



Exploring research on the management of business ethics

Explorando la investigación sobre la gestión de la ética empresarial

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ABSTRACT

Society is constantly striving to promote actions that are environmentally, socially and economically sustainable in the long term. The initiatives that are currently being proposed are not only global, but corporate as well, and they all contribute to a more environmentally-friendly future. In this context, the concept of business ethics arises, referring to the set of arguments that allow to improve the relations between workers and external parties directly related to the business activity. This starting point is essential to explain how achieving an ethical organizational environment may bring about improved economic, social and environmental results. For this reason, this work focuses on discussing business ethics through a literature review and a bibliometric analysis.

Keywords: Business Ethics, Corporate Ethics Management, Ethical Responsibility, Global Research, Bibliometric Analysis.

RESUMEN

La sociedad se esfuerza constantemente en promover acciones que sean sostenibles a largo plazo, desde el punto de vista medioambiental, social y económico. Las iniciativas que se proponen en la actualidad no son sólo globales, sino también empresariales, y todas ellas contribuyen a un futuro más respetuoso con el medio ambiente. En este contexto, surge el concepto de ética empresarial, referido al conjunto de argumentos que permiten mejorar las relaciones entre los trabajadores y las partes externas directamente relacionadas con la actividad empresarial. Este punto de partida es esencial para explicar cómo la consecución de un entorno organizativo ético puede suponer una mejora de los resultados económicos, sociales y medioambientales. Por ello, este trabajo se centra en la discusión de la ética empresarial a través de una revisión bibliográfica y un análisis bibliométrico.

Palabras clave: Ética empresarial, Gestión de la ética corporativa, Responsabilidad ética, Investigación mundial, Análisis bibliométrico.

1. INTRODUCTION

Business ethics refers to the interaction between ethics and business (De George, 2009). In order to delve into this concept, it is necessary to define the terms that compose it. According to the Royal Spanish Academy (2019), and choosing that definition that best fits the meaning of the word, ethics is understood as “the set of moral rules that govern the conduct of the person in any sphere of life”. This moral philosophy pursues to identify and distinguish the patterns of right and wrong, good and bad and, therefore, the behaviors of the human being, such as rights, norms or obligations (Tajalli & Segal, 2018). Thus, these ethical statements or value judgments allow individuals themselves to determine the appropriateness of actions in order to get decision-making right (Joyner & Payne, 2002). On the other hand, if reference is made to the second term, entrepreneurial is understood as “that which pertains or pertains to businesses or entrepreneurs” (Royal Spanish Academy (2019). An enterprise is an institution or organization, which is identified within a specific industry, and which is defined by the type of buyers it has, products it sells and geographical scope it has (Houthoofd, 2009). In this context, this concept is characterized by the set of values or norms that guide towards appropriate behavior in various circumstances, among which the field of management is considered (Lewis, 1985; Vallaster *et al.*, 2019). Ethical beliefs and behaviors performed by top management are fundamental to organizational performance (Shin *et al.*, 2015). In the global dimension, business ethics addresses issues such as corruption, working conditions of workers or bribery (Warren, 2011).

Depending on the level of ethical commitment established, different types of companies can be distinguished, including proactive and reactive companies (Schlegelmilch & Pol-lach, 2005). The main difference between the two is the way in which they approach situations. Proactive organizations seek to position themselves in the market through actions that are supported by corporate values, as well as being proactive in communicating ethics within the company. On the other hand, those of a reactive nature, are those companies that do not manage ethics and decide to get involved only when there are situations that may negatively affect the image of the company itself (Enciso *et al.*, 2017). Several studies mention that when employees do not feel identified with the organization they work for, the percentage of absenteeism increases and they become emotionally exhausted (Hansen *et al.*, 2016; Trivellas *et al.*, 2019). Yet, when good actions are carried out, all parties involved tend to feel identified with them. Turn-over will then significantly decrease which means that less money will need to be devoted to issues such as coordination and training, among others. Therefore, it is of the essence that members of all departments should recognize the importance of social values, thus defining a clear ethical position throughout the company (Joyner & Payne, 2002). This is where a business ethics program comes into play. This system consists in the implementation within the organization of a set of moral standards or rules which will promote a widespread ethical commitment both inside the organization and outside (Remišová *et al.*, 2019).

