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NETWORK APPROACH IN BUSINESS ETHICS EDUCATION

Summary. This paper is concerned with the network approach as a background for ethical considerations covered in ethics courses in business schools of higher education. Different levels of recognizing business ethics processes are presented based on Thaft and White's (2007) concept. Moreover, authors illustrate some useful educational practices that, when incorporated in curricula, may potentially enhance the educational process in the business ethics field.

Keywords: business ethics, networks, education

PODEJŚCIE SIECIOWE W KSZTAŁCENIU ETYKI BIZNESU

Streszczenie. W artykule zaprezentowano podejście sieciowe, jako tło dla rozważań etycznych podejmowanych w ramach zajęć dydaktycznych z zakresu etyki, prowadzonych w wyższych szkołach biznesu. Przedstawiono różne perspektywy (poziomy) postrzegania procesów etyki biznesu, opierając się na koncepcji Thafta i White'a (2007). Ponadto, autorki wskazują kilka przydatnych praktyk, których wdrożenie do programów nauczania potencjalnie stwarza możliwości doskonalenia procesu kształcenia w obszarze etyki biznesu.

Słowa kluczowe: etyka biznesu, sieci, kształcenie

1. Introduction

One of the most commented on trouble spots in management education of the past decade has been a weak moral condition of business school graduates as there are many voiced opinions about a lack of these schools' ability to educate ethical business professionals¹. Neubaum et al.² support this stance claiming that "many of the recent discussions have centered (...) on how the theoretical foundations of business school education may be linked to ethical lapses and scandals involving managers who have been subjected to business school training". This opinion is based on numerous blatant examples of corporate managers (such as Jeffrey Skilling and Kenneth Lay from Enron, Bernard Ebbers and Scott Sullivan from WorldCom, Calisto Tanzi and Fausto Tonna from Parmalat, etc.) who initiated great moral scandals having severe consequences on the whole financial sector. However, it is important to note that the above mentioned persons were not the only ones responsible for the collapse of business morals as there is much evidence showing that also auditing companies and other financial institutions participated in these underhand dealings. There emerges a question: was enough effort taken to prevent those companies from catastrophe and who failed to do this? The answer is not straightforward as it is very difficult to attribute moral responsibility in today's radically networked business field.

Nowadays, as the world has become global, we face problems of a new kind. Newly emerging challenges are mostly caused by common human interconnectedness and relationships between companies, communities and environment. It is impossible to deny that we live in a network society as "a historical trend, dominant functions and processes in the Information Age are increasingly organized around networks. Networks constitute the new social morphology of our societies, and the diffusion of networking logic substantially modifies the operation and outcomes in processes of production, experience, power, and culture"³. Today "power and powerlessness are a function of access to networks and control over flows. (...) Access to significant networks (i.e., status as a node) is a minimum condition of social, economic and political membership in the network society, and lack of access both reflects and reproduces disenfranchisement, but this is not to say that mere access constitutes

¹ See: Ghoshal S.: Bad management theories are destroying good management practices. "Academy of Management Learning and Education", No. 4(1), 2005; Swanson D.L.: The buck stops here: why universities must reclaim business ethics education. "Journal of Academic Ethics", No. 2(1), 2004; Sims R., Felton E.L.: Designing and delivering business ethics teaching and learning. "Journal of Business Ethics", No. 63(3), 2006; Mitroff I.I.: An open letter to the deans and faculties of American business schools. "Journal of Business Ethics", No. 54(2), 2004.

² Neubaum D.O., Pagell M., Drexler Jr. J.A., McKee-Ryan F.M., Larson E.: Business education and its relationships to student personal moral philosophies and attitudes toward profits: An empirical response to critics. "Academy of Management Learning and Education", No. 8(1), 2009, p. 9.

³ Castells M.: The Rise of Network Society. Blackwell Publisher, Malden, MA 2000, p. 500.

empowered membership or equality.”⁴ Thus, in order to manage effectively with awareness of ongoing processes it is necessary to understand a network approach and to try to manage the network. It is also a great challenge for business schools to prepare their future graduates to play significant roles in their prospective networks and deal with ethical issues in a network economy.

This paper is concerned with the network approach as a background for ethical considerations covered in ethical courses in business higher education. Different levels of recognizing business ethics processes are presented as well as some useful educational practices that, when incorporated in curricula, may potentially enhance the educational process in the ethics field.

2. Networking and Network Approach

The theoretical background on networks is really extensive but it also includes many different issues, some of which highly relate to management and business education. The notion of networking became present in many publications about managerial practices and it is an element of business schools' curricula. That is why it should be distinguished from the network approach, which is a further concept. Nevertheless, networking shall be briefly discussed here as some networking practices are embodied in the network approach.

Although there is much evidence that networking as a general business strategy is very fruitful, it mostly focuses on an individual's benefits, such as career and psychological support coming from a multitude of people both inside and outside one's organization⁵ as well as improvement of learning and knowledge acquisition⁶. These all have effects on social capital improvement of an individual⁷. Individuals are encouraged to develop networks with their stakeholders (suppliers, customers, experts, etc.) as they may provide specific know-how, reputation development, and access to unique resources⁸. Relationships with others are a resource that can provide new ideas, timely information, job opportunities, business leads,

⁴ Barney D.: *The Network Society*. Polity, Cambridge, UK 2004, p. 30.

