
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 way 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...
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). 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Corruption: Bribery</th>
<th>60</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Misuse of public power for private gain; asking, offering, or accepting bribes</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Conflict of (private and public) interest</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal interests (through assets, jobs, gifts, etc.) that interfere with public interests</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Improper use of authority (for noble causes)</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of illegal or improper methods to achieve organizational goals (e.g., illegal methods of investigation or disproportionate violence by police)</td>
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<td>6. Misuse and manipulation of information</td>
<td>70</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lying, cheating, manipulating information, or breaching confidentiality</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Discrimination and sexual harassment</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misbehavior toward colleagues or citizens and customers</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Waste and abuse of resources</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure to comply with organizational standards, improper performance, incorrect or dysfunctional internal behavior</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Private time misconduct</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
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<td>Conduct in an employee’s private time that harms the public’s trust in administration or government</td>
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Table 1 Types of Integrity and/or Law Violations

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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 Hermodsson 2000; Miceli, Near, and Dworkin 2005; Rothschild and Miethe 1999; Treviño and Victor 1992; Zipparò 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reporter</th>
<th>Case-Interested</th>
<th>Case-Disinterested</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inside government</td>
<td>Not co-worker</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside government</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

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

Furthermore, many studies on whistle-blowing in the last two decades have concentrated on private sector organizations. Does this compare to public sector feelings and actions concerning reporting?

There is strong evidence that it does not: Brewer and Selden (1998) conclude that federal whistle-blowers act in ways that are consistent with the theory of public service motivation (see, e.g., Houston 2006; Lewis and Frank 2002; Perry and Wise 1990). Miceli, Near, and Dworkin say, "Recent research suggested that there may be effects of industry in whistleblowing—specifically, for example, that whistleblowers cluster in public rather than private or not-for-profit sectors" (2008, 85).

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

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

Another important aspect is the report target: “whistleblowing 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 organization (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). Furthermore, 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: “Associations 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 “informant” 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 Internal Affairs (BIO), 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 highest 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 organizations, it is possible to report anonymously at a central point in the organization. Reporters can also ask to report confidentially. However, 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
BIO in particular has clearly articulated and reinforced statements of behavioral misconduct.

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

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

**Indexing the Archives**

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

**Documents and Interviews**

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

The indexed archives were first studied to determine the reasons for peer reporting. We studied each case in its own nuanced context. Victor, Treviño, and Shapiro comment on the importance of actuality: “Little previous research has been conducted on peer reporting of unethical behavior in organizations and no previous study has measured actual peer reporting behavior” (1993, 259–60). We kept special notes on every case that was labeled “peer reporting.”

Archived reporter interviews gave especially useful information on the process of peer reporting, but, as previously mentioned, most archived information was about the wrongdoer and wrongdoing—that is, evidence of an integrity violation. Therefore, we decided to conduct our own interviews where possible.

To select the cases, first all cases that were labeled “peer reporting” were considered. Then we eliminated some reporters because of restrictions, the most important of which was that the file was still active. In the end, 27 requests for interviews were made and 25 were 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,

Various approaches to the study of whistleblowers have been taken. Previous researchers have identified a small number of high-profile whistleblowers from media sources and performed case studies (Glazer and Glazer 1989). Others (Jos, Thompkins, and Hays 1989) have derived samples of whistleblowers from support agencies (e.g., Government Accountability Project), and still others have drawn a sample from a single occupation. Unfortunately, however, these strategies are limited because they tend to yield atypical samples (e.g., high-profile cases). (1999, 108–9).

The main interview questions were about the reasons (not) to report. The process was then evaluated by the interviewee. Extensive notes were taken during each interview (no audio or videotape was used). About half of the interviews took place in the organization of the reporter. The other interviews took place at the workplace (university) of the interviewer. The interviews, which lasted one hour on average, were often emotionally intense. In most cases, the reporters had thought long and hard before acting, meaning that the process of deciding to report and its arguments were vividly remembered by the interviewees. This differs significantly from Johnson’s description of external whistle-blowers, who felt that certain factors so outweighed others there was “no deciding” (2003, 48). Our interviewees mentioned losing sleep before and after the ordeal. To study the reasons not to report, we first planned to interview silent observers. Unfortunately, their names could not be elicited from the archives, and thus we stumbled on a study limitation. Those who were suspected of being silent observers denied knowing about the violation. Two-thirds of the reporters who were interviewed deliberated extensively before acting (more on this later), meaning that they also vividly remembered the reasons they had not to report. It is likely that they are the same reasons that the silent observers chose not to report. Many interviewees confirmed this, stating they suspected that their own doubts about reporting were similar to silent observers’ reasons to not report. Yet no conclusions about nonreporters are drawn here.

