

### **3. WHO BLOWS THE WHISTLE, WHO DOESN'T AND WHY?**

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#### **3.1. Introduction**

In the previous chapter it was demonstrated that whistleblowing is more prevalent than is generally believed. However large numbers of employees clearly observe wrongdoing within their organisation, but neither speak up nor take any other action in response. It was also shown that there are significant differences in reporting and inaction rates across organisations – that is, in both the proportions of employees who having perceived wrongdoing, speak up about it, or alternatively who appear to take no action. What explains these significant differences?

Later chapters will examine the relationship between different reporting and inaction rates in organisations, and their approach to whistleblowing including the quality of their whistleblowing procedures. In this chapter we drill further into the data from the Employee Survey to see what might explain differences in reporting rates at the level of the individual employee. Clearly, understanding the drivers of and impediments to reporting wrongdoing is of crucial importance for the development of practices and programs to encourage those with evidence of wrongdoing to come forward – for example, by informing the development of new procedures or the content of workplace educational initiatives. This is especially so when organisational practices and the nature of the wrongdoing itself may be the primary determinants of whether or not an observer of wrongdoing will decide to report it.

There are two common explanations for why some individual employees choose to report wrongdoing they perceive, but others do not. The first is that some types of individuals are predisposed to blow the whistle, and hence that any differences between reporters and non-reporters can be attributed to, and even predicted by, the personal characteristics of the individual observing the wrongdoing. On some stereotypes, a reporter might be more likely to be diligent in their job; or on others, they might be predisposed to conflict. This explanation might be attractive to some managers in organisations, for different reasons. If these characteristics could be identified, a manager seeking to encourage reporting might be able to staff the organisation only with those types of individuals. Conversely, a manager trying to pre-empt or manage some of the conflict that can be provoked by reporting, could use such characteristics to try to anticipate in advance which staff are more likely to report.

In fact, existing international research provides very limited support for this explanation. The first part of the chapter examines whether this is also true in the Australian public sector agencies in this study. Employee Survey respondents who observed wrongdoing are divided into three groups (non-reporters, role reporters and non-role reporters) and compared in terms of their individual characteristics,

involving both socio-demographic and attitude scales. The results confirm the international evidence that only very weak bases exist for trying to predict who is likely to blow the whistle using personal characteristics. It is more likely that depending on the circumstances, almost any employee who perceives wrongdoing could be either induced or provoked to report it.

The second part of the chapter pursues this second explanation, that the individual human element is a less important influence on reporting behaviour than situational factors surrounding the perceived wrongdoing. It compares the same groups, focusing instead on characteristics of the wrongdoing they said they observed, including its perceived frequency, seriousness, and the position in the organisation occupied by the perceived wrongdoers. The results show much more distinct trends in the circumstances where the whistle is likely to be blown. They suggest that employees are more likely to report wrongdoing where it either threatens the core business of the organisation or where it is directed at them personally (or both), and where they perceive it to be more serious and frequent. On the other hand, employees were less likely to report when more than one perceived wrongdoer was involved, and when the wrongdoer(s) included people more senior than them in the organisation. These results suggest not only that the likelihood of reporting depends on the situation, but that the decision whether or not to report is most often a rational act, reflecting normal assessments of risk in the context of the individual's organisational relationships.

Given the evidence in support of this second explanation, the reasons given by employees for reporting or not reporting become crucially important. The third part of the chapter examines these. The reasons given for reporting confirm the earlier findings, and also indicate that many employees will proceed to report wrongdoing if they believe the problem will be corrected, even if they have relatively low knowledge or confidence about whether they will be supported and protected. The reasons for *not reporting* mirror this picture. Putting aside those who did not report because others already had, or because they took other action, the overwhelming reason given for not reporting was the belief that no action would follow. A lesser, but still very important reason for not reporting was the fear of reprisal – particularly of reprisal from the perceived wrongdoer, and especially where the wrongdoer was more senior in the organisation than the employee concerned.

These results confirm the soundness of the basic objectives of whistleblowing legislation and procedures, discussed in chapter 1. The encouragement of the reporting appears to turn directly on employee confidence that the organisation will take effective action to stop or remedy the perceived wrongdoing. In many cases the decision to report will also hinge on an employee's assessment of the associated risk, and especially whether the organisation is capable of protecting them from adverse outcomes where more senior employees or management are involved. The same results show, however, that in many instances, current whistleblowing policies are struggling to deliver the levels of employee confidence necessary to satisfy these primary preconditions of reporting. Many of the solutions lie in the types of procedural and legislative reform discussed in later chapters.

In conclusion, this chapter also discusses the need for managers to abandon some of the stereotypical views of whistleblowers that receive little support from this analysis, and focus on the encouragement and better management of reporting. The evidence suggests this might usefully be pursued by ensuring that management responses to whistleblowing reflect and embed a larger commitment to organisational justice. This concept recognises that the decision to report or not report is most often

based on differing rational assessments as to outcome, considered in an organisational context (Colquitt, Greenberg, & Scott, 2005). While the application of organisational justice to whistleblowing events and research has been suggested elsewhere (Trevino, Weaver & Reynolds, 2006), it becomes clear from the present study that this concept can do much to inform better management responses to whistleblowing.

### **Notes on the analyses**

The results in this chapter are based primarily on the Employee Survey. As outlined in chapters 1 and 2, respondents were asked to nominate the most serious type of wrongdoing for which they had direct evidence, with direct evidence defined as *'something that you personally observed, experienced or was formally reported to you'*. Participants were then asked a number of questions about that wrongdoing, and whether or not they reported it. The Employee Survey also contained questions about the employee's organisational experiences and perceptions.

In the previous chapter, and later chapters, many of the analyses focus on public interest whistleblowing by excluding those respondents for whom the most serious type of wrongdoing falls into the category of 'personnel and workplace grievances'. In this chapter, however, it is useful to include all the wrongdoing types offered by the Employee Survey, both for comparison and because of the conclusions this ultimately supports about the need for whistleblowing procedures to reflect a broader commitment to organisational justice. Key differences between the major wrongdoing categories are nevertheless shown for particular results.

For the current analyses, participants were divided into three main groups: employees who observed wrongdoing and: (1) did not report it (non-reporters: n=3125); (2) reported it as part of their role as defined in chapter 2 (role reporters: n=619); and (3) reported it outside their role (non-role reporters: n=1497). This group of non-role reporters corresponds most closely to the 'whistleblowing' definition used elsewhere in this book, although for the reasons just given, in this chapter it also includes employees who reported 'personnel and workplace grievances'.

The three groups were compared on a range of personal and situational variables, using MANOVA and Chi-square statistical procedures as appropriate. To facilitate readability, statistical results are not reported in detail, and only findings for which there was a statistically significant difference ( $p < .01$ ) are shown (indicated in tables by a tick, ✓).

## **3.2. Employee Characteristics**

There are several reasons why an effort is often made to try to identify, or predict, whether particular types of employees are more likely than others to report wrongdoing. However, international research suggests that demographic, personality and attitudinal variables are unreliable identifiers of prospective whistleblowers. For example, a literature review by Near and Miceli (1996) identified males as more likely to blow the whistle, but a recent meta-analysis found females to be more likely to be whistleblowers (Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2005). To present an attitudinal example, Near and Miceli (1996) reported that job satisfaction was unrelated to whistleblowing, but this finding was contradicted by Mesmer-Magnus

and Viswesvaran (2005). Similarly, Brewer and Selden (1998) contradict both Miceli and Near (1996) and Mesmer-Magnus and Viswesvaran (2005) in reporting that ‘commitment’ positively predicts whistleblowing.

The inconsistent results across different studies already constrain the validity of demographic and attitudinal variables as identifiers of whistleblowers. The present study also sought to establish whether this was the case in an Australian public sector context, and by so doing, to determine more clearly whether there is any value to any particular stereotypes of a whistleblower, or alternatively whether other frames of reference are needed to explain when wrongdoing is or is not reported.

Data were collected on both socio-demographic characteristics of employees, and their responses on a number of scales and other survey items. Results for these data are presented separately.

