

**WORKSHOP:  
EMBEDDED CAPITALISM AND  
BUSINESS ETHICS EDUCATION**

Michaela Haase\*

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Abstract: I give a short report on the origin of the International Working Group on Business Ethics Education (IWBE) the group's workshop sessions at the IABS conference. Building on the discussions throughout these workshop sessions, I outline how IWBE's perspective on business ethics education can be related to analytical perspectives from anthropology and economics.

Keywords: Culture, Anthropology, Neoclassical Economics

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**IWBEE'S ORIGIN AND PERSPECTIVE**

The International Working Group on Business Ethics Education (IWBEE) organized this workshop session. IWBEE is an international and interdisciplinary association of scholars, students, practitioners, and others interested in business and society, business and economic ethics, sustainability, or CSR. Research on the cultural embeddedness of business practices and research on the impact that this embeddedness actually has gained on business ethics education is amongst the tasks of the group, as well as the development of curricula that fit the cultural and historical idiosyncrasies of business practices.<sup>1</sup>

Before the workshop sessions took place in Bath, this ad-hoc group has met twice (Berlin and Warsaw 2010). These meetings were related to two preceding workshops on business ethics education that took place under the lead of the German Academic Association for Business Research (VHB) in Germany. The first so-called ethics education workshop (EEW) in Berlin 2008 invited contributions from a variety of disciplines (philosophy, theology, cultural studies, and pedagogy), as well as from the different stakeholder groups of management education: scholars, students, businesses, business schools, public agencies, trade unions, etc. At the end of their short report on this EEW, Haase & Mirkovic (2010: 255) propose, with respect to ethics

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\* Author contact information:

Michaela Haase: iwbee@lists.fu-berlin.de • +49 30 83852493 • Freie Universität Berlin, School of Business and Economics, Otto-von-Simson-Str. 19, 14195 Berlin, GERMANY

<sup>1</sup> For more details, cp. the homepage of the group: [http://www.wiwiss.fu-berlin.de/institute/marketing/International\\_Working\\_Group\\_on\\_Business\\_Ethics\\_Education\\_IWBEE/Mission\\_statement/index.html](http://www.wiwiss.fu-berlin.de/institute/marketing/International_Working_Group_on_Business_Ethics_Education_IWBEE/Mission_statement/index.html).

education, to continue the cooperation with the stakeholders in ethics education; to develop, implement, and evaluate curricula based both on interdisciplinary scholarly work and from the joint effort of the stakeholders; to engage in international and transdisciplinary exchange of experiences and research projects; and to particularly promote UN initiatives like the Global Compact initiative for responsible management education and the UNESCO guidelines on education for sustainable development.

The first workshop was followed by a second one in 2009 in Munich.<sup>2</sup> The interest of the VHB in business ethics education continues; and additional activities took (and still take) place in this field.<sup>3</sup>

Participants from Poland, Canada, and Germany met first in Berlin 2010 for a workshop that dealt with the CSR understandings in these countries, with regard to differences in business ethics education, and to the impact these differences in CSR understandings and practices have – or should have – on business ethics education. The international workshop in Berlin in January 2010 was followed by a second one in August 2010 in Warsaw. Additional participants from Austria and the USA joined this meeting throughout which the idea to apply for a workshop session at the IABS's conference in Bath 2011 was discussed and positively decided and the name "IWBEE" was coined.

In the meantime, the members of the group have intensified their cooperation. A common research project, exchange of scholars, and other forms of cooperation are part of the plan for the next year. The group invites individuals or other groups interested in the cultural dimensions of business ethics (education) to cooperate with it. IWBEE's perspective on business ethics education can be summarized by the subsequently listed foundational statements:

1. Ethics education can be understood as part of the human right to education (Kruip 2010). Although the human rights are universal rights, business ethics education needs to reflect the cultural and historical developments in our respective countries. There is no unique style of business ethics education that can meet all demands due to the diversity of business practices.
2. Business practice is highly affected by the development of the market economy, by historical and cultural factors of influence (Van Hoorn & Maseland, 2010). The institutional framework of an economy, such as laws, legal property rights, social norms, routines, or customs, also influences business practice. Also, there are institutions which work at a "lower" level of the economy like economic property rights, or contracts, (which work at the dyadic level), or social institutions for groups (Mailath & Postlewaite, 2003: 355).
3. The actors' mental models, business philosophies, or ideologies have a long-lasting influence on their business practices. Business education has to take notice of that and to make it a starting point of its program.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.controlling.bwl.uni-muenchen.de/ethik/sonstiges/konferenzen/eew/index.html>.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.vhbonline.org/arbeitsgruppe-unternehmensethik/>.

