Ethical Challenges in Human Resource Management and Performance in Private Organizations

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Abstract

This paper explores the relationship between workplace ethics and employee performance, motivation, and satisfaction, with a specific focus on the challenges of nepotism and privacy violations in the Albanian context. It identifies the ethical implications of leveraging personal connections for employment and promotion which lead to diminished employee morale and organizational performance. The discussion extends to the ethical considerations surrounding employee monitoring, emphasizing the balance between performance assessment and respect for privacy.

The methodology in this article uses secondary sources and primary data extracted from a survey. By analyzing employee treatment, the paper advocates for a robust ethical framework within organizations that promotes transparency, fairness, and respect nurturing employee loyalty which leads to organizational success. Ultimately, the findings stress that ethical conduct in the workplace is not a moral obligation

but a strategic imperative that influences employee engagement and organizational performance.

The study acknowledges limitations related to the time frame of data collection, challenges in reaching a representative sample and a potential bias in responses especially when the respondents know they are being studied affecting the validity of the findings. Another limitation is that ethical standards in HRM change over time and therefore the study might become outdated if it doesn't account for societal expectations.

Finally, the study has an original value since it delineates the concept of employee performance as pivotal for organizational success within the context of the Albanian organizations. It underscores the significance of a fair and ethical workplace environment in fostering employee motivation and satisfaction.

Keywords: *Ethics, Human Resource Management (HRM), employee, organizational success, privacy, performance*

Introduction

Private organizations play a crucial role in economic development and improve the quality of life by empowering individuals financially. As these organizations evolve in response to market changes, so do the expectations regarding employee performance. According to Stannack (1996), performance is often measured in terms of efficiency and effectiveness in achieving organizational goals, with definitions varying among researchers. Research indicates that joining strategic groups and collective behaviors are key resources for effective employee performance (Caves & Porter, 1977). Porter (2014), further develops this idea by stating that an ethical organizational climate significantly enhances employee morale and engagement. On the other hand, Mary Connaughton (2016) shifts the focus on the importance of investing in people, as they are vital for organizational success and possess fundamental rights and needs. Consequently, the human resources since they are pivotal for an organization are protected by law. Hence, unethical management practices, such as poor organization of work and biased recruitment, can have long-term negative consequences. This study will address various ethical issues linked to these practices, such as discrimination, nepotism and invasion of privacy.

The primary goal of this study is to evaluate the impact of unethical human resource management practices on employee performance. The study aims to create a conceptual framework based on existing literature and explore the reasons behind unethical decision-making by Human Resources (HR) professionals no matter if the reasons are internal or external ones, delve into phenomena such as

discrimination, securing advantages through networks of acquaintances, violation of privacy, as well as the effects of such practices on individual and organizational performance. This research is conducted on ethics in HRM for its perception, importance and impact on employees in private Albanian organizations.

Literature Review

Ethics in the Context of Human Resource Management (HRM)

This section emphasizes the critical role of ethics in Human Resource Management (HRM), highlighting that HR professionals are at the forefront of addressing ethical issues between employees and employers. HRM involves various functions such as recruitment, selection, employee treatment, performance evaluation, and conflict management, all requiring an ethical approach to foster a fair workplace. Organizations often entrust HR professionals with the responsibility of creating and maintaining ethical programs, including codes of ethics and training (Wiley, 2000). The responsibility of HR departments extends to safeguarding employee rights, promoting a culture of responsibility and integrity, and ensuring that organizational actions align with the interests of all stakeholders, as posited by R. Edward Freeman's stakeholder theory. This theory asserts that organizational success depends on fulfilling the needs of all stakeholders, including employees, customers, suppliers, shareholders, and the broader community (Cit. Greenwood, M. & De Cheri, H., 2007).

