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# Research on Ethics and Integrity in Governance

## A Review and Assessment

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### Abstract

This article reviews and assesses the research on ethics and integrity in governance published in American journals in 1999–2004 and also focuses on research on this subject in other nations and cultures. It follows upon an earlier article in this journal in which the author reviewed the research published before 1999. As the study demonstrates, research on ethics and integrity in governance has grown from a cottage industry into a robust and flourishing enterprise in the United States and abroad.

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Research on ethics and integrity in governance has expanded at an astonishing rate in recent years. Menzel and Carson (1999) reviewed research on this subject published in American outlets from 1970 to 1998. He concluded that considerable progress had been made toward building a body of knowledge in this field but stated that the task was and is far from finished. It would be presumptuous to suggest that a mere six years later everything has been done that needs to be done. Nonetheless, what a difference six short years makes. More scholars have been more engaged in this enterprise than at any other period in recent memory. While much of this research has been published in American journals and deals with the American experience, an increasing number of scholars are focusing on experiences in other cultures and countries. Thus a second purpose of this paper is to draw attention to research conducted on this subject in other countries (e.g., China, Great Britain, Korea, Kuwait, the Netherlands, and Russia).

Four study questions guided the 1999 review.

1. What is the primary focus of empirical research on ethics in public administration and governance? What research questions are being asked?
2. How well does empirical research inform ethics theory? How well does ethics theory inform empirical research?

3. Are the research findings cumulative? Has progress been made toward building a body of knowledge?
4. Are there new avenues of research? Are there neglected areas of study?

The answers to these questions resulted in five inter-related themes: (1) ethical decision-making and moral development, (2) ethics laws and regulatory agencies, (3) organizational performance, (4) ethics management, and (5) the ethical environment. Each theme serves as a marker in this article for reviewing research published over the past six years. The five themes are not mutually exclusive, nor do they align directly with each question. They are best viewed as products of the several questions. (See Table 1 for a selected list of articles published in each category.)

The methodology is straightforward. The author focused primarily on research articles published from 1999 to 2004 in ten U.S. print journals: *Public Administration Review*, *Public Administration Quarterly*, *American Review of Public Administration*, *Administration and Society*, *Public Productivity and Management Review* (now renamed *Public Performance and Management Review*), *International Journal of Public Administration*, *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, *Public Integrity*, *Journal of Public Affairs Education*, and *State and Local Government Review*. Several articles published in related journals are also included, although no systematic effort was made to search other journals. Articles published as conceptual essays or commentaries are not included, nor are books and government publications.

## Ethical Decision-Making and Moral Development

Ethical decision-making and moral development are central to the deontological and teleological approaches to ethics, regardless of whether one is examining Kantian ethics or utilitarianism (as espoused by Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill) or Aristotle's treatises on virtue ethics. Ethical decision-making and moral development are also central to Kohlberg's (1980) well-known theorizing and Thompson's (1985) exploration of the possibility of administrative ethics. A growing number of investigators have been drawn to these theories in an effort to test relevant hypotheses (Jurkiewicz and Brown 2000; Swisher, Rizzo, and Marley 2001; Stewart, Sprinthall, and Kem 2002; White 1999; Wittmer 2000).

Stewart and Sprinthall's research (1993), which employed Kohlberg's framework, was launched in the 1990s with the development of the Stewart-Sprinthall Management Survey. Their initial empirical focus was on American students and local government managers. By the end of the decade their research had branched out to Polish and Russian local government officials. Their Polish subjects were 485 local government officials in two provinces. Their primary question was: "What system of moral reasoning is characteristic for newly appointed and elected officials in post-Communist Poland?" (Stewart, Siemienska, and Sprinthall 1997). They expected to find a strong preference for principled reasoning when making ethical decisions in the work setting. They discovered that their Polish respondents were remarkably similar to their American subjects in their ethical reasoning. One striking difference, however, appeared when gender was taken into account. Polish women were

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The author thanks several anonymous reviewers for very helpful suggestions and criticism. All errors of omission and commission are the author's.

**TABLE 1**  
**Topics and Selected Research Articles, 1999–2004**

**Ethical decision-making and moral development**

- Frederickson, H. G., and Meredith A. Newman. 2001. "The Patriotism of Exit and Voice: The Case of Gloria Flora." *Public Integrity* 3, no. 4:347–362.
- Jurkiewicz, Carole L., and Roger G. Brown. 2000. "Power Does Not Corrupt Absolutely: An Empirical Study." *Public Integrity* 2, no. 3:195–210.
- Lovell, Alan. 2003. "The Enduring Phenomenon of Moral Muteness: Suppressed Whistleblowing." *Public Integrity* 5, no. 3:187–204.
- Rizzo, Ann-Marie, and Laura Lee Swisher. 2004. "Comparing the Stewart-Sprinthall Management Survey and the Defining Issues Test-2 as Measures of Moral Reasoning in Public Administration." *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 14:335–348.
- Stewart, Debra W., Renata Sieminska, and Norman Sprinthall. 1999. "Women and Men in the Project of Reform: A Study of Gender Differences Among Local Officials in Two Provinces in Poland." *American Review of Public Administration* 29, no. 3:225–239.
- Stewart, Debra W., Norman A. Sprinthall, and Jackie D. Kem. 2002. "Moral Reasoning in the Context of Reform: A Study of Russian Officials." *Public Administration Review* 62, no. 3:282–297.
- White, Richard. 1999. "Are Women More Ethical? Recent Findings on the Effects of Gender Upon Moral Development." *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 9, no. 3:459–471.
- Wittmer, Dennis. 2000. "Individual Moral Development: An Empirical Exploration of Public- and Private-Sector Differences." *Public Integrity* 2, no. 3:181–194.

