The Link Between Organizational Ethics and Job Satisfaction: A Study of Managers in Singapore

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ABSTRACT. Based on a survey of 237 managers in Singapore, three measures of organizational ethics (namely, top management support for ethical behavior, the organization's ethical climate, and the association between ethical behavior and career success) are found to be associated with job satisfaction. The link between organizational ethics and job satisfaction is argued from Viswesvaran et al.'s (1998) organizational justice and cognitive dissonance theories. The findings imply that organizational leaders can favorably influence organizational outcomes by engaging in, supporting and rewarding ethical behavior.

KEY WORDS: ethical climate; ethics and career success; organizational ethics and job satisfaction; organizational outcomes; top management support

Introduction

The last decade has seen a significant increase in business ethics research and literature. This is not surprising given the growing complexity of

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business ethics in organizations and the growing importance of business ethics in the international arena. Ethical situations in business are becoming increasingly more complex, involving issues such as societal expectations, fair competition, legal protection and rights, and social responsibilities. They also have potential consequences on more and more parties, including customers, employees, competitors and the general public (Vitell and Davis, 1990a). In the international arena, the increasing globalization of businesses has brought about a greater need to deal with ethical questions in new and different settings (Viswesvaran et al., 1998). These developments have increased both the depth and breadth of business ethics research.

Traditionally, research in business ethics typically involves inquiry into the nature and grounds of moral judgments, and standards and rules of conduct in situations involving business decisions (Vitell and Davis, 1990a). A great part of the research is normative in nature (dealing with the theoretical foundations of business ethics and ethical decision-making models), with empiricism gaining importance in recent years (see, for example, Randall and Gibson, 1990; Robertson, 1993).

To date, many empirical studies have been conducted to investigate the determinants of ethical behavior. Determinants that have been most commonly investigated include personal attributes (e.g., religion, nationality, sex and age), education and employment background (e.g., type of education, years of education, employment and years of employment), personality, beliefs and values (e.g., machiavellianism, locus of control, acceptance of authority and role conflict and ambiguity), referent groups (e.g.,

peer group influence, top management influence and rewards and sanctions) and others (e.g., codes of conduct, type of ethical decision and organizational factors). An excellent review of this area of business ethics literature is provided by Ford and Richardson (1994).

Investigating the determinants of ethical behavior is important as it increases understanding of the factors associated with business ethics and ethical decision-making. In addition to such antecedents, the consequences of business ethics and ethical decision-making also comprise useful areas for business ethics research. In particular, there is a need to study the organizational outcomes of business ethics. At a corporate level, much can be gained from understanding the association, if any, between a firm's ethical behavior and its performance (e.g., financial performance). On an individual level, consequences such as job satisfaction, stress, motivation, commitment or job performance can have significant impact on organizations. Although this area of business ethics research is potentially useful, little has been done to date.

Further, most business ethics research has been conducted in developed countries (especially Western countries) and the findings may not be generalizable to developing countries (e.g., Asian countries). As Asian countries are gradually opening their doors to foreign trade and investment, there is correspondingly increasing research interest in organizational ethics in this region (e.g., Zabid and Alsagoff, 1993; Cyriac and Dharmaraj, 1994; Honeycutt et al., 1995; Visweswaran and Deshpande, 1996 and 1998). Nevertheless, no empirical research has been conducted on organizational ethics in Singapore, a country reputed as the least corrupt in Asia, and ranked as the seventh least corrupt in the world in the poll conducted by the Berlin-based Transparency International (Sim, 1998).

Given the above, the objective of this study is to investigate the link between organizational ethics and job satisfaction in Singapore companies. The present study helps fill the gap in the existing business ethics literature in the international arena. Also, job satisfaction is an important organizational construct to study as it is often related to employee motivation, performance,

absenteeism and turnover (e.g., Bullen and Flamholtz, 1985; Saks et al., 1996). Thus, it is useful to investigate whether corporate leaders can generate favorable organizational outcomes through its role in organizational ethics.

The remainder of this paper is divided into four sections. The first section lays the theoretical foundation and develops the research hypotheses. The research method employed in the study is discussed in the second section. The third section presents the results and findings. Finally, the fourth section concludes the study, discusses the limitations and suggests directions for future research.

Theoretical foundation and hypotheses development

Practitioners' literature contains anecdotal evidence that ethics is associated with job satisfaction (see, for example, Laabs, 1997; Kornfeld, 1999; Traynor, 1999). For this study, the link between organizational ethics and job satisfaction is explained by the organizational justice theory and cognitive dissonance theory. The salient points are summarized below (see also Viswesvaran et al., 1998).

Organizational justice theory

According to Hartman et al. (1999), the concept of organizational justice is central to understanding a wide range of human attitudes and behaviors in organizations. The underlying premise is that the justice perceptions of employees affect their job attitudes and organizational outcomes. Leigh et al. (1988), for example, concluded that employees look more to the broader organizational environment than to their particular role in attributing their satisfaction to their job. In particular, as stated by Dailey and Kirk (1992), perceptions of organizational justice affect job attitudes such as job satisfaction and turnover intention. Organizational justice is often dichotomized into two components: (1) distributive justice which addresses the fairness of managerial decisions relative to the distribution of outcomes such as pay and pro-

motion, and (2) procedural justice which focuses on how such managerial decisions are made. Dailey and Kirk (1992) found that employee perceptions of both distributive and procedural justice play a central role in relation to job satisfaction. Sweeney and McFarlin (1993) and Hartman et al. (1999), however, found that distributive justice predicts job satisfaction better than procedural justice does.

