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Perception of managers as to the ethical responsibility and competition strategy: A survey

Hasan Tutar[a], Mehmet Altınöz[b]*, Demet Çakıroğlu[b]

a Sakarya University, Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences Esentepe Campus, Sakarya, Turkey
b Hacettepe University, Vocational School of Social Sciences Campus Opera, Ankara, Turkey

Abstract

Seeking an answer for the questions such as when determining strategy, are the business managers only acting from the concern of being long dated, returning profit over the average and determining a position as regards the competitors in any cases or do they have any responsibility concerns like social responsibility or ethical responsibility? Since the primary objective of the business is to return profit and to continue its existence, then are the managers acting only with economic concerns and profit motive or do the variables like social sensitivity, voluntary sensitivity that have an impact upon its decisions have any effect for the realization of the aforesaid objectives of the managers? Are the sensitivity factors like social responsibility, social sensitivity, ethical and voluntary responsibility of the business managers necessary in terms of the continuation of the business' existence and considering as being possessed and highly regarded within the framework of the activities? Constitute the primary objective of this research.
Another objective of the research is to draw attention for the requirement of acting as well within the scope of the ethical responsibility upon the strategic decisions under the market conditions where the businesses are tightly controlled by the internal and external environment. Free market conditions necessitate the consideration of the ethical responsibility and competitive strategy together. This is especially the requirement of the reputation management that has a place on the business management in the recent period. In keeping the assets of the businesses reputation insomuch as the profit is considered as a significant factor. According to the analysis results of those assumptions it is ascertained that there is a difference between ethical responsibility perceptions and competitive strategy perceptions of the managers. Furthermore, with regard to the results of the correlation analysis carried out, it is determined that there is a medium-level relation between the competitive strategy perceptions and ethical responsibility perceptions of the managers.

Keywords: Leadership; ethical strategy; strategy; strategic leadership; ethical climate; work ethic

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +90-312-311-6015; fax: +90-312-311-6089.
E-mail address: maltinoz@hacettepe.edu.tr.

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1. Introduction

Thanks to the means of communication and information today the businesses felt themselves under the control of the customers. Ever after the actors of the control mechanism which was named by Adam Smith as “the market is controlled by an invisible hand” is quite visible. In other words, the market is now controlled by a visible hand (customer) systematically and tightly. During the control period businesses not only consider their performance in terms of profitability and efficiency but also they address the issue in terms of the variables like ethical responsibility, being held in esteem, feeling social responsibility in the environment in which they are carrying out activities. Not only the price of the goods and services, its quality or presentation style, but also the social responsibility and sensitivity conceptions that the businesses have concerning the strategic managements of the businesses are considered and they are regarded as the reputation factor of the business.

Social responsibility includes the responsibility dimensions such as legal responsibility, economic responsibility, voluntary responsibility and ethical responsibility. Here the ethical and voluntary responsibility is considered together with the strategic responsibilities of the businesses. Today, it is no longer possible to differently consider the businesses’ ethical responsibilities from legal responsibilities, legal responsibilities from the economic responsibilities, economic responsibilities from the voluntary responsibilities Chryssides and Kaler [1] and all those from the strategic responsibilities. Ethical responsibility as a dimension of the social responsibility considers as necessary to address the good and evil not only in terms of the business but in terms of the competitors also.

2. Ethical Responsibility

Ethics is an ethical philosophy and it is the body of rules that demonstrate the general rules, the common good and the common right that the individuals should observe while attaining their purposes. It connects all the attitudes and behaviors of the individual in its private and social life to the principles in pursuant to the certain rules. It demonstrates the limits of the good, right and wrong. Ethical responsibility in the organizations should be addressed together with the institutional social responsibility. Here the institutional social responsibility implies emphasizing the necessity of the means and the methods preferred by the businesses not to cause loss to the economic, social and cultural welfare of the society while they are on the way to realize their objectives. Even since the ethical rules have normative features, they demonstrate mandatory characteristics on the principles and values developing the economic, social and cultural structures of the societies. Ethics is not descriptive but mandatory. In other words, ethical responsibility includes responsibilities like product safety in terms of institution, pollution measures, avoiding from employing children as laborers, avoiding from the violation of human rights, avoiding from resorting to mobbing [2]. Institutional ethical responsibility acts from the approach that as the individuals have ethical responsibilities, the institutions should have also [3].

