Do you know your company's ethical status?

The effective management of ethics in the workplace includes a few basic prerequisites. Knowing and understanding what constitutes ethical behaviour and what is considered unethical are primary issues. The 'doing' part of ethics is equally important: ethical standards need to be lived so that ethics permeates the company's behaviour, decisions, strategy and culture. In addition, sound ethical management requires the assessment of the organization's ethical status. A variation on the business dictum that 'you can't manage what you don't measure' can be applied to ethics, namely that you can manage ethics better and more easily if you measure it.

Web-based survey

An accurate ethics assessment can be done with the Ethics Monitor, a web-based ethics survey, which surfaces employees' perceptions and experiences of ethics in the workplace. The results highlight the company's ethical strengths and weaknesses, and identify and prioritise actions to improve ethics.

The Workplace Ethics Checklist can also be used as a quick and easy appraisal of the level of a company's ethics awareness, understanding and management. If an organization answers "no" to any of the eight questions, it indicates that further action should be taken to more effectively manage its ethics.

1. **Do your people (directors, executives and employees) share a common understanding of what constitutes ethics in your business?   Yes ❑   No ❑**

A clear, shared understanding is an essential foundation for ethical behaviour. It also serves to build greater levels of ethical awareness. In the absence of a common understanding, differences can arise from divergent personal values.

2. **Do your people understand why workplace ethics is important? Yes ❑   No ❑**

Insight into the benefits of sound ethics and the potential costs of unethical conduct strengthens employees' understanding of why workplace ethics matters so much. Benefits include being able to attract and retain key staff and board members, strong customer loyalty, increased investor and market confidence and easier access to capital. Costs can range from financial losses to fines, damaged reputations and, in extreme cases, jail sentences and the closure of the business.

3. **Do you know your company's ethical status as perceived and experienced by your employees and key stakeholders? Yes ❑   No ❑**

You should measure your company's ethics so that you know and understand your organization's current ethical reality – not as you wish it to be or as the board of directors assume it to be, but as it really is. The assessment should thus be based on the experiences and perceptions of all employees and key stakeholders.

4. **Have you set up a social and ethics committee? Yes ❑   No ❑**

The Companies Act requires all but small companies to set up a social and ethics committee. Instead of this being viewed as another compliance cost and treated in a 'tick-box' manner, it can fulfil an important role and add value for those organizations that strive to be good corporate citizens and are prepared to embrace the associated responsibilities.

5. **Do you manage your ethics proactively and regularly? Yes ❑   No ❑**

The benefits of ethical conduct and the costs associated with misconduct warrant that ethics is not managed reactively or on an ad hoc basis. Effective ethics management rests on proactive, regular attention.

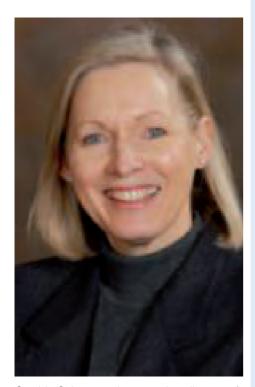6. **Do you have a strategy to manage ethics effectively? Yes ❑   No ❑**

An ethics strategy should identify clear goals and a set of coordinated actions to create an ethical workplace and an ethical culture. Ideally, this strategy needs to include six focus areas: setting the ethical standards; setting up an ethics committee; building ethical awareness; measuring and monitoring ethical status; taking action to improve ethical behaviour and reduce unethical conduct; and maintaining an ethical culture.

7. Do you provide opportunities for your people to learn how about ethics and how to handle ethical dilemmas effectively?
Yes ❑   No ❑

Effective training to address ethical challenges in the workplace (among other issues) reinforces an ethical culture. To ensure that ethics training programmes are impactful, the following design features should be taken into account: Take the 'knowing–doing' gap into account; Don't teach what the participants already know; Teach ethics based on the company's ethical reality; Combine appropriate theory and practice.

8. Do you report on your company's ethics? Yes ❑   No ❑

Ethics reporting is a recommendation of King III and a requirement of the Companies Act social and ethics committee. An ethics report should include the activities of the social and ethics committee and the annual measurement of the company's ethics, both of which should be presented in relation to the organization's ethics strategy and goals.

Cynthia Schoeman is managing director of Ethics Monitoring & Management Services, which provides support for the proactive management of workplace ethics. This includes the Ethics Monitor, a web-based ethics survey, which enables organizations to measure, monitor and report on their ethical status. *www.ethicsmonitor.co.za*

CISCO recognised as one of the world's most ethical companies

CISCO has also established a scholarship fund that supports students studying at the African Leadership Academy in Honeydew (South Africa).

For five consecutive years Cisco has been recognised by Ethisphere as one of the World's Most Ethical Companies.

It's a proud statement that manifests itself in a broad commitment to ethical business practice and corporate social responsibility. "We believe integrity is more than compliance with applicable laws and regulations around the world. Even if something is technically legal, it might not be the right thing to do. Cisco's core values include integrity, respect, open communication and accountability, which in turn shape our self-governing policies and robust, award-winning ethics programme," explains Anthony R. Vonsée, managing director of CISCO Africa. "Drawing on the experience and expertise of our employees we promote responsible business practices at every level of the company. We strive to conduct business ethically, honestly, and in accordance with our Code of Business Conduct and we expect all partners to meet our high ethical standards. The message for each employee is clear: any success that is not achieved ethically is no success at all."

A local initiative that reflects their commitment to ethical business practice has been to support the establishment of the SA Supplier Diversity Council to help promote greater diversity and job creation in under-privileged communities. "Supplier diversity is the active business process of sourcing products and services from previously under-used suppliers," explains executive director Gary Joseph. "This process helps to sustainably and progressively transform a corporation`s supply chain to reflect the demographics of the society in which it operates. In South Africa, it involves the process of integrating a growing pool of competitive black suppliers into corporate supply chains, using targeted procurement and enterprise development to achieve this. CISCO was an active participant in helping establish our Association and remains a committed partner in all our activities."

CISCO has also established a scholarship fund that supports students studying at the African Leadership Academy in Honeydew (South Africa). The Academy is a highly competitive two-year, pre-university boarding school that identifies promising young African men and women to build a strong, connected generation of leaders who will transform Africa. Cisco has funded 16 scholars over the past four years. The programme focuses on practical leadership experience, training in entrepreneurship, and African Studies for a deep understanding of the overarching issues facing Africa on both the global and local level. The rigorous curriculum prepares students for success on the Cambridge International Examinations and ALA guides them to scholarships at some of the best universities in the world. Students commit to work in Africa for ten years, acting on their ideas and experiences.ALA also helps students build a human network to support them for the rest of their lives and multiply the impact of their experience. "We seek to build a world-class leadership institution that will develop 6,000 transformative African leaders over the next 50 years," said Theodore Sutherland, external affairs fellow, African Leadership Academy.