Full Length Research Paper

Systemic factors moderating effective whistle blowing: An exploratory study into a public service organisation

Soma Pillay[1] and Nirmala Dorasamy[2]*

[1]Swinburne University of Technology, Hawthorn, Melbourne, Australia.
[2]Department of Governance and Economic Development, Durban University of Technology, Durban, South Africa.

A review of research concerning whistle-blowing suggests that it is of benefit to society; hence, sophisticated policies have been introduced to encourage whistle blowing. However, research on conditions that lead to whistle-blowers being effective in stopping wrongdoing is still developing in industrialised countries or woefully absent in developing and less developed countries. The purpose of this paper is to use survey data to examine the variables impacting on whistle-blowing using the case of a developing country. It was found that a majority of respondents believe that systemic factors moderates effective whistle-blowing. Based on these findings, we present a model of a culture contingent whistle-blowing process which considers context, content, situational variables, and outcomes. This paper has practical implications for policy makers, managers and public officials in developing democracies, especially in designing policies that consider the cultural aspects of complex open systems and exploring concerns of obvious importance practically as well as theoretically.

Key words: Whistle blowing, corruption, national culture.

INTRODUCTION

Corruption and concerns around ethics have perpetuated through history, heavily influenced by ineffective whistle blowing processes and systems. It has afflicted all forms of institutions and government and remains one of the most important challenges to the moral basis of developed and developing democracies. Whistle blowing is an ethical issue, based on the value systems of a nation. Its effectiveness requires total commitment and concerted efforts by government and civil society to examine cultural influences on such acts. There is no doubt that reluctance around whistle blowing poses a particularly serious danger to newly democratised countries such as South Africa.

The article is structured in four parts. First, a brief overview is provided of scholarly advancements around the conception of whistle blowing. Second, South Africa's institutional context and task environments are described to illustrate the country's characteristics. The study does

this by examining the country's socio-economic and political legacy. Third, using the constructs of various cultural theorists, the study examines South Africa's cultural characteristics. Such cultural characteristics and influences are visible in institutional and task environments. Fourth, it examines the findings from the survey data followed by a discussion on some of the challenges around whistle blowing.

Over the years, many definitions have advanced around whistle blowing. Some definitions have focused on activities outside the organisation whilst others have examined the act from the perspective of loyalty (Uys, 2008). Definitions of whistle blowing date back to the early 1970's with Nader et al. (1972i) defining it as 'the act of a man or woman who, believing that the public interest overrides the interest of the organisation he (sic) serves, publicly blows the whistle if the organisation is involved in corrupt, illegal, fraudulent or harmful activity'. Westin (1981) later extended Naders definition by focusing on the specific actions and its effect on the whistle blowers life "whistle blowers as well known, are employees who believe their organisation is engaged in illegal, dangerous or unethical conduct. Usually, they try

*Corresponding author. E-mail: sopillay@swin.edu.au. Tel: +61 3 92148536.

to have such conduct corrected through inside complaint, but if it is not, the employee turns to government authorities or the media. Usually, whistle blowers get fired. Sometimes, they may get reinstated. Almost always, their experiences are traumatic, and their careers and lives are profoundly affected'. Many scholarly definitions have evolved since Nader's definition and have offered multiple perspectives (Near and Miceli, 1996; Miceli and Near, 1984, 1988, 1989, 1994, 1995; Miceli et al., 1991, 1998; Magnus and Viswesvaran, 2005). More recent is De Maria's study in which an alliance is created between whistle blowing and protesting (De Maria, 2008). Overall, whistle blowers are individuals who expose wrong doing at a great personal and professional risk (Dryburgh, 2009).

Such definitions reflect a myriad of characteristics related to the act of whistle blowing, such as morality, ethical profiling, psychological implications , varying conceptualisations of ethics, wrong and right, good and bad, organisational support, organisational commitment and consequences. The study believes that a whistle blowers decision to either blow the whistle or not, is also dependant on the country's institutional context and task context. Various conceptualisations and models relevant to whistle blowing lack the specificity around task and institutional environments of a society and its influence on effective whistle blowing. In South Africa, whistle blowing is a phenomenon embedded in a complex system, a system where individuals, organisational and societal characteristics dynamically interact and converge/ diverge. The study develops a model which depicts these interactions as influences from the country's national culture. This in turn results in outcomes that reflect a pursuit of conflicting goals.

Further, we exam the institutional and task environments of South Africa that contribute to the integrative model we develop. The study examines the national cultural orientation of South Africa using the cultural constructs of various theorists. This assists us in developing propositions which we test though the findings from survey data.

SOUTH AFRICA

The institutional environment

The South African reality is characterised by two facts. First, South Africa is possibly the most highly developed economy in the African continent and second, this development is limited and constrained by a colonial past (Mkgoba, 1999). South Africa's legacy can be seen as two fold: socio-economic and political.

The socio economic legacy started during the late 19th century. South Africa's history, political economy and economic structure changed with the discovery of gold. This discovery led to the formation of the South African Union (SAU) in 1910. This union excluded the black majority in any meaningful participation, thereby reinforcing their inability to participate in the benefits of economic growth (Pillay, 2008). Certainly, the major failure of the policy-making during the decades of rapid growth was that this growth was never really transformed into development that embraced the majority of the population, nor was it used to significantly and efficiently diversify the economic base of the country. Therefore, whilst South Africa experienced economic growth, it did not experience economic development. The majority of its population remained poor while the distribution of new wealth was limited to the minority. At the same time, beginning in the late 1960s, and increasingly during the 1980s, South Africa's growth was undermined by its economic destabilization of its neighbours, its involvement in the civil wars in Mozambique and Angola and its internal political unrests (Pillay, 2008). These developments - and, of course, in a different sense, lack of development - left South Africa with certain features: ownership of land, levels of health, education and living standards enjoyed by the white minority far superior to the vast majority of the black population; the growth of a poorly educated black middle class being facilitated by employment creation within the public sector rather than private sector; the country's endemic poverty and deprivation, neglect of human development (formal education), a shortage of skilled labour and managerial skills necessary to develop competition, while unemployment grew; and despite the high levels of unemployment, the cost of labour in South Africa was high.

