

THE ROLE OF UNETHICAL BEHAVIORS TOWARDS EMPLOYEES IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN KNOWLEDGE SHARING AND INTERNALIZED EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE*

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Abstract

In the information age, one of the critical success factors that enable organizations to create a sustainable competitive advantage in the knowledge-based economy is knowledge sharing. The characteristics of knowledge sharing, such as improving the motivation and abilities of employees, the intensity of effort devoted to the relevant activities, etc., prove the effect of knowledge sharing on employee performance, especially on internalized employee performance. Easy and quick access to knowledge may lead to unethical behaviors that include the violation of moral norms, rules, standards and principles or codes determined by the organization. Unethical behaviors towards employees, which are among the factors that constitute unethical behaviors considered as the dynamics of businesses that disrupt the organizational climate, constitute the mediator variable of this study. This study examines the mediator variable effect of unethical behaviors towards employees in the relationship between knowledge sharing and internalized employee performance, thus making a valuable contribution to the literature.

Keywords: Knowledge sharing, Internalized Employee Performance, Unethical Behaviors towards Employees.

BİLGİ PAYLAŞIMI ve İÇSELLEŞTİRİLMİŞ ÇALIŞAN PERFORMANSI İLİŞKİSİNDE ÇALIŞANLARA YÖNELİK ETİK DIŞI DAVRANIŞLARIN ROLÜ

Özet

Bilgi çağında örgütlerin bilgiye dayalı ekonomide sürdürülebilir rekabetçi avantaj yaratmasını sağlayan kritik başarı faktörlerinden biri bilgi paylaşımı olarak değerlendirilmektedir. Bilgi paylaşımının çalışanların motivasyonunu ve yeteneklerini geliştirmesi, ilgili faaliyetlere adanmış çabanın yoğunluğu gibi özellikleri, çalışan performansına özellikle içselleştirilmiş çalışan performansına etkisine işaret etmektedir. Bilgiye erişimin son derece kolay ve hızlı olması beraberinde örgüt tarafından belirlenen ahlaki normlara, kurallara, standartlara ve ilkelere veya kodların ihlal edilmesini ifade eden etik dışı davranışlara neden olabilmektedir. İşletmelerin örgüt iklimini bozan dinamiği olarak değerlendirilen etik dışı davranışları oluşturan faktörlerden çalışanlara yönelik etik dışı davranışlar bu çalışmanın aracı değişkenini oluşturmaktadır. Bu çalışma, bilgi paylaşımı ve içselleştirilmiş çalışan performansı ilişkisinde çalışanlara yönelik etik dışı davranışların aracı değişken etkisini incelemesi dolayısıyla literatüre katkı sağlamaktadır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Bilgi Paylaşımı, İçselleştirilmiş Çalışan Performansı, Çalışanlara Yönelik Etik Dışı Davranış

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1. Introduction

In today's competitive environment, resources and competencies are the most fundamental factors that enable organizations to survive, innovate, and grow. Knowledge and knowledge sharing among these factors is one of the most crucial factors in the sustainability of organizations (Kapoor and Adner, 2012; Swart et al., 2014). Because the mutual sharing of knowledge by the individuals within the organization about the organization or their duties with other members of the organization plays an important role in organizational learning and employee performance (Ryu et al., 2005). This is since the knowledge sharing, which is prosocial in nature, is beneficial for interpersonal cooperation and collective activity (Collins and Smith, 2006). Moreover, the use of advanced information communication technologies used within the organization is a factor that increases and facilitates the desire to share information (Wang et al., 2014). Knowledge sharing is an activity that can facilitate and accelerate the efforts of the organization to achieve strategic changes, results, and innovations. Employees are expected to share more knowledge than ever in order to achieve the goal(s) set in such times of change and transformation (Elrehail et al., 2018). Knowledge sharing is one of the factors that positively affect the organizational learning. By means of knowledge sharing, employees associate their individual learning about organizational policies, standard processes and procedures, cultural norms, organizational stories and ceremonies with other employees of the organization, and this harmony created between all members of the organization enables the organization to gain a competitive advantage over its competitors (Rao et al., 2018). Knowledge sharing is positively related to employee motivation and organizational commitment, which makes it important for organizations (Gibbert and Krause, 2002). Moreover, knowledge sharing is not only necessary for employees or organizations to achieve better performance, but is increasingly considered as an ethical challenge in organizations (Wang, 2004; Styhre, 2002). For example, Lin (2007) argues that refusal of employees to share knowledge with colleagues can threaten the core interests of an organization, such as market survival and competitiveness, and can therefore be considered a violation of ethical norms in organizations. However, some organizations prioritize performance and do not care about unethical behaviors. Such organizations see employee performance important in the sustainability of the organization (Piccolo et al., 2003). High employee performance can be considered important enough to ignore the violation of moral norms. This may partially explain why unethical behaviors are not always condemned or reported to the organization officially (Trevino and Nelson, 2011). Moreover, organizations