### ***Socio-demographic variables***

Results for demographic data are summarised in Tables 3.1 and 3.2. As shown in Table 3.1, age, tenure in the public sector, and tenure in the current organisation significantly discriminated among the three groups. In discussing these and subsequent results, most attention is given to the comparison between non-role reporters and the other two groups, since non-role reporters are closest to the traditional notion of ‘whistleblowers’. Accordingly, on average, those who reported outside of their role:

- were older than non-reporters but younger than role reporters;
- had longer tenure in the public sector than non-reporters but not as long as role reporters; and
- had shorter tenure in their current organisation than role reporters but did not significantly differ from non-reporters.

***Table 3.1. Reporting behaviour by characteristics of the employee (means)***

Variable (years)	Mean			Significance		
	1 Non- Report	2 Role Report	3 Non-Role Report	1v2	1v3	2v3
Age	42.3	46	43.1	✓	✓	✓
Tenure in public sector	14.7	20.2	15.4	✓	✓	✓
Tenure in organisation	10.0	13.8	10.6	✓		✓

Other demographic variables are shown in Table 3.2. Note that because of the nature of these data (categorical rather than continuous), it is not possible to conduct direct comparisons between each group as was done for Table 3.1. The statistical analysis examines the overall significant difference in the variables shown, although, exercising caution, it is possible to make some inferences about where the difference lies among the various groups. For ease of interpretation, variables for which there were more than two categories (e.g. level of education) were collapsed into two categories. There were overall significant differences for gender, role in the

organisation, employment status, language, and work-unit size. Employees who reported outside their role:

- were more likely than the other two groups to be female;
- were markedly less likely than role reporters to be managers, but only slightly less likely to be managers than non-reporters;
- were less likely than role reporters to have an audit role (or similar), but somewhat more likely to have an audit role than non-reporters;
- earned less than role reporters, but did not differ from non-reporters;
- were somewhat less likely to be permanent than role reporters but slightly more likely to be so than non-reporters;
- were somewhat more likely than role reporters to speak a language other than English at home, but somewhat less likely than non-reporters to do so; and
- were more likely to be in smaller work units than role reporters, but were somewhat less likely to be in smaller units than non-reporters.

**Table 3.2. Reporting behaviour by characteristics of the employee (percentages)**

Variable	Percentage		
	Non-Report	Role Report	Non-Role Report
Gender:			
<i>Male</i>	49.3%	56.5%	43.2%
<i>Female</i>	50.7%	43.5%	56.8%
Role – Management:			
<i>Yes</i>	17.6%	71.3%	14.0%
<i>No</i>	82.4%	28.7%	86.0%
Role - Audit etc:			
<i>Yes</i>	20.8%	46.7%	25.5%
<i>No</i>	79.2%	53.3%	74.5%
Salary range:			
< \$59,000	54.7%	18.0%	54.1%
≥ \$60,000	45.3%	82.0%	45.9%
Employment status:			
<i>Non-permanent</i>	9.2%	3.4%	6.6%
<i>Permanent</i>	90.8%	96.6%	93.4%
Language other than English at home:			
<i>Yes</i>	10.8%	6.3%	9.2%
<i>No</i>	89.2%	93.7%	90.8%
Size of immediate work unit:			
≤ 20	66.0%	51.5%	62.8%
≥ 20	34.0%	48.5%	37.2%

It should be noted that a number of these variables are likely to be interrelated. Age, tenure in the public sector, tenure in the current organisation, role in the organisation, employment status, and salary are all potentially related in varying

degrees to respondents' seniority in the organisation. For example, managers are likely to be permanent employees, be older and earn more.

Our main interest is in identifying how employees who reported outside their role differed from the other two groups. There are major differences between non-role reporters and role reporters. In general, role reporters are more likely to have the cluster of characteristics associated with seniority. This is hardly surprising given that by definition many role reporters are in supervisory positions over other staff. Role reporters are also less likely to be female, which again probably reflects the lack of women in supervisory roles.

Of more interest is the comparison between non-role reporters and non-reporters. Here there differences are less extreme. In general there is tendency for non-role reporters to possess more seniority characteristics than non-reporters. Even though this seniority was not directly related to their reporting behaviour (inasmuch as it is not clear that they reported *because* of their role) it may be that seniority gave them greater confidence to report, or more extensive knowledge of reporting procedures. The finding for gender is more interesting. Women, if they have direct evidence of wrongdoing, are proportionately more likely to report outside there role than are men. At this stage we can only speculate on the reasons. Perhaps women have a greater sense of duty; or they may have higher reporting rates because they are less inclined to deal with the matter themselves.

Finally, it is worth noting variables for which there were no significant differences among groups. We found no evidence that reporting behaviour varied for Indigenous cultural background, union membership, level of education, or work location (urban/rural).

### **Attitude scales**

The Employee Survey contained a number of standardised scales, as well as items written for this study. Scales are described in Table 3.3, beginning with measures of Organisational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB) introduced in chapter 1. All items in each scale run from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree. Alpha ( $\alpha$ ) levels describe the degree of internal consistency of each scale, that is, the extent to which each item in the scale contributes to the overall construct (they all measure the same thing). Possible values run from 0 to 1 and any score over 0.7 is considered satisfactory. On this basis, all scales with the exception of the Personal Industry subscale may be considered to have good internal consistency, and Personal Industry is sufficiently close to the criterion to proceed with its use in a research context.

**Table 3.3. Summary of measures used in the study**

Measure	Description	Items	$\alpha$
Organisational Citizenship Behaviour (Moorman & Blake, 1995)			
<i>Interpersonal Helping</i>	Assisting others with work related problems	5	.74
<i>Individual Initiative</i>	Being communicative and attempting to influence others in the workplace, and behaviour which may be seen as rocking the	5	.80

	boat		
<i>Personal Industry</i>	Task related behaviours that go beyond the standard required in terms of innovation, persistence, responsibility, and being a good example to others	4	.67
<i>Loyal Boosterism</i>	Promoting, protecting and defending the organisation and remaining committed under adverse conditions	5	.83
Whistleblowing propensity (Keenan et al, 2000)			
<i>Individual propensity to whistleblow</i>	Having favourable personal opinions towards whistle blowing.	5	.83
<i>Organisational propensity to whistleblow</i>	Possessing information on how to report whistle blowing	5	.84
Trust in management (Robinson & Rousseau, 1994)	Belief that management will treat employees fairly	7	.90
Job satisfaction (Agho & Mueller, 1992)	Enjoyment of role and working conditions	6	.86
Opinion of legislation (new)	Belief in the effectiveness of existing whistle blower legislation	6	.76
Management response (new)	Perceived level of openness to employee reports on the part of management.	13	.94

Results of the analyses comparing the three employee groups with respect to these scales are shown in Table 3.4. There were significant differences on most scales (with the exception of Personal Industry), although the pattern of significance between particular groups varied. It was found that on average, employees who reported outside their role:

- had less trust in management than both role reporters and non-reporters;
- had less job satisfaction than both role reporters and non-reporters;
- had higher levels of Interpersonal Helping than non-reporters but did not differ from role reporters;
- had higher levels of Individual Initiative than non-reporters but less than role reporters;
- had lower levels of Loyal Boosterism than role reporters but did not differ from non-reporters;
- had higher Individual Propensity to Whistleblow than non-reporters but less than role reporters;
- had lower Organisational Propensity to Whistleblow than role reporters , but the same as non-reporters;
- had less favourable opinions of the legislation than both role reporters and non-reporters; and
- had less favourable opinions of management response to whistleblowing than both role reporters and non-reporters.

**Table 3.4. Reporting behaviour by attitudes of the employee (means)**

Variable	Mean			Significance		
	1 Non- Report	2 Role Report	3 Non-Role Report	1v2	1v3	2v3
Trust in management team	3.4	3.7	3.1	✓	✓	✓
Job satisfaction	3.5	3.7	3.3	✓	✓	✓
Organisational Citizenship Behaviour						
<i>Interpersonal Helping</i>	3.9	4.0	4.0	✓	✓	
<i>Individual Initiative</i>	3.7	4.0	3.8	✓	✓	✓
<i>Personal Industry</i>	3.8	3.9	3.9	✓		
<i>Loyal Boosterism</i>	3.5	3.8	3.5	✓		✓
Whistleblowing propensity						
<i>Individual propensity to whistleblow</i>	4.1	4.3	4.2	✓	✓	✓
<i>Organisational propensity to whistleblow</i>	3.4	3.9	3.4	✓		✓
Opinion of legislation	3.2	3.4	3.1	✓	✓	✓
Management response	3.3	3.6	3.1	✓	✓	✓

Overall the differences between non-role reporters and role reporters were greater than between non-role reporters and non-reporters. However, in either case the differences between the groups were small. When sample sizes are large, such as in the present study, relatively minor differences can show up as being statistically significant. Caution needs to be exercised, therefore, when interpreting the results. For example, while non-role reporters were found to have significantly higher levels of Interpersonal Helping than non-reporters, the difference was just 0.1 on a 5-point scale (a 2 per cent variation). Thus, while there is statistical difference, from a practical point of view not too much should be read into the finding.

