Unethical Behaviors and their Management in Human Resource Management: A Content Analysis of a Company’s Personnel Regulation

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Abstract: The purpose of this study is to examine the approaches by human resource management units in utilizing personnel regulations on preventing unethical behaviors and encouraging ethical behavior. HRM includes effective management of individuals in order to realize organizational objectives. The human resources managers may encourage ethical behaviors within an organization by their increased participation in the ethical initiatives of the organization. Unethical behaviors, in addition to being associated with the personal characteristics of the individuals working in the organization, may as well arise from the organization itself. Unethical conduct includes behaviors that lead to damaging consequences for the others, through disregarding the laws, policies, regulations and organizational norms, which define the broad legal parameters for the sustenance of the society, and are considered as illegal or unethical by the society. To that end, the personnel regulation of a leading enterprise in Turkey has been analyzed through the contents analysis method. The analysis performed over defined codes (themes) demonstrates that enterprises may effectively benefit from personnel regulations in developing an ethical working environment. As a result of the study, it has been observed that there are many articles in the enterprise's personnel regulation aimed to prevent unethical behaviors. At the same time, it has been noticed that there is a separate section titled “principles of business ethics” aimed to direct and support ethical behaviors and that the articles in the other sections of the regulation are in support of these principles.

Key Words: Ethics, Business Ethics, Unethical Behavior, HR Department.

As the most significant part of ethical practices in business life is associated with the activities of the human resources (HR) department, the relationship between human resource management (HRM) and ethics plays a vital role in organizations (Greenwood, 2002; Weaver & Trevino,
Which behaviors of individuals in the business environment are wrong or right, ethical or unethical are defined within the scope of certain rules (Aydin, 2002; Bayrak, 2001; Schermerhorn, 1996). This is very important in the reliable operation of the working environment and the ability of the enterprise to establish trust-based relationships with its stakeholders (Certo, 1992, p. 86; Ferrel & Fraedrich, 1994; Shaw, 1991). The liability of the enterprise to its employees is a part of its social responsibility and the application of the HRM functions includes issues such as justice, equal opportunities, privacy and faith (McHugh, 1992; Vallance, 1995). Meanwhile, the employees have a liability towards the enterprise for acting in compliance with business ethics (Arslan, 2001), and accordance of their conducts with business ethics is monitored by the HR departments.

In our day, many large scale businesses have formal programs to manage ethical behaviors and compliance with the laws (Weaver & Trevino, 2001). However, ethical practices are usually considered to be a function of the top management in enterprises, and the significance of HR on this issue may be generally overlooked. The reason behind this may be that ethical programs are observed as practices that cover the organization in general, rather than a single and unique unit. As a matter of fact, the management of human resources within the organization will substantially contribute to the total integration of business ethics within the organization. And, this is only possible through the sensitivity and approach of the HR department to this issue.

HRM includes effective management of individuals in order to realize organizational objectives. The human resources managers may encourage ethical behaviors within an organization by their increased participation in the ethical initiatives of the organization. Therefore, it is necessary to establish awareness on justice and honesty within organizations (Greenwood, 2002; Weaver & Trevino, 2001; Winstanley et al., 1996).

In a part of the studies handling the reflection of business ethics on HRM, ethics-based activities required in HRM have been discussed with respect to moral dimensions (Barrett, 1999; Bevan, 2007; Greenwood, 2002; Shultz & Brender-Ilan, 2004; Weaver & Trevino, 2001). In addition to these studies evaluating the HRM functions with regard to their moral bases, there also are studies aimed for the individual relationships between HRM functions and ethics (Bevan; Dessler, 2006; Weaver & Trevino; Winstanley et al.,
1996; Wooten, 2001). Meanwhile, first the concept of unethical behaviors has been defined in this study, and then how and from which respects the relationships between the HR department and unethical behaviors could be handled has been discussed, finally the personnel regulation of an enterprise has been examined and it has been attempted to demonstrate the various aspects of the relationship between the HRM department and unethical behaviors.

