

The Connection between Business Ethics and the Organizational Culture

Florina (Mihai) Leța

"Ovidius" University of Constanta, Faculty of Economic Studies, Romania
florina.leta12@gmail.com

Abstract

The article examines the connection between corporate culture and business ethics. Ethical considerations have grown in importance in today's corporate environment, impacting not only internal decision-making processes but also the culture of the entire corporation. This study delves into the dynamics that underlie the interplay between business ethics and organizational culture, examining how ethical principles are embedded in the values, norms, and behaviors that define an organization's identity. By synthesizing existing literature and drawing on empirical examples, the paper aims to elucidate the impact of ethical practices on the development and sustenance of a positive organizational culture and investigates the reciprocal influence, exploring how the prevailing culture within an organization can either foster or hinder the adoption and adherence to ethical principles. The results of this study should deepen our understanding of the close connection between organizational culture and business ethics, having important implications for scholars and policymakers who work to foster ethical workplace environments.

Key words: business ethics, organizational culture, connected, norms, values

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1. Introduction

In the dynamic landscape of contemporary business, the symbiotic relationship between business ethics and organizational culture has emerged as a focal point of inquiry and strategic consideration. As organizations navigate an increasingly interconnected and complex global environment, the imperative to uphold ethical standards is not only a moral obligation but a crucial factor in shaping the very fabric of their internal structures and external interactions. This paper seeks to explore and elucidate the intricate interplay between business ethics and organizational culture, recognizing them as integral components that coalesce to define the ethos of a company.

Business ethics, encompassing principles of integrity, responsibility, and fairness, serves as the compass guiding the decision-making processes within an organization. Concurrently, organizational culture, comprising shared values, beliefs, and practices, shapes the collective identity and behavioral norms of its members. The intersection of these two constructs yields a dynamic interrelationship where ethical considerations become woven into the cultural tapestry of the organization, influencing its character and shaping the perceptions of internal and external stakeholders.

Understanding this connection is pivotal for leaders and decision-makers grappling with the challenge of fostering environments that not only adhere to ethical standards but also cultivate a culture that aligns with these principles. This research endeavors to shed light on the mechanisms through which ethical values are embedded within an organizational culture and, conversely, how the prevailing culture can impact the adoption and manifestation of ethical conduct. Through an exploration of pertinent literature, theoretical frameworks, and real-world examples, this paper aims to contribute to the evolving discourse on business ethics and organizational culture, providing valuable insights for practitioners, policymakers, and scholars alike. As organizations strive to navigate the complex terrain of ethics in business, an enhanced understanding of this nexus offers a roadmap for cultivating environments where ethical considerations are not only acknowledged but ingrained in the very essence of organizational identity.

2. Literature review

The nexus between business ethics and organizational culture has garnered significant scholarly attention, reflecting the growing recognition that ethical considerations are deeply interwoven with the fabric of corporate environments. The present literature review provides an overview of key perspectives that elucidate the intricate relationship between business ethics and organizational culture.

The interplay between business ethics and organizational culture represents a rich and evolving field of study that delves into the complex dynamics shaping the ethical dimensions of corporate conduct. Scholars and researchers have explored various facets of this relationship, providing insights into how ethical principles become ingrained in organizational culture and reciprocally influence the ethical decision-making processes within companies.

Ethics as a Cultural Foundation. Schein's seminal work (1985) laid the groundwork for understanding organizational culture. Schein argued that organizational culture is not merely a set of values and behaviors but a deeply embedded system that influences the way individuals perceive and respond to ethical challenges within a corporate context. Building on this, Treviño and Nelson (2016) argue that a strong ethical culture acts as a powerful driver for responsible behavior, influencing the choices made by employees and leaders alike.

Leadership Influence on Ethical Culture. The role of leadership in fostering an ethical organizational culture has been a focal point in the literature. Treviño et al. (2003) highlight the crucial influence of leaders in setting the ethical tone of an organization, suggesting that ethical leadership is instrumental in creating a culture where ethical behavior is both expected and rewarded. Also, Treviño and Nelson (2007) highlighted the pivotal role of leadership in shaping ethical organizational cultures. Their research emphasizes that ethical leadership practices contribute significantly to the establishment of a culture where ethical behavior is not only encouraged but becomes a norm.

Ethical Climate and Employee Behavior. The concept of ethical climate, introduced by Victor and Cullen (1988), emphasizes the importance of shared perceptions of what is ethically appropriate within an organization. This framework suggests that the ethical climate significantly influences employee behavior, shaping the overall ethical culture.

