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A Focused Evaluation of Sales Employees' Ethics Training and Its Effect on the Diffusion of Ethics in a Financial Organization

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A Focused Evaluation of Sales Employees' Ethics Training and Its
Effect on the Diffusion of Ethics in a Financial Organization

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in Human Resources and Workforce Development Education

by

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ABSTRACT

Ethical scandals have continued to batter corporate America into the twenty-first century. Companies such as Enron and MCI WorldCom became household names overnight because of ethical issues that shuttered the organizations' operations and stunned shareholders. Training has served as a primary mechanism for companies to impart ethical values in employees and leadership teams. However, despite the ongoing focus and resources dedicated to education and associate development in this area, historically there appears to be no diffusion of ethical standards within organizations. There is a lack of consensus in current research regarding the effectiveness of organizational ethics training and its ability to diffuse ethical standards to employees to influence their behaviors.

This mixed-methods study utilized Rogers' diffusion of innovations theory as a framework to investigate how ethics training impacts the diffusion of ethical standards throughout a financial organization and its frontline sales force. It examined the theory's five innovation characteristics of relative advantage, compatibility, trialability, observability, and complexity. The study also incorporated the work of Moore and Benbasat, utilizing their validated diffusion survey instrument as a primary avenue for data collection and examining three additional diffusion attributes that accompanied their research—image, result demonstrability, and voluntariness.

This paper serves as a new starting point for diffusion studies because the current body of research is silent in how diffusion of innovations theory informs the effectiveness of ethics training. It provides recommendations for future research in the fields of diffusion and human resources and workforce development education. It also offers a unique perspective and opportunity to identify a root cause of America's ethic scandal epidemic.

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

A common tenant of ethics in society is an expectation for people to do the right thing, and this principal of ethics can be traced throughout one's lifetime. As children, individuals are taught the golden rule of doing unto others as you would have them do unto you. In all levels of competitive sports, athletes are challenged to embrace sportsmanship and promote fairness during competitions. As adults, parents are expected to raise children who make proper decisions and abide by the morally right things to do. Even at the macro levels of community and corporations, service projects and initiatives are expected to encourage participants to make a difference in society. However, some human behavior in society leads one to question if these efforts to teach and instill ethics are falling short of what are considered to be reasonable standards.

If ethics is such a strong foundational component of society taught to all members, why are extraordinary stories of business misconduct continuing to surface? Concerns around the ethics of businesses have been ongoing, making headlines a half-century ago (Raymond, 1961). Fast forward several decades and recent history has been replete with staggering headlines of unethical behavior among recognized names in corporate America (Hadjicharalambous & Shi, 2015). These incidents have occurred despite an inflow of legislation designed to ensure solid, ethical business practices and a movement by businesses to adopt stronger ethics policies (Weber, 2015). If these rules appear to be falling short, is it fair to question the effectiveness of educational efforts in diffusing ethics throughout organizations?

A Recent History of Ethics

The 21st century was ushered in with the Enron scandal—the story of an underperforming company masquerading as a beacon of innovation and a wealth-creation engine for investors (Healy & Palepu, 2003). Through a series of inappropriate financial practices and violations of accounting standards, Enron kept its problems buried, and the company eventually filed for bankruptcy at the end of 2001 (Olson & Mendoza, 2015). The American public no sooner digested the news of Enron before it was faced with another corporate ethical debacle when MCI WorldCom saw its collapse in 2002 with bankruptcy filings and news of accounting fraud totaling billions of dollars (Maniam & Teetz, 2005). Fast forward a few years and the news was even grimmer. The United States experienced its most significant economic decline since the world wars during the Great Recession of 2007 to 2009 (Brooks & Manza, 2013). This catastrophe inflicted damage across global markets and was dubbed a risk-laden failure among banks and the government agencies responsible for their oversight (MacKenzie et al., 2012).

It should be noted that the storyline of questionable ethical behaviors is not limited to high-profile corporate scandals with the potential for big payouts. Ethics applies to actions and situations that could be deemed minor or unimportant by many. For example, surveys have pointed to higher levels of perceived stress in the workplace and an increased likelihood of employees engaging in questionable conduct (Selart & Johansen, 2011). Stress is prevalent because the corporate landscape is not slowing down with shifting technologies and globalization adding to its intricacies (Hughes et al., 2019). Inappropriate behavior has entered the mainstream with workers acknowledging they have called into work sick when they were not ill, lied to customers, prepared reports that contained skewed or inaccurate information, treated other

workers in a derogatory manner, and purposely produced work that was of an inferior quality (Boyd, 1997).

Following the Great Recession, the virtues and character that play into ethical decision-making became a significant topic of interest (Crossan et al., 2013). The influences of ethical conduct standards within an organization were shown to reverberate through its team members who serve as vehicles of business performance (Chun et al., 2013). However, a review of the literature shows the interest in utilizing ethical approaches in business practices (Buckley et al., 2001) and a renewed interest in training to diffuse ethical principles within the workforce surfaced many years before this time (Wells & Schminke, 2001). Buckley et al. (2001) noted a focus on ethical standards reflect public relations and political risks in focusing on profits over people and a business response to employees that are skeptical and not committed to a particular organization. Maniam and Teetz (2005) stated ethical failures can have a domino effect of slower economic growth, hitting businesses with an increase in their costs which are eventually passed to the different players in the market. Wells and Schminke (2001) demonstrated ethics training was already mainstream prior to the scandals with Enron and MCI WorldCom.

Competing Views of Ethics

Before beginning a debate on the effectiveness of ethics training, the question of how ethical standards are delineated should begin the conversation. Is it possible that ethics compels multiple viewpoints in its definition and practice? One shocking statistic reflects a view by eight in 10 Americans that no outright benchmark of ethics exists (Maniam & Teetz, 2005). Other research questions the internal moral compass of workers, revealing a need of employees to set their sights on someone in leadership to influence or direct their ethical decision-making (Brown et al., 2005).

In attempting to articulate the meaning of ethics, several descriptions rise to the surface. Some definitions point to the basic concept of a dichotomous nature in explaining situations in terms of right and wrong or good and bad (merriam-webster.com). Others quantify ethics in theoretical terms, steering clear of characterizations that are rigid and distinct (Maniam & Teetz, 2005) while still attempting to clarify behavior that is considered normal (Buckley et al., 2001). Buckley et al. marginally blends the concepts of ethics and morals, using moral judgments as a means to define ethics. Other classifications take a slightly different approach, clarifying morals as a way to prevent individual injury and guarantee conduct viewed as appropriate and good (Lashley, 2016). Another definition of ethics takes a commercial focus, utilizing morality to define ethical practices in terms of business practices (Hadjicharalambous & Shi, 2015).

If practitioners cannot agree on a definition of ethics, what challenges are they are facing that is enticing the disagreement? There are several concerns regarding challenges to reaching consensus on ethics in the workplace. These concerns include diversity and ethics, ethical sensitivity, and the interactions of workplace stress and ethics.

Diversity and Ethics. The challenges and benefits of diversity and ethics garnered attention decades ago through the work of Boyer and Webb (1992). One challenge is building consensus on a set of shared values among groups of people who are diverse and represent varying perspectives (Buckley et al., 2001). Sex, age, educational background, and religious beliefs have all been linked to different decision-making outcomes in ethical scenarios.

Diversity can also extend to the realm of psychology with a variety of personality traits such as a desire for power, extroversion, and locus of control influencing ethical decision-making and identifying solutions for complex situations (Hadjicharalambous & Shi, 2015). Appropriate knowledge, skills, and understanding of individual differences are needed in today's

workforce to allow for effectual interactions among stakeholders (Hughes, 2019). Organizations dedicated to elevating diversity and ethics together in a position of prominence experience the benefits of the two working together, bringing value to workers, managers, and customers (Hughes, 2018).

Ethical Sensitivity. A second concern lies within the presence of ethical sensitivity in individuals (Treviño & Brown, 2004). This argument derives from the notion that an individual cannot demonstrate ethical judgment if he or she cannot distinguish an issue exists (Geva, 2006). In this case, the person's response or lack of a reaction cannot be explained in terms of ethical judgment because there was no awareness of a problem to trigger an action (Treviño & Brown, 2004). There can also be times when an individual recognizes a decision must be made without realizing an ethical component is present in the dilemma (Geva, 2006).

Ethical sensitivity also has roots at the organizational level. An organization's culture and atmosphere can have significant influence in how individuals behave and the level of ethical sensitivity they display. This convergence of culture and ethical sensitivity further can define how companies are governed (Chan & Cheung, 2012).

Workplace Stress and Ethics. A third concern can potentially be found in the link between workplace stress and ethics. Boyd (1997) asserted a majority of workers feel pressure because of expectations at work and impacts to their balance between family and job. He found these burdens were increasing over time as businesses continue to operate in an environment of rapid change, resulting in half of employees at the time feeling compelled to engage in activities that are unethical or illicit in an effort to cope with the rising anxieties and demands on-the-job (Boyd, 1997). Two decades later, COVID-19 has worsened these issues, exacerbating the balance between family and job. This has been found to be especially true for working women

(Couch et al., 2020). Some impairment in moral awareness to recognize problems has been found to be a product of workplace stress (Selart & Johansen, 2011).

Although differing views and definitions of ethics present challenges to businesses, there is consensus that tackling ethical challenges is a requirement for contemporary organizations (Selart & Johansen, 2011). Alignment among leaders in the business community sheds light on the need to embrace the debate of ethical decision-making and moral issues. Individuals at the top of organizations and businesses should recognize ethics as an issue where there can be no concessions and negotiations. It must become part of the organization's essence and identity (Reynolds, 2019).

The Role of Human Resources and Workforce Development in Ethics

One may ask how human resources and workforce development fits in defining ethical standards and encouraging their diffusion within the organizational context. HRD practitioners have a strong role to play in tackling the business of ethics, serving in both a capacity to champion the development of the workforce while keeping leadership grounded in its approach to please stakeholders (MacKenzie et al., 2012). Ultimately, this is one of the ways human resource teams can make contributions to the organization's financial bottom line. Positive employee citizenship actions and concern for organizational goals and objectives can all be enhanced and driven through adhering to ethical standards because moral leaders generate focus, movement, and reinforcement on ethical norms (Mo & Shi, 2017).

Chun et al. (2013) found that adhering to ethical standards produced results associated with an optimistic social climate for employees, boosting employee job satisfaction and overall commitment to the organization. Upholding ethical standards increases effective recruiting, hiring, and retaining talent as it clears the way for fairly and consistently evaluating performance

and rewarding employees through pay and incentive programs. Potential new-hires and current employees view the adherence to ethical standards as a benefit because it serves as a connector to the employer crafting a fair workplace where they will be treated appropriately (Buckley et al., 2001). It also serves as a central point in a company's culture, defining how employees should interact and respond as a representative of the organization, and codifying these beliefs via leadership and organizational development (MacKenzie et al., 2012).

Methods of Governing Ethics

To reinforce ethics education efforts and the dissemination of ethical standards, organizations utilize different mechanisms to influence employee behaviors. These include code of ethics programs (Kaptein, 2011) and ethical leadership modeling (Brown & Treviño, 2014). Legislative bodies also provide a level of reinforcement by formalizing regulations that seek to force individual and business compliance with ethics (Ridnour et al., 2001).

Code of ethics. A popular way to address ethics within the organizational context is through the use of a formalized code of ethics (Geva, 2006). This practice arose to prominence in the early 1990s when most corporations in the United States elected to codify their guidelines (Weaver & Treviño, 2001). Figures ranged as high as three in four large American firms having a code of ethics on file (Singh et al., 2018). These codes strive to fabricate moral standards into the essence of the organization, representing leaderships' values as a defining part of the company ethos (Valentine & Fleischman, 2004). They may include exception language that provides guidance to unique circumstances (Geva, 2006). However, critics of formalized codes of ethics state they can be ineffective because employees may not demonstrate the desired behaviors because their beliefs do not align with company standards (Valentine & Fleischman,

2004). They must also be utilized in conjunction with other ethical mechanisms within the organization to achieve effectiveness (Singh et al., 2018).

Formalized codes are only the first line of defense in promoting ethical conduct. Structures such as ethics offices (Weaver & Treviño, 2001) and committees (Singh et al., 2018) can signify a stronger level of commitment to the governance of ethics and create visible symbols for these efforts. These structures can support monitoring activities where employees can report concerning activity without revealing their identities. They can also serve as an outlet in providing advice and support to the workforce (Weaver & Treviño, 2001).

Ethical leadership modeling. Another tool in the organizational arsenal is the modeling of ethical behaviors by corporate executives and managers. Codes of conduct, structures, and training programs will likely be ineffective if members of management do not embrace corporate espoused values and lead by example (Maniam & Teetz, 2005). Leadership roles typically afford individuals with a visible position within the business to which others focus their attention (Brown et al., 2005). This prominence gives executives a means to not only reflect the desired behaviors but also display outward gratification when they observe others embracing the values of the organization (Buckley et al., 2001).

Overall, ethical leadership modeling generates positive responses in workers and their willingness to take ownership in the organization (Wells & Schminke, 2001) while boosting their inclination to display leadership qualities in their current roles (Mo & Shi, 2015). Supportive leadership characteristics can generate huge payoffs in building a solid work environment through increases in job satisfaction and commitment from team members (Jaramillo & Mulki, 2008). Conversely, if leaders fail to consistently lead by example or do not commit to promoting ethical values as a topic of everyday importance, employees view these actions as ineffective in

challenging team members to uphold the company's values and standards of excellence (Maniam & Teetz, 2005).

Legislative methods of governing ethics. Lawmakers and governing bodies have attempted to force ethical compliance through various pieces of legislation, rules, and policies in the United States. However, these directives can prove to be decades-long battles as laws come and go through waves of regulation and deregulation in industries such as banking, finance, and utilities (Ridnour et al., 2001). Technology often forces these regulatory changes as economic sectors face constant, brisk changes (Hughes et al., 2019). Another challenge is the notion that actions deemed as ethical are often assumed to be legal, but ethical and legal standards are not always one and the same (Maniam & Teetz, 2005). Legal compliance does not guarantee moral behaviors. Laws often suffer from poor wording and a narrow focus, proving ineffective in addressing the heart of the problem and providing businesses loopholes to true governance (Appelbaum et al., 2009).

Despite their shortcomings, rules and laws abound. Following the collapse of Enron through the beginning of the Great Recession, a focus on governance and codifying policies was at its highest point across the American and global economies (Adams, 2012). In the United States, the Financial Accounting Standards Board (FASB) and the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) are two entities at the forefront of setting accounting benchmarks for corporations. Their goal is to craft definitive standards to make clear expectations of transparent financial reporting in firms. The downside of these well-defined directives is an approval structure that seeks agreement among stakeholders and an overwhelming specificity that can limit the use of the rules in broad applications (Healy & Palepu, 2003). Other entities that serve as regulators with heavy influence in the financial sector include the Office of the Comptroller of

the Currency (OCC), the Federal Reserve, and the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) (Adams, 2012).

Training as a Primary Control for Ethical Behaviors

Ethics training is one of the most popular organizational methods of diffusing information about which behaviors are considered acceptable among employees and managers (Wells & Schminke, 2001). It is considered a typical ingredient in many business ethics platforms (Weber, 2007), and most organizations have instituted some sort of recognized training routine (Weber, 2015). There is consensus that to properly integrate strong business ethics principles and ideals into an organization, an inclusive training platform should be implemented to empower members to take an ownership interest in educating themselves (Rampersad, 2006). Information surrounding ethical norms must be diffused within every part of the organization with all associates grasping and applying these ideals (Sekerka, 2009).

Research has indicated ethics training programs are viewed by workers in a positive light, creating a sensitivity to ethical actions on-the-job and guiding employees to make morally appropriate decisions (Appelbaum et al., 2009). They may be guided by formal platforms such as ethics training committees in some corporations (Singh et al., 2018). However, it is unclear if the training application or simply its presence impacts the perception of effectiveness (Appelbaum et al., 2009).

Like formalized codes, training programs have their opponents. Wells and Schminke (2001) state many individuals question the effectiveness of training as a direct result of continued negative employee behaviors and the presence of high stress to perform in the workplace. The structures of these programs often come under fire because they lack in-depth development and do not demonstrate an understanding for applicable theory (Wells & Schminke, 2001). Ritter

(2006) argues most individuals are incapable of being taught ethics because people develop a moral compass during adolescence. A connecting argument states the way many individuals mature to adulthood conditions them to be unable to process moral dilemmas (Ritter, 2006).

Statement of the Problem

Ethical scandals continue to batter corporate America, and historically there appears to be no diffusion of standards within organizations. Training is a primary mechanism for addressing ethical issues with employees and leaders, but there is a lack of consensus in current research regarding the effectiveness of organizational ethics training and its ability to diffuse ethical standards to employees to influence their behaviors.

Purpose of the Study

This study addresses attributes of ethics training that prevent best practices and moral behaviors from diffusing within an organization following a training application. Specifically, the purpose of this study is to investigate how ethics training impacts the diffusion of ethical standards throughout an organization using Rogers' diffusion of innovations theory by examining the theory's five innovation characteristics of relative advantage, compatibility, trialability, observability, and complexity. The scope of this research is further refined to focus on a financial organization and its frontline sales force. This allows the research to recreate the setting of prior players in corporate ethical scandals while focusing on sales practices that can inflate revenues and mislead customers when mishandled. Because diversity has been noted in the research as a potential influencing factor in ethical behavior, the impacts from gender are also examined. The following general research questions are utilized as guidance:

1. What is the financial organization doing, through its educational efforts, to motivate customer-facing employees and hold them accountable to be ethical in their sales practices?
2. Which innovation characteristics (i.e., relative advantage, compatibility, trialability, observability, and complexity) were influenced by the organization's capstone sales and ethics training course?
3. Does gender affect the perceived impacts of the innovation characteristics on the diffusion of ethical standards to employees?
4. What compelling influences has the organization implemented to encourage compliance with the ethics principles outlined in the capstone sales and ethics course?

