



Online Ethics Center  
FOR ENGINEERING AND SCIENCE

# Organizational Climate and Culture Subject Aid

## Author(s)

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## Description

A short bibliography of definitions and seminal articles and policies that look at ethics in organizational cultures. This includes methods for accessing ethical cultures.

## Body

Organizational *culture* refers to the system of shared assumptions, values, and beliefs that govern how people behave in a specific organization. Organizational ethical *climate* is the shared perceptions and attitudes of how individuals perceive the quality of the environments in which they are immersed and the extent to which their organizational unit supports responsible practices and integrity. An organization's ethical climate is often heavily influenced by organizational *culture*. This culture provides guidelines that help members of the organization know how to perform their jobs in a way that will be acceptable to other members of the organization. An organization's climate and culture can both help cultivate ethical or unethical behaviors and practices, depending on a variety of factors. This can include organizational structures and processes such as how funds and other

resources are obtained and allocated in the organization, organizational leadership and oversight, and how individuals are rewarded, to name a few.

Adapted from: Martinson, Brian, Carol Thrush, and A. Lauren Crain. 2013.

"Development and Validation of the Survey of Organizational Research Climate (SORC)." *Science & Engineering Ethics* 19 (3):813-834. doi: 10.1007/s11948-012-9410-7.

## Subject Overviews

**Anderson, Melissa S., Emily A. Ronning, and Raymond De Vries. 2007. "The Perverse Effects of Competition on Scientists' Work and Relationships." *Science and Engineering Ethics* 13: 437-461. Doi: 10.1007/s11948-007-9042-5**

Though competition for funding, positions, and prestige is often seen as one of the main components driving scientific advancement, little attention has been given to its possible negative effects on scientists, their work, and their relationships. The authors of this study conducted focus-groups with 51 mid-to-early career scientists which revealed that this kind of competition often leads to strategic game-playing in science, a decline in one's willingness to share information and methods, deformation of relationships, and in some cases, questionable research conduct. When such competition is pervasive, the authors argue, it can undermine the integrity of science.

**Barnett, Tim, and Elizabeth Schubert. 2002. "Perceptions of the Ethical Work Climate and Covenantal Relationships." *Journal of Business Ethics* 36 (3):279-290. doi: 10.1023/a:1014042613106.**

Employees' perception of the existence of a covenantal relationship between themselves and their employer indicates that they believe there is a mutual commitment to shared values and the welfare of the other party in the relationship. Research suggests that these types of employment relationships have positive benefits for both employees and employers.

**Fryer-Edwards, Kelly. 2002. "Addressing the Hidden Curriculum in Scientific Research." *The American Journal of Bioethics* 2 (4):58-59. doi:**

**10.1162/152651602320957619.**

Though ethics education is important, the author of this short piece points to the need to pay attention to the “hidden curriculum” of scientific research, or the organizational culture in which this education and research takes place, and how this either reinforces or undermines the importance of ethics in how research is performed in a specific lab, department, or organization.

**Geller, G., A. Boyce, D. E. Ford, and J. Sugarman. 2010. "Beyond "compliance": the role of institutional culture in promoting research integrity." *Academic Medicine* 85 (8):1296-302. doi: 10.1097/ACM.0b013e3181e5f0e5.**

The authors highlight relevant themes that emerged from a study of ethical issues encountered in the conduct of clinical and translational research. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected through a short survey targeting research staff, course evaluations from a research ethics and integrity education course attended primarily by faculty and fellows, a review of institutional policies on research ethics education, and in-depth interviews of key administrative officials. Major themes included the relative influence of regulatory compliance and relationships between research personnel at different levels of the organizational hierarchy on the responsible conduct of research. The majority of respondents (85%) expressed comfort with reporting suspected breaches in research integrity, but the others did not feel comfortable doing so for fear of professional repercussions. Respondents provided insight into factors in the research environment they felt were most helpful in fostering research integrity, particularly with respect to relationships and power differentials between individuals or groups. The authors conclude that compliance with research regulations is only one of a number of important factors in an institution's ethical culture of research. Equally important are a clear articulation of the ethical reasoning that underlies the regulations, and efforts to redress power imbalances by encouraging open communication. Other ways of improving relationships among various members of the academic research team should be the focus of the future.

**Martinson, Brian, Carol Thrush, and A. Lauren Crain. 2013. "Development and Validation of the Survey of Organizational Research Climate (SORC)." *Science & Engineering Ethics* 19 (3):813-834. doi: 10.1007/s11948-012-**

## **9410-7.**

Development and targeting efforts by academic organizations to effectively promote research integrity can be enhanced if they are able to collect reliable data to benchmark baseline conditions, to assess areas needing improvement, and to subsequently assess the impact of specific initiatives. To date, no standardized and validated tool has existed to serve this need. A web and mail-based survey was administered in the second half of 2009 to 2,837 randomly selected biomedical and social science faculty and postdoctoral fellows at 40 academic health centers in top-tier research universities in the United States. The article discusses the developing concerns of organizational climate and ethics, describes the development of the SORC, and its success as an assessment tool.

