Blessed are the ignorant?

Predictors of integrity breaches

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Introduction

In the past years society has mainly had attention for improper behaviour and social safety, which also included attention for unwanted behaviour (Kerkhoff & Van Der Wal, 2023). There was a major shift when it came to unwanted behaviour in 2017 with the #MeToo movement. A tweet from Alyssa Milano (2017): 'If you've been sexually harassed or assaulted write "me too" as a reply to his tweet.' With a photo stating the following: 'If all the women who have been sexually harassed or assaulted wrote "me too" as a status, we might give people a sense of the magnitude of the problem'. This tweet started the movement. A lot of women came forward with their own story, related to unwanted behaviour. Other bigger examples of unwanted behaviour are: Kevin Spacey, Bill Cosby and the Voice of Holland (NOS, 2022). Unwanted behaviour is a subjective topic, everyone has their own idea (norms and values) on what they find (un)wanted behaviour. A few factors can influence the perception of behaviour: surroundings, situation, people, et cetera. Unwanted behaviour is an integrity breach form.

An integrity breach occurs when a coworker does not comply with or act in defiance of the regulations. In this thesis the following definition of Brenkert (2004) is used: Integrity is acting according to the stated (dominating) rules, norms and values. There are different categories of integrity breaches according to the Uniforme Registratie Integriteitsschendingen (URI) of the Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties (BZK): financial breaches, misuse position and conflicts of interests, leaking and misuse of information, inappropriate communications, misuse of power, unwanted behaviour, misuse of company means and breach of internal rules, misconduct in private live and wrongdoings according to the whistle blower regulations.

The research motive was a rise in the integrity breaches within the organization, they wanted to know if it was possible to prevent any future integrity breaches. Specifically a rise within the category unwanted behaviour (examples: bullying, sexual tinted remarks, (non)physical intimidation) was visible. It was the same for the category misuse of company means and breach of internal rules (examples: use of alcohol, drugs during workhours, wrongful declaration and misuse of leave). There was also a rise in the total amount of contact moments with the confidential advisors. According to internal research by the organization only 0.5% to 1% of the employees are involved in (the suspicion of) integrity breaches. When looking at these aspects the following research question was drafted: What are the predictors of integrity breaches within the organization?

Method

In order to map the predictors of integrity breaches the method interviews/conversations was used. The interviews with the coworkers were approach differently from the interviews with the confidants and integrity coordinator. The interviews with the coworkers were about the behaviour and attitude of the individual and about the attitude of the coworkers in general. The coworker interviews were also held in a less formal setting and tone, so the coworkers would not feel like they were being interrogated, in order to prevent getting socially acceptable answers.

Approach: 40 (mostly) random coworkers were selected for participating by a company employee using a current overview of all coworkers. When selecting the coworkers, the different departments of the organization were kept in mind, in order to have a correct division based on the amount of coworkers per department. The 40 selected coworkers received an online meeting request for a conversation, 28 coworkers accepted this request, these are the participants.

Procedure: The starting point of every conversation was the same: the researcher introduced themselves, then the anonymity and confidentiality were emphasized. The permission for recording the session was the asked and if the coworkers agreed to participate in the research (this was again asked at the end). After the formalities, there were some background questions established: age, gender, years of service and if the person had a management function within the company. A few topics were central within the interview (these are the same as the analysis codes). The questions were used as a basis for the conversation, however the sequence changed in order to keep the conversation flowing. The questions were mostly based on the Huis van Klokkenluiders (2017) integrity management and the ASE-model.

Analysis: A thematic analysis was used. Which is used for qualitative research in order to find relevant patterns, using themes and categories. The codes were: atmosphere and work experience, norms and values, pressure points and obstacles, management and colleagues, knowledge and attitude, unwanted behaviour and misuse of company means, background data and remaining relevant data.

