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Leading Ethically: What Helps and What Hinders

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Introduction

Ethics is concerned with moral obligation, responsibility, social justice, and the common good. It is about defining the practices and rules – written and unwritten – which inform responsible conduct and behaviour between individuals and groups in order to maintain, or enhance, the common good. Everything we do has a consequence, such that ethics is fundamental to the very essence of who we are, and what we value, both as individuals and as people. This chapter presents the findings of a study that aimed to identify those enablers that seem to help individuals to live and act ethically, and those stumbling blocks that prevent them from translating a theoretical knowledge of ethics and morals into action. The sample involved 646 middle managers enrolled on the MBA programmes of the University of Cape Town (South Africa) and Erasmus University (Netherlands). The chapter explains the approach taken and presents the findings, as a contribution to the debate on the practical steps that might increase ethical behaviour in individuals.

Enablers

Our theoretical starting point for the enablers of ethical behaviour utilises a virtue ethics approach. Virtue ethics, or character ethics, directs our attention not just to questions about what is the ethical thing to do, or how we are to act ethically, but to questions about what it means to be an ethical sort of person (Mahoney, 1998). The four cardinal (*cardes*, ‘hinges’) virtues of Aristotle and Greek philosophy – *justice*, *wisdom* (prudence), *courage* (fortitude), and *moderation* (self-control, temperance) form the basis of Western ethics. The intellectual virtue

of wisdom is education-based, while the moral virtues of justice, courage, and moderation are practice-based. All other virtues are derived from these four. Mahoney (1998:191) argues that the particular contribution of virtue theory to business ethics is to emphasise that there is really no substitute for integrity: the trustworthiness, loyalty, and moral courage of the individual person working within the company for its best interests. It was Plato who noted that the way to virtue was through knowledge of the Good. According to him, if we knew without a doubt that virtue was always for our good, and that justice is always more profitable than injustice (the central teaching of *The Republic*), then we would have no motive for preferring vice. Lantos (1999:222) explains that 'the ethical person chooses the moral course of action regardless of personal sacrifice'. April et al. (2000) believe that authenticity and ethics are linked, arguing that 'in order to become an authentic leader, it is important to know where one stands on important moral and professional issues and then act accordingly'. Persons of character do not allow situations to be the determining force behind their actions (Scarnati, 1997:25), since 'what we have worked hard to achieve during our lifetime can be quickly lost if the basic principle is seriously violated'.

Stumbling blocks

However, situational social psychologists argue that the notion of ethics is not global (Alzola, 2006), but that it evolves according to time and culture (Svensson and Wood, 2003), and varies by individual, place, and time. It is therefore situation-specific (Annas, 2006). The main proponents of the situationist thesis (Doris, 1998 and 2002; Harman 1999, 2002 and 2003; Zimbardo, 1971, 2004 and 2007) largely base their views on findings from experimental psychology. Arjoon (2008) summarises five types of situational contexts, which studies show can lead to ethical sub-optimisation. First, *obedience to authority*, originating from Milgram's (1974) Yale University electric shock experiments and Zimbardo's (1971) Stanford Prison experiments. Secondly, *mood effects*, which can be characterised as organisational culture, deriving from Isen and Levin (1972). Thirdly, *bystander* studies (Asch, 1951; Latane and Darley, 1968 and 1970; Latane and Rodin, 1969) point to conformity when a given behaviour is called for. Fourthly, the *Good Samaritan* or hurry factor (Darley and Baston, 1973) shows that people tend not to stop when that would be the right thing to do. Lastly – *consistency*. Studies carried out among schoolchildren have

shown that children who are consistently honest at school are not necessarily honest at home, or vice versa (Hartshorne and May, 1928). Within the business ethics literature, situationist authors (Gandossy and Sonnenfeld, 2005) have shown how many of the recent corporate crises like Enron, Shell, Tyco, and WorldCom can be traced back to a range of these factors, with organisational obedience to authority looming largest. Positioning situational social psychology as a necessary cause of immoral behaviour is of course incorrect. What the situationists simply identify is that certain situations more often than not lead to bad behaviour. The debate between proponents of virtue ethics and the situationists has long been seen as a dichotomy but need not be constructed as such (Webber, 2006). That said, the situational factors identified as encouraging negative behaviours have been used to provide a framework of classification for the stumbling blocks in this study.

