

Chapter 77

Techniques for Preparing Business Students to Contribute to Ethical Organizational Cultures

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ABSTRACT

This chapter distinguishes among four corporate cultures with respect to ethics—cultures of defiance, compliance, neglect, and character—and outlines a plan for constructing an ethical organizational culture. Some proven ideas are then shared for showing business students how to contribute to such a culture. These include (a) describing how to establish an effective learning context for teaching about business ethics, (b) offering a number of practical suggestions for student assignments and experiences that can empower students to understand, appreciate, and contribute to ethical organizational cultures, and (c) explaining how to enhance experiential learning by conducting an effective debriefing session. The chapter concludes with three examples from the authors' experience illustrating how these ideas can be incorporated into programs designed to teach business students how to contribute to organizational cultures grounded in moral character.

INTRODUCTION

The ethical crisis in business is very real and appears to be continuing unabated (Zutshi, Wood, & Morris, 2012). For extensive evidence of this fact see Audi (2009), Quatro and Sims (2008), Sauser (2005a), Shaw and Barry (2010), Stanwick and

Stanwick (2009), and Wankel and Stachowicz-Stanusch (2012b). The ever-increasing sophistication and interconnectivity of modern information technology has exacerbated ethical problems in business worldwide (Balkin, Grimmelmann, Katz, Kozlovski, Wagman, & Zarsky, 2007; Stamatellos, 2006). Countering this crisis by creating ethical

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-8195-8.ch077

organizational cultures—*cultures of character* as they are termed in this chapter—is a key challenge faced by business leaders if they are to regain the respect and confidence of the public. As the present authors have noted earlier,

Organizations with cultures of character not only comply with legal and ethical standards, they also internalize them from top to bottom such that every member of the firm becomes a guardian of integrity. A culture of character is built by intention. Its leaders possess strong moral fiber and seek to appoint, develop, and reward others like them throughout the organization. They work hard every day to infuse character into the organization through their decisions and their interactions with others. They seek to develop the next generation of leaders so the integrity of the organizations they have served will continue into the future. (Sauser & Sims, 2012, p. 233)

Business teachers have extensive opportunities to influence their students' ideas about ethical (and unethical!) actions in business. How can business professors best prepare their students to understand, appreciate, and contribute to the establishment of ethical cultures of character in the businesses that seek to employ these students—and which these students may ultimately lead? Are there new approaches to teaching ethics in business (Knapp, 2011; Sauser & Sims, 2012; Sims, 2008; Sims & Sauser, 2011a; Wankel & Stachowicz-Stanusch, 2012a) that can be employed for this purpose? In this chapter the authors distinguish among four corporate cultures with respect to ethics—cultures of defiance, compliance, neglect, and character—and outline a plan for constructing an ethical organizational culture. The authors then share some proven ideas for showing business students how to contribute to such a culture by

1. Describing how to establish an effective learning context for teaching about business ethics,

2. Offering a number of practical suggestions for student assignments and experiences that can empower students to understand, appreciate, and contribute to ethical organizational cultures, and
3. Explaining how to enhance experiential learning by conducting an effective debriefing session.

The article is concluded with three examples from the authors' own experience—one from an undergraduate class, one from an Executive MBA class taught at a distance, and one from a case study prepared for advanced students and professionals—illustrating how these ideas can be incorporated into programs designed to teach business students how to contribute to ethical organizational cultures. This chapter further develops and expands upon ideas expressed in some of the present authors' earlier works (e.g. Sauser & Sims, 2012, 2014).

ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURES AND CHARACTER

Trevino and Nelson (2004, p. 225) state, “‘Culture’ has become a common way of thinking about and describing an organization’s internal world—a way of differentiating one organization’s ‘personality’ from another.” Schermerhorn (2005) defines ‘organizational culture’ as “the system of shared beliefs and values that develops within an organization and guides the behavior of its members” (p. G-12). “Whenever someone, for example, speaks of ‘the way we do things around here,’ they are talking about the culture,” continues Schermerhorn (2005, p. 96). Using such important components of culture as core values, stories, heroes, symbols, and rites and rituals, ethical leaders must influence the organization and its members to incorporate and exhibit desirable virtues and behaviors (Sauser, 2005b).

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