

# Assessing and solving ethical dilemmas philosophy essay



“Honesty is the cornerstone of character. The honest man or woman seeks not merely to avoid criminal or illegal acts, but to be scrupulously fair, upright, fearless in both action and expression. Honesty pays dividends both in dollars and in peace of mind.”

B. C Forbes

What are Ethical dilemmas ??

Ethical dilemmas occur generally when a person is made to choose between two or more alternatives and all of them seem right from different perspectives. Such dilemmas have a very blurred line between right and wrong thus complicating the decision making process for a person.

Sometimes it's not even a question of right or wrong but which of the alternatives is more viable. Decision is further made difficult by the varying amount of impact of each decision on the profitability, share price, market share, competitiveness, relations and various other factors. For e. g. should wealthier person be forced to pay more taxes for poor people in the society.

### **Why ethical dilemmas exist ??**

For any organization, it's difficult to maintain harmony as opinions of individuals vary, stakes are high and emotions run strong. This may give rise to ethical issues which in turn can become ethical dilemmas, also known as ethical paradox. Let us first try to understand as to how ethics can be maintained in an organization as well as individual:

Justice It talks about rights and laws, rules and regulations, fairness etc. The good thing about it is that it accentuates on equality and believes in

providing justice to all irrespective of any cast, creed etc. This helps in establishing ethical standards and the enforcement may cause people or organization to abide by the law and remain ethical.

Care Nothing can beat positive organizational climate and the value for each other's feelings. Strong personal connections and trust over each other may make ethical decisions simpler by simplifying the lines between good and bad.

Power Sometimes power and influence and the resultant fear to abide by the rules and regulations keep people on track. If the autocratic behavior of a leader denounces unethical steps then it makes his/her followers also to choose the correct path guided by him.

Community These days we find the topic of Corporate Social Responsibility being taken up very seriously by the organizations. To keep themselves in the good books of community, the firms have started acting in the welfare of community which itself closes some unethical measures by company.

Profession One can't deny clashes between personal and professional codes. Both the employee and employer should be careful in choosing each other else it will lead to lot of unrest and instability to both the parties.

Differences and issues related to work work give rise to conflicts. The differences can come from various factors like working style, personal differences etc but if the difference is due to an ethical clash, then it can have serious repercussions.

The following diagram shows us that an individual does have ethical issues with the organization on whole or with the team due to which he may not be able to deliver his 100% best in the work he undertakes.

## **How to resolve ethical dilemmas??**

As such there are no fixed rules to decide what is to be followed in case of ethical dilemmas. As stated earlier it's not just about right or wrong decisions but taking a decision which one feels is more appropriate in a given context. However there are some methods suggested by various people in the field of business ethics for deciding which better decision to be chosen by an organization or individual under given circumstances. For e. g. Organizations and individuals can choose to follow many of the suggested ethical theories for moving ahead with their decisions. But the most useful and most effective method of choosing an ethical decision seems to be finding a similar example of ethical dilemma in past with any other individual or organization. Analyzing the actions, the reasons for actions & the consequences of those actions which took in the past gives us a very good idea about the direction in which a person should proceed in case of ethical dilemmas. Therefore before deciding on any plan of action a person must analyze all the possible consequences of the act and must check for how are the actions in line with the moral values and principles governing the organization or individual. Few of the right consequences by taking right decision can be:

**Substantially improve society.**

**Help maintaining a moral course in turbulent times**

**Cultivate strong teamwork and productivity**

**Support employee growth and meaning**

**An insurance policy — they help ensure that policies are legal**

**Promote a strong public image**

**Ethical dilemmas from Hindu epics**

In this part of the project we would describe the various ethical dilemma situations from the Hindu epics of Mahabharata and Ramayana. The situations described are very much character centric and hence each situation would be described in context of the character. But these situations from these epics can very clearly be seen even in present conditions across the world at individual level, family level, organization level or country level. Following are the characters and their ethical dilemma situations from epics :

**Bhishma :**

Bhishma also known as “Gangaputra”, meaning the son of Ganges (the holy river). The context of ethical dilemma being mentioned here with Bhishma is about his fighting the war of Mahabharata from the side of Kauravas while he always wanted the victory of his opponents Pandavas. This ethical dilemma shows how even a very powerful and highly knowledgeable person like Bhishma do fall in the ethical dilemma trap and are not able to make out clearly that which of the decisions are better to go with. Let’s analyze the ethical dilemma of Bhishma on following criteria.

