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Impact of Work Ethics on Job Satisfaction in Malaysian Organisations

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Abstract

A sturdy work ethic embodies certain ideas that guide their work and behaviour that encourage employees to produce great work constantly and the output motivates them to continue to be on track. This study examines the relationship between work ethics and job satisfaction among employees from business organisations. The study employed a quantitative methodology and distributed an online survey to 190 respondents between the ages of 20 and 50 representing a number of disciplines from the public, private, and nonprofit sectors. Data collection and the testing of the study questions used a simple random sampling technique. The research instruments were adapted from (Boretti, 2013; Bellingham, 2011). Questionnaires were distributed over emails and social media platforms. To assess the reliability and investigate the relationship between the variables, SPSS software vs.27 was employed.

Keywords: Work Ethics, Job Satisfaction, Performance, Moral Behaviour, Motivation

Introduction

The origin of the word “ethics” can be traced back to the Greek word *ethos*, which means propensity, custom, appearance or character. Work ethics in the simplest definition is an arrangement of good standards which is called morals. In order to create like-minded, amiable, and moral representatives, an organisation with a strong ethical culture would provide advice and direction in several areas. In any event, there is no ideal moral guidance or standard that is comprehensive, appropriate, and relevant to all organisations (Salahudin et al., 2016). Hence, work ethics is a set of ethical ideas a person makes use of in their job and life. People who possess a sturdy work ethic embody certain ideas that guide their work behaviour, lead them to produce great work constantly and the output motivates them to continue to be on track. Factors like goal-oriented actions, prioritised focus, availability and reliability, conscientiousness, rewards and embracing positivism are identified as contributing to good work ethics.

Contemporary thoughts of morals are derived from rationality, religions, and worldwide societies. In a business, an ethics code is a characterised set of standards which control an organisation in its practice and choices. Employees that adhere to moral principles somehow hold true to strategies and standards while seeking to fulfil the objectives of the endeavour. Ethical behaviour among employees ensures that work is completed with respectability and dependability. Improved confidence among employees is a by-product of morally upright workplace culture. On the other hand, a negative work ethic is actually the result of one person's or a group's actions, which results in a persistent lack of productivity, dependability, accountability, and a widening circle of unprofessional or toxic interactions (Raja et al., 2020). Therefore, ethics is basically a virtue or value which could strengthen a character or abilities of an individual. Whether it is a good or bad work ethic, it all depends on who practices it and how it is practised which correlates to one's job satisfaction.

In its simplest form, job satisfaction refers to the sense of fulfilment or satisfaction that comes from doing one's job. Job satisfaction can be evaluated both, emotionally, and behaviorally. According to Taghizadeh et al (2013), job satisfaction has a distinct dimension which was identified by Alexander (2004); Atteh et al (2020) as the beautiful and positive energy that resulted from a job assessment or personal encounters. Taghizadeh et al (2013) in his study also defined job satisfaction as a combination of psychological, physiological, and environmental factors that upholds honesty and fulfilment as propounded by (Biason, 2020). Job satisfaction could also be attributed to an employee's attitude toward his/her work which is later recognised and drives motivation.

Freeman, Parmar & Martin (2020); Zahrah et al (2016) highlighted that the growth of international trade and technological development on a global scale have shown increased concerns of social accountability and ethical behaviour among all levels of employees. and these research areas are still relevant and strongly debated.

Literature Review

Work Ethics

Work ethics is the discipline in dealing with what is good and bad which should align with moral duties and obligations. While work ethics is a belief in work as a moral good, it is also a set of values centred on the importance of doing work and reflected especially in a desire or determination to work hard. Work ethics can be interpreted as a gesture of personality, temperament, personality and belief in something (Sapada et al., 2018). According to the study, this mindset is no longer owned by individuals but through different groups and the public, and is believed to have many elements, and sources and is associated with a person's psychological value, ingrained views, attitude and hope. Besides that, work ethic determines how an employee behaves in his workplace. This is closely related to the employees' relationship with their employers, colleagues, or corporate clients.

