

Political Behavior in the Public Sector of Pakistan: An Ethical Dilemma

Shakil Sabbir

Trainer and Manager (HRD)
Global Lumber Resources Inc. Dubai, UAE
shak121314@gmail.com

Malik Muhammad Afzal (PhD)

Pakistan Scientific and Technological Information Center Islamabad Pakistan

Faheem Rasool

Allama Iqbal Open University Islamabad Pakistan

Abstract

Ethical education has acquired the key attention of policymakers due to recent incidences of immoral practices at both micro and macro levels in Pakistan. The developing world is already criticized due to the wide prevalence of corruption and wrongdoings. Public officials in Pakistan have been largely criticized due to growing unfair and unethical practices in their respective departments. This study sought to compare the ethical beliefs and political behavior of public officials who have studied business ethics as a course during their academic life and those who couldn't with the help of 203 employees (n=203). Results showed significantly high differences between the two groups for both the variables under investigation. Furthermore, this study also established the missing link in the existing literature, between ethical beliefs of employees and political behavior. Discussion and findings are presented based on the results of the study.

Keywords: *Ethical Beliefs, Political Behavior, Influential Tactics, Pakistan, Business Ethics*

1. Introduction

Governance and transparency have always been highlighted as key impediments in the progress of the developing world (Grindle, 2004; Olken, 2011). Considering Pakistan, it has made significant reforms in the legislative framework to address corruption (Ismail, 1999). According to the latest Transparency International report, Pakistan was ranked 139 on the corruption perception index. Earlier it was ranked at 134 in 2011 and 143 in 2012 (see transparency international official website). Corruption Perceptions Index specifically measures the perceived corruption in the public sector based on opinion surveys and expert assessments. Corruption caused heavy leakages in the national exchequer of Pakistan during the past government (Abbasi, 2012). Since the inception of the corruption perception index in 1995, Pakistan couldn't get any encouraging ranking. Media reports have highlighted various unethical practices by sportsmen (Desk, 2012), media persons (Abbas, 2012), and elected parliamentarians (Klasra, 2011) during the past few years. Even the corporate world of Pakistan is also experiencing substantial ethical concerns in recent years (Raja, 2013; Nangiana 2013; Bhutta, 2013).

Researches show that education categorically develop the moral values of individuals (Tsalikis and Fritzsche, 1989; Wiley, 1998; Hunt and Vitell, 1986; Pascarella et al., 1988; Pascarella and Terenzini, 1999). This was probably the reason, Higher education commission (HEC) of Pakistan introduced ethics courses in the curriculum to develop the attitude and behavior of the people at large. Higher Education Commission (HEC) has the mandate to regulate the Higher Education in Pakistan. Vide 2002 ordinance, HEC is not only responsible for higher education policy but also ensures its quality. It strives to develop and upgrade the curriculum for the

universities (HEC, 2013). Studies have shown diverse findings of ethics education and its effects on various individual and organizational outcomes. It enhances the sensitivity to ethics issues (Bok, 1976) and helps in ethical decision-making (Ritter, 2006). According to Gross (1999), ethics education has a strong bearing on the cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioral outcomes of individuals. Ethics education helps to foster ethical behavior in the organization which further affects its profitability and performance (Luthar and Karri, 2005).

Considering the business world, various authors and experts have contended that ethics instruction improves the ethical understanding of business students (Ruhe, 1991; Luthar et al., 1997) and advances their moral and ethical development (Green and Weber, 1997). Generally, ethical standards and beliefs are perceived to be relatively weak in Asia and particularly in South Asian countries (Nyaw and Ng, 1994; Resick et al., 2006). Since business schools are the platforms to develop business professionals both academically and ethically (Bennis and O'Toole, 2005) therefore, the higher education commission of Pakistan introduced business ethics as a course in the curriculum of business students for their moral development (see HEC Business Curricula).

2. Literature Review

Ethics is taken as moral principles that control individual's act or behavior during course of one's life. The nearly same definition is prescribed in the Cambridge Dictionary that refers ethics as a belief system that guides human behavior. Following the same analogy, business ethics defines employee's behavior in a way to gauge what is right and wrong or what is acceptable and unacceptable.

