

An Anti-Corruption Culture



STATSKONTORET

Swedish Agency for Public Management

A sound administrative culture

The Swedish Agency for Public Management contributes to and coordinates the state authorities' work towards a sound administrative culture. A sound administrative culture deals with the professional ethical foundations that must characterise the work of all state employees. The focus of our work is on the importance of leadership and management and on the special role of being a state employee.

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Corruption affects trust and confidence in the state

It is vitally important to prevent and militate against corruption, simply because it has such significant consequences. It is not only about the consequences for those directly involved, but rather concerns the confidence in the entire government and all its state authorities. In the long run, the legitimacy of the entire political system is at stake.

By its very nature, corruption is very difficult to detect. The consequences are significant, both for trust and confidence in the state as a whole and for the organisations, groups and individuals involved. The rule of law is chipped away, companies and citizens are treated unfairly, and confidence in the state authorities and the political system is in danger of declining. Corruption can affect the entire state authority and its standing. This, in turn, can spill over to employees, managers and the most senior managers in the leadership of the organisation.

Many state authorities do not take sufficient responsibility to prevent corruption from occurring.¹ One possible explanation is that Sweden is regarded as having a relatively low level of corruption. Evaluations show that the state authorities have not adequately analysed the risks of corruption.

The potential consequences of each new case of corruption that is revealed are huge. Therefore, it is important that all state authorities prioritise their preventive work. In order to be able to trust them and society at large, citizens need to feel that the state authorities are acting impartially.²

Overall, Sweden has a high level of social trust and confidence in its institutions, and each year is ranked among those countries in the world whose citizens perceive the state to be the least corrupt.³ Despite this, Swedes think that corruption exists in local governments to a greater extent than do people in the other Nordic countries.⁴

What is corruption?

As government employees, our objectivity is essential in order for citizens to be able to trust the government. We must both be and be perceived as objective and impartial. Corruption is a threat to this confidence in society. Inappropriate behaviour as well as criminal behaviour can be corruption.

Taking advantage of one's position

We start out from the Swedish Government's broad definition of corruption, which states that corruption involves *exploiting a public position so as to obtain improper gain for oneself or others*. The definition encompasses criminal acts such as receiving or giving bribes or exploiting one's position of trust. Similarly, related criminality is the influencing of employees at a state authority through threats or violence. Corruption also encompasses acts that are inappropriate, even if they may not be strictly illegal. It may involve, for example favouring a tenderer in the process of a procurement, giving priority to processing a friend's case before a given state authority, or the use of bonus points from official work-related travel for private use.

Objectivity militates against corruption

A prerequisite for trust in the state authorities and society in general is that we as government employees act in a fair and objective manner, and are perceived as being fair and objective. The legislation places clear and unambiguous demands on the objectivity of government employees. These requirements mean that we may only take into account what is relevant in our work, and that we must avoid conflicts of interest. Personal gain and our own personal values and interests must give way to what is objective. We must also be careful to ensure that it does not appear from the outside that we are biased.

Favouritism to friends is more common than bribery

When one thinks of the concept and term “corruption,” what often comes to mind is vulnerable citizens who are forced to pay money “under the table” to a brazen government official simply to obtain a favourable decision or a permit/authorisation, one that in fact there is no official charge for. Actually, this image does not match reality. Studies show that what is more common are corrupt acts that are performed without any direct demand for financial compensation or consideration in return, what is referred to as “cronyism,” favouritism to friends and associates.⁵ This may involve, for instance, a friendship that has arisen between a government employee and a supplier through recurring contacts in the course of one’s work. The supplier then exploits this via invitations to friendly dinners (which they pay for, of course), or gifts which are intended to strengthen the relationship and provide private benefits in future contacts.

Improper or inappropriate actions may be corruption

The broad definition shows the characteristic of all corruption: a slippery slope between what is legal and illegal with significant grey areas.⁶ One example is an administrator who makes a decision in a matter where, when seen from the outside, it looks as if there is a conflict of interest. The administrator thinks to himself that he can distinguish between the substance and the person; however, those who are affected by the decision may perceive things differently. In such a situation, the administrator must take responsibility for managing conflicts of interest by making a notification of disqualification and allowing someone else to make the decision. Another example is the importance of evaluating only the objective merits in recruitment and hiring new staff. For employment with the government, personal merit, capability and competence are to form the basis for the decision to hire. Requirements for experience that is far too specific, such as experience in a specific workplace, may be irrelevant and not considered to be objective.

