. To emphasize this point, comparison is made between the response of a male subject involved in Kohlberg's original longitudinal study with that of a female subject interviewed by Gilligan. With this example, Gilligan is able to highlight women's orientation towards relationships of interdependence and how women thus bring a different point of view and order of priorities to the development life cycle.

Gilligan provides a convincing argument for gender differences in development life cycles including the moral cycles. From an education perspective, knowledge about such differences is important, as they are also probably reflected in learning styles. It seems logical that the emphases of moral education programmes for males and females may need to be different to achieve equivalent moral advancement in both sexes. However, many writers, including Kohlberg, have been critical of Gilligan's claims. A number of studies undertaken under the umbrella of Kohlberg's theory using male and female subjects have failed to show any marked differences in gender performance (Derry, 1989, quoted in [2]).

The lack of a clear body of support for Gilligan's theory does cast doubt on its reliability despite the sampling biases identified in formative research. However, the study does raise questions as to the true gender universality of Kohlberg's CMD theory and it therefore demands that consideration be given to the prospect that gender differences exist in moral and ethical reasoning, in the adoption of moral education mediums by learning facilitators. Different education media may invoke different gender responses, and this link warrants further research. However, as noted in Trevino's 1992 paper[2], studies designed to measure gender differences in this area have to date been inconclusive in their results. Finally, Gilligan's comments on female interdependence could provide some clue as to appropriate media for ethics and moral education, such as group interaction.

Cognition versus action

Malinowski and Smith[7], aimed to test Kohlberg's claims concerning cognition and action, the link between moral judgement and moral behaviour. An experiment based on people's propensity to cheat was devised to test a number of hypotheses relative to Kohlberg's theory, after a brief but succinct review of the literature.

Malinowski and Smith devised an experiment which required the subjects to complete a kinaesthetic repetitive exercise on the premiss of measuring attention concentration against the clock to test their hypotheses. Confederates were present under both conditions, but only in the experimental condition did the confederate

say anything about cheating in order to influence the actions of the subjects. After the test the subjects were given measures for need for approval, test anxiety and guilt, and asked questions about the test. The aims of the experiment were not declared until after the experiment, at which time the subjects were given the option of withdrawing their data if they so wished. None did. The hypotheses were tested using correlations and analysis of variance (ANOVA). The results found support for the hypotheses that higher moral maturity resulted in a lower incidence of cheating, and that the influence of the confederate was greater on individuals of lower moral maturity, and for the sub-hypothesis that anxiety increased the incidence of cheating, more so for stage 3 than stage 4 subjects. Anticipatory guilt, although related to cheating, was not found to correlate with moral judgement.

The link between moral judgement and moral action is one of the fundamental areas targeted by critics of Kohlberg's theory. Although Malinowski and Smith's experiment lacks external validity in a number of areas, particularly in the non-random nature of the subject selection and the all-male bias of the sample, the results are well supported statistically and the experiment appears to have been soundly conducted. Repetition of the study would assist validity, but unless undertaken in different environments, subject conditioning could be a risk.

The link which it is suggested exists between moral judgement and moral action is important to education facilitators as it does provide some justification for the use of Kohlberg's theory as a basis for education programmes. However, other factors, such as the effects of socialization[4,9] can intervene.

The theory in practice

The following section reviews literature which considers the interface between developed theory and practice.

A case for continuing education

Trevino[2] focuses on business ethics, and extols the virtues of education as a facilitator of moral reasoning in the development of business ethics.

Trevino's extensive introductory literature review provides a clear summary of the development of CMD theory through to the paper's publication. Although strongly categorized, Kohlberg's CMD theory provides the common thread linking all modern studies reviewed. Topics covered include measurement of cognitive development, adult moral reasoning, moral reasoning and gender, moral reasoning and culture, and behaviour influencing moral reasoning.

Trevino offers well-considered conclusions to the studies reviewed. Some of the more important ones include:

moral reasoning scores increase with age; continuing adult development has been linked to higher education; moral reasoning may vary depending on context; proof of gender differences is inconclusive; participation and role-taking may improve development; evidence suggests some relationship between moral thoughts and moral behaviour; moral education programmes have succeeded in producing substantial gains in moral reasoning. In the concluding section, Trevino focuses on a research question which she believes requires further research, that question relating to the workplace: whether the work itself and work setting influence continuing adult moral development (suggesting positive and negative influences may be present). Amplifying this issue, she suggests that more research is required in the area of socialization theories of morality. The concluding paragraph contains a very important observation, that CMD is just one facet of the study of business ethics. The study area of ethics and moral behaviour is clearly multifaceted and, as yet, only in the development stages.

