

## MACHIAVELLIANISM ATTITUDE TOWARD BUSINESS ETHICS AMONG STATE SCIENCE STUDENTS

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### Abstract

The study aims to explore the attitudes of state science students towards business ethics. The research used a voluntary online survey in Hungary. The results are based on the responses of 99 students from 2022. Machiavellianism is the most characteristic philosophy among state science students, similarly to business students. The analysis explored that this characteristic is not uniform; sub-groups can be defined. These clusters show different opinions about the perception of CSR. Considering Machiavellianism is a rational, opportunist philosophy, the middle way of scores is the most consistent with the idea that CSR can contribute to sustainability. Understanding the patterns allows targeted human resource management strategies to amplify environmentally conscious behavior.

### Introduction

Society level and personal approaches to environmental and social problems have long been the focus of interest. Considering that decision-makers are individuals or a group of individuals, their value system is expected to be more or less reflected in organizational actions. Exploring national, local, or profession-level patterns can contribute to substantive and acceptable CSR actions. Pálvölgyi et al. [1] stated that CSR is a particular challenge in formerly socialist countries since the fulfillment of social goals was regarded for decades as solely the state's responsibility, and similarly, economic responsibilities were also limited. Although three decades have passed, traces of the previous system remain in these cultures.

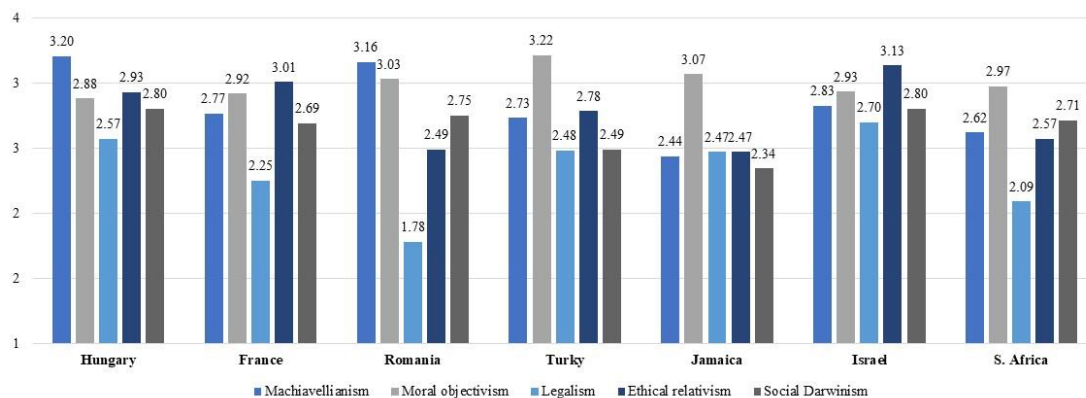


Figure 1: Business philosophy scores of selected countries [2, 3, 4]

The Attitudes Towards Business Ethics Questionnaire (ATBEQ) is an instrument oriented towards attitudes on selecting business ethics situations [5] based on the work of Stevens [6]. Clark et al. [7] present a concise summary of five business philosophies covering the ATBEQ statements: Machiavellianism, ethical relativism, legalism, social Darwinism, and moral objectivism. An extensive worldwide database is available among business students that allows an international comparison. The results pointed out that Machiavellianism is the most

prominent in the case of post-socialist countries among business students (Figure 1), and the moral objectivism score is lower in this international comparison. Hungarian data was based on the author's data collection [4].

According to Clark et al. [7], Machiavellianism covers the idea that business firms are self-contained organisms with their own 'natural laws' that can be bent but not broken. Miesing and Preble [8] highlighted that Machiavellianism is amoral since the outcome justifies the way to access it.

Machiavellianism can be considered both opportunist and realistic behavior [8]. It gives a practical approach to CSR application. According to Christie and Geis [9], in their opinion, people should believe in what they do rather than do what they believe in. Analyzing the Big Five personality trait dimensions, Czibor et al. [10] found that a high level of Machiavellianism is inversely proportional to agreeableness (friendliness) and conscientiousness. All these characteristics strengthen rationality, which is beneficial to business interests.

The study attempts to extend the investigations to public administration. Although the curriculum and teaching methods are different in the case of state science students and business students, they act as citizens and organizational decision-makers. CSR is increasingly integrated with public administration bodies, and these are supported or regulated by legal actions. The government's role in the field of social responsibility is multifaceted. Consequently, an emphasis on the field is reasoned. State science master students will play a key role in legal and administrative positions in the future on a national level. The question is whether their attitude to business ethics is similar to business students' attitude or differs from it. The study focuses on the analysis of Machiavellian characteristics.

