Abstract: Factors Influencing the Unethical Behavior of Business People

Adam Boes, Duncan Vos, Kevin Lehnert, and Suzeanne Benet

Abstract Corporate unethical behavior is nothing new. We are constantly bombarded with stories of managers engaging in illegal or unethical behavior. What is unknown are the reasons behind such behavior. Building upon Tenbrunsel and Messick's (1999) work on ethical framing we investigate the boundary conditions on how we look at ethical decisions. Through a qualitative and quantitative study, we propose that when managers are put into a business frame, they are more likely to solve problems without an ethical view and thus engage in unethical behavior. More importantly, when we extend the business frame from a short-term to a long-term focus, we expect that business decisions would be more ethical. Further, how ethical the corporate culture is would moderate our decisions. Results indicate that ethical framing of problems do result in ethical outcomes, and that a corporate culture helps. However, the role of a strategic short-term and long-term frame is less understood, with managers using short-term business frames exhibiting more unethical behaviors, while long-term business frames are inconsistent in relation to short-term or ethical frames.

References Available Upon Request.

A. Boes • D. Vos • K. Lehnert (✉) • S. Benet
Grand Valley State University, Allendale, MI, USA
e-mail: boesa@mail.gvsu.edu; vosdu@mail.gvsu.edu; lehnertk@gvsu.edu; benets@gvsu.edu