

University Staff's Perceptions on Ethical Climate in Their Workplaces

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ABSTRACT The objective of this study is to find out the perceptions of university staff on ethical climate in their workplaces. The findings of the study suggest that the university employees have a positive opinion of the practices concerning laws, rules and policies in the institution they work in, and that they have a positive perception on ethical climate in this regard. Nevertheless, it could also be said, that the performance levels of the academic and administrative staff in terms of acting independently in carrying out their functions is 'undecisive', and therefore, could be rated as medium.

INTRODUCTION

The word ethics is derived from the Greek word *ethos*, which means, character or disposition. The concept of ethics emerged as a result of the investigation of moral rules and values which emphasize what is ideal and abstract. In this regard, ethics is more specific and philosophy-based as compared to social and moral rules (Bute 2011). Undoubtedly, the concept of ethics is closely related to the science of psychology as well. After the year 1844, Auguste Comte considered ethics as the seventh major science in his classification, and expressed the vision that Humanity cannot be explained not with human, but human can be explained with the humanity (Bulbul 2001). The main factors affecting ethical behavior can be explained as follows: Personal factors, institutional factors, effects of employers or managers, ethical policies and codes, and corporal culture (Atmaca 2010).

The concept of climate is derived from a Greek word meaning, inclination. It is also used to define physical phenomenon such as temperature and pressure. When it is used in business management in this sense, climate would mean the internal and external environment of the organi-

zation perceived and considered by the members of that organization (Haller 1971; Yagmur 2013). The ethical climate is defined as the behaviors which are expected, supported and rewarded in enterprises (Schneider and Rentsch 1988). In other words, it is the psychologically meaningful and consistent perceptions of the individual, in the organization on ethical procedures and policies existing in the organization, and in the subunits of the organization (Schneider 1990; Wimbush et al. 1997; Grojean et al. 2004). Ethical climate is generally considered by researchers as a sub-dimension of the organizational climate. Therefore, in a broader sense, ethical climate is defined as the general ethical state or infrastructure of the organization (Elci and Alpkın 2009).

Today's world constitutes an environment which is open to intense and continual change, as a result of ever increasing and intensifying effects of globalization. The final goal of business enterprises operating in such an environment is to be successful and to survive. Enterprises can attain success by being aware of the values which make them different from other enterprises. And this can be achieved only in an environment of trust where the ethical behaviors are shaped (Donertas 2008). Ethical climate helps the employees to evaluate the existing problems and to consider the alternatives, it lights the way for them to decide about which behaviors are acceptable and which are not (Demirdag and Ekmekcioglu 2015). Thus, it doesn't only show to organizations what the correct behaviors are, but it also helps them to decide what to

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do when ethical problems are encountered (Sahin and Dundar 2011). While helping the employees to evaluate their problems and considering various alternatives, ethical climate also helps in understanding the acceptable and unacceptable behaviors (Barnett and Schubert 2002). There are three main concepts which are important for organizations and which are related to ethical climate. The first one is, the work ethics, which is closely connected not only with the theoretical philosophy of ethics, but also with the ethical values in daily life, and it also studies the generally accepted rules, standards and ethical principles in working life concerning what are the wrong and correct attitudes in a certain situation (Jaramillo et al. 2006).

The ethical climate, which improves the quality of the management, the performance of the employees, the organizational loyalty and the level of social responsibility as well, provides contributions to the organization in many ways (Schwepker 2001; Weber and Seger 2002). Inclusion of ethical element into the corporal climate is manifested by a definition which is closer to the definition of ethical culture rather than that of the ethical climate. The prevailing opinion is that, in order for an ethical behavior to be displayed in an organization, it is necessary to establish first, unofficial ethical structures and then an official ethical structure within the organization and thus, to have an overall ethical climate in place (Belak et al. 2015; Duh et al. 2010; Garcia-Marza 2005; Morris et al. 2002; Thommen 2003).

Perceived ethical climate helps the members of the organization to answer the following questions: Which professions have an ethical content? What are the appropriate decision making criteria? What is the right alternative from the organizational point of view? And, what do I need to do? (Weeks et al. 2004). One of the important factors in developing the ethical climate is to create an expectation. Expectation makes the individuals embark in a quest concerning what is expected, and this makes it easier to define and perceive what is expected or sought (Salancik and Pfeffer 1978).

