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ETHICS EDUCATION: A BETTER WAY FORWARD THAN ETHICS TRAINING?

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ABSTRACT

This paper contends that ethics 'training' is not the correct perspective for organizations to use in their attempt to develop ethical decision making in staff. This paper argues that it is cognitive moral development, and not ethics training, which will provide employees with a framework they can use in the future when confronted with diverse ethical dilemmas. Before organizations introduce ethics training into their organisation they should consider whether they want to train their employees in ethics or to educate their workers as to the possibilities that may confront them, and to provide them with frameworks to enhance their ethical decision making abilities.

ETHICS EDUCATION: A BETTER WAY FORWARD THAN ETHICS TRAINING?

A number of writers have cited ethics ‘training’ programs as a means of institutionalizing ethics within the organisation, (Weber, 1981; Browning and Zabriskie, 1983; Center for Business Ethics, 1986; Murphy, 1988; McDonald and Zepp, 1989; Axline, 1990; McDonald and Zepp, 1990; Harrington, 1991; Laczniaak and Murphy, 1991; Maclagan, 1992; Dean, 1992; and Sims, 1992). Amongst writers there is a range of views on the frequency of such programs. Laczniaak and Murphy (1991) suggest that these training programs should only comprise one seminar to be attended every several years, whilst Harrington (1991:29) believes that organizations should,

orient ethics training toward strategic issues ... Thus ethics training is really part of a larger, organized effort to integrate ethics into the culture and long-range strategic efforts of the firm.

Fraedrich and Ferrell (1992:250) whilst examining the cognitive consistency of marketing managers in ethical situations came up with the finding that,

Only 15 percent of the respondents did not change moral philosophies between work and non-work situations. This may mean that people alter their moral philosophy or value structure to cope with ethical issues in the work environment. Respondents may have separated personal ethics from business ethics based on social and economic factors in the work environment. These factors may be opportunity, a manager’s superior, increased pressure for monetary results, or significant others.

Hence, if Fraedrich and Ferrell are correct, the issue of ethical decision making is a complex one that requires more attention than “attending a seminar every several years”. If ethics was a simple skill that one could ‘train’ for in all situations, then why this large disparity between ethical decisions made at work as compared to non-work situations?

It is argued that an individual’s ethics can be impacted upon at two levels. One is at the individual level and the other is at the corporate level. Individuals whilst working for the corporation are, one could assert, also working in their own self-interest. The individual impacts on the corporation and the corporation impacts on the individual. This is not a simple interaction.

As such, in this paper, we contend that ‘training’ is not the correct perspective to be placing on the process of trying to involve staff in ethical decision making. The complexity of the problem/task means that one can better resolve the issue by ‘educating’ individuals to the possibilities that may confront them and provide them with frameworks to enhance their ethical decision making abilities.

TRAINING OR EDUCATION?

The purpose of training, according to Bryans and Smith (2000:228) is “relatively narrow and well-defined being typically short term with outcomes that can be specified in a degree of detail, probably as competencies or skills”. Training typically teaches people to do specific tasks and as such it is often narrow in its focus and without necessarily influencing behavior. Training implies that there are ‘answers’ to problems which present themselves. In providing answers or solutions to situations, training does not acknowledge the existence or variability of outside factors that may impact on the situation. The term ‘training’ comes from the latin word *trahere* that means 'to drag or to draw'. Education comes from the latin *ducere*, which means 'to lead'. Qubein (1996) sees training as organizations dragging their employees towards their goals rather than leading them. Education on the other hand is broader than training in that it is about developing the individual in terms of one's personal characteristics.

There are a number of differences between training and education. Training teaches people what to do, it deals with actions; it teaches *how* to do something. It is prescriptive in nature and as such is anchored in the past. It teaches people to perform repetitive actions and in an environment as volatile and dynamic as today, employees need to have an orientation that is comfortable with constant learning or change. When circumstances change old ways of doing things have to be ‘unlearned’ and a whole new set of protocols learned. Training becomes dead-end when skills become obsolete.

