

# Special Issue Call for Papers



## Understanding Ethical Behavior and Decision Making in Management: A Behavioural Business Ethics Approach

**Submission Deadline February 15, 2010**

### Guest edited by

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The numerous scandals in business such as those at AIG, Tyco, WorldCom, and Enron have raised many concerns about the emergence of unethical and irresponsible behavior in organizations. The seemingly unending occurrence of instances of corruption, in both business and politics, has also activated consciousness about ethics in general and business ethics in particular. Although there may be no universal definition of business ethics, and one scholar likened defining it to “nailing jello on a wall,” (Lewis, 1985), most definitions focus on evaluating the moral acceptability of the actions of organizational leaders and their employees. We suggest that a study of behavioral ethics—which focuses on how people behave as opposed to how they should behave—can supplement the traditionally normative approach to business ethics and hence provide a particularly worthwhile approach to understanding business’s contemporary ethical failures.

Early explanations promoted the idea that most business scandals were the responsibility of a few bad apples. This assumption is intuitively compelling and attractive in its simplicity; at a practical level, it also facilitates the identification and punishment of those deemed responsible. More recent research, however, suggests that it is not a select few who succumb to unethical action; instead, almost everyone is susceptible to the forces that ultimately result in questionable decisions and unworthy actions, e.g., “there but for the grace of God go I,” as some have put it. This research takes the perspective that most individuals involved in the business world know that a range of behaviors are not acceptable in both the workplace and the marketplace: business people are aware of appropriate, ethical decision rules and moral behaviors and how they might be promoted (e.g., rules in a company’s code of conduct). Despite this awareness, however, irresponsible and unethical behaviors and decisions still emerge. In essence, some sets of circumstances may be sufficient for almost anyone to engage in unethical behavior. And an understanding of these circumstances will enable leaders to create ethical organizations. This is a fundamental, foundational idea in the emerging field of behavioral ethics.

Clearly, business leaders, organizations, and their employees need to improve the ethicality of their actions, which provides an important opportunity for organizational scholars and business school academics to increase understanding of the dynamics of ethical behavior and decision-making. This special issue is dedicated to outlining and identifying the benefits of the behavioral ethics approach to management and organizations. Thus, we seek papers that use psychological perspectives to address questions that deal with topics such as ethical leadership, rewards and sanctions, trust and

reconciliation, the corrupting influence of power, ethical dilemmas, and the biological foundations of ethical behavior. Much of the current business ethics literature has adopted a normative framework, advocating what employees and organizations ought to be doing. In contrast, we plan to present a behavioral perspective that examines how people actually behave, in an attempt to understand why they frequently deviate from normative expectations. By increasing our insights into the psychology of unethical behavior and decision making, we hope to develop better ways for leaders, and for the field of management and organizations, to deal with the ethical challenges that today's world repeatedly presents.

## Submissions

To be considered for publication, please follow the British Journal of Management author guidelines (see [www.blackwellpublishing.com/bjm](http://www.blackwellpublishing.com/bjm)) and submit your manuscript (of no more than 6,000 words, excluding references) via <http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/bjm>. The final deadline for submissions is February 15, 2010.