

Ethical Decision- Making Model for Thai Context

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Abstract

The ethics issue has been receiving massive attention of today's managers due to the publicized scandals and cases of fraud, bankruptcy and others. For managerial convenience numerous ethical decision making models were proposed by researchers, but six models are widely accepted by ethics based practitioners (Ferrell, Fraedrich & Ferrell, 2008). Each model has unique characteristics, which enhances understanding about ethical dilemma. This paper reviewed the relevant literature and utilized seven models: (Kelly & Elm, 2003; Jones, 1991; Ferrell, Gresham & Fraedrich, 1989; Hunt & Vitell, 1986; Trevino, 1986; Ferrell & Gresham, 1985; Kohlberg, 1969) and then cultivated ethical decision-making model for Thai context. In addition, the authors also reviewed the literature on Thai culture and focused on Buddhist philosophy, beliefs, values and norms of Thai people. Finally, the Seven ethical decision making models and Buddhist philosophy were integrated together to propose a model for ethical decision making for Thai organization.

Keywords: ethical, decision – making, model, Thai, culture, context

1. Introduction

The rising level of complexity for the businesses in terms of high volume and swift flow of information coupled with mounting pressure to perform well has directly led to higher chances of error in ethical decision making (Toor & Ofori, 2009). Ferrell, Fraedrich and Ferrell (2008) stated that various companies have been involved in publicized scandals and cases of fraud, bribery and bankruptcy. Hence the trait of leadership demands greater level of integrity, a positive moral perspective and good conduct in leadership (Cameron, Dutton & Quinn, 2003). Identifying and resolving ethical issues have received the great attention of many managers in organization. In response to scenario of fraud, bribery, bankruptcy and other complexities of organization, ethics has become very essential for organizations. In the wake of this; the stakeholders have also become alert as they require ethical and authentic information to institutionalize and incorporate ethics into organizational decisions. Numerous ethical decision models were proposed by the scholars and six models are widely accepted by practitioners (Ferrell, Fraedrich & Ferrell, 2008). Each model holds a unique feature and characteristics which enhances understanding about the ethical issues, also provided the depth knowledge about the factors, effects and considerations for constructing ethical decision-making model. Additionally literature also revealed that culture effects on ethical decision-making. All the frameworks mentioned above were based on particular country wise needs and situations, these models are quite contextual in nature. The above mentioned ethical decision making models were not developed for Thai context. Since no prior study has proposed integrated ethical decision making model for Thai organization and effect of culture on ethical decision making process, thus it was interesting to find appropriate ethical decision-making model in Thai context. Therefore, this study presents an integrated ethical decision-making model for Thai organization; it combined the various existing ethical decision-making models and cultural effect in Thai context.

1.1 Research Objectives

This article is written with purpose to examine the literature and to develop an ethical decision making model for Thai context.

2. Literature Review

Managers in organizations need to know that how employees use their moral philosophy at workplace, also their emphasis should be on as to how employees' understanding can be enhanced to make realization that ethical behavior in organization is aligned with organizational objectives and how everyone in organization can make ethical decision. Therefore this literature review section is designed to elaborate some insight on ethics, ethical decision making, business ethical decision making (seven models of ethical decision making), need for development of ethical decision making in Thai context.

2.1 Ethics

Carolyn (1995, p. 22) mentioned that ethics relates to “moral obligation, responsibility and social justice.” The word “ethics” is derived from Greek vocabulary of "ethikos" and “ethos” which means frequent, custom or usage. Aristotle then applied the notion of character and

disposition. Thereby, ethics reverberates as the characteristic of people and organization. Holian (2002) mentioned that ethics is involved with several elements: “integrity, morality, honesty, legality, flexibility, professionalism and inequity or nepotism”. Rawls (1971) stated that ethics denotes as justice. Ethics means foundation or strategies: a realistic individual would choose in order to manage their behavior in the society and they behave according to the society’s requirement. The Oxford online dictionary identifies ethics as the “moral principles” that manage people’s acts or the execution of their actions (Dictionary, 2014). Consequently, it can be said that ethics is perceived in a society through the human behavior. Ethics is also evolved in business as the manager and the employees are faced with ethical dilemmas.

