



Shades of grey: The business ethics game

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Educational game playing

This game draws on a number of benefits from educational game playing. Student engagement, motivation from a fun activity, short and sharp discussions amongst small groups, all combined with the use of technology tools. The game encompasses some of the standard principles of good practice in undergraduate education (Chickering & Gamson, 1987) including the development of cooperation among students; the use of active learning techniques; providing prompt feedback; and emphasis on time management. Although the use of technology is an important feature of this game, it is also recognised that technology alone will not improve learning (McVay, Murphy, & Yoon, 2008). Making the learning process more enjoyable supports the motivation levels and increases the attention levels (Cermignano, Hargadon, & McMullen, 1998). The move away from a traditional lecture is not a new concept, nevertheless due to the cost-effectiveness and low threat to student involvement, the traditional lecture method is still widely used in business classrooms (Cook & Hazelwood, 2002).

The game uses ethical dilemmas to challenge students to apply ethical codes of conduct. This is especially important for business students in their future professional lives and for them to gain critical perspectives on ethical issues (Haywood, McMullen, & Wygal, 2004). The challenge for educators is to effectively engage students in this process of ethical understanding.

The effect of cooperation on learning

It is widely believed that cooperation can enhance the outcomes of individuals (Na'im, 2004). It has been shown to improve the performance of all students and is particularly effective for those students who are the least well prepared (Giraud, 1997). Students playing the game are grouped and encouraged to work together to come up with the best possible answers and score points for their team. Cooperation enhances engagement with activities and promotes learning of the material (Keeler & Steinhorst, 1995).

The shades of grey game

The Shades of Grey game involves groups of students competing against each other through a series of 15 multiple choice questions based on short ethical dilemmas. The multiple choice questions each have four possible answers with a variety of positive and negative scores contributing to their team performance. A facilitator guides the student teams through the questions displayed on a projector screen, which they can see simultaneously on a hand-held mobile computing device (iPod touch in this case). The facilitator allows a short period of time for team discussion on each question. After this time the teams each need to agree upon their answer, which they submit through their hand-held device. All teams are immediately provided with general question feedback both on the big screen and on their hand-held devices. As teams progress through the game the facilitator can show a scoreboard on the projector screen displaying current position (score), which relates to a fictitious position within the company for each team.

The learning experience

The literature shows that the learning experience is greatly enhanced for students by providing an environment that encourages and supports student engagement; uses computer technology as part of the experience; and has elements of fun that make the experience more enjoyable for the students.

The Shades of Grey game can be used as an ice-breaker for a topic area or as a capstone activity for the course. The duration time is approximately 30 minutes. This game activity requires group collaboration (often with other students who are not known to each other at the start of the semester). For the purpose of the experiment, students are allocated to groups of 5-6 students. This group size encourages discussion and thinking amongst all group members, increasing the opportunities for participation and involvement. Upon submission of their answers, students are provided with feedback and are able to reflect and discuss in their groups.

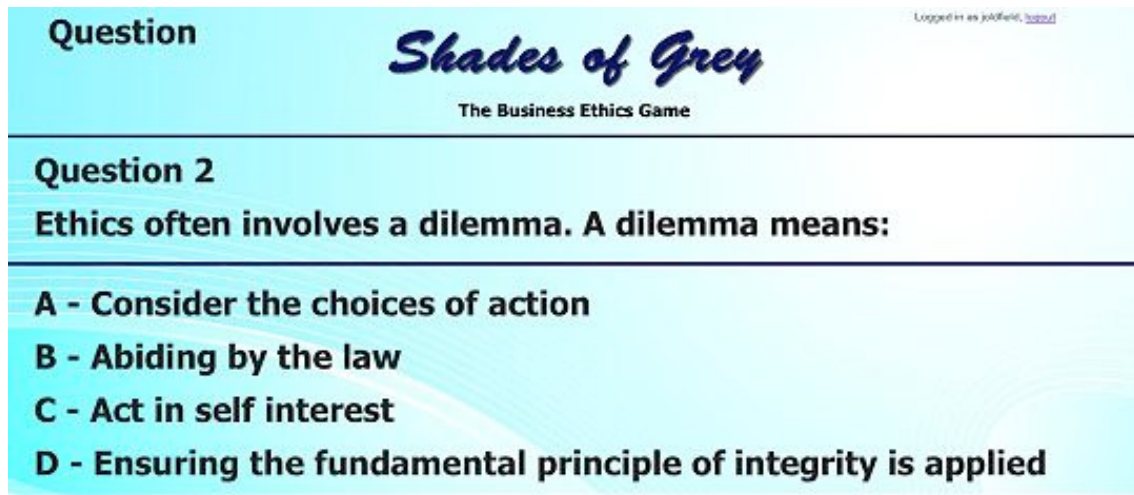


Figure 1: Screenshot from the shades of grey game

The evaluation

Prior to playing the game, students will be tested by a series of multiple choice questions to establish the base level of their understanding of the topic area. They will then take part in the Shades of Grey game where they will compete in teams to gain the highest score in the ethical game (the game is based on similar ethical principles to those in the test). Following on from the conclusion of the game students will take the same test again that they completed before the game. Students who are happy to participate will then be given a brief survey which will investigate their perceptions of the experience.

Students scores from before the game will be compared to those after the game to see if the game learning experience has been beneficial for them. This information along with the student perception information resulting from the survey will then be analysed to evaluate the impact Shades of Grey and other learning games can have on the student learning experience.

The future

Future work into the Shades of Grey game will likely include expansion in the following areas:

- Creation of new packs of questions in different topic areas - beyond business ethics
- Incorporation of a "challenge" system which encourages further critical thinking and allows the students to challenge the answers to specific questions - questions in ethics often have more than one right answer
- Expansion of question types to include multimedia - such as video or audio based questions/case studies

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