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# Reflection on the Integration of Ethics Teaching Into a Palestinian Undergraduate Management Degree Programme

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### **Abstract**

This paper is concerned with the question of incorporation of ethics teaching into an undergraduate management degree that is currently lacking in all Palestinian universities, though ethics is needed most to build a transparent accountability in a newly born Palestinian Authority. It is argued that the contribution of teaching the overall programme can be understood in terms of particular characteristics common to mainstream management/organizational studies modules and those in ethics. These characteristics reflect a model for degree curriculum concerned with organizational process in general, as well as an institutional culture favourable to critical perspectives on the subject matter. The emphasis on generic processes would distinguish this curriculum from those that focus more on functional area of business organizations. The paper considers these contrasting models for curriculum design, the question of module evaluation, the institutional context, the rational and content of the ethics modules and their relationship to other elements of the degree programme. It concludes with a particular emphasis on the case for a critical perspective in business ethics teaching.

**Keywords:** Ethics teaching; Business management; Palestine; Curriculum; Cultural context; Syllabus; Module; Kantian; Utilitarianism; Emotive theory.

### Introduction

A significant number of higher education students from Palestine started to study business and management at UK universities as a contemporary development educational trend (Schermerhorn, 2002). Although Palestinian universities might be expected to aim to produce well-rounded graduates, there has been a perception that business schools have tended to take a narrow view of business studies in comparison to the entity of Western business schools, especially in UK and USA (Hajjawi, 2007; Hajjawi,2008b). Such expansion of business schools would appear to provide an opportunity to educate future managers about ethical issues that draw together three areas of inquiry and their literatures, namely: corporate culture and organizational behaviour, business philosophy and philosophical ethics (Crossley et al, 1993). A significant proportion of Western hemisphere institutions are now offering at least some business ethics teaching, either within a "mainstream" subject or as a separate module (Appendix 1).

There has been much written material about the incorporation of ethics teaching into business and management that started back a decade or so in both UK and USA, addressing the issues at

undergraduate, postgraduate and post experience levels (Mahoney, 1990; De George, 1991; Snell, 1997; Dunfee and Robertson, 1988). The business ethics education has been since then the subject of repeated studies and surveys (Cummins, 1999; QAA, 2000). In contrast, Arab Business Schools have not been explicit in the introduction and institutionalization of an ethics component into the undergraduate management degree (Hajjawi, 2008a; Hajjawi,2008b). The primary purpose of writing this paper is not to discuss or claim any particular merit in the actual teaching methods used in teaching ethics courses; it is rather to consider their nature in curriculum terms, with particular reference to their embeddings in the degree electives as a whole. This may entail few comments on details of teaching, such as the use of case material and religious socio-economics, but this integration and alignment with the rationale of the overall degree programme must lend much to the contribution of students' learning.

## **Two Modules for Curriculum Design**

The ethics modules have evolved over a period of many years, and this development has reflected the institutional and academic context in which it has taken place. That context is characterized by a focus on the management degree programme, on the generally applicable and critical studies of organisations as systems (Whetstone, 1998). This model is called an 'organisational' model for ethics teaching, and management is assumed to be a generic process common to all types of organization.

Since ethical studies are commonly phased into descriptive ethics, normative ethics and metaethics (De George, 2006), such a model should be regarded as an 'ideal-type' (Weber, 1949). It accentuates certain features to a simplified and exaggerated extent for purposes of comparison with actual practice. Ethical decision making and the moral dimension to persons' conduct is seen as part of this process, and considerable attention is paid to social, organisational and psychological factors influencing and explaining such actions and behaviour. Similarly, the normative ethical questions were concerned with organisational concepts and processes, such as interpersonal relations, motivation, and responsibility, rather than specific business issues in finance, marketing, etc.

A 'business studies' model is very much contrasting the organisational model (Trevino and Nelson, 1995; Maclagan, 1998). There is usually an assumption here that we are dealing with private sector business. There is more emphasis on equipping students to address ethical issues and dilemmas in specific areas such as accounting, advertising, human resources, marketing or sales. These areas may represent the functional differentiation of business organisations into specific departments or divisions. This model may risk leading us into a reduction trap of ignoring the holistic nature of organisations as homologous systems, and overlooking the generic social processes of ethical management, which are addressed in the organisational model. A 'business studies' model appears to be dominant paradigm for contemporary business ethics education (Cummins, 1999).

