

Differential Impact of the Perception of Ethical Climates upon Job Satisfaction Among Different Types of Employees

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ABSTRACT

The main objective of this current research study is to examine if there are any differences between cis male and cis female employees, between managers and non-managers/subordinate employees, and between full and part-time workers in terms of their perceptions of organizational ethical climate and their self-reported job satisfaction. The research collected data from 140 participants. The research study found a statistically significant predictive effect regarding perception of workplace ethical climates scores upon the self-reported job satisfaction scores across all participants regardless of gender, employment status (full-time and part-time employees), and employment level (managers/supervisors and non-managers/subordinate employees). Another key research finding is that the self-reported job satisfaction scores predicted by the variance in the perception of workplace ethical climates scores among the managers/supervisors are over double the predictive value as compared to non-managers/subordinate employees.

Keywords: Ethical climates, job satisfaction, ethics, differential statistics, males and females, full and part-time workers, managers and non-managers

INTRODUCTION

An ethical climate includes several dimensions of self-interest, company profit, efficiency, friendship, team interest, social responsibility, personal morality, rules and standard operating procedures, and laws and professional codes (Trevino et.al., 2000). Just as ethical culture can be viewed as a subset of organizational culture, the ethical climate is an outgrowth of work done on organizational climate. Some studies show that an organizational ethical climate can have an inhibitory effect on employees' unethical behavior (Lee & Ha-Brookshire, 2018). However, existing research generally examined the organizational ethical climate in a holistic manner, but it is important to consider that differently-oriented organizational ethical climates would

have differential effects on the unethical behavior of employees. As an important part of an organizational ethical climate, ethical climate rules focus on organizational rules and order and research findings have indicated that ethical climate rules have been able to restrain employees' unethical behaviors (Barnett & Vaicys, 2000).

To better understand the relationship between an organization's ability to create a positive ethical environment and how this environment would impact job satisfaction, there must first be an understanding of the various motivational variables and hygiene factors that were first introduced and documented by Frederick Herzberg during the late 1950's (Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1959). The findings of Frederick Herzberg provide researchers with a more detailed understanding of the job satisfaction of employees by examining the motivational factors or variables that can satisfactorily motivate workers. This theory also identifies hygiene factors that also can be related to the non-satisfaction of workers and can lead to dissatisfied employees within an organization (Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1959). By understanding both motivational factors and hygiene factors such as supervision, policy, and standards, there can be a better understanding of some of the complexities and variables of an ethical climate and how it can help to create job satisfaction among workers.

One of the earliest research studies examining the impact of the perception of an ethical climate in the workplace was conducted by Satish Deshpande in 1996. Research conducted by Deshpande (1996) tried to understand how an organization's ethical environment impacts worker job satisfaction. This prior study also develops a baseline understanding of what is considered an ethical climate as the variables of professionalism, caring, rules, instrumental, efficiency, and worker independence were examined in the research study. These variables create an understanding of an overall ethical environment. Job satisfaction for the study was identified by pay, promotion, worker, manager, and work satisfaction (Deshpande, 1996). Both ethical climate and job satisfaction variables identified in this research study provide a greater understanding of the types of ethical climates that often are established within any organization; a better understanding of the different components that have to do with job satisfaction; and lastly how different organizational ethical climate types have a dramatic impact on job satisfaction (Deshpande, 1996). The main findings from this prior study showed that an ethical climate could have many varying types (Deshpande, 1996). The most referred type of ethical climate within the study by Deshpande's (1996) findings was around professionalism. In contrast, the most uncommon trait for an ethical climate appeared to be related to workplace or task-related efficiencies (Deshpande, 1996). Another important component that helps to understand an ethical climate and job satisfaction was the result that most managers found their work to be more critical to job satisfaction as compared to their salaries.

This prior study also concluded that having a code of conduct and ensuring that workers follow legal and ethical organizational requirements also play a profound impact in creating the ability for job satisfaction (Deshpande, 1996). Lastly, the most negative component related to a workplace or organizational climate identified was the understanding that an instrumental climate where workers feel they must protect their self-interests can often create poor job satisfaction within their workplace environment.

