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A HOLISTIC PERSPECTIVE ON BUSINESS ETHICS: INTEGRATING ETHICAL LAYERS FROM INDIVIDUAL TO SOCIETY

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This study is related to the topic of business ethics and its components. In the literature related to business ethics, professional ethics, work ethics, and management ethics are examined in detail as components of business ethics. The main objective of our study is to reveal, through an "interactive ethics approach," whether individual ethics influence professional ethics, work ethics, management ethics, organizational ethics, and social ethics. If individual ethics influence other types of ethics, what are the stages of this influence? In this approach, which we have named the interactive ethics approach, ethical elements sequentially influence each other. The interactive ethics approach model encompasses layers of individual ethics, professional ethics, organizational ethics, and social ethics. While explaining the interactive ethics model, the metaphor of the "Earth's crust" was utilized. This is because the Earth's crust also consists of interconnected layers that influence each other. In the literature, the concepts of work ethics, professional ethics, and business management ethics are explained by referring to the three main components of business ethics. The concept of "business ethics" emerges as a component of these three ethical concepts. However, the ethics possessed by an individual form the core of ethical behavior. Starting from this core, ethical behaviors expand in layers and influence each other positively or negatively. For this reason, we have named this approach the "interactive ethics approach." Therefore, the topic of ethics should be evaluated and applied from a holistic perspective. It is hoped that this study will contribute to new research where ethics is evaluated from a holistic perspective.

Keywords: Interactive Ethics, Individual Ethics, Ethical Layer, Professional Ethics, Work Ethics, Management Ethics, Organizational Ethics.

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Introduction

Some ambiguities in the definition of business ethics lead to confusion and misunderstandings among managers. Therefore, numerous myths surround business ethics. These myths about business ethics stem from the fact that the functions of "business" in society are not clearly defined. In addition, the fact that "ethics" is not taken into consideration sufficiently when defining "business", especially in profit maximization in private enterprises, causes ethical problems (Primealuks, 1994:287). Business ethics explores how employees and their stakeholders should act. In addition, business ethics provides advice on how businesses should be conducted. In other words, business ethics is a practical discipline that establishes the rules of professional conduct in the workplace.

This study is a theoretical one. Our main objective is to determine the influence of individual ethics on other types of ethics, namely professional ethics, work ethics, management ethics, organizational ethics, and social ethics. Our fundamental question is: Does individual ethics influence professional ethics, work ethics, management ethics, organizational ethics, and social ethics? Another question is: If ethical values influence each other, what are the steps involved in this influence? This study aims to demonstrate that ethics is a multi-layered, comprehensive, and multifaceted concept. Our study explains the fundamental elements that constitute business ethics. However, considering the individual who plays a central role in business ethics, individual ethics plays a leading role in ethical matters. Individual ethics form the basis for other types of ethics. The "ethical layers" that influence business ethics and the relationships between the elements that constitute these layers are explained. In other words, the ethical layers represent an "interactive ethical approach".

A better understanding of the relationships between the components of business ethics requires a thorough understanding of the principles of business ethics. Furthermore, to ensure a clearer understanding of the "ethical layers" explained in the "methodology, theoretical and conceptual framework" section, it was deemed appropriate to explain both ethical and inconsistent behaviors. These ethical layers are systematized within a hierarchy. These layers are arranged in the following order: individual ethics layer, professional ethics layer, organizational ethics layer, social ethics layer, and international ethics layer. We explained that business ethics has three fundamental components. In addition, to successfully adapt business ethics to business life, we analyzed the layers of ethics and attempted to define the relationships between them. Since ethical layers directly influence each other, importance should be given to and developed in each layer. It should be adopted by individuals and society through a holistic approach, without excluding any layer of society.

Literature review

Ethics is the branch of philosophy that investigates the nature and foundations of good and bad, right and wrong (Khaled and Anesa, 2026:457), values between people. In another definition, it is a sub-branch of philosophy that deals with values such as good-bad, right-wrong, justice-injustice (Ulus, 2003:322). Conceptually, ethics is one of the most challenging concepts to define in today's conditions of value crisis. The history of ethics, which is a branch of philosophy, dates back to about 2500 years (Brickle and Smith, 2002:1821). Business ethics, on the other hand, is a research branch that tries to define and explain the rules of conduct of business life. Ethics, which guides how business practices can be changed and improved, is defined as normative business ethics (Takala, 2005:8). According to Ozgener, business ethics is a discipline that examines the principles and values that guide sound choices in economics and the business world (Ozgener, 2002:177).