With this caveat in mind, some tentative conclusions can be drawn. Looking first at the comparison between non-role reporters and role reporters, role reporters were more positive in their attitudes than non-role reporters on eight of the ten scales (the exceptions being Personal Industry and Interpersonal Helping). As with the demographic data, these findings might be expected given the more senior position that role reporters typically hold.

For the non-role reporters versus non-reporters comparison, there are differences on seven scales (not Personal Industry, Loyal Boosterism, and Organisational Propensity to Whistleblow), and as noted, these differences are small. On the whole, employees who report outside their role see themselves as more dedicated corporate citizens than employees who do not report. This suggests that at least some of the motivation to report wrongdoing comes from a greater commitment to prosocial organisational behaviour and a belief that reporting is for the good of the organisation. As one might expect, they are also more positive towards whistleblowing. However, they are slightly less positive towards their job, the whistleblowing legislation, the likely management response to whistleblowing and are marginally less trusting in the management team than are non-reporters.



One problem with interpreting these results is that the directions of these effects are a matter of speculation. For example, it is not clear whether less trust in the management team encourages employees to report wrongdoing, or whether the experience of reporting wrongdoing makes employees less trusting of the management team. The second of these possibilities probably seems the most likely, as further discussed in chapters 4 and 5.

In addition, when interpreting the results it needs to be borne in mind that, in absolute terms, none of the groups responded negatively on any scale. The lowest mean score was 3.1, which is just on the positive side of the scale midpoint ('neither agree nor disagree'). All other scores were positive. Thus, for example, when it is reported that non-role reporters had lower trust in management, this must be interpreted in relative terms.

## **Summary**

Leaving aside employees whose role included reporting the wrongdoing, these findings indicate a number of personal differences between employees who have direct evidence of wrongdoing and do not report it, and those with direct evidence who do. Non-role reporters are less senior and more likely to be female than non-reporters. They are also more likely to have somewhat more positive views with regard to their level of organisational citizenship and whistleblowing generally, but somewhat more negative views of management and the whistleblowing legislation. Together these results give a picture of whistleblowers as possessing stronger personal motivations to report wrongdoing, but as also being more cynical about the process of reporting. Still, these differences are small and absolute scores are mostly positive.

There is little in the findings to support either of the main stereotypes that might justify attempts to develop a predictive model of whistleblowing, based on personal characteristics. While there is some evidence that reporters either began or ended the process with views consistent with higher organisational citizenship, overall there is little to differentiate them from the larger number of employees who elected not to report. For example, there was no significant difference between the reporters and non-reporters on the Personal Industry scale, the main measure of perceived diligence. There is even less evidence to support a view of whistleblowers as predisposed to conflict, for example because they are disgruntled and embittered employees, driven to report by perverse personal characteristics. This being the case, there are good reasons to believe that explanations for variations in reporting behaviour are more likely to lie outside the individual, in other circumstances such as the characteristics of the wrongdoing itself.

### **3.3. Characteristics of the wrongdoing**

This section examines variations in reporting behaviour as a function of the nature of the wrongdoing which they observed. As discussed at the outset, if the individual characteristics of reporters shed only limited light on who appears likely to report, other explanations are also needed. Internationally, characteristics of the wrongdoing and contextual variables have been shown to have a more consistent

relationship with the decision to report wrongdoing. For example, Near, Rehg, Van Scoter and Miceli (2004) found that reporting rates differed by type of wrongdoing, with non-reporting most likely when employees believed nothing would be done to rectify the situation. Scenario-based research by Brennan and Kelly (2007) found that 96 per cent of participants would report the wrongdoing contained in a scenario rated as very serious, while only 70 per cent would report in a scenario rated as trivial. Similarly, Masser and Brown (1996) reported that whistleblowing was more likely to occur when the wrongdoing was seen to be serious, there was a belief that there would be an improvement after the report, and the threat of retaliation was low. Brewer and Selden (1998) found that reports were made by employees who believed the wrongdoing constituted a threat to the public interest that they (as public servants) were supposed to protect.

Mesmer-Magnus and Viswesvaran (2005) reported that the seriousness of the offence positively predicts whistleblowing, but that this only accounts for three per cent of the final decision. These researchers suggested a number of contextual variables including fear of reprisals, organisational climate and supervisor support are incorporated into the decision to report or not. Further, they drew a distinction between those who stated an intention to make a report and those who actually did report. For example, fear of reprisals was negatively correlated with the intention to make a report, but does not necessarily stop those who see no other option than to make a report.

### ***Wrongdoing type***

From the present study, Table 3.5 shows the most serious type of wrongdoing nominated by respondents, categorised in terms of the same three groups used above: non-reporters, role reporters and non-role reporters. Results are shown in bold for each of the major categories of wrongdoing into which the survey responses were grouped for analytical purposes (see chapter 2 and Appendix 1), and in italics for each of the individual wrongdoing types making up those categories. Because of the large number of wrongdoing categories, statistical analysis was not conducted on these data.

As can be seen, this comparison includes ‘personnel and workplace grievances’ in addition to public interest matters. For all three groups, the most common wrongdoing nominated was bullying of staff, particularly by non-role reporters, for whom this behaviour accounted for one in four of all responses. This suggests that when bullying is the most serious wrongdoing observed (or experienced) by employees, they are relatively likely to report it, by comparison with other forms of grievance such as favouritism in promotion. Across the whole category, however, there was little overall difference between non-reporters and non-role reporters as to the frequency that the relevant wrongdoing was a personnel or workplace grievance. Role reporters were somewhat less likely than the other groups to nominate personnel or workplace grievances, consistent with the fact these often have processes designed to be triggered by the aggrieved employee themselves. Consistently with their roles, role reporters were more likely to nominate the various recognised forms of employee misconduct (theft, sexual harassment, downloading pornography).