In a more recently published research study, Feng et al. (2018) established a better understanding of the impact of an organization's ethical environment by specifically examining if an organization's ethical climate has any impact on the creativity and innovation among their employees. The prior published study by Feng et al. (2018) surveyed 340 employees along with 32 leaders within 16 organizations that are focused on high levels of creative or innovative outputs. A total of 270 surveys were returned with a response rate of 86%, including over 60% of participants with jobs including researchers and managers (Feng et al., 2018). The research study showed that ethical leadership is positively related to employee creativity and innovation. Moreover, there is a curvilinear relationship between ethical leadership and employee creativity, whereby the positive relationship between ethical leadership and employee creativity will be weakened when ethical leadership is at a high level. Finally, employees' intrinsic motivation mediates the curvilinear relationship between ethical leadership and employee creativity (Feng et al., 2018).

In a more recently published research study, Ganji et al. (2021) sought to better understand the relationship between an ethical climate, the predictors leading towards an ethical climate along with how all of these variables can impact employee empowerment, employee turnover intention, and ultimately worker job satisfaction. Ganji et al. (2021) found that job satisfaction for a sample of 215 employees had a statistically significant negative linear relationship with the self-reported turnover intention among the aforementioned employees. Moreover, there was also a positive linear relationship between the predictor variables of employee empowerment, ethical climate, and perceived organizational support on the outcome variable job satisfaction along with the negative linear relationship between the predictor variables of ethical climate and perceived organizational support on the outcome variable of turnover intention among employees. The research results also support the statistically significant mediation of the variable of job satisfaction in the effect of predictor variables of ethical context and perceived organizational support on the outcome variable of turnover intention.

As stated earlier, the goal of the current research study is to examine if there are any differences between cis male versus cis female employees, managers versus non-managers, and full versus part-time employees in terms of their perceptions of organizational ethical climate and their self-reported job satisfaction. In terms of gender, prior research has shown mixed results in terms of the perception of ethical workplace climates between men and women. For example, Derry (1989) conducted a study that found no significant gender differences in the ethical reasoning used in work conflicts. Other research studies have also found no differences between male employees' and female employees' ethical attitudes in the workplace (ex. Fritzsche, 1988). In contrast, other research studies found that female employees self-report more ethical workplace attitudes than their male employee counterparts (Betz et al., 1989; Ruegger & King, 1992). As such, this research study examined this gender difference again but in the context of both their perception of ethical climate and their self-report of job satisfaction.

In terms of managers and non-managers, most of the prior research on ethical climates has focused on the perceptions of ethical climates by samples of subordinate employees in the workplace (Nedkovski, Guerci, De Battisti, & Siletti, 2017) along with the prior research being focused on the perception of subordinate employees on the ethical leadership of managers or supervisors (Kalshoven, Den Hartog, & De Hoogh, 2011). The goal of the current research study is to also compare if there are any differences between managers and non-managers (i.e.

subordinate employees) regarding their concurrent perception of workplace ethical climates and their current job satisfaction.

Finally, most of the published research on the topic of employee perceptions of ethical climates was previously focused on full-time employees (Wang & Hsieh, 2012, Wang & Hsieh, 2013) but there is little to no current research on the perception of ethical climates among part-time employees. As such, the goal of the current research study is to also compare if there are any differences between full-time employees and part-time employees regarding their concurrent perception of workplace ethical climates and their current job satisfaction. Based on the goals of the current research study, the four main research questions that were examined in the research study included:

Research Question 1: Are there significant differences between male and female employees on the outcome variables of the perceptions of workplace ethical climates and job satisfaction?

Research Question 2: Are there significant differences between manager/supervisor versus non-supervisor/subordinate employees on the outcome variables of the perceptions of workplace ethical climates and job satisfaction?

Research Question 3: Are there significant differences between full-time versus part-time employees on the outcome variables of the perceptions of workplace ethical climates and job satisfaction?

