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The Impact of Ethical Climate on Relationship between Corporate Reputation and Organizational Identification

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Abstract

The achievement of strategic competitive advantage largely depends on employee behavior and employee behavior then, is influenced by the strength of the organizational identification. Thus, organizational identification has been subject to so many studies in literature. Besides, corporate reputation is discussed as another outstanding factor. The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between the perceived corporate reputation of organization and organizational identification, and how ethical climate underlines such a possible effect on this relation. The survey of this study is conducted on 228 employees of a leading multinational insurance company in Turkey. The obtained data from the questionnaires are analyzed through the SPSS statistical packaged software. Analyses results showed that corporate reputation has significant positive effects on organizational identification and this relation is moderated by two different types of ethical climate.

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Keywords: Ethical climate; Corporate reputation; Organizational identification

1. Introduction

The organization requires strengthening the organizational identification as it believes that identification has positive effects on employee's performance. Thus, organizational identification becomes an important variable for organizations' strategic competitive advantage. Understanding the concept of identification provides many advantages to the corporate performance of organization. It is significant to display the identification variables which provide the integration of employees with

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organizational values, goals, etc. It is also important to determine their effects on organization. One of these variables is corporate reputation.

The literature displays that improving corporate reputation will have positive effects on organizational identification (Mael and Ashforth, 1992). Members may feel proud of being part of a well-respected company as it strengthens their feelings of self-worth to bask in reflected glory (Smidts, Pruyn and Riel, 2001). In addition to corporate reputation, we assume that ethical climate has moderating effects on the relationship between corporate reputation and identification.

In this context, the study begins with a literature review of ethical climate, corporate reputation and organizational identification; then goes on to development of hypothesis. We test the hypothesis if perceived corporate reputation strengths identification. Furthermore, we hypothesize that ethical climate moderates the impact of corporate reputation on organizational identification. Research methodology, analyses results and research model is discusses in the second part/section. In the last section, the results of the analyses are discussed and recommendation is provided for managers and academicians.

1. Literature Review And Hypotheses

1.1. Ethical Climate

Ethics is to distinguish the good from the bad, the right from the wrong, and always to act as per the good and the right. According to Miesing and Preble (1985) “ethics are frameworks for human conducts that relate to moral principles and attempt to distinguish right from wrong”. Ethics can be defined as the “inquiry into the nature and ground of morality, in which the morality is defined in the context of moral judgments, standards, and rule of conduct” (Mason and Bearden and Richardson, 1990). The presence of ethical code provides a set of rules or principles that must be followed, and non-compliance can result in, among other actions, expulsion from the association (Bullock and Panicker, 2003). Parallel to the concept of ethics, business ethics is described as a set of rules that stipulates how businesses and their employees ought to behave (Gbadamosi, 2004). As for that, the perception of business ethics in a company and the implementations intended to this perception generates ethical climate.

Victor and Cullen (1987) defined organizational ethical climate as the shared perceptions of what ethically correct behavior is, and how ethical issues should be handled. Their study is based on Schneider's (1975) argument that various types of climates can exist in a single organization. Thus, with the Schneider's types of climates, ethical climate is considered as one of the dimension of organization climate. In addition, most of the research results also indicate the importance of measuring ethical climate from a multi-dimensional perspective (DeConinck, 2011).

According to Victor and Cullen (1988) ethical climate of an organization described in terms of the perceptions of organizational members as to organizational practices and procedures that define what is considered right or wrong within the organization. They believe that organizations are social actors responsible for the ethical or unethical behaviors of their employees. Based on the moral development research of Kohlberg (1981), employees use different types of ethical criteria, and display different types of moral reasoning. Kohlberg categorized ethical climates into three dimensions; egoism, benevolence, and principle and level of analysis as; individual, local, cosmopolitan. Egoism refers to the maximization of personal interests while benevolence seeks maximum pleasure and/or less inconvenience for an organization as a whole and principle places greatest emphasis on duty founded upon laws, rules, norms

and policies. Cross-classification of these dimensions reveals nine ethical climate types; however, in literature many studies merged friendship and team interest as caring (Victor and Cullen, 1987-1988; Cullen, Victor, and Bronson, 1993; Vaicys, Barnett, and Brown, 1996), and self-interest and company interest as instrumental based on their results (Victor and Cullen, 1988; Brower and Shrader, 2000). The ethical climate types are shown in Table 1:

