The naked king and the whistleblower

BY LUIS ALVIA SUAREZ

One of the childhood fairy tales that I remember is the one of a medieval king who was cheated by three dirty scoundrels, hiring their services to make a suit whose main wonder, besides the rich fabrics, was that it could not be visible to the eyes of those who were the sons of a crook. After months of work—it’s clear, at the expense of the kingdom’s profit and loss account—it arrives on the final day. For the true misery of the king, for it is then that he reaches full account of his obscure origin, when he doesn’t see any dress at all. The praises of his vassals to the elegance of the clothing just increase his pain. The mockery goes down when the black groom holding the reins—perhaps a guy that might have little to lose—says: “Majesty, you may very well think I am the son of a crook, but as I feel that I am not, I have to tell you that you have no shirt.”

Who among us has ever seen any naked executive… but I am asking you: Who has been in the role of the black groom? If I am recalling that story, attributed to the Spanish middle-age fairy tales of “El Conde Lucanor,” it is because it has to do with the conclusion reached during one of the working sessions at the SCCE European Compliance & Ethics Institute: the worldwide number of countries that are truly protecting whistleblowers today is zero. Donna Boehme couldn’t say it in a louder voice: “Sit a whistleblower at...
Sometimes people ask me how is it possible that, despite so many controls implemented, so many expert consultants and executives, still failures occur in companies, giving rise to serious breaches of the market rules, and so far from what would reasonable diligence and care require from those who are responsible for taking decisions?

Is it just because they don’t listen? Is it because they are misguided? The press has recently echoed the fact that in the UK is born an association with the aim to provide support to “whistleblowers” who have lost their jobs. Killing the messenger is not a good solution to the problem; however, that these kind of associations appear indicates that we are still far from “sitting a whistleblower at the table”—as Donna Boehme recalled at the SCCE European Compliance & Ethics Institute—and still far away from considering the added value that someone, without fear of consequences, tells us that the king has no clothes.

In our story, the black groom made his king stop spending money on feeding four knaves who ate his fortune on the pretext of making a magic dress. The fairy tale does not tell us, however, what happened to this first medieval “whistleblower”…I hope he was rewarded and recognized as a hero.

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