Hence, employees' overall performance is strongly influenced by their work ethics and self-discipline. If a local authority is reliable with a good work ethic and their self-discipline is high, it would have a tremendous effect on employee performance. The work ethic of employees is a normative guideline containing a system of values and ethical concepts as a guideline for personnel in performing job responsibilities within the company.

The normative is derived from work ethics, and the management policy ought to uphold ethical policy such as equity and openness in terms of compensation, career advancement and performance evaluation. This way each ethical choice in the enterprise is no longer linked only to the management but also to the employees. In other words, work ethic is the character of an employee whose work is complementary and fosters truthful dynamics (accommodating, sensitive, responsive, and proactive) within the organisation.

Work ethic also refers to valuing work outside of religion (Czerw & Grabowski, 2015; Kalemci & Kalemci, 2019) by evaluating work in both a moral and regularizing sense. They included a construct which consist of seven dimensions defining the work ethic of Miller et al (2002) namely: allocating an incentive to diligent work, treating work as life's centre, negative attitude of wasting time, dissatisfaction or unwillingness with the expectation of complimentary time, postponement of delight, confidence, and profound quality or ethic.

Taghizadeh et al (2013) stated that morals are a focused legitimacy in an organisation. The prerequisites of organisation management are ethical absolutes and integrity (ethics) is the foundation of a good organisation. When relating to attitude, it is all about how a person acts towards his/her work. This could be obtained earlier from the factor of good work ethic.

Job Satisfaction

According to Wolter et al (2019); Taghizadeh et al (2013), there are certain theories that are related to job satisfaction. This theory, which is divided into micro models and macro models, was developed by (Harold, 1996). The effect of internal variables and powers in granting rewards that make people happy is explained by the micro model. While the outcome of the macro model is more organisation-focused, particularly with regard to the processes that are crucial in generating and providing services.

The micro model includes the employees' assumptions and hypotheses related to ideal needs and job responsibilities. Their perspective is that work fulfilment is based on internal power fulfilment within the job's parameters. Which reinforced the notion that when a person's intellectual and emotional goals are met, they will feel comforted. Harold (1996) clarified some of the suppositions made in the second section of the macro model, stating that job satisfaction is important for the context of the organisation more so than it is for the individual's activity fulfilment. These hypotheses, which are in the macro models' attribute, include a simple technique that is essential for managers. The effectual factors on job satisfaction are divided into environmental and individual factors (Taghizadeh et al., 2013; Toropova et al., 2021). These two variables serve as the main determinants of how satisfied employees are with their jobs. If any of these elements does not turn out to the employee's expectations (satisfaction), they may simply act in a dissatisfied manner and ultimately quit their job. All organisations should incorporate these elements into their organisational policy to reduce employee absenteeism, turnover, and disengagement.

For job satisfaction, the model constructed and tested by Taghizadeh et al (2013) is a fragment of three stages namely job satisfaction, employee perception and possible behaviour. Although job happiness is crucial for employees, organisation managers place a greater emphasis on the outcome of that satisfaction because they are in charge of ensuring that their staff are treated well and feel appreciated.

Two-factor theory of Herzberg et al (1959) was the first to develop a theory which emphasizes the motivator-hygiene components and explains motivation and satisfaction in organisations. According to Alrawahi et al (2020), the theory primarily focuses on the effects of satisfaction and dissatisfaction. They claimed that Herzberg et al (1959) went on to illustrate that, in addition to motivation, there are other features of a job that contribute to satisfaction as well as the factors that contribute to dissatisfaction. Elements of satisfaction include achievement, recognition, work itself, responsibility and opportunity, whereas elements of dissatisfaction comprise salary, supervision, working conditions, company policies - administration - procedures, interpersonal relationships, status and security.

Dugguh & Dennis (2014) theory of affective event theory was extracted from Thompson & Phua (2012) which was first developed by psychologists (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). They explained how emotions and moods actually influence job satisfaction. This theory also shows affective behaviour resulting from the linkage between moods and emotions. Furthermore, affective event theory has underlined that positive and negative induced emotional happenings at work do have a consequential psychological effect towards employee job satisfaction.