In a study of layoffs, job insecurity and survivors' work effort, Brockner et al. (1992) reported that perceived distributive fairness and perceived procedural fairness affect survivors' reaction to the layoff in terms of their work effort. In particular, positive perceptions are significantly associated with increased work effort. Other studies have also reported that perceptions of unfair promotion may affect job attitudes and organizational outcomes adversely (see Saal and Moore, 1993). In the context of selection and hiring, Gilliland (1993) suggested that fairness perceptions affect individual and organizational outcomes such as job-application and job-acceptance decisions, self-perceptions such as self-esteem and self-efficacy, and attitudes and behavior such as motivation, work performance, job satisfaction and organizational citizenship behavior (see also Gilliland, 1994; Steiner and Gilliland, 1996). More recently, Ployhart and Ryan (1997) confirmed that fair procedures resulted in more favorable perceptions, and this was more pronounced when individuals also perceived fair outcomes. Also, in a study of part-time workers, Tansky et al. (1997) found that perceptions of fairness or equity influence employees' attitudes about the organization.

On the conceptual front, Lind's (1992) fairness heuristic states that perceptions of fairness in one area influence perceptions of fairness in another area. In the context of this study, it means that employees who perceive their organizations to be ethical are also likely to perceive their organizations as being fair to them. This, in turn, is likely to enhance employee job satisfaction. Hence, organizational ethics and job satisfaction are expected to be positively linked. More generally, Lind et al. (1993) argued that justice judgments affect attitudes, behavior and decisions across a wide variety of social contexts and they

also play an important role in how employees respond to organizational outcomes and organizational procedures and process.

In view of the above, if employees perceive strong top management support for ethical behavior, a favorable ethical climate, and a strong association between ethical behavior and career success in the organization, then they are also likely to have a higher level of job satisfaction. The converse is also true. The role of top management has also been documented in non-ethics literature. For example, Rodgers and Hunter (1991) and Rodgers et al. (1993) reported that top management commitment impacts on organizational performance, productivity, success and job satisfaction positively. More generally, top management support enhances the effectiveness of any organizational development intervention.

Cognitive dissonance theory

According to the cognitive dissonance theory (first proposed by Festinger in 1942), individuals strive to minimize dissonance in their environment. (Similar concepts include the balance theory (Heider, 1958), the congruity principle (Osgood and Tannenbaum, 1955) and the discrepancy theory (Michalos, 1991)). Empirical evidence has shown the operation of the cognitive dissonance theory in finance (Goetzmann and Peles, 1997) and marketing (Gerald et al., 1998). In a nutshell, continued dissonance results in distress and dissatisfaction with the situation (Visweswaran et al., 1998). Essentially, employees desire consistency between their ethical value system and the ethical climate of their organization (Schwepker, 1999). Assuming that employees generally strive to be individually ethical, dissonance results if these employees perceive little top management support for ethical behavior, an unfavorable ethical climate in their organization, and/or little association between ethical behavior and career success. This dissonance will, in turn, reduce job satisfaction.

Further, top management sets the organizational climate for, and serves as a referent group to, employees. Thus, any discrepancy between employees' internal standards of ethics and their

perceptions of top management will result in a moral conflict and cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1942; Dozier and Miceli, 1985). This again reduces job satisfaction. More recently, Sims and Kroeck (1994), Viswesvaran and Deshpande (1996), and Schwepker (1999) found that the lack of an ethical fit (i.e., ethical incongruence) between employees and their organization can result in distress and job dissatisfaction, among other things.

To summarize, a positive link between organizational ethics and job satisfaction is expected. That is, a higher level of ethics is expected to be associated with a higher level of job satisfaction in organizations. Given this expectation, one-tailed tests will be conducted in the study.

