

# Exercising Ethics Report

August 2018 Ethical Dilemma Exercise

**This sample report is from a real Exercising Ethics program, showing the type of insights you can expect from our analysis.**

This Exercising Ethics report provides valuable observations that will help in guiding your company to further develop the ethical skills of your people.

We approach this report by providing an assessment of the four fundamental types of ethical skills: **Judgement**, **Resourcefulness**, **Influence**, and **Commitment**. We conclude with specific recommendations for Your company to teach and reinforce ethics in the workplace.

**99** respondents

**120** words (avg. response length)

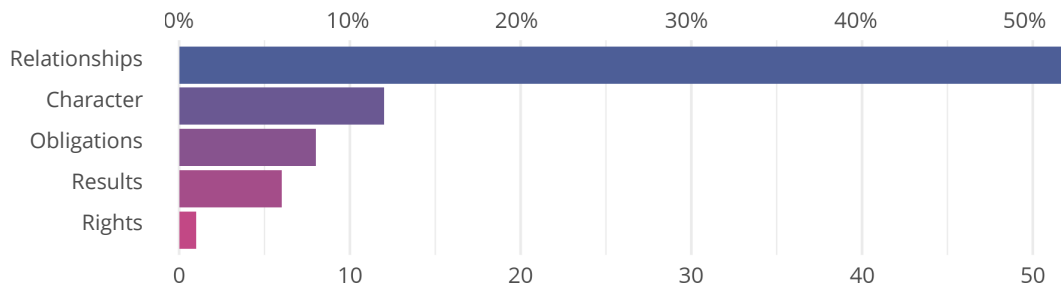
**10** minutes (avg. response time)

## Judgement

### *Ethical Reasoning*

In ethics, there are five overarching frameworks used to measure ethical reasoning: **Results**, **Rights**, **Relationships**, **Character**, and **Obligations**. Knowing how your employees *think* about ethical dilemmas helps you to know how to *talk* to them about ethics.

More than half of all respondents gave advice to Clyde using relationship-based language (i.e. *relationships*, *vulnerable*, *family*, and *friends*). More than 10% of participants discussed character-based ethics (i.e. *virtue*, *character*, *integrity*, and *reputation*). Just a few respondents mentioned results, rights, or obligations in their answers. The chart below represents a general preference for relationship-based ethical reasoning over other perspectives.

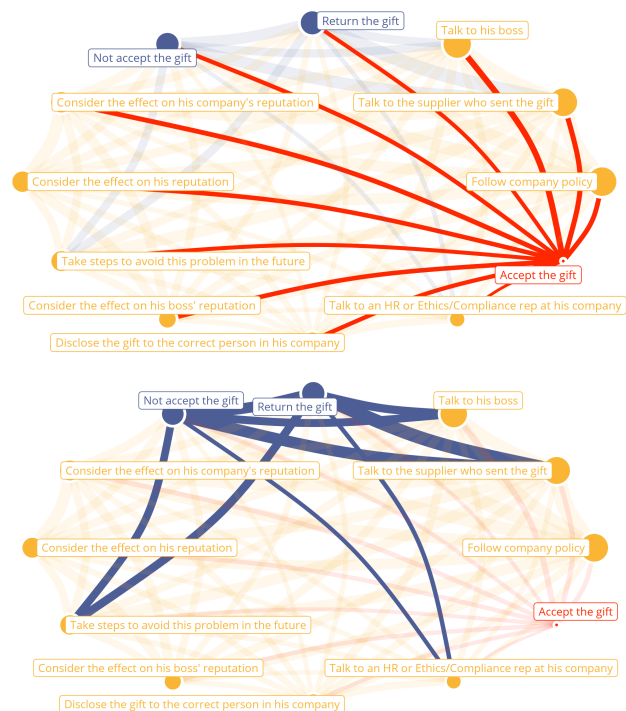


## Ethical Creativity

This dilemma invited employees to recommend possible strategies to Clyde. These charts show how often different answers appeared together (e.g. if a respondent recommended returning the gift, but selected other answers as well).

People who recommended accepting the gift (top) were also more likely to recommend a multitude of other aspects for Clyde to consider. People who recommended Clyde return or not accept the gift (bottom) were less creative in their advice. The majority of respondents were in this second category.

Ideally, employees will creatively explore all of the issues around a dilemma. Managers should continue to encourage creative thinking to resolve ethical dilemmas.



## Other Judgment Observations

There was a strong preference among your employees that Clyde return the gift. About 17% recommended he keep the gift, but this was one among multiple strategies recommended by this group. Only about 1/3 recommended he take steps to avoid this problem in the future. Ideally, all employees would recommend to Clyde that he plan ahead.

**61%** recommended that Clyde "follow company policy"

*Most responses demonstrated a general preference for returning the gift.*

**17%** recommended that Clyde "accept the gift" instead

*Reasons for keeping the gift included "protecting the vendor relationship" and the actual value of the gift was "small". However, these same respondents also selected several other options, recommending various conditions and caveats which demonstrate a thoughtful ethical decision-making process.*

**37%** recommended that Clyde "take steps to avoid this problem in the future"

*If an ethical challenge occurs once, the circumstances that caused it are likely to repeat in the future unless there is a deliberate action to prevent them.*

## Resourcefulness

As the second fundamental ethical skill, we examine the resourcefulness of your participants in utilizing policies, colleagues, and other reliable sources for ethical guidance.

Most of your employees instructed Clyde to speak with his boss (57%) about the dilemma. This reflects a trust in communication with superiors and a willingness to seek advice from those in charge. However, just 27% suggested that Clyde speak with his HR and/or Ethics department.

