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# Ethics programs in business and management literature: Bibliometric analysis of performance, content, and trends

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**Abstract**

Research regarding ethics programs represents an important segment of business ethics literature. In the last thirty years, scientific discourse on ethics programs has flourished. Numerous studies examined their functions, composition, application in organizational practice, and impact on employee ethical behavior and many other organizational variables. However, so far there has been no study that would comprehensively map this particular field. Given that, this paper aims to examine discourse on ethics programs in its complexity within business and management literature. Based on a sophistically composed search protocol in the Scopus database, and after multiple rounds of checks, we extracted a final sample of 287 documents that matched the selection criteria. The sample was thoroughly analyzed by means of advanced bibliometric analytics tools. The results show the quantitative impact of ethics program literature via publication and citation metrics, a network of co-occurring themes and clusters of scientific inquiry, and the evolution of respective discourse over time. This detailed analysis results in a set of conclusions provided in the last part of the paper summarizing the quantitative performance and thematic scope of literature on ethics programs.

**Keywords:** bibliometric analysis, business ethics, ethics management, ethics program, organizational ethics

## Introduction

Many organizations seek to build a good reputation as a responsible and trustworthy business partner. They are aware that it is not enough just to declare corporate values. Companies must consistently demonstrate respect for ethical standards in all activities and business decisions. If company owners and managers are serious about ethics, and really care about complying with principles, they will inevitably realize that they need clear and understandable ethics management processes, which must also be appropriately implemented into the everyday life of the organization. Unethical company conduct is related to increased reputational risks, loss of trust and market position, reduced profitability, and eventually, bankruptcy.

The available literature offers several tools for aligning employee behavior with established norms and principles. To achieve this, a systematic and integrated approach is essential. One of the most useful tools in this sense is the organizational ethics program (EP). In general, it represents a well-integrated system of meaningfully mutually interconnected values and norms as mandatory ethical standards, and related processes and structures, which the organization implements for the continuous development of ethics in and outside the organization (Remišová, Lašáková & Kirchmayer, 2019).

In recent decades, EP theory has undergone a massive development. In connection with that, certain terminological ambiguities persist in the respective scientific discourse. For instance, EP is often associated in the literature with a compliance program, although they are not identical, and as such, they necessitate different managerial methods of approaching employees, communication, or control (e.g., Bohinská, 2019; de Klerk, 2021; Skalská, 2020). In addition, the respective discourse also encompasses other terms, e.g. integrity program, ethics infrastructure, or ethics management. These terms overlap, although, strictly speaking, they are not synonyms. Due to unclear boundaries of the given concepts in extant studies, a search of

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literature aiming for comprehensive reviews and bibliometric analyses can be quite problematic.

Still, research in the EP domain substantially contributes to enhancement of ethics in organizations, and this area keeps growing rapidly, creating a natural demand for mapping this dynamically evolving field. This paper aims to examine EP discourse in its complexity within business and management literature. Several methods of bibliometric analysis are employed to examine a relatively large sample of scientific publications (n = 287) extracted from the Scopus database. Sample composition is based on a carefully designed search protocol, and it was subject of multiple rounds of checks for consistency with the aims of this study before running the analyses.

The research is carried out in three directions: (1) quantitative performance indicators of EP literature via publication and citation metrics; (2) construction of a network of co-occurring themes and clusters of scientific inquiry by means of VOSviewer for bibliometric analysis; and (3) evolution mapping using the SciMAT analytic tool, showing how the discourse altered and evolved during the examined period from 1991 to 2021.

The analysis results in a set of conclusions provided in the last section of the paper summarizing the quantitative performance and thematic scope of EP literature. Despite the variety of utilized methods, we are aware that this study has certain limitations, which result from the specificities of bibliometric analyses as such. Compared with a traditional manual literature review, bibliometric tools provide a structured, and potentially also more rigorous and objective approach to analyzing specific fields of research (Zupic & Cater, 2015), especially in larger sets of documents, where a classical literature review might be complicated. The popularity of bibliometric analysis among researchers is on the rise (Ellegaard & Wallin, 2015), but certain limitations must be considered (Donthu et al., 2021). In this study, we employ data only from the Scopus database. Although it is widely considered in academia as one of the leading and most comprehensive scientific databases, some papers on EP might not be included. Furthermore, although Scopus provides high quality bibliometric data, when working with article keywords, special attention should be paid to potential errors and overlaps in the search outputs, and an extensive cleansing process must be applied before running the analysis itself. This is particularly complicated in our research area due to above discussed terminological ambiguities and overlaps. To avoid these pitfalls, we constructed precise thesauruses and applied them before running analyses in VOSviewer and SciMAT. Still, because hundreds of keywords were subject to analysis, some information might have escaped our attention during this process. Another limitation regards the quantitative nature of bibliometrics, which provides results that are particularly demanding to interpret in qualitative terms (Donthu et al., 2021). Therefore, in discussing the outputs from bibliometric analyses in this study, results are complemented by going back to the content of the researched sources and providing fitting examples from the literature.

## Materials and methods

Data for this bibliometric analysis were obtained from the Scopus database, which was accessed in April 2021. As outlined in the introductory section, the conceptual clarity and terminology in EP literature is quite problematic, and as a result, some terms are often used interchangeably as synonyms, substitutes, or proxies, which leaves less space for their meaningful differentiation. Therefore, besides EP as the main inquiry in this study, we utilized several related terms that are used frequently in business ethics literature, whilst bearing similar meaning to EP and denoting intersecting phenomena.

The search protocol consisted of several steps. First, the key terms *"ethic* program*"*, *"ethic* infrastructure*"*, *"ethics management"*, *"ethics and compliance"*, *"best practice* in business ethics"*, and *"integrity management"* were searched for within items of abstracts, titles,

and keywords. As we wanted to access all relevant bibliographic sources, the time span for this research was set for *"all years"* in question.

