The Effect of Pedagogy on Students’ Perceptions of the Importance of Ethics and Social Responsibility in Business Firms

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Ethics is increasingly viewed to be an important component of business education. However, assessment of the ethics component of business education has not received the same degree of examination as has assessment of the functional areas. Instead, ethics education is often simply assumed to be effective. Is it? The objective of this study is to begin to explore this question by examining the effects of the integration of ethics into a functional area of business education, specifically a management principles course. The results raise questions about the effectiveness of integrating ethics across the business curriculum.

Keywords: ethics, pedagogy, student learning, business ethics

Reflecting the needs of businesses and society, the curricula of collegiate business schools have undergone extensive changes in recent years (Mitchell, 2007). Among the many classes and programs that have been added to the offerings of many business schools are those addressing the subjects of ethics and social responsibility. This increased attention to ethics and social responsibility is in response to the incidence of a number of well-publicized ethical laps in business. The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), the primary accrediting body of collegiate schools of business, furthered this attention to ethics and social responsibility by requiring the inclusion of ethics instruction in accredited business programs (Waples, Antes, Murphy, Connelly, & Mumford, 2009).

Unfortunately, the effectiveness of many of the curriculum changes in business has been questioned. Malekzadeh (1998), for instance, noted that any change in curriculum at universities is difficult and likened it to relocating graves and redesigning some tombstones. Indeed, often
Changes are made to curricula with minimal actual effect. Changes to how ethics is addressed in business curricula are no exceptions. Gioia (2002), for instance, bemoaned business education’s role in the crisis of corporate confidence because current offerings in academia may be less than useful. Similarly, Etzioni (2002) observed that a business education appears not only to fail to improve the moral character of the students but may actually weaken it. Kurpis, Beqiri, and Helgeson (2008) noted that due to the specialized nature of business, business professionals are likely to encounter ethical dilemmas that are unique to their profession. As a consequence, the role of ethics in business education appears to warrant attention.

In an attempt to ensure that collegiate business education is able to deliver on its promises, AACSB has placed increased attention on assessment (Callahan, Strandholm, & Dziekan, 2009; LaFleur, Babin, & Lopez, 2009). Assessment of the ethics component of business education has not received the same degree of examination as has assessment of the functional areas. Instead, ethics education is often simply assumed to be effective. Is it? The objective of this study is to begin to explore this question by examining the effects of the integration of ethics into a functional area of business education, specifically a management principles course. First, ethics in decision making are discussed. Second, ethical ideologies are explored. Third, ethics education in business education is examined. Finally, the hypothesis is developed and tested, and conclusions are drawn. The premise is that ethics education in business significantly impact ethical decision making. However, an individual’s ethical ideologies would moderate this proposed relationship.

ETHICS IN BUSINESS DECISION MAKING

The call for ethical and socially responsive business practices is not new (Frederick, Davis, & Post, 1988; Luthans, Hodgetts, & Thompson, 1984). The ethics scandals in the early 2000s (e.g., Enron, Worldcom, Adelphia, Tyco) reawakened the need for attention to business ethics. Several researchers largely attributed these ethics scandals to the lack of moral development of managers and the amoral, “profits first” theoretical underpinnings of business education (Ghoshal, 2005; Kochan, 2002; Pfeffer, 2005). Mitroff (2004), for instance, made a direct and scathing indictment that business school faculty are “guilty of having provided an environment where the Enrons and the Andersens of the world could take root and flourish. . . . We delude ourselves seriously if we think we played no part whatsoever” (p. 185). Similarly, Ghoshal (2005) stated, “By propagating ideologically inspired amoral theories, business schools have actively freed their students from any sense of moral responsibility” (p. 76). In summary, several allege that business education may have a deleterious effect on the morality and ethics of managers. Indeed, the most recent business and government scandals (e.g., AIG) have only reinforced this view. Hence, ethics is increasingly viewed to be an important component of business education.

Although business education can be expected to directly affect the actions of business graduates in the workplace, additional factors are also in play. It is logical to expect that the ethics of business professionals are affected at least in part by their individual personal qualities. The personal moral philosophies, or “the set of beliefs, attitudes and values providing a framework for shaping and considering ethical dilemmas” (Barnett, Bass, & Brown, 1996, p. 1164), of individuals have an input into the decisions that they make (Barnett et al., 1996; Kohlberg, 1984). The mere fact that individuals with the same business education exhibit different moral behaviors implies that personal ideologies have an effect on one’s morality regardless of the nature
of business education. One’s decisions, therefore, can be expected to be affected by one’s personal qualities (such as one’s moral philosophy), education, and one’s environment (Hunt & Vitell, 1986).

