



Inculcating Professional Ethics among Employees in the Workplace: A Systematic Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

Professional ethics has become a vital and challenging topic in today's environment. Thus, the goal of this study is to encourage and enhance ethical behaviour among employees, as well as to foster a strong professional ethics culture inside organizations. In this sense, the study's goal is to accomplish three objectives. First, it explains what professional ethics is and how it affects an organisation. Second, the article emphasizes the importance and necessity of cultivating an ethical culture inside a company. Finally, the study investigates how employees' attitudes influence workplace ethics and some implications are derived from the findings. Secondary data sources such as journals, articles, books, research papers, and websites were used in this study, which was mostly performed using a qualitative research approach. The study's findings indicate that employees' attitudes have an influence on organizations' workplace ethics. According to the findings of this study, professional ethics is essential for any organization to establish and sustain a strong and ethical culture among its employees. Therefore, managers should focus not just on achieving corporate goals while fostering meaningful working relationships, but also on encouraging ethical behaviour among employees.

KEYWORDS: *Professional Ethics, Ethical Culture, Employees, Ethical Behaviour*

1 INTRODUCTION

“In an ideal workplace, structures and relationships will work together around core values that transcend self-interest. Core values will inspire value-creating efforts as employees feel inspired to do what is right, even when the right thing is hard to do – Shaping an Ethical Workplace Culture”

Professional ethics is a hotly debated topic in today's society, notably in commercial sectors and international corporations (Brown, Treviño, & Harrison, 2005). Organizations that are inclined to perform in accordance with ethical standards, morals, and values have acknowledged the need for ethical regulations and guidelines to be defined and implemented throughout the company, as well as becoming a priority for the management (Brimmer, 2007). Employees are a company's most significant asset, and any ethical business would want to ensure their happiness and prosperity by providing a safe and pleasant working environment, consistent employment, proper work-time adjustments, and a healthy work-life balance (Grigoropoulos, 2019). Positive work ethics is emphasized by businesses since such ethics lead to happier and more productive employees (Robert & Demand, 2009). As a result, it is becoming increasingly vital to institutionalize the process of ethical behavioral culture across the entire company.

Most businesses nowadays compete intensely to achieve their corporate goals and objectives. Because of the fierce rivalry in these businesses, new strategies must be developed and implemented in

order to survive and grow. When looking at and discussing today's issues and challenges, it is evident that, as organizations become more complex and the number of unethical workplace acts increases, the notion of ethics and moral management has become particularly important and visible to professionals (Cowton, 2011). Without a doubt, the importance of ethics in the business world is unrivaled, and it comes with a boatload of benefits. Every day, new worries and trends develop, putting pressure on businesses and their customers. Therefore, in order to avoid potential lawsuits, effective and healthy ethical behavior within organizations has become vital (Johnson, 2012).

Ethics are self-regulatory standards for making judgments and defining professions, and they aid in the smooth operation of day-to-day operations. Professional organizations preserve the integrity of their professions, explain members' expected conduct, and protect the welfare of subjects and consumers by establishing ethical rules (Shamoo & Resnik, 2009). As a result of its importance in evaluating employee conduct and performance, as well as its worth for organizational performance, work ethics has become a fascinating topic in management and business in general (Schminke, Ambrose, & Neubaum, 2005).

Ethical behavior is a new approach to settling professional conflicts and creating specified standards. It encompasses a wide range of professional ethical obligations and issues. It also includes various activities that help people achieve a specific status while adhering to certain

beliefs (Gharmaleki, 2003). Furthermore, despite earning profits for the corporate organization, ethical behavior is characterized by "honesty, integrity, morality, and sound management practices" (Paliwal, 2006). As a consequence, personal ethics refers to an individual's obligation as a human being, whereas professional ethics, which consists of a collection of principles, behavioral duties, and instructions, relates to an organization's professional responsibility for its employees' professional activities.

Therefore, managers must concentrate not just on attaining company objectives while building meaningful working relationships, but also on promoting ethical behavior among personnel. Unethical workplace behavior is possible until otherwise indicated. As a result, every organization should have an ethics code in place that reflects the firm's beliefs, responsibilities, and standards of conduct. It should act as a moral compass for those who are confronted with ethical dilemmas. Furthermore, ethical behavior will help the organization maintain its reputation for high professional standards and values. The preceding aspects demonstrate that workplace ethics is important in the organization, setting the stage for the organization's success; but there are challenges that must be addressed carefully before it becomes essential.