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Analysis

The data which was obtained by means of the study was evaluated, using the statistical

methods included in the SPSS 13.0 software package. In the section of research findings and evaluation, frequency distributions were used in order to determine the demographical characteristics of the academic and administrative staff taking part in the study; while the ethical climate perceptions were determined based on the mean values and standard deviations; the reliability analysis was employed in order to determine whether the data is suitable for statistical analysis; factor analysis was used in order to find out the number of dimensions of the scale; the Independent Samples T test was used in order to find out whether there was a significant difference between the two groups in terms of the independent variables such as gender, marital status and professional position; and the One-Way ANOVA test was employed in order to examine whether there was a significant difference between more than two groups.

Sample and Sampling

The population of the present study, which comprised 176 staff members, 119 being administrative and 57 academic staff members, working in Usak University during the fall term of the 2015-2016 educational years, was selected by means of the random sampling method. T-test and one-way ANOVA test were used in order to evaluate the results concerning the ethical climate perceptions of the university staff in terms of their demographical characteristics. The differences from other independent variables were evaluated.

Reliability Analysis

At the end of the reliability analysis of the ethical climate scale, which comprised of 26 questions, the Cronbach's Alpha value was found to be 0.792. Since 0.70 is accepted as the minimum reliability value in the studies conducted in social sciences, the Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.792 found for the present study can be considered as a good result.

Data Collection

In the present study, the ethical climate scale developed by Cullen et al. (2003), was used. The original version of the scale had nine dimensions; however, it has been compacted into five dimensions in the studies conducted by Victor

and Cullen (1988), Wimbush and Shepart (1994), Peterson (2002), Vardi (2011), and Ogut and Kaplan (2011). The adaptation to Turkish of the expressions used in the scale was carried out by means of the translation – back translation method by getting help from a linguist. To that end, the expressions in the scale were translated by the author into Turkish (Yurdakul 2013). Since the lowest value acceptable for the social sciences has been envisaged to be 0.70, it can be said that the obtained Cronbach's Alpha value is quite a good result in terms of the internal consistency of the scale (Nunnally 1978).

RESULTS

It can be seen from the Table that the answers of the participants to questions relating to the laws, rules and policies dimension of ethical climate perception were close to each other. The overall mean of the answers to the entries concerning the laws, rules and policies dimension was found to be $x = 3.59$, which is in the Agree interval of the 5-level Likert Scale. Accordingly, it could be said that the university employees

hold a positive opinion of the practices concerning laws, rules and policies in the institutions where they work, and that they have a positive ethical climate perception (Table 1).

When the overall mean of the acting out of concern for others dimension of the ethical climate perception was considered, it was found out that it is within the Undecided interval of the five-level Likert scale with a value of $x = 3.11$. Accordingly, the participants stated that they were undecided concerning the acting out of concern for others dimension of the people working in their institution. Of the five entries in this dimension, two were within the Agree interval of the five-level Likert scale. Of these two entries, Acting out of concern for the employees of our institution as a whole is our main principle had a mean value of $x = 3.53$, and in our institution, the most efficient way is the most correct way also had a mean value of $x = 3.53$. The lowest value in this dimension belonged to the entry What is best for the other people always constitute our foremost concern at the Undecided level with a mean value of $x = 2.74$ (Table 2).

Table 1: Findings concerning the perception of university employees on the dimension of "Laws, Rules and Policies"

<i>Laws, rules and policies</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
5. Our institution always expect us to do what is correct for the customers and the public.	176	3.66	1.06
7. In our institution, everyone is primarily expected to work in an efficient way.	176	3.61	1.16
8. All employees are expected primarily to comply with the laws and occupational standards.	176	3.69	1.20
9. In our institution, laws and occupational standards constitute the primary criteria in all decisions and practices.	176	3.48	1.17
10. The employees working in our institution are expected to strictly comply with the laws and occupational standards.	176	3.68	1.03
11. The prior criterion in our institution is whether decisions are in accordance with the relevant laws.	176	3.68	1.00
12. In our institution, it is of utmost importance to comply with the institutional rules and procedures.	176	3.48	1.07
13. All employees are expected to be loyal to comply with the rules and procedures of the institution	176	3.47	1.15
Mean		3.59	1.10

Table 2: Findings concerning the perception of the university employees on the dimension of "Acting out of Concern for Others"