**Ethics laws and regulatory agencies**

- Brown, Alysia J. 2000. "Public Employee Political Participation." *Public Integrity* 2, no. 2:105–120.
- Fain, Herbert. 2000. "The Case for a Zero Gift Policy." *Public Integrity* 4, no. 1:61–69.
- Feigenbaum, Edward D. 2002. "Beating Around the Roubush: Abandoning Precedent in the Bush Presidential Recount." *Public Integrity* 4, no. 3:39–250.
- Gray, W. Robert. 2002. "The Four Faces of Affirmative Action: Analysis and Answers." *Public Integrity* 4, no. 1: 43–59.
- Roberds, Stephen C. 2003–4. "Do Congressional Ethics Committees Matter? U.S. Senate Ethics Cases, 1789–2000." *Public Integrity* 6, no. 1:25–38.
- Roberts, Robert. 1999. "The Supreme Court and the Law of Public Service Ethics." *Public Integrity* 1, no. 1:20–40.
- Rohr, John. 2002. "The Ethical Aftermath of Privatization and Contracting Out: A Constitutional Analysis." *Public Integrity* 4, no. 1:1–12.
- Rosenson, Beth A. 2003. "Legislative Voting on Ethics Reform in Two States: The Influence of Economic Self-Interest, Ideology, and Institutional Power." *Public Integrity* 5, no. 3:205–222.
- Smith, Robert W. 2003a. "Enforcement or Ethical Capacity: Considering the Role of State Ethics Commissions at the Millennium." *Public Administration Review* 63, no. 3:283–295.
- Van Noy, Carolyn M. 2000. "The City of Seattle and Campaign Finance Reform." *Public Integrity* 2, no. 4:303–316.

**Organizational performance**

- Bohte, John, and Kenneth J. Meier. 2000. "Goal Displacement: Assessing the Motivation for Organizational Cheating." *Public Administration Review* 60, no. 2:173–182.
- Haines, David W. 2003–4. "Fatal Choices: The Routinization of Deceit, Incompetence, and Corruption." *Public Integrity* 6, no. 1:5–23.

(continued)

- Jurkiewicz, Carole L., and Roger G. Brown. 2000. "Power Does Not Corrupt Absolutely: An Empirical Study." *Public Integrity* 2, no. 3:195–210.
- Zajac, Gary, and Ali A. Al-Kazemi. 2000. "Administrative Ethics and Organizational Learning in Kuwait and the United States: An Empirical Approach." *International Journal of Public Administration* 23:21–52.

### **Ethics management**

- Cooper, Terry L., and Diane E. Yoder. 2002. "Public Management Ethics Standards in a Transnational World." *Public Integrity* 4, no. 4:333–352.
- Gilman, Stuart C. 2000. "An Idea Whose Time Has Come." *Public Integrity* 2, no. 2:135–155.
- Glor, Eleanor D., and Ian Greene. 2002–3. "The Government of Canada's Approach to Ethics: The Evolution of Ethical Government." *Public Integrity* 5, no. 1:39–65.
- Hall, Thad E., and Anthony Sutton. 2003. "Agency Discretion and Public Ethics: The Case of the Immigration and Naturalization Service." *Public Integrity* 5, no. 4:291–303.
- Holland, Ian, and Jenny Fleming. 2002–3. "Reforming Ministerial Ethics: Institutional Continuity and Change." *Public Integrity* 5, no. 1:67–82.
- Huberts, Leo W. J. C. 2000. "Anticorruption Strategies: The Hong Kong Model in International Context." *Public Integrity* 2, no. 3:211–228.
- Joaquin, Ernita T. 2004. "Decentralization and Corruption: The Bumpy Road to Public Sector Integrity in Developing Countries." *Public Integrity* 6, no. 3:207–219.
- Roberts, Alasdair. 2004. "A Partial Revolution: The Diplomatic Ethos and Transparency in Intergovernmental Organizations." *Public Administration Review* 64, no. 4:410–424.
- Smith, Robert W. 2003b. "Corporate Ethics Officers and Government Ethics Administrators." *Administration & Society* 34, no. 1:632–652.
- Van Blijswijk, Jacques A. M., Richard C. J. van Breukelen, Aimee L. Franklin, Jos C. N. Raadschelders, and Pier Slump. 2004. "Beyond Ethical Codes: The Management of Integrity in the Netherlands Tax and Customs Administration." *Public Administration Review* 64 (November/December):718–727.
- West, Jonathan P., and Evan M. Berman. 2004. "Ethics Training in U.S. Cities: Content, Pedagogy, and Impact." *Public Integrity* 6, no. 3:189–206.

### **The ethical environment**

- De Vries, Michiel S. 2002. "Can You Afford Honesty? A Comparative Analysis of Ethos and Ethics in Local Government." *Administration & Society* 34, no. 3:309–334.
- Eimicke, William B., Steven Cohen, and Mauricio Perez Salazar. 2000. "Ethical Public Entrepreneurship." *Public Integrity* 2 (3):229–245.
- Feldheim, Mary Ann, and Xiaohu Wang. 2003–4. "Ethics and Public Trust: Results from a National Survey." *Public Integrity* 6, no. 1:63–75.
- Ghere, Richard K., 1999. "Public Integrity, Privatization, and Partnership: Where Do Ethics Fit?" *Public Integrity* 1, no. 2:135–148.
- Marlowe, Justin. 2004. "Part of the Solution or Cogs in the System? The Origins and Consequences of Trust in Public Administrators." *Public Integrity* 6, no. 2:93–113.
- Montjoy, Robert S., and Christa Daryl Slaton. 2002. "Interdependence and Ethics in Election Systems: The Case of the Butterfly Ballot." *Public Integrity* 4, no. 3:195–210.
- Thomas, Rosamund Margaret. 2001. "Public Trust, Integrity, and Privatization." *Public Integrity* 3, no. 3:243–261.

*Note:* The articles selected here are arranged alphabetically and are illustrative of the topics. The topics are not meant to be exclusive, as some research publications deal with several topics.

