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by Ian Gee and Ruth Steinholtz, JD

The Alchemy of Ethics, Part 2: Ethical drivers

- » Ethical drivers are a way of understanding why some individuals and teams are ethically compliant and why others are not.
- » If you can identify the drivers at play in an individual, team, or the wider organisation, you can design more effective interventions to drive change.
- » Attitudes are the expression of the interaction of personal values, beliefs, and feelings.
- » Some employees may need help building their skills, so they can make choices based on reality, rather than choices driven by anxiety.
- » Do a stakeholder analysis and identify key influencers who can help you carry the message into the group and bring about change.

The first part of this article was published in our October 2015 issue.

In the first part of this article, we explored the opportunities that working with organization development (OD) practitioners can give you. In this article, we explore one of the ways in which you might work together to deliver value to you organization.



Gee

Through our discussions and ongoing exploration, we developed the idea of “ethical drivers” as a way of understanding why some individuals and teams are ethically compliant and why others are not. Once you have started to think about and analyse your organization in this way, it gives you a choice of tailored and focused interventions to bring about change.



Steinholtz

To help us with our exploration, we drew on the work of Eric Berne, the founder of Transactional Analysis.^{1,2} He and his colleagues

developed the idea that we all operate from a set of common drivers that motivate us and drive us towards or away from actions. So our question was: What drives people’s behaviour, both towards and away from being ethical and doing the right thing?

Attitude, behaviour and skill

We believe that we can categorise the drivers we have uncovered in relation to ethical behaviour as attitude, behaviour, and skill. By *attitude* we mean the interaction of personal values, beliefs, and feelings; by *skill* we mean ability, access to information, knowledge, and resilience; and by *behaviour* we mean actions driven by the expectations of the organisation’s culture and the external environment.

Identifying drivers

If you can identify the drivers at play in any individual, team, or the wider organisation, then it makes designing and tailoring interventions—and therefore bringing about change—much easier. It also costs a lot less

than traditional, plain vanilla, “sheep dip” style training. But how do you identify the drivers? The process is both intuitive as well as structured. On the intuitive front, once you are familiar with the drivers, you will recognise them in terms of what you hear people say and what you see people do. On the more structured front, all organisations are full of data, so for instance, you can identify drivers by analysing engagement surveys or values assessments, looking at performance management discussions, seeing what people are saying in exit interviews, and analysing the results of investigations or risk assessments, etc.

When looking to identify the driver’s underpinning behaviours, we use the following headings to help us understand them, recognise them, and then decide what to do:

- ▶ **What you experience** – What have you found in the data? What are you seeing and hearing?
- ▶ **The evidence**—What is the proof or verification of what you are experiencing?
- ▶ **The underlying driver**—What is it that supports and encourages what you are seeing and experiencing or what you found in the data?
- ▶ **The relationship of the driver to ethics and compliance**—What do people do in terms of ethics and compliance when the driver is in operation?
- ▶ **Possible interventions**—What can you do to bring about change?

The three drivers

Let’s explore the three drivers in more detail.

Attitude

Attitudes are the expression of the interaction of personal values, beliefs, and feelings. If attitude is the primary driver at play, in terms of unethical behaviour, then you are likely to hear people saying things like:

- ▶ “I know best.”

- ▶ “What’s the least we have to do and how do we get away with things that are not necessary?”
- ▶ “I am simply doing what I (we) have always done around here.”
- ▶ “It’s not me; it’s my job.”
- ▶ “It’s someone else’s responsibility.”

The relationship to ethics of people or teams driven by attitudes is one of choice and has nothing to do with the organisation’s needs, requirements, or mandates. They are self-oriented, and you will often experience them as being aggressive or passive/aggressive if challenged. They will spend time reassuring each other that they are doing the right thing.

The evidence you will see is an absence of overall behavioural compliance, with people making selective choices based on personal needs, desires, and/or “What will the boss notice?” In terms of interventions, it is worth exploring what we in OD call normative re-education, which is looking at a balance between reward and punishment, probably best expressed in terms of bonuses. This is about clearly linking actions with consequences.

Another way of doing this is to use simulations as a way of getting people to understand the outcomes and impact of their actions or non-actions, both in terms of the wider organisation and of themselves in relations to this. It is also important to make sure that the tone at the top is being heard loud and clear. Ultimately you may have to manage some of them out of the organisation, if they won’t change. This in turn will send a message to others who are attitude driven in terms of their relationship to values and ethical behaviour.

Skills

The skills driver is about knowledge and the ability to put things into practice. If skill is the primary driver at play, in terms

of non-compliance, then you are likely to experience people as being confused about what is expected of them. They don't really understand what being ethical or complying is, in the context of the work they do. People generally don't like to admit what they don't know. We as humans don't like to look foolish and, rather remarkably, would sooner get things wrong than admit we don't know! You are likely to hear people saying the following:

- ▶ "What does 'being fully compliant' mean in practice?"
- ▶ "How do I comply?"
- ▶ "What do I need to do?"
- ▶ "What does ethics mean to my job and me?"
- ▶ "Who can help me?"

They can often also be overwhelmed, and you will see them running from one issue to another. "Too many meetings and not enough time to do the work!" It's not that they don't want to be ethical; it's just that they don't know *how* to be.

Their relationship to ethics is one where they will make ethical choices that they think won't reflect their ignorance, and often they will become stressed and anxious about their lack of skills. The more anxious people feel, the more likely they are to get things wrong. The interventions here are more obvious than those involving attitude. It's about training and helping people prioritise, helping them to manage risk, and make better choices based upon knowledge. It's about building people's confidence in their skills, so they can make choices based on reality and not driven by anxiety. It may also be about reorganising the way people work and making structural changes.

Behaviour

Behaviour is the expression of the organisation's culture through actions. If

behaviour is the primary driver at play, in terms of non-compliance, then you are likely to hear people saying things that make you believe that they know best. They are on the ground and know what needs to be done to make the numbers. You will hear things like:

- ▶ "We know best and say what happens 'round here."
- ▶ "This is rubbish and HQ codswallop."
- ▶ "We are too important to the organisation. If we ignore it, it will go away!"
- ▶ "We decide what we need to do, not them."

The kinds of interventions here are based on co-creation, working with them to enable them to fit the ethics and compliance agenda around their tasks and targets. Create the program with them, so they feel they own it. You can also find ways of linking ethics and compliance to personal success—such things as promotions, bonuses, and other forms of rewards, again linking an action or lack of it to consequences can also help. People with true behavioural issues may also need interventions from outside the group, coming under the spotlight of senior leaders. It can also be useful to do a stakeholder analysis and identify key influencers who can help you carry the message into the group and bring about change.

Conclusion

We hope that in this article we have helped you see how by building a new relationship with OD practitioners you can add a new dimension to your work as an ethics and compliance professional. In doing so we also hope we have encouraged you to make new friends and find the workplace less of a lonely one! *

1. Eric Berne: *Games People Play: The Psychology of Human Relationships*, Grove Press, 1964.
2. Taibi Kahler: *Transactional Analysis Revisited*. Human Development Publications, Little Rock, Arkansas, November 1978.

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