Methodology

Our research base comprised 646 middle managers enrolled on the MBA programmes of the University of Cape Town and Erasmus University. Participants were given the following definition of 'ethics':

Ethics is concerned with moral obligation, responsibility, social justice and the common good, and can both be taught and also exist instinctively in an individual. Ethics are a set of moral principles or rules of conduct (virtues) by which human beings live in relation to other human beings, nature, God and/or themselves, and against which human actions and proposals may be judged good or bad, or right or wrong, in a particular context. These rules of conduct, recognised in respect of a particular class of human actions, when acted upon through choice among equally plausible alternatives by an individual, shape his/her character (lived virtues/values/principles). In other words, ethics are not simply a series of norms or values to be imposed as a template upon people, but rather imply a rational, discursive practice on the part of the individual – and are most evident at a time of ethical dilemma. The main factors which most likely cause people to compromise ethical standards are: pressure to meet unrealistic business objectives/deadlines, desire to further one's career, and the desire to protect one's livelihood.

We encouraged the research respondents to write their own personal stories, and to self-report their experiences relating to stumbling

blocks and enablers. We also asked them to report on the practical actions that they employed to live and work ethically. When we received the written situated-experiences of the research respondents, we analysed the data using a five-step blueprint (Srnrka and Koeszegi, 2007:35):

Our analysis of the 646 self-reported documents identified 255 different mentions (in 10 separate themes) of enablers, and 98 different mentions (in six separate themes) of stumbling blocks. Additionally, respondents mentioned 176 different practical actions/recommendations (in 10 separate themes) which they took in their own lives in order to be more ethical. The findings are listed in Table 10.1 (enablers), Table 10.2 (stumbling blocks), and Table 10.3 (actions), respectively. The enablers and the stumbling blocks were both grouped by theme, then grouped with the cardinal virtues and the rules/regulations situational corrector. Lastly, the behaviours and actions listed by respondents that might encourage and further develop ethics were coded and are presented by theme.

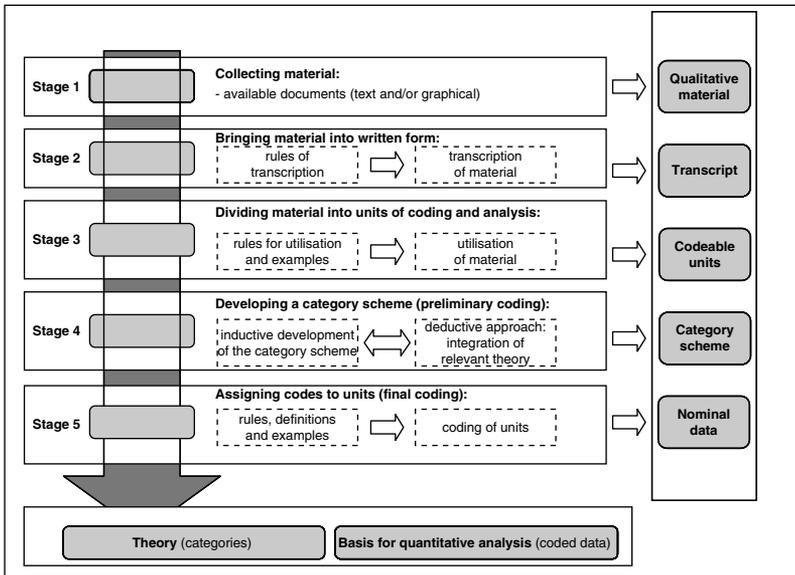


Figure 10.1 Blueprint for the Qualitative Analysis Process
 Source: adapted from Srnrka and Koeszegi, 2007

Table 10.1 Frequency – Enablers

Themes of enablers mentioned	Listings
Upbringing	57
Spirituality	54
Mentors and role models	45
Honesty, courage and integrity	37
Self-control	21
Conscience	17
Standing up for own beliefs	8
Codes of conduct	8
Self-knowledge	7
Defining moments	1

Findings – enablers

Table 10.1 shows the frequency of enablers mentioned, in descending order. The enablers are then discussed under the headings of the virtues of justice, wisdom, courage, and moderation.

