

ETHICS AS USUAL? GENDER DIFFERENCES IN WORK ETHIC AND GRADES

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Received: 24. 5. 2019

Accepted: 7. 10. 2019

DOI <https://doi.org/10.30924/mjcmi.24.2.2>

Preliminary communication

UDC 174:305-055.2

Abstract. *This research focuses on female work ethics in Iceland, one of the most gender equal countries in the world. The Multidimensional Work Ethic Profile (MWEP) was used for measuring the work ethic of 238 students of both genders. Based on a convenience sample obtained from the School of Business, University of Iceland we tested two hypotheses. The first concerned whether women have a higher work ethic than men; the second whether female students have higher grades than their male counterparts. We found women to have both a higher work ethic and grades than men. Overall outcomes based on the MWEP revealed statistically significant differences between the averages of women and men, with the mean for women higher by 7.07 points. In addition, women's average university grades were found to be statistically higher than those of men by a margin of 0.36 points. These results provide interesting insights into the potential contribution of women and men to the workplace, suggesting that women, on average, will be more productive and deliver superior performance. Furthermore, work-based research and evaluations are*

necessary to test this inference, including the research across different sectors of the Icelandic economy.

1. INTRODUCTION

There is widespread acknowledgement that good ethics can positively impact organisation's economic performance, with literature suggesting that ethics, values, integrity and responsibility are prerequisites in today's workplace, assuming that strong ethical principles are necessary for good business (Joyner and Payne, 2002; Shaltegger and Burritt, 2018). Even though ethics for good business are vital, recent evidence indicates a decline in the perceived work ethic (Tolbize, 2008) due to fraud, theft, corruption, manipulation of information, misconduct, and similar incidents (Huberts et al., 2007; Shan and Hu, 2020). These occurrences highlight

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anew the relevance of research on ethics and highlight that in order for an organization to be in a leadership position in the market, a business needs to fulfil institutionalized ethics (Victor and Cullen 1988; Schminke et al., 2007).

Research suggests that work ethics are related to working attitudes and values, work-related behaviour of workers, performance at work, different personality factors, demographic factors and education (Parkhurst, 2013). Recent studies have also examined cultural differences (Hassall, et al., 2005; Woehr, et al., 2007; Mohammad, and Quoquab, 2016; Zabel et al., 2016) generational differences, and, notably, gender differences (Meriac, et al., 2009, Fakunjoju, 2018).

Work ethic is vital for businesses (Miller, et al., 2002) due to its potential to increase long-term efficiency (Meriac, et al., 2009). It is also a good predictor of work-related behaviours of employees and their performance at work. Studies have demonstrated that those with good work ethics are hardworking, last longer with repetitive tasks, work faster and are more productive (Furnham, et al., 1993; Meriac, 2012; Miller, et al., 2002; Saks, et al., 1996). Employees with good work ethic also work longer hours, take fewer and shorter breaks, and make an active contribution in work-related events (Mudrack, 1997). Furthermore, such employees generally gain more success in their work as they are hardworking and intrinsically more motivated than those who do not have good work ethic (Furnham, 1990; Mudrack, 1997; Faisal et al., 2018). These features provide a rationale as to why assessing work ethics is becoming more important for business executives in building a diligent workforce throughout companies (Meriac, et al., 2009).

A number of studies have been carried out on work ethics and gender (Furnham and Rajamanickam, 1992; Hill and Rojewski, 1999; Meriac, et al., 2009; Fakunjoju, 2018), but little has been researched in Iceland, which is one of the most gender equal countries in the world, holding a leading position in the Global Gender Gap Index for 7 consecutive years (World Economic Forum, 2007). Female participation in the labour market in Iceland is 77.6 percent (representing 45,5% of the total labour force), which is the highest among the OECD countries (Centre for Gender Equality, 2012), making gender issues in the job market very important. The main issue in this research is addressed with the focus on Icelandic students. Strauss and Volkwein (2002) found students to apply the same work ethics both in studying and working. Therefore, a focus on students' work ethics in study settings can be a proxy evaluation for work ethics in general. This provides us with insights into the attitudes to work ethics among the upcoming generation and their potential contribution to employment in the future.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. Gender and work ethics