The adult moral reasoning and influencing moral reasoning sections of Trevino's paper are of most relevance to this current article. The statement that moral reasoning scores increase with age is not, I believe, generalizable to all age groups as implied, as most research in this area to date has involved child subjects. The results recorded in the Armstrong study[10] may even offer support for the proposition that a decrease in moral reasoning occurs with age after a certain age is reached (although this proposition was not raised in this study). Continuing education may be the intervening variable required to ensure continuing development of moral reasoning.

The conclusions highlighted by Trevino provide a foundation on which effective media for facilitating learning of good ethical and moral judgement and behaviour can be built. The link that is made between higher education and continued adult moral development is important. However, no longitudinal studies have as yet been undertaken to measure the long-term benefits of continued education. The proposition that participation and role-taking improves moral development is also important in providing a clue as to appropriate types of education medium, such as role-play and group discussion. Trevino argues that a strong link exists between moral reasoning and action but, while there is some evidence that this link may exist, this is tenuous.

Also important is identification of the impact of socialization on moral development, particularly when it is suggested that a person with inferior moral reasoning ability may provide a negative influence on those with a higher moral standing in a group situation. This issue is researched specifically in the studies of Nichols and Day[9] and Dukerich *et al.*[4].

The interaction of groups and individuals

Nichols and Day[9] describe a study undertaken to measure the effect of group interaction on moral decision making, for comparison with individual performance on the same case-study dilemmas. The study employed Rest's DIT to measure the difference under a situation where individuals were given one version of the DIT and, following grouping, were given the test again in a different manner.

The results of Nichols and Day's study display a significant difference between the measured mean moral judgement of the individuals and groups, and three reasons were given for this difference. The first was risky shift, and the second disparity among individual scores creating a need for more interaction, which could lead to more consideration of principled moral issues. These two reasons were tested for and subsequently argued as insignificant. The third suggested reason was cited as influence by the highest scoring individual (higher moral judgement) on the other individuals in the group. This reason was considered the most realistic, but the writers were cautious in their conclusion as, despite support from the literature to the contrary, they had no means of measuring this variable and considered that some conditioning (or moral judgement development) could have occurred between the two administrations of the DIT. As well as this limitation, the researchers also correctly highlighted the poor external validity of laboratory type experiments such as theirs.

Nichols and Day's findings that the group scores varied from the mean individual scores of the group members demonstrates the potential of group media. Despite the validity problems, the finding that the group interaction increased individual scores on a before-and-after basis provides justification for the use of groups as an effective education medium in ethics or moral education. The effectiveness of this medium does, however, need to be measured against other forms of learning facilitation.

The study's conclusion that individuals with high DIT scores, and therefore an implied high level of moral judgement, can positively influence the reasoning of others in a group situation, has important ramifications for educators also contemplating the facilitation of group moral or ethics learning media. The study falls short, however, in providing proof of this finding, this being left for Dukerich *et al.*[4] to investigate.

Dukerich *et al.*[4] focus on two studies undertaken to investigate how groups reason about moral dilemmas. The first study was undertaken with no researcher intervention and the second, with the researchers manipulating the leadership of the groups. The relevance of studying group resolution of moral problem solving was supported by the observation that, in real life, such dilemmas are often addressed by groups such as

company boards, city councils, and management teams etc. Based on Kohlberg's CMD theory, Dukerich *et al.* find support in the literature linking positive changes in moral reasoning to the amount of social interaction or perspective-taking opportunities, and interaction with others.

To justify their study, Dukerich *et al.* draw a strong link with the Nichols and Day study, which concluded that an intervening variable in their study could have been the influence by the highest-scoring individual (higher moral judgement) or leader. Although, in the context of their study, Nichols and Day were unable to prove this link, Dukerich *et al.* specifically set out to confirm the effect of this intervening variable. The study involved the administration of Rest's DIT to the subjects and then, following a one-to-two week break, manipulated groups of the subjects were assembled and asked to resolve the same problems presented in the DIT. Finally, a second and different individual DIT was administered, and a statistical comparison of the pre- and post-experiment scores undertaken. The experiment was duplicated with an additional manipulation, that being to appoint a group leader, either with a low or high DIT score, based on the subject's pre-experiment scores.

