Influential Indicators on Professional Ethics Development at Stable Virtual Universities (Qualitative Research)

Maryam Mesbahi

Department of Social Sciences and Economic, Payame Noor University,
P.O. Box 19395-3697, Tehran, Iran

Abstract: Ethic is a reflection and mirror image of dominant values in organizational activities and responsibilities. The present study investigated the experiences and viewpoints of faculty members of Payam-e-Noor University of Kerman regarding the influential factors in professional behavior at the stable virtual University. The study at hand investigatedthe contents of interviews of 14 facultymembers in some educational departments such as Basic Sciences, Vocational-Engineering, Literature and Humanities at Payam-e-Noor University of Kerman in 2013 September who had profound semi-structural and goal-based interviews. Data collection and data analysis were carried out simultaneously and were analyzed thematically. The findings of this study confirm three shading themes including: background factors, structural factors, contextual factors and ten minor themes. The findings of this study specify the influential indicators on the development of professional ethic from the viewpoint of faculty members at Payam-e-Noor University of Kerman. The point which should be taken into consideration is that the removal of the structural obstacles leads to the enhancement of professional behavior.

Key words: Professional ethics, stable virtual education, content analysis, enhancement, faculty members

INTRODUCTION

By dominance of information system in organization in the middle of twentieth century, information technology has become a competitive advantages resource and organizations care more about it (Powell and Dent-Micallef, 1997). Education and learning and its patterns have changed proportional to historical evolution and time course. Open and distance learning is accepted as a power participant in social and economic development and becomes an essential element of mainstream of educationalsystems in developed and developing countries.

This growth has motivated to some extent among teachers and educators and also in application of internet-oriented and new multimedia. The other reason for this motivationis understanding that the traditional techniques should be reinforced by modern techniques. Introducing the web facilities to electronic learning environments, learners become active as energetic knowledge producers and this closed structure changed to friendly and congruent environment with students.

Web is introduced by technologies such as blog, moblog, podcast, vodcast, RSS, wiki and social networking. With respect to life style in present century and virtual environment, the breadth oforganizations and also cultural, social and economic problems in societies, the only solution to exit such problems is ethical virtues. Lack of ethics in organizations and university causes misbehaviors of managers, depression in students, disliked job lives, burnout for professors, damage to individual life, Individualinterestsrather thanthepublicinterest and Violation of therights ofstudents in universities.

Experts defines professional ethics a sense of identity with a profession, the need for continuity in a job and sense of high responsibility towards job (Abtahi and Molaei, 2006). Besides knowledge transfer, there are other tasks in universities which have social and scientificvalues and are categorized as higher education duties (Iranian e-Institute of Higher Education). These duties are implicit or defined besides ethical rules.

Research conducted inthis regard are showing root of problems are less technical and more related to organization and human issues (Kaisler et al., 2005). This subject has attracted attention from one decade age inIran university environments. On the other hand, special education system of Payam-e-Noor University in decision making is mainly based on centralized

methods. This university is differed from other universities and these differences may affect professional ethics. This university is a kind of stable virtual organization and in fact there is a central part in this organization which specifies essential rules for cooperation of different parts.

The study innovation is identifying and categorizing the effective elements for development of professional ethicsin stable virtual universities.

This study examined the effective elements developmentof professional ethics in stable virtual education from Payam-e-Noor faculty member's viewpoints and in qualitative method. The purpose of study is to help the more identification of scientific professional ethics in professional ethics extension in scientific stable virtual centers. Regarding ethics is increasing psychological security in the university and its improvement and also increases efficiency and decreases costs.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Thematic analysis has been applied to recognize the effective indicators for development of professional ethics of faculty members. The main question of this study is: "what are the effective factors on development of professional ethics in stable virtual education system?" in content analysis process, phrases and words meanings, intentions and outcomes are paid attention. So in addition to words or sentences, the context in which data are formed, should be considered. Otherwise, incomplete task is done (Morgan, 1993). In this way, the researcher should leave the presuppositions and interpret the world from people view points that have repeatedly experienced that phenomenon (Burns and Grove, 2006). To explain the professional ethics from facultymember's points of view, the qualitative content analysis was used. Qualitative content analysis is more than explicit content exploration from textual data but hidden themes and patterns inside the data content of participants may be discovered (Campos and Turato, 2009).