<i>Acting out of concern for others</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
1. It is our main principle to act out of concern for all of the employees of our institution as a whole.	176	3.53	1.36
2. The most important issue in our institution is the interests of the employees as a whole.	176	2.97	1.33
3. Our primary concern is always what is good for other people.	176	2.74	1.23
4. In our institution, each employee acts out of concern for other employees.	176	2.77	1.26
6. In our institution, the most efficient way is considered to be the most correct way.	176	3.53	1.20
Mean		3.11	1.28

When the overall mean of the independence dimension of the ethical climate perception was considered, it was found out that it is within the Undecided interval of the five-level Likert scale with a value of $x = 2.88$. Accordingly, the level of the academic and administrative staff members of the university in terms of acting independently is considered to be at the level of Undecided, in other words at a medium level (Table 3).

When the overall mean of the individual interest dimension of the ethical climate perception was considered, it was found out that it is within the Undecided interval of the five-level Likert scale with a value of $x = 2.86$. Accordingly, the university employees perceived the level of the academic and administrative staff members in terms of giving priority to their own individual interests, to be at the level of Undecided. Among the four questions concerning this dimension,

the respondents gave the response Disagree to the expression in our institution, there is no room for the own moral and ethical values of the employees, with a mean value of $x = 2.55$ (Table 4).

When the overall mean of the institutional interest dimension of the ethical climate perception was considered, it was found out that it is within the Undecided interval of the five-level Likert scale, with a value of $x = 2.85$. Accordingly, the university employees perceived the levels of the academic and administrative staff members in terms of giving priority to the institutional interests, to be at the level of Undecided. Among the five questions concerning this dimension, the respondents gave the response Disagree to the expression In our institution, the employees are not interested in anything other than the interests of the institution with a mean value of $x = 2.55$ (Table 5).

Table 3: Findings concerning the perception of the university employees on the dimension of “Independence”

<i>Independence</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
23. In our institution, the employees are expected to act based on their own personal and moral values.	176	2.98	1.09
24. The employees of the institution decide what is right or not by themselves.	176	2.82	1.12
25. The most important issue in our institution is the own perception of the employees on what is right or wrong.	176	2.85	1.16
26. The employees of our institution are directed by their own personal ethical values.	176	2.86	1.17
Mean		2.88	1.14

Table 4: Findings concerning the perception of the university employees on the dimension of “Individual Interest”

<i>Individual interest</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
16. The employees of our institution value their own interests above anything.	176	3.13	1.25
17. The employees of our institution mostly consider only their own interests.	176	3.13	1.27
18. In our institution, there is no room for the employees’ own moral and ethical values.	176	2.55	1.17
19. The employees are expected to do anything for the interest of the institution without thinking about the consequences.	176	2.65	1.10
Mean		2.86	1.20

Table 5: Findings concerning the perception of the university employees on the dimension of “Organizational Interest”

<i>Organizational interest</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
14. In our institution, successful people are the ones who comply with the written instructions.	176	2.77	1.14
15. In our institution, the employees strictly comply with the corporal policies.	176	2.79	1.05
20. In our institution, the employees are not interested in anything other than the organizational interests.	176	2.55	1.01
21. The works are considered to be unsuccessful when they harm the interests of the institution.	176	3.14	1.12
22. The primary responsibility of the employees in our institution is to control the budget.	176	2.98	1.08
Mean		2.85	1.08

When the ethical climate perceptions of the university employees were examined based on their marital status, significant differences were found between the married and single employees in the dimension of laws, rules and policies; in the dimension of individual interests; and in the dimension of institutional interests. A significant difference was found between the married and single employees in the entry, the prior criterion of our institution is whether the decisions made are in accordance with the laws. For this entry, the perception of the married respondents ($x = 3.807$), is significantly higher than that of the single respondents ($x = 3.435$). A significant difference was also found between the married and single employees in the entry all employees were expected to comply with the rules and procedures of the institution. For this entry, the perception of the married respondents ($x = 3.623$), is significantly higher than that of the single respondents ($x = 3.177$).

A significant difference was found between the married and single employees in the entry in our institution, there is no room for the own moral and ethical values of the employees, which is in the dimension of individual interest. For this entry, the perception of the single respondents ($x = 2.839$), is significantly higher than that of the married respondents ($x = 2.386$). A significant dif-

ference was found between the married and single employees in the entry any work is considered to be unsuccessful when it harms the interests of the institution, which is in the dimension of institutional interest. For this entry, the perception of the married respondents ($x = 3.325$), is significantly higher than that of the single respondents ($x = 2.806$) (Table 6).

