

Fostering Ethical Whistleblowing Intentions: Cultivating Integrity and Accountability through Educational Integration

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To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBS/v15-i1/24445> DOI:10.6007/IJARBS/v15-i1/24445

Published Date: 27 January 2025

Abstract

This study looks at the elements that influence people's intentions to engage in ethical whistleblowing, with a particular emphasis on building an organizational culture of integrity and accountability. It investigates the role of integrating educational efforts centered on whistleblowing ethics as a strategy of encouraging ethical behavior and increasing organizational transparency. Whistleblowing, or disclosing unethical or illegal action, is vital to encouraging transparency and ethical behavior. The study investigates the influence of variables such as magnitude of consequences, social consensus, proximity to wrongdoing, fear of retaliation, organizational commitment, and organizational ethical values in the emergence of whistleblowing intentions. Drawing on existing literature and theoretical frameworks, the study synthesizes empirical evidence and theoretical insights to provide a comprehensive understanding of the determinants of ethical whistleblowing intentions. To investigate this issue, quantitative data was collected from 150 citizen workers and convenience sampling. The findings highlight the significant relationship of importance of social consensus, proximity and organizational commitment and whistleblowing intention. The study concludes with implications for organizational practice and recommendations for future research in the field of whistleblowing and organizational ethics.

Keywords: Whistleblowing, Integrity, Accountability

Introduction

Whistleblowing, the exposure of unethical or illegal practices within organizations, has become a crucial aspect of ethical corporate governance and corporate responsibility. In recent years, whistleblowing has attracted the attention of academics, policy makers and practitioners due to its potential to expose wrongdoing, protect stakeholder interests and uphold ethical standards. Understanding the dynamics of whistleblowing behavior and the factors that influence individuals' intentions to come forward is critical to promoting transparency, integrity, and ethical behavior in organizations.

Whistleblowing is the report of any wrongdoing or misbehavior within an organization. Whistleblowing can be described as the exposure of any illegal practices involving members or organizations, either internationally or internally. Corruption, biased practices, fraud, waste, and any opportunity that may result in a negative impact on the organization, consumer, public, or environment are examples of illegal practices or misconduct. As indicated by Chiu (2003), and Said et al. (2017), the number of fraud cases continues to rise rapidly year after year due to unsuccessful leaks of unethical, not right, or criminal acts in the organization.

The literature on whistleblowing covers a wide range of topics, including the motivations and barriers to whistleblowing, the role of organizational culture in shaping whistleblowing behavior, and the impact of whistleblowing on organizational governance and reputation (Miceli & Near, 2005; Miceli & Near, 2009).

One of the most difficult aspects of researching whistleblowing is balancing the competing interests and ethical quandaries that whistleblowers face. While whistleblowing is frequently praised as an act of bravery and moral obligation, whistleblowers may face considerable dangers such as reprisal, social isolation, and professional ramifications. Understanding the motives and impediments to whistleblowing, as well as the systems in place to encourage and protect whistleblowers, is crucial for building an atmosphere conducive to ethical reporting.

In psychology, the decision to blow the whistle is not straightforward (Miceli & Near, 2005; Miceli & Near, 2009; Zainol et al., 2018). Therefore, the Malaysian Parliament approved the Whistleblower Protection Act 2010 in May 2010, which became effective in December 2010. According to the National Key Result Area (NKRA), the act is a Malaysian law that encourages and facilitates disclosures of improper conduct in the public and private sectors, protects those who make those disclosures from adverse action, provides for the matter disclosed to be investigated and dealt with, and provides for the remedies related thereto (Zainol et al., 2018).

Corporate culture influences behavior and attitudes regarding whistleblowing. Cultures that value transparency, openness, and ethical behavior are more likely to foster whistleblowing and effectively confront misconduct. In contrast, societies marked by secrecy, fear, and hierarchical authority may discourage whistleblowers and preserve a culture of silence. Research has highlighted the importance of fostering a supportive organizational culture that values integrity, trust and accountability in order to encourage ethical whistleblowing (Miceli & Near, 2005; Miceli & Near, 2009). Even if various studies have been completed addressing the element encouraging and influencing to be a whistleblower, the research needs to be continually conducted extensively to acquire knowledge on certain specific questions about whistleblowing, especially in Malaysia (Zainol et al., 2018).

This paper to investigate the factors that influence whistleblowers' intentions and behavior in the context of organizational, cultural setting and integrating whistleblowing education into organizational structures in order to create a solid ethical framework that promotes responsible reporting practices.

