

# **Employee responses to organisational wrongdoing as coping strategies: A process model and integrative review**

Marissa S. Edwards

*School of Business University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia*  
m.edwards@business.uq.edu.au

Dominique A. Keffe

*School of Advertising, Marketing and Public Relations Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane,  
Australia*  
d.keffe@qut.edu.au

Neal M. Ashkanasy

*School of Business University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia*  
n.ashkanasy@bel.uq.edu.au

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## **ABSTRACT**

This conceptual paper aims to demonstrate how employees' behavioural reactions to organisational wrongdoing serve as a coping response designed to reduce the stress associated with witnessing or experiencing wrongdoing. To this end, a model of employees' coping responses is presented that extends Lazarus and Folkman's transactional process theory of stress and Affective Events Theory to investigate employee silence, disclosure to others, confrontation, and whistle-blowing as coping mechanisms. We propose that these responses are conscious and proactive coping mechanisms rather than more passive behavioural reactions to wrongdoing. The theoretical and practical implications of this model are discussed, as well as its limitations and future directions for research.

*Keywords: coping responses, organisational wrongdoing, silence, whistle-blowing*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Historically, researchers studying employees' reactions to organisational wrongdoing have failed to explore the complex nature of employees' motivations for engaging in silence and speaking up behaviour. The decision to remain silent in the face of wrongdoing has been regarded as a passive response to organisational circumstances, signalling satisfaction and acceptance of the status quo (Pinder & Harlos, 2001), while whistle-blowing has been conceptualised as an example of prosocial behaviour, driven by the need to expose organisational wrongdoing and bring its perpetrator(s) to justice (Miceli & Near, 2005). Overall, researchers have largely considered silence, disclosure to others, whistle-blowing, and confrontation as behavioural *reactions* to wrongdoing, driven by relatively simple motives. Our paper challenges this traditional assumption, and seeks to demonstrate how employees' reactions to organisational wrongdoing serve as conscious, proactive coping responses designed to reduce the stress associated with witnessing or experiencing wrongdoing.

Over the past decade, researchers have increasingly become interested in the behaviours that damage organisations and their employees (Fox & Spector, 2005). In this paper, we use the term

‘organisational wrongdoing’ to describe immoral, illegal or illegitimate behaviour in an organisational setting and argue that this term encompasses multiple behaviours, ranging from clearly illegal acts such as theft, discrimination, sabotage, and sexual harassment, to episodes of bullying, lying and revenge. These behaviours have serious consequences for employees and organisations and are highly prevalent in the 21<sup>st</sup> century workplace (Bennett & Robinson, 2000; Magley, Hulin, Fitzgerald & DeNardo, 1999; Rayner, 1995).

In this paper, we focus on how employees simultaneously respond to and cope with the situation once they have witnessed wrongdoing or become the target of the perpetrator. Drawing on Lazarus and Folkman’s (1984) transactional process theory of stress as well as Affective Events Theory (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996), the process model presented here suggests that, following an episode of organisational wrongdoing, employees engage in a two-stage appraisal process of the situation, which ultimately elicits emotional reactions. These emotional reactions, in turn, lead to specific behaviours, such as silence, disclosing the situation to trusted colleagues, friends and relatives, confronting the perpetrator, or whistleblowing. Our central contention is that these actions represent coping strategies designed to alleviate the stress associated with witnessing or experiencing wrongdoing, particularly when it occurs over a long period of time. Specifically, rather than dismissing these behaviours simply as reactions to wrongdoing, we are interested in the cognitive and emotional processes underlying them. Indeed, as noted by Lowe and Bennett (2003), the relationship between emotions, cognitive appraisals, and coping has received only limited attention thus far, highlighting the need for further research in this area. Furthermore, we believe that our explicit conceptualisation of these behaviours as coping strategies represents an important and original contribution to the organisational behaviour literature, as well as to our understanding of why employees choose to engage in these actions.