The ontology status of organisations and questions of corporate responsibility have to be addressed, but the focus would be on the search for normative ethical answers to specific substantive moral questions in business, such as whether 'bluffing' in commercial transactions is ethical, and whether it is acceptable to subject consumers to psychological pressure through advertising, or 'creative accounting'. The modules being considered here are not labeled 'business ethics', because it is of their basis in the organisational model. The modules should represent the ethos of management degree programme.

### **Criteria for Evaluation**

The evaluation of programmes in higher education, as elsewhere, is hugely problematic (Patton, 1978). Different interested parties will have different, often conflicting, criteria by which they judge the design, delivery and consequences of such activity. Some of these criteria will be very specific and means-related. Others will refer to the wider context and they may perhaps be classed as ends-related. Much of the information gathered from students through module evaluation questionnaires (MEQs) falls into the first category, dealing with technical matters such as the clarity of actual lectures, the usefulness of reading lists, the organization of tutorials, etc. At the other extreme, the extent to which a

particular module reflects overall programme goals (or 'ends') may be vague, difficult to assess, and yet it might be of fundamental importance. Moreover, although student 'learning outcomes' may be defined for a degree programme, there is a wider array of stakeholders in university education whom we should not overlook. The potential employers are most obvious, but also society at large is of great importance.

The degree learning outcomes are officially defined in terms of knowledge and understanding, as well as skills of various types: intellectual, practical and transferable. A Management programme includes "the significance of values and ethics in an organizational context". It is strongly implied the synergic students' benefit of learning from the overlap between the ethics modules and other cognate subjects in the curriculum. Information on the extent to which this might actually happen is not specifically sought through MEQs. Patten (1978, pp. 109-113) stresses that evaluation on the basis of unintended benefits is no less important than that captured in other formal data. These benefits are the benefits on integration, and students have acknowledges that overlap between the ethics modules and a concern for values and critical thinking found elsewhere in the programme is valuable and stimulating (Power and Lundsten, 2001).

### 1. Evaluation by Staff

The learning outcomes indicated above represent the criteria by which staff would assess the adequacy of the ethics modules. 'Knowledge and understanding' here includes a raised awareness of ethics in management, and a capacity to see connections with other parts of the degree programme. We are also concerned with the students' intellectual development and a 'critical thinking' capacity. Our concerns would be going well beyond the ability to simply reiterate prepared arguments. Hence, a capacity to think, for example in the application of ethical theory, is itself a transferable skill. The module 'performance' is measured by way of making exams and other assessed work, apart from ad hoc estimation in tutorials. But what does a mean students' grade really tell us regarding the adequacy of the modules? One should not be surprised at a greater number of poor results from weaker students or from those who may take exception to the subject, but that need not mean that the curriculum or teaching methods are inappropriate.

### 2. Evaluation by Students

In discussing module evaluation the views of students tend to assume centre stage, though students themselves vary in their standpoint that is being disguised by statistical averages. We are talking here about beliefs and judgments on the quality of delivery as they experience it, on how interesting they find a subject, on their assessment of its relevance to their 'vocational' aspirations and on the intellectual stimulation they derive from it. There are other factors which may have more bearing on whether students select an optional module in the first place, such as its reputation as an 'easy' subject, the known pass rates, or the lecturer's popularity. Other students resent being required to take ethics as an elective and they may adopt a hostile attitude towards it. This can be because they do not see ethics as relevant for the practice of management as they understand it. Antipathy may also reflect the fact that the subject is not easy intellectually, and weaker students may blame the course or the lecturer rather than their own shortcomings. If students have made a conscious choice of the subject, for which an early module is a prerequisite, they are better placed to see how ethics relate to the practice of management.

