Picking up the pieces: transitional points in acts of corruption
INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE PREPARATION OF THE PAPER

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FULL PAPER

The purpose of this presentation is to provide a 'work in progress' outline of a current project undertaken by the Corruption and Crime Commission (CCC) and Murdoch University. The will include a discussion of the processes undertaken and an overview of the project design, as the project is still underway a preliminary analysis of interview data will be highlighted. The project aims to analyse and explore the perceptions and interpretations of people who have been involved in a CCC investigation. The presentation will begin with an outline of the aims of the project; it will then discuss some of the problems encountered in undertaking qualitative research in this area. The next part of the presentation will explain the design of the project and the analytical methods. The paper will finally present some of the preliminary findings drawn from the first round of interviews undertaken with participants. In that this presentation acts as a 'work in progress' it does not articulate a central or unifying position on the findings to date.

This project is working from the basic research question of: how do the contextual factors that contribute to corruption inform our understanding of corruption. In developing this question the project has two related anticipated outcomes: first, to add conceptual detail to the ways in which corruption can be understood. The objective in meeting this outcome is to provide further tools that can be employed in anti-corruption strategies. The second anticipated outcome refers to identifying strategies that may assist with the post investigation phase of a corruption allegation. While there is contemporary research that points to the consequences of corruption in terms of economic measures in relation to downturns in productivity and growth [1], the misallocation of resources[2], a reduction in forms of investment [3]and the effects of corruption in the public sector on staff morale [4.] There is however scant reference to the long lasting effects of corruption allegations, whether proven or not, on people who have been part of a corruption investigation process [5]. While this project acts as an exploratory study into the ways in which corruption affects the lives of people who have been part of CCC investigations, it does so in order to inform our understanding of corruption, its effects on personal and institutional practices and to identify strategies that could be

incorporated into educational programs that aim to reduce the incidence of corruption in the public sector.

1. PROCESSES AND DESIGN

One of the key ideas embedded in this study is to explore the perceptions and interpretations of people who have been personally involved in a CCC investigation. In order to do so the project requires that people willingly articulate their 'story' as well as provide their views and interpretations of the investigation and any outcomes derived from this process. These two factors have raised several complex issues in relation to both inviting people to participate in the study and ensuring that their privacy is protected. While the study was developed to meet the protocols of Murdoch University's Human Research Ethics Committee this did require an extensive consultation period with the Chair of the Ethics committee in order to address concerns regarding the protection of confidential information (see the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* 2007).

The project has employed an inductive design in order to inform our theoretical understanding of corruption [6]. As such, the project is premised on observation through the use of interview data, pattern recognition and subsequently situating these themes in relation to key literature in the area [7]. This project has drawn on a similar 'corruption grid' developed from the work of de Graff and Huberts [8]. This includes the variables: the individual, the organisation, networks and investigation. Each variable is then broken down into subcategories, for the individual this includes: motives, processes and character; for the organisation, structures, context and culture, networks comprises relationships, connections and incidents, and investigation includes knowledge, interpretation and effects. The interviews of each participant are then mapped and coded into the corruption grid [9]. An example grid is displayed in Table 1 and Table 2.

Individual			Organisation		
motives	processes	character	structures	context	culture

Table 1: Corruption grid

Networks			Investigation		
relationships	connections	incidents	knowledge	interpretation	effects

Table 2: Corruption grid

These grids are then overlaid with Bourdeau's theoretical lens of the theory of action (TA) [10] and Schutz's analysis of the structures of the everyday world (EW) [11]. This matrix enables the study to track the participants' perceptions and interpretations in relation to the dynamic conditions in which corruption occurs and investigations take place.

2. PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS

2.1. Individual

In the interview data to date one participant has identified that their actions were driven by a justification for supplementary payment from business connections. While recognising that this was

'wrong' the participant justified these actions in terms of doing 'extra' work which therefore required 'extra' payment. For the remaining participants, the idea that they had been engaging in 'corrupt' behaviour or that their actions could be constituted as some form of 'misconduct' appeared incomprehensible. While three people within the current cohort had some misconduct findings against them, each person stated that they felt that their actions had been in response to 'pressure' from citizens demands or 'pressure' from within their organisation in terms of 'getting things done quickly'. For these three people, the idea that their actions were motivated by some form of 'personal gain' [12] or a 'moral failure in relation to the public interest' [13] appeared bewildering. For the remainder of the interview cohort, those who identified themselves as bystanders, the preliminary analysis has highlighted that these people invariably viewed the actions of their colleagues, excluding the person who was receiving financial benefit, as 'normal' responses to the pressures of the job.