After providing an overview of stress and coping, we introduce Stephens and Gwinner’s (1998) process model of consumer complaint behaviour, which provides the framework for the model proposed in

this paper. In the absence of relevant models in the organisational behaviour literature, we elected to extend Stephens and Gwinner's model because it incorporates our major constructs of interest, including appraisal, emotion, coping, silence and speaking up behaviour. Following a review of Affective Events Theory, we present our model of employees' coping responses to an episode of wrongdoing, and provide a justification for each of its components. We consider employee silence, disclosure to trusted others, confrontation, and whistle-blowing explicitly, and explain why individuals may elect to engage in these behaviours following an episode of wrongdoing. Finally, we discuss the limitations of our work, implications of our model, and suggest avenues for further research in this field.

## **STRESS AND COPING**

Occupational stress is a major issue of concern in modern organisations and is associated with a number of adverse employee outcomes including absenteeism, turnover, and lower productivity (Hurrell, Nelson, & Simmons, 1998; Quick, Quick, Nelson, & Hurrell, 1997). Stress itself has been conceptualised as a complex process characterised by physiological, cognitive, emotional and behavioural changes that occur in response to a perceived discrepancy between situational requirements and personal resources or goals (Lazarus & Folkman, 1987). Coping, in turn, has been defined as “the cognitive and behavioural efforts a person makes to manage demands that tax or exceed his or her personal resources” (Lazarus, 1991: 5). From a practical perspective, coping is a voluntary process that involves the identification and implementation of strategies designed to reduce stress (Ashkanasy, Ashton-James & Jordan, 2003).

### ***Transactional process theory***

One theory that explains individual differences in responses to stressful situations is Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional process theory of stress. Transactional process theory views stress from a cognitive-behavioural perspective and is one of the most influential theories to emerge to date in the stress and coping literature (Dewe & Trenberth, 2004). Specifically, Lazarus and Folkman argue that individuals continually evaluate what is happening to them in terms of its relevance for their well-being

and attainment of personal goals. This process is termed 'cognitive appraisal' and involves both primary appraisal and secondary appraisal. Three forms of primary appraisal exist: (1) irrelevant; (2) benign-positive; and (3) stressful (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). While events that have no implication for an individual's well-being will be appraised as irrelevant, events that may potentially enhance, maintain or improve an individual's circumstances will be appraised as benign-positive. Stressful situations, however, can be appraised as harmful, threatening, or challenging. While harm and threat appraisals tend to be associated with negative emotions, challenge appraisals involve considering the potential benefits of a situation, and can therefore give rise to feelings of optimism, determination, and hope (Moskowitz, 2001).

While the primary appraisal process involves evaluating events with respect to their relevance for one's well-being, secondary appraisal occurs once an event has been appraised as stressful (Lazarus, 1991). Specifically, it involves the evaluation of coping resources and the likelihood that those coping resources will be effective in alleviating or preventing the stressful situation. As Lazarus and Folkman (1987) point out, secondary appraisal is a crucial supplement to primary appraisal because one's perception of the extent to which a situation is harmful, potentially threatening or challenging depends also on how much control we think we can exert over the outcome. If there is a risk of a detrimental outcome but one is confident that it is preventable, the situation is likely to be appraised as only minimally stressful.

A critical assumption of Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) model is that the secondary appraisal process produces emotions that lead individuals to engage in coping behaviour, which in turn influences their experienced emotions and encourages reappraisal of the situation. They argue that this appraisal-emotion-coping-emotion-reappraisal process continues until the situation is no longer appraised as stressful or is resolved of its own accord. It is important to note that although Lazarus and Folkman's model has received strong theoretical support, researchers have struggled to establish a causal relationship

among appraisal, emotion and coping in empirical studies because they influence each other, often in a very short period of time (Moskowitz, 2001).