Business ethics requires everyone who produces goods and services to deliver the product they have committed to their customers on time. In this context, there are fundamental issues on which business ethics is based. Business ethics is based on personal ethics. Because there is no clearly defined distinction between individuals' ethical behavior in their private lives and being honest in their business lives. On the other hand, business ethics is based on honesty. Because the parties showing respect to each other when conducting a transaction indicate that business ethics rules are being followed. Business ethics requires being truthful. Being truthful in business life is a requirement of business ethics. It is essential to inform customers accurately about the goods or services being offered. The other characteristic of business ethics is being reliable. Because real information must be provided to the parties related to the business. Besides this characteristic, business ethics is applied both internally and externally. Because businesses that continue their activities by adhering to business ethics principles behave ethically towards both their personnel and their customers. The other characteristics of business ethics are that businesses are shaped according to the attitude of the top management. As long as the manager adheres to business ethics principles, the personnel also adhere to business ethics principles.

As stated before, it is not possible to separate business ethics from individual ethics with definite lines. Therefore, we should clarify the distinction between appropriate and inappropriate ethical behaviors. At this stage, we clarify appropriate business ethical behaviors. Then we clear inappropriate business ethical behaviours.

Appropriate Behaviours for Business Ethics. Managers have significant responsibilities in ensuring the successful implementation of business ethics within the organization. Because managers who comply with ethical principles have dedicated themselves to high standards of ethical behavior. The ethical manager is expressed with the concept of "moral manager", and ethical leadership (Palmer, 2009:529). It is possible to explain the characteristics of managers who act according to business ethics. Creating awareness of business ethics in the business is so important because managers who act in accordance with business ethics uphold common values, principles of doing business, and ethical standards. Leaders' behaviors and interpersonal communication are important clues that shape adaptive cognitive processes (Naubert et al., 2013:273). When creating ethical awareness, it is necessary to start with the managers first. In addition, incorporating ethical principles into business writing serves as a quality ethical guide. Therefore, creating, publishing, and following ethical principles to be consulted in case of hesitation is one of the basic duties of an ethical leader. Leaders who demonstrate ethical behavior expect similar behavior from their staff. A leader’s verbal praise of ethical behaviors holds no more value for followers if they do not demonstrate it in their activities. This is because the impact of leaders’ behaviour is greater than the impact of his/her expressions. “Transformational leadership effects are identified through the ability of the leader’s actions to shift the followers’ attitudes from lousy behavior that leads to poor outcomes to results that are higher than previously expected” (Yetongnon and Kasztelnik, 2024: 3). Therefore, a leader’s behaviors and statements must be consistent with each other. Ethical leaders consider the core values and principles of the business when making decisions.

In some organizations, leaders may exhibit behaviors characterized by extreme self-interest and exploitation of their followers. This type of leadership behavior is described as “exploitative leadership” (Peng and Peng, 2025:750). Exploitative leadership can also be considered a behavior incompatible with ethical leadership. Research has shown that leadership plays a crucial role in shaping employees’ perceptions of their working conditions, particularly regarding work-related issues that affect well-being and unhappiness (Swanzy et al., 2025:2). Ethical leader behavior has been positively associated with employee pay fairness, willingness to report ethical problems, providing extra effort, increased trust in the leader, and perceptions of effectiveness and satisfaction with one’s leader (Rubin et al., 2010:217). At the same time, they carefully adhere to the ethical principles of the business and make decisions within the framework of ethical values.

A leader who exhibits ethical behavior first complies with ethical rules themselves and gives responsibility to the personnel. Responsibility is first assigned to top managers, followed by middle-level managers, lower-level managers, and employees, respectively. According to some researchers, ethical leadership (Saleem et al., 2026:263) plays a crucial role in the success of startups (Saba et al., 2025:181). A study in the hospitality sector found that managers should encourage and reward ethical behavior and punish unethical behavior. Furthermore, rewarding is more successful than punishing in influencing employees. Additionally, another finding is that the absence of a punishment system leads to an increase in unethical behavior within the organization (Tuna and Yeєiltaє 2021:200).

The direction of the leader’s behavior has a direct impact on the behavior of the followers. Therefore, the ethical leader needs to act with ethical awareness. At the same time ethical leaders should provide ethical education and training to their staff. The educational research literature is not short of guidance concerning ethical issues (Kris and Fox, 2009:501). Ethics is a critical element of counseling practice, and competent training in ethical decision making should be a component of professional training programs (Cottone and Claus, 2000:281). Academic studies have suggested that moral competence as an individual skill can be developed through educational programs (Martini et al., 2025:441). For this activity, managers should allocate the necessary training budget. Especially for developing nations, enhancing educational infrastructure, strengthening institutional governance, and adopting stringent academic integrity policies are crucial steps (Artyukhov et al. 2025:152). In other words, an ethical leader must continually renew himself and his staff through continuous training programs. Besides training programmes, ethical leader should focus on change and prepare their staff for change. This criterion examines the effectiveness of the leadership and governance structure within the institution. It encompasses strategic planning, decision-making processes, resource allocation, and the institution’s commitment to continuous improvement and quality enhancement (Aid and Moulfi, 2024: 47). Beside ethical leader characteristics, ethical leader who adhere to ethical principles should select staff who will comply with the company’s values and adhere to ethical principles when selecting them.