Bribery is the most common criminal offence

The vast majority of criminal cases of corruption reported to the police and prosecutors are about bribery.⁷ As employees or independent contractors, we are forbidden from accepting bribes for the performance of our official duties or services. It is also absolutely forbidden to demand, to offer or to give bribes. One of the statute’s requirements for it to be considered to be a criminal offence is that the bribe has a connection with the position or task/assignment. The law also requires that the compensation is *improper*, in other words that it is inappropriate.

A county governor was criticised for a decision concerning exemptions from the rules regarding shoreline protection

A county governor modified the municipality's decision and gave the exemption, making it possible to construct houses close to the water, despite the rules for protection of the shoreline. The justification was that the four locations are in sparsely populated areas. However, the fact that location is in a sparsely populated area is not a permissible ground for exemption under the Swedish Environmental Protection Code. The county governor was seriously criticised by the Parliamentary Ombudsman (JO), even though the decision to grant an exemption was not a criminal offence. This was due to the fact that the Parliamentary Ombudsman was of the opinion that the exemption was not sufficiently well grounded in circumstances other than those contained in the rules of the Swedish Environmental Code. (JO's Decision 11/10/2013, J. no. 4427-2011).

Bilprovningen/Swedish Motor Vehicle Inspection was criticised for its partnership and joint activities with Renault

The Parliamentary Ombudsman criticised Bilprovningen for the joint activities cooperation it had with Renault in the spring of 2010. Bilprovningen was criticised for two letters they sent out to owners of Renault vehicles concerning "Renault and Bilprovningen's joint work to promote safety" and the offer of a free check at a Renault dealer before the inspection. The Parliamentary Ombudsman was of the view that Bilprovningen's independence could be called into question, due to the fact that it appeared in the letters that they worked very closely with Renault. (JO's Decision 18/02/2011, J. no. 1668-2010).

The Swedish Tax Agency's most senior managers received criticism

The Office of the Chancellor of Justice (JK) criticised the Swedish Tax Agency's Director General and the Agency's Deputy Director-General for attempting to inform a former colleague about the fact that the TV programme *Uppdrag Granskning* had requested copies of the former colleague's income tax return. The Office of the Chancellor of Justice felt that by ringing them up, the Director General and Deputy Director-General risked damaging public confidence in the Swedish Tax Agency and the employees' confidence in the senior management. The Office of the Chancellor of Justice also criticised the Swedish Tax Agency for not itself reporting the state authority's behaviour to the Parliamentary Ombudsman or the Chancellor of Justice prior to the external review. Instead, the state authority had set up its own investigation with the support of an external party (JK's Decision 30/05/2017, J. no. 3104-16-21).

What is inappropriate or improper is assessed based on whether or not the bribe can affect, or can be regarded as affecting, the performance of the government employee's official duties. This must be determined on a case-by-case basis, and depends very much on the context, how the benefit or money is distributed, what work tasks and responsibilities it concerns, and whether the employee is able to influence the situation of the party providing the benefit or money. Similar benefits can be assessed completely differently, depending on the context and task or assignment in question.

Other offences may also be corruption

As state employees, many of us have been entrusted with the handling of large sums of money for our employer. This may relate, for instance, to having the authority to decide on a purchase or the disbursement of money. Taking advantage of the situation and abusing one's position of trust may be criminal, and in such a case it is referred to as breach of trust or *disloyalty to the principal*. Those of us who have received a special trust thus have a greater responsibility vis-à-vis our employers, for instance, and if we commit a breach of trust, we risk being prosecuted.

Another perspective is when we have work tasks and responsibilities that involve the exercise of state authority, for example, deciding to grant or deny an individual a financial allowance or benefit on the basis of a law. Here, the corruption can occur by either intentional acts or by failing to act. Thus, we can find ourselves guilty of misconduct in the discharge of our official duties (*tjänstefel*). Some employees in the private sector can sometimes also have work tasks and responsibilities that entail the exercise of state authority, such as those dealing with the mechanical inspection of vehicles or the inspection of private independent schools.

Impermissible to entice purchasing agents with consumer electronics

Representatives of a company which sold office equipment were convicted of the crime of bribery (*bestickning*, now referred to as *givande av muta*) for offering buyers in both private sector companies and public sector agencies a free portable music player if they ordered goods for a certain amount. The Supreme Court found that the music player was a personal reward to the individual who placed an order for their employer in the performance of their duties. The reward was inappropriate due to the fact that the purpose was to influence buyers to order things that they otherwise might not have ordered. (NJA 1993 p. 539).