After this first round of search, 3553 items were retained. Engineering, Energy, Material Sciences and Earth and Planetary Sciences were amongst the best represented categories, presumably due to the term "integrity management", which bears, in these disciplines, a specific technical meaning, representing a set of management and safety standards for engineering assets such as plants, facilities, or equipment.

As this study focused on scientific reflection of EP primarily in business and management literature, to avoid contamination of the bibliometric data, in the second step, we limited the search to the *"Business, Management and Accounting"* discipline. After the second step, 353 items were retained.

In the third step, we reviewed rigorously the abstracts of each of the 353 items and excluded papers which did not meet the expected scope of our research, i.e., EP as a set of components and measures applied in an organizational setting. This thorough selection resulted in *n = 287 documents* that form the basis for this study. The sample was then subject to the analyses described below.

First, we conducted *quantitative performance analysis* regarding the corpus of extracted studies with the aim of gaining an overview of the publication activity and its impact in terms of various quantitative indicators. Data for this analysis were exported from Scopus into an Excel sheet that entailed a multitude of bibliometric details. One of the great advantages of bibliometric analysis in Scopus is that this database offers the processing of basic information in the form of summative graphs and tables.

Second, VOSviewer software was utilized in this study (van Eck & Waltman, 2010; 2020). It is a specialized software tool for analyzing and visualizing scientific literature and it is considered useful in finding latent patterns connecting these documents. In this research, we utilized the co-occurrence of key terms. To eliminate duplicities in keywords, we used a thoroughly designed thesaurus file to exclude redundancies which would otherwise negatively affect the quality of findings. More than 800 key words were included in this research, and the minimum number of occurrences was set to three. The co-occurrence analysis of key words was processed to retain a network of *main research topics regarding EP in clusters*.

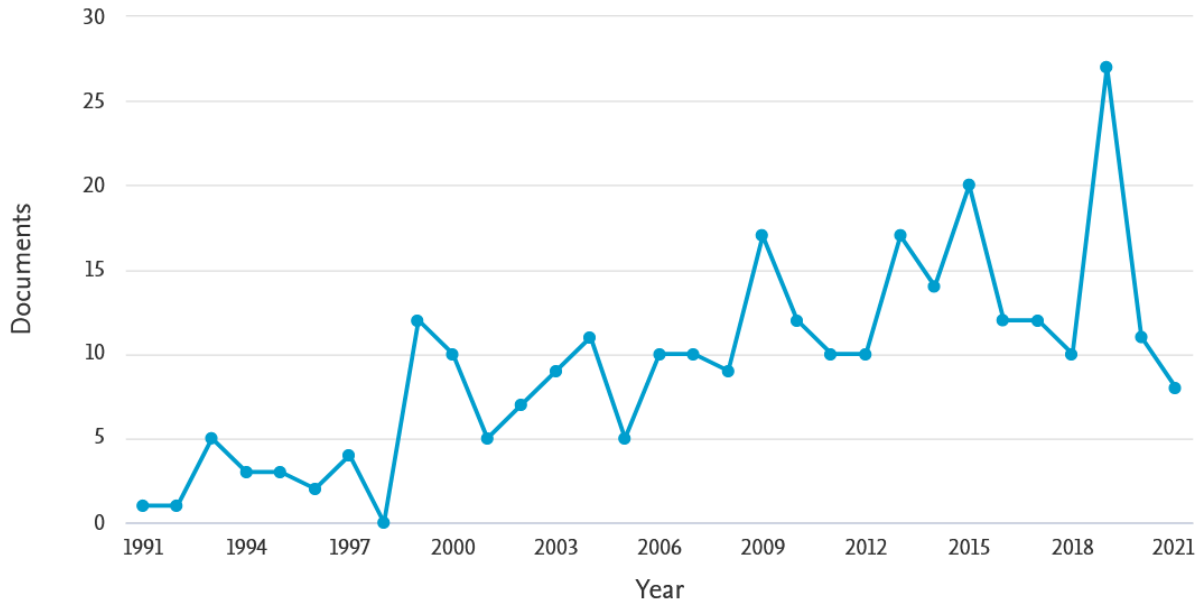
Third, SciMAT software (Cobo et al., 2012) was used to identify the *inner dynamics and trends* over specified time periods in EP literature. The evolution mapping was based on co-occurrence of author key words (n = 670), with association strength as normalization and evolution measure, and simple centers clustering algorithm. Maximum cluster size was set to 12 (min 4). The Jaccard index was used as the overlapping measure. Papers in the sample were grouped into five time periods.

## Results and Discussion

### 1. Quantitative analysis of ethics program literature

Figure 1 shows the year range for the sample of documents from 1991 to 2021 and indicates the number of papers by years. We see an *ascending trend* indicating raising attention to this topic in business and management literature (except 2021 – data not complete as the search was conducted in April 2021). The highest number of documents was published in 2019 (27 items) and in 2015 (20 items).

**Figure 1:** Number of documents in the sample by year (1991–2021)




Source: Scopus, Elsevier, April 2021

Next, Figure 2 shows the top seven journals that publish most frequently on the respective topic. The absolute hegemony in publishing EP-related research belongs to the *Journal of Business Ethics* (Springer) with 74 papers, followed by *Public Integrity* (Taylor & Francis) with 17 papers, *Business Ethics Quarterly* (Cambridge Core) with nine contributions, *International Journal of Public Administration* (Taylor & Francis) with five papers, and *Business and Society Review* (Wiley), *Business Ethics: European Review* (Wiley, from 2021 as *Business Ethics, the Environment, and Responsibility*), and *Science and Engineering Ethics* (Springer), all with four papers published.