Cultural Dimensions and Ethical Decision-Making. Researchers such as Hofstede (2001) have explored the impact of cultural dimensions on ethical decision-making. This perspective emphasizes that national and organizational cultural values play a substantial role in shaping individual and collective responses to ethical challenges.

The Role of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). The literature on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) highlights how organizations can embed ethical considerations into their cultures through socially responsible practices. Carroll's CSR pyramid (1979) and subsequent refinements provide a framework for understanding how ethical responsibilities can be integrated into organizational culture.

Embedding Ethics in Organizational DNA. The work of Den Hartog and De Hoogh (2009) explores how organizations can embed ethical values in their DNA, making them integral to the identity and operations of the company. This perspective underscores the importance of aligning ethical principles with the broader cultural context to create lasting ethical norms.

Ethical Decision-Making in Organizational Contexts. The literature on ethical decision-making processes within organizations offers valuable insights into the factors that influence individual and collective choices. Rest's (1986) Four-Component Model provides a framework for understanding the cognitive and behavioral aspects of ethical decision-making within the organizational context.

Synthesizing these perspectives provides a comprehensive understanding of the interconnection between business ethics and organizational culture. This paper aims to contribute to this discourse by examining how ethical considerations permeate organizational cultures and how, in turn, the prevailing culture influences ethical decision-making processes within business entities. As organizations strive to navigate an increasingly complex ethical landscape, these insights offer valuable implications for cultivating and sustaining ethical cultures.

3. Research methodology

The relationship between business ethics and organizational culture is intricate and symbiotic, each influencing and shaping the other in a dynamic interplay. There are several key aspects that illuminate this relationship. *Shared Values and Beliefs*. At the heart of the relationship lies the alignment of ethical principles with the shared values and beliefs that form the foundation of an organizational culture. When the ethical principles of an organization resonate with its cultural values, a harmonious environment is cultivated, promoting a sense of shared purpose and moral responsibility among members.

Cultural Norms Impacting Ethical Behavior. Organizational culture establishes the norms and expectations that guide behavior within the workplace. Ethical norms, embedded within the cultural framework, influence how employees perceive, interpret, and respond to ethical challenges. A culture that prioritizes integrity and responsibility encourages ethical behavior, fostering an environment where employees feel compelled to make principled choices. *Leadership as Cultural Architects*. Leadership plays a pivotal role in shaping both organizational culture and ethical standards. Ethical leaders, by embodying and promoting ethical values, contribute to the establishment of an ethical organizational culture. Conversely, a culture that values and demands ethical behavior reinforces the importance of ethical leadership.

Ethical Decision-Making Processes. Organizational culture significantly influences the ethical decision-making processes of individuals within the company. A culture that encourages open communication, transparency, and a commitment to ethical conduct provides a supportive context for employees to navigate ethical dilemmas and make morally sound decisions. *Impact on Reputation and Stakeholder Relationships*. The ethical underpinnings of an organizational culture have a direct impact on its reputation and relationships with stakeholders. A culture that values ethical considerations enhances the organization's credibility and trustworthiness in the eyes of customers, investors, employees, and the broader community. Conversely, ethical lapses within the organizational culture can result in reputational damage.

Adaptability and Resilience. The adaptability and resilience of an organizational culture are influenced by its ethical foundation. An ethical culture tends to be more adaptive and resilient in the face of challenges, as it is rooted in enduring principles that guide decision-making even in turbulent times. This adaptability is crucial in navigating the complexities of the business environment. *Continuous Improvement and Learning*. Ethical organizational cultures often foster a commitment to continuous improvement and learning. Embracing ethical principles encourages a culture of reflection, where organizations assess and refine their practices in response to evolving ethical standards and societal expectations.

Understanding and actively managing the relationship between business ethics and organizational culture is essential for cultivating an environment that not only complies with ethical standards but also integrates them into the core identity of the organization. As organizations strive for sustainable success, recognizing and nurturing this relationship becomes a strategic imperative in fostering responsible and ethical corporate behavior.

Managing organizational culture is a complex and ongoing process that involves leadership, communication, and intentional efforts to shape and reinforce the values, behaviors, and beliefs within a company. There are some key strategies and practices for effectively managing organizational culture that involved managers could use in order to constantly grow their company's organizational culture.

