SITUATIONAL INFLUENCES ON QUANTITY SURVEYORS WHEN FACING ETHICAL DILEMMAS

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Abstract: This paper continues Ho’s (2006) paper and focuses on analyzing the impact of case-free interest considerations of quantity surveyors on their case-specific responses, which is a much more direct investigation of situational influences upon decisions towards ethical dilemmas. Hypotheses are tested by rigorous statistical techniques such as Multivariate Analysis of Variance and Hierarchical Regression Analysis. Interest considerations of professional quantity surveyors towards common ethical dilemmas are related to their background, ethical training, case-free ethical and interest considerations. The effect of professional quantity surveyors’ background on their interest considerations is not as strong as expected but is again subject to the specific circumstances of the cases. It is found that the less experienced the quantity surveyors are, the more emphasis they place on the interest of their colleagues; and the more senior the membership and less educated they are, the more emphasis they would place on the interest of their employer. Moreover, given the same personal profile, the quantity surveyors can be classified as either stressing their self-interest while disregarding the interest of their employer, or emphasizing the interest of their employer while sacrificing their own interest. Post-work ethical training tools enhance quantity surveyors' emphasis on their own interest. Importantly, both case-free ethical and interest considerations tell us that self-interest of quantity surveyors not only runs against the interest of their employer but also the interest of their client and superior. The findings again reinforce case study approach in the area of professional ethics.

Keywords: Professional ethics; ethical dilemmas; interaction effects; ethical training; case-specific

1 Introduction

This paper continues Ho’s (2006) analysis of situational influences of specific ethical dilemmas towards quantity surveyors' responses. Unlike Ho (2006) which focuses on the quantity surveyors' decisions towards ethical dilemmas under different time and place, this paper majors in investigating how the case-specific interest considerations of quantity surveyors are affected by their background, ethical training, case-free ethical and interest considerations. The case studies detailed in Fan, Ho and Ng (2001a, 2001b) are utilized again. Since the general definition of ethics, the specific concept of professional ethics and contemporary ethical theories have already been presented in Ho (2006), these are omitted here to save space and avoid repetition. Results of hypothesis testing are again analyzed within the context of Hong Kong construction industry. Implications and recommendations for future research are summarized at the end of this paper for further development in the area of professional ethics.

2 Research Objectives

This research paper on “Ethical Problem in the Construction Profession” which is funded by the Hong Kong Polytechnic University and commenced in 1998 is the first series of paper in Hong Kong attempting to identify the ethical perceptions of professional quantity surveyors in relation to their daily practices. The research objectives particular to this paper are the same as Ho (2006):

- To explore the perceptions and decisions of practising quantity surveyors towards common ethical dilemmas
- To investigate the differences among subgroups of and effects of background and ethical training on their perceptions and decisions
- To investigate the interaction and moderating effects among background variables
- To reconcile the effects of specific cases by reference to ethical and interest considerations under
case-free situations

3 Research Methodology

The two case studies, which are detailed in Fan, Ho and Ng (2001a, 2001b) and partly analyzed by Ho (2006), comprise of four questions in Case 1 concerning “ghost workers” and three questions in Case 2 concerning “outside work” respectively. The following analyses will contain the last questions in Case 1, i.e. Question 4, and the last questions in Case 2, i.e. Question 3. The two cases will be briefed first prior to the presentation of the analyses. The question of generalizability of the findings across cases will be dealt with afterwards. The hypotheses are exactly the same as Ho (2006) and described as follows:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Quantity surveyors’ considerations and decisions are different towards different ethical dilemmas, i.e. case-specific.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): The background variables of quantity surveyors strongly differentiate their ethical consideration and decision towards the same ethical dilemma.

Hypothesis 3a (H3a): The effect of membership negatively moderates that of age, education level and experience, and vice versa.

Hypothesis 3b (H3b): The effect of membership positively moderates that of gender, organization type and management level, and vice versa.

Hypothesis 3c (H3c): The effect of gender negatively moderates that of age, education level, organization type, experience and management level, and vice versa.

Hypothesis 3d (H3d): The effect of age negatively moderates that of organization type and management level, and vice versa.

