



Innovative ethics officers as drivers of effective ethics programs: An empirical study in the Netherlands

Sjoerd Hogenbirk¹ | Desirée H. van Dun²

¹Partner and Management Consultant, House of Performance, Utrecht, the Netherlands

²Change Management & Organizational Behaviour Department, Faculty of Behavioural, Management and Social Sciences, University of Twente, Enschede, the Netherlands

Correspondence

Sjoerd Hogenbirk, Partner and Management Consultant, House of Performance, Hamburgerstraat 30, Utrecht 3512 NS, the Netherlands.
Email: s.hogenbirk@hofp.nl

Abstract

Ethical misconduct and violations seriously harm individuals and organizations and lead to massive fines or the dismissal of employees and CEOs. Many firms have implemented ethics programs to prevent unethical behavior but these are often ineffective and take a traditional approach. Ethics officers are often responsible for running and developing ethics programs, in collaboration with other departments. They can, therefore, play a key role in improving ethics program effectiveness. We postulate that ethics officers need to adopt a more innovative approach in order to achieve ethical behavior among employees and managers, and that such an innovative approach requires certain personality traits. This study investigates how ethics officers' personality traits and innovative work behaviors relate to the effectiveness of ethics programs and normative ethical behavior through an online questionnaire conducted among 110 ethics officers in large Dutch organizations. Structural equations modeling showed that innovative work behavior mediated the relationship between ethics officers' openness to experience and ethics program effectiveness which, in turn, is related to more normative ethical behavior. Future research must examine the (partial) mediation effects, including other characteristics of ethics officers in relation to ethics program effectiveness and ethical behaviors at work, and replicate the study multi-nationally.

1 | INTRODUCTION

In January 2017, Rolls Royce agreed to pay a £671 million fine to the British, American, and Brazilian authorities because of corruption, false accounting, and failure to prevent bribery (Skapinker, 2017). In the Summer of 2018, Uber's CEO Travis Kalanick resigned following his mishandling of a series of scandals about sexual harassment and macho culture (Kleinman, 2017). In 2019, the American Federal Trade Commission imposed a historic \$5 billion dollar penalty on Facebook for violating its customers' privacy as part of the Cambridge Analytica scandal (Jaeger, 2019). Over the last 10 years, global CEO dismissals

due to ethical lapses have risen from 3.9% to 5.3% (Per-Ola, DeAnne, & Rivera, 2017). Unethical behavior at work is not restricted to top management: According to the Ethics Resource Center (2012), 52% of the Fortune 500 employees had been ticked off for ethical misconduct. People are increasingly aware that such a reputation damages and compromises the long-term profit of a firm and stakeholders as customers will abandon them. Banks et al. (2016) described the elimination of unethical behavior in organizations as a "grand challenge" for researchers and practitioners alike.

Often urged by external pressures, many organizations have installed an "ethics" program to stimulate ethical behavior

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(Kaptein, 2015; Treviño, den Nieuwenboer, Kreiner, & Bishop, 2014). An ethics program is defined as “the formal organizational control system designed to impede unethical behavior” by clarifying the nature and distinguishing the unethical and ethical behavior of managers and employees (Kaptein, 2015, p. 415). For example, an ethics program can provide guidelines for doing business in an ethical way, or guide employees to solve ethical issues. By creating such clarity, an ethics program can standardize employee behavior (Weaver, Treviño, & Cochran, 1999). Ethical behavior is thus a long-term investment whereby the company commits to specific values or behavioral standards (Lütge, 2005). Many scholars have, however, challenged the effectiveness of the traditional approach taken in most ethics programs (Collier & Esteban, 2007; Kaptein, 2015; Smith-Crowe et al., 2015; Tenbrunsel & Smith-Crowe, 2008; Tenbrunsel, Smith-Crowe, & Umphress, 2003; Warren, Gaspar, & Laufer, 2014).

Key practices within ethics programs have remained largely unchanged over the last 30 years (Weber & Wasieleski, 2013); they include: a code of ethics, ethics training, an ethics officer, audits, ethics committees, preemployment integrity screening, and a hotline (Ethics Resource Center, 2007; Kaptein, 2015; Weber & Fortun, 2005; Weller, 2017). Yet, these practices explain only 11.6% of the variance in unethical behavior (Kaptein, 2015). Haidt and Treviño (2017) called for the empirical testing of innovative business ethics change practices, which are also linked to the effectiveness of ethics programs. Following LeClair and Ferrell's (2000) notable introduction of a business ethics behavioral simulation game, Weber (2006, p. 36) argued that there is a need for “new add-ons” and fresh ways of thinking to promote ethical behavior in the workplace. Similarly, Joseph (2002) found that ethics officers were aware that their training efforts needed to evolve with their employees.

The responsibility for designing and improving ethics programs is usually assigned to ethics officers by top management (Adobor, 2006; Ethics Resource Center, 2007; Hoffman & Rowe, 2007; Kaptein, 2015; Weber & Fortun, 2005). They are often responsible for running and/or (further) developing the corporate ethics program (Adobor, 2006; Treviño et al., 2014; Weber, 2015). Ethics officers thereby work closely with a variety of other departments such as: legal, human resources, security, audit, and purchasing (Joseph, 2002). In the slipstream of such programs, ethics officers must also help in managing the change process toward more ethical behavior. To design more innovative and effective ethics programs, ethics officers need to introduce new ideas and practices proactively that bring about desirable outcomes (Al-Haddad & Kotnour, 2015). This study, therefore, focuses on the innovative work behavior of ethics officers, that is, their idea generation, idea promotion, and idea realization (Scott & Bruce, 1994), and how this behavior may affect the effectiveness of the programs and the resulting ethical behavior.

To date, little research is available about an ethics officer's role (Adobor, 2006; Treviño et al., 2014). In fact, the Ma, Liang, Yu, and Lee (2012) review of the most cited Business Ethics publications between 2001 and 2008 does not even mention once the term “ethics officer.” What we do know is that ethics officers have several job

responsibilities, including: organizing ethics training, managing compliance, advising top management, mediating, securing resources, investigating cases, and corporate social responsibility (Adobor, 2006; Izraeli & BarNir, 1998; Smith, 2003). In order to meet legal requirements, minimize risks of litigation and indictment, and improve accountability mechanisms, ethics officers must recommend and review disciplinary procedures and execute program audits to ensure program consistency (Joseph, 2002). Due to this broad and diverse set of roles, ethics officers may face role conflict (Adobor, 2006). Thus, in order to deal with all their duties and to focus on compliance, ethics officers must have some level of conscientiousness. However, conscientious individuals typically show less propensity for engaging in creative or innovative behavior (George & Zhou, 2001).

