ENABLED AND CONSTRAINED:
CULTURE, ETHICS AND STRUCTURATION IN AN ADVERTISING AGENCY

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ABSTRACT

Understanding the complexity of advertising ethics mandates an organizational approach to empirical research. This ethnography examines the relationship between organizational culture and advertising ethics at an advertising agency from a structuration perspective. Forty-five days of fieldwork and one-on-one interviews with 45 agency practitioners examined shared and divided views of organizational values, goals, challenges, and aspects of leadership; as well as perceptions of ethics. Members’ ethical perceptions fell along a continuum from moral myopia to acute ethical awareness. Organizational values enabling ethical awareness include integrity and respect for others. However, a leader suggested ethics was not an intention for starting the agency. Furthermore, the agency does not espouse explicit ethical values or code. Therefore, the perceptions categorizing moral myopia suggest ways in which ethical awareness is simultaneously constrained. The concept of amorality is presented as the organizational perspective for understanding, and as a constraint upon, ethical intentions for an agency.