Virtuous Circles in the Academy

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[00:00:00] Thinking about ethics in big organizations is always complex. Mm-hmm. But scale that up to a global association with members everywhere, that feels like a whole different level of challenge. Absolutely. How do you create a shared ethical understanding across, well, potentially huge cultural divides? It's fascinating.

It really is. And that's exactly what we're exploring today, the ethical organizational culture. Or EOC at the Academy of International Business (AIB) [1]. Right. We're drawing from a really insightful article by Lorraine Eden. It's in the December, 2024 issue of the Journal of International Business Policy, JIBP.[2]

And Lorraine Eden brings such unique viewpoint, doesn't she? Former JIBS Editor in Chief, AIB President, Dean of the Fellows. She's seen AIB's ethics journey from multiple angles. Exactly. And the article itself is an autoethnographic case study, so it's her personal reflection, but analyzed for broader lessons.

It gives us a real insider feel. Yeah, a firsthand perspective. Our goal here is really to understand how [00:01:00] AIB developed its ethical culture, and maybe pull out some useful lessons for you, especially if you're faculty involved in similar global academic groups. And it's good to remember this builds on foundational work, particularly by Linda Trevino, about how these ethical cultures work, the mix of formal rules and um, the informal how things are done.

That's key. So maybe let's start there. What exactly is an ethical organizational culture, an EOC? Well, at its core, it's kind of the organization's personality regarding ethics. You know. How we do things around here when ethical questions come up. And that includes the written rules, but also the unwritten stuff.

Precisely. You've got the formal side - codes of conduct, policies, ethics committees, things like that. The official structures, right. And then there's the informal side - the shared values, the norms, what people actually do, who they look up to as ethical role models. So you can have a great code on paper.

Yeah. But if the underlying culture, the informal part, doesn't really support it, it might not [00:02:00] mean much in practice. That's the crux of it. For a strong EOC, those formal and informal parts need to line up. They have to reinforce each other. Misalignment really weakens the whole structure. Okay, now. The article positions AIB as a pretty unique case study for this.

What makes it so special? Well, several things. It's an academic association. It's nonprofit. Focused on international business. Serving its members globally, and that global reach is huge. Members in 96 countries. The article says 96! Yeah, and that immediately flags the diversity challenge, right? Plus, because it's international business, members come from different academic fields, different types of universities all over the world.

[1] https://www.aib.world.

[2] Lorraine Eden. 2024. Virtuous circles in the academy: insights from AIB's ethical organizational culture. *Journal of International Business Policy*, 7: 397-415. https://link.springer.com/article/10.1057/s42214-024-00198-z.

It's very dispersed, which makes building that cohesive culture trickier than, say, a more nationally focused group. Okay, so a global, diverse, dispersed academic nonprofit. Got it. The article talks about three virtuous circles that shaped AIB's EOC. What does that mean? [00:03:00] Eden uses this model to show how ethical development spread through AIB.[3]

The three interconnected circles are the journals, the leaders and the members, and there was a specific sequence to how these develop. Yes, it seems so. It kicked off with the Journal of International Business Studies JIBS, creating its Code of Ethics back in 2007. Okay. Starting with research integrity.

Exactly. That initial focus on ethical publishing then seemed to influence the association's leadership. They developed the AIB Leader's Code of Ethics in 2012. Mm-hmm. And then finally it expanded to the broader membership with the AIB Members Code of Ethics in 2018. So it cascaded outwards from the core academic output to governance to the entire community.

It's interesting. Let's dig into those steps. The JIBS code in 2007. What was important about that? Well, Eden notes that unlike many business journals, medical and science journals often had codes. JIBS looked to them for inspiration. Smart. Yeah. And apparently it was the first specific COE for a business journal covering not [00:04:00] just authors, but reviewers and editors too.

That's quite comprehensive, covering everyone involved. Right. And later JIBS joined COPE, the Committee on Publication Ethics, which helped strengthen their proactive, sort of preventative ethical measures. Okay, so after the journal focus came, the leaders in 2012, what drove that? A big driver was AIB's nonprofit status in the US.

That requires careful governance, managing conflicts of interest, that sort of thing. Uh, legal and structural requirements. Exactly. So a specific code for leaders emerged and crucially, this is when they set up the AIB ethics committee to handle ethical issues.

