

Technology and Ethics in Workplace

The American Society of Chartered Life Underwriters & Chartered Financial Consultants (ASCLU & ChFC) and the Ethics Officer Association (EOA)

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Objectives:

- Determining the increase of unethical practices due to the advance of new technologies.
- Determining the behaviors that workers believe to be unethical.
- Determining the percentage of respondents who have committed unethical acts last year.
- Find out what needs to be done by the organizations to address pressure, fears and unethical behavior.
- Measuring the level of pressure, fears of the future, comfort level and usage pattern of new technologies.

Highlights:

- The International Communication Research mailed 4000 surveys from Feb 23, 1998 through Mar 17, 1998 to household income levels and occupation categories.
- The response rate (24%) was more than twice the typical response rate of this type of survey.
- The 726 respondents included highly educated, upper middle income, more men than women and more full-time workers. Professions run from laborer to lawyer, from business owner to clerical representing all types of industries.

Background:

- The rapid changing business environment raises issue related to the benefits and limitations of the new technologies.
- Organizations have started enforcing high ethical standards to maintain good reputation, which matters as never before. The increase of membership in EOA from 12 to 500 in just five years indicates the interest in this area.
- Although the ASCLU & ChFC and EOA believe that the increase in the risk of unethical practices is due to new technologies, no study has attempted to measure the comfort level.

Key Findings:

- When presented 16 technology related actions, 12 were identified as unethical. The percentages following the actions listed below indicate the percentage of respondents who thought the action was unethical. About 45% of workers engaged in one or more of the following 12 unethical actions during the last year:
 1. Sabotage systems/data of current co-worker or employer (96%).
 2. Sabotage systems/data of former employer (96%).
 3. Access private computer files without permission (93%).
 4. Listen to private cellular phone conversation (92%).

5. Visit pornographic websites using office equipment (87%).
 6. Use new technologies to unnecessarily intrude on co-worker's privacy (70%).
 7. Create potentially dangerous situation by using new technology while driving (67%).
 8. Use office equipment to network/search for another job (66%).
 9. Copy the company's software for home use (65%).
 10. Wrongly blame an error you made on a technological glitch (61%).
 11. Make multiple copies of software for office use (59%).
 12. Use office equipment to shop on the Internet for personal reasons (54%).
- Most employees do not feel that the increased reliance on new technologies has made traditional standards of right and wrong. Two-thirds of the employees disagree with the statement: "Traditional standards of right and wrong are no longer relevant in the workplace because of the onset of new technologies."
 - Though not a majority, it is important to note that one in six employees agrees with the statement that traditional standards are no longer relevant and one-third either agree or are ambivalent. This sentiment increases with age. Only 7% of those ages 30-34 agree, but more than 21% of the respondents over the age of 55 say that traditional standards are no longer relevant.
 - The majority of respondents did not believe the following actions are unethical: play computer games on office equipment during work hours (49%), use office equipment to help your children/spouse do school work (37%), use company e-mail for personal reasons (34%) and use office equipment for personal reasons (29%).
 - An equal number of men and women (5%) reported visiting pornographic sites from the office. The highest percentage in this category are those 50-54 years old (8%) and those working 'at home business' (12%).

More about the Survey:

The survey talks about the comfort level and the usage profile of the workers with the new technology. It talks about the technology related pressures.

Future Problems:

The biggest concerns of the employees are the availability of dangerous and offensive material on the Internet (76%), invasion of privacy by the government (76%), invasion of the privacy by business (75%) and the loss of person-to-person contact (65%).

Corporate Solutions:

- Employees are in favor of more passive corporate solutions which center on empowering employees to change behavior. These generally include solutions such as defining and creating guidelines on corporate policies, though they are also in favor of installing computer software, which would limit access to certain Internet sites.

- They are not in favor of solutions that have "Big Brother" overtone or which may be perceived as invading privacy. They do not want government involvement, nor do they want management to monitor their emails and files.