As already stated, statistical MEQs data tend to emphasize means-related, technical, aspects of teaching and learning support, rather than the more diffuse question of the integration of the module curriculum with the overall degree programme. There are however two items in the MEQs that have broader implications: A question on the level of interest generated by the lecturers, and another on the amount of intellectual content in the module. The latter may be associated with a degree of difficulty experienced by students, and/or their evaluation of practical relevance. It may reflect a 'tail' of disaffected students, or it is perhaps clouded a comment on the lecturer rather than on the subject as such! There is an opportunity on the questionnaires to students to provide additional qualitative

feedback such as that management/business ethics is an "interesting subject" (Turban and Meredith, 1991; Hajjawi, 2008a).

### 3. Evaluation by Others

Employers and general public would be interested in the topic as well as students and academics. The emphasis in these modules is on anchoring the whole subject area in the broader organizational context, and on cultivation of a transferable skill in handling ethical issues and dilemmas. It has to be part of a generic process of management to equip managers to address adequately the ethical dilemmas that are inescapable of modern business and public life (Webley, 1995). The functioning of the organization in terms of its efficiency, profitability or effectiveness in the provision of product or service is not threatened by many such dilemmas of every day issues. Their resolution is often beneficial to such performance, though profound matters arise when such functional standards and goals are threatened by a demand to take account of other social and environmental values. Such conflicts are discussed in the final year ethics module in the BA Management (Appendix 1), building on the critical management studies tradition.

Employers may view business ethics versus educational courses in terms of strategically useful concepts and theories that might help managers to pilot the organization through enemy waters that might be environmental and social pressure groups, a hostile media, ethically motivated consumers and public opinion generally. This 'enlightened self-interest' standpoint is inevitable effect of commercial pressures. This position is also adopted by some academics who feel that to "sell" ethics as a subject they must package it in a form consistent with 'business' values. The legitimate concerns of people are rightly recognized in business ethics curriculum. It should be therefore recognized that individual employees might seek to express moral concern over much matters, and they should be helped to acquire a capacity to do something about it. Nonetheless, one should recognize the difference between 'ethics as functionally relevant' and 'ethics as genuine moral concern'. The latter should take precedence, and it does not need to preclude the former. This particular case represents the 'critical thinking' ethos.

### Discussion

### 1. The Institutional Cultural Context

Ever since the inception of the management programme there has been some core components with somewhat radical intellectual ethos, reflecting the leanings of the teaching staff (De George, 2006). These would demonstrate a critical awareness of values and ideology in management theory, as well as a healthy, constructive, skepticism of much empirical research in the field. For example, interpretation of the Hawthorn experiments; the origins of the Human Relations movement in management (Roethlisberger and Dixon, 1939) would include a reference to counter-interpretations such as Carey (1967) and to the issue of psychological manipulation (Baritz, 1960). Some staff has been indeed attracted to the institution, because they have also taken to this culture. Hence, there has been an implicit if not explicit concern for ethics in some other modules in the general area of management and organizational studies, as well as in accounting, marketing, etc. (Burrell and Morgan, 1979; Jackson and Carter, 2000). So, the introduction of an ethics degree programme was a natural development in 1989 (Cowton and Cummins, 2002). The author's experience has apparently prevailed at many UK institutions.

### 2. The Rationale of Ethics Modules of the BA Management Degree

Fayol (1949) famously identified the generic process of management in organizations in terms of planning, organizing, directing and controlling. Accordingly, the BA management emphasizes the process of managing within any organizational setting and it gives particular attention to the role of ethics as an integral part of that process. The programme was subsequently enhanced by curriculum

developments in systems theory, operational research, organization development, organizational analysis and information technology, as well as subjects that are more associated with functional areas of organizations, such as marketing and human resources management (De George, 2006). The principal focus of a final year course on ethics was on the application of ethical theory. As the curriculum has evolved it has broadened to consider one's conduct and capacity for moral reasoning, organizational cultures, systems and structures. This has a bearing on requisite lecturer's 'skills and experience' to articulate the importance of comprehending theoretical connections with other areas of management and organisation (Robbins and DeCenzo, 2005; Cummins, 1999).

