Chapter 59
Addressing Work Ethic in the New Century

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ABSTRACT

This chapter takes the reader through a historical review of work ethic and the ways in which organizations can motivate their employees to adopt a healthy rather than unhealthy work ethic. McGregor's Theory X and Y theory is examined. To determine whether an organization has acquired a healthy work ethic based on Theory X and Theory Y, Wang's valid and reliable instrument for the organization's employees to use is presented. Maslow, Hertzberg, and McClelland's motivational theories form the foundation of the factors that motivate employees. The diverse characteristics of employees are reviewed, including the Baby Boomers and Generation X and Y, and how these cohorts of employees look for different motivating factors in their job. The chapter concludes with future trends that are impacting organizations and the workforce and the importance of understanding the different motivating factors that play a part in employees' work ethics across cultures.

INTRODUCTION

To determine whether a country is well developed or not, one can look at how much intelligent work people in that country engage in. It is safe to claim a healthy work ethic is the driving force behind the rise or fall of an organization in today's competitive economy. This article begins with a background of different perspectives of work ethics, a brief historical look at the roots of ethics and continues with the argument that a healthy work ethic is needed in the 21st century. The article continues with an exploration of some of the motivational theories; for example: Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Hertzberg's two-factor theory and McClelland's need for affiliation.

The article concludes with future trends including a review of how work ethics differ across some cultures. With increasing diversity in organizations, it is important to understand the trends of the workforce growing older and how the different generations and different ages of employees play

a role in determining what motivates an employee to work hard.

It is the author's intent that through this vibrant discussion of a healthy work ethic in this new century, we can reach some common agreement, although this topic itself has always been a controversial one.

BACKGROUND

In order to define ethics, one should look closely at the roots. Ethos is the Greek translation which means customs, conduct or character (Northouse, 2013). The term of ethics can be traced back to the Ancient Greeks Plato and Aristotle. Northouse (2013) goes on to say that ethics focuses on values and morals in a person and why people behave as they do. Aristotle describes an ethical human being as possessing the following 9 virtues:

- Courage.
- Temperance.
- Generosity.
- Self-control.
- Honesty.
- Sociability.
- Modesty.
- Fairness.
- Justice (Northouse, 2013).

It is understood that these virtue-based ethics are already within a person's character and as a person grows older and practices these virtues, they become more of a habit.

To correctly understand one's work ethics, it is necessary to examine how people view work through the ages. A brief review of the dominant meanings that people have given to work at different times in history contributes to our understanding of work ethics needed in today's organizations.

Wenrich, Wenrich, and Galloway (1988) noted that the Hebrews thought of work as painful drudgery and so did the Greeks and Romans. The same

scholars noted that early Christianity followed the Jewish tradition by regarding work as a punishment. However, everyone in the West seems to agree that Christianity added a positive function, that work is necessary not only to earn one's living, but also so that those who wished could share their profits with the poor. Many philanthropists in the Western societies share this positive view of work by donating most of their wealth to charitable organizations. For example, Bill Gates and the second wealthiest individual in the United States have given away 80% of their wealth to societies in the world. It is true in the past people worked for livelihood–a means of substance. This is true in the past for the Europeans and so is the case with Asians. Unfortunately, a number of people in developing countries still struggle to work for just this livelihood. Most Africans belong to this category. To people in developed countries, they work beyond their daily bread; they work because it is the right and moral thing to do (Kazanas et al., 1973; Tilgher, 1930). DeGrazia (1962, p. 45) wrote that American Protestants and Puritans considered work as good and idleness as bad.

To date, scholars and practitioners have summarized seven well accepted viewpoints towards work:

1. Work is continuous and leads to additional activity;
2. Work is productive and produces goods and services;
3. Work requires physical and mental exertion;
4. Work has socio-psychological aspects;
5. Work is performed on a regular or scheduled basis;
6. Work requires a degree of constraint; and
7. Work is performed for a personal purpose (intrinsic or extrinsic). (Petty & Brewer, 2005, p. 94)

The German philosopher, Marx argued that work is social activity, and that the conditions and forms under and through which people work are

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