Dugguh & Dennis (2014) also linked it to equity theory from Walster, Berscheid & Walster (1973) which reviewed equity theory as how a person gets treated in a fair way in terms of social relationships (Robert, 2020). By meaning itself, equity means the justice given to employees despite their position level, level of concerns given also the major concern of this theory, payment (Kim et al., 2019). It suggests that an employee is distressed or dissatisfied because the input and output given are not equally segregated. This input and output consist of internal and external factors: If this input and output are given strong measures, and both are equally driven towards all employees, there would not be any problem in applying this theory in all organisations. As the theory is entitled equity theory, everything should be divided equally covering all internal or external aspects.

Work Ethics and Job Satisfaction

Work ethic is a major factor in determining how satisfied you are with your career. Unfortunately, even in Islamic countries like Malaysia, most people today refuse to respect the rules and behave inappropriately (Zahrah et al., 2016). Despite the fact that this insight focuses on the Islamic perspective on work ethics, which holds that in order for an individual to succeed in their profession, they must adhere to the Islamic work ethics (IWE), it nonetheless somehow connects to work ethic and job satisfaction in the broadest sense. Komari & Djafar (2013); Islam et al (2020) also reported the same understanding of work ethics and job satisfaction based on religious principles demonstrating a positive effect.

Yousef (2017) also focused on the effects of job satisfaction and attitudes toward organisational change. He reported that the change of attitudes toward organisational change indirectly defined the effect on job satisfaction and job satisfaction has a direct effect on attitudes toward organisational change. Based on the findings, it can be asserted that there is no single model or concept that focuses exclusively on work ethics and job happiness. However, all of the tested elements or questions employed for quantitative research in the prior research studies relevant to Islamic work ethic were implicitly revealed by the earlier study.

The employees in the company have a relaxed attitude towards work ethics. However, there haven't been many studies done on this subject in Malaysian workplaces. According to Komari & Djafar (2013), work ethics has a non-significant negative impact on employee satisfaction but has a notable positive impact on hierarchical duty when it comes to work ethics. Additionally, they stated that while strong work ethic attitudes are important for supervisors and leaders, they could not naturally achieve high levels of job satisfaction. To increase their quality in the workplace, all employees should practice good work ethics, which should be continuously improved. The researchers' propensity to discuss work ethics from a religious point of view has been identified as one of the limitations of prior studies on work ethics like the one conducted by Zahrah et al (2016) which stated that it examined Muslim employees' understanding of religion in Malaysia, specifically in Islamic Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). This study will elaborate on the multicultural and multi-religious perspectives on work ethics and job satisfaction in Malaysia since previous studies have concentrated on Islamic Work Ethics (IWE).

The majority of prior studies also focus on variables like organisational commitment, and Islamic work ethics, as well as other areas like job performance, in addition to work ethics and job satisfaction. Hence, this study was conducted primarily due to a lack of research in this area and to examine the direct relationship between work ethics and job satisfaction.