Table 1: Types of Ethical Climates

Levels of Analysis Ethical Criteria	Individual	Local	Cosmopolitan
Egoism	Instrumental <i>(Self-interest + Company interest)</i>		Efficiency
Benevolence	Caring <i>(Friendship + Team interest)</i>		Social responsibility <i>(or Stakeholder orientation)</i>
Principle	Personnel morality	Rules and procedures	Law and professional codes

Source: Martin and Cullen, 2006.

1.2. Corporate Reputation

Reputation is clearly a concept held in the minds or cognitions of stakeholders (Brower and Shrader, 2000). As Fombrun defines “a corporate reputation is a perceptual representation of a company’s past actions and future prospects that describe the firm’s overall appeal to all of its key constituents when compared with other leading rivals” (Fombrun, 1996). Alternatively, Gray and Ballmer display corporate reputation as a valuation of a company’s attributes, performed by the stakeholders, what would almost completely exclude affective components (Gray and Balmer, 2006). The most important stakeholders that effect corporate reputation are customers and employees (Kitchen and Laurence, 2003).

According to Pruzan (2001), there are two perspectives of corporate reputation. First one is pragmatic perspective, in which protecting and improving corporate reputation is perceived as a necessary condition for maintaining the corporation's license to operate and harmonious relationships with its many stakeholders and, most importantly for competitive economic performance. In contrast, the reflective perspective on reputation primarily mirrors an organizational-existential concern which arises with the existential questions dealing not with superficial appearances but with identity, integrity, accountability and fundamental purpose. The distinction between pragmatic and reflective perspective is that the first is primarily external in its orientation and deals with corporate image, while the other is primarily internal and deals with corporate identity and integrity. In today’s competitive nature of business, the two perspectives on corporate reputation need not be in opposition to each other so as to enable an improved and more inclusive depiction of the corporation and its performance.

Based on this point of view, it is accurate and reasonable to understand corporate reputation as a multidimensional concept. It became evident with the study of Fombrun et al. (2000) that there are six dimensions of corporate reputation; emotional appeal, products and services, vision and leadership, workplace environment, social and environmental responsibility and financial performance.

1.3. Organizational Identification

Organizational identification is the perception of oneness with or belongingness to an organization, where the individual define him or herself in terms of the organization(s) in which he or she is a member (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Edward and Peccei, 2007). The concept is also defined as a psychological linkage between the individual and the organization whereby the individual feels a deep, self-defining affective and cognitive bond with the organization as a social entity. Therefore, identification represents the social and psychological binding between employees and the organization (Wiesenfeld, Raghuram and Garud, 1999). According to Valackiene, to identify oneself with the organization means to be actively involved into the processes which include specific activity areas and behavior, determined by the interaction of the organizational environment and employee adaptive behavior. A sense of identification creates a degree of perception to which a member associates him or herself with the organization's goals and values (Miller et al., 2000). It is mandatory to create the identity of the employees in an organization for its objectives. The goal, principles and values provide employees with organizational expectations, which become unwritten game rules. According to the different identity state in an organization, different performance ways are possible. If there is no identity at all, the organization carries a risk of not surviving (Valackiene, 2009). Identification allows the employee to vicariously take part in accomplishments beyond his or her powers (Katz and Kahn, 1978). Today we experience the lack of identity with organizations, which is mainly based on the strategic purposes (Valackiene, 2009).

