

Exploring Millennial Researcher Ethical Decision Model: Towards Using A Psychoanalytic Approach

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Abstract—Generational factor is significantly important because Millennials are more ambitious, confident, independent, and achievement-oriented and thus, created generational differences in ethical choice as a conscientious moral agent and how to act to maximize outcome. Due to these characteristics, the Millennials are found to be less ethical reasoning tolerant. Accordingly, this proposed study is to synthesize the underlying factors of ethical decision making in millennial researchers. With interest in understanding the ethical framework used by millennial researcher, this research will explore into the characteristics of the millennial and focus on the integration of moral development and theory of reasoned action to support the third thrust of National Higher Education Strategic Plan (NHESP) wherein to enhance research and innovation.

Keywords: Ethical decision, Millennial, Moral development, Psychoanalytic, Theory reasoned action

I. Introduction

Little is known on the psychoanalytic approach underlies ethical decision impetus of millennial researchers in Malaysia, let alone an integrated model of ethical decision making due to the dearth of empirical support to further understand their ethical wisdom and sensible conduct in research. Many empirical studies on ethical decision making aimed to adapt theories into practice for individual designating segments. However, these studies have failed to explain the characters' behavior and motivations that seem closely to apply to the characters' behavior. Most of the ethical decision surveys conducted in Malaysia were focused on university students specific accounting students (Mohamed Saat et al., 2009), and business students (Lau et al., 2009), sales managers (Karande et al., 2000), nurses (Nemie, 2009), information technology employees' (Fung, 2001), internal auditors (Ahmad et al., 2010), human resource executives (Wan Nasir, 2005) and managers (Mustamil & Quaddus, 2009, 2008) due to strong empirical supported the ethical decision making process (Karande et al., 2000), and in an attempt to understand the way they think and act when faced with an ethical dilemma at work (O'Fallon & Butterfield, 2005). However, little is known on the underlying

ethical decisions impetus (Khalid et al., 2013) of millennial researcher in Malaysia, let alone an integrated model of ethical decision making. The implication of ethical decision making in psychoanalytic approaches to date has yet to be explored in order to provide an integrative source of decision making capacity beyond the clinical-based research.

A millennial generation known as generation Y, this group was born between the 1980s and early 2000s or age 32 and below. Generation Y is making around 40 percent population in Malaysia and remains so much to be understood about this demographic group. Recent research proposed that these members of the millennial generation, employ deontological decision making rules more often than Gen X but use a variety framework depending upon the scenario and this group is poorly understood and different from other generation in view of the process and value (Harris & Arli, 2012, pp 114). The undervaluation of ethical dimensions has caused practical disability of researchers to describe social activities accurately, and to employ adequate justification of social hope and moral justification. With interest in the understanding millennial generation, generational factor is important because millennial is more ambitious, confident, independent, and achievement-oriented and thus, created generational differences in ethical choice as a conscientious moral agent and how act maximize outcome (Trevino & Nelson, 2007). Due to generational characteristics, this millennial group of researcher is believed to have less ethical tolerance (Abdul Hamid & Yahya, 2011).

This is especially true with the challenging development of theoretical framework due to the multitude complex and varied constructs of millennial researchers' ethical behaviors. Nevertheless, the modus operandi of the construction of ethical decision making process is always vague. The non-existence of psychoanalytic approaches to sense the nature of ethical agents in motivation and drive has limited the enriching contribution of experiences, the unconscious, and defense mechanisms that make up the majority of human being's personalities (Gaffney & Perryman 2012), and embody universal psychological processes and motivations (Bowker, 2011). According to Danforth (2006), pragmatism frames the disability of researchers to describe the social activity accurately. The moral development theory rectifies the disadvantage through individual thought that grow to be a possible source of social hope and moral imagination (Bowker, 2011). Conversely, the theory of reasoned action is considered a culture (organization and social) and its influence of personality to enrich ethical reflection (Meissner, 2007). These theories are mutually blended to address the limits in psychoanalytic approach that have failed to include the

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evidence of the impact of the environment on the individual's cognitive development (Gaffney & Perryman, 2012),

Thus, the purpose of the proposed study is to synthesize the underlying factors of ethical decision making and mutually enriching contribution of ethical analysis. In particular, the research will focus on the moral development theory and the theory of reasoned action to support the third thrust of National Higher Education Strategic Plan (NHESP) in which to enhance research and innovation (Ministry of Higher Education, 2006).