Another concept with regard to institutional social responsibility is the concept of “altruist” used in the social psychology. This concept implies the behaviors that are in favor of the others and carried out without expecting in return. The concept with regard to the classification made by Mintzberg as “the purest state of the institutional social responsibilities” [4] and by Lantos as “altruistic institutional social responsibility”, is used in the similar meanings with altruism [5]. Even benevolence-oriented KSS is focused on different strategic concerns that are different from totally utilitarian classical strategic responsibility by way of returning profit, being long-termed, position-determining according to the competitors. Benevolence-oriented institutional social responsibility presents a capitalism instance that is enlightened and undertaken mercy. Thus, as different from the classic strategic responsibility focused on the profit, it conceives being beneficial to the society at the center of strategy development [5].

Social responsibility concept is addressed with its different dimensions at business management. One of those dimensions is the concept of “ethical responsibility”. Other dimensions of Carroll’s [6] social responsibility model are voluntary responsibility, economic responsibility and legal responsibility. For Carroll, those mentioned responsibility dimensions not only cover business utility but at the same time involve pursuing the social utility also. Social responsibility necessitates behaving in compliance with the values and objectives of the entire social factors. In such a responsibility conception, it is quite out of the question to exempt the competitors from this.

Social responsibility model that is presented as four dimensional in Caroll's theory is a basic model as regards social responsibility. Thereafter many researchers carried out various researches depending on this model. In such researches, businesses are emphasized as the basic economic units of the society and it is dwelled on the fact that they should act in the context of "ethical responsibility" in the strategies determined in each decisions taken and in every practices implemented. Within the framework, while the business conceives providing quality good and service, deriving a profit to owners and stakeholders of the business as the requirement of "economic responsibility", then carrying on its activities that should not be incongruous with the legal rules as the requirement of the "legal responsibilities" and acting in compliance with social values and norms as the requirement of the "ethical responsibilities". Furthermore, carrying out all those activities without any external force is considered as the requirement of voluntary responsibility.

While voluntary responsibility covers the organizational identity of the business towards its internal environment and organizational image towards its external environment, it is at the same time the synthesis of organizational image and identity as well as a type of responsibility as regards organizational reputation which is regarded as the most important one of its abstract values. Voluntary responsibility necessitates that the business should have an affirmative reputation around its environment. It is assumed that with regard to the interaction between the business and its environment the ethical responsibility, which constitutes the basis of all types of social responsibility, will take a significant part in the reputation of the business [7].

Ethical responsibility in Caroll's model implies that as regards the expectations of business owners, the staff, other individuals and society from the business, they should be carried out within the scope of the ethical rules. This responsibility necessitates the business to conceive its competitors in the same context while determining its strategy as well. In a way, ethical responsibility constitutes the core of the social responsibility. In Porter's business activities, generic strategies like differentiation, taking the lead in the competitive market advantage, focusing on the particular areas of the market fall behind in terms of ethical responsibility. For this assumption, while some of the managers focus on and give priority to Porter's generic strategies, some of them prioritize ethical responsibility. Another assumption is that the third group managers successfully address ethical responsibility and strategic responsibility together.

H1. There is a difference between ethical responsibility dimensions of the managers.

One of the approaches of the social responsibility is Social Stakeholder Theory). This theory addresses social stakeholdership within the scope of strategic management. For this theory businesses should not act with the objective of short-term profitability only, but on the contrary they should behave accordingly to wider and longer term sustainable development vision. This vision implies that the businesses should bear responsibility with regard to not only the investors but all the social stakeholders, in other words, all the groups (to its consumers, its customers, its suppliers, its staff, non-governmental organizations and its competitors) that are affected from the business activities and that have influence upon those activities also [8, 9]. This approach should be considered together with sustainable development [10] and continuing its existence, which is one of the basic objectives of the business.

Strategic responsibility is a responsibility which is in compliance with the argument of Friedman [11] expressed as "businesses have only one responsibility; that is to improve profit provided that they should lie within the rules of the game". For the argument, strategic responsibilities of the business should not negatively affect the sustainability and profitability of the company. However, when not only the economic but also the ethical values are considered, being result-oriented are evaluated according to the result of the ethical behaviors. For this approach, if the results are "good", then they should also be "good" in terms of not only the business but the society and even the competitors also. According to the "utilitarianism" conception, which is one of the teleology concepts of John Stuart Mill, implies that the more the business gains favor to its social stakeholders the more it behaves responsible (good). Social stakeholders of the business cover those who exist in the supply chain and even the competitors.