Concept of Ethics and Business Ethics

The field of business ethics gained traction in the 1960s and 1970s, initially rooted in Catholic thought. Business ethics can be broadly defined as the study of situations, activities, and decisions in business concerning right and wrong (Crane & Matten, 2010). Two key concepts connected to business ethics are morality and law. Morality involves norms, values, and beliefs that define right and wrong for individuals or communities, while law represents the minimum acceptable standards of behavior. Business ethics examines situations, activities, and decisions in business regarding right and wrong, emphasizing that ethics transcends legal frameworks, demanding a higher standard of integrity and responsibility (Ferrell, O.C., & Fraedrich, J. 2015). Ethical business practices contribute to building trust and reputation, affecting relationships with stakeholders and the organization's long-term performance. Ethical behavior encourages individuals and organizations to make decisions that not only meet legal requirements but also promote fairness, transparency, and honesty (Trevino, L.K., & Nelson, K.A. 2016). Issues addressed by business ethics include fair treatment of employees, corporate social responsibility, and sustainable environmental practices.

Ethical Judgment and Decision-Making

When individuals recognize an ethical dimension in situations, they engage in ethical judgment, leading to either ethical or unethical behavior. Ethical judgment involves a decision-making process that identifies problems, establishes criteria, weighs those criteria, generates alternatives, evaluates each alternative, and selects the most optimal one (Rest, J. R. 1986). However, decision-making may not always follow this model optimally, as unconscious psychological processes can lead individuals to make decisions that conflict with their moral standards. Organizational context significantly influences ethical behavior, with empirical studies showing discrepancies between ethical codes and actual practices. There are several factors, both internal and external, that impact ethical decision-making within HRM which involve Organizational Culture, Ethical Climate and Leadership, Responsibility and Accountability, Reward Systems, Bureaucracies, and the National Context (Brown, M. E., Treviño, L. K., & Harrison, D. A. 2005).

Research shows that decisions in ethically ambiguous situations are frequently made unconsciously, potentially conflicting with personal moral standards. The concept of "ethical fading" suggests that subconscious processes can influence ethical decision-making, causing individuals to act against their declared values (Gino, F., & Pierce, L. 2009). Furthermore, individual, contextual, and social factors all significantly impact managerial decisions, indicating a gap between what organizations write in their ethical codes and actual practices. A study by CIPD highlights that while many HR professionals believe employees should influence workplace decisions, few implement this principle. Ethical considerations are vital in recruitment and selection processes, as they shape how organizations treat applicants and select employees. Clear communication and high ethical standards are essential for a fair recruitment process. Additionally, promoting diversity and inclusion is crucial for fostering an equitable workplace culture (Shen, J., Chanda, A., D'Netto, B., & Brown, K. 2009). Ultimately, embedding ethical values in recruitment and selection not only enhances organizational performance but also cultivates a positive and trustworthy image in the broader community. Overall, the integration of ethical principles into HRM practices not only enhances organizational performance but also fosters a positive image within the community and builds trust among employees and clients.

Ethical Challenges in Human Resource Management (HRM)

Wooten (2001) defines ethical challenges in HRM as complex dilemmas where personal, professional, and organizational beliefs, expectations, and values conflict due to environmental influences. Key issues include discrimination and equality during recruitment processes. Discrimination involves treating

individuals differently based on personal characteristics (e.g., race, gender, age), while equality emphasizes fair treatment for all applicants. Organizations must commit to avoiding discrimination at all recruitment stages, ensuring job descriptions and selection criteria are clear and unbiased (Kossoudji, S. A., & Kahn, J. 1993). Interview questions and assessment tests should be objective, focusing on necessary skills and experiences. Compliance with laws and ethical standards is crucial to ensure all applicants are treated with respect and have equal opportunities.

Discrimination can be manifested in various ways. One significant form is in recruitment practices; relying solely on referrals can lead to hiring individuals from specific groups, excluding others. According to Bourne, M., & Neely, A. (2003) transparency is crucial, as clear communication about job positions and evaluation criteria is essential for fairness. Fair evaluation requires that all applicants be assessed based on objective criteria without favoritism. Additionally, structured interviews should respect all candidates, allowing equal opportunities to demonstrate their abilities. Organizations must also transparently communicate hiring decisions and provide feedback to candidates. Discriminatory qualifications can occur when job requirements do not relate to the position, unfairly disadvantaged by certain groups (Baron, J.N., & Newman, A.E. 1990). Promotional discrimination may arise when promotions are based on seniority or subjective recommendations, perpetuating inequality. Moreover, pay disparities reflect a clear form of discrimination, especially when there is unequal pay for similar roles. Lastly, unfair dismissals, such as terminating employees for non-performance-related reasons, are also discriminatory practices that undermine fairness in the workplace (Baker, K. 2008).