In addition to being conscientious, ethics officers may also need to be more open to improvement and adaptation. The success of an ethics program depends on making it fit the context (Joseph, 2002). Considering that this context is constantly changing, effective ethics programs must evolve and change with their organization (Joseph, 2002). Ethics officers should thus challenge their own and other's assumptions about what works, balance competing priorities and even revise program practices (Joseph, 2002). The personality trait “openness to experience” was shown as a predictor of innovative performance as it encompasses inclinations to seek out a broad range of thoughts, ideas and people interactions (McCrae, 1987; McCrae & Costa, 1997). Madrid, Patterson, Birdi, Leiva, and Kausel (2014, p. 238) aptly describe “open individuals are less prone to prejudice and authoritarian submission, as it is easier for them to understand and adapt perspectives from others while having a strong sense of self-confidence in their own ideas.” Therefore, we examine to what extent ethics officers' openness to experience relates to their innovative work behavior. Our research question is: *To what extent do the personality traits and innovative work behaviors of ethics officers enhance the effectiveness of ethics programs and, in turn, the (normative) ethical behavior within organizations?*

Although a number of papers refer to ethics officers, there is little consistency in the description of “ethics” or “compliance” officers' jobs (Smith, 2003; Weber & Fortun, 2005). Despite organizations moving from strict compliance programs to more harmonized, value-oriented ethics programs (Calderón, Piñero, & Redín, 2018; Joseph, 2002), the global “Ethics Officers Association” recently changed its name into “Ethics and Compliance Officers Association” to highlight the growing importance of compliance in ethics programs.¹ Kaptein (2015, p. 416), moreover, used the title “ethics officer” to cover: “compliance office(r), ombudsperson, ethics information and expertise center or desk.” Following Joseph (2002), Hoffman and Rowe (2007), and Kaptein (2015), we use the term “ethics officer” to refer to those responsible for the strategic and operational leadership of ethics and compliance programs.

The following section describes our key variables and hypothetical framework. We integrate elements from different disciplines (as called for by Köseoglu, Yildiz, & Ciftci, 2018), namely: Work and Organizational Psychology, Innovation theory, and Business Ethics. We then report the methods and results of surveying 110 Dutch

ethics officers who led the ethics programs in their respective organizations. Since little is known about ethics officers (Adobor, 2006; Treviño et al., 2014), we hope studying this collection of individuals will offer a unique insight into their perceptions of their work, behaviors and the effectiveness of the program. Previous studies were based on interviews with employees (Pelletier & Bligh, 2006; Smith-Crowe et al., 2015; Warren et al., 2014) or a private panel database (Kaptein, 2015). Only few studies sampled and surveyed ethics and compliance officers (Hoffman, Neill, & Stovall, 2008; Joseph, 2002; Morf, Schumacher, & Vitell, 1999; Treviño et al., 2014). We conclude with implications for theory and practice as well as avenues for further exploration.

2 | HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

2.1 | Ethics program effectiveness and normative ethical behavior

The function of ethics programs has multiple perspectives. Kaptein (2015, p. 415), on the one hand, emphasizes their control function in order to “impede unethical conduct and promote ethical conduct”, whereas Beeri, Dayan, Vigoda-Gadot, and Werner (2013, p. 65), on the other hand, view ethics programs as “a managerial tool designed to increase employees’ awareness of ethical issues and to serve as a guide through which employees can navigate these issues in all their complexity.” According to Beeri et al. (2013), this awareness helps employees to make more informed, and subsequently, better ethical decisions. While Kaptein’s (2009) definition refers to broad organizational systems, Beeri et al. (2013) focus on an organization’s managers and employees. Thus, both definitions shed light on different aspects and purposes of ethics programs which, essentially, stimulate ethical conduct pro-actively through raising awareness of and giving support to solving ethical issues on the work floor.

However, the effectiveness of ethics programs is contested. According to Treviño et al. (2014), measuring the effectiveness of ethics programs is one of the hardest parts of the job because they do not lead directly to bottom-line savings or increased sales. One common approach for ethics officers is to emphasize behavior, possibly because behavior is the most visible (Treviño et al., 2014). Indeed, Morales-Sánchez and Cabello-Medina (2015) stipulate that ethical appraisal should preferably be linked to ethical behavior. This means that the effectiveness of an ethics program is best measured through asking employees about their appreciation of the program (Pelletier & Bligh, 2006).

By aiming for more ethical behavior, an ethics program can be regarded as a change program. Change programs, and their implementation, are often more open-ended than linear (Weick & Quinn, 1999). Organizational change has been conceptualized as an example of organizational learning (Shaw, 2017). Shaw (2017) argues that change needs explorative learning, which involves searching for innovation; the aim is to refine the existing ways of doing things. Therefore, an ethics program can only be deemed effective if it is also innovative and makes use of innovative practices.

Moreover, effective ethics programs must have a positive impact on the ethical behavior within the organization (Kaptein, 2015) because employees use their organizational peers as an arbiter of what is morally correct (Lu & Lin, 2014). Therefore, we looked at normative ethical behavior which “includes the normative values and beliefs concerning moral issues that are shared by the employees of that organization” (Lu & Lin, 2014, p. 212). For example, normative ethical behavior entails not blaming an innocent other for errors and/or claiming the credit for someone else’s work. Hence, our first hypothesis is:

Hypothesis 1 *The effectiveness of ethics programs is positively related to employees’ normative ethical behavior.*

2.2 | Innovative work behavior and ethics program effectiveness

Ethics officers are responsible for implementing innovative change practices, provide resources for ethical decision-making and improve the effectiveness of the ethics program (Beeri et al., 2013). Hence, the ethics officer essentially needs to demonstrate innovative work behavior to develop new components, services or work procedures within ethics programs. This entails three consecutive actions: idea generation, idea promotion, and idea realization (Scott & Bruce, 1994). Idea generation constitutes the creation of useful and novel tasks or output (Amabile, Conti, Coon, Lazenby, & Herron, 1996; Gumusluoglu & Ilsev, 2009). After the idea is born, the creator must garner support for it, which requires engaging in various social activities. Finally, the idea must be implemented in the work situation.

