

CULTURE AND ETHICS

As one moves across borders, the number of ethical challenges increase. What may be customary behavior in one culture, e.g., the paying of bribes, is considered unethical behavior in other cultures.

Ethics refers to values about right and wrong. Here we are concerned with acceptable behavior in the workplace. Since ethics are values, they are influenced by other beliefs and values such as the ones that we have been examining as part of the hidden dimensions of culture. We know that ethical dilemmas confront us in our own culture, and determining what is right is not always clear. The reason for this is two fold; (1) society's concepts of appropriate behavior changes over time, and (2) people within a given culture vary in their view of what the appropriate standards of behavior should be. Given these difficulties in one culture, they increase as one moves into other cultures that have different values, standards, and consequently, different definitions of what is right.

This section will examine the possible effect cultural values have on two aspects of ethical behavior: (1) the use of universal versus relative standards to determine ethical behavior, and (2) the application of standards. Ethicists are not in agreement as to the type of standards to be used to determine the right behavior. One view is that the standards are relative to one's situation, known as ethical relativism. Internationally this means, "when in Rome do as the Romans". The standards of the local culture should prevail. The opposite view is that of universalism. The view states that there are basic moral standards that transcend the particular situation or culture. For example, standards against murder and "doing unto others" appear to be prevalent in most cultures. Whether relative or universal standards may either be explicit (clearly stated) or implicit. Once the standards are determined, they may or may not be applied to all persons in all circumstances. For example in some cultures powerful people are often not held to as strict a standard of behavior as are lower status members of the society.

Assumptions and Ethics

Two of the assumptions examined here appear to be related to ethical behavior: human nature and context. Cultures in which people are perceived as evil tend to apply standards selfishly because others cannot be trusted. Thus, one engages in behavior if it is "right for me". In cultures where people can be trusted, one chooses the right behavior if it is right for all concerned; the action must benefit all affected by it. Low context cultures find meaning in explicit verbal language; therefore, ethical standards must be explicit in order for them to be meaningful. High context cultures are used to determining meaning from the situational cues so implicit ethical standards provide sufficient clarity as to what is right.

ASSUMPTIONS AND ETHICS

<u>Assumptions</u>	<u>Types of Standards</u>	<u>How or to whom applied</u>
<u>Environment:</u> Submit Control	- -	- -
<u>Human Nature:</u> Evil Good	- -	Right for me Right for all

Values and Ethics

All four of the values examined appear to affect both the type and application of moral standards in determining what is right. Low PD cultures favor equality among members of society. They tend to favor relative standards because all ideas and values are viewed as having some worth in determining what is right. High PD cultures stress obedience to authority and, therefore, favor universal standards provided by their leaders. How moral standards are applied also are affected by PD. Low PD cultures favor standards that apply to all since everyone should be treated equally; whereas, high PD cultures are willing to permit a looser or different set of standards for higher status individuals as part of the privileges of their rank.

Low UA cultures value truth but do not feel that it has been fully defined so they favor relative standards which by definition are implicit/general because they are defined by the situation. High UA cultures prefer universal standards because they are known and are less uncertain than changing relative standards. High UA cultures also prefer explicit/specific standards because they are clearer and more

certain. Low UA cultures also apply their standards more leniently; rules have to be broken if it is more practical. High UA cultures tend to feel that rules should not be broken because exceptions creates more uncertainty about when the rules should apply.

Cultures with a collective orientation feel that people should conform to group norms in determining the right behavior; whereas, individualists are considered to be responsible for their own behavior right or wrong. Its up to the individual to determine the right behavior given the prevailing standards. In collective cultures different often stricter standards are required for members of one's in-group versus people outside their group. Individualists, however, favor standards that apply to all because each person is of equal value and should be treated as such.

Members from feminist cultures tend to favor more relative standards because they are more permissive in allowing people to express themselves in an effort to build good interpersonal relations. Masculine cultures tend to favor more universal standards which can be applied efficiently to correct wrong behavior and enhance the output or results they are seeking. Cultures that differ on assertiveness also favor other types of goals which may affect their definitions of correct behavior. Feminist cultures favor conservation of resources of all kinds in order to produce results with the least side effects ,whereas, masculine cultures favor growth which is an end in itself. These goal differences can lead to differing interpretations of the right behavior a firm should pursue. Growth could be achieved with a considerable expenditure of resources which is unacceptable to those holding feminine values. Finally, assertiveness may affect differences in how the standards of behavior are applied. Feminists tend to be more lenient or sympathetic towards the less fortunate, whereas, people from masculine cultures are not as sympathetic to less fortunate members of society and would not make exceptions in applying behavioral standards in their case.

Of all the management practices we have discussed, ethics is the least well defined in terms of concepts and behaviors. The relationship between culture and ethics is the least well established. Thus, much of what is discussed in this section is still speculative, but it does provide a crude guide as to why different decisions or other behaviors might be handled or treated differently from one culture to the next based on some of the assumptions and values discussed.

[References: 5, 10, 11, 16, 18, 21, 23, 26]

VALUES AND ETHICS

<u>Values</u>	<u>Types of Standards</u>	<u>How or to whom applied</u>
<u>Power Distance: Low</u>	Relative	Apply to all
High	Universal	Differ for powerful

<u>Uncertainty Avoidance:</u> <u>Low</u> High	Relative Implicit Universal Explicit	Break rules if practical Don't break rules
<u>Self-orientation</u> Collective Individual	Group norms Personal responsibility	Differ for in group vs. out group Apply to all
<u>Assertiveness:</u> Feminine Masculine	Relative Conservation Universal Growth	Differ for less fortunate Apply to all

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