Ethical Ideologies

The issue of “what is right” has been addressed for millennia without a single answer. Indeed, from a business ethics perspective, Lewis (1985) compared defining ethics to “nailing Jell-O to a wall” (p. 377). Forsyth (1980) developed two dimensions of ethical ideologies—idealism and relativism—which are determinants of attitudes toward moral and social issues. According to idealism, the first primary ethical philosophy, morally “right” behavior leads to positive outcomes. Although it is similar to a deontological approach in that it is noncompensatory and concentrates on the “rightness” of behavior, idealism focuses primarily on the effects of one’s choices and actions on others (Forsyth, 1980). According to the second philosophy, relativism, ethical principles and codes do not exist—instead, ethics is in the “eye of the beholder.” Individuals who hold to this philosophy reject the possibility of developing or relying on universal principles or rules (Forsyth, 1980).

Although both idealism and realism are ethical ideologies and represent different systems upon which the ethicity of decisions and actions can be evaluated, they are very different in their results. Because relativism involves the rejection of universal moral rules or imperatives, some view a relativistic perspective to be synonymous with a lack of ethics (Zacharias, 1996). In actuality, relativistic individuals view ethicity as being dependent on the nature of the situation they face instead of being based on moral imperatives—ethical judgments are based on the evaluation of the circumstances as opposed to ethical principles. Consequently, ethics and social responsibility may at times be subordinate to other personal and/or organizational needs, such as competitiveness or efficiency (Vitell, Ramos, & Nishihara, 2010). Empirical research supports this viewpoint. Vitell, Rallapalli, and Singhapakdi (1993) observed that individuals who are more idealistic are more likely to display honesty and integrity than individuals who are more relativistic. Similarly, Vitell et al. (2010) observed a positive relationship between idealism and corporate ethical values but a negative relationship between relativism and corporate ethical values.

Forsyth (1980) suggested that idealism and relativism actually represents two independent ethical dimensions, where idealism represents the extent to which one idealistically assumes that desirable consequences can always be obtained when the “right” action is chosen, and relativism represents the degree to which one rejects relying on universal moral rules when making decisions. Based on the degree to which one is idealistic and relativistic, individuals can express four different ethical approaches to decision making: (a) situationism (high idealism, high relativism), (b) absolutism (high idealism, low relativism), (c) subjectivism (low idealism, high relativism), and (d) exceptionism (low idealism, low relativism). See Table 1 for an explanation of each of the ethical approaches.

In the absence of other influences, individuals can be expected to make decisions consistent with “their” ethical ideology (Pava, 2002). Indeed, evidence suggests that individuals’ implicit beliefs or predispositions significantly directly affect behavior (Dahlin & Regmi, 2000; Hofer, 2004; Kardash & Howell, 2000). When human behavior is examined, however, this relationship is not always seen. The reason for this finding is that the relationship between ethical ideology
TABLE 1
Taxonomy of Ethical Approaches

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Idealism</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Low</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Relativism</td>
<td>Absolutists:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Situationists:</td>
<td>Assumes that the best possible outcome can always be achieved by following universal moral rules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rejects moral rules; advocates individualistic analysis of each act in each situation; relativistic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Subjectivists:</td>
<td>Exceptionists:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Appraisals based on personal values and perspective rather than universal moral principles; relativistic</td>
<td>Moral absolutes guide judgments but pragmatically open to exceptions to these standards; utilitarian</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

and behavior is dependent upon the degree to which individuals are cognizant of their ethical ideology. Although most individuals believe that they are using a specific ethical philosophy in their decision making, the consistent use of an ethical ideology requires a thorough knowledge of the ethical ideology being used and how it is to be implemented into one’s life and an awareness of ethical situations. Ethics education can be used as a means to help students become aware of their ethical philosophy, provide them with the tools to make choices consistent with it, and sensitize them to the existence of ethical situations.