Ethical behavior is judged on moral ground in terms of good vs bad and right vs wrong (Sims, 1992). According to Velasquez (1999), ethics confers the moral judgement to decide acceptable or unacceptable in business settings. Business ethics consists of a set of moral principles to refrain individuals and organizations in controlling unaccepted practices (Jones, Parker, and Bos, 2005)

2.1 Factors affecting Ethical Behavior

Although individuals' personal qualities (set of beliefs, attitudes, and values) play an important role in promoting their ethical behavior (Barnett et al., 1996; Kohlberg, 1984) yet ethical tendencies are also dependent upon the examples set by the seniors and particularly by the managers in an organizational context (Tsalikis and Fritzsche, 1989, Weiss, 1997). Some other variables shaping one's moral philosophy include personal codes, the conduct of peers, family, and school training (Tsalikis and Fritzsche, 1989; Wiley, 1998). According to Hunt and Vitell (1986), ethical health is shaped by one's personal qualities, education, and environment. Precisely, one can believe that education and training play an important role to inculcate or augment the ethical beliefs of individuals. As a result, different studies have been conducted to define and examine the ethical and moral behavior of business students in various settings (Lane, 1995; Borkowski and Ugras, 1984; Beltramini, Peterson and Kozmetsky, 1991; Lysonski and Gaidis, 1991), the reason might be the lasting effects of the college experience in developing student's moral norms and values (Pascarella et al., 1988; Pascarella and Terenzini, 1999). Since the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan has prescribed Business Ethics as a course in the curriculum of business students, therefore, this study evaluates the following hypothesis;

***H1:** Employees who have studied business ethics as a course are less involved in unethical behavior.*

Literature shows a wide array of researches conducted to segregate different groups in terms of their ethical tendencies (Cohen, Pant, and Sharp, 2001). For example, O'Higgins and Kelleher (2005) attempted to know the ethical orientation and tendencies between HR, marketing, and finance managers. Results indicated that HR and finance managers were found more ethical than marketing managers due to their job demands, perception, and conditions. Relatively HR managers were slightly more ethically sensitized than finance managers (O'Higgins and Kelleher, 2005).

However, most of the previous researches strived to compare ethical perception and manifestation between males and females (Kidwell et al., 1987). In most of the cases, females were found ethically strong than their male counterparts (Betz, O'Connell, and Shepard, 1989; Ritter, 2006; Chonko and Hunt, 1985). Akaah (1989) contended that ethical standpoints in corporate world would go on rise due to unequal segregation of gender-wise employment. Likewise, some studies have explored ethical differences among managers belonging to different regions (Redfern and Crawford, 2010), business students representing various cultures (Chung, Eichenseher, and Taniguchi, 2008), and some other stakeholders (Bone and Corey, 2000).

Likewise, Peterson, Rhoads, and Vaught (2001) attempted to examine the relatedness between age and gender with the ethical views of the business incumbents. The study concluded that junior business executives at entry level positions were more susceptible to unethical behavior. In terms of gender-wise segregation, younger females exhibited high ethical soundness at in comparison to male counterparts while males had relatively high ethical beliefs in older age groups.

2.2 Political Behavior / Influential Tactics

Politics is a common feature of organizational life (Buchanan, 2008). However, it is perceived to be a complex and contradictory phenomenon in the literature of behavioral sciences (Vigoda, 2003; Bodla and Danish 2009). Various attempts have been made to explore the nature, causes, and consequences of this particular construct (Poon, 2003; Vigoda, 2001; Mayes, 1977; Drory, 1990), Yet ambiguity lies due to its varying nature and intensity from organization to organization (Allen et al., 1979; Vigoda, 2003).

Literature showed three paradigms to analyze politics in the organization. A widely influential approach delineates organizational politics as behavior directed to influence others to protect self-interest in a competitive environment (Burns, 1961). This approach mainly dealt with actively involving in political behaviors which were termed as influence tactics. Employees may use different political/influential tactics in their respective environments to manipulate others. For example, Falbe and Yukl (1992) specified ingratiation, consultation, inspiration, exchange, rational persuasion, personal appeals, lobbying, small fractions to networking and undue pressurizing whereas Kipnis et al., (1980) indicated sanctions, exchange, assertiveness, ingratiation, upward appeals, rationality, coalitions and blocking as common facets of influential behavior.