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much more likely than their male counterparts to favor “a model of ethical reasoning characterized by concern for abstract principles of social cooperation than did their male counterparts” (Stewart, Siemienska, and Sprinthall 1999, 237). Their study of Russian public administrators (Stewart, Sprinthall, and Kem 2002) consisted of a survey administered to 113 public officials enrolled at the Russian Academy of Public Service. Using instruments similar to those they employed in the United States and Poland, the researchers were able to compare and contrast ethical reasoning by and among Russian, Polish, and American respondents. Their results found that gender was (once again) a significant variable in ethical reasoning; Russian female respondents exhibited a greater propensity to engage in principled reasoning than their male counterparts. Differences among Russian, Polish, and American respondents were not significant, although the Russian sample expressed the strongest preference for principled reasoning. However, Russian respondents scored low on “law and order” reasoning. The investigators had some difficulty explaining this. As they put it, “from the perspectives of theory, research, and practice, this study of Russian administrators challenged us on all fronts” (Stewart, Sprinthall, and Kem 2002, 294).

Wittmer (2000) also employed Kohlberg’s theory and the Defining Issues Test (DIT) developed by Rest (1986) to explore ethical decision-making. He focused on such questions as “Does ethical sensitivity result in more ethical decisions?” “What makes a person more ethically sensitive?” and “Are there significant differences in ethical decision-making of those employed in public versus private sectors?” Wittmer employed an experimental research design involving 156 students drawn from programs in public administration, business management, and engineering at two universities to test hypotheses. The students were presented with an ethical case and asked to decide what they should do. Wittmer found that greater sensitivity fosters or promotes more ethical decision-making, and more personalized information enhances an individual’s ethical sensitivity to the moral dimensions of a situation. He also found, to his surprise, that business administration and engineering students scored higher than public administration students on the general measure of principled reasoning. Public administration students scored higher than the others on Kohlberg’s stage-three level: conventional ethical reasoning that emphasizes loyalty, trust, respect, and commitment to group. He observes that this finding may be disturbing to those who view public administrators as having a responsibility to protect individual citizen rights and uphold the fundamental values of American political culture. However, he concludes that “public managers are well served by recognizing that most adults tend to follow conventional moral reasoning” (Wittmer 2000, 191). Thus he implies that public administrators may be more sensitive to, if not in touch with, ordinary Americans.

Another study based on Kohlberg’s theory of moral development was conducted by Jurkiewicz and Brown (2000). They examined the link between leadership, defined as the effective exercise of power in an organization, and ethics. They hypothesized that there is a positive relationship between one’s level of ethical reasoning and effective leadership. Forty-two chief executive officers of nonprofit organizations in a large metropolitan community formed their database. Using a sophisticated screening process involving academic and practitioner judges who identified a sample of executives as highly effective, they surveyed two equal-in-size samples of those judged highly effective and those judged non-effective. Rest’s Defining Issues

Test was the measurement instrument. Their findings support the primary hypothesis that effective executives are more likely than non-effective executives to evaluate moral decisions on the basis of calculated rights, values, or principles (Jurkiewicz and Brown 2000, 205).

White (1999) also drew on the Kohlberg framework to study the effect of gender upon moral development. His research compared 299 male and female members of the U.S. Coast Guard. His study found that women scored higher on the Defining Issues Test. That is, they exhibited a higher level of ethical reasoning than their male counterparts. White offers several explanations for this finding. First, “Coast Guard women may be a valid reflection of women in general and may confirm the argument that women score higher on the DIT” (*ibid.*, 467). Second, Coast Guard women may be an “isolated segment of the population who join the “Coast Guard for more altruistic reasons than do their male counterparts and this might indicate a higher level of moral development in the women” (*ibid.*, 477).

The extensive use of two survey tools for assessing moral reasoning—the Stewart-Sprinthall Management Survey and the Defining Issues Test—prompted two researchers to test the validity of the tools. Rizzo and Swisher asked members of the American Society for Public Administration Ethics Section to complete both tools so that side-by-side comparisons could be made. Section members were selected because the investigators believed that members would “give reasoned responses to questions regarding ethical dilemmas” (Rizzo and Swisher 2004, 338). Their findings led them to conclude that “both instruments are valid measures of moral judgment” (*ibid.* 342). However, the authors believe that the instruments may measure different dimensions of moral reasoning by public administrators.

The reader may be inclined to think that research on ethical decision-making and moral development is driven by Kohlbergian theory and Rest’s Defining Issues Test. Not so. Other investigators have employed survey research and case studies to gain insight into the ethical reasoning and moral development of officeholders. For example, Frederickson and Newman (2001) explored the decision by a high-ranking manager in the U.S. Forest Service to resign her position. She “exited with voice” and, according to the investigators, is a moral exemplar. Their theoretical framework was based on Hart’s (1992) notion of a moral episode. The episode had to do with Gloria Flora’s judgment that, as the supervisor of a national forest in Nevada, she could no longer carry out her stewardship duties in the face of powerful economic and political pressures to exploit federal lands protected from mining, timber production, and livestock grazing. Gloria Flora’s more than twenty years of service with the U.S. Forest Service was terminated when she was less than three years from vestment in the civil service retirement system. She paid a high price, emotionally and financially, for her moral courage. Frederickson and Newman ask why she would do this. The answer—because she could not compromise her strong belief to do the “right” thing. “She was motivated to act as she did out of a sense of responsibility” (2001, 360).

Research regarding ethical decision-making also encompasses an array of whistleblowing studies or, in some instances, near-whistleblowing studies. This rich literature (see Brewer and Coleman 1998; Folks 2000; Glazer and Glazer 1989; Perry 1993; Jos, Tomkins, and Hays 1989; Miceli and Near 1992) is cast in a different light by Lovell. He investigated the behavior of what might be called “near-whistleblowers” among certified accountants and human resource professionals in seven accounting firms in the United Kingdom. Using an interview methodology, he



sought answers to three questions: What types of issues produce “ethical twinges” (i.e., some level of ethical discomfort)? Why were these issues ethically problematic? How were they handled or coped with? Nine case examples of suppressed whistleblowing were reported. The cases paint a picture of organizational life in which “the fear of impairing one’s future career prospects was a significant factor shaping the muteness of many of the managers about their respective ethical dilemmas” (2003, 201). Lovell’s research points to the often compelling and suppressing influence that organizational imperatives can have on an employee’s moral agency. Suppressed whistleblowing, alias moral muteness, Lovell contends, is an enduring and troubling phenomenon in modern organizations.

