

Gender Differences in Perception of Ethical Practices

Empirical Study of Selected Sectors in India

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Abstract

Existing research on ethical practices primarily focus on impact of ethics on employee performance, attractiveness to perspective employees, improved employee relationship, etc. The current study intends to explore gender differences in employee's perception about the ethical practices being followed by Indian business organizations. Seventeen ethical value statements have been used to explore the ethical perception of employees using Likert scale rating. Using a sample of 412 respondents, Mann-Whitney U differential tests asserted that there is significant difference in perception of ethical practices between men and women. The male patriarchal set up of Indian societal norms seems to transgress from the social life to corporate life style. Men consider ethical codes as part of training program to be a significant ethical issue where as female gave more consideration to paying fair wages and taking care of health and safety. Age and position of female employees are correlated to their ethical perception. Role of ethics in Indian companies has not been adequately studied. Further, the interplay of gender dichotomy and perception of ethical conduct is also missing in literature. The research attempts to correlate gender and

employee perception in a male dominated society and workplace in India.

M14: *Corporate Culture, Diversity and Social Responsibility*

Keywords: *Ethical Issues, Employee Perception, Gender Differences, Patriarchal Society, Gender Sensitivity*

INTRODUCTION

Business ethics is important because it generates positive externalities like trust and commitment to stakeholders, which in turn ensure long-term performance (Hosmer, 2005; Jones, 2010). Ethical behavior encourages building internalities like organizational culture (Nel, 2008), organizational citizenship behavior (Baker et al., 2006), employee commitment (Moore and Moore, 2014), and job satisfaction (Ahmed et al., 2012).

Extant literature in the domain of corporate ethics emphasizes affirmative influence of ethical behavior on the organizational culture, competitiveness, customer relationship, and brand value of a business organization (Kerns C.D., 2003; Akram and Azad, 2011; Purlys, 2010). Companies should adopt practices that will benefit the community at large by providing the quality goods and decent services (Byus et al., 2010).

Effectiveness of ethical practices measured by external rating agencies are mostly based on symbolic measures of business ethics leading to inaccurate ratings as seen in case of Enron (Glavas and Kelley, 2014). Measuring ethical practices at individual level can help in measuring how the ethical values have embedded within the organization culture. Thus, it becomes very important to understand employee perception as they have a significant

influence on workplace attitudes, behaviors and performance (Cable and Judge, 1996). Employees are considered key stakeholder as they are the residual risk-takers along with shareholders and have legitimate power and urgency to become salient stakeholder (Mitchell et al., 1997; Bies & Tripp, 2005; Turban and Greening, 1997).

Existing research on ethical practices primarily focus on impact of ethics on employee performance (Jones, 2010), attractiveness to perspective employees (Turban & Greening, 1997), improved employee relationship (Glavas & Piderit, 2009), etc. With the increase in participation of women in the workforce, there has been an emphasis on examining whether gender differences exist in the workplace attitudes and behaviors of men and women (Aven, Parker, & McEvoy, 1993; Wahn, 1998). The range of workplace variables in which gender differences have been examined is quite broad and include job satisfaction (deVaus & McAllister, 1991; Mason, 1995), leadership style (Eagley & Johnson, 1990; Hutchison et al., 1998), ethical behavior (Barnett & Karson, 1989), etc. Considering ethical behavior as an integral part of all business activities, this paper explores the difference in perception of male and female employees on various ethical issues in India.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Part 1: Influence of Ethical Practices on Employees

Employee-conducive environment, well defined code of ethics, ethical training, and justified system of disciplining and rewarding employees help in integrating the ethical culture within the organizational framework (Nel, 2008, Liao and Teng, 2010, Warren

et al., 2014). Corporate ethical performance influences hiring prospective employees (Rahim et al., 2011) and provide organization justice, procedural and retributive justice (Trevino and Weaver, 2001).

Paying wages in fair and justified manner and taking care of safety of employees at workplace are important parameters which improve the reputation and branding of the company (Stancu et al., 2011, Mishra & Sharma, 2010). However, Buys et al. (2010) indicated the employees are not positive about the organization efforts to manage stress.

Part 2: Gender Differences at Workplace

Gender differences in workplace originate from social, psychological or physical factors, and also stem from gender stereotypes related to men and women (Nadler and Stockdale, 2012). According to social role theory, men and women are placed in different places in occupation as well as roles in family based on gender (Diekman and Schneider, 2010; Stewart et al., 2007). Employers have different expectations about how employees will behave based on their gender (Eagly, 1987).

