

# The Relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Ethical Decision Making: A Study on Human Resources Specialists\*

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## Abstract

Psychologists, philosophers and some other social scientists have studied on emotional intelligence for many years and they have made different descriptions while creating different models. Recent studies show that conscious business firms are now paying attention to emotional intelligence and try to measure it with various tests, role-playing methods, and promotions alongside education level and work experience. The level of emotional intelligence can be used as an element through which business firms can estimate people's ethical decision-making levels. This study aims to reveal the relationship among the sub-dimensions of emotional intelligence by tackling the relationship between people's emotional intelligence and their ethical decision-making through human resources specialists working in the telecommunications sector.

## Keywords

Emotional intelligence • Ethical decision making • Human resources • Ethics • Business ethics

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Emotional intelligence, as a term, owes its popularity in both the business world and education theories to Daniel Goleman's book, *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*, which was a bestseller in 1995 (Rietti, 2008, p. 631). Goleman defines emotional intelligence as the skill "to mobilize oneself, to go on despite misfortunes, to delay satisfaction through checking instincts, to administer one's state of mind, to bar troubles, stop thinking, and to put oneself in others' place," (Goleman, 2011, pp. 62–63) Despite the fact that no clear evidence exists on how much of the difference between individuals arises from emotional intelligence, studies have established that it has a very powerful effect and sometimes is more determining than IQ (Goleman, 2011, pp. 62–63).

Ethical decision-making is a process of making choices through which methods or results of a certain behavior or event are systematically taken into consideration or assessed according to ethical principles (Özdemir, 2009, p. 132).

Ethical decision-making requires behaving in accordance with certain ethical rules. Principles such as justice, rights, honesty, and fairness are among the most important principles of ethical decision-making (Kıranlı & İlğan, 2007, p. 150).

This study is a descriptive research that has been carried out in order to examine the relationship between the emotional intelligence levels and ethical decision-making skills of people working in human resources departments at telecommunication firms, as well as the relationships among the sub-dimensions of these variables. The research population consists of employees working in the human resources departments of general management in telecommunication firms in Istanbul. The research sample consists of 161 employees in human resources departments who have consented to take part in the research.

Survey forms have been conveyed to the human resources employees through a website called SurveyMonkey. The survey forms consist of three main parts. In the first part are five questions for specifying participants' demographic features. These features are gender, level of education, age range, terms of employment in the business, and position in the firm. The questions from the emotional intelligence scale in the second part of survey were developed by Hall (1999) and adapted to Turkish society by Ergin (2000) in order for use in the study "A Survey on the Relationship between Emotional Intelligence of University Students and 16PF Personality Traits." The scale, which consists of 30 questions in total, comprises the following five sub-dimensions: being aware of emotions, administering emotions, self-motivation, empathy, and social skills (Keskin, 2010, p. 23). The questions from the ethical decision-making scale in the third part of survey form were formed by Kaya (2015) in order for use in the research "Scale of Predisposition to Ethical Values: A Validity and Confidence Study;" it has 16 questions.

According to the results of survey we made, a meaningful relationship clearly exists between emotional intelligence and levels of ethical decision-making among employees in human resources departments. In this study, we have discussed emotional intelligence through five sub-levels: Being Aware of One's Emotions, Administering Emotions, Self-Motivation, Empathy, and Social Skills. Meanwhile, ethical decision-making has been studied in three-sub dimensions: Love, Fairness, and Cooperation.

In our study, the sub-dimensions of Administering Emotions and Self-Motivation, which are used in the literature, are not dissociated; as such, they show up together as sub-dimensions. According to the factor analysis results, those items which represent these two sub-dimensions in the emotional intelligence scale are gathered under the same factor structure in the participants' perceptions.

Each meaningful connection from the sub-dimensions of emotional intelligence and ethical decision-making has been established, and our hypothesis has been supported. The results are clearly seen to parallel similar surveys made in different geographical locations.

In future studies, the number of samples can be increased and intra sector comparisons can be made by involving different sectors in order to reflect work life better. These studies can also separately address the private and state sectors.

According to the surveys, businesses with human resources departments practice more relevant business ethics than businesses with no human resources departments (Gök, 2008, p. 570). Ethical behaviors can be encouraged by establishing reward-and-punishment systems in business firms with clearly defined borders that organize in-service training on ethics and create ethical codes (Saylı & Kızıldağ, 2007, p. 246).

As a result of the literature reviews, ethical decision-making is expected to increase in organizations that have people with higher levels of emotional intelligence.

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