5. The Informed Commitment Model: Best practice for journalists engaging with reluctant, vulnerable sources and whistle-blowers

ABSTRACT

Investigative journalism is often said to be based on two pillars of information gathering—documents and sources. Yet while document retrieval and analysis has received much attention in recent years, particularly with the advent of computer-assisted reporting and Freedom of Information legislation, remarkably little attention has been given in the journalistic literature to best practice for developing and maintaining sources, especially vulnerable sources with high-risk information. This study analyses four high-profile examples of New Zealand investigative journalism based on revelation by vulnerable and reluctant sources. Using interviews with both the sources and the journalists who persuaded them to speak out, it draws on persuasion and social psychology theory to explain the decision-making process of the sources and establish a model of best practice for journalists wishing to persuade reluctant, vulnerable people to speak out safely and effectively.

JAMES HOLLINGS
Massey University

Introduction

INVESTIGATIVE journalism is often said to be based on two pillars of information gathering—documents and sources (Ettema & Glasser, 1998; Spark, 1999). Yet while document retrieval and analysis has received much attention in recent years, particularly with the advent of

computer-assisted reporting and Freedom of Information legislation, remarkably little attention has been given in the journalistic literature to best practice for developing and maintaining sources, and especially those reluctant, vulnerable sources with high-risk information who decide to become public witnesses to wrongdoing. Such work as there is has been based mostly on journalists' self-report, without insight from those reported upon (Ettema & Glasser, 1998; Rosner, 2008; Ruvinsky, 2008; Woodward, 2005). This not only raises questions about its reliability, but also leaves many unanswered questions about how and why such people decide to put themselves at risk by speaking to journalists, and what could be done to make this process easier and safer for both parties. For example, journalists often mention trust as essential to building and nurturing sources, but little is known about how much difference it makes as to whether this particular group of sources, or witnesses, speak out or not. Similarly, an important question is whether journalists need to become 'attached' to sources; how much on their side, if at all, should they be to get the story? Why are some journalists so successful at developing and maintaining sources who reveal sensitive information at considerable personal risk, where others are not?

There is a small body of work in which both journalist and source are interviewed (Ericson, Baranek, & Chan, 1989; Flynn, 2006; Schlesinger, 1994), but often not about the same story. This work also does not look at vulnerable or reluctant sources, but those who deal regularly with (mainly by 'leaking' to) the news media as part of their work —as a professional interest, so to speak. As Manning (2001) has pointed out, it tends to be preoccupied with power relations—who controls the news agenda, rather than issues of journalistic practice. Zelizer (2004) has noted the preoccupation with sociological themes in journalistic literature, but another feature is the limited application of psychological theory to intra-personal and bi-personal issues, such as journalist-source relations. For example, Flynn's (2006) study of Australian 'leakers' and political journalists considers some aspects of best practice for journalist-source relations, including what she calls 'unauthorised leakers' (although there are still people who deal with the news media regularly as part of their job). It affirms the importance of persuasion, trust and good relationships, gives little attention about how, why, or to what extent these and other factors may be important, or to what extent they affirm or are explained by established theories of persuasion and relationships. The preoccupation in the source

literature with 'leakers', who tend to be those with regular contact and often professional training in media relations, tells us little about those sources who have little or no experience with the media, and have to be persuaded to speak out, and who do so at considerable personal cost and risk by becoming public witnesses to wrongdoing. While the academic journalistic literature has not so far considered this group in depth, popular journalism literature suggests these people sometimes have unique access to explosive information and consequently may be the most difficult to persuade to part with it (Anderson & Boyd, 1980; Cropp, 1997; Hunter, et al., 2009; Northmore, 1996; Spark, 1999). This memoir and 'how-to' literature also explains little about the thought processes of these sources. It emphasises the importance of trust-building in persuading such people to talk, particularly through demonstrating reliability and care for protection of anonymity where needed. Trust is assumed to be important—but how much, compared to other factors such as the impact publication could have, or even the likeability or charm of the journalist? What makes some of these people want to become public, and others not?

The most useful insights into the decision-making process of such reluctant, vulnerable sources come from research on whistle-blowers and witnesses (Angle, Malam, & Carey, 2003; Fyfe & Smith, 2007; Gundlach, Douglas, & Martinko, 2003; Hamlyn, Phelps, & Sattar, 2004; Hersh, 2002; Jos, Tompkins, & Hays, 1989; Miceli, Near, & Schwenk, 1991; Near & Miceli, 2008; Spencer, 2001). Whistle-blowing is often defined as employees speaking out on an issue (Miceli & Near, 1992, p. 15). However, not all definitions require that a whistle-blower be a member of an organisation, and in a time when contractual confidentiality clauses can reach beyond the workplace, Jubb's wider (1999) definition seems more useful:

> Whistle-blowing is a deliberate non-obligatory act of public disclosure, which gets onto public record and is made by a person who has or had privileged access to data or information of an organisation, about nontrivial illegality or wrongdoing whether actual, suspected or anticipated, which implicates and is under the control of that organisation, to an external entity having the potential to rectify the wrongdoing. (Jubb, 1999, p. 78)

This definition is wide enough to include those who may not be or have been a formal part of an organisation, but have damaging knowledge about it. It could thus include other kinds of witnesses to wrongdoing, such as crime

witnesses, who have many similar features, including fear of retribution. While many whistle-blowers come forward of their own volition, this study is concerned with those who are reluctant and vulnerable and have to be persuaded to come forward. Thus, for the purposes of this study, the words whistle-blower, witness or source are used interchangeably, and intended to refer to this group of reluctant, vulnerable individuals who would not come forward if not persuaded to do so.

Although it would seem likely that whistle-blowers in different situations would be motivated in different ways—those in the military compared to those in nursing, for example—a review of whistle-blower research concluded that there is no one type of person most likely to become a whistle-blower (Hersh, 2002). Many whistle-blower studies have found that people often do it for altruistic reasons, such as to protect children, as well as for less-altruistic reasons. A perception that only they can stop the wrongdoing—if they don't do it, no one else will—is often cited as a reason. Another common finding is that they often need to become angry to make the decision to speak out, and find the support of family and friends important in overcoming the fear of the almost inevitable retribution they will experience (Alford, 2002; Blenkinsopp & Edwards, 2008; Gundlach, et al., 2003; Hersh, 2002; Mesmer-Magnus, 2005; Miceli, et al., 1991). Despite numerous studies over the past three decades, several writers have noted that theoretical models of whistle-blowing have not been successful in predicting the decision to speak out, and argued this may be due to a lack of research until recently on the emotional aspect of the whistle-blower decision-making process (Blenkinsopp & Edwards, 2008; Gundlach, et al., 2003; Henik, 2008). Some of the models that have been proposed that do include emotion have yet to be empirically tested (Gundlach, et al., 2003; Henik, 2008). Another problem in drawing reliable conclusions about whistle-blowing predictors may be that many whistle-blower studies have extrapolated from surveys of employee intention in the face of wrong-doing, rather than reporting on what action, if any, was taken (e.g. Brown, 2008).

Recent work on whistle-blower decision-making has tried to explore the whistle-blowing experience in more depth to explore potentially relevant theory from within the positivist tradition before advancing to predictive theory. For example, one recent study used a qualitative approach to analyse the decision-making process of two nurses, one who spoke out about wrong-doing, and one who remained silent (Blenkinsopp & Edwards, 2008). This

study drew on Weick's sensemaking paradigm (Weick, 1995) and a strand of cognitive appraisal theory (Baumeister, 2007) and concluded that emotion did play a significant part in the decision-making process. The authors concluded that anticipated emotions, such as shame at being seen to have done nothing in the face of wrongdoing, may have influenced decision-making. However, the dual-process based strand of appraisal theory chosen has itself been questioned (Clore & Ortony, 2008; Cunningham & Zelazo, 2007).

Perhaps another limitation of whistle-blower research has been the emphasis on the whistle-blower's character in the decision to speak out, without considering the influence of persuaders such as journalists and others close to the whistle-blower. This seems surprising given that community support is often noted in earlier qualitative whistle-blower research as helping them overcome fear of retribution when deciding to speak out (Alford, 2002; Glazer, 1999).

This study attempts to redress some of these deficiencies by drawing on the psychological literature within the context of a study which unites both whistle-blower and journalistic experience to describe the decision-making process of a unique and important subset of sources or whistle-blowers who have so far had little attention—those who are vulnerable, abused and need to be persuaded to speak. From there it attempts to identify elements of best practice with a view to establishing a model of best practice for journalists dealing with such people.

Method

In line with Flick's (2007) admonition to qualitative researchers to avoid bringing the preconceptions of prior theory to a relatively unexplored field, [1] and thereby occlude potentially significant data, a methodology was developed which aimed to capture as wide an array of data as possible while also bringing to bear the insights provided by established theory. Thus, four cases were chosen in which whistle-blowers had come forward to tell their stories, and in which both the whistle-blowers and the journalists who persuaded them to come forward were also available to be interviewed. Cases of investigative journalism were chosen because these were more likely to involve serious wrong-doing, in which the whistleblower had to be persuaded to speak, rather than coming forward of their own accord, and in which the potential whistle-blower was more likely to face the threat of

retribution; in short, cases in which the stakes were higher. All cases met the more rigorous, and most common definition of investigative journalism (Protess, et al., 1991; Ullmann, 1995) as being of public interest, involving information that would not have come out otherwise, that was of significant public interest, and which led to some kind of public reform.

