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Employee Views of Ethics at Work: 2012 Continental Europe Survey

BY SABRINA BASRAN

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Executive Summary

In 2012 the IBE extended its British Ethics at Work Survey to four countries in continental Europe. The British Survey has been carried out at regular intervals since 2005 and a separate report presents the 2012 results.¹

This Paper sets out the online responses of nationally representative samples of full and part-time employees in private and public sector organisations in France, Germany, Italy and Spain, totalling 3,001 employees.

Part 1 presents employees' **perceptions of ethical behaviour** in their organisation.

Part 2 explores the **culture** within continental European organisations as perceived by their employees.

Part 3 reports on the **formal assistance** on ethical matters that employees say their organisations provide, i.e. through an **ethics programme**.

The Paper ends with some **concluding remarks** on the Survey findings. The Survey questionnaire is presented as an Appendix.

Findings

Continental Europe

These are the key findings of the IBE 2012 Continental Europe Ethics at Work Survey:

- **The majority** (77%) of employees say that **honesty is practiced** "Always/Frequently" in their organisation's daily practices. A fifth (19%) say that honesty is practiced "Occasionally/Rarely/Never" and 3% "Don't know".
- Almost **three quarters** (71%) of employees say they have **not felt pressured** at work to compromise their organisation's ethical standards. **Twenty two percent said they had felt pressured** (answered "Yes" or "Sometimes") and 7% said they "Don't know".
- **Three in five** (60%) continental European employees say they **have not been aware of misconduct** in their organisation in the past year. **Twenty eight percent said they had been aware of misconduct** and 12% said they "Don't know".
- The **majority** of continental European employees perceive their organisation as having six of seven **positive indicators of an ethical culture** in place.²

The following findings are of concern:

- Of the quarter (28%) of employees who said they had been **aware of misconduct** during the past year at work, **only half raised their concerns** with their employers.
- Just **half** (53%) of employees say their organisation has **written standards** of ethical business behaviour in place.
- **Less than half** of employees say their organisation has an anonymous **speak up mechanism** (31%) or an advice or information **helpline** (34%) in place, or provides **training** (39%) on ethical issues.

¹ *Employee Views of Ethics at Work: 2012 British Survey* report and the 2005 and 2008 British Survey reports are available at: www.ibe.org.uk.

² Indicators of an ethical culture identified by IBE. See Webley S & Werner A (2009) *IBE Employee Views of Ethics at Work: The 2008 national survey*. Available at: www.ibe.org.uk.

- Country trends** The following trends emerged within each of the four continental European markets:
- Overall, **Italian** employees were most likely to say their organisation is ‘ethical’ in terms of behaviour and standards. Though, they were most likely to report feeling pressured to compromise ethical standards.
 - Compared with the total sample of continental European employees, significantly higher proportions of **Spanish** employees said their organisation has three of four aspects of a formal ethics programme in place – but this was not reflected in employees’ perceptions of behaviour.
 - **German** employees were the least likely of continental European employees to say their organisation provides formal support and assistance to encourage ethical behaviour. Yet, perceptions of the existence of unethical behaviour in their workplace are less widespread than among employees in France, Italy and Spain.
 - **French** employees’ perceptions of ethical behaviour in their workplace were generally in line with those of continental European employees’. However, compared with the total sample they were significantly less likely to say their organisation provides an anonymous speak up mechanism and training on ethical standards.
- Public vs. Private sector** Public sector employees were more likely to say their organisations provide three of the four aspects of a formal ethics programme than employees in the private sector.
- Full vs. Part-time** Part-time employees were generally less likely to be aware of whether their organisation has in place the indicators of an ethical culture or a formal ethics programme to encourage ethical business conduct.