RESPECTING EMPLOYEE PRIVACY AND PROFESSIONAL PRODUCTIVITY: A GROUNDED THEORY STUDY IN IRAN

RESPEITANDO A PRIVACIDADE DOS FUNCIONÁRIOS E A PRODUTIVIDADE PROFISSIONAL: UM ESTUDO DE TEORIA FUNDAMENTADA NO IRÃ

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Resumo. No ambiente de negócios atual, as interseções entre o pragmatismo organizacional e os imperativos éticos tornaram-se cada vez mais proeminentes. Este estudo de teoria fundamentada explora essas interseções para compreender as dimensões que influenciam as start-ups iranianas modernas. Baseando-se em entrevistas aprofundadas com 24 funcionários-chave em diversas funções, o estudo revela vários temas centrais: orientação pragmática, orientação ética, orientação cultural e os meandros da interseccionalidade e da complexidade. As principais conclusões enfatizam a importância da agilidade, da mitigação de riscos e do bem-estar dos funcionários na tomada de decisões pragmáticas. Ao mesmo tempo, o espectro ético dentro das organizações estende-se dos imperativos deontológicos à ética relacional. As nuances culturais, moldadas pela identidade nacional, pelas influências globais e pelas normas em evolução, influenciam ainda mais as trajetórias organizacionais. A investigação revela a interação matizada destas orientações e apela a uma abordagem equilibrada que integre harmoniosamente a praticidade com considerações éticas e culturais no ecossistema de start-ups iraniano. Portanto, dizemos que, para utilizar melhor as medidas de produtividade nas start-ups iranianas, precisamos de ter meticulosamente em conta os critérios específicos do Irão de preservação da privacidade.

Palavras-chave: Privacidade dos Funcionários; Ecossistema de Startups; Produtividade no Local de Trabalho; Irã.

Abstract. In today's business environment, the intersections of organizational pragmatism and ethical imperatives have become increasingly prominent. This grounded theory study, explores these intersections to understand the dimensions influencing modern-day Iranian start-ups. Drawing upon in-depth interviews with 24 key personnel across diverse roles, the study reveals several core themes: pragmatic orientation, ethical orientation, cultural orientation, and the intricacies of intersectionality and complexity. Key findings emphasize the importance of agility, risk mitigation, and employee well-being in pragmatic decision-making. Concurrently, the ethical spectrum within organizations extends from deontological imperatives to relational ethics. Cultural nuances, shaped by national identity, global influences, and evolving norms, further influence organizational trajectories. The research reveals the nuanced interplay of these orientations and calls for a balanced approach that harmoniously integrates practicality with ethical and cultural considerations in the Iranian start-up ecosystem. Therefore, we say, in order to better use measures of productivity in the Iranian start-ups, we need to meticulously take into account the Iranian-specific criterial of privacy preservation.

Keywords: Employee Privacy; Start-up Ecosystem; Productivity at Workplace; Iran.

INTRODUCTION

Technological advancement and globalization have created an unprecedented life-work ecosystem in which start-ups have emerged as the beating heart of innovation and economic development. They challenge the status quo, introduce disruptive technologies, and reshape industries. While Silicon Valley often stands as the archetype of this entrepreneurial revolution, it is essential to recognize that the start-up ethos is a global phenomenon, deeply rooted in diverse cultural, social, and economic contexts. One such intriguing landscape is Iran, a nation that juxtaposes ancient traditions with modern aspirations, and where the entrepreneurial spirit is in dynamic interplay with cultural norms and societal -and sometimes governmental- values. The economic pressure due to international sanctions have played its role in this ecosystem too.

Iran has been under economic pressures in the past decades but the past five years have witnessed even more harsh decline. The financial downturn, disrupted national and international communication, and sanctions from the U.S. have collectively contributed to the rising exodus of Iranian students and investors abroad (Sarfi et al., 2023). Over the last five years, Iranian migration to Turkey has surged threefold. In 2019, about 42,000 Iranians made Turkey their home. Consequently, from 2017 to 2019, there was a capital drain of $100 billion from Iran. Data from the last quartet of years indicates that Iranians have founded over 2,700 businesses in Turkey and acquired upwards of 13,000 residential properties (Middle East Institute, 2021).

