



Values and Ethics in Aboriginal Workplace

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Agenda

- What makes an action Ethical or Unethical?
- Is it black & white or on a continuum?
- Personal choice vs professional pressure
- Confidentiality and ethics
- Can Ethics be regulated or is it self-regulated?
- Aboriginal Workplace
- Case Studies – what would / could you do if faced with

Purpose of Session

- An introduction to a very complex subject
- A case based exploration ... not too much philosophy
- Some discussion on cultural context: does “ethics” have the same meaning in aboriginal and non-aboriginal workplace
- The legal issues or implications will not be discussed





What is ethics?

- We make many different ethical decisions each day – many without even recognizing them as such
- To act or not to act, to tell someone some key piece of information or not,...these may all be ethical decisions

What makes an action ethical or unethical?

- An employee surfs the internet for personal items during work hours
- A manager shares internal information with a competitor for her own personal gain
- A store misrepresents the quality of a product or advertized sale item
- An accountant tells the supplier the “cheque is in the mail” knowing it really isn’t

Unethical or is it simply what is fair or even just the cost of doing business?

- The first two had to do with individual employees taking advantage of their employer. It was justified because everyone does it, because the employer had been unfair,...
- The second two had to do with employees working to protect the employer – these were justified as the cost of doing business, without these interventions the company would go under,...



Definition of Ethics

- Ethics are principles that define behaviour as right, good and proper
- Ethics address concerns of right from wrong, and good from evil
- It defines behaviour that is deemed morally correct and benefits society
- Unethical behaviour refers to acts that are deemed immoral and seen as harming society



What is ethical and unethical?

- In the case of the individual as sole beneficiary (using company internet) is that immoral? Does it harm society? Is it wrong as it is actually stealing?
- Organizations that employ tactics such as stalling a supplier or offering low-quality products may be protecting the jobs of those working for the company, but what about the suppliers or customers protection?

Black & white or a continuum?

- What if the employee the surfed internet on his own time (during lunch)?
- What if employee the surfed *inappropriate* internet sites, even if on his own time?
- What if it was legitimate and approved by the supervisor to buy school supplies for children, not available in community? But there was a “no personal internet use” policy in the organization?

What about the case of the “cheque is in the mail”?

- If this was a case of trying to balance AP and cashflow, why not just tell the supplier you are having cashflow problems?
- Which is more unethical – giving away internal information or withholding information from a legitimate supplier?
- Which right and wrong is more important to protect: the employers’ or the suppliers’?

Personal choice vs professional pressure

- It is different if you choose to say “the cheque is in the mail” vs the Band Manager telling you to do it?
- What about the case where the Band Manager tells you to act one way but the Chief tells you to act another?
- What about being asked for information from your Grandmother (an elder) when you have been told by the Band Manager not to disclose it to anyone?



Ethics is also about self restraint

You have the power, the right and the desire to do many things...

...not all choices however, may be ethical.



Not doing what you have the power to do

Just because you can...

- tell another more junior employee to do an unpleasant task assigned to you
- show up late for a meeting that needs you there to start, just to teach them a lesson

...it's not ethical

Not doing what you have the right to do

Just because you have the Right to ...

- hire a less qualified Band member rather than a fully qualified and suitable non-member
- adopt a “work to rule” policy even if it means others will suffer – snow clearing only during the day

... it's not ethical



Not doing what you want to do

Just because you Want to ...

- keep confidential information about a loved one in trouble to protect that person from legal trouble

...it's not ethical

(Choosing to do more than the law requires and less than the law allows)



Confidentiality and Conflict of Interest

Confidentiality

- Being given private or classified information and ensuring it is kept secret

Conflict of Interest

- Removing oneself from a decision making process that could impact or benefit you or close family member
- Ensuring that as an elected official, your actions do not benefit your private interests

Aboriginal context

Participating in making a decision that will impact you is a conflict of interest

- As an employee of a Band Administration and also an elected Council member, you need to remove yourself from a decision making process that would benefit you or a family member (eg. approving the allocation of education allowances if your child has applied)
- By definition – almost all Band employees and elected leaders are often in a conflict of interest because they are also Band members



Aboriginal Context

You see an individual walking into the SA office and later see them at the health clinic, and again later see them talking to the Chief asking for an advance

- Can or should it be disclosed for the greater good of society (the Band)?
- Or is protecting confidentiality more important?

Easy and hard choices

- It is often easier to choose the unethical alternative (give in to the pressure to breach confidentiality), but it is never “wrong” to choose the ethical alternative (eg. refusing to tell your Grandmother something the Chief told you not to)



Regulated vs Self-regulated

- Can ethical behaviour be controlled and managed by having a Code of Conduct?
- Is ethics something that can be taught in a classroom (make someone take a course on ethics), or, is it something we have to take ownership of and be accountable for ourselves?



Value based vs Rule based Codes

- Values based: come from shared values and guiding principles the organization uses to make decisions and set goals
- Rule based: are an explicit set of rules that limit behaviours with clearly stated implications for non compliance (termination from a job, or loss of a professional designation)



Why do we want to be ethical?

- Inner benefit – virtue has its own reward
- Personal advantage – good business to be ethical, prudent in longrun
- Approval – being ethical increases self-esteem, admiration of loved ones and peers
- Religious – serving God/Creator
- Habit – ethical actions part of your upbringing, taught as a child



Discussion Questions?

- Have you ever had to deal with an employee that violated company policy? What did you do?
- What would you do if an employee confided in you he was stealing?
- Have you ever been denied a promotion because of something you did or did not do?
- Do you believe sometimes telling a lie is your only choice?



Additional Questions?

- Have you ever felt pressured by a supervisor or leader to do something you didn't think was right? What did you do?
- Do you think having a formal code of conduct would have helped you in that situation? Why or why not?



Questions for me?

Thank you

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