Hypothesis 3e (H3e): The effect of age positively moderates that of education level and experience, and vice versa.

Hypothesis 3f (H3f): The effect of education level negatively moderates that of organization type and management level, and vice versa.

Hypothesis 3g (H3g): The effect of education level positively moderates that of experience, and vice versa.

Hypothesis 3h (H3h): The effect of organization type negatively moderates that of experience, and vice versa.

Hypothesis 3i (H3i): The effect of organization type positively moderates that of management level, and vice versa.

Hypothesis 3j (H3j): The effect of experience negatively moderates that of management level, and vice versa.

Hypothesis 4 (H4): The ethical training of quantity surveyors strongly differentiate their ethical consideration and decision towards the same ethical dilemma.

4 Sampling and Data Collection

The population of the study is those quantity surveyors having a membership in the Quantity Surveying Division (QSD) of Hong Kong Institute of Surveyors (HKIS) and practising in Hong Kong. “Snowball” sampling method was used and the self-administered questionnaires were distributed to quantity surveyors practising in the five types of organizations, i.e. Academy, Public Client, Private Client, Consultants and Main Contractor. The questionnaires successfully reached about 7% of the population and over 80% of the returned questionnaires are usable. The final sample size is 10% of the population.

Measures

All background variables are measured in Part I of the questionnaire (Fan, Ho and Ng, 2001a) and the background variables include Membership (M), Gender (G), Age (A), Education Level (EL), Experience (EX), Management Level (ML) and Organization Type (O). Gender (G) and Organization Type (O) are classified as categorical variables while the rest of background variables as ordinal variables. The seven ethical training tools selected are Prevention of Bribery Ordinance, RICS/HKIS Bye-law, RICS/HKIS Regulations, RICS Rule of Conduct for Chartered Surveyors, Corporate Code of Conduct, College Courses and CPD Courses.
Quantity surveyors’ perceptions towards ethical theories under case-free situation are revealed from their responses to the 4-point Likert Scale in Question 2.5. The seven ethical theories selected are Egoism, Utilitarianism, Right, Justice, Duty, Categorical Imperative and NORM. The interest considerations of quantity surveyors concern the interest of Self, Employer, Client, Superior, Colleagues (including Subordinate), Family and General Public. These interest considerations under case-free situation are reflected from Question 2.6 in Part II.

5 Data Analysis Methods

The statistical techniques used in this paper are exactly the same as Ho (2006). Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) helps indicate the differences among subgroups of various independent variables whereas Hierarchical Regression Analysis (HRA) investigates the cause-effect relationship between variables by progressively incorporating different sets of independent variables. The four sets of hypotheses described above are tested based on both MANOVA and HRA results. Both primary regression equations, quantity surveyors’ case-specific interest considerations are set as dependent variables at the same time. More than one subsidiary regression equations are hence envisaged in each primary regression equation, which is expressed as a matrix. Model 1 includes the main effect of quantity surveyors' background variables only. The set of interaction variables showing the interaction effects of the background variables are further incorporated in Model 2. Model 3 replaces the interaction effects by ethical training effects (Question 2.3). Case-free ethical (Question 2.5) and interest (Question 2.6) considerations are included in Model 4 and 5 respectively.

6 Results

6.1 Case Study 1 – Clint: Ghost Workers – Brief of Case

Case 1 describes a case where the site foreman, Bobby, has found some fraudulent attendance records of two labourers, the ganger of whom is Chui, the assistant of Bobby. Bobby wonders whether Chui is involved and faces with an ethical dilemma whether to tell his superior, Clint, about the records and his suspicion. The last question concerns the quantity surveyors’ considerations of the importance of the following:

- Q4(a) Chui and the two ghost workers’ job prospect
- Q4(b) Relationship with Chui (Bobby’s subordinate)
- Q4(c) Relationship with Clint (Bobby’s superior)
- Q4(d) Clint’s action to Bobby if he comes to know about the event
- Q4(e) Reinforcement of workers’ bad practice even if it is common and traditional
- Q4(f) Company’s loss due to the possible delay caused by the absence of the workers, either tangible or intangible
- Q4(g) Client’s loss due to the same as Q4(f)
- Q4(h) General public’s economic loss due to the delay of works completion

The eight types of considerations actually represent the interest of various parties: Colleagues (Q4(a)), Self (Q4(b), Q4(c) and Q4(d)), Employer (Q4(e) and Q4(f)), Client (Q4(g)), and General Public (Q4(h)). The interest of some parties is represented by more than one statement in an attempt to take into the account the multifaceted nature of the interest of a party. Assuming that these considerations are interrelated, a multivariate approach is taken and they are set as dependent variables in the regression models, i.e. Model 1 to 5 in Tables 1 and 2, at the same time.