Elk hunting – sometimes forbidden, sometimes not

Representatives of a group of municipality-owned companies were convicted of bribery after having invited, for several years, both private sector and public employees to participate in an annual hunt. The hunt was initially free of charge, although, after a few years, the group charged a fee. The actual value of the hunt was significantly higher than the fee. The Court of Appeal concluded that the benefit was not included in the employees' official duties, but rather was entirely focused on recreation. In addition, the offer was directed at specially selected employees for the purpose of establishing good relationships with them and thus benefitting the Group. (Court of Appeal for Northern Norrland, Ruling 07/04/2003, RH 2003:56).

In a different case however, the Supreme Court found that it was not inappropriate to accept an invitation to an elk hunt. This case involved a forestry company which invited a county governor to a hunt. The county governor had had the formal possibility to make decisions that could affect the forestry company, although these decisions were delegated to others on the county administrative board. The court ruled that the county governor could participate in the elk hunt due to the fact that a county governor has the responsibility for acting for the region and representing the county in various different contexts and elk hunting is of significant importance in Jämtland (NJA 2008 p. 705).

Salary paid to cohabitant partner – an example of cronyism

An employee of the municipality who had the task of hiring hourly employees and managing their wages incorrectly registered that the employee's cohabitant partner had performed certain work tasks. The employee was convicted of breach of trust and the cohabitant partner for complicity. Both of the guilty parties were sentenced to probation and fines. (Svea Court of Appeal, Decision 21/10/2016, Case No. B11223-15.)

Even a financial gain can be a breach of trust against the principle

A manager in the social services of a municipality was sentenced to two and a half years in prison for aggravated breach of trust. The manager was responsible for the decisions regarding payments and disbursed more than SEK five million over a period of five years to individuals who were not entitled to receive payments. After that, the manager received about one-half of the money paid back, it being sent to his own bank account. (Court of Appeal for Western Sweden Court, Decision 21/10/2015, Case No. B2449-15.)

Misconduct in assisting in a matter relating to a relative's sickness benefit compensation

An administrator at the Swedish Social Insurance Agency was sentenced to pay an income-based fine for misconduct in the discharge of their official duties and data breach after the administrator participated in the investigation of the administrator's daughter-in-law's qualifying income for sickness benefits. The administrator did not make a decision, but nevertheless by investigating the case violated the Swedish Social Insurance Agency's internal rules concerning conflicts of interest and disqualification. (Court of Appeal for Western Sweden, Decision 12/06/2014, Case No. B5203-12.)

Where is the corruption and what is it due to?

Even though it is difficult to detect corruption, there are warning signs. Also, there are known risk areas where we as state authorities need to implement additional measures.

Corruption occurs in what is unseen

Corruption manifests itself in various ways and can have many causes. By its very nature, it is difficult to detect due to the fact that the people involved want to conceal what is going on. An employee who has not received sufficient training is less well-equipped and will find it more difficult to assess the borders concerning what one can or cannot do as a state employee.⁸

It may be tempting to act corruptly

The state authorities' power and the significant personal gain it can mean in certain instances, for example winning a contract with a major state authority, can entice people and businesses to attempt to influence us as state employees and control how we act.

Who then is most vulnerable to being influenced by external forces in their work? Managers and others with key functions with access to sensitive information and who have direct or indirect influence over decision-making can be particularly vulnerable.⁹ Most organisations also have employees or managers who, for a wide variety of reasons, do not feel loyal to the authority's activities. An employee may feel uncertain about their continued employment, that they have been passed over for promotion, that they are being ignored, not properly paid or otherwise treated unfairly. Or an employee may have private financial difficulties.¹⁰

The research into corruption highlights the concept of “temptation structure.”¹¹ This means that those who are subjected to temptations in their work are at far greater risk of corruption, especially if the rules for what is permissible are unclear. When it is possible to acquire personal gain or benefits, and the risk of being exposed is minimal, even the most principled individual can be enticed. However, it is not necessary for a private benefit to be large to make it tempting. A free meal or tickets to an event, do not constitute large benefits; they can nevertheless be regarded as corruption depending upon the context. In such a situation, the benefit may be so small that the employee does not realise that it does matter whether they accept it or not.