Aside from personal interaction, 35% of participants referred to company policies in their responses. However, only 5% mentioned policies on gifts. From our discussions, we know your company's policy hadn't been widely known before this exercise, explaining the reason for few recommendations to Clyde that he follow the gift policy.

**35%** discussed company policies in their responses

**10%** talked about asking the HR department for advice and guidance

**5%** mentioned a gift policy in their responses

## Influence

Influence measures the ability to convince others to follow an ethical strategy. This requires strong communication skills. Based on the average response time of 10 minutes, respondents generally took time to thoughtfully craft their response and apply their influence. The quality of their responses is also evident as you read them individually.

Most respondents at your company urged Clyde to communicate his dilemma to someone else (i.e. boss, vendor, HR department, etc). This reflects a culture of positive influence and communication, both in the instinct to communicate about a problem and in the willingness to have difficult conversations.

**57%** recommended talking to the boss/manager

**58%** recommended talking to the supplier/vendor

**27%** recommended talking with HR or ethics department

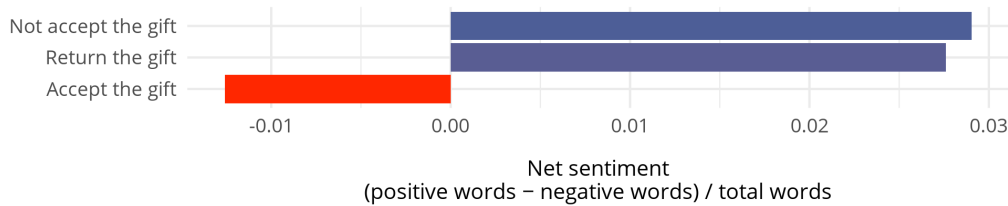
**29%** recommended disclosing the gift to the company

**1%** recommended discussing the issue with a mentor or friend at the company

## Commitment

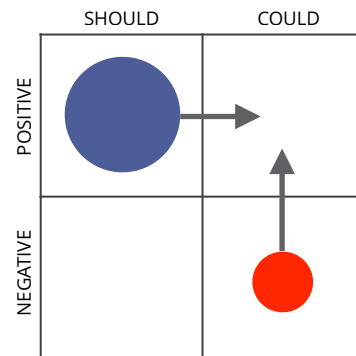
As the fourth and final fundamental ethical skill, we examine the commitment that respondents show for doing the right thing.

Responses generally fell into two groups. The first (and larger) group is characterized by positive language, but also a less-creative approach of what Clyde *should* do in this situation. The second (and smaller) group is characterized by pessimistic or negative sentiment, but also a willingness to explore various strategies for what Clyde *could* do in this dilemma.



A commitment to do the right thing can be limited if the range of possible strategies is too limited. Conversely, considering many possible strategies may not lead to the right outcome if the decision-maker is generally pessimistic about ethics.

This grid illustrates these two groups within your company. The ideal is a 'positive/could' combination, one where employees can move toward with training and reinforcement from leaders. Those who find themselves in this section (refer to arrows below) will be known for their positive language and willingness to explore multiple options when confronted with different ethical dilemmas in the future, including situations that are more vague in nature.



### Commitment to Your Company Values

In their discussion of the ethical dilemma, less than half of all respondents used language that reflected your company's value of integrity, including words and phrases like *integrity, principled, honest, ethical, and right thing*. No other company values were mentioned in participant responses. This reflects a need to communicate company values more often at work so that people can make a stronger commitment to them as guiding principles in their decision-making process.

## Recommendations

We offer the following recommendations based on this exercise.

### **Revise Your Company Values and Communicate Them More Often**

It was evident both from the exercise responses and from our focus group, that your company's mantra of values is not widely known by the employees of the company. This is important because *some* set of values will pervade your culture but, without a more strategic effort, they may not be the ones you articulate.

We recommend revisiting your values to make sure they accurately reflect the culture you hope to sustain. We then recommend reinforcing those values in more deliberate ways, including prominently displaying them, making them part of performance evaluation, and celebrating employees that exemplify them.

### **Build Optimistic/*Could* Mindset**

Leaders in your company should encourage two essential habits:

First, talking about ethics in positive, optimistic ways. This means having more open conversations about ethical issues and reaffirming to employees that their instincts to do what's right are fully supported.

Second, encouraging a creative, *could*-oriented mindset. Often the best solution to a dilemma is not the hard choice, but the creative one. One way to enhance creativity is to encourage employees to share their ethical dilemmas, when appropriate, in team meetings and inviting others to share potential solutions. While managers should be sure to encourage good behavior, they should also encourage creative thinking.

### **Make Better Use of Mentors**

Even with a strong culture of communication at your company, it's important to note that just one participant recommended that Clyde seek advice from a mentor or friend at his company. In our experience, this is a common absence from an ethical dilemma strategy, but a critical one. It is perhaps worth probing to get a sense of how many of your people have trusted mentors at work. It is definitely important to help them see these mentors as resources for navigating ethical dilemmas.

### **Learn to Plan Ahead**

Only 37% of responses recommended that Clyde take steps to prevent this problem from happening again in the future. It's important for those at your company to understand that ethical dilemmas are not one-time events, but instead, can lead to a string of other potential dilemmas. Take time to help others understand that if an ethical challenge occurs once, it will often happen again unless deliberate actions are taken to prevent it. We recommend making the idea to plan ahead part of conversations about dilemmas.

We are ready to help with training and consulting in all of these recommendations. Our success comes from helping your company succeed. Developing and reinforcing an ethical skill-set in all of your people will be critical to that success.