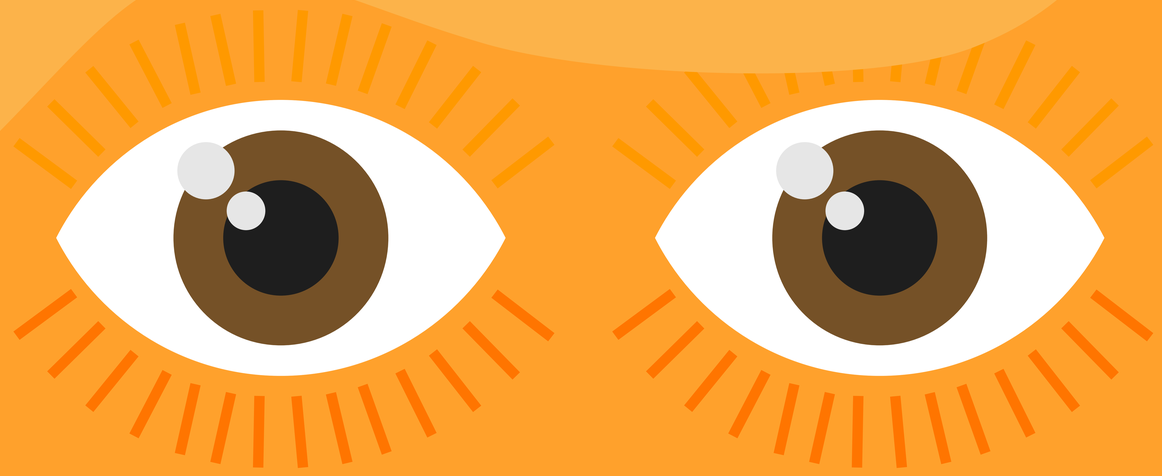
NorthWhistle

Report

For Healthier workplaces

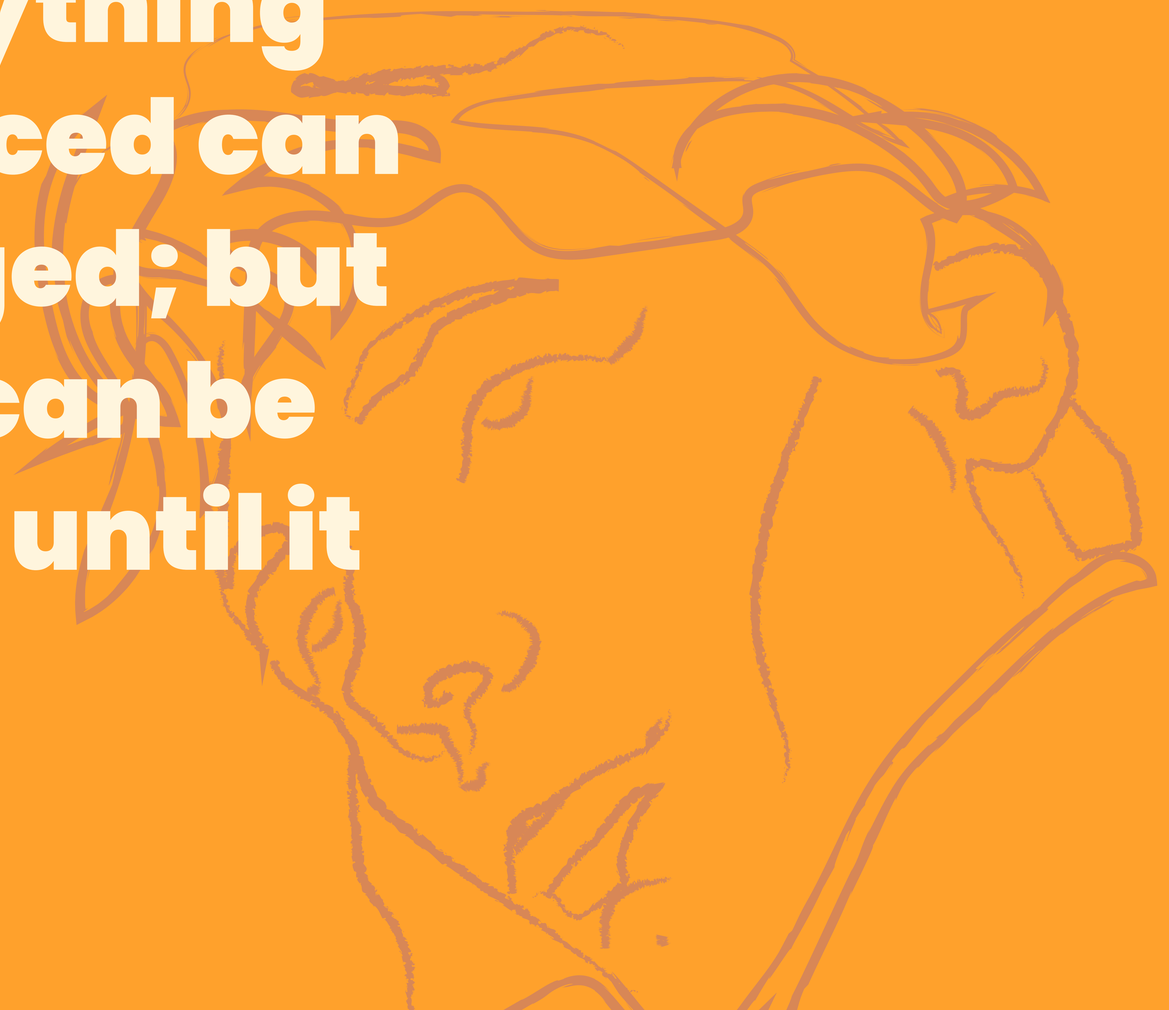
Well informed, well protected

2023



Not everything that is faced can be changed; but nothing can be changed until it is faced.

- James Baldwin, 1962



It is never too late to create a positive change.

When Transparency International did their surveys in 2017[5] and 2021[13], they asked their recipients if they fear retaliation when it comes to speaking out or reporting about corruption. Unfortunately the numbers show that an increase among the respondents has occurred.

Even though within these years, the EU directive has been pushed out as a way to protect those who blow the whistle. This is a strong indication that the public knowledge about the directive isn't widespread, and that understanding of whistleblower rights has gone undetected.

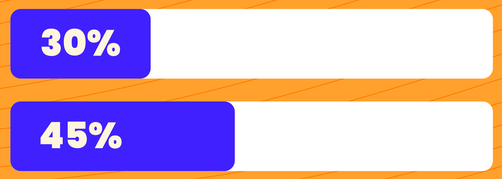
So what can be done about this?

In addition to legislative adjustments regarding whistleblowing, there is a critical need for a shift in the attitudes and perceptions surrounding whistleblowing.

And as the EU directive is angled at whistleblowing at a work related level, we will look into how work dynamics can change for the better.

To achieve this, a comprehensive look into of the underlying factors influencing work dynamics is essential.

NorthWhistles core belief is that a healthy workplace should be accessible for everyone, and that includes being able to speak up and feel safe about it.



2017: 30% fear retaliation if they speak out about corruption[5].

2021: 45% fear retaliation if they report corruption[13].

Given that workplaces typically consist of groups of individuals, we will look into the factors that affect both group and individual behavior. As well as analyze the statistics of whistleblowing in Europe.