## **Why such a dilemma happened ??**

Bhishma was an obedient son. He during the reign of his father, Shantanu took a pledge that he will always abide by the orders of the king. He also pledged that he will never marry and won't ever become the king himself. So at the time of Mahabharata war he was in dilemma because he was binded by his pledge towards following the orders of king and hence to fight the war from the side of Kauravas but at the same time he knew very well that objective of Kauravas for the war was not good. He knew that Pandavas are the true people for owning the throne of Hastinapur. He was actually confused between whether it is right to break his earlier pledge of obedience for what he considered right or to blindly follow his pledge. This is a perfect example of a manager in present condition who is trapped in a quandary to follow or refuse the decision by top management if he finds them in conflict with his own ethics though following them might pave way for his lucrative career.

## **Consequences of Decision**

As per his decision of fighting for Kauravas against Pandavas, finally Bhishma lost the fight with Arjuna and died after the war was over. During his last moments he mentioned that it was a mistake on his part to consider himself above the nation or taking the side of an army which was not fighting for good reason.

## **Conclusion**

By analyzing the character of Bhishma , we can conclude that though his intentions for serving his king were good but he made a mistake by blindly

following it without reflecting on his decisions from time to time. He should have realized that welfare of the kingdom is an insurmountable purpose in priority and his personal decisions shouldn't defeat it. This lesson can be implemented in present scenario when an individual feels obliged on joining an organization and stops thinking if the organization is leading in the right path. He has to rationally figure out if the managerial decisions:

legitimizes managerial actions

strengthens the coherence and balance of the organization's culture

improves trust in relationships between individuals and groups

Supports greater consistency in standards and qualities of products/services.

Cultivates greater sensitivity to the impact of the enterprise's values and messages.

## **An analogy with Corporate real life case**

### **Hyundai Chairperson went to jail for embezzlement and breach of trust**

Problem: In late April 2006, Hyundai Motor Company chairman, Chung Mong-koo was arrested. This example would show us that the society interest prevails over individual's interest.

Problem Details: The following month he was accused on charges of breach of trust, embezzling company funds, and causing damage to companies in the Hyundai group.

Consequences: In April 2006, the directors of Hyundai apologized to the public and said the Chung family would donate assets worth Won 1 trillion to society. In June 2006, Chung appeared in court and admitted his guilt “ to a certain extent”

## **Karna :**

Eldest of the Pandava brothers, but not known to any of his brothers. Loyal friend of Duryodhana. Ethical dilemma of karna has been analyzed on following basis :

## **Why such a dilemma happened ??**

Karna was son of Kunti (Mother of pandavas). He was born before kunti's marriage and hence because of fear of social repubation, kunti floated the child in the river. Karna was brought up by Adhirath, the chariot driver of king. Karna was supported by Duryodhan when he was not accepted by anyone else. Duryodhana made him king of “ Ängdesh”. All these benefits by Duryodhan made karna indebted to him. For rest of his life karna promised to be loyal to Duryodhan in return of all these benefits. Here again we can see that an issue of loyalty against moral values of karna coming into play. This is because karna was always aware of what is morally right and what is morally incorrect but because of his loyalty to Duryodhana he decided to remain loyal in place of being morally correct in his own eyes.

## **Consequences of Decision**

As a consequence of his decision to remain loyal to a person (Duryodhan) instead of being moral or doing what is in benefit of larger people, Karna



fought in the Mahabharata war from side of Kauravas. He was finally killed by Arjuna.

## **Conclusion**

Here also we see that karna was considering his loyalty towards a person (Duryodhana) to be more important than his moral values and doing the things for betterment of larger people. This analogy of karna can very well in this context be related to the way employees of Enron remained loyal to their top management by concealing the actual condition of the organization from the larger number of stakeholders. They did not go for morally correct decision of informing the condition of the degrading organization to the stakeholders.

