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March 2013

Online at <https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/68784/>

MPRA Paper No. 68784, posted 12 Jan 2016 12:54 UTC

Business Ethics & Employee Turnover: CAFE¹ Matrix

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Prologue

Business ethics is in discussion for its importance universally, so is the employee turnover in business. Unethical practices are unwanted, so is the high employee turnover. Unethical practices and high employee turnover in business is ubiquitous. No consensus exists on defining ethics. Employee turnover is well defined, but there is no consensus on when employee turnover is disadvantageous for the company. The Golden Rule⁴ or ethic of reciprocity, a maxim states that either one should treat others as one would like others to treat oneself or one should not treat others in ways that one would not like to be treated. A direct, inverse relationship exists between high job satisfaction, high organizational commitment and employee turnover; the higher the job satisfaction and organizational commitment, the lower the staff turnover. Indeed job satisfaction leads to organizational commitment (Mowday et al, 1979). This paper attempts to build a model⁵ in form of a matrix having high ethical standard in the company with two sets of companies having high or low employee turnover; and with low ethical standard in the company having two sets of companies with high or low employee turnover.

We examine ethical issues that arise in a business environment and its relation with employee turnover. The paper discusses the impact of ethical standard of the company on employee turnover. The rate of change in employees per period is known as attrition or employee turnover. In other words, employee turnover refers to the number or percentage of workers who leave an organization and are replaced by new employees. Several theories have been used to explain the relationship between organizational commitment and corporate ethical values. Individuals select organization they work for that best matches their own characteristics. Tom (1971) concluded that a person's preference for an organization showed vary with degree of similarities between his self-concept & his image of the organization. Thus, ideally high ethical companies should have low employee turnover and low ethical companies should have high employee turnover because of similarities in ideology of employer and employee. The perception of similarities & match at the time of joining employment generally built after smaller interactions, which get tested once employee works for reasonable period with the company.

¹ Catastrophic, Averse, Feeble & Exemplary

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⁴ <http://www.worldofproverbs.com/p/golden-rule.html>

⁵ CAFE Matrix, Chart-1

Importance of ethical climate

Employee works within specific company environment. An employee's view regarding to the values and norms, trails and other practices of an organization under the candle of ethics is called Ethical Climate⁶ (Schwepker, 2001). Environment can interact with several other factors to influence employees' decisions to either act ethically or unethically (Bommer et al, 1987). It has been argued that organization's ethical orientation can affect employees' attitude. Robin and Reidenbach (1987) argued that the key to success of any corporate culture is the selection and implementation of an organizational profile identified by core values, which eventually becomes an integral part of the organizational mission. On the ethical dimension of corporate values, Hunt et al. (1989) concluded that corporate culture equals the aggregation of ethical values of individual managers, as well as the formal and informal policies of the organization on ethics. The corporate ethical values are not just the underpinning of all other values relating to product and service quality, advertising content, selection of distribution channels, and treatment of customers, but also help establish and maintain the standards that describe the 'right' thing to do and the things 'worth doing' (Jansen and Von Glinow, 1985).

Ethics affect organization in many ways. The clients will go away from the products and services of those organizations with unethical environment (Gilbert, 2003). Such practices are illegal, and consequently cause the firm's legal responsibility, economic risk, and expenses (Chan, 2002). Unethical environment affect employees through greater workplace stress, decreasing job satisfaction, also decreases job performance, and finally tends to turnover (Babin 2000). Schneider (1987) asserted that "the people make the place" and that organizational culture, climate and practices are determined by the people in the organization. Schneider contends that if an individual finds that they do not fit within the organization they selected, they will prefer to leave. When bottom line reflects higher costs, management begins to look ways to reduce the costs. Managers with high employee turnover and its associated costs are very high, but it also lowers organizational productivity. Thus ethics as exhibited good conduct & positive relationship with employees is a factor that enhances productivity. It is international concern & supported worldwide.