may sometimes increase unethical behaviors to ensure sustainability since they feel the pressure from various environments to reflect a positive picture of their financial performance (Kaptein, 2008).

In the light of these findings in the literature, the conceptual structure of the study is composed of the examination of knowledge sharing, internalized employee performance, and unethical behaviors towards employees. The data obtained in the study shows that knowledge sharing positively affects internalized employee performance. Moreover, it is shown that this performance is adversely affected in cases of discrimination against employees of enterprises, racism, intimidation, verbal harassment, violation of occupational health rules or safety conditions, neglect of health rules and safety conditions, and violation of employee confidentiality.

2. Literature Analysis and Conceptual Framework

Knowledge sharing in organizations is considered by many researchers, analysts and practitioners as one of the most critical components of the knowledge management process (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995). Because, most of the time, finding the right and useful data required to carry out a given task in an organization is one of the most challenging tasks, and thus knowledge sharing is one of the critical success factors for organizations (Lee, 2001). Today, knowledge sharing is one of the most important resources of organizations, and improving knowledge sharing skills has become one of the ways to gain sustainable competitive advantage. Furthermore, as a result of the production-based economies evolving into knowledge-based economies, “knowledge” is now a basic resource within organizations. Organizations start to realize that this new power comes from the brain power of their employees. Therefore, knowledge sharing is one of the leading strategic areas of organizations and considered an indispensable tool to gain competitive advantage as well as organizational and employee performance (Donnelly, 2019). Knowledge sharing is defined as “the activities of transferring or disseminating information from one person, group or organization to another” (Chang et al., 2017; King, 2006). Moreover, knowledge sharing is a process wherein one unit is affected by the experiences of another. In this respect, the process of sharing information simply means more than the transmission or acquisition of knowledge from one to another, and becomes the process of exchanging and processing knowledge for the completion and use of the one unit’s knowledge by another unit (Willem & Buelens,

2007). However, there are two types of knowledge in organizations as “explicit” and “tacit”. While explicit information can be shared by verbal communication, tacit knowledge is shared through socialization, observation, and apprenticeship (Bartol and Srivasta, 2002). In addition, tacit knowledge can be shared with stories, metaphors and analogs (Nonaka, 1994).

Knowledge sharing in organizations is also a voluntary action. One of the factors that encourage employees to share knowledge within the organization is the organizational culture. The organizational culture either encourages employees to share knowledge or prevents them from sharing knowledge (Rohman et al., 2020). Moreover, the use of “Information and Communication Technologies” is one of the important factors supporting knowledge sharing within the organization since it enable employees to continuously access information (Law et al., 2017). Minbaeva (2005) examined the factors that support knowledge sharing and stated that (1) “Knowledge sharing contains both skill and motivation of the employee”, (2) “The adoption of knowledge sharing, (a) the prior knowledge of the recipients, and (b) the intensity of the dedicated effort”. It can be said that employee performance is high in organizations where knowledge sharing is supported and intensive (Attar et al., 2019). Effective knowledge sharing performed by the members of an organization provides benefits to the organization and the individuals who are the members of the organization. Furthermore, if there is no efficient knowledge sharing, knowledge may decrease gradually (Kearns and Lederer, 2003; Spender, 1996; Dosi et al., 1998).

