

STUDENTS ATTITUDE TOWARDS HONESTY AS AN ETHICAL VALUE IN BUSINESS

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ABSTRACT

Over the last decades, it has become obvious that no extensive and perspective development of economics is possible without due consideration of moral. This study explores attitudes towards the value of honesty of masters level students at the University's in Latvia, specializing in business administration. The basis of the research of masters level students is value orientation survey, elaborated within the European project WACRA. The results of this study indicate that the masters level students consider, that honesty to be of utmost importance in their work. Given the complicated nature of the concept of honesty additional studies are needed to sort out what exactly is their understanding of honest behavior in business. Given the current situation in Latvia, it is of some interest to note that these future leaders underscore the necessity of legal regulation of the economy by the state.

Key words: value orientation, ethics, ethical value in business, honesty.

Summary

Under the current economical and globalization conditions, companies in Latvia have to be aware of the importance of the enterprises' social responsibility in the formation of a successful long term development, efficient working environment and company's publicity. It is crucial for enterprises in Latvia to incorporate the principles of social responsibility - honesty in company mottos in their values. Informal education that is provided by employers is an important way and efficient means how to make the ideas of honesty understandable and acceptable among the employees. Therefore, in order to ensure the quality and efficiency of studies, it is necessary to learn the individual qualities and differences of the employees. This study investigates the relationship between values orientations and sensitivity to honesty among current business students. Using a questionnaire on value orientation, survey data was collected from a sample of 420 masters level business students.

The results of this study indicate that the masters level students in Business Administration at the University of Latvia are well qualified to take their places as the leaders in the contemporary business enterprises. It is heartening to note that they consider honesty to be of utmost importance in their work. Given the complicated nature of the concept of honesty, as indicated earlier, additional studies are needed to sort out what exactly is their understanding of honest behavior in business.

Introduction.

Over the last decades, it has become obvious that no extensive and perspective development of economics is possible without due consideration of moral. (McIntosh, Thomas, Leipziger, Gill, 2003; Robbins, 1997; Siccone, 1998; Garleja, Vidnere, 2000, Vidnere, 2007, 2008, Milts, 2000) Economics is becoming more productive if maximum attention is focused on the principles of ethics.

The Aim of the Study.

This study explores attitudes towards the value of honesty in a group of masters level students at the University's in Latvia, specializing in business administration. In the course of their studies these students have acquired not only theoretical knowledge but they have also spent a considerable amount of time in practice, in their own country as well as abroad.

Methods:

The basis of the research is a group of masters level students at the University of Latvia and Daugavpils , specializing in business administration (Respondents to the survey (n=420 Survey contained: 1) value orientation survey, elaborated within the European partner states grant cooperation project WACRA, in English, adjusted in Latvian. (Vidnere, 1997; Garleja, Vidnere, 2001);) Description of the method: to obtain data basis through survey over a definite period of time so that the data basis can be processed by statistic data processing and analyses software Statistic 6 Statsoft Co.

Results:

The results of this study indicate that the masters level students in Business Administration are well qualified to take their places as the leaders in the contemporary business enterprises. It is heartening to note that they consider honesty to be of utmost importance in their work. Given the complicated nature of the concept of honesty, as indicated earlier, additional studies are needed to sort out what exactly is their understanding of honest behavior in business.

Conclusions. .

Given the current situation in Latvia, it is of some interest to note that these future leaders underscore the necessity of legal regulation of the economy by the state.

Key words: value orientation, business ethics, ethical value in business, honesty.

The Ancient Greek philosophers and many since then have called attention to the fact that people conduct their lives according to certain criteria. While one person may give priority to pleasure, another may strive to gain knowledge. In general, people try to avoid conditions that are unpleasant and distressing, discerned where the biological needs form the basic first level while the spiritual values represent the higher levels of the hierarchy (A.Maslow). The more mature a person the more that person is guided by values that belong to the upper levels of the value hierarchy. Society is shaped by the values people implement. Values can either strengthen or destroy a society. Values do not just describe the current situation but they designate people's attitudes towards that which they strive for. Philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, for example, defines the concept of value as to meaning that we choose. One's value orientation dictates what to reach for and what will give meaning to one's activities. Friedrich Nietzsche, the great value redefiner, was convinced that values are relative. Values change over the time. They are transient because they are generated by people. Values depend on who does the valuing and in what situation.