It is especially important for the heads of state authorities to pay attention to changes in personnel or changes in the workplace that can increase the risk of corruption. But, it is difficult to perceive such warning signs, and occasionally changes in behaviour patterns are revealed afterwards. Some signals may include extensive overtime work, sick leave or other absence, or altered private consumption habits.¹²

Breeding grounds can be created by the organisational culture

Certain organisational cultures can be preventive and counteract corruption. On the other hand, other cultures can create a breeding ground for corrupt behaviour and make the efforts to combat corruption more difficult. The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (BRÅ) has identified four cultures that can increase the risk of corruption.¹³

The culture of blindness is characterised by individuals’ choices, and the taking of risk is controlled more by habits, rules of thumb and wishful thinking than by rational calculations. Corruption is perceived here as something that cannot exist within the organisation. In a culture of blindness it may happen that incidents occur that are not noticed, or are not regarded as an attempt to influence an employee.

A culture of silence at work is characterised by the fact that criticism is muted or silenced by colleagues and managers. Norms that characterise the culture of silence include “mind your own business” and “do not question.” Those employees who defy norms are likely to be frozen out or overlooked regarding promotion. The culture of silence can lead to suspicion of corruption not being transferred from employees to managers.

A culture of informal rules is a culture that deviates from the formal rules. Situations with a culture of informal rules may arise when employees find that the rules are not adapted to the particular work situation.¹⁴ This can lead to employees not complying with the body of rules, which in turn increases the risk of corruption. A culture of informal rules also provides the possibility of defending one's own improper or inappropriate actions if the corruption is revealed – “everyone else is doing this.”

The efficiency culture is characterised by a too one-sided focus on results, at the expense of the quality of decision-making and in the work environment, among other things. It will also become more difficult to check whether or not the employees and managers are complying with the rules. In such a negative efficiency culture, it can be difficult for employees to convey views that make it more difficult to achieve the efficiency goals. There are also examples of employees in state authorities with a culture characterised by efficiency taking shortcuts in order to achieve good results, which may open up doors to corruption.

Known risk areas are procurement and payments

Risks of corrupt behaviour can exist in all aspects of a state authority's activities, although some areas are particularly vulnerable. Several studies indicate six typical risk areas:¹⁵

Procurement and purchasing. Contracts for the supply of goods or services to government agencies are often highly coveted. A government employee in a position of authority with responsibility for procurement is in a vulnerable position when companies attempt to influence the state authority's decision.

Disbursements. The national government's institutions pay out large sums for loans, foreign aid, research funding and other grants/support to individuals and organisations. Employees can utilise their position to pay out too much or make disbursements to recipients who are not entitled to social services support.

Payments received. Payments received may consist of taxes, charges or fines. For example, individuals or companies can persuade civil servants to approve payments that are less than the amount due.

Supervision, criminal investigations, research. The activities of many state authorities can have potentially far-reaching implications for individuals, companies or organisations. This can lead to someone attempting to influence state employees to distort the outcome by, for example, not making a negative report after an inspection.

Sensitive or strategic information. Many state authorities have sensitive information about individuals or organisations which may be of value to third parties. State employees may be tempted to disclose such information in exchange for financial consideration.

Licensing and certification. Different types of licenses and permits can provide benefits or opportunities for individuals and businesses. For example, state employees may be influenced to grant a permit or authorisation in contravention of the regulations.

Another aspect is how the state authorities with international contacts and activities with other countries are to work to prevent and manage the risk of corruption. The risk areas are different in different parts of the world, and corruption can take many different forms. Therefore, state authorities operating abroad need to acquire a knowledge of the local situation in terms of risk so that preventive work will be as effective as possible.

What should the state authorities do in order to prevent corruption?

Here is some advice on how state authorities can guard against corruption. One of the most important measures is to conduct a risk analysis customised for the particular activity to be used as a basis for measures to be taken. It is also important to organise the work in a manner that minimises the risks of corruption arising. Other important measures include training all staff and engaging in exercises discussing difficult situations.

Analyse and monitor risks

The state authority which is aware of its risks can manage them in an effective manner, and a risk analysis lays the foundation for the preventive work to guard against corruption.¹⁶ The results of the risk analysis can then be used to find measures that are adapted to the activities which can easily be integrated into our daily work. A risk analysis can also be the starting point for discussions about corruption at the authority.

