

# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH IN COMMERCE & MANAGEMENT

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**ENCOURAGING POSITIVE WORKPLACE BEHAVIOUR: ETHICS ON THE JOB**

**GEETU SHARMA**  
**ASST. PROFESSOR**  
**SHREE ATAM VALLABH JAIN COLLEGE**  
**LUDHIANA**

**ABSTRACT**

Have you ever experienced a situation at work in which a highly performing and highly skilled employee was accused of some inappropriate behaviour in the workplace? You probably watched, along with other employees, to see if the person being accused would be confronted if their behaviour was indeed determined to be unethical. Maybe you were disappointed because your organization overlooked the unethical behaviour due to the fact that the accused employee was such a "good" performer? Albert Einstein said, "A man's ethical behaviour should be based effectually on sympathy, education, social ties; no religious basis is necessary. Common Workplace Ethics ;Punctuality, Responsibility, Integrity, Loyalty, Teamwork, Positive attitude, Professionalism Most of us have experienced or witnessed some type of inappropriate behaviour in the workplace and have been involved or observed how our organization handled it. Many organizations do a good job of finding their moral grounding and deal with unethical behaviour when it is encountered. Other organizations may struggle even though they understand and value the importance of practicing good ethical behaviour in the workplace. Workplace ethics will help make the entire staff more satisfied with their jobs. Workplace ethics is the moral philosophy developed by a place of business that determines what is expected of employees in a particular setting. Unlike the difference in job descriptions, workplace ethics apply to all members of the organization and are used to determine what is the right, wrong and preferred way to behave at work. There are a number of reasons why developing a workplace code of ethics is important. It Sets The Rules, Equal Playing Field, Enhanced Reputation, and Values Drive Behaviour. When a business has a set of values that are shared and known by the entire staff, the environment will be conducive to values-driven. Knowing what is right and what is wrong, according to the workplace ethics, will naturally encourage behaviour that is consistent with the values. When an employee sees that he is continually being treated fair and in a way consistent with the ethics, it will encourage him to treat others fairly as well. It is a living example of the Golden Rule. The ethics code will also encourage members of the staff to react more positively to others, which will be passed on throughout the staff creating a contagious wave of positive actions. Work Ethics is invisible employee behaviour, noticeable by its absence. Ethics is something that is learned & chosen throughout one's life. It helps a lot in effective productivity as well as a great balance of responsibilities in your life on personal & professional front. Thus, Ethics are the difference between what you could do versus what is right to do.

**KEYWORDS**

workplace behaviour, job ethics.

**INTRODUCTION**

The versatility of life sometimes put us in front of situations where we really stuck in a tug of war between good and not good. Imagine a situation where a customer asked for a product from you. After telling him the price, he said he couldn't afford it. You know he could get it cheaper from a competitor. Should you tell him about the competitor or let him go without getting what he needs? What will you do? What are the issues you will think before coming to a conclusion? What your conscious says, if you know that one of your colleague is going to invest heavy money unknowingly that he is going to laid off very soon under the terms of company plans.

**ETHICS**

Ethics are about making choices that may not always feel good or seem like they benefit you but are the 'right' choices to make. They are the choices that are examples of 'model citizen' and are the examples of 'golden rules' like; don't hurt, don't steal, don't be dishonest, don't lie. But if we take Ethics as a subjective philosophy then what will happen to these golden rules. Especially at the time of facing any ethical dilemma how one should decide - what is ethical and what's unethical? Organization provides rules, regulations, code of conduct, protocols which provide guidelines to work, it shows how to walk, but it does not show the correct path to walk on. Ethical dilemmas faced by managers are often more real to life and highly complex with no clear guidelines, whether in law or often in religion. Ethics is the part of philosophy that talks about good and evil but today rarely any business school would have left which does not provide lessons on Ethics Management. Some philosophers call ethics the "science of morality", morality is what someone thinks or feels is good or bad. However, other philosophers believe that ethics is subjective. This means that they think what is right for me is whatever I say is right. This means that ethics is just a person's own morality. These philosophers do not think that ethics is the same for all people.

**MORALITY**

Again, what morally correct is not always ethically also. Morals and the expression, "moral values" are generally associated with a personal view of values. Personal morals tend to reflect beliefs relating to drinking, gambling, etc. They can reflect the influence of religion, culture, family and friends. These concepts and beliefs about right and wrong are often generalized and codified by a culture or group, and thus serve to regulate the behaviour of its members. Conformity to such codification may also be called *morality*, and the group may depend on widespread conformity to such codes for its continued existence.