Therefore the characteristics of South Africa's socio economic position are (Barker, 2008):

i. Poverty, primarily, but not exclusively, is a rural feature. For example, the international labour organisation (2007) maintained that only about 20% of households in rural areas have water, electricity or waterborne sewage in the house.
ii. Income Inequality has been extensive, however over the last two decades, interracial inequality has diminished whilst intra racial inequality has increased. This may be attributed to increased unemployment among the black population in particular. Second, there has been a high upward mobility of many Africans into senior positions.
iii. Unemployment is concentrated amongst the black population and amongst females. Whilst unemployment is a major problem for the country and for the individual concerned, it is also a major contributing factor to two of the country's other major labour market problems: inequality and poverty.
iv. High labour costs and low productivity are combined with the absence of pressures to increase the level and quality of output. The declining labour intensity of economic growth is disconcerting because far fewer jobs are being created for every percentage of economic growth. Where labour productivity has increased, it has been at

the cost of job losses.

The political legacy was described by Mbeki (1998) as two nations living in opposite and different worlds, separated by a Chinese wall. Mbeki argued that this wall divided the world of the settler from the world of the native, for the settler was the citizen and the native was the subject. Many South Africans saw the country as one where democracy was racialised as a privilege of a minority. This gave rise to the vexing moral dilemma that apartheid was democratically sanctioned by a minority that voted for it in greater numbers with each passing election (Mkgoba, 1999). The political context of South Africa has been significantly influenced by history and its colonial past. The legacy of the colonial state has been fourfold (Fitzerald et al., 1997):

1. A patron - client state system that controlled entry into the public service (usually along racial and ethnic lines);
2. A highly centralised top down political system which lacked institutional processes of governance;
3. Administrative systems which precludes decentralisation, self governance and the creation of viable structures; and
4. Increasingly authoritarian control mechanism that function to protect the interests of those who control the state at the expense of society as a whole.

Emanating from these socio economic and political characteristics, South Africa inherited major characteristics: a profound and racially skewed distribution of wealth; a typically developing economy with the usual problems of poverty and an oversupply of unskilled labour; a narrowly diversified economic base and, a highly centralised bureaucratic government structure with concentrations of skewed power structures. This was a country of contradictory opposites.

Task environment

The study describes the task environment as comprising those factors influencing the effectiveness of task or service delivery. Two tools of governance were introduced to address improvements in the task environment: (i) The Constitution of 1996 and (ii) The White Paper on Transformation of the Public Service (also known as the Batho Pele).

Under the Constitution of 1996, a framework for new structure were established including a unified public service, decentralisation, national and provincial public service commissions and restructuring of public service departments. Nine new provincial authorities were established which incorporated the previously fragmented administrations within their territorial area (Fitzgerald et al., 1997). These provincial authorities had to establish authority over a range of administrative systems. Such

administrative systems were characterised by racial, sectoral, political/ethnic and geographical fragmentation. This resulted in little sustained policy improvements around constitutional change. Therefore, constitutional change proved to be slow and insufficient. The integration of systems was not an easy solution as there was no clear uniformity of functions around service delivery, policies or political interests.

Designated Batho Pele and outlined in the White Paper on transforming public service delivery, the South African government's service delivery mandate included examining and improving systems and processes to ensure focus on the customer; increasing access, especially for those traditionally underserved; providing useful information so that citizens could be aware of government business; increasing openness and transparency in government to ensure more effective citizen participation; improving systems and processes so that mistakes and failures could be remedied; and providing the most effecttive, most directly and efficient service delivery possible.

Whilst these two policies were intended to provide transformational change, it was important to establish where the public service came from, where it wished to go and what challenges had to be addressed to get there. South Africa's task environment is often perceived as a highly centralised, control orientated bureaucracy, removed from the realm of citizen participation and accountability (Fitzgerald et al., 1997). Fitzerald mainatains that such a culture evolved by means of:

i. A hierarchical structure with strict control and supervision at all levels;
ii. Standardised procedures, codes, and manuals which are extensively and rigidly used when dealing with the public;
iii. Centralised departments providing and regulating interdepartmental domestic services in finance; and
iv. Reports and accounts with prescribed checking systems.

Bureaucratic power was often associated with problems around accountability and regularity. Further attempts to practise the tenets of good public administration resulted in the introduction of the South African Protected Disclosures Act, 2000 aimed at encouraging employees to disclose information on unlawful or irregular conduct of their employees. Despite the introduction of these tools, concerns about public-sector reform in South Africa have intensified in recent years (Pillay, 2008). There have been calls for greater efficiency, transparency, and integrity in public institutions - driven by the realisation that poor governance in the South African public sector reinforces the unequal distribution of opportunities and that corruption threatens democracy.

