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ETHICAL WORKPLACE CULTURE: A KEY TO EMPLOYEE SATISFACTION

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ABSTRACT

In the day's globalization, it is highly necessary to understand and also interpret workplace culture. Workplace culture has been considered as one of important core competencies of an organization. Culture influences people in good and bad ways. Culture creates the identity for the organization. The individuals, groups and the organization as a whole are running under its culture although it is almost intangible. In an ideal workplace, structures and relationships will work together around core values that transcend self-interest. Core values will inspire value-creating efforts as employees feel inspired to do what is right, even when the right thing is hard to do. The main aim of research article is to identify strategies for strengthening organizational culture and how to create and sustain an ethical workplace culture. The paper also identifies the common workplace dilemmas that the employees face on regular basis in employment. Thus a study of the workplace culture helps the organizations to formulate policies directed towards enhanced effectiveness of human resources.

KEYWORDS

organizational culture, employee satisfaction, human resources, globalisation.

INTRODUCTION

Today's organization is predominantly dynamic as it poses large opportunities and challenges to the corporate practitioners and policy makers. Understanding such dynamism is very crucial to pursue the organizational strategic objectives. **Ethics - the values an organization demonstrates in its goals, policies and practices - are the heart of any workplace culture.** And the quality of experience in an organization depends on the quality of its culture. Whether we are employees, customers or clients, a positive culture enlivens and enriches our experience of a firm - and a negative culture diminishes it. Good organizational culture creates good society as well as good citizens. So the impact of culture plays a major contribution in any society. Workplace culture is the "binder" that combines people together and makes them part of the organization experience. A strong corporate culture refers to how broadly and steeply employees hold the company's strong values and beliefs. Organizational culture guides the sense-making process. It aids employees understand what happens and why things happen in the organization. Culture of corporate also makes it simple for them to understand what will be expected of them and to join with colleagues who are well versed with the culture and believe in the organization. People are constantly surrounded by culture. It forms the strong background of working area, colouring everything in an organization. Organizational culture also gives a powerful tool for regulating behaviour by affecting how we attach benefit to our world and how we perceive events.

Employees within an organization make choices and decisions everyday guided by their culture and ethical workplace climate that will impact the overall success of the organization. Employee engagement affects several business outcomes such as customer loyalty, profitability, productivity, employee turnover, and satisfaction.

Organizational culture has been received extraordinary attention ever since the concept was proposed by American scholars in 1980's. By contrast with the management practice in Japanese companies, the concept of organizational culture was proposed and related theories were developed. The academia and managerial practitioners have reached the consensus that organizational culture is the core competency for an organization. It will impact effectiveness or performance of the individuals, the groups and the whole organization. Employee satisfaction reflects the psychological state of the individuals working in an organization. Although it is implicit, it will obviously impact the employee's performance. Organizational culture can have an influence on employee satisfaction. The relationship between them should be clarified in order to provide managerial practitioners with more meaningful guidance to their practices.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To study the strategies for strengthening organizational culture.
2. To identify the ways to create and sustain an ethical workplace culture.
3. To study the models of ethical workplace culture.
4. To explore the ethical practices in organizations and the study of employee ethics.
5. An attempt to study common ethical workplace dilemmas.

THE IMPORTANCE OF ETHICS IN THE WORKPLACE

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 shore-up your ethics in the workplace so that good behaviour is practiced and encouraged.

STRATEGIES FOR STRENGTHENING ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

1. Actions of founders and leaders: Founders develop the systems and structures that support their personal values. The founder's cultural imprint often remains with the organization for decades. Wal-Mart, the discount retailer, has a deeply embedded customer satisfaction value long after its founder Sam Walton passed

away. Transformational leaders strengthen organizational culture by communicating and enacting their vision of the future. Cultural values are particularly reinforced when leaders behave in ways that are consistent with the vision. James Preston did this when he became CEO of Avon. He dismantled the boys' club culture by promoting women into more senior positions. Today, 44 percent of Avon's senior vice presidents are women.

