

Organizational Identification, Corporate Ethical Values, and Intention to Report Peers' Unethical Behavior

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Abstract

Employees' misconducts and unethical behaviors are prevalent and growing. Extant research indicate that most employees engage in some form of organizational misbehavior. These misconducts result in billions of lost dollars in revenue annually. Unfortunately research results indicate that employees misbehaviors are largely went unnoticed. Therefore, since employees are in a position that enables them to be more aware and knowledgeable of their colleagues' misconducts, a better way to deal with unethical behaviors is to encourage peer reporting. Yet research showed that employees are not inclined to report their colleagues' misconducts. Thus exploring reasons that inhibit or enhance peer reporting is worthwhile. This study investigated the impact of organizational identification and corporate ethical values on employees' intention to report peers unethical behaviors. The results supported our hypothesis as they revealed that organizational identification and corporate ethical values are positively associated with intention to report unethical behaviors committed by peers. Implications, limitation and recommendations for future studies have been presented.

Keywords: Unethical Behavior, Peer Reporting, Whistleblowing, Organizational Identification, Corporate Ethical Values, Jordan, Nurse, Healthcare

1. Introduction

Employees misconducts in the workplace is widespread and costly problems facing business organizations. Extant research indicate that most employees engage in some form of organizational misbehavior (Arya & Khandelwal, 2013, Still & Lehner, 2009). These misconducts result in billions of lost dollars in revenue annually. For example, lost revenues due to organizational wrongdoing in the form of workplace theft in US were estimated at \$400 billion annually (Payne & Gainey, 2004; Wells, 1999). Beyond the direct economic losses, employee theft has been cited as a major cause of business failure. It was found that employee misconduct accounted for up to 50% of all business failures (Mishra & Prasad., 2006, Greenberg, 1997). Other research reported that about 30% of small business failures are linked to employee dishonesty (Still & Lehner, 2009). Other researchers reported similar figures as they suggested that employee theft is responsible for about one third of all business failures among insurance firms (Oliphant & Oliphant, 2001). Of course this will result in lost taxes, lost jobs, and higher prices (Baily, 2006; Appelbaum et al., 2006; Ama & Ifezue, 2012; Payne & Gainey, 2004). Though alarming, some researchers content that these numbers do not reflect entirely misconducts at the workplace reality or its full extent. It has been estimated that about four fifth of employee theft incidents goes undetected (Green 1997). Employees misbehavior is a universal issue and no organization is immune from it (Shanikat et al., 2014).

Unethical behavior is prevalent and widespread among healthcare professionals (Chullen et al., 2010; Feudtner et al., 1994). A study conducted by Fayez et al et al., (2013) found that majority of participants agree that unethical behaviors do occur among healthcare providers. Other studies results corroborated these results (Baldwin et al., 1998; Satterwhite et al., 1998). Interestingly, other studies found that medical students participation or exposure to unethical behavior led them to perceive these kind of behaviors as appropriate (Satterwhite et al., 2000). It is widely believed that it is nurses duty to protect patients interests and safety, so when nurses encounter unethical practices in the workplace, their codes of ethics bind them "to the role of patient advocate and compel them to take action when the rights or safety of a patient are jeopardized." (Ahern & McDonald &, 2002, p. 303). Yet nurses are not inclined to disclose the wrongdoing they observe at the work place (Johnstone, 2004).

Focusing on security measures, and law enforcement, though important, is insufficient to control this kind of behaviors. Sacket & DeVore (2002) noted that there is little substantive empirical evidence supporting the effectiveness of such control mechanisms. Due to the proliferation of this phenomenon, it is difficult to deal with every single case. Add to this, unethical behavior is done in private, so it is difficult to detect (Aleassa et al., 2011). Employees do their best to conceal their misconducts from their superiors, however coworkers are in better position to be aware of such behaviors (Trevino & Victor, 1992; Miceli et al., 2013). Thus, since direct supervision is unable to fully monitor the full range of employees' actions "co-workers who are willing to monitor their peers' behavior and report violations to management represent a potentially important supplemental control resource for organizations... Therefore, managers who face persistent problems with misconduct may wish to encourage work group members to report their peers." (Trevino and Victor, 1992,

pp. 38-39). Peer reporting is defined as "reporting another group member's misconduct to someone in a position of authority" (Curphy et al., 1998, p. 27).