Significance of the Study

With all of the attention ethics garnered following the scandals of the early 2000s, effective ethics education came into focus (Ritter, 2006). However, the argument was launched questioning if ethics, morals, and character can be taught (Hartman, 2006). Crossman et al. (2013) said yes. In their analysis of ethical decision making, they emphasized training as a conduit to trigger critical thinking and moral reasoning that would allow students to build integrity (Crossman et al., 2013). Wells and Schminke (2001) advocated for the opposite side of the argument, pointing to program deficiencies that prevent educators from addressing the depth of ethical concerns and building applicable problem-solving skills in this arena.

This research is significant to the body of research on two fronts. First, this study does not follow the path of many researchers in assuming concerns with ethical decisioning reside at the individual level. Traditional approaches to examining the effectiveness of ethics training applications and employees' adoption of ethical standards focuses on a person and his or her

skills in critical thinking and problem-solving as addressed by Crossman et al. (2013) and Wells and Schminke (2001). The current body of research is silent in considering how ethical standards diffuse as a result of a training application. By using diffusion of innovations theory and its five innovation characteristics, this research considers a previously untapped theory and how it can potentially explain the perception of ethics training and the impacts on diffusion instead of how the attributes of a person influence the dissemination of ethical standards. Second, ethical standards are not being appropriately diffused within businesses as evidenced by ongoing ethical scandals, and it is important for these standards to be diffused and adopted similar to the other research specialties presented in Rogers' work and in the current body of research. Therefore, this inquiry supports the ongoing study of diffusion of innovations theory and provides a new avenue for its application.

Basic Assumptions of the Study

Two basic assumptions exist for this study. First, all participants are assumed to be business professionals possessing an awareness of the concept of ethics. Second, participants are assumed to work for an organization that complies with legal requirements and espouses a commitment to ethical behaviors.

Study Limitations

This study utilizes survey data subsequent to an ethics training application as the significant source of information for evaluation. It surmises participants will provide clear and honest feedback in their survey responses. However, it is possible respondents may overestimate their own ethical behaviors to avoid any perception of inappropriate or questionable actions or intentions. Because the research uses a post-treatment survey as the primary data gathering tool, the choice was made to not examine and include the actions of participants when they return to

the job as part of the study. Instead, it is assumed the intentions of the participants in response to the training application is an estimate of how they will likely behave going forward.

The capstone course and the environment where it is applied is another study limitation. The course is a specialized training treatment, delivered in a virtual format, and tailored to one financial entity. Because the application of the class is distinctive in content and setting, the results cannot be generalized to other situations or organizations.

The study is also limited on two additional fronts—the lack of a control group and impacts from COVID-19 on sample size. Because financial entities are bound by government regulations, all sales employees are required to attend training to fulfill compliance dictates. Therefore, comparisons could not be generated between the experimental group participating in the coursework and a control group that would not receive the training treatment. COVID-19 also restricted the research due to hiring impacts across the financial services and retail industries. Because the pandemic resulted in a severe economic slowdown and magnified risk and uncertainty, the organization drastically reduced the number of new employees being hired. This led to a small available sample size of new associates who would be available to take part in the training.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is diffusion of innovations theory. This framework was selected because it allowed the researcher to focus on potential areas of concern with the attributes of ethics instead of following traditional paths of study that examine issues with the individuals making ethical decisions. The goal was to forge a new path that did not ask what is wrong with a person or his or her environment that results in immoral choices. The locus

was centered on the concept of ethics, seeking to determine if there was a quality it possessed that prevented or impeded its diffusion and adoption within a social group.

Diffusion of innovation theory came to light in 1962 through the work of Everett M. Rogers, emphasizing the process by which an idea is dispersed and adopted (or disregarded) among participants in a social system over time. Rogers first became interested in diffusion after questioning why farmers in his hometown in Iowa were reluctant to adopt new ideas that would have benefited their farming operations. He was later inspired as a doctoral student by the work of Bryce Ryan and Neal Gross (1950) and their study of the adoption of hybrid corn plantings among Iowa farmers. Rogers' dissertation centered on an agricultural diffusion study in Collins, Iowa, and his research on this project noted similarities with diffusion research in other disciplines. This propelled him to engage in new diffusion studies following graduation and write his book on the diffusion of innovations in 1962. His work continued for several decades, and his book was amended four times with new content (Rogers, 2003).

In defining the diffusion of innovation theory, Rogers (2003) identified four components of diffusion. These components are the innovation being examined, the communication channels used to disperse the message about the innovation, the period of time in which the diffusion occurs, and the social system's members who adopt or reject the innovation. It should be noted the term innovation may conjure an image of a wholly original concept that has never before been implemented or tested. In reality, the theory considers an innovation as a novel idea when framed through the perspective of a potential adopter who views it as new. The period of time the innovation has been in existence bears no relevance (Rogers, 2003).

When defining the system participants, Rogers (2003) labels members by the order in which they embrace the innovation: innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and

laggards. Dearing (2009) adapts this list in more simplified terms with only four generalized groups: innovators, early adopters, majority, and late adopters. He also points out the variations in the drivers to innovate among these groups. Some individuals may be drawn to the notion of being the first to try a new idea, while others may feel the only prudent action is to allow the innovation to be tested and proven to be the appropriate course. Still others adopt simply because they view the innovation as the new norm, caught in the mainstream flow of what everyone else is doing. By considering the personal attributes of the social group's members and playing to each group's preferences, organizations can aid in diffusing an innovation and speeding up its rate of adoption (Dearing, 2009).

Individual characteristics of members is only one side of the equation when addressing the time component of the theory (Schleper & Busse, 2013). Rogers (2003) looked at the whole picture and addressed time from the social system perspective instead of how quickly an individual adopted an innovation. In general, the traditional view of diffusion can be represented by an S-curve with a small number of participants embracing a new idea at the beginning and end of the adoption cycle while the majority of acceptance occurs within a median range of time (Dearing, 2009).

Characteristics of the innovation can also impact how quickly participants embrace the new idea and should be considered when designing applications to speed adoption rates (Rogers, 2003). Schleper and Busse (2013) outline the five features of an innovation. Relative advantage determines if the innovation is perceived to be better than the current process, policy, technology, etc. Compatibility explains how the innovation fits with current standards and ideals. Trialability acknowledges the ease by which a participant can investigate the application of the innovation. Observability assesses the innovation's ability to convey a seeing is believing type of

outcome. Complexity defines how easy an innovation may be to comprehend or implement (Schleper & Busse, 2013; Rogers, 2003).

In addition to the four components of diffusion, Rogers (2003) prescribed a five-step innovation-decision process—knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation, and confirmation. Knowledge refers to the initial revelation and comprehension of an innovation. Persuasion follows when a person's opinion is formed about the innovation, while decision moves the individual to act on that opinion through adoption or rejection. Implementation encompasses the change in behavior when the innovation is utilized in practice either through an exact adoption or some level of re-invention. Confirmation seeks external validation about the choice to adopt or reject with a potential for overturning the original decision if the feedback does not produce alignment and harmony.

Rogers identified nine unique research specialties in which diffusion work has proliferated: anthropology, early sociology, rural sociology, education, public health and medical sociology, communications, marketing and management, geography, and general sociology. Throughout his book, he presented numerous examples of diffusion work in a variety of disciplines (Rogers, 2003). The results of these interactions may prove germane in applying diffusion of innovations theory to explain the successes and failures of workforce education in the distribution and adoption of organizational ethics practices. For example, could education efforts centered on changing the smoking habits of Americans provide insight? Smoking is now widely viewed as a harmful practice, yet many Americans still knowingly and willingly engage in this activity. And what about the adoption of cell phone technology? This innovation's attributes received exceptionally high marks, resulting in expedited mainstream education through social networks and nearly universal usage in many circles (Rogers, 2003).

Definition of Terms

Communication channel – the conduit by which information is shared

Compatibility – compares how the innovation fits with pre-existing norms within the organization

Complexity – analyzes the extent to which the innovation and its components are easy or difficult to comprehend

Confirmation – a point in time when a system participant makes a decision to continue forward with an innovation or ultimately reject the innovation; the fifth step in the process of adoption

Decision – the period of time when a system participant adopts (or rejects) an innovation; the third step of the adoption process

Diffusion – the means by which a new idea is conveyed to members of a social system over a specified time period

Ease of use – a complementary term with complexity; denotes the level of simplicity in learning to utilize an innovation

Ethics – a broad term conveying the morality of a decision; often viewed as a simple argument of right and wrong

Image – the overall impression or representation an innovation portrays to system participants

Implementation – the point in time when an adopter begins utilizing an innovation; the fourth step in the adoption process

Innovation – an idea viewed as new by an individual or potential group of adopters

Knowledge – the point of initial contact with an innovation; the first step of the adoption process

Observability – examines the ability of an innovation and its impacts to be observed by participants

Persuasion – a period in which a system participant seeks information and greater understanding of an innovation; the second step in the adoption process

Relative Advantage – asks participants if the innovation is perceived to be better than the current process, policy, technology, etc. the innovation is replacing

Results demonstrability – the level of ease with which system participants can explain the outcome(s) of an innovation

Time – the period covering the first message of the innovation through to its adoption or rejection by a group of participants

Trialability – assesses the access given to participants to test an innovation

Visibility – how easily system participants can observe the presence of an innovation in both form and usage

Voluntariness – the level of free will or choice a system participant can exert in adopting or rejecting an innovation

Chapter II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This study seeks to better understand the dissemination and adoption of ethical standards within an organization through its ethics education and training curriculum. The framework undergirding this work is Rogers' diffusion of innovations. It has maintained time in the spotlight with ongoing research enhancing its application and understanding (Schleper & Busse, 2013). It has been part of the narrative in a long list of study areas including sociology, economics, marketing, political science, and health science (Greenhalgh et al., 2004). Work has spanned multiple continents, resulting in a vigorous theory in the social sciences (Dearing, 2009).

Pinpointing the successes and failures of diffusion in specific scenarios has triggered new studies and hypotheses to explain these results. In this way, diffusion of innovations has proven fundamental in furthering new lines of thinking and triggering theory development (Dearing & Cox, 2018). It has also found a home in mainstream perspectives such as information technology to explain the adoption rate of tech and digital innovations (Chang, 2010) while sustaining non-traditional applications in fields such as entomology and anthropology (Shelomi, 2015).

Given the extended period of time since Rogers first introduced his theory (Rogers, 2003) and the ongoing attention to the study of unethical corporate behavior in the literature (Weber, 2015), one might assume a quick internet or library search would reveal significant work or proposed studies connecting the two. However, when evaluating keywords such as "diffusion of innovations", "corporate ethics", "education", and "training" as a collective, the available research is minimal. Pages of results are produced by the search engine, but few are relevant in

connecting and understanding the complexities of corporate ethics through the lens of diffusion of innovations theory. In contrast, when examining each of these topics separately, the scope of information is considerably robust with hundreds of articles and books available for review. This points to a potential gap in the current body of literature regarding human resource and workforce development and ethics education evaluated through the perspective of diffusion of innovations theory.

To complete this literature review, searches were completed via Proquest, JSTOR, and Google Scholar. Journal articles from business publications were the overwhelming primary source of information in addition to Rogers' fifth edition of *Diffusion of Innovations*. Articles were screened and included if the research was conducted in a corporate setting or some type of business environment. Keywords utilized to refine the article search included the terms "ethics" or "business ethics" in tandem with the following topics: diffusion of innovations, training, education, leadership, diversity, and ethics theory.

The four research questions were modified to allow them to be entered as search terms in the three databases. Table 1 lists the theories and concepts those searches produced, representing the insights present in the current body of research related to this study's research questions. Following the review of the topics in Table 1, a brief overview of diffusion studies across several industries is included.

Table 1
Research Questions and Associated Topics

Research Question	Related Topics
1	Cognitive Moral Development; Diversity; Ethics Training Platform Design; Training Transfer; Self-efficacy; Virtue Ethics; the Virtuous Corporation
2	Motivational Theory; Appraisal Theory; Work-Place Passion; Cognitive Dissonance Theory; Self-determination Theory; Motivational Systems Theory of Group Involvement; Ethical Leadership; Social Learning Theory; Transformational Leadership; Authentic Leadership; Spiritual Leadership
3	Same as Research Question 2
4	Procedural Justice; Organizational Citizenship Behavior; Deviant Work Behavior; Accountability Theory; Corporate Incentives; Reinforcement Theory; Expectancy Theory

Cognitive Moral Development and Ethics

An assumption fundamental to ethical decision-making is the ability of an individual to distinguish a moral concern is present in a given situation (Geva, 2006). Beyond this initial recognition, a person can be further challenged when the dilemma offers multiple avenues for resolution, impacts a large number of stakeholders, and/or results in a trade-off situation versus a definitive resolution classified as right or appropriate (Chia & Mee, 2000). Understanding how individual's make ethical decisions is of great value at the organizational level because the actions of the employee invariably reflect and become the actions of the business (Maniam & Teetz, 2005).

Cognitive moral development (CMD) has been a prevalent concept in tackling ethical decision-making (Wells & Schminke, 2001) and a suggested basis for ethics training platforms (Waples et al., 2009). The paradigm was introduced by Kohlberg and contains six stages within three levels of reasoning—preconventional, conventional, and postconventional (Chung & Hsu, 2017). Stages one and two reflect a seemingly selfish approach within the individual, focusing on his or her own wants as well as actions to circumvent any type of penalty for his or her actions

(Ellis, 2013). Stages three and four see the individual look outwardly by considering the broader standard of conduct expressed by family, friends, colleagues, and community (Chung & Hsu, 2017). Stages five and six take on a macro approach that is universal in nature and scope, employing ethical principles with a broad stroke at humanity (Jordan et al., 2013).

Cognitive moral development has been evaluated via Kohlberg's Moral Judgment Interview, presenting a set of scenarios to the individual and judging the thought process behind the chosen moral response (Ellis, 2013). CMD progressed beyond Kohlberg's six stages through the work of James Rest and his Defining Issues Test (Chung & Hsu, 2017). Rest emphasizes his four-component model that spotlights moral sensitivity, moral judgment, moral motivation, and moral character (Ellis, 2013).

As its name indicates, cognitive moral development focuses on cognition and not the behaviors of the individual (Jordan et al., 2011). Despite the potential disconnect between reasoning and behavior, moral decisions typically underscore a person's reasoning in what is right and wrong (Geva, 2006). From a training perspective, this concept proves relevant because highlighting cognition and moral reasoning in ethics training materials has been shown to increase the overall effectiveness of the curricula (Waples et al., 2009).

Diversity

When ethics is described in an organizational context, it moves beyond the actions and decisions of the individual to that of a moral system based out of community (Buckley et al., 2001). However, values and normalized standards of behavior can vary across communities and social groups (Chia & Mee, 2000). Successful ethics training platforms can assist employees in understanding industry norms and organizational policies as well as their own personal moral inclinations (Sekerka, 2009).

Diversity and ethics are often linked within the body of research (Buckley et al., 2001) with discussions centered around equality and fair treatment in employee relations (Cocchiara et al., 2010). Boyer and Webb (1992) posited changes in the workplace were being driven by women, minorities, and different cultures as their integration on the job challenged the status quo of values, predispositions, actions, and viewpoints. Over time, the literature has continued the recognition of an ever-changing workplace, noting the increases in diversity in the American workforce with each passing year (Hite & McDonald, 2006; Al-Asfour & Lettau, 2014; Roh & Kim, 2016).

Diversity training and ethics. To address the diversity transformation of the American and global workforces, organizations have relied on diversity training programs to educate employees and stakeholders on the multi-faceted views that may be present in the workplace (Hughes & Byrd, 2015; Jones et al., 2013). A variety of perspectives exist in how to integrate a myriad of views into organizations and society as a whole. Assimilationists and universal citizenship advocates tend toward a singular view of beliefs and values in which members forfeit their traditions and consent to the philosophies of a homogenous community. Multicultural citizenship supporters encourage individuals to retain their language and cultural histories, embracing and leveraging these differences to add to the richness of the larger collective (Banks, 2008).

The importance of inclusion and diversity training and its effectiveness has recently been amplified with opposing views playing out in the political landscape following the 2016 United States election cycle (Cheng et al., 2018). Modern research has indicated diversity training is one component to a larger platform to ensure diversity and inclusion initiatives are successful. However, to ensure effectiveness following educational applications, employees and managers

should be given opportunities to constructively interact, learn from each other, and contemplate divergent views to welcome and support a heterogeneous workplace over time (Fujimoto & Hartel, 2017).

Gender, education level, and age-related factors. Gender and its impacts on ethical sensitivity have been studied by several authors, but the analysis has not resulted in definitive links. Some examinations have found women to behave more ethically than men, while other findings reflect no difference in ethical sensitivity based on gender (Hadjicharalambous & Shi, 2015). Medeiros et al. (2017) noted men experienced a minor increase in positive benefits from ethics training treatments compared to mixed gender audiences.

Education level may play a role in influencing the willingness to take part in ethical training programs (Wells & Schminke, 2001), but working professionals seem to garner more benefits from ethics training than undergraduate or MBA students (Medeiros et al., 2017). Age may become a factor based on an older worker's willingness to learn something new or be open to change compared to younger workers (Wells & Schminke, 2001). Age and ethical decisioning may also be impacted through human development theory as individuals utilize increasingly multifaceted views of their interactions and events through time, adding complexity in how they evaluate codes of integrity (Marsick, 1997).

Gender and age have also been highlighted in other studies related to ethics training. Waples et al. (2009) noted these two characteristics may not impact an individual's ability to make ethical decisions, but they could become factors when educational applications hinge on moral reasoning. Age was found to be a potential criterion in ethics training efficacy by Weber (2014) when technology became a consideration. In his example, if employees under the age of 40 preferred online learning platforms instead of instruction-based approaches, this could create

a divergence in training effectiveness between millennials and older workers when online education is favored (Weber, 2014).

