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A Report On Reporting: Why Peers Report Integrity and Law Violations in Public Organizations

Though
Contemporary
Public
Management
Dilemmas

The 2004–2005 archives of three bureaus of integrity are analyzed in order to study the reasons for reporting integrity and law violations within public organizations. Peer reporting accounts for only a small percentage of cases; most investigations originate from routine and continuous institutional controls. What are the reasons peers choose to report or not report? A sense of justice is most important, followed by self-protection and protection of the wrongdoer. The most important reason for or against coming forward is the reporter's fear of negative consequences. One surprising rationale for not reporting is that an individual feels responsible for the wrongdoer's punishment. Six propositions are elicited from this research as well as specific pragmatic recommendations for management procedures to improve reporting of integrity and/or law violations.

We structure our research around two questions. The first is, *how do investigations of integrity violations within public organizations get started?* ... [S]econd, ... *what are the reasons for reporting integrity violations in public organizations?*

The importance of attending to integrity violations in public administration is evident. Integrity violations harm trust in government (cf. Nieuwenburg 2007) and lead to substantial financial losses and organizational problems (Ouchi 1979; Eisenhardt 1989a). We note here that integrity violations can be, but are not necessarily, legal violations, and that “unethical” and “illegal” are different. When we refer to “integrity violations” in the remainder of this article, they are to be understood as “violations of integrity and/or the law.”

In a study of corruption (De Graaf and Huberts 2008), the peers of corrupt officials often had suspicions—sometimes even evidence—that something was wrong long before the investigation, but kept the information to themselves. The study describes the process of becoming corrupt as a “slippery slope,” and in some cases, even the corrupt official wished he had reported earlier so that he could have been stopped when the case was relatively minor. The sooner the

integrity violation is discovered, the sooner action can be taken to minimize damage. Newspapers occasionally report a governmental integrity violation. Sometimes it is clear how the violation was discovered, often not. In this study we ask, who reports integrity violations in public organizations, what are the violations, and why? The aim is to formulate advice on integrity management for public organizations to facilitate “good” reporting of integrity violations.

We structure our research around two questions. The first is, *how do investigations of integrity violations within public organizations get started?* In other words, who first reports the violations? Literature on this question is sparse. Nelen (2003) and Huberts et al. (2004) have reported that in the Netherlands, cases are initiated by citizens, coworkers, and supervisors in fairly equal shares. They also

warn that their figures are tentative and may or may not differ according to the type of violation. The second research question is, *what are the reasons for reporting integrity violations in public organizations?* According to Treviño and Victor, “Co-workers who are willing to monitor their peers’ behavior and report violations to management represent a potentially important supplemental control resource for organizations” (1992, 38).

New data will be presented on this article’s two research questions. First, we discuss the theoretical background of the study and define its key concepts. We then propose typologies of integrity violations (the “what” in “who reports what”) and reporters (the “who” in “who reports what”). We follow with a general discussion of the literature on whistle-blowing with respect to the reasons potential peer reporters have to report. We then describe the study background and methodology: where and how the data

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were collected, the explorative design, the study of the archives of three public organizations, and the reporter interviews. In the following three sections, we present the findings on the two research questions, list propositions elicited from the research, and discuss them in the context of current literature. We conclude with implications and recommendations for public integrity management.

Theoretical Background

Some Key Concepts of the Study Defined

A *reporter* is defined here as one who discloses information about a perceived integrity violation to someone who has the ability to effect action (cf. Near and Miceli 1985, 4). The reporter has no authority over the accused and thus lacks the power to directly rectify and punish. The reporting of integrity violations includes at least three parties, each of which takes action in response to the other (cf. Åkerstrom 1991, 16; Near and Miceli 1996, 508): the reporter, the wrongdoer, and the information receiver. The reporter takes three steps: *observing* an act (a broad category—hearing, for example, can be included), *defining* the act as an integrity violation, and *reporting* the act (cf. Near and Miceli 1996, 508).

Integrity is defined broadly as the quality of acting in accordance with relevant moral values, norms, and rules. In the public context, integrity “can be thought of as individuals upholding the obligation of office by implementing public programs in accordance with laws and rules, as well as in support of the public intent or the collective trust” (Blijswijk et al. 2004, 719). The focus here, however, is on integrity *violations*: behavior that violates relevant moral and/or legal values, rules, and norms. Note that many integrity violations are also legal violations, but not necessarily so. Unethical and illegal are not one and the same. In this article, we therefore use the term “integrity violations” as shorthand for “violations of integrity and/or the law.”

Typology of Wrongdoing

Categorizing the “what” in “who reports what” is a necessary step in researching how investigations get started in the first place. The type of wrongdoing has previously been related to whistle-blowing (e.g. Near et al. 2004), but mostly in the context of whether the type of wrongdoing affects the whistle-blowing process rather than where reports come from or how they surface. Near et al. (2004) conclude, based on a survey of a large U.S. military base, that employees who observe perceived wrongdoing involving mismanagement, sexual harassment, or unspecified legal violations are significantly more likely to report than those who observe stealing, waste, safety problems, or discrimination. The authors also conclude that the type of wrongdoing makes a difference in the whistle-blowing process and should be examined further in the future. (For a similar study within American police agencies, see Rothwell and Baldwin 2007).

This study employs a typology of integrity violations derived from an analysis of the literature on integrity and corruption by Huberts, Pijl, and Steen (1999).¹ The types of integrity violations are considered universal and thus useful for describing unethical behavior in almost all (public) organizational contexts. Lasthuizen (2008) recently succeeded in a first validation of the typology.

The types of integrity violations [used in this study] are considered universal and thus useful for describing unethical behavior in almost all (public) organizational contexts.

Table 1 Types of Integrity and/or Law Violations

1. <i>Corruption: Bribing</i>	Misuse of public power for private gain; asking, offering, or accepting bribes	60
2. <i>Corruption: Nepotism, cronyism, and patronage</i>	Misuse of public authority to favor friends, family, or party	61
3. <i>Fraud and theft</i>	Improper private gain acquired from the organization (with no involvement of external actors)	62
4. <i>Conflict of (private and public) interest</i>	Personal interests (through assets, jobs, gifts, etc.) that interfere with public interests	63
5. <i>Improper use of authority (for noble causes)</i>	Use of illegal or improper methods to achieve organizational goals (e.g., illegal methods of investigation or disproportionate violence by police)	64
6. <i>Misuse and manipulation of information</i>	Lying, cheating, manipulating information, or breaching confidentiality	65
7. <i>Discrimination and sexual harassment</i>	Misbehavior toward colleagues or citizens and customers	66
8. <i>Waste and abuse of resources</i>	Failure to comply with organizational standards, improper performance, incorrect or dysfunctional internal behavior	67
9. <i>Private time misconduct</i>	Conduct in an employee's private time that harms the public's trust in administration or government	68

Typology of Reporters

To determine how investigations get started in the first place, a useful classification of reporters is needed. According to the literature (e.g., Åkerstrom 1991; King and Hermodson 2000; Miceli, Near, and Dworkin 2008; Near and Miceli 1996; Rothschild and Miethé 1999; Treviño and Victor 1992; Zipparo 1999), the reporter–wrongdoer relationship and whether the reporter has a prior interest in the case are important factors. Thus, reporters can be distinguished along three dimensions: (1) whether the reporter is internal (reporting from within government) or external (reporting from outside government), (2) whether the reporter has an interest in the case, and (3) whether the reporter and the alleged wrongdoer have a work relationship (relevant only when the reporter is inside the government).

