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On ethics: Philippa Foster Back

An interview by Adam Turteltaub, CHC, CCEP, SCCE & HCCA Vice President of Strategic Initiatives & International Programs

Philippa Foster Back CBE, Director, Institute of Business Ethics, London, UK

AT: You regularly survey Europe on a wide range of ethics topics, and every three years release a very large Ethics at Work survey. What are some highlights of the latest survey?

PFB: Reassuringly, the majority of employees say their organization acts with honesty. Across the eight European countries surveyed, the average was 78%, ranging from 69% in Germany to 88% in Ireland. This was up in Germany and France from 2015 results, showing a 6% and 5% rise respectively.

A third of employees have been aware of misconduct in the past year, and more are likely to have spoken up (54%), particularly in the UK (67%), but less likely in Portugal (49%).

AT: One notable point from the survey is that a lack of follow-through on ethics issues by the company can be highly corrosive to trust. It seems to me that employees are saying, “If you want us to take ethics seriously, we have to see you doing the right thing by us.” Is that fair to say? And how can employers demonstrate their own commitment to ethics?

PFB: Certainly the effect of providing a work environment that is perceived to be supportive to ethics will lead to more positive perceptions of how frequently honesty is practiced at work (91%) than in those organizations that are deemed unsupportive (53%). Allied to this are results that fewer people are aware of misconduct, feel less pressured to compromise on ethics, and are more willing to speak up (70%), measured against those who feel unsupported (47%).

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