Using Persuasive Communication to Foster Appropriaton of Code of Ethics Standards by an Organization's Employees

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Abstract

Scientific research has generated a substantial corpus of knowledge on nearly all facets of ethics, governance and sound management in public and private organizations. However, there has been little research into the role of communication as a factor that enables an effective link between what some call ethical infrastructures, like a code of ethics, and ethical behaviour or judgement. The purpose of the study was to establish whether the use of persuasive communication strategies could foster appropriation of code of ethics standards by an organization's employees. To measure the effect of persuasive communication on appropriation, we created three experimental conditions that drew on the variables in Cialdini's persuasion model. The methodology used was quantitative and experimental. A total of 119 employees participated in the study. Our results show that the persuasion strategies tested have a statistically significant impact on cognitive appropriation, but not on behavioural appropriation.

Key Words: Communication, code of ethics, organizational culture, personnel management, social psychology

Introduction

Background

Scientific research has generated a substantial corpus of knowledge on nearly all facets of ethics, governance and sound management in public and private organizations. As Treviño, Weaver and Reynolds (2006) explained in their comprehensive literature review, conducted several years ago, scientific research has looked at all areas of organizational ethics. These authors associate ethics with a strong image: apples, which can be delicious, or rotten. The first category of research they identified refers to what they call "barrels", i.e. organizational factors that structure ethical questions (Müller et al., 2013; Thoroughgood, Hunter & Sawyer, 2011; Ashforth et al., 2008; Kulik, O'Fallon & Salimath, 2008; Brass, Butterfield & Skaggs, 1998). The second category of research focuses on the apples themselves, that is, the actors and all the personal and relational factors that influence their work and decisions (O'Boyle, Forsyth & O'Boyle, 2011; Gino, Gu & Zhong, 2009; Kerr et al., 2009; Bazerman & Banaji, 2004; Dunlop & Lee, 2004). Over the last twenty-five years, research on "barrels" has dealt with topics as wide-ranging as codes of ethics and ethics programs (Adelstein & Clegg, 2016; Valentine & Fleischman, 2008; Weaver, Treviño & Cochran, 1999; Frankel, 1989), performance control mechanisms (Berrone, Surroca & Tribó, 2007; Stansbury & Barry, 2007), management and training approaches and organizational culture (Warren, Gaspar & Laufer, 2014; Delaney & Sockell, 1992). The research on "apples" has looked at such things as professional identity (Vadera, Aguilera & Caza, 2009), leadership (Goetsch & Davis, 2014; Mayer et al., 2009; Brown, Treviño & Harrison, 2005), personal qualities and ethical climate (Brunton & Eweje, 2010; Martin & Cullen, 2006; Wimbush & Shepard, 1994; Victor & Cullen, 1987).

However, there has been little research into the role of communication as a factor that enables an effective link between what some call ethical infrastructures (Tenbrunsel, Smith-Crowe, & Umphress, 2003), like a code of ethics, and ethical behaviour or judgement. The few studies that have focused on communication (Ellman & Pezanis-Christou, 2010; Stevens, 2008; Johnson, 2007; Schwartz, 2004) do not consider the critical contribution made by persuasion as a communications strategy that can foster appropriation of the standards in an organization's code of ethics by that organization's employees. Research into standards and their role in interactions within groups of different sizes is highly developed in social psychology (Lapinski & Rimal, 2005; Bendor & Swistak, 2001; Cialdini, Kallgren & Reno, 1991; Tajfel, 1981; Moscovici, 1976). However, social psychology researchers point to the dearth of studies on communication as a factor for circulating and retaining such standards (Hogg & Reid, 2006). As for organizational communications, it does not touch on ethics very much, as researchers in the area are unfamiliar with this field of expertise (Jones et al., 2004).

In organizational ethics, it is interesting to note that several studies have looked at the standards in codes of ethics, for example, analyzing the principles that allow practitioners to structure and implement codes of ethics within organizations (Murphy, 1995; Montoya & Richard, 1994); other studies have empirically looked at the properties and contents of codes of ethics (Helin & Sandström, 2007). Much work remains to be done, however, when we consider the concrete influence of codes of ethics on the behaviour of employees in organizations (De Waegeneer, Van De Sompele & Willem, 2016; Kaptein, 2011; Kaptein & Schwartz, 2008; Stevens, 2008; Cleek & Leonard, 1998). As Helin and Sandström (2010) stress, of the few studies that look at the impacts of codes of ethics on what they call "ethical behaviour," very little research has been done into the code's reception by the stakeholders to whom it is addressed (Stöber, Kotzian & Weissenberger, 2019). To our knowledge, no study has focused specifically on how a persuasion strategy that is simultaneously passive (reception of the mes-

sage) and active (taking of a personal stance on the message) can affect appropriation by taking an organization's code of ethics as the main source of the message.

