

4. COMMUNICATION ETHICS

“Because instant information has to be given, it becomes necessary to resort to guesswork, rumors, and suppositions to fill in the voids, and none of them will ever be rectified, they will stay on the readers’ memory. How many hasty, immature, superficial, and misleading judgments are expressed every day, confusing readers, without any verification? The press can both stimulate public opinion and miseducate it. Thus, we may see terrorists turned into heroes or secret matters pertaining to one’s nation’s defense publicly revealed, or we may witness shameless intrusions on the privacy of well-known people under the slogan: “everyone is entitled to know everything”

– Alexander Solzhenitsyn. (SM)

Q.No.1. What do you understand by Ethical Communication? What are its elements?.

(B)

(N11 - 5M)

MEANING:

- According to the **National communication Association**, Ethical communication is necessary to responsible thinking, decision making and the development of relationships in any field of activity.
- Ethical communication enhances human worth and dignity by promoting truthfulness, fairness, responsibility, personal integrity and respect for self and others.
- While unethical communication threatens the quality of all communication and consequently the well-being of individuals and the society in which we live.
- In nutshell ethical communicators have a ‘well developed sense of social responsibility’.

ELEMENTS OF ETHICAL COMMUNICATIONS ON WHICH:

- Includes all relevant information
- Is true in every sense and is not deceptive in any way.
- Is accurate and sincere. Avoids language that manipulates, discriminates or exaggerates.
- Does not hide negative information behind an optimistic attitude .
- Does not state opinions as facts.
- Portrays graphic data fairly.

Q.No.2. Outline the importance/significance of Ethical Communication. (C)

(PM) (For Student Self - Study)

Communication has always been of critical importance to the success of companies.

IMPORTANCE OF ETHICAL COMMUNICATION:

1. Survival & Growth:

- The basic business objective is of creating consumer loyalty for products and services.
- Ethical Communication helps in achieving this objective effectively.

2. Dignity:

- Ethical Communication enhances human worth and dignity.
- It fosters truthfulness, fairness, responsibility, personal integrity, and respect for self and others.



3. Corporate Image:

- a) When an organisation communicates internally, it shapes the values of its employees.
- b) When it communicates externally, it influences the perception of all other Stakeholders.

4. Shareholder Value:

- a) Ethical Communication promotes long-term business success and profit.
- b) Thus, it enhances shareholder value.
- c) If the cost of being ethical outweighs the benefits, ethical choices would no longer be possible.

**5. Quality of People:**

- a) Ethical Communication is a must for attracting, retaining and motivating high quality people.
- b) Competent people are likely to search for organizations, which maintain high ethical standards.

6. Long Term Integrity:

- a) Ethical Communication involves certain actions in three basic areas –
 - i) Cultural ii) Policy iii) Personal
- b) Ethical organizations are created and sustained by individuals of personal integrity, operating in a culture of principle, and governed by careful policies.

SIMILAR QUESTIONS:

1. "Ethical communication improves corporate image and share holders value"- comment
A. Refer 4th and 5th point of above question.
2. Give a brief note on organization values and Communication Ethics.

Q.NO.3. Write Short Notes On:

(A)

- (a) Advantages of Ethical Communication
- (b) Organization Values

(M12 - 4M)
(PM, RTP - M15)

a) ADVANTAGES OF ETHICAL COMMUNICATION:

- i) Ethical communication promotes long-term business success and profit.
- ii) One advantage of ethics is long-term integrity.
- iii) Surveys report that all employees want to work for organizations with high ethical standards.
- iv) Competent people are likely to search for organizations that maintain high ethical standards. When competent people migrate toward ethical firms, everyone benefits because both competence and ethics are continued.

b) ORGANIZATION VALUES:

- i) Values are the principles and ideas that people or organizations strongly believe in and consider important.
- ii) When people are in doubt about decisions, they frequently rely on deep-seated values to help them make the right choice.
- iii) In organizations, reliance on shared values makes setting goals easier in the face of the competing ideas, desires, and objectives of individual employees.