According to Buchanan, D. A., & Boddy, D. (1992) another challenges that HRM faces are the issue of nepotism and favoritism poses significant ethical challenges, particularly in the Albanian context. Nepotism refers to unfair employment practices where family members or friends of those in power are hired not based on merit but on personal connections. This is often more prevalent in the private sector, especially in family-run businesses. Pfeffer, J. (1992) states that nepotism can lead to several negative outcomes, including deterioration of organizational performance reduced morale and motivation, and failure to manage talent. When employees perceive that promotions and benefits are distributed based on personal relationships rather than merit, it can demoralize them, adversely affecting productivity. Hiring unqualified individuals due to personal connections can result in poor decision-making, harming overall organizational performance. Nepotism obstructs the identification and development of talent, potentially leading skilled employees to leave for better opportunities where merit is recognized (Kacmar, K. M., & Ferris, G. R. 1991).

Ethically, nepotism compromises integrity and fairness within organizations. It undermines transparency and trust, violates principles of equality and justice, and can damage an organization's reputation. Favouritism, which involves unfair preferential treatment of individuals or groups over others, can manifest in various ways, including discrimination in selection, promotion, and training practices. It may also lead to illegal behaviours, such as quid pro quo situations or retaliation against employees who voice concerns (Robinson, S. P., & Judge, T. A. 2019).

Lastly, privacy violation in the workplace (Bennett, C. J. 2006) is another challenge that is generally faced in different workplaces in Albania. The issue of employees' privacy violations during performance monitoring is important in human resource management, especially with the advancement of technology that facilitates electronic monitoring. This process involves collecting, storing, analysing, and reporting information about employees' activities. Monitoring methods include computer monitoring which is the use of software to check the accuracy and speed of typing, also providing feedback on completed work; video monitoring to observe employees' behaviour; monitoring by other employees, call recording which includes destination, number, frequency, and duration, and the email monitoring of the employees (Stanton, J. M. 2000). Although these methods can provide objective assessments and immediate feedback for employees, they also collect confidential information and exert continuous pressure, which can negatively affect employees' mental health and psychology.

The Concept of Performance and Its Connection to Ethics

Employee performance is crucial for organizational success. Chegini (2010) asserts that when employees meet expected standards, organizational performance improves. Armstrong (2006) defines performance as an employee's ability to effectively and efficiently fulfill assigned duties, emphasizing that it also reflects the willingness and motivation to support organizational values. The individual performance of employees relates closely to organizational commitment, defined by Meyer & Allen (1991) as the psychological state that characterizes the relationship between the employee and the organization, influencing the decision to stay or leave. Leal, Rego, & Coelho (2012) found an empirical link between organizational commitment and ethical behavior within organizations. Employees develop greater psychological capital and affective commitment when they perceive ethical conduct from their organization, leading to "Organizational Citizenship Behavior" (OCB). Engaged employees are seen as more committed, loyal, and less likely to voluntarily leave the organization. When organizational and individual goals align, employee engagement levels rise promoting adaptive behaviors.

Ethics and Its Impact on Employee Motivation and Satisfaction

Workplace ethics significantly influence employee motivation and satisfaction (Valentine, S., & Fleischman, G. 2008). Organizations that uphold high ethical standards foster a positive and supportive work environment, enhancing employee motivation and well-being. Ethical practices create a fair and sustainable workplace, guided by norms and values that ensure actions and decisions align with moral and professional standards (Kaptein, M. 2011). When employees perceive fairness and integrity within their organization, they tend to be more committed and motivated to achieve their goals. Schein, E. H. (2010) is of the idea that an ethical work environment is essential for ensuring that individual behavior and organizational decisions are just and transparent. Such environments promote respect and trust, making employees feel valued and supported.