There are several cases when an organization faces an issue of product recall which does arise when their product develops certain defect such as General Motor recalled 820,000 cars worldwide and Johnson & Johnson took off the uterine surgical tool from the market after there was criticism that it could cause the spreading of cancer tissue (Ivory, 2014). Kraft also recalled Velveeta Cheese from Wal-Mart in 12 U.S. states because there was a lack of preservative which might result in the food spoilage (DeNinno, 2014). Even though these multinational companies coped-up with these incidents very quickly but people still talk for their codes of conduct in handling these dangerous situations. Certainly, these ethical issues involved their decision making as recalling such events could cost these companies billions of dollars and also adversely affect their established goodwill. The next section provides some insight about the importance of ethical - decision making and business ethical decision making.

2.2 Ethical Decision-Making

Ethics means a set of principles for selecting between right or wrong conduct (Windsor, 2006). Thus, the ethical decision-making was developed through the “cognitive moral development” of people (Fraedrich, Thorne & Ferrell, 1994; Blasi, 1980; Kohlberg, 1969) value base (Musser & Orke, 1992; Rokeach, 1968) or moral Philosophies (Beauchamp & Bowie, 1979; De George, 1986). Ethical decision making means the process and moral base that one uses to decide whether each matter is correct or incorrect. The procedure of ethical decision-making is comprised of the consideration of responsive behavior and people’s choice of making decisions, rules and norms and moral standards compared to individual’s actions and ethical theories as providing weighty principle toward decision making (Carroll, 2007). Buchholz and Rosenthal (2001) claimed that knowing and understanding of ethics is essential for application in real life situation that need moral pluralism and ability to observe ethical and moral dimensions to solve problems and make decisions through creative integration and human intelligence.

2.3 Business Ethics Decision-Making

As mentioned in the ethics definition, ethics involve the judgment of people whether the action is right or wrong (Windsor, 2006). When it is applied to business then the business ethics not only involves right or wrong, good or bad, just or unjust, fair or unfair but it is also concerned with doing no harm to stakeholders or minimizing it as much as possible (Carroll,

2007). Elements of business ethics are acknowledging various ethical theories, applying values and assumptions, making moral decisions and considering the results and behavior of that decision making afterward (Buller, Kohls & Anderson, 1997; Hofstede & Bond, 1988). Several authors have proposed different ethical decision making models, but some ethical decision making models are broadly accepted in ethical literature by academicians and practitioners (Ferrell, Fraedrich & Ferrell, 2008). Each model contains unique characteristics to explain the ethical decision making process. The explanation of each model is as follows.

2.3.1 The Kohlberg Model

Kohlberg's (1969) is famous for cognitive moral development model, cognitive moral development presented the cognitive components of ethical decision making behavior and ethical justification in organization. He stated that identical conditions having ethics challenges would produce different reactions by the different individuals, because these individuals are at the stages of moral development. Kohlberg's (1969) contributed a model of moral reasoning and its conversion from middle childhood to adulthood. His model is based on three levels and six stages and each level is further comprised of two stages.

I. *Level one-pre-conventional*: It includes stage 1 and 2 and it describes that individuals in organizations are concerned with consequences like reward and punishment. These individuals follow rules to avoid punishment and to get reward. And they stick with rules for his or her own interest.

II. *Level two-conventional*: This level also covers two stages 3 and 4 which describes that right: conform to expectation of good behavior from larger group or society; also expectation of people who are very close. It could also be viewed as one's duty to society.

III. *Level three-principled*: This level is based on two more stages 5 and 6. It explains that right is examined by principled value. In fact individuals hold many values. The individuals at this level see beyond norms, law and authority.

