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# The Influence of Personal and Organizational Factors on Ethical Decision-Making Intentions Among Managers in Oil and Gas Companies

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#### ABSTRACT

Ethics is attracting the attention of management in both the public and private sector organizations. This paper explores an empirical assessment of the influence of job satisfaction, organizational commitment, codes of ethics and rewards, which lead managers' behaviours to their intention in making decision ethically. This paper employed the correlation tests to investigate the impact of personal and organizational factors on ethical decision making intentions among managers and used the one-way ANOVA to determine the impact of the managers' demographic profiles towards the ethical decision making ability. The t-test analysis was used to investigate the influence of the independent sample i.e. gender towards the ethical decision making ability. The primary data were gathered between October and December 2005 by using a questionnaire, which was sent via electronic mail and post and also hand-delivered. This exploratory study found that job satisfaction, organizational commitment, codes of ethics and rewards significantly influenced ethical decision making of managers in oil and gas companies. Surprisingly, the academic qualification and salary levels were also found to significantly and highly influence the ethical decision-making ability among managers.

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### **Background of the Study**

In the era of global marketing, the more global the companies the higher the likelihood of ethical problems to occur. According to Singhapakdi and Karande (2001), the differences in the perceived importance of ethics and social responsibility among marketers from Australia, Malaysia, South Africa, and the United States of America exist because of differences in the country's culture, economic development, and legal or political environment; differences in organizational ethical climate; and differences in gender. While many studies have examined the relationship between personal and organizational factors with ethical decision-making intentions, Sims (1999) on the other hand indicates that overall the dilemmas do not simply measure demographic characteristics of the individual or organization, but instead measure actual differences in ethical decision-making.

One of the key requirements of excellence corporate performance in the new millennium somehow depends on business and personal ethics. This is true due to the positive correlation between business ethics and corporate performance (Sullivan, 1990). She adds that the 1990's avalanche of corporate collapse could be all attributed directly or indirectly to the decline in business ethics. Thus, companies' social performances have become a crucial factor as investors' interest towards a company's ethical behaviour and social contribution has significantly grown.

Previously, any of the foregoing models could and have used the basis for empirical studies to investigate ethical decision-making. It is suggested that more research should be conducted on ethical decision-making intentions and moral intensity after more recent reviews of the empirical literature regarding ethical decision-making are found. Therefore, an investigation is begun by accepting the definition of an ethical decision, that is, a decision that is both legally and morally acceptable to the larger community.

Business ethics is the application of general ethical ideas to business behaviour. The area of business ethics has received considerable attention from the corporate, academic and public sectors over the past decades. Besides, more and more businesses are now realizing that unethical behaviour is costly to the firms, their employees, their investors and the society. In light of these considerations, it is proposed to ascertain the influence of not only job satisfaction and organizational commitment on ethical decision making but also other relevant variables for the purpose of expanding the empirical database and increasing the understanding of ethical or unethical decisionmaking.

### Problem Statement

Ethics is a tool that should guide the judgment in particular and general circumstances, either implicitly or explicitly. It is contingent with the personal and organizational factors. In today's competitive business environment, some companies try to get by with unethical business practices in order to be sustainable. Unconsciously, unethical business practices pose a hidden cost of doing business. Let's say for example, a businessman who offers a bribe to obtain a license would ultimately pass this extra cost to the final consumers in the form of increased prices. With the increased reported cases of fraud, mismanagement, and corruption in the public and private sectors, it is realized that the unethical behaviour is costly not only to the consumers but also to the firms, employees, investors, and the whole society.

Ahmad Sarji (1995) emphasizes that corrupt business practice is a dangerous disease especially when those indulged in it receive accolades, status and recognition. He adds that an unethical businessman who is interested in pursuing short-term goals would have his deeds backfire on him later. Under the new management of Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, the Prime Minister of Malaysia, the National Integrity Plan (PIN) has been introduced. One of its agendums is to fight social diseases such as bribery and corruption in both the public and private sectors. He adds that "lack of professional management and business ethics" is one of the contributing factors to the Asian economic crisis. One article in Malaysian Business published on 16<sup>th</sup> January 1997 shares the same view. It is clearly stated that if bribery, corrupt practices, favouritism and any other unethical behaviours in business dealings become the norm rather than the exception in the society, then this will lead to a decline in the economy as well as in social values.

