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INFORMATION ORIENTATION AND ETHICAL PRACTICES IN GOVERNMENT ORGANISATIONS: A CASE OF HEALTH SECTOR

ANJU THAPA
RESEARCH SCHOLAR
THE BUSINESS SCHOOL
UNIVERSITY OF JAMMU
JAMMU

DR. VERSHA MEHTA
PROFESSOR
THE BUSINESS SCHOOL
UNIVERSITY OF JAMMU
JAMMU

ABSTRACT

Information is widely recognized as the most important asset of organization in the current transition of developed countries towards knowledge-based economies. With the advent of new technologies and innovations, the entire work system in corporate as well as government has become more oriented towards efficiency, cost-effectiveness and transparency. The present paper is an attempt to study the level of Information Orientation (Information technology practices, Information management practices and Information behavior and values) among the employees in the health and medical sector organizations. The study also investigates the impact of Information Orientation on ethical practices in both the select public as well as private sector health organizations. The results revealed that Information orientation does have a positive impact on enhancing ethical practices in an organization. Also it has been found out that the Information orientation in public organisation is significantly different than in the private sector organization.

KEYWORDS

Ethical practices, Information orientation, Knowledge based economy.

INTRODUCTION

Information is widely recognized as the most important asset of an organization especially as a result of transition of economies to being knowledge-based. It has been seen, since the last decade, that there has been an increasing interest in managing knowledge in the organizations. This has been due to the rapid development of information systems and technologies which have enabled organizations to manage their knowledge assets more effectively. With the advent of new technologies and innovations the entire work system in corporate as well as government organizations has become more efficient, cost-effective and transparent. The organizations of late, have realized that the intellectual capital and the corporate knowledge is a valuable asset which needs to be shared as well as managed effectively to improve ethical practices in organization. Besides, it also enables organizations to communicate and share information instantaneously across the globe. This is in the backdrop of Information becoming a critical success factor for gaining competitive advantage.

Contemporary organizations are becoming knowledge driven and it has become imperative to keep abreast of the latest trends to achieve success of an organization. It is needless to say that Information and the knowledge is critical not only for competitive existence but also for the sustainability of an organization. In this context, it is essential that every individual associated with the organization be it management, employer, employee, worker, stakeholder or a competitor must be Information Oriented and transparent at work. Thus, for the sustainability of an organization, in a highly competitive environment, there should be a focus on Information i.e. its collection, management and dissemination. Also effective Information use in organizations depends not only on how people senses, represent, and communicate but also on the attitude of seeking, learning, and sharing of information (Information behavior and values).

Various studies have shown that Information Orientation among the employees increases the level of business performance in one way or another (C.S.Lee , I.S.Ko, C.Jung, 2008). Also, it has been found that the Information Orientation significantly reduces information asymmetry. This influence may be mediated by (i) Information sharing and (ii) Information collection. It is also indicated that the organizations having stronger orientation towards information may have less information asymmetry problems and thus in turn would be more capable to take appropriate decisions based on information (Hsieh, Lai and Shi, 2006). Also, one has to be ethical while sharing information in order to be more transparent and efficient at the work place. Ethics is not as simple as deciding what is 'good' or 'bad' – although that is certainly a part of it. Instead, it is about 'doing what is right'. The 'right thing' is often 'the fair thing' i.e. the action that considers others' needs. It therefore, concerns the values that shape our behaviour towards fellow employees, customers, suppliers, competitors and all our organization's stakeholders (Lagan, 2000). Also, it needs to be found out that whether Information Orientation improves ethical practices of an organisation. Also, what impact Information technology practices, Information management practices and information behaviour and values have on ethical practices (Donald A. Marchand, William J. Kettinger, and John D. Rollins, 2001). In addition Information Orientation mediates the link between Information seeking behaviour of employees in the organizations and their performance. Thus, from the above studies it can be assumed that there exists a relation between level of Information Orientation of employees in an organisation and their information behaviour and values, the result of which improves the ethical practices which in turn can enhance overall performance of an organisation. The purpose of this research is to study the relationship between Information Orientation (IO) and Ethical practices (EP), and also to establish a linkage amongst IT practices, Management practices and Information behaviour and values with the Information Orientation and also with the Ethical practices. A comparative study has been done comparing public as well as private sector health organizations. Thus, the Information Orientation improves Ethical practices and Information orientation depends on (i).Information management (IT practices and Management practices) and (ii).Information behavior and values in an organisation.

