“So, am I ethical?”

Ethics and the Everyday Decisions of Managers.

Sarah Gregory

*Lancaster University Management School, Lancaster, UK*

Email: s.gregory@lancaster.ac.uk

ABSTRACT

This paper is based on research conducted in the UK to investigate middle managers’ experience of using ethics in their everyday decisions.

From nine in-depth interviews with managers in five organisations, critical incidents have been identified that illustrate situations that present ethical dilemmas. Managers’ definitions of ethical and unethical behaviour are considered and three critical incidents presented: accepting gifts/hospitality, confidentiality and racism. The ethical management styles used by the managers are analysed using Carroll’s (1987) framework.
Findings from the research are that managers appear confident when discussing unethical behaviour and ethics influences their decisions in specific contexts but is not usually considered in everyday decisions. A final point is that some managers are seeking confirmation about whether they are ethical, because they don’t know.

**Key Words**
*Ethics, Managers, Dilemmas, Moral, Immoral, Amoral*

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**INTRODUCTION**

In 1986 Waters, Bird and Chant wrote that `morality and ethics are [really] everyday concerns for most managers’ (p383), yet twenty years on there are still very public examples of behaviour by managers that can be described as unethical. The attention has been on the people who lead or hold key positions at the top of organisations – the skills, abilities, influence and ethics of CEOs and company directors. However there is less research into the impact of ethics on managers within the organisation; those below the directors at senior and more particularly middle management levels. These employees are key to transmitting the messages from the top, which include messages regarding
ethical behaviour. But has ethics become part of their working life? How salient is ethics to middle managers and does it influence their everyday decisions and actions? In order to approach this, I interviewed a number of managers to find out their perception of ethics.

Building from an overview of academic literature concerning definitions of ethics and ethical issues, the paper focuses on Carroll’s (1987) model of ‘Three Types of Management Ethics: Moral/Amoral/Immoral’ as a way of understanding the different ‘styles’ that managers adopt when making decisions. These styles are utilised to examine three critical incidents that arose in the interviews with middle managers. The paper will finish with a discussion of the work to date.

THE ETHICAL CONTEXT: IN SEARCH OF ETHICS

As a first step to researching the influence that ethics has on the decisions of managers in organisations, definitions of ethics were considered to provide a context for understanding what it means to be ethical.

Defining Ethics
There is a degree of consensus amongst academics about a definition of ethics. Singer (1994: 4) sees it as ‘the set of rules, principles, or ways of thinking that guide, or claim authority to guide, the actions of a particular group.’ Trevino and Nelson (2004: 13) also view ethics as being about conduct: ‘the principles, norms and standards of conduct governing an individual or group.’ Other authors refer to principles but link these to determining what is right and wrong (Mackie, 1977; Snell, 1993). Indeed for Jones, Parker and ten Bos (2005: 2) ethics is about asking ‘questions about what is `good’ and ‘bad’.’ So, in essence, ethics can be seen to be concerned with what is right and wrong, good and bad and involves the development of principles to guide actions.

De George (1995), Hinman (1998), Mendonca (2001) and Boatright (2003) link ethics to morality and for De George (1995: 19) ‘ethics presupposed the existence of morality, as well as the existence of moral people who judge right from wrong.’ The connection between ethics and morality is strong but as Beauchamp and Bowie (2004: 2) express ‘morality consists of what persons ought to do in order to
conform to society’s norms of behaviour, whereas ethical theory concerns the philosophical reasons for and against aspects of the morality stipulated by society.’ Morality then can be seen as driving people’s actions, whereas ethics is the justification for and reflection on these actions. Why is it important to define morality? As Hunt and Vitell state (in Peterson and Ferrell, 2005: 18) ‘people’s ethical judgements differ because of differing personal moral codes.’ Therefore to return to the research question: ‘Does ethics influence the everyday decisions of managers in organisations?’ this must be considered in the context that different managers will have different views on what is ethical. So the focus of this research is on ethics, on managers’ justification for and reflection on decisions, in terms of what they see as right and wrong, good and bad.