# **Objectives of the Study**

The main purpose of this study is to examine the influences of personal and organizational factors on ethical decision making. This study used a path analytic approach to examine the job satisfaction, organizational commitment, codes of ethics and rewards towards decision making of managers from private companies working in oil and gas industries in Terengganu. Ford and Richardson (1994) noted that they did not find any studies that investigated the relationship between job satisfaction and organizational commitment with ethical decision-making behaviour.

The secondary objective of this study is to investigate the relationship between ethical decision making intentions with selected demographic variables such as age, gender, years of working experience, academic qualification, salary and race. Previous empirical studies conducted by Ziegenfuss et al. (1994) that investigated the relationships of age, gender, nationality and religion with ethical decision making found these relationships to be non-significant or inconsistent.

### **Designing the Questionnaire**

The questionnaire was designed to measure the influences of job satisfaction, organizational commitment, codes of ethics and rewards on ethical decisionmaking. Section A of the questionnaire contained the respondent's sociodemographic characteristics; Section B measured the personal factors i.e. job satisfaction and organizational commitment; while Section C measured the organizational factors i.e. codes of ethics and rewards. The last section consisted of the business scenario approach, in which some researchers have argued that these responses were more valid than responses to simple questions (Fritzsche, 1995). The scales employed in the questionnaire measured from a range representing strongly agree (1) to strongly disagree (7). Thus (4) on the scale indicated indifference, (i.e. neither satisfied nor dissatisfied). The seven-point Likert scale's usefulness lies in its ability to capture and report psychographic data. According to the American Heritage Dictionary of English Language (1992), psychographics is the use of demography to study and measure attitudes, values, lifestyles and opinions. Hence, this was an appropriate tool for this study.

# Sampling Design

The sample group of this study consisted of managers from the oil and gas companies located in Terengganu. The data were collected between October and December 2005. The questionnaires were sent through an electronic mail, by post as well as hand-delivered to the respondents. The collection of data was based on non-probability sampling and it was gathered based on convenience basis. Out of 42 oil and gas companies in the Kerteh area with 279 managers, there were 210 respondents and they represented the sample of the study. The statistics of the selected respondents is depicted in Table 2.

#### Measurements

Two ethical decision making scenarios were utilized for measuring the ethical decision making intentions. Scenarios have been commonly used as part of data gathering instruments in numerous business ethic studies (i.e. Singhapakdi 1999; Singhapakdi, Vitell and Kraft, 1996). The utilization of scenarios "helps to

standardize the social stimulus across respondents and at the same time make the decision making situation more real". Scenario 1 employed in the present study has been utilized in previous data gathering studies (i.e. Singhapakdi et al., 1996). Scenario 2 was developed by Paolillo and Vitell (2002) and was pretested for face validity.

An ethical intention (the dependent variable) was measured by asking the respondents to indicate whether they would act in the same manner as the individual depicted in the scenario. Specifically, the statement used in this study was, "I would act in the same manner as did the individual in the above scenario". A seven-point strongly agree/disagree scale measured this ethical intention construct. Since the action depicted in Scenario I was ethically questionable, agreement with the action in the first scenario indicated less ethical decision making intentions than did the disagreement.

#### Data Analysis

The data collected were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 12. The coefficient of correlation, one-way ANOVA and the t-test were used to analyze the data. Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to determine the magnitude, direction and significant level of relationship for job satisfaction, organizational commitment, codes of ethics, rewards and ethical decision making intentions. One way analysis of variance (one way ANOVA) was used to examine the differences in the mean values of a dependent variable (ethical decision making – Scenario 1, Scenario 2 and combined scenarios) for each category of the single independent variables i.e. age, experience, qualification, salary and race. A T-test of independent samples for comparing the means was used to determine the differences in the mean values of 1, Scenario 2 and combined scenarios) and for each category of the independent variable i.e. gender.

# **Findings**

The first part of the analysis was related to the hypotheses in examining the impact of the personal and organizational factors on ethical behaviour. To test the hypotheses, the correlation analysis for the dependant variable (ethical decision making) with each of the independent variables i.e. job satisfaction, organizational commitment, codes of ethics and rewards was performed.

