



OVERWHELMING PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR WHISTLEBLOWERS ACCORDING TO NEW UNIVERSITY OF GREENWICH SURVEY.

Most would report wrong-doing in their organisation, but fewer think that society finds it whistleblowing acceptable.

New research shows 4 out of 5 Britons think that people should be supported for revealing serious wrongdoing, even if it means revealing inside information. However, under half of the respondents (47%) thought whistleblowing is an acceptable thing to do in our society. Hence, people think society is less supportive of it than it should be.

Three quarters of respondents, who are employees or members of an organisation, also indicated that if they observed wrongdoing, they would feel personally obliged to report it to someone in their organisation. However, a smaller proportion were confident their organisation would stop wrongdoing if they reported it, and less than half thought management in their organisation were serious about protecting people who report wrongdoing. Still, almost 9 out of 10 in Britain believe whistleblowers should be able to use the media to draw attention to wrongdoing (either as a first resort, when there become specific reasons to do so or as a last resort).

Dr Wim Vandekerckhove from the Work and Employment Relations Unit (WERU) at the University of Greenwich, who leads the research, believes that at a time where a change in the UK legislation on whistleblower protection is demanded by different actors and in different directions, it is important to take stock of how citizens feel about whistleblowing. Any changes to the legislation should be in line with attempts to close the gaps identified by this research.

Dr Vandekerckhove concludes that this research shows people will raise concern inside their organisation, but adds: 'If we don't make it safer for employees to speak up inside their organisations, people will support those who blow the whistle to the media.' Political, business and community leaders must accept this new reality, and develop and implement legislation and policies that make it safe and effective to speak up about wrongdoing inside the organisation.

This research was funded by the University of Greenwich Business School. ComRes interviewed 2,000 adults online from 26th to 28th October 2012. Data were weighted to be demographically representative of all British adults aged 18+. ComRes is a member of the British Polling Council and abides by its rules. Full data tables are available at ComRes.co.uk.

Dr Wim Vandekerckhove is Senior Lecturer at the University of Greenwich where he researches and teaches on whistleblowing, business ethics, and organisational behaviour. He has published widely in academic journals and books, and is a regular international speaker at conferences and events on whistleblowing and business ethics.

The survey is part of an ongoing international project measuring public attitudes to whistleblowing. Findings in Australia show a similar thrust as these from Britain.

Full research report available at: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=2176193>

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UK Public Attitudes to Whistleblowing

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Summary

- This survey was conducted online by ComRes for the University of Greenwich, on 26-28 October 2012, of a stratified national random sample of 2,000 British adults aged 18+ (see page 6)
- Half of all Britons (53%) believe **too much information is kept secret in organisations** in our society. The remainder are split between those who think about the right amount of information is kept secret (22%), a small number who think not enough information is kept secret (8%), and 16% who did not know. (Q1)
- A large majority of the British (81%) consider it more important to **support** whistleblowers for revealing serious wrongdoing in organisations, even if they reveal inside information, than to punish them for revealing information (6%). (Q3)
- When asked for their personal opinion, 71% consider it acceptable for someone to blow the whistle on **people in charge** of an organisation, and 70% find this acceptable on **other staff or workers**. A reduced majority (58%) finds it acceptable to reveal wrongdoing by a **family member or friend** in the organisation. (Q4)
- Of the 54% of respondents who identified as an employee or organisation member, 75% also indicated that if they observed wrongdoing, they would feel **personally obliged to report it** to someone in their organisation. (Q6)
- The results indicate a large gap between citizens' personal values and expectations, and current British social and organisational standards towards whistleblowing as perceived by respondents:
 - Despite high levels of people saying whistleblowers should be supported (81%), only 47% of adults believe British society finds it **'generally acceptable'** (Q2)
 - Only 58% of employees or organisation members are confident their organisation **would do something appropriate about a wrongdoing** if they reported it (Q6)
 - Less than half (46%) of employees or organisation members polled see their management as serious about **protecting people** who report wrongdoing (Q6)
- About half of the British adults (51%) think the **most effective** way to stop serious wrongdoing is to report it to people in authority, via the official channels. (Q7)
- However, a large majority (88%) still believe that whistleblowers should also be able to **use the media (including journalists and the internet)** to draw attention to wrongdoing – whether as a first option (10%), when there become specific reasons to do so (34%) or as a last resort (44%). (Q8)
- These results tend to indicate that the British public are generally supportive of whistleblowing – inside their organisations as well as to the media – as an important integrity measure for organisations in society.
- The results also indicate that in Britain, people are less sure that there is wide spread support for speaking up about serious wrongdoing in organisations. This is a call to both political and organisational policy makers to improve organisational cultures and public trust in our institutions. This research shows people will raise concern inside their organisation if that route can be made more safe and effective. If not, people will support those who blow the whistle to the media.

Questions and results

The following questions are part of a study funded and conducted by the University of Greenwich.

The questions ask your views about when and how someone who has 'inside information' about serious wrongdoing in organisations, should reveal it to people who may be able to stop the wrongdoing.

Revealing inside information like this, is often called 'whistleblowing'

Please click the button to continue

1.

'Inside information' is information that someone has because of their role in an organisation – for example, as an employee of a government department or a business, or as a member of an education, religious or community organisation.

