

Chapter 5: Ethical Theories and Behaviors
Book Title: Procedures & Theory for Administrative Professionals, Seventh Edition
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Chapter 5

Ethical Theories and Behaviors

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Chapter Introduction

Learning Objectives

1. Understand the basics of ethics and consider the importance of ethical behavior in the workplace.
2. Identify characteristics of an ethical organization.
3. Develop a framework for making ethical decisions.
4. Identify characteristics of an ethical administrative professional.

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5-1 Ethics 101

[Ethics \(The standards that help a person determine right from wrong\)](#) are the standards that generally help people determine right from wrong or what they ought to do. They include widely accepted ideas such as the importance of loyalty, honesty, and kindness toward others as well as the wrongness of actions such as murder, theft, lying, and assault. [Business ethics \(The application of ethical standards in the workplace\)](#) is the application of ethical standards in the workplace. This chapter will help you understand the role ethics plays in the workplace and how you can develop ethical habits as an administrative professional.

For individuals and businesses, ethics are important. For you as an administrative professional, your reputation as a trustworthy employee and your value in that respect are at stake with each decision you make. For example, will you repeat confidential or sensitive information that you are privy to as an administrative professional? Can your supervisor trust you to do your work diligently when he or she is away from the office? Can your co-workers trust you to act fairly?

Businesses must also face the issue of reputation. A business that consistently treats its employees fairly will tend to have satisfied and loyal employees. Businesses with questionable ethics may experience high turnover and may spend more time and effort finding and training employees. Reputation is also important when dealing with competitors and customers. Those who are treated fairly and honestly will respect and do business with an ethical organization.

Ethics are often confused with laws, character, and values, and they are also sometimes identified with feelings and religion. Laws are the rules established by governments, which may or may not be ethical (what people ought to do). You can probably think of some periods in history when certain laws were enacted that were later deemed unethical. The term **character** (Your consistent personal standards of behavior) refers to your consistent personal standards of behavior. Character has been defined as the person you are when no one else is watching. **Values** (Personal beliefs about right and wrong) are personal beliefs about what is right or wrong. Your values were, and still are, being shaped by parents, religion, culture, television, friends, social networking, and schools as well as various other influences. You rely most often on your personal values when making decisions about what is right or wrong.

Ethics are concrete standards that are not based on feelings. Feelings, when making an ethical decision, might be deceptive. For example, you promised a coworker that he is next on the list to get an outside cubicle, but your best friend has asked you for that workspace several times recently. Relying on feelings could lead you to choose pleasing your friend over keeping a promise to a coworker. Ethics are also not limited to religion. While most religions do advocate ethical behavior, and ethics certainly have roots in religion, ethics are not only for people with religious beliefs. They are standards for everyone, since they recognize obligations and benefits to society.

An ethical organization is environmentally responsible.



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5-2 Characteristics of Ethical Organizations

When you begin looking for employment as an administrative professional, an important factor to consider is whether the organization is ethical. Many characteristics can demonstrate an organizations ethics. Here are a few to consider.

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5-2a Environmental Responsibility

An environmentally responsible organization not only obeys environmental laws but shows a commitment to environmental concerns above and beyond what is legally required. A familiar example is a company recycling program. An environmentally responsible company might voluntarily upgrade its anti-pollution equipment, stream-line its production processes to produce less waste, make corporate donations to support environmental causes, and adopt green building practices, such as using local materials and native landscaping.

Acting ethically regarding the environment benefits organizations in several ways. For instance, adopting environmentally friendly methods of waste disposal and water and energy conservation can help with public and employee perceptions and can motivate consumers to buy products and services. In contrast, skirting regulations could be detrimental. In addition to legal problems, there can be repercussions due to negative perceptions within the community.

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5-2b Global Awareness

Directly or indirectly, many organizations do business with companies outside the United States. In deciding whom they will do business with and where, ethical organizations consider issues such as human rights, labor practices, and environmental policies. For example, a company that manufactures engines in the United States decides to purchase parts from one of two companies overseas. When it finds that one of the companies employs child labor in manufacturing the parts, the company chooses the other.

The drive to produce goods as inexpensively as possible can lead to ethical problems. For instance, in some foreign nations, a company might offer substantially lower labor costs because its employees work long hours for very low wages with few measures taken for safety. Globally aware organizations avoid countries or companies with poor ethical records or use their influence as customers to effect change.

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5-2c Organizational Commitment to Ethical Behavior

As you learned in [Chapter 1](#), every organization has its own particular culture, which may be ethically strong, ethically weak, or somewhere in between. The culture of the organization you work for will definitely impact your ethical behavior in the work-place. Employees who work for ethical companies generally act more ethically than employees who work for unethical companies. Peer pressure isn't just for teenagers and young adults; all age groups are susceptible.

