

# **The Relationship between Tolerance for Scholastic Dishonesty and Tolerance for Dishonest Work Place Practices amongst University Business Management Students**

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*Recent studies have demonstrated a link between the lack of academic integrity within the students' group and future dishonesty in their professional lives. The author further explored this link by studying the correlation between tolerance for scholastic dishonesty and tolerance for dishonest work place practices amongst university business students. In this study, students' perceptions in regards to scholastic dishonesty and work place practices were surveyed. Questionnaires were distributed to 520 undergraduate university students from two universities. The results indicated that students' tolerance for scholastic dishonesty is positively correlated to his/her tolerance for dishonesty work place practices.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The 2008 financial crisis has put the role of higher education in training the leaders of tomorrow at the center of public debate. Business schools have been blamed for not producing more ethical managers and entrepreneurs (Ghoshal, 2005; Halbesleben, Wheeler, & Buckley, 2005; Khurana, 2007), and for having contributed, in a significant way, towards the crisis (Donaldson, 2012; Maclagan, 2012).

Many business schools responded to such criticism by including, and/or increasing, the number of business ethics and legal studies courses as part of their core curriculum. Although, since the late 1980's, Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business International (AACSB) has mandated the coverage of ethics in business curriculum for its member schools, in 2004, the Ethics Education Task Force of AACSB International recommended to its International Board of Directors that AACSB International should offer more in way of clear and measurable requirements.

While having an ethics course in most business schools is part of the core curriculum, and a number of empirical studies have established a correlation between taking courses in business ethics and students' inclination to behave ethically in business, Davis (1991) argues that, "formal ethics training is not likely to be the dominant factor in the development of ones perceptions of ethical behavior." Devonish, Alleyne, Cadogan-mcclean, & Greenidge (2009) found that exposure to ethics courses in business programs, at best, moderate the relationship between degree program and ethical intentions among undergraduate students. In the light of such shortcomings of formal ethics training, many studies in the past several years have concentrated on studying possible links between self-reported academic cheating among business students and future dishonesty in their professional lives. Over the past 20 years, studies have indicated that students who admit to have cheated academically also admitted that they have been dishonest at work (Sims, 1993; Nonis & Swift, 2001; Carpenter, Harding, & Finelli, 2006; Lovett-Hooper, 2007; Graves,

2008; Sloan, Martin, & Rao, 2009; Bratton & Strittmatter, 2013). However, it is interesting to note that many of these studies have used self-reported cheating as a variable to measure the lack of academic integrity, which might induce bias and social desirability issues. As such, this study concentrated on students' tolerance rather than self-reported acts.

The purpose of the current study was to measure business students' tolerance toward various forms of academic dishonesty and various forms of dishonest work place practices and establish a positive correlation between the two. If a positive correlation was found, the study would continue in the future to establish a cause-and-effect relationship. This will be further discussed in the Implications for Future Research part of this paper.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Cheating Among Business Students**

Cheating among university students has risen dramatically during the past 50 years (Hutton, 2006; McCabe, Butterfield, & Trevino, 2006). According to the Center for Academic Integrity (Fields, 2003), 75% of students in higher education admit to cheating behaviors. Wajda-Johnston, Handal, Brawer, & Fabricators (2001) found that up to 55.1% of graduate students in their study admitted to cheating during their graduate student career. Business and Management majors are among the most dishonest (Caruana, Ramaseshan, & M. T. Ewing, 2000; Clement, 2001; Smyth & Davis, 2004). Klein, Levenburg, McKendall, & Mothersell (2007) found that cheating amongst business and economics majors was noticeably higher than amongst those in other majors.