Organizations that implement structured and ethically guided orientations, promote justice and equality, and ensure transparent communication achieve higher levels of innovation, productivity, sustainability, and overall business performance (Okon and Nkwam, 2026:17). It is a fact that ethical transactions cannot be carried out with unethical staff. In personnel selection, in addition to technical knowledge, work discipline and adherence to ethical values should also play a decisive role. It is possible to summarize ethical values as follows: Truthfulness, acting reasonably, honesty, equality, and impartiality, a sense of responsibility, and respect for human rights and the rule of law.

Inappropriate Behaviors for Business Ethics. If the manager’s social and cultural environment is far from implementing ethical norms, the manager cannot be expected to behave ethically. Therefore, directing managers who do not exhibit ethical behavior towards ethical behavior requires a significant effort. Because the manager tends to apply the behaviors he/she learned from the environment in which he/she grew up. The cultural and social environment is both a cause and a result in terms of the individual's ethical behavior. Unethical behavior of the business manager; is to obtain unfair profit, not to fulfill tax and other legal responsibilities to the state, not to act reasonably in hiring and promoting personnel, not to respect the financial rights of employees, to use the company's resources for his/her extraordinary expenses, to sell the company's know-how to competitors, to endanger the health and life of staff, to create a sense of distrust among employees, and not to protect the environment (Guney, 2006:135). Unethical behaviour by either party disrupts the relationship and produces unproductive and ineffective exchanges (Tsalikis et al., 2023:97).

Discrimination is one of the important problems encountered in business. Discriminated staff are generally mistreated in matters that are not of their own choice. For example, prejudices regarding race, gender, and ethnic origin remain a significant ethical issue in the business world (Orman and Parlak, 2009:54). However, issues such as race, gender, and nationality are beyond a person's own control.

The compatibility between the candidate's characteristics and the job requirements is a key factor in ensuring the candidate's placement. Therefore, the suitability assessment in the personnel selection phase cannot be considered discriminatory. It is outside the scope of discrimination to prefer candidates with suitable characteristics for business and personnel purposes. One of the primary concerns is ensuring efficiency and productivity for the business. The real problem here is that discrimination is based on unfair and irrelevant criteria such as an individual's color, gender, or ethnicity. Discrimination based on such criteria is seen as an ethical problem. Criteria that are not related to the knowledge and skills required to accomplish any job are described as unfair Discrimination (Orman and Parlak, 2009:90). Discrimination in organizations generally occurs in two ways. The first is explicit discrimination based on gender or racism. The second is institutional discrimination, which refers to the underrepresentation of women or minorities in the organization compared to other groups, even if the organization offers employment opportunities through an impartial selection process (Velasquez, 1988:319). Discrimination generally manifests as discrimination based on religion, language, race, sect, and gender. Such distinctions marginalize individuals and groups. At the same time, it closes the business off to different cultural riches. However, if the differences within the organization are well-managed, they can be a source of wealth for the organization. In this context, viewing differences as a source of wealth is possible with democratic leadership and an open management style. Some multinational companies have good practices in this regard. Instead of highlighting the differences mentioned above and discriminating against individuals, the focus is on the value they add to the business. With the value that individuals bring to the organization, its competitiveness in the sector is enhanced. Legal measures should be taken to eliminate discrimination in business life. In addition, personnel should be taught in detail that Discrimination offends people and is not in accordance with ethical principles. The absence of discrimination will contribute to social peace as it will allow different segments of society to work together.

Favoritism is another inappropriate behavior for business ethics. Favoritism is defined as a behavior that occurs by prioritizing emotional and traditional loyalties by disregarding official obligations (Gul, 2006:69). Favoritism is examined under three main headings as nepotism, cronyism and political favoritism (Bektas, 2023:69).

The starting point of corruption is individuals' efforts to obtain unfair personal gain. The aim of individuals to obtain unfair material or moral, personal or political gain leads to corruption. The concept of corruption, which is considered one of today's global problems, occurs as a result of corruption in the decision-making mechanisms of public and private institutions. The concept of corruption encompasses actions that negatively impact all segments of society, including bribery, embezzlement, malfeasance, money laundering, fraud, insider trading, gaining an unfair advantage, and favoritism. Corruption, shortly, encompasses the privileged transaction of a public official in return for money or goods, abuse of authority in monetary or non-monetary affairs, illegal use of state authority for personal or political gain, a public official acting in favor of those who provide this benefit in return for money or other rewards, and irregular behavior of public officials for personal purposes.