6.2 Case Study 1 – Clint: Ghost Workers – MANOVA Results

The MANOVA results of quantity surveyors’ interest considerations towards Case 1 Question 4 are reported in Table 1. Similar to their responses to Case1 Question 1 to 3, Model 1 shows that the subgroups of
background variables of quantity surveyors do not have significant differences in interest considerations. Only Gender exhibits significantly different interest considerations among subgroups (p=0.05) where in Table 1 Model 1, the F-Statistic of Gender highly non-significant (p=0.778). The subgroups of Education Level again have strongly different interest considerations (p=0.094) but to lesser extent than for Case 1 Question 1 to 3 (p=0.011). Subgroups of the rest of background variables do not show significant differences in their interest considerations. H2 is rejected in this case.

In Model 2, the interaction effects of background variables show more significant F-Statistics for Question 4 than Question 1 to 3. Surprisingly, the set of interaction variables including either Gender or Education Level does not have significant differences among their subgroups. Instead, whenever Organization Type or Age constitutes one of the two background variables forming interaction variables, these interaction variables almost all show significant differences in interest considerations among subgroups except GxA (p=0.613), OxML (p=0.111). Besides these interaction variables, only ELxML has significant F-Statistic (p=0.025). Accordingly, interaction effects of background variables seem to differentiate the opinions of quantity surveyors more than their main effects.

Unlike making decisions on whether to tell the whole story to Clint, pre-work ethical training here in interest considerations is more effective than post-work ethical training in making a difference between those quantity surveyors who received relevant collegiate training from those who did not (p=0.000) in Model 3. Nevertheless, the post-work ethical training tools also strongly differentiate subgroups' responses. RICS/HKIS Bye-law has significant F-Statistic (p=0.05) while RICS/HKIS Regulations (p=0.096) and Corporate Code of Conduct (p=0.051) exhibit strong differences among subgroups. Ethical training can differentiate the interest considerations of quantity surveyors to greater extent than the main and interaction effects of background variables. H4 can therefore be accepted.

Those who support NORM (p=0.05), Utilitarianism (p=0.01) and Justice (p=0.05) have significantly different interest considerations from those who do not (See Model 4). The proponents and opponents of Categorical Imperative (p=0.062) also have strongly different opinions in interest considerations. Here, the effect of NORM (p=0.028) on interest considerations is similar to its effect (p=0.08) on quantity surveyors in deciding whether to tell Clint the whole story of the ghost workers in Question 1 to 3.

The interest considerations of quantity surveyors under case-free situation in generally do not exert differentiation effect on subgroups' interest considerations except Client and Superior. However, MANOVA results in this regard cannot tell how the interest considerations under case-free situation affect those under specific ethical dilemmas. We better refer to the following HRA results for further investigation.

6.3 Case Study 1 – Clint: Ghost Workers – HRA Results

Quantity surveyors' background variables seem not to be good predictor of their interest consideration in Case 1 in Table 2 Model 1. None of the F-Statistics are significant with the worst case of Q4(e) (p=0.923). The R² values are quite low: Colleagues (16.4%), Self (13.5%, 10% and 15.2%), Employer (5.2% and 16.6%), Client (12.6%), and General Public (14.2%). We therefore cannot tell whose interest the quantity surveyors may emphasize simply from their background. The βs are occasionally significant. Nevertheless, we can tell that the less experienced the quantity surveyors are, the more emphasis they place on the interest of their colleagues; and the less educated and experienced they are, the more emphasis they place on their self-interest.