⁵ de Janasz S.C., Forret M.L.: Learning the art of networking: A critical skill for enhancing social capital and career success. "Journal of Management Education", No. 32(5), 2008.

⁶ Leeman R., Whymark J.: Networking for knowledge and business improvement: A bumpy ride for networking? "Management Services", No. 45(8), 2001.

⁷ Forret M.L.: The impact of social networks on the advancement of women and racial/ethnic minority groups [in:] M.F. Karsten (Ed.): *Gender, Ethnicity, and Race in the Workplace*, Vol. 3, Praeger/Greenwood, Westport, CT 2006.

⁸ Parker H., Arthur M.B.: *Careers, organizing and community*, [w:] M.A. Peiperl, M.B. Arthur, R. Goeffe, T. Morris (Eds.): *Career frontiers: New Conceptions of Working Lives*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK 2000.

influence and social support⁹. Networking may also bring some advantages for the manager's organization as developing contacts through such practices is important for both starting a business and its continued development¹⁰. However, the vast literature on networking education is only concerned with techniques of developing students' communication skills¹¹.

Another mainstream of networking education involves the application of ICT, especially social media, in the educational process¹² as "social networking once meant going to a social function such as a cocktail party, conference, or business luncheon. Today, much social networking is achieved through Web sites such as MySpace, FaceBook, or LinkedIn"¹³. Tools of this kind help to create an online community sharing the same subject of interest. The networking area is constituted in order to raise problems, share cases and often to find solutions and distribute information¹⁴. Moreover, it "can dynamically assist students to gain during their studies in higher education knowledge of group dynamics, the flexibility to work in teams, the ability to lead, to problem-solve and to communicate effectively"¹⁵. However, the main advantage of this social learning system is that it goes beyond the sum of its parts, where the involved persons bring their individual perspectives on any given issue and create conditions for ongoing collaboration beneficial for the whole community¹⁶.

Apart from the usefulness of social network tools in the educational process, there also exists a noticeable trend of incorporating those solutions in business ethics education and research as there emerge lots of communication platforms founded as associations or results of various multinational projects concerning those issues: Business Ethics Network (BEN), European Business Ethics Network (EBEN), Canadian Business Ethics Research Network (CBERN), Australasian Business Ethics Network (ABEN), Business and Organization Ethics

⁹ Baker W.: *Achieving success through social capital: Tapping the hidden resources in your personal and business networks*. Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, US 2000.

¹⁰ Ostgaard T.A., Birley S.: *New venture growth and personal networks*. "Journal of Business Research", No. 36, 1996.

¹¹ For instance: Friar J.H., Eddleston K.A.: *Making connections for success: A networking exercise*. "Journal of Management Education", No. 31(1), 2007; de Janasz S.C., Forret M.L.: op.cit.

¹² For instance: Wankel, Ch. (Ed.): *Cutting-Edge Social Media Approaches to Business Education: Teaching with LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, Second Life, and Blogs*. Information Age Publishing, Charlotte NC 2010; Walker R., Arnold I.: *Introducing virtual solutions for course design and delivery in business education: Experiences from two economics courses*, [in:] C.U. Ciborra, R. Mercurio, M. de Marco, M. Martinez, A. Carignani (Eds.): *Proceedings of the 11th European Conference on Information Systems. ECIS 2003, Naples, Italy 16-21 June 2003*.

¹³ Roberts S.J., Roach T.: *Social networking Web sites and human resource personnel: Suggestions for job searches*. "Business Communication Quarterly", No. 72, 2009, p. 110.

¹⁴ Ozkan B., McKenzie B.: *Social networking tools for teacher education*, [w:] K. McFerrin et al. (Eds.): *Proceedings of Society for Information Technology and Teacher Education International Conference 2008. AACE Chesapeake, VA 2008*.

¹⁵ Mentzelou P., Michailidou A., Bargouli M., Vounoukis V.: *Supporting Learning Process in Higher Education through Social Network*. Paper presented on International Conference on Interactive Computer aided Learning, 23-25.09.2009, Villach, Austria 2009.

¹⁶ Wenger E., McDermott R.A., Snyder W.M. *Cultivating Communities of Practice: A Guide to Managing Knowledge*. Harvard Business School Press, Boston, MA 2002.

Network (BON), etc. They aim at promoting ethical practices in business, increasing awareness about ethical challenges in the global economy, exchanging ideas on teaching, training and consulting in the field of business ethics and many others.

However, in this paper the approach is understood as something more than just networking perceived as a critical competency aimed at developing communicative relations. The aim of the presented approach is to integrate theoretical reasoning (including critical thinking) and practical skills necessary for a coherent perception of contemporary conditions and environment in which ethical decisions are embedded. But it is not as easy as within a network “[there] is certainly not a new culture, in the traditional sense of a system of values, because of the multiplicity of subject in [it]. (...) But there is indeed a common cultural code (...). It is made of many cultures, many values, and many projects, which cross through the minds and inform the strategies of diverse participants in the networks (...). It is a multi-faceted, virtual culture (...), a material force because it informs, enforces, powerful economic decisions at every moment in the life of the network”¹⁷. This ambiguity requires a wide perception from various viewpoints. That is why a multilevel ethical analysis is highly recommended also to business students.

