INTEGRITY SYSTEMS AT WORK –
THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL FOUNDATIONS

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There seems to be a growing consensus, both in the academic public administration literature (see e.g. Hondeghem (1998) and Cooper (2001)) and in the more practice oriented literature (see e.g. OECD (2000; 1996)), that a significant shift in public sector ethical standards is taking place in all OECD countries. Multiple explanations have been put forward to account for these changes. Many of them focus on the trend of "New Public Management" reforms that aimed to introduce private sector management techniques in the public sector and, as such, supposedly transformed the values of civil servants. Other explanations include broader changes in society, such as the increasingly critical and assertive attitude of citizens (that puts pressure on the traditional ethics of civil servants) and a more general shift in all types of societal governance.

Whether the change in ethical standards is real or not, the interest in the topic is visibly increasing. International organizations such as the OECD, the World Bank, the UN, but also the international non profit organization 'Transparency International' (TI) and the European Union have launched initiatives to curb national and transnational corruption and to foster integrity and high standards in the public sector. Simultaneously or in reaction to these international initiatives, many countries have introduced anti-corruption and ethics management measures. In Africa, Latin America and the transitional countries of the former Soviet Union, the emphasis was mainly on fighting blatant
instances of corruption in order to help establishing stable
democratic structures and a healthy economy. The focus in
established democracies, on the other hand, was rather on
securing integrity in the public service to counter the long-
term trend of declining public trust (Fijnaut & Huberts,
2002). In the Netherlands, for example, former Minister of
the Interior, the late Mrs. Jen Dales, launched a public sec-
tor ethics policy in the beginning of the 1990s as way to
restore trust. Since then, many measures have been taken at
all levels of government, and "ethics management" or "integ-
rency policy" has become a genuine policy area. Similarly
in the UK, the Committee on Standards in Public Life (set
up in 1994) has published a series of reports on ethics man-
gement issues that had a significant impact on actual prac-
tice. In Portugal, a reform to regulate campaign finance,
financial interests of elected politicians and the respective
penal laws were initiated in 1993 (de Sousa 2002; 2003). In
1998, the German federal ministry of the Interior issued an
anti-corruption directive containing a whole bundle of anti-
corruption and integrity-fostering measures such as a code
of ethics, the establishment of Ombudsmen in federal agen-
cies and departments or procedural regulations (Behnke
2004). And even a seemingly "clean" country like Sweden
passed (in 1998) reforms of the conflict of interest legisla-
tion in reaction to several scandals as well as in adoption of
the respective EU directives (Andersson 2002). Other coun-
tries might not (yet) have introduced comprehensive ethics
management initiatives, but the ideas are clearly popping
on policy agendas around the world.

Likewise, the academic interest in the topic has also
increased significantly. There was already a significant
degree of research in the US (for reviews, see e.g. Menzel
(1999; 2005)) and in other Anglo-Saxon countries like
Canada, New Zealand or Great Britain. Yet, during the
1990s the topic increasingly attracted interest in other parts
of the world. In Europe, for example, research was emerg-
ing in many countries, and some initiatives were taken to exchange experiences and to build up a stock of common insights. These include the 1997 conference of the European Group on Public Administration (EGPA) on "Ethics and accountability in a context of governance and new public management" hosted by the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (Belgium) and a conference in the Netherlands in 1998 of the Ethics in the Public Service Network that was organized by the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and entitled "integrity at the the public-private interface".

Perceiving a demand for a more permanent network and inspired by the successful Section on Ethics of the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA), a Permanent Study Group on Ethics and Integrity of Governance was set up within the structure of EGPA in 2003.2 The aim of the Study Group was to establish a long-term network that would stimulate research on public sector integrity and ethics in Europe. The figures suggest that the Study Group indeed responded to a need, with about 20 papers presented at each annual meeting, an average attendance of over 35 people at the Study Group sessions and an active email-list with now over 200 members from about 30 countries. In addition to its annual meetings, the Study Group also co-organised a conference together with its American counterpart, the ASPA Section on Ethics, at the Public Management Institute of the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (Belgium) in June 2005.3

This symposium is the first printed product of the Study Group’s activities. It is a selection of the papers that were presented at the second meeting of the Study Group at the annual EGPA conference in Ljubljana, Slovenia in September 2004. Whereas research on corruption, ethics and integrity has been conducted extensively and increasingly at least since the late 1980s, many publications were case studies or normative reflections on what the good administrator should be like. The 1990s saw more systematic em-
Empirical research and even some comparative studies and it is to that growing tradition that the current symposium wants to contribute. Empirical findings from different Eastern and Western European countries will be presented: Lithuania (ALAN DOIG), the Netherlands (ZEGER VAN DER WAL), Denmark (TORBEN BECK JORGENSEN) and Germany (PATRICK VON MARAVIC).

