

# Teaching Ethics in Human Resource Management Education : A Study in Sri Lanka

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## Abstract

The objectives of this paper were to argue richly for the need to learn the topic of ethics in the human resource management (HRM) education, to identify specific topics of ethics to be taught in the HRM education curriculum from the relevant literature, to evaluate and describe the intensity of ethics integration into the HRM curricula of the bachelor's degrees and full professional qualifications in HRM being offered by universities and professional institutes in Sri Lanka, and to present some suggestions towards improving the effectiveness of teaching ethics in HRM education. This study, being exploratory and descriptive, was carried out by using a desk research based on relevant existent literature, a descriptive analysis of detailed contents of learning materials, an objective evaluation, and a case study analysis. Seven categories of arguments supported to establish the case for learning ethics in HRM education. Five main dimensions of the topic of ethics to be taught were identified. The findings of the evaluation revealed that there is a serious need of ethics integration into the HRM education. The case analysis of the practice of the university which was rated as the highest revealed some useful specific practices for enhancing the effectiveness of teaching ethics in HRM education.

**Keywords :** intensity of ethics integration, human resource management, HRM education, teaching ethics

**JEL Classification Codes :** A2, M12, M53

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Sri Lanka is a country which has a great potential for its economic and social development, though it is still a developing country. How well any country survives in this global economy depends squarely on the performance of its organizations (Werther & Davis, 1996). While success depends on good organizations, progress of success depends on better organizations (Opatha, 2009). HRM is one of the most important functional fields of organizational management. HRM, which is about managing people at work efficiently and effectively for organizational effectiveness (Bohlander & Snell, 2017 ; DeNisi & Griffin, 2008) leads to superior financial performance of organizations (Huselid, 1995) ; is vital to organizations of the twenty-first century (Schuler, 1998) ; and critical to the success of all organizations, large and small, regardless of industry (Jackson, Schuler, & Werner, 2012). HRM plays a critical role in the success of the organizations, and employees remain the only competitive advantage that cannot be copied by others (Joshi, Sunny, & Vashisht, 2017). Right practice of HRM in industry is determined by right HRM education. HRM education refers to the system of teaching knowledge, skills, and attitudes of HRM to people who aspire to become successful professionals in HRM. Here, the focus is HRM education in bachelor's degree level and full professional qualification level.

All professionals need to be ethical owing to many reasons, and HRM professionals are not an exception. In

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general, ethics are moral principles of conduct with regard to right and wrong used to govern the decision making and behavior of an individual or group of individuals (Dess, Lumpkin, & Eisner, 2008 ; Daft, 2014 ; Silva & Opatha, 2015). As far as HRM education is concerned, organizational ethics becomes applicable and the application of ethics to behaviour of personnel in a particular organization refers to as organizational ethics, alternatively called business ethics or managerial ethics. Opatha (2019b) defined organizational ethics as :

A critical aspect of the organizational management that consists of the moral values, beliefs, and rules which are utilized to govern the way employees are supposed to behave when dealing with parties inside and various parties outside the organization and when making decisions individually and collectively. (p. 89)

It is indispensable that HRM education makes the students ethical and become potential to work ethically when performing in the world of work. Little research has been done with regard to creating a synthesis of arguments for the need to learn the topic of ethics in HRM education, specification of specific topics of ethics for HRM education, and examination of the intensity of ethics integration into the HRM curriculums of the bachelor's degrees and professional qualifications in HRM. In particular, it reveals a gap in the empirical knowledge of the intensity of ethics integration into the HRM curriculums of the bachelor's degrees and professional qualifications in HRM being offered by universities and professional institutes in Sri Lanka, indicating a contextual gap in research too. In addition, there is an intellectual curiosity to know the need to learn the topics of ethics in HRM education supported by a rich set of arguments, a specification of specific topics of ethics for HRM education, and the intensity of ethics integration into the HRM curriculums of the bachelor's degrees and professional qualifications in HRM being offered by universities and professional institutes in Sri Lanka. Hence, the objectives of this study are :

- To argue richly for the need to learn the topic of ethics in HRM education.
- Identify specific topics of ethics to be taught in the HRM education curriculum from the relevant literature.
- Evaluate and describe the intensity of ethics integration into the HRM curricula of the bachelor's degrees and full professional qualifications in HRM being offered by universities and professional institutes in Sri Lanka.
- To present some suggestions towards improving the effectiveness of teaching ethics in HRM education.