Establish clear rules and guidelines

Clear guidelines concerning corruption act as a support for our employees concerning how to deal with difficult issues and ethical dilemmas. For example, it may concern how we should deal with offers of gifts or what applies when it comes meals and entertainment. The guidelines can also be a support for us with external contacts. It is easier to explain the reason for not accepting a gift or declining an invitation to dinner by pointing to the regulations.

However, it is not sufficient that there are clear guidelines. The guidelines must also be appropriate and adapted to the activities, entrenched, and disseminated throughout the authorities' activities. One factor for success is to provide staff with educational sessions and training, and then regularly monitor to ensure that employees and managers are complying with the rules in which they have been trained.

The policy and guidelines should also specify what the penalties are if one does not comply with them, both criminal and labour law sanctions. If the staff are not aware of the penalties, guidelines will have a very limited preventive effect.

Organise work in such a manner as to minimise the risks of corruption occurring

Each state authority needs to organise its work in order to minimise the risk of corruption occurring. By means of some relatively simple organisational methods, we can achieve good results.¹⁷

A two-person decision rule means that the civil servants work in pairs at certain sensitive stages, such as in making certain decisions or in large amounts of disbursement over a certain level. In this way, more than one person has knowledge of the work and thus the risk of corruption occurring is reduced.

Job rotation in exposed positions within the state authority protects against the risks of corruption that can occur in connection with frequent external contacts.

Control systems are one of the primary methods of detecting and guarding against corruption. These include such things as verification of inbound payments and disbursements, IT controls and permission barriers to access computer systems where specific authorisation is required.

The conversation about avoiding corruption must be held all the time

It is important that the conversation about corruption and the risks of corruption occurs on a regular basis. This is closely related to how the state authority's system of internal rules is formulated and what principles and values have been established in the workplace. However, discussions concerning norms and values rarely come up all by themselves in management groups or within working units. It is the supervisor's responsibility to keep the discussion on-going, with training sessions, meetings and performance reviews, for example.

A prerequisite for the prevention work is that managers have the time available plus the ability to guide and support their staff. Close leadership also increases the chances of detecting signs of behavioural changes or risks of corruption.

The head of a given state authority has the overall responsibility for the authority's efforts against corruption and other issues relating to a sound administrative culture. It is the parties responsible for activities at various levels who are responsible for initiating discussions about the culture of the workplace and the risk of corruption; this can occur, for instance, in employee performance reviews. However, it should also be taken up in other discussion forums such as at meetings.

Many people experience the fact that inquisitive and intrusive discussions about corruption and corruption risks in their activities are difficult and sensitive. In order to be able to implement these discussions, it is necessary that the climate for discussions in the workplace is open. It is advisable to make this and other work-related ethical issues a standing item at workplace meetings and similar meetings. Then, eventually it will become easy and natural to conduct the discussions. Managers and supervisors should always lead or participate in these meetings.

Take up the purpose of transparency and what this means in practice in the training sessions and workplace discussions. Show in words and deeds that senior management wants transparency also to result in an open climate for discussion within the state authority.

Lead by good example

The state authority's management and managers at various levels are role models for all employees, as the organisation will mimic their behaviour. Therefore, it is important that managers practice what they preach, and, for instance, make decisions or take actions that are consistent with their own ethical approach. Leaders must avoid conflicts of interest and anything that may be interpreted as expensive entertainment, too familiar relationships with interested external parties, or excessive benefits.

Work in joint collaboration with other organisations

State authorities that work in collaboration with others learn from each other. This collaboration can contribute to making the work against corruption more effective and efficient. One example is the anti-corruption action plan that the governmental agencies working to combat organised crime have jointly developed.¹⁸ Another is the state anti-corruption network, which the Swedish Agency for Public Management (Statskontoret) is coordinating.

Follow up on the preventive measures

The state authorities should continuously monitor the efforts they have undertaken in order to ensure that the measures are effective and that employees have the knowledge they need. In addition, visible follow-up work carried out and increased awareness of the work against corruption should be encouraged. This is an important area of improvement for many state authorities.¹⁹

Practice, practice, practice!

Every state authority needs to continuously discuss the risks of corruption, the state authority's regulations, and ethical dilemmas. Employees and managers need to continuously discuss the boundaries between what is acceptable and what is not.

Practicing and discussing provides an opportunity to raise awareness of the risks of corruption. It is important that managers also participate in such exercises. And it is also important to come back to the discussion on a regular basis and make it a natural part of authorities' activities.