The studies highlighted here, as well as others, break intriguing intellectual ground (Bowman, Berman, and West 2001; Folks 2000; Jurkiewicz 2002; Jurkiewicz and Nichols 2002; Jurkiewicz and Thompson 1999; Lovell 2003; Pfiffner 2003; Swisher, Rizzo, and Marley 2001; Williams and Guy 2000). Collectively, they provide motivation and guidance for probing more deeply and more systematically into the dynamics of ethical decision-making and the moral development of public managers. They also strongly suggest that there is a viable link between ethics theory and empirical testing. Theory is driving research in this subfield.

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## **Ethics Laws and Regulatory Agencies**

Nearly every American state has an ethics statute or law, and many have ethics offices, boards, or commissions that investigate alleged cases of unethical behavior. Many cities, including the mega-cities of Los Angeles and Chicago, have established ethics commissions to investigate real and alleged wrongdoing. The federal government established the Office of Government Ethics (OGE) with the passage of the Ethics in Government Act of 1978. Now, some twenty-five years later, nearly 15,000 full- and part-time ethics officials can be found in the federal executive branch, not counting inspector-general offices (Gilman and Lewis 1996, 521).

A number of scholars have launched studies of ethics regulatory bodies, especially at the state level. For example, Smith (2003b) studied the Florida, Connecticut, and New York ethics commissions. His comparative case study was based on anonymous interviews with sixty ethics officials and an examination of the laws, rules, and regulations employed in these states. The central paradigm that emerged from his study was enforcement (Smith 2003b, 286). By this he means that “complaint making, investigations, and adjudicative proceedings all were geared toward, and products of, this enforcement function” (ibid., 287). His study compares and contrasts the practices of the state agencies; it does not allow the reader to reach conclusions regarding “best practices” or which state ethics commission is more or less effective than another, nor why this might be the case.

Other research has attempted to explain why states adopt ethics reform legislation. Rosenson (2003) examined roll-call voting in New York and Massachusetts to

determine why legislators were more or less likely to embrace reforms involving conflicts of interest, mandatory financial disclosure, and the establishment of independent ethics commissions. Her statistical analysis identified three main factors that influenced roll-call voting on ethics reform: ideology, economic self-interest, and institutional power. Lawmakers who were more liberal, as well as those, whether liberal or conservative, whose economic self-interest was not threatened, were more likely to support reform, as were members of the majority in New York, but not in

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Massachusetts (2003, 213). The apparent inconsistency of the majority-party status variable, she explains, is a function of context. That is, "Democrats had controlled the Massachusetts House of Representatives for many years, and therefore had much to lose from ethics reforms that took aim at their perquisites and power" (2003, 213). By contrast,

New York legislators had been the out party for more than thirty years, and they still voted as the out party when they became the in party in 1965, thus favoring ethics reform.

Studies of legislative bodies, while not extensive in the ethics literature, are appearing with greater frequency. One new study (Roberds 2003–4) addressed the question: "Do congressional ethics committees matter?" This work examined U.S. Senate ethics investigations from 1789 to 2000. Roberds attempted to find out what happens to senators who are subjected to ethics investigations. Does an investigation adversely affect a senator's career? Re-election? A total of forty-seven investigations were assessed and led to the conclusion that "allegations of ethical misconduct have their greatest effect on decisions to retire rather than risk electoral defeat" (ibid., 25).

Ethics agencies and practices at the local level of government have also been scrutinized. Van Noy (2000), for example, reports on Seattle's experience, noting that the city has been a leader in developing and implementing legislation that reduces the influence of "money on elections and the conduct of government" (2000, 303). She finds that public financing has proven the only successful tool for limiting the influence of money on elections and government conduct. The practices of another city, Houston, are detailed by Fain (2002). He reviews the zero-gift policy adopted by Houston and contends that it has deterred unethical behavior by city employees. This policy also enables two investigation and enforcement agencies—the Houston Office of Inspector General and the Harris County district attorney—to be effective. Fain notes that Houston has suffered no further embarrassment due to questionable acceptance of gifts since this policy was put into effect (2002, 67).

Other investigators have focused on the legal or constitutional aspects of ethics issues (Brindle 2000; Brown 2000; Feigenbaum 2002; Gray 2002; Mackey 2003; Roberts 1999; Rohr 2002). Rohr offers a constitutional analysis of the ethical aftermath of privatization and contracting out. He explores the arguments developed by the justices of the U.S. Supreme Court and concludes that the "link between ethics and constitutional law is forged by the oath many public servants take to uphold the Constitution of the United States" (2002, 1). Gray (2002) reviewed the legal history and justifications for affirmative action with attention to state and federal judiciary decision-making. Brown (2000) reviewed the federal Hatch Act and the Little Hatch



Acts adopted by many states to regulate the political behavior of civil service employees. She found no pattern across the states' Little Hatch Acts to suggest why some state laws contain more/less strict provisions. Since the federal act changed in 1993, however, to permit expanded political participation by federal civil service employees, she notes that "there has been a definite trend toward loosening Little Hatch Acts" (2000, 118). One other legally oriented study is noteworthy. Roberts (1999) examined the role of the U.S. Supreme Court in "defining the nature of the law of public service ethics by using an individual responsibility model of official accountability" (1999, 20). His study covered such issues as the immunity doctrine and its evolution, codes of ethics and the appearance of impropriety, administrative investigations of official misconduct, and mail fraud.

These studies add significant insight into ethics laws and the practices of regulatory agencies. However, they are neither driven by, nor add to, ethics theory building. While empirically oriented, they are cast in a legal-institutional context.

