



WORK ETHICS AND VALUE SYSTEM - A FACT FINDING STUDY OF CORPORATE PRACTICES

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Abstract

The concept of work ethics and value system is a strategic factor which shapes how efficiently the companies do business. Ethics in work and value system touches every facet of Human Resource. Efficient incorporation of these concepts optimizes the human capital of the organisation.

In this era of global competition, ethics and value system comes as a survival technique, and this paper is an attempt to publicize the tremendous growth opportunity of it as a sustainability technique.

The rapid growth of companies globally, poses numerous puzzles. Why it is occurring, and why do people care about it? This paper proposes an explanation for many of these puzzles in terms of the increasing importance of work ethics and value system in the organizations.

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It has to be recognized that the appearance of a code of ethics in an increasing number of companies reflect a generalized ethical concern or at least, the idea that, without a customary ethical behaviour, the company in the long run, cannot work efficiently. The paper identified six ethical dilemmas with work environment of a business. The firm cannot sustain without addressing the ethical dilemmas for a long time as it needs to shift its benefits offered to its employees in line with the changing business scenario.

Business transaction is a moral challenge to see that both parties come out fairly. The spirit of the Golden Rule or of win-win, is a spirit of morality, of mutual benefit, of fairness, for all concerned."

-ADAM SMITH

Introduction

The current business scenario is very turbulent and with new business emerging from different ideas, the very base on which a firm had been thriving is threatened. Or is it? The study attempts to view the concept of ethics and values in the working environment and answer the question like "What is ethics? – and what value the work environment is creating for the sustainability?"

"TSMCHASTRNM PRAMANAM KARYAKARVAYASTHITAO GYATVA SHASTRAVIDHANOKTAM KARM KURTUMIHAHIRSI."

-THE BHAGWAT GITA IN 16-24

This means let the shastras be your authority in deciding what you should do and you should desist from doing. Here the shastras are nothing, but the 'codes' of best practice developed by various institutions.

The subject of work ethics has dramatically been brought to the forefront following the breakdown of governance in institutional companies. Work ethics is a framework of institutional and cultural factors shaping the pattern of influence that the people exert on the process of work.

The paper deals with analysing the business through a value perspective. Efficient incorporations of these concepts optimize the human capital of the organisation

and productivity. The paper analyses some of the ethical dilemmas of the current work environment. It goes on to explain the need for the reassessment of the current issues and suggest a shift towards more ethical friendly work practices.

Background

Little more than a decade, the concept of work ethics has grown from the interest of few philosophers and business scholars into an interdisciplinary area of study that has found a secure niche both liberal arts and standard business curriculum.

What are Ethics and Value Systems in the World of Work Environment?

The American Webster's new world dictionary defines ethics as adhering or confirming to moral standards, generally, or in a given profession or a group. Working ethically is working responsibly.

Dictionary meanings of 'value' are – 'worth', 'merit', 'usefulness', 'importance of things'. Value denotes the motive and/or basis for choosing between alternative courses of action, when an important decision needs to be taken. Thus, values influence the process of decision making.

Value can also be defined as the manner in which an individual tends to make judgement as choices, both about goals and means at different facets of it, as are deemed to lead to the well-being and happiness of oneself and society.

Values are governed by ethics. Values decides one's attitude. If these values are practiced in day-to-day management practices with the soul objectives of common welfare, we are managing by values.

A standard 'code of ethics' in work is needed in an organisation for its growth and nourishment because without which there cannot be a healthy development. Thus, 'ethics and work' in turn supplements the individual growth of an employee. According to the value based management, upholding the larger interest of the organisation against individual interest is the 'ethics in work'.

Work is Worship

'Work is worship' is the prescription of every religion, culture and civilisation of the world. Work done by an individual produces outputs which benefits others in the society. Back to Vedas, our Vedic literature abounds in concepts and theories relating to the ethics in work environment. Gita also suggested work for

'loksangrah'. Here desire for self would be outweighed by desire to accrue benefits for others. "Desire to do well for others, for the organisation for the world is a wholesome and to date against the desire for the self... work ethics will then be the by-product.

Ethical Code of Conduct – Is it Mandatory?

Ethical practices (corporate ethics) are too critical subject to be left to chance. Quite often, left to individual discretion, what is ethics takes different shapes and colours, including some blanks.

Much as this is important, however, caught in the midst of the pulls, pushes and the changing environment of the business world, it is difficult, if not impossible to provide ready directory of what constitutes of being ethical under different conditions, and it is here that one begins to see the value of people's maturity levels, skills, knowledge and attitudes to the point where they can be self-led and function on their own.

It is also very likely that the information available itself could be patchy, coloured and clouded because of multiple points of use or that some situations could demand maturity, courage, sacrifice and objectivity- qualities which tend to be generally in short supply. Besides, in the rush to succeed, or in the knowledge that one would not be in the same position for long, it may be convenient at times to view ethical issues as something to remote to warranty any serious thought.

Written Code of Conduct

So as not to leave it to chance, an organisation should develop its ethical code in writing. To be meaningful it should be a brief, clearly worded, living document that spells the organisations values is routinely articulated and reviewed and religiously followed. In any way, it has to be recognized that the appearance of a code of ethics is an increasing number of companies reflects a generalized ethical concern, or atleast the idea that without a customary ethical behaviour the company in the long run cannot work efficiently.

Ethics in Leadership

Business today is a complex piece of mechanism with increasing outsourcing, franchising, sub contracting, human rights and anti child movements, and

mounting competition, etc...etc...it would get yet more complex and complicated in the days to come.

Ethics – what is right and what is wrong is not a matter of white and black; there is a considerable range of greys in between. It is about the transparency in dealings and the belief in the leadership is being ethical, upright and honest. Leadership should try to develop human values by setting examples.