To analyze the data, thematic analysis method was used. This method is most common and widely used for analyzing qualitative data. Thematic analysis is coding practice and data analyzing with the goal that what the data states. Using purposive sampling, researcher interviewed each professor in his/her office. Interviews were done on set times. Interviewer explained the goal and research questions. The 11 faculty members of science, engineering and technology, humanities as subdivisions of Kerman Payam-e-Noor University were interviewed. In the beginning, participants were asked to explain the "professional ethics" term.

Then, they explained their experiences and perceptions of this term. They were asked, for example, to give an example of professional ethics which affected their function. Also, this question was asked: which factors have developed your professional ethics and played an obstacle or facilitating role.

This study has been done from October 2013 till February 2014. Interviews were recorded and on the same day, they were converted and were used as main data of the study. By average, each interview took 1 hour. Before the next interview, the interviews were coding and analyzed. Three coding stages were done: open, axial and selective coding. The text of each interview was studied several times and main sentences were recorded as codes in open coding stage. Then, the codes with the same concept were put in the same category.

Initial categories were contrasted and the same items were merged, then the related categories were put around shared axial in axial coding. Then the selective coding was done and the core variable was defined. At this level, the researcher concentrated on the most repeated variable. According to theorical sampling, collected data were was extracted using the thematic, categorized, organized analyzing and core categories. To evaluate reliability and validity, some methods were used. The researcher related to research places and participants for a long time and this relationship helped the researcher to attract the participants trust and to understand the study environment. The participants reviewed the data and extracted codes validity, to endorse the validity. Also, fiveexperts surveyed some interviews texts, extracted codes and categories. There was 70-80% agreement among extracted results. To calculate the agreement the proposed method by Polit and Hungler (1999) was used. The number of extracted codes of one interview by main researcher, for example was 101 codes. The second person agreed on 90 items with the main researcher. The agreement percentage was 88.14. Demographic characteristics of participants are shown in Table 1. Secrecy and choice of participating

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of participants

Demographic characteristics	Frequency
Age	
25-35	3
35-45	8
Gender	
Female	5
Male	6
Kind of employment	
Contractual	3
Temporary	3
Tenure	5
Executive post	
Manger	9
Consluant	2
Humanities	4
Engineering	4
Science	3

Table 2: Categorizing shading and minor themes

Minor themes	Shading themes
One's past professional mission	Contextual factors
Organizational environment, 'participation and cooperation, organizational culture	Background factors
Conflict management, line and staff contradictions Support processes, external cooperation, compensation and equal payments	Structural factors

in study, during the investigations was observed. This study was endorsed in Kerman Payam-e-Noor researching council (Table 2).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Contextual factors of shading themes were specified by minor factors: one's past and professional mission. Also, participants emphasized on professional mission. A participant explained his experiences:" I think, mission plays an important role in professional ethics. Some of my colleagues are very responsible when they are teaching. They use class time (2 h) completely. It is also valid in researching. Researcher should not use fake data and be commitment in article writing.

Background factors of shading themes with minor themes are recognized by: organizational environment, organizational culture, communications and cooperation. One experience on organizational environment was explained by a participant: it is said the main factor human prosperity is "his job environment" so, I should be compatible with my colleagues and prepare a good job situation and it can be just possible in recognizing individual positions and deferential communication in job environment.

Also, participants mentioned the key role of culture (and its subsets) in professional ethics. They state that

hen the culture role highlights, the professional ethics function improves. Rewarding the moral behavior was mentioned by participants as a culture subset, it also emphasized on manager role. A participant explained that: "everybody thinks whether the system appreciates him/her or not whether your manager cares about your function or not. Suppose I establish a new lab, I expect them to mention my name in the reports, at least. Structural factors of shading themes were categorized by support processes, compensation system, line and staff conflicts, conflict and external cooperation management.

Participants experiences shows that support processes are effective on professional ethics. Such experiences are: "suitable environment and tool should be prepared for faculty members but often there is no personal and special place. For example, a room is only for 4 people but 8 should work there, so teaching and researching efficiency becomes less. "Many participants emphasized the role conflict in their experiences:" the number of students increases every year, our responsibilities increase too. Add lack of facilities and employees weak cooperation to this, so we are under more stress. We should do researching activities but actually no time remains or there is no concentration or energy, any more. Accordingly, you may see non-professional ethics when we communicate with colleagues or students.

"Participants emphasized the external cooperation in professional ethics representation. A participant said:" our invited professors are several times of our faculty members. Unfortunately, they may show non-professional ethics, too. In Payam-e-Noor University, fewer classes are held. The number of professors is not enough so we cannot substitute them. In such situation, the students are under pressure and they become unsatisfied.

