Name

Name of Professor

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Day Month Year

Whistle-Blowers

Introduction

The issue of whistleblowing has grabbed more attention in media recently to showcase the wrongdoings of different organizations. This is the act of bringing different unethical issues and acts or organizations in the light of media or external parties. By definition, it is the public exposure of the misconducts by an organization or its members which involves ethical resistance against the offense being committed. A recent example of whistleblowing can be of Edward Snowden’s who leaked the misconducts of United States National Security Agency (NSA). Whistleblowing is an act solely aimed at bringing the unethical issues and misconducts to limelight and to save the victims of that action if any. This paper seeks to showcase the importance of whistleblowing as an act of dissent by discussing the case of Peter Buxton who had blown whistle on the unethical Tuskegee Syphilis study by the U.S. Public health service and he was able to help the community of Negros suffering from the brutality of experimentation. Whistleblowing is an admirable act and it must be encouraged since due to the act of ethically upright whistleblowers, various issues have been brought to light, which would not have been possible otherwise, as supported by the example of Peter Buxton case.

Discussion

Whistleblowing is the term which is used to describe all the incidents of wrongdoings and emphasize the case of public welfare. This term has many origins and it acts as a signal to any wrongful conduct. According to some authors, it is the public exposure of wrongdoings and it involves the disclosure of any illegal and immoral acts in an organization. A whistleblower is a concerned citizen who highlights the significant wrongdoing or unethical conduct on his/her free will and to an agency expecting them to investigate and take the corrective action. The disclosures by the whistleblowers need changes and corrective actions in the light of the law and with the aim to protect the public interest.

One of the cases of whistleblowing that brought issues of unethical experiment on light is the famous Tuskegee case whereby the significance of whistleblowing can be measured. In Macon County, Alabama, an unethical research experiment was led on the population of African American in Macon County (Whistle.Blower, “Whistleblower Peter Buxtun and the Tuskegee Syphilis Study”). This experiment lasted for about forty years and the participants of this experiment were convinced by offering them free meals and food, minor remedies and burial expenses so that they take part in this activity. All of the participants came from poor backgrounds and they suffered from Syphilis. They were kept unaware of the disease and were not medicated expect they were given painkillers. Though by 1943, penicillin was discovered as a treatment of syphilis the participants were not given any treatment. In addition, they were also not informed that they are the part of this experiment instead they were told that they are given treatment for the bad blood which is the leading cause of death in their community. A whistleblower, Peter Buxton brought this study to limelight who leaked the information to the press and protested to stop this unethical attempt of using people as part of the experiment.

In 1966, he wrote to CDC and share his concerns about the unethical practices, however, the department emphasized the need to finish the study until all subject died and autopsied. CDC also got support by the National Medical Association in the continuation of study. When Peter Buxton decided to approach the press, it caused a serious public outrage at that time. However, it led to the formation of an ethical panel which determined the ethical issues with the experiment and declared that the experiment was not justified ethically, ordering the termination. As a result of the revelations by Peter Buxton, different policies were triggered considering the public reaction. Different inquiries and lawsuits were filed, and different hearings took place as well. One of the affected families was able to get compensation of $10 million which assisted them for lifetime services, and the affected people were also able to get the medical treatment. Not only this had their widows and offspring also obtained several benefits in the form of financial support. Furthermore, a clear difference was observed in the ethical consideration during experimentation. The National Research Act 1974 created a commission in order to protect the human participants in the experiments of biomedical and behavioural research studies. Principles of ethical conduct were highlighted and new laws and regulations were made to obtain the informed consent of the participants involved. According to the CDC, all the research related to education and health will be subject to the review for the evaluation of ethical standards. CDC. In 1978, the Belmont Report was published to provide ethical guidelines in protecting human participants which focused on justice, and respect for the people involved. This shows the strength of the act of whistleblowing as a way of helping the oppressed and discriminated population.

Buxton's early requests in 1966 were rejected claiming that the experiment has not yet completed. His another request made in 1972, became the front page news of the New York Times and resulted in action against that unethical conduct. In 1967, Buxton was well aware that his act of whistleblowing might result in backfire on him and he also thought about having another job, in fact outside of the government. His claims were not supported due to the fact that it will shatter the noble and kind image of doctors and medical health professionals. He was the one who highlighted that the good intentions of doctors are not enough. This case also discloses the fact that how human research objects are treated brutally without the absence of ethical conduct, reviews, and oversight in this regard.

