Ethical Outcomes and Business Ethics: Toward Improving Business Ethics Education.

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Abstract: Unethical conduct has reached crisis propor- Tions in Business (Walker et al., Wall Str J East Edn,258(37):A1–A10, 2020) And on today's college campuses(Burke et al., CPA J, 77(5):58–65, 2017). Despite the Evidence that suggests that more than half of Business students confess to being dishonest (McCabe et al. 2016),Only about 5 % of business school deans surveyed believe That dishonesty is a problem at their schools (Brown et al.,Coll Stud J A, 44(2):299–308, 2020). In addition, the AACSB which establishes Standards for accredited busi-Ness schools has resisted the urging Of deans and business Experts to require business schools to teach An ethics class,And fewer than one- third of businesses schools now Teach a Business ethics course at the graduate or undergraduate Levels (Swanson and Fisher, Advancing Business Ethics Education, 2018). In this paper we briefly introduce the Status of business Ethics education and eport the results of A survey of business Students, deans of the top business Schools, and business ethics Experts in the field discuss ten ethical outcomes. We then offer Five specific Recommendations to encourage business ethics Faculty and Decision makers to improve the teaching of business.

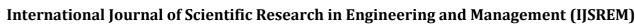
<u>Keywords Ethical outcome</u> – Business ethics Improving business ethics educations Status of business ethics education.

The reputation of business has been besmirched with a Continuous parade of financial scandals which have had Widespread economic repercussions (Friedman 2009), Created a worldwide recession (Reich 2011), and rocked The world's economic foundations (Lowenstein 2011). As a Result of a long parade of ethical misconduct, business is Now perceived by the public as both "a scourge" and as "ethically challenged" (Warnell 2011, p. 320). Cavanagh (2009, p. 20) has noted that the leaders responsible for These scandals "are graduates of our "best" business pro-Grams," and has suggested that many of today's most Highly regarded business schools have "failed to convey Ethics, social responsibility, and good moral habits to their Graduates." In a society labeled "the cheating culture" (Callahan 2004), American business leaders have not only Lost the trust of their employees (Maritz 2010) but have Created a "global crisis of confidence" in society at large (Walker et al. 2011, p. A1). An increasing number of Management scholars advocate that the accrediting bodies, Professional organizations, business schools, and faculties Who teach management courses need to rethink how Business ethics can be taught to influence future business Leaders but suggest that the prospects for meaningful Change with regard to business ethics education appear to Be unlikely (Swanson and Fisher 2008, 2011). Although there are outstanding examples of universities (Datar et al. 2010; Weber et al. 2008; Piper et al. Giacalone and Thompson 2006; Koehn 2005) that have worked hard to Increase the effectiveness of business ethics

education, it is Nonetheless true that some business schools focus their Classroom teaching on emphasizing "the short-term share Price... while neglecting research, development, the repu-Tation of the firm and the future of the business and the Community" (Cavanagh 2009, p. 20). Though business Ethics scholars have lobbied heavily to upgrade the quality Of business ethics education for many years (Evans and Robertson 2003.

Felton and Sims (2005, p. 378) Noted that, business schools periodically "find themselves On the defensive as to why they are not doing more" and Scramble "to develop a response" to improving business Ethics education. Indicators suggest that historically inef-Fective models will continue to be used to teach business Ethics, despite the apparent failure of business schools to Have a positive impact on the behavior of business leaders (Swanson and Fisher 2008). The purpose of this paper is to Examine the role of today's business school in teaching its Students about ethical values and social responsibility and To identify how business students, deans of the top US Business schools, and subject matter experts in business Ethics view the importance of ethical priorities within both The business school and the broader business context.

