

## Chapter 18

# Research on Corporate Codes of Ethics and Its Application to University Honor Codes

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### ABSTRACT

*Honors codes have been shown to have a positive impact on the integrity of students and have been adopted by numerous colleges and universities. Students are informed of the code and asked to sign it. Instructors have academic dishonesty policies on their syllabi. However, the honor code should be further emphasized and lesson can be learned from research on ethics codes. These lessons can serve as practical strategies and suggestions for future research on university honor codes. Training students to be professionals and preparing them to act ethically in the workplace should be our top priority. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss these implications.*

The following areas are discussed:

- Factors that influence ethical decision making and behavior
- Theories related to ethics
- Research on Corporate ethical codes and ethics training
  - Content of the Codes
  - Ethical climates and cultures
  - Communication of codes
  - Orientation to ethics
  - Leader set examples for others
  - Code implementation strength and embeddedness
- Research on University Honor Codes
- Corporate codes of ethics in relation to student honor codes

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- Practical implications for universities and suggestions for future research
- Strategies for promoting climates for ethical behavior and decision making in universities

## **INTRODUCTION**

Reports of unethical behavior in both the corporate arena and also in universities often gain the attention of the public, colleges and universities, businesses, and government officials. This issue is increasingly important to higher education administrators, faculty, and staff because unfortunately, there are far too many reports of ethical misconduct. Scandals, such as these affect the public perception of the effectiveness of businesses and other institutions such as universities and colleges. Scandals can also influence workplace behaviors. Those individuals involved in this scandal often have been involved in this behavior in the past. Most of these individuals have spent time furthering their education at colleges and universities. Thus, it is imperative that organizations and universities promote ethical conduct.

Some of these institutions have ethical codes and others do not. Codes of ethics are formal, written statements about the values of the organization and the expected conduct by its stakeholders. Ethical conduct is a concern that needs to be addressed and many organizations are adopting different strategies to prevent unethical behavior such as: training communication, codes of ethics or honor codes, and altered rewards (McCabe, Trevino, & Butterfield, 1996) that will be discussed in this chapter. However, the presence of corporate codes of ethics has been shown to positively influence ethical decision making and ethical behaviors within an organization (McCabe & Trevino, 1993).

Honor codes have been shown to have a positive impact on the integrity of students and have been adopted by numerous colleges and universities (McCabe & Trevino, 1993). Honor codes

reinforce ethical values. Students are informed of the code and asked to sign it. Instructors have academic dishonesty policies on their syllabi. However, the honor codes should be further emphasized and lessons can be learned from research on ethical codes. These lessons can serve as practical strategies and suggestions for future research on university honor codes. Training students to be professionals and preparing them to act ethically in the workplace should be our top priority (McCabe & Trevino, 1993). Therefore, it is critical that both management educators and student affairs personnel strengthen the impact of university honor codes and implement illustrations from research on corporate codes of ethics in the workplace.

Codes of conduct influence the ethical community of the organization. People develop their identity from others and the community or context they are in. Therefore, they must abide by the standards of virtue such as integrity within the community (McCabe, Trevino, & Butterfield, 1996). When students graduate they become part of the organization that hires them and are part of the work community. Students that cheat are more likely to do unethical acts in other environments. Undergraduate students are also part of the community and during the years they are in college higher education contributes to their moral growth and development (McCabe et al., 1996). Honor code environments have definite procedures, benefits, and requirements of ethical conduct. When individuals violate ethical norms then they are disciplined thus honor codes can reduce academic dishonesty (McCabe & Trevino, 1993; McCabe et al., 1996).

In this chapter, several key areas from the research on corporate codes of ethics will be discussed. This discussion will include: factors that influence ethical decision making, code content, ethical cultures and climates, communication of codes, employee orientation and training, roles of organizational leaders in relation to codes of conduct, code implementation strength, and

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