The virtue of justice

Standing up for your beliefs

P38 wrote: *‘Whenever I am placed in a difficult or grey situation with two or more choices where morality/ethics is questionable, I refer to this instant in my life and ask myself which of the two options is the more difficult. Experience has shown me that the more difficult choice is the ethical option, and because of past experiences having resulted in awful circumstances, I now always choose the high road, that is, I practice greater self-control and avoid unethical temptations.’*

Conscience

Scarnati (1997:26) argues that ‘dedication to the virtue of honesty establishes an internal warning system called “conscience” that will assist in keeping us upright and out of unethical situations’. People who listen to their conscience experience deep fulfilment even in the midst of difficulties and challenges (Covey and Merrill, 1994:185). P89 agreed and wrote: *‘My conscience is one factor that enables me to keep grounded into the issues of ethics. This is not to suggest that it prohibits me from engaging in unethical acts, but often than not it prevents me from becoming too far involved and makes me to realize that my actions were being contrary to the*

norms of a decent person. My conscience causes me to realise that although there are no legal obligations involved, there are major issues about keeping one's word, about being honest about being fair, that are values that need to be considered and applied if we are to live in a society that is both satisfying and at least relatively stable.' Badaracco (2006:34) argues that 'a moral compass is useful for questions of right and wrong but in most organisations, however, the hardest choices arise when right conflicts with right'. P139, however, believed: *'It is the conviction that you know that you will be able to sleep at night, that what you are doing will make the world a better, safer place that enables us to be ethical.'* P481 argued that: *'There have been times in the past where I have done something I have been ashamed of. Afterward I feel very uncomfortable, and anxious. Often this is only relieved if I admit to someone what I have done.'* Holian (2006:1134), however, warns that sometimes increased awareness of ethical issues can lead to an increased perception of uncertainty, risk and overload, which paralyses decision-making.

Self-knowledge

Much in the same way as Augustine's documented early education in the fourth century, which through contemplation and self-reflection led to an awakening to his personal beliefs, a re-reading of his personal value narratives, and the formation of his ethics (upward ascent of the soul), P210 argued: *'Knowing my values and beliefs and being true and honest with myself, and being able to distinguish the right from the wrong, are enablers for me to always strive to be a better person and do the right things',* while P449 claimed: *'I feel that by being aware of the influence of ethics on my judgements, I am able to adjust my values and behaviour whenever needed.'* P442 concurred: *'There are times when I have applied my ethics in business at the cost of short-term financial gain, but I have slept well at night and I do not regret for one second having done that. I feel that in the long-term I have made the right decision.'*

The Virtue of wisdom

Upbringing

Odom and Green (2003:67) argue that 'early education experiences and family influences are going to have the most critical impacts on the integrity of future business leaders and their willingness and ability to be value driven'. P400 concurred and stated: *'Every building that lasts is built on solid foundations. Similarly when we build our "self" – our character or personality – we need a solid platform to build on. It is therefore vital*

that we have an ethical foundation that we use to judge our actions or viewpoints.' P122 also argued: *'I have the good fortune to have been guided by my mother, who even though she had not progressed beyond grade 8 at school, taught me to live a life based on consideration for others, to know the difference between right and wrong and to act in accordance with that knowledge, and if in doubt, to consult somebody who knows.'* P391 also related to folklore and stated: *'My adult life therefore draws back and is shaped mostly by my fundamental beliefs, which were infused in me by my grandmother. In her pursuit to instil moral instincts in me, she would sometimes tell me mystical stories that would make me differentiate between good and bad, and mostly discourage me from what our society perceived as bad.'* P232 questioned the usefulness of a protected upbringing and stated: *'I am proud of where I come from and, by and large, I think that the morality that was instilled in me has helped to shape the person I am. However, as I have grown into an adult I have trouble at times assimilating these values with the realities of my adult life, which appear more complex.'*