Bribery is another inappropriate behavior for business ethics. Bribery is the consideration for a person's performance of behavior that is inconsistent with working arrangements and the nature of the work. That is, it involves an explicit or implicit understanding combined with a person's duty and role. This understanding has always been viewed negatively. This consideration does not necessarily have to be in the form of money. It can also take the form of gifts, banquets, special products, services, and influence (Orman and Parlak, 2009:96). In one of his articles, Kirby argues that proponents of 'democratic dirty hands' have missed the import of another feature of contemporary governance: public institutions. Public institutions, as organizational agents, intermediate the relationship between public officer and public; and in so doing, the dirt necessary for stability may be 'laundered': the public may still gain the benefit of a public officer's hands, but remain clean of their dirt (Kirby, 2023:540). Finlay states that dirty hands arise not from a conflict between morality and established political norms, but from the need for the political actor to interact with specific phenomena that often create their own normative problems for political action (Finlay, 2023:562). Bribery is a kind of human rights violation. The terminology of 'human rights violations' often serves as an umbrella term, encompassing more narrowly defined issues that are sometimes used interchangeably, like modern slavery, human trafficking, and forced labor (Rapior and Oberhauser, 2026:29). Unfair advantages obtained in return for bribery victimize the true rights holders and undermine social trust. Weak institutions and cumbersome legal practices have also been linked to corruption. Firms operating in countries with advanced infrastructure, security, and judicial systems have been found to have lower rates of bribery and lower total bribery costs (Gaganis et al., 2025:227). Taking and giving bribes leads to the obstruction of rights and the law and the disruption of social order. This attitude is often a violation of human rights. In other words, it means a violation of community law.

Violence and oppression can be defined as emotional overflow. They are inappropriate behaviours for business ethics. Violence and oppression emerge as a product of helplessness. In other words, violence is a form of behavior that emerges from believing and fearing that there is nothing left to do (Gul, 2006:71). Unethical violence and oppression in the workplace weaken individuals' organizational citizenship and lead to organizational conflicts.

Physical and sexual harassment are other unethical attitudes in business ethics. Physical harassment is a type of unethical behavior that is practiced mainly by unsuccessful people as a suppression mechanism when they encounter people who are weaker than themselves. Sexual harassment means unwanted sexual behaviors that damage the honor of female or male employees (Ergun, 2009:156). To prevent physical or sexual harassment within the organization, managers must implement programs to take the necessary measures. An effective sexual harassment prevention program covers some stages (Ozgener, 2009:106). These are: determining a specific policy prohibiting sexual harassment, developing an internal complaint procedure to prevent sexual harassment, taking urgent measures to investigate employees' complaints and find solutions to them and applying disciplinary penalties against those who commit sexual harassment. The measures to be taken against sexual harassment, which is an unethical behavior, should be more preventive. Although the methods to be carried out after the harassment are deterrent, there are victimizations. For this reason, it is necessary to prevent physical and sexual harassment by taking into account factors such as the arrangement of working hours and the physical conditions in the workplace.

Being arrogant, both in social and business life, is a behavior that contradicts ethical principles. A person who exhibits arrogant behavior thinks of himself as more superiorly talented than others. In reality, however, this is a big mistake. With this mistake, the person closes himself off to new ideas. People who believe they are superior to others often perceive themselves as special and act accordingly. Feeling special, the desire to be unique and different leads a person to the idea that they are better than everyone else. The bad feeling expressed as "smug" causes others to be despised (Ozel, 2013:253). The feeling of arrogance makes it difficult for the manager to consult others and acquire new ideas. A person who trusts only his own knowledge and believes his ideas are perfect does not bother to learn the opinions of others. The possibility of error is also very high for a manager who acts solely on their own ideas and does not exercise common sense.

The purpose of the article

This article is aimed to developing the scientific approach to the business ethics and it's components and layers.

Presentation of mail results

This section of the study explains the components of business ethics and the layers of ethics. Three fundamental components constitute business ethics. In other words, business ethics is formed by the combination of three sub-concepts: work ethics, professional ethics, and business administration ethics.

The fundamental question in this study on the interactive ethical approach is: Does individual ethics influence professional ethics, work ethics, management ethics, organizational ethics, and social ethics? If ethical values influence each other, what are the steps of this influence?

Based on this fundamental question, our hypothesis is as follows: If a person's individual ethical values increase, their professional ethics, work ethics, management ethics, organizational ethics, and social ethics values will also increase.

These three elements, individually, cannot form business ethics. However, they can come together to form a set. Similarly, the layers of ethics develop by overlapping and influencing one another. It is impossible to achieve organizational ethics without achieving individual ethics. Likewise, social ethics supports the ethical behavior of the individual. Therefore, a more accurate approach would be to evaluate the issue of ethics from a holistic perspective, encompassing multiple layers of consideration.