Table 2 Logical Classification of Reporters

Reporter	Case-Disinterested		Case-Interested	
	Not coworker	Coworker	Not coworker	Coworker
Inside government	1	4	2	3
Outside government	6	n.a.	5	n.a.

Reporting in the Literature

The second research question focuses on the reasons for reporting integrity violations—the “why” question—which we can begin to answer by reviewing the literature. We will see that the reasons to report are straightforward in all categories of reporters save one: peer reporting.

The literature, while vast, is primarily centered on whistle-blowing. Several enlightening reviews (Mesmer-Magnus and Viswesvaran 2005; Maesschalck and Ornelis 2003; Miceli,

1 Near, and Dworkin 2008; Near and Miceli 1996; Vandekerckhove
2 2006) summarize the (mainly) quantitative studies on whistle-
3 blowers and whistle-blowing. Their emphasis is on the personal
4 characteristics of the whistle-blower, and on predicting and finding
5 the determinants of organizations at high risk of whistle-blowing
6 (Vandekerckhove 2006, 13). Many factors are associated with the
7 likelihood of whistle-blowing, internal and external. They mostly
8 correlate with aspects of various levels of the reporting process,
9 including the reporter's personal characteristics (gender, self-esteem,
10 personality traits, religion) and situational aspects (type of alleged
11 wrongdoing, quality of supervision, status of the recipient, organiza-
12 tional integrity policy, and so on).

13
14 Several scholars have stated that peer reporting can be considered
15 a type of whistle-blowing behavior (e.g., Treviño and Victor 1992;
16 Victor, Treviño, and Shapiro 1993). However, knowing which
17 conclusions to adopt from the general whistle-blowing literature
18 when looking for the reasons for peer reporting in the public sector is
19 difficult. The studies on whistle-blowing tell us much about common
20 characteristics and organizations but, because they are mainly quanti-
21 tative, say little about the *process* of deciding to report.² Maesschalck
22 and Ornelis (2003, 539) note that for insights into the deeper mecha-
23 nisms of whistle-blowing, survey research will not do and qualitative
24 research is necessary. Since then, interesting qualitative studies have
25 been conducted, putting public whistle-blowing in (a public) context,
26 such as a study by Johnson (2003) concentrating on external whistle-
27 blowers, and a study by O'Leary (2006) on government guerrillas,
28 who sometimes become whistle-blowers (but most do not).

29
30 Furthermore, many studies on whistle-blowing in the last two
31 decades have concentrated on private sector organizations. Does this
32 compare to public sector feelings and actions concerning reporting?
33 There is strong evidence that it does not: Brewer and Selden (1998)
34 conclude that federal whistle-blowers act in ways that are consistent
35 with the theory of public service motivation (see, e.g., Houston
36 2006; Lewis and Frank 2002; Perry and Wise 1990). Miceli, Near,
37 and Dworkin say, "Recent research suggested that there may be
38 effects of industry in whistleblowing—specifically, for example, that
39 whistleblowers cluster in public rather than private or not-for-profit
40 sectors" (2008, 85).

41
42 A third difficulty in adopting general conclusions from the whistle-
43 blowing literature is that nearly every study's definition of whistle-
44 blowing is different (cf. Chiu 2003; Jubb 1999; Vandekerckhove
45 2006). Are the behaviors comparable, or do they simply share the
46 same name? Based on Jubb (1999) and Vandekerckhove (2006, 22),
47 we can distinguish seven elements of whistle-blowing with ambigu-
48 ous definitions: act, actor, outcome, motive, subject, target, and
49 recipient. Unlike the whistle-blowing literature, in which cases often
50 are reported by the media, more than 99 percent of the reports in
51 the studied archives were *internal*. Although both internal and
52 external reporting are part of its definition, "whistle-blowing"
53 implies a lot of noise, and thus is indicative of *external* reporting
54 (cf. Chiasson, Johnson, and Byington 1995; Johnson 2003).

55 Can the reasons for reporting a colleague to the media be
56 the same as reporting a colleague to the boss?

57
58 Another important aspect is the report target: "whistleblowing
59 literature has focused primarily on reporting the wrongdoing of

superiors rather than the wrongdoing of peers" (Victor, Treviño,
and Shapiro 1993, 253). Much whistle-blowing literature is about
organizational wrongdoing, with management as the responsible
party. In the development of California's Bay Area Rapid Transit
system (Anderson et al. 1980), for example, the whistle-blowers
faced a loyalty conflict between the public interest and their organi-
zation (Vandekerckhove 2006, 9). Based on the wider sociological
literature, however, we can hypothesize that going outside one's
group (as in peer reporting) is a different kind of loyalty conflict:
peer reporters have to balance their loyalty to a sense of justice (the
organization) against their loyalty to the group in general and the
wrongdoer in particular. As Pershing states, "Deciding how to react
to occupational misconduct may be conceptualized as choosing
between two conflicting loyalties: to the institution of which one
is a member and to organizational peers" (2003, 150). Further-
more, peers in public organizations wrestle with the government
code of being loyal to the highest moral principle (Johnson 2003,
27). Loyalty to immediate colleagues—the group—is often much
stronger than loyalty to the organization (e.g., Heck 1992). The
victim of betrayal may suffer, but the betrayer does, too: "Associa-
tions of guilt or shame can linger on long after the act took place"
(Åkerstrom 1991, 19).

From the few studies that exist on peer reporting, it is clear that a
serious decision has to be made, one that differs starkly from many
other types of reporting. This becomes clear by the value- and
emotion-laden vernacular of peer reporting: "snitching" (Pershing
2003), "tattling," and "ratting out." Nor is the term "informer"
neutral: it is loaded with negative associations (Åkerstrom 1991).
Whether peer reporters are labeled as heroes or traitors, cowardly or
courageous, depends on the context and point of view. It is the result
of a process of social construction that varies with time and place.

Research Background and Methodology

Settings

To study how integrity investigations get started in government and
why they are reported, we studied the 2004 and 2005 archives of
three bureaus: the Amsterdam police department's Bureau of Inter-
nal Affairs (BIO),³ the city of Amsterdam's Bureau of Integrity (BI),
and the National Agency of Correctional Institutions within the
Ministry of Justice's Bureau of Integrity and Safety (BIS). Together,
the BIO and BI are the integrity agencies for all the civil servants
of the city of Amsterdam; the BIS represents a national ministry
serving institutions nationwide. Collectively, these three bureaus
represent a broad range of types of public employees, from the high-
est officials to street-level bureaucrats.