The ethical culture of an organization is evident in the rewards and punishments given and the policies and procedures developed and adhered to within the organization. An organizational culture that is highly ethical is concerned about getting the job done in an ethical manner, as opposed to just getting the job done. Highly ethical organizational cultures in general experience less misconduct. Employees feel less pressure to do something un-ethical, are more likely to report misconduct seen in the workplace, and are less likely to be retaliated against if they do report wrongdoing. In contrast, organizations with a weak ethical culture have a higher incidence of employee-reported ethical violations

—such as lying to employees or the public, falsifying time sheets, abusive behavior, abuse of company resources, safety violations, discrimination, and employee benefits violations—than do companies with a strong ethical culture. *

While mission statements and the like give some indication of an organization's culture, for it to be truly understood, you will need to discover it over time as you learned in [Chapter 1](#) through observing how things work and what people say and do. A close acquaintance who works in an organization will also be able to tell you about the organization's culture. Is this the kind of company you want to be associated with? Is it a place where you would want to build a career?

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5-2d Honesty

An ethical organization is honest when dealing with employees and other organizations and individuals. For example, the company makes its personnel policies, such as salary and promotion policies, clear to all employees. In a sales organization, product specifications and pricing structures are straight-forward and easily understood by customers and business partners.

In an ethical organization, honesty, like other ethical behaviors, is demonstrated from the top down, with leadership at all levels setting an example. In turn, the organization holds employees accountable for honesty toward their fellow workers, supervisors, and customers.

Corporate Philosophy Statements

Corporations usually have mission statements or corporate philosophies, which can help employees to know how to respond in certain situations. For example, due to an employee error, several workers at a paper mill were accidentally exposed to chlorine gas, a potentially fatal situation. It wasn't fatal in this circumstance, but the press immediately contacted the manager of the mill for information. The manager responded by explaining the mistake and subsequent accident. The company philosophy states that all employees should be honest in reporting information. In this case, the company philosophy served as a guide for the employee and allowed him to confidently report with honesty.

Here is Google's corporate philosophy:

As we keep looking towards the future, these core principles guide our actions.

1. Focus on the user and all else will follow.
2. It's best to do one thing really, really well.

3. Fast is better than slow.
4. Democracy on the web works.
5. You don't need to be at your desk to need an answer.
6. You can make money without doing evil.
7. There's always more information out there.
8. The need for information crosses all borders.
9. You can be serious without a suit.
10. Great just isn't good enough.

From Google, "Our Philosophy," <http://www.google.com/about/corporate/company/tenthings.html> (accessed July 20, 2011).



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5-2e Commitment to Diversity and Nondiscrimination

Ethical organizations are committed to diversity, which they develop through affirmative action programs comprising recruitment, hiring, promotions, and other activities. As you learned in [Chapter 3](#), a diverse workforce benefits companies in a number of ways. For instance, it offers different ideas and ways of thinking that can give companies a competitive edge, and it helps organizations attract and retain talented employees.

Discrimination

An ethical organization believes in treating all individuals equally. Federal laws prohibit employers from discriminating based on race or color, gender, religious beliefs, national origin, disability, age, or genetic information (Figure 5.1). Some states and cities, and a growing number of companies, go beyond federal regulations, banning, for example, discrimination based on sexual orientation.

Figure 5.1

Many laws protect U.S. citizens against employment discrimination.

Federal Laws Prohibiting Job Discrimination

-
- The Equal Pay Act of 1963 (EPA), which makes it illegal to pay different wages to men and women if they perform equal work in the same workplace
-
- Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VII), which prohibits discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin
-
- The Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967 (ADEA), which protects individuals age 40 or older from discrimination because of age
-
- Sections 501 and 505 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which prohibits discrimination against qualified individuals with disabilities who work in the federal government
-
- The Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1978, which makes it illegal to discriminate against a woman because of pregnancy, childbirth, or a related medical condition
-
- Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), which prohibits employment discrimination against qualified individuals with disabilities in the private sector and in state and local governments
-
- The Civil Rights Act of 1991, which, among other things, allows monetary damages in cases of intentional discrimination
-
- The Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act of 2008 (GINA), which makes it illegal to discriminate against employees or job

applicants on the basis of genetic information

All these laws also make it illegal to retaliate against someone who files a discrimination charge or otherwise complains about discrimination.

Source: U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, "Laws Enforced by EEOC," <http://www.eeoc.gov/laws/statutes/index.cfm> (accessed July 20, 2011).

Unfortunately, even with laws in place, discrimination continues to occur. The U.S. [Equal Employment Opportunity Commission \(EEOC\)](#) (The federal agency that enforces laws related to discrimination in the workplace), the federal agency that enforces laws related to discrimination in the workplace, reports that in a recent year, 99,922 employees filed charges alleging workplace discrimination. *

Sexual Harassment

A common form of workplace discrimination is [sexual harassment \(Sexual conduct that is unwelcome by the recipient and that may be either physical or verbal in nature\)](#), defined by the EEOC as "unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature" that

- Explicitly or implicitly affects an individual's employment.
- Unreasonably interferes with an individual's work performance.
- Creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment. *

When sexual harassment is based on the first two criteria, it is referred to as *quid pro quo* (Latin meaning "this for that") sexual harassment. When sexual activity is presented as a prerequisite for getting a job, a promotion, or some type of benefit in the workplace, the behavior is illegal.

The third criterion is referred to as *hostile environment* sexual harassment. In this situation, the employer, supervisor, or coworker does or says things that make victims feel uncomfortable because of their gender. Hostile environment sexual harassment does not need to include a demand for sex. It can be the creation of an uncomfortable working environment.

