

Morality of principle versus morality of loyalty: The case of whistleblowing

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ABSTRACT. Whistleblowing involves the unauthorised disclosure of organisational wrongdoing by an employee (or former employee) to those who are perceived to be in a position to act on this information. When considering whether to disclose such information, whistleblowers confront the conflicting demands of the morality of principle versus the morality of loyalty. The aim of this paper is to explore the dynamics involved in this moral dilemma. A typology reflecting the possible responses in managing such moral dilemmas is developed. Three dimensions related to wrongdoing, namely perceptions, extent of the wrongdoing and power relationships are also analysed. It is concluded that, although the conflicting demands of the morality of principle versus the morality of loyalty will always exist, there are measures that can be taken to limit the impact of these conflicts and in the long run even resolve them. In particular, if loyalty is reconceptualised as rational loyalty, the disclosure of perceived wrongdoing could more easily be interpreted as loyalty to the organisation as a whole.

Key words: Whistleblowing, business ethics, morality of principle, morality of loyalty, conformity, deviance.

Introduction

Issues of corruption and fraud are presently prominent in many African countries. It brings to the fore questions with regard to the extent of organisational wrongdoing and ways in which these problems can be addressed. One such mechanism is through encouraging employees who become aware of organisational wrongdoing to disclose information about the alleged misconduct to a relevant authority. The unauthorised disclosure by an employee or former employee of any illegal and/or immoral behaviour within the workplace to those who are perceived to be in a position to deal with the organisational wrongdoing is commonly known as whistleblowing.

Reports in the media and research into whistleblowing reveal that the decision to blow the whistle is not a straightforward one. Although one may be inclined to assume that organisations appreciate such disclosures, and would respond positively, the experience of most whistleblowers suggests otherwise.

Numerous cases of whistleblowing demonstrate that the act is in fact not appreciated and that whistleblowers are severely victimised by their employers. In reality

employees who become aware of misconduct face a moral dilemma, which might discourage them from blowing the whistle. This dilemma relates to the choice between their obligation to care for the public good and their obligation of loyalty to their employer, that is confronting the conflicting demands of the morality of principle versus the morality of loyalty. A typology reflecting the different possible responses in managing moral dilemmas of this kind is developed. The extent to which the dynamics involved in this moral dilemma influences the choices that actors make, is explored. The paper is concluded with suggestions as to how the conflicting demands of the morality of principle versus the morality of loyalty could be reduced or even resolved. The re-conceptualisation of loyalty as rational loyalty is of particular importance here.

Typology

When considering the choices whistleblowers need to make, it is clear that they are confronted with a serious moral dilemma, or stated otherwise, with two equally demanding and legitimate moralities, i.e. the "morality of principle", and the "morality of loyalty". Bredemeier and Stephenson (1967, pp. 17-18) developed this distinction based on Parsons's (1951, pp. 58-67) five-fold set of pattern variables, in particular the distinction between universalism and particularism. Parsons argued that in a particular interaction situation individuals need to make a choice between acting in terms of universally accepted abstract rules of behaviour (universalism) or basing interaction in their relationship on a particular person or group of people (particularism).

Flowing from this distinction the morality of loyalty is defined as the "morally good" to be committed, as a first priority, to a particular person or group of people (in this context typically an owner/manager of a business and/or colleagues in that organisation) irrespective of the universally acceptable rules applicable in that particular context. Loyalty is described as a special obligation to selected people, organisations or groups within a particular context, which flows from the special relationship that exists between individuals or members of an organisation or group. Organisational loyalty requires that employees should act in good faith and in the best interests of the corporation by obeying any reasonable instruction, conforming to the values and norms of the organisation, protecting the reputation of the organisation and maintaining confidentiality (Uys, 2008, pp. 909-910). One can only be loyal to

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people or collectivities of people and not to principles. The morality of loyalty within the organisational context states that it is right or proper for employees to be loyal to their organisations.

