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### Business Ethics Literature Review an Organizational Design Perspective

### Introduction

For businesses to maintain and flourish in a world where globalization has taken to the forefront they must have a plan of action in place which enables them to be structured organized so their objectives are met. Ethical business principles provide the foundation for various modern concepts for organizations which ultimately broaden individual and corporate priorities beyond traditional profit and shareholder enrichment. Managers and leaders are responsible for ensuring that there is a level of integrity in the organization’s design and structure, the operations of the business, the responsibilities, the shareholders’ interests, and the overall strategic plan of the organization.

For the intent of this literature review, according to Daft (2013), an organization is defined as, “social entities that are goal-directed, designed as deliberately structured and coordinated activity systems, and are linked to the external environment” (p. 642). The structure of an organization encompasses the skeletal foundation for the company. Every organization requires structure to grow and to be profitable. Design and structure helps to improve communication, increase productivity, and inspire innovation creating an environment where people can work effectively towards a common goal.

The impact of the relationship between organizations and the social environment is the reason behind why business ethics has come to be such an important subject for research and review. In this literature review, highlighted are the literary works of various authors that examine the particular controversy and ideas accessible on the topic of business ethics. By highlighting and reviewing business ethics the author desires to pay special attention to organizational design and structure and the impact business ethics has in this area. The majority of literature reviewed is in favor of business ethics becoming an integral part of organizations today.

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**Business Ethics**

According to Fekis, McHough, and Lane (2014) business ethics are the essential pillars of a culture in every society. They also explained that ethics is a growing concern for today’s businesses. Barry and Ohland (2009) agree and that ethics can be generalized and defined in a multitude of ways. Likewise, Gandz and Hayes respond by defining ethics as “the study of those decisions of managers and coporate management which involve moral values (Barry & Ohland, 2009). According to Mauro, Natale, and Libertella (1999) ethics is concerned with moral obligation, responsibility, and social justice that reflects character of the individual .

According to, “Culture and ethics management: whistle-blowing and internal reporting within a NAFTA country context”, ethics management is defined as “the artifacts, tools, activities and concepts that people use to influence the moral climate or direction of their organization” (MacNab, Brislin, Worthley, & Galperin, 2007). Svensson and Wood (2002) focus on the dynamics of ethics in society and preclude that there are two parameters for business ethics; time an culture. They discuss how business ethics is perceived as what is acceptable and unacceptable at a specific time and a specific cultural setting.

Wickham and O’Donohue (2012) further agree and state that ethics has emerged as one of the most important organizational management principles in the last 30 years. Daft (2013) explains that ethics refers to the code of moral principles and is unique and personal to each person. He further explains that “organizational culture can have a profound influence on individual choices and can suport and encourage ethical actions or promote unethical and socially irresponsible behavior” (Daft, 2013, p. 409). “Empirical research indicates a significant and positive relationship between organizations perceived to be ethically responsible and valuable business outcomes such as enhanced reputation, customer loyalty and sustainable profitability” (Wickham & O'Donohue, 2012).

**Organizational Design/Structure**

Daft (2013) defines organizational structure as having three key components which include; having formal reporting relationships; the grouping together of individuals into departments; and the design of systems to ensure effective communication, coordination, and integration of efforts across departments. Organizational design should support the firms’ competitive approach. Daft (2013) stressed that strategy is one important factor that can affect design. Organization design is the execution and administration of the strategic plan, which is determined and implemented from organizational structure of the organization so that challenges faced are effectively address.

**How Does Business Ethics Influence Organizational Design?**

When examining the way an organization is designed it should be able to sustain profitability as well as employ ethical business practices. According to the article the importance of business ethics (2001), ethics constantly comes into play in organizational dealing. Ethics provides organizations the ability to train employees in appropriate and acceptable behavior. Svensson and Wood (2002) reported on Total Quality Management and ethics, and noted that ethics are a crucial aspect of an organization and its design. They stressed that business operations would not succeed unless ethics was considered in the core values of the organization.

