

Whistleblowers suffer 'rat' reputation despite acting in the public interest

Submitted by: BlueSky Public Relations Ltd

Tuesday, 10 July 2018

Whistleblowers risk their jobs to expose secrets and bring high profile people and institutions into light for public scrutiny. Despite this bravery, new research from HEC Paris reveals that whistleblowers suffer from a legitimacy deficit in society and are often portrayed as traitors and rats.

According to Professor Hervé Stolowy and his co-authors Yves Gendron from Université Laval, Jodie Moll from Alliance Manchester Business School and Luc Paugam from HEC Paris, actions need to be taken to encourage and protect whistleblowers.

"Evidence suggests society questions the legitimacy of whistleblowers – despite legal protections now being in place in some countries, including the United States," says Professor Stolowy.

"However, we discovered that in reality whistleblowers' actions are often perceived by superiors, colleagues and more generally society in a negative way. Yet, it is a legitimate and effective way to prevent fraud.

"Our research shows that, facing such challenges, whistleblowers develop a discourse that contributes to build the legitimacy of their role by bringing it to the public's attention, tightly defining their actions and demonstrating its importance. The recent case of Wells Fargo highlights the difficulties faced by whistleblowers and how crucial a few voices can be to deter fraud. During several years a number of Wells Fargo employees denounced the fraudulent business practices, such as the creation of fake bank accounts, but were intimidated and retaliated against by hierarchy."

According to their research, one core element of all whistleblowers is, regardless of their success, they all acted with the public interest in mind.

The researchers examined a variety of statements from seven high profile cases (including Enron, WorldCom and Madoff), looking at 69 sources, including books, first- and second-hand interviews, websites and videos.

/ENDS

For more information, a copy of the paper, or to speak to Professor Hervé Stolowy contact Kate Mowbray at BlueSky PR on kate@bluesky-pr.com or call +44 (0)1582 790 706