

The Antecedents of Ethical Climates in the Spanish Business Higher Education Institutions

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Abstract Ethical climate in organisations has been studied widely and its influence on ethical behaviour has been documented. However, little is known about the ethical climate at university context and about its antecedents. Universities are social change institutions and their ethical climate could influence the ethical behaviour of future economic, social and political leaders. The current study analyses the perceived ethical climate in Business Studies Higher Education Institutions in Spain and whether university's ownership, size and signing up for international initiatives influence it. The study is based on survey responses of 385 lecturers of Spanish Business Studies Faculties to an ethical climate questionnaire and on survey responses of 33 Business Studies Deans to a questionnaire related to the commitment to ethics and social responsibility in each Faculty. An exploratory factor analysis has been used as well as ANOVA tests and lineal regressions. The results reveal the predominance of an *instrumental* ethical climate in Spanish Business Faculties, an ethical climate that does not promote ethical behaviour or organisational commitment among its members. The results also confirm the significant influence of university's ownership and signing up for Principles for Responsible Management Education on the ethical climate in Business Higher Education institutions. This study advances the understanding of the ethical climate in Business Studies institutions, and suggests measures to be taken by university managers in order to improve ethical judgment and behaviour of the university community.

Keywords Business studies · Ethical climate · Higher education · Ownership · PRME, size

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Introduction

Society has requested changes in the education for future leaders of both society and the economy, as universities are responsible for developing competent, responsible professionals. Several documents published by national and international organisations (including the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD) (UNESCO 2012), the Aichi-Nagoya Declaration (Aichi-Nagoya 2014), Global Compact (United Nations 1999) and Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME) (United Nations 2007); the Global Reporting Initiative (Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) 2006); the European Union 2020 Strategy, developed at the Lisbon Summit) coincide in stressing the importance of training in values and responsibility as a primary task that universities must undertake. The aforementioned documents highlight the role and importance of education as a basic driver for the development of individual and collective responsibility, and the university's role in leading the process of providing future executives with comprehensive education and training.

Due to these calls, Universities are experiencing a process of change, in which sustainability and value education have become priority objectives (Holm et al. 2015; Karatzoglou 2013; Larrán et al. 2015; Lozano et al. 2015; Setó-Pamies and Papaoikonomou 2016). Universities are increasingly incorporating ethical training in their degrees at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. However, individuals' behaviour is influenced not only by education in values: increasing credence is given to the belief that the context or ethical climate of the organisation to which an individual belongs also has a significant influence (Treviño et al. 1998; Victor and Cullen 1988; Martínez et al. 2002). Literature suggests (Victor and Cullen 1988; Boye and Jones 1997; Kunda 1992; Trevino 1986 (Vardi 2001) that individual behaviour is strongly influenced by the organisation's value system. When behaviours in an organisation are perceived to be ethical, these perceptions influence ethical decision making of organisational members (Brown and Treviño 2006). As Schneider et al. 2013, p. 367 affirm: "That is, when workers perceive that organization is concerned about their well-being through its emphasis on fairness, diversity, ethics, trust, and so forth, they are more amenable to the efforts of management to focus on strategic outcomes of value to the organization".

An appropriate ethical climate increases the desire to become emotionally involved, and enhances both socialisation and organisational commitment (Arias and Tejada 2004).

A substantial body of research addresses organisations' ethical climates, and their influence on members' behaviour (Cullen et al. 2003; Peterson 2002; Wimbush and Shepard 1994). Literature affirms that people tend to accept and internalize the organisational climate to which they belong, and that the perception of climate influences their behaviour (Schneider and Hall 1972; Schneider 1975; Steers and Mowday 1981; Wimbush and Shepard 1994; Vardi 2001, Haron et al. 2015, Jiang et al. 2012). This research has been conducted in many different contexts, but few papers concentrate on the ethical climate in universities (Acharya 2005; Al-Omari 2013; Floyd and Yerby 2012; Moore 2012; Putranta and Kingshott 2011). However, there is a call for further research in the university context area (Tauginienė 2016).

Universities are social changing entities and contribute to social, cultural and environmental development (Chatterton and Goddard 2000; Gunasekara 2006; Peer and Stoglehner 2013). They are responsible for the values of future social, political and economic leaders. So it is not enough to introduce ethics in their curriculum but to generate an ethical climate that promotes ethical behavior among their members. Universities are multilevel learning environments, in which ethics, social responsibility and sustainability should be integrated inside and outside the classroom, both implicitly and explicitly (Setó-Pamies and Papaoikonomou 2016). These three

terms (ethics, social responsibility and sustainability) are used as overlapping concepts following previous studies (Larrán and Andrades 2014; Matten and Moon 2004; Setó-Pamies et al. 2011).

The study provides new evidence regarding ethical climate in higher education institutions. The results of this paper reveal an instrumental ethical climate's predominance, which does not enhance ethical behaviour among its members, nor organisational commitment. This study reveals the significance of university's ownership and university's commitment to ethical principles as antecedents of the ethical climate in higher education institutions. It advances an understanding of the ethical climate in Business Studies institutions, and suggests measures to improve ethical judgment and behaviour. The implications of the results for the improvement of professionals' ethical awareness and behaviour are also stated.