Organizational ethics encompass good conduct, equitable treatment and fair behavior among employees & between them & their employees. Since most individuals by their own decision rule strive to be ethical

⁶ The "feel of the organization" about the activities that have ethical content or those aspects of the work environment that constitutes ethical behavior. The ethical climate is the feel about whether we do things right; or the feel of whether we behave the way we ought to behave.

and successful, there exists positive relationship between the individual and perceptions of success and perceptions of support for ethical behaviour. It is likely that top managers reflect success in most organizations. Now, if there is a perception that top managers in an organization do not support ethical behavioral dissonance results. This dissonance contributes to dissatisfaction with existing conditions in the work place. Liking and disliking of something is a natural phenomenon. Mostly people like or dislike something because of a reason. This feeling of liking or disliking behaves in the shape of attitude. Researches supports that the results of attitudes is behavioral intentions (Ajzen, 2001). Because of this as satisfaction of jobs is that attitude which comes from the workers estimate about the conditions of their jobs, which is strongly attached with employee turn over intentions (Spector, 1997). Attitudes sometime lead to intentions, so if employee is dissatisfied in his job or he doesn't like the environment or his fellow worker will most probably go for intent to leave his job. This well established negative relationship between job satisfaction and turnover intentions is also endorsed by Mulki et al, 2006. In real life employer may have low or high ethical standard and employee may have preference of high or low ethical standard. So, along with similar likes and dislikes of low or high ethical standards, exceptions are also observed.

CAFE⁷ Matrix

We propose a conceptual model⁸ in form of the matrix to locate any company on parameters of ethical standard and employee turnover on a scale. While building the model, companies are classified into low and high ethical standard on horizontal axis. The vertical axis classifies companies into low & high employee turnover. There is no scientific method, which can accurately & scientifically measure on either of the parameter. Ethical standards are subjective⁹ and could be best captured on scale on the basis of perception of the people attached with the company. Employee turnover is quantifiable¹⁰, but the threshold limit for high turnover is an estimated line and one can not ascertain whether particular employee turnover is good or bad¹¹. Though it is highly debatable, for our limited purpose, we ignore the issues that are briefed here and assume that the companies may be classified into low & high for (i) ethical standards and (ii) employee turnover. The company having high ethical standard may be desirable but it brings surprise when the employee turnover is high. Similarly, company with low ethical standard is undesirable, but it also brings surprise when employee turnover too is low.

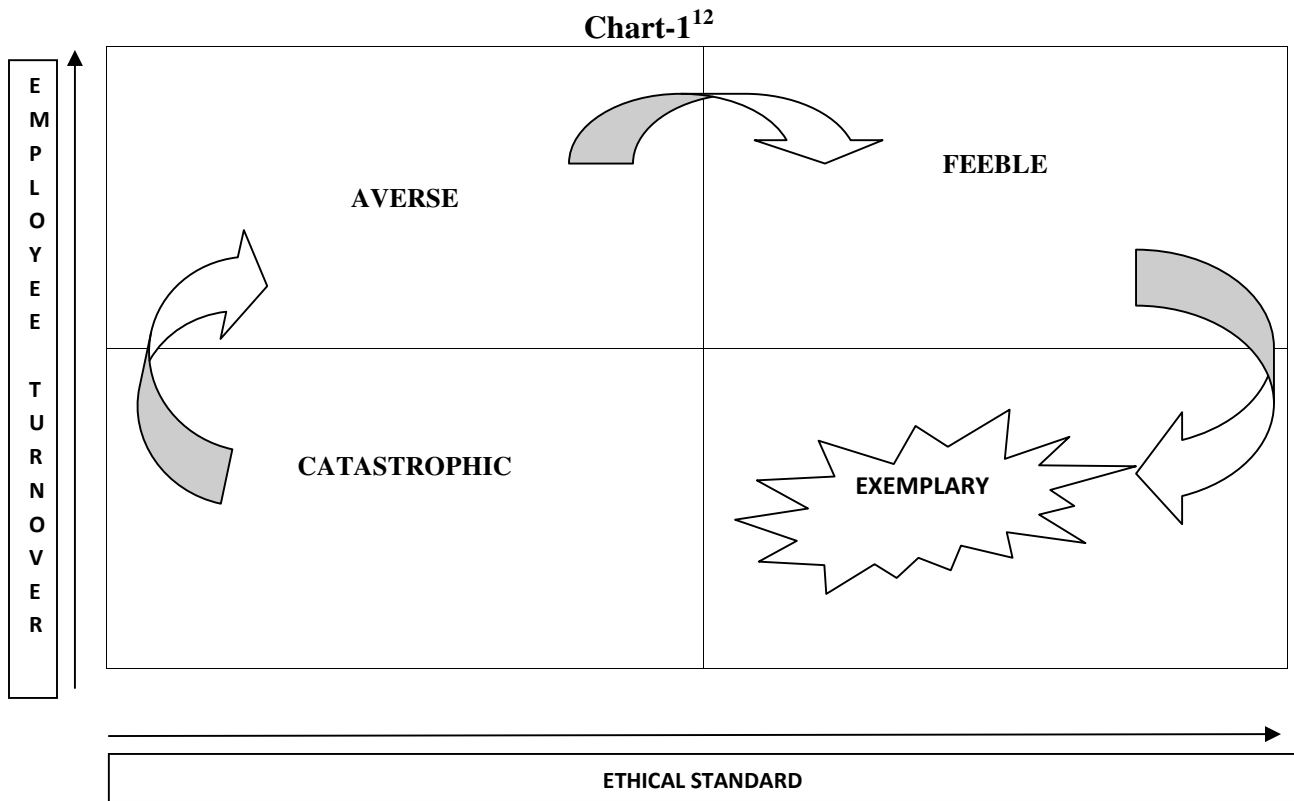
⁷ Catastrophic, Averse, Feeble, Exemplary