The Concept of Unethical Behaviors

Unethical conduct, in general, includes behaviors that lead to damaging consequences for the others, through disregarding the laws, policies, regulations and organizational norms, which define the broad legal parameters for the sustenance of the society (Danley, Harrick, Schaefer, Strickland, & Sullivan, 1996), and are considered as illegal or unethical by the society (Brass, Butterfield, & Skaggs, 1998, p. 15; White, 1999, p. 110).

Unethical behaviors create an environment of conflict within the organization, impair the organization culture, and reduce the employee commitment, performance and motivation (Özdevecioğlu & Aksoy, 2005, p. 96). It is necessary to evaluate the concept of unethical behaviors within organizations in two dimensions. Unethical behaviors, in addition to being associated with the personal characteristics of the individuals working in the organization, may as well arise from the organization itself (Dessler, 1998, pp. 81-82; Hills & McShane, 2008, p. 90; Hitt, 1990, p. 136; Kahn, 1990; Key, 1999, p. 218; Oruç, 2004; Sims, 1991, p. 502; Velasques, 1982, p. 332).

Unethical Behaviors and the HR Department

The HRM experts also are regularly faced with ethical problems in daily life, as is the case for many people (Dessler, 2006; Mathis & Jackson, 2003; King & Wilcox, 2003). The HR department assumes a role in quite significant decisions such as employment, training, development, promotion, job definition, discipline, layoff and retirement. Enterprises need a dynamic process requiring the generation, improvement and evaluation of ethical behaviors in order to establish trust-based relations not only with their employees, but also with their other stakeholders (Bartol & Martin, 1994; Saylı & Kızıldağ, 2012; Trevino & Victor, 1992, p. 38). The HRM also has significant functions in issues such as occupational safety, mobbing and affirmative action that emerge to the forefront in our day. According to
the research by Weaver and Trevino (2001), the probability of the development of unethical behaviors and reports on such behaviors are reduced when there is faith within the organization on that the employees are treated fairly and are trusted in (Trevino & Nelson, 1999). The managers are required to take note of certain HRM functions in order to warrant the ethical behaviors of their employees and to ensure that these functions are effectively implemented (Anderson, 1988, p. 306; Brooks, 1993, pp. 19-22; Granville, 1999, pp. 315-327; Post, Lawrance, & Weber, 1999, p. 108; Paine, 1997, pp. 67-86; Post; Tierney, 1997, p. 90).

It might be told that the HR department may pursue many different paths to reduce unethical behaviors in the working environment and that this is required for all functions to be performed effectively (Dessler, 2006; Sinclair, 1993, p. 64). One of the most effective methods used in reducing unethical behaviors (Hearn, 1999) within the working environment emerges as human resources (personnel) regulations and these may offer significant contributions to enterprises in creating a reliable working environment (Dean, Brandes, & Dharwadkar, 1998, pp. 341-352).

**Method**

In this paper, a case study has been made in order to determine the personnel regulation approach used by HRM units in preventing unethical behaviors and encouraging ethical conduct; the personnel regulation of one of the leading businesses in Turkey has been investigated with the content analysis method, and themes (codes) and sub-themes (sub-codes) associated with the issue have been determined.

The research model used is a qualitative research method, which is document analysis based on a case study. In the study, the personnel regulation of a large scale industrial enterprise that has a factory in Eskişehir has been examined. The qualitative method has been deemed appropriate in this study as it is based on the responses to the questions of what, why, how, and tries to understand the relationships associated with the researched subject. The personnel discipline regulation has been analyzed according to the elements classified in “the categories in Company ethical codes” (Schwartz, 2001, p. 248), in the research by Robin, Giallourakis, David, and Moritz (1989). Behaviors that remain outside the definitions of these categories have been assumed as unethical behaviors and the main themes have been generated accordingly. Therefore, it might be told that these ethical code
definitions have assisted in determining the main themes of the research. For the validity and reliability of the research, the personnel regulation has been analyzed by two experts, working independently of each other, based on the study by Robin et al.

The formula used for the validity and reliability of the research is; reliability = consensus ÷ total consensus + dissensus (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 64). Following the analyses of the researchers, made independently of each other, the conclusions have been compared, and as a result of the issues defined as consensus and dissensus, high validity and reliability has been ensured, with 85% reliability.