This study examined Kerman Payam-e-Noor university faculty member's experiences from qualitative viewpoints. Contextual, background and structural factors were recognizes very important. Contextual factor is based on one's pastand professional mission. Also, Mr. Mazaheri asserted in his study that ethics is different from rules observation and often is accompanied with personal background.

When people are commitment to their own behaviors and also others behaviors and also they believe in God and faithful, working is worshiping and serving itself and causes growth and dynamism. When

the employees see themselves generous and acting generously, they never lose their generosity to obtain something else.

Participants emphasized on organizational environment and culture in second aspect including background factors. Organizational culture layers are consisting of organization values, norms, beliefs and attitude. When faculty members accept a set of core values, they pay more attention to their responsibilities and tasks and are more commitment to others, so occupational integration improves. Hamilton believes virtual organizations are successful if leaders try to create culture resulting in learning varied values, investing on them and also safe communications (Hamilton and Scandura, 2003).

Curry *et al.* (1986) found when someone commitments to high standard professional ethics, extensive job participation is made. People are impressed by organizational structure variables. Professional ethics extensive depends on organized approach, appropriate structural contexts and cultural proper mechanisms.

Structures which enhance employees understanding of organizational supports resulted in organizational commitment increasing. So, when employees understand they are supported by organization, extensively; they feel duty to response to this act of supporting (Meyer and Smith, 2000). Compensation system and external equality observance were significant from participant's viewpoints. In organizations with high levels profit, Attrition is less. Such rewards are essential investments which increases organizational commitment (Buchko, 1993). Also, Hozouri concluded that faculty members believed the university did not do something special for them to commitment them to working in that organization, any more.

Complex administrative protocols and line and staff contradictions especially experts roles, were structural themes indexes which found by researcher. One of the participants declared Payam-e-Noor University is "employee-driven". Also, Ansari concluded that structure can hinder professional ethics. This includes employees, managers relationships, community and rules.

Each part of scientific society in our country is dependent on special experts. Thesis delivering process to a researching center takes time. Approving some field of study in Higher Education Development Council takes a long time, because it depends only on some special experts or employees. Education processes would progress if job description was defined or surveillance became more or the number of them increased.

Zuzek *et al.* (2008) concluded when communications decrease, resulted in less cooperation; so managers may face difficulty in operating paradigms in such education systems.

Participants mentioned the support processes weakness. Researches show scientific community equipment and environment are not in good condition. Today, e-Learning and virtual universities play a significant role in higher education system. Alikhani states physical spaces, their facilities, needed equipment, internet and other communication networks should be improved and standardization according to specifiedjob description and the number of users. Conflict and ambiguity was another research finding. Such conflict happens when more than role should simultaneously be played by one which derived from ethical dilemma (Chonko and Burnett, 1983). While, conflict and creating defense mechanisms is which inevitable (Broumand, 2006) overshadow the ethical behavior. Buck and Watson (2002) recognized role ambiguity as an effective factor on professional ethics. Role conflict makes stress and anxiety in personnel and causes despair and discouragement to the job (Roman and Munera, 2005).

Studies indicate that stress in impresses the behavior (ethical or not ethical). Virtual teams also have another challenge, they don't cooperate face to face and this may create conflicts.

From participant's points of view external cooperation (employing invited professors) is effective in developing professional ethics. Public confidence is obtained through showing that university professors are members of a high standard occupation. O'Reilly *et al.* (1991) believe reciprocity of one's values and organization results in commitment, sense of duty (Randall and Cote, 1991) strong belief in organization goals and value (Mowday *et al.*, 1979). So, occupational experience is a significant force in Personnel socialization process or their effectiveness and it is a main factor in taking responsibilities and duties in organization (Mowday *et al.*, 1982).

CONCLUSION

Improvement of professional ethics system in stable virtual education depends on reinforcement of effective content, contextual indicators and policies and structures with prerequisite such as over confidence avoidance and paying attention to professional mission. While, culture and values try to establish ethics in organization, it is important to make organization environment sweet to establish a culture motivating ethic behaviors, participation and cooperating in organization. Creating sanction in stable virtual universities, the structure can play very significant role in institutionalization of moralities.