4. Business practice has to react to the limited resources available from our planet and to delimit the overuse of resources. Business ethics education needs to increase the attention to sustainable business models and an ethics of wealth<sup>4</sup>.

5. Business ethics education is a field of growing interest worldwide. Its relevance is expressed in the UN initiatives like the Global Compact, the Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME)<sup>5</sup>, and the UN Decade for Education for Sustainable Development.

Next, I give a glimpse into the discussions throughout the two workshop sessions of the group in Bath.

### **WORKSHOP SESSIONS AT IABS**

IWBEE has organized two workshop sessions at IABS. In the first session Jacek Sojka discussed the relevance of culture for business ethics education (From East to West: Cultural and Historical Influences on Business Ethics Education). After that, Brad Agle presented a comprehensive conception of business ethics education and illustrated how it is put into practice at Marriott School of Management in Utah, USA. The second session focused on a discussion of different German perspectives on business ethics. It drew on a review summary by Albert Löhr of a selection of business ethics textbooks mainly used in Germany (The Ethics of Business Ethics textbooks in Germany – A critical review).<sup>6</sup>

The group will continue conducting regular workshops that aim at the presentation and discussion of research on business ethics education, the exchange of ideas, and the reflection on experiences in this field of study.

The next subsection is devoted to an outline of a cultural approach to business ethics that is able to comply with IWBEE's foundational statements; however, it is not the approach of the group but a personal proposal.

### **A CULTURAL APPROACH TO THE STUDY OF BUSINESS ETHICS EDUCATION**

#### **1. Basic Dimensions of the Analytical Framework**

The financial and economic crises of the last years have increased the number and weight of voices demanding the teaching of business ethics at business schools. Even though the findings addressing the impact of ethics education on perceptions, values, and behaviors show no uniform results (Brunton & Eweje, 2010: 352), they nevertheless speak in favor of gaining more knowledge about the issue. Many contributions to this field have pointed to the relevance of culture for the study of business ethics (education): "It is important to identify cultural

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<sup>4</sup> Moran (1901).

<sup>5</sup> Cp. Rasche & Escudero (2010).

<sup>6</sup> This presentation can be downloaded under [http://www.wiwiss.fu-berlin.de/institute/marketing/International\\_Working\\_Group\\_on\\_Business\\_Ethics\\_Education\\_IWBEE\\_/News/](http://www.wiwiss.fu-berlin.de/institute/marketing/International_Working_Group_on_Business_Ethics_Education_IWBEE_/News/)

dimensions and their influence on ethical judgments” (ibid.: 353). It is recognized that culture has an impact on perceiving the world, values, decision-making, and behavior (Mirshekary & Lawrence, 2009).

All human activities, including economic activities, are cultural activities. However, this basic insight does not straightforwardly lead to a particular research program. It can also be assumed that there is no unique and generally accepted analytical framework. I consider Alverson’s (1986) characterization of the concept of culture in modern anthropology by means of the three dimensions ecology, institutions, and ideology as very fruitful starting points for the achievement of an understanding of the concept of culture in economics and business ethics. As Alverson (1986: 662) points out “(t)he essential object of study in anthropology is ‘culture’.” Alverson’s approach provides useful connecting points to economics, management studies, and business ethics, which are also a basis for interdisciplinary research. Other characterizations of culture in terms of dimensions, like those by Hofstede (1991, 1994)<sup>7</sup> or Trompenaars (1993) can be linked to this approach. Compared with Hofstede’s and Trompenaars’ approaches, Alverson’s characterization provides the basis for a systematic linkage between economics and anthropology that is discussed below.

### 1.1 Culture

Every study of culture is based on a preceding determination of entities or phenomena that fall under the concept of culture. These concepts are the components of a framework by means of which the field of study is circumscribed. “Culture” is conceived of as an analytical framework, “a meta-language within which comparative analysis of distinct cultures is carried out” (Alverson, 1986: 666). In addition to that framework or meta-perspective, Alverson (ibid.) highlights the macro perspective on the field of study: “(C)ultures are the fundamental, holistically conceived units of comparative analysis.” This means, if one studies aspects of the culture of countries A and B, one compares representations written in the above-mentioned meta-language.