According to Mavuso and Balia (1999), poor accounttability around whistle blowing has been one of the causes of institutional weaknesses (Table 1). Therefore,
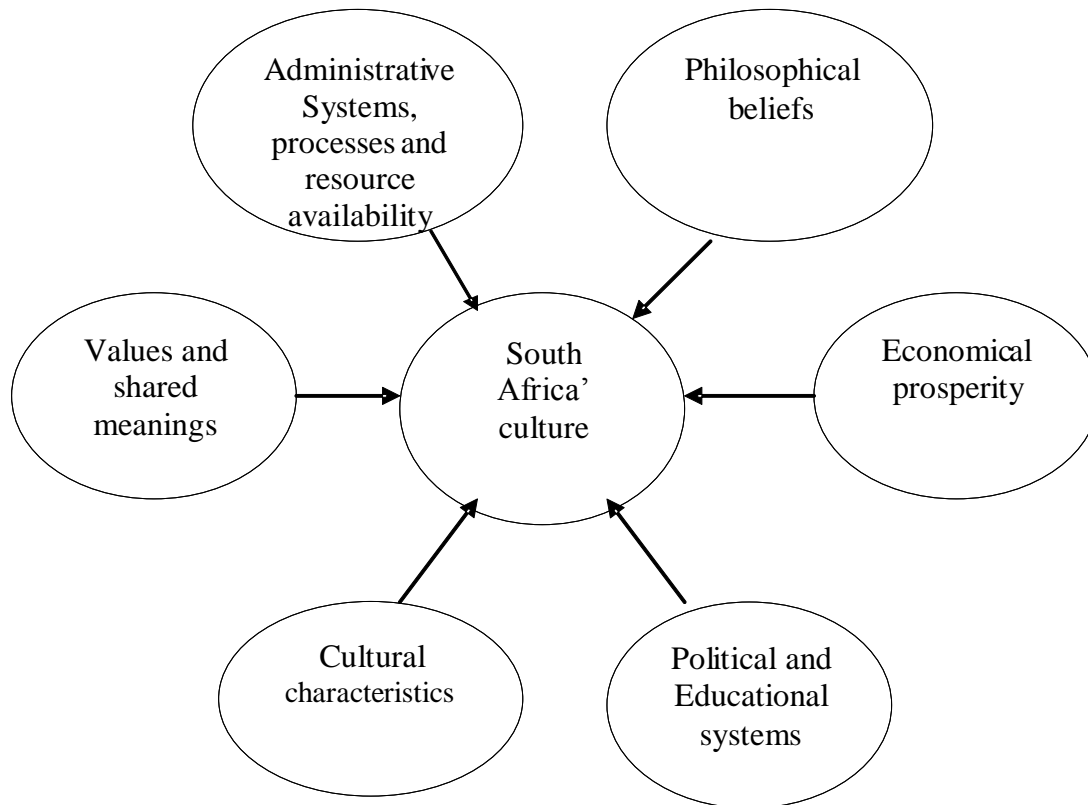
Figure 1. Institutional context and task context factors contributing towards South Africa's complex cultural system.

the motivation for public-sector employees to disclose wrong doing has been undermined by institutional and task factors such as lack of economic resources, political rigidities, excessive rules, institutional practices such as nepotism, and lack of resources. Staff members have also been demoralised by dysfunctional government budgets, inadequate supplies and equipment, delays in the release of budget funds, and a loss of organisational purpose. The motivation to remain honest has been weakened as a result of senior officials and political leaders using public office for private gain.

It is in relation to these characteristics that one can identify the main socio economic, cultural and political challenges that face the country in the 21st century (Pillay, 2008; Dorasamy, 2010). It is also against this backdrop that South Africa's cultural context has evolved.

For whistle blowing to be effective, one must take into account both the institutional and task environment and content in which governance takes place (Thwala and Phaladi, 2009; Ali et al., 2010; Bhasin, 2010), and also the relationship between administrative systems, resource availability values/shared meanings, cultural characteristics, philosophical beliefs, economic prosperity, education and political systems (French, 2007; Minogue et al., 1998; Miceli and Near, 1995; Alam et al., 2010; Alam, 2009; Ali et al., 2010) (Figure 1).

The broad cultural realities of South Africa are quite different from those found in many other countries in which effective whistle blowing is noticed and successfully implemented. Many theories have advanced in an attempt to delineate the relationship between whistle blowing and national culture (Hwang et al., 2008). However, the explanations offered by these theories have been inadequate in terms of how whistle blowing is influenced by both institutional and task variables.

Here, we explore South Africa's cultural characteristics which reflect deeper facets of South Africa's cultural differences in terms of its societal functioning. It is important to develop an awareness of the impact of culture on people in a particular society. This allows us an understanding of the realities of society. The underlying premise is that culture matters.

The study uses the construct of various theorists to explore the dimensions of national culture with whistle blowing. The study contends that national culture is a prerequisite to understanding antecedents to effective whistle blowing. South Africa's national culture is a product of a complex open system largely determined by its ecology and history. The dimensions that are of primary interest to the present study are 'power distance', 'uncertainty avoidance', and 'individualism' (Hofstede, 1983; Trompenaars, 1993; Schwartz and Sagiv, 1995;

Triandis, 1972). In terms of the cultural dimensions, South Africa is perceived to be a high power distance, high uncertainty avoidance and collective type society.

Theoretical propositions

Power distance (PD) refers to the extent to which less powerful members of organisations and institutions accept that power will be distributed unequally (Hofstede, 1980; Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005). Trompenaars (1993) likens the term power distance to achievement where power and status comes from membership in groups. Two other cultural theorists, Schwartz and Sagiv's (1995) introduced 56 values, five of which were clustered under 'hierachy', similar to Trompenaars and Hofstede where wealth, social power, authority and influence are emphasised. This value type accepts the unequal distribution of wealth, power, influence and authority.

Power distance is an important factor in whistle blowing because significant PD implies fewer checks and balances against the abuse of power and stronger hierarchical cultures. In such societies, strict respect for authority and centralised organisations are the norm, and inequalities in power provide a cultural setting in which corruption is likely to take place and whistle blowing more likely not to take place. According to Gurgar and Shah (2000), the control-oriented structure of bureaucracies in developing countries results in civil servants and elected officials enjoying a significant degree of autonomy from public pressure.

Relational orientation and Hofstede's (1980) power distance construct, emphasises the role of centralised decision-making by an elite (Maznevski and DiStefano, 1995; Phatak, 2005). This unequal distribution of power, reflective of the South African culture, discourages subordinates from questioning authority (Park, 2003), and means that decisions are not made on the basis of merit (Hofstede, 1997). Such a paternalistic system is very likely to discourage whistle blowing. A typical example is offered by Neal et al. (2007). They described a sheiko-cray whose integral feature is an indigenous form of corruption known as wasta. This refers to influence and status a person holds by virtue of familial and personal connections. People will often be heard to have 'big wastas' or 'use their wastas to influence'. This pervasive feature of corruption similar to practices in South Africa may be viewed as an influencing factor on whether to blow the whistle or not.