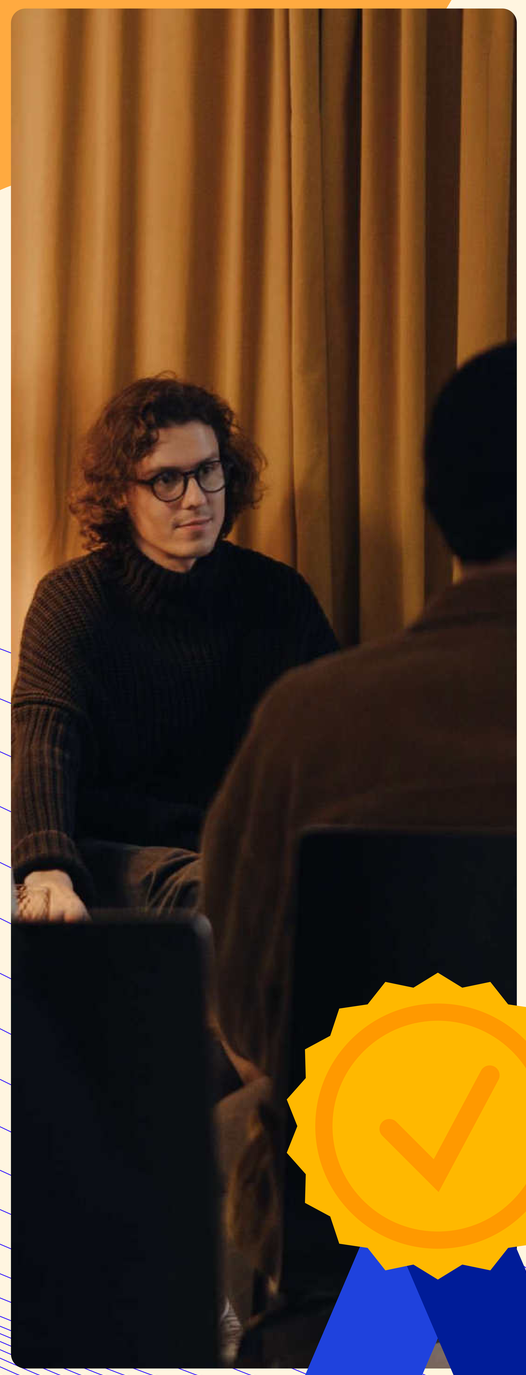
Collaborating with field experts, we will interpret the data and explore what can be done instead.

We will present insights from our field experts, shedding light on potential strategies and providing an analysis of the current state of whistleblowing.

Topics

1. Embarking on a new beginning
2. Even heroes need protection
3. Attitudes that last for decades
4. The group and the individual
5. Cultural shifts

Our experts



Alexandra Sandberg

Specialist within security, investigations, and EU legislation.

Alexandra is a specialist within whistleblowing, investigations, and EU legislation with hands-on experience in whistleblowing. She has investigated and uncovered fraud on behalf of one of Sweden's major audit firms and held a key managerial role within whistle-blowing in the security industry.

Today, Alexandra is recognized as a specialist in the practical adaptation of the new whistleblowing laws. With a client-focused approach. She has assisted countless individuals and organisations in navigating the complexities of whistleblowing, always ensuring that compliance is at the forefront.

Oscar Fredriksson

Lawyer with a speciality in organizational development, regulatory reform, leadership and Public Value Governance.

Oscar has several years of experience from management as well as board assignments nationally and locally within both the government and the Swedish Red Cross.

He is an expert on organisational development, simplification of regulatory reform, trust-based leadership, and Public Value Governance.

As a lawyer (LLM) with added specialty in social psychology and philosophy, he currently works as head of investigations at the consulting firm Starck Partner. He is in charge of the investigations for cases within harassments, sexual misconduct, discrimination, bullying, organisational audits, and investigations of cases initiated by whistleblowers.

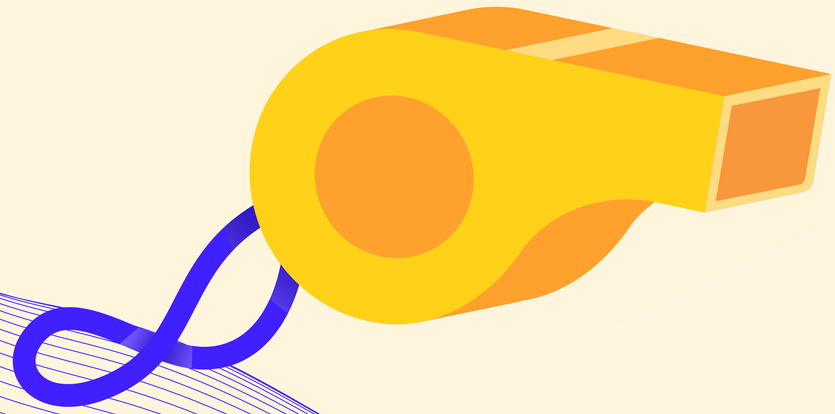
Malin Freiman Moezzi

Licensed psychologist, working with organisational psychology and strategic HR.

Malin is a licensed psychologist and has seven years of experience working with organisational psychology and strategic HR.

In her professional role today, she helps managers and HR work more inclusively and evidence-based, regardless of whether it's about recruiting the next employee, developing leaders or gaining insights into the internal competence.

Malin also lectures for various companies and networks to spread knowledge about how we can work more fairly and efficiently to promote diversity and inclusion, as well as how we can create learning and resilient organisations.



1 Embarking on a new beginning:

What lays ahead is unchartered

We are only just beginning to glimpse the possibilities that lie ahead with this groundbreaking EU directive designed to shield whistleblowers from backlash.

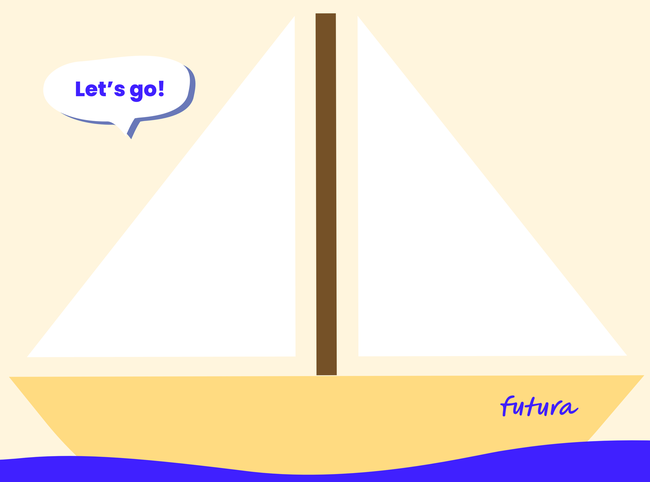
The directive focuses on safeguarding the rights of those who speak out, and marks an exciting beginning.

It promises to be a fascinating journey as we observe how different nations embrace and adapt to this directive, and how citizens respond to its provisions.

Will we see more cases of whistleblowing, and will there be a sustainable change in how whistleblowers are perceived and viewed?

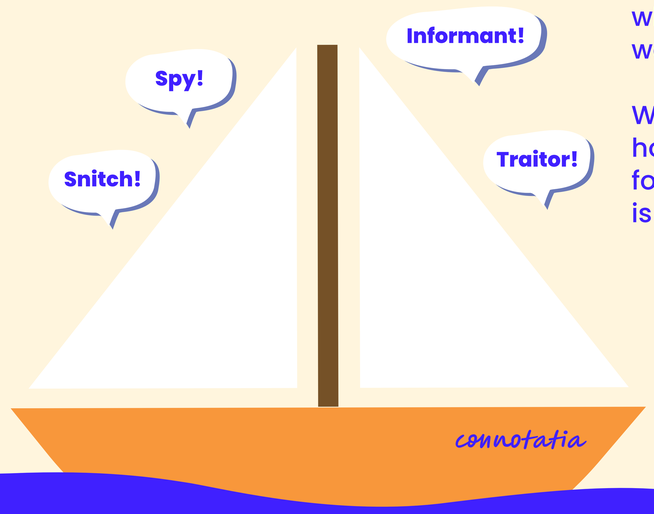
Our hope is that the negative lens that is put on whistleblowing will change.

And rather be seen for what it actually is - an opportunity for communities and organisations to develop and grow, and that wrongdoing is identified and addressed before events escalate to unrepairable proportions.



This directive isn't just about protection

Despite the many negative connotations that relate to whistleblowing, many past events have been brought to the surface through the actions and courage of people such as whistleblowers. Their acts have changed the world for a better place and saved many people from harm.



This directive isn't just about protection; it's about the empowerment of individuals to uphold what's right, to ensure the welfare of society, and to hold those in leadership positions accountable for creating safe spaces where speaking up is made easy.

As much as this is about keeping whistleblowers safe, it's also a about workplace health.

With this new directive, we will hopefully see a change where courage for speaking out and using your voice is both normalised and celebrated.

2

Even heroes need protection

Well informed, well protected

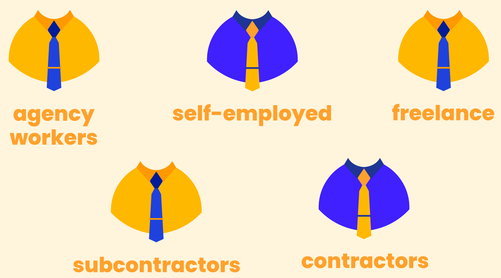
Whistleblowing, as defined by the EU directive[8], is the act of reporting or disclosing information on violations of EU law in various areas.

