

# CAN WE BE CATALYSTS FOR CHANGE?

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**This article is a think piece about how we can be catalysts for change by looking at how existing workplace cultures and pressures can have an impact on our ethical decision making and behaviours. This can often be inadvertent, without us being aware of it until it becomes an issue, or because it's just always been like that. We need to think about how we can start to influence and address these through the power of positive leadership.**



How can we empower our colleagues and peers to speak up and have the confidence to ask for advice, or collectively to challenge behaviours?

What can we start doing now to make sure we really do change things going forward?

## Setting a scene

To begin thinking about empowerment and change, this quote is a good starting place:

***'You can't go back and change the beginning, but you can start where you are and change the ending.'***

To start, here is a scenario that I don't think will be unfamiliar:

As the new person on the department, you're expected to make all the tea for your colleagues, to only then be told they'd asked for coffee. Each time, you wash and clear up the mugs.

The skills and expertise you've gained from any previous roles don't mean anything – you can't drive the car or offer expert advice to anyone – your opinion counts for nothing.

You're excluded from the team WhatsApp group. And no one is going to call you by your name; they'll just refer to you however they choose.

This carries on until someone else joins – after which you'll become everyone else's equal and you'll treat the new person in the same way...

... or will you?

This example is real (not from archaeology) and was happening in 2018. To the people in the department, it is the norm:

.....

*'It happened to me so why can't it happen to them?'*

*'It's just a laugh, nothing is meant by it, we all know that!'*

.....

These cultures can develop in many workplaces, in many different guises and often without us realising what's going on.

In this scenario, do the senior managers know this is happening? Has someone complained about it but are they just thought to have been a troublemaker, or making something out of nothing?

.....

*'It's the first I've heard of it. No one else has mentioned it.'*

.....

Perhaps the senior managers aren't sure how best to deal with the issue and hope it will just resolve itself over time?

## What steps can we take to influence and change the behaviours we witness?

In 2019 the Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development (CIPD) published its *Rotten apples, bad barrels and sticky situations: unethical workplace behaviour* report following research into factors that influence ethical behaviour at work. Two headlines from the report are that

- organisational culture and leadership can influence unethical behaviour (bad barrels)
- certain situations, or aspects of jobs, can impact on ethical behaviour (sticky situations)

Poor ethical cultures in workplaces can often have detrimental consequences to the organisation as staff leave the company, resulting in it not being able to deliver its services properly.

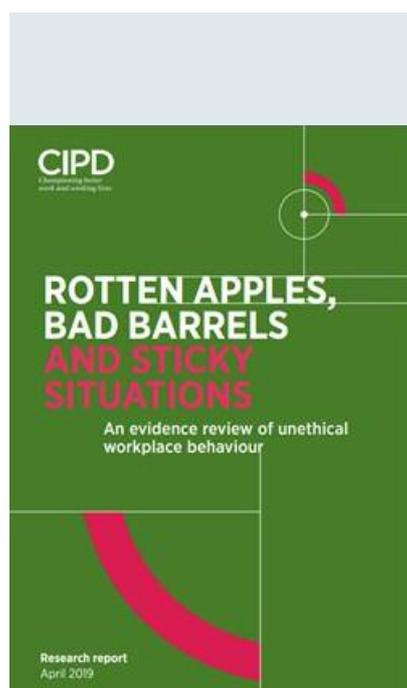
By now you might have started thinking about something you'd like to change or wished you'd been able to change. Is there a certain type of culture in your workplace? Has someone mentioned something that you've dismissed – but could there be an issue you were unaware of? How do we make these visible and how can we use positive leadership to influence and address unethical cultures?

'Leadership' doesn't just mean managers – although these roles do potentially have more influence to change cultures as well as form them. **Everyone** has the potential to influence change through leadership. Social norms and peer pressure can be powerful influencers on the ways we behave, and these can be used in a positive context as well as the more negative associations with 'peer pressure'.