Moreover, for delivering to future business entrants the foundations matching the up-to-date business reality, it is necessary to stick to the network paradigm that emerged in organizational sciences of the last decade¹⁸. This general approach is not limited just to considering contemporary organizational forms that are of network characteristic like strategic alliances, joint ventures or virtual enterprises, but it is understood as a dominant feature of today’s interdependent society that is made up of organizations and structured in networks¹⁹ that consist of nodes (that represent individuals, groups, organizations or other entities), ties being connections between the nodes and channels (like correspondence, contracts, etc.) for flows that pass between the nodes (such as financial, information or knowledge flows)²⁰.

This paper, in the process of ethics consideration, will concentrate mainly on people as nodes linked with social relationships. However, groups and organizations will be taken into account as well, because they are also perceived as living systems, which, in terms of ethical processes, are considered to be autopoietic systems “defined as unities, as networks of production of components that (1) recursively, through their interactions, generate and realize the network that produces them; and (2) constitute in the space in which they exist, the

¹⁷ Castells M.: *The Rise of Network Society*. 2nd Edition. Blackwell Publisher, Malden, MA 2000, p. 214-215.

¹⁸ Borgatti S.P., Foster P.C.: *The network paradigm in organizational research: A review and typology*. “*Journal of Management*”, No. 29(6), 2003; Adler P.S., Kwon S.W.: *Social capital: Prospects for a new concept*. “*Academy of Management Review*”, No. 27(1), 2002; Lin N. *Social Capital: A theory of Social Structure and Action*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, UK 2001.

¹⁹ Lozano J.M.: *An approach to organizational ethics*. “*Ethical Perspectives*”, No. 10(1), 2003, p. 60.

²⁰ Barney D.: *The Network Society*. Polity, Cambridge, UK 2004.

boundaries of this network as components that participate in the realization of the network...”²¹.

Nevertheless, ethical reasoning requires the incessant confrontation between multiple roles played by individuals in multilevel networks within which they exist. A particular difficulty in this matter is visible in the business professionals’ field as societies’ expectation towards it has increased heavily in recent times. Indeed, one of the greatest challenges for business school faculties is to prepare future leaders for day-to-day struggles.

3. Multilevel perspectives of ethical analysis

Contemporary societies being multilevel systems of relationships²² need to be analyzed from multilevel perspectives that give us a chance to understand better the complexity of the network processes. For this reason in this paper there was adopted the approach of Thaft and White²³ who have proposed four perspectives for ethical consideration: individual, group, organizational, and international ones and suggested moving from personal codes to international contexts during the educational process.

3.1. Individual ethics

At the very beginning considerations are aimed at grounding students in their own individual ethical principles²⁴. They need to externalize their tacit knowledge of their own beliefs that they acquired as a result of their primary socialization experience. Students input their family background, principles and values (predispositions to influence), and prior academic preparation into higher education²⁵. At the initial stage of their ethics education they become aware of the values and principles they had retained or discarded during both their childhood and adolescence and what influenced or modified their values. It provides the basis for considering ethical relativism as students become aware of familial, religious, cultural and societal roots of their individual ethics and behaviors associated with the

²¹ Maturana H.R. Autopoiesis, [in:] M. Zeleny (Ed.): Autopoiesis: A Theory of Living Organization. Elsevier Science Ltd North Holland, New York 1981.

²² Hitt M.A., Beamish P.W., Jackson S.E., Mathieu J.E.: Building theoretical and empirical bridges across levels: Multilevel research in management. “Academy of Management Journal”, No. 50, 2007.

²³ Thaft S., White J.: Ethics education: Using inductive reasoning to develop individual, group, organizational, and global perspectives. “Journal of Management Education”, No. 31(5), 2007; Cf. Reidenbach R.E., Robin D.P.: An application and extension of a multidimensional ethics scale to selected marketing practices and marketing groups. “Journal of Academy Science”, No. 19, 1990.

²⁴ See: Tyler C.L., Tyler J.M.: Applying the transtheoretical model of change to the sequencing of ethics: Instruction in business education. “Journal of Management Education”, No. 30(1), 2006.

²⁵ Weidman J.C.: Socialization of students in higher education: Organizational perspectives, [in:] C.F. Conrad, R.C. Serlin (Eds.): The SAGE Handbook for Research in Education: Engaging Ideas and Enriching Inquiry. SAGE Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA 2005.

enactment of particular principles. It should be emphasized that the individual backgrounds of network members vary a lot, especially when we take into account the diverse (e.g. multinational) network characteristic for global enterprises. Those considerations need to be discussed in class, supported by relevant case analysis. Moreover, the findings should be referred to universal codes (such as the Ten Commandments, the Golden Rule, Kant's categorical imperative) as well as rules of law and policies (Sarbanes-Oxley Act, UN Global Compact, UN Declaration of Human Rights, Global Sullivan Principles, and the Caux Principles)²⁶ as they form the basis for ethical absolutism. It is important for students to distinguish descriptive ethics, which consists in a description and/or investigation without judgment of existing moral behavior, and standards in a particular society, culture, or organization, from normative ethics, which in turn attempts to explore and explain a coherent moral ideal as the foundation for action²⁷. Through the exploration and confrontation of the foundations and origins of their own belief systems, students internalize self-understanding and theory²⁸, 2002). This level of analysis takes into account only the internal aspect of each individual student, thus, in the network context consideration is focused on a particular node. This perspective may seem to be egocentric as there is no analysis of the relationship with other network actors, but its aim is to give some foundation for empathic attitude based on ethical relativism as well as to build legal frameworks for students' future decisions.