In this study, I reviewed several articles and came to a conclusion about professional ethics among employees in the organization. First, it describes professional ethics in an organization and its role. Secondly, it examines the

necessity and importance of professional ethics in the organization. Finally, the study finds out the employees' attitudes towards ethics in the workplace. By reviewing these papers, the importance of professional ethics, employees' attitudes and their behavior within the organization can be better understood.

1.1 Research Problem

In government organizations, unethical behavior and inconsistent performance have recently been claimed to be on the rise. 41% of US employees have experienced or observed improper or unlawful workplace behavior, according to the Business Ethics Survey (National Business Ethics Survey - Ethics Resource Centre, 2011). According to various studies, managers and employees who fail to follow professional ethical norms can lead to a firm's failure and collapse (Huntly, 2008). The growing complexity of businesses, as well as an increase in immoral and illegal workplace actions, have prompted managers and leaders to focus on establishing and maintaining professional ethics in all enterprises (Rahimnia & Nikkhah, 2011). Every employee should be aware of the importance of professional ethics in their everyday actions. It will have a detrimental impact on the organization's success unless it introduces specific hurdles. Hence, businesses should try to establish a culture where doing "the right thing" is both easy and expected.

In Sri Lankan contexts, few researchers have identified a relatively new area of inquiry into business ethics. Working styles are characterized by strong work

ethics, commitment to the task, company ambition and customer attentiveness (Senadheera & Karunaratn, 2016). In addition, principles of fairness, justice, honesty, competence, innovation, compassion, trust, integrity, loyalty and truthfulness have been integrated and helped preserve an organization's ethical environment.

An ethical workplace is built on trust. Customers will notice these layers of trust and return, and, more significantly, everyone will gain when employees trust their leaders and leaders trust their subordinate. For instance, if you are working in a company with a positive mood, you will feel like you like to return to work every day to continue your work. You will be more motivated and enthusiastic as well. If you don't trust your employer or believe they don't trust you, on the other hand, you can find yourself worrying more than working. Similarly, if someone commits a crime at work, it will have a negative impact on the company's ethical culture. As a result, loyal employees cost less to acquire and train than recruits, and they may be priceless assets to a developing company (Seid & Venkataram, 2016).

Ethical values are the representations of organizations that are the result of various organizational ideals. Some organizations, however, breach these standards, causing worry in both the government and business and creating problems. Consequently, the intention of this paper is to highlight the importance of professional ethics in the process of developing an ethical

environment among corporate personnel to solve this problem.

1.2 Research Objectives

The primary purpose is to improve and promote ethical behavior among employees while also establishing a strong professional ethics environment within the organization. Alternatively, the precise objectives of the study could be stated as follows:

- Defining professional ethics and its role to make the employees more ethical in order to create an ethical working environment.
- Understanding the importance and demands of professional ethics in the workplace.
- Identifying and enhancing employees' attitudes towards ethics in an ethical working environment.

1.3 Research Questions

In order to fulfill its aims, several basic research questions that reflect the study's objectives have been fielded in this study.

- What is professional ethics and its role to make the employees more ethical, hence, to create an ethical working environment?
- Why is professional ethics necessary, and considered essential in the workplace?
- What are the employees' attitudes towards ethics in an ethical working environment?

2 METHODOLOGY

For the objectives of this study, the research methodology employed was primarily qualitative in nature and followed an inductive research design. A systematic review of the literature was conducted, and materials were obtained from a variety of sources, including scholarly journal articles, books, and relevant organizational websites, in order to fulfill the study's goals. Most of the research was done by searching several databases for pertinent theoretical and research papers utilizing the EBSCOhost platform. Only a few of the databases used were Academic Search Complete, JSTOR, and Springer. The following terms were used to find articles: ethics, professional ethics, workplace ethics, business ethics, professional ethics culture, ethical conduct, employees' attitudes, and employees' perceptions. After reading around 50 to 60 abstracts and journal articles on the subject, the study chose about 30 research papers that were directly related to this topic and studied them in depth.