However, innovative work behavior is often not part of the job description of ethics officers. In order to come up with new ethics program practices, and to implement such innovations, ethics officers may need to display behaviors that fall outside their traditional task performance domain (Rank, Nelson, Allen, & Xu, 2009). Innovation can be associated with extra-role performance, which includes actions that are not part of an employee’s established job description but help achieve an organization’s goals (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). Hence, although innovative work behavior is considered essential for the effectiveness and long-term survival of organizations, it generally falls outside the realm of ethics officers’ in-role work behaviors (Janssen, 2000). Following the questioning of the effectiveness of traditional ethics programs, Weber (2006) suggested they could be expanded by continuously introducing new add-ons. Some ethics officers actually innovate their practices and keep the employees’ training fresh and vital (Joseph, 2002). As noted by an ethics officer (Joseph, 2002, p. 339): “I think it’s insulting to hit them with the same stuff year after year.” Kaptein (2015) found that ethics programs with broader scopes are more effective than less extensive ones. For such programs to become more innovative, and thus effective, ethics officers must adopt more innovative work behaviors. Thus, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 2 *Ethics officers' innovative work behaviors are positively related to the effectiveness of the ethics programs.*

2.3 | Ethics officer's personal characteristics and innovative work behaviors

What factors stimulate ethics officers' innovative work behaviors? It appears that personal characteristics are essential for creative performance among employees (Anderson, Potočnik, & Zhou, 2014). The Big Five personality traits (i.e., openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, neuroticism, and agreeableness) are widely accepted among Organizational Behavior scholars (Church et al., 2016). These personality traits display minimal overlap and are relatively stable over time, situations and social roles. An impressive body of literature provides evidence for the robustness of the Big Five model (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Judge & Zapata, 2015).

In terms of those Big Five personality traits, we expect that ethics officers may need to be open to experiences. First of all, ethics officers must perform in a context characterized by task complexity, ambiguity and information overload, and must also cope with conflicting demands from multiple stakeholders (Adobor, 2006; Smith, 2003). Adobor (2006) hypothesized that when ethics officers display tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity, they are more effective than their counterparts with a low tolerance for ambiguity. Second, due to the unstructured nature of their tasks and sometimes imprecise job descriptions (Adobor, 2006; Smith, 2003), it is hard to determine what exactly ethics officers are supposed to do and plan for. Thirdly, ethics officers must be capable of integrating their ethics programs differently across various divisions, business units, and regions, and be flexible especially in times of transition (Joseph, 2002). To deal effectively with this, and to tailor programs better to fit the operational reality, ethics officers must have personal networks and operational experiences within other areas of the organization (Joseph, 2002). An ethics officer, therefore, needs to be flexible (Smith, 2003), enabling him or her to continuously look for new ideas and new ways of working as well as to adjust the program to the known operational context (Joseph, 2002).

If someone is *open to experience*, he or she is intellectually curious and tends to seek out new experiences and explore novel ideas, thoughts, and perspectives (Holtbrügge, Baron, & Friedmann, 2015; Zhao & Seibert, 2006). Openness to experience is seen as an important predictor of ethical attitude (Holtbrügge et al., 2015) and of innovative job performance (Madrid et al., 2014). As noted by Hoffman et al. (2008, p. 91), ethics officers must have a level of curiosity to look at ethical cases involving senior management with "healthy skepticism." Moreover, it is likely that the decision to incorporate innovative practices, such as the experiential ethics simulation games reported by LeClair and Ferrell (2000), requires ethics officers to be open to such new experiences. As openness to experience is often associated with creativity, it is also likely to be related

to innovative work behavior (Stock, von Hippel, & Gillert, 2016; Sung & Choi, 2009). Hence, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 3 *Ethics officers' openness to experience is positively related to innovative work behaviors.*

We are also interested in ethics officers' levels of conscientiousness. Conscientiousness can be defined as "an individual's degree of organization, persistence, hard work, and motivation in the pursuit of goal accomplishment" (Zhao & Seibert, 2006, p. 261). Many ethics officers are expected to ensure that the people across their organization stick to the rules and regulations. As an illustration, nearly three quarters of ethics and compliance programs are developed to ensure compliance to a limited set of priorities (Joseph, 2002), for example, through installing codes of conduct (Morf et al., 1999; Stöber, Kotzian, & Weißenberger, 2019). As noted before, these priorities typically include (Joseph, 2002, pp. 316–317): "meeting legal and regulatory requirements, minimizing risks of litigation and indictment, and improving accountability mechanisms." Moreover, ethics officers are responsible for recommending and reviewing disciplinary procedures and formal program audits to ensure program consistency (Joseph, 2002). Next to this focus on compliance, ethics officers must also have a professional attitude, including: dedication, diligence, integrity, resoluteness, vigor, and responsiveness (Izraeli & BarNir, 1998). Some even state that ethics officers must role-model integrity (Llopis, Gonzalez, & Gasco, 2007). Such an attitude will, for instance, help in the thorough investigation of complaints (Izraeli & BarNir, 1998). This insinuates that the job of an ethics officer requires a considerable level of conscientiousness.

Research from the Ethics Resource Center (2007) indicates that substantive ethical organizational culture change takes up to 10 years because achieving the goals of an ethics program typically takes substantial time and energy. Such an integrated ethics program is hard to achieve: experienced ethics officers, therefore, "tend to see integration as a continuous process rather than a destination" (Joseph, 2002, p. 311). An ethics officer thus needs patience and persistence to deal with unexpected delays and barriers to change (Ethics Resource Center, 2007). Such persistence is part of the previously mentioned definition of conscientiousness. Although conscientiousness is a significant predictor of job performance, its relationship with creativity is less obvious. For example, while Stock et al., (2016) mentions positive associations between conscientiousness and creativity, George and Zhou (2001) find a negative relationship. Conscientious employees generally prefer to carry out their tasks in an efficient and organized way. They like to work in a control-oriented organizational culture (Holtbrügge et al., 2015) and may not like the task flow being disrupted by the pitching of new ideas. Moreover, individuals with a high level of conscientiousness tend to avoid risk-taking or experimentation (Sung & Choi, 2009). Thus:

Hypothesis 4 *An ethics officer's conscientiousness is negatively related to innovative work behavior.*

3 | METHODS

3.1 | Sampling

An online survey was distributed to a professional network of ethics officers and the clients of a management consulting firm in the Netherlands. In addition, the survey was brought to ethics officers' attention during a national business ethics conference and two workshops. Via convenience sampling, commonly used in quantitative studies (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016), 110 Dutch ethics officers of large, public, and private organizations responded. Their position characteristics entailed relatively high job security and independence. Almost two-thirds of the respondents were male (see Table 1). 98% of the respondents had completed higher education. They were on average 46.1 years old ($SD = 8.9$), with 43% of the respondents being between 40 and 49 years of age. The ethics officers had between 1 and 30 years of work experience in their current positions ($M = 5.4$; $SD = 5.2$).