**Findings and Discussion**

When the elements that are included in the ethical codes of businesses are examined, it may be observed that most of the enterprises build ethical codes based on the same foundations. Adhering with the ethical behaviors codes developed by the researchers, it has been attempted to determine how conducts that are non-compliant with the defined codes are handled or how these are approached. For this purpose, the personnel regulation of the above mentioned enterprise has been examined. In a sense, it might be told that the main theme of the research is defined as unethical behaviors. The main themes and sub-themes determined as a result of the research are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Main Themes</strong></th>
<th><strong>Sub-Themes</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Not being a reliable organization member</td>
<td>- <em>Failure to show</em> respect, courtesy and justice to consumers, suppliers, competitors and colleagues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- <em>Failure to comply with</em> protection, health and safety regulations</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Displaying bad attitudes or actions</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- <em>Failure to comply with the</em> system aimed for business attires</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- <em>Failure to comply with the</em> working hours</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Committing a disgraceful offense</td>
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| 2. Being involved in actions harming the organization | - Disclosing the company data and secrets  
- Being involved in activities decreasing personal performance or the performances of other colleagues  
- Giving or receiving bribes  
- Using or damaging company property and resources for personal purposes  
- *Failure to assume or perform* the obligations of the job  
- Working outside the enterprise  
- *Failure to comply with the* legal rules  
- Encouraging the employee to gather information from the outside  
- *Failure to inform the* employee on the working conditions |
|---|---|
| 3. Other | - *Failure to display* professional conduct  
- Being involved in racial, ethnic, religious or sexual harassment  
- *Failure to be involved in* environment friendly activities |

The enterprise’s personnel regulation has been handled in 9 sections. Within this regulation, the principle enterprise business ethics have been determined to direct ethical behaviors. Within the regulation, there are sections such as general provisions, employment process, duties and responsibilities of the employees, arrangement of working life, discipline rules, termination of employment contract, miscellaneous provisions, business ethics principles and arrangement aimed to protect the enterprise information (Carroll, 1991, pp. 39-48; Velasques, 1982, p. 332). From the regulation, it is understood that a staged discipline practice is applied in the organization (Gözler, 2012; Malkoç, 1989). The defined topics include arrangements with respect to what the enterprise expects from the employee, what the employee is required to comply with and what the consequences would be in case of noncompliance. However, it is difficult to determine how this text, adopted in writing, is being implemented within the business. Yet, it is possible to state that the themed issues have been handled within the sections of the personnel regulation.

As a result of the study, it is possible to note that the personnel regulation plays a significant role used in communicating unethical behaviors to the employees in businesses. It is necessary to state that unethical behaviors
emerging in enterprises include many different elements and a part of these have not been included in this paper. Emphasis on how personnel regulations, which constitute a general guidance for unethical behaviors, are implemented within the enterprise may provide guidance for future researches.

At the same time, it has been observed that the enterprise significantly emphasizes ethical behaviors. The business we have examined has made noteworthy references aimed for both social responsibilities and work ethics. It might be told that personnel regulations assume a significant role in developing conducts aimed for business ethics in Turkey (İş ve Sosyal Güvenlik, 2012). As a result of the study, it has been observed that there are many articles in the enterprise’s personnel regulation aimed to prevent unethical behaviors. At the same time, it has been noticed that there is a separate section titled “principles of business ethics” aimed to direct and support ethical behaviors and that the articles in the other sections of the regulation are in support of these principles. It is possible to state that the sub-themes underlying the main themes include many articles are provided in detail, in support of business ethics and steering individually to act ethically. In the enterprise, emphasizing business ethics from many different aspects, while there is a section for example on paying due respect, courtesy and justice to consumers, competitors and colleagues, it has been determined that the obligations aimed for the stakeholders have also been handled. This case study, made deliberating on the personnel regulation of only one enterprise, may be further questioned by new researches addressing other businesses in detail. At the same time, the examination of enterprises that have institutionalized business ethics and have developed an ethics code may provide a broader perspective, and may demonstrate the role of the HR department in the implementation of business ethics principles more effectively.

References/Kaynakça


