

Ethical Dilemmas in the Education Sector

Jenna K. Battaglia

Department of Organizational Leadership, Saint Mary's University of Minnesota

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Dr. Jaya Perez

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The Ethical Dilemma of Earned Sick and Safe Time

The Earned Sick and Safe Time (ESST) law went into effect January 1, 2024, requiring employers to provide one hour of paid sick time for every 30 hours worked across most Minnesota business sectors (Wurzer, C. Kuznetsov, A. 2024). While various organizations have been impacted, my focus will be on the education sector and how the law affects current policies, procedures, contractual obligations, and the overall employee/employer relationship. By giving employees more flexibility and placing restraints on employers, relationships between leaders and employees will be impacted, creating feelings of uncertainty and distrust, and affecting moral sensitivity (Johnson, C. 2019). I used the moral compass model to determine that the impact the ESST law has placed on education-based organizations is currently unethical. This model ensures ethical reflections play a role in organizational decisions (Johnson, C. 2019).

Ethical Arguments: Trust, Ethical Principles and Meaningful Work

The role trust plays within an organization, particularly between the employer and employee, is essential to ensuring success (Bowie, N. 2017). The ESST law has removed the organization's authority to act if there is any suspicion of the employee abusing earned sick and safe time (Minnesota Statutes 2023). For example, if an employee shows a pattern of being absent several Fridays in a row, the employer is unable to question it. If this unethical behavior occurs, there can be a loss of trust between the employer and employee.

Most employees in the education sector participate in contracts that include language regarding the accrual and use of sick time. Typically, one does not enter a contract with the intention of breaking it, however the ESST law overrules current agreements. By adjusting the contract after an agreement has been made strains the contract process, instilling the idea that

contracts do not need to be honored (Bowie, N. 2017). These conditions were not considered with the passing of the ESST law, impacting ethical principles and practices (Johnson, C. 2019).

The Kantian perspective believes capitalism provides jobs that help shape self-respect. Our work should hold value, providing us with the pleasures of life (Bowie, N. 2017). Leaders of the education sector strive to provide the best benefits to their employees; however, they do not operate like private sectors. The education sector is non-profit, and funded through tax-payer dollars. Additional expenses have been created to meet the requirements of the ESST law. A narrative could be created that budgets matter more than the health of employees, thus impacting the employee/employer relationship.

Counter Arguments: Trust, Ethical Principles and Meaningful Work

To create and sustain trust in an employee/employer relationship, an employer should be mentoring more than policing their employees (Bowie, N. 2017). The new ESST law should not have such an impact that it threatens the foundation of trust within the relationship. Through mentorship, ethical behavior should have been continuously modeled previous to this law being enforced. By building trust through transparency and full disclosure, employers should not have to worry about staff being dishonest when calling in sick (Bowie, N. 2017).

Contracts are formed under the assumption that violations will not be made, however there may be events that require changes to the current agreement (Bowie, N. 2017). This holds true with the ESST law. When developing and implementing contracts, employees should be willing participants, agreeing with the ethical principles instilled within the agreement (Bowie, N. 2017). Changes made to a contract due to unforeseen circumstances should not threaten the morality behind the use of contracts. It should be assumed that those working under current

contractual terms share similar ethical principles, and changes made benefiting the employee do not threaten the overall structure of contracts.

Leaders should be viewing employees as humans rather than a means to an end, such as the bottom line. Humans have dignity and deserve respect (Bowie, N. 2017). If an organization, such as one within the education sector, faces financial crisis due to the ESST law being implemented, then there are other underlying financial issues prior to this new law taking place.

Aligning Principles with Ethical Dilemmas

As a result of the case analysis of the ethical dilemma outlined, it can be concluded that the decision taken was unethical based on the supporting premises which suggests that too many outlying factors are challenging ethical principles and hand-cuffing employers to properly address unethical behaviors based on current policies and contractual obligations. Unfortunately, we do not live in a world where everyone holds the same ethical principles and models agreeable ethical behaviors. Utilizing the moral compass model properly provided awareness to moral sensitivity that helped to strengthen and guide the discussion surrounding the moral issues of the ESST law (Johnson, C. 2019). As we have seen in this analysis, the selected ethical decision-making methodology reviewed offered an effective means of achieving ethically-based decisions regarding the ESST law.

References

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