The three organizations are required by law to have whistle-blowing
regulations that include protections from retaliation for whistle-
blowers. These regulations exist in all three organizations, but
recent research shows that most civil servants in the Netherlands do
not know about them (USBO 2008). Furthermore, it was found
that the current regulations for Dutch public officials hardly offer
whistle-blowers any protection (USBO 2008). In the three organiza-
tions, it is possible to report anonymously at a central point in the
organization. Reporters can also ask to report confidentially. Howev-
er, once a case turns out to involve unlawful conduct, confidentiality
cannot be guaranteed. None of the organizations has a public record
of fair treatment of whistle-blowers. Of the three organizations, the

1 BIO in particular has clearly articulated and reinforced statements
2 of behavioral misconduct.

3
4 We obtained permission from each organization's administration
5 and agreed that no traceable details of any case would become
6 public. The researcher spent 11 days investigating the archives of the
7 Amsterdam police (171 and 168 cases in 2004 and 2005, respec-
8 tively), 6 days studying the archives of the city of Amsterdam (78
9 and 140 cases), and 7 days studying the archives of the correctional
10 institutions (104 and 128 cases).

11
12 The cases researched were the known cases within the respective
13 organizations. This is clearly different from *all* integrity violations
14 that actually took place, undoubtedly a much greater number. For
15 the purpose of this study, however, it was most important that the
16 cases be characteristic of those discovered and investigated in the
17 Netherlands.

18
19 **Indexing the Archives**

20 The cases were studied to distinguish (1) the reporter, (2) the type
21 of violation, (3) the reason(s) for reporting, and (4) consequences
22 for the reporter. The information on the reporters differed strongly
23 among bureaus and cases, with one exception: most information
24 was about the wrongdoer and the (perceived) integrity violation,
25 not the reporter. In most cases, however, it was possible to trace the
26 origin of the investigation. Files comprising only a page or so were
27 generally cases that had been dismissed. Others contained of yards
28 of folders. The police files turned out to have the most—as well as
29 the most interesting—information because police investigators have
30 more power than investigators of other bureaus. Much valuable
31 information was collected from filed interviews with reporters.

32
33 **Documents and Interviews**

34 The intensity of the peer reporting experience is not just a matter
35 of personality or individual perception. It depends in large part on
36 context (Åkerstrom 1991, 19), and research methodologies must
37 therefore take context into account. Therefore, we employed qualita-
38 tive and explorative research so that every option, insight, and novel
39 finding based on any variable mentioned in the whistle-blowing
40 literature was open for inspection.

41
42 The indexed archives were first studied to determine the reasons for
43 peer reporting. We studied each case in its own nuanced context.
44 Victor, Treviño, and Shapiro comment on the importance of actual-
45 ity: "Little previous research has been conducted on peer reporting
46 of unethical behavior in organizations and no previous study has
47 measured actual peer reporting behavior" (1993, 259–60). We
48 kept special notes on every case that was labeled "peer reporting."
49 Archived reporter interviews gave especially useful information on
50 the process of peer reporting, but, as previously mentioned, most
51 archived information was about the wrongdoer and wrongdoing—
52 that is, evidence of an integrity violation. Therefore, we decided to
53 conduct our own interviews where possible.

54
55 To select the cases, first all cases that were labeled "peer reporting"
56 were considered. Then we eliminated some reporters because of
57 restrictions, the most important of which was that the file was still
58 active. In the end, 27 requests for interviews were made and 25 were
59 accepted, a more than adequate number: "[W]hile there is no ideal

number of cases, a number between 4 and 10 cases usually works
well" (Eisenhardt 1989b, 545).

The opportunity to so select the cases resulted in unique research
material. It allowed us to avoid some pitfalls mentioned in the few
whistle-blowing studies that have interviewed reporters. Rothschild
and Miethe note,

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68 Various approaches to the study of whistleblowers have been
69 taken. Previous researchers have identified a small number of
70 high-profile whistleblowers from media sources and per-
71 formed case studies (Glazer and Glazer 1989). Others (Jos,
72 Thompkins, and Hays 1989) have derived samples of whistle-
73 blowers from support agencies (e.g., Government Account-
74 ability Project), and still others drawn a sample from a
75 single occupation. Unfortunately, however, these strategies are
76 limited because they tend to yield atypical samples (e.g., high-
77 profile cases). (1999, 108–9)

78
79 The main interview questions were about the reasons (not) to
80 report. The process was then evaluated by the interviewee. Extensive
81 notes were taken during each interview (no audio or videotape was
82 used). About half of the interviews took place in the organization of
83 the reporter. The other interviews took place at the workplace (uni-
84 versity) of the interviewer. The interviews, which lasted one hour on
85 average, were often emotionally intense. In most cases, the reporters
86 had thought long and hard before acting, meaning that the process
87 of deciding to report and its arguments were vividly remembered by
88 the interviewees. This differs significantly from Johnson's description
89 of external whistle-blowers, who felt that certain factors so out-
90 weighed others there was "no deciding" (2003, 48). Our interview-
91 ees mentioned losing sleep before and after the ordeal.

92
93 To study the reasons *not* to report, we first planned to interview
94 silent observers. Unfortunately, their names could not be elicited
95 from the archives, and thus we stumbled on a study limitation.
96 Those who were suspected of being silent observers denied knowing
97 about the violation. Two-thirds of the reporters who were inter-
98 viewed deliberated extensively before acting (more on this later),
99 meaning that they also vividly remembered the reasons they had *not*
100 to report. It is likely that they are the same reasons that the silent
101 observers chose not to report. Many interviewees confirmed this,
102 stating they suspected that their own doubts about reporting were
103 similar to silent observers' reasons to not report. Yet no conclusions
104 about nonreporters are drawn here.

105
106 **Across-Case Analysis**

107 After the within-case analyses (in this explorative study, first the
108 nuances and context of every case were considered), it was neces-
109 sary to look for patterns across cases. According to Eisenhardt
110 (1989b), the advantage of this design is that it allows the researcher
111 to recognize general patterns in different settings and to generate
112 theory in the form of propositions. The disadvantage of this design
113 is that every case, with its own context and contingencies, has to be
114 reduced to a more abstract level to enable across-case comparisons
115 (Dyer and Wilkins 1991), and we wanted to generate theory in
116 the form of propositions. To find across-case patterns, Eisenhardt
117 suggests techniques that force investigators to go beyond initial
118 impressions: "Overall, the idea behind these cross-case searching

tactics is to force investigators to go beyond initial impressions, especially through the use of structured and diverse lenses on the data” (1989b, 541).

Given our research strategy, we faced an immense quantity of data. We followed Miles and Huberman’s (1994) suggestion to use a monster grid. On one axis of the grid are the 25 reporters; on the other are categories such as “mentioned reasons to report” and “mentioned reasons not to report.” The cells of the grid are not filled with numbers, but with verbal comments and citations (Swanborn 2003, 16). We derived patterns in the form of propositions from the grid, which were then juxtaposed with the empirical data. This inductive process was repeated many times before the impressions were written down.