Ethics Training Platform Design

The reality of ethical decisions reflects a complex landscape of different ideologies and schools of thought (Treviño & Brown, 2004). The power of diversity of thought can reach into the ethics training platform itself (Sekerka, 2009). To create peak effectiveness, the recommendation to include training that is comprehensive (Rampersad, 2006) often runs into significant challenges because of the disparity in how businesses view and design their ethics education curricula (Medeiros et al., 2017). Some models focus on compliance with legal requirements, while others seek ethics training as a means to equip organizational members to counter questionable behavior on-the-job (Weber, 2015).

There is also a disparity of thought among instructors and researchers. According to Ritter (2006), a surveyed group of educators put forth the idea that ethics should be integrated throughout various curricula. However, theorists disputed this idea of incorporating ethics at a macro level and claimed a single class devoted to ethics and decision-making was the most effective route (Ritter, 2006). Regardless of the disagreement, there are multiple avenues for businesses and educators to incorporate ethics education into their culture and objectives, and these continue to play out throughout the corporate landscape (Sekerka, 2009).

The evaluation of the effectiveness of ethics education practices has been tackled by several authors in the previous three decades. During the 1990s, ethics inquiries pursued a variety of issues, but most did not address concerns related to human resources unequivocally (Wells & Schminke, 2001). Scholars' concentrations were very basic, investigating the presence of ethics training programs in organizations and how those programs were delivered, irrespective

of their effectiveness (Delaney & Sockell, 1992). During the last two decades, meta-analytic reviews of ethics training effectiveness have dotted the literature, attempting to take a deeper view into ethics training regiments (Waples et al., 2007; Medeiros et al., 2017).

Ineffective training treatments. At the height of the Great Recession, Waples et al. (2007) aggregated data from 25 ethics training programs. Pedagogy-based criteria were a primary focus of the evaluation, using characteristics of the program and its approaches in delivering materials to determine training success. The findings reflected negatively on training effectiveness in influencing the ethical conduct and perception of individuals. It found three primary problems with training mechanisms—no stated objective for education, disagreement in whether businesses or traditional educational institutions should be tasked with teaching ethics, and a lack of direction or recommendation in what should be contained in course work (Waples et al., 2007).

In spite of the shortcomings found in training applications, Waples et al. (2007) noted opportunities for improvement. They advocated for an approach outlining codes and rules as reference points for learners while including the development of training applications that broadened the reasoning capabilities of individuals who are already part of the workforce. They favored a case-based teaching platform utilizing a pre-post mechanism to effectively evaluate progress in the specific areas of interest being taught (Waples et al., 2007).

Effective training treatments. During the following decade, Medeiros et al. (2017) submitted findings that were in conflict with the work of Waples et al. (2007). While their study agreed that ethical awareness in individuals can be unaffected by ethical interventions, it asserted behaviors can be improved to levels considered more principled through education. They found value in utilizing broad and field-sensitive approaches while cautioning practitioners to not allow

the scope of the materials to grow out of control. There was agreement with the 2007 meta-analytic review for developing activities to expand participants' cognitive abilities in addressing ethical dilemmas and encourage employees to vigorously engage in class discussions. The review mirrored similar criteria in focusing the study on the attributes and components of the training treatment. These components included the means by which the training was delivered, the program setting, time length of the training treatment, and superiority of design (Medeiros et al., 2017).

Case-based ethics training applications. The use of cases in ethics training examines an individual's ability to reason through specific scenarios that are often based in the real-world (Kurland, 1995). Weber (2015) tackled ethics education effectiveness by examining programs among representative organizations within the Ethics and Compliance Officer Association. His approach was undertaken because a gap in the literature existed surrounding ethics surveys of American firms that provide in-depth assessments of corporate ethics education curricula. He found most survey data was limited in its breadth and depth, affording more of a surface view of ethics programs. Weber's evaluation noted a uniform finding from respondents in including educational courses as part of the organization's ethics philosophy, seeking to endow managers with tools and skills to effectively evaluate ethical scenarios and including case studies as a means of strengthening training efficacy. However, he also noted ethics education platforms often underperformed due to concerns with the frequency and duration of coursework, a need to expand participants beyond management level associates, and ineffective means of evaluating the training treatments' impacts on employee behaviors (Weber, 2015).

Harkrider et al. (2013) also focused on a case-based approach to ethics education. They promoted a positive response among training participants who reviewed case studies in ethics

courses, citing a feel for real-world application and ability to link and contrast the content of different cases. In their study, 115 graduate students were solicited to participate in a two-day university-sanctioned ethics class designed to evaluate participant fulfillment in gaining a stronger comprehension of the subject matter through case-based work. The examples were viewed favorably because they provided a point of reference for participants to utilize when evaluating real-world ethical dilemmas, lending theoretical support for case-based instruction (Harkrider et al., 2013).

Training Transfer

Transfer of learning has been of special interest to human resource practitioners (Islam, 2019), and the harnessing of innovation and competitive advantage through the management of new ideas is a reality of the new millennia (Edvinsson, 2002). Decades ago, scholars noted the Industrial Revolution was in the rearview mirror, and the age of information was settling in its place (Bohn, 1994). Today, the global marketplace is a highly competitive and rapidly changing arena, and transitioning intangibles such as knowledge and learning into usable assets can provide a sizable edge over rivals (Islam, 2019).

Because contemporary organizations are operating and competing in a fluid marketplace, expenditures towards associate development have grown in importance (Kim, 2014). In addition, more attention has been given to organizational learning and how businesses can leverage the knowledge and skills of associates at a macro view (Sun, 2003). Implementing a collaborative learning environment on the frontlines can translate to significant learning impacts at a corporate level (Islam, 2019). Organizational learning is itself a competitive advantage and can lead to better judgment and an ability to respond quickly to new challenges and issues (Basten & Haamann, 2018).

There are limits in how training can impact the behaviors of workers (Burke & Hutchins, 2007) as well as the cost impacts of training applications to the financial performance of businesses (Garavaglia, 1993). The focused educational efforts of organizations on their employees can render a myriad of results—an enhanced execution of job functions, a regression in performance and output, or a status quo in which nominal change occurs (Wells & Schminke, 2001). Studies have shown as little as 15% of training is applied on the job with some applications showing no return on investment (Islam, 2019). Diversity training has been particularly impacted by a lack of training transfer because workers can view it as lacking results because they do not see its implementation on the job following the application (Combs & Luthans, 2007).

Many research reviews and models have been presented to rationalize the results of training transfer (Blume et al., 2010). Popular points of research have included employee traits, qualities of the workplace, and the curricula (Blume et al., 2019). In addition to these characteristics, the impacts of follow-up methods and support on training transfer have been evaluated (Martin, 2010).

Hg and Ahmad (2018) examined trainee characteristics and their impacts on motivation to improve work through learning (MTIWL). Their work pointed to significant effects from employees' personalities on MTIWL, and that MTIWL could be useful in predicting training transfer. Their recommendation was to evaluate how to best engage with all levels of employees in educational platforms to maximize the effectiveness of the treatment and motivate them to push their new knowledge to the workplace (Ng & Ahmad, 2018).

Islam (2019) examined training transfer in organizations through the lens of workplace climate and self-efficacy of employees. His study found constructive effects on the transfer of

training when employees perceive their work environment fosters education and the exchange of ideas. This can give rise to the cultivation of new ideas, proactive learning, and healthy communication among organizational members. Prior research of the work environment noted the need to provide appropriate follow up and remove barriers by encouraging trainees to interact together and providing resources to bolster the curricula (Martin 2010). Self-efficacy injected positivity into this environment when members demonstrated a strong belief in their ability to contribute to the discussion (Islam, 2019).

Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is attributed to the work of Bandura and describes how an individual views his or her ability to perform a job or assignment (Walumbwa et al., 2011). It is directly associated with theories of social learning and self-regulated learning (Welch, 2013) as well as social cognitive theory (Turgut & Sökmen, 2018). Self-efficacy hones the belief in controlling one's own destiny and achieving the favored results (Welch, 2013). A person possessing a high level of self-efficacy may prove to be more ethical (Wells & Schminke, 2001). There is a greater likelihood of higher levels of problem-solving skills and drive to continue forward in the face of adversity (MacNab & Worthley, 2008). This ability to engage under challenging circumstances translates to a decreased need in motivational influences to behave ethically (Turgut & Sökmen, 2018). An employee's demonstration of his or her own self-efficacy can be enhanced in an environment of strong ethical leadership and positive individual identification with the organization (Walumbwa et al., 2010).

A person with high self-efficacy will likely have a stronger capacity and belief that he or she can apply training on-the-job (Wells & Schminke, 2001). Several studies have found a positive correlation between high self-efficacy and training transfer and mastery (Burke &

Hutchins, 2007). May et al. (2014) found a strong connection between business ethics training and moral efficacy. Wells and Schminke (2001) noted the strong correlation between self-efficacy and positive training impacts. In evaluations of plagiarism, internal whistleblowing, and academic dishonesty, high self-efficacy was found to have a mediating effect on behaviors, reducing the incidents of unethical actions of the test subjects or failure to report others for immoral actions (Welch, 2013). Focusing on building self-efficacy traits in participants was also found to improve the results of diversity training through the intent to apply diversity and inclusion directives (Combs & Luthans, 2007).

Virtue Ethics & the Virtuous Corporation

Ethics education is not relegated to principles of morality taught in a classroom. The study of ethics and morality has proven to be an important component in the field of philosophy across many centuries and societies (Kulshrestha, 2005). Character traits such as integrity and a willingness to speak up against immoral actions are assumed to have a positive impact on ethical decision-making (Wells & Schminke, 2001). Employees are expected to behave in an ethical way because of the impacts to those around them and any potential stakeholders of the organization (Maniam & Teetz, 2005). This focus on the effects to others and the larger benefit to a group elucidates the realm of virtue ethics in education (Sekerka, 2009).

Philosophers such as Aristotle characterized humanity as many individuals gravitating toward a communal existence, behaving socially, and thinking rationally. He connected ethics to virtues (Hartman, 2006), normative ideals that replicate what is considered normal among peers (Kleinsmith et al., 2016). Aristotle's approach viewed a desire for virtue along a similar vein as a common-sense desire to possess good health (Hartman, 2006). Wisdom, character, and justice

are considered worthy philosophical pursuits of virtue to shape a positive society (Crossan et al., 2013).

The virtues of the individual can further be impacted at a communal level through the moral intensity of an issue. This concept speaks to ethical decisioning as the general agreement within the community of a choice's consequences, and the impending scope of the results will likely trigger a strong ethical response from the decision maker (Selart & Johansen, 2010). This concept of altruism—the consideration of how an individual's choices influence others—is represented in an ethics decisioning template attributed to Sanford Krolich. His matrix identifies four classifications of decisions based on their outcomes: individualism, altruism, idealism, and pragmatism (Maniam & Teetz, 2005).

Virtue is not a concept that only has application at the level of the individual. Corporate character alludes to an institutional level of morals through the idea of virtuous corporations (Moore, 2005). Ethical ideals are an intricate part of the organization and its goals and policies and cannot be separated from the institution's identity (Buckley et al., 2001). Individuals are social by nature, and organizations can be powerful forces in the socialization of character standards (Hartman, 2006). This is evident in organizations that do not follow a corporate virtue standard, instead choosing to institutionalize, validate, and promote dishonesty and fraud as condoned conduct (Ashforth & Anand, 2003). Associates of virtuous organizations are said to strive toward a higher level of performance, while businesses demonstrating strong virtues have been shown to outpace the performance of organizations lagging in this measure (Weber, 2015) and generate collaboration between the business and its strategic partners (Schaltegger & Burritt, 2018).

Motivational Theory

Motivation and workforce development have been tagged as crucial tasks for contemporary businesses to remain effective (Lee & Bruvold, 2003). Organizations quantify their intent to motivate employees in mission statements, corporate vision, and company codes and policies (Bastons et al., 2017). Motivation and innovation tend to be intertwined in competitive firms where associates are inspired, compensated, and directed to be creative (Gupta & Singhal, 1993) with an understanding failure is part of the innovation process (Mazouz & Zhao, 2019). Associates working in human resources have a hand in how the workforce is motivated through the evaluation of performance metrics and the application of an arsenal of compensation tools. Both serve to encourage individuals to align their behaviors with the goals of the organization (Huselid, 1995), and consistent appraisals of performance can enhance the transfer of training (Martin, 2010).

Social psychology and organizational theory have been drivers in the research and development of motivational models dating back 50 years (Bastons et al., 2017). Motivation can be viewed from the firm perspective (Nielsen & Parker, 2012) and the individual contributor level (Bastons et al., 2017). A business can be driven by economic ques (ensuring profitability and increasing the firm's value), social ques (building stronger relationships and ties with strategic partners, customers, and stakeholders), and normative ques (accepting legislative governance) (Nielsen & Parker, 2012). Employees tend to be motivated by external influences including pay and benefits as well as internal reasons such as their individual growth and development. They can also be impacted from a social aspect in crafting value for shareholders and others touched by the organization's performance (Bastons et al., 2017).

From a research perspective, arguments abound as to whether ethics can be taught (Wines, 2008). There is also discussion around why individuals take actions that oppose their belief systems (Lavergne & Pelletier, 2016). In some cases, it has been shown that moral individuals are driven to implement immoral behaviors if their workplace inadvertently motivates them through risks to their well-being and income. Conversely, environments where the open-door policy and free flow of ideas are encouraged seem to motivate employees to perform well (Wines, 2008).

Appraisal theory and work passion. Zigarmi et al. (2018) developed the Employee Work Passion Appraisal model (EWPA) using appraisal theory and an examination of an individual's passion for work. From an appraisal theory standpoint, an employee assesses his or her environment and determines what impacts it may have on overall well-being. In their effort to validate EWPA, Zigarmi et al. found workers' passion for their jobs and desire to perform are positively associated with their locus of control and ability to motivate themselves. Their work characterized motivation as an internal mechanism within the individual (Zigarmi et al., 2018).

Cognitive dissonance theory and self-determination theory. Cognitive dissonance theory (CDT) has proven useful in evaluating what motivates individuals to balance differences in their attitudes and behaviors. CDT's focus is explaining why a person may exhibit behaviors that do not fit his or her belief system. It attempts to evaluate and predict if the individual will be motivated to augment the belief system to match the behavior or vice versa to reduce dissonance (Lavergne & Pelletier, 2016).

Self-determination theory (SDT) has been used as a complement to CDT in defining how individuals are motivated to augment their behaviors. SDT states humans operate in either autonomous, controlled, or impersonal motivational domains. The autonomous sphere drives

individuals to act in accordance with their value system, while the controlled arena looks outwardly to align more closely with the value system of others in an effort to maximize rewards and good standing. The impersonal sphere does not impact actions because individuals assume there is no opportunity or ability for control of their conduct (Lavergne & Pelletier, 2016).

Motivational systems theory of group involvement. Not all motivational influences are restricted at an individual level. The diversity of today's workforce introduces a myriad of ideas and perspectives in an increasingly complex and forceful global marketplace. The modern rapid pace of change can necessitate workgroups possessing a diverse set of talents and views to tackle these business complexities. These teams are often best equipped to compel the organization forward but must navigate differences among members (Hinsz et al., 2019).

Hinsz et al. (2019) offered a theoretical basis for how diverse groups respond to incentives and penalties by building on the earlier motivational systems theory work of Park and Hinsz (2006). They examined the impacts of individualism-collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity-femininity, long versus short-term orientation, and analytic-holistic reasoning and how these elements affect a multicultural group's decision-making. In general, penalties elicit an avoidance response in individuals and groups who actively seek a clearer understanding of risk in a given situation, but the impacts have limits. Work groups appear more insulated from the adverse effects of penalties in decision-making because members do not feel isolated and forced to bear consequences alone. Incentives craft an opposing response, stimulating encouragement in individuals and groups to consider new avenues for rewards (Hinsz et al., 2019).

Ethical Leadership

The majority of employees look beyond themselves when crafting their views of ethics (Brown & Treviño, 2006). The ethical climate of an organization can stem from its executive

team as well as the employees who carry out the day-to-day business functions. A firm's ethical standards are often perceived as no different than those of the people it employs (Chun et al., 2013). However, seeking external validation goes beyond the formation of points of view. Research has shown something as simple as the presence of teammates in a workspace can positively impact the displayed ethical behaviors of individuals (Pascual-Ezama et al., 2015).

Because of the strong ties between interpersonal relationships and employee motivation, a strong niche of interest in the past decade has focused on ethical leadership and its impacts on the mindsets and actions of the workforce (Yidong & Xinxin, 2013). The decisions of an organization's leadership team impact the connections with their direct and indirect reports (Verbos & Miller, 2015), and it has been proven individuals often look to leadership as a source for ethical guidance (Brown & Treviño, 2006). Ultimately, the ethical standards employees see portrayed at a corporate level become the ethical standards they apply in their job roles (Chun et al., 2013).

To better understand the impacts of ethical leadership, many arenas have been pursued for study. Social learning is one avenue that has gained traction through the review of multiple leadership models (Brown & Treviño, 2006). A second is organizational culture, serving as a cornerstone in research to explain how ethical leadership impacts the ethics foundation of an organization (Ardichvili et al., 2009). A third avenue consider promotional opportunities to determine how strongly ethical leadership characteristics appear to be valued in the organizational context (Longenecker & Fink, 2008). Procedural justice (Brebels et al., 2011) and organizational justice (Zoghbi-Manrique-de-Lara, 2010) are additional areas of study that have been evaluated as mitigating factors in ethical leadership.

Ethical leadership and social learning. Following the financial scandals at the turn of the 21st century, Brown et al. (2005) set out to evaluate ethical leadership through the lens of social learning. With this outlook, the focus was on how ethical leaders impacted the behaviors of subordinates in leading by example, and how this simulation of morals could be crafted into a formal construct to describe ethical leadership. Individuals high in ethical leadership were described by employees as trust-worthy, appealing, charismatic, and fair. These characteristics triggered higher levels of job satisfaction and willingness to openly communicate ethical concerns to management (Brown et al., 2005).

