# 10. TRYING TO BE GOOD



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# 10.2 Ethical project management


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# Causes of unethical behaviour

**A highly persuasive organisation culture** – demanding complete obedience, driven by a charismatic but flawed leader

**Massive self-belief** – core leadership clique who think they are uniquely talented and critics are stupid

**Pre-occupation with shareholder (or power group) interests** – prioritised over all others, displaying social indifference

**Misguided targets** – achieving at all costs, no questions asked

**Acute short-termism** – often setting the scene for mid- and long-term problems

**Narrow performance criteria** – making sure everything stays on time and within budget, no objections allowed



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# Causes of unethical behaviour

- **Conflict of interest** – a situation where someone has an incentive to act improperly
- **Hiding behind legality** – legal and ethical are not the same
- **Out of sight, out of mind** – people fail to consider the consequences of their decisions
- **Suppression of valid dissent** – persecution of doubters or whistle-blowers
- **Prioritising the brand** – fear that disclosure of failings will hurt reputation or sales
- **Peer pressure to conform** – sanctions are imposed against objectors
- **Personal commitments** – employees have to keep their jobs and make a wage


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# Why is this so significant now?

**What propels organisations to be good?**

- More open societies
- **Knowledgeable and active stakeholders**
- Well funded and vociferous pressure groups
- **The internet rapidly shares news of transgressions**

**What helps the bad organisation stay bad?**

- Slow death of mainstream journalism
- **Political expediency**
- Intimidating lawyers
- **Operating from lax jurisdictions**


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# An ethics code

**Sets out rules and guidelines for behaviour**

Professional codes of ethics cover specialists

**Problems with an ethics code**

- It may be full of platitudes.
- **It is hard to spread values to the furthest corners of the organisation.**
- It cannot be valid in all circumstances.
- **It may not address really tough ethical dilemmas.**
- It may allow senior management to detach themselves from individual cases.
- **Managers may in practice be given considerable ethical leeway.**
- It may produce ‘jobsworth’ behaviour


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# Defining your own ethical stance

**The moral framework**

- Upbringing
- **Religion**
- Politics
- **Human rights**
- Ethical norms
- **Coaching**

It is about who you are, not what you do.

**The golden rule**

- Do to others as you would have them do unto you
- **The silver rule**

**Fake it 'til you make it**

- Emulate a role model
- **Someone, somewhere is watching you**
- The newspaper test


Image: Gregory Peck as Atticus Finch in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Universal Pictures, 1962
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# Personal touchstones

Act with integrity and professionalism

Apply honesty and fair dealing to all work

View every action from an ethics perspective

Share any concerns with someone you can trust

Make safety and well-being paramount

Do not steal - anything

Never falsify data or records

If your mother was looking over your shoulder, would she be alright with what you are doing?


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# Keeping on the right track

Make ethics a lively topic not a dry code

Train staff in ethical principles

Help them each develop their own moral framework

Establish project values and display them

Discuss the likely ethical dilemmas of the project

Have a route for escalating dilemmas

Protect whistle-blowers


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# Project ethics will always be a grey area

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Genuine mistake** | | **Deliberately false estimate** |
| **Over optimism** | | **Exaggerated claims** |
| **Healthy competition** | ***The grey area*** | **Win at all costs** |
| **Expecting full commitment** | | **Unreasonable demands** |
| **Reasonable hospitality** | | **Undue influence** |

A good person will approximate to the right decision in any situation.


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