Business students' attitudes toward cheating provides a possible explanation of why there are higher levels of cheating among them than students from other majors. Bunn, Caudill, & Cropper (1992) found that 70% of the students surveyed did not view cheating as a problem and considered it to be a trivial issue. McKendall, Klein, & Levenburg (2009) found that those who cheated perceived the consequences of detection as being insignificant, and that the perception of benefits from cheating significantly exceeded the perception of potential costs. Timiraos (2002) noticed that business students have a mindset that the ends justify the means. Allen, Fuller, & Lockett (1998) found that marketing students' rationalization for cheating was that since dishonesty surrounds them in college and society, cheating is justified. Even MBA students acknowledged ground for cheating because of their perceptions of unethical peer behavior (McCabe, et al., 2006). Additionally, cheating appears to take place regardless of a school's reputation and/or ranking. Premeaux (2005) found that students at AACSB International tier 1 schools of business cheated mainly on written assignments compared to tier 2 schools, where students reported more cheating on exams.

McCabe, et al. (2006) proposes that students' learning in business schools is a possible theoretical reason of why they cheat more. Since in most business schools maximization of shareholder wealth and economic theories of free-market philosophy form the foundation of its curriculum, Ghoshal (2005) argued that such emphasis has a harmful impact on business students' values, attitudes, and behavior. To support the theory further, Frank, Gilovich, & Regan (1993) found that economics students, driven by their exposure to the self-interest model, act in more self-interested ways than other students. Frank and his colleagues observed that students that took an introductory course in economics versus students who took an introductory course in astronomy exhibited a greater decline in honesty and a greater increase in self-interest behavior.

### **Dishonesty in the Work Place**

Employee theft is a widespread form of crime that effects all businesses and industries directly and indirectly (Friedrichs, 2010; Greenberg, 1997; Hollinger, 1989; Hollinger & Clark, 1983; Mustaine & Tewksbury, 2002). Employee theft is estimated to be responsible for 47% of retail inventory shrinkage. This represents business losses of over \$20 billion each year (Friedrichs, 2010; Mustaine & Tewksbury, 2002; Payne & Gainey, 2004). This figure increases by billions of dollars spent on insurance, security systems, and security guards to protect against such thefts. McCormick (1997) found that although over

the past several years shoplifting by non-employees declined by a small percentage, crimes committed by employees increased by nine times as much as the average shoplifter. According to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, 75% of employees steal from work repeatedly and that the major factor contributing to over 30% of business bankruptcies is employee theft. Roderick, Jelley, Coiok, & Forcht (1991) found that over 60% of employees who committed employee theft did not feel guilty having stolen things from their employers.

Theoretical explanations for increase in employee theft vary. Bennett & Robinson (2000) suggest that dissatisfaction, modeling, perceived injustice, and thrill seeking are among major reasons why employees engage in deviant behaviors. Albrecht, Wernz, & Williams (1995) link employee dishonesty to three factors; individual integrity, personal pressures, and opportunity. And yet, Gellerman (1986) suggests that personal values and organizational values determine employee ethical behavior, regardless of learning and experiences during college years.

### **Linkages between Scholastic and Workplace Dishonesty**

In the past 20 years, there have been numerous studies linking academic cheating to workplace dishonesty. Much of the research has linked self-reported scholastic cheating to be a predictor of potential unethical decision-making in professional practice. Although, a number of different methods was used to research such a correlation, all of the studies have used self-reported cheating as a variable to measure the lack of academic integrity which might induce bias and social desirability issues.

Social desirability is the tendency, for the respondent, to claim socially desirable traits and behavior, and to deny socially undesirable ones. This usually results in saying things which places the speaker in a favorable light. Social desirability is one of the most common sources of bias affecting the validity of experimental and survey research findings (Nederhof, 1985). A large number of studies have shown that social desirability may seriously bias data (Edwards, 1953; Crowne & Marlowe, 1964; Millham & Kellogg, 1980). The lack of control for social desirability in academic dishonesty studies is not surprising, 90% of the studies that focus on academic cheating rely on self-report data (Bernardi & Adamaitis, 2006).

Measuring tolerance for an undesirable behavior, rather than self-reporting claims of having exhibited that behavior, reduces the effects of social desirability in the respondents.

**Hypothesis:** College business students' level of tolerance towards scholastic dishonesty is positively correlated to their tolerance toward dishonest workplace practices.