The morality of principle, on the other hand, defines it as “morally good” to act in accordance with certain abstract principles (in this context typically the legal or ethical requirements applicable to the organisational context) irrespective of the people involved. This implies action in terms of universalistic values where one’s relationship with particular individuals, groups or organisations is not taken into account in determining what is right or moral¹.

It should be stated that a true moral dilemma could only be said to exist where two equally valid and demanding moral options are involved. If any of the options were believed to be of higher moral value than the other, then the dilemma would theoretically disappear as the choice would be conspicuously clear.

When the division between the morality of principle and the morality of loyalty is subdivided in terms of whether the individual actor is ‘conforming to’ or ‘deviating from’ one or both of the moralities, a typology with four cells emerges as reflected in Table 1. Deviance is used here in its broadest possible sense to refer to ‘those acts that do not follow the norms and expectations of a particular social group’ (Haralambos *et al.*, 2004, p. 330). Deviating from the morality of principle therefore implies not to act in terms of the abstract rules that govern a particular situation.

TABLE 1:
 TYPOLOGY: MORALITIES OF PRINCIPLE VERSUS LOYALTY

		MORALITY OF PRINCIPLE	
		Conformity (C)	Deviance (D)
MORALITY OF LOYALTY	Conformity (C)	Congruent Morality (CC)	Conspiracy of silence (DC)
	Deviance (D)	Whistleblowing (CD)	Amoral (DD)

The resulting four response options have been conceptualised as ‘amoral’, ‘conspiracy of silence’, ‘whistleblowing’ and ‘congruent morality’. It should be stated from the outset that only the conspiracy of silence and whistleblowing responses involve true moral dilemmas within the context of organisational wrongdoing. The congruent morality and amoral responses represent no moral dilemma *per se*. A brief description of each response is provided below.

Amoral behaviour (deviating from both the morality of principle and the morality of loyalty) typically involves action with disregard for legal/ethical principles, as well as disregard for any consideration of loyalty to any person or category of people, be they members of or outsiders to the organisation. It is important to consider the distinction between amoral and immoral behaviour in this regard. Immoral behaviour is not only devoid of

ethical principles or precepts, but also depicts what is positively and actively opposed to what is ethical’ (Carroll 1987, p. 9). The immoral actor can distinguish right from wrong but knowingly decides to do wrong. As per the typology actors who deviate from both the morality of principle and the morality of loyalty are not necessarily consciously doing wrong: they either believe that ethical considerations are not applicable in the business world (intentional amoral behaviour) or they ‘lack ethical perception and moral awareness; that is, they blithely go through their organisational lives not thinking that what they are doing has an ethical dimension to it’ (unintentional amoral behaviour) (Carroll, 1987, p. 11). Obviously “going blithely through their organisational lives” could be justified or rationalised by simply denying the ethical relevance of what they say and do within the organisational context².

The conspiracy of silence (deviating from the morality of principle but conforming to the morality of loyalty) typically involves particularistic behaviour in Parsons’s terms (1951, p. 62). In this case loyalty to people (in the case of disclosures typically loyalty to the manager/owner and/or colleagues in the organisation) supersedes principled action as evaluative directive (Senekal, 1999, p. 445). Remaining silent about wrongdoing by colleagues or the organisation constitutes a double-edged sword. On the one hand the organisation’s reputation is believed to be protected, which constitutes conforming to the morality of loyalty. On the other hand the organisational wrongdoing is at the same time passively being condoned, which constitutes deviating from the principle of caring for the public good. As a result, a climate conducive to corruption is created not only within the organisation but also, and perhaps especially, in the organisation’s interaction with its social environment. Once again, denial that a climate conducive to corruption is in this way being created is an effective social-psychological mechanism to justify or rationalise a continuation of this action by a particular individual or group.