This overview shows that besides the focal business ethics field (JBE, BEQ, BEER, BSR), EP is also of particular interest to the field of public administration and policymaking. Works are published mostly in *Public Integrity* and *International Journal of Public Administration*. Papers focus, among other things, on public organizations' ethical performance (e.g., Khaltar & Moon, 2020), setting a normative framework for public organizations (e.g., Hoekstra & Kaptein, 2012; 2021), whistleblowing mechanisms (e.g., Hoekstra & Talsma, 2021), corruption and white-collar crime (e.g., Kerkhoff & Overeem, 2021; Kolthoff, 2016). In the field of engineering ethics, *Science and Engineering Ethics* journal publishes papers concentrated on process of implementing and developing ethics within professions (e.g., Davis & Keefer, 2013; Soskolne & Sieswerda, 2003), tackling ethics of science and technology with the emphasis on bioethics (ten Have, 2010), and the interplay between codes of ethics and employee behavior within the construction industry (Ho & Oladinrin, 2019).

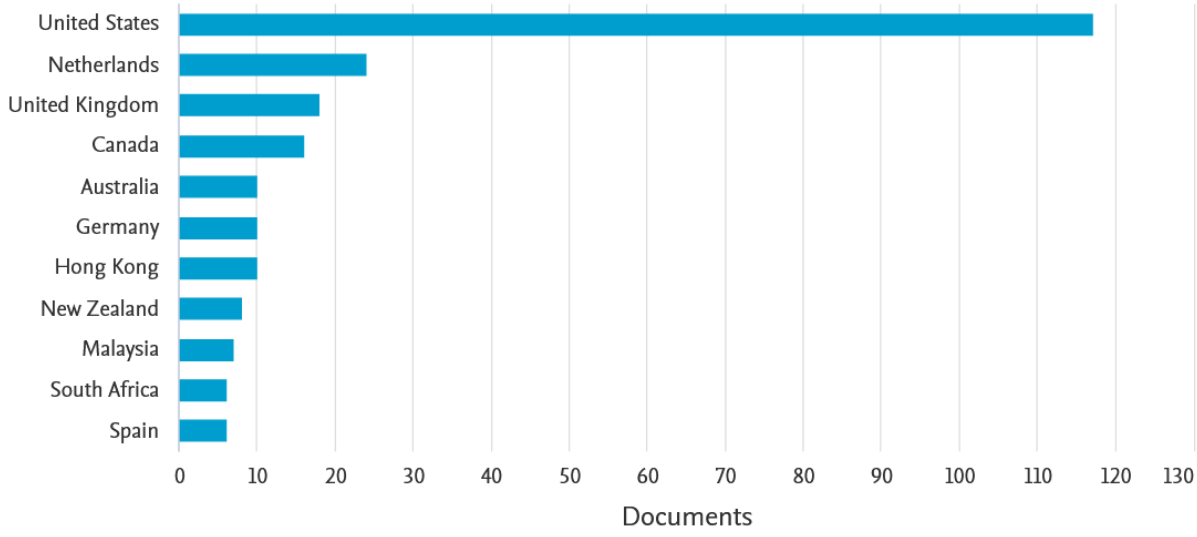
**Figure 2:** Papers by year and journal (top 7)




Source: Scopus, Elsevier, April 2021

Figure 3 shows the number of documents per country, with the clear dominance of papers from the USA (117), followed by the Netherlands (24), the UK (18), Canada (16), Australia, Germany, and Hong Kong (all with 10 publications), New Zealand and Malaysia (with 7 papers each), and South Africa and Spain (with 6 contributions). Altogether, 49 countries have at least one document in the sample (with 25 items undefined).

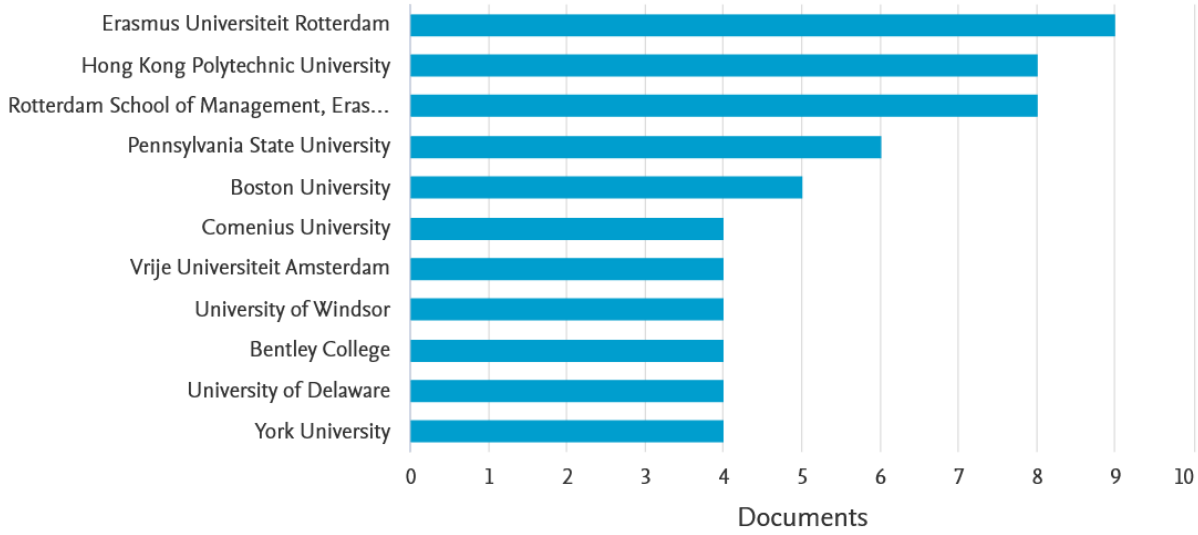
**Figure 3:** Documents by country (countries with the highest no. of papers)




Source: Scopus, Elsevier, April 2021

Looking more closely to the institutional affiliation of authors publishing in the domain of EP, Figure 4 shows that most institutions are located in the U.S. and Western Europe, whereas only one university is located in Asia (Hong Kong Polytechnic University) and one is located in the Central and Eastern Europe region (Comenius University in Bratislava, Slovakia).