Got it. Expanding the formal infrastructure then came the members code in 2018. What were the challenges there? Well, the big one was making it relevant and workable for members across those 96 countries. How do you write a code that fits so many different contexts? Yeah, that sounds tough. They looked at the American Finance Association's code, which uses broad principles for some ideas.

This led to creating two [00:05:00] more key committees. The Ethics Policy Committee, EPC, to develop policy and the Ethics Review Committee, ERC, to handle specific cases. Okay. And they also worked to harmonize the leaders and members codes so everything felt consistent. Makes sense. The article also mentions AIB's Mission, Vision and Values Statement from 2018.

How does that fit in? That statement acts like the North Star. For everything else, it lays out the core principles, the fundamental beliefs of AIB. Ahhh, the why exactly. It guides the spirit and content of the specific codes and policies. It's the ethical foundation, right? So. Building on all this experience, the article draws out policy implications, particularly for faculty and leaders and other academic associations.

This seems really useful for our listeners. Let's focus here. What about journal editors? Eden sees them as crucial ethical guardians. Since journals are often central to an association's mission, editors set a powerful tone. So what should they be doing? Well, the article suggests having [00:06:00] in-house journal codes of ethics is really valuable.

They can be tailored specifically to the field, fostering more ownership than just relying on generic publisher rules. Mm-hmm. Partnering with groups like COPE is important too, to stay current and

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[3] https://www.aib.world/about/ethics/

actively promoting ethics publishing editorials about it, encouraging discussion. Don't just react to problems.

Be proactive. Right. And it also gives a nod to the managing editors who often do a lot of the groundwork in upholding standards day to day. Okay. So editors have a big role. What about association leaders, presidents, board members, executive directors? For leaders, it's about commitment from the top. They need to visibly champion ethics, communicate policies clearly, and provide resources.

Lead by example. Absolutely. Mm-hmm. Building a coalition of the willing, getting key committees, senior members, chapter leaders involved, helps embed the culture. The executive director's buy-in is especially vital for sustained effort. Right. The operational lead. Yeah. And Eden even floats the idea of a dedicated ethics leader role in [00:07:00] some associations.

Someone specifically tasked with overseeing the EOC. Interesting. Okay, that's clear. What about the general members? What are the implications for them? For the faculty listening for members, it's about making ethics accessible and shared.

So translating policies for global groups is important. Offering training in different languages, meaning it practical, yes. And encouraging bottom up ideas. Maybe members propose ethics related projects or discussions. Fostering ownership, right, and always being mindful, especially in global groups. Of the four Ds Eden mentions differences, diversities, distances, disparities, these all impact ethical understanding.

So cultural sensitivity is key, hugely, but ultimately it starts with the individual. The article stresses that idea of when in doubt, give a shout. Don't guess, see clarification. If you face an ethical puzzle, that's a good practical principle, right? So pulling back to AIB. Based on this autoethnographic view, what was Eden's assessment of their EOC?

Now she [00:08:00] felt AIB had done a really strong job on the formal side, the codes, the committees, the policies are well developed. Okay. But she suggested the informal side, the shared values, the day-to-day culture, the two-way communication with members about ethics could still be strengthened. Further room for growth on the culture part.

Yeah. Yeah. The formal and informal seem aligned, which is good, but nurturing those less so. Tangible values-based aspects is maybe the next phase. That makes a lot of sense. You need the rules, but you also need the shared commitment. So wrapping up, what are the main takeaways here for faculty, for leaders and academic associations around the world?

I think there are three key things. First, AIB's story shows a possible pathway. Using those circles of journals, leaders and, members can be a useful model. Second, the absolute need to develop both formal structures and informal norms and make sure they support each other, you can't just have one. No. And third, those practical implications.

We discussed concrete actions for editors, leaders, and members. Everyone [00:09:00] has a role. It really drives home that building an ethical culture isn't just about writing a code. Not at all. So maybe the final thought for you listening is reflecting on AIB's journey. What are one or two concrete steps your association or even your department could take to strengthen its own ethical culture and build that trust within the wider academic community?

Yeah, that's the key question to take away because building and maintaining this kind of culture, it's not a project with an end date. It's an ongoing conversation, an ongoing commitment.