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What is whistleblowing?

20TH DECEMBER 2011

Blair McPherson, author of a number of management books, asks when is whistleblowing not whistleblowing?



Hearing an NHS board member recently described as a whistleblower came as quite a surprise to me as they are generally in a powerful position, privy to many key decisions with access to the chief executive and directors.

It can also be frustrating, especially if you are a lone dissenting voice, but that does not make you a whistle-blower.

The case did highlight how tensions and disagreements are played out in NHS boardrooms.

The relationship between non-executive directors and the chief executive and senior management team can be finely balanced and while a good working relationship is good for the organisation, problems can arise if some non-executive directors fear it is becoming too cosy or that the feeling is that the chief executive has too much power.

I've seen this outside of the NHS where the long serving chief executive maintained their control over the organisation by influencing who was invited to join the board and by ensuring a turnover of non-executive board members.

So how is the balance of power maintained in NHS boardrooms?

While the chair with the backing of the board can get rid of the chief executive, what generally happens is that each board finds its own way to an effective working relationship... until the budget overspend comes to light, the trust is named and shamed over its performance or there is a major scandal over the quality of nursing care.

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