In such societies, scandals and disclosing information involving people in authority are more likely to be covered up by subordinates who are under pressure to comply with a superior's wishes in the face of intimidation and/or an ethical dilemma (Brody et al., 1999; MacNab et al., 2007). Such an ethical dilemma whilst may be viewed as a worldwide phenomena, however, in such circumstances, the ethical dilemma of 'whistle-blowing' is

viewed as being disloyal or a challenge to authority. According to Husted (1999), people in a high PD culture are more likely to judge a questionable business transaction as being ethical than are people from a low PD culture. In addition, economic adversity in high PD societies can encourage extortion among lower-level officials (Davis and Ruhe, 2003; Nieuwbeerta et al., 2003). However, it should also be noted that discriminatory public services are not only provoked by the hope of financial gain, but also by the norms of interpersonal relationship in societies that are dominated by groups of unequal power.

Conversely, in cultures of low PD, such as Denmark, Finland, New Zealand, and Australia (Hofstede, 2005), subordinates expect to be consulted and expect that their leaders are accountable for their actions. In low PD societies, the bureaucratic structures are flatter and more horizontal, the hierarchical system is viewed as merely an inequality of roles established for convenience, and roles are easily changed. Such organisations are fairly decentralised and characterised by 'flat' hierarchical systems (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005). Superiors are expected to be available for consultation, and subordinates are more likely to question their superiors' actions. For these reasons, whistle blowing will more likely take place in cultures characterised by low PD. On the basis of the foregoing discussion, the following proposition is advanced:

P_1: Effective whistle blowing is influenced by a society's level of power distance as part of its national culture which includes bureaucratic structures.

Uncertainty avoidance (UA) may be described as the extent to which members of a culture feel threatened by uncertainty or unknown situations (Phatak et al., 2005, Hofstede, 1983). Societies that are characterised by high UA have a greater concern for stability and security. High UA cultures are characterised by structured organisational activities, reduced risk-taking, lower labour turnover, and inhibited ambition. However, this desire for predicttability implies a reliance on formal rules and regulations. Such strictness and lack of flexibility can impair effective whistle blowing. In addition, financial auditors are less likely to question management - particularly if 'appropriate behaviour' is not specifically prescribed by professsional norms or standards (Brody et al., 1999). Moreover, because bureaucratic rules and regulations in high UA cultures govern human resource management, there is little accommodation for using discretion. Furthermore, high UA cultures are likely to favour well-defined unambiguous rules and regulations, which reduce the discretion enjoyed by public officials. This, in turn, has the potential to reduce the level of arbitrariness in corruption (Pillay, 2008).

From another perspective, it can also be argued that the reduction of uncertainty in risk-avoiding cultures can be of greater importance than legitimacy. In many cases,

the creation of wealth, including illicit wealth-creation, offers an opportunity to diminish uncertainty (Park, 2003). In these circumstances, corruption can be viewed as a mechanism for reducing uncertainty (Husted, 1999). For this reason, countries that are high in UA will be more tolerant of corrupt practices, making whistle blowing more ineffective due to systems and processes that tolerate corrupt activities. On the basis of the foregoing discussion, the following proposition is advanced:

P_2: The effectiveness of whistle blowing is influenced by levels of uncertainty avoidance.

Individualism/collectivism refers to the extent to which people pursue their own personal goals versus the group's goal (Hofstede, 1980; Trompenaars, 1993). Schwartz's conservatism dimension may also be associated with collectivism where maintenance of status quo and restraint of personal actions that disrupt solidarity, cohesiveness and traditional order are valued. Characteristics of such conservatism include obedience; respect of tradition, family security and social order. Triandis (1972) introduces the dimension 'tightness' which may also be associated with collectivism. Tight cultures do not tolerate deviation from social norms and expected role behaviours. Triandis (1972) noted that self control and control over behaviour are learned more easily in tight cultures.

Park (2003) has noted that several features of this dimension influence the effectiveness of whistle blowing within a society. Collectivist societies are characterised by the interests of the group prevailing over the interests of the individual. This is manifested in the predominance of such traits as, obedience, loyalty, and conformity to the norms and duties of the group. This inhibits 'whistle-blowing' and enhances the pervasiveness of corruption. Several authors (Hooper, 1995; Banfield, 1958; Fabre, 1996; LaPalombara, 1994, in Husted, 1999) have affirmed this relationship between collectivism and the level of corruption. Banfield (1958) and Fabre (1996) associated collectivism with 'amoral familism' (favouritism for family members leading to illegal transactions such as bribes), and La Palombara (1994) noted that a collectivist society is difficult to change because people are more likely to violate laws if those laws contradict traditional codes of behaviour. Also, officials are more likely to seek consensus and might be more prone to nepotism because networks of friends and family tend to create loyal relationships that encourage favouritism. In exchange for favours to members of their own social group, public officials might be tempted to accept bribes (Davis and Ruh, 2003). In a collectivist culture, loyalty to 'in–groups' can become a more important ethical standard than social justice.

Nevertheless, collectivist cultures are not uniform, rather, they are characterised by laws, regulations, and rights that differ from group to group within the wider society (Hofstede, 1991), hence, the existence of subsets of cultures within a culture. On the basis of the foregoing discussion, the following proposition is advanced:

P_3: Effective whistle blowing will be influenced by levels of collectivism within cultures.

The national cultural overview provided earlier is reflective of the South African culture which is important in terms of which it influences effective whistle blowing. The study contend that understanding these dimensions will assist policy makers in predicting whistle blowing probability or acceptance, based on cultural factors. The study contends that a critical piece of a society's make up, determines the culture of public institutions: values, norms, attitudes, and expectations of employees. Culture is shaped powerfully by the rest of the make up such as an institution's accountability system and its power structure; change these, and the culture will change (Osborne and Platrik, 1997). But culture does not always change the way public officials and leaders expect them to. Sometimes, it may lead to resentment and resistance. Other times, change may be slow to satisfy policy makers. Bureaucratic systems often use procedural rules and job descriptions to shape the behaviour and attitude of what subordinates do (Werlin, 2003). They make the opportunity for individualism too risky. As subordinate become habituated to these conditions, they become carriers of these cultural conditions. They become reactive, dependant, fearful of taking risks and engaging in self initiatives. In this way, a bureaucratic culture creates cultures of collectivism and subordination, defensiveness and fear of instability.

Whilst this is not to be regarded as an attempt to discourage whistle blowing efforts, it is a phenomena that management needs to be aware of when formulating lines of communication, reporting protocols and management systems. A close examination of the institutional and task context and situational variables of South Africa's national culture, will allow managers and policy makers to modify standard operating procedures.

