ETHICAL PERCEPTIONS OF RETAIL MANAGERS IN AUSTRALIA, SINGAPORE, SOUTH AFRICA AND ZIMBABWE

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Abstract

This study examines the ethical perceptions of retail managers in four countries; Australia, South Africa, Singapore and Zimbabwe. A literature review of retailing ethics and cross-cultural studies of ethics was completed. The questionnaire used for this study was developed from previous studies. The results of this study suggest that retail managers are more ethical than retailing students, and that retail ethics perceptions differ in the four countries studied.

Introduction

There has been a rise of interest in business ethics amongst ethicists and businessmen during recent years (Cooke 1986). Many academics and practitioners have justified the need for proper ethical conduct in business (Beversluis 1986; Laczniak, 1983; Lombard, 1985; and Martin, 1985). Several chief executive officers have reached the conclusion that ethical business is good business (Tsalikis and Fritzche, 1989). In spite of this, it has been suggested that the business community is troubled by ethical problems and ethical standards have declined over the last decade (Herman and Cullen, 1986; Touche Ross 1987).

According to Dubinsky and Levy (1985), the retail sales environment is particularly susceptible to the development of troublesome ethical situations. Retail salespeople must satisfy both the customer and their management. They thus have a 'front-line' and 'boundary-spanning' role (Donnelly and Ivancevich, 1975). They thus have to perform a variety of tasks in order to satisfy both customer and management.

Relatively little research has been focused on retailing ethics and no cross-cultural retail ethic studies have been undertaken, and thus there is a reason to conduct this study. The objectives of this study were first, to investigate the perceptions of retail managers of potentially troublesome retailing situations, and secondly to compare the perceptions of retail managers in South Africa, Zimbabwe, Singapore and Australia.

Literature Review

Retail Ethics

Few studies have been reported until recently with regard to ethical considerations of retail practices (Gifford and Norris, 1987). Ethical perceptual differences between speciality, discount and department store managers were examined by Dornoff and Tankersley (1975-76). This study was replicated by Gifford and Norris (1987). They found that speciality, discount and department store managers are more 'consumer-oriented' or 'ethically minded' today than were their counterparts a decade ago. Dubinsky and Levy (1985) investigated a number of potentially troublesome retail situations, and found that retail sales people did not consider a large number of the situations to reflect problems of ethical policies. Burns and Smith (1990) investigated ethical perceptions of retail students. They found that the ethical perceptions of retail students varied from that of retail practitioners. Students were 'less ethically minded' than practising retailers.

Cross Cultural Studies

Academic literature addressing the topic of ethics has paid little attention to cross-cultural studies. International business and marketing textbooks, however, often cite the impact of culture on beliefs and behavior. Prasad and Rao (1982) state that although certain ethical norms such as honesty, integrity, self-discipline, loyalty and compassion are widely proclaimed and are part of any civilization, the level of adherence to these standards varies greatly among people.

A study of achievement incentives prompted McClelland (1961) to conclude that culture has an effect on business practices. According to England (1975), people raised in different cultures hold different values and ethical beliefs.

In a major study in cross-cultural ethics, Lee (1981) examined the impact of culture and management level on ethics in marketing practices. The study compared the ethical beliefs of British managers working in Hong Kong with the ethical beliefs of Chinese managers. Lee (1981) concluded that the evaluation frameworks of British and Chinese managers were extremely similar and attributed this finding to a possible acculturation of the British Managers. The results of the study therefore contradict those of England (1975) and McClelland (1961). Lee's (1981) findings have been supported by the result of later cross-cultural studies. Comparisons of the beliefs of American and Israeli business managers (Izraeli, 1988), black and white business students (Tsalikis and Nwachukwa, 1988), and Greek and American business students (Tsalikis and Nwachukwa, 1989), all found that ethical beliefs varies little from culture to culture.

The Retailing Industry

It is necessary to look at the retailing structure of the sample countries because it may influence the ethics of managers.