Use the dilemma exercises

It is not always easy to determine whether an act counts as corruption or not. It is also difficult to detect when one moves into the grey zone approaching corrupt behaviour. One way to educate oneself in the ability to determine what is acceptable might be to obtain coaching in dilemma exercises. By working with cases that are specifically adapted to their own activities, employees can test and develop their skills. Dilemma exercises are often an important step in developing the employees' ability to deal with difficult situations and to build a sound administrative culture within areas other than the work against corruption. It is equally important for workers to exercise their ethical compass as it is to exercise their other vocational skills.

As part of its mission to promote and coordinate the work of a sound administrative culture in the national government, the Swedish Agency for Public Management has set up a dilemma bank on the www.forvaltningskultur.se website. There are a number of dilemmas here, categorised according to various topics and subject areas. There are also examples of dilemmas from other state authorities. Here are examples of two dilemmas.

Engagement in incidental employment – what is permissible and where is the limit?

“Why should I have to report it? Actually, this concerns my private life!” Christina stares at her boss Anna with a sullen gaze. “I would think that you understand perfectly clearly that it matters,” replies Anna, attempting to explain that she certainly respects Christina’s private life, but sometimes one nevertheless has to ask questions. “I have heard you talking about the fact that you have your own company which is engaged in auditing, and because you work as an auditor here, there may be an issue of an engagement in incidental employment. In such case, you must make a report and notify the state authority about this.” “What I do in my free time has nothing to do with you. I do my job and fulfil my work tasks, and you are satisfied with my work, so don’t barge into what does not concern you,” Christina sputters. Anna asks Christina to go and speak to the chief legal officer, Anders. Christina moans inwardly but trudges off to Anders to get it over and done with.

Anders is actually not Christina’s favourite person. Of all the lawyers she knows, he is dry, tedious and long-winded. Infinite references to sections here and sections there, and then his non-stop “on the one hand, however, and on the other hand.” Christina is feeling fed up even before she arrives at Anders’ office. “Incidental employment,” says Anders, “as a general rule it is permitted; however, there are certain exceptions and these are governed in §§ 7 a-d of the LOA ...” He goes on endlessly, thinks Christina to herself. “Harmful to trust... impeding work... competition...,” it’s so dull and tiresome that Christina almost falls asleep standing up.

“For example, I am myself engaged in incidental employment,” Anders tells her. “I give rock climbing courses and lectures on rock climbing. I informed my superiors of this when I was first hired, and I filled in a form that went into my personnel file. Have you seen my climbing pictures?” Before Christina has had time to protest, Anders calls up his personal website with photographs from his latest rock climbing trip to southern France. Anders’ enthusiasm for rock climbing is hard to resist. When she leaves, she has her head full of images with breath-taking views, vertical rock walls, tanned limbs and supple strong muscles. “Anders – he seems so boring” thinks Christina to herself, and wonders if she might have actually signed up for a rock climbing course? “But what did he actually say about incidental employment?”

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- What do you regard as being problematical in this situation?
 - Which incidental employment could be a problem for your state authority?



Criticism of the state authority

Alexander criticises the state authority in a television programme. He raises particularly serious accusations of “racism and discrimination” against the state authority and its leadership in the television documentary.

Soon afterwards, there are strong reactions to the state authority. The Head of Human Resources calls him to a meeting. “Why don’t you raise the problems internally rather than going out in the media?” wonders his colleague Lisa. “Can’t I speak to the news media just as everyone else can?” counters Alexander.

The head of the department, Mohamed, tries to calm the situation down. He suggests that the two work together to map out what has occurred, in order to identify possible solutions. Secretly, Alexander records the entire conversation on tape.

A little later, Alexander is again on another television programme. His supervisors and colleagues are attempting to prevent him from speaking out about the problems at the state authority, he says. The audio tape from the meeting is played back. It becomes apparent that many of the participants at the meeting are angry or disappointed, and that the majority believe that the problems should have been discussed internally first, but nobody forbids Alexander from speaking out.

“It felt like a trial. Everyone ganged up against me. I wasn’t even able to bring someone in to provide support for me,” comments Alexander, in the programme.

Mohamed decides to ask an outside consultant to examine whether there are grounds for criticism. Alexander feels that it is increasingly difficult to work with his colleagues and later accepts an offer of new work responsibilities within the organisation.