⁸ CAFE Matrix, Chart-1

⁹ Ethics: The Basics, by John Mizzoni

¹⁰
$$\text{Monthly turnover rate} = \frac{\text{Number of separations during the month}}{\text{Average number of employees during the month}} \times 100$$

¹¹ Not All Employee Turnover is Bad, Dr. John Sullivan



CAFE Matrix: Business Ethics & Employee Turnover

Nomenclature

We attempt to name the characteristics of a company falling in each quadrant of the matrix. The company having low ethical standard and low employee turnover is named as **‘Catastrophic’**, a situation which is never desirable where employer and employees both are happy with lower ethical standard. The company having low ethical standard but high employee turnover is named as **‘Averse’**, not a desirable model, but employees are not accepting unethical practices of employer and creating space for other employees if new employees can influence the company to raise ethical standard. The company having high ethical standard and high employee turnover is named as **‘Feeble’**, a strange situation where employees are leaving company having high ethical standard, that is to say employees are not befitting otherwise ethical environment of the company. The company having high ethical standard but low employee turnover is named as **‘Exemplary’**, serving as a desirable business model and representing the best of its kind. Based on the common traits, we cluster the common characteristics¹³ of employers & employees that are prevalent in each kind of company in all four quadrants of the CAFE Matrix.

¹² CAFE Matrix, developed by the authors

¹³ Chart-2, Characteristics of employers & employees, developed by authors

High Ethical Standard

The corporate goals, corporate culture, corporate policy & procedures are some of the organizational factors that can influence ethical decision-making. Corporate ethical behavior encompasses several factors including fairness, justice, and neutral managerial actions. Studies show that not only job satisfaction and organizational commitment reduce turnover, but corporate ethical practices lead to reduced turnover, increased job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Organizational commitment is reciprocal. An overwhelming majority of employees recently surveyed¹⁴ emphasized that it is important that the company they work for is ethical. Ethics is such an important consideration. Large numbers of employees were willing to be paid less and work for a company with ethical business practices than receive higher pay at a company with questionable ethics. While doing the right thing is and always should be its own reward, there are real financial benefits for employers to embrace ethics in the workplace. An ethical climate can reduce costly employee turnover as well as provide an incentive for employees to stay where they are when tempted by more lucrative but more ethically challenging work elsewhere.