Later Gandz and Murray (1980) suggested measuring organizational politic in perceived terms. They defined perception of politics as a perceptual phenomenon wherein employees in organizations perceive majority of incumbents deliberately following self-centered and self-beneficial behavior that is illegitimate and harmful for individuals and organizations (Gandz and Murray, 1980). This opened new avenues and the mainstream of researches conducted to know the perception of organizational politics in the organizational setting in different environments (Muhammad, 2007; Poon 2003 and 2006; Rosen et al., 2009; Vigoda, 2000). The third dominant

approach appeared to examine political skills an employee possesses while working at the workplace (Ahearn et al., 2004; Blass et al., 2007).

Because of the behavioral theories, the focus of the present study is to understand the political behavior which may be termed as unethical due to immoral practices exercised to secure personal benefits and gains. Organizational politics is defined by various authors as;

“... informal, parochial, typically divisive and illegitimate behavior that is aimed at displacing legitimate power (Mintzberg, 1983, p. 172)”.

“... activities that are self-serving, illegitimate, and often harmful to the organization or its members (Ferris et al., 1989; Kacmar & Baron, 1999)”.

“... a behavior strategically designed to maximize self-interest and therefore contradict the collective organizational goals or the interests of other individuals (Ferris et al. 1989)”.

“... actions by individuals, which are directed toward the goal of furthering their self-interests without regard for the well-being of others or their organization (Kacmar et al., 1999)”.

“... an informal approaches to gaining power through means other than merit or luck (Dubrin, 2001)”.

“... a social influence attempts directed at those who can provide rewards that will help promote or protect the self-interest of the actor (Zhang and Lee, 2010)”.

“... Politics is the process whereby individuals or interest groups use power to obtain or retain control of real or symbolic resources (Bacharach and Lawler, 1981)”.

“... intentional acts of influence undertaken by individual or groups to enhance or protect their self-interest when conflicting courses of action are possible (Gray and Ariss, 1985, p. 707)”.

“... involves activities taken within the organization to acquire, develop and use power and other resources to obtain one’s preferred outcomes in a situation in which there is uncertainty or dissensus about choices (Pfeffer, 1981, p. 7)”.

Foregoing shows organizational politics as a deceptive, divisive, illegitimate, partial, self-serving, and power-grabbing behavior, to protect self-interests and secure rewards at the cost of others and the organization. Therefore, the political environment can be characterized as highly unethical and employees involved in the political behavior can be considered as immoral using unethical practices to secure their self-interests (Gotsis and Kortezi, 2010; Cavanagh, Moberg, and Velasquez, 1981).

According to Vredenburg and Maurer (1984), political behavior is stirred on account of individual personalities, group dynamics and situational stimulated (Dalton, 1959; Pfeffer, 1978). Usually, sharp, astute, prompt, and adventurous people are involved in political behavior (Dalton, 1959; Pfeffer, 1978). These arguments help to develop the following hypothesis;

H2: *Employees who have studied business ethics as a course, have less likelihood to involve in political behavior as compared to those who have not studied business ethics as a course in their academic life.*

The underpinning of the third hypothesis is derived from various theories. According to cognitive development theory, individuals with high ethical values are less motivated to engage in unethical behaviors (Piaget, 1932; Piaget & Inhelder, 1973). Since this measure the ethical beliefs of the employees, therefore, employees with weak ethical orientation are more likely involved in unethical activities i.e. political tactics at the workplace. Moreover, behavior theories claim that behavior intentions and actual behavior are contingent upon the attitude one has about an event, condition, object, individual, or anything else (Ajzen, 1991; Davis, 1989; Davis Bagozzi and Warshaw, 1989). Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), Technology Acceptance Model (Davis et al., 1989), and Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) are all the manifestations of an attitude that plays an important role towards intended behavior. Individual's attitude explicates the positive or negative feelings towards something or towards certain behavior, is shaped on account of belief system (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Therefore, it can be assumed that an individual's moral philosophy may have a bearing on his/her political behavior (influential tactics).

H3: Employees with weak ethical ideology are more involved in political behavior.

3. Methodology

Ethical philosophy and ethical behavior in the public sector is always been questionable. Especially in Pakistan, concerns have been raised about the fairness and moral issues in the government services, both from the context of internal and external customers. Public officials have been categorized among the most corrupt (Transparency International, 2012) therefore, employees working under the umbrella of the government sector were considered the population of the study. For an effective and efficient collection of data, the population was confined to the public sector organizations within the vicinity of the federal territory.

