Blowing the Whistle: Barriers to Federal Employees Making Disclosures

In this study, MSPB compared responses from Governmentwide surveys in 1992 and 2010. Since 1992, the percentage of employees who perceived wrongdoing has decreased. Yet perceptions of retaliation against whistleblowers remain a serious concern, despite provisions of the NoFEAR Act requiring that Federal agencies train employees on rights and remedies under whistleblower protection laws. In both 1992 and 2010, approximately one-third of employees who believed that they had been identified as the reporter of wrongdoing indicated that they had subsequently experienced or been threatened with reprisal. As shown below, the most important factors for Federal employees in deciding whether to report wrongdoing were not personal consequences, but rather the seriousness of the wrongdoing and the likelihood of the agency’s acting positively on a report. Thus, agencies have the power to influence employees’ decisions about reporting wrongdoing. The most important step that agencies can take to prevent wrongdoing may be to foster a culture that supports whistleblowing.

For the full report, including detailed survey results, please visit www.mspb.gov/studies.