Ethics is a field of study focused on studying human behaviour, in relation to what is expected of him or her by others (Malloy, 2003). Derived from the Greek word "ethos", meaning character or custom, ethics is a set of values and norms, functioning as a standard for assessing the integrity of individual conduct (Huberts et al., 2007). Consequently, ethics defines what makes behaviour right or wrong (Fajana, 2006). In work settings, work ethics are the standards of behaviour that guide

employees in their work, and in relationship with their co-workers, customers and other stakeholders.

A number of studies have examined gender differences relating to work ethics, but findings differ (Wentworth and Chell, 1997). Recent studies show that women have higher work ethics than men (Furnham and Rajamanickam, 1992; Hill and Rojewski, 1999; Meriac, et al., 2009; Wentworth and Chell, 1997; Wang and Calvano, 2013). At the same time, women seem to organize their time better and have greater capacity to postpone rewards (Bembenutty, 2009). Researchers have considered gender difference to be due to variations in socialization among men and women (Akbarnejad and Chanzanagh, 2012; Furnham and Rajamanickam, 1992). Gender-based stereotypes are believed to be able to partially account for the differences in work ethics of men and women (Akbarnejad and Chanzanagh, 2012).

Some researchers have used social and cognitive career theory (SCCT) to explain why women tend to have superior job ethics than men (Diegelman and Subich, 2001; Hill and Rojewski, 1999) There are different gender priorities in job selection – men place greater emphasis on wages, competition and career advancement, while women place greater emphasis on good communication, interesting work, and professional growth (Kirkcaldy, et al., 1992). There is a difference between the opportunities offered to men and women in the labour market, which are indicated by the gender pay gap and different career development opportunities between the sexes (Hill and Rojewski, 1999; Zunzunegui et al., 2015). Many women who have faced obstacles have found themselves forced to work harder to overcome them. Therefore, women adopt a good work ethic, which includes

the fundamental idea that hard work leads to success (Hill and Rojewski, 1999). From the perspective of SCCT, the belief of women in their own abilities implies that with hard work, they can expect positive career advancement that reinforces their commitment to their personal goals. This theory provides a credible explanation as to why women generally score higher than men in the measurement of work ethics (Hill and Rojewski, 1999). In line with this theory, the hypothesis is that women have higher work ethic than men.

***Hypothesis 1:** Women have higher work ethic than men.*

2.2. Gender differences in grades

Having great work ethic is not a sufficient condition for performance in the workplace. We therefore turn to a more direct measure of performance, i.e. academic grades. A number of studies have shown that in universities, women have higher average grades than men. These findings apply to US university students as a whole, across a variety of subjects and for different types of study institutions (Buchmann and DiPrete, 2006; Mau and Lynn, 2000; Sonnert and Fox, 2012).

Some academics have argued that different biological brain structure in men and women may be the reason for differences in intelligence, and this then results in variations in academic performance (Allik et al 1999; Lynn, 1999), but others have argued that such biological differences have not been the cause of any divergences in intelligence or academic success (Brody, 1992; Mackintosh, 1998). Indeed, other aspects can explain variability in academic results, and issues such as socio economic background may be more explanatory of gender differences when it comes to better grades (Young and Fisler, 2000). Several

researchers have also suggested that women's higher work ethic might be one the reasons for their higher grades.

Women usually have higher work ethic than men, they are more hardworking and spend more time studying, preparing lessons, conducting exams and doing assignments (Mau and Lynn, 2000; Chee et al., 2005). Average grade outcomes are highly correlated with the likelihood of women leaving college (Sonnert and Fox, 2012). Seymour (1995) found that 78% of women who discontinued their studies did so because they were unsatisfied with their grades, but only 43% of men abandoned their studies for the same reason. In line with previous research, it is suggested that women have a higher average grade than men.

Hypothesis 2: Women have higher average grades than men.