Peer reporting is a specific type of whistle-blowing which is defined as "the disclosure by organizational members (former or current) of illegal, immoral, or illegitimate practices under control of their employers, to persons or organizations that may be able to effect action" (Near & Miceli, 1985, p. 4). While both of these concepts (peer reporting and whistleblowing) are concerned with the observation and reporting misbehaviors they differ in at least two major aspects. Firstly, the former focus is on observing and reporting wrongdoings committed by peers (who may be of the same status or position), therefore it is a form of lateral control attempt. The later is concerned with observing and disclosing of wrongdoings committed by superiors or the entire organization, by this it is a kind of upward control attempt (Loyens, 2013). Secondly, whistle-blowing is a control attempt in which the reporter has the choice to report the suspicious behavior to higher organizational authority or other external agencies (such as governmental agencies) (Near et al., 2004). Whereas, in peer reporting "the observer may report the incident to other employees within the organization, or to a member(s) outside the group (e.g., an immediate supervisor) who can prevent the incident from reoccurring" (King & Hermodson, 2000, p.312).

Peer reporting includes at least three elements: the reporter, the peer wrongdoer, and the information recipient (De Graaf, 2010). The reporter first observe the peers behaviors, then judge a behavior as wrongdoing, finally he decides whether to report that wrong doing (Keil et al., 2010). It seems that employees are not inclined to do what is expected of them; that is to report the wrongdoing (McCabe et al., 2001, Vadera et al., 2009). Research findings indicate that employees are reluctant to report a colleague whom they saw engage in misbehaviors (Keil et al., 2010; Berta. 2003). That's because employees are not willing to violate group norms and suffer from the consequential punishment (Trevino & Victor, 1992; McCabe et al 1998). Thus, when a group member sees his colleague engages in misbehavior he prefers to deal with the situation internally or remain silent (Barnett, 1996). A qualitative study conducted by De Graaf & Huberts (2008) found that though employees had evident suspicions of their colleagues corruptions they preferred to remain silent and not to report their suspicions to the superiors. More interestingly, De Graaf (2010) asserted that "in some cases, even the corrupt official wished he had reported earlier so that he could have been stopped when the case was relatively minor. The sooner the integrity violation is discovered, the sooner action can be taken to minimize damage." (p. 767).

Therefore, peer reporting is an important control mechanism for inhibiting peer inappropriate behavior (Miller and Thomas, 2005). However, while whistle-blowing has been an area of frequent research little research effort has been directed at understanding peer reporting (Miller & Thomas 2005; King, 2001; Trevino & Victor, 1992). In this realm, (Chiu & Erdener, 2003, p. 335) stated that "Although popular interest in whistle blowing continues to increase, little is known about why some employees who observe the wrongdoing of a peer or colleague would report it, while others would not. As peer reporting is becoming an important mechanism to control unethical behaviors within an organization, investigation on peer reporting is an essential need." Thus this study is an important step toward filling this void as it aims at investigating the effect of two important constructs; organizational identification and corporate ethical values, on employees intention to report peers wrongdoing. This investigation is an important addition to the literature; we are not aware of any other study that explored these variables in the context of peer reporting. Thus results of this study will enhance and increase our understanding of factors that motivate employees to report their team members misconducts.

