Engaging Creativity – Bringing Business Ethics to Life

Extract from Paper for Future Publication

This paper discusses a project undertaken by the University of Roehampton Business School with the help of an HEA Development Grant, to provide a method for teaching Business Ethics in a way that engages students. The first phase of the project involved students creating fictional scenarios based on their own real-life working experiences and is the primary focus of this paper. The second phase involves the creation of a 3D Animated Game based on a particular scenario, which is currently under development.

The paper explores the idea of creativity within the context of business management courses – traditionally courses designed from a scientific paradigm. It examines what role the arts can play to enhance teaching and inspire new business leaders. As far back as 1976 Mintzberg ascertained that management education needed serious revision to redress the balance of 'left hemisphere' dominated activities in which maths and economic theory rule (1976). The consensus was that the focus on the scientific paradigm of rationalist positivism, as opposed to the intuitive gestalt had produced technocrats and craftsmen but few 'artists' (Bolman & Deal, 1991). In 2004 Mintzberg maintained that little change has been seen in management education over the years, despite the fact that business has changed irrevocably with increased competition through technological development and globalisation (Drucker, 2002). However Adler points to a sea change in management education, 'Managing as designing – rather than as decision making - is now considered so important that a growing number of top business schools are partnering with designers and design schools to co-create their curriculum.' (2011 p.211)

The current array of crises befalling the world (financial, educational, environmental) have all come about or been exacerbated by ethical failings and Alder comments that this means developing creative solutions is no longer a luxury but a necessity (2011 p.210). She comments on General Kofi Annan's challenge to the world's business community to 'reposition itself by "*jumping levels*"' (ibid p. 209) – adjuring leaders to focus less on the success of individual executives and companies and to see 'civilisation and the planet' as their 'ultimate clients'. Adler maintains that a key role in education should be to help 'current and future leaders reposition themselves' – to 'expand from the micro (individual) focus to a macro (societal) perspective' and this requires the power of artistic processes to foster a creative economy – one that appreciates and embraces beauty. The idea of aspiring to beauty resonates when considering how to teach Business Ethics. Our goal should be to help in the development of business leaders as strategic managers capable of *jumping levels – to see the bigger picture*. This requires students who are able to see reality for what it is – to have sensitivity to their surroundings, much as an artist would and to think *creatively* to find innovative solutions not necessarily tried before and to have the *courage* to think outside the box.

Teaching professional ethics effectively requires more than the reductive analytical approach often seen on business ethics courses in which moral decision-making exercises and codes of conduct are evaluated through case study. The development of ethical sensitivity (an important component of moral development) (Jagger, 2011) experiences a number of stages. Ethical sensitivity is an ability to perceive that a moral problem exists that partly occurs semi or sub-consciously through empathetic response. Interpretation of that problem is a conscious realisation and is sometimes followed by (although not always) an attitudinal or behavioural change in acknowledgement of the dilemma (Narvaez, 1996). There are many factors at play in challenging students in their evaluation of ethical situations that involve deeper perceptions – the 'seeing' of dilemmas, and the emotive understanding of the situation from different perspectives; the personal experience of that individual. Thus to teach ethics effectively requires seeing through multiple lenses - that is utilising a combination of both scientific and artistic philosophies. (Peroff, 1999) explained the differing elements that exist within management as a science and management as an art,

> When management is considered a science, the knowledge that a manager uses to keep an organization moving effectively in a given direction largely has its origin in rigorous scientific research acquired in strict adherence to the scientific method. When management is viewed as an art, knowledge about how to keep an organization moving successfully in the right direction is in tune with primal human nature and springs from a manager's intuition,

> imagination, and creativity.' (p. 99)

Maranvile's recent paper expounds the importance of the artistic paradigm in the teaching of strategic management. He contends that liberal and fine art 'share the essential quality of creative expression through interpretation' (2011 p.788) and thus study of these art forms are a suitable method to help in the development of interpretation and expression. He describes a classroom exercise in which students analysed a business level case study using the prescribed methodology, after which he asked students to develop a strategic vision related to the case and to depict the vision by painting with oils. He explained that as synthesis was effectively a creative function, evaluation would best be served using a creative medium. He wanted his students 'to experience the difficulties of not only conceiving a strategic vision but also of implementing and executing that vision as it was conceived' (ibid, p.795).

Similar to Maranvile, I also required my ethics class students to do something creative in the form of writing a fictional story about ethics. The assignment involved a number of sections which included working in groups to discuss their own personal ethical experiences at work; research to analyse how their experiences compared with current views and legislation; and finally to write a story about a fictional event of an ethical dilemma experienced by someone in the workplace.

The use of storytelling has long been accepted by leaders and educators as a way of communicating a vision or message. Gabriel and Connell comment on the usefulness of the story particularly in a world in which information overload is prevalent, to help make sense of complex experiences,

> By linking events together through the magic of plot, stories enable the storyteller to cast individuals into roles, such as hero, victim, villain and so forth, to pass judgments on others' actions and to draw moral conclusions. (2010 p.507-8)

Schultz (1960) referred to telling a story as a 'recipe' in which sense-making is implied, as the story delivers an interpretation which defines meaning whilst also providing a strategy for action. There are many examples of the use of storytelling to bring about meaning and how they help to shape organisations and organisational character (Boje et al, 1982). The power of the group narrative in the development of organisational identity is discussed by Brown (2006, p.735), '…the fabric is both a patchwork quilt of narrative episodes stitched together through shared conversations, and rippled, with stories variously borrowing threads from each other, continuing and extending some, and seeking to unravel others'.

The presentation discusses how the assignment which utilised group storytelling was formulated; my experiences as a lecturer; and the perceptions of students about the work based on two anonymous surveys.

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Biography

Dr Suzy Jagger is a Principal Lecturer at the University of Roehampton teaching undergraduates and postgraduates within the Business School in the areas of Professional Ethics, Web Design and Management Information Systems. Since 2011 she has been a member of the Business School Executive Team and responsible for Learning & Teaching strategies within the school. Her work as an innovative practitioner was recognised in 2004 with the award of a University Teaching Fellowship and last year she was awarded an HEA Development Grant to develop a 3D Animated game to aid in the teaching of Business Ethics - http://www.roehampton.ac.uk/staff/Suzy-Jagger/ .