**Ethical Issues**

In 1988 Robert Jackall published ‘Moral Mazes: The World of Corporate Managers’, which examined ‘the occupational ethics that [managers] construct to survive and flourish in their world’ (vii). One of Jackall’s conclusions was that ‘managers do not generally discuss ethics, morality, or moral rules-in-use in a direct way with each other’ (1988: 6). Therefore how much influence can ethics have on their decision-making? Are they comfortable talking about ethics? This question will be returned to in the analysis and discussion.

To understand if ethics influences managers’ everyday decisions, the ethical issues presented by a number of authors were considered. Waters, Bird and Chant (1986: 375) presented a comprehensive list, which included issues relating to employees (feedback about performance, security, fair treatment, appropriate working conditions); peers and superiors (telling the truth, loyalty and support); customers (fair treatment, truth-telling, loyalty); suppliers (respect, fair and impartial treatment, avoiding unfair pressure tactics); and other stakeholders (respect, truth-telling). They concluded that ‘in a large majority of cases, managers are fairly clear regarding relevant moral standards’ (1986: 381). However they did identify cases where managers felt ‘a need to explain or justify actions’ or where they ‘professed uncertainty about how to act either because of conflicting norms or doubts about scope of responsibility’ (1986: 381).
For Vallance (1995), Sternberg (2000), Trevino and Nelson (2004) and Fisher and Lovell (2006) human resources were a key area of common ethical problems, in particular related to recruitment, remuneration, diversity, equality and discrimination. Conflicts of interest were cited by Shaw (1999), Sternberg (2000) Trevino and Nelson (2004) and Power and Lundsten (2005). Linked to this, bribes and gifts were mentioned by Shaw (1999), Sternberg (2000), McEwan (2001) and Trevino and Nelson (2004) as another key ethical issue. Work by Power and Lundsten (2005: 188) looked at `Managerial and Other White-Collar Employee’s Perceptions of Ethical Issues in their Workplaces’ and identified six issues that were perceived as ethical, these being ´complex business issues’, ´honesty’, ´personal issues’, ´relationship issues’, ´fairness issues’ and what they termed ´other issues’. Their research illustrates that managers are still identifying a wide range of ethical issues in organisations.

In essence there is some agreement about what constitutes ethical issues although different authors use different words to describe these. Managers have to be capable of making decisions on these issues but what influences the way they approach these decisions? A framework that can be used to consider the behaviour of managers when faced with an issue is that of Carroll’s (1987) ´Three Types of Management Ethics, which will be discussed next.

`In Search of the Moral Manager’

Carroll’s paper ´In Search of the Moral Manager’ was first published in Business Horizons, March-April 1987. Carroll’s argument was that ´moral managers are hard to find’ (p7) and most managers are either ´immoral’ or ´amoral’. Based on a study of organisational scandals at that time, he defined three styles of management:

i) Immoral management - ´decisions, behaviours and actions do not accord with ethical principles’ (p9). Immoral management has selfish motives and is focused on ´company gains’. The ability to distinguish right from wrong is present but management ´chooses to do wrong’ (p9). In terms of relationships, immoral management ´does not care about others’ claims to be treated fairly or justly’ (p9);

ii) Moral management – in contrast to above, here management is striving ´to be ethical in its focus on ethical norms, professional standards of conduct, motives, goals, orientation
towards the law, and general operating strategy’ (p9). For Carroll, moral management is about fairness and justice and their motives are unselfish.

iii) Amoral management – this is the grey area that Carroll places between immoral and moral management and he saw it as being prevalent in organisations. He defined two types of amoral management. The ‘intentional amoral manager does not factor ethical considerations into their decision making, actions or behaviour’ (p11). They don’t see it necessary to apply the same rules in the workplace as in other aspects of their lives. ‘Unintentional amoral managers’ are ‘simply morally casual, careless or inattentive to the fact that their decisions and actions may have negative effects on others’ (p11). These managers do not recognise that there is an ethical dimension to what they are doing or the impact their actions might have on others.