Business Ethic Components. The concept of business ethics is a framework concept that includes three sub-concepts. To better recognize and internalize business ethics, the following three components must be analyzed (Orman and Parlak, 2009:305): Work Ethics, Professional Ethics, Business Administration Ethics.

The components of business ethics (Bektas, 2023:67) are illustrated in Fig. 1 below.

Fig. 1. Components of Business Ethics
Source: Orman S., Parlak, Z. (2009: 305)

Work Ethics. Work ethics express the attitudes and behaviors of individuals living in a society towards working (Akinci, 2013:93). The attitudes of societies towards work are generally different from one another. While diligence is exceptionally high in some societies, laziness emerges as the main characteristic in others. The cultural structure of societies is very effective in shaping individuals’ views on work. Work ethic reveals the working standards and application standards in the enterprise. There is no obligation to write these standards. Work ethics consist of values, discipline, productivity, quality and efficiency. For this reason, work ethics require that personnel be hardworking, frugal, punctual, and honest. Economic development is usually high in societies where the work ethic is high. Having a strong work ethic is both a personality trait and a cultural phenomenon. The foundations of work contain some characteristics. These characteristics can be summarized: Working is a social duty and working is more important than free time. Beside these, working is an action that organizes time and makes a person punctual, frugal and disciplined. Shortly working gains the person his identity, respect, psychological satisfaction and status through his work.

Professional Ethics. Another sub-component of the concept of business ethics is professional ethics. It reveals the universal principles of the relevant profession. At the same time, it is a guide for those who practice the profession in question. Professional ethics suggest that a profession should be practiced with its requirements, importance, and honor. Professional ethics is a branch of philosophy that encompasses the attitudes and relationships between managers and staff in the workplace. The principles of professional ethics are universal in nature. In addition to the universal principles of professions, there are also some unique principles (Akinci, 2013:92). These principles outline the ethical standards that members of a profession must adhere to. In the medical profession, the “Hippocratic Oath” explains the working principles of doctors. Similarly, lawyers and accountants have similar principles. While work ethic varies from country to country and culture to culture, the principles of professional ethics generally share similar characteristics worldwide. Because professional ethics show the general rules that must be followed in the execution of a profession (Orman and Parlak, 2009:305).

Business Administration Ethics. Business ethics reveal the activities, values, and management standards of the business. It also plays a crucial role in determining the strategies, policies, procedures, and tactics that the business creates to achieve its objectives. Business ethics define the principles and norms that the business must comply with in the economic and social environment in which it operates. This type of ethics requires the business to act with a sense of ethical responsibility towards all its stakeholders (its employees, customers, suppliers, and the natural environment). Related to the term professional ethics is that of management ethics, which some have defined as “the systematic study of moral choice by which what is good is made” (Aboelazm, 2025:187). In this context, business ethics requires a corporation to sustain its business operations by adopting ethical principles as a guide for its managerial activities. In this way, business ethics guides all internal and external activities of the business. In this way, business ethics guides the manager in the realization of functions such as raw material supply, purchasing, production, marketing, human resources management, research, and development. The ethical principles applied by management should first be communicated to the personnel. Studies have shown that in performance-oriented environments, employees may resort to practices that disregard ethical considerations to achieve their performance goals (Wang et al., 2026:354). The manager's adoption and implementation of ethical principles creates a positive effect on all personnel. The personnel will also be meticulous about work ethics and professional ethics while performing their duties. Therefore, business ethics, the third component of work ethics, also positively affects the other two components. Work and professional ethics cannot be expected to be successful in a business where business ethics are not successful. Because business practices hierarchically affect all employees positively or negatively.

Business Ethic Layers. Ethical behavior encompasses multiple layers in society. Individuals who do not comply with individual ethical principles also tend not to comply with business ethics principles. Individuals who do not comply with business ethics principles also fail to adhere to their individual ethical principles. Similarly, individuals who do not comply with business ethics principles also do not comply with professional ethics principles and social ethics principles. Therefore, there is no definite barrier between ethical layers. Some authors emphasize that ethical issues in family businesses become increasingly relevant for businesses, societies and organization layer (Ferasso et al., 2025:141). The acceptance of ethics extends from the individual to the entire society, and even to societies. Ethical layers also directly affect one another. Therefore, all layers of ethics need to be explained. Ethical layers are described in five layers as follows (Weiss, 1994:8). The five layers of ethics are briefly explained in Fig. 2 below.