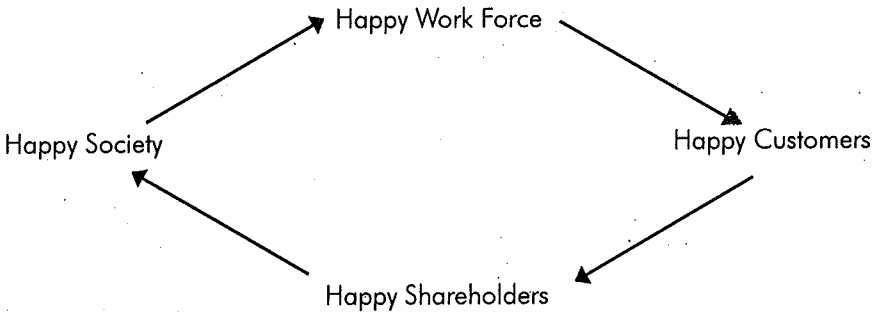
In the words of the great Tamil Seer Tiruvallur who lived 2000 years ago, business ethics unfolds like this

“Vaanigum Seivaarku Vaanigum;
Peinip Piravum Thamopole Seyin”

“Business is required to be transacted with uprightness of the heart, espousing the interests or money of others as our own; give not less and take not more”

It is the leadership who has to take responsibility for deciding what values and standards to espouse and what kind of an identity or self image they need to promote in the organization.

The winning combination should be:-



A work culture that creates a sense of commitment and loyalty that is the concept of happy work force. The management must try to add value to the people and enhance the employability of individuals. Then this will automatically transfer to the customers and to the shareholders and thereby creating a happy society as a cycle.

The role of ethics in work according to Aristotle lead successful rewarding lives- the kind of lives that we could call “the good life.”

Ethical Dilemma in Work Environment

What is dilemma? 'A situation that requires one to choose between two equally balanced and often equally unpleasant alternatives' More usually we can think of it as choice between two partial rights each of which has a degree of wrong mixed in with it.

What are the ethical dilemma in Work Environment?

1. Values and goal conflict
2. Employee privacy
3. Whistle blowing
4. Discrimination
5. Coercion
6. Downsizing or right sizing

1. Values and Goal Conflict

An unclear job description, ambiguity about an employee's role and conflicting expectations about values employees should uphold within the context of the organisation are potential grey areas and can cause ethical dilemmas for employees or Human Resource Managers.

2. Employee Privacy

Why do we value privacy so highly and hold that it ought to be protected as an employee right? Certainly, we desire to have a sphere of our life in which others do not possess certain information about us.

It is the responsibility of the organisation, more specifically; the HR or logical compliance manager to ensure personal information about the employee is safeguarded.

3. Whistle Blowing

There can be situations in which managers and staff feel particularly strongly about what they see as ethical issues, but have no 'safe' route by which to get their concern heard.

Whether to blow the whistle on misconduct in an organisation is the most difficult decision that some people ever have to make. The decision is wrenching personally because the stakes are so high. The decision is also difficult ethically, since whistle blowing involves a conflict between two competing duties: to protect the public and to be loyal to an organisation.

4. Discrimination

The term 'discrimination' describes a person deprived of some benefit or opportunity because of membership in some group towards which there is substantial prejudice. Discrimination in employment which is our concern here generally arises from the decisions made by the employers about hiring, promotion, pay, fringe benefits, and the other terms and conditions of employment that directly affect the economic interests of employees. Discrimination in a form of unequal treatment. It creates an economically inefficient matching of equal two jobs.

5. Coercion

This is likely to be more of an issue in one-on-one meetings or during team building sessions, where the consultant or leader managing asks for inappropriate information. In this situation, leader is attempting to leverage their authority to their own advantage, from an unwilling subordinate by putting them in an uncomfortable position.

6. Downsizing and Right Sizing

Achieving a good financial performance necessarily demands a sound staffing pattern and this amounts to the loss of workforce in the name of downsizing. The reading out of underperforming employees is getting justified in the name of rightsizing by many of the management thinkers; this requires a thorough debate on the possible implications and ethical perspective of the act.

The adoptability of this method to both public and private sector organisations depicts the human values and ethical concerns that have to be taken into account. The pursuit of the downsizing policy contradicts the employee retention policy. The employee's emotional attachment to the organisation will be at stake if downsizing is prescribed as a profit making strategy.

Resolving Dilemmas

How can people cope with the ethical dilemma that they face at work?

It is time to stop feeling helpless and to see that there are ways in which you can bring together the kind of person you want to be in your private life and the kind of person your company wants to be in its public life.

The ethical standards of a manager or a worker should not be changed or ignored just because the context changes. From an investigative standpoint, HR managers should also try to explore the origin of certain issues that led to the ethical dilemma in the first place. This modelling of an approach to ethical dilemmas may appear cumbersome at first sight, and for managers who have not been able to clarify their own values or who work in an unsympathetic climate it may seem to be quite irksome. This kind of approach has been found to be useful in practice and it does become easier with practice.

Another important dimension is to employ a thoughtful, dispassionate and objective non-pattern approach to ensure mutual perception of employee's and employer's interest. Human Resource Management should be the outspoken advocate of Economic interest. Its role is not to win arguments, but to ensure that people's issues are given the attention they deserve.

Conclusion

In this era of global competition, ethics and value system comes as a survival technique, and this paper is an attempt to publicize the tremendous growth opportunity of it as sustainability techniques. The paper identified six ethical dilemmas with work environment of a business. The firm cannot sustain without addressing the ethical dilemmas for a long time as it needs to shift its benefits offered to its employees in line with the changing business scenario.

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