One case was analysed using Grounded Theory (Glaser, 1992), to gene-rate general themes for a more thorough analysis of all four cases. This threw up three significant themes; persuasion, emotion and relationships. Grounded Theory was considered but discarded for analysis of all four cases in favour of the potential benefits of insights generated by theory from other fields. To maximise the opportunities of theory-based analysis while avoiding the limitations of choosing just one theory, a range of theories were chosen, in line with Langley's alternate templates model (1999). Each case was analysed in terms of two established theoretical models to identify which model or models seemed the best fit for the processes involved, with a view to establishing a theoretical model which could then be tested further in future studies. The theories were all from what might be termed the positivist strand of social psychology. This approach was taken because most of the literature on sources and whistle-blowers is situated here, and findings on this particular group of reluctant, vulnerable whistle-blowers would thus be potentially more comparable. Another factor was that there was neither the time nor the space within this study to compare theoretical traditions such as the positivist vs. constructivist tradition.

Persuasion models
The main persuasion theories used were the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984) and the Cognitive Dissonance Model (Festinger, 1956). Both were chosen because they have gained widespread, though not universal acceptance as useful persuasion models (Dillard & Pfau, 2002; Perloff, 2008). The ELM is one of the so-called dual-process models, adapted from cognitive psychology, which have gained widespread acceptance in both fields. The main idea of the ELM is that the amount of cognitive effort (elaboration) individuals put into thinking about a persua-sive message depends on their motivation and ability to process it. If they are highly motivated and have the ability to process the arguments (usually meaning the time to do so and the capacity to understand the concepts) they will elaborate considerably on the message. This high-elaboration condition

is known as the central route to persuasion. If they are not motivated, or lack the time or ability to process the message, they will not elaborate on the message, but are more likely to rely on non-message factors, such as whether they trust the message sender, or think them an expert, or find them attractive. This low-elaboration condition is the peripheral route to persuasion. Motivation to process a message usually depends on involvement—whether the message receiver is personally affected. For example, someone considering getting a loan to buy a house will probably take the time and gain the knowledge necessary to process the pros and cons of which bank deal is best, rather than rely on the attractiveness of the bank officer or how much they trusted them or thought them expert. One important caveat is that even highly involved people may avoid processing a message if they have a strong value block against doing so (Perloff, 2008).

The main idea in Cognitive Dissonance Theory is that when people's behaviour is out of step with their beliefs, they experience psychological discomfort (dissonance) and are motivated to change either their behaviour of their beliefs to bring them into alignment. Seiter & Gass (2004) have noted four main paradigms in cognitive dissonance research, the most relevant of which for this study appears to be the disconfirmation bias paradigm. This holds that people who gain information which disconfirms their belief may react to the resulting dissonance by intensifying their belief. They are more likely to be able to do so if their close support network holds the same belief, but less likely if their support network does not (Harmon-Jones, 2002).

Emotion models and persuasion

The role of emotion in persuasion is still not well understood. As Nabi (1999) has pointed out, the ELM as initially proposed did not account for the role of emotion, and only later was the idea of mood introduced as a peripheral cue in low elaboration conditions, and as an argument in high elaboration conditions. Nabi drew on cognitive psychology and research on emotion to propose his own theory of how emotion affects decision-making, the Cognitive Functional Model (Nabi, 1999, 2002).[2] The CFM draws on cognitive theory to propose that each of the five 'discrete emotions'(anger, fear, disgust, guilt, shame) leads to an action tendency.[3] According to this paradigm, fear tends to lead to avoidance, whereas anger helps 'mobilise and sustain high levels of energy for the purpose of defending oneself, defending one's loved ones, or correcting some appraised wrong' or

removing a barrier to a goal (Nabi, 1999, p. 296). Once a discrete emotion is experienced, two motivations are stimulated simultaneously: *motivated attention* and *motivated processing*. The first of these proposes that, based on the type and intensity of the emotion experienced, the receiver will have a degree of avoidance or approach response to the emotion-inducing message component. For example, anger will be aroused if they perceive the message implies there is a threat or barrier to themselves or someone they empathise with, and this anger will motivate them to process the message. The notion of motivated processing argues that a message that arouses an emotion will motivate someone to process the remainder of the message, provided the receiver expects the remainder of the message to satisfy the emotion-induced goal. For example, if anger has been aroused, a message receiver will be motivated to process the remainder of the message if they think it suggests they should attack or approach the threat or barrier.