## **METHOD**

### **Sample**

The hypothesis was examined by collecting data from 520 undergraduate university students from two universities, one in the United States (312 students), and the other in Slovakia (208 students). Two different counties were used in order to see if there are differences due to national culture. The reason Slovakia was chosen to compare to the United States was due to its ranking in the corruption perception index as published by Transparency International. Slovakia is ranked 50th in the corruption perception index - Transparency International 2015 and the US is ranked 16th. This difference gives enough contrast to study possible cultural influences. The students were all majoring in business (management, marketing, finance, or accounting) at two large private universities, one in Bratislava, the capitol city of Slovakia, and the other in Southern California, United States. There were a total of 276 (53%) male and 244 (47%) female subjects. The vast majority of the individuals, 455 (87.5%), were between the ages of 17 to 25.

**TABLE 1  
STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS**

| Demographics |          | Number of Students | Percentage of Total |
|--------------|----------|--------------------|---------------------|
| Country      | Slovakia | 208                | 40.00%              |
|              | U.S.A.   | 312                | 60.00%              |
| Gender       | Male     | 276                | 53.08%              |
|              | Female   | 244                | 46.92%              |
| Age          | 17-25    | 455                | 87.50%              |
|              | 25<      | 65                 | 12.50%              |
| Total        |          | 520                |                     |

I also collected data using the same measurement from 44 faculty, 22 from the United States and 22 from Slovakia. In the United States group, all 22 were full-time faculty. Six (27%) were full professors, two (9%) were associate professors, 12 (55%) were assistant professors, and two (9%) were full-time instructors. In this group, three (14%) had 1-2 years of teaching experience, three (14%) had 3-4 years of teaching experience, 11 (50%) had 5-11 years of teaching experience, and five (22%) had more than 11 years of teaching experience. In the Slovak group, 20 (90%) were full-time faculty and two (10%) were part-time faculty. There were no full professors, one (4.5%) was an associate professor, 13 (59%) were assistant professors, seven (32%) were full-time instructors, and one (4.5%) was a part-time instructor. In this group, five (23%) had 5-11 years of teaching experience, and 17 (73%) had more than 11 years of teaching experience.

**TABLE 2  
FACULTY DEMOGRAPHICS**

| Demographics  |                       | Number of Students | Percentage of Total |
|---------------|-----------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| Faculty       | Full Time             | 42                 | 95.45%              |
|               | Part Time             | 2                  | 4.55%               |
| Status        | Full Professors       | 6                  | 13.64%              |
|               | Associate Professors  | 3                  | 6.82%               |
|               | Assistant Professors  | 25                 | 56.82%              |
|               | Full Time Instructors | 9                  | 20.45%              |
|               | Part Time Instructor  | 1                  | 2.27%               |
| Experience    | 1-2 Years             | 3                  | 6.82%               |
|               | 3-4 Years             | 3                  | 6.82%               |
|               | 5-11 Years            | 16                 | 36.36%              |
|               | 11 Years <            | 22                 | 50.00%              |
| Total Faculty |                       | 44                 |                     |

**Measures**

I used a total of 18 questions to measure scholastic dishonesty. These 18 questions were adapted from a variety of studies (Ferrell & Daniel, 1995; Sims, 1993; Stevens & Stevens, 1987; Tom & Borin, 1988). To measure work place dishonesty, I used a total of 19 questions, 16 of which were adapted from Sims (1993) and three were adapted from Hilbert (1988). All of the questions had five possible response categories to measure tolerance towards each behavior: a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “not serious” to “very serious”.

**Analysis**

Because each student was asked to give responses to both sections, scholastic dishonesty and dishonest work related practices, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) was suitable for the analysis. As such, the hypothesis was tested using linear regression and binary logistic regression models with scholastic dishonesty as the independent variable and dishonest work place practices as the dependent variable. There were two reasons why scholastic dishonesty was chosen as the independent variable. One, it is reasonable to assume that all of the students were exposed to academic dishonesty either through direct or indirect experience or through direct or indirect knowledge. However, not all of the students were directly or indirectly exposed to dishonest work place practices. Two, if correlation is established, future research can investigate causation. That is, if tolerance for scholastic dishonesty can be improved, will it influence tolerance for dishonest work place practices to improve as well?