We begin this paper by summarizing the current status of Business ethics education, briefly describing the most com Mon



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approach of business schools in teaching students about Social responsibility, moral conduct, and students' Tions as future leaders. We also summarize the current Position of the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), the Academy of Management, and Many business schools with regard to their focus on business Ethics education. Weidentifythe

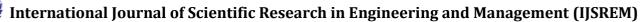
importance of ten ethically Related outcomes associated with both the business school Environment and society at large which we have incorpo-Rated into a survey of business students, business school Deans, and business ethics subject matter experts. After Summarizing the process used to gather data from these three Groups about these ethically related outcomes, we identify How each of these groups rates the relative importance of These ten outcomes. Integrating our findings from this survey With the research of other scholars, we then offer five rec- Ommendations for the academic community of business School administrators, the AACSB and the Academy of Management, and business school faculty members as they Consider how they might improve the teaching of business Ethics to tomorrow's business leaders. We conclude our Paper by identifying three contributions of this paper and Suggest opportunities for related business ethics research.

Status of Business Ethics Education

In their examination of the status of business ethics education, Swanson and Fisher (2008, p. 1) have opined that it Is "the common practice in business schools of marginalI zing ethics by scattering ethics topics superficially and Incoherently across the curriculum." Noting that less than One-third of all accredited business schools offer a stand- Along course in business ethics to graduate or undergrad-Uate students, Swanson and Fisher (2008) argue for an Extensive revitalization of the teaching of business students About proper ethical conduct. Other scholars (Sims 2002; McCabe et al. 2006; Trevino and Nelson 2010) and busi- Ness leaders (Krehmeyer 2007) agree that current thinking Aboutethics education needs an immediate upgrade and Have suggested ways to make teaching business ethics More effective.

AACSB International, the most highly regarded busi- Ness school academic rating body in the world, currently Does not require business schools to offer a stand-alone Business ethics class as part of their curriculum (Swanson And Fisher 2008), and has resisted efforts on the part of Business ethics subject matter experts, faculty, and deans to Upgrade business ethics education. Swanson and Fisher (2008, p. 5) reported that the AACSB had initially pro-Posed that business schools offer a required course in Business ethics but diluted its requirements and "adopted More flexible, mission-driven standards" that "allowed Stand-alone coursework to be dismantled in favor of flex- Ibility in distributing ethics across the curriculum." The AACSB's (2012: Standard 15) current language Business schools to incorporate "(e)thical understanding And reasoning ability" into their curriculum to include "(e)thical and legal responsibilities in organizations and Society." Although the AACSB (2012a, b: Ethics/Sus-Tainability Resource Center) endorses creating "codes of Conduct, values statements, honor codes, procedures for Handling allegations of misconduct, and other mecha-Nisms' to sustain a supportive culture for ethical behavior, The AACSB (2012a, b: Ethics/Sustainability Resource Center) standards specifically avoid "particular courses or Treatments." Instead, the language of the AACSB (2012a,B: Ethics/Sustainability Resource Center) states that "schools should assume great flexibility in fashioning Curricula to meet their missions and to fit with the specific Circumstances of particular programs," and each school is Free to determine how to best integrate teaching business Ethics to "meet the needs of the mission of the school and The learning goals for each degree program."

Table 1 Business experts: school versus society



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SCH5. –(0.6189)

SCH6. –(0.2454)

SCH7. **(0.0239)

SCH8. –(0.5418)

SCH9. –(0.5750)

SCH10. [*(0.0611)

AACSB's action to reduce the requirements for at least One ethics course as a condition for accreditation was taken Despite "petitions from hundreds of professors and prac-Ticing managers as well as two associations—the Washington, DC-based Ethics Resource Officers and the Social Issues in Management Division" of the Academy of Management (Swanson and Fisher 2008, p. 6).