All organizations require employees who are committed to their vision, mission and goals in order to continue to exist and be sustainable. Organizations need employees with mutual goals and values; willingly exert effort to achieve organizational goal; and strongly desire to remain with them (Mowday et al, 1979). Given that employees' commitment is necessary for desirable organizational outcomes such as profitability (Brett et al, 1995), job satisfaction (Lum et al, 1998), lower turnover intention (Sims & Kroeck, 1994), it is necessary to retrace the antecedents of organizational commitment with a view to identifying if any incongruous situation exists between employee & organizational goal. The high ethical standards have been held to enhance organizational success, if widely shared among organizational members (Brown, 1976). Generally the organizations desire committed employees. To garner these benefits employers need to ensure that they tighten their ethics practice and focus on cultivating an ethical corporate culture. This requires an equal focus on inspiring all employees. The company should imbibe culture & values in the system to meet the needs of employees in personal and meaningful ways so that they embrace the principles behind the effort and internalize ethics into their decision making on the job. The reasons of employee turnover may be employee, employer or the employment market¹⁵. In the

¹⁴ LRN Ethics Study

¹⁵ Common reasons for employee turnover, Dave Laber, PHR, Helena Job Service Workforce Center

circumstances, one can not precisely ascertain reason of employee turnover in general and ethics in specific, but we clusters common characteristics of company in each matrix.

Feeble (High Ethical Standard but High Employee Turnover)

This kind of company have high employee turnover in spite of high ethical standard. It is observed that the company may be lacking strength in certain area. Dictionary meaning of 'feeble' is lacking physical strength. The company may have high ethical standard but other business strength may be lacking to retain employees. Reasons of attrition on the part of employee could be good business opportunity outside the organization, lack of job satisfaction, low wage rate, health and safety related issues, over strict organizational policy, burdonesome business environment, cumbersome procedure, internal politics, less perquisites etc. The company believing in wealth maximization should focus on means as well as outcomes; profit should not be only motive of the organizations. Wealth maximization should be the objective and it should be visible at all level. Company may have failed to select fit employees, selection of right employee for the right job at a right time is very important for the organization. The company may not selected right employee for the job so employees turn over may be very high. The company under 'Feeble' may have not proper disclosure & implementation policy, transparency and governance are inevitable part of the any organization. The company may have designed policy but may have failed to implement the policy properly to improve job satisfaction of the employees.

The employees may have short term career goal, career goal should be for long term and not for the short term. The employees may feel suffocation and hence they may be ready for capturing market opportunities, organizational environment should be amicable up to certain extent so employee feels to stay there for long period of time. Feeble company and their employees have contrast for high ethical standards vis-à-vis business environment for the employees. In another assumption, the employees of 'feeble' employer disregard high ethical standard of their employer company.

Exemplary (High Ethical Standard and Low Employee Turnover)

These kinds of companies are serving as a desirable model; representing the best of its kind having high ethical standard and low employee turnover. Dictionary meaning of 'exemplary' is serving as a desirable model; representing the best of its kind. Theses are the star companies. The focus of the company is on means as well as outcomes, and the profit is not the only motive of these organizations. Wealth maximization is being the objective of exemplary organizations. These companies employee selection process is proper. The selection of right employee for the right job at a right time is very important for the

organization. The company keeps proper disclosure and appropriate implementation. Transparency and governance are inevitable part of the exemplary organization. They design policy and implement properly to improve job satisfaction of the employees. Compensation policy of these company is in pace with the market and enjoy good social image. The company may have good social image to the extent that employee take the pride to work for the company. The exemplary company selects qualified persons having proper match of job description and job specification.

