

Facilitating Understanding of Ethics Through Concept Mapping in Workplace Communication

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Abstract

The teaching activity described in this report was proven to enhance students understanding in application of ethical communication principles through the application of a concept mapping tool combined with a discussion group activity. The techniques involves defining ethics, examining the relevance of ethics in academic and professional settings, and assessing ethical challenges through case studies by applying them in the workplace. This approach integrates concept maps as visual tools to facilitate comprehension and critical analysis. Through activities like reading articles, discussing key elements, and analyzing case studies, students engage in the act of learning and collaborative discussions. The effectiveness of the approach is evaluated by the class through debriefing sessions and student reflections, highlighting positive outcomes such as improved comprehension and awareness of ethical principles. Overall, the practice aims to foster student's personal and professional development as well as their ability to communicate ethical reasoning.

Keywords: Concept mapping, ethics, workplace communication

Background

Integrating concept maps in workplace ethics discussions fosters deeper student engagement, critical thinking, and comprehension. This pedagogical strategy using concept maps and discussion groups grounds the use of concept maps in ethical communication by providing students with a structured method to visualize complex ethical principles, enhances discussion, and allows students the opportunity to apply their understanding to real-world scenarios.

Ethics Education

An understanding of ethics is essential in professional communication, as it helps to foster trust, aids in ensuring compliance, and improves leadership skills (Walker, 2011). Teaching ethical communication equips students to better navigate dilemmas, build credibility, and uphold societal standards (ten Have, 2023). Concept maps and concept mapping enhances ethical learning by connecting theory to practice, fostering critical thinking, and encouraging engagement (Yelich Biniecki & Conceição, 2015). Integrating ethics education with concept mapping deepens students' understanding, preparing them to be ethical communicators who can positively impact their careers and society (Walker, 2011). Additionally, ethical communication influences career advancement, motivating students to prioritize integrity (ten Have, 2023). These activities not only increase ethical awareness but contribute to a more responsible workforce (Walker, 2011).

Concept Maps

Concept maps are visual tools that help organize and represent complex information through nodes and connecting arrows, creating a structured, hierarchical framework (Read, 2008; Yelich Biniecki & Conceição, 2015). Widely used in education, they enhance learning, comprehension, and teaching by illustrating relationships between concepts (Hsu & López, 2025; Read, 2008; Yelich Biniecki & Conceição, 2015). They also facilitate collaboration, communication, problem-solving, planning, and decision-making (Hsu & López, 2025). In research, concept maps help present findings and theories, support collaborative efforts, and serve as effective tools for presentations and assessments (Hsu & López, 2025; Yelich Biniecki & Conceição, 2015).

Their versatility extends across disciplines and educational levels. Programs that focus on STEM, health care (Daley et al. 2017), language arts, high school (Read, 2008), and other college-level courses can all benefit from the use of concept maps for showing relationships and extending understanding. Research shows that concept maps can improve understanding, reflection, and problem-solving (Hsu & López, 2025; Daley et al. 2017; Read, 2008; Yelich Biniecki & Conceição, 2015). By helping to show theory through practical application and design, concept maps provide a valuable method for organizing and conveying complex ideas (Hsu & López, 2025; Daley et al. 2017; Yelich Biniecki & Conceição, 2015).

Integrating the Activity into Lessons

Integrating concept maps into lessons involves a two-phase process: introduction and application. This method enhances students' comprehension and critical thinking. First, students learned the basics of concept maps by reading an article, engaging in group activities, and participating in discussion periods they develop a foundational understanding of how concept maps function as visual learning tools. In the second phase, students apply their knowledge by exploring ethical issues through case studies, using concept maps to organize and analyze complex information. This transition from theory to practice promotes deeper engagement, active learning, and collaborative skill development. The process transforms concept mapping from a theoretical exercise into a meaningful, real-world application, enriching students' educational experience.

Introducing Concept Maps

Regarding the direct application of this activity into lessons, in the case of this assignment, students were given the task of reading an article introducing the theories behind concept maps (see Appendix). Next, they were encouraged to make notes on any aspects of the article that they found confusing, as well as items they understood, and finally, areas in which they needed clarification. The students were divided into small teams and then engaged in a 5-minute think, pair, share activity. Following this, the class came back together where they discussed the key elements of creating a concept map from their findings about the articles. This process allowed the students to effectively address any confusion and uncertainties within their teams and prompted a deeper understanding of the components and functions of a concept map from their discussions.

For homework, students were asked to read the National Communication Association (NCA) Credo for Ethical Communication (see Appendix) and create a concept map based on their interpretation of and reflection on the reading material. During the next class session, students formed groups and discussed their individual concept maps. Together, they collaborated to construct a group concept map based on their collective findings then presented them as a group to the class as a whole.

Applying Concept Maps to Ethical Issue Case Studies

Once students had a solid understanding of the functions and purpose of concept maps, students were then encouraged to understand ethical issues through a case study. Again, students were organized into small groups and provided with a selection of cases to choose from (see Appendix). In a collaborative fishbowl-style discussion, students participated in a multi-step process. First, they read and analyzed the selected case study individually, multiple times, taking notes as needed to grasp the

complexity. Next, each student independently created a concept map that reflected their understanding of the case. These concept maps served as a visual representation of their comprehension, helping to synthesize and organize the key information and concepts from the case study. Finally, during a class session, each member of the small groups took turns discussing their respective concept maps and were given the chance to present discussion questions or critical points they had extracted from their analysis of the case. This structured group discussion was intended to foster a deeper exploration of case's various facets and encouraged students to engage in an exchange of ideas and perspectives of their case studies.

Debriefing

The class collectively recognized the positive impact of incorporating concept maps into their fishbowl group presentations. Their feedback revealed that this approach not only enhanced the quality of class discussions but also fostered more organic and professional conversations among students. They noted that concept maps served as powerful tools for creating transformative connections and promoting a structured organization of ideas. This realization emphasized the effectiveness of concept mapping in supporting comprehension, communication, and collaborative learning.

As part of the debriefing, students were required to write reflections on their learning experience. Many shared that concept mapping helped them better understand and communicate complex information, particularly in analyzing ethical issues. Students also recognize the broader applicability of concept maps in their professional careers and other academic courses. Finally, they reported gaining deeper insights into ethical communication—both in terms of future professional roles and within their ongoing educational journeys.

Appendix

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