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WORK ETHICS, ORGANIZATIONAL ALIENATION AND JUSTICE AMONG HEALTH INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY MANAGERS

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Failure to comply with work ethics by employees working in Health Information Technology (HIT) Departments and their negative attitudes about organizational justice may have an adverse impact on patient satisfaction, quality of care, collecting health statistics, reimbursement, and management and planning at all levels of health care; it can also lead to unbearable damages to the health information system in the country. As so far there has been no research on HIT managers to assess the moral and ethical aspects of works and their relationship with organizational alienation and justice, this study aimed to evaluate the relationship between work ethics and organizational justice and alienation among the HIT managers. **Methods:** This study was performed in affiliated hospitals of Semnan University of medical sciences in Semnan, Iran, in 2015. In this study, a census method was used. The data collection tool was a researcher made questionnaire. **Results:** There was a negative and significant relationship between work ethic and organizational alienation ($B = -0.217, P < 0.001$), and there was also a positive and significant relationship between work ethic and organizational justice ($B = 0.580, P < 0.001$). There were negative and significant relationships among between education level and work ethic ($B = -0.215, P = 0.034$) and organizational justice ($B = -0.147, P = 0.047$). **Conclusion:** The results of this study showed that the managers' attitude toward justice and equality in the organization can affect their organizational commitment and loyalty and thus have a significant impact on the work ethics in the work environment. On the other hand, with increasing the education level of the managers, they will have higher expectation of the justice in the organization, and they feel that the justice is not observed in the organization.

Key words: Work ethics, Organizational alienation, Organizational justice, Manager, Health Information Technology.

1. INTRODUCTION

Work ethics, from the perspective of different people, has different meanings, but it is generally known as the ability to discriminate right from wrong at work. Because of work ethics, a person adopts the right choice and leaves the wrong item and behavior. According to a comprehensive definition "work ethics could be both defined as a social norm and / or a set of characteristics which are present in an employee (1). Overall, the main aim of ethics is to establish a set of moral principles of behavior that helps people to select the correct action and behavior from among different behavioral styles (2).

Awareness of ethical issues can help people to raise their awareness in their activities; it can also enhance people's alertness toward the mutual responsibility of people and

community (3). There are many items which motivate organizations to put emphasis on the role of ethics; these items include the followings: the role of ethics as a part of corporate strategy, its impact on management, and the positive effects of ethics which can help to create a perfect image of the organization (4).

In addition to the work ethics of an organization, employees are also influenced by organizational alienation. Organizational alienation is the degree of psychological integration or belonging to an organization in which a person works; it is associated with organizational and individual factors. Organizational alienation can determine a relative degree of individual's identity and shows how much a person is involved and participate in the organizations' activities. This also includes the respect for organizational

values and objectives, making considerable efforts to fulfill organizational goals, and having a strong and deep inclination to continue membership in the organizations (5). Hence, people with lower levels of organizational alienation are less inclined to leave the organization, because it is logically more ethical (6).

In addition to the components of work ethics and organizational alienation, employees' perception of organizational justice is also important. Organizational justice represents the employees' perception of a fair environment at work (7). Organizational justice refers to a sense of individualism in organization in which the person feels he / she receives a payment which is proportional to the amount of work he / she is doing in the organization. In fact, organizational justice can be mainly perceived through comparing oneself to others in terms of salary and benefits received commensurate with the work performed (8). Maibodi and et al conducted a study in 2012 and found that the work ethics ultimately led to improvement in the work efficiency of nurses (9). Niazazari et al.'s study showed that managers of health care organizations must put emphasis on general and specific aspects of work ethics which should be observed in different jobs during their career; the managers must also practically observe all ethical principles so that they become a model for others (10). In a study by Ebrahimipour it was found that the best way to reduce the restrained behaviors of the staffs is trying to create and improve the behaviors in work environment (11).