**LAW**

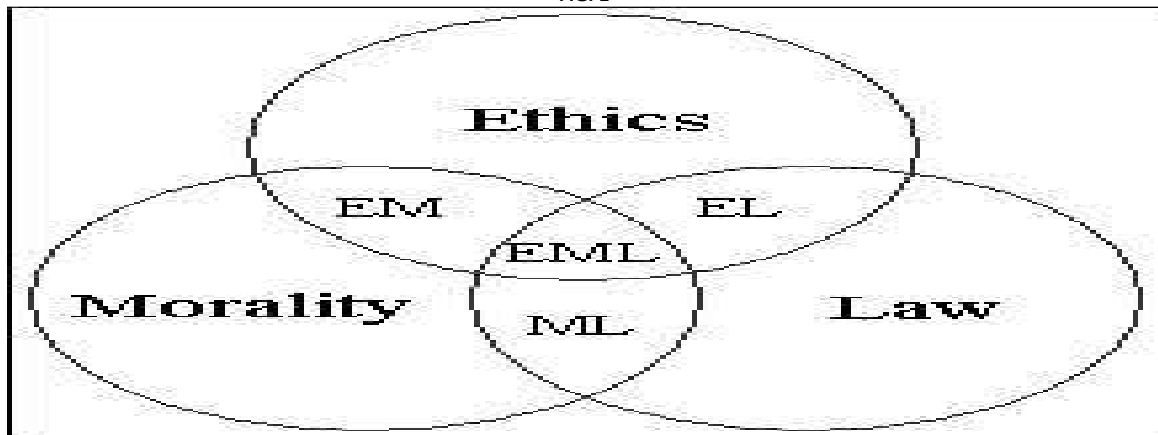
When we talk about Law at work place, we discuss the set of rules imposed by authority. In other words, law is a rule or body of rules of conduct inherent in organization and essential to or binding upon all the employees.

**ETHICS + MORALITY + LAW**

The systematic study of morality is a branch of philosophy called ethics. When Ethics seeks to address questions such as how one ought to behave in a specific situation ("*applied ethics*"), how one can justify a moral position ("*normative ethics*"), and how one should understand the fundamental nature of ethics or morality itself, including whether it has any objective justification ("*meta-ethics*").

Ethics is concerned with how a moral person *should* behave. Ethical values are beliefs concerning what is morally right and proper as opposed to what is simply correct or effective. An individual may personally believe that drinking is immoral. However, drinking is not, in and of itself, unethical. Game shows are a sophisticated way of gambling thus immoral but not unethical. Further, it is unethical to impose your personal moral values on another.

FIG. 1



Ethical values go above cultural, religious, or ethnic differences. Ethical values embrace a more universal worldview.

*Albert Einstein said, "A man's ethical behaviour should be based effectually on sympathy, education, social ties; no religious basis is necessary."* Sometimes, we have to do things which are legally correct but not morally, or go ethically right but not morally. At workplace we have to keep a proper balance of Morality, Ethics and Law. The safest place is where your action covers all the three aspects (EML). From the organization's point of view you must not cross the boundaries of law i.e. perform within EL, EM, L or EML. Further, an employee may not always follow the law sometime he could listen to his ethics but one should always have the answer of breaking the law of Work life.

In the words of great *Abraham Lincoln* – "When I do good, I feel good; when I do bad, I feel bad. That's my religion."

### ENCOURAGING POSITIVE WORKPLACE BEHAVIOUR: ETHICS ON THE JOB

Have you ever experienced a situation at work in which a highly performing and highly skilled employee was accused of some inappropriate behaviour in the workplace? You probably watched, along with other employees, to see if the person being accused would be confronted if their behaviour was indeed determined to be unethical. Maybe you were disappointed because your organization overlooked the unethical behaviour due to the fact that the accused employee was such a "good" performer?

### COMMON WORKPLACE ETHICS

- Punctuality
- Responsibility
- Integrity
- Loyalty
- Teamwork
- Positive attitude
- Professionalism

Most of us have experienced or witnessed some type of inappropriate behaviour in the workplace and have been involved or observed how our organization handled it. Many organizations do a good job of finding their moral grounding and deal with unethical behaviour when it is encountered. Other organizations may struggle even though they understand and value the importance of practicing good ethical behaviour in the workplace.