The courts have found that suggestive comments, jokes, leering, unwanted requests for a date, and touching can be sexual harassment. Offensive comments about a person's sex that are not sexual in nature are still considered sexual harassment. Sexual harassment can occur between people of the same sex; it can be a woman harassing a man or a man harassing a woman. Victims can sue and recover for lost wages, future lost wages, emotional distress, punitive damages, and attorneys' fees.

Organizations have a legal duty to prevent and eliminate sexual harassment. An organization is liable for the behavior of its employees even if management is unaware that sexual harassment is taking place. Management is also responsible for the behavior of

nonemployees on the company's premises. For example, if a visiting representative or salesperson harasses a company's receptionist, the receptionist's company is responsible. As a result of these responsibilities, many companies have published policy statements on sexual harassment (Figure 5.2).

Figure 5.2

Many organizations have developed sexual harassment policy statements.

Sexual Harassment Policy Statement

It is against the policy of this company to discriminate against and/or exclude an employee from participation in any benefits or activities based on national origin, gender, age, sexual orientation, or disability. Harassment on the basis of sex is a violation of the law and a violation of company policy.

Once the policy is established, it must be communicated to all supervisors and employees, along with a grievance procedure. If you are not made aware of the organization's sexual harassment policy and grievance procedure when you are employed, you should ask for a copy. A sample grievance procedure follows:

Any employee who believes he or she is being sexually harassed on the job shall file a written grievance with the director of human resources within 24 hours after the alleged sexual harassment has taken place. The grievance is reviewed by the supervisor, and appropriate action is taken. If the employee believes the grievance is not handled satisfactorily, he or she has the right to appeal to the next-level supervisor, with appeals going through the line of authority to the president.

To prevent sexual harassment in the workplace, management has the responsibility of educating its supervisors and employees concerning procedures. If you, as an employee, are faced with sexual harassment, you can seek help or handle the situation yourself, whichever you believe is more appropriate. If you are unsure whether a situation could be considered sexual harassment, talk with the human resources director of your company. Figure 5.3 gives several steps for handling sexual harassment in the workplace.

Figure 5.3

Be prepared ahead of time to help yourself or others if sexual harassment occurs.

Steps for Handling Sexual Harassment

-
1. Know your rights. Know your organization's position on sexual harassment, what is legal under EEOC guidelines, and what your

employer's responsibility is. Know what redress is provided by federal laws.

2. Keep a record of all harassment infractions, noting dates, incidents, and witnesses (if any).
3. File a formal grievance with your organization. Check your organization's policy and procedures manual, or talk with the director of human resources as to the grievance procedure. If no formal grievance procedure exists, file a formal complaint with your employer in the form of a memorandum describing the incidents, identifying the individuals involved in the harassment, and requesting disciplinary action.
4. If your employer isn't responsive to your complaint, file charges of sexual harassment with federal and state agencies that enforce civil rights laws, such as the EEOC.
5. Talk to friends, coworkers, and relatives. Avoid isolation and self-blame. You are not alone; sexual harassment does occur in the workplace.
6. Consult an attorney to investigate legal alternatives.

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5-2f Commitment to the Community

Ethical organizations understand they have a social responsibility to contribute to the community. In fact, it is in the organization's best interests to be involved in and committed to the community. For example, a company near a scenic river may recruit employee volunteers to help maintain a clean shoreline. This helps the community by improving the appearance of the local landscape at no cost to the community. It also helps the company recruit employees to the area and promote its public image. Activities like the following show an organization's commitment to the community:

- Contributing to charities
- Participating in the local chamber of commerce and other service organizations

- Working with youth groups
- Supporting an inner city in its crime reduction programs
- Assisting schools and colleges with internship programs
- Encouraging employees to participate in local communities by recognizing and rewarding their endeavors

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5-2g Commitment to Employees

Another way to distinguish an ethical organization is by how it treats its employees. For example, an employee who has used up her vacation time needs several days off to help move her sister, who is a single mother, to another state. The employer agrees that family responsibilities are important and allows the employee to take un-paid leave.

It is in the best interests of an employer to treat employees well. Content employees are typically more productive and less expensive, and they are also a recruiting tool. A high turnover rate is very costly for organizations, since much time and money is spent hiring and training people. Here are some ways that organizations show their commitment to employees:

- Establish realistic job expectations
- Pay well and offer a good compensation plan
- Administer fair and useful employee evaluations
- Provide training for employees who want to learn new skills
- Ask for employee input regarding significant company issues
- Encourage cooperation and collaboration among employees

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5-2h Identifying Ethical Organizations

Organizations that give to the community help everyone.



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It is much easier to join an organization whose values coincide with yours than to be placed in a difficult or unpleasant situation, and even to have to make a change, later. Here are a few suggestions on how to evaluate an organization's ethics before you apply for a job or during the application process:

- Spend some time at the organization's website. Is there a mission statement or corporate philosophy? Does the company have a sexual harassment policy, an affirmative action policy, or other assurances regarding commitments to diversity and employee safety? Are there news releases that show a commitment to the community or global awareness? Does the organization have professional growth programs for employees?
- Use news reports to check the history of the organization. Has the company ever made headlines for behaving ethically or unethically?
- Talk with acquaintances who work for the organization. Ask them to describe the ethical environment of the company.

