

Modeling Situational IT Ethics in UAE

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Abstract

The rapid development in the field of information technology has provided significant benefits to both society and the business world. There are numerous ethical challenges that computer users must deal with. These include violation of intellectual property, hacking, invasion of privacy, honesty, secrecy, loyalty, accountability, and responsibility. Situational and individual characteristics influence information systems employees' behavioral intentions to act ethically. The situational variables that affect employee ethical behavior and financial losses can be controlled and influenced by organizations to determine and control employee ethical conduct and financial losses. Ethics-related losses caused by information systems employees can be successfully resolved by incorporating the code of ethics into the code of professional conduct and employee contract, incorporating ethics into organizational culture, designing rewards for ethical behavior and severe punishments for unethical behavior, and incorporating ethics into the code of professional conduct and employee contract.

Keywords

Ethics, Information Technology Ethics, Professional Ethics, Situational Ethics

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Introduction

The rapid development of information and technology has brought notable advantages to societies and the corporate world. Automation of production processes improved productivity, efficiency, and reduced production and operational costs in businesses. However, besides these noteworthy developments brought by digitalization and automation, societies and enterprises were exposed to and experienced many financial losses due to computer misuse and unethical behaviors by the employees and some external, illegal corporates. Some of the common social and economic problems brought by technology are computer crimes, software thefts, hacking, viruses, and invasion of privacy, and the sale of unreliable software. These cyber activities and crimes had prejudiced many entities of huge sums of money during this digital age.

Research into information communication and technology (ICT) ethical behaviors shows that computer users, in general, face many ethical dilemmas ranging from invasion of intellectual properties, hacking, invasion of privacy, honesty, confidentiality, loyalty, accountability, and responsibility. Information systems employees cannot avoid these ethical problems in their daily activities. According to research, the rapid development of ICT has ripple effects on the social, business, and legal environment, raising ethical and moral issues that expose information systems employees to a wide range of ethical dilemmas.

Eventually, facing ethical dilemmas, information systems employees should decide on ethical behaviors to take: ethical or unethical. Scholars found that situational and individual characteristics influence such ethical behaviors. Individual characteristics and attributes include ego strength, moral judgment, locus of control, attitude towards the ability to control the outcomes, degree of reliance on others for guidance, values, knowledge, personality, demographic characteristics, self-concept, goals, life experiences, and status. On the other hand, situational factors encompass the ethical situation itself, the worker's environments, and organizational context, culture, and work characteristics. Major environments include personal environments, professional environments, legal environments, and social environments. These variables, together with many others such as workers' perceived importance of the ethical dilemma; organizational context; organizational culture; working conditions; and the nature of the ethical situation itself, impact intentions, influencing ethical behavior.

This study will start with a comprehensive literature review around the research problem: factors influencing information systems employees' ethical behavior intention when faced with ethical dilemmas. The exploration of past literature will be followed by a discussion of the methodology employed in this study, and a discussion of results. Finally, the study will end by concluding on the research findings and recommending future actions that corporates may take to prevent further financial losses associated with information systems employees' unethical behavior.

Concisely, situational and individual characteristics influence information systems employees' behavioral intentions to act ethically or unethically; however, organizations may control and influence the situational variables to determine and

control employees' ethical behaviors and mitigate financial losses. Incorporating the code of ethics into the code of professional conduct and employee contract, incorporating ethics into the organizational culture, and designing rewards for ethical behavior and severe punishments of unethical behavior can successfully solve ethics-related losses caused by information systems employees.

Literature Review

Previous research by scholars shows that information systems employees encounter a trail of ethical dilemmas in their daily work activities due to the introduction of new technologies. The introduction of new technologies has ripple effects on a diversity of issues, which converges in a set of moral dimensions from which ethical dilemmas are bred. Concisely, researchers found that the ethical behavior intention of information systems employees, when faced with these ethical dilemmas, is a function of individual characteristics, attributes, and environmental factors.