3.2 | Measures

Most variables were tested using existing measures. We retained the original phrasings as much as possible and translated the items from English to Dutch via the translation-back-translation technique (Brislin, 1970; Chen & Boore, 2010), except for the validated published Dutch versions of the openness to experience and conscientiousness scales. A pilot survey, tried among 11 Dutch ethics officers ($M_{\text{age}} = 48.5$; $M_{\text{experience}} = 3.6$ years; 10 males, 1 female; 100% higher education or more), provided valuable feedback for improving the

TABLE 1 Sample descriptive statistics

Characteristics	%
Gender	
Male	60
Female	37
Undisclosed	3
Educational level	
Secondary education or lower	2
Higher education (non-university)	24
Higher education (university or higher)	74
Age	
<30 years	4
30–39 years	19
40–49 years	42
50–59 years	29
60+ years	6
Work experience in current position	
<2 years	12
2–5 years	39
6–10 years	23
10+ years	26

final survey. Regarding consistency and convenience purposes, all the measures involved a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 “strongly disagree” to 7 “strongly agree,” with the exception of the innovative work behavior scale, which ranged from 1 “never” to 7 “always.”

3.2.1 | Openness to experience

Denissen, Geenen, van Aken, Gosling, and Potter (2008) validated a Dutch scale consisting of 10 items that measures openness to experience. A sample item is: “I am someone who is curious about many different things.”

3.2.2 | Conscientiousness

We used the validated Dutch version of the conscientiousness measurement (Denissen et al., 2008), which consists of nine items. A sample item is: “I am someone who perseveres until the task is finished.”

3.2.3 | Innovative work behavior

Innovative work behavior was measured with Janssen's (2000) nine-item scale, with items such as “I am someone who searches out new working methods, techniques, or instruments.”

3.2.4 | Ethics program effectiveness

Following Pelletier and Bligh (2006), the perceived effectiveness of the ethics program was assessed via one item “Our ethics program is effective,” on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 “entirely disagree” to 7 “entirely agree.” In addition, we examined the level of innovation and the implementation of new practices into the ethics program (Al-Haddad & Kotnour, 2015) and added two items based on Pelletier and Bligh's (2006) phrasing: “Our ethics program is innovative” and “Our ethics program contains many innovative elements.”

3.2.5 | Normative ethical behavior

We used Lu and Lin's (2014) 10-item scale to measure normative ethical behavior. A sample item is: “I think my peers do not claim credit for someone else's work.” To reduce possible ambiguities among the respondents, we removed “do not” from every item. Before the data analyses were conducted, the responses were recoded.

3.3 | Data analysis

Using AMOS a confirmatory factor analysis was conducted, followed by an analysis of the convergent validity through the average

variances extracted (AVEs) as well as the square roots of the AVE for each construct to determine the discriminant validity. Reliability was checked via composite reliability (CR) and Cronbach's alphas coefficients. Then, to assess the effect of common method variance, Harman's single factor test was performed on all the used items. After checking the correlations, the assumption of normal distribution was tested using D'Agostino's skewness test and Anscombe-Glynn's kurtosis test (Arbuckle, 2010; Ghasemi & Zahediasl, 2012; Öztuna, Elhan, & Tüccar, 2006).

The hypotheses were tested via a path analysis using AMOS. Previous researchers recommended the use of several fit indices, since each index highlights a slightly different model of fit (Hu, Bentler, & Hoyle, 1995; Lu & Lin, 2014; Newsom, 2012). We included the following model fit indices and cut-off criteria: Chi-square divided by degree of freedom (χ^2/df ; < 2), comparative fit index (CFI; >0.90), standardized root mean square of residuals (SRMR; <0.08) and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA; <0.08).

The test of joint significance was used to test the mediation effect (MacKinnon, Lockwood, Hoffman, West, & Sheets, 2002). According to this test, a mediation effect is present when two conditions are fulfilled: (a) the relationship between the independent variable and the mediator is significant, and (b) the relationship between the mediator and the dependent variable, while controlling for the independent variable, is significant. The authors studied several methods to test mediation effects and concluded: "The best balance of Type I error and statistical power across all cases is the test of joint significance of the two effects comprising the intervening variable effect" (MacKinnon et al., 2002, p. 83). In addition, we also tested three alternative models using Structural Equations Modeling: swapping the order of the two mediators and including direct paths in the analysis.

4 | RESULTS

4.1 | Validity, reliability, and common method variance

A confirmatory factor analysis was performed to investigate the measurement model (see Figure 1). The results show that the

model did not fit the data: $\chi^2 = 1,479.65$ with $df = 769$, $\chi^2/df = 1.92$, CFI = 0.71, RMSEA = 0.09, and SRMR = 0.10. Therefore, we deleted 14 items with low loadings. The fit of this measurement model was good: $\chi^2 = 333.12$ with $df = 238$, $\chi^2/df = 1.40$, CFI = 0.92, RMSEA = 0.06, and SRMR = 0.07. Both the remaining items and the deleted ones are presented in Table 2.

All the factor loadings (see Table 2) were significant and most of them were higher than the recommended threshold value of 0.50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Only one item of openness to experience loaded slightly lower: 0.49. Table 2 shows that the AVEs of innovative work behavior, ethical program effectiveness and normative ethical behavior were greater than the cutoff value of 0.50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). These results support the convergent validity of the constructs. However, the AVEs of openness to experience and conscientiousness were lower. Fornell and Larcker (1981) indicated that the square root of each construct's AVE should be greater than its correlation with all the other constructs to support their discriminant validity. Table 3 demonstrates the discriminant validity of all five constructs.

Table 2 presents the CR and Cronbach's alpha coefficients computed to evaluate the reliability of the constructs. The Cronbach's alpha and the confidence intervals (CI) were as follows: openness to experience: 0.74 (95% CI: 0.65–0.81); conscientiousness: 0.79 (95% CI: 0.73–0.85); innovative work behavior: 0.87 (95% CI: 0.83–0.90); ethics program effectiveness: 0.89 (95% CI: 0.84–0.92); and normative ethical behavior: 0.81 (95% CI: 0.75–0.86). The CR values ranged from 0.75 to 0.87. These results reveal that, although several items were deleted, the scales were reliable.