Retailing in Australia

Retailing in Australia is an amalgamation of European and American practices. It is a highly concentrated industry, with the top twenty retailers accounting for 44 percent of total retail turnover. There are however, a large number of small retailers. The departmental stores have lost market share over the past decades as discount departmental stores and speciality chains have expanded. Supermarkets in Australia are mature and now threatened by rapid expansion of Food 'Barns'. Australia has only one hypermarket (in Queensland), no warehouse type retail outlets and very few off-price outlets.

Regional shopping centres dominate but are in the mature stage. The central business districts are being rejuvenated with retail developments and traditional strip shopping is struggling. Increased penetration by international retailers including the Japanese is occurring.

The major players in Australian retailing included the dominant Coles Myer group. They include departmental stores Myer and Grace Bros., Target and K Mart discount stores and speciality store Katies and Red Rooster. The largest supermarket chain is Woolworths. Total retail sales in 1989/90 amounted to A$79313.7 mil (ABS, 1991)

Retailing in Singapore

Retailing in Singapore is influenced by United States and Europe mainly due to its dependence on foreign trade. It has one of the world's highest population densities. As a result of the lack of land, multistorey shopping centres are dominant (Sim and Way, 1989). There are many small retailers in the country as well as large departmental stores and supermarkets. According to the retail trade census of 1986 there was 15503 retail establishment doing a turnover of S$9,581,209,000. Departmental stores had a market share of 20 percent, supermarkets 14 percent and the remaining market taken by mainly single-line retailers (Retail Trade International, 1989). Many international retailers have branches or franchises in Singapore, including McDonalds, Burger King and Toys R Us.

Retailing in South Africa

Retailing in South Africa compares with the best in Europe and the United States of America. It is an industry dominated by large chain store groups and therefore is highly concentrated. There are many smaller independent retailers as well. In the food business the top five percent of stores account for 61 percent of the business (Financial Mail, April 26, 1991). Shopping centres have grown over the last twenty years and new regional centres have been built recently. There are also projects to revitalise the central business districts of the major cities, Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban and Pretoria. Departmental stores have not

grown in recent years, but discount stores, hypermarkets and speciality goods chains have gained market share.

The clothing chains that dominate the market are Edgars, Truworths and Foschini. Dominant food retailers include Pick n' Pay, Checkers and the O.K. Bazaars. The furniture industry is dominated by Amrel, Rusfurn and Joshua Doore. The market size in 1990 for food was R21921 mil, for clothing R6008 mil, furniture R2209 mil, appliances R1011 mil and toys R171 mil (Financial Mail, April 26, 1991). The future of retailing in South Africa is good mainly due to the increase in income of the numerically superior black consumer.

Retailing in Zimbabwe

Retailing in Zimbabwe follows South African trends. It is concentrated with a few dominant retailing groups but there are a large number of small retailers. The central business districts of the major cities and towns are the dominant retailing areas but shopping centres do exist. Retailing is characterised by stock shortages due to the lack of foreign exchange to purchase imported items. The department stores are dominated by the O.K. Bazaars, supermarkets by the T.M. Group and clothing by Edgars.

The retailing structure of all the countries studied, with the possible exception of Singapore, are very similar. Retail concentration prevails in all countries.

Methodology

Questionnaire

The questionnaire used for this study was developed from previous studies relating to retailing ethics. It is comprised of a list of situations or practices which are viewed as potentially ethically troubling for retail salespeople. The list was developed by Levy and Dubinsky (1983) and Dubinsky and Levy (1985) via the nominal group technique (Delbecq, van de Ven and Gustafson, 1975). One item not included in the above mentioned studies was included and taken from the Burns and Smith (1990) study. For each of the situations and practices, respondents were asked to answer the following question : Does the situation present an ethical question for you? (Do you feel that the situation pressures you into taking actions that are inconsistent with what you feel is right?).

Each question was scored using a seven-point Likert Scale on which 1 represented highly wrong and 7 represented not wrong at all.