3.2. Group ethics

Taft and White's model²⁹ as the next stage incorporates the group level of analysis. It is a crucial point of the educational process as it confronts students with a dualism between personal intrinsic code and ethics of a higher level. On this level of consideration, students become aware of the influence their local contexts, such as groups at work, school, home, and a professional community (their ego network) have on their ethical on-the-spot decisions in everyday practice. Group influence is undeniable as it can enhance, degrade, or otherwise intervene in individual ethical choices. It is not always a peer pressure, it is rather the result of socialization as most people are a product of their context; they look around and do what others expect them to do³⁰. At this level students become aware that each ethical decision is a kind of reconciliation between individual ethics and collective approach. The way to gain useful findings from this stage of educational process is to conduct case analyses and

²⁶ Lawrence A., Weber J., Post J.: *Business and society: Stakeholders, ethics, public policy*. 11th edition. McGraw Hill-Irwin, New York, NY 2005.

²⁷ De George R.: *Business ethics*. 5th Edition. Prentice Hall, Upper Saddle River, NJ 1999.

²⁸ Sims R.R.: Debriefing experiential learning exercises in ethics education. "Teaching Business Ethics", No. 6, 2002.

²⁹ Thaft S., White J.: *op.cit.*

³⁰ Trevino L.K., Brown M.E.: Managing to be ethical: Debunking five business ethics myths. "Academy of Management Executive", No. 18(2), 2004.

discussions involving students considering “what-if” situations that are characterized by critical thinking. In order to give undergraduate students an opportunity to imagine better ethical dilemmas that occur in practice, it is also recommended to include business partners in the educational process. They may provide a leader speaker series as well as participate in some discussion sessions or informal meetings³¹. These are necessary solutions as whereas business academics tend to focus on theoretical and analytical aspects, the practitioner provides insight into actual practice³². Those direct contacts with professional community representatives are also a chance for the use of soft networking skills in order to initiate a closer relation with professionals attending the lectures or meetings. A request for a business card may be the first step (of course followed by additional actions) towards joining a particular professional executive in a student’s ego network.

On the personal membership group level the horizon of perception has been extended but it is still limited to the direct relations binding a particular node (person) with other group members, as well as connections between them. The recognition of structure in those relations may show who plays the leader’s role in particular social groups, and how it is connected with the strength of his/her impact on others as well as the paths of dissemination for particular attitude or values.

3.3. Organizational ethics

The subsequent level of analysis is a shift from an ego network perspective to an organizational network which means that there are taken into account not only the direct strong social relations but also the weak, indirect ties occurring within an organization. A future manager should be aware not only of the processes in which he/she is involved personally, but also needs to take into consideration the wider processes that shape organizational ethics. This level is not so simple since “developing and employing organizational ethics is a demanding strategic task for the autopoietic organization,”³³ which evolves in the value communication of decision makers and stakeholders where the organizational culture is based on dialogue, which creates the possibility of managing constructively. Consensus may be achieved on different levels including individual decisions, rules and procedures regarding the differences in opinion, as well as values and preferences. Conflicts must be solved regularly on an individual, group and corporation level as well, through the autopoietic decision processes, where consensus is but a station in the flow of

³¹ See: Matherne B.P., Gove S., Forlani V., Janney J.J.: “Walk the Talk”: Developing Personal ethical agency through business partnership. “Journal of Management Education”, No. 30(1), 2006.

³² Brown P.R., Lint P.E.: Co-teaching: A key to auditing instruction. “Journal of Accountancy”, No. 154(3), 1982.

³³ Pruzan P., Thyssen O.: Conflict and consensus: Ethics as a shared value horizon for strategic planning. “Human Systems Management”, No. 9, 1990, p. 151.

communication³⁴, (2009; 30-31). It is at this point where there is the requirement to adjust personal, communal and organizational ethics.

This stage of analysis is also connected with the notion of professional socialization which means acquiring a professional identity. This in turn, which involves not only gaining the knowledge and learning skills required to perform a particular job task, but also the attitudes, values, norms, language and perspectives necessary to interpret experience, interact with others, prioritize activities and determine appropriate behavior³⁵. Business graduates entering the labor market for the first time may struggle with some moral dilemmas, because they are to socialize with a completely new professional environment and will be prone to acquiring the values, attitudes and knowledge pertaining to a new professional subculture³⁶. There emerges a basic question of the professional role of managers who originally were supposed to be fiduciaries of owners. Today, it is no longer obvious that the main objective should be acting in the best interest of stockholders³⁷. Indeed, managers need to tackle the complexity and ambiguity of real-life situations. It may be particularly hard for new recruits to deal with problems such as hypocrisy and double standards in their jobs³⁸. That is why a standpoint of professional ethics may be quite difficult to adopt for those who so far did not have to focus on anything other than their own social groups.

