

# “Business Ethics Everywhere”: An Experiential Exercise to Develop Students’ Ability to Identify and Respond to Ethical Issues in Business

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## Abstract

This article introduces an experiential exercise that enhances students’ ability to identify ethical issues and to respond to them in ways that consider the relationship between organizational factors and ethical action. Students identify a required number of ethical incidents in their workplaces during a specified period. Students submit a written description for each incident, drawing from moral philosophical frameworks and/or other ethical concepts to label the issue as one that either exemplifies a “best practice” or “raises concern.” For “best practice” examples, students consider the implications of the practice on the organization and its stakeholders and whether and how the practice could be improved. For examples that “raise concern,” students explain what the ethically appropriate action would be, indicate whether they would take that action, report any reservations they have about taking that right action, and consider how to behave ethically in a way that would bring about desired outcomes without incurring negative outcomes. Then, a subset of submissions

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is selected for an in-class discussion. Using examples from students' own experiences engages them and underscores for them the relevance of business ethics issues. Instructions for facilitating classroom discussion and variations for adapting the exercise are provided.

### **Keywords**

business ethics, ethical decision making, ethical reasoning, ethical sensitivity, ethics, experiential exercise

Society has lost faith in business integrity as fallout from widespread corporate scandals since the 1990s has affected the lives of literally millions of people. Citizens no longer trust businesses and business people to behave ethically. In spite of the passage of Sarbanes-Oxley in 2002 and the amendments to the U.S. Sentencing Commission's Federal Sentencing Guidelines for Organizations in 2004, as well as stepped-up attention to ethics training and education, more than half of the employees surveyed by the Ethics Resource Center (2008a, 2008b, 2008c) had witnessed misconduct in their private-sector, non-profit, and government workplaces within the past year.

As society clamors for businesses to undergo ethical makeovers, eyes are on business schools to increase our emphasis on ethics instruction. The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business International (AACSB) has recognized ethical leadership and ethical decision making as important components of business instruction (AACSB, 2004) and has suggested that both undergraduate and master's-level degree programs include ethics-related learning experiences (AACSB, 2008). Business school deans rank ethics second among the top five curricular goals for undergraduate programs (Martell & Calderon, 2005). (Although this survey has not been updated, Martell, personal communication, 2010, reports that participants who attend the several training sessions she conducts each year for AACSB consistently rank ethics among their important learning goals.) Likewise, the Business Roundtable Institute for Corporate Ethics (2007) has called for business courses that entail "integrating ethical concepts into business decision-making and management practices" (p. 6).

Instructors seeking to help their students learn business ethics course materials have used an impressive variety of pedagogical tools, including cases (Ashamalla & Crocitto, 2001; James & Smith, 2007; Kayes, 2002; Laditka & Houck, 2006; Landrum, 2001; Rosile, 2007; Tomlinson, 2009), literature (Kennedy & Lawton, 1992; Kimball, 2007; McAdams, 1993; McAdams &

Koppensteiner, 1992; Shepard, Goldsby, & Gerde, 1997), comics (Dyrud, 1998; Gerde & Foster, 2008), film (Champoux, 2006; Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2001; Harrison, 2004; Shaw, 2004; van Es, 2003), the laddering interview (Trocchia, Swanson, & Orlitzky, 2007), games (Collins, 1999; Gibson, 2003), role-plays (Comer & Vega, 2006), challenge course activities (Goltz & Hietapelto, 2006), other experiential exercises (Giacalone, Jurkiewicz, & Knouse, 2003; Golden & Dechant, 2006; Lenaghan & Smith, 2004; Payne, 2006; Schumann, Scott, & Anderson, 2006), and even visits to incarcerated white-collar criminals (Castleberry, 2007).

Most of these materials focus on helping students either *to identify ethical issues* (Collins, 1999; Gerde & Foster, 2008; Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2001; Laditka & Houck, 2006; McAdams & Koppenstein, 1992; Shaw, 2004) or *to apply moral philosophical frameworks or other decision-making criteria* (James & Smith, 2007; Landrum, 2001; Meisel & Fearon, 2006; Schumann et al., 2006; Shepard, Goldsby, & Gerde, 1997; Tomlinson, 2009)—or both (Champoux, 2006; Jurkiewicz, Giacalone, & Knouse, 2004; van Es, 2003).<sup>1</sup> Students in an ethics course typically learn about moral philosophical frameworks (e.g., virtue ethics, utilitarianism, universal rights, and distributive justice) and then have opportunities to apply them to help make sense of ethical issues in business. We agree that it is important to increase business ethics students' facility at recognizing the variety of ethical issues in the workplace (Hartman, 2007; Williams & Dewett, 2005) and applying moral criteria as they consider how (un)ethical actions affect a variety of stakeholders, including employees, managers, the organization itself, customers, investors, government, the community (DesJardins, 2009; Treviño & Nelson, 2007), and especially themselves (Barker, 2010).

Some educators have lamented, however, that teaching business ethics has, at best, only a negligible effect on their students' behavior (Lund Dean & Beggs, 2006). Indeed, "[o]rganizations can . . . make moral behavior much more difficult" (Rossouw, 2002, p. 415; see also Comer & Vega, 2005, 2008, 2011; Zimbardo, 2007) and often discourage the expression of ethical concerns (Detert & Treviño, 2010; Shahinpoor & Matt, 2006). Although the capacities to recognize the ethical parameters of both everyday and extraordinary issues (moral awareness) and to select an ethical choice among possible alternatives (moral judgment) are precursors to ethical behavior (Rest, 1984), we need to prepare students for the workplace, where principled action is not always welcomed. Moberg (2006) has advocated teaching students to implement ethical decisions in a way that fits organizational realities and thereby increases the effectiveness of their behavior. As management educators, we need to give our students opportunities to determine how to respond to ethical situations they confront in the workplace. Beyond determining a morally appropriate

response to an ethical situation, our students must also be able to think through the implications—for themselves and for other stakeholders—of their response.