The literature review for this study is divided into three sections. First, a variety of articles, definitions, and research to accurately describe professional ethics were gathered to examine its relevance in the workplace. Second, a thorough literature study was conducted to establish why professional ethics is so important in the organization. Finally, employees' attitudes towards ethics in the organization were examined in the study. Table 01 shows the search strategies for this study.

Table 01: Search Strategies

Database	Search Strategy
EBSCOhost	((((("Full Text Only": professional ethics) AND "Full Text Only": ethics) AND "Full Text Only": organizational ethics) AND "Full Text Only": employee's attitudes) AND "Full Text Only": ethical behavior) AND "Full Text Only": professional ethics and employee attitudes) AND "Full Text Only": professional ethics and ethical behavior)
Academic Search Complete	((((("Journal of Business Research": professional ethics) AND "Journal of Business Research": ethics) AND "Journal of Business Research": organizational ethics) AND "Journal of Business Research": employee behavior) AND "Journal of Business Research": business ethics) AND "Journal of Business Research": professional ethics and employee perceptions) AND "Journal of Business Research": ethics and attitudes)
JSTOR	((((professional ethics) AND (ethics)) AND (organizational

	ethics)) AND (employee attitudes)) AND (workplace ethics)) AND (professional ethics and employee attitudes)) AND (ethics and behavior)) AND la:(eng OR en)
Springer	(((((professional ethics) AND (ethics)) AND (organizational ethics)) AND (employee perceptions)) AND (attitudes)) AND (professional ethics and employee attitudes)) AND (ethics and organization)) AND (eng OR en) AND (Article)

professional standards of conduct (Gasper, 2009).

Professional ethics is part of applied ethics. Establishing professional ethics has the purpose of improving the quality of ethical, professional practices and ensuring that they are carried out appropriately and honestly (Aydin, 2006; Bersoff & Koepl, 1993; Kucuradi, 2000; Kultgen, 1988; Strike, 1990; Tsalikis & Fritzsche, 1989). Ideals, guiding notions, and recognized norms of personal and business behaviour make up professional ethics. One researcher defines professional ethics as a code of ethics issued by professional organizations to assist and advise their members and stakeholders in carrying out their work activities in accordance with good and consistent ethical standards (Arasteh & Jahed, 2011). Another researcher defines professional ethics as the moral responsibility of the institution or organization under which various people operate and interact with various types and degrees of stakeholders (Anabestani & Saeedikia, 2016). One study points out professional organizations that develop ethical rules to defend professionalism, define appropriate behaviour among individuals, and ensure the wellbeing of members and consumers (Shamoo & Resnik, 2009).

According to a study by Aydin (2006), professional ethical norms include professionalism, responsibility in service, justice, equality, non-corruption, honesty, truthfulness, and trust, impartiality, professional dedication and continual growth, and effective resource usage. Professional ethics is concerned with the social and professional dimensions of

2.1 What is Professional Ethics and its Role in the Workplace?

To grasp what professional ethics comprises, one must first grasp the meaning of the term "ethics." Previous scholars have defined the term "ethics" in a variety of ways. The term "ethics" comes from the Greek word "ethos," which means "personality" or "custom." Ethics is essentially a branch of philosophy that stretches back around 2,500 years, to the period of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, all of whom concerned human conduct. It is still a fundamental concept that keeps people interested (Brickley, Smith, & Zimmerma, 2000). In other words, it is a system of norms, practices, and beliefs that all members of a group or organization follow. As a result, ethical behavior is valued in every profession around the world. It is widely employed in the context of organizational operations and

ethical and unethical behavior in commercial and professional circumstances, as well as ethical challenges in the profession (Hedayati, Borjalizadeh, & Allah, 2011). According to Gharamaleki (2006), professional ethics is inclusive of any form of labour, obligation or responsibility which are carried out with an ethical commitment and a consciousness. Knowing, demanding, performing, and maintaining an ethical attitude are the outcomes of knowing, demanding, performing, and maintaining an ethical attitude in any field. According to a recent study professional ethics governs behavior and attitudes toward employees both within and outside the class. Professional ethics has been described in a number of ways by numerous scholars, as seen by the aforementioned definitions (Hebenstreit & Hlavac, 2018).

Based on the aforementioned definitions of professional ethics, it can be identified that previous scholars have recognized and defined professional ethics in a number of ways with various perspectives. Consequently, for professional ethics there is no one standard definition. But the researchers have the common understanding that professional ethics is "a system that every member of an association follows of principles, values, beliefs, and practices of code of ethics, ethical standards and ethical attitudes".