It is an essential mechanism aimed at safeguarding the public interest and promoting transparency, accountability, and the rule of law within the European Union.

The directive aims to protect whistleblowers of good faith, which means that a person is protected if there is reasonable grounds to believe that the information reported was true at the time of reporting, and that it falls within the scope of the directive.

An individual is considered a whistleblower if they are a current or former person who performs services in return for remuneration.

Individuals in non-standard roles also have whistle-blower rights and protection, such as;



Members of management, shareholders, trainees, and volunteers are also covered under the directive.

The EU directive itself doesn't protect whistleblowers

It's the national legislation in each country that protects, and is based off on the minimum requirements of the EU directive.

The only times that the directive can provide protection is if the country in question is late with its implementation of its own national laws.

The aim is to protects employees working in the public and private sectors who have acquired information regarding a breach of law and are likely to face retaliation if they report it.

It[9] also extends protection to people who have not begun work, third persons connected with the person who reports work-related retaliation such as relatives or colleagues are also eligible for whistleblower protection.

Legal entities working closely with whistleblowers and workplace facilitators such as individuals who assist people reporting whistleblowing are considered to have whistleblower rights and protections too.

As a minimum standard

Member States must ensure whistleblower protection when employees report breaches in specific areas of EU law:

Both whistleblowers and organisations receive access to support measures when wrongdoings are investigated. The EU whistleblower directive allows nations to decide for themselves whether anonymous whistleblowing is allowed.

In either case, an employee who makes a report can potentially have their identity revealed and be exposed, with the risk of retaliation or other factors that might harm the persons reputation, job position or other that the directive is set in place to protect them from.

- **Nuclear safety**
- **Food safety, animal health and welfare**
- **Product safety**
- **Public health and consumer protection**
- **Environmental Protection**
- **Public procurement**
- **Corporate tax and competition law**
- **Transport safety**
- **Protection of privacy, personal data and network security**
- **Financial services, products, markets and the prevention of money laundering and terrorist financing**

We want to do good yet fear is keeping us silent.

According to a study made by writer Pring, published in 2017 for Transparency International[5] :

The reason most people keep silent on misconduct and wrongdoing is based out of fear of retaliation or negative backlash.

In France, The Netherlands, and Portugal this is seen as the main reason people do not report on corruption.

Still, one in four citizens in the EU think that reporting corruption is the most effective method against it.

While only a small minority would speak up. And at the same time, most EU citizens personally feel compelled to report an incidence of corruption.

Expert on the topic

" There are interesting findings regarding the fear of losing one's job and, consequently, experiencing a worsened financial situation. The fear of losing one's job may not only be related to losing one's own employment but can also stem from the concern that shedding light on a serious misconduct could endanger the entire existence of one's employer. "

Alexandra Sandberg
Specialist within security, investigations, and EU legislation

In 2008,
almost **10 years before** the EU directive was implemented.

Researcher Gerard Sinzdak[11] found some eye opening numbers;

82 % of whistleblowers **suffer harassment**

17 % of whistleblowers **lose their homes**

10 % of whistleblowers **attempt suicide**

60 % of whistleblowers **lose their jobs**

His recommendation to curb these numbers was **giving whistleblowers more options for reporting channels to avoid retaliation.**

This is also something that is adapted in to the new EU directive.

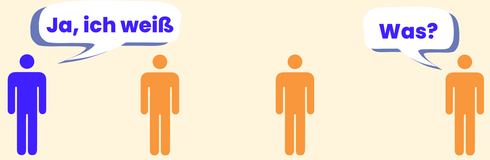
Employees in Portugal and **Italy** are the least likely to report incidents, while workers in the **UK*** and **Switzerland** are the most likely to do so.

*the study was conducted pre-Brexit.

49% **50%** **67%** **58%**

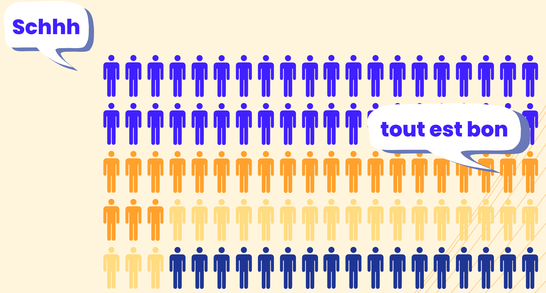
Germany

Less than **a quarter** employees are aware of their organisation providing advice, information, or an internal whistleblowing channel.



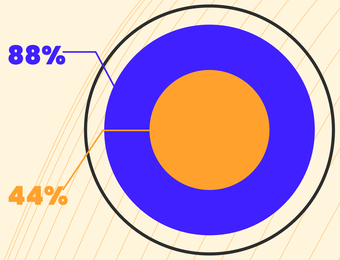
France

46% of employees are aware of misconduct but don't speak up because they think it's none of their business **25%,** don't want to be seen as a troublemaker by management **20%,** worry they'll be jeopardising their job in, or they assume managers already know about the problem **17%.**



Ireland

88% of employees believe their organisation always/frequently practises honesty. Even so, **44%** of employees who have been aware of misconduct did not speak up about it.



Expert on the topic

" It is important, just as Gerard Sinzdak suggests, to provide multiple reporting channels to enable more individuals to be able to, and/or feel comfortable reporting. Much of our world operates digitally now, but as an employer, one must not forget that workers in a factory environment and those in head quarter may not always have the same conditions for digital reporting at work. Therefore, verbal reporting and physical meetings are a crucial addition to a trustworthy whistleblower system. "

Alexandra Sandberg
Specialist within security, investigations, and EU legislation

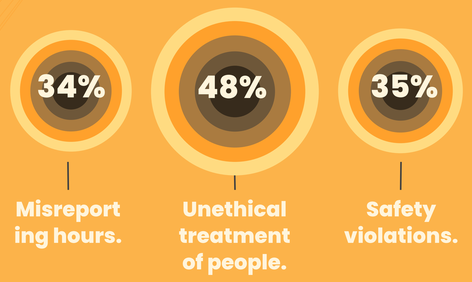
Expert on the topic

" In order to move forward in the creation of an efficient EU the directive to safeguard the protection of whistleblowers is essential - but we need also to focus attention to the development of a more modern and trust based leadership where it is safe to raise questions in the workplace on a daily basis. "

Oscar Fredriksson
Lawyer with a speciality in organizational development, regulatory reform, leadership and Public Value Governance.

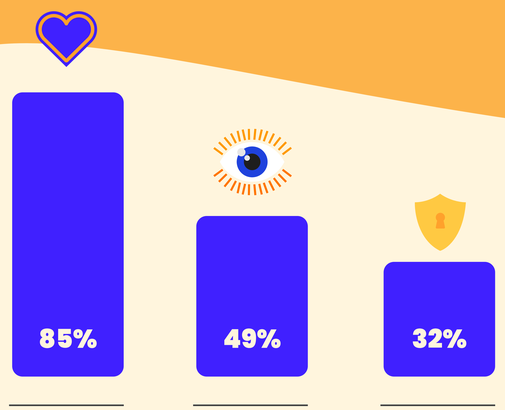
Spain

Employees are less likely than those in other EU nations to be aware of advice or information and whistleblowing channels. The study found that **40%** of employees have been aware of misconduct such as unethical treatment of people **(48%)**, safety violations **(35%)**, and misreporting hours **(34%)**, but chose not to disclose it.



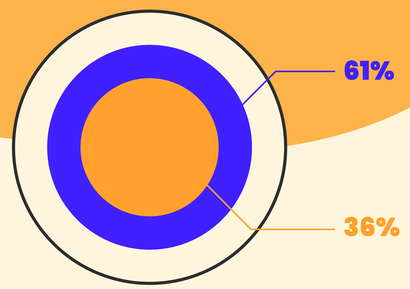
Portugal

85% of employees feel their organisation always or frequently practises honesty in daily operations, and yet, **49%** have been aware of misconduct and decided not to speak up. The most frequent reason given is that they believe no corrective action would be taken **(32%).**



Switzerland

Employees **(61%)** are the most likely to say their organisation provides written standards for ethical business conduct and guidelines for their job, but only **36%** say they have a means of reporting misconduct confidentially.



Why people avoid blowing the whistle

Why people might not want to blow the whistle

As a way to collect data for the EU directive, the EU Commission ordered a survey[3] to find out what the some of important reasons might be for people to not whistleblow in those cases they would experience misconduct.