## **The Business Ethics Everywhere Exercise**

Lund Dean, Beggs, and Fornaciari (2007) reported that business school faculty members are interested in learning new methods, especially ones that involve experiential activities, to teach ethics in their classes. We introduce an experiential exercise for students of business ethics, the Business Ethics Everywhere (BEE) exercise. This exercise is designed to go beyond raising students' awareness of ethical situations in organizations and having them apply moral philosophical frameworks, to giving them opportunities to work through how to respond to these ethical situations. The BEE exercise asks students to consider the organizational realities that affect ethical behavior. Students reflect on ethical situations they have recently experienced in an organizational setting and consider retrospectively what they and their organizations could have done differently, and/or prospectively what they and their organizations could and should do—and why.

In our exercise, students search for examples of ethical situations in their own workplaces during a given period of time. The situations they seek to identify cover a range of ethical issues (see Appendix A, which is also available online at <http://jme.sagepub.com/supplemental>). Students report each incident in writing, taking care to conceal the identity of all involved parties and labeling the incident as one that either constitutes a “best practice” or “raises concern.” Students then consider how a “best practice” affects an organization and its stakeholders and whether and how the practice could be improved. They also consider what an ethically appropriate action might be for a “raises concern” example, discuss whether they would take that action and the reservations they might have about taking that right action, and then suggest ways to take the right action in a way that would bring about desired outcomes without incurring negative repercussions. After students complete this individual written assignment, the instructor facilitates in-class discussion of several submissions.

### *Learning Objectives for the Exercise*

There are two learning objectives for this exercise:

1. To enable students to identify a broad variety of ethical issues in the workplace and to apply moral reasoning to these issues.
2. To enhance students' ability to make decisions that consider the relationship between organizational factors and ethical behavior.

Using students' own personal incidents engages them and underscores for them the relevance of business ethics and thus enhances their ability to identify and to reason about ethical issues (Adams, Harris, & Carley, 1998; McWilliams & Nahavandi, 2006; Sims & Felton, 2006; Williams & Dewett, 2005). Drawing from students' own experiences is particularly important for those early in their careers and at lower levels in their respective organizations, who are more likely to encounter everyday ethical issues than instances of multimillion dollar fraud (Adams et al., 1998). The AACSB's Ethics Education Task Force has recommended using students' personal examples to help them learn about ethical decision making (AACSB, 2004). There is empirical evidence that brain areas activated when individuals consider personal moral scenarios are different from those activated when they make impersonal moral decisions (Greene, Sommerville, Nystrom, Darley, & Cohen, 2001; see also Krebs & Denton, 2005). Adams et al. (1998) and Laditka and Houck (2006) use student-centered written cases to teach ethics because the heightened relevance and salience of cases promote reflection and learning. A student's case is an excellent vehicle for in-depth analysis of a single ethical scenario. However, there are times when instructors seek both intensive and extensive coverage of ethical issues in the workplace. Moreover, whereas ethics cases typically ask students only to reflect *retrospectively* on how they or an organization behaved (Laditka & Houck, 2006) or on what might have been done differently (McWilliams & Nahavandi, 2006), students also stand to learn by thinking *prospectively* about what they and their organizations could do and how they could do it. In BEE, students draw on their own experiences to explore a wide range of both positive and negative ethical issues,<sup>2</sup> and consider how contextual factors affect and are affected by their behavior and the behavior of their organizations.

### *Target Audience*

The exercise is designed for a stand-alone course in business ethics but may be modified for use in other courses. The student population may be upper-division undergraduates or graduate students.

### *Timing*

The exercise is best conducted in the last third of a stand-alone business ethics course, after students have studied moral philosophical frameworks and various ethical issues that may occur in the workplace. The exercise is conducted over a 3-week period. Students work individually outside of class during most of this time. Class time is needed to introduce the exercise and to discuss and

debrief it. The BEE discussion and debriefing session is best suited for an 80-minute class, but it can be condensed for a 50-minute class. Discussion and debriefing may also be expanded for longer classes. Table 1 provides a time table for conducting the exercise. Variations for using BEE in a shorter time frame are discussed in the section titled “Discipline-Specific,” and recommendations for timing in shortened periods appear in the footnote to Table 1.

### **Materials Needed**

*Appendices A and B.* Each student needs a copy of Appendix A (Classification of Ethical Issues in Business, which is also available online at <http://jme.sagepub.com/supplemental>) and Appendix B (BEE: The Business Ethics Everywhere Exercise—Instructions for Individual Assignment, which is also available online at <http://jme.sagepub.com/supplemental>) at the beginning of the exercise. The categories in Appendix A are drawn from previous classification schemes based on ethical issues (Ferrell, Fraedrich, & Ferrell, 2008; Power & Lundsten, 2005; Treviño & Nelson, 2007) and context (i.e., in terms of whose behavior affects whom; Power & Lundsten, 2005). The resulting list thus encompasses a broad variety of organizational activities that affect multiple stakeholders (e.g., customers/clients, employees, the community, suppliers/vendors, and shareholders, as well as the company itself). Instructors may modify the list of categories to correspond to their textbook, course content, and/or student composition. For example, those whose students work for global organizations may want to add a detailed category for cross-cultural ethical issues.

*Writing materials.* The instructor may use white boards or flipcharts and appropriate writing tools to highlight key concepts during the discussion and debriefing session.

### **Advance Preparation by Instructor**

Before giving the exercise to students, the instructor should

- read through the entire exercise;
- decide the dates during which the exercise will be conducted;
- review Appendices A and B and modify them as course appropriate;
- determine the amount of credit to be given to the individual assignment (and to the optional team assignment, if used);<sup>3</sup>
- decide whether to use a grading rubric (see Appendix C for a sample rubric, which is also available online at <http://jme.sagepub.com/supplemental>);

