

Enhancing Ethical Reflection of Managers Through Andragogy and Socratic Approaches: A Multi-University Comparison

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Abstract. There have long been debates about the teaching of business ethics. Should business ethics be taught like functional business courses like marketing, law and strategy using behaviourist or teacher centred models in business courses? Or should adult learning methodologies adopt Socratic method with reflective practice as a means of promoting ethical self-awareness and enhancing personal development in meta-cognition and learning? This paper canvases literature pertaining to how business ethics and fields such as CSR should be taught. It outlines the methodological differences between pedagogical versus andragogic approaches and focuses on Socratic and reflective practice approaches. Extracts from student assessments including comments, feedback, and insights, from a number of MBA ethics and management subjects in different universities are presented. This provides evidence of the effectiveness of these approaches in enhancing participants' abilities to engage in ethical reflection and decisions, validating the process as an appropriate and effective educational method.

Keywords: ethics education, andragogy, socratic method, reflective practice.

1. Introduction

The interest in corporate social and environmental responsibility, and by default business ethics, has increased largely through public pressure and media highlighting successive corporate scandals and an increasing attention to environmental and sustainability issues (Gardiner and Lacy 2005; Gioia 2002; Van Poeck *et al.* 2009). The concepts of CSR and ethical business practices are

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now firmly fixed considerations within mainstream business enterprises (Godfrey and Hatch 2007; Matten and Moon 2004; Moon 2007; Pedersen and Neergaard 2008; Wolff 2002). This has increased the debate about the role of business ethics and CSR education, particularly in business schools (de los Reyes, Kim and Weaver 2016; Jorge and Pena 2014; Lozano 2022; Rundle-Thiele and Wymer 2010; Seto-Pamies and Papaikonomou 2016; Segon and Booth 2009).

Orme and Ashton (2003) put forward that ethics is a foundation competency and argue that individuals cannot be expected to adhere to ethical rules unless they actually understand them. Ethics is not a methodology or approach that one can apply without grounding in basic theory principles and concepts (Foy 2002). Orme and Ashton (2003) argue that ethics needs to be explained, and experiential and practical exercises need to be incorporated for people to understand the moral dimensions of issues. Winch (2010, p. 36), argues “Ryle’s claim that there is a distinction between knowing how and knowing that holds.” Winch points out that knowing that associates with propositional knowledge and knowing how relates with practical knowledge. In relation to analysis on and determining an ethical position on ethical issues it would be paramount to know the that of ethical theories and know the how of ethical decision processing. The teaching of ethics poses challenges, certainly with the expectation that participant, thought and action will become ethically informed (Rest 1988). Consideration of how ethics and CSR content and to whom it is taught, is just as critical as what is taught. Another issue is the capability of the professoriate to teach ethics. Dean and Beggs (2006) identified that business schools do not consider that they can influence students’ ethical behaviours and that the faculty’s conceptualisations of ethics do not align with their classroom methods.

This article examines literature on andragogy, its assumptions as a theory of adult learning, in management and finally the application of these approaches to teaching business ethics and CSR through Socratic method and reflective practice. A qualitative research methodology is outlined and extract data from over 300 participant reflective reports across multiple universities are presented. An analysis and discussion section advances findings followed by a conclusion of insights on the application of adult learning practice of Socratic method and participant reflective practice. The article furthers the continuing interest in the journal regarding facilitation of business ethics learning and business ethics higher education curriculum approaches.

This article adds to the many faceted debates on the nature of and approaches to business ethics education (Buchko and Buchko 2009; Crane and Matten 2004; George 1987; Hooker 2004; Park 1998). In particular, the article contributes to those that have stressed the import of ethics education for business managers and suited approaches (Brinkmann, *et al.* 2011; Hartman and Hartman 2004; Hasnas 2013; Neesham and Gu 2015). This article is suited to the mission of the journal as it contributes:

- Ideas on adult learning, Socratic, and reflective practice method to the debate on teaching business ethics in university business programs, particularly masters level programs.
- Conclusions from analysis to inform educators and curriculum developers in higher education.