Carroll proposed that the ‘average manager’ is amoral most of the time, but will slip into a moral or immoral style depending on the context (p12). He describes them as ‘basically good people’ but they don’t recognise the ethical aspects of the ‘competitive business world’ (p13). So a further set of questions emerged to be addressed in this paper: (1) do the experiences of managers support or illustrate Carroll’s view and (2) what is the context where managers become aware of ethical implications and therefore ethics influences their everyday decisions? The analysis will explore these questions further through looking at the managers’ definitions of ethical and unethical behaviour and three critical incidents.

**METHOD**

This empirical research uses data based on the experience of the interviewees as ‘knowledge gained through experience and the senses is acceptable’ in research (Bryman and Bell, 2003: 9). The aim of this research therefore is to explore the range of different ways in which managers experience ethics in everyday work. Nine in-depth interviews were conducted with middle managers in five organisations between October 2004 and May 2005. The interviewees were the National Sales Manager of a global pharmaceutical company, a Group Store Manager for a national retail organisation, an Administration
Manager in a not-for-profit company, a Senior Manager from the public service sector and five Managers employed by a public utilities company. All have supervisory responsibilities. Six of the interviewees were male and three female and their ages ranged from thirty to fifty years old.

**Data Collection**

The interviews were semi-structured, being based around thirteen questions that covered definitions of ethical and unethical behaviour, the values and behaviours encouraged in the organisation and organisational codes that described the desired values and behaviours. The interviewees were also asked if they could identify any recent situations where ethics had been used to guide a decision.

Following the work of Fernandes and Randall (1992) it was acknowledged that ‘social desirability’ could play a strong role in introducing bias into the interviews, as there is a ‘tendency of individuals to deny socially undesirable traits and behaviours and to admit to socially desirable ones’ (p183). Their research found that this bias appeared to be common when the interviewees were asked about attitudes rather than behaviours. Therefore the majority of the questions in the interviews focussed on behaviours in an attempt to elicit as honest a response as possible. Another consideration when designing the research approach was that of Fishbein and Ajzen’s ‘Theory of Planned Behaviour’ as discussed by Weber and Gillespie (1998). This considers three areas: ‘individual beliefs (What should I do?), intention (What would I do?) and actual behaviours (What did I do?)’ (p447). Weber and Gillespie cite researchers such as Gilligan (1982) and Taslikis and Nwachukwu (1991) who noted that there was a difference in response to a hypothetical or unfamiliar situation (‘should’) as compared to real or familiar situations (‘did’), with interviewees presenting the ‘ethically expected norm’ when asked what ‘should’ or ‘would’ you do, as to compared to when asked what ‘did’ you do (1998: 451). Therefore they concluded that the questions must be made ‘as real to the respondent as possible’ (1998: 462), hence the focus on asking managers for situations that they had either observed or been involved in, rather than presenting them with hypothetical situations. Finally Collins and Wray-Bliss (2005: 807) put forward the argument that research subjects should have ‘an active voice in the construction of texts that represent their lives’ as this is a ‘central way that ethical responsibilities to research subjects can be manifested’. Therefore the interviewees are constructing themselves through the interviews and hence the analysis has to acknowledge this construction.
Analysis – Using Critical Incident Technique

Selectively following Hycner’s (1985) phenomenological approach, the transcript of each interview was analysed, looking at how the interviewees defined ethical and unethical behaviour and whether or not this corresponded to the organisational examples they presented. The steps that Hycner advocates and that I followed were: 1) transcription; 2) listening to the interview for a sense of the whole; 3) delineating units of general meaning; 4) clustering units and; 5) determining themes from clusters of meaning. From these definitions and the examples provided, issues were identified which were compared across interviews to determine if similar issues were salient for different interviewees.

