



Malpractice

Over the past three decades, researchers have attempted to understand malpractice and why individuals behave unethically in the workplace, yet much remains to be understood about how and under what circumstances individuals make unethical choices. In looking at ways to prevent, identify and deal with misconduct there is a tendency to seek and develop a so called 'magic bullet' solution. This 'magic bullet' solution concentrates on searching for and punishing corrupt behaviour. Such an approach, however, tends to be individually based, focussing more on the human antecedents of misconduct at the expense of understanding and addressing the more complex concept of organisational normalisation of misconduct and corruption.

This view has been driven primarily by the realisation that the 'few bad apples' theory, which argues that the root causes of corrupt behaviours are the particular psychologies of the individuals involved, has previously been overemphasised. The 'bad apple' theory has been conveniently used by public sector and corporate leaders to explain ethical transgressions and corrupt culture within their organisations. This simplistic explanation paves the way for equally simplistic solutions. Those who stand behind the 'bad apple' myth tend to promote and accept solutions such as better training and improved checking of potential employee credentials.

Reliance on the 'bad apple' theory detracts from the more complex organisational, cultural, environmental and social forces that overtly and covertly influence unethical and corrupt behaviour.

Simply put, the obvious weakness in the 'bad apple' approach is that it undermines the potential to proactively examine organisational systems and cultures including how employees are persuaded, coaxed, threatened, or socialised to join in and

eventually escalate their involvement in serious misconduct, thereby preventing a true understanding of what malpractices are occurring in an organisation.

If organisations develop appropriate tools to address the activities above, they shift their emphasis from concentrating on the 'bad apples' to examining the 'barrel' in an attempt to understand what it is about the 'barrel' that is tainting the 'apples'.

An effective way for organisations to minimise and manage misconduct is to collaboratively examine their systems and cultures to reach agreed understandings of their strengths and weaknesses. This enables them to work on overcoming weaknesses and build on existing strengths. Safe2Say can complement this examination by providing you with first-hand knowledge of malpractices occurring in your organisation.

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