It ought to be stressed that following ethical codes, norms or moral principles is insufficient as they are constantly transformed by the various interpretations which they are subject to, by the multiplicity of existing rules (safety-related, occupational, technical, legal, organizational, etc.) which form an interdependent network and, above all, by the contrasting and changing nature of their uses. Between the setting of the rule and its use, there springs a wide range of controversies, amendments, meetings and strategic approaches that depend upon the interests, culture and the working habits of each of the groups abiding by the rule which, in theory, is the same for all³⁹. Therefore, although ethics generally should not be

³⁴ Zrinyi I.U.: Dialogic ethics for business, [in:] L. Zsolnai, Z. Boda, L. Fekete L. (Eds.): Ethical Prospects: Economy, Society and Environment, Vol. 1. Springer 2009, p. 30-31.

³⁵ Perna L.W., Hudgins C.: The graduate assistantship: facilitator of graduate students' professional socialization. ASHE Annual Meeting. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education. Memphis, TN, October 31 – November 3, 1996, p. 3.

³⁶ Page G.: Professional socialization of valuation students: what the literature says. Proceedings 10th Pacific Rim Real Estate Society Conference. Bangkok 2004.

³⁷ See: Goodpaster K.E.: Business ethics and stakeholder analysis. "Business Ethics Quarterly", No. 1(1), 1991; Heath J.: Business ethics without stakeholders. "Business Ethics Quarterly", No. 16(3), 2006.

³⁸ Badaracco J., Webb A.: Business ethics: A view from the trenches. "California Management Review", No. 37(2), 1995. See also: See also: Darley J.: How organizations socialize individuals into evildoing, [in:] D. Messick, A. Tenbrunsel (Eds.): Codes of Conduct: Behavioral Research into Business Ethics. SAGE, New York, NY 1996.

³⁹ Deslandes G.: Wittgenstein and the practical turn in business ethics. "Electronic Journal of Business Ethics and Organization Studies", No. 16(1), p. 50.

expressed in propositions, it can be applied and displayed in its own way as “must lie in the action itself”⁴⁰.

Despite the fact that considering ethics on this level is very demanding for inexperienced business students as it requires capabilities in abstract and complex thinking⁴¹, it is necessary because as future managers they need to be prepared for embracing a wider organizational context than others are supposed to. Managers in organizations have to meet various expectations as in today’s world the maximization of an organization’s profit is not their only responsibility. They also need to find consensus for various, and frequently contrary standpoints that occur within an organization as there exist different internal stakeholders.

This is the reason why practice-learning is in special demand in contemporary business education and should not be focused on acquiring practical business skills only, but needs to comply with learning how to use business as an instrument for making the positive contribution one wants to make (instead of attempting to convince that applying ethics may be reconciled with organizational aspirations)⁴². Above all, the minimal advantage of a learning period in a business student’s educational process gives him/her an opportunity to confront his/her abstract projection of on-the-job ethical dilemmas with the reality. However, this confrontation requires business faculties to supervise this apprenticeship process and discuss the findings gained on this proving ground.

An organization is a much more complicated system than individuals and groups. It is more difficult to identify the whole network in an organization and to recognize all relations bonding central or linking polarized nodes as structures of communication influence each node in the network in a different way and to different extents. Sometimes, within an organization there emerges the influence of dominant coalitions⁴³, which along with individual choices translated into action, a system may become the basis for organizational ethics⁴⁴. However, this influence is not necessarily positive as some intra-organizational cliques and subunits may infect the whole organizational body with unethical behavior⁴⁵.

On this level of analysis there is also the question of the structure of a manager’s ethical influence as employees within an organization tend to judge the ethics of their managers

⁴⁰ Wittgenstein L.: *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Kegan Paul, London, UK 1933: § 6. 422.

⁴¹ Thaft S., White J.: *op.cit.* Ethics education: Using inductive reasoning to develop individual, group, organizational, and global perspectives. “*Journal of Management Education*”, No. 31(5), 2007, 614-646.

⁴² See: Hooker J.: The case against business ethics education: A study in bad arguments. “*Journal of Business Ethics Education*”, No. 1(1), 2004.

⁴³ Thomas T., Schermerhorn J.R., Dienhart J.W.: Strategic leadership of ethical behavior in business. “*Academy of Management Executive*”, No. 18(2), 2004.

⁴⁴ Bardoel E.A., Haslett T.: Exploring ethical dilemmas using the “drifting goals” archetype. “*Journal of Management Education*”, No. 30(1), 2006.

⁴⁵ See: Shapiro L., Brass D., Labianca J.: Examining from a social network perspective [in:] S.W. Gilliland, D.D. Steiner, D.P. Skarlicki (Eds.): *Justice, Morality, and Social Responsibility*. Information Age Publishing, US 2008; Klerks P.: The network paradigm applied to criminal organisations: Theoretical nitpicking or a relevant doctrine for investigators? Recent developments in the Netherlands. „*Connections*”, No. 24(3), 2001.

based on observed evidence, rather than espoused principles, of just, fair and trustworthy behaviors⁴⁶. There is the conviction that leaders are those who articulate a vision that includes ethical principles, communicate the vision in a compelling way, demonstrate consistent conduct, and play a vital role in signaling the importance of a commitment to high moral standards in an organization⁴⁷. However, as Macleod has pointed out, the contribution of individual firms or individual business executives to the improvement of the moral quality of business activities is not always enough⁴⁸ because individual managers and corporations must operate under the conditions of the global economy⁴⁹ which in turn requires adopting the perspective on the subsequent inter-organizational level.

