

SYLLABUS

Master Seminar

„Managing Ethics in Organisations“

Winter Semester 2025/26

Prof. Dr. Anna Lašáková

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Type	Research Seminar
Level	Master
ECTS	6 Credits
Language	English
Pre-requisites	- No formal requirements - Knowledge in Human Resource Management recommended
Class	Tuesdays, 16-20 h in room tba

Concept

This seminar introduces students to key aspects of managing ethics within organizations. Participants will learn which organizational processes are crucial for fostering an ethical culture, minimizing unethical (and illegal) behavior, and promoting ethical conduct among employees. Together, we will explore how to manage organizational ethics, design human resource management (HRM) systems that support ethical behavior, and develop ethical leadership—recognizing that leaders play a central role in shaping organizational ethics. The course is highly interactive, incorporating tools and activities designed to engage all participants in a dynamic and enjoyable learning experience.

In the first thematic block, we begin by mapping the landscape of ethics and morality. Business ethics will be examined not just as a matter of concern, but as a well-established academic discipline with both

theoretical underpinnings and practical applications. We will then identify the major challenges of corporate social responsibility (CSR) from a managerial perspective, discussing the tensions that often arise between ethical intentions and business demands. Following this, we will investigate the connection between CSR and organizational ethics—emphasizing that CSR goes beyond public relations or regulatory compliance and is deeply rooted in the ethical fabric of the organization. You will also become familiar with the components of an “ethics infrastructure” and learn how to effectively combine these elements to create a robust ethics program.

The second block adopts a process-oriented approach to ethics management. We will clarify what ethics management entails—and what it does not—by examining real-life examples of corporate best practices. Special attention will be given to HRM processes, as they form the “heart” of ethics management. Key HRM areas such as recruitment, performance evaluation, career development, and compensation must be aligned with four core ethical principles—referred to as the Big Four of ethical HRM. During the seminar, you will learn what these principles are and how to apply them within your organization’s HR practices.

In the third block, we will focus on the micro-foundations of organizational ethics. We will explore the roles of managers, leaders, and business owners in cultivating a pro-ethical workplace climate, and why leaders, in particular, are pivotal in this regard. The “dark side” of leadership will also be discussed, including factors that may contribute to destructive or unethical behavior—threatening employee well-being and, in extreme cases, the organization’s survival. In contrast, we will also examine positive examples of ethical leadership and the “bright side” of leader influence.

The fourth thematic block will delve into ethical decision-making. You will explore the factors that influence managers when faced with ethical dilemmas, assess your own ethical orientation, and deepen your understanding of moral disengagement theory.

Finally, we will conclude the seminar by identifying key takeaways, engaging in personal reflection based on the seminar discussions, and outlining a plan for individual ethical self-development.

Assessment

- **In-class assignments** (50%)
 - 1) Two team tasks done during the class, each for 5 points
 - 2) Three quizzes related to the content of the lectures, each for 10 points
 - 3) One open-book test during the class, 10 points

Note: Detailed information on the task timing will be discussed at the first meeting.
- **Term paper** (50%) – Small teams will resolve a case study provided by the lecturers. A brief outline for the structure of the term paper (circa 5.000 words):
 - 1) Intro part: Background of the case. Team's approach/methodology in analyzing the case. Detailed summary of the case (facts, timeline, stakeholders). Any missing information inferred or assumptions made (clearly labeled as such).
 - 2) Core part: Main problem(s) or decision point(s) in the case. Root causes and supporting evidence from the case. Theoretical frameworks and concepts applied. Data analysis. Comparison of alternative options or solutions. Recommended solutions. Justification for your choice (e.g., feasibility, impact, alignment with values). Anticipated risks or downsides, and how to mitigate them.
 - 3) Conclusion part: Implementation plan and action plan with timeline. Resource allocation (people, time, budget if relevant). Key performance indicators (KPIs) to evaluate success. Summary of key insights and lessons learned from the case.
 - 4) References – proper academic referencing in APA style.
 - 5) Team reflection and self-assessment: How the team collaborated, roles and responsibilities, what worked well, what could be improved.

Term Paper Deadline: 28.02.2026.

Timeline

- Enrolment via FLEXNOW July 28 - November 24, 2025
- Withdrawal in FLEXNOW until December 9, 2025
- Erasmus/exchange students by email to: sekretariat.fo@ur.de using the [accreditation form](#)

Contents

1. **Tuesday, 25. Nov: 16 – 20 h**
Week 24-28 Nov (4 hours, onsite): Welcome & Introduction to the course. **Mapping the terrain:** Ethics and morality. Business ethics as a discipline. CSR-related challenges in managerial work. Interconnectedness of CSR and organizational ethics. The main ethics program elements.
2. **Tuesday, 2. Dec: 16 – 20 h**
Week 1-5 Dec (4 hours, onsite): **A process-based view: Ethics management and ethical HRM:** What is ethics management (EM). Functions of EM in organizations. Review of best practices in EM applied by companies. Ethical principles in HRM. Hard approach, Soft approach, and Humanistic approach to people management. The Big Four ethical principles in people management – Theoretical background and practical applications.
3. **Tuesday, 9. Dec: 16 – 20 h**
Week 8-12 Dec (4 hours, onsite): **Micro-level foundations of ethics management and ethical leadership:** The dark side of leaders – Bad apple, bad barrel, and bad cellar metaphors. Destructive leadership, Corporate psychopathy, Dark triad/Tetrad models. Bright side of leaders – the concept of Ethical leadership and Authentic leadership in theory and practice.
4. **Tuesday, 16. Dec: 16 – 20 h**
Week 15-19 Dec (4 hours, onsite): **Empowering individuals: Ethical decision-making and self-reflection:** Moral dilemmas faced by leaders and how these are resolved. Influencing factors at micro, mezzo, and macro levels. Ethics positions typology in people. Phenomena of Moral framing, Moral disengagement, and Moral issue intensity.
5. **Week 5-9 Jan** (4 hours online, time slots will be specified for each team): **Consultations** on the term papers. Teams present a preliminary understanding of the assigned case study, the planned outline of problems identified in the case study, and the planned structure and concepts included in the term paper.

Further questions can be addressed via email to
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Literature

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- Trevino, L. K., & Brown, M. E. (2004). Managing to be ethical: Debunking five business ethics myths. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 18(2), 69-81.