Social psychologists have long paid attention to the fact that people vary in their tendencies to value cooperativeness, and hence in their intrinsic motives to behave cooperatively (Fehr & Fischbacher, 2002). Specifically, they have identified a stable personality trait, called Value Orientation , referring to people's self- versus other regarding preferences (e.g., Van Lange, 2000). As this trait also reflects how people evaluate interdependent outcomes for self and others (Messick & McClintock, 1968),it can be considered an important determinant of cooperative motives, strategies and behavior. Values underpin all behaviour. People act in accordance with their belief systems, which are organising systems for individuals and organisations (Kimmerle, Wodzicki,& Cress, 2008).

Social psychology assumes that social rather than egoistic motivations are typical (Perdue, Dovidio, Gurtman,& Tyler,1990), that people normatively include others in their "scope of moral concern"(Schwartz, 2007) and are motivated to include others in their sense of self (e.g., Aron et al., 2004), but they can also exclude others from their scope of moral concern (Tversky, & Simonson,1993).

A person's value orientation is rooted in the socio-economic sphere of his society. In general, value orientation may be expressed by the following scheme:

NECESSITY → INTEREST → ATTITUDE → VALUE ORIENTATION

Values shape not only individual lives but the entire society. Especially ethical values affect social relationships. One of the most important among these is the value of honesty.The Webster's New World College Dictionary (3rd edition, 1988) defines honesty as the state or quality of "being honest, refraining from lying, cheating, or stealing: being truthful, trustworthy, fair and straightforward."

Although the dictionary definition is clear, and although countless generations have been raised to heed the Ten Commandments that prohibit lying and assorted other vices, honesty in daily life is not without its problems. What about the so called "White Lies"? The line between absolute honesty in the sense of truthfulness may not be clear in all circumstances. It may be particularly difficult to observe absolute honesty in the business sphere where the principle of profit is paramount. It is therefore of some interest to explore the attitudes of future business leaders towards the idea of honesty.

Subjects

This study explores attitudes towards the value of honesty in a group of masters level students (420 students) at the University of Latvia and Daugavpils University , specializing in business administration. In the course of their studies these students have acquired not only theoretical knowledge but they have also spent a considerable amount of time in practice, in their own country as well as abroad.

Instrument

The data gathering instrument was the questionnaire prepared by prof. Lembit Turnpuu of the Estonian Business School in Tallin. The questionnaire consists of 91 statements concerning different trends, principles and factors in management and business. The respondents are asked to use a 7 point scale, ranging from “insignificant” to “especially important”.In Latvian language metod of values orientations adapted by Mara Vidnere(Vidnere M.&StrautmanisJ., 2006,2009).

For the purposes of the current study the 91 statements were organized in 7 categories.These are as follows:

Questions	Nr	Y if X=0	St Err Y	R ²	X Coef	St Err X Coef	X Coef/St Err	
5 Good relationships among the staff	5	4.09	1.026	0.05	0.217	0.211	1.028	
6 The leader's enterprising spirit of setting up and solving problems	6	4.41	1.08	0.031	0.217	0.211	1.028	
1 The existence of the premises enabling companies activities	1	4.299	1.196	0.037	0.26	0.234	1.111	
15 Interest in the subordinates' personal lives	15	2.031	1.22	0.035	0.269	0.2436	1.104	
42 The evaluation of the quality of the company's production and service	42	4.74	0.75	0.095	0.27	0.147	1.836	
72 The investment into the company's future at the expense of the present wealth	72	3.53	0.886	0.082	0.295	0.173	1.705	
8 Professional fanatics (commitment)	8	2.04	1.42	0.037	0.31	0.27	1.148	
46 The leader's balance	46	3.065	1.058	0.091	0.3111	0.207	1.501	
29 The staffs understanding of the company's objectives	29	3.08	1.189	0.069	0.358	0.233	1.536	
20 The similarity of the personnel's professional evaluation criteria	20	2.54	1.067	0.023	0.36	0.21	1.714	

