Business Ethics Education and Faculty Teaching Expertise: Are Business School Educators equipped, trained and capable to teach Normative Ethical Theory?

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Statement of Originality

This dissertation contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. I give consent to the final version of my dissertation being made available worldwide when deposited in the University’s Digital Repository, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

(Signed)

Sven Erlic 9th August, 2015
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Abstract

Business schools are increasingly introducing the teaching of ethics into their academic programs and in particular to MBA’s, partially in response to recent business scandals. Nevertheless, the overwhelming trend is to teach ethics within another subject rather than as a compulsory and stand-alone subject. The reason is partially because empirical researches into the effectiveness of business ethics education do not reach uniform conclusions. A portion of studies have found that ethics education is ineffective and therefore concluded that ethics cannot be taught.

However, there is a growing call to investigate variables that were never explored in these studies, and in particular: the subject knowledge of the educators and their teaching methods. Therefore, in response to that call, this study sought to find out if currently employed business school educators have an appropriate level of knowledge in the subject of normative ethical theory, and if any particular variable increases an educator’s level of teaching expertise for teaching ethics.

This quantitative study surveyed 128 academics that teach ethics to business students in 29 Australian universities in order to test their ability to teach ethics effectively. It found that academics, highly educated in business and management but who have themselves not studied ethics as a stand-alone subject, do not have a reasonable understanding of normative ethical theory
and concluded that they are therefore unlikely to be able to teach ethics successfully. It found that an overwhelming majority of business school educators are not equipped, trained or capable to teach ethics to business students. However, it also found that educators who had themselves been taught ethics as a stand-alone subject did have a reasonable understanding of ethics theory and therefore concluded that there is a higher likelihood that ethics can be taught effectively if it is taught by educators who themselves have studied ethics, critical thinking or philosophy as a stand-alone subject.