

Tutor's Guide

Activity 14. An Ethical Dilemma

Aim

In this exercise the students are asked to consider ethical dilemmas that they may face when in employment. By discussing the scenarios students should begin to think about how to conduct themselves in a professional way.

Activity

The topics covered in this activity are,

- Bullying
- Plagiarism
- Compromising standards
- Corruption
- Dishonesty

Some form of these scenarios could easily be encountered in the workplace. This activity aims to allow the students to think in advance about how they would behave if they encountered problems, possibly for the first time in their careers. However, it also goes beyond this and encourages the students to think and act in a professional and ethical manner.

The students should be divided into groups of 4-6. Each group should be assigned a dilemma. Depending on group size there may be more groups than individual dilemmas. This doesn't matter as usually each group will arrive at a different answer. The groups should be allowed around ten or fifteen minutes to discuss the problem and come to a conclusion about what they would do. One person from each group should briefly outline the topic of their dilemma and what that group would do if they were in that position and why they chose that option. The other groups should be encouraged to question their decision. There are many possible responses to the situations and as such there isn't a single 'right' answer to the scenarios. Some suggested possible outcomes are included for the tutor's use. These may help to guide the group discussions.

Assessment

The quality of the presentation and / or the reasoning may be assessed.

Possible outcomes of the ethical dilemmas

Scenario 1 Compromising Standards

You refuse to pass the batch, not compromise your principles and resign.

You pass the batch even though you know it is not up to standard and accept any possible repercussions. To some extent it may depend on what the material was. If it was an inert bulk filler for shampoo, then being slightly below standard would mean a few people might have a bad hair day. If it was the active component for an anti-seizure drug, clearly the consequences could be far reaching. What ever the comeback was, it would be your signature on the clearance form and you would be the one who had to take responsibility.

You could try going above your manager to a more senior colleague, assuming they were available to see you in time. Even if they were prepared to get involved and listened to your version of events, would you be able to work with your manager after this?

Scenario 2 Bullying

This person puts on a really good act for your boss. You could bring the problem you have with this person to the boss's attention, but they have a completely different view of her. After all, she has just been promoted.

You could just put up with it, but as it is already making you extremely stressed, this is unlikely to be a realistic long term option.

You could ask the person outright if there was a problem and see if it the situation could be resolved.

Apply for other jobs and leave as quickly as possible.

Scenario 3 Corruption

If you blow the whistle, this person will probably lose their job. Even if this person was disliked, getting him fired could make you very unpopular with your colleagues. People may be nervous to be around you; nobody likes a ‘sneak.’

You could say nothing, pretend you don’t know what’s going on, and forget about it.

You could have a discreet word with him and see what he says. However, if this person is stealing and he knows you know this, he may try to damage your career prospects.

Scenario 4 Repetition of Results

One option is to undertake as many of the results as possible in the time available. Before the area manager calls, you could approach your supervisor and explain what you have done rather than telling him when the area manager is there. This may not be well received though.

You could do as many of the repetitions as possible but claim you had done all of them. This would involve falsifying your laboratory records, you may or may not get found out. Either way you would have to reconcile this with your conscience.

You could go to someone who is more senior than your manager and explain the situation. This may not be well received by either your manager or his supervisor.

Scenario 5 Plagiarism

Just accept it and vow to be more careful next time. This may be difficult to ignore as you see the person enjoying the promotion prospects that should rightfully be yours.

You could speak to your manager and tell them it was you who saw the results and put in the extra work. It would be your word against theirs. If this person is dishonest enough to steal someone else’s work, then clearly they may be dishonest enough to lie if confronted.

Alternatively you could refuse to continue working in this environment and resign.

You may decide to approach your union and/or HR and ask them to pursue the case for you. In the long run this may get you labelled as a trouble causer and may not get you any recognition anyway.

Meta data

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