The study aims to contribute to literature regarding the ethical climate at universities by surveying a sample of Spanish university lecturers. It is the first to provide empirical evidence of the ethical climate at Spanish universities, and to analyse the background of the university's ethical climate.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. Section 2 reviews literature on ethical climates and its background in universities. Section 3 outlines the empirical study conducted, while Section 4 presents our findings. The paper concludes with an outline and discussion. Bibliographical references are appended at the end of the paper.

Literature Review

Ethical Climate

Climate is a construct or concept originated in cognitive and moral psychology, and refers to the study of organisations' behaviour (Peterson and Spencer 1990). These authors assert that an organisation's climate can be defined in terms of current common patterns found in the organisation's primary dimensions, or its members' perceptions and attitudes regarding these dimensions. Schneider et al. (2013, p.381) state that '*organisational climate emerges in organisations through a social information process that concerns the meaning employees attach to the policies, practices and procedures they experience, and the behaviours they observe being rewarded, supported and expected*'.

Schneider (1975) defends the idea that within an organisation, numerous different climates can influence its members. Along these lines, research into the climate in organisations has developed through specific approaches. Numerous studies have been conducted on the climate at organisations, focusing on such specific objectives as service (Schneider et al. 1998), safety (Zohar 1980) and innovation (Klein and Sorra 1996), or different processes, such as ethics (Victor and Cullen 1987) and fairness (Colquitt et al. 2002).

The body of research on organisations' ethical climates analyses organisational processes from an ethical perspective. Ethical climate is considered a dimension of the overall organisational climate. The relevant literature defines this as '*the shared perception of what is correct behaviour, and how ethical situations should be handled in an organisation*' (Victor and Cullen 1987, p. 51–52).

The ethical climate theory (Victor and Cullen 1987, 1988) describes the types of ethical thinking that can be encountered as an organisation, on the basis of a model with two primary dimensions: moral philosophy and sociological theory in reference groups.

The philosophical dimension of ethics includes three criteria: egoism, benevolence and principles. ‘Egoism’ is behaviour in which the only concern is one’s own interests. ‘Benevolence’ is behaviour in which decisions are made in an effort to do good deeds for as many people as possible. ‘Principles’ involve decision-making in accordance with laws, regulations, codes or procedures (Victor and Cullen 1988). These three criteria are based on Kohlberg’s (1981) theory of cognitive moral development, under which moral reasoning is divided into different stages, through which one sequentially progresses. Kohlberg defines three ethical bases, which he calls ‘self-interest’, ‘caring’ and ‘principles’, which coincide with criteria used by Victor and Cullen (1987, 1988) in constructing their theory.

The sociological dimension includes three reference groups used to apply different criteria in organisations’ ethical decisions: individual, local and cosmopolitan. Decisions in the individual orientation are made by only considering oneself. Primary reference groups and expectations in the local orientation are contained within the social system in which the individual operates, for example, his or her working group. Reference groups in the cosmopolitan orientation are located in a social system external to the organisation itself, such as society in general.

The combination of the philosophical and sociological dimensions creates nine ethical climate types. However, the climates identified in the research conducted to date are shown in Table 1.

Numerous studies have been conducted regarding perceived ethical climates (Cullen et al. 2003; Mayer et al. 2009), Neubaum et al. 2004; Wimbush et al. 1997). Victor and Cullen (1988) and Martin and Cullen (2006) suggest that multiple ethical climates can be identified within the same organisation, even though usually one type prevails. Relevant literature indicates that an organisation’s context can condition the type of ethical climate that emerges within it (Cullen et al. 2003; Martin and Cullen 2006; Simha and Cullen 2012; Victor and Cullen 1988). The extensive body of literature that examines the perceived ethical climate in profit organisations cannot generalise the climate type anticipated in each case because of the wide diversity of organisations and sectors analysed.

Regarding non-profit organisations, Cullen et al. (1989) predicted climates based on benevolence, but literature suggests different ethical climates in these organisations (Agarwal and Malloy 1999; Rasmussen et al. 2003).

Given universities’ social function, the perceived ethical climate might be expected to be one based on social outlook and public service. However, the type of climate identified in certain organisations may not always be the one expected (Simha and Cullen 2012). Tsahuridu (2006) suggests that due to the nature of work and lecturers’ high autonomy in universities, it could be anticipated that lecturers perceive an ‘*independent*’ ethical climate. He also suggests that as universities are perceived as market organisations, a perceived ‘*instrumental*’ ethical

Table 1 Types of ethical climates

Ethical Criteria	Locus of Analysis		
	Individual	Local	Cosmopolitan
Egoism	Instrumental		Efficiency
Benevolence	Care		Social Responsibility
Principle	Independence	Rules	Law and Codes

Source: Cullen et al. (1993)

climate could be anticipated. However, literature reveals different results regarding universities' ethical climates (Acharya 2005; Al-Omari 2013; Floyd and Yerby 2012; Moore 2012; Khasawneh 2014; Putranta and Kingshott 2011).

We first identify the type of ethical climate perceived by Spanish university lecturers due to the different approaches that can be expected at the university regarding the perception of ethical climate.

