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## Article

# Enhancing the efficiency of management development programmes through ethical leadership

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## **Enhancing the Efficiency of Management Development Programmes through Ethical Leadership**

**Suleman A.<sup>1</sup>, Rossouw Dirk<sup>2</sup>, Bounds M.<sup>3</sup>**

**Abstract:** Ethics should be prominent in education as ultimately the graduates are often the future leaders of business. It has also been found that the ways in which ethics is taught must be considered carefully in order to enhance the impact thereof. This study sought to compare and analyse the efficacy and impact of ethical leadership education. This was done by a qualitative research and by interviewing various stakeholders involved in ethical education, such as students, academics and industry representatives. One recommendation is a renewed focus on ethical leadership content.

**Keywords:** students; academics; industry representatives; leadership; corruption; Business Development Programmes (MDP's)

**JEL Classification:** M10

### **Introduction**

The global financial crisis uncovered several ethical malpractices across the world, including cases such as the Goldman Sachs fraud trial (Oates & Dias, 2016). Oates and Dias (2016) say that a reasonable explanation of the increase in unethical practice is the failure of society to promote an ethical and values-based business culture. They add that enhanced importance needs to be attributed to ethical education as this can be seen as a preventive measure to ethical malpractice.

Stephenson, Ling, Burman and Cooper (1998) maintain that the increased animosity in the world is a result of the lack of values in education. However, the concept of values education is often debated as it becomes politicised and educators have to deal with a plethora of motivations as to whether values should be taught in education or not. Education is also acknowledged to be a remedy for social problems and therefore values need to be taught in order to alleviate social concerns.

Berkovich and Schwartz (2011) suggest that values and principles education influences the way individuals make decisions and therefore a focus on ethics and values could result in enhanced decision-making. They feel that values-based education could be used to mitigate crime as values-based decisions have an ethical consideration in decision-making. According to Quin (2016), contemporary management education has failed society and business because it fails to truly incorporate ethical considerations in business. This failure could be attributed to the increase in corruption across the world. Lawter, Rua and Guo (2013) emphasise that business schools are failing in producing ethical managers.

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This failure could be attributed to a lack of focus on ethical education. Even in instances when ethics education is indeed taught, it is taught in a superficial manner and not diligent study. According to MacManus (2011), business schools and the like need to advocate enhanced emphasis on responsible management and ethical training. Traditional MDPs sometimes touch on ethics but do not focus on ethical enquiry, and this notion needs to be revisited. Business schools must take responsibility for the professionals they place in industry and therefore ensure that the professionals that graduate through their institutions are ethically sound.

MacManus (2011) finds ethical education to be present in every field of study and asserts that it should be focused on in every management area of study, such as ethics in marketing, in operation and in strategic management. Furthermore, the lack of ethical consideration in management programmes needs attention. As we move into a far more complex world, the ethical challenges that will be faced will increase, and therefore business needs leaders that will always make the right decisions.

Given the severity of the effects of corruption as well as the lack of focus on ethical leadership, this study aimed to promote the inclusion of values-based education and ethical leadership in MDPs in order to enhance awareness as well as contribute to decreasing corruption by understanding ethical leadership.

## **Literature**

Kretzschmar and Bentley (2013) find ethics education in South Africa to be limited and limited to certain academic disciplines. The increase in corruption within South Africa has motivated a renewed focus on ethics in education. The reason for this is that ethical training can be seen as a preventive measure for corruption.

## **Corruption**

Graycar and Sidebottom (2012) identify several factors that lead to corruption and corrupt activity and say that the notion that corruption is more frequent in developing countries could attest to the lack of enforcement in these countries. Godinez and Garita (2015) assert that corruption is prevalent across the world, in both developed and developing economies, but it is much more notable in developing countries. This could be attributed to a host of reasons ranging from historical colonialism to poor governance mechanisms.

A study conducted by Mallik and Saha (2016) found that corruption and economic growth follow a cubic relationship. They found that corruption exists in every environment, but countries need to find ways to promote growth while limiting the negative effect it can have on a country. Their study suggests that low levels of corruption could impede growth and high levels of corruption could stunt growth. However, intermediate corruption will result in positive growth. While their study does not promote corruption, it found that some organisations use corruption as a tool for doing business and ultimately a medium to get things done.

Jonck and Swanepoel (2016) rank corruption among the top ten burning concerns for South Africa among other pertinent concerns such as unemployment, poverty and crime. Consequently, in order to

achieve national prosperity, South Africa desperately needs to respond to concerns of corruption. Africa represents several factors and characteristics which enable corruption and create the opportunity for individuals to act in a corrupt manner (Warf, 2017). These factors include a lack of values-based education, illiteracy, poverty, weak institutions and poorly developed civil societies. Jones (2016) identifies several factors that contribute to corruption in developing countries: lack of accountability, extensive bureaucracy, inequality and abuse of power. However, some of the more innate causes of corruption include a lack of understanding and internalisation of ethics and values.

### **Ethical Leadership**

Cooke and Ryan (1988) published an original work, which is referred to by several theorists. This study advocates that ethics is of core relevance to management education. In this study it was argued that tertiary institutions are tasked with the responsibility of producing managers and leaders that will contribute to business success. Business success in this instance should refer to the ethical and profitable business. Ethics in business education has been a concept that has been debated several times over the last century.

Renowned scholars such as Peter Drucker refer to business ethics as “a dubious exercise” because it relates to personal and individualistic questions which have no place in business (Cooke & Ryan, 1988). Furthermore, scholars have argued that the only business of business is to increase profits. However, this mindset has begun to change as more and more theorists recognise the potential impact that organisations have on society and therefore the unquestioned responsibility that they have to act in a way that promotes the wellbeing of all stakeholders. Cooke and Ryan (1998) oppose the views represented by Drucker and others as fundamentally wrong, as businesses have a responsibility to act in a socially responsible and ethical manner which will lead to greater societal wellbeing in every aspect; this can be achieved through education.

Cooke and Ryan (1988) found that one of the most notable concerns with ethical education is its impact. It is often difficult to measure the effectiveness of social competencies such as ethics as this does not adequately translate into the results of competency assessments, since students could just say what they think is right in order to be right. Cooke and Ryan (1988) maintain that for ethics education to be effective, ethical behaviour should be reinforced constantly; this can be achieved by keeping ethics as a standalone module but also by reinforcing morality in every subject discipline. If this is achieved, institutions will most likely produce well-rounded ethical leaders and managers.