Purpose of the Study

To fill this gap in the literature, this study has been undertaken to better understand how communication may contribute to the code of ethic's "performativity" (Parker & Sedgwick, 2013; Searle, 1969; Austin, 1962), that is, how implementing and disseminating a code of ethics within an organization may influence stakeholder behaviour. More specifically, the purpose of the study was to establish whether the use of persuasive communication strategies (using specific variables) could foster appropriation of code of ethics standards by an organization's employees. In light of the research on similar themes (Stevens, 2008; Helin & Sandström, 2007; Adam & Rachmann-Moore, 2004; Weeks & Nantel, 1992), we hypothesize that, by exposing an organization's employees to persuasive strategies that rely on empirically tested models, it would be possible to measure a positive change in the level of appropriation of the standards in the code of ethics.

Conceptual Framework

To achieve the study's objective, on one hand, we had to establish how to define and measure appropriation and, on the other, identify which persuasive communication approach to use to foster appropriation. Our conceptual or theoretical framework thus had to simultaneously address how to conceptualize appropriation and measurement. To appropriate something is to "make it one's own." In terms of an ethical standard, there are two aspects of appropriation: cognitive and behavioural. The cognitive aspect refers to the change in knowledge, while the behavioural aspect refers to a change in behaviour. In other words, our experimental design had to help us see whether employees had a better knowledge of the code of ethics' standards after being exposed to persuasive communication strategies, or whether their behaviour at work had changed reflecting the internalization (appropriation) of the code of ethics' standards.

Note that the code of ethics used for the study is the code that applies to all of the organization's employees (healthcare sector), regardless of the area in which they work (care, administration, archives, etc.). The code is available on the organization's website and is also given to employees upon hiring. It contains a series of standards employees must comply with in their work and relations with users (respect for confidentiality, politeness, cleanliness, diligence, etc.). The organization's code of ethics is different from the codes of ethics that apply to employees who belong to professional orders (doctors, nurses, physiotherapists, etc.).

To measure cognitive change, we developed a quiz that contained a few short questions on the contents of the code of ethics, somewhat like the tests administered to students in class to evaluate their mandatory course readings. Because, with this aspect of appropriation, we only had to assess the degree to which study participants remembered the key information in the code (primary rights and responsibilities), we thought a very simple questionnaire format (the quiz) was adequate, as it has generally proven effective in assessing this type of "competence" (memorization of key words). To measure behavioural change, we opted to use a validated questionnaire: the General Self Efficacy Scale (Scherer et al., 1982). The decision was based on the fact that, since ethics concerns the way individuals make practical choices that are influenced by their vision of good and

bad (Gert & Gert, 2002), the capacity to make and take responsibility for these choices will likely be determined by their sense of self efficacy. A sense of self efficacy fosters achievement and well-being by prompting individuals to set better goals, persevere, and bounce back from failures (Bandura, 1982). These dimensions are also essential to what we can term "ethical competency." We started with the assumption that a high sense of self efficacy would have a positive impact on the employee's ability to handle ethical dilemmas arising in the context of his or her work. We thus deemed that using the self efficacy questionnaire would make it possible to measure appropriation of ethical standards behaviourally. Further information on data collection tools is provided in the following section, which deals with methodology.

We drew on Robert B. Cialdini's (2001) persuasive communication model in setting up the experimental design's communication strategies. The model is made up of six variables: reciprocity, scarcity, authority, consistency, liking and consensus. Reciprocity is the principle that holds that someone who has received something (a gift, a favour, etc.) will feel obligated to give something back. This persuasion technique is often used by companies that give their customers gifts to encourage them to buy other products. Scarcity refers to the fact that people generally place more value on something that is scarcer. That is what explains the high value of luxury products. The persuasive value of authority plays on the fact that message receivers often see statements made by people in positions of authority (scientific experts, for example) as more credible. Consistency plays on the fact that, in general, people like to be consistent with what they've said or done before. Liking refers to the fact that people are more willing to follow people that they like or admire. Advertisers understand this: they choose stars who are popular with the public for certain causes or products. Lastly, the consensus variable expresses the effect of social conformity, which has been measured many times. In other words, people will tend to follow a group's majority opinion to avoid the psychological pressure that comes from taking a dissenting stance (Asch, 1955).