93% fear
legal consequences when it comes to whistleblowing

92% fear
financial consequences for raising their voice

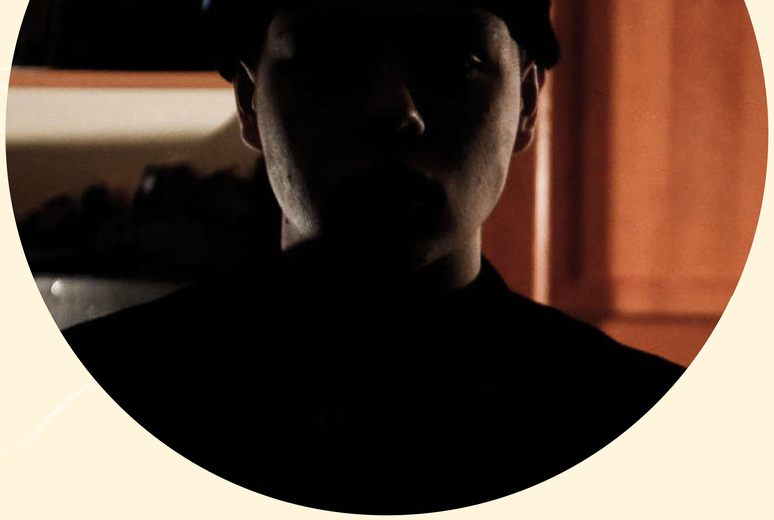
86% fear
getting a bad reputation for blowing the whistle

These are their findings for what might keep people from reporting on misconduct:

86% found that
threat or harm to the public interest would be too difficult to prove

84% think it's
lacking knowledge about where and to whom to report to

78% thought that
no action will be taken to remedy the wrongdoing

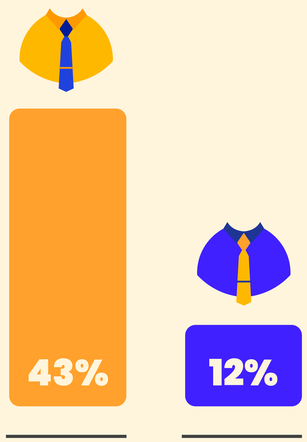


Not trusting leadership

Dondé[4] continues that **43%** in the private industry who have been aware of misconduct in the workplace did not raise concerns about the issue where the main cause for silence (28% of respondents) has been the lack of confidence in management's willingness to take corrective action, followed by the fear of jeopardising ones job security (27%).

Also, similar numbers have been seen by Pring[5] where one in eight believe that the main reason people do not report is because of:

- **The lack of action being taken.**
- **Having a lack of trust in the reporting channels effectiveness.**
- **Public officials immunity against corruption (12%).**

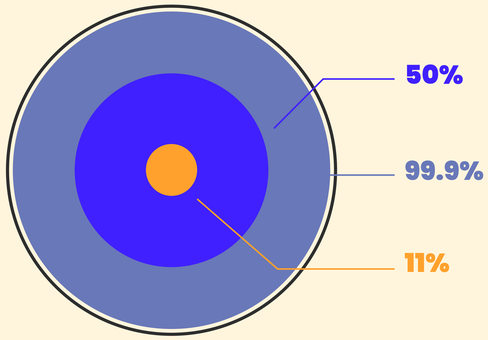


When being anonymous helps

Safety and anonymity
Healthy organisations should have a speak up culture and promote discussions on ethics in all levels of the company.

But for those who feel unsafe at work, fear losing their jobs or risk retaliation for speaking up against misconduct, it's important to have anonymous channels to report to.

In those cases, anonymity promotes safety when it comes to whistleblowing - and lowers the barrier to blow the whistle on misconduct and wrongdoing.



In 2017 the EU Commission[3] conducted a survey with over 5,700 respondents.

Over **11%** of the respondents had been involved in a whistleblowing case in their workplaces over the last 10 years.

Of these, over **50%** had experienced it directly as either witnesses or that they themselves were the once who blew the whistle.

Almost all, **99.9%**, believed that whistleblowers should be protected.

And in those cases where reporters fear retaliation in some form, one of the ways to keep them protected is by offering channels where they are anonymous.

Expert on the topic

" Anonymity, in my opinion, is a prerequisite for obtaining timely and relevant information. It should be in the employers' interest to offer it to ensure that potential misconduct is brought to their attention at an early stage. The focus should be on what has been reported and not on who made the report. Addressing the misconduct and taking appropriate actions should be the only focus. "

Alexandra Sandberg
Specialist within security, investigations, and EU legislation

3 Attitudes that last for decades

Google it

Rat, snitch, tattletale - these are words associated with the act of whistleblowing.

Just a simple Google search looking for synonyms lead to these terms. Terms set in countries that for decades were **under the rule of authoritarian regimes with an existence of secret police networks.**

During Soviet times, individuals would often secretly provide authorities with information on neighbors, co-workers and family members[1].

Often times under force or fear for their own lives. This part of history still lingers in modern language and has even become a part of the day to day narrative seen in pop-culture and movies.

Whistleblowing carries a stigma and negative connotations in many European nations and is not limited to countries with an authoritarian past.

In Ireland and Italy, there is a general mistrust of public authorities and on not speaking out against your neighbor or colleague. But to rather keep quiet for the sake of the community that you are a part of.

In Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania – all countries with small populations and often times impenetrable communities – this poses some difficulties.

Communities that can often be closely intertwined with work pose a significant challenge for whistleblowing mechanisms. It creates difficulty to encourage disclosures and to assure complete confidentiality of whistleblowers who come forward.[1]

What needs to highlighted is that the EU directive in actuality is all about **creating safer workplaces.** It needs to be brought to light so that the attitude's surrounding the narrative can change, and for a much needed cultural shift to happen as the respect for whistleblowers as of right now is still far away in Europe[2].

