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INSIGHTS INTO THE DIFFERENCES IN THE CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING OF ETHICS¹

Keywords: *Cultural dimensions, ethical frameworks, international ethics, Hofstede*

Aim/Purpose

Cultural and regional differences have an impact on an individual's understanding of ethics. The purpose of this paper is to provide a deeper understanding of the cultural impact on ethics based on a survey of employees in a multinational organization. This understanding will help multinational organizations as they attempt to establish a consistent response to ethical dilemmas.

Background

This paper analyzes the impact of cultures on ethics using survey data and a literature review. It provides insights into ethical responses for global organizations.

Methodology

Quantitative analysis of survey data, and a literature review to establish a theoretical basis for cultural impact on ethics. The data consisting of 321 responses from people in 19 countries around the world.

Contribution

The paper provides insights into a range of ethical frameworks along with how different cultures lean towards one or another ethical framework. It also reinforces the relationship between cultures and their different responses to ethical dilemmas. The research also contributes to the understanding of the drivers behind choices as illustrated in "The Trolley Problem" and "The Footbridge Problem," but adding an understanding of the impact of different cultural dimensions to the ethical choices.

Findings

The major findings are that the Hofstede Cultural Dimensions remain a good approach to describe a culture. There are eight key ethical frameworks at play, and six that were seen as key for this research. There is a significant difference in three of the six Hofstede Cultural Dimensions between the USA and

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India. Analyzing the data, we were able to define two ethical frameworks best suited for business operating in the USA and India should they wish to use consistent approaches to consider ethical dilemmas. These were the Common Good and Duty Ethical Approaches. A further finding was the relationship between cultural dimensions and the choices that people make when facing ethical dilemmas.

Recommendations for Practitioner

For Practitioners, the richer the understanding of cultures and their impact on ethical understanding, the better able the International Business Leader is to guide a consistent approach to addressing ethical dilemmas.

Recommendation for Researchers

The linkage between cultures and ethics is a field needing deep research and academic perspective.

Impact on Society

Having a deeper understanding of how cultures differ, and how this impacts an individual's understanding of ethics will aid greater cultural sensitivity and enable different parts of society to work in greater harmony.

Future Research

It would be insightful to also analyze the data based on other dimensions like those of Forsyth or Inglehart.

Ethical understanding is contingent and changes over time, it would be a good topic to study to examine the differences between cultures and the implications on the choice of ethical framework over time.

Gathering a more comprehensive data set that would allow for generalization of the research so that it could guide organizations in a greater range of countries than simply the USA and India.