1.1. Theoretical Background

Maximizing profits regardless of the means employed to do so appears to have been the guiding mentality in business for decades. This is the main reason why, at first, it might seem contradictory to combine the terms “business” and “ethics” in a single concept. Although the interest in business ethics burst with force in 1920 (Tsalikis & Fritzsche, 1989), it was not until the 1970s that the needs of society and the growing ethical dilemmas led to a significant transformation (Guillén, 1996). In this context, beliefs such as the fact that the only motivation for workers was of a monetary nature were redefined, giving way to considering psychological or social factors as fundamental as well (Agulló, 1999). Later, in the 1990s, employers themselves were encouraged to include ethics in their strategic planning processes. In fact, it was argued that the trust of all parties involved towards the organization was necessary, since the lack of it would result in poor performance that would in turn lead to consumer dissatisfaction (Creyer & Ross, 1997). In the last decade of the 20th century, there was a clear increase in the number of countries, institutions and research centers that decided to contribute to this issue (Stark, 1993). Subsequently, and as at that time the relationship between business and ethics was not yet regarded as necessary, the dilemma of whether to continue maximizing profits or to start considering business ethics as a fundamental part of management began to be raised (Nygaard & Biong, 2010).

A company cannot survive when isolated from society, or vice versa. Thus, it is clear that the growth of a company is defined by the quality of the relationship in three different contexts. The first refers to the entities that make up the organization, i.e. the internal parties. Secondly, the relationship established between the internal and the external parties. Finally, the relationship between the former and other distant parties (Sirgy, 2002). By ensuring the quality of life through respect towards the human rights of all, effectively resolving the conflicts that arise and carrying out a business activity committed to society, success is ensured (Debeljuh, 2009). Therefore, business ethics today seeks to address a wide variety of issues such as environmental and social improvement or social responsibility (Abad-Segura, Batlles-de la Fuente *et al.*, 2020; Joyner & Payne, 2002). Undoubtedly, as well, it is currently argued that business ethics has turned into an intangible asset within the company which appeals to business partners and consumers alike (Enciso *et al.*, 2017). Furthermore, ethics is said to be a suitable means to achieve the objectives that companies set out for themselves; this is also an opportunity to be more competitive and to heighten quality (Debeljuh, 2009).

The present paper contributes to the literature in two ways. The first is through the analysis of the main bibliometric indicators that allow to analyze the state of the art and the current interest in advancing the scientific production of business ethics. Secondly, after knowing the fundamental relationship between organizations and business ethics to ensure their long-term survival in the market, the keywords that have been used since the beginning of the research are analyzed in order to ascertain the period in which research on this economic aspect began, and also to identify the gaps in the research or the new emerging topics of interest.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study aims to show a global vision of ethics management in business. With this aim in mind, a bibliometric analysis has been carried out that allows to identify, organize and analyze the main components of this line of research (Lievrouw, 1989). These bibliometric techniques, which are currently used in studies of various disciplines (Abad-Segura *et al.*, 2019; Abad-Segura, Batlles-de la Fuente *et al.*, 2020; Meseguer-Sánchez *et al.*, 2020), allow to manifest the main driving forces of a certain field of study and detect the main lines of research developed from an analysis of the keywords in the records. In addition, through an analysis of co-authorship and co-citation, the links established between these agents can be represented throughout the period in which the scientific production has been developed (Li *et al.*, 2021; Valérie & Pierre, 2010).

For the elaboration of this analysis, several databases of academic and scientific works related to the subject have been consulted (Harzing & Alakangas, 2016; Mongeon & Paul-Hus, 2016). Finally, it was decided to use Elsevier's Scopus database, since it is the one that contains the largest number of articles, journals and authors (Mongeon & Paul-Hus, 2016). In addition, there are numerous studies that use this database as a reference to carry out bibliometric analyses (Duque-Acevedo *et al.*, 2020; Li *et al.*, 2021).

The initial review of the literature has made it possible to identify the terms of the document search: business, corporation, ethics and management, and has been limited to the time horizon between 1982 and 2021. Thus, all research to date has been analyzed, with the exception of one paper published in 1979, in order to ensure that all the periods considered had covered the same years. Thus, the final search was as follows: (TITLE-ABS-KEY ("busine* ethic*" OR "corpor* ethic*" OR "compan* ethic*") AND TITLE-ABS-KEY (manage*)) AND DOCTYPE (ar) AND (EXCLUDE (PUBYEAR, 1979)) AND (EXCLUDE (PUBYEAR, 2022)). However, the sample was checked to ascertain that it contained the concept of manage* as related to managerial, management or synonyms, and therefore in no case were the themes far removed from the subject under study. Finally, to avoid duplication in the information analyzed and maintain rigor due to peer review (Cossarini *et al.*, 2014), only scientific articles have been selected, obtaining a final sample of 1,487.

This sample allowed to delve into different aspects such as the number of investigations carried out, the journals in which they are published, the main thematic areas in which these are classified, the most prolific authors, countries and research institutions, as well as the main keywords. Likewise, in order to complete the information, network maps have been prepared using the VOSviewer tool (version 1.6.18, University of Leiden, Leiden, the Netherlands), which allows for the analysis of the collaboration structure among the different driving agents of this topic (van Eck & Waltman, 2010).