Professional ethics plays a vital role in the organization. Companies working to develop a strong ethical culture encourage everybody to speak and behave with integrity and honesty. Organizations that have high ethics attract their products and

services to customers. Therefore, the operations and performance of the company are influenced by professional ethics. Professional ethics boosts organization performances and similarly, it enhances communication and decreases various risks possess by an organization.

2.2 Why is Professional Ethics necessary and important?

“Real Integrity is doing the right thing, knowing that nobody’s going to know whether you did it or not” – Oprah Winfrey

Many research studies in professional ethics have identified moral problems that can lead to ethical ignorance, ethical disappointment, or bad intentions, and there is no wonder that businesses should contribute to facilitating such an environment in order to create an ethical organizational environment (Mayer, 2014). Furthermore, several recent research studies have explored and debated this need (DeBode, et al., 2013; Arulrajah, 2016). To overcome the unethical challenges in the organization, it is essential to educate and train employees on a regular basis. In this regard, more focus should be placed on concerns about professional ethics. However, it is important that every employee knows the importance of professional conduct and they should be trained in the organization's rules and processes, with a monitoring body in place to ensure that they are followed (De Zoysa, 2019). Hence, professional ethics is important in this regard, since it allow any organization to build and maintain a strong and positive ethical culture among its professionals.

Consequently, it aims at establishing a value system within a company, as well as discouraging negative attitudes and increasing employee motivation.

Institutionalizing an ethical environment is a major strategic aim for every organization, and it will lead to enormous advantages that will assure the success of a positive and loyal corporation. Furthermore, sustaining strong ethics entails adhering to the principles of good moral conduct on a regular basis. Hence, organizations are always striving for a better ethical environment within their workplace culture. According to a study, a company's ethical behavior boosts productivity, efficiency, and effectiveness, which boosts revenue (Hempel & Porges, 2004).

Ethical cultures' measures are based on three factors: ethical content, how well ethics is implemented in day-to-day operations, and how well each individual follows ethical guidelines (Morgan, 2013). To understand an ethical culture, one must first know what ethics is, as well as its principles and essence. Several studies on employee ethical behavior have been conducted (Dubinsky & Ingram, 1984; Hunt & Vasquez-Parraga, 1993; Schwepker, 2001). Employees' long-term behavior is governed by an ethical culture and ethical standards. They are justice practices, integrity practices, confidentiality and privacy practices, and self-control practices, which strengthen employees' commitment, motivation, and satisfaction (Heskett, et al., 2008; Ferrell, et al., 2012). In today's business environment, not only employees but also organizational leaders are confronted with

ethical issues on a daily basis; that could be based on whether their decisions, actions, or behaviors are right or wrong and fair or unfair. As a result, ethical behavior is developed at the highest levels of the business.

Employees in organizations must adhere to a number of essential and indisputable professional ethics principles. Honesty, dedication, and respect for the business and natural environment, as well as fair behavior, equality, and justice, are becoming more important in business ethics (Buchholz & Rosenthal, 1998). Employees will be able to adopt the proper path of ethical irresolution if they keep all of these principles in mind, and obstacles like stress, weariness, pressure, and heavy workload will not be a reason to adopt unethical remedies (Saremi & Nezhad, 2014). Employees' ethical behavior enhances the capability of honesty, integrity, motivation and a sense of harmony among all personnel. Most organizations focus on the adoption of ethical standards and ethical norms as a key component of professional ethics at this time (Bulog & Granþiü, 2017). Furthermore, ethical principles assist in the identification of normative judgments and guide and lead employees' thinking by giving a framework for choosing how they should act when an ethical issue occurs, rather than viewing it through rose-colored glasses. In this perspective, professional ethics is an unavoidable need for any organization, and it must be maintained and implemented in a positive manner.