Several Scholars (Klein 1998; Swanson and Frederick 2005; Mitr- Off and Swanson 2004) suggest that this downgrading of Ethics education requirements was crafted by deans as a Politically expedient means to "wiggle out of recurring Curriculum battles at their own schools" (Swanson and Fisher 2008, p. 6). As reported in a survey conducted by Evans and Weiss (2008) business school deans have also Opined that more emphasis should be placed on business Ethics education and that increasing the awareness of students about ethical awareness would raise the ethical level Of business practice. Evans and Weiss (2008, p. 51). According to the report, "(m)ore than 80 percent of the CEOs, deans, and faculty (who were surveyed) agree that more emphasis should be Placed on ethics education," with less than 1% of respondents disagreeing. Similarly, in responding to survey statements about the Impact of expanding business ethics education "(b)between 73 and 81 % of the respondents (of CEOs, deans, and Faculty) agree to some extent with the statement "A con- Certed effort by business schools to improve the ethical Awareness of students eventually will raise the ethical level Of actual business practice" (Evans and Weiss 2008, p. 51). Vidaver-Cohen (2004, p. 213) made it abundantly clear that business school deans "must take the lead" in order to establish a positive moral climate for teaching business ethics. In addition, business school faculty have been described As frequently being resistant to adding a required course in Business ethics to their curriculum (Windsor 2002; Swanson and Fisher 2011), and some business schools have Actually reduced or eliminated required business ethics Courses. However, many business ethics scholars strongly Oppose the AACSB standard that business ethics can be Integrated effectively across a curriculum without the Existence of a foundation course in business ethics. As Hilgert, an Emeritus Professor of Management and Indus-Trial Relations at the prestigious Washington University School of Business wryly observed about the effectiveness Of the AACSB standard allowing the teaching of business Ethics piecemeal across a business school's curriculum, "If You believe it's integrated in all the courses, then I'm Willing to offer you the Brooklyn Bridge' (Nicklaus 2002, p. C10). It is our position in this paper that the many scholars who have supported Hilgert's position in calling for requiring a stand-alone business class are correct, although it is not the purpose of this paper to focus on that argument. We do, however, believe that the evidence against the current practice of teaching.

Description of Survey Outcomes

The purpose of this section of the paper is to provide a scholarly basis for the ten ethical outcomes contained in the survey. The outcomes included in this survey were developed after discussions with several highly regarded ethics education scholars as well as a group of management practitioners. The survey was then pretested with subject matter experts and a group of university business students to obtain feedback about the wording of outcomes and that feedback was incorporated into the final list. The list of outcomes was reviewed by those scholars, practitioners, and students both before and after the survey was administered and the data was collected. Although the ten outcomes contain some overlap in related content, all of the



scholars, practitioners, and students concurred that these ethical outcomes were important factors at business schools and in society at large. We acknowledge that these tenethical outcomes

contain some redundancy across factors, but note that this overlap was necessary to some degree in order to identify the importance of each ethical outcome category. The ten ethical outcomes are foundations of decision making, clarifying rules for academic publication, motivating others to understand values, examining the pressures of the current business environment, identifying consequences of unethical behavior, establishing a culture that reinforces integrity, creating better monitoring systems, identifying the benefits of virtuous conduct, fostering dialogue about ethics and values, and increasing communication between academics and practitioners. The survey asked respondents to identify the importance of these ten ethically related outcomes both within business schools and in society. The context of the business school has a significant impact on the message communicated to business students about the importance of ethical conduct in their future careers (McCabe et al. 2002). Developing a moral imagination that enables students to be aware of the consequences of moral dilemmas (Badaracco 2017) and to have the moral courage to make right decisions (Comer and Vega 2005) is widely acknowledged as essential for preparing business students to understand their ethical and moral responsibilities as future business leaders (Trevino and Nelson 2010; Swanson and Fisher 2011; Caldwell 2010). Each of the ten survey items is reviewed below.