2.3.2 The Ferrell and Gresham Model

Ferrell and Gresham (1985) constructed the contingency model for an ethical decision making for organizations. This model is based on social learning theory, comprised of multiple stages: it explains first order interactions between nature of the ethical situations, the individual's characteristics, the significance of others and the opportunity that may lead to ethical or unethical behaviors. This model depicts that all these stages interact with each other. Ferrell and Gresham (1985) explained that less distance between the individuals and significant others leads to more influence on individual decision making, because peers influence more. Again there is interaction and connection between individuals and top management. The top management possesses power and they can influence the decision. The authors also explained that individuals learn from people with whom they are intimate and who are in their close group; most probably they behave ethically and unethically depending on circumstances and frequency of interaction with the close group. Thus, if an individual interacts more with unethical behavior than ethical pattern behavior, most probably he/ she

will behave unethically. In addition, this model also describes that individuals are most probably involved in unethical behavior when they receive more reward and less punishment. Sometimes when organizations build corporate policies and professional codes of ethics, they may help individuals within the organization by discouraging unethical behavior.

2.3.3 Hunt and Vitell Model of Ethical Decision Making

Hunt and Vitell (1986) developed a model of “General Theory of Marketing Ethics”, describes the ethical- decision making process for ethical judgment. This model explained “individual process of incorporating moral philosophies in to ethical decisions for more cognitive perspective” (Ferrell et al., 1989, p. 59). Hunt and Vitell (1986) stated that individual uses two theories or philosophies (deontology or teleology) for ethical judgments. This model also suggested that initially individuals must understand the situation as a problem carrying ethical issue and then develop a solution to the problem. The two philosophies, deontology and teleology are considered at this stage. In this second stage two types of evaluation of these theories take place for each potential alternative deontology and teleological evaluation. In deontological evaluation, the individuals identify inherent right or wrong behavior which is required by each potential alternative. In the same model some other constructs are also involved at teleological evaluation. The individuals identify consequences of each alternative or solution for the sake of different stakeholders (customer, employee). The consequences of each alternative will occur with every group or stakeholders. The desirability and undesirability of each consequence will occur with each stakeholder. Finally the individual will reach an ethical judgment which will be result of applying norms of behavior to reach alternatives and from an evaluation of perception about “good” or “bad” resulting from each alternative. Hunt and Vitell (1986) also explained that behavior in ethical judgments is affected by another intervening variable such as intentions. Ethical judgments of individual may vary from intentions because an individual person could perceive an alternative as the most ethical, but another alternative may possess more desired consequences. Later the Hunt and Vitell (1986) suggested that individual will determine and will compare actual consequences going back into the construct of personal experience, industry, organization and cultural norms. Thus, people may reach an ethical judgment on the basis of their perception about reality and ethical theories (deontology or teleology) or a combination of these two theories.

2.3.4 A Synthesis of Ethical Decision Making Models for Marketing

Ferrell, Gresham and Fraedrich (1989) presented a Synthesis model which is the combination of all above discussed models of (Kohlberg, 1969; Hunt & Vitell, 1986; Ferrell & Gresham, 1985). Each model has significantly contributed in various aspects to the synthesizing model of ethical decision making for marketing. The steps of synthesizing model are: problem recognition, search for alternatives, evaluation, selection and outcome. The first step is to identify ethical issues in a social and economic context. That is how managers determine an ethical dilemma; at this step Kohlberg’s (1969) model of cognitive moral development may work. The synthesis model depicts that moral development directly affects how the individual interacts with ethical issues. Second step of the synthesizing model focuses on moral