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- In your opinion, what do you regard as being problematical in this particular situation? Why?
 - How would you personally act in this situation? And why would you do so?

How should the state authority respond to suspected corruption?

It is important that all employees know what they should do if they suspect corruption. Each state authority must have procedures for how the authority is to respond in the event corruption is detected. It is important to curb the spread of rumours and gossip; this can be done by being open about the incidents that do occur and how the state authority has dealt with them – do not sweep anything under the carpet.

Introduce procedures to deal with suspicions

Many state authorities lack the procedures for how to deal with corruption or suspected offences. This can contribute to the fact that the employees feel that they should not talk about corruption within their own activities. They may be reluctant to report their observations or suspicions out of fear of being regarded as an alarmist or being disloyal to the state authority, their immediate supervisor, or colleagues.

Act with transparency and provide information about what has occurred

Act vigorously and with transparency against corruption and against suspicions of corruption. It is valuable to be transparent regarding the incidents that occur in order that both one's own state authority and others can learn from what has occurred. Straightforward information about the incident, how it was detected, how it was dealt with and the consequences for those involved, all support the internal discussion about right and wrong. This then contributes to dealing with what occurred and also to preventing corruption in the future.

An underlying problem may be that senior management is afraid of disclosing the incidents, because this risks damaging confidence in the state authority. The withdrawal reflex may be to silence suspicions, in order to avoid a scandal. However, the scandal becomes all greater if – or rather when – the information about the incident leaks out.

Brief co-workers on the procedures so that everyone is aware of them

It is important that all employees are aware of how the state authority acts and what measures are taken against those who behave corruptly. As a basic rule, a suspected crime must be reported to the police. These procedures must be familiar so that all employees know what corruption can lead to, for example, that the matter will be taken up in the personnel disciplinary board or reported to the police.

The procedures for reporting and dealing with suspected corruption consist of

- reporting procedures
- established measures for dealing with suspicions
- principles for action or corrective measures vis-à-vis those involved.

The procedures for reporting suspicions should contain several different courses of action, due to the fact that the circumstances are different in the case of different suspicions. A manager or supervisor who suspects an employee of corruption should be able to take it up with his/her immediate superior or with a specially designated unit centrally within the state authority. An employee should be able to have the choice of taking the issue up with their manager, the senior management of the authority, or the specially designated unit. It is important that employees feel free to go other ways than via the regular line organisation, as the manager's behaviour may be part of the problem.

Many larger state authorities have established whistleblower units centrally within the authority which receive and process both open and anonymous reports. Some state authorities have chosen to allow a third-party audit or law firm to receive reports. The Swedish Agency for Public Management has previously found that the legal preconditions for such systems are unclear and should be further investigated.²⁰

It is senior management's responsibility to build a supportive culture for the whistleblower within the state authority. No one who has the courage to report their observations or suspicions should risk being punished via direct or indirect retaliation on the part of either managers or colleagues.

Efforts to combat corruption strengthen a sound administrative culture

Corruption can be prevented by various means, including by identifying risks and organising for greater transparency. This leads to fewer employees being tempted to pass the threshold to inappropriate or corrupt behaviour. Every employee that the preventive work helps to do the right thing instead of the wrong thing is a big win for the state authority, and an important element in systematically building a sound administrative culture.

Combating corruption cannot wait!

The efforts against corruption rest on systematic preventive work and dealing with suspicions of corruption in an effective and transparent manner. Preventive work is a prerequisite for detecting and dealing with corruption. The employees' and the managers' awareness of the risks increases. The awareness creates space to act, if one suspects corruption. If management shows that corruption is absolutely not tolerated and is dealt with in a vigorous and transparent manner, this also increases the trust of employees and their willingness to contribute.

Managers and employees both have a responsibility

Managers play an important role in leading the way in the prevention of corruption. The objective is for all employees to feel part of the practical efforts to militate against corruption and to be aware of the risks of corruption arising. On the other hand, it is the state authority's senior management that must assume the responsibility for carrying out risk assessments and creating the preconditions so that these efforts function. It is this work that makes it easy for employees to do the right thing.

The employees also have an important role to play. Each of us as state employee has a responsibility for how we act, both internally and vis-à-vis external parties, as well as in relation to our work tasks and responsibilities. We are all obligated to take a personal responsibility to be objective and impartial, and to report to our employer when an actual or potential conflict of interest arises.