**Table 1.** Time Table for Conducting the Exercise<sup>a</sup>

Date/Week	Estimated Time	Action
Early in semester	15 minutes in class	Instructor distributes Appendix A (Classification of Ethical Issues in Business) in class, discusses categories, and advises students to be aware of ethical situations in their organizations, which they will use later in the semester
Prior to week 1 of BEE exercise	15-20 minutes in class	Instructor introduces BEE exercise and distributes Appendix B (BEE: The Business Ethics Everywhere Exercise—Instructions for Individual Assignment)
Weeks 1 and 2	Students work outside class	Students individually collect ethical situations and write about each “best practice” or “raises concern” that they find. Each student will submit his/her individual collection for grading at end of BEE debriefing session
Immediately after Week 2	First part of class period is used for Discussion; last 10-15 minutes allocated for Debriefing	BEE Discussion and Debriefing Session. Students present and discuss their ethical situations. Instructor debriefs exercise. See section on Discussion and Debriefing the Exercise below
Week following in-class Discussion and Debriefing Section	Full class period for face-to-face team debriefing; no class time if team is conducted online	Optional group exercise. See “Optional Team Component” section in “Variations on the Exercise” below

<sup>a</sup>We suggest this time table for administering the exercise in a stand-alone business ethics class. When using the exercise in a management or organizational behavior class, in which ethics is one module among many, distribute Appendices A and B a few weeks before the topic of ethics is introduced in class and encourage students to begin looking for ethical incidents. Have students submit their papers at least 1 week after ethics course content has been discussed in class.

- decide whether to use paragon examples (see Appendix D, which is available online at <http://jme.sagepub.com/supplemental>) and if so, how to distribute them; and
- (if optional team exercise is used) form teams if standing teams don't exist.

### *Advance Preparation by Students*

Students need not undertake any special preparation before participating in the exercise. They will instead apply their knowledge of ethical principles and concepts learned throughout the course as they engage in the exercise.

### *Discussion and Debriefing Session*

The discussion and debriefing session is held on the day that students submit their written assignments. During the discussion session, students report their examples of ethical “best practice” and “raises concern” situations to the whole class. In the debriefing session, the instructor ensures that learning objectives are met by guiding the whole class in identifying the ethical issues in students’ situations and discussing suitable responses to these situations. Discussion and debriefing may be conducted separately, which is especially useful for shorter class meetings. If both are conducted during one class period, it is more natural to follow discussion of each situation with debriefing questions before moving on to the next issue and set of situations.

Before beginning discussion, the instructor should establish guidelines about the confidentiality of information shared during the discussion and debriefing session. Although some students may choose to use pseudonyms for the workplaces that they discuss, others do not, or they may start with a pseudonym but then reveal the company’s real identity. We recommend asking students not to discuss specific examples, classmates’ names, or company names with anyone who is not a class member. (To paraphrase the title of the 2008 movie about the city in Nevada famed for its gambling resorts, “What happens in the classroom stays in the classroom.”)

Based on our experiences administering BEE, we suggest encouraging students to prepare cogent explanations of their examples before sharing them with their classmates. Students who give meandering explanations for Question A (see Appendix B) may lose the interest of their classmates before they can delve into the meatier issues in Questions B, C, and D. Because of the great number of categories for which students may report “best practice” or “raises concern” situations, it is unlikely that all categories will be covered in either a 50-minute or 80-minute session. Thus, the instructor may want to choose categories in order to generate a classroom discussion that reinforces lessons learned in prior weeks or elaborates on concepts not covered in detail.

Discussion may be active and exuberant, with side conversations developing as students discuss the current situation with those seated near them. It is important for the instructor to direct the discussion and tie the reported situations to the



learning objectives. If a student offers a situation that does not fit the category under discussion, the instructor should ask the class, “Is this situation an example of X category, or is there a better category for this example? If so, what and why?” Because the category of *Conflicts of Interest* can be particularly challenging to students with less work experience, examples may need to be discussed in greater detail. For instance, younger students may ask, “What’s wrong with getting my friend a job where I work?” even though it involved the friend bypassing many of the hiring steps faced by other applicants (Banaji, Bazerman, & Chugh, 2003, explain how favoritism toward one’s own group leads to discrimination against others). As another example, younger students are less likely than their older counterparts to see a problem with a doctor accepting money, gifts, or a vacation to prescribe a medication that he or she likely would have chosen anyway.

To illustrate that ethical situations may be complex and may fall into more than one category, the instructor may ask the class, “Does anyone have a situation that fits this category *and* another?” During debriefing, the instructor may then point out the number of situations discussed that cross category boundaries. An instructor seeking to reinforce different philosophical frameworks could inquire, “How would a utilitarian approach this situation? How would a universal rights theorist approach it?” To reinforce students’ thinking through the consequences of personal or organizational action or inaction, the instructor should focus on one category at a time, soliciting “raises concern” situations and then choosing one situation with which he/she is comfortable to serve as the focal point of the discussion. Questions already answered by students in their written exercise will be useful for spurring discussion. For a best practice, ask “How has the organization been affected by this practice?” “What has been the effect on employees and other stakeholders?” “Could this practice be improved? Why or why not?” For a raises concern incident, ask “What is the ethically appropriate way to act in this situation; that is, what *should* you do/have done, and why?” “How did you—or *would* you—actually act, and why? Does this match what you thought was appropriate ethical behavior?” “Do you have reservations about acting in the appropriate way? If so, what are they? And, what could you do to improve your likelihood of taking the right action and minimizing negative repercussions to yourself, others, and the organization?” These questions typically generate rich and lively discussions. An instructor may want to allocate extra time for students to think and form their thoughts to other students’ situations. An unhurried discussion allows students to offer ideas about improving classmates’ actions and minimizing negative repercussions. A checklist of these questions is available online at <http://jme.sagepub.com/supplemental>.

It is necessary to solicit both “raises concern” and “best practice” examples for the categories under discussion. Although it is likely that the “raises concern”

situations will outnumber the “best practice” situations, the latter are vital to reinforce positive models of ethical behavior and to acknowledge that ethical behaviors are practiced in the workplace.

**Student reaction.** Students have succeeded at identifying a variety of “best practice” and “raises concern” examples. During the discussion, students are fully engaged. They have a high attention level and are generally eager to share their situations. It is not unusual for students to react with surprise at some situations and with vigorous agreement about other situations. These reactions may be vocal and/or may include body language such as head nodding, fist pumping, or other gestures. Students who are normally quiet in class are more likely to participate in this activity than in other in-class activities. Students react more strongly to and are more likely to extend discussion of “raises concern” situations than “best practice” situations.

