

Professional Ethics Essay

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Abstract

This paper is on professional ethics specifically relating to project management. I was a little taken back on why there was even a need for a code of ethics in project management, until I started doing a little research. The corruption, bribery and professional misconduct over the last few decades have set the profession and has caused a lack of trust in the public eye. This essay will attempt to explain what ethics means in an organizational structure, the articles of the code of ethics in project management, enabling ethics organizations and why ethics are so vital.

Introduction

Project management is one of the fastest growing career fields in the world. It is estimated that certain areas of project management, such as construction and IT could expand by over 35% over the next decade. According to (Frame, 2017), “demand for qualified project professional’s due to industry growth and worker attrition, project manager orientated labor force will grow by 33% by 2027” (pg. 7). This means billions of dollars being pumped into corporations and infrastructure. When you start talking about big dollars, corruption is not far behind. There is a growing impatience within society with selfish and irresponsible actions that deprive some, while enriching crafty and cunning people.

Code of Ethics in Project Management

PMI.org defines ethics as simply a code of moral standards for personal and professional conduct. Project Management Institute has developed a code of ethics, specifically for project management. All of the articles that explain the code of ethics entail embracing morals and values. According to PMI.org, Article I: “Project Managers shall maintain high standards of personal and professional conduct” (Ireland and Parry, 1982). It all starts with integrity. There are many different angles on how to define integrity. The short-condensed version would be to do or be, what is right when no one is looking. The military lives by these core values as well. Within each branch of service, all start with integrity relating to their core values. Article II: “Project managers will try to engage in maximum productivity while keeping budgets at minimum costs”. An example could be working with procurements and or subcontractors; not to cut side deals and over charge the organization in order for you to get kickbacks. Living in Detroit for my first 23 years, we have had our fair share of corrupt leaders. Mismanagement was

one area that project managers and city leaders fell into when trying to renovate the city 20 years ago. In the end, the city as a whole continued go down, certain key players were convicted and in 2013, the city of Detroit was the first major city in America to file for Chapter 11 (Bomey & Priddle, 2013). Article III: "Project managers must maintain loyalty to its employers". Projects range is size and complexity. It is important that when project teams, sponsors and customers sign the project charter and agreements, teams fulfill their responsibilities. Imagine the havoc it would create if project teams would start a major project, and half way through, they get better, more lucrative deal from company B, and they pull out from the first project. The ripple effect would catastrophic. Article IV: "Project managers must have a sense of responsibility to the community". I have experienced this professionally as well as personally. When I make things less about me, things seem to go so much better as a whole. Project managers that have a sense of pride for their community and want to contribute in making it a better place to live for everyone; everything tends to go in the right direction. It's one thing to read and speak about ethics, it is another to take action and implement ethics in our organizational structure and culture from the bottom up. This paper shed light on how to develop this code of ethics into the organization and the benefits that it will deliver.

Body

Project management is in itself a fairly straightforward process with few mysterious surprises. It is the context of today's projects that brings complexity into the equation (Helgadottir, 2007). In order to properly implement codes of ethics into the web of an organization, there is a need to perform holistic assessment of the business system by looking at the basic components of the organization that contribute to implementation (Oladinrin & Ho,

2014). There are many different enablers on how ethics can be implemented into the organization and it starts with leadership.

Leadership

In a system approach, everything, including project management, is connected to one another and a change in one entity will invariably affect the others in the system; therefore, to effectively and proactively accommodate the demands of incessant unethical behavior in the organization, all system components must be addressed regarding decision making. One of the most important aspect of any business organization is leadership (Oladinrin & Ho, 2014). The author further describes, how leaders are the ones that recognize change, perceives the possibilities for the change, and consequently takes action. The ability to make the correct decision at the right time. Implementing ethics in the organization starts with solid leaders.

In my work organization, I have had the privilege of working with some incredible leaders and officers. All of them spoke and attempted to convey the message of implementing ethical behavior, however not all took adequate action. It was a “do what I say, not as I do” philosophy. Unfortunately, over the course of time, that does not work; ethics and integrity flows from top-down. Leaders must be walking the walk and conduct themselves in a professional matter because it establishes a key element in a successful organization, trust.

When people distrust each other, they often spend inordinate amounts of time and energy attempting to discern hidden agendas and the true meaning of communications and then securing guarantee to promises (Larson & Gray, 2014). I can certainly relate to the authors in that statement. If there is no trust among my colleagues or leaders, I spend more time looking into if what they are telling me is true or do I have the whole story. People have a bad habit of

omission. They tell me only a part of the story and leave out key details to only discover later at the most inopportune moment. This creates extra work and wasted time spent following up, to make sure individuals are providing all of the facts. This time could be spent focusing on the project. It also cultivates distrust amongst coworkers.