3. ANALYSIS OF THE SCIENTIFIC PRODUCTION ON BUSINESS ETHICS MANAGEMENT

3.1. Evolution of Research Activity

Table 1 shows the main characteristics of research on business ethics. The study encompasses 40 years of research on this subject, that is, from 1982 and until 2021. In this way, the analysis is divided into 4 10-year periods. The total sample contained 1,487 scientific articles, of which 45.86% belong to the last period (2012-2021). The variables collected in Table 1 allow to reflect the growth trend experienced throughout the entire time horizon.

The first period (1982-1991) has 53 articles, written by 73 authors; however, the last period (2012-2021), registers a total of 682 articles and 1,799 authors, which shows the growing global interest in this subject. The average number of authors participating in the preparation of each article increased from 1.38 in the first period, to 2.20 authors in the last.

Likewise, the number of countries linked to management applied to corporate ethics increased proportionally over the years, from 8 countries in the first period, to 87 countries in 2002-2011, decreasing to 84, in the last.

What is more, 590 journals have published articles related to the research field. The first period, with 24 journals, represents 4.07%, compared to 56.95% in the last, with a total of 336 journals. Lastly, the number of total citations received experienced an exponential growth, as it increased from 89 citations (1982-1991) to 27,315 (2012-2021).

Table 1
Main characteristics of scientific production (1982-2021)

Period	Articles	Authors	Countries	C	C/A	Journals
1982-1991	53	73	8	89	1.68	24
1992-2001	196	268	29	967	4.93	98
2002-2011	556	924	87	6,165	11.09	241
2012-2021	682	1,499	84	27,315	40.05	336
Total	1,487	2,764	208	34,536	—	699

Note: C: total citations in articles; C/A: average number of citations per article.

Source: Own elaboration.

Figure 1 shows the evolution in the publication of articles and the percentage of variation experienced. In this case, the 40 years of research are divided into 5 periods of 10 years each, with the aim of looking in detail at the evolution in the number of

investigations on business ethics. 2009 was the year in which the most articles were published, with a total of 97.

The periods 1992-2001 and 2002-2011 register the highest percentages of variation. The first period saw an increase from

53 publications to 196; while the period 2002-2011, went to 556. This indicates that the last decade of the 20th century and the beginning of the 2000s was the period when the paradigm shift was conceived, focusing on business ethics management, as evidenced by the analysis of studies on consumers' perceptions of corporate social responsibility (Maignan, 2001) or ethics in strategic communication campaigns (Botan, 1997). The last period analyzed (2012-2021) registers 682 documents.

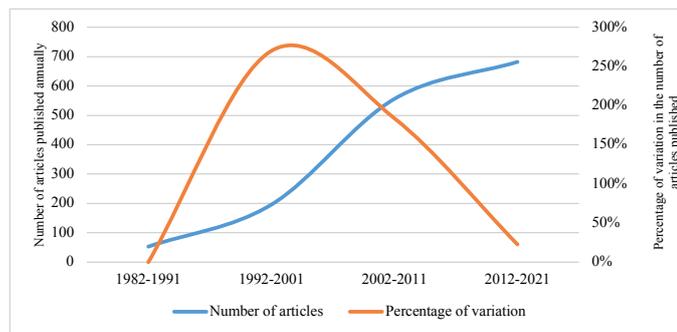


Figure 1
Comparison between the number of articles published and the percentage of variation (1982-2021)

Source: Own elaboration.

3.2. Research analysis by thematic categories

Elsevier's Scopus database classifies scientific documents into different thematic categories, according to the publisher's interest. The sample of 1,487 articles is classified into 26 different thematic areas. It is necessary to indicate that the same scientific article may be included in more than one subject area. Among them, the first five stand out (Business, Management and Accounting; Social sciences; Economics, Econometrics and Finance; Arts and Humanities; and Medicine), since these include practically 90% of the sample (see Figure 2).

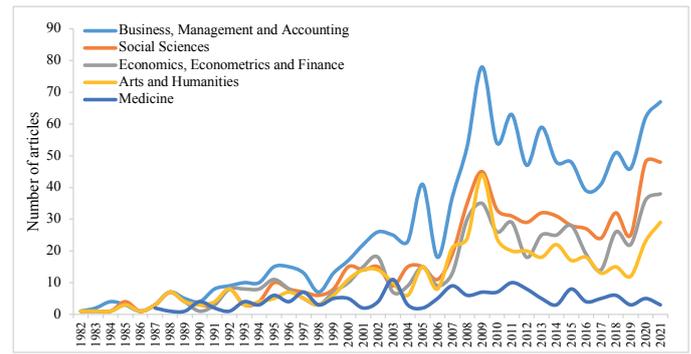


Figure 2
Evolution of the main thematic areas (1982-2021)

Source: Own elaboration.