**Table 3.5. Most serious type of observed wrongdoing, by reporting behaviour**

Wrongdoing	Percentage		
	Non-Report	Role Report	Non-Role Report
<b>Misconduct for material gain</b>	<b>24.3%</b>	<b>32.3%</b>	<b>17.1%</b>
<i>Theft of money</i>	2.6%	7.6%	2.7%
<i>Theft of property</i>	3.2%	8.1%	2.8%
<i>Bribes</i>	0.7%	1.0%	0.5%
<i>Using official position for services/favours</i>	2.2%	1.2%	1.0%
<i>Giving unfair advantage to contractor etc</i>	1.9%	1.5%	1.2%
<i>Improper use of facilities for private purposes</i>	7.2%	5.8%	3.6%
<i>Rorting overtime/leave</i>	5.6%	5.6%	4.5%
<i>Making false/inflated claims for reimbursement</i>	1.0%	1.7%	0.8%
<b>Conflict of interest</b>	<b>1.3%</b>	<b>1.9%</b>	<b>1.4%</b>
<i>Failing to declare financial interest</i>	0.1%	0.2%	0.3%
<i>Intervening in a decision on behalf of a friend or relative</i>	0.9%	0.5%	0.7%
<i>Improper involvement of a family business</i>	0.3%	1.2%	0.4%
<b>Improper or unprofessional behaviour</b>	<b>12.3%</b>	<b>25.6%</b>	<b>11.6%</b>
<i>Downloading pornography on a work computer</i>	1.6%	3.6%	1.1%
<i>Being drunk/under the influence of illegal drugs at work</i>	4.7%	5.3%	3.6%
<i>Sexual assault</i>	0.2%	1.7%	0.4%
<i>Stalking (unwanted intrusion into personal life)</i>	0.6%	2.6%	1.2%
<i>Sexual harassment</i>	2.3%	6.4%	2.9%
<i>Racial discrimination against a member of the public</i>	0.9%	0.2%	0.8%
<i>Misuse of confidential information</i>	2.0%	5.8%	1.6%
<b>Defective administration</b>	<b>9.4%</b>	<b>6.5%</b>	<b>13.3%</b>
<i>Incompetent or negligent decision-making</i>	6.9%	2.6%	8.1%
<i>Failure to correct serious mistakes</i>	0.5%	0.3%	1.0%
<i>Endangering public health or safety</i>	0.8%	1.3%	1.8%
<i>Producing or using unsafe products</i>	0.1%	-	0.2%
<i>Acting against organisational policy, regulations or laws</i>	1.1%	2.3%	2.2%
<b>Waste or mismanagement of resources</b>	<b>6.5%</b>	<b>3.1%</b>	<b>4.6%</b>
<i>Waste of work funds</i>	3.4%	0.5%	1.0%
<i>Inadequate record keeping</i>	2.6%	2.1%	3.3%
<i>Negligent purchases or leases</i>	0.5%	0.5%	0.3%
<b>Perverting justice or accountability</b>	<b>7.3%</b>	<b>6.4%</b>	<b>9.1%</b>
<i>Covering up poor performance</i>	6.5%	4.5%	7.4%
<i>Misleading or false reporting of agency activity</i>	0.4%	0.3%	0.2%
<i>Covering up corruption</i>	-	0.2%	0.5%
<i>Hindering an official investigation</i>	0.1%	0.3%	0.2%
<i>Unlawfully altering or destroying official records</i>	0.3%	1.2%	0.8%
<b>Personnel and workplace grievances</b>	<b>36.5%</b>	<b>19.2%</b>	<b>37.6%</b>
<i>Racial discrimination against a staff member</i>	1.8%	1.3%	1.6%
<i>Allowing dangerous or harmful working conditions</i>	2.0%	1.3%	3.4%
<i>Unfair dismissal</i>	1.5%	0.5%	0.5%
<i>Failure to follow correct staff selection procedures</i>	4.2%	1.3%	2.5%
<i>Favouritism in selection or promotion</i>	11.6%	0.3%	5.6%
<i>Bullying of staff</i>	15.4%	14.5%	24.0%
<b>Reprisals against whistleblowers</b>	<b>0.4%</b>	<b>0.5%</b>	<b>1.4%</b>
Other	1.9%	4.3%	4.0%
<b>Total (rounded)</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

In the more ‘public interest’ categories, non-reporters and non-role reporters were somewhat more likely than role reporters to nominate wrongdoings affecting the business of the organisation, or associated with behaviour of management or failures of the organisation as a whole (such as incompetent decision making, and covering-up poor performance). Non-role reporters were also somewhat more likely to nominate these types of wrongdoing – that is, to have blown the whistle on them – than the non-reporters, who were somewhat more likely to have observed, but not reported, various types of misconduct involving material gain.

### ***Seriousness, frequency and organisational context***

Differences in reporting behaviour as a function of further characteristics of the nominated wrongdoing are summarised in Tables 3.6 and 3.7. Here the differences become even more pronounced. The wrongdoing nominated by non-role reporters:

- was judged by them to be more serious than the wrongdoing nominated by non-reporters, but not as serious as that nominated by role reporters;
- was judged to be more frequent than the wrongdoing nominated by both other groups;
- was more likely to involve wrongdoing involving only one person than for non-reporters, but less likely than for role reporters; and
- was more likely to involve wrongdoing involving people below or at the respondent’s position than for non-reporters, but less likely than for role reporters.

The wrongdoing nominated by non-role reporters was also more likely to involve wrongdoing that was directed at them, or for which they had direct evidence, than for non-reporters (role reporters by definition will in most cases have had the incident reported to them in their official capacity). However as will be discussed below, much of this result relates to the retention of personnel and workplace grievances in this analysis.

***Table 3.6: Reporting behaviour by further characteristics of wrongdoing (means)***

Variable	Mean			Significance		
	1 Non- Report	2 Role Report	3 Non-Role Report	1v2	1v3	2v3
Seriousness	3.5	4.2	4.0	✓	✓	✓
Frequency	3.0	2.5	3.1	✓	✓	✓

**Table 3.7: Reporting behaviour by further characteristics of wrongdoing (percentages)**

Variable	Percentage*		
	1 Non- Report	2 Role Report	3 Non-Role Report
How found out?			
<i>Directed at me</i>	12.7%	3.6%	34.7%
<i>Invited to participate</i>	3.0%	0.8%	4.9%
<i>Observed it</i>	64.6%	15.2%	56.5%
<i>Direct evidence</i>	9.6%	10.5%	25.5%
<i>Reported to me in my official capacity</i>	8.1%	80.5%	10.0%
<i>Other</i>	9.8%	1.6%	7.5%
How many involved?			
<i>Just one person</i>	39.3%	63.0%	42.9%
<i>More than one person</i>	60.7%	37.0%	57.1%
Position of wrongdoer:			
<i>Below/same as my level</i>	40.8%	86.1%	44.6%
<i>Other</i>	59.2%	13.9%	55.4%

\* Because multiple responses were permitted for this item, the column total exceeds 100%. For this reason, statistical tests cannot be applied to this question.

In summary, wrongdoing that came to the attention of role reporters was relatively more serious, likely to have involved misconduct for material gain or improper behaviour, and likely to have been carried out by one person below or at the level of the role reporter. This profile is consistent with someone in a supervisory role who has observed or received reports from other employees about the misbehaviour of a subordinate.

Comparing the most serious wrongdoing observed by non-role reporters with that observed by non-reporters, it seems that perceived seriousness and frequency of the wrongdoing have a direct influence on the likelihood of a report being made. The likelihood of reporting also increases where an employee has direct evidence of the wrongdoing, in addition or as opposed to simply observing it. These results seem consistent with the types of wrongdoing in the non-grievance category that appear more likely to give rise to whistleblowing, tending to be either more serious by nature, or more likely to directly affect organisational core business, or perhaps more clear-cut to prove. Together, these results suggest that in the majority of cases, the decision to report is probably taken quite rationally.

On the other hand, where the wrongdoing involves multiple participants and participants at a higher organisational level than the observer, reporting is much less likely. This also tends to confirm the rational nature of most employees' decision as to whether or not to report. In these circumstances, the wrongdoing is more likely to be systemic, to involve managers, or to have been allowed to develop because of management laxity. The likelihood of anything being done is therefore also lower. Especially where superiors or managers are perceived as directly responsible, it is reasonable to assume that reporting is also judged to be relatively risky and more likely to invite reprisal. The fact these circumstances emerge as clear indicators of

when employees are likely to report, has important implications for the whistleblowing processes in place in the agencies surveyed.

### ***Degree of personal involvement***

As noted above, in Table 3.7 it can also be seen that a major difference between non-role reporters and non-reporters is whether the wrongdoing was directed at the respondent. The likelihood of a report is also increased when the observer is the object of the wrongdoing. This is also not surprising, since the employee clearly has a greater personal stake in the issue under these circumstances.

How important is this factor, relative to others? If important, it could change the emerging picture of why and when employees are likely to report wrongdoing, because it could suggest a motive that is based more promoting one's self interest. For example, the real determinant or 'tipping point' in the making of the report might not be the reporter's prosocial assessment of the impact of the wrongdoing on the organisation or the public, but simply the fact they have become a direct victim of it. This could support a stereotype that irrespective of what public interest is 'objectively' involved, reporting is still only likely when an employee becomes disgruntled or personally aggrieved by conditions within the organisation.

To test this, comparisons were made to identify any systematic differences between the two groups of non-role reporters – those who indicated they learned of the wrongdoing because it was 'directed at me' (n=526) and those who simply observed it or became aware of it in another way ('not directed at me', n=1171).