Strong workplace ethics also encourage collaboration and trust among colleagues and managers. When individuals know they can rely on one another to act fairly, communication improves, and teamwork becomes more effective (Dirks, K. T., & Ferrin, D. L. 2002). This trust and collaboration enhance overall team and organizational performance. In ethical environments, employees are less likely to engage in negative behaviors, such as work sabotage or misconduct. A culture of ethics helps prevent conflicts and promotes a positive, cooperative atmosphere, contributing to a more sustainable and productive workplace (Brown, M. E., & Treviño, L. K. 2006).

When treated with fairness and integrity, employees are more likely to be committed and loyal to their organization. This strong sense of commitment and loyalty helps reduce employee turnover and maintain a stable, dedicated workforce, which is crucial for the long-term success of the organization. Fombrun, C. J., & Shanley, M. (1990) emphasize that an organization adhering to high ethical standards benefits from a positive reputation both internally and externally This reputation attracts new talent and retains existing clients and partners, positioning the organization favorably in the market. According to Eccles, R. G., Ioannou, I., and Serafeim, G. (2014) a strong ethical reputation is an asset that contributes to long-term success.

Ethics in the workplace also promotes employees' professional development by creating an environment where they can grow and thrive. When employees feel supported in their professional growth and have fair opportunities for advancement, they are more motivated to learn and improve their skills. Ethical decision-making reduces conflicts and disagreements in the workplace. When employees believe that policies and procedures are fair and equitable, they are less likely to feel unjustly treated and more willing to cooperate and resolve disputes constructively. De Dreu, C. K. W., & Van Vianne, A. E. M. (2001) in their article

states that effective conflict management is essential for maintaining a healthy and productive work environment.

Methodology

The methodology used is based on secondary source research and primary research and data. The study begins with a theoretical framework based on a review of various literatures, exploring key concepts from different authors and their interconnections. The **secondary research** involved a literature review to explore the concepts addressed in the study, including ethics in human resource management, ethical decision-making, and challenges in HR practices. The second part focused on employee performance within organizations, emphasizing its significance for organizational success and its link to ethical behavior through organizational commitment.

To achieve its objectives, as primary research means was used a survey. This quantitative approach is aimed at gathering data on employees' perceptions of unethical practices by managers and their impact on performance. The survey, comprising three sections, aimed to assess employees' perceptions of their managers' ethics and the workplace environment. The first section collected general demographic data without requiring personal identifiers. The second section explored the subordinate-superior relationship and its perceived impact on employees. The third section examined experiences of discrimination, nepotism, favoritism, and privacy breaches at work.

The survey targeted individuals residing in Albania who are employed in companies operating in the country, including both full-time and part-time employees. Questions were designed to be straightforward, ensuring reliability and accuracy, and were based on internationally approved standards for easy comparison with other studies. Participants were informed about the study's purpose and assured of their anonymity. The survey was distributed online via Google Forms and analyzed using SPSS software. The quantitative method allows for statistical analysis of findings, presented through graphs and tables, complemented by qualitative interpretations.

Analysis and Findings

This part of the article includes the analysis of data collected from a survey with 76 participants, 64 out of which were females and 12 males. The survey was conducted with the purpose of assessing workplace relationships, perceptions of management, and ethical behaviors. The data was processed using SPSS and is presented in graphical and tabular forms.

TABLE 1: General Data Results

Education Level	Results	Age Group	Results	Years of Experience in the organization	Results
High School	8%	18-24 years	72.40%	Recently Hired- up to 12 months	63%
Bachelor's Degree (only)	48%	25-34 years	10.50%	1-3 years	14%
Master's Degree	44%	35-44 years	11.80%	More than 3 years	24%

According to the data in Table 1 the vast majority of the participants have a degree in Higher Education, amounting to 92 % holding bachelor's degree and 44% of them holding a master's degree. The remaining 8% have a high school degree. The second element in the table is related to the age groups of the respondents. Most of them belong to the 18-24 years group with respectively 72.4%, 10.5 % to the 25-34 years age group and the remaining 11.8% to the category of 35-44 years old. The respondents reflect a youthful workforce. The third element analyzed in Table1 is the experience of work in the organization. More than half of the respondents exactly 63 % have a working period of less than a year in the organization, but a significant portion has work experience in the organization.