2. Theoretical Background and Hypotheses Development

2.1 Organizational identification

One important issue organization face nowadays is "harmonization of workers' aims with organizations' aims" (Yildiz, 2013, p. 264). Thus understanding how individuals relate and identify with their employing organizations is a topic that deeply concerned practitioners and scholars alike (Wan-Huggins et al., 1998; Edwards, 2009). Identity has been conceptualized as continuum ranging from personal to social identity (De Moura et al., 2009). Personal identity relates to the unique traits which a person as an individual possesses and differentiates him from others (Richter et al., 2004). Social identity is derived from group membership and defined as "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (Tajfel, 1978, p. 63). One specific type of social identity is organizational identification (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). Due to the belief that organizational identification is associated with employees' attitudes and behaviors that are essential to their organization functioning, this psychological state has become increasingly important to organizations (Riketta, 2005; Edwards, 2005). Organizational identification describes a strong psychological integration between the employees and their employing organizations. Strongly identified individuals define themselves through the organizations that employ them (Ashforth et al., 2008; Wieseke et al, 2012). Ashforth and Mael (1989) defined organizational identification as "a perceived oneness with an organization and the experience of the organization's successes and failures as one's own" (p. 103). Employees perception of oneness

and belongingness would lead us to conclude that the fate and interests of both the individuals and their organizations are inseparable and interwoven (Avanzi et al 2012; Van Dick et al, 2004).

One important determinant of organizational identification is the perceived prestige and reputation of the organization (Jones & Volpe, 2011). This is because people incorporate their membership in a social group (i.e. organization) into their self concept (Zagenczyk et al, 2011). By this, self concept is not only determined by self identity but also by social identity which is derived from membership in particular organization (Avanzi et al, 2012; Bartels et al., 2007). Thus, identification will influence, at least partly, peoples need for self definition (Scott & Lane, 2000). Individuals motivation to seek positive self-concept will encourage them to protect the perceived image of the organization with which they identify. Van Dick et al (2004) stated that “the more I identify myself with my organization, the more I define myself in terms of this particular membership and the more is my own future determined by the organization’s future” (p.352). Based on this reasoning, employees who strongly identify with their organization will perceive wrongdoings committed by their colleagues not only detrimental to the status and the future of their organizations but, to a substantial degree, also to their self concept.

Strong organizational identification reflects strong psychological bond or tie with the employing organization (Moriano et al., 2014). This tie would lead employees to support and defend the well being of the organization with which they identify (Liu et al., 2011). Organizational members’ identification with the organization would induce individuals to interpret and respond to misconducts harmful to organizations as if they were directed to them. This in turn, would promote employees readiness to act in the organization best interest and even to subordinate their interest to those of the organization (Haslam et al., 2003; Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2008). This will lead employees to refrain from dysfunctional behaviors and exhibit behaviors that enhance organizational functioning. Employees strongly identify with an organization of which they are a member perceive that their survival is linked to their organizations’ survival (Dutton et al., 1994). This perception will induce them to engage in behaviors that protect the organization’s success and survival. This perception will motivate this kind of individuals to be more willing to report peers misbehaviors to others who they think can halt it.

2.2 Corporate Ethical Values

Organizations desire to create an environment that encourages employees to behave ethically (Duh et al., 2010). One important organizational variable that has substantial effect on how employees respond in particular situation is organizational culture (Deshpande & Webster, 1989). In line with this, Vitell & Hidalgo (2006) suggest that one effective way of enhancing employee propensity to behave ethically is to build core ethical values in the organizational culture. Vitell et al., 2010) proposed that “the central dimension of organizational culture is corporate values” (p. 471).

Rokeach (1968) defined value as “a centrally held, enduring belief which guides actions and judgments across specific situations and beyond immediate goals to more ultimate end-states of existence” (p.161). Hence, some researchers argue that values provide the criteria or basis upon which individuals base their preferences, choices, and judgments (Marta et al, 2001). This implies that ethical values are criterion upon which employees judge their ethical decisions and behaviors (Honkanen et al., 2006; Groves & LaRocca, 2011). As such, Value connotes an ethical dimension, as so it allows organizations to establish normative standards that allow employees facing ethical dilemma to act ethically (Valentine & Barnett, 2002.)

