

ETHICS CODE AWARENESS, PERCEIVED ETHICAL VALUES, AND ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT

Sean Valentine and Tim Barnett

This study examines the relationships among ethics code awareness, perceived corporate ethical values, and organizational commitment. Three key findings emerged. First, those aware of the existence of an ethics code in their organizations perceived their organizations as having more ethical values than those not aware of an ethics code in their organizations. Second, respondents exhibited higher levels of organizational commitment when they were aware of an ethics code in their companies. Finally, the relationship between ethics code awareness and organizational commitment was fully mediated by perceptions of an organization's ethical values. The results suggest that ethics codes may lead to higher levels of organizational commitment by increasing the belief that their organizations have strong ethical values, as long as the existence of ethics codes are adequately communicated.

An organization's code of ethics is a written expression of its ethical norms and values (Farrell and Farrell 1998; Schwartz 2001; Valentine and Barnett 2002). Ideally, an ethics code demonstrates the company's interest in business ethics and communicates core beliefs to employees (Adams, Tashchian, and Shore 2001; Sims 1991; Wotruba, Chonko, and Loe 2001). Formal codes of ethics may lead to more positive perceptions of the ethical values of the organization (Valentine and Barnett 2002; Wotruba, Chonko, and Loe 2001) and may also contribute to higher levels of ethical conduct among employees (Ferrell and Skinner 1988; McCabe, Trevino, and Butterfield 1996). To the extent that ethics codes cause employees to believe that the organization's norms and values are congruent with their own, they may also lead to higher levels of organizational commitment (Finegan 2000; Hunt, Wood, and Chonko 1989; Schwepker 1999, 2001). However, some studies have found that the existence of ethics codes makes little, if any, difference in employees' attitudes and behaviors (Chonko and Hunt 1985; Cleek and Leonard 1998). One explanation for these inconsistent results is that, even when an organization has a code of ethics, personnel might not be aware of its existence or acquainted with its composition (Wotruba, Chonko, and Loe 2001). Thus, employees' awareness of the ethics code is likely more important than the existence or nonexistence of the ethics code itself.

Within a sales context, there has been little, if any, empirical research examining ethics code awareness, perceptions of

organizations' ethical values, and job attitudes such as organizational commitment. Certainly sales and marketing professionals are confronted almost daily with ethical dilemmas (McClaren 2000; Wotruba 1990). If awareness of ethics codes and perceptions of organizational values affect the way they respond in such instances, empirical study of these issues seems highly relevant to their effective management. Further, since sales professionals may be more psychologically and socially distant from the organization (Dubinsky et al. 1986), factors that could affect their organizational commitment should be studied, particularly since organizational commitment is likely to affect job performance (Ricketta 2002), extra-role behaviors (MacKenzie, Podsakoff, and Ahearne 1998), and turnover (Cohen 1993).

The purpose of the present study is to examine the relationships among ethics code awareness, perceptions of corporate ethical values, and organizational commitment. We argue that those who are aware of the existence of an ethics code in their organization will perceive their organization as having more ethical values than those who are not aware of the existence of an ethics code. Further, we suggest that ethics code awareness will be associated with higher levels of organizational commitment, but that perceptions of ethical values will fully mediate the ethics code awareness → organizational commitment relationship. Figure 1 provides a graphical representation of these relationships.

BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

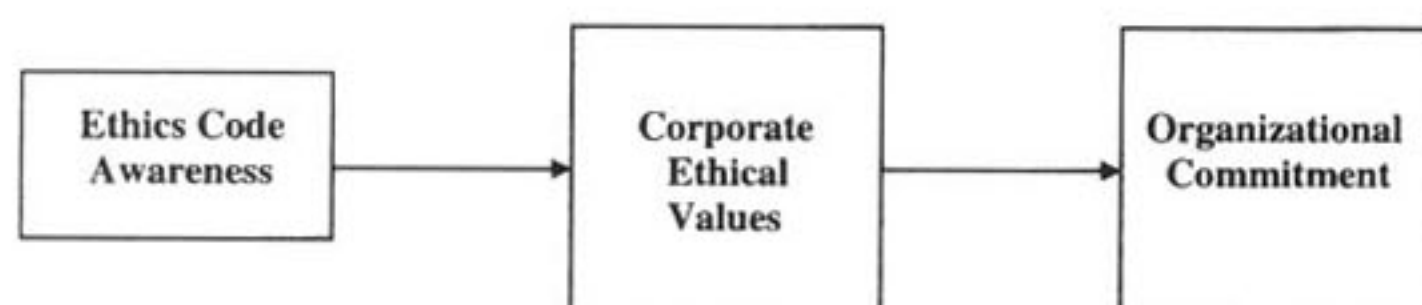
Ethics Code Awareness and Perceptions of Organizational Ethical Values

