

‘Whistling While They Work’:

Enhancing the Theory and Practice of Internal Witness Management in Public Sector Organisations

***Australian Research Council
Linkage Project – 2005-2008***

What Is The ‘Whistling While They Work’ Project?

‘Whistling While They Work’ is a three-year collaborative national research project into the management and protection of internal witnesses, including whistleblowers, in the Australian public sector.

The project is being led by Griffith University and is jointly funded by:

- the Australian Research Council
- the five participating universities, and
- 14 partner organisations including some of Australia’s most important integrity and public sector management agencies.

The protection of whistleblowers and other internal witnesses to corruption, misconduct and maladministration is a great unsolved problem of public sector governance.

This first national study of internal witness management is setting out to describe and compare organisational experience under varying public interest disclosure regimes across the Australian public sector.

By identifying and promoting current best practice in workplace responses to public interest whistleblowing, the project will use the experience and perceptions of internal witnesses and first- and second-level managers to identify more routine strategies for preventing, reducing and addressing reprisals and other whistleblowing-related conflicts.

Partner Organisations

Commonwealth Government

- Commonwealth Ombudsman
- Australian Public Service Commission

Queensland Government

- Qld Crime & Misconduct Commission
- Queensland Ombudsman
- Office of Public Service Merit & Equity

New South Wales Government

- Independent Commission Against Corruption
- NSW Ombudsman

Western Australian Government

- WA Corruption & Crime Commission
- Public Sector Standards Commissioner
- WA Ombudsman

Victorian Ombudsman

Northern Territory Commissioner for Public Employment

ACT Chief Minister’s Department

Transparency International Australia

Research Plan

Credible strategies for managing internal disclosures are crucial to effective integrity systems, early detection of corruption and maladministration, and the maintenance of positive, healthy workplaces. They are critical to law enforcement, sound financial management, public accountability and the careers and well-being of individual staff.

This project aims to contribute to early detection of workplace misbehaviour and reduce the political, organisational and human costs associated with whistleblowing, by providing managers and integrity agencies with more effective strategies for managing key conflicts. Its findings will inform reviews of existing legislation and identify the regulatory reforms needed to support good workplace practice.

The researchers will:

- Repeat and expand previous confidential, random surveys of a wide range of public employees on their knowledge, attitudes and practices regarding the making and management of public interest disclosures;
- Establish a more representative picture of the incidence and significance of whistleblowing activity in major public sector organisations;
- Conduct in-depth surveys of internal witnesses, managers and other employees on current strengths and weaknesses in systems for managing public interest disclosures;
- Conduct comparative analysis of the lessons of different whistleblower protection systems across Australia and overseas;
- Help the participating governments and agencies to devise better internal disclosure procedures (IDPs) at operational levels; and
- Assist in the evaluation of the legislative regimes for 'whistleblower protection' across Australia, particularly those serving the Queensland, NSW, Western Australia and the Commonwealth Governments.

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