The interaction effects of background variables greatly enhance the predicting power of Model 2. Almost all regression equations in the model have significant F-Statistics except Q4(e) (p=0.066) and Q4(h) (p=0.107), which are also close to p<0.05. The R² values increase up to 55.9%–67.9%. This means that the interaction effects of background variables are not only very powerful in predicting ethical decisions but also interest considerations of quantity surveyors. Th background variables exhibit their moderating effects mainly in the three regression equations concerning the interest of Self i.e. Q4(b), Q4(c) and Q4(d). Organization Type consistently positively moderates Education Level but negatively moderates Age, Experience and Management Level. Age also consistently positively moderates Experience and Management Level but negatively moderates Membership and Education Level. Experience is also found to negatively moderate


Management Level as far as self-interest is concerned. Besides the interest of Self, the interaction effects of background variables only occasionally show significant moderating effects in the cases of Employer, Client and General Public. Therefore, H3a and H3e are partly accepted. H3d and H3h are rejected because no such relationship is observed. H3j is accepted.

Ethical training, similar to Table 2 Model 3, does not sharply raise the predicting power on quantity surveyors' interest considerations. Only the regression equations for interest of Self (Q4(b) and Q4(d)) and General Public (Q4(h)) are significant at \( p \leq 0.05 \). The \( R^2 \) values only increase up to 21.6%\textendash{}34.9%, much weaker than the interaction effects in Model 2. Those ethical training tools showing significant effects on interest considerations again fall into those regression equations concerning the interest of Self (Q4(b), Q4(c) and Q4(d)) and General Public (Q4(h)). However, unlike the MANOVA results for Model 3 of Table 1, post-work ethical training tools like RICS/HKIS Bye-law, Corporate Code of Conduct and CPD Courses seem to enhance quantity surveyors' emphasis on their own interest. This finding is consistent with that for Case 1 Question 1 to 3 where quantity surveyors, who received post-work ethical training, would tend to disclose the story of ghost workers to their superior.

In Model 4, quantity surveyors' support for different ethical schools of thought can moderately help predict their interest considerations. However, unlike Model 2 and 3, only those regression equations predicting the interest consideration of Colleagues (\( p=0.005 \)), Employer (\( p=0.003 \) and \( p=0.012 \)), Client (\( p=0.058 \)) and General Public (\( p=0.034 \)) have significant F-Statistics. The range of \( R^2 \) values is about 28.6\%\textendash{}48.7\%. Those who support Utilitarianism would tend to emphasize the interest of Self and General Public (See Q4(d) and Q4(h)). It is interesting to note that those prefer to Egoism (essentially the interest of Self!) would tend to emphasize the interest of General Public (See Q4(h)). It can be argued that the quantity surveyors always take the interest of general public into account as if it is their self-interest. Surprisingly, those quantity surveyors, who emphasize the interest of Employer and Client, are actually those oppose the concept of Duty and Categorical Imperative (essentially an alternative form of Duty). The latter two findings indeed deserve further investigation.

Quantity surveyors' interest considerations under case-free situation, however, do not have much predicting power on their interest considerations specific to Case 1. In Model 5, only the regression equations for the interest of Colleagues (\( p=0.000 \)), Self (\( p=0.01 \), \( p=0.006 \) and \( p=0.014 \)) and General Public (\( p=0.043 \)) are significant. Accordingly, their \( R^2 \) values are relatively greater and range from 30\% to 43.1\%. Nevertheless, only a few interest considerations under case-free situation have significant predicting power. In terms of \( \beta \)s, those quantity surveyors who in general emphasize the interest of their Colleagues would put their Self-interest at the top agendum in Case 1 (Q4(b), Q4(c) and Q4(d)). However, interestingly, the less emphasis the quantity surveyors put on the interest of their Superior and Client in general, the more they would emphasize their Self-interest in the present case. It is also the case as far as the interest of Colleagues is concerned. In Q4(a), should the quantity surveyors be found to emphasize the interest of their Colleagues, it is expected that they would disregard the interest of their Superior. It seems that the interest of Employer, Client and Superior very often runs against the quantity surveyors’ Self-interest and the interest of their Colleagues in Case 1.