Values form a key part of a company's overall culture, affecting many important activities and relationships, such as competitive strategies, personnel policies, and relationships with different stakeholder groups (Hunt, Wood, and Chonko

Sean Valentine (D.B.A., Louisiana Tech University), Assistant Professor of Management, College of Business, University of Wyoming, valentin@uwyo.edu.

Tim Barnett (D.B.A., Mississippi State University), Associate Professor of Management, College of Business and Industry, Mississippi State University, tbarnett@cobilan.msstate.edu.

Figure 1
Hypothesized Relationships



1989). Therefore, organizational values are commonly defined as “the standards that guide the external adaptation and internal integration of organizations” (Hunt, Wood, and Chonko 1989, p. 79). Values imply an ethical component, and it is this component of organizational values that is of interest here. Ethical values concern what is “right” and “wrong” and allow the organization to set normative standards for employees (Chen, Sawyers, and Williams 1997; Jansen and Von Glinow 1985). An organization’s ethical values emanate from the personal beliefs of key corporate members (Schein 1985) and are determined by a company’s institutionalized and unendorsed practices (Hunt, Wood, and Chonko 1989; Sims 1991).

The marketing profession is troubled by many incidents of unethical work conduct (Wotruba 1990), and the sales field in particular is perceived as mishandling many ethical dilemmas (McClaren 2000). Most marketing personnel “believe that ethics and social responsibility are important determinants of organizational effectiveness” (Singhapakdi 1999, pp. 89–90), and that institutionalization of strong ethical values might strengthen employees’ positive job attitudes and behaviors. Institutionalization of ethical values may be achieved if an organization develops and communicates the existence of a code of ethics, as well as other policies and procedures (i.e. reward systems, internal complaint channels) that define and encourage ethical behavior among its employees (Ferrell and Gresham 1985; Schwepker 2001; Sims 1991). In this study, we focus on the ethics code component.

Many companies develop ethics codes to emphasize important ethical principles (Cassell, Johnson, and Smith 1997; Farrell and Farrell 1998; Hunt, Wood, and Chonko 1989; Murphy 1995; Sims 1991). Effective codes establish clear workplace expectations and provide insight into how employee conduct is appraised by management (Farrell and Farrell 1998; Nijhof, Fisscher, and Looise 2000). These guidelines therefore “improve the organizational climate so that individuals can behave ethically” and “institutionalize the morals and values of the company founders such that they become part of the corporate culture and help socialize new individuals into the culture” (Adams, Tashchian, and Shore 2001, p. 199). Wotruba, Chonko, and Loe or state: “It seems reasonable to consider that an ethics code coupled with the attitudes and behavior it influences make a significant contribution to the organization’s ethical climate” (2001, p. 60).

People who work for organizations that have a written ethics code should therefore be more inclined to believe that their company is prepared to support ethical reasoning and behavior with increased recognition and rewards (Valentine and Barnett 2002). However, as noted earlier, empirical research into the effect of ethics codes on employees’ perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors has yielded mixed results. For example, Schwartz (2001) reviewed 19 ethics code studies, eight of which found that ethics codes were effective and nine of which found that ethics codes were ineffective. We suggest that one potential explanation for the inconsistent findings is that employee awareness of ethics codes is a critical determinant of their effect on employee attitudes and behavior. Unless organizations adequately communicate their formal ethics code to employees, many of them may not even be aware of its existence or at all familiar with its content. In this situation, it is unlikely that the ethics code will influence employees’ perceptions, attitudes, or behaviors (Sims 1991; Weeks and Nantel 1992; Wotruba, Chonko, and Loe 2001).

