

Here are the biggest ethical issues facing businesses

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In businesses, there is a thin line between ethical and unethical practices. Most businesses may find themselves failing to draw the line between the two. According to the Global Business Ethics Survey of 2018, 40 % of employees believe that their company has a weak leaning ethical culture, and that little progress has been made to alleviate wrongdoing. This article will explore some of the ethical issues that have plagued some businesses.

Fraudulent accounting practices

A common problem especially in public traded companies is deliberately reporting false accounting information. An example of this is a 2001 scandal that involved American energy company Enron, which for years inaccurately reported its financial statements and its auditor, accounting firm Arthur Andersen, knowingly signed off on these inaccurate statements. The result of this was a loss of over 80 000 jobs. Most companies do this as a tax evasion methods however this can have disastrous consequences once the truth comes to light.

Social Media

The biggest question involving social media is, “Is it ethical for companies to fire or otherwise punish employees for what they post about?” The widespread nature of social media has made it a factor in employee conduct online and after hours. Are social media posts counted as “free speech”? The line is complicated, but it is drawn when an employee’s online activities are considered disloyal to the employer. This means that a Facebook post complaining about work is not punishable on its own but can be punishable if it does something to reduce business.

Health and Safety

The International Labour Organization (ILO) [states that](#) 7,397 people die every day from occupational accidents or work-related diseases. This results in more than 2.7 million deaths per year.

According to the Occupational Safety & Health Administration, the [top 10](#) most frequently cited violations of 2018 were:

1. Fall Protection, e.g. unprotected sides and edges and leading edges
2. Hazard Communication, e.g. classifying harmful chemicals
3. Scaffolding, e.g. required resistance and maximum weight numbers
4. Respiratory Protection, e.g. emergency procedures and respiratory/filter equipment standards
5. Lockout/Tag out, e.g. controlling hazardous energy such as oil and gas
6. Powered Industrial Trucks, e.g. safety requirements for fire trucks

7. Ladders, e.g. standards for how much weight a ladder can sustain
8. Electrical, Wiring Methods, i.e. procedures for how to circuit to reduce electromagnetic interference
9. Machine Guarding, e.g. clarifying that guillotine cutters, shears, power presses and other machines require point of operation guarding
10. Electrical, General Requirements; i.e. not placing conductors or equipment in damp or wet locations

Physical harm isn't the only safety issue to be aware of, though. In 2019, an [ILO report focused](#) on rise of “psychosocial risks” and work-related stress. These risks, which include factors like job insecurity, high demands, effort-reward imbalance, and low autonomy, have been associated with health-related behavioural risks, including a sedentary lifestyle, heavy alcohol consumption, increased cigarette smoking, and eating disorders.

The line between technology & privacy

With developments in technological security capability, employers can now monitor their employees' activity on their computers and other company-provided electronic devices. Electronic surveillance is supposed to ensure efficiency and productivity, but when does it cross the line and become spying? Companies can legally monitor your company email and internet browser history; in fact, 66% of companies monitor internet connections, [according to 2019 data from the American Management Association](#). 45% of employers track content, keystrokes and time spent on the keyboard, and 43% store and review computer files as well as monitor email. Overall, companies aren't keeping this a secret: 84% told employees that they are reviewing computer activity. Employees should review the privacy policy to see how they are being monitored and consider if it can indicate a record of their job performance.

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