

Execs: Study of ethics a must for CEO success, but not their own

ANN ARBOR---While most top executives say the study of business ethics is important for the success of CEOs, only 15 percent rank it among the top three fields of study crucial to their own success, according to research by the University of Michigan Business School and eePulse Inc., a technology and management research firm.

In a new study of nearly 250 senior business managers, all of whom took part in the U-M Business School's Executive Education program in the past five years, the field of business ethics ranks behind only business strategy as the most important area for study by successful CEOs.

But when the study participants were asked to list the top three fields that were critical to their own personal success, business strategy (62 percent), human resource management (58 percent) and communications (29 percent) were most frequently cited.

"When forced to rank only three fields, business ethics fell off the radar screen," says Theresa Welbourne, adjunct professor at the U-M Business School's Zell-Lurie Institute and CEO and president of eePulse Inc. in Ann Arbor. "This may be due to the fact that ethics is not as well developed a field of study in most business schools."

Business strategy was rated as the single most important field of study for CEO success, in general, with 98 percent of the survey respondents saying it is "very important or critical." Ethics (84 percent), communications (75 percent), finance (71 percent) and human resource management (59 percent) rounded out the top five (among 15 fields of study).

"With the recent recession, many businesses have gone back to the drawing board to re-craft their strategies," Welbourne says. "Thus, as a basic building block of any business, it's not surprising to see that knowledge of strategy is valued as critical for the CEO job. Business strategy also is the one academic field that pulls all of the other business subjects together."

While more than three quarters of the survey respondents ranked fields such as general management, entrepreneurship, organizational behavior, marketing and operations management as "important, very important or critical," more than a third said that the study of sales, business law and accounting were not important for CEO success.

In addition, more than 60 percent of the study participants ranked management consulting as not important. In fact, some even said that it may have negative career effects.

"Given the collapse of Arthur Andersen and the current skepticism of consultants, this is not surprising," Welbourne says. "Given the interest that most MBA students have in consulting careers, this will be an interesting trend to watch over the next few months and years."

The study also asked respondents what advice they would give business school deans and faculty to help them better educate students and business executives in the critical skills defined as essential for success.

Overall, responses focused on offering classes that go beyond finance and accounting and emphasized "real-world" applications with advanced training in strategy, human resource management and ethics. In addition, the survey suggested that faculty have a strong background in corporate business with current, "real-world" experience, and to use case studies rather than recite theory alone.

To see the report, visit <http://www.eepulse.com/research.html>

Contact: Bernie DeGroat
University of Michigan
Business School Communications
Phone: (734) 936-1015
E-mail: bernied@umich.edu

###