evaluation here Hunt and Vitell (1986) contributed by giving a detailed explanation of selecting moral theories and philosophies. Third step of this model is intentions, as Fishbein and Ajzan (1975) stated that “a person’s intention to perform a behavior is immediate determinate ‘intention is the individual’s subjective probability of behavior engagement” (Ferrell et al., 1989, p. 61). The behavior is identified by individual belief, which is created by moral evaluation of situation, alternatives and perceived consequences. At the next and last stage of the synthesizing model; it has another construct which is named as organizational culture, in which people make their decisions, as consisting of two other sub-constructs. Opportunity is an individual moderator that also has an effect on the decision-making process. We have discussed earlier in Ferrell and Gresham (1985) model that the culture and its components have substantial impact on ethical decision making. Ferrell and Gresham have also discussed that the opportunity, as a combination of circumstances, professional codes, corporate policy, rewards and punishment, also affects the ethical and unethical behavior. The authors suggested that the individual moderators are values, attitude and knowledge, whereas Hunt and Vitell (1986) suggested that personal experience is an individual moderator.

2.3.5 Jones Ethical Decision Making Model

Here we also examine the contribution of Jones (1991) on ethical decision model. This model explains the concept of the “issue contingent” model. The ethical decision - making model is explicit; it reflects characteristics of the moral issue. A vigilant assessment of the Jones’ model provides understanding that how individuals can assess the effectiveness of an ethical decision. He suggested that the nature and characteristics of the moral issues considerably effect the process of ethical decision – making and later on ethical behavior. Jones’s model did not focus on individual characteristics of decision makers, such as moral development (Kohlberg, 1969). He suggested that moral intensity is consist of six dimensions; (a) magnitude of consequences: Magnitude of consequences describes the cumulative loss / profit which is the outcome of the moral action in question. (b) Social consensus: Social consensus of the moral issue refers to the level of agreement that alternative is good or bad. (c) Probability of effect: The probability of effect is the probability that the action will take place and will lead to the expected loss / profit. (d) Temporal immediacy: Temporal immediacy is defined as the time difference between the present and outcome of the moral action. (e) Proximity: Proximity explains the feeling of intimacy that moral agent holds for those who suffer and gain out of action in question. (f) Concentration of effect: Concentration of effect of the moral act is stated as the “inverse function” of the number of individuals affected by a given act. Finally, (Jones, 1991, p. 373) in his model also supported that content validity can be claimed on the basis of “the observation that (a) moral intensity varies from issue to issue, (b) individuals can make judgments of moral intensity and (c) these judgments, although often subject to error and systematic bias, are sufficiently accurate for a person to make critical distinctions”.

2.3.6 Trevino's Person – Situation Internationalist Model

This Theoretical models of the ethical decision making process explain an interactionist approach, it suggests that ethical decision making is a function of various individual and situational factors. This model explains that a manager's moral reasoning level and field dependence interacts with the immediate workplace factors and organizational culture to influence the ethical decision making process. Trevino (1986) developed a model; based on two variables: the individual personal variable and the situation variable. The individual variables are based on Kohlberg (1969) moral development. As Kohlberg's (1969) model described only the individual moral development, but Trevino's model is one that uses moral development as a base and indicates an interaction of the person and the situation. The internationalist model consists of five steps: ethical dilemma, cognition, individual moderators, situational moderators and ethical and unethical behavior.

2.3.7 Kelley and Elm Revised Decision Making Model

Kelley and Elm (2003) offered insights on key elements of ethical decision- making models and criteria by which a model can be judged. While review of (Jones, 1991) model, Kelley and Elm described an increased focus on organizational factors that significantly effect on decision maker's experience of the ethical issue. Moreover, these authors collected data form the social services context and argued that organizational characteristics directly influence the moral intensity of the ethical issues rather than only the moral intent and moral behaviors of the decision maker. They proposed that environment also plays a prominent job in an individual's capacity to define the ethical components of issues.