Beware of becoming complacent about ethical issues. Unless you are completely committed ethically, you may stay in an organization that becomes unethical and find yourself supporting unethical behaviors to the detriment of your own value system and career growth. Promise yourself that if your organization engages in unacceptable unethical behaviors, you will seek employment elsewhere. Commit now to making ethical behavior an important part of your professional life.

Know where you are going ethically.



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5-3 Making Ethical Decisions

For some ethical decisions, the right answer is not obvious. In these instances, it is important to have a game plan. Be prepared and systematic in how you make ethical decisions. This will help you to be consistent, and although you may make mistakes, the bulk of your decisions will be characterized by ethical standards. This section of the chapter will give you some practical tools to use as you make ethical decisions.

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5-3a Build an ethical Road Map

A road map is a tool that helps people determine the right direction to go. An **ethical road map** (A set of personal qualities and practices that help individuals determine the right direction ethically) helps individuals determine the right direction ethically. To build your

own personal tool to help you make ethical decisions, it is important to develop yourself in several areas: integrity, responsibility, compassion, and forgiveness.

Integrity

Integrity implies a commitment to a set of values. A person with integrity is firm in his or her dedication to a code of ethical and moral values. What are your core values? A person with integrity makes sound ethical decisions. Having integrity means engaging in activities that demonstrate truthfulness, sincerity, and an incorruptible attitude. As noted in [Chapter 1](#), an employee with integrity doesn't engage in activities that will cause others to doubt his or her commitment to high ethical values.

Leadership/Responsibility

Responsibility

The word *responsible* is rooted in accountability and trustworthiness. A responsible person is accountable for her actions and trustworthy in her obligations. With responsibility, there is little cause for blame. A responsible person acts and reacts with this knowledge in mind. The responsible administrative professional

- Doesn't try to blame others when she makes a mistake.
- Always gets to work on time.
- Pays attention to commitments—makes them a priority, for example, and writes them down.
- Keeps her computer files secure, protecting sensitive information about clients, coworkers, her supervisor, and the company.
- Learns company guidelines so she can follow them—she doesn't hide behind an excuse of ignorance when a mistake is made.
- Answers questions honestly.
- Gives credit where credit is due.
- Doesn't leave jobs undone.
- Performs her duties rather than trying to give them to someone else.
- Takes responsibility for knowing how to perform her duties well. She asks or does research if she has a question.
- Understands she represents the organization even when she is off duty.

- Responds to all e-mail and telephone messages in a timely manner.
- Is aware that she is an example for new employees.
- Is helpful to new employees and other coworkers.

Activity

Use the list above to develop a “responsible student” list that demonstrates how a responsible student acts and reacts in a variety of circumstances.



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Responsibility

Developing your ethical road map in the area of responsibility means being willing to answer for your actions. A responsible person is trustworthy and willing to be held accountable. Can you be trusted with your obligations? Do you shift blame to others or admit mistakes and make amends? The 21st Century Skills feature, above, lists characteristics of a responsible administrative professional.

Compassion

Compassion means being aware of another person’s problem and wanting to help. It isn’t a term you hear often when talking about ethics, but it speaks to the core of ethical motives. Thinking of others—seeing from another person’s perspective or putting someone else’s needs above your own—helps bring ethical decisions into focus. Consider this example:

Jenny and Rick just heard that their coworker Deja is almost out of sick leave since she has been caring for her child, who is ill with leukemia. The company allows employees to donate sick days to others in times of need. Jenny gives Deja five days of her sick leave. Rick doesn't have many sick days, so he sends Deja a gift card for a local restaurant that has takeout food he knows she likes. He reasons Deja doesn't have time to cook. Both Jenny and Rick make ethical decisions as they demonstrate compassion by being aware of Dejas difficulty and trying to help.

Forgiveness

Forgiveness means not holding another person's offense against the person. Forgiveness can also be personal, meaning to forgive yourself for your own mistakes. Harboring resentment against those who have wronged you or dwelling too long on your own errors can hamper your ability to move forward with a positive attitude and make decisions based on ethics and not emotions. Using the tool of forgiveness will help you keep a clear, unemotional, and stable attitude.

It is important to have all the facts before making a decision



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When Demetrius was working with Julie several months ago, he overheard her making some negative comments about him. He calmly confronted her about the comments, and she, realizing her mistake, apologized. Demetrius has forgiven Julie and does not hold her actions against her. He knows that he also makes mistakes and cannot expect forgiveness from others if he doesn't forgive as well.

Forgiveness is very hard and involves personal maturity. If you find yourself holding a grudge, try talking the situation over with a friend. Reflecting during a long walk or another quiet activity that allows you time to think can also help. Once you have thought through the situation and have reached a resolution, make a conscious decision to let it go.

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5-3b Facts, Options, and Consequences

Train yourself not to act until you have all the facts. You cannot make a reliable decision based on incomplete information.

Your supervisor, Rhonda, doesn't like the proposal adopted by a committee, so she overrides it and then immediately goes around the office trying to find support for her decision. This causes mistrust and disunity in her department, and she is seen as unethical. Rhonda acted without talking with the committee, so she made her decision without having all the pertinent information.