Malpas (2015) recommends that ethics and the study of ethics in education be revisited, and that ethics become a golden thread which weaves through education in order to create ethical individuals. Ethics should move away from being just a tick box exercise in corporate organisations to the way that the organisation operates and this could be achieved through education. It should be translated into every facet of life as a primary objective. Malpas (2015) regards ethics and education as synonymous, and attributes the demise of ethics to the fact that it has been regarded as a separate study from behaviour, management and education. Both educators and institutions must understand that ethics cannot be taught as a standalone discipline of study or as an additional element of study, but rather that it needs to form an element of every discipline of study. It should be included to some extent in every subject in every

learning programme, which will foster and develop the ethical leaders and managers that the world needs. Through adopting this approach, institutions such as universities and business schools will produce students, business people and individuals that are ethically and morally sound and this will assist in decreasing corruption and lead to the betterment of all.

According to Wang, Feng and Lawton (2017), the most widely held definition of ethical leadership has been suggested by Brown (2005), who refers to ethical leadership as “the normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement and decision-making”. Wang et al. (2017) found that while this definition is acceptable, it is vague and that more clarity and depth need to be attributed to ethical leadership, which could be achieved through education.

Qin, Huang, Hu, Schiminke and Ju (2017) found that ethical leadership is of the utmost importance within the business landscape as it refers primarily to the authority and influence exercised over subordinates and this influence determines employee behaviour to a certain extent. Wu (2017) conducted a study among over 200 sales representatives and a key finding was that the perceived behaviour of leaders had the most significant impact on whether an employee would act ethically or unethically. Qin et al. (2017) link the increase in corruption and corporate scandals directly linked to the lack of ethical leadership within corporate environments. They believe that ethical leadership provides guidance to an employee, which ultimately moulds the behaviour of employees and prevents them from acting unethically. By the same token, it is suggested that if a leader acts unethically, then employees will follow in the unethical behaviour that has been promoted by their leader.

Waldman, Wang, Hannah and Balthazard (2017) refer to significant research which supports the hypothesis that ethical leadership has long-lasting favourable effects on followers in terms of ethical capability. This therefore needs to support the promotion and inclusion of ethics and ethical education into the academic curriculum. Bischak and Woiceshyn (2016) find that while there is significant research suggesting that ethical leadership has favourable effects on followers, there is little research on ways in which ethical leadership can be promoted, but one of the ways is by learning from the insights and lessons of great ethical leaders.

### **Ethical Decision-Making**

Wu (2017) states that ethical leaders shape the culture of an organisation and promote an ethical environment which employees ideally associate with and emulate. This results in a far greater ethical organisation. Therefore, significant attention needs to be given to ethical leadership and ways that society can adopt and use to create more ethical leaders. Duarte (2008) regards the role of institutions such as universities as significant in moulding society because the education that is imparted to students today will determine the role that they play and the way that they will lead society tomorrow. Ethics and moral education must therefore be included in management education to assist in producing more ethical leaders in the future. Ethics in this regard needs to be a compulsory component of management education offered by universities.



In a survey of business students conducted by Duarte (2008), it was found that the majority of students at a selected business school felt that ethics is a vital component of business education and that more could be done to integrate ethics into the business curriculum of management programmes. The majority of interviewees felt that in order to be better business people, ethics needed to play a significant role in their personal behaviour and that by acting in a more ethical way, they would contribute more to the wellbeing of all organisational stakeholders. A concern that was highlighted in that study is that while ethics is sometimes taught as a standalone module in business courses, the ethics module does not adequately equip participants with the ability to think and act in a more ethical manner. It was further concluded that this could be achieved through advocating more time, importance and emphasis to behavioural studies in order to promote ethical behaviour.

Murray, Dunbar and Murray (2014) suggest that a focus on values-centred education will lead to sustainable development for companies and countries alike. They emphasise that theory supports the premise that for values education to be effective, it needs to be introduced at the foundational levels of learning. This view is in line with the literature by theorists such as Cooke and Ryan (1988), Duarte (2008) and Malpas (2015), who all support the role that needs to be played by foundational education. However, much like Murray et al. (2014), these scholars also point out that tertiary institutions have to play a significant role in enhancing ethical behaviour. It can therefore be deduced that ethics and values-based education should form part of a continuous learning pattern that is taught, understood and learnt at every different stage of learning.

Murray et al. (2014) would like all students at all levels of education to be exposed to pedagogy relating to ethics, values and principles education. This should be one of the focal aims of any school, university or institution which is producing students that can integrate into society effectively and act in a socially and morally acceptable manner. However, this argument also supports the notion that education is a lifelong process and as students' progress, their cognitive abilities develop further; therefore, the depth and scope of ethical, values and principles education should in turn increase as they progress. This premise places significant responsibility on tertiary institutions since at this stage facilitators and lecturers should no longer teach ethics as they would any other skill or competency; rather, they should structure learning in a way that it responds to the personal values of students in order to act more ethically.

Jones (2016) suggests that ethics and values-based education should be taught at primary level through outreach programmes, in which learners are exposed to universal ethics. Government, through outreach programmes which would assist in preventing and deterring corrupt practices, should spearhead this. Personal integrity should be a compulsory module at school level and this should continue into university and postgraduate scholarship since a key priority for any institution is to create ethical leaders.

The notion expressed above is in line with that of Perri et al. (2009), who argue that while ethics could and should be taught at basic primary education level, there is a growing need to enhance the way that ethics is taught at tertiary level. This premise is based on Kohlberg's moral cognitive development approach (1969), which states that ethical reasoning develops over time. This supports the rationale that ethics should be taught at university and tertiary level as students are then more sophisticated and better positioned to understand the impact of their decisions and change the way that they act.



Murray et al. (2014) admit that the above is difficult to achieve, as ethics, morals and values mean different things to different people. They are unique, as they are often tied to emotion. Therefore, instead of teaching a specific set of rules which are deemed as right, educators should impart the ability to think, analyse and behave critically in a manner which supports their innate values.

Hope (2016) agrees with the sentiments expressed above and adds that the business curricula need to be redesigned and reshaped to promote whole-person outcomes. Business studies have unwaveringly promoted profit at all costs and have to be reviewed. Ethics modules offered as a means of ensuring credibility, international rankings and enhancing institutional reputation must be eliminated and a new fresh look at ethical business education must be adopted to remedy the ills of society such as corruption. Business studies need to be amalgamated with the social sciences in order to promote aspects such as morality, values and ethics. The way that ethics education is currently taught should be reviewed and new developments in education such as technology have to be introduced in order to enhance the understanding of ethics by management students.

Maritz, De Waal, Buse, Herstatt, Lassen and MacLauchlan (2014) stress that in order to produce ethical individuals, MDPs must become much more innovative. They should engage with the most sophisticated learning designs and methodologies available in order to produce programmes that are deeply meaningful and highly impactful. Tools such as technology, teaching styles and learning styles should all be investigated in order to enhance the way that education is offered with the hope of shifting the focus to produce more ethical individuals.