Problem Statement

Whistleblowing is full of complexity and ethical dilemmas, as individuals have to deal with conflicting interests and potential risks when deciding whether to report wrongdoing within their organization. Although whistleblowing is often seen as a courageous act of moral responsibility, whistleblowers can face significant barriers, including fear of retaliation, social ostracism and professional consequences. In addition, organizational cultures that emphasize secrecy, loyalty and hierarchical authority can discourage whistleblowers and perpetuate a culture of silence (Baraz & Sivil, 2019). In addition, educational measures play an important role in shaping individuals' perceptions of whistleblowing. Integrating whistleblowing into university curricula provides students with the necessary knowledge and skills to challenge ethical dilemmas in real-life scenarios. By incorporating topics such as ethical decision making, communication strategies and legal frameworks into academic programs, students will be better prepared for ethical challenges in their future roles. The current study was conducted for the following purposes:

1. To investigate the factors that influence whistleblowers' intentions and behavior in the context of organizational, cultural setting and integrating whistleblowing education into organizational structures in order to create a solid ethical framework that promotes responsible reporting practices.

Literature Review

Whistleblowing Intention

Whistleblowing, the act of reporting unethical or illegal behavior within an organization, plays a crucial role in promoting integrity and accountability. Organizations with a strong culture of ethical whistleblowing encourage employees to speak up about wrongdoing without fear of retaliation, thereby fostering trust and transparency. Whistleblowing intention indicates to the possibility that association members will testify unlawful dishonorable activities to parties in the company who are inclined and able to take action to fix the wrongdoing (Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2005). In general, whistleblowing intention can be defined as an individual's deep desire to achieve something advantageous. Someone who understands the importance of whistleblowing in exposing wrongdoing and the negative consequences of such wrongdoing acts manages to have whistleblower intention.

Magnitude of Consequences

Tara (2011) defined magnitude of consequences as the harm or benefit to individuals arising from an action. Magnitude of consequences such a reality of the effect of an immoral action (Valentine & Hollingworth, 2012; Valentine & Hollingworth, 2019). Sampaio and Sobral (2013) specified that magnitude of consequences is linked with the degree to which an individual associate with the penalties of the wrongdoing. The perceived severity of the wrongdoing and its potential impact on stakeholders significantly influences individuals' decisions to blow the whistle. Therefore, the magnitude of consequences serves as a motivator for ethical whistleblowing intentions, as individuals weigh the potential harm caused by the wrongdoing against the risks associated with reporting it.

Social Consensus

Barnet (2001) defined social consensus as the level agreement an individual about the impact of the societal issue. Trongmateerut and Sweeney (2013), stated that when people close to specific individual accept or approve the behavior, the individual will feel less uncertain and

more expected to connect in the moral behavior. Social consensus is the degree to which people believe that others in their social surroundings share their ethical ideals and conventions. Employees are more likely to feel supported and validated in their decision to blow the whistle in businesses that have a strong agreement on ethical behavior and an integrity culture. According to research, social support and peer validation have an important effect in reducing fear of retaliation and fostering ethical whistleblower action.

Proximity

Proximity defined as the point to which an actor can detect with potential wrongdoer of the social issue. Proximity can also be described how socially, ethnically, physically close the victim of moral act is to individual that make a wise decision (Shawver, 2011). The proximity of individuals to the wrongdoing influences their likelihood of blowing the whistle. Employees who are directly involved or witness unethical behavior firsthand may feel a stronger moral obligation to report it (Miceli & Near, 2005; Miceli & Near, 2009). Proximity to the wrongdoing increases individuals' awareness of the ethical implications and motivates them to take action to address the misconduct, even in the face of potential retaliation.

Fear of Retaliation

Retaliation have been defined as undesirable action taken counter to a informer as a result of internal or external whistleblowing (Miceli & Near, 2005; Miceli & Near, 2009). Moreover, retaliation is a variety of positive or negative outcomes confronted by whistleblower in direct reaction to whistleblowing. Fear of retaliation is a significant barrier to ethical whistleblowing intentions. Employees may be reluctant to report misbehavior because of fears about negative consequences such as job loss or emotion. Organizations that fail to create a supportive environment for whistleblowers risk silencing dissent and perpetuating a culture of secrecy and misconduct (Miceli & Near, 2005; Miceli & Near, 2009). Mitigating fear of retaliation through robust whistleblower protection policies and supportive leadership is essential for nurturing ethical whistleblowing intentions.

Organizational Commitment

Organizational commitment can be described as the virtual strength of an individual' recognition and engagement with the organization (Alleyne et al., 2016). Employees' commitment to their organization and its values influences their willingness to engage in ethical whistleblowing. Organizational commitment serves as a driving force for ethical whistleblowing intentions, as employees strive to uphold the integrity and reputation of their organization.