Brown and Treviño (2006) continued the examination of ethical leadership and social learning theory by acknowledging a leader's behaviors are a blatant means of messaging ethics in a highly visible way. They point to a transformational leadership approach that builds its strength from motivating others in looking externally at the greater good instead of internal, personal desires that satisfy one's self. This concept of transformational leadership focuses on attributes of managers and executives such as passion, inspiration, and charismatic influence (Brown & Treviño, 2006). This ties in with the notion leaders are the epicenter where an organization's strategic goals and vision radiate to all invested parties (Leigh, 2013). Transformational leaders focus their resources on transforming employees via coaching and development while embracing the transference of power to these individuals to make decisions on their own (Rodriguez, 2012).

Brown and Treviño (2006) touched on two other models of leadership—authentic leadership and spiritual leadership—as a means for role models to shed an image of self-interest and demonstrate self-awareness and candidness in their motivation to care for others and their knowledge of the beliefs and values of their audience. They further project that social learning

theory applies to ethical leaders and their learning styles and not simply leaders and their workforce. Ethical leaders likely recognize moral ideals in someone else and fashion their behaviors and opinions after their observations of this archetype. In this respect, ethical leaders possess the ability to learn and teach (Brown & Treviño, 2006).

Ethical leadership and organizational culture. Ethical leadership is a connecting point to organizational culture because it is cited by many employees as a primary driver in the establishment of a company's values and philosophy (Ardichvili et al., 2009). Leaders work under the dual function of moral persons and moral managers. Their personal lives reflect their individual integrity, but as moral managers they are crafting the corporate culture with each step and leaving a legacy of protocols and ideals (Mo & Shi, 2017). Building a solid corporate culture presents many challenges to leadership and its workforce, requiring unrelenting focus and resources. The resolution of moral issues is interwoven into the cultural fabric of the organization and cannot be viewed apart from its fundamental values (Leigh, 2013).

Ardichvili et al. (2009) established leadership at the top of the hierarchy in developing a moral culture and sought to better understand the qualities of ethical cultures. Using grounded theory, they interviewed various executives and scholars to determine a list of ethical organizations and the details surrounding why those companies were viewed as moral. Respondents gave significant value to the creation of a positive culture through the actions of managers and executives. There was a linkage between executives demonstrating veracity and a strong moral compass, triggering the same types of actions in employees and how they treat each other and the clients of the business. Actions of executives appeared to be viewed as synonymous with corporate culture (Ardichvili et al., 2009).

Ethical leadership and career promotions. The current body of research is limited in its ability to quantify the precursors or predictors of ethical leadership in an individual (Jordan et al., 2013). In the workplace where conditions can transform at a moment's notice, hiring for critical management positions can be a daunting task (Longenecker & Fink, 2008). Managers must espouse morality in their day-to-day dealings and uphold the ideals of corporate social responsibility to judiciously raise the tide of performance and attitudes in its workforce (Yidong & Xinxin, 2013).

In a study by Longenecker and Fink (2008), the attitudes of individuals in management positions were evaluated to determine the general understanding of measures by which they could be promoted to higher level positions. More than 300 supervisors representing at least 100 entities were surveyed to identify how key management roles might be awarded in the hiring process. Three of four respondents cited proven results as a deciding factor, and two out of three believed it was centered on their existing relationships and connections. Ethics and character fell toward the bottom of participants' responses with 39% considering it a determining factor—almost the same number of respondents as being in the right place at the right time (Longenecker & Fink, 2008).

Ethical leadership and procedural justice. Procedural justice relates to how leaders incorporate fairness in their decisions, and it is a proven driver in impacting employee outcomes (Brebels et al., 2011). It differs from a related concept--distributive justice—which focuses on outcomes instead of how managers arrive at decisions (He et al., 2014). Together, procedural justice and distributive justice serve as the primary components of the broader concept of organizational justice (Weaver & Treviño, 2001). Another term—interactional justice—is sometimes mentioned in the literature as a third component of organizational justice. It focuses

on the direct interactions between individuals and their supervisors, differentiating itself from the macro viewpoint of procedural justice and its overall decisioning strategies of the company as a whole (Kurdoglu, 2018).

Procedural justice has been examined in tandem with ethical leadership in many articles and research studies (Andrews et al., 2015; Loi et al., 2012; Schuh et al., 2019; Shin et al., 2015). A compelling case can be made that ethical leadership cannot exist without procedural justice. Ethical leadership focuses on executives and managers demonstrating fair and appropriate conduct in their individual actions (Shin et al., 2015), while procedural justice acknowledges the processes and protocols by which these fair decisions are made (Brebels et al., 2011). Ethical leadership is the conduit by which organizations demonstrate their culture and values (Ardichvili et al., 2009). When procedural justice is in force, there is a maximization of the values held in common between the individual and the business, and employees are believed to self-manage and adhere to company protocols (Leasure, 2016).

Similar to ethical leadership, procedural justice bears application in how workers view the integrity of their day-to-day job responsibilities and the extent to which they feel valued by leadership (Shin et al., 2015). It is the mechanism by which employees validate the policies and procedures of the organization and the power afforded its leaders (Leasure, 2016). It correlates with ideas such as behavioral integrity (BI) in which employees identify perceived discrepancies in a manager's words and behaviors (Andrews et al., 2015). Ultimately, it is a concept that embodies subjectivity because its basis is the perception and perspective of the view holder (Nagin & Telep, 2017).

Procedural justice has been identified as a strong predictor in how employees react within the organizational context. It influences several human resources related metrics centered on how

employees feel about the business including job satisfaction, general dedication, and employee loyalty (Loi et al., 2011). Additional research has gone beyond the emotional side of the equation, examining if sentiment drives action through greater engagement and willingness to devote time and resources to a cause (He et al., 2014). This pushes the variables beyond the presence of intrinsic motivators to the actual demonstration of results via organization citizenship behavior (He et al., 2014). Sentiment can drive behaviors in the opposite direction as postulated by equity theory. Equity theory suggests that employees who discern inequality in the organization will seek equilibrium by protecting their personal interests over those of the business (Treviño & Weaver, 2001).

Organizational citizenship behavior and deviant work behavior. Organizational justice and its effects on employee outcomes have been evaluated in past research through the assessment of organizational citizenship behavior (Zoghbi-Manrique-de-Lara, 2010). According to social exchange theory, organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) is a means for employees to enact the golden rule and repay employers in the vein of integrity and fairness with which they have been treated (Treviño & Weaver, 2001). In another crossover with ethical leadership, Mo and Shi (2017) found OCB was enhanced when workers perceive management has crafted a constructive work environment focused on impartiality and reason.

The antithesis of OCB—deviant workplace behavior—occurs when associates experience a lack of integrity in the workplace, generating risk for the organization as they willingly defy rules governing normal performance expectations (Zoghbi-Manrique-de-Lara, 2010). Under the view of psychological contract theory, workers see unfairness as a breach of contract between the organization and them. This agreement involves guarantees outwardly expressed by the employer as well as assurances assumed to be in place by employees (Andrews et al., 2015).

Employees may express their distrust with organizational leadership through retaliation efforts (He et al., 2014) such as poor attendance (Zoghbi-Manrique-de-Lara, 2010) and failing to report concerns to management (Treviño & Weaver, 2001). A surge in job tension is also likely as individuals experience higher work-related stress levels (Andrews et al., 2015).

Corporate Social Responsibility and Ethics

Corporate social responsibility reflects the actions of an organization that give consideration and even preference to the good of society and the surrounding environment (Lashley, 2016). This is in the same vein as virtue ethics, espousing a focus on the greater good (Sekerka, 2009). Corporate social responsibility positions the firm as a team player whose initiatives focus on the betterment of the organization and community (Lashley, 2016). However, this concept has its challenges in offering a straight-forward and universal definition. An interesting facet of corporate social responsibility is the way its definition can shift through time. Issues that were of social concern several decades ago may differ drastically from those of contemporary society. Also, just as diversity can speak to the different values across groups of people (Chia & Mee, 2010), corporate social responsibility can see different social groups eliciting opposing views of an issue and its impacts on environment and community (Campbell, 2007).

From a theoretical perspective, stakeholder theory and utilitarianism frame corporate responsibility in a constructive position. The impacts to employees and shareholders are balanced, and businesses focus on ideas that will bring about the most good (Greenwood, 2002). However, corporate social responsibility can be cast as negative when framed as the antagonist to business profitability. Critics question why one would identify a requirement for an organization to behave in a socially responsible way when its primary focus should be to

maximize its financial value and profits (Campbell, 2007). Some financial experts have even gone so far to state corporate social responsibility is an unnecessary evil because a free market will by nature bring resolution to issues that may surface (Wines, 2008).

Although being socially responsible can be billed as having a dubious impact on a firm's financial status, there are arguments for positive impacts to the financial bottom line (Lashley, 2016). Wartick and Cochran (1985) argued social responsibility maintains two primary facets. The initial aspect states businesses endure because society wants them to exist. This reason for existence means businesses must adhere to cultural norms. The secondary aspect groups businesses with a variety of institutions and states these entities as a collective serve as a community's vehicle for morality (Wartick & Cochran, 1985).

Many of the effects from socially responsible behaviors take place within holdings of the company that can be difficult to define or quantify such as reputation and public relations (Lashley, 2016). Technology presents an especially interesting frontier because digital firms can push new and exciting products to market, but consumers demand an expectation for their data to remain confidential and secure on systems that are dependable. Consumers in general maintain a belief that as technology grows and advances, it should be used for the good of society (Brusoni & Vaccaro, 2017).

Corporate social responsibility is also present in conversations centered around sustainability (Ardichvili, 2012). Corporate social responsibility and sustainability have transitioned into two strong topics of combined interest for companies over the past 15 years, examining the business case to implement related initiatives (Schaltegger & Burritt, 2018). Sustainability can produce an acknowledgement that an organization's actions today can have a supportive or detrimental impact on its ability to thrive tomorrow. These influences can

reverberate through environmental and civil societal contexts, directly swaying a community's way of life (Lashley, 2016). Human resource development practitioners are being challenged to cultivate a paradigm shift in organizations that is not fixated on constant growth because boundaries exist in how far businesses can expand (Ardichvili, 2012). As with technology, sustainability calls for long-term assessment and planning for the well-being of all parties involved (Lashley, 2016).

Accountability Theory

Several sectors of the economy suffer from skeptical consumer perceptions of nominal culpability within their ranks (Mansouri & Rowney, 2013). The criticism surrounding the corporate failures of Enron and WorldCom centered on a lack of accountability internally within the two organizations. There was also a lack of accountability externally with Arthur Anderson—the accounting entity responsible for keeping them in check and ensuring fulfillment of the law (Frink & Klimoski, 2004)—and the analysts who evaluated corporate industries and made their information available to the investing public (Healy & Palepu, 2003). This type of liability centered on blatant compliance issues and is considered a primary aspect of accountability. A secondary aspect focuses on the infrastructure of the organization in which policies and procedures are proactively written and implemented to avoid ethical problems (Geva, 2006). In the case of Enron, appropriate infrastructure was lacking and allowed the firm to exploit short-term accounting practices mismatched with its long-term business model (Healy & Palepu, 2003).

Incentives for moral behaviors. The loss of integrity at Enron did not occur because the corporation was lacking in ethical structures. It occurred because stakeholders elected to ignore the codes set in place (Treviño & Brown, 2004). Accounting issues have historically been a point

of contention with executives lured by incentives at organization and individual levels. For example, depressing expenses and legally booking them in later periods can reflect positively on short-term net income targets for the corporation and increase an executive's personal incentives that are based on the firm's financial performance (Beaudoin et al., 2015). With Enron, the potential for significant profits and financial windfalls became the driving force in behaviors (Maniam & Teetz, 2005). From this reality, one can extrapolate financial incentives have the potential to strongly influence and motivate an individual or group's actions.

Pendse (2012) brought together several concepts that tie accountability and financial incentive motivations together. He noted reinforcement theory can help organization's create structures that ensure appropriate behaviors are elevated and bolstered but warned unwelcome conduct can be accidentally rewarded if the structures put in place ignorantly compensate for the wrong things. He also touched on expectancy theory and how individuals make decisions based on the projected after-effects of their choices and what value may come from them. Expectancy theory interprets the likely choice of a person as the one that will bring he or she the most anticipated benefit (Pendse, 2012). Taken together, this means organizations must be exceptionally mindful their incentive programs reward proper behaviors, provide appropriate benefit to the business and the individual, and strive to maintain fluidity in the ability to make changes as unintended consequences surface.

Diffusion of Innovations Research in Other Disciplines

Rogers (2003) included several examples of diffusion studies throughout his primary work, *Diffusion of Innovations*. These examples covered a variety of disciplines and applications spanning decades of research. They tackled cultural impacts on diffusion and the ups and downs of involving players such as change agents, opinion leaders, and peers (Rogers, 2003). A few

examples of diffusion research outside the business arena are included in this review. The successes and lessons learned in these cases point to the viability of utilizing diffusion of innovations theory in the study of ethics education.

Diffusion of innovations and the health sciences. A well-known media headline from recent history was the explosion of the AIDs epidemic. At the height of the disease's spread, segments of the population were ostracized and stigmatized as a disgrace to society (Herek & Glunt, 1988). Despite the ongoing stigma and the presence of innovations that could prevent the disease, AIDs continued a rampant spread across the world for a period of time—stunning many in the science and political communities. Diffusion of innovations proved to be a viable theory in addressing the shortcomings of preventative measures and in identifying ways to disseminate information to the affected populations to change behaviors (Bertrand, 2010). In this instance, diffusion of innovations served as a jumping off point in explaining a phenomenon in which what was considered the discernable and correct course of action was not undertaken by individuals. Similarly, the ethics controversies surrounding large corporations could have been avoided if individual players had steered clear of obvious ethical missteps and deliberate actions on their part (Treviño & Brown, 2004). Diffusion of innovations theory may be able to be applied in the same way to explain the ongoing ethics controversies and breakdowns in the dissemination of moral principles where an assumed right course of action is not pursued, stunning analysts and the general public.

The AIDs epidemic is only a single example in which diffusion of innovations theory has found itself in the spotlight in the field of medicine. Four decades ago, Greer (1977) conducted an analysis of available studies surrounding diffusion of innovations and its impacts on organizational diffusion and adoption of medical technologies. She developed a frustration with

the lack of strong theory underpinning the literature of the day. She noted health care facilities are complex entities, and innovations are not always advantageous. These concepts opposed conventional views of diffusion during the 1960s and 1970s and showcased a need to expand diffusion of innovations theory's scope to explain why diffusion succeeds or fails (Greer, 1977). Fast forward to present-day, and the problems with innovation adoption have continued, but diffusion of innovations is said to have a place in explaining the dense intricacies of healthcare (Dearing & Cox, 2018). According to Parston et al. (2015), a rule of thumb in the health care industry is a nearly two-decade delay between an innovation's introduction to its common use and practice. They identified a need for championing cultural change within the organization and being deliberate in change management planning and execution (Parston et al., 2015). If the health sciences community experiences an extended lag in adoption rates of beneficial innovations, perhaps those lessons can be applied to the general business community's assimilation of ethical practices while acknowledging the complexities of today's organizations. It may also speak to the need for deliberate change management planning and implementation in business.

Diffusion of innovations and information technology. Chang (2010) and Kim et al. (2019) examined the use of diffusion of innovations in explaining the adoption of digital technologies. In one investigation, the use and adoption of hashtags was examined during a time when twitter was expanding to become a primary social media platform. Hashtags were gaining popularity in communicating and organizing information, but some hashtags were universally adopted while others struggled to gain traction. Diffusion of innovations theory was determined to be a point of needed future study to explain the patterns of adoption and use (Chang, 2010).

In a study of South Korean seniors, the adoption behaviors of individuals over 50 years of age were examined to determine why this group used mobile social network sites for travel and leisure. The researchers discovered diffusion-related characteristics were a driver in seniors' adoption activities in using these mobile sites including relative advantage, compatibility, and complexity. Their recommendation was to incorporate this information into site design to positively impact adoption (Kim et al., 2019). In ethics education, identifying and incorporating this same type of information into the training platform design may enhance program effectiveness.

On an opposing note, Lyytinen and Damsgaard (2001) questioned the validity of using diffusion of innovations theory in some areas of information technology. They noted diffusion of innovations usage had been widespread in the field for several years prior to their work, but they pointed to the multifarious aspects of IT that could lessen the effectiveness of diffusion of innovations in explaining individual behaviors. While Lyytinen and Damsgaard ascertained diffusion of innovations was ineffective with the complex, this is in direct opposition to Dearing and Cox (2018) and their work in healthcare. They stated diffusion of innovations was a useful tool in understanding the complexities of the healthcare industry and the dissemination and diffusion of information influencing adoption behaviors (Dearing & Cox, 2018). However, in one fundamental argument, Lyytinen and Damsgaard (2001) stated technology is different because it is constantly evolving. This progression can modify the innovation and influence the view of time—two key components in diffusion of innovations theory. They advocated the need for deeper views and complex models beyond a simple diffusion of innovations approach to improve the effectiveness of IT diffusion paradigms (Lyytinen & Damsgaard, 2001). This

negative view of diffusion of innovations may not be material in ethics education since the fundamental underpinnings of ethics have remained intact over long periods of time.

Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to investigate how ethics training impacts the diffusion of ethical standards throughout an organization using Rogers' diffusion of innovations theory by examining the theory's five innovation characteristics of relative advantage, compatibility, trialability, observability, and complexity. Because the examples cited in this research focused on scandals within corporate America, a financial entity was selected for study to mirror these occurrences. Since the scope of the topic of ethics was far-reaching and the organization under review employed thousands of associates, the research was narrowed to focus on the spread and implementation of ethical standards among frontline, customer-facing associates following the application of a capstone sales and ethics training course.

This study utilized Rogers' five innovation characteristics to examine the dissemination and adoption of ethical standards in the financial organization's sales and customer service practices as outlined in its capstone course. The efficacy of diffusion of innovations theory to explain the dissemination and adoption of ethical standards through ethics training is undetermined in the current body of research. This study sought to examine this unexplored arena to better understand and explain why ethical scandals continue to occur in the corporate realm despite the presence of ethics training and other structures to ensure compliance.