METHODS

As whistle blowing is a laden concept, its analysis will differ from society to society due to the varying cultural dimensions of a country. Given its complexity and cultural influences, a quantitative investigation was considered to be most suitable.

As this simplistic data reflects only *one part* of a larger survey undertaken, the data may perhaps limit its usefulness elsewhere. The process by which data was collected and analysed, is outlined here.

The sample

This paper is based on a *part* of a much larger study undertaken on corruption. A survey was conducted by administering semi-structured questionnaires, designed to determine the perceptions and attitudes of public officials towards the nature of corruption. In this paper, part of the study that focuses on the perceptions around

whistle blowing was examined. The study included individual level data from 702 South African national public servants (SANPs). A total number of 1500 samples were administered with a total return of 702, representing a 47% return. This was an overwhelming response, possibly because the research tool assured anonymity.

The sample was administered across 9 provinces to the 26 South African National Public Service (SANPS) departments in South Africa. Participants were requested to return their responses in stamped and addressed envelopes.

The sample was not directed at a particular designation of rank, as SANPs designated at every rank are affected by ethical behaviour directly or indirectly. This assisted in highlighting varied attitudes of respondents' right from junior staff to officials at management echelons.

Variables

Much of the literature on whistle blowing focuses on institutional construction and change processes. The study chooses to focus on how culture plays an important part in effective whistle blowing. This also leads to de-institutionalisation. The study also contends that the phenomenon of de- institutionalisation through institutional and task origins is equally important but less explored. De- institutionalisation is the process whereby institutions weaken through their task and institutional environments (Dacin et al., 2002).

Institutional context related variables

Institutional related pressures arise from economic and political constraints. Laws, political hardware, and the role of the criminal justice system, unclear rules and policy and lack of familiarity with codes of conduct are influencing factors. These pressures may also be tied to broader environmental variables such as economics (competition for resources). The sample extracts responses around institutional pressures underlying transparency, fairness and complexity.

Task context related variables

Task environment is influenced by de- institutionalisation through example, rigid systems and processes, resource availability, uncertainty due to an uninformed society and political software (improper policies, unqualified or unmotivated personnel). The sample looks at participants' perception towards these variables and how these in turn affect whistle blowing. As this study is based on perception, rather than actual experiences with whistle blowing, this in itself presents certain limitations to the analysis.

FINDINGS

The act of whistle blowing in South Africa poses many difficulties. The rigid institutional environment (culture, economics and politics), task environment (resource, systems and processes), leader behaviour context (power distance, personality, experiences) and subordinates behaviour context (loyalty, intimidation, group response and environmental influences) poses problems to manage effectively the act of whistle blowing.

Whistle blowing is an important mechanism, not because it helps only law enforcement but also because it creates a potential link between the individual and the state. Yet, when people act in this injunction and bring a complaint, they may face immense difficulties because of institutional and task related constraints. In order to understand the conditions of failure and success in whistle blowing it is necessary to get some insight into conditions that encourage it.

Participants were requested to indicate their feelings and perceptions towards whistle blowing, on likert scales and through open ended questions. The questions asked were (i)'what is the culture around whistle blowing in your institution; (ii) would you feel safe to blow the whistle, if you found reason to; (iii) why would public officials feel reluctant to blow the whistle; (iv) should people elected to government be expected to be more honest that public officials; (v) do you feel that the criminal justice system is effective in managing effective whistle blowing and; (vi) how does the bureaucratic structure affect effective whistle blowing in your institution?' Some of the open ended questions were directed at participants' perception towards how history and politics influenced current practices.

Generally, corruption in South Africa was considered to be pervasive by the public servants that responded to our survey. A major influencing factor was the failure or refusal to blow the whistle on wrong doing. The data indicates that the type of behaviour was predominantly of a serious nature. The responses to the reasons for public officials' reluctance to blow the whistle were classified as either task related (TR) or institutional related (IR).

DISCUSSION

Majority of participants indicated that contributing factor was victimisation, intimidation and fear for losing one's job. This reflected the uneven distribution of power; therefore, power distance is an influential factor in effective whistle blowing. Responses through the open ended questions indicated that legislation alone will not suffice as enough protection for the whistle blower. Participants indicated that the best protection for a person wishing to make a disclosure about wrongdoing is being part of an organisational culture which encourages such disclosures to be made in accordance with an internal reporting system, one which accommodates the needs of the person making the disclosure and protects the rights of the individuals who are the subjects of disclosure. Participants also indicated that having the right type of culture will decrease the likelihood of adverse consequences to others affected by the disclosure.

A rigid bureaucracy and a high power distance type country characterises South Africa. In such a case, communication is often closed, increasing uncertainty and therefore, anxiety. Participants indicated that an important factor in minimising anxiety for the whistle blower is to ensure that throughout the investigation, the whistle blower is kept informed of the status of the inquiry. Improved whistle blowing procedures are consistent with the emphasis on openness and transparency. To this

Table 1. Reasons for reluctance to blow the whistle.

Reason	Percent
Lack of awareness of procedures to follow (TR)	4.5
Victimisation (IR)	39.4
Loyalty to colleagues (IR)	13.8
Job Security and Uncertainty (IR)	6.0
Improper /Inadequate policies/ /unqualified staff(TR)	1.1
Lack of faith in the criminal justice system (IR)	15.2
Power distance and bureaucracy (IR)	20.0

effect, responses through open ended questions sugges-ted that when dealing with the whistle blower, managers and/or investigators should ensure that the details of the allegations are fully explored and understood by them and that the investigative process is explained to the whistle blower. Information concerning the time taken to conduct investigations, why some matters are investiga-ted and others are not, and the possibility that some allegations will result in long term system changes rather than spectacular criminal charges or disciplinary actions should also be explained. Respondents indicated that context factors should be considered as making these matters clear from the start; unrealistic expectations may be eliminated, reducing the likelihood of outcomes which are unacceptable to the whistle blower. This may result in emotional ramifications which can be serious. It is imperative therefore, that investigators are aware of both the 'task' and 'consideration' factors. On another level, without understanding the 'human consideration' factor, investigators may easily and unwittingly increase the negative emotional and psychological ramifications for the whistle blower. By initially focussing on the needs of the whistle blower, and completely explaining the investigative and judicial process and timeframe, the investigator will better equip the whistle blower to 'last the distance' of a protracted investigation.