Considering the current literature noted in this paper, we are not going to raise a hypothesis, but a research question:

RQ1: What are the ethical climates at Spanish universities?

Antecedents of Ethical Climates in Universities

Public Versus Private Universities

Public and private organisations are most commonly defined and distinguished according to ownership and/or funding (Perry and Rainey 1988). An organisation's public or private ownership influences how it is managed, and the environment in which it operates. Publicly owned organisations are funded from a public purse, and are therefore subject to pressure and control from society. They also tend to be highly structured and bureaucratic in responding to requirements (Ayree 1992). These characteristics of public organisations may influence their perceived ethical climates. In this sense, Wittmer and Coursey (1996) suggest that an ethical climate based on personal interest, or the *instrumental* climate as per Victor and Cullen (1988), can be anticipated in public organisations because of their rigidity and bureaucracy. However, other authors suggest that the primary value in the public sector is either responsibility (Van der Wal et al. 2008) or a moral commitment to society (Wittmer and Coursey 1996). Therefore, publicly owned organisations could have benevolence-based ethical climates, or the *care* and *social responsibility* types that parallel Victor and Cullen's (1988) criteria.

Private sector organisations may have different characteristics and ethical climates. These organisations are forced to note market demands through competitiveness and a dynamic environment (Ayree 1992). Van der Wal et al. (2008) assert that the primary value in the private sector is the profit motive. Therefore, these types of organisations could have an ethical climate of *efficiency* (Victor and Cullen 1988). Liu et al. (2004) also suggest that private organisations focus more on personal morality, and may therefore be expected to possess ethical climates based on benevolence (*care* or *social responsibility*) or principle (*rules* or *laws and professional codes*), in the terms used by Victor and Cullen (1988).

Universities have a mission at the core of all their activities, which could be essentially focused on values and ethics, depending on the university's ownership.

In such countries as Spain, most private universities are closely linked to religious organisations, whose missions are usually related to educational values and are closely connected with ethics and morality (Larrán and Andrades 2014). These types of institutions more highly emphasize ethics than public institutions because the institutional demand involves the understood and accepted influence of a self-conscious theological tradition, and thus, a presumably ethical reflection (Evans et al. 2006). It could be anticipated in this sense that these types of universities present an ethical climate based on benevolence or principles (*care* or *law and codes*). Studies conducted regarding ethical climate in private universities

(Acharya 2005; Putranta and Kingshott 2011) reveal the coexistence of different ethical climates, but do not specify which predominates.

Regarding public universities, Evans et al. (2006) highlighted that public universities offer a traditionally 'value-free' education. These authors also suggested that if public universities do incorporate values in their institutions, these expectations are not nearly as clear, direct, and authoritative as those from religious universities. Perry and Rainey (1988) concluded that public universities are bureaucratic, with rigid hierarchical arrangements. Ramachandran et al. (2011) affirm that hierarchical culture is rule-based, and therefore, it could be expected that public universities present a *rules*-type ethical climate. Results are inconclusive from studies conducted at publicly owned universities (Floyd and Yerby 2012; Khasawneh 2014; Moore 2012); some prevailing climates are based on benevolence, while others are based on principles.

Therefore, our first hypothesis is as follows:

Hypothesis 1: *University's ownership influences the ethical climate perceived by lecturers.*

Size of Universities

A factor that influences the ethical behaviour of an organisation's members is its size (Lozano 2013; Weber 1990). Weber (1990) suggests that in larger, more structured organisations, individuals may feel detached from decision-makers. That remoteness may be because larger organisations are more impersonal, and their members experience difficulty in identifying with them (Mathieu and Zajac 1990). In this context, Treviño et al. (1998) argue that in larger organisations, the rules issued that reflect their culture gradually dissipate as they filter down through large bureaucracies. Members of smaller organisations, in contrast, are more familiar with the rules by which they are governed (Malloy and Agarwal 2003). Therefore, commitment to an organisation and its promoted values may be influenced by the size of that organisation.

In this sense, Peterson et al. (1986) suggest that an organisation's size can influence the way in which its members perceive its ethical climate.

In the specific context of ethical climates in large and small organisations, Neubaum et al. (2004) conducted a study of 73 United States firms, and concluded that employees in larger firms perceive the *rules* and *laws and professional codes* climates to a lesser extent.

However, not all studies reveal the same results: in a study of non-profit organisations, Malloy and Agarwal (2003) concluded that size does not influence members' perceptions regarding their ethical climate.

No previous empirical studies have been conducted concerning the link between university's size and perceived ethical climate, although some studies of different-sized universities have found different types of ethical climates. In this sense, Acharya (2005) found that the *instrumental* ethical climate was predominant at a small university, but Khasawneh (2014) identified *care* climate as the respective factor. Two studies at medium-sized universities showed ethical climates based on egoism (Al-Omari 2013; Putranta and Kingshott 2011). This leads to our second hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: *University's size influences the ethical climate as perceived by lecturers.*

Universities' Commitment to Ethics and Social Responsibility

Society has called for changes in the education of future leaders in both society and the economy. Accordingly, the United Nations (Global Compact, 1999; PRME, 2007), the European Commission and many national governments now advocate education in business studies that focuses not only on technical content, but also on developing sound ethical values and social responsibility.

