Dissertation Proposal Sample

Dimensions of Ethical Climate and Ethical Capital in the UK Public

Sector: An Assessment of Law Enforcement

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1.1.   Title

Dimensions of Ethical Climate and Ethical Capital in the UK Public Sector: An Assessment of Law Enforcement

1.2.   Introduction

Extant literature has examined the role of ethics in public administration from the perspective of impact on governance, such as performance in local governance (Brereton & Temple, 1999) as well as impact on public sector employees, such as inclusion of employees in ethical decision making (Beeri et al., 2013), awareness of ethical code of conduct (Banks, 2011) and perception of ethical climate (Shacklock et al., 2011). Menzel (2005:141) argues that the most common method used by public organisations to ensure that the ethical responsibility of public officials is promoted is largely dependent on the ethical codes, policies and other guidance standards set at a local and a national level. Gawthorp (2005:241) reports that there is a growing need for an internationally applicable government system and that in such cases the responsibility of promoting ethical and moral values within the democracy is found to directly rest on policymakers and public managers. The author also argues that in such cases the promotion of a positive ethical climate is key. In light of the above views, this research will focus on the importance of ethics in relation to public sector employees by examining the perception of ethical climate within a single public sector.

The primary research question of the study is:

How is the ethical climate within UK law enforcement perceived by its employees?

The objectives which meet the above research question include:
1. To identify the dimensions of ethical climate which are applicable to public sector organisations from literature and identify a literature framework.

2. To examine the relevance of these dimensions within the UK law enforcement sector.

3. To identify the importance of ethical capital in impacting the ethical climate.

4. To assess implications and recommendations for the specific law enforcement agencies.

Raile (2012:253) identifies that the extent to which a democratic government is able to improve the welfare of its people and meet its aims of serving its citizens is largely dependent on the behaviour of its employees. It is reported by EU (2012:123) that 71% of UK citizens consider corruption a key problem in the UK and that 64% believe that corruption is part of the UK's public sector culture (EU, 2012:32). The report also identifies that 33% of people consider bribery or abuse of power as widespread amongst the policy force (EU, 2012:134). Verkaik (2012) reported that in 2011, a total of 67 officers were asked to leave the police force, 45 cases were referred to external bodies and 643 officers were given a warning and advice on the need to follow ethical procedures. It is therefore argued that addressing the ethical issues within the context of law enforcement in the UK is a key area of research.

This clearly shows the need to revisit the perception of ethical climate within the public sector in the UK, especially amongst law enforcement departments.

1.3.   Relation to Previous Research (Theoretical Framework)

Ethical climate is defined in literature as the shared perception of a group of norms which relate to the policies of an organisation, the procedures followed and the actual practices (Martin and Cullent, 2006). The ethical climate of an organisation can also be identified as norms which distinguish between the correct and wrong behaviour of the employees within an organisation (O'Fallon and Butterfield, 2005). It is argued that there is extensive research on the perception of ethical climate in the private sector (Peterson, 2002; Trevino et al., 1998). However, the research on public organisations is less (Menzel, 1995; Ashkanasy et al., 2000; Shalock et al., 2011). Many implications of ethical climate and its importance within the public organisation have been identified, including mediation by organisational politics

(Vashdi et al., 2012) and lower job satisfaction (Menzel, 1996). The purpose of this research is to extend these views to law enforcement officials within the UK and assess their perception.

1.3.1.   Ethical Climate and its Dimensions

The current research identifies with a specific domain of organisation climate, referred to as the ethical climate. The primary efforts to identify the dimensions of ethical climate in organisations were carried out by Victor and Cullen (1988). The authors identify that ethical climate within an organisation is a multi-dimensional construct and that to measure such an instrument consists of nine a priori types.

The nine a priori ethical climate constructs identified by Victor and Cullen were found to emerge from two dimensions and three levels. The first of these two dimensions is called the type of criteria. The criteria type identifies the dominant moral philosophy that is prevalent within the organisation.   The three levels within this dimension include egoism, benevolence and principle (Victor and Cullen, 1988:105).   The second dimension is the locus of analysis, which identifies the primary concern of the individual with respect to ethical decision making. The three levels within this dimension include self-interest (individual factors), company interest (local factors) and societal interest (cosmopolitan factors) (Victor and Cullen, 1988:107).

These dimensions were tested and extracted using factor analysis and five components were identified. The first component, caring, identifies the degree to which the environment is characterised by workers who are interested in promoting the well-being of others. The second component, law and code, identifies the degree to which employees are found to adhere to the codes and regulations of their government. The third component, rules, identifies the degree to which employees are found to follow the rules of their organisation. The fourth component, instrumental, identifies the degree to which self-interest is given importance, and finally, the fifth component, independence, identifies the degree to which employees proceed based on their independent moral beliefs (Shacklock et al., 2011:54). The current research will examine the ethical climate dimensions of Victor and Cullen in the context of law enforcement officials.

