



ETHICAL CONTEXT OF ORGANIZATION AND TURNOVER INTENTION OF WOMEN EMPLOYEES: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF PERCEIVED ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT

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ABSTRACT

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Previous studies found that females understand and react to behavioral factors such as ethical behaviors and organizational support different from men. As females appear to have higher sensitivity to ethics and supportive behaviors, thus, their behavioral response including turnover intention (TI) has been gaining a vast amount of attention in literature. This study aims to examine the influence of ethical context on female employees' turnover intentions. It also examines the mediating effect of perceived organizational support. The sample of 210 was obtained from female employees at Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Iran using a standard questionnaire. We employ Partial Least Square Structure Acquisition Modeling (PLS-SEM) to analyze data. The results of the research demonstrate that perceived organizational support is a mediator in the link between ethical context and turnover intention. The negative direct and indirect effects of ethical context on turnover intention were also supported. Moreover, perceived organizational support negatively affected turnover intention.

Contribution/Originality: This study contributes to the existing literature by conceptualizing the mediation effect of perceived organizational support in the relationship between ethical context and turnover intention which was not sufficiently investigated in literature.

1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, human capitals are seen as a major asset for any organizations, the main competitive advantage and a valuable resource for economic prosperity of every country (Belcourt, Bohlander, & Snell, 2008). However, different components are considered to increase the retention of talented workers, turnover is an essential concern in the most enterprises (Cohen, Blake, & Goodman, 2016; Kim, Tam, Kim, & Rhee, 2017).

In an academic setting, the turnover of employees has been a major issue due to the high time and staffing costs, replacement and coaching new staff and the consequent drop in efficiency and productivity of the organization (Alkhatari, Abuelhassan, Khalifa, Nusari, & Ameen, 2018; Saeed, Waseem, Sikander, & Rizwan, 2014; Zeffane & Bani, 2017). The high turnover rate in organizations may cut off the quality and stability of services provided by the organization, leading to dissatisfaction of customers (Trevor & Nyberg, 2008).

Though a huge number of firms are focused on the financial causes which could increase turnover intention, surveys have found that turnover intention is influenced by diverse components (Arshad & Puteh, 2015). Different research found that turnover intention rise once employees believe that their working environment do not care about the ethical issues (Liu & Lin, 2016; Rubel, Kee, Quah, & Rimi, 2017) and organizational support (Liu et al., 2018; Satardien, Jano, & Mahembe, 2019).

One of the variables predicting turnover intention is perceived organizational support. However, the link between perceived organizational support and turnover intention is controversial (Alkhateri et al., 2018). While some researchers shown a positive, direct and significant effect of perceived organizational support on intention to quit (Engelbrecht & Samuel, 2019; Tetteh et al., 2020) others found that this relationship is insignificant (Newman, Thanacoody, & Hui, 2011). These contrasting results show that there may be some other variables that impact this relationship.

Lack of ethical behavior is another main issue in some Iranian organizations (Kokabi, 2009; Nakhaie, Shariat, & Kavousi, 2011) which can determine employees' perceived organizational support (Cheng, Yang, Wan, & Chu, 2013; Chinomona, Popoola, & Imuezerua, 2017) and turnover intention (Demirtas & Akdogan, 2015; Ensari, Sebnem, & Melisa, 2016; Liu & Lin, 2016; Rubel et al., 2017). Unethical behavior is not a context-based phenomenon limited to a specific firm or country (Kaptein, 2011). This ethical issue in an organization may include lack of loyalty to the organization or public, the priority of self over others, and disobeying rules that lead organizations to improve employees' ethical behavior (Ahanchian & Ganji, 2017). Ethics are also very important for universities. Education is an indispensable part of the sustainable development and growth of any country (Mete & Sökmen, 2019). Universities always develop ethical codes guiding students' behavior and preparing them to enter job market (Ahanchian & Ganji, 2017).