The Corporate Finance Institute defined ethical dilemma, also known as moral dilemma or ethical paradox, as a decision-making problem that involves two possible competing options, none of which is ethically acceptable [1], whereas Reference [2] defined ethics as behavior guiding principles of what is wrong and right. Thus, information systems employees are obliged to make ethical decisions daily, yet they are compelled to violate one principle in favor of another in many circumstances. According to reference [3], new information and technology are characterized by ripple effects that invite ethical, social, and legal issues that converge on property and information rights, property and information obligations, quality of life, accountability and control, and systems quality moral dimensions.

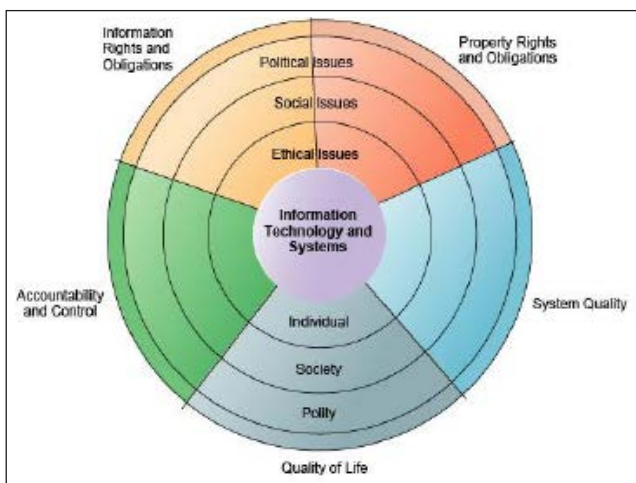


Fig 1: Information Technology and related systems

Information systems employees have to make well-calculated behaviors and actions in response to the inevitable ethical dilemmas.

Many scholars concurred that employees' behavioral intentions are influenced by individual attitudes towards the situations, the environment, individual characteristics and attributes. Reference [4] coined that individual characteristic such as knowledge and values, ego strength, field dependency, and locus of control, determine their ethical behavior intentions. Moreover, Reference [4] asserted that individual behavioral intentions towards ethical issues are a function of individual attributes. Reference [5] suggested key individual attributes such as moral values, motivation, demographic characteristics, and self-concepts, amongst many. Reference [6] added that job context, culture and characteristics such as corporate policy, goals, professional codes, and rewards and punishments greatly influence employee attitudes. This shows that, in the event of ethical dilemmas, employees' behavioral intentions are influenced by environmental factors, individual characteristics and attributes, organizational and work context, culture, and working conditions. The inherent employee attributes and external factors influence intentions, which later affect behavior.

In the model, reference [4] summarized the situational and individual characteristics that influence employees' ethical behavior intention. Their model shows that individual features such as ego strength, locus of control, perceived normative beliefs, environmental factors, and moral obligation directly affect intentions that determine ethical behavior. However, factors such as individual attributes, moral judgment, cost, cognitive beliefs, effective beliefs, and perceived importance impact attitudes towards ethical situations and eventually influence behavior intentions.

