

**INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF LAW**  
**MANAGEMENT & HUMANITIES**

**[ISSN 2581-5369]**

---

**Volume 4 | Issue 5**

---

**2021**

© 2021 *International Journal of Law Management & Humanities*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://www.ijlmh.com/>

Under the aegis of VidhiAagaz – Inking Your Brain (<https://www.vidhiaagaz.com/>)

---

This Article is brought to you for “free” and “open access” by the International Journal of Law Management & Humanities at VidhiAagaz. It has been accepted for inclusion in International Journal of Law Management & Humanities after due review.

In case of **any suggestion or complaint**, please contact [Gyan@vidhiaagaz.com](mailto:Gyan@vidhiaagaz.com).

---

**To submit your Manuscript** for Publication at **International Journal of Law Management & Humanities**, kindly email your Manuscript at [submission@ijlmh.com](mailto:submission@ijlmh.com).

---

# The Psyche of a Whistleblower

---

AKSHITA GROVER<sup>1</sup>

## ABSTRACT

*Whistleblowers, from across the world, come from different backgrounds, ethnicity, cultures, nations, yet beyond this, they share common psychological factors which make them different from the mainstream community. They are cut out very differently and their ways of thinking, perceiving, and believing are fundamentally different, which propel them to speak up, despite knowing that the consequences might backfire. A lot of theories and studies have been developed and established regarding the psyche of someone who can muster up the courage to speak up, despite the repercussions. The following paper deals with the psyche of a whistleblower. It dives into answering the question, "what traits make a powerless personality speak up against authorities for their wrongs?". This paper also talks about, Ed Snowden, a name that is always associated with 21<sup>st</sup> Century "whistleblowing".*

**Keywords** – Whistleblowing, behaviors, theories.

## I. INTRODUCTION

*"As long as the people don't fear the truth, there is hope. For once they fear it, the one who tells it doesn't stand a chance. And today, truth is still beautiful... but so frightening"*-

*Alice Walker.*

Wrongs are seen by most, but to point them out and voice them, is not a common, encouraged, or mainstream idea. A certain set of people give up their entire lives to speak up the truth, to point a stain in the bigger picture. These people may not even get compensation for bringing dangerous and bitter truths to light and are instead, most of the time blacklisted in their profession and society. These people are addressed as "whistleblowers". Whistle-blowers, risk retaliation both by their organization (job loss, demotion, decreased quality of working conditions) and by the public (character assassinations, accusations of being merely "sour grapes", spies, or "squealers") (R. and Viswesvaran, 2005). They are cut out very differently and their ways of thinking, perceiving, and believing are fundamentally different, which propel them to speak up, despite knowing that the consequences might backfire. In two simple words, they are non-conformists. The following paper deals with the psyche of a whistleblower. It

---

<sup>1</sup> Author is a student at Jindal Global Law School, India.

dives into answering the question, “what traits make a powerless personality speak up against authorities for their wrongs?”. This paper also talks about, Ed Snowden, a name that is always associated with 21<sup>st</sup> Century “whistleblowing”.

## **II. WHO IS A “WHISTLEBLOWER”?**

The Economist Times defines a whistle-blower as “a person, who could be an employee of a company, or a government agency, disclosing information to the public or some higher authority about any wrongdoing, which could be in the form of fraud, corruption, etc”. There is no watertight compartment as to how a whistle-blower behaves, thinks, or perceives because they come from any demographic, gender group, age group, cultural or economic background. But whistleblowers have psychological elements in common, such as the way they perceive the fraud and traits that make them more susceptible to be a whistle-blower (Understanding the Mind of a Whistleblower, 2021).

### **(A) The Psyche**

Personal characteristics include whistleblowing have been examined: whistleblower demographics (age, gender, qualification, level of job held), personality variables (locus of control), moral and ethical judgment, and other characteristics such as job performance, organizational commitment, role responsibility, approval of whistleblowing (R. and Viswesvaran, 2005). Whistleblowers have very high moral values. For them, fairness and ideological beliefs are indispensable to professional values (Understanding the Mind of a Whistleblower, 2021). They are non-conformists. Their belief system is based on moral and ethical values. They trust their instincts. Studies have found that high performers are likely to be the whistleblowers rather than those at lower positions. Whistleblowers are mostly middle-aged and married, i.e., those individuals who have a secured personal life. They are not young employees as they lack the experience to judge wrongdoing (Understanding the Mind of a Whistleblower, 2021).