6.4 Case Study 2 – Jonathan: Taking up Outside Work – Brief of Case

Case 2 concerns the dilemma where a quantity surveyor, Jonathan, has received an offer of freelance final account work, given by an outside company. Such final account work is originally the responsibility of Jonathan's colleagues, who will however leave the company very soon. Jonathan's superior wants Jonathan to take up the final account but he is too busy to do so. The work is then subletted to an outside freelance company, the head of which, Leo, is an old friend of Jonathan. Leo wants to further sublet the freelance final account work to Jonathan because his team has their hands full at that time. The last question relates to the quantity surveyors' considerations of the importance of the following:

- Q3(a) Self financial gain
- Q3(b) Loss of spare time with his family or friends
- Q3(c) Possible errors to be made during his daily work due to lack of rest time as consumed by the
outside work and vice versa
Q3(d) Possible conflict of interest
Q3(e) Relationship with Leo and future cooperation opportunities
Q3(f) Superior’s action to Jonathan if he comes to know about the event
Q3(g) Company’s loss and possible risk due to subletting the final account work

Same as Case 1, the seven types of considerations represent the interest of various parties: Self (Q3(a), Q3(e) and Q3(f)), Family (Q3(b)), and Employer (Q3(c), Q3(d), Q3(g)). Again, a multivariate approach is taken and these considerations are set as dependent variables in the regression models, i.e. Model 1 to 5 in Tables 3 and 4, at the same time.

6.5 Case Study 2 – Jonathan: Taking up Outside Work – MANOVA Results

The MANOVA results for Case 2 are summarized in Table 3. It is shown that the background variables have more significant F-Statistics in Model 1 than Case 2 Question 1 and 2. The subgroups of Organization Type (p=0.03), Membership (p=0.007) and Education Level (p=0.008) have significantly different interest considerations if they were Jonathan. This profile is similar to Case 2 Question 1 and 2 but the three background variables do not have significant F-Statistics in that case.

Nevertheless, the interaction effects of the background variables in Model 2 do not follow the patterns in Model 1. Those interaction variables associated with Organization Type, Membership and Education Level generally do not have significant F-Statistics while those associated with Management Level like MxML, ELxML and EXxML are either significant or close to significance. It seems that the subgroup members of Membership and Education Level cluster similarly as those of Management Level. The reasoning of “professional circle” again serves as the main argument of this phenomenon. But, for the case of AxEL and AxEX, the reasoning is entirely different. It is generally expected that the older the quantity surveyors, the highly educated and more experienced they be.

Post-work ethical training tools again significantly differentiate the interest considerations of the quantity surveyors in this case as in Case 1 but the level of significance is even greater. Both pre-work, i.e. College Courses (p=0.033), and post-work ethical training, i.e. Prevention of Bribery Ordinance (p=0.027), RICS/HKIS Regulations (p=0.011) and Corporate Code of Conduct (p=0.023) induce significant differences in interest considerations among their subgroups. However, it does not mean that ethical training should have strong predicting power. It is therefore necessary to refer to the HRA results in Table 4 for further confirmation. Nevertheless, H4 can be accepted.

Like Case 2 Question 1 and 2, both NORM (p=0.048) and Right (p=0.001) continue to significantly differentiate quantity surveyors’ interest considerations. Moreover, those who support Utilitarianism (p=0.05) and Categorical Imperative (p=0.017) also exhibit significantly different interest considerations from those who do not. This indicates that differences are found not only those emphasizing the consequences of ethical decisions but also those concerning the process of reaching such decisions.

