INTENT TO ACT ETHICALLY: A REDEFINED MEASURE

ABSTRACT

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This paper proposes a step-wise methodology for the development of a scale measuring intent-to-act ethically, which is a step forward in understanding the ethical decision-making process. To test the robustness of the methodology, data from two different populations gathered from 75 students and 181 professionals were examined to ensure reliability in ethical workplace scenarios. The value of this research has become timely and relevant to recent issues such as the current economic crisis lead by the sub-prime banking failures and the failures of Enron and Tyco are extreme examples of failure of societal members to act ethically. In developing a construct measuring ethical intent, this paper fills a research gap in business ethics. The construction of scale-measuring items was based on a theory of intent, and issues identified from the human resource management literature related to reasons employees do not report perceived unethical behavior in the workplace. Tested for social desirability bias, the results show that the proposed scale offers an improved reliability for assessing behavioral intent related to ethical decision-making. With these findings, the paper provides a potential new tool for research that relies on a measure of ethical intent as a proxy for ethical behavior.