ETHICS EDUCATION

Although classes in business ethics have existed for many decades, widespread ethics instruction in business curriculum is relatively new. Prompted in part by public demands in response to various ethics scandals in the business community mentioned earlier, AACSB has added a requirement for an ethics component in business education (Mangan, 2003). This requirement has become a driving force in business ethics education (Swanson & Frederick, 2005). The requirement for ethics education has raised two important questions: What is the goal of ethics education, and what structure can best accomplish it?

Goals of Business Ethics Education

Can ethics be taught? This question has been debated for some time (McDonald, 2005; Waples et al., 2009). The debate is often centered around two different goals of ethics education—changing students’ standards or increasing students’ ethical sensitivity. Although changing students’ ethical standards would seem to be a desired goal of ethics education, this goal may not be attainable. Many believe that individuals’ ethical development is virtually complete before college age. If this is true, changing students’ ethical standards appears to be unlikely (Hosmer, 1985). Indeed, Seshadri, Broekemier, and Nelson (1998) concluded that classes in business ethics have no impact on one’s ethical decision making.
Instead of attempting to change students’ ethical standards, most ethics instruction is undertaken with the objective of increasing students’ sensitivity to ethical issues and of increasing students’ abilities to employ their ethical philosophies (Shawver & Sennetti, 2009). Within this context, the goal of ethics education is to strengthen students’ ability to recognize and respond to ethics issues so they will be best able to apply their ethical philosophy to their decision making (McDonald, 2005).

Several researchers have observed that ethics instruction and perceptions of ethical culture are related to the moral development of students (Desplaces, Melchar, Beauvais, & Bosco, 2007; Kashyap, Mir, & Iyer, 2006; Tyler & Tyler, 2006). In particular, ethical instruction results in a greater reflection and ethical discussions on part of students before ethical actions are embarked upon. In short, students think more before making a decision in an ethically charged situation. Essentially, ethics instruction confers upon the students “the ability to perceive that a web of competing economic relationships is, at the same time, a web of moral or ethical relationships” (Powers & Vogel, 1980, p. 40).

Structure and Position of Ethics Instruction in Business Education

There has been significant debate over the most effective vehicle for ethics instruction in business education (Lopez, Rechner, & Olson-Buchanan 2005; Waples et al., 2009). Littar and Karri (2005) suggested that the inconsistent results and the lack of results observed in ethics research may originate from several factors, including the nature of the ethics instruction. In an initial response to AACSB directives, ethics instruction was usually added to business curricula in the form of stand-alone classes (Collins & Wartick, 1995). This format guaranteed that ethics would be addressed in the program, permitted an easy way to demonstrate to AACSB that ethics are indeed a part of the curriculum, and allowed ethics to be taught by a faculty with knowledge of ethics.

The effectiveness of stand-alone ethics courses in affecting students, however, has been questioned (e.g., Frederick, 1998; Park, 1998). Murray (1987), for instance, believes that most attempts to incorporate ethics instruction via stand-alone courses have been superficial and not well integrated into business curricula. As a stand-alone class, ethics instruction can easily be viewed by students as merely a necessary course requirement with little applicability to actual business practice (Evans, Trevino, & Weaver, 2006). Furthermore, will a stand-alone ethics class provide students with the ability to apply material from the course to the role that ethics plays within the various business disciplines? To provide insight into this question, Awasthi (2008) observed that when asked to solve a case in an accounting course, students who had taken a stand-alone course in business ethics displayed differing managerial judgment from those who had not and were more inclined to judge an ethically questionable practice as “bad.” Awasthi (2008) also observed no differences in the moral judgment of students who have taken a stand-alone course in business ethics and those that did not. In other words, there was an effect from taking a stand-alone course in business ethics, but it was surprisingly small and limited in scope. As a result of a stand-alone course in business ethics, students may become great debaters on ethical issues, but they are unlikely to respond ethically when presented with actual ethical issues.
As a consequence of the less-than-great results from stand-alone ethics courses, several have suggested that the optimal way to incorporate ethics instruction into business education may be to integrate ethics across the curriculum (where ethics is addressed in the classes of each functional area) as opposed to concentrated in stand-alone courses (e.g., Etzioni, 2002; Mitroff & Swanson, 2004). In response to the less-than-optimal results observed from stand-alone ethics courses, AACSB adapted its guidelines to permit the integration of ethics instruction within the classes of each functional area. As a result of the change in AACSB guidelines, stand-alone ethics courses have been disappearing from the curriculum of many business programs (Crane, 2004), with less than 10% of business schools relying on a single stand-alone course for instruction in ethics (McDonald, 2005). In its place, there is a strong trend toward integrating ethics across the business curriculum (Solberg, Strong, & McGuire, 1995).