Study results support the previous theory that group discussion leads to increases in moral reasoning scores. In this case, this was regardless of the score of the individual who assumed leadership of the group, although greater gains were measured when the assumed leader had a high pre-experiment score. Considering the effect of the leadership role on group performance under the manipulated experiment, leaders with lower moral reasoning scores under the DIT had a marked effect on the group test scores relative to the accumulative individual scores, despite individual scores rising between the pre- and post-experiment tests. Higher scoring individuals had little effect on the group scores when compared to the cumulative individual scores. Leadership was thus identified as an important intervening variable.

The finding of the Dukerich *et al.*[4] study, that leadership by individuals of lower moral reasoning (measured by Rest's DIT) can result in a poorer group performance than would be the case under a higher score individual's leadership, is important in organizational and education settings, particularly when group discussion requiring group resolution of problems is contemplated. The reinforcement of the finding of previous studies, that individuals may benefit from group discussion regardless of the quality of leadership, is also important. It appears that exposure to opinions of lower moral reasoning may also help enhance an individual's moral reasoning ability. These results, however, measure a short-term gain. Research needs to address the question of longer-term effects, what effect prolonged exposure to a group

situation under the leadership of a low scoring individual has on the moral reasoning performance of other individuals in the group.

The development of ethics in the business environment

Armstrong[10] describes a study which involved the administration of Rest's DIT to two separate samples of currently practising accountants (CPAs). The study set out to measure the level of moral judgement development of the sample groups and relate this directly to Rest's study results which focused on college students. It was reported that Rest claimed that development in moral judgement advanced as long as a person is in school (or university) and stabilizes when education stops. In this study, both samples were small and this was acknowledged as a limitation by the author. Despite this, the results were interesting in that the mean CPA scores were lower than the benchmark college students' mean scores for the DIT. This was unexpected, but led the author to conclude only that the CPAs' college education may not have fostered continued moral growth since graduating.

Unfortunately, Armstrong concludes the paper without offering any other explanation for the lower DIT mean scores of the CPAs compared to the college students. Other possible reasons, such as the effect of prolonged exposure to unethical practices in the workplace, may be equally justifiable. Certainly, the reason for this poor performance is the most significant question left in the reader's mind after reading the paper. In the context of this current article, the failure of practising CPAs to improve in their moral judgement while in the workforce has important ramifications for educators when read in conjunction with Kohlberg's theory that education is effective in advancing moral judgement development. Armstrong proposes that moral reasoning can be taught, that specific courses in moral reasoning be required of students (at college) and these developed further for practitioners, presumably under the umbrella of continuing education. She does not, however, offer adequate support for the link between judgement and actions, preferring the implied approach.

Also considering ethics in the workplace, Trevino and Youngblood[11] investigated moral reasoning and moral behaviour in the organizational setting. A multiple-influences causal model was designed, incorporating the influences of social learning, CMD, and locus of control (LC), which were hypothesized to influence ethical decision making. Outcome expectancies associated with social learning (vicarious reward, vicarious punishment, and control) were considered as moderating variables. Rest's DIT was utilized as a measure of CMD, and Rotter's Internal-External LC scale as a measure of an individual's

perception of how much control he or she exerts over events in life.

The study's sample comprised all of the 94 students enrolled in a university-run organizational behaviour course. The experiment appears to have been well thought out and the process is well documented. Path analysis was utilized to test the hypothesized causal linkages. The hypothesis that subjects displaying high internal LC and high CMD were expected to behave more ethically was supported, with LC exhibiting the strongest direct effect on ethical decision making, although it was noted that LC, CMD, and outcome expectancy are correlated.

Trevino and Youngblood's conclusion, that the results provide partial support for the proposed multiple influences causal model of ethical decision-making behaviour, appears reasonable. The results did not, however, find support for the hypothesis that vicarious reward and punishment influence ethical decision-making behaviour through their influence on the observer's outcome expectations. Vicarious reward was found to have some influence on ethical decision-making behaviour primarily through outcome expectations, but vicarious punishment did not significantly influence outcome expectancies or behaviour.