Traditionally, an ideal worker is one who can spend more time at office and this has been used as a tool of performance evaluation (Caberera, 2009). Task oriented dimensions were a predictor of commitment and turnover intention of males where as relationship oriented dimensions influence females (Fredricks et al., 2014). Burke (2010), Burke et al. (2012) asserted female employees are young at age, work at lower levels of organization, work for fewer hours and earn less income as compared to male employees but female employees have same level of job satisfaction, engagement and exhaustion as male employees. Sorlin et al. (2011) found

smallest variation in gender gap with respect to education and salaries and largest variation for parental leave and number of male and female employees.

Paid work is more central to men's attitude where as personal characteristics and family circumstances are more significant for women (Emslie et al., 1999). Females are more ethically predisposed than their male counterparts (Gill, 2010). Males exhibit less diversity in ethical decision making while females are more related to increased ethical judgment, ethical intension and higher altruism (Valentine et al., 2009). Female employees experienced better quality of work life than male employees (Ganesh and Ganesh, 2014). Burke (2010), Indumati and Selvan (2013) found that there is a significant difference between male and female employees with regard to stress, social integration and communication at work. Female workers are not encouraged to work equally in the developing countries (Nadeem et al., 2015).

Part 3: Gender Disparity in India

According to world-bank report of 2012, although India is the second fastest growing economy but gender disparity remains deep and persistent in India. Gender inequality in developing countries like India stems from economic underdevelopment, labor intensive home production, brawn based occupation, poverty, and cultural factors like patrilocality, dowry system, desire to protect female security and purity (Jayachandran, 2014; Das et al., 2015). As per the UNDP human development report of 2013 India is ranked 132 out of 187 countries on gender inequality index (Mitra, 2014). Gender inequality is widespread in access to basic rights, control of resources, economic opportunities and power and politics (Thomas R E, 2013).

Girl child in India further faces inequalities in access to education and healthcare facilities. Further, a wide gap exists between male and female participation in workforce (Mitra, 2014). The gender gap in workforce participation is much wider in urban areas as compared to rural areas. Since women in urban areas are more educated than in rural India, workplace participation is inversely related to education levels (Mukhopadhyay and Tendulkar, 2006).

The traditional concept of joint family is slowly disappearing which has led to increase in women participation in workforce but there is little change in pattern of household responsibility for women (Patel, 2005, Singh, 2004). There is a significant difference in perception of male and female employees with regard to taking care of emergencies at home and child care facilities at workplace (Doble and Supriya, n.d.).

Part 4: Difference in Gender Perception about Ethical Issues

Employee perception on values and compliance in ethics program is associated with employees' willingness to report misconduct and level of their engagement in the organization (Weaver and Trevino, 1999, Mitonga and Cilliers, 2015, Phatshwane, 2013). Females often view themselves as treated worse than males in the workplace (Stokes, Riger, & Sullivan, 1995). Males show higher reactivity towards organization revenge and interpersonal violence and females are more sensitive on ethical issues (Ogungbamila and Udegbe, 2014, Sidani, 2009). Male perceive employee rights more important for job where as women perceive having job gives them more independence (Angelina, 2015). Top level managers have more positive attitude towards the ethical

practices and believe that senior management take ethics more seriously than their junior counter parts (Trevino et al., 2008, Foglina et al., 2013). Men are more concerned about economic implications of CSR as compared to significant importance given to voluntary CSR by women (Peterson, 2004; Ibrahim & Angelidis, 1995).

From the review of literature it is evident that despite significant progress in female participation in industry in last 25 years, pervasive and persistent gender differences have been documented in both developed and developing countries. In this paper we explore different ethical issues influencing employees and study the difference in gender perception about such ethical issues in Indian context.

HYPOTHESIS OF THE STUDY

H₀ There is no significant difference between perceptions of male and female employees regarding ethical behavior of the companies in India.

METHODOLOGY

The research instrument used to collect data for this study is based on the self administered questionnaire which adopted different ethical issues identified by Stancu et al. (2011) and Mishra and Sharma (2010) on ethical practices that influence the ethical behavior and perception. Besides the demographic questions, the respondents were required to place their responses towards seventeen identified ethical issues on a five point likert scale ranging from strongly agree-1 to strongly disagree-5. Cronbach's alpha test gave a score of 0.953 indicating reliability of the instrument. Respondents are the employees working at different levels of management in large scale companies belonging to Engineering, IT and Power sector placed in urban areas of

Bangalore and Delhi (NCR) in India. The selected companies include both private and public sector Indian companies having local as well as international operations.

500 questionnaires were administered but only 412 responses were received which could be taken as usable data for analysis. Using SPSS 16, Mann-Whitney *U* differential tests are performed to test the hypothesis.

DATA ANALYSIS

Tables 1 and 2 shows the disparity in employment as 71.8% of the respondents are male and only 28.2% respondents are female. Female employees are younger in age than male employees.