As work ethics has a significant effect on the activities and outcomes achieved in every organization, and since it improves communication and reduces the degree of risk, the observation and realization of the ethical principles can reduce discrimination, injustice, dissatisfaction, and can increase organizational morale and commitment. Thus, the employees working in the Health Information Technology (HIT) Departments must try to realize the work ethics more than ever. Failure to comply with work ethics by HIT managers and their negative attitudes about organizational justice may have an adverse impact on patient satisfaction, quality of care, collecting health statistics, reimbursement, and management and planning at all levels of health care; it can also lead to unbearable damages to the health information system in the country. As so far there has been no research on the HIT managers to assess the moral and ethical aspects of works and their relationship with organizational alienation and justice, this study aimed to evaluate the relationship between work ethics and organizational justice and alienation among HIT managers.

2. HYPOTHESES

- Hypothesis 1: There is a significant relationship between work ethics and organizational alienation.
- Hypothesis 2: There is a significant relationship between work ethics and organizational justice.
- Hypothesis 3: There is a significant relationship between demographic characteristics of the managers and work ethics.
- Hypothesis 4: There is a significant relationship between the managers' demographic characteristics and organizational justice.

3. MATERIAL AND METHODS

Sample and setting

Participants in this study were HIT managers of hospitals and health care institutions affiliated to Semnan University of medical sciences in Iran. The research was conducted from February 2015 to October 2015. A total of 135 questionnaires were distributed; 112 were returned, which represented a response rate of 82.96%.

Measures

A questionnaire was developed by the authors, after reviewing Gregory's work ethic questionnaire (12), Niehoff's and Moorman's organizational justice questionnaire (13) and organizational alienation literatures. The questionnaire consisted of 49 questions in four sections. The first section focused on demographic information (sex, age, education, work experiences, and marital status). The second section comprised a scale to measure the attitudes of the participants in relation to work ethic (interest in work, seriousness in work, healthy and humanitarian relations in the workplace and collective spirit and participation in work). Attitudes on each item were measured on a 5-point Likert type scale, Never=1, Seldom=2, Sometimes=3, Often=4 and Always=5. The third section measured organizational alienation (to meet the needs in the organization, the gap in the organization, to be useful, optimism about the future, a effective role in the organization, awareness of the goals and programs and believe in them); attitudes on each item were measured on a 5-point Likert type scale, very low=1, low=2, somewhat=3, high=4 and very high=5; and the four section evaluated the organizational justice (amount of payments, received awards, informing staff of organizational decisions, the impact of managers' views on job decisions, criticism of the organization, manager's sensitive to employees' needs, manager's honest with top managers and managers' awareness of decisions related to managers' job). Attitudes on each item were measured on a 5-point Likert type scale, completely disagree=1, disagree=2, neither agree nor disagree=3, agree=4 and completely agree=5. The primary questionnaire was reviewed for content validity (through the content validity index (CVI)), and evaluated by 10 experts, who offered feedback in relation to the simplicity and clarity of questions, and the relationship between questions. The experts evaluated each question on a 4-point scale (1=low score; 4=high score), and the ratio of their response scores (3 and 4 to the total of 10 responses) were obtained. Items with scores higher than 0.80 were considered suitable; items with scores of less than 0.80 were removed or revised as recommended by the experts, and then reevaluated. The questionnaire was then piloted on 16 managers randomly selected from all hospitals and health care institutions. Participants in the pilot study were excluded from the study. Internal consistency was expressed as Cronbach's alpha 0.984 for work ethic, 0.651 for organizational alienation, and 0.866 for organizational justice. Next, further revisions were made and some statements were rephrased. Lastly, the final version of the anonymous questionnaire was distributed among the participants and they were asked to complete the questionnaire.

Data analysis

A total attitude score for each of the section was calcu-

Characteristics	Group	N	%
Sex	Man	43	38.1
	Female	69	61.6
marital status	Married	97	87.4
	Single	14	12.6
Education	Bachelor degree	48	44
	Master degree	56	51.4
	PhD	5	4.6
Age(Year)	20-30	27	26
	31-40	34	33
	41-50	34	33
	50<	8	8
	<5	20	18.3
Work experience (Year)	5-10	21	19.3
	11-15	18	16.5
	16-20	13	11.9
	20<	37	33.9

Table 1. Demographic characteristics.