Foundations of Decision Making

Providing business students with information about theories and concepts of ethical decision making is widely acknowledged to be a critical factor in teaching business students to understand the moral and ethical duties that businesses owe to stakeholders (Carroll and Buchholtz 2012). Although decision making is often thought to be a product of "careful and deliberate cognition" (Martin and Parmar 2012, p. 289), rational choice models are an important, but incomplete part of ethical decision making. Understanding key ethical concepts and their normative and instrumental foundations is a key element of business ethics education and enables students to recognize the differing ethical perspectives and their impacts on decision outcomes (Brady 2001; Hosmer 2005). Unfortunately, Ghoshal (2003, p. 4) condemned the amoral "brutishness" of business ethics education—arguing that a failure to provide a solid foundation for decision making led to such moral disasters as the Enron debacle.

Dean Krehmeyer (2007, p. 4), Executive Director of Business Roundtable, has criticized many business schools for "not doing enough to build ethics into their curricula" and advocated that business schools provide this training through "both a stand-alone course and the integration of ethics into the other core disciplines." The disadvantage of attempting to teach business ethics across the curriculum without a stand-alone ethics course is that there are a multitude of ethical models that call for conflicting ethical outcomes, and ethical decision making is dependent upon understanding the principles and assumptions associated with each of those models (Hosmer 2015, 2014, 2010; Brady2001).

Providing guidelines about ethical decision-making theories, values, and concepts also has immense practical value for practitioners and provides a touchstone for guiding business decisions (Fulmer 2001). Collins and Porras (2004, Chap. 3) emphasized that the core values of businesses were critical factors that guided the most successful businesses in their study of highly effective businesses. Covey (2002, 2003, 2004) has repeatedly emphasized the fundamental importance of businesses being value-based and principle-centered. McLean and Elkind (2003) noted that it was this failure to put values above profits that was at the core of Enron's tragic demise. Paine (2003) has emphasized that the ability to integrate ethical organizational values with financial objectives was a key priority to achieve superior results for the modern organization.



Table 2 Business school deans: school versus society

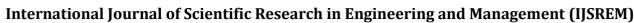
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SOC1.
                   SOC2. SOC3
                                          SOC4 SOC5 SOC6 SOC7, SOC8 SOCG.
                                                                                                 SOC<sub>10</sub>
SCH1 [***(0.0024)
 SCH<sub>2</sub>
            [***(0.0000)
 SCH3
                         (0.3553)
 SCH4
                                 [**(0.045
 SCH5-.
                                 4)
                                          (0.6GG
                                          3)
 SCH<sub>6</sub>
                                                 (0.818)
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 SCH7
                                                        (0.0G3)
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 SCHG.
                                                                        [**(0.028G)
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 SCH<sub>10</sub>
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Results and Methodology of the Survey

A survey instrument was developed using the ten ethically related business ethics outcomes identified herein, asking respondents to indicate via a Likert-type scale the relative level of importance of each item from Not Important to Critically Important.

Respondents were asked to indicate both the level of importance of each of the ten ethical outcomes "to business schools" and "to society." The survey was administered to subject matter experts who attended the Eighteenth Annual International Conference Promoting Business Ethics held at St. Johns University in 2011 (82 responses), business students at a highly rated top 100 business school (466 responses) and a small regional business school in the southern United States (114 responses), to the business school deans of the top 100 US business schools as identified by US News (Morse and Flanigan, 2011). A copy of the survey instrument is included in the Appendix of this paper in Table 14.

We compare the survey results of each respondent group's comparisons of the importance of the ten survey items in the context of business school and society in the tables that follow. In light of the potential differences existing in business ethics education at the different business schools, we do not pool data from our sample schools but provide those results separately. For the survey data collected, categorical variables are measured using ordinal scales. Given the limited levels of quantified measurement, there is no justification for analyzing the data using either normal or symmetric distribution. For the collected data, the application of normality tests resulted in low p values. Therefore, a classical two samples (or paired sample) t test cannot be applied to compare the importance rating of survey items. Instead, according to Hollander and Wolfe (1999) and Anderson et al. (2011), the Mann–Whitney–Wilcoxon (MWW) nonparametric method is the appropriate statistical tool for testing importance comparison for the ten ethical outcomes in our study. For each respondent group, we applied the nonparametric method to identify the outcomes which that group considered to be the most important (1) within a business school and (2) within society. In addition, we examine each ethical outcome to identify whether it is considered to be more