Universities' commitment to an ethical culture could be complied through codes of ethics or values declarations. At this respect, ethical climate could be fostered the dissemination of these values and ethics declarations and/ or code of ethics via communication systems and training (Kuntz et al. 2013).

Signing Up to International Initiatives: The Global Compact and the PRME (Principles for Responsible Management Education) The Global Compact (1999) is a UN initiative that seeks to voluntarily establish general principles for businesses' responsible behaviour. This is an attempt to promote and implement universal principles of acknowledged prestige at an international level, and is especially aimed at companies that aspire to create a fairer, more equitable market, in which there is room for everyone (McIntosh 2004).

Companies are free to sign up for the Global Compact, and more than 10,000 have done so, to date. Businesses, institutions and other types of organisations, including universities, may also join or become partners. In 2011, 19 Spanish universities had signed up for the Global Compact (Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports 2014), and the figure now stands at 30 (Global Compact Network 2016).

The PRME established a scheme in 2007 linked to the UN Global Compact, in response to worldwide calls for universities and business schools to gradually adapt their curricula, research and teaching methods, and institutional strategies to address new business opportunities and challenges. This scheme's primary goal is to develop a generation of responsible business leaders (Godeman et al. 2014).

Signing up for the PRME evidences a firm's commitment to sustainability and social responsibility as a core facet of the signatory's operations in both teaching and research. Universities that make such a commitment are conveying that their priorities include the production of honest business professionals. We believe, therefore, that lecturers at these universities should perceive a value-based climate and culture.

No studies exist, to our knowledge, which address the influence of signing up for the Global Compact or PRME on universities' perceived ethical climate. However, Hansen et al. (2016) found that when employees observe their organisation's socially responsible actions, they perceive their organisational climate as more ethical. Academically, joining these initiatives can be observed as an indicator of the signatory universities' commitment to sustainability and social responsibility, and therefore, could influence the ethical climate as perceived by lecturers.

***Hypothesis 3:** Registering for the Global Compact and/or the PRME influences the ethical climate as perceived by lecturers at signatory universities.*

Codes of Ethics Universities' creating a code of ethics and conduct may be perceived as an expression of their commitment to ethics and social responsibility, in establishing how the

university community should behave (Gaete 2011). Particularly regarding Business Studies, the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB, 2004) recommends that business schools create codes of ethics.

A code of ethics is created to forge an organisation's character in specific circumstances (Lozano 2011, p. 158); its effectiveness depends on how motivated the organisation's members are, and what solid guidelines are provided for them to follow. Erwin (2011) posits that codes of ethics are fundamental in establishing social responsibility policies, and essential for creating and maintaining an ethical culture within organisations. Similarly, Treviño (Trevino 1986) includes codes of ethics as a part of corporate culture.

Adams et al. (2001) conclude that the mere existence of a code of ethics in an organisation may generate favourable results, as they may act symbolically. The authors state that such codes serve as a signpost for employees as to whether the organisation is concerned with ethics. Lozano (2011) asserts that a code of ethics is not the solution to all ethical problems that may arise in organisations, but that it may effectively enhance their ethical standards. The absence of a code of ethics, in contrast, may be perceived as a message that those in charge do not believe ethics are important (Adams et al. 2001).

Floyd et al. (2013) surveyed deans from the top 100 business studies faculties in the United States, and highlighted that deans' positive attitudes toward codes of ethics at their universities were necessary to create a culture of integrity.

The relationship between the existence of codes of ethics and the organisation's ethical climate has been previously studied in organisations other than higher education ones. Peterson (2002), in a study of business professionals, concluded that members of organisations that did not have a code of ethics in place were more likely to perceive their ethical climate as *instrumental*. Other authors (Martin and Cullen 2006; Treviño et al. 1998; Wimbush and Shepard 1994) suggest that organisations with codes of ethics can be expected to have *rules-type* ethical climates. However, while Malloy and Agarwal (2003) found no significant differences in the perceived ethical climate depending on whether a code of ethics exists, several other authors suggest that this factor may be influential (Cullen et al. 1989; Martin and Cullen 2006; Peterson 2002; Stevens 1994).

Limited literature exists regarding codes of ethics' influence on universities' perceived ethical climate. However, considering this, a university's formal code of ethics may be expected to influence the perceived ethical climate. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

***Hypothesis 4:** Having a code of ethics at a university influences the ethical climate perceived by lecturers.*

Method

Sample and Distribution

Two surveys were conducted at the same time. One addressed to Spanish Business Studies lecturers and the other one, to the Deans of these institutions.

Sample and Distribution: Lecturers

The target population for this study was all the lecturers of Business Studies Faculties in Spain. There are 82 universities in Spain (50 of them with a public ownership and 32 with a private one) (Conference of Rectors of the Spanish University in its 2013–2014 Annual Report).

The survey was distributed online, mainly through the support of the Deans of the different Faculties. We sent the link to access to our online survey as well as a letter explaining the purpose of the study. Lecturers were informed that their participation was voluntary and that their responses would remain anonymous and confidential.