## **Methods**

This study is not a study using the hypothetico – deductive method ; hence, it may have less academic vigour from the point of quantitative analysis. This study explores a new area of research in HRM and its education. In terms of purpose of the study, this study is exploratory and descriptive. In order to achieve the first and second objectives, a desk research based on relevant existent literature was conducted. Generally, specific relevant literature was scant. In order to identify specific topics of ethics to be taught in HRM education curriculum, a Google search of websites such as Biblio.com, Amazon.com, Alibris.com, etc. was carried out. As the search revealed that there was no single textbook available exclusively for teaching ethics for HRM, 25 well known HRM textbooks were examined, resulting in that only four HRM textbooks with a separate chapter on Ethics were available, and in addition, few HRM ethics related scholar books were utilized through a descriptive analysis of detailed contents. Textbooks are a useful source of theory in a specific area covering a broad range of topics, furthermore covering a topic much more thoroughly than articles can (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). A focus group technique could have been

used, but it was not possible owing to the unavailability of relevant experts who had specialized in HRM ethics.

The third objective deals with evaluating and describing the intensity of ethics integration into the HRM curricula of the bachelor's degrees and full professional qualifications in HRM being offered by universities and professional institutes in Sri Lanka. In order to achieve the third objective ; first, a conceptualization and an operationalization were performed with regard to the concept of intensity of ethics integration into the HRM curriculum by using existent literature and logical beliefs of the author of this study. As a result, four dimensions with objective scoring scales were identified. Second, a web search was carried out to find out the number of all state universities, private universities, and HRM professional institutes in Sri Lanka. It was found that 15 state universities, five private universities, and two HRM professional institutes were operating in Sri Lanka at the time of doing this research. Third, only universities and professional institutes which were offering specialized HRM education were selected for evaluation. Fourth, the evaluation of the selected universities and professional institutes was done by using web - based information, which was published officially online by the respective organizations. In particular, curriculum structures given in the student handbooks were examined to do the evaluation.

In order to achieve the fourth objective of the study, a case study analysis was done in addition to the use of some useful literature. The selected case was the university which was rated as the highest in terms of the intensity of ethics integration into the HRM curriculum.

## **The Need to Learn the Topic of Ethics in HRM Education**

It is difficult to imagine an area of study that has greater importance to society or greater relevance to students than business ethics (Shaw, 2014). The topic of ethics is not a mere or fashionable addition to the pool of various topics to be taught to and learnt by students of HRM. Discussing ethics is not a private matter, and avoiding discussion of ethics at all levels of education may only fuel mystification and/or ignorance (Ryan & Bisson, 2011). Many business school deans rank learning ethics among the top five learning goals for their programs, and discussing ethics must be within educational programs without being it a private matter (Martell, 2005). There are empirical evidences claiming that a positive shift in ethical reasoning occurred as a result of ethics education (Weber, 1990), an increase in students' awareness and sensitivity towards social issues occurred (Stead & Miller, 1988) ; and furthermore, an increase of ethical awareness of the members of the experimental group occurred when compared with that of the controlled group (Burton et al. 1992 as cited in Ryan & Bisson, 2011). Several valid reasons could be drawn from the existent literature to show the need of learning the topic of ethics.

### ***Argument 1 : Global Performance Deficiency***

What is expected ideally is that organizations should not involve in financial frauds and corruptions. What is really seen is that there are organizations, which have been involved in financial frauds and corruptions. Globally, it has been observed that there are many incidences in organizations involving in financial frauds and corruptions (Rose, 2005). The term “CEO” (chief executive officer) has become increasingly associated with scandal, and the term “CFO” (chief financial officer) perhaps even more so (Deckop, 2006). Recent financial crises resulted in attracting a significant debate in media with regard to ethical and moral issues that ought to have been considered by the stakeholders involved in the market (Gupta & Sukumaran, 2013). There has been an increase of corporate accounting frauds in India, and the unholy nexus between auditors and managers is allegedly the key reason for the rising trend in the country (Kumar, 2014). Recent business scandals have renewed the interest of business leaders, academics, and society at large in ethics (Shaw, 2014).

## ***Argument 2 : Local Performance Deficiency***

It has generally been observed in Sri Lanka that incidents such as giving promotions to unqualified persons ; appointment of personnel for top positions on political influences ; unnecessary foreign trips and local functions ; sexual harassments ; bullying behaviours ; retaliations ; evil conflicts ; assassinations ; character assassinations ; assaults ; abuse of public properties ; receiving various gifts and gratifications by assigning contract work to relatives, friends or associates ; receiving a high commission on the basis of purchasing various assets or properties at higher prices for government or organization, and misappropriation of public funds have occurred (Opatha, 2019b). Opatha (2019b) predicted that it is more likely that future Sri Lankan society will be distressed and full of problems, including serious damages to the natural environment unless a serious intervention by way of application of organizational ethics is not made.