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) further identified two types of coping strategy individuals may engage in when confronted with a stressful situation: problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping. Specifically, *problem-focused coping* seeks to address the source of the stress directly, whereas *emotion-focused coping* focuses on reducing the emotional consequences of stress. Many researchers have since developed new categorisations and typologies of coping strategies (see Thoits, 1995 for a review), some of which vary considerably according to the stressful event in question and population of interest. For the purposes of clarity, we have elected to use Moskowitz's (2001) classification of coping responses, which integrates many of the strategies proposed in the literature thus far. According to Moskowitz, *problem-focused coping responses* include cognitive or behavioural attempts to address the stressor directly; *social coping responses* involve turning to others for information, advice and support; and *avoidant coping responses* include cognitive or behavioural attempts to distance oneself from the stressor. Based on this classification, the major aim of this paper is to demonstrate how employees' behavioural reactions to organisational wrongdoing serve as coping strategies designed to reduce the stress associated with witnessing or experiencing wrongdoing. As researchers have not proposed this idea in the organisational behaviour literature to date, we turn our attention to the consumer behaviour literature and summarise Stephens and Gwinner's model of consumer complaint behaviour, which provides the framework for our current model.

## **MODEL OF CONSUMER COMPLAINT BEHAVIOUR**

Stephens and Gwinner's (1998) process model of consumer complaint behaviour is the only model to date to incorporate appraisal, emotion, coping and speaking up behaviour in an organisational setting. Based on Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) theory, authors argue that a dissatisfying marketplace experience (e.g., receiving poor service) will trigger a process of cognitive appraisal, which will

subsequently elicit emotions and lead consumers to engage in coping behaviour. Namely, they suggest that consumers can engage in problem-focused coping (e.g., making plans to take action), emotion-focused coping (e.g., self-blame, denial), and avoidance coping (e.g., physically removing oneself from the situation). Although it was designed to explain consumer complaint behaviour, we argue that a similar process of appraisal, emotion and coping occurs once employees have witnessed or experienced an episode of organisational wrongdoing. While Stephens and Gwinner's model makes an innovative contribution to the consumer complaint literature, it fails to clearly explicate the link between emotion and each coping strategy or demonstrate *why* individuals may elect to engage in certain coping behaviours. To this end, we revise Stephens and Gwinner's model and apply Affective Events Theory, which specifically focuses on employee attitudes and behaviours, to explain *employee* behaviour following wrongdoing.

## **AFFECTIVE EVENTS THEORY**

AET is arguably the most influential theory that has emerged to date regarding the effect of affect, emotion, and mood on employee attitudes and behaviours (Ashton-James & Ashkanasy, 2005). According to Weiss and Cropanzano, stable characteristics of the work environment, such as work-related stress and role expectations, determine the occurrence of discrete 'affective events' that lead to affective states such as emotions and moods (see also Ashkanasy, Ashton-James, & Jordan, 2004). Of course, not all events in the workplace will generate an emotional reaction in employees. In this respect, Weiss and Cropanzano draw on the work of cognitive appraisal theorists (e.g., Lazarus, 1991; Ortony, Clore & Collins, 1988) to suggest that employees are likely to engage in a two-stage appraisal process following a workplace event. As explained earlier, primary appraisal involves evaluating an event in terms of its significance and meaning to one's personal well-being. Once an event is appraised as a significant harm, threat or challenge to one's well-being, then secondary appraisal is concerned with the identification and assessment of available coping resources (Lazarus, 1991). It is this secondary appraisal process that gives rise to specific emotions such as anger, fear, sadness and joy. In addition to producing discrete emotional reactions, Weiss and Cropanzano argue that the cumulative effect of these affective events and their