Research Question 4: Is there a significant linear relationship between the perception of workplace ethical climate and job satisfaction among all types of employees?

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The participants for this research project were 140 voluntary participants recruited from SurveyMonkey Audience. The sample was primarily comprised of currently employed employees who are managers (or supervisors) and non-managers (or subordinate employees), male and female employees, and full and part-time employees. The average age of the participants was 44.45 years old ($SD=13.16$). The average length of time working for the sample of participants was 84.19 months ($SD=100.17$) which is approximately 7 years. Out of 140 sample respondents, there were 95 Caucasian participants (69%), 18 Asian participants (13%), 14 Hispanic participants (10%), 9 Other participants (6%), and 4 African American participants (3%). Out of 140 sample respondents, 46 participants completed an undergraduate degree (33%), 27 participants completed some undergraduate college credits (19%), 25 participants completed a Masters or Doctorate degree (18%), 20 participants completed at least a high school education (14%), 11 completed some post-graduate credits (8%), and 11 completed a vocational degree (8%). Out of 140 sample respondents, there were 92 cis females (66%), 46 cis males (33%), and 2 identified as other (1%). Because two individuals did not identify as either male or female only 138 responses were utilized in the comparison between male and female employees in the results section of the current research study. Out of the 140 sample respondents, there were 48 managers (34%) and 92 non-managers (66%). Out of the 140 sample respondents, there were 111 full-time respondents (79%) and 29 part-time respondents (21%).

Research Instrument

The method chosen for this research project was an online survey questionnaire. As part of the survey questionnaire, demographic questions were asked for each participant's gender, age, length of time working (measured in months), education level, employment status (full-time versus part-time), and employment level (manager or supervisor versus non-manager/non-supervisor). The demographic information was used to assist in giving more insight into the relationship between demographic variables upon their perception of the ethical climate in their workplace and their current job satisfaction. After completing the demographic questionnaire, the participants in the study completed the validated Ethical Climate Questionnaire previously developed by Cullen, Victor, and Bronson (1998) and the validated Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire that measures job satisfaction that was developed by Weiss, Dawis, and England, (1967).

The Ethical Climate Questionnaire developed by Cullen, Victor, and Bronson (1998) asks a series of 26 questions that are all related to one of five specific ethical categories which are identified by the perceptions experienced by organizational members as to what the right and wrong behaviors or behavioral standards within any organization should be. One category of "Caring" is identified within seven specific questions that are directly related to concern for the organization and its workers. The category of "Law and Code" is identified with four specific questions that are directly related to an organization's professional standards. The category of "Rules" is identified with four specific questions that are directly related to company's standards and procedures. The category of "Instrumental" is identified with seven specific questions that are related to self or company interests. Lastly, the category of "Independence" is identified with four specific questions that are related to a worker's personal beliefs regarding ethics in the workplace. Each of the 26 items on the Ethical Climate Questionnaire by Cullen, Victor, and Bronson (1998) was rated by participants on a 6-point Likert scale (0= Completely False, 1= Mostly False, 2= Somewhat False, 3=Somewhat True, 4=Mostly True, and 5=Completely True). An overall score is computed based on participant responses on all 26 items on the Ethical Climate Questionnaire.

Finally, the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ) was originally designed by Weiss, Dawis, and England (1967) to measure an employee's satisfaction with their current employment. Three forms of the measure included two long forms (the 1977 version and the 1967 version) and a short form. This study used the short-form version with 17 items. The 17 questions are all related to job satisfaction and are identified as either intrinsic job satisfaction or extrinsic job satisfaction. Intrinsic job satisfaction often stems from factors such as being respected, having challenging work, or being trusted, and are directly related to how a worker achieves job satisfaction. Extrinsic job satisfaction often stems from variables such as working conditions, pay, benefits, or supervisor behavior. Overall job satisfaction in general is a combination of both intrinsic and extrinsic job satisfaction. The responses on each of the 17 items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (5=Very Satisfied means I am very satisfied with this aspect of my job, 4=Satisfied means I am satisfied with this aspect of my job, 3=Neutral means I can't decide whether I am satisfied or not with this aspect of my job, 2=Dissatisfied means I am dissatisfied with this aspect of my job, 1=Very Dissatisfied means I am very dissatisfied with this aspect of my job). The MSQ is also useful in generating information about the relevant job-related rewards which are meaningful to workers (Weiss Dawis, & England, 1967). The MSQ can be administered to groups or to individuals and is appropriate for use with individuals who