3.4. Inter-organizational level

Although Taft and White⁵⁰ have not distinguished the inter-organizational level, from my point of view, it is worth a distinct focus as here the object of concern crosses organizational borders and is investigated by the way an organization interacts with its direct external stakeholders. It literally means that particular actors interact with members of other organizations and entities (also sub-networks which constitute the actors and their relations). Moreover, those relations may be of dual kind. The first are formal ties where the nodes are the representatives of the whole organizations. In this case an organization may be regarded not necessarily as a network but as a compound node provided that a member of the organization complies with the shared organizational ethics. The second kind is an informal one where actors are not authorized by the organization to represent it. Although this informal link still shapes the inter-organizational network, here the employee is treated as a particular simple node. The manager's role here is also significant yet, as for the internal code of ethics, peer pressure, intra-organizational influences, external demands and expectations influence his/her decisions. Also the representative role of managers who ought to play in the best interest of an organization makes the situation even more complicated. There emerges a new challenge that is connected with the duty to assure the organization's strong position in the network structure and on this level it does not depend fully on the

⁴⁶ Whitener E.M., Brodt S.E., Korsgaard M.A., Werner J.M.: Managers as initiators of trust: An exchange relationship framework for understanding managerial trustworthy behavior. "Academy of Management Review", No. 23(3), 1998.

⁴⁷ Buller P., Kohls J., Anderson K.: When ethics collide: Managing conflicts across cultures. "Organizational Dynamics", No. 28(4), 2000. Cf.: Mattila M., Aaltio I.: From tools to social construction of organizational reality: studying value dissemination in three case companies. "Electronic Journal of Business Ethics and Organization Studies", No. 11(2), 2006.

⁴⁸ Macleod A.: Moral philosophy and business ethics: The priority of political, [in:] E.R. Winkler, J.R. Coombs (Eds.): Applied Ethics: a Reader. Basil Blackwell, Oxford, UK 1993.

⁴⁹ Kopperi M.: Business ethics in global economy. "Electronic Journal of Business Ethics and Organization Studies", No. 4(1), 1999.

⁵⁰ Taft S., White J.: op.cit.

managers' own effort. Inter-organizational relations become powerful as an organization has the ability to bridge structural holes⁵¹ and to exclude its market opponents from the flows of resources existing within the structure⁵². And this structure is not determined only by organizational actions but by individuals as well. The issue of exclusion both in terms of opportunity for organizational growth as well as of harmful impact it has on business and society should be raised and discussed with students

The inter-organizational perspective also needs to respect not only the strong groups of interest that affect organizational performance but also the expectations of the regional and local community. This additionally determines a manager's decisions to act in accordance with corporate social responsibility. Moreover, he/she should recognize how to make a reasonable choice of a business partner just to minimize the risk of harmful consequences (also of legal kind) of the partner's unethical conduct. In this case the rationality of an executive's decision is also influenced by the general community expectations as "business is not a game unto itself but an integral part of larger society that makes business possible"⁵³. Moreover, another obstructive decision making factor may be the local culture that may differ from a manager's individual and even organizational ethics. This is a problem arising from the global perspective ascribed to corporations operating in an international and multicultural environment.

3.5. International perspective

The most ambiguous standpoint is the global perspective as it needs to integrate not only different ethics but also various cultures. It occurs not only when a company needs to cooperate with foreign partners which are considered as the vital ones, but it also relates to multicultural organizations (as well as companies after a merger, acquisition or with divisions located worldwide), which need to be integrated into a coherent whole.

There exists the choice between the relativistic approach that will increase the manager's tolerance towards distinct practices and the absolutism approach that complies with fundamental international rights. And the choice is hardly unequivocal here.

On this level of consideration the welfare of the society usually prevails over the personal morality. In this case the reflection concerns the intersection of free-market capitalism,

⁵¹ Burt R.S.: *Structural Holes: The Social Structure of Competition*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA 1995.

⁵² See: Tongia R., Wilson, E.J. III: *Turning Metcalfe on his head: The multiple costs of network exclusion*. Department of Engineering and Public Policy. Paper 120, 2007; Huxham C., Beech N.: *Inter-organizational power*, [in:] *The Oxford Handbook of Inter-Organizational Relations*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK 2008; Zaheer A., Gözübüyük R., Milanov H.: *It's the connections: The network perspective in inter-organizational research*. "The Academy of Management Perspectives", No. 24(1), 2010.

⁵³ Hooker J.: *The case against business ethics education: A study in bad arguments*. "Journal of Business Ethics Education", No. 1(1), 2004, p. 79.

cultural variation, the good of humankind, and social justice⁵⁴. Inclusion in the discussion of the problem of asymmetry of global influences may also enrich the findings. Moreover, the problems of the spread of unethical networks (such as terrorism or crime networks) as well as potential global consequences of a decision⁵⁵ should also be brought up.