In the case of whistleblowing (which represents one important example of deviating from the morality of loyalty but conforming to the morality of principle) principled action as evaluative directive supersedes loyalty to people and, in fact, is often perceived to be an act of disloyalty to the people involved and even a betrayal of them (Uys, 2008, p. 908). This is often only discovered by the whistleblower well into the process or after the whistleblowing act. It is usually during this time that the moral dilemma is experienced acutely by the whistleblower, although to some extent retrospectively.

The final cell in the table represents the ideal situation where actors are not compelled to choose between the morality of principle and the morality of loyalty as the two moralities are complementary and mutually supportive (i.e. non-contradictory). We therefore label this situation one of congruent morality.

Whistleblowing and the morality of principle

Whistleblowers act according to the moral dictates of principle when the wrongdoing that they disclose is non-trivial and in the public interest. Martin (1999, p. 15) suggests that 'Whistleblowing is speaking out in the public interest, typically to expose corruption or dangers to the public or environment.' While it is clearly in the public interest to expose some forms of wrongdoing such as the dumping of toxic waste or corruption in the civil service, other issues might be more open to interpretation (in terms of the extent to which the issue is overtly unethical). Whistleblowing becomes a particular problem if the employer does not perceive the disclosure to be in the public interest or considers it to be a matter of confidentiality or security (Hunt, 1998, p.527). Whistleblowers might believe that they are acting in the best interests of the organisation by disclosing suspicions of perceived wrongdoing in order for the organisation to address these and are therefore loyal employees. Since whistleblowers reveal entrusted information that the employer does not want revealed, the employer often considers whistleblowers to be disloyal to the organisation (Davis, 2003, p. 545).

Whistleblowing and the morality of loyalty

The duty of loyalty is usually expressed as 'acting in good faith' and 'acting in the best interests of the corporation'. This is particularly important with regard to keeping corporate information confidential and considering that which emanates from the organisation's activities to be "the property of the employer".

It is clear that the morality of principle and the morality of loyalty are often in a relationship of tension with each other. Jubb (1999, p.82) explains this tension as follows:

"Persons contemplating whistleblowing face a dilemma because their roles entail loyalties to the targeted organisation that conflict, not just with integrity, that is loyalty to self, but also with perceived responsibilities to others, for instance their professional associations or the general public."

Jubb encapsulates the essence of the moral dilemma of the whistleblower here. Whistleblowers have to deal with the conflicting expectations of being loyal to the organisation and putting its interests first, while at the same time complying with the expectation that they should act in the best interest of the public. Professionals find this a particularly vexing issue as they have committed themselves to abiding by their professional code of ethics, and therefore the morality of principle, while the organisation expects the morality of loyalty to be the prevailing allegiance (Uys, 2006).

Employees do not embark upon the act of whistleblowing lightly. Jensen (1987) identifies various ethical tension points (or moral dilemmas) that the whistleblower has to contend with. The predominant ethical dilemma that the whistleblower faces has to do with the balancing of conflicting loyalties, obligations and values. Loyalty towards the organisation and especially the issue of confidentiality has to be weighed against one's ethical obligations to one's colleagues in the organisation, one's profession, one's family, oneself, the general public and core values of society (Uys, 2006).

Dynamics involved in the moral dilemma

The dynamics of the moral dilemma that whistleblowers face can be analysed in terms of *three bipolar dimensions*, which define the parameters within which the experience of the dilemma could fluctuate. These three are firstly the *dimension of perception*; that is the perception of the whistleblower versus the perception of the employer or organisation. Secondly, the *dimension of scope* is identified as the extent to which the wrongdoing is limited to the individual 'bad apple', or involve an extensive number of people (perhaps even including high profile members of the organisation in positions of authority). The nature of the perceived wrongdoing is also relevant here, that is the distinction between occupational and organisational misconduct. Thirdly, the *dimension of power* plays a role, and particularly the power wielded by the whistleblower compared to the power held by the wrongdoer or wrongdoers.