The way that ethics is taught will determine the impact that it has on society (Perri et al.; 2009). Ethics and ethical training can and very well may lead to a decrease in unethical behaviour such as fraud and an increase in societal wellbeing. However, this can only be achieved if ethics is presented in a way that makes sense to students. Students need to understand the benefits of acting in an ethical manner even at the expense of self-interest. Ethics in management programmes should develop individuals who represent the cognitive ability to act ethically in the face of unethical opportunity. This cannot be taught through simply enforcing rules, values and principles of good business conduct, but rather in a way that challenges individual behaviour and encourages ethical action.

Perri et al. (2009) acknowledge that there is no golden recipe as to how ethics should be taught, but there is consensus that it must be understood. Students need to be able to make their own decisions and these decisions should be ethical. Therefore, educators should adopt learning strategies which replicate real-world scenarios and force ethical dilemmas on students in order to reinforce ethical behaviour. Strategies that could be used to achieve this include simulations, ethics-based scenarios, action learning and on-the-job training to name a few. Situational and individual factors promote unethical behaviour, so in order to teach ethics, these situational factors need to be replicated and the right individual behaviours highlighted.

For Hope (2016), the most effective MDPs which promote ethical behaviour are those that are interactive, student focused and value oriented. These programmes need to motivate and inspire students to act in a more ethical manner and should foster the understanding that ethics, values and doing the right thing are more important than profits at all costs. Jones (2016) realises that while there are several potential solutions that can be explored to mitigate corruption, education should be seen as the most



effective and most important. Education is the primary fight against corruption and this needs to be acknowledged by schools, universities, business and society. Education could be seen as a preventive measure rather than a reactive measure.

Jones (2016) proposes that MDPs consist of means and methods to combat corruption but also tools that can be adopted to prevent corruption. This therefore places focus on the personal as well as technical skills required with regard to corruption. Curriculum development and the way that learning is designed are also of the utmost importance and educators should keep ethics and sustainable development in mind when designing MDPs.

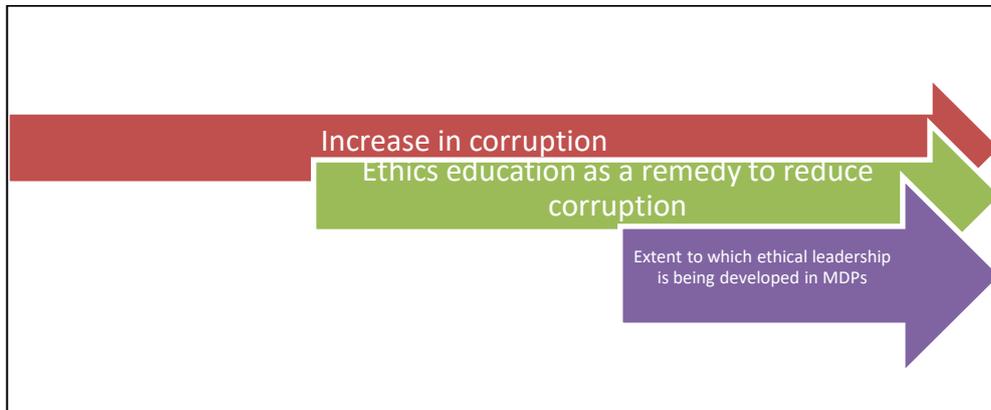
MacDougall, Bagdasarov, Johnson and Mumford (2015) emphasise that ethics and values-based learning are an essential component of education and that if used properly, they can assist in enhancing global wellbeing and reducing corruption. For this to be achieved effectively, business has to play a key role in learning and needs to inform and influence institutions of learning in order to produce more ethical managers and leaders. Business has significant influence on institutions of higher learning and should use this influence to translate needs into results and should therefore insist that issues such as ethics be a vital component of education.

Organisations should pride themselves on hiring and employing ethical employees as this will benefit the organisation (MacDougall et al.; 2015). In addition, ethical employees could lead to sustainable competitive advantage for the organisation; this understanding must be fostered throughout the organisation. The function of ethics and ethics training within a business is the responsibility of the human resource office, as they have a responsibility to ensure that employees act in an ethical manner. The increase in unethical practice in the workplace is a stark reminder that human resource managers should be doing much more to eradicate this. One of the ways to achieve more ethical employees is through education.

With reference to the above and as deduced through the work of MacDougall, Bagdasarov, Johnson and Mumford (2015), human resource managers need to work collaboratively with institutions such as business schools in order to design training programmes that focus both on technical competence as well as personal and professional competencies such as ethics, values and morality.

### **Training Programmes that Facilitate Ethical Decision-Making and Ethical Leadership**

The motivation is to focus on ethical education in MDPs and to promote the notion that a renewed focus on ethical training in management programmes can lead to a decrease in corruption. This could be represented as follows:



**Figure 1. Representation of Study**

Several theorists such as Jones (2016), Pillay (2004) and Warf (2017) agree that education could be seen as a tool, which if used effectively could serve as a medium to remedy the effects of corruption.

Business schools now have much more responsibility to produce leaders that are concerned with both profit as well as stakeholder value and ultimately doing business in a way that reduces the negative effects of corruption and ensures sustainability by protecting people, planet and profits. This approach will produce more sound business people and will reduce corruption, increase sustainability and ultimately lead to a better world for all. However, Perri, Callanan, Rotenbury and Oehlers (2009) accept that this is far more difficult than it sounds, as apart from changing the way that business education is taught, business schools need to respond to the values, principles and morals of students in order to produce individuals that are morally and ethically sound business people.

Business schools have to understand and identify the impact of ethics and values-based education in management programmes and investigate the mediums of teaching that will result in the highest level of internalisation. In addition, business schools must adopt approaches and methods of teaching ethics and values-based education which relate to delegates, enhance their understanding and lead to more well-rounded holistic managers and leaders (Perri et al.; 2009).

Warf (2017) found that corruption exists not only in Africa, but also across the world and that there needs to be a collective unified response to the concerns of corruption; this could be found through education. The establishment of structures and institutions that mitigate corruption has had limited success. This therefore supports the ideal that in order to reduce corruption, more effort is required to change the behaviour of individuals, which could be achieved through education.