The discipline that heads this list is Business, Management and Accounting, including a total of 1,095 articles, which represents 33.3% of scientific production. It is followed by Social Sciences, with 663 articles (20.2%); Economics, Econometrics and Finance, with 550 (16.7%); Arts and Humanities, with 467 (14.2%); and Medicine, with 165 articles (5%). These results coincide with the literature reviewed, since the terms are directly linked to the management of organizations (Enciso et al., 2017; Warren, 2011).

3.3. Analysis of the journals

The total sample of journals that published this line of research was 590. Table 2 shows the 10 most prolific journals, including a total of 520 articles, that is, 34.97% of the total sample. Of these journals, 7 are included in the first quartile and 6 are published in the United Kingdom (UK). In addition, 7 journals have published in the last year (2021).

Table 2
Top 10 Journals (1982-2021)

Journal	A	C	C/A	ha	hj	SJR(Q)	Country	First Year	Last Year
<i>Journal of Business Ethics</i>	312	13,694	43.89	63	187	2.209(Q1)	Netherlands	1982	2021
<i>Philosophy of Management</i>	40	112	2.80	6	9	0.266(Q2)	Switzerland	2003	2021
<i>Business Ethics Quarterly</i>	37	1,961	53	22	74	1.793(Q1)	UK	1996	2021
<i>Business Ethics</i>	33	356	10.79	11	35	1.343(Q1)	UK	1993	2020
<i>Emerald Emerging Markets Case Studies</i>	32	6	0.19	2	5	0.197(Q3)	UK	2011	2021
<i>Business and Society Review</i>	24	263	10.96	10	21	0.524(Q2)	UK	2008	2017
<i>Journal of Management Development</i>	16	153	9.56	8	59	0.632(Q1)	UK	1996	2019
<i>Management Decision</i>	15	378	25.20	9	98	0.923(Q1)	UK	2000	2021
<i>Journal of Management Education</i>	14	162	11.57	7	47	0.786(Q1)	USA	2005	2021
<i>Sustainability</i>	13	166	12.77	7	85	0.612(Q1)	Switzerland	2017	2021

Note: A: number of articles; C: total number of citations; C/A: number of citations per article; ha: Index h (or Hirsch index) of the articles on the subject studied; hj: Index h of the journal; SJR: Scimago Journal Rank; Q: quartile; USA: United States.

Source: Own elaboration.

The Dutch *Journal of Business Ethics* considered a benchmark in the field of business ethics, heads Table 2 with the publication of 312 records. It stands out from the rest of the journals for its high

values in all the variables considered, as well as for being the one with the longest research trajectory. The British *Business Ethics Quarterly* which is in the third position of Table 2, has the second

highest number of total citations (1961), the best average number of citations per article (53), and the second highest index h in the articles on the subject (20). Also, *British Management Decision*, in the eighth position, stands out for ranking second in h-index (98). Finally, the British *Emerald Emerging Markets Case Studies* contains a significantly low number of total citations throughout the period (6), average number of citations (0.19), h-index in articles (2) and h-index in the journal (5).

3.4. Analysis of authors

The total sample of authors participating in scientific production is 2,655. Table 3 shows the 10 most prolific authors, where authors of European origin predominate (70%).

The North American author, Gary R. Weaver, heads Table 3 with 9 published articles, a total of 1,599 citations, and an average number of citations of 177.67. This author published his first article in 1999 and has an h-index of 8. The Belgian author, Yvesel Fassin, also stands out with 9 published articles, and is the first author of this rank to publish (1993). The American, Linda Klebe Treviño, is the author with the highest average of citations per article (245.17) and the second highest value of citations received (1,471). Finally, the European authors, Yvesel Fassin, Muel Kaptein and Ingo Pies, are the only authors who have published in the last year (2021).

Table 3
Top 10 Authors (1982-2021)

Author	A	C	C/A	Research Institution	Country	1A	LA	h-index
Weaver, G.R.	9	1,599	177.67	University of Delaware	USA	1999	2011	8
Fassin, Y.	9	553	61.44	Universiteit Gent	Belgium	1993	2021	7
Habisch, A.	6	104	17.33	Katholische Universität Eichstätt-Ingolstadt	Germany	2010	2020	5
Treviño, L.K.	6	1,471	245.17	Penn State Smeal College of Business	USA	1999	2008	6
Wood, G.	6	65	10.83	Kristiania University College	Norway	2004	2018	5
Dierksmeier, C.	5	126	25.20	Universität Tübingen	Germany	2009	2020	4
Harris, H.	5	20	4.00	University of South Australia	Australia	2004	2018	3
Kaptein, M.	5	471	94.20	Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam	Netherlands	2004	2021	4
Marens, R.	5	126	25.20	California State University	USA	2007	2013	4
Pies, I.	5	193	38.60	Martin-Universität Halle-Wittenberg	Germany	2010	2021	5

Note: A: number of articles; C: number of citations for all articles; C/A: total number of citations per article; 1A: first published article; LA: last article published; h-index: index h on the subject studied.