The CFM, like the ELM, and feedback theory, is based what has been described as the 'dual-process' paradigm of cognitive appraisal theory. Dual-process appraisal models generally see emotional experience as being a result of two distinct neural processes; either instinctive (a sudden gut reaction to a situation) or as a result of a more considered appraisal of a situation according to one's goals and values. Although dual-process models have been influential, there is debate about the usefulness of the dual-process paradigm itself within the emotion context (Clore & Ortony, 2008; Cunningham & Zelazo, 2007). This is not surprising considering the ongoing debate within the psychological literature about the nature and function of emotion (Clore & Ortony, 2008; Fox, 2008). More recently, researchers have built on recent MRI-based research into the amygdala and cortical processes to propose the Iterative Reprocessing Model (Cunningham & Zelazo, 2007). This holds that instead of two routes, emotion results from a hierarchy of cognitive and physiological responses that continually reference and build on each other in an ongoing 'recursive feedback loop'. One recent review of appraisal theories (Clore & Ortony, 2008) suggests that the IRM holds more promise as a model of emotion and it was thus chosen to compare to the CFM to see which was a better 'fit' for explaining the cause and role of emotion in the whistle-blower's decision-making process.

Relationship models

The Investment Model (Rusbult, 1980; Rusbult, Coolsen, Kirchner, &

Clarke, 2006) was developed to explain why some relationships were maintained better than others, and especially why people stayed in relationships when satisfaction was low. It grew out of social exchange-based relationship theories, in particular interdependence theory (H. Kelley & Thibaut, 1978). However, the Investment Model builds on this by suggesting that dependence (the extent to which someone needs a relationship) is a function not just of satisfaction levels and availability of alternatives, but also the level of investment by both parties. It also proposes that commitment —defined as the intent to persist in a relationship—results from increasing dependence. As couples become more dependent, they want to commit more. Commitment helps drive investment; the more couples commit, the more they invest, and the higher their satisfaction (Rusbult, et al., 2006, p. 618). Commitment has been noted to promote prosocial maintenance acts, such as controlling the impulse to retaliate when provoked or sacrificing one's own needs for the relationship. These maintenance acts have been termed diagnostic situations (Holmes & Rempel, 1989; H. H. Kelley, 1983) because they allow one party to determine the strength of their partner's commitment by how much they are willing to sacrifice for the relationship. They thus develop trust, which Rusbult et al. define as 'the strength of one's conviction that the partner will be responsive to one's needs, now and in the future' (2006, p. 627). According to this model, as people become increasingly trusting, they become more willing to place themselves in vulnerable positions relative to the partner by becoming increasingly dependent (p. 628). This view of commitment and trust was the approach adopted in this study.

The therapeutic model is the generalised term given by Roy (2005) to an approach to managing patients based on the principles of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, which is widely accepted in the clinical setting (see e.g. ACC, 2008). Important facets of this approach include collaboration with the patient, developing a structure for the therapy, and relationship-enhancing strategies such as availability, friendliness, empathy, consistency, a belief that the relationship matters, and remaining client-centred, i.e. giving the client power over the rate and choice of topics discussed (ACC, 2008).

Data collection
The whistleblower and journalists involved in each case were interviewed at length using Iorio's (2004) semi-structured interview model. The interviews were recorded and transcribed, coded loosely into data shells, then

analysed using Yin's (2002) pattern-matching method, with an overlay of general analysis using inductive, deductive and creative inspiration-based analytical approaches looking for key factors for each theoretical model in line with Langley's admonition to 'make sense wherever we can' (1999, p. 708). After each was analysed individually, all four were compared with each other, again using a mixture of inductive and deductive analysis and creative inspiration to elicit commonalities and induce theory. A series of conclusions about the whistle-blower decision-making process and a proposed theoretical model of best practice were then drafted and the participants invited to review these. Suggestions were then incorporated into the model presented below.

Results and discussion

All four cases can be described as vulnerable, in that they had suffered considerable distress and intimidation and feared it would continue if they spoke out. They also all involved 'reluctant' whistle-blowers—those who had to be persuaded by journalists to come forward, over a period of weeks or months. Case One involved an employee of a New Zealand government-funded charitable educational trust. This woman was approached in 2002 by investigative journalist Philip Kitchin and asked to corroborate documents suggesting her employer (the high-profile Member of Parliament, Donna Awatere-Huata) was stealing from the trust. The employee was very reluctant to do so, mainly because she felt it wrong to speak 'ill' of those she knew well.[4] She was also being threatened with violence by unknown persons. Her testimony contributed to a series of articles in the Dominion Post in 2002 detailing thefts from the trust by Awatere-Huata and her husband Wi Huata. Awatere-Huata was expelled from Parliament in 2004, and she and her husband were later convicted and imprisoned for fraud and obstruction of justice. Cases Two and Three involved two women, Louise Nicholas and Donna Johnson, who had suffered significant sexual abuse and intimidation at the hands of serving police officers during the 1980s and 90s. The stories about Louise Nicholas led to the resignation of the Assistant Commissioner of Police, a commission of inquiry (which recommended changes to police procedures) and the conviction and imprisonment of a former senior detective for attempting to obstruct the course of justice. Both were reluctant to come forward, partly because of the high-profile of those they were accusing, and partly out of concerns at the effects on their own and even their accusers' families.