The data was analysed using multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA). Multivariate analysis provides for the simultaneous analysis of two or more response variables. Multivariate analysis parallels univariate analysis in many respects, but differs from repeating univariate analysis, because it accounts for the

correlation and covariances among the dependent variables. If the dependent variables are uncorrelated, then the results of multivariate analysis are identical to those obtained by separate univariate analysis. A strength of MANOVA is that is can identify a difference in a set of response data that is not detected by separate univariate analysis. The response for each question was assumed to approximate a continuous variable, an assumption that is typically made in social science when analysing ordered response categories.

Sample

The research was carried out by means of a mailing to senior retailing executives in department and/or chain stores in four countries, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Singapore and Australia. A list of the top two department chain stores (by sales volume) was obtained from each country. Fifteen questionnaires were sent to the chief executive of each organisation with a covering letter requesting senior executives to complete and return them to the authors. Thirty-two usable replies were received from South Africa, twenty-three from Zimbabwe, five from Singapore and twenty-two from Australia. A profile of the respondents is shown in table one. The sample conforms to the profile of chain store retail managers in the four countries.

TABLE 1

PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

AGE	SOUTH AFRICA n = 32	AUSTRALIA n = 22	ZIMBABWE n = 23	SINGAPORE n = 5
20 - 29	1	9	1	
30 - 39	19	5	14	1
40 - 49	12	7	7	4
50 +	.	1	1	.
Gender				
Male	30	6	21	1
Female	2	16	2	4

Limitations

The sample consisted of managers from two major chain store groups in South Africa, Australia and Zimbabwe, as well as one chain store group in Singapore. Only five managers responded from the one chain store group in Singapore. It was decided to include the respondents from the Singapore group as it represents the largest chain store group in that country. The chain groups chosen for this study were the two largest groups (by sales volume) in each country. They are therefore successfully retail organisations. The results may be biased because it is unknown whether these groups represent typical retailers in the respective

countries. There could be some difficulty therefore to make generalisations about the results, as they are applicable to professional chain store managers only.

The instrument used in this study has not been clearly validated. As this research was based on previous studies, the same problem existed in those applications. Interstudy comparisons can be made. Another limitation concerns the situations or practices. Many

items contained normative issues and therefore socially desirable responses could have been made.

Findings

The results of this survey are shown in Table 2 (raw scores) and Table 3 (means). The result of the Burns and Smith study (1990) are presented for comparison in Table 3. It is clear from these findings that the students in the Burns and Smith study are 'less ethical' than practising managers in South Africa, Australia, Zimbabwe and Singapore. The four countries studied, generally speaking, all view the situation/practices the same way. Singapore differs in situation/practices numbers 4, 12, 13, 15, 17, 21, 22, 30, 32 and 36 when compared to other countries in this study. These differences may be due to the relatively small sample obtained. However, the result of the multivariate statistics show that the four countries differ in terms of ethical perceptions at the 99 percent confidence interval.

Discussion and Implications

The similarity or difference in the ethical perceptions of retail managers in the four countries studied (with the obvious exceptions noted above) cannot be determined conclusively from the present study. Australia, South Africa and Singapore have capitalistic economic systems with a reasonable level of free markets. Zimbabwe, although officially a socialist state, has a reasonably free market economy and many capitalist ideals still prevail. So one reason for any similarity is that English is one of the official languages of all four countries and all were British colonies at some time. Thus past cultural tradition could have been handed down from generation to generation.

The results of this study support the view that we need world-wide ethical conduct and codes of ethics in retailing. In English speaking countries, at least, a code of conduct for retailers can be, and should be drawn up. As reported in the Dubinsky and Levy (1985) study, salespeople wanted ethical issues to be covered in company policies. It is essential for retailers to draw up ethical codes to maintain ethical standards.

The code should deal with a few major areas, customer service, merchandise, price and personnel policy.

As far as customer service is concerned, the following should be included:

- All customers must be assisted even if they are less likely to buy. (This may not be applicable to self service retailers).

