

versions of ten organizational dilemmas I encountered during my consulting experiences. For each dilemma, attempt to determine what you would actually do if faced by this situation and what you should do. If what you would do and should do are different, state why. Finally, after analyzing all ten situations, attempt to determine what criteria you used in applying ethical standards.

Ethical Dilemmas in Organizational Communication

1. You are the newly appointed personnel director for a large beverage distributor. Your new job responsibilities include screening all applicants for promotions to management positions. Your company's usual procedure is for the personnel director to screen applicants and select the top three for further interviews with management. You also know that the president of the company does not want a woman on his personal staff. Your current decision is difficult because your most recent vacancy is on the president's personal staff and your top three applicants are female. You can send the three applicants to the president and wait to see what happens. You can rethink your selection criteria and try to have a male applicant in the top three. You can reopen the position, hoping to attract additional qualified applicants. You can confront the president about his discriminatory posture. You also have other options. What would you do? What should you do?

2. A crew member from the night shift's manufacturing group has come to you as her personnel liaison with a concern about drug use on the production line. She won't give you any specific details for fear of those involved finding out who has turned them in. She suggests that you should investigate immediately but warns against involving her in any way. She asks you not to tell the other personnel liaisons because the grapevine has it that one of them may be involved. You can go to your boss and work with her in deciding what to do next. You can try to investigate on your own. You can bring up the drug problems the plant is experiencing at a staff meeting and watch closely to see if there are any unusual reactions from your peers. You can tell your source to give you more specific information before you will do anything. You can ignore the problem because of lack of evidence. You have other options. What would you do? What should you do?

3. You have overheard a conversation between your manager and the manager of a department in which your best friend is employed. From their conversation, it is apparent that your friend is not pleasing her manager and she will definitely be passed over for the promotion she badly wants. You don't want to see her hurt, and you happen to know she has a job offer from another group within your organization. Should you tell her about the conversation and urge her to take the new offer? Should you remain silent because of the manner in which you heard the information? Should you go to your boss and tell him that you accidentally overheard the conversation and are concerned because your friend might turn down a good job offer? Should you urge your friend to confront her boss? You have other options. What would you do? What should you do?

4. You are the lead copywriter in an advertising agency handling a major chemical products account. Your copy is frequently criticized by the chemical manufacturer's marketing director. He wants a stronger sell, even if that means omitting much of the

disclaimer information associated with the safe use of the products. He contends that people buying chemicals should take individual responsibility for safety and that a company should not be required to devote scarce ad and package label space to full disclosure of the potential hazards. You realize that he may even be willing to test whether government regulating agencies will restrain his actions if he refuses to comply with industry product-labeling requirements. The issue comes to a head when you receive copy proofs changed by the marketing director to omit disclosure information that you believe should remain in the new ad series. Your immediate boss is out of town on vacation and cannot be reached. You either have to let the changes go or confront the marketing director. You know he will not appreciate your interference. You can let the copy go as is. (You have documented evidence that the marketing director, not your agency, made the changes.) You can ask to be removed from the account. You can go to the manager's boss in the chemical company. You have other options. What would you do?

5. You have received a job offer from one of your current employer's principal competitors. The offer was unsolicited and has come as a surprise. Although the type of offer is not uncommon in the advertising business, you are unsure how to respond. The vice president urging you to come to work for her also mentioned that one of your current employer's largest accounts is talking with her group about changing agencies. You have reason to believe that the account is pleased with your work and wonder if her offer is not aimed at increasing the chances of taking business away from your employer. So far, the vice president has not asked you any questions about the account. You are scheduled to meet her for lunch next week. Should you tell your employer that you are considering another position? Should you refuse to discuss the account in question if the vice president mentions it? How can you learn whether the offer has a hidden business agenda? Do you have a responsibility to your current employer to tell him a major account is being solicited by another firm? What would you do? What should you do?

6. You are the member of a task force asked to recommend to the city council how the city's Park and Recreation Department can better serve low-income members of your community. Two members of your group believe the city government should reduce its budget, and they view your assignment as an ideal way to make that statement. You disagree. The task force is charged with making programming recommendations. The Park and Recreation Department is charged with incorporating those recommendations into their budget, which must be approved by the council. You support more programs for low-income areas of your community and hope some of your recommendations will be part of the final report. Several group members agree with you, two strongly disagree, and several are undecided. At the next-to-last task force meeting before the report is due to council, a reporter asks to interview a member of the task force in order to get a progress update. The two members with whom you have had the most disagreements are late to the meeting. Others in the group suggest you talk with the reporter. You agree, hoping for an opportunity to express your support for low-income programming. As the interview begins, you wonder whether your remarks should reflect the various perspectives present in the group or whether it is appropriate to represent your personal view. Should you tell the reporter that members both support and disapprove of increased

park and recreation programming? Should you tell the reporter that the final report to council is very likely to contain a dissenting opinion and you are not sure which side of the issue will receive majority support? Will this type of dissent weaken the effectiveness of the report? Should you represent your position because the other two members are late and would have had an opportunity to speak to the press had they arrived on time? What would you do? What should you do?

