

Trust and Integrity Violations in Finnish Public Administration: The Views of Citizens

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ABSTRACT

Trust and integrity are the cornerstones of a democratic and open society. Good governance and transparency should be studied by observing citizens' influence, particularly when the citizen perspective is often neglected in empirical research on administrative ethics.

This article deals with trust and integrity violations in Finnish public administration from the citizens' viewpoint. We survey how ordinary citizens judge (significance valuated) trust and integrity violations in Finnish public administration. The following ethical issues are analysed:

- trust in public organizations and institutions
- serious violations of integrity, such as bribery, theft and fraud
- other forms of corruption such as old boy networks, nepotism, linkages in business life and bad and careless treatment of citizens.

The evidence is based on the empirical data from a large-scale citizen questionnaire implemented by the University of Vaasa in Spring 2008. Two of the 18 questions of our questionnaire form are reported upon here, including unstructured responses from open-ended questions. The original sample of the survey incorporates 5,000 Finnish people. Compared to other national surveys, the sample of the study is regarded as relatively high.

Ethical governance is based on trust. Among citizens, trust is a sort of general confidence in politicians and public authorities. Ethical governance is also based on model examples given by politicians and public authorities. In the case of Finland, public organizations and institutions so far enjoy the confidence of ordinary citizens, and estimations of unethical actions were quite moderate. However, citizens estimate that old boy networks, nepotism and excessive linkages in business life as corruption forms are quite common in the Finnish society. We expect that if unethical actions, e.g. excessive linkages in business life, become more usual, this will sooner or later interact with trust.

The article continues the methodological discussion of the relevance of survey-based research in administrative ethics. By collecting citizens' opinions, attitudes and expectations about chosen ethical issues, we expect that the article will provide the grounds both to consider and develop 'citizen-focused' ethical governance.

The article is based on our conference paper at EGPA Conference 2008 in Rotterdam (Study Group: Ethics and Integrity of Governance).

Key words: administrative ethics, trust, integrity, corruption, citizens, survey-based research.

1. Introduction

Trust and unethical actions: previous discussion

Administrative ethics and integrity violations have been the subject of considerable scholarly study and research (e.g. Frederickson and Ghere 2005; Cooper 2006; Lawton and Doig 2006; Sampford et al. 2007; Menzel 2007, Huberts et al. 2008). Basically trust is a trait of deserving confidence. Trustworthiness is a moral value. Are there clear explanations in previous research how trust is related to unethical actions? What causes lost in trust, low trust or distrust? (see more, Christensen and Laegreid 2002, 2005; Kim, Helgesen and Ahn 2002; Bouckaert and Van de Walle 2003; Heinzman and Marson 2005; Menzel 2005; Warren 2006; Chang and Chu 2006; Van de Walle et al 2008; Six and Huberts 2008.)

People's trust in public institutions is a complex and multidimensional issue. Warren (2006: 164) refers to Jeremy Bentham's classical statement according to which every good political institution is a system of distrust, because politicians have authority and temptations to abuse it. That is why we can ask: Are politicians and public sector leaders trustworthy? One single factor to explain trust does not exist. Those who are involved in politics might think more of their own welfare than of the welfare of citizens. Secondly, a high level of trust in one institution tends to extend to other institutions. Thirdly, in general terms, corruption decreases institutional trust.

As Six and Huberts (2008: 65-69) stress, trust is an attribute of the trustor, and trustworthiness is an attribute of the trustee. In our analysis, citizens as trustors evaluate trust in three types of Finnish institutions and organizations. From the trustees' viewpoint, citizens judge the level of integrity by giving their assessment of the frequency of unethical actions in the Finnish politico-administrative system. Trustworthiness is studied in relation to serious and other forms of corruption. The concept of trust covers both politicians and public authorities.

Integrity violations belong to the debate of political and administrative trust. Corruptive phenomena erode citizens' trust in the administrative and political systems, and there are numerous debates about officials' and politicians' independence from external linkages. Indiscreet behaviour by those who govern may damage public confidence (Isaksson 1997, 10; Fawcett and Wardman 2008, 123, 136).