Hypotheses development

Based on the above discussion, the research framework for the study can be represented by Figure 1. In particular, it suggests that ethics in organizations has an impact upon the job satisfaction of employees. Organizational ethics, as operationalized in the study, comprises top management support for ethical behavior, the ethical climate in the organization, and the association between ethical behavior and career success. Job satisfaction of employees can be measured in terms of the following dimensions: pay, promotion, co-workers, supervision and work. Summing across the five different dimensions gives an overall job satisfaction measure. Viswesvaran et al. (1998) postulated and obtained evidence that the impact of ethics is most pronounced on the job satisfaction dimension of supervision.
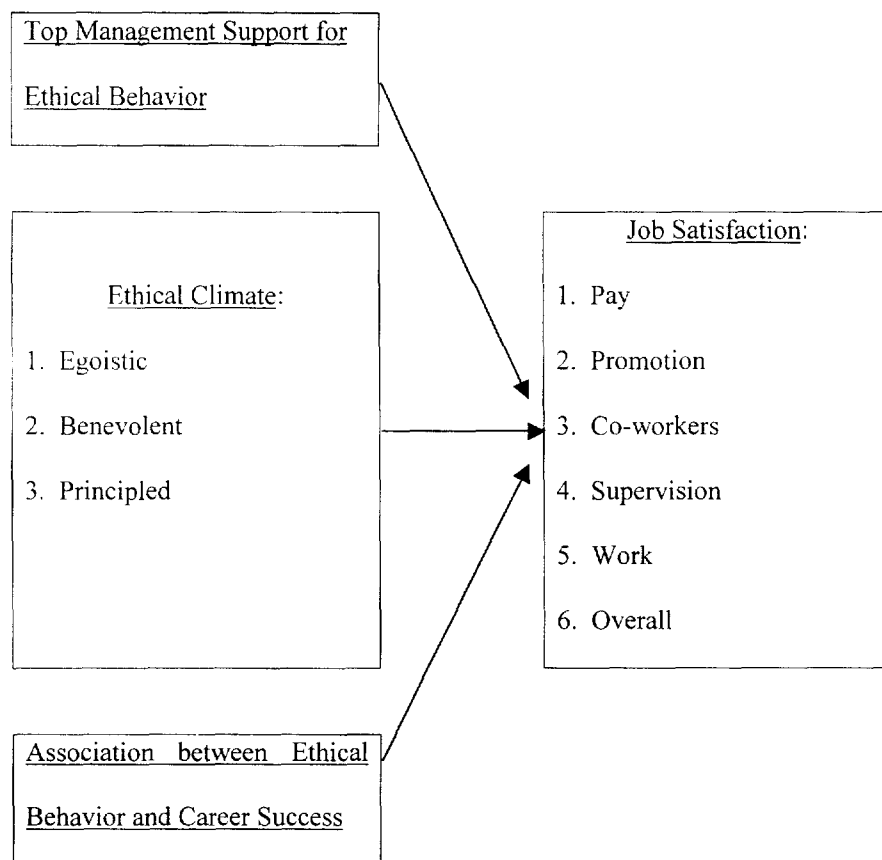

Figure 1. Research framework.

Top management support for ethical behavior. In organizations where legitimate authority is an accepted tenet of the work setting, employees are expected to carry out the orders of top management, even if those orders are contrary to their determination of what is right (Trevino, 1986). Consistent with the cognitive dissonance theory (as discussed above), such a conflict or dissonance could be a considerable source of stress leading to lower job satisfaction. From the perspective of justice theory, top management that supports ethical behavior is perceived to be fair to employees. Ceteris paribus, this will result in a higher level of employee job satisfaction.

Vitell and Davis (1990b) found evidence of the relationship between top management support for ethical behavior and job satisfaction. The study by Viswesvaran et al. (1998) on Indian managers, however, did not find such a relationship. The authors speculated that the insignificant results might have been attributed to cultural differences as the causal explanations were based on the literature from American samples. It was possible that the Indian managers were accepting the ethical decisions of top management more passively than other managers were.

Although Singapore managers are very much exposed to foreign management style and influence, it is not known whether the results in the Western context would similarly be observed here. Thus, a null hypothesis is proposed to test whether top management support for ethical behavior has any impact on the job satisfaction of Singapore managers:

H_1: Top management support for ethical behavior has no significant effect on job satisfaction.

The ethical climate in the organization. The ethical climate in an organization provides the collective norms that guide behavior (Trevino, 1986). For employees who generally find personal satisfaction in behaving ethically, a conflict or dissonance will arise if the norms within the organization require employees to compromise their ethical values in order to achieve organizational goals. A conflict between ethical values of the employee and the organization's ethical climate will lead

to a lower level of job satisfaction. Argued from the justice theory perspective, employees who find themselves in an organization that promotes the company's interest at the expense of other considerations including employees' interests and ethical values, will feel that fundamental values and their personal rights have been violated. This is expected to lead to a lower level of job satisfaction.

In a study of managers in a large non-profit organization, Deshpande (1996) found that an organization could influence the job satisfaction of its employees by manipulating the ethical climate. Similar results were found by Joseph and Deshpande (1997) of nurses' job satisfaction in a non-profit hospital. Drawing from Pervin's (1968) person-organizational fit theory, Sims and Kroeck (1994) tested a few hypotheses, one of which proposed that employees who have achieved a match between their current ethical work climate and their expressed preferences are more likely to experience positive job satisfaction. Unfortunately, they did not find any significant results.

As mixed findings are observed in prior studies, a null hypothesis is proposed to test the effect of ethical climate on employees' job satisfaction:

H_2: Ethical climate in the organization has no significant effect on job satisfaction.

The association between ethical behavior and career success. Luthans and Stajkovic's (1999) meta-analysis on studies that draw from the reinforcement theory concluded that individual behavior is encouraged through all three types of reinforcers – money, feedback and social recognition. Thus, in an organization where ethical behavior is closely associated with career success, the ethical behavior of employees is reinforced. As the organization recognizes and rewards values that are consistent with those intrinsically valued by employees, they will derive a greater level of satisfaction from their job. Based on the cognitive dissonance theory, the converse is true for companies that reinforce unethical behavior. Similarly, from the justice theory perspective, ethical employees who are not rewarded or

promoted because they are not willing to compromise their ethical values will feel frustrated and hence experience a lower level of job satisfaction.

There is empirical evidence that employees are more satisfied when they perceive a relationship between ethical behavior and career success (Vitell and Davis, 1990b; Viswesvaran and Deshpande, 1996). This leads to the following null hypothesis:

H_3: The association between ethical behavior and career success in the organization has no significant effect on job satisfaction.