Harman's test revealed that the single factor explained only 19.23% of the variance, which is far below the critical value of 50%. This result does not exclude the potential of common method variance (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003), but it does suggest that common method variance is not of great concern (Chang, Van Witteloostuijn, & Eden, 2010; Moura, Orgambidez-Ramos, & Gonçalves, 2014).

Table 3 also shows the correlations among the study variables. Openness to experience and innovative work behavior ($r = 0.27$; $p < .01$) and ethics program effectiveness and normative ethical behavior ($r = 0.32$; $p < .01$) had the strongest correlations. Although conscientiousness and innovative work behavior ($r = 0.17$; ns) were not significantly correlated, innovative work behavior and ethics

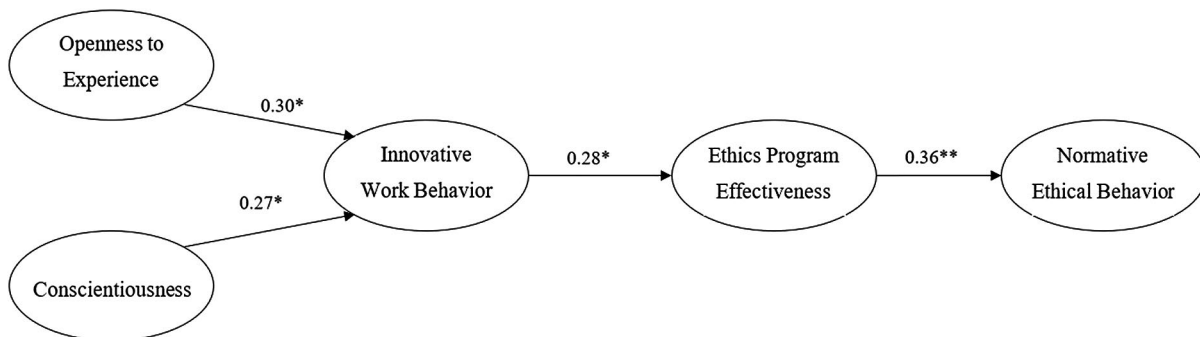


FIGURE 1 Hypothesized structural model with standardized path coefficients between the latent variables (Model 1). * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

TABLE 2 Item loadings of resulting confirmative factor analysis, AVEs, and CRs

Items	Loadings	Cronbach's alpha	AVE	CR
Openness to experience		0.74	0.45	0.80
I am someone who				
Values artistic, esthetic experiences	0.84			
Has an active imagination	0.49			
Is curious about many different things	0.52			
Has few artistic interests (r)	-0.75			
Likes to reflect, play with ideas				
Is inventive				
Is original, comes up with new ideas				
Is sophisticated in art, music, or literature				
Is ingenious, a deep thinker				
Prefers work that is routine				
Conscientiousness		0.79	0.39	0.82
I am someone who				
Perseveres until the task is finished	0.59			
Tends to be disorganized (r)	-0.70			
Tends to be lazy (r)	-0.63			
Is a reliable worker	0.59			
Makes plans and follows through with them	0.56			
Is easily distracted (r)	-0.57			
Can be somewhat careless (r)	-0.72			
Does things efficiently				
Does a thorough job				
Innovative work behavior		0.87	0.50	0.85
I am someone who				
Creates new ideas for difficult issues	0.68			
Searches out new working methods, techniques, or instruments	0.62			
Makes important members enthusiastic for innovative ideas	0.87			
Acquires approval for innovative ideas	0.81			
Transforms innovative ideas into useful applications	0.62			
Evaluates the utility of innovative ideas	0.55			
Generates original solutions for problems				
Mobilizes support for innovative ideas				
Introduces innovative ideas into the work environment in a systematic way				
Ethical program effectiveness		0.89	0.75	0.87
Our ethics program is effective	0.61			
Our ethics program is innovative	0.99			
Our ethics programs contains many innovative elements	0.93			
Normative ethical behavior		0.81	0.56	0.75
I think my peers pass blame for errors on to an innocent co-worker (r)	0.82			
I think my peers claim credit for someone else's work (r)	0.80			
I think my peers conceal personal errors (r)	0.79			
I think my peers divulge confidential information (r)	0.55			
I think my peers conduct personal business in company time (r)				
I think my peers give gifts/favors in exchange for preferential treatment (r)				
I think my peers use company services for personal use (r)				

Note: N = 110. Items without a factor loading were deleted.

TABLE 3 Correlations between variables, means, and SD

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Openness to experience	5.38	1.00	(0.67)				
2. Conscientiousness	5.46	0.85	-0.04	(0.62)			
3. Innovative work behavior	4.40	0.98	0.27**	0.17	(0.70)		
4. Ethics program effectiveness	4.23	1.31	0.25**	0.16	0.22*	(0.87)	
5. Normative ethical behavior	3.31	1.20	-0.03	0.08	-0.07	0.32**	(0.75)

Note: The AVEs square roots are presented between brackets on the diagonal.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

Bold indicates the significance of p values.

TABLE 4 Fit statistics for hypothesized and alternative models

Model	df	χ^2 (N = 110)	χ^2/df	CFI	RMSEA	SRMR
1 Hypothesized model	243	347.88	1.43	0.91	0.06	0.08
2 Alternative model swapping the order of IWB and EPE	243	356.49	1.47	0.90	0.07	0.10
3 Alternative model including a direct effect between IWB and NEB	242	345.11	1.43	0.91	0.06	0.08
4 Alternative model including a direct effect between OTE and EPE	242	342.23	1.41	0.91	0.06	0.08

Abbreviations: CFI, comparative fit index; EPE, ethics program effectiveness; IWB, innovative work behavior; NEB, normative ethical behavior; OTE, openness to experience; RMSEA, root mean square error of approximation; SRMR, standardized root mean square of residuals.

program effectiveness were ($r = 0.22$; $p < .05$). Finally, we also found a significant correlation between openness to experience and ethics program effectiveness ($r = 0.25$, $p < .01$). Skewness and kurtosis of the scales ranged between -1.00 and 1.51 , well within the generally accepted boundaries of -2.00 and 2.00 (Ghasemi & Zahediasl, 2012). There was no sign of multicollinearity, meaning the correlations between the independent variables were not too high and that the coefficient variables were stable and straightforward to interpret (Mason & Brown, 1975).