## ***Argument 3 : Business Case***

Factually, a vital part of management practices of an organization is organizational ethics because of the reason that John F. Akers, former Chairman of the board of IBM, said that it makes good sense for managers to be ethical, and companies cannot be competitive in either national or international markets without being ethical (Certo & Certo, 2008). According to Akers (as cited in Certo & Certo, 2008, p.66), ethics and competitiveness are inseparable, and as a society, it is not possible to compete very long or successfully with people stabbing each other in the back; with people trying to steal from one another; with everything requiring notarized confirmation because the other person cannot be trusted; with every little squabble ending in litigation; and with government writing reams of regulatory legislation ; businesses trying hand and foot to keep themselves honest. Akers's remark is vital and has to be believed and adhered to by every manager. The employment of ethical business practices can enhance overall corporate health in three important areas : productivity, stakeholder relations, and government regulation (minimizing or stopping enforcement of new regulations) (Certo & Certo, 2008). An ethical strategy can be good business and serve the self-interest of shareholders (Thompson, Peteraf, Gamble, Strickland III, & Jain, 2012). Thompson et al. (2012) observed that :

The more egregious are a company's ethical violations, the higher the costs and the bigger the damage to its reputation (and to the reputations of the company personnel involved). In high-profile instances, the costs of ethical misconduct can easily run into hundreds of millions and even billions of dollars, especially if they provoke widespread public outrage and many people are harmed. The penalties levied on executives caught in wrongdoing can skyrocket as well, as the 150-year prison term sentence of financier Bernie Madoff illustrates. (p. 535)

It is argued that to create an ethical culture results in avoiding the pursuit of unbridled self-interest of employees, protecting collective interests of an organization and the general society, establishing desired end states and the relevant modes of behaviour, improving productivity, and improving organizational image in the society (Opatha, 2015).

## ***Argument 4 : Moral Case***

An organization, in particular a business organization, gets the license to operate its business in order to pursue a fair profit, and it does not possess a license given by the members of the society to maximize profits by doing any form of harm to general well-being of the people in the society and the Earth on which people live. If operations of a business organization advertently or inadvertently do any harm to the society and the Earth, then those

organizations indeed become responsible for that. Hence, morally, a business organization is obligatory to act as an ethical corporate citizen. A company's strategy should be ethical because a strategy that is unethical is morally wrong and reflects badly on the character of the company personnel (Thompson et al., 2012). Teaching behavioral ethics can improve students' ethical decision making in a manner that can lead to a more ethical climate in organizations and in society more generally (Drumwright, Prentice, & Biasucci, 2015).

### ***Argument 5 : Individual Case***

At the individual level, reasons such as need of knowing ethics in order to be a person of ethics, need of adhering to organizational ethics as a job requirement, to build excellent personal character, to deal with ethical dilemmas with confidence, to give a good example of being ethical to others, to avoid various costs involved, and to avoid or reduce occupational stress show the importance of learning ethics (Opatha, 2019a).

### ***Argument 6 : Case of Human Resource Manager's Roles***

An HRM professional (Manager or Head) carries out three distinct functions : a line function, a coordinative function, and staff functions (Dessler, 2013). A human resource manager or the head of the department of HR in an organization can become an ethical maven, and as an ethical maven, he/she is required to play four roles which include : Advocate (to make the case that ethicality is an essential competence of performing jobs and doing business for betterment of all stakeholders), Builder (to help identify and construct the knowledge and skills needed to make ethicality a core competence of all the responsible people in the organization), Leader (to lead and motivate employees in order to ensure that their behaviour is ethical), and Practitioner (to lead by example by improving his/her own ethical competence) (Opatha, 2019b).

### ***Argument 7: Case of Performance of HRM Functions Ethically***

Silva, Opatha, and Gamage (2016) identified a common view among scholars that it is essential to perform HRM functions ethically in an organization in order to maintain justice, fairness, and well-being towards its stakeholders. HRM functions from job design to labour relations will have to be performed in an ethical way in order to achieve the objectives of HRM (Fisher, Schoenfeldt, & Shaw, 2006 ; Opatha, 2009).

These seven arguments richly result in establishing a serious need of learning the topic of ethics in educating students of HRM.

## **Identification of Specific Topics of Ethics for HRM Education**

Certainly, locally and perhaps globally, in particular South Asian context, teachers and academics in HRM have a problem about what to teach under the topic of ethics if it is to be taught. The topic of ethics is abstract and not concrete, implying that it is difficult to identify and list exactly specific topics to be taught to or learnt by the students of HRM. Surprisingly, many well-known general textbooks of HRM do not have a separate chapter on ethics for HRM. An attempt was made to examine 25 textbooks on HRM, and it was found that none of the textbooks had a separate chapter on ethics for HRM, or ethics in HRM, or ethics and HRM.

