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ABSTRACT

In this paper some of the main concepts of freedom, conscience, responsibility will be looked at in detail and further the meaning of these terms in the context of the business day will be explored in detail. Humans of course must pay careful attention to issues as they come up to them, exercise careful intellect about them and then act up being faithful to the ones he has found, not easily. The first thing explored would be the basic elements of an act of human person before it would go on to examine the pressures that can be faced in an organisation and then would examine each situation from the perspectives of Kantian thought, utilitarianism and virtue ethics. Perverse incentives and bad corporate culture, as collectively occurred at Wells Fargo and the Volkswagen emissions scandal, can be whiskeys and snaps in the real world to the extent that they seem routine. Lastly, recommendations are given for whistleblowing protection, fair incentivisation, independent investigation, and holding people accountable; a feasible code of ethics for employees and managers, and organisations is suggested.

INTRODUCTION

In addition to being profit extracting entities, businesses generate jobs, useful products, and in some instances, give harmful financial, social, and environmental impacts to their employees, customers, investors, communities and public institutions. Think of it this way: when misconduct is uncovered, it's only a handful of people who are to blame; there's more often than not an aggressive target, reward for result—no matter how it's garnered, and little management action, and even fear of repercussion within the business itself. In the centre, the question which arises in this regard is how should a person act when his/her conscience is in conflict with the expectation of the Company. Employers do have some responsibilities to their employees, but they don't have to over-stretch in their loyalty and they cannot be responsible for employees acting on behalf of the customers to say and do things that aren't legal, to falsify records, create a situation in which the customer is needlessly endangered, or to cover up illegal activity by the employee. Moral responsibility also requires that to be considered, fairness requires due regard for it, according to what the individual is responsible for, what he or she knows, can do, means to do, actually does, and what choices are truly available to him/her. It examines the relationship between human freedom, conscience and corporate responsibility in business organisations, outlines the elements of a human act, and looks at two specific cases of business behaviour in the news in detail to extract some ideas for business leaders. It proposes a feasible code of ethics to maintain personal integrity and a socially responsible workplace, and then proposes practical measures to foster a culture of integrity.

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PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS & THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Human freedom is the freedom to think things through and to make a selection of real alternatives; however, the employees do not live lives in isolation as they are constrained by contracts, legislation, time frames, organizational structure, and economic considerations. It is not to say that these limitations kick out the person agency altogether, however Audi, R., & King, N. L. (2026). A junior employee can ask questions, record issues, refuse to repeat the lie, or get help from another employee if he/she has had instructions to do an act he or she doesn't want to do and that his or her employer doesn't want him to do. For this reason the responsibility has to be congruent to the knowledge, the authority, the intention and freedom of the person at a particular instance. This is not just something we did in the past, working for principals and institutions means we should not harm them in the first place, admit fault, but ensuring that systems are in place to make doing the right thing easy and not difficult Dion, M. (2026).

A comprehensive ethics examination looks at the action and why it is being taken, as well as the context in which the action is being taken. The act asks the following question: what is actually happening: Honest explanation, a hidden change with a report, hiding something with a report, or is a safety concern being raised when there is a risk? Purpose: 'Why are they doing that? is it really helping the customer? or is it trying to get a bonus? Is it being done with a good intention, but with no consideration for whether it isn't the appropriate product for them? Just because someone has a good intent, does not justify a bad act Alford, H. (2026). Time, role, information and the risk of harm, as well as the culture of the workplace, all contribute to a reduction or enhancement of the sense of 'blame' but 'pressure' is not an excuse.

ANALYSIS OF MORAL STRUCTURE & DECISION-MAKING

Changing from "should" to "must; those involved no longer feel they have a choice, but rather feel they must be loyal to the job, the position, and the company; and nothing else is being done by anybody else Deb Biswas, D. (2026). All this can deplete a person's options, especially when the manager is not attentive to processes used to reach results. When a person's freedom is impaired because he or she is responsible for something, that is indeed a real, serious threat that compromises that person's freedom; a mere sense of discomfort, or loss of a bonus, often does not justify what is wrong. Staff continue to have a duty to be mindful of the damage that could be done by what they do and organisations have a duty not to encourage dishonesty because of what they do. The higher-ranking managers the more responsible they are the more targets they set that involve deception and/or repeated warnings down the hierarchy Xu, A. J., & Que, X. (2026).

The objective is to have a senior citizen, with a high level of moral responsibility and decision-making power, to decide whether or not a decision will be made; looking first to clarify the facts and who might be affected, then to look into the moral issue that may have arisen, primarily deception, injustice, danger, and conflict of interest Caniago, I., & Juliani, A. (2026). As you think about relevant duties and stakeholders, ask yourself whether a choice might apply uniformly, whether it is respectful, the potential consequences at this time and in the future, and whether the choice relates to character and motive.

CASE STUDY & ETHICAL DILEMMA EVALUATION

The Wells Fargo scandal was one such occasion on which so many of these performance systems have clashed with those of their customers. It was found that staff had been opening up accounts and enrolling individuals who were not actually authorized to undergo them, and that the processes in place which incentivised staff to reach sales targets were more important than telling the truth Heo, W., & Grable, J. E. (2026). It is self-evident that creating an account without legitimate consent is a breach of trust with customers and chasing a number or generating a bonus profile is an out-of-the-way of customer dignity and a right to choice. It most certainly isn't that the employees were not entitled to be apprehensive about their job being taken from them by being constantly subjected to pressure from their supervisors, it would most certainly be not to say that an unapproved transaction was acceptable on their part, it's not to say that it wasn't the management's responsibility to set reasonable targets and also keep in mind clear warning indicators Hayati, K., & Juliani, A. (2026). The Volkswagen emissions scandal is also a more technical challenge, and investigators found that some of the cars were fitted with software to detect when they were taking part in testing conditions, and then manipulate engine performance to mislead the test – covering up the significantly greater amount of emissions that occur while they are in regular driving.