Note that *how* scholars study culture is also affected by culture. The development of theories does not take place in the void; they are developed to solve the problems of the time and by scholars affected by the cultural system in which they live and work. Thus, the works of cultural scientists like Hofstede have been criticized because of their “inbuilt Western bias” (Magala, 2005: 77).

In anthropology, culture is analyzed with reference to three dimensions: ecology, institutions, and ideology (Alverson, 1986: 666). I touch on them in this order. Alverson (ibid.: 668) characterizes “ecology (as) the study of interrelationships between populations of organisms and their effective environment.” The culture-bearing community and its environment are interactive

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<sup>7</sup> According to Hofstede (1991: 236), “(t)he main cultural differences among nations lie in values. Systematic differences exist (...) with regard to values about power and inequality, with regard to relationships between the individual and the group, with regard to the social roles expected from man and woman, with respect to the ways of dealing with the uncertainties in life, and with respect to whether one is mainly preoccupied with the future or with the past and present.”

entities (“reciprocals”); i. e. they are not independent of each other. The ecologic perspective can be made fruitful for the study of resource usage, sustainability, and the “ethics of wealth” (Moran, 1901) in business ethics.

The basic credo of institutional economics is that “institutions matter” (North, 1994). The list presented by Alverson (1986: 673) and conceived of as relevant for cultural institutional analyses provides a broad basis for a potential interdisciplinary cooperation between institutional economics and anthropology: legal systems, governments, production and exchange systems, formal organizations, and others. As part of the social sciences (Yeager 2001), for business ethics (education), institutions matter, too.

Ideology is neither a new object of study in business ethics (Lodge, 1982; Goodpaster, 1985), nor in institutional economics (Denzau & North 1994). In anthropology, ideology is conceived of as an “ideational constituent that suffuses human behavior” (Alverson, 1986: 671). For business ethics education, the distinction between knowledge and ideology will be important as well as the way “we justify beliefs to one another in our culture” (ibid.: 672).

According to Alverson, all patterned (i. e., non-erratic) human behavior can be characterized by all three dimensions: “(A)ll patterned human acts have an ecological value, cause, or effect, an institutional value, cause, or effect, and an ideological value, cause, or effect (ibid., 665).” According to this model, “culture is organized” and has a time and space dimension, too.

## 1.2 Economy

Business activities or practices are an expression of culture. That means that the study of business and the study of culture cannot be separated from each other (or, if they are separated, only at certain costs<sup>8</sup>): If we study business, we study culture. However, the reverse is not true. Notwithstanding, culture is seldom the object of study of that discipline that is mainly taught at business schools (or other institutions<sup>9</sup> of management or economic education): economics.

Neoclassical economics has “until recently, ignored the potential role of culture in explaining variation in economic outcomes” (Fernández, 2008: 1). Although it does not deny that cultural aspects do exert influence on economic activities, cultural aspects are usually abstracted from throughout the processes of model construction and theory building (Maseland, 2009). Consequently, if it takes place, in economics the study of culture is conceptualized as the study of the impact of culture on economic outcomes. Fernández (2008: 2), for example, asks: “Do differences in beliefs and preferences that vary systematically across groups of individuals separated by space (either geographic or social) or time – what I shall henceforth term *culture* – play an important role in explaining differences in outcomes?” Compared with this approach, in our view the study of differences between institutions in, e. g., Poland, Canada, and Germany

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<sup>8</sup> These costs have to be compared with the gains of specialization that can be achieved in the academic division of labor as elsewhere.

<sup>9</sup> This use of the concept of institution deviates from that throughout the paper where “institution” are “the rules of the game – both formal rules, informal rules and their enforcement characteristics. Together they define the way the game is played, Organizations are the players” (North, 2008: 21).

and their interaction with business practices is a cultural study because the concept of institution is part of the analytical framework.

Fernández (ibid.) has characterized the stance of neoclassical economics on culture by use of the terms “ignorance” and “reluctance.” There are several reasons for this; I touch on three of them: First, most economists take preferences and motivations for granted; they do not study them because they are interested in market behavior or organizational behavior but not in the factors that underlie it (Krelle, 1991: 97). Although this has changed in the times of experimental economics, game theory and behavioral economics, its impact can still be noticed. Second, economists are interested in general statements expressing economic regularities or regularities which can be analyzed by economics.<sup>10</sup> To the study of both history and culture sticks the scent of local contextuality (cp. Mailath & Postlewaite, 2003, for an approach to address the social context of economic decisions]. Third, most economists try to avoid valuations and value judgements in their analyses; often, they adhere to an interpretation of the thesis of being free from value judgments (Werturteilsfreiheit) that has promoted an unreflective style of scientific work with regard to values and valuations.