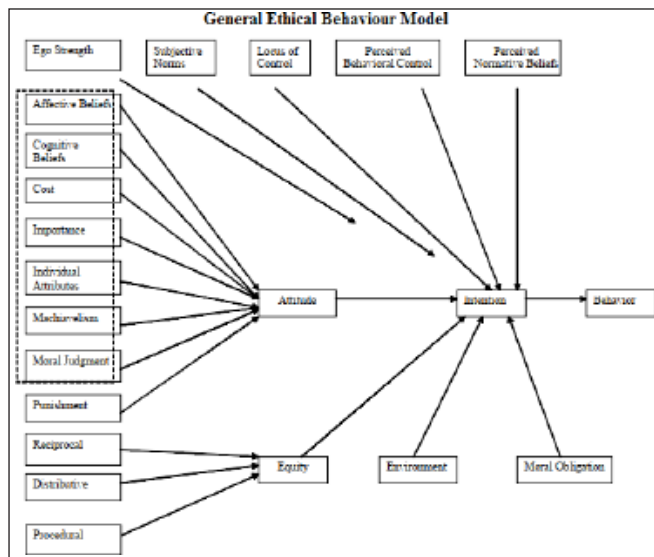


Fig 2: Information Technology Ethical Behavior

Similar researches confirm that information systems employees' intention to behave ethically and their attitude toward ethical behavior is a function of individual characteristics, environmental factors, behavioral controls, and organizational ethical climate. In their information technology (IT) ethical behavioral model, Reference [7] modeled ethical behavior as a function of the intention to behave ethically or unethically, where the intention to behave ethically or unethically is a function of moral judgment, attitude toward ethical behavior, personal normative beliefs, ego strength, locus of control, perceived importance, sex, age, and ethical scenario. In the same model, reference [7] posited that the attitude towards ethical behavior of information systems employees is determined by the societal environment, personal environment, legal environment, business environment, and perceived ethical behavior's consequences.

Reference [7] posited that an individual's reasoning, when faced with a moral dilemma, depends on their moral development stage. Reference [8] classified stages of moral development into pre-conventional, conventional, and post-conventional. Reference [9] agrees that ethical decisions depend on an individual evaluation of favorable and unfavorable behavior (attitude), moral obligation to act (personal normative beliefs), the strength of one's conviction (ego strength), and the degree of an individual's internal or external orientation (locus of control). Besides, reference [10] postulated that an individual's perception of the importance of the ethical issues at hand, one's values, goals, moral levels, and experiences, and individual awareness on the extent of the impact of the consequences of the ethical issues contribute immensely into ethical behavior intentions of information system employees. Research by reference [10] into software piracy confirms that

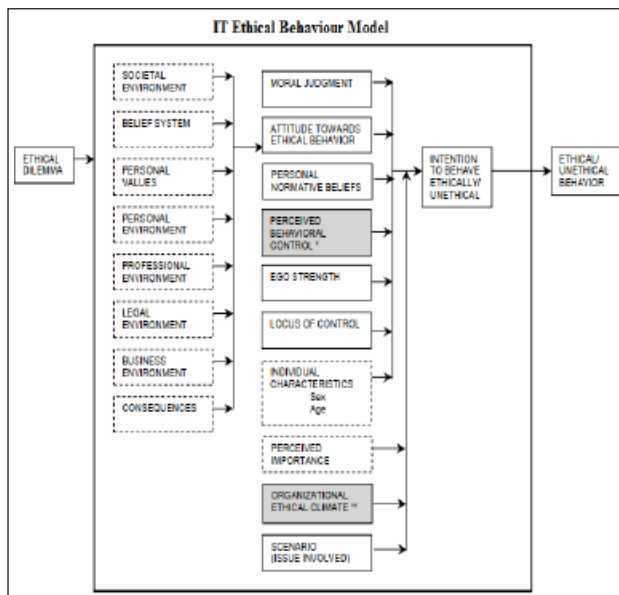


Fig. 3: Influencers of IT ethical behavior intention

consequences significantly influence IT employees' ethical behavior intentions. On a similar note, Reference [11] discovered that, depending on the ethical scenario itself, environmental factors: societal, personal, legal, business, and professional, shape ethical behavior intentions. This analysis shows that individual ethical behavior intentions of IT employees primarily rest on individual and situational factors.

Moreover, other scholars argue that ethics involves individual choices, and upon making ethical decisions, individuals are responsible for their actions' consequences. This idea concurs with the view of perceived consequences. To this end, Reference [12] affirms that ethical choices and actions are influenced by the concepts of responsibility, accountability and liability. The concept of responsibilities entitles the IT employees to accept all potential costs, duties, and obligations embedded in their ethical behaviors and actions [12]. Further, responsibility ensures that mechanisms are in place to trace the one responsible for particular consequences, and liabilities entitle affected parties to recover losses resulting from someone's actions [6]. On this ground perceived consequences due to one's responsibility, accountability and liability, guide individual employees' ethical behavior intentions. It implies that individual IT employees will make ethical decisions that do not bring more problems to them by carrying out an extensive ethical analysis to assess ethical situations. Eventually, ethical analysis plunges into examining the ethical scenario, the environment, and consequences, concurring perfectly with the ideas of ethical models presented.

