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A Framework for Developing Vocational Morals

Abstract

This paper proposes fifteen principles of educational intervention for developing vocationalised moral values for workplaces. The principles are drawn from a study of fourteen construction workers in Queensland, Australia and draws from their understanding and perception of vocational moral development. The paper proposes these principles as a basis for lifelong learning. This concept of lifelong learning is summarised in terms of educational outcomes and engagements within institutional and industrialised regulatory contexts and contrary experiential social and personal contexts.

INTRODUCTION

Moral action and judgement are integral to workplace interrelations. That is, the quality of professional and social interrelationships at work is judged by the way workers perform to the appropriate expectations of other workers, their clients and bosses. Thus, interrelationships in work environments—whether a worker should comply with norms or not, or make choices favouring others or themselves, or take responsibility or abdicate them—are distinctively social, vocational and ethical in nature (James, 2005).

Vocational morals embrace values derived from experience and explicit learning and their application in workplace ethical events. Morals are described here as being actions, judgements and decisions that consider the welfare of others in each situation associated with, and encompassing, an ethical event. The definition echoes situationalism (Fletcher, 1966). This paper advances 15 key principles for developing the capacities of workers for such moral thinking and action. The paper draws on an interpretive study where 14 construction workers explained aspects of vocational moral experiences and how they learnt such morals. The 15 principles derived from their stories are: *early, formal* and *vocational* modes of education; *specialised knowledge, diversity, situatedness, collegiality, negotiation*, and *individualisation* as representing educational outcomes; *coherence, experiential learning, modelling, and feedback* representing educational engagements; and *regulation* and *cultural climate* to acknowledge industry contexts. The paper argues that the grouping of the 15 principles into these 4 categories (Modes of Education, Educational Outcomes, Educational Engagements and Industry Context) provides a basis for formulating how to enhance the lifelong journey of vocational moral values development.

In the study, none of the 14 participants had formally learned to vocationalise moral values; but had learnt such values serendipitously along a lifelong journey. The participants talked about the transitional process of learning vocational moral values and regarded it as incidental. They learnt vocational moral values within family, school and social contexts, as well as within the work environment itself. From their youth, the workers spoke about important aspects to moral learning that are derived here as principles. It was such principles that the participants found had helped develop vocational moral values. Here, vocational moral values are regarded as

primal morals re-contextualised for their applicability to appropriate practices in individual workplaces.

Outlined in the following paragraphs, is the conceptualisation of vocationalised moral values and their development. This is followed by a description of the study, followed by the results. The results are organised to report on findings related to the need for a structured intervention into the ways in which vocational moral values are acquired, followed by the principles for such an intervention.

VOCATIONALISED MORAL VALUES

Evidence has been adduced that people in workplaces engage in moral reasoning, decision-making and action; and that the reasoning, decision-making and action involves morals acquired through upbringing, social contexts, schooling and experience in the workplace (James, 2005). Ethical people, who acquire morals in this way, apply them to real situations. Vocational moral values are applied ethics (Bagnall 2004, Singer 2000). In terms of theory, they exemplify the applied ethics branch of moral philosophy.

Applied ethics is the third major branch of moral philosophy. The task in applied ethics, as opposed to theoretical normative ethics, is to resolve specific moral issues and moral problematic concrete cases which arise in different areas of life (Callahan, 1988: 7).

Vocational moral values have a particular application within workplace environments. They are moralities particularised by people engaged in work and earning a living through association with other like people. Their particular application is variously conceived in moral philosophy as disciplines, for example, of: (a) moral axiology, (b) virtue ethics, (c) moral obligation (Callahan, 1988: 7) and (d) moral privatisation (Bagnall, 1997: 1):

Contemporary and projected trends in social responsibility are in the direction of its radical privatisation within an increasingly pluralistic context. While there are different dimensions to that privatisation, one that is emerging as being of particular importance in [vocational education and training] is that of workplace morality and ethics.

In association with this particularity, that is vocational moral values, are cultural imperatives, which are importantly embedded in the workplace and working out the common good through sensitivity within cultural reality and a privatised

context (Bagnall, 2004: 9). In practice, vocational moral values are sensitive to situations and the welfare of others within the culture and context of the workplace environment (Fletcher 1966). There is a sense of the situationalist ideal in ethical appreciation. Vocational moral values are bound by the true nature of ethics but their application suggests a need for sensitivity to situations, episodes and the welfare of others through using ethical orientations in a most sensitive way. For such moral development, this paper proposes to go beyond traditional philosophical orientations to take them to their grounding in practice in workplaces and their cultural context.