Therefore, the following conceptual framework is drawn

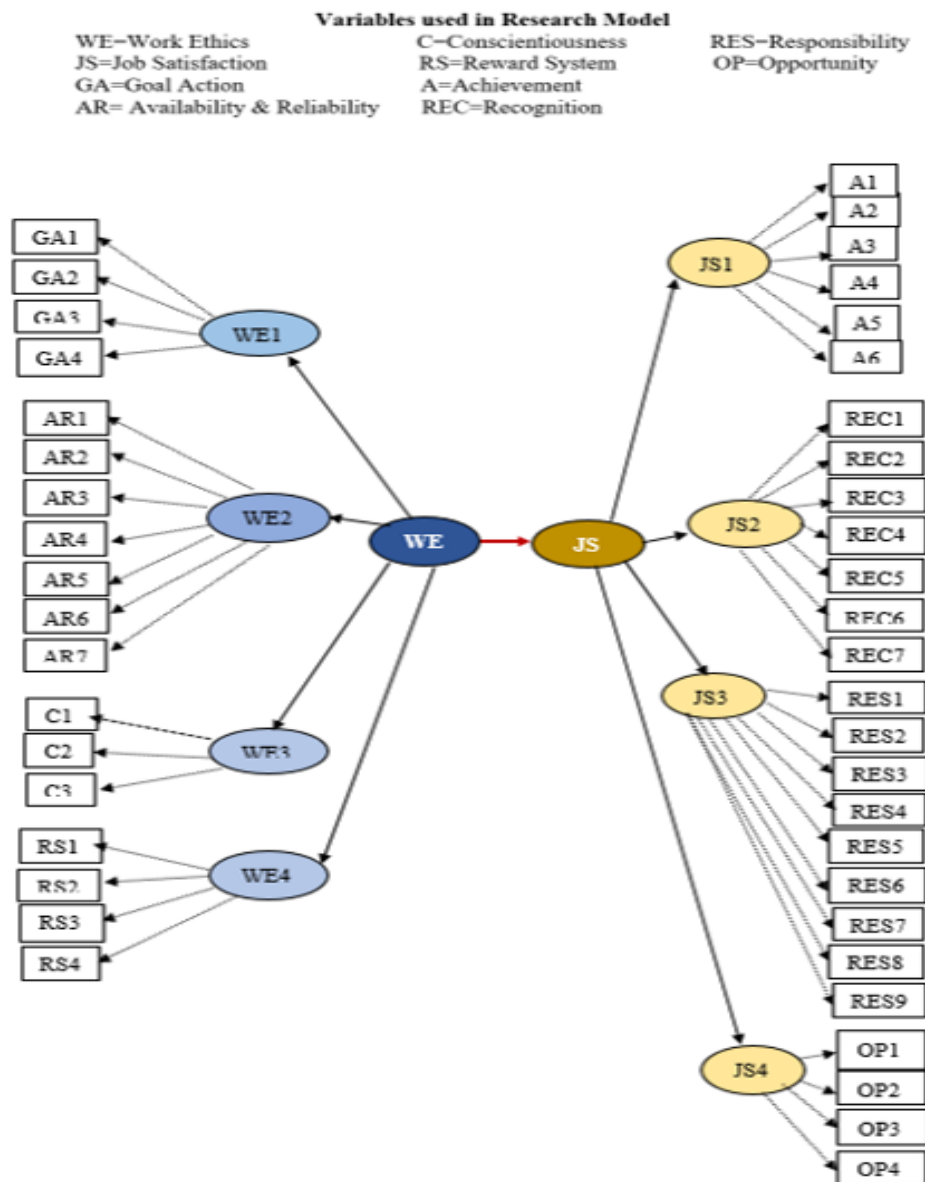


Figure 1. Research Framework

Research Objectives

The objective of the study is to

- examine the relationship between the work ethics variable of goal action with job satisfaction.
- examine the relationship between the work ethics variable of availability and reliability with job satisfaction.
- examine the relationship between the work ethics variable of conscientiousness with job satisfaction.
- examine the relationship between the work ethics variable of reward system with job satisfaction.

Research Questions

- What is the relationship between the work ethics variable of goal action achievement with job satisfaction?
- What is the relationship between the work ethics variable of availability and reliability with job satisfaction?
- What is the relationship between the work ethics variable of conscientiousness with job satisfaction?
- What is the relationship between the work ethics variable of reward system with job satisfaction?

Methods

The study used a quantitative method by employing an online google form (survey questionnaire) to 190 respondents aged between 20-50 from different organisations from the government sector (56), private sector (75) and not-for-profit (59). Multiracial participants from major ethnicities of Malays, Chinese and Indians in Malaysia participated in the study. A simple random sampling technique was used to collect data and test the research questions. The questionnaire was adapted from James Boretti (2013) for work ethics and Richard Bellingham (2011) for job satisfaction. The survey was distributed online via official emails and popular social media apps like WhatsApp, Facebook and Instagram. SPSS software vs.27 was used to measure reliability, and to examine the correlation between the two categorical variables piloted on 50 respondents.

Findings and Discussion

The result of Cronbach's Alpha score of 0.852 showed that the questionnaire was reliable and the set of constructs was consistent.