## **An analogy with Corporate real life case**

### **Dell Investors filed suit Over Accounting Practices**

**Problem:** A group of investors had filed a lawsuit in Feb, 2007 alleging that Dell had used illegal accounting methods to hide secret kickback payments paid by Intel . This case would show us that though being associated with the firm , the investors didn't get deter to complain against Dell.

**Problem Details:** According to allegations, the payments from Intel were meant to ensure that Dell used only Intel Processors in its PC's according to suit. The investors claimed that Dell's profits were inflated by hundreds of millions of dollars.

**Consequences:** Regulators from the U. S. Securities and Exchange

Commission (SEC) and the U. S. attorney for the Southern District of New

York launched an investigation of Dell's accounting practices due to which Dell had failed to file its quarterly earnings numbers for the periods ending Aug. 4, 2006 and Nov. 3, 2006, leading the Nasdaq stock exchange to take the decision of dropping Dell from its listing board for some period of time.

### **Yudhishtira:**

Eldest son of Pandu, former king of Hastinapur. He is considered to be the best judge of right and wrong things. On the basis of his such a great knowledge he was awarded the title of " dharmraj"(King of right doings). But in Mahabharata we see even yudhishtira was caught in the web of ethical dilemma.

### **Why such a dilemma happened ??**

This situation happened when Yudhishtira was invited by his younger brother Duryodhana for " dhyut krida", a game of gambling. Those days the art of gambling used to make or break a king's reputation. Any person refusing to be a part of this game was considered either a coward or penniless. Yudhishtira as a king was well aware of the risk associated with the game yet he went beyond his limits by betting on his wife and ultimately losing to Duryodhan. Even though in the midst of the game, he had a clue of his losing out badly yet to prove he was strong enough to take the game further, he not only insulted his wife but tarred his own image.

### **Consequences of Decision**

As a consequence of giving priority to his impression on society over what he believed to be morally and ethically correct, it led to the decline of the fame of Yudhishtira. He lost his fame and respect in the eyes of the people who

considered him to be a real distinguisher of right and wrong. This game of gambling is a blemish on the character of Yudhishtira till date.

## **Conclusion**

By analyzing the character of Yudhishtira, his act, reasons for act & consequences of act we can conclude that decisions by people must be based on what is ethically correct rather than acting to inflate one's ego.

## **An analogy with Corporate real life case**

### **Samsung paid \$ 90 m in DRAM case**

Problem: Samsung paid \$90m to bring to an end lawsuits brought against it by 41 US states as a result of its role in a worldwide DRAM price-fixing cartel. This would show us how in a bid to control the market (similar to Yudhishtira's claim to pride though he knew that he was committing mistake ), Samsung fell in the trap.

Problem Details: Samsung, Elpida, Hynix and Infineon were all found guilty by the US Department of Justice of conspiring to set memory prices between July 1999 and June 2002

Consequences: In May 2006, Samsung, Hynix and Infineon agreed to pay \$160m to settle a class-action brought against them by individuals who claimed they were financially harmed by the alleged conspiracy.

## **Vibhishan :**

Vibhishan was the brother of Ravana. He was aware of the reality of Rama & his real powers. For this reason he suggested Ravana to know the reality of Rama and move towards him making shri Rama his friend instead of making <https://assignbuster.com/assessing-and-solving-ethical-dilemmas-philosophy-essay/>

him his enemy. The dilemma faced by vibhishana is mentioned on following basis :

### **Basis of existence of Dilemma :**

Vibhishan knew that Rama's power stood superior to that of his own brother (Ravana). He tried persuading Ravana to follow the path of goodness and extend a friendship relation to Rama. But when all his efforts went in vain, he was in a dilemma of whether to stay with his brother & country at the time of war or should he stand in support of Rama, a person who he considered right. Hence here we see Vibhishana getting trapped between being a good obedient brother or being an enemy of his own brothers and country.

### **Consequences of decision taken:**

He was insulted by his brother in front of society and ordered to leave his kingdom. This all happened after all the efforts taken by Vibhishana to pacify his brother's and Rama's relations. Later he decided to follow the path which he believed to be morally correct and a path towards achieving Moksha. He went to Rama and became his friend and a very important advisor against battle with Ravana. At the end after winning the battle Rama offers the kingdom of Ravana to Vibhishana as gift of his friendship and his gratitude towards his help and support in the war.