The lack of research in Iran on women's behavior in organizations and the lack of attention to the impact of ethical context and perceived organizational support on the intention of women to quit their jobs is a gap that this research seeks to address. In other words, women's emotional sensors in organizations are more sensitive than men, and this is a reminder of the differences that need to be addressed. It is expected that Iranian universities have been more successful in adhering to these principles than other organizations. Therefore, the current research considers Ferdowsi University of Mashhad as a case for research. The objectives of this research is to determine the role of ethical context and perceived organizational support on the intention to leave Ferdowsi University of Mashhad by female staff. The following will explain the research variables, research hypotheses and conceptual model.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Turnover Intention

Turnover is referred to the real behavior of employee to quit its organization (Arshad & Puteh, 2015). Turnover intention is defined as the worker's desire to leave her/his jobs voluntarily (Schyns, Torka, & Gossling, 2007). If the employer plans to fire an employee, the term used is involuntary turnover intention. Voluntary turnover occurs when the staff member has an alternative, better job opportunity. Involuntary turnover occurs when the organization fires an employee due to low performance (Saeed et al., 2014). Due to the fact that the survey on the actual turnover is sophisticated because workers who quit their jobs are hard to trace (Johnsrud & Rosser, 2002) researchers use turnover intention, which is highly correlated with actual turnover behavior (e.g. (Arshad & Puteh, 2015; Cohen et al., 2016; Saeed et al., 2014)).

Turnover intention reflects employees' interest in seeking alternative jobs as well as leaving the organization, and it is also a rational antecedents of actual turnover (Cohen et al., 2016). Turnover intention indicates a desire to quite the firm, and actual turnover will most likely be the result of such resigning intentions (Kim et al., 2017; Lee & Jang, 2020; Xiong & Wen, 2020). In the present study, turnover intention was measured by the tendency to quit and find alternative employment.

2.2. Ethical Context

Ethical context is defined as the policies and principles establishing a joint grasp of business ethics (Ahanchian & Ganji, 2017; Cheng et al., 2013; Ganji & Johnson, 2020; Jung, Namkung, & Yoon, 2010; Valentine, Nam, Hollingworth, & Hall, 2014). Treviño, Butterfield, and McCabe (1998) evaluated ethical context by two concepts of ethical climate and ethical culture. These constructs are as a part of broader concept of organizational culture or climate (Shafer & Simmons, 2011). Ethical culture is a complicated interactions of not only formal procedures including formal policies, power structures, and incentive schemes, but also informal procedures including co-workers' behavior, organizational norms which may facilitate both ethical and unethical manners (Shafer & Simmons, 2011; Trevino, 1990) concentrating on the visible culture, conducts, structures, procedures, and policies. On the other hand, the organizational climate construct is focused on the in-depth values and presumptions (Treviño et al., 1998), and is defined as a shared assumption by employees creating a meaningful psychological environment (Schneider, 1975).

2.3. Perceived Organizational Support

Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, and Sowa (1986) first submitted perceived organizational support by publishing an article in the field of psychology. Based on their work, employees feel support from the form the company when the organization worth their co-operation, and their welfare.

The concept of perceived organizational support lies at the heart of social exchange theory (Reader, Mearns, Lopes, & Kuha, 2017). According to this theory, when one has some good social relations with another, the person feels obliged to compensate for the favor. The greater the benefit, the greater the tendency to compensate. Researchers believe that social exchange is also taking place between employees and employers, because the organization is a resource that meets the needs of the employees. Organizational support theory states that employees form an overall view of an organization's support, and based on it, one pays attention to the goals of the organization and their fulfillment. Employees therefore develop general beliefs toward the extent to which the firm supports their needs and aspirations, based on the interaction of managers with organizational representatives (Eisenberger, Stinglhamber, Vandenberghe, Sucharski, & Rhoades, 2002). According to Social exchange theory, the value of the bond-exchange relationship will only increase when it is done voluntarily. When employees feel that their organization is paying attention to their well-being rather than just providing support due to legal requirements or union pressure, they respond better to gain the organizational objectives (Cheng et al., 2013). On one hand, the organization is a vital source of satisfying social needs of employees such as the need for authentication and self-esteem. On the other hand, employees can assist the firm meet its objectives relying on exchange norms (Eisenberger, Fasolo, & Davis-LaMastro, 1990).

