

Sheryl Menadue

INTRODUCTION

The reasons why people disclose information about others is unclear. Existing research in this area tends to focus on self-disclosure and so fails to speak to the question of why a person discloses information about somebody they know, in what circumstances they are most likely to disclose, and how these situations tend to emerge.

This study investigates the characteristics and motivations of individuals who disclose information about others, using linguistic and behavioural analyses of 848 narratives.

MOTIVATIONAL STATES IDENTIFIED

The study identifies five core motivational states for disclosing information about others:

1. **Relationship:** Disclosing information about a person when their behaviour is negatively impacting on a family member or friend.
2. **Responsibility:** Disclosing information through a sense of duty, often to protect vulnerable individuals such as children, the elderly, or patients.
3. **Role:** Disclosing information in an effort to conform with professional responsibilities and expectations within the workplace.



4. **Rule Breaking:** Disclosing information when the person has failed to follow regulations or official guidelines.
5. **Righteousness:** Disclosing information in an attempt to correct a person's wrongdoing, often involving situations of theft or misconduct.

The motivational states are not mutually exclusive. A medical professional who observes negligence by a colleague, for example, can be motivated by states (2), (3), (4) and (5).

The research also indicates that individuals are more likely to disclose to authority figures who possess the power to act on the information, rather than any specific qualities of the handler.

KEY TRAITS OF DISCLOSERS:

Disclosers in the current study were typically shown to be female, in their twenties or thirties, and mostly from working or middle-class backgrounds. The sample of disclosers generally lacked dark triad or manipulative traits and were open, emotionally stable, conscientious, agreeable, agentive and felt a sense of union or solidarity with others. Different motivational states were associated with different trait characteristics. For example, those motivated by Role were also those low in openness to new experiences.

CONCLUSION

This study contrasts with previous research on informants (e.g., Miller, 2011), which identified self-interest as a primary motivator for disclosure. Instead, the findings indicate that those who disclose are largely motivated by prosocial factors, including relationships, responsibility, and adherence to societal norms.

These findings have applicability in security contexts where law enforcement seeks assistance from law-abiding citizens who are acquainted with individuals suspected of criminal activity, such as family members involved in extremist activities.

ABOUT THIS PROJECT

This Executive Summary is from the CREST project 'Linguistic Tools to Measure Source Motivation and Intent': crestresearch.ac.uk/projects/linguistic-tools-to-measure-source-motivation-and-intent/

The Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats (CREST) is funded by the UK's Home Office to identify and produce social science that enhances their understanding of security threats and capacity to counter them. Its funding is administered by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC Award ES/V002775/1). www.crestresearch.ac.uk.

*The design of the research, data analysis and interpretation are completed independently by the research[*er] [team] and should not be taken as representative of views held by those who fund CREST.*