Table 2 provides an overview of how each research question was addressed in the study. Because this research is an initial step in connecting diffusion of innovations theory and ethics training, the evaluation was simple and straightforward. A previously validated survey instrument in diffusion of innovations theory was utilized, and Rogers' five innovation characteristics were measured following the organization's capstone sales and ethics course. The

data was analyzed to determine the correlations between each of the five characteristics.

Because diversity was cited in the background information and literature review as a potential influencer, demographic data was collected and cross-referenced with each of the five innovation characteristics.

Table 2
Research Questions and Data Collection

Research Question	Data Collection	Data Analysis
1	Utilized the company's learning management system to review corporate training catalogue for all course offerings with ethics content focused on frontline sales team members; reviewed attendance requirements for identified courses	No statistical analysis needed
2	Used validated survey instrument by Moore and Benbasat to measure Rogers' five innovation characteristics following the organization's capstone ethics and sales course; conducted one-on-one interviews with survey respondent volunteers	Calculated mean, standard deviation, and response frequencies for the five innovation characteristics
3	Used demographic data disclosed by participants at the end of Moore and Benbasat's survey to separate responses by gender	Determined differences between groups using a ranked T-test
4	Reviewed performance standards for frontline sales positions used in annual performance appraisals; researched the presence and application of mechanisms to promote ethics beyond training via the company's internet and intranet sites and available published information (i.e., ethics officer, ethics hotline, code of ethics policy)	No statistical analysis needed

Research Questions

For study participants, the researcher examined the perceived attributes of ethics and the intent to adopt the moral principles presented in an ethics course. Four research questions guided the study.

1. What is the financial organization doing, through its educational efforts, to motivate customer-facing employees and hold them accountable to be ethical in their sales practices?
2. Which innovation characteristics (i.e., relative advantage, compatibility, trialability, observability, and complexity) were influenced by the organization's capstone sales and ethics training course?
3. Does gender affect the perceived impacts of the innovation characteristics on the diffusion of ethical standards to employees?
4. What compelling influences has the organization implemented to encourage compliance with the ethics principles outlined in the capstone sales and ethics course?

Rogers (2003) provided additional direction for this research through his generalizations about the five innovation characteristics. He states these attributes account for a minimum of half of the variance in adoption rates, and in many cases the variance is explained at a rate well over 75%. Relative advantage and compatibility are considered the dominant attributes, maintaining a direct relationship in predicting if an innovation will be adopted or rejected. Trialability and observability are also seen as having a direct relationship with adoption rates to a lesser degree, but complexity displays an inverse relationship in the adoption or rejection of an innovation.

Based on these generalizations from Rogers, five null hypotheses were utilized to test research question three. Because this research mentioned diversity as a potential influencer for ethics, the hypotheses focused on the impacts of gender. In light of the ongoing corporate scandals, research has intensified related to gender and ethical issues (Chen et al., 2016), finding males are more likely to behave unethically than females (Haroardottir et al., 2019). If females are more ethical, one might assume they would be more likely to diffuse ethical standards within

the organization. Female participants are then expected to assess higher levels of relative advantage, compatibility, trialability, and observability and lower levels of complexity in the ethics course materials versus male participants if diffusion is occurring (see setting and participants section for more information in how this variable was selected). In line with the study's original statement of the problem, it is assumed diffusion is not taking place within organizations, and the null hypotheses note there should be no expected difference in the responses of men and women.

Research Question 3

H₀₁: Female participants will not assess higher levels of relative advantage in the course materials versus male participants.

H₁: Female participants will assess higher levels of relative advantage in the course materials versus male participants.

H₀₂: Female participants will not assess higher levels of compatibility in the course materials versus male participants.

H₂: Female participants will assess higher levels of compatibility in the course materials versus male participants.

H₀₃: Female participants will not assess higher levels of trialability in the course materials versus male participants.

H₃: Female participants will assess higher levels of trialability in the course materials versus male participants.

H₀₄: Female participants will not assess higher levels of observability in the course materials versus male participants.

H₄: Female participants will assess higher levels of observability in the course materials versus male participants.

H₀₅: Female participants will not assess lower levels of complexity in the course materials versus male participants.

H₅: Female participants will assess lower levels of complexity in the course materials versus male participants.

IRB Approval

Prior to data collection, approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville, Arkansas was received on 03/01/2021 (See Appendix D). The data collection process for this study commenced on 03/22/2021. Survey respondents were informed their participation was voluntary, their answers would remain confidential to the extent possible, and participation could be withdrawn at any time during the process. Consent was obtained from all participants.

Research Design

This study utilized a mixed methods approach—presenting qualitative findings in conjunction with quantitative data. One of the most common uses of mixed methods research is through the utilization of surveys followed by one-on-one interviews with participants (Patton, 2015). Because impacts from COVID-19 limited the sample size available for a survey, volunteers were sought among survey respondents to participate in individual interviews with the researcher. This allowed for more in-depth examination of the survey results, providing both statistics and commentary from the employees' responses.

The researcher pursued quantitative information through the collection of online survey data following the two-day capstone sales and ethics training class. Surveys provide a descriptive

solution, allowing participants to self-report the application of training in their work environment and demonstrate their attitudes with a given subject matter. Online instruments provide researchers with quick access to information, and participants also maintain ease of access and convenience in providing their responses at their preferred place and time (Swanson & Holton, 2005). Surveys have been utilized throughout the current body of research in studies addressing ethical-related concerns (Kurland, 1995; Longenecker & Fink, 2008; Selart & Johansen, 2011; Forquesato, 2016) and in studies applying diffusion of innovations theory (Kim, et al., 2018).

Despite their ease of use and proliferation, survey instruments have disadvantages that must be considered. While surveys give participants the benefit of self-reporting, this means of obtaining information can result in biased, influenced, or inaccurate responses (Kirk, 1995). Many industries have experienced survey fatigue because of the popularity the platform has garnered in recent history (Swanson & Holton, 2005), and a lackluster response rate can negatively impact external validity (Russ-eft & Preskill, 2009). There are also concerns with ensuring data is privacy-protected in an online arena that experiences ongoing threats to steal information (Swanson & Holton, 2005). Reliability and/or validity could be questioned if respondents interpret questions differently or allow another individual to access the online portal and provide responses in their place (Russ-eft & Preskill, 2009).

The goal of this study was not to interpret the survey results to define an ethics training protocol as effectual or encourage a particular program design as a preferred method for teaching ethics to employees. The focus was to determine the level of relative advantage, compatibility, trialability, observability, and complexity participants perceived in the information presented in the ethics training. The perceived level of each of these innovation-related characteristics was

compared to participants' intentions to implement ethical standards in their places of work to identify possible relationships in the data.

Setting and Participants

To recreate the setting where many of the publicized ethics scandals of the past occurred, a business entity in the finance and accounting sector was selected. This industry was also chosen because of its substantial role in the events of the Great Recession and the ongoing attempts by federal and state governments to regulate and delineate ethical behaviors. The selected business represented a mid-sized firm with more than 5,000 employees from a twelve-state area within the United States.

Participants were sales team members who completed the capstone sales and ethics course, representing the target population of approximately 2,000 employees. Using a free tool on [surveymonkey.com](https://www.surveymonkey.com), a sample size of 323 was calculated representing a confidence level of 95% and margin of error of 5%. However, due to restrictions from COVID-19, obtaining this sample size was not possible within the given time constraints. Although all frontline employees were required to enroll in the two-day capstone course within their 120-day introductory period, hiring restrictions as a result of the pandemic limited the organization's ability to offer classes and enroll participants. Two or three sessions were available per month in a virtual classroom setting with a maximum capacity of 30 employees per session. As a result, the target sample size was reduced to 66 to represent a 90% confidence level and 10% margin of error.

Three steps were utilized to determine study participants:

1. Obtain a copy of the sales and ethics capstone training rosters.
2. Verify the email addresses of participants.

3. Estimate the number of responses needed for an error rate of 5% at a confidence level of 95% (later reduced to a 10% error rate at a 90% confidence level).

The class rosters were obtained through the learning platform, and 14 sessions were offered during a six-month period. Names and email addresses of participants were verified through the organization's intranet directory with a total of 315 employees enrolling in the training course. After email addresses were obtained, all enrolled employees received a request to complete a questionnaire following completion of the training class, resulting in a convenience sample for the researcher. All employees were included regardless of work status (i.e., full-time, reduced-time, part-time, seasonal). Employees participating in the study completed the informed consent form (Appendix C).

Because diversity has been noted as a potential influencer in ethics, the class roster was also reviewed for demographic measures that could serve as independent variables. Because of the impacts of the pandemic on hiring, the sample pool was limited from a demographic perspective. Because most participants were white (non-Hispanic), race and ethnicity were excluded as potential factors. However, gender provided heterogeneity in the sample group and was translated into hypotheses used to test research question three.

Many of the published ethics scandals occurred in Fortune 500 organizations. The number of employees at Fortune 500 companies varies significantly between hundreds and millions of people (fortune.com/fortune500). Because the business entity in this research has fewer employees than most Fortune 500 companies and the researcher was targeting at least 66 received responses from a pool of 315 potential participants, three attempts were made to follow up with employees to ensure the highest response rate possible. At the end of the six-month data

collection period, 115 surveys were started with 47 responses received for a completion rate of 41%.

Survey respondents were asked if they would be willing to sit for a one-on-one interview with the researcher. The target number of interviewees was set at a minimum of 10 and a maximum of 20. Nine respondents volunteered for the interview on the survey, and three responded to the calendar invitations and provided feedback. Three of the volunteers did not respond to calendar invitations or email requests sent within three days of completing the survey. Three respondents confirmed interest in the interview process via email but did not follow through in attending the one-on-one discussions. In a final effort to increase interview participation, the researcher sent an email invitation at the end of the six-month period to the 44 participants who did not take part in the one-on-one discussions. No one in this group of 44 responded to the final request.

Instrumentation

Rogers (2003) acknowledged the work of Gary C. Moore and Izak Benbasat (1991) in developing a framework to measure the relative advantage, compatibility, trialability, observability, and complexity of innovations in information technology. Although his individual preference was to encourage researchers to develop their own measures specific to their area of study, Rogers noted the work of Moore and Benbasat could be utilized in subsequent investigations of diffusion and adapted to a variety of fields (Rogers, 2003). This study chose to use the constructs created by Moore and Benbasat. The questions in Appendix A were taken directly from the work of Moore and Benbasat (1991) as published in *Information Systems Research*.

Moore and Benbasat (1991) included 44 questions in their original published instrument examining diffusion of innovations. They also expanded the number of diffusion-related attributes from Rogers' original five to eight. The new attributes of result demonstrability, voluntariness, and image were added in their scale items in an effort to further clarify and measure Rogers' five characteristics. These additional attributes were not removed from the survey due to potential impacts in the reliability and validity of the instrument.

Moore and Benbasat confirmed the validity and reliability of their work through a series of sorting and pilot tests involving various panels of judges. Moore and Benbasat noted the instrument could be adapted to a smaller format of 25 questions if a shorter survey was desired without likely impacts to reliability and validity. They concluded the shortened survey would likely be reliable and valid because the deletions would have a negligible effect on the ALPHA scores of each measure. These measures are included in Table 3.

Table 3
ALPHA Coefficients of Short Scales

Construct	Number of Survey Questions	ALPHA
Relative Advantage	5	0.90
Compatibility	3	0.86
Ease of Use	4	0.84
Result Demonstrability	4	0.79
Image	3	0.79
Visibility	2	0.83
Trialability	2	0.71
Voluntariness	2	0.82
Total Survey Questions	25	

Because survey fatigue has been noted as a negative factor impacting response rates (Russ-eft & Preskill, 2009), the shortened format was employed to incent respondents to participate. A copy of the questionnaire, organized by attribute, is included in Appendix A.

Data Collection

Data collection began a few weeks following IRB approval and ended six months later at the end of September. Respondents used a seven-point Likert scale to record their answers, ranging from 1 to indicate a response of strongly disagree to 7 for a response of strongly agree. The questionnaire was administered to employees using UA Qualtrics software. This software is free to use for doctoral students at the University of Arkansas.

Two of the qualitative interviews were conducted and recorded via zoom. These interactions were also audio-recorded utilizing voice notes on the researcher's mobile phone—providing a backup of the information in the event of errors with the zoom recording. The interviews were transcribed the following day. The third qualitative interview was conducted via phone at the interviewee's request. This engagement was also audio-recorded utilizing voice notes on the researcher's mobile device and transcribed the following day. To address credibility, the researcher encouraged open communication by reminding interviewees responses would not be shared with their supervisors. The participants were also prompted to speak freely because no right answers were being sought in the discussion. A listing of the questions utilized in the qualitative interviews is included in Appendix B.

Data Analysis

For research questions one and four, no statistical analysis was required. A listing of the applicable courses and their attendance requirements was crafted for question one. For question four, a listing of the ethics control structures (outside of training) was compiled as well as metrics utilized in performance appraisals for frontline sales positions.

For research question two, the mean and standard deviation were tabulated for each of the five innovation characteristics. The mean was reviewed and included due to the potential for

central tendency bias often present in Likert scale responses. To better understand how the data from the survey could be utilized, the researcher conducted a Proquest search for articles related to Moore and Benbasat's model in practical use. Despite searching for keywords including "Moore and Benbasat", "model", and "survey", available sources were exceptionally limited. Because the researcher could not locate an appropriate point of reference, the data was analyzed against Rogers' assumptions that higher levels of relative advantage, compatibility, trialability, and observability as well as lower levels of complexity would be present if diffusion were occurring. Mean scores above 4 were assumed to signify higher levels of a characteristic because they translated to some level agreement per the Likert scale. Mean scores below 4 were assumed to signify lower levels of a characteristic because they translated to some level of disagreement per the Likert scale. The frequencies of the innovation characteristics were also included.

For research question three, the independent variable was gender, and the dependent variables were relative advantage, compatibility, trialability, observability, and complexity. After the data was collected, the p-value, Cohen's d, gender means, and standard deviation were calculated for two of the gender groups. Consistent with research question two, the mean was reviewed and included to evaluate for the potential for central tendency bias. In determining the best statistical test for the study, the following criteria were considered: the study examined differences between groups of one or more variables, the same participants were only tested once, and the gender categorization provided two groups for analysis. Based on these assumptions and the relatively small sample size, a ranked t-test was selected for use.

It is noted two respondents were removed from the evaluation of research question three. One participant noted their gender as non-binary/third gender. One participant preferred not to answer the question. Because each of these gender categorizations only contained one response,

there was insufficient data to include in the final analysis and comparison with the other two groups.

For the qualitative data, the interviews were transcribed with labels and themes added to the different phrases of the participants' responses as comments in the margins. These comments were checked for patterns or close similarities to identify content of potential significance. The data was then set aside for three days. The researcher came back and completed the process again, adding labels and themes to the participant's comments. The two rounds of coding were compared, labels and themes were combined into a single set of information, and the results were contrasted against the quantitative data from the surveys.

Chapter IV

RESULTS

This chapter represents the findings of the mixed methods study, investigating how ethics training impacts the diffusion of ethical standards throughout an organization using Rogers' diffusion of innovations theory. The research examined the five innovation characteristics of relative advantage, compatibility, trialability, observability, and complexity. This section first reviews the demographic characteristics of associates participating in the 25-question survey. Next, results are articulated for each of the four research questions.

Demographic Characteristics

For the quantitative portion of the research, 315 online surveys were distributed to 14 sections of the capstone class facilitated during the spring and summer months. There were 115 surveys started and 47 submitted for a completion rate of 41%. The 68 incomplete surveys did not progress beyond the participant consent question. This level of response fell short of the researcher's revised goal of 66 completed surveys and even farther from the original desired sample size of 323. Because the sample size did not meet the projected benchmark, it could not be assumed the data was representative of the population. However, despite the small survey size, total surveys collected did exceed 30 ($n > 30$), leaving the assumption of a normally distributed dataset intact.

Respondents were invited to provide demographic data following the completion of the 25 survey questions. Gender, age, level of education, sales experience, and prior ethics training were the five items selected for measurement. Responses were voluntary, and participants were given the option to not disclose. Tables 4 through 8 provide a visual representation of this data. Among the 47 participants, 30% were male and 66% were female.

Two-thirds of respondents were under the age of 40, while almost 80% had participated in some level of post-secondary education. Roughly four in five participants had no more than five years of sales experience with 53% acknowledging prior ethics training. While all questions noted at least one individual electing to not disclose a category, the question related to exposure to previous ethics training appeared anomalous. This question saw the highest number of participants eliciting a preference to not disclose, five times higher than all but one of the other demographic questions.

Table 4
Gender Representation of Survey Respondents

Gender	Participant Number	Participant Percentage
Male	14	29.79%
Female	31	65.95%
Non-binary/third gender	1	2.13%
Prefer not to disclose	1	2.13%
	47	100.00%

Table 5
Age Representation of Survey Respondents

Age	Participant Number	Participant Percentage
18-25 years	18	38.30%
26-39 years	18	38.30%
40-55 years	9	19.14%
56 years or higher	1	2.13%
Prefer not to disclose	1	2.13%
	47	100.00%

Table 6
Education Level of Survey Respondents

Level of Education	Participant Number	Participant Percentage
High School	9	19.14%
Some College/Specialized Training	19	40.43%
Bachelor's Degree	17	36.17%
Master's Degree or Higher	1	2.13%
Prefer not to disclose	1	2.13%
	47	100.00%

Table 7
Sales Experience of Survey Respondents

Years of Experience	Participant Number	Participant Percentage
Less than one year	17	36.17%
1-5 years	20	42.56%
6-10 years	4	8.51%
More than 10 years	3	6.38%
Prefer not to disclose	3	6.38%
	47	100.00%

Table 8
Experience with Prior Ethics Training among Survey Respondents

Attended an Ethics Course	Participant Number	Participant Percentage
Yes	25	53.19%
No	17	36.17%
Prefer not to disclose	5	10.64%
	47	100.00%

Research Questions & Results

As a mixed-methods study, the research employed qualitative and quantitative data. Research questions one and four employed information the researcher gathered through approved access to the organization's learning management platform and intranet. Research questions two and three utilized data gleaned from post-class surveys and one-on-one interviews with three class participants.