Some of the constructive outcomes both for organizations and for employees associated with organizational identification can be listed as; increased motivation, performing beyond the tasks (Reade, 2001), organizational citizenship behavior, the internalization of organizational norms and practices (Dutton, Dukerich and Harquail, 1994), willingness to cooperate with others (Weisenfeld, Raghuram, and Garud, 1999), low turnover intentions (Cole and Brunch, 2006), job satisfaction and extra-role (Van Dick et al., 2007), and satisfaction of some individual needs such as the needs for safety, affiliation, self enhancement and meaning in one's life (Pratt, 1998).

1.4. Development of Hypothesis

According to the literature, it is proposed that perceived corporate reputation influences organizational identification. As mentioned by Dutton et al. (1994), employees feel proud of belonging to an organization, and this is believed to have socially valued characteristics. Authors such as Mael and Ashforth (1992), Pratt (1998), Fisher and Wakefield (1998), Bhattacharya, Rao, and Glynn (1995) also indicate that perceived corporate reputation affects organizational identification. In such studies that took place in literature, it is displayed that employees highly identify themselves with the organizations which are perceived as well-reputed.

Although one of the recent researches on ethical climate and organizational identification displayed that facets of an ethical work climate is related directly to organizational identification (DeConinck, 2011), in literature ethical climate researches largely focus on the relationship between the types of ethical climate and organizational commitment or trust (Valentine, Godkin, and Lucreo, 2002; Trevino, Butterfield, and McCabe, 1998; Mulki, Jaramillo, and Locander, 2006; Ruppel and Harrington, 2000; Weeks, Loe, and Chonko, 2004). Thus, it seemed there is a lack of research on the relationship between ethical climate and organizational identification. Consequently, we want to test the relationship between ethical climate and organizational identification and the possible moderating role of the concept on the relationship between corporate reputation and organizational identification.

We therefore propose:

Hypothesis 1: There is a relationship between perceived corporate reputation and organizational identification.

Hypothesis 2: There is a relationship between ethical climate and organizational identification.

Hypothesis 3: The effect of perceived corporate reputation on organizational identification is moderated by ethical climates.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Goal

The primary aim of this study is to identify the impact of ethical climate and corporate reputation on organizational identification, and to display the moderating effect of ethical climate on the relationship between corporate reputation and organizational identification. In order to analyze the hypotheses, a survey using questionnaires was conducted.

2.2. Sample and Data Collection

The survey of this study was conducted on employees of a leading multinational insurance company in Turkey. Data related to the ethical climate, corporate reputation and organizational identification were obtained directly from the employees of the firm through the questionnaires, which means primary source data were used in the research. The firm has 228 employees throughout the country. All these employees were contacted via email with the help of the human resources department of the firm's head office, and asked to participate in the survey. A total of 214 questionnaires were returned, so the return rate of the research was %94. However, 48 of them were not usable, so 166 questionnaires were used in analysis (n=166). Data obtained from questionnaires was analyzed through the SPSS statistical packet software (v.18) and proposed relations were tested through hierarchical regression analyses.

2.3. Measures and Reliabilities

In this study we used three different surveys mentioned below to measure our three variables determined as perceived corporate reputation, ethical climate and organizational identification. All the items in the questionnaire were accompanied by a 6-point rating scales (1: Strongly Disagree - 6: Strongly Agree). The Reputation Quotient developed by Fombrun et al. (2000) consisted of 20 items, The Ethical Climate Questionnaire (Victor and Cullen, 1993) consisted of 36 items with four items for each theoretical dimension of ethical climate, and The Organizational Identification Scale developed by Miller et al. (2000) with 25 items were used.

1 Sample K-S test was used for testing normality in distribution; thus, parametric tests of significance were used in the study. For the reliability of these surveys, The Cronbach's alpha scores obtained were; $\alpha= 0,973$ for The Reputation Quotient scale and $\alpha= 0,972$ for The Organizational Identification Scale, which indicates that the scales are reliable. The Cronbach's alpha score of The Ethical Climate Questionnaire is $\alpha= 0,943$, which indicates that the scale is reliable, after item 1 deleted, because of its negative effect on reliability.