Organizational context factors intervene through a code of professional conduct and code of ethics that defines appropriate ethical behaviors. Reference [13] posited that high-tech companies like Google Inc. and Microsoft Inc. pursue appropriate ethical behaviors through professional conduct codes to guide their information systems employees' behaviors. Employees react to the rewards and punishments attached to codes of conduct, concurring with the IT ethical models' ideas.

Methodology

This research was constructed on the existing literature by conducting a comprehensive literature review related to and published on information systems employees' behavioral intentions when faced by ethical dilemmas in UAE. A comprehensive literature review assisted the researcher to build the researcher on and relating it to already existing knowledge and findings. There is already overwhelming research concerning information systems employees' behavioral intentions when faced with ethical dilemmas. Constructing the research on such existing empirical evidence reduces research duplication and saves both time and financial resources. Reference [14] argues that using existing literature as a research methodology facilitates theory development and advancement of knowledge by integrating findings and perspectives from numerous empirical findings, profoundly addressing research questions.

A. Research Sample

This study gathered pertinent information relating to employees' behavioral intentions when faced with ethical dilemmas from all major online journal sources such as Science Direct, Google Scholar, IEEE, JSTOR, Springer, and Research Gate. These online journal sources are a collection of reliable and peer-reviewed journal articles. The researcher established well-thought inclusion and exclusion criteria to select high-quality journal articles relevant to the research problem: information systems employees' behavioral intentions when faced by ethical dilemmas in UAE. Keywords that characterized the inclusion and exclusion criteria included information systems, ethics in IT, ethical dilemmas, and employees' behavioral intentions.

Moreover, for trusted, reliable, and high-quality secondary information, the researcher collected only at most five years old peer-reviewed articles. The priority given to articles that consider information systems' ethical issues in the UAE. For a broad and profound analysis, the researcher included only fifteen journal articles in the sample. This small sample promoted scrutiny and study of concepts.

B. Data Collection And Analysis

For all articles that qualified in the sample, the researcher thoroughly scrutinized the methodology and research findings sections, followed by a synthesis of the findings to draw evidence on a meta-level. The researcher collected all evidence that uncovers information systems employees' behavioral intentions when faced with ethical dilemmas. At one point, this evidence helped the creation of conceptual models and theoretical frameworks.

Reference ^[14] commented on the accelerated pace of knowledge production and development industries, which also remained fragmented and interdisciplinary. Reference ^[14] argued that this development inhibits keeping up with advanced research, being at the research forefront, and assessing collective evidence in a particular field (2019). These features characterize the information and technology industry. Despite the availability of ready data on ethics and information systems, approaching the research problem from a field study angle would not provide in-depth analysis and exploration into the concept. Hence, the considerations for a comprehensive literature review.

Eventually, after analyzing and exploring evidence from the existing literature, the researcher presented and commented on the findings. Most evidence circulated around the general IT ethical behavior models, used in this study to exhaust the research problem.

Results

The study gathered those employees' behavioral intentions when faced by ethical dilemmas influenced by individual and situational characteristics. The researcher found that a number of theoretical and conceptual models developed around IT

ethical behavior intentions, and they all converge around individual and situational factors concerning employees' behavioral intentions.

C. Individual Characteristics

The research gathers that individual attributes such as ego strength, moral judgment, locus of control, attitude towards the ability to control the outcomes, degree of reliance on others for guidance, one's values, and knowledge significantly influence ethical behavior intentions among ICT employees. Research shows that these personal characteristics vary from one individual to another, and each employee will behave differently according to his or her set of personal features [4]. Scholars isolated ego strength, moral judgment, and locus of control as the most significant personal qualities that guide ICT employees' behavior intentions when faced with ethical dilemmas.

Ego strength: Unlike low ego strength individuals, the study gathers that high ego strength individuals resist impulses and follow their convictions [7]. Thus, when faced with an ethical dilemma, employees with high ego strength are expected to ignore external forces and behave according to their views and principles, unlike employees with low ego strength.