On the other hand education should provide employees with the ability to cope with change, to be innovative and to show initiative. It is about providing people with a framework or bank of skills and abilities that they can draw upon in the future to make decisions. Training is prescriptive, education teaches people to make choices. Whilst training gives people competence it is not competence which is the hallmark of successful employees. People who can demonstrate inner qualities rather than just external skills are more successful (Quebein 1996).

Traditionally, learning in the workplace has been understood in terms of behaviorism, which Marsick (1988:187) says “ is a perspective compatible with the machine like design of organizations”. Behaviorism, a philosophy that emphasizes environmental conditioning at all levels, does not foster the reflective abilities needed to assist people to learn in the workplace. It is this reflectivity which we would contend is an integral part of any ethics education program.

Mezirow (1981, 1985) identified 3 domains of learning applicable to the workplace. Instrumental learning takes place when people learn their job and it is generally prescriptive. Dialogic learning is when people learn about the culture of the organization, its policies and procedure. Self-reflective learning involves individuals asking fundamental questions about their own identity and the need for self-change. People become aware of the connection between all 3 when they become critically reflective i.e. they bring their “assumptions premises, criteria and schemata into consciousness and vigorously critique them” (Mezirow, 1985:25).

At the time that Mezirow and Marsick were writing, most workplaces were taking a behaviorist approach to training. There has however been a new paradigm emerging in terms of workplace learning. This new paradigm has been loosely termed “the learning organization” (Senge 1990). This new organization has broadened the focus of learning away from the purely instrumental approach. An integration of both personal and job-related development is now emerging and there is a need to recognize the value of the individual and the group in terms of decision making in the organization. All of this is taking place in an environment that encourages individuals and groups to reflect on their day to day activities. This 'reflectivity' is done in both formal and informal situations and in doing so decisions are reviewed in the light of outcomes and problems that may be reconceptualized as factors change. In this enlightened environment to which many organizations are now aspiring, the approach that we are suggesting to educate people in morals seems imminently suitable. If individuals are to be encouraged to make their own sense of reality through decision making, then how are such decisions made in ethical situations?

MODELS OF ETHICAL DECISION MAKING

In the last twenty years, a number of writers have attempted to encapsulate the ethical decision making process in a model. Three of these models are those by Trevino (1986), Hunt and Vitell (1986) and Strong and Meyer (1992).

Trevino: A Person-Situation Interactionist Model

The title of Trevino's model implies that when individuals are making ethical decisions there is a definite interaction between the individual and the situation in which the person finds themselves. The model is based upon three factors. These areas are cognitive moral development, individual moderators and situational moderators. The stage of cognitive moral development of the individual interacts with the other factors in the model to produce decisions which lead one to act either ethically or unethically in any given situation, depending upon the nature of the ethical dilemma.

Trevino (1986) contends that the situational moderators can change one's stage of cognitive moral development. This Trevino believes can be done by placing individuals in the position where either the organisation's culture, the immediate job context or the characteristics of the work can lead the individual to face ethical dilemmas which will challenge the individual's current stage of cognitive moral development. The need to face these ethical dilemmas will mean that these moderators will have a positive impact on the individual's stage of cognitive moral development.

Hunt and Vitell: General Theory of Marketing Ethics

The Hunt and Vitell (1986:5) model was established in an attempt to explain the decision making process for problem situations having ethical content. Hunt and Vitell (1986)

used studies by: Newstrom and Ruch (1975), Brenner and Molander (1977), Ferrell and Weaver (1978), Dubinsky, Berkowitz and Rudelius (1980), and finally, Bartels (1967) to build up evidence to support their contention of the importance of the role of the organisation in influencing the ethics of employees.

The Hunt and Vitell (1986) approach has been labeled as the “rational man” approach by Laczniaak and Murphy (1991). Their approach is based upon the belief that an individual will focus upon any given ethical problem from the perspective of calculating the dimensions of the problem and working through “a set of decision protocols” that will maximize the outcomes available to the individual. One then decides upon the appropriate option by examining the relative merits of each course of action and evaluating them. Finally, one makes a decision based on one’s judgement of the situation that is being faced. However, that decision and the proposed ensuing course of action, that the individual had planned to take, may be impacted upon by situational constraints that may exist at the time.