To achieve this purpose, it is necessary to do modification and review of structural indicators in the static virtual universities especially in compensation system aspects, respect forequality, line and staff relations, support processes, conflict management and external cooperation, thereby the possibility of improvement and continuous promotion of professional ethics quality becomes facilitate, especially in virtual education. Accordingly, respect to research result, researcher suggests universities authoritie's more attention to recruitment emphasizing on professional mission especially in values transmission and socialization process and understanding norms and moral planning in professors training program.

Virtual universities management is mainly possible on systematic approach in utilizing competitive advantages, especially in tactical level by organizational learning and negotiation and mass customization along with conflict management of virtual teams and external cooperation.

In order to enhance the professional ethics behavior outbreak compared to other universities, hardware and software infrastructure and electronic cooperation obstacles should be removed and in terms of facilities, favorable condition should be prepared for faculty members. Also, it is necessary and evitable to create a unique organizational culture and strengthening partnerships, along with holding discussions regularly and reinforced social networks, emphasizing on shared vision, university goals and missions reviewing.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

REFERENCES

Abtahi, S.H. and N. Molaei, 2006. The relationship between professional commitment and organizational commitment. Tadbir, Vol. 18,

Broumand, Z., 2006. Organizational Behavior. Payam-e-Noor University, Tehran, Iran,.

Buchko, A., 1993. The effects of employee ownership on employee attitudes: An integrated causal model and path. J. Manage. Stud., 30: 633-658.

Buck, J.M. and J.L. Watson, 2002. The relationship between human resource management strategies and organizational commitment. Innovative Higher Educ., 26: 175-193.

Burns, N. and S.K. Grove, 2006. Understanding Nursing Research: Building an Enidence-Based Practice. 4th Edn., Saunders Publisher, ?Philadelphia, Pennsylvania,.

Campos, C.J.G. and E.R. Turato, 2009. Content analysis in studies using the clinical-qualitative method: Application and perspectives. Rev. latino Americana Enfermagem, 17: 259-264.

Chonko, L.B. and J.J. Burnett, 1983. Measuring the importance of ethical situations as a source of role conflict: A survey of salespeople, sales managers and sales support personnel. J. Pers. Selling Sales Manage., 3: 41-47.

Curry, J.P., D. Wakefield, J.L. Price and C.W. Mueller, 1986. On the causal ordering of job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Acad. Manage. J., 29: 847-858.

Hamilton, B.A. and T.A. Scandura, 2003. Implication for organizational learning and development in a wired word. Organizational Dyn., 31: 388-402.

Kaisler, S.H., F. Armour and M. Valivullah, 2005. Enterprise architecting: Critical problems. Proceedings of the 38th Annual Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences, January 6-6, 2005, IEEE, New York, USA., ISBN:0-7695-2268-8, pp: 224-224.

Meyer, J.P. and C.A. Smith, 2000. HRM practices and organizational commitment: Test of a mediation model. Can. J. Adm. Sci., 17: 319-331.

Morgan, D.L., 1993. Qualitative content analysis: A guide to paths not taken. Qual. Health Res., 1: 112-121.

Mowday, R.T., L.W. Porter and R.M. Steers, 1982. Employee-Organization Linkages: The Psychology of Commitment, Absenteeism and Turnover. Academic Press, New York.

Mowday, R.T., R.M. Steers and L.W. Porter, 1979. The measurement of organizational commitment. J. Vocat. Behav., 14: 224-247.

O'Reilly, C.A., J. Chatman and D.F. Caldwell, 1991. People and organizational culture: A profile comparison approach to assessing person-organization fit. Acad. Manage. J., 34: 487-516.

Polit, D.F. and B.P. Hungler, 1999. Nursing Research: Principles and Methods. Lippincott, Philadelphia.

Powell, T.C. and A. Dent-Micallef, 1997. Information technology as competitive advantage: The role of human, business and technology resources. Strat. Manage. J., 18: 375-405.

Randall, D.M. and J.A. Cote, 1991. Interrelationships of work commitment constructs. Work Occupations, 18: 194-211.

Roman, S. and L.J. Munuera, 2005. Determinants and consequences of ethical behaviour: An empirical study of salespeople. Eur. J. Marketing, 39: 473-495.

Zuzek, M., M. Talik, T. Swierczynski, C. Wisniewski and B. Kryza *et al.*, 2008. Formal Model for Contract Negotiation in Knowledge-Based Virtual Organizations. In: Computational Science, Bubak, M., G.D.V. Albada, J. Dongarra and M.A.S. Peter, Springer, Berlin, Germany, ISBN: 978-3-540-69388-8, pp: 409-418.