Cross-Cultural Generalizability of the Study

All of the data in this study come from the Netherlands, which raises the question of generalizability to other countries. In their review article on whistle-blowing, Near and Miceli state, “We limit our discussion to whistleblowing in the context of U.S. society. Very little has been published on this topic outside North America and Great Britain ... Thus research is needed to examine whistle-blowing ... in different countries” (1996, 508). Progress indeed has been made since that report in 1996. Recently, Miceli, Near, and Dworkin (2008, 72) presented a list of 15 countries in which whistle-blowing had been noted.

A few comparative studies have also been conducted. Keenan (2002), for example, conducted a survey among American and Indian managers on perception variables on whistle-blowing, and compared Chinese and American managers on whistle-blowing (Keenan 2007). Sims and Keenan (1999) compared U.S. and Jamaican managers. Brody, Goulter, and Mihalek (1998) concluded that there are large differences in ethical perceptions of American and Japanese students when it comes to whistle-blowing. Miceli, Near, and Dworkin (2008, 88–89) discussed work by Rehg and Parkhe (2002), in which theoretical predictions about possible interactions among organizational culture and societal culture are discussed, based on differing power differences. Furthermore, India, Israel, Russia, and the United States have been compared on (external) whistle-blowing on a country level (Johnson 2004). In sum, cultural context is indeed important. Miceli, Near, and Dworkin note,

It is easy to imagine how country or culture characteristics could affect whether an observer believes she or he has witnessed wrongdoing, and whether anyone has the responsibility for reporting. Unfortunately, due to the paucity of research, it is too early to develop a taxonomy of country or cultural influences on the observation of wrongdoing. (2008, 72)

The propositions coming out of our Dutch data will be compared with the relevant international literature. To what precise extent, however, a Dutch study of integrity violations in public organizations can be compared to,

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Who Reports What

How the Ball Gets Rolling

The logical typology of table 2 was crossed with the empirical material from the archives, resulting in the following specifications of the six categories:

1. Cases stemming from ongoing investigations (BIO); regular controls, accountant or police investigations (BI); or police investigations, security agencies, etc. (BIS)
2. Cases starting after something was stolen in the organization without a clear suspect (therefore no clear reporter–wrongdoer relationship)
3. Cases stemming from a report by an administrator who was the (alleged) victim of the integrity violation
4. Cases stemming from peer reporting
5. Cases stemming from reports by citizens, customers, companies, or prisoners who had an interest in the case
6. Cases stemming from reports by citizens, customers, companies, or prisoners who had no interest in the case

Table 3 lists the rounded percentages of occurrence. The unknown category comprises primarily cases in which the researcher could not firmly establish who made the initial report.

Table 3 Where the Reports Come from in the Three Organizations

	Category description	Percent
1	Information from regular controls, accountants, police	35–39
2	Theft	5–12
3	Peer reporting with the reporter as victim	6–12
4	Peer reporting	9
5	Citizens, customers, companies, or prisoners who had an interest in the case	15–29
6	Citizens, customers, companies, or prisoners with no interest in the case	3–5
	Unknown	8–14

First of all, it is notable that the impressions from Nelen (2003) and Huberts et al. (2004)—that violations are reported by citizens, coworkers, and supervisors in fairly equal numbers—were wrong. Nelen and Huberts et al. rightfully warned that their figures were tentative, based on impressions rather than thorough research, and may differ according to type of violation. As Nelen and Huberts et al. argue, the veracity of the official figures on which they based their impressions was unclear. For example, a peer report is made to a supervisor; the supervisor decides to investigate. Often, in official figures, the supervisor becomes the reporter, not the peer. Nor do official statistics clearly distinguish between peers, supervisors, accountants, and so on; they are all (in official statistics) called colleagues.

The largest category included cases stemming from institutional controls within public organizations (35 percent to 39 percent), followed

1 by citizens who were (perceived) victims of an action by one or more
2 public administrators (15 percent to 29 percent). In many cases of
3 peer reporting (6 percent to 12 percent), the reporter was a (per-
4 ceived) victim of the wrongdoer (e.g., sexual harassment and violence
5 among colleagues). Peers (who were not victims) reporting on other
6 peers was a tiny category, only 9 percent. Therefore, we can conclude
7 that the earlier impression—that most internal integrity investiga-
8 tions in public organizations stem from internal whistle-blowers—is
9 wrong.

10
11 Anonymous reports from the collective archives could be counted
12 on one hand. The few that existed came from both administrators
13 and civilians.

14 **Types of Violations**

15 Category 1 represents all integrity violations broken down by organ-
16 ization. The city of Amsterdam mostly concerned “fraud and theft”
17 (46 percent). This category at correctional institutions was one-
18 third of that (13 percent), having “private time misconduct” as its
19 leader (33 percent). The latter mostly involved improper (typically
20 amorous) relationships with prisoners. “Misuse and manipulation of
21 information”—usually involving police information leaks—domi-
22 nated violations in the Amsterdam police force (45 percent), with
23 “private time misconduct” in second place at 23 percent.

24
25
26 Category 2 (theft without a suspect) was normally populated by
27 theft within the organization, occurrences apparently common to
28 all organizations. Although usually reported by peers, we must note
29 that reporting an unidentified suspect entails a completely different
30 decision-making process (emotionally and otherwise) from report-
31 ing a colleague.

32
33 Category 3 (employees who were also perceived victims of an in-
34 tegrity violation) comprised “discrimination and sexual harassment”
35 cases, including cases of violence.

36
37 In peer reporting (category 4), all types of integrity violations were
38 involved in all organizations, but they were not evenly spread out.
39 The city of Amsterdam had two clear leaders, “fraud and theft” (30
40 percent) and “waste and abuse of resources” (26 percent). The most
41 common violation reported in the Amsterdam police force was
42 “misuse and manipulation of information” (31 percent). The most
43 common types of peer reporting at correctional institutions involved
44 “discrimination and sexual harassment” and “improper use of author-
45 ity” (25 percent each).

46
47 The reporters in categories 5 and 6 were citizens and companies,
48 usually government “clients.” Cases reported by those with some-
49 thing at stake were more numerous than those reported by dis-
50 interested parties. They represented all possible types of integrity
51 violations although in the city of Amsterdam the reporters were
52 most often (perceived) victims of “corruption” and “fraud and theft”
53 (46 percent together). The police reports evidenced mainly cases
54 of unnecessary violence (30 percent) and misuse and manipula-
55 tion of information (34 percent). At the correctional institutions,
56 most reports by inmates were equally spread among (1) suspicion of
57 corruption (smuggling cell phones, marijuana, etc.), (2) improper
58 violence against inmates, and (3) improper contact with inmates
59 (usually by female guards).

