THE EFFECT OF SPIRITUALITY ON WORKPLACE ETHICS

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ABSTRACT

The issue of ethics in the Management Science field has been recognized for a number of years, and researchers have focused on ethics in organizations, including the investigation of ethical culture, the incorporation of ethical codes, and the development of ethical climates. But, it is the individual employee's personal ethical framework that influences individual ethical behavior, so a more proper unit of analysis when investigating ethics might be the individual. One of the factors that has been hypothesized to impact ethics in the workplace is spirituality, but relatively little empirical research has assessed this proposed relationship. Based on a sample of 261 employees, spirituality was found to be a statistically significant predictor of ethics in the workplace. Additionally, age of the employee, having an employer code of ethics, and having had ethics training were also found to be significant predictors of workplace ethics. Implications are discussed in this paper.

INTRODUCTION

The issue of ethics in the Management Science field has been recognized for a number of years. Singer and Singer noted in 1997 the developments that had occurred in the field in the previous 15 years or so that were directly related to business ethics, but also noted the lack of attention these developments had received in the mainstream business ethics literature. Ten years later, Brans and Gallo (2007) noted the growing interest and awareness of the relevance of ethics in Management Science and provided a historical account of the evolution of concern about ethics in the field, noting the discussion of ethics among MS researchers in the 1950s as well as the beginning of the development of ethical codes and guidelines for the field in the 1970s and 1980s.

Ethics researchers have focused much attention on ethics in organizations, including the investigation of ethical culture, the incorporation of ethical codes, and the development of ethical climates. But, it is the individual employee's personal ethical framework that influences individual ethical behavior, so a more proper unit of analysis when investigating ethics might be the individual (Al-Khatib *et al*., 2004). Researchers have been interested in the effects of situational or contextual variables on ethical behavior (e.g., Ford and Richardson, 1994; Jones and Kavanagh, 1996; Mesmer-Magnus and Viswesvaran, 2005; Robertson and Ross, 1995; Trevino, 1986), but have also developed theoretical models that attempt to explain the behavior of individuals when faced with ethical choices, including those faced by businesspeople (Jones, 1991; Trevino, 1986).

The determination of the factors that influence individual ethics in the workplace is of primary concern to the study of ethics in the workplace, but relatively little attention has been paid to this question (Giacalone and Jurkiewicz, 2003). One of the factors that has been hypothesized to influence individual ethics is spirituality. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the influence of spirituality on individual ethics in the workplace.

Spirituality

 Spirituality is one of the factors that has been hypothesized to impact ethics in the workplace, but some

of the research on ethics has treated and spirituality as interchangeable with religiosity. Vitell and Paolillo (2003) use the terms "religiosity/spirituality" and "religious/spiritual" when developing their hypothesis concerning religiosity and ethical beliefs, and Vitell, et al. (2005) suggest that the reason that extrinsic religiousness has no impact on ethical beliefs is that extrinsic religiousness does not involve spirituality, which implies that intrinsic religiousness does involve spirituality. While some authors assume that religiousness and spirituality are indistinguishable, others argue that they are different and unique. King and Crowther noted in 2004 that the field has moved towards considering them as separate constructs, and this trend has apparently continued as evidenced by the large amount of research assessing spirituality as a construct independent from religiousness. The current research treats spirituality as an independent construct in order to assess its effects on workplace ethics.

An ever-growing body of literature on spirituality has been developing in recent years. Much attention has been devoted to developing models and theories of spirituality in the workplace (e.g., Ashmos and Duchon, 2000; Mohamed, Wisnieski, Askar, and Syed, 2004; Pawar, 2009a) and identifying various approaches and conceptualizations of workplace spirituality (e.g., Gotsis and Kortzei, 2007; Pawar, 2008a, 2008b; Karakas, 2010). However, relatively little empirical research has been conducted to assess the impact of spirituality in the workplace. Studies have investigated the effects of spirituality on outcome variables such as job satisfaction, job involvement, organizational commitment, organizational identification, organizational frustration, work rewards satisfaction, and perceptions of unethical business activities (Giacalone and Jurkiewicz, 2003; Kolodinsky, Giacalone, and Jurkiewicz, 2007; Rego and Cunha, 2008; Pawar, 2009b), but these efforts have been relatively few.

Thus, the current paper makes contributions in two ways: the primary contribution is to add to the body of knowledge regarding the determinants of ethics in the workplace, and, secondarily, we extend the empirical research on the effects of workplace spirituality.

H1: Spirituality will be positively associated with workplace ethics.

METHOD

Sample

The sample consisted of 261 people working in organizations located in the southeastern United States. Females comprised 52% of the sample; 63% of the respondents were Caucasian, and 27% were African-American; 59% were between 20 and 39 years of age, with another 36% between the ages of 40 and 59; and 71% had at least a college degree.

Measures

The dependent variable in the analysis was workplace ethics, which was measured with the Ethics Sensitivity Scale developed by Newstrom and Ruch (1975) and used by Al-Khatib, et al., (2004) and others, consisting of 14 items (e.g., "concealing one's errors at work" and "taking longer than necessary to do a job") on a 5-point Likert-type scale anchored by "strongly believe it is wrong" and "strongly believe it is not wrong," with higher values indicating stronger belief that the behavior is wrong.