We selected the Cialdini model as its efficacy has been empirically validated in a multiplicity of routine contexts (Kenrick, Goldstein & Braver, 2012), including workplaces. It thus seemed realistic to think that we could set up an experimental design that drew on persuasion in classical professional situations, such as the relationship between an employer and supervisor, or a team meeting. To measure the effect of persuasive communication on appropriation, we thus created three experimental conditions, two of which drew directly on the variables in Cialdini's persuasion model. The first condition is based on authority. In this scenario, we sent an employee an email in which a hierarchical superior stressed how important the code of ethics is for the organization. An electronic version of the code was attached to the superior's message. We wanted the second condition to draw on consistency and commitment. We assembled the group's members at a lunch meeting to discuss the code of ethics. At the end of the meeting, we asked employees whether they were prepared to indicate their commitment to the code of ethics by signing it in front of their co-workers. The third condition drew on a variable that is not included in the Cialdini model, but which seemed promising: reflexivity (Gentile, 2010). We wanted to know whether encouraging employees to take a critical look at their code of ethics would facilitate appropriation. The third experimental condition seemed essential, in that it introduced an active, participatory factor into communication and appropriation of standards. Since it is common in many

large Western organizations to consult employees on certain matters and establish fairly egalitarian relations with them, we thought it important to round out our investigation by drawing on reflectivity and critical thinking, rather than focusing solely on passive receipt of a message. Therefore, to measure this aspect, we created a third experimental group in which employees met once over the lunch hour. At this time, we asked them to tell us how they would write the code of ethics if a new version was needed. This question prompted them to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the current version of their code.

Methodology

Population and Sampling

The methodology used was quantitative and experimental (Cook, Campbell and Shadish, 2002), with a pre-test, post-test and a control group. Employees were recruited for the study by means of announcements on the organization's Intranet, as well as by solicitation in the cafeteria. Our approach was, of course, approved by the organization's senior management, as well as by its research ethics board. The sample covered all of the job categories within the organization, a health and social services centre with nearly 5,000 employees located in a major Canadian city. The only criterion for exclusion was seniority: all employees selected had completed their probationary periods (they therefore had at least one year of experience with the organization). A total of 119 employees participated in the study (three experimental groups and one control group). Thirty (30) employees were tested under condition 1, twenty-nine (29) under condition 2, thirty (30) under condition 3, and thirty (30) were in the control group. Participants were randomly assigned to groups. Table 1 provides the employee profile.

Data Collection

The pre-test involved administering two questionnaires just before the intervention with persuasion techniques. The first questionnaire was a quiz with ten short-answer questions (one or a few words) on the content of the code of ethics. It was designed to measure employees' knowledge of the code (cognitive aspect of appropriation). Scores on the questionnaire ranged from 0 to 10. The second questionnaire was the General Self Efficacy Scale, used to measure the behavioural aspect of appropriation. This questionnaire contains ten statements that the person must rank using a four-degree Likert scale (1. strongly disagree 2. disagree 3. agree 4. strongly agree). Accordingly, scores on this questionnaire ranged from 0 to 40. The post-test involved administering these two questionnaires to employees again two weeks after the intervention. Members of the control group were not exposed to a persuasion strategy and completed the questionnaires two weeks apart (Campbell & Stanley, 2015). Given the nature of the research design, a control group was needed to eliminate the bias created by the fact that performance on the post-test could be influenced by having been questioned about the code of ethics in the pre-test. It took members of all groups an average of 5 to 7 minutes to complete to the questionnaires.

Results

The experimental design involved three independent variables (the three communication strategies) and two dependent variables (the cognitive and behavioural aspects of appropriation). In the statistical analysis, we considered each independent variable (communication strategy) separately, as well as each dependent variable (results of the two questionnaires). Because

Categories	Job titles	N
Clinicians	Spiritual care provider	1
	Nurse	10
	Social worker	14
	Occupational therapist	9
	Physiotherapist	2
	Educator	4
	Psychologist	2
	Cytologist	1
	Pharmacist	1
Physician		1
Lawyer		1
Administrative personnel	Computer analyst	1
	Librarian	2
	Archivist	3
	Medical doctor	1
Administrative agents		24
Pharmacy technician		1
Managers	Administrative	13
	Clinical	10
Non-management (directors)		7
Client service personnel		9
Research assistants		2
Total		**119**