## **Experimental**

A voluntary online survey was used for data collection among Hungarian higher education students, including the ATBEQ questions. The research sample of this study focuses on the responses of the state science (master level) students at the Ludovika University of Public Service, Budapest. The sample consists of 99 responses, including 60 females and 39 males. Statistical analysis included analysis of variance and cluster analysis, supported by IBM SPSS software. The analysis aimed to find the most characteristic philosophy. Machiavellianism score is calculated as the mean value of 12 related statements, evaluated on a 5-point scale (1: strongly disagree; 5: strongly agree):

- The only moral of business is making money.
- A person who is doing well in business does not have to worry about moral problems.
- Business decisions involve a realistic economic attitude and not a moral philosophy.
- Moral values are irrelevant to the business world.
- "Business ethics" is a concept for public relations only.
- George X says of himself, "I work long, hard hours and do a good job, but it seems to me that other people are progressing faster. But I know my efforts will pay off in the end." Yes, George works hard, but he's not realistic.
- For every decision in business the only question I ask is, "Will it be profitable?" If yes—I will act accordingly; if not, it is irrelevant and a waste of time.
- In my grocery store every week I raise the price of a certain product and mark it "on sale." There is nothing wrong with doing this.
- A business person cannot afford to get hung up on ideals.
- If you want a specific goal, you have got to take the necessary means to achieve it.
- The business world has its own rules.

A good business person is a successful business person.

**Results and discussion**

The pattern of the state science students is similar to the business students’ evaluation (Figure 1). Results show that Machiavellianism is the most characteristic philosophy (Table 1). However, the remarkable skewness index suggests further investigations. The distribution of the individual scores (Figure 2) confirms a mixing of samples; the state science students’ Machiavellian characteristic is not uniform or follow a normal distribution.

	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>	<b>Skewness</b>	<b>Kurtosis</b>		
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
<b>Machiavellianism</b>	3.23	0.516	0.476	0.243	0.206	0.481
<b>Moral objectivism</b>	2.56	0.518	-0.122	0.243	-0.345	0.481
<b>Legalism</b>	2.87	1.157	0.181	0.243	-0.546	0.481
<b>Ethical relativism</b>	2.88	0.664	0.097	0.243	0.890	0.481
<b>Social Darwinism</b>	2.77	0.478	0.537	0.243	-0.252	0.481

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of the philosophies (n=99, measured on a 5-point scale)

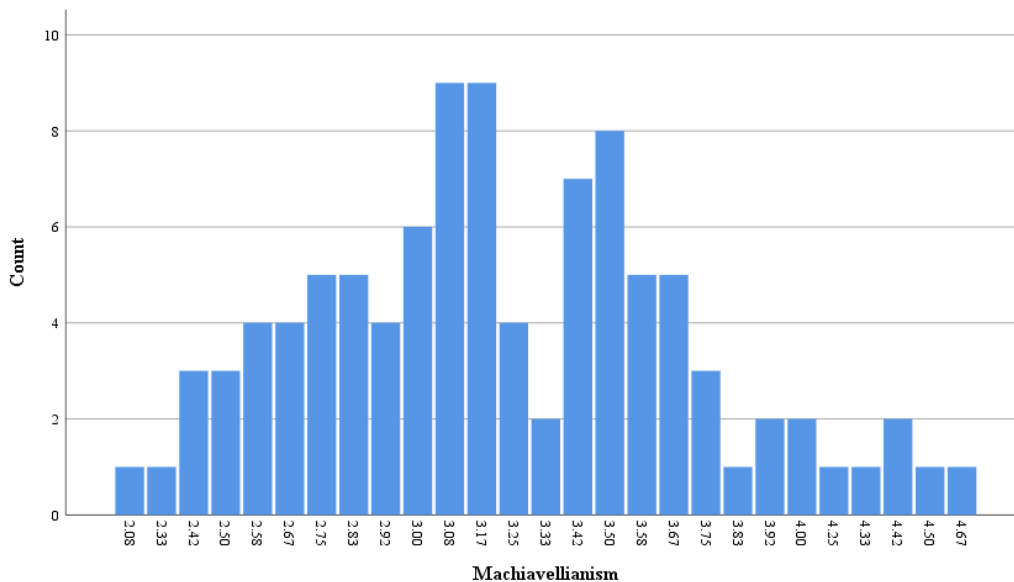


Figure 2: Distribution of Machiavellianism scores (SPSS output)

The analysis of variance confirmed only a few significant differences in the scores by gender, and any of these by other grouping factors like study religiousness, CSR knowledge level, or work experience. A cluster analysis was applied to explore characteristic patterns. Hierarchical clustering by Ward-method (results the lowest variance within the groups) allowed 3 clusters (Figure 3).