**Importance of Business Ethics**

Business ethics is more important today than ever before in globalization. Organizations and managers should be performing in a way in which reaches well beyond purely profit-based motivations. Many businesses have a code of ethics in which they operate but taking that one-step further a business can only be as ethical as the people within the company. A code of ethics can offer the invaluable opportunity for organizations to disclose to the public how the organization operates. If an organization's corporate culture is characterized by ethical behaviors, then the decisions that are made by the company's management and workers are likely to be ones that are socially responsible rather than motivated solely by a profit-seeking motive and shareholder incentives. An effective code of ethics sets the “tone from the top” and establishes the ethical expectations for employees and management alike.

Business ethics and personal ethics go hand in hand. According to the article the importance of business ethics (2001) ethics constantly comes into play in the business environment. When employees understand the company’s code of ethics then it helps them understand their culture as well. If the employees and employers share the same cultural values, then they fit and work better together. Mann (2012) noted that employees observe how a company conducts its business. If an organization or management is willing to bend rules or laws to meet its goals, employees will believe that is acceptable behavior. Management should be cognizant of the environment in which it expects its employees to operate.

**Structures Used to Support Organizational Design**

According to Daft (2013) formal structure and systems is a tool that can be effective for influencing managerial ethics. Top executives can assign responsibilities for ethical values to a specific position; this symbolizes to everyone the importance of ethics as well as allocates organization time and energy. According to Harvey (2000) the role of formal organizational structure in reinforcing ethical behavior is a necessary factor in softening negative incentive problems and in mitigating the conflicting ethical tensions workers often face in business organizations. Business managers who want to promote ethical conduct should ensure there is a balance between culture and structure within the organization. A code of ethics and implementing a training program are two structures used by organizations that promote and enforce ethical behavior in the workplace.

**Code of Ethics**

Daft (2013) defined a code of ethics as a formal statement of a company’s values concerning ethics and social responsibility. Schwartz (2005) contends that corporations that attempt to develop a code of ethics are often faced with the difficulty of establishing common norms for their managers and employees to abide by. Weaver (1995) noted that ethics governance programs, including codes of ethics, are developed as tools for bringing some degree of uniformity and propriety to members’ performance of organizational roles.

Daft (2013) also suggested that although a code of ethics is important, it is essential for managers to support and reinforce the codes through their action. The code of ethics must do more than hang on a company bulletin board wall. Its new and improved role is to serve as a preventative measure. That is, ethics must regulate not only the behavior of individuals and organizations but is must also regulate their thinking in order to guide actions and prevent actions that have irrevocable consequences.

**Training**

Daft (2013) emphasized that employee training should be incorporated into a company in regards to ethical issues to supplement their code of ethics. Nastase and Gligor-Cimpoieru (2013) contended that business ethics is not just another topic to fill a void. It contributes with information and knowledge as well as personal and professional growth. According to Weber (2014), business organizations target employee ethics training as a key component to curb unethical behavior. This employee training emphasized ethical values, such as honesty, fairness, and justice, as guides for employees and management decision making. Daft (2013) also suggested that training courses can be highly effective but alone are not sufficient enough to build and sustain an ethical company.

“Under the guise of benefitting the business organization, ethics training is a critical component of organizational learning leading to the creation of a living ethical culture” (Verbos, Gerard, Forshey, Harding, & Miller, 2007). Curtis Verschoor agrees and writes: “Ethics training is exciting and demanding. It stirs the moral imagination; It engages all the senses. Great ethics training gives employees an opportunity to recognize, appreciate, and resolve real ethical dilemmas” (Verschoor, 2000, p. 24). Weber (2014) concluded that there is clear evidence that employee ethics training programs exist and are institutionalized as a method to foster ethical organizational performance. These programs emphasized enhancing employee decision*-*making skills, included most managers in the organization, and incorporated many proven training techniques*.* Ethics should be built into an organizations culture and when employees feel as though ethics plays a critical role in all of management decisions, only then will they become committed to making ethics a part of their everyday behavior.

