BUSINESS ETHICS AND CAUTIONARY INTEGRITY

Florina BRAN [a], ***Dumitru Alexandru BODISLAV*** [b]*, ***Ioan GAF-DEAC*** [c], ***Florin UTA*** [d]

[a, b, d] *Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania*
[c] *University of Petroșani, Romania*

ABSTRACT
Numerous organizational cultures, as well as MBA and PhD programs, have emerged in the realm of ethics. However, the question arises: can we truly embody these ethical ideals in our actions? Is it imperative enough to be an integral part of a company's strategic vision? Should it find its place in the employee handbook or be woven into job descriptions? In a landscape teeming with diverse ethical and moral perspectives, many individuals employing these terms may actually mean something quite distinct from one another. When an organization meticulously fine-tunes its relationship with competitors, ethics can emerge as a potent competitive advantage. This article subscribes to the idea that ethics, morality, and integrity should serve as the fundamental guiding principles for long-term evolution, and it offers a concise set of methodologies for ensuring their enduring preservation.

KEYWORDS: *business ethics, communication, integrity.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Do we recycle paper and bottles? We ought to, you know.
Are we prone to inflate business expenses in order to defraud the I.R.S.? We should not.
Do we know someone who disobeys the law but is unsure and unwilling to confirm it?...
These are minor inquiries that add up to the main inquiry: How ethical are we? We frequently discuss the value of integrity (which is fantastic), but how do we actually define it? Do we practice what we preach as well as what we say?
Many organizational cultures and MBA and PhD programs have been developed in the area of ethics, but can we live by upholding it? Is it important enough to be addressed in the business strategy of the company? Can it be found in the employee handbook or in his job description?
Business ethics and integrity are two fundamental principles that underpin the functioning of organizations in the modern world. Ethics, in the context of business, refer to the moral principles and values that guide decision-making, while integrity is the consistency of actions, values, methods, measures, principles, expectations, and outcomes. Together, they create the framework upon which businesses operate, impacting their reputation, sustainability, and long-term success. This essay explores the significance of business ethics and integrity, their impact on various aspects of organizational performance, and the challenges in maintaining them in a complex global business environment.

* Corresponding author. E-mail address: *alex.bodislav@ase.ro.*

There are numerous ethical and moral perspectives, and the majority of people who use the term above imply something different from what they think of as ethical and moral (Bodislav, 2010). They make a mistake by failing to defend the desired course of academic ethics while making an ethical decision. It is incorrect to redefine "ethics and moral" in academic ethics because their users might:

1. Apply just one ingrained notion of wellbeing and value theory that they learned from their families and believe reflects how they relate to other partners;
2. Believe and spread farther from the social point of view;
3. Use to demonstrate a compromise between entrepreneurship and social by making ethical decisions;
4. Have faith in a judgment as being truthful or right if it is based on moral or legal principles. Disasters result when ethics are disregarded.

Organizational scandals and (unethical) disasters must be prevented, eliminated, and survivable by strategic planning for "integrating" the organization.
Disasters that result from unethical action pose a significant risk to the growth and survival of the company. The mass media stands for a decline in collective integrity, which results in lawsuits for billions of dollars, financial fraud, higher costs, fines, damage to the company's reputation, and dwindling customer confidence. No business is safe from these dangers. Businesses that are cautiously executed must plan and manage their integrity and continuity by understanding their vulnerability to disasters caused by unethical behavior, implementing preventative steps, and putting their organization in a position to advocate for and survive some controversies.

