

# A STUDY ON ETHICAL DILEMMAS OF MANAGERS AT WORKPLACE

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**Abstract** Business ethics always have incredible importance in business world. Transparency and moral etiquette are becoming very essential components for the organisations to sustain and grow. Not giving due consideration for the ethics in commercial activities has put many governmental and non-governmental organisations at stake. Through a strategically incorporated ethical policy, the management can also send a clear communication about the priorities of the organisation to its stake holders. The concept of ethical dilemmas of managers is very much influenced by the rapidly changing business dynamics along serving the organisation's objectives and needs. Managers play a key role in contributing to the ethicality of the organisation. An ethical dilemma is a common and intricate mental situation often involving an evident mental conflict between moral imperatives, in which to obey one would result in contravening another. It is imperative in this context to find out the factors that influence the managers' attitude towards the ethicality at workplace and also to understand grey areas where the managers find themselves in ethical dilemmas at workplace. Noteworthy business ethics cases are analyzed to emphasize the study.

For carrying out the present study, select organisations in Chittoor district of Rayalaseema are considered and managerial personnel from all the select organisations are included. This study contributes standard and innovative solutions for the managers' ethical dilemmas at workplace because developing innovative management strategies with due concern for ethics is indispensable.

**Keywords:** Ethical Dilemmas, Ethics, Strategies

## INTRODUCTION

"Ethical dilemmas often arise as the unintended consequences of well-intentioned actions, not from unethical motives." - Michael Rion

Many businesses are developing an ethical policy to clearly state what employees and customers should expect. That is, how one can specify to employees what that organisation considers inappropriate or unethical actions. An ethical dilemma is a common and complex mental situation often involving an evident mental conflict between moral imperatives, in which to obey one would result in transgressing another. As ethics are inherent in the societies and their systems, the ethical dilemmas also follow in. Business ethics are set to have standards for and how the business is to be conducted. They define the value system of how the organization functions in the market place and within the business. Due to so many illegal scandals and news of businesses taking place in the world over, the businesses are giving lot of attention to the ethical issues of their businesses and reflecting on how they have to lead in an ethical way.

A code of ethics is to be maintained by the organisation to guide the people involved with its work processes. Code of ethics is a "soul surgery" to turn chaos into tranquility,

blindness into awareness, and cynicism into creativity (Chad Auer, 2004). Following a code of ethics uncovers the truths of wisdom, courage, temperance, justice, honesty, integrity, compassion, optimism, hope and generosity. Attention to virtue leads to happiness and it is possible when one sticks to a code of ethics. It is essential in every part of life, from being a student to organisational member and from being a son or daughter to grandparent. Every philosopher must deal with the idea of truth. There is a comprehensive synthesis and evaluation of the published scales measuring the components of the decision making process in ethical situations using the Hunt-Vitell (1993) theory of ethics as a framework to guide the research (Scott J. Vitell & Foo Nin Ho, 1997).

## Benefits of Ethical Behaviour for an Organisation

- Ethical behaviour enhances high employee morale and commitment
- Higher profits can be attained by the organisation
- Ethical behaviour of the organisation is highly motivating factor for the employees, loyal customers and also its share holders
- Depicts the responsibility and raises the image of the company.

- Helps in bringing about desired change in the organisation very easily.
- Ethical behavior promotes higher productivity for the company.

Ethics involve learning what is right or wrong, and then doing the right thing. In our society today, managers are faced with ethical decisions every day that require their own judgment. There are many concepts in ethics, but the definition is narrowed to two aspects, right and wrong. Attention to ethics in the workplace sensitizes managers and workers to how they should act; it also helps ensure that when managers are struggling in times of crisis, they retain a strong moral compass.

### Areas of Ethical Dilemmas in Business Functioning

There are generally considered grey areas where managers would find themselves in ethical dilemmas in work situations. To mention, prominently there are five categories of common ethical dilemmas in business. (1) Employee safety issues, (2) Human resource issues, (3) Conflicts of interest, (4) Customer confidence, (5) Utilisation of corporate resources. Few more issues or areas where managers face ethical dilemmas are; hiring and termination Issues, discrimination based on age, race, colour, national origin, religion, and gender, as well as pregnancy or handicapped status, performance appraisals, disciplinary issues.