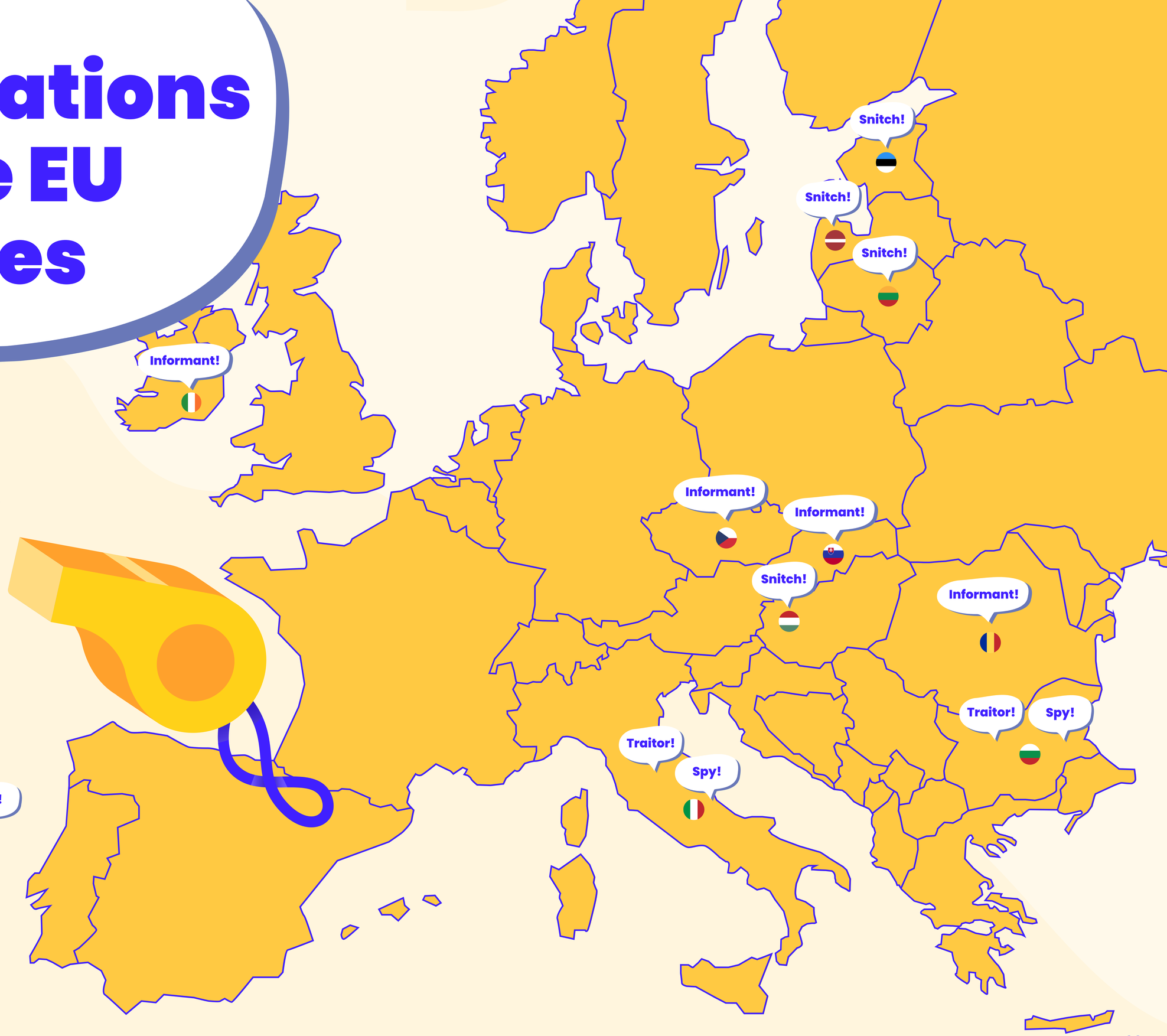
Connotations in some EU countries

In Czech Republic, Ireland, Romania and Slovakia, the term "whistleblower" is associated with being an **informant.**

Bulgaria, Italy with a **traitor** or **spy.**

Hungary, Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania with a **snitch[2].**

This is also strengthened by a survey made by the EU commission in 2017[3] where **81%** can see that negative attitudes towards whistleblowers are an important reason as why people might not want to whistleblow when experiencing misconduct.



In 2013 **Transparency International**[32] conducted a report where they collected:

European connotations that are circulating in different countries.

Here are some of them.

- = Positive
- = Neutral
- = Negative

And a few more

- = Positive
- = Neutral
- = Negative

Social acceptance varies in the EU

Social acceptance of whistleblowing is key for more people to raise their voice and concerns in wrongdoing and when seeing misconduct happen.

The rates of social acceptance varies immensely across Europe where **only five** out the countries in the EU report having a majority of between **63-74%** saying it is social acceptable to whistleblow.

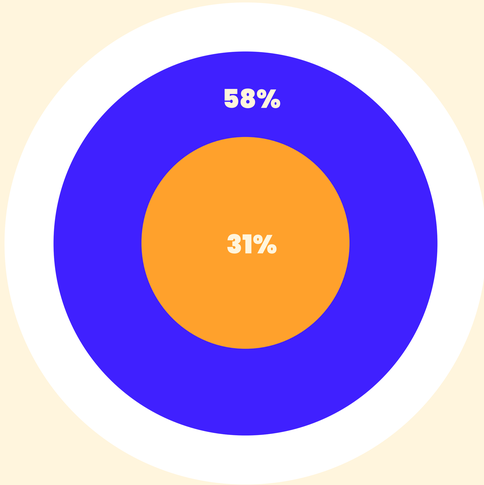
The five
Portugal, France, Italy, Germany, UK and Sweden.

Whereas in Lithuania, Bulgaria, Croatia, and Hungary, just **15%** of citizens believe it is acceptable to report corruption[5].

More on how social acceptance comes in to play in work settings and group dynamics follows in the next chapter.

There is also a noticeable disparity between **EU members who joined before 2004, and after.**

Older member states have a higher social acceptance with **58%**. While for newer members it is only **31%**.



4 The group and the individual

The pain of rejection

Workplaces often times consist of groups of individuals collected to reach a common goal. When being in groups, and workplaces some psychological effects play a role in creating these dynamics.

Colleagues, managers, and stakeholders work in group settings where they cannot help but have expectations. These different roles come with different sets of implicit or explicit rules. These rules are the social norms of the group for what is counted as acceptable behaviors, values, and beliefs of its members[14].

When members of the group don't conform, they are perceived as standing out by being different, or acting difficult. Eventually they will be considered as deviant and are often punished for it in different ways. Because of this most people try to avoid situations that can lead to isolation or anything that could lead to rejection by the group.

Feeling accepted is a fundament to our survival. We are by nature a social species, and others are important to our sense of safety and well-being.

To be isolated for long periods of time and being deprived of human contact is a painful and traumatic experience[15].

Here we mention a few of those effects that play a role when it comes to why it can be so hard to speak up, let alone blow the whistle when experiencing misconduct.

To understand how hard it can be, and how much courage actually is being exerted by those who dare to create a change.

Normative Social Influence:
Is the need to be accepted by the group no matter what the individuals in the group actually believe to be true.

It can affect people to the point where they outwardly conform to the groups actions and beliefs to gain their approval and acceptance, even when the individual privately doesn't agree[14].

Even so when what's right is obvious, there are strong incentives to be agreeable, and some people find it difficult to risk social disapproval, even from strangers[17].

Group mentality

Of course, not all people conform or feel socially pressured, but there are som factors that do play an impactful role when choosing to go against the groups norms.

The term Social Impact Theory[14] was coined by Bibb Latan and is based on the principle that;

Conforming to social influence is dependent on 3 factors:

1 Strength

We are more likely to conform to groups that are important to us.

2 Number

Group size. It doesn't take an extremely large group to create normative social influence, but the larger the group, the stronger the social pressure.[14]

3 Immediacy

It's easier for groups to have a member conform if they are closer to them in time and space.

Social Identity Theory:
People shape their identities through unique experiences and personalities. Simultaneously, social identities are also formed and are based on the different groups they associate with, whether it be nationality, religion, political parties, or profession[20].

These social identities provide a sense of belonging and purpose where being part of an "us" is comforting and safe[14].

This group mentality can lead to feeling responsible for the groups well being by identifying with it, and seeing the others in it as a part of our prolonged selves. And therefore feeling that the group needs to be protected against others.

Knowing people for longer:
People in communities that have known each other for a while, feel accountable towards each other, compared to meeting new people. Being part of a community leads to an attachment and a greater concern with one's own reputations in that specific community[25].

As people want to be seen as attributing to the wellbeing of their community as a way to be accepted by the group. A workplace is a community, and the relationships created in these work settings apply to this factor as well.

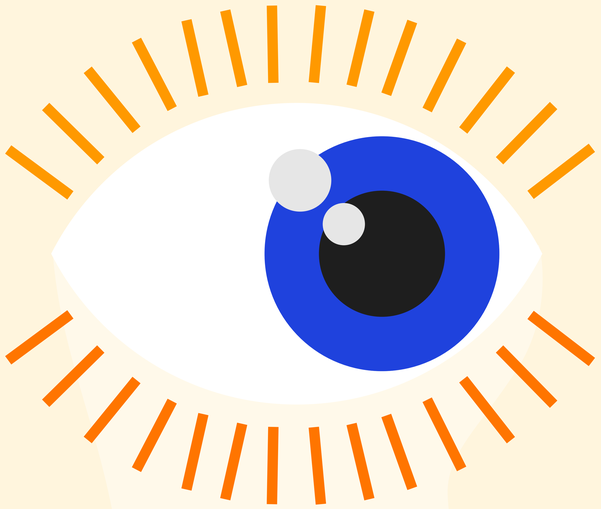
To feel the need to protect colleagues or managers, or others within a work setting is a result built through these relationships[24]. And the longer a relationship has been active, the stronger that bond can be through the relationships that are built[24].

Getting caught up in the role
Social norms can be helpful in workplace settings, as it helps members of the group, like the workplace, know what to expect from each other. With clear and defined roles, people tend to perform better.[22]

In business settings, a manager and an employee are expected to have different roles, and different areas of expertise and responsibilities. And for some people, identifying with their jobs and roles is fulfilling. Getting into a work setting and having a role, means knowing in general terms what is expected.