### **Outline Syllabuses of Ethics Modules**

Since ethics implies human conduct, the perspective on business ethics treats it as a particular interpretation of the organizational behaviour as an academic subject. Thus, the aim of the module at the early start of the programme teaching is to raise awareness of the ethical dimension to management. It is to provide grounding in ethical theory, and to stimulate students' imagination in order to recognize moral dilemmas and to handle them adequately (Appendix 1). It is emphatically not to 'convert' or to steer students' to a particular viewpoint, though Bishop (1992) argued that persons' values are not fixed at adolescence. It is probably wise to assume that 'moral conversion' is not a prime objective (Cooke and Ryan, 1988). It is rather well intentioned individuals who may encounter moral dilemmas in organization, would then articulate the ethical values in such specific situations. Waters et al. (1986) found that managers encounter frequently moral issues involving 'everyday' matters like staff, customers, suppliers, and others that relate to trust, integrity and so forth. Child (1972) and Anthony (1986) made a distinction in the discretionary nature of much executive action, as opposed to a more deterministic model implied in some management textbooks that seemingly assume inevitability of commercial forces. A heightened concern of ethics could increase pressure on managers to exercise personal judgment in reconciling value conflicts (Toffler, 1986). An introduction to the idea of moral development is a further included link between the real organizational context for moral behaviour and the different normative ethical theories (Kohlberg, 1981). The normative ethical element comprised the standard Kantian and Utilitarian theories (De George, 2006). Other perspectives include feminist critique (Gilligan, 1982), virtue ethics (Pincoffs, 1986), and the theory of prima facie duties (Ross, 1930) as developed by Dancy (1993). Other specific topics of general relevance to management comprise trust, equality, discrimination, work, and motivation. They provide a connection with the other elements of the overall degree programme concerned with organizational behaviour, human resource management, decision making, marketing, etc.

Employers might look for key issues in an ethics course, and they include the legitimacy of managerial authority on matters of ethics, employee dissent, whistle blowing, the role of non-government organizations (NGO), and various interpretations of corporate and individual responsibility as a significant aspect of contemporary business ethics enquiry (Cummins, 1999). It is worth remembering that although control-oriented position is defined in terms of enforced adherence to organizational values, no amount of managerial control can entirely eliminate the need for personal discretion and moral judgment. The programme is multidisciplinary and it has more emphasis on concepts and theory from other disciplines such as education, politics, psychology and sociology.

### **Education and the Process of Dilemma Resolution**

This paper is not primarily concerned with the detail of teaching and learning methodology; the process invites a particular pedagogical emphasis. Many cases and vignettes have to be discussed in tutorials (Appendix 2). The main mode of analysis appears as moral duties prima facie, and an appropriate solution is then adopted on the basis of moral judgment that is influenced by past learning of Kant's categorical imperative, Utilitarianism, Rawlsian-like approach to justice, and so on. It is very possible to identify features of a situation that "makes a difference" for a verdict in the case in question (Dancy, 1993). For example, how will you implement a redundancy scheme in the face of a business downturn? One may have a moral duty to protect those employees who might lose their jobs, but it is more pressing if there is no alternative work for them! Dancy (1993) emphasized that one might make particular efforts to assist those losing their jobs, i.e. if one decides on one duty over another, this does not mean the other duty is ignored. Also, if you must convey bad news to someone it will be best done face to face rather than by other means of communication, in order to use precise language, tone of voice, posture, and so forth. This stresses the means to cultivate generic capacity to cope with moral issues and dilemmas. The focus is on the ethical issues thinking that becomes part of the business decision-making process, though a great deal of 'reality' is lacking such as knowledge of the actual characters, emotional aspect and contextual detail (Oddo, 1997).

### **The Non-cognitive Dimension**

It is quite unrealistic to divorce cognitive aspects of ethics in management and organization from the need to cope with social and emotional pressures, and the need to assert yourself and so on (Snell, 1993). Such a non-cognitive facet of real organizational life is intertwined with the emotive theory of ethics that our moral expressions for a particular situation represent our emotional responses. Individuals with particular personal qualities can resist hierarchical directives (Trevino, 1986). It is hoped that students can become more aware of what is happening when individuals do not act on ethical issues. When students are implicitly alerted to the effect of social pressure groups (Asch, 1956; Festinger, 1957) they may become more able to resist bullying tactics.

