# Chapter 94
# Conflict Resolution and Ethical Decision-Making for Engineering Professionals in Global Organizations

**Charles R. Feldhaus**
*Indiana University – Purdue University Indianapolis, USA*

**Julie Little**
*Indiana University – Purdue University Indianapolis, USA*

**Brandon Sorge**
*Indiana University – Purdue University Indianapolis, USA*

## ABSTRACT

*As an introduction to recognizing individual and organizational conflict as well as ethical issues within global firms, the goals of this chapter are to equip Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) professionals, especially those in engineering, with solid decision-making tools, including self-awareness, ethical perspectives and theories, ethical decision-making models, and various conflict resolution approaches. Given the current challenges in business and industry that have often led to unethical practices, and ultimately conflict, it is critical that both organizational leaders and followers possess the necessary tools and perspectives to create an ethical climate that deals appropriately with various types of conflict. This chapter examines new trends in conflict coaching and the delivery of ethics training in an effort to provide the aforementioned tools and perspectives.*

## INTRODUCTION

Conflict and decision-making impacts all humans at some point. One need only tune in to the local or national newscast, pick up a magazine or go to the local library to learn that conflict is very much a part of the human condition. Nations are at war, people sometimes do horrible things to each other, relationships and marriages are often a challenge, belief systems and ideologies cause intrapersonal and interpersonal conflict, and the workplace is regularly described by leaders and

followers as stressful. This is especially true in the intense, internationally diverse, high-energy, pressure-packed, STEM fields. In short, conflict resolution and ethical decision-making is something that every engineering professional must understand and embrace to be successful in global organizations today.

Answers to the issues surrounding ethical decision-making should be researched, formulated, implemented and become part of the organizational culture, climate and daily discourse if the workforce is to thrive. Ethical decision-making skills are not just "common sense"; they are complicated sequences of relational skills that most humans don't know or understand (Wilmot & Hocker, 2007). There have been numerous books written about and significant research performed on the topics of conflict management and ethical decision-making (Ayers, 2008; Crenshaw, 2007; Furlong, 2005; & Gerzon, 2006).

Many organizations hold ethical decision-making seminars, conflict resolution/management training seminars, and mediation seminars. They also design and develop performance/motivational tools and climate/culture audits to better understand the true nature of the workplace. Most organizations have developed employee handbooks that define expected compliance with both organizational rules and regulations, and often integrate ethics as a key piece of the handbook. Additionally, many university based graduate programs that cater to working engineering professionals have developed ethics and conflict resolution courses as part of the curriculum. Each of these efforts has one thing in common; there is often a third party who takes responsibility for expected outcomes.

What requires a more detailed examination are the efforts to build capacity among employees to address their own ethical decision-making skills and conflict situations rather than relying on a third party or external decision maker to solve problems after they have arisen. Although third-party approaches can be beneficial, there is often no better method for achieving a truly effective,

lasting resolution to an ethical or interpersonal conflict than placing the responsibility of managing it in the hands of those who experience it directly. Unfortunately, many employees do not possess the skills and confidence to manage conflict and ethical decision-making resulting in organizations relying not on the individuals within the situation, but on true third-party approaches, that are facilitated by managers and/or the human resources department. The need for new and innovative approaches to address organizational conflict and ethical decision-making is significant, and this chapter will provide new insights in creating a more meaningful ethical decision-making model as well as conflict coaching environments within organizations.

Whitbeck (1998) believes that engineers encounter difficult ethical problems from day one on the job and likens these issues to "design problems." He and other engineering ethics researchers (Harris, Prithcard, Rabins, James, & Englehardt, 2014; van de Poel & Royakkers, 2011 and Whitbeck, 1998), have found that ethical challenges are complex and often ill-defined, and that resolving them involves an iterative process of analysis and synthesis. These researchers also believe that professional engineers struggle with professional responsibilities, personal values and a responsibility for human welfare. Multiple solutions to these "design problems" can confound the engineering professional and conflict with deeply held personal and professional beliefs. According to a National Science Foundation Report (2014), barring large reductions in retirement rates, the total number of retirements among science and engineering-degreed workers will dramatically increase in the next 20 years; particularly those workers holding PhDs because of the steepness of their age profile. During that time, as many new engineers enter the profession, it is clear that soft skills such as conflict resolution and ethical decision-making will continue to gain in importance.

22 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: www.igi-global.com/chapter/conflict-resolution-and-ethical-decision-making-for-engineering-professionals-in-global-organizations/146482

# Related Content

Leading With Emotional Intelligence: A Black Woman Leader's Perspective
De`Anna Z. Bond (2023). *Black Women's Formal and Informal Ways of Leadership: Actualizing the Vision of a More Equitable Workplace  (pp. 217-234).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/leading-with-emotional-intelligence/329657

Alternative Dispute Resolution: A Legal Perspective
Saleem Gul (2016). *Handbook of Research on Effective Communication, Leadership, and Conflict Resolution (pp. 126-143).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/alternative-dispute-resolution/146650

Using an Extended Theory of Planned Behavior to Study Nurses' Adoption of Healthcare Information Systems in Nova Scotia
Princely Ifinedo (2018). *Nursing Education, Administration, and Informatics: Breakthroughs in Research and Practice  (pp. 504-522).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/using-an-extended-theory-of-planned-behavior-to-study-nurses-adoption-of-healthcare-information-systems-in-nova-scotia/202182

State of the Art in Semantic Organizational Knowledge
Mamadou Tadiou Kone (2021). *Encyclopedia of Organizational Knowledge, Administration, and Technology (pp. 1762-1773).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/state-of-the-art-in-semantic-organizational-knowledge/263652

The Impact of Video Self-Analysis on the Development of Preservice Teachers' Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK)
James E. Jangand Jing Lei (2017). *Educational Leadership and Administration: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications  (pp. 1103-1119).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/the-impact-of-video-self-analysis-on-the-development-of-preservice-teachers-technological-pedagogical-content-knowledge-tpack/169052