Research method

Subjects

The research questionnaire was administered to a random sample of 400 students enrolled in the MBA program in one of the universities in Singapore. It can be argued that MBA students comprise an appropriate sample as they are managers who have to deal with business ethics issues in the course of their work. Hence, they are in a position to give meaningful responses to the questionnaire. A total of 237 usable responses was received, giving a response rate of 59%.

A majority of the respondents is in the age group of between 25 and 45 years old (84%), and male (60%). Most of the respondents are in the lower (35%) and middle (49%) level managerial positions. In terms of working experience, 111 (47%) have at least five years of working experience. (As pointed out by an anonymous referee, MBA students with less than five years of working experience may not be good surrogates for managers. To assess this confounding factor, differences in results (i.e., regression intercepts as well as slopes) attributable to a dummy variable representing five years or more of working experience were assessed. No statistical significance was found. Hence, results relating to the entire sample are presented in the paper).

A large proportion of the respondents (64%) comes from organizations that employ at least 200 employees. Many of the respondents' organizations are in the manufacturing, service,

and finance sectors (27%, 20% and 16% respectively). Finally, there are 81 (34%) private companies, 79 (33%) listed companies and 55 (23%) government-related organizations represented in the sample.

To test for non-response bias, differences between the top one-third (i.e., top 79) and bottom one-third (bottom 79) of the 237 respondents were assessed. No significant statistical differences were found for the variables in the research hypotheses. The respective p-values are 0.3067 for satisfaction with pay, 0.4214 for satisfaction with promotion, 0.8888 for satisfaction with co-workers, 0.8003 for satisfaction with supervision, 0.1742 for satisfaction with work, 0.6862 for overall job satisfaction, 0.1806 for top management support for ethical behavior, 0.7066 for benevolent ethical climate, 0.3314 for principled ethical climate, and 0.7082 for the association between ethical behavior and career success.

Measurement of variables

The dependent variable, job satisfaction, is measured using a 20-item instrument which has been used by previous researchers in the business ethics area (e.g., Vitell and Davis, 1990b; Joseph and Deshpande, 1996; Viswesvaran et al., 1998). In the instrument, overall job satisfaction is derived from satisfaction with pay, promotion, co-workers, supervision and work. Each dimension comprises four items measured on a scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). A higher level of job satisfaction is indicated by a higher mean score.

The three independent variables in the study are measured as follows. For top management support for ethical behavior, the three items developed by Hunt et al. (1984) to measure top management action are adapted. An additional item is added to give a 4-item measure using a 4-point scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). A high mean score represents strong top management support for ethical behavior.

To measure the association between ethical behavior and career success in the organization,

the 6-item ethical optimism scale developed by Hunt et al. (1984) is used, with an additional item inserted to give a 7-item instrument. Each item is similarly measured on a 4-point scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). A high mean score represents a strong association between ethical behavior and career success in the organization.

As for ethical climate in organizations, the ethical climate questionnaire developed by Cullen et al. (1993) is adapted. The following three categories of ethical climate are assessed: (1) egoistic, which emphasizes the company's interest; (2) benevolent, which emphasizes the employees' interest; and (3) principled, which emphasizes compliance with rules and standard operating procedures. Additional items are added so that each of the three categories is measured by four items on a 4-point scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). An observation is assigned to the ethical climate with the highest mean score.

The items to measure the dependent variable (i.e., job satisfaction) and independent variables (i.e., top management support for ethical behavior, ethical climate and association between ethical behavior and career success) are presented in the Appendix.

Statistical methods

Descriptive statistics (i.e., frequency distributions, means and standard deviations) are used to develop a profile of the respondents and to summarize the variables. Also, alpha coefficients (Cronbach, 1951) are computed to assess the reliability of job satisfaction, top management support for ethical behavior, ethical climate and association between ethical behavior and career success in the organization. To better understand the relationships among the variables, correlation analysis is performed to generate the correlation matrix.

Finally, to test the research hypotheses, multiple regression analysis is used. This statistical method is appropriate as job satisfaction, top management support for ethical behavior, and the association between ethical behavior and

career success are measured on an interval scale. Such an approach is also consistent with those of previous studies (e.g., Joseph and Deshpande, 1996; Viswesvaran et al., 1998). As there are multiple items for each construct, the average of the multiple items is used in the multiple regression. As ethical climate is measured as a categorical variable (egoistic, benevolent or principled), it is coded as two dummy variables with the egoistic ethical climate as the reference point.

Results and findings

Descriptive statistics, alpha coefficients and correlation coefficients

The descriptive statistics and alpha coefficients of job satisfaction (pay, promotion, co-workers, supervision and work), top management support for ethical behavior, ethical climate (egoistic, benevolent or principled) and association between ethical behavior and career success are summarized in Table I. As shown, the alpha coefficients range from 0.55 to 0.89. That is, some of the variables have reliability less that the typical acceptable benchmark of 0.70 (Hair et al., 1998). In particular, satisfaction with promotion, top management support for ethical behavior, egoistic ethical climate and principled ethical climate have alpha coefficients of 0.63, 0.65, 0.55 and 0.67, respectively.