Traditional undergraduates are more likely to offer examples involving human resources (e.g., discrimination/favoritism, sexual harassment, and privacy) or corporate resources (especially employee theft). Requiring them to identify situations from four categories helps increase their awareness of the variety of ethical issues in their organizations. When the class is composed of students with greater work experience, the reported situations tend to cover a broader range of categories and to include more flagrant violations of ethical principles, although students with less work experience may also report glaring transgressions. The situations reported by students with greater work experience may invoke a fuller palette of emotional responses and more rapid shifts from one response to another: some incidents may be funny, and some may be touching. Older students with greater work experience are more likely to report personal experiences, some of which may be very poignant and/or involve complex moral dilemmas. Younger students with less work experience are more likely to report ethical violations that they have witnessed and then say, “I know that ‘the right thing’ was *this action*, but instead I did *another action* because there’s no way I’m doing *this!*” which typically generates strong mixed responses from other class members. Personal situations reported by younger students usually involve dilemmas of lower moral intensity (Jones, 1991) than those reported by older students with more work experience.

## Variations on the Exercise

Instructors may use the BEE exercise with students with varying work experience and cultural backgrounds, at different academic levels and in different disciplines, and as a capstone exercise. They may wish to extend the exercise by assigning a team component.

### *Limited Work Experience*

Although most undergraduates have at least part-time work experience (Baum & Steele, 2007), the BEE exercise may be modified if students are not currently working. Those students could use situations they have witnessed in past work experiences. If students have no work experience at all, they may be instructed to collect “raises concern” and “best practice” situations during the same 2-week period using their community, athletic, social, and/or religious organizations. If students have limited organizational experience from which to draw, they may use events found in the news during a specified 2-week period. We strongly discourage students from using “hearsay” situations provided by family or friends because students who depend on others’ accounts often miss key details they need to complete the assignment. We likewise do not permit students to use nonwork situations involving their family and friends because such examples shift the emphasis from ethics in formal organizations to personal interactions.

An instructor whose class has numerous students with limited work experience may want to consider introducing the concepts and distributing the exercise early in the semester, and giving students longer than 2 weeks to observe ethical concerns or best practices. Whereas students with greater work experience or who are currently working generally do not have a problem identifying situations within a 2-week period, some of their less work-worldly counterparts may find it challenging to come up with examples in this time frame.

### *Different Cultural Backgrounds and Ethical Relativism*

If the class has a number of students representing diverse cultural backgrounds, cross-cultural comparisons can be made. The instructor could ask all students to report “best practice” and “raises concern” situations that they have witnessed or are aware of in their home culture. During the debriefing session, differences in cultural situations may be used to lead a discussion of ethical relativism.

If most of the students are from one culture and only one or two from a different culture, the instructor should use discretion when drawing cultural distinctions to ensure that the minority students do not feel singled out.

### *Varying Academic Levels*

As discussed in the debriefing instructions, students with greater work experience will generally report more personal and more complex ethical situations. Thus, students in an MBA program or adult learners who have more work or

life experience may report a wider range of ethical situations and may engage in richer discussions of them.

At the other end of the spectrum, traditional juniors or seniors who have negligible work experience may have personally witnessed only a few ethical workplace situations in their lifetimes. The recommendations offered in the "Limited Work Experience" section above may be used for these students. In our experience, though, only a handful of students have not had sufficient formal organizational experience from which to generate their own personal observations.

### *Capstone Exercise*

The exercise could be used as an end-of-semester capstone exercise in a stand-alone ethics course inasmuch as it comprehensively covers ethics course contents and themes. Indeed, faculty members could assess students' learning of ethics-related goals by reading their written submissions. We are aware of only one other published business ethics capstone, that of Giacalone et al. (2003). In Giacalone et al.'s (2003) exercise, students develop an ethics training session and manual. That exercise, like ours, involves identification and discussion of ethical issues. However, because their exercise focuses students on a single industry and does not have them draw from their own experiences, it exposes them to a narrower range of examples and ethical themes than the exercise presented herein.

### *Discipline Specific*

To ensure that their students receive adequate instruction in ethical concepts and practices, some schools offer a semester-long, stand-alone course in business ethics. Indeed, former Academy of Management Ethics Ombudsperson Linda Treviño has recommended that business ethics be taught in a stand-alone course (Henderson, 2007). The percentage of MBA programs that require a course dedicated to business and society issues has increased from 34% in 2001 to 69% in 2009 (The Aspen Institute Center for Business Education, 2010). At the undergraduate level, a survey conducted by the American Accounting Association showed that 46% of business schools offered a separate course in business ethics (Haas, 2005).

Ethics instruction may also occur "across the curriculum" at some institutions. An instructor teaching a discipline-specific course (e.g., management or organizational behavior) may use this exercise as part of a 1- or 2-week business ethics component relative to that discipline. Instructors would tailor

the *Classification of Ethical Issues in Business and Instructions for Individual Assignment* (Appendices A and B, respectively) to the discipline-specific ethical content taught in that course. The footnote in Table 1 suggests when to administer the exercise in a non-stand-alone ethics course.

### **Optional Team Component**

The instructor may elect to use a team assignment that follows and builds on the individual assignment and thus enhances students' achievement of the learning objectives of the exercise. Logistically, it may not be possible for an instructor to devote the time to this team component, particularly when ethics is only one of several course modules in an OB or management class. Yet there are benefits of further team discussion. After describing these benefits, we provide directions for conducting the team assignment either in a face-to-face class setting or online.

**Benefits of team discussion.** When individual students discuss with teammates ethical situations they have observed, they are able to link their personal experiences with the concepts covered in the course. Sharing their personal experiences gives permission to others to share their experiences, as well (Fort, 2007), which helps students to appreciate the breadth of ethical issues faced in the workplace, the variety and complexity of perspectives on the same ethical situation (James & Smith, 2007; Rossouw, 2002; Sims & Felton, 2006), and the social context of the situation (Stein & Hurd, 2000). Likewise, students' reasoning begins as they reflect alone on how to confront ethical challenges. Then, interaction among team members sharpens problem-solving skills (Fink, 2004; Qin, Johnson, & Johnson, 1995; Zeff & Higby, 2002). Team output is often of higher quality than individual output, particularly for a task that is complex or requires judgment (Hare, Blumberg, Davies, & Kent, 1994; Michaelsen, 2004). Team members can draw on one another's help as they discuss their ethical situations and ponder, "What *should* I do?" "What *could* I do?" and "How can I avoid negative repercussions while doing the right thing?" In the case of best practices, students can ask, "How were the stakeholders affected by this?" "Did this improvement really work?" or "It seems to be working; what more could be done?"