**Across-Case Analysis**

After the within-case analyses (in this explorative study, first the nuances and context of every case were considered), it was necessary to look for patterns across cases. According to Eisenhardt (1989b), the advantage of this design is that it allows the researcher to recognize general patterns in different settings and to generate theory in the form of propositions. The disadvantage of this design is that every case, with its own context and contingencies, has to be reduced to a more abstract level to enable across-case comparisons (Dyer and Wilkins 1991), and we wanted to generate theory in the form of propositions. To find across-case patterns, Eisenhardt suggests techniques that force investigators to go beyond initial 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, say, the United States can be clarified only by conducting further comparative research.

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–wrong-doer 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>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category description</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Information from regular controls, accountants, police</td>
<td>35–39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theft</td>
<td>5–12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer reporting with the reporter as victim</td>
<td>6–12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer reporting</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizens, customers, companies, or prisoners who had an interest in the case</td>
<td>15–29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizens, customers, companies, or prisoners with no interest in the case</td>
<td>3–5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>8–14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

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

Types of Violations

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

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

Category 3 (employees who were also perceived victims of an integrity violation) comprised “discrimination and sexual harassment” cases, including cases of violence.

In peer reporting (category 4), all types of integrity violations were involved in all organizations, but they were not evenly spread out.

The city of Amsterdam had two clear leaders, “fraud and theft” (30 percent) and “waste and abuse of resources” (26 percent). The most common violation reported in the Amsterdam police force was “misuse and manipulation of information” (31 percent). The most common types of peer reporting at correctional institutions involved “discrimination and sexual harassment” and “improper use of authority” (25 percent each).

The reporters in categories 5 and 6 were citizens and companies, usually government “clients.” Cases reported by those with something at stake were more numerous than those reported by disinterested parties. They represented all possible types of integrity violations although in the city of Amsterdam the reporters were most often (perceived) victims of “corruption” and “fraud and theft” (46 percent together). The police reports evidenced mainly cases of unnecessary violence (30 percent) and misuse and manipulation of information (34 percent). At the correctional institutions, most reports by inmates were equally spread among (1) suspicion of corruption (smuggling cell phones, marijuana, etc.), (2) improper violence against inmates, and (3) improper contact with inmates (usually by female guards).

The Reasons for Reporting

Reasons for Reporting in All Categories

Of all the categories in the previous section, the reasons for reporting became immediately clear, except when (nonvictim) peers reported. Public administrators reported because of a specific duty to do so (category 1); the reports were role-prescribed disclosures.

Often, as with accountants, the report was an explicit part of a professional standard of the reporter (Davis 2002). This can also be labeled “institutionalized particular organizational reporting.” Usually the reporter and the wrongdoer in these cases were colleagues in the sense that they worked in the same organization but not in the same area; there was no direct work relationship. How well they knew each other depended on the organization and case contingencies. It became clear that the incentives for reporters in category 1 were very strong and that reasons not to report were few or none.

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

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

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

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

Peer Reporting

Because the reasons to report in the peer-reporting category were not immediately clear, we conducted interviews. Except where mentioned, the interviews did not reveal organizational patterns.

At the beginning of each section describing the research findings on reasons for peers to report, we present the proposition that emanated from the material. We then discuss study data leading to the proposition. Finally, we juxtapose the propositions with the existing knowledge on whistle-blowing. Where possible, we discuss case details to illustrate the findings. Anonymity requirements prevent in-depth case story presentations.

Proposition 1. The strongest reason to peer report in the public context is a sense of justice. The integrity violation was perceived as worthy of
action. In other words, the reporters witnessing the violation found it so morally compelling that they had to tell somebody.

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

“You have to draw a line. This was clearly unnecessary violence, so I had to report it.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Results from the meta-analysis and the qualitative data suggest 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)

**Proposition 2.** Putting the security of the group at risk is an important reason for the reporter in the public context to report. Related to a sense of justice is security of the group, a reason to report that was cited by all five prison guards interviewed. The integrity violations reported were unnecessary violence toward inmates, corruption, smuggling (especially of cell phones and soft drugs), and inappropriate contact with inmates.

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

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

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

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

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

Scarce literature exists on propositions 3. It has been noted, however, that considerations of the wrongdoer play a role in the decision process of the reporter. Miethe (1999), for example, concludes that when the wrongdoer is considered a (close) friend, the potential reporter is less likely to report, and if he does so, he is more likely to report internally. Also related are studies that note the greater the trust in organizational justice, the greater the chance of reporting problems (e.g., Goldman 2001; Treviño and Weaver 2001).
Proposition 4. Self-protection is an important reason to peer report in the public context. Several interview statements supported self-protection as a reason to report.