Participants:

Tabel 1

Participants

Background data	Frequency
Age	
• 18-34 years old	5
• 35-49 years old	11
• 50 plus	12
Years of service	
• Less than 2 years	5
• Between 2 and 5 years	6
• Between 5 and 10 years	6
• 10 plus	11
Gender	
• Men	21
• Women	7
Total participants	28

Theoretical framework

Behaviour and motivation theories

There is little literature to find about understanding integrity (breaches). In order to get a better understanding of ethical behaviour and integrity, literature on related subjects was used. Topics like the understanding and mapping (dishonest) behaviour. Keeping that in mind the Theory of Self-Concept Maintenance, the ASE-model and the social cognitive theory were selected.

The Theory of Self-Concept Maintenance (Mazar et al, 2008; Gino et al, 2009) gives insight into the way individuals feels, upkeep or improve their self-worth related to dishonest behaviour, using moral arguments. The theory describes two motivations: external (outside stimulus, like rewards) and internal (internal stimulus, like emotions) motivation. These motivations could collide with each other,

but in reality an individual usually finds a balance between the two. So, a balance between keeping a positive self-worth and displaying (a little) dishonest behaviour. There are two mechanisms who influence this balance: the inattention to moral standard (not knowing what the moral standard is) and categorization malleability (the interpretation of honest behaviour). This theory is relevant since an integrity breach usually involves a display of dishonest behaviour, so it is interesting to see what the theory says about internal conflict that happens when an individual displays dishonest behaviour.

The ASE-model (De Vries et al, 1988) is based on the Theory of Planned Behaviour. The model suggests that by using the intention of an individual it is possible to predict if they are planning on displaying the desired behaviour. ASE stands for attitude, social influence and self-efficacy (De Vries, 1993). Attitude concerns the attitude an individual has of the desired behaviour (De Vries, 1993). Social influence concerns the influence from significant others, for example parents or friends, it is about the social norm and perceived behaviour (De Vries, 1993). Self-efficacy is the confidence an individual has in their ability to display the desired behaviour (De Vries, 1993).

Social cognitive theory (SCT) of moral thoughts and behaviour is about the withholding factors of showing immoral behaviour by using a person's own sanctions (Bandura, 1986, 1991). These sanctions have a constant impact and help with regulating moral behaviour and thoughts. However these sanctions can be ignored which can lead to dishonest behaviour (Bandura, 1991). This theory mentions two kinds of behaviour: operant conditioning (voluntary and controlled behaviour, usually adjusted to the surroundings and reaction) and respondent behaviour (automatic response to stimulus) (Bandura, 1971). There are three factors who determine behaviour according to the SCT: Behavioural factors (self-efficacy, skills), environmental factors (social environment) and cognitive factors (knowledge, attitude).

The ASE-model and the SCT describe ways to map and predict certain behaviour. They both show that an individual needs to have the motivation, capacity and opportunity in order to change their behaviour. So if the integrity breaches want to be understood, the intentions (motivation, capacity and opportunity) needs to be understood. In order to understand the dishonest behaviour, the desired behaviour needs to be know first.

Facilitating factors

Psychological safety describes the perception of an individual when keeping the consequences of interpersonal risks in the work environment in mind (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). Social safety is the extent to which a person feels/is protected against personal suffer by others (Ardis, z.d.; Beks, 2022). The main difference between the two is between the behaviour of an individual (psychological safety) or the behaviour of the social environment (social safety). It is important that people feel safe to express themselves. In order to create a psychological safe environment there are four characteristics of importance: inclusion (able to be yourself), sharing (having the freedom to share), contribution (everyone is a team member and is actively involved) and learning (setting goals and mistakes are allowed) (Beks, 2022; Clark, 2020). A good atmosphere and integration are important for social and psychological safety. These insure a good connection with the company, since a bad company connection can lead to more integrity breaches and dishonest behaviour. A good connection helps people choose the desired behaviour more easily.