### APPROPRIATE WORKPLACE BEHAVIOURS

- Being respectful of the space of other employees
- Keeping conversations professional
- Demonstrating professional courtesy in meetings
- Remaining poised in difficult situations
- Approaching each difficult situation with diplomacys
- Understanding that sometimes saying nothing is better than saying something
- Preventing gossips at workplace

### INAPPROPRIATE WORKPLACE BEHAVIOURS'

- Interrupting an ongoing conversation with a personal question
- Using a loud voice in a common area
- Using slang or other derogatory comments
- Disregarding the feelings of others
- Being part of a clique
- Creating animosity among fellow co-corkers
- Posting your feelings electronically for others to read
- The water cooler gossips
- Becoming more than colleagues at work

### REASONS FOR WORKPLACE ETHICS

Workplace ethics will help make the entire staff more satisfied with their jobs. Workplace ethics is the moral philosophy developed by a place of business that determines what is expected of employees in a particular setting. Unlike the difference in job descriptions, workplace ethics apply to all members of the organization and are used to determine what is the right, wrong and preferred way to behave at work. There are a number of reasons why developing a workplace code of ethics is important.

#### ➤ It Sets The Rules

Workplace ethics set the rules of conduct for everyone at a particular business. One set of moral expectations at work applies to everyone from hourly employees to upper management. This set of rules provides detailed information on what is expected from everyone during the workday and it makes it clear when someone violates the ethical code and must be held responsible for their actions.



### ➤ Equal Playing Field

Workplace ethics helps to level the field when it comes to employee conduct. If everyone is clear on what kind of behaviour is considered acceptable and what is considered unacceptable, employees are able to point out when any member of the team has strayed from the moral obligation. The ethics policy adopted by a business also ensures that everyone is treated equally and with dignity, and it gives them a right to speak up when they feel that they have been treated in a way that is inconsistent with the workplace's code of ethics.

### ➤ Enhanced Reputation

Having a set of ethical standards that are obvious to everyone on the staff and easily recognized by outsiders will make the business' reputation more favourable with consumers or clients. When a breach of workplace ethics happens, clients will rest assured that the offender will be disciplined and that these types of occurrences will not be tolerated.

### ➤ Values Drive Behaviour

When a business has a set of values that are shared and known by the entire staff, the environment will be conducive to values-driven behaviour. Knowing what is right and what is wrong, according to the workplace ethics, will naturally encourage behaviour that is consistent with the values. When an employee sees that he is continually being treated fair and in a way consistent with the ethics, it will encourage him to treat others fairly as well. It is a living example of the Golden Rule. The ethics code will also encourage members of the staff to react more positively to others, which will be passed on throughout the staff creating a contagious wave of positive actions.

## HOW TO MANAGE ETHICS IN THE WORKPLACE

The usage of proper ethics in any workplace is vital to the success of the company. Unfortunately, companies fail and people sometimes even go to jail because of unethical decisions made at work. Follow these steps to manage ethics in the workplace.

### INSTRUCTIONS

- Communicate the company's ethics policy clearly to the employees. Posting it around the office and distributing it to employees is great, but you should have regular meetings in which everyone spends some time discussing ethics. Ask people to talk about examples of different ethical decisions. Review the rules and the reasons for them. Make it clear that the company won't tolerate unethical conduct and outline the consequences for it.
- Make it easy for employees to seek guidance when they need help making a decision. Employees may not always be sure what the ethical solution is. Therefore, it's the company's responsibility to provide the resources that they need to make the right decision. Someone should be available at all times with whom employees can discuss these issues.
- Create an atmosphere in which employees can trust their supervisors and know they can report violators of the ethics policy. Supervisors should keep employees who report violators anonymous and not make them face penalty. However, employees shouldn't feel like it's their responsibility to report violations.
- Set an example. Supervisors cannot expect employees to respect them if they don't follow the rules that they set. Model decision-making that embraces the ethical values that the company embraces. Employees will respect their supervisors more and will likely follow their example.

## ETHICS MANAGEMENT WORKSHOPS

Many organizations are providing Ethics management workshops for their employees to refrain them from such situations. There are a number of benefits such workshop bring in like,

- i. It removes undue stress which may result in the wrecked work relationship, low turnover, accidents etc.
- ii. It cultivates strong teamwork and productivity.
- iii. These programs are like insurance policy because even at the turbulent times a company can rely on its man force.
- iv. It builds good image of a company in market which provides such programs.
- v. Such programs give positive affect on Public relations.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF ETHICS IN THE WORKPLACE

I remember playing golf with my dad when I was young. He used to say to me, "Count every stroke, including your penalty strokes." Since I hit the ball out of bounds a lot, it wasn't easy giving myself the two-stroke penalty each time I hit the ball out of bounds. I certainly wasn't going to break any of Arnold Palmer's golf records. But, besides instilling in me the importance of keeping an honest golf score, my dad was teaching me another important life lesson about honesty. By keeping an accurate score each time I played, I could tell how much I was improving each time I played. The accuracy of my golf score helped me get better at playing golf because I knew what part of my game I needed to focus on. Thanks to my dad's wise golf advice, I have been able to apply that same life lesson to others areas of life, as well, including my work.