Unethical behavior is one of the topics that have been studied in the field of organizational behavior for a long time. The reason behind this is that unethical behavior can cause serious damage to organizations, economies and societies (Jacobs et al., 2014). In addition, ethical principles are internalized issues for organizations. Therefore, ethical behavior depends partly on employees and partly on the ethical climate of the organization (Bavik et al., 2018). Lewis (1985) defines ethical business behavior as “the ability to adhere to the moral norms, rules, standards and principles or codes set by the organization as guidelines for morally sound behaviors”. Unethical behaviors represent the violation of these codes and moral norms (Gunz et al., 2019). On the other hand, Zuber and Kaptein (2014) define unethical behaviors as “moral and illegal behaviors that are not accepted by the masses” as a result of their extensive literature review. According to this, unethical behaviors contain a wide variety of behaviors ranging from mobbing, nepotism, and bribery to late arrival to work and behaviors such as gossip, bad habits, and selfishness (Wu et al., 2009). Unethical behaviors within the organization may be caused by the employees themselves or

the unethical conduct of managers in order to achieve organizational goals (Rauh, 2020). Moreover, the literature also states that unethical behaviors are repetitive in pursuit of goals (Cowell et al., 2014; Diefenbach, 2009; Kolthoff et al., 2007). Unethical behaviors refer to conflicts and behavioral problems within the organization. Depending on the situations caused by unethical behaviors, the organizational culture weakens, which can lead to a decrease in employee commitment, performance and motivation (Özdevecioğlu and Aksoy, 2005). At this point, one of the most important reasons of unethical behavior in organizations is considered as the inadequacy of organizational culture and climate. Basically, it can be stated that organizational culture is shaped by the effects of the external environment and sometimes by environmental uncertainty (Key, 1999).

Employee performance is a wide multidimensional concept aimed at achieving results and has a strong link with the planned goals of an organization. Muchinsky (2003) describes employee performance as “a set of workforce behaviors that can be successfully studied, measured and evaluated at an individual level”. Bhatia and Jain (2012) assert that employee performance can be “evaluated by a mixture of quality, quantity, time and cost”. In the light of all this information, it is possible to define employee performance as “the employee's fulfillment of his/her duty effectively and obtaining a final result” (Morillo, 1990). The literature shows that although employee performance is considered as a multidimensional concept, it is mostly examined in terms of "task performance" and "contextual performance" (Jawahar & Carr, 2007). Task performance is defined as “actions performed by employees within the scope of work responsibilities that provide support to the basic activities of the technical core of the organization through technological support or resources, materials or services” (Borman and Motowidlo, 1997). Contextual performance is defined as “helping and supporting colleagues, volunteering for assigned tasks, contributing to the learning of colleagues while performing these tasks, working for others even in the absence of personal responsibilities, sharing knowledge and making extra effort” (Befort and Hatrup, 2003).

Another factor that increases employee performance is employee commitment. Employees who show commitment to their organizations are able to exhibit a wide variety of productive behaviors that increase synergistic team efforts towards organizational goals. These synergistic efforts increase employee performance (Bakker and Schaufeli, 2008). Another factor that increases employee performance is employee empowerment.