Source: Own elaboration.

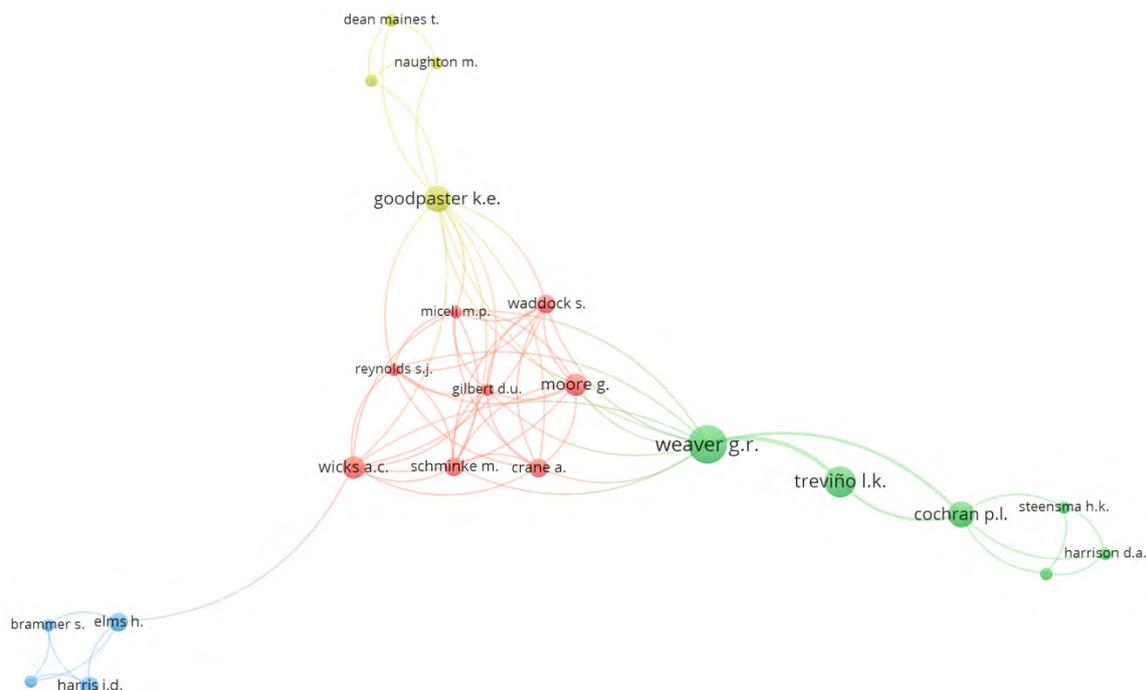


Figure 3
Cooperation network based on the co-authorship method (1982-2021)

Source: Own elaboration.

Figure 3 shows the collaboration network among authors, from the VOSviewer software (Waltman *et al.*, 2010). Four clusters are distinguished by colors, while the nodes vary in size depending on the degree of cooperation between authors.

The first cluster, in red and the most central, is noteworthy due to the high number of authors it includes, and is headed by Moore, G. and Waddock, S. The second cluster, in green, has the presence of Gary R Weaver (the author who heads the ranking of the most prolific) and Linda Klebe Treviño. The third cluster, in yellow, includes, among others, Goodpaster, K.E. and Naughton, M., whereas the fourth group, in blue, contains Harry, J.D. and Elms, H., among others.

3.5. Analysis of research institutions

Table 4 shows the top 10 institutions in the field of business ethics from 1982 to 2021. The North American, University of Virginia, is the institution that heads this ranking, since it presents the highest values in the indicators of the number of published articles (15) and h-index (11). The Belgian, Universiteit Gent, has the highest number of total citations received (613); while the Dutch, Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam has the highest average number of citations per article (62.89).