Here, we suggest that when sales professionals (or for that matter, any employees) are aware that their organization has an ethics code, that they will form more positive perceptions of the organization’s ethical values. The ethics code demonstrates that the organization places some value on ethical behavior and can educate employees as to the “correct” ethical values (Adams, Tashchian, and Shore 2001; Benson 1989). When adequately communicated to employees, it potentially makes a contribution to a more ethical organization climate (Wotruba, Chonko, and Loe 2001). Several empirical studies suggest the possibility that ethics code awareness may influence employee perceptions’ of the organization’s ethical values. In one study, individuals who reported the existence of a formal ethics code evaluated their companies’ ethical position more highly than individuals in other companies (Adams, Tashchian, and Shore 2001). In another, employees rated ethics codes as one of the more important ways that they could learn about the ethical values of the organization (Stevens 1999).

Although employees must be aware of the existence of an ethics code if it is to affect their perceptions of organizational values, it may not be necessary for them to be intimately familiar with code details or for the code to prescribe specific attitudes or behaviors as “unethical.” Rather than recalling specific details of the code, employees should be aware that the code emphasizes the importance of ethics as a dominant value of the organization (Adams, Tashchian, and Shore 2001). Based on the above rationale, we offer the following hypothesis:

H1: Individuals who are aware of the existence of an ethics code in their organizations will perceive their organizations as having stronger ethical values than those who are not aware of the existence of an ethics code in their organizations.

Ethics Code Awareness and Organizational Commitment

Organizational commitment involves an employee's generalized favorable attitude toward his or her company (Mowday, Steers, and Porter 1979; Porter et al. 1974). Of particular interest here is affective commitment, which involves a person's broad adoption and support of a company's principles and objectives (Mowday, Steers, and Porter 1979). Committed individuals also possess "a willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization," and "a strong desire to maintain membership in the organization" (Mowday, Steers, and Porter 1982, p. 27).

Employees claim to prefer ethical organizations (Jose and Thibodeaux 1999; Trevino, Butterfield, and McCabe 1998), which suggests that their awareness of an ethics code may enhance their organizational commitment (Fritz, Arnett, and Conkel 1999; Vitell and Davis 1990). Employees may "feel more attached and committed to an organization if they perceive that the organization supports and encourages ethical conduct and discourages unethical conduct" (Trevino, Butterfield, and McCabe 1998, pp. 452–453). Although the relationship between ethics code awareness and organizational commitment has received little empirical attention, one study of accountants did find that organizational commitment was higher among employees in firms with ethics codes than in firms without codes (Somers 2001).

H2: Individuals who are aware of the existence of an ethics code in their organization will exhibit higher levels of affective organizational commitment than those who are not aware of the existence of an ethics code in their organization.

Mediating Effect of Perceived Values

Although we expect a statistically significant association between ethics code awareness and organizational commitment, we suggest that this relationship will be fully mediated by perceived corporate ethical values. That is, we do not expect that ethics code awareness will have an independent effect on organizational commitment, but, instead, that awareness will affect organizational commitment indirectly through its influence on the perceived ethical values of the organization.

For this to be true, perceived organizational values must not only be affected by ethics code awareness (H1) but must also have a direct association with organizational commitment. We believe that the value congruence literature provides a rationale for the perceived values → organizational commitment relationship. Value congruence suggests that employees who find that their organizations have values consistent with their own will exhibit more positive job attitudes and behaviors. Studies suggest that most employees prefer ethical environments where they do not feel pressured to do

things that are inconsistent with their own moral values. In such contexts, individuals are more likely to internalize the organization's ethical values and develop higher levels of organizational commitment. The research that has been done, though limited, supports this perspective (Fritz, Arnett, and Conkel 1999; Herndon, Fraedrich, and Yeh 2001; Hunt, Wood, and Chonko 1989; Trevino, Butterfield, and McCabe 1998, Valentine, Godkin, and Lucero 2002). Therefore, we expect perceptions of company ethical values to be significantly associated with levels of organizational commitment, and that these perceptions will fully mediate the ethics code awareness–organizational commitment relationship.

