Prologue for the special issue on "business ethics in the virtual work environment: Challenges to educators and practitioners"

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Lockdowns in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic pushed people around the world in a virtual work environment. Businesses initially struggled and then capitalized on effective use of technology to make virtual work environments productive and enjoyable for participants. Knowledge workers, especially, have become so

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acclimated to working from home that they are reluctant to rejoin their places of work. This raises several ethical concerns that need to be addressed by academicians and practitioners. The challenges to business resilience, and economic and environmental sustainability have given social responsibility a new meaning. There are also concerns regarding network surveillance, cybersecurity, digital divide, technological warfare and violation of rights to privacy, physical and psychological distress due to long virtual work hours, and work-to-home and home-to-work conflicts.

Scholarly interest in the transformation of workplaces by digital technology has been increasing, in particular after the pandemic disruption. Artificial intelligence, robotics, data analytics, and digital platforms are accelerating these explorations. In addition, digital technologies are also hailed as the key forces in achieving sustainable development goals. Ajwani-Ramchandani and Bhattacharya (2022), for example, have suggested a digital technology integrated framework for creating wealth out of municipal wastes by influencing participation of various stakeholders. Digital technology encompasses a host of computing technologies that combine large structured and unstructured data to create new work design where more autonomy characterizes typical work role. In spite of the type of surrounding in the era of Industry 4.0, no sufficient attention has been given to the need of "Digital ethics" in management research. Scholarly interest on the use of digital technologies needs to enhance organizational goals as well as protect fairness and justice. Most of the research in this context has been taken in western context, and therefore this issue focusing on Asia is an attempt to bridge the gap. Digitization as a global phenomenon needs to consider the cultural and other contextual parameters to deliver on its promise. This special issue offers a collection of research papers on the challenges to educators and practitioners of business ethics in the virtual work environment.

Virtual online learning platforms have now become a viable option for learners of all ages and disciplines, something which will continue in some form in the "new normal." Learners are looking forward to getting opportunities to flip traditional face-to-face classrooms with a self-paced, self-directed learning platform in the form of MOOCS or trainer-created asynchronous videos. Collaborative online learning opportunities can engage learners from across the world to find solutions to real-life cases through team discussions in virtual "break-away" rooms. Although a hybrid approach, with substantial emphasis on online learning, can be the best way to make education accessible and cost-effective, a buy-in from educators and learners in adhering to ethical norms is essential. Delving further into this theme, Bhattacharya et al. (2022) found that during live online sessions, keeping the cameras on implies an intrusion into the learner's private space, causing discomfort to the learner, their family members, and the other participants. Similarly, the privacy of trainers may be at stake, as they fear public release of their videos and caricatures in some unpleasant way. The study confirms that a virtual learning environment, too, requires an empathetic relationship between learners and trainers. Online learning assessment, either through a proctored or non-proctored system, has seen use of unfair means. The only way it can be combated is by using authentic application based assessment. A recent paper exploring the principles of realm of virtual workplaces concluded that challenges arise mainly from three areas: culture, people, and technology. Cultural issues revolve around communication, perception, and conflicting ideas of man and machine. People

issues include discrimination, lack of integrity, weak legal framework, and unfair work practices. Technology-related issues include privacy, accessibility, and weakness in training (Gupta & Pathak, 2022). It has been argued that the ethical integrity in digital domains such as artificial intelligence could only be maintained through a "holistic" approach (Saurabh et al., 2021). Digitization makes "engagement" an imperative for the managerial culture. The isolation of virtual workplaces creates high dependency on ICT-based communication tools as well as generates uncertainties of geographic, cultural, and economic distances. In the first article of this issue, Rautela et al. (2022) *explored factors that lead to use of unfair means during evaluations through Total Interpretive Structural Modeling with MICMAC analysis. Identified factors include interpersonal relationship, assessment tools, technological barriers, and expertise of the trainers.*

Business resilience depends on how industries are able to adapt to technology and capitalize on it for the betterment of its stakeholders. On the flip side, businesses should prevent the possibility of being a victim of cybercrime. In a recent article, D'Cruz et al. (2022) argued that ethical approaches to digitization need to focus on three distinct levels: societal ecosystems, corporate level strategies, and at the technology level. The main challenge they formulate is in the domain of ethics. They argue that the mitigation of digital inequality generates ethical gaps. This perspective could be extended to a holistic paradigm of four distinct levels of analysis. First, at the "global level" where values, principles, and UN Charters create guiding pathways. Second, at the "societal level" where the diverging local cultural variations are incorporated to reflect fairness. Third, at the "corporate level," an integration of the global principles and societal divergences creates a cross-verging ethical frame. At the fourth level, managerial education, action, training, and conversations dominate the implementation regime. Bohm et al. (2022) suggest that the emphasis and obligations of justice extend from global principles to local practices. This is because technological transformations connect people across the world in stronger convergence beyond the narrow boundaries of nations and regions (Bohm et al., 2022). In this issue, Nayak & Chandiramani (2022) *critically evaluated the multiple financial frauds committed by the bankers of Punjab and Maharashtra Co-operative (PMC) Bank in India, including defaulting returns to investor deposits. Through the case study, they argued the significance of teaching corporate ethics to business students and employees in the financial institutions and discussed some of the effective pedagogical approaches such as a neurocognitive model of the ethical decision-making and performance of a project premortem. They emphasized the need of bankers to be vigilant against phishing, malware, and wire fraud, and to educate both customers as well as prospective employees on ethical issues in the financial sector.*

Corporate citizenship behavior encompasses economic, social, legal, and ethical responsibilities of individual corporate participants which collectively drives their course of interactions with the society. Corporate, while focusing on achieving economic efficiency, should also attempt to create social values (Noronha et al., 2022). Ramachandran et al. (2022) *have explored the corporate citizenship behavior from Aristotle's Virtue Ethics theory, using a mixed-methods approach. They identified the themes of personal and collective virtues that lead to corporate citizenship behavior. They found that both these personal and collective virtues are significant*

positive predictors of corporate citizenship behavior, with collective virtues having a stronger impact. Emotional intelligence is an important virtue for members of varied cultures working in virtual teams, who face communication hurdles, linguistic barriers, and often are required to adjust to working in different time zones. Murmu and Neelam (2022) *highlighted how individuals' personality traits determine virtual team effectiveness mediating through emotional intelligence.* Another important construct which is getting significant interest in business ethics literature is the "voice or silence," whether employees explicitly raise their concerns or maintain silence during organizational change or disruption. Joseph and Shetty (2022)*, through their study of information technology firms in India, found that employee voice has a significant negative relationship with destructive leadership, whereas employee silence has a significant positive relationship with destructive leadership. Destructive leadership, on the other hand, negatively impacts conducive organizational culture, and is a significant mediator between the relationship of employee voice and silence with conducive organizational culture.*

The collection of five articles in this special issue speaks about various ethical, social, and geo-political challenges that are being faced by different industries in the Asia–Pacific region in the context of virtual, hybrid, and physical work environments. We expect the collection will provide both academics and practitioners sufficient food-for-thought for theorizing emerging themes of ethics and strategizing future course of actions. Our sincere thanks to Editor-in-Chief, Professor Allan Chan, for allowing the Special Issue to proceed and always helping and encouraging us with support and suggestions. We also acknowledge the efforts of Editorial Assistants, Ms Farzana Banu and Ms Emima Jacob, of Springer Nature for helping us always in managing the review process.

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