60 **The Reasons for Reporting**

61 **Reasons for Reporting in All Categories**

62 Of all the categories in the previous section, the reasons for report-
63 ing became immediately clear, except when (nonvictim) peers
64 reported. Public administrators reported because of a specific duty
65 to do so (category 1); the reports were role-prescribed disclosures.
66 Often, as with accountants, the report was an explicit part of a
67 professional standard of the reporter (Davis 2002). This can also be
68 labeled “institutionalized particular organizational reporting.” Usu-
69 ally the reporter and the wrongdoer in these cases were colleagues
70 in the sense that they worked in the same organization but not in
71 the same area; there was no direct work relationship. How well they
72 knew each other depended on the organization and case contingen-
73 cies. It became clear that the incentives for reporters in category 1
74 were very strong and that reasons not to report were few or none.

75
76 The reasons for reporting theft (category 2) were clear: something
77 was noted to be stolen, reported, and documented. The reporter
78 rarely knew whether the wrongdoer was a colleague or cleaning staff.
79 The thief was almost never found.

80
81 Reasons for reporting when the reporter was the (perceived) victim
82 of the integrity violation (category 3) were straightforward: the
83 reporter wanted the violation stopped and the wrongdoer punished.
84 From the archives, it became clear that this did not mean the reports
85 were easy to make (cf. Knapp et al. 1997). On the contrary, victims
86 of integrity violations by colleagues have to overcome a high barrier
87 to report, which we expand on later.

88
89 The reasons for reporting in the peer-reporting category (4) were
90 vague. Little information was found in the files. (We expand on this
91 point later as well.)

92
93 Reasons to report in category 5 had to do with the reporter’s stake
94 in the case: the reporter wanted an unjust, unacceptable, or harmful
95 situation corrected. The few cases in which citizen reporters had no
96 stake, category 6, are beyond the purview of this article and will
97 not be studied in depth. We know from the literature (e.g., Gorta
98 and Forell 1995) that citizens are hesitant to report suspicions of
99 governmental fraud and corruption. In general, citizens are hesitant
100 to report white-collar crime and crime with no direct victims, which
101 is usually the case in governmental integrity violations when the
102 reporter is not the victim. Skogan (1984) draws similar conclusions
103 in a review article on citizen reporting determinants.

104 **Peer Reporting**

105
106 Because the reasons to report in the peer-reporting category were
107 not immediately clear, we conducted interviews. Except where
108 mentioned, the interviews did not reveal organizational patterns.
109 At the beginning of each section describing the research findings on
110 reasons for peers to report, we present the proposition that ema-
111 nated from the material. We then discuss study data leading to the
112 proposition. Finally, we juxtapose the propositions with the existing
113 knowledge on whistle-blowing. Where possible, we discuss case
114 details to illustrate the findings. Anonymity requirements prevent
115 in-depth case story presentations.

116
117 **Proposition 1.** *The strongest reason to peer report in the public context*
118 *is a sense of justice.* The integrity violation was perceived as worthy of

1 action. In other words, the reporters witnessing the violation found
2 it so morally compelling that they had to tell somebody.

3
4 “As long as I didn’t report—it took me several days—I knew I
5 wouldn’t be able to sleep.”

6
7 “You have to draw a line. This was clearly unnecessary vio-
8 lence, so I had to report it.”

9
10 “Integrity is number one for me. I don’t want bad apples in
11 our organization.”

12
13 “For me it wasn’t a tough decision. If I find that something
14 isn’t right, I report it.”

15
16 “If you know about something and don’t report, you tacitly
17 cooperate.”

18
19 “I have a strong sense of justice, that’s in my character.”

20
21 “I would have regretted it immensely if I hadn’t reported.
22 What he did was clearly wrong, so he had to be punished.”

23
24 “We correct inmates if they show wrong behavior. If you don’t
25 do the same as a guard, you’re lowering yourself.”

26
27 In short, a sense of justice compelled the reporter to report. What
28 Pershing (2003, 150) calls loyalty to the institution—one of two
29 conflicting loyalties—can now be called loyalty to a sense of justice.
30 In moral philosophical terms, the integrity or moral self-image
31 needs to be protected (cf. Musschenga 2004), which induces a
32 person to act. A “sense of justice” was never worded as “sense of ob-
33 ligation” to the public. No one explicitly referred to a public service
34 ethic (cf. Brewer and Selden 1998).

35
36 A sense of justice as a reason for reporting is closely connected to
37 the gravity of the integrity violation. “It depends on the serious-
38 ness of the violation. It has to be grave enough for me to report it.”
39 Reporters often mentioned that they had witnessed small integrity
40 violations but did not report them. In cases with more than one
41 witness to a violation, we asked the reporter why the other(s) had
42 not reported. An often-mentioned reason was that the colleague
43 apparently did not find the violation serious enough. Based on this,
44 we can hypothesize that one difference between a reporter and silent
45 observer may lie in the perception of the violation’s seriousness.
46 This, too, is a difference in sense of justice.

47
48 Some support for proposition 1 can be found in the wider whistle-
49 blowing literature; several scholars looked at the moral judgment and
50 values of whistle-blowers. For example, Rothschild and Miethe note
51 that “[m]any said that their own personal values, grounded in their
52 religious or humane traditions, moved them. Of our interviewed re-
53 spondents, 79 percent spoke of the personally held values that drove
54 them to act” (1999, 119). Similarly, Chiu (2003) found that ethical
55 judgment is positively related to whistle-blowing intention among
56 Chinese managers. Yet Miceli, Near, and Dworkin are not convinced:

57
58 Results from the meta-analysis and the qualitative data sug-
59 gest to us that employees believe that they would blow the

whistle in the future or have blown in the past because of
their values and that moral reasoning may predict how people
say they would behave or how others should behave. But
statistical evidence is scant that employees have actually blown
the whistle because of moral reasoning or values. (2008, 59)

60
61
62
63
64
65
66 **Proposition 2.** *Putting the security of the group at risk is an impor-*
67 *tant reason for the reporter in the public context to report.* Related to a
68 sense of justice is security of the group, a reason to report that was
69 cited by all five prison guards interviewed. The integrity violations
70 reported were unnecessary violence toward inmates, corruption,
71 smuggling (especially of cell phones and soft drugs), and inappropri-
72 ate contact with inmates.

73
74 “I had to do something with the information ... for our
75 security that was important ... When a colleague is corrupt,
76 he endangers my safety too.”

77
78 “It is a matter of order and safety. She had a relationship with
79 an inmate and he can ask her to bring stuff inside the walls.
80 What if something happened? The lives of guards can depend
81 on that.”

82
83 Thus, even though loyalty to peers and the fear of being called a
84 “snitch” are important reasons *not* to report (as we will see shortly),
85 within the violent atmosphere of correctional institutions, where
86 guards work in small groups and are strongly interdependent, the
87 most important reason to report is for the group itself. Reporters
88 can live with themselves after because it can be justified to them-
89 selves and the group. Should colleagues accuse them of disloyalty to
90 the group, they can argue that it was precisely their loyalty to their
91 group that compelled them to act. Once the interests of the group
92 are at stake, the loyalty conflict can be resolved.