Table 4
Top 10 research institutions (1982-2021)

Research Institution	Country	Articles	C	C/A	h-index	IC (%)	ICC	CNCI
University of Virginia	USA	15	380	25.33	11	33.33	27.40	24.30
Deakin University	Australia	12	178	14.83	9	50.00	9.00	20.67
Universiteit Gent	Belgium	12	613	51.08	8	41.67	21.40	72.29
University of South Australia	Australia	11	83	7.55	4	27.27	1.67	9.75
Copenhagen Business School	Denmark	10	280	28.00	8	60.00	15.83	46.25
Darden School of Business	USA	10	246	24.60	8	30.00	26.00	24.00
Hong Kong Polytechnic University	Hong Kong	9	213	23.67	7	44.44	29.75	18.80
Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam	Netherlands	9	566	62.89	9	55.56	51.40	77.25
UNSW Sydney	Australia	9	156	17.33	6	55.56	15.60	19.50
University of Jyväskylä	Finland	9	153	17.00	7	33.33	9.00	21.00

Note: C: total number of citations; C/A: total number of citations per article; h-index: index h on the subject studied; IC: collaboration index in percentage; ICC: total citations in articles with international collaboration; CNCI: total citations in articles without international collaboration.

Source: Own elaboration.

Furthermore, the Danish Copenhagen Business School registers the highest percentage of collaboration (60%), followed by the Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam and the Australian University of New South Wales (UNSW Sydney), both with a percentage of collaboration of 55.56%. Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam is the institution with the most citations in articles with international collaboration (51.40), while the Australian University of South Australia stands out for being the institution with the least (1.67).

3.6. Identification of the most relevant countries in scientific production

The scientific production analyzed has been carried out in 130 countries. In this sense, the country variable refers to the country of origin of the lead author's institution as mentioned in recent research (Donthu *et al.*, 2021). Table 5 shows the 10 most prolific countries (7.69% of the total), which have published 1,084 articles (72.9% of the total). The USA heads this ranking with the highest values in number of investigations (482), total citations (16,031), h-index (55) and number of collaborating countries (53), among which the following stand out: Canada, UK, China, Australia and Germany. It is followed by the UK, with 151 registrations, 30 collaborating countries and a collaboration percentage of 38.41%.

China is the country with the highest percentage of collaboration (51.43%), since out of 35 articles published, 15 have

been produced by means of international collaboration. Australia is the country with the highest number of total citations received in international articles (106.98), followed by the USA (73.69). Likewise, all the countries in this ranking register a greater number of total citations in articles produced internationally, with the exception of Spain and the Netherlands.

Figure 4 shows the international collaboration established among the countries that promote research on the management of corporate ethics. Eight clusters of different colors are distinguished.

The first cluster, in red, is led by the UK, Germany and France. In this case, comparing the rest of the countries that make up the cluster and Table 5, it is understood that Italy is part of it due to its collaboration with the UK, while Austria and Switzerland are there due to their collaboration with Germany. Meanwhile, the second cluster, in blue, is led by the USA, which collaborates with South Africa, New Zealand and Hong Kong, among other countries.

The third cluster, in purple, is represented by Spain, which collaborates with Chile, Colombia and Venezuela. Additionally, the fourth cluster, in yellow, has the presence of two of the prolific countries (Australia and Canada). The orange and green clusters are led by China and India, respectively, both included in Table 5 of the most productive. Finally, the light blue cluster has the collaboration of the Netherlands, Finland, Denmark and Slovenia.