As suggested by an anonymous referee, to further investigate these low reliabilities, the item intercorrelations were examined. It was found that dropping the second item from the top management support for ethical behavior measure would improve its alpha coefficient from 0.65 to 0.77. Also, dropping the third item from principled ethical climate would improve its alpha coefficient from 0.67 to 0.76. It was decided that these two refined measures be used in the data analysis.

It is also noted that the alpha coefficient of 0.63 for satisfaction with promotion is consistent with some prior studies. For example, Hagedoorn et al. (1999) reported an alpha coefficient of 0.65 for their measure of satisfaction

TABLE I
Descriptive statistics and alpha coefficient of variables

Variable	Mean	(Std. Dev.)	Alpha coefficient
Job satisfaction (Pay)	2.37	0.58	0.71
Job satisfaction (Promotion)	2.48	0.56	0.63
Job satisfaction (Co-workers)	2.79	0.56	0.79
Job satisfaction (Supervision)	2.86	0.59	0.74
Job satisfaction (Work)	2.85	0.58	0.75
Job satisfaction (Overall)	2.67	0.45	0.89
Top management support for ethical behavior	2.76	0.61	0.65
			0.77*
Ethical climate (Egoistic)	3.12	0.47	0.55
Ethical climate (Benevolent)	2.79	0.63	0.77
Ethical climate (Principled)	3.02	0.53	0.67
			0.76*
Association between Ethical Behavior and career success	2.60	0.64	0.84

* Revised alpha coefficient after eliminating one item from the original measurement.

with supervision. A mitigating factor is that satisfaction with supervision is only one of five facets of job satisfaction used in the study. As discussed in a later section, all the facets of job satisfaction give similar results. Finally, egoistic ethical climate is not used directly in the data analysis. Instead it is used with two other measures to derive two dummy variables to capture the organization's ethical climate.

Generally, variables with low reliability lead to an underestimation of the actual strength of the relationships among them (Dooley, 1995). Thus, the error is on the conservative side. Further, the measurement refinements discussed above are expected to reduce the effect of low reliabilities on the relative importance of the variables in the regression model.

The correlation matrix of the variables in the regression model is given in Table II. As can be seen, all the measures of job satisfaction (i.e., X1 to X6 in the table) are significantly and positively correlated among themselves. In addition, top management support for ethical behavior and association between ethical behavior and career success (i.e., X7 and X10 in table, respectively) are significantly and positively correlated with the measures of job satisfaction. The only significant negative correlation is between benevolent ethical climate and principled ethical climate

(i.e., X8 and X9, respectively, in Table II). This is expected as the two ethical climates are dissimilar. Based on the correlations, only principled ethical climate is significantly and positively correlated with job satisfaction.

Multiple regression analysis results

A total of six regression runs were performed — for overall job satisfaction as well as satisfaction with pay, promotion, co-workers, supervision and work. The multiple regression analysis results are summarized in Table III. As each regression model gives consistent findings, the results are discussed only for the model with overall job satisfaction as the dependent variable.

As shown in Panel F of Table III, the regression model is significant (p-value = 0.0001) and has an R-square of 0.3626 (adjusted R-square = 0.3516). That is, 36.26% of the variation in employee overall job satisfaction can be explained by the variation in the ethics variables in organizations. The R-square level is considered adequate as the objective of the model is to assess the direction and strength of the association between organizational ethics and job satisfaction, and not to predict job satisfaction.

To test the three research hypotheses, the

TABLE II
Correlation matrix of variables

Variable	X1	X2	X3	X4	X5	X6	X7	X8	X9	X10
X1	1.00									
X2	0.40	1.00								
X3	0.29	0.55	1.00							
X4	0.44	0.63	0.75	1.00						
X5	0.23	0.55	0.62	0.66	1.00					
X6	0.61	0.80	0.82	0.89	0.79	1.00				
X7	0.21	0.32	0.30	0.36	0.32	0.38	1.00			
X8	0.09	0.12	0.10	0.02	−0.01	0.08	−0.05	1.00		
X9	0.16	0.14	0.13	0.19	0.13	0.19	0.21	−0.42	1.00	
X10	0.28	0.46	0.47	0.51	0.44	0.56	0.40	0.23	0.02	1.0

Note: Correlation coefficients ≥ 0.13 or ≤ -0.13 are significant at a 0.05 level of significance.
Legend: X1 = Job satisfaction (Pay); X2 = Job satisfaction (Promotion); X3 = Job satisfaction (Co-workers); X4 = Job satisfaction (Supervision); X5 = Job satisfaction (Work); X6 = Job satisfaction (Overall); X7 = Top management support for ethical behavior; X8 = Benevolent ethical climate (Dummy); X9 = Principled ethical climate (Dummy); X10 = Association between ethical behavior and career success.

significance of the *t*-tests for the model coefficients is assessed. As shown, the *p*-value for "top management support for ethical behavior" is 0.0036, which is highly significant. Hence, the null hypothesis H_1 (that top management support for ethical behavior has no significant effect on job satisfaction) can be rejected. In particular, the positive coefficient indicates that a stronger top management support for ethical behavior is associated with a higher level of job satisfaction in the organization. This finding is consistent with expectation.