Case Four is that of Fionnuala Kelly,[5] a former prison human relations manager who in 2005 exposed mismanagement in a New Zealand prison. Her revelations led to an official inquiry and changes to prison procedures. She also had to be persuaded by a journalist to come forward, but required much less persuasion than the whistle-blowers in cases one to three.

In all four cases, the whistle-blowers clearly made two separate decisions; the decision to speak out, and who to speak out through. And in all four cases, the journalists used similar messages to persuade all four whistle-blowers—that speaking out was important to prevent the same thing happening to others, and that they could be trusted as someone to speak out through. Beyond those commonalities, there were clear differences in the decision-making process of each whistle-blower for each decision. In cases one, two and three, the women deliberated long and hard both on whether they should speak out at all, and on whether they should speak out through the journalist who approached them. In terms of the ELM, for these three cases, the decision to speak out was clearly made using central route processing (CRP). As the situation was highly involving for all three, they all required the motivation and ability to process the message. They gained ability from being given time by the journalists, and being coached in how the media worked, and in the pros and cons of speaking out. They gained motivation at different times, particularly once they realised how speaking out affected them personally.

Anger was important for all four whistle-blowers in helping them gain motivation to process the message about speaking out. As predicted by the ELM, on such a highly involving topic (defined as one that affected them personally) the credibility of the journalist (their trust and expertness) was not as significant in persuading the whistle-blower to speak out as were the pros and cons of the case itself. However, these credibility factors were significant to the extent that they became part of the message about whether they should speak out through this particular journalist. The decision of whom to speak to, although revolving around credibility factors, was a CRP-based decision for the women in cases one, two and three. These three women thought carefully about these journalists' trust and expertness. Rather than take the journalists' word for it (i.e. use peripheral route processing) they assessed the trust and expertise of the journalists, with a combination of 'test' situations (see below) and their own research into the journalists' background, before they made the decision to do a story with them. One also checked the journalist's background

with a friendly detective; another also googled recent stories. Further evidence that these three cases used CRP came from their excellent recall of the reasons and process by which they made their decisions. All three women also had to overcome blocks to speaking out, which appeared to inhibit them from processing the journalists' core messages for some time. In all cases the women explicitly stated they needed to become angry in order to make the decision to speak out (see below). Only in the fourth case did the whistle-blower use peripheral-route processing, and that was only for the decision on whom to speak out through. In that decision, the main difference appeared to be that the whistle-blower was not deeply personally involved; she was informing on prison corruption, whereas in the other cases the whistle-blowers either had a long relationship with those they were informing on or it involved deeply personal situations of sexual abuse. This fourth whistle-blower did not at first feel she was revealing information that would affect how people thought about her. Once she realised that her own credibility was coming into question she became more critical of some journalists who she felt did not follow the story far enough. Further evidence this fourth whistle-blower used peripheral route processing comes from the fact that she had less recall of the reasons and process she followed, and appeared to put more weight on the demeanour of some of the journalists she spoke to than their messages about why she should speak to them. However, her excellent recall of the reasons she spoke out indicated she used central route processing for that decision.

The Elaboration Likelihood Model thus provided a convincing explanation of the process involved, including the differences in the fourth case. The analysis indicated that reluctant, vulnerable whistle-blowers who have a high degree of personal involvement in the situation they are contemplating exposing do usually engage in central route processing of messages about speaking out; but will only central route processing for the decision of whom to speak to, to the extent that they feel their personal credibility is at stake. Thus, journalists who use sound arguments with compelling reasons, and who assist whistle-blowers in gaining the motivation and ability to process these arguments, are more likely to be successful in persuading them to speak out than those who rely on peripheral factors such as how much they are liked or trusted (these factors may of course become important in the decision of who to speak out through). Important factors for those deciding whether to speak out appear to be whether they have decided that the person they are speaking

out about is in the wrong, whether they feel that speaking out will be useful, whether anyone else will speak out if they do not, and whether the benefits of speaking out outweigh any damage that might be caused.