2.4. The Effect of Ethical Context on Turnover Intention

Some researchers (Ensari et al., 2016; Ganji & Ahanchian, 2016; Valentine et al., 2014) emphasize the effect of ethical climate on human resource turnover intention. Chiang and Hsieh (2012) stated that a company's ethical plans, such as ethical code of conduct, ethical training, and organizational beliefs, may encourage desirable attitudes and decrease employee turnover. Valentine et al. (2014) stated that ethical context has a negative impact on turnover intention. Demirtas and Akdogan (2015) also show that the moral climate negatively predicts turnover intention. Shafer (2002) found that an unethical manner decreased employees' satisfaction, commitment, and led to their turnover intentions. In view of the forgoing literature, the hypothesis is developed below:

Hypothesis 1: Ethical context of an organization has a negative impact on female employees' turnover intention.

2.5. The Relationship between Ethical Context and Perceived Organizational Support

Some studies consider perceived organizational support as a dependent variable and examine its antecedents. What creates a sense of support among employees is identified and investigated. The results of these studies have shown that some organizational variables make employees feel supportive, including: organizational justice (Arnéguy, Ohana, & Stinglhamber, 2018; Babic, Stinglhamber, & Hansez, 2015; Ishak, Hussein, Hussain, & Hamid, 2018) job conditions (Stinglhamber & Vandenberghe, 2004), and perceived ethical context (Cheng et al., 2013). Kincaid, Baloglu, and Corsun (2008) show that support of senior management has a vital effect in shaping an organization’s ethical climate. Based on previous discussions, the hypothesis can be included as;

Hypothesis 2: Ethical context of an organization has a positive impact on female employees perceived organizational support.

2.6. The Effect of Perceived Organization Supports on Turnover Intention

Some studies have investigated the consequences of perceived organizational support. In such studies, researchers have tried to show what positive consequences of employees' support have on employees themselves and organizations. In other words, these studies have targeted the effect of organizational support on the variables that are important to the firm. At the organizational level, perceived organizational support increases emotional commitment and improves employee performance (Cheng et al., 2013; Nica, 2016; Shahzad, Farrukh, Kanwal, & Sakib, 2018). On the other hand, it reduces their dismissal behavior (Cheng et al., 2013; Eisenberger et al., 2002; Jawahar & Hemmasi, 2006; Wong & Wong, 2017). Shafique, ud Din, and Tahir (2018) showed that the support employees received from supervisors was negatively correlated with turnover intention. Tetteh et al. (2020) and Arokiasamy, Marimuthu, and Moorthy (2010) shown that the major antecedents of worker’s turnover intention are the poor organizational support they perceived. When the employees receive a low level of organizational support, they tend to search for an alternative job (Engelbrecht & Samuel, 2019). Therefore, it could be said that organizational support is a mechanism that is predictable to mediate the link between ethical context and turnover intention. From this view point, the next hypothesis can be expressed as follows:

Hypothesis 3: Perceived organizational support of female employees has a negative effect on turnover intention.

Notice that the three hypotheses just developed suggests that perceived organizational support is a mediating variable in the connection between perceived ethical context and turnover intention. According to the research hypotheses, the conceptual framework is depicted in Figure 1.