H2. Ethical responsibility perceptions of the business managers have influence upon the strategic responsibility perceptions.

3. Competitive Strategy

Strategic decisions are about the arrangement of the relations between the business and its environment. When we considered the issue in terms of profit, then the decisions as regards which products will be produced and in which markets they will be sold should be in question. This is also called as the activity field selection [12]. Competing in the business' own industry and even demonstrating high performance and achieving competitive advantage are directly related with its profitability as well as it is also directly related with the objective of continuing their existence. According to Porter, for the business to make profit against its competitors, in other words over the average, it should have the capabilities of low cost and product differentiation. Aforesaid strategies called as genetic competitive strategies cover cost leadership, differentiation and focusing strategies. However, among the generic strategies of Porter, there are no social responsibility strategies, which are considered together with the recent business strategies like social responsibility, ethical responsibility or voluntary responsibility. While the only objective of the generic strategies is to reach to a favorable position vis-à-vis the competitors of the business, to return even higher profit, in other words, business' making profit, whereas the social responsibility strategies focus on the winning strategy together with all the stakeholders, even with the competitors.

While the "cost leadership" strategy from generic strategies are focusing on carrying out the activities of the business with a lower cost and concentrating on the scale economy with a view to returning profit over the sector average, the differentiation strategy, on the other hand, is concentrating on specialty goods and services which are regarded as the motives highly preferred by the customers. Businesses in differentiation strategy develop strategies to meet customer expectations different from the competitors. They intend to return profit over the sector average by offering the good and service to the market, which are accepted to be paid over the market prices by the customer thanks to specialty goods and services. However, while differentiation strategy is formed, factors like customer's quality perceptions and price are considered important as starting point, its value judgments, beliefs, ethical values, working and living values are left out.

Another tool out of the generic strategies developed in the strategic management of the businesses is the focusing strategy. It is the strategy tool developed in case where the businesses are unable to tolerate destructive competition with their existing means and capabilities where the number of competitor companies is too many in the market and in the markets where the competition is severe. Businesses in focusing strategies are concentrating on very narrow areas by limiting the market with a view to first of all being favored in the market and then competing or proving competitive advantage. This narrowed market could be classified as geographical or regional or canalizing to different customer wills and requirements may be in question. Businesses with the focusing strategy do not actually compete with their competitors; they try to carry out activities in a market far from competition, in other words, they avoid competition. By these three general strategy approaches, Porter [13] intends to cope with the competition powers, but here he does not conceive social responsibility as a strategy element.

In various researches, Porter's [13] generic strategies are discussed as the model's being viable to theoretical and conceptual level. Although there are some who express favorable opinion to this issue [14-16], some of the researches who criticize on account of the fact that he left out the variables like communication, public relations (PR), social responsibility, social sensitivity, ethical responsibility, stakeholder responsibility, reputation and image management, logistics, environmental scanning, human relations that we dwell on here [17-19].

H3. There is a relation between ethical responsibilities and competition strategies of the managers.

When a brief literature review is carried out in this subject, it is determined that the businesses operated in different sectors address competition strategies together with the business performances [20-22] however, there is no research in which the competition strategies are studies together with the ethical responsibility. In this regard the research matters. Nonetheless although there are some researchers who address the competition phenomenon of the managers by Porter approach, it is assumed that there is also a group who may consider together with the abovementioned social and ethical responsibility.

4. Research Design

Questions like strategic perspective that is more applicable for realizing short-term targets of the business managers is obstructed by ethical responsibility targets directly related with its long-term targets?; do the business managers think that social responsibilities cover competition strategies as well while determining the basic strategic targets and carrying out activities? Constitute the basic problem of this research. Within the scope of the research problem, ethical responsibilities of the businesses is intended to be analyzed by the relation and difference tests by making comparisons in terms of addressing in a way to include the compliance with the social values and ethical norms, to obstruct the competitor organizations' achievement of their objectives in an unethical ways, being a fair institution, ethical responsibility and competition strategies.

With a view to delivering data to the research which is an empirical study, data were gathered by the questionnaire method from a sample determined by random sampling methods from the small and medium sized enterprises (KOBİ) that are carried out in Ankara Middle East Industry and Commerce Center (OSTIM) with a view to measure the relation between the ethical responsibility perceptions and competitive strategy perceptions of the managers. Data were gathered by distributing the "ethical leadership scale" having ten items developed by Brown et al. [23] and the "competitive strategy scale" having 15 items developed in reference to the Porter's generic strategies dimensions by us for the research and the data gathered were analyzed in accordance with the difference and relation tests (quantitative/qualitative). Sampling 200 questionnaires were distributed. 140 of those questionnaires turned back and 120 of those were used in the analysis.