## Action for the archaeology sector

In 2019, ClfA, Prospect and FAME – the three bodies representing archaeology's professional organisation, trade union and trade association – signed a pan-sectoral agreement to tackle bullying, harassment and discrimination in our profession, and a key part of addressing this is about changing the cultures that lead to this.

Some things are easier to address than others. Going back to the scenario at the beginning, could an easy positive change be for someone in the team to help wash the cups up too? How might that have an impact on what people are experiencing?



CIPD's report *Rotten apples, bad barrels and sticky situations*

## How about some self-assessment?

A possible first step in positive leadership is taking the time to self-assess; to consider what things you are doing that might impact on others is important, as is reviewing a situation and considering where things may not have gone so well and what can be done to improve them.

The environments we create and the attitudes we have can have a detrimental impact on staff wellbeing and productivity if they are not positive – the ‘bad barrels’ in the CIPD guidance.

This quote on LinkedIn from Tobias Stuesson, podcast host for Leading Transformational Change, is very relevant:

***‘Instead of assuming we are all good, we need to welcome brokenness. To acknowledge while our organisations can be awesome in so many ways they might still be broken in others. And we need to have the courageous humility to listen and learn where that brokenness lies.’***



Photo by Tobias Rademacher on Unsplash

## How does our behaviour influence others?

It’s also important to think about how we might appear to others. We may believe that we are friendly and approachable, but others might not see us that way. Do you have an open-door policy, but no one ever comes in? After all, Rag’n’Bone Man tells us he’s ‘only human’ but I’m not sure he’d be my first port of call; or how about sticking your head round Lord Alan Sugar’s door? We shouldn’t ‘judge a book by its cover’ but that’s easier said than done, and perhaps reflecting on how we are perceived would be beneficial. What can we do to address this? How can we give other people the confidence to speak up to us, to ask questions and maybe challenge the social norms?

Let’s use the example of the All Blacks rugby team. In the early 2000s the team experienced poor World Cup performances and behaviour by players. To address this the coaches started working towards a new ‘sweep the sheds’ culture based on individual character and personal leadership, with a philosophy that ‘better people make better All Blacks’. No person is bigger than the team, and everyone is responsible for the smallest detail – including cleaning out the changing room at the end of a match. This created a coherent, positive team environment and behaviour, taking them back to their winning ways.



Photo by James Coleman on Unsplash

It's also worth considering the simple Betari Box cycle, which shows how our attitude and behaviours can affect and influence the attitudes and behaviours of those around us.



Betari Box cycle

Going back to the scenario at the beginning, what if sometimes the person who helped with the washing up was the team leader? Being in an equal environment can help to break down the barriers to conversation and allow people to chat things over.

So how has our scenario changed? Perhaps the new person now feels more able to express their feelings to the team leader, and by listening, maybe the team leader starts to reflect on organisational cultures and how these may need to change in future.

## Considering work pressures

Another area that can have an impact on decision-making and ethics are pressures at work, as can lack of morale and feeling undervalued.

Work pressures can sometimes be external and less easy to influence, but a working environment that encourages people to share their anxieties is beneficial and can help teams to share problem solving.

Creating opportunities for discussing issues and ethical grey areas is a great way to raise awareness and to influence change. The article in *The Archaeologist* 106 by Joe Abrams tells us about the benefits of having a regular team meeting and keeping a section on the agenda for staff to share the ethical dilemmas they've faced at work, using the ClfA professional practice paper and referring to the *Code of conduct* and standards and guidance to help inform what decisions should or shouldn't be made. Sometimes answers that seem obvious to us as individuals may not be obvious to others and being able to ask for advice, input and feedback can allow positive change, in turn allowing other people to learn and grow in confidence.

