Employee Views of Ethics at Work

2012 British Survey

By Sabrina Basran and Simon Webley

ibe Institute of Business Ethics

The Institute of Business Ethics (IBE)

Business Ethics

The IBE was established in 1986 by business people to encourage high standards of business behaviour based on ethical values.

Today it leads the dissemination of knowledge and good practice in business ethics globally.

We raise public awareness of the importance of doing business ethically, and collaborate with other UK and international organisations with interests and expertise in business ethics.

We help organisations to strengthen their ethics culture to encourage high standards of business behaviour based on ethical values. We assist in the development, implementation and embedding of effective and relevant ethics and corporate responsibility policies and programmes. We help organisations to provide guidance to staff and build relationships of trust with their principal stakeholders.

We facilitate the sharing of good practice in business ethics.

We achieve this by:
- Offering practical and confidential advice on ethical issues, policy, implementation, support systems and codes of ethics
- Delivering training in business ethics for board members, and employees
- Undertaking research and surveys into good practice and ethical business conduct
- Publishing practical reports to help identify solutions to business dilemmas
- Providing a neutral forum for debating current issues and meetings to facilitate the sharing of good practice
- Supporting business education in the delivery of business ethics in the curriculum
- Offering the media and others informed opinion on current issues and good practice.

Our team apply their practical business experience of the issues that organisations face to fulfil the Institute's vision and mission.

The IBE is a registered charity, supported by donations from businesses and other organisations, as well as individuals.

Through their donations, IBE subscribers help to promote ethical business practice. They also contribute to the work of the IBE by sharing good practice and experiences of ethical issues.

Contents

Authors   **Sabrina Basran** is a Research Officer at the City of London Corporation. Prior to joining the City of London Corporation she worked as Researcher for the Institute of Business Ethics, where she researched and wrote on best practice on a range of business ethics topics, advised companies on embedding ethical values in their organisations, and engaged in public speaking to raise awareness of the subject. She has published a number of research reports on business ethics topics including: *Employee Views of Ethics at Work: 2012 Continental Europe Survey* (2012) and *Corporate Ethics Policies & Programmes: UK and Continental Europe Survey 2010* (co-author, 2011).

Simon Webley is Research Director at the Institute of Business Ethics. He has published a number of studies on business ethics, the most recent being: *Religious Practices in the Workplace* (2011), Corporate Ethics Policies & Programmes: UK and Continental Europe Survey 2010 (co-author, 2011), *Employee Views of Ethics at Work: The 2008 National Survey* (2009), and *Use of Codes of Ethics in Business* (2008).

Executive Summary

Executive Summary

During January and February 2012, the Institute of Business Ethics (IBE) carried out its third Ethics at Work Survey of British full-time employees. The data was collected by Ipsos MORI as part of its omnibus face-to-face survey of a structured sample of the British population.

This report sets out the responses of 665 full-time British workers (a subset of a nationally representative sample of the British population), including 305 with managerial/supervisory roles.

The analysis is presented in three chapters:

- The first explores full-time employees' and managers'/supervisors' **own attitudes to ethical issues in the workplace**.

- The second presents their perceptions regarding **ethical practices in their organisations**.

- The third reviews the **formal assistance** on ethical matters that organisations provide for their employees.

The results are compared with those of the second IBE British Ethics at Work Survey conducted in 2008[1] and reference is made to the 2005 British Ethics at Work Survey and other relevant surveys for general interest purposes.

Overall the findings from the 2012 Survey are encouraging:

- The **majority** of British full-time workers feel that **honesty is practiced** "Always" or "Frequently" in their organisation's daily operations.

- The **majority** of British employees perceive their organisation as having each of seven **indicators of an 'ethical culture'** in place.

- Compared to 2008, there has been a **significant increase** in the proportion of workers saying their organisation provides each of four aspects of a formal **ethics programme**.

- There is evidence in this Survey that the existence of formal ethics programmes and a culture that is underpinned by ethical values, are linked with employees' perceptions of **higher standards of ethical behaviour** in their workplace.

- A significantly higher proportion of employees say they have **not felt pressured** to compromise their organisation's ethical standards **than in 2008**.

- Employees are more likely to say that in the past year they have **not been aware of misconduct** that violates the law or their organisation's ethical standards, **than in 2008**.

- British **employees who report** their concerns about misconduct are generally **satisfied with the outcome**. However, **30% are not satisfied**.

---

[1] Webley S & Werner A (2009) *Employee Views of Ethics at Work: The 2008 national survey,* IBE. The results of the first IBE British Ethics at Work Survey, conducted in 2005, are not explored here but are in an earlier report: Webley S & Dryden P (2005) *Ethics at Work: A national survey,* IBE. Both reports are available at: www.ibe.org.uk

- A **significantly higher proportion** of employees than in 2008 said **"Issues of right and wrong are discussed in staff meetings"**.

Regarding employees likely to have higher ethical standards, the Survey data indicates that:

- **Women in full-time work** are generally **stricter** in their ethical standards than men.

- **Employees aged 16 - 34** are significantly more likely to be tolerant of unethical workplace practices.

These are similar to the 2005 and 2008 British Ethics at Work Survey findings.

The following findings raise concerns:

- A **fifth** of British employees have been **aware of misconduct** in their organisation in the last year, but of these **only half say they have reported it**.

- **Attitudes of indifference** ("It's none of my business") and the **belief that no corrective action** would be taken, **deter employees** who are aware of misconduct from raising their concerns.

- Employees are significantly **more likely** to experience **specific types of pressure to behave unethically** – to **meet unrealistic business objectives/targets**, to take **short cuts** and from wanting to **help the organisation survive** – than in 2008.

- **"Petty fiddling"** is still considered to be **inevitable** in British organisations by around three in ten of those in **managerial/supervisory roles**.