As noted by the authors, the result concerning vicarious punishment may have been affected by subjects' a priori beliefs, and thus was not truly situational, but influenced by presage factors linked to the subject's perception of the severity of punishment.

The study is important as, in addition to its recognition of the complexity of ethical decision-making behaviour in organizations, it identifies that outcome expectancies do have a direct effect on ethical decision-making behaviour. Unfortunately, it fails to identify the "multiple factors" which influence outcome expectancy, for example, age, experience, level of education, etc. It is also unfortunate that the weakness of vicarious punishments used in the study was not identified during pilot testing, as this has given an element of bias to the experiment. Vicarious punishment also forms the basis of Kaplan's paper[12], but again the effects on moral judgement or behaviour are not well ratified in this paper, it being largely opinion-based.

Teaching ethics in the higher education environment

Penn and Collier[13], claim that there is a need to devise and implement an education programme that results in the advancement of students to higher stages of moral development (in accordance with Kohlberg's CMD theory). To advance this proposition, the authors state four claims: that the development of human consciousness increases the probability of rational consensus on

the just resolution of value conflicts; that the capacity for principled moral reasoning can and must be developed by means of focused, systematic and long-term education effort; that it is necessary to develop moral reasoning to its highest level in order to have rational, individual and social direction; and that current efforts of education institutions lack the focused, systematic and long-term efforts necessary to bring people to the highest level of moral reasoning.

The focus of Penn and Collier's argument is on the need to achieve rational consensus on the just resolution of value conflicts, a condition which is said to have the greatest potential to occur at Kohlberg's post-conventional stages. To this end they note 100 or more studies (only one specifically cited) which link moral judgement test scores with real life decision making and behaviour. Their own study is poorly reported with respect to demographics, how it was administered, or what measures were utilized. They claim, however, that their results are consistent with those of prior research, recording a result of a 37 per cent shift in their subjects' moral reasoning scores to a post-conventional stage between pre- and post-experiment testing. Armed with this result and support from the literature, the writers restate their opening claim of the need to devise and implement an education programme that results in the advancement of students to higher stages of moral development as their primary conclusion.

While the tenor of their paper appears sound, the paper lacks a balanced viewpoint. The writers fail to acknowledge literature which offers contrary opinions to those expressed, or questions the results as reported. The poor reporting of the writers' experiment does little to support their claims. Certainly, from the limited data given, the sample size of 19 allows little scope for confident generalization of the results to the greater population.

For the proposition to be proved, it would need to be backed by a sound body of research focused on the causal relationship implied. It would also have to provide unchallengeable confirmation that moral thoughts reflect moral actions and confirm that learning results from the experience proposed. Unfortunately, Penn and Collier's study considers only the short-term effects of the education medium. There appears to be a real need for longitudinal studies to be undertaken to address the long-term effects of moral education. It is acknowledged, however, that the impact of other variables, such as concurrently occurring life experiences, could render accurate measurement of a particular learning medium well-nigh impossible.

Focusing on a specific professional group, Goldman and Arbuthnot's 1979 study [14], aimed to highlight the need for ethical and humanitarian education in medical schools. The paper describes the structure and effectiveness of a course designed to equip medical graduates to

better handle ethical problems in practice. The introduction sets the scene by quoting the thoughts of a resident (recent graduate) and a third-year medical student about a dilemma experience each had faced, accompanied by the writers' suggestion that these experiences were not unique. Goldman and Arbuthnot go on to suggest that the inability of graduates to deal with such situations at the end of their medical training is not only disturbing, but is close to negligent.

This paper introduces the theory of professional socialism which incorporates the study of the effects of environmental and situational factors associated with traditional-style medical education on the preparation of students for practice.

For their study, the authors provided the students with an extensive introduction to Kohlberg theory. The target adult students were enrolled in a specific ethics course run by a trained moral educator. In contrast to all previous studies, not only were the moral dilemmas presented to the subjects during the course different, being primarily based on topics of medical dilemmas derived from books and films, but also Kohlberg's structural issues scoring measure was administered for both the pre- and post-experiment tests instead of Rest's DIT. Based on results from the literature, the course was structured to ensure that arousal of genuine moral conflict, uncertainty and disagreement about genuinely problematic situations occurred, and that modes of thought one level above that of the students were presented to them for consideration. How this was achieved is not entirely clear. Results from the study, based on a statistical comparison of the scores from the pre- and post-experiment tests, revealed an increase in the mean level of moral reasoning across the sample. It was also noted that there was no difference in the change between medical dilemmas and the few non-medical dilemmas utilized. These results are, however, reported to out-perform those recorded in other studies.