- No customer returns should be refused if you think that it should be accepted.

- Telephone customers should be assisted at all times.

The following merchandise issues should be included:

- No merchandise may be hidden in order to take advantage of a markdown later.

- Samples may not be hoarded that were meant for customers.

- All units available for sale must be sold to customers and not kept for personnel.

- All customers are entitled to the truth about the characteristics of a product.

Pricing issues that should be included are:

- No customer must be given the incorrect change.

- No people, including friends or family not entitled to a discount, must be given employee discounts.

- Full price must not be charged for a sale item without the customers knowledge.

Personnel policy should include:

- Time sheets must be signed correctly for time worked.

- All thefts must be reported even though there may be pressure from other employees not to do so.

- All salespeople must work to their full potential even though this may offend other employees.

This list is by no means exhaustive. However, as these issues were said to be wrong by retailers in all the sample countries they should be included in all codes in all retail organisations. This does not stamp out unethical behavior in retailing, but clearly defines the boundaries for retail personnel. Thus, in turn, retail organisations can apply sanctions more effectively when this ethical code is breached.

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TABLE 2

RAW SCORES OF ETHICAL PERCEPTIONS

Situation/Practice	Country	Scale 1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1 Don't offer information about an upcoming sales that will include merchandise the customer is planning to buy.	South Africa	6	7	3	2	2	4	8
	Australia	1	1	6	3	4	3	4
	Zimbabwe	3	11	1	1	1	3	3
	Singapore	.	2	.	1	.	1	1
2. Have to sell non-sale items at full price when the items were accidentally placed with the sale merchandise	South Africa	5	9	3	1	2	8	4
	Australia	2	5	2	.	2	4	7
	Zimbabwe	2	4	1	1	1	7	7
	Singapore	1	1	1	.	.	2	.
3. Don't assist customers you believe are less likely to buy	South Africa	17	12	3	.	.	.	.
	Australia	17	5	.	.	.	.	.
	Zimbabwe	14	4	3	2	.	.	.
	Singapore	3	2	.	.	.	.	
4. Make excuses to customers about unavailable merchandise that is not yet in stock or sold out	South Africa	11	9	3	1	5	2	4
	Australia	6	6	1	3	3	3	.
	Zimbabwe	5	6	2	1	2	6	1
	Singapore	2	2	.	.	.	1	.
5. Sell a more expensive product when a less expensive one would be better for the customer	South Africa	7	12	5	2	1	5	.
	Australia	4	8	2	1	1	5	1
	Zimbabwe	4	10	3	.	2	3	1
	Singapore	2	.	2	.	1	.	.
6. Ignore a prospective customer for one you believe will be a better one	South Africa	12	16	.	1	1	2	.
	Australia	11	9	1	.		.	1
	Zimbabwe	8	7	5	.	1	1	1
	Singapore	3	2	.	.	.	.	
7. Use of a sales contest for sales people in order to generate sales to customers	South Africa	1	.	1	2	1	11	16
	Australia	.	1	.	1	2	7	11
	Zimbabwe	.	1	1	1	1	10	9
	Singapore	.	.	.	2	1	1	1
8. Hide merchandise that you want and are waiting for the store to mark down	South Africa	20	8	1	1	1	1	.
	Australia	20	2	.	.	.	.	.
	Zimbabwe	15	7	.	.	1	.	.
	Singapore	5	.	.	.	.	.	
9. Charge markdown price to customers for similar full-price merchandise	South Africa	13	8	4	3	2	2	.
	Australia	15	4	.	1	1	.	1
	Zimbabwe	8	7	2	3	1	1	1
	Singapore	2	2	1	.	.	.	
10. Make a promise you cannot keep regarding the time when something will be ready	South Africa	20	12	.	.	.	.	.
	Australia	18	3	.	.	1	.	.
	Zimbabwe	17	6	.	.	.	.	.