2. STRATEGIC INTEGRITY

Numerous firms have a wealth of expertise in ongoing business planning, which is crucial for anticipating and prioritizing tasks effectively, defending against and surviving natural disasters, losses in their databases, and acts against the corporation. Many people have recently realized that continual integrity planning actually constitutes due diligence. It is necessary to include ethical issues into the organization's strategic plan.
In addition to being legal, managing integrity should also be prioritized from a moral standpoint. Employees who are aware that decisions affecting their work environments, habits, and current decision-making processes are made ethically are more linked to and driven to act ethically (Leclair et al., 1998). Employees who use their own hierarchical, ethical scales and who are less aware of the ethical ramifications of their actions and more motivated to act unethically in order to gain material advantages are those who perceive these activities as not being a part of ethical conduct.
Business ethics and integrity are critical components of organizational culture that influence decision-making, behavior, and the overall sustainability of businesses. The literature on this topic encompasses a wide range of perspectives, theories, and empirical studies, shedding light on the significance, challenges, and impacts of business ethics and integrity in various contexts.
Ferrell and Fraedrich (2019) emphasize the role of business ethics in building trust with stakeholders. They argue that ethical behavior enhances a company's reputation, which, in turn, leads to greater stakeholder trust. Trust is regarded as a valuable intangible asset that can provide competitive advantages (Singh & Hari, 2016). Stakeholders, including customers, investors, and employees, are more likely to engage with organizations they trust.
Scholars like Brown and Treviño (2014) highlight the role of leadership in shaping an organization's ethical culture. Ethical leaders who demonstrate integrity serve as role models for employees, influencing their behavior and decision-making. Ethical leadership contributes to the development of an ethical organizational climate (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999).

Integrity management is the nexus between organizational culture management and the informal reward/motivational process that shapes the choices and actions of the employed staff in a way that goes beyond the rules outlined in an internal conduct code. Common ethics and professional standards include the presumption that decisions and behaviors are led honestly and that employees and managers don't have an interest in harming other employees, shareholders, clients, consumers, or their own distributors through deception, known misinterpretation, fraudulent reports, coercive measures, conflicts of interest, or other criminal behavior.

2.1 Disasters caused by immoral behavior

A succession of events that produce operational crisis and threat, or are regarded as threats in the continuity of operational evolution in the organization, lead to specific, unexpected ethical wrongdoing that develops into an unethical non-routine.

However, not every immoral choice made results in a disaster for the company. In actuality, organizations that maintain their own integrity may systematically absorb, react, and modify their flaws in behavior and decision-making. All the time, poor decisions are made. The answer lies in the extent to which the organization has prepared itself to combat a lack of ethics in decisions made through disciplinary actions, communication with hired staff (sales force), and crisis management of external communication. A general public survey on the company can reveal the path it is taking, which, if it isn't examined, could result in bankruptcy, via the seriousness, persistence, and lack of speed and an acceptable response to the thought of misconduct.

After the passage of "The Sarbanes-Oxley" Act, everything seems to have changed. Large multinational corporations' true foundation is their immorality and lack of ethics, and this act has awakened the American legal system, American business system, and, by extension, the world business system, to this fact. When Franklin Delano Roosevelt was president, everything was moral and everyone worked for their own partial advantage, but mostly for the benefit of the American economy and the global economy. This act superseded all the comparable federal legislation that had been in force and had appeared at that time. The importance of hard labor and collective management through the division of labor (DoL) and the desire for the early stages of automation (Henry Ford, Cornelius Vanderbilt, and Rothschild) increased at that time. None of them wanted to defraud the government or gain greater benefits at the expense of other participants through fraud, but rather through their abilities to compete in the market. This regulation was created in response to reports of unethical behavior occurring in our society's day-to-day operations. Real-world examples include: British Petroleum, Arthur Andersen, Martha Stewart, Merrill Lynch, Tyco, Enron, WorldCom, Qwest, Merrill Lynch, Tyco, Lehman Brothers, Goldman Sachs, Bernard Madoff, Sears, Mitsubishi Motors, United Way of America, Global Crossing, Adelphia, Citigroup, Bear Stearns, Lehman Brothers, Goldman Sachs, and the list goes on. Many of these cases were resolved by giving their CEOs lengthy prison terms, but for little gain (Bodislav, 2010).

The prediction of future scandals in American and international business is not a precise science, but the average number of these is 20 ethical crises annually (Burton, 2001). Scandals based on unethical behavior can originate at any level of the organization's operations.

These crisis models' primary subcategories are:

1. Harassment or discrimination;
2. Criminal or unlawful activity;
3. Financial inconsistency;
4. Betraying the confidence of customers;
5. Bribery or the use of influence;
6. Violation of established rules;
7. Conflict of interest.