Examples of issues raised were concerned with recruitment, promotion, confidentiality of information, lying and cheating, gifts and hospitality, bullying, harassment and racism.

As part of the interview process, the interviewees were asked to provide situations or ‘critical incidents’ that had ethical implications. The critical incident technique, developed by Flanagan (1954) is ‘a procedure for gathering certain important facts concerning behaviour in defined situations’ (p335). As Collis and Hussey (2003) comment, this technique is of value in interviews where ‘the interviewees have difficulty in expressing their opinions’ (p165). The use of these incidents offered a way of looking at the interviewees’ understanding of ethical and unethical behaviour. They also helped to develop an understanding of the significance to the interviewees of certain events or behaviour. The critical incident technique allowed them to ‘tell stories’ (Bryman and Bell, 2003: 130) from which learning can be developed. Three critical incidents will be discussed in the Analysis: accepting gifts and hospitality; confidentiality; and racism.

Due to the sensitivity of the information discussed in the interviews, all interviewees were promised confidentiality therefore no organisational names will be used in this paper and the interviewee’s names have been changed.

ANALYSIS: THREE ETHICAL ISSUES OF MIDDLE MANAGERS
As mentioned earlier, different people have different views on what being ethical means, so this analysis will start by briefly looking at the definitions of ethical and unethical behaviour presented by the managers to illuminate the extent to which they relate to the subject of ethics.

Manager’s Definitions in Practice

Four of the responses linked ethical behaviour to working relationships and the way that people are treated: ‘treating people fairly, honestly and openly’ (Susan); ‘being open, fair, communicating with staff’ (Gemma); ‘being open and honest, don’t deceive or lie, have regard for others’ (Stuart); ‘be fair and consistent with staff’ (Edward). Issues of ‘being open’, ‘fair’ and ‘honest’ were connected to ethical behaviour for these managers and there was also a strong link to their relationship with their staff. Two managers defined ethical behaviour in a wider social context: ‘morally acceptable, socially acceptable, not exploiting people and is just and fair in actions’ (Guy); ‘socially or individually acceptable behaviour and does not cause harm’ (Sebastian). These definitions have both a positive aspect in terms of doing the right thing, but also clearly state what should be avoided: ‘not exploiting people’; ‘not cause harm’. Another definition saw ethical behaviour as being: ‘about doing the right thing in the circumstances and it’s a balance and a judgement’ (Mark). For this interviewee, defining ethics was ‘tricky’ because ‘it is subjective’.

When asked to define unethical behaviour, the interviewees presented more detailed answers although again there were differences in the responses. For Steve, unethical behaviour was linked to the reputation of the organisation: ‘there’s behaviour that might lead to the company being harmed, there’s behaviour that might lead to people being harmed and there’s behaviour that might lead to employees being harmed.’ Guy also defined unethical behaviour from an organisational perspective: ‘a non-ethical organisation is one that pollutes, destroys things and is not environmentally friendly.’ However he extended his definition to include behaviour of individuals, in particular by people in middle management positions who are prepared to lie: ‘there are cases where people will tell lies, mainly middle managers who are interpreting what they have to do to deliver the requirements of senior managers.’ The issue of lying is one that Susan also referred to: ‘being unethical is about cheating on results or lying about things to make yourself look better.’
Ethics in Managerial Practice

As well as giving definitions, there was also a glimpse of the managers’ personal theories about how ethics works in practice. Sebastian’s definition raised the point that ethics ‘will depend on each individual’s view’. Even with codes and legislation, it is the individual manager who ultimately has to decide what to do, as what is unethical ‘is subjective and depends on each individual’s view so what 90% of employees would not be prepared to do, there will be 10% who see it as no problem’ (Sebastian). Indeed Stuart also referred to the issue of different employees being prepared to behave unethically, but gave possible reasons for this behaviour: ‘I would walk out of an organisation if I felt that I was being asked to behave unethically. My children are now at university and I don’t have mortgage payments to worry about. However, younger employees might behave unethically as they are attracted by the money.’ So, it was seen that there are rewards for behaving unethically, which adds a further dimension to whether it affects the everyday decisions of managers. Are they rewarded for being ethical or it is unethical behaviour that gains rewards?