5. Data Analysis and Hypothesis Test Results

With a view to gathering data for the research, data were collected for measuring competitive strategy perceptions and the ethical leadership perceptions of the managers from the sampling having the following features:

Table 1. Descriptive statistical table as regards the demographic features

Age	F	%	**Education**	F	%	**Gender**	F	%
20-30	10	8,3	High School	25	20,8	Female	15	12,5
31-40	25	20,8	Associate degree	20	16,6	Male	105	87,5
41-50	40	33,3	Undergraduate	45	37,5			
51-+	45	37,5	YLS / Dr	30	41,6			
Total	120	100,0	Total	120	100,0			

Data were analyzed by means of SPSS 16,0 and LISREL 8.7 statistical programs. In analyzing the data, mean, frequency distribution, confirmatory factor and path analysis were used. With a view to testing the validation and reliability of the model, "Confirmatory Factor Analysis" for the validity of the structure, declared variance estimation of the factors and reliability coefficients of the factors for the reliability were used. Alpha values with regard to the reliability of research scales are within the acceptable limits. Values of the goodness of fit obtained as a result of DFA (X2=224,346; df=181; p=0,000; RMR=0,032; GFI=0,979; NFI= 0,983; RFI=0,967; IFI=0,978; CFI=0,981; IFI= 0,922; RFI= 0,931 RMSEA=0,033). It is considered that the measurement model is complied with the data at the medium level. No modification is made since the goodness of fit values obtained in the validation factor analysis (DFA) demonstrates that structure validity of the measurement model is in normal compliance.

Table 2. Measurement model results

Latent variables Observed variables	**St. Estimated Value (MLE)**	**St. Error**	**t Value**	**Declared Variance[a]**	**Factor Confidence Coefficient[B]**
Ethical responsibility	0,789	0,172	3,349	0,874	0,753
Strategic responsibility	0,796	0,165	3,286	0,793	0,816

[a] Variance Estimations of the Factors (Variance Extracted Estimate)
[b] Reliability coefficients of the Factors (Composite Reliability); all "p" values belonging to "t" value equals to "0,000"..

Standard estimated values (MLE), standard errors, t values and reliability values of the variables are seen in Table 2. When the standard estimated values (MLE) of the variables are considered, it is seen that they take the values of 0,789 and 0,796. Therefore, the standard estimated values (factor loads) are above 0,70, which is a critical value. Those values demonstrate that the scale has structure validity. It is seen that t value of both scales (t value is 1.96 and above at ,05 level) is significant.

6. Findings and Comments

Table 3. Dimension average and standard deviation values table

VARIABLES	**X**	**SD**
Strategic Responsibility (General)	3,9	,5743
Focusing Strategy	4,1	,4458
Cost Leadership Strategy	3,9	,8833
Differentiation Strategy	3,8	,7962

When Table 3 is considered, it is understood that the strategic responsibility perceptions of the personnel is (X=3,9, ss=,5743), whereas ethical responsibility perceptions are relatively low (X=3,4, ss=,8603). The highest perception average (X=4,1, ss=,4458) in the research belongs to focusing strategy sub-dimension. Furthermore, it is necessary to indicate that the ethical responsibility perceptions have the lowest perception average. Those values demonstrate that the managers have positive strategic responsibility and ethical responsibility perception. However, it is understood that they attach relatively greater value (importance) to the strategic responsibility. Concurrently, those results also demonstrate that H1 hypothesis which implies that "the ethical responsibility and the strategic responsibility perceptions of the managers are different" is acknowledged.

6.1. Correlation Findings

The results of the correlation analysis carried out with a view to specify the relation between strategic responsibility and ethical responsibility perceptions of the managers are demonstrated in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Correlation analysis table

LOWER DIMENSIONS		A	B	C	D	E
A- COST LEADERSHIP	Pearson r	1				
	significance	.				
B- FOCUSING	Pearson r	,442(**)	1			
	significance	,000	.			
C- DIFFERENTIATION	Pearson r	,344(**)	,066	1		
	significance	,000	,587	.		
D- STRATEGIC RESPONSIBILITY (GENERAL)	Pearson r	,538**	537**	,486**	1	
	significance	,000	,000	,000	.	
E- ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITY (GENERAL)	Pearson r	,-445**	,-341**	,-388**	,-356**	1
	Significance	,000	,000	,000	,000	.