## Organizational Performance

Efficiency, economy, and effectiveness have been the hallmark values of modern public administration ever since Woodrow Wilson declared that "the field of administration is a field of business" ([1887] 1941, 20). Public officeholders, so presumed Wilson and his intellectual successors, were expected to be men and women of high moral character. Thus there was little reason to be concerned about the need to add a fourth "e"—ethics—to this holy trilogy. But times change, and ethics has become academic talk and shop talk.

One might well think that this trend is the result of an increase in incidents of wrongdoing. Upon closer examination, however, a more compelling explanation is plausible—the growing recognition that productive, high-performing units can add value to their organization by adhering to practices and behaviors that promote ethics and integrity. Both practicing public managers and public affairs scholars are devoting greater energy to understanding and building ethical workplaces (see Bohte and

Meier 2000; Jurkiewicz and Brown 2000; Zajac and Al-Kazemi 2000). They are also gaining a greater appreciation of the role that professional associations and ethics codes play in fostering organizational integrity.

Still, scandals and well-publicized ethical failings in public agencies are newsworthy and can bring about organizational change. Sadly, there is evidence that even what might be regarded as minor incidents of wrongdoing can breed an organizational climate of deceit, incompetence, and corruption. Taking a case-study approach based on fifteen years of experience in federal and state agencies, Haines (2003–4) describes how deceit, incompetence, and corruption became so routinized through minor human failings that the organizations he worked for were the antithesis of the rational, productive, efficient agencies they were designed to be.

Haines's study is bolstered by research conducted by Bohte and Meier (2000) on

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cheating in Texas public schools. Their study found that important organizational goals were displaced, thus impairing the effective performance of Texas schools (i.e., the production of educated members of society). The study identified the motivations for organizational cheating. It found that cheating occurs because of inadequate performance measurement, resource scarcity, overwhelming workload demands, and a lack of accountability (2000, 177–178). Bohte and Meier's research points to ethics failure in organizations, a subject investigated by Zajac and Comfort (1997) and Zajac and Al-Kazemi (2000).

Zajac and Al-Kazemi further investigated ethics failure and organizational learning in a study of public agencies in a non-American setting, Kuwait. Adopting the methodology employed to analyze county health departments, the researchers surveyed and interviewed 254 employees in six

Kuwaiti agencies in 1996. Three questions guided their study: (1) How do public agencies in Kuwait respond to ethics failures? (2) How much effort is committed to organizational learning when failure occurs? (3) Where organizational learning is found, what are its specific features? (2000, 22–23). Among their findings, there were low to moderate levels of organizational effort directed toward learning from ethics failures in both the American counties and the Kuwaiti agencies, effort toward preventive eth-

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ics learning (ethics audits) was high in all the sampled agencies in both countries, and none of the agencies in either country engaged in formal ethics scanning, that is, routinely seeking information about ethics problems (2000, 39). Zajac and Al-Kazemi contend that “the significance of this research is found primarily in the high cost of ethics failure, both for public agencies and the public” (2000, 23). These costs include misappropriation of public resources (corruption), additional expenditure of agency and law enforcement resources to remedy failures, and the time and attention which the agency devotes to its response to the failure that might otherwise be spent in the pursuit of its mission (ibid.).

In summary, there is a substantial and growing interest in probing the relationship between ethics and organizational performance. On the one hand, the literature reviewed here suggests that this subject has been thoroughly examined. On the other hand, this is not so evident, because many studies rely on perceptions and attitudes and therefore take only a partial step toward closing the gap in explicating the relationship between ethical behavior and organizational performance. The studies reported here are promising, but much more needs to be done. The employment of relevant organizational theories to tease out important testable hypotheses is especially important.

## **Ethics Management**

Can agency leaders and public officials manage ethics in the workplace in the same way that budgets, policies, or people are managed? Does ethics management imply controlling the hearts and minds, not to mention behaviors, of employees? Perhaps.

But even the single act of developing and adopting a code of ethics or a statement of principles is “managing ethics in the workplace.” Ethics management is not a new enterprise. What is new is how we think about it. If viewed as a systematic and conscious effort to foster organizational integrity, as Article IV of the American Society for Public Administration’s Code of Ethics declares, then there is such a thing as ethics management. If viewed only as “control,” then it may be disingenuous to contend that there can be effective ethics management.

A number of investigators have focused on this subject over the past six years (see Cooper and Yoder 2002; Gilman 2000; Grundstein-Amado 2001; Glor and Greene 2002–3; Holland and Fleming 2002–3; Huberts 2000; Kim 2000; Quah 1999; Smith 2003a; West and Berman 2003, 2004). Among the more resourceful studies are several conducted by West and Berman. The

research they published in 2003 reports the results of survey of city managers in all 338 U.S. cities with populations over 65,000. This study focused on the use and effectiveness of municipal audit committees, including an analysis of how audit committees promote accountability and help resolve ethical issues related to financial management. They report that there is a positive relationship between audit committee activities and the presence of ethics training in a municipality, and audit committees actively seek to detect ethical wrongdoing (2003, 356).

This study was followed by another (West and Berman 2004) that describes and assesses the state of ethics training in U.S. cities. Three questions were investigated: (1) What are the stated purposes of ethics training? (2) What topics are covered, and what are the pedagogical and delivery approaches? (3) What are the correlates of ethics training? Related, why do some jurisdictions engage in more/less training than other jurisdictions? And, are those cities that invest more heavily in ethics training more likely to enjoy higher levels of organizational productivity? The first question probes the fit between ethics training and important organizational practices, such as hiring and promotion. The second question deals directly with the “how to” of training employees. The third explores the factors associated with the use and impact of training, such as the ethical leadership of top management, municipal resources and capabilities, and how ethics training influences productivity and the culture of the workplace.

The findings are too involved to be summarized here. However, the main conclusions can be noted. West and Berman conclude that the depth and breadth of training is modest at best. While 64 percent of the cities offer some form of ethics training, only 36 percent call it “ethics training” (2004, 202). The methods of instruction vary widely but most are in the form of live instruction; that is, “reality-based and practical, involving hypothetical scenarios, case materials, or role-plays or short exercises—methods consistent with most descriptions of best training practices” (2004, 197). The correlates of ethics training—why some cities engage in more training than others—are adequate resources and propensity for innovation. Somewhat surprisingly, employee grievances and litigation proceedings are not associated with the adoption of ethics training. Regarding the impact of training, West and Berman assert that “ethics training was significantly associated with improvements

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in the organizational culture” (2004, 199) and positive labor-management relations.