#### **Correlation Analysis (Scenario 1)**

Table 1 clearly illustrates that all variables were significantly related to the ethical/unethical decision making in Scenario 1. The correlation coefficient revealed in Table 1 indicates that the managers' perception on the ethical decision making was very much influenced by their perceptions on their job satisfaction level, organisational commitment, codes of ethics, and the rewards they received. These are shown by the significant values (2-tailed) of more than 0.05. However, the Pearson Correlation values of 0.274, 0.239, 0.363 and -0.174 indicated that the relationship between the managers' perceptions on the ethical decision making intentions were weak. Furthermore, only rewards had a negative relationship with the dependent variable. This means that the lower rewards received led to a higher intention in making ethical decision. On the other hand, a higher level of job satisfaction, organizational commitment and codes of ethics seemed to contribute to a higher intention in making excellent ethical decisions.

Table 1: Mean, Standard Deviations and Correlation Matrix for Scenario 1

Variables	Mean	Std. Dev.	EDMI	Avg. JS	Avg. OC	Avg. COE	Avg. RWD
EDM1	3.7476	1.81121	-		-	-	-
Avg. JS	2.7012	0.94859	.274(**)	-	-	-	-
Avg. OC	4.4619	1.50191	.239(**)	.476(**)	-	-	-
Avg. COE	3.2131	0.93931	.363(**)	.206(**)	.272(**)	-	-
Avg. RWD	3.2440	0.85890	174(*)	153(*)	149(*)	262(**)	-

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

#### **Correlation Analysis (Scenario 2)**

Table 2 clearly illustrates that all independent variables were significantly related to ethical/unethical decision making in Scenario 2. Table 2 indicates that the managers' perceptions on the ethical decision making were very much influenced by their perceptions on their job satisfaction level, organisational commitment, codes of ethics, and rewards they received. These are shown by the significant values (2-tailed) of more than 0.05. However, the Pearson Correlation values of -0.217, -0.171, -0.216 and 0.252 indicated that the relationship between the managers' perceptions on the ethical decision making intentions and their job satisfaction, organizational commitment and codes of ethics had a negative relationship with the manager's ethical decision making. This means that low level of job satisfaction, organizational commitment and codes of ethics lead to a higher intention in

Variables	Mean	Std. Dev.	EDM2	Avg. JS	Avg. OC	Avg. COE	Avg. RWD
EDM2	4.2143	1.87320	-	-	-	-	
Avg. JS	2.7012	0.94859	217(**)	-	-	-	-
Avg. OC	4.4619	1.50191	171(*)	.476(**)	-	-	-
Avg. COE	3.2131	0.93931	216(**)	.206(**)	.272(**)	-	-
Avg. RWD	3.2440	0.85890	.252(**)	153(*)	149(*)	262(**)	-

Table 2: Mean, Standard Deviations and Correlation Matrix for Scenario 2

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

making ethical decision. On the other hand, higher levels of rewards received seem to contribute to a higher intention in making ethical decision.

#### **Correlation Analysis (Combined Scenarios 1 and 2)**

Table 3 illustrates that none of the variables was significantly related to ethical/ unethical decision making in the combined scenarios. However, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, codes of ethics and rewards were found to be significantly related to ethical/unethical decision making in Scenario 1 (Table 1) and Scenario 2 (Table 2) at the 0.01 and 0.05 levels respectively. Therefore, hypotheses 1, 2, 3 and 4 are accepted and it is confidently believed that all the selected variables were associated with the ethical/unethical decision making intentions and moderately influenced ethical decision making intentions among managers working in the oil and gas based industries.

Variables	Mean	Std. Dev.	Avg. E	DMAvg. JS	Avg. OC	Avg. COE	Avg. RWD
Avg. EDM	3.9810	1.14900	-		-	-	-
Avg. JS	2.7012	0.94859	.039	-	-	-	-
Avg. OC	4.4619	1.50191	.048	.476(**)	-	-	-
Avg. COE	3.2131	0.93931	.110	.206(**)	.272(**)	-	-
Avg. RWD	3.2440	0.85890	.068	153(*)	149(*)	262(**)	-

Table 3: Mean, Standard Deviations and Correlation Matrix for the Combined Scenarios

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

#### The one-way ANOVA

The second part of the analysis was to examine the differences in the mean values of dependent variables (ethical decision making – Scenario 1, Scenario 2 and combined scenarios) for each category of the single independent variables

i.e. age, experience, qualification, salary and race. The analysis was done using the one-way analysis of variance (one way ANOVA).