Spirituality was measured with the Human Spirituality Scale (Wheat, 1991), a 20 item, 5-point, Likert-type instrument, where higher values on the response scale indicate a higher degree of spirituality. This instrument is a measure of global spirituality and has been validated and used in prior research (Wheat, 1991; Belaire and Young, 2000; Young, et al., 2000; Giacalone and Jurkiewicz, 2003). Items were reverse scored in the scales wherever necessary; the Cronbach's alpha reliability estimates of the scales used in study ranged were .822 and .942 for the workplace ethics scale and the Human Spirituality Scale,

respectively.

We also included demographic variables in our analysis: age (using the midpoint of the category of each respondent), gender, race (coded as Caucasian or other), education (coded as high school degree or less, or some college or higher), and sector of employment (public or private). We also asked whether respondents had ever received ethics training from their employer or professional association, if their employer had a formal code of ethics, and if there was a code of ethics for their occupation or profession.

RESULTS

Multiple regression analysis was used to test the hypothesis, which predicted a positive association between spirituality and workplace ethics. The results are provided in Table 1. The first model included only the demographic variables. As can be seen, the partial slopes for age ($p<.01$) and for the presence of an employer code of ethics ($p<.05$) were statistically significantly different from zero. The slope for ethics training was marginally significant. Spirituality was added as a predictor in the second model; as can be seen in table 1, the slope for spirituality was significantly different from zero ($p<.001$), and there was a significantly higher R^2 ($p<.001$) for the second model. Thus, strong support was provided for Hypothesis 1. Additionally, both age ($p<.05$) and an employer code of ethics ($p<.05$) remained significant predictors of workplace ethics in the second model, as was ethics training ($p<.05$).

TABLE 1

REGRESSION RESULTS

	Model 1		Model 2			
Predictor	β	T	β	T	ΔR^2	F
Sector	-0.0831	-0.72	-0.0729	-0.69		
Race	-0.0498	-0.50	-0.1205	-1.31		
Rducation	0.0551	0.27	0.0498	0.26		
Age	0.0117	2.71**	0.0078	1.95*		
Ethics Training	0.1699	1.48[a]	0.1922	1.82*		
Occupational Code of Ethics	-0.0756	-0.47	-0.1649	-1.12		
Employer Code of Ethics	0.3176	2.28*	0.2297	1.78*		
Gender	0.0878	0.90	-0.0528	-0.57		
Spirituality			0.7167	6.71***		
R^2	8.5%		22.8		.143	46.5***

***$p<.001$, **$p<.01$, *$p<.05$, [a]$p<.10$

Another question that arose concerns whether public sector workers might differ in their perceptions of ethics from other types of workers and if the relationship between spirituality and workplace ethics might be different for public sector workers versus private sector, so we performed checks for the moderating as well as the main effects for sector of employment. The results were non-significant for the main effect of sector of employment in all of the models and also for the moderating effect, when tested.

CONCLUSION

The results indicate that spirituality is a significant predictor of workplace ethics. The slope for spirituality was statistically significant and was positive, providing evidence of a positive relationship between spirituality and workplace ethics. Additionally, the amount of explained variation was significantly higher in the second model, when spirituality was added as a predictor, indicating that spirituality has substantial explanatory power in predicting the ethics of individual employees' in the workplace. Spirituality apparently has an important role to play in the determination of ethical beliefs concerning behaviors at work. People who exhibit a higher degree of spirituality have more of a tendency to view ethically questionable behaviors as wrong compared to those who exhibit a relatively less spiritual nature. People who are more spiritual, then, may be less likely to engage in manipulative behavior at work, to conceal errors at work, to falsify reports, and to engage in other such unethical behaviors.

Additional interesting results involved the other variables. We found a positive relationship between age and workplace ethics. Our data indicate that as employees grow older, they become more ethical in their view of questionable workplace behaviors. We also found that training in ethics, provided either by the employer or a professional association, and the existence of an employer code of ethics was positively related to workplace ethics; apparently, employers might be able to take proactive steps to influence their employees' views towards acceptable behavior in the workplace.

Our research has important implications for practicing managers. It might be beneficial to establish and promote a code of ethics for the organization, and to either provide training in ethics for employees or provide encouragement and support for employees to receive training through their professional association. Also, the results indicate that people who are more spiritual may also be relatively less likely to engage in unethical activities. Thus, organizations might be able to find an advantage in encouraging and/or developing spirituality among employees and incorporating spirituality in the selection process. However, managers must take into account anti-discrimination laws, particularly the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and ensure that both current and prospective employees are not subjected to unequal treatment. Managers should strive to create a workplace where tolerance is promoted.

Of late, there has been increasing interest in helping organizations integrate spiritual values into the workplace. Authors are suggesting that organizations should find ways to enhance spirituality in the workplace (e.g., Garcia-Zamor, 2003; McLaughlin, 2005; Pawar, 2009a; Karakas, 2010). Indeed, the *Journal of Organization Change Management* dedicated two issues to this topic (Neal and Biberman, 2003, 2004). Emphasizing and modeling spiritual integrity in the workplace can enhance the personal integrity and well-being of the individuals who are employed there, so that both employees and employers might benefit.

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