Table 3.8 shows the primary explanation for the relative prevalence of 'directed at me' observers among the non-role reporting group. In over 60 per cent of instances, the type of wrongdoing reported was a direct personnel or workplace grievance (mostly bullying). When the wrongdoing involved a range of other improper behaviours, such as sexual harassment or stalking, the fact it was directed at the reporter was also understandably important. However in no other category did the fact that the wrongdoing was directed at the respondent take on any such importance; and in most clear 'public interest' categories, such as misconduct for material gain and defective administration, it becomes relatively unimportant. In these categories, therefore, the earlier analysis stands.

***Table 3.8: Degree of involvement by type of most serious wrongdoing (percentages)***

Variable	Percentage		
	1 Non Report	2 Non-role report - Not directed at me	3 Non-role report - Directed at me
Wrongdoing category:			
<i>Material Gain</i>	24.3%	23.0%	6.8%
<i>Conflict of interest</i>	1.3%	1.5%	1.2%
<i>Improper behaviour</i>	12.3%	11.8%	11.3%
<i>Defective administration</i>	9.4%	16.6%	6.3%
<i>Waste</i>	6.5%	7.0%	0.6%
<i>Pervert Justice</i>	7.3%	12.7%	2.0%
<i>Personnel etc grievances</i>	36.5%	24.5%	62.3%

<i>Reprisals</i>	0.4%	0.1%	3.7%
<i>Other</i>	2.0%	2.8%	5.8%
<u>Total (rounded)</u>	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Notwithstanding that the bulk were complaining of a personnel or workplace grievance, those non-role reporters at whom the wrongdoing was directed provide a general reminder that where the personal involvement is higher, there remains a higher likelihood of a report. There is also likely to be a higher degree of associated conflict within the relevant parts of the organisation, and whether before the report or as a result of it, a lower degree of trust in management's ability to respond properly to the situation. These results are apparent from the differences on attitude scales shown in Table 3.9. While some of the differences may be slight, and whatever the reasons, those who reported having the wrongdoing directed at them:

- had lower trust in management than both other groups;
- had lower job satisfaction than both other groups;
- had lower levels of Loyal Boosterism than 'not directed at me' reporters;
- had a higher levels of Individual Propensity to Whistleblow than non-reporters;
- had lower levels of Organisational propensity to Whistleblow than 'not directed at me' reporters;
- had a poorer opinion of the legislation than both other groups; and
- had less faith in the management response to reporting than both other groups.

**Table 3.9: Degree of involvement by characteristics of the employee (means)**

Variable	Mean			Significance		
	1 Non Report	2 Non-role report - Not directed at me	3 Non-role report - Directed at me	1v2	1v3	2v3
Trust in management team	3.2	3.2	2.8	✓		✓
Job satisfaction	3.4	3.4	3.2	✓		✓
Organisational Citizenship Behaviour						
<i>Loyal Boosterism</i>	3.4	3.5	3.4	✓		✓
Whistleblowing propensity						
<i>Individual propensity to whistleblow</i>	4.0	4.2	4.2	✓	✓	
<i>Organisational propensity to whistleblow</i>	3.2	3.5	3.3	✓		✓
Opinion of legislation	3.1	3.2	2.9		✓	✓

Management response	3.2	3.2	2.8	✓	✓
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Tables 3.10 and 3.11 provide a useful further contrast between these groups. In addition to heightened conflict and risks that the employee has a sourer view of the organisation, the wrongdoing observed by ‘directed at me’ reporters:

- is rated as more serious than the wrongdoing observed by both other groups;
- is rated as more frequent than the wrongdoing observed by both other groups;
- is more likely to involve multiple people than the wrongdoing observed by ‘not directed at me’ reporters; and
- is more likely to involve people above their level than the wrongdoing observed by both other groups.

In other words, irrespective of the presence of personnel and workplace grievances in this analysis, the fact the employee is directly involved does appear to influence the circumstances in which he or she will be prepared to report. In particular, it likely contributes to the perceived seriousness of the matter to the employee, further increasing the likelihood of a report. Direct personal involvement will also likely offset the deterrents to reporting that are found when multiple people are perceived to be responsible, and when they include more senior people. Employees who feel they are on the receiving end of wrongdoing are more likely to be prepared to report it, even when they normally might not, even though the risks of conflict or reprisal would objectively also appear to be higher. These results reinforce the need for an approach to the management of whistleblowing which shows a broader commitment to organisational justice, as discussed further below.

**Table 3.10: Degree of involvement by further characteristics of most serious wrongdoing (means)**

Variable	Mean			Significance		
	1 Non Report	2 Non-role report - Not directed at me	3 Non-role report - Directed at me	1v2	1v3	2v3
Seriousness	3.5	3.9	4.3	✓	✓	✓
Frequency	3.0	3.0	3.4		✓	✓

**Table 3.11: Degree of involvement by further characteristics of most serious wrongdoing (percentages)**

Variable	Percentage		
	1 Non Report	2 Non-role report - Not directed at me	3 Non-role report - Directed at me



How many involved?			
<i>Just one person</i>	39.3%	44.9%	38.2%
<i>More than one person</i>	60.7%	55.1%	61.8%
Position of wrongdoer:			
<i>Below/same as my level</i>	40.8%	50.6%	30.0%
<i>Other</i>	59.5%	49.4%	70.0%

### 3.4. Reasons for reporting or not reporting wrongdoing

Some of the reasons that an employee would report or not report can be inferred from the analyses conducted so far. However, respondents were also asked directly the reason for their decision. The results show a consistency with the evidence that reporting decisions are typically quite rational, reflecting both the employees' desire for the problem to be rectified, and their desire not to suffer as a result of bringing it to notice.

#### ***Why employees report***

Table 3.12 presents the reasons for reporting given by non-role and role reporters in response to the Employee Survey, ranked in order of importance given by the non-role reporters. For comparison, we have also included the reasons that casehandlers and managers in the smaller number of case study agencies thought were important, in their perception of decisions by employees to report wrongdoing (from a matching question in the Casehandlers and Managers Surveys). In both cases the respondents were asked to rate these items on a 4-point scale (1='not at all important', 2='somewhat important', 3='very important', and 4='extremely important').

**Table 3.12: Reasons for reporting by actual and perceived reasons (means)**

Sources: Employee Survey Q27, Casehandler and Manager Survey Q25

Variable	Mean			
	Non-role reporters	Role-Reporters	Case-handlers (perception)	Managers (perception)
I saw it as my ethical responsibility	3.2	3.4	3.0	3.0
The wrongdoing was serious enough	3.1	3.2	3.2	3.2
I believed my report would correct problem	3.1	3.2	3.3	3.2
I had evidence to support my report	3.0	3.1	2.9	2.8
I knew who to report to	2.9	3.1	2.8	2.8
I trusted the person I should	2.9	3.1	3.4	3.4

report to				
I thought I would be supported by management	2.8	3.0	3.2	3.2
I thought I would be supported by co-workers	2.7	2.5	3.0	3.0
I believed I was under a legal responsibility	2.5	3.1	2.6	2.5
I believed I would have legal protection	2.4	2.4	3.1	3.1

Looking at the absolute value of scores, all except two scores are on or above the midpoint ('I believed I would have legal protection' as rated by role reporters and non-role reporters), and most are above 3, indicating that the reasons are judged to be at least 'very important'. It can be seen that there is a close parallel in the order of importance given by role reporters and non-role reporters, although non-role reporters generally rate all the reasons as somewhat less important. The consistent result is that once motivated by seriousness to report the wrongdoing, employees indicated they did so when they had confidence that action would result, and knowledge and/or confidence in the process they were meant to follow. Confidence that they were going to be supported or protected was either less present or less of a consideration.

There is less similarity in the relative importance of reasons given by reporters and those given by casehandlers and managers. An ethical responsibility to report was judged to be the most important reason by both groups of reporters, while trust in the receiver of the report was thought to be the most important reason by casehandlers and managers. Similarly, reporters gave less importance to legal protection than casehandlers and managers thought that they would. Generally, reporters were more likely to rate reasons associated with a sense of duty and the nature of the wrongdoing, while casehandlers and managers thought that they would be more likely to rate guarantees of protection as the most important.

This provides some mixed results for agencies' approaches to whistleblowing. Reporters, it seems, are rather more prosocially-motivated than casehandlers and managers assume them to be. Their belief that a problem is serious and can and should be fixed often appears to rank more highly than their desire for self-protection. On one hand this tends to confirm the prosocial value of whistleblowing, and further explain its prevalence as discussed in chapter 2. On the other hand, it underscores the responsibility of agencies to provide safe and just processes for those who blow the whistle, given that many employees apparently do so notwithstanding the logical risks of intra-organisational conflict or reprisal.

