Paper Trail

INSTRUCTOR'S GUIDE

VIRTUAL **LEARNING**
EXPERIENCES

The K20 Center for Educational and Community Renewal is a statewide education research and development center which promotes innovative learning through school-university-community collaboration. Our mission is to cultivate a collaborative network engaged in research and outreach that creates and sustains innovation and transformation through leadership development, shared learning, and authentic technology integration.

The K20 Center's Virtual Learning Experiences (VLE) development team is tasked with creating game-based learning experiences to be used in undergraduate courses at The University of Oklahoma. The experiences are designed and developed by a small team working with volunteer university professors.

The purpose of this guide is to support the effective integration of Paper Trail into your classroom teaching. This guide provides an overview of the game and instructions for how students will access the game in your Canvas classroom.

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ABOUT THE GAME

PURPOSE

Paper Trail is intended to be used in college-level business ethics classes. This game can be used to facilitate discussion, or it can be used in place of traditional case study analysis. Through the game, students will experience what it's like to make decisions in an authentic, morally tenuous business environment. Similar to discussing an ethics case study, Paper Trail presents an instance of corporate corruption and challenges students to consider how the actors in this case came to their decision and how they would behave if confronted with a similar situation.

Unlike a traditional case study, Paper Trail allows students to directly take part in the ethical case. Throughout the game, the student's decisions are tracked and mapped to three ethical frameworks. At the end of each act, the student will have the opportunity to choose which moral framework best describes their actions thus far. They will then receive feedback on their actual performance, including instances of biased decision making. By playing the game, we hope that students will gain an understanding of how difficult it is to recognize and make unbiased, ethical decisions in a complex situation. Gaining such an understanding is essential for the practices of moral integrity and ethical behavior.
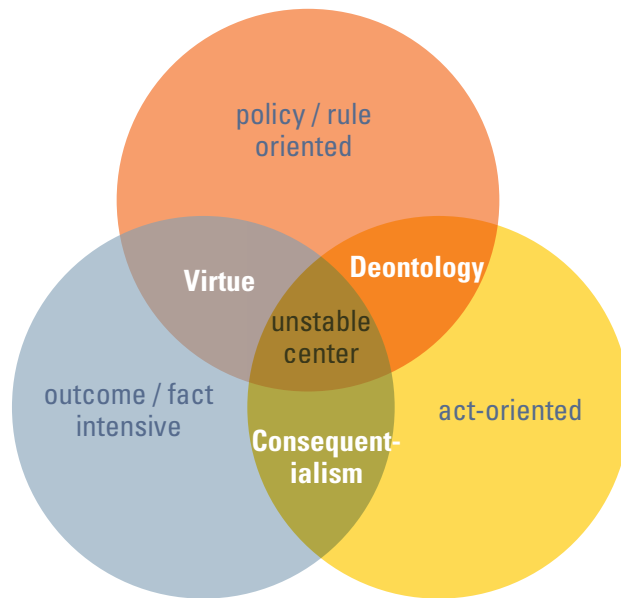
GAME NARRATIVE

MIS is a mid-sized company that produces and sells safety equipment used by energy companies. The student plays an "accountability agent" who is tasked with ensuring that corporate policy is maintained across all departments and branches.

When reports come in of customer complaints, pushy salesmen, and low-quality products, the student's character is dispatched to investigate. This investigation leads the student down a rabbit hole of cover-ups and corruption that goes far up the company ladder. The student will meet many different characters who have had to make their own difficult ethical decisions along the way. Eventually, the student will discover that they are just as entangled in the company's corruption as everyone else, and must decide how best to mitigate the damage to themselves, the company, its employees, and society at large.

ETHICAL FRAMEWORKS

While philosophers recognize a wide range of ethical views, in this game, we have chosen to focus on three broad ethical frameworks: deontological, consequentialist, and virtue. Focusing on these three main frameworks allows us to more accurately gauge the student's understanding of, and alignment to, the frameworks.

policy / rule oriented

Virtue

Deontology

unstable center

outcome / fact intensive

act-oriented

Consequent-ialism

INTEGRITY

A common definition of integrity is the ability to recognize ethical cases and to make rational decisions consistent within one's ethical framework. While we do not prescribe what ethical framework students should follow, we encourage them to practice integrity by carefully selecting an ethical framework and sticking to it.

Much like discussing a case study, students playing this game will have an opportunity to consider the integrity and decision-making process of characters in the game. Going beyond the limitations of traditional case studies, this game allows students to practice integrity by making ethical decisions in an authentic business environment. At the end of each act, students will be evaluated on their ability to identify their primary ethical framework and their ability to remain consistent within that framework.