Female employees are better qualified than males as 38% of female employees are graduates as compared to 32% male graduates and 37% of female employees are post graduate as against only 30% of male respondents. Female employees have less experience than their male counterparts but there is no significant difference in number of female and male employees working at different positions of management.

Mean score is lowest for health and safety (2.28) and for respecting the rights of the employees (2.34) which indicates that most of the employees perceive that these issues are well taken care by the employers. But mean score is highest for training based on ethical codes and conduct (2.64) which indicates that ethical code of conduct is not a part of training programs for employees.

Mean score of female perception is less than males for all the ethical issues and thus females consider employers to be more ethical as compared to males. The difference between male and female employees is maximum for

Table 1: Gender Profile of Respondents

<i>Gender</i>	<i>No. of Respondents</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Male	296	71.8%
Female	116	28.2%

Table 2: Age of Respondents

<i>Age</i>	<i>No. of Respondents</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>%</i>
18-25	35	22	7%	13	11%
26-35	142	95	32%	47	41%
36-45	146	97	33%	49	42%
>45	89	82	28%	7	6%

Table 3: Educational Qualification of Respondents

<i>Qualification</i>	<i>No. of Respondents</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>%</i>
Diploma	102	78	26	24	21
Graduation	141	97	33	44	38
Post Graduation	133	90	31	43	37
Any Other	36	31	10	5	4

Table 4: Work Experience of Respondents

<i>Experience (Yrs)</i>	<i>No. of Respondents</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>%</i>
<2 years	39	25	8	14	12
2-5 years	94	53	18	41	35
5-10 years	148	98	33	50	43
>10 Years	131	120	41	11	10

Table 5: Management Position Profile of Respondents

<i>Management Position</i>	<i>No. of Respondents</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>%</i>
Junior Level	97	64	22	33	28
Middle Level	174	127	43	47	41
Senior Level	141	105	35	36	31

Source (Table 1-5): Calculated by Researcher using primary data collected

Table 6: Result of Descriptive Statistics and Mann Whitney U Test

Ethical Value Statements	Mean	Std. Deviation	Male		Female		Mann-Whitney U	Wilcoxon W	Z	Sig. (2-tailed)
			Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation				
Health and safety at workplace	2.2888	1.19674	2.422	1.273	1.948	0.893	14001.5	20787.5	-3.086	0.002
Rights of employees are respected	2.3422	1.07702	2.456	1.158	2.052	0.767	14217.5	21003.5	-2.870	0.004
Improving quality of life at workplace	2.4345	1.11964	2.493	1.129	2.284	1.086	15464.5	22250.5	-1.628	0.103
Employees involvement in handling problems	2.4175	1.11197	2.527	1.132	2.138	1.012	13876	20662	-3.163	0.002
Transparency in communication	2.4320	1.14528	2.557	1.189	2.112	0.958	13725.5	20511.5	-3.306	0.001
Developed System of code of conduct	2.5218	1.15133	2.659	1.194	2.172	0.953	13380.5	20166.5	-3.633	0.000
Training on ethical practices and code of conduct	2.6359	1.13920	2.764	1.137	2.310	1.083	13297.5	20083.5	-3.702	0.000
Code of ethics available to employees	2.5218	1.16394	2.642	1.162	2.216	1.117	13505.5	20291.5	-3.504	0.000
Protecting employees reporting ethical or legal violations	2.4490	1.12906	2.554	1.200	2.181	0.871	14585	21371	-2.468	0.014
No discrimination in employment	2.5922	1.09577	2.706	1.119	2.302	0.980	13698	20484	-3.338	0.001
Redressal of employee complaints	2.5121	1.14724	2.615	1.182	2.250	1.012	14198.5	20984.5	-2.823	0.005
Fair wages and benefit in a justified manner	2.5437	1.14647	2.618	1.167	2.353	1.073	15033	21819	-2.052	0.040
Performance linked promotions and rewards	2.3738	1.07893	2.436	1.059	2.216	1.117	15038.5	21824.5	-2.036	0.042
Equitable growth opportunities provided	2.4417	1.08473	2.537	1.101	2.198	1.006	14257.5	21043.5	-2.785	0.005
Follows labour legislations applicable	2.5267	1.15965	2.628	1.186	2.267	1.050	14350.5	21136.5	-2.690	0.007
Involvement in solving social issues	2.5874	1.14396	2.696	1.188	2.310	0.973	14187.5	20973.5	-2.880	0.004
Involvement in solving environmental issues	2.6238	1.19883	2.733	1.240	2.345	1.039	14339.5	21125.5	-2.702	0.007

Source: Calculated by the researcher based on primary data using SPSS.

developing a system of code of conduct for employees. The difference in mean score between the two genders is minimum on the issue of quality of work life provided by the employer. The female employees are more concerned about health and safety of the employees whereas male employees are more concerned about the social and environment issues.