Goldman and Arbuthnot's study is interesting in that, uniquely, the moral dilemma stories presented were profession-specific. Previous studies have all relied on Kohlberg's original dilemma stories unaltered, regardless of the context, cross-cultural studies excluded. Although not discussed in Goldman and Arbuthnot's paper, tailoring the stories to the subject's own field of study should render the learning experience appropriate. The results are somewhat confusing, however, given the writers' observation that no difference was measured between the subjects' improved performance for medical dilemmas and that for non-medical dilemma situations, and that the subjects' improvement in moral reasoning scores on a before-and-after basis exceeded anything measured in previous studies. A further complication was that the subjects were drawn from non-medical courses, and, therefore, although the dilemmas were tailored for

medical students, for some unexplained reason the subjects were not medical students. This is curious and goes largely unexplained in the paper except for the authors' acknowledgement that it affects the generalizability of the results. Another problem with the study is the lack of a control group against which to measure the results.

Teaching ethics in the business school environment

Brown[15] offers role-play as a suggestion for integrating ethics into business education courses. The paper describes a model session for the readers' consideration and discusses a number of pitfalls for the inexperienced. After introducing the concept, the paper reiterates the concerns of industry management and academics about the need for more explicit attention to ethical education within the business school curriculum. It is proposed that role-play, as a method for providing subjects with the means to clarify their own values, and direct or change their own behaviour, links strongly with the view of Cava[16] that finding a way to stimulate critical thinking is important. Brown acknowledges the tenuous nature of this link, but stresses her opinion that role-play provides the opportunity for critical thinking to occur.

No attempt is made in this study to measure the effects of role-play in improving ethical or moral decision-making behaviour, which has been a common thread through most other papers reviewed. It is unclear whether the subjects actually learn about ethics and moral issues from the experience, and research in this area would be most interesting and informative. It is acknowledged, particularly in light of the manner in which role-play is used by Brown as a historical reference point, that the effectiveness of the method may not be immediately obvious, and that learning may occur as the session is reflected on in subsequent sessions.

Boyd[17] evaluates the success of courses studying the social responsibility of the corporate sector, which are now incorporated into the curriculum of many business schools. The paper focuses on the ability of these courses to affect student values and, to measure the effect of such courses, describes an experiment where the effect is evaluated using Kohlberg's CMD theory. The experiment involves a large sample of 241 students, split unevenly but in a non-random manner (courses were chosen by the students) between three different courses. One of the courses (the experimental group) was ethics-based, in the second ethics was an issue but not the focus of the course, and the third was a control group taking a course where no ethical issues arose. Rest's DIT measure was applied in pre- and post-experiment applications. The results revealed that the mean test scores for the experimental group increased significantly between the two tests, but those of the control and intermediate groups showed little change. Boyd reported that the increase was not gender

specific, but no details were provided on the proportion of male and female subjects within the sample. He concluded that an ethics-based course can significantly accelerate the rate of moral development of college students (as measured by the DIT), but suggested that further research was necessary to identify what particular learning experiences are most instrumental in promoting moral judgement.

Effectively, Boyd's call for the identification of learning experiences which promote moral judgement advancement reflects in part the aim of this current article. Identification of these media is only part of the process and requires further refinement to provide a comparative evaluation of the various media.

Boyd's paper concludes that DIT is designed to measure preference rather than conduct, and thus further studies will be required to determine whether tomorrow's managers actually apply their new-found precepts. Again the link between moral judgement and action is questioned. Within the context of this comment, the longer-term effects of moral education can be considered. It may be possible to measure moral actions in the short term, but if moral reasoning declines over time, as could be inferred from the results of the Armstrong study[10], then proof of a correlation between declining moral reasoning scores and incidents of bad ethical behaviour could provide support for the need and importance of continuing education. It would also be important to identify reasons for the decline if such a correlation could be measured, such as those of context.