### 3. The Intra-relationship of the Ethics Modules

The interrelationships between business ethics and other subjects within management degree programme may take various forms. But, a separate ethics component is something that seems to be assumed as normal by many people in UK and USA (Gandz and Hayes, 1988; Sims and Sims, 1991, Acevedo, 2001, De George, 2006). Of course there are arguments opposed specific courses on ethics as a distinct theme. One of the main grounds for this position is viewed as a subordinate to the 'more important' business values of efficiency and effectiveness in underpinning mainstream subject matter. A third way therefore would clearly avoid the dangerous tendencies just noted; yet it adds certain advantages of a separate module. This is to stipulate both a distinct component on ethics, and to integrate it into the rest of the curriculum (Acevedo, 2001). This is what is now happening on the BA management degree as ethical aspects of the module are diffused rather than integrated explicitly due to the critical stance adopted in some of these other modules (Appendix 1). If adequate coverage of the generically applicable theory is to be provided, it will surely make sense to do this in a single compulsory ethics module. Such a theoretical foundation is desirable to make the students become more able to grasp the seriousness and complexity of ethical problems (Sims and Sims, 1991). Sims et al. (1993), Watson (1994) and De George (2006) provided a vicarious introduction to the reality of organizational life and other significant aspects of organisational behaviour.

The first year courses of ethics prepare students for later in-depth study, and not exclusively to ethics modules. In the second year ethics learning, theories of Kantian, Utilitarian and Taylor's (1967) "scientific management" are used to critically reinterpret concepts and theories of management and organisation. In the final year ethics course, the moral implications of organizational politics, the attribution of responsibility, bureaucracy, authority and dissent are considered. Management learning

and problem solving have identifiable inherent links with ethics and moral development. This is alongside the teaching in accounting, finance, human resources, and marketing management. The students will therefore draw connections between the ethics teaching and other subjects. Such synthesis is facilitated and reinforced by case studies (Appendix 2), especially discussions on knowledge, power and ideology in organizations (Jackson and Carter, 2000).

### **Conclusion**

This paper attempts to show how ethics can be implemented in Palestinian business schools. It has intentionally focused on how can Palestinian business schools might be able to adopt the integration of two ethics modules into an undergraduate management degree programme. The curriculum design was suggested in two "ideal type" models. The first, the 'organizational' model, emphasizes generic process of management. The second, the 'business studies' model, reflects the assumed functional divisions of business organizations. The ethics modules are primarily concerned with handling of moral issues and dilemmas in general, the organizational and behavioural context, and other generally applicable dimensions to ethics in organizations. This was contrasted with business ethics that puts more emphasis on normative ethical issues. However, although organizational and business studies models are distinct paradigms, they are totally compatible. The BA degree programmes based on the business studies model could incorporate a generic process-oriented ethics component, considering that moral conduct and ethical decision-making are surely an aspect of behaviour in/of organizations. The detailed matter of connecting this learning with others topics such as finance, human resources, marketing, etc. is beyond the scope of this paper because reference to other empirical cases would be required.

It is now possible to present ethics as a strategic value to management. Since business schools serve corporate market, the curriculum has to incorporate a concern for genuine ethical thinking. Yet, ethics teaching is not about contributing to business 'success' in merely functional sense, it is mainly about doing the 'morally right' thing. The final year ethics module is distinctively about the difference between managerial dictation over what counts as ethical and the right of the individuals to be treated as morally responsible people. Of course employees and senior managers will doubtless concur with the view that integrity, fairness, and other obvious moral principles are important thought they may disagree on their interpretation in actual situations. It is crucial to comprehend that "whistle blowing" individuals might on occasion feel a need to dissent from what they see as an ethically questionable corporate line, or they draw attention to ethically significant problems in organizational systems. It is the "unconscious civilization", a need to counter tendencies towards suppression of individuals' moral awareness. The whole self should be actively employed, not merely the functionally useful parts of it. Hence, ethics must be an integral part of business and management education, and the values dimension is readily done when the overall curriculum accommodates critical thinking about human purposes and organizational goals and conducts.

In conclusion, the adage of "there is no free lunch" is often quoted in business circles to link what we get with what we pay. The price in Palestine might be in money, time, and convenience and in opportunities lost.