Heidi Weber, Curriculum Developer at WorkPlace Sociology, a whistleblower herself states that “whistleblowers have a strong sense of confidence, in who they are, what they stand for, and in their work skills. They have a strong ethics background/upbringing, advocate fairness, and feel compelled to protect everyone automatically. Whistleblowers are altruists and are inquisitive about practices they don’t understand.” A tremendous amount of personal, social, psychological, and financial costs for disclosures is paid by whistleblowers. Almost 82% experienced retaliation from employers, including being harassed, blackballed, and fired, claims a recent New England Journal of Medicine study showed, (The Courage of a

Whistleblower, 2020). Whistleblowers face social ostracism from co-workers and undergo stressful psychological strain (The Courage of a Whistleblower, 2020). This proves that all whistleblowers are courageous and have the audacity to sacrifice their respect and their career, only to bring to light legal or ethical violations. (The Courage of a Whistleblower, 2020). A piece in PLoS Medicine looked at medical whistleblowers who exposed fraud or faulty marketing practices or unreported side-effects in pharmaceuticals and these whistleblowers described the decision to speak up as a duty to enhancing public health and safety even while they faced threats of retaliation (Waytz, 2021). A study by Adam Waytz found the greatest driver of decisions to speak up were moral concerns, not self-interested pragmatic concerns (Waytz, 2021). People might have financial interests given that some organizations and governments offer whistleblower bounties but across the board when people decide to blow the whistle they're doing so for strictly moral reasons, and they ask themselves "will I make the world a better place by exposing wrongdoing?" (Waytz, 2021). Adam Waytz concludes that there are two reasons why whistleblowers come out. First, whistleblowers simply cannot stand unfairness and injustice, and second, they are the epitome of universalist values & compassions towards a global circle of humanity.

### **III. THE LENS OF SOCIAL-PSYCHOLOGICAL THEORIES**

Empirical findings regarding the personal correlates of whistleblowing intentions and actions are typically interpreted through the lens of social-psychological theories of behavior (R. and Viswesvaran, 2005). Hollander's Idiosyncrasy Model 1958 suggests that those individuals who are considered to be the best contributors to the group and organizational objectives will be given greater leeway to deviate from the group or organizational norms, so good job performers, are more likely to have accumulated idiosyncrasy credits (interpersonal bonuses) within the organization, thus providing some latitude to report wrongdoing without suffering retaliation, and more importantly, to effect the desired change (R. and Viswesvaran, 2005). Pheffer and Salancik's (1978) Resource Dependence Theory posits that when one party possesses resources upon which another is dependent, that party will be more powerful. Within the whistleblowing context, an individual with more experience, tenure, and better job performance is more valuable to an organization, thus giving them, some leverage to report misdeeds, hence perceived leverage may increase whistleblowing potential and action (R. and Viswesvaran, 2005).

Theories of power relationships suggest that individuals gain and exercise various bases of power by possessing valued and not easily replaceable characteristics, thus, employees with better job performance and longer tenure are more likely to be inclined and successful to persuade authorities to stop the undesirable acts, also increasing the potential they will report a transgression (R. and Viswesvaran, 2005). While results seem to differ slightly across studies, whistleblowers tend to have good job performance, to be more highly educated, to hold higher-level or supervisory positions, to score higher on tests of moral reasoning, and to value whistleblowing in the face of unethical behavior (R. and Viswesvaran, 2005).

There are three options for organizational employees to address an unsatisfactory situation faced within an organization, one, to leave the organization, two, to voice discontent (i.e., blow the whistle), or three, to remain silent (R. and Viswesvaran, 2005). Employees with greater tenure are more invested in the organization and may prefer voice to exit. This is consistent with what the theories of power in organizations have predicted, that is, employees with greater tenure and greater power to effect change may prefer voice to exit or silence (R. and Viswesvaran, 2005). In a similar vein, individuals demonstrating higher organizational commitment are more invested in staying with the organization, therefore are more likely to blow the whistle rather than exit the organization, particularly when the prospect of continued wrongdoing is uncomfortable or unacceptable (R. and Viswesvaran, 2005). Thus, theoretical explanations based on available idiosyncrasy credits, power relations, voice-exit choices, and control theory are congruent with empirical findings that older, high-performing, more committed, and more experienced employees are more likely to report wrongdoing in and by organizations (R. and Viswesvaran, 2005).