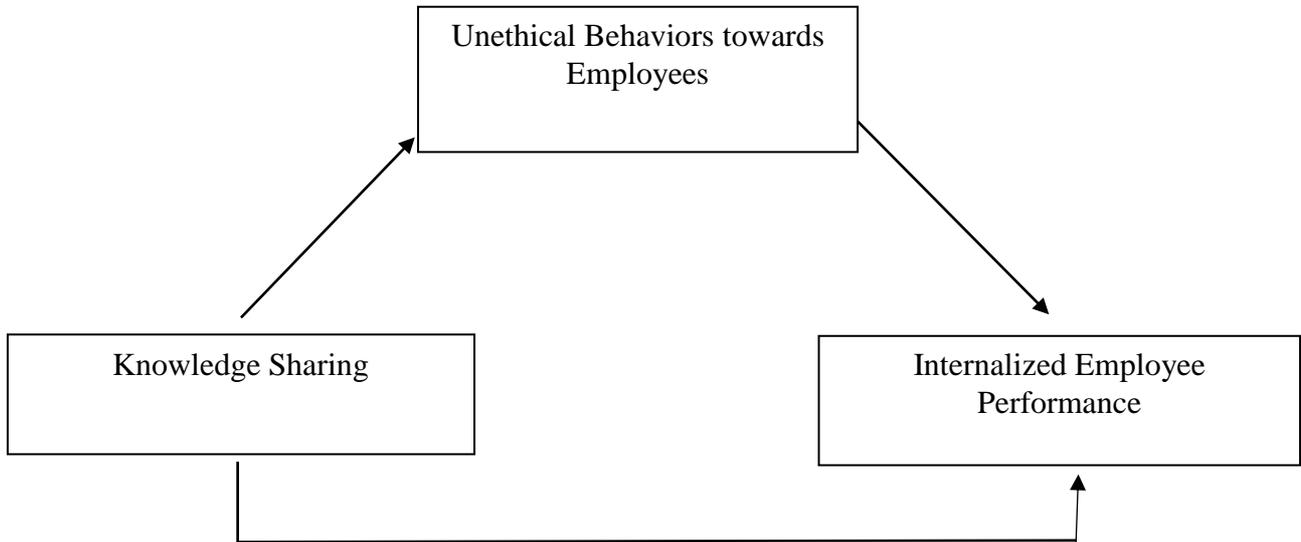
With the shift of power from centrality to decentralization, the productivity and performance of employees who start taking initiative increase (Huang et al., 2018). Ethical climate, an important factor affecting the management of organizations, is considered a factor that positively affects employee performance. The literature shows that positive ethical climate perception has a negative effect on the intention to quit, while having a positive effect on job satisfaction, organizational commitment, trust in managers and employee performance (Raile, 2013). For example, Luthans et al. (2008) found a positive relationship between ethical organizational climate and employee satisfaction and employee performance in their study. Some factors can adversely affect employee performance. For example, job insecurity increases psychological tensions, thus adversely affecting the performance of employees. However, the exposure of employees to “rudeness”, which is one of the unethical behaviors they experience due to their managers, is another factor that adversely affects employee performance (Shin and Hur, 2020). Negative feedback can be another factor that may adversely affect employee performance. Negative feedback of the manager about an employee may decrease his/her performance in some cases and even result in unethical behaviors such as anti-productive work behavior (Belschak and Den Hartog, 2009).

3. Purpose and Methodology of the Study

Employee performance, which plays a critical role in increasing the operational and financial performance of companies, is positively affected by communication thanks to information communication technologies of the 21st century (Lavanson, 2007). One of the important factors that increase the performance of employees in companies is the sharing of information as explicit information among employees. However, in the competitive world where access to information is extremely easy and fast, it may cause the companies to conduct unethical behaviors inside and outside the organization. Unethical behaviors that many international companies exhibit in their business processes, in formal or informal situations in a controlled or uncontrolled manner affect the performance of the employees.

The purpose of this research is to examine the effect of knowledge sharing on the internalized performance of employees and to evaluate the mediating role of unethical behavior towards employees in this relationship. The conceptual model of the research, which is predicted to meet these conditions, is given in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Conceptual Model of the Research



In order to measure the conceptual model in Figure 1, the relevant literature was reviewed and appropriate scales were used for research variables. The subject of knowledge sharing is examined via the scale created by Connelly and Kelloway (2003) and adapted by Staples and Webster (2007) in their studies. For the survey, these studies are taken as reference. Despite different scales in the literature for unethical behaviors in the organizational level, Kaptein (2004) proposed a scale and expanded his scale in 2008. In this research, the measurement of the survey on the unethical behaviors is prepared by adapting these scale questions, and the expressions of the scale including unethical behaviors towards employees were taken from this scale. The employee performance is widely measured in a number of studies on human resources under the title of “employees’ job performance” (Bouckenoghe et al., 2015; Marin-Garcia and Tomas, 2015; Ditzian et al., 2015). However, this scaling method requires that the performance of employees be evaluated by the their relevant managers and that the scaling be conducted by other individuals. The scale that enables the employees to self-evaluate their performance and that is adapted to be used in this study is developed by Öcal in 2008. Internalized Employee Performance questions are prepared by using this scale.

The following hypotheses are developed in the light of the conceptual model of the research and the literature.

H1: Knowledge sharing has an explanatory effect on internalized employee performance.

H2: Unethical behavior towards employees affects the explanatory nature of knowledge sharing on internalized employee performance.

4. Determining the Research Sample Mass

Population is composed of all the members of the organizations active in Turkey. In the convenience sampling method used in the study, due to the subjectivity of the sampling and uncertainty of whether the individuals in the sampling represent the truth (whether the employees within an organization really witness unethical behaviors in the organizational level) this study can be used for generalization. The sampling method used in the study is snowball sampling. All the companies in the sampling are located in the Turkey/Marmara region, and mostly in the provinces of Istanbul, Kocaeli, Tekirdağ and Çorlu. The survey was sent to 450 individuals working in the relevant companies. However, only 298 employees responded to the survey. During the ordering and numbering of these surveys, 53 were discarded that contain visible respondent errors. As a result 245 surveys were included in the analysis after coding and data entry.

