

Extension Material 9.3

Witnesses—ethical and moral issues

The chances are that if an action or behaviour that breaches formal standards or rules occurs in an organization, then managers, particularly at more senior levels, are unlikely to be the first to know about it. It is important that an organization can trust and rely upon staff not only to do the right thing, in the sense of conforming to established norms, but to bring it to the attention of their manager if they have concerns that standards are not being properly followed by a colleague. The dilemma that may be faced by a person who witnesses something untoward is what the consequence will be to himself/herself should he or she raise the issue at a more senior level. It is possible that the individual will expect confidentiality to be respected by his/her manager in such circumstances. On the other hand, anyone accused of acting inappropriately would feel that they have a right to know the identity of any person who brings such a complaint against them. In any disciplinary investigation, it is important to consider this when taking statements from witnesses. Confidentiality should not be guaranteed unless it is possible to respect this. Anyone accused may also expect the opportunity to question a witness as part of his or her defence in a disciplinary hearing. Only if there is a risk to an individual in naming them as a witness will it be reasonable to withhold identity.