

# The Dynamics of Victimisation

How can we make sense of what happens when a whistleblower is victimised?

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# Whistleblowing in Organisations: The Paradox

- DeMaria (1994) *“The data..... unabiguuously [declare] that our trust in the state structures specifically designed to eradicate wrongdoing is entirely misplaced”*.
- Despite the existence of powerful frameworks and safeguards protecting whistleblowing, there is evidence that whistleblowers suffer reprisals, threats, loss of jobs, reprimands, and serious emotional ill effects such as severe stress, bitterness, depression, reduced job functioning, frustration, self doubt and feelings of inability to cope with life.
- How can this happen in organisations which frequently endorse whistleblowing protection policies, and are part of a community that, in principle, wants to protect whistleblowing disclosures?

# The whistleblower and the organisation

## Characteristics of the relationship

- Substantial power and resource imbalance
- Both parties have some shared knowledge of the wrongdoing
- Whistleblowing disclosure occurs in the context of a deteriorating relationship
- Both parties can become emotionally distressed and irrational when their sense of self is challenged
- The organisation has vastly greater capacity to maintain the appearance of rationality, civility and objectivity

## When the organisation experiences a threat to its sense of self

- Cannot tolerate information about its own actions that has the capacity to challenge its **sense of self**
  - challenge to core beliefs, values and statements about itself
  - potential threat to continued survival in its present form
  - present leadership
  - likely financial loss
  - loss of public standing and reputation

# Whistleblower Action and Organisational Response Matrix

- **Internal Disclosure**
  - Disclosure **does not have** potential to challenge the integrity of the organisation
  - Resistance/guarded acceptance of the message
  - Control the messenger
- **External Disclosure**
  - Disclosure **does not have** potential to challenge integrity of the organisation
  - Damage to reputation (embarrassment & humiliation, possible financial loss)
  - Neutralise message
  - move against and neutralise messenger
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- **Internal Disclosure**
  - Disclosure **has potential** to challenge the integrity of the organisation
  - Reinterpret, camouflage, neutralise the message
  - Control or neutralise the messenger
- **External Disclosure**
  - Disclosure **has potential** to challenge the integrity of the organisation
  - Organisation cannot tolerate the disclosure
  - Deny or Suppress message
  - Attack and harm the messenger