



Employee Views of Ethics at Work

The 2008 National Survey

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Executive Summary

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In September 2008, the Institute of Business Ethics carried out its second National Survey of full-time employees on the subject of ethics at work. The Ethics at Work Survey was conducted as part of Ipsos MORI's omnibus face-to-face survey of a structured sample of the British population. This report sets out the responses of 791 full-time workers ("employees", a subset of a nationally representative sample of the British population), including 332 with managerial or supervisory roles.

The results of the analysis are presented in three chapters:

- The first explores the ethical **attitudes** of full-time employees and managers.
- The second presents their **perceptions** regarding ethical practices in their organisations.
- The third reports on the **formal assistance** on ethical matters that is provided for employees by their employers.

The results are compared with those in the first British Ethics at Work Survey¹, conducted in 2005.

The findings from the survey are encouraging:

- **Compared to 2005**, British full-time workers are generally **less tolerant** of unethical practices in the workplace.
- Employees feel **less pressured** to compromise ethical standards in their place of work **than in 2005**.
- Organisations are being seen by their staff as **more ethical than three years ago**.
- There is evidence in this survey that the existence of formal ethics programmes and a positive ethical climate are linked with **higher standards of ethical behaviour** in the workplace.

In terms of which employees are likely to have higher ethical standards, the survey data shows that:

- **Female employees** are generally **stricter** in their ethical standards than male employees.
- **Employees aged 16-34** are significantly more likely to be **tolerant of unethical workplace practices**.

These are similar to the 2005 findings.

¹ Webley, S. and Dryden, P. (2005) *Ethics at Work: A National Survey*, IBE.

The following findings raise concerns:

- Around a quarter of British employees are aware of **misconduct** in their organisations but of these only **three out of five are reporting** it.
- **Attitudes of indifference** ('none of my business') and the belief that no corrective action would be taken, **deter employees** who are aware of misconduct from reporting it to management.
- The provision of **formal assistance** to employees on ethical matters is still relatively **low in private sector** organisations compared to that provided for those working in the public sector.
- Of note is that **minor 'fiddling'** is still considered to be **inevitable** in a modern organisation by three in ten of those in managerial or supervisory roles.