Locus of control: The study distinguishes internally-oriented and externally-oriented individuals and concluded that internally-oriented employees attribute their life events to their own behaviors and efforts. On the contrary, externally-oriented employees attribute ethical dilemmas to forces beyond their control [5]. Thus, these two groups of employees will react differently to ethical paradoxes; internally-oriented employees are more likely to behave ethically than externally-oriented.

Moral judgment: There are three moral stages: pre-conventional, conventional, and post-conventional exits [7]. Pre-conventional employees will consider their self-interest more than morality; conventional employees will consider group values, societal norms, and laws; and post-conventional employees' value morality beyond one's group values, laws, and norms. Thus, post-conventional employees are more likely to behave ethically, followed by conventional employees; yet pre-conventional employees exhibit unethical behavior characteristics.

D. Individual Attributes

The research isolated individual attributes influencing information systems employees' behavioral intentions in ethical dilemmas. These attributes include moral levels, personality, demographic characteristics, self-concept, goals, life experiences, and status [4]. Researchers noted a correlation between ethical behavior to age, gender, and experiences. Authors concurred that ethical perceptions vary across and change with age and experience and that gender is determinant of ethical and unethical behavior intentions. Thus, when information systems employees face ethical dilemmas, their behavioral intentions to act ethically or unethically will be controlled by their life and work experiences, age, and gender. Scholars concur that these unique personal attributes influence one's attitude towards the ethical dilemma, influencing behavior intentions.

E. Organizational Context, Culture, and Work Characteristics

Factors related to the organization's context, culture, and working conditions influence ethical behavior intentions in ethical dilemma situations. Scholars isolated work conditions such as rewards and punishments, professional codes of conduct, corporate goals, and policies.

Organizational culture: Scholars concur that each organization has a unique ethical atmosphere, which sets the platform and standards for ethical decision-making. As a result, individual employees' behavioral intentions are shaped by their perception of the corporate ethical atmosphere [6]. Some frequently appearing ethical climates include independence, caring, and rules.

Corporate goals: Information systems employees also react to the goals and profit motive of their organizations. They will choose behavioral intentions that are coordinated with the corporate objectives. Thus, in ethical dilemmas, a decision that protects the organization and helps it achieve its goals will be the most favorable to ICT employees.

Professional codes of conduct: Professional codes of conduct set ethical behavior standards and professional expectations within the information systems profession [7]. Researchers found that, when faced with ethical dilemmas, information systems employees refer to these professional conducts. In the UAE, ICT professionals will be bound by ICT enactments that govern data protection, privacy, video privacy, electronic communications, and computer security. Other authorities posit that professional codes of conduct make ICT professionals responsible, accountable, and liable for their actions and behaviors, improving ethical behaviors.

F. The Ethical Dilemma Itself

Researchers argued that an ethical scenario being judged or an employee is facing controls his behavioral intentions. Ethical situations vary from one situation to another, and each situation requires a unique approach or response [9]. Scholars found that employees' attitudes and behaviors vary significantly from one context to another. The situational concept correlates to employees' perceived importance of the ethical situation. Researchers argued that employees develop different perceptions of the degree of importance of the issue before them from each ethical situation. Some scholars used the moral intensity concept and developed the concept of perceived importance (PI) of the ethical issue to foresee employee behavior intentions in varying ethical situations [9]. A general conclusion was that when ICT employees rate an ethical situation high in PI, they have a high probability of behaving ethically. In contrast, the opposite holds for ethical situations that rate low in PI.

G. Environment

The research also identified the overwhelming effects of the environment on the information systems employees' behavioral intentions when faced with ethical dilemmas. Authorities agreed on the following major environments: personal,

professional, legal, and social environments ^[11]. The study found that each environment contributes extensively towards intentions, which affects behaviors to act ethically or unethically.

Personal environments: Peer groups and families exert an influence on one's ethical behavior. Peer groups and families with strong ethical values encourage ethical behaviors than those weak ethical values.