385 usable questionnaires were replied directly to the researchers. In order to determine whether or not respondents were similar to nonrespondents, a comparison between the distribution of the various population variables and the proportions of teaching staff at public and privately run universities, as published by the Spanish Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport in its 2014 Annual Report of facts and figures concerning Spanish Universities, confirms our sample is representative of the group under study.

Table 2 illustrates the characteristics of the lecturers who comprised the sample. Approximately 54% of the replies were from male lecturers. With respect to university's ownership, most of the replies (88.45%) came from a publicly operated one. A classification according to the number of lecturers in each Faculty reveals that 27% of the respondents worked in large Faculties, 48.6% at medium-sized Faculties, and the remaining 24.4% in small Faculties.

Sample and Distribution: Deans

The target population for this study was the Deans of the Spanish Business Studies Faculties.

The questionnaire was emailed directly to the Deans. They were informed that their participation was voluntary and that their responses would remain anonymous and confidential.

We received 33 valid questionnaires.

Table 2 Demographic variables

	Lecturers	%
GENDER		
Male	208	54.45%
Female	174	45.55%
TOTAL	382	100%
UNIVERSITY'S OWNERSHIP		
Public	337	88.45%
Private	44	11.55%
TOTAL	381	100%
UNIVERSITY'S SIZE		
Small (<150 lecturers)	93	24.41%
Medium (151–300)	185	48.56%
Large (>300 lecturers)	103	27%
TOTAL	381	100.00%

Questionnaires

Questionnaire for Lecturers

We used a complete, 36-question ethical climate questionnaire (ECQ), as proposed by Cullen et al. (1993), to identify the types of ethical climates perceived in Spanish universities' Business Studies Faculties. This questionnaire measures how individuals perceive their organisation's ethical climate, and seeks to explore the ethical dimension of organisational culture through the perceptions of the organisation's members. Respondents assume the role of observers, namely, they are asked to report on their perceived ethical climate without evaluating it.

This questionnaire has been broadly validated in relevant literature (Cullen et al. 1993; Fritzsche 2000; Martin and Cullen 2006; Wimbush et al. 1997). However, little has been published concerning the ethical climate in universities and no relevant studies in Spanish have been found, so we proceeded to translate the questionnaire into Spanish. In some cases, items were modified slightly to reflect the context of universities as opposed to the generic format of the ECQ. We ran a preliminary test before distribution to ensure that it would be properly understood. The recommendations made in the wake of that test were subsequently incorporated into the questionnaire.

Respondents were asked to indicate on a 6-point Likert-type scale (ranging from completely disagree to completely agree) how accurately each of the items described their work climate.

The demographic variables (gender, tenure, knowledge-area, university) were measured by asking lecturers this data on the questionnaire.

Questionnaire for Deans

Deans of Business Studies Faculties were sent another questionnaire to obtain data about different actions regarding the commitment to ethics and social responsibility in each Faculty.

Table 3 reveals the number of universities that have taken actions regarding their commitment to ethics and social responsibility. As can be observed, ten Business Studies Faculties have sign up for the Global Compact and most of them are publicly operated. Likewise, only three Faculties/Universities registered for the PRME. Regarding the existence of a code of ethics, less than half of the Faculties have one, and most are public.

Results

This section presents and discusses the results on the ethical climate in Spanish Business Faculties, and the influence of university's ownership, size and commitment to ethics and social responsibility on the perceptions of ethical climate.

Exploratory Factor Analysis

The types of ethical climate as perceived by the sample's lecturers from different universities are presented in Table 4. Data suitability was checked by applying the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin sampling adequacy test (0.926) and Bartlett's sphericity test (8918.298, with 630 degrees of freedom and a significance level of 0.000), both of which indicate that factorial analysis is a suitable process for

Table 3 Commitment to ethics and social responsibility measures

	OWNERSHIP				
	PRIVATE			PUBLIC	
	Univ	Univ	Lecturer	Univ	Lecturer
GLOBAL COMPACT					
Yes	10	1	3	9	113
No	23	3	40	20	220
TOTAL	33	4	43	29	333
PRME					
Yes	3	2	18	1	8
No	30	2	25	28	325
TOTAL	33	4	43	29	333
CODE of ETHICS					
Yes	12	2	18	10	119
No	17	1	15	16	192
TOTAL	29 ^a	3	33	26	311

^aTwo universities did not send the questionnaire, and two answered that they did not know whether they had a code of ethics

this data. A factor analysis was then applied using the principal axis factoring extraction method with oblimin rotation, as proposed by Victor and Cullen (1987, 1988).

This analysis originally resulted in seven factors, with initial eigenvalues greater than unity. As the saturation squared of the last two factors' extraction was less than 1, it was decided to maintain only the other five, which explains approximately 60% of the variance.

We decided to consider only the values higher than 0.5 to determine which items correspond to each type of ethical climate, paralleling relevant literature (Agarwal and Malloy 1999; Treviño et al. 1998; Victor and Cullen 1987). Items with values greater than 0.4 in more than one factor are not included in any of the factors due to their high correlation. This results in 19 items that comprise the five factors or types of identified ethical climates. Such reductions in item quantities are habitually applied in other studies that have used this instrument with conditions as restrictive as those applied here. Subsequently, to avoid any doubts concerning arbitrariness in items' exclusion, the factor analysis was repeated without considering the excluded items. The result is similar to that obtained using all items.