**Procedures for team assignment.** Any number of teams may participate in the exercise. Each team should have four to six members. If teams have worked together throughout the semester, the same teams should be used for this exercise. If standing teams do not exist, it is advisable to assign teams to achieve heterogeneity, especially for traditional undergraduate students who have less work experience. Executive or nontraditional students with greater work experience can choose their own teams.

In the week following class discussion and debriefing of students' individual BEE assignments and after students have submitted their individual assignments for grading, teams should meet during class to choose one "best practice" situation and one "raises concern" situation for further discussion by the team.<sup>4</sup> Teams will submit these two situations in written format for a team grade. Team discussion and write-up of Discussion Question D (see Appendix B) for these two situations should demonstrate further reasoning about the relationship between ethical action and organizational factors. Instructors also may ask questions to encourage further reflection of specific issues or gaps in student reasoning that surfaced during the individual BEE in-class discussion and debriefing and/or in individual written assignments.

*Online discussion.* When including the team component as an online discussion, the instructor can create a separate discussion forum for each team to heighten a sense of group membership and identity (see Alderfer, 1977; this may be especially helpful when using nonstanding groups) and to foster intrateam confidentiality. Within each team's discussion forum, all the members of that team will post their "best practice" and "raises concern" situations as new threads (so, e.g., in a four-person team, there will be four "best practice" and four "raises concern" threads) and then the team will, in a separate thread, discuss which "best practice" and "raises concern" situations are most suitable for the team assignment. After selections have been made, all team members will post comments in the selected "best practice" thread regarding whether and how the practice could be improved or why it could not be improved; they will post comments in the "raises concern" thread that recommend how to behave ethically in a way that would bring about desired outcomes without incurring negative outcomes. The instructor will examine the discussion threads for evidence that teams have added value to the individual response by further considering the relationship between ethical action and organizational factors. Then, within each team, the student whose "best practice" example is selected and the student whose "raises concern" example is selected will take the lead in drafting a revised response to Question D and e-mailing it to teammates for their feedback before submitting it to the instructor for grading.

## Evidence of Effectiveness

The BEE exercise has been used over a 7-year period. Variations in samples include student classification (undergraduate, traditional, adult learner, part-time, full-time) and course (stand-alone Ethics course or course in which Ethics is only one module). In the fall of 2010, we and another colleague administered BEE at three postsecondary institutions to students in two stand-alone Ethics

courses, two Principles of Management courses, and an Organizational Behavior course. The sample of 197 students included undergraduates with sophomore, junior, or senior standing and comprised business majors and minors, as well as liberal arts and health sciences majors. Both traditional students and adult learners were included in the sample, as were American and international students, and the sample was racially diverse. We used three methods to evaluate students' achievement of BEE's learning objectives and the usefulness of the exercise itself: Instructors graded each student's BEE exercise using the rubric to measure learning objectives. Also, immediately after students submitted their BEE assignments, we invited them to provide both quantitative and qualitative data about the exercise ( $n = 167$ , response rate = 84.8%).

Instructors' grading of BEE assignments resulted in the majority of students across the five courses receiving good or excellent grades. Only a small number of students submitted poor-quality work. Typically, those who performed poorly did not provide thorough answers to all parts of the exercise and/or did not answer all of the questions. In the Principles of Management classes, students who received low scores were invited to redo the assignment. The constructive feedback they received on their initial submission allowed them to improve their work.

Students responded to a post-BEE survey containing 4-point Likert-type statements (1 = *I disagree very much*, 2 = *I disagree somewhat*, 3 = *I agree somewhat*, 4 = *I agree very much*) about the exercise and the learning objectives. Each learning objective was assessed with more than one statement. We used scales without a midpoint to force students either to agree or disagree with a statement. In the following report, we have collapsed "1" and "2" responses as "disagree" and "3" and "4" responses as "agree."

### ***Objective 1: Enabling Students to Identify Ethical Issues in the Workplace and Apply Moral Reasoning***

Students in all courses agreed, ranging from 91.3% to 100% for each course, that BEE helped them to identify a broad variety of ethical issues and best practices in the workplace. At a slightly lower rate, ranging from 87.3% to 96.2% for each course, students found that BEE helped them to think through ethical issues and apply moral reasoning to the situations that they identified in their assignments. Within this set of responses, though, students were more likely to disagree, ranging from 6.9% to 12.5% for each course, that BEE helped them to apply specific moral and philosophical frameworks to organizational situations. This supports instructors' grading of assignments, in which we found that Question B, application of moral frameworks, was more problematic for students who received lower

grades. To flip these results, though, from 87.3% to 93.1% of respondents reported that BEE helped them to apply moral-philosophical frameworks.

### ***Objective 2: Enhancing Students' Ability to Make Decisions That Consider the Relationship Between Organizational Factors and Ethical Behavior***

In four of the five courses, students agreed, ranging from 89.7% to 96.2%, that the exercise helped them to become more aware of organizational factors affecting their own ethical decisions and behavior, the actions that they might take when faced with future ethical decisions, and the effects of ethical/unethical behavior on an organization's stakeholders. In a fifth course, the agreement with these statements dropped to a range of 83.3% to 87.0%. Students in four of five courses, ranging from 88.5% to 95.7%, thought that BEE helped them to prepare to address ethical issues that they might face in the future, but only 81.3% of students in a fifth course agreed with this.<sup>5</sup>

Students in all of the courses in this sample found BEE helpful to their learning (agreement ranging from 86.2% to 93.8% in five courses) and overwhelmingly agreed that BEE reinforced what they had learned about business ethics throughout their courses (ranging from 91.3% to 100.0% in the five courses). They also agreed that BEE would be helpful to students in future classes (ranging from 86.7% to 98.2% in five courses).