SCOPE

The finding of the study shall fill the gap in the existing literature and establish a link between Information orientation and ethical practices in the health and medical related organizations. The focus of the study is to determine the Information orientation and ethical practices among the employees of government and private hospitals. The study has been conducted in the select hospitals of Jammu region. The respondents of the research study comprise of the employees in hospitals associated with Government medical college (GMC), Jammu and Acharya Shri Chander College of Medical Sciences (ASCOMS), Jammu.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To study the level of Information Orientation of the select organizations.

2. To study the impact of Information Orientation on ethical practices in the health organizations.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The current literature demonstrated that Information sensing, collection, organisation, communication and its use with a high information orientation are critical to the knowledge-based organisations (Marchand et al 2001). A study conducted on the subject of information orientation by Marchand et al (2001) claimed to be one of the first studies to identify a link between information systems and performance. The study broadens the scope of practices examined and including elements such as information management practices and organisational culture. Also, it has been seen that information based organizations require specialists of many kinds to carry out their mission and translate their objectives into specific actions. For this, knowledge workers or managers play an essential role in managing information and implementing information and communication technology in organisation. (Hargrove, 2001; Kluytmans, 2005; Boonstra, 2005). In a recent study conducted by Marchand (2010), it has been revealed that the information and information related systems represent a competitive advantage as it helps in improving the ability of the managers and employees. Thus, technology has penetrated significantly into business processes and directly controls the key processes and their introduction has resulted in a radical change in the business processes. It is also highlighted that IT alone cannot generate values; rather it is how IT is used that contributes to organizational performance (Prasad and Heales, 2008). Hence, the success of an organization is based on Information advantage. The information is dispersed throughout the market in the form of competition and Information gaps are thus closed (Picot, Reichwald, and Wigand, 2008). Since, the business environment is constantly changing and evolving. Business themselves change over time and as they grow and develop, the information needs of the business will also change.

The Information Orientation model (Aytes and Beachboard, 2007), pointed that the organisation that demonstrates effective uses of Information (Information behavior and values IBV), Information management (Information management practices IMP) and management of its information Technology (Information technology practices ITP) in combination affects organizational performance. It has been seen that if an organisation is "mature" i.e. effective in these three areas, the organisation will experience superior business performance. Gaither and Frazier (2007), revealed in the study that advances in Information and communication technology have allowed organizations to manage operations easily and to work on projects which are globally dispersed among the teams. The wide spread use of e-mail today allows employees to communicate quickly and cheaply with vendors and customers as well as with co-workers. This also results in faster decision and improved performance at the work place. Also, it has been studied that Information Orientation could significantly reduce information asymmetry. This influence may be mediated by information sharing and information collection. In addition to this, IO could significantly influence e-business adoption also. It is found that the company with stronger IO may have less information asymmetry problems, and thus would be more capable to make appropriate decisions based on information (Hsieh, Lai and Shi 2006). Information Technology add different and non-existence capabilities to individuals and groups that may cascade with other impacts. It also shows that IT use will lead to changes in work practices and thereby to organizational transformation (Baxter and Lyytinen 2005).

In addition to it, the ethical practices allow the organisation to identify the gaps between desired to be good practices and what is happening in reality and in turn provide with suggested development actions. It also monitors employees understanding and perception about company's values and culture. Improving Information management practices is a key focus for many organisations, across both the public as well as private sector. Thus as a result of it, there is an impact of information on ethical practices (Malhotra, 2005). The results from existing literature show that practices in the organisation do matter. The organisations having better practices have better out comes. The researchers divide the given organisations into two groups based on particular interests. These are (a) Leaders and Laggards (b) What sets off leaders from laggards. It has shown that leaders perform well in all of the best practices. Leaders are not merely using best practices but they also use them effectively. Laggards, on the other hand, don't have well applied practices and may have problems in performing effectively at the work place. They need to improve their practices in order to catch up with the leaders (Sanner and Wijkman, 2005). Further, Marchand (2004) differentiate between low IO organizations from the organizations possessing high IO. People do not know enough about their customers to adequately serve and anticipate their needs in the former, while Information is easily accessed across organizational boundaries and hierarchies in the later. Efforts to serve customers have failed due to a lack of information and sharing across channels while managing information. Collecting, organizing and maintaining are viewed as everyone's responsibility. Thus, the study confirms previous research findings, related to the "critical role" of information in organizations and specifically small companies. Information has emerged as a critical supporting theme either explicitly having a clear reference to corporate information competence, or implicitly not immediately identifiable as corporate information competence (Sen and Taylor, 2007). Also, the results of the study by Guthrie (2001) indicate a positive association between use of high involvement ethical practices and employee retention which may ultimately result in higher productivity.

