

## Why vigilance and scrutiny matters

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### Key words

vigilance, scrutiny, transparency, accountability, candour

### Abstract

*Educational institutions, corporate concerns as well as government departments are complex organisations. Within each entity the human dynamic is such that it is often both difficult to read and invariably multifaceted. Power and patronage, whether overt or covert, each play their part and as a consequence there are a whole raft of reasons why employers and employees behave in the way that they do. Where once there was a general acceptance that one accepts things as they had apparently always been, there is now a growing appreciation of the importance of vigilance as a means of thwarting danger and scrutiny as a way of elucidating potential flaws and weaknesses.*

*From the shop floor to the board room it is imperative that individuals are empowered to appreciate that they have the capacity to see and read the signs of danger. The question is do existing leadership and management structures have the ability to receive and process information that might be forthcoming? There are many organisations who appear to prefer to engender a collective indifference or amnesia rather than a culture of openness and candour. Vigilance is a state of mind, one that requires fine tuning and where possible codifying in official policies and practices. Issues such as bribery and corruption, bullying, sexual harassment and health and safety can only be effectively identified and tackled thanks to vigilance. Whilst it must be appreciated that situations vary enormously, a common failing that emerges when crises break forth is frailty within the chain of vigilance. Vigilance is often not welcomed or encouraged, for it may be seen as a threat or that noticed or observed not acted upon. Such breaks in the chain can thus lead to serious internal problems that in certain circumstances become sufficiently toxic to causing serious damage financially and to an organisation's reputation.*

*Equally scrutiny is of paramount importance, especially as a means of detecting sins of omission or commission on CVs, possible policy blunders or errors in projections and procedural documentation. The cursory glance or the supine attitude can prove extraordinarily costly, especially in an era of rampant subcontracting and litigation. Just as forensic accounting has developed in recent years, so has been an appreciation of the importance of ensuring that directors ask pertinent questions and resist that temptations to acquiesce with all that is put before them. Sadly it is not unknown for some individuals to deliberately seek to ensure that documentation is opaque or of an obfuscatory nature. Naturally, as we are sentient beings rather than automatons, it imperative that we understand the protocols for conveying concern or misgivings. Policies and processes are essential, in the same way that there are invariably rules concerning whistle blowing and the like. No one should underestimate the importance or sensitivity surrounding such activity, for indifference and passivity will often be exploited by the unscrupulous or downright criminal. We would all do well to remember those words of Edmund Burke (1729-1797): "All that is necessary for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing."*

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