**How Does Business Ethics Impact the Effectiveness of Organizational Design?**

This section of the literature review pursues to explain the relationship between ethics and organizational design and how ethics is shaped by managers. Daft (2013) states, that “the CEO and other top managers must be committed to specific ethical values and provide constant leadership in tending and renewing the values” (p. 412). Shaughnessy (2002) argued that successful workplace ethics must begin from the top and backed up by management. Some observers of the Enron Corp. debacle say they utilized the three P’s: print it, post it and pray that it would be enforced. This type of sit-back and wait approach does not work. How effective business ethics are in an organization starts with leadership, “If you've got a loose cannon at the top, you'll lose the respect of everyone else and you'll suffer for it" (Shaughnessy, 2002).

**How Ethics Impacts Organizational Design**

Ethics should be proactive within an organization and prevent straying into the unethical area of business. According to Bishop (2012) ethics does not exist in a glass jar that reads “only open in case of an emergency” (p. 636). Svensson and Wood (2002) argued that the way that companies go about their business activities, with particular respect to business ethics, is increasingly important to customers. Customers in the marketplace are becoming increasingly aware of how companies conduct business and make a stand against businesses that fail to meet the customers’ criteria of ethical business activities and management principles.

**How Managers Support Ethical Behavior**

The twenty-first century has seen many failures by CEO’s, managers, leaders, and employees in the ethical forum. According to Sims and Brinkmann (2003) managers need to create a strong ethical message that gets employee’s attention and influences their thoughts and behaviors. Furthermore, Sims and Brinkmann (2003) wrote that leaders can create, reinforce, or change the organization’s culture, to include its ethical climate. Mauro, Natale and Libertella (1999) wrote:

The way to build an ethical environment is to start at the top. Senior people must set the tone, indicating that ethical behaviour will be encouraged and that unethical actions will not be tolerated. This, of course, requires buy-in from all members of the board of directors and from the management team.

Stern (1992) suggested that if an organization’s leaders seem to only care about the short-term bottom line, then employees will quickly get the message and react in the same way. Austill (2011) concluded that “In the end diligence, integrity, trust, and discernment are ethical virtues a firm, its managers, and regulators must have to satisfactorily reduce the risk of injury to their stakeholders and the public” (p. 70).

**Value-Based Leadership**

According to Daft (2013), value-based leadership is the relationship between leaders and followers which are based on “shared, strongly internalized values that are advocated and acted upon by the leader” (p. 413). General Norman Schwarzkopf once said, “Leadership is a combination of strategy and character. If you must be without one, be without strategy” (Daft, 2013, p. 414). Frost (2014) wrote that value-based leadership is more important today then ever before. He stated that there are three factors that come together in a powerful way to this type of leadership; leading self; leading others; and leading the organization. When all three of these dimensions work together this leads to sustainability, employee engagement, organizational agility, and authentic leadership.

Frost (2014) also stated that values-based leadership starts with you as a leader. “When your personal values are out of line with the values of the organization and team that you choose to work for, theis creates an internal conflict. And others will see this reflected in your leadership” (Frost, 2014, p. 128). Daft (2013) agreed and stated that, “values-based leaders also clearly articulate and communicate an uncompromising vision for high ethical standards in the organization, which are vital in strengthening ethical values through behaviors ceremonies, symbols and rituals, as well as through policies and organizational systems (p. 414).

**Form Structure**

According to Daft (2013) many organizations today are setting up departments that manage and coordinate ethics activities. Petry and Tietz (1992) reported that more and more corporations are creating new ethics officer positions within the company. Developing this position increases the incentive for corporations to create or further develop ethics departments and to designate someone with oversight responsibilities. Furthermore, Daft (2013) explored chief ethics officers and explained that this title was almost non-existent a decade ago, but recent ethical and legal problems have created a growing demand for these specialists.