Professional environments: Professional environmental factors such as codes of professional conduct and licenses set ethical standards and behaviors. In such environments, ICT employees are more likely to behave ethically to avoid associated punishments since they are made responsible, accountable, and liable for their ethical behaviors ^[12].

Legal environments: Legal issues such as ethical legislation and judicial systems place ethical responsibility, accountability, and liability on ICT employees, encouraging ethical behaviors during ethical dilemmas.

Social environments: Scholars also concur that cultural, religious, societal, and humanistic values shape one's intentions and ethical behaviors. Where such values are strong, employees tend to act more ethically than when the values are weak.

Overall, the research found that employees' behavioral intentions are influenced by individual and situational characteristics when faced with ethical dilemmas. Individual characteristics such as ego strength, locus of control and moral judgment; personal attributes such as age, gender, experience, self-concept, and status; organization culture, corporate goals, and code of professional contact; the ethical dilemma itself; and the environmental variables impact ethical intentions, which in turn influence ethical behaviors.

Conclusion and Future Recommendations

H. Conclusions

This study confirms that employees are subject to multiple ethical dilemmas following the rapid developments in information and technology. Ethics turns out to be highly essential and very crucial for organizations implementing the use of Information Technology (IT) in a clear approach ^[16].

The developments in ICT pose have ripple effects on social, legal, business environments, and many others. These ripple effects raise ethical and moral issues that expose information systems employees to a wide range of ethical dilemmas. This study found that the behaviors intentions to act ethically or unethically of these information systems employees is influenced by a wide range of factors that fall into two categories: situational and individual. Individual characteristics and attributes include ego strength, one's moral judgment, and locus of control, attitude towards the ability to control the outcomes, degree of reliance on others for guidance, one's values, knowledge, one's personality, demographic characteristics, one's self-concept, goals, life experiences, and status. Scholars noted that each individual's features and attributes affect behavior attitudes and intentions to act ethically or unethically. The impact of these variables on

individual employees' ethical behaviors formed aided the construction of IT ethical behavior models

More so, besides the individual features, scholars observed that situational factors have an equally important role. Situational factors encompass the ethical situation itself, the working environments, and organizational context, and culture. Major environments include personal environments, professional environments, legal environments, and social environments, which are confirmed to have an overwhelming impact on intentions, and finally, on ethical behaviors. Additionally, the study confirms that employees' general ethical attitude and behaviors vary from one ethical dilemma to another and are impacted by an employee's perceived importance of the ethical situation. Finally, researchers identified the significance of organizational factors and variables such as working conditions like rewards and punishments, professional codes of conduct, and corporate goals and policies. Most of these variables derive their major influence from their ability to place ethical responsibility, accountability, and liability on employees. Thus, information systems employees' ethical behavior intentions when faced with ethical dilemmas are influenced by individual and situational characteristics.

I. Future Recommendations

Since the study results confirm that ICT employees' ethical behavior intentions are also influenced by situational factors such as corporate culture, code of conduct, working conditions, and corporate goals and policies, corporates should consider crafting strategies to deal with losses associated with employees' unethical practices.

Incorporate code of ethics in the code of conduct: Organizations must incorporate a code of ethics in the employees' code of conduct to define ethical behaviors, and set ethical standards. The conduct will act as a reference guide and directs employees' behaviors when faced with ethical dilemmas.

Designing rewards and punishments for ethical behavior: To encourage ethical behaviors, organizations must consider offering employees ethical awards, for example, annually. The awards may include rewarding whistleblowing. Recognition of ethical behavior will motivate and attract all employees to consider ethical practices in their activities^[15]. Also, the human resources department must severely punish unethical behavior for discouraging such behaviors. Punishments may include demoting, dismissing, suspending, or fining unethically behaving employees.

Incorporate ethics in corporate culture: Incorporating ethics in corporate culture will raise the company's ethical standards and guides employees' daily behaviors^[17]. However, employees must be trained and equipped with cultural changes.

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