Figure 1. Mean scores of the study subjects' attitudes

Variables	R	R2	Adjusted R2	df	F	B	SD	Beta	t	P-Value
Organizational alienation	0.447	0.200	0.192	1	24.011	- 0.217	0.044	-0.447	-4.900	<0.001
Organizational Justice	0.407	0.16	0.157	1	19.219	0.580	0.134	0.407	4.384	<0.001

Table 2. Regression analysis between work ethic and organizational alienation and justice

Variables	t	Beta	SD	B	F	df	Adjusted R2	R2	R	P-Value
Work ethic	-2.144	-0.205	0.100	-0.215	4.599	1	0.33	0.042	0.225	0.034
Organizational Justice	-2.016	-0.200	0.073	-0.147	4.062	1	0.03	0.040	0.200	0.047

Table 3. Regression analysis between the study subjects' education level and work ethic and organizational justice

lated based on the mean scores for each of the sections (low score <3; high score ≥3). A low score indicated a negative attitude, while a high score indicated a positive attitude. Regression test was used to examine the relationships among the study subjects' characteristics, work ethic, organizational alienation and organizational justice.

Ethical consideration

Ethics approval was obtained from the Semnan University of Medical Ethics Committee. A covering letter was prepared for distribution with the survey document, which described the purposes of the study and explained that a response to the survey would indicate the consent of the participant to take part in the research. It also assured participants of the confidentiality of their responses.

4. RESULTS

Demographic characteristics of the data are outlined in Table 1. The majority (61.6%) were female. 56 people (51.4%) had master degree. 97 people (87.4%) were married. 40 people (36.7%) were 41-50 years old. 37 people (33.9%) had work experience more than 20 years. Figure 1 shows the mean scores of participants' attitudes on each of the sections of the questionnaire on the 5-point attitude scale. The findings show the study subjects gained a low score in organizational alienation and organizational justice. There was a negative and significant relationship between work ethic and organizational alienation ($B = -0.217, P < 0.001$), and there was also a positive and significant relationship between work ethic and organizational justice ($B = 0.580, P < 0.001$), as shown in Table 2. Table 3 shows that there were negative and significant relationships among between education level and work ethic ($B = -0.215, P = 0.034$) and organizational justice ($B = -0.147, P = 0.047$).

5. DISCUSSION

This study aimed to determine the relationship between work ethics and organizational justice and organizational alienation among the HIT managers. The results showed that work ethics is fairly observed among the HIT managers (mean=3.7) and the HIT managers fairly had a sense of organizational alienation (mean=2.45). In addition, there was a significant inverse relationship between work ethics of the HIT managers and their attitude towards the organizational alienation ($B = -0.217$). The results of the study confirmed the hypothesis 1. In view of that, according to the results, failure to observe the work ethic among the HIT managers increased the organizational alienation by 0.217. Ansari et al. in their study on marketing managers found a significant

relationship between organizational factors and work ethics (14). The findings of this study suggest that when the HIT managers lack seriousness, perseverance, interest toward and devotion to work, cooperation, sense of collectivism, and safe and humanistic relations, such conditions may result in lack of motivation among managers, waste of time, escape from work, and problems for the clients.

It seems that ethical management practices in the HIT Department can lead to direct and good outcomes within the organization, for instance it can increase productivity, strengthen teamwork conscience, institutionalize new moral values, and change organizational culture. In addition, it can also increase the commitment and allegiance of the HIT managers toward their work environment.

The findings of this study showed that the HIT managers felt some level of injustice in the workplace (mean=2.45). The

results showed that the organizational commitment of the HIT managers is influenced by their conception organization's responsibility toward top managers. As a result of such a condition, the HIT managers expect that when they make an attempt to meet organizational goals, they will be appropriately rewarded.