Malpas (2015) has attributed the increase in corruption across the world to the decrease in value placed on ethics and says that the world is slowly failing as it forgets the value and importance of ethics. Ethics should and needs to play a fundamental role in every interaction of human life, from doing business to running a country. Malpas (2015) argues that while ethics is now a more known term across the world, it has also become a less valued term. Literature regarding ethics continues to grow, but ethical behaviour in society is dwindling. Organisations have codes of ethics, yet ethics is not considered in any business transaction. Ethics has become a word used by politicians and executives alike to show commitment to values, but these are not lived nor practised and this has led to the increase in corruption.

### **Research Problem and Question**

The growth in corruption should encourage theorists and others to find renewed ways to respond to concerns of corruption. The research mentioned above suggests that education could be used as an effective tool to reduce corruption. The purpose of this study was therefore to ascertain the effectiveness and efficacy of training students for ethical leadership and therefore a likely means of reducing corruption.

**Research question:** Can students be trained to be ethical leaders in the management of a business and society?

The purpose of the study could be translated into the following primary and secondary objectives:

**Primary objective:** To determine student's willingness to accept the responsibility of ethical leadership.

**Secondary objectives:** To determine whether and how ethical leadership is being taught and to compare the understanding of ethical leadership by lecturers, students and industry representatives.

### **Research Methodology**

According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009), the research design provides a general direction or focus of the study, which identifies the objectives, sources and limitations of the study. This study followed the research design of both a descriptive and explanatory study, which will be further clarified below.

This was a qualitative study, focusing on three distinct groups of individuals, namely specified representatives from industry, selected students as well as identified academics. Two higher institutions were selected for this study as they are prominent public institutions of higher learning within Gauteng. Both are tasked with the opportunity of providing sound management education to industry and have a significant role to play in the development of leaders in industry. As seen in the literature, education can have a positive influence on potentially reducing corruption; therefore, there is an opportunity for educational institutions to provide educational programmes which produce leaders who are far more ethical.

The industry representatives interviewed were referred by an industry-recognised research-based organisation that regularly conducts research based on the master's programmes offered by higher education institutions in relation to the needs of industry.

The participants therefore provided a triangulated approach as insight was gained from students, academics and representatives from industry in order to provide a true reflection of ethics and the impact of ethics in MDPs and the opinions of key stakeholders involved in MDPs.

This study followed a method of purposive sampling. Saunders *et al.* (2009) explain that purposive sampling is best suited to research that relies on sound selection and judgements in order to select cases that will assist in answering the proposed research question. This method was therefore fruitful as this study accessed select cases based on existing networks which provided an in-depth source of knowledge that was used to respond to the research question.

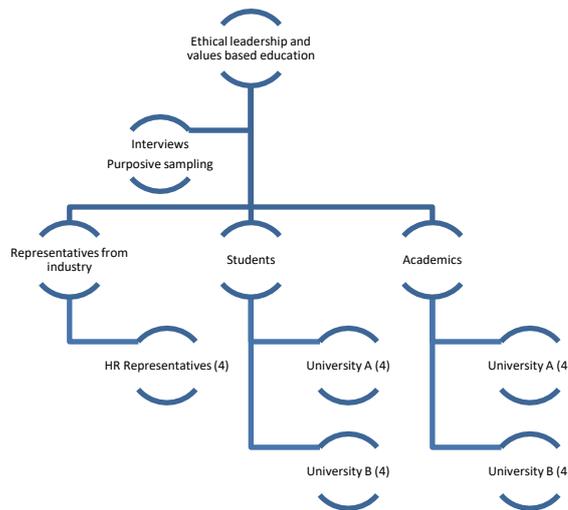
Twenty interviewees were purposively selected by means of referral for this study (Saunders *et al.*; 2009). According to Mason (2010), the samples of qualitative studies are much smaller than those of quantitative studies and therefore much more effort needs to go into ensuring that most or all of the perceptions that might be important are uncovered. Semi-structure interviews were conducted with the identified participants.

The data analysis of this study was qualitative and descriptive and content analysis was applied to the outcomes of the interviews. To verify the trustworthiness of a research project, credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability need be addressed (Shenton, 2003). These aspects were therefore taken into significant regard and formed a guiding framework for this research to enhance the trustworthiness of the findings.

The dependability of the project could be enhanced through measures such as thorough reporting and documentation on the research plan as well as findings (Shenton, 2013), and these suggestions were followed to ensure the reliability of the project. The integrity of findings is questioned in confirmability and, according to Shenton (2003), confirmability can be achieved in research projects by limiting bias and creating an audit trail for findings. This was achieved in this report through intricate reporting of findings as well as the use of methods such as grouping findings into themes.

Ethical considerations were also considered. Prior to the interviews being scheduled, full consent from participants was requested, the anonymity of interviewees was ensured, permission to conduct the interviews was obtained and participants were assured of their voluntary participation and withdrawal.

The research is a cross-sectional study as it was targeted at individuals at a particular point in time. In summation, the diagram (Figure 2) below provides a graphical representation of the research design followed.



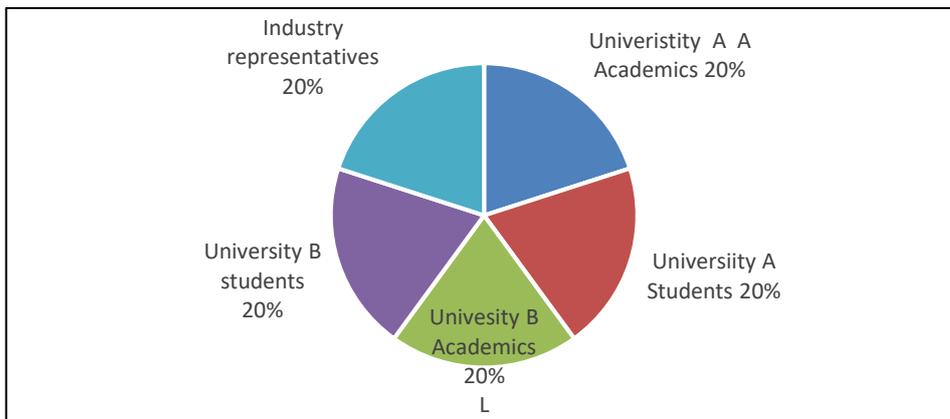
**Figure 2. Research Design**

**Research Findings**

**Biographical Background of Interviewees**

**Sample**

The interviewees were clustered into groups of four. Four students had completed the MCom (Business Management) at University A, four students had completed the MBA at University B, four were academic staff members from University A, four were academic staff members from University B and four were industry representatives.