### ***Student Comments***

In the post-BEE survey, we also posed the following open-ended question: "Do you have any suggestions to improve this exercise? Please add any other comments you have about the exercise." Excluding "no's" and "N/As," students wrote 152 comments. With very few exceptions, the comments were positive. Our initial coding and subsequent recoding of the comments helped us to learn about the data and resulted in six broad themes: general comments about the exercise ("I enjoyed working on it"; "It was hard"), value of the exercise, class discussion, exercise content, exercise structure, and suggestions to vary the exercise. We now present students' qualitative feedback in terms of the learning objectives.

***Learning objectives.*** Comments in the five broad themes other than General Comments reinforced the quantitative findings in the survey and offered support for the achievement of the learning objectives of the exercise. Students described the exercise as "useful" and "helpful" for increasing their awareness of



“different ethical issues and practices” that occur in the workplace; giving them an opportunity to “dissect,” “reflect on,” and “think about” their own and their classmates’ experiences to understand these various ethical situations; and applying moral-philosophical frameworks covered in class to these situations (Objective 1). Students also reported that the exercise made them more aware of the “consequences” of ethical (or unethical) actions on “stakeholders.” They told us that hearing about their classmates’ best-practices examples gave them ideas for following “good” ethical practices and that thinking about their own examples and learning how their classmates had responded to “raises concern” situations gave them “techniques” to help them “deal with” similar situations in the future (Objective 2).

*Students’ suggestions.* Suggestions to improve the exercise referred to the content and structure of the exercise and possible variations. In terms of content, students would have liked more discussion in the post-BEE plenary class discussion and debriefing demonstrating application of philosophical frameworks as other students shared their ethical situations. As for structure, students suggested including detailed examples in the exercise instructions as a means of providing further clarity beyond the bare-boned list in Appendix A. Also regarding the structure of the exercise, students recommended allowing an observation period longer than 2 weeks, students in the OB and Principles of Management classes advocated permitting multiple samples from one category, and one student in a stand-alone Ethics class advocated reducing the number of examples from four to fewer and/or permitting multiple examples from one category (students in the Principles of Management classes were required to submit only one “Best Practice” example and one “Raises Concern” example). Another category of comments in the Structure theme concerned some students’ lack of work experience or expressed an interest to expand the exercise to include personal as well as professional examples.

In the theme of Suggestions to Vary Exercise, one student suggested using videos to demonstrate examples of ethical situations in addition to discussing them during the preexercise instructions. Other suggestions included allowing students to work in pairs on the exercise and permitting presubmission and revision before final grading. Although students were not explicitly invited to submit their papers for previews, in four of the five classes a few did so and received early feedback.

### *Applying Student Feedback*

As a result of student comments about clarity of directions, we have posted paragon examples on our electronic course management systems (see examples in

Appendix D, which is available online at <http://jme.sagepub.com/supplemental>). We address most of the student comments about lack of work experience in the section "Limited Work Experience." Although these variations are not written explicitly in the instructions (because we want to encourage students to try to identify examples in their current workplaces), they are delivered orally by instructors when the exercise is first distributed to students. If students are absent for that initial discussion, their instructor may require them to schedule a meeting at which they can receive a copy of the exercise and review the instructions. Alternatively, the instructor could post the instructions on a course management system and encourage students to ask questions during class meetings or office hours or via e-mail. Instructions and exercise questions are reviewed in subsequent classes up until the exercise is submitted.

Although some students would have preferred a longer time period to complete the exercise, we feel that the specified 2-week period forces immediacy of examples and also helps students who are working to recognize that ethical concerns and best practices occur in their organizations on an almost daily basis. As noted above, students with limited work experience do have the option of drawing on past experiences.

## **Conclusion**

As ethics instruction plays a more prominent role in the business school curriculum, management educators seek meaningful activities for their students. This article has introduced an experiential exercise designed to develop students' competency at identifying and responding to ethical issues. The easy-to-administer BEE Exercise involves activities students need to perform beyond the classroom (Axelrod, 2010; Jonassen, Howland, Moore, & Marra, 2003; Mueller, 2010). Although BEE was designed for a stand-alone ethics class, it can also be included in the business ethics component of a course in management or OB. We have used the exercise with various student populations to generate fruitful classroom discussions about ethical situations in the workplace and other formal organizations with which students are affiliated. By having students draw examples from their own experience, BEE engages them and helps them to appreciate the implications of ethical action. BEE is therefore a useful addition to faculty members' pedagogical repertoire and to students' business ethics education.

## Appendix A<sup>a</sup>

### *Business Ethics Everywhere (BEE): Classification of Ethical Issues in Business*

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This list contains five broad categories for classifying ethical issues that may arise in business. Some examples of specific types of these issues are bullet-pointed in each category.

#### Categories

##### **Human Resource Issues**

*(responsibilities employers have to their employees)*

- hiring, compensation, performance appraisal, discipline, and termination procedures
- training
- company benefits
- privacy (drug testing)
- privacy (e-mail, voicemail, computer, hacking, whacking, phone eavesdropping)
- diversity discrimination
- sexual harassment
- favoritism
- bullying
- occupational health and safety
- work-life balance
- company's loyalty to employees

##### **Consumer Confidence Issues**

*(responsibilities employers and employees have to their customers/clients)*

- fiduciary responsibilities
- customer confidentiality/privacy
- product safety
- truth in advertising (withholding information from customers, hiding/distorting/falsifying information)
- treatment of customers regarding pricing, billing, quality, etc.
- selling customers products/services they don't need
- favoritism toward/discrimination against customers

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*(continued)*

## Appendix A (continued)

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### Use of Corporate Resources Issues

(responsibilities employees have to their employers, fellow employees, and stakeholders)

- use of corporate reputation
- use of corporate resources
- compliance with oversight agencies (e.g., accrediting bodies or regulators)
- reports and reporting practices
- providing honest information
- fraud
- employee loyalty to company
- employee theft (ideas, supplies, time, expense account padding)
- employee integrity (honesty, taking credit for someone else's ideas/work, stealing someone else's ideas/work, not taking responsibility for one's mistakes, asking for special treatment that co-workers don't receive, doing one's share of work)