### **Conclusion :**

Here again we see an ethical dilemma faced by a character between his loyalty towards personal relations and an ethical path. But here if we see in detail about the conditions, actions taken and consequences faced by the character, we can conclude that at the end Vibhishana took the right

decision of joining with Rama. As we can see that by joining with Rama Vibhishana ensures that the effects of battle should be minimal on the citizens of his own country " Lanka". With deeper thought we realize that his decision was out of his true love and respect for his country for he knew that by joining Rama, undesired damages of his kingdom can be avoided. Hence by observing this situation of Vibhishana we can also say that what actually looked to be a person who shifted to the enemy camp in the time of war and who was considered as a traitor by his own citizens was actually the real person concerned about the safety of his country. Here is a very good example by which we can explain that following ethical decisions may seem to be against some of the known and dear ones in the short run but finally it is the ethically and morally correct decisions which are really good for the betterment of the organizations. This example of ethical decision resulting in loss for an organization in the short run but finally coming out as the most beneficial decisions ever taken in history for the organization in long term can be seen very well from the ethical decision taken by Johnson & Johnson while calling back all its medicines which were considered fatal for the health of people consuming these medicines. As a result of this decision organization faced a huge short run financial loss even it looked that company may go for bankruptcy but now finally it is seen by everybody that Johnson & Johnson is the top organization in its field and has a very good brand value and is perceived as one of the best ethically driven organizations.

## **An analogy with Corporate real life case**

### **SEC fined TREND Micro CEO**

Problem: The allegation of suspicious trading of shares by Chen, chief executive and co founder of leading anti- virus firm Trend Micro on the major Chinese Internet Portal Sina. com. She was found to be in partner with the wrong dealings by his own husband too. This example would show us that one shouldn't keep silent over his/her close one's misdeeds.

Problem Details: Apart from allegations of insider trading, there was also an inquiry into whether Ms Chen under reported her holdings in Trend Micro shares.

Consequences: the CEO of Trend Micro was ordered to pay a fine by US Financial watchdogs. Also the US Securities and Exchange Commission did its investigations following the allegations. The company suffered huge losses due to it.

## **Conclusion from the Project**

### **Most prominent ethical dilemma from Epics :**

By the study of various characters from Mahabharata we have seen that there is prominent type of ethical dilemma which exists across large number of characters. This prominent type of dilemma is the dilemma of loyalty versus moral values. Here by loyalty we mean that loyalty of a person can be towards anything. This loyalty in case of Bhishma was towards his own pledge of protecting his king. In case of Karna this loyalty is towards Duryodhana. Here the reason of loyalty is again different. While in case of Bhishma the reason of loyalty is his pledge in case of Karna reason of loyalty <https://assignbuster.com/assessing-and-solving-ethical-dilemmas-philosophy-essay/>

is his being indebted to Duryodhan because of the benefits given by Duryodhan to him. Similarly for Yudhishtira the inclination was towards popularly accepted beliefs rather than his own inner voice telling him not to go ahead with the game. In Ramayana, Vibhishan on the other hand was an example to show that ethically taken decisions stand much superior to one's worldly relations.

### **Existence of similar dilemma in present scenario :**

The ethical dilemma faced by the large number of characters in Mahabharata can be seen in present scenario as well. This dilemma of loyalty versus personal moral values of an individual can also be seen in case of Enron failure. Here also as already explained above, employees found it their duty to remain loyal to the organization or top management by not concealing the degrading condition of organization to outside public.

### **Conclusion :**

From all the above mentioned examples we can conclude that following ethically and morally correct decisions are the ones which an organization or an individual should always go with though they may be hard to follow. This is because these decisions may look difficult and harmful when viewed in short term perspectives but these are truly the decisions which are going to be beneficial in long run. All successful individuals and organizations are those which have a respected and trustworthy image in the minds of the public and stakeholders it has. This kind of image of individuals and organizations is never built in a day or so but is an effect of continuous dealings of ethical or moral values. According to Universalist theory of

Business Ethics too, the interest of the larger mass prevails over individual  
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interests It rightly says that the best moral choices are those that you want others to do , even when you cannot make yourself an exception , and , that respect others as persons.