Who decides what “business activities” are, what their purpose is (e. g., beyond the satisfaction of individual wants), which rules should guide them, and so on? Many people seem to believe that it is simply individual utility maximization or profit maximization that makes the end of business activity. Where does this belief come from? It is ideology having strong ties to economics. According to Alverson (1986: 673), in neoclassical economics the term “economy” is “coterminous with the principles of human behavior that maximize individual utilities (generally profit) by production and exchange in the so-called free, competitive, price-taking market.” In business ethics, this view is expressed in Friedman’s (1970) claim that the social responsibility of business is to increase its profits as well as in Carroll’s (1991) stipulation that the economic responsibility of business is to “be profitable.”

Alverson (1986) opposes neoclassical economics to classical political economy. Neoclassical economics exerts influence on the mindsets of all economics actors whereas the classical political economy plays, if at all, only a minor part for today’s study of business practices or the economy, respectively. Neoclassical economic theory abstracts from concrete activities; it rather focuses on the consequences of individual decisions and the mechanisms that bring the meta-level consequences on markets about. From the model-theoretical point of view, utility maximization or profit maximization are important “inputs” into the functioning of such a mechanism. Compared with neoclassical economics, “(c)lassical political economy (...) took as its essential object of study the totality of arrangements by which individuals were organized to undertake their tasks of production and reproduction necessary to provision themselves and the institutions that encapsulated them” (Alverson, 1986: 662).

The study of business ethics education is related to the study of the economy. The concept of economy is determined by those theories from which it can be deduced or gained, i. e. by

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<sup>10</sup> As Stigler (1976: 1212) concludes with respect to Adam Smith: “So Smith was successful where he deserved to be successful – above all in providing a theorem of almost unlimited power on the behavior of man. His construct of the self-interest-seeking individual in a competitive environment is Newtonian in its universality.”

economics. As to economics, to mention a few important aspects, we hold interest in activities, practices, the mental models (partly constituted by knowledge and ideology, cp. Haase, Roedenbeck, & Söllner, 2009) that inform these activities and practices, and the institutions of governance that guide them. Many of these activities accrue from the endeavor to get access to resources or control over them. The economic framework in Figure 1 (cp. 1.3) draws on institutional economics and the institutional economic theory of the firm, which can be developed into an “economics of responsibility” (Clark, 1916). Such an economics of responsibility would acknowledge the need to reflect on the tasks of economic activity as well as on the principles that direct or should direct it (with respect to economics, mainly efficiency and effectiveness).

In the next subsection, I link the frameworks called “culture” and “economy” to IWBEE’s foundational statements listed above. Sustainable resource usage (sustainability), institutional change (institutions), and ethical decision-making are highlighted as parts of the third framework.

### 1.3 Business ethics education and the connection of the three frameworks

Within our framework, the identification of issues of relevance for business ethics education is, or can be, related to a previous combination of framework 1 (culture) and framework 2 (business). Any such “combination” is a potential subject of change for theoretical, empirical or practical reasons; thus, it is an expression of a working “hypothesis.” This working hypothesis deals with the way how (in terms of theoretical and practical knowledge) to enhance the understanding of what (the students’ knowledge, or competences, or personal skills, etc.), or *how* business ethics education can or should take influence on *what*, in order to bring about, exert influence on, develop or improve *what* (insights into the nature of ethical problems, improvement of the ability to ethical decision-making, etc.). For this reason, no conception of business ethics education can be independent of answers to the question what the economy is and how it works or what part the economics actors (individuals and organizations) can play in it.

Figure 1 represents a first sketch of the analytical perspective based on three interrelated frameworks addressing culture, the economy, and business ethics education.

These three frameworks are not be understood in terms of cause and effect. They are rather a kind of “map” that can guide research interest or inform ethics education. Figure 1 specifies *one way* how the topics brought to the fore by the anthropologic view on culture (expressed e. g. in the concept of institution) can be linked with an (institutional) economic (theory of the firm<sup>11</sup>) framework 2 (expressed e. g. in the concepts of “governance” and “activities”). Framework 3 represents topics that trace back to IWBEE’s foundational statements, e. g., “institutional change.”