The second group of graphs deals with the idea of how management is perceived.

TABLE 2: Perceptions of Management

Relationship with Manager
    Satisfied: 61.8%
    Somewhat Satisfied: 31.6%

Impact of Managerial Behavior   43.6% of employees report a decline in motivation in the case of unethical behaviors

The data in Table 2 show that 61.8 % of the participants think that having satisfactory relationships with the managers indicates a high level of approval. Furthermore, 43.6% of the participants share the opinion that there is a strong link between ethical behavior of managers and employee motivation.

TABLE 3: Organizational Climate

Organizational Climate - Are unethical behaviors are acceptable to ensure benefits?		
14.5% - of respondents as view this acceptable	19.7% - of respondents view this as partially acceptable	65.8% of respondents view this as unacceptable

Table 3 contains data related to the climate that exists within the organizations. The main question related to this was whether unethical behaviors are acceptable to ensure benefits at the workplace. The majority, namely 65.8% of the participants in the study viewed the unethical behavior   as unacceptable, 19.7% considered

them as partially acceptable while the remaining 14.5% were in favor of this idea. This result indicates that a significant portion of employees are sensitive to an unethical atmosphere.

TABLE 4 a: Issues of Discrimination

Discrimination?		
34.7% - discriminated groups do not have a fair treatment	18.3 % - there is discrimination based on gender	21% - the discriminated work in lower positions

TABLE 4 b: Issues of Nepotism

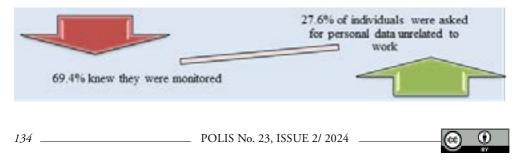| Nepotism?		
53.9 % - have made use of acquaintances and CV to get hired. 14.5 % - were hired through acquaintances	52.6 % admit existance of the nepotism	53.9% think that favorization is present

Tables 4a/4b are related to the issues of discrimination and nepotism within the workplace. According to the data shown in table 4a 34.7% think that there are discriminated groups in their workplace and above all these groups do not receive a fair treatment; 18.3% of the respondents are of the idea that men and women are not given the same respect and treatment which shows gender discrimination within their organization. Finally, 21% of the participants think that the discriminated groups or individuals work in inferior positions.

Table 4b displays the results related to the issue of nepotism in the workplace. What is interesting in the above table is the answer to the question of how the respondents were hired in the organization they were working. 14.5 % of them admitted that they employed through acquaintances, 53.9% of the participants said that they were hired making use of the CV and acquaintances. 52.6% say that the phenomenon of nepotism is present in their workplace. To the question whether the phenomenon of favoring based on these acquaintances was present in their workplace 53.9 % of the respondents admitted it. The results of the above tables highlight significant challenges regarding equity and justice in the workplace.

The last issue tackled in the study was whether there was a violation in privacy in the workplace.

TABLE 5 : Violation of Privacy

27.6% of individuals were asked for personal data unrelated to work

69.4% knew they were monitored

The results in Table 5 show that 27.6% of individuals reported that they were asked for personal data unrelated to work, and 69.4% of the respondents knew they were constantly monitored in the workplace.

The reliability of the statistical analysis in this study was tested with ***Cronbach's Alpha***. According to the data the coefficient of the reliability is Cronbach's Alpha = 0.936, indicating a high level of consistency in the data. There are significant relationships between the length of employment and the justification for unethical actions, suggesting that employees with longer tenures tend to justify unethical behaviors. While according to ***ANOVA*** the results indicate that unethical practices affect employee engagement and organizational performance, with p = 0.001, which is below the acceptable alpha level of 0.05.