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

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

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

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

Proposition 5. Fear of what will happen to the reporter is an important argument for him or her not to peer report in the public context. The reporters also mentioned several strong reasons not to report. One reason often mentioned by our interviewees was the fear of what would happen to their own lives, mainly with respect to how other colleagues would react. “Ratting out” on colleagues is unpopular.

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

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

“Snitches are not tolerated in our organization.”

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

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

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

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

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

The perceived reaction of the organization is also important.

“I reported something before. I was afraid they would say, ‘There he goes again.’”

“From the past I knew it was useless to report a corps commander. I’d get in trouble and they’d do nothing with the report.”

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

Much has been written about this proposition in the wider literature, and much of it is supportive (cf. Mesmer-Magnus and Viswesvaran 2005; Messchel and Ornalis 2003; Miceli, Near, and Dworkin 2008; Near and Miceli 1996; Vandekerckhove 2006). Whistle-blowers fear group retaliation, and rightfully so. According to Johnson: “The pattern across countless examples, almost without exception, is that the individual whistleblower experiences reprisals” (2003, 93).

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

“One once there is an investigation, it could influence his life, not just his career, but his life.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

“I didn’t want to harm anyone. I asked my boss to be very careful with him, and to tell as few people as possible. If you take that first step and it turns out that nothing was wrong, she’s still damaged. And if nothing is wrong, she doesn’t deserve that. I don’t want to unfairly harm someone. Not
surprisingly, the closer the reporter is to the wrongdoer, or the more negative the consequences for the wrongdoer are perceived, the tougher it is to report.”

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

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

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

**Reasons to Report: A Summary**

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. Reporters often feel like victims. “I did nothing wrong, yet I was in this difficult situation I didn’t ask for.” Therefore, it is notable that only in one case did the reporter blame the wrongdoer for this.

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

**Insights Relevant to a Good Reporting Policy**

**Doubts, the Reporter–Wrongdoer Relationship, and Anonymous Reporting**

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

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

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

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

An interesting issue is how and whether animosity plays a role in peer reporting, as mentioned in the literature on whistle-blowing (e.g., Near and Miceli 1996), in the sense that the report is intended to settle a personal score. We conclude that this rarely plays a role. Only five of the 25 cases revealed a bad relationship between the reporter and the wrongdoer (at least one in each organization). And in three of these cases, the relationship was not rancorous: “I didn’t like her that much.” There is also evidence that in some cases, the reporter did not care what would happen to the wrongdoer. In only two cases were there possible signs (in either the interviews or the files) of rancor, but it seemed to have played an insignificant role.

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

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

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

“Never worried about what would happen with her. I didn’t like her. She didn’t belong there: a professional can’t mistreat minors. These little boys were defenseless. That’s wrong, period. That’s not even up for discussion.”

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

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

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

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

All respondents were explicitly asked whether they had considered reporting anonymously. Only one of the 25 had done so, but,

“I would never do that again.” And the rest agreed: anonymous reporting is not a good option, for two reasons: (1) in most cases, it is clear to everyone who reported anyway, and (2) it feels “unfair.”

“Anonymous reporting is cowardly in my eyes.”

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

The use of the words “openly” and “honestly” is interesting. With these strong feelings, a reporter turns away from being “sneaky,” “untrustworthy,” or “cowardly.” Being labeled a betrayer, tattler, snitch, informer or traitor (Åkerstrom 1991, 67) is bad enough; it
The drawbacks to anonymity are supported in the recent whistle-blower literature review by Miceli, Near, and Dworkin (2008, 158). Some who had doubted for a long time about reporting had a sense of relief. “I did good. It gives a clean feeling.” But most had mixed feelings.

“I rang the bell, but did I do the right thing? I lay awake for many nights.”

“After making the report I felt bad. I snitched on someone. He will lose his job. And he already had financial problems.”

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

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

“I was ignored by several groups of colleagues. They called me a snitch and accused me of betrayal. I had to defend myself for weeks, even though someone else did something wrong.”

“I can’t handle it anymore. I’m looking for a new job.”

This last case is an exception. Even though the repercussions are tougher than expected, most reporters function (reasonably) normally in the long run. Yet, as Heard and Miller (2006) stress, reports of retaliation should be taken seriously and followed up on.

As mentioned, group processes are important, and so is collegial reaction to reporters. “How your colleagues react is important. It plays a big role. You’re afraid people will get an image of you that you don’t like.” In some cases, the colleagues did not know who reported. The reactions of those who did know differed strongly. Sometimes the reporter was ignored and blamed. Others sided with the reporter.

“I told two colleagues. They agreed with me. That was an important confirmation. I didn’t want to be a snitch.”