The dimension of perception

This dimension refers to the incongruence between the definition of the act of disclosure by the whistleblower and the definition of the same act by those in positions of authority i.e. typically the employer/organisation. In most cases the whistleblower (especially in the internal disclosure phase) defines his or her act as being an act of loyalty to and in the interest of the organisation and the general public i.e. as approximating or falling squarely within the congruent morality category (CC) of the typology discussed earlier. The definition of the very same act by the employer (also often during its internal disclosure phase), however, frequently perceives the act of disclosure as being a fundamental act of disloyalty and betrayal of the organisation and colleagues even though, deep down, they might realise that some wrongful act is being rightfully exposed.

Most whistleblowers initially believe that the organisation is really committed to its mission, that it desires to be informed about misconduct in the workplace and that the reporting of misconduct will be rewarded or at least appreciated, only to realise later that their initial belief was naïve. The typical whistleblower begins his or

her career as a loyal employee who realises, only when it is too late, that the organisation generally does not appreciate bad news. In many cases whistleblowers had little previous intention to blow the whistle. Or, they were of the opinion that they were doing their duty as loyal employees by acting according to their professional norms (Uys, 2006).

Organisations typically regard whistleblowing as illegitimate. They believe that whistleblowing is a deviant act, which threatens the profitability of the organisation and tarnishes its reputation. Organisations consider whistleblowing to be a form of betrayal and therefore tend to deal with whistleblowers as traitors by punishing those who engage in this kind of activity.

The following comments by Ben-Yahuda vividly illustrate something of this strain:

“The organisation sees whistleblowing as betraying of the interests of the organization, violating the rules of hierarchy, bypassing authority, squealing, damaging the reputation of the organization, poisoning the atmosphere, and supplanting cooperation with suspicion. Whistleblowers, on the other hand, tend to justify their activities in such terms as doing one’s job, being faithful to the community, revealing the truth, and doing something that is in the best interests of the organization.” (Ben-Yahuda, 2001, p. 79)

When these conflicting perceptions exist, the perceiver of wrongdoing is confronted by the unenviable choice of either conforming to the morality of principle and deviating from the morality of loyalty (whistleblowing) or conforming to the morality of loyalty and deviating from the morality of principle (the conspiracy of silence). Both choices, however, constitute harm to the individual and to the organisation. In both cases the wrongdoing would probably continue unabated, with the whistleblower looking for a job and the silent conspirators having to face their lack of moral courage.

The dimension of scope

In cases of internal disclosure where an individual wrongdoer who steals from the organisation is exposed, top management would in all probability welcome and even reward the whistleblower. The moral dilemma of having to choose between the morality of principle and the morality of loyalty typically does not arise in the case of occupational misconduct. The latter is generally not tolerated in organisations (Miethe, 1999, pp. 27-28) and exposing it is hailed as a loyal act.

However, where wrongdoing is systemic or occurs on an organisational level that involves (through participation, approval and cover-up) members of top management, a different scenario is likely to unfold. In the latter case, disclosure (even internally) typically leaves the whistleblower in a highly vulnerable position due to the overwhelming power imbalance within the organisation. Rather than addressing the message, management tend

to shoot the messenger. This is especially the case where, as Rothschild and Miethe (1994, p.264) state “...the whistleblower’s information points to *systemic* abuses in the organization’s way of doing business, as opposed to a one-time ‘bad apple’ claim...” The dimension of scope is particularly relevant where the whistleblower has to choose between the options of whistleblowing and the conspiracy of silence (i.e. the CD and DC quadrants of our typology). The dimension of scope therefore overlaps to a considerable extent with the dimension of power that will be discussed next.

The dimension of power

The comparative power of the whistleblower versus that of the wrongdoer in determining the organisational response to the whistleblower is directly related to group norms about appropriate behaviour. Miceli and Near (1992, p.144) explain it as follows:

“Group norms may interact with the power of the group to enforce norms (and perhaps other variables) to produce or inhibit whistleblowing... That is, a powerful group that accepts certain wrongdoing may inhibit whistleblowing; a powerful group that prescribes it may experience infrequent norm violations, but when they occur, whistleblowing occurs. The norms of a group that is less powerful may be irrelevant to whistleblowing. Groups are particularly powerful when focal members are highly dependent on them, as when the group provides valued rewards or information, where tasks are independent, where the majority is highly credible, and where the focal member feels insecure.”