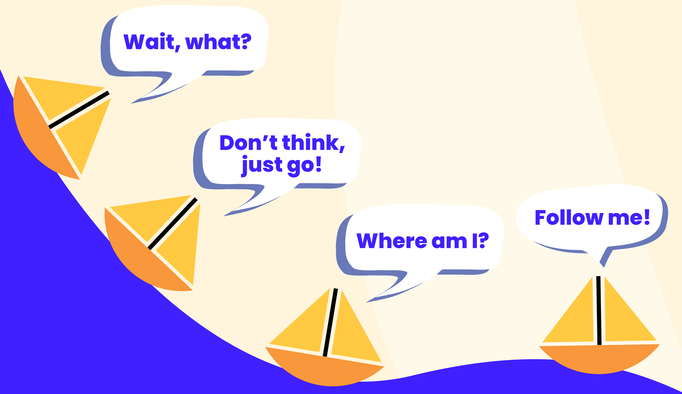
It's when these roles are enmeshed with the personality, and stress, that Wilson, Aronson, and Sommers (2019), researchers within psychology, mean that;

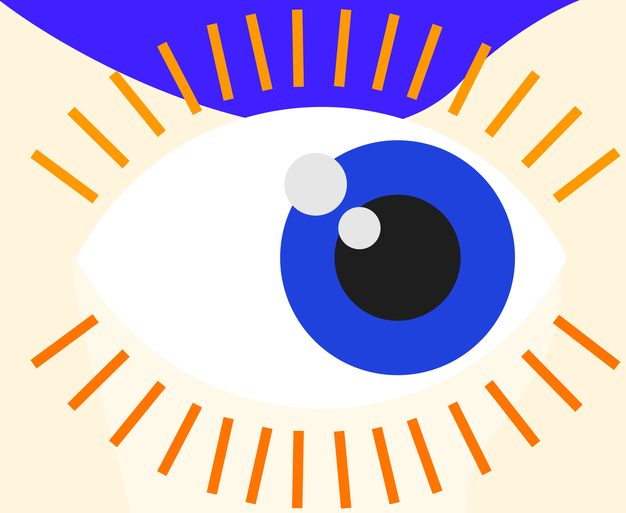
Some people can get so far into a role, that their personal identities and personalities get lost.



When getting caught up in expectations on what it means to be a leader, or to try to gain acceptance from others in a group, we are looking at normative conformity[14].

Normative conformity can go both ways, it can lead people to forget moral values for the sake of being a part of the group or to gain status, but it can also lead to doing better if that is what is expected by the group. Group settings direct us where we want and feel the need to go, when the main need is to feel accepted.





If others aren't reacting – it can't be anything serious, right?

Feeling overwhelmed
Several factor do play a role here, and some of them are based on the size of the society we live in.

In fact[23] people living in smaller communities compared to bigger cities are more willing to help out others when they are in trouble.

This is not value based, but rather based on that people in bigger cities are more often being overwhelmed by the constant stimulations of noise, sight, stress and of being in a hurry[26].

This makes people want to keep to themselves[24], to preserve their energy.

If others aren't reacting – it can't be anything serious, right?
People want to do good, but also want to act according to the social norms and proper way in any given situation.

When situations are very strongly defined as emergencies or that others need help, and the knowledge in how to help is in that given situation is there - it's clear what needs to be done. No matter what others might think.
And this is especially true if there are no other people sharing the experience of the situation, but just the one witness.

But when a situation is ambiguous, and it's unsure of what's happening - if it is in fact an emergency - people tend to look at others to help define their reality[14].

Pluralistic ignorance

When a serious situation is interpreted through the lens of others as if it's nothing to take notice on, it's usually because of **pluralistic ignorance**[28].

The faces of others help decide whether it's something to worry about or not. But when all the faces are looking to each other, thinking that someone else knows better, and no one reacts, that is the reaction that will be transmitted.

These blank faces are interpreted as if there is nothing to worry about. But what is missed in these neutral faces is that all of them, are trying to figure out what to feel and how to react, and are only trying to look as if they belong.

And the more people interact in this, the harder it is to understand what to do, and to feel accountable to help.

In workplaces where there are many people working, it's easy to ignore misconduct as it might go under the radar.

People might think that someone more knowledgeable knows what to do and have already sounded an alarm about it.

This is called the bystander effect[27].

And the more people that are in the same situation, the lesser the chances are that someone will help, or in fact blow the whistle.

A study released in 2008 by researcher Stadler argued that the bystander effect is valid, but that it depends on the size of the group.

The more people are in a crowd, the bigger the chance that at least one person will intervene[36].

It's also dependens on what the cost will be for the bystanders. The bigger the cost, the lesser the likelihood that people will intervene as it can pose a real danger to the onlooker's life.

A more recent study by Philpot, Liebst, Levine, Bernasco, and Lindegaard in 2019[35] also posed the same question – is the bystander effect as strong as it seems? And like Stadler, they concluded the same. People generally want to help, and do good, and that in larger crowds, several people do interfere to help.

It's not so much about people's personalities or their moral that decides if they help others out or not, but rather the nature of the social situation that decides[14].

The more we know, the better we can help

Reminding ourselves of what doing good means.

To overcome **the bystander effect**, and the diffusion of responsibility, which is rooted in the fear of being judged by others for doing the wrong thing, just being aware of the psychology behind[29] makes it less pronounced.

This is something that researchers Beaman, Barnes, Klentz and McQuirck noticed in their study from 1978, that **43%** of the participants who had been made aware of how bystander intervention works would help others out in simple situations, while only **25%** of those who were not aware of this would stop what they were doing to help.

To get out of these inhibitions as when looking to others to understand what is going on.

And how to react, reminding oneself of past situations where stepping beyond limiting beliefs is a source to change.

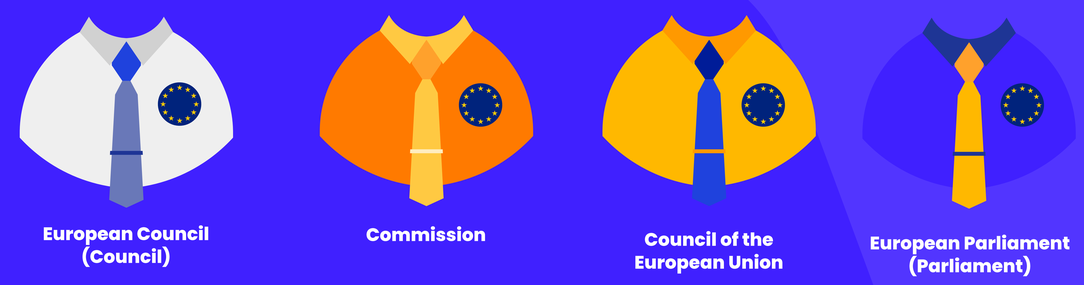
Remembering other instances when having stepped out of the comfort zone in ambiguous situations makes it more likely that people will overcome the passiveness of **the bystander effect**[30].

Motive, understanding and knowing to whom, or where to turn, is of essence when it comes to helping others and when it comes to whistleblowing.

In 2019 The European Court of Auditors[31] released a report that looked in to:

The awareness and attitudes on ethical understanding, and the knowledge where one could report misconduct.

The target group was the staff and members of the:



A target group that you would imagine should be more aware of the EU directive. But as it shows, even within this group;

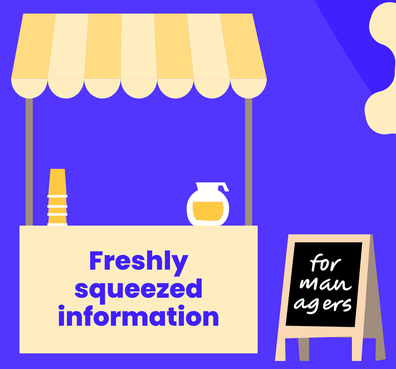
The fear of not fully knowing what to do seems to influence them as well.

This is why **information campaigns about what to do and where to turn is of essence**, as well as understanding the mechanisms behind the;

Bystander effect

80% **Managers**
80% of the managers believe that they have good knowledge of ethical framework and/or know how to obtain more information if needed.

50% About **50%** of the Managers received training on ethics.

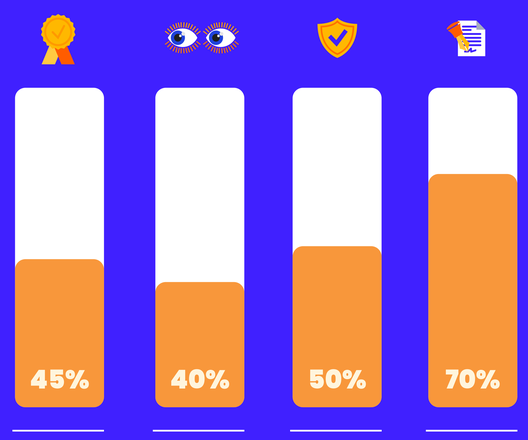


40% **Staff**
Less than **half** of staff members received training on ethics.