Also, it has been seen that ethical attitudes and ethical behavior in organizations may have substantial ramifications on a firm's operation. The study investigates whether or not managers are perceived by employees to exhibit ethical attitudes and ethical behavior and thereby being their role models. Effective strategic ethical practices can help firms to enhance their performance while competing in turbulent and unpredictable environments. When the activities called for by these components are completed successfully, the firm's strategic ethical practices can become a source of competitive advantage. Thus, Ethical practices can be applied to all business activities, both locally and offshore, and are best achieved through transparent and accountable processes. An ethical practice in an organization is about going beyond legal considerations, ensuring compliance with not only the letter of the law, but the spirit too. The organisational practices are also dependent upon the surrounding context and its specific ethical values and principles. Furthermore, it is dependent upon the gap between different perceptions of ethical values and principles and if the outcome of the corporation's ethical values and principles are proactive or reactive in relation to the reigning ethical values and principles in the marketplace and society. Finally, it is also dependent upon the potential and eventual consequences of ethical values and principles (Goran Svensson and Greg Wood, 2007). When the ethical climate is not clear and positive, ethical dilemmas will often result in unethical behavior. In such instances, an organization's culture also can predispose its members to behave unethically.

Thus, from the existing literature it needs to be found out whether there exists any relation between Information Orientation and ethical practices in the organizations. The purpose of this research paper is to study the relationship between Information Orientation (IO) and Ethical practice (EP) and to establish a link among IT practices, Management practices and Information behavior and values on Information Orientation and further in turn its impact on ethical practices. A comparative study of all these factors can be done in both public as well as private sector health organizations in the Jammu region.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study has been conducted among the employees of one of the crucial organization related to common mass i.e. Health and Medical Department in Jammu region of the state Jammu and Kashmir. This sector has been chosen for the study, as it is one of the biggest service organizations which deal with the serving people. Also, this study will be helpful in evaluating the Orientation of the employees of the select hospitals towards information and establish a link with ethical practices. For the purpose of the given study primary as well as secondary data has been used. The Secondary data has been collected from various books, journals, published research papers and websites etc. The primary data has been collected by means of a standard questionnaire (Source: Aytes and Beachboard. *Using the information orientation maturity model to increase the effectiveness of the core MBA IS course; Journal of Information Technology Education, 2007 and Addy. D. et al.*). Copies of the questionnaire were given personally to respondents in the two select hospitals i.e. Government medical college (GMC), Jammu and Acharya Shri Chander College of Medical Sciences (ASCOMS), Jammu. The questionnaire contained a total of 34 (32+2) items with 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1-strongly disagreed to 5-strongly agreed. The sample was randomly selected and 70 respondents were personally collected to give their responses.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATIONS

The study deals with the analysis of the level of information orientation among the employees in the health department and makes comparison between public and private sector hospitals in terms of their ethical practices. The data collected from the respondents has been first subjected to simple percentage method,

mean score and finally the regression method has been used in order to know the impact of Information orientation on ethical practices in the select health organizations.

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

For studying about the demographic profile of the employees, simple percentage method has been used. The results shows that more than half of the respondents are females (54.3%) and rest are males (45.7%). In terms of age majority of respondents (88.57%) are below 35 years and having their tenure less than 2 years (54.3%), 38.6% respondents have their tenure ranging between 2-5 years. About 44.3% employees have income below Rs 15000 and 45.7% have income ranging Rs. 15,000 to Rs. 30,000. More than half (57.1%) of the employees are graduate, 25.7% are under graduate and 11.4% are post-graduate.

TABLE 1: INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY PRACTICES (ITP)

	Information Technology Practices	Public	Private
1.	Sharing knowledge	4.02	4.45
2.	Market trends	2.65	3.62
3.	Taking risk	3.85	3.25
4.	Exploring and sharing new ideas	4.11	4.22
5.	New products and services	3.71	4.00
6.	Relations with suppliers and customers	3.65	3.74
7.	Controlling different operations	4.14	4.20
8.	Employees performance	3.74	4.02
9.	Efficiency of work	4.20	4.11
	Grand Mean Score	3.78	3.95