Surprisingly few studies have examined the effectiveness of integrating ethics across the curriculum. This omission is noted by Evans et al. (2006), who suggested that the omission may result from the difficulty in assessing the quality and extent of ethics instruction in the programs in which it is supposedly integrated. As a result, Evans et al. (2006) are leery about whether ethics are actually integrated into the curriculum of many business schools. Furthermore, even if ethics are truly integrated in the curriculum, the responsibility for ethics instruction lies in the hands of individuals (functionally based faculty) who may have little interest or knowledge of ethics or may not be able to adequately integrate this material into their courses.

Lopez et al. (2005) claimed to be the first study to empirically examine the effectiveness of ethics instruction integrated across the curriculum. They reported evidence of a positive change in that, as a result of the integrated ethics approach, students were more disapproving of unethical behavior (utilizing a before-and-after assessment). Desplaces, Melchar, Beauvais, and Bosco (2007) observed that students who participate in discussions on ethics in their core business courses displayed marginal gains in moral competence, but not in moral reasoning. (Of interest, these findings are similar to those observed for stand-alone courses.) The relative dearth of research examining the effectiveness of integrated ethics education is disappointing, particularly given the extent to which ethics instruction has been integrated into business education.

THE STUDY

This study extends the research on the effectiveness of the integration of ethics into a core business course by examining the effects of integrating ethics in a management principles course, which included an assigned class project. Specifically, as developed earlier, most ethics education in business is conducted with the goals of increasing students’ sensitivity to ethical issues and increasing their abilities and propensities to employ their ethical philosophies. Research on the effectiveness of ethics education generally examines the ethical perceptions of individuals (ethical ideologies) as indicators of individuals’ sensitivity to ethical issues, as “marketers must first perceive ethics and social responsibility to be important before their behaviors are likely to become more ethical and reflect greater social responsibility” (Singhapakdi, Vitell, Rallapall, & Kraft, 1996, p. 1131). Hence, if ethics education in business is effective, it will provide students with a better understanding of the ethical system they employ, enabling them to possess perceptions and make decisions consistent with their ethical systems. Consequently, if ethics education in business is effective in reaching its goals, it is logical to expect that the strength of
the relationship between students’ ethical ideologies and their perception of role of ethics and social responsibility in business will increase as a result of the education. Consistent with this discussion, the following hypothesis seems appropriate.

H1: The strength of the relationship between business students’ ethical ideology and perceived role of ethics and social responsibility is stronger for individuals receiving ethics instruction as a part of a management principles course than for individuals who do not.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The sample consisted of undergraduate students at a Catholic university in the Midwest United States. The students were enrolled in a Principles of Management class, the aim of which is to introduce students to the various aspects of human behavior, such as organizational culture, global management, motivation, diversity, and leadership, that influence the complex process of managing any organization. As a part of this course, the final project for students is to examine, in teams, strategies for companies that they select (e.g., Proctor & Gamble, Pepsi Co., Google). They act as consultants to these companies, and their role is to advise the company about a possible strategy and its implementation for making the organization more effective. As a part of this project, they collect information about the internal environment of the company, such as corporate strategy, top management, technology issues, and economic issues. They also collect information about elements in the external environment of the company, such as competition, customers, suppliers, and economic trends. With the information available to them, the student teams are required to suggest what strategy (or a combination of strategies) will be most appropriate for their company to sustain a competitive advantage.

In two semesters, the projects required of students differed. In the first semester (control group), there was less focus on ethics and socially responsible business practices. Specifically, students were not required to integrate the subject of ethics into their projects. In the subsequent semester (treatment group), beginning early in the semester, attention placed on ethics in the business environment was greatly increased. In addition to including a discussion on a chapter on ethics and social responsibility, discussions on ethics were integrated into the class discussion in other subjects covered in the course. Ethics also played a key role in the course project. In the final project, students were specifically required to consider the ethical implications of their proposed strategy. Students were expected to consider that the effectiveness of an organization is tied as closely to the use of ethical and socially responsible strategies/practices as it is to the organization’s financial bottom line.