II. Literature Review

A. Millennials and Ethical Decision Making

Individual or organizations to choose are among several actions that must be evaluated as right or wrong, ethical or unethical (Ferrell & Fraedrich, 1991). Ethical or unethical behavior and judgment occur in a situation that raises ethical consideration. Ethics include reasoning (critical thinking), conception of right and wrong (values) and related to behavior (conduct). Freeman (2007) revealed that age is an important factor in determining the ability in ethical decision making. Likewise, Huang (2006) and Mujtaba et al. (2009) mentioned that empirical findings have found younger respondents with 29 years old and younger have less ethical wisdom than older ones. According to Khalid et al. (2011), and Khalid (2012), age does affect ethical decision making in determining ethical or unethical conducts with younger person less than 40 years old is confirmed to have significantly less ethical tolerance. These empirical findings are consistent with meta-analysis of 35 studies by Borkowski and Ugrass (1998) that concluded maturity in age as a crucial factor in ethical evaluation. They further explained that as the age increases, the ethical evaluation becomes more sensible. Even though previous studies have evidenced the relationship between age and ethical decision, but studies by Abdul Hamid and Yahya (2011), and Christie et al. (2003) have found that age is insignificantly related to ethical decisions.

They further explained that experiences need to be accounted for in the assessment of ethical decision because the level of wisdom and maturity are varied from one individual to another. Similarly, empirical findings from earlier studies by Baston (2006), Forte (2004), and Wilson (1995) have suggested that age is a prevalent factor as claimed in some earlier research. The result is mixed due to under-evaluation of the ethical decision elements of motivation (Christie et al., 2003). Khalid (2012) contended that the elements of intention and awareness in decision making are necessary to further highlight the variety of ethical evaluations.

B. Moral Development Theory

Moral development theory defines by Jean Piagets and then developed by psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg. This theory helps us to understand that morality starts from the early childhood years and can be affected by several factors.

Most research on ethical decision making is based on Kohlberg cognitive moral development theory. Kohlberg's (1973) provides a framework to understand factors that influenced individual ethical beliefs and also explored the reasons behind an individual moral perception, decision making behavior and categorized the various reasons given to justify an action into six stages of moral development which are more generally classified into three levels. The three levels of moral development are pre-conventional level, conventional level and the post conventional level. Colby and Kohlberg (1987) found that the pre-conventional level carries a concrete individual perspective. At this level, the individual attempts to follow rules for fear punishment and moral decision are reasoned based on specific outcomes for the individual (Trevino, 1992). For the second level, individual internalizes the rule and expectation of significant other and concerned with laws, social approval, and the welfare of others. Colby and Kohlberg (1987) describe this group indicates concern for interpersonal conformity and maintaining a relationship. In stage three, the individuals are interested in interpersonal trust and social approval and at stage four, the individual's perspective broadens to consider the society of which they are a part. This stage moral reasoning places the individual in context of the social system (Weber & Wasieleski, 2001; Trevino, 1992). At the last level (post-conventional level), an individual makes the decision autonomously and adopts a broader perspective on society when making a decision about right and wrong. At stage five, individuals still emphasize laws and rule, but they consider the possibility of changing these for social purpose and at the last stage (stage 6), the individual is guided by self-chosen ethical principles of justice and the right of a human being (Trevino, 1992).