4.2 | Hypotheses-testing

The hypotheses were tested by constructing a path model consisting of latent variables (see Figure 1) and by analyzing this model using AMOS. Most of the model's goodness-of-fit indices were satisfactory (see Table 4): $\chi^2 = 347.88$ with $df = 243$, and chi-square divided by degree of freedom ($\chi^2/df = 1.43$). Also, the model of fit indices, including the comparative fit index (CFI = 0.91) and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA = 0.06) were satisfactory. However, the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR = 0.09) was just above the critical value.

Hypothesis 1 was confirmed, because ethics program effectiveness was positively related to normative ethical behavior ($\beta = 0.36$, $p < .01$). Innovative work behavior was found to have a positive

relation with the effectiveness of the ethics program ($\beta = 0.28$, $p < .05$), thus confirming Hypothesis 2. Openness to experience turned out to be positively related to ethics officer's innovative work behavior ($\beta = 0.30$, $p < .05$), which confirmed Hypothesis 3. Also, Hypothesis 4 was supported, as conscientiousness was significantly related to innovative work behavior ($\beta = 0.27$, $p < .05$). A path analysis with the latent variables confirmed all four hypotheses further.

Although no causal effects could be tested due to the cross-sectional design of the study, the model in Figure 1 suggests a causal order of the variables. The results show that this order matched the data. To test whether an alternative, logical model would also fit well, we swapped the order of innovative work behavior and ethics program effectiveness around in the model (model 2, Table 4). This model had the following fit values: $\chi^2 = 356.49$ with $df = 243$, $\chi^2/df = 1.47$, CFI = 0.90, RMSEA = 0.07, and SRMR = 0.09. The SRMR exceeded the critical value of 0.08, indicating that this model did not fit the data. The difference between the two models could not be tested, because the degrees of freedom were the same.

We checked the mediating effect of ethics program effectiveness by adding a path from ethics officer's innovative work behavior to normative ethical behavior (model 3). This model had the following fit values: $\chi^2 = 345.11$ with $df = 242$, $\chi^2/df = 1.43$, CFI = 0.91, RMSEA = 0.06, and SRMR = 0.08. The difference between this model and the hypothesized model was not significant and also the added path was not significant, indicating a full mediation.

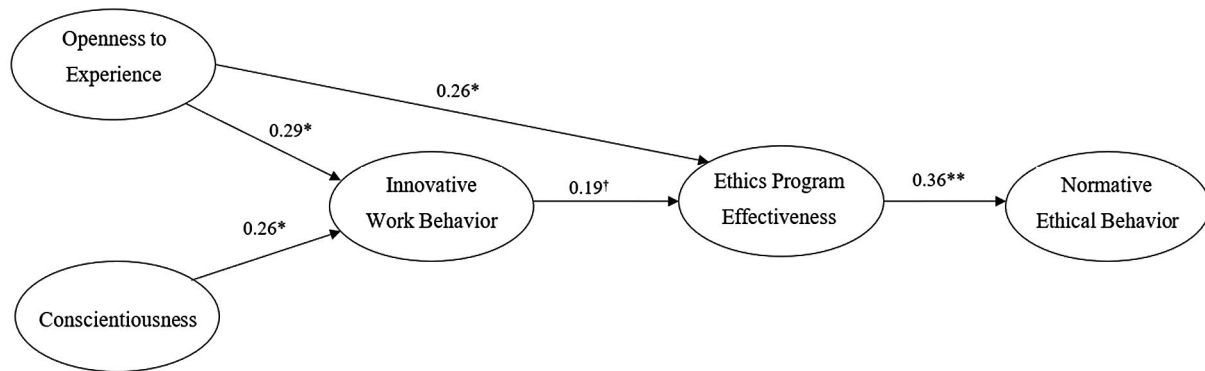


FIGURE 2 Best fitting structural model with standardized path coefficients between the latent variables (model 4). † $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Finally, model 4 checked for a possible direct effect of ethics officer's openness to experience on ethics program effectiveness because of the strong correlation between both variables (see Figure 2). The model's fit values were: $\chi^2 = 342.23$ with $df = 242$, $\chi^2/df = 1.41$, CFI = 0.91, RMSEA = 0.06, and SRMR = 0.08. The fit indices for this alternative fourth model appeared to be better than the originally hypothesized model (model 1) and the difference between the two models was significant ($p < .05$). There is thus reason to conclude innovative work behavior has a partial mediation effect between ethics officer's openness to experience and ethics program effectiveness. Other mediators than innovative work behavior may potentially account for the remaining effects.

5 | DISCUSSION

To date, little attention has been paid to the personality and innovative work behavior of ethics officers. Our study fills this void by showing that the innovative work behavior of ethics officers is positively related to their ethics program's effectiveness, which in turn is positively related to employees' normative ethical behavior. Specifically, we find that when an ethics program is regarded as more innovative and contains more innovative components, it is positively related to normative ethical behavior. In addition, this study highlights that the personality traits "openness to experience" and "conscientiousness" might serve as antecedents of innovative work behavior among ethics officers, while openness to experience also relates directly to ethics program effectiveness. These findings implicate that innovative work behavior, which is often regarded as an extra-role behavior for ethics officers (Janssen, 2000), must be seen as an in-role behavior instead.

In other words, ethics officers, who might be seen as one of the leading actors in corporate change, need to be able to creatively envision the future and how to realize it (Al-Haddad & Kotnour, 2015). As argued by various scholars (Haidt & Treviño, 2017; Weber, 2006), ethics officers have to display creativity and innovation to manage change successfully. It is necessary for ethics officers to change toward more innovative behavior in order to instill more ethical behavior at work.