40% The **majority** of staff do not know whether their institution handles ethical issues appropriately.

50% **Half** of the staff feel safe reporting on ethical issues.

70% Almost **70%** of staff members have little or no knowledge about ways to report unethical conduct.



Whistleblowing is a powerful tool in holding organizations accountable for their actions.

But it is not always without its risks, especially when health and safety are at stake.

Being well-informed, cautious, and aware of the potential dangers is crucial for any individual contemplating such a significant step.

By prioritizing safety, seeking alternatives where one might be anonymous, and protecting their well-being, whistleblowers can navigate this complex terrain with greater confidence and resilience.

Expert on the topic

" It is surprising that 70% of employees do not know how to report misconduct, and less than half have received training on ethical issues. To achieve a strong ethical standard, one cannot only react to raised suspicions, but must work proactively to prevent misconduct at all levels within the organization. To accomplish this, internal and external regulations need to be continually raised, anchored, and confirmed. "

Alexandra Sandberg
Specialist within in security, investigations, and EU legislation

A helping hand

One is all it takes

The psychological effects we've looked into are centered around a whole group feeling one way, while an individual might feel another way.

The normative social influence is at its most powerful state when everyone in a group follows the same social norms, or has the same beliefs or behaviors.

But according to researcher Asch[18] this can be disrupted with only one more person.

When one person dares to disagree with the group it helps others to feel validated in not agreeing and promotes them come forward with opinions or behaviors that differ from the group.

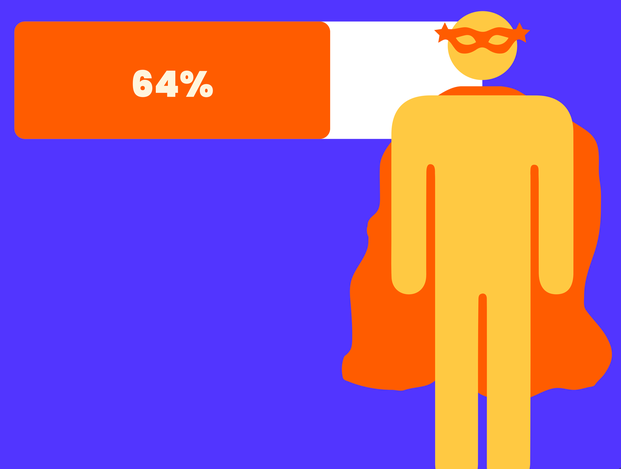
The importance of having an ally is that it dramatically helps the members of a group resist the pressures of normative social influence[14], and even by just observing another person resist emboldens others to do the same[19].

People see themselves as part of the solution

There is hope glimmering when it comes to standing up and speaking out on misconduct. According to a survey that Transparency International came out with in 2021, almost two thirds of people in the EU think that citizens can actually can make a difference in the fight against corruption[13] .

The ordinary citizen has a moral compass of what is right and wrong, and do see themselves as part of the solution, and want safer and more reliable workplaces and societies in which they live.

64% think that ordinary people can make a difference in the fight against corruption.



Expert on the topic

Malin Moezzi

Licensed psychologist, working with organisational psychology and strategic HR.

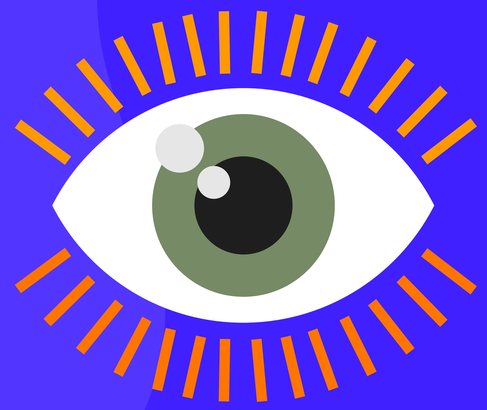
From a psychological perspective, the need to feel belonging and inclusion is a fundamental human drive.

Already as children we send signals in the form of smiles to approach other people, we signal our desire for connection and acceptance, and we learn which behaviors are socially accepted.

In our work life, it's about wanting to be perceived as good colleagues, above all as competent and that we can perform. In a work culture characterized by fear, the consequences are that you don't dare to ask questions, share thoughts and ideas as you risk looking stupid.

There is a great risk that you are afraid of being punished if you make mistakes, and it can also lead to not daring to report errors like in the case of whistleblowing.

Not having insights into this human drive and **the effects that fear based management has on both employees and organization can lead to catastrophic consequences** for example in healthcare and safety-classified professions.



But even if the consequences aren't as catastrophic as in those cases, it will still have a negative effect on employer engagement and productivity.

To build resilient and successful organisations one needs to establish a high level of psychological safety.

Psychological safety; is a scientific measure that evaluates the fearlessness of an organisational culture and is crucial in cultivating a successful team.

High-performing groups with a strong sense of psychological security exhibit several key characteristics, one of them being that these groups frequently report their errors and mistakes.

By acknowledging and learning from these mistakes, they can effectively identify areas for improvement and work towards correcting inaccuracies.

This commitment to learning from failures leads to greater organisational learning and growth.

To build psychological safety, it is crucial to have leaders be the role models and exhibit behaviors that promote vulnerability and curiosity.

This starts with acknowledging your own shortcomings and being willing to seek help when needed.

By openly discussing our mistakes and how we can learn from them, we **create an environment where others feel comfortable doing the same.** Employees are like children, they don't do as we say, they do as we do.

Meaning, leaders and management must lead with example if we are to create a cultural shift. This requires a high level of trust in employees, which can be described as risk-taking trust.

It will highlight their value within the organisation and empower employees to make decisions and act independently, which often leads to a greater sense of responsibility and motivation. This, in turn, enables them to persevere during challenging periods.

Malin Moezzi

Licensed psychologist, working with organisational psychology and strategic HR.

5 Cultural shifts

Create a cultural shift?

Trends, time, and effort
Surveys and research can give us different statistic, yet they are coherent when it comes to seeing trends as the difference is often times small.

They show us the current trending status of whistleblowing in people's minds. The good intentions on wanting to report on wrongdoing, yet fear hinders most people to blow the whistle on misconduct.

Fear of bad reputation, financial and legal consequences and not trusting that leadership will correct the reported wrongdoings.

It is also clear that there is a lack of knowledge about to whom and where a report should and could be filed. This is an opportunity to help boost this information so that it reaches as many people as possible. So that informed decisions can be made.

The new legislation aims to protect whistleblowers from retaliation and a lot of new whistleblowing system are out on the market to keep them safe beyond what is counted as being compliant to meet future safety standards, such as anonymity.
Even if the current laws in the different countries as of right now don't fully support anonymity, or leave it to the organisations themselves to decide if that is needed.

Expert on the topic

" Research by Stefan Blomberg[34] from 2022 shows that supportive leaders are the best safeguard against misconduct in the workplace when it comes to Bullying and Harassment – this is most likely also true regarding whistleblowing. Therefore, we should focus on good leadership in order to create a culture that supports whistleblowers. "

Oscar Fredriksson

Lawyer with a speciality in organizational development, regulatory reform, leadership and Public Value Governance.

Not too late yet to change.

It takes time to create a cultural shift
As to quote Dr Simone White[7]:

" the new legislation alone is no magic bullet"

To change the fears and attitudes that are related to whistleblowing, efforts to reach people with this information must be done. Time needs to pass before whistleblowers begin to understand and trust systems that have been put in place to protect them.

A change in culture in the workplace must also take place for whistleblowers to begin trusting in reporting procedures before we might see a noticeable increase in the number of reported misconducts after the full adaption of the new legislation.

It is clear that the negative connotations and that the social acceptance of whistleblowing varies in different countries, but no single country is an exception when it comes to this phenomena, and is therefore a problem that concerns all of the members states in the EU.

The legislation has already begun and the EU directive should be followed and adapted to the latest on December 17th 2023.

And since there has been no widespread information campaign about this, the companies and organisations that are affected by the directive are the ones responsible for informing and keeping their employees and co-workers up to date on this.

