

Ethics at Workplace

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Abstract– Human resource management deals with manpower planning and development related activities in an organization. It is that branch of management where ethics really matters most, since it concerns human issues specially those of compensation, development, industrial relations and health and safety issues. Ethics in HRM has acquired significance today because of several examples of unethical behaviour on the part of organizations, like unfair labour practices and employees failing to keep up the minimum productivity and output expected of them. Ethics is important for the overall performance of the organization. Good ethics have a beneficial effect on organizational well being. It helps in productivity improvement, risk reduction, better relations with customers and clients and an increasing flow of communication. This paper explores some of the ethical dilemmas encountered in the workplace and the ethical behaviour and values that relate to HR.

Keywords: Ethics, Ethical work environment.

I. INTRODUCTION

Ethics is a societal discussion of what ought to be considered for overall human well-being, including the broader concepts of fairness, justice and injustice, what rights and responsibilities are operable under certain situations, and what virtues a society admires and wants to emphasize. Human Resource Management is a business function that is concerned with managing relations between groups of people in their capacity as employees, employers and managers. Ethics is the bedrock on which all the relationships are built; it's about how employers, employees, co-workers, customers, Communities and suppliers are related to each other. Ethical behavior is affected by both the characteristics of individuals and the characteristics of organizations. Expectations of ethical behaviour are typically communicated to employees through a code of conduct, policy, training and the role model behaviour of top management. If fairness and justice are important to achieve the goals of ethics, HR function can play a key role in fostering fairness in the organization. Any failure to foster fairness in the HR policies can undermine the organizational attempts to encourage ethical behaviour. A person's membership in the organization should be valued and the organization should respect him. Such a feeling becomes a precursor for commitment and involvement with the goals of the organization.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Greenwood (2002) finds this an underused approach in analyzing the ethical aspects of HRM. She feels that it provides a framework which brings into relief both the macro (ideology) and micro (specific policy) aspects of HRM. Goodpaster (1984) has attempted to develop a set of rules along Kantian lines for business practice which include avoid and prevent harming others, help those in need, do not lie or cheat, respect the rights of others, keep promises or contracts, obey the law, be fair and encourage others to follow these principles.

Winstanley and Woodall (1996) highlight a number of ethical concerns about standards of HR practice, arising from this strategic focus. These include increased job insecurity arising from 'flexible' work practices, short-term and temporary conditions of employment, fear of job loss due to outsourcing and off-shoring, increased stress, a widening imbalance of power between management and workforce, increase in surveillance and control which ranges from the use of psychometric tests to electronic surveillance of work patterns. Driscoll and Hoffman, (1998) have stated that HR managers are taking the lead in recognizing the need for ethics programs and in making them happen". The reasons they provide are that those in leadership positions in human resources are highly respected within their organizations for integrity, having the ability to solve complex ethical dilemmas, understanding the company's culture and communicating it at all hierarchical levels in the organization. Driscoll and Hoffman (1998) claim that even in smaller companies that do not have the resources for a separate ethics function", ethics initiatives properly fit as part of the human resources department".

III. FACTORS INFLUENCING ETHICAL ENVIRONMENT:

In this current context, it becomes most relevant to Human Resource Management is more susceptible to violation of the code of ethics because most of its activities are based on judgment. Though performance appraisal training, internal mobility, incentive plans, and many such activities respond to policies, in the final analysis they do depend on the judgment of the individual. Such judgment is based on the merit of the case or may be based on individual biases and prejudices. A number of critical factors which influence the ethical environment in an organization are presented below:

1. RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION: It is essential that the selection process should focus on attracting and selecting employees who share the organizational values systems. Human resources staff must ensure that their

first impression is positive and the resulting role identity incorporates recognition of the importance ethics. To ensure that the selection system is perceived as fair and ethical, human resource managers:

- Should use tests that have been validated for their organizational purpose. A test that is found to be good in one organization may not prove to be good for the other organization.
 - Should clearly set out the criteria of selection. These should be made known to those who are involved in selection
 - In a panel situation, the ratings on the performance of candidate should be justified.
2. **TRAINING:** Training of the employees is the best way of fostering ethical programmes of organization (Manuel G.Velasquez, 2002). Training needs to focus on the culture of the organization, its values and expectations. In addition to focusing on the contents of training, the employees should be encouraged to develop skills in applying relevant ethics concepts and theories of ethics to work practice. The employees should be provided opportunities for participants to acquire knowledge about professional, legal and ethical standards of practice, their role in competent, ethical work place, and times at which legal and professional standards may conflict. There should be an increase in self-awareness and awareness of the interplay of personal values and professional behavior. The training should enable participants to increase their ability to recognize ethical issues and to apply ethical decision-making frameworks and protocols through enhanced use of critical thinking skills. The employees should be trained to increasingly recognize and embrace the role of diversity and social justice in understanding and addressing ethical dilemmas.
 3. **PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL:** The process of performance appraisal should incorporate concern for ethics in the criteria for evaluation and the conduct of the appraisal itself (George P.Sillup, et.al., 2010). The performance goals must be in accordance with the overall ethical goals of the organization. It should be free from bias and should be communicated honestly to the employees. The essentials of a good performance appraisal system includes standardized performance appraisal system, uniformity of appraisals, defined performance standards, trained raters, use of relevant rating tools or methods, should be based on job analysis, use of objectively verifiable data, avoidance of rating problems like halo effect, central tendency, leniency, and severity, consistent documentations maintained and no discrimination based on cast, creed, race, religion and region.
 4. **REWARD SYSTEM:** Reward system should be evaluated in terms of fairness. Rewarding ethical behaviour and punishing unethical conduct reinforces ethical expectations from the employees (David Murray, 2001). Many incentive systems have been designed by organizations wanting to reward their employees for above-average performance. Unfortunately, these systems often fall prey to unethical administrative practices. If this happens, employees are penalized and the intent of the process is destroyed (Erik Jansen and Mary Ann Von Glinow, 2005). Managers charged with the administration of merit and bonus budgets, for example, often are unwilling to differentiate between employees on the basis of performance. They simply divide rewards equally, or nearly so, among performers who may range from inadequate to outstanding. When this happens they end up reinforcing poor performance while penalizing superior work. Compensation has to be paid based on a job's intrinsic value in comparison to wages being paid for the other jobs requiring comparable skills, efforts and responsibility, and having compensable worth to the organization.
 5. **GUARDING AGAINST SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN THE WORK PLACE:** The effects of sexual harassment on the individual can be physical, emotional and psychological trauma, loss of self-esteem, isolation, absenteeism, lower productivity, loss of job and even spillover effects into family life (Ananda Das Gupta, 2005). The employer responsibilities towards guarding against sexual harassment include:
 - Formulation of anti-sexual harassment policy which should clearly state the employer's commitment to a safe work environment and constitute a Complaints Committee as per Supreme Court guidelines
 - Conduct anti-sexual harassment awareness training for employees
 - Ensure that equity is conducted as per the law of natural justice
 - Take prompt action on the complaint
 6. **IMPROVING WORK ETHICS:** Work ethics refers to the strength of one's commitment and dedication to hard work. It is employee's attitude (Bani P.Banerjee, 2005). Work ethics is a set of values held by an employee. It is also a principle in the ethical advantage of work and its capacity to improve one's character. Having good work ethics is a long process. Some of the work ethics include working as an efficient team member, being honest and reliable. Work ethics can be improved by inculcating the feeling of love among employers and employees, creating strong work culture through appropriate systems, rewards and penalties and involving the employees in more challenging jobs, in decision making process and in giving suggestions.
 7. **MANAGING VALUES:** Values are at the core of personality. Values represent basic convictions or enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct is personally or socially preferable (S.K.Bhatia, 2005). Whether it is writing a code or developing an ethics

program, organizations need to identify and define a set of values that represent the ethical ideals of the organization. Values help in self-development, building good inter-personal relations, reducing conflicts and disputes, developing satisfaction in the employees and enhancing goodwill and image of the organization (Michael S.Poulton, 2005). The values need to be defined, communicated and aligned with practices. Statement of Organizational Values is derived from an understanding of the current values that are found within the organization's culture and those values that senior management sees as integral to the realization of the organization's mission. A Code of Ethics translates such a statement of core values into a practical guide for employees at all levels of the organization.

IV. CONCLUSION:

Ethics in organizations operates at individual level, organizational level, societal level and international level. These levels show the complexity and linkages of ethical decision making. Ethical education and training can be useful for developing a broader awareness of the motivations, values and consequences of our decisions. Ethics requires managers to be honest with stakeholders' interests, society, environment and themselves. The organizations should practice equity of employees. They should protect the rights of the employees and help maintain dignity of the workers. An organization can build a culture that reflects a concern for ethics, and it can change its culture to be more supportive of ethical conduct.

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