6.6 Case Study 2 – Jonathan: Taking up Outside Work – HRA Results

As shown in Table 4 Model 1, the background variables have much greater predicting power on interest considerations in Case 2 than in Case 1. Almost all regression equations have significant F-Statistics except Q3(b), Q3(c) and Q3(g). Hence, the quantity surveyors’ background variables are especially powerful in predicting their interest considerations of Self (p=0.005 for Q3(a), p=0.002 for Q3(e) and p=0.028 for Q3(f)). The overall R² values range from 12% to 28.7%. However, only the βs of regression equations for the interest of Self (Q3(a), Q3(e) and Q3(f)) and Employer (Q3(d) and Q3(g)) are occasionally significant. It is found that the highly educated, less experienced and lower management level the quantity surveyors are, the more emphasis they would place on their own interest. Moreover, the more senior the membership and less educated they are, the more emphasis they would place on the interest of their employer. This matches the current population composition of the profession: the top management is usually less educated than the middle and low management level, albeit much more experienced. It can be concluded that the young surveying
profession would take more selfish approach than the old ones in tackling ethical dilemmas like Case 2. Contrary to Case 1, the interaction effects of background variables in Model 2 are more significant in predicting the interest considerations of Employer \((p=0.288, p=0.011 \text{ and } p=0.000)\) rather than Self \((p=0.201, p=0.002 \text{ and } p=0.119)\) and Family \((p=0.211)\). The \(R^2\) values increase up to 50.2\%–71.9\%. Unlike Model 1, individual interaction variables are more significant in case of the interest of Employer rather than Self. In case of the interest considerations of Employer, Organization Type and Membership positively moderate Experience and Management Level; Age is found positively moderating Membership and Education Level but negatively moderating Experience; and Management Level positively moderates Education Level and Experience. Other than these moderating relationship, only Age is found to positively moderate Membership in the case of interest considerations of Self. H3a, H3b and H3f are hence rejected. H3c, H3d, H3g, H3h and H3j are rejected due to the absence of such relationship. H3e is partly accepted. H3i is accepted.

In Model 3, ethical training is moderately powerful in predicting quantity surveyors’ interest considerations. Regression equations for the interest of Self are all very significant \((p=0.000 \text{ for Q3(a), } p=0.001 \text{ for Q3(e)} \text{ and } p=0.025 \text{ for Q3(f)})\). It is also the case where the interest of Family is concerned. The \(R^2\) values increase up to 33.5\%–56.3\% for the interest of Self, 34.9\% for Family and 18.4\%–31.9\% for Employer. The individual interaction effects are also very significant in the case of predicting the quantity surveyors’ interest consideration of Self. Four out of the seven ethical training tools like Prevention of Bribery Ordinance, RICS/HKIS Regulations, RICS Rule of Conduct, Corporate Code of Conduct and College Courses are significant either at \(p<=0.01 \text{ or } p<=0.001\). It is interesting to note that those quantity surveyors having studied RICS Rule of Conduct, Corporate Code of Conduct and College Courses tend to disregard their Self-interest. On the other hand, those who read Prevention of Bribery Ordinance and RICS/HKIS Regulations would treat the interest of Self and Family seriously.

Unlike Case 1, perceptions towards ethical schools of thought are powerful in predicting quantity surveyors’ interest considerations. Almost all regression equations are significant while the others are close to \(p<=0.05\). The \(R^2\) values increase up to 36.5\%–57.3\%. Individual interaction effects are more significant in predicting quantity surveyors’ interest considerations of Family than the others. However, contradictory results are encountered where Utilitarianism shows both positive and negative impact on the quantity surveyors’ interest considerations of Family. At the same time, Duty has negative impact but Categorical Imperative, which is essentially a variant of Duty, has positive impact upon the same issue. Further research should be carried out to identify the reasons why it is the case. Nevertheless, the more emphasis the quantity surveyors place on the concept of Right in general, the more they would care about the interest of their Family. It is also found that the more they prefer to the concept of Right and Justice and the less they prefer to the concept of NORM and Utilitarianism, the more emphasis they would place on their Self-interest; the more they prefer to the concept of Utilitarianism and NORM and the less they prefer to the concept of Duty and Categorical Imperative, the more emphasis they would place on the interest of their Employer. This gives us an impression that as far as their self-interest and the interest of their family are concerned, the quantity surveyors tend to emphasize whether the decisions they make are right and just to them and their family while disregarding the consequences of their decisions upon the general public at large. Conversely, when the interest of their employer is the focus, the quantity surveyors would revert back to emphasizing the consequences of their decisions upon the general public at large, especially their colleagues.