Table 1. Employee profile.

we had two measurement times for each experimental group, we aggregated an overall result for each subject, the positive or negative change in performance between the pre- and post-tests. The aggregated result was obtained by taking the post-test result and subtracting the pre-test result. For example, if a subject scored 6 on the pre-test and 8 on the post-test, this subject's aggregate score on the quiz is +2. If the post-test score was lower than the pre-test score, the aggregate result is negative. We applied this operation to all the experimental groups and the control group. The calculations yielded a series of aggregated results for each questionnaire that we could compare with the control group's aggregated results. The operation made it possible to see whether the change in the test groups was significantly higher than the change in the control group, so as to measure whether the communication strategies did, in fact, have an impact on appropriation.

To measure the impact of each of the three communication strategies on appropriation, we first performed an ANOVA with difference scores. Where the results were significant, we subsequently performed a Dunnett's post hoc test to assess whether each communication strategy had a statistically significant impact on the cognitive or behavioural facets of appropriation when compared with the control group (Field, 2013). The confidence interval used to analyze the result was 95%. The tables below (Tables 2, 3 and 4) illustrate the results obtained using SPSS version 25. The first table (Table 2, p. 11) shows the descriptive statistics, i.e. the average results (using difference scores) obtained for each questionnaire when each of the persuasive communication strategies was applied. The following table (Table 3, p. 11) shows the statistical results derived from the ANOVA. The last table (Table 4, p. 12) displays the results for the Dunnett's post hoc test. The following section contains the interpretation of the results (discussion).

Experimental group	Test	Mean (M)	N	Standard Deviation (SD)
1) Email from a hierarchical superior	Quiz	0.77 (0)*	30	1.87
		1.87 (1)*	30	2.16
	GSES	0.2 (0)	30	2.51
		0.7 (1)	30	2.34
2) Commitment and signing of the code of ethics	Quiz	0.77 (0)	30	1.87
		2.17 (1)	29	1.81
	GSES	0.2 (0)	30	2.51
		0.55 (1)	29	2.38
3) Reflexivity	Quiz	0.87 (0)	30	1.93
		2.03 (1)	30	1.66
	GSES	0.2 (0)	30	2.5
		1.03 (1)	30	2.74
* : (1) = experimental group; (0) = control group				

Table 2. Average variations in results (quiz and General Self Efficacy Scale).

		SS	DF	MS	F	P value.
Cognitive diff.	Intergroup	38.177	3	12.726	3.572	.016
	Intragroup	409.671	115	3.562		
	Total	447.849	118			
Behavior. diff.	Intergroup	19.089	3	6.363	1.019	.387
	Intragroup	718.306	115	6.246		
	Total	737.395	118			

Table 3. Results of ANOVA.

Dependant variable	(1) group	(0) group	MD (1-0)	SD	P value
Cognitive diff.	E-mail	Control group	1.10	0.48	0.067
	Commitment	Control group	1.41	0.49	0.014
	Reflexivity	Control group	1.33	0.49	0.020
Behavior. diff.	E-mail	Control group	0.77	0.65	0.497
	Commitment	Control group	0.62	0.65	0.661
	Reflexivity	Control group	1.10	0.65	0.217

Table 4. Results of Dunnett's post hoc test.

Discussion

Statistical Significance
The ANOVA shows that the communication strategies had a statistically significant impact on cognitive appropriation $(F(3,115) = 3.57, p < 0.05, \omega^2 = 0.061)$, but not on behavioural appropriation $(F(3,115) = 1.02, p > 0.05, \omega^2 = 0.0005)$. Therefore, in the following step of statistical analysis, we rejected the behavioural analysis and solely focused on cognitive appropriation. The Dunnett's post hoc test allowed us to understand more precisely the effect (on cognitive appropriation) of each communication strategy by comparing the results of each experimental group with the results of the control group.

For the first experimental group, the sending of an email from a hierarchical superior had a marginally significant (p value a little higher than 0.05) impact on cognitive appropriation. The experimental group's difference scores differ, but just marginally, from the control group's difference scores $(MD = 1.10; SD = 0.49; p = 0.067)$. For the second experimental group, we also noted that commitment by signing the code of ethics in front of co-workers had a statistically significant impact on cognitive appropriation. The experimental group's scores differ appreciably from the control group's scores $(MD = 1.41; SD = 0,49; p = 0.014)$. The results for the third experimental group are similar to the second experimental condition. The reflexive and critical aspect we introduced into this condition had a statistically significant impact cognitively. The experimental group's quiz scores differ from the control group's scores $(MD = 1.33; SD = 0.49; p = 0.020)$.