H3: Individuals' perceptions of their organizations' ethical values will fully mediate the relationship between ethics code awareness and organizational commitment.

METHOD

Data Collection

Data were collected as part of a larger study of ethical decision-making in business. Contact information for 3,000 randomly selected U.S. sales professionals was purchased from a commercial source. Each of these individuals was mailed a survey packet, which included a cover letter, a questionnaire, and a postage-paid return envelope. Four weeks after the initial mailing, a second wave of questionnaires was mailed to each member of the sample frame. There were 373 completed questionnaires returned, for an overall response rate of 12.7 percent. For the present study, a subset of 181 respondents who self-identified themselves as sales, marketing, or promotional managers was utilized. Although the percentage of surveys returned seems somewhat low, comparable research has yielded similar response rates (cf. Rallapalli, Vitell, and Barnes 1998; Webb, Green, and Brashear 2000). The potential for nonresponse bias was assessed by comparing respondents to the first wave of questionnaires with respondents to the second wave, using a procedure recommended by Armstrong and Overton (1977). The demographic characteristics of respondents, their organizations' characteristics, and the study variables were compared. Among the 20 separate comparisons made, only company tenure differed between the respondent groups, which suggests that nonresponse bias was not a problem in the study.

Measures

Affective Organizational Commitment

Commitment was assessed with the nine positively worded items of the organizational commitment questionnaire (OCQ) developed by Mowday, Steers, and Porter (1979). The OCQ

is the most widely used measure of affective organizational commitment. Statements were scored on a seven-point scale anchored by "1" (strongly disagree) and "7" (strongly agree), with higher scores indicating greater organizational commitment. Sample items include "I find that my values and the organization's values are very similar" and "I really care about the fate of this organization." The measure had a coefficient alpha of 0.91.

Corporate Ethical Values

Individuals rated corporate ethical values with a five-item scale developed by Hunt, Wood, and Chonko (1989). This scale has been utilized extensively in past research (e.g., Bhuian and Menguc 2002; Paolillo and Vitell 2002; Singhapakdi, Vitell, and Franke 1999; Valentine and Barnett 2002; Valentine, Godkin, and Lucero 2002). Sample items include "top management in my company has let it be known in no uncertain terms that unethical behavior will not be tolerated" and "in order to succeed in my company, it is often necessary to compromise one's ethics." After two items were reverse scored, the statements were rated on a seven-point scale anchored by "1" (strongly disagree) and "7" (strongly agree). Higher item scores indicated a company's values were perceived as more ethical. The scale had a coefficient alpha of 0.79.

Ethics Code

Respondents were asked whether or not they were aware of a written code of ethics in their companies. A "no" answer was coded as "0" and a "yes" answer was coded as "1."

Job Tenure

The length of time an employee has been with a company may affect their awareness of ethics codes, perceptions of corporate values, and organizational commitment. Respondents were asked to indicate the length of time (in years) that they had been employed by their current organization.

Social Desirability

The tendency of individuals to provide what they believe to be socially acceptable responses is a potential problem with many studies based on survey data (Randall and Fernandes 1991; Zerbe and Paulhus 1987; Weaver, Trevino, and Cochran 1999). To determine if the tendency toward providing socially desirable responses was correlated with any of the variables of interest in this study, a ten-item version of the Marlowe-Crowne social desirability scale was administered (Crowne and Marlowe 1960; Fischer and Fick 1993; Strahan and Gerbasi 1972). Each statement was answered either "true"

or "false." Responses were combined so that higher values indicated increased social desirability. The values of this social desirability measure ranged from one to ten.

ANALYSIS

Descriptive statistics were first examined to assess the characteristics of the sample members and their organizations. Correlation analysis was then employed to assess the bivariate relationships among the focal variables. Mediated regression analysis was used to test the study's hypotheses (see Baron and Kenny 1986). This approach requires (1) regressing the hypothesized mediator on the independent variable(s), (2) regressing the dependent variable on the independent variable(s), and (3) regressing the dependent variable on both the independent variable(s) and the hypothesized mediator. According to Baron and Kenny (1986), to establish mediation the independent variable(s) must significantly affect the mediator in the first equation and the dependent variable in the second, and the mediator must affect the dependent variable in the third equation. If all three conditions hold, the effect of the independent variable(s) on the dependent variable must be less in the third equation than in the second. If the significant effect completely disappears, then the relationship between the independent variable(s) and the dependent variable is fully mediated.