Still another investigator who has examined ethics management approaches and strategies is Smith (2003a). His most recent study focuses on ethics administrators in government agencies and corporate ethics officers in the private sector. Who and what are ethics administrators and officers? Why are they needed? Are they effective? What difference do they make? His research answers the who, what, and why questions, but, as he acknowledges, does not answer the two latter and perhaps most significant questions. He asserts that his inquiry raises more questions than it answers. Still, Smith’s study offers helpful insight into initiatives that contribute to organizational integrity.

Case study research (Hall and Sutton 2004; Kurtz 2003) also helps illustrate how the failure of a federal agency to implement statutes equitably can result in ethics failure. The research by Hall and Sutton focused on the Immigration and Naturalization Service and the exercise of agency discretion. Key research questions were:

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***Are other nation-states embracing ethics management strategies? Yes, to some extent, but perhaps from a different perspective—with most focusing on how to curb corruption.***

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“What is the ethical duty of an administrator who is asked to implement a law that cannot be implemented . . . as passed by the legislature? Can administrators use their own discretion and implement the law however they see fit, or do they have a moral duty to attempt to implement the policy as desired by the legislature? What are the implications for

the agency and the administrator when no effort is made to implement a law or to carry out responsibilities delegated to the agency?” (2003, 291). Their research focused on two actions of INS managers in implementing the 1996 Immigration Act (Public Law 104–208), only one of which is described here. This action had to do with a series of amendments regarding the deportation of non-citizens convicted of a serious crime, the right of aliens to appeal their case to a federal court after the Board of Immigration Appeals hears the case, and the prohibition denying the release from prison of aliens incarcerated for committing serious crimes. “INS analysts determined that implementation would require a tremendous level of resource commitment and planning” (2004, 295), and this, as it turns out, was never forthcoming. The consequence, Hall and Sutton contend, was the “inequitable treatment of immigrants” (291). INS failure, although driven by legislative failure, was nonetheless an ethical failure of substantial proportion. The authors argue that the failure of INS managers to exercise greater discretion in implementing the law “resulted in a loss of credibility and the literal destruction of the agency” (301).

The research highlighted above takes important steps toward improving our understanding and knowledge of what it means to manage ethics or be vulnerable to an ethics lapse, how it can be done, and what outcomes agency managers can expect. Nonetheless, there is still a need for systematic information about the various ethics management strategies and their consequences. While researchers are leaning more about these matters in local, state, and federal agencies and nonprofit organizations, there is much to learn about similar practices in countries worldwide.

Are other nation-states embracing ethics management strategies? Yes, to some extent, but perhaps from a different perspective—with most focusing on how to curb corruption. The literature in this area is vast and can only be dealt with here in a limited manner (see Cooper and Yoder 2002; Gilman 2000; Glor and Greene 2003;

Grundstein-Amado 2001; Holland and Fleming 2002–3; Huberts 2000; Joaquin 2004; Kim 2000; Quah 1999; Seligson 2001). Huberts (2000) investigated the anti-corruption strategies and practices of the twenty-five-year-old Hong Kong Independent Commission Against Corruption and offers a detailed assessment of the strategies employed in the fight against corruption. Kim (2000) provides a similar assessment that South Korea adopted to strengthen integrity in governance. Joaquin (2004) explored the link between political and administrative decentralization in many regions of the world and concludes that in some countries decentralization contributes to corrupt public acts but in other regions it mitigates the corruption. “Finding the connection is difficult,” she asserts, “because decentralization and corruption are concepts that fluctuate from one setting to another” (216). Studies of Canada have also found their way into the literature on ethics and corruption. Glor and Greene (2003) provide a detailed analysis of ethical reform in the governance of Canada, as do Holland and Fleming (2003), who compare Canadian ethics initiatives with those in Australia.

Others who have added their voices to understanding the two-sided coin of integrity and corruption in governance are Gilman (2000) and Cooper and Yoder (2002). Gilman, who served in the U.S. Office of Government Ethics, reviews what it has done since its creation in 1978 to assist governments worldwide in developing and implementing strategies and practices that foster integrity and ethics in governance. Cooper and Yoder examine the work done by the United Nations and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development to combat corruption. They document what international organizations have done to establish international ethical standards that promote consistent public management ethics practices.

Integrity in governance is widely believed to be fostered by greater transparency in the functioning of complex organizations, private and public. An important study along these lines is Roberts’s (2004) investigation of the transparency, or lack thereof, of several intergovernmental organizations. He focused on the World Trade Organization, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund. These organizations operate behind a veil of diplomatic secrecy which, he contends, has contributed to a “crisis of legitimacy” (2004, 410). Moreover, he says, “these organizations have attempted to address this crisis by promising the ‘maximum possible level of transparency,’ but in fact, the improvements have been modest” (*ibid.*).

The management of integrity, to borrow a phrase from the study by van Blijswijk and colleagues (2004) of the Netherlands Tax and Customs Administration, must go beyond the establishment of a code of ethics. Other necessary steps include (1) training new and current employees on how to handle dilemmas, (2) appointing integrity counselors who will “serve as the first line of inquiry to employees’ questions with regard to integrity,” (3) creating reflection groups from among the integrity counselors to “discuss real-life cases and what actions have been taken,” and (4) offering intranet group discussion opportunities for employees (van Blijswijk et al. 2004, 723). This ambitious integrity project in the Netherlands adds to our knowledge of ethics management in a non-American setting and points to the value of striking a balance between codifying ethics and meeting the day-to-day challenges of acting with integrity.

In summary, studies that probe the complex ethical and moral interface between the individual and the organization, like those described earlier on ethics agencies and regulatory bodies, are largely atheoretical. There is little or no demonstrated



link between behavioral or institutional theories of governance (e.g., public choice theory or New Public Management theory) and the development of ethics management strategies.