2. Learning and Educational Design: Pedagogy vs. Andragogy

The word “*pedagogy*” is commonly used to refer to all forms of education learning, instructional methodology and education design. However, the term’s origin raises questions as to this use. Davenport (1993) and Mohring (1990) note that the term derives from two Greek words; “*paid*” meaning child, and “*agogus*” meaning to guide, or in its verb form “*ago*” which means to teach and or instructor lead. Ozuah (2005, p. 83), defines pedagogy as “the art and science of teaching children”, with the assumed purpose being the transmission of knowledge (Knowles 1984, 1980; Morris and Wood 2011). In this approach the teacher determines what is to be taught and how, hence the term “teacher centred or teacher-oriented” approach (Ozuah 2005). This is typically referred to as behaviourist education design and is characterised by standardised lectures and structured classes with the students being tested to determine their level of knowledge retention.

Knowles (1984, 1980) asserts that most theories of learning and teaching continue to be based on studies of children, typically being where attendance is compulsory, based on various assumptions: (a) learners have dependent personalities, (b) learning is subject oriented, (c) extrinsic motivation is an essential factor to learning, and (d) learner’s previous experience is not relevant to learning.

Burns (2003), Merriam and Baumgartner (2020) and Noe (2010) advance differences in capabilities, experiences, and knowledge, require alternative approaches for teaching adults and it is inappropriate to use the term *pedagogy* when referring to adult learning in the environment in which it occurs. These differences have profound implications for adult education, as learning is not preparatory as with children, but has a mission of assistance, helping adults realize their potential and addressing work required skills (Burns 2003; Lieb 1991; Lukianova 2016). Kolb (1984) further argues that the learning process is not identical for all people and needs to be adapted to suit different learning needs.

The term *andragogy* (based on the Greek *andr* – meaning “man”) was coined to distinguish a process of adult learning (Davenport 1993). Knowles *et al.* (2005, 2012) popularised the term describing it as the process whereby learners become aware of significant experiences when they know what is happening and what

importance such events have (Kearsley 2010). Merriam (2017), in discussing adult learning theory from the humanistic psychology perspective, stresses the importance of distinguishing adult learners from childhood learners. She notes that; “a humanistic perspective on learning emphasizes personal growth and development rather than the more mechanistic change in behavior” (Merriam 2017, p. 28). This clarifies the significant difference required for adult learning based on andragogic, self-directed processes aimed at transformation of perspectives which are more organic, whereas child learning is based on mechanistic, modelling leading to adoption of behaviours.

2.1. Adult Learning and Management Education

Andragogic learning approaches have been utilized in disciplines such as education, medicine, criminal justice and management (Bedi 2004; Birzer 2004; Bolton 2006; Forrest and Peterson 2006). Forrest and Peterson (2006) maintain that andragogy is more effective in management education preparing students for their working environment. They state, “modern management requires practical implementation of skills learned, not regulation of principles. Without implementation, students cannot adapt to the ever-changing workplace” (Forrest and Peterson 2006 p. 114). Alam (2021) argued that andragogy is a key learning principle in management education. He contends that adult learners, particularly in MBAs, need to be self-directed and reflective to develop effective management practice. Similarly, Berti, *et al.* (2021) advance that business ethics education requires integrated, experiential approaches combined with reflection, and an opportunity to apply knowledge through experimentation to enhance ethical decision-making. This aligns with early arguments of Gosling and Mintzberg (2003, 2004). With a volatile unpredictable, complex and ambiguous environment now the norm management education and MBA education in particular must elicit higher level capacities in learners to ensure they are effective practitioners.

Against this background there still exists reluctance on the part of educators to adopt new approaches to teaching of business courses inclusive of ethics, effectively relying on the same teacher centred techniques of the past, such as lectures even in e-learning (Koris 2017; Nygaard and Holtham 2008). Most recently Matulich, *et al.* 2008, Montiel, *et al.* 2020 and Sholihin, *et al.* 2020 have advocated much more student-centred approaches to delivery of ethics learning in higher education settings.

In considering the learning needs of the present millennial cohort of adult students now undertaking management education, McNally, *et al.* (2018) argue that management and entrepreneurial learning needs to embrace volatility and ambiguity as reflected in the business world and often uncertain social and economic circumstances. Because management education focuses on practical application, andragogy is argued as more effective because the instructional

designer and facilitator can tailor the learning context to meet participant needs and interests. This is achieved by providing scenarios and contexts that reflect real-world business problems. By involving participants in planning the learning objectives, activities and problem solving, they recognize the relevance and value of the learning. Given the cooperation between the learner and facilitator/instructional designer, andragogy results in more effective communication (Marshak 1983). These approaches enhance trust between the student and the instructional designer/facilitator that allows for greater self-analysis and self-awareness in participants (Baran 2019; Boyatzis and Saatcioglu 2008). Andragogic learning processes and practices best suit this new learning environment for managerial course design and delivery (McNally, *et al.* 2018).