93
94 Earlier research has noted that the type of wrongdoing is strongly
95 correlated with whistle-blowing rates (e.g., Miceli, Near, and
96 Dworkin 2008, 79–80), but uncertainty exists about which types.
97 Proposition 2 is about threatening the security of the group, and
98 earlier studies (e.g., Treviño and Victor 1992; Victor, Treviño, and
99 Shapiro 1993) corroborate this: when a violation is perceived as
100 harming the group, the inclination to peer report will be higher.

101
102 **Proposition 3.** *Protecting the wrongdoer is often a reason to peer report*
103 *in the public context.* In these cases, the reporter’s information is
104 likely uncertain, but so harmful to the perceived wrongdoer that
105 an investigation would allow redemption and thus safety: “We had
106 to report to protect our colleague. A policeman cannot have these
107 stories about him on the street, it’s dangerous. It had to be sorted
108 out. If it wasn’t true, his name could be cleared.”

109
110 Scarce literature exists on proposition 3. It has been noted,
111 however, that considerations of the wrongdoer play a role in the
112 decision process of the reporter. Miethe (1999), for example,
113 concludes that when the wrongdoer is considered a (close) friend,
114 the potential reporter is less likely to report, and if he does so, he
115 is more likely to report internally. Also related are studies that note
116 that the greater the trust in organizational justice, the greater the
117 chance of reporting problems (e.g., Goldman 2001; Treviño and
118 Weaver 2001).

1 **Proposition 4.** *Self-protection is an important reason to peer report in*
2 *the public context.* Several interview statements supported self-pro-
3 tection as a reason to report.

4
5 “My boss once said, ‘if you don’t report the violation, you’ll be
6 punished.’”

7
8 “All weekend I doubted whether to report. But I saw it and if
9 I didn’t report, I’d commit an offense myself, even though
10 I didn’t do anything wrong! I didn’t want to be drawn in by
11 him.”

12
13 “What if my boss had found out in another way? Then he
14 would have known that I had known but didn’t tell him.
15 That’s against the law.”

16
17 The broader whistle-blowing literature also offers some support. On
18 whistle-blowers in general, Rothschild and Miethe note, “In another
19 11 percent of these cases, their motivations would have to be clas-
20 sified as chiefly defensive, in the sense that they feared that if they
21 did not report and the malfeasance was eventually discovered, that it
22 would be blamed on them” (1999, 119).

23
24 **Proposition 5.** *Fear of what will happen to the reporter is an impor-*
25 *tant argument for him or her not to peer report in the public context.*

26 The reporters also mentioned several strong reasons *not* to report.
27 One reason often mentioned by our interviewees was the fear of
28 what would happen to their own lives, mainly with respect to
29 how other colleagues would react. “Ratting out” on colleagues is
30 unpopular.

31
32 “We’re not just talking about my colleagues here, they’re
33 also my friends. You don’t want to be placed out of the
34 group.”

35
36 “A colleague of mine had been in a similar situation. In his
37 case the wrongdoer wasn’t fired. Because of that, my colleague
38 felt that the organization had concluded that he was wrong
39 and the wrongdoer was right. He didn’t dare even look at the
40 wrongdoer ever again.”

41
42 “Snitches are not tolerated in our organization.”

43
44 “When you report, you have no life anymore in our
45 organization.”

46
47 “Other colleagues don’t report because of a strong group
48 feeling. It has to do with collegiality.”

49
50 “In our group there’s a strong sense of never ratting on each
51 other. Older colleagues are especially in favor of that.”

52
53 Even if the reporter remained anonymous to the group, most
54 mentioned that they do not like to feel like a “snitch.”

55
56 There is also an understandable fear for the consequences when the
57 perceived wrongdoer is the reporter’s supervisor: “He’s my boss and
58 when he gets only a disciplinary sanction, he’ll still be my boss, the
59 one who judges me. Then I don’t have a life anymore!”

The perceived reaction of the organization is also important. 60

61
62 “I reported something before. I was afraid they would say,
63 “There he goes again.””

64
65 “From the past I knew it was useless to report a corps com-
66 mander. I’d get in trouble and they’d do nothing with the
67 report.”

68
69 Seeing a colleague report and perceiving the organization’s reaction
70 as wrong (too severe, nothing at all) is an important reason to forgo
71 reporting in the future. This harks back to Organ (1990), who pro-
72 posed that extrarole behaviors are more likely when employees per-
73 ceive a just organizational environment. Similarly, Victor, Treviño,
74 and Shapiro (1993) conclude that the inclination to report a peer
75 for theft in a restaurant is associated with procedural and retributive
76 justice perceptions (cf. Skarlicki and Folger 1997).

77
78 Much has been written about this proposition in the wider lit-
79 erature, and much of it is supportive (cf. Mesmer-Magnus and
80 Viswesvaran 2005; Maesschalck and Ornelis 2003; Miceli, Near,
81 and Dworkin 2008; Near and Miceli 1996; Vandekerckhove 2006).
82 Whistle-blowers fear group retaliation, and rightfully so. According
83 to Johnson: “The pattern across countless examples, almost without
84 exception, is that the individual whistleblower experiences reprisals”
85 (2003, 93).

86
87 **Proposition 6.** *Fear of what will happen to the wrongdoer is an*
88 *important argument for reporters not to peer report in the public*
89 *context.* This proposition was surprising in that it is rarely mentioned
90 in the literature on whistle-blowing, but is widely supported by our
91 interviewees.

92
93 “Once there is an investigation, it could influence his life, not
94 just his career, but his life.”

95
96 “If you report and it turns out he did it, he could get fired.”

97
98 “I thought long and hard about the possible consequences for
99 the wrongdoer. When you report, you decide about someone’s
100 job. Maybe about his marriage or life. That is not to be taken
101 lightly!”

102
103 “Reporting could mean a loss of income for him.”

104
105 “He was a colleague and you do think about the consequences
106 for a colleague.”

107
108 “In general, you want to protect a colleague, that’s a loyalty
109 issue.”

110
111 This is also true for possible negative consequences of being a
112 suspect.

113
114 “I didn’t want to harm anyone. I asked my boss to be very
115 careful with him, and to tell as few people as possible. If you
116 take that first step and it turns out that nothing was wrong,
117 she’s still damaged. And if nothing is wrong, she doesn’t
118 deserve that. I don’t want to unfairly harm someone. Not

1 surprisingly, the closer the reporter is to the wrongdoer, or
2 the more negative the consequences for the wrongdoer are
3 perceived, the tougher it is to report.”

4
5 “If he had been a close colleague, I would have tried to stop
6 him privately. Then I would never have told my boss.”

7
8 “When you face the person you reported every day, that
9 makes it tougher.”

10
11 The available evidence as well as the person and type of violation
12 play a role in the decision process. “Before you report something
13 like that, you want to be sure. Before you destroy someone’s career.
14 I wasn’t sure at first, and that’s why I didn’t report earlier.” Many
15 perceivers of integrity violations confirm their suspicions with an
16 investigation of their own before they report. Widely rumored
17 wrongdoers are easier to report because the reporter’s likelihood of
18 being right is higher. If the reporter is the only one with informa-
19 tion, reliability of the information is more tenuous.