There are several cases wherein government take action on the disclosures of whistleblowers and in most of the cases the government tries to blur and hide the facts when it is the fault of government authorities. When the case of Peter Buxton took place and it Buxton was proved right, in 1997, President Bill Clinton apologized for their acts and agreed that government action is clearly racist and morally wrong (Whistle.Blower, “A Timeline of US Whistleblowers”). Currently, the US government has made a law for the protection of whistleblowers and those who raise a voice against any wrong and unethical conduct. The Whistleblower Protection Act of 1989, protects the employees of the federal government for disclosing information about any illegal or unethical act. The laws of whistleblowing also have a history and it started in 1778 during the American Revolutionary War. The Civil Service Reform Act of 1978 also classified some rights of whistleblowers, however, the law of 1989 better protects the employees who raise voice against anything illegal.

The United States has a long history of the cases of whistleblowing. A timeline of famous cases of whistleblowing revels that it is not new and various cases have helped solve many issues producing negative impacts on numerous people (Whistle.Blower, “A Timeline of US Whistleblowers”). Like the Peter Buxton case resulted in many families obtaining aid and financial help, whistleblowing is an act which helps a number of people not able to speak for themselves. Whistleblowers also face some negative consequences on their part such as Richard Parks, an engineer with Bechtel Corp, was relocated and fired owing to the fact that he disclosed that his hiring company and Bechtel are not taking care of the regulations set by Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC).

Studies indicate that whistleblowing is one of the best practices that organizations can encourage to promote ethical practices in an organization. They indicate that ethical leadership is very important to encourage employees to speak against unethical practices as there is a relationship between ethical practices and leadership. Ethical leaders not only promote ethical practices but also enables employees to decide what is right. They also promote intrinsic motivation to report any wrongdoing witnessed. Studies organizations to fulfill the need for ethical leadership so that ethical leaders can act as the role models subordinates can follow and promote ethics in an enterprise. Employee frauds are the common practice in organizations these days, top scandals like Enron are examples of this. In this case, whistleblowing is the only activity that can control such practices. It is only applicable if the leader acts as a moral exemplar and must develop training programs to encourage moral potency in their subordinates. In addition, the relation of leadership and ethical practices are also influenced by some other factors such as impression management, supervisor support, and psychological safety (Zhang et al.).

Internal whistleblowing has many benefits, especially in sensitive cases and areas such as healthcare. The example of whistleblowing discussed in the case also proves its significance. In the long-term this whistleblowing by employees may be costly for the organization but and the whistleblower may face aftermath such as bullying and negative emotional job effects but health employees if refrain from blowing whistle result in causing loss to patients. As a result, laws, and legislation have to protect whistleblowers so that it increase the cases of whistleblowing among health care and reduce the poor practices in patient care resulting in quality care for the patients (Rauwolf and Jones).

There are different claims and myths which discourage whistleblowing, such as it is considered as a crime. Disclosing information is considered as a criminal act, even if it is related to a crime. Though it is not a crime but a protected right. It is the duty and responsibility of employees to disclose any illegal acts if witnessed. Whistleblowers are the public narratives and they disclose the information for the benefit of the majority of the public. In addition, whistleblowers raise voice because they do not find the government policies and regulations in place. Employees have the legal rights to disclose information about illegal acts.

Another claim that is made about whistleblowers is that they are too quick to go to the press to share their views and they are not right all the time, though, it is not right all the time. However, in reality, all the whistleblowers first share their concerns internally with the managers and high authorities by the internal channels. Employees have faith in their own management and they always use the right approach to share their concerns. When they do not get any support or they are asked to keep quiet or leave, they do to the outside source such as press and media to share their concerns. Whistleblowers are also considered as if they are doing it for fame and money. In reality, whistleblowers are the people who have a strong sense of professional and ethical responsibility which stimulates them to stand up and raise voice against wrongdoings. Though some laws offer monetary compensation to those who report such, these laws include the False Claim Act and the Dodd-Frank Act, and these laws have been able to disclose many unethical issues.

Most of the employees and people who speak for the unethical issues and concerns do not want the monetary rewards. One of the fact which discourages the employees to speak up and blow the whistle is that they often face negative consequences. However, laws have been made to protect the employees who blow the whistle for any unethical conduct. The Whistle Blower Protection Act protects employees and other whistleblowers, to encourage them. In addition, many cases of unethical practices have been identified due to the employees who blow the whistle for the misconduct they observe at the workplace.

Conclusion

To conclude, our understanding of why such incidents occur is very important, and these issues are highlighted by public outrage and emotional reactions. Whistleblowing is a good practice and it must be encouraged. In the case discussed as an example, a lack of compliance resulted in the death of many people due to the disease. It shows how the absence of whistleblowing could have resulted in the loss of many more lives. Unethical issues are prevalent in many industries and cases but the presence of whistleblowers result in disclosing these issues and cause benefit to the victims. Therefore, whistleblowing is a practice which must be encouraged among all the members of the organization because these people would not act these incidents could never possibly have been brought to light, and it is only possible because of such people. It was clear that life was not valued by the perpetrators and whistleblowing proved instrumental in preventing further damages or casualties.

Works Cited

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