Strong and Meyer: An Integrative Descriptive Model of Ethical Decision Making

Strong and Meyer have developed a model in which they have attempted to align managerial decision making with the effect that it has upon corporate conduct. Strong and Meyer (1992) suggested that managerial behaviour and decision making would have an impact upon the manager’s conduct of business from the perspective of social responsibility in the areas of: legal responsibility, ethical responsibility, economic responsibility and discretionary responsibility. The benefit of this measure, according to Strong and Meyer (1992), is that it forces individuals to make a choice between conflicting options. This choice approximates the real world of managerial decision making where managers must look at alternative ways of solving dilemmas. In many cases, a manager will be confronted by the necessity to decide trade-offs between alternatives. The perfect solution is rarely found and so a compromise situation must be considered and actioned.

Each of the three models examines the ways in which individuals attempt to make ethical decisions. They all recognise that the process is a synthesis of individual and situational factors that combine in different ways to produce decisions. Each individual comes to any decision situation as a unique being. The person can not separate themselves from the past, the present, or the future in terms of the impact of the decision that may be made. Each individual perceives the issue, the constraining features of the external environment and the organisational forces that are involved from a unique perspective. Each person then makes a decision. The individual then feels the impact of that decision which may either reinforce the decision made, or may lead, in future situations, to a modification of the original behaviour. All of the models demonstrate that the circumstances in which one makes an ethical decision are complex and that more empirical testing needs to be done to determine the explanatory power of variables.

Hence, how can one ‘train’ for these situations? The simple answer is that one can not. Frederick Taylor could ‘train’ workers to shovel better and the Gilbreths could ‘train’

people to lay bricks better, but you can't 'train' people to be better ethical decision makers because of the complexity of the task at hand. You can 'educate' them to use "a set of decision protocols" in various situations as suggested by Hunt and Vitell (1986), but 'training': impossible!

The next section of this paper looks at one such method of 'educating' staff based on the work of Kohlberg that may enhance an employee's ability to make better considered ethical decisions. Kohlberg is of interest because both the Trevino model and the Strong and Meyer model draw heavily upon his work.

KOHLBERG: HIS IMPACT UPON THEORIES OF MORAL DEVELOPMENT

Kohlberg is a prominent scholar in the subject of moral development of the individual. As MacLagan (1992:323) says,

The inclusion of some reference to Lawrence Kohlberg's (1969; 1973; 1981) work on individuals' moral development has become de rigueur for those writing on this aspect of management and organisation development.

Kohlberg's interest in moral development stemmed from his interest in Piagetian theory. He pursued his interest in the moral development of individuals contending that, even though in Piagetian theory children developed to the stage of autonomous morality at the age of twelve or thirteen, they had further to go in order to reach the stage of moral maturity.

Kohlberg (1969) developed a model of cognitive moral development (CMD) that comprises six stages. The model consists of three major levels with two stages within each level.

In the first level, or the Preconventional level (Stages 1 and 2), the focus in Stage 1 is upon the individual who works to avoid punishment or receive the hedonistic consequences of one's actions. At this stage the individual also respects physical power and those individuals who are in charge. In Stage 2 the individual progresses on to develop the desire to continue to satisfy one's own needs and occasionally the needs of others. At this level, moral decisions are made on the basis of the immediate consequences to the individual.

At the second level, or the Conventional level, the orientation in Stage 3 is towards good behaviour that pleases others and is approved by them. One gains approval by doing the 'right' thing as perceived by those in authority. In Stage 4 one develops into the law and order stage where one focuses upon the right of authority and rules. The desire is to maintain the social order.

In the final level, or the Post-Conventional, Autonomous, or Principled Level, one attempts to define moral values in a personal way that does not necessarily rely upon or take its guidance from others. A person in Stage 5 still considers a legalistic perspective,

as in Stage 4, but now the possibility of 'social utility' is explored. By that one means, that the views of the society need to be considered, not just what is prescribed by law. In the final stage, or Stage 6, one seeks to define what is right according to one's conscience and the pursuit of personally justified ethical principles. There is a desire to pursue the universal principles of justice, reciprocity, equality of all and the recognition of the worth and dignity of the individual. At this level, the individual becomes decreasingly egocentric in favor of strong personal commitment to self-selected universal principles (Goolsby and Hunt, 1992).