	Singapore	2	3	.	.	.	.	.
11. Give preferential treatment to certain customers	South Africa	5	10	3	3	3	6	2
	Australia	6	3	2	2	4	1	4
	Zimbabwe	4	6	2	2	2	7	.
	Singapore	1	2	.	.	.	1	1
12. Sign time sheet incorrectly for time worked	South Africa	26	6	.	.	.	.	.
	Australia	20	2	.	.	.	.	.
	Zimbabwe	20	3	.	.	.	.	
	Singapore	4	.	.	.	1	.	
13. Customer damages a product in the store and wants a markdown	South Africa	18	8	5	1	.	.	.
	Australia	13	5	2	2	.	.	.
	Zimbabwe	17	3	.	1	1	1	.
	Singapore	2	.	.	2	.	1	
14. Make excuses when merchandise is not ready for customer pickup	South Africa	9	16	4	.	2	1	.
	Australia	7	7	5	1	1	1	.
	Zimbabwe	6	11	3	.	2	1	.
	Singapore	1	3		1			
15 Buy merchandise before it is available to the customer	South Africa	10	9	4	5	3	1	
	Australia	7	6	3	2	3	1	.
	Zimbabwe	9	8	.	3	1	1	1
	Singapore	2	3		.	.		
16 Perform your job with inadequate job information or training	South Africa	9	17	6			.	.
	Australia	5	8	4	.	2	1	2
	Zimbabwe	7	8	5	1	2	.	.
	Singapore	1	4	.	.	.	.	
17. Sell a product as an exclusive, when it is in fact available in other stores	South Africa	16	11	2	3	.	.	.
	Australia	16	6	.	.	.	.	.
	Zimbabwe	10	10	.	2	1	.	.
	Singapore	1	3	.	.	1	.	.
18. Pressure from fellow sales people not to report theft	South Africa	27	5					
	Australia	21	1					
	Zimbabwe	21	2					
	Singapore	4	1					
19. Hoard free samples that are meant for customers	South Africa	24	5	3				.
	Australia	17	4	1				.
	Zimbabwe	17	6	.			.	.
	Singapore	6	.					
20. Give incorrect change to customers on purchases	South Africa	27	3	2		.		
	Australia	22	.	.	.	.	.	.
	Zimbabwe	21	2	.	.	.	.	
	Singapore	5	.	.				
21. Peer pressure not to say anything to managers about other sales people's personal problems	South Africa	8	7	6	7	3	1	
	Australia	5	3	8	3	1	1	1
	Zimbabwe	3	9	5	4	2		.
	Singapore	.	2	.	2	.	1	
22. Don't sell the last unit because you want to purchase it yourself	South Africa	16	12	2	2			
	Australia	14	6	.	1	1		
	Zimbabwe	13	6	2	2	.		
	Singapore	5		.	.			
23. Refuse return by customer when you think the item should be accepted	South Africa	14	15	2	1	.		
	Australia	17	3	1	.		1	
	Zimbabwe	15	6	2	.	.	.	
	Singapore	3	2	.	.	.	.	
24. Take return from customer when you think the item should not be accepted	South Africa	1	9	2	6	10	3	1
	Australia	3	4	2	2	6	5	.
	Zimbabwe	3	4	3	5	5	3	.
	Singapore	.	2	.	2	1		.
25. Pressure from a friend or family member not entitled to a discount to give him or her your employee discount	South Africa	17	8	4	1	2	.	.
	Australia	19	3	.	.	.	.	.
	Zimbabwe	19	3	1		.	.	.
	Singapore	1	4	.	.	.	.	.
26. Don't give the complete truth to a customer about the characteristics of a product	South Africa	20	9	1	.	.	.	1
	Australia	16	4	1	.	1	.	.
	Zimbabwe	10	10	1	1	1	.	.
	Singapore	2	3	.	.	.	.	.
27. Charge full price for a sale item without the customer's knowledge	South Africa	20	9	1	.	.	.	1
	Australia	22	.	.	.	.	.	.
	Zimbabwe	17	4	1	.	.	1	.
	Singapore	4	1	.	.		.	
28. Offer to give a friend (or family member) not entitled to a discount your employee discount	South Africa	18	9	5	.	.	.	.
	Australia	22	.	.	.	.	.	.
	Zimbabwe	20	2	1	.	.	.	.
	Singapore	2	2	.	1	.	.	.
29. Take sales from a fellow sales person	South Africa	6	9	7	5	2	2	1
	Australia	14	3	4	.	1	.	.
	Zimbabwe	7	7	.	4	4	1	.
	Singapore	2	2	.	1	.	.	
30. Pressure customers into making a sale	South Africa	4	11	7	5	2	2	1
	Australia	6	11	1	1	3	.	.
	Zimbabwe	4	8	4	1	5	1	.
	Singapore	2	3	.	.	.		
31. Don't get a cheque authorisation when required	South Africa	9	12	4	2	2	2	1
	Australia	13	6	3	.	.	.	.
	Zimbabwe	6	15	.	1	1	.	.
	Singapore	2	3	.		.		