3. Requirement for Development of Ethical Decision-Making in Thai Context

Husted and Allen (2008) described that collectivism and individualism effect ethical behavior more than any other cultural factors because these two dimensions directly deal with “the way people resolve conflicts in human interests and optimize mutual benefits” (p. 294). Burnaz, Alakan, Topcu, and Singhapakdi (2009) revealed that the ethical decision – making process of Turkish, Thai and American business people or organization perceived the moral intensity, corporate ethical values and importance of ethics differently. According to the study results, Americans and Turkish organizations were found to have higher corporate values than Thai organization. However, Thai and American business people perceived ethics to be more important for business success than Turkish business people. It is a similar finding to Marta and Singhapakdi (2005) that American organizations were found to possess higher corporate ethical values than Thai organizations. Americans managers were more likely to perceive the unethical marketing practices to be more serious. As Singhapakdi, Gopinath, Marta and Carter (2008) explained that Thai personal characteristics and organizations' environment influence their ethical perceptions. The corporate ethical values and idealism shown positively affected, while their perception their perception are negatively influenced by relativism. Ralston, Egri, Furrer, Kuo Li, Wangenheim, and Weber (2014) revealed that the values at the individual- level make a more significant contribution to explaining variance in ethical behavior than values at societal- level. Since the individual factor plays an important role on ethical decision – making from cultural perspective. Therefore it is

interesting to examine that which factors influence on decision-making at individual level; particularly in Thai context. The next part focuses on factors influencing on Thai decision making.

4. Factors Influencing Thai Ethical Decision-Making

Studies (Burnaz, Atakan, Topcu & Singhapakdi, 2009; Singhapakdi, Gopinath, Marta & Carter, 2008) of ethical decision – making based on the U.S or western models. These studies showed that cultural characteristic effecting on decision-making (Karande, Rao & Singhapakdi, 2002; Singhapakdi, Marta, Rao & Cicic, 2001; Hofsted, 1980). Therefore, this study aims to develop ethical decision-making model in Thai context by integrating factors that affecting Thai’s life (Buddhism as religious, belief, value/norms).

4.1 Buddhist Morality

Buddhist morality influences the beliefs, practices and institutions pertinent to the Thai people and has been widely accepted and adopted as a state of religion and an organized way of social life by majority of people living in t Thailand (Kitiarisa, 2010). The foundation for the Buddhist ethics is Dharma; Buddha claimed only to have discovered dharma, not to have invented it (Keown, 2005). Dharma can be translated to a “natural law” which explains the principle of order and regularity seen in the behavior of natural phenomena. The reflection of Buddhism on the ethical decision-making in Thai society is from (a) Karma - the ethical implication of Dharma. Karma connects actions with consequences that can be carried to the next life. (b) Merit – good Karma. People compared the accumulation of good merit to the money depositing in the bank; more is the better. (c) Precepts – the forms of duties which consist of c.1) refrain from killing c.2) refrain from stealing c.3) refrain from sexual immorality c.4) refrain from speaking falsely and c.5) refrain from taking intoxicants. In brief, precepts are a list of things that various people will never do (p. 12). (d) Dana – the most important virtue for Buddhist. Dana means giving or generosity. Buddhists practice giving at all levels of society. It has seen as an indication of spiritual development, because a virtuous person is far from egocentric thoughts and is sensitive to the needs of other. (e) Ahimsa – means non-harming or non-violence. It is considered to be a deeply positive feeling of respect for living beings and awareness of others’ dislike. According to Keown (2005) Buddhist morality is embedded in Thai’s life. The Buddhist is aware of Karma, good action-merit, actions according to the Precepts and the actions that must be generous and non-harming to the stakeholders.