In the dimension of laws, rules and policies, a significant difference was found between the employees with an associate degree and the employees with an undergraduate or doctoral degree. In this dimension, the ethical climate perception of the employees with an undergraduate or doctoral degree is significantly higher when compared to the ethical climate perception of those with an associate degree ($p < 0.05$). It was also found out that there was a significant difference between the employees with an associate degree, and those with an undergraduate or doctoral degree in the dimension acting out of concern for others. In this dimension, the ethical climate perception of the respondents with a doctoral degree was found to be significantly higher than that of the ones with an associate degree ($p < 0.05$) (Table 7).

In the dimension of laws, rules and policies, a significant difference was found between the employees who described themselves as ex-

Table 6: Ethical climate perception of university employees by their marital status

	Marital status	N	Mean	Sd	P
<i>Ethical Climate Dimensions / Entries</i>					
<i>Laws, Rules and Policies</i>	Married	114	3.683	0.778	0.045
	Single	62	3.423	0.878	
11. The prior criterion of our institution is whether a decision is in accordance with the relevant laws or not.	Married	114	3.807	0.977	0.019
	Single	62	3.435	1.018	
13. All employees are expected to be loyal to the rules and procedures of the institution.	Married	114	3.623	1.116	0.014
	Single	62	3.177	1.167	
<i>Acting Out of Concern for Others</i>	Married	114	3.165	0.938	0.298
	Single	62	3.010	0.948	
<i>Independence</i>	Married	114	2.868	0.834	0.835
	Single	62	2.895	0.777	
<i>Individual Interest</i>	Married	114	2.818	0.775	0.329
	Single	62	2.948	0.945	
18. In our institution, there is no room for the employees' own moral and ethical values.	Married	114	2.386	1.093	0.014
	Single	62	2.839	1.257	
<i>Organizational Interest</i>	Married	114	2.916	0.643	0.051
	Single	62	2.719	0.618	
21. The works are considered to be unsuccessful when they harm the interests of the institution.	Married	114	3.325	1.117	0.003
	Single	62	2.806	1.069	

$P < 0.05$ means a significant difference.

Table 7: The Tukey test concerning the ethical climate perception of university employees by their educational status

	Tukey's HSD test		Difference Between the Mean Values	P
	(I) Education	(J) Education		
<i>Ethical Climate Dimensions Laws, Rules and Policies</i>	Associate degree	High School	0.099	0.998
		Undergraduate	-0.492	0.021
		Postgraduate	-0.398	0.202
		Doctorate	-0.760	0.002
<i>Acting Out of Concern for Others</i>	Associate degree	High School	-0.156	0.994
		Undergraduate	-0.476	0.081
		Postgraduate	-0.270	0.712
		Doctorate	-0.878	0.002

P<0.05 means a significant difference.

troverts and the employees who described themselves as hyperactive, irritable and short-tempered. In this dimension, a significant difference was also found between the employees who described themselves as hyperactive and the employees who described themselves as quiet and calm. In this dimension, the ethical climate perceptions of the respondents who described themselves as hyperactive was found to be significantly higher than that of the ones who described themselves as irritable and short-tempered ($p<0.05$). And it was also found for this dimension, that the ethical climate perception of the respondents who described themselves as quiet and calm were significantly higher than that of the ones who described themselves as hyperactive ($p<0.05$). In the dimension of Independence,

significant differences were found between the respondents who described themselves as irritable and short-tempered and the ones who described themselves as quiet and calm and the ones who described themselves as social and extroverted. In this dimension, the ethical climate perception of the respondents who described themselves as irritable and short-tempered was found to be significantly lower than that of the ones who described themselves social and extroverted ($p<0.05$) (Table 8).

DISCUSSION

In the entry, the prior criterion of our institution is whether the decisions made are in accordance with the laws included the dimension of

Table 8: The Tukey test concerning the ethical climate perception of university employees by their description of themselves

Dimensions of ethical climate	Tukey's HSD test		Difference between the mean values	P
	(I) Description of themselves	(J) Description of themselves		
<i>Laws, Rules And Policies</i>	Social and extroverted	Quiet and calm	0.252	0.235
		Hyperactive	0.834	0.000
		Irritable and short-tempered	0.656	0.004
	Hyperactive	Quiet and calm	-0.582	0.027
		Social and extroverted	-0.834	0.000
		Irritable and short-tempered	-0.178	0.889
<i>Independence</i>	Irritable and short-tempered	Quiet and calm	-0.598	0.013
		Social and extroverted	-0.514	0.043
		Hyperactive	-0.165	0.913

P<0.05 means a significant difference.