**RESULTS**

Since different questions, in both the scholastic dishonesty section and dishonest work place practices, carry different importance, I used the averages of the responses in the faculty surveys as weights for the averages in the students' surveys. This was done to take into account the importance of different observations as they carry different levels of seriousness. The weights obtained from faculty in Slovakia and faculty in the United States were slightly different. The average of the questions related to scholastic dishonesty, questions 6 through 23, for the faculty from the United States was slightly lower (-1.47) compared to the faculty from Slovakia. This indicates that the faculty from the United States are slightly more tolerant towards scholastic dishonesty than the faculty from Slovakia. The average of the questions related to dishonest work place practices, questions 24 through 42, for the faculty from the United States was slightly higher (+2.03) compared to the faculty from Slovakia. This indicates that the faculty from Slovakia are slightly more tolerant towards dishonest work place practices than the faculty from the United States.

**Linear Regression**

For the United States group, the results revealed that students' level of tolerance for scholastic dishonesty is positively correlated to his/her level of tolerance for dishonest work place practices,  $r=0.822$ ,  $n=312$ ,  $p=0.001$  (see Table 3 & Table 4).

**TABLE 3**  
**ANOVA<sup>a</sup>**

| Model        | Sum of Squares | df  | Mean Square | F       | Sig.              |
|--------------|----------------|-----|-------------|---------|-------------------|
| 1 Regression | 2587.971       | 1   | 2587.971    | 644.073 | .000 <sup>b</sup> |
| Residual     | 1245.622       | 310 | 4.018       |         |                   |
| Total        | 3833.592       | 311 |             |         |                   |

a. Dependent Variable: Dishonest work related practices

b. Predictors: (Constant), Scholastic dishonesty

**TABLE 4**  
**MODEL SUMMARY**

| Model | R                 | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate |
|-------|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| 1     | .822 <sup>a</sup> | .675     | .674              | 2.00453                    |

a. Predictors: (Constant), Scholastic dishonesty

For the Slovak group, the results also revealed that students' level of tolerance for scholastic dishonesty is positively correlated to his/her level of tolerance for dishonest work place practices,  $r=0.703$ ,  $n=208$ ,  $p=0.001$  (see Table 5 & Table 6).

**TABLE 5**  
**ANOVA<sup>a</sup>**

| Model        | Sum of Squares | df  | Mean Square | F       | Sig.              |
|--------------|----------------|-----|-------------|---------|-------------------|
| 1 Regression | 1056.319       | 1   | 1056.319    | 201.399 | .000 <sup>b</sup> |
| Residual     | 1080.450       | 206 | 5.245       |         |                   |
| Total        | 2136.769       | 207 |             |         |                   |

a. Dependent Variable: Dishonest work related practices

b. Predictors: (Constant), Scholastic dishonesty

**TABLE 6**  
**MODEL SUMMARY**

| Model | R                 | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate |
|-------|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| 1     | .703 <sup>a</sup> | .494     | .492              | 2.29018                    |

a. Predictors: (Constant), Scholastic dishonesty

### Binary Logistic Regression

For this analysis if a students' average was below the average of the faculty, then tolerance was assumed and a value of "0" was assigned. In converse, if a students' average was above the average of the faculty, then intolerance was assumed and a value of "1" was assigned. Binary logistic regression was used to measure correlation between "0"s and "1"s matching.

For the United States participants, the results revealed that students that are tolerant toward scholastic dishonesty are 12.095 times more likely to be tolerant towards dishonest work place practices (see Table 7 & Table 8).