Fig. 2. Ethical Layers
Source: this Figure was systematized by the authors

Individual Ethics Layer. "Individual ethics" constitutes the basis of ethical layers. Individual ethics is related to a person's ethical attitudes and behaviors. Individual ethics is related to the extent to which a person accepts and applies the general values of the society in which they live. Additionally, individual ethics also impact other ethical layers. Because individual ethics form the core of all ethical frameworks. It is not possible for a person who does not adhere to individual ethical principles to adopt other professional and organizational ethical principles. Therefore, individual ethics form the kernel of ethical behavior. Individual ethics guide human relations with their environment. At the same time, it encompasses behavior standards and values that are specific to the individual. The source of an individual's ethics is determined by their own family, relatives, friends, educational background, experiences in business, and the culture of the society in which they live. One of the important representatives of the individual ethics system, Martin Buber (1878-1965), argues that the source of individual ethics is the voice (or conscience) that comes from within the individual. This ethical understanding is based on the individual's ethical infrastructure. Additionally, it reflects the behavior that an individual exhibits in response to events they experience and witness around them.

Individual ethics enables the individual to turn to themselves, and the individual becomes freer. Besides this individual ethics is up to the individual's conscience to make the right or wrong decision in the situations they face. Additionally, individual ethics is related to sense of moral obligation. Moral obligation is also related to explaining intentions or behaviours that involve a degree of responsibility and/or where there are meaningful consequences to others (Shnor et al., 2026:867). People may seek a meaningful job, right or wrong, simply because it is a meaningful job, not to live a meaningful life (Mortimer, 2023:838). Colero states that individual ethics encompasses issues such as caring for the welfare of others and respecting their autonomy, honesty, obeying the law, being charitable, refraining from taking bribes, being fair, and maintaining truthfulness (Colero, 2005:12). The relationship between a person's goodness and their actions is explained by the perception of a person as a traveler in the world of normative values, in the name of the fundamental value of their work (Silver, 2023:829). Therefore, democracy and legal awareness take center stage in individual ethics. Because individual ethics primarily requires respecting the rights of other people. The most important of the norms put forward on individual ethics is «being truthful". Because a person who lies very easily violates other ethical rules as well. Therefore, the basis of correct behavior is being truthful.

Professional Ethics Layer. The concept of profession can be defined as the work a person does in a professional capacity. The professional layer of business ethics reflects a particular professional’s view of their profession. A professional association aims to protect the reputation of its profession from individuals who are not genuinely interested in the profession and may harm its perception. There are sanctions determined by professional chambers or associations on this issue. Members who fail to uphold professional honor are primarily punished by their colleagues with specific sanctions. The professional ethics layer helps to restrict the negative behaviors of professionals. In the professional layer of business ethics, members strive for the prestige of the profession. Undoubtedly, professional ethics does not contradict the general ethical norms of society. On the contrary, professional ethics is closely aligned with societal ethical norms. In this context, professional ethics is influenced by both the general ethical principles of the society in which the profession is practiced and the universal principles related to that profession. Professional ethics includes principles such as objectivity, reliability, fulfilling professional responsibilities, and avoiding potential conflicts of interest for professionals. By adhering to professional ethics principles, colleagues also protect each other’s rights. As long as ethical principles are sincerely followed, cooperation and solidarity also take place among the members of the profession.

Organizational Ethics Layer. The organizational ethics layer encompasses the procedures, policies, goals, and ethical rules that businesses establish to achieve their purpose (Schlegelmilch, 1998:8). This layer also includes the ethical principles that guide the relationships and cooperation between organizational members. Team-based learning has the potential to develop ethical competencies and collaboration skills (Alizadeh et al., 2025:2). This is because team members contribute to the corporate memory of the organization by sharing their individual knowledge with each other. Ethics in the organization is traditionally associated with implementing formal and informal ethics elements while striking the right balance of ‘push for compliance’ and ‘pull for integrity’ in employee behavior (Anand et al., 2025:3). Organizational ethics has been centrally concerned with what constitutes a theory and practice of ethics relevant to the specificities of work organizations as dominant social institutions (Rhodes, 2022:499). Organizational ethicality is shaped by multilevel influences, including ethical climate and culture, leadership and governance, and these influences intersect with role obligations, institutional rules, and the strategic ambiguity that often arises under threat (Rubel Lifschitz et al., 2026:2). As is known, an organization consists of individuals. Individuals also carry their ethical attitudes and behaviors to the organization with them. For this reason, the personnel’s compliance with individual and professional ethical principles ensures an ethical climate at the organizational level. So organizational ethics deals with the organizational capacity to morally develop and learn through action. In particular, ethics in the collective setting is not about abstract principles but organizational practice (Kornberger and Leixnering, 2025:260). Personnel who adhere to professional principles and their own individual ethical standards help create an ethical climate at the organizational level.