Having recognized the significance of culture as an influential factor in shaping employees reactions and behaviors, it has been incorporated as an essential element into several theoretical models which have been developed to explain and analyze ethical decision making within organizations (Hunt & Vitell, 1986; Ferrell & Grisham, 1985; Trevino, 1986). Consistent with this Hunt et al., (1989) developed a construct labeled, corporate ethical values, defined as “a composite of the individual ethical values of managers and both the formal and informal policies on ethics of the organization” (p. 79), and conceptualized it as principal component of corporate cultural values. By this corporate ethical values influence and shape employees ethical behaviors and decisions.

It has been theoretically argued and empirically shown that corporate ethical values is associated with positive employees attitudes (Hunt, 1989; Valintine et al., 2006; Elci et al., 2007) and their tendency to behave on the behalf of the organization (Sharma et al, 2009; Valintine et al., 2011; Sabir et al., 2012). Also, some research results indicated that corporate ethical values affect employees’ ethical perceptions and judgment (Elias, 2011; Marta & Singhapakdi, 2005) and ethical intentions (Marta et al., 2001; Marta et al, 2012).

Moreover, a number of previous research findings could be interpreted to support the significant link between corporate ethical values and peer reporting. Sims & Keenan (1998) reported a significant positive relationship between corporate ethical values and external whistleblowing. Zhang et al., (2009) study results indicated that corporate ethical culture strengthened the relationship between whistleblowing judgment and whistleblowing intention. Victor et al., (1993) noted that “Peer reporting is frequently considered an extra-role behavior in that it is generally not a required part of the job. Rather, it is a voluntary behavior engaged in by an employee who wishes to help management” (P. 254). A study conducted by Valentine et al., (2011) found that corporate ethical

values promote extra-role behavior (i.e. altruism) through career satisfaction. In a similar realm, the results of an empirical study carried out by Ruiz-Palomino & Martinez-Canas (2013) showed that ethical culture is associated with organizational citizenship behavior.

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

This is a cross-sectional survey design study. The data of this study was obtained via self administered questionnaires distributed to a randomly selected group of nurses working in public and private hospitals. Participants of this study were recruited from hospitals in three municipalities of Jordan with the help of graduate students in the field of healthcare administration. They were informed that participation is voluntarily, no incentives or penalties will result from their decision.

Nurses were informed that to be eligible to participate in the study he/she should be a permanent employee with at least one year service with his/her current employer. Confidentiality was assured, and participants were ascertained that no one will have access to the data other than the researcher. Respondents were informed that the responses are anonymous and collected data will be pooled, thus there is no possibility to relate the responses to the participants. Thus respondents were encouraged to be as accurate and honest as they can.

A total of 310 questionnaires were sent out, of them 253 were returned, 9 questionnaires were dropped from the study due to various reasons such as incomplete data or the respondent did not complete the specified period of service. This left us with 244 analyzable surveys, this number represents about 79% response rate. Of the total respondents, 65% reported their gender as male. As for the marital status, 57% of the respondents were married. Respondents were employed for their current organization on average for 3.95 years. The average years of experience was 6.33 years, and the average age was 32.27 years.

3.2 Measures

The questionnaire comprised two sections the first one elicited information about demographic data of the respondents (age, gender, marital status, length of time employed in the current hospital, years of experience). The second section contained a set of items that measure the focal variables of this study. The respondents rated the items on a seven point Likert-type scale anchored by the two end points strongly disagree (1) and strongly agree (7), with higher scores signaling higher amount of the relevant focal construct. Responses to the items representing each construct were averaged to create an overall composite score. Negatively stated items were reverse coded.