The goal of the ethics component was to increase both students’ sensitivity to ethical issues and their abilities and propensities to employ their ethical ideologies. Comparing with the control group (students who have not been exposed to the ethics component), we would expect that better understanding of ethics will permit students in the treatment group to act more consistently with their ethical ideologies.

In the control group, the questionnaire was administered to 43 students. Participation in the survey was voluntary, and students were made aware of their informed consent. Of the 43 students, 39 students completed the questionnaire in its entirety with no missing values.
sample comprised 53.8% male students. In the treatment group, the questionnaire was administered to 60 students. Of the 60 students, 54 students completed the questionnaire in its entirety with no missing values. Male students made up 50% of the sample.

Instrument

The survey instrument included two scales. The first instrument, the Ethics Position Questionnaire (EPQ; Forsyth, 1980), was used to measure students’ moral philosophy. The EPQ consists of 20 items, 10 questions to measure each of two dimensions—idealism and relativism. Research has established the EPQ to be a valid and reliable instrument, shown to be related to a variety of individual difference variables such as attitudes, norms, and values (e.g., Douglas, Davidson, & Schwartz, 2001), moral judgments (e.g., Forsyth, 1980), sensitivity to ethical issues (Shaub, Finn, & Munter, 1993), and behavioral intention (Eastman, Eastman, & Tolson, 2001), and has been shown not to be reflective of social desirability bias (Barnett, Bass, Brown, & Hebert, 1998). Marta, Singhapakdi, and Kraft (2008) suggested that the EPQ is the most valid existing scale for measuring individuals’ moral philosophy.

The second scale is the Perceived Role of Ethics and Social Responsibility scale (PRESOR; Singhapakdi et al., 1996). The PRESOR scale consists of 13 items to measure perceptions of the role of ethics and social responsibility in achieving organizational effectiveness. The scale consists of three factors; social responsibility and profitability, long-term gains, and short-term gains. The scale appears to be reliable and valid (Singhapakdi et al., 1996).

Data Analysis

The Cronbach’s alphas for the idealism, relativism, and PRESOR scales were determined to be .82, .80, and .87, respectively, indicating adequate reliability. The items in each of the scales were factor analyzed to confirm the scales. The factor analysis produced the expected factors representing each of the three scales. The results were used to further refine each of the instruments. Although the instrument to measure idealism is comprised of 10 items, only 6 items were utilized in this study due to poor factor loadings for 4 items. Similarly, 7 on the instrument to measure relativism were retained, and 12 of the 16 items from the PRESOR scale were retained.

The two groups of respondents (control and treatment) were examined. No significant (at the .05 level) difference was observed between the two groups in their age ($t = .522$, $\alpha = .603$), gender ($\chi^2 = .134$, $\alpha = .714$), or class level ($t = 1.096$, $\alpha = .276$). When students’ ethic orientations were examined, again no significant differences were observed for either idealism ($t = .930$, $\alpha = .355$) or relativism ($t = .570$, $\alpha = .570$). The students, therefore, appear to be relatively homogeneous across the two classes, suggesting that it may be appropriate to compare the control and treatment groups in terms of the relationship between ethical ideology and perceived role of ethics and social responsibility.

A three-factor model was tested (the effect of the two ethical ideology factors [idealism and relativism] on PRESOR) across the two groups (control and treatment). Path analysis was used. As per the hypothesis, it was predicted that the effect of ethical ideology (idealism and relativism) on PRESOR would be stronger in the treatment group versus the control group.
RESULTS

When the relationship between the ethical orientations and perceived role of ethics and social responsibility (PRESOR) was examined, both relativism and idealism were observed to be related to the perceived role of ethics and social responsibility as expected. Idealism was observed to significantly (at the .05 level) positively correlated with PRESOR \(r = .398, \alpha = .000\) and relativism was observed to be significantly (at the .05 level) negatively correlated with PRESOR \(r = -.420, \alpha = .000\). As discussed earlier, past research suggests that individuals who more strongly follow an idealistic ethical ideology perceive ethics and responsibility as important, whereas individuals who more strongly follow a relativistic ethical ideology perceive that ethics and social responsibility is less important. These relationships were observed.