7 The employees' good professional education	7	3.33	1.11	0.07	0.361	0.217	1.663
4 Creation of career opportunities in order to ensure future staff	4	2.997	1.001	0.097	0.364	0.196	1.857
30 The established standards of the professional behaviour in the company	30	2.5	1.01	0.1	0.381	0.199	1.914
44 The company's atmosphere favouring achievements and support of each other	44	2.995	0.932	0.123	0.388	0.182	2.131
25 Good teamwork with the subordinates	25	3.22	1.025	0.11	0.398	0.2	1.991
62 Economic stability and the lack of unreasonable risks in the company	62	3.03	1.07	0.103	0.404	0.21	1.924
33 The leader's principles (persistent preference of following certain principles	33	1.71	1.35	0.067	0.405	0.265	1.528
34 The staffs readiness and ability of independent decision in their sector of activity	34	3.25	0.87	0.152	0.409	0.17	2.406
91 The feeling of security in the company	91	3.57	0.906	0.145	0.41	0.117	3.504
76 Permanent reflex ion of the leader's characteristics and behaviour	76	2.64	0.983	0.13	0.421	0.192	2.193
32 Advertising as a success factor of the company's business activities	32	3.04	1.175	0.094	0.421	0.23	1.830
24 The information of the staff and its awareness of the company) 's condition	24	1.81	1.02	0.123	0.424	0.199	2.1306
71 Good conditions of the buildings ensuring the company's activities	71	2.2	0.889	0.163	0.436	0.174	2.506
40 The traditions and customs commonly followed in the company	40	1.2	1.21	0.094	0.436	0.238	1.832

17	The acknowledgement of an employee as a specialist in his/her field	17	2.74	1.01	1.32	0.44	0.19	2.316
28	The employees' staying in the chosen field of activity (the professional stability)	28	2.69	0.98	0.14	0.44	0.192	2.292
11	Contemporary means of communication in the company	11	2.971	1.057	0.128	0.45	0.207	2.174
58	The development of professional abilities	58	2.34	0.925	0.162	0.451	0.181	2.492
56	The manager's good sense of humour	56	1.71	1.26	0.091	0.453	0.247	1.834
49	Strict subjection to the management's directions	49	2.78	0.94	0.162	0.461	0.185	2.492
66	The manager's skills and life experience	66	2.366	1.21	0.106	0.462	0.238	1.941
26	Taking into account the subordinate's individuality	26	1.53	1.004	0.162	0.498	0.197	2.528
19	Legal regulation of the economy by the state	19	1.76	1.4	0.093	0.5	0.27	1.852
27	Working in the profession	27	1.71	1.27	0.11	0.502	0.25	2.008
80	"Our" feeling in the company	80	1.83	1.11	0.143	0.507	0.22	2.304
53	Democratic management	53	1.835	1.191	0.131	0.51	0.23	2.217
10	The accordance of staffs activities to the company's objectives	10	2.27	0.956	0.192	0.51	0.187	2.727
39	The clarity of the management's job instructions	39	2.366	1.11	0.146	0.511	0.258	1.981
31	Opportunities for sports and hobbies	31	0.645	0.1281	0.1176	0.518	0.251	2.064
88	The leader's professionalism in the sphere of human relations	88	2.25	0.86	0.24	0.53	0.16	3.312
16	An active attitude towards the surroundings	16	1.111	1.038	0.18	0.539	0.203	2.655

