

ETHICAL BELIEFS AND SELF-MONITORING

Gülçimen Yurtsever-Ertekin*

Abstract: This paper explores possible relationships between ethical beliefs and self-monitoring. Two dimensions of ethical beliefs were investigated: ethical relativism and idealism. The data was collected from 125 managers of exporting and importing departments of Turkish firms by means of a self-administered questionnaire. The results indicate that there is no relationship between ethical idealism and self-monitoring and its subscales. However, the results do show positive relationships between ethical relativism and self-monitoring and its subscales except for the extraversion subscale.

Key words: Ethics, idealism, relativism, self-monitoring, business

Özet: Bu çalışmada etik inancı ile kendi kendine denetim arasındaki ilişki araştırılmıştır. Etik inancının iki boyutu araştırılmıştır: göreceli etik ve idealizm. Anket sorusuna 125 ihracattan ve ithalattan sorumlu yönetici cevap vermiştir. Yöneticilerin verdikleri cevapların sonuçlarına göre, idealizm ile kendi kendine denetim ve kendi kendine denetim alt bölümleri arasında bir ilişki yoktur. Diğer taraftan, göreceli etik ile kendi kendine denetim ve alt bölümleri arasında pozitif bir ilişki bulunmuştur. Ancak, kendi kendine denetimin bir alt bölümü olan fazla dışa yönelik ile göreceli etik arasında bir ilişki bulunmamıştır.

Anahtar sözcükler: Etik, göreceli, idealizm, kendi-kendini denetim, işletme

I. INTRODUCTION

It has been recognized that individuals are capable of exercising control over their behavior. Therefore, individuals use social cues that operate in different situations to monitor and adapt their behavior in order to create certain impressions for others (Briggs, Cheek & Buss, 1980; Goffman, 1956; Norris & Zweigenhaft, 1999; Snyder, 1987;). However, there are individual differences in the extent to which individuals monitor and adapt their behavior. Snyder (1974) conceptualized these individual differences in his theory of self-monitoring. According to Snyder's conceptualization, individuals are either high or low self-monitors when deciding how to act. Low self-monitoring people are less aware of situational norms and more concerned with their personal dispositions, affective states and attitudes. Further, they do not easily adjust their

* Doç. Dr., İİBF, İşletme Bölümü, Çağ Üniversitesi, Mersin. Email: gyurtsever@cag.edu.tr

actions to changing situational conditions (Head, 1998). In contrast, high self-monitoring individuals use social situations as guidelines for monitoring and managing their expressive behavior. These people may adopt more flexible and multidimensional stances toward the social world (Schlenker & Weigold, 1992). Their behavior shows great flexibility across situations. Behavioral patterns, values, art, forms, institutions and ethical beliefs are characteristics of a community of social expression (Hall, 1977).

Ethical beliefs may represent an important determinant in self-monitoring. Since ethical beliefs are the core of society they limit individual behavior, thus integrating the individual in to society (Rieff, 1967). The failure to align self-monitoring with one's ethical beliefs not only diminishes one's effectiveness in the society but also, in many cases may lead the individual to lose the right to react in the society. Frequent ethical violations have led to the downfall of many politicians, corporate executives and other leaders (Blodgett & Carlson, 1997). Therefore, this study attempts to investigate the relations between ethical beliefs and self-monitoring.

II. SELF-MONITORING AND ETHICAL BELIEFS

Ethical beliefs affect individuals' behavior and decisions as they interact with others. The impact of interpersonal processes on individuals in morally toned situations has increasingly been emphasized (Hogan & Emler, 1978; Waterman 1978; Forsyth & Nye, 1990; Barnett, Bass & Brown, 1994). An individual's moral behavior may vary because interpersonal demands vary across situations (Haan, 1986). Personal moral philosophy or ethical ideology provides guidelines for explaining differences in ethical judgment. Schlenker & Forsyth (1977) argue that two dimensions can describe individual differences in ethical beliefs: relativism and idealism. The first dimension, relativism, describes a rejection of universal moral rules in moral judgment. The second dimension, idealism, claims to always achieve a morally correct solution and reflects the degree to which people believe that moral behavior always leads to good consequences.