Some studies have tried to connect Kohlberg three levels of moral development with different ethical theories. For example, Victor and Cullen (1988) argued that the first pre-conventional level represents the egoistic theory, conventional level represents a theory of rules and final level represents ethical decision based on individual principle. Besides that, Hoffman (2000) claimed that Kohlberg's work insufficiently explained the cognitive development of moral behavior since motivation factors were not accounted for. Rest (1999) claimed that moral decision involved logic thinking rather than chromatically. He introduced four major psychological processes to enable people behave morally based on domain of moral development with different starting viewpoints to recognize different levels of moral decision, but ignored the importance of the physiological aspect in motivation, and experimental and deliberative approach in judgment (Khalid et al., 2012). Rest et al. (2000) further mentioned that the model is not a linear problem solving model and it involved cognition, affect and behavior traditional domains (Eisenberger et al., 1986) as explained on the theory of reasoned action (Fishbein & Azjen, 1975). Furthermore, moral development theory is criticized for being incomprehensible, focusing on justice rather than the rational aspect of morality (Rest et al., 2000) like obligations and consequences theories (Hunt & Vitell, 1986) and character theory (Arjon, 2000) that effect the reaction of an individual's ethical reasoning and behavior (Mustamil & Quaddus, 2009).

C. Theory Reasoned Action

The theory of reasoned action assumes that individuals are usually rational, they utilize information that is available to them when deciding to engage in a given behavior, and their behavior is under control (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). Based on previous studies, theory reasoned action (TRA) has provided an important framework in predicting and understanding human behavior. According to Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) framework, they believe that human social behavior controlled by unconscious motives or overpowering desires and it can be characterized as capricious or thoughtless. They also explained that attitude could explain human action and argue that people always consider the implication of their action before they take a decision. When making a decision, the decision maker is influenced by their behavior, attitude and intention. That is why the best way to making a decision is following the TRA model. TRA model constructed in three components; 1) behavioral intention, 2) attitudes and 3) subjective norms. This model is often used because of the structure or model is simple and a clear concept of attitudes, normative belief and motivation in explaining behavior.

Theory reasoned action has been tested in several laboratory studies such as contraceptive behavior (Miller & Grush, 1986; Pagel & Davidson, 1984); smoking behavior (Budd, 1986; Marin et al. 1990), seat belt use (Budd, North, & Spencer, 1984), voting behavior (Netmeyer & Burton, 1990) and several others. It is shown that the theory of reasoned action can also be applied to moral behavior. Theory reasoned action underlying the model has successfully been shown to predict intention and behavior elsewhere, for instance, in consumer decision making (Sheppard et al., 1988).

D. Psychoanalytic Approach

Another approach to the study of the millennial ethical decision model focuses on the role of psychoanalytic approaches in ethical decision. Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) was the founder and pioneer of psychoanalytic theories and still has influences in modern knowledge. Freud worked hard in order to understand the human mind and his main purpose was to explain how the human mind works. Freud developed his first theory, according to which our personality consists of three instances which are unconscious, preconscious and conscious. Based on the Moris perspective (1976), psychoanalysis has given emphasis on the unconscious, instinctive role, the role of family foundations, dynamic pressures, and lastly, the formation of the personality. This approach also has to pay attention to the internal processes of the individual, external behavior, past and present experiences and social condition of a person. Based on an outline of psychoanalytic Freud (1949), the human mind was composed of three elements; there is the id, ego and the superego. The Id has the quality of being unconscious and contains everything that is inherited, everything that is present at birth, and the instinct. The ego is the component of personality that is responsible for dealing with reality. Ego has the quality of being conscious and is responsible for controlling the demands of the id and the instinct, becoming aware of stimuli, and serving as a link between the id and the external world. Lastly, the superego, whose demand is managed by the id, is

responsible for the limitation of satisfactions and represents the influence of others, such as parents, family, and role model as well as the impacts of racial, societal and cultural traditional.