The above process of recognizing typical managerial ethical dilemmas occurring on subsequent levels of considerations has a main educational objective: to make business students aware of the ambiguity of ethical decision, which never is an unquestionable choice between their intrinsic morality and external ethical context.

Above all, the network approach should be a kind of network background for considering ethical dilemmas as nowadays it structures most business processes. The multilevel process is viewed below as if we took a step back and looked at a particular network level from a distance – from the base level (node) going successively to a wider perspective (Figure 1).

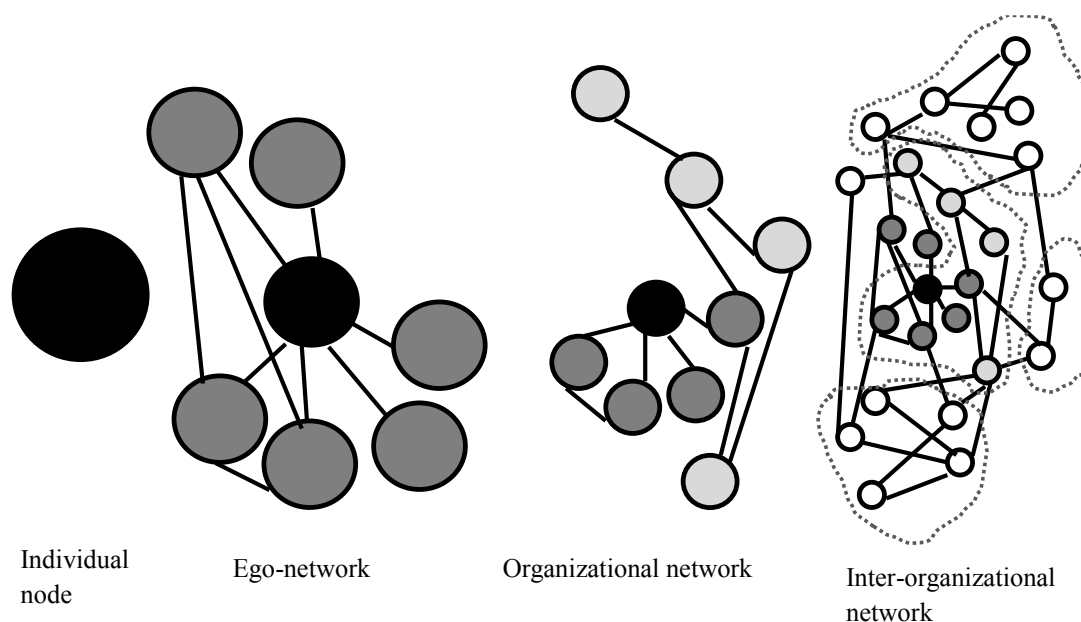


Fig 1. Four levels of ethical recognition (with the omission of the global perspective)
Rys. 1. Cztery poziomy postrzegania etycznego (z pominięciem perspektywy globalnej)
Source: Author's own study.

The first stage is non-network as we can see just a single node whose only relations are self-recurrent (self-recognizing). It is the basis which will be treated as the fundamental reference mark in the following levels. The group stage enables the recognition of the ego-network with direct dominant relations. This analysis is helpful in determining “ethical resources” identification as well as the strongest ethical relations influencing the ego’s ethical

⁵⁴ Thaft S., White J.: op.cit., p. 635.

⁵⁵ See: Kahn A.E.: The tyranny of small decisions: market failures, imperfections, and the limits of economics. “Kvklos”, No. 19, 1966; Hardin G.: The tragedy of the commons. “Science”, No. 162, 1968.

attitude. Furthermore, the organizational network both gives an opportunity to analyze all internal relations that affect a manager's position within an organization in terms of his/her power to influence others (also peripheral ones) and provides information about the impact of internal stakeholders (and organizational cliques) on him/her in terms of value diffusion. As it was stated, a common organizational ethics is being formulated during ongoing dialogue that takes place in an organizational network. The recognition of communicative relations inside an organization may provide information about the way organizational ethics are established. The inter-organizational perspective crosses the organizational boundaries and shows the impact of external stakeholders on an organization's position. The interconnectedness with various kinds of entities should enforce multilateral reasoning in terms of making ethical decisions being a consensus of different standpoints taken in order to sustain a member of the network (not to be excluded because of a failure to fulfill ethical duties). The global network (not represented in Figure 1) not only shows the power and roles played by particular actors, clusters of some entities linked with relations of high density, but also ensures the consideration of widespread diffusion of cultural elements (such as values, norms, attitudes) in conditions of globalization. Nonetheless, a network approach in educating business ethics gives an opportunity to visualize the inter-relational character of ethical processes and indicates that each particular decision has its impact on every individual, group, organization as well as inter-organizational range.