Organizational identification was measured using Mael & Ashforth (1992) scale. This is a six items scale; a sample item is "this hospitals successes, are my successes". An extensively used instrument developed by Hunt et al. (1989) was adopted to measure corporate ethical values. This is five items instrument that asses the hospital's values as perceived by the respondents. Respondents' perception summed and averaged to produce an overall score of corporate ethical values, a sample item is "in order to succeed in my hospital, it is often necessary to compromise one's ethics". Intention to report peers wrongdoing was assessed via scenario based scale adapted from (King, 1994). The scenario depicted unethical behavior committed by a nurse in a hospital. Respondents were instructed to carefully read the scenario then answer the three questions related to the scenario that measure the respondents intention to report the unethical behavior described in the scenario. The participants were informed to put themselves in the place of scenario actor and assume that they become aware of the unethical behavior committed by the nurse then indicate the probability that they would report the wrongdoing (three questions) on a scale ranging from 1 (extremely unlikely) to 7 (extremely likely). Scenario based approach has been acknowledge as appropriate method to assess ethical behavioral intention (Hunt & Vitell, 1986; Bay & Nikitkove, 2011). Actually, Bay & Nikitkove, (2011) stated that "largely due to the difficulty of observing behavior, empirical business ethics research relies heavily on the scenario methodology" (p.1). Researchers are increasingly becoming more dependent on this technique, This led Khera (2010) to conclude that "given the large number of recent studies using this technique, scenarios seem to have become a basic and indeed the preferred tool in empirical business ethics research" (p, 36).

4. Results

To test for reliability Cronbach's alpha was calculated for each construct. The scores for organizational identification, corporate ethical values, and intention to report peers, were .77, .72, and .74 respectively. We see that all values of this test are above the .70 acceptable level. To test the stated hypotheses of this study, simple linier regression was used, this test the relationship between the independent variables (organizational identification and corporate ethical values) and the dependent variable (intention to peer report) as delineated by the research hypotheses. Two separate regression analysis were conducted to test the association between the variables. In test one intention to peer report was regressed on organizational identification. The results (see table 1) revealed that 19.4% of the variance in the dependent variable could be explained by organizational identification ($R^2=.194$, $F(1, 242) = 58.18$, $p < .001$). Also, the results indicated that organizational identification

was positively associated with intention to report peers misbehavior ($B=.531, t(242) = 7.628, p < .001$). The results of test two where the dependent variable was regressed on corporate ethical values showed that 11.6 % of the variance in the dependent variable was accounted for by this predictor ($R^2=.116, F(1, 242) = 31.761, p < .001$). Moreover, regression analysis results revealed a significant positive relationship between intention to report peers misbehaviors and corporate ethical values ($B=.4, t(242) = 5.636, p < .001$).

Table 1. summary of simple regression Analyses for variables predicting peer reporting

Model	Independent Variable	R ²	df	F	sig	B	t	sig
1	Organizational identification	.194	1,242	58.18	.001	.531	7.628	.001
2	Corporate ethical values	.116	1,242	31.761	.001	.40	5.636	.001

5. Discussion and Implications of Findings

Employees misconducts and unethical behaviors are prevalent and growing (Farhadi et al., 2012). Because this kind of behaviors is costly and harmful to organizations, managers desire to curtail the occurrence of such behaviors, unfortunately research results indicate that employees misbehaviors are largely went unnoticed (Nicholson & DeMoss, 2009; Yahr et al. 2009). Therefore, since employees are in a position that enables them to be more aware and knowledgeable of employees' misconducts, some researchers suggest that a better way to deal with unethical behaviors is to encourage peer reporting (Lin & Ding, 2003). Yet research showed that employees are not inclined to report their colleagues misconducts (Keil et al., 2010). Thus exploring reasons that inhibit or enhance peer reporting is worthwhile.