The decrease in the chance to help a victim when passive bystanders are present is called the bystander effect (Fischer et al, 2011). The individual feels like others are likely to help, so they feel less inclined to help, which might lead to no help at all. There are five steps an individual needs to take in order to help a victim (Latané & Darley, 1970). The five steps are: noticing (noticing the situation),

interpreting (the individual needs to interpret the situation as one that needs help), taking responsibility (between step two and three there can be a diffusion of responsibility: the more bystanders, the less a person feel responsible for helping (Fischer et al, 2011)), deciding how to help (a few obstacles here might be lack of knowledge/skills and the possibility of failing in front of others) and the last step is actually helping. All five steps need to be taken in order for a person to help. (Kassin et al., 2021). Unwanted behaviour in a work environment usually takes place when other people, bystanders, are present. So during an unwanted behaviour situation there might be a bystander effect taking place. The theory is however based on an emergency, a situation related to an integrity breach is not directly related to an emergency, but certain aspects mentioned in the theory do overlap.

Results

The atmosphere and work experience were generally experiences as positive and open. It was however more difficult to maintain social contacts and a connection with the organization, because of the Corona period, since more coworkers work from home more often. More about social contacts: the coworkers expect that they would interfere when they see unwanted behaviour, however they have not done this of have had to.

Most coworkers were not familiar with the norms and values of the organization, since these were not discussed or written down. The norms and values they did know were mostly transferred by social interaction with another coworker. These aspect were again seen in the attitude and knowledge of the coworkers; most had no knowledge of the code of conduct. Most did find it important that integrity was on the agenda or that it needed to be. This also led to some good points of improvement according to the coworkers: making the code of conduct better known and to discuss more integrity related subjects. The attitude of the coworkers, who worked longer than 10 years at the organization, was something that stood out. These coworkers knew where the 'limit' was on certain tasks, they understood how to stop just before the line of a possible integrity breach. When the coworkers were asked if they found it odd that there were integrity breaches within the organization, about a third did not find surprising.

Pressure points and obstacles were experienced by several coworkers, especially surrounding the rules. Most of the rules were unknown, unclear or not aimed at the reality of the situation. The pressure around time management was something that also stood out, the causes of this were: pressure around the production (too high), political influences (planning was too short), communication problems (in several aspects), procedures (too long and/or unclear) and peak times (resulting in people with short fuses). Other aspects mentioned were the abundance of information, pressure from the environment (could also be lead back to time pressure) and not feeling heard in their expertise. (The result can also be seen in the table in the appendix. It shows how many times the coworkers mentioned the codes used in the analysis.)

Conclusion

The next conclusions about the research question: 'What are the predictors of integrity breaches within the organization?' were drawn. The possible predicting factors are:

- The uncertainty and unfamiliarity with the rules, their mismatch with the reality and the abundance of information.
- The pressure points and obstacles (connection to the organization).
- Ingrained behaviour.

The uncertainty and unfamiliarity with the rules, their mismatch with the reality and the abundance of information is the first possible predicting factor. If a coworker does not know what the rules and code of conduct is, then how are they supposed to know when they cross the line into an integrity breach? This can also be lead back to the Theory of Self-Concept Maintenance (Mazar et al, 2008; Gino et al, 2009), since the theory states that a person seeks a balance. One of the mechanisms that influences the balances in inattention to moral standard. The coworkers do not know the moral standard of the organization. This increases the chances of displaying dishonest behaviour and therefore an integrity breach.

The other mechanism is the categorization malleability, which states that a person will behave dishonest if that behaviour can be interpreted more easily as honest behaviour, this is also influenced by the environment (Mazar et al, 2008; Gino et al, 2009). So if a coworker is not sure what the norms and values are, then it might also be easier to view certain behaviour as honest, instead of dishonest. The social cognitive theory can also be linked to this, since a person has their own sanctions based on their norms and values (Bandura, 1986, 1991). So, if the person has no idea of the organizations norms and values it is easier to ignore one's own sanctions and display dishonest behaviour (possibly for a reward, external motivation), thus leading to a possible integrity breach. However, if a person does not hold themselves to their norms and values is might come at a cost at their self-worth, which might be an internal motivation to not display dishonest behaviour.

