

# The Influence of Value-Based Education on Ethical Actions of Professionals: A Review

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**Abstract.** Value-based education and its connection with ethical decision-making among professionals has been a subject for discussion in multiple professional disciplines in recent years. Bridging the gap between value-based and ethics education, on the one hand, and ethical behavior, on the other, remains contested. This paper set out to examine the literature on value-based and ethics education and its influence on the ethical decision-making of professionals. While some studies were found to depict a positive correlation between value-based education and ethical actions, perceptions and decision-making of working professionals, others indicated an absence of such a relationship or a weak relationship, and yet others qualified the relationship as based on the nature or format of the training. Among the challenges are instances of organizational values being at variance with those of a worker's profession and personal values. Although an ideal situation would be a convergence of values, this is not always the case. Ethics and values were noted to be situation- and context-sensitive, which creates opportunities to explore how profession-specific values and ethics are affected by national and organizational cultural differences.

**Keywords:** values, education, ethics, ethical action, decision-making.

## 1. Introduction

In the last few decades, the world has passed through many changes that enabled a better human life but also raised many ethical concerns, such as child labor, climate change, data safety and privacy, corporate scandals, corruption and many others (Cole *et al.* 2021). Such circumstances have led to strong social demands for corporate social responsibility and business ethics, tighter government regulations and increased awareness of the importance of the implementation of moral values and ethics in all spheres of human lives (Bhana & Bayat 2020). In line with that, organizations have become increasingly concerned with defining and adhering to ethical work practices and professional conduct, while teaching

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values and ethics have become topical at primary, secondary, tertiary, professional and organizational levels (Dunn & Sainty 2020).

By including ethics in the curriculum, in addition to technical knowledge and abilities, students can develop soft skills, based on the ideals they have learned through ethics education, which is deeply rooted in values of virtue (Mukherjee & Ghosh 2022), thus becoming aware of the value of social responsibility in their professional behavior. They also mold their character by developing moral virtues, values and habits, based on the lessons learned from the numerous business crises, enabling them to use their increased courage and sense of security in the proper direction (Snieder & Zhu 2020). As a result, value-based and ethics education develops future leaders who will be able to choose right over wrong on any occasion and make ethical decisions in both their private and professional lives (Pfeil *et al.* 2017).

Hence, it can be argued that value-based and ethics education influences how businesspeople view ethical behavior, which reinforces the need to step up efforts to develop corporate leaders who are prepared for the challenges of the twenty-first century (Papageorgiou *et al.* 2022), resulting in the decreased likelihood of future corporate scandals and scams. In this regard, value-based education and its connection with ethical decision-making among professionals has been a subject of discussion in multiple professional disciplines in recent years (Prendeville & Kinsella 2022; Dunn & Sainty 2020; Shah 2018). In order to contribute to this discussion, the objective of this paper was to provide a review of existing studies on the impact of value-based and ethics education on the ethical decision-making of professionals and ask the research question: Can people be taught to make choices ethically? thus contributing to the current knowledge on this important and timely topic and helping its further development by enhancing additional research in this field of study.

The selection criteria of studies used in this research were their relevance, credibility and year of publication. Previous studies were carefully selected using various academic databases, such as Google Scholar, Science Direct, Web of Science, and other sources of credible research studies. To find relevant studies, search terms related to the topic of this research were used, such as ethics, value-based education, decision-making, and professional ethics. Moreover, since this paper aimed to provide a comprehensive review of the current knowledge in this field of study, only up-to-date studies were used. Finally, since this paper sought to offer a critical analysis of the literature on this topic, it included studies that looked at this area from different aspects and/or came to different findings. Collected studies were reviewed again to narrow the selection. After that, selected studies were contrasted and compared to come to conclusions regarding the impact of value-based and ethics education on the ethical decision-making of professionals.

The paper begins with definitions of the key terms, followed by a discussion of value-based education at various levels and its influence on people. The last

part focuses on value-based education and its influence on the ethical actions of professionals to evaluate whether such education influences their decision-making processes. The paper concludes by highlighting areas that need further investigation to add depth to value-based education – ethics – decision-making discourse.

## 2. Definition of Key Terms

Key terms that need definition in this paper are values, ethics, education, value-based education, and decision-making of working professionals.

### *Values*

Values refer to deep-rooted, long-lasting attitudes, beliefs and ideals shared by the members of a certain community that determine what is good and bad, useful or important, what to choose and do, and how to behave with others (Pfeil *et al.* 2017). They are abstract concepts of worth and beliefs that have become so strong to the point of transforming into specific principles or philosophies one must follow consistently and use them to define what is considered wrong or right in each situation (Yazdani *et al.* 2015). Values can be positive or negative and they can and do change over time (Prendeville & Kinsella 2022). Because values are formed through experiences over time, individuals are often unaware of some values learnt at an early age which then become difficult to recognize, but they still guide their feelings and actions with regard to specific ideas, things, situations, and people.

### *Ethics*

Ethics refer to standards of conduct that indicate how people ought to behave, based on values and principles about what is right. They are associated with the virtues of being fair, credible, honest, responsible, trustworthy, transparent, and respectful (Chowdhury 2018). Ethics relate to one's ability to differentiate between right and wrong and the commitment to do what is right based on agreed values. As a synonym of morality, ethics is defined through the universal values and standards of behavior expected from every rational person, but it is also a branch of philosophy concerned with the origins of human values and standards (Crane *et al.* 2019). While ethics is concerned with how a person should behave, values concern the underlying beliefs and attitudes which determine how a person behaves (Papageorgiou *et al.* 2022). Hence, ethical values are values that relate directly to beliefs about what is accepted as right and proper in each situation. In that regard, ethics includes actions and decisions which, when consistent with shared values, result in one being deemed to act ethically (Yazdani *et al.* 2015).

### *Education*

Education is the process of acquiring, innovating, acclimatizing, and transmitting information, knowledge, skills, and values based on the needs of people in society in a formal or informal setting (UNESCO 2011). The UN's declaration on education integrates values as it states that education:

“...shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance, and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace” (p. 6).

In line with new circumstances, education has shifted from traditional to modern pedagogical paradigms (Chaika 2024), including the emergence of value-based education.

### ***Value-Based Education***

Value-based education refers to a holistic approach to learning which equips students with both academic knowledge and strong ethical values and principles, such as integrity, responsibility, equality, empathy, fairness and others (Chaika 2024). The result is the creation of a steady and right society based on shared positive human values that not only give direction to people on how to behave to not harm anyone but also encourage them to impart values to others, weigh and make choices, explore consequences and work through problems to find which approaches help reach positive, healthy solutions (Bhardwaj 2016). Value-based education also promotes a secure physical, emotional and political locus within society, responsibility towards social, political, economic, environmental and cultural factors, as well as an appreciation of the importance of learning (Nirupama & D'Souza 2021).

### ***Decision-Making of Working Professional***

Working professionals are people who acquired knowledge, skills and abilities through formal and informal education that apply daily at their workplace (Johnson *et al.* 2022). Professionals also acquire additional skills through training based on the demands of their professions. Using this knowledge, they become able to make decisions in different circumstances they may face. Although people, including professionals, may use various methods to make proper decisions, usually decision-making includes an evaluation of possible outcomes and the risks associated with these outcomes (Johnson *et al.* 2022). Most often, the decision-making of working professionals is also guided by the codes of conduct of their respective professions. Ethical behavior, in that case, refers to adherence to applicable professional codes. In addition, working professionals must adhere to organizational values which, like professional ones, need to be learnt (Chowdhury 2018).