“I got positive reactions from my colleagues like, ‘how brave of you. I wouldn’t have dared.’”

When the whole organization knew who reported, the reporter appreciated being able to explain the report to the group and having leadership on her side. “My boss said in a meeting how happy he was with me, how everyone should be. I hardly got any criticism from my group.”

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

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

“They never said, ‘Well done!’”

“I didn’t need a pat on the back, but ‘Thank you for reporting’ would have been nice. I would have known that I was doing what I was supposed to.”

The few expressions of appreciation were gratefully received. “I got a thumbs-up from the bureau. That’s good, it’s important to know that there are people behind you.”

It is also important to peer reporters that the report be taken seriously and that some feedback is given, even if the decision is for no further action. Heard and Miller (2006) stress this. The reporter needs to trust that the matter will not wind up in someone’s desk drawer. “Nothing happened, and I heard nothing about it, ever.” Yet the other side of the coin is that the reporter also needs to trust that the organization will not overreact, that the wrongdoer will get fair treatment.

Discussion and Implications for Public Management

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

The most important reason to report suspicion of a colleague’s integrity violation is a sense of justice. The reporter considers the situation wrong and feels that something should be done. Other important aspects are the security of the group or organization, the seriousness of the violation, and protection of the wrongdoer. The most important argument for reporters not to report is, as we might expect, the negative consequences for the reporter. A surprising reason not to report is the negative consequences for the wrongdoer: the reporter feels responsible for the wrongdoer’s punishment. Other considerations include the perceived reaction of the organization and the reporter’s quality of evidence. In general, peer reports
are not rancorous. Anonymous reporting is rare because it makes the reporter feel sneaky or untrustworthy.

**Recommendations**

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

- Promote an open culture in which doubts and insecurities about integrity can be discussed, one in which employees who overstep the mark are addressed by their colleagues and serious integrity violations are reported. After studying government guerrillas, O’Leary offers similar advice: “Create an organization culture that accepts, welcomes, and encourages candid dialogue and debate” (2006, 109). Avoid damaging the social fabric of trust and cooperation. Urging employees to report every wrong detail of a coworker could create what Case (1987) refers to as a “suspicion awareness context.” Peer reporting should not undermine the stability and trust within groups (King and Hermodson 2000).

- Design a reporting protocol and discuss it with supervisors. Find out which integrity violations are most common in the organization and which are most serious. Communicate within the organization what actions will not be tolerated and the importance of public administrators reporting serious violations. Some examples from Victor, Treviño, and Shapiro: “Management may prescribe responsibility for peer reporting in codes of conduct and/or job descriptions, redefining peer reporting as an in-role rather than an extra-role behavior. Management may also highlight ways in which a co-worker’s misconduct harms other workgroup members” (1993, 261–62). The last suggestions resonate well with the findings of this study on the importance to peer reporters of integrity violations that harm the (the security of the) group.

- Design a reporting procedure in which the report is taken seriously and without organizational overreaction. Decide what is considered fair punishment for specific violations.

- Give the reporter attention and offer guidance. Tailor it to the particular situation. Discuss with the reporter the guidance that would best help. Try to find out for which group processes a reporter fears. Confirm that the reporter did the right thing and express appreciation. Most importantly, let the reporter know what steps were taken.

- The most logical person a peer reports to is someone who is trusted. In most cases, this is the supervisor. An alternate superior should be available in the case of a bad employee–supervisor relationship. A central reporting place in the organization would take care of other contingencies. As a last resort (these cases should be very rare), give opportunity to report anonymously; in some cases, it is necessary to protect the reporter. This should not be encouraged, however, and anonymity should not extend so far as to preclude communication with the reporter for purposes of investigation. Having different options is similar to O’Leary’s advice: “Create multiple channels for dissent” (2006, 114).

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

invaluable input during the whole research process.

**Notes**

1. This typology was the outcome of an analysis of the literature on police integrity and corruption and was assessed against the results of empirical research on internal investigations in the police force. It was important in developing the typology that it included the following:

- All types of relevant behavior: behavior within the organization, interaction with external actors (citizens), and private time behavior as far as was relevant to the organization
- All types of relevant moral norms and values: in laws and rules, in internal codes and procedures, and in the unwritten, informal norms and values
- Behavior contrary to the organization’s interest, favoring the organization, but harming relevant social norms and values

2. For interesting exceptions, see Rothschild and Miethe (1999), King and Hermodson (2000), and Pershing (2003).

3. The full name is the Police Department of Amsterdam-Amstelland.

4. In some cases, it was a good option to ask the bureau to keep their identity secret to their colleagues (confidentiality), but that is another issue.

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