**Meyers, Christopher. 2004. "Institutional Culture and Individual Behavior: Creating an Ethical Environment." *Science & Engineering Ethics* 10 (2):269-276.**

Much of the work in professional ethics sees ethical problems as resulting from ethical ignorance, ethical failure, or evil intent. While this approach gets at real and valid concerns, it does not capture the whole story because it does not take into account the underlying professional or institutional culture in which moral decision making is imbedded. The author's argument in this paper is that this culture plays a powerful and sometimes determinant role in establishing the nature of the ethical debate; i.e., it helps to define what are viable action options, what is the organization's genuine mission, and what behaviors will be rewarded or criticized. Given these conclusions, He also argue that consulting ethicists need more than an understanding of ethics theory, concepts and principles; they also need a sufficiently rich understanding of organizational culture and a willingness and an ability to critique that culture.

**Verbos, Amy Klemm, Joseph A Gerard, Paul R Forshey, Charles S Harding, and Janice S Miller. 2007. "The positive ethical organization: Enacting a living code of ethics and ethical organizational identity." *Journal of Business Ethics* 76 (1):17-33.**

A vision of a living code of ethics is proposed to counter the emphasis on negative phenomena in the study of organizational ethics. The living code

results from the harmonious interaction of authentic leadership, five key organizational processes (attraction–selection–attrition, socialization, reward systems, decision-making and organizational learning), and an ethical organizational culture (characterized by heightened levels of ethical awareness and a positive climate regarding ethics). The living code is the cognitive, affective, and behavioral manifestation of an ethical organizational identity. The authors also draw on business ethics literature, positive organizational scholarship, and management literature to outline the elements of positive ethical organizations as those exemplary organizations consistently practicing the highest levels of organizational ethics. In a positive ethical organization, the right thing to do is the only thing to do.

## **Policies and Guidance**

**The National Academies of Science, Engineering and Medicine. 2014. *Safe Science: Promoting a Culture of Safety in Academic Chemical Research*. Washington, D.C.: National Academies Press.**

**<https://www.nap.edu/catalog/18706/safe-science-promoting-a-culture-of-safety-in-academic-chemical>**

This report examines the culture of safety in research institutions and makes recommendations for university leadership, laboratory researchers, and environmental health and safety professionals to support safety as a core value of their institutions. The report discusses ways to fulfill that commitment through prioritizing funding for safety equipment and training, as well as making safety an ongoing operational priority. A strong, positive safety culture arises not because of a set of rules but because of a constant commitment to safety throughout an organization. Such a culture supports the free exchange of safety information, emphasizes learning and improvement, and assigns greater importance to solving problems than placing blame. High importance is assigned to safety at all times, not just when it is convenient or does not threaten personal or institutional productivity goals.

**The National Academies of Science, Engineering and Medicine. 2012. *Practical Guidance on Science and Engineering Ethics Education for Instructors and Administrators: Papers and Summary from a Workshop***

**Washington, D.C.: National Academies Press.**

**<https://www.nap.edu/catalog/18519/practical-guidance-on-science-and-engineering-ethics-education-for-instructors-and-administrators>**

*Practical Guidance on Science and Engineering Ethics Education for Instructors and Administrators* is the summary of a workshop convened in December 2012 to consider the best practices for ethics education programs in science and engineering. The workshop focused on four key areas: goals and objectives for ethics instruction, instructional assessment, institutional and research cultures, and development of guidance checklists for instructors and administrators. Leading experts summarized and presented papers on current research knowledge in these areas. This report presents the edited papers and a summary of the discussions at the workshop.

**The National Academies of Science, Engineering and Medicine. 2002. *Integrity in Scientific Research: Creating an Environment That Promotes Responsible Conduct*. Washington, D.C.: National Academies Press.**  
**<https://www.nap.edu/catalog/10430/integrity-in-scientific-research-creating-an-environment-that-promotes-responsible>**

“Integrity in Scientific Research” attempts to define and describe those elements that encourage individuals involved with scientific research to act with integrity. Recognizing the inconsistency of human behavior, it stresses the important role that research institutions play in providing an integrity-rich environment, citing the need for institutions to provide staff with training and education, policies and procedures, and tools and support systems. It identifies practices that characterize integrity in such areas as peer review and research on human subjects and weighs the strengths and limitations of self-evaluation efforts by these institutions. In addition, it details an approach to promoting integrity during the education of researchers, including how to develop an effective curriculum. Providing a framework for research and educational institutions, this important book will be essential for anyone concerned about ethics in the scientific community.

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Bibliography

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