For instance, ethics officers must (learn to) make the right decisions at the right time to align the ethics program with the changing environment and to motivate employees to implement ethical changes. For instance, continually changing the ethics priorities and managerial expectations of the ethics program outcomes may have major implications for the programs themselves (Joseph, 2002). Moreover, ethics officers must be capable of integrating their programs across various divisions, business units, and regions (Joseph, 2002). Ethics officers should, therefore, develop more change-oriented leadership skills, defined as "a set of principles, techniques, or activities applied to the human aspects of executing change to influence intrinsic acceptance while reducing resistance" (Griffith-Cooper & King, 2007, p. 14). The ethics officer's profile thus needs to include more "extra-role" responsibilities, going beyond the basic investigative, compliance- or internal auditor-type requirements mentioned by Izraeli and BarNir (1998), Morf et al. (1999) and Smith (2003). In turn, an ethics program becomes more than just a technical plan; it must also incorporate change management (Ackoff, Magidson, & Addison, 2006). Yet, considering that effective change programs are open-ended rather than linear (Weick & Quinn, 1999), ethics programs have to also be innovative for them to be very effective. This study confirms that those ethics officers who show more innovative work behavior are likely to achieve more effective ethics programs. This also matches Shaw's (2017) conclusion that leading change requires explorative learning which, in turn, involves searching for innovation in order to refine existing ways of working. Hence, ethics officers must unite in their focus on ethics, innovation, and change so as to increase the impact of the ethics programs. This does not mean that ethics officers can do it all by themselves. First of all, ethics officers should be given a strong, independent position on being appointed by the executive board, with sound competencies and responsibilities (Hoffman & Rowe, 2007; Remišová, Lašáková, & Kirchmayer, 2018). Such a practice may symbolize senior management's (initial) commitment (Llopis et al., 2007). Secondly, following the *ethical leadership theories* that highlight the importance of setting the tone in terms of morality by hierarchical leaders (Brown, Treviño, & Harrison, 2005; Dinh et al., 2014; Kim & Vandenberghe, 2020), managers and other systemic factors must be taken into account when aiming for more ethical behavior in the workplace. For instance,

leaders can influence followers through interpersonal dynamics and by role-modeling (Dinh et al., 2014). Moreover, there could be more focus on creating alliances with academics, non-academics, and even consulting firms (Bowie, 2001).

Finally, this study shows the importance of the personal characteristics of ethics officers. In line with our expectations, the personality traits “openness to experience” and “conscientiousness” are positively related to innovative work behavior. Adobor (2006) already hypothesized that ethics officers with a higher tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity are more effective than their peers. Intriguingly, the findings also reveal a *partial* mediating effect of ethics officers’ innovative work behavior between their openness to experience and ethics program effectiveness. Naturally, being innovative is not the only behavior effective ethics officers engage in. Any leading change agent, including ethics officers, must carefully plan the change program, (co-)develop and communicate clear change goals and timeframes among the various intraorganizational stakeholders, and safeguard the necessary resources, while addressing and navigating other critical factors that affect the effectiveness of their change programs (Al-Haddad & Kotnour, 2015). Future studies are thus warranted to examine an even richer behavioral palette of ethics officers in relation to the quality of their output: ethics program effectiveness.

The partial mediation effects can also be explained through the *trait activation theory* which postulates that “a personality trait will have its greatest effect on behavior when the situation is relevant to the trait’s expression” (Naveh, Katz-Navon, & Stern, 2015, p. 445). A factor that plays a moderating role in trait activation is one’s work experience. Woods, Mustafa, Anderson, and Sayer (2018) found that highly open, longer-tenured employees are less likely to adopt all facets of innovative work behavior (especially in terms of idea promotion and realization). Instead, the ethics officers in our sample, who were in fact quite experienced, count on contextual knowledge and adopt other behaviors as well before they engage in innovative work behavior (Joseph, 2002). Both Woods, Lievens, De Fruyt, and Wille (2013) and Thoresen, Bradley, Bliese, and Thoresen (2004) reported that the Big Five personality traits were differentially related to maintaining performance versus growth job stages. In the transition stages, when unfamiliar areas must be explored, openness to experience is a predictor of job performance (Thoresen et al., 2004). Hence, this empirical study points to a new stream of exciting future research concerning the work and personal characteristics of both beginning and seasoned ethics officers and understanding the mechanisms in the field of Business Ethics better (Köseoglu et al., 2018). A combination of the required personality traits, behavior, and innovation of ethics programs should be taken on board “so that performance contributes efficiently and effectively to organizational results” (Morales-Sánchez & Cabello-Medina, 2015, p. 164). Also, future research should not only study ethics officers’ Big Five personality traits in relation to ethical behavior, but also those of (top) managers who must role-model such behaviors (Rua, Lawter, & Andreassi, 2017). Studying ethics officers’ and managers’ personalities and behaviors may lead to the

emergence of more ethical behavior in the workplace: a “grand challenge” that will certainly improve our work lives, as indicated by Banks et al. (2016).

6 | STRENGTHS, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study is one of the first to investigate innovative practices among ethics officers and underlines the importance of their personal characteristics, innovative work behaviors and impacts on normative ethical behaviors. We were able to engage 110 ethics officers nested in large organizations within the Netherlands. Nevertheless, this study has some limitations.

First, the initial measurement model did not fit the data well. After removing several items, we found a measurement model with a good fit, but it was adapted to this specific sample. Therefore, a replication study is needed to investigate whether new data are suitable for this (partial) mediation model and whether the results of the path model can be replicated. Even after modifying the model, the AVEs of openness to experience and conscientiousness were below the critical value, indicating that these personality traits had not been measured very well. Therefore, the results regarding these traits should be interpreted with caution. Moreover, the fact that we found a significant relationship between both the examined traits and innovative work behavior in the path model suggests that using a better measure would increase this relationship.

In addition, the sample is quite small and Dutch. The Netherlands is known for its relatively low power distance (Den Hartog et al., 1999; Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). This contrasts, for instance, the U.S.A. where the ethics and compliance function is disconnected from the board of directors and there is more distance (Hoffman & Rowe, 2007). Also, in the U.S.A., work contexts are much more competitive and adversarial (Bowie, 2001), with more stress on the market, the individual, and a focus on managers rather than on workers (Den Hartog et al., 1999; Hoffman & Rowe, 2007). The extent to which ethics officers’ futures depends on their CEO or boss is an important aspect of their work context (Hoffman et al., 2008; Schwartz, Dunfee, & Kline, 2005): It may well be that it is harder in Northern America to show “extra-role” behavior than in the low power distance environment of the Netherlands.

The level of impact on and the power of the CEO in ethical matters also influences the level of ethical business or the ethical tone of the organization. Only top management can transform the “occasional” ethical decision into a “principled” one, meaning that ethical decision-making is incorporated into every business area (Joseph, 2002; Schroeder, 2002). As well as the tone coming from the top (Warren, Peytcheva, & Gaspar, 2015), the exemplary action or ethical role-modeling by the top may create an ethical climate on the work floor (Schwartz et al., 2005). Without full support from the organization’s leadership, the embedding of ethical practices is at risk (Collier & Esteban, 2007). Future research should therefore take into account the “tone at the top” and the specific characteristics of the country

context. Nevertheless, a strength of our work is that the sample covers a large number of active ethics officers within the Netherlands. Moreover, the hypotheses are grounded in the international literature and our findings result in a strong model which can be further validated by a larger-sample study across various countries. Such an international replication and comparison would lead to increased external validity, which in turn would provide more solid proof for our hypothetical model (Cooper, Schindler, & Sun, 2006; Mann, 2003).