3. METHODOLOGY

The main purpose of this study was to investigate work ethic of females via a sample of female university students and how this is related to several other variables of interest. We address this topic and test our hypotheses by means of a survey conducted on a sample of students.

3.1. Procedure

Both graduate and undergraduate students at the University of Iceland were approached during class with the approval of their professor. Participants were instructed to sit one seat apart and not communicate with each other during administration of the questionnaire. The participants did not receive any course credits for participation but had a possibility of winning a prize in a

small lottery as a reward for turning in the questionnaire.

3.1. Participants

Participants in the study were part of a convenience sample of undergraduate or graduate students at the School of Business, University of Iceland. The total number of participants was $N=238$, of which 132 were women (55.5%) and 106 men (44.5%). The participants were approached during a class and a response rate of 96.75% was achieved. The age of the participants ranged from 20 to 55 years, and their average age was 26 ($SD = 6.23$). The questionnaire submitted to the participants consisted of 40 questions.

3.3. Measures

For measuring work ethic, the Multidimensional Work Ethic Profile (MWEP) was used (Miller et al., 2002). MWEP has been widely used as a measurement of work ethic (Parkhurst, 2013). The MWEP is composed of seven dimensions. These dimensions are Hard work, Wasted time, Leisure, Self-Reliance, Delay of gratification, Centrality of work, and Morality. The MWEP was previously translated and deemed reliable through confirmatory factor analysis by Þormar and Garðarsdóttir (2013). The items for each dimension were measured on a five point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. All dimensions were reliable with Cronbach's alpha being higher than 0.70 (Cohen, 1988). Table 1 gives an overview of the different dimensions of the MWEP as well as examples of items for each dimension. Each dimension was composed of four items and all of the items in the questionnaire were randomly ordered.

Table 1. *MWEP Dimensions and Dimension Definitions (Miller et al,2002)*

Dimention	Definition	Sample items
Hard Work	Belief in the virtues of hard work.	If you work hard you will succeed.
Wasted Time	Attitudes and beliefs reflecting active and productive use of time.	I try to plan out my workday so as not to waste time.
Leisure	Proleisure attitudes and beliefs in the importance of nonwork activities.	People should have more leisure time to spend in relaxation.
Self-Reliance	Striving for independence in one's daily work.	I strive to be self-reliant.
Delay of Gratification	Orientation toward the future; the postponement of rewards.	The best things in life are those you have to wait for.
Centrality of Work	Belief in work for work's sake and the importance of work	Life without work would be boring.

In accordance with previous studies, the average grade was used to measure the attainment of the students (Meriac et al., 2012; 2014). All data was treated confidentially, and the responses of individual participants could not be identified. Therefore, there was no reason for participants to misrepresent their response, and there was no reason to assume that the reported average grades used in the study were inaccurate. In addition, a due diligence analysis was performed, where a strong correlation was found between the stated average score and grade rating ($r = 0.943$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that participants did not falsely report their grade point average. This is in line with previous studies, which have also found that average grades and actual grades provided by university students are very similar (Kuncel, et al., 2005).

4. RESULTS

4.1. Work Ethic

The work ethic of all participants was calculated from the results of the Multidimensional Work Ethic Profile

(MWEP), and was obtained from both the overall outcome and the scores of all seven factors. A high score for a participant was indicative of a good work ethic.

Table 2 shows the participants' average scores on the Multidimensional Work Ethic Profile list and overall outcomes across the sample. Participants score the highest on the morality factor, where the average was $M = 44.31$. In addition, the standard deviation of the variable ($SD = 4.42$) is small, indicating low distribution values around the mean. Participants, however, score the lowest in the leisure factor ($M = 23.04$). The large standard deviation of the variable ($SD = 6.99$) also indicates a high average distribution. Interestingly, the participants also score rather low on the delay of gratification ($M = 29.22$, $SD = 7.48$), with their scores ranging from 10 to 50. Considering the overall outcome of the list, denoted by the term whole, it can be seen that the average score of the participants is $M = 244.46$, the lowest value of the sample is 170 and the highest 300. Further examination of the distribution of the variable as a whole revealed that it is normally distributed and

the results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test did not indicate a deviation from the normal distribution. The standard deviation of the

distribution SD = 21.39 is small, indicating a low distribution from the average.