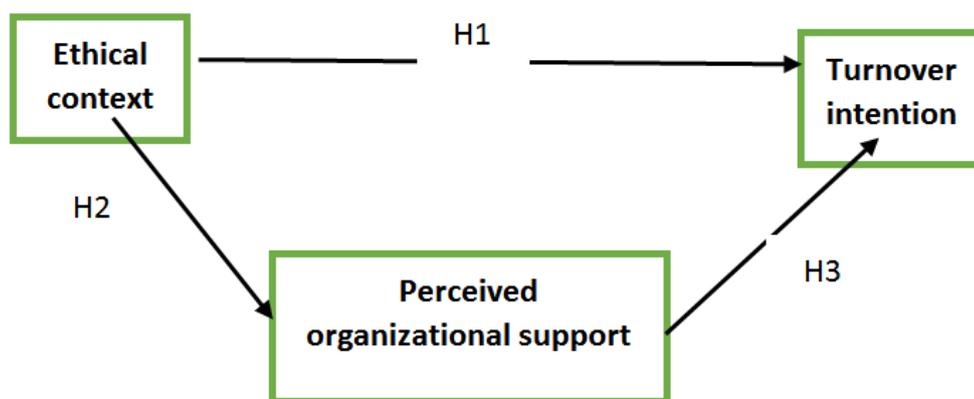


Figure-1. Research conceptual model.
 Source: Cheng et al. (2013); Ganji, Kafashpour, and Sorkhan (2017); Ganji and Kafashpour (2016).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The population for this study consists of all female employees at Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, estimated as about 315 employees. The sample size chosen was 210. A two-stage sampling procedure was used. In the first stage,

the staff at Ferdowsi University of Mashhad were placed into 23 categories according to the classification of staff in university recruitment documents. Then, samples were randomly selected within each class according to the list of employees.

The questionnaire was developed using adapted measures from other published studies. Ethical context questions were formulated using five items extracted from Cheng et al. (2013) and Ahanchian and Ganji (2017). Perceived organizational support items were designed using the Eisenberger, Armeli, Rexwinkel, Lynch, and Rhoades (2001) questionnaire; and turnover intention using the Cheng et al. (2013) and Ganji and Johnson (2020) questionnaire.

4. RESULTS

For an assessment of the questionnaire's content validity, seven professors who had done research in organizational behavior and ethical issues assessed the items, confirming the content validity of the scales. The Cronbach's alpha method was employed to determine the reliability of the survey. For all constructs including employees' perceptions of ethical context (0.802), perceived organizational support (0.829), and turnover intention (0.742) the alpha is above 0.7, confirming the reliability of the measurement instrument (Table 1). Accordingly, Composite Reliability (CR) values are more than 0.7, and the average variance extracted (AVE) values are above 0.5 Table 1 which means strong reliability and validity Table 1.

Table-1. Reliability and validity.

Survey items	Factor loadings	Mean	Cronbach's alpha	CR	AVE
Ethical context		3.326	0.802	0.812	0.527
1-Managers always involve unethical behaviours (reverse code).	0.784				
2. in this university, ethics is vital to succeed.	0.816				
3. Unethical behaviour in this university is not tolerated.	0.725				
4.Managers often punish employee who involved in unethical behaviour for her/his personal benefits.	0.772				
5. Managers often punish employee who involved in unethical behaviour for corporate benefits.	0.820				
Perceived organizational support		2.830	0.829	0.864	0.513
6. The university always be supportive when I needed a special help.	0.754				
7. The university takes pride in my achievements.	0.842				
8. The university pays attention on my problems	0.833				
9. The university takes care of my happiness.	0.756				
10. My goals and beliefs are so important for university.	0.907				
Turnover intention		2.271	0.742	0.715	0.640
11. I decide to quit this university.	0.854				
12. I will quit this university in the future.	0.763				
13. I will quit my job to work with other university.	0.813				

According to Table 1 the turnover intention means of 2.27 is at an acceptable level for Ferdowsi University of Mashhad. Also, the ethical context means of 3.32 is reasonable. But organizational support is not good due to the mean being only 2.83.

4.1. Hypothesis Tests

In this study, the WARPLS software was used to test the hypotheses. In PLS models, multiple regressions are used to calculate the coefficient of determination (R^2), path coefficients (β) and p-values for each part of the regression model Figure 2.