RESULTS

A summary of the respondents' characteristics is provided in Table 1. The mean age of the respondents was 44.9, and a majority of the respondents were white (96.7 percent), married (87.8 percent), and male (85.6 percent). Most of the participants reported having some college education, with 31.5 percent having attended college without graduating, 45.9 percent having graduated, 11.0 percent having some graduate/professional hours, and 2.2 percent possessing a graduate degree. With regard to employment characteristics, respondents' mean gross salary was \$72,550, with an average of \$11,609 of this salary coming from bonuses. Participants had an average of 19.7 years of selling experience, 13.1 years of management experience, 6.5 years of job tenure, and 9.1 years of company tenure. The respondents made an average of 6.8 sales calls per day. Finally, they had attended an average of 13.8 hours of sales training and 1.5 hours of ethics training in the past year.

A summary of the company characteristics is presented in Table 2. Almost 40 percent of the organizations were in the manufacturing/construction industries, and nearly 30 percent of the companies were in wholesale or retail distribution. Roughly 69 percent of employers represented had fewer than 100 employees, approximately 25 percent had 100 to

Table 1
Sales Employees' Characteristics

| Variable | Category | Mean | Standard Deviation | Frequency | Valid Percent |
|---|--------------------------------------|----------|--------------------|-----------|---------------|
| Age | | 44.9 | 9.5 | | |
| Gross Salary | | \$72,550 | \$33,978 | | |
| Total Bonuses | | \$11,609 | \$16,548 | | |
| Selling Experience (years) | | 19.7 | 9.7 | | |
| Management Experience (years) | | 13.1 | 9.7 | | |
| Job Tenure (years) | | 6.5 | 5.4 | | |
| Company Tenure (years) | | 9.09 | 6.21 | | |
| Sales Calls Made Per Day | | 6.8 | 16.2 | | |
| Accounts Serviced | | 147.6 | 492.7 | | |
| Selling Activity Per Week (hours) | | 31.4 | 18.0 | | |
| Sales Training Attended in Past Year (hours) | | 13.8 | 23.7 | | |
| Ethics Training Provided in Past Year (hours) | | 1.5 | 5.2 | | |
| Gender | Male | | | 155 | 85.6 |
| | Female | | | 26 | 14.4 |
| Marital Status | Single | | | 11 | 6.1 |
| | Married | | | 159 | 87.8 |
| | Separated, divorced | | | 11 | 6.1 |
| Education Level | Grade school | | | 1 | 0.6 |
| | High school graduate | | | 15 | 8.3 |
| | Some college | | | 57 | 31.5 |
| | College graduate | | | 83 | 45.9 |
| | Some graduate/professional education | | | 20 | 11.0 |
| | Graduate/professional degree | | | 4 | 2.2 |
| | Ph.D. | | | 1 | 0.6 |
| Race | Black | | | 3 | 1.7 |
| | Asian | | | 2 | 1.1 |
| | White | | | 174 | 96.7 |
| | Other | | | 1 | 0.6 |

999 employees, and the remaining 7 percent had 1,000 or more employees.

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Descriptive statistics, correlations, and coefficient alphas are presented in Table 3 as appropriate. In general, the observed correlations were in the predicted directions and were statistically significant.