Next, the data were obtained using self-report measures. The correlations may have been somewhat inflated by the use of a single method. Utilizing self-reports is valuable, but a common method bias could be present (Madrid et al., 2014, p. 240) despite controlling for it with a Harman's single factor test (Chang et al., 2010). Future studies should complement self-reports with other methods, such as interviews, observation, and longitudinal survey measures. Besides collecting data from ethics officers, one may also involve, for example, their direct reports or superiors. We know that most individuals see themselves as more ethical than their peers (Jackson, 2001; Tenbrunsel, 1998). We strongly recommend future research to apply a 360-degree approach whereby peers, colleagues, and supervisors are asked to give feedback on the ethical behavior of the research subjects or on the effectiveness of the ethics program. Moreover, although the pilot study did not raise concerns regarding respondent's interpretation of the concept of "innovation," future studies could prime respondents using a more formal definition in the questionnaire. Despite these limitations, we are confident, based on the variation in the ethics officers' self-ratings, that they were honest about their ethics program's effectiveness, as befitting their professional focus on integrity.

The usual limitations of cross-sectional research also apply to this study. The possibility of reverse causality cannot be excluded, although on testing our data with several alternative models, the fit was poorer. Nevertheless, to enable ethics officers to view an ethics program as more effective, the program has to be more innovative, which may, therefore, demand more innovative work behaviors from the ethics officers themselves. Yet, as mentioned by Kaptein (2015, p. 428): "in the event of reverse causality it would suggest an even greater impact of ethics programs on unethical behavior. Because organizations that are confronted with unethical behavior would implement (a broader) ethics program than organizations that are confronted with less or no unethical behavior." In our view, reverse causality will probably stimulate innovative work behavior from the ethics officer because ethics programs regularly require new components (Haidt & Treviño, 2017).

Many organizational research studies include control variables without providing a clear rationale for them (Becker, 2005); some do it for purification purposes despite growing into a methodological "urban legend" (Spector & Brannick, 2011). However, control variables should not be included when there is no clear rationale for their inclusion (Breaugh, 2008), which happened here. Future research may want to examine whether someone's previous work experiences or problem solving style influences innovative work behavior (Scott & Bruce, 1994).

Future research could also explore: *How exactly do ethics officers demonstrate innovative work behavior? Which methods and activities*

*do they undertake while generating ideas? How do they gain support for their ideas and accelerate the implementation of ideas? The use of grounded theory would be useful in order to understand and theorize better on ethics officers' thoughts and feelings (Treviño et al., 2014). Also, what innovative behaviors should be explored? Ethics officers' innovative work behaviors could entail being more creative in the components they use, or learn from each other and other organizations, for their program. What is "old" for organization "A" may be innovative for organization "B." This could also count for the way components are implemented. Here, we studied the effects of complete ethics programs and did not specify the effects of individual components. However, organizations may differ in terms of how many and which individual components are implemented (Remišová et al., 2018). Building upon the earlier work by Treviño et al. (2014), Kaptein (2015) distinguished nine ethics program components, namely: (a) a formal ethics code; (b) a dedicated ethics officer or ethics office; (c) ethics training and other types of information/communication; (d) an ethics report line ("hotline"); (e) disciplinary policies; (f) investigation and corrective policies; (g) incentive policies to reward ethical behavior; (h) implementation of internal monitoring systems and ethics audits; and (i) preemployment screenings to assess the integrity of prospective employees. By selecting the most fitting components, ethics officers can tailor the program to meet the specific needs of their context (Remišová et al., 2018). Besides adding new innovative elements, existing practices could be innovated too. Take for instance the code of conduct, a practice that has already existed for more than 20 years (Morf et al., 1999; Stöber et al., 2019; Treviño et al., 2014). An example of implementing this component in a more innovative way was given by one of the ethics officers: He did not prescribe a full code of conduct but, instead, asked employees to write their *personal* code of conduct based upon a provided framework fitting the organization's values and minimal legal requirements. This was an innovation for the organization to stimulate the desired ethical behavior. Another option for innovative change practices concerns taking a more dialogical "neo-Kantian" kind of approach to developing "moral imagination" (De Colle & Werhane, 2008, p. 759), as well as gamification (LeClair & Ferrell, 2000) of the change process. It would be interesting to examine the effects of such single innovative components of ethics programs on employees' ethical behavior. This would also answer the call by Haidt and Treviño (2017) to test ethics program innovations in order to select the ones that are most effective and abandon practices that are ineffective or even counterproductive.*

A final opportunity for future research concerns the wide variety of variables that may lead to (ethics officers') innovative work behaviors. For instance, Anderson et al. (2014) identified no less than 73 variables that can influence the level of creativity and innovation at the individual, team, organizational, and multiple levels of analysis. Thus, a study with more multi-level variables would be valuable for improving our understanding of the various factors influencing innovative and other work behaviors of ethics officers that impact the effectiveness of their output. Broader knowledge of the impact of the ethics programs on employees' ethical behavior will make business ethics not only a more cumulative science (Haidt & Treviño, 2017), but also a more *cumulative practice*.

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ORCID

Sjoerd Hogenbirk  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5607-1401>

Desirée H. van Dun  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6279-5510>

ENDNOTE

¹ We would like to thank the reviewer who pointed this out.

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Sjoerd Hogenbirk, MSc., is a partner at House of Performance, Utrecht, the Netherlands. House of Performance is a management consultancy firm specialized in strategy execution, process optimization and data-driven change. Hogenbirk's educational background is in Theology and Governance. He is passionate about creating sustainable and ethical organizational performance improvements through changing managers' and employees' behavior, operational work processes and management control. Hogenbirk has a track record in leading large organizational change programs within the top-100 Dutch companies, and has worked as both an internal consultant and external management consultant.

Desirée H. van Dun, is an assistant professor in Change Management & Organizational Behaviour at the University of Twente, the Netherlands. Apart from 10 years of management consulting experience, she has obtained a cum laude Ph.D. degree (2015); the thesis won various local and international awards. Her research has appeared in journals such as the *International Review of Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, *International Journal of Operations & Production Management*, *European Management Journal*, *BMC Medical Research Methodology* and *Journal of Manufacturing Technology Management*. Van Dun is currently studying effective human behavioral dynamics in the context of lean management, agile, Industry 4.0, innovation, and other forms of operational excellence.

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