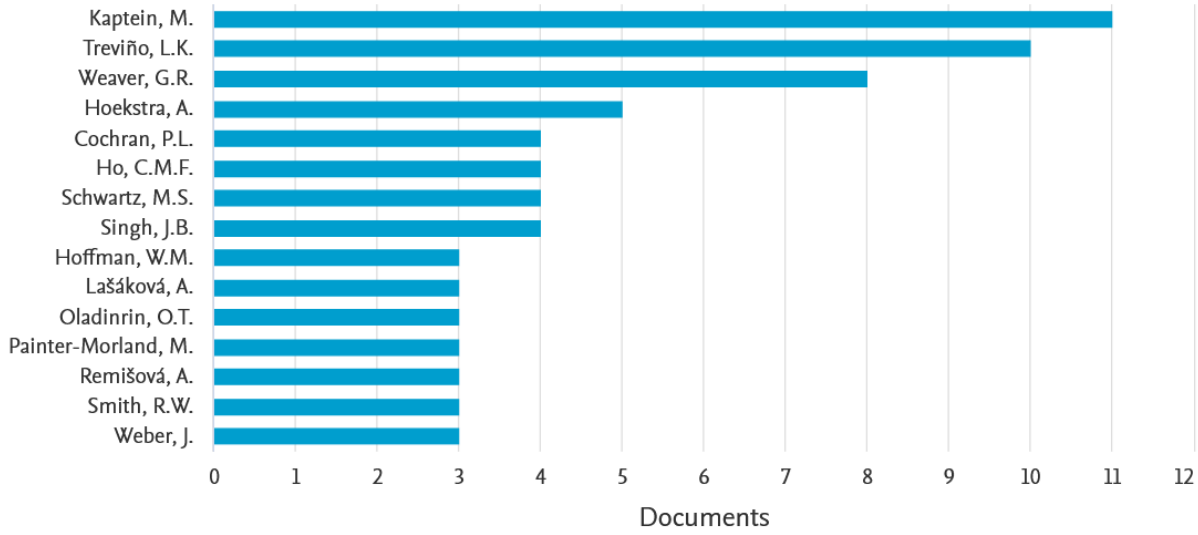
**Figure 4:** Documents by institutional affiliation (universities with the highest no. of papers)




Source: Scopus, Elsevier, April 2021

An overview of the most productive authors in the respective field is shown in Figure 5. The ranking leads a Netherlands-based author, Kaptein, with 11 papers, followed the by U.S.-based Trevino (10 papers) and Weaver (8 papers), and then Hoekstra (5 papers) from the Netherlands. Here, it is important to note that this ranking considers individual authors, although many of them published several papers on EP in co-authorship. Again, the analysis shows that the discourse on EP is sustained mostly by authors from the USA (e.g., Trevino, Weaver), Canada (for e.g., Singh, Schwartz), the UK (e.g., Oladinrin, Painter-Morland), and Western Europe (e.g., Kaptein, Hoekstra). Region of South-East Asia is represented by Ho (Hong Kong), and Central and Eastern Europe by Remišová and Lašáková (Slovakia).

**Figure 5:** Most productive authors (ranked by the no. of published papers, and alphabetically)

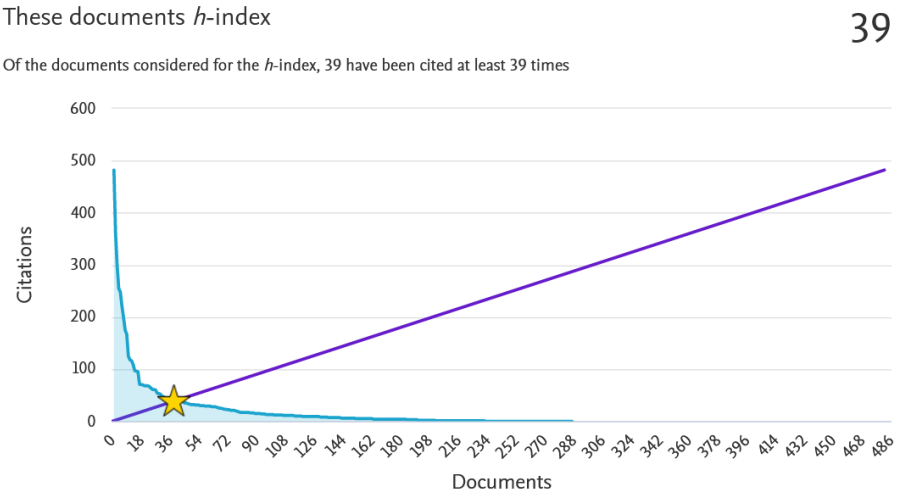



Source: Scopus, Elsevier, April 2021

The next part of this bibliometric analysis deals with citation analysis. Calculations were done with exclusion of self-citation. In total, there were 6566 citations for the 287 works included in the sample up to the year 2020. For the n = 287 documents in the sample, the h-index, which

shows the highest number of papers having at least the same number of citations, was equal to 39 (see Figure 6).