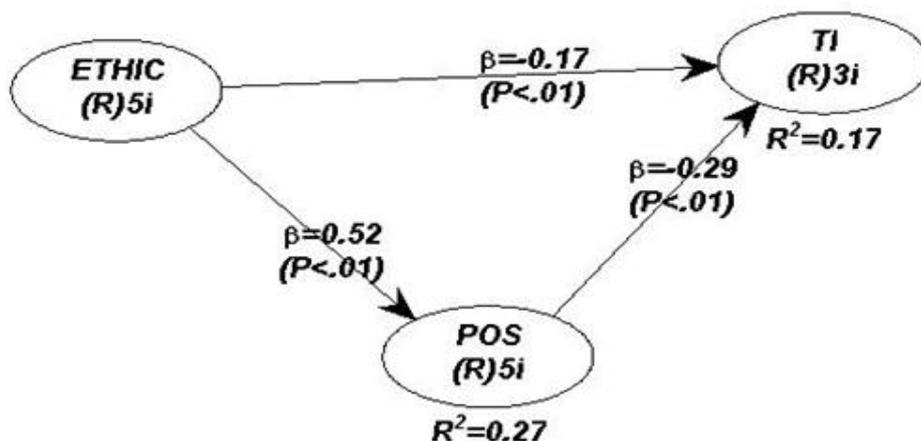


Figure-2. PLS-SEM model results.

According to the R^2 value in the model, 27% of the changes in perceived organizational support can be explained by variation in the ethical context. That is, other variables affect perceived organizational support, but it can be argued that ethical context is an important factor in predicting perceived organizational support. Also, 17% of changes in female staff turnover intention are explained by variation in perceptions of the ethical context and perceived organizational support. That is, other variables affect turnover intention that were not addressed in the present study. All estimated paths have the hypothesized sign and are all significant ($p < .01$) so all three of our hypotheses are confirmed.

WARPPLS software also shows details on the direct, indirect and total impacts among variables relationships, as presented in Table 2:

Table-2. Direct and indirect effect.

Ethical context	Turnover intention		
	Total effect	Indirect effect	Direct effect
	-0.33	-0.15	-0.17

Based on the findings of testing the model, the first hypothesis which was the direct and negative impact of ethical context on turnover intention is confirmed. This finding is consistent with that of Rubel et al. (2017); Jung et al. (2010); Valentine et al. (2014); Demirtas and Akdogan (2015); Ensari et al. (2016) and Ganji et al. (2017) who all find that that ethical climate predicts turnover intention negatively. The second hypothesis is also confirmed. The ethical context will positively influence perceived organizational support. In other words, the considering of ethical issues by the organization creates a feeling of support in the female staff of Ferdowsi University of Mashhad. This is in line with the findings of Cheng et al. (2013) and Kincaid et al. (2008). The third research hypothesis, which is the effects of perceived organizational support on turnover intention, was also confirmed. This is in line with the Liu et al. (2018); Satardien et al. (2019); Arokiasamy et al. (2010) and Alkhateri et al. (2018) studies who show that supervisor support decreases turnover intention of employees. We can also see that the perceived support of the organization is a mediator of the negative link between the ethical context of the organization and the turnover intention, which is similar to the results of Cheng et al. (2013); Valentine et al. (2014) and Ensari et al. (2016).

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this study, factors affecting the turnover intention among female staff of Ferdowsi University of Mashhad. were investigated. In other words, how far a university creates a healthy climate by fostering ethical behaviors might negatively correlate to employee’s intention to quit.

According to the results of the present study, it seems that psychological aspects of the workplace and in particular the ethical context and perceived support of the organization are very important for female employees in determining their intention to leave their job. Therefore, particular attention should be given to ethical issues at the university. This attention will be created by developing an ethical culture and ethical climate in the organization. This requires that the management of universities and colleges act ethically and that regulations, frameworks and codes of ethics are clarified in the organizations (Ganji & Kafashpour, 2016). Because of the educational climate of the university which plays a supportive role in ethical aspects, it seems that the university is not in a bad status to create ethical context, and staff perception of the organizational ethics is moderate and acceptable, but lack of perceived organizational support make some troubles, and special attention must be paid. Female staff in Iran seem to feel less supportive behaviors because of the gender discrimination in terms of appointments and promotions, and this is evident not only at Ferdowsi University but also in many organizations in Iran (Ahanchian & Ganji, 2017), which should definitely change.

There are some limitations to this research as well. This research has been conducted at one of the public universities in Iran, and results should be carefully generalized to other universities. This study examined the researcher's sense of duty towards women, as well as the evidence that more supportive and ethical issues are important to women. And there is a need to do a similar research in men's society.

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