As observed in Table 4, the resulting factors are consistent with five of the nine theoretical ethical climate types proposed by Victor and Cullen (1987, 1988): *care*, *rules*, *efficiency*, *instrumental* and *laws and professional codes*.

Ethical climate theory does not require strict independence, and acknowledges the coexistence of many types of ethical climates within a single organisation (Victor and Cullen 1987, 1988). For this reason, the mutual independence of the different types of identified ethical climates was analysed using Pearson's correlation analysis.

Table 5 illustrates the internal consistency of the factors thus defined between the different climate types. Low independence exists between measurements of ethical climate types, as all factors significantly correlate at 5%.

All factors show high internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values of at least 0.83.

To determine the type of ethical climate perceived by the study's participants, the scores for each factor are calculated as the average of the points awarded by respondents for each relevant item. Table 6 notes the average scores for each factor or ethical climate type.

Table 4 Matrix for the five resulting factors

	Factor				
	Care	Rules	Efficiency	Instrumental	Laws and Codes
What is best for each individual is a primary concern in this faculty/University (BI)	.750	.027	-.024	.106	-.015
Our major consideration is what is best for everyone in the faculty/University (BL)	.740	.046	-.137	-.039	-.054
The most important concern is the good of all people in the Faculty/University (BL)	.733	.053	.084	.011	-.062
In this faculty/University, our major concern is always what is best for the other person (BI)	.701	.059	-.026	-.132	.040
People are very concerned about what is generally best for employees in the faculty/University (BL)	.644	.066	-.203	-.171	.020
In this faculty/University, people look out for each other's well-being (BI)	.543	.114	-.147	-.357	-.010
The effect of decisions on the students and society are a primary concern in this faculty/University (BC)	.523	.072	-.148	-.168	-.163
The most important consideration in this faculty/University is each person's sense of right and wrong (PI)	.505	.075	-.034	-.055	.000
Successful people in this faculty/University strictly obey the faculty/University's policies (PL)	.078	.708	-.198	-.086	.045
Successful people in this faculty/University go by the book (PL)	.158	.702	.004	-.139	.115
In this faculty/University, the law or ethical code of their profession is a major consideration (PC)	.234	.540	-.188	-.085	-.134
The major responsibility for people in this faculty/University is to consider efficiency first (EC)	.133	.016	-.786	.040	.028
The most efficient way is always the right way in this faculty/University (EC)	.187	-.027	-.715	-.001	-.037
People in this faculty/University are very concerned about what is best for themselves (EI)	-.219	-.108	-.049	.669	-.032
In this faculty/University, people protect their own interests above other considerations (EI)	-.188	.076	-.015	.669	.140
In this faculty/University, people are mostly out for themselves (EI)	-.259	-.023	-.021	.661	.042
People are expected to comply with the law and professional standards above other considerations (PC)	-.009	.282	-.120	-.061	-.659
In this faculty/University, people are expected to strictly follow legal or professional standards (PC)	.039	.224	-.137	-.035	-.652
It is expected that you will always do what is right for the student and society (BC)	.155	-.057	-.257	-.194	-.603

E - Egoism, *B* - Benevolence, *P* - Principles, *I* - Individual, *L* - Local, *C* - Cosmopolitan, *EI* - Instrumental, *EC* - Efficiency, *BI* - Care, *BL* - Care, *PL* - Rules and *PC* - Laws and Professional Codes

As observed in Table 6, the first ethical climate perceived in our sample's universities is the *instrumental* climate. This means that lecturers perceive that decisions in Spanish Business Studies Faculties are solely based on self-interests, without considering the consequences of those decisions for third parties. This is the ethical climate least conducive to ethical behaviour, job satisfaction and commitment to one's organisation (Treviño et al. 1998).

The *laws and professional codes* ethical climate is the second most widely perceived. This suggests that the second-ranked perception among lecturers in Business Studies Faculties in Spain is that ethical decisions are made on the basis of deontology and professional codes.

Table 5 Correlation among ethical climate types and Cronbach's alpha values

		Efficiency	Care	Rules	Laws and Codes	Cronbach's Alpha
Instrumental	Pearson's Correlation	-.274**	-.566**	-.249**	-.329**	0.832
	Sig. (bilateral)	.000	.000	.000	.000	
Efficiency	Pearson's Correlation		.522**	.432**	.539**	0.830
	Sig. (bilateral)		.000	.000	.000	
Care	Pearson's Correlation			.514**	.573**	0.907
	Sig. (bilateral)			.000	.000	
Rules	Pearson's Correlation				.505**	0.834
	Sig. (bilateral)				.000	
Laws and Codes	Pearson's Correlation					0.845
	Sig. (bilateral)					

** $p < 0.05$

The third-ranked ethical climate, as perceived by Spanish lecturers, is that of *efficiency*, which focuses on ensuring the system's overall efficiency above the interests of individuals, organisations or units (Rasmussen et al. 2003).

It is noteworthy that the *care* ethical climate has the lowest score, despite this climate fostering ethical behaviour most strongly.

Antecedents of the Perceived Ethical Climate in Universities

Firstly, we performed simple ANOVA tests for every type of ethical climate, in order to determine if there were significant differences among average values of different groups. Table 7 shows the results of these analyses.