Finally, it can be stressed that the research has highlighted important aspects of employee-manager relationships, as well as the impact of the organizational climate on ethical behaviors and employee performance. The results suggest a need for improvements in management and the promotion of an ethical culture within the organization

Discussion

This chapter discusses the findings derived from statistical analysis and their connection to a critical review of the literature. According to the results, there is a positive relationship between ethics and employee engagement. Specifically, based on the results, we understand that employees tend to become demotivated when faced with favoritism or nepotism confirmed by the existence of an empirical link between organizational commitment and ethics, indicating that employees develop affective commitment when they perceive that the organization engages in ethical behavior. Ethical leadership is an important factor influencing the ethical behavior of employees and human resource managers. The study also identifies the importance of an ethical climate and leadership as "guides" for ethical actions and decisions.

Conclusions

In this article various literature sources were exploited to define the concepts of ethics in general terms and within the context of CSR, ethical decision-making processes and the influencing factors, ethical challenges in CSR, and performance. Based on research from various authors, a connection has been found between the concepts studied and the impact of ethically exercising CSR practices on employee performance. In conclusion, the phenomena and ethical issues addressed in

this article show a tendency for these practices to lead to inefficiency in private organizations due to the significant importance of human resources and their high sensitivity to ethical and unethical practices. The inefficiency of these practices results from: 1) lack of diversity that they lead to, 2) the hostile climate they create in the organization, 3) employee demotivation, and 4) psychological burden on employees, which directly or indirectly leads to decreased performance.

By exercising discrimination in hiring practices, organizations continuously gather individuals who are similar (representatives of a grouping), losing the opportunity for diversity in human resources, along with the diverse perspectives it could provide. Such practices lead to inefficiency as diversity is necessary for the organization, especially now with increasing globalization. Furthermore, discriminatory practices violate the basic right to equality and lead to unfair distribution of benefits in society.

Based on the study conducted, employees' perceptions of their managers' behavior and its impact on them were noted. Employees were influenced by the reward of a certain behavior, encouraging the repetition of that behavior and reducing unrewarded behavior. The survey indicated that employees perceived the organization they work for as ethical, and that managers' behavior had a positive correlation with their own behavior. Employees felt demotivated and did not perform adequately when confronted with unethical behavior. The study found that although the phenomenon of nepotism and favoritism was equally prevalent, the consequences they had on employees varied. It was observed that in organizations where favoritism occurs, the climate tends to be more hostile than in those where nepotism happens. There is also a greater desire to leave companies where favoritism occurs compared to those where nepotism is present. The most common monitoring methods were camera surveillance and computer monitoring. Most employees viewed this to focus on their work or base their work on facts. From the survey results, we learned that organizations recruit candidates primarily through recommendations. This indicates that these organizations seek to gather individuals like those they currently have, which somewhat constitutes a form of discrimination, albeit legal. According to the literature, many individuals are unaware of most of the ethically questionable situations they engage in, and the same conclusion emerged from the survey. Most employees believe they are "morally clean" when in fact they are not. Given that ethics is a broad concept, employees do not fully understand when they are faced with ethical dilemmas.

It can be said that ethical behavior from management contributes to increased engagement and reduced employee turnover. This is because an ethical organizational climate, represented by a safe working environment, fair rewards based on merit, competitive salaries, and equal opportunities for career advancement, fosters trust relationships between employees and the organization, leading them to see their future closely tied to that of the organization. In this way,

they become more willing to engage and "sacrifice" to achieve the organization's goals and objectives.

Recommendations

- Since leadership by an ethically grounded leader, as presented in the study, is essential, and has a significant positive impact on the working environment, the first recommendation for those organizations that do not take this aspect seriously is to include HR managers in ongoing training on ethics.
- The second recommendation for organizations facing "challenges" in assessing, rewarding, and promoting based on merit is to maintain records of each employee's achievements, so that decisions are as objective as possible when necessary, ensuring employees are convinced that decisions are based on facts.
- Considering the positive aspects highlighted in the study regarding monitoring employees, I would recommend that, in collaboration with the employees themselves, agree on the use of methods that bring minimal negative effects.
- The final recommendation is to create a CSR that is as diverse as possible, in terms of perspectives and skills.

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