The concepts of framework 1 play a role in the other two frameworks, too. Framework 2 draws on framework 1 but “adds” perspectives from economics. It expresses, e. g., that ideology exerts influence on the mental models of economic actors. Resources and activities are a way by means

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<sup>11</sup> Cp. Kleinaltenkamp & Haase (1999); Haase (2008).

of which economic actors influence the environment; in business ethics education one way to address sustainability is thus by having reference to concrete resource usages.

**Figure 1: Three frameworks for the study of business ethics education**

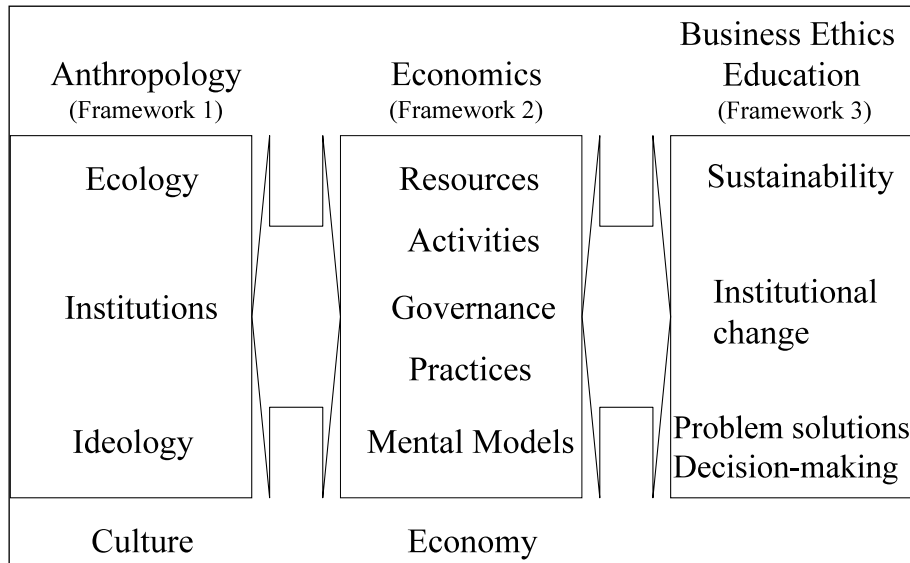


Figure 1 represents three frameworks of analysis and their optional interrelations. The connection between the frameworks in Figure 1 is not specified in detail. Note that Figure 1 is a first, rough, incomplete example of a “world view” which might give rise to a research agenda. The dotted lines in Figure 2 show possible connections between the three frameworks based on a combination of concepts that are a constitutive part of the respective framework. This selection is not by chance but it can change.

In the final part of this subsection I mention two examples of topics in business ethics education that are not thought of as straightforward applications of the framework sketched above but indicate the relevance of the cultural approach to business ethics education.