Research on Kohlberg's model by Colby et. al (1983) cited in Robertson & Fadil (1999) suggests that moral development is positively related to education and work experience. One of the criticisms levelled at Kohlberg's work is that it explains and predicts cognition and not behaviour. Yet, Trevino's (1986) studies have shown a statistically significant relationship to exist between moral reasoning and ethical behaviour.

A CMD approach to ethics education concentrates on developing individuals' reasoning patterns so that they can better integrate the interests of various organisational stakeholders into their decision making. This approach to ethics education assists employees with working through ethical issues rather than exhorting them, through traditional ethics 'training', to 'do the right thing', or imposing prescriptive codes of conduct upon them. The approach of implementing a "mechanical decision process for resolving ethical issues is illusionary" (Brady 1999:310).

For those individuals whose personal ethics are at the highest level of cognitive moral development there will be no need to seek guidance or advice from superiors as they will have already formed ethical principles which will guide their decision making. For those individuals less cognitively developed there may be concerns for the organisation.

Grover (1993) found that professionals with low cognitive moral development are more likely to act unethically as compared to individuals at the highest level of cognitive development. Trevino (1986) posits that individual variables (such as ego strength and locus of control) as well as organisational and situational variables may affect the extent to which there is consistency between cognition and ethical behaviour. However, Trevino (1986) further suggests that it is cognitive moral development of the individual which has the greatest influence on ethical decision making compared with the other variables.

One of the criticisms levelled at CMD is its failure to transfer to business organisations (Goolsby & Hunt, 1992). Equally such a criticism can be levelled at many traditional business ethics programs. Many business ethics programs use situation-specific case studies and while these are usually applicable to the business environment, they cannot hope to cover the myriad of situations that individuals may find themselves confronted with in the future. Courses that focus on guidelines and procedures are often criticized as being too abstract or too simplistic to be of real value (Goolsby & Hunt 1992). These criticisms tend to focus on the content rather than the process of courses. These types of courses do not provide participants with transferable skills to assist with their decision making when they encounter situations outside the parameters of the case-specific

examples they encountered in their training. CMD courses educate people in how to reason through moral dilemmas by exposing them to reasoning patterns, and thereby providing them with an understanding of what is required when they encounter ethically difficult situations (Goolsby & Hunt 1992).

MORAL EDUCATION

According to Kohlberg and others, a major goal of education is to stimulate development of individuals through the stages of moral reasoning (Fraenkel 1977). Kohlberg 1971, cited in Munsey 1980 said that “The goal of moral education is the stimulation of the individual’s own moral judgements and capacities, thus allowing him (sic) to control his own behavior...[It is] the stimulation of development...rather than...the teaching of fixed rules...[It] involves taking the next step in a direction towards which he is already tending, rather than imposing an alien pattern upon him...” From an organizational point of view, how do organizations transpose the ideas of Kohlberg and his cognitive moral development, into their ethics education programs?

Several researchers including Galbraith and Jones (1975) and Beyer (1976), looked at applying Kohlberg’s theory to the classroom. Galbraith and Jones (1975) developed a 3-part model for teaching moral discussions. This model had a list of general instructions for presenting the original dilemma. It had a series of alternative dilemmas in case the first dilemma failed to elicit controversy and it had a list of probe questions.

Beyer (1976) suggested 5 distinct steps or stages through which one needs to take the student. This model sees the facilitator presenting a dilemma, recommending possible courses of action and getting the students to take a tentative position. The next step in the model sees individuals in small groups discussing the reasoning behind their initial position. Then the groups are all called together and, as a large group, they discuss decisions and reasoning behind all the small group decisions.