The strength of the relationships between ethical ideology and the PRESOR factors are displayed in Table 2.

Significant (at the .05 level) positive relationships are observed between idealism and the first and third PRESOR factors (good ethics is good business and quality and communication). A marginally (at .1 level) significant positive relationship was observed between idealism and the second PRESOR factor (profits are not paramount). Significant (at the .05 level) negative relationships are observed between relativism and the first two PRESOR factors (good ethics is good business and profits are not paramount). A marginally (at .1 level) significant negative relationship is observed between relativism and the third PRESOR factor (quality and communication).

The three-factor causal model was tested using path analysis with both the control and treatment groups. As per the hypothesis, it was predicted that the effect of ethical ideology (idealism and relativism) on PRESOR would be stronger in the treatment group versus the control group. Using a multisample approach, results indicate that both ethical ideology factors (idealism and relativism) affect significantly PRESOR in both the control and treatment groups and that these effects are not statistically different across the two groups \(ps > .05\). In other words, both the idealism and relativism factors affected significantly the PRESOR factor equally in both groups, suggesting that the treatment (i.e., intervention via pedagogy) did not moderate these effects, as illustrated in Figure 1). Hence, no support was observed in support of the hypothesis.

**TABLE 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Idealism</th>
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<th>Relativism</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(r)</td>
<td>(\alpha)</td>
<td>(r)</td>
<td>(\alpha)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRESOR</td>
<td>.398*</td>
<td>.000*</td>
<td>-.420*</td>
<td>.000*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRESOR Factor 1</td>
<td>(r)</td>
<td>(\alpha)</td>
<td>(r)</td>
<td>(\alpha)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Good Ethics is Good Business”</td>
<td>.454*</td>
<td>.000*</td>
<td>-.366*</td>
<td>.000*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRESOR Factor 2</td>
<td>(r)</td>
<td>(\alpha)</td>
<td>(r)</td>
<td>(\alpha)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Profits are not Paramount”</td>
<td>.195</td>
<td>.063</td>
<td>-.404*</td>
<td>.000*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRESOR Factor 3</td>
<td>(r)</td>
<td>(\alpha)</td>
<td>(r)</td>
<td>(\alpha)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Quality and Communication”</td>
<td>.297*</td>
<td>.004*</td>
<td>-.182</td>
<td>.080</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. \(\alpha\) = Significance; PRESOR = Perceived Role of Ethics and Social Responsibility scale.
*Significance beyond the .05 level.
DISCUSSION

The results of the study demonstrate that the incorporation of an ethics component into a Principles of Management course did not provide students with the ability to more effectively employ their moral philosophies into their decision making. This finding does not support the hypothesis that the ethical component in the course will provide students with increased awareness of ethical situations, allowing them to better employ their moral philosophy.

Given that no evidence was observed in support of the hypothesis, a post hoc examination was conducted to identify areas for future research. Although not significant at the .05 level, the results seem to suggest, rather surprisingly, that the students in the control group (who were not subject to the ethics-enhanced class) appear to place higher importance on ethics and social responsibility than students in the treatment group as indicated by their responses to the entire PRESOR scale and for each of its factors.

Given that this is the opposite of what was hypothesized, additional analysis appears to be warranted to aid future research. As discussed earlier, by doing a mean split on each of the two ethical ideologies, each student can be grouped into one of four groups, each reflecting a different ethical orientation (situationists, absolutists, subjectivists, and exceptionists; see Table 1). For each of the four ethical orientations, no significant (at the .05 level) differences were observed.
between the students in the two groups (control and treatment) on any of the demographics examined (age, gender and class level), suggesting that no demographic differences exist between the students in the treatment and control groups for each of the four ethical orientations.

When PRESOR and its factors are examined between the control and the treatment groups for each of the ethical orientations, significant (at the .05 level) differences are observed (see Table 3). For students classified as absolutists (high in idealism and low in relativism), a significant (at the .05 level) difference was observed for the overall PRESOR scale and marginally significant (at the .1 level) differences for two of the PRESOR factors (good ethics is good business and quality and communication). In each instance, the individuals who had taken the class with the additional ethics component possessed lower scores than students who had taken the course without the ethics component. This finding contradicts what would logically be expected. Absolutists strongly rely on universal moral rules for decision making. Although the small sample sizes and the post hoc nature of the additional analysis prevent the drawing of any conclusions, the finding suggests that the additional ethics instruction may lower this group’s reliance on universal moral rules. Future research is required to verify the existence of the relationships observed and to examine whether different forms of ethics instruction may have similar effects on absolutists.