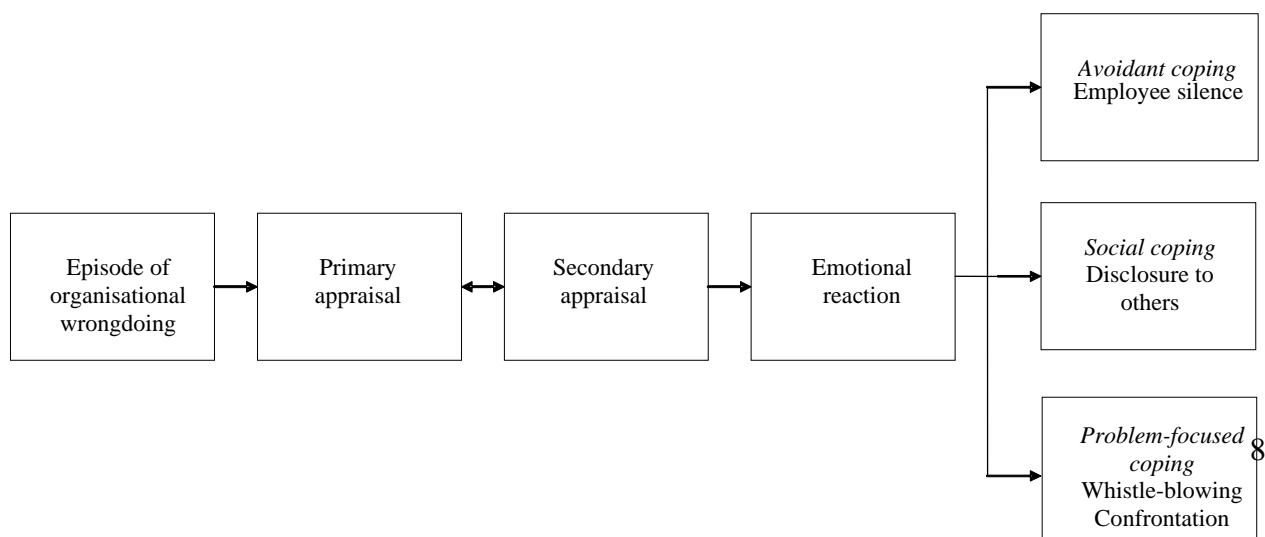
corresponding affective states over time can influence both employee attitudes (such as job satisfaction) and behaviour (such as turnover, absenteeism, prosocial and antisocial workplace behaviour).

In summary, based on Stephen and Gwinner's model, and in line with transactional process theory and AET, we argue that witnessing or experiencing wrongdoing will lead an employee to engage in a process of cognitive appraisal. In particular, we argue that an employee will appraise such a situation as potentially harmful, threatening or challenging, which will then prompt them to assess their ability to cope with the situation given the resources at their disposal. Furthermore, employees' appraisal of the situation will initiate an emotional response, such as anger, fear, guilt, shame, hope, exhilaration, which will drive coping behaviour such as silence and whistle-blowing. Because of the scope of this paper, we have elected to focus on the effect of negative emotions only on employee behaviour. The following section of this paper introduces our conceptual model of this process.

## MODEL OF EMPLOYEES' COPING RESPONSES FOLLOWING WRONGDOING

Our model of employees' coping responses following wrongdoing is presented in Figure 1. It originates with an episode of organisational wrongdoing, such as the discovery of a colleague stealing money from the organisation, or experiencing bullying or discrimination. Following this event, we argue that those who witness or experience the wrongdoing then engage in the process of appraisal, which elicits an emotional reaction and leads to the employee to engage in coping behaviour.

**FIGURE 1. Model of Employees' Coping Responses Following Wrongdoing**





It should be noted that our model is generally concerned with the responses of a single individual, though we acknowledge that it is possible for more than one employee to witness or experience the wrongdoing. We also acknowledge that an employee who personally experiences organisational wrongdoing (i.e., when the wrongdoing involves victimisation) may respond differently to an employee who happens to witness the behaviour. Nevertheless, we maintain that both witnesses and victims engage in the same process of appraisal, emotion and coping following a stressful event. Since our paper is primarily focused on employees' coping responses, we now consider employee silence, disclosure to others, confrontation and whistle-blowing in detail.

### ***Employee Silence***

Tangirala and Ramanujam (2005) use the term 'employee silence' to refer to the intentional withholding of ideas, questions, concerns, information or opinions by employees about issues relating to their job and organisation. Research indicates that silence is an extremely common response to problems and incidences of wrongdoing in organisations. In a recent study, Milliken, Morrison and Hewlin (2003) interviewed 40 employees across a range of industries and found that 85 per cent of interviewees reported that they had failed to speak up about problems or concerns to management on at least one occasion. The most common reasons for remaining silent were fear of being labelled or viewed negatively, fear of damaging a relationship, and general feelings of hopelessness and futility. Other reasons included concerns about not wanting to get someone into trouble and fear of retaliation or punishment.