The GDP of Iran experinces a reduction of 7.6% during the initial three quarters of 2019/20, largely attributed to challenges in the oil sector. Following Trump's exit from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, there was a stark drop in oil production, hitting a historical low at 2 million barrels daily by the end of 2019. According to a 2021 report by The World Bank, persistent international sanctions combined with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have further intensified strains on Iran's economy. Hindered access to international reserves, a consequence of US sanctions, led to significant depreciation of the exchange rate, subsequently escalating prices (Shahghasemi et al., 2023). The economic downturn, coupled with the pandemic-induced job losses and soaring inflation, hit the welfare of the population, especially the underprivileged. Early 2021 saw inflation rates exceeding 48%. Since April 2020, the Iranian rial's worth decreased by 50% due to US-imposed restrictions on accessing overseas reserves. A rise in the poverty rate was observed, going from 13% to 14% between 2017 and 2018, before the emergence of the pandemic. Predictions made before mid-2021 anticipated that the combination of reduced household incomes, resultant from the pandemic, and the inflation-driven high living expenses would increase poverty by an additional 20%. Marking a first in 60 years, Iran sought a $5 billion loan from the IMF. Furthermore, data from the Statistical Center of Iran unveiled an increase in inequality, climbing from 38.5 points in 2015 to 39.9 points in 2019 (Shahghasemi et al., 2023).

The Iranian start-up ecosystem, however, is a fertile ground for exploration, particularly given the unique challenges and opportunities it presents. From navigating Islamic regulatory frameworks and geopolitical complexities of living and working in the Middle East to harnessing a rich heritage of craftsmanship, trade, and intellectualism, Iranian entrepreneurs tread a path that's distinct yet universally resonant. Their journey is emblematic of a broader global trend where business imperatives increasingly intersect with ethical considerations and cultural contexts. Particularly, the many opportunities the big-tech companies have provided for Iranians seem to be offering far more benefits than challenges (Sarfi, et al., 2021; Zohouri et al., 2021).

By adopting a grounded theory approach, this study aims to unearth the foundational principles, ethical considerations, and cultural nuances that guide the operational and strategic decisions of Iranian start-ups. At its core, the investigation seeks to understand how respect for employee privacy is balanced with the imperatives of professional productivity in a context as unique as Iran. This article will unravel the axial coding results, offering a thematic understanding of the interplay between pragmatism, ethics, and culture. It aims to provide scholars, entrepreneurs, and policymakers with insights into the Iranian start-up ecosystem, drawing lessons that are both locally significant and globally relevant.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Searching scientific databases, we found perhaps our study is the first in the world that directly studies the role of employee privacy preservation and its relationship with efficiency. We found, however, that there are some studies interested in studying the outcomes of employee privacy preservation.

Palm (2009) conducted an insightful exploration into the intricate facets of privacy claims within the semi-public domain of the workplace. Notably, the study identified a prevalent deficiency in thorough investigations into privacy considerations in such settings. The research presented a compelling argument, underscoring that employees harbor legitimate expectations concerning their privacy while at work. This study was structured into two core segments. The initial segment employed a descriptive analytical approach to delineate the specific dimensions of employees' requisites for workspace privacy. The ensuing segment was characterized by a normative analysis, with the principal objective of elucidating the underlying rationales advocating for the safeguarding of privacy. A significant contribution of Palm's research was its endeavor to put forth a more encompassing concept of privacy. This expansive perspective aspires to lay down a more fitting groundwork for the development of legislations and professional codes that address privacy protection in professional settings. It emerges from the study that

the predominant frameworks guiding workplace privacy protection appear somewhat constrained. Palm postulates that for a truly holistic approach, it's imperative that the employees' desires for local privacy be recognized and integrated, in tandem with considerations for informational privacy.

Grobler (2012) offers an in-depth examination into the realm of occupational medicine, emphasizing its unique position within the context of labor settings. This particular branch of medicine operates squarely within the boundaries established by labor-related legislations and is closely tied to labor relations. An interesting observation by Grobler is that the practice of occupational medicine is predominantly organized and financed by the employer. Within the occupational milieu, the dynamic between the employer and employee is characterized by an inherent imbalance of power. This asymmetry holds profound implications for all operations and activities within the domain. Employers, driven by a vested interest in productivity, profitability, the safety of their work environments, and the overarching objective of employee management, invariably shape the landscape of occupational medicine. Grobler highlights the potential peril that looms over patient autonomy given this scenario. The imperative for professionals in this field is clear: there must be an unwavering commitment to safeguarding the autonomy of their patients. However, it's noteworthy that the concept of patient autonomy in the realm of occupational medicine isn't absolute; it's relative. Despite this relativity, Grobler firmly advocates for the utmost respect to be accorded to patient autonomy.