Two dummy variables are included in the regression model to represent ethical climate; namely, "benevolent ethical climate" and "principled ethical climate". The reference group (coded as "0" for both dummy variables) is "egoistic ethical climate". At a significance level of 0.05, "benevolent ethical climate" is not significant (*p*-value = 0.2201) and "principled ethical climate" is significant (*p*-value = 0.0026). Hence, the null hypothesis H_2 (that ethical climate in the organization has no significant effect on job satisfaction) can be rejected. As indicated by the numerical sign of the "principled ethical climate" coefficient, the results indicate that a more favorable ethical climate is associated with a higher level of job satisfaction

in the organization. This finding is also consistent with expectation. Deshpande (1996) similarly found an association between job satisfaction and the organization's ethical climate.

Finally, the *p*-value for the "association between ethical behavior and career success" is highly significant at 0.0001. Therefore, the null hypothesis H_3 (that the association between ethical behavior and career success in the organization has no significant effect on job satisfaction) can be rejected. As expected, the coefficient is positive. That is, a stronger association is linked to a higher level of job satisfaction, a finding similarly obtained in Viswesvaran and Deshpande (1996).

Incidentally, Viswesvaran et al. (1998) suggested that ethics in organization should enhance satisfaction with all facets of the job, especially job satisfaction with supervision. This belief is indirectly supported in the study by the highest model *R*-square when the dependent variable is job satisfaction with supervision (as compared to the *R*-squares for job satisfaction with pay, promotion, co-workers and work). This finding is significant given the suggestion by Hagedoorn et al. (1999) that among all the facets of job satisfaction, satisfaction with supervisors and supervision has the greatest impact on employees.

TABLE III
Results of multiple regression analysis

Variable	Coefficient	t-value	p-value*
A. Job satisfaction (Pay)			
Intercept	1.53	8.72	0.0001
Top management support	0.08	1.38	0.0852
Benevolent ethical climate (dummy)	0.17	1.73	0.0424
Principled ethical climate (dummy)	0.22	2.69	0.0039
Ethical behavior and career success	0.19	3.01	0.0015
Model	(R-square = 0.1198; Adjusted = 0.1047)	F = 7.90	0.0001
B. Job satisfaction (Promotion)			
Intercept	1.22	7.83	0.0001
Top management support	0.10	2.14	0.0166
Benevolent ethical climate (dummy)	0.13	1.42	0.0784
Principled ethical climate (dummy)	0.16	2.16	0.0159
Ethical behavior and career success	0.33	5.95	0.0001
Model	(R-square = 0.2507; Adjusted = 0.2378)	F = 19.40	0.0001
C. Job satisfaction (Co-workers)			
Intercept	1.54	9.81	0.0001
Top management support	0.08	1.71	0.0440
Benevolent ethical climate (dummy)	0.09	0.99	0.1606
Principled ethical climate (dummy)	0.14	1.91	0.0287
Ethical behavior and career success	0.36	6.39	0.0001
Model	(R-square = 0.2503; Adjusted = 0.2374)	F = 19.37	0.0001
D. Job satisfaction (Supervision)			
Intercept	1.37	8.63	0.0001
Top management support	0.12	2.35	0.0099
Benevolent ethical climate (dummy)	−0.03	−0.28	0.3693
Principled ethical climate (dummy)	0.18	2.40	0.0087
Ethical behavior and career success	0.42	7.39	0.0001
Model	(R-square = 0.3140; Adjusted = 0.3021)	F = 26.54	0.0001
E. Job satisfaction (Work)			
Intercept	1.57	9.41	0.0001
Top management support	0.11	2.14	0.0166
Benevolent ethical climate (dummy)	−0.11	−1.14	0.1283
Principled Ethical Climate (dummy)	0.07	0.88	0.1909
Ethical behavior and career success	0.36	6.12	0.0001
Model	(R-square = 0.2285; Adjusted = 0.2152)	F = 17.18	0.0001
F. Job satisfaction (Overall)			
Intercept	1.45	12.47	0.0001
Top management support	0.10	2.72	0.0036
Benevolent ethical climate (dummy)	0.05	0.77	0.2201
Principled ethical climate (dummy)	0.15	2.82	0.0026
Ethical behavior and career success	0.33	8.02	0.0001
Model	(R-square = 0.3626; Adjusted = 0.3516)	F = 33.00	0.0001

* For t-tests of the model coefficients, this is the p-value for a one-tailed test since the expected direction of the alternative hypothesis is known.

Implications of findings

Generally, the findings of the study are consistent with expectations and with prior findings in the ethics literature. As compared to the prior findings of Viswesvaran et al. (1998), however, the current findings are stronger in that significant relationships were found between three measures of organizational ethics (namely, top management support for ethical behavior, the organization's ethical climate, and the association between ethical behavior and career success) and different facets of job satisfaction (with respect to pay, promotion, co-workers, supervision, work and overall). In contrast, Viswesvaran et al. (1998) found only one significant positive correlation: that between perceived top management support and job satisfaction with supervision. The current findings also confirm the prior findings of Joseph and Deshpande (1997) that ethical climate is significantly associated with job satisfaction, and of Viswesvaran and Deshpande (1996) that the association between ethical behavior and career success is significantly associated with job satisfaction.