73 Religion as a control factor of the people's behaviour of people in the society	73	0.226	1.2	0.141	0.544	0.236	2.305
55 Good relationships between the superiors and the subordinates	55	2.294	0.79	0.286	0.554	0.154	3.597
37 Reading new literature in the speciality	37	1.737	0.936	0.226	0.561	0.183	3.065
89 The company's opportunities of selecting the new staff	89	2.063	0.937	0.229	0.57	0.183	3.115
35 Co-operation to achieve common objectives	35	2.09	0.99	0.21	0.576	0.194	2.969
9 The company's ownership of land and real property	9	1.086	1.409	0.12	0.576	0.27	2.133
79 Fair assessment of the staff	79	1.83	0.951	0.232	0.58	0.186	3.118
79 Fair assessment of the staff	78	0.528	1.456	0.116	0.586	0.285	2.056
54 Decision-making at the lowest management levels possible	54	0.927	1.022	0.22	0.606	0.204	2.971
36 The leader's imagination (the speed of thought and openness to new ideas)	36	1.946	0.969	0.236	0.608	0.189	3.217
67 Professional foreign contacts in the company	67	1.295	1.23	0.173	0.624	0.241	2.589
13 The leader's peace of mind (lack of fear, worry and hopelessness)	13	0.527	1.244	0.174	0.634	0.2436	2.603
86 The leader's creativity while solving the problems	86	1.597	0.904	0.396	0.667	0.177	3.768
82 Permanent watching of the rivals, learning from their mistakes and successes	82	1.887	0.786	0.37	0.667	0.153	4.359
77 Specialization in a narrower field of business activities	77	0.992	0.96	0.289	0.679	0.188	3.611
83 The national identity	83	-0.403	1.46	0.149	0.679	0.287	2.366

84	The staffs personal interest in the quality of the company's production and services	84	1.71	0.856	0.342	0.684	0.167	4.096
90	The strictness towards the subordinates	90	1.061	0.746	0.409	0.687	0.146	4.705
38	Necessity of management education	38	0.643	0.945	0.301	0.688	0.185	3.718
60	The people's faith in the strength of the collective	60	0.573	1.16	0.23	0.704	0.227	3.101
85	The leader's prestige among the subordinates	85	1.108	0.773	0.406	0.709	0.151	4.695
81	Meeting the security requirements in the company	81	1.06	0.907	0.349	0.736	0.177	4.158
70	The staffs similar vision of the company's future	70	0.328	1.183	0.24	0.737	0.231	3.190
52	The access of the company's production to the world market	52	0.354	0.953	0.345	0.773	0.191	4.047
68	An employee's professional fanatics and pride	68	-0.079	1.121	0.289	0.792	0.21	3.771
69	The management's supervision of the staffs activities	69	-0.928	0.994	0.38	0.862	0.194	4.443

There are also questions the replies of which don't correlate with honesty . One such question is Nr12

Profit is of primary importance in the company

Coef/St	Nr	Y if X=0	St Err Y	R ²	X Coef	St Err X Coef	X
	12	4.62	1,13	0.0089	0.119	0,222	0.5

It is likely that honesty does not respond to maximal profits

The replies have been analysed by a pair correlation analysis. On the X –axis have been laid down - the balls the “**honesty as an ethical value**” This should characterise the importance the honesty in the eyes of students, which belong to different professional level. On the Y-axis the balls of various replies have been put down. These balls should characterise the attitude to psychological aspects. The data have been analysed by linear regression program Quattro Pro. Graphics have not been inserted in this report. Out print of statistical analysis have shown that the question of honesty as an ethical value may be one of the chief factors determining the economic success of the enterprise.

This is illustrated by same examples.

If Y is the **strictness towards the subordinates**, then higher honesty as an ethical value corresponds to higher strictness. The Y values (if $x=0$) is 1,0. The standard error of the $y = 0,746$, $R^2=0,41$ X, coefficient $=0,69$, the standard error of the coefficient 0,14.

If Y is the leader's prestige among the subordinates, then higher honesty as an ethical value corresponds to higher leader's prestige among the subordinates. The Y values (if $x=0$) is 1,1. The standard error of the $y = 0,77$, $R^2=0,406$ X, coefficient $=0,709$, the standard error of the coefficient 0,15.

If Y is the management's supervision of the staff's activities, then higher honesty as an ethical value corresponds to higher management's supervision of the staff's activities. The Y values (if $x=0$) is $-0,93$. The standard error of the $y = 0,99$, $R^2=0,38$ X, coefficient $=0,86$, the standard error of the coefficient 0,19.

