

Bounded Ethicality:

IDENTIFYING COMMON PITFALLS

What It Is

Bounded ethicality explains how even the most ethical people can behave unethically.

Ethical blind spots result from

- believing you are ethical and therefore assuming your behavior will be ethical
- unconscious biases
- conflicts of interest

Why It Matters

Hiring good people is not enough. People can behave unethically without knowing it.

Consider these common circumstances:

- new employees making an effort to become part of the team
- managers trying to reach their quarterly sales or growth targets
- workers with a vested interest in perceiving a problem a certain way

It's all about noticing. Building awareness of our flawed self-perception and blind spots before taking action leads to ethical decisions.

What To Do

BUILD HUMILITY

Unethical behavior is not simply the result of "bad apples." Understand your vulnerabilities to unethical behavior and challenge/evaluate your actions accordingly.

IDENTIFY BIASES

Understand unconscious processes that may create bounded ethicality. Remain alert for implicit discrimination, cultural norms and framing when making a decision.

POP THE BUBBLE

When deciding whether an action is ethical, do not consider it in a bubble. Instead, compare the behavior or decision to similar, more familiar situations.

PAY ATTENTION

Recognize the environmental and social circumstances that may cause people to behave unethically. Create circuit breakers by challenging the culture of group norms and the desire to please higher-ups.

Where To Go Next



Bazerman, M.H., & Tenbrunsel, A.E.
Blind Spots: Why We Fail to Do What's Right and What to Do about It.
Princeton University Press, 2011.

Websites

ethicalsystems.org
ethicalleadership.nd.edu

Twitter

@EthicalSystems
@NDDCEL

Please make copies and share this information with your colleagues.