The human resources department is considering three qualified candidates for a position. An HR officer calls the references on two of the three candidates and then offers the position to one of them. This is unethical, since the decision to hire was made without having all the information on all the candidates.

Once you have all the facts, you are in a position to examine your options. Look for several alternatives. Are there other options you haven't thought of yet? Consider similar situations. Ask others for their opinion. Your values plus the culture and expectations of the organization for which you work could make it difficult for you to determine what is right and wrong in a particular situation. Asking these questions can help you decide what is ethical:

- What are the facts of the situation?
- What are the ethical issues involved?
- Who are the [stakeholders \(A person or group that has an interest in the outcome of a decision or situation\)](#) (people who have an interest in the outcome)?
- Who will be affected by my decision?
- Are there different ways of looking at this issue? If so, what are they?
- What are the practical constraints?
- What actions should I take?
- Are these actions practical?

If you are still unclear about what you should do, ask yourself these questions:

- If my actions appeared in the newspaper, would I feel comfortable knowing everyone was reading about what I did?
- Is what I anticipate doing legal?
- Could I proudly tell my spouse, parents, or children about my actions?
- Will I be proud of my actions one day, week, and year from now?
- Do my actions fit with the person I think I am?

Consider the consequences for all options. Be prepared to defend your decision. Can you? Do you have all the documentation you need? Is there a company policy for this?

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5-3c Change is Possible

Even though you may have established certain values early in life and held on to them into adulthood, you can change those values if you are open to honestly evaluating situations that suggest a need to change long-held beliefs. If you find yourself needing to change an unethical habit, you can form new habits in a matter of time. Do the right thing for several weeks, and you'll find it's now a habit.

Another way to change a bad habit is to concentrate on doing the opposite. In other words, you replace the unethical habit with an ethical habit. For example, suppose you are in the habit of coming back from lunch about ten minutes late most days. You decide you will break this unethical habit (since you are essentially stealing ten minutes from your employer every day) by returning five minutes early. You set a new habit of being at your desk early or on time from now on simply because you choose to make it a habit.

Some unethical practices are easier than others to change. For example, you may simply decide you aren't going to make personal copies anymore at work. However, leaving an employee's personal information file open on your computer screen when you are away from your desk may be an oversight and a habit you'll have to work harder to change. You make a plan to remember to lock your computer anytime you are away from your desk.

Ask yourself questions when trying to make an ethical decision.



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5-4 Characteristics of Ethical Administrative Professionals

If you are to be an ethical administrative professional, you need to understand the importance of ethics and corporate culture, and you need to have tools to help you make ethical decisions. You also need to address your own ethical behavior. An ethical administrative professional has integrity, responsibility, compassion, and the capacity to forgive. Pay careful attention to the following additional characteristics of ethical administrative professionals.

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5-4a Committed to Ethical Behavior

Whenever you, as an administrative professional, encounter someone who is not acting ethically, take a stand. Be sensitive and direct. Let people who are cynical about ethics know you believe strongly in the concept. Let them know you believe honesty, concern for society, and respect for the rights of others are values that belong in the organization. Here is an example:

Michele comes back from lunch at 1:30. Luciana says to you, “Did you see Michele? She just waltzed in at 1:30. She did that yesterday also. She knows we’re supposed to be back at 1, but she just does whatever she wants, apparently”

Tech Talk

Collaborative Websites

Collaboration is very important in business. Collaborative websites like wikis allow people to work together easily and securely. *Wiki* is the Hawaiian word for *quick*, and a [wiki \(A website that can be easily set up and used and that is collaborative in nature\)](#) is a quick website that can be collaborative. One reason a wiki is considered quick is that it is easy to set up and use. By altering the membership settings, the owner can allow anyone from a single individual (such as a coworker) to the public at large (as on Wikipedia) to contribute material to the wiki or to edit what is already there. Here’s a likely scenario for collaboration with a wiki:

Joe, Marquis, and Clara are putting together some information about benefits for new employees. Joe creates a wiki with pages for the categories of information they are collecting and enters a list of benefits information. He then invites Marquis and Clara to be members. Clara accepts membership, clicks the edit button on the benefits page, and adds some information Joe forgot. Marquis accepts membership and clicks the new page button to add a brainstorming page, since at their last meeting they discussed some ideas that might help new employees manage their benefits package. He enters those ideas on the page and then moves to the benefits page, where he adds one more item to the list that Joe and Clara worked on earlier.

Joe checks the wiki and sees Clara’s and Marquis’s contributions. He adds another page that will be the beginning of a handout. The information on this page might later be added to the company website or pasted into a Microsoft Word document.

In the above scenario, all members of the team own the document and contribute. Each can see the contributions of others, and each can take responsibility for the information.

There are many free wiki providers. Links to several are provided on the website for this text.

You don’t know why Michele has been late, but you defend her by saying, “Well, she has been trying to sell her house, so maybe she had something to do related to that and had permission to come back late. I don’t know all the facts, but I hate to accuse her without having all the information.”

