

Role of Gender and Business Ethics Education in Ethical Judgment of Post Graduate Students

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Abstract

The present study is undertaken to analyze the impact of gender on ethical judgment of business students taking business ethics education into consideration. This study aims to examine the impact of gender and business ethics education on the ethical judgment of postgraduate students. The sample of 90 students was chosen from the postgraduate business students studying in a private B-school in Uttar Pradesh. The business school offered business ethics course as optional course in third semester. The ethical judgment was measured with the help of two scenarios which were adopted from Frank (2004). The first ethical dilemma was related with business situation and the other was related with a non-business related situation. The study finds that though business ethics education and gender plays little role in improving the ethical judgment of young post graduate students, yet business ethics education plays an important role on the relationship between gender and ethical judgment. This study is limited to postgraduate business students considering the fact that these students have fairly developed understanding of business ethical issues.

Key Words: Ethical Judgment, Business Ethics Education, Gender

I. Introduction

The effectiveness of business ethics courses has been questioned by many researchers. Jewe (2008) opine that a business ethics course will not affect student's ethical attitude significantly. Lampe and Engleman-Lampe (2012) support this argument by demonstrating that ethical training has no significant impact on ethical behavior, measured by cheating rate, of business students. Despite these criticisms, many business schools across the world have taught business ethics to their UG and PG business students (Waples et al. 2009). Litzky and MacLean (2011) observe that business ethics are being taught either as a separate course or as a part of other courses in more than 70% of top business schools worldwide.

Researchers are interested in exploring factors affecting the relationship between business ethics education and ethical attitude and behavior. Kohlberg (1969) opine that age should positively affect ethical perception and behavior "due to development of a moral compass". However, Borkowski and Ugras (1998), in their meta-analytical study, report that age

affects ethical perception, attitude and behavior both ways, positively and negatively. Similarly, there is debate on the role of gender on ethical perception, attitude and behavior. Robin and Babin (1997) show, in their meta-analysis study on the role of gender on ethical outcomes, that there is no significant relationship between ethicality of male and female students of business courses. However, their study report significant differences in male and female student's ethical behavioral intentions, but insignificant differences in ethical judgment of males and female business students.

The present study is undertaken to extend the previous research in this and analyze the impact of gender on ethical judgment of business students taking business ethics education into consideration. This study aims to examine the impact of gender and business ethics education on the ethical judgment of postgraduate students. This study is limited to postgraduate business students considering the fact that these students have fairly developed understanding of business ethical issues.

II. Literature Review

Many research studies, analyzing the impact of gender on ethicality of business students and professionals, have found women more ethical than their male counterparts (e.g., Roxas and Stoneback 2004; Albaum and Peterson 2006). Albaum and Peterson (2006) demonstrate that male undergraduate business students are slightly, but significantly, lesser ethically inclined than their female counterparts. Similarly, Nguyen et al. (2008) observe that female business students exhibit a higher level of ethical judgment than that of male students. Many research studies, examining ethicality of male and female business professionals, also support this conclusion (Hoffman, 1998; Malinowski and Berger, 1996).

Considering the previous research findings, this study hypothesizes

H₁: Female students will make better ethical judgment on business ethical dilemmas than their male counterparts.

Further, research studies have shown that those students cheat for better academic grades tend to be more unethical in their professional conduct (Lawson 2004; Hutton 2006). In this regard, it is interesting to mention that Lampe and Engleman-Lampe (2012) report that business students are more likely to use unfair means or involves in unethical practices than their counterparts in other disciplines. However, it is also argued that individuals' cognitive, emotion, and judgment may change as they move through stages of moral developments (Kohlberg's, 1969). This theory supports the positive effect of business ethics education on ethicality of individuals as the ability to make ethical decisions will improve and can be learned through ethics education (Gundersen et al. 2008). Thus, the study argues that business ethics education will positively affect ethical judgment of students.

Hence,

H₂: Business students studying "business ethics" will make better ethical judgment on ethical dilemmas than those who are not studying "business ethics"

Regarding the interaction of business ethics education on the impact of gender on the ability to make better ethical judgments when faced with business ethical dilemmas, it is argued that business ethic education will affect the impact of gender on ethical judgments. Following hypotheses can also be derived from the above mentioned two hypotheses, with respect to who will make better ethical judgments when faced with business ethical dilemmas.

H₃: Female students studying business ethics will perform better than female students not studying the same

H₄: Female students studying business ethics will perform better than male students studying the same

H₅: Female students studying business ethics will perform better than male students not studying the same

H₆: Male students studying business ethics will perform better than male students not studying the same.

III. Research Methodology

The sample for this study was chosen from the postgraduate business students studying in a private B-school in Uttar Pradesh. The business school offered business ethics course as optional course in third semester. All Students were in the second year of their two year education programme. Two groups were formed based on whether they have opted for the "business ethics" course or not. Thus there were two groups in this study i.e. a treatment group of business students who chose "business ethics" course during third semester, and a control group of students who did not opt for this course. These students were not informed about the objective of our study as this might influence the result of this study because of the effect of social desirability on ethical decisions, particularly when the

research focuses on gender differences (Dalton and Ortegren 2011). Another issue was if the respondents guess or know the objective of this study, they would have provided the “socially desirable” responsive (Pedhazur and Schmelkin 1991).