### Noteworthy Cases on Ethics in Business

The following includes some important business ethics cases of some well-known organisations:

1. **Enron** – Questionable accounting practices and manipulation of the energy supply brought down this company.
2. **Monsanto** – Monsanto has been criticized for its mega-size. Critics fear they are taking over the food supply as well as creating negative environmental issues.
3. **Arthur Andersen** – Arthur Andersen is known for its unethical auditing practices.
4. **Wal-Mart** – Studies have shown that Wal-Mart may save people's money but they may also negatively impact communities. Their low prices may also hurt suppliers.
5. **Countrywide** – The company offered subprime loans that later resulted in default.
6. **Beechnut** – Beechnut's ethics came into question when it was discovered that they were selling "apple juice" to foreign countries that contained something less than apple juice.
7. **Starbucks** – Clustering strategy may force smaller companies out of business.
8. **Nike** – Manufacturing practices included producing shoes offshore to save money. Nike has used its share of sweatshops in manufacturing.

It is imperative in this context to find out the factors that influence the managers' attitude towards the ethicality at workplace and also to understand grey areas where the managers find themselves in ethical dilemmas at workplace. Taking into consideration all the above mentioned aspects related to the ethicality at workplace, the present study is undertaken and the following objectives are laid down;

### OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To find out the grey areas where managers encounter ethical dilemmas at workplace.
2. To analyze the managerial attitude towards following ethics.
3. To evaluate how the managers are overcoming their ethical dilemmas during the work processes. (support system)
4. To understand the support of strategies (Code of Ethics) drafted by the companies to the managers at work in reducing their ethical dilemmas.

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Numerous studies over the past several decades have documented evidence of unethical behaviour in many organizations (McDonald and Nijhof, 1999). There are so many instances where much unethical behaviours are uncovered in the form of falsifying reports, harassment of co-workers, and deceptive advertising. The study of unethical behaviour in organisations remains an area of high interest among practitioners and academic researchers (Loe *et al.*, 2000). Generally, most theories and empirical research have attributed unethical behaviour to either situational variables associated with the organisation, characteristics of the individuals, or the interaction between these two factors (Ford & Richardson, 1994; Loe *et al.*, 2000; Trevino, 1986). The code of ethics is not a subject to be learnt; in fact, it is way of living. This is to be essentially made to learn and habituated to the students from the beginning of the education and to be implemented in their careers. It is further made to be followed by the future generations. Being guided by the code of ethics has always proven to be good and effective in leading a better life. Executives are accepting the importance of code of ethics in their general well-being and of the people they are dealing with in their professional and personnel life. Though in this era of hyper-competition and result-oriented nature of businesses, it is difficult to run huge

**Table1: The Universal Moral Code**

Do No Harm	Do Good
Do not do to others what you would not like them to do to you. Do not lie. Do not steal. Do not cheat. Do not falsely accuse others. Do not commit adultery. Do not commit incest. Do not physically or verbally abuse others. Do not murder. Do not destroy the natural environment upon which all life depends.	Do to others what you would like them to do to you. Be honest and fair. Be generous. Be faithful to your family and friends. Take care of your children when they are young. Take care of your parents when they are old. Take care of those who cannot take care of themselves. Be kind to strangers. Respect all life. Protect the natural environment upon which all life depends.

empires on ethical grounds and standards. Ethics refer to the study and process of human conduct, as a part of the society or an institution, in the light of moral principles.

The Universal Moral Code is a list of fundamental moral principles that can be found throughout the world. It was created by Dr. Kent M. Keith in 2003 while writing a book on morality and ethics. The code incorporates basic, universal ideas about how one should live and how we should treat each other. The code is divided into two complementary sets of statements (Table 1).