Employee's

The greatest assets in any large organization is its people. Technology and tools alone cannot make the firms to accomplish their goals is common among many organizations these days as people facilitate competitive advantage for the company (Oladinrin and Ho, 2014). Implementing ethics in the organization, needs to start with leadership and then be carried out by its employees. Larson and Gray, (2014) states that, team members base their actions on how they think the project manager would respond (pg. 357). Ethical dilemmas involve situations where it is difficult to determine whether conduct is right or wrong. Most of the time, dealing with tough decisions, making the ethical choice is not always 'black and white'. Is it acceptable to falsely assure customers that everything is on track when, in reality, you are only doing so to prevent them from panicking? I believe most people think they are ethical and when called upon, would do the right thing when moral issues arise. This does not always happen. There are many complicated variables, along with unethical opportunity to make a profit, can lead employee's off the path. Making the right ethical choice is not always easy. Making the ethical choice could lead to you getting in trouble or colleagues losing their jobs. Omission, cutting corners, covering up, making deals to make quick bucks, may work on the surface and benefit you today. However, I believe that once you cross that boundary, it is just that much easier to do it again the next time. Until those ethical boundaries start to get blurry and disappear.

Awareness training relating to ethics can help keep those boundaries in sight and help employees stay on the path.

Training and awareness

Ethical awareness is critical in every organization. It is imperative that supervisors and leaders properly train and cultivate ethical awareness. Ethical training can help in keep employee's aware and keep core values on the surface. Ethical training can help in communicating important ethical values, practices and norms so that employees understand workplace standards and expectations (Helgadottir, 2007). This will have a positive effect on their personal ethics, which will hopefully carry over. Employees are positioned at the heart of the organization and a sound knowledge of their interaction with the whole organizational structure is a crucial ingredient for the success of any business. Helgadottir, (2007) also states in his article, "Implementing ethics into an organization through policy and strategy means that the organization strives to have a clear vision through stakeholder strategy, supported by relevant policies, plans, objectives, targets and processes". In my former job, we had ethical training, in the form of computer based training along with core value training that took place at commanders call and annual briefing that we needed to attend on an annual basis. This training consisted of many different issues, that leaders felt that needed to be addressed. This training could relate to rules of engagement with the enemy in a foreign operating area, or it could relate computer security awareness training. The key was keeping insight our morals and values in critical situations so that everyone would make the 'right' decisions in critical situations. Ethical training and awareness leads to making ethical choices. I believe, this plays a key role to keeping units safe, secure, and protecting resources and assets.

Ethics = Positive Work attitude

Creating an ethical environment and emphasizing responsible business practices should encourage employees to respond more favorably to the workplace (Valentine & Godkin, 2016). When everyone is doing the next 'right' thing, it promotes an overall positive working environment. This is one of the facets from the working in the Air Force that I will miss the most. The quality and integrity of the people that I had the opportunity of working with on a day to day basis. In my work environment, there was nothing shady that ever seemed to transpire. Crossing unethical boundaries never even entered my mind in 20 years.

(Valentin et al., 2016) further explains, "employers that emphasize ethics often encourage a variety of positive work-related outcomes, yet the manner in which different ethics policies and corporate social responsibility enhance employee attitudes is still being researched. It seems apparent, that organizations that establish ethical codes and policies lead to higher ethical performance, increased organizational pride, enhanced identity, stronger morale climate, better communication, clearer vision and yields higher job satisfaction and commitment.

Chick Fil A, is a chicken fast food chain that is based out of Atlanta, GA. The organizational structure and culture they have developed over the last 20 years is astounding. Leaders recruit and hire the best of the best. They go after employees with strong moral character and ethical behavior. They can retain these employee's by paying them on average up to 10% above the national average (Peterson, 2016). All employees move in the same direction and all do "the next right thing". Peterson (2016), also states that this corporation is not only one

of the fastest growing fast food chains, but one of the fastest growing organizations in the country. It all started with one leader with a vision and built a restaurant with a foundation of employees with strong moral character and ethical values. If you go into any Chick-fil-A, you will see their mission statement on the wall. Their mission statement consists of doing what is right. Ethical values lead to overall better job satisfaction and better job performance.

Conclusion

I understand how and why people can get off the moral path. Especially in complex career field like project management, where complex, multi-billion dollar projects can take up to 10 years to close. There are windows to cut corners, make side deals, in order to save time and pad wallets by doing unethical practice. I understand because it's easy to do. Living a code of ethics requires a certain degree commitment and awareness. It entails standing in your truth every single moment of every single day. It is not always easy. Standing in my truth at times can be controversial. However, having the courage, commitment and desire, to do what is right, will provide me with job satisfaction. It will allow me to sleep at night and make me a happier human being. People cut corners, because it's easy and or they feel pressure from external circumstances. I have been on that side of the fence before and I do not want to ever go back there. I prefer to be committed and invest in myself, and my organization, and do what is right. I may make mistakes but I will always be my authentic self and convey the code of ethics, professionally and personally.

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