It is implied that the following kinds of traditional philosophical orientations would be found in workplace practice, for example: egoism, altruism, deontology, teleology, universalism, virtue and so on. What they mean, here, is drawn from various writers. For instance, from a purely egoistic perspective, Baier, (1993: 197) explained that such *egoism* is characterised in one's intention to act as being "...inconsiderate, unfeeling, unprincipled, ruthless self-aggrandisers, pursuers of the good things in life whatever the cost to others." From a non-egoistic perspective, consequentialists Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill argue that egoism may be conceived as doing good for others through doing good for one's self (Midgley, 1993: 4-5). *Altruism*, on the other hand as benevolence, contrasts which egoism in human motivation to act only for the benefit of others at one's own expense if such needs arise as in the Christian injunction to "...love your neighbour as yourself." (Preston, 2001: 30). *Deontology* argued by Kant, (1724-1804) is doing one's duty—the categorical imperative to act on a duty "...out of the respect for the moral law..." (Abbott, 1987: 167). *Teleology* in the Greek means end or goal ('teleo' or 'telos' respectively). It is expounded by the consequentialist Peter Singer arguing that "...consequentialist start not with moral rules but with goals," in their motivations to act (Singer, 2000: 8). *Universalism* is the tradition that Bauman, (1993: 26) explained as that of generalised ethical guidance. Such philosophical orientation Ferrara, (1990: 14) clarifies as forming right and good through generalising shared norms, rules and principles "...neutral' with respect to values, culture or historical situation..." (James 2005: 26). *Virtue* is excellent human character and integrity (James, 2005: 20). MacIntyre, (1984: 138) proposes the question at the root of virtue ethics: "How should we live?" to recognise such human character and motivation for action. In addition, Aristotle, (1915: 8) is credited with aretaic ethics, or the sciences

of virtue, to explain a standard for individual moral behaviour to, in turn, influence a good society. These ethical orientations are some of the traditions that inform moral practice in the workplace and its educational intervention, which helps to develop it.

The following study reported here examines the relationship between grounded moral practice and such traditional philosophical orientations. It, then, considers these in terms of educational concerns, in order to synthesise a proposal for the educational development of vocational moral values.

THE STUDY

This qualitative study of fourteen Construction Industry workers' perceptions of their development of vocational moral values, investigated their understanding of workplace ethical experience, underpinning moral competence, and contemporary moral practice. Transitional learning emerged through participants' stories of their ethical experience within their life-worlds and building and construction industry workplaces. Information was collected from individual semi-structured interviews over a period between 2002 and 2004. Interviews with ten male and four female participants from various sectors of the Construction Industry were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The distribution of male to female participants was indicative of the male dominated industry.

The participants' interpretations of vocational morality were drawn from their descriptions of workplace ethical events. The participants articulated, among other things, how morality had developed differentially over time. What emerged was a picture of the way the participants developed vocational morality from early childhood through to their activities within the cultural context of the building and construction industry workplaces. The focus of the paper is on the way vocational morality developed **for them**, which emerged from their descriptions of what can be summarised as a vicarious learning journey.

Participants

Participants came from different sectors of the building and construction industry in Queensland, Australia. They included apprentices, tradespeople, industry trainers, managers, architects, engineers, company owners, sales and hardware people who had

a passion for their industry and a concern for the values that significantly informed and misinformed moral action and judgement in their workplaces. The participants related what they perceived as being the ethics and morals they experienced and used in their workplaces—seen here as those of vocational morals.

Pseudonyms are used throughout the paper to protect the identity of participants in accordance with human research ethical guidelines.

The Interviews

The semi-structured interviews were one-on-one with some telephone interview follow up for clarifying issues. The semi-structured nature of the interviews meant that there were no pre-worded questions asked similarly of each participant. The interviewer, to prompt individual interviewees or to keep interviews on track, chose impromptu questions that suited the flow of discussion at the time. A conceptual framework guided the study and the direction of the interview discussion. Each participant verified their story by reading a hard copy of their own respective interview transcript. Data analysis was undertaken after each participant had given signed permission for their transcript to be used.

Data Analysis

For the focus, here, on vocational moral development, information from the interviews was analysed by identifying data related to educational interventions in participants' stories. The analysis was undertaken by multiple readings through the individual transcripts and the study conceptual framework of several headings (concepts) were used as 'bins' into which the data were collated and later analysed collectively.

Limitations

The paper is constrained by the research study of 14 participants and their stories. As other workplaces share similarities, comparisons may be found for their purposes of vocational moral application or development. It is not intended that there be any generalisation from this group.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Need for a structured intervention

It was apparent from the involvement with the fourteen construction workers that they desired a better moral image for their industry—an image which represented a culture of satisfaction and achievement and which provided for a happier workforce seeking profits or gains in partnership with quality, productivity, integrity and sustainability.