In South Africa, the criminal justice system is also seen to be experiencing pervasive levels of corruption due to ineffective whistle blowing processes (Mafunisa, 2000). This obviously has severe consequences for public perceptions of the institutions of criminal justice, which many South Africans already doubt (15.2%). Participants alluded to the occurrence of theft and/or sale of police dockets, with indications that public officials are involved in such activities. Low salaries, a lack of accountability and insufficient action against corrupt members are among the reasons cited for such activities.

Whistle blowing raises a variety of other problems as well, such as loyalty, a characteristic of collectivist type societies. A significant percentage (13.8) (Table 1) indicated that they felt a sense of loyalty to their collea-gues and would therefore choose not to disclose public wrong. It conflicts with traditions of loyalty to superiors and solidarity with colleagues. Indeed, reported wrong-doing often backfires with whistle blowers becoming

victims, being considered disloyal and not being good team players. With South Africa being a high power distance type country as well as a high uncertainty avoidance country, it would be natural then for people to be fearful of their careers suffering and the possibility of job losses occurring. Participants (6%) indicated that they were fearful of losing their jobs if they chose to blow the whistle.

These findings reveal that the South African Govern-ment has endeavoured to call for the enhancement, at all levels, of mechanisms to report wrongdoing and to protect whistleblowers. It further required departments and government institutions to implement internal whistle blowing mechanisms that allow for confidential reporting of suspected cases of corruption as well as protect whistle blowers.

South Africa has passed comprehensive legislations to protect whistleblowers in the public sector. Although, the scope of protection is limited to certain type of persons or offences, whistle blowing provisions have also been included in sectoral laws such as anticorruption laws, competition laws, corporation laws, public servant laws, criminal codes, labour and employment laws, freedom of information acts, etc. Whilst South Africa's law protects disclosures, it also contains limitations on the permissible channels for making such disclosures. The Act's preference is that the disclosure be made to the employer itself or an appropriate public authority, rather than, for example, the media. South African law does not provide for any independent agency of the State to investigate whistleblower complaints, or assist the whistleblower. Instead, the whistleblower may invoke the jurisdiction of any court or tribunal in order to protect them against retaliation. Further, under the law, where it is practicable, a whistleblower that reasonably believes that he or she is going to be subject to an occupational detriment must, at his or her request, be transferred to another position with the employer (Kaplan, 2001).

Other contextual limitations include people living in areas where there are service delivery problems. This is a concern as people often complain about not being able to reach the relevant officials because of government pro-tocols that have to be followed. This has sometimes resulted in violent protest.

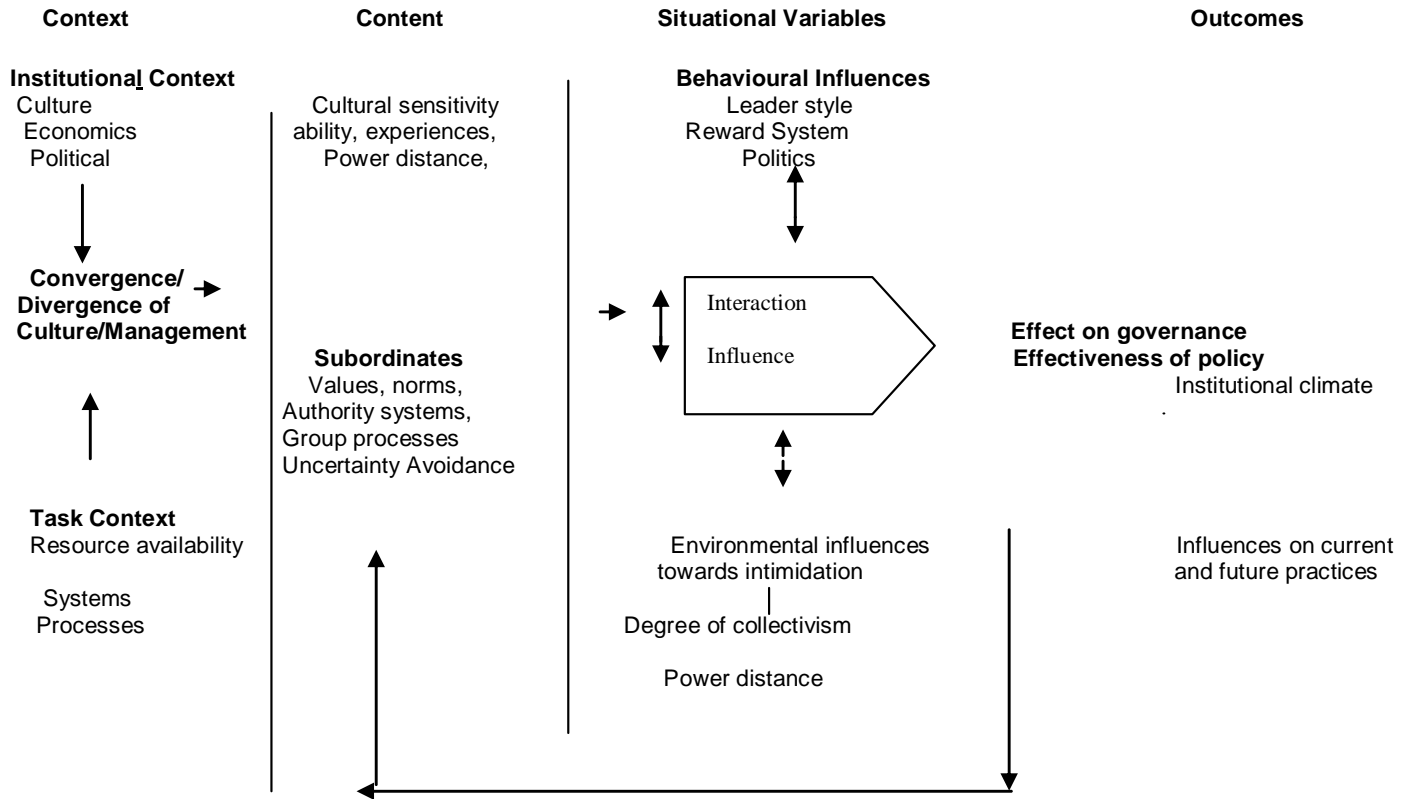Resource based concerns are that most departments