In his 2021 research, Dobrinoiu shines a spotlight on the implications of the sudden surge in teleworking, precipitated by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Historically, the notion of "teleworking" was approached with a degree of reticence by employers (Mojahed et al., 2022;). Yet, as the pandemic reared its head, it transformed into a vital tool, serving the dual purpose of safeguarding workers' health and ensuring the continuity of business operations. However, Dobrinoiu underscores that the widespread adoption of remote working practices doesn't come without challenges. A central issue he highlights is the blurring of boundaries between professional commitments and personal life. Specifically, when employees transition to working predominantly from home, it becomes increasingly challenging to delineate work hours from rest periods. This overlap has tangible ramifications on employees' private lives. Supporting his observations with empirical evidence, Dobrinoiu presents some alarming statistics. His research indicates that individuals who consistently work from their homes are more than twice as likely to clock in over 48 hours of work every week, in comparison to their counterparts who operate from an employer's establishment. Moreover, a striking revelation from the study is that almost 30% of teleworkers reported working during their designated free time on a daily basis or multiple times throughout the week. In contrast, this figure stands at less than 5% for individuals working from an office setup.

In Leblebici's 2012 study, a comprehensive analysis was undertaken on a private foreign bank located in Turkey, employing a total of 300 individuals. The research hinged on both primary and secondary data sources. The latter encompassed factors recurrently highlighted in academic literature as key determinants of performance, which were elucidated in a prior section of the study in an exhaustive manner. In contrast, primary data was extracted from insights gleaned from a survey, administered to a select 50 employees. The group chosen for the survey consisted of call center personnel, a segment believed to be most influenced by workplace conditions, given the specific demands of their roles. The survey was structured in two distinct parts. The initial section was focused on garnering demographic data. The resultant findings revealed an almost even gender split among the respondents. A significant 72% of participants fell within the age bracket of 20 to 29 years. When it came to educational qualifications, 84% possessed at least an undergraduate degree. A noteworthy point was the tenure of these employees at the bank, with over 80% having served for more than a year. The latter section of the survey pivoted towards understanding the implications of environmental factors on the productivity levels of employees, gauged through their own perceptions. This segment probed into aspects such as relationships with supervisors, perceptions of fair treatment, and the overall communication dynamics within the bank. The objective was to discern the importance of behavioral environmental components in the employees' professional lives. The feedback was overwhelmingly in favor of these elements, with the majority of respondents strongly concurring that aspects like supervisor relationships, fair treatment, and effective communication held significant importance in their work environment.

Melé's 2021 research studies the ethical dimensions of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (FIR), a realm that has been relatively under-explored in the burgeoning volume of academic discourse around this topic. While numerous studies have accentuated the efficiency, productivity, and economic strides made possible by the FIR, only a handful have shed light on its ethical implications, especially in the

workplace setting. The unique lens through which this research views the ethical ramifications of FIR is the Catholic Social Teaching (CST), a doctrine that extends its insights not just to the Catholic community but to all individuals with benevolent inclinations. Through the prism of CST, the study navigates the intricate terrain of ethical challenges and opportunities in the contemporary workplace, underpinned by the technological advancements synonymous with Industry 4.0, the heart of the FIR. Central to CST is the affirmation of the worker's inherent dignity and the imperative of fostering an environment conducive to human flourishing. The fundamental tenet here is that while robots, artificial intelligence, and a slew of interconnected technologies are mere tools, the true epicenter of work is the human worker. This assertion forms the backdrop against which several ethical dilemmas are dissected, including but not limited to the ramifications on employment prospects, wage dynamics, economic inequality trajectories, humane treatment of workforce, inter-personal relationships in professional ecosystems, workplace safety protocols, health considerations, surveillance mechanisms targeting employees, and the quest for imbuing work with deeper meaning.

After the COVID-19 pandemic broke out, the implications of the vast transition to working from home (WFH) became a focal point for researchers (Sarfi, et al., 2023; Shariati et al., 2013). Galanti et al., (2021) conducted an exploration to decipher the myriad influences on productivity, engagement, and stress levels for employees in a WFH setting. Their examination centered on pivotal variables: family-work conflict, social isolation, job autonomy, self-leadership, and potential distractions in the working environment. The researchers employed a cross-sectional design, sourcing their data from an online questionnaire. This survey captured the experiences and perceptions of 209 employees, all of whom had been thrust into the WFH model due to the pandemic's exigencies. To validate the relationships between their selected variables, the team utilized hierarchical linear regression. Several noteworthy conclusions emerged from their analysis. The study pinpointed family-work conflict and pervasive feelings of social isolation as significant detractors from WFH productivity and overall engagement. In stark contrast, attributes like self-leadership and a heightened sense of job autonomy were identified as bolstering both productivity and engagement levels in the WFH context. As regard to the realm of stress, it was evident that family-work conflict and social isolation exacerbated stress for remote workers. However, intriguingly, neither the autonomy nor the self-leadership facets seemed to have a discernible impact on the stress experienced by employees. Drawing these insights together, the narrative painted by Galanti and team's (2021) study is abundantly clear. The journey of WFH, especially in the backdrop of a global health crisis, is a nuanced tapestry of challenges and opportunities, with various personal and professional factors pulling the strings. As businesses and organizations recalibrate their strategies in this new era, such findings offer invaluable insights, illuminating the path to creating an optimally supportive and efficient remote working ecosystem.