I guess that's the difference between running a small business and somebody running a large company. One cares for individuals more than the other. The little man cares more.... (Glen)

It's out of consideration for him [business colleague]. I think you've got to consider other people. (Nev)

...knowing how to get a fair days pay for a fair day's work... (Ric)

...the contract which had at least a fair risk sharing and protection that both parties had in respect of each other. (Wes)

I think that everyone should be treated equally and given a fair chance. (Steve)

If we've finished a job at three o'clock and the quality is very good and everybody has gone at it. Then the guys can go fishing and they know that they will be paid up to five o'clock...It's a give-and-take situation. (Pam)

However, no one from the study said that education and training—including Vocational Education and Training (VET) was playing a part in helping to develop moral values applicable to their individual workplace cultures or contexts. Hence, on coming into the workplace for the first time, they experienced difficulties with adjusting to workplace morality. Participants spoke about a need to integrate with the work community and its culture in order to act or make judgements in context. To know what was, and was not, appropriate was in the main accidental and, at best, opportune from imitating other more experienced workers. Mark, who was a carpenter and trainer, made the point that he initially depended on older workers for his guidance; but without assurances of a positive or negative moral in what he observed, his actions were left to chance.

... [tradesmen] had seen a lot more pitfalls and a lot more problems and a lot more stuff-ups and know how to get around them rather than me who was only about four and a quarter years into my apprenticeship. (Mark)

Participants implied from their understanding of moral transition that it was important for workers to be able to discriminate between social values learned in

social contexts and vocational moral values learnt in workplaces. That is, for Mark to respond appropriately to specific workplace events, judgements and experiences he had to consider a contrary aspect of the application of his primal socially acquired moral value because what he learnt in society and previously used in society was not directly applicable in the workplace (James, 2005). While the moral values may have been similar to what was originally learnt, their application was different. The point here is that learning in non-work social contexts lacked the necessary preparation for participants' moral experiences in workplaces, suggesting the need for intervention in existing processes of learning vocational moral values.

The need for more effective development of vocational moral values is also evident in government funded reports. In a defining study undertaken by the Royal Commission into the Building and Construction Industry in Australia (Cole, 2003) to investigate the culture, practices and governance of the industry recommended more regulation and penalties for their non-compliance. This approach did little to change the insensitivities within the industry.

Building and Construction workplaces in Queensland still evidence a predominant culture of self-centredness, as indicated by this sample from the study.

The contracts most used by people in the house building industry are written by the QMBA and HIA. They tend to be very much biased toward their members...They are written by builders for builders, promoted by them and accepted by them. (Mary)

It's interesting [in tribunal hearings] that the only ones that make any money out of this are the solicitors. (Doug)

...that is what I call unethical...This happens a lot in the trade when something goes wrong - they try to blame the next fella down the line. (Mic)

Such evidence confirms the need for a structured intervention to secure more commitment to understand appropriate action in the construction workplace; and presumably within others. Such intervention would need to develop from, and extend on, normal lifelong learning engagements; a journey through upbringing, schooling, social contexts to workplace experience (James, 2005). It is proposed that the vocational moral learning journey should draw upon moral implications from the context and culture of workplaces themselves (vocationalisation).

It is also proposed that the development of vocational moral values is a responsibility for providers of vocational education and training. However, vocational providers would need to intervene with a planned approach in order to fill the current gap in the education and training system. This would be a challenge because this intervention would be different from formal training packages delivered as a direct response to industry dictates (ACCI, 2009; Skills Australia, 2008), which are the established formal guides to training provision in Australia. Rather, developing vocational moral values need to be integrated within education over a life span, where important early moral development takes place outside of vocational education. The challenge would be to provide a full range of inter-related direct, indirect, formal and informal learning opportunities. For instance, the *informal* might be through multi-media, that is, television, movie theatre prelog, advertising and promotion, toy characters, story books and so on, essentially to create a discourse built around a culture of vocationalising moral values. Thus, rather than penalties for infringement, it would be preferable to achieve the development of vocational moral value before infringements occur. The *formal* might mean providing necessary instruction and guidance, flexible and structured, involving schooling, training packages, directed experiential learning, mentoring, coaching and so on. In this way, vocationalisation of ethics and its development for workers would accompany the learner. To borrow from Dewey (1966: 311), this would involve continual growth as the discovery of life's vocations became clearer.

Thus, the participants' stories provide a basis for considering an intervention to make good on the vision for a better working environment based on moral valuing. Even so, there remains a challenge for lifelong learning to base its staging on *upbringing, schooling, social contexts* and *workplace experiences* and principles for intervention on which vocational education and training providers can ground their planning and delivery. In the following paragraphs, principles on which to provide effective development of vocational moral valuing are derived from the participants' stories.