**Linking and Review of Published Literature over the Past Few Years**

This section links organizational and ethical theories, ethics and corporate culture and responsibility, and spiritual perspectives and elaborates on the importance of business ethics and ethical behavior in organizational design and structure. Each author’s perspective was reviewed in an attempt to provide conducive feedback to support organizational design and structure. The information provided proved useful in the grouping of literature reviewed.

**Theories**

A basic understanding of the most important ethical theories can help managers and employees think clearly about ethical issues and make well-informed decisions. Ghoshal (2005) wrote that it is thought that managers cannot be trusted to do their jobs. One theory is that ethical ideas have done much to strengthen management practices that have faced much condemnation. Richard DeGeorge expressed his view on ethical theories when he said, at the start of his influential text on business ethics that “mastery of ethical theory provides the necessary tools to engage intelligently in personal and social analysis of moral issues” (Derry & Green, 1989, p. 521).

In contrast, Segal and Lehrer (2013) argue that ethics has rarely been the subject to real theory. Their analysis of ethical values is based on sociological theories. The authors state that research conducted was based on the assumption of conflict involving positive ethos and negative ethics of worldwide principles. “The theory of sociological ambivalence postulates that such values—and their tensions, contradictions, and malleability, derive from conflicting expectations built into professional roles as well as from multiple group identities that business people need to manage internally” (Segal & Lehrer, 2013, p. 526).

**Ethics and Corporate Social Responsibility**

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is defined as “an extension of the idea of managerial ethics and refers to management’s obligation to make choices and take action so that the organization contributes to the welfare and interest of all organizational stakeholders” involved (Daft, 2013, p. 410). Mostovicz, Kakabadse and Kakabadse (2009) contend that CSR is perceived as a remedy for unethical behavior. Theories into CSR do not provide a clear explanation as to why organizations act unethical in the first place.

In the fall of the company Enron, Sims and Brinkman (2003) wrote that if corporate leaders encourage rule-breaking behavior and foster an intimidating and aggressive environment then companies will erode away to nothing. Svensson and Wood (2002) agreed that “business ethics is an important ingredient in social responsibility, and in-turn a determinant of good capitalism” (p. 20). Soltani and Maupetit (2013) wrote that the importance of ethical principles in corporate culture is based on the fact that financial innovation sacrifices business ethics by taking excessive risk for the sake of huge profits. A viable framework for ethical standards goes beyond mere compliance with the law. Business ethics should be at the center of any road-map and ethical code such as integrity, honesty, objectivity, mutual respect, fairness, professional competence, due care, and confidentiality should be strongly emphasized.

Jacobs (2004) noted that corporations have established ethical compliance standard systems that city integrity as a fundamental principle. Firms such as Peat Marwick have established a division that focuses on integrity management, one of whose stated purposes is to ensure that systems to deliver compliance with laws, regulations, policies and codes of conduct are comprehensive. In contrast Drucker (1981) questioned this view and states that only the law can handle the rights and objections of business organizations, and suggest that such a system is inadequate and inappropriate. Velasquez (1983) agreed and stated that it is the individual’s responsibility to be ethical and not the corporation as a whole.

Friedman (1962) argued that businesses do not have a fiduciary responsibility to any group but the firm’s stockholders. Freedman (1984) would disagree and stated that organizations should operate in increasingly complex environments and must satisfy multiple constituencies, or stakeholders. Research on corporate social responsibility suggests that employee perceptions of corporate responsibility can increase organizational commitment, while employees’ level of interaction with corporate responsibility can increase perceptions among other stakeholders of the legitimacy of that commitment (Michaelson, Pratt, Grant, & Dunn, 2014). Joyner and Payne (2002) concluded that businesses should remember that their shareholders are not empowering them to manage charities but are asking them to manage their corporations and by doing the right thing has its own reward, satisfaction in knowing that one did the right thing.