In our model of employees' potential coping responses following wrongdoing, we classify employee silence as avoidant coping behaviour. Roth and Cohen (1986) were the first to consider systematically the concepts of approach and avoidance in the context of stress and coping, particularly following traumatic events. Their review paper identified three benefits of avoidant coping behaviour: it is often associated with reduced stress in the short term, it can allow for the gradual recognition of threat, and its minimal use can lead to the development of hope and courage. We suggest that employees' initial decision to remain silent is driven by negative emotions, particularly fear (Detert & Edmondson, in press;

Milliken et al., 2003; Pinder & Harlos, 2001). Yet the decision itself to remain silent can often result in feelings of relief and even optimism, in addition to reduced anxiety (Milliken & Morrison, 2003). Consequently, we argue that silence should not be conceptualised as an inherently negative or detrimental response; indeed, it may often be the most logical, safe, and adaptive response in the face of a highly stressful situation. However, as time passes and employees continually reappraise events, the negative emotions associated with the decision to remain silent can accumulate and increase in both frequency and intensity (Pinder and Harlos, 2001). In this sense, silence can produce intense cognitive dissonance and simultaneously offer a sense of relief infused with despair. While an employee may feel intensely guilty and ashamed about failing to report the wrongdoing, suffering in silence may still represent a relatively less distressing and dangerous option than confronting the perpetrator or whistle-blowing, especially if the risk of retaliation is high. In this situation, employees may choose to exit the organisation entirely or disclose the situation to trusted others. We consider the option of disclosure as follows.

### ***Disclosure to Others***

Numerous studies have demonstrated that social support can help to buffer the effects of stress on physical and psychological well-being (e.g., Schonfield, 2001; Snow, Swan, Raghavan, Connells & Klein, 2003; Yue-Juan, Yun-Jing & Zeng-Qli, 2005). Social support is an extremely broad concept and includes behaviours such as communicating positive affect, expressing agreement with another person's opinion, encouraging one to express their emotions, providing advice or information, and providing financial aid or resources (see Kessler, Price & Wortman, 1985).

We argue that there are several reasons why employees may choose to divulge information to trusted others, particularly colleagues, following an incident of observed or experienced wrongdoing. Firstly, other employees may be seen as a source of information regarding organisational policies and procedures about unacceptable or prohibited workplace behaviour (Snow et al., 2003). Further, colleagues can serve as a valuable source of validation and emotional support following an incident of wrongdoing. For example, in the justice literature, observer perceptions of fairness have been found to have a powerful

effect on individuals' attitudes and behaviours in the workplace. According to Leung, Chiu and Au (1993), if an observer perceives injustice in the organisation they are more likely to provide their support to the grievant, which plays a crucial role in the grievant's choice of coping behaviour. Similarly, in cases where there are multiple witnesses to the wrongdoing, research from the prosocial behaviour literature suggests that encouraging comments from another observer may influence an employee's decision to blow the whistle (Dozier & Miceli, 1985). These examples demonstrate that disclosing the situation to others can serve as both a problem-focused and emotion-focused strategy (Lazarus & Folkman, 1991), though we have elected to use the more specific term 'social coping' in the current context. Furthermore, we suggest that a positive response (i.e., one of support, empathy, and encouragement) from others can influence future employee behaviour. Namely, the support from others may encourage employees to reappraise the situation and their own coping potential more optimistically, leading them to engage in problem-focused coping such as confrontation or whistle-blowing (Heaney, House, Israel, & Mero, 1995).

### ***Confrontation***

According to Newell and Stutman (1988), a social confrontation occurs when one party informs another that their behaviour violates (or has previously violated) the expectations of conduct for a particular situation or relationship. Individuals typically engage in confrontation in an attempt to fulfil certain goals including ending the wrongdoing, venting frustration, seeking to understand why the transgression occurred, or achieving retribution (Stutman & Newell, 1990). In their review of the sexual harassment literature, Knapp et al. (1997) note that although confrontation and negotiation appear to be effective ways of ending the harassment, targets rarely use these strategies due to fear of retaliation, a propensity to avoid conflict, and the relatively higher levels of emotional distress associated with challenging the perpetrator about their behaviour. Studies of women who have encountered workplace discrimination also support this finding (e.g., Swim & Hyers, 1999).