Our previous contribution to integrity violations dealt with the control mechanisms of corruption in Finland (Salminen et al. 2007). In that discussion it remained unanswered whether the country as the least corrupt nation in the world is perceived

to be as corruption-free as the international statistics (Transparency International) portray. In Table 1, a limited country ranking of corruption is presented. True or not, in a comparative setting, Finland is still in a good position. But when analyzing the views of citizens, this ranking list is partly beyond the questions we pose here.

Table 1.

Country rankings in Corruption Perception Indices: Finland among neighboring and Baltic countries.

Year and rank	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Country	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank
ESTONIA	29	33	31	27	24	28	27
FINLAND	1	1	1	2	1	1	5
LATVIA	52	57	57	51	49	51	52
LITHUANIA	36	41	44	44	46	51	58
NORWAY	12	9	8	8	6	9	14
RUSSIA	71	86	90	126	121	143	147
SWEDEN	5	6	6	6	6	4	1

Part of this is exactly what we are trying to do in this presentation. Trust in different types of institutions and organizations, and different forms of corruption are described. In the Finnish survey data, citizens express their views, opinions, attitudes and expectations towards trust and unethical actions. However, comparative settings of explaining trust in different countries (Kim, Helgesen and Ahn 2002) and common explanations of distrust in the public sector (Van de Walle et al 2008) are not included in this analysis.

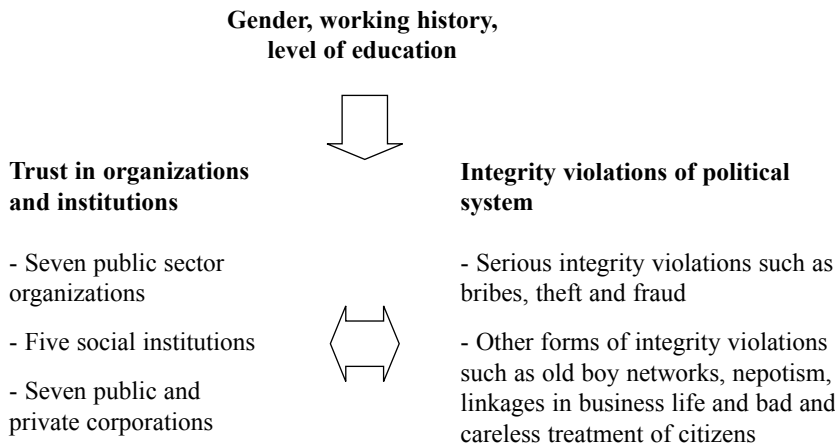
The focus of our presentation

Two core ethical issues are examined, namely trust and integrity violations. Although trust is clarified in Finland through academic research and governmental reports, there is a limited number of research reports which relate trust to unethical actions in parallel. The interconnection between trust and corruption is rather rarely studied as far as it concerns citizens' views. As far as it concerns our focus, we share the opinion of Van de Walle (2008, 215-216), that the relationship between trust and integrity violations is complicated rather than easy. Do perceptions of trust determine the views on integrity violations or vice versa?

According to our considerations, a fresh approach to the integrity issue is how ordinary citizens view trust and corruptive behavior in Finnish public administration. In reflection of the hardening ethical climate of the Finnish society, politicians and leading public employees are not safe anymore from public debate and severe criticism. A few ethical issues are taken under closer examination here as structured in

Figure 1. The subjects of the questions represent both sustaining and violating integrity. Basically trust is a part of maintaining integrity. According to our questionnaire, other issues of integrity, such as good administration, accountability, responsibility and openness, are not included in this analysis. Trust was estimated through 19 governmental and non-governmental Finnish institutions and organizations (for details, see Figure 2). On the contrary, as part of violating integrity, unethical actions are described through the seven forms of unethical actions, including one open-ended question named by citizens themselves (for details, see Figure 3).

Figure 1.
Chosen issues for ethical analysis.