Table no.1 Key strategies and practices for an effective organizational culture

The key strategy and practice	Additional clarifications
<i>I. Leadership Alignment</i>	
Visible Leadership Commitment	Leaders must visibly embody and champion the desired culture. Their actions, decisions, and communication should align with the cultural values they seek to instill.
Communication of Core Values	Clearly articulate and communicate the core values that underpin the desired culture. Regularly reinforce these values through various channels, such as town hall meetings, internal communications, and leadership messages.
<i>II. Employee Involvement</i>	
Inclusive Decision-Making	Involve employees in decision-making processes that impact the organizational culture. Solicit their input on values, behaviors, and initiatives to create a sense of ownership and inclusion.
Employee Recognition	Recognize and reward employees who exemplify the desired cultural values. This reinforces positive behaviors and creates role models for others to follow.
<i>III. Cultural Assessments</i>	
Regular Surveys and Assessments	Conduct regular surveys and assessments to gauge employee perceptions of the organizational culture. Use the feedback to identify areas of strength and improvement, allowing for informed decision-making.
<i>IV. Onboarding and Training</i>	
Cultural Integration in Onboarding	Incorporate cultural orientation into the onboarding process for new employees. Clearly communicate the company's values, norms, and expectations from the beginning of their tenure.
Continuous Training	Provide ongoing training and development opportunities that reinforce cultural expectations. This can include workshops, seminars, or e-learning modules focused on cultural elements.
<i>V. Performance Management</i>	
Alignment with Performance Metrics	Align performance metrics and evaluations with cultural expectations. Ensure that employees are assessed not only on job-specific tasks but also on their contribution to and embodiment of the organizational culture.
Feedback and Development	Provide constructive feedback on cultural alignment and offer resources for professional development that supports the desired culture.
<i>VI. Communication Channels</i>	
Open Communication Channels	Establish open channels for two-way communication. Encourage employees to share feedback, ideas, and concerns regarding the organizational culture.
Storytelling	Use storytelling as a powerful tool to illustrate and reinforce cultural values. Share success stories, anecdotes, and examples that embody the desired culture.
<i>VII. Adaptability and Evolution</i>	
Cultural Flexibility	Recognize the need for cultural adaptability as the organization evolves. Be open to refining cultural elements to align with changes in the external environment or business strategy.

Learning from Mistakes	Acknowledge and learn from cultural missteps or challenges. Use these experiences as opportunities for growth and improvement.
<i>VIII. Symbolism and Rituals</i>	
Cultural Symbols	Incorporate symbols, rituals, and traditions that represent and reinforce the organizational culture. This could include logos, slogans, or regular events that celebrate cultural values.
<i>IX. Monitoring and adjusting</i>	
Regular Assessments	Continuously monitor the organizational culture through feedback mechanisms, surveys, and informal channels. Be proactive in addressing any cultural misalignments promptly.
Adjustment Strategies	Implement targeted strategies to address specific cultural challenges or opportunities identified through assessments.
<i>X. Crisis Management</i>	
Cultural Response to Crisis	In times of crisis, leverage the organizational culture as a source of resilience and adaptability. Clearly communicate how the cultural values guide the company's response to challenges.

Source: done by the author

As seen above in Table no.1, there are several guidelines in the form of key aspects, that all managers which are orientated towards a successful and highly profitable management and to positively impact the organizational culture and public image must possess or use in their strategy.

Effective management of organizational culture requires a holistic and strategic approach. It is an ongoing journey that involves the active participation of leaders, employees, and other stakeholders. By integrating cultural considerations into various aspects of organizational life, companies can cultivate a strong and resilient culture that aligns with their mission and objectives.

Identifying companies with strong organizational cultures involves recognizing those with distinctive values, beliefs, and practices that are deeply ingrained and widely shared among employees. Several companies are renowned for their strong organizational cultures, and they often attribute their success, innovation, and employee satisfaction to the cultivation of these cultures.

Table no.2 Companies with strong organizational culture

Company	Basis of organizational culture
Google (Alphabet Inc.)	Google is known for its innovative and collaborative culture. The company places a strong emphasis on creativity, risk-taking, and a flat organizational structure. Google's culture encourages employees to pursue ambitious projects and allocates time for personal projects through initiatives like "20% time."
Zappos	Zappos, an online shoe and clothing retailer, has a culture centered around delivering exceptional customer service. The company emphasizes core values such as "Deliver WOW Through Service" and "Create Fun and A Little Weirdness." Zappos has a unique onboarding process that immerses new employees in the company culture from day one.
Southwest Airlines	Southwest Airlines is renowned for its people-centric culture. The airline emphasizes values such as a "Warrior Spirit," a "Servant's Heart," and a "Fun-LUVing Attitude." The company's commitment to employees and a positive work environment is considered a key factor in its success.
Apple Inc.	Apple's organizational culture is characterized by a focus on design, innovation, and simplicity. The company encourages a culture of excellence and attention to detail. Steve Jobs, Apple's co-founder, played a significant role in shaping the culture with his visionary leadership and commitment to creating groundbreaking products.
Netflix	Netflix has a culture that prioritizes freedom and responsibility. The company values employee autonomy and innovation. Netflix's culture is characterized by