Highly idealistic individuals approve actions that result in positive consequences for all individuals. They also believe that actions should conform to universal moral principles. This view assumes that everyone in this world has similar ethical beliefs. Therefore, idealistic individuals seem less aware of cultural norms, or, at least, are less concerned with others' ethical beliefs. In contrast, high self-monitors are keenly aware of the society's values.

Self-monitoring identifies individuals who apply social and

situational cues to guide their behavior. High self-monitors use varied social information when they decide how to act. Therefore, high self-monitors act like different people in different societies and with different people. Further, they easily alter their behavior, words and deeds to produce a favorable impression for others (Snyder, Simpson & Gangestad, 1986). On the other hand, ethical idealism is concerned with universal rules and implies that there is one moral right for everyone. The fact

that individuals have the same ethical values therefore means that the world's people have the same culture. They may show persistence in their ethical beliefs since their ethical beliefs are based on universal rules and may not be sufficient to justify different situations. Therefore, idealistic individuals may not act like different people in different cultural environments.

Based upon the reasons stated above, the first hypothesis set forth in this study is:

H1: There is a negative relationship between ethical idealism and self-monitoring and subscales of self-monitoring.

Ethical relativism is concerned with feeling and attitude and relies on social convention behavior (Miesing & Preble, 1985). The major implication of relativism is that moral values are determined by the agreement of a society or culture that cannot judge the rightness or wrongness of another culture's value system. High self-monitoring individuals also show a highly differentiated life space in which the behavior and attitudes are guided by regions (Head, 1998). They carefully tailor their ethical behavior to appear to be the right person at the right place.

Highly relativistic individuals believe that values and moral principles need constant re-evaluations since circumstances are constantly changing in important respects (Robin, 1980). When they make an ethical judgment, they answer this question: Should I apply my own earlier ethical standard? Therefore, the ethical standard of the past, or of today is not expected to be the same as the ethical standard in the future (Mayo, 1998). High self-monitors also allow themselves to modify their behavior as they faced new information or new situational norms (Anderson, 1990).

The social version of ethical relativism evaluates the event within the social context. Society seeks to legitimize its practices and the attempted legitimating provides a basis for making critical judgment (Williams, 1985). High self-monitors, who are great need of approval, value society's acceptance and approval more than individuals who are low on these traits.

Relativistic individuals try to answer these questions when they make an ethical judgment: What kind of situation? What is appropriate for me in a

situation? (Mayo, 1986). High self-monitoring individuals use situational strategy to guide their behavior. Their behavior shows greater flexibility across situations (Norris & Zweigenhaft, 1999). High self-monitors also ask a similar question " How can I make more of myself in this situation?" (Leona & Corte, 1994). It would appear therefore that the number and type of social behaviors may influence the behavior of high self monitors and relativistic individuals.

Based upon the reasons stated above, the second hypothesis set forth in this study is:

H2: There is a positive relationship between relativism and self-monitoring and subscales of self-monitoring.

III. METHOD

III. 1. Sample

In this study, questionnaires were sent to 400 importing and exporting managers of the 400 largest Turkish firms in terms of employment capacity. Survey packets containing the questionnaires, a personalized cover letter and a stamped return envelope were mailed to survey recipients. By the four-week cut off date, 125 managers had responded, giving us a 31% response rate. Ten percent of respondents were upper - level managers. The other respondents were middle level managers. The average age was 43.

III. 2 Measures

Self-monitoring was measured using Snyder's (1974) version of the instrument. This instrument consists of 25 self-descriptive statements. A five point Likert - type response was presented. The self-monitoring scale has been factor analyzed yielding three subscales (Briggs, Cheek & Buss, 1980; Gudykunst, Yang & Nishida, 1987). The three self-monitoring subscales are extraversion, acting, and other-directedness. The extraversion subscale is related to being the center of attention and telling jokes and stories. Other -directedness emphasizes pleasing others and social conformity. The acting subscale emphasizes acting, entertaining, and public speaking. Snyder's scale was used for this study because it continues to stimulate research related to self-monitoring (Leone & Corte 1994, Norris & Zweigenhaft, 1999; Schlenker & Weigold; 1992).