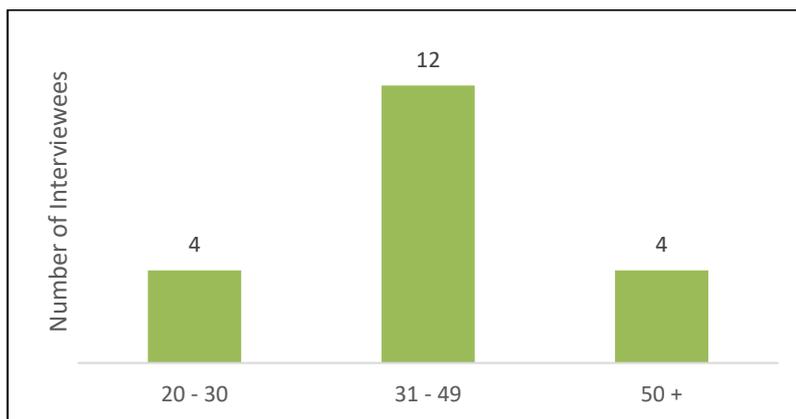


**Figure 3. Sample**

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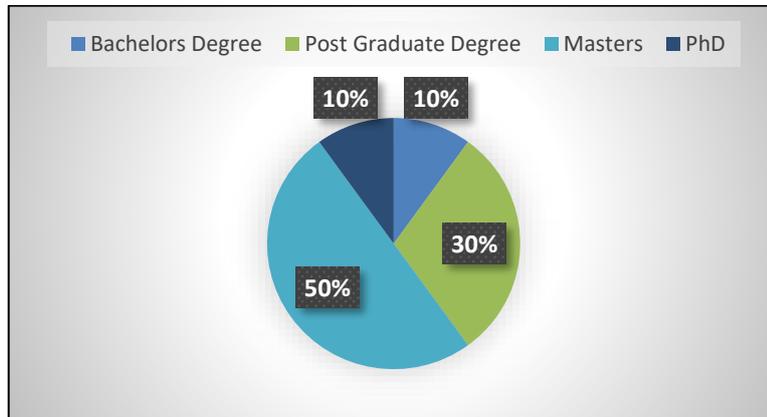
**Gender split of interviewees:** 10 interviewees as male and 10 as female.

**Age of interviewees:** The majority of the interviewees were between the ages of 31 and 49 years. There were, 4 interviewees that were younger than 30 years of age and 4 that were older than 50 years. The age of the interviewees is presented as follows:



**Figure 4. Age of Interviewees**

**Academic qualification of interviewees:** All of the interviewees were gainfully employed at the time of the interview. The majority (10) of interviewees held a master’s degree and 6 had a postgraduate degree. Two interviewees had a bachelor’s degree and only 2 of the respondents had a PhD.



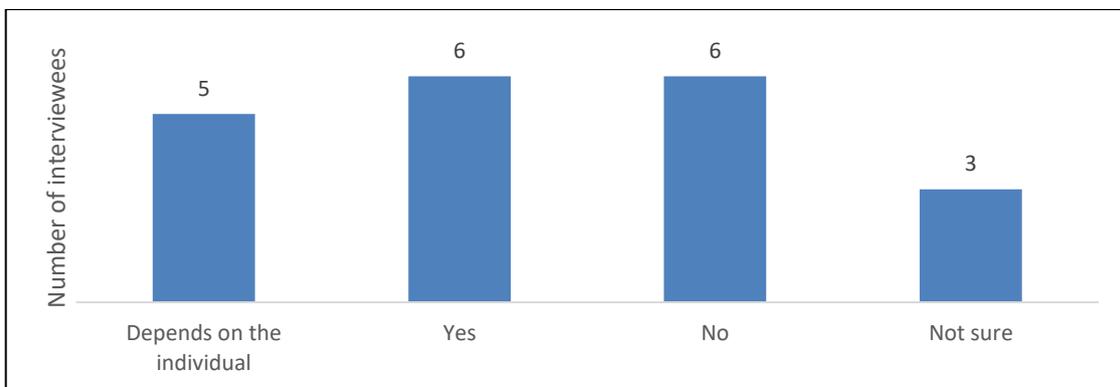
**Figure 5. Academic Qualification of Interviewees**

The findings of the respective interviews will be presented according to each question. The questions are linked to the objective of this study and will therefore provide insight into the information gathered in relation to the objectives of this study. In addition, the key themes that emerged per question will be presented and a summary made for each question. Verbatim quotes are used throughout.

- Students’ willingness to accept responsibility for ethical leadership;
- Respondents understanding of ethical leadership;
- Ways in which ethical leadership is being taught;
- Emphasis on ethics and ethical leadership;
- How to enhance ethics in module content.

**1. Students’ willingness to accept responsibility for ethical leadership**

With regard to question 1, varying themes were identified, but no themes proved to be conclusive as no clear majority on a particular theme was recorded. The findings are presented as follows:



**Figure 6. Acceptance of Ethical Leadership**

Six out of the 20 interviewees said that students would be willing to accept the responsibility of ethical leadership. Interviewees articulated reasons for alluding to the premise that students would act ethically, namely that ethics and ethical leadership are much more prominent now in all spheres and therefore there is more awareness about it which will prompt an individual to accept the responsibility of acting ethically.

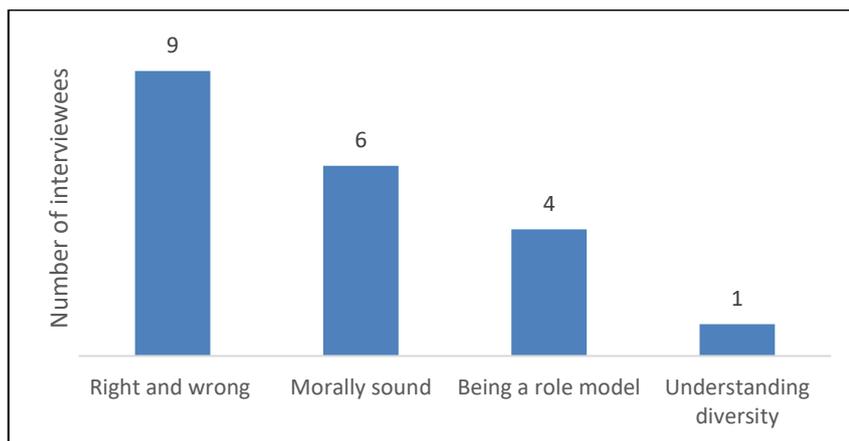
In contrast, 6 out of the 20 interviewees argued that students would not accept the responsibility of ethical leadership. The rationale for this response varied, with two interviewees being of the opinion that the ethical turmoil currently being faced in the country was testament to the fact that students would not accept the responsibility of ethical leadership and the others saying that students would not accept this responsibility due to a lack of understanding as well as a lack of motivation to act ethically.