The intricate interplay between an employee's right to privacy and a company's prerogative to operate efficiently is a longstanding debate, meticulously explored by Bîgu (2009) in a seminal paper. Bîgu studied four prevalent arguments frequently presented to circumscribe the scope of an employee's privacy rights in the corporate environment. The inaugural argument is rooted in the company's property rights, asserting that since the employee functions within the company's domain and using its assets, their claim to privacy becomes secondary. However, Bîgu critically examines this viewpoint, highlighting that mere ownership or property rights of a company do not categorically negate an employee's legitimate expectation of privacy. This perspective challenges the traditional property-centric view, positing that rights anchored in property don't always supersede personal privacy rights. Transitioning to the second argument, Bîgu evaluates the assertion that if compromising an employee's privacy leads to a spike in productivity, then such an infringement is justified. After scrutinizing this perspective, Bîgu concludes that the perceived direct correlation between diminished privacy and augmented productivity is not universally valid. The underlying insinuation that productivity gains can be a carte blanche to erode privacy is thus dismissed as an oversimplification. The third line of reasoning acknowledges the necessity for companies to monitor adherence to employment contracts. Bîgu concedes that under certain circumstances, ensuring compliance might warrant encroachments on an employee's privacy. This recognition underscores the delicate balance between upholding contractual obligations and preserving individual rights. Lastly, Bîgu confronts the argument positing that companies can, and sometimes must, infringe upon employee privacy to circumvent potential legal repercussions. This premise rests on the assertion that protecting the company from legal liabilities might necessitate certain surveillance measures. Bîgu concurs with this stance, underscoring the pragmatic necessity for businesses to shield themselves from legal pitfalls, even if it comes at the cost of employee privacy.

Mačiulaitis (2023) studies intricacies surrounding the preservation of employee privacy in employment settings. A fundamental duty of the employer in such a context is to educate employees about the local regulations governing their professional environment. Notably, a tension emerges between the employer's vested interest in safeguarding their enterprise, ensuring the fluidity of business processes, asset security, and the overall health and safety of their employees, against the overarching duty to respect and uphold the employee's right to privacy. One of the prevalent means of overseeing employees involves the use of technical monitoring, a method that efficiently gathers data. However, the deployment of such means invariably leads to a pertinent question: Is all the data acquired through these automated processes essential and justifiable? Simply collecting data out of sheer curiosity, without implementing strict parameters surrounding its acquisition and the boundaries of the information collected, inevitably infringes upon the employee's right to privacy. An employer is not merely authorized to gather data to oversee an employee's professional demeanor and conduct. They can, however, document specific data if it is paramount for safeguarding production, maintaining health and safety standards, or ensuring organizational efficiency. But even in these scenarios, the onus is on the employer to either curtail such surveillance or critically assess its outcomes. The author meticulously examines these issues by placing them within the broader framework of the employment relationship. This analysis is further contextualized through the lens of the employer's responsibility to devise particular local guidelines and their duty to ensure that employees are thoroughly informed about these regulations, thereby underscoring the principle of transparency.

Allahrakha (2023) offers an exploration into the nuanced balance between cyber-security and privacy in today's digital environment. The article critically examines the challenges that arise when attempting to implement rigorous cyber-security protocols without infringing upon privacy rights. Drawing on legal frameworks from various jurisdictions, Allahrakha provides insights into the current regulations governing both cyber-security and personal privacy. Beyond the legal discourse, the piece also scrutinizes the ethical dimensions of this balance, advocating for a thoughtful integration of both values. The article underscores the imperative of embedding both ethical and legal considerations in the evolution of digital technologies and their oversight, emphasizing the continuous need to maintain equilibrium between security and individual privacy in the digital realm.

METHOD AND SAMPLING

To derive a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation, a grounded theory approach was employed (davoudi,2018). This approach is particularly suitable for exploring complex social processes and interactions, which in this context revolved around the intersection of employee privacy and professional productivity within Iranian start-ups.