Apart from the interaction between the power of the group, group norms and the extent to which whistleblowing is likely to occur, the relative power of the wrongdoer versus that of the whistleblower, and the financial or other dependence of the organisation on the wrongdoing, play an important role in determining the nature of the response of the organisation to the whistleblower. A powerful wrongdoer is more likely to be protected by the organisation rather than be sanctioned, while organisations may be more likely to respond positively to whistleblowers on which they rely heavily, i.e. whistleblowers in key positions (Miceli & Near, 1992, p.188-189). Similarly to the case of the dimension of scope, power differences are experienced as particularly influential in the would-be whistleblower’s choice between the options of a) whistleblowing or b) the conspiracy of silence (i.e. the CD and DC quadrants of our typology).

These three dimensions tend to be interdependent. Where the perpetrators are powerful members of the organisation, and the organisational wrongdoing is widespread and to the advantage of the organisation, employers tend to view whistleblowers in a negative light. The inclination is then to encourage the conspiracy of silence. Under these conditions only very committed

and defiant (some would say foolhardy) whistleblowers would opt for the morality of principle.

Towards resolving the conflicting demands

The congruent morality option as suggested by the typology is characterised by conformity to the moralities of principle and loyalty simultaneously. In this case no moral dilemma exists, as there is no conflict between the abstract rules in place and the interests of different parties involved in the situation. In the whistleblowing context the question arises whether such an ideal could be achieved and if so, how? A satisfactory answer to this question could dramatically reduce the conflict and trauma associated with whistleblowing.

Two logical approaches can be distinguished in our attempt to find a solution to the moral dilemma. The first approach is based on the assumption that whistleblowing is retained as an option and the whistleblower's position *vis-à-viz* the non-whistleblower is protected within the organisation. The second approach is based on the assumption that whistleblowing becomes unnecessary. As a new and open, pro-integrity moral order is developed within the organisation and marketed as a strong asset, whistleblowing could become redundant. These approaches are discussed briefly.

With reference to the first approach (i.e. retaining whistleblowing), there are three institutional issues that need to be addressed: '(i) conformity with organisational cultures; (ii) adherence to professional standards (including collegiality); and (iii) the dynamics of institutional loyalty' (McNamee 2001, p. 432). In this regard Johnson (2003, p.28) argues that both whistleblowers and co-workers should respect the way in which the other exercises loyalty:

"[T]he whistleblower would be required to respect his or her co-workers' sense of loyalty to family, career, and personal interest. At the same time, they in turn would need to view the whistleblower not as someone who is disloyal, but as someone loyal to another cause."

In order to facilitate whistleblowers in their role as corporate citizens their position should be protected and regulated. This entails protection of whistleblowers by legal means. In this approach whistleblowing is based on the premise that the morality of principle represents the higher order morality while the morality of loyalty represents the lower order morality, which should, if the need arises, be sacrificed in favour of the former. This solution lessens the impact of the moral dilemma through bestowing a higher moral value to the morality of principle. Although this would theoretically mean that the dilemma no longer exists, it would in fact most likely remain. Its impact would, however, be less profound.

Unfortunately the motivation for this state of affairs (i.e. where organisations are encouraged to put principle above loyalty through providing protection to

whistleblowers) emanates from an external source, such as the state or an authority external to the organisation. It represents a less favourable scenario and could involve serious costs for whistleblowers, their colleagues and the organisation in terms of possible retrenchment, breach of trust and loss of reputation within the public domain.