Spirituality

P41 claimed: *'It is my belief that there is a higher force that we are all responsible and accountable to. I am talking about my belief in the Bible and what it teaches about the existence of God, that God is love and that God created the universe. I use the Bible to understand love, which is the call message that God tries to send to every mankind. In believing in the ethics and authentic values through following the Bible, I create a special bond with God.'* P119 concurred and stated: *'My sense of right and wrong has been greatly influenced by my religion. I am aware of God watching me and am aware of the profound influence the rigid code of conduct that my religion requires of me and its effect on my everyday life.'* P254 contrasted the Christian and Muslim beliefs and argued: *'I am a practicing Muslim and my religion is a huge cornerstone of what I define as good or bad behaviour. The Quran does not have a set of commandments similar to that in the Bible. Instead, the Quran defines specific guidelines on what is acceptable and what is not. These guidelines form the principles on which I base my ethics and values.'* Shipka (1997) advises that it is through spirit that we infuse deeper meaning and purpose to our lives. Through our spirituality we also unleash untapped unlimited creative potential; we comprehend our connection to reach others and all life.

Mentors and role models

Odom and Green (2003:67) argue that 'when leaders are truly transformational and serve as role models of ethical behaviour, a positive

culture will permeate the whole organisation'. P38 agreed and stated: *'I believe that mentors serve as a beacon of light and morality especially when faced with difficult decisions. I am fortunate enough to have had a number of mentors to date.'*

The virtue of courage

Honesty/courage and integrity

P332 viewed honesty as *'a non-negotiable policy but when faced with sensitive issues, I have had to temporarily compromise on my policy and hold back on my honesty'*. However, Lewis (1952) wrote: *'We might think that provided you did the right thing, it did not matter how or why you did it – whether you did it willingly or unwillingly, sulkily or cheerfully, through fear of public opinion or for its own sake. But the truth is that the right actions done for the wrong reason do not help to build the internal quality or character called a virtue and it is this quality or character that really matters.'* P120 by contrast believed ethics required: *'... the courage to make an unpopular decision without concern for personal consequences'*. P266 believed: *'Honesty and integrity allow the clear projection of one's own intentions and thoughts.'*

The virtue of moderation

Self-control

P456 argued that: *'Self control, in this respect, is a matter of choice and personal attitude. Control of noticing feeling at a particular moment, awareness of recognising what is wrong or right and having the courage to act against it or not.'* P455 agreed and stated: *'I am strongly convinced that you always have a choice whether you adapt to your standards or adapt to the environment. By having that choice it also means you are in control.'* P282 believed that *'self control helps to avoid unethical temptations'*. P12 stated: *'I noticed that if someone firmly believes and defends his/her opinion properly, people respect that person more than a person who is always happy to go along with the rest of the group and has never expressed an opinion for himself/herself.'*

Codes of conduct

P282 stated: *'I am an accountant by profession, and the professional body that sets the accounting standards stipulates that accountants must practice by the highest levels of morals, ethics and integrity. I even signed an oath with*

regards to this.' April and Wilson (2007) argue that rules not backed up by punishment will normally not be adhered to. In South Africa, the corporate governance guidelines provided by King (King, 1991) are used by most companies to set ethical standards.

Findings – stumbling blocks

Table 10.2 shows the frequency of stumbling blocks mentioned, in descending order. The stumbling blocks are then grouped by the five factors derived from the social psychology literature: obedience to authority, mood effects, the bystander/Good Samaritan factors, and the factor of consistency.

Obedience to authority

P446 stated: *'I know I like to be part of a group. I sometimes even adapt myself to become part of certain groups. This sometimes can result in feeling the peer pressure, wanting to change my natural personality. I know though that this peer pressure does not go that far that I will change myself and act against my own values and beliefs.'* P119 concurred and stated: *'My stumbling blocks have been doing what others are doing in a certain situation, not willing to be personally accountable for the decisions.'* P229 also wrote: *'I should have left the company the first time I came to the realisation that I did not approve of the way we did business. I was afraid that I might not find another well-paying job, or I may have to move and start a new life again.'* P93 viewed *'ethical behaviour in the workplace as something that is being driven very strongly by procedures and standards. Unfortunately the compliance to these is not always very good. An example is discrimination during recruitment, as well as disciplinary procedures. In the end, the ethics of any business depends on the ethics of the people working in that business and therefore you need to start with the people.'*

Table 10.2 Frequency – Stumbling Blocks

Themes of stumbling blocks mentioned	Listings
Bottom-line mentality	34
Organisational influences	31
Fear	21
Peer pressure	8
Compliance	2
Humour	2