The result of the non parametric Mann Whitney U test indicates the significant difference between the perception of male and female employees over the stated ethical issues. The significant p value is less than 0.05 for all ethical issues except for the issue on employer taking steps to improve the quality of life of employees at work and outside (p value = 0.103), thus the null hypothesis is rejected.

DISCUSSION

This study extends earlier literature by examining the confounding role of Indian culture in establishing gender perception on ethical practices followed by Indian companies. The male patriarchal set up of Indian societal norms seems to transgress from the social life to corporate life style. The study provides interesting observations relating to female participation, role imbalance at work-balance, and skewed social, economic independence of male employees.

The glaring difference in male and female participation even in urban areas in India is visible from the worker participation rate as only 28% are female respondents. The results are consistent with Mukhopadhyay and Tendulkar (2006) who have highlighted that women participation rate is low in urban areas as compared to rural areas in India though the disparity reduces in educational

qualification. Secondly, as women are being deprived of basic facilities in social life, they perceive that health and safety of employees is more important. Thomas R.E. (2013) asserts that poor health care for women in India and discriminatory upbringing of children has always deprived them of proper health care facilities.

Thirdly, regarding employee rights, male employees place higher importance to the rights and privileges at workplace compared female counterparts. This finding further reiterates patriarchal system prevalent in Indian culture where women are socially suppressed and hence, they have accepted being less privileged as part of their work life as well (Jayachandran, S., 2014).

Fourthly, female employees perceive employers being less fair on economic remuneration and promotions and advancements in career as compared to males. Moreover, social and economic discrimination is reflected in corporate culture with male employees holding important portfolios in the top management. However, this needs further analysis on divergent sectoral categories and larger sample sizes.

Apart from Indian context, there have been multiple studies evaluating the gender perception of ethical practices. Like Angelina (2015), Burke et al. (2012), Stewart et al. (2007), Witt (1989) found a significant difference between male and female employees' perception over how they perceive rights to the job, being independent and being better executives in business organizations. The results of this study are consistent with Indumathi and Selvan (2013) as there is no significant difference in the perception of male and female employees on the issue of quality of work life provided by the employer.

Contrary to the findings of Ogungbamila and Udegbe (2014) this study finds a significant difference with respect to discrimination. The results are consistent with Stancu et al. (2011), Hosmer & Kiewitz (2005) and Trevinno & Weaver (2001), who have also identified the similar issues like fair treatment, respecting employer right and safety at work as important dimension of corporate ethics towards employees.

The study supports Liao & Teng (2010) and Warren et al. (2014) that proper training programs based on ethical code of conduct should be devised which would help in improving employee morale and perception about the company. Giving stress on improving the quality of life would increase the satisfaction of employees and further improve the commitment and loyalty leading to profitability in the long run (Fatoki & Chilya, 2012, Ganesh & Ganesh, 2014).

Organization commitment to CSR improves employee satisfaction and performance (Shin et al., 2016). This study contradicts with Ekin and Tezolmez, 1999; Marz et al., 2003 that employees with higher level of education place more attention to CSR activities. However, it confirms that older employees have less tolerance towards unethical practices and employees at higher position display more ethical behavior. Female employees have better understanding about CSR activities (Asad et al., 2015). The relationship between CSR and commitment is stronger for female employees (Stawiski et al., 2010).

Future research can explore varied ethical issues and study its impact on employee performance and commitment. Ethical issues related to nepotism, favoritism and sexual harassment can be further studied in Indian context.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

From the statutory stand point Indian government has taken multitude steps to ensure women participation and empowerment at work place but it seems the social fabric of the country is a major constraint in its implementation. Policy initiatives like increased market flexibility, higher social spending especially on education and health are required to address the issue of gender disparity in India. This analysis possibly will assist the management in creating strategies for taking ethical initiatives that support diversified workforce. The role and importance of women employees can no longer be ignored for creating a well balanced organizational citizenship. Women employees give more critical feedback as against men (Snyder, 2014). Since women constitute half of the population, their active involvement can lead to significant development in the country (Azam et al., 2014). Female workers are more sensitive and need extra care to work effectively (Anakwe, 2002).

The study recommends that Indian companies should adopt a balanced approach towards its responsibility for different stakeholders and form separate committees for proper planning and implementation of ethical initiatives. Empowering the employees to make decisions could also result in overall development of the employees. Besides, ensuring proper execution of ethical policies would result into satisfied work force and committed employees. Employers should be more sensitive to gender issues keeping the Indian social framework in mind and thus encourage female participation and growth at workplace.

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