Ethical beliefs were measured using the Ethics Position Questionnaire (EPQ) developed by Forsyth (1980). The EPQ was chosen for this study based on the widely accepted use of this scale in previous literature (e.g., Forsyth & Pope, 1984; Furnham & Briggs, 1993; Rawwas, 1996; Vitell, Lumpkin & Rawwas, 1991). The EPQ consists of two scales each containing 10 items. The

first scale was designed to measure idealism and the second was designed to measure relativism. Respondents were asked to indicate their agreement or disagreement with each item using a five -point Likert format.

The original English items were translated into Turkish and back translated by different translators. The use of back-translation assures that denotative meanings of items on the questionnaires are equivalent. Then, a committee of Turkish psychologists and sociologists checked the Turkish version of items. The committee felt that the 20 items of EPQ (Yurtsever, 1998) and 25 items of the self-monitoring scale were appropriate for Turkey.

IV. RESULTS

TABLE The Relationship of Ethical Beliefs to Self- Monitoring and its Subscales
(Pearson Correlation Coefficients)

Relativism	Idealism	
Self-monitoring	-.06	.47*
Other-directedness	.02	.26**
Acting dimensions	-.06	.20**
Extraversion	.04	.09

**p<.05.

Coefficient alpha was computed as a measure of internal consistency reliability for EPQ (Idealism and relativism), self -monitoring scale and its subscales. Coefficient alpha for the idealism scale was .76, for the relativism scale it was .77 and for the self-monitoring scale, it was .74

The first hypothesis proposed the existence of negative relationships of ethical idealism to self-monitoring and its subscales. The results in the Table indicate that there is no such relationship between ethical idealism and self-monitoring and its subscales. Therefore, the results did not support the proposed hypothesis.

The second hypothesis was that there were significant and positive relationships between ethical relativism and self-monitoring and its subscales. The results show that there were positive relationships among ethical relativism and self-monitoring and its subscales except for the extraversion subscale.

V. CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationships of ethical beliefs to self-monitoring and its subscales. The results did not support hypothesis I as highlighted by the insignificant relationships between ethical idealism and self-monitoring. The reason may be that an idealistic individual puts a line between a facade of regional appropriateness and ethical beliefs. They may monitor and adapt their behavior according to social cues. However, when they encounter ethical issues they may try to solve them by applying universal moral principles rather than the moral principles of the society in which they live. The results also showed that there is no relationship between relativism and the extraversion subscale. The reason may be that a desire for being center of attention can be detrimental to social appropriateness if the desire becomes too explicit. Since the desire of the individual becomes consciously apparent, the individual may not pay attention to moral principles of the society.

Positive relationships were found among ethical relativism and self-monitoring, the acting subscale and the other-directedness subscale. This result suggests that ethical relativism is a concern in various social situations. The reason may be that relativistic individuals are skilled at diagnosing social context and their behavior varies with social norms. These results also indicate that relativistic individuals are more concerned with social impression management behavior.

Overall, it is true that business in general stands to gain more from application of social appropriateness than by ignoring it. Thus, managers make the environment compatible with their dispositions. On the other hand, managers should be aware of the ethical relativism, which can be excused (e.g., bribery and sale of harmful products) for cultural variety. They may take advantage of this ethical behavior to create a good impression on their audience. Particularly, when a firm is deciding to operate internationally, it moves into an arena-involving complex the ethical beliefs. Trying to fit into this ethical environment may encourage unethical behavior if the ethical climate of the country is unclear. Therefore, managers should continuously maintain a delicate balance between obeying and disregarding the ethical rules of the environment in which they conduct business.

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