Mark saw unethical behaviour as being on a ‘spectrum’. There are behaviours he clearly saw as being unethical: ‘contravening criminal law or Human Rights legislation or anything that is against something like a Code of Conduct.’ However, when relating to working relationships he appeared unclear about how to define unethical behaviour as demonstrated in the following quote: ‘you can behave in a way that is unhelpful or oppressive or coercive just in terms of your style, which might not be a breach of any code, but might just be something that isn’t appropriate to the organisation and not an appropriate way to deal with or treat people.’ This appears to be a significant dilemma that managers face: the subjective element to understanding ethics. As opposed to situations being cut and dried, there is often a ‘grey’ area with no hard and fast rules to follow. In these cases managers have to make a judgement and this can be experienced as a dilemma.

So, what can be drawn from the definitions presented by the nine interviewees. Firstly there is no clear definition of ethical and unethical behaviour. For some it relates to individuals and how they are treated; for others it has a wider context and is more about the organisation. Also the interviewees
seemed more confident when defining unethical behaviour and a number referred to things that one should not do (such as ‘don’t deceive or lie’, ‘not exploiting people’) in their definitions of ethical behaviour. Could it be that managers are not clear about what constitutes ethical behaviour? Is this because they have to wrestle with different priorities rather than slavishly applying a code? If this is the case then the influence of ethics will be a lot more problematic. Yet they appear to be clear about what is unethical.

Critical Incidents

During the interviews, a number of managers referred to specific incidents that they saw as demonstrating ethical, or more usually unethical behaviour within their organisations. Following are three of these incidents, which illustrate the different types of ethical situations the managers have faced and emphasise the problematic nature of ethics in the workplace for middle managers.

#1 Accepting gifts or hospitality

The first incident described a situation where Jane had to make a decision about what was acceptable in term of providing and accepting hospitality and gifts.

'We worked in the Events department, I would take key customers to the races. We had a company marquee and would invite customers, but this was about relationship building.'

So Jane appeared comfortable with providing hospitality to clients as it was about ‘relationship building’. She then described an occasion when she accepted hospitality from a client:

'I've only been to one event where I was taken out by a customer, to the 'Lord of the Dance' and for a meal. I thought about this very carefully and was nervous about what they would want as I didn’t want to feel compromised by accepting. But I did accept as this was just about them saying thank you.'

Jane identified that there could be a conflict of interest if she accepted this offer but justified her actions through identifying what she saw as the clients reason for offering the hospitality - ‘saying thank you’. She did not mention company policy regarding the acceptance of gifts/hospitality. She finished her discussion of this issue by saying:
'However if the offer was to be flown in a private plane to the golf then I would feel uncomfortable and not accept as this would be spending too much money. Also if an employee constantly goes out on corporate events with the same clients, this is not ethical.'

The ethical dilemma that Jane appeared to be presenting in this incident was one of interpretation of what was acceptable (‘this was about relationship building’, ‘saying thank you’) compared to what was not (‘spending too much money’, ‘goes out on corporate events with the same clients’). Jane was aware that there was an ethical dilemma and was quite clear about what was unethical in principle, but she appeared less certain in practice. Considering Carroll’s (1987) model, Jane could be seen to fall into the ‘intentional amoral manager’ in this situation where ‘different rules apply in business than in other realms of life’ (p9). However based on her last statement, she was clear about what was unethical and so could be viewed as falling into the ‘immoral management’ style, where managers ‘know right from wrong and chooses to do wrong’ (p9). This however seems a tough statement as Jane does recognise the greyness of the situation and seems to be pulled across the boundary from what is moral to what could be seen as immoral. What is indicated is that it is not as clear cut for managers in practice as some theoretical frameworks or codes might suggest.