Mediated Regression Analysis

The results of the mediated regression analysis are presented in Table 4. Equation 1 tested the hypothesis that perceptions of corporate ethical values would be more positive among those who were aware of their organizations' ethics codes than among those who were not aware of the existence of a written code. This expectation was confirmed by the results of the analysis ($\beta = 0.32, p < 0.001$). Among respondents aware of a written code in their organizations, the mean corporate ethi-

cal value score was 6.06 (s.d. = 1.07), whereas the score for those not aware of a written code was only 5.18 (s.d. = 1.36). Thus, H1 was confirmed. Equation 2 tested the hypothesis that levels of organizational commitment would be higher among those who were aware of their organizations' ethics codes than among those who were not aware of the existence of a written code. This expectation was confirmed by the results of our analysis, although the strength of the relationship was only moderate ($\beta = 0.22, p < 0.05$). Among those aware of a written code, the mean reported level of organizational commitment was 6.04 (s.d. = 0.99), whereas the score for those not aware of a code in their organizations was 5.53 (s.d. = 1.18). Thus, H2 received support.

Equation 3 tested the primary hypothesis of interest, that perceptions of corporate ethical values would fully mediate the relationship between ethics code awareness and organizational commitment. As noted earlier, for this hypothesis to be supported, the proposed mediating variable (corporate ethical values) must be significantly associated with the independent variable (ethics code awareness). This relationship was

Table 2
Company Characteristics

| Variable | Category | Frequency | Valid Percent |
|--|--------------------------------|-----------|---------------|
| Industry Classification | Wholesale/retail/distribution | 52 | 28.7 |
| | Manufacturing/construction | 68 | 37.6 |
| | Services | 19 | 10.5 |
| | Communications | 4 | 2.2 |
| | Advertising/marketing research | 4 | 2.2 |
| | Other | 34 | 18.8 |
| Number of Employees | Fewer than 100 | 124 | 68.5 |
| | 100 to 999 | 45 | 24.9 |
| | 1,000 to 9,999 | 7 | 3.9 |
| | 10,000 and more | 5 | 2.8 |
| Respondent Aware of a Company Code of Ethics | Yes | 56 | 37.1 |
| | No | 95 | 62.9 |

Table 3
Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

| Variable | Mean | S.D. | α | N | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|------------------------------|------|------|----------|-----|---------|---------|--------|-------|---|
| 1. Organizational Commitment | 5.74 | 1.11 | 0.91 | 179 | — | | | | |
| 2. Corporate Ethical Values | 5.48 | 1.35 | 0.79 | 179 | 0.63*** | — | | | |
| 3. Written Ethics Code | 1.37 | 0.48 | — | 151 | 0.21** | 0.32*** | — | | |
| 4. Job Tenure | 6.54 | 5.39 | — | 179 | 0.01 | -0.05 | -0.18* | — | |
| 5. Social Desirability | 5.74 | 1.82 | — | 178 | 0.10 | 0.17* | 0.11 | -0.03 | — |

Notes: *** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$.

Table 4
Results of Mediated Regression Analysis

| Equation | Dependent Variable | Independent Variable | β | Adjusted R ² | F Value |
|----------|---------------------------|--------------------------|---------|-------------------------|----------|
| (1) | Corporate Ethical Values | Written Ethics Code | 0.32*** | 0.09 | 8.60*** |
| | | Job Tenure | -0.02 | | |
| (2) | Organizational Commitment | Written Ethics Code | 0.22* | 0.03 | 3.47* |
| | | Job Tenure | 0.02 | | |
| (3) | Organizational Commitment | Written Ethics Code | 0.02 | 0.38 | 31.60*** |
| | | Corporate Ethical Values | 0.62*** | | |
| | | Job Tenure | 0.04 | | |

Notes: *** $p < 0.001$; * $p < 0.05$; sample sizes for regression equations ranged from $N = 150$ to $N = 151$ because of missing data.

observed in equation 1. Second, the dependent variable (organizational commitment) must be significantly associated with the independent variable (ethics code awareness). This relationship was observed in equation 2. The remaining conditions are that the hypothesized mediator (corporate ethical values) be significantly associated with the dependent variable (organizational commitment), and that the significant relationship between the independent variable (ethics code

awareness) and the dependent variable (organizational commitment) disappear when the dependent variable is regressed on both it and the hypothesized mediator. Thus, in equation 3, organizational commitment was regressed on ethics code awareness and corporate ethical values, as well as the control variable, job tenure. As indicated in Table 4, perceptions of organizations' ethical values were strongly associated with levels of organizational commitment ($\beta = 0.62$, $p < 0.001$); how-

ever, the relationship between ethics code awareness and organizational commitment was nonsignificant. Therefore, all the conditions for mediation were observed and H3 received strong support. That is, perceptions of corporate ethical values fully mediated the relationship between ethics code awareness and organizational commitment.