Later you discover that you were right. Michele had to sign some papers and so got permission to take her lunch 30 minutes later both days. You sent a subtle message to Luciana by defending someone who wasn’t there to defend herself and set a good example of giving someone the benefit of the doubt when all the facts aren’t known.

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5-4b Refuse to Engage in Negative Workplace Politics

What does the term workplace politics (The relationships within an office and the nature of the networks established in a workplace) mean? It means that the people you know within an organization can be important. It means that networks can exist in which favors are done for people based on the networks. Workplace politics can be good or bad. Consider this example of positive workplace politics:

You believe your department records management system is inadequate. You begin to talk with your supervisor and coworkers about a more effective system. You also talk with coworkers in other departments, express your concerns, and suggest possible solutions. You are able to garner support, and your supervisor goes to bat with upper management for the money to get the system. You have used your connections with other people in the workplace positively to get support for an idea that will benefit the organization.

Workplace politics become bad when they are used as a quid pro quo. That is, if you do something for me, I will do something for you, with no consideration of whether that something is good for the organization. It is merely good for you. Workplace politics are also bad when employees trade on their position or a powerful association in the company to get what they want. In other words, they are furthering their own personal interests.

Another unpleasant aspect of workplace politics is gossip. Do not gossip about people at work. If a conversation becomes negative about someone, turn it to another topic or withdraw from it.

In a perfect world, negative workplace politics do not exist. But the reality is that they do exist. So how do you handle them? First, you become aware of their existence. When you begin a new job, notice what is happening around you. Learn about the power bases, who knows whom, and what the relationships are. Next, hold on to your own value system. Don't ask for favors. Draw a clear line between being appropriately helpful and supporting and engaging in activities you know you shouldn't be part of. Use your awareness of workplace politics to help yourself do your job. Generally, if you live your values and do your job well, you will be recognized and respected for it.

Be respectful and polite to everyone, regardless of position in the company.



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5-4c Trustworthy with Confidential Information

Administrative professionals are often privy to information of a confidential nature. Working ethically means protecting the confidentiality of sensitive information. Protecting confidentiality is usually a legal requirement as well. In the health care field, for example, the [Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 \(HIPAA\) \(A federal law that protects the privacy of personal health information\)](#) prohibits communication of a patient's medical and billing information, except for certain purposes, without the patient's written consent. In education, the [Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 \(FERPA\) \(A federal law that protects the privacy of student education records\)](#) prevents your college from providing your education records to anyone, including your parents, without your permission. Similar protections are afforded to client information in legal offices, as well as to company information and personal and financial data of employees and clients in many other types of businesses.

Other information isn't formally protected by law but has an assumption of privacy. Here are two examples:

A coworker sends you an e-mail asking for advice. You know another coworker will be able to advise her better. Before forwarding the writer's e-mail, you ask her permission. She has an assumption of privacy, and it would be unethical to forward her e-mail without her consent.

You and three coworkers are at a professional development conference to learn the new database software your company is adopting. At the end of a long day of training, the conference presenters host a two-hour architectural cruise down a local historic river. It's a great time to relax as well as talk with other attendees about how they use the software at their companies, not to mention you enjoy the fresh air and time with your coworkers. One of your coworkers is taking pictures with her smartphone, including a picture of you. Without asking you, she posts the picture on her social networking site. When you return to work on Monday, the whole office is talking about the "vacation" you took at company expense. It's never OK to post or pass along someone's picture without that person's permission.

It is very important that you be aware of your responsibilities in protecting private information. Make sure you know your company's policies and the law. Always ask questions when things are unclear. You should also know that while breaches of confidentiality are sometimes intentional, they can also occur through ignorance and carelessness. [Figure 5.4](#) lists several common mistakes made with confidential information.

Figure 5.4

Confidentiality is often breached through ignorance or carelessness.

Violations of Confidential Information

- Leaving someone's personal information displayed on your computer when you step out of your office or when someone else comes in to talk with you
- Forwarding an e-mail without the writer's permission
- Posting or forwarding an image of someone without that person's permission
- Placing a note that contains personal information in an office mailbox
- Telling another person's age, which you know from personnel records you must occasionally access
- Discussing someone's illness, which you know about because you processed the sick-leave forms

5-4d Honesty

Honest administrative professionals avoid hypocrisy. They do not tell white lies to supervisors or coworkers. Even a lie you consider small can cause major damage to your professional reputation. Honest employees do not blame someone else for their errors or break rules and then claim ignorance of the rules. Honest employees do not falsify expense reports, time reports, or personnel records.

Honesty includes actions as well as words. Would you be surprised to learn that employee theft costs employers billions of dollars each year, more than they lose to shoplifters? Honest employees do not take organizational supplies or equipment for personal use. Honest employees do not steal time from employers. For example, Bill checks his social networking site throughout the day. Since he is paid for eight hours of work, this is not honest. He is essentially stealing time throughout the day. Joan doesn't use a social networking site, but she does occasionally take a ream of printer paper home from work for use in her personal printer.