## The Ethical Environment

Studies of the ethical environment are wide-ranging in theory, methodology, and geography. Some question how the ethical environment of one city or community is interwoven with the ethical conduct of public officials (Eimicke, Cohen, and Salazar 2000; Ghre 1996, 1999; Thomas 2001). Others examine the relationship between ethics and trust building in one's agency and community (De Vries 2002). Still others explore how public managers, elected officials, and citizens view one another ethically and do/do not hold common outlooks that may influence private-public partnerships in their communities. Ghre, for example, analyzed statements and materials at annual meetings of the National Council for Public-Private Partnerships and concluded that there are ethical risks associated with privatization. As he put it, "conversations between public officials and business executives appear troubling in view of stewardship responsibilities to promote open and candid dialogue" (1999, 147).

Privatization, contracting out, and commitment to competition are viewed by some scholars as the tools of entrepreneurial behavior and decision-making in the public sector. But are there significant ethical risks associated with employing these tools? Eimicke, Cohen, and Salazar (2000) investigated this question through case studies of Orange County, California; Indianapolis, Indiana; San Diego, California; and Bogotá, Colombia. These cases, they contend, are typical of privatization and contracting out in cities, and, "although many decisions are carried out without controversy and with beneficial results, ethical questions abound" (2000, 240). In other words, public sector entrepreneurialism does involve high-level ethical risk-taking (see also Cohen and Eimicke 1999).

Thomas (2001) approaches privatization from a different perspective—the extent to which it contributes to a loss of public trust and confidence in governmental leaders and political representatives. Her research, which was conducted in Great Britain, focuses on two questions: (1) Will privatization result in a "new spate of loss of public trust nationally and internationally"? and (2) "How can trust and integrity be integrated into privatized functions?" (2001, 242). She draws on two case studies to formulate answers. One case is the privatization of British Rail, and the other is the proposed privatization of British Nuclear Fuels Ltd. These cases, especially the British Rail case, "ha[ve] led to a backlash in the UK, with calls for a halt to future privatizations, such as the National Air Traffic Services and London Underground" (2001, 250). In sum, she feels that privatization is undermining public trust in and the integrity of government.

Studies of ethics, leadership, and public trust can also be found in the literature. Marlowe (2004) draws on data from the 1996 General Social Survey to explore public perceptions of the trust placed in public administrators. He observes that it is very difficult to determine whether or not public administrators are part of the problem (declining trust in government) or part of the solution. Indeed, he concludes that they could be both and calls for future investigators to "explore whether citizens are in fact aware of the constraints that shape public administrators' work environments, and whether knowledge of the constraints affects public trust in the same adminis-



trators” (2004, 108–109). Similar research by Feldheim and Wang (2003–4), who employed survey data of U.S. city officials, examined the relationship between the ethical behavior of public employees and public trust. A key research question was: “Does ethical behavior by civil servants influence public trust?” They concluded yes, because they found a positive relationship between chief administrators’ views of the trust of citizens in their city governments and the ethical behavior of employees. That is, managers who viewed their citizens as placing high levels of trust in city government also viewed their employees as having high levels of ethical behavior. Feldheim and Wang believe that their research findings provide evidence that public trust is increased by the demonstration of “integrity, openness, loyalty, ethical competency” among public employees (2003–4, 73).

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***Do ethical communities and cultures  
beget ethical governments and  
governance? Or is it the converse?***

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It is widely assumed that politicians and administrators find it challenging, if not near impossible, to act with integrity in carrying out their duties. Systematic research documenting this assumption is, however, rare. One rare study is De Vries’s (2002) investigation of the honesty of local government politicians and administrators in seventeen countries. His study is also an example of the effort to link traditional ethics theory with empirical research. Four philosophical views—teleological and deontological ethics theories, virtue ethics, and dialogic ethics—are used to frame the work. Nearly 10,000 respondents were asked “questions about their valuation of honesty in general and more specific questions about their opinions on the disclosure of facts and the presentation of one-sided facts” (2002, 313). Subsets of fifteen politicians and administrators in each of 408 communities in thirteen countries enabled DeVries and his colleagues to analyze community as well as individual proclivities toward being honest. At the individual level, his statistical model could explain only 5 percent of the variance. However, at the community level, his statistical model performed much better, explaining 26 percent of the variance in the politicians’ responses and 13 percent among administrators. These findings, he concludes, suggest that “opinions on ethical behavior are foremost socially-culturally determined” (2002, 330). Furthermore, “public officials will tell the truth when they can afford it, and when they are dishonest, this can be explained by the circumstances that do not allow them to tell the truth” (2002, 332). How well does ethical theory explain these outcomes? Not very well at all, concludes DeVries. Rather, as suggested above, social-cultural influences appear to make the more significant difference in actual behaviors. Perplexing? So it would seem.

Another study that explores the interface between ethics as an individual trait and one’s organizational environment was conducted by Montjoy and Slaton (2002). Their research examined the infamous Palm Beach, Florida, butterfly ballot controversy in the 2000 U.S. presidential election debacle. Was the butterfly ballot design an ethics failure of the Palm Beach County supervisor of elections? Many observers thought so. Montjoy and Slaton disagree. Their case study and ethical analysis conclude that the failure was a product of complexity and the unwillingness of many actors in a highly interdependent election process to assume responsibility for their behavior. As they put it, “determining who is responsible and for what in the decentralized and often fragmented electoral system of the United States requires an appreciation of interdependence” (2002, 196).

Do ethical communities and cultures beget ethical governments and governance? Or is it the converse? Developing a meaningful measure for determining whether a community or a government is ethical would be rather difficult. Still, it can be persuasively argued that ethical governance is not likely to be found in a community rift with an unethical culture. It also seems probable that no matter how difficult the challenge may be, managers and public officials who promote and embrace strong ethical values and practices can raise the ethical consciousness of their communities.