The employees of such company are focusing on long term career goal. Good ethical conduct in the workplace indicates that employees take pride in their company's ethical standards and have respect for other employees, customers, suppliers and partners. Employees who have a positive working relationship with their direct supervisors and co-workers are likely to stay at their jobs. In addition, a company that pays well compared with others offering similar jobs is likely to see low turnover. Another cause of low turnover is having room for advancement so employees feel like they can move up in their careers if they stay at the company. Poor economic conditions can also contribute to low turnover because employees fear not being able to find other work. Exemplary company build a model for professional conduct consists of a set of rules that prescribe a baseline of legal ethics and professional responsibilities. At a minimum, companies usually expect employees to comply with applicable local laws and government regulations. Employees who respect their organization and co-workers tend to act ethically, leading to high efficiency. Lost time, supplies, equipment and productivity result in lower company profits. Employees who exemplify a model ethical code of conduct in the workplace treat other people and company property with respect to ensure the reputation of their company remains intact. People who act with integrity create an atmosphere of fairness and equality where job satisfaction is high, employee turnover is low and absenteeism is negligible.

According to expectancy theory¹⁶, every employee expects some characteristics from their jobs. These job characteristics are job autonomy and job variety that draw them to a motivational power to perform and continue the satisfying jobs. In such jobs conditions employees will not leave their jobs and organization because their jobs and organization fulfill their favors (Vroom, 1964). In addition to this, there is also the possibility that the favorable conditions of job also meet the employee personal values. This is possible if the job gives them a sense of enjoyment and success (George and Jones, 1996). Exemplary company and their employees have mutual respect for high ethical standards.

¹⁶ A Review of Employee Motivation Theories and their Implications for Employee Retention within Organizations by Sunil Ramlall

Low Ethical Standard

The corporate goals can be short and long-term, with most companies emphasizing the short-term goals in terms of return on investment and profitability. If short-term goals are dominant in a company's policy, there is high likelihood of ethical concerns being compromised. The motive of such companies being profit maximization, top management insist on lower management to work for profit, even at the cost of lowering ethical standards. Supporting this argument, Laczniak (1983) argues that the managers are usually faces pressure with demands for results when the profit goal is dominant in a firm's short-term goals, which is interpreted that any impediment to this goal should be disregarded. In this regard, pressure from the organization can be a significant factor in ethical decision-making (Ferrell & Gresham, 1985). Besides affecting a company's ability to recruit and retain employees and increasing the legal, regulatory and compliance risks a company faces, unethical behavior has a direct impact on employee productivity. Very few of those who experienced unethical employees also indicated a willingness to protest when dissatisfied with a company's ethical standards.

Catastrophic (Low Ethical Standard and Low Employee Turnover)

Company under the category have low ethical standard and low employee turnover. An Oxford dictionary meaning of catastrophic is subversive or disaster, deep or seemingly bottomless chasm. The companies under this category may have profiteering motive and no long term goal. The mission & vision of the company may not be clear, may have short-term vision. The company may not have clear and well-defined mission and vision. The employees of catastrophic companies may be unqualified or after money. Such company may not have proper selection process for the employees and that's why their goal is not for the well-being of the company. There may not be market opportunities for the employees. Such undeserving employees may be having lack of proper market experience and hence find less market opportunities. Catastrophic company and their employees are disregarding high ethical standard.

Averse (Low Ethical Standard but High Employee Turnover)

Company under the category have low ethical standard but high employee turnover. The dictionary meaning of 'averse' is having a strong dislike of or opposition to something. Employees of such company do not endorse low ethical practices. These companies may have profiteering motive. In this type of companies attitude of the employees have mismatch with the employer. The management of 'averse' company may be unqualified to gauge the pulse of employees expectations, which is socially acceptable and may lack of vision . The employees may be otherwise qualified and may have long term career goal,

and good market opportunities for them self. The employee of 'averse' company disregard employers' probably low ethical standard or business environment provided by their employers.

High turnover is related to employee dissatisfaction with the job. Some specific reasons might include low pay, poor working conditions, long hours, not enough benefits or a negative atmosphere, especially from higher authority. There are three factors that are predictors of employee misconduct: pressure to perform, observed misconduct and dissatisfaction. Further, the distracting power of ethical lapses can create friction, dissonance and distraction that can get in the way of productivity. A significant percentage of employees witness unethical behavior on the job, and most are affected in some way by the behavior. It is important for companies to not only create programs and mechanisms to prevent ethical lapses but to do the same to effectively detect, respond, root cause and correct ethical lapses in consistent and timely ways.