Mood effects

Mood effects, or an organisational culture that promotes unethical behaviour, are clearly drivers. P514 wrote: *'I cannot fail to mention that I come from Peru, where unethical behaviour like bribing, are "tools" and common practice to move ahead, when primarily dealing with governmental bureaucracy. To me, it is hard to imagine a business entity, which along their lifetime did not bribe and not only in Peru, but I can attest that in all of Latin America. This might seem tough and dark, but it is reality; furthermore, I believe that given the collective unconsciousness in my mother-home society this is a common practice and some may argue, needed. Western ethical behaviour amidst this scenario will be tough to fulfil.'* P37 justified unethical conduct by stating: *'If a person has no financial option whether or not they stay in the job it may well serve their interest to accept the unethical manner of doing business, even if it is in contrast to their own moral code.'* P129 also argued that: *'At other times, Lucifer whispers equally sweetly into my ear and tells me that money is good and by working hard, I am actually servicing humanity in my own sweet way!'* P10 argued that: *'Although at a personal level I might consider myself moral or ethical in my conduct, business life poses its own challenges on a daily basis.'* P9 claimed: *'In an organisation, if one is not in a position of power, it is sometimes very difficult to act ethically even if one wants to. One is forced to conform to the organisation's expectations.'* P501 also argued that: *'Another big stumbling block regarding ethics is the feeling that my contribution towards a better world is so small, that my effort does not matter.'* P35 concurred with P9 and P501, and stated: *'Although I did employ an ethical and moral approach in my own day to day professional activities, I was not placed in a senior enough position where I could challenge those that do things for their own personal gain and recognition within the company. I suppose that this is one of the main reasons why I decided to leave the company at the end of the day.'*

The bystander/good samaritan factors

These factors can lead to an emphasis on profits at the expense of service. P14 argued that: *'In organisations, I have been involved in dilemmas...It was very definitely a case of profit first and morality, ethics, social responsibility, etc. a distant second.'* P273 stated that: *'Sometimes I become too focused on the bottom-line on a specific project, and then ethical dilemmas that may previously have caused me to rethink my relationship with the client are given less prominence. There are lots of grey areas between what is right and wrong; the lines become even more blurred when focused on the bottom-line.'* P120 believed that making shareholders happy drove him to: *'... manipulate financial results if I can get away with it to make the*

shareholder happy, or profits at the expense of environmental degradation, and the attainment of huge bonuses as the expense of others.' P275 agreed with the view of a life of comfort and claimed: 'One of the driving forces behind my ambition to succeed is to be able to provide for my mom, siblings and children what I never had. In the quest of this, I sometimes lose sight of the bigger picture and adopt a bottom-line mentality.' P275 stated that: 'One of my challenges is exposing the snake in the suit. I know what she is doing is wrong and causing much unhappiness in a few people's lives. I know the right thing to do is to expose her to her superiors at work so that she can be dealt with, and the situation rectified. For years I have been ignoring this, not to upset the apple cart.'

Consistency

P228 argued: 'I found this quite challenging; working in an environment where corruption is an integral part of daily life in both the public and the private sectors. I resisted offers on some occasions but on others the offers were too tempting to resist. As I think back, I realise that on those occasions where I did not act ethically, I convinced myself that my efforts alone were likely to be isolated and will do little to fight corruption. I also found solace in the thinking that it was not so bad "earning" a commission when you acted as a middleman in a corrupt deal. It was the desire to earn another "buck" that led me into seeking justification for things that were certainly morally incorrect.' P477 stated: 'When I want immediate or physical gratification, it is amazing to see how I can rationalise my own behaviours and treat those events as if they live in a vacuum, and hence have no impact on my wholeness.'

Table 10.3 Practical Actions Frequency

Themes of practical action/recommendations	Appearances
Act in accordance with my values and beliefs	29
Increase self-awareness	17
Develop, make use of and value my support network	14
Religion/Spirituality	12
Act with courage	11
Practice reflection, meditation and mindfulness	11
Be open, honest and transparent	10
Embrace diversity	9
Heighten awareness and exposure	9
Other	54

Findings – practical actions

The respondents made the following recommendations as to what can be done as far as ethics and morals are concerned. These are listed in descending order of frequency of mention in Table 10.3.