Companies are increasingly looking for candidates for critical roles within their organizations who *"inherited ethics"* from their families. The majority of employees emphasize the view that they are constrained by the confidentiality policies of the organizations for which they work and cannot reveal these anomalies to the general public or to the legal courts. The concept of a "whistle-blower" is not covered by any economic legislation from this planet, and firms often evade regulations as an implicit means to assert their supremacy over the law.
Most frequently, ethical crises include personnel who have failed to adopt the corporate culture of the organizations they work for (Păuna et al., 2022). Too many corporate crises have happened because the company was unable to discipline personnel for their unethical behavior.
The formula for maintaining corporate integrity or another type of conclusion as a fix and a sort of resolution I came up with a five-step process to use when highlighting the value of ethics and integrity in a business: establishing the company's ethical standards.
Managers that are careful might start the subsequent proactive initiatives that will drive their company toward the aims and objectives of getting and utilizing honesty (Georgescu, 2023).
Every business should develop clear guidelines for what is expected of them in terms of ethics. Examples of typical and everyday scenarios should be included in the regulations so that expectations in particular crucial situations are made apparent. All of these codes of conduct should be distributed throughout the organization, but only with the condition that they are followed and evaluated. The company's dedication to ethical standards is based on managers that need to demonstrate that the company's senior management is dedicated to the idea of integrity as a strategic goal. Employees can more easily see that senior management's promises are genuine by creating a management team that can develop a plan for strategic integrity and demonstrate their dedication to the cause. Additionally, the process of increasing performance must be connected to the system of rewards, the integrity indicators, and the productivity indicators. Additionally, it is crucial to continually reward business partners' or clients' integrity in the labor framework.

2.2 Ethical communications

As part of the strategic commitment management in fostering the concept of ongoing integrity, every employee, manager, and executive director from a company should participate in ethics seminars and training. Following the scandals of the previous four years, cautious executive directors should ascertain the ethical training model or followed by the accounting and audit company, the suppliers, distributors, sales network, and other business partners they operate with.
In order to get a true picture of the sorts of behavior and decisions that exist and are made in the business, it is crucial to monitor and audit employees' behavior (both official and informal). establishing and maintaining some arbitration procedures, legal provisions, and protection for people who report improper behavior in the workplace.
By praising and rewarding acts of integrity and moral decisions, one can create and sustain an environment that is conducive of ethical behavior. the principle of upholding and ensuring the contractual disciplinary conditions while adhering to the moral or just course of action. a readiness to recognize potential dangers to long-term integrity.

2.3 Integrity as a business evolutionary tool

Integrity has a pivotal and indispensable role in the realm of business, being an essential and unwavering element for ethical and prosperous organizations. The aforementioned statement encapsulates the fundamental values of integrity, openness, and moral behavior, which form the bedrock of confidence and reliance among enterprises, their interested parties, and the broader community. This article aims to examine the complex notion of integrity within the realm of business, highlighting its importance and its contribution to the cultivation of long-term success. Through the analysis of empirical cases and the exploration of the difficulties associated with preserving integrity, this study aims to emphasize the paramount importance of sustaining integrity for all corporate entities.

The Significance of Integrity in the Business Context

The concept of integrity in the realm of business comprises a multitude of characteristics, all of which are essential for the preservation of a principled and ethical corporate culture. The aspects included under this framework are as follows:

- The virtue of honesty serves as the fundamental basis for maintaining integrity. The concept encompasses the practice of maintaining honesty and openness in all aspects of company operations, ranging from the accurate disclosure of financial information to effective communication with workers, customers, and partners. The use of ethical procedures fosters trust among stakeholders and enhances the organization's reputation.
- Ethical behavior in the realm of business entails the steadfast adherence to moral and ethical standards across all facets of operations. Ethical behavior refers to the act of adhering to moral principles and doing what is considered morally correct, especially in situations when it may present difficulties or provide lesser immediate benefits. The practice of ethical conduct fosters the development of trust and enhances one's reputation.
- Fairness is a crucial component of integrity, since it entails the equitable treatment of all parties. This encompasses the principles of ensuring just remuneration, equal treatment of personnel, and offering consumers transparent and impartial pricing. The promotion of fairness contributes to the cultivation of enduring connections and the establishment of consumer loyalty.
- Accountability is a crucial aspect that necessitates organizations to assume responsibility for their activities and choices. This entails taking responsibility for errors, addressing them, and developing strategies to avoid their repetition. The practice of accountability enhances the credibility and trustworthiness of an organization.
- Transparency refers to the act of providing stakeholders with explicit, precise, and easily available information. The aforementioned elements include the practice of honest financial reporting, open communication, and the disclosure of possible conflicts of interest. The establishment of transparency fosters the development of trust and mitigates the presence of distrust.

The Importance of Integrity in the Business Context

The presence of integrity within the realm of business is not just a matter of moral obligation, but also a critical strategic need. The reason for its significant importance is as follows:

- Trust and reputation are crucial elements in the realm of business, as they serve as delicate but very precious assets. Organizations that continuously exhibit integrity establish a foundation of confidence among their consumer base, workers, investors, and partners. Trust, in its essence, fosters the establishment of a robust reputation that has the potential to result in long-lasting prosperity.
- Businesses that demonstrate a steadfast dedication to ethical conduct are more inclined to attain sustained success in the long run. Organizations of this kind have a tendency towards reduced staff turnover rates, increased consumer loyalty, and heightened investor confidence. Several variables contribute to the long-term development and profitability of a business.
- Competitive Advantage: In a contemporary era characterized by rapid dissemination of news and information, possessing a reputation for honesty may provide a formidable competitive edge. Consumers have a higher propensity to choose enterprises that engender trust, even in cases when such enterprises provide comparable goods or services.

- Ensuring Regulatory Compliance: The maintenance of integrity is often mandated by legal obligations. Numerous nations have implemented rigorous regulatory frameworks and legal measures to uphold ethical conduct in company operations. These include anti-corruption statutes, consumer safeguarding provisions, and corporate governance norms. Non-adherence to established regulations and guidelines might result in significant legal ramifications.
- Risk Mitigation: The implementation of ethical business practices may serve as a means to minimize the risks that arise from engaging in unethical activity, including but not limited to legal actions, financial penalties, and harm to one's reputation. Organizations that place a high emphasis on integrity are more equipped to effectively navigate through challenging situations and ultimately emerge with enhanced resilience and success.
- The level of employee engagement is positively correlated with the degree of commitment shown by employees towards an organization, particularly when the organization upholds principles of integrity. A robust ethical culture has the potential to recruit highly skilled individuals and enhance employee morale, productivity, and loyalty.

The upholding of integrity: challenges

The significance of integrity in the realm of business is evident; nonetheless, the task of upholding it becomes arduous within a multifaceted and cutthroat commercial landscape. Several prevalent issues are encountered, including:

- The need to optimize profits: In the pursuit of immediate financial benefits, enterprises may face the temptation to take shortcuts, violate ethical standards, or engage in unethical behaviors. The aforementioned pressure might be especially pronounced in sectors characterized by high levels of competitiveness.
- Business executives often encounter ethical dilemmas in which they are confronted with the decision between adhering to moral principles and pursuing actions that provide financial benefits. The resolution of these difficulties requires the demonstration of moral bravery and a steadfast dedication to upholding integrity.
- Insufficient Supervision: In some instances, inadequate supervision or ineffective internal controls may contribute to the manifestation of unethical conduct within an organizational setting. This phenomenon is most evident when workers have the belief that they may engage in actions without facing any consequences.
- Conflicts of interest have the potential to undermine integrity if they are not effectively controlled. The establishment of explicit regulations and effective methods to detect and resolve possible conflicts is crucial for firms.
- Businesses that operate with intricate supply chains on a worldwide scale may have difficulties in ensuring that all their partners and suppliers maintain compliance with ethical standards. The maintenance of integrity is contingent upon the criticality of supply chain openness.
- The establishment of a secure atmosphere inside organizations is crucial to facilitate the reporting of unethical conduct by whistleblowers, hence mitigating the risk of retaliation. The act of retaliating against individuals who disclose sensitive information, often known as whistleblowers, has the potential to dissuade future potential whistleblowers from stepping forward and may have detrimental effects on an organization's reputation for ethical conduct.