The Cognitive Dissonance Theory (disconfirmation bias) paradigm was useful in highlighting how important the whistle-blower's support group was in helping them speak out, and suggesting reasons why this might be so. For the two most reluctant, and possibly those two who were risking the most self-disclosure (cases one and two), the journalist made a point of talking to the whistle-blowers in conjunction with their support groups, which were more easily persuaded of the merits of the argument and helped convince these two women to speak out. An important part of the support groups' role was helping the women think through conflicts between speaking out and their own values. In one case the woman believed it wrong to speak ill of others; another was concerned speaking out against her abusers would cause hurt to their children. It could be these women displayed evidence of the disconfirmation bias paradigm, in that their own beliefs against speaking out may have intensified in the face of strong arguments for speaking out. One problem with this explanation is that it is hard to assert that their beliefs did intensify in the face of disconfirming information, rather than simply become more obvious.

All of the women involved experienced anger at a crucial time, and all of them explicitly cited anger as helping decide them to make the final decision to speak. As predicted by the Cognitive Functional Model (CFM), the type of emotion experienced did coincide with a change the direction and processing of arguments. For example, in Case One, when the receiver became angry (after hearing herself slandered by her employer) she was highly motivated to process the message. According to the CFM this was because the goal of her dominant emotion, anger (to approach, or attack, the threat to herself or loved ones) now aligned with the outcome promised by the journalist's message (that exposing the wrongdoer would help eliminate her ability to slander her). A similar interpretation could be offered for each of the other three cases, who also progressed from either fear or indecision to anger, and who then quickly made the decision to speak. However, while the CFM did provide an explanation of how issue-related emotion influenced decision-making in these cases, its suggestion of a causal link was not proven by this study. Nor, on the basis of these cases, was its explanation of how messages elicit emotion convincing. It is far from clear that the emotions experienced by these women were

generated by the journalist's messages and their resulting cognitions about them. For example, in cases One and Four, anger was aroused so quickly in response to action by the wrongdoer that there simply did not seem to be time to ponder the message of speaking out and its associated action tendency.

The IRM seemed to explain more convincingly the interactive nature of emotion and cognition in these cases. For example, the slandering of the whistle-blower in Case One was not the first abuse she had suffered; why did this instance of abuse provoke anger and lead to action, while earlier instances of abuse had not? Why should the same event arouse different emotions at different times? According to the IRM, one explanation is that their cognitive appraisal structures changed over the course of their interaction with the journalist, so that the same event memories were reprocessed in line with new self-concepts and thus aroused different emotions. It seems likely that these new self-concepts revolved particularly around legitimacy (their sense of what was right and wrong, and in particular value conflict between concepts of loyalty and protection and those of stopping injustice) and coping (their sense of their ability to do something about the situation). She realised more clearly that her abuser was in the wrong, that they did not share the same values, and that she could do something about it. Thus a situation of flagrant bullying, which caused physiological arousal, was processed not into fear or shame, but anger, which led to action.

By giving them a viable mechanism for redressing the abuse they had suffered, the journalists (and others who interacted with them during this time) made it more likely they would become angry at abuse that had previously aroused mainly shame or fear. There is not the space here to discuss these cases in line with all recent emotion-based whistle-blower models (Blenkinsopp & Edwards, 2008; Gundlach, et al., 2003; Henik, 2008), but this explanation of the role and function of emotion in whistle-blower decision-making, although highly contestable and obviously in need of further refinement, does seem a more holistic and potentially inclusive explanation of the processes involved than any offered so far.

Relationship theory also provided useful insights into the decision-making process of these whistle-blowers. The women in cases one to three used their relationships with the journalists to test them for their independence, trustworthiness, expertise and commitment to getting the story right. Both relationship models provided a reasonable explanation, although the

Investment Model was a closer fit. As the model predicts, greater investment and commitment by both parties resulted in more long-term satisfaction. Journalists and whistle-blowers who showed commitment and who invested in the relationship appeared to develop a more satisfactory relationship which met both parties' needs and expectations. Journalists could commit to the relationship without compromising their independence; in fact as independence was valued by these women, it was important not mutually exclusive with a satisfactory relationship. Furthermore, the Investment Model explained how these women used a series of diagnostic situations that arose to test the journalists' integrity and commitment. As the model predicted, satisfactory performance in these situations, in which one party was required to make themselves vulnerable to the other, led to a cycle of mutual growth of trust and relationship satisfaction. The three women in this study that had the most satisfactory relationship with the journalist were also the most satisfied with the outcome of the story, despite having the most harrowing tales of abuse and being exposed to considerable public questioning. Two of these women have gone on to become significant public figures, unafraid of talking about their previous experiences and regularly speaking out in the national news media on related issues. The therapeutic model was also a good fit in terms of explaining how a client-centred, safe, collaborative approach enabled the whistle-blower to explore their abusive experiences and reconfigure them in a way that was easier to live with. Again, the three women that had the best relationship with the journalist in therapeutic terms—i.e. collaborative, client centred, safe—also felt most resolved about their act of speaking out.