Studies of community, ethics, and trust building provide a foundation for further research. There can be little argument, however, about the need to more fully understand what community leaders can and should do to foster ethical and trustworthy government. And, by the same measure, what government leaders need to do to build trustworthy relationships with members of their communities. The research challenge here is substantial but surmountable.

## Future Research

Research on ethics and integrity in governance is healthy and growing quantitatively and qualitatively. Indeed, a substantial amount of research has been initiated since 1998, with much of it empirical. And there is every reason to believe that the decade ahead will bring forth more studies that build and link ethics theory and observation, contribute to a cumulative body of knowledge, open new avenues of research, and attend to overlooked areas of study. Some of the research reported in this article is informed by ethics theory (especially the study of ethical decision-making and moral development), but much is not. More theory–observation bridge-building remains to be done by future investigators.

Has progress been made toward building a body of knowledge about ethics and integrity in governance? Yes, but more is needed here as well. There is a growing body of research reaching publication in European outlets, and we are likely to see more studies published in journals in other parts of the world. There is also a small but expanding body of knowledge that compares the legal and informal ethical practices and experiences of nations. Smith (2004), for example, compares the ethics infrastructure of China and the United States. His mostly descriptive research is a much-needed first step in understanding how two regimes so seemingly different are remarkably similar in the nature of the ethical problems each country faces and in the approaches each takes to deal with them. Studies of transitional societies in Eastern Europe are also adding to knowledge of ethical governance. Research here covers a gamut of issues that range from establishing legal codes of ethics to their enforcement to the forging of new relationships between private-sector actors and government (see Garcia-Zamor 2002; Rego, Sarrico, and Moreira 2005; Saarniit 2005). Other study horizons are also visible with respect to the ethical applications of information technology in the workplace, including the use and abuse of the Internet. Research is needed as well on how organizational structures influence the “formation and development of public officials’ ethical disposition toward administrative action” (Kim 2001).

A rapidly growing body of research literature has come to the fore in the field of policy ethics (see Brainard 2000; Di Norcia 2003; Gonzalez 2001; Wisensale 1999; Zundel 2002). While scholars have had a long-standing interest in policy ethics (see Ellis 1998; Fischer and Forester 1987; Meehan 1990; Tong 1986), systematic em-

pirical research in this area is relatively new. The subject matter varies from interest groups and domestic policy to health policy to energy policy to generational equity and on. The terrain here is most intriguing but largely unmapped. More recently, the daunting subject of spirituality has also captured the attention of a number of ethics scholars (see Ashmos and Duchon 2000; Bruce 2000; Cash, Gray, and Rood 2000; Garcia-Zamor 2003; Giacalone and Jurkiewicz 2002; Mitroff and Denton 1999). Here too, the terrain is largely unexplored.

Finally, in the field of administrative ethics, Cooper (2004) calls on ethics scholars to collaborate and focus their work on the “big” questions. Although he identifies four big questions, he does not claim exclusive ownership; rather, he encourages “discussion

about the big questions of the field, not to urge others to simply adopt the ones I have advanced” (2004, 396). We might well ask, therefore, to what extent the research reviewed in this article has contributed to a discussion of the big questions. Cooper’s questions are: (1) What are the normative foundations for public administration ethics? (2) How do American administrative ethical norms fit into a global context? (3) How can organizations be designed to be supportive of ethical conduct? and (4) When should we treat people equally in order to treat them fairly, and when should we treat them unequally? (Cooper 2004, 404).

The research on ethical decision-making and moral development certainly contributes to a discussion of normative foundations for public administration ethics in that it raises fundamental issues about the role of administrators in exercising moral reasoning in democratic polities and in societies in transition from authoritarian regimes to more democratic regimes. When should managers “go along to get along,” and when shouldn’t they? What is a citizen administrator? What are the administrator’s obligations to protect constitutional values? to advance the public interest? These questions are part of understanding ethical decision-making and moral development.

Cooper raises the question of whether or not a global ethic is emerging and, if so, what the American experience has to contribute to a global ethic. Scholarship on ethics laws and regulations contributes to the discussion of American administrative norms in a global context. The research literature on American experiences illustrates both the diversity and the value added by commitment to the rule of law. The diversity of American ethics laws and regulations provides little evidence of the imminent arrival of a universal governance ethic in the United States, not to mention the possibility of a global ethic that Cooper ponders. At the same time, the greater global interdependence resulting from trade, travel, and technological advances in communication in combination with a growing emphasis on the rule of law suggests that a global ethic may well evolve. Commitment to rule of law presages the evolution of what Rohr (1989) calls a minimalist compliance conception of ethical behavior—in other words, behavior that is legal is also ethical.

Perhaps most notable is what scholars laboring in the fields of organizational performance and ethics management have to say about what can be done to design organizations to support ethical conduct. The short answer is that organizations are doing a great deal, ranging from the development of codes of acceptable behavior to providing ethics training to conducting ethics audits and more. Still to come, how-

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***Has progress been made toward building a body of knowledge about ethics and integrity in governance? Yes, but more is needed here as well.***

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ever, are the identification and diffusion of best ethics management strategies and practices.

As Cooper so aptly observes, the Progressive Age formula of treating everyone the same meant treating everyone fairly, but this is no longer the nostrum it once was. The age of standardization and the decline of patronage government were well suited for the belief in and practice that equal treatment for all is fair treatment for all. Post-modern societies, with their ethnic, racial, gender, and age diversity, have challenged elected officials and administrators around the world to rethink how to treat people unequally and yet be fair. Ethics scholars have probably contributed less to this discussion topic than to the other topics mentioned by Cooper. Still, the studies that explore the ramifications of privatization are helpful in that they point to who benefits and who loses from an ethical perspective. Studies of trust building within and between communities add to this discussion. It is hard to imagine how one might treat some unequally and be fair with others unless there is a high degree of trust among everyone involved.

This article has examined recent research on ethics and integrity in governance with a focus on the American experience and the emerging literature that explores experiences in other nations and cultures. No claim to closure is made, because this review and assessment is a work-in-progress. The journey continues.

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