TABLE 3

ETHICAL PERCEPTIONS (MEANS)

SITUATION NUMBER	BURNS AND SMITH (USA)	SOUTH AFRICA	AUSTRALIA	ZIMBABWE	SINGAPORE
1	3.8	3,969	4,545	3,087	4.200
2	4.0	3.813	4.364	4.913	3.600
3	3.8	1.563	1.364	1.696	1.400
4	3.7	3.188	3,045	3.478	2,400
5	4.6	2,781	3,091	2,957	2,600
6	4.0	2.125	2,000	2.391	1,400
7	3.3	5,938	5,864	5,957	5,200
8	3.9	1.719	1.136	1,478	1,000
9	4.2	2.219	1,727	2,522	1,400
10	4.5	1,531	1,545	1,304	1,600
11	4.1	3.281	3.409	3,522	3.600
12	5.0	1.219	1.136	1.130	1,800
13	4.7	1,719	1.727	1,696	3.400
14	4.5	2.125	2.364	2.261	2.200
15	3.1	2.438	2.636	2.435	1.600
16	4.4	1.906	2.727	2.217	1,800
17	4.7	1,688	1,227	1.870	2.400
18	5.4	1.188	1,045	1,087	1.200
19	4.3	1.406	1.273	1.261	1.000
20	4.9	1.219	1,000	1.130	1.000
21	3.9	2.719	2,818	2.652	3.600
22	3.7	1,688	1,682	1.696	1.000
23	4.4	1.688	1,455	1,522	1,400
24	4.6	3,844	3,682	3,522	3,400
25	4.2	1,844	1,364	1,217	1,800
26	4.8	1.563	1,409	1,826	1.600
27	5.1	1.563	1,045	1,478	1.200
28	3.8	1,594	1,000	1,174	2,000
29	4.8	2,688	1,682	2,696	2.000
30	4.4	3.000	2,273	3,043	1,600
31	4.2	2,563	1,545	2,087	1.600
32	4.5	1,594	1,182	1,565	1,000
33	5.0	2,531	2,136	3,913	1,600
34	4.4	1,750	1,455	1,870	1,800
35	3.4	3,563	4,136	1,870	4,600
36	3.1	4,031	4,909	4,000	5,200
37	4.7	2,156	1,818	2,391	5,200
38	4.9	2,094	2,136	2,348	2,200
	n = 109	n = 32	n = 22	n = 23	n = 5

Scale :
1 Highly Wrong
2 Wrong
3 Maybe wrong
4 Neutral
5 Maybe Acceptable
6 Acceptable
7 Not Wrong At All

MANOVER RESULTS

Statistic	Value	d.f.	F. Statistic	Prob.
Wilk's Lambda	0,0001	114	10,761	0,000
Pillai's Trace	2,688	114	9,739	0,000
Hotelling - Lawley Trace	33,903	114	11,797	0,000