Grounded theory is a research methodology that emerged in the 1960s, primarily developed by sociologists Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (Glaser & Strauss, 2017). Unlike traditional research methods that begin with a hypothesis derived from existing theory, grounded theory aims to generate new theories rooted directly in the data it analyzes. This inductive approach starts with data collection, with the intent to identify key themes and patterns that emerge organically (Mohajan & Mohajan, 2022; Tightiz & Yoo 2022). The analysis process in grounded theory is systematic and iterative. Researchers started the data gathering, segmenting it, identifying recurring themes, and eventually relating these themes to one another. This coding process often starts with "open coding," where raw data is broken down into distinct parts. As the analysis progresses, these parts are interconnected in what's known as "axial coding." The final phase, "selective coding," involves refining these connections, forming a cohesive and grounded theory. A cornerstone of this method is the "constant comparative method." Every new piece of data collected is continuously compared to previous data, ensuring the evolving theory is consistently rooted in empirical evidence (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007; Tightiz & Yoo 2023). Another unique aspect of grounded theory is its emergent design. Researchers remain open to adjusting their inquiries based on the insights they gain throughout the study. This flexibility can lead to more profound insights that a rigidly designed study might miss. As researchers immerse themselves in data, they also engage in memo writing—a process of noting down reflections, questions, and ideas that arise during the analysis. These memos are instrumental in the theory-building process, offering a space to think critically and creatively about the data (Williams, 2008).

Participants and Sampling Strategy

The participants in this study were chosen through a purposive sampling strategy, ensuring that they had firsthand experience and knowledge pertinent to the study's objectives. The sample comprised of 24 respondents, each occupying varying leadership positions within start-ups based in Iran. The range of roles included Chief Executive Officers, Chief Financial Officers, Directors, Chief Marketing Officers, Chief Technology Officers, and Chief Product Officers. The aim was to obtain a multifaceted perspective on the subject matter. Given the diverse nature of the participants' roles and responsibilities within their respective start-ups, this study ensured that the voices of both males and females, spanning different age groups and educational backgrounds, were taken into consideration. It is important to note that the age of the participants ranged from 23 to 69 years, and their educational qualifications spanned from high school diplomas to doctoral degrees.

Data Collection

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with each of the participants. These interviews were carried out in a comfortable environment conducive to open dialogue, ensuring that participants felt safe to share their insights and experiences. The interviews were designed to probe and better understand the participants' perceptions, beliefs, and experiences related to the balance between respecting employee privacy and ensuring professional productivity. The interviewees were briefed in advanced and their informed consent were obtained.

Data Analysis

After collecting the data, a systematic approach to coding was employed, which is central to the grounded theory methodology. The data was first subjected to open coding, where initial codes were generated. Subsequent to this, axial coding was carried out to identify relationships between codes. Finally, selective coding was employed to integrate and refine the overarching categories. The iterative nature of grounded theory meant that data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously, allowing the research to be driven by emerging findings. Throughout this research, measures were taken to ensure the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the findings. Peer debriefing and member-checking were among the strategies employed to enhance the trustworthiness of the study.

Table 1. Demographics of the participants

Respondent	Gender	Age	Position in the Start-up	Education
P1	Male	37	Chief executive officer	No Answer
P2	Female	28	Chief financial officer	BA
P3	Male	43	Director	PhD
P4	Male	65	Chief financial officer	High School Diploma
P5	Female	29	Chief executive officer	MA Student
P6	Male	32	Chief product officer	MA
P7	Female	24	Chief marketing officer	MA
P8	Male	36	Chief product officer	PhD Candidate
P9	Male	45	Chief financial officer	MA
P10	Male	51	Chief executive officer	PhD
P11	Male	32	Chief executive officer	PhD Student
P12	Female	28	Chief product officer	MA
P13	Male	36	Chief financial officer	PhD
P14	Female	49	Chief executive officer	MA
P15	Male	51	Chief technology officer	MA Student
P16	Male	42	Chief executive officer	PhD
P17	Male	40	Director	PhD Candidate
P18	Female	69	Chief technology officer	PhD
P19	Male	30	Chief executive officer	MA
P20	Male	26	Chief marketing officer	MA
P21	Male	39	Chief financial officer	PhD Student
P22	Male	34	Chief technology officer	MA Student
P23	Male	49	Chief product officer	PhD Candidate
P24	Male	40	Chief executive officer	BA Student

FINDINGS

One of the primary concerns of us throughout this study was to invent and use techniques and methods to help us better study our subjects. Iran is a Middle Eastern country and these cultures are known as hi-context cultures (see for example Shahghasemi and Prosser, 2019; Ishenin et al., 2021). We also had concerns if our coding procedure was methodologically reliable. After a careful and well-discussed coding procedure, we came to the following table.

Table 2. Axial coding.