**TABLE 7**  
**CLASSIFICATION TABLE<sup>a</sup>**

| Observed           |                                  |             | Predicted                        |        |                    |
|--------------------|----------------------------------|-------------|----------------------------------|--------|--------------------|
|                    |                                  |             | Dishonest work related practices |        | Percentage Correct |
|                    |                                  |             | .00                              | 1.00   |                    |
| Step 1             | Dishonest work related practices | .00<br>1.00 | 273<br>39                        | 0<br>0 | 100.0<br>.0        |
| Overall Percentage |                                  |             |                                  |        | 87.5               |

a. The cut value is .500

**TABLE 8  
VARIABLES IN THE EQUATION**

|   | B      | S.E. | Wald    | df | Sig. | Exp(B) |
|---|--------|------|---------|----|------|--------|
| Step 1 <sup>a</sup> Scholastic dishonesty | 2.493  | .380 | 42.985  | 1  | .000 | 12.095 |
| Constant                                  | -2.725 | .258 | 111.464 | 1  | .000 | .066   |

a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: Scholastic dishonesty.

For the Slovak participants, the results revealed that students that are tolerant toward scholastic dishonesty are 20.903 times more likely to be tolerant towards dishonest work place practices (see Table 9 & Table 10).

**TABLE 9  
CLASSIFICATION TABLE<sup>a</sup>**

| Observed               |      | Predicted                        |      |                    |
|------------------------|------|----------------------------------|------|--------------------|
|                        |      | Dishonest work related practices |      | Percentage Correct |
|                        |      | .00                              | 1.00 |                    |
| Step 1 Dishonest       | .00  | 193                              | 0    | 100.0              |
| work related practices | 1.00 | 15                               | 0    | .0                 |
| Overall Percentage     |      |                                  |      | 92.8               |

a. The cut value is .500

**TABLE 10  
VARIABLES IN THE EQUATION**

|   | B      | S.E. | Wald   | df | Sig. | Exp(B) |
|---|--------|------|--------|----|------|--------|
| Step 1 <sup>a</sup> Scholastic dishonesty | 3.040  | .675 | 20.306 | 1  | .000 | 20.903 |
| Constant                                  | -3.989 | .583 | 46.868 | 1  | .000 | .019   |

a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: Scholastic dishonesty.

## DISCUSSION

The study results support the hypothesis. Using two different correlation analyses, the results of this study has demonstrated that students that are tolerant towards scholastic dishonesty are significantly more likely to be tolerant towards dishonest work place practices. These results are consistent with other recent findings.

Further analysis indicated some disturbing findings. Student tolerance towards scholastic dishonesty and dishonest work place practices were significantly higher than the faculty. In the United States 88% of the students scored below the average of the US faculty in regards to their tolerance towards scholastic dishonesty. In the same group 83% of them scored below the average of the US faculty in regards to their tolerance towards dishonest work place practices. In Slovakia these numbers were 93% and 79% respectively. Although I do not see much of a difference, in this regards, between the students from the United States and the students from Slovakia, in both countries a large majority of the students were more

tolerant in all of the questions asked. In addition, in both countries I did see gender play a further influence. Tolerance towards scholastic dishonesty and dishonest work place practices was more frequent among male students than female students.

In the United States, 91% of the male students scored below the average of the US faculty in regards to their tolerance towards scholastic dishonesty. In the same group, 88% of them scored below the average of the US faculty in regards to their tolerance towards dishonest work place practices. For the female students these numbers were 82% and 78% respectively. The female students averaged about 10% less than the male students.

In Slovakia, 96% of the male students scored below the average of the Slovak faculty in regards to their tolerance towards scholastic dishonesty. In the same group, 86% of them scored below the average of the Slovak faculty in regards to their tolerance towards dishonest work place practices. For the female students these numbers were 90% and 73% respectively. The female students averaged about 10% less than the male students.

May & Loyd (1993), Terpstra, Rozell, & Robinson (1993), and Budner (1987) have suggested that gender-- role socialization theory accounts for these differences. They argue that historically, due to cultural and social conditioning, women are more conscientious to act morally and be obedient to the rules set by society. Terpstra, Rozell, & Robinson (1993) provide additional support for gender bias by arguing that men have tendencies to be more competitive, and as such, they are biased for unethical behavior.