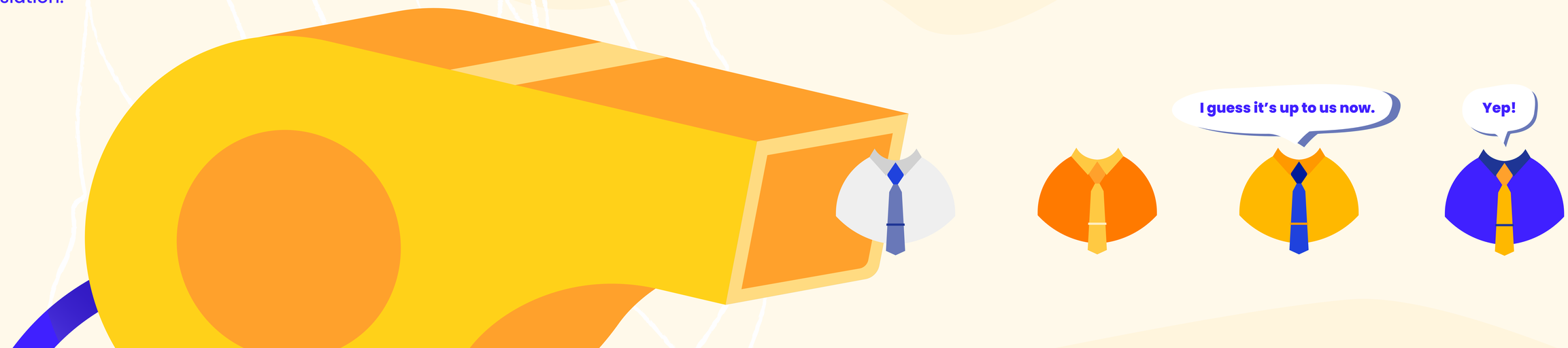
As this is already set in motion, the change of connotations and attitudes before the process has already passed.

But it is not too late yet to change the way we view speaking up, and what the role of the whistleblower is in society.

There is a need to raise awareness about the critical role whistleblowers can play in detecting wrongdoing, both among the general public and within key target groups such as policy makers, journalists, trade unions and decision makers in private and public organisations[2].

The lead for this should be put on authorities that carry out information campaigns to foster awareness of whistleblowing and to improve its public perception[2].

And the EU directive is one main step in reaching this. But there is a significant gap of people, the ones who actually need to know about it, the potential reporters, are unaware of what the directive is. Or what their rights are, and how to report in a safe and thought through manner.



For healthy and happy workplaces - for everyone

Expert on the topic

" The EU directive and national legislations provide a security for more individuals to be willing to blow the whistle on suspected misconduct. At the same time, it offers employers a valuable opportunity to become aware of issues at an early stage.

However, employers are required to do more than just provide a whistleblowing system to comply with the law.

It's all about establishing trustworthy processes where the correct actions are taken at every subsequent step, and high integrity is maintained throughout the entire whistleblowing process.

It is only **when whistleblowers feel safe to come forward** that systematic corruption can truly be combated. "

Alexandra Sandberg

Specialist within security, investigations, and EU legislation

One organisation at a time

With the directive and the new legislation's around EU, there are now several efforts made to change the conditions for whistleblowers.

Still the connotations and misconceptions add to the fear of speaking up. Even when, as we can see by the numbers in this report, people want to do good, but stay silent because of fear.

With greater insight to the whistleblowing process, information about ethics, employers rights and inspirational leaders who aim on building secure speak up cultures, we can see a glimmers of hope that help us stay motivated.

We want to continue spreading the word about what whistleblowing is and how it benefits all in society.

We want to help create a change where scrutiny and fear are replaced by praise and ease. One organisation at a time. **For healthy and happy workplaces - for everyone**.

Sources

1. Osterhaus, A., & Fagan, C. (2009). Alternative to Silence: Whistleblower Protection in 10 European Countries.
2. Batishcheva, M., & Vorontsov, V. (2013). Whistleblowing across Europe:it seems a «gradient» from West to East, from North to South. What lessons to be learned?
3. EU Commission. (2017). Public consultation on whistleblower protection.
4. G, Dondé. (2018). Ethics at Work: 2018 Survey of Employees. Institute for Business Ethics.
5. Pring, C. (2017). People and Corruption: Europa and Central Asia: Global Corruption Barometer. Transparency International.
6. White, S. (2018). A matter of life & death: whistleblowing legislation in the EU.
7. Timothy D. Wilson., Robin M. Alert., Elliot Aronson., Samuel R. Sommers. (2018): Social psychology. Ninth Edition.
8. Banaji, M.R. and Heiphetz, L. (2010) Attitudes. In: Fiske, S.T., Gilbert, D.T. and Lindzey, G., Eds., Handbook of Social Psychology, John Wiley & Sons, New York
9. (Directive 2019/1937/EU)
10. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32019L1937
11. Gerard Sinzdak. (2008) An Analysis of Current Whistleblower Laws: Defending a More Flexible Approach to Reporting Requirements. California Law.
12. Holtz, R. (2004). Group cohesion, attitude projection, and opinion certainty: Beyond interaction. Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice.
13. Roberto Martinez B. Kukutschka. (2021). Global corruption barometer European Union. Citizens' views and experiences of corruption. Transparency International.
14. Timothy D. Wilson., Elliot Aronson., Samuel R. Sommers. (2019): Social psychology. Tenth Edition.
15. Williams, K. D., & Nida, S. A. (2011). Ostracism: Consequences and coping. Current Directions in Psychological Science.
16. Abrams, D., Palmer, S. B., Rutland, A., Cameron, L., & Van de Vyer, J. (2014). Evaluations of and reasoning about normative and deviant ingroup and outgroup members: Development of the black sheep effect.
17. Baron, R. S., Vandello, J. A., & Brunsman, B. (1996). The forgotten variable in conformity research: Impact of task importance on social influence. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology.
18. Asch, S. E. (1955). Opinions and social pressure. Scientific American.
19. Nemeth, C. J., & Chiles, C. (1988). Modeling courage: The role of dissent in fostering independence. European Journal of Social Psychology.
20. Brewer, M. B., & Brown, R. J. (1998). Intergroup Relations. McGraw-Hill.
21. Bettencourt, B. A., & Sheldon, K. (2001). Social roles as mechanism for psychological need satisfaction within social groups. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology.
22. Amato, P. R. (1983). Helping behavior in urban and rural environments: Field studies based on a taxonomic organization of helping episodes. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology.
23. Milgram, S. (1970). The experience of living in cities. Science.
24. Oishi, S., Rothman, A. J., Snyder, M., Su, J., Zehm, K., Hertel, A. W., et al. (2007). The socioecological model of procommunity action: The benefits of residential stability. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology.
25. Oishi, S., Talhelm, T., Lee, M., Komiya, A., & Akutsu, S. (2015). Residential mobility and low-commitment groups. Archives of Scientific Psychology.
26. Darley, J. M., & Batson, C. D. (1973). From Jerusalem to Jericho: A study of situational and dispositional variables in helping behavior. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology.
27. Latan., B., & Darley, J. M. (1970). The unresponsive bystander: Why doesn't he help? Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
28. Van den Bos, K., & Lind, E. A. (2013). On sense-making reactions and public inhibition of benign social motives: An appraisal model of prosocial behavior. Advances in Experimental Social Psychology.
29. Beaman, A. L., Barnes, P. J., Klentz, B., & McQuirk, B. (1978). Increasing helping rates through informational dissemination: Teaching pays. Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin.
30. Van den Bos, K., & Lind, E. A. (2013). On sense-making reactions and public inhibition of benign social motives: An appraisal model of prosocial behavior. Advances in Experimental Social Psychology.
31. European Court of Aduitors. (2019). Special Report. The ethical frameworks of the audited EU institutions: scope for improvement (pursuant to Article 287(4), second subparagraph, TFEU).
32. Worth, M. (2013). Whistleblowing in Europe: Legal protections for whistleblowers in the EU. Transparency International.
33. Prot, S., Gentile, D. A., Anderson, C. A., Suzuki, K., Swing, E., Lim, K. M., et al. (2014). Long-term relations among prosocial-media use, empathy, and prosocial behavior. Psychological Science.
34. Blomberg, S. (2022). Beware of Non-Supportive Leaders : Moderating Effects of Supportive Leadership on the Risks and Effects of Workplace Bullying. Linking University.
35. Philpot, R., Liebst, L. S., Levine, M., Bernasco, W., & Lindegaard, M. R. (2019). Would I Be Helped? Cross-National CCTV Footage Shows That Intervention Is the Norm in Public Conflicts. American Psychologist.
36. Stadler, D. (2008). Revisiting the issue of safety in numbers: The likelihood of receiving help from a group. Social Influence.