Chapter 10

Effectiveness and Content of Corporate Codes of Ethics as a Model for University Honor Codes

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ABSTRACT

Reports of unethical behavior in the corporate, governmental, and academic settings are gaining attention. At least 50-70% of students have engaged in academic misconduct. Some colleges and universities have codes of conduct while others do not. However, the implementation of an effective code can deter academic dishonesty. This article discusses how corporate codes of ethics can be used as models for implementing university honor codes. Effective corporate codes of ethics have certain characteristics, are communicated appropriately, are accompanied by training, and become part of the culture of the organization. These elements and strategies can be applied by universities in order to deter cheating and other unethical behaviors.

INTRODUCTION

Increasingly, 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. It is estimated that 50-70% of students have engaged in academic misconduct (Powell, Frost, Casmir, & Hamlin, 2013). This issue is ever more important to higher education administrators, faculty, and staff because unfortunately, there are far too many reports of ethical misconduct in universities particularly when it comes to cheating. Corporate scandals and cheating affect the public perception of the effectiveness of businesses and other institutions such as universities and colleges. Scandals can also influence work-

place behaviors. Those individuals involved in this scandal often have been involved in this behavior in the past and enforcement of codes of conduct are often inconsistent (Powell, et al, 2013). 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. Having a code of conduct can be linked to many positive benefits (McKinney, Emerson, & Neubert, 2010). They provide guidance, communicate ethical values, and impact ethical behavior. However, having a code is simply not enough. The effectiveness, content, and communication of ethical codes are important (Kapstein, 2011; Singh, 2011).

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 et al., 1996) that will be discussed in this article. However, the presence of corporate codes of ethics has been shown to positively influence ethical decision making and ethical behaviors within an organization (Singh, 2011) but further content elements are needed for further effectiveness.

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. In an attempt to enforce ethics, students are informed of the code and asked to sign it. Instructors have academic dishonesty policies on their syllabi. The use of realistic course previews and discussion of academic dishonest at the beginning of the term can further curtail these behaviors. 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. 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 et al., 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 article, 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, organizational values, communication of codes, employee orientation and training, roles of organizational leaders in relation to codes of conduct, code implementation strength, and embeddedness. The current literature on honor codes, practical implications, and strategies for promoting ethical behaviors will also be discussed. Let's begin with a discussion of the factors that influence ethical decision making and behavior.

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