More surprisingly, according to an examination of three HRM textbooks with contemporary issues or contemporary approach, two textbooks did not have a separate chapter on ethics. Redman and Wilkinson (2009) presented a separate chapter on employment ethics in their textbook titled *Contemporary HRM*. Torrington, Hall, Taylor, and Atkinson (2011) presented a separate chapter on ethics and corporate social responsibility as one of the contemporary issues in their textbook titled *Human Resource Management*. A separate chapter on the ethical



**Table 1. Specific Topics of Ethics Given in HRM Textbooks with a Separate Chapter on Ethics**

Author/s	Year	Specific Topics
Redman & Wilkinson	2009	Introduction, ethical theories : enter the moral maze, an employment ethics agenda, shaping an ethical workplace, the history of ethical employment management, the advent of HRM, and conclusion: three fallacies of HRM ethics
Torrington, Hall, Taylor, & Atkinson	2011	The ethical dimension, early management concern with ethics, renewed interest in business ethics, ethics and human resource management, ethics across national boundaries, and some current and developing ethical dilemmas
Armstrong & Taylor	2014	Introduction, the meaning and concerns of ethics, the nature of ethical decisions and judgements, ethical framework, ethical theory, justice, HRM ethical guidelines, ethical dilemmas, and the ethical role of HRM in performance of HRM functions ethically, and creation and enhancement of employee ethicality
Opatha	2019b	The meaning of organizational ethics, importance of organizational ethics, types of ethics, unethical behaviour, a practical framework for ethical decision making : ethical dilemmas, the role of HRM in organizational ethics, and HR Manager as an ethical maven

dimension of HRM was written by Armstrong and Taylor (2014) in a well-known textbook titled *Armstrong's Handbook of Human Resource Management*. Locally, in Sri Lanka, only one textbook is available to date and it was written by me. In the textbook titled *Sustainable Human Resource Management : Expanding Horizons of HRM* published in 2019, there is a separate chapter on organizational ethics and HRM. Relevant specific topics or subtopics given by these authors in their textbooks are listed in Table 1.

A Google search of websites such as Biblio.com, Amazon.com, Alibris.com, etc. revealed that there is no single textbook available exclusively for teaching ethics for HRM. It was possible for me to find two scholar books (not textbooks, but books having research papers or chapters edited) and one book. Pinnington, Macklin, and Cambell (2007) edited a scholar book titled *Human Resource Management : Ethics and Employment* published by Oxford University Press having three parts and 16 chapters. In 2006, an edited book, a collection of essays and research papers titled *Human Resource Management Ethics* edited by Deckop presented 14 chapters. A learning module written by Myrna (2010) published by Society for Human Resource Management, USA titled *Ethics in Human Resource Management* which was designed for four class sessions of approximately 50–90 minutes each includes four main topics such as ethical theories, moral development, discussion of cases, and HRM and ethical organizations. Table 2 gives the specific topics covered by these three books.

After a careful examination of what has been mentioned in Tables 1 and 2, it is possible to observe five main dimensions of the topic of ethics for HRM education such as Ethics in General, Ethical Decision Making, Performance of HRM Functions Ethically, Creation and Enhancement of Employee Ethicality, and HR Manager as an Ethical Maven. It is believed that teaching with regard to these five main dimensions can be done by offering a course on ethics for HRM which consists of five modules. After removing repetitions, all specific topics presented by all the authors mentioned above can be covered under the five main dimensions.