21 **Reasons to Report: A Summary**

22 We have confirmed the hypothesis that peer
23 reporters find themselves in a situation of
24 conflicting loyalties. They have to balance
25 their loyalty to a sense of justice against
26 their loyalty to the group in general and the
27 wrongdoer in particular. Reporters often feel
28 like victims. “I did nothing wrong, yet I was
29 in this difficult situation I didn’t ask for.”
30 Therefore, it is notable that only in one case
31 did the reporter blame the wrongdoer for this.

32 Reporters are in a confusing situation. They
33 can be labeled a “snitch,” with all of the negative social consequen-
34 ces that this implies. But the social constructions of these labels are
35 themselves confusing. Reporters struggle with identity: sometimes
36 they feel like heroes and sometimes cowards.

38 **Insights Relevant to a Good Reporting Policy** 39 ***Doubts, the Reporter–Wrongdoer Relationship,*** 40 ***and Anonymous Reporting***

41 About one-third of the interviewees said they had little or no doubt
42 before reporting.

43
44 “It was not a tough decision. I find leaking information
45 wrong. I had to report.”

46
47 “I had no doubt, not on an earlier report I made either. If
48 I find that something is wrong, I simply report it.”

49
50 Clearly, the reasons to report are the same for doubters and non-
51 doubters: something is wrong and has to be reported. The difference
52 between them is not surprising: the arguments not to report did
53 not play a role in the decision process of the nondoubters. The only
54 reason for peers in this group not to come forward is information
55 uncertainty.

56
57 An interesting issue is how and whether animosity plays a role in
58 peer reporting, as mentioned in the literature on whistle-blowing
59 (e.g., Near and Miceli 1996), in the sense that the report is intended

60 to settle a personal score. We conclude that this rarely plays a role.
61 Only five of the 25 cases revealed a bad relationship between the
62 reporter and the wrongdoer (at least one in each organization). And
63 in three of these cases, the relationship was not rancorous: “I didn’t
64 like her that much.” There is also evidence that in some cases, the
65 reporter did not care what would happen to the wrongdoer. In only
66 two cases were there possible signs (in either the interviews or the
67 files) of rancor, but it seemed to have played an insignificant role.
68

69 The reasons to report differ only slightly with the reporter–wrong-
70 doer relationship. In the case of a bad relationship, however, report-
71 ing is easier. The reporter has fewer doubts about reporting and
72 penalties for the wrongdoer are not a consideration.

73
74 “I hardly knew him. When you know someone longer, taking
75 the step to report is much harder.”

76
77 “I did not doubt: the step was easy because you don’t do what
78 he did. It wasn’t a colleague who was popular in our group.
79 She was an outsider.”

We have confirmed the hypothesis that peer reporters find themselves in a situation of conflicting loyalties. They have to balance their loyalty to a sense of justice against their loyalty to the group in general and the wrongdoer in particular.

80
81 “I never worried about what would hap-
82 pen with her. I didn’t like her. She didn’t
83 belong there: a professional can’t mistreat
84 minors. These little boys were defenseless.
85 That’s wrong, period. That’s not even up
86 for discussion.”

87
88 It was often expressed that if the relationship
89 had been good, taking the initiative would
90 have been harder:

91
92 “When you like someone, it’s hard to report on him.”

93
94 “In general, you weigh the consequences for the person you
95 report on, in this case not because I didn’t like him, but in
96 general it’s your moral duty; he could lose his job! In good
97 relationships, it is more common to first address the perceived
98 wrongdoer.”

99
100 “It makes a difference if you know someone well or not. In
101 that case, you can directly ask the person about it. But if you
102 barely know him, you report.”

103
104 All respondents were explicitly asked whether they had considered
105 reporting anonymously. Only one of the 25 had done so, but,
106 “I would never do that again.” And the rest agreed: anonymous
107 reporting is not a good option, for two reasons: (1) in most cases,
108 it is clear to everyone who reported anyway, and (2) it feels
109 “unfair.”

110
111 “Anonymous reporting is cowardly in my eyes.”

112
113 “Those kinds of things should be done openly and honestly.”

114
115 The use of the words “openly” and “honestly” is interesting. With
116 these strong feelings, a reporter turns away from being “sneaky,”
117 “untrustworthy,” or “cowardly.” Being labeled a betrayer, tattler,
118 snitch, informer or traitor (Åkerstrom 1991, 67) is bad enough; it

1 is worse to feel like one, and anonymous reporting can accomplish
2 just that.⁴ While it is possible that reporters differ in this respect
3 from silent observers, it is unlikely. As mentioned, anonymous
4 reports were rare in all organizations, despite the opportunity.
5 The drawbacks to anonymity are supported in the recent whistle-
6 blower literature review by Miceli, Near, and Dworkin
7 (2008, 158).

8
9 **The Reporter's Fate and the Role of the Bureaus**

10 The feelings of the reporter after making the report differed sharply.
11 Some who had doubted for a long time about reporting had a sense
12 of relief. "I did good. It gives a clean feeling." But most had mixed
13 feelings.

14
15 "I rang the bell, but did I do the right thing? I lay awake for
16 many nights."

17
18 "After making the report I felt bad. I snitched on someone.
19 He will lose his job. And he already had financial problems."
20

21 Furthermore, the impact of making the report is often larger than
22 feared. "I never thought that telling something to my boss over a
23 cup of coffee would have such an impact. I had regrets: what had
24 I done? I didn't sleep for weeks. There was much turmoil in our
25 organization because of what I said."

26
27 As hypothesized from the whistle-blowing literature, there were
28 strong repercussions in those cases in which colleagues knew who
29 made the report.

30
31 "I was ignored by several groups of colleagues. They called me
32 a snitch and accused me of betrayal. I had to defend myself
33 for weeks, even though someone else did something wrong."
34

35 "I can't handle it anymore. I'm looking for a new job."
36

37 This last case is an exception. Even though the repercussions are
38 tougher than expected, most reporters function (reasonably) nor-
39 mally in the long run. Yet, as Heard and Miller (2006) stress, reports
40 of retaliation should be taken seriously and followed up on.
41

42 As mentioned, group processes are important, and so is collegial re-
43 action to reporters. "How your colleagues react is important. It plays
44 a big role. You're afraid people will get an image of you that you
45 don't like." In some cases, the colleagues did not know who reported.
46 The reactions of those who did know differed strongly. Sometimes
47 the reporter was ignored and blamed. Others sided with the reporter.
48

49 "I told two colleagues. They agreed with me. That was an
50 important confirmation. I didn't want to be a snitch."
51

52 "I got positive reactions from my colleagues like, 'how brave
53 of you. I wouldn't have dared.'"
54

55 When the whole organization knew who reported, the reporter ap-
56 preciated being able to explain the report to the group and having
57 leadership on her side. "My boss said in a meeting how happy he
58 was with me, how everyone should be. I hardly got any criticism
59 from my group."