4.2 Confucian Dynamics

Confucian dynamism was labeled by (Hofstede & Bond, 1988), as associated with economics development. Confucianism created the foundation of values in Far Eastern societies, including Thailand that has contributed to all organization’s behavior. Five Cardinal Relationships of Confucianism, which is a model of interpersonal relationships, include (a) relationship between ruler and subject, (b) relationship between father and son, (c) relationship between older sibling and younger sibling, (d) relationship between husband and wife and (e) relationship between friend and friend. These Five Cardinal Relationships play a

crucial role in defining and sustaining relationships in society (Hill, 2007). Duangduen (2007) revealed the psychological framework in order to find out fundamental factors and mental components that lead to satisfied behaviors. This framework has been modified to be the Ethical Theory Tree. There are three parts of the Tree (a) flowers and fruits represent generous behaviors. Refrain from all bad behaviors and follow social diligence as the behaviors of good person. (b) trunks represent good behavior in a career that consists of ethical rationality, internal locus control, self-efficacy, achievement motivation, attitude and virtue and value and (c) roots represent intellectual and social experiences and mental health. The author described that the root forms the fundamental part of being the virtuous person. We find that this study gives the value to intrinsic characteristics to generate the generous behaviors.

5. Research Methodology

In this article the systematic review of literature was done on different ethical decision making models, using the different data sources such as peer- reviewed journal articles, books, published and unpublished thesis and other relevant published resource. Overall limited research on development of ethical decision making models has been done, which was included in the review. The criteria for selection of articles for review was based on: articles written in English, explaining ethics, describing ethical decision- making framework in any field, Thai culture and cultural factors. By examining the literature on ethical decision making, this review paper aimed to provide a thoughtful stance on current knowledge and thus contribute in the existing state of understanding on ethical decision making in Thai context.

6. Integrated Model of Ethical Decision Making for Thai Context

Extensive literature provided insightful information about on the work of various authors on ethical decision making models, role of culture in ethical decision making and Thai culture (see literature section). The Thai ethical decision making model was built on the basis of (Duangduen, 2007; Keown, 2005; Hofstede & Bond, 1988; Hunt & Vitell, 1986; Trevino, 1986; Ferrell & Gresham, 1985). The Thai ethical decision- making model starts with ethical situation, it describes how manager identify an ethical issue. Trevino's (1986) model applies here. The second component of proposed model is individual characteristics; Ferrell & Gresham (1985) contributed in selecting this component. For this step Hunt and Vitell (1986) provided a detailed explanation on ethical judgment theories (deontology and teleology). The Thai model also indicates that organizational factors also directly affect how to make ethical decision - making. This element of Thai ethical – decision making model has been drawn on the basis of Trevino's (1986) model of ethical decision - making model. In the Thai context some other factors also influence on ethical decision- making. Keown (2005) proposed that Buddhist morality, composed of Karma, Merit, Precepts, Dana and Ahimsa. Hofstede and Bond (1988) described that Confucian dynamism influencing the Asian countries and the Five Cardinal Relationships. Duangduen (2007) proposed that Ethics Theory Tree, applied from the cognitive moral development of Kohlberg. In conclusion the Thai ethical decision making model consist of five components: Ethical leadership, individual factors, organizational factors, influence of Thai culture and ethical decision making process (see

figure. 1).