One recurrent topic of discussion in the Study Group meetings is the insight that integrity in the public sector cannot be secured by laws and rules alone. Neither can it be left to the internalized morals and good will of public administrators. Rather, prescriptive rules, laws and procedures backed by sanctions must be complemented by an internalised acceptance of the normative system. The latter, however, can only exist in a conducive environment, where examples, formal and informal socialization, and the prevalent value system all point in the same direction. Training and information, transparency, well-functioning mechanisms of accountability as well as an interested and critical public are thus necessary corollaries to formal rules and sanctions. In short, the “compliance” approach to ethics management should be complemented with an “integrity” approach. This logic lies at the heart of the notion of a "National Integrity System" (NIS), as it was developed by the NGO Transparency International (see e.g. Pope 2000). The NIS is the concept around which this symposium is organized. An integrity system is the practical effort – based on theoretical insights – to combine law enforcement and motivation in an integrated system of rules, values, guidelines and socialization mechanisms. It is an effort to meet the complexity of the task to root integrity reliably in the public sector. In order to achieve this ambitious goal one has to acquire an understanding of relevant values, of corruption-curbing institutions, of the nature of situations in which corruption is likely to emerge, and of the way in which these three elements interact with each other. These are the
four constituting elements of an NIS and will also be the central elements in the contributions to this symposium.

Specifically, the articles in this symposium all circle around the theme of how to establish a functioning integrity system, each of them highlighting some, but not all of the different aspects of an integrity system. ALAN DOIG first introduces the notion of an integrity system. He points out that a combination of objectives, key strategies and relevant institutions is crucial to form an integrity system. He reports about his ample experience with the introduction of integrity systems in developed and developing countries and those countries' efforts to fight corruption and to establish transparency and financial probity. His case study on Lithuania shows the difficulties not only developing and transitional countries face in their effort to establish a functioning integrity system, but that are also relevant for established democracies. The different elements that – if they work well together – form an integrity system are explored in greater depth in the subsequent articles.

A key element in establishing an integrity system is to gain an understanding of the values actually existing in a public administration as well as to form an idea(l) about which values should exist. ZEGER VAN DER WAL et al. explore existing and desired values in the Netherlands, TORBEN BECK JORGENSEN in Denmark. Both rely on theoretical classifications to group and evaluate the value systems and report the results of empirical research that combines different sources and different modes of data collection. Their classifications can act as useful starting points for similar analyses in other countries. One theme that keeps on attracting discussions about values and about the discrepancy between existing and desired values is the introduction of New Public Management (NPM) reforms. EMILE KOLTHOFF et al. focus on this problem. By adding new values, goals and instruments to the traditional public sector (or altogether substituting old for new), NPM reforms have
altered the environment within which public administrators take their decisions. Borders between what is private and what is public are becoming blurred and drastic changes occur in organizational forms (agencies instead of departments) and modes of governance (market mechanisms and competition instead of hierarchy, loyalty and clear responsibilities). The clash of private sector and public sector values, and additionally, the unclear boundaries between private and public, allegedly create situations in which conflict of interest or outright corruption are more likely to occur. Kolthoff et al. conclude that some elements of NPM such as entrepreneurship and the market model are more risky in terms of facilitating corruption, than performance measurement and decentralization of budgets and authorities.

The latter topic of the NPM-style decentralization and its impact upon corruption is studied empirically by Patrick von Mara Vic in his article on “decentralized corruption” in German local administrations. In terms of the “National Integrity System” framework, Maravic focuses less on values, but more on institutions and their influence on the context within which corruption might occur. One institutional context factor of outstanding importance for the risk or chance of corruption is the way in which accountability is allocated and organized. Again, due to NPM reforms, accountability structures have changed, often becoming less clear, and enforcement of accountability becomes more difficult. The shifts in conception and reality of accountability in a context of public administration are explored by Tero Erkkilä. He shows that an appropriate organization of the accountability structures is crucial for securing an integrity system. In order to cope with new challenges, as captured in the concept of governance, it might become necessary to complement traditional modes of accountability with new modes, such as performance and deliberation. Even more than Erkkilä, Gjalt de
GRAAF puts context at the centre of his analysis in his broad-ranging review of the corruption literature. He investigates the power of different theories to explain why corruption happens in certain circumstances and not in others. He argues that only theories that take explicit account of the situational context, such as Pierre Bourdieu's theory of disposition, have the potential to give satisfying explanations for corrupt behaviour.

By taking into account the interaction of different elements of an integrity system, the analysis moves from a static to a dynamic way of looking at the problem. These aspects of time and interaction are dealt with more or less explicitly in several of the papers. ALAN DOIG points at perspectives for adapting and changing the Lithuanian integrity system, in particular by closing existing regulatory gaps. TORBEN BECK JORGENSEN discusses likely dynamics of values, differentiating between core values which hardly ever change and more "fashion-sensitive" values that emerge and disappear more quickly. EMILE KOLTHOFF et al. and PATRICK VON MARAVIC enquire into long-term consequences of cultural and institutional changes, and TERO ERKKILÄ bases his theoretical considerations on the emergence of the conceptually as well as empirically new notion of "governance".

Together, these papers give an idea of the many different aspects that need to be combined to make an integrity system work. Like the "National Integrity System" framework, the papers suggest that it is not enough to institutionalise controls and to punish misbehaviour and corruption. Rather, an ongoing discussion among public officials about relevant values, an internalisation of standards, the preservation or creation of an ethical administrative culture and constant exchange and co-operation among different elements are necessary building blocks for a functioning and learning integrity system.
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