- iv) One can get a good idea about the values of an organization by examining its vision and mission statement.
- v) These statements are short descriptions of the purpose of organizations and the directions they try to take to achieve success.
- vi) Many organizations post their vision and mission statements in several places so that employees know what the organization values are.

Q.No.4. What are the Factors Influencing Ethical Communication. (B) (PM, N16 - 4M)

FACTORS INFLUENCING ETHICAL COMMUNICATION

1. **Every Communication Decision has some Ethical Aspect to it, Acknowledged or Not.**
 - a) In communication, an individual faces three simple choices: to speak, to listen, or to remain silent. Each choice implies an ethical decision.
 - b) The timing and mode of communication add another layer of complexity to the ethical dimension.
 - c) Remaining silent in the face of unlawful behavior or a potentially harmful situation presents a serious ethical decision.
2. **The Ethical Nature of Communication must be Considered within the Context of Who, What, When, and Where, we are communicating.**
 - a) Ethical communicators are not concerned with just who or what or where or when, but with all four dimensions simultaneously.

Q.No.5. Explain Ethical dilemmas in Communication. (A) (PM, M 15 – 4M)

- An ethical dilemma is a complex situation that often involves a clear mental conflict .
- Managers frequently confront tough business decisions that involve ethical issues. Sometimes the ethical choice is also the profit maximizing choice.
- But some of the toughest decisions involve situations where the manager has to choose between profit maximization or ethical conduct.

SOME OF THE ETHICAL DILEMMAS FACED WHILE COMMUNICATING ARE:

- a) **Secrecy:** Secrets are kept for both honorable and dishonorable reasons; the challenge for the manager is to determine when secrets are justifiable and when they are not.
- b) **Whistle-blowing:** Any employee who goes public with information about corporate abuses Or negligence is known as a whistle-blower.
- c) **Leaks:** A leak is like anonymous whistle- blowing; one distinction being the propriety^(=decency) of the leak; namely, that the person who leaks information cannot be cross-examined. This often throws doubt on the credibility of the claim.
- d) **Rumor and gossip:** Rumors and gossip seem to be an inevitable part of everyday corporate life. There is a distinction between the terms. Rumors tend to focus on events and information, whereas gossip focuses on people.
- e) **Lying:** A lie is a false statement intended to deceive. Of all the ethical dilemmas discussed thus far, lying would appear to be the least morally perplexing. Most would agree that "one ought not to lie."
- f) **Euphemisms:**
 - i) By definition, a euphemism is using a less offensive expression instead of one that might cause distress.

- ii) For example using the expression "passed away" instead "died" is one of the more common examples.
 - iii) This usage is understandable. However, people frequently use these terms to cover up the truth.
 - iv) For example a purchasing agent has a far easier time accepting a "consideration fee" than a "bribe."
- g) **Ambiguity:** Ambiguity, like secrecy, can be used for ethical or unethical purposes. Language itself is made up of various words that carry values. So by using words in certain ways, one can influence others behaviour and expectations.

SIMILAR QUESTIONS:

1. "Rumors and lies lead to ethical dilemmas" – comment
- A. Refer the concerned points in the above answer.

Q.No.6. Suggest guidelines to handle communication ethics dilemmas. (B)
(PM, RTP - M17, M13 - 5M)

GUIDELINES TO HANDLE COMMUNICATION ETHICS DILEMMAS:

- a) **Maintain candor:** Candor refers to truthfulness, honesty, frankness and one should stick to these elements while communicating with others.
- b) **Keep message accurate:** At the time of relaying information from one source to another, communicate the original message as accurately as possible.
- c) **Secrecy:** One has to maintain secrecy and confidence in communication. So one should not divulge such information to others.
- d) **Ensure timeliness of communication:** The timing of messages can be critical. Delay in sending messages can be assumed unethical.
- e) **Avoid deception:** Ethical communicators are always vigilant in their quest to avoid deception, fabrication, intentional distortion or withholding of information in their communication.
- f) **Confront unethical behaviour:** One must confront an unethical behaviour in order to ensure a consistent ethical view point.



APPLICATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

Q.No.7 Rumors and gossips are synonymous. (B) (PM, M15 - 2M)

- a) The given statement "Rumours and gossips are synonymous" is INCORRECT.
- b) Rumours and gossip seem to be an inevitable part of everyday corporate life. Even though rumours and gossip often travel through the same network, there is a distinction between the terms.
- c) Rumours tend to focus on events and information, whereas gossip focuses on people.
- d) The information has a way of creeping into performance evaluations and promotion decisions, even if unintended.

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Q.No.8. Lying breaks down the trust between individuals. (C)

(PM, M15 - 2M)

The given statement "Lying breaks down the trust between individuals" is CORRECT.

- a) A lie is a false statement intended to deceive.
- b) Of all the ethical dilemmas, lying would appear to be the least morally perplexing. Most would agree that "one ought not to lie". Yet lies in business are more common than many would care to admit.
- c) Lying break down the trust between individuals, shaking the foundation of ethical communication.

Q.No.9.Discuss whistle blowing. (C)

- a) Any employee who goes public with information about corporate abuses or negligence is known as a whistle-blower.
- b) Corporations and managers legitimately expect employee loyalty. Greed, jealousy, and revenge motivate some whistle-blowers.
- c) Some are simply misinformed. Some confuse public interest with private interest.
- d) Certainly the community has a right to know about corporate practices that are potentially hazardous, yet courting the whistle-blower too aggressively can be problematic.

QUESTIONS FOR ACADEMIC INTEREST – FOR STUDENT SELF STUDY

Q.No.10 Explain the Meaning of Communication Ethics. (C)

(SM, N11 - 5M)

1. Ethical Behavior means the decisions taken and their impacts on the people related to it and the society. Ethical communication means communicating with a sense of responsibility, towards the society.
2. Ethical communication enhances human worth and dignity by fostering truthfulness, fairness, responsibility, personal integrity and respect for self and others. One advantage of ethics is long-term integrity.
3. According to the National communication Association, ethical communication is fundamental to responsible thinking, decision making and the development of relationship and communities within and across contexts, cultures, channels and media. (PM)



To take the decisions, due thought has to be given about their impact on the stakeholder, the organisation and the society, as a whole.

There are essentially two types of communication undertaken by an organisation:

Internal : It shapes the values of the employees of an organization.

External : It influences the perception of the external public.

Ethics play a crucial role in communication.

The word 'ethics' comprises the whole image of human conduct, with regard to an organization. It includes:



- | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. Colleagues | 2. Staff and workers |
| 3. Shareholders | 4. Customers |
| 5. The industrial community | 6. The government |
| 7. The environment and even | 8. The nation and its interest |

Q.No.11 Outline the guidelines of National Communication Association (NCA), in the context of Ethical Communication. (C) (SM)

The National Communication Association (NCA) states that, “Ethical Communication enhances human worth and dignity by fostering truthfulness, fairness, responsibility, personal integrity, and respect for self and others”. The following are the rules for Ethical communication -

1. Truthfulness, accuracy, honesty, and reason are essential to the integrity of communication.
 2. Advocate freedom of expression, diversity of perspective, and tolerance of dissent to achieve the informed and responsible decision making fundamental to a civil society.
 3. Strive to understand and respect other communicators, before evaluating and responding to their messages.
 4. Access to communication resources and opportunities are necessary to fulfill human potential contribute to the well-being of families, communities, and society.
 5. Commit to the courageous expression of personal conviction in the pursuit of fairness and justice.
 6. Advocate sharing information, opinions, and feelings when facing significant choices while also respecting privacy and confidentiality.
- Accept responsibility for the short-term and long – term consequences for our own communication and expect the same of others.

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. For what purpose, do you suggest external communication in your organization?
2. Which Communicators act in good faith, and do not mislead or receive people for personal reasons?
3. Which may appear to be the safest way to avoid ethical conflict?
4. Which focuses on people & which focuses on events?
5. Which are used deliberately to “hide the truth an unethical acts”?
6. Which right does every organization has to protect sensitive information?
7. Who is a Whistleblower and what is Whistle blowing policy?

THE END