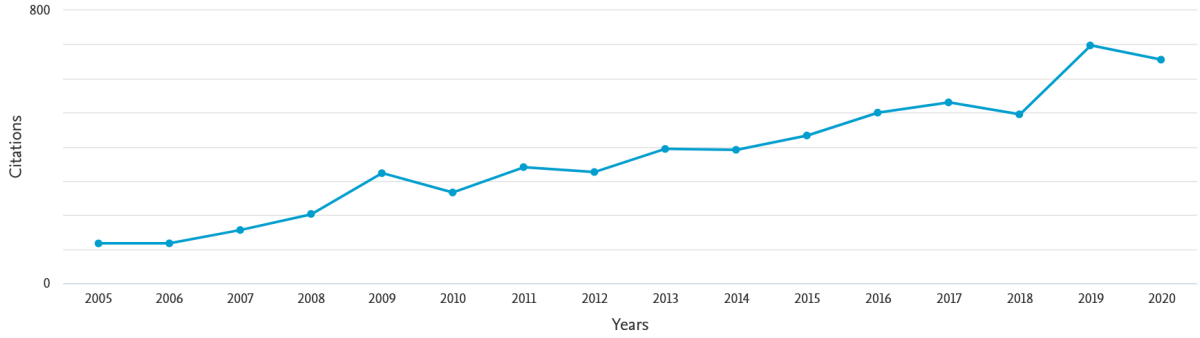
**Figure 6:** Citation analysis – the h-index for documents in the sample (excl. self-citations)




Source: Scopus, Elsevier, April 2021

The line graph in Figure 7 shows the trend in citing papers related with EP. The highest number of citations was noted in 2019 (n = 697). In general, the trend is ascending, with a minor decline in 2020 with 655 citations (2021 is not included in this analysis since the data were collected in April 2021).

**Figure 7:** Citation analysis – overview of number of citations pre year (excl. self-citations)




Source: Scopus, Elsevier, April 2021

There were 49 papers in the sample with zero citations, and on the other side of this continuum was the most cited paper by Weaver, Trevino and Cochran (1999c) with 482 citations. Their paper introduced formal corporate EPs as a way for companies to respond to societal expectations for socially responsible company conduct. Also, this paper was one of the first to raise the issue of organizational ethics decoupling as a gap between what the company verbalizes in a program and what it does in practice. In addition, this paper stressed the unique role of top management commitment to ethics as a way of overcoming the distance between formal processes and real actions in companies.

Interestingly, the second most cited paper with 362 citations was written by the same team of authors, Weaver et al. (1999b) and published in the same place, the *Academy of Management Journal*. Here, the authors discuss compliance- and values-based control of employee behavior as two main orientations of an EP and provide future research and policy implications for practitioners.

With 299 citations, the third most cited paper by Valentine and Flieschman (2008) represents an exploratory study on the connection between employee job satisfaction and EP components

like a code of conduct or ethics training. They propose a nowadays strongly advocated idea of implementing multiple ethics components to better manage employees' work attitudes.

The analysis of the most productive authors (see Figure 5) showed that the Netherlands-based author Kaptein, as one of the most influential authors in the field, authored and co-authored 11 papers in the sample. According to the Scopus data, these papers have 571 citations in total. The most cited paper with 248 citations by Kaptein (2004) analyzed the content of business codes of large multinational firms. His research informs theory on three types of codes, namely the stakeholder statute, the values statement, and the code of conduct. Still, the core of Kaptein's work lies in enhancing an ethical organizational culture through EP components (i.e., Kaptein, 2009; 2010; 2011; 2015).

Another influential author in this area is Schwartz with four papers in the sample and 283 citations for these papers in total. Papers in the sample by this Canadian author dealt with codes of ethics (Schwartz, 2002; Schwartz, Dunfee & Kline, 2005), and ethical organizational culture (Schwartz, 2013). The Canadian stream of research in EP also involves Singh with four papers and 70 citations of these papers. This author focused on the Canadian corporate EPs (Singh, 2011a), codes of ethics (Singh, 2011b; 2015), and operationalization of business ethic in companies (Singh et al., 2018).

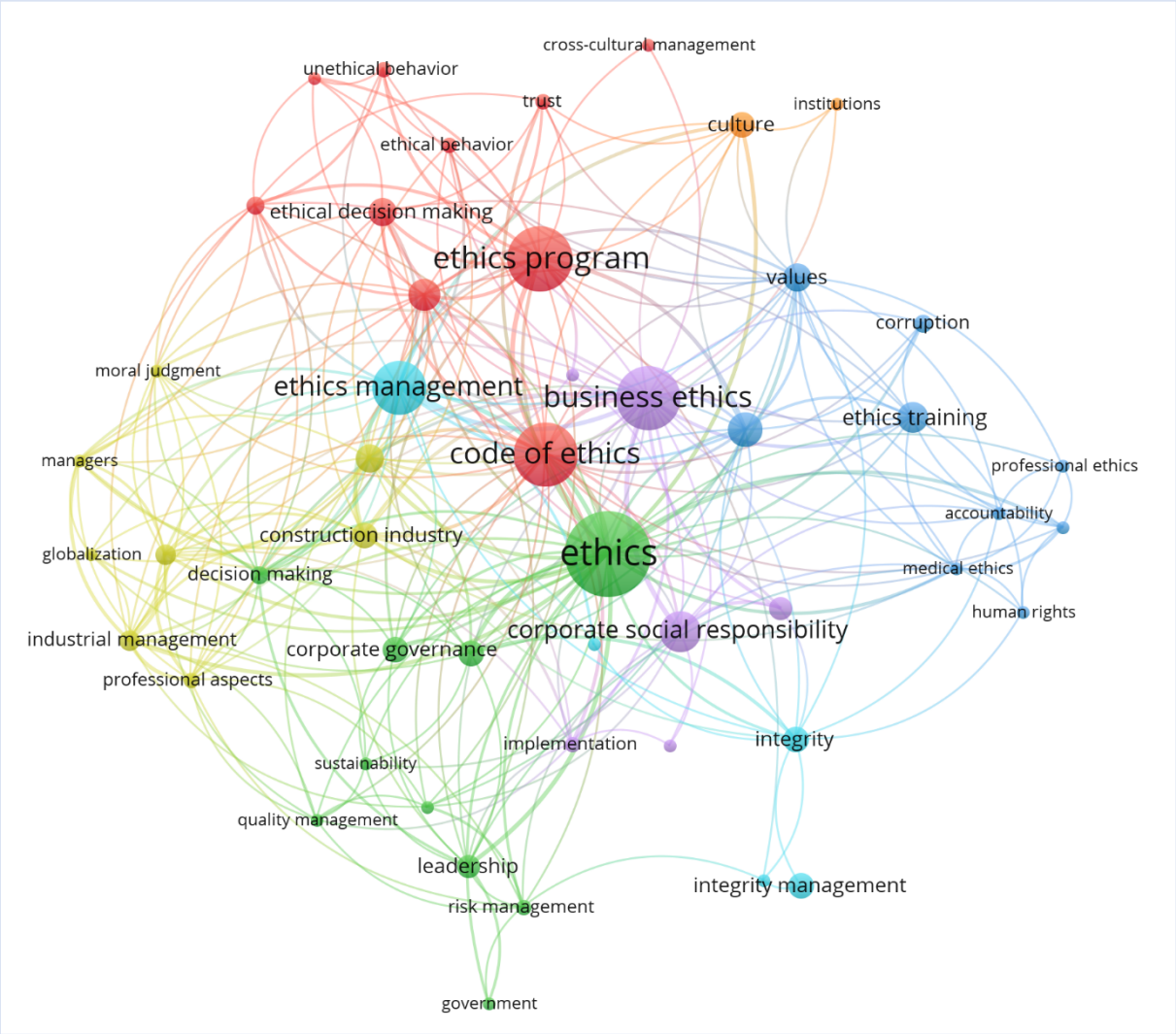
### 2. Network of co-occurring topics and clusters within ethics program literature