60 Compliments from the bureaus were exceptional. Almost all reporters
61 complained about how the organizations dealt with the reporter after
62 the report. Two complaints surfaced: the reporters were not told what
63 happened after their report, and they were not thanked in any way.
64 "The wrongdoer was fired, but I never heard that from the bureau."
65

66 Some form of appreciation turns out to be valuable to reporters.
67 This cannot be overly stressed. They are not looking for monetary
68 rewards (they would feel even more like a Judas), but some sort of
69 confirmation that they did the right thing, a reaffirmation of their
70 value. In their confusing process of identity reconstruction, they
71 need positive support. They made clear that after the reports, doubts
72 linger; they were still confused and trying to make sense of the
73 situation. Being reassured is important, especially from leadership.
74 Instead, most reporters had the feeling that the bureaus and leaders
75 thought what they did was routine. The reporters had no sympathy
76 for the emotionally tough situation they had been in.
77

78 "They never said, 'Well done!'"
79

80 "I didn't need a pat on the back, but 'Thank you for reporting'
81 would have been nice. I would have known that I was doing
82 what I was supposed to."
83

84 The few expressions of appreciation were gratefully received. "I got
85 a thumbs-up from the bureau. That's good, it's important to know
86 that there are people behind you."
87

88 It is also important to peer reporters that the report be taken seri-
89 ously and that some feedback is given, even if the decision is for no
90 further action. Heard and Miller (2006) stress this. The reporter
91 needs to trust that the matter will not wind up in someone's desk
92 drawer. "Nothing happened, and I heard nothing about it, ever." Yet
93 the other side of the coin is that the reporter also needs to trust that
94 the organization will not overreact, that the wrongdoer will get fair
95 treatment.
96

97 **Discussion and Implications for Public Management**

98 Only 9 percent of integrity violation cases in public organizations
99 were started by peer reporting. Although this could be a reason to
100 reevaluate internal reporting systems, a strong case can be made to
101 remain sharp in routine supervision because we now know that ap-
102 proximately one-third of cases originate with institutional functions
103 of control and investigation (table 3). Nor should the organization
104 overreact. Distrust breeds distrust, as Luhmann (1979) notes. Be-
105 cause total eradication of integrity violations is impossible, remain-
106 ing vigilant in routine controls is recommended.
107

108 The most important reason to report suspicion of a colleague's
109 integrity violation is a sense of justice. The reporter considers the
110 situation wrong and feels that something should be done. Other
111 important aspects are the security of the group or organization, the
112 seriousness of the violation, and protection of the wrongdoer. The
113 most important argument for reporters not to report is, as we might
114 expect, the negative consequences for the reporter. A surprising
115 reason not to report is the negative consequences for the wrong-
116 doer: the reporter feels responsible for the wrongdoer's punishment.
117 Other considerations include the perceived reaction of the organiza-
118 tion and the reporter's quality of evidence. In general, peer reports

1 are not rancorous. Anonymous reporting is
2 rare because it makes the reporter feel sneaky
3 or untrustworthy.

4 Recommendations

5 Based on the findings of this study, we offer
6 the following general recommendations for
7 public organizations:
8

- 9 • Promote an open culture in which
10 doubts and insecurities about integrity can be discussed, one in
11 which employees who overstep the mark are addressed by their
12 colleagues and serious integrity violations are reported. After
13 studying government guerrillas, O'Leary offers similar advice:
14 "Create an organization culture that accepts, welcomes, and
15 encourages candid dialogue and debate" (2006, 109). Avoid dam-
16 aging the social fabric of trust and cooperation. Urging employees
17 to report every wrong detail of a coworker could create what Case
18 (1987) refers to as a "suspicion awareness context." Peer reporting
19 should not undermine the stability and trust within groups (King
20 and Hermodson 2000).
- 21 • Design a reporting protocol and discuss it with supervisors.
22 Find out which integrity violations are most common in the or-
23 ganization and which are most serious. Communicate within the
24 organization what actions will not be tolerated and the impor-
25 tance of public administrators reporting serious violations. Some
26 examples from Victor, Treviño, and Shapiro: "Management may
27 prescribe responsibility for peer reporting in codes of conduct
28 and/or job descriptions, redefining peer reporting as an in-role
29 rather than an extra-role behavior. Management may also highlight
30 ways in which a co-worker's misconduct harms other workgroup
31 members" (1993, 261–62). The last suggestions resonate well with
32 the findings of this study on the importance to peer reporters of
33 integrity violations that harm the (the security of the) group.
- 34 • Design a reporting procedure in which the report is taken
35 seriously and without organizational overreaction. Decide what is
36 considered fair punishment for specific violations.
- 37 • Give the reporter attention and offer guidance. Tailor it to
38 the particular situation. Discuss with the reporter the guidance
39 that would best help. Try to find out for which group processes a
40 reporter fears. Confirm that the reporter did the right thing and
41 express appreciation. Most importantly, let the reporter know
42 what steps were taken.
- 43 • The most logical person a peer reports to is someone who is
44 trusted. In most cases, this is the supervisor. An alternate superior
45 should be available in the case of a bad employee-supervisor
46 relationship. A central reporting place in the organization would
47 take care of other contingencies. As a last resort (these cases
48 should be very rare), give opportunity to report anonymously; in
49 some cases, it is necessary to protect the reporter. This should not
50 be encouraged, however, and anonymity should not extend so
51 far as to preclude communication with the reporter for purposes
52 of investigation. Having different options is similar to O'Leary's
53 advice: "Create multiple channels for dissent" (2006, 114).

54
55
56 Two-thirds of our interviewees had serious or very serious doubts
57 before reporting. A conflict of loyalty renders no choice right. Public
58 organizations ought to consider, then, how potential reporters can be
59 helped and supported through this tough process and loyalty

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60 conflict. If many of our interviewees had
61 serious doubts about reporting, imagine the
62 number of integrity and/or law violations that
63 remain hidden because the decisions of poten-
64 tial reporters fell to the side of "silent observer."

65 Acknowledgments

66 The author would like to thank the members
67 of the research group on Integrity of Govern-
68 nance at VU University Amsterdam for their
69 invaluable input during the whole research process.

70 Notes

- 71 1. This typology was the outcome of an analysis of the literature on police integrity
72 and corruption and was assessed against the results of empirical research on inter-
73 nal investigations in the police force. It was important in developing the typology
74 that it included the following:
75
76
 - 77 • All types of relevant behavior: behavior within the organization, interaction
78 with external actors (citizens), and private time behavior as far as was relevant to
79 the organization
 - 80 • All types of relevant moral norms and values: in laws and rules, in internal
81 codes and procedures, and in the unwritten, informal norms and values
 - 82 • Behavior contrary to the organization's interest, favoring the organization, but
83 harming relevant social norms and values
- 84 2. For interesting exceptions, see Rothschild and Miethe (1999), King and
85 Hermodson (2000), and Pershing (2003).
- 86 3. The full name is the Police Department of Amsterdam-Amstelland.
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Uncorrected Proofs