As can be seen from Table 7 there are two significant variables ($p < 0.05$) regarding the perception of different types of ethical climates, which are university's ownership and whether universities have signed up for PRME. University's ownership is a significant variable for the perception of the *care*, *instrumental* and *law and codes* ethical climates. This means that the perception of a *care* ethical climate and of a *law and codes* ethical climate is higher for private universities' lecturers, while the perception of an *instrumental* ethical climate is higher for public universities' lecturers.

Regarding universities' registering for PRME, this variable presents significant differences in the perception of a *care*, *instrumental* and *rules* ethical climates by lecturers of Business Studies Faculties. The results of Table 7 show that lecturers from universities signing up for PRME present a greater perception of the *care* and the *rules* ethical climates, while lecturers from universities not registered for the PRME perceive to a greater extent the *instrumental* one.

Secondly, in order to identify the cause and effect relationship between variables under study, we ran five lineal regressions (see Table 8). In each of them, the dependent variable was

Table 6 Means, standard deviation

	Mean	Standard deviation
Instrumental	4.7818	0.9829
Laws and Codes	4.0857	1.0957
Efficiency	3.7455	1.1919
Rules	3.4502	1.1451
Care	3.2169	1.0277

Table 7 Influence of the variables on the means of the identified ethical climates (ANOVA tests)

	Care	<i>P</i> -value	Instrumental	<i>P</i> -value	Efficiency	<i>P</i> -value	Rules	<i>P</i> -value	Law and Codes	<i>P</i> -value
Ownership	Public	3.1732	4.8566	0.000***	3.7389	0.721	3.4204	0.16	4.0475	0.011**
	Private	3.6307	4.1742		3.8068		3.7348		4.4924	
Size	Small	3.336	4.7061	0.643	3.7473	0.305	3.3835	0.67	4.2509	0.282
	Medium	3.2791	4.7802		3.827		3.5081		4.0685	
	Large	3.0316	4.8382		3.6019		3.4304		4.0162	
Global Compact	Yes	3.1735	4.9224	0.073*	3.75	0.977	3.4339	0.853	4.1868	0.295
	No	3.2471	4.7282		3.7462		3.4577		4.059	
PRME	Yes	3.8894	4.2692	0.005***	3.9423	0.387	4.0256	0.008***	4.4872	0.059*
	No	3.175	4.8267		3.7329		3.4076		4.0695	
Ethical Codes	Yes	3.3248	4.747	0.292	3.7847	0.755	3.4161	0.479	4.1436	0.966
	No	3.1564	4.8583		3.744		3.5056		4.1385	

p* < 0.1; *p* < 0.05; ****p* < 0.01

Table 8 Ethical climates regressions models

	Care		Instrumental		Efficiency		Rules		Law and Codes	
	B	Sig.	B	Sig.	B	Sig.	B	Sig.	B	Sig.
Private	0.1464	0.5704	-0.478	0.0475 **	0.0507	0.8673	0.6164	0.0341 **	0.8792	0.0013 ***
Small	0.3816	0.0300 **	0.0613	0.7075	0.2366	0.2512	-0.032	0.8694	0.1293	0.4835
Medium	0.2513	0.0958 *	-0.003	0.9852	0.2873	0.1052	0.1002	0.5538	0.0341	0.8295
PRME	0.5841	0.0331 **	-0.282	0.2687	0.0832	0.7957	0.1688	0.5826	-0.202	0.4827
Global Compact	-0.2020	0.1461	0.1132	0.3822	-0.126	0.4384	-0.086	0.5837	0.1154	0.4299
Ethical Codes	0.1205	0.2968	-0.065	0.5489	-0.007	0.9569	-0.156	0.2310	-0.03	0.8066
Constant	2.9721	<0.001 ***	4.8572	<0.001 ***	3.5992	<0.001 ***	3.4472	<0.001 ***	3.9992	<0.001 ***
R ²	0.0621		0.0485		0.0109		0.0387		0.0528	
F	37.174		2.8615		0.6184		2.2642		3131	
F Significance	0.0014		0.0099		0.7156		0.0371		0.0053	

p* < 0.1; *p* < 0.05; ****p* < 0.01

the type of ethical climate (*care*, *instrumental*, *efficiency*, *rules* or *law and codes*) and the independent variables were university's ownership, university's size, university's adherence to Global Compact, university's register for PRME and the existence of ethical codes.

As can be seen from Table 8, there are three significant variables regarding the different types of ethical climates, which are university's ownership, size and whether Universities have registered for the PRME.

With respect to university's ownership, this is a significant variable in the perception of an *instrumental* ethical climate, and in the perception of the *rules* and *law and codes* ethical climates, but it is not a significant variable in the perception of the *care* ethical climate.

The second significant variable in the perception of an ethical climate is university's size. Whereas ANOVA test showed a slight difference (significant in 10%) of university's size in the perception of *care* ethical climate, the regression analysis confirms the significant influence of university's size in the perception of the *care* ethical climate. In this sense, small universities have a significantly higher perception of the *care* ethical climate than big universities.