Corporate Ethical Values

Alleyne et al. (2016) stated corporate moral value as a division of organizational philosophy, indicating a multidimensional interaction among numerous either formal or informal systems of social control. Therefore, organizations that stress ethical ideals and integrity in their corporate culture are more likely to encourage employees to report ethical violations. Organizations that promote ethical standards and hold employees accountable for following them are better able to avoid misconduct and address it in a timely and efficient manner.

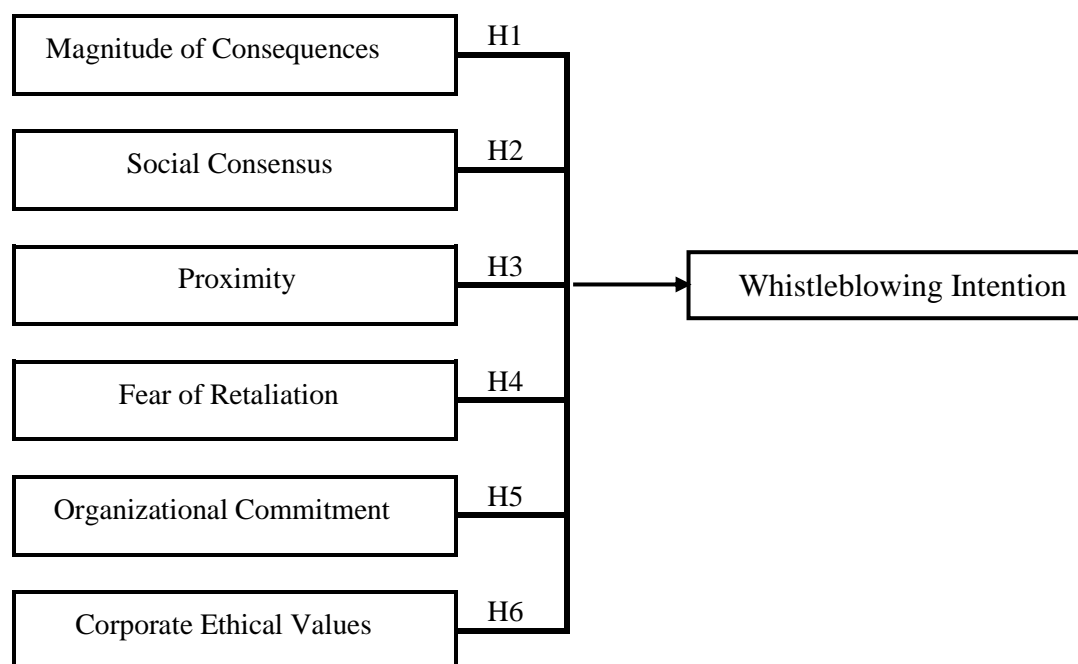
Research Framework

Figure 1: Research Framework

Methodology*Research Design*

The study's population was 1,898 citizen workers. According to Krejcie and Morgan (1970), based on the population, 320 employees were made up to be the sample. The quantitative survey method was conducted by distributing the questionnaires to citizen worker above 18 ages in northern region of Malaysia organization to reflect our investigation which is the factor lead to the intention of whistleblower. The convenience sampling process is run by selecting a sufficient number of elements from the population then the result obtain will be concluded to present a whole population actual result. The Statistical Package for Social Science was used to evaluate the data after employing simple random sampling and survey procedures (SPSS).

In examining whistleblowing intention as the dependent variable, the measurement approach draws upon the work of Chen and Lai (2014), who provide a construct consisting of four items for this purpose. Conversely, the independent variable, which encompasses the dimensions of magnitude and consequences, is operationalized utilizing a scale adapted from the framework proposed by Baird, Zelin, and Olson (2016), comprising four items. Social consensus, an integral facet of the independent variable, is assessed through a scale comprising four items, as delineated by Trongmateerut and Sweeny (2013). Similarly, the construct of proximity is evaluated using a scale comprising three items, as established by Carlson et al. (2009).

Additionally, the construct of fear of retaliation, recognized as a significant determinant of behavior, is assessed through a comprehensive scale comprising five items, as conceptualized by Brown (2008). Moreover, organizational commitment is gauged using a scale comprising

four items, as outlined by Hunt et al. (1985), while corporate ethical values are examined through a construct consisting of four items, also established by Hunt et al. (1985). The scale will be used is five-point likert scale, which will be defined as 1 = “strongly disagree” to 5 = “strongly agree”.