3.1 Procedure;

The main purpose of the study was to compare the ethical beliefs and political tactics between employees who had studied business ethics as a course in the academic life and also to know the relationship between ethical orientation and political behavior. Therefore, data had to be collected by two groups who had studied business ethics and those who had not studied business ethics to know the variation between them.

In Pakistan, business students or students with management science backgrounds are preferred for administrative and servicing jobs in the government sector. However, some other qualifications are also deemed appropriate in parallel with business education.

A questionnaire as an instrument was used, with an item asking if they had studied business ethics courses at any level (graduating/postgraduate) during their academic life. To further ensure, employees were also required to indicate the period of degree completion, the title of the degree, and the name of the Institute. Though it was a difficult task this helped to distinguish employees who had studied business ethics from those who had not. Group-I was named to those who had studied business ethics and Group-II who had not. Employees further had to indicate the GPA (Grade) earned in this particular course. Only those respondents were taken onboard who scored at least a "B" grade (70% marks) as they were assumed to have studied this course in true spirit.

This required the personal efforts of the researcher; therefore 500 questionnaires were distributed to the population elements mostly through self-administered efforts. Around 227 questionnaires were collected back. Among them, 89 were the individuals who indicated that they had studied business ethics. Some of them did not explicitly specify their enrollment details but claimed to

study business ethics. Such questionnaires and some others were filtered out. Ultimately 81 questionnaires were retrieved back from Group-I whereas respondents in Group-II were 122 in total (n = 203).

3.2 Instrumentation

The questionnaire comprised two parts. Part-I measured demographical information about the respondents measuring age, gender, education, and tenure of employment. This part was also accompanied by a question asking "have you studied business ethics as a course at graduating or post-graduation level?" measured through a dichotomous scale (Yes/No) with other necessary detail as mentioned before.

The next part measured individuals' ethical beliefs and political behavior (influential tactics). The main objective of the study was to measure the ethical beliefs of the individuals. Various standard instruments were available to measure ethical tendencies either based on dilemmas (Bay and Greenberg's, 2001; Rest et al., 1999; O'Higgins and Kelleher, 2005) or items concerning ethical orientations either uni-dimensional (Peterson, Rhoads and Vaught, 2001) or multi-dimensional (Perryer and Scott-Ladd, 2013; Peterson et al. 2001; Jackson and Artola, 1997 and Perrier and Tsahuridu, 2004). However, some of the authors have recommended using scenarios to measure ethical orientation being more authentic and reflects real-life situations (Beu et al., 2003). Therefore, 7 real-life scenarios were given to the respondents adopted from the study of O'Higgins and Kelleher (2005). All dilemmas were based on a five-point Likert scale with the following options.

- 1 = Extremely unacceptable
- 2 = Unacceptable
- 3 = Uncertain
- 4 = Acceptable
- 5 = Extremely acceptable

A five-point response scale was employed to measure all items relating to political behavior and ethical orientation (1 = 'strongly agree', to 5 = 'strongly disagree').

To measure political behavior or influence tactics, items were adopted from the study of Vigoda and Cohan (2002) which was originally based on the study of Kipnis et al. (1980) and other related studies. The scale comprised 10 most parsimonious items to measure influence tactics towards supervisors, co-workers, and subordinates each making 30 items in total. All the respondents were required to indicate the frequency to be involved in given influence tactics on the following scale;

- 1 = Never or seldom
- 2 = Seldom
- 3 = Sometimes
- 4 = Usually
- 5 = Always or almost always

4. Results

4.1 Demographical Analysis;

Demographical information showed that the majority of respondents were between the age group of 31 to 50 (62%). Such employees were less volatile to skip jobs and wished to build their careers with their respective organizations. Being male dominant society, 85% of respondents were males associated with different positions. In Pakistan, a Masters's degree is considered as

the least requirement for managerial jobs therefore, an encouraging figure was obtained about the education level. 68% of the respondents had acquired a post-graduation level of education (16 years of education is equivalent to a Masters's degree).