Research Question One

RQ1: What is the financial organization doing, through its educational efforts, to motivate customer-facing employees and hold them accountable to be ethical in their sales practices?

For all associates within their first year of employment, five training courses were listed as standard requirements. These classes were facilitated by an instructor in-person or in a virtual classroom setting. Coursework was automatically assigned by job title via the corporate learning platform. Managers were responsible for incorporating these classes into associates' work schedules.

The initial offering of the five courses was an orientation for new team members covering the basic expectations for all job roles, concurrent with the first week of employment. Course content included a review of the company's mission and vision, general compensation and benefits package, important contacts to remember, and an iteration of fundamental expectations from the code of ethics policy and associate handbook. It was typically facilitated by a member of the human resources team.

The second course focused on customer service and how to process client requests. There were five versions of this class available, dependent on the specific job role of the associate and the types of client requests handled by a given job role. Content assisted associates in becoming

familiar with the organization's technology platforms, accurately handling initial requests, offering additional help as needed, and stressing the ethical importance of the confidentiality of client data. The course was facilitated by a member of the corporate training team.

All associates were required to attend a third and fourth course centered on diversity, equity, and inclusion. Curricula touched on the benefits of diversity in crafting an innovative and productive workforce, promoting better understanding of individuals' perspectives, acknowledging bias, and supporting the needs of communities within the organization's trade territory. The content addressed diversity from the stance of associates and clients. The initial diversity course was required within the employee's introductory period, while the second class was required by the one-year anniversary date. This course was taught by the corporate training team with support from the office of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

The fifth course was the capstone sales and ethics course required of associates across all lines of business. As with the diversity courses, this class brought employees together from across the organization. Topics included the company's value statements, mission, and vision. It emphasized the code of conduct expected of all employees and provided an evaluation of participants through a standardized personality test. The goal of the personality testing was to provide associates perspective on their behaviors and thought processes and their potential impacts on peer, manager, and client interactions and relationships. Facilitation originated from the corporate training team.

In addition to the instructor-led courses, e-learning was a secondary component of the organization's required education platform. Online modules centered on the federal and state regulations that applied to entities within the finance industry were to be completed by associates at their workstation. Employees were automatically enrolled in two or three lessons each quarter,

and these courses were part of a rotating annual curriculum, serving as a reminder of the expected compliance with the laws governing the organization's operations.

Outside of prescribed coursework, associates had access to elective training classes that could be completed during downtime. For example, one class focused on the driving principles for appropriate conduct on-the-job. Two additional classes addressed relationships with peers and interactions with customers. These offerings outlined avenues to navigate situations that were difficult, unfamiliar, or rare in occurrence and engaged participants with a variety of real-life scenarios.

Completion of the instructor-led courses and e-learning modules was tracked via the company's learning management system. A team of managers overseeing the training function provided reporting to human resources managers and local department heads. The information reported by the training managers filtered into the performance appraisals of division managers and human resources managers with a minimum expectation of 90% of associates completing required training by the assigned deadlines.

Research Question Two

RQ2: Which innovation characteristics (e.g., relative advantage, compatibility, trialability, observability, and complexity) were influenced by the organization's capstone sales and ethics training course?

Quantitative Data. Fourteen sections of the course were identified to receive the survey across a six-month period. The total number of class participants was 315. All 315 participants received the survey. Qualtrics revealed 115 participants clicked on the survey, but only 47 participants completed the survey. Non-respondents were contacted several times, and additional

sections were added to try and increase the response rate. Table 9 provides a breakdown of the survey completion rates by session.

Table 9
Survey Completion by Class Section

Class Section	Surveys Distributed	Surveys Started	Surveys Completed
Section 1	26	7	2
Section 2	20	8	5
Section 3	26	11	7
Section 4	26	5	2
Section 5	20	6	1
Section 6	18	5	1
Section 7	23	9	3
Section 8	19	5	1
Section 9	25	10	5
Section 10	23	10	4
Section 11	29	12	5
Section 12	20	8	4
Section 13	18	7	2
Section 14	22	12	5
Total	315	115	47

Respondents answered the 25-question survey utilizing a seven-point Likert scale. Ratings included strongly disagree (1 point), disagree (2 points), somewhat disagree (3 points), neither agree or disagree (4 points), somewhat agree (5 points), agree (6 points), and strongly agree (7 points). Tables 10 through 16 present the mean, standard deviation, and frequencies for the responses to each question. The far-right column of the table identifies the diffusion attribute associated with each question. Moore and Benbasat (1991) used eight attributes, three more than the original five attributes of Rogers (2003). Their research also utilized different terms for some of the attributes, referencing “ease of use” to denote complexity and “visibility” to denote observability.

Table 10
Survey Score Averages by Question

Question Number	Mean	S/D	Diffusion Attribute
1	5.23	1.37	Relative Advantage
2	5.53	1.40	Relative Advantage
3	5.51	1.37	Relative Advantage
4	5.55	1.27	Relative Advantage
5	5.45	1.30	Relative Advantage
6	5.64	1.51	Compatibility
7	5.77	1.28	Compatibility
8	5.68	1.31	Compatibility
9	5.04	1.61	Image
10	5.06	1.41	Image
11	5.11	1.70	Image
12	5.85	1.09	Ease of Use (Complexity)
13	5.81	1.21	Ease of Use (Complexity)
14	6.15	0.82	Ease of Use (Complexity)
15	5.96	1.11	Ease of Use (Complexity)
16	5.66	1.17	Result Demonstrability
17	5.47	1.15	Result Demonstrability
18	5.70	1.13	Result Demonstrability
19	3.67	1.81	Result Demonstrability
20	5.52	1.21	Visibility (Observability)
21	2.87	1.85	Visibility (Observability)
22	5.26	1.17	Trialability
23	4.77	1.67	Trialability
24	2.57	1.74	Voluntariness
25	3.23	1.87	Voluntariness

Table 11
Survey Score Averages for Relative Advantage and Image

Question Number	Mean	S/D	Diffusion Attribute
1	5.23	1.37	Relative Advantage
2	5.53	1.40	Relative Advantage
3	5.51	1.37	Relative Advantage
4	5.55	1.27	Relative Advantage
5	5.45	1.30	Relative Advantage
9	5.04	1.61	Image
10	5.06	1.41	Image
11	5.11	1.70	Image
Combined Average:	5.31	1.42	

Table 12
Survey Score Averages for Compatibility

Question Number	Mean	S/D	Diffusion Attribute
6	5.64	1.51	Compatibility
7	5.77	1.28	Compatibility
8	5.68	1.31	Compatibility
Combined Average:	5.70	1.37	

Table 13
Survey Score Averages for Trialability and Voluntariness

Question Number	Mean	S/D	Diffusion Attribute
22	5.26	1.17	Trialability
23	4.77	1.67	Trialability
25	3.23	1.87	Voluntariness
Combined Average:	4.42	1.57	
24	2.57	1.74	Voluntariness *scale reversed

Table 14
Survey Score Averages for Observability and Result Demonstrability

Question Number	Mean	S/D	Diffusion Attribute
16	5.66	1.17	Result Demonstrability
17	5.47	1.15	Result Demonstrability
18	5.70	1.13	Result Demonstrability
20	5.52	1.21	Visibility (Observability)
Combined Average:	5.59	1.17	
19	3.67	1.81	Result Demonstrability *scale reversed
21	2.87	1.85	Visibility (Observability) *scale reversed
Combined Average:	3.27	1.83	

Table 15
Survey Score Averages for Complexity

Question Number	Mean	S/D	Diffusion Attribute
12	5.85	1.09	Ease of Use (Complexity)
13	5.81	1.21	Ease of Use (Complexity)
14	6.15	0.82	Ease of Use (Complexity)
15	5.96	1.11	Ease of Use (Complexity)
Combined Average:	5.94	1.06	

Table 16
Response Frequencies by Question

Question Number	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Diffusion Attribute
1	1	2	1	8	11	17	7	Relative Advantage
2	1	2	1	3	12	16	12	Relative Advantage
3	1	2	0	5	11	17	11	Relative Advantage
4	1	2	0	2	12	22	8	Relative Advantage
5	1	2	0	4	13	19	8	Relative Advantage
6	1	2	2	4	6	16	16	Compatibility
7	1	0	1	6	6	18	15	Compatibility
8	1	1	0	6	7	19	13	Compatibility
9	1	3	4	9	9	10	11	Image
10	0	2	4	13	6	14	8	Image
11	1	5	2	9	4	15	11	Image
12	0	1	1	3	7	22	13	Ease of Use
13	0	2	0	4	8	18	15	Ease of Use
14	0	0	0	2	7	20	18	Ease of Use
15	0	1	1	2	8	18	17	Ease of Use
16	0	2	0	3	14	16	12	Result
17	0	1	1	8	10	19	8	Demonstrability
18	0	1	2	2	11	20	11	Result
19	2	15	7	9	4	3	6	Demonstrability
20	0	1	1	9	7	18	10	Result
21	13	13	6	7	2	2	4	Visibility
22	0	1	2	8	15	13	7	Visibility
23	3	2	5	8	11	11	7	Trialability
24	17	12	4	9	1	1	3	Trialability
25	13	4	11	7	5	4	3	Voluntariness

The mean of each question's responses was evaluated for perceived general agreement or disagreement with the diffusion characteristic associated with that question. The underlying

assumption was an average greater than four would demonstrate some level of agreement with a higher perceived presence of an innovation attribute—excluding questions 19, 21, and 24. With these three questions, scores less than four would demonstrate agreement with a higher perceived presence of an innovation attribute. To summarize, mean scores higher than four (excluding questions 19, 21, and 24) would translate to the presence of diffusion for purposes of this initial research. The standard deviation and frequencies were included to ascertain the variability in the dataset.

Results by Innovation Characteristic

An explanation and breakdown of results by innovation characteristic for research question two follows.

Relative Advantage. Respondents scored relative advantage higher among the five associated questions ($M=5.45$, $SD=1.34$). Respondents scored the related attribute of image lower among the three associated questions ($M=5.07$, $SD=1.57$). When considering the frequencies, twice as many participants expressed some level of disagreement with image compared to relative advantage. However, mean scores were higher than four on both measures. Therefore, participants assessed higher levels of relative advantage in the course materials, indicating diffusion of ethical standards was likely occurring post-training.

Compatibility. The mean scores for this characteristic were found to be tightly clustered together. The average mean for the three associated questions was nearing 6 ($M=5.70$, $SD=1.37$). Five participants expressed disagreement with the attribute in one question, but only two expressed disagreement on the remaining related questions. This translated to 6.25% of respondents reflecting disagreement with compatibility. With mean values well above five,

participants assessed higher level of compatibility in the course materials, indicating diffusion of ethical standards was likely occurring post-training.

Trialability. Measurements for trialability were limited to two questions, and metrics for the distantly-related attribute of voluntariness were limited to two questions. The scoring for both reflected higher amounts of variability versus what was noted in the other attributes. For the first question related to trialability, the mean was above 5 ($M=5.26$, $SD=1.17$). However, the second question reflected a lower mean below 5 ($M=4.77$, $SD=1.67$). The results for voluntariness were even more varied. The scale for question 24 was reversed due to the inverse wording of the question, reflecting a mean below 3 ($M=2.57$, $SD=1.74$). The second voluntariness question produced the lowest mean among the 22 questions where the scale was not reversed and the highest standard deviation in the dataset ($M=3.23$, $SD=1.87$). Question 25 was also the only question in which respondents expressed an overall disagreement with the attribute. If only the trialability responses were considered, the means were greater than four, indicating diffusion was likely occurring post-training. However, because participants assessed lower levels of voluntariness (attribute added by Moore and Benbasat) in the course materials based on question 25, it could not be assumed diffusion of ethical standards was likely occurring post-training.

Observability. Visibility (observability) and its related attribute of result demonstrability displayed the largest extremes in responses within the data set. Questions 16, 17, 18, and 20 combined for a mean score well beyond 5 ($M=5.59$, $SD=1.17$), and just over 95% of the responses to these four questions reflected some level of agreement with visibility and result demonstrability. However, questions 19 and 21 elicited significantly different results. These questions were inversely worded, reversing the scale and interpretation of results. The two mean scores were below 4 with some of the highest standard deviations in the dataset ($M=2.87$,

SD=1.85 and M=3.67, SD=1.81). When reversing the scale, participants demonstrated approximately five times the level of disagreement in questions 19 and 21 compared to questions 16, 17, 18, and 20. However, because the means for questions 16, 17, 18, and 20 were higher than four and the means for questions 19 and 21 were lower than four, participants assessed higher levels of observability and result demonstrability in the course materials. Therefore, the diffusion of ethical standards was likely occurring post-training.

Complexity. The attribute of complexity was assessed from the standpoint of ease of use instead of how difficult the materials were to understand. Higher mean figures would dictate lower levels of complexity perceived by associates. Ease of use was rated highest of all attributes with the highest recorded mean and lowest standard deviation (M=6.15, SD=0.82). It was also the only attribute to garner a standard deviation score below one for a survey question. Almost 97% of responses expressed some level of agreement, and 75% of answers reflected a scoring of agree or strongly agree. These findings pointed to a strong level of agreement among participants and a high degree of ease of use. Therefore, the diffusion of ethical standards was likely occurring post-training.

Qualitative Data. While the original target was a minimum of 10 participants for one-on-one interviews, nine respondents provided permission and their email addresses to be contacted. When scheduling the interviews, six participants responded to the researcher's calendar invitations. Of the six participants who confirmed the one-on-one engagements, only three followed through with the appointment. Three respondents who initially provided permission for the one-on-one interviews did not respond to calendar invitations. The researcher made three separate attempts over the six-month period to contact these final three volunteers, but none of them responded.

The one-on-one interviewees included two male associates and one female. One of the participants was an industry veteran with 15 years of experience. The remaining participants were in their early 20s and just beginning their professional careers. Despite the disparity of experience and age, the interactions revealed similar responses to the capstone course. The similarity of responses revealed two key themes in the qualitative data. First, participants agreed the course was well suited in their introductory suite of training, serving as a means of establishing fundamental expectations for all employees. Second, the course underscored the importance of “communicating effectively and treating others well—whether it be peers, managers, or customers”.

The interviews provided perspective of multiple work groups and management styles because the respondents either traveled between different facilities and/or engaged with a variety of teams and their supervisors. All three interviewees noted the class was helpful in demonstrating effective communication and the building of rapport with the many individuals they engage with in their day-to-day responsibilities. This stemmed from possessing a clear understanding of the organization’s expectations in its mission and values including the importance of adhering to rules and regulations, embracing open communication and the open-door policy, and fostering an inclusive work environment.

One respondent noted the ethics class was important in this specific type of workplace setting. One of the participants had previous work experience with a different type of financial entity that provided similar services to its clients. The participant joined the current organization as a frontline sales associate and also serves in a supervisory role. The participant noted the ethics class clearly delineated the expected behaviors the organization set for its teams and would assist this individual in supporting and modeling the expected ethics behaviors for colleagues

and followers. The participant also noted an uncertainty around procedures following the ethics course. The participant mentioned an assumption could be made the participant's supervisor would have additional discussions with the participant about the class following its conclusion. Those discussions had not been mentioned or set up prior to taking the course.

The remaining participants stressed the importance of manager support and the opportunity to practice the concepts from the capstone course, referring to this aspect of learning as "crucial". Throughout the individual interviews, both participants continued to circle back to their current position in their career journeys and the limited experience they possessed. They referenced a need for their direct supervisors "to be available" when associates have questions about the material and a desire to see an environment crafted where "it is acceptable to practice and learn in small steps". One respondent went further in this dialogue, noting the reason for coming to work for the company was to help pay bills at home. Initially, the participant had not accepted or cared about the corporate culture and how the organizational leaders proposed to do things. However, as the participant transitioned through the training curriculum, the participant noted a personal mindset shift that more closely aligned the participant with the company's vision and values. At the conclusion of the capstone course, the participant better understood the organization's beliefs and wanted "an opportunity to learn and practice" those ideals on-the-job.

One concern that was noted by a participant was in the cadence of the training. The participant noted the intensity and pace at which associates were expected to learn and how "it can feel overwhelming at times". The participant was unsure how to effectively fit the expected quantity of required training courses into the daily routine. The participant noted the materials seemed easy to learn and understand and expressed a positive view of the organization overall.

The participant also felt like the choice to join the organization was the right choice because it was “a good company that maintained a positive culture” for associates.

Research Question Three

RQ3: Does gender affect the perceived impacts of the innovation characteristics on the diffusion of ethical standards to employees?

Demographic data was gathered at the end of the survey from participants who elected to disclose. Among the 47 respondents, there were 14 males, 31 females, one non-binary/third gender, and one preference not to disclose. The small sample size fell below the researcher’s initial target of 66. It also produced a sample with twice the number of female respondents as male respondents. However, the statistical power of the study remained intact with $n > 30$ (Hogg & Tanis, 2001).

The original intent of this study was to employ a t-test for independent samples to assess the gender-based data. However, to compensate for the limited dataset, the researcher transitioned to the utilization of a ranked t-test to determine if there was a statistically significant relationship between each question and responses based on gender. In these scenarios, ranked t-tests are more likely to produce accurate data due to the small sample size (Glass & Hopkins, 1996). Information is outlined in Table 17.