Social Ethics Layer. The fourth layer of ethics can be expressed as the “social ethics layer”. It includes laws, norms, traditions, and customs. The factors in this layer express “social ethics”. The social layer of ethics plays a more inclusive role for society compared to the individual and organizational ethics layers. Hindriks (2024:288) suggests that social sustainability has three dimensions: Resilience, values (in general), and justice (specifically). “Concepts of justice are explained in terms of what is deserved by each individual, and to what each individual is entitled, without partiality and to deliver equitable treatment (Hewitt, 2007:1153). To give this suggestion more substance, he developed a framework he calls the ‘Corporate Sustainability Framework’. Social sustainability is generally seen as a fundamental characteristic of communities. Social sustainability is also inevitable for the institutionalization of social ethics. Society must have a set of rules and a belief system to live in peace. Therefore, social ethics is the widely accepted form of individual ethics in social life. Because in a society where ethical principles are insufficient, it is impossible to carry out social and economic life properly. The shrinking of market shares and the shortening of product life cycles further increase competition. The importance of ethical principles in the social layer is increasing day by day to reduce the destructive effects of competition. The social layer of ethics is reached when every member of society internalizes ethical norms. Ethical values are successfully represented in the social layer as long as they are accepted and practiced by society. When ethics reaches the social layer, organizational, professional, and individual ethical norms are also followed. In this case, compliance with professional ethics and individual ethical principles is also ensured. As a result, a general sense of peace and trust is ensured in society. To strengthen the social ethical layer, common values should be emphasized more than differences in society. The unification of individuals in society on common ground will strengthen social ethics. Therefore, reaching a consensus on ethical norms in society is vital for social integrity.

International Ethics Layer. The increasing growth of businesses and their expansion into different markets brings international ethical practices with them. The need for a comprehensive, cohesive, and universal code of conduct for multinational companies, as well as smaller organizations doing business internationally, is paramount (Payne et al., 1997:1735). In response, many global firms have adopted ethical language to describe their algorithmic tools, e.g. "fair by design," "AI for good" and "bias-aware AI" populate annual reports, technical white papers and executive speeches (Kumar, 2025:2). Especially in multinational companies, the implementation of ethical principles that appeal to individuals or a single society causes unforeseen problems. Therefore, international ethical principles should be adopted in the international ethics layer. Accepted international ethical norms should not exclude individuals of different beliefs and cultures. Culture plays an important role in defining ethical standards (Cohen et al., 1992:689). In other words, Discrimination based on language, religion, belief, or race should be avoided. The ethical principles to be applied in the international ethics layer should comply with universal ethical principles. When an application outside of international ethical principles is made, international businesses face ethical problems. For businesses to avoid problems related to international ethical practices, they must thoroughly analyze ethical rules and act by taking differences into account. It should be acknowledged that differences are not a negative situation for the business, but rather an asset. The implementation of ethical principles in the international ethics layer will increase organizational citizenship awareness.

Conclusion

In this study, which we call the interactive ethics approach, our fundamental question was: Does individual ethics influence professional ethics, work ethics, management ethics, organizational ethics, and social ethics? If ethical values influence each other, in what order does this influence occur? In other words, what are the steps in the interactive ethics approach? Based on this fundamental question, we developed our hypothesis as follows: If an individual's ethical values increase, their professional ethics, work ethics, management ethics, organizational ethics, and social ethics values will also increase. Our findings and conclusions indicate that individual ethics directly influence professional ethics, work ethics, management ethics, organizational ethics, and social ethics.

During the research process, we investigated business ethics and the concepts that constitute it from the literature. We found that business ethics consists of three sub-components: work ethics, professional ethics, and business administration ethics. To better understand the concept of business ethics, we explained what behaviors are consistent with and inconsistent with business ethics, again using the literature. The primary objective of this research was to elucidate the concepts of ethics, business ethics, its components, and the various ethical layers. Another factor that led us to this research was the idea that ethics begins with the individual and spreads to society. This idea led us to the conclusion that ethics consists of a layered structure. Because ethics is not a static phenomenon, but a dynamic one. This dynamism of ethics spreads from the individual to the entire society.