The other significant (at the .05 level) difference was noted for exceptionists (low idealism and low relativists). A significant (at the .05 level) was observed for one of the PRESOR factors (good ethics is good business). In this instance, students who had taken the class with the additional ethics component possessed higher scores than students who had taken the course without the ethics component. Exceptionists rely on pragmatics for decision making. In this instance, the results suggest that the additional ethics instruction may provide these students with a pragmatic rationale for ethics in business.

The post hoc analysis raises the important question of whether ethics integrated into the coursework of core business courses (at least in the form used in this study) affect students differently. Much research on ethics instruction implicitly assumes that it affects all students equally.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 3</th>
<th>Differences in Importance of Ethics and Social Responsibility Between the Control and Treatment Groups Across the Ethical Orientations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Situationalists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRESOR</td>
<td>−.849</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRESOR Factor 1</td>
<td>“Good Ethics is Good Business”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRESOR Factor 2</td>
<td>“Profits are not Paramount”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRESOR Factor 3</td>
<td>“Quality and Communication”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. α = significance; PRESOR = Perceived Role of Ethics and Social Responsibility scale.
*Significance beyond the .05 level.
The results from this study begin to question this assumption. Are the effects of the integration of ethics into the coursework of core business courses possibly negative for some students, where their ethical perceptions actually decline as a result of being exposed to ethics? If so, what is the cause of this effect? Do differences between individuals also exist for other modes of ethics instruction? What is the role of ethical ideologies in these relationships? A neglect of the differences that may exist across students in their receptivity to ethics instruction and/or the effects of such instruction may explain the weak and contrary findings that have been observed in the research on the effectiveness of ethics instruction. Could these differential impacts on students collectively result in a nullification at the aggregate level in our study?

This once again opens up an opportunity for faculty dialogue and curriculum development. An opportunity exists for business school faculty to work with trained ethicists to develop pedagogy and readings. For example, if teaching ethics is more like management, that is, keeping people’s efforts coordinated although they might be working on different tasks (Brady & Hart, 2007), then perhaps it is all about developing a more customized approach. Standard approaches to teach ethics as in a hypothetical or a classroom setting may not be relevant. A different way of teaching ethics could be via personal development approach (Griseri, 2002). Further, what type of textual genres may have a greater impact for reflection and analysis? Would case-based interactive seminars be effective? Or would various types of discourse analysis (Hardy, 2004) such as using comics (Gerde & Foster, 2008) and cartoons be effective in revealing an individual’s interpretive reality of debatable issues such as ethics? These questions and more call for an increased dialogue.

LIMITATIONS

Several limitations exist that may affect the generalizability of the findings. First, the study was conducted at a single university (a Jesuit university where students are introduced to ethics instruction early in their freshman year). The generalizability of the findings to students attending other types of colleges and universities is unknown. Second, the study was based on a single course in management. The generalizability of the findings to other courses and other disciplines is also unknown. Third, the study only examined short-term effects. The long-term effects of incorporating ethics in the course were not examined. Finally, only a single form of ethics integration in one course was examined. Not all methods used to integrate ethics are likely to be equally efficacious.

CONCLUSIONS

Given the rise of corporate scandals, business schools are being held responsible for developing ethical business leaders (Evans et al., 2006). From that perspective, it is assumed that a course integrated with ethics is likely to produce more conscientious students—students who may be better equipped to handle the vagaries of business decisions in a more informed manner. Unfortunately, the findings from this study reinforce existing literature showing little or weak effect of pedagogy on the students’ use of ethical ideologies on behaviors, at least in the short
run. Questions are raised, therefore, concerning the efficacy of pedagogical methods emphasizing the teaching of ethics in business education. Although there is general agreement that ethics should be taught, it appears that it is unclear on how to teach do so.

A post hoc analysis of the findings suggests that additional research is needed to examine the effects of ethics education on individual students. The analysis suggests that ethics instruction may affect different students in different fashions. Future research to examine this possibility is needed and may be of the utmost importance.

REFERENCES