An individual usually exerts considerable effort to minimize dissonance in their environment, which put in an organizational context, implies employees strive and desire congruence between their ethical standards and that of their organization (Koh & Boo, 2001). Where dissonance or incongruence is perceived, this will lead to dissatisfaction (Viswesvaran et al, 1998) and employees would want to minimize this. The minimization could lead to withdrawal and resignation from the organization (Jansen & Von Glinow, 1985). It was reported that few employees left the company on grounds including disagreement with the ethics of fellow employees, a supervisor or management, felt pressure to engage in illegal activity etc. Many employees left because they didn't think the company was acting according to its promises or corporate values. Employee turnover costs due to ethics issues are potentially alarming. Estimates of turnover costs range from 25 percent to almost 200 percent of an employee's annual compensation depending on the position. Therefore, the fact that one third of the workers have left the job for ethical reasons signifies that companies can significantly reduce costs associated with turnover and lost productivity by fostering an ethical corporate culture.

Suggestions

The company should aim at becoming exemplary i.e. high ethical standard and low employee turnover. Though it is mutual responsibility of employee and employer, the company should provide business framework for high ethical standard and business environment to reduce employee turnover. We suggest some ways to bring up the business ethical standard. The company should demonstrate importance of ethical conduct. Managerial practices promoting an ethical culture are the best way to imbibe ethics in employees. How management's actions reflect the company's values and principles is most important in

penetrating the ethical values. The actions of higher management act as a visible role model on employees. The decisions, actions and behaviors of management convince the value a company places on ethical conduct.

The company should educate employee on ethical standards. Education programs should teach employees about ethical, legal and compliance issues they may encounter in carrying out their responsibilities, more important is to help employees them self recognize potentially problematic situations, including those that may be outside the scope of common business scenarios. The goal of any education initiative should be to foster an environment that encourages and embraces ethical decision made by providing real-world opportunities for employees to wrestle with ethical dilemmas. Education can only be additive to a company's ability to foster a strong ethical culture when it is additive to the role and job function of every individual conducting business on behalf of the company, including directors, executives, partners and joint ventures. Communications should be an outcome of viewing ethics as a business strategy, and like all business strategies, should be reinforced consistently so that the standard of conduct the company expects can be internalized within the company's culture. Aligning promotion, increments and other incentives with corporate values reinforce that the company embraces ethics and doing the right thing.

The company should be communicating ethical expectations. The organizations should provide proper training to their employees for maintaining ethical standard. Visibly rewarding ethical acts and punishing unethical ones is an approach the company should opt for. The organizations should award their employees for the ethical act and punishment for the wrongdoing.

The company should maintain high tolerance for risk. The employers should encourage their employees to take risk for business and taking decisions by innovative way. The company should keep low to moderate in aggressiveness. The employer should avoid pressure on employees to be more aggressive. The business should focus on means as well as outcomes. The profit should not be only motive of the organizations. Wealth maximization should be the objective.

The ethical climate requires ethical leadership at every level. It is essential to inspire employees to internalize ethical decision making. This requires the development of an environment where employees are encouraged to talk openly about ethical dilemmas. The most influential ethical role model in an organization is the individuals' immediate supervisor. Therefore, it is important to encourage an environment where an employee can just as easily turn to the colleague in the next cube of their immediate supervisor as the ethics and compliance office for advice on how to handle tough ethical decision, where the right or wrong answer is not always clear. An ethical leader is one that does what is

right in the absence of oversight and is one that ensures that a climate of right behavior flourishes. Fostering a culture of ethical leaders relies upon engaging employees in ethics so that there is a common understanding that “how” business gets done is more important than that it gets done.