Five interviewees said that the answer to this question would depend on the individual, as some individuals have a predisposition to act more ethically while others do not. This could depend on aspects such as upbringing, religion and culture but ultimately would depend on an individual’s moral compass. Only one of these interviewees alluded to the premise that it is easy to act ethically when everything is fine, but when faced with dire circumstances such as poverty then it may not be so easy.

Three of the 20 interviewees were not sure whether students would accept the responsibility to act ethically. Two of these three interviewees felt that students may likely act ethically in class, but when taken out of a safe environment and faced with temptations, they may not.

**Respondents Understanding of Ethical Leadership**

Recurring themes were found in the answers of interviewees in reference to this question These themes can be presented as follows:



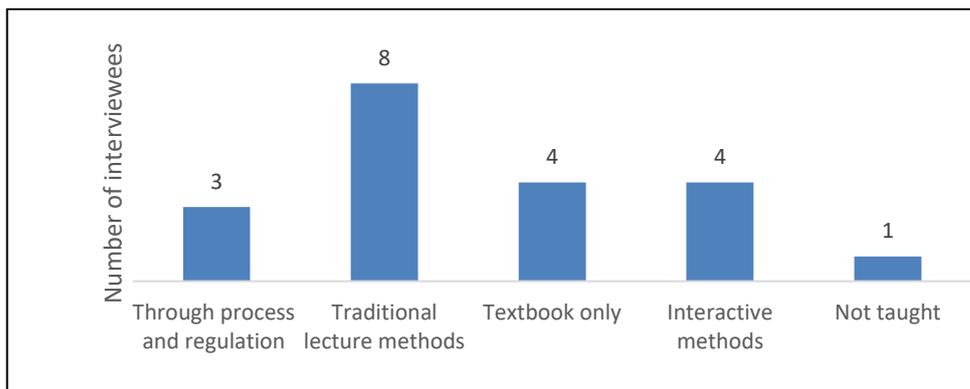
**Figure 7. Understanding Ethical Leadership**

Nine out of 20 of the interviewees indicated that ethical leadership relates in some manner to the concept of establishing right and wrong and acting in a way that promotes the understanding and ideals of acting right and wrong. This theme was consistent across the groups interviewed, and at least one individual per sample group responded that their understanding of ethical leadership was being able to

establish what is right and wrong and to act in a manner conducive to this. Six out of 20 interviewees said that ethical leadership refers to the understanding of being morally sound and that it is a product of cultural factors which include upbringing, socialisation, education and even religion. For these individuals, lessons extracted from culture and religion underpin ethical leadership and a true understanding of this would lead an individual to be morally sound. Four interviewees regarded ethical leadership as being a role model for others and in doing so, practising sound ethical leadership. For these respondents, leadership roles are often roles of authority and because these roles represent influence over others, ethical leadership refers to practising a distinct type of leadership that encourages subordinates to emulate principles of ethics. In conclusion, only one individual said that ethical leadership refers to the understanding of and respect for the diversity of others.

**2. Ways in which ethical leadership is being taught**

Six core themes emerged from this question, highlighting that varying responses were recorded. However, some themes were more prominent than others. The themes that emerged from question 4 could be presented as follows:



**Figure 8. Ethics Teaching Methods in MDPs**

The majority (8) of the interviewees found that traditional lecture methods were used to teach ethics in the master’s programmes offered by the two universities. Traditional lecture methods refer to lectures, class discussions and content covered through the textbook. For these interviewees, these were the primary methods of teaching ethics in their respective MDPs and questions were raised about the impact of this method. Three of the eight interviewees referred to theoretical academic lectures that were characterised by covering content from a textbook. Four of the interviewees said that ethics was currently being taught through a textbook only. Upon further investigation, it was found that this referred to self-directed chapters or sub-chapters on ethics that students were expected to go through in their own time.

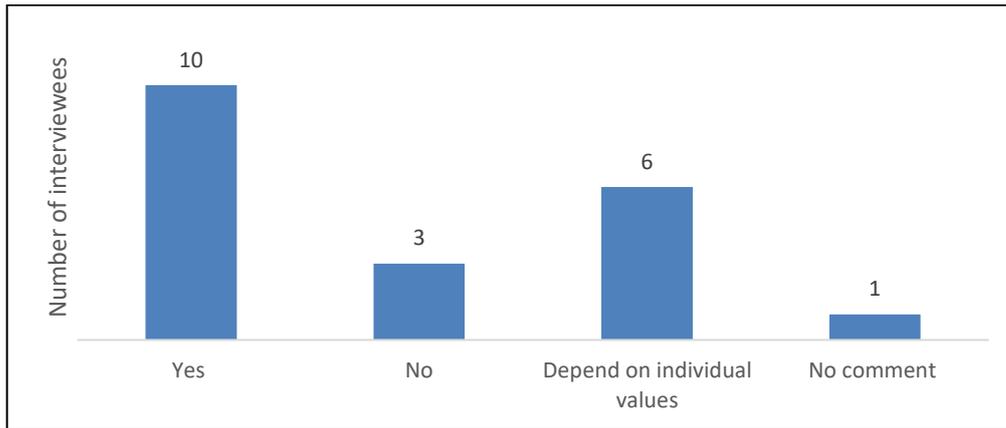
Four interviewees said that ethics was being taught through interactive methods and this included case studies, simulations and role plays, which was done to better relate content to students. Three interviewees indicated that ethics was being taught through compliance with processes and regulations in the respective master’s programmes. This included abiding by university protocols such as anti-plagiarism and adhering to policies on ethical research. One individual felt that ethics was not being

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taught in the master’s programme as the individual completed the programme still unsure of what ethical leadership or ethics is. Students’ willingness to accept responsibility for ethical leadership

**3. Influence of lessons learnt in module content on prompting students to act more ethically**

Three primary themes emerged from this question and these themes can be presented as follows:



**Figure 9. Willingness of Students to Act Ethically**

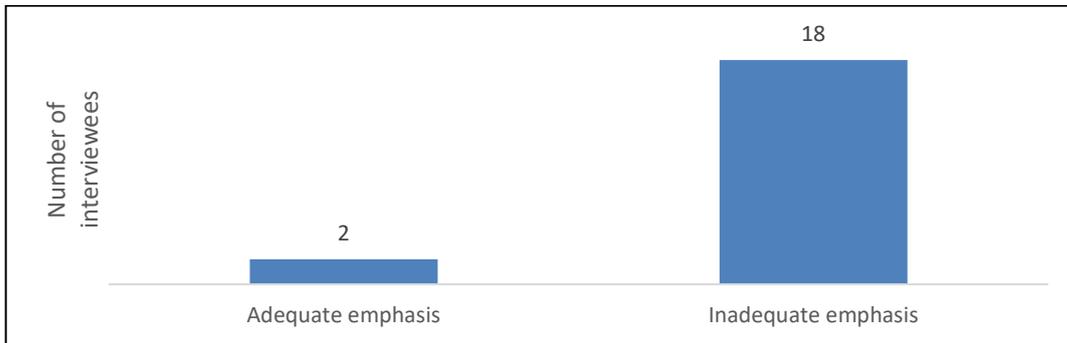
The majority (10) of the interviewees felt that the lessons learnt in an MDP would prompt an individual to act in more ethical ways. The rationale for this was that an MDP would lead to an enhanced awareness of ethics and ethical leadership. The individual responses, however, varied in that some (3) argued that if enough attention were given to ethics, then it would prompt an individual to act more ethically, whereas others (2) felt that through adherence to processes and protocols, ethical awareness would be fostered.