The findings suggest that when the HIT managers are not satisfied with the realization of justice or organization's orientations toward a fair environment, their perceptions will influence their practice and results in the absence of loyalty to the organization. In other words, any strategic decision or operational measure adopted to interact with the HIT managers primarily influences their evaluation of and feelings toward justice in the organization; later, such a perception and feeling will influence the other attitudes and behaviors of the managers. As a result, a sense of injustice in the workplace can directly affect managers' displacement, turnover, job dissatisfaction, lack of confidence in top management, organizational conflicts, tensions, and work stress (15, 16). In this study we did not evaluate the effect of the job status of the HIT managers, however, people who suffer from a lack of job security and stability are more prone to have a poor relationship with the organization and they are finally alienated from the work process and their morals are also influenced by such a condition (6, 17). It seems that the attempts to fulfill the needs of the HIT managers can increase the managers' job satisfaction and consequently lead to a higher level of managers' commitment toward their workplace.

The results of this study showed a significant positive relationship between the managers' attitude toward organizational justice and the observation of work ethic by the managers ($B=0.580$). In view of that, organizational justice increased work ethic among the HIT managers by 0.580. This finding confirmed the hypothesis 2. Whisenant's study showed that all the factors that were involved in work ethics were also effective in the organizational justice (15). This consistency in the results suggests that justice is a moral concept. Justice, which is created via special methods, helps the managers to keep away from the extremes and guides them toward the direct path and eliminates the ground for corruption and irregularities in the work environment. On the contrary, managers who perceive injustice may have negative responses and reactions such as not making enough efforts, poor organizational citizenship behaviors, and in its acute form resign from the work (18).

The findings of the present study indicated a significant inverse relationship between the level of education and the observation of work ethics by the HIT managers. Accordingly, education level could decrease the work ethics by 0.215. This finding confirmed the hypothesis 3. The results of Moayedfar's study are also consistent with the results of our study. In his study, that was conducted to determine the work ethics and the related factors, it was concluded that people with higher education level, citizenship, and social and economic status had weaker work ethics (19). Perhaps the similarity in findings indicated that the education level and expertise are not considered and valued much in the workplace and do not lead to career advancement. Hence, the expectations of educated people are not met. The lack

of respect to education level can lead to job dissatisfaction and reduce the work ethics among this group of health information management managers.

The results of this study suggest a significant inverse relationship between the level of education and the attitudes of the HIT managers toward organizational justice. In view of that, education level could decrease managers' attitudes towards organizational justice by 0.147. This finding confirmed the hypotheses 4. In a study by Ansar et al. the researchers studied the effects of individual and organizational factors on the work ethics of marketing managers; they also used organizational justice as the moderator variable. They found that people with higher education level expect the following items more: delegating the tasks to qualified managers, positioning the managers in a proper job position, proper level of reward, appropriate volume of work load assigned, good system for promotion and punishment, patronage, and assigning authority and responsibilities proportional to the managers' abilities and skills (14). Failure to comply with these conditions will lead the managers with higher levels of education to feel injustice.

The results of this study showed that organizational ethics is based on trust. Hence, the managers' confidence in the state of justice in the workplace can increase their commitment, loyalty, motivation, effort, and their individual and collective performance. The managers prefer a just behavior because they think just behavior is more ethical while unjust behaviors are not ethical. This perception can affect the managers' attitude toward the job, working environment, and top managers.

Limitations and future research

The results of this study must be interpreted with caution. Because, on the one hand, this study was conducted in a province with a limited population; therefore the results cannot be generalized to the entire managers working in the HIT Department in Iran. However, the results of the present study were in line with other studies in this field. On the other hand, the quantitative nature of this study has limited its capacity; as a result, we were not able to fully discover and investigate the experiences of the HIT managers and other organizational factors in the hospitals and health care institutions that could affect their work ethics. Hence, there is a strong need for a study with a mixed method (both quantitative and qualitative) with a large sample size to discover and investigate the managers' perception of organizational factors and their effects on work ethics.

6. CONCLUSION

The results of this study showed that the attitude of the HIT managers toward justice and equality in the organization can affect their organizational commitment and loyalty and thus have a significant impact on the work ethics in the work environment. On the other hand, with increasing the education level of the managers, they will have higher expectation of the justice in the organization, and they feel that the justice is not observed in the organization. Such a condition can affect the staff's work ethics. Neglecting business ethics in the workplace and in dealing with external stakeholders can lead to many problems for the organization; it can threaten the legitimacy of the organization, thus

affecting organizational profit and success.

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