ABSTRACT

Society is increasing its demands for more ethical behaviour by managers of organisations. However, societal and workplace ethical norms and standards are constantly evolving, as workplace diversity, generational differences and cultural differences make the workplace more complex. Behaviour that was unacceptable just a few years ago, may now be seen as a minor abuse of standards, while other behaviour may be considered a much more grave offence than was the case in the past. While a number of studies have attempted to classify behaviour into different categories, more work is needed in this area. This paper reports on an exploratory study that examined perceptions of what constitutes ethical behaviour in the workplace. Graduate business students at an Australian university (n=234) were asked to indicate the ethicality of 17 different behaviours, based on published ethical measurement scales. Factor analysis revealed a three-factor structure in the data, consisting of misuse of company resources, deceit, and the giving or receiving of favours for personal gain. Descriptive statistics indicated that misuse was considered less unethical than exchanging favours for personal gain. Deceit was considered to be the most unethical type of behaviour. Implications for managers and directions for further research are discussed.