Validity of The Reputation Quotient and The Organizational Identification Scale were analyzed by their developers and used and tested in various studies by other researchers as well. Therefore these

instruments are adequate and stable. The construct validity of The Ethical Climate Questionnaire was tested by factor analysis. Based on the results, 8 items were deleted according to the factor loadings and eventually 5 factors were found. The factor analysis results are shown in Table 2:

Table 2: Factor Analysis Results

Ethical Climate Items	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5
S 27	,825				
S16	,779				
S28	,770				
S32	,766				
S21	,756				
S4	,751				
S36	,742				
S31	,683				
S35	,674				
S17	,634				
S30	,629				
S12	,548				
S29	,520				
S20		,832			
S15		,830			
S14		,828			
S23		,743			
S13		,721			
S24		,772			
S7		,712			
S5			-,803		
S10			,744		
S6			,708		
S11				,786	
S9				,756	
S2					,850
S3					,735

There are 13 items in the first factor of the scale. This factor includes 4 items of friendship, 3 items of team interest, 3 items of company interest, 2 items of social responsibility, and 1 item of efficiency, and the first factor is labeled as "Climate 1". This factor's Cronbach's alpha score was $\alpha = 0,941$, which indicates that the factor is reliable.

There are 7 items in the second factor of the scale. This factor includes 4 items of rules and procedures, and 3 items of law and professional codes. So, we merged two climate types likewise in some studies in literature, (Vaicys, Barnett, and Brown, 1996; Wimbush, Jon, and Markham, 1997; Brower and Shrader, 2000) and labeled as "Climate 2" This factor's Cronbach's alpha score was $\alpha = 0,910$ which indicates that the factor is reliable.

The remaining factors' loadings were not significant for literature, so they were excluded from the analysis. Consequently, two types of ethical climate stood out in this study.

2.4. Analysis and Results

The demographic questions related to the participants' sex, age, educational level, position (top-level, middle-level, non-manager workers, and others), working area (head office or district office), length of time working in the insurance sector and length of time working in this company. Of the study participants, 55,1 % were male and 44,9 % were female. The participants had a mean of 36,6 years old, the median was 37, and the mode was 35. 20,2 % of the participants had a high school degree, 59,7% a bachelor's degree, 5,7 % a master's degree, and 14,4% the others. Of the participants 42,1 % were working in head office and 57,9 % were working in district office. 2,2 % of the participants were the top-level managers, 27,3% the middle-level managers and 70,5% non-manager worker. The participants had a mean of 15,37 years of experience in the insurance sector. The median was 16 years and the mode was 17 years. They also had a mean of 6,88 years of experience in the sample firm. The median was 5 and the mode was 3.

As seen in Table 3, there is a strong positive relationship between perceived corporate reputation and organizational identification (0,826); so correlation analysis results support H1. Secondly, there is a relationship between organizational identification and the two types of the ethical climate as Climate 1- C1 (0,744) and Climate 2- C2 (0,646). As a result H2 is supported as well.

Table 3: Correlations between Variables

Variables	Reputation	Identification	Climate 1	Climate 2
Reputation	1			
Identification	,826**	1		
Climate 1	,812**	,744**	1	
Climate 2	,583**	,646**	,642**	1

**Correlation is significant at the 0,01 level ($p < 0,01$)

For testing H3, hierarchical regression analysis was conducted with its results presented above. It can be seen in Table 4 that corporate reputation has significant effect on organizational identification ($\beta=0,839$, $\text{Sig}=0,000$). In model 2 and model 3; ethical climate types added separately to the analysis and it's seen that both dimensions have a role ($\beta=0,183$, $\text{Sig}=0,011$ for C1 and $\beta=0,238$, $\text{Sig}=0,000$ for C2) on the effects of corporate reputation on organizational identification.

According to the regression analysis results in Model 4, when both ethical climate dimensions (C1 and C2) included in the regression analysis, the significant effect of corporate reputation on organizational identification has decreased. Thus, the two ethical climate types have moderating role on the effects of corporate reputation on organizational identification. So, it can be displayed that H3 is supported.