Ethical areas that relate to most types of organisations include downsizing considerations in lean times, environmental controls, resource optimisation, technology management, employee rights, and maintaining safe working conditions and products (Neil Kokemuller, 2007).

Generally, most theories and empirical research have attributed unethical behaviour among various organisations to be the integrity or ethical attitude of the organisation's leaders (Sims and Brinkmann, 2002). "Moral bankruptcy need not be the price for managerial success. Building systems to checking day-to-day decisions with core values are interpreted" (Holden, 2000). A study suggests that there are two distinct modes of moral reasoning, one based on a morality of justice, the other based on a morality of care (Robbin Derry, 1989). The study examined the relationship perceived leader integrity, belief in universal moral values, and employees' ethical intentions while controlling for socially desirable response tendencies (Sims and Brinkmann, 2002).

Marshall Schminke (1997) examined subjects' reactions to other managers' responses to ethical dilemmas. Empirical attempts to demonstrate the influence of leaders' ethical attitudes have failed to produce consistent results. The results indicate that leaders are perceived to play a very important role in determining ethical attitudes of their subordinates (Brenner and Molander, 1977, Posner and Schmidt, 1984, Soutar *et al.*, 1994).

Existing theoretical models of individual ethical decision-making in organisations place little or no emphasis on characteristics of the ethical issue itself (Thomas M. Jones, 1991). Personal values were found to be related to how subjects chose to resolve an ethical dilemma presented to them, but as expected, this relationship did not hold when subjects were made to feel accountable to another for their choices (Arthur P. Brief, 1991). Hence the present study is undertaken to find out the ethical issues at workplace. The study also focuses on the organisational strategies which support the managers in being ethical and overcome ethical dilemmas at workplace.

## METHODOLOGY

This section deals with the methodology adopted for the study. It includes research approach, design for the study, the setting, sample and sampling technique, development of the tools, pilot study, data collection procedure and data analysis.

### Research Approach

Survey method is adopted to determine the ethical dilemmas of the respondents in general as well as at workplace.

### Study area and Population

The area of study is the select industries at Rayalaseema region of Andhra Pradesh which includes the Amara Raja Batteries Limited, Lanco Industries, Sri Chakra Cements, Saint Gobain Limited and Nutrine Confectionaries Limited.

### Sampling Frame

This is a cross-sectional study that involved managers working in select industries of Rayalaseema region of Andhra Pradesh.

## Study Tool

A questionnaire is drafted in three sections taking into account the universally accepted ethical principles which are mentioned in earlier section. The first was demographic section which contained questions regarding age, gender, experience and education of managers. The second section covered the statements to measure the attitude of managers towards ethics in general while the third section is concentrated on the statements regarding the attitude of the managers towards ethics at workplace. The criteria for measuring the ethical attitude and ethical dilemmas of the respondents are based on the Marlowe – Crowne Social Desirability Scale (CSDS) scoring and Universal Moral Values created by Dr. Kent M. Keith.

## Sampling Technique and Sample Size

A Stratified Random Sampling technique has been used to collect data from the managers from the select five industries of Rayalseema. The number of managers from each industry has been fixed proportionately in order to get a sample of 50 managers.

## Statistical Analysis

Collected data are analysed using appropriate statistical tools like frequency tables (one-way tables), cross tabulations (two-way tables), percentages, Chi-square test, independent sample t-test, one-way ANOVA (Analysis of Variance), Karl Pearson's using SPSS version 20. Obtained results are properly concluded at various significant levels.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The present study reveals interesting aspects regarding the ethical issues of the managers at work. The managers at work who are educated (technical & non-technical) are more ethical with their attitude. The managers at various industries do face ethical dilemmas while dealing with the work processes. The ethicality of the managers is assessed on the basis of certain independent variables such as age, level of education, experience, gender. Certain statistical methods and techniques are used to make the findings. As the responses have discrepancies two questionnaires are discarded. Hence, the present sample size is 48.