As with the Investment Model, the degree of collaboration or commitment from the journalist did not affect how much the whistle-blower disclosed—all women spoke out—but it did affect how they felt about it afterwards. The only whistle-blower who had a less satisfying relationship (Case Four) was also the one who experienced less commitment and investment, or in therapeutic terms, collaboration and client-centredness, from some of the journalists she engaged with after Ryan. She allowed herself to be talked into appearing on television by another journalist without having had time to think it through, and came to regret that decision. The only advantage gained for the journalist was getting the story out in a time frame that suited the broadcaster; but by placing the values of his employer above those of his 'client' the journalist forsook the opportunity for a mutually satisfying relationship.

Conclusion

The Elaboration Likelihood Model provided a good overall framework for explaining the process by which these whistle-blowers processed messages from journalists about speaking out, but the other models considered here all offered useful insights which coloured in various parts of the picture as a whole. It is clear that journalists wishing to persuade reluctant, vulnerable whistle-blowers on high-risk stories need to realise that a decision to speak out will be highly involving in ELM terms, and thus whistle-blowers will need both the motivation and opportunity to process any message to speak out and who to speak out through. Their thinking is likely to be based on the merits of the argument, rather than simply trusting or liking the journalist, and thus journalists that advance convincing arguments for speaking out, and enhance the whistle-blowers' ability to process them by giving them time and sometimes the knowledge they need, will be more successful.

Nonetheless, trust and expertise are important for whistle-blowers and journalists should emphasise these. Messages encouraging speaking out may elicit emotions of fear, anxiety or anger, with anger more likely to lead to a decision to speak out. Journalists may be able to enhance the likelihood that anger is elicited by combining a message promoting speaking out with one that emphasises that the wrong-doing is personally relevant to them, for example a threat to their loved ones, and that their actions could minimise this threat. Helping the whistle-blower clarify their emotional connection with and responsibility towards a wrongdoer, particularly in contrast to the connection with their loved ones, may also make it more likely that value conflicts over misplaced loyalty are resolved, that appropriate anger is elicited, and a decision to speak out is taken. Journalists also need to be aware that the decision-making process involves considerable and sustained cognitive effort, and may require a whistle-blower to overcome strong personal value blocks involving difficult ethical choices, and they need to be alongside them to help them through these. This effort may also arouse strong emotions, requiring the journalist to offer support where they can in helping the whistle-blower make a decision they feel comfortable with.

Journalists may also be able to enhance the motivation of the whistle-blower to process their message by strengthening the coping and legitimacy appraisals of the whistle-blower, so that they are more aware that what they have experienced is wrong, and more aware that they can and should do

something about it. In particularly sensitive cases, the whistle-blower may wish to include the journalist in their close support group, and the journalist should support this, both because it provides the whistle-blower with a second opinion on the journalist, and because it helps the whistle-blower in climbing down from long-held but self-destructive beliefs if they know they have the support of those they trust deeply.

This study also shows that while relationship quality may not be essential to the whistle-blower's decision to speak out through a journalist in all cases, it may well be in particularly sensitive cases. In these sensitive cases, whistle-blowers use the relationship to test the journalist's trustworthiness and expertise in the context of 'diagnostic situations' and use the results of those tests to help decide whether to speak out through that journalist. As the Investment Model predicts, commitment and investment are key to maintaining a good relationship between journalist and whistle-blower. Commitment, however, is not mutually exclusive to independence; indeed these whistle-blowers scrutinised the journalists carefully for independence and integrity. Commitment, in this context, means a determination to see the story through, and understand and tell the whistle-blower's story properly. Investment, in this context, meant a willingness to put in time and effort, and also make oneself vulnerable to the other party, usually through taking some kind of risk such as delaying publication or withholding key details if the source requests it. Such investment led to a growth of trust and eventual further revelation.

The results above suggest that several accepted norms about journalistic practice in dealing with reluctant, vulnerable sources need revision. Firstly, while trust is crucial to the journalist-source relationship, it is only one of many factors that determine whether the source will speak out. Others include the journalist's expertise, and more importantly, the overall merits of speaking out. In particular, what will be gained by it, will it prevent further instances of abuse/ corruption/ crime etc, and is there no other way to prevent these. Secondly, the quality of the relationship between the journalist and the source is of great importance to the source, and traditional journalistic norms about detachment and retaining objectivity are of limited relevance, if they ever were. Journalists must show commitment and investment in the relationship, but these need not compromise their independence. They must also practise the tenets of a good therapeutic relationship; good communication, honesty, including about what they can and can't do, accessibility, and keeping it

client-centred and collaborative, and safe. At times this may require that they compromise their expectations in terms of timing and naming, but these compromises are not only ethically justifiable in their own terms, but will often be essential to making the story public.