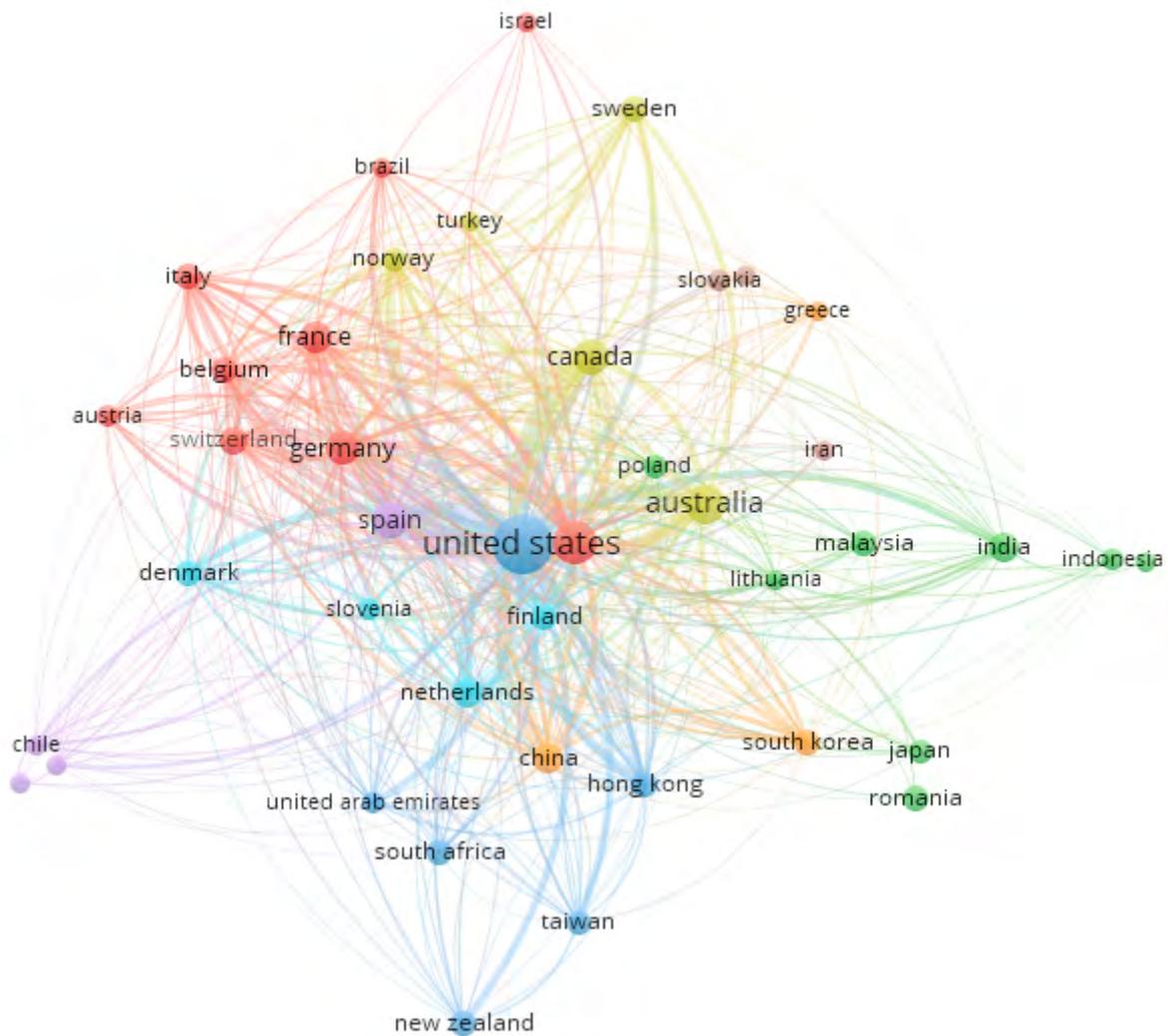


Figure 4
International collaboration network between countries (1982-2021)
 Source: Own elaboration.

Table 5
Top 10 countries (1982-2021)

Country	A	C	C/A	h-index	NC	Main collaborators	IC (%)	C/A	
								IC	NIC
USA	482	16,031	33.26	55	53	Canada. UK. China. Australia. Germany.	18.26	73.69	24.23
UK	151	3,238	21.44	31	30	Australia. USA. Spain. Netherlands. Belgium.	38.41	27.50	17.67
Australia	104	5,926	56.98	24	22	UK. USA. Canada. Sweden. France	42.31	106.89	20.38
Canada	71	2,444	34.42	25	37	USA. Australia. France. Spain. Belgium.	43.66	41.68	28.80
Spain	70	1,483	21.19	21	37	UK. USA. Canada. Chile. France.	40.00	13.32	26.43
Gernany	52	747	14.37	16	20	USA. Italy. Belgium. Switzerland. UK.	36.54	17.11	12.79
France	44	539	12.25	12	35	Australia. UK. USA. Belgium. Canada.	47.73	15.43	9.35
India	40	189	4.73	6	11	USA. Lithuania. Spain. Bhutan. Germany.	32.50	4.77	4.70
China	35	528	15.09	11	31	USA. Hong Kong. South Korea. UK. Canada.	51.43	16.67	13.41
Netherlands	35	2,049	58.54	18	14	UK. Australia. USA. Belgium. Denmark.	45.71	44.06	70.74

Note: A: number of articles; C: total number of citations; C/A: total number of citations per article; h-index: index h on the subject studied; NC: number of collaborators; CI(%): collaboration index in percentage; CI: total citations in articles with international collaboration; NIC: total citations in articles without international collaboration.

Source: Own elaboration.

3.7. Analysis of keywords

Table 6 shows the 20 most widely-used keywords in scientific production on business ethics management. The analysis of the most common terms in the research allows to know the interests that have arisen along the time horizon. In addition, as shown in Table 6, the variation in the number of occurrences for each keyword provides information on the evolution of the term, and on whether interest in that field is beginning or has ceased giving way to new lines in this research field.

The term “corporate social responsibility” heads Table 6 with 142 occurrences. This term was mentioned for the first time in the second period analyzed (1992-2001) and, since then, it has been considered in the articles of the rest of the periods. In addition, in the last study (2012-2021), it reaches the highest number

of occurrences (84). The term “administration”, in second position, has a total of 91 occurrences in the analyzed time horizon.