Six interviewees felt that this would depend on the individual and his/her values. The rationale for this was that some people act more ethically by nature whereas others do not; similarly, whether a student will act more ethically depends on whether he/she really engages with and internalises learning. Three interviewees did not think that the lessons learnt would prompt an individual to act more ethically because an MDP was not the most adequate platform to achieve this.

For these interviewees, aspects such as primary schooling, religious classes and culture should foster ethical awareness and understanding and they felt that these platforms would have much more significant impact. One individual refrained from commenting based on the fact that they had not witnessed an increase or decrease in ethical behaviour after the completion of the master’s from the two universities.

**4. Emphasis on Ethics and Ethical Leadership**

Two primary themes emerged from this question, with one of the themes proving to be conclusive with a resounding majority of interviewees attesting to or aligning with this theme. These themes can be presented as follows:

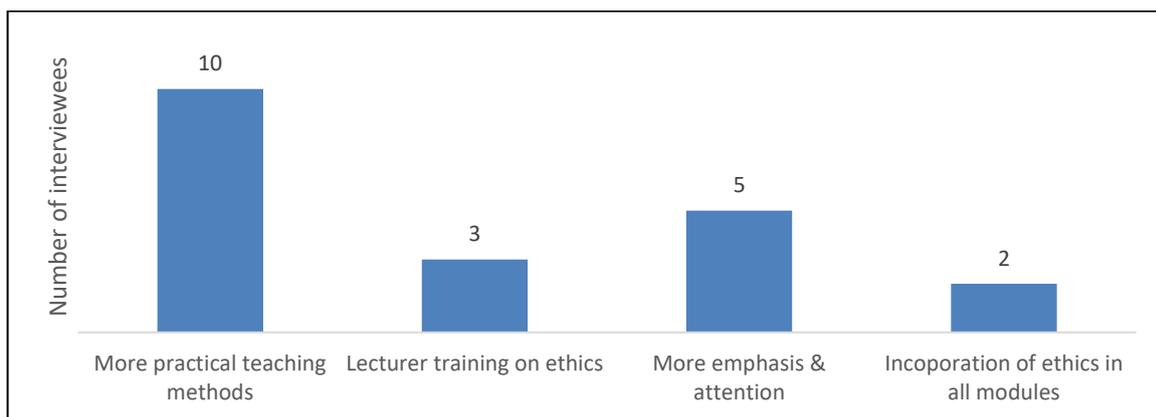


**Figure 10. Emphasis of Ethics in MDPs**

18 of the 20 interviewees did not feel that enough emphasis was currently given to ethical leadership in the MDPs offered by the two universities. The rationale for this answer varied. The majority (12) of the 18 interviewees indicated that not enough attention was given to ethics and that this could be remedied by giving more attention and emphasis to it. Only 3 interviewees added that ethics needed to be better incorporated into the master’s programmes offered by the two universities and by doing this, more emphasis would be given to it. Similarly, 3 interviewees suggested that the way ethics was currently being taught be revised in terms of giving more emphasis to it. Only two interviewees stated that adequate emphasis was being placed on ethical leadership in the master’s programmes offered by the two universities

**5. Methods to enhance ethics in module content**

Four prominent themes were identified in relation to this question. These themes can be presented as follows:



**Figure 11. Methods to Enhance Ethics in MDPs**

Most (10) of the interviewees felt that ethics could be enhanced by revising the current teaching style. This could be achieved by using more interactive, practical and experiential methods of teaching. Interviewees suggested methods such as incorporating more case studies unique to the African context, introducing guest speakers, role plays and simulations, all of which could assist in enhancing ethics as it would make ethics more relatable to students. Interviewees suggested a move away from a purely

academic theoretical model and the adoption of experiential learning so that students are better prepared to deal with unethical situations instead of just reading about what ethics is.

Five interviewees said that ethics could be enhanced simply by placing more emphasis on it. Currently ethics does not form a major part of the master's curriculum at the two universities and allocating more time to ethics through the introduction of a compulsory module on ethics would enhance the way that it is taught. Three interviewees suggested that all lecturers attend compulsory ethical training in order to be better ethical role models for students and by doing this, the programme would be enhanced. The rationale for this is that a lecturer will impart ethical principles to students if they have an adequate understanding of ethical leadership, regardless of the subject they are lecturing. Lastly, two interviewees felt that ethics could be enhanced through incorporating it as a golden thread through every module as this would enhance individual understanding of ethics in relation to different aspects of business.

## **Conclusions**

This discussion is based on the primary and secondary objectives of this study. The discussion of the objectives will be based on the insight gained from the interviews. The secondary objectives are aligned with the themes that emerged from the questions.

### **Primary objective 1: To determine students' willingness to accept the responsibility of ethical leadership**

It was found that there was no certainty regarding the willingness of students to accept the responsibility of being ethical. This finding was based on the opinions of individuals interviewed and, on the discussions, debates and general perception of whether students would be willing to accept the responsibility to act more ethically. It was found that while students are willing to accept the responsibility of ethical leadership in the classroom, this may not always be the case in the professional world where there are real ramifications of unethical behaviour. It was further identified that within the confines of a safe classroom, students would act ethically, but when faced with the illicit benefit of acting unethically, they may very well falter.

This affirms the notion that students may likely act unethically even after being taught about ethics. This further draws attention to the methods used to teach ethics and their impact with regard to producing more ethical individuals. More practical teaching methods are therefore suggested that will place students in ethical dilemmas and force them to act accordingly, thus mimicking the external pressures that students could be faced with in reality.