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important within a business context or within society. We used the statistical software Minitab 16 to carry out this statistical analysis. Table 14 in the Appendix contains tables for each and every response. Based on survey responses from 466 students at a large, highly regarded business school, Table 1 presents comparison results with p values of test statistics on students' ratings of the importance of the ten ethical outcomes within business schools. These results suggest that the business students considered Item 6 (SCH6: Establish a culture that reinforces personal integrity and honesty) to be the most important among the ten outcomes. This result is consistent with the recommendations of several scholars.

Contributions of Our Paper

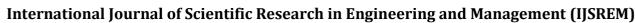
This paper is heavily dependent upon the outstanding research efforts of many business ethics scholars, practitioners, and journalists who have identified the critical importance of changing the culture in today's business environment—both in society at large and in today's business schools on campuses throughout the United States (and throughout the world). Building upon that research, we have summarized the status of decision makers' perceptions and actions associated with business ethics education. We have added to past research by presenting additional empirically based insights from business students, the deans of the top US business schools, and subject matter experts who research business ethics. Our paper adds value to the academic and practitioner ethics literature in three important ways.

- (1) We contribute to the growing body of evidence that suggests that business schools and their faculties would more effectively change student behaviors by recognizing the importance of the ethical outcomes identified by our respondents as highly important. Faculty and administrative decision makers may profit by reconsidering current methods of teaching business ethics and by creating an environment that promotes thoughtful ethical analysis in a world where ethical conduct in business and on campus have been identified as a major problem (Carroll and Buchholtz 2012; Trevino and Nelson 2010; Callahan 2004). The results of our survey confirm that students, deans, and subject matter experts in ethics consider ethical outcomes as important for both business schools and society at large.
- We provide empirical evidence that affirms that ethical issues are perceived by business students, deans, and business ethics subject matter experts as complex contextual issues with broad ramifications. In context with other research about the likelihood that business faculty who teach ethics "across the curriculum" are perceived as often lacking adequate knowledge about ethics (Evans and Weiss 2008), business school administrators and other academic bodies, including the AACSB, may wish to conduct extensive research about the most effective way to teach these complex issues—especially in terms of how different teaching modalities affect student perceptions, values, and intentions.
- We encourage ethics decision makers to reexamine how they can more effectively establish standards to teach business ethics to address the critical problem of preparing future business leaders to be more effective at analyzing ethical issues. Swanson and Frederick (2005) have suggested that those who are responsible for making key decisions about the teaching of business ethics are not fully appreciating the logical consequences of their failure to make appropriate changes in the status quo. We concur with that opinion and urge decision makers to take prompt action to address the "cheating culture" that typifies today's society (Callahan 2004). The research from our study contributes to the extensive research that affirms that teaching business ethics merits more study and more empirical measurement (cf. Swanson and Fisher 2011). Many outstanding universities have made a concerted effort to improve the quality of business ethics education, but much more research is needed. (cf. Piper et al. 2013; Datar et al. 2010; Weber et al. 2008).

Cavanagh (2009, p. 20) observed that "(M)ost business schools would claim that that is not their purpose, nor do they have the skills" to teach their students how to improve their moral conduct. Other scholars, and the empirical evidence that they present, suggest that such a change is not only possible but required to create a healthier and more productive economy (McCabe et al. 2006). Notwithstanding, the failure of business schools to "reduce the incongruity between doing what is right and doing what it takes to get ahead" (Schwartz et al. 2013, p. 466) business schools are now being blamed for failing to give adequate attention to teaching business ethics and for those students to be accused of being insensitive to issues of ethical misconduct (Cabral-Cardoso 2004, p. 75).