That favorable organizational ethics is associated with job satisfaction has important implications. It is noted that top management support for ethical behavior, organizational ethical climate, and the association between ethical behavior and career success can be influenced by top managers in organizations. Thus, by consciously working on these variables, top management can enhance job satisfaction among employees and in the workplace. The crucial role of top management cannot be over emphasized. As mentioned earlier, top management commitment and support significantly impact on the effectiveness of any organizational development intervention.

Job satisfaction is an important construct in organizational settings as it has been found to affect job attitudes/behaviors and organizational outcomes. For example, job satisfaction has often been linked to organizational commitment (Joseph and Deshpande, 1996). Greater job satisfaction is expected to lead to stronger organizational commitment. Past research confirms that job satisfaction is a determinant of organi-

zational commitment (see, for example, Sims and Kroeck, 1994; Saks et al., 1996). Hence, the current findings suggest that top management can build organizational commitment by creating an ethical organization. Incidentally, the relationship between job satisfaction and organizational commitment holds not only for full-time employees but for part-time employees as well. Tansky et al. (1997) reported that job satisfaction is a significant correlate of organizational commitment among part-time workers in both their retail and health care samples.

Job satisfaction and organizational commitment are also important determinants of absenteeism and turnover intention (Dailey and Kirk, 1992). Both absenteeism and turnover are very costly to the organization. They lead to lower productivity and morale, and higher cost of hiring, retention and training. While some turnover may be desirable (e.g., as a channel to phase out unsuitable employees), absenteeism and turnover are largely disruptive to the organization and its other employees. The current findings suggest that organizational ethics can help enhance job satisfaction, which can in turn reduce absenteeism and turnover.

On organizational outcomes, the literature suggests that job satisfaction is associated with higher profitability and productivity. Whitehead (1998) cited surveys that report job satisfaction as a crucial element in the business success of organizations and in the provision of quality service to customers. The end results are higher profitability and productivity. The positive relationships between higher job satisfaction and higher profitability and productivity are also supported by West and Patterson (1998). They reported that high levels of job satisfaction and organizational commitment are determinants of improving financial performance and suggested that effective employee management explain the variation among companies in terms of profitability and productivity. Interestingly, effective employee management (and the resultant enhanced job satisfaction among employees) far outstrips emphasis on quality, technology, competitive strategy or research and development in its influence on the bottom line. Grant (1998) reported similar findings in large employee

surveys. Given the above, an implication of the findings is that organizational ethics can be expected to be at least indirectly associated with organizational performance.

In addition to job satisfaction affecting organizational commitment and business performance, a recent study by Hagedoorn et al. (1999) examined the role of job satisfaction in employees' reactions to problematic events in the organization. Generally, employees can react to problematic events via exit (e.g., leaving the organization), voice (e.g., suggesting solutions), loyalty (e.g., waiting for conditions to improve), and neglect (e.g., being absent from work). Both voice and loyalty are often categorized as constructive behaviors while exit and neglect as destructive behaviors. It is found that job satisfaction promotes constructive reactions and suppress destructive reactions to problematic events. Hagedoorn et al. (1999) also speculated that organizational justice (which is expected to affect job satisfaction as per this study) may also be a motivator of constructive behaviors and suppressor of destructive behaviors.

From above, it can be seen that organizational ethics affect job satisfaction, which in turn promotes favorable job attitudes/behaviors and organizational outcomes. Also, top management has considerable influence on organizational ethics.

Conclusions, limitations and future research

This study investigates the link between three measures of organizational ethics and job satisfaction perceived by managers in Singapore. In particular, it investigates whether a higher level of job satisfaction is associated with a higher level of top management support for ethical behavior, a more favorable ethical climate in the organization, and a stronger association between ethical behavior and career success. A questionnaire survey yielded 237 usable responses (a response rate of 59%). Results obtained from multiple regression analysis indicate a significant and positive link between all the three measures of organizational ethics and job satisfaction. This finding implies that organizational ethics is one

of the means through which corporate leaders can generate favorable job attitudes/behaviors and organizational outcomes. It also indicates the importance of continued research in this area.

More important, it is useful for top managers to be aware that enhanced job satisfaction can lead to higher organizational commitment, lower absenteeism and turnover, higher profitability and productivity, and more favorable job attitudes/ behaviors (e.g., in dealing with problematic events in the organization).

To enhance organizational ethics, this study has examined top management support for ethical behavior, the organization's ethical climate, and the association between ethical behavior and career success. The organizational ethics program should, however, go beyond these three components. For example, the literature suggests that the code of ethics is probably the most common way that organizations can influence ethical behavior. Ross (1988) reported that a code of ethics is the most effective measure for encouraging ethical behavior. Besides providing guidelines for appropriate employee behavior and establishing better corporate culture, a code of ethics can also improve management, help organizations to comply with government guidelines, and produce more socially responsible organizations (Cleek and Leonard, 1998). To enhance its effectiveness, however, a code of ethics should be reinforced by other factors (e.g., top management support for ethical behavior).

As aptly put by Stevens (1999), codes of ethics represent a good start, but they cannot exist on their own. In particular, these codes must reflect ideals in which employees believe in and they must become part of the organizational culture. In addition, serious and comprehensive management of organizational culture means, among other things, communicating ethical values effectively. Stevens (1999) reported that training programs is the best source for learning ethical expectations. Teaching and learning from co-workers, behavioral modeling by co-workers and top managers, and orientation programs are important sources for learning about ethics in the organization too. To sum up, effective ethical communication appears to be the key in organizational ethics.