Cava begins by posing the questions, "can ethics be taught?" and "if so, how?" (16, p. 10). Citing the desire of some to define ethics, Cava cautions this goal by quoting Dr G.A. Luoma, "that this can be very difficult in a world that accepts many different points of view". Proposed as an alternative to the need to define ethics, a tenuous link is then drawn between ethical behaviour and critical thinking, Cava suggesting that stimulation of critical thinking in decision making is a starting point in ethics education. She suggests that, to achieve a state in which critical thinking occurs, the subjects should be provided with accepted theories, and then encouraged to apply these theories to different problems.

To this end, two theories are discussed by Cava, those of teleology and deontology. Teleology is consequence-based, focusing on the premiss that the right choice in any situation is the one that produces the greatest good for the greatest number. In contrast deontology is duty-based, focusing on one's duty to perform according to certain societal rules such as those proposed by Kant. Cava describes a study undertaken in 1989 by Conry and Nelson in which both theories are applied to subjects in an effort to produce disequilibrium or cognitive dissonance, and individual awareness of inadequate

moral reasoning within subjects. She reports that Rest's DIT was used on a pre- and post-experiment basis to measure a significant increase in the mean scores of the experiment group in comparison to a control group. Cava also reiterates Conry and Nelson's comments that an integral part of this approach is to permit the subjects to examine and express their own views, and to challenge each other in the process, this representing the occurrence of critical thinking.

In concluding the paper, Cava claims that repetitive application of both the consequence and duty-based theories of ethics throughout business courses will increase subject awareness of ethical issues and provide them with a degree of confidence in articulating moral judgements.

There are a number of weaknesses in Cava's study. In describing the use of Rest's DIT measure, she incorrectly attributes Kohlberg's story scenarios, as used in the DIT, to Rest. Additionally, Cava provides little or no support for a number of her claims, for example, the claim that repetitive application of moral-based learning experiences increases moral reasoning and action. No evidence is provided in support of this claim. There is also little indication from the comments made about the study results of what type of learning had occurred, whether it was surface (conditioned?) or deep.

Cava reiterates the opinion of other researchers that group interaction mediums are effective in promoting moral advancement (learning?) in that, in this case, they invoked the expression of personal views, and the challenging of the views of others. This, in Cava's opinion, represented the occurrence of critical thinking. If the actions described do reflect the occurrence of critical thinking, in accordance with theory developed in the field of educational psychology (for example [18]), learning should indeed occur if critical thinking is invoked.

Kummerow[19] describes an integrated ethics education system which was run, over a lengthy period, by a professor based at the University of Wisconsin. The system included a significant leadership component, and appears to have been founded on the premiss of leading by example. It is reported that ethics were integrated into all courses taught by Graaskamp and not taught as a separate subject. Graaskamp additionally provided extramural emphasis of ethical issues through various means.

The fundamental emphasis of Graaskamp's system can be summarized as: recognition of ethical behaviour through the presentation of an award; presentation of examples of poor ethical behaviour and the results of such; fostering of strong peer relationships among students (through social activities, which continued after graduation, and work-related activities) to develop a collective ethic, the group becoming an enforcer for standards for individuals (this continuing after the

students entered the workforce); providing personal examples of ethical behaviour; provision of theories that provided for and justified ethical behaviour; pointing out ambiguous ethical situations and offering solutions; placing the obligations of the profession in the context of the wider world; and developing an extensive personal and genuine interest in students.

Kummerow's paper provides only anecdotal evidence of the effectiveness of the system, but is convincing in the manner expressed. Unlike any of the studies described thus far, Graaskamp's system does not include a specific course on ethics but instead integrates ethics education into the subject matter of a number of courses. This method provides the facilitator with the ability to contextualize the education, which should provide it with relevance for the learners. The presentation of theories which reflect ethical behaviour is also a means whereby the subject can be contextualized. The use of examples with reference to the outcome of bad ethical behaviour reflects the issue of vicarious experiences as raised by Trevino and Youngblood[11] and Kaplan[12]. Presentation of an award for good ethical behaviour reflects a positive vicarious experience.

Kummerow also considers the issue of leading by example and thus adding a real face to the subject matter as important. Subject perception of the ethical standing of the researchers undertaking any of the ethics or morals experiments reviewed in this current article has not been considered, but in fact may have had the potential to influence the results of reported experiments. For example, if subjects had a poor impression of the ethical standing of their teachers or researchers, then this situational factor may have some bearing on the results of the study.