This study is a step in this direction. We tested the effect two important factors (that left unattended in peer reporting literature) on employees' intention to report their peer misconducts. The results supported our hypotheses. We hypothesized that organizational identification would positively influence employees intention to report their colleagues' misbehaviors. Regression analysis results indicted that organizational identification is a significant predictor of peer reporting. This result suggests that the likelihood of peer reporting depends, at least partially, on the strength of identification with an organization. Social identity is a mean to fulfill individuals' desire for positive personal identity (Liu et al., 2011). Being strongly identified with their organizations, individuals are inclined to behave in the best interest of the organization (Van Knippenberg, 2000), that's so because "identification blurs the distinction between self and group, and turns the group, psychologically, into a part of the self" (Van Knippenberg, 2000, p. 358). Therefore, the more one identify with his organization the more likely he will exhibit behaviors that are in the good for the organization. The sense of oneness and belonging to an organization would induce employees to internalize the organization's goals and interest and perceive them as their own (Ellemers et al., 2004; Richter et al., 2004), thus, are apt to engage in behaviors that are conductive to the organization. Therefore managers are prompted to strengthen employees identification with their organization. One promising way to do that is through reducing intraorganizational competition and improving satisfaction (Mael and Ashforth, 1992). Enhancing perceived image of the organization, improving the communication climate and employee ownership are other useful means to strengthen individuals sense of oneness with their organization (Long, 1978; Kassing, 2000; Bartles et al., 2007). Hypothesis two predicted that corporate ethical values would be positively related to intention to report ethics violation committed by their peers. The results supported this hypothesis, as it indicated that corporate ethical values is a significant and important determinant of intention to report the wrongdoings committed by their colleagues. This suggests that employees who perceive that their organization has high corporate ethical values are more inclined to report to their superiors the wrongdoings they might notice in their workplace. This finding points to a fact that managers should realize the importance of corporate ethical values as a significant contributing factor that foster inclination to peer report.

Perceived corporate ethical values is shaped by formal and informal systems (codes of ethics, overt behaviors of managers etc...). Managers should institutionalize and integrate ethical values into their corporate cultural values; they should "institutionalize the ethical principles underlying their policies, practices, and goals. They should decide what will be considered right, what will be considered wrong, and what things are worth doing from an ethical perspective in their organizations" (Hunt et al., 1989, p. 88).

Managers should communicate to their employees, through actions, words, and policies, that unethical behaviors are intolerated in their organization and it will certainly be punished. In the same vein, individuals who behave ethically and in the best interest of the organization should be recognized and rewarded.

6. Limitations and Future Studies

This is cross sectional study and data on both the dependent variables and the dependent variable was collected at the same time, so causality might not be inferred. Longitudinal design is much more suitable research design to demonstrate casual relationships (Zapf et al., 1996), thus future research are advised to adopt this methodology.

Social desirability bias is a major concern in ethics research. To deal with this issue anonymity and

confidentiality were assured (Podsakoff et al., 2003). However, future research is recommended to statistically control for this kind of bias.

Data of this study was collected from one profession, thus generalizability of results to non-healthcare workers might be restricted. Examining the research model of this study on samples from other professions will enhance its generalizability.

In this study we did not measure actual peer reporting behavior rather we used scenario based measure of intention to peer report. However, intention has been widely used and proven to be a valid proxy measure of actual behavior. Extant research has reported consistent association (ranged between medium to large) between behavioral intention and actual behavior in different context including health profession (Eccles et al., 2006; Sheeran, 2002). These results provide support to the contention that people tend to enact behaviors they intend to perform. However, this association is not perfect, so Vadera et al., (2009) indicated that it is difficult to predict that people responding to a scenario would enact their intentions when they encounter a similar real life situation. Therefore, future studies are needed to test this assumption.

Substantial proportion of the sample of this study was young and male. Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran (2005) reported that demographic characteristics, such as age and gender were related to whistle blowing intention and action. Thus it is possible that peer reporting behavior would vary across different ages and gender, This study did not test for this effect, therefore future studies are needed to test whether the model predict differently for different sample groups.

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