Professional Pointers

Here are some tips for helping you to behave ethically in the workplace:

- Critique ideas, not people.
- Do not publicly criticize your supervisor or coworkers.
- Do not listen to or pass along gossip about other individuals.
- Check out information you hear from the grapevine. If you know the information is false, say so without becoming emotional. Feed accurate information into the grapevine.
- Communicate in person when appropriate.
- Be a good listener, but do not pass on everything you hear. Remember that you must behave professionally; professionalism carries with it lack of pettiness and rumormongering.
- When you have a problem, go directly to the source of the problem in an attempt to correct the situation.
- Appreciate diversity. Understand that people have different values, abilities, and priorities.
- Practice empathy. Putting yourself in the situation of others (figuratively)

allows you to relate more closely to the barriers they face or the feelings they have.

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5-4e Loyalty

The ethical employee is loyal to the organization. This is not a blind loyalty, in which mistakes are covered up and unethical or illegal behavior is tolerated. Instead, it is a commitment to directions that support the values of the company. Ethical organizations encourage employees to disagree constructively, to speak out on issues, and to be heard by management in the process. However, once a direction is decided on, employees must be loyal and productive members of the team. Ethical employees understand and live by this type of loyalty.

Loyalty involves speech and general attitude. A loyal employee doesn't complain behind the boss's back, deride company policy, or stir up strife within the department. A loyal employee goes directly to the source when there is a complaint. A loyal employee is a team player (see [Chapter 3](#)) and is committed to the goals of the team.

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5-5 Chapter Review

5-5a Summary

To reinforce what you have learned in this chapter, study this summary.

- Ethics are standards that help people determine right from wrong. They represent obligations as well as benefits to society.
- Many characteristics distinguish an ethical organization. Examples are being environmentally responsible; globally aware; honest; and committed to ethical organizational behavior, diversity and nondiscrimination, the community, and employees.
- To make the right choice consistently in difficult ethical decisions, be prepared and systematic, build an ethical road map (integrity, responsibility, compassion, and forgiveness), and consider facts, options, consequences.

- Additional ethical characteristics of administrative professionals are a commitment to ethical behavior refusal to engage in negative workplace politics, trustworthiness with confidential information, honesty, and loyalty.

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Chapter Review

5-5b Key Terms

Business ethics (The application of ethical standards in the workplace)

character (Your consistent personal standards of behavior)

Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) (The federal agency that enforces laws related to discrimination in the workplace)

ethical road map (A set of personal qualities and practices that help individuals determine the right direction ethically)

Ethics (The standards that help a person determine right from wrong)

Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA) (A federal law that protects the privacy of student education records)

Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA) (A federal law that protects the privacy of personal health information)

sexual harassment (Sexual conduct that is unwelcome by the recipient and that may be either physical or verbal in nature)

stakeholders (A person or group that has an interest in the outcome of a decision or situation)

Values (Personal beliefs about right and wrong)

wiki (A website that can be easily set up and used and that is collaborative in nature)

workplace politics (The relationships within an office and the nature of the networks established in a workplace)

Study Tools

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Chapter Review

5-5c Let's Discuss

1. In your own words, explain what you believe ethics is.
2. List and explain the characteristics of an ethical organization.
3. What is sexual harassment?
4. What groups are specifically protected by federal law from workplace discrimination?
5. Is discrimination ever ethical? Why or why not?
6. Explain what it means to have an ethical road map and why it is important to have one.
7. List and explain the characteristics of an ethical administrative professional.

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Chapter Review

5-5d Put It To Work

Unethical supervisor Isabella was recently hired in her first full-time position as an administrative professional. She has been working for the company for six months. She is not happy in her job. She does not like her supervisor because she believes he is unethical. He steals time from the company by surfing video-sharing websites throughout the day, almost always leaves 15 minutes early “to beat the traffic” never admits a mistake (he always finds someone to blame), and brags about “padding” his mileage when reporting travel expenses.

Recently Isabella talked with Dao, one of her friends in the company, and asked her advice about quitting her job. Yesterday Isabella’s supervisor called her in and told her she was being disloyal to him. He explained that he was told she had been spreading vicious rumors about him throughout the company.

What is the problem? How should Isabella handle it? (Learning Objectives 3 - Develop a framework for making ethical decisions. and 4 - Identify characteristics of an ethical administrative professional.)

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Chapter Review

5-5e Communicate Successfully

1. Corporate philosophy Using the Internet, find the corporate philosophy or mission statement of a company, such as a company that produces common household products, automobiles, or technology or is in retail sales. In a group of two or three students, compare the statements and create a list of the ethics-related statements or principles from all the companies. (Learning Objectives 2 - Identify characteristics of an ethical organization.)
2. Personal ethics What are your personal ethics or core values as a student, an employee, or both? Write ten words that you believe describe your current life principles, and then write a one-paragraph statement of your personal ethics. Start your paragraph with “I believe ethics is...” (Learning Objectives 4 - Identify characteristics of an ethical administrative professional.)
3. Research Using the Internet, find a news article about a company that demonstrates ethical or unethical behavior. Write a one-paragraph summary and be prepared to share your information with the class. (Learning Objectives 2 - Identify characteristics of an ethical organization.)

4. Ethical behavior at work Add a new post to the blog you created in [Chapter 1](#). In this entry, reflect on the following statement: **From this chapter I have learned about the importance of ethical behavior in the workplace in the following ways.** (Learning Objectives 1 - Understand the basics of ethics and consider the importance of ethical behavior in the workplace.)