	a focus on high-performance, candid communication, and a lack of traditional hierarchy.
Toyota	Toyota is known for its strong culture of continuous improvement and efficiency, often associated with the Toyota Production System. The company emphasizes principles such as "Kaizen" (continuous improvement) and "Genchi Genbutsu" (go and see for yourself), fostering a culture of problem-solving and quality focus.
IBM	IBM has a culture rooted in innovation, diversity, and a commitment to societal impact. The company places a strong emphasis on values such as "Dedication to Every Client's Success" and "Innovation that Matters." IBM's culture encourages employees to contribute to meaningful projects and pursue continuous learning.

Source: done by the author

In Table no.2 there are a series of multinational companies which have created a strong ethics code; thus, they are cited worldwide on the matter and can effectively impact also other companies on their organizational culture.

It's important to note that organizational cultures are dynamic and can evolve over time. Additionally, perceptions of organizational culture can vary among employees and stakeholders. These examples highlight companies that have been recognized for their distinctive cultures, but the success of an organizational culture is ultimately measured by its ability to align with the company's goals, engage employees, and adapt to changing environments.

Determining the "top" companies with strong organizational cultures can be subjective and may vary based on different criteria. However, several companies are often recognized for their distinctive and positive organizational cultures.

Table no.3 "Top" 10 companies which have a strong organizational culture

Company	Cultural Emphasis	Noteworthy Practices
Google (Alphabet Inc.)	Innovation, Collaboration, and Employee Empowerment.	"20% time" for personal projects, a flat organizational structure, and a focus on a diverse and inclusive workplace.
Zappos	Exceptional Customer Service, Fun, and a Little Weirdness.	Unique onboarding processes emphasizing cultural immersion, a commitment to core values, and a flat organizational structure.
Southwest Airlines	Employee-Centric, Fun, and "Warrior Spirit."	Extensive employee training, a unique company culture committee, and a commitment to servant leadership.
Netflix	Freedom and Responsibility, Innovation.	A culture of transparency, minimal hierarchy, and emphasis on employee autonomy.
Salesforce	Trust, Customer Success, Equality, and Innovation.	Emphasis on diversity and inclusion, a commitment to philanthropy, and a strong focus on employee well-being.
HubSpot	Transparency, Autonomy, and Continuous Learning.	Open and transparent communication, a commitment to employee growth, and a culture of flexibility.
Cisco Systems	Innovation, Inclusion, and Empowerment.	Inclusive leadership initiatives, a commitment to corporate social responsibility, and a strong emphasis on employee development.
Microsoft	Inclusion, Innovation, and Corporate Social Responsibility.	Emphasis on diversity and inclusion, a commitment to sustainability, and a growth mindset culture.
Procter & Gamble (P&G)	Innovation, Inclusion, and Purpose.	Strong focus on diversity and inclusion, a commitment to sustainability, and a purpose-driven culture.
IBM	Innovation, Inclusion, and Societal Impact.	Emphasis on diversity and inclusion, a commitment to ethical business practices, and a focus on employee well-being.

Source: done by the author

These companies are often highlighted for their efforts in fostering positive organizational cultures that contribute to employee satisfaction, innovation, and overall business success. It's important to note that organizational cultures are dynamic and can evolve over time, and perceptions of culture may vary among employees and stakeholders. What we can also observe in Table no. 3 is that some of the companies are also mentioned in Table no.2. This could only mean that even though the top 10 companies could be done from a subjective point of view, it is still somewhat critical and done so that the academic community would benefit from all the information available.

4. Findings

The study finds a mutual reinforcement between business ethics and organizational culture, with ethical principles becoming deeply embedded within the cultural fabric of successful organizations. Treviño et al. (2003) posit that ethical leadership practices contribute significantly to the establishment of a culture where ethical behavior is expected and rewarded.

The paper reveals a deep-seated interdependence between business ethics and organizational culture, where ethical values are intricately woven into the cultural fabric of successful organizations. Schein (1985) argues that organizational culture is a set of shared assumptions that dictate behavior, with ethical considerations playing a crucial role in shaping these beliefs.

The influence of leadership on the ethical climate of an organization is evident. Ethical leaders play a pivotal role in shaping and promoting a culture of integrity and responsibility. Brown and Treviño (2006) note the importance of leaders as moral agents in influencing the ethical decision-making processes within organizations.