As a part of this process, Beyer (1976) identifies 5 types of probe questions. First, is the clarifying probe that asks people to define terms or clarify comments. The second type of probe is an issue specific probe. This probe encourages participants to consider their attitude to a particular issue. The inter-issue probe encourages participants to think about what they would do when a conflict occurs between two separate issues. A role-switch probe has participants taking on the position of someone else involved in a dilemma, in this way getting the students to see another point of view. The last type of probe – the universal consequence probe - asks participants to consider what might happen if such reasoning were applied to every situation.

Despite Beyer’s belief that moral dilemmas should be as simple as possible, in reality, dilemmas in real life are seldom simple. Most of these models focussed on teaching children about morals and so the belief that scenarios should be kept simple seems logical. However, it is our contention that you can take these early models and develop them for use with adults. In this case, there needs to be balance between dilemmas that are too complicated and can confuse, and situations which do not challenge or sufficiently interest the participants.

One way of hopefully avoiding this scenario is to sequence the dilemmas. In sequencing dilemmas the same story and characters are used but the original situation is changed to provoke disagreement about what the main characters should do (Fraenkel 1977). The notion of sequencing dilemmas has some merit as one might be used to build on the previous one and in this way you can 'move' individuals through different stages of development, as espoused by Kohlberg. It is important to note, however, that it is not just about analyzing situations and moving on to the next situation it is about giving explicit and sustained consideration of what the consequences of each decision may be. Using this process one hopes to develop an individual's cognitive moral ability. "One reason why a lot of people do not develop morally is because better alternatives have not occurred to them. They frequently continue to react in conventional ways because they perceive they have no other way of reacting" (Fraenkel 1977:80).

More recent researchers, such as Trevino (1992) and Brown (1994), suggest the use of participation and role-plays as being ideal for ethics and moral education. Determining the value of such media as being as effective as group problem solving or discussions sessions requires further investigation.

In discussing cognitive moral development we must be cognizant of the fact that most of the work in this area was directed at developing children. It was not until 1980 that Kohlberg (cited in Armon 1997) acknowledged that Stage 5, which includes the reciprocal relationship between systems of rights and systems of duties, was probably a phenomenon of adulthood. In considering older learners, we must be conscious of the need to apply adult learning principles and in addition, we need to consider the environment in which this learning takes place.

Brookfield (1998:290) defines moral learning as "the process whereby adults learn to integrate a moral dimension into their decision making". According to Brookfield, adult moral learning focuses on 5 interconnected processes:

- what is morally admirable or defensible behavior is subjective
- morality is collectively determined, transmitted and enforced
- moral reasoning and behaviour can be ambiguous, therefore there is a need for tolerance of a multiplicity of views
- learning to accept one's own moral limitations
- learning to be self reflective about our own moral reasoning and claims to morality.

Once individuals come to appreciate these factors this then enhances their ability to process multiple norms and consequences in order to come up with an appropriate ethical judgement. Being critically reflective involves assessing the accuracy and validity of norms. It is about judging the 'fit' between the moral rules we have learned over the course of our life, and the applicability and relevance they have to our adult and working life. "Adult moral learning focuses on the contradictions involved in fusing universal moral standards with the pragmatic constraints and situational imperatives of relationships, work and community involvement."(Brookfield 1998:9).

In their study, which examines the improvement of moral development through an increase in reflection, Lopez and Lopez (1998:234) found that “the teaching and learning of attentional strategies, of problem solving procedures, of the anticipation of consequence, of verbal self control by using internal self-speech and the learning of how to take the necessary time before dealing with problems, all of which form part of the process for increasing reflectivity, enable the individuals to improve their moral judgement.”

A word of warning however, to those responsible for conducting the ethics ‘education’ session. Facilitators of adult learning cannot simply function as resource people or technicians of learning. Facilitators need to prompt individuals to consider alternatives. They need to get their students to scrutinize their values and behavior and the process should be one that is not so personally threatening as to be a block to learning. There is no point in a facilitator rigorously examining group members' beliefs and values, if that process is so anxiety producing that individuals, in an attempt to protect their self-esteem, choose to leave the room, or withdraw from discussion (Brookfield 1986). This same facilitator also has the difficult task of keeping his/her values and beliefs in check and not letting this influence the learning process: not an easy task.