Companies should not tolerate questionable business practices. Successful leaders demand that employees maintain high standards of ethical conduct in the workplace and do not blame others for missed deadlines, poor decisions, bad results or non-compliance. Managers resist the temptation to pad budgets in anticipation of cutbacks. Employees avoid compromising too much to win a customer's sale, gain support for a controversial project or avoid a conflict on a volatile issues. Risks need to be discussed and handled responsibly to benefit all employees. An effective leader ensures his subordinates get the training they need to exemplify model ethical conduct in the workplace. By running workshops and seminars, companies provide opportunities for their staff to examine case studies and common moral dilemmas. For example, employees are asked to treat company money as their own money. They reflect on if their decisions could result in controversy before choosing an option or alternative in problem solving. They are also asked how they would feel if news of their actions were to be published in the local newspaper. Anytime an action might result in anxiety, employees need to seek guidance before making a decision. Employees should also not defer a decision without careful consideration.

The sense of caring needs to be demonstrated from the top all the way down to the employee's immediate supervisor. The value of the caring boss is greatly diminished if the employee experiences a strained relationship with his or her immediate supervisor. Often the weak link of the supervisory level goes unnoticed by top management although it produces dissatisfaction severe enough to promote a high turnover rate. Dissatisfied employees may have difficulty in communicating their unhappiness to upper level management. Committed employees who remain in an organization feel that they have a lot of control over their own destinies within the company. They feel that their voices, opinions, and ideas are valued and taken into consideration when decisions are made. They do not experience the same sense of isolation and detachment experienced by employees who feel uncared for and under-valued.

Satisfied employees have a strong sense of understanding about what is expected of them. Management communications are clear and frequent about expectations and goals. Everyone understands the mission. Employees are strongly encouraged to ask for clarification of unclear job performance requirements. Committed and satisfied employees speak of a sense of fairness that they perceive a lack of favoritism, and avoiding the perception that "some are more equal than others." It's also crucial to ensure your company's leadership is engaged. Take a proactive approach to employee relations and make sure your

managers do as well. The open door policy and sharing mistakes can help employees to build confidence. Get down in the trenches and work with employees frequently. You can learn a lot about what is really happening in your company just by staying engaged. High-performing workers need to feel that they are being challenged and are moving forward in terms of professional growth and development. Take time to meet with your employees and be proactive in discussing career and succession plans with them. A dreadful supervisor can make any employee dejected. Even if your staff is completely committed to the business, if their immediate supervisor creates an uncomfortable work environment they may consider leaving. Employees often voluntarily leave a job due to the relationship they have with their direct managers. As human beings we crave routine, structure and consistency. Generally, an employee can settle for average wages and even highly stressful work if the work relationships are positive and motivating.

Chart-2

No.	The quadrant	Employer	Employee	Characteristics of organization	
1	Low Ethics Low Employee Turnover	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> C A T A S T R O P H I C </div> <p>Profiteering motive</p>	Mission & vision not clear, Short term vision, Weak performance management, Rusty hiring, Lazy managers,	Unqualified, after money, No long term career goal, No market opportunities, Poor performers, Weak skills, Not ambitious, Feel comfort, Not innovative, Overly tolerant, Unemployable because of poor industry image, Low employee visibility, Fear of retributive culture of company,	<p>CATASTROPHIC</p> <p>A deep or seemingly bottomless chasm,</p> <p>Employer & Employees both are tolerating unethical practices</p>
2	Low Ethics High Employee Turnover	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> A V E R S E </div>	Unprofessional, Lack of vision	Qualified, long term career goal, good market opportunities, Feel no pride for employer, No job satisfaction, No opportunity to perform well at challenging work, See no future,	<p>AVERSE</p> <p>Having a strong dislike of or opposition to something</p>
3	High Ethics High Employee Turnover	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> F E E B L E </div> <p>Wealth building motive</p>	Faulty selection employees, improper disclosure, implementation policy, Low salary	Short term career goal, feel suffocation, ready for any market opportunities, No opportunity to perform well at challenging work, No recognition of contribution	<p>FEEBLE</p> <p>Lacking strength</p>
4	High Ethics Low Employee Turnover	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> E X E M P L A R Y </div>	Proper selection, disclosure, implementation & compensation policy, Good social image	Qualified, long term career goal, Better opportunities outside,	<p>EXEMPLARY</p> <p>Serving as a desirable model; representing the best of its kind</p>

Employer-Employee characteristics based on relation of ethics & employee turnover

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