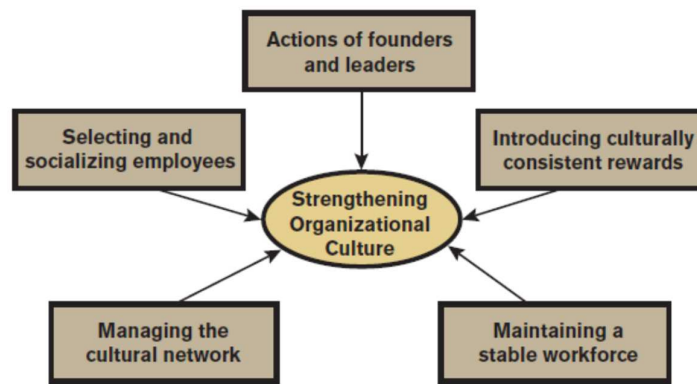
2. Introducing culturally consistent rewards: Reward systems strengthen corporate culture when they are consistent with cultural values. Aggressive cultures might offer more performance-based individual incentives, whereas paternalistic cultures would more likely offer employee assistance programs, medical insurance, and other benefits that support employee wellbeing. Employees at the Atlanta-based home improvement retail chain receive stock incentives which the company hopes will support a value system of customer.

3. Maintaining a stable workforce: An organization's culture is embedded in the minds of its employees. Organizational stories are rarely written down; rituals and celebrations do not usually exist in procedure manuals; organizational metaphors are not found in corporate directories. Thus, organizations depend on a stable workforce to communicate and reinforce the dominant beliefs and values. Corporate culture also weakens during periods of rapid expansion or mergers because it takes time for incoming employees to learn about and accept the dominant corporate values and assumptions.

4. Managing the cultural network: Organization culture is learned, so an effective network of cultural transmission is necessary to strengthen the company's underlying assumptions, values, and beliefs. The cultural network exists through the organizational grapevine. It is also supported through frequent opportunities for interaction so that employees can share stories and rituals. Company magazines and other media can also strengthen organizational culture by communicating cultural values and beliefs more efficiently.

5. Selecting and socializing employees: A good person-organization fit also improves job satisfaction and organizational loyalty because new hires with values compatible to the corporate culture adjust more quickly to the organization. Job applicants are also paying more attention to corporate culture during the hiring process. By diagnosing the company's dominant culture, it is more likely to determine whether its values are compatible with your own. Along with selecting people with compatible values, companies maintain strong cultures through the effective socialization of new employees. **Organizational socialization** refers to the process by which individuals learn the values, expected behaviours, and social knowledge necessary to assume their roles in the organization. By communicating the company's dominant values, job candidates and new hires are more likely to internalize these values quickly and deeply.

FIGURE 1: STRENGTHENING ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE



CREATING AND SUSTAINING AN ETHICAL WORKPLACE CULTURE

A well-used axiom in organizational behaviour thought asserts that *values* ultimately drive our *behaviour*. In a nutshell, values exert influence over our attitudes, and attitudes influence our behaviour. Values are integral to attitude formation and to how we respond to people and situations. In practice, six categories of virtuous values are intertwined. For example, the capacity to administer resources fairly and offer fair guidance to stakeholders along the way is supported by courage and integrity. Difficult decisions surrounding the allocation of limited resources leave some individuals and groups with less than they would prefer. The redeeming grace is the perception that such decisions are made with fairness and integrity. Unpopular decisions are easier to accept when they are perceived to be derived fairly and with integrity. Driving ethical behaviour with values and attitudes requires that there be alignment among values, attitudes, and behaviour. Examples of this alignment between each of the virtuous values, associated attitudes, and behaviour are offered in Table 1.