If these types of ethics discussions are to be successful then Brookfield (1986) suggests 4 conditions that need to be met. First, group members need to develop an appropriate culture for group discussion so that there is equity of participation. Second, leaders should give considerable thought to the material used for the discussion so that it is neither too factual nor too uncontroversial and it definitely should not be answered in the course preparatory reading. Third, leaders should be well versed in the subject and in the principles of group dynamics. “Only someone who is skilled at dealing with problems caused by apparent isolates, pressures to silence deviants and those adults who attempt to use the group as a means of bolstering their self-esteem, can be said to be an effective discussion leader” (Brookfield 1986:140). Finally, discussion participants should be prepared for discussion sessions. This is done by developing their reasoning skills, (prior to these sessions) so that inconsistencies and ambiguities in arguments can be detected and through this process communication skills are also enhanced. If organizations can provide a forum that enables the development of reflective analytical skills as well as expecting participants to maintain a democratic, respectful culture in group discourse, then the discussion method is uniquely suited to facilitating critical adult learning.

After examining one's expectations from the teaching of business ethics, Morgan (1996:52) concluded that we should hope for, “...the cultivation of critical awareness of both the moral problems presented in business and the means of applying some moral principles and reasoning in order to achieve clarity, the avoidance of logical fallacies, an understanding of moral concepts and critical examination of arguments.”

Whilst there is considerable evidence to support the view that most people’s values and morals are learned early in life, Armon & Dawson’s (1997) long term study found that moral reasoning, as conceptualized by Kohlberg (1981, 1984), can develop into

adulthood. They acknowledge that moral development continued into middle age but for some, the occurrence diminished. It does support the evidence for continued and significant development during middle and possibly late adulthood. The implication for teaching business ethics using cognitive moral development is self-evident.

CONCLUSION

Ethical decision making is not a simple skill for which one can train. It is a complex process that requires education initiated and conducted by experienced facilitators, who understand the intricacies of that which is required in educational situations.

Unlike Taylor, who believed that there was 'one best way', and that people could be trained in that 'one best way', adult moral learning is more complex as it involves a myriad of factors that impact on the decision to be made. The individual's moral values, the organisational culture and society's expectations, all meld into one. Acknowledging this, from an organisational perspective is a more accurate representation of the realities confronting employees with regard to ethical decision making.

Organizations need to recognize that they are unable to 'train' individuals in ethical decision making. The best that one can hope for is to arm one's employees with a range of skills that enables each person to establish an ethical reality for himself or herself in any given situation. Such education should be "...not about rules, but about how to make value-based decisions." (Newman 1997:26).

Cognitive Moral Development, as the basis for ethics education programs, must surely be seen as more than just a 'viable alternative'. It should be the foundation stone upon which ethics education in organizations is constructed. Hopefully, the education provided will assist each individual to decide for themselves the best course of action to take when confronted with an ethical dilemma. The best outcome, for which the senior management of an organization can hope, is that the decision made has an ethical congruence with the values of the organization.

Education will produce this ability to adapt, whilst training will only produce an ability to replicate known situations. As ethical dilemmas vary from situation to situation and the individual perspective of employees will differ, one must rely on the adaptive ability of education based solutions than those narrowly defined in training. Education broadens the mind to deal with the unfamiliar and thus it should be relied upon when facilitating ethical discussions within organizations.

