

Page, J.S. (2015) 'In the Public Interest' *The Whistle: Newsletter of Whistleblowers Australia*. No.83. (Book review of Peter Bowden's *In the Public Interest: Protecting Whistleblowers and Those Who Speak Out*. Melbourne, 2014). July, 2015. p.5.

This book is a valuable contribution to the growing collection of critical literature on whistleblowing and the way that agencies respond to whistleblowing. It's written by a former professor of administrative studies at Manchester University, who also has wide international experience, and thus is well qualified to write on this topic.

The scope of the book is ambitious. Bowden announces in the Preface that the book "is aimed at strengthening ethical practices in our institutions of government and in our business organisations", and proceeds to examine examples in the UK, USA and Australia. The book also seeks to serve as a self-help book for would-be whistleblowers, and to provide some ethical underpinning for whistleblowing.

There were many aspects of this book which I found intriguing. One is how we define whistleblowing. Bowden differentiates whistleblowing from social activism, although it seems that within a global society this distinction is becoming increasingly blurred. For instance, if a citizen speaks out against a social wrong, and is persecuted by his/her government, should he/she be regarded as a whistleblower? I'm starting to think that the popular understanding of a whistleblower, that is, any person who speaks out against wrong, may be the most appropriate.

I was intrigued with Bowden's discussion on why whistleblowers tend to be, in a general and theoretical sense, highly regarded, but paradoxically demonized within specific organizations. Bowden suggests the answer lies in our atavistic desire to belong, to be part of a group. Whistleblowers are often deemed to be a threat to the group. Otherwise put, they are seen to be disloyal. Of course, seeing whistleblowers as disloyal is superficial. If one has the courage to speak out about wrong within an organization or group, that ultimately is a statement that the person believes the group is of value.

I was also intrigued with Bowden's own journey as a whistleblower. He only mentions this in passing (it involved his work with an NGO, and subsequent reprisals against him for having pointed out maladministration within that NGO), but it is clearly important for him. I would call this the existential dimension of whistleblowing. I suspect that one can only really appreciate how wrong it is that whistleblowers are, in most cases, badly treated, and the need for social change here, once one has been down that path of being a whistleblower oneself.

Weaknesses with the book? Perhaps the scope of the book is too ambitious. For instance, I'm not sure that Bowden adequately deals with the important issue of providing an ethical underpinning for whistleblowing. I would have liked to have seen more on deontological ethics, namely, the duty to speak out when one sees a wrong. And I believe virtue ethics has the potential to be empowering for whistleblowers, in that telling the truth is part of a person's integrity, and further that this personal integrity is something that an organisation may well attack, but ultimately can never destroy.

I also had some doubt as to how effective the book was as a potential self-help guide to whistleblowers. I would have liked to have seen more on how to use the so-called Dracula Solution, that is, shining light on organizational wrongdoing through disclosure on the internet and the media. Given that whistleblowers are generally people under a great deal of pressure, I suspect that a "How to Blow the Whistle" approach would be most effective.

The above are, however, minor criticisms. Bowden advocates that the ethics and practicalities of whistleblowing ought to be taught at university-level courses in public and business administration, and I suspect he is correct here. It is possible that his book may end up as a text for students in this field.

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