CONSEQUENTIALIST/UTILITARIAN APPROACHES

Consequentialism/utilitarianism holds the highest principle of morality is to maximize happiness (for all, not just for the individual). This is usually understood as a matter of maximizing utility, or the overall balance of pleasure over pain (Sandel, 2009). It is a view that stresses optimization and so does not posit specific behavioral rules (e.g., there are no strict rules in the form of "never/always perform actions of this sort"). Consequentialism/utilitarianism doesn't require that individuals form specific kinds of characters either; the appropriate character traits are just the ones that maximize happiness in a given circumstance. Though there may be general "rules of thumb" about which sorts of actions tend to result in good outcomes in common situations, this framework focuses on only the act being performed and its outcome. Based on the initial work of Jeremy Bentham (1962), this view is such that the consequences of one's actions are the only basis of evaluating the morality of that action. To a utilitarian, the means are only relevant in relation to the end state—in their effort to either mitigate negative consequences or promote positive consequences for society as a whole.

John Stuart Mill (2001), noting that it is very difficult to determine the utility of the consequences of actions on a case-by-case basis, argues that we can, and indeed must, base social policy on more general arguments about what sorts of actions are generally

conducive to utility. Unlike Bentham, Mill also distinguishes pleasures as higher or lower, with regards to their value. Mill (2001) states "of two pleasures, if there be one to which all or almost all who have experience of both give a decided preference, irrespective of any feeling of moral obligation to prefer it, that is the more desirable pleasure." In taking this view, Mill seems to add some elements of virtue theory (see below) to utilitarian ethics, adding a second judgement to the equation.

DEONTOLOGICAL/KANTIAN APPROACHES

Deontological/Kantian ethical theory espouses the existence of innate human dignity and focuses on the rules required to respect that dignity. These rules describe actions that a person must take and that they are prohibited from taking (duties) as well as freedoms that others are prohibited from infringing upon (rights). Rather than looking to results such as virtuous actions or happiness, deontological ethics posit that morality is just a matter of the free application of pure, practical reason. Sandel (2009) uses the example of a person pushed from a building, landing on, and killing another person. In this example, the person who fell is not morally responsible for the other's death as they did not make the choice to fall on them. There was no rational choice to break the rules against murder, fail in their duty to protect life, or infringe upon another's right to life. One should judge not the outcome of an action but the motive, which should be that an action was taken because it was right—in this ethical theory, meaning the action was aligned with the rules, duties, and rights determined by reason. A person who follows these rules is considered moral even if their action has negative consequences, where a person who breaks the rules in search of some positive consequence would be judged immoral.

Kant (1964) explained this philosophy with the simple rule that one should "Act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law." In this, he is saying that an action should be based on a premise principle that can be universally applied without incoherence. This principle provides a sort of logical test for actions: if not everyone could act on the same principle, then that principle could not be universal in the way that a moral law must be. There are different interpretations of Kant that all center on what counts as incoherence in the application of a principle.

VIRTUE/ARISTOTELIAN APPROACHES

Virtue/Aristotelian ethics emphasizes the idea that all moral decisions should be based on considerations of character (Sandel, 2009). The goal of morality, in this view, is for a person to be the best sort of person they can be. What sort of person one is, in this view, is a matter of character traits, not merely actions. In contrast to consequentialism and deontology, the focus is on being (dispositions to act) rather than particular actions. Morality, then, is a matter of the character traits (virtues/vices) of a person rather than just their actions. A person who has virtues will act in a way that leads to positive outcomes and human flourishing. Their actions are a reflection of who they are rather than a result of societal pressures to do what is expected to be the right thing.

This theory also posits that to learn virtue, one must practice virtue; and to practice virtue, one must know the reason for virtue. Aristotle stated "we become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts" (as cited in Sandel, 2009); and accomplishing these acts serves as an example to others to learn and practice virtue themselves. However, what virtues are important is often up for debate and is determined by the various teleological views being defended. That is, different views about the meaning, purpose, or essential character of human life lead to different suites of virtues.

COGNITIVE BIASES

Daniel Kahneman (2011) defines biases as systematic errors that recur predictably in particular circumstances. These biases are the result of subconscious thought processes. These thought processes are often helpful, saving valuable time and energy in day-to-day life. At other times, they interfere with more reasoned judgement. Biases often appear in the form of intuition, assumption, or personal prejudice. The ability to identify and label various forms of bias can allow one to anticipate and attempt to mitigate the effects of biases on the decision-making process. In this game we focus two biases: appeal to authority and framing biases.

APPEAL TO AUTHORITY

Appeal to authority refers to a person's tendency to follow the orders of an authority figure without considering the ethical consequences of those orders. Though, as a society, we are quick to condemn those who attempt to use appeal to authority as an excuse, we also naturally follow the orders of those we view to be in charge. A prime example of appeal to authority in action would be the famous Milgram experiments in which subjects believed they were applying increasingly powerful electric shocks to another subject at a doctor's direction (Milgram, 1974).

