

ethikos Volume 33, Number 11. November 01, 2019 On ethics: Marianne M. Jennings, Professor Emeritus, Legal and Ethical Studies in Business, Arizona State University – Part 1

An interview by Adam Turteltaub CHC, CCEP, Vice President of Strategic Initiatives & International Programs, Society of Corporate Compliance and Ethics & Health Care Compliance Association.

AT: There's an increasing focus on corporate culture when discussing ethics. How do you see the interplay between them?

MMJ: I believe that ethics is at a place where safety culture was in 1979 for the nuclear industry, and where the defense industry was in 1986, after the Blue Ribbon Commission report on corruption (criminal activity) was an ongoing issue in the military-industrial complex. After the incident at Three Mile Island, the nuclear industry and many others began a process of introspection. They had a longer distance to run, because they did not have industry-wide organizations for sharing best practices, developing codes of ethics, and continuing discussions that already exist in the healthcare industry already. However, both the nuclear and defense industries, through their evolution, have come to accept that the dashboard measurements—the measurements that come largely from the federal government on the components of an ethics/compliance program—are the infrastructure.

All of that checklist/dashboard stuff cannot get any organization where it needs to be, that is, preventing ethical lapses, not investigating them after the fact. But all of that is a framework, not a strategy for change. A lot of folks quote management consultant Peter Drucker as saying that “Culture eats strategy for lunch (or some other meal depending on who is quoting it). He never said it, but Dr. Edgar Schein is probably the real source of the thought. Dr. Schein, a former professor at the MIT Sloan School of Management, had great influence in the nuclear industry. Dr. Schein wrote that “culture constrains strategy,” and “culture determines and limits strategy.”^[1] If culture controls strategy, it surely controls ethics. For example, if a new strategy of an organization is customer/patient service, that goal is achieved only if every person in the organization understands what that means, sees others doing what it means, sees leadership living what it means, sees measurements in performance reviews that use what that means in evaluating all employees, and sees those doing what it means rewarded and those not doing what it means are disciplined, dismissed, or trained more.

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