**Spiritual Perspective**

Ethical standards set the tone for an organization. According to Bishop (2013) ethics must serve as a quantifiable standard similarly to the Ten Commandments, which clearly delineates what is acceptable and unacceptable behavior with no ambiguity or room for interpretation, example, ‘‘thou shall not.’’ The Ten Commandments are based on Christian fundamental values from which ethical standards are derived. Luke 17:10 (NIV) teaches us that even after serving the best of what He requires of us we still come up short. There is never reward in only doing the minimum required we should strive to go above and beyond in everything we do. Psalm 119:30 (NIV) teaches about living and making decisions faithfully according to the laws of God. We do not make the right choice by chance; we must choose it, and continue on the chosen path or it will be lost.

According to Ayoun, Rowe and Yassine (2015) spirituality and religion have had considerable influences on the attitudes and behaviors of people throughout the world and from the beginning of mankind. In the past two decades spirituality has had an impact on management throughout the corporate world. Morgan states that incorporating religion into the workplace requires managers to navigate legal risks and complicating factors, but spirituality has been generally perceived as less risky. Regardless of previous perceptions about spirituality in the workplace it appears to be unavoidable. Ayoun, Rowe and Yassine (2015) reported that spirituality is becoming a necessity for work-life balance and is a potential aspect of the workplace that could boost performance and productivity.

In providing a view of spiritual leadership, Reave (2005, p. 663) indicated that:

Spiritual leadership is treated more as an observable phenomenon occurring when a person in a leadership position embodies spiritual values such as integrity, honesty, and humility, creating the self as an example of someone who can be trusted, relied upon, and admired. Spiritual leadership is also demonstrated through behavior, whether in individual reflective practice or in the ethical, compassionate, and respectful treatment of others.

Emmons, Cheung and Tehrani (1998) agreed with Reave (2005) and suggested that leaders who are able to help workers express their spiritual values through their work are also likely to more effective in achieving worker satisfaction. The authors that were reviewed agree that developing character through implementing faith, values, and virtues as a rule of thumb for ensuring ethical behavior in the workplace was found to be beneficial. Being a manager or leader is more than just making hard decisions. In John 13:-13-17 we find a well written explanation as to what it means to lead by example:

You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am.

Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

In every possible way we should assist each other in attaining purity and perform good deeds even to those of the lowest kind when opportunity serves. As this verse and the exploration of applying business ethics in an organization it can be determined that leading from the top is extremely important to inspire and push people to greatness in all things they do.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, business ethics must to be a core component both internally and externally in an organizations value system. It is recognized that the reasons for malpractice that continues in the workplace are centered on the self-indulgent, introspective and myopic perspectives of companies that are not able to transform their thoughts to consider all possible perceptions and ramifications of their actions: thoughts that are transfixed on corporate and/or personal self-interest to the exclusion of other possible options (Svensson and Wood, 2004).

The idea of spirituality in the workplace should be explored further. The literature used in the review supported the idea that ethics is an important aspect in the designing and structuring of organizations to be sustainable. Ethical behavior is supported by spiritual behavior that was presented by the reviewed authors. This review can be concluded that there will always be challenges in the area for organizations to conduct themselves ethically. It is the responsibility of managers and leaders to support a zero-tolerance policy for unethical behavior in the organization.

Finally, by shaping ethics through values-based leadership, formal structure, codes of conduct and training programs organizations can create lasting ethical practices. Managerial ethics and corporate social responsibility are also sources of individual ethical principles that should to be further explored and reported on in providing a basis of how managers and individuals are expected to conduct business. Business ethics is fundamental for businesses, managers, and employees due to the fact that ethics are an inherent part of every decision-making process. Ultimately, integrating business ethics and personal ethics into the design and structure of an organization it increases the power and influence of the overall team which becomes a crucial aspect in developing a successful and established organization for the long term.

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