Although andragogy is seen as important in adult learning, there are also some criticisms of this approach. One is it does not consider the social and political contexts in adult learning settings (Caffarella and Baumgartner 2007; Pearson and Podeschi 1997; Sandlin 2005 cited in Merriam). Pratt (1993), Roberson (2002) and Wlodowski and Ginsberg (1995) criticize andragogy for not considering cultural perspectives and Knowles' linear perspective of learning emphasizes western concepts of analysis and rationality. The authors dispute these criticisms as andragogy requires the designer/facilitator to involve the learner and their experiences as part of the design and delivery process. This means different cultural perspectives, economic systems, and work experiences, including the political nature of organization must by, definition be part of the learning design to ensure relevance to the learners.

2.2. Andragogy: Assumptions and Implications for Delivery

Brookfield (1986) advances six principles of effective educational practice, which parallel the process elements of andragogy as proposed by Knowles (1984). These include, voluntary participation, respect of each other's self-worth, collaborative facilitation, praxis, fostering a spirit of critical reflection, and nurturing of self-directed, empowered adults. The respect and collaboration elements are identical to Knowles' (1984) design elements whilst the other practices appear to reinforce Knowles' foundation for how best to design adult instruction. Additionally, Apps (1981) outlined nine adult principles from his research of effective classroom behaviours that are consistent with those discussed by Knowles (1984). These can be summarised as an understanding of the learners and their experiences that should be used as part of the learning context. In summary these theorists advocate linking theory to practice in order to increase relevance, provide a positive learning climate in which a number of different techniques can be used, and lastly provide feedback to learners on their development.

When andragogic principles and design elements are sufficiently addressed, it has the ‘ability to address the differences of learning needs between adults and children via sharply differentiated instructional methods’ (Brookfield 1986, p. 96). Darkenwald and Merriam (1982 p. 99) state that gaining an ‘understanding of the learning process could enhance the practice of adult education’. Knowles, *et al.* (2005) point out that in an adult learning environment, the andragogic model is more appropriate because it includes many of the pedagogical assumptions and strategies and thus implies that a transactional model is in place that speaks to characteristics of the learning situation. Merriam and Brockett (1997) stated that andragogy’s applicability to adult education is that it forces educators to evaluate and select the best way to work with adult learners to meet the learner’s needs regarding process and outcome.

2.3. Socratic Approaches

The Socratic approach to learning is a cognitive behavioural one linking action and inquiry, by asking focused, open-ended questions that deepens understanding and encourages reflection consistent with reflection in action (Bagshaw, 2014; Clark and Daudelin 1996; Egan 2015; Schön 1983). Reflection connects theory with experiences past, present and future, questioning assumptions and the criteria used to make judgments embodied in both theory and professional practice (Boud, *et al.* 1985; Morris and Wood 2011; Reynolds 1999).

According to Neenan, (2008), Paul and Elder (2007); Strang (2011) and Tienken, *et al.* (2009) there are up to nine types of Socratic questioning including probing, clarifying, substantiating, rationalizing evidence, extrapolating implications, and querying inferences and implications drawn. The approach clearly seeks to encourage participants to analyze their own assumptions, values, and practices and to consider multiple options in decision making as well as the potential impact on a range of stakeholders. This directly parallels reflective practice process that seeks similar objectives. Bagshaw (2014) states that Socratic teaching results in innovative and substantive reflection for the learners through the facilitator promoting questions that encourage joint exploration of underlying assumptions, concepts and facts in particular cases or scenarios.

The use of a discursive approach is a prerequisite for a deeper learning that can result in a change of behaviour (Slayton and Mathis 2010). Scharmer (2009) describes a discursive approach as a collective capacity in which participants explore issues together. Mezirow (2000) defines it as reflective discourse “devoted to searching for a common understanding and assessment of the justification of an interpretation or belief as a critical assessment of assumptions” and leads “towards a clearer understanding by tapping collective experience to arrive at a tentative best judgment” (pp. 10-11).