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Correlation analysis relation values between sub-dimensions demonstrate that there is a significant and medium level relation between strategic responsibility and its sub-dimensions. However, when we consider the results of the strategic responsibility (general) and the ethical responsibility (general) of the managers, it is understood that there is again a medium level (r:,-456), but this time a negative relation. According to those results, it is understood that H2 hypothesis which implies "there is a significant relation between ethical responsibilities and strategic responsibilities of the managers" is acknowledged. Besides, since the relation between strategic responsibility and ethical responsibility is negative, it implies that one unit increase in the ethical responsibility will lead to a decrease of 35% in the strategic responsibility perceptions. Accordingly, those results are accord with the theoretical framework of the research. However, it is not ruled out here that the correlation analyses are only used for determining the relation level between the variables. However, explanatoriness of this relation, in other words which factor influence which of them in which level could be determined by the regression analysis.

6.2. Multi Regression Findings

Regression analyses are used for explaining the relation between the dependent variable (predicted) and the independent (predictor) variables that are assumed to have an influence on the dependent variable by a mathematical model. In the research, ethical responsibility is taken as an independent (predictor/cause) strategic responsibility as a dependent (predicted /effect) variable. R2 value in the regression analysis is used for finding how much the percentage of the total variance in the dependent variable is explained by the independent variables.

Table 5. Ethical responsibility and competition strategy ANOVA table

Source of the Variance	s.s	Sum of Squares	Average of Squares	F	P
Regression	3	23,520	3,905	21,223	,000
Residual	117	25,432	,312		
Total	120	48,952			
Predictors: Dependent Variable: Ethical Leadership					

When ANOVA table is considered, F statistical value is 21, 223; and the observed significance level is (p<0,000). Those values verify our research's second hypothesis of "there is a significant relation between ethical responsibility perceptions and strategic responsibility perceptions of the managers".

Table 6. Regression analysis table

Variables	**B**	**Standard Error**	***β***	**T**	**P**	**Double r**	**Partial r**
Ethical	2,764	,241		10,242	,000	,384	,147
Strategic	,373	,083	,368	5,623	,000		
R -,368	**R2=324**	**F=22,428**		**P,000**			

When the partial correlation carried out between the predictor (independent) variables and the dependent (predicted) variable is analyzed, there is a negative and medium level (r= -0,368) relation between the "ethical responsibility" and the "strategic responsibility" perceptions of the sample. It is understood that those values at the negative and the medium level the ethical responsibility perceptions have a negative effect at (p<0,05) level on the strategic responsibility perceptions of the managers. Definiteness (determination) coefficient is determined as (R2) 0,324. Therefore, it is understood that the 32% of the change in the ethical responsibility perception depends on the strategic responsibility perception. Those results demonstrate that H3 hypothesis like "ethical responsibility perceptions of the business managers have influence upon the strategic responsibility perception" is acknowledged.

7. Conclusion

Theoretical framework of the research emphasizes the necessity of guided the businesses not only by profit motive but by the factors like social responsibility, social sensitivity and ethical responsibility also. For this conception businesses are technical, economic but the social systems as well. A system operates like a social structure. Therefore, the businesses should have social responsibility emotions not only for the customers, but also the competitors. Yet, the mechanism called as the market operates wholesomely in an environment where the competitors exist and the businesses could develop strategies only by seeing the future under the market conditions that operate wholesomely. Especially after the 1970s business management is evaluated not as the management of the specific businesses, but as the businesses in an overall economy and the issues are addresses by an approach called as business economy. Adaptation approaches, conditional dependency approaches appear as a result of the aforesaid trend. It is considered that there is an overall conciliation on the assumption that with all those different conception and approaches businesses have ethical social responsibilities, but they only become successful to an extent that they fulfill those responsibilities.

It is considered that the businesses should have a supporting function in the activities of the social stakeholders apart from the fact that they do not cause any harm on them dues to their activities. In one of the cases, an ethical behavior is not only explained by business advantage, but also it is addressed within the scope of the "common good" in terms the other businesses, competitors and all stakeholders. In the recent period its name turns into social sensitivity by going beyond the dimensions of institutional social responsibility, classical institutional social responsibility devoted to “benevolence”. There is a conviction that those developments will be advantageous in terms of continuing the existence of the business.

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