Numerous empirical instances serve to underscore the ramifications associated with both adhering to and disregarding integrity within the realm of business.
The *Enron Corporation*'s notable downfall in 2001 serves as a prominent illustration of the erosion of corporate ethics. The corporation resorted to engaging in fraudulent accounting practices in order

to disguise its financial difficulties, ultimately resulting in its declaration of bankruptcy, the initiation of criminal proceedings, and the subsequent disintegration of what was once a very prominent corporate entity.

The prompt and effective reaction by *Johnson & Johnson* to the Tylenol poisonings in 1982 is often seen as an exemplary demonstration of corporate honesty. The corporation promptly initiated a recall of 31 million units of Tylenol, notwithstanding the absence of culpability for the tampering incident, therefore exemplifying a steadfast dedication to ensuring client safety.

The emission crisis that occurred in 2015 involving *Volkswagen* provides as a pertinent example of the potential enduring consequences that might arise from engaging in unethical conduct. The corporation purposefully engaged in the manipulation of emissions tests conducted on its diesel automobiles, leading to substantial financial penalties amounting to billions of dollars and a significantly compromised public perception.

Patagonia, a renowned corporation recognized for its dedication to environmental and social responsibility, has successfully cultivated a devoted clientele by harmonizing its operational strategies with its core principles. The organization's commitment to openness and ethical behavior has played a significant role in its ongoing success and expansion.

The presence of integrity in the realm of business is not only an indulgence, but rather an essential need for achieving sustained success over an extended period of time. The concept comprises a range of principles, including honesty, ethical behavior, fairness, accountability, and openness. These principles are considered fundamental in establishing trust and cultivating a positive reputation. Although there are obstacles to maintaining integrity, companies that value ethical conduct are more likely to achieve long-term success. Real-life instances, including both favorable and unfavorable outcomes, serve to illustrate the ramifications stemming from decisions taken in the pursuit of integrity or the absence thereof. Hence, it is imperative for every firm to acknowledge the fundamental significance of integrity in attaining long-term success and accord it utmost priority across all facets of their organizational activities. By engaging in such behavior, individuals not only safeguard their standing but also have a constructive impact on the wider social and economic well.

2.4 The bias of Business Ethics towards Integrity

Stakeholder Trust

One of the primary reasons for the importance of business ethics is its role in building and maintaining trust with various stakeholders. Customers, investors, employees, and the community at large place their trust in organizations to act responsibly and ethically. When businesses adhere to ethical principles, they enhance their reputation, which, in turn, fosters trust and goodwill among stakeholders.

Legal Compliance

Business ethics are closely tied to legal compliance. Many ethical principles have been codified into laws and regulations to ensure that businesses operate with fairness, transparency, and accountability. Failure to adhere to these ethical standards can lead to legal consequences, tarnishing a company's reputation and causing financial and operational setbacks.

Competitive Advantage

Ethical behavior can also provide a competitive advantage. In a market where consumers are increasingly conscious of social and environmental issues, businesses that demonstrate ethical practices can differentiate themselves from their competitors. For instance, companies that prioritize sustainability and fair labor practices can attract a more environmentally and socially conscious customer base.

Internal Consistency

Integrity within an organization ensures that there is internal consistency in actions and decisions. When employees and leaders uphold integrity, it leads to a harmonious and efficient work environment. Consistency in values and actions fosters a sense of trust and reliability among team members.

Ethical Leadership

Integrity is a key trait of ethical leadership. Leaders who display integrity set an example for their teams, encouraging ethical behavior at all levels of the organization. This, in turn, promotes a culture of ethics and encourages employees to make ethical decisions even in challenging situations.