These results partially support the assumption we formulated at the outset. Drawing on specific, proven persuasive communication strategies can improve employee appropriation of the code, but only cognitively.

Connections with Data from the Literature
Our study shows that authority (to a lesser extent), commitment and reflexivity are communication strategies that have a positive influence on knowledge of the code of ethics. Commitment and reflexivity were especially effective. This result seems instructive for organizations that want to implement a code of ethics with true reach for employees. Although some studies have asserted that the strategy for implementing the code has to be "top down" (Murphy, 1988), our results indicate that, while authority might be an effective variable in persuasion (condition 1), it seems wise to help employees appropriate the contents of the code by fostering personal commitment and critical reflection on the contents they must appropriate. Moreover, a strategy with a more "bottom up" dynamic is consistent with more egalitarian, democratic organizational values, which are more akin to the values practiced in most western societies. Accordingly, while using authority may foster appropriation, this approach must form part of a communication strategy that is not one-way.

With respect to study condition 2 (signature of the code in front of co-workers), in research on a U.S. multinational in Sweden, Helin and Sandström (2010) pointed to a lack of buy-in (and thus persuasive value) created by simply signing the code (electronically in this case), and highlighted the need to "discuss" the code with employees. Our results confirm that it is, in fact, desirable for an organization to allow employees to discuss and reflect on the contents of the code. However, we also found that the commitment created by signing the code (condition 2) can be effective if the process of signing the code occurs face to face, i.e., employees are physically in each other's presence and witness their co-workers' commitment. The persuasive value of commitment is well documented in social psychology, in a stream known as "binding communication" (Girandola & Joule, 2012; Girandola & Bernard, 2007).

The results for the first experimental condition applied to our research subjects also demonstrated that authority (email to employees from an executive at the establishment) marginally fostered cognitive appropriation. For many decades now, social psychology has been highlighting the enormous persuasive power authorities have over individuals (Milgram, 1963). However, the literature on psychology, communications and ethics does not have much to say about authority's impact on appropriation. Education is the area in which we find studies that have focused on similar issues. For example, there is an entire stream of "critical pedagogy" that has sought to demonstrate the advantages of lessening the hierarchical relationships between teachers and students, and of more sustained interactions that allow each party to express their point of view on the

content of learning and of evaluations (Reynolds, 1999). The critical reflection engaged in by subjects in our third experimental condition gave them the opportunity to develop a more "embodied" knowledge, in that critical thinking forced them to see a very concrete connection between theoretical content (the standards in the code of ethics) and professional practices. Learning by exercising critical thinking and reflexive dialogue is also echoed in pedagogical approaches rooted in social constructionist epistemologies (Cunliffe, 2002). On this issue, voluminous multi-disciplinary literature has been developed to demonstrate the advantages for learning (Steffe & Gale, 1995).

Study Limitations

We believe our study has three major limitations. However, it was logistically difficult to work around them. Although we do not believe the obstacles invalidate our results, they would clearly have had broader reach if we had had the opportunity to eliminate them when implementing our experimental design.

The first limitation concerns the first experimental condition, i.e., an email from a hierarchical superior. In the research design's conceptualization phase, we asked whether it was better to have an immediate superior send the email to employees (team leader, for example), or to have it sent by a superior who was higher in the hierarchy (executive position). Because our study involved employees across the organization, we decided that it would be easier to call on an executive who was hierarchically superior to all employees. Doing otherwise would have increased the study's logistical complexity considerably, as we would have had to recruit several team leaders from several sectors to fulfil the condition. While the results obtained for condition 1 are significant in terms of cognitive appropriation, qualitative interviews with employees who participated in the study (the results of the interviews will be published in another article) showed us that employees were more sensitive to the authority of hierarchical superiors they worked with regularly. We can therefore consider that the results would likely have been even better if we had been able to have them participate.

The study's second limitation concerns the dimensions of the communication we tested. Our experimental design only allowed us to measure the sender-receiver communication dynamic from a persuasion perspective. Obviously, an organization's communications environment can be much broader. All elements pertaining to the context of the relationship between the actors, and the dimensions of interpersonal communication that go beyond simple persuasion must be considered by the organization if it wants to communicate with its employees effectively. That being said, as with most empirical studies, we opted to limit the study goal to certain key variables that could be isolated and measured within the context of our experimental design. Once again, however, the group interviews conducted with research subjects after the project's quantitative phase provide us with some intriguing, broader indications as to what the organization should do to mobilize employees around ethics.