Steve also discussed the issue of receiving gifts:

'Ve have a policy here that we’re not allowed to accept any hospitality ... we’re not allowed to be influenced like that because that’s unethical.’

So, like Jane he was aware that there was an ethical dimension to accepting gifts and hospitality. However, he acknowledged that although the policy was ‘relatively strictly adhered to’ he would break it on occasions:

'One of the biggest difficulties is Christmas because we have lots of suppliers and they tend to want to give us Christmas gifts and it’s nice to receive them. Often by the time they come here it’s too late to decline them anyway so you know, hand on my heart, hands up, I do accept them sometimes and phone them up and say ‘thank you very much’.
Steve clearly knew that he was breaking company policy for his own personal gain, which could place him in the `immoral manager’ type (Carroll, 1987), but again this seems a strong statement about an individual. In the interview he justified accepting the gifts:

‘I’m not supposed to do that but they’re not massive gifts you know, they’re not cars or tellies or anything like that. Usually it’s a bottle of wine.’

Arguably, the acceptance of gifts or hospitality is clearly an issue where managers have to make an ethical decision and decide between cut and dried rules and the dilemmas that occur in everyday life.

#2 Confidentiality

The second ethical issue related to responsibility for confidential information. Edward described an incident concerning a member of his staff where he was unsure about the appropriate action to take. Edward had defined ethical behaviour as being `fair and consistent with staff” and the following incident illustrated a dilemma he was facing:

‘I have a female member of staff who has performed wonderfully for years but has gone off the rails lately. I asked the person who is supervising her about this and was told in confidence that she has serious financial problems. As I was told this in confidence, is it ethical to now tell HR about the situation?’

Edward had identified that there was an ethical dimension to this situation but he did not know what to do. He then continued to explore the dilemma:

‘If things don’t improve, as her manager I will probably be asked about this person in a month’s time. I’m not making an issue of this but I just want guidance on what to do next as currently her timekeeping is bad and I need to be sure how long to let this go on.’

As discussed by Vallance (1995), Sternberg (2000), Trevino and Nelson (2004) and Fisher and Lovell (2004) human resources are a key area of ethical problems for managers and what is interesting is that Edward was asking for `guidance’ on his next actions. He finished by illustrating a conflict that managers can face:

‘I have to be consistent with staff and I do like this person, but something is not right so I have to sort this out. It’s about confidentiality as I was told of the situation in confidence, but I do feel that it is OK to discuss the situation with HR.’
This incident illustrated the complexity of situations that managers have to make decisions about. Unlike the first critical incident where the decision could be seen to be reasonably straightforward (to accept the gift/hospitality or not), here there are more issues to be considered (responsibility as a manager, handling confidential information, being fair and consistent to staff). Edward felt that he was lacking guidance on what to do, but ultimately his actions were being driven by his responsibilities as a manager. Hence he could be seen as falling into Carroll’s (1987) ‘moral management’ style as he is striving to be ethical in doing the right thing.

#3 Racism

The final issue concerned racism and was recalled by Mark in a particular incident:

'This guy is on a high potential development scheme and I’m his mentor and he’s from an Asian background ... he’s come up against people saying ‘well you’re only on this high potential development scheme (which is accelerated promotion basically) because of your race’, you know, he’s had that. He’s had senior people say that to his face and that’s just basic racism.'

Mark continued to expand on his direct involvement in this situation:

'This is one of the issues I had to deal with actually because somebody did say that to him and he brought it to my attention as I was his line manager as well as his mentor, and I said we’ll have to do something about this but he wouldn’t report it formally because of all the hassle it would cause.'

So policies and procedures in the organisation were in place to handle issues such as this but staff can be reluctant to apply them. Mark finished recounting this example through describing the actions that he took:

'But somebody else in our management team said exactly the same bloody thing a few weeks later and I tackled him about it and said ‘I’m absolutely sick of this, it’s got to stop. I don’t want people thinking like this’ and we did something about it, but it becomes part of the culture.'