In an organization, workplace behaviour ethics should be a core value. Aside from doing the right thing, conducting ourselves ethically has great rewards and returns. Being ethical is essential to fixing problems and improving processes. It is needed to establish baseline measures and increase efficiencies. Most importantly, it is essential to having strong working relationships with people. On the other hand, covering up our unethical behaviour does the opposite of these important workplace practices and impedes on our ability to grow as leaders, as workers and as people.

### SELF-REFLECTION

Let's say that I believe that it is important to be an honest person. What do I do when I make an error at work? Do I admit it or do I cover my error and hope that no one finds out? I may rationalize, "If I tell my boss, she will be disappointed in me. I may not get that raise that is coming up next month. There is no harm in not telling her."

We humans tend to weigh the benefits and consequences of our actions and we look for the path of least resistance, where we will suffer the fewest consequences. When we are deciding what to do with our error, we need to ask ourselves, "Do I really value honesty like I say I do? If I am willing to lie to cover up my error, what am I really valuing?" When we lie to cover up our error, we are doing so to protect ourselves from the consequences of our actions. So, what is the greater value to us, honesty or self-protection?

As leaders, the importance of being ethical must be emphasized even more. Leaders must always be cognizant of the fact that they are in a "fishbowl" and how they behave is clearly visible to others. Whatever they do will not only be seen by others, but may be duplicated as well. So how do we ensure that we not only say that honesty is important, but that we "walk the talk?" Here are some important things to consider to shore-up your ethics in the workplace so that good behaviour is practiced and encouraged.

## TIPS FOR MANAGING ETHICS IN THE WORKPLACE

- ❖ **Define your values.** If you haven't done so already, define your values and include honesty as a core value. Take your leadership team off on a retreat or use your staff meetings, but make sure that you have clear and visible statements about what is important to your core business principles. Put them up on a poster so that they are visible to all employees. Post them on your website, put them in your policy manual and your employee handbook. And, add them to your performance review process so that you can hold people accountable to them.
- ❖ **If you post, you must practice** Posting values and then not actively demonstrating them can be very damaging to an organization's culture. Hold everyone accountable especially your senior management team. Make sure that they are "walking the talk" of ethical behaviour. If they are doing anything that even could be perceived as questionable, confront it.
- ❖ **Integrate ethical workplace behaviour into performance criteria.** Don't rate people as "high performers" if they do not practice ethical workplace behaviour. In still in your leaders that high performance means high integrity. They are not mutually exclusive. Don't give big raises, promotions, etc. to

people who perform “well,” but have questionable ethical behaviour. Don’t let a highly skilled employee hold you “hostage.” Don’t let people get away with bending the rules of appropriate workplace behaviour just because you don’t have a good backup plan for them if they quit and go to your competitor. Make sure you have a succession plan in place for anyone who has a skill that is critical to your success.

- ❖ **Watch out for the “slippery slope.”** Have you ever used the term, “his behaviour really crossed the line?” Each workplace has a “line” that separates appropriate behaviour from the inappropriate. Organizations get into “hot water” when they define or ignore some unethical behaviour because it is considered to be a “small” issue or “no big deal.” When they do this, they are moving their “line” farther down the slippery slope. Many companies who have been sued for large amounts of money due to ethical issues were allowing way too much unethical behaviour because their “line” kept sliding down the “slippery slope.” Businesses must stand firm on their intolerance of any and all dishonesty and unethical behaviour.
- ❖ **Being above reproach.** Above reproach is the practice of not only staying above the “line,” but staying way above it. Ethical organizations manage perception, as well as reality. They ensure that even those types of behaviour that might look like unethical behaviour are discouraged as well and drive this point with their leadership team.
- ❖ **Getting past self-protective behaviour.** Remember that ethical behaviour is not just about me knowing right from wrong, it is about my willingness to admit it when I have done something wrong and accepting the consequences for my actions. It is about valuing integrity even if it hurts. Good leaders not only practice ethical behaviour themselves, they help people get past looking out just for themselves and seeing the greater good of team and corporate objectives.

Ethical behaviour makes organizations succeed. A business that does not value integrity and does not “walk the talk” of being ethical will find themselves at the bottom of the slippery slope and wonder when and how they crossed the “line.” This is why we need ethics in the workplace.

## CONCLUSION

Work Ethics is invisible employee behaviour, noticeable by its absence. Ethics is something that is learned & chosen throughout one’s life. It helps a lot in effective productivity as well as a great balance of responsibilities in your life on personal & professional front. Thus, Ethics are the difference between what you could do versus what is right to do.

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