Table 2. Work ethics of participants

	Mean	Standard deviation
Hard work	41.53	5.42
Wasted time	35.41	7.05
Leisure	23.04	6.99
Self-Reliance	30.5	8.01
Delay of gratification	29.22	7.48
Centrality of work	40.45	6.28
Morality	44.31	4.42
Total	244.46	21.39

As presented by Table 2, which shows the aggregate averages of all participants in the factors of the MWEP list, there is a considerable difference between the averages, depending on the dimensions of the list. Participants place greater emphasis on the underpinnings of hard work, wasted time, the centrality of work and morality, than they do on self-reliance, the delay of gratification and on leisure.

4.2. Gender differences in work ethic

Participants were divided by gender in order to investigate whether there was a difference in their work ethic, both in terms of the overall outcome of the MWEP list and its factors. Gender was rather similarly distributed, with 55.5% (132 out of 238) of participants being women and 44.5% (106 out of 238) were men. Table 3 shows the participants’ work ethics by gender, as well as the results of the statistical tests that were carried out to determine whether there were differences between the genders. Significant differences were found in three of the seven factors of the MWEP. On the

factor of wasted time, the average of women (M = 37.21 and SD= 6.36) was higher than the average of men (M = 33.16 and SD = 7.24), with a significant difference between the groups, $t(236) = 4, 59, p < 0.05$. When looking at the centrality of work, the average of women (M = 41.52 and SD = 6.02) was also higher than the average of men (M = 39.13 and SD = 6.39) and the difference was significant, $t(236) = 2, 96, p < 0.05$. For the morality factor, the average of women (M = 45.26 and SD = 4.13) was higher than the average of men (M = 43.11 and SD= 4.49) and was found to be significantly different, $t(236) = 3, 84, p < 0.05$. On the subject of hard work, leisure, self-reliance and delay of gratification, the genders did not differ significantly.

When examining the overall outcome of the multifaceted work ethics list, there was a significant difference between the average of women (M = 247.61 and SD = 20.62) and the average of men (M = 240.54 and SD = 21.78), $t(236) = 2.56, p < 0.05$, where the average of women was higher.

Table 3. Work ethics of participants by gender

	Women		Men		P-value
	Mean	St.dev.	Mean	St.dev	
Hard work	41.87	5.33	41.11	5.51	0.279
Wasted time	37.22	6.36	33.16	7.24	0
Leisure	22.28	6.91	23.98	7.02	0.06
Self-Reliance	30.66	8.12	30.31	7.91	0.734
Delay of gratification	28.81	7.7	29.74	7.2	0.34
Centrality of work	41.52	6.02	39.13	6.39	0.003
Morality	45.26	4.13	43.11	4.49	0
Total	247.61	20.62	240.54	21.79	0.01

Table 3, which shows the participants' work ethics by gender, indicating that women score higher than men on all factors except on the postponement of rewards and interests.

Our findings shows women to have better work ethics than men in Iceland, just as they generally do in other countries (Diegelman and Subich, 2001; Hill and Rojewski, 1999). Iceland is doing well by focusing on gender equality and women benefit from their ethical and hard-working behaviour. It is not only women who benefit from their work ethics, but the organizations and the society as a whole as well since corporate culture becomes both more gender equal and ethically focused. Indeed, organizations in Iceland should utilize the female corporate culture of stronger ethics, for all of its members.

In order to investigate the difference in the work ethic of the participants who were working with their studies and those who were not, a t-test of two independent groups was performed. There was a significant difference in the factors of self-reliance, where the average of those who were working ($M = 31.23$ and $SD = 7.98$) was higher than those who were not working alongside

their studies ($M = 243.32$ and $SD = 21.14$), $t(236) = 2,108$, $p < 0.05$. However, no significant difference was found with respect to the overall outcome of the MWEP list or its factors.