So to minimize the impact of such influences, the study employed a survey administered in common class for all students irrespective of whether they studied business ethics course or not. Moral judgment on ethical dilemmas was measured in a common class without asking any personal information, except the enrollment number, and information regarding their enrollment status for business ethics course. Students were presented with two ethical dilemmas where one was business related and other was non-business related. The survey was administered in the month of January 2016 so as to ensure student studying the course on business ethics have finished the course successfully. Later, information regarding their gender and enrollment status for business ethics course was taken from their department office with the permission of their Head of Departements.

The ethical judgment was measured with the help of two scenarios which were adopted from Frank (2004). The first ethical dilemma was related with business situation and the other was related with a non-business related situation. The business dilemma was if the respondent will, as a business person, inform their supplier of an error on the invoice bill and

ask for the correction of amount which will be much higher than the previous one. The other dilemma was related with day to day life situation. Students were asked if they will return a purse containing ten thousand rupees and having owner’s visiting card. In each dilemma, students were asked to rate how likely they will respond in particular way ranging from 1 (will not do it) to 100 (will surely do it).

IV. Data Analysis and Findings

Total 97 surveys were collected out of which 90 were found suitable for data analysis purpose. The sample consisted of students having specialization in marketing (40 %), finance (20 %), human resource (22 %), and general management (18 %). There were 40 % Female students and 60% male students in the sample. 60 % of the students have studied the course on business ethics and completed successfully while remaining 40% students have not opted for this course. The average CGPA of the sample was 6.12. Further for testing the hypotheses of this study, independent sample t-test was used to compare the means of different groups.

Table 1 shows the results of t-test for the impact of gender on business and non-business related dilemma. As the p-value is greater than .05, we cannot reject the null hypothesis of no difference. Hence, the H1 does not get supported and this study finds that gender does not influence the ethical judgment of students.

Table 1: t- test for Hypothesis 1

Variables	Male		Female		t-test	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	t	Sig. P
Business related dilemma	44.27	22.50	47.63	21.03	0.71	0.47
Non-business related dilemma	38.35	23.64	40.69	21.61	0.47	0.63

Similarly Table 2 shows the impact of “business ethics” education on ethical judgment and here as well, no significant difference was found in the ethical judgment of the students who have studied business ethics and who have not as part of their post graduate programme. Hence, second alternative hypothesis also does not get supported by this study

Table 2: t- test for Hypothesis 2

Variables	Students of Business Ethics		Other Students		t-test	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	t	Sig. P
Business related dilemma	40.20	23.07	38.91	22.20	0.26	0.79
Non business related dilemma	41.87	21.60	39.75	21.71	0.45	0.65

Finally, to analyze the impact of interaction of business ethics education on the relationship of gender and ethical judgment, remaining four alternative hypotheses were tested. No hypotheses among the remaining four gets supported except H5. Table 2 shows that there is no significant difference in the ethical judgment of female studying business ethics to the ethical judgment of those female students who did not study that course.

Table 3: t- test for Hypotheses 3

Variables	Female Students of Business Ethics		Female Students of Other Courses		t-test	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	t	Sig. P
Business related dilemma	38.09	20.68	39.06	20.26	0.02	0.98
Non business related dilemma	39.09	19.67	42.18	19.31	0.34	0.72

Similarly as analysis of H1 shows that gender does not influence the ethical judgment, the same was also found true when compared between female and male students who studied the business ethics as the part of their post graduate programme. Table 4 and Table 6 show the results of t-test analyzing H4 & H6 and as p value is greater than .05, null hypothesis of no difference will not be rejected. Table 5 shows the only hypothesis of this study being supported i.e. female students studying the business ethics education will make better judgments than that of male students who have not studied business ethics.

Table 4: t- test for Hypotheses 4

Variables	Female Students of Business Ethics		Male Students of Business Ethics		t-test	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	t	Sig. P
Business related dilemma	42.18	19.31	37.43	17.15	0.85	0.39
Non business related dilemma	39.10	18.75	41.56	18.86	0.42	0.67

Table 5: t- test for Hypotheses 5

Variables	Female Students of Business Ethics		Male Students of Other Courses		t-test	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	t	Sig. P
Business related dilemma	49.68	22.61	37.20	14.50	2.13	0.03
Non business related dilemma	50.31	23.34	36.79	18.39	2.04	0.04

Table 6: t- test for Hypotheses 6

Variables	Male Students of Business Ethics		Male Students of Other Courses		t-test	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	t	Sig. P
Business related dilemma	40.69	19.69	41.87	21.35	0.94	0.34
Non business related dilemma	41.43	17.58	38.95	20.69	0.17	0.86

V. Conclusion

As no hypotheses of this study gets supported by the empirical data except on the role of ethics education on the relationship between gender and ethical judgment, it can be concluded that business ethics education and gender plays little role in improving the ethical judgment of young post graduate students. However, this study also found that business ethics education plays an important role on the relationship between gender and ethical judgment. The findings and results of this study should be considered in the light of various limitations. Though the sample size was sufficient for testing hypotheses, it was indeed small and consists of students of one B-school only. So generalizability of findings is limited due to its limited geographical coverage. Further, there is a difference in classroom situations and real world and it may not necessarily be true that how students respond to ethical dilemma given in classroom setting will also be same when faced in real life. Nevertheless, this study does not suggest discontinuing business ethics education being imparted in B-schools because it does sensitize students at very early stage that about the ethical dilemmas and their implications in real world. The earlier students learn the importance of ethical behavior and attitude in their career, the sooner they will start developing the same (Borkowski and Ugras 1998).

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