Along similar lines to Graaskamp's system, Shenkir[20] provides a framework for ethics education, by proposing a six-stage, motive-based model. The model is based on Kohlberg's theory; while Shenkir acknowledges this can be criticized, he considers it still provides a sound basis for ethics education. It is proposed that, in line with Kohlberg's theory, basing ethics education on a comprehensive understanding of what motivates people to act ethically may enable ethics education to influence the later behaviour of graduates. To succeed, Shenkir considers that a climate supportive of such development has to be nurtured by the facilitators, and that a student-run honour system similar to one described in the article would succeed in this manner by promoting a spirit of community conducive to mutual trust among students. The paper concludes with Shenkir noting that nurturing ethical behaviour is a lifelong process, and thus ethics education should be continued after graduation. Graduate knowledge of Kohlberg's theory is considered beneficial in enhancing the effectiveness of continuing ethical development.

Shenkir's business publication paper is included as a summary of what is perceived to be required to advance learning in ethics and moral behaviour, and to highlight the significant number of questions that remain unanswered by research undertaken to date. For example, the paper propounds student education about Kohlberg's theory but the literature has failed to confirm that knowledge of this theory actually results in more ethical behaviour. In other words the link between moral judgement and action requires further investigation. Shenkir fails to provide the reader with details of the most appropriate media for effecting moral advancement. He does offer an interesting observation concerning the context within which learning about ethics and moral behaviour should occur. However the proposition of student empowerment implied by the student-run honour system appears to have the potential to provide an ideal foundation on which to conduct education on ethics similar in context to the system operated by Graaskamp[19].

Kaplan[12] reports on a method of presenting students with the concrete results of unethical behaviour in order that they might experience the effects of such behaviour. Kaplan describes the method as giving the students a "Ghost of Christmas Future" providing a direct reference to Scrooge in Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*. The method involves bringing convicted white-collar offenders into business school classrooms, and encouraging them to share their stories with the students.

Kaplan's paper is also sourced from a business publication, and thus is discussion oriented. The experiment described does not include quantitative analysis of the results or effectiveness of the method, only qualitative quotation of three positive statements made by students who attended the session as support for its effectiveness. However, the vicarious medium for invoking learning about ethical and moral behaviour introduced within the paper is interesting, despite the lack of experimental results to support its effectiveness. Relating the medium to that described in the Trevino and Youngblood paper[11], the severity of the vicarious punishment in this scenario may have been sufficient to invoke a different result if adopted in the context of that study. Given the implied effectiveness of vicarious punishment as a learning medium, there is scope for further research in this area, particularly if vicarious experiences are to be used efficiently as a learning medium in ethics education.

Conclusions and identification of areas for future research

The primary question for which this article sought an answer from the literature was: Can moral judgement and ethical behaviour be learned? The article also sought to

find, as associated facets, evidence of what forms of delivery best facilitate adult learning of morals and ethics, and evidence to confirm the link between the occurrence of learning and moral advancement which is assumed by many.

Considering first associated facets, the papers reviewed have highlighted a number of factors which may have an impact on the effectiveness of any medium employed to facilitate learning of good moral and ethical behaviour in either the lecture theatre or business environment, if such learning is possible.

Cross-cultural differences have been identified in the manner in which different cultures reason about moral issues[3], and gender differences may exist[5] but evidence of this is inconclusive. These potential differences in the presage factors of individuals have important ramifications for teachers and managers, particularly those involved with groups of mixed cultural and or gender composition. Different media may in fact invoke different gender and cultural responses.

Outcome expectancies have been identified as important in the process of moral reasoning[11], again suggesting a link with presage factors which need to be identified by future research in order that they can be adequately accommodated by education mediums. Related to this are the effects of vicarious experiences as suggested by Trevino and Youngblood, and in the writings of Kaplan[12] and Kummerow[19]. Devising methodology to adequately measure the effects of presage factors, given the complexity, is clearly a challenging but interesting research area.

The possibility that learning occurs not only during a particular education session, such as role-play, but also as a result of the integration of issues raised during such a session over the period of a formal course, where revisiting the issues stimulates reflection and critical thinking[15], complicates appraisal of the effectiveness of a teaching technique if it is to be considered in isolation. The moral standing of the facilitator, an issue raised in Kummerow's paper[19], could also be a significant intervening variable on how well the subjects learn, regardless of the effectiveness of the medium of ethics education utilized by the facilitator. Also indicated as important to the effectiveness of the education medium is the relevance of the ethics examples portrayed to subjects as suggested by the studies of Snarey[3] and Goldman and Arbuthnot[14].