7. You are a member of a project team charged with designing a new service support training program for your organization's 150 customer support representatives. The representatives are generally knowledgeable but resistant to a new training program. Your team members include two of your peers from the training department and two customer support representatives. The initial design meetings have been productive, but you become aware that the two customer support representatives expect you and your coworkers to do the work. They will critique what you propose. Further, you know that at least one of the customer support representatives is talking with others in his work group about your ideas. You have learned that some representatives think you don't know what the work really is and can't possibly design a good program. You want the program to be good but are concerned with the rumors and lack of work from two members of your team. Should you confront the representatives? Should you ask team members for more effort? What would you do? What should you do?

8. You are a member of a self-directed work team charged with processing travel requests for over 3,000 salespeople worldwide. Your team has been praised for quality work and cost savings. In fact, your group has reduced processing costs by 40 percent over previous groups. One longtime member of your team is not pulling her share of the load. Jane is excellent with her accounts but is not helping other team members when they are overloaded. Jane is popular with management and many of the salespeople you support. Other team members have asked you to talk with Jane. You think that the entire team should engage in this conversation. To make matters worse, you learn that Jane, but not the rest of the team, has received a coveted customer support award. Jane has not mentioned this award to the team. Should you ask Jane about the award? Should you insist the team join you in talking to Jane? What would you do? What should you do?

9. You have been asked by your boss to evaluate the e-commerce strategy the marketing department of your company proposes. You have reason to believe that your boss doesn't really understand the proposal because she has little experience with potential Internet business applications. You don't have the experience to do the evaluation but know you must make a response within the next week. You decide to review the Internet strategies of your major competitors. To your surprise, you find that your company's marketing proposal ignores several features for customer service that all your competitors are using. When you discuss this omission with the director of marketing, he laughs at you for what he considers your lack of experience and suggests that you have no right to question his judgment. You are concerned about your lack of experience but believe you have some valid concerns. You don't want to put your boss in a bad position by opposing a proposal from another department. Should you talk with your boss? Should you present your concerns despite the marketing director's opposition? What would you do? What should you do?

10. You are a senior member of a global marketing team charged with developing a major promotion for your organization's new line of consumer products. The products are intended to be introduced simultaneously in eighteen countries including the United States of America, several European countries, and large segments of Asia. The company's international marketing director prefers that your team develop a single promotional theme for, as he puts it, "the globe." You are concerned because team members from Asia contend this is dangerous and culturally inappropriate. Several team members consider the initial promotional copy brash and insulting. You and some of your European counterparts believe the copy is direct and will gain instant attention from potential consumers. You must present a proposal to the marketing director within a week. You can ask the director for more time. You can present the significant disagreement to the director even though you know he will not be pleased. You can have the team vote, knowing that the majority will support the theme some find offensive. What other options do you have to resolve this dispute? What would you do? What should you do?

After analyzing these examples, are the behaviors you would do and should do always the same? If they were different, what caused the difference? What contributed to similarities? Was it difficult to determine what was ethical in a given situation? Can you identify the standards you used as your criteria? After considering these examples, can you see the relationship between competency and ethics?

Chapter Highlights

Values are the subjective assessments we make about the relative worth of a quality or object. These assessments are thought to guide our behavior in making choices and judgments. Both individuals and organizations have value systems that are expressed through communication behaviors. Ethics are the standards by which behaviors are evaluated for morality, for rightness or wrongness. When applied to human communication, ethics are the moral principles that guide our judgments about the good and bad, the right and wrong of communication, not just communication effectiveness or efficiency. Values and ethics are a part of all communication and organizational experiences.

Workshop

1. Turn to the Hockaday Responders case on page 400 and discuss in small groups the questions for Chapter 4.

2. Divide into groups of four or six members each and discuss the ten ethical dilemmas presented in this chapter. Compare your individual responses with those of other group members. As a group, what would you do? What should you do?

3. "People, Planet, and Profit: Sustainability and the Triple Bottom Line" by Laura Quinn¹ examines the ethical basis of the concept of sustainability. As you read her essay on page 400, prepare to discuss as a class the value and ethical implications of using sustainability as part of organizational strategy and organizational communication.

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