Data was collected from various sectors such as education, food, chemicals, retail, electronics, furniture, automotive, tourism, informatics, textiles, etc. While collecting data from companies active in these sectors, only the companies with a workforce of over 20 and a network-centric organization were contacted. In order to prevent single source bias in the study wherein the research area is composed of these types of companies, data were collected from at least two employees at each company.

5. Findings of the Research

The demographic characteristics of the participants in the study are given in Table 1. In this study, the gender of the respondents who answered the survey, the number of employees, the duration of operation of their companies, age, title and the departments they work in were examined and summarized. Table 1 shows that 62% of the companies

participating in the research have 20-250 employees. According to the data, when the distribution of the companies participating in the research according to their activity periods is examined, it is seen that the operating periods are significantly high. Frequency analysis results show that 67% of the companies have been operating for more than 10 years. Moreover, 84% of the people participating in the survey are between the ages of 21-39. The data on the departments that the respondents work in reveal the existence of a heterogeneous, balanced distribution that is compatible with the average firm structure.

Table 1: Table of Demographic Characteristics

<i>Gender</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>	<i>Cumulative Percentage (%)</i>
Female	92	38	38
Male	153	62	100
TOTAL	245	100	
<i>Number of Employees</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Ratio (%)</i>	<i>Cumulative Percentage (%)</i>
20-250	150	62	62
251-500	18	7	69
501-1000	17	7	76
1001 or more	60	24	100
TOTAL	245	100	
<i>Duration of Operation</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Ratio (%)</i>	<i>Cumulative Percentage (%)</i>
1-5 years	26	19	19
6-10 years	19	14	33
11-15 years	13	10	43
16-20 years	30	12	55
21 years or more	157	45	100
TOTAL	245	100	
<i>Age</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Ratio (%)</i>	<i>Cumulative Percentage (%)</i>
60-69	6	1	1
50-59	7	1	2
40-49	34	14	16
30-39	111	46	62
21-29	87	38	100
TOTAL	245	100	
<i>Department</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Ratio (%)</i>	<i>Cumulative Percentage (%)</i>
Management	67	27	27
Production	7	3	30
Accounting-Finance	8	18	48
HR	8	3	51
Sales-Marketing	33	14	65
Other	122	35	100
TOTAL	245	100	

At the start of the research, the variables in the dataset were evaluated in terms of their compliance with the factor analysis. First, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) sampling adequacy was calculated. The KMO sampling adequacy value was 0.939, and very high in comparison with the proposed value of 0.50. Moreover, the Bartlett test of sphericity was found statistically significant at 1% ($\chi^2(1665) = 990, p < 0,01$) (Field, 2005).

Firstly, since the aim was to determine the expressions that constitute the factors (concepts) of unethical behaviors, knowledge sharing and employee performance, which are the variables of the research and to calculate the composite values, the “Explanatory Factor Analysis” method and “Principal Components Analysis” were used. Two expressions were discarded since they could not be loaded to a factor and meet the criteria of the factor loading being equal to or higher than 0.50 or were loaded to more than one factor and the factor loading in other factors (cross-loading) was equal to or higher than 0.40. With 18 indicators remaining after the above-explained process principal components factory analysis (varimax rotation) was applied. The factor loadings of all indicators were found over 0.50 and cross-loadings below 0.30. The factor analysis results (factor loadings, total explained variance) are shown in Table 2. As shown in Table 2 the statements constitute the appropriate scales. Moreover, since all factor loadings are greater than 0.50, the structure validity is present.