4. Curricula elements supporting business ethics education

The network approach applied in business ethics courses may be enforced by some other curricula elements. The first of them is the former students' preparation in the field of Social Network Analysis⁵⁶ as a general concept (often incorporated into social sciences educational programs) as well as the acquired practical skills in at least one of the available software programs. Such preparation not only gives students an explanation of the network phenomenon referring to an interdisciplinary field (social sciences, statistics, strategic analysis, and also financial studies or marketing), but also familiarizes them with terms such as structural hole, broker, strong and weak ties, as well as develops their analytical skills. There is also a great emphasis to refer to business ethics issues as there exist many cases of

⁵⁶ Wassermann S., Faust K.: *Social Network Analysis. Methods and Applications*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, UK 2007; Scott J.: *Social Network Analysis. A Handbook*. SAGE, London, UK 2000; De Nooy W., Mvar A., Batagelj V.: *Exploratory Social Networks Analysis with Pajek*. Cambridge University Press, New York, NY 2005.

ethically related processes that were modeled within the SNA technique⁵⁷ and their visualizations are good examples to be remembered. Moreover, students may design their own networks and model their changes in time.

Despite the difficulties in visually representing some ethical conditions, which may be diminished with the application of SNA, there exists a crucial need for undergraduate students to gain some work experience in order to better recognize real-situation dilemmas. Apprenticeships and practice-learning programs are the best solution here provided that they are to give students a chance to be responsible for achieving particular objectives of considerable importance to the organization. It is also appreciated if they are linked not only to business but also to the environment, local community and regional needs. In this place the service-learning initiatives seem to be very worthy of note as they help to face problems both of business character and from the other stakeholders' viewpoint⁵⁸. It also enables the consideration of in-class cases within stakeholder analyses that are based on students' real and personal experience. From this stance, prospective managers can become aware that ethics dilemmas are not milestones but elements of everyday business practice. The additional advantage is the incorporation of the local business leader into the student's community (and academic organizational network), which may prove fruitful in case of sustaining and developing mutual relationships.

Another chance to put some real cases into theoretical analysis (which would also be convincing) is the practice of incorporating local business leaders in the educational process where they give some leader-speaker series sharing their own experience of ethical dilemmas as well as participate in informal discussions on particular ethical problems equally with business students.

All of the above facilitators of business ethics education will not bring any positive results without in-class moderated discussion of those practical implications. Here, the acquisition of both the ability to think critically and incorporate another parties' point of view will be a satisfactory result in the educational process.

⁵⁷ Schwartz D.M., Rouselle T.D.A.: Using social network analysis to target criminal networks. "Trends in Organized Crime", No. 12(2), 2008; Tang L., Barbier G., Liu H., Zhang J.: A social network analysis approach to detecting suspicious online financial activities, [in:] Proceedings of International Conference on Social Computing, Behavioral Modeling and Prediction (SBP'10), 2010; Czinkota M.R., Knight G.A., Liesch P.W., Steen J.: Positioning terrorism in management and marketing: Research propositions. "Journal of International Management", No. 11(4), 2005; Sarnecki J.: Delinquent Networks: Youth Co-offending in Stockholm. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK 2001.

⁵⁸ See for instance: Vega G.: Teaching business ethics through service learning metaprojects. "Journal of Management Education", No. 31(5), 2007.

5. Conclusion

Above all, business ethics education attracts premium attention these days as many academics are releasing handbooks on the topic⁵⁹, publishers are launching journals including papers on this issue (e.g. Journal of Business Ethics Education, Journal of Academic and Business Ethics, Journal of Business Ethics, Academy of Management Learning and Education, Teaching Business Ethics, special issues of Journal of Management Education), lots of business schools are modifying and publishing on-line their curricula on ethics as well as international organizations are formulating relevant policies (such as: Principles for Responsible Management Education, Business Accreditation Standards of The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business). These extensive efforts provide a chance to move the business ethics courses closer to reality and contemporary needs.

Also, the network approach to business education as the background for ethical consideration should be applied especially in emerging, and all the more dominant, network paradigms. However, the approach is not limited only to business ethics, as it encompasses knowledge and innovation processes. We should be aware that talks about organizational ethics are the result of existing autopoietic organizational knowledge⁶⁰, which is structured mostly in reflexive flows of tacit knowledge and is a carrier for shared values. Moreover, contemporary organizations, including enterprises, develop by forming social networks with various partners (incl. public institutions) in order to sustain the autopoietic (self-organizing) potential of their organizational knowledge⁶¹ (Stachowicz and Stachowicz-Stanusch, 2010).

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⁵⁹ Wankel Ch., Stachowicz-Stanusch A.: Management Education for Integrity: Ethically Educating Tomorrow's Business Leaders. Emerald Group Publishing, Bingley, UK 2011; Gentile, M.C.: Giving Voice to Values: How to Speak Your Mind When You Know What's Right. 1st Edition. Yale University Press, London, UK 2010.

⁶⁰ See: von Krogh G., Roos J., Slocum K.: An essay on corporate epistemology, [in:] G. von Krogh, J. Roos (Eds.): Managing Knowledge: Perspectives on Cooperation and Competition. SAGE, London, UK 1996.

⁶¹ Stachowicz J., Stachowicz-Stanusch A.: The pressure of social and network character of contemporary enterprises on their ethical behaviors, [in:] Sepp J. (Ed.): The Key-Factors of Business and Socio- Economic Development. Wilkes University, Wilkes, PA 2010.

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