Laws, Rules and Policies, a significant difference was found between the married and single respondents. For this entry, the perception of the married employees ($x = 3,807$), is significantly higher than that of the single ones ($x = 3.435$). For the entry all employees are expected to comply with the rules and procedures of the institution, which is also included in this dimension, a significant difference was found between the married and single respondents. For this entry, the perception of the married respondents ($x = 3.623$), is significantly higher than that of the single ones ($x = 3.177$).

In similar studies, it has been found out that the ethical climate perception of married people is higher than that of the single ones (Bartel et al. 1998 ; Dickson et al. 2001; Schminke et al. 2005; Mayer et al. 2012; Yagmur 2013). In the dimension of Laws, Rules and Policies, significant differences were also found between the respondents who described themselves as extroverted and the ones who described themselves as hyperactive and the ones who described themselves as irritable and short-tempered. In this dimension, significant differences were found between the respondents who described themselves as hyperactive and the ones who described themselves as quiet and calm. In the same dimension again, the ethical climate perception of the respondents who described themselves as social and extroverted were found to be significantly higher than that of the ones who described themselves as irritable and short-tempered ($p < 0.05$) (Appelbaum et al. 2005; Appelbaum et al. 2007; Ozen et al. 2016; Peterson 2002).

On the other hand, the study conducted by Demirdag and Ekmekcioglu (2015), suggested that the organizational loyalty level of the individuals who were high school graduates or who had an associate degree (mean = 55.73; SD = 12.09), did not differ significantly from that of the ones who had undergraduate or postgraduate degrees (mean = 53.73; SD = 13.62). Studies have suggested that there is an inverse correlation between the ethical climate and the antisocial behaviors. Again, in this dimension, the ethical climate perception of the respondents who described themselves as quiet and calm is significantly higher than that of those who described themselves as hyperactive ($p < 0.05$).

In the dimension of Laws, Rules and Policies, a significant difference was found between the employees who have an associate degree

and the ones who have an undergraduate or doctoral degree. In this dimension, the ethical climate perception of the employees with an undergraduate or doctoral degree is significantly higher than that of the ones who have an associate degree ($p < 0.05$). Ozipek (2014) found out that the employees with a doctoral degree were more likely, compared to the employees who are high school graduates, to perceive the organization they work for as having an ethical climate, which supports the present study.

CONCLUSION

In the dimension of acting out of concern for others, a significant difference was found between the employees with an associate degree and those with a doctoral degree. In this dimension, the ethical climate perception of the employees with a doctoral degree was significantly higher when compared to that of the employees with an associate degree. The overall mean of the replies to the entries of the dimension Laws, Rules and Policies is in the agree interval of the five-level Likert scale, with a value. Accordingly, it can be said that university employees have a positive opinion of the practices concerning the laws, rules and policies in the universities where they work, and that they have a positive perception of ethical climate in this regard.

In the dimension of Independence, significant differences were found between the respondents who described themselves as irritable and short-tempered and those who described themselves as quiet and calm and as social and extroverted. In this dimension, the ethical climate perception of the irritable and short-tempered employees was found to be significantly lower when compared to that of the employees who are social and extroverted. When the overall mean of the dimension of independence was examined, it was found to be within the interval Undecided of the five-level Likert scale with a value. Accordingly, the level of university employees perception of the academic and administrative staff working in their institution in terms of their being able to act independently is Undecided, i.e. at the medium level. As for the entry The works are considered to be unsuccessful when they harm the interests of the institution, which is included in the dimension of Organizational Interest, a significant difference was found for the entry between the married and single employ-

ees. The perception of the married employees concerning this entry, was found to be significantly higher than the perception of the single employees. When the overall mean of the ethical climate perception concerning the dimension of Organizational Interest, was examined, it was found to be in the Undecided interval of the five-level Likert scale with a value. Accordingly, the university employees perceived the behaviors of the academic and administrative staff working in their institution in terms of giving the priority to the organizational interests to be at the level of Undecided that is, at the medium level.

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