Customer Integration and Beyond
Towards a Business Economic-Ethical Theory of the Firm

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Stakeholderintegration – Erweiterung der Kundenintegration und Ansatzpunkt zur Entwicklung einer ökonomisch-ethischen Theorie der Unternehmung

The paper aims to make a contribution to the overcoming of what Freeman has characterized by his “separation thesis” and, based on a theory of the firm, the resources-processes-outcomes approach, developing of a business economic-ethics approach. The resources-processes-outcomes approach draws on two main theoretical concepts: integrative production and customer integration. The concept of customer integration throws light on the mutual responsibility of supplier and customer for the value-creation process and its outcomes. As regards management implications, customer integration can be interpreted as a special case of stakeholder integration. The paper outlines this program and proposes its implementation in two steps. Whereas the first step is mainly concerned with the statement, analysis and extension of the ethical dimensions of the available theory, step two shall contribute to the development of a business economic-ethical theory.

Keywords: Business Economic-Ethical Theory, Integrative Production, Customer Integration, Stakeholder Integration, Expectations, Stakeholder Management

1. Introduction

In business economics\(^1\) there are contributions which point out the economic-ethical dimensions of the assumptions of economic theories, or are of importance for the analysis or reflection of business-economic problems, or, from the perspective of business ethics, elaborate on the integration of business economics and ethics.\(^2\) That notwithstanding, business-economic theories usually abstain from a more intensive and systematic integration of their subject matter with that of business ethics. Still missing are business-economic theories which identify and solve economic-ethical problems, i. e., problems which evolve from a common perspective from the outset. Beyond

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\(^1\) As the paper mainly draws on an economic approach in the German Betriebswirtschaftslehre, it prefers the term “business economics” to “business administration”.