Table 17
Survey Response Analysis Based on Gender Using a Ranked t-test

Question Number	p-value	Effect Size (Cohen's d)	Male Mean	Female Mean	Statistically Significant
1	0.262	0.397	4.71	5.55	No
2	0.022	0.773	4.86	5.90	Yes
3	0.074	0.638	4.93	5.84	Yes
4	0.077	0.607	5.07	5.84	Yes
5	0.029	0.822	4.86	5.81	Yes
6	0.287	0.405	5.14	6.03	No
7	0.284	0.417	5.29	6.10	No
8	0.488	0.263	5.43	5.90	No
9	0.818	0.082	4.93	5.19	No
10	0.472	0.244	4.86	5.23	No
11	0.560	0.215	4.79	5.39	No
12	0.118	0.576	5.64	6.10	No
13	0.126	0.535	5.50	6.06	No
14	0.279	0.366	6.07	6.32	No
15	0.657	0.154	5.93	6.10	No
16	0.087	0.577	5.36	5.97	Yes
17	0.175	0.423	5.36	5.65	No
18	0.846	0.068	5.79	5.81	No
19	0.846	0.059	3.57	3.67	No
20	0.309	0.370	5.31	5.68	No
21	0.668	0.144	2.64	2.97	No
22	0.063	0.647	4.84	5.52	Yes
23	0.780	0.090	4.93	4.74	No
24	0.799	0.079	2.36	2.58	No
25	0.890	0.045	3.21	3.19	No

A p-value of 0.1 served as the evaluation benchmark

When comparing responses by gender, there was a statistically significant relationship found in six of the questions evaluating three attributes—relative advantage, observability, and trialability. Because of the small sample size, a p-value of 0.1 was utilized as the evaluation benchmark (Hogg & Tanis, 2001). The p-values for the six questions were all less than 0.1, pointing to results considered statistically significant for this research. The Cohen d results were

also the highest of the dataset, indicating a medium to large effect size. The larger effect sizes point to differences between the two groups that are statistically significant and material.

Hypothesis One: H_{01} : Female participants will assess similar levels of relative advantage in the course materials versus male participants.

H_1 : Female participants will assess higher levels of relative advantage in the course materials versus male participants.

The hypothesis was evaluated using a ranked t-test. The two smallest p-values ($p=0.022$ and $p=0.029$) and the two largest effect sizes ($d=0.822$ and $d=0.773$) in the data set were noted among the five questions pertaining to relative advantage. Four of the five questions evaluating this attribute demonstrated a significant relationship in the different responses between female and male participants. The values for the related attribute of image reflected a different result and did not assert a statistically significant relationship in the data. The p-values exceeded 0.1 ($0.472 \leq p \leq 0.818$). The effect sizes were small ($d=0.082, 0.244, \text{ and } 0.215$). However, because the results were significant for the four relative advantage questions and females assessed higher levels of relative advantage, the null hypothesis was rejected.

Hypothesis Two. H_{02} : Female participants will assess similar levels of compatibility in the course materials versus male participants.

H_2 : Female participants will assess higher levels of compatibility in the course materials versus male participants.

The hypothesis was evaluated using a ranked t-test. The p-values for the three questions related to compatibility were higher than 0.1 ($p \geq 0.284$). The Cohen's d values were less than 0.5 ($0.263 \leq d \leq 0.417$), marking a small to slightly modest effect size. The findings show support for

the null hypothesis and affirm no significant relationship to be found in the differences in participant responses based on gender.

Hypothesis Three. H_{03} : Female participants will assess similar levels of trialability in the course materials versus male participants.

H_3 : Female participants will assess higher levels of trialability in the course materials versus male participants.

The hypothesis was evaluated utilizing a ranked t-test. Question 22 reviewing trialability noted a statistically significant relationship in the data and moderate effect size ($p=0.063$, $d=0.647$). The remaining results were significantly different, reflecting large p-values ($p\geq 0.780$) and small effect sizes ($d<0.1$). Because females assessed higher levels of trialability in question 22, the null hypothesis was rejected.

Hypothesis Four. H_{04} : Female participants will assess similar levels of observability in the course materials versus male participants.

H_4 : Female participants will assess higher levels of observability in the course materials versus male participants.

The hypothesis was examined using a ranked t-test. Similar to trialability, one of the questions (16) evaluating result demonstrability pointed to a statistically significant relationship in the data ($p=0.087$, $d=0.577$). The remaining questions evaluating result demonstrability and visibility offered a disparity of p-values ($0.175\leq p\leq 0.846$) with effect sizes that were generally small except for two results ($d=0.370$ and $d=0.423$). Because the results for 16 reflected a statistically significant relationship and one of the larger effect sizes, the null hypothesis was rejected.

Hypothesis Five. H₀₅: Female participants will assess similar levels of complexity in the course materials versus male participants.

H₅: Female participants will assess lower levels of complexity in the course materials versus male participants.

The hypothesis was evaluated using a ranked t-test. As a data set, the responses to complexity (ease of use) reflected a wider range of p-values and effect sizes than some attributes. A couple of p-values were near 0.1 (p=0.118 and p=0.126) and boasted moderate effect sizes that were among the higher values in the dataset (d=0.576 and d=0.535). The remaining p-values demonstrated weaker relationships in the data with larger p-values (p=0.279 and p=0.657) and smaller effect sizes (d=0.366 and d=0.154). However, because all p-values were greater than 0.1, the relationship between the responses of male and female participants was not found to be statistically significant, and the null hypothesis was affirmed.

Research Question Four

RQ4: What compelling influences has the organization implemented to encourage compliance with the ethics principles outlined in the capstone sales and ethics course?

In a review of the company's performance management system, the annual evaluation form referenced four ethics-related metrics. The first metric focused on the sales performance of the employee, evaluating the overall volume of products sold measured against the product as an appropriate solution for the client. The second metric evaluated the associate in the level of operational proficiency, overall error rate, and completion of training coursework covering federal and state regulations. The third metric reviewed the overall level of judgment displayed during client and peer interactions. The fourth metric referenced adherence to policy and compliance with regulatory requirements.

A list of the organization's job descriptions and management hierarchy was obtained from the corporate intranet human resources site. There was no job title for an ethics officer, and no formal ethics office was found in the corporate directory. A search was later conducted to find job titles that potentially carried out ethics oversight functions for the organization. In this secondary investigation, three job titles of interest were located: compliance officer, chief risk officer, and director of audit. The compliance officer and chief risk officer roles were contained in one reporting structure while the audit function was contained in an independent reporting structure. Because corporate ethics scandals often center around financial gain for the individuals involved, a third search was conducted to determine the oversight of pay and compensation. A division governing how employees were compensated for sales and performance was uncovered, and this team was contained in a separate structure, reporting to the chief operations officer. In summary, three independent organizational divisions managed components of the ethics function—compliance and risk, audit, and general operations.

An additional search on the corporate intranet was undertaken to uncover ethics structures that were readily available to all employees. Digital copies of the code of ethics policy and associate handbook were accessible for download via the human resources site. An ethics hotline was posted on one of the front-facing intranet pages to provide ease of access, high visibility, and an outlet for associates to anonymously report concerning behavior. A portal was available to allow general associate feedback, focusing on comments and suggestions for how the organization could innovate and improve. Videos and articles authored by senior and executive leaders related to culture, current climate, diversity, social responsibility, and ethical fundamentals were also published and available for viewing.

A final influence in the organization's arsenal was one similar in idea to the feedback portal yet more targeted. Feedback was directly solicited from associates via email regarding the performance of peers and supervisors. An annual associate survey (given to a select portion of the associate population each year) provided an opportunity to discuss views of executive leadership, team leadership, and the overall climate, culture, and trajectory of the organization. Training surveys addressed the impacts of curricula and the skills needed for on-the-job performance. Ad hoc surveys throughout the year provided insight into organizational culture and current workplace concerns.

Chapter V

DISCUSSION

This mixed-methods study investigated how ethics training impacts the diffusion of ethical standards in a financial organization through the lens of diffusion of innovations theory. The research was narrowed to focus on frontline sales employees and their perception of the five innovation characteristics of relative advantage, compatibility, trialability, observability, and complexity found in the course materials of the organization's capstone sales and ethics course. The study also reviewed the three additional diffusion attributes of image, results demonstrability, and voluntariness used by Moore and Benbasat (1991) in their validated 25-question survey instrument.

Diffusion of innovations research was originated by Rogers in 2003 and has served as a catalyst for many different studies and new theory generation (Dearing & Cox, 2018). The study of ethics and business is not new. Headline grabbing research regarding business and ethics has been around for decades (Raymond, 1961). Despite the long histories of diffusion of innovations theory and ethics research, there was no contemporary work found in the literature that connected the two areas of research prior to this study.

The problem addressed in this research was inspired by the ongoing scandals that have continued to pommel corporate America. From a historical perspective, the visibility of ethical standards within organizations are not apparent despite the presence of ethics training. The only things that appear to be clear are the ethical failures of organizations. Training serves as a major conduit for tackling ethical issues at all levels of organizations, but there is no agreement in the current body of research reflecting the efficacy of organizational ethics training as an avenue to

diffuse ethical standards to members of the organization and influence their behaviors. The study engaged four research questions to address this problem:

1. What is the financial organization doing, through its educational efforts, to motivate customer-facing employees and hold them accountable to be ethical in their sales practices?
2. Which innovation characteristics (e.g., relative advantage, compatibility, trialability, observability, and complexity) were influenced by the organization's capstone sales and ethics training course?
3. Does gender affect the perceived impacts of the innovation characteristics on the diffusion of ethical standards to employees?
4. What compelling influences has the organization implemented to encourage compliance with the ethics principles outlined in the capstone sales and ethics course?

Research question three was further refined with the addition of five null hypotheses specifically noting how ethics training and the diffusion of ethical standards could be impacted by the five primary innovation characteristics (see null hypotheses throughout this paper).

Research Question 1

RQ1: What is the financial organization doing, through its educational efforts, to motivate customer-facing employees and hold them accountable to be ethical in their sales practices?

The organization employs a multi-faceted approach to learning by engaging participants with in-person, virtual, and web-based training applications. It is also multi-faceted from the standpoint of curricula requisite and frequency as some courses are completed only once during the initial first year of employment, some courses require completion on an ongoing, annual basis, and some courses are electives taken at the discretion of associates. This aligns with the

work of Medeiros et al. (2017) in the importance of addressing the training needs of individuals through an omni-delivery channel system.

Ritter (2006) noted many firms advocate for ethical concepts to be a common thread in a variety of training applications, while other practitioners urge a single course dedicated to ethics. Based on a basic evaluation of the curriculum content, it appears the company has adopted the first approach, weaving ethical concepts and expectations throughout its course offerings. This could aid in training transfer because Islam (2019) found that most training is not applied on-the-job or recalled by employees. Because the training team continues to teach a core set of principles and adherence to policies over time, this repetitiveness could be beneficial in generating greater recall of course materials by associates as well as application in the workplace.

Despite the perceived presence of adequate content in the available courses, awareness of available courses and ease of use of the company's learning management software are areas where additional information would have been useful. During the qualitative research, one of the interview participants noted the software tools available to associates "should be reviewed for possible updates because it does not appear state-of-the-art as compared to others encountered in a previous job" and during the participant's post-secondary education.

The training site is easily accessible for employees, located one click from the intranet's welcome page. The site provides links to the different areas of training and development available to team members. The organization's efforts align with Rogers' (1961) diffusion of innovation theory by using the training platform as a primary communication channel. However, an interviewee noted when trying to locate and enroll in classes, the search function within the learning management system was challenging to navigate, not intuitive to use, and "often

produced results that did not matter”. Because this system serves as a primary mechanism to educate associates on course offerings and availability, it may be a missed opportunity to fully support and create visibility around the organization’s educational efforts.

Research Question Two

RQ2: Which innovation characteristics (e.g., relative advantage, compatibility, trialability, observability, and complexity) were influenced by the organization’s capstone sales and ethics training course?

In the original statement of the problem, it was noted the ongoing corporate scandals in the United States point to a lack of dissemination of ethical standards within organizations. It was also noted training is viewed as a critical component of organizational strategy to tackle ethical concerns, yet consensus is lacking in its effectiveness. If diffusion is not occurring within organizations, a key indicator could be the absence of one or more of the innovation characteristics of relative advantage, compatibility, trialability, and observability and the presence of the characteristic of complexity. By using the survey instrument crafted and validated by Moore and Benbasat (1991), the research sought to uncover the levels of each diffusion attribute participants perceived in the training course content.

If diffusion is likely occurring, survey respondents would be expected to assess higher levels of relative advantage, compatibility, trialability, and observability and lower levels of complexity in their responses. One would also anticipate higher levels of image, result demonstrability, and voluntariness if diffusion is taking place. The mean scores for all questions supported this assertion except one. The exception displayed lower levels of perceived voluntariness in the application of the course principles. When addressed during the one-on-one interviews, the respondents noted this was a desired outcome because ethics fundamentals and

appropriate behavior among employees “should be [prescribed] by the organization and not optional”. One specifically noted a preference to conform to the organization’s expectations because this was an opportunity to gain needed experience in a professional work environment. For this individual, the organization provided the first opportunity to learn the basics of ethics in a business setting.

It is noted the study saw increased variation in the results for the characteristics attributed to Moore and Benbasat (1991) versus those advocated by Rogers (1961). Although the mean scores were not exceptionally different among the eight characteristics, the higher standard deviations in the dataset tended to be produced from the questions evaluating Moore and Benbasat’s attributes of image, result demonstrability, and voluntariness. The question evaluating voluntariness also produced the study’s only result that questioned the presence of diffusion. While interesting to note, the impacts of Rogers characteristics versus Moore and Benbasat’s additional three characteristics in evaluating the effectiveness of ethics training in the diffusion of ethics fundamentals is beyond the scope of this study.

Even with the small sample size of this study, the researcher did not anticipate respondents to assess higher levels of relative advantage, compatibility, trialability, observability, image, results demonstrability, and voluntariness and lower levels of complexity across all but one survey question. This pattern does not lend support to the idea that the diffusion of ethical standards is not occurring within organizations. If this is truly the case, the data points to new questions. If training applications are an effective means of disseminating ethical standards, what is limiting their ability to elicit ethical behavior in the workforce? If ethical standards are diffusing as a result of training applications, what is the root cause of ongoing scandals and

unacceptable behaviors within corporations? If training applications are an effective means of diffusion, can they be considered a primary channel of communication?

Research Question Three

RQ3: Does gender affect the perceived impacts of the innovation characteristics on the diffusion of ethical standards to employees?

This study reviewed the potential impacts of gender in the dispersion of ethical standards because the current body of research is inconclusive in its determination of gender as a driver of ethical decisioning. Hadjicharalambous & Shi (2015) noted gender's impacts on ethics has been given ongoing attention by researchers, but study results have presented cases on both sides of this argument. Hughes and Byrd (2015) and Jones et al. (2013) discussed the diversity transformation in the United States and across the globe. With women making up a larger portion of the modern workforce, their influence on ethical behaviors and attitudes in the workplace will continue to increase and should garner a greater amount of attention in research circles.

The data for research question three reflected an uneven number of responses among males and females. Over two-thirds of surveys originated from women. When reviewing the demographic information from the overall sample of 315 employees, the number of female participants stood at approximately 60%. This translated to an increased likelihood of more female participants completing the survey versus male participants.

The hypotheses were structured in line with theoretical outcomes supporting the idea that females tend to be more ethical than males. Under this assumption, it was expected women would assess higher levels of relative advantage, compatibility, trialability, observability, image, result demonstrability, and voluntariness and lower levels of complexity. The study's dataset supported a portion of the researcher's assumptions, noting a statistical difference in responses by gender for three of the attributes—relative advantage, trialability, and observability. It is also

noted that almost all questions reflected a higher mean score for female respondents versus male respondents, regardless of statistical significance.

From a gender perspective, these results again point to a divergence in how respondents rated Rogers' (1961) five characteristics compared to the three additional characteristics of Moore and Benbasat (1991). All but one of the questions producing a significant statistical relationship were connected with one of Rogers' original attributes. Only one was related to an attribute identified by Moore and Benbasat. However, evaluating the effectiveness of Rogers' five characteristics versus the eight advocated by Moore and Benbasat to predict the diffusion of ethical principles is not addressed by this study.

Research Question Four

RQ4: What compelling influences has the organization implemented to encourage compliance with the ethics principles outlined in the capstone sales and ethics course?

The organization's ethical structures and practices were in line with those of research and industry standards. Weaver and Treviño (2001) discussed the practice of codifying guidelines, and the organization possessed a formal code of ethics requiring associate acknowledgement. Bastons et al. (2017) referenced motivational theory via mission statements, vision, and corporate policies as a means to persuade employees to behave in a prescribed manner. The organization had developed and implemented each of these items. Huselid (1995) and Martin (2010) spoke of the role of human resources practitioners, and how performance metrics, compensation tools, and ongoing evaluation can positively impact motivation and learning retention. Again, the company was aligned and had set in place a prescribed performance management system that included job expectations, definitions of performance metrics, and tools to understand pay, incentives, and benefits.

A potential area of opportunity was found in the corporate governance structure for ethics. Weaver and Treviño (2001) noted the presence of formal ethics offices in many firms. However, the organization did not possess a formal office of ethics or have a titled ethics officer on staff. Instead, the responsibilities were shared across multiple lines of business in a shared governance structure, marginally in the same vein as the ethics committees mentioned by Singh et al. (2018). A potential benefit to this structure could be similar to what is seen in the federal government—a group of “branches” administering ethics together, providing checks and balances in the work and oversight being performed. However, Singh et al. (2018) postulated a formal ethics office sends a strong message in ethics governance by forging a visible symbol for associates and leaders to see. It can serve as a tangible means to communicate and demonstrate the importance of ethics from executive leadership. Executive leaders through ethical leadership modeling are responsible for crafting the protocols and ideals of the organization according to Mo & Shi (2017), and the incorporation of a formal ethics office in conjunction with the pre-existing structure could serve as an avenue to further solidify the organization’s ethical foundation.