can read at the fifth-grade level or higher. The computed Cronbach's alpha for the sample of 140 participants responses on all the items on the MSQ in this study was 0.912 which reflects the high internal reliability of the 17 questions on the MSQ survey used in the current research study.

Procedure

The participants for this study were recruited from SurveyMonkey Audience. The secure online SurveyMonkey platform ensured the privacy and integrity of information collected among the participants in the research study. The SurveyMonkey audience members are volunteer participants who are minimally compensated for participating in the research study. The participants were reminded that the entire online survey would take between 25-30 minutes to complete.

DATA ANALYSIS

Male Versus Female Employees

Inferential statistics were utilized to calculate if there were statistical differences in the mean scores for both the perception of workplace ethical climates and self-reported job satisfaction results between cis males and cis female employees. Based on inferential statistical analyses, there were no statistical differences in the perception of workplace ethical climates between the female employees ($M=78.17$, $SD=19.64$) and male employees ($M=79.02$, $SD=13.81$), $t(136)=2.129$, $p=.794$. Moreover, the self-reported job satisfaction was not statistically different between the female employees ($M=64.16$, $SD=12.18$) and male employees ($M=63.67$, $SD=11.17$), $t(136)=-0.262$, $p=0.822$.

Manager Versus Non-Manager Employees

Inferential statistics were also utilized to calculate if there were statistical differences in the mean scores for both the perception of workplace ethical climates and self-reported job satisfaction results between Managers versus Non-managers. As a result of statistical analysis, the perception of ethical climate was statistically higher among managers ($M=82.75$, $SD=20.71$) as compared to non-managers/subordinate employees ($M=76.10$, $SD=15.67$), $t(138)=2.129$, $p=.035$. The self-reported job satisfaction was also statistically higher among managers ($M=67.21$, $SD=11.28$) as compared to non-managers/subordinate employees ($M=62.25$, $SD=12.01$), $t(138)=-2.364$, $p=.019$.

Full Versus Part-time Employees

Inferential statistics were again utilized to calculate if there were statistical differences in the mean scores for both the perception of workplace ethical climates and self-reported job satisfaction results between full-time and part-time employees. As a result of statistical analysis, there was no statistically significant difference between full-time ($M=78.87$, $SD=16.90$) and part-time workers ($M=76.48$, $SD=21.00$) on the perception of workplace ethical climates, $t(138)=-0.201$, $p=0.521$. Moreover, there was no statistically significant difference between full-time ($M=64.05$, $SD=12.19$) and part-time workers ($M=63.55$, $SD=11.20$) on self-reported job satisfaction, $t(138)=-0.501$, $p=0.841$.

Linear Regression between the Perception of Workplace Ethical Climates and Self-Reported Job Satisfaction

The linear regression analysis showed that there was a statistically significant linear relationship between the independent variable of the perception of workplace ethical climates and the dependent variable of self-reported job satisfaction among all the participants in the survey, $F(1,139)=32.45$, $p<0.001$. Overall, the research project found an R-square value of 0.19 which means that 19% of the self-reported job satisfaction scores are predicted by the variance in the perception of workplace ethical climates scores of the participants. The slope of 0.24 indicates that there is a positive linear relationship where there is a corresponding increase in self-reported job satisfaction scores among participants alongside the increasing perception of workplace ethical climates scores of the participants.