#### **IV. ED SNOWDEN- HERO OR TRAITOR?**

The twentieth century was the age of Civil Disobedience, and the twenty-first century was the era of Whistleblowing (Delmas, 2015). The one name that is always associated with the 21<sup>st</sup> Century of whistleblowing is that of Ed Snowden, a 29-year-old former National Security Agent contractor who executed the single largest leak of classified intelligence in modern American history (Weinstein, 2021). The cooperation of select journalists and media outlets made it possible for him to come out (Weinstein, 2021). After 2 days of blowing the whistle, Snowden revealed his identity and then took refuge in Russia. American citizens have ambiguous views about him. Snowden caused damage as his leaks not only revealed sources and methods but also diminished America's cyber power in an increasingly competitive pool of actors (Weinstein, 2021). His leaks left American credibility severely tattered at precisely

the same time that America's adversaries were in jeopardy of commanding almost no international credibility on cyberspace policy whatsoever. Snowden's leaks brought "Post Snowden Era", where the policies governing the American cyber operations warrant more public scrutiny. For some, Snowden was a hero who shed light on the monumental invasion of privacy, for others, he is a Moscow-based fugitive who committed grave damage to the U.S. national security interests and reputation (Weinstein, 2021).

## V. CONCLUSION

Whistleblowers give up their entire careers, and their social status for what actually matters. There have been extreme cases where whistleblowers have been found dead under suspicious circumstances, for example when in 2012, two chief medical officers were murdered in Uttar Pradesh after they had raised concerns involving alleged corruption surrounding the National Rural Health Mission (Chatterjee, 2015). There are many forms of retaliation and discrimination in the workplace resulting from whistleblowing, such as dismissal, punitive transfers, harassment, withholding promotion (Chatterjee, 2015).

To support whistleblowers, the government and the authorities should have an enforceable channel of legal protection. Whistleblower Protection Act, in Japan, explicitly lists violations of food, health, safety, and environmental laws (Chatterjee, 2015). The Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 protects most of the working population and was passed after the high death rates in pediatric cardiac surgery in Bristol were reported in the 1990s in the United Kingdom. Whistleblower legislation should clearly define the scope of disclosures such as in Japan, the UK, and the US (Chatterjee, 2015). On 9 May 2014, after years of bureaucracy, India's Whistle Blowers Protection Act 2011 has been enacted, but no hope of implementation (Chatterjee, 2015). In a country already suffering from abysmal corruption, whistleblowing legislation becomes even more indispensable. It is high time, the legislature makes strong laws with strict implementation to protect those, who stand for truth. I salute to all the whistleblowers out there, who are fighting a war against the respective authorities. It is a life-long struggle they encounter, and as freedom fighters claimed, *Satyameva Jayate*.

\*\*\*\*\*

## VI. REFERENCES

- Chatterjee, P., 2015. Whistleblowing in India: what protections can doctors who raise concerns expect?. *BMJ*, [online] 350(feb24), pp.1-3. Available at: <<https://www.bmj.com/content/350/bmj.h763>>
- Delmas, C., 2015. The Ethics of Government Whistleblowing. *Social Theory and Practice*, [online] 41(1), pp.77-105. <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/24332319>>
- Icaew.com. 2021. Coronavirus: How can directors support effective whistleblowing in the current crisis?. [online] Available at: <<https://www.icaew.com/technical/corporate-governance/roles/company-directors/directors-guidance/how-can-directors-support-effectivewhistleblowing-in-the-current-crisis>>
- Lamb, M., 2020. [online] Available at: <<https://www.peoplemanagement.co.uk/experts/legal/coronavirus-and-whistleblowing#gref>> [Accessed 29 March 2021].
- The Courage of a Whistleblower. 2020. [DVD] insiderexclusive.
- R. Jessica, Chockalingam Viswesvaran., 2005. Whistleblowing in Organizations: An Examination of Correlates of Whistleblowing Intentions, Actions, and Retaliation. *Journal of Business Ethics*, [online] Vol. 62, No. 3 (Dec., 2005), pp. 277-297<<http://www.jstor.org/stable/25123666>>
- Waytz, A., 2021. Why do whistleblowers risk speaking out?. [video] Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7MzWYJhst4E>> [Accessed 26 March 2021].
- Whistleblower Lawyers, 2021. Understanding the Mind of a Whistleblower. Available at: <<https://www.thewhistleblowerlawyer.com/blog/psychology-of-whistleblowing/>> [Accessed 19 March 2021].
- Weinstein, D., 2021. Snowden and U.S. Cyb. Georgetown Journal of International Affairs, 2014, International Engagement on Cyber IV (2014), [online] pp.4-11. Available at: <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/43773644>> [Accessed 29 March 2021].

\*\*\*\*\*