**Table 2. *Specific Topics of Ethics Given in Ethics – HRM Books***

Author/s	Year	Specific Topics
Pinnington, Macklin, & Cambell	2007	Socio-political theory and ethics in HRM ; The ethics of HRM in dealing with individual employees without collective representation ; HRM and performance : can partnership address the ethical dilemmas ? ; Strategic management and human resources : the pursuit of productivity, flexibility, and legitimacy ; Ethical employment practices and the law ; HRM and the ethics of commodified work in a market economy ; Stakeholder theory and the ethics of HRM ; HR managers as ethics agents of the state ; The ethical basis for HRM professionalism and codes of conduct ; Engineers of human souls, faceless technocrats, or merchants of morality ? : changing professional forms and identities in the face of the neo-liberal challenge ; Ethical leadership in employee development ; Ethics and work in emergencies : the UK fire service strike 2002–03 ; HRM, ethical irrationality, and the limits of ethical action ; Expanding ethical standards of HRM : necessary evils and the multiple dimensions of impact ; Strategy, knowledge, appropriation, and ethics in HRM ; and The morally decent HR manager
Deckop	2006	Socially responsible HRM ; Ethics and strategic HRM ; Wisdom, ethics, and HRM ; Beyond rhetoric and bureaucracy: using HRM to add ethical value ; An examination of the potential of HRD to improve organizational ethics ; The role of moral development in motivating ethical behavior by employees ; Caring for workers, caring for clients : everyday ethics in assisted living ; Reevaluating drug testing : questions of moral and symbolic control ; The persistence of sexual harassment ; Fairness and reciprocity – norms to enhance the ethical quality of compensation scholarship and practice ; Religion and pay: implications for compensation ; Ethics and economic justice in the public sector and nonprofit sectors ; The consequences and challenges of union decline : an ethical perspective ; and the ethical problems of a materialistic value orientation for business (and some suggestions for alternatives)
Myrna	2010	Ethical theories (Ethics and morals, Ethical theories, Ethical relativism, Utilitarian theory, Categorical imperative, Distributive justice, Ethics of care, and Aristotle’s virtue ethics) ; Moral development (Kohlberg’s stages of moral development, Moral judgment and moral conduct, Do moral people behave unethically ?, and ethical decision making ; Discussion of cases (When the boss doesn’t like her ; Now you see it, now you don’t ; Real sales or wishful thinking ? ; The best person for the job ; Whatever happened to Lana ?) ; and HR management and ethical organizations (Human resource practices, Building a culture of ethics, and Long-term results)

## The Intensity of Ethics Integration into the HRM Curriculum

Ethics can be taught (Ryan & Bisson, 2011). In addressing the issue of how ethics should be taught, Ryan and Bisson (2011) concluded that the standalone ethics course can be offered or ethics discussions can be embedded within a curriculum, and both have merit ; yet authentic discussions should pervade curriculum, be contextualized and multifaceted. A separate course titled Ethics for HRM can be offered to all the students of HRM. As identified in the above section, it is possible to offer five modules such as Ethics in General, Ethical Decision Making, Performance of HRM Functions Ethically, Creation and Enhancement of Employee Ethicality, and HR Manager as an Ethical Maven. HRM curriculum has many specialized (such as human resourcing, performance evaluation and management, human resource development, and rewards management) and generalized courses (fundamentals of human resource management, human resource context, contemporary human resource management, and organizational behavior) in HRM. Teaching ethics can be embedded within these specialized and generalized courses. It is argued that ethics teaching via a standalone course and embedded ethics discussion within a curriculum are better because both ways lead to increase the intensity of ethics integration into the HRM curriculum.

Another important aspect of ethics education is including professional association codes and corporate codes into the business curriculum (Ryan & Bisson, 2011). Code of ethics is a formal statement of the values and ethical standards that guide a firm's actions (Griffin, 1997). A code of ethics is a formal statement of the company's values concerning ethics and social issues ; it communicates to employees what the company stands for (Daft, 2014). According to the observation of Oddo (1997), professional association codes and corporate codes were incorporated into the curriculum by Niagara University. This incorporation leads students to get learned about evaluating business decisions using codes, and eventually they gain a skill that has to be applied when entering the real world of working.

Character-based ethics is an important component of ethics education (Ryan & Bisson, 2011). Character is the extent to which a person possesses virtues (patience, self-discipline, tolerance, humility, honesty, respect, loyalty, gratitude, benevolence, caring, etc.) and vices (jealousy, deception, desire for others' things, greed, selfishness, anger, hostility, reprobation, retaliation, lust, etc.) (Opatha & Teong, 2014), and it is the true foundation for right decision making (Weragoda & Opatha, 2016). Character-transmission is the essential mission of education, and characterlessness is the destitution which cannot be worsened (Budhananda, 2005). One type of ethics is virtue ethics, which are about personal character qualities for being morally good. Virtue ethics is an approach that is seen to originate with Aristotle (384 – 322 BC) ; and he was concerned with good people rather than the qualities of good acts or principles (Rose, 2005). Virtues are different from values and virtues are absolutes and universally accepted moral principles and do not vary according to race, nationality, religion, culture, or any other classification, but values are relatives and not universally accepted beliefs or ideals and vary according to race, nationality, religion, culture, or any other classification (Macmillan & Macmillan, n.d.; Opatha & Teong, 2014). Thus, it is argued that a course on character enhancement or personal quality enhancement is a right incorporation into HRM education as the students of HRM need to develop their own personal character, and furthermore, they will be required to develop personal character of employees in the organizations where they will get employed as HR professionals in the future.

The intensity of ethics integration into the HRM curriculum is considered as a variable which is of course abstract. It is defined for this study as the extent to which the particular HRM curriculum includes the topic of ethics. This working definition is operationalized into four dimensions, that is, inclusion of stand-alone ethics course, inclusion of embedding ethics curriculum, incorporation of professional association codes and corporate codes into the curriculum, and inclusion of character-based ethics course. Table 3 presents the four dimensions and their measurement scales.