The abundance of information, especially seeing that the code of conduct is over thirty pages long, and the lack of awareness around the code of conduct can be explained using the Cognitive Load Theory (Kirschner et al., 2018). This theory is about the mental capacity of a person when reading and learning (Kirschner et al., 2018). The theory states that there are three different cognitive loads, one is the extraneous cognitive load. The extraneous cognitive load states that if a person finds the information non-relevant they will not remember the information. So, the lack of knowledge regarding the code of conduct could also be caused by the coworkers finding the document not relevant and too long.

The second possible predicting factor are the pressure points and obstacles, which were mostly about the time pressure and about the rules (as stated above). The time pressure might not be (immediately) changeable within the organization, which is why is important to look at the work enjoyment, since a lesser work enjoyment might lead to a lesser connection with the company, which then might lower the threshold of committing an integrity breach. The Self Determination Theory (Deci et al., 2017) can be used to explain this, the theory is aimed at the reasoning behind human behaviour in the work environment. The theory mentions two independent variables: social context and individual differences (Deci et al., 2017). According to the theory people need competency, autonomy and relatedness. Relatedness is about feeling apart of the company and having that connection. If that connection is less present, then coworkers perform poorer and do not enjoy it as much. So, this might also lower the threshold of committing an integrity breach.

The connection to the company is also based on being and feeling safe at work, so having a high level of social and psychological safety. Coworkers should feel safe to share their ideas/opinions. The coworkers expect that they would intervene when they see unwanted behaviour, however they have not intervened (yet), so do they feel safe enough to share everything? This is a part of the four characteristics of psychological safety: feeling safe enough to share (Beks, 2022; Clark, 2020). The social environment also needs to be sufficient in order to have the security to share and help, which also leads to a few examples mentioned during the interviews with coworkers. There were some examples about a certain situation where an individual said an inappropriate comment about a coworker in a meeting. None of the other coworkers said something in that moment, but did discuss

it later and found it inappropriate. This would suggest that there might have been a bystander effect (diffusion of responsibility). There are five steps to helping an individual according to the bystander effect: noticing, interpreting, taking responsibility, deciding how to help and then helping (Latané & Darley, 1970). The people in the meeting might have not noticed that the comment and that is was inappropriate, then they need to feel safe to say something about it (also social and psychological safety). After that they need to decide how to help, however if they do not know how to help (and/or the company provides no information about this subject), they might not help. So, keeping this in mind it might lead to more integrity breaches than people are aware of at this moment.

The third and last possible predictor is ingrained behaviour. Some of the coworkers working longer than 10 years at the organization show ingrained behaviour. They are aware of how the processes work within the organization and know how to stay just on the edge of the 'correct' side. However, this might not be done completely consciously, as the dual process theory suggests (Evans et al., 2023; Watson et al., 2022). The theory describes two individual cognitive systems that are used for making decisions. System 1 is automatic, thoughtless and quick. System 2 is purposeful and slower, here a person considers multiple options. It is a possibility that the longer working coworkers use system 1 more often for certain tasks, since they have done it quite a number of times. So they do not have to think about the task anymore, but that does not mean that they have been doing it correctly all this time. What happens if the form changes slightly? This might lead to more integrity breaches.

Discussion

The factors might not be direct predictors of integrity breaches, since the participants were coworkers with little to no knowledge of integrity topics. So, it is more likely that the mentioned factors are pressure points/obstacles. The lack of no knowledge also made it difficult to really get to bottom of a few topics. Some interviews were held online, which might mean some information regarding the body language of the coworkers was lost. However it was nice to hear that almost all the participants said that they enjoyed the conversation.

It was also possible that some participants gave socially acceptable answers, since the subject was very sensitive. Hopefully this was limited by the fact that the researcher held an independent position from the organization. The confidentially was also emphasized during the interviews. The participants were also not specifically asked about their own integrity/behaviour, but more about those around them. These factors hopefully limited the chance on receiving socially acceptable answers, however there was still a chance.