The metaphor of the Earth's crust inspired our research. As is known, the Earth's crust consists of some layers. Each layer has its own unique components and a different structure. Although each layer has different chemical and physical properties, each layer is related to the layers above and below it. During the analysis, the structure and relationship of the layers are taken into account. Similarly, the layers of ethics also influence each other. Individual ethics, at first glance, reflect the individual's own ethical understanding. In other words, it reflects the individual's attitude and behavior towards their family and environment. Furthermore, it reflects the level of respect they have for others' rights. Professional ethics refers to the value an individual places on their work and the extent to which they adhere to workplace rules. Furthermore, a person who adheres to professional ethical principles also abides by the written rules of their workplace. At first glance, these two aspects may seem independent. However, despite their differences, they cannot be considered entirely separate. A person who does not respect human rights in their personal life cannot be expected to respect the rights of their colleagues. Similarly, someone who does not abide by the written principles of their own workplace is unlikely to act in accordance with the written principles of society. Therefore, as in the metaphor of the earth's crust, the issue of ethics should be addressed holistically. So, individual ethics influences business ethics, and business ethics influences social ethics. In other words, ethical behavior moves both from the individual to their environment and from their environment to the individual. Shortly, this system works in two directions. Therefore, ethical values should be considered holistically. Ethics education should be structured in a way that starts with the individual and encompasses family, society, work life, and social life. Individual ethics is the essence of ethical behavior. This behavior then develops and is reflected in families, businesses, and all layers of society. These ethical layers interact with and influence one another. Just as an individual's ethical behavior affects their environment, the ethical behavior of the environment also affects the individual. Consequently, there is no rigid boundary between ethical layers; instead, there is an interaction between them. Components of ethical layers are both the cause and the effect of each other. Therefore, both educators, practitioners, and administrators should evaluate the issue of ethics holistically, not independently.

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ЦІЛІСНИЙ ПІДХІД ДО ДІЛОВОЇ ЕТИКИ: ІНТЕГРАЦІЯ ЕТИЧНИХ РІВНІВ – ВІД ОСОБИСТОСТІ ДО СУСПІЛЬСТВА

Бекташ Четін, Арслан Ейсель

Статтю присвячено дослідженню ділової етики та її складових. У літературі з ділової етики детально розглядаються професійна етика, трудова етика та етика управління як складові ділової етики. Мета статті – з’ясування, за допомогою «інтерактивного підходу до етики», наявності впливу індивідуальної етики на професійну етику, трудову етику, етику управління, організаційну етику та соціальну етику. Якщо індивідуальна етика впливає на інші види етики, то які етапи цього впливу існують? У запропонованому підході інтерактивної етики етичні елементи послідовно впливають один на одного. Модель інтерактивного підходу до етики охоплює такі рівні: індивідуальна етика, професійна етика, організаційна етика та соціальна етика. Під час пояснення інтерактивної моделі етики було використано метафору «земної кори». Це пов’язано з тим, що земна кора також складається з взаємопов’язаних шарів, які впливають один на одного. У літературі поняття трудової етики, професійної етики та етики управління бізнесом пояснюються з посиланням на три основні складові ділової етики. Поняття «ділова етика» випливає як складова цих трьох етичних концепцій. Однак саме етичні принципи, якими керується людина, становлять основу етичної поведінки. Виходячи з цього ядра, етичні моделі поведінки розгалужуються шарами й впливають одна на одну – як позитивно, так і негативно. Саме тому підхід отримав назву – «підхід інтерактивної етики». Отже, питання етики слід розглядати та застосовувати з цілісної точки зору. Результати статті сприятимуть проведенню нових досліджень, у яких етика розглядатиметься з цілісної точки зору.

Ключові слова: інтерактивна етика, індивідуальна етика, етичний рівень, професійна етика, етика праці, управлінська етика, організаційна етика.

A HOLISTIC PERSPECTIVE ON BUSINESS ETHICS: INTEGRATING ETHICAL LAYERS FROM INDIVIDUAL TO SOCIETY

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This study is related to the topic of business ethics and its components. In the literature related to business ethics, professional ethics, work ethics, and management ethics are examined in detail as components of business ethics. The main objective of our study is to reveal, through an “interactive ethics approach,” whether individual ethics influence professional ethics, work ethics, management ethics, organizational ethics, and social ethics. If individual ethics influence other types of ethics, what are the stages of this influence? In this approach, which we have named the interactive ethics approach, ethical elements sequentially influence each other. The interactive ethics approach model encompasses layers of individual ethics, professional ethics, organizational ethics, and social ethics. While explaining the interactive ethics model, the metaphor of the “Earth”s crust” was utilized. This is because the Earth’s crust also consists of interconnected layers that influence each other. In the literature, the concepts of work ethics, professional ethics, and business management ethics are explained by referring to the three main components of business ethics. The concept of “business ethics” emerges as a component of these three ethical concepts. However, the ethics possessed by an individual form the core of ethical behavior. Starting from this core, ethical behaviors expand in layers and influence each other positively or negatively. For this reason, we have named this approach the “interactive ethics approach.” Therefore, the topic of ethics should be evaluated and applied from a holistic perspective. It is hoped that this study will contribute to new research where ethics is evaluated from a holistic perspective.

Keywords: Interactive Ethics, Individual Ethics, Ethical Layer, Professional Ethics, Work Ethics, Management Ethics, Organizational Ethics.

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