Table 1 given above depicts the Information technology practices (ITP) in the public as well as private sector hospitals. The table shows the nine statements whose mean scores are calculated for comparing public and private sector health organizations. As revealed by the table, in case of public-sector hospitals, efficiency of work has the highest mean score (4.20), followed by controlling different operations (4.14), exploring and sharing new ideas (4.11), sharing knowledge (4.02), taking risk (3.85), employees performance (3.74), new products and services (3.71), relations with suppliers and customers (3.65), and market trends (2.65). Similarly, in the case of private sector hospitals, sharing knowledge among employees has the highest mean score (4.45), followed by exploring and sharing new ideas (4.22), controlling different operations (4.20), efficiency of work (4.11), employees performance (4.02), new products and services(4), relations with suppliers and customers (3.74), market trends (3.62), and taking risk (3.25). Since, the mean scores of almost all the statements are above 3, except role of information technology in knowing market trends (2.65) in case of public sector hospitals. It indicates that the Information technology practice has positive impact on Information orientation of the employees of the public and private sector health departments. Also, the grand mean scores are calculated which comes out to be 3.87 and 3.95 of public and private hospitals respectively, which shows at there are high Information technology practices in both the organizations.

TABLE 2: INFORMATION MANAGEMENT PRACTICES (IMP)

	Information Management Practices	Public	Private
1	Hiring skilled people	3.68	3.97
2	Providing training skills	4.05	4.42
3	Evaluating people	3.74	4.11
4	Rewarding people	3.60	3.60
5	Information overload	3.42	3.80
6	Reuses of information	3.51	3.97
7	Data updating	3.82	4.14
8	Assessing customer demands	3.88	4.22
9	Anticipating problems	3.82	4.28
	Grand Mean Score	3.72	4.05

Table 2 given above depicts the Information Management Practices (IMP) in the public as well as private hospitals of Jammu region. The table shows the mean scores of the statements and thus, comparison of the public and private sector health organizations can be done. As indicated from the table, in case of public-sector hospitals, providing training skills has the highest mean score (4.05), followed by assessing customer needs (3.88). It has been seen that data updating and anticipating problems has equal mean score (3.82), followed by evaluating people (3.74), hiring skilled people(3.68), rewarding people (3.6), reuse of information (3.51) and information overload (3.42). Similarly, in case of private hospitals, providing training skills also has the highest mean score (4.42), followed by anticipating problems (4.28), assessing customer demands (4.22), data updating (4.14), evaluating people (4.11). In this case, hiring skilled people and reuse of information both has equal mean score of 3.97, followed by information overload (3.8) and rewarding people (3.6). Since, the mean scores of all the statements are above 3, it indicates that the Information technology practices has positive impact on Information orientation of the employees in the health department. Also, the grand mean score are calculated which comes out to be 3.72 in case of public sector and 4.05 in case of private sector hospitals, which clearly shows that Information Management Practices (IMP) are high in both sectors but more in case of private sector than public sector health organizations .

TABLE 3: INFORMATION BEHAVIOR AND VALUES (IBV)

	Information Behavior and Values	Public	Private
1.	Information exchange	4.05	3.97
2.	Keeping information	2.20	2.28
3.	Informal sources of information	2.40	2.02
4.	Inaccurate Information	3.37	2.30
5.	Manipulating information	2.82	2.02
6.	Relevant information	4.00	4.11
7.	Discloses information to its members	3.54	3.42
8.	Evaluating people	3.97	3.74
9.	Changes in the government	3.71	4.05
	Grand Mean Score	3.34	3.10

Table 3 given above depicts the Information Behavior and Values (IBV) in both public and private sector health organizations. The table shows the mean scores of the nine statements which are categorized under Information Behaviour and Values. In the public sector hospitals the information exchange has the highest

mean score (4.05), followed by relevant information (4), evaluating people (3.97), changes in the government (3.71), discloses information to its members (3.54), inaccurate information (3.37), manipulating information (2.82) and informal sources of information and keeping information has equal mean score of 2.20. Like wise the mean scores of the private sector hospitals are calculated. The highest mean score are (4.11) of relevant information, followed by changes in the government (4.05). The mean scores of information exchange and informal sources of information was equal to 3.97, followed by evaluating people (3.74), discloses information to its members (3.42), inaccurate information (2.30), keeping information (2.28) and manipulating information (2.02). Also, the grand mean score are calculated which comes out to be 3.34 and 3.10 respectively of public and private sector hospitals, which shows that Information Behavior and Values (IBV) are high in both the sectors.