### ***Why employees do not report***

***Table 3.13: Reasons for not reporting by role (percentage)***

Variable	Percentage*		
	Non-role	Role	Total
<b>Inadequate management response:</b>			
<i>I didn't think that anything would be done about it</i>	38.1%	-	36.4%

<i>I didn't trust the person I had to report to</i>	15.5%	-	14.8%
<i>I didn't think the organisation would protect me</i>	13.6%	-	13.0%
<i>I didn't think my identity would be kept secret</i>	13.5%	-	12.8%
<b>Nature of the wrongdoing:</b>			
<i>I didn't have enough evidence to report it</i>	21.4%	9.2%	20.8%
<i>It wasn't important enough to report</i>	15.2%	5.6%	14.8%
<b>Resolved in some other way:</b>			
<i>Someone else had already reported it</i>	18.6%	51.8%	20.1%
<i>I dealt with the matter myself informally</i>	12.9%	14.2%	13%
<i>I dealt with the matter formally as part of my role</i>	3.5%	27.7%	4.6%
<b>Fear of reprisal:</b>			
<i>I was afraid the wrongdoer would take action against me</i>	18.7%	-	17.8%
<i>I was afraid my co-workers would take action against me</i>	8.4%	-	8.0%
<i>I was afraid the organisation would take action against me</i>	9.2%	-	8.8%
<b>Other negative consequences:</b>			
<i>It would have been too stressful to report it</i>	15.1%	-	14.4%
<i>I didn't want to get anyone into trouble</i>	11.3%	0.7%	10.8%
<i>I was aware of others' bad experiences reporting wrongdoing</i>	7.8%	0.7%	7.5%
<i>I had a previous bad personal experience reporting wrongdoing</i>	6.6%	0.7%	6.3%
<i>Other people advised me not to report it</i>	4.0%	-	3.8%
<i>I didn't want to embarrass the organisation</i>	2.5%	-	2.4%
<i>I would not have the support of my family</i>	0.2%	-	0.2%
<b>Unsure of process:</b>			
<i>I didn't think it was my responsibility to report it</i>	10.9%	2.1%	10.5%
<i>I didn't know my legal protection if I reported it</i>	7.9%	-	7.5%
<i>I didn't know who to report it to</i>	7%	0.7%	6.7%

\* multiple responses permitted

Table 3.13 shows the reasons selected by employees who had direct knowledge of wrongdoing but did not report it. Non-reporters have been divided into two groups: those who (1) did not have an official role-reporting position in the organisation (n=2981), and (2) did have an official role-reporting role in the organisation (n= 144). For ease of analysis, we have grouped responses in terms of more general categories.

There are easily discernible differences between the two groups. In almost all cases, the reasons given by employees in reporting roles concerned the fact that the problem was resolved in another way, or a lack of either sufficient seriousness or evidence. These responses were also popular with non-role observers, but relatively less so. If we accept their judgement about the wrongdoing, then in these cases the decision not to report is justifiable, and in the case of role observers, they are not neglecting their role responsibilities.

The reasons given for not reporting by employees who did not have an official role reporting position (non-role observers) are more varied. However they tend to mirror all the evidence presented so far, producing an increasingly consistent picture

of the circumstances that appear to give rise to reporting behaviour. The most common reasons for not reporting were to do with expected management reaction to a report. In particular, over one-third of respondents believed that nothing would be done if they reported the wrongdoing. The other responses concerned a lack of faith in the ability of the organisation to properly handle the whistleblowing process. The frequency with which respondents indicated that they did not report because they did not have appropriate evidence, is also significant. On one hand, this may simply be an exculpatory reason. At the same time, it tends to confirm that the decision as to whether or not to report is a rational one, in which issues of process and risk figure prominently.

In the middle lies another large cluster of responses showing the role that fear of reprisal has in deterring reporting. While fewer than 10 per cent of the respondents said they did not report because of fear of reprisal from management or co-workers, significantly more respondents (17.8 per cent) feared action from the wrongdoer. However these categories are not mutually exclusive. Taken together, a total of 24.4 per cent of non-role observers gave fear of reprisal from any source as a reason for not reporting – making this the second largest reason overall. There is also a large degree of overlap between those who said they feared reprisal, and those who did not think the organisation would protect them (from just such a reprisal).

Table 3.14 also confirms that when many of these respondents said they did not report the wrongdoing for fear of reprisal from the wrongdoer(s), they were referring to wrongdoer(s) who were higher than themselves in the management chain. Allowing that the respondents could make multiple responses, the table shows that, of the non-reporters who indicated fear of the wrongdoer to be a factor, 82 per cent were referring to cases where this included their supervisor and/or higher level managers. Of the non-reporters who indicated a fear of organisational reprisal, at least 91 per cent were referring to this same type of case. These results make it clear that fear of management reprisal is a major reason for non-reporting, particularly when management is also the perpetrator of the wrongdoing. The rational nature of this fear is reinforced by evidence in chapters 5 and 6 about the extent to which those who do blow the whistle report being mistreated by management.

Some of the least common reasons for not reporting were often still significant. These included a range of possible indirect negative consequences of reporting, from the anticipation of stress to not wanting to embarrass the organisation. It is notable that one in ten respondents did not want the wrongdoer to get into trouble. The least significant reasons were those to do with uncertainty about the reporting process. Most respondents, for example, did not seem uncertain about to whom they needed to report wrongdoing (or if they were, it was not seen as a reason not to report).

**Table 3.14. Source of apprehended reprisal risk among non-reporters (%)**

Employee Survey Q25, Q44

Position of wrongdoer(s) in the organisation <sup>a</sup>	Reason for non-reporting		
	<i>Afraid wrongdoer would take action against me</i> (n=557)	<i>Afraid co-workers would take action against me</i> (n=249)	<i>Afraid organisation would take action against me</i> (n=275)
Employee(s) below      Only	2% (9)	5% (13)	1% (4)

level	along with others	4% (25)	11% (27)	5% (15)
	Subtotal	6% (34)	16% (40)	6% (19)
Employee(s) at level	Only	15% (81)	28% (69)	7% (18)
	along with others	11% (59)	19% (48)	9% (26)
	Subtotal	26% (140)	47% (117)	16% (44)
Immediate supervisor(s)	Only	26% (140)	20% (51)	18% (49)
	along with others	15% (86)	16% (41)	17% (48)
	Subtotal	41% (226)	36% (92)	35% (97)
High-level manager(s)	Only	37% (205)	19% (47)	49% (135)
	along with others	14% (76)	11% (28)	18% (50)
	subtotal	51% (281)	30% (75)	67% (185)
<u>Immediate supervisor(s) and/or High-level manager(s)</u>		<u>82% (456)</u>	<u>60% (149)</u>	<u>91% (250)</u>

<sup>a</sup> Subtotals adds to more than 100% as multiple responses permitted. Outside contractors or vendors excluded from this table.

### 3.15: What could be done to increase likelihood of reporting (means)

Variable	Mean
Training managers on how to deal with reports of wrongdoing	2.2
Knowing that I would have support from my co-workers	2.2
My organisation having clear policies on protection of whistleblowers	2.1
Training staff on how to deal with reporting wrongdoing	2.1
My organisation having an active support system for whistleblowers	2.1
Being assured that I would be supported by management if name disclosed	2.0
My organisation having clear policies on reporting wrongdoing	2.0
Being assured name would be kept secret	1.9
Having opportunity to report without giving name	1.9

Finally, non-reporters were also asked if anything could be done to increase the likelihood that they would have reported the wrongdoing (Table 3.15). Note that these items were rated on a 4-point scale (1='make no difference', 2='somewhat increase likelihood', 3='significantly increase likelihood', and 4='guarantee reporting'), so the notional midpoint is 2.5 (there was no actual middle value on the scale). Ratings were within a very narrow band (1.9-2.2) and towards the lower end of the scale. For example, training managers was rated the most likely strategy to increase reporting, but only marginally so compared with other strategies, and with a rating of 2.2, judged to do just slightly better than 'somewhat increase likelihood' of reporting. Thus none of the strategies were endorsed with any great enthusiasm although all were seen to have some limited value.