Reputation and Brand

Integrity significantly contributes to an organization's reputation and brand image. Businesses known for their integrity are more likely to attract customers who value honesty and transparency. Maintaining a strong reputation can lead to increased customer loyalty and positive word-of-mouth marketing.

3. THE CROSSING BETWEEN BUSINESS ETHICS AND INTEGRITY AND ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE

Ethical Decision-Making

Business ethics and integrity are closely intertwined when it comes to decision-making. Ethical decision-making requires aligning one's actions with a set of moral principles and values, which is essentially an expression of integrity. It involves considering the impact of decisions on various stakeholders and choosing the option that best aligns with ethical standards.

Ethical Dilemmas

In the complex landscape of modern business, ethical dilemmas often arise. These situations test an organization's commitment to ethics and integrity. For example, a company may face a dilemma when dealing with a supplier who offers lower costs but engages in unethical labor practices. In such cases, a commitment to integrity and ethics may require choosing a more ethical supplier, even if it means higher costs.

Financial Performance

Business ethics and integrity can have a significant impact on financial performance. Unethical behavior, such as fraud or insider trading, can lead to financial scandals that damage a company's stock price and lead to regulatory fines. Conversely, companies with strong ethical reputations often see greater investor confidence and loyalty, contributing to long-term financial stability.

Employee Satisfaction and Retention

Organizations that prioritize ethics and integrity tend to have more satisfied and engaged employees. When employees believe that their organization operates ethically and with integrity, they are more likely to stay with the company and contribute positively to its success. High employee turnover can be costly and disruptive to business operations.

Customer Loyalty

Ethical behavior and integrity can also foster customer loyalty. Customers are more likely to trust and remain loyal to companies that are transparent, honest, and socially responsible. Repeat business and positive referrals from satisfied customers can drive revenue growth.

Risk Management

Ethical behavior and integrity are crucial for effective risk management. Organizations that prioritize ethics are less likely to engage in risky practices that could lead to legal and financial repercussions. Moreover, a commitment to ethics can help businesses identify and mitigate potential risks more effectively.

Globalization

In a globalized world, businesses often operate in diverse cultural and regulatory environments. Navigating these differences while maintaining consistent ethical standards can be challenging. Companies must develop strategies for ensuring that their ethical principles are upheld across borders.

Short-Term vs. Long-Term Goals
Pressure to meet short-term financial goals can sometimes conflict with long-term ethical considerations. For example, a company might be tempted to cut corners to boost profits in the short term, even if it compromises its long-term reputation and sustainability. Balancing short-term and long-term objectives is a complex challenge for organizations.
Ethical Lapses
Even organizations with strong ethical cultures can experience lapses in judgment or behavior. These lapses can result from individual misconduct or systemic issues within the organization. It is essential for businesses to have mechanisms in place to detect and address ethical violations promptly.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Integrity and organizational ethics must be applied through all channels of message dissemination in order to build a synergistic model that will increase visibility for clients and employees of the corporation, as well as the corporation's networking with state entities (bodies) and other competitors or complementary global market elements.
At any given time, the world has a finite supply of attention and reputation. The world of commodities and services solely exists for the purpose of purchasing these priceless assets for the benefit of the business model that will be later discovered (Bodislav, 2013). These are the new scarcities. The free good moves the economic emphasis from items that are worth and useful now to those that are worthy and measured in dollars, euros, or leu. The capitalization of integrity and ethics will be the cornerstone of the future development of the modern firm, the 3.0 company; the immaterial component of the company will distinguish between companies and distribution services.
Business ethics and integrity are essential pillars of organizational success. They play a pivotal role in building trust with stakeholders, enhancing reputation, and contributing to financial performance. The interplay between business ethics and integrity creates a foundation for ethical decision-making, ethical leadership, and the overall ethical culture within an organization. However, maintaining ethics and integrity in a complex and rapidly changing global business environment poses significant challenges. Nevertheless, businesses that commit to these principles are more likely to thrive in the long run, as they create sustainable relationships with customers, employees, investors, and the broader community. Ultimately, business ethics and integrity are not only good for business but are also a moral imperative in the pursuit of a just and responsible society.

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