People must take responsibility for their decisions and actions; there is no "I was just following orders" excuse. It is important, then, that people are always ready to consider the ethical implications of their actions rather than merely attempt to divert responsibility onto an authority figure. However, this can be problematic due to the hierarchical nature of many workplace cultures that often encourage blind obedience to leadership decisions (Prentice, 2004).

More insidious is the fact that people will often trust that those in authority have good intentions, even if they realize that an action is unethical. They will follow the example of leadership they respect, despite any internal misgivings, because they wish to support their leaders and are unwilling to do things that they feel could threaten or undermine them (Prentice, 2004).

FRAMING

Framing refers to a person's tendency to view and react to situations directly based on how they are presented while ignoring wider implications. Problems become conceptualized based on a limited data set. This tends to induce a sort of "tunnel-vision" on some features of a situation because it is often framed either to focus on only the positive or only the negative aspects of the situation, which then influences judgement (Druckman, 2001). In an extreme example, a company might frame its decisions in terms of maximizing profit, resulting in losing track of other relevant dimensions of its decisions (environmental impacts, employee wellbeing, etc.). Framing can also be seen frequently in politics, where the spin that politicians or the media put on an issue can sway public opinion.

Even people who are typically very ethical can find themselves negatively impacted by framing. The simple rewording of a question or piece of data can change how a person perceives it and can reframe it in their minds so that they ignore possible consequences or don't realize they are breaking certain rules. Even something as simple as changing the goal of a project from providing excellent service to trying to win an award can cause a framing "tunnel vision" effect to the point that a person or team ignores unethical behavior as they race towards their goal.

PLAYING THE GAME

THE INTERFACE

To move about the level, students simply mouse click where they want to go.

To rotate the camera, hold the left mouse button and drag the mouse.

To interact with characters and objects, click on them.

Documents collected throughout the game are added to the inventory. These can be viewed at any time by clicking on each item's respective icon.

Unethical or inconsistent decisions in the game are met with "mental anguish." This game mechanic serves as an indication to the student that their decision was inconsistent with their ethical framework. They will also receive feedback to tell them exactly why they received the "mental anguish."
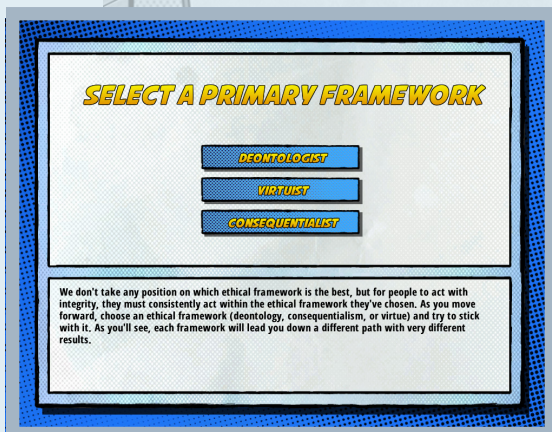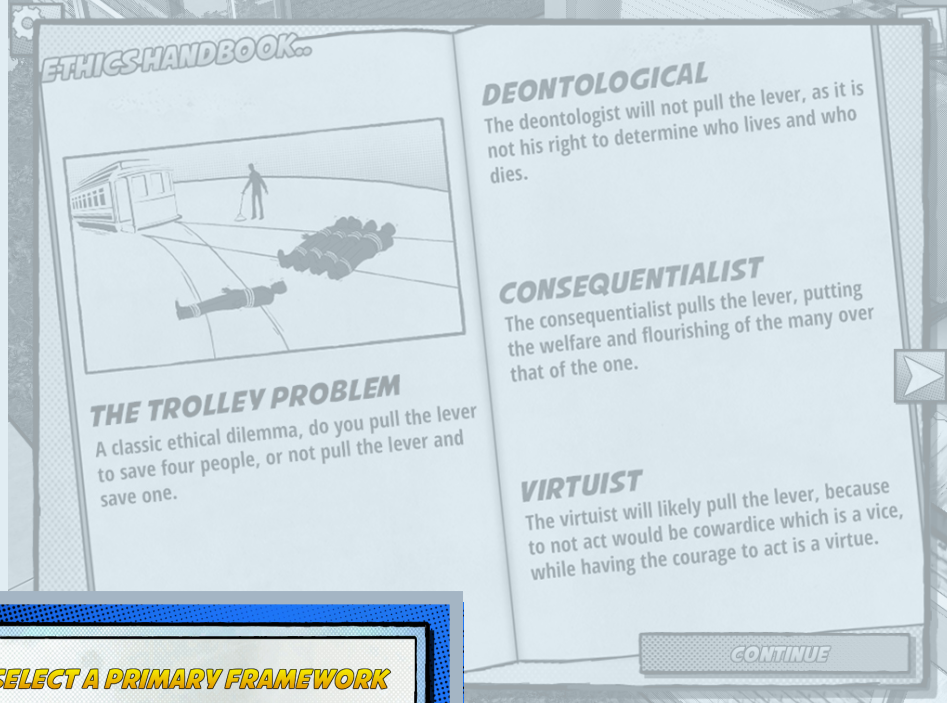
Inventory Items