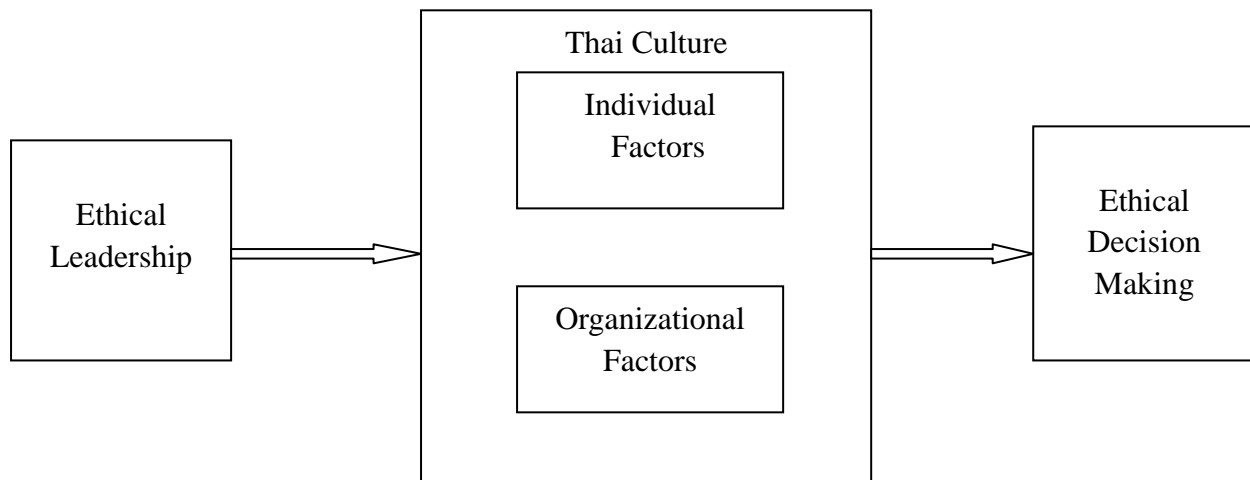


Figure 1. Integrated ethical decision making model for Thai context

7. Discussion and Conclusion

This study proposed the integrated model of ethical decision-making in Thai context. The Thai ethical decision-making model was grounded on the basis of (Duangduen, 2007; Keown, 2005; Hofstede & Bond, 1988; Hunt & Vitell, 1986; Trevino, 1986; Ferrell & Gresham, 1985). The above mentioned research contributed remarkably in understanding the dimensions of ethical decision – making but also helped in constructing Thai model for ethical -decision making. According to literature review, culture was essential element that influences over ethical decision-making. Culture plays background role. The culture in Thai context was considered as Buddhist morality and Confucian dynamism. Therefore, the culture was integrated into model of ethical decision-making in Thai context. To date the theoretical development and empirical research in ethical decision making have not provided any model for Thai organization. Most of previous research regarding ethical decision making models provide for useful understandings. Previously developed models are useful and multipurpose in nature. Some ethical decision making models are general, explains cognitive moral development and cognitive components of ethical decision making behavior in organization. While other describes potential variables, effecting on decision making. Somehow previous model explained issue of contingents, focused on individual, situational and organizational and moral reasoning. Although some ethical decision making framework were also developed by synthesizing previous ethical decision making models and proposed ethical decision making model for marketing. The model of ethical decision making in Thai context is exclusive and suggests that there is variation in this model, because it is combination of various ethical decision making models and touch of cultural variables. The ethical decision making model in Thai context are comprised of components: ethical situation, individual factors, organizational factors, Thai culture and ethical decision making process. The existing ethical decision making model may not be appropriate to adopt by many organization (Oliveira, 2007), because the previous model have not incorporated the culture factor (Trompenaars, 1994) The researchers also recommended that culture is plays a critical

role in developing and directing people's action, help them to solve their problems, they also claimed that culture effects on thinking, behaving and communication of practices of people (Hofstede, 1997; Trompenaars, 1994). This study may enrich the existing literature as it provides ethical decision making model for Thai organization, the researcher may use this model for foundation of their research. This model may also be helpful for Organizations, employer and employee in guiding and making ethical decision making.

8. Limitation and Future Research

Presently, the major limitation of this study involved that only few previous ethical decision making model were reviewed and focused. Conversely, it was also observed that globalization play central role in Thai society but it was not incorporated in the development Thai model. The future consideration for further research should be given and future researcher should test the proposed ethical decision making model by examining its validity and reliability. Culture is key variable effecting on ethical decision-making, it needs to be verified whether all culture will effect on the ethical decision-making, if so, what is the intensity of culture factor to impact the ethical decision-making process. However, it was observed that the globalization somehow play key function in Thai society. For further study, globalization needs to be explored in Thai context. The different ethical-decision making model should be developed for different culture and should also be tested in other Asian countries such as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal.

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