The second approach (i.e. making whistleblowing redundant) aims to resolve the whistleblower's dilemma by making it unnecessary to blow the whistle. Davis (1989, pp. 9-16) proposes that organisations should attempt to "avoid the tragedy of whistle-blowing". This, according to him, could be achieved by institutionalising a climate where the reporting of bad news is encouraged as part of the regular way of going about the organisation's business. Organisations should therefore be restructured in order to facilitate the disclosure of bad news by implementing 'whistleblowing' procedures, i.e. authorising and/or encouraging the disclosure of information about irregularities in particular ways to particular bodies or officials. This means that the communication channels of the organisation should be opened up so that no potential whistleblower is in a position to prevent bad news from filtering through to the highest structures. These highest structures should be empowered to deal with the bad news instead of merely sweeping it under the rug.

In an unstable world the consensus required in an organisation in order to avoid "the tragedy of whistleblowing" may be difficult to achieve. As organisations become insolvent or are taken over, new thinking is introduced and cultural clashes within the organisation may well occur. In view of this it is suggested that the two logical approaches referred to above would, at least initially, be complementary rather than mutually exclusive.

Moving towards a moral order would entail that the organisation strives to become an ethical organisation in spirit as well as practice (Rossouw & Uys, 2004). This could be achieved by implementing systems within the organisation, which would not only pre-empt the necessity of whistleblowing, but would render it superfluous.

In this regard organisations should, on the basis of the initiative from top management (or its functional equivalent), be working towards a dispensation, including, but not necessarily limited to, the following.

- The establishment of an internal forum or committee with the authority and explicit instruction or function to meet regularly on the basis of agreed upon procedures, to focus on issues and concerns raised (and not people), to discuss, take the necessary corrective measures and if possible, resolve the issues and concerns;
- A feedback loop towards some body of accountability (which could be management or a combination of

management, unions, employees, customers and shareholders [where applicable]) could be established to oversee and report on the entire process and its outcomes; and

- Having succeeded in institutionalising and routinising such structures and procedures, organisations could use this dimension of their organisational makeup to market their transparent integrity.

A new, transparent and pro-integrity dimension to organisational culture could thus be initiated. If this dimension becomes a publicly known fact about the organisation, the general public, shareholders and customers in particular would soon start asking why certain other organisations do not have this dimension in place. This, in turn, would raise concerns about whether non-participating organisations may have something to hide. Increased transparency may in future be forced upon organisations as financial disasters (such as the current [2008] sub-prime crisis in the USA) occur. Integrity may perhaps follow transparency, especially once shareholders make a connection between transparency, integrity and profitability.

Although a reduction in the need for whistleblowing and the facilitation of information flow could go some way towards easing the severity of the dilemma that the observer of wrongdoing experiences, it does not remove the dilemma altogether. It is argued here that the more favourable scenario, in fact the ideal in this context, is a situation where the morality of principle and the morality of loyalty were reconciled to such an extent that acting according to principle would amount to, and be seen to amount to, loyalty to management, colleagues, the organisation and the broader community/public and vice versa.

How then could this be achieved? In terms of the typology presented this would require moving whistleblowing from the conformity/deviance cell (CD) to the conformity/conformity (CC) cell or quadrant. In essence this amounts to creating a moral order where the morality of principle and the morality of loyalty will be congruent to each other, at least inside the organisation.

Ronald Duska (2004, p. 309) argues that the contradictory nature of whistleblowing is a fallacy as 'companies are not the kinds of things that are properly objects of loyalty'. As organisations do not hold similar views, Duska's view does not resolve the dilemma of the whistleblower.

In contrast, Michael Davis (2003) offers a complicity theory of whistleblowing. This theory is aimed at the supposition that an employee who perceives wrongdoing and does nothing about it, is complicit by allowing the wrongdoing to continue. The whistleblower therefore has an obligation to sound the alarm as it could express 'loyalty to the organization as a whole' (Davis 2003, p. 553). Davis's view also does not resolve the whistleblower's dilemma, as the principle of loyalty is over-emphasised as such.