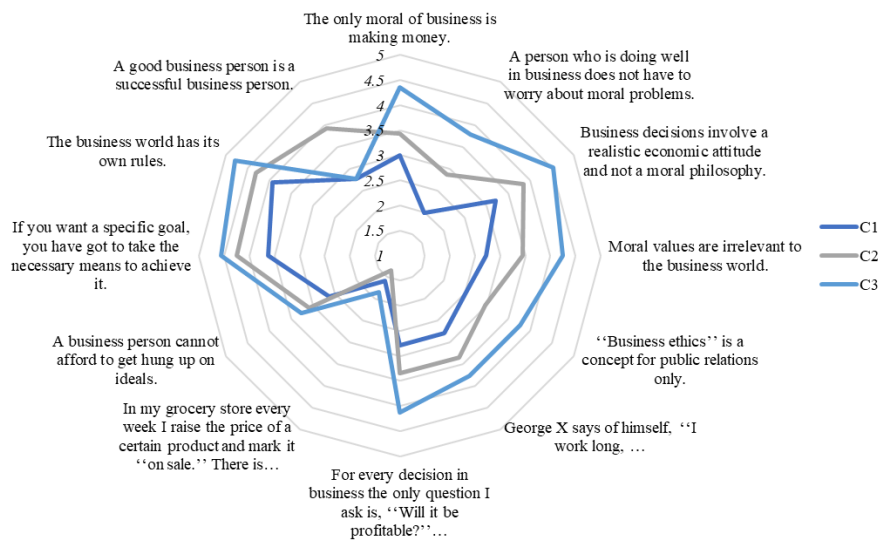


Figure 3: Survey results by clusters

Cluster 1 (n=42, Machiavellianism score=2.79) includes students with the lowest scores on most questions. Machiavellianism is the least characteristic among these students. Cluster 3 (n=25, Machiavellianism score=3.81) represents the highest scores, except for the statement that being good means being successful. Cluster 2 (n=32) presents the middle way; the Machiavellianism score is 3.35. The survey included some statements about CSR judgment (Figure 4). Clusters show significant differences in three statements:

- Another tool for companies to generate profit (F=3.724, sig.=0.028)
- CSR can only be successful in the case of large companies (F=3.909, sig.=0.023)
- CSR implementation is expensive (F=3.474, sig.=0.035)

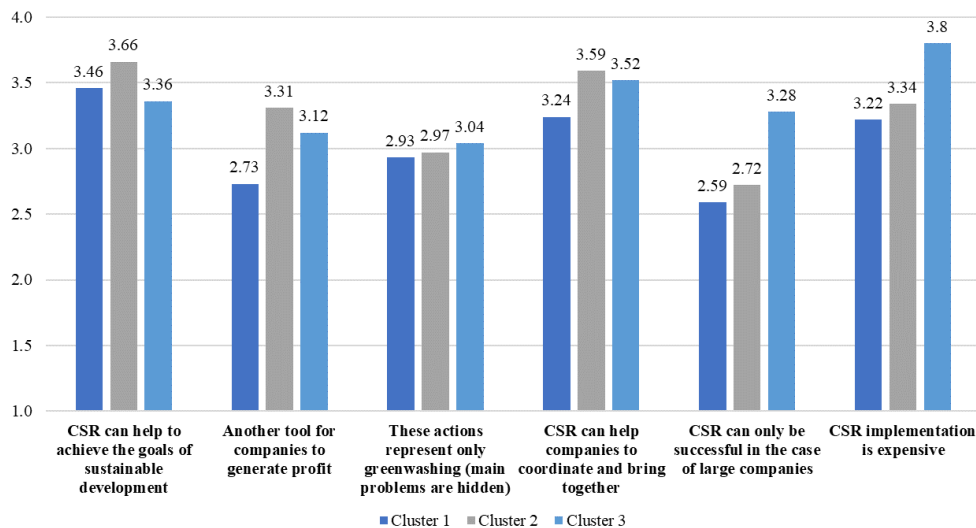


Figure 4: Evaluation of CSR by clusters

## Conclusion

The attitude toward business ethics is similar among state science and business students. Survey results confirmed that Machiavellianism is the most characteristic philosophy, but the pattern is not uniform. These patterns show a correlation with opinions about social responsibility.

Cluster 1 has the lowest score in Machiavellianism but does not believe that CSR is only a tool for profit generation. They find the implementation of CSR the least expensive compared to the other clusters, as well as they found it applicable beyond large companies. Cluster 2 is represented by the medium Machiavellianism scores in most statements; they believe in the coordinative role of CSR and do not refuse it as a business interest. Considering the philosophy as a rational, opportunist approach, the middle way seems to pay off in the interest of CSR's contribution to sustainability. Cluster 3 is the most characterized by Machiavellianism, and their CSR approach is the most limited to large organizations and expensively.

The results contribute to the finding [5] that the ATBEQ instrument can be used to predict CSR perception. Since ATBEQ is dealing with the value system of the respondents, which can be considered an enabler factor, exploring the personal patterns may support effective human resource management strategies. As a result, better support of CSR efforts can be achieved by a refined division of labor meeting personal values.

Nevertheless, further investigations require the enhancement of the sample and the consideration of the other business philosophies. Moreover, correlations may be engaging with other aspects. We plan to check the relation with technology adoption propensity that can be traced back to environmental and social problem-solving.

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