Principles for intervention

From the interviews, fifteen principles for grounding vocational moral development were identified. These fifteen principles were initially categorised into four broad groups:

- modes of education (*early, formal and vocational*),
- educational outcomes (*specialized knowledge, diversity, situatedness, collegiality, negotiation, and individualisation*),
- educational engagements (*coherence, experiential learning, modelling, and feedback*) and
- industry contexts (*regulation and cultural climate*).

It is proposed that these principles provide a framework, which educational providers might use to plan their curriculum—in other words, to provide lifelong learning. Each is elaborated in turn in the following paragraphs.

Modes of Education

Modes of education refers to timing of learning and teaching within a lifelong development of vocational moral values. The principle of *early intervention* was derived from participants' reflections that family members, friends and others acted as role models and sharing knowledge throughout their childhood and adolescent years; that primal moral learning was achieved gradually within the developing social, and potential, moral sense. Several participants commented on the importance of early learning experiences in their moral development:

I think that the people, apart from the parents who have the most influence, are the schoolteachers in years one, two and three grades. It is there that you've still got a chance of dealing with things because the character isn't yet moulded. (Wes)

To your question...It starts off probably at kindergarten, in the house, in the home, in primary school, in the workplace, at TAFE. (Wes)

It is to do with morals and upbringing... very early training within the family that there are ways in which to behave appropriately. (Mary)

If you were brought up in a home where you were told to do things and that this is the way you should act, then if you start like that in your life

when you are a kid, then it should also continue through your life...it is no good waiting until they are 15 or 16 years old and then try to teach them something different from what they have seen or believe to be the way to act from their home life – it is too late. (Mic)

The principle also implies early engagements in new experiences at any stage of development such as, for example, workers might have when starting a new job or in their apprentice training where they observe and assume a moral sense. For example:

...I believe the only way to teach is to start at the beginning of their apprenticeship...To start them off properly in their apprenticeship. (Ron)

The principle of *formal intervention* draws on the perception that primal moral valuing is an initial step to learning vocational moral values. The moral agent requires a foundation before interacting with others, that is, where morality becomes grounded in the learners' thinking before learning its applicable development to cultural implications.

[I was] taught to respect...as a student... (Mark)

My experiences weren't only from when I reached the workforce because my whole primary and senior schooling was a process of learning. (Sandi)

These are acquired beliefs and values. I don't think that they are strictly my own. There comes a time in your life when you say: "I have been taught all this stuff..." (Mary)

As the principle denotes that which can be taught, it relates not just to primary or secondary schooling but also to other educational interventions such as apprenticeships, traineeships, internships and cadetships. It underpins the proposal that primal ethical knowledge and moral skill form part of the formal curriculum.

The principle of *vocational intervention* was identified by participants as value adding to their primal grounding through engaging in vocational contexts. According to Doug (an engineer) *...with the job, there was always a background of ethics...with a code of ethics that relates to what I do* ; while Nev, a business owner

stated: *I think that you have to have a standard, a documented standard or values and standards that you teach [employees] by.* Vocational intervention is grounded in contextualizing a moral within a range of vocational outcomes such as specialized knowledge, diversity, community, self-preservation and so on to create a vocational moral value. For example, Sandi, an apprenticeship liaison officer commented ...*that we, at a [vocational] training facility, have the best opportunity to impart preferred methods of behaviour.* The strongly cultural nature of ethical learning impacts on vocational intervention. The importance of recognizing the particular nature of the work context and the need to learn in a way that is sensitive to that particularity is noted by Ric, an apprentice plumber: *Teaching a bloke how to use a hammer and teaching a bloke to have good sense should come hand-in-hand.* The principle was also articulated in responses that emerged when participants reflected on the best ethical education for workers in the industry. Such education taught them to act reflexively in situations and to be cognizant of their responsibilities, experiences and experiences of others.

I have never been taught how to run a tender. We do it by custom and we tend to have a process of running a tender, which is quite ethical. (Mary)

A handshake to me means that we have accepted it and agreed and we will go forward in the spirit of the thing...It is a commitment that you make to a situation. (Nev)

I guess that you have a benchmark, or at least I have had a benchmark and I wouldn't go under that benchmark. (Pam)

In summary, the three modes are an expression of different stages of the lifelong learning journey into developing vocational moral values. The principles relating to modes are applicable across modes. The principle of *early* intervention refers to the need to address moral values early in any program, project or learning engagement. The principle of *formal* intervention refers to need for dedicated help or intentional instruction, such as provided in schooling. The principle of *vocational* intervention refers to the need to vocationalise moral reasoning, decision-making and action by contextualizing them in vocational practice. Together they embrace the educational outcomes that mix within the various early, formal and vocational education experiences.

Educational Outcomes

The six educational outcome principles that underpin educational outcomes, which emerged from the participants' perceptions were: *specialised knowledge, diversity, situatedness, collegialism, negotiation* and *self-preservation*.