Another approach towards resolving the moral dilemma engendered by whistleblowing is through re-conceptualising loyalty as distinct from commitment (Coughlan 2005, pp. 46-53). Coughlan identifies three elements of loyalty that sets it apart from commitment. These are 'its voluntary nature, its demand for ongoing adherence, and its grounding in morality'. In contrast, commitment involves 'three distinct processes: compliance, identification and internalisation'. Rather than reflecting a devotion to the organisation, loyalty is related to 'the attitudes and behaviors related to a community's moral values'. This implies that loyalty should be determined through the willingness of employees 'to universalize moral standards within the communities where they work' (Coughlan, 2005, p. 53). This argument brings us closer to a possible solution.

Vandekerckhove and Commers (2004) present a similar argument to that of Coughlan by employing the concept of rational loyalty, which they define as follows:

"[T]he object of *rational loyalty* is not the physical aspects of the company – buildings, executives, boards, hierarchies, colleagues – but the explicit set of mission statement, goals, value statement and code of conduct of the organization which is judged as legitimate." (Vandekerckhove & Commers, 2004, p. 229).

Understanding loyalty as rational loyalty removes the moral dilemma that the whistleblower faces. Should organisational loyalty imply being loyal to the explicit values and norms of the organisation, perceiving organisational wrongdoing would then compel the loyal employee to blow the whistle. This would establish a climate of *congruent morality* in the organisation where following the dictates of one's principles necessarily implies acting in the best interests of the organisation.

Conclusion

Observers of wrongdoing in the workplace face a difficult choice: should they disclose their suspicions or remain mute. This paper represents a departure from the assumption that people in general prefer to view themselves as acting in terms of what is right and proper. The dilemma of observers of wrongdoing is analysed in terms of a typology that distinguishes between the contending moralities of principle and loyalty. Observers of wrongdoing needs to decide whether it is morally good in the particular context to prioritise their loyalty to a particular person, a group of people or the organisation as an entity and therefore remain silent, or whether the moral decision is to act in terms of the universally acceptable rules applicable in that particular context and to therefore expose the moral transgression.

It is proposed that the moral dilemma created by the contending moralities as expressing itself in the context of whistleblowing could be addressed in two ways. The first option is to adopt legislation to provide increased

protection for whistleblowers. The second option is to implement systems in organisations, which not only pre-empt whistleblowing but also make it redundant. This requires the implementation of open, pro-integrity reporting systems in organisations. It should be possible to report organisational wrongdoing internally with the assurance that the reports will be investigated and dealt with. The institutionalisation of structures and procedures, which authorises disclosures of wrongdoing, may render whistleblowing as the unauthorised disclosure of information (and its tragic consequences) superfluous.

However, even in a truly ethical workplace a situation could arise where conforming to the morality of principle makes it necessary to disclose information that the organisation would prefer to suppress. Organisational loyalty should therefore be understood as rational loyalty, which views loyalty as being loyal to the explicit values and norms of the organisation. Perceiving organisational wrongdoing then compels the loyal employee to blow the whistle. Organisations should strive to establish a climate of congruent morality where conforming to the morality of principle necessarily implies acting in the best interests of the organisation³.

A corporate environment that focuses on the message rather than the messenger should be created. This requires a change in corporate values where business ethics is a core dimension of the functioning of the organisation. A truly ethical workplace is one where congruent morality dominates, and the ethical climate is such that raising concerns, but not necessarily blowing the whistle formally, is the natural way of conducting the business of the organisation.

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(Endnotes)

- 1 The norm of adherence to abstract principles in the workplace is of course not universally accepted. Ubuntu in South Africa and guanxi in China are two notions that give preference to personal relationships over any other.
- 2 The decision not to conform to either morality can of course also be deliberate, which would make it immoral rather than amoral. We are arguing that in the majority of cases actors do not consciously deviate from these moralities.
- 3 This would of course not apply if the organisation is corrupt.

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