Reduced risks of corruption contribute to good governance and a sound administrative culture

Preventive measures against corruption and a good discussion climate also lead to the establishment of a sound administrative culture. To actively prevent and deal with corruption and suspicions is a central and important part of establishing creating a sound administrative culture.

Other parts of the work in achieving a sound administrative culture include strengthening knowledge about the ethical foundations of the national government and what it means to be a state employee. This may entail, for instance, how we as state employees are to learn how to manage conflicts of interest. Another part is to improve our ethical capabilities.

To strengthen all state employees' abilities to be objective and impartial, to know what the laws that apply are and to comply with them not only prevents corruption, but also strengthens sound administrative culture as a whole.

To continue your work and efforts

Each state authority must take upon themselves the responsibility to initiate and bring to life the fight against corruption and the work to develop a sound administrative culture. It is important to start from the core mission and to find the methods and measures that best fit in with activities.

The Swedish Agency for Public Management has the task of promoting and coordinating the efforts to establish a sound administrative culture. We provide advice on how one can work to achieve this goal, and it is our desire to inspire all state authorities to find good ways to work against corruption.

As part of this effort, we have set up the www.forvaltningskultur.se website. Here you can find a knowledge base, advice and guidance on how to work, together with information on seminars, workshops, training opportunities and sources of information.

Notes

- ¹ See i.a. *Protection against Corruption in the State authorities of the National Government*, Riksrevisionen/Swedish National Audit Office (RiR) 2013:2 and the *Efforts within the State authorities to Prevent and Detect Corruption*, Statskontoret, (2015:23).
- ² See i.a. *Corruption and Impermissible Influence*, Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions, 2016.
- ³ See e.g. Andersson et al. (2010): *Corruption, Abuse of Power and Legitimacy*, Norstedts, p. 18 f. and Andreasson, Ulf. (2017) *Trust and Confidence – The Nordic Gold*, Nordic Council of Ministers, p. 13 f.
- ⁴ *General public benefit or own personal gain? An ESO report on Corruption in Swedish*, ESO 2013:2, p. 92 ff.
- ⁵ *Corruption in Government Sweden. Impermissible influence vis-à-vis an insider*, Brå in 2014:4, p. 17.
- ⁶ *The Reported corruption in Sweden. Structure, Risk Factors and Countermeasures*, Brå 2013:15, p. 16.
- ⁷ Brå 2013:15, p. 24.
- ⁸ Brå 2014:4, p. 123.
- ⁹ Brå 2014:4, p. 52.
- ¹⁰ Brå 2014:4, p. 72 ff. and Statskontoret 2015:23 p. 21.
- ¹¹ Erlingsson, Gissur Ó. (2006). "What do we know about municipal corruption?" Ratio Working Paper no. 100. The Ratio Institute: Stockholm.
- ¹² Brå 2014:4, p. 65 f.
- ¹³ Brå 2014:4, p.79–87, see also *Preventing and Dealing with Attempts at Influencing. A Handbook*, Brå 2017, p.24–26.
- ¹⁴ See Thygesen, N. & Sjöberg Kampmann, N. O. 2013. *Trust at the bottom line [Tillid på bundlinjen]. Offentlige ledere går nye veje [Public sector leaders go new ways]*, p.102–103.
- ¹⁵ *The Structure of Corruption in Sweden*, Brå 2007:21 and RiR 2013:2
- ¹⁶ *Systematised Common Sense*, ESV 2011:2, p. 48.
- ¹⁷ Brå 2007:21, p. 130–143 and RiR 2013:2, p. 33.
- ¹⁸ Statskontoret 2015:23, p. 28 and 103.
- ¹⁹ Statskontoret 2015:23, p. 39.
- ²⁰ *The Whistleblower Unit in the State*, Statskontoret, 2016:30, p. 66 f.

You have a responsibility as a state employee. And this responsibility applies to everyone, not only to managers. You must strive to be objective and take measures to ensure that confidence and trust in the state and its institutions are maintained. Therefore, your own actions are important and the consequences can be significant if you are not objective and impartial.

Preventing corruption involves both employees and employers, and contributes to good governance in the long-term. It is important to militate against inappropriate behaviour (such as cronyism) as well as phenomena which are clearly criminal in order to strengthen and maintain the objectivity of all state employees and the confidence in the state as a whole.

But how can you prevent corruption? The Swedish Agency for Public Management provides a brief background on corruption in this publication and gives practical tips on how state authorities can prevent and deal with corruption.

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