### 3.5. Discussion and Conclusions

#### *Predicting reporting behaviour*

The analyses reported in this chapter were conducted in order to test whether whistleblowers could be distinguished from non-whistleblowers on the basis of demographic characteristics, attitudinal measures, and perceived characteristics of a wrongdoing. While some significant employee characteristics were identified, the majority of demographic variables did not distinguish between reporters, non-reporters or role reporters. Differences that did occur were most commonly between role reporters and non-role reporters. The demographic variables that offer the clearest distinction between role reporters and non-role reporters were age, gender, tenure in the public sector and organisation, playing a management role, employment status and the size of the immediate work unit. Compared to role-reporters, non-role reporters (many of whom would fit the description of ‘whistleblowers’) were more likely to be younger with less tenure in the organisation or public sector, female and in non-managerial roles. Non-role reporters were similar (in general) to non-reporters, however, they were slightly more likely to be older, female, managers and to have more tenure in the public sector.

These results are broadly consistent with previous research that has found that reporters are more likely to be female employees with higher seniority (Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesveran, 2005). Seniority was also connected to reporting by Keenan (2002) who found upper level managers to be more positive towards (and more likely to engage in) reporting than middle or lower level managers. Near and Miceli (1996) also connect seniority to reporting, although in contrast to the present findings they found males to be more likely to be whistleblowers than females. However, these results do not provide a clear indication that demography alone would allow for reliable accurate prediction of who would report. The effect sizes of the differences were small, especially when the large sample size is considered, which suggests there are other relevant variables that contribute beyond demography (Miethé & Rothschild, 1994). For example MacNab and Worthley (2007) could not connect age to whistleblowing, nor did they find a direct predictive relationship between whistleblowing and tenure, managerial experience or age. What they did find was an indirect relationship between managerial experience and reporting through the person-centred variable ‘self- efficacy’. Managers had higher self efficacy, and it was this variable that predicted the making of a report. However, in many cases the relationship between managerial experience and reporting noted by other studies, may simply capture those cases that in the present study have been identified as role-reporting, rather than non-role reporting which aligns more closely with ‘whistleblowing’.

Attitudinal variables also contribute to the decision to report or not, but the broad pattern across these variables also does not support the idea that whistleblowers are malcontents who can be distinguished from non-whistleblowers by having a particular constellation of anti-organisational perceptions and attitudes. There were, however, a number of differences found between reporters and non-reporters. Non-role reporters had less trust in management, less job satisfaction, a lower opinion of legislation and less confidence that management would respond positively to whistleblowing, than either non-reporters or role reporters. However, this may have been based on their experience, as will be explored in later chapters. Non-role

reporters also viewed themselves as organisational citizens of good standing, showing signs of being more helpful and exercising more initiative than non-reporters, while being just as loyal and industrious. Non-role reporters still also had a more favourable attitude towards whistleblowing, but no greater knowledge of reporting procedures than non-reporters.

Levels of trust and organisational citizenship are both markers of an individual's attachment to, and willingness to cooperate with, an organisation (De Cremer & Tyler 2007; Fassina et al 2007). Research has found a positive association between trustworthiness and organisational citizenship behaviours and a negative association with counterproductive work behaviours (Colquitt et al 2007). Therefore, if a lower level of trust was found together with lower levels of organisational citizenship amongst non-role reporters, it would suggest that these employees were more likely to make reports based on a willingness to cause or engage in conflict, with less regard for organisational or social consequences. In the present study, however, non-role reporters did not score any mean that fell below the 'neutral' level, and the differences between groups were small, as were the effect sizes. The failure to find major distrust or lower levels of organisational citizenship amongst non-role reporters also suggests that whistleblowers in the current sample are neither markedly undesirable employees nor particularly antagonistic towards management or their organisation. Certainly, the idea of a whistleblower as a 'crackpot' (Miceli & Near 1996) or someone with a generally troublesome work attitude is not supported.

At the same time, nor is there necessarily support for opposite stereotypes of whistleblowers as always inherently altruistic and trusting. It is notable that neither non-role reporters nor non-reporters felt management to be particularly trustworthy. Both groups were effectively neutral in their confidence in management's handling of reports. Similarly, even though many employees showed a generally favourable attitude towards whistleblowing, it cannot be claimed that this necessarily played a causal role in their decision to actually report wrongdoing, given the situational variables that emerged as important. Even though behaviour is generally expected to follow a favourable attitude, whistleblowing behaviour has been found to be an exception to the rule, with both Ellis and Arieli (1999) and Mesmer-Magnus and Viswevaran (2005) having also found that a favourable attitude towards whistleblowing does not predict actual whistleblowing behaviour. Based on the pattern of these results, we cannot conclude that individual attitudes will differentiate whistleblowers from other groups.

### ***Situation and context***

In contrast to the above results, most of the analyses suggest that almost any employee could potentially come to fulfil the role of a whistleblower, depending on the circumstances. Among these, the perceived characteristics of the wrongdoing are clearly more influential than personal characteristics in the decision making process. The evidence suggests that the first preconditions for most whistleblowing are perceptions by the employee that the wrongdoing involved is serious and frequent, followed closely by rational assessments about whether they have sufficient information or basis on which to make a report, and perhaps above all, about whether any effective management action will flow as a result ('whether anyone will do anything about it'). This result is consistent with the connection between expected inaction and failure to report made previously by Masser and Brown (1996) and Near

et al (2004). This then appears to be followed, in most cases, by equally rational assessments of reprisal risk. Where the wrongdoing involves more people (that is, appears to be more systemic), or people more senior than the observer, the likelihood of a report drops off considerably. This is confirmed by the evidence that for those who do not report, lack of confidence in management action and the fear of management *reaction*, in circumstances where management is involved or perhaps complicit, represent the major disincentives to reporting. Where employees do go ahead and report, it is usually because these risks are less present, or because the perceived seriousness outweighs the risks and the employee is willing to take their chances.

The variable that best distinguishes between non-role reporters and non-reporters, across all the analyses, is whether the reporter is the direct target of the wrongdoing (see Tables 3.7 to 3.11). However, this is most commonly the case only for personnel and workplace grievances, and to a lesser extent other forms of improper interpersonal behaviour, rather than for categories of wrongdoing with greater 'public interest' content. In these situations, the earlier variables continue to tend to dictate whether a report will be made, include the degree of clarity and availability of evidence about the wrongdoing. Less clear-cut or 'subjective' forms of perceived wrongdoing, such as defective administration (for example, incompetent or negligent decision-making), are more likely to be reported where the whistleblower has clear evidence that the organisation's core business or larger public interest are affected.

The presence of personnel and workplace grievances in the dataset nevertheless poses the question: what motivates other non-role reporters (i.e. public interest whistleblowers) to make a report when they were not the target of the wrongdoing, given that they do not differ from non-reporters on attitudes such as trust? The most likely explanation is again that most whistleblowing is prosocial not just in character, but intent, irrespective of how much conflict might surround it. It also reinforces that in the absence of a personal motivating factor, such as experienced by those making a personal grievance, other strategies are needed in organisations to overcome the barriers to reporting. Unless the wrongdoing is very serious, such that the observer feels they really cannot ignore it, then non-role reporting by those who are not also in a position of 'victim' is usually only likely where the reporter perceives they are in a personally safe situation. A vital question for later chapters becomes, how are more employees to be given greater confidence that it is safe to report, given the clearly rational basis of their concerns that the reporting of any wrongdoing that involves more people or more senior people is inherently risky.

### ***Organisational justice***

From the evidence in this chapter, it appears that many organisations require a new frame of reference from which to approach the question of how to better manage whistleblowing. The encouragement of whistleblowing is motivated both by public interest and organisational interest concerns. However the question of whether it will actually happen when it should – before wrongdoing becomes more serious, systemic or entrenched – depends on how individual employees view the likely organisational responses. These anticipated responses include both the organisation's response to the perceived/alleged wrongdoers, and its response to the individual themselves, as a reporter or whistleblower.