Act in accordance with my values and beliefs

In my definition for ethics, I am not only going to focus on being able to tell what is right and wrong, but also being able to act on what I believe to be right.

This guideline ranked first in terms of nominations. Respondents felt that it was extremely important to act in accordance with their values and beliefs if they were to improve their ethical performance in any way.

I will, through practice, act in accordance with what I believe more often and be brave [enough] to disagree with anyone who compromises my beliefs.

And that is where I think the crux [with] ethics lies. It is not whether you know the difference between 'right' and 'good', it is about whether you know the difference, but choose to ignore it for your own gain. I therefore think that the secret to becoming a better, more ethical person is just to do what you know is right in your heart. If everybody lived [according] to this simple rule, we would have a lot better, happier, more loving world out there.

One respondent highlighted the fact that she needs to take action, even if she believes that the small role she plays cannot make a difference.

The final step is acting on your moral decision. I must have the confidence in my abilities to do what is correct. I have often felt that one person cannot make a difference and therefore I don't even try. However I must recognise that one person can make a difference, even if it is a small difference and therefore I must be willing to act.

Another questioned himself as to whether his ethical behaviour was driven by principles or was based on a fear of consequences. He felt that his true challenge lies in being ethical and acting in accordance with his values and beliefs, even if it went against mainstream thinking.

What became evident under this guideline is that respondents felt they needed clarity on their 'moral code' and 'value proposition' before enacting what they believed to be right.

My goal is to cultivate my moral code according to the purest form of known truth. This means that I must have my perception of 'what is the truth' under a microscope. Tied firmly to this mission is to ensure that my every action matches my moral code. That my decisions are in perfect tandem with my theoretical beliefs of right and wrong.

Increase self-awareness

This guideline received the second most mentions. Most respondents discussed the importance of checking their values and refining them if necessary.

Ethics have always been important to me and I was brought up with a strong set of values. I think that this helped me to get through some difficult periods in my life. As I move on through my life, and from continent to continent, I will regularly have to make a reality check on my set of values and readjust when necessary.

I recognise that to attain effective self-leadership I must be able to determine what I stand for and have a system of reviewing these as, and when, time and space allow.

Others felt that by being fully self-aware, they would be in a better position to stand their ground.

If I know what is right and what is wrong I will be able to stand my ground in any situation and defend this.

Self-awareness links to self-discipline, and five respondents also felt that by instilling greater self-discipline within themselves they would be better able to stick to their beliefs and perform in an ethical fashion.

Develop and make use of a support network

This guideline received the third most nominations. Several respondents mentioned that they would consider using a mentor to guide their ethical behaviour.

Kerns (2003) also recommends wisdom and knowledge as important enablers to distinguish between right and wrong. In this regard, I believe

that mentors (Odom and Green, 2003) will serve as a beacon of light and morality, especially when faced with a difficult decision.

In my future career in business, I will have to deal with many ethical issues. My personal action plan that will help me develop the competencies I will need to handle these issues effectively is, firstly to have a mentor or a positive role model. I will use my mentor as a sounding board whenever I am unsure of the next steps to take – in business, or in life in general.

Others suggested surrounding themselves with those they believed to have high moral and ethical standards.

I will certainly attempt to surround myself with ethical people as this can certainly aid good ethical behaviour, as suggested by Reilly and Myroslaw (1990).

I must become acquainted with, and seek guidance from, those whom I believe live their lives with humility and integrity.

Religion/spirituality

Religion/spirituality received the fourth most mentions.

The adage goes that without God everything is justifiable, so people can never be held accountable for their actions. God demands fairness and that we do what is right and good (Is. 56:1) because, in the end, we will all be judged (Rev. 20:12). It is the standard I have set for my life because I'll be held to account.

Instead of determining my ethics by what is socially acceptable, I need to ask myself what is acceptable to God. Failing to do so, ethics becomes nothing more than etiquette, a reflection of time- and spatial-specific norms. Without genuine integrity and 'fundamental character strength', life's challenges will eventually expose my true motives (Covey, 2004:22).

Act with courage

Respondents highlighted this guideline 11 times. Several felt that they needed to act with courage, especially when going against the flow.