Involving others in the discussions about decision-making can also help them to acknowledge the complexities of work life and to build trust. And sometimes open discussion can lead to change – professional ethics isn't just about following rules and laws but reaching beyond these. Perhaps there are situations where we should be more confident in standing by our professional obligations and to push back or say no to a deadline being forced on us that could have a detrimental impact of what we can deliver. Or to query why someone has taken the decision they have. Alongside the practice paper, ClfA has developed an e-learning module with a range of everyday ethical scenarios archaeologists may face. These can be thought about individually, but we are keen to encourage members to discuss them with other colleagues to consider the range of judgements that could be made.

Other work pressures can be of our own making and can impact others. For example, by continually reinforcing the need to book cheaper travel, are we unconsciously influencing people to take later trains and putting themselves or their staff into a situation where they are unsafe? Is our micromanagement of someone else's workload putting extra pressure on them and forcing them to make unethical decisions?

Giving staff the autonomy to control areas of their work can build their confidence and help them to learn – give them an overall travel budget and the responsibility to spend it; step back a bit from the everyday management to let people find their own way, but keep regular review meetings to make sure things are on track.



Natalie Olembo

Natalie Olembo joined ClfA for a summer placement and in her write-up of her experience she highlighted how she appreciated the autonomy she was given:

*'While I knew that the help was there if I needed it, the fact that I had full autonomy over the content of the projects and how I completed them meant that I was able to understand what ClfA does for myself. There is an importance in forming your own understanding of things, as it allows you to grasp concepts that were foreign for you.'*

This is a balancing act though, as we want to avoid unconsciously passing on work to someone who might not be fully confident or competent in what they are doing (another area of the *Code of conduct*) and creating a different pressure.

## How does this change the situation?

Returning to the scenario, now we've introduced opportunities for autonomy and allowing open discussion:

As the new person on the department, you're encouraged to help the team leader to make tea. It gives you the opportunity to get to know them and introduces you to the rest of the team.

Everyone helps with the washing up and it's a great chance to have informal chats about things.

You're added to the team WhatsApp group and encouraged to share your ideas and experiences from your other roles as part of the regular meetings.

You feel like you're already part of the team and keen to learn more.

Photo by Tom W  
on Unsplash



## A role for everyone

The examples above look at ways in which we as individuals can change the way we behave, but to have real impact this has to be done collectively and not just by some. It must not be a one-way street and as well as reflecting on how we behave and how we make ourselves more approachable, we must be confident to speak up and speak **to** people.

How many times have you said or heard:



*'Well I've told them about that, but no-one has done anything!'*



How clearly did we express our views, or were we speaking to the right people?

We also need to make sure that those who do speak up are respected and heard; not dismissed for rocking the boat or side-lined as 'troublemakers'.

Along these lines, in February 2021 ClfA hosted a virtual training session conducted by **Protect** (the whistleblowing charity) aimed at encouraging a speak-up culture in archaeological workplaces, covering how to handle concerns and address grievances. The main messages from this training were about having clear policies for staff regarding raising concerns, to give staff confidence that they will be listened to and to know they won't be victimised for speaking up.

The person who originally described the scenario at the beginning did speak up, not just to the people they considered friends at work, but to people who could have more influence, and some changes have happened. It wasn't easy for them, and they may only be small steps, but they are progress and the individual speaking up and the one listening and taking action are both 'leaders', acting as catalysts for change.

## A few thoughts to take away

- **Reflect** – individually and as an organisation; what are the parallel problems in archaeology to the scenario at the beginning? Can we see them happening and what can we do to help change them?
- **Provide** – provide opportunities for discussions or concerns to be raised by staff and individuals. How can we give our colleagues the confidence to speak up and how can we be clear about the mechanisms to do so?
- **Lead** – where can you influence culture change in your organisation, or the environments we are in? Where can ClfA and our peers help us to do this? How can we see that we are making progress?

And, to finish with another quote:

*'Isn't it funny how day by day nothing changes, but when you look back, everything is different'*

C S Lewis