Further analyses of the linear regression between the independent variable of the perception of workplace ethical climates scores and the dependent variable of self-reported job satisfaction scores among female employees only, $F(1,91)=19.94$, $p<0.001$, and among male employees only, $F(1,45)=12.69$, $p=0.001$, were both statistically significant. The overall R-square value of 0.18 or 18% predictive value of the self-reported job satisfaction scores predicted by the variance in the perception of workplace ethical climates scores among the female participants is not that different from the R-square value of 0.22 or 22% predictive value of the self-reported job satisfaction scores predicted by the variance in the perception of workplace ethical climates scores among the male participants.

Moreover, analyses of the linear regression between the independent variable of the perception of workplace ethical climates scores and the dependent variable of self-reported job satisfaction scores among full-time employees only, $F(1,110)=25.86$, $p<0.001$, and among part-time employees only, $F(1,28)=6.68$, $p=0.015$, were both statistically significant. The overall R-square value of 0.19 or 19% predictive value of the self-reported job satisfaction scores predicted by the variance in the perception of workplace ethical climates scores among the full-time participants is not that different from the R-square value of 0.20 or 20% predictive value of the self-reported job satisfaction scores predicted by the variance in the perception of workplace ethical climates scores among the part-time participants.

Finally, analyses of the linear regression between the independent variable of the perception of workplace ethical climates scores and the dependent variable of self-reported job satisfaction scores among managers or supervisors only, $F(1,47)=18.41$, $p<0.001$, and among non-managers or non-supervisors only, $F(1,91)=12.49$, $p=0.001$, were both statistically significant. The overall R-square value of 0.29 or 29% predictive value of the self-reported job satisfaction scores predicted by the variance in the perception of workplace ethical climates scores among the managers or supervisors is over double from the R-square value of 0.12 or 12% predictive value of the self-reported job satisfaction scores predicted by the variance in the perception of workplace ethical climates scores among the non-managers and non-supervisor participants.

DISCUSSION

Overall, the current research study provides additional evidence for the statistically significant predictive effect regarding the perception of workplace ethical climates scores upon the self-reported job satisfaction scores across all participants regardless of gender, employment status (full-time and part-time employees) and employment level (managers/supervisors and non-

managers/subordinate employees). The research finding that stands out in the current research study is the self-reported job satisfaction scores predicted by the variance in the perception of workplace ethical climates scores among the managers or supervisors (R-square value 0.29 or 29%) is over double from the predictive value of the self-reported job satisfaction scores predicted by the variance in the perception of workplace ethical climates scores among the non-managers/subordinate employees (R-square value of 0.12 or 12%). This indicates that workplace managers or supervisors perceive a significantly higher impact of their own self-reported job satisfaction scores predicted by the variance in their perception of workplace ethical climates scores as compared to their non-managers/subordinate employee counterparts. This may be explained by how much the managers or supervisors strongly value the importance of workplace ethical climates in workplace settings.

The results from this research study also found no significant statistical differences in the responses of cis male and cis female employees on their perception of workplace ethical climates and self-reported job satisfaction as indicated by prior research (Betz et al., 1989; Ruegger & King, 1992; Yucel & Ciftci 2012). The specific findings that this current research showing significant statistical differences in the responses of managers/supervisors versus non-managers/subordinate employees on their perception of workplace ethical climates and self-reported job satisfaction is also indicated by prior research (Anupama & Kumari, 2014). In contrast to prior research by Anupama and Kumari (2014) that highlighted how there were “gray areas” or perceptions in how managers/supervisors responded to many ethical workplace situations, the current research study highlighted that managers/supervisors have higher ratings regarding their workplace ethical climates as compared their non-manager/subordinate employee counterparts. Finally, another key finding from the study is that there were no statistically significant differences in the perception of workplace ethical climates and self-reported job satisfaction between full-time and part-time employees. Overall, all these research findings can be critical information and knowledge for any professional organization within any industry to understand how different perspectives and perceptions on ethical climates can ultimately impact the employees’ self-reported job satisfaction. The knowledge gathered in the current research study could help organizations to better understand how to successfully meet the needs of all workers regarding workplace ethical considerations along with achieving high levels of employee job satisfaction, productivity, and retention of talent.

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