The third variable influencing lecturers' perceptions of ethical climate is registration for the PRME. ANOVA test showed significant differences for *care*, *instrumental* and *rules* ethical climates. However, considering the regression model, registration for PRME is only significant for the *care* ethical climate. This result suggests that lecturers from universities that register for the PRME have a significant higher perception of the *care* ethical climate than those from universities that have not adhered to this initiative.

Taken into account the results, the first hypothesis, concerning the influence of university's ownership and the second one, concerning the influence of university's size are supported.

The third hypothesis, concerning the influence of registering for international sustainability and social responsibility initiatives is partially supported.

These results do not support the fourth hypothesis regarding the influence of existence of codes of ethics on the ethical climate in the university.

Discussion

This study's primary objective is to determine the ethical climate perceived by lecturers in Spanish Business Studies Faculties, and whether certain variables of the universities, such as their size and ownership, or having registered for international ethics, social responsibility or sustainability initiatives, influence lecturers' perceptions of the ethical climate.

Society expects universities to produce responsible, ethical professionals, and an ethical climate must prevail in university communities for that to occur. The importance of fostering ethical behaviour among business students has been highlighted by international initiatives, and primarily after the last financial and economic international crisis.

Our findings reveal the coexistence of various ethical climates among these Spanish Business Studies Faculties: *instrumental*, *efficiency*, *care*, *rules* and *laws and professional codes*.

However, the results are not the same for different types of universities. In this sense, an analysis of the antecedents of perceived ethical climates reveals the existence of significant differences for university's ownership, university's size and signing up for PRME.

The results reveal that the perception of a *care* ethical climate is higher in small universities as well as in those that have registered for PRME. Members of small organisations used to feel closer to managers, with stronger commitment to the organisation (Malloy and Agarwal 2003).

So this result supports this idea for the university context. The results also show that registering for the PRME transmits the institution's commitment to ethics and social responsibility to its lecturers. This suggests that when a university signs up for the PRME, this fosters the perception among lecturers that it seeks to produce honest professionals and is concerned about its environment. It is worthwhile to consider the benefits of an ethical climate that fosters ethical behaviour and organisational commitment among its members.

With respect to lecturers' perception of *instrumental*, *rules* and *laws and codes* ethical climates, the only variable which influences this perception is university's ownership. Public university lecturers' perceptions of a predominant *instrumental* climate corroborate previous findings, which suggest that such universities have lost their original public service-oriented values (Van der Wal et al. 2008).

Likewise, lecturers of private universities perceive the *rules* and *laws and codes* ethical climates in a greater extent than the lecturers of the public universities. Literature (Larrán and Andrades 2014; Madison and Schmidt 2006) has suggested that private universities link their mission to ethics and morality, and this could be why these lecturers most strongly perceive the *laws and codes* ethical climate. This ethical climate is conducive to ethical behaviour and commitment to one's organisation, unlike the *instrumental* one. Ownership's significant influence on the perception of ethical climates at university settings suggests the necessity for further research regarding the initiatives taken by private universities. These universities promote an ethical climate that fosters ethical behaviour.

The results obtained in this study suggest that university authorities, and particularly those in public owned universities, must consider actions to display their commitment to ethical climates more suited to producing responsible professionals with ethical attitudes. In this sense, initiatives such as signing up for international initiatives like the PRME, which implies a high compromise on the part of university managers and community, are good examples of the measures that universities could take in order to promote ethical climates in accordance with what society expects from Higher Education Institutions.

The development of codes of ethics has not been significant in this study. This result may suggest that it is not enough with the development of codes of conduct to promote ethical climates that foster ethical attitudes. Further research could investigate the possible relevance of codes of ethics when these types of initiatives are really integrated in the university community.

This study contributes significantly to ethical climate literature. First of all, this is one of the few international studies on ethical climate at university settings. The knowledge of the ethical climate at higher education institutions is the first step for the generation of an ethical climate that promotes ethical behaviour and organisational commitment among the university community. Second, as far as we know, it is the first study conducted at Business Studies Faculties. Literature has suggested the importance of promoting an ethical climate in this type of studies due to the necessity of insufflating ethical values to the future business professionals. Third, it is the first one conducted in Spain. No previous studies have analysed the ethical climate in Spanish Universities. Finally, it identifies the contextual background of the ethical climate in universities, thus contributing to the limited literature on this subject.

Our findings must be interpreted in the context of certain limitations. First, our sample comprised solely Business Studies Faculties in Spain. It would be helpful to apply the study elsewhere, such as in other degree courses and countries, to generalise the study's conclusions. A second limitation is that the ethical climate literature review is based primarily on studies from the United States, given that few such studies have been conducted elsewhere. As

conducting our study in Spain may provide a cultural limitation it would be advisable to conduct more ethical climate studies in Spanish universities.

Finally, as this is an exploratory study, it analyses the potential effects of certain factors on the ethical climate as perceived by lecturers. However, other factors may exist that also influence their perceptions. Future research could analyse other factors' influence on lecturers' perceptions of ethical climate, and the consequences of the ethical climates perceived in universities. It would also be interesting to analyse the ethical climate as perceived by other members of the university community, such as administrative staff and students.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Ethical Approval All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

Informed Consent Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

Conflict of Interest The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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