

Ethical Scenarios at Work

Source: Chartered Institute of Management Accountants

This self-assessment was designed by the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants and published as follows:

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Further information on this self-assessment can be found in the above article in the BPIR.com's Business Periodicals Database.

How the self-assessment can help BPIR members...

This self-assessment tool will help you to assess your ethical style in regard to the use of your employer's time and resources. A number of scenarios are presented and your ethical stance is assessed.

A useful exercise would be to have a group of employees respond to the assessment questions and then have a discussion to discuss the reasoning behind their responses. The company's viewpoint on these ethical issues could then be presented and differences discussed.

The Self-Assessment

Answer each question by making an honest choice of either A, B, or C

1. You attend a lunch time celebration with colleagues. Company policy allows one hour for lunch, however the lunch goes on for two and a half hours. When you return to the office your boss asks you where you've been. Do you:	
• Tell your boss exactly what you what you were doing	A
• Explain that you took a long lunch break and offer to make up the time, but don't mention what you were doing	B
• Say that you were in a meeting - after all, it was just one lunch and you have been working late quite a lot recently	C
2. One of your supervisors takes his team out for drinks to thank them for their good work over the year. It is company policy not to reimburse unofficial entertainment, however you are asked to sign off the supervisor's expenses which include a claim for the bar bill. Do you:	
• Refuse to sign the expenses which are against the rules	A
• Sign off the expenses, but remind the supervisor that what he did was wrong and that it must not happen again	B
• Say nothing and sign off the expenses. After all it was not a lot of money for the company, and the team had worked hard	C
3. It is close to the holiday season and you need to contact a relative who lives abroad. Because of the time difference, it's difficult to call outside of working hours. Do you:	
• Leave it until your day off because personal calls are not permitted at work	A
• Make the call from your desk, but do it during a lunch break.	B
• Call during office hours for a good chat. What's one phone call, after all?	C
4. After on office celebration you need to get a taxi home. A colleague is going in the same direction as you, so you share a cab. You offer him money for your share of the fare but he refuses, saying that he will charge it to expenses. Do you:	
• Remind him that this is against company policy and insist that he takes your share of the fare	A
• Tell him that the taxi should not be claimed as company expenses, but It's up to him	B
• Enjoy the free ride - his expense claims are not your problem	C
5. In the accounts department you process a director's weekend golf trip expenses. Later you overhear him talking about it and realise that it wasn't a work trip. Do you	
• Go to your manager and explain what you have discovered	A
• Decide to keep a closer eye on his expenses in future	B
• Ignore the incident - it is none of your business if he claims false expenses	C
6. You transfer critical customer information onto a memory stick to work on over the weekend. When you begin work the next day, you realise that it has gone missing. Do you:	
• Contact your manager immediately to advise of a potential breach of customer confidentiality	A
• Decide that it's not worth disturbing your manager at the weekend and resolve to inform him immediately on Monday if it doesn't turn up	B
• Decide not to say anything. The loss will not look good, and it's unlikely that anyone will find it	C
7. From time to time company goods are sold for cash in warehouse sales. You find that some proceeds have not been put through the books but used instead to fund an annual staff raffle. Do you:	
• Immediately halt the sales and end the raffle	A
• Establish new procedures to ensure that money from the sales goes through the books and consider alternative ways to fund the raffle.	B
• Let the sales continue. You won the raffle last year	C
8. You want to send seasonal greetings cards to your friends and relatives. You are not sure that they will all arrive in time if you wait until the end of the working day to send them. Do you:	
• Wait until the end of the day to buy some stamps and post the cards. They'll arrive late but after all it's your fault for leaving things to the last minute. You shouldn't use company resources for personal tasks	A
• Take only the most urgent cards to the company mailroom to ensure that they arrive on time	B
• Throw all 200 cards into the outgoing mail bag and move on. The mail room staff will return the favour for you turning a blind eye to their occasional questionable expense claims	C
9. A customer sends you a plasma screen television as a gift. Its value is above the threshold that staff may accept, however you know that two other senior managers have accepted similar gifts from the same customer. Do you:	
• Thank the customer but return the gift explaining that company policy forbids you to accept it	A
• Find out if there is perhaps a policy enabling the acceptance of large gifts as long as they are declared	B
• Keep the TV. If you were to send it back, the other managers would be affected and this would not make you very popular	C

Scoring Key

If you answered mainly A, you tend to keep to the letter of the law in all circumstances. Your application of the rules is consistent but may be at the expense of compassion. Sometimes it's appropriate to make exceptions. Flexibility engenders a culture of trust and this can be as important as enforcing the rules when it comes to embedding ethics.

If you answered mainly B, you are aware of the rules but apply them flexibly and are influenced by your emotions. This creates a danger of appearing to be inconsistent or ambivalent. Flexibility can be a sign of a strong ethical culture in an organisation, demonstrating mutual trust between managers and employees, however clearly fraudulent actions should not be tolerated. Relatively small transgressions may turn out to be bigger next time. Beware of setting precedents and be clear where the boundaries lie.

If you answered mainly C, you take a very relaxed view of ethics that appear to be based on personal consequences rather than on the consistent application of ethical standards. You perhaps see yourself as flexible but you are taking this too far. Your behaviour is not contributing to an ethical culture in your organisation and you are not setting a good example.