When I feel that I have authority in a matter and where I have influence over others, it is much easier for me to make ethical decisions. However, when I am not in control I find it easier to go with the flow instead of

standing up for what I believe in. I need to become braver and learn that I do not necessarily have to hurt anyone by not going along with his or her decisions.

I will endeavour to stand my ground on ethical issues despite that this has a potential to sideline me and hinder my career progression.

Others mentioned being courageous in terms of setting goals and boundaries for themselves.

My quest is to be more courageous in setting goals and boundaries for myself.

Practise reflection, meditation and mindfulness

This guideline was cited 11 times.

I will be mindful of everything happening around me and continue being resolute in my beliefs of right and wrong.

Acting in an ethical way requires more than simply knowing what is right. Knowing what is right but failing to act upon this knowledge still constitutes unethical behaviour. It is important, therefore, that I am honest with myself and that I reflect upon my actions.

Being in the present, and noticing my body sensations, helps me to sense what is right and what is wrong. Usually my body does not lie – I just have to be open to such intuition.

Be open, honest and transparent

The respondents highlighted the importance of being open, honest and transparent as a way to enhance enablers and overcome stumbling blocks within this seed.

In this situation I find [one of] my stumbling blocks is that [I live] in Africa, where bribery is rife, thus leading and encouraging unethical behaviour. I need to speak out and be more transparent with my surroundings and [thereby] allowing me to be true to myself.

Two respondents mentioned the importance of not judging others based on their personal ethical standards.

I must try not to judge others by my everyday ethical standards.

Embrace diversity

Respondents highlighted this guideline nine times. They recognised the fact that different communities have different ethical standards, and that these need to be understood and embraced.

I will endeavour to explore more ways of identifying perceptions of ethical standards, and also try to accept the standards that I do not agree with.

When I think 'ethics', I need to constantly challenge myself to think outside my own mindset in order that I can accommodate different perspectives and cultures.

Heighten awareness and exposure

Practise constant integrated awareness.

'Heighten awareness and exposure' was cited nine times. One respondent felt that she needed to increase her awareness of the fact that her decisions have an effect on others.

The first important step in ethical decision-making is to recognise that your decision has an effect on others. When making a decision we must ask who will be affected by my actions. If a person does not recognise a moral issue they will not employ moral decision-making schemata and instead make the decision according to other schemata, such as economical rationality. I generally am able to recognise that people will be affected by the decisions I make.

Others felt that it was important to 'keep up with the times'.

Be aware of the influence of the times in which I 'currently' live.

Other

Respondents offered several other suggestions as to practical actions.

Seven respondents felt it important to accept *accountability* as part of improving their ethics.

In my experience one's ethical stance is inextricably linked to authenticity, accountability and being in control. Kerns (2003) claims that ethics can be compromised when one is not taking accountability for their actions or they lack self-control. The capacity to take the ethical path requires a

commitment to the value of acting with temperance. Through improving my accountability and internal orientation I will ensure that my ethical standpoint will never be questioned.

Six respondents listed as a guideline 'Treat others as you would like to be treated.'

In order to become more ethical, I need to make a deliberate choice to apply the Golden Rule in my daily life, namely 'Do for others just what you want them to do for you' (Luke 6:31).

Six respondents also felt that they could take an active role in their ethics progression by focusing on *building education and learning into their lives* as much as possible.

I plan to take the 'Before the Whistle Blowers' elective course [as part of my] MBA in order to understand the legislative and corporate governance frameworks [controlling] unethical behaviour. This will give me the skills to proactively influence my company's commitment to ethics, and help me make informed decisions on how to encourage ethical behaviour in the workplace. I can be the agent of change in any company I work for.

I have to be open to diverse ethics and keep myself informed and educated at all times, especially when getting in contact with people from different cultural backgrounds.

Linked to this, two respondents recommended *sharing this knowledge and learning with others.*

My family up-bringing and education to date has made working at this company easy. This is endorsed by Fransworth and Kleiner (2003:130–140) when they stated that 'education serves to reinforce existing values and encourage their application. Early education experiences and family influences are going to have the most crucial impacts on the integrity of future business leaders and their willingness and ability to be value driven'. My personal challenge is to ensure that I pass on to my children the true value of abiding by their ethics.