Recommendations

The first recommendation is to break up the code of conduct in pieces, to discuss the information and to make a shorter document. A good code of conduct is supposed to be supportive, clarifying and inspiring (Huis van Klokkenluiders, 2017; Rijksoverheid, 2023; TNO, 2020). An option for this is making use of a poster or infographic, with for example do's and don'ts or 10 behaviour rules (ROC Tilburg, z.d; ROC TOP, z.d; O&O Fonds GGZ, 2018). The poster/infographic can be sent via email and/or displayed inside the building. This can be a good starting point for the integrity, code of conduct discussion. It is important that the discussion is open and safe for everyone, so it might also be good to create a training for managers on how to lead a discussion (Wouters & Maesschalck, 2009; Forsyth, 2019; Johnson & Frank, 2002; Rabinowitz, z.d). In the future it might also be an idea to register the background data of perpetrators in categories (to prevent any ethical or privacy concern)

(for example the same categories as used in this document). Then it might be possible to connect the integrity breaches to a certain group. It might also be interesting for the organization to do further research into the time pressure and work enjoyment (Steffens, 2021).

During the literature review it became clear that there is not a lot of information about (predictors of) integrity breaches and possible prevention methods. Mostly likely because of the sensitivity and confidentiality of the subject. The most related subject was the display of dishonest behaviour (Mazar et al, 2008; Gino et al, 2009; De Vries et al, 1988; Bandura, 1986, 1991). It would be very interesting for organizations to do further public research about the subject (Maesschalck et al., 2013; Wouters & Maesschalck, 2009), since it might help them prevent integrity breaches. The recommendation is then to also talk with both perpetrators of integrity breaches and ordinary coworkers, in order to get the difference between predictors and pressure points/obstacles.

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Appendix

Tabel 2

Results of the interviews with the coworkers

Codes	Frequency
<u>Atmosphere and work experience</u>	<u>28</u>
• Nice, good and open atmosphere	28
• Less contact moments and less presence at the office	20
<u>Norms and values</u>	<u>24</u>
• Transfer by social contacts	17
• Personal	13
o Experience	6
o Common sense	3
<u>Pressure points and obstacles</u>	<u>24</u>
• Confusion and uncertainty surrounding the rules	11
• Time pressure	10
o Pressure around the production	2
o Political influences	4
o Communication problems	3
o Procedures	6
o Peak times	2
o Healthy pressure	3
• Pressure from the environment	7
• Not feeling heard	3
• Other relevant information	
o Less knowledge	2
o Power balance	1

○ Less contact moments	2
○ Stuck in current position	1

Colleagues and management	<u>27</u>
• Intense discussions	5
○ Stays professional	4
• Still a lot left to learn about intgrity	2
• Examples	6
• Buddy system (new coworkers has a contact point in the organization, which is a other coworker)	4

Knowledge and attitude	<u>28</u>
• Does not know the code of conduct	24
○ Knows the code of conduct	3
○ Partially	1
• Did a training regarding integrity	6
○ Does not remember the contents	3
• There is attention for integrity within the company	8
○ Mostly on social safety	2
○ Made people in management position think about integrity for the future	3

Unwanted behaviour and misuse of company means	<u>26</u>
• Unwanted behaviour definition	26
○ About the feelings of the other person	23
○ Physical or verbal	18
○ Subjective / gray area	25
• Misuse of company means	26
○ Believe it happens within the organization	10
○ Have seen that something is missing from the work environment	4
○ There is no one to check certain forms	7
○ Unclear rules	4
○ Does not pay attention to 'things' related to integrity	3

Background data	<u>24</u>
• Sees no difference in background data	13
• New coworkers made the people longer at the organization think	3
• People longer at the organization know the ways around	4
• Difference between men and women	2
• Personal character	9

Changes in the organization	<u>12</u>
• More attention and change surrounding integrity	10
○ Change for the better	6

What can improve regarding integrity?	<u>28</u>
• More attention for integrity	13
• Make the rules and information more clear, concrete and compact	12
• Good role model behaviour from management	5

Total participants	28