### The One-way ANOVA (Scenario 1)

For Scenario 1, ethical decision making did not vary significantly with the different age groups and years of working experience. However, there was strong evidence that at the 0.01 significant level, ethical decision making varied significantly with the qualification (education) and salary levels; while with the race of the managers was significant at the 0.05 level.

#### The One-way ANOVA (Scenario 2)

For Scenario 2, at the 0.05 significant level, there was no evidence that ethical decision making varied significantly with the manager's academic qualification, salary level and race. However, there was enough evidence that at the 0.05 significant level, the manager's ethical decision making varied significantly with age groups and working experience.

#### The One-way ANOVA (Combined Scenarios 1 and 2)

For the combined Scenarios 1 and 2, at the 0.05 significant level, there was no evidence that ethical decision making varied significantly with the manager's age, years of working experience, academic qualification and salary except for race. This was inconsistent with the findings for Scenario 1 and Scenario 2, in which there was enough evidence to suggest that ethical decision making varied significantly with the manager's qualification and salary level at the 0.01 significant level, while age groups, working experience and race are varied at the 0.05 significant level. Therefore, hypotheses 6, 7, 8 and 9 are accepted and it is confidently believed that the manager's difference in age groups, working experience, academic qualification, salary and race.

#### The t-test Analysis

The third part of the analysis was based on the t-test of the independent samples to compare the means to determine the differences in the mean values of the dependent variable, ethical decision making (for Scenario 1, Scenario 2 and combined Scenarios 1 and 2) and the independent variable (gender).

#### The t-test Analysis

For Scenario 1 and the combined Scenario 1 and 2, there was no evidence that at the 0.05 significant level, ethical decision making varied significantly with gender groups, except in Scenario 2. Therefore, hypothesis 10 is accepted and it is believed that gender was associated with the dependent variable and substantially influenced ethical/unethical decision making intentions.

# **Discussion and Conclusions**

The primary focus of this exploratory study was to document the influence of job satisfaction, organizational commitment, codes of ethics and rewards on the ethical/unethical decision-making intentions of managers in organizations. Based on this study, job satisfaction and codes of ethics were found to significantly influence ethical/unethical decision making intentions at 99% confidence level for both scenarios (Scenarios 1 and 2) while organizational commitment and rewards were found to significantly influence ethical/unethical decision making intentions at the 0.01 level in only one of the scenarios. The findings support the previous study by Hunt et al., (1989) which reported that there was a positive link between ethical values and organizational commitment. However, the findings were in contrast to the study done by Paolillo and Vitell, (2002) in which it was discovered that none of the personal factors selected, job satisfaction or organizational commitment were found to influence ethical/unethical/unethical.

The secondary objective of this study was to document the influence of demographic profiles on ethical/unethical decision-making intentions of managers in the oil and gas companies. Therefore, the second part of this study was to investigate the relationships between ethical decision making with the different groups of independent variables: age, years of working experience, academic qualification, salary and race. The study found that ethical decision making varied significantly with the qualification and salary at 99% confidence level. The statistical evidence also suggested that ethical decision making only varied significantly between the managers' age groups, years of working experience and race at the 0.05 significant level. However, this evidence contrasted that of Mehta and Keng (1984) who found that higher income (salary) insignificantly led to unethical decision making. This finding was also in contrast with the previous empirical studies done by Ford and Richardson (1994) and Ferell et al. (1989) who investigated the relationships of age, gender, nationality and religion with ethical decision making and found that the relationships of those variables were non-significant or inconsistent.

The last focus of this exploratory study was to document the influence of gender on ethical/unethical decision-making intentions of managers in the

organizations. Based on this study, gender was found to significantly influence ethical/unethical decision making intentions at the 95% confidence level for Scenario 2 solely. On the other hand, for Scenario 1 and the combined scenarios, there was no evidence at the 0.05 significant level to indicate that ethical decision making varies significantly with the gender of managers. Therefore, it can be concluded that gender was mildly associated with the dependent variable and substantially influenced ethical/unethical decision making intentions.

# **Recommendations for Further Research**

For further research, it is recommended that other researchers focus on other factors such as opportunity for advancement, leadership style and personal attributes that could be some of the variables that contribute to unethical/ ethical decision making intentions among employees.

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