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# **Appendix 1: Outline Syllabuses of Ethics Modules**

- 1] Ethics and values
  - Defining ethics and morality. Meta-ethics and normative ethics.
  - Defining values. Values and ethics. Social and personal values.
  - Cultural variations. Organizational influences.
- 2] Ethical values and organizational life
  - Organizations, values and ethics.
  - The evolution of business ethics.
  - Organizational goals and the concept of rationality.
  - Management theories. Egoism and altruism. Human nature in the workplace.
- 3] Moral issues and dilemmas in management
  - Types of moral issues faced by managers.
  - Moral issues and moral dilemmas.
- 4] Normative ethics
  - Kohlberg's theory. Individual cognitive or moral development.
  - 'Contemporary' ethical theories. Consequentialism and Utilitarianism. Deontology and Kant's ethics.
  - Disillusionment with 'modern' ethical theories. A retreat from modernity!
- 5] Moral judgment in organizations
  - The organizational context for managerial moral judgment.
  - The application of the *prima facie* duties approach.
- 6] Trust and distrust in organizations
  - Trust as a central concept in organizational behaviour. Vulnerability, jeopardy and uncertainty.
  - Analyzing (dis)trust. Interpersonal and systemic (dis)trust relations. Corrupt trust relations.
  - Trust and professionalisation. Management control as distrust?
- 7] Justice, equality and discrimination in the workplace
  - Inequality and discrimination in organization. Explanations for inequality.
  - Discrimination in organizations. Systemic and individual bias. Deliberate and unintentional discrimination.
  - The equitable organization. Distributive justice. Procedural justice.
- 8] Work, motivation and management control
  - Work and alienation concept. Work as subjectively meaningful.
  - Self-interest and service at work. Socially useful work. Cultural and organizational constraints.
  - Subjective and objective concepts of responsibility. The ambiguity of 'responsibility' as a concept in management theories.
  - An ethical critique of schools of thought in management theories: Kantian and Utilitarian arguments. Management science, human relations, self-actualization. Participative management and manipulation.
- 9] Paradigms for organizational ethics
  - Managerial control and individual moral autonomy.
- 10] Moral responsibility in organizations
  - The concept of responsibility.
  - Psychological theories and explanations for the denial of individual responsibility.
- 11] Moral dissent in organizations
  - Political obligation.
  - Loyalty and dissent.
  - Whistle blowing.

- 12] Organizational responsibility and stakeholder theories
  - Theories of stakeholder relations.
  - Corporate social responsibility as a process.

### 13] Developing organizations

- Organizational culture and leadership.
- Codes of ethics.
- Communication, dialogue and the moral community.

## 14] Moral development and managers' development

- Individual moral development revisited.
- Management development in the context of ethics.

# 15] Global issues and moral obligation

- Famine, malnutrition.
- Oil and the depletion of natural resources.
- Kyoto protocol.
- Science and the media.
- Animal rights. Animal subjects in research.
- Intellectual property rights. Genome, human genetic mapping.

# **Appendix 2: Example of a Case Study for Tutorial**

Ahmad is the general manager of a large superstore, one of high street national chain. He worked for this organization for 20 years, and he feels considerably loyal towards it. He has just returned from monthly senior managers' meeting at headquarters where the managing director has strictly informed him in confidence that his store is scheduled for closure. He will be personally transferred to another nearby store. The fate of his staff is unclear, but the manager director has promised to involve him in decision on their future. Ahmad also knows that other local organization that is currently expanding may provide his staff with alternative employment opportunities if they apply quickly.

Hasan who is Ahmad's assistant, has been a friend for many years. He 'phoned' Ahmad to discuss with him the rumors that are already circulating about the closure of the store. He is particularly concerned, because his wife is expecting their second child in a month' time and they are thinking of buying a house. Ahmad realizes facing a moral dilemma what to say to him.

- 1. Show how an approach based on the idea of *prima facie* moral duties might help Ahmad in deciding what to do.
- 2. Consider this dilemma from:
  - (a.) Kantian perspective, based on the Categorical Imperative, and
  - (b.) Utilitarian ethical perspective.