Since a large majority of the students in both countries were between the ages of 17 and 25 years old, an age analysis was not done due to lack of numbers in other age groups for a reliable statistical analysis.

### **Contributions**

One of the contributions of this study is that it concentrated on students' tolerance towards scholastic dishonesty and dishonest work place practices rather than self-reported acts. Most prior research has simply examined self-reported cheating, scholastically or work related, as the measured variable, which might induce bias and social desirability issues. In this study, measuring tolerance as the variable diminish this effect. By examining students' tolerance, this study established a clear correlation between tolerance towards scholastic dishonesty and dishonest work place practices without social desirability influence. Another contribution of this study is that cultural differences does not seem to play a role in the correlation. Slovakia and the United States are ranked very differently in regards to their corruption perception index - Transparency International 2015. Slovakia ranked 34 places below the United States, and yet there were no significant differences between the correlations measured. In addition, the study showed clear bias when it came to gender. Male students were, on average, 10% more tolerance towards scholastic dishonesty and dishonest work place practices than female students in both countries. It is interesting to note that although Hofstede's cultural dimensions analysis ranks the United States at 62 and Slovakia at 100 in the Masculinity dimension, this difference was not reflected in our results. The difference of tolerance measured between male and female students in the United States was very similar to the difference in Slovakia.

### **Limitations**

There are several limitations with this study. First, the findings of this study are limited to only one university in each country. Although this limitation may not be significant in Slovakia, due to its relatively small geographical size and population, in the United States there are noticeable regional and cultural differences. For the United States results, the California setting may have influenced the findings. Harries (1988) found that geographic region has an influence on relative appropriateness or inappropriateness of various behaviors.

Another limitation is the due to that fact that only two countries were used to measure cultural influence. Although the United States and Slovakia rank differently in their Transparency International corruption perception index, Slovakia, 27 years after its move from a command economy to a market economy, may be more similar in its view of dishonesty than the difference in the index indicates.



Specially, since more of the students were below the age of 25, they had never experienced life outside of a market economy.

Finally, since both universities were private, it is possible that the type of students that attend private universities taking the surveys may serve as another limitation in the study. Traiser & Eighmy (2011) found that there is a difference in the level of narcissistic personality tendencies of business students from private vs. public institutions.

### **Implications for Future Research**

In this study, tolerance for scholastic dishonesty was positively correlated to tolerance for dishonest work place practices. However, there could be additional factors that may affect the strength of this correlation. For example, business students in private universities may look at the severity of scholastic dishonesty differently than business students in public universities. Also, the region where the university is situated may have a cultural bias influencing students' perception of dishonesty work place practices. Thus, future studies should survey students from both public and private universities in different parts of the United States. The results will further strengthen the existence of a positive correlation.

If future studies in public and private universities in different parts of the United States establish a strong correlation between tolerance for scholastic dishonesty and tolerance for dishonest work place practices, then the next stage of the study is to measure whether tolerance for scholastic dishonesty is improved through various academic programs, and what are the effects on tolerance for dishonest work place practices. This may indicate causation.

### **CONCLUSION**

The recent financial crises has put great pressure on business schools to graduate ethical business leaders and entrepreneurs. To respond to such pressures, business schools have begun to add business ethics courses to their curriculum. Studies have shown that such efforts in isolation have little influence on improving students' ethical intentions (Davis, 1991; Devonish, et al., 2009).

This study has established a positive correlation between tolerance for scholastic dishonesty and dishonesty work place practices. This correlation suggests a possible causation that needs to be further studied. If causation is established, this gives way to a new perspective on how to influence ethical intentions in business students. Such a possible perspective dictates that in addition to ethics courses, business schools must provide educational experiences that will improve a students' tolerance for scholastic dishonesty, which in turn will improve the students' ethical intentions.

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