At the outset, it was suggested that concepts of organisational justice might provide a better unifying framework for understanding not only *when* the whistle is or is not likely to be blown, but *why* this is the case, and what can be done to influence this behaviour. The above results make it clear that organisational justice provides a better means of analysing the management actions needed to encourage whistleblowing, as a construct that unites both offence and context.

Organisational justice can be considered along two dimensions, 'distributive justice' and 'procedural justice'. Distributive justice is considered to reflect the degree of equity in the allocation of an outcome based on judgements of what would constitute a fair return relative to inputs. While outcomes are generally thought of in terms of pay, promotion, and privileges, they need not be limited to these. Procedural justice is defined in various ways, including trust in authority and intra-group respect (e.g. De Cremer & Tyler 2007). Six common criteria of procedural fairness are (a) consistent application of rules, (b) unbiased investigation, (c) use of accurate information in decision-making, (d) corrective mechanism for mistakes, (e) decisions that match prevailing ethical standards, and (f) ensuring all relevant voices are heard (Colquitt et al 2001). There is a common concern for the perceived fairness of methods used to arrive at an outcome across these different definitions (Ambrose & Arnaud 2005). More recently, 'interactional justice' has also been identified as a form of organisational justice, concerning the extent to which a person is valued by the organisation (Colquitt et al 2001). Interactional justice refers to the level of dignity and respect that authorities or decision-makers display in their treatment of employees (interpersonal justice), and to the provision of information about processes and explanations for decisions (informational justice).

The perceived justice climate was not directly measured in the present study. However, justice perceptions clearly align with a broad range of the variables relevant to whistleblowing, such as trust, organisational citizenship behaviour, organisational commitment, job satisfaction, outcome satisfaction, cooperation with organisational authorities and evaluation of organisational authorities (Colquitt et al 2006; De Cremer & Tyler 2007; Fassina et al 2007). Whatever its precise mix of motives, whistleblowing is often motivated by the desire of individuals to correct what is perceived to be a seriously incorrect situation, which itself is likely to often involve a concern for justice (Trevino et al, 2006). For example Table 3.12 confirmed that 'having an ethical responsibility', 'seriousness', and a 'belief that making a report would correct the problem' were the most potent reasons for reporting.

At the same time it is clear that the decision as to whether to act, is interwoven with an evaluation of the justice climate within the organisation. While it might be hoped that employees in a 'just' system would be less likely to need to blow the whistle, they should also feel more free to voice whatever concerns they do hold, as they should also feel that reporting will be managed in a way that maintains the ethical integrity of the organisation (Linda & Kray 2002; Trevino et al 2006). Conversely the belief that an organisation is unjust can be identified as having a wide range of negative organisational effects (Acquino et al 2006; Bies & Tripp 2005). In the present study, a lack of faith in the organisation's capacity to provide justice can be seen when employees lack confidence that reported wrongdoing will be dealt with, or that their reporting role will be properly understood and respected. Both the organisation's view of whistleblowing (a correlate of intent to make a report) and evaluation of the justice climate are based on observations of how others are treated and on direct experience within the workplace (Kray & Lind, 2002; Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2005). The belief that the organisation would ignore a report of a

wrongdoing perceived to be serious violates perceptions of procedural justice (Harlos, 2001). It also violates perceptions of distributive justice in the sense that exerting the effort to make a report would not result in a fair hearing or any change.

Organisational justice is therefore a concept that is consistent with much of the data above, especially given that the major cited reasons for not reporting were expectations of organisational inaction and of reprisal action. For example, the informational component of interactional justice helps explain why non-role reporters could not be separated from non-reporters on the basis of their knowledge of reporting procedures. It is reasonable to expect that those who had made a report would be more familiar with the procedures. However, the absence of this difference suggests that reporters are routinely kept outside of the process that is triggered by their report. As indicated in chapter 2, a large proportion of non-role reporters simply do not know if an investigation was ever carried out. For informational justice to be served, it needs to be clearly communicated that the report was heard and acted upon, with periodic updates on the progress of any investigation and the actual outcome (Bies 2005). These elements are reinforced by further evidence about the procedural satisfaction of whistleblowers presented in chapter 5.

Similarly, many elements of procedural and interactional justice can provide managers with a ready guide for how to better encourage reporting, given that they must usually make their evaluations based on retrospective data (written reports, interviews and observation of the workplace). Interactional justice will be served by employees being made aware of the official complaints procedure. The analyses here also show that an organisation wishing to increase reports of wrongdoing can do so by ensuring procedures are just, by checking the accuracy of information, taking all reports seriously, referring all reports to an unbiased, well-respected arbiter, giving all involved the opportunity to provide input, and the other features of good investigation reviewed in chapter 8. Interpersonal justice demands that all interaction between investigators and those involved are to be polite, respectful and honest.

Organisational justice concerns become most salient of all when it comes to the role of perceived risk of reprisal from management. Those higher in an organisational hierarchy are clearly capable of influencing organisational culture and workplace climate through their ability to approve and enforce policies, and through their actual behaviour (Appelbaum et al 2005; Foote & Robinson 1999). Those higher in an organisation are also expected to exemplify ethical behaviour in order to set a professional example, if only to legitimise their own roles. Those with less power, on the other hand, rely on organisational systems for protection, but clearly are only likely to do so when they believe the system is procedurally just (Acquino et al 2005). If there is dissatisfaction with the way the organisation responds to a complaint, and especially if management itself is seen as responsible for or unable to protect a reporter from actual harm, then the perceived level of systemic procedural justice will have been violated.

Finally, procedural, interactional and distributive justice interact, as can be seen in later chapters. For example, receiving an unfavourable outcome (such as not having a complaint upheld) may lead to a perceived lack of distributive justice; but this may be offset if it is clear that notwithstanding this, management will still respect and protect the role of the employee who made the complaint, demonstrating a high level of procedural and interactional justice (Ambrose & Arnaud, 2005; Brockner & Wiesenfeld, 2005; Brockner et al, 2007; Skarlicki & Folger, 1997).

Overall, there is a clear potential benefit for organisations in ensuring that whistleblowing policies and procedures are embedded in, and reinforce, their other

strategies for achieving organisational justice. The analyses here suggest that in the alternative, they can expect to continue to only learn of many of the more systemic and complex types of wrongdoing after they have already developed into serious threats to organisational integrity. Even if those involved are not always satisfied that the outcome was distributively just, it may be that other members of the organisation will have confidence that the outcome was fair if the organisation's whistleblowing practices and procedures are seen to be consistently fair over a number of separate events (Cropanzo et al 2001). By managing reports in a just manner, there is good reason to believe that organisations can discourage malicious or retaliatory complaints and instead encourage the prosocial reporting of wrongdoing (Aquino et al 2006).

## **Summary**

This chapter has confirmed the soundness of the basic objectives of whistleblowing legislation and procedures, discussed in chapter 1. The encouragement of reporting appears to turn directly on employee confidence that the organisation will then take effective action to stop or remedy the perceived wrongdoing. In many cases the decision to report will also hinge on an employee's natural assessment of the associated risk, and especially whether the organisation is capable of protecting them from adverse outcomes where more senior employees or management itself is involved.

The same results show, however, that in a large proportion of instances, current whistleblowing policies are struggling to deliver the levels of employee confidence necessary to satisfy these primary preconditions of reporting. Many of the results suggest that the low reporting rates and high inaction rates in response to perceived wrongdoing described in chapter 2, stem from the need for organisations to do more to gain the confidence of employees that reports or wrongdoing will be handled seriously and professionally.

Among those who are not currently inclined to report the wrongdoing they observe, the degree of ambivalence towards managerial responses or other strategies like symbolic legislation (Table 3.15) confirms this is not necessarily an easy task. Many of the solutions lie in the types of procedural and legislative reforms discussed in later chapters. For its part, this chapter has demonstrated the need for managers to abandon some stereotypical views of whistleblowers and focus instead on the encouragement and better management of reporting, on the basis that, depending on the circumstances, almost any employee could be expected to speak up about wrongdoing. Similarly, depending on the circumstances, almost any employee might well also remain silent. The focus of management needs to fall on these different circumstances, including whether the organisational environment is conducive to speaking up. In particular, the prospects for encouraging the early and more constructive forms of reporting may depend on how well management responses to whistleblowing reflect a larger commitment to organisational justice.