1	**Pragmatic Orientation**	**Operational Efficiency**	Agility
			Openness and Collaboration
			Resource Allocation
		Risk Mitigation	Legal Liabilities
			Data Security
			Reputation Management
		Work-Life Balance	Employee Well-being
			Remote Work Considerations
2	**Ethical Orientation**	**Deontological Ethics**	Moral Imperatives
			Consistency and Fairness
			Accountability
		Consequentialist Ethics	Long-Term Benefits
			Social Responsibility
			Organizational Culture
		Relational Ethics	Trust Building
			Emotional Intelligence
			Conflict Resolution
3	**Cultural Orientation**	**Cultural Relativism**	National Identity
			Interpersonal Relations
			Local Legislation
		Evolution of Norms	Global Influences
			Technological Impact
			Younger Workforce
		Cultural Syncretism	Balanced Approach
			Organizational Hybridity
			Ethical Pluralism
4	**Intersectionality and Complexity**	**Multi-Faceted Decision Making**	Contextual Adaptability
			Organizational Values
			Stakeholder Influence
		Dynamic Intersectionality	Organizational Growth
			External Factors
			Internal Learning
		Composite Orientation	Ethical Pragmatism
			Culturally-Infused Ethics
			Pragmatic Culture Sensitivity

PRAGMATIC ORIENTATION

Operational Efficiency

Managers falling under this sub-theme viewed operational efficiency as a cornerstone of their approach to privacy. They recognized the unique challenges that come with the fast-paced, resource-constrained environment of startups. Under this umbrella, several aspects came to light:

Agility: Managers emphasized that startups must be agile to survive, and agility often requires quick access to information. For them, too many privacy restrictions could slow down processes and negatively affect agility.

Openness and Collaboration: Another aspect was the promotion of an open culture, aimed at fueling collaboration and innovation. Managers with this perspective felt that stringent privacy policies might stifle the organic flow of ideas, inhibiting the creative atmosphere necessary for a startup to thrive.

Resource Allocation: Some managers pointed out that startups operate under significant resource constraints, which makes it difficult to invest heavily in comprehensive privacy protocols. For these

managers, available resources are better directed towards core business activities that offer immediate ROI.

Risk Mitigation

Within the realm of risk mitigation, there were several nuanced perspectives:

Legal Liabilities: One subgroup was primarily focused on avoiding legal repercussions that might arise from privacy violations. These managers often talked about the need to comply with existing privacy laws to shield the organization from potential lawsuits.

Data Security: Another subgroup expressed concerns about protecting sensitive corporate data. For them, monitoring employee activities to some extent was essential to avoid unintentional or deliberate leaking of confidential information.

Reputation Management: A less commonly cited but important aspect was reputation management. Certain managers indicated that any lapses in privacy protocols could risk exposing not just employee information but potentially sensitive company information, damaging the company's reputation.

Work-Life Balance

Interestingly, the topic of work-life balance emerged as a sub-theme for some pragmatic managers, specifically:

Employee Well-being: These managers acknowledged that encroaching on employee privacy could create stress and lower morale, thereby reducing productivity in the long run.

Remote Work Considerations: Internet has revolutionized out lives and all aspects of our perceptions and daily routines are know being reshaped by the Internet (Zohouri, Darvishi & Sarfi, 2020; Nosrati et al., 2020; Sabzali et al., 2022; Shahghasemi et al., 2023).In the context of increasing remote work, some managers were navigating new challenges in balancing surveillance and privacy. They pointed out that while monitoring productivity in a remote setup was essential, it also raised new questions about intruding into employees' private spaces.

By dissecting the Pragmatic Orientation into these sub-themes and aspects, it becomes clear that managers in Iranian startups weigh a complex array of factors when considering employee privacy. Their viewpoints are not driven by pragmatism in a narrow sense but are influenced by a multifaceted set of considerations that impact both the immediate operational needs and the long-term viability of the organization. Each sub-theme and its associated aspects represent a different lens through which these managers evaluate the trade-offs between operational exigencies and employee privacy. The composite picture is one of considerable complexity, reflecting the multifaceted challenges that these managers face in navigating the intricate landscape of employee privacy.

Ethical considerations, as found in the study, appear to provide a significant framework within which managers assess and make decisions about privacy issues. In the interviews, the layers of ethical thought could be unfolded into various nuanced sub-themes, each offering a distinct lens on the ethical implications of privacy management.

ETHICAL ORIENTATION

Deontological Ethics

Managers subscribing to a deontological ethical approach leaned heavily on a rules-based understanding of ethics. Several distinct layers were observed within this sub-theme:

Moral Imperatives: These managers expressed a belief that there are unequivocal moral rules that must be followed, with privacy being one such inviolable rule. They cited both internal company ethics guidelines and external frameworks, such as international human rights accords, as providing these imperatives.

Consistency and Fairness: Another aspect was the emphasis on consistently applying privacy rules across all levels of the organization. For them, ethical management meant treating everyone fairly and without exception, which includes respecting the privacy of each employee equally.

Accountability: There was also discussion around the notion of managerial accountability. In this view, ethical leaders must hold themselves accountable for ensuring privacy, both within the organization and in any interactions with external stakeholders.