Limitations

The predominant concern limiting this study was the small sample size. The researcher originally targeted a sample size of 323, representing a confidence level of 95% and margin of error of 5%. However, implications from COVID-19 meant the organization was operating at reduced capacity levels of staffing and lacked the ability to bring on huge swaths of talent because of a pandemic-induced shortage of labor within its trade territories. As a result, the targeting sample size was reduced to 66, representing a confidence level of 90% and margin of error of 10%. After six months of survey data collection and ongoing reminders to participants

encouraging completion of the survey, the final tally of responses only reached 47. The response rate also fell short with the one-on-one interviews. The initial goal was to interview ten participants, but only three interviews were able to be conducted within the six-month timeframe. Multiple requests and reminders were forwarded to respondents to increase engagement, but the researcher was unable to increase interview participation to ten.

A second limitation was the overall setup of the study. The lack of a control group was a negative impact, eliminating a potential means of evaluating and comparing the effects of the training treatment. The number of female participants also outnumbered male participants by more than a factor of two-to-one. In reviewing the organization's overall demographic data, it was noted this was in line with the overall trend of female employees representing just over 65% of the company's workforce. Assuming this trend would hold with future groups of incoming new hires, surveying additional class sections would likely not improve the ratio of male to female responses.

A third potential limiting factor was additional impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic beyond a shortage of labor. The full effects of COVID-19 were not immediately clear. The researcher discovered many organizations within his center of influence were unwilling to participate in research studies during this time, instead focusing their resources on maintaining operations and navigating an environment of uncertainty. It is unclear if the environment the pandemic created affected the responses of participants in this study and the willingness of class attendees to volunteer for the study. As uncovered by research question four, the organization where the study was conducted operated under a heavy reliance of surveys and feedback requests. In a conversation with the director of communications, it was noted the pandemic resulted in an even greater than normal dependence on surveys. This was due to a significant

decrease in in-person interactions because of the high number of associates working remotely for most of 2020. This continued into 2021 when this study was conducted. A higher volume of feedback requests could have contributed to survey fatigue and lessened employees' willingness to take part in the survey and interviews.

A fourth limitation was the course under evaluation. The capstone sales and ethics course offered an opportunity to engage with employees within their first year of employment to gain a fresh and unbiased perspective of the organization. However, as indicated by the course name, the content was not solely devoted to ethics. It blended ethical concepts with additional topics such as company culture and sales expectations. While these areas are inter-related, a course solely dedicated to the study of ethics would have been preferred by the researcher to produce more refined data. As is, the study results could be attributed to one of the additional topics instead of ethics. A secondary item of concern with the course was its delivery method. The capstone sales and ethics course was only delivered in a virtual classroom setting due to COVID-19 restrictions. The impacts of e-learning as the selected training solution was not evaluated in this study.

Implications for Human Resources and Workforce Development

Swanson and Holton (2009) stressed the importance of theoretical fundamentals and theory development to advance the cause of human resource development. They advocated for ongoing advancement of theory to keep the field from stagnating or becoming grounded and unable to advance as needed. As a new line of research that fills a vacancy in the current body of work, this study's focus on diffusion of innovations provides an additional lens for human resource professionals to view and understand ethics training efficacy. Opponents of training effectiveness often point to anemic theoretical fundamentals (Wells & Schminke, 2001), and

equipping human resource practitioners with a mainstream theory like diffusion of innovations would weaken those arguments.

In spite of this study's limited sample size, participant responses pointed to the presence of relative advantage, compatibility, trialability, and observability and absence of complexity in the ethics training content. These results, in addition to the existence of an omni-delivery training platform and ethical structures such as a code of ethics policy, ethics hotline, and ethical components to the performance management system, increase the likelihood the diffusion of ethics fundamentals is occurring within the organization. If future studies also confirm diffusion is taking place, this work will inform the response of human resource and workforce development experts to focus on several areas with tiebacks to many of the topics and theories discussed in chapter two.

Ethics Training Platform Design. If diffusion is occurring, human resource professionals must ask what information is being dispersed within the workforce. An examination of ethics course content will be critical to consistently convey the organization's vision and expectations. However, this has proven to be a challenge as companies do not agree in how to define ethics and approach curriculum design (Medeiros et al., 2017). The researcher also advocates the importance of content delivery to meet the needs of an ever evolving, diverse, and often remote workforce, with a focus on omni-delivery solutions. Sekerka (2009) acknowledged the variety of widely available options to companies and trainers to infuse ethics education with their corporate cultures and visions.

Motivational and Accountability Theories. If diffusion is occurring, human resource professionals must evaluate how to incent employees and leaders to adopt the organization's ethical ideals. Companies must be cognizant and intentional in how the message of

accountability aligns with the interests of the employer and employee. The outcomes and consequences of motivational tools such as incentives must be evaluated in an ongoing manner, leaving the opportunity to engage in a course correction if avenues meant to motivate and elicit accountability produce an opposing result (Pendse, 2012). In addition, this focus on accountability should inform the extent to which ethics should be included in performance evaluations.

Cognitive dissonance theory (CDT) and self-determination theory (SDT) could help inform human resource teams in possible outcomes for the adoption of ethical standards. CDT evaluations the motivation of an individual to modify his or her belief system or behaviors (Lavergne & Pelletier, 2016). Self-determination theory (SDT) operates in tandem with CDT, evaluating the impacts of rewards and image in motivating a person to align his or her actions with the organization's value system (Lavergne & Pelletier, 2016).

Ethical Leadership Modeling. Similar to motivational and accountability theories, ethical leadership modeling can be a tool to employ to convince employees to embrace ethical standards. Human resource and workforce development must have a strong voice and direct access to organizational leadership. Training programs will not have the desired impacts if those in positions of authority do not embrace a mindset of ethical leadership modeling (Maniam & Teetz, 2005). Leadership roles often place individuals in the spotlight (Brown et al., 2005), and that spotlight informs employees of the organization's focus on procedural justice through the leaders' actions. Procedural justice forges a bond between employer and employee by amplifying commonly held views of the two, improving individual performance and adherence to desired corporate standards (Leasure, 2016). Human resource and workforce development teams can serve as the communication point to bridge this gap between leadership accountability and the

resulting impacts to frontline performance (MacKenzie et al., 2012). In this scenario, the organization, its leaders and employees, and the field of human resources wins.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study was the first of its kind examining ethics training efficacy through the lens of diffusion of innovations theory and the five innovation characteristics of relative advantage, compatibility, trialability, observability, and complexity. Because the study was limited by a low response rate, reproducing this study in another corporate entity with a larger population and a different ethics course could provide more definitive data. The addition of a control group would also elicit benefits in better understanding the impacts of an ethics training course in the diffusion of ethical standards in an organizational setting.

To continue forging a path in diffusion research and its influences on ethics training, the examination of new types of demographic data would be helpful. This would directly align with recent work in the body of research focused on the impacts of gender (Waples et al., 2009), age (Weber, 2014), and education level (Medeiros et al., 2017) on ethics training efficacy. Future examinations evaluating these factors—paired with a control group—would craft a more robust and meaningful path for diffusion work. The scope should also be broadened beyond an organization's frontline sales force. Understanding the impacts of diffusion across all business lines and levels of associates in the corporate landscape could provide greater understanding and application in using diffusion of innovations theory to explain the impacts of ethics training. It is possible training could impact the dispersion of ethical standards differently among customer-facing sales associates, operations team members, frontline managers, and division and executive leadership.

Future studies should also incorporate a follow-up interaction with survey and interview participants one year following the completion of the ethics coursework. This interview data

could be further utilized to evaluate new research questions. The current study employed a simple approach, asking associates to respond to survey questions from a perspective of how they believed they would behave on-the-job. However, no verification of actual behaviors took place. In subsequent studies, the participants' supervisors should be engaged to evaluate changes in performance or instances of behavior that did not align with the principles advocated in class. Additional survey tools or qualitative interviews could be utilized to determine how much participants are able to recall from class. This data could then be compared to the control group to evaluate any statistically significant differences in performance and general knowledge of ethics.

Based on one participant's concerns with the viability of the organization's learning management system, technology may serve as a supplementary area for future research. Recent studies have focused heavily on the drivers of e-learning technology adoption including how easy and enjoyable a system is to utilize. These factors can influence learners' levels of engagement with course materials (Findik-Coskuncay et al., 2018; Nguyen, 2021). Future research might also focus on questions exploring ways to guarantee the usefulness and quality of course information in a learning management system and their impact on employee engagement.

Because this was an inaugural research study, replication of the research will be another avenue to pursue. Future research should first reproduce this study in a population large enough to support an appropriate sample size. This replication would take place within another financial entity to serve as a point of comparison. Studies in new sectors and industries would come next, widening the scope of research and increasing the understanding of diffusion attributes' impacts on ethics training. Reviewing the legal implications of ethics training in these sectors and industries could also prove material since state and federal governments often attempt to

mandate ethical behaviors. Ways to measure legal compliance with ethics would serve as another connecting topic of interest and relate back to general accountability.

Utilizing components of diffusion of innovations theory outside Rogers' five attributes could also prove material—including the components of diffusion and the categories of adopters. Rogers advocated four components of diffusion. These components—the innovation, communication channels, time period, and social system—could each become the cornerstone of diffusion work evaluating the efficacy of ethics training. For example, studies could be constructed around the four categories of adopters within an innovation's social system (innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards), evaluating how training impacted their drive to adopt ethical principles and the extent to which they implemented those principles. Other studies could evaluate the impacts via communication channels, examining the adoption of ethical ideals following different delivery methods of training including in-person classrooms, virtual classrooms, online learning, job shadowing, and mentorships.

A final possibility within the realm of diffusion work outside of the five attributes should focus on the five stages of adoption (or rejection). Rogers' (2003) five stages are knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation, and confirmation. Different components of ethical theories and industry best practices could be incorporated into this type of research. Ethics training could be a means of evaluating the knowledge and persuasion stages while decisioning could be related to how individuals observe ethical leadership modeling in their organizations. Implementation and confirmation could focus on the impacts of peer behaviors and how employees and managers are held accountable if ethical principles are ultimately adopted or rejected.

Conclusion

This study utilized diffusion of innovations theory to examine the attributes of ethics training that block best practices and moral behaviors from being disseminated within an organization following a training application. It was the first of its kind connecting ethics training and diffusion of innovations, specifically targeting the impacts of training on the diffusion of ethical standards using Rogers' five innovation characteristics of relative advantage, compatibility, trialability, observability, and complexity. The study also considered the work of Moore and Benbasat and the three additional diffusion attributes they studied—image, result demonstrability, and voluntariness.

The study was framed by an initial assumption that ethical scandals continue to bombard corporate America because ethical principles are not diffusing within these organizations. The results of this study did not support this conclusion and pointed to the likelihood diffusion is occurring. However, differences were noted in how male and female participants perceived the levels of three attributes in the course content—relative advantage, trialability, and observability. This potentially supported the conclusion of previous studies finding women behaving more ethically than men—assuming women could be more likely to diffuse ethical standards to others following the class. Another interesting takeaway from the data pointed to overall greater mean scores originating from female respondent as compared to males with most survey questions—irrespective of statistical significance with those scores.

This research was also significant from the standpoint of viewing ethics as an innovation to be studied. The current body of research tends to focus on how individuals make ethical decisions through critical thought processes and problem resolution (Wells & Schminke, 2001; Crossman et al., 2013). In this respect, ethics can be viewed as more of an outcome or result of

an action taken. This study pursued a different approach, placing ethics as the center of study applied via a training treatment. In this way, ethics could be studied in a way where it possessed attributes, and those attributes could directly impact its adoption or rejection by system participants.

Prospective research with diffusion of innovations and ethics will support diffusion work that has been ongoing for many years by Rogers and other field experts. This will provide researchers a novel avenue to pursue while giving human resource and workforce development practitioners a new and expanded theory upon which solutions to current challenges and new initiatives can be built. It may also provide a pathway to rebuilding trust between the corporate sector and the general public while lessening the need for governmental legislation and oversight. The persistent ethical issues that continue to plague corporate America and other entities around the world require renewed focus and strong solutions. Human resource and workforce development teams are well-positioned to play a significant role in offering these solutions. Equipping these teams with information and research grounded in theory will sustain their efforts while accelerating a diminished impact and expectation of financial scandals as part of mainstream American culture.

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25. Although it might be helpful, using what I learned in class is certainly *not* compulsory
(required) in my job.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Additional participant data requested. Please circle a response.

Are you willing to participate in an individual one-on-one interview? Yes No

If yes, please provide your email address: _____

Gender: Male Female Choose not to disclose

Age: 18-25 years 26-39 years 40-55 years

older than 55 years Choose not to disclose

Level of Education: High School Some College

Bachelor's Degree Master's Degree Doctoral Degree

Choose not to disclose

Years of Sales Experience: Less than 1 year 1-5 years

6-10 years More than 10 years Choose not to disclose

Prior Ethics & Culture Training: Yes No Choose not to

disclose

APPENDIX B: QUALITATIVE INTERVIEW GUIDE

Volunteers were recruited among survey participants with a targeted minimum of 10 interviewees. Interview participants were among the respondents who answered “yes” to the survey question “Are you willing to participate in an individual one-on-one interview?” Ten questions were utilized in the one-on-one interviews, representing two points of inquiry into each of the five characteristics of diffusion—relative advantage, compatibility, trialability, observability, and complexity. Interviews were conducted and recorded via zoom and transcribed the following day from the recordings. Interactions were also recorded via voice notes on the researcher’s mobile phone as a backup in the event of possible errors with zoom.

Question 1 (Relative Advantage): How will what you learned in class impact the way you do your job?

Question 2 (Observability): How are the concepts from class being implemented in your workplace?

Question 3 (Trialability): How will your supervisor allow you to use the things you learned in class?

Question 4 (Compatibility): How do you feel about the training?

Question 5 (Complexity): What recommendations do you have for the training team to make the class more effective?

Question 6 (Relative Advantage): How will what you learned in class impact you in your career journey with the company?

Question 7 (Observability): Tell me about how you see your peers using the materials and concepts presented in class.

Question 8 (Trialability): In what ways are you allowed to put your own “spin” on what you learned in class in your day-to-day duties?

Question 9 (Compatibility): Tell me how you feel about this being a required course for associates.

Question 10 (Complexity): Talk to me about how easily you think it will be to apply (on-the-job) what was presented in class.

APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

A FOCUSED EVALUATION OF SALES EMPLOYEES' ETHICS TRAINING AND ITS EFFECT ON THE DIFFUSION OF ETHICS IN A FINANCIAL ORGANIZATION

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Principal Researcher: Justin Luebker

Faculty Advisor: Claretha Hughes

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

You are invited to participate in a research study about diffusion in education. You are being asked to participate in this study because you are an employee at a financial entity, participating in a required training course discussing the organization's culture and how it defines the right and wrong way of doing business.

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THE RESEARCH STUDY

Who is the Principal Researcher?

Justin Luebker

jluebker@uark.edu

XXX.XXX.XXXX

Who is the Faculty Advisor?

Claretha Hughes

chbanks@uark.edu

479.575.2047

What is the purpose of this research study?

The purpose of this study is to address attributes of ethics training that prevent best practices and moral behaviors from diffusing within an organization following a training application. This research also focuses on organizations within the finance and accounting industries.

Who will participate in this study?

Approximately 75 participants ages 18-65.

What am I being asked to do?

Your participation will require the following:

Completion of a 25-question online survey and an optional one-on-one interview via zoom.

What are the possible risks or discomforts?

There are no anticipated risks for participation. However, participants may feel discomfort in providing feedback regarding training that is a required part of their employment.

What are the possible benefits of this study?

There are no anticipated benefits to participants.

How long will the study last?

The online survey will take 10-15 minutes to complete. The one-on-one interview will last approximately 30 minutes.

Will I receive compensation for my time and inconvenience if I choose to participate in this study?

No. Because of regulations within the finance and accounting industries, no compensation will be provided.

Will I have to pay for anything?

There is no cost for participation.

What are the options if I do not want to be in the study?

If you do not want to be in this study, you may refuse to participate. Also, you may refuse to participate at any time during the study. Your job will not be affected in any way if you refuse to participate.

How will my confidentiality be protected?

All information will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by applicable State and Federal law.

Responses will remain anonymous, and data will be secured by the researcher and not stored on any of the company's systems.

Will I know the results of the study?

At the conclusion of the study, you will have the right to request feedback about the results. You may contact the faculty advisor, Claretha Hughes (chbanks@uark.edu) or Principal Researcher, Justin Luebker (jluebker@uark.edu). You will receive a copy of this form for your files.

What do I do if I have questions about the research study?

You have the right to contact the Principal Researcher or Faculty Advisor as listed below for any concerns that you may have.

Justin Luebker (jluebker@uark.edu – XXX.XXX.XXXX)

Claretha Hughes (chbanks@uark.edu – 479.575.2047)

You may also contact the University of Arkansas Research Compliance office listed below if you have questions about your rights as a participant, or to discuss any concerns about, or problems with the research.

Ro Windwalker, CIP
Institutional Review Board Coordinator
Research Compliance
University of Arkansas
109 MLKG Building
Fayetteville, AR 72701-1201
479-575-2208
irb@uark.edu

I have read the above statement and have been able to ask questions and express concerns, which have been satisfactorily responded to by the investigator. I understand the purpose of the study as well as the potential benefits and risks that are involved. I understand that participation is voluntary. I understand that significant new findings developed during this research will be shared with the participant. I understand that no rights have been waived by signing the consent form. I have been given a copy of the consent form.

APPENDIX D: IRB APPROVAL

To: Justin Luebker
From: Douglas J Adams, Chair
IRB Expedited Review
Date: 03/01/2021
Action: **Exemption Granted**
Action Date: 03/01/2021
Protocol #: 2101312346
Study Title: Using diffusion of innovations to evaluate the successful diffusion of ethics in an organization

The above-referenced protocol has been determined to be exempt.

If you wish to make any modifications in the approved protocol that may affect the level of risk to your participants, you must seek approval prior to implementing those changes. All modifications must provide sufficient detail to assess the impact of the change.

If you have any questions or need any assistance from the IRB, please contact the IRB Coordinator at 109 MLKG Building, 5-2208, or irb@uark.edu.

cc: Claretha Hughes, Key Personnel