Table 1

Cronbach Alpha of Questionnaire

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on N of Items	Standardized Items
.852	.851	55

Descriptive Statistics of Variables

Table 1 below shows the descriptive statistics of work ethics variables. The results are obtained by checking the mean analysis of each variable. The four dimensions of work ethics were studied in this research.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics on Work Ethics Variables

Variables	Statements	Mean	Std. Deviation
WE1	GA1	2.97	.814
	GA2	3.00	.848
	GA3	2.30	1.146
	GA4	2.77	.765
WE2	AR1	2.98	.821
	AR2	2.94	.826
	AR3	3.10	.720
	AR4	3.14	.787
	AR5	3.09	.870
	AR6	3.02	.793
	AR7	2.89	.785
WE3	C1	3.03	.800
	C2	2.77	.688
	C3	2.67	.750
WE4	RS1	2.83	.903
	RS2	3.06	.853
	RS3	2.56	.766
	RS4	2.63	.694
	Valid N (listwise)		

The coding of each variable and item was done for identification and labelling purposes. WE1 stands for the variable Goal Action, and GA1 - GA4 represent the question statement or items for Goal Action. While WE2 identifies with availability and reliability, and the items AR1 - AR7 represent the statements for the variable availability and reliability. The same goes with WE3, conscientiousness for items C1 - C3. Lastly, WE4 represented the reward system (RS1 - RS4).

Job Satisfaction consists of four dimensions too as shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics on Job Satisfaction Variables

Variables	Statements	Mean	Std. Deviation
JS1	A1	2.99	.662
	A2	2.81	.733
	A3	2.98	.719
	A4	3.09	.630
	A5	2.81	.685
	A6	2.93	.958
JS2	REC1	2.84	.792
	REC2	2.69	.788
	REC3	2.87	.722
	REC4	3.03	.785
	REC5	2.82	.743
	REC6	2.87	.796
	REC7	3.01	.742
JS3	RES1	2.72	.779
	RES2	2.90	.875
	RES3	2.94	.879
	RES4	2.98	.821
	RES5	2.89	.880
	RES6	2.99	.742
	RES7	2.96	.792
	RES8	2.88	.762
	RES9	2.98	.734
JS4	OP1	2.93	.747
	OP2	3.06	.740
	OP3	2.94	.770
	OP4	2.87	.796
	Valid N (listwise)		

The items A1 - A6 represented achievement, while JS2 (REC1 – REC 7) refers to the variable recognition, JS3 (RES1 – RES9) represented responsibility, and JS4 (OP1 – OP4) represented opportunity and items. By measuring the mean values, the strength of each statement can be obtained, and conclusions can be drawn on the relationship between each variable.

Correlation Analysis

Table 4 indicates the results of Pearson correlation tests for the sub-variables of work ethics namely Goal Action, Availability & Reliability, Conscientiousness and Reward System. All results are recorded based on the Pearson Correlation and the Sig (2-tailed).

Table 4

Validity Test for Work Ethics Variables

Items	Pearson Correlation	Sig (2-tailed)	Description
WE1	.789	.000	Valid
WE2	.876	.000	Valid
WE3	.731	.000	Valid
WE4	.790	.000	Valid

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 5

Validity Test for Job Satisfaction Variables

Items	Pearson Correlation	Sig (2-tailed)	Description
JS1	.897	.000	Valid
JS2	.879	.000	Valid
JS3	.895	.000	Valid
JS4	.848	.000	Valid

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Pearson Correlation showed a significant value of .000 ($p < 0.01$). Based on the significant (2-tailed) value, each variable is described as a valid value. This test has successfully proved that each variable has valid statements and the questions measure what it is meant to measure. This confirms the findings of Amilin (2016) as the results of this study are consistent for all statements measured.

