Course: Unethical decision making in organizations
Assignment 2: Final assignment
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Context
The context of this assignment is a semi-public organization that assists the government of my country in the development of standardized tests for primary, secondary and third cycle education. The institute is the oldest and most renown of 3 institutes that do this kind of work in my country in this field. Internationally, this organization is seen as a top institution in its field. My role in this organization is that of test developer. This means I develop test items (questions) for standardized test in different subjects and across different educational levels. Most of the work involves searching the internet for real live examples in which to embed the questions we make. I do this together with a team of 7 people (there are more teams, which all work more or less independent). The teams are coordinated by four coordinators which are experienced test developers.

Ethical issues and risks
Two types of issues and risks can be identified in this context. The first relates to the performance standards and the second relates to access to information.
The ethical issue relating to performance standards is that there are no targets at all when it comes to developing test items. This means that employees are not motivated at all to be productive. Instead of these targets, employees are expected to be busy during working hours. This in itself is not bad but, given most of the work involves searching the internet for real live examples to embed the questions in, can lead to bad incentives where people are browsing the internet just for fun or personal things. If you do the latter it still seems your are doing genuine work while you in fact you do personal things in your boss' time. As there are no targets for you as an individual and your team it will take a long time to detect this.
The second issue comes from the sensitive nature of the information we work with. As we have access to many standardized test items people can have incentives to share this information with others who should not have access to this material. Even though we all signed a confidentiality agreement, pressure could exist from family and friends which could lead to unethical behavior (e.g. distributing copies of the test before it takes place).

Application of theoretical concepts
The main idea that applies to this situation from the theoretical concepts of this course is that of framing. With regard to the first of issue of the targets this is related because of the way the lack of output indicators is framed is because of the need for quality over quantity. As the main indicator for success is quality this can result in framing the quality as the only important thing.
With regard to the access to information issue, the main theoretical concept is that of compliance. Even though this only means to catch the bad apples, current policies are primarily related to this. It is made operational through the use of digital tracking of employees and by having them sign a non disclosure agreement. However, these systems do not help them to face pressures from outside the organization.

Activities

I would like to take up the following activities to prevent myself and my organization from creating ethical blindness:

- Set an (internal) target for the number of test items that each individual or team has to develop each day or week.
- Restrict access to sensitive information we do not need access to.
- Limited the specificity of information I share with friends and relatives on which projects we work on.

Results I want to see

I want to see that the incentives of acting unethically are removed so there is no temptation for individuals to act unethically. This is because I believe it is not in the interest of the individual or the organization to do so in the long run, given the high profile work of the business we are in.