Organizations with a strong ethical culture exhibit a high degree of alignment between stated values and actual behaviors, fostering a sense of trust among employees and stakeholders, which Den Hartog and De Hoogh (2009) emphasize the importance of values congruence in building an ethical organizational culture. Victor and Cullen's (1988) research on ethical climates highlights the impact of organizational culture on employee perceptions, which basically means that employees within organizations with a strong ethical culture tend to perceive a greater sense of fairness, commitment to social responsibility, and a positive work environment.

Organizations with an ethical culture demonstrate greater adaptability and resilience in the face of challenges, leveraging shared values to navigate uncertainties. Treviño and Brown (2004) argue that ethical organizational cultures contribute to a higher level of organizational resilience.

Companies with a strong ethical culture often enjoy higher levels of trust and loyalty from customers and stakeholders, contributing to long-term success, for which Aaker et al. (2009) discuss the impact of ethical behavior on brand trust and reputation, which extends to overall stakeholder trust.

Ethical organizational cultures are characterized by a commitment to continuous improvement, fostering a culture of learning and adaptability. Rest's (1986) Four-Component Model suggests that ethical decision-making involves a continual process of moral development and learning. Leadership emerges as a pivotal factor in shaping the ethical climate of an organization. Effective ethical leadership fosters a culture where ethical behavior is not just encouraged but becomes a norm.

Organizations with a strong ethical culture showcase a high degree of alignment between stated values and actual behaviors, creating a cohesive and trustworthy environment. Employees within organizations fostering a strong ethical culture perceive a more positive work environment, higher levels of job satisfaction, and a greater commitment to the organization's mission and values.

Organizations with an ethical culture demonstrate heightened adaptability and resilience, utilizing shared values as a guiding force during times of change or uncertainty. Companies with a strong ethical culture are more likely to gain the trust and confidence of external stakeholders, including customers, investors, and the broader community.

What could be the baseline of the present study is that ethical organizational cultures are characterized by a commitment to continuous improvement, creating a culture of learning and adaptability. Only companies which have a very developed ability to improve and constantly adapt to change can be between those most ethical companies and which could have a very strong organizational culture.

5. Conclusions

In conclusion, this study has delved into the intricate web of connections between business ethics and the culture of organizations, uncovering a tapestry of interdependence and mutual influence. The findings offer valuable insights into the profound impact that ethical considerations wield on the cultural dynamics within successful organizations. As we reflect on the culmination of this exploration, several key conclusions emerged. *Mutual Reinforcement*. The study substantiates the notion that business ethics and organizational culture are not disparate entities; instead, they engage in a continuous and reciprocal relationship. Ethical principles become ingrained in the cultural DNA of thriving organizations, shaping behaviors, decisions, and the overall ethos.

Leadership as a Cornerstone. Leadership emerges as a cornerstone in this connection. Ethical leaders, through their actions and guidance, serve as architects of a culture where ethical values are not merely espoused but actively practiced. The influence of leadership extends beyond rhetoric, permeating the organization at all levels.

Alignment and Cohesiveness. Organizations with a strong ethical culture exhibit a remarkable alignment between stated values and actual behaviors. This alignment fosters a cohesive and transparent environment, engendering trust among employees and stakeholders alike. *Employee Perceptions and Commitment*. The study underscores the profound impact of ethical culture on employee perceptions and commitment. Employees within organizations fostering ethical cultures experience a positive work environment, leading to heightened job satisfaction and a deep-seated commitment to the organization's mission.

Adaptability and Resilience. Ethical organizational cultures are not only characterized by their moral compass but also by their adaptability and resilience. Shared ethical values serve as guiding beacons during turbulent times, allowing organizations to navigate challenges with integrity. *External Validation*. The findings affirm that the positive connection between business ethics and organizational culture extends beyond the organizational boundaries. External stakeholders, including customers and investors, place trust in organizations with strong ethical cultures, recognizing them as reliable and responsible partners.

Continuous Improvement and Learning. Ethical organizational cultures are dynamic, fostering a commitment to continuous improvement and learning. This commitment positions organizations to adapt to changing ethical standards and societal expectations, ensuring their relevance and sustainability.

In essence, the interplay between business ethics and organizational culture is not a static phenomenon but a dynamic and evolving relationship. As organizations navigate an ever-changing landscape, understanding and nurturing this connection becomes imperative. The insights gleaned from this study serve as a foundation for practitioners, scholars, and organizational leaders to cultivate environments where ethical considerations are not just integrated but celebrated, contributing to the enduring success and positive impact of organizations in the global landscape.

6. References

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