Table 2 depicts the attitude of the managers of select industries regarding the consideration of ethics in general by them personally. It is evident from the table that managers hold to ethics personally. About 91.7 percent of the managers are ethical with regards to the gossiping at workplace. 100 percent of the respondents condemn the rebellion behaviour at work as unethical.

The personal qualities like good listening, not taking advantage of others, admitting mistakes always, try to practice what they preach; never hurting the feelings of others, not feeling jealous of others, angry on people when they express their ideas also proved that the managers are ethical. Some more characteristics are not insisting things to happen their way, never let others be punished for one's mistakes, courteous to people who disagree with them, admitting if they don't know something, so on.

The responsibility for the ethics at workplace lies on all the stakeholders of the company but most significantly it lies in

**Table 2: Attitude of Managers Towards Ethics in General**

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I like to gossip at times	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	44(91.7)	4(8.3)
I rebel against people in authority even they were right	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	48(100)	0 (0.0)
I am a good listener	0 (0.0)	44(91.7)	4(8.3)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Take advantage of others	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	35(72.9)	13(27.1)
Admit mistakes always	7(14.6)	39(81.3)	2(4.2)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Try to practice what I preach	9(18.8)	39(81.3)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
I never hurt the feelings of others	8(16.7)	40(83.3)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
I felt I was punished without any cause at times	0 (0.0)	2(4.2)	3(6.3)	43(89.6)	0 (0.0)
Feel jealous of others	0 (0.0)	1(2.1)	3(6.3)	42(87.5)	2(4.2)
Angry on people when they express their ideas	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	2(4.2)	43(89.6)	3(6.3)
Insist things to happen my way	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	3(6.3)	45(93.8)	0 (0.0)
Never let others be punished for my mistakes	4(8.3)	44(91.7)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
I am courteous to people who disagree with me	0 (0.0)	42(87.5)	5(10.4)	1(2.1)	0 (0.0)
I admit if I don't know	5(10.4)	43(89.6)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)

(Figures in brackets are percentages)

**Table 3: Attitude of the Managers Towards Ethics at Workplace**

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Ethics are important at work	33(68.8)	15(31.3)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
It's my first responsibility as manager to be ethical myself	32(66.7)	16(33.3)	0(0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
I ignore things if I encounter ethical dilemmas	0 (0.0)	3(6.3)	3(6.3)	25(52.1)	17(35.4)
I take it as a challenge when ethical dilemmas come my way	1(2.1)	14(29.2)	2(4.2)	18(37.5)	13(27.1)
There are standard policies for the company related to ethics	7(14.6)	38(79.2)	3(6.3)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
ED at the time of recruitment	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	40(83.3)	8(16.7)
Time of disciplinary action	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	36(75)	12(25)
Time of termination	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	42(87.5)	6(12.5)
Overcome ED by myself	0 (0.0)	40(83.3)	4(8.3)	4(8.3)	0 (0.0)
Follow company's policy in ED	6(12.5)	42(87.5)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Refer the issue to superiors	3(6.3)	42(87.5)	3(6.3)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Code of discipline applicable to all equally	19(39.6)	27(56.3)	2(4.2)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Difficult to follow company's rules	1(2.1)	24(50)	0 (0.0)	6(12.5)	17(35.4)
High rate of confidence in job	4(8.3)	40(83.3)	4(8.3)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Expect encouragement by others in performing my job	7(14.6)	23(47.9)	0 (0.0)	17(35.4)	1(2.1)
Hesitate to go out of my way to help others	0 (0.0)	2(4.2)	0 (0.0)	36(75)	10(20.8)
I face ED while dealing with customers	0 (0.0)	1(2.1)	0 (0.0)	37(77.1)	10(20.8)
Feel ED in dealing with workers issues	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	38(79.2)	10(20.8)
I feel I am lying when I market my company's products/services	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	38(79.2)	10(20.8)
I feel all the ads given by my company are falsifying	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1(2.1)	32(66.7)	15(31.3)
Auditing is very transparent in the company	3(6.3)	14(29.2)	7(14.6)	24(50)	0 (0.0)
Records maintained by the company are imperfect and confusing	0 (0.0)	11(22.9)	5(10.4)	23(47.9)	9(18.8)

(Figures in brackets are percentages)

the managers who manage processes and people mutually. They are the representatives; they are the mediators for the development and sustainability of the organisation. Almost all the managers believe and feel personally responsible for the ethics at workplace. They regard ethics as very essential component at workplace.