1.3.2. Importance of Ethical Capital

Huq et al. (2011) contend that the promotion of positive attitude by the public is key to law enforcement. In light of this view, the ethical capital should be considered as a key factor impacting ethical climate. Early research has identified that the perception of an ethical climate will help facilitate improvements in productivity and outcomes by creating an intangible reservoir of ethical implications. The researchers identify such outcomes as being similar to those of social capital (Portes, 1988; Putnam, 2000), which can be identified as a non-monetary measure of capital. For instance, Portes (1988:2) identifies that social capital is capital where "the involvement and participation in groups can have positive consequences for the individual and the community". Raile et al. (2012:254) contend that when there is accrual of ethical capital in public organisations, there is a positive perception of ethical climate by public sector employees.

1.4. Proposed Methods

1.4.1. Research Design

The research will adopt the Saunders et al. (2011) research onion approach to present the research methodology. The study aims at adopting a positivist research philosophy, where all conclusions are based on scientific reality (Bryman and Bell, 2007). The study will identify a specific research area (ethical climate) and arrive at answers to a specific research question (i.e. the perception of ethical climate by law enforcement officials).

Saunders et al. (2011) identify that the research approach and method can be of two types. The deductive-quantitative paradigm involves the testing of previously proposed theories and research instruments in the given context. In the current research, quantitative data is expected to be collected using the ethical climate questionnaire of Victor and Cullen. The numerical data will be tested to identify with the five components and thereby address the research hypotheses. The inductive-qualitative paradigm, on the other hand, involves observations which are then

associated with theoretical frameworks. A qualitative research method will involve the collection of non-numerical data to identify underlying themes (Bryman, 2012). The qualitative research approach will help assess the role of ethical capital in promotion of ethical climate. This method is adopted as there are no established frameworks which have been validated to test the relationship. The research will make use of an interview to establish the relevance of ethical climate and capital within law enforcement agencies. Therefore a mixed methods approach is promoted in the study.

1.4.2. Data Collection

The study will use primary data collection instruments including a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. According to Saunders et al. (2011), the use of a primary data collection approach will help gather first hand information about the research and thereby arrive at clear implications for the study population. The questionnaire is used as it will help to identify multiple respondents within a short period of time. The previously validated Victor and Cullen instrument for ethical climate will be promoted. The semi-structured interview, on the other hand, will give detailed information about a specific organisation. The semi-structured interview will be framed from a detailed review of literature to examine the importance of ethical capital and its relationship to ethical climate within the organisation.

1.4.3. Sampling and Data Collection

The research targets the law enforcement department of _____. The researcher will use a random sampling method to reach out to employees within the department. The employees include both police and administrative personnel. The researcher will gain permission and approach the employees directly in the break-room to request participation in the study. The respondents who are willing to take part will be provided with the instrument and asked to fill it in within the next seven days. The respondents will be given an envelope in which to mail the completed questionnaire to the researcher. The employees who were interested in taking part

in the interview will be contacted for an appointment to conduct the interview. The interview will be conducted and the responses taped.

1.4.4.   Data Analysis

The questionnaire data will be examined using SPSS software, while the qualitative data will be examined using thematic analysis.

1.5.   Reflections

The researcher expects practical limitations, including access to the employees during their free time. It is also expected that the research instruments may be screened by the law enforcement public relationships department before being allowed to be presented to their employees. It also expected that the time taken to receive the completed instrument may be longer than seven days. Another major area of concern is the possibility that the response rate is low. According to Saunders et al. (2011), the response rate that can be expected is 50%. However, in the current research environment (a high stress work environment), there may be problems of even lower response rate. To reduce this limitation, the researcher expects to contact employees from different shifts to maximise response. The researcher also hopes that the data collection process will be carried out at the first stage of research to ensure enough time to maximise data collection.

Some of the theoretical implications which can be associated with the research include the relevance of the Victor and Cullen instrument to the law enforcement department. It is also important to acknowledge that there is limited research which has tested the ethical climate and ethical capital within the law enforcement agencies of the UK. Therefore, the scope of argument and the relevance of the study instruments to the study should be clearly tested. To overcome this problem, the researcher will first do extensive validation including testing of reliability and validity.

The researcher also acknowledges that there can be ethical problems, including the possible reluctance of the employees to answer truthfully. It is also important for the

researcher to be very clear in expressing the findings, as a negative implication on the law enforcement agency can have negative public implications. Therefore, it is important that the researcher ensures that the results are presented within the scope of the study and no generalisations are made to law enforcement officials throughout the UK.

1.6. Timetable

	Weeks					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Submission of proposal	■					
Approval and ethical clearance		■				
Literature review	■	■	■			
Instrument development		■	■			
Data collection - interview			■	■		
Data collection - questionnaire				■		
Analysis					■	
Write up of results and work completion					■	■

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