TABLE 1: VALUES —> ATTITUDE —> ETHICAL BEHAVIOR CHAIN

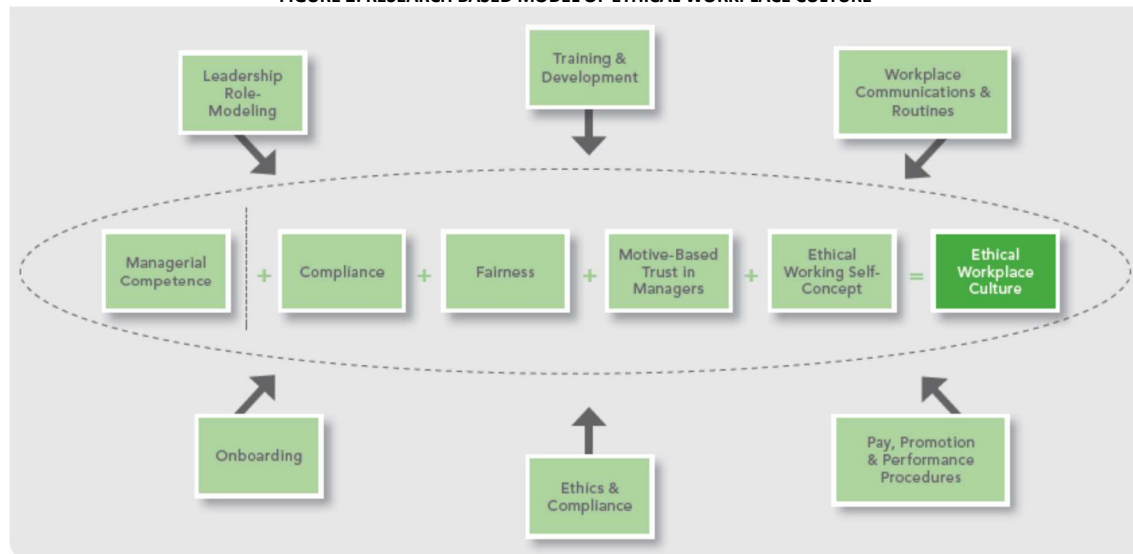
Value	Attitude	Ethical Behavior
Wisdom and Knowledge	Experience promotes wisdom that helps convert information to knowledge.	Using knowledge to solve problems ethically and to do what is right.
Self-Control	Self-control means effectively managing reactions to challenging situations and temptations.	Putting personal motivations aside and acting with objectivity by doing what is right.
Justice	Acting justly and fairly is a long-term driver of ethical behaviour; remember the "Golden Rule."	Establishing just and mutually agreed upon criteria and administering them fairly to all people.
Transcendence	The belief in a power and source outside oneself reduces self-serving actions and increases humility.	Putting institutional and/or stakeholder interests above self interests. Identifying a personal purpose that is aligned with organizational mission.
Love and Kindness	Treating people with kindness helps increase the reservoir of positive affection and love.	Recognizing and encouraging others for their contributions.
Courage and Integrity	Ethics requires the courage to do the right things consistently without regard to personal consequences.	Making unpopular decisions based on fair consideration of the facts.

ETHICAL WORKPLACE CULTURE: THREE MODELS

The extent to which an organization's managers and leaders leverage the four building blocks discussed above will determine the type of ethical workplace culture they shape. The ethical culture of most organizations falls into one of three models:

- 1. Compliant ethical workplace cultures** promote the minimum ethical standards required by law, regulation and social convention. Concerns about justice and fairness are limited to contractual obligations and commitments, such as respect for employees' rights and respect for employer's property.
- 2. Positive ethical workplace cultures** go beyond the legal bare minimum by ensuring that self-transcending values and expectations are clearly communicated to all managers and employees and by ensuring that all employees adhere to the highest levels of justice and fairness. Furthermore, positive ethical cultures encourage their managers to become role models and to learn from the ethical dilemmas that inevitably arise in conducting business.
- 3. Virtuous ethical workplace cultures** pursue the highest standards and levels of compliance and justice and make adherence to self-transcending values a priority. Ethical values are synonymous with a firm's value-creating, core competencies. Ethics also forms a substantial part of managers' performance evaluations.

FIGURE 2: RESEARCH BASED MODEL OF ETHICAL WORKPLACE CULTURE



Source: SHRM Effective Guideline Practices

METHODS FOR MANAGING ETHICAL WORKPLACE

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.

1. 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.

2. 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.

3. Integrate ethical workplace behaviour into performance criteria: Don’t rate people as “high performers” if they do not practice ethical workplace behaviour. Instill 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.

4. 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. Businesses must stand firm on their intolerance of any and all dishonesty and unethical behaviour.