Context	Content	Situational Variables	Outcomes

Institutional Context
Culture
Economics
Political

Cultural sensitivity
ability, experiences,
Power distance,

Behavioural Influences
Leader style
Reward System
Politics

**Convergence/
Divergence of
Culture/Management**

Interaction

Influence

**Effect on governance
Effectiveness of policy**
Institutional climate

Subordinates
Values, norms,
Authority systems,
Group processes
Uncertainty Avoidance

Task Context
Resource availability

Systems
Processes

Environmental influences
towards intimidation

Degree of collectivism

Power distance

Influences on current
and future practices

Figure 2. Whistle blowing as a culture contingent process: An integrative model.

have their own hotlines or customer service centres, and the government has a central hotline run by the Public Service Commission (PSC) - the National Anti-Corruption Hotline (NACH). This hotline receives grievances, compiles a report and forwards it to the relevant departments. The problem is that it is up to the departments to investigate the cases further and take the appropriate action. The biggest challenge facing the hotline, according to the PSC, has been the lack of capacity in departments to investigate these cases (www.gov.za). The issue is not whether a new hotline is needed, but how the new one will function. Government departments across South Africa, except in the Eastern Cape, have performed badly in giving feedback on cases forwarded by the NACH.

According to the PSC's state of the public service report released last year, the NACH received and forwarded to departments, 3355 cases of corruption in 2006 to 2007. However, the PSC received feedback on only 35% of the cases (Business Day, 2009). Therefore, the broader issue is perhaps not how effective or ineffective hotlines are, but how seriously government takes the prosecution and disciplining of corrupt and underperforming officials through all channels. If other channels do not work, should one expect hotlines to work? If hotlines are used as a substitute for good governance, which demands political will, then they will make little impact.

Such examples reflects that sophisticated attempts

have resulted in various policy initiatives being introduced to address the scourge of corruption, however, despite this, that part of corruption, being effective whistle blowing, still remains an area to be developed due to its failure to appreciate the process as a cultural contingency one.

The propositions advanced are therefore validated and find support from the findings of the study. Based on the findings, we develop an integrative model that appreciates whistle blowing as a culture contingency process (Figure 2). Figure 2 depicts an integrative model that pulls together the variables described in this paper; it shows the powerful influence of culture as it affects the whistle blowing process. Looking at the left part of the illustration, context, the model presents culture from the broad institutional factors to outcomes affected by the entire whistle blowing situation. The broad context in which institutions function necessitates adjustments in the whistle blowing process to all those variables relating to the work and task environment. Cultural variables (values, work norms, the locus of control, bureaucratic, over centralisation, power and authority, social power and so forth) affects and shapes the content which in turn influences situational variables.

The interaction is then further shaped by the leader's choice of behaviours (for example, autocratic) and by the subordinate's attitude towards authority, bureaucracy,

obedience and loyalty (Deresky, 2008). These effects determine the outcomes of the existing whistle blowing process and systems. The results from these outcomes then act as feedback (positive or negative) into the cycle of the cultural contingent whistle blowing process.

Conclusion

The prevention of unethical and corrupt behaviour is contingent upon people willing to blow the whistle under the control of managers and leaders who may be able to pursue such preventions efficiently and effectively. This study indicates that power distance and associated cultural characteristics of a strong bureaucratic culture discourages effective whistle blowing. Future research may wish to expand the area to include other parts of Africa or engage in a cross cultural study to include other developing democracies.

The research reported in this paper suffers from various limitations. As is the case with most survey based research, this study is subject to perceptual errors on the part of some respondents. In addition, there was a large concentration of participants from one particular province/ state, therefore resulting in an imbalanced response rate considering that there are nine provinces that make up the nation. More importantly there could have possibly been other contextual factors that may have contributed to the study, which were not examined in this study. Therefore, this study should be interpreted, subject to these limitations. Despite these limitations, however, this study provides valuable insights into what we believe is the first empirically based evidence on an African developing democracy with profound historical influences on management practices and culture.

REFERENCES

Alam GM (2009). Can governance and regulatory control ensure private higher education as business or public goods in Bangladesh? Afr. J. Bus. Manage., 3 (12): 890-906.

Alam GM, Hoque KE, Ismail L, Mishra PK (2010). Do developing countries need education laws to manage its system or are ethics and a market-driven approach sufficient? Afr. J. Bus. Manage., 4(15): 3406-3416.

Ali I, Rehman KU, Ali SI, Yousaf J, Zia M (2010). Corporate social responsibility influences, employee commitment and organizational performance. Afr. J. Bus. Manage.,4(12): 2796-2801

Barker F (2008). The South African Labour Market, Theory and Practice, Cape Town, Van Schaik.

Bhasin M (2010). Corporate governance in the Asian countries. Afr. J. Bus. Manage., 4(10): 1964-1971.

Business Day (2009). www.gov.za .

Brody RG, Coulter JM, Lin S (1999). The effect of national culture on whistle blowing perceptions, J. Teach. Bus. Ethics, 3: 385-400.

Davis JH, Ruh JA (2003). Perceptions of country corruption: Antecedents and outcomes. J. Bus. Ethics, 43(4): 275-288.

Dacin MT, Goodstein J, Scott WR (2002). Institutional Theory and Institutional Change: Introduction to the Special Research Forum. Acad. Manage. J., 45(1): 45-57.

De Maria W (2008). Whistleblowers and Organisational Protestors: Crossing Imaginary Borders, J. Curr. Sociol., 56(6): 865-883.

Deresky H (2008). International Management, Managing across Borders and Cultures, 6th ed, Pearson Prentice Hall, Australia.