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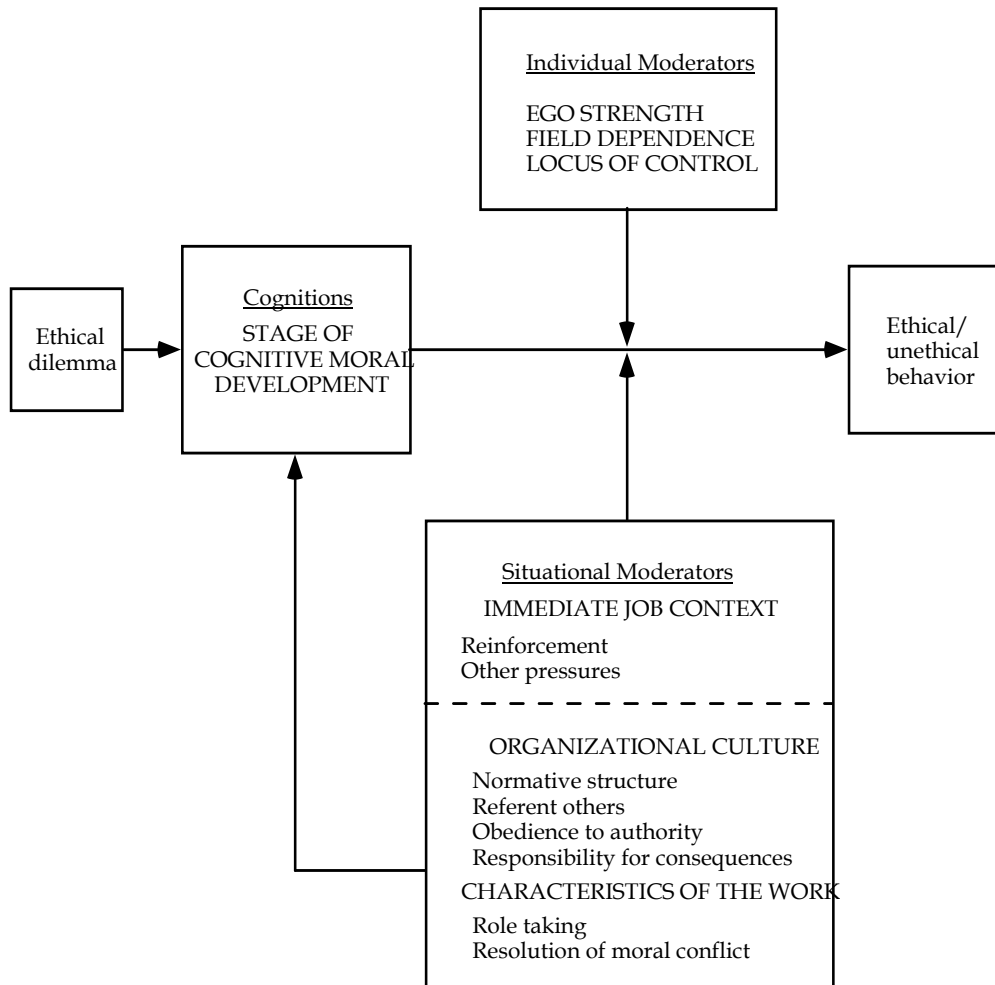
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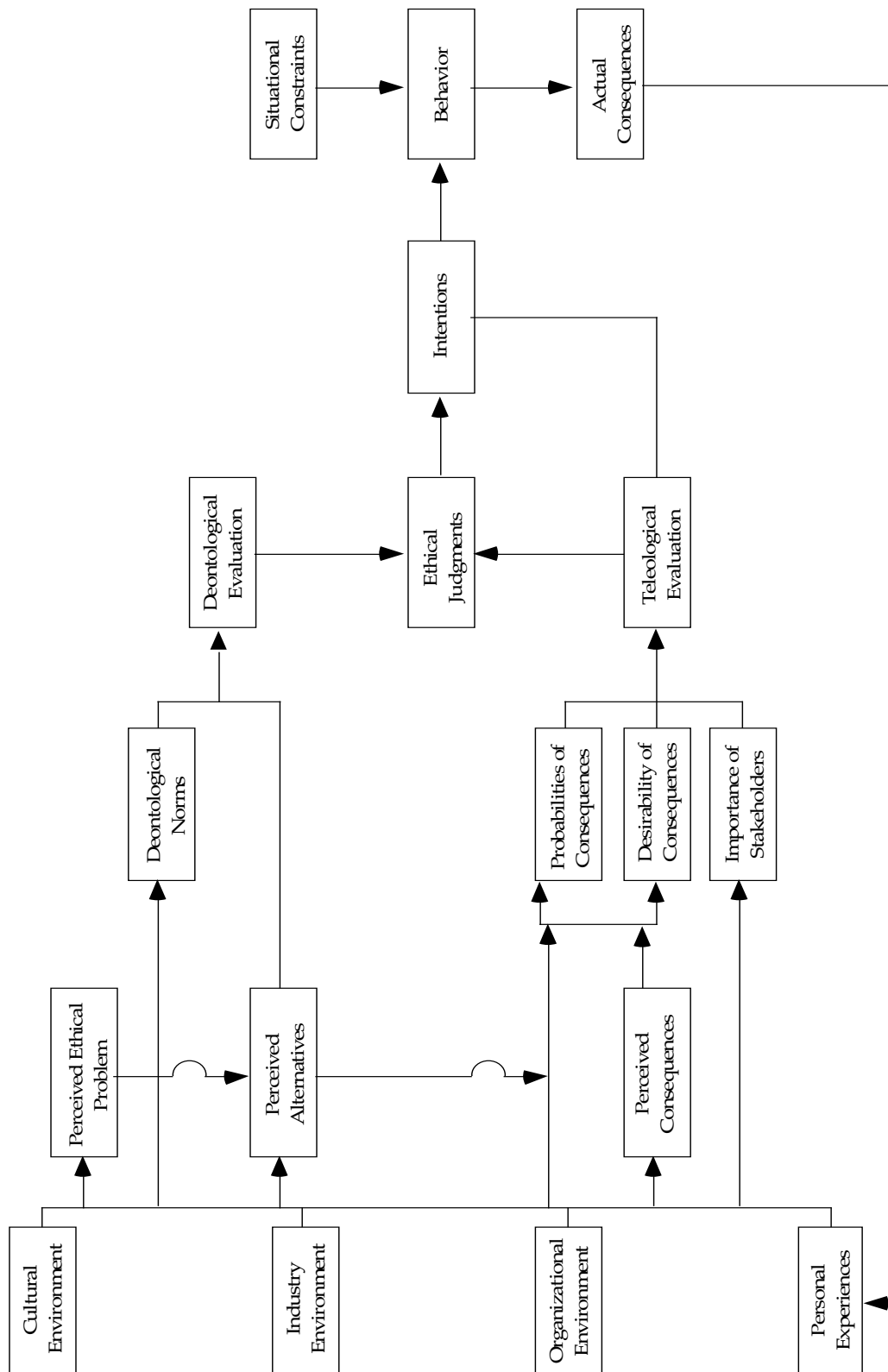