While this may or may not enhance ethics, it provides students with better insight into the types of ethical dilemmas in reality and allows them to better reflect on how they would respond in light of the pressures. It was also found that in certain instances students will not be willing to accept the responsibility of being ethical and that this is based on the individual and whether the individual internalises learning. This therefore could lead to a discussion of whether the process of internalisation of learning and reflection within the MDPs is adequate and whether this should be revised to create greater impact for students. According to Hope (2016), for ethics to be taught effectively, it must be coupled with self-discovery and self-reflection as this will enable learners to internalise learning, leading to enhanced impact.

**Secondary objective 1: To determine whether and how ethical leadership is being taught**

When questioned about how ethics is currently taught in MDPs, respondents provided varying answers, implying that there is no consistency in the ways that ethics is taught. It was gauged that ethics is being taught through traditional lecture mediums, namely lectures, discussions and textbook learning, which is not sufficient.

Ethics should be taught in much more engaging, relatable and practical ways, which would make the impact of ethics in the classroom far greater. Traditional methods of lecturing ethics do not relate to students well enough and do not critically challenge the way that they understand and think about ethics. Quin (2016) and Cooke and Ryan (1988) assert that ethical leadership education needs to challenge the way individuals think and make them more conscious of the decisions that they make and the potential impact of their decisions.

It is evident that the MDPs are not achieving the ideals set out by Quin (2016) and Cooke and Ryan (1988). Only a handful of respondents felt that ethics was taught in interactive ways. This has to change; Quin (2016) affirms that if ethics is taught in more interactive and practical ways, the impact of ethics will be far better in the classroom.

**Secondary objective 2: To compare the understanding of ethical leadership by lecturers, students and industry representatives**

From this question it was evident that interviewees shared a similar understanding of ethical leadership in that it could basically refer to the ability to distinguish between right and wrong. Primarily, ethical leadership will prompt an individual to make the right choice when faced with an ethical dilemma. This affirms the definition of Gülcan (2015) of ethical education as the study of what is right and wrong according to morals, values and principles. Other interviewees said that ethical leadership could refer to being morally sound whereas some even alluded to the fact that it refers to being a role model. Fraedrich, Ferrell and Ferrell (2011) share a similar viewpoint, namely that ethics is underpinned on right and wrong based on premises of morality and morally sound decisions. For Wang *et al.* (2017), ethical leadership could be defined as normatively appropriate actions and the promotion of such actions to followers, which aligns with the definitions above.

For this question, insight was gained through the different understanding of ethical leadership, and while common themes emerged, no two answers were exactly the same. Therefore, although there was a common understanding of ethics, this could not be articulated in a coherent and consistent manner across the interview groups. In addition, interviewees referred to cultural and religious background when probed on their understanding of ethical leadership, confirming the notion of Stephenson *et al.* (1998) that socialisation plays an important role in forming a fundamental understanding of ethical leadership but that it does not play the only role.

Burns (2005) states that ethics is not only the study of virtue in judgement between right and wrong but ethics and values are essential as they deal primarily with the interaction between human beings as well as the interactions of human beings with the world. The promotion of ethical leadership therefore supports the notion that prior to a focus on profitability, organisations should adopt leaders that strive to



be not only the best *in* the world, but also the best *for* the world in all spheres of activity, social, economic and environmental.

### **Recommendations**

Although the MDPs do currently focus on ethics and ethical leadership, more could be done in terms of the way these topics are taught. This will result in more ethical managers and leaders exiting higher education institutions.

The following recommendations are therefore made:

- Lecturers should play a more integral role in creating a common understanding of ethics

It was evident through the variety of responses to ethical leadership that there are several permutations of ethics and ethical leadership. It was found that a lecturer plays a significant role in developing ethical leadership. In addition, ethics is often subjective and means different things to different people. Therefore, it is recommended that lecturers play a much more influential role in creating a common understanding of ethics for all individuals through debates, discussions as well as academic content.

This could be achieved in a number of ways, but could also include compulsory training on ethics and ethical leadership for all MDP lecturers. The benefit of this will be twofold: lecturers will understand ethics better and will be better able to entrench principles of ethics and ethical leadership within the classroom. In addition, this will allow lecturers to practise better ethical leadership and be better role models for students in the classroom.

- Design of MDPs needs to be revised

It was evident in the interviews that while ethics does form part of the MDPs offered by UJ and WBS, it is not regarded as a formal outcome of the programmes, and is not explicitly considered in the design of these programmes. The aim of these MDPs is to produce competent and highly skilled professionals that will lead business in their respective fields. The competencies and attributes for a global leader have to include a sense of good corporate citizenship and relate to ethics and best practice.

Therefore, it is recommended that institutions such as UJ and WBS redesign the master's programme in order to find ways to better integrate ethics into the curriculum. It was found the master's programmes offered by WBS and UJ do not focus enough attention on ethical leadership. In addition, the current context of South Africa and the world, which has witnessed an increase in unethical behaviour, should prompt these institutions to engrain ethics in students, both formally and informally, to a much greater extent. By redesigning the master's programme, these institutions will be able to integrate ethics as a golden thread throughout the programme, i.e. taught as a sub-section of different disciplines or even as a standalone module. This will enhance the impact of ethics and ethics will then be seen as a formal outcome of the respective programmes.

- Enhance the way that ethics is taught

Through the interviews it was found that although ethics is currently touched on in the MDPs, it has little to no impact. Therefore, apart from identifying ways that ethics could be better incorporated into



the design of the programme, institutions must find better ways that will allow them to teach ethics to students. One of the suggestions made during the interviews was making ethics much more relatable to students through interactive, experiential and practical methods.

This could be achieved by introducing gamification, simulations, industry visits and guest speakers into the programme. This will enable students to relate more to the discipline of ethics as well as challenge their thinking through practical scenario-based learning. This recommendation is based on the findings from the interviews that ethics is often taught by means of textbook content and that this is not always the most impactful way to teach ethics. Introducing interactive and practical ways of teaching ethics will challenge the way that individuals see ethics and develop critical thinking skills that will enable them to deal with unethical situations.

## **Conclusion**

This study found that more could be done to enhance the impact and efficacy of the content terms of ethics and ethical leadership. This could be achieved in multiple ways, including allocating more significance to the subject as well as revising the ways that ethics is currently taught. This will aid institutions in producing better graduates that manifest both commercial as well as ethical acumen. Ethics needs to be better engrained in the education curricula and this will aid in combating and eradicating corruption. Through a renewed focus on ethics, individuals will be made more aware of ethics, its consequences and ways to navigate unethical situations. This will prepare students for the harsh reality of the professional world and will equip them to deal with unethical situations. Ultimately the graduates produced from these institutions could be seen as the future leaders of business in the country and on the continent. Therefore, academic institutions have a great responsibility to produce leaders that have the best interests not only of their organisations at heart, but also those of society and the world at large.

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