

## PERSONAL VIEW

# Blowing whistle is good for business

THE delight with which business representatives greeted the further delay in the introduction of the Whistleblowers Protection Bill (The Sunday Times, November 7) demonstrates a misunderstanding of the potential benefits such legislation could hold for business.

This attitude will lead consumers to fear that corporate malpractice really is endemic. This mistrust cannot be good for business.

Whistleblowing is often used as a derogatory term linked with disloyalty and "grassing" as we instinctively recognise the duty of employees to respect the commercial confidentiality of their employer.

However, if the employer is doing harm to society, be it to our pockets through overcharging or to our health by flouting safety regulations, we should be grateful to the brave person who dares to expose it.

The fear that legal protection for whistleblowers will bring every crank with a grudge against his or her employer out of the woodwork underestimates the heart-searching and heavy personal cost that whistleblowers and their families incur even with the benefit of legal protection.

The purpose of whistleblowing legislation is to deal with matters of public concern not individual grievances. Sound legislation does not reward cranks, only those with a genuine problem to expose.

The idea of a whistleblowers' charter is based on the eminently sensible notion that employees working within an organisation are the most likely to know what is going on. In many workplaces senior management is too far removed from day-to-day practices to spot wrongdoing and for non-executive directors it is even more difficult.

However, these are the people who will be held responsible and must answer to the courts and the media when the cat finally gets out of the bag.

If companies don't have a defined system that allows staff to report issues without fear of reprisal, for example to specially trained managers or through advice hotlines, their employees have no choice but to go outside the organisation.

If there are no reporting systems and processes to ensure employee concerns are addressed there is a clear message that management does not care and would prefer not to know.

A healthy culture and a strong values system is undoubtedly effective in helping to protect a firm making it far less likely that bad behaviour will be tolerated.

We also need to recognise the impact that the culture of the organisation can have in allowing malpractice. People follow group norms and rationalise behaviour based on what everybody else is doing. Consensus and "the way we do things around here" are strong influences. This makes it imperative that managers find a way to listen to the voices that express concerns.

What better signal to send to staff of a desire for a culture of openness and accountability than making it clear to them through the introduction of defined formal processes that they can raise concerns without fear of reprisal?

Organisations that introduce arrangements for employees to blow the whistle internally should be applauded. In showing such concern they are protecting their shareholders, customers, suppliers, partners and of course their staff.

**Grainne Madden**  
founder,  
GMJ Associates