Table 1. Characteristics of Survey Respondents

Measures	Items	f	%
Age	20 or below	8	3.9
	21-30	48	23.6
	31-40	62	30.5
	41-50	64	31.5
	51 or Above	21	10.3
Gender	Male	172	84.7
	Female	31	15.3
Education Level	Graduate	66	32.5
	Post Graduate or Above	137	67.5
Tenure of Employment	Less than 1 year	12	5.9
	1-5 yrs.	44	21.7
	6-10 yrs.	82	40.4
	10 or above	65	32.0
Studied Ethics	Yes	82	40.4
	No	121	59.6

Employees were also required to indicate their total length of service. In this regard, 72% of employees had more than five years of working experience. This figure was quite aligned with the age groups which were reported between 21-50. Length of service also indicated that the majority of employees were in a better position to indicate influence tactics after spending considerable time in their respective organizations. Since respondents had to indicate about studying business ethics as a course at graduating or postgraduate level. Therefore, 60% of respondents had studied business ethics and 40% had not, which were taken on board for further analysis.

Table 2. Mean differences between Groups

Variables	Mean (Standard Deviation)				t-score	F
	n	Group-I	n	Group-II		
Ethical Beliefs	82	2.47 (0.85)	121	3.25 (0.61)	-7.09***	24.03***
Political behavior / Influential tactics	82	2.93 (0.49)	121	3.31 (0.38)	-5.97***	5.23**

*p<0.01; **p<0.05; ***p<0.001

Note: n = 203. Less mean values indicated high ethical beliefs and less political behavior.

An independent sample t-test was applied to compare the ethical beliefs and political behaviors of employees who had studied business ethics (Group-I) during their academic life and who hadn't (Group-II). Results showed a statistically significant difference between the two groups in terms of ethical beliefs ($t = -7.09$, $p = 0.000$). Mean difference was also found for political behavior between these two groups at 95% confidence ($t = -5.97$, $p = 0.000$).

Table 3. Regression Results for Ethical Beliefs on Political Behavior

Variables	Political Behavior/Influential Tactics	
	β	t
Ethical Beliefs	0.21***	5.52
R	0.36	
R ²	0.132	
Adj.R ²	0.13	
F	30.58***	

* $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.001$

Note: $n = 203$.

Considering the mean values between groups, employees who had studied business ethics as a course during their academic life were found ethically strong ($\chi = 2.47$, $\sigma = 0.85$) as compared to employees who lacked any ethical orientation during their study period ($\chi = 3.25$, $\sigma = 0.61$). Results also confirmed more political behavior and influential tactics exercised by the Group-II ($\chi = 3.31$, $\sigma = 0.38$) as compared to Group-I ($\chi = 2.93$, $\sigma = 0.49$). These results substantiated H1 and H2.

Given the importance of ethical beliefs and political behavior, the third hypothesis assumed that employees' ethical beliefs further lead towards political behavior and different influential tactics. The relationship between ethics education with ethical behavior is quite explicit (Luthar and Karri, 2005). Correlation and regression analysis were used to test H3 (Table 3).

Table 4. Regression Results for Ethical Beliefs on Various Types of Political Behavior

Variable	Political Behavior/Influence Tactics					
	Supervisor Focused		Co-Worker Focused		Subordinate Focused	
	β	t	β	t	β	t
Ethical Beliefs	0.24***	5.21	0.14**	2.67	0.20***	4.29
R ²	0.119		0.04		0.08	
Adj.R ²	0.12		0.03		0.08	
F	27.17***		7.11**		18.37***	

* $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.001$

Note: $n = 203$.

A significantly high relationship was found between ethical beliefs and political behavior ($r=0.36^{**}$, $p<0.01$). Regression results also showed that ethical beliefs helped to predict employee's political behavior lending support to our third hypothesis ($\beta=0.21^{**}$, $p<0.001$, $F=30.58^{***}$). Nearly 13.2% variation in political behavior was explained by the ethical beliefs of employees.

Since political behavior comprised three key dimensions i.e. supervisor, co-workers, and subordinate-focused influence tactics, therefore, regression analysis was further applied to breakdown the predicting strength of ethical beliefs for the individual facet. Ethical beliefs although found significant predictors of all the sub-variables, however, supervisor focused influential tactics ($\beta=0.24^{***}$, $p<0.001$) emerged as the key criterion variable of ethical beliefs as compared to co-worker focused ($\beta=0.14^{**}$, $p<0.001$) and subordinate focused influential tactics ($\beta=0.20^{***}$, $p<0.001$).

