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Title: “A mosaic of personal ethical decision making in learning organizations”

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The authors of this manuscript assume in case of acceptance to develop the paper according the guidelines and until the deadline of March 15 2011.

Abstract

According to the Free Dictionary (2010), “a mosaic is a picture or decorative design made by setting small coloured pieces, as of stone or tile, into a surface, or a composite picture made of overlapping, usually aerial or photographs”. Using the mosaic metaphor is the authors’ intention to discuss four levels of arguing:

1. personal ethical decision making in learning organizations;
2. construct the mosaic for each organizational group (top management, middle management and workers);
3. if it is possible to draw a behavioural pattern of the mosaic by organizational group (top management, middle management and workers);
4. to acknowledge the truthiness about organizational culture in knowledge environments not be a “spherical” concept (metaphorical symbolism for perfect and constant) (Costa, Prior & Rogerson, 2009a), which will reflect a comparison among groups behavioural patterns.

In fact, this manuscript resumes a key analysis of the first author PhD research: why link knowledge management, organizational culture and ethics? (for further details e.g. Costa, Prior & Rogerson, 2009b; Costa, Prior & Rogerson, 2010a; Costa, Prior & Rogerson, 2010b). Contrarily to the prior publications, which highlight the research protocol and pre-tests/pilot study initial empirical findings (performed during 2009) this manuscript aspires to produce a high level analysis concerning these and the case studies results (which were performed during November and December 2010, as well January 2011).

Thus, the chosen queries of the questionnaires and interviews to debate the research question are:

- what is the organizational position: top manager, middle manager or worker? (multiple choice);
- what you value most? (order from 1 to 3 your options, being 1 the most important. In case of evaluating the criteria in the same way choose that option);

- and, refer if you consider that ethical decisions may change according to the role and the context of knowledge creation, management and sharing. And, in which way such decisions affect organizational trust?

Although, in order to frame the debate boundaries is crucial to shed some light over the following concepts: learning organizations; personal ethical decision making; and, an example of the mosaic “creation” procedures.

The concept “learning organization” was firstly mentioned by Senge (1994) and since then management literature has prospered (Sankar, 2003), despite the lack of accuracy about its boundaries or limits. Ortenbald (2002) argues that learning organizations encompass four levels of analysis: cultural values, leaders, communication, and knowledge environment.

A knowledge environment is promoted through a permanent learning culture which acknowledges lifelong learning practices (Yeo, 2005) and encourages a truly sharing environment (DiBella, 2001). These actions will lead to permanent innovation (idiosyncratic element) (Cavaleri, 2004). For that, leaders have to communicate ethically because upward or downward communication allows knowledge creation and sharing within an organizational context (Nesan & Holt, 2002). As regards to its values usually these are bounded to managers’ values, meaning that each organizational context may entail dissimilar results (Grieves, 2008).

Literature acknowledges numerous studies about ethical decision making in organizations (e.g Kelley & Elm, 2003; Cardy & Selvarajan, 2004), which report two leading constructs: moral intensity and moral sensibility. According to Jones (1991) moral intensity acknowledges the degree of issue-related moral imperative within a circumstance, which includes six features: magnitude of consequences; social consensus; probability of effect; temporal immediacy; proximity; and, concentration of effect. When moral intensity is high the individual introduces ethical principles in its decision; nonetheless, when it is lower the opposite outcome occurs. Besides, Jones (1991) argues

that moral sensibility resumes the individual cognitive process, which is related to moral intent (Frey, 2000).

Pertaining to the mosaic “creation” procedures is necessary to approach: the framework; and the procedures. Following Costa, Prior & Rogerson (2010a) the framework that acknowledges personal ethical decision making in knowledge environments is depicted in figure 1.

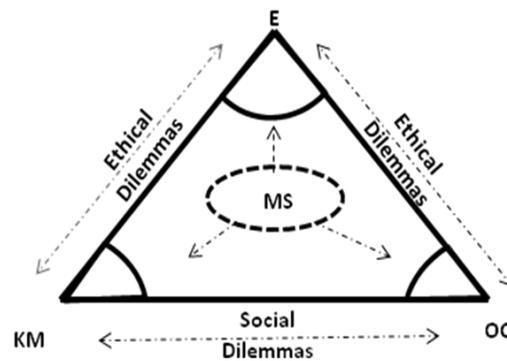


Figure 1. Individual decision making framework

These authors also claim that the triangle reproduces an individual that values equally the three essential dimension of learning organizations (ethics, knowledge management and organizational culture). Or, the triangle becomes scalene when the three variables have dissimilar weight; and, a right triangle for those individuals that value most one variable (90 degrees angle), and equally the remaining ones. Finally, an acute triangle acknowledges two equivalent variables and less weight on one.

Concluding, “creation” procedures will be produced for each stage of the empirical results (pre-tests, pilot study and case studies), acknowledging the sum up of the several individual triangles within each organizational group (top management, middle management and workers) as a way to achieve the mosaic and permit to discover a potential behavioural pattern (see figure 2).

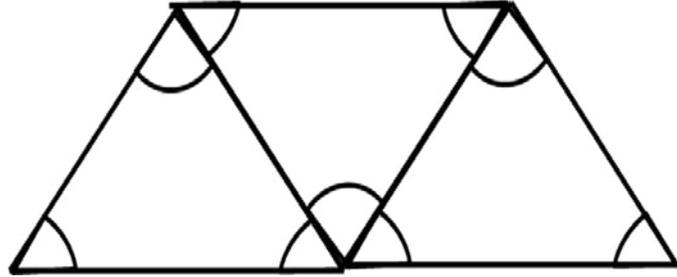


Figure 2. Mosaic for workers- potential example

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