The interest considerations of quantity surveyors under case-free situation have very minimal impact on predicting their case-specific interest considerations. Most of the \(F\)-Statistics decrease and \(R^2\) values increase only by 0.019–0.116. This means that the case-free interest considerations do not always have significant impact on case-specific interest considerations and hence cannot be generalized across different ethical dilemmas, see the contrast between Case 1 (Table 2 Model 5) and Case 2 (Table 4 Model 5). The predicting power of case-free interest considerations as a whole is stronger when the interest of Self is concerned \((Q3(a) \text{ and } Q3(f))\). The regression equations tell us that if the quantity surveyors are found to emphasize the interest of Self, it is expected that they would disregard the interest of the Colleagues and General Public. Besides this, none of the \(\beta\)'s are significant.

7 Generalizability across Case Study
In testing H1, a qualitative approach is taken to generalize the findings from Case 1 Question 4 and Case 2 Question 3, both of which concern the quantity surveyors’ interest considerations of Self, Family, Colleagues, Employer, Client and General Public. Comparison of matrices of responses to the two questions is not possible because of their different sizes.

Ho (2006) argues that the time and place when the quantity surveyors have to make decisions against ethical dilemmas are essential and deterministic to what action they will take. This pinpoints the highly contingent nature of decision-making when facing ethical dilemmas.

Similar to Ho (2006), both the MANOVA and HRA results of the two cases cannot be generalized from one case to another. Both the main and interaction effects of quantity surveyors’ background variables have significant predicting power on their interest considerations but their effects are greater on Case 2 than on Case 1. Nevertheless, contradictory results are encountered where both highly educated (Case 2) and less educated (Case 1) quantity surveyors are observed to put their own interest as the top agenda. Moreover, the major areas of interest considerations where interaction variables exhibit their effects are the interest of Self for Case 1 and interest of Employer for Case 2 respectively. The moderating relationships between quantity surveyors’ background variables very often run in the opposite directions. For example, Organization Type negatively moderates Experience and Management Level as far as the interest of Self is concerned in Case 1 while positively moderating these background variables so long as the interest of Employer is the focus in Case 2. It can therefore be asserted that the quantity surveyors’ self-interest generally runs against the interest of their employer. However, this cannot be generalized across the two cases because the quantity surveyors’ interest considerations of Self do not double-confirm this assertion.

Ethical training is powerful in predicting quantity surveyors’ interest considerations in Case 2 than in Case 1. The interest of Self is again the focus and post-work ethical training works well in both cases. Perceptions towards respective ethical schools of thought also have significant predicting power on different interest considerations in Case 1 and 2. No contradictory results are observed for the two cases in this regard but different ethical schools of thought are more effective in predicting different interest considerations of quantity surveyors. Quantity surveyors’ interest considerations under case-free situation only have minimal predicting power on their interest considerations specific to the two cases. The original expectation that the case-specific interest considerations of quantity surveyors can be implied from their interest considerations under case-free situation is found to be inapplicable.

Conclusively, H1 is hereby accepted but this basis of this acceptance is very different from Ho (2006). The circumstances under which Case 1 and Case 2 are compared in this paper is more compatible because the case-free interest considerations of quantity surveyors are directly compared with the case-specific ones in both cases. The results directly answer the question whether the quantity surveyors’ responses are case-specific. However, for the purposes of eliciting the reasoning behind, further research is needed.

8 Discussion and Conclusions

Further exploring Fan, Ho and Ng’s (2001a) and continuing Ho (2006) case study analysis, this paper focuses on analyzing whether the case-free interest considerations of quantity surveyors on their case-specific responses. The impact of the main and interaction effects of quantity surveyors’ background variables, ethical training, case-free ethical and interest considerations on their interest considerations towards Case 1 (through Question 4) and Case 2 (through Question 3) are investigated.

The subgroups of quantity surveyors’ background variables do not have significant differences in their interest considerations for both cases. Nevertheless, more differences in responses among subgroups are observed in Case 2 Question 3 than in Case 2 Question 1 to 2. HRA results show that he background variables have much greater predicting power on interest considerations in Case 2 than in Case 1. Nevertheless, we can still concluded from Case 1 that the less experienced the quantity surveyors are, the more emphasis they place on the interest of their colleagues. However, both the less educated (from Case 1) and highly educated (from Case 2) quantity surveyors are found to emphasis their self-interest. Unless the contingent nature of ethical dilemmas is highly recognized, it is neither sensible nor logical to accept the coexistence of these findings. In addition, it is also found from Case 2 that the more senior the membership and less educated they are, the
more emphasis they would place on the interest of their employer. The characteristic composition of the professional population again serves as a good reason for this: the top management is usually less educated than the middle and low management level, albeit much more experienced.