When an organisation no longer values honesty as much as an interest in gaining performance, the two scenarios illustrate how quickly the focus on the goal can outweigh the moral aspect of honesty Xu, A. J., & Que, X. (2026). The acts in both were ones that were tolerated in a criminally negligent way in connection with systems: in the case of Wells Fargo it was systems of consent and sales practices, and in the case of VW it was systems of compliance and reporting that were inappropriately and wrongfully allowed to lead to non-compliance. In both cases, however, it would be misleading to assume that the responsibilities of all employees were equal: there was a front line employee, an engineer, a supervisor, and an executive.

DISCUSSION & PROFESSIONAL APPLICATIONS

Nothing is more about you than it is about your organization, and, as the following case examples in this book illustrate, something that sounds like: "Be Ethical" when not discussed around the water cooler is just a pretty word on the wall. Organizations should dig more deeply into results (not just results) and look at the results for any unanticipated side effects, verify there are independent controls over customer consent, definition of accuracy and compliance, but otherwise avoid depending on self-reporting Yeboah, R., & Smesar, A. E. (2026). Reporting channels should be anonymous, line-free, and have the ability to escalate up to individuals on whose staff colleges would ultimately be held accountable for the role. If allegations of misconduct are to be investigated, this should be done quickly, without bias, and on the basis of fact, and not rumour Chong, V. K., & Woodliff, D. R. (2026). But once unethical behaviour has been exposed, the following actions must be taken: stop the harmful practice, if to your disadvantage, confront the person involved — as necessary — give a fair remedy, allow third party monitoring of your performance, and look at what are the incentives that led you to perpetuate the bad practice rather than replace the person and carry on! A true understanding of the organisation's wider role recognises that it must aim to inform the customer of the reality, ensure employees feel safe to raise concerns, provide honesty in reporting to investors, safeguard communities from harm, and ensure candour in disclosures to regulators – and when these conflict, open and transparent arguments provide a way to navigate the conflict rather than bury it under a mountain of silence Meng, J., & Zhou, S. (2026).

PERSONAL ETHICAL WORLDVIEW & RECOMMENDATIONS

I believe that the only thing that is beneficial in business is when it is done in an honest and responsible way instead of a shortcut that weaves its way through the lives of others Audi, R., & King, N. L. (2026). Profit is of course essential if organisations are to serve their customers, employ staff and have the necessary resources to be able to innovate, but profit should never be used as an excuse to deceive, exploit and put people at needless risk. But in all decisions, whether big or small, dignity, fairness, truthfulness and accountability must provide the yardstick of all business! I also believe in having one's own conscience but one's conscience has to be built on evidence and honest consideration — not on instinct — so, what is the evidence, what rights are involved, what duties really obtain and what consequences are going to flow? Protecting a reputation or covering up for an individual should never come before loyalty to legitimate values, or loyalty to the public interest, in such a situation where company loyalty should come into conflict with these higher obligations.

Following this mindset in a practical way implies different things at various levels. In records, people ought to recount the truth, including when it is unpleasant for them, and if they need to recall information and it doesn't make sense, they should ask enquiries appropriately—and if they have a serious concern, put it forward in an appropriate manner—and own up to their mistake in a truthful manner Dion, M. (2026). Ethics should be as sacred as an outcome, managers need to be able to voice their disapproval without fear of being reprimanded, there must be no hidden escape clause for managers to take shortcuts and the manager should treat senior managers like any other staff member. There needs to be a statement of ethical standards, several methods for complaints to be raise, there needs to be an accountability in actions to whistleblowers and reviews of consent, safety and compliance, and ethical behaviour needs to be part of promotion and pay Deb Biswas, D. (2026).

CONCLUSION

Ethical business is about human freedom, conscience and personal responsibility – everything an organisation decides, whether to do or not, is done and acted on by actual humans. When examining an action from the point of view of its purpose and circumstances, it is possible to make fair judgments of the action without overlooking what the person did or what pressures he was under. Respecting people and not using them as working tools reminds us of duty based thinking; thinking about general welfare keeps consequences in mind; thinking about character and practical wisdom reminds us of importance of good habits; and thinking about awareness, judgement, motivation and action reminding us that they can prove wrong at different stages of the thinking process. By considering the cases raised in this paper it has been demonstrated how evils can arise in an enterprise that is rewarding the end product but neglecting to pay attention to the processes that are used to attain the end product. Sometimes at work a person has less or no freedom of action, which can be caused by pressure, but this doesn't render responsibility irrelevant entirely either, and it is these leaders who create incentives and determine how warnings will be dealt with who deserve closer analysis.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Individual and Organisational Ethics Checklist

Before you make or approve a difficult business decision, pause and ask yourself the following questions:

1. Is this action honest, lawful and in line with my professional obligations?
2. Does it respect the dignity, rights and informed choices of the people it affects?
3. What is my real purpose here, and am I treating anyone merely as a way to reach a target?
4. What pressures or circumstances are shaping my thinking right now?
5. Who stands to gain, who could be harmed, and what might the long term effects be?
6. Would I be comfortable defending this decision in public, with every relevant fact on the table?
7. Have I asked for advice, written down my reasoning and looked at safer alternatives?
8. If I need to raise a concern, which channel will protect the evidence and lower the risk of retaliation?
9. If harm has already happened, what correction or remedy is needed straight away?
10. What changes to incentives, supervision or controls would make it less likely to happen again?