The principle of *specialised knowledge* captures participants' concerns for the desirability of regarding moral development as producing ethical knowledge as a specialised moral skill within the vocational context. This principle is grounded primarily in the distinctiveness of the diverse knowledge types within ethical actions identified in the study. As a body of knowledge and learning, and as a set of competencies, ethical knowledge was clearly identifiable to all the participants across the range of events they articulated as being ethically important. No participants in this study had difficulty in identifying ethically important qualities of human action, although some certainly did struggle to be lucid. It is suggested that participants may have struggled, because they did not have the formal words to express what morality meant to them. However, in their own words they could report morality. For example, Mic was able to report it as ...*[being] honest and [having] an attitude to do good work* . Participants also unambiguously identified ethical and counter ethical behaviours in the context of their industry and knew what was, and was not, moral. This principle of specialized knowledge is evidenced in the contemporary cultural context of the construction industry, for example, ...*commitment, honesty and wanting to do their trade (Sandi)*. Such specialised ethical knowledge was exemplified by Mic, who identified unethical behavior in a situation where the other bloke ...*was going to blame me...he wanted to save himself some money that's all...he didn't do his job properly*.

The principle of *diversity* captures participants' concerns for the importance of taking into account the range of ethical approaches available to the moral agent, as identified previously by a number of researchers (e.g. Bagnall 1999, James 2005, Singer 1994,), e.g.: egoism, deontology, teleology, virtue ethic, universalism, situationalism and so on. Ethical action is clearly action that can be taken on a number of different grounds within a wealth of customs, cultures and events. The principle captures the understanding and recognition of difference and draws on the ability to develop spontaneity in moral action, decision-making, judgment and

learning. Importantly for moral education, diversity forms within one's ethical framework for dealing with difference; to become morally sensitive and aware within that framework. Participant responses which captured this principle include:

...as a member of the human race and living in this society, you are a good enough example of someone who can think it out for themselves within the framework... (Mary)

Isn't the deciding factor on something being ethical or not is: what the reason for it is? (Nev)

Oh, I suppose [keeping the employer's equipment] could be [seen as theft]. But, isn't possession nine tenths of the law? He just hasn't come to pick it up. (Ric)

I think that I am relatively open to hear people's views on things...I will stay committed to what I have said and explain more fully the reasons why I still hold those views.... (Doug)

The principle of *situatedness* captures participants' concerns for the importance of ethical action being responsive to the immediate cultural context. For example:

...[learning ethics] depends on one's maturity as a young person, that without the experience, a young person may not even understand the implications of the different situations. (Mary)

...where ethics probably comes in more...is with experience and you come across situations. (Doug)

The principle is an elaboration of the principle of diversity but is grounded in the cultural diversity of the contemporary context of ethical action. Underpinning the principle is the responsiveness of participants in the study to the diverse customs, traditions, practices and environments involved in ethical action, decisions and learning. An ethical act, then, is deemed to be appropriate when it is reflexive of situational circumstances in the customs, culture and context of the industry. A general principle for ethical knowledge and moral skill is appropriateness; that in

ethically charged events and situations, the vocational moral value is applied appropriately. Learning to be situationally adept is to know one's morality and how it is to be applied appropriately; a learning task that is lifelong. It is not morality that applies a rule unintelligibly, but appropriately, by refraining from doing so or applying it differentially in separate ethical events or situations in response to a concern for others' welfare. Understanding difference is implicit in the principle because a situational ethic draws on the specificities or vagaries, and the diversity within each separate event and action. A plethora of cultural and physical contexts which are variously seen to influence the participants and their ethically significant events informs the principle.

There are times when the individual good is undermined by the perceived good of the whole – even when the perceived good of the whole is entirely irrelevant to the situation... (Mary)

I talk to them [my employees] about how they feel about their family. It is probably something that we are not supposed to do now in these anti-discrimination sensitive times, but I talk to them about how they feel about their family....It is my responsibility as the employer for taking my employees into someone else's home. (Pam)

The principle of *collegiality* captures participants' concerns for the importance of support from like-minded workmates of any gender, professional entity and/or mentors, especially for taking action contrary to prevailing norms or values. The principle calls for learning the skills to argue persuasively one's point of view to engender the support of others in a joint approach to ethical action. First and foremost, it draws attention to learning competencies in identifying people who assent to ethically appropriate action. One such characteristic from the study was experience:

[Experienced tradesman] had done the years and worked in places that I had never heard of – all around the countryside on a variety of jobs and they'd seen a lot more pitfalls and a lot more problems and a lot more stuff-ups and know how to get around them... (Mark)

Collegiality also calls for a degree of self-confidence in presenting one's case. Grounding the principle is egoism because it potentially requires a level of egoistic

self-confidence in a highly motivated and self-determined person acting to convince others:

...It was ethical...on the basis that he wanted to advance his product and he saw us as an opportunity [and] I was buying his expertise at a cheap price. (Nev)

A universality of ethical perception within group action, grounded in collegiality within the industry and public organizations, is also implicit in the principle:

The Queensland Master Builders Association are there to negotiate regulation for the industry with industry interest being their main concern. (Mic)

...the master builders would sit down with the national public works people - who look after the interest of the public works and the master builders look after the interest of the builders - and you might get the engineers and architects involved and they all agree that this is a document that is fair and reasonable amongst the parties. (Wes)

Collegiality within the contemporary cultural context of the construction industry is seen as being in itself appropriate and customary. In some cases, such as within industry associations, collegial pursuits and structures are to be expected because the associations were created for just such a purpose. The principle is grounded primarily in participants' observations about the value of collegial support and the difficulty of acting ethically in its absence. Its development arguably grounds mechanisms important for moral ascendancy in the workplace.

The principle of *negotiation* captures participants' concerns for the importance in ethical action of being able to work towards agreement with others in making difficult ethical decisions. Negotiation is an ethical activity when it engages workers in agreements of mutual understanding and worth. The outcomes of negotiations are not necessarily the issue here, although a positive outcome was desirable and implied by most participants as that which provided a satisfactory outcome for both parties:

I think it is just if it's got integrity, it's honest and to the benefit for all the people involved – fair to both parties. (Nev)

Other participants in the study were concerned with issues arising in contracting, industry associations negotiating for better practices, and worker conditions being pursued. For example, Wes was satisfied with *Construction Queensland, [who] at the moment, has an area as part of its charter to look at equitable contracting* . It was the ethics of these negotiations that was the particular focus of their concern, including acquiring the skills to engage effectively in the conciliation process that was the important educational outcome. The principle invites a response to the circumstances and agendas contingent to cooperation, compromise and concession. An ability to anticipate contingent agendas is needed here. It is on this basis that the principle is seen to be highly situational and grounded in openness to others within the contemporary cultural context: *If you have a situation where your client and yourself can agree to a higher aspiration then it is moral to do it if they agree.* (Mary) Through such openness, collegiality emerged from the study as also being dependent on the responses to the context in which each negotiation was conducted.

The principle of *individualisation* captures participants' concerns for the importance of learning to protect one's own interests and welfare. It is illustrated, in one example, by an architect who expressed concern about giving advice at personal risk:

In this case, I was having a casual conversation with someone and I wasn't paid for any advice but, all the same, I was negligent in opening my mouth about it at all without going and having a look...The correct thing to say would be: "It sounds like a good idea from a life style point of view, but don't take out any wall until you speak to a structural engineer to see if it is a structural wall." Now, that is the right thing to say. Going back to the example, having just told them and we are out in the street and there are no witnesses and it is not the proper environment or anything like that, proof comes down to my word against their word. (Mary)

The principle is grounded in participants' observations of the need to protect themselves from foreseeable harm. The majority of the participants made observations

of this sort in describing their ethically significant events. The principle emerges from the egoistic culture of individual industries—a culture that is supportive of individual action that creates an advantage over others. It also highlights the importance of workers being appropriately responsive to the workplace context. In such a context there is a high expectation that individuals will first and foremost act in their own interest. Egoistic action in such a context is here understood as ethical to the extent that action to protect one's own interests is seen as being socially responsible. To act otherwise would potentially expose one's self to health and occupational risk or to becoming a burden on others and, hence, to be acting irresponsibly. Individualism confers a disposition of character toward self-mastery of one's ability to act egotistically but to do so appropriately within social and contextual convention (Gibbs, 1979: 121-122).

In summary, the data suggest that it is important that the educational outcomes of vocational moral development include specialized knowledge, as well as attention to diversity, situatedness, collegiality, negotiation and individualization.

Educational Engagements

Educational engagements is a broad category outlining ways for vocational moral value to be developed within the lifelong learning experiences of vocational moral appreciation and formation for interrelationships within the construction industry workplace. The principles, outlined below, are *coherence*, *experiential learning*, *modeling* and *feedback*.

Within the category, the principle of *coherence* captures participants' concerns for the need for vocational education to build on each individual's existing ethical knowledge and skill. The principle recognizes prior competencies that can enhance ethical learning or reinforce it for its application within the vocational context; the principle builds on the implication that, in Doug's words ...*experiences in life are a learning type processes...the thing that you felt uneasy about back then has been made clear over time*. Each participant in this study spoke of a unique combination of ethical qualities and contexts in his or her individual background and experience as seen earlier in their comments about upbringing. The principle is grounded primarily in the diversity of conceptions of, and approaches to, ethical learning drawn from the identified factors influencing ethical learning. According to Pam: *If [my employees]*

don't have the utmost respect for their own parents, how can I expect them to feel respect for someone they don't even know? Such coherence clearly recognizes the need to build on each learner's prior ethical learning. To do otherwise, for example, to ignore prior ethical knowledge and skill in the face of spontaneity, would be at best non-educational and incoherent; but it risks immorality or to act oblivious to moral sense, (i.e., it is amoral).