5. Discussion and Findings

Literature certainly supports the pervasive influence of ethics education in shaping individuals' behavior, their ethical awareness, and moral reasoning (Cagle and Baucus, 2006; Lau, 2010; Mayhew and Murphy, 2009). Weber (1990) claimed that students' ethical awareness or reasoning skills can be enhanced by studying business ethics as a course in their academic career. However, most of the research findings are contributed from the developing world which should be cautiously generalized to the developing world as such countries differ significantly at the cultural dimension scale prescribed by Hofstede (1980; 1993). Pakistan is categorized as a highly collectivist society where ethical concerns have been raised time and again. There also exists dearth research on ethical issues in Pakistan (Hyder and Nadeem, 2001), therefore this study was an attempt in this regard to investigating the ethical beliefs of individuals who have studied business ethics as a course during their academic life. Moreover, it also established the missing link between the ethical beliefs of individuals and their political behavior in an organizational setting.

Results showed that employees who had studied business ethics as a course were ethically strong as compared to those who couldn't be trained in this regard. Ethics education helps to develop moral values of society which has lasting effects throughout their professional career. Therefore, this study compared the two distinctive groups and their ethical manifestations. Although results show an explicit distinction between those who have been given ethical education and who do not have any exposure to business ethics, however, the results should be treated with caution that the ethics education largely depends on the instructor competency and student's willingness not only to study in true spirit but also to incorporate learned norms in their professional life. Otherwise, it may not produce the desired results. A clear distinction is found between the two groups. Employees who had exposure to business ethics showed high ethical beliefs as compared to others. The reason being the careful selection of the subjects for this study. Only those employees were taken onboard who scored high in the business ethics course.

Furthermore, results also confirmed substantive political behavior and influential tactics exhibited by the employees who lacked any exposure to ethics education. Political behavior is conceived as all the influential tactics employees use to secure their benefits ignoring the interest of the organization as a whole. Political behavior is viewed as illegitimate and as counter to organizational goals (Mintzberg, 1983). Influence tactics threaten the partiality of the performance evaluation process both directly and indirectly (Dulebohn and Ferris, 1999; Higgins

et al. 2003; Su, 2010). Therefore, such kind tactics should be discouraged in public organizations.

This study further compared the predicting qualities of ethical beliefs towards supervisor focused, co-worker focused and subordinate focused influence tactics. Among all, supervisor focused influence tactics emerged as the key criterion variable followed by co-worker focused and subordinate focused. Previous researches also highlighted the dominant role of supervisor-focused influence tactics as these helped to enhance subordinates' liking and help in *promotability* (Thacker and Wayne, 1995; Wayne and Ferris, 1990). Employees further needed to use different tactics to maneuver the behaviors of peers for their interests. Though employees needed to influence subordinates since they were already under subordination, therefore, it required the least effort to manipulate their behavior. This ultimately caused comparatively small variance explained about ethical orientations.

5.1 Practical Implications

Theoretically, our study added a discrete finding to the body of literature. We compared the ethical beliefs and political behavior of two vital segments of public offices. Employees with learning and understanding about the ethical principles and conduct, avoid following any immoral behavior. On practical grounds, our study presents the following implications for working managers:

- Business ethics is offered at graduating or under-graduate level. Since business ethics as a course has proved to be the key factor in developing ethical orientation and control the political tendencies among individuals, therefore, it should be offered at a post-graduate and higher level as a compulsory course.
- Employees who lacked any orientation and training about ethical aspects of occupational life should be trained about ethical issues confronting various functional areas of businesses.
- Ethical courses may also be added in other educational programs such as ethics in mass communication, societal ethics, ethics in sports, etc.

5.2 Limitations and Future Directions

The study has certain limitations that should be considered while generalizing the results. Cross-sectional data collection methods are always susceptible to common variance. Secondly, the study was limited to a certain geographical area, hence results may differ in other parts of the world considering varying cultural typologies. Moreover, the labor market in developing countries of South Asia is dominated by females, hence the majority of study respondents were male participants.

The author recommends replicating the same parameters to other parts of the world to see any deviation in the results. Objective measures may also be used. Longitudinal research design may also be followed to see if the results are time sensitive.

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