The co-occurrence analysis of key words was processed in VOSviewer. The purpose was to retain a network of research topics regarding EP in interconnected clusters. After careful inspection of retained key words in the first round, a thorough thesaurus was constructed and implemented to exclude overlapping terms and plurals.

The network visualization in Figure 8 illustrates clusters of terms representing research areas, which can be regarded as specific fields of scientific inquiry within EP literature. Analysis has isolated *50 items* classified into *seven clusters*.

In general, the larger the term is displayed on the map, the higher the frequency of occurrence of the term. Also, the smaller the distance between the terms, the higher the correlation of the terms, meaning that terms appearing more often in combinations are placed closer together on the map. While areas in the core of the map are researched extensively, areas at the borders may represent a potential gap in the current literature and an open area for further research as such. Topics positioned closer to EP are studied more frequently in combination and include ethical decision making, ethical behavior, and trust. On the other hand, for instance government structures, human rights, quality management, risk management, or sustainability are amongst less researched topics in connection with EP.

**Figure 8:** Network visualization of clusters in ethics program literature




The *red cluster* encompasses research topics focusing on behavioral aspects associated with EP. They represent closely interconnected organizational phenomena, namely ethical behavior – ethical climate – ethical culture – ethical leadership – ethical decision making – trust – unethical behavior. Also, they are placed in the same cluster as EP, indicating that this area of research is nowadays quite saturated. Clearly, one of the largest portions of research goes into the relationship between EPs and codes of ethics. Interestingly, cross-cultural management also belongs to the red cluster, and is included in studies dealing with inter-country comparisons like the study by Weaver (2001) on EPs in global business and the role of culture in managing ethics. Other examples for this connection include, for instance, the study by Trapp (2010) on how global firms communicate business ethics in culturally diverse teams, or the study by Singh et al. (2018) comparing views of managers in Australia, Canada and Sweden on how to operationalize business ethics in organizations.

Central terms in the *dark blue cluster* are values, compliance, and ethics training, providing connections between EP and the other areas of research interest. Placement of terms indicates that the dark blue cluster involves two interconnected groups, namely education – medical ethics – human rights – accountability – professional ethics, and compliance program – corruption – values.

In the *green cluster*, central terms that connect EP with the other green terms are corporate governance and regulatory compliance. This cluster includes research topics focused on the top

executive roles (terms: leadership – management – government) and related processes taking place at the top of companies as well as regulatory tactics in governmental bodies, especially at local levels and municipalities (terms: decision making – risk management – quality management – sustainability).

The *yellow cluster* includes studies considering a wider perspective on managing ethics in organizations within a framework of globalization, the nature of societal institutions, and the broad area of industrial management, including the construction industry as a specific sector. Furthermore, professional aspects are considered in this cluster, mostly connected with managers and their moral judgment.

The *violet cluster* unites more broad and evolutionary older terms co-occurring with the term EP and indicating its conceptual roots like business ethics, organizational ethics, or corporate social responsibility. Studies from this area consider the decision to implement an EP as a matter of CSR (Gaur, Ghosh & Zheng, 2019), and investigate what impacts this strategic choice, for instance institutional complexity (Chandler, 2014), or institutional isomorphism and conformity pressures (Martin & Johnson, 2008).

The *light blue cluster* involves terms related to integrity management (integrity – integrity management – integrity systems – whistleblowing), whilst the fifth term in this cluster is ethics management positioned closer to EP than the rest of the light blue terms. As outlined in the theoretical introduction in this paper, EP-related discourse operates with many terms, while their conceptual borders have not been fully clarified yet. This is true especially for the term "integrity management", which overlaps to a great extent with the definition of ethics management. Integrity management is generally understood as systematic and complex monitoring, evaluation, and development of the ability of organizations to combat breaches of integrity (Kaptein, 1999). The term denotes alignment of thoughts, words and actions; in other words, a sense of "wholeness" in both organizational (company) and individual (employee) actions (Hoekstra & Kaptein, 2021). Some studies tend to underline the focus on compliance in achieving integrity (e.g., Kerkhoff & Overeem, 2021). Also, some studies link integrity with the functioning of whistleblowing mechanisms in an organization (Hoekstra & Talsma, 2021).

