Scholarly Article 2
Ethical Leadership

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Introduction and Article Selection

Just as the article reviewed for the first scholarly paper was found in *Performance Improvement (PI)* so is the article for this second scholarly paper. Time and time again, *PI* proves to offer articles with significant relevance to my career and work environment. The article I selected is One of the Corporate World's Biggest Headaches: Ethical Behavior and was published in the November/December 2005 issue of *PI*. The article discusses how organizations, primarily those in a corporate or business setting, need to align performance and behaviors through organizational values, organizational management, behavior analysis, a behavioral approach, and requirements and consequences. Fully understanding these aspects of employees and organizations is the first step to set the foundation for ethical behavior.

Organizational Values and Management

This article (Hurst, Palya, & Mills, 2005) begins with a discussion about organizational values. The authors present a position that many companies use grandiose words to inspire the masses. However, do these words actually tell an employee what to do, what to do more of, or what to do less of? The item lacking in this type of inspirational message is a connection to corporate strategy and behavioral applications. This solution may seem simple enough, but the authors go on to note that many executives lack the understanding of or refuse to accept that such a large challenge, such as ethical behavior, can be modified through behavioral techniques. Ultimately, "large or small, [ethical] problems typically begin and end with the behavior of people and the management or mismanagement thereof" (p. 23). It is important to note that this could also have been written leadership or misleadership thereof because the authors use the terms management and leadership interchangeably throughout the article.

Using the wealth of studies that exist on the productivity of employees, leaders can begin

to understand employee performance, and then use that to their advantage as a leader. The leader's action is to begin aligning behaviors (his or her own and the employee's) with the corporate strategy. The leader must also be sensitive to the personal aspirations of the employee, as failing to give this aspect due attention may result in the loss of the employee. One of the tools that leaders often employ to begin this alignment process is the ABC model. ABC represents antecedent, behavior, and consequence. Basically, this model says that behaviors can be modified through the right application of consequences (i.e., positive and negative reinforcements). If we accept that all behaviors are a result of an antecedent (prompt/cue), then we can identify the right consequence for the behavior. Many studies have shown that positive reinforcement results in a higher rate of behavioral change than negative reinforcement. The authors do note that the ABC model has been viewed as a robotic model, in that leaders are in a sense programming employees. This argument is countered by the authors. "The behavior-based approach to performance improvement is just the opposite: It recognizes that all humans strive for recognition, personal progress, and input to their surroundings" (p. 23).

<div align="center">Behavior Analysis and a Behavioral Approach</div>

Behavioral modifications require observable and measurable performance to track progress and to identify when the behavior has modified. This is often a challenge when the behavior that needs to change is affective (attitudinal). Attitudinal reactions often include internal thoughts that are not observable, and therefore, not measurable. To overcome this, the authors discuss that there is a way to interpret an attitudinal behavior in terms of observable actions. The authors list attitudes such as confusion, procrastination, and frustration and offer a sample translation which is observable. These observable actions are the antecedents to the employee's behavior. Ethical decisions made by employees are attitudinal behaviors. With this

understanding, leaders have the opportunity to maintain an ethical workforce through these behavioral techniques. These techniques are summarized by three messages: (1) behaviors are maintained or changed through consequences; (2) the ABC model offers a usable means of identifying behavioral causes; and (3) other models that are more complex than the ABC model are generally found to be too subjective.

The implementation of the ABC model into practice requires the acceptance of a few general concepts. First, leaders have to have a good relationship with their employees. Not knowing who each employee is may result in ineffective consequences. Second, the ABC implementation should not be the same for every employee. Although the behavior may be the same from employee to employee, it is possible that the antecedent is different. Therefore, the consequence may be different. Third, consequences that are rewarding have to be contingent on some specific and observable behavior. Rewarding someone too soon, will not result in the desired behavioral change. Fourth and final, the consequence needs to be timely, if not immediate. It is easy to see how a delayed reward loses significance. The impact of a negative reinforcement acts the same way.

<center>Conclusion: Real Requirements and Real Consequences</center>

"The key to a good organization is that it highlights excellent role models" (p. 25). In many ways, this statement also says to lead by example, which is a necessary behavior for a good leader. If a leader's behavior is not exemplary, then the followers' behaviors are likely not to be also. A leader is in a complex position, but a good leader will use the opportunities this position offers to positively impact the organization. A good leader will look at the organization as a system and identify areas where behaviors are not aligned and begin making adjustments. A good leader will recognize that continued acceptance of or rewarding behavior that is not

exemplary not only reinforces the poor behavior of the individual, but also acts as an antecedent for other employees. Once a leader fails to exhibit exemplary behavior, the followers receive the message that a different behavior is acceptable. Leaders can ensure optimal behavior, including ethical behavior, by adopting exemplary behaviors themselves and actively identifying behavioral antecedents and appropriate consequences.

Reference

Hurst, P., Palya, W., & Mills, W. C. Jr. (2005). One of the world's biggest headaches: ethical behavior. *Performance Improvement, 44*(10). pp. 22-26.