



**TRANSPARENCY
INTERNATIONAL**

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Die Koalition gegen Korruption

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Communication – key to flushing out corruption

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I

Of all the white-collar offences, corruption must be the crime that has the greatest need for discretion, cover-ups and secrecy. No one boasts about bribery or venality, the giving or receiving of money or financial advantages; they are not the right subjects for bar-room chat, or even the sort of subject to be mentioned to “good friends.”

Moonlighting, tax evasion, fiddling travel expenses or faking attendance during core time are all venial sins, *peccadilloes* as some might say. No one pays that much attention because, as a rule, everyone has some little skeleton in their cupboard. But corruption shuns the spotlight like vampires avoid daylight.

This is why it is no coincidence that the majority of corruption cases come to light as the result of acts of revenge. The secretary who feels undervalued, the colleague passed over for promotion, the cheated wife, the competitor who always thought that something was not right, they all take their revenge on those guilty of corruption if

they know about it. They spill the beans anonymously or openly to their superiors or to the Public Prosecutor; they phone an anonymous hotline and ultimately set corruption proceedings in motion. This is at least what the investigating authorities have found: corruption is often reported by people working in the same environment.

II

Corruption benefits both givers and takers. It is a third party that is left to count the cost: usually a company, local authorities, an association or an organisation, all of which are fairly abstract impersonal structures. As giver and taker both have the feeling that they are doing no harm to anyone they know, they have comparatively few scruples about breaking the rules. No one would defraud their next-door neighbour, whom they see everyday, but the health insurance system, the household insurance system or the public works department of a large town or city authority is different.

It often takes a great deal of effort on the part of the criminal to breach the walls set up to protect the system from the self-service of corruption. Accounts are doctored, secret commissions are concealed in invoices and orders, double invoices are produced, receipts are forged, distribution channels are fiddled with, packaging is opened, consignment are papers "replaced," money is shipped abroad. Contracts are awarded for overpriced and useless studies. Procurement procedures are disregarded; the goods delivered are not of the promised quality; deals are struck "between friends." The range of corruption offences is with and varied.

III

If there is one thing that is anathema to all the crooked dealings it is the spotlight of publicity. This is why the key to preventing corruption is communication. The wrongdoers must live in fear that it could all come out because A tells B or C tells boss D about their suspicions or because Y might ask X a follow-up question but because X is not there, Z gets asked and starts wondering what is going on.

Most corruption offences are discovered by chance. That is something of which the investigating authorities are fairly sure. They also know that every case they investigate is connected to a further five cases at least. This is why it takes a lot of

staff to investigate suspected corruption. Authorities are reluctant to look into suspicious circumstances because they do not want to launch complex investigations for which they do not have the staff. This is ultimately why less corruption is brought to light than could be the case.

Communication can take a variety of forms. Private conversations or recordings are the simplest form. But checks along the chain of events are also a method of communication. Internal audits also communicate with departments and other structures within the organisation. External auditing, i.e. checking annual accounts and the annual report, also shines the spotlight. Reports in the company paper and public relations work by companies or authorities open up further channels. Lastly, it is possible to talk to similar or comparable organisations to influence structures. Transparency International Germany benefits from these ideas.

IV

Transparency International was founded in Berlin and The Hague in 1993 with the aim of combating corruption. The idea was to build coalitions within civil society to prevent corruption and create structures within which corruption would find it less easy to flourish. Such structures are created by calling for them and lobbying until they are finally set up. The first step towards achieving Transparency International's goals was the signing in 1997 of the OECD Convention on Combating Bribery of Foreign Public Officials. The second step was getting the Convention ratified by most of the OECD member states. What is needed for the third step is a broad-based campaign to make as many people in the OECD as possible aware of the aims of the Convention. Regrettably, that this is not happening; business organisation persist in the belief that there are just a few black sheep engaging in corruption, that the few have no impact on the market and that therefore this Convention is ineffectual and unnecessary. A glance through the daily papers, however, is enough to realise that this is not the case.

Transparency International's work would be impossible without extensive communication between all members of society. TI's work therefore depends on the media. It is generally the case that the media play a key role in uncovering and analysing corruption cases, and then of disseminating their findings. As

Transparency International does not conduct any investigations of its own or monitor individual cases, without media input its work would soon grind to a halt.

Both Transparency International and the media are not even indirectly involved in prosecutions. But by adopting a clear line, by lobbying and by working to keep public interest alive they can make a considerable contribution to the prosecution of corruption cases.

Every year Transparency International makes Integrity Awards to honour the heroes of the fight against corruption. This is another way of reaching out to wider public. The public is interested in the heroes' life stories and at the same time learns about the corrupt environment that has made them into heroes. Often these heroes are journalists and often they are honoured posthumously, as reporting corruption is almost as dangerous as being a war correspondent, and can sometimes be even more perilous.

A few weeks ago Transparency International Germany made a further attempt to reach a wider audience. "In the shadows of the spotlight" (*Im Schatten der Öffentlichkeit*) was the title of a conference that focused in the media and media corruption. It was concluded that the greatest possible professionalism and economic independence were the most effective weapons available to journalists in the fight against corruption. The view was also taken that guidelines for conduct with regard to the objects of reports and the marketplace were necessary and would be useful.