The learning-moral advancement and moral judgement-moral action links which are fundamental to the foundation theory in the area of moral and ethical behaviour, relate directly to the primary research question this article sought to answer. These links are largely assumed in Kohlberg's CMD theory and in nearly

all studies reviewed since its inception. Malinowski and Smith's paper[7] offers some evidence in support of the assumed link between moral judgement and moral action, but none of the papers reviewed provided research-backed evidence in support of the learning-moral advancement link. More importantly, education-ists, practitioners and managers continue to assume that moral education advances moral judgement and thus results in improved moral actions, while this relationship remains conjecture.

As an example, Trevino[2], although convincing in her claim that a link exists between higher education and moral development, offers no scientific support for this claim. Armstrong's revelations of lower moral judgement scores measured in mature CPAs in comparison to college graduates also fails to provide support for this claim, despite the importance of this study's results.

An important factor in proving the assumed link between moral advancement and learning would involve devising a suitable method for measuring this link. It is apparent that, if theories such as Kohlberg's CMD theory are to have any real benefit to ethics or moral education, then this link must be proven beyond reasonable doubt.

Considering the studies which sought to measure the advancement of moral judgement, it is possible that the reported results in some did not reflect learning, but rather conditioning, the effects of which could be lost in the longer term. Indeed there appears to be a weakness in the research undertaken to date, in its failure to consider whether improvements measured are permanent or not. It would be interesting to retest subjects again a year or two after an experiment, and compare these scores with the original pre- and post-experiment scores. Intervening factors such as the subject's life experiences since the experiment could however distort the results of such a re-test.

Contemplating the quest for evidence of what forms of delivery of ethics education and/or environmental factors best facilitate student learning, the literature failed to reveal any of a comparative nature. Many of the studies noted compared one type of delivery to a control group where no ethics or moral education was rendered, or offered a largely unsupported opinion on the effectiveness of a particular medium[15]. However this only serves to suggest that the medium utilized in the experiment has some effect perhaps, but not that it is the best or most efficient means of facilitating learning. The Boyd study[17] went part of the way in its comparison of three courses, (two of which were ethics-based) which allowed some comparison between the delivery methods in terms of effectiveness. However, as this was not the primary focus of this study, little is reported about the secondary delivery method, except that the moral reasoning scores of the subjects involved in this course did not increase as a result of the course.

What is curious about many of the studies noted in this article is that the actual administration of courses between studies is often different, but seldom have differences from what has gone before been commented on in subsequent studies. One common theme was the almost exclusive use of group participation in the studies. The delivery medium was not, however, well reported in some studies, such as Penn and Collier[13].

Many researchers expressed the opinion that media which invoke participation and role-taking are ideal for ethics and moral education[2,15]. Others, with a similar viewpoint, propounded group interaction, or socialization, as being effective, as highlighted by the studies of Nichols and Day[9], Dukerich *et al.*[4] and Cava[16]. Cava claims that the process of group interaction stimulates critical thinking in the participants. More research is required in this area. Kummerow[19], in discussing Graaskamp's methods, implies an integrated approach which permits contextualization of moral and ethical issues. However, the comparative effectiveness of individual delivery media, such as role-play, compared to group problem-solving sessions or general discussion periods, remains unknown and requires future research.

In conclusion, the literature reviewed fails to provide an adequate answer to the primary research question raised in this article, namely, can moral judgement and ethical behaviour be learnt? However, if the implicit relationship between moral advancement and learning exists, then the studies do provide some justification that learning may occur at least in the short term. The studies reviewed fail to establish whether what has been measured may be the result of conditioning as a result of the experimental process, or, if it is evidence that learning has occurred, whether the experience has long-lasting effects, i.e. that it has been a deep learning experience. There is clearly considerable scope for further research in this important and fundamental area of education.

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Further reading

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Application questions

- (1) The author's view is that the existing literature is inconclusive on whether moral and ethical behaviour can be learned. What is your view on the question?
- (2) What is morality in business? What are business ethics?