In interpreting the findings of the study, the following limitations should be borne in mind. First, the sample comprises students enrolled in the MBA program conducted by one of the universities in Singapore. Although most of these MBA students hold full-time positions in organizations while they pursue their MBA studies, they may not be representative of the population of managers in Singapore. Further, the findings may not be generalizable to a different population (e.g., general workers) or geographical region (e.g., Japan or Australia).

Second, the usual limitations of a self-report research questionnaire and survey apply (i.e., non-response bias and response bias). Non-response bias may come about when sampled subjects who are significantly different from the respondents do not respond. However, this may not be a serious problem in the study because the response rate of 59% may be considered acceptable for a survey. Further, test results detect no indication of non-response bias. Response bias may be introduced when a respondent's responses are biased by the background characteristics of the respondent or the study. This, however, is mitigated by the anonymity of the respondents and promised confidentiality of the responses.

Third, the variables investigated in the study are not meant to be complete or exhaustive. For example, the dependent variable (i.e. job satisfaction) is only one of several possible organizational outcomes. Other variables that future research can focus on include staff motivation, commitment, productivity and company returns. Similarly, the independent variables to capture organizational ethics are limited to only top management support for ethical behavior, ethical climate and the association between ethical behavior and career success in the organization. Other possibilities include the existence or implementation of a code of ethics, and some measures of staff attributes and ethical attitude. However, it is noted that a lengthy research questionnaire is likely to make the questionnaire more difficult to complete and hence is likely to reduce the response rate.

Finally, in this concluding section, it is appropriate to suggest some possible directions for future research. The last limitation mentioned above suggests that future research can be extended to cover more organizational outcomes and other measures of organizational ethics. Such extensions can add to the existing business ethics literature, especially on the outcomes of ethics in organizations. Future research can also investigate the process mechanisms by which organizational ethics affect organizational outcomes. It is also suggested that this line of research account for individual differences in personality and other factors. Further, it is useful to study business ethics in different countries to understand the antecedents and consequences of ethical behavior from an international, global, or even cultural, perspective. Finally, future research can attempt to distinguish between nationality and ethnicity (e.g., one can talk of Chinese and Malays in Singapore or Aryans and Dravidians in India).

Acknowledgement

Appendix – Measurement of constructs

Job Satisfaction

Pay
1. My organization pays better than competitors.
2. My pay is adequate considering the responsibilities I have.
3. I am underpaid for what I do.*
4. My fringe benefits are generous.

Promotion
1. I do not like the basis on which my organization promotes people.*
2. Promotions are infrequent in my organization.*
3. If I do a good job, I am likely to get promoted.
4. I am satisfied with my rate of advancement.

Co-workers
1. The people that I work with do not give me enough support.*
2. In my organization, when I ask people to do things, the job gets done.
3. I enjoy working with the people in my organization.

4. In my organization, I work with responsible people.

Supervision
1. The managers I work for back me up.
2. The managers I work for are competent.
3. My supervisors do not listen to me.*
4. Management does not treat me fairly.*

Work
1. My job is interesting.
2. I feel good about the amount of responsibility in my job.
3. I would rather be doing another job.*
4. I get little sense of accomplishment from doing my job.*

Top management support for ethical behavior

1. Top management in my organization has clearly conveyed that unethical behavior will not be tolerated.
2. Top management in my organization should have higher ethical standards than they do now.*
3. If a manager in my organization is discovered to have engaged in unethical behavior that results primarily in personal gain rather than corporate gain, he will be promptly reprimanded.
4. If a manager in my organization is discovered to have engaged in unethical behavior, he will be promptly reprimanded even if the behavior results primarily in corporate gain.

Ethical climate

Egoistic
1. My organization emphasizes the importance of furthering its interests.
2. Employees in my organization are not expected to be concerned with the organization's interests all the time.*
3. All decisions and actions in my organization are expected to contribute to the organization's interests.
4. Work that hurts my organization's interests can be acceptable.*

Benevolent
1. Concern for employees is prevalent in my organization.
2. My organization does not emphasize employee welfare.*

3. All decisions and actions in my organization are expected to result in what is generally best for everyone.
4. My organization does not consider the well-being of all employees.*

Principled
1. Compliance with organization rules and procedures is very important in my organization.
2. Employees in my organization are not expected to stick to organization policies strictly.*
3. People who do not follow organization rules and procedures are not viewed favorably in my organization.
4. My organization does not emphasize the importance of its rules, procedures and policies.*

Association between ethical behavior and career success in the organization

1. Successful managers in my organization are more ethical than unsuccessful managers.
2. In order to succeed in my organization, it is often necessary to compromise one's ethics.*
3. Successful managers in my organization withhold information that is detrimental to their self-interest.*
4. Successful managers in my organization make rivals look bad in the eyes of important people.*
5. Successful managers in my organization look for a "scape-goat" when they feel they may be associated with failure.*
6. Successful managers in my organization take credit for the ideas and accomplishments of others.*
7. Ethical behavior is important for success in my organization.

* Indicates reverse-scored items.
Note: All items are measured on a 4-point scale, where "1" = "Strongly disagree" and "4" = "Strongly agree".

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