Relationships between ethical climate, political behavior, ethical leadership, and job satisfaction of operational officers in a wholesale company, Bangkok Metropolitan region

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ABSTRACT

This research investigated whether the ethical climate, political behavior, ethical leadership, and job satisfaction in one organization have an impact on each other. The research was conducted using a selected group of 177 operational officers in a wholesale business company in the Bangkok Metropolitan region. The operational officers were recruited from four divisions (commercial, finance, marketing, and administration) using a stratified random sampling approach. The majority was female and the participants' average age was 32 years. The instrument used was a designed questionnaire divided into five sections and consisting of checklists, opened-end questions, and rating scales. The data were analyzed statistically using percentages, means, standard deviations, Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient, and multiple regression analyses. The results showed that the operational officers in the wholesale business company had a high level of overall ethical climate, a low level of overall political behavior, and moderate levels of overall ethical leadership and overall job satisfaction. The ethical climate and ethical leadership were positively correlated with job satisfaction. The multiple regression analyses method also confirmed that the ethical climate, political behavior, and ethical leadership constructively had significant predictive ability regarding job satisfaction.

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Introduction

The ethical climate is a state where employees possess a sense of what is right and wrong in their company without an expressed order or a written set of rules. The ethical climate is considered a part of organizational culture (Boonbongkarn, 2001) and is the key factor to cultivating a good relationship among employees and organizational cultures which will help to predict work effectiveness (Ulrich et al., 2007). Most ethical climate theories applied in this study are based on the ideas of Victor and Cullen, as the “fathers of ethical climate” (Victor & Cullen, 1988 as cited in Goldman & Tabak, 2010). The ethical climate means a shared perception by operational officers of acceptable behavior, relationships, use of power, and ethical standards within an organization, without a written announcement. This so-called perception can influence their attitude, decision making, and ethical behavior. There are five types of ethical climate: 1) instrumental, an ethical climate that encourages serving the organization’s interests; 2) caring, a climate that encourages concern for and consideration of others; 3) independence, a climate that encourages decisions according to personal moral beliefs; 4) rules, a climate that emphasizes decisions guided by internal rules...
and regulations; 5) law and codes, a climate that supports decisions based on external codes such as the law or professional codes of conduct.

Previous studies suggested that the ethical climate perceived by professional nurses in non-profit private hospitals in the Bangkok Metropolitan region has a positive correlation with their job satisfaction (Sasomsap, 2004). The team’s interest, social responsibility, and laws and professional codes climate had a positive correlation with the job satisfaction of both employees and managers (Elci & Alpkan, 2009). Moreover, it was found that ethical climate types can predict 58 per cent of the overall managers’ job satisfaction (Okpara & Wynn, 2008).

There are also several associations between ethical climate and deviant political behaviors such as personal aggression and backstabbing between coworkers (Peterson, 2002 as cited in Appelbaum, Deguire, & Lay, 2005). The ethical climate has a significant influence on the behavior of both leaders and subordinates (Smith & Conje, 1982 as cited in Pio, 2000). It can decrease employees’ morality and job satisfaction (Saritwanit, 2009). All levels of personnel, especially leaders, should acknowledge the importance of the ethical climate in the workplace and subsequently allay deviant political behavior, as the main role of leaders is to lead the organization to success. Leaders can exercise their authority both directly and indirectly in order to lead groups to fulfill the appointed task (Sittilert, 2007). Ethical leadership is the key factor that decreases employee counterproductive behavior (Brown & Trevino, 2006). The constant dissatisfaction of employees can lead to lower organizational citizenship, causing counterproductive behavior such as voluntary absence, lateness, making errors, conflicts with colleagues, and actual turnover (Riggio, 2009). Many scholars have proposed various definitions and terms for political behavior, that is politics in an organization. Based on the literature review, we can conclude that those different terms all involve the same definition which is “actions” having a meaning similar to “behaviors”. Political behavior means any form of actions of operational officers that are considered an unauthorized or illegal use of power according to the company’s rules. Political behavior is the means by which people attempt to obtain power over a person, a group, and a company in order to gain personal interest for themselves, or any intended groups, and also to maintain personal (and/or their group’s) power. According to Moorhead and Griffin (2010), there are eight techniques of political behavior: 1) controlling information; 2) controlling lines of communication; 3) using outside experts; 4) controlling the agenda; 5) game playing; 6) image building; 7) building coalitions; and 8) controlling decision parameters. This research did not use the techniques of using outside experts, controlling the agenda, and controlling decision parameters because they are irrelevant to the scope of responsibilities. The operational officers under this entity would not have flexibility in the chain of command, as such—the reporting line and requested tasks are mostly driven by the management level.

The study of the correlation between political behavior and job satisfaction by Kulachai (2009) showed that perceptions of organizational politics have a positive influence on political behavior. The perceptions of organizational politics are able to reduce job satisfaction, organizational commitment, citizenship behavior, and task performance, and lead to increased psychological strain (Chang et al., 2009 as cited in Guclu, Mahmoud, Bryan, & Barry, 2010). Perceptions of self-promotion and ingratiating behavior are related negatively to job satisfaction, especially of supervisors, and are related positively to turnover intentions (Cook, Ferris, & Dulebohn, 1999).

Nowadays, in Thailand, government officers, state enterprise officers, and employees working in the private sector are as well-educated as their counterparts in developed countries in terms of administrative technology; however, it is irrefutable that Thai workers are still lacking in professionalism and work ethics (Pratchayapruet, 2008). Large or renowned organizations are constantly under public and media scrutiny and pressure. In order to protect their good reputation, maintain satisfactory performance quality, and preserve public confidence, they must regulate legal and ethical conduct (Tangkrajangjit, Pangniraran, & Sokaew, 2003). It is predicted that within 5 years, Thai exports will expand at about 7−8 per cent. Thailand’s export sector will play an essential part in propelling economic growth. Furthermore, urbanization and the formation of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) will increase tourist arrivals and e-commerce growth (Anonymous, 2014). As a result, the participants in this study were chosen from a large, privately owned, consumer wholesale products company providing services to a large portion of the Thai population. The findings from this research can be used to plan strategic guidance to enhance the ethical climate and ethical leaderships for commanders, to allay deviant political behaviors in private sector organizations, and to ultimately promote job satisfaction for personnel within organizations properly and harmoniously within the context and culture of Thai society.

Ethical leadership is often believed to be a dominant trait in three leadership theories consisting of transformational leadership, authentic leadership, and spiritual leadership (Brown & Trevino, 2006; Kalshoven, Den Hartog, & Hoogh, 2011). Several studies on leadership theories found that ethical leadership is not merely a trait in other theories of leadership, but rather it is another distinct theory of leadership itself (Brown & Trevino, 2006). Ethical leadership relates to a number of personal characteristics of chief operational officers including honesty, trustworthiness, and fairness. The ethical leaders are caring and principled. They also make ethics explicit by role modeling ethical behavior, communicating an ethics message, demonstrating appropriate decision making, setting moral standards, and by applying the reward and discipline system to hold followers accountable for ethical conduct, in order to benefit oneself, other people, and the broader society to the utmost. According to Kalshoven et al. (2011), there are seven forms of ethical leader behavior: 1) fairness; 2) power sharing; 3) role clarification; 4) people orientation; 5) integrity; 6) ethical guidance; and 7) concern for sustainability.

The leadership behavior of school administrators (both relationship-oriented and task-oriented) positively correlates to the high morality and job satisfaction of teachers.
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