As a transformational leader I must serve as a role model of ethical behaviour, 'if I achieve that a positive culture will permeate the whole organization' (Odom and Green, 2003).

Focusing specifically on learning about ethics, four respondents had found it helpful to *engage with the philosophical concept of ethics* specifically.

I finally discovered that I have to engage in the philosophical concept of ethics to understand it better.

In understanding the philosophical concept I believe I will be able to implement it sustainably in my life and day-to-day actions.

I believe that it would be more useful to study both the opposing and agreeing value set and, in this way, try to get a better idea of the arguments. It should be easier to construct a stronger argument by analysing both sides. I try to be strongly moral and ethical, but because of my innate curiosity and sceptical bent, I get confused by the blurring lines and grey areas I discover. I've often thought that it would be much easier to live by a simple moral code, such as that which George W. Bush, ex-President of the USA, advocates: a world where everything is black or white, good or evil (his famous 'axis of evil' speech), with or against 'us'. Things are set in stone, there are rules. But rules that are unquestioned are equal to dogma, something I just cannot agree to. I need to question, to search, to wonder – and when I find, I must remember the poet Kahlil Gibran's words, 'say not, "I have found the truth", but rather, "I have found a truth"'.

Six respondents mentioned that it was important to *never compromise*.

Svensson and Wood (2003) contend that the activity of examining one's moral standards or the moral standards of a society, and asking how these standards apply to our lives and whether these standards are reasonable or unreasonable. I believe I still have a long way to go when it comes to ethics especially in view of the alignment and political pressures at work, I will endeavour to stand my ground on ethical issues despite that this has a potential to sideline me and hinder my career progression.

I will never indulge in any activity that could dent my dignity.

Listen to my gut feeling. If it does not feel right it probably is not. No compromises.

Four respondents advised others to choose to operate in *environments which support ethical behaviour*.

Another useful tool that, in the future, would empower me to continue practising these values is finding a work environment that allows and supports ethical behaviour.

Learning from your mistakes was a guideline listed three times and, connected with this, two respondents felt it important to improve their self-esteem: *'In case I fall down, I must learn to stand up, lift my head up and walk tall, never looking back.'*

Other guidelines that were mentioned included the importance defining a sense of purpose, decreasing self-preoccupation, and practising forgiveness. One respondent recommended the Buddhist philosophy of 'First, do no harm', and another commended a maxim of 'continuous improvement, not destination perfection'.

Conclusion

Locus of control is defined as a personality construct reflecting a belief or perception about who controls a person's behaviour and life events (Connolly, 1980). It was the generalised belief of the majority of our research respondents that behavioural outcomes are under one's personal control (internal locus), rather than being dependent on outside forces, luck, or powerful others (external locus) (Rotter, 1966). Power does not rest solely on belief about locus of control, but action emanating from such belief is often required. Our research highlighted the fact that such action was often inward-focused, that is, drawing strength from one's upbringing, one's defining moments, one's spirituality, one's conscience; exercising self-control, using honesty, courage, and integrity; standing up for one's beliefs and using mentors to lean on (enabling individuals) to encourage the upholding of codes of conduct. Our respondents emphasised the fact that such action often counted as some of their most difficult life experiences which, when reflected upon and learnt from, became the crucibles that forged their characters, developed their internal powers, and gave them a sense of freedom to handle difficult circumstances in the future, and to inspire others to do so as well (enabling environments).

However, individual behaviour, we found, is bound by contextual constraints. Therefore, ethics is essentially a methodological attempt to make sense of our individual and social moral experience, such that rules for governing (constraining) human conduct, rules identifying the societal values worth pursuing (constraint), and the character traits deserving development (constraint) are highlighted and made to be the norm. Bandura (1986) identified self-efficacy as, perhaps, the single most important factor in promoting changes in behaviour. Despite literature suggesting that individuals can rise above their circumstances through their own independent will, fear is a very dominant stumbling

block with respect to ethics. And individuals who challenge the status quo or the order of things, or seek to shift ethical constraints, may suffer personally. Indeed, our research respondents identified, in the main, organisations and society as the key stumbling blocks. These were the stumbling blocks which the respondents most often had to tolerate to be able to meet their financial commitments, often at the expense of fulfilment, self-worth, authenticity and ethical living.

Note

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