Results

The rating of the various factors, principles and trends in management and business, obtained from the masters level students in Business Administration, show that they consider honesty to be the most important of all the factors listed in the data gathering instrument. The mean rating of it is 6.11. Next in importance is the quality of the company's products and services, with a mean rating of 5.94. The third place is shared by three items, each receiving a mean rating of 5.89. They are: (a) the leader's enterprising spirit in setting up and solving problems; (b) legal regulation of economy by the state, and (c) the leader's professionalism in the sphere of human relations. Each of these three items receives a mean rating of 5.89. 1. The quality of the leader (e.g., the leader's initiative and ability to solve problem).

2. The quality of the employees (e.g., their ability to make judgements and act independently).

3. The image of the firm (e.g., the quality of its products and services).

4. The psychological climate in the firm (e.g., how secure the employees feel in the firm).

5. Communication (e.g., the ability to cooperate to reach common goals).

6. Knowledge (e.g., the professional knowledge of the employees about activities of the firm).

7. A general category containing statements about the value of honesty; the legal regulation of economy by the state; employees commitment to and pride in their work, and others, a total of 18 items.

Table 1 presents the ten most important factors in management and business, as perceived by the participants in this study. The numbers in frontal the items particular place of the item in the data gathering instrument.

Table 1

The Ten highest rated items in Management and Business

#	Item	Mean Rating
3	Honesty as an ethical value	6.11
42	The quality of products and services	5.94
88	The leader's professionalism	5.89
19	Legal regulation of economy by state	5.89
6	Leader's ability to solve problems	5.89
91	Sense of security in the company	5.83
34	The staff 's ability to act independently	5.83
35	Cooperation among the staff	5.78
23	The employee's self-respect & behavior	5.67
22	The regular analysis of the company's economic activities	5.67

The ten lowest rated items are listed in Table 2.

Table 2

The Ten lowest rated items in Management and Business

#	Item	Mean Rating
51	The need for a company car	2.72
45	The staff 's relationships outside work hrs	2.72
73	Religion to control behavior	3.00
18	Participation in vocational unions	3.39
15	Interest in staff 's personal lives	3.39
83	National identity	3.56
77	Specialization in a narrower field	3.83
69	Supervision of staff 's activities	3.83
31	Opportunities for sports and hobbies	3.83
52	Access to world markets	3.94

Considering the seven categories of items listed in the data gathering instrument, we find that the Professional knowledge of the employees receives the highest mean rating (5.27), followed by Communication among the employees (5.16), and the Quality of the leader (5.08). The mean ratings of each of the seven categories of items are shown in Table 3.

Table 3

The Means of the Various Categories of Questions

Category	Mean
Professional knowledge of staff	5.27
Communication among staff	5.16
Quality of the Leader	5.08
Quality of the Employees	5.01
The Psychological climate	4.88
General Category	4.88
Image of the Company	4.29

Discussion

The results of this study indicate that the masters level students in Business Administration at the University of Latvia are well qualified to take their places as the leaders in the contemporary business enterprises. It is heartening to note that they consider honesty to be of utmost importance in their work. Given the complicated nature of the concept of honesty, as indicated earlier, additional studies are needed to sort out what exactly is their understanding of honest behavior in business.

The remaining items rated as being among the most important ones present no surprises. These ratings show that the respondents have a sound grasp of management and business. Given the current situation in Latvia, it is of some interest to note that these future leaders underscore the necessity of legal regulation of the economy by the state. This is an area of much concern to many citizens of the country.

Examining the ten lowest rated items listed in Table 2, it may be noted that the respondents in this study seem to resemble their counterparts in the USA in that their work life and personal life are in separate spheres of endeavor. Whatever sports and hobbies they intend to pursue, they do not expect those to be facilitated by the company. They also do not seem to want to overspecialise but would keep their options open. It is somewhat perplexing that they do not consider of much importance the access of the company's products to the world market. Would this indicate a certain lack of competitiveness? And finally, having grown up in an atmosphere of the Soviet ideology, not surprisingly they do not regard religion as an important factor in shaping the behavior of people in society.

Discussion

In the colon the listed "X Coefficient" is the proportionality Coefficient between Y and X-values. The questions are laid down in a colon with increasing values of the X- coefficient. At the top there are questions where the X coefficient values are 0,207.

The questions are: 5 Good relationships among the staff

6 The leader's enterprising spirit of setting up and solving problems

The reply on these questions does not refer too much upon the "honesty."