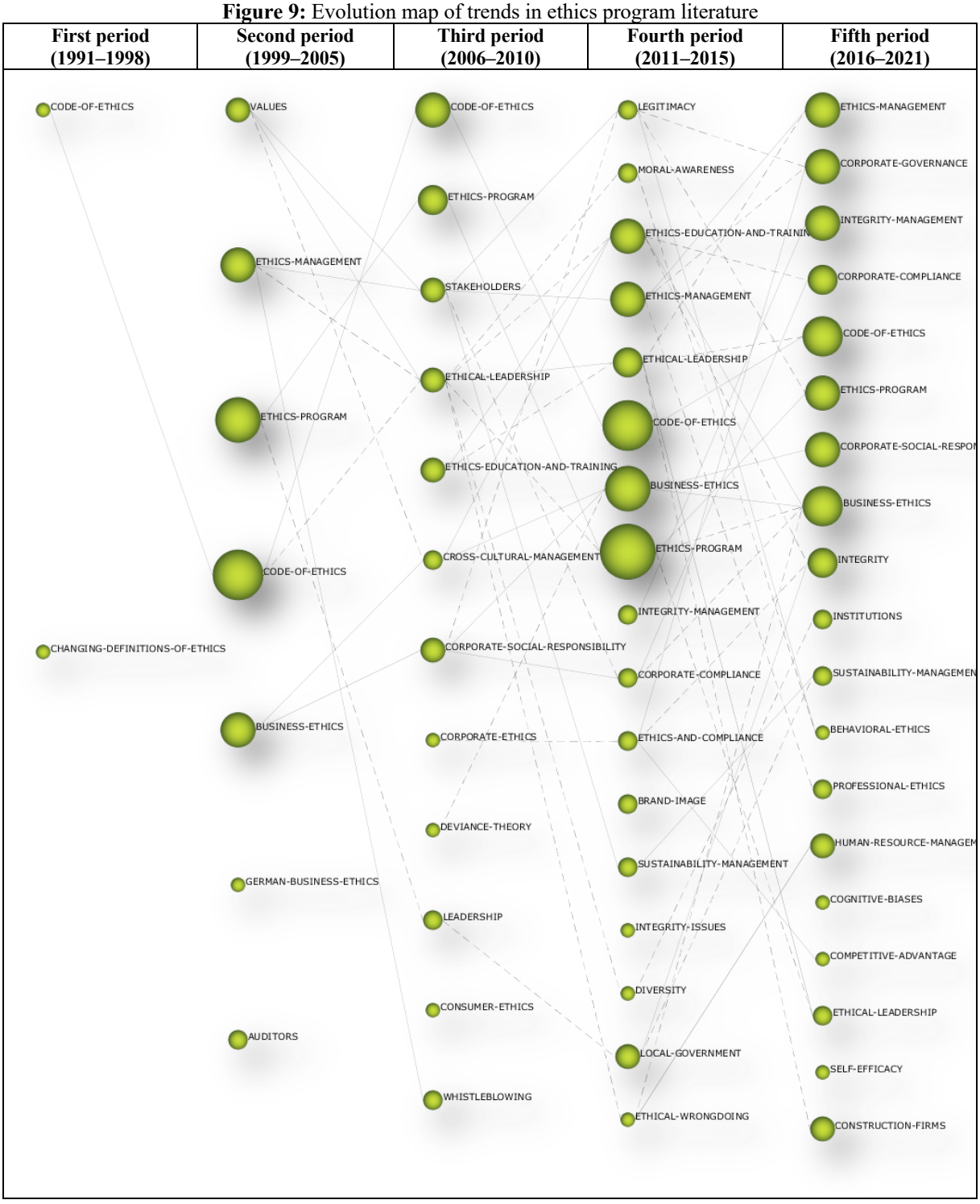
Finally, the *orange cluster* consists of two interconnectedly researched terms; culture and institutions. For instance, one study in this cluster deals with the importance of cultural institutional pillars for achieving the highest level of transparency and anticorruption (Paik, Warner-Søderholm & Huse, 2019). Other authors examine institutions through the lens of cultural consensus theory (Keller, 2019), or examine the effectiveness of various ethics measures in specific cultural contexts like Africa (Ndedi, 2015) or Hong Kong (Ho et al., 2004).

In summary, the positioning of the seven clusters indicates how these research areas relate to each other. For instance, the topic of governance is not researched in mutual connection with ethics training, unethical behavior or ethical climate as much as with for instance., compliance or codes of ethics (e.g., Demise, 2005; Schwartz, Dunfee & Kline, 2005). Or, in another instance, studies on the connection of ethical leadership and compliance are substantially less developed than for example, studies examining the relationship between ethical leadership and its behavioral outcomes or values (e.g., Beeri et al., 2013; Plinio, Young & Lavery, 2010; Schwartz, 2013).

## 3. Evolution of ethics program discourse across time periods

The last section of research results deals with trends analysis carried out by means of the SciMAT science mapping software tool. After close inspection of the dynamics of EP literature in terms of production of papers between the oldest reference in the sample (1991) and the newest papers (2021), five periods were identified to best suit the aim of constructing a map depicting the evolution of EP literature and main trends across time (see Figure 9).

**Figure 9:** Evolution map of trends in ethics program literature




The first period regards early stage of the respective discourse until the year 1998 (19 papers). As the discourse started to gain strength around 1999, the remaining production of scholarly articles was divided into four shorter periods to capture all relevant details and nuances in the discourse evolution. The second period (1999–2005) included 59 documents, the third period (2006–2010) listed 58 papers, the fourth period (2011–2015) comprised 71 papers, and the fifth period (2016–2020) involved 80 documents.