More accurately, two questions are posed here. The first is how trustworthy Finnish citizens estimate the above-mentioned organizations and institutions to be. Issues of trust are examined through trust in public sector organizations, trust in social institutions and trust in public and private corporations. The second question is how frequently the above-mentioned eight unethical actions take place in the estimations of Finnish citizens. The detailed list of questions is presented in the Appendix. In addition to these two questions, we analyze three socio-demographic variables, namely gender, working history and level of education. We try to find differences in opinions between the different respondent groups.

The national citizen survey

For gathering opinions, attitudes and expectations – as we did –, the survey technique is an accurate tool in administrative ethics when the purpose is to reach a wider population (see e.g. Bossaert and Demmke 2005; Salminen 2006; Demmke et al. 2007; Moilanen and Salminen 2007; Van de Walle 2008). The evidence of this research is based on the empirical data from a national citizen survey implemented

by the University of Vaasa.¹ The questionnaire consists of three main themes: citizens' assessment of:

- 1) ethics of public services, such as guaranteeing public services, ethical values of services and the future of public services
- 2) good administration, such as administrative principles, accountability and the realization of virtues
- 3) ethics of the political system, such as democracy, openness and transparency and change of ethics in society.

The questionnaire form is twelve pages in length. Altogether, it covers 18 question groups and 128 statements and assessments of the ethical themes. Each of the three themes has one open-ended question. Three additional open-ended questions were included at the end of the form. Through these questions, a lot of personal stories were collected from the respondents. The written-down material is about 300 pages.

The questionnaire, with separate introductory letters and postage-paid return envelopes, was sent in March and re-sent in April 2008. The survey was sent to 5,000 Finnish citizens, aged 25-65. The sample was chosen to represent Finland in miniature. The survey-sample was received from the Finnish public agency called the Population Register Centre. All the questions are multiple-choice. The multiple-choice questions were executed in Likert's scale to secure the statistical runs. The answers were recorded in the statistics program SPSS.

The careful selection of the respondents raises the validity of the results of our study. What also speaks for their validity is the relatively high response rate. Although incentives were not used, the response rate rose to 40.4 %. More than 2,000 carefully completed questionnaire forms were returned.

2. Trust in organizations and institutions

The first issue in our article is trust, which can be regarded as one of the leading ethical values in the Nordic countries. If trust is lost in the public realm, much is lost. The whole political and administrative system will appear in a different light.

Trust is studied through different dimensions: trust between individuals, trust towards the activity of professionals, trust inside and within organizations, trust between organizations, trust in politicians, or trust inside the community. (Lawton and Doig 2006, 16-17.) When talking about trust, it is a question of citizens' emotions, beliefs, opinions and experiences shaping through many processes. Part of the opinions are already formulating as youngsters through the process of socialization. We agree with Christensen and Laegreid (2005, 487) that when a citizen strongly

¹ The survey is a part of the large research program "Citizens first? Ethical Government in Terms of Citizens" (<http://www.uwasa.fi/eettinenhallinto/english/>) in the University of Vaasa. The three-year program is funded by the Academy of Finland.

trusts one organization, he/she is likely to also trust other public sector organizations.

All distrust is not harmful. A certain amount of distrust is healthy and functional: it is needed to maintain the level of administrative accountability. The optimal level of trust depends on the development of political and administrative culture. The certain level of trust may be high in one but low in another country. (Van de Walle et al 2008, 52; see also Hofstede 1980.) There is no single or unambiguous explanation why some organization seems to be trustworthy and another does not. It is the question of personal experience, the experience of the circle of acquaintances, images and the history and base of the trustor. (Van de Walle 2005, 224-225.)

Lewis and Gilman (2005, 21) state that public sector ethics is different from private sector ethics because the citizens' trust keeps democracy effective – or at least alive. Strict ethical standards are included in public trust. The OECD report (2000) underlines that public service also means public trust. Citizens assume they will get impartial service, and when the service level ensures impartial and trustworthy services, trust in public administration increases. Public trust is an essential factor when talking about the successes and losses of organizations. Trust is a question of an organizations' reputation. Institutionalized trust is more important to the society than personal, informal trust which can be connected to old boy networks, political patronage or