

(Im)moral management

Abstract

The case involves a manager who finds himself working with another manager who is unprincipled, devious and a liar. What, if anything, should he do?

Key words

Stages of moral development, whistle blowing

The case

As one of three area managers Chris is often in meetings with the other area managers and the Regional Director. Over the four months since joining the organisation Chris has learned the hard way that David, one of the other regional managers, is simply not to be trusted. It has taken Chris some time to realise quite how David operates - and even now Chris can hardly believe what he sees and hears. This is not ordinary politicking and 'keeping in' with the boss that most managers, Chris included, expect of each other and practice discretely themselves. David appears completely a-moral, his only goal being his own advantage. This seems to involve:

- 'Managing upwards' - always aiming to please the Director.
- Running his area on a patronage basis - to secure loyalty rather than long-term performance and the best use of resources.
- Telling barefaced lies to account for difficulties or shortfalls or for reneging on agreements.
- Instructing his staff to disregard established policy and procedure - but never doing so in writing or to more than one individual at a time.
- Maintaining, with consummate plausibility, the façade of a cheerful, straight-talking, man of the people.

Chris is infuriated by this but is not sure how to respond; sinking to David's level would be unacceptable, but just putting up with it, as the other regional manager and David's own staff do, would also be intolerable. But how do you accuse a colleague of dishonesty?

Discussion points

- Are these the only choices facing Chris?
- What principles do you think are relevant in dealing with a colleague of this sort?

References

- Kohlberg, L. (1984) *Essays in Moral Development, Volume 2, The Psychology of Moral Development*, New York: Harper and Row.
- Kohlberg, L. (1969) *Stages in the Development of Moral thought and Action*, New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston.
- Snell, R. S. (1993) *Developing Skills for Ethical Management*, Chapman and Hall: London.

Tutor's notes

This case might usefully be approached using Kohlberg's theory of moral development. The stage of development of the bad manager can be easily established. The location on Kohlberg's scale of Chris' possible responses can then be discussed.