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III. Theoretical Framework

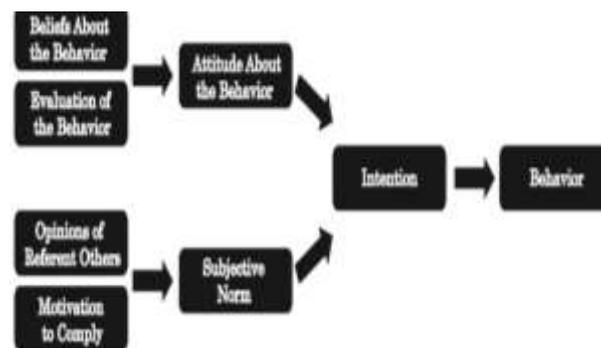


Fig 1: Fishbein and Aizen: Theory Reasoned Action

Theory reasoned action by Fishbein and Aizen found that human behaviors are based on their intention. Intention is defined as the individual subjective probability that he or she will engage in the behavior. This theory predicts that behavioral intention is created or caused by two factors which are attitude and subjective norms. Attitude has two components which Fishbein and Aizen call these as the evaluation and the strength of a belief. Based on TRA model, attitudes as individual process determines a person's actual and potential responses, in other word; attitude functions as a predictor of behavior. Based on Werner (2004), attitudes refer to an individual perception toward specific behaviors. Subjective norms refer to the individual's subjective judgment regarding other's preferences and support for behavior (Werner 2004). There are two components in subjective norm in the TRA model which is the opinion of referent other and motivation to comply. We can see from this model, the

decision maker is rational and makes the decision based on information available to them.

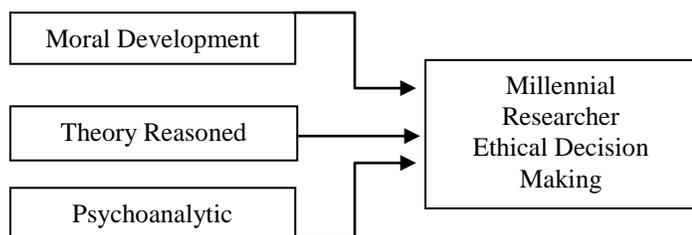


Fig 2: Theoretical framework of the study

Figure 2 explains that millennial researcher ethical decision process is influenced by the moral development, theory reasoned action and the psychoanalytic approach. We have seen that theory reasoned action model is functionally of a millennial decision making and this model is the best way in term of making decisions for millennial researcher. This study also found that moral development framework by Kohlberg can add our understanding of ethical decision making process. Decision makers need to recognize the moral component in decision making because every decision they make involve a moral related issue.

IV. Research Methodology

Millennial researchers who are born after 1980 or aged between 32 and below and employed in higher learning institutions (HLIs) and government research institution (GRIs) will be the focus group of this study. Respondents will be engaged with survey, cognitive interview, and focus group discussions to minimize the issue of validity and reliability of data. For survey purpose, the millennial researchers will be randomly selected, while interview and focus group discussions with selected millennial researchers will be conducted in order to complement the instrument development in the study. Literature review based on previous study is also used for this study to obtain more information. Selected article were published based on this topic and all articles chosen were published in academic journals and reported empirical results. Studies were found using the search term “ethical decision model” with the subcategory of the psychoanalytic approach, theory reasoned action, millennial, and moral development in order to focus search results on this field of study. Search engines used included ProQuest, Psynet and Academic search premier. Besides that, database of individual published also were searched, including Emerald, Taylor & Francis and Wiley to ensure the inclusion of less well-distributed article in the literature review.

V. Discussion and Finding

This conceptual study investigates ethical decision making framework used by millennial researchers. Results show that millennial characteristics are different from other generations in both though process and values based on Bucic et al. (2012). Millennial researchers used a variety of ethical frameworks depending on the scenario. Empirical findings have found younger to 29 years old and younger are less

ethical than older ones. In fact, age functions as a crucial factor in ethical evaluation. Different theories and concepts from multi disciplines will allow the construction of complementary perspectives to enrich the understanding to ethical decision making. This study also examines the ethical decision making composition. Ethical decision factor is highlighted in this proposed study to reflect the importance of interdisciplinary research.

VI. Conclusion

This conceptual study supports earlier findings that generational differences are an attribute that significantly influence in the decision making process. Psychoanalytic approach existed between theories, empirical finding and practices because cognitive process is concerned with moral thinking in which will significantly impact the actual action in ethical decision making. The integration of the theoretical models of individual decision making is a significant step towards the understanding of different components involved in ethical decision making. The integration of most relevant theories enables re-definition and conceptualization of ethical decision making to overcome the lacking of prior ignored components that intervene the ethical decision making in research.

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