In terms of the processes around corrupt behaviour the participants commented that their initial response by way of 'favouring' the demands of some clients over others was not taken lightly or that it made it easy to continuing to engage in these practices. The three participants commented that 'favouring' people in order to alleviate the pressures that were placed on them added to their 'stress' about work. However, for the one participant who did receive financial benefit, this was viewed as 'one step leading to another' which, in effect, left this person articulating a sense of 'being caught in a strange situation'. All of the participants commented that whether through granting more favourable conditions to 'customers' or through having received financial benefit due to 'extra' work their actions made it difficult to stop when the same customers returned with further work related demands.

The participants' interpretation of their character also raises questions in regards to research in the area of corruption [14]. For several of the 'bystander' participants, their perception of the person who was found to be engaging in corrupt actions was one of 'flamboyance' and 'loud' who 'liked to work on his own'. This same participant also described himself as someone who could 'get things done'. For the remainder of the participants, those who had findings of misconduct against them, their perception of their own character varied from 'hardworking' 'competent' and 'working as part of a team' to 'not being able to get the bosses to hear me'. In terms of situating these views in a broader picture, these comments suggest the personality of people who may engage in misconduct requires further detailed exploration and analysis.

2.2. Organisation

The preliminary analysis of the organisational structures and contexts that have been part of this study suggest two key areas of investigation. First, the participants invariably commented that they were not aware of the structures within the organisation with which to deal with demands that were placed on them. This was especially so with people working at lower levels within particular public sector agencies. Moreover, several participants commented that he or she had not had any formal induction or training regarding the structure of reporting or how to request assistance. All of the participants discussed that in part these actions were part of the cultural heritage of the organisation and that while they were aware that things were 'changing' they were not aware how these changes impacted on their daily working practices.

2.3. Networks

The preliminary analysis around networks has indicated that the majority of the participants did not feel they had the appropriate skills to deal with 'customers'. Several of the participants indicated that an integral part of their work required that they form relationships with business people who require the services of these government agencies. These participants also recognised that for many business people offering 'gifts' was seen as a normal part of the corporate world, but that they had no experience in dealing with the 'constant' offerings of gifts or favours. One particular participant commented that while he had accepted a favour from a customer, he was not comfortable with the arrangement and that he had tried to remedy the situation but that the business partner had simply commented that 'you're into deep now'. Managing these external relationships was especially problematic for the lower level public servants as these participants found that they did not have the interpersonal skills to deal with the situation and once started, the situation appeared to be 'out of their control'.

2.4 Investigation

One of the key imperatives in this study is to provide some indicative areas whereby the Corruption and Crime Commission could enhance their investigation procedures and outcomes. With that in mind, the interviewees were asked a series of questions regarding their views of the CCC and the investigation process. Several preliminary themes have been highlighted. In the area of knowledge, all of the participants were aware of the nature of the work of the Commission, however each participant commented that he or she had no knowledge of the Corruption and Crime Commission Act, the powers held by the Office or that the Commission would investigation incidents that were 'at this level' or that the Commission would undertake extended investigations.

In the area of interpretation of the investigation, all of the participants commented on the need for an organisation that explores and identifies corruption in the public sector, and importantly, that such an organisation does require power to scrutinize the actions of public servant employees. However, each member of the interview cohort to date has commented that he or she experienced the investigation officers as 'heavy handed, confrontational, accusatory, and assumed a tone of 'guilt' ''. Moreover, the participants who had been central players in these investigations commented that the most stressful aspect of the investigation was that it was handled in a covert and secret manner. That often the person did not know what the 'charges' were until he or she appeared at the Commission for either a closed hearing or one that was aired in public. Further to this, that once the person had been informed of the investigation he or she could not comment on or talk about this process with anyone. This accordingly left the people concerned in an isolated position, feelings of vulnerability and a loss of control of one's life have been the main themes noted to date.

The effects from the investigation process, according to the interviewees, range from ongoing medical assistance for diagnosed depression, medication to that effect, mood swings, a loss of confidence in one's self, impact on the person's personal relationships, a loss of trust in friends and not wanting to engage with people outside their close family. Several participants discussed a lingering sense of 'shame' that was not warranted given the nature of the person's actions, a lack of support from the agency, a perception that he or she was 'marked' as corrupt and an ongoing 'fear' of making decisions. Some participants discussed that their close managers were very supportive,

however these participants articulated that 'management' had not acknowledged the difficulties that staff had faced or the detrimental effects of the investigation on individuals' lives. As one participant commented, "it would have been good if they (management) had come and said we know you have all been through a rough time and we will take some of these ideas to make working here better". This accordingly, was not the case and while people have 'moved on with their work' each person commented that there is still a sense of carrying a 'black mark' around.

These key themes serve as preliminary signposts that will guide a deeper level of analysis through the work of Bourdeau and Schutz. As this is a 'work in progress' further interviews are underway, with the aim to build on these preliminary ideas.

3. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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