The Belgian customs officers and corruption in a global trade market

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Anti-corruption training for Belgian customs officers

- A training organised by the National School of Finance and Taxes on the initiative of the Belgian Customs

- Trainers:
  - GoFS: the Flemish part
  - ULg: the French part

- Aim of this training: to sensitize the customs officers for corruption in their work environment and to the corruption vulnerability of their complex job:
  - 2008-2009: level a and level b – more than 1000 customs officers took one compulsory training day
  - 2009-2010: level c and level d – more than 1200 customs officers will take one compulsory training day

- Content:
  - A theoretical introduction
  - A dilemma discussion
  - Communication training: role-playing

The vulnerability for corruption

- The aetiology of corruption for the Belgian customs
  - Macro-level
  - Meso-level: the organisation
  - Micro-level

- Motivation
- Opportunity
- Control:
  - Neutralisation / moral disengagement
  - Corruption as a process
Individual motivation: difficult to discuss

Organisational motivation: the protection of the economy
- Customs is the facilitator of trade
- All for (big) business: a pressure on people not to control

Opportunities
- A label of corruption inherited from the past
- New public management: the client-oriented approach
- Leadership: a system of inherent collusion:
  - Receptions, parties, exaggerated working dinners, trips, …
  - Customs officers who are working in the company building
- Regulation: a lack of straight rules: the self-made customs officer
  - DR: tolerating fake goods / accepting favours and presents
- A computer-controlled system:
  - A computer-controlled system losing authority to an incapable system
  - … that is not working: Do it yourself-attitude

Control
- PLDA: a system of “control”
- Training of new-comers / starters
- The independent complaint desk / no whistleblowing rules
- Communication:
  - No top-down control - no support of the top
  - No informal social control of colleagues: Some work as if they have an independent profession
Moral disengagement

- Neutralization techniques and corruption
- Albert Bandura: Social cognitive theory on 'Moral Disengagement' (1990 & 1996)
- Moral disengagement operates through eight different cognitive mechanisms:
  1. Euphemistic labelling
  2. Moral justification
  3. Advantageous comparison
  4. Displacement of responsibility
  5. Diffusion of responsibility
  6. Distortion of consequences
  7. Dehumanization
  8. Attribution of blame

Scientific work on moral disengagement has remained primarily theoretical and used in explanations of military violence, severe violent crimes, cybercrimes

Celia Moore theoretical concept of moral disengagement in the context of organizational corruption (2008)

- Celia Moore (2008)
Conclusions

- Prevention: both organisational & behavioural approach
- Corruption nestled in the system is hard to stop
- Handling corruption through prevention?