2.3. What are Employees' Attitudes towards Workplace Ethics?

“In any moment of decision, the best thing you can do is the right thing. The worst thing you can do is nothing” - Theodore Roosevelt (1858 – 1919); 26th U.S. President

According to several research studies, there is a significant relationship between employee attitudes and morale and workplace productivity (Fatile, 2013; Yücel & Çiftci, 2012). Furthermore, there are several real-world instances that demonstrate that when individuals are pleased and positively motivated, they will work harder, better, and smarter (Browne, 2017). Attitudes have an impact on both employee satisfaction and organizational productivity (Offorbike, NNADI, & AGU, 2018). A positive attitude toward upholding high work standards frequently leads to a productive firm where workers are proud of their job and clients, suppliers, and partners want to do business (Duggan, 2019). Employee attitudes, whether favorable or bad, have an impact on how they do their jobs, and attitudes can spread to others around them. A good attitude has a beneficial impact on overall productivity, and the inverse is also true (Joseph, 2019).

Omisore & Oyende, (2015) claimed and agreed that employees with positive work ethics work longer hours and don't spend a significant amount of time on leisure, resulting in greater performance and, as a consequence, such employees benefit the organization even in terms of overall performance. Furthermore, the researchers demonstrated that the influence of work ethics, such as honesty, feeling of responsibility, quality focus, self-discipline, and collaboration by the model, confirmed that employees with high work

ethics do extremely well on the job when compared to employees with low work ethics. Ahmed, et al., (2003) examined how cultural variations impact employees' attitudes toward corporate ethics and how they react to them. Another study discovered that employees and managers in commercial enterprises have a basic understanding of and a positive attitude toward the concept of social responsibility, and that if there is a possibility for special benefits for companies in the community, the firms' image will improve (Milenkovska, Petrovska, & Stoilkovska, 2019).

As previously discussed, attitudes have an influence on workplace behavior. Employers may use incentives to encourage employees to maintain a positive outlook. Employees may have a positive or negative attitude about specific working activities. Employees' workdays are more pleasurable when they have good attitudes. In addition, responsibilities will be completed much more quickly and with less animosity. Bad attitudes, on the other hand, contribute to indifference toward daily activities. Minor issues may irritate employees easily. Furthermore, whatever the duties such employees complete will guarantee that the required criteria are met (Leonard, 2019). Giving ethics training, recognizing ethical conduct in the workplace, integrating ethics into performance assessments, and encouraging open discussion about ethical problems are just a few methods to create positive attitudes among employees.

3 RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Previous scholars have recognized and defined professional ethics in a number of ways. Professional ethics are not uniformly defined. Professional ethics are the principles regulating the conduct of a person or a group in a business context. Like values, professional ethics provide guidance on how a person should deal with other persons and organizations in work environment. Therefore, it is necessary to develop and improve a professional ethics environment in the workplace in order to face the unethical issues in the organization.

Moreover, according to numerous research studies, it has been revealed that an ethical environment is essential for an organization's performance and is built on the alignment of formal processes and policies that ensure and encourage organizational members to act in accordance with high ethical norms and standards. Apart from that, it has been identified that there is an influence of employee attitudes towards professional ethics in the work environment. Therefore, it is important to enhance positive attitudes and minimize negative attitudes among employees in order to achieve optimal organizational performance.

Further, based on the study findings, the following implications can be made to enhance the ethical environment among employees in the workplace.

- It is important to increase the awareness of a professional ethics environment among the employees in the workplace.
- More ethics training is required to enhance employees' particular ethical framework.

- It is critical to implement an ethics "checklist" to ensure that all workers are held responsible.
- It is essential to build up clear standards for employee behaviour, give appropriate training and educational opportunities, and hold people accountable for their actions.
- Clear expectations, standards, and policies must be established in the organization.

4 CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this article was to gain a good understanding of professional ethics and its role in order to build a successful professional environment in the workplace among employees. Hence, in today's world, professional ethics is now more than ever recognized to be one of the most important strategies in any organization to enhance ethical behavior: companies must guarantee that their employees understand how to cope with ethical concerns in the workplace. The paper explores how professional ethics are important and necessary and further it helps with professional ethics to handle unethical situations.

As a consequence, when there is a clear and good ethical environment, everyone knows what is expected of them when ethical issues arise. This can offer employees the assurance that they can be on the lookout for unethical behavior and act with the knowledge that what they are doing is correct and will be accepted by the whole organization. Hence, every organization must concentrate on encouraging ethical behavior among employees.

Therefore, the following conclusions are drawn from the above study findings.

- It is essential for organizations to create and maintain a strong and reliable ethical environment among employees in the workplace.

Employee attitudes have an impact on the organization's workplace ethics.

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