Consequentialist Ethics

Managers who adopted a consequentialist perspective focused more on the results of actions rather than the actions themselves. Several aspects stood out:

Long-Term Benefits: These managers often discussed how ethical decision-making around privacy had long-term organizational benefits, such as engendering trust and improving employer branding. They believed that these long-term gains outweighed any short-term advantages that might be garnered from lax privacy standards.

Social Responsibility: Some managers extended their consequentialist thinking to a broader societal context, arguing that ethical conduct around privacy contributes to social welfare. They felt that companies had a responsibility to set good examples, asserting that business ethics should align with societal well-being.

Organizational Culture: Another focus within this sub-theme was the impact of ethical decisions on organizational culture. Managers believed that ethical conduct, especially around sensitive issues like privacy, could shape the cultural fabric of the organization, influencing employee behavior and organizational outcomes for years to come.

Relational Ethics

A third sub-theme, which emerged less frequently but was nonetheless significant, was relational ethics. Key aspects included:

Trust Building: Managers felt that respecting privacy was an essential component of building trust between employees and management. They noted that trust is not just an emotional quality but has practical organizational implications, such as increased loyalty and reduced turnover.

Emotional Intelligence: Some managers mentioned the importance of being emotionally intelligent in navigating privacy issues, understanding the emotional and psychological impact of privacy decisions on employees.

Conflict Resolution: A few managers stated that an ethical approach to privacy also provides a strong foundation for resolving conflicts. By setting ethical standards and guidelines, they believed that conflicts could be more easily mediated and resolved, should issues arise.

The Ethical Orientation to managing employee privacy among Iranian startup managers is far from monolithic. It encompasses a rich tapestry of ethical philosophies, principles, and practical considerations. Managers navigate this complex ethical landscape by employing one or multiple lenses, often dynamically adapting their ethical framework in response to specific situational factors and organizational contexts. This multidimensional ethical orientation highlights the importance of incorporating nuanced ethical perspectives into privacy management practices and policies, thus contributing to both the scholarly discussion and practical applications in the field of management ethics.

CULTURAL ORIENTATION

Cultural Relativism

The sub-theme of cultural relativism captures those managers who believe that cultural context significantly shapes the ethics and norms surrounding privacy. Several aspects stood out within this perspective:

National Identity: Some managers spoke about how Iranian culture and Islamic traditions shape their approach to privacy, with a tendency to value community over individualism. They suggested that global privacy norms might not be directly translatable into an Iranian context.

Interpersonal Relations: In this view, culturally mediated interpersonal relations significantly influence the expectations around privacy. It was often stated that within the Iranian cultural framework, social hierarchies and relationships are instrumental in shaping privacy norms.

Local Legislation: Managers highlighted that the legal environment, often rooted in cultural norms, informs privacy considerations. They acknowledged the importance of adhering to local laws and regulations, which are culturally contextualized, in managing privacy.

Evolution of Norms

The dynamic nature of culture was another area of focus, especially concerning how cultural norms are evolving due to globalization and technological changes:

Global Influences: Some managers admitted that exposure to global business practices and international partnerships have led them to reevaluate traditional approaches to privacy.

Technological Impact: The digitization of work has, in the eyes of some managers, necessitated a shift in how privacy is conceptualized, often causing a blend of traditional and modern perspectives.

Younger Workforce: Managers noted that the younger generation, often more exposed to global norms and digital lifestyles, have different expectations around privacy, pushing for a gradual shift in traditional attitudes.

Cultural Syncretism

An emergent theme was that of cultural syncretism, which involves a conscious amalgamation of different cultural elements:

Balanced Approach: Managers in this category aim to harmonize global and local privacy norms, customizing global standards to fit within the cultural fabric of Iranian society.

Organizational Hybridity: Some managers discussed creating a unique organizational culture that fuses both global and local elements, seeing it as a way to get the 'best of both worlds.'

Ethical Pluralism: A few managers articulated that their syncretic approach extended to ethical considerations, combining universal ethical principles with culturally specific norms to guide their privacy policies.

After studying these sub-themes and aspects, it becomes clear that the Cultural Orientation among Iranian startup managers toward employee privacy is both intricate and multilayered. The cultural landscape informs managerial attitudes in ways that are nuanced and complex, affected by both the rootedness in Iranian culture and the openness to evolving global norms. This dynamic interplay adds another layer of complexity to managerial decision-making processes regarding employee privacy. The cultural orientation thereby emphasizes on the necessity for tailored privacy approaches that are sensitive to the cultural realities and fluctuations shaping the Iranian startup ecosystem.

Intersectionality and Complexity

Intersectionality and complexity are two concepts that have become increasingly important in contemporary theoretical discussions, especially in the fields of sociology, gender studies, and critical race theory. While both concepts address multifaceted and layered social phenomena, they are distinct in their origins and applications.

