



Impact of Sustainability and Ethics Learning on Career Considerations

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Problem and Purpose. Developing effective, holistic curriculum and instructional strategies, requires a better understanding of the interrelationship of the three learning domains (cognitive, affective, and psychomotor). Learning outcomes related to career selection and satisfaction are increasing being examined in the apparel and textiles (AT) field (Hodges et al., 2010; Shim et al., 1999; Watchravesringkan et al., 2013). The purpose of this study was to apply the Knowledge, Attitude, and Behavior (KAB) model to examine the role of students' objective and subjective cognitive learning on their affective perceptions of sustainability and ethics, and further on their career intentions. This study looked at students across majors with the goal of creating a baseline of student intentions to select a career in a sustainable or ethical company that can be used to expand understanding of how the career intentions of students in the AT field are being impacted by curricula that focuses on sustainability and ethics.

Framework. Shim et al. (1999) used a values, attitude, behavior model to explore the relationship between various values and the choice of a retail career. Watchravesringkan et al. (2013) used a similar model, with the addition of self-assessed entrepreneurial knowledge to predict career intentions related to entrepreneurship. The research on a "first year experience" program by Schrader and Brown (2008) suggests that the KAB theory is a pragmatic approach to evaluating "participants' cognitive, affective, and behavioral constructs as they pertain to an intervention" (p 316). The KAB model examining the intention to seek a career in a sustainable or ethical company developed for this study has five constructs, which are operationalized* as follows. *Objective knowledge about sustainability and ethics:* This construct used three items measuring the extent to which a student has learned sustainability and ethical issues from classes, instructors, and overall coursework. *Subjective knowledge about sustainability and ethics:* This construct used two items measuring the extent to which a student believes he/she is informed and knowledgeable about sustainability and ethical issues. *Perceived importance of sustainable and ethical principles in workplace:* This construct used four items measuring how important the sustainable and ethical principles in workplace are to a student when he/she considers a career. *Personal obligation to consider sustainability and ethics in career situations:* This construct used one item measuring the extent to which a student feels an obligation to consider sustainability and ethical issues in his/her career. *Desire to pursue a career in sustainable and ethical workplace:* The two items measuring the extent to which a student wants to work in a career that would allow him/her to contribute to sustainability and work in an ethical manner were developed by the authors with a consideration of classical behavioral intention theories.

Methods and Results. An invitation to participate in an IRB approved online survey sent to the entire body of undergraduates (N=29,458) at a public university in the Southern U.S. The survey questionnaires included the instruments that measure the main constructs for this study. A final and valid sample size was a total of 1,480 (median age=20), which was used to conduct

structural model testing on both the empirical model and hypothesized construct relationships. Given the adequate measurement model fit ($\chi^2_{(df=26)} = 7.03, p = .00, GFI = .98; CFI = .98, NFI = .97, RMSEA = .06, RMR = .03$), the reliability and validity of all the measurements was ensured. Afterwards, the structural model was specified with objective knowledge as an exogenous variable and other four constructs as endogenous variables. With acceptable model fit ($\chi^2_{(df=46)} = 9.67, p = .00, GFI = .95; CFI = .95, NFI = .95, RMSEA = .08, RMR = .07$), the relationships among latent variables were examined. The effects of objective knowledge were significant on subjective knowledge ($\gamma = .36, p < .01$), and smaller but still significant on perceived importance ($\gamma = .07, p < .05$), and personal obligation ($\gamma = .06, p < .05$). The effects of subjective knowledge were significant on personal obligation ($\beta = .26, p < .01$) but not on perceived importance ($\beta = .01, p = .73$). The effects of perceived importance were significant on personal obligation ($\beta = .30, p < .01$) as well as on desire to pursue ($\beta = .49, p < .01$). The effects of personal obligation on desire to pursue were significant ($\beta = .34, p < .01$).

Conclusions and Implications. This study identified significant links between objective and subjective cognitive learning and the affective attitude of personal obligation to consider sustainability and ethical issues in a career situation which ultimately had a significant relationship to the intention to work in sustainable workplaces. Although students' perceived importance of sustainable principles for workplaces were not significantly increased by objective and subjective cognitive learning, it is encouraging to see that they can drive the personal obligation to consider sustainability and ethical issues in a career situation. This study is intended to provide a baseline upon which a deeper exploration of the role of AT curricula on fostering sustainable and ethical industry could be built. The study demonstrates that the students who have formed intentions to work in sustainable and ethical workplaces can be predicted by examining their attitudes and that those attitudes are shaped by their self-reported knowledge related to sustainability and ethics. These results should be used to bolster the dialog among AT faculty and also with the industry about how our curricula are impacting the expectations of students to work in a sustainable or ethical industry.

References

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*References for all the measurements can be provided upon request.