### Conflict of Interest Issues

(responsibilities employees have to their employers, fellow employees, and stakeholders)

- overt bribes
- subtle bribes (gifts, entertainment)
- company-vendor relations
- use of personal influence to benefit family and/or friends
- use of privileged information to benefit family and/or friends

### Corporate Social Responsibility Issues

(responsibilities organizations have to their stakeholders)

- corporate social responsibility actions by company (e.g., conservation of natural resources, environmental pollution)
- public health and safety
- sustainability
- corporate philanthropy by company (includes community service)
- (in)attention to/(in)consideration of a stakeholder's needs and interests

### Other Ethical Issues (Not Included in Above Categories or Applicable to More Than One Category)

- e.g., whistleblowing

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<sup>a</sup>A handout of Appendix A for class use is available online at <http://jme.sagepub.com/supplemental/>.

## Appendix B<sup>a</sup>

### *BEE: The Business Ethics Everywhere Exercise—Instructions for Individual Assignment*

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#### *Purpose*

Each student will observe, collect, and reflect upon ethical situations listed in the categories list [refer to Appendix A, “*Classification of Ethical Issues in Business*”] in the time period during [insert dates of two-week observation period]. The situations are events that either are **ethical best practices** or **raise ethical concerns**.

#### *Procedures*

Situations should be personally observed by a student during the two-week period. Situations may be ethical best practices (i.e., those that deserve praise) or may raise concern. Each student should type a description of the ethical situations that he or she *has personally observed in his/her workplace or formal organization during this time period*. The information this description must include is listed in the Sample Submission section below. (If you do not have a workplace or formal organization in which to observe, contact the instructor as soon as possible.)

#### *In-Class Discussion Session*

On [insert date], during our regular class period, we will conduct the discussion session, using student observations to illustrate the benefits of ethical best practices as well as to examine ethical issues that may be found in organizations. See the description in the *Sample Submission* below for questions that will focus our class discussion.

#### *Written Submission Due [insert date of discussion period] at End of Class*

Each student is required to submit a minimum of four situations that demonstrate either a “best practice” or “raises concern.” There must be at least one situation that represents a “best practice” and at least one that “raises concern.” Each of these four situations must illustrate a different category named in the

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*(continued)*

## Appendix B (continued)

*Classification of Ethical Issues in Business* handout [indicate where students can access this handout]. List your situations in the order named in that list.

**Each student's assignment will have a maximum value of [insert point value] points**, which count toward the [indicate relevant portion] portion of the course grade. The assignment will be graded on proper identification of situations, number of situations listed (four are required), thoroughness of description, application of moral frameworks and ethical concepts, and other factors (see the grading rubric, which is [indicate where students can access this handout]).

- Sample Submission:** type situations in the following format.  
**Time period:** (insert date observed)  
**Organization:** (name of organization or pseudonym [if you wish to preserve anonymity])  
**Category of Issue:** (one of the categories listed on *Classification of Ethical Issues in Business*)  
**Specific Type of Issue:** (can be one listed on *Classification of Ethical Issues in Business* or another that isn't listed)  
**Practice or concern:** (indicate whether this situation is a "Best Practice" or "Raises Concern")

### Description:

- A) In three or four sentences, describe the situation, including the setting, the actors, and the ethical issue. Provide sufficient information that your instructor and classmates can easily understand the situation.
- B) In another three or four sentences, describe why this situation raises concern or is a best practice. Be sure to support your opinion by using moral philosophical frameworks (e.g., utilitarianism, deontology, etc.) and/or any other ethical concepts discussed in class and/or in the readings.

Your responses to C and D depend on whether your situation is a "best practice" or "raises concern."

### For a "best practice" situation:

- C) In another three or four sentences, describe how this best practice has affected the organization and its stakeholders (e.g., employees, customers/clients, owners/investors, competitors, the general public). For example, has the organizational culture changed? How do other employees, customers, or other stakeholders view this practice?

(continued)

## Appendix B (continued)

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- D) In your last five or six sentences, explain whether this “best practice” could be improved. If so, how? If not, why not?

For a “raises concern” situation<sup>b</sup>:

- C) In another three or four sentences, identify what you think YOU should do in this situation—that is, what would be the ethically appropriate way for you to behave in this situation and why? For example, if you have observed someone else doing something that raises concerns, what should you do? Or, as another example, if you have done something that raises concern, what should you do next?
- D) In your last five or six sentences, state whether you actually would act as you think you should and explain why you would or wouldn't. Indicate any reservations you may have about acting in the way that you think is ethical. If you have reservations, indicate what you could do to make it more likely that doing the right thing would be effective at accomplishing your objectives and would have fewer negative repercussions.
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<sup>a</sup>A handout of Appendix B for class use is available online at <http://jme.sagepub.com/supplemental/>.

<sup>b</sup>If your students do not have a current organization in which to observe and may be reporting situations that they have observed in the past, consider wording Questions C and D as follows:

- C) In another three or four sentences, identify what you think YOU should do in a current situation or should have done in a past situation—that is, what would be the ethically appropriate way for you to behave/have behaved in this situation and why? For example, if you have observed someone else doing something that raises concerns, what should you do or have done? Or, as another example, if you have done something that raises concern, what should you do next or should you have done next?
- D) In your last five or six sentences, state whether you actually would act in a current situation or did act in a past situation as you think you should and explain why you would or wouldn't/did or didn't. Indicate any reservations you may have/have had about acting in the way that you think is ethical. If you have reservations, indicate what you could do/did/could have done to make it more likely that doing the right thing would be effective at accomplishing your objectives and would have fewer negative repercussions.

