An Exploratory Study of Ethical problems in Digital Service and Engineering Project Management

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This research focuses on ethical issues in project management within India's digital service industry, which we define [1] as information technology (IT), telecommunications, software development, consultancy and business process outsourcing (BPO). India is the leading digital service industry nation with 55% of the global market, including the highest market value (above US$150 billion). The digital services industry is comprised of over 75% staff below average age 35, with 5.8 million skilled staff employed [2]. Indian software exports are approximately US$75bn in 2014/15 with an additional US$100bn from the BPO service sector [3].

This research study aims to investigate the ethical problems in project management within the digital service industries in India. The main objective of study is to test the hypothesis that ethical problems are causing high staff attrition rates in the digital service industries in India.

To investigate our hypothesis we used a mixed method research approach using a quantitative practitioner survey questionnaire and to obtain exploratory qualitative information through semi-structured interviews [4]. Initially we sent more than 30 quantitative research questionnaire requests to practitioners and have received 12 responses to date. We have conducted 4 interviews using the quantitative questionnaire, so far. A semi-structured interview guide is under development to collect more information and in which we will triangulate responses from managers, employees and human resource department staff respectively to identify the ethical problems and challenges in digital service industries.

We have investigated the code of ethics developed by international professional bodies like (PMI [5], ACM [6], IEEE [7], and BCS [8] and also the Computer Society of India. The codes of ethics related to IT professionals, code of practice towards organizations, employees, clients and community and action against any members who breach the code as well as the complaints procedure and sequence of action [9]. Gender-based ethical behavior issues in digital service sector, have been investigated by Catalyst India, and concluded that women are getting less salary, as compared with men [10]. This is also one of the drawback and major issue in digital industry, as women have same intelligence as men and use their knowledge to complete the same tasks as men [10].

These preliminary investigations show that there are different ethical issues present in the digital service industries, that ethical issues are a real concern and that these problems are causing people to change their employer. In the past, people wanted to change their job for the better remuneration but nowadays they need sound ethical practices at their current workplace which is not available in the industry. The preliminary results of this study provide evidence of the following eight ethical problems: favoritism, immorality, partiality, enmity and hate, discrimination, gender difference, misuse of management position, internal project disputes and conflicts. Favoritism is the practice of giving unfair preferences to one person or group of people at the expense of another. We use immorality to describe the behavior that is dishonest or does not follow accepted operational standards. Partiality means unfair prejudice or bias in favor of person or group. Enmity and hate is the unethical action and deep-seated hatred among the individuals. Discrimination is the unjust treatment to individuals on the basis of their caste, ethnic group, economic status and religion. A gender differences refers to unfair treatment and inequality trial on the ground of gender. Misuse of management position describes the use available resources and powers improperly or incorrectly. Internal project disputes and conflicts is the psychological, physical and moral struggle within the group of people in the organization. Although it is opposition of needs, values and interests between people working together.

We have compared the code of ethics developed by Computer Society of India and our findings from practitioners in digital sector in India. We also investigated the code of ethics and professional conduct developed by Project Management Institution, USA (PMI) which includes vision and applicability, responsibility, respect, fairness and honest behavior code of practice [5]. We found evidence of several ethical issues which are described in the code of ethics towards individuals' behavior towards organization, employees, investors and stakeholders. However, we also found evidence of several ethical issues that are not included in the professional code of conduct.

In future, we will conduct more interviews with participants from digital service industry for data collection. The long term goal of this research study is to improve project management decision making process by proposing recommendations that will, if implemented, reduce attrition, reduce ethical problems to make a healthy working environment in digital service industry.

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