From Table 3, it is found out that about 6.3 percent managers find themselves in ethical dilemmas at workplace. It is noteworthy point to make that ethics are challenging aspects at work, as the same is revealed by 29.2 percent of the respondents. 37.5 percent have disagreed for the same. 79.2 percent have standard policies for maintaining an ethical code in organisation. This indicates that ethical dilemmas of the managers are resolved through an effective and clear cut policy on ethics. 50 percent of the managers disagreed on the transparency of the auditing issues of the company. About 22.9 percent of the managers revealed that they agree that the records maintained by the present company are imperfect and confusing. 47.9 percent of the respondents disagreed for the same.

Table 4 reveals that the attitude of the managers towards ethics in general has no significant influence on their attitude towards ethics at workplace. Though there is an association

of personal ethicality of the individuals on their ethicality at workplace, the present study reveals that the personal ethicality doesn't equate with the ethics at workplace. The same is depicted in Table 4 with the help of Chi-square test. When it comes to the ethicality at work it is found to be different. The study shows evidence that 67 percent managers are ethical.

Table 5 discloses the ethicality of the managers at workplace by age. The managers in the age group between 20-29 years are more ethical with attitude (79 percent). The attitude of the age group 40 and above is unethical by 60 percent. From the table, it is evident that there is no significant impact of age on the attitude of the managers towards ethics at workplace.

Table 6 displays the ethicality of the managers at workplace by educational qualification. The educational qualifications of the managers are broadly classified as technical and non-technical. The technical education covers the engineering; diplomas in mechanical engineering, polytechnic, etc., and the non-technical qualifications include MBAs, diplomas in management studies, etc. 67 percent of all the managers are ethical at workplace. When compared to managers with technical (65 percent) and non-technical (67 percent)

**Table 4: Attitude of Managers Towards Ethics in General Versus Ethics at Workplace**

Chi-square value	p-value	Attitude of the Managers towards Ethics at Workplace		Total
		Unethical	Ethical	
<b>0.182@</b>	<b>0.670</b>			
Attitude of Managers towards ethics in general	Unethical	11	20	31
		35.5%	64.5%	100.0%
	Ethical	5	12	17
		29.4%	70.6%	100.0%
Total 33.3%		16	32	48
		66.7%	100.0%	

@ Not significant

**Table 5: Attitude of the Managers Towards Ethics at Workplace by Age**

Chi-square value	p-value	Attitude of the Managers towards Ethics at Workplace		Total
		Unethical	Ethical	
<b>4.280@</b>	<b>0.118</b>			
Age	20 - 29 years	3	11	14
		21.4%	78.6%	100.0%
	30 - 39 years	7	17	24
		29.2%	70.8%	100.0%
	40 and above	6	4	10
		60.0%	40.0%	100.0%
Total 33.3%		16	32	48
		66.7%	100.0%	

educational qualification, there is not much difference found between the two. Therefore, it is evident that there is no significant impact of educational qualification on the attitude of the managers towards ethics at workplace.

Table 7 shows the ethicality of the managers at workplace by experience (in years). Experience of the managers in work has a significant contribution on their attitude towards life, especially organisational process and personnel working with them. There is not much difference established between the most experienced and less experienced managers with regarding their attitude towards ethics. Hence, it is clear that there is no significant impact of experience on the attitude of the managers towards ethics at workplace.

Table 8 puts forward the ethicality of the managers at workplace by gender. Gender variation is considered as an important parameter to find out the ethicality of managers at workplace. From the table, it is evident that there is slight difference in the attitude of the male and female managers with regarding ethics at workplace. Hence, it is evident that there is no significant impact of gender on the attitude of the managers towards ethics at workplace. The same is proved by applying Chi-square test.