Higher values of the X Coefficient mean that the Y Value is more dependent of the X value. The numbers of balls on Y and X -axes are in the same dimensions. Therefore if the Y values are coincidence with the X values, then the X coefficient should be 1. If there is no correlation between Y and X values, then the X coefficient should be 0. In the current survey there are no questionnaire replies, which are independent of "honesty". Less dependant of "honesty" is the replies listed at the top of the survey. More dependant of "honesty" is the replies listed at the bottom of the survey. The questions are laid down in a colon with increasing values of the X- coefficient. At the top there are questions where the X coefficient values are higher than 0,7.

Upon the honesty very much relations are to the questions listed in the lower rows, as for example:

85 The leader's prestige among the subordinates

81 Meeting the security requirements in the company

70 The staffs similar vision of the company's future

52 The access of the company's production to the world market

68 An employee's professional fanatics and pride

69 The management's supervision of the staffs activities

The X coefficient has a standard Error. The Standard Error should be compared with the value with the X coefficient. The comparison is evident from the last colon of the tab. The comparison gives the opportunity to estimate the mathematical awareness of the Y dependence of X. In the table there are listed only data at which the Standard Error of the X coefficient is lower than the coefficient it self. If the St Error of the coefficient 1,68 times lower than the coefficient, then the probability is 90%. If the St Error of the coefficient 2,02 times lower than the coefficient, then the probability is 95%.

If the St Error of the coefficient 2,7 times lower than the coefficient, then the probability is 99%.

From the table it is evident that the ratio of the X coefficient to the Standard Error increases with the increasing of the coefficient. Very high is the statistical significance in replies were the Y dependence from X is high.

Another indicator of Y dependence from X is the Y value when X=0. At positive Y values the enterprise can work even when the honesty level =0. They are listed in the upper part of the table:

5 Good relationships among the staff	5	4.09
6 The leader's enterprising spirit of setting up and solving problems	6	4.41
1 The existence of the premises enabling companies activities	1	4.299
42 The evaluation of the quality of the company's production and service	42	4.74

There are also relationships at which Y values have a “-“ sign. That means that enterprise cannot work if the honesty value is 0.

68 An employee's professional fanatics and pride -0.079

69 The management's supervision of the staffs activities -0.928

However the Standard error of the Y estimated is in the range of the value of Y estimated. Therefore this situation is unrealistic.

The correlation coefficient R^2 is increasing if the ratio of X value divided by the standard error of the X value is higher. That means, that higher Y dependence of honesty corresponds to higher statistical significance.

No statistical significance gives the replies on the question 12 Profit is of primary importance in the company.

The results of this study indicate that the masters level students in Business Administration at the University of Latvia are well qualified to take their places as the leaders in the contemporary business enterprises. It is heartening to note that they consider honesty to be of utmost importance in their work. Given the complicated nature of the concept of honesty, as indicated earlier, additional studies are needed to sort out what exactly is their understanding of honest behavior in business.

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Conclusion

Several business factors formulated by Lembit Turnpuu, professor of the Estonian Business School, are more dependent upon the honesty than others. The more important are:

84 The staffs personal interest in the quality of the company's production and services

90 The strictness towards the subordinates

38 Necessity of management education

60 The people's faith in the strength of the collective

85 The leader's prestige among the subordinates

81 Meeting the security requirements in the company

70 The staffs similar vision of the company's future

52 The access of the company's production to the world market

68 An employee's professional fanatics and pride

69 The management's supervision of the staffs activities

No statistical significance gives the replies on the question 12 Profit is of primary importance in the company

We can observe essential differences in the evaluation of honesty, if we single out students. 18 –19 year old first year students gave the category of honesty significantly lower evaluation. The average evaluation of the above category by the total of respondents (n=420) was 4.62, points. Among them males (n=256) evaluated honesty with 4,31, but female students (n=160) – even 4,80 points.

Evaluation of honesty by age groups demonstrated ascending trend: each next age group gave higher evaluation. Honesty evaluation data were subjected to disperse analyses in order find out the impact of the factorial features interaction. The analyses resulted in confirmation of the statistical significance.

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