

Qualitative Content in Research on Business Ethics

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In order to identify scholarly trends in the literature on organizational misconduct, it is useful to characterize prominent themes in a sample of representative publications. To accomplish this goal, I selected approximately 50 publications from the literature. These publications were found using Google Scholar while using keywords such as "corruption", "ethical", and "organizations". Papers were selected that appear in peer-reviewed journals that are common outlets for research in organizational theory (*Organization Science*, *Journal of Business Ethics*, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, etc.). The resulting sample is not intended to be comprehensive, but it is purportedly representative of the research in this field. See the bibliography for the full set of publications on which this analysis is based.

The abstracts from these publications were then downloaded for a content analysis. Common words, such as articles and prepositions, were removed from the text. Duplicate words within a single abstract were collapsed. For instance, if "corruption" appeared twice in the same abstract, only one iteration of the word was retained in the processed data. In this way, if a word appears prominently in the subsequent analysis, it is not because its representation was skewed by an abstract that reused the word multiple times. Following this procedure, all of the words were compiled into a single string of text and displayed as a "wordcloud" using the eponymous package in the R environment (Figure 1).

Many of the results that are evident in the wordcloud are relatively unsurprising. "Organizational" and "behavior" are the two most commonly represented words, paralleling the academic subfield with which many of the included authors likely identify. The less prominent words reveal potentially emergent trends, such as research on corporate fraud. In terms of the units of analysis, "employees" and "managers" seem more common than "firm," which is potentially a reminder that corrupt behavior is enacted by the individuals within organizations.

This is a preliminary assessment of content in the field. Future meta-analysis along these lines would benefit from considering trends over time. A larger sample of publications would also be useful, as would a consideration of the full text of the research, not just the abstracts.

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