Multiple Regression Result

Table 6

*Multiple Regression Analysis Test
Coefficients^a*

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.536	.272		5.655	.000
	MeanWE4	.498	.097	.480	5.138	.000
2	(Constant)	1.423	.274		5.186	.000
	MeanWE4	.396	.110	.382	3.606	.001
	MeanWE1	.144	.076	.200	1.893	.062
3	(Constant)	1.531	.289		5.292	.000
	MeanWE4	.450	.119	.434	3.779	.000
	MeanWE1	.184	.083	.256	2.207	.030
	MeanWE2	-.122	.105	-.142	-1.160	.249
4	(Constant)	1.431	.311		4.594	.000
	MeanWE4	.395	.134	.381	2.938	.004
	MeanWE1	.184	.083	.257	2.213	.030
	MeanWE2	-.117	.105	-.136	-1.113	.269
	MeanWE3	.083	.095	.095	.877	.383

a. Dependent Variable: Overall_JobSat

Table 6 shows the results of the multiple regression test held on all variables for both work ethics and job satisfaction. This test is carried out to fulfil the research objective requirements. The constant value is used against all the mean computed for work ethics variables: WE1, WE2, WE3 and WE4 (independent variable).

Based on the results, when all four sub-variables of work ethics were tested against Job Satisfaction, only WE1 and WE4 showed a significant value, but WE2 and WE3 showed a non-significant value >0.05 . Among all variables used in each model WE1 and WE4 are the most constant in each model with a positive and significant value for Standardized Beta Coefficients, whereas WE2 shows a negative value, with a non-significant value >0.05 for both WE2 and WE3.

For the overall result, the average mean value is around 2.00 until 3.00 which shows consistency in the pattern as the mean value shows a stable value for each statement or item. For example, in work ethics, WE1 have 4 statements or items. Each statement carries a different value of the mean. From each value shown, decisions can be made on which statements have the highest influence on the said variable, WE1. For this case, GA2 has a better influence on WE1. In other words, the statement "I challenge myself to do the right thing" has the highest influence in the Goal-oriented Action dimension. This can be related to the findings of the study by Deng et al (2022); Taghizadeh et. al (2013) who mentioned in their studies that during adverse or challenging times one can initiate an innovation towards an action.

The results obtained are consistent with the findings of the study by (Taghizadeh et al., 2013). Moreover, the reward system (WE4) is another factor that contributes to job satisfaction. While in Model 2, the constant variable 'Overall_JobSat' is tested against the variables MeanWE4 as significant although a non-significant value is recorded for WE1. Salahudin et al (2016) justify this as having an influence on work ethics as the β value shows a positive result. Similarly, the negative β value (-.122) for WE2 was also observed by Amilin (2013) and is not significantly related to job satisfaction.

Conclusion

Today the idea of ethics has taken a vital place in one's personal and professional life. With a positive hard working attitude, people can turn out to be progressively engaged and dependable at their workplaces. The individual can likewise develop a feeling of accomplishment, and this can enhance one's satisfaction.

In a broad sense, ethics refers to the standard way of going about tasks, projects, or assignments where one is mindful of the spirit of cooperation and mutual trust of colleagues, which is essentially one's attitude towards others and towards work. Workplace ethics refers to the essentially desirable characteristics of all employees in an organisation, such as honesty, assurance, devotion, competency, etc. When an employee's personal work ethic is challenged, it illustrates how the organisation is affected by the practice and how the work ethics components assure that an employee feels satisfied in their job. In a nutshell, the results of this study have indeed been able to answer the research questions and objectives.

The relationship between the four components of work ethics (goal action, availability and reliability, conscientiousness, and reward system) and job satisfaction was examined. The results of Pearson correlation tests for the work ethic sub-variables were determined to be valid and significant. The multiple regression test for all four sub-variables of work ethics was conducted against job satisfaction. The results showed that only two out of the four sub-variables of work ethics, WE1 (goal action) and WE4 (reward system), showed a significant value and were observed to be the most constant in each model with a positive and significant value.

Based on the sample size and the variables employed to assess the influence of work ethics on job satisfaction, the current study encounters several methodological limitations. The primary focus of this study has been somewhat shifted by the overconsumption of models from earlier research projects. Therefore, they could be investigated in further study. Future studies can also gauge the respondent's level of comprehension prior to performing the survey. This will improve the experience of accurately acquiring all the information. Future research should also look into how different cultures adapt to various work ethics, as well as how job satisfaction is viewed as an indicator that one's working style should be improved. In addition, future research can look at whether or not the gender of different cultures has distinct perspectives or if they all share the same understanding of work ethics.

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