Thus, from the above analysis it has been concluded that all the three variables of Information orientation i.e. Information technology practices (ITP), Information management practices (IMP) and Information behavior and values (IBV) are high which indicates that the employees of the health sector organisation are highly oriented towards information.

TABLE 4: ETHICAL PRACTICES (EP)

	Ethical Practices	Public	Private
1.	Discussion about errors and mistakes	4.28	4.22
2.	Loss of privacy	3.45	3.68
3.	Members trust each other	4.12	4.20
4.	Transparency	3.87	4.22
5.	Sharing of gifts	3.81	4.34
	Grand Mean Score	3.90	4.13

Table 4 given above depicts the ethical practices in the public and private sector health organizations. In case of public sector health organizations, the discussion about errors and mistakes has the highest mean score which comes out to be 4.28, followed by members trust each other (4.12), transparency (3.87), sharing of gifts (3.81) and loss of privacy (3.45). Similarly, in case of private sector health organizations, sharing of gifts has the highest mean score (4.34), followed by discussion about errors and mistakes and transparency (4.22), members trust each other (4.20) and loss of privacy (3.68). Grand mean scores of the items of ethical practices were also calculated which comes out to be 3.90 and 4.13 in case of public and private sector health organizations respectively. Thus, from the above table it has been revealed that both public as well as private sector health organizations has high score of ethical practices but private sector has comparatively more inclination towards ethical practices.

TABLE 5: REGRESSION ANALYSIS

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
Public	.875	.766	.062	.30780
Private	.911	.830	.319	.21344

Table 5 given above depicts the overall analysis of the results of the Information Orientation (IO) and Ethical Practices (EP) among the employees of the public and private sector health organizations. The mean scores of the responses were subjected to the regression method in order to know the impact of Information Orientation (IO) on Ethical Practices (EP). In case of Public sector health organizations the correlation between Information Orientation and Ethical Practices comes out to be 0.875, which implies that the correlation between the two variables is positive and high. Also, it has been observed that the value of R square comes out to be .766 in case of public sector health organizations which indicates that 1% change in the independent variable i.e. Information Orientation (IO) may lead to cause 76% change in the dependent variable i.e. Ethical Practices (EP). Thus, it can be concluded that Information Orientation (IO) has high impact on Ethical Practices (EP) in the public sector health organizations. While in case of Private sector health organizations the correlation between Information Orientation and Ethical Practices comes out to be 0.911, which implies that the correlation between the two variables is positive and very high. Also, it has been observed that the value of R square in case of private sector health organizations is .911 in case of public sector health organizations which indicates that 1% change in the independent variable i.e. Information Orientation (IO) may lead to cause 91% change in the dependent variable i.e. Ethical Practices (EP). Thus, it can be concluded that Information Orientation (IO) significantly affects the Ethical Practices (EP) in the private sector health organizations also.

Thus, it can be revealed, that the Information Orientations does have a significant impact on the ethical practices of the employees of both public as well as private sector health organizations. Also it has been seen that the components of the Information Orientation i.e. Information management practices (IMP), Information technology practices (ITP) and Information behavior and values (IBV) individually affects the Information orientation of the employees but the impact of Information management practices and Information technology practices alone cannot lead to the significant results. It is more of Information behavior and values (IBV) which need to be improved in the organizations in order to enhance the overall Information orientation in the organizations. Thus, the overall results demonstrated that for improving the Information orientation of the employees of any organization, Information management practices (IMP), Information technology practices (ITP), along with Information behavior and values (IBV) need to be improved which may enhance the overall ethical practices in the organizations.

CONCLUSION

In summary, it can be concluded that information and information related technology become ever more important organization tools. Its use has become increasingly important for anticipating and reacting to the changing market conditions in both corporate as well as government sector. The attempt to study the Information Orientation and ethical practices among the employees of the health department was quite successful. It helped the employees to understand the relationships among information management practices, Information Technology practices, and the "culture" of information sharing and use i.e. Information behavior and values in an organization. The findings of the study provided an excellent opportunity for the employees of the health sector organizations to be more oriented towards information in order to become more efficient, cost-effective and transparent. In addition, it can be concluded that it is more of Information behavior and values (IBV) which need to be improved in the organizations in order to enhance the overall Information orientation in the organizations. Thus, the study can be concluded by saying that for improving the Information orientation of the employees of any organization, Information management practices (IMP), Information technology practices (ITP), along with Information behavior and values (IBV) need to be improved which may enhance the overall Ethical Practices (EP) in the organizations.

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