**Table 3. Four Dimensions of the Intensity of Ethics Integration into the HRM Curriculum and Their Measurement Scales**

Dimension	Scale
Inclusion of stand-alone ethics course	5 = Included as a compulsory course 3 = Included as an optional course 1 = Not included
Inclusion of embedding ethics curriculum	5 = Embedded within all the courses 4 = Embedded within more than a half of the courses 3 = Embedded within a half of the courses 2 = Embedded within less than a half of the courses 1 = Embedded within only one or two courses
Incorporation of professional and corporate codes	5 = Incorporated and compulsory 3 = Incorporated but optional 1 = Not incorporated
Inclusion of character-based ethics course	5 = Included as a compulsory course 3 = Included as an optional course 1 = Not included

## Results of the Evaluation

For the purpose of evaluation of the intensity of ethics integration into the HRM curriculums of the bachelor's degrees and professional qualifications in HRM being offered by universities and professional institutes in Sri Lanka, first an attempt was made to explore the availability of the specialized HRM education at the first degree level in all the state and private universities and at a full professional qualification level in professional institutes in Sri Lanka. Results of the exploration of the availability of the specialized HR education are shown in Table 4.

According to Table 4, there are 15 state universities which are full-fledged universities and members of the association of Commonwealth Universities. Out of the 15 state universities, specialized HRM education is offered by only 8 universities. Four private universities numbered 16, 17, 18, and 19 are operating and three of them offer specialized HRM education. Only two professional institutes of HRM operate in Sri Lanka and they offer professional qualifications in HRM. The Chartered Institute of Personnel Management is the only professional institute of HRM in Sri Lanka enacted by the Sri Lankan Parliament.

Table 5 provides the results of the evaluation of the intensity of ethics integration into the HRM curriculum of each of the 13 educational organizations given in Table 4 which offer specialized HRM education.

According to the evaluation done by using the four dimensions of the intensity of ethics integration into the HRM curriculum, none of the educational organizations could be awarded with 20 points (maximum points). Only one university, which is a state university, could be awarded with more than 10 points (average). Only four universities, which are state universities, got 8 points. All the three private universities, and more surprisingly, the two HRM professional institutes could be given the minimum points (4 points).

Furthermore, a case study was carried out with regard to the state university which got 13 points from the evaluation in order to find the details about how it teaches ethics for HRM students. The university is one of the leading state universities in Sri Lanka and has a separate academic department for HRM education under the Faculty for Management Studies education. The department of HRM offers a specialized degree in HRM with

**Table 4. Availability of Specialized HRM Education in Sri Lanka**

University/Institution	Available	Unavailable
University of Colombo	X	
University of Peradeniya	X	
University of Sri Jayewardenepura	X	
University of Kelaniya	X	
University of Moratuwa		X
University of Jaffna	X	
University of Ruhuna	X	
The Open University of Sri Lanka		X
Eastern University, Sri Lanka	X	
South Eastern University of Sri Lanka		
Rajarata University of Sri Lanka	X	
Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka		X
Wayamba University of Sri Lanka		X
UvaWellassa University of Sri Lanka		X
University of Visual & Performing Arts		X
Sri Lanka Institute of Information Technology	X	
NSBM Green University	X	
ICBT		X
Horizon Campus	X	
Chartered Institute of Personnel Management	X	
Human Resource Management Institute	X	

a 4 - year duration curriculum structure, which includes a character-based ethics course title, which is Personal and Social Responsibility, which is offered in the Semester II of the second year as a compulsory course consisting of seven modules such as character development, time management, solution of student conflicts, social responsibility, business ethics, anger management, and positive thinking.

As a major innovation to the Degree, this course was started in 2005. The course's main focus is development of individual character. This type of course had never been offered in the history of management education in Sri Lanka. A student survey (done by the Department) (Opatha, 2009) displayed that majority (72.7%) of the students (who were specializing in HRM in the Faculty) perceived strongly that discipline of the common university students needs to be improved heavily. It was observed generally by every academic member of the Department that abilities of their students and graduates to function as responsible citizens, act responsibly, give respect to things and persons which deserve to be respected, control self, act fairly and justly, bear differences, and engage in caring were missing or were unsatisfactory. Majority of the academics of the university had a similar view. The student survey showed that 95% students liked to learn very much about character education. These views *inter alia* influenced on education of character development to be incorporated into the curriculum. The course had 45 direct student teaching contact hours (03 credits) and at least 28 sessions during the semester with one and a half hour duration each. An exclusive manual was developed for the course and a copy was given to each student free of charge. The most senior academic of the Department of HRM, Professor of HRM (on merit) developed mainly the manual by getting certain modules written by several senior academics (senior lecturers) and edited by him.

