

The Ethics Landscape in American Business

*Society for Human Resource Management
Ethics Resource Center (2008)*

OBJECTIVE:

This report examines the role of HR professionals in organizational ethics, as well as the types of standards and practices that organizations have in place, and the behaviors of top management, supervisors and non-management employees that shape ethical culture.

METHODS USED:

In November 2007, 3000 HR professionals who were SHRM members were randomly selected for this survey. Of these 3000, 2736 professionals received the survey questionnaire and 513 of them responded, yielding a response rate of 19%.

KEY FINDINGS:

- 23% of HR professionals reported that their organization had a comprehensive ethics program in place.
- 72% of HR professionals indicated that they were involved in formulating ethics policies for their organizations to a moderate or large extent.
- 91% of HR professionals are familiar with their organizations' ethics standards.
- Approximately four out of ten HR professionals agreed or strongly agreed that their organization rewards employees who follow its ethics standards.
- Only two out of ten HR professionals overall felt pressure to compromise their organization's ethics standards.
- The most common type of misconduct observed by HR professionals in their organizations during the past 12 months were abusive or intimidating behavior toward employees, email and/or Internet abuse, misreporting accrual time or hours worked, behavior that places an employee's interest over the organization's interests and employees calling in sick when they were not.
- Eight out of 10 HR professionals reported their observations of misconduct to management or another appropriate person during the past 12 months.
- Although 49% of HR professionals reported having an ethics officer or a professional in a similar role, only 20% overall used that option.

- Three-fourths of HR professionals agreed or strongly agreed that their supervisor, non-management employees and top management set a good example of ethical behavior.

CONCLUSION:

The survey suggests that the culture of the organization plays a very important role in the ethical behavior of its employees and HR professionals. But for ethics to be taken seriously by employees, those in management positions also must reflect and embrace ethical values and standards.

LINKS:

[Society for Human Resource Management
Full Survey Document](#)