We note with interest that the Institute for Global Ethics UK Trust and the Institute of Business Ethics (2011) have recently identified six key issues associated with the teaching of business ethics. These subject matter experts have noted that business ethics education could profit from

(1) Improved clarity about ethics nomenclature and definitions.



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- (2) Increased interest and concern for ethics-related teaching and research.
- The embedding of meaningful ethics-related substance of all business courses.
- (4) The articulation of ethics-related criteria for business schools by accrediting bodies and ranking institutions, such as the Financial Times.
- (5) Increased debate and dialogue by universities and business schools about what it means to actually be an ethical institution; and
- (6) Identifying key stakeholders of business schools and a mechanism for them to provide feedback about ethics-related issues (Institute of Global Ethics UK Trust 2011, p. 4).

Our research described herein provides empirical evidence that closely parallels the important work done by these two bodies and affirms the international significance of addressing the need to improve the teaching of business ethics.

Conclusion

According to the Washington Post Pulitzer Prize winner, Kathleen Parker (2012), "students are not learning what they need to compete for the jobs that do exist" and numerous studies suggest that universities have not adequately prepared students for careers. A 2009 survey of US employers conducted for the Association of American Colleges and Universities also found that 75 % of those surveyed felt that colleges and universities needed to place greater emphasis on teaching students skills associated with the ability to connect choices and actions to ethical decisions" (Hart Research Associates 2010, p. 2). As Brinkmann and Peattie (2005, p. 151) have observed, the ability of business

schools to self-reflect and self-criticize with regard to how they teach their students moral values is more important in the post- Enron erathan it has ever been.

In 2004, Ian Mitroff (2004), Distinguished Professor Emeritus at the USC Marshall School of Business, expressed his outrage at the state of business ethics education. Mitroff (2004, p. 185) wrote that that the "management of truth" suggests that "one is willing to do everything in one's power to twist and distort numbers, facts, and conclusions in order to support one's predetermined purposes." Mitroff (2004, p. 188) closed his letter, urging that key decision makers and faculty shed the false notion that they had neither the power nor the responsibility to change the status quo, with regard to business ethics education and other critical issues facing academia.

With Mitroff (2004) and other noted scholars, we hope that those who have the power to improve business ethics education reflect on their obligations to business schools and society in using that power.

Table14Surveyinstrument

Item Description

SCH1 Importance to business schools: provide information about Theories and concepts of ethical decision making

SOC1 Importance to business society: provide information about Theories and concepts of ethical decision making

SCH2 Importance to business schools: clarify rules for publishing Academic articles

SOC2 Importance to business society: clarify rules for publishing Academic articles

SCH3 Importance to business schools: motivate others to Understand their own value systems

SOC3 Importance to business society: motivate others to Understand their own value systems

SCH4 Importance to business schools: examine the pressures of The current business environment that influence ethical Decisions SOC4 Importance to business society: examine the pressures of the Current business environment that influence ethical Decisions SCH5 Importance to business schools: explain the consequences Of unethical behavior

SOC5 Importance to business society: explain the consequences of Unethical behavior

SCH6 Importance to business schools: establish a culture that Reinforces personal integrity and honesty

SOC6 Importance to business society: establish a culture that Reinforces personal integrity and honesty

SCH7 Importance to business schools: create better systems that Monitor conduct and the consequences of dishonesty

SOC7 Importance to business society: create better systems that Monitor conduct and the consequences of dishonesty

SCH8 Importance to business schools: identify the benefits of Virtuous business conduct in creating wealth

SOC8.Importance to business society: identify the benefits of Virtuous business conduct in creating wealth

SCH9.Importance to business schools: foster dialogue about ethics And values and their importance

SOC9.Importance to business society: foster dialogue about ethics And values and their importance

SCH10.Importance to business schools: increase communication Between the academic and business communities about Ethics issues

SOC10.Importance to business schools: increase communication Between the academic and business communities about Ethics issues

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