For those who do elect to confront the perpetrator, we argue that confrontation is a form of problem-focused coping generally driven by negative emotions. In line with previous research, we

propose that anger, frustration, and indignation are likely to play an important role here. For example, Haidt (2003) and Hoffman (1987) have found that, following an adverse incident, anger motivates individuals to engage in some type of action designed to retaliate against the offender or redress some type of injustice. Furthermore, Batson (1995) noted that emotions such as moral outrage, widely considered a type of anger directed at the perpetrator of the wrongdoing, trigger prosocial behaviour. As a coping response, confrontation offers several advantages over remaining silent, including increased perceptions of controllability and affect ventilation (Roth & Cohen, 1986). Furthermore, we suggest that the perpetrator's response to the confrontation will trigger a reappraisal of the situation; if the transgressor acknowledges that their behaviour was wrong and immediately ceases to engage in the wrongdoing, this reaction is likely to elicit positive emotions such as relief and happiness and the situation will no longer be appraised as stressful. However, if they respond with denial or a counterattack this may generate even stronger negative emotions and lead the witness or target to consider alternative coping responses such as whistle-blowing. It is important to note that the relatively low prevalence of confrontational behaviour following wrongdoing, as well as the corresponding lack of empirical research in this area, means that the relationships suggested here are somewhat speculative in nature. Thus, we suggest that the role of appraisal and emotion in social confrontations, particularly in the context of serious organisational wrongdoing, is an important area for future research.

### ***Whistle-blowing***

Whistle-blowing is defined as “the disclosure by organisation members (former or current) of illegal, immoral or illegitimate practices under the control of their employers, to persons or organisations that may be able to effect action” (Miceli & Near, 1985: 4). Generally, researchers have found that situational characteristics, such as the nature of the perceived wrongdoing and the culture of the organisation in question, appear to have a greater influence on whistle-blowing behaviour than individual characteristics such as gender, age and organisational tenure (for a comprehensive review, see Miceli & Near, 2005). Overall, Miceli and Near conclude that if an employee feels that the wrongdoing is

sufficiently serious and that the organisation will respond appropriately to disclosure (i.e., the wrongdoing will be terminated), research suggests that they are likely to speak up.

We conceptualise whistle-blowing as a problem-focused coping response in our model, and suggest that anger and guilt are two emotions that are likely to motivate whistle-blowing behaviour. Although anger has not been examined specifically as a predictor of whistle-blowing in any empirical studies to date, Gundlach, Douglas and Martinko's (2003) social information processing model of whistle-blowing proposes anger as one emotion that will influence the decision to speak up or not. According to Tangney et al. (1996), guilt elicits an other-oriented perspective that leads to feelings of empathy and tends to motivate individuals to behave in a caring, socially responsible manner. Indeed, Barrett (1995) argues that guilt typically moves individuals to speak up about wrongdoing, whereas shame encourages withdrawal and silence.

While speaking up about serious wrongdoing is generally an extremely taxing experience, we suggest that it can simultaneously alleviate the stress associated with withholding information and increase perceptions of personal mastery, thus helping to facilitate successful coping behaviour in the future. For instance, Cortina and Magley (2003) have suggested that feeling unable to voice personal concerns at work may lead to feelings of increased stress, poor physical health, and finally helplessness and despondency over time. Although often very stressful in itself, whistle-blowing is one way of dealing with the frustration, anger, and despair associated with silence or an unsuccessful confrontation with the perpetrator. In an innovative study involving qualitative interviews and surveys with whistle-blowers, Rothschild and Miethe (1999: 121) reported that 90 per cent of the whistleblowers in their sample said that they would still disclose the organisational wrongdoing if they were offered the opportunity to re-consider their actions. According to the authors, whistle-blowers develop a strong sense of their own morality and integrity due to the suffering they endure throughout the disclosure process. Overall, the findings of the

study demonstrate the value of the reappraisal process and suggest that whistle-blowing is not always an intrinsically negative experience.

