Critical Themes in Business Ethics Research:

A Citation/Co-citation Analysis

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Abstract

This study examined the status of contemporary business ethic research in the new century. With citation data of SSCI from the top two business ethics journals, Journal of Business Ethics and Business Ethics Quarterly, this study used citation and co-citation analysis to identify the most important publications, scholars, and research themes in business ethics area, and then mapped the intellectual structure of business ethics studies. The results suggest that the contemporary business ethics research is organized along different concentrations of interests: social contract theory, ethical decision making, corporate social responsibility, and stakeholder theory, with some discussions on business ethics development.

Key Words: Business Ethics, Intellectual Structure, Citation, Co-citation, Social Network Analysis

1. Introduction

Business ethics grew out of religion’s interest in ethics in business and management education’s concern with social issues [1]. The history of ethics in business is a long one, going back to the beginning of business, yet the history of business ethics is brief and some might even claim business ethics is too recent a phenomenon to have a history. In his review on the status of business ethics development, De George [1] argued that business ethics had gradually developed into an interdisciplinary field and that the research on business ethics had experienced five different stages in the past decades until the middle of 1980s, including the ethics in business stage (prior 1960), the rise of social issues in business (in the