**Table 5. Evaluation of the Intensity of Ethics Integration into the HRM Curriculums**

University/Institute (Name of the Educational Organization has not been Specified) Ethics Course		Inclusion of Stand-alone Ethics Course	Inclusion of Embedding Ethics Curriculum	Incorporation of Professional and Corporate Codes	Inclusion of Character-based Total Points	More Than 10 Points
A	3	1	3	1	8	
B	3	1	3	1	8	
C	1	2	5	5	13	X
D	3	1	3	1	8	
E	1	1	1	1	4	
F	1	1	1	1	4	
G	1	1	1	1	4	
H	5	1	1	1	8	
I	1	1	1	1	4	
J	1	1	1	1	4	
K	1	1	1	1	4	
L	1	1	1	1	4	
M	1	1	1	1	4	

The teaching was implemented through analyses of cases and critical incidents, self-rating exercises, and structured lectures. Real world scenarios were utilized for encouraging engagement in learning.

As far as embedding ethics curriculum is concerned, the topic of ethics was taught in several compulsory courses and they were Personal and Social Responsibility (as a module titled *Business Ethics*), Performance Evaluation and Management (as a topic *Ethics in Performance Evaluation*), Contemporary HRM (as a topic *Ethics in HRM*), and Advanced HRM (as a topic *Organizational Ethics and HRM*). Incorporation of professional and corporate codes was done as a separate sub - topic under the main topic of *Organizational Ethics and HRM* in the course Advanced HRM which is offered in the final year.

## Discussion and Conclusion

I am not in a position to make a traditional type of discussion to confirm the research findings through the previous empirical research evidences as there are no previous similar studies available. However, some indirect studies were utilized. The first objective of this study is to argue richly for the need to learn the topic of ethics in the HRM education. Seven categories of arguments were derived from the attempt done systematically through the use of existent literature. Global performance deficiency, local performance deficiency, business case, moral case, individual case, case of HR manager roles, and case of performance of HRM functions supported to establish the case for learning ethics in HRM education. Hence, this finding reveals that there are at least seven valid major reasons to justify that the students of HRM are required to learn the topic of ethics. It is possible to conclude that learning ethics is indispensable for the students of HRM.

The second objective of this study is to identify specific topics of ethics to be taught in the HRM education curriculum from the relevant literature. The systematic attempt made in this regard by using relevant existent literature resulted in the finding that there are five main dimensions of the topic of ethics for HRM education

including ethics in general, ethical decision making, performance of HRM functions ethically, creation and enhancement of employee ethicality, and HR manager as an ethical maven. To cover these five main dimensions or aspects of the topic of ethics, it is possible to offer a full comprehensive course on ethics for HRM or five modules on each main dimension.

The third objective of this study is to evaluate and describe the intensity of ethics integration into the HRM curricula of the bachelor's degrees and full professional qualifications in HRM being offered by universities and professional institutes in Sri Lanka. One finding is that out of 15 state universities, only eight universities offer specialized HRM education. As Sri Lanka is an emerging economy and still developing, the number of employment opportunities in HRM is relatively lower than those for other areas such as accounting, marketing, finance, and business. This may be one reason. Another reason may be lack of academics who specialized in HRM. In the entire university system, there are less than 10 university professors in HRM in Sri Lanka. Another finding from the evaluation is that none of the universities and professional institutes in Sri Lanka could be ranked as very high in terms of the four dimensions of the intensity of HRM integration into the HRM curriculum. Only one state university got more than average points (13) out of the maximum points (20). Most of the universities were seriously lacking in the four dimensions. One reason may be that there is a shortage of academics specializing in ethics. Another reason may be that those who are responsible for developing HRM curricula have not yet, unfortunately, comprehended the essentiality of teaching and learning ethics. Another reason might be that academics in HRM are not competent to teach the topic of HRM successfully owing to lack of relevant education, experience, and training. Lecturer competence has a significant positive impact on lecturing behaviour (Opatha, 2020). Perhaps they do not have a right positive attitude in respect of ethical education. Lack of good character in our society causes a great deal of harm to people and the society will have to be regarded as morally bad (Opatha, 2007).