Data Analysis

Table 1

Pearson Correlation Analysis

| Variables | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|---------------------------|---------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|---|
| Magnitude of consequences | 1 | | | | | | |
| Social consensus | -0.24** | | | | | | |
| Proximity | -0.08 | 0.04 | | | | | |
| Fear of retaliation | -0.11 | 0.09 | 0.08 | | | | |
| Organizational Commitment | -0.35** | 0.48** | 0.10 | 0.39** | | | |
| Corporate Ethical Values | -0.35** | 0.38** | 0.06 | 0.24** | 0.42** | | |
| Whistleblowing Intention | -0.25 | 0.45** | | 0.21* | 0.48** | 0.33** | 1 |
| | | | 0.24** | | | | |

Note: N= 150, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Of the 320 sample respondents, 320 questionnaires were distributed and received. Only 150 (47%) were usable. Of this, 81 were male respondents (54%) and 69 were female respondents (46%). The results in Table 1 were interpreted using Pearson correlation coefficients (r). In this study, 3 independent variables (social consensus, organizational commitment, corporate ethical values) were significantly and positively correlated with the dependent variable (whistleblowing intention).

Table 2

Regression Analysis

| Dependent variable: Whistleblowing intention | | |
|--|---------|---------|
| Independent variables | β | Sig. |
| Magnitude of consequences | -0.046 | 0.538 |
| Social consensus | 0.285 | 0.000** |
| Proximity | 0.192 | 0.005** |
| Fear of retaliation | 0.042 | 0.577 |
| Organizational commitment | 0.262 | 0.004** |
| Corporate Ethical Values | 0.073 | 0.359 |
| R square | 0.348 | |
| Adjusted R square | 0.320 | |
| F test | 12.711 | 0.000** |

Note: N= 150, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

The result of regression analysis is presented in Table 2, which provides the tabulated findings of the analyses on the relationships between the independent variables (magnitude of consequences, social consensus, proximity, fear of retaliation, organizational commitment and corporate ethical values) and the dependent variable (whistleblowing intention). Table

2 shows 3 independent variables (social consensus, proximity and organizational commitment) significantly and positive relationship with the dependent variable. However, 3 independent variables, namely: magnitude of consequences, fear of retaliation and corporate ethical values insignificant relationship with the whistleblowing intention.

Discussion

The organizations can foster a culture of integrity and accountability by implementing robust support mechanisms and promoting transparency in reporting processes. The study contributes to theoretical understanding by providing empirical evidence of the determinants of whistleblowing intention. The results have several implications for practice and policy. Organizations should prioritize the implementation of whistleblower protection policies, ethical leadership training, and transparent reporting procedures to create an enabling environment for ethical reporting. In addition, policymakers and regulators should enact legislation to protect whistleblowers from retaliation and create opportunities for anonymous reporting.

Limitations and Suggestions For Future Research

This study was confined to citizen workers in general and focused solely on the northern region of Malaysia. It is difficult to conduct a study on whistleblowers, which could be seen as a limitation. Future research should explore cross-cultural differences in whistleblower attitudes and behaviors, examine the long-term outcomes of whistleblowing for whistleblowers and organizations, and investigate the role of new technologies in facilitating ethical reporting.

Conclusion

Whistleblowing remains a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that intersects with issues of ethics, corporate governance and organizational behavior. Encouraging whistleblowing is essential to promoting transparency, integrity and accountability in organizations. By removing barriers to whistleblowing and creating an enabling environment for ethical reporting, organizations can improve their governance practices, protect stakeholder interests and uphold ethical standards. Despite the progress that has been made in understanding whistleblowing behavior, there are still some research gaps that warrant further investigation. Through interdisciplinary collaboration and evidence-based interventions, researchers, academics, practitioners and policy makers can work together to promote a culture of integrity and accountability among employees and university students as future employees in the modern workplace. Therefore, incorporating whistleblower education into university curricula is a proactive step toward raising ethical awareness and encouraging responsible behavior among future generations.

This research contributes to the theoretical understanding of whistleblower intents by including essential elements like as social consensus, proximity and organizational commitment into the framework of ethical decision making. The study expands on current models by stressing the importance of educational integration in molding ethical awareness and conduct, providing more insight into the elements that drive ethical reporting. Through a detailed study, it adds to the expanding body of research on the relationship between ethical decision-making and corporate governance, providing a new viewpoint on how educational initiatives might build an integrity culture within firms.

Contextually, this research provides insight on the Malaysian business environment by investigating how cultural values, legal frameworks, and organizational structures influence whistleblowing activities. It highlights the importance of teaching activities that are specifically tailored to Malaysia's unique cultural and legislative framework, ensuring that ethical principles are not just known but actively practiced. The findings are a helpful resource for policymakers and corporate leaders as they build focused policies to increase ethical awareness, open communication, and responsible reporting within firms.

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