Options

Dialog

ETHICS HANDBOOK...

THE TROLLEY PROBLEM
A classic ethical dilemma, do you pull the lever to save four people, or not pull the lever and save one.

DEONTOLOGICAL
The deontologist will not pull the lever, as it is not his right to determine who lives and who dies.

CONSEQUENTIALIST
The consequentialist pulls the lever, putting the welfare and flourishing of the many over that of the one.

VIRTUIST
The virtuist will likely pull the lever, because to not act would be cowardice which is a vice, while having the courage to act is a virtue.

CONTINUE

SELECT A PRIMARY FRAMEWORK

DEONTOLOGIST

VIRTUIST

CONSEQUENTIALIST

We don't take any position on which ethical framework is the best, but for people to act with integrity, they must consistently act within the ethical framework they've chosen. As you move forward, choose an ethical framework (deontology, consequentialism, or virtue) and try to stick with it. As you'll see, each framework will lead you down a different path with very different results.

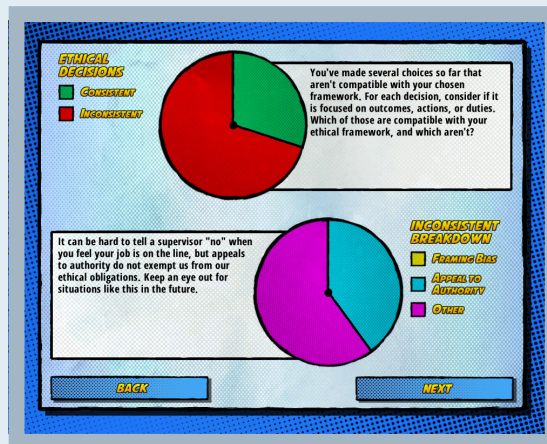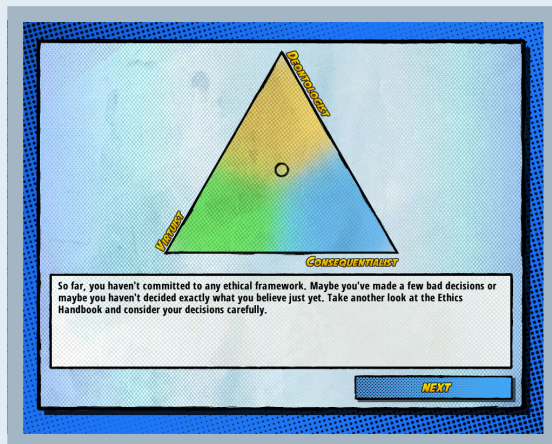**Assessment**

The game is broken into a prologue and four acts. At the end of each section, students will select the ethical framework they think best describes the decisions they've made in the game thus far.

So far, you haven't committed to any ethical framework. Maybe you've made a few bad decisions or maybe you haven't decided exactly what you believe just yet. Take another look at the Ethics Handbook and consider your decisions carefully.

NEXT

ETHICAL DECISIONS
- Consistent
- Inconsistent

You've made several choices so far that aren't compatible with your chosen framework. For each decision, consider if it is focused on outcomes, actions, or duties. Which of those are compatible with your ethical framework, and which aren't?

It can be hard to tell a supervisor "no" when you feel your job is on the line, but appeals to authority do not exempt us from our ethical obligations. Keep an eye out for situations like this in the future.

INCONSISTENT BREAKDOWN
- Framing Bias
- Appeal to Authority
- Other

BACK

NEXT

The ternary graph displays the student's ethical framework as a composite of the decisions they've made in the game. Certain decisions are identified as being inconsistent with certain ethical frameworks. In a perfect game—one where the students behaved with perfect integrity—the point on the graph would appear at one of the three corners. In most cases however, the point will appear as a mix of decisions from all three frameworks.

The student also receives feedback on their performance and an additional explanation of their primary framework.

The student receives feedback on how many decisions they made that were inconsistent with their primary ethical framework in the previous act. Additionally, they will receive feedback on their ability to avoid biased decisions.

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