In addition, the change in R square was presented in Table 4 and is statistically significant. According to the tolerance and VIF values, there is no collinearity between independent variables.

Table 4: Multi Regression Analysis Results on the Moderating Effect of Ethical Climate on Corporate Reputation and Organizational Identification Relationship

		B	Std. Error	β	R Square	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
Model 1	(Constant)	,286	,104		,704	,006		
	Reputation	,834	,042	,839		,000	1,000	1,000
Model 2	(Constant)	,130	,119		,715	,274		
	Reputation	,686	,071	,690		,000	,341	2,934
	Climate 1	,183	,071	,183		,011	,341	2,934
Model 3	(Constant)	-,042	,118		,741	,726		
	Reputation	,696	,049	,700		,000	,660	1,515
	Climate 2	,248	,051	,238		,000	,660	1,515
Model 4	(Constant)	-,079	,124		,743	,525		
	Reputation	,646	,068	,651		,000	,334	2,991
	Climate 1	,075	,073	,075		,307	,298	3,360
	Climate 2	,228	,055	,219		,000	,576	1,736

Dependent Variable: Organizational Identification

3. Conclusion

This study indicates the relationship among perceived corporate reputation, ethical climate and organizational identification. The results show that having an ethical climate in a company does influence the degree to the effect of perceived corporate reputation on organizational identification. In other words, it can be asserted that ethical climate has a significant moderating role on the relationship between perceived corporate reputation and organizational identification.

The first result of the study is that perceived corporate reputation has strong positive relationship with organizational identification, so H1 is fully supported. Also corporate reputation has significant effect on organizational identification, which means the higher corporate reputation is perceived, the more employees identify themselves with the company.

Secondly, two types of ethical climate were emerged in the sample. The first type (Climate1) includes mostly caring (friendship and team interest), social responsibility, which is seen in the literature as well (Brower and Shrader, 2000) and company interest. The combination of three levels of benevolence (individual/ friendship, local/ team interest, and cosmopolitan/social responsibility) is reasonable and shows that the company has a highly benevolent ethical climate. It is also acceptable that company interest's located under same dimension. Therefore, we named Climate 1 as "benevolent ethical climate". The second ethical climate type (Climate 2) includes the local level of principle as rules and procedures, and cosmopolitan level of principle as law and professional codes. This combination is also consistent with the literature (Vaicys, Barnett, and Brown, 1996; Wimbush, Jon, and Markham, 1997; Brower and Shrader, 2000) and shows that the employees behave within the framework of rules and laws. This result indicates that there is a strong normative behavior in the sample, so we labeled the combination of these climate types as "normative ethical climate". Results indicate that both types of ethical climate have significant positive relations with organizational identification, so H2 is supported as well. Analyses show

that the presence of benevolent ethical climate of the company effects organizational identification in a positive way more than normative ethical climate.

Thirdly, when benevolent ethical climate added in the effects of corporate reputation on organizational identification (Model 2), the explanatoriness of reputation has decreased, so the moderating effect of benevolence was observed. This result is valid for normative ethical climate as well (Model 3). Besides, the moderating effect of normative ethical climate is more than the effect of benevolent ethical climate.

The most striking result of this study is obtaining statistical significance for the addition of each ethical climate type in Hierarchical Regression Model 4. The analyses show that both normative and benevolent ethical climates have a significant moderating effect on the relationship between corporate reputation and organizational identification. Although there are so many studies examining the relationship between corporate reputation and organizational identification (Mael and Ashforth, 1992; Pratt, 1998; Fisher and Wakefield, 1998), in literature, this moderator effect of ethical climate is examined and revealed for the first time through this study, which can be considered as the contribution of the study to the literature.

Overall, this study expands the understanding of ethical climate and its relationship with corporate reputation and organizational identification by pointing out that having an ethical climate can ensure positive outcomes for companies. However, the study was limited in scope given the sample. Future studies could expand the sample size or analyze different variables to generalize the findings.

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