Often inside information is secret or confidential, for good reason. However, often it is also about important things going on within the organisation.

Which one of the following comes closest to your view? (*select one answer*)

1	In Britain, too much information is kept secret in organisations	53 %
2	In Britain, about the right amount of information is kept secret in organisations	22 %
3	In Britain, not enough information is kept secret in organisations	8 %
99	Don't know	16 %
		100.0 %

Base: all respondents [n=2,000]

2.

Sometimes, inside information can be about serious wrongdoing. This is when a person or organisation does things that are unlawful, unjust, dangerous or dishonest enough to harm the interests of individuals, the organisation, or wider society.

Which one of the following comes closest to your view? (*select one answer*)

1	In British society, it is generally unacceptable for people to speak up about serious wrongdoing, if inside information would have to be revealed	32 %
2	In British society, it is generally acceptable for people to speak up about serious wrongdoing, even if it means revealing inside information	47 %
99	Neither / Don't know	22 %
		100.0 %

Base: all respondents [n=2,000]

3.

Which of the following best describes what you think should happen in British society? *(select one answer)*

1	People should be supported for revealing serious wrongdoing, even if it means revealing inside information	81 %
2	People who reveal inside information should be punished, even if they are revealing serious wrongdoing	6 %
99	Neither / Don't know	13 %
		100.0 %

Base: all respondents [n=2,000]

4.

And how acceptable do you personally think it is for someone to reveal inside information about serious wrongdoing by each of these different types of people? To reveal inside information about ... *(select on answer per row)*

	To reveal inside information about...	Acceptable		Neither / Don't know	Unacceptable		
		Highly	Fairly		Fairly	Highly	
A	Serious wrongdoing by people in charge of an organisation	56 %	15 %	13 %	4 %	13 %	100 %
		71%			16 %		
B	Serious wrongdoing by other staff or workers in an organisation	44 %	25 %	14 %	6 %	10 %	100 %
		70 %			17 %		
C	Serious wrongdoing by a family member or personal friend working in the organisation	32 %	26 %	23 %	8 %	10 %	100 %
		58 %			18 %		

Base: all respondents [n=2,000]

5.

Are you currently a member of an organisation? Choose the answer that best describes your present role, if any. *(select one answer)*

1	Manager or director of an organisation	4 %
2	Employee of an organisation	35 %
3	Self-employed or contractor	6 %
4	Volunteer or unpaid worker	5 %
5	Other type of organisation member (including student or other community group member)	4 %
99	None / not a member of any organisation	46 %
		100.0 %

Base: all respondents [n=2,000]

6. *(if member of an organisation)*

Thinking about your role in the organisation you mentioned – how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? *(select one answer per row)*

		Disagree		Neither / Don't know	Agree		
		Strongly	Slightly		Slightly	Strongly	
A	If I observed wrongdoing, I would feel personally obliged to report it to someone in my organisation	2 %	4 %	19 %	32 %	44 %	100 %
		6 %			75 %		
B	If I reported wrongdoing to someone in my organisation, I am confident something appropriate would be done about it	7 %	11 %	24 %	32 %	27 %	100 %
		18 %			58 %		
C	Management in my organisation is serious about protecting people who report wrongdoing	5 %	8 %	41.3 %	23 %	22 %	100 %
		13 %			46 %		

Base: all who say they are a member of an organisation [n=1,114]

7. (entire sample)

In different societies, there are different views on the most effective way to get action to stop serious wrongdoing. Which one of these do you think is the most effective way in British society?
(select one answer)

1	By reporting the serious wrongdoing to people in authority, via the official channels	51 %
2	By reporting the serious wrongdoing to journalists or news organisations	19 %
3	By reporting the serious wrongdoing directly to the general public, via the internet, Twitter, Facebook or on online blogs	7 %
4	Some other way	2 %
5	None of the above – in British society, there is no effective way to get action to stop serious wrongdoing	12 %
99	Don't know	9 %
		100.0 %

Base: all respondents [n=2,000]

8.

If someone in an organisation has inside information about serious wrongdoing, when do you think they should be able to use a journalist, the media, or the internet to draw attention to it?
(select one answer)

		Ever / Never?	When reason to / last resort?	Full details
1	As a first option, in any situation	88 %	43 %	10 %
2	Whenever there become specific reasons to do so			34 %
3	Only as a last resort, if all else fails			44.3 %
4	Never	5 %	5 %	5 %
99	Don't know	8 %	8 %	8 %
		100.0 %	100.0 %	100.0 %

Base: all respondents [n=2,000]

Methodology

Questions

- Developed by Griffith University, University of Melbourne, University of Greenwich, Newspoll, and ComRes in light of existing surveys, qualitative data and in consultation with key members of the International Whistleblowing Research Network worldwide.
- This poll was also held in Australia in May 2012.

Sample

- Conducted among 2,000 British respondents aged 18+.
- Respondents in the sample were randomly selected to complete the survey online by ComRes.
- Data were weighted to be demographically representative of all British adults aged 18+.
- Full data tables are available at comres.co.uk.

Interviews

- Conducted over the period 26-28 October 2012.

Research Ethics

- ComRes is a member of the British Polling Council and abides by its rules.
 - Research approved by the University of Greenwich Research Ethics Committee.
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