Blog

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Chapter Review

5-5f Develop Workplace Skills

5. Interview ethics You have been asked to help interview candidates for an administrative professional opening at your company. After the team has reviewed all the resumes and completed the interviews, they begin to discuss the candidates. One team member says that she doesn't like one of the candidates because he has Tourette syndrome (TS). During the interview, the team learned that the candidate was subject to the following symptoms: involuntary blinking, shrugging, head jerks, grimaces, throat clearing, sniffing, tongue clicking, yelping, and other noises. The team member is concerned the candidate won't represent the company well when he greets clients.

Would choosing not to hire the candidate on this basis be unethical? Would your decision be any different if the position did not include much client interaction? Look up TS on the Internet. What would your decision be if the candidate's symptoms were quite severe? (Learning Objectives 2 - Identify characteristics of an ethical organization.)

6. Responsibility Look again at the scenario in the previous question. Remember, you are a member of the team. What (if anything) should be your response to your team member's concerns? Consider what you learned about working in teams in [Chapter 3](#) as well as what you have learned in this chapter. (Learning Objectives 3 - Develop a framework for making ethical decisions. and 4 - Identify

characteristics of an ethical administrative professional.)

7. **Social network dilemma** You and a friend from work are on vacation. Your friend becomes intoxicated, and you take a short (and quite entertaining) video of her. Should you post the video on your social network page? Why or why not? (Learning Objectives 3 - Develop a framework for making ethical decisions.)
8. **Food for thought** You are the administrative professional responsible for ordering the food for the next “lunch and learn” seminar for your department. Your sister has just started a catering business, and you know she needs the work. Her prices are several dollars more per person than prices at the usual place. What should you do? Justify your actions. (Learning Objective 3 - Develop a framework for making ethical decisions. and 4 - Identify characteristics of an ethical administrative professional.)

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Chapter Review

5-5g Build Relationships

9. **Office predicament** Inez Ramos has been working as an administrative professional at Kapor Pharmaceuticals for one year. Her supervisor has a friend from another company, Timothy Madeley, who visits the office three or four times a month. Inez has a pleasant relationship with him, and they usually chat for a few minutes each time he comes to the office. Mr. Madeley is married, and he frequently talks about his wife and their three children.

On his last visit to the company, Mr. Madeley stopped by to chat with Inez. At the end of the conversation, he said, “Let’s have lunch sometime.” Inez, thinking she would enjoy a casual meal out, replied, “Sounds good to me.” Today as he came to her office after his visit with her supervisor, he said, “I really want to have lunch with you. How about next Tuesday? I have the afternoon free. Maybe you can take the afternoon off so we can enjoy a pleasant outing.”

Inez was surprised and concerned when he suggested they spend the afternoon together. She did not know how to respond. She merely said, “Let me think about it.” You are Inez’s friend, and she has asked for your advice. How should Inez handle the situation? (Learning Objective 2 - Identify characteristics of an ethical organization. and 4 - Identify characteristics of an ethical administrative professional.)

10. **Teamwork** You are supposed to be working with Todd on a short summary of a project your supervisor asked the two of you to review. Todd is very good at writing and has been an administrative professional two years longer than you have. He does the work and e-mails the finished summary to you, at the same time explaining that he is sick and has to miss the afternoon staff meeting. You give the summary to your supervisor but do not explain that Todd is sick or that he prepared it. Your supervisor assumes you worked on it together.

Todd will probably never know that you didn't give him credit. Is this honest? What are the implications of what you've done or not done? Write one or two sentences describing how you could have responded when your supervisor said, "OK, let's hear from Todd and Marlina about the TGV summary." (Learning Objectives 1 - Understand the basics of ethics and consider the importance of ethical behavior in the workplace., 3 - Develop a framework for making ethical decisions., and 4 - Identify characteristics of an ethical administrative professional.)

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Chapter Review

5-5h Use Tech Tools

11. **Wiki** On a team of four to five students, create a wiki, with each person creating a page. The creator of the wiki should invite the other members or give them the URL so they can request to join. Each member is responsible for a page. On that page the member should put one element he or she considers important when building a personal ethical road map. Links to several free wiki creation sites are provided on the website for this text. (Learning Objectives 1 - Understand the basics of ethics and consider the importance of ethical behavior in the workplace. and 4 - Identify characteristics of an ethical administrative professional.)

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Chapter Review

5-5i Plan Ahead

Create an ethical road map With your team from the previous activity, create a team ethical road map on your wiki. Discuss your personal ethical road map, and then develop

an ethics creed for your team. The creed could be for students or for administrative professionals. The home page should have a brief explanation and a visual of your creed. Use a concept mapping tool or drawing or chart tools in your word processing software to create the image. All the other pages should have explanations of the elements of your creed along with examples of each in the workplace (such as an explanation of responsibility and an example of getting enough rest so you can perform at 100 percent in your job). The creator of the wiki is responsible for the home page. Each other team member page must have a different element of the team ethics. Links to concept mapping tools are provided on the website for this text. (Learning Objectives 1 - Understand the basics of ethics and consider the importance of ethical behavior in the workplace. and 4 - Identify characteristics of an ethical administrative professional.)

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