## **LIMITATIONS**

We acknowledge that our model of employees' coping responses to wrongdoing has at least three limitations. Firstly, we have not attempted to label the specific emotions that lead to each coping response in our model. While we have suggested that certain emotions (e.g., guilt) are likely to be associated with certain responses (e.g., whistle-blowing), we also note that the same emotion (e.g., anger) can facilitate more than one response (e.g., both confrontation and whistle-blowing). We argue that further research is required to establish the effect of discrete emotions on coping behaviour. Secondly, because of the scope of this paper, we have not discussed the role of reappraisal in facilitating future coping behaviour. As discussed earlier, Lazarus and Folkman (1984) suggest that coping itself will elicit an emotional response (e.g., silence may lead to feelings of relief, because the stressor has been avoided), and that this emotional response will lead employees to reappraise the situation. We argue that this process of reappraisal is critically important, as it may help to explain why employees who initially elect to remain silent may finally choose to break their silence and report the wrongdoing, or why a whistle-blowers, following retaliation for speaking out, may react with apathy and indifference even in the face of continued wrongdoing. Finally, our discussion has almost exclusively focused on the effect of negative emotions on silence and speaking up behaviour following wrongdoing. Though our review of silence, disclosure to others, confrontation and whistle-blowing suggests that negative emotions play a critical role in facilitating each coping response, we acknowledge that positive emotions may influence these behaviours too.

## **IMPLICATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

The model proposed in this paper has important implications for researchers, employees, and organisations. Theoretically, our model is an important addition to the literature as it extends existing

conceptualisations of silence, social confrontation, and whistle-blowing to consider these behavioural reactions as coping responses following an affective workplace event. In this respect, we feel that our paper makes a significant contribution to the literature considering employees' motives for engaging in various behaviours after witnessing or experiencing wrongdoing (e.g., Miceli & Near, 1997; Van Dyne, Ang & Botero, 2003). The role of emotion in facilitating silence and speaking up behaviour, in particular, has received little attention from previous researchers, and our model suggests that emotion plays a pivotal role in this process. Overall, we have tried to emphasise the potentially adaptive value of these responses and sought to explain how they can help employees to cope with the stress and negative emotions associated with witnessing wrongdoing or suffering victimisation.

Given the limited amount of research in this area, we have not offered any specific propositions regarding the relationships between an episode of wrongdoing, appraisal, emotion, and coping. We suggest, however, that our model poses important research questions that should be explored in future studies. Obviously, it is initially important to explore whether certain types of appraisal and corresponding emotional responses are associated with silence, disclosure to others, confrontation, and whistle-blowing respectively. For example, it is possible that harmful and threatening appraisals will be more likely to lead to an emotion of fear and subsequently employee silence, while challenge appraisals may inspire feelings of courage, hope, and optimism, and therefore inspire confrontation and whistle-blowing. We believe that it would also be useful to investigate the role of positive emotions in this process, given that researchers have found that positive emotions can help to facilitate successful coping behaviour (for a review, see Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000). We suggest that qualitative studies are ideally suited to answering such exploratory questions, and should use methods such as semi-structured interviews, phenomenography, and ethnography. Qualitative research typically generates richer, more detailed descriptions of phenomena and events than quantitative research and it is particularly useful for uncovering the deeper meaning of phenomena, such as conceptualisations and understandings (Patton, 2002).

From a practical perspective, we suggest that silence may be a sensible and constructive response to wrongdoing, particularly in the short term; implicit in this proposal is the notion that timing is a critical factor to consider, such that employees should evaluate the costs and benefits of remaining silent versus speaking up in their current circumstances. For example, it may be most beneficial for an employee to remain silent about observed wrongdoing prior to receiving a promotion, as power and status may help to protect them against retaliation and punishment (Near & Miceli, 1992). We have also emphasised the potential benefits of disclosing the situation to trusted others, underscoring the importance of having a close network of friends, family or colleagues to provide emotional support, advice, encouragement and information in a highly stressful situation.



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