Multi-Faceted Decision Making

Managers frequently described a multi-layered decision-making process that did not neatly fall into any single orientation. Key aspects included:

Contextual Adaptability: Managers often indicated that their approach would shift depending on the context. For instance, a decision influenced primarily by ethical considerations could be adjusted if there were pressing pragmatic concerns, such as operational efficiency or legal risks.

Organizational Values: Managers also expressed that the core values of the startup could serve as a guidepost, offering a common framework within which pragmatic, ethical, and cultural considerations are evaluated and balanced.

Stakeholder Influence: The perspectives and expectations of various stakeholders, including employees, investors, and regulatory bodies, were considered crucial. Managers acknowledged that their attitudes toward privacy often needed to align with or at least accommodate these diverse expectations.

Dynamic Intersectionality

The interplay of various orientations was not static but rather a dynamic process that evolved over time, shaped by several elements:

Organizational Growth: As startups grow and mature, the balancing act among pragmatic, ethical, and cultural orientations may shift. For example, what was once primarily a focus on operational efficiency may gradually incorporate stronger ethical or cultural dimensions as the organization scales.

External Factors: Geopolitical events, changes in legislation, and technological advancements were cited as external factors that could prompt a reevaluation of managerial attitudes.

Internal Learning: Managers often spoke about the role of experience and organizational learning in refining their views. Mistakes and successes in handling privacy issues were seen as opportunities for iterative learning and adaptation.

Composite Orientation

The idea that managers might have a composite orientation, blending elements from different categories, was a significant emergent theme:

Ethical Pragmatism: Some managers specifically identified with an ethical pragmatism approach, where ethical guidelines provide a foundational structure, but flexibility is allowed to adapt to real-world challenges.

Culturally-Infused Ethics: There were instances where managers described their ethical frameworks as being deeply influenced by cultural norms, thus exhibiting a form of culturally-infused ethical orientation.

Pragmatic Culture Sensitivity: Other managers indicated that while they operate under a mostly pragmatic framework, they are sensitive to cultural norms and boundaries, especially in the Iranian context.

By examining these sub-themes and aspects, the "Intersectionality and Complexity" section reveals that Iranian startup managers navigate an intricate web of influences and considerations when it comes to employee privacy. Their attitudes are not confined to singular domains but are the outcome of a complex, dynamic, and often intersecting set of factors. This underscores the need for an integrative approach in both academic inquiry and practical management, one that can account for the multi-layered, fluid, and intersectional nature of managerial attitudes toward employee privacy.

CONCLUSION

The world of start-ups, particularly in the Iranian context, is a mosaic of multifaceted challenges and opportunities. Moreover, Iran is governed by an Islamic establishment and there is continuous pressures and sanctions from outside on this country that affect every aspect of business life in this country. The findings of this grounded theory study offer a comprehensive glimpse into this intricate universe, shedding light on the interwoven threads of pragmatism, ethics, and culture. At the heart of the entrepreneurial spirit lies a 'pragmatic orientation'. This orientation emphasizes on the significance of agility in decision-making, the need for preemptive risk management, and the pivotal role of ensuring employee well-being. In the unpredictable ecosystem of start-ups, where the terrain is often uncertain and the stakes high, these pragmatic tenets serve as essential guiding principles. Yet, it's essential to recognize that this pragmatism is not about a blind race towards profitability; it's also about sustainability and long-term vision.

Complementing this pragmatic lens is the 'ethical orientation'. Ethical considerations in Iranian start-ups are far from monolithic. They span the gamut from deontological ethics, which emphasize duties and rules, to relational ethics, which focus on interpersonal relationships and trust. It's evident that while start-ups aim for growth and scaling, they are acutely aware of the moral compass guiding their journey. This reflects a mature entrepreneurial landscape that recognizes the long-term benefits of ethical operations. Adding richness to this tapestry is the 'cultural orientation'. Iran, with its rich tapestry of history, tradition, and modern aspirations, provides a unique backdrop against which these start-ups operate. Local legislations, national identity, and traditional values often converge with global influences and technological advancements. This cultural amalgamation shapes the very ethos of Iranian start-ups, influencing their strategic choices, stakeholder interactions, and brand narratives to shape a dynamic perception about the most beneficial strategy for employee privacy.

Yet, the narrative doesn't end here. The theme of 'intersectionality and complexity' weaves these individual threads into a coherent whole. Start-up decisions in Iran are not made in silos. They are reflective of a sophisticated interplay of various factors, where pragmatism meets ethics, and where both are modulated by cultural nuances. This intricate dance of orientations ensures that decisions are robust, well-rounded, and in tune with the broader socio-economic and cultural milieu.

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