5. 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.

6. Getting past self-protective behaviour: 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.

COMMON ETHICAL WORKPLACE DILEMMAS

Most people spend a great deal of their weekdays at their offices or job sites. It’s not surprising, then, that employees face ethical dilemmas there. Several of these dilemmas pop up on a regular basis. With some common sense and a bit of analysis, employees can resolve common workplace dilemmas without losing their jobs or bringing harm to their employer.

1. Conducting Personal Business on Company Time

Because employees tend to spend so much of their weekday hours on the job, they often are tempted to conduct personal business on company time. This can include setting up doctor’s appointments on company phone lines, making vacation reservations using their employer’s computers and Internet connections or even making phone calls for a freelance side business while on company time. At first glance, this ethical dilemma is fairly clear: It is an abuse of your employer to conduct personal business on company time. But there are shades of gray here. What if your spouse calls to tell you that your children are ill? Is it OK for you to schedule a doctor’s appointment? A good rule of thumb is for an employee to check with his manager or human resources supervisors to clarify what counts as an actionable offense in the company.

2. Taking Credit for Others’ Work

Employees often work in teams to create marketing campaigns, develop new products or fine-tune services, yet rarely does everyone in a group contribute equally to the final product. If three members of a five-person team did all the work, do those three members demand to receive proper credit while pointing out that two members of the team did not pull their weight? This is a thorny question. If employees single out their co-workers in a negative light, it could foment resentment. The same thing could happen, however, if all employees accept equal praise even though only a select few did the real work. The best way to resolve this ethical dilemma is to not let it happen. Team members should insist that all employees perform specific tasks to help complete a project.

3. Harassing Behaviour

Employees often don’t know what to do if they see one of their co-workers harassing another employee, either mentally, sexually or physically. Employees may worry for their jobs if they attempt to report a superior for harassment. They may fret that they’ll be labelled a troublemaker if they report co-workers who display inappropriate behaviour toward other employees. The best way to resolve this ethical dilemma rests with the staff members who develop the company’s employee handbook. It is their job to include specific language that spells out that employees won’t be punished for reporting the harassing behaviour or inappropriate actions of their co-workers.

TABLE 2

	Compliance is required with ...	Employees are treated fairly according to the standards of...	Management builds motive-based trust by ...	Formation of an ethical working self-concept by all employees is ...
Virtuous workplace culture	Law & self-transcending ethical values tied to firm's value-creating competencies	Law & self-transcending values tied to firm's value-creating competencies	Evaluating all managers on trust-building behaviors & attributes	Actively fostered and facilitated
Positive workplace culture	Law & self-transcending ethical values	Law & self-transcending ethical values	Encouraging & supporting all managers to model ethics	Encouraged
Compliant workplace culture	Law & social convention	Law & social convention	Chance & ad hoc interactions	Not activated

Source: SHRM Effective Guideline Practices

CONCLUSION

High ethics creates high trust. High trust creates high performance. Building an ethical workplace culture requires equal skills in policy-making and relationship-building and equal emphasis on procedures and values. Structural concerns like codes, training and clear criteria matter, but so do storytelling, mentoring and presiding over an organization's routines and ceremonies. In an ideal workplace, structures and relationships will work together around core values that transcend self-interest. Core values will inspire value-creating efforts as employees feel inspired to do what is right, even when the right thing is hard to do. The ethics of our workplace cultures matter because the work itself matters and requires the cooperation that only positive, virtuous ethics can sustain. Compliance keeps us out of trouble, but virtuous ethics will create value for our co-workers and for our organization. The job performance of organization has a strong impact of strong organization culture as it leads to enhance productivity. The norms and values of organization based upon different cultures influence on work force management. In an organization strong culture enables to effective and efficient management of work force employees. The net profit in an organization helps in enhancing performance of employees. The common path for making perfect use of resources in same cultural association helps in positive development of organization. On basis of particular conditions organizational culture is helpful in improving and providing competitive edge. The employee commitment and group efficiency helps in improving performance based upon organization sustainability. The nature and power of organization culture influence upon sustainability and effective of organization.

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