Dorasamy N (2010). From self interest to public interest: Promoting higher levels of business ethics. Afr. J. Bus. Manage., 4 (1): 049-055.

Dryburgh MM (2009). Personal and Policy Implications of Whistle-Blowing, The case of Corcoran State Prison. Pub. Integr., 11(2): 155-170.

Fitzgerald P, McLennan A, Munslow B (1997). Managing Sustainable Development in South Africa, Oxford, Cape Town.

French R (2007). Cross cultural Management in Work Organisations, CIPD, UK.

Gurgar T, Shah A (2000) Localization and Corruption: Panacea or Pandora's Box?" World Bank Working Paper, November 14.

Hofstede G (1980). Culture's consequences: International differences in work-related values. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Hofstede G (1983). National cultures in four dimensions, J. Int. stud. Manage. Organ., 13(1): 46-74.

Hofstede G (1991). Cultures and Organisations, London, McGraw-Hill.

Hofstede G (1997). Cultures and Organisations- software of the mind, New York, McGraw- Hill.

Hofstede G, Hofstede GJ (2005). Cultures and Organisations- software of the mind, New York, McGraw- Hill.

Husted BW (1999). Wealth, culture, and corruption. J. Int. Bus. Stud., 30(2): 339-360.

Hwang D, Staley B, Chen TY, Lan JS (2008). Confucian Culture and whistle blowing by professional accountants: an exploratory study. Manage. Audit. J., 23(5): 504-526.

International Labour Organisation (2007). Equality in Employment and Occupation, Geneva, ILO.

Kaplan M (2001). The International Emergence of Legal protection for whistle blowers. J. Pub. Inquiry, pp. 34-42.

MacNab B, Brislin M, WorthleyW, Galperin BL, Jenner S, Lituchy TR, MacLean J, Aguilera G.M, Ravlin E, Tiessen JH, Bess D, Turcotte MF (2007). Culture and Ethics Management -Whistle-blowing and Internal Reporting within a NAFTA Country Context. Int. J. Cross Cult. Manage., 7(1): 5–28.

Mafunisa MJ (2000). Public Service Ethics, Juta, South Africa.

Magnus JRM, Viswesvaran C (2005). Whistle Blowing in Organsiations, J. Bus. Ethics, 62: 277-297.

Makgoba W (1999). African renaissance, Mafube Publishing, Western Cape.

Mavuso V, Balia D (1999). Fighting Corruption – Invitation to Ethics Management. Unisa Press: Pretoria.

Maznevski ML, DiStefano JJ (1995). Measuring culture in international management- the cultural perspectives questionnaire, work in progress paper presented at Academy of International Business Annual meeting.

Mbeki T (1998) 'Two Nations Speech', South Africa. www.gov.za.

Micheli M, Near J (1984). 'The Relationship among Beliefs, Organizational Position and Whistleblower Status: A Discriminate Analysis'. Acad. Manage. J., 27: 687-705.

Miceli M, Near J (1988) 'Individual and Situational Correlates of Whistle blowing'. Pers. Psychol. J., 41: 267-282.

Miceli M, Near J (1989). 'The Incidence of Wrong Doing, Whistle blowing and Retaliation: Results of a naturally occurring Field Experiment. Employee Responsib. Rights J., 2(2): 91-108.

Miceli M, Near J (1994). 'Whistle blowing: Reaping the Benefits'. Acad. Manage. Exec., 8: 65-73.

Miceli M, Near J (1995). 'Effective Whistle blowing'. Acad. Manage. Rev., 20(3): 679-708.

Miceli M, Near J, Schwenk C (1991). 'Who Blows the Whistle and Why?' Ind. Labor Relat. Rev., 45(1): 113-130.

Miceli M, Roach B, Near J (1988). 'The Motivations of Anonymous Whistleblowers: The Case of Federal Employees'. Pub. Personnel Manage., 17: 281-295

Minogue M, Polidano C, Hulme D (1998). Beyond the New Public Management, Changing Ideas and Practices in Governance. Edward Elgar: USA

Nader R, Petkas P, Blackwell K (1972). Whistle Blowing: The report of the conference on Professional Responsibility, Grossman, New York.

Nieuwbeerta P, De Geest G, Siegers J (2003). Street level corruption in industrialised and developing countries. Eur. Soc., 5(2): 139-165.

Neal M, Finlay JL, Catana GA, Catana D (2007). A Comparison of Leadership Prototypes. Int. J. Cross Cultural Manage., 7(3): 291-316

Near JP, Miceli MP (1996) Whistle Blowing: Myth and Reality, J. Manage., 22(3): 507-526.

Osborne D, Platrik P (1997). Banishing Bureacracy-The Five Strategies for Reinventing Government, Addison Wesley, Unites States of America.

Park H (2003). Determinants of national corruption: A cross national analysis. Multinational Bus. Rev., 11(2): 29-47.

Phatak AV, Bhagad RS, Kashlak RJ (2005). International Management-Managing in a diverse and dynamic global environment, New York, McGraw-Hill.

Pillay S (2008). A Cultural Ecology of New Public Management. Int. Rev. Adm. Sci., 74(3): 373-394.

Republic Of South Africa (1997). The White Paper on Transformation of the Public Service. Gazette 18340, Notice 1459, 1 October.

Schwartz SH, Sagiv L (1995). Identifying Culture Specifics in the content and structure of Values. J. Cross Cult. Psychol., 26(1): 92-116.

Triandis HC (1972). The Analysis of Subjective Culture, New York, Wiley.

Trompenaars F (1993). Riding the waves of Culture, Understanding Diversity in Global Business, London, Economist Books.

Thwala WD, Phaladi MJ 2009. An exploratory study of problems facing small contractors in the North West province of South Africa. Afr. J. Bus. Manage., 3(10): 533-539.

Uys T (2008) Rational Loyalty and Whistle Blowing: The South African Context. Curr. Sociol., 56(6): 904-921.

Werlin HH (2003) Poor nations, rich nations: A theory of Governance, Pub. Adm. Rev., 63(3): 329-342.

Westin AF (1981) Whistle Blowing! New York, McGraw-Hill.