Taking all the above into account, a model of best practice for journalists dealing with reluctant, vulnerable sources is proposed. It was decided to call this the Informed Commitment Model, to underscore the themes which emerged from the research, of communication and commitment.

The Informed Commitment Model

1. Journalists should approach reluctant and vulnerable sources in a non-threatening way, if possible by asking a trusted intermediary for an introduction.

2. Journalists should take the time to explain the reasons for doing the story, and the potential risks and benefits to the source. Journalists may lay out the reasons in their own way, although it may be that two-sided messages—which provide alternative scenarios—may work best. Journalists can and should emphasise their own credibility, such as their trustworthiness and expertise and independence, but they should not rely on these factors alone to persuade the source. They should be aware that a decision to speak out is a highly personal one for a source, and will thus require persuasion on the merits of the argument, regardless of how much they like or trust the journalist. Journalists should ideally ensure that the source's support group is included in this process, and that they also understand the reasons for doing the story.

3. Once the message has been delivered, journalists should give the source the time and opportunity to process it. They should be available to answer further questions during this time. This does not mean they cannot tell the source of their own deadlines and expectations, but they should not pressure or harass the source into making a decision before they are ready.

4. Journalists should be aware that by asking the source to consider their message, they have entered a relationship with the source, and it should be treated as such. They should commit to this relationship, which includes a commitment to being honest about what they can and cannot do, to understanding their story as fully as possible, and

if possible, seeing it through to publication. They should at all times be honest with the source, keep any commitments that are made, keep them informed of developments in the story, and inform them of what they can't tell them, such as confidential details of other sources.

5. Journalists should be aware that during the decision-making process, the source may test them, by asking for more information, or making other requests, and they should accommodate these as much as they are able to or explain clearly why they cannot.

6. Journalists should be aware that the decision-making process for a source deciding to speak out is intensive, often agonising, and may involve the stimulation of intense emotions such as anger. In particular, messages which help resolve value conflicts and loyalty conflicts, which emphasise the threat to the source's loved ones from the wrong-doing, and that the source can minimise these threats, may elicit anger. This emotion may help the source gain enough motivation to process the arguments for speaking out, and to overcome personal inhibitions about doing so. Journalists should be aware that it is critically important that they remain available during this time, as in others, ready to answer any questions or help the source process internal arguments that may arise, in an honest and sincere manner that aims to help the source arrive at a decision they can live with.

7. If the source has decided to tell their story, the journalist should ensure that it is told fully and truthfully. They should also remain available to the source through the stressful period of publication and post-publication media attention, and not refrain from giving advice on dealing with other media. They should recognise that the source has placed a great deal of trust in them, and this trust necessitates an ongoing commitment of support. By providing this support freely in the early stages in particular, the journalist can help the source move more quickly through an often intense and stressful period and gain confidence in their new more public self.

This model is proposed as worthy of further testing in the field to see how well it works as a guide to best practice. It is not intended as a predictive model, though researchers may find some aspects useful as a framework for a developing predictive theory. Based on the above cases, it seems likely that

a reliable predictive theory of whistle-blower behaviour will need to include a thorough understanding and incorporation of the role of emotion in their decision-making, which in turn is likely to require a more nuanced explication of the various appraisals relevant to speaking out than was possible in the scope of this study.

Notes

1. Obviously, inasmuch as one can ever put one's own preconceptions aside.

2. Another model that draws on discrete emotion and action tendency work is the Anger Activism Model (Turner, 2007). This was considered as part of the doctoral thesis on which this paper is based, but for space reasons is not reported here.

3. Emotion is often defined by cognitive psychologists as a discrete, intense response to an external event consisting of five components; physiological arousal, cognitive appraisal of a situation, a subjective feeling state, a motivational component (action tendencies), and motor expression (facial and vocal expression). Mood is a less intense feeling state that lasts over several days or weeks. (Fox, 2008; Nabi, 1999)

4. Case One did not want her name used in this study, but is considered to have come forward because without her help in corroborating documents the story would not have been published.

5. Kelly had a prior, but not close social relationship with Ryan. Ryan suggested Kelly speak out, and Kelly then contacted a newspaper and spoke of her experiences. She also later spoke on Ryan's radio programme, and later to other newspaper and television journalists.

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James Hollings is a lecturer in journalism in the Massey University Department of Communication, Journalism and Marketing, Wellington. This article is a later version of a research paper presented at the Media, Investigative Journalism and Technology (MIJT10) conference at AUT University on 4-5 December 2010. It is drawn from his doctoral research studies. Hollings is a past winner of New Zealand's Jubilee Prize for Investigative Journalism and was a resource person at the conference.
J.H.Hollings@massey.ac.nz