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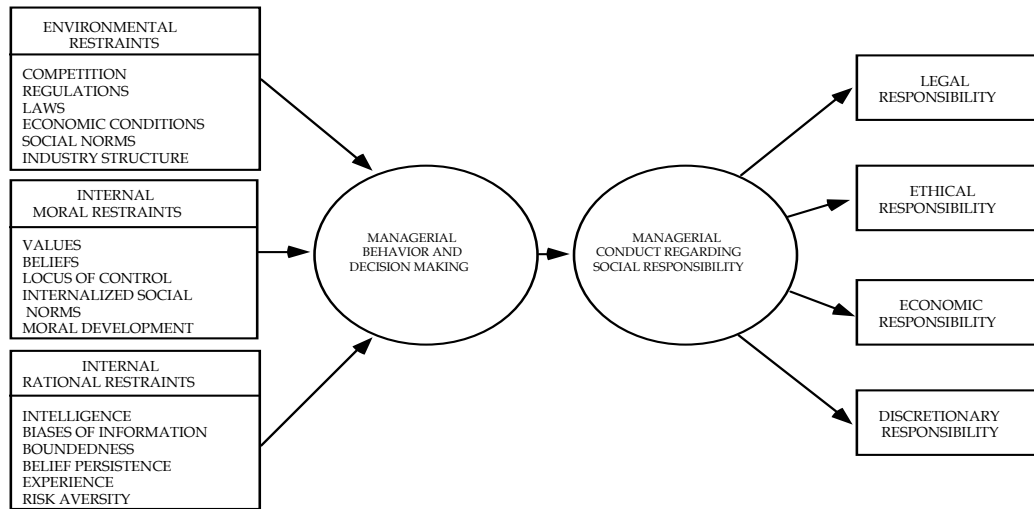


Fig. 1. Managerial decision making model of corporate responsibility