As far as interaction effects are concerned, Organization Type and Age seem to induce differences in interest considerations among the subgroups of those interaction variables consisting of one of the two in Case 1 while Age and Management Level take up this role in Case 2. These interaction effects have quite different predicting power towards quantity surveyors’ interest considerations for the two cases. For Case 1, they are effective in predicting quantity surveyors’ interest consideration of Self while it is the case for the interest of Employer in Case 2. In case of Self-interest consideration, Organization Type positively moderates Education Level but negatively moderates Age, Experience and Management Level; Age positively moderates Experience and Management Level but negatively moderates Membership and Education Level; and Experience negatively moderates Management Level. For the interest of Employer, Organization Type and Membership positively moderate Experience and Management Level; Age positively moderates Membership and Education Level but negatively moderates Experience; and Management Level positively moderates Education Level and Experience. It is very obvious that the moderating relationships for the interest considerations of Self and Employer very often run in the opposite direction against each other. This means that given the same personal profile, the quantity surveyors can be classified as either stressing their self-interest while disregarding the interest of their employer, or emphasizing the interest of their employer while sacrificing their own interest.

Ethical training is only moderately powerful in predicting quantity surveyors’ interest considerations for both cases. The ethical training tools show significant effects on interest considerations of Self and General Public in Case 1 while only on interest consideration of Self in Case 2. However, for the two cases, post-work ethical training tools work well in enhancing quantity surveyors' emphasis on their own interest. It is also interesting to note from Case 2 that those quantity surveyors having studied RICS Rule of Conduct, Corporate Code of Conduct and College Courses tend to disregard their Self-interest.

Ethical schools of thought are more powerful in predicting quantity surveyors’ interest considerations in Case 2 than in Case 1. Again, their predicting power in this regard is interest-specific. For Case 1, those quantity surveyors, who concern whether their ethical decisions can benefit great number of people, i.e. Utilitarianism, tend to emphasize their self-interest and the interest of general public. At the same time, it is interesting to note that those who generally emphasize their own interest, i.e. Egoism, tend to emphasize the interest of general public. It is argued that the quantity surveyors always take the interest of general public into account as if it is their self-interest. However, Case 2 tells an entirely different story. The more the quantity surveyors emphasize the reasoning of their ethical decisions, i.e. Right, in general, the more they would care about the interest of their family. The self-interest and the interest of employer seem to be contradictory in the mind of the quantity surveyors again. Case 2 shows that the less they prefer to the concept of NORM and Utilitarianism, the more emphasis they would place on their own interest; at the same time, the more they prefer to the concept of Utilitarianism and NORM, the more emphasis they would place on the interest of their employer. This reinforces the necessity of further investigating the conflicts between quantity surveyors’ self-interest and the interest of their employer.

The predicting power of quantity surveyors' interest considerations under case-free situation is only minimal. This means that the case-free interest considerations do not always have significant impact on case-specific interest considerations. Nevertheless, those quantity surveyors who generally emphasize the interest of their colleagues would also emphasize their own interest for both cases. It is interesting to note from Case 1 that the less emphasis the quantity surveyors put on the interest of their superior and client in general, the more they would emphasize their own interest as well as the interest of colleagues. In this case, quantity surveyors’ self-interest not only runs against the interest of their employer but also the interest of their client and superior.

Similar to Ho (2006), it can be generally concluded that the findings in one ethical dilemma cannot be generalized to the others. The findings are always interest-specific, i.e. the predicting power of each independent variable is specific to various interest considerations. Moreover, it is necessary to check why the self-interest of quantity surveyors usually runs against the interest of their employer. Further research is therefore recommended in this direction of case study that collects and generalizes quantity surveyors’ responses towards different ethical dilemmas for the development of a knowledge-based decision-making
system or model for more systematic and streamlined ethical training purposes. New requirements and expectations from clients and the general public are also essential and needed to be incorporated into the knowledge base, which can serve as a feedback loop to help continuously improve the quality of professional services.

References


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