## MAJOR FINDINGS

Having a clear idea of the ethics at workplace is an important factor to determine the extent of ethical dilemmas faced by the managers at workplace.

The study reveals the grey areas of ethical dilemmas, such as, at the time of recruitment, while considering performance appraisals, at the time of taking disciplinary action, at the time of recruitment. It is evident from the study that managers of the select organisations in Rayalseema region do not view any ethical dilemmas while performing their duties and responsibilities.

The attitude of the managers can be regarded very understanding and right in their approach to ethics at their respective workplaces. Table 1 depicts the data regarding the same. About 91.7 percent of the managers are ethical with regard to variables such as gossiping. Rebellion behaviour is unethical with regard to general behavioural patterns.

Majority (88 percent) of managers overcome their ethical dilemmas by following the code of discipline drafted by the company. This enhances the importance of standard ethical policies.

**Table 6: Attitude of the Managers Towards Ethics at workplace by Educational Qualification**

Chi-square value	p-value	Attitude of the Managers towards Ethics at Workplace		Total
		Unethical	Ethical	
<b>0.043@</b>	<b>0.836</b>			
Educational Qualification	Technical	7	13	20
		35.0%	65.0%	100.0%
	Non-Technical	9	19	28
		32.1%	67.9%	100.0%
Total 33.3%		16	32	48
		66.7%	100.0%	

**Table 7: Attitude of the Managers Towards Ethics at Workplace by Experience**

Chi-square value	p-value	Attitude of the Managers towards Ethics at Workplace		Total
		Unethical	Ethical	
<b>4.815@</b>	<b>0.186</b>			
Experience	Up to 5 years	0	7	7
		0.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	6 - 10 years	5	9	14
		35.7%	64.3%	100.0%
	11- 15 years	6	11	17
		35.3%	64.7%	100.0%
	16 and above	5	5	10
		50.0%	50.0%	100.0%
Total 33.3%		16	32	48
		66.7%	100.0%	

**Table 8: Attitude of the Managers Towards Ethics at Workplace by Gender**

Chi-square value	p-value	Attitude of the Managers towards Ethics at Workplace		Total
		Unethical	Ethical	
<b>0.084@</b>	<b>0.772</b>			
Gender	Male	14	27	41
		34.1%	65.9%	100.0%
	Female	2	5	7
		28.6%	71.4%	100.0%
Total 33.3%		16	32	48
		66.7%	100.0%	

It is found out from the study that the managers are very mostly guided by the moral principles or code of ethics drawn by the company. Table 3 exhibits that 79.2 percent have standard policies for maintaining an ethical code in organisation. Almost all the areas of work, dealing with customers, workers and processes, the managers don't hold any ethical dilemmas.

It is conceived from the study that 50 percent of the managers disagreed on the transparency of the auditing issues of the company. About 22.9 percent of the managers revealed that they agree that the records maintained by the present company are imperfect and confusing.

There is also a finding that there is no significant impact of age, educational qualification, experience and gender on the attitude of the managers towards ethics in workplace. Apart from the above mentioned factors in Tables 5 through 8, there is also no significant influence of ethical attitude of the managers in general, on the ethical attitude that they carry at workplace. Table 4 reveals the same.

## CONCLUSION

The managers' attitude headed for ethicality at workplace is more of organisational concern. The code of ethics has more

prominence in overcoming ethical dilemmas by the managers at workplace situations and issues. From the present study, the grey areas where managers come across ethical dilemmas are discovered. Apart from these aspects there is also a noteworthy point regarding the percentage of managers. 50 percent of the managers disagreed on the transparency and maintenance of clear accounts of the organisations. Hence, it can be concluded stating that Code of Ethics which is of strategically concerned in the organisations are the guiding norms for the managers to form an attitude and to overcome their ethical dilemmas at workplace.

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