Finally, the third limitation concerns the nature of the research design we used. Our results allow us to assert that authority, commitment and critical reflection contribute to cognitive appropriation of the code of ethics. However, the temporal horizon over which research subjects were tested in our three experimental conditions was relatively short. We exposed them to persuasion strategies, then tested them again two weeks later. As a result, we cannot know how retention of the information evolves over time, nor how many times a message must be repeated for it to be heard, without saturating the employees. During the group interviews, one employee mentioned various strategies that need to be repeated several times a year. For the strategy to be optimal, it would be better to measure the longer-term effectiveness of communication strategies using a longitudinal research design. Although these designs are very rich in data, they are costlier to implement and more complex logistically, as it is hard to mobilize an organization's employees for a study lasting several months. It would have been nearly impossible with the organization we worked with, and we believe we would have lost many participants along the way (they would have dropped out because of a lack of time).

Conclusion

Despite the limitations we have described, we believe our study's results can help develop a communication strategy that could be effective for organizations that want to foster implementation of a code of ethics with a real influence on employees. By engaging key organizational leaders with authority over their colleagues, by fostering employee commitment to each other, and by encouraging them to think critically, organizations can give their communications persuasive force that benefits appropriation. Persuasion must not be reduced to an obscure force that manipulates people to rob them of their freedom to decide, as is too often asserted (Bernays, 1928). Here, persuasion is understood as a form of communication that does strive to convince, but within a logic of free and informed consent; the only form that can promote stable, lasting employee buy-in to their code of ethics. The variables of authority and commitment help a message sender stress its importance. For its part, critical thing enables more egalitarian two-way communication, as well as appropriation by means of active learning. Naturally, strategies that use persuasion must be part of a broader program, in which the organization's culture and efforts that are repeated over the long term play a key role.

Moreover, it is important to remember that there are two components to appropriation: cognitive and behavioural. Although the cognitive component is an interesting jumping off point in developing a strong ethical cultural within an organization, the fact remains that ethics is primarily about the ability to take appropriate action. Our study shows that it is not that difficult to produce a positive change in knowledge. Behavioural change is more complex, however. In particular, it demands a more substantial investment of time and money from organizations. Given that most organizations have limited financial means, the situation creates a dilemma on the place ethics, or, more specifically, the code of ethics, should have in the hierarchy of priorities. That being said, we believe that, in addition to contributing to the understanding of the connection between communication and organizational ethics, our study has, in the area of methodology, successfully put forward a measurable, operational conceptualization of appropriation.

In light of these conditions, we believe that three lines of research could provide an interesting complement to this study. They are related to the limitations we noted. The perspective on the communication developed in the study's conceptual framework was more focused on the influence relationship between the message's sender and receiver, i.e. on a fairly positivistic epistemological perspective (input-output). One strong complement would be to use a more phenomenological perspective, in which the employee's perspective and way of perceiving the influence of the message on his or behaviour would be questioned. Through the employee's gaze, a number of highly practical considerations could emerge, helping the organization to refine its message. A phenomenological study could also

help grasp how the employee gives meaning to the standards applied in the concrete work situation. The advantage of such a study would be that it would go beyond a purely prescriptive, undifferentiated vision of the code of ethics to establish a "map" of the standards based on their "saliency," i.e. their effective capacity to mobilize employees around practices that are oriented on strong ethical values (respect, harmony, autonomy, etc.). Among other things, given the central role of message retention in understanding its effectiveness, it would be desirable to be able to conduct a longitudinal study of the issues associated with communication and appropriation. However, as we explained, this type of design would be fraught with difficulties. Lastly, since organizations must operate within a complex, highly diversified environment, where every dollar has to count, more in-depth studies could be conducted using samples that are stratified based on diverse characteristics (sex, age, culture, beliefs, etc.). This valuable information would probably keep organizations from using communications strategies that are insufficiently tailored to the evolving context in which they operate.

Compliance with ethical standards:

All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

Data availability statement:

The data set used for this research can be available upon request.

Conflict of Interest:

Yanick Farmer declares that he has no conflict of interest. Michelle Pimont declares that she has no conflict of interest.

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