

## Social Issues in Management and Business Ethics: Exercises and Activities

Exercise/Activity Title:

### **Real Life Ethical Dilemma Discussions**

Exercise/Activity Explanation (150 words or less):

As employees, students have experienced many ethical dilemmas. Students compose a one or two paragraph ethical dilemma about an experience at work that challenged an organization's core value, involved moral uncertainty regarding what to do, or disrespected a stakeholder. In order to preserve anonymity, references to specific people and places are changed.

Students then read their narratives in a small group and ask others what action option they would pursue if they were the decision-maker facing the core values tension point. The presenter concludes by sharing what happened in real life.

Assignment is on the following page.

Optional – Contact Information:

If interested in additional information, please contact Professor Denis Collins, School of Business, Edgewood College, Madison, WI; [dcollins@edgewood.edu](mailto:dcollins@edgewood.edu)

## Real-Life Ethical Dilemma Narrative

Denis Collins, Edgewood College, [dcollins@edgewood.edu](mailto:dcollins@edgewood.edu)

### Real Life Ethical Dilemma Narratives Exercise

As employees, you have experienced many ethical dilemmas. Write a one or two paragraph ethical dilemma about an experience YOU had at work that challenged an organizational core value. Five ways that might help you arrive at an issue are:

- 1) Describe a situation where you were not sure of the right thing to do.
- 2) Describe an incident at work that challenged your conscience.
- 3) Describe an incident at work that challenged the company's code values.
- 4) Describe an incident that seemed disrespectful toward owners, customers, managers, employees, suppliers, community or the natural environment.
- 5) Describe an incident that highlights the tension tradeoffs between: (a) truth vs. loyalty, (b) individual vs. organization vs. community, (c) short term vs. long term, (d) justice vs. mercy.

Don't do a narrative about "squealing on someone." In order to preserve anonymity, change references to specific people and places.

In order to preserve anonymity, change references to specific people and places.

- Begin the first sentence with: "You are the (state the job title of the key person facing the ethical dilemma, i.e. accounting manager)".

- Describe the core value tension point (context, concerns, conflict) and clarify both sides of the issue (other people need to understand why the unethical option was a reasonable thing for the decision-maker to pursue).
- Reach the key decision point, and then ask “What would you do?” followed by several possible action options, such as (a) notify X or (b) do nothing.

You will then read your narrative in a small group and ask others what action option they would pursue if they were the decision-maker facing the core values tension point.

**Sample:** You supervise ten employees. Kim, the best performer, called in sick today. You learn from a very trustworthy subordinate whom Kim is meeting for lunch that Kim is not actually sick. Instead, Kim is taking a “mental health” day and just wanted some unscheduled time off from work. The company’s sick leave policy does not allow for mental health days. You suspect that Kim might do this once or twice a year, within the allowable sick day allocation. Allowing Kim to take a “mental health” day off when not sick can damage employee morale by creating a double-standard, one for Kim and one for everyone else.

What would you do? Would you:

- 1) Demand that Kim work an extra day without pay to make up for the missed work day?
- 2) Just give Kim a warning?
- 3) Do nothing?

Why?