Overall, the composition of the evolution map implies that new themes were introduced in each period, and the discourse gradually gained in strength and scope of topics examined within

the EP agenda. In its beginnings, the discourse started very slowly and only two clusters were identified in the first period. The development of the entire field sped up in 1999, especially after papers by Kaptein (1999) on integrity management and a series of four papers by Weaver, Trevino and Cochran (1999a; 1999b; 1999c) and Weaver and Trevino (1999), which represented seminal works on EP literally motoring the respective field. As shown in Figure 15, the second period included 7 clusters, whereas 12 clusters were isolated in the third period, 17 clusters in the fourth period, and 19 clusters in the fifth period.

The *first period* brought in a strong theme of codes of ethics, which also remained topical in the next periods. Co-occurring terms in the *second period* include the core of the whole discourse that remains more or less the same throughout the next phases. This core involves terms like business ethics, ethics management, and codes of ethics. An immense increase in new topics is visible in the *third period* after 2006. In this phase, the research was enriched by topics of ethical leadership, employee ethics education, cross-cultural perspectives in business and organizational ethics, consumer ethics, and whistleblowing in organizations. Next, the research expands in the *fourth period* with issues like companies gaining moral legitimacy in relations with company stakeholders, moral awareness as a component of the ethical decision-making process, integrity management, diversity, and EPs at the level of local government. The *fifth period* includes topical issues of corporate governance, sustainability management, ethics in human resource management, cognitive biases influencing the fit between EP, organizational values and individual values, and behavioral aspects of ethics, for example, in team performance.

## Conclusions

This paper employs several methods of bibliometric analysis to map EP discourse within business and management literature. We pinpoint its quantitative impact via publication and citation metrics, present a network of co-occurring themes and clusters, and show how the discourse altered and evolved during the examined period over the last thirty years.

In this section, we summarize the main outcomes. Based on in-depth analysis of quantitative aspects and thematic variety of the respective field of literature, we found that:

1. There is a quite steady ascending trend of scholarly attention paid to EP. The number of publications on EP and the number of citations as well continues to grow with a few smaller swings consecutively during the observed period.

2. As for the most preferred places for publishing studies on EP, the Journal of Business Ethics holds primacy. In addition, besides this main publishing outlet for the respective topic, a significant portion of papers is also being published by the other three top-tier journals in business ethics, namely Business Ethics Quarterly, Business Ethics, the Environment, and Responsibility (former Business Ethics: European Review), and Business and Society Review.

3. Interestingly, besides these classic outlets for business ethics literature, EP is also of particular interest to the field of public administration with journals like Public Integrity, or the International Journal of Public Administration. Authors in this domain focus on the usefulness of EP and its components in minimizing unethical behavior particularly in public organizations. Studies on EP are also being published by the Journal of Science and Engineering Ethics, where mostly ethics in specific professions and industries is addressed.

4. The institutional affiliation of prominent authors publishing in the domain of EP is mostly in the USA and Western Europe. The US school of thought is dominating the whole discourse and is represented by Weaver and Trevino as two of the most productive and most cited authors in the field. In Europe, the most influential author (in terms of number of papers and citations) is the Netherlands-based author Kaptein. He is the most productive author in the field and together with Hoekstra from the Netherlands they contribute to the European strand of this

discourse. In this regional perspective, another influential center of EP literature is in Canada, with Schwartz and Singh as two most visible authors with high numbers of citations.

5. As for particular components of EP, research focuses mainly on codes of ethics, ethics boards and committees, ethics officers, ethics audit and control. Amongst these components, special attention is ascribed to employee ethics training and its effects on employee behavior and the rate of unethical practices occurring in companies.

6. Furthermore, the analysis points out well-saturated areas of research and potential research gaps as well. Saturated areas include research issues connected with EP that are already covered by considerable amount of accumulated knowledge, e.g., codes of ethics, compliance programs, internal reporting in companies and whistleblowing procedures, ethics training, and organizational ethical climate. Other popular research topics include international differences in EP application, and EP as a prerequisite for an ethical organizational culture in the company. This connects with the topic of ethical leadership, and how it coalesces with EP, to boost employee ethical behavior and to build ethical organizational culture.

7. Potential research gaps offer enough space for further research. Subsequent research could focus on the implementation of EP in national and supra-national governments, the relationship of EP with quality management, its functionality with respect to risk management in the company, the potential of EP in developing human rights of internal and external company stakeholders or uncovering potential linkages between EP and sustainable company conduct. The reinforcing effects of EP on the relationship between ethical leadership and legal compliance in the company could also be examined. EP's influence on the relationship between corporate governance and ethical climate, or its mitigating effects in the relationship between corporate governance and employee unethical behavior are also proposed as a potentially open avenue for future research.

8. The temporal analysis of the evolution of the respective discourse revealed several evergreen topics appearing throughout nearly all examined periods. In this sense, particularly perseverant was the topic of code of ethics.

9. Results of evolution mapping also indicate that during the last thirty years, EP discourse gradually involved new topics and grew in scope in each period. After a somewhat slower start, the development of the entire field sped up in 1999. An immense boost of new topics is visible in the periods after 2006, especially in connection with ethical leadership, ethics training, and whistleblowing in organizations, moral awareness, diversity issues, and ethics in local governments and municipalities.

10. The current fifth period expands EP discourse by topics of corporate governance, sustainability management, ethics in human resource management, or different professional, psychological and behavioral aspects of ethics (e.g., self-efficacy, cognitive biases). Also, there is an evident trend in recent years of a more detailed examination of the topics from previous periods. It seems that EP discourse is still in a phase of gradual progress and growth.

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