

Work Ethics

For Industrial Harmony to exist, the employer and employee need to align their ethical obligations

By
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Work is basically an exchange process in which an employee renders a service (be it intellectual or manual) for which the employer pays. It is about value creation and reward. As established by McGregor in his theory Y analysis, work gives as much joy to employees as leisure. The reward system (monetary and non-monetary) must, therefore, be such as to encourage the average employee to trade off leisure for work. While monetary incentive may be an initial motivating factor to work extra hours, it loses its potency to motivate beyond a certain level if the Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is anything to go by. Whatever the motivating factor, it is obvious that employees are not paid for doing the things they like. They are paid to get the right things done, that is, for effectiveness. The desired effectiveness cannot be achieved without some agreed rules. In fact, some acceptable pattern of behaviour, often described as work ethics, must exist in order to avoid unsavoury and uncivilised conduct in work places.

Work ethics can simply be defined as the generally acceptable rules of conduct that govern a given work environment. In essence, what may be acceptable in one environment may not be acceptable under a different work setting. But generally, behavioural codes in workplaces are designed to guide and regulate the disposition of employees to corporate objectives, build up better relationships between employees and make the work place conducive enough for the consummation of productive activities.

Activities in workplaces involve exchange, decision making and value judgements that border on ethical issues. While the organisation exists to fulfil certain obligations, the employee has his/her own objectives to achieve. For a

harmonious relationship, both objectives must be aligned, albeit, at some price. Thus, there are two classes of ethical obligations that subsist in the workplace: employer's obligations and employee's standard of conduct. How well an employee manages the delicate balance between self-interest, corporate goal and societal aspirations, depends on his/her level of education, professional training, on-the-job and out-of-the-job experiences and access to information. The following are the basic work ethics:

Employer's obligations:

1. For the employee to continuously create and add value to corporate results, he requires up-to-date specialised skill, information and materials, which the employer must provide.
2. The employer must also provide an enabling industrial environment in which work can be done. Hostility in the

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work environment or undue show of authority is a negation of this philosophy. Empathy with the employees is crucial since they are human.

3. However, the employer must consistently and equitably reward excellence and punish indolence/mediocrity. In addition to the promotion

of affirmative actions, its employment policies must give equal opportunities to all irrespective of race, colour or creed.

4. An employer must continuously stress the importance of the efforts of all staff in the drive towards the achievement of corporate success. Thus, leadership strategy must be such as to enable employees appreciate their relevance in the corporate structure.

5. Besides, the employer must deliberately groom the employee to take on greater leadership responsibilities. Implicit in this assertion is the concept of delegation. It is an acceptable work ethic for leaders to delegate some functions and powers to their subordinates as this ensures that operations are not stalled in the absence of the big boss, reduces cost of operations as well as give leaders the ample chance to think of the future of the organisation.

6. Employers must set a dress code, which should reflect the corporate culture of the environment as this contributes to the positive rating of the organisation in the eyes of the public.

7. Employers must create a sense of job security, self-esteem and self-fulfillment among employees in order to elicit absolute fidelity. In essence, employers must make it possible for employees to satisfy higher order needs beyond the physiological needs of food, clothing and shelter.

8. To promote the revered ethical values of honesty, integrity and transparency, the employer must put in place a firm policy on incentive gifts.

9. The employer **must walk his talk**. He must not only lead by example, he must be able to financially support the corporate culture he wants employees to imbibe.

Employee's Obligations

10. Since the reward an employee

receives for his service enables him to meet his obligations to his immediate and extended families, he must resolutely defend that source of livelihood. Such defence is a function of the quantum/adequacy of reward. Reward must necessarily be handsome and commensurate to service provided.

11. A well-paid employee owes a duty to his employer to be loyal, maintain the material and confidentiality of information (trade secret) he acquires in the course of his duty. To divulge business/trade secrets to competitors for personal gains amounts to corporate "treason."

12. Therefore, at all times, he must see himself as the representative or agent of the organisation and must act in a manner that will promote the objective, continued existence and prosperity of the organisation. To do otherwise amounts to disloyalty.

13. In this respect, he must discharge his duty with the highest level of technical competence and integrity as dictated by his professional calling. He must not compromise his integrity, independence, professional standard or sense of fair play for any pecuniary or non-pecuniary gains. In fact, he should not take undue advantage of his position to enrich himself, punish other employees or short change his employer or the larger society.

14. It is unethical for a loyal employee to accept jobs for which he is not technically competent because of **extra-official reasons** since the ultimate cost of the learning process will negatively impact on economic results.

15. An employee is also ethically bound to make available to his employer any information he has that can have positive impact on corporate performance or vitiate the attainment of corporate goals.

16. An employee must cultivate the habit of reliability by telling the truth at all times, accurately passing on information, avoid gossips that will damage the cordial relationship between employees. To be economic with the truth does not only demean the integrity of an employee, it reduces the quantum of trust that can be placed in him. To be trusted, as one expert noted, you must be trustworthy.

17. He must defend the cause of the organisation in the true spirit of collective responsibility once a decision on an issue has been taken by management even if he personally disagrees with the policy.

18. He must learn to build consensus among colleagues in order to engender team spirit and commitment of all. He must also learn to build on the strength of his subordinates, colleagues and superiors and not on their weaknesses.

19. Objectivity and equity must underlie all corporate decisions taken. In fact, they must learn to make effective and right decisions on the basis of adversarial proceedings as noted by Peter Drucker. No discrimination on the basis of sex, tribe, religion, consanguinity or race should be practised in any corporate setting.

20. Since the organisation obtains its existence from the resources of a given society, it must contribute towards the maintenance of that environment. Therefore, an employee must encourage his employer and in fact ensure that his organisation contributes towards the enhancement of the environment in which it has its being through payment of appropriate taxes, non-involvement in illegal businesses, promotion of projects that will be beneficial to the citizenry, etc. For professional accountants, for instance, social responsibility and environmental accounting are now to be

emphasised in corporate reports.

21. In summary therefore, like professional codes, work ethics are often designed to enhance the harmony in the industry through the promotion of acceptable mannerisms. It behoves on all employees to imbibe the cherished values of their different workplaces.

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