The sixth term of the ranking, “corporate governance”, and the tenth term, “sustainability”, do not have occurrences in the first two decades, since they are linked to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), set in the year 2000 (Feeny & Clarke, 2009a, 2009b).

From this ranking, it is clear that the terms “organizational culture”, “drug industry” and “morality” have been the last keywords that have been used in this field of research, mainly related to corporate processes that have negative effects on society (Abad-Segura, Morales *et al.*, 2020). The term “ethics, institutional”, directly linked to the theme, only had one occurrence in the last period (2012-2021), which represents 0.15% of the total sample.

Table 6
Top 20 keywords (1982-2021)

Keyword	1982-2021		1982-1991		1992-2001		2002-2011		2012-2021	
	A	%	A	%	A	%	A	%	A	%
Corporate Social Responsibility	142	9.55	0	0.00	3	1.53	55	9.89	84	12.32
Management	91	6.12	1	1.89	13	6.63	31	5.58	46	6.74
Organization and Management	83	5.58	5	9.43	34	17.35	33	5.94	11	1.61
Social Responsibility	72	4.84	2	3.77	12	6.12	33	5.94	25	3.67
Financial Management	61	4.10	2	3.77	10	5.10	28	5.04	21	3.08
Corporate Governance	60	4.03	0	0.00	0	0.00	28	5.04	32	4.69
Medical Ethics	57	3.83	2	3.77	28	14.29	13	2.34	14	2.05
Leadership	56	3.77	2	3.77	2	1.02	29	5.22	23	3.37
Commercial Phenomena	52	3.50	5	9.43	10	5.10	18	3.24	19	2.79
Sustainability	52	3.50	0	0.00	0	0.00	8	1.44	44	6.45
Decision Making	51	3.43	1	1.89	2	1.02	26	4.68	22	3.23
Organization	48	3.23	4	7.55	13	6.63	18	3.24	13	1.91
Ethics Institutional	47	3.16	10	18.87	29	14.80	7	1.26	1	0.15
Economics	46	3.09	2	3.77	15	7.65	17	3.06	12	1.76
Standard	46	3.09	10	18.87	25	12.76	10	1.80	1	0.15
Stakeholder Theory	41	2.76	0	0.00	1	0.51	23	4.14	17	2.49
Commerce	35	2.35	5	9.43	10	5.10	10	1.80	10	1.47
Organizational Culture	35	2.35	0	0.00	7	3.57	20	3.60	8	1.17
Drug Industry	34	2.29	1	1.89	2	1.02	17	3.06	14	2.05
Morality	34	2.29	0	0.00	14	7.14	11	1.98	9	1.32

Note: %: Percentage of the total sample.

Source: Own elaboration.

In order to be able to discern the main changes and new interests that are emerging in this line of research, it is necessary to analyze the year in which they were incorporated and/or mentioned in the scientific production. In this case, Figure 5 has been elaborated from the 150 keywords with the highest number of occurrences. As can be seen, the keywords that have formed

part of the sample since the beginning of the research refer to legal aspects of the company itself and to the medical perspective on workers' safety and well-being. However, in recent years, the study's preferences have been turning towards topics focused on sustainability.

of the concept and allows for a broadening of the topics of analysis. Furthermore, the thematic areas analyzed clarify which the most researched topics are and, therefore, give way to new research that might contribute in other less explored categories as is the case of the discipline of earth and planetary science.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This review has made it possible to delimit the concept of business ethics in order to know what its implications and applications are in the current environment and, additionally, to identify the variables that define the state of the art in this subject. In fact, from the bibliometric analysis, it has been possible to locate gaps in the keywords that are emerging in recent years, and also to recognize in the discussion topics that should be considered for future research.

However, this paper has some limitations that should be mentioned in order to lay the groundwork for future studies. These are (i) the methodology, which could be expanded with other qualitative or quantitative search and data collection techniques, (ii) the use of Scopus as a support tool, which could be complemented with other databases such as Web of Science or Google Scholar, and (iii) the incorporation of terms that study the current legislation approved in the field of business ethics.

The findings obtained are valuable for a group of actors involved in scientific research on ethics in corporate management that require an examination of past and future information, such as scholars, researchers, research institutions, universities, managers, public administration and the society as a whole.

To conclude, the great importance that issues like this have in today's society must not be overlooked, since they promote a more sustainable and environmentally-friendly action towards the entities that make up society. Likewise, it is encouraged to continue developing research that improves the understanding of corporate ethics and that allows to promote its proper incorporation in all companies.

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