Table 2: Factor Analysis Results

Name of the Factor Group	Exploratory Nature of the Factor	Reliability of the Factor Group (Cronbach's Alpha)	Statement	Factor Loadings
Knowledge Sharing	4.048	0,91	Individuals in my company keep their best ideas to themselves.	0,651
			Individuals in my company are willing to share their knowledge/ideas with others.	0,591
			Individuals in my company explicitly share their ideas with others.	0,593
			Individuals with expert knowledge in my company are willing to help others in the team.	0,561
			My work team is good at using the knowledge/ideas of their colleagues.	0,690
			When I learn something new about my job, I share it with my colleagues.	0,629
			When my colleagues ask me anything about my work skills, I respond.	0,582
			When I ask my colleagues about their work skills, they respond.	0,603
Unethical Behaviors towards Employees	8.976	0,82	There is discrimination against the employees in my company. (on the basis of age, race, gender, religious belief, sexual orientation, etc.)	0,701
			The team members in my company are harassed or a hostile work environment is created . (intimidation, racism, pestering, verbal abuse, physical violence...)	0,683
			Occupational health or safety rules are violated in my company.	0,611
			Salary, overtime pay, or severance pay rules of the employees in my company are violated.	0,705
			Employee privacy is violated in my company.	0,619
Internalized Employee Performance	13.566	0,85	I support the aim and the goals of my organization.	0,549
			I carefully represent my organization at any place.	0,563
			I have responsibility against my organization.	0,502
			I am loyal to my organization.	0,511
			I constantly develop myself through self evaluation.	0,609

In order to test the hypothesis expressing the conceptual model created in the research, regression analysis was performed and the role of unethical behaviors towards employees in the relationship between the knowledge sharing and the internalized employee performance was examined. The results of the regression analysis for this data are given in Table 3.

Table 3: Results of Regression Analysis Examining the Role of Unethical Behaviors Towards Employees Between Knowledge Sharing and Internalized Employee Performance

Model	B	Beta	Significance Value	R	R ²
First Step					
Knowledge Sharing	0,204	0,361	0,000	0,361	0,130
Dependent Variable	Internalized Employee Performance				
Second Step					
Knowledge Sharing	0,217	0,340	0,000	0,340	0,110
Dependent Variable	Unethical Behaviors towards Employees				
Third Step					
Unethical Behaviors towards Employees	0,257	-0,278	0,000	0,390	0,150
Dependent Variable	0,228	0,164	0,000	Internalized Employee Performance	

The results of the regression analysis examining the role of unethical behaviors towards employees in the explanatory effect of knowledge sharing on internalized employee performance are given above. According to the results, the significance value is less than 0.05, indicating that the regression model is explanatory. It is seen that the explanatory beta value of 0,361 of the knowledge sharing on the internalized employee performance in the first stage is -0,278 in the third stage. In this context, it is concluded that knowledge sharing has an explanatory affect on internalized employee performance. However, the change in the variables of knowledge sharing and unethical behavior towards employees explains 15% of the change on internalized employee performance. Based on the data and explanations, the H1 and H2 hypotheses of the research were supported.

Conclusion

Knowledge sharing, which is defined as the process of exchanging and processing knowledge for the completion and use of the one unit's knowledge by another unit in an organization, has become a more important concept with the activation of the digital business world. Sustainable success performance of enterprises is made possible by the correct use of information as well as the dissemination of knowledge sharing culture in enterprises (Marouf, 2016). The facilitation of knowledge sharing through various information communication tools may cause unethical behaviors in enterprises. Reasons such as competitive environments where knowledge sharing is widely performed, social impacts, the necessity to reach the goals determined by enterprises, desire to earn more money, egocentrism, self-justification and career progress expectations are common reasons for unethical behaviors (Bellé and Cantarelli, 2017). The study measures the effect of knowledge sharing on internalized employee performance (H1) and the mediating effect of unethical behaviors towards employees (H2), and confirms the H1 hypothesis and the negative mediating effect of the H2 hypothesis. The research shows that if individuals share their ideas and knowledge and cooperate with each other, develop their work skills together, share new business-related information with each other, they support the goals and objectives of the organization, represent the institution in every environment, and have an advanced responsibility and commitment to the organization. However, it is determined that these positive developments are adversely affected in case of discrimination, racism, intimidation, against employees in the organization and the violation of occupational health, safety rules and their personal rights.

In this research, which examines the role of unethical behaviors towards employees in the relationship between knowledge sharing and internalized employee performance, the process of measuring highly sensitive behaviors such as unethical behaviors was meticulously carried out. A carefully-designed procedure has been applied for individuals to report unethical behaviors of others in the work environment, not self-reporting. Therefore, although it is observed that although the employees are willing to participate in the research, they may still have a research limitation in terms of objective attitude and behavior assessment.

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