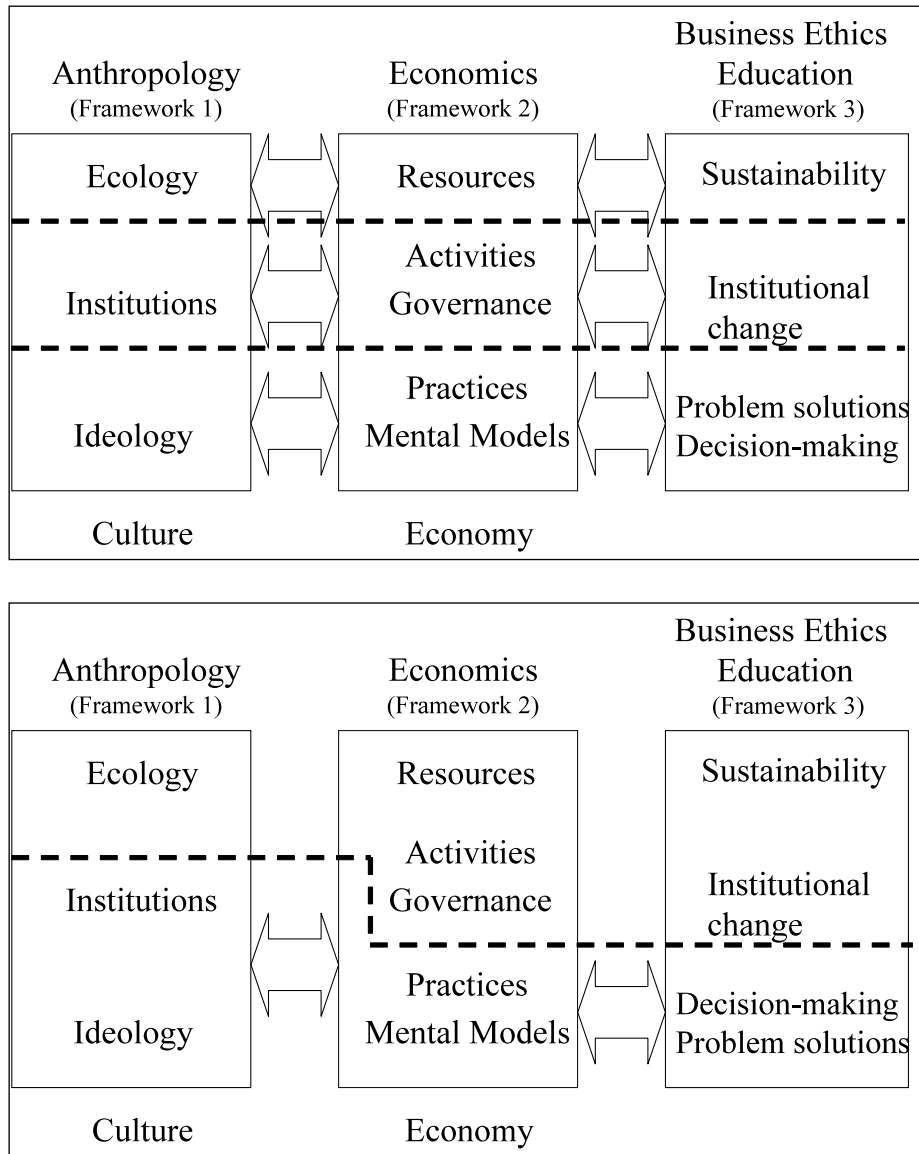
#### *Decision-making competences*

Not different from the times of Socrates, the implementation of the cultural dimensions into business ethics education raises questions that are related to economic globalization. Economic globalization has led to a long lasting debate on the question of possible advantages or disadvantages for the developed and less developed world (Pereira, 2010; Magala, 2005; Kolodko, 2002). Ethically, globalization has given rise to the question of a cultural “coloring” of moral values, decisions, or behaviors. Thus, it has called into question the possibility of having universal values, norms, and principles. Socrates’ answer to this question was the development of a meta-ethic for the reflection on values and concepts from a higher level of analysis and within a common (meta) language. Having the distinction between ethics (in the sense of theory of morality) and morals (in the sense of conventional societal belief systems) in mind, one can say that the cultural determination of what is considered as being morally “right” or “wrong” can at least be reflected from the perspective of an ethical theory. This is an important task of



business ethics education. Therefore, recognizing the relevance of culture is an argument for the integration of ethics (in the sense of moral philosophy) and meta-ethics into the curriculum.

**Figure 2: Optional combinations of the frameworks**



As Brunton & Eweje (2010: 353) have pointed out, globalization has entered the education business in a rather practical sense, too. Business students are “citizens of the world” in a double meaning: At first, as customers who demand a service in the education business, they come from very different parts of the world. Second, in countries like the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and others, the domestic students have roots in very different ethnic groups and will perhaps attempt to bring own “rights to culture” (Miller & Ahluwalia, 2011, 457) in the process of education.

*CSR in management education*

Matten & Moon (2008: 405), resuming own work and that of others in the field, point out that “CSR” is an “essentially contested concept;” “internally complex;” “an umbrella term” overlapping with other “conceptions of business-society relations;” and a “dynamic phenomenon.” It is well known that there are differences in the understanding of CSR between different countries; however, the reasons for these differences are less well understood (ibid.).

As Matten & Moon (ibid.) have emphasized, with respect to CSR “the precise manifestation and direction of the responsibility lie at the discretion of the corporation.” The CSR demands of society are formulated as culturally coined demands; the practices of corporations which face these demands are cultural ones. Therefore, we consider culture as an important factor for the development of research designs addressing national differences in CSR demands and CSR-related performances. Therefore, as a hypothesis, we state: An a-cultural style of business ethics education cannot be as effective as a cultural one.

**2. Final remarks**

Figure 1 provides a combination of the perspectives of anthropology and economics that can inform the study of topics in business ethics education. It is of course not the only way to address economic activities *as* cultural activities and to illuminate their relevance for business ethics education. The framework is hypothetical in a double way: First, it is based on theories which embody conjectural knowledge (Popper, 1963). Second, the way the framework is built is hypothetical. It is considered as a map that can be improved by investigating into the terrain.

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