Glanzer and Ream (2007) did a review of teacher curricula from 156 colleges and universities, and found that only 9% of teacher education programs offered ethics courses as program requirements or electives. All teachers must learn about and commit to instructional and behavioral practices that foster an ethical school culture that embraces and promotes the core values of respect and responsibility, integrity and honesty, and care for self and others (Mathur & Corley, 2014). Business students are far more likely to engage in unethical conduct than others, based in part on their belief that 'you have to do whatever it takes to get ahead' (Naimi, 2007). There is considerable evidence of ethical and intellectual failure among accounting practitioners, and at least some responsibility for these failures can be laid at the door of accounting education that fails to develop students' intellectual and, relatedly, ethical maturity (Gray, Bebbington, & McPhail, 1994). Furthermore they write that this failure may be due to moral failure on the part of accounting educators, and current accounting knowledge implicitly reinforces intellectual and ethical atrophy. My personal observation of actual Sri Lankan HRM cases reveals that many HRM professionals have failed to be ethical. It is attributed that lack of sufficient ethics integration into the HRM education is a cause of this visible ethical atrophy of HRM professionals.

## **Theoretical and Practical Implications**

The major theoretical implication of this study is the synthesized description of reasoning and presenting a set of reasons to explain the need of teaching ethics in HRM education. The systematic attempt done in this study resulted in creating a synthesis that consists of seven arguments for the need to learn the topic of ethics in the HRM education. This set will hopefully establish the case for teaching ethics in HRM education. Another major theoretical implication this study has is the identification of the specific topics of ethics for HRM education, which will hopefully lead to the development of specific literature on those identified specific topics. The conceptualization and operationalization of the intensity of ethics integration into HRM curriculum can be

considered as an original contribution to the existing body of knowledge of HRM education. The results of this study have several practical implications. Indeed, the findings of the evaluation reveal that there is a serious need of ethics integration into the HRM education. The current situation may lead to a pool of graduates in HRM and subsequently HRM professionals who are unethical inadvertently and incompetent to play the important roles such as advocate, builder, leader, and practitioner.

Sri Lanka badly needs a workforce of HRM professionals who immensely contribute to create, maintain, and enhance an ethical culture that is a critical part of the organizational culture that consists of the moral values, beliefs, and rules, which are utilized to govern the way employees are supposed to behave when dealing with parties inside and various parties outside the organization and when making decisions individually and collectively. Creating an ethical culture has now become a major priority for many organizations ; it is because of that failing to do so can be catastrophic (George & Jones, 2005). Hence, it is firmly believed that it is possible to make organizations and their human resources ethical through a serious intervention by way of application of ethics integration into HRM education. HRM education is a major part of management education, and it is indeed indispensable (Opatha, 2019a).

It is suggested that a university or a professional institute that needs to do ethics integration into the HRM education focuses on developing a standalone ethics course, introducing embedding ethics curriculum, incorporating professional and corporate codes into the curriculum (a good practice may be within the standalone ethics course), and introducing a character-based ethics course. Furthermore, students can be exposed to attend workshops on ethics, write an HRM ethics term paper, engage in analysis of cases & critical incidents and doing exercises (including real world scenarios and self-rating tools) with regard to ethics.

## **Limitations of the Study and Scope for Further Research**

Any study has limitations and this study is not an exception. The first limitation is the assumption that web based information, which has been published officially online by the respective organizations is updated and current. It might not be. The second limitation is its explorative nature rather than explanatory and hypothesis testing. The third limitation is that only one university was taken for the case study. I believe that there is a serious need of developing study material with regard to actual ethical cases and critical incidents which occurred nationally rather than teaching based on foreign applications. Hence, future studies will need to be done in order to explore actual cases and critical incidents happened within Sri Lanka. Carrying out field experimental studies will be possible in order to find out whether teaching ethics based on locally developed learning material is more successful than teaching ethics based on internationally developed learning material in terms of teaching and learning effectiveness. In addition to cross sectional studies, longitudinal studies will be more useful to find out the impact of different levels of intensity of ethics integration into HRM education on ethical attitude and ethical behaviour of the students. According to an empirical study (Pattanaik, Modi, & Budhiraja, 2015), it was found that personal values work as predictor of ethical behaviour of managers, and further, the study revealed that self orientation and materialistic orientation were the major personal values which promoted unethical behaviour among managers, while selfless work, conformity to authority, and achievement orientation discouraged unethical behaviour.

It is suggested to conduct empirical studies to find out whether unethical behaviors of managers are impacted by their personal values such as self-orientation, moralistic orientation, selfless work, conformity to authority, and achievement orientation. Valid research findings of such studies will pave the way for developing a focus on building right personal values within the students in general and the HRM students in particular.



## Author's Contribution

Prof. Dr. H.H.D.N.P. Opatha is the single author of this research paper. Conceiving the idea, writing the conceptual part of the research, empirical part of the research, and the whole writing of the paper were performed by Prof. Dr. H.H.D.N.P. Opatha.

## Conflict of Interest

The author certifies that he has no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest, or non-financial interest in the subject matter, or materials discussed in this manuscript.

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