In summary, our findings provide relatively strong support for all three hypotheses, and, most particularly, for the hypothesized mediating effect of corporate ethical values. The implications of these findings are discussed in the next section. The limitations of the study are also highlighted, along with recommendations for future research.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationships among awareness of ethics codes, perceptions of an organization's ethical values, and the level of organizational commitment. We found that ethics code awareness was associated with perceptions of more ethical organizational values and greater levels of organizational commitment, but that the ethics code awareness → organizational commitment relationship was fully mediated by the perception of ethical values. The results of this study have several implications for management practice and future research.

First, the results suggest that individuals who are aware of an ethics code in their organizations perceive their organizations as having more ethical values. This suggests that organizations interested in creating an ethical climate should develop, implement, and, perhaps most importantly, fully communicate their ethics codes to employees. The existence alone of an ethics code does not ensure that it will affect employees' perceptions of their organizations' values—personnel must be aware of the code's existence before it can impact these perceptions (Adams, Tashchian, and Shore 2001; Wotruba, Chonko, and Loe 2001). A company must therefore make "its ethical standards visible in everyday organizational life through managerial example, organizational enforcement, and communication with peers" (Fritz, Arnett, and Conkel 1999, p. 295). Ethics training and awareness programs provide a potentially useful way to communicate with organizational members about the company ethics code and its content. Such programs should make employees more aware of ethical values (Loe and Weeks 2000; Minkes, Small, and Chatterjee 1999; Sims 1991; Stevens 1999; Wotruba, Chonko, and Loe 2001). Offices that handle ethical concerns, programs that solicit feedback about company ethics, and firm literature outlining ethical challenges might also be utilized (Jose and Thibodeaux 1999). Ethics training should include an overview of ethical concerns relevant to salespeople by utilizing dilemmas that prompt ethical decision-making and discussion among participants (Knouse and Giacalone 1997; Loe and Weeks 2000).

Leaders should also communicate the company's ethical philosophies and codes as often as possible and encourage employees to read the organization's codes of ethics (Fritz, Arnett, and Conkel 1999; Wotruba, Chonko, and Loe 2001).

Second, the results suggest that ethics code awareness is likely to influence the level of organizational commitment, although this effect is fully mediated by perceptions of corporate ethical values. Thus, employees who are aware of an ethics code appear to perceive their organizations as more ethical. Perhaps because of this perception, they perceive a greater degree of "fit" between the organization's values and their own (see Valentine, Godkin, and Lucero 2002). This conceivably leads to a greater degree of identification with the company's objectives and principles and, correspondingly, a greater degree of organizational commitment. Since employees who are highly committed to their organizations are probably less likely to turn over and more likely to engage in positive behaviors (Mathieu and Zajac 1990; Organ and Ryan 1995; Shore and Wayne 1993; Tett and Meyer 1993), from the organization's perspective, high levels of organizational commitment are highly desirable.

Despite the study's findings, several limitations should be discussed. Even though our nonresponse bias tests did not reveal a significant problem, the study did have a relatively low response rate. Same-source bias was also a potential problem because questionnaires were used to collect all information for this study. Only a subjective assessment of ethical context was used in the study, which could have also affected the results.

Future research should examine whether other job responses, such as continuance commitment, job involvement, and prosocial behavior, are related to ethics code awareness and perceptions of ethical values. Additional attention should be given to the identification of ethical principles that best enhance individuals' attitudes at work. The positive relationships between awareness of ethics codes and job attitudes might also be moderated by a variety of personal and company characteristics (see Trevino 1986), and future research should investigate these possibilities. By examining the role of ethical practices in the management of the sales force, companies will be better able to standardize principles that increase salespersons' work experiences. Such inquiry can enable leaders to find the best ways to influence the organization's ethical values in a way that will positively affect salespersons' job attitudes while maintaining a highly ethical organizational climate (Vitell and Davis 1990).

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