

Partnership in Health and Safety: A Source of Fair and Ethical Treatment?

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Introduction

The notion of fairness is central to many conceptualisations of ethical management (see, *e.g.*, Legge, 1998; and Miller, 1996). The objective of creating greater fairness in the employment relationship moreover forms a central rationale for both the legislative and labour-market policies that have been adopted by the present Labour government in Britain, and more specifically, its advocacy of "partnership" between employers and workers (Department of Trade and Industry, 1998). At the same time, the ethical basis underlying this endorsement of partnership, and its objective of fairness, is arguably far from clear, if not contradictory. Thus, on the one hand, it can be seen to encompass the view that employers *should* comply with certain minimum standards relating to the treatment of workers and hence embody, to some degree, a perspective that contains elements of rights- and justice-based ethical frameworks, as well as stakeholding. On the other, the fact that the government, for the most part, perceives partnership as a voluntary activity suggests that it is less concerned with "fairness" as a right and more with its value as a means of generating more productive employment relationships. This perspective can be linked with rather different ethical positions, such as ethical egoism and utilitarianism. There has been extensive debate concerning the potential value of partnership as a mechanism for protecting and advancing the interests of workers

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