Worksheet for Considering the Consequences

Instructions

*When deciding what course of action to take to resolve an ethical dilemma, carefully examine the potential consequences of a proposed course of action. Use this worksheet to consider the consequences related to an ethical dilemma you’re facing.*

**Part 1: Identify the Dilemma and Proposed Course of Action**

1. What is the ethical dilemma you are facing?*Example: “I’ve just learned that I’ll need to lay off several of my employees in a couple of months. My manager has asked me to keep the news confidential. One of the affected employees is considering buying a home and has asked for my advice on purchasing real estate. I don’t know whether to tell him about the impending layoff.”*

1. What course of action are you leaning toward taking?*Example: “At this point, I’m leaning toward telling him about the layoff, but asking that he not share the information with anyone else."*

**Part 2: Compare Intentions with Likely Results**

1. Describe your true intentions if you were to carry out the course of action you’re leaning toward. *Example: “My true intention in telling my employee about the impending layoff is to help him avoid making a major financial commitment that he couldn’t fulfill, while also safeguarding the morale and productivity in the rest of my team.”*

1. Describe the results that would most likely emerge if you implemented the course of action you’re considering. *Example: “The employee would probably decide not to buy the house. But he might also share the information about the layoff with the rest of the team, causing stress and loss of productivity.”*

**Part 3: Identify Potential Harm**

1. Identify any ways in which the course of action you’re considering could have negative **financial** consequences on your organization. *Example: “If the employee shares information about the layoff with the rest of the team, productivity could suffer, which would lead to costly inefficiencies and lost revenues.”*

1. Identify any ways in which the course of action you’re considering could have negative consequences for specific **people**. *Example: “All of my employees could lose trust and confidence in the company and fear loss of their jobs. This could lead to stress-related medical problems.”*

1. Identify any ways in which the course of action you’re considering could have negative consequences for the **common good.** *Example: “If word of the impending layoff were to spread outside the company, people in the communities where we do business may become even more cynical about business. Cynicism is not healthy for any community.”*

**Part 4: Discuss the Issue with Affected Parties**

1. List individuals you could discuss this dilemma with, then schedule and carry out the conversations with each person. *Example: “I could get my own boss’s insights into how best to handle the situation. I could talk with our legal department to see what the rules say about announcing layoffs. I could talk with my employee and learn more details about his situation—such as how interested he is in buying the home and whether he has other sources of income.”*

1. Drawing on your responses to the above questions and the conversations you held, write down the course of action you’re leaning toward at this point. It may be the same one you identified earlier, a totally different decision, or a modification of your earlier potential solution. *Example: “Since I’ve learned that my employee isn’t intent on buying a new home right away and has additional sources of income, I’m now leaning toward not telling him about the impending layoff until we can make a companywide announcement once all the formal details have been worked out.”*