A comparison was made between the average grades of participants where they were divided into groups by gender. The result from our analysis supports hypothesis two, women were on average with a higher average score ($M = 7.63$ and $SD = 0.70$) than men ($M = 7.27$ and $SD = 0.69$) and the difference between the groups was significant, $t(227) = 3.915$, $p < 0.05$

5. CONCLUSIONS

As Hypothesis 1 predicts, women have higher work ethic than men and this result is consistent with previous studies (Furnham and Rajamanickam, 1992; Meriac, et al., 2009; Wentworth and Chell, 1997). Previous studies have shown that women seem to place greater emphasis on the actual value of work and the positive effects it brings (Kirkcaldy, et al., 1992, Van Ness, et al., 2010). This is in line with other studies that have suggested that women focus more on good communication,

interesting work and professional growth rather than commissions or salaries (Kirkcaldy, et al., 1992). According to Bembenutty (2009), women plan their time better than men.

The results of the study showed that women had a higher average score grade than men, in line with previous studies (Buchman and DiPrete, 2006; Mau and Lynn, 2000; Sonnert and Fox, 2012). Therefore, Hypothesis 2 was not rejected. Women generally have higher work ethic than men, they are more hard-working, and therefore spend more time and effort in carrying out their studies and working (Mau and Lynn, 2000). In this research it was shown that women work more alongside their studies than men do, providing evidence of the importance of the work ethic in this context. People who have good work ethic are likely to be diligent in their work and studies, which allows them to work more while studying without compromising their study performance; thus, working and studying is prioritized over free time and relaxation (Parkhurst, 2013).

5. DISCUSSION

As for the limitations of the study, it is clear that this study relies on a student sample. Furthermore, the research was carried out in Iceland so it is possible that this could be a country specific result, as work ethic can vary between countries and genders. The explanation ratio was often low or moderate, and this could possibly be due to the relatively small variability of participants' measurements of the multifaceted work ethic list, but a high distribution of the other variables, such as learning time, number of hours worked and the average grade of the participants. However, this is a limitation of this research and further research

is, therefore, needed to examine ethical issues in relation to gender.

For future research, it would be interesting to investigate whether women in other industries also show higher work ethics than men. It would also be interesting to look at other countries in comparison with Iceland, such as the Baltic countries where history, background and economic situation is different from Iceland. Last but not the least, future research could include gender-specific ethical behaviour within Icelandic companies. Such research would be more focused, yet hard to carry out.

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S ETIKOM KAO I OBIČNO? SPOLNE RAZLIKE U RADNOJ ETICI I OCJENAMA

Sažetak. *Ovaj se rad bavi radnom etikom žena na Islandu, jednoj od država s najvišom razinom spolne ravnopravnosti na svijetu. U radu se koristi multidimenzionalni profil radne etike za mjerenje radne etike 238 studenata obaju spolova. Na temelju prigodnog uzorka studenata poslovne škole Sveučilišta u Islandu, testirane su dvije hipoteze. Prva se odnosila na veći stupanj radne etike, a druga na veću razinu ocjena žena u odnosu na muškarce. Obje su hipoteze potvrđene, s obzirom da je, korištenjem multidimenzionalnog profila radne etike, dobivena statistički značajna razlika između prosjeka žena i muškaraca, pri čemu je prosjek žena bio veći za 7.07*

bodova. Nadalje, prosječne ocjene studija žena su bile statistički značajno veće od ocjena muškaraca za iznos 0.36 jedinica ocjene. Dobiveni rezultati nude zanimljiv uvid u potencijalni radni doprinos žena i muškaraca, pri čemu se pokazuje da bi žene, u prosjeku, mogle biti produktivnije. Nadalje je potrebno istraživanje utemeljeno na praksi, kako bi se testirala postavljena tvrdnja, uključujući i istraživanja kroz različite sektore islandskog gospodarstva.

Ključne riječi: *poslovna etika, spolne razlike, multidimenzionalni profil radne etike, Island.*