## Appendix C<sup>a</sup>

### Grading Rubric for Business Ethics Everywhere (BEE) Individual Assignment<sup>b</sup>

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Evaluation Criteria	Below Average Performance	Max. Pts.	Average Performance	Max. Pts.	Exemplary Performance	Max. Pts.	Your Score
Number of Situations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lists fewer than 4 situations</li> <li>• Doesn't list one "best practice"</li> <li>• Doesn't list one "raises concern"</li> <li>• Lists 2 or fewer categories of issues</li> </ul>	2.4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lists 4 situations</li> <li>• Doesn't list a "best practice" OR doesn't list a "raises concern"</li> <li>• Lists 3 or fewer categories of issues</li> </ul>	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lists 4 situations</li> <li>• Lists at least one "raises concern"</li> <li>• Lists 4 categories of issues</li> </ul>	4	
Identification: specific category; best practice or concern	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For two or more situations:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Misidentifies the broad category of ethical issue</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Misidentifies the specific type of ethical issue within broad category</li> <li>• Misidentifies situations as "raises concern" or "best practice"</li> </ul>	3.6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For one or more situations:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Misidentifies the broad category of ethical issue</li> <li>• Misidentifies the specific type of ethical issue within broad category</li> <li>• Misidentifies situations as "raises concern" or "best practice"</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	4.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For each situation:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Correctly identifies the broad category of ethical issue</li> <li>• Correctly identifies the specific type of ethical issue within the broad category</li> <li>• Correctly identifies each "raises concern" or "best practice"</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	6	
Thoroughness of Description	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Two or more situations do not meet the description requirements of A:</li> <li>• (A) Description of situation—setting, actors, and specific ethical situation.</li> </ul>	2.4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One or more situations do not meet the description requirements of A:</li> <li>• (A) Description of situation—setting, actors, and specific ethical situation.</li> </ul>	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Each situation fully meets the description requirements of A:</li> <li>• A) Description of situation – setting, actors, and specific ethical situation</li> </ul>	4	
Explanation of "Best Practice" or "Raises Concern"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Two or more situations do not meet the description requirements of B:</li> <li>• (B) Explains why situation is best practice or raises concern; uses moral philosophical framework and/or ethical concepts as part of explanation</li> </ul>	3.6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One or more situations do not meet the description requirements of B:</li> <li>• (B) Explains why situation is best practice or raises concern; uses moral philosophical framework and/or ethical concepts as part of explanation</li> </ul>	4.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Each situation fully meets the description requirements of B:</li> <li>• B) Explains why situation is best practice or raises concern; uses moral philosophical framework and/or ethical concepts as part of explanation</li> </ul>	6	

(continued)



## Appendix C (continued)

Evaluation Criteria	Below Average Performance	Max. Pts.	Average Performance	Max. Pts.	Exemplary Performance	Max. Pts.	Your Score
Thinking Through Each Situation (part C)	Two or more situations do not meet the description requirements of C: • (C) For "best practice," how has practice affected organization and its stakeholders; OR for "raises concern," what is ethically appropriate way to behave and why?	4.8	One or more situations do not meet the description requirements of C: • (C) For "best practice," how has practice affected organization and its stakeholders; OR for "raises concern," what is ethically appropriate way to behave and why?	6	Each situation fully meets the description requirements of C: • C) For "best practice," how has practice affected organization and its stakeholders; OR for "raises concern," what is ethically appropriate way to behave and why?	8	
Thinking Through Each Situation (part D)	Two or more situations do not meet the description requirements of D: • (D) For "best practice": could practice be improved; OR for "raises concern," would you act as you think you <i>should</i> ; reservations about ethical actions; ideas to limit negative effects	4.8	One or more situations do not meet the description requirements of D: • (D) For "best practice": could practice be improved; OR for "raises concern," would you act as you think you <i>should</i> ; reservations about ethical actions; ideas to limit negative effects	6	Each situation fully meets the description requirements of D: • D) For "best practice": could practice be improved; OR for "raises concern," would you act as you think you <i>should</i> ; reservations about ethical actions; ideas to limit negative effects	8	
Total score					Total Maximum Points:	36	

<sup>a</sup>A page-size handout of Appendix C for class use is available online at <http://jme.sagepub.com/supplemental/>.

<sup>b</sup>The point values may be adjusted to fit your grading scheme or to emphasize different parts of the exercise. In this rubric, the maximum number of points for "Average Performance" is set at 75% of total points possible for each criterion and at 60% for "Below Average Performance."

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## **Authors' Note**

The Business Ethics Everywhere exercise was inspired by Rueschoff's (2001) "Scavenger Hunt," an exercise designed to demonstrate to Organizational Behavior (OB) students that OB concepts are found not only in corporate settings but in their everyday lives. Susan Baker adapted Rueschoff's exercise for use in the business ethics classroom by changing its subject content, refocusing the exercise to increase awareness of workplace situations rather than nonwork incidents/examples, and emphasizing the role of instructor-led facilitation and interaction.

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## **Notes**

1. Additionally, Gibson (2003) strives to raise students' awareness of prudence versus morality as drivers of behavior; Payne (2006) tries to show students how their cognitive and perceptual biases affect ethical decision making; Castleberry (2007) underscores for students the life-changing consequences of making illegal decisions; and Trocchia, Swanson, and Orlitzky (2007) help students to comprehend how their values affect decision making.
2. Indeed, exercises that teach ethics commonly focus on negative (i.e., unethical) examples (see, e.g., McWilliams & Nahavandi, 2006).
3. Whereas some individuals/corporations behave ethically/act as socially responsible citizens because "doing the right thing" is intrinsically gratifying, many other individuals/corporations need extrinsic incentives to engage in moral behavior. Likewise, at least a portion of our students will apply more effort to this exercise because it counts toward their course grade.
4. Although student teams could meet either outside of class or during class, we recommend allocating time in class for teams to further tease out elements of Question

D for the team written exercise. Allocating class time negates the “we-can’t-all-get-together-outside-of-class” argument and, further, gives instructors the ability to monitor and assist teams as they discuss their situations. Using virtual teams that meet on line is another option (see the “Online Discussion” section).

5. The course in which fewer students agreed that the exercise had helped prepare them to address ethical issues in the future is not the same course in which fewer students agreed that the exercise helped them to become more aware of organizational factors affecting their own ethical decisions and behavior, the actions that they might take when faced with future ethical decisions, and the effects of ethical/unethical behavior on an organization’s stakeholders.

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