The principle of *experiential learning* captures participants' concerns for the need for ethical learning to involve learners actively in ethical decision-making and action as part of the educational engagement. For instance, Doug believes...*you can teach so much, but until you actually do something with it, the teaching doesn't always stick*. This principle is grounded primarily in the experiential nature of ethical learning identified by the participants in the study as that best learnt within social and/or workplace involvements. It was through engagement and reflection that the participants talked about gaining significant benefit from experience, through their own encounters with others in ethically significant events, from having emotional involvement, and through engaging in further meaning-generation from their prior involvement with lifelong learning. Sandi's comment exemplifies this: *Learning for me personally? It was life experience*. The principle is also seen to embrace both positive and negative learning experiences where ethical or counter-ethical knowledge and skill can be learnt or reinforced, for example, in Ric's case: *...you learn from your mistakes and you learn from what you get right*. The experiential learning principle is grounded within the uniqueness of language, concepts, rules and interrelationships that learners of morals can identify within others and themselves as learners. These findings add that the contemporary cultural context is another aspect of the experiential nature of vocational moral development, and it involves transforming moral understanding in order to achieve its application to contemporaneous workplace culture and practice.

The *modelling* principle captures participants' concerns for the importance of learning from emulating the good example of others, especially respected others:

I think it is something that you've got to lead by example. (Wes)

...the older tradesman would know infinitely more about the work than the young fellers. (Mark)

It is grounded in the frequent mention by participants of the importance of the appropriate example of others to their ethical development.

It is all part of the quality of people and the quality of leadership and the quality of everything is always to do with people doing what is right, fair, honest, ethical, etc. So if you've got a good role model, you'll learn. If you've got a bad role model, you'll react to that. (Wes)

The importance of a workplace climate conducive to positive modeling is drawn out of the social dimension of ethical action, where participants spoke of their desire for more altruistic behaviour. The participants' responses, with two examples here, were reflecting on a need being asked for a suggested conducive modeling alternate workplace culture.

...in the back of my mind I would always want to help people. My wife and I have always done that. If someone needs you we've always helped them. (Ric)

...I think you've got to consider other people. (Nev)

Moreover, it was only when a participant had already learnt the appropriate action that negative modeling was seen as reinforcing ethical action. In advising others, Ric *...would advise him not to hold a grudge against anyone because that will only chew away at you for the rest of your life. You're better off forgetting about it and getting on with your life.* The use of negative modeling, in reinforcing or strengthening already formed ethical sense, is thus seen as a positive outcome of negative modeling.

This modeling principle was found by participants to be effective across the lifelong learning journey of upbringing, schooling, work experience and other social contexts.

The *feedback* principle captures participants' concerns for the importance of evaluative comment, critical reflection and acknowledging experience in reinforcing appropriate ethical action and in drawing attention to inappropriate action. For Mary,

...[feedback] could be beneficial to have appropriateness reinforced with a few words and noticing what you are learning so you are conscious of it rather than it just seeping in by chance. Implicit in the nature of feedback, in this vocational moral context, is that of timeliness, of being proximate to the action, and of always providing it openly and honestly. The principle is primarily grounded in the strongly situated nature of ethical action in the contemporary cultural context:

...looking at what you can pick up and observe from the outside, you use your opinion to say: Well this is what I think has happened from that, and so on. (Doug)

To be situated involves being responsive to the particularities of that context—this is a vocational moral value. In turn, to be responsive entails appropriate feedback on the impact of one's actions within, and upon, the context. In other words, it requires reflexivity. Feedback is a key part of that reflexivity. The principle is grounded in the learner's impressions of what are characteristics of moral agents, appropriate actions, judgments that lead to appropriate consequences and that which provides the learner with positive vocational moral values.

In summary, these four principles of educational engagement (coherence, experiential learning, modeling and feedback) are important in ensuring that the vocationalisation of moral reasoning, decision-making and action is coherently related to general moral development, but appropriately transformed for the context of work.

Industry Context

The industry context is the cultural workplace for utilising vocational moral values. Important characteristics of industry contexts were found to be application, influence and particularity. From context, one draws the necessary differences that set vocational moral values apart from other moral values. Two principles were drawn from the data: *regulation* and *cultural climate*.

