

## When is whistleblowing morally required?

External whistleblowing should be morally permissible and justifiable. In addition, it should also be morally required.

For external whistleblowing to be morally required, De George (1999) proposed two requirements.

Firstly, the whistleblower must have access to documented evidence that would convince a reasonable, impartial observer that his/her view of the situation is correct and that the institution's product or practice poses a serious and likely danger to the public or to the user of the product.

For example, the circumstances causing 200 schoolchildren that got sick due to the food they ate at a school hostel at Keetmanshoop poses a serious and likely danger to their health.

Secondly, the employee must have good reasons to believe that, by going public, the necessary changes will be brought about to rectify the situation and/or product.

The chance of being successful must be worth the risk taken and the danger to which such a person is exposed.

To ascertain the probability that the necessary changes will be brought about, four questions must be raised. Firstly: did you exhaust all possible internal whistleblowing mechanisms?

Secondly, taking into account the management and leadership style and the historic ability to acknowledge the institution's wrongs: what is the probability in terms of an approximate percentage that the institution will rectify the situation and/or product?

Thirdly: will you as whistleblower be protected or victimised? Fourthly: if it is most probable that you will not be protected, what strategies do you have in



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place to deal with the negative impact?

### THE PANAMA PAPERS

Recently an international scandal followed after the release of more than 11 million documents, the "Panama Papers", which exposed tax evasion amounting to an estimated U\$S 100 million by corporates, politicians and businessmen through using offshore havens.

This money could have been used for development to reduce poverty, to make a difference between life and death.

This enormous diversion of money illustrates the need for external whistleblowing. With children dying of hunger for many reasons including greed, apathy and our fear of doing anything about it, it is appropriate to conclude with the words of John Pulitzer, cited by Alleyne Ireland (1920): "There is no crime, there is no dodge, there is no trick, there is no swindle, there is not a vice that does not live by secrecy. Get these things in the open, describe them, attack them, ridicule them in the press, and sooner or later public opinion will sweep them away. Publicity may not be the only thing that is needed, but it is the one thing without which all other agencies will fail."

#### • References

De George, R.T. 1999. *Business Ethics*.

Pulitzer, J. 1920. *Reminiscences of a Secretary: An Adventure with a Genius*.

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