His final comment was: 'So it’s around, racism is alive and well.’ What Mark expressed in this incident was the difficulty of handling ‘accepted norms’ which have unethical implications but can easily become ‘part of the culture’. Although he knew what ought to be done - ‘report it formally’, his colleague was unwilling to do this, hence Mark’s strong feeling of frustration that this behaviour was
continuing. Here Mark can clearly be seen to follow the ‘moral management style’ (Carroll, 1987) but he is facing colleagues who adopt a different ethical approach within the organisation.

From these incidents it can be argued that some of the interviewees were not clear about how to interpret what is ethical and unethical behaviour. They provided examples of dilemmas or incidents that helped them to explain their views on ethics but the examples focussed on unethical rather than ethical behaviour. Could it be that the interviewees found it harder to provide examples of ethical behaviour or is it that their tendency is to recognise unethical behaviour (the bad things that one must not do) rather than ethical behaviour (the good things that one must do)? This raises the question as to whether being ethical is the norm in organisations, as the lack of examples of ethical behaviour may suggest that it could be limited in salience and equivocal in organisational life.

DISCUSSION

The focus of the research was on the influence that ethics has on the everyday decisions of middle managers in organisations. It was important to look at how managers defined ethical behaviour as it could then be determined if their definitions were carried through into actions. Carroll’s (1987) model provided a framework to further investigate whether managers were aware of what being ethical means, through consideration of their behaviours and the justification for these. The research indicates that not all managers can clearly define what ethical behaviour is. They can identify situations where they face the dilemma of not knowing what decision to make as shown in the critical incident relating to confidentiality. They do seem to find it easier and to be more comfortable defining and giving examples of unethical behaviour, which could indicate that they are aware of the ‘bad things’ that they must not do as compared to the ‘good things’ they must do.

Carroll’s (1987) argument was that the average manager is amoral most of the time, but will slip into a moral or immoral style depending on the context. One problem with Carroll’s model is that it is a strong judgement to call somebody ‘immoral’ hence, unless their behaviour is very extreme, the tendency will be to see a person as ‘amoral’ with immoral lapses. But, maybe this is what is causing
some problems in organisations today – managers are often not prepared to use such language about colleagues as it could mean that they themselves will then be judged. Looking at the example of Steve and accepting gifts, he is knowingly breaking company policy and doing something wrong, which according to Carroll is ‘immoral’. Yet he sees himself as being an ethical person. Two other incidents, as told by Edward and Mark indicate that these managers were following Carroll’s ‘moral’ management type as they were looking to be fair and consistent with staff, but this may be the result of ‘social desirability’ (Fernandes and Randall, 1992). An area for further research is to investigate whether today’s average manager fits with Carroll’s amoral style in their everyday decisions. The important finding of the presence of the amoral manager requires deeper investigation to confirm and explain its prevalence. One point to note is that all of the managers included in this paper were in organisations that had Codes of Conduct, although these often did not refer specifically to ethics.

From the study to date it is not possible to answer if there were incentives to encourage ethical behaviour or if there was perceived to be a culture of ethics in each organisation. One participant (Mark) saw there as clearly not being a culture of ethics in his organisation but further analysis is required to develop this area of research.

So, does ethics influence the everyday decisions of managers in organisations? The answer to this is still unclear but indications are that while ethics does consciously influence some decisions of managers, it is not prominent in relation to their everyday decisions. There are situations that managers see as having an ethical dimension but some are prepared to ignore this in terms of the actions that they subsequently take, either for selfish reasons (immoral) or because they do not see the negative effects of their actions (amoral). The final comment in this paper relates to something that happened after the interviews had been completed. Once the tape recorder had been switched off and the managers were being thanked for their time, three asked: ‘So, am I ethical?’ In essence this is the dilemma that some managers are currently facing. They just don’t know.
REFERENCES