The principle of *regulation* captures participants' concerns for the importance of ethically supportive regulatory regimes. The principle highlights the regulatory criteria and standards used by an industry to generate and maintain procedural and performance consistency across a diverse population of professionals, business owners, advisors, tradespeople, labourers, suppliers and clients. Regulation is seen as

having an important influence over the ethics of actions taken within the industry. For Mic: *...A lot of it is in our interest. [Industry associations] are there to negotiate regulation for the industry with industry interest being their main concern, and ...if we are going to have to be regulated so should every one else be.* The principle is grounded in the broader contemporary cultural context of accountability, quality control and governance. The principle is deontological in that it embraces the obligation of ethical agents to official Acts, standards and best industry practices.

The principle of *cultural climate* captures participants' concerns for the value of a working climate that is supportive of ethical action and learning in the industry. The principle is strongly grounded in the existence of workplaces that encourage action that benefits others. Glen's comments embody this principle: *I guess that's the difference between running a small business and somebody running a large company. One cares for individuals more than the other. The little man cares more.* The principle relates learners to a culture that either values or devalues ethical action through qualities such as selflessness, respect, fairness, honesty, openness, and impartiality or their inherent opposites. The principle is a dualism in vocational moral development to encourage ethical action on the one hand, and on the other, to challenge learners of vocational moral values to act differently where a tendency for immoral action is suggested.

In summary, the industry context, for the potential of developing vocational moral values, embraces ethics as a means to sustaining practice through moral interpretation in a controlled environment.

SUMMARY

Based on these findings, the case for teaching ethics as part of Vocational Education and Training (VET) in the construction industry may be summarised as follows.

Firstly, there is a clearly established perception of a need for improved ethical action in the industry. This is evident from critical reports on the industry, such as that by Cole (2003) and from the examples of ethically challenging events presented by the participants in the study.

Secondly, there is reason to believe that ethics can be taught and learned through educational interventions as a part of vocational education. This is grounded

in the evidence informing the first three principles above—those identifying the value of *formal* educational intervention to enhance ethical action, the value of *early* educational intervention to that end, and the particular value of such intervention through *vocational* education. It is also confirmed by how the participants could illuminate how interventions had been effective in their experiences.

Thirdly, the learning outcomes towards which such educational interventions should be directed might best construct ethical knowledge along the lines indicated in the following six principles identified in the study. They are principles to present ethical knowledge as a *specialized* form of knowledge and skill, evidenced in a *diversity* of workplace practices and ethical perspectives, each of which has a unique set of *situational* particularities. Ethical action is encouraged by *collegiality* and the ability to *negotiate* ethically appropriate courses of action with others, but from a position of autonomous *individualism*.

Fourthly, the educational processes that need to feature strongly in such interventions might best be guided by the following four strategic training principles identified in the study – those pointing to the importance of building *coherently* on each individual’s existing learning, using *experiential* approaches to learning, and *modelling* ethical skill and commitment in learning contexts rich in ethical *feedback*.

Fifthly, the construction industry and possibly other workplaces might embrace and enact, not only those of the foregoing principles (particularly those of modelling and feedback) through which the workplace is ethically powerful, but also the final two principles—those identifying the importance of an ethically supportive *regulatory* framework and of the *cultural climate* in the industry itself.

Finally, the combination of the 15 principles as a group of curriculum resources to plan and deliver a lifelong educational journey for the workers of tomorrow is testament to the moral achievements of the 14 construction workers who shared their understanding and perceptions of vocational moral values and how they acquired them. For further clarity, the 15 principles are summarised below in Table 1. Table 1 summarises the categories in the first column and the 15 principles as subheadings with their respective sub-sets in the second column. The third column

illustrates the way educational outcomes and the industry contexts relate to traditional ethical orientations and that of situationalism.

A model (Figure 1) provides a diagrammatical relationship between the categories in order to illustrate an ideology for a curriculum to develop vocational moral values. That relationship is developmental where the industry context, as a cultural milieu, influences vocational moral development through the various modes of education, which, in turn, produce the educational outcomes from the engagements within the modes.

[Table 1 and Figure 1 about here]

CONCLUSION

This paper has identified 15 principles for engaging in the development of vocational morals. It argues the case for intervention in vocational moral development which otherwise would continue to be serendipitous in a social context that calls for more serious and structured attention to this important matter. The principles have been derived from the reflections of construction workers who have been able to exemplify each in the history of their own moral reasoning, decision-making and actions. The set of fifteen principles outlined in this paper have been derived from the reflections of the workers and professionals in the construction industry, but relate well to general concepts of moral development, which are often introduced in schooling and developed in diverse life experiences. The workers saw these factors as most valuable in the development of their own vocational moral sense. The set of principles should not be seen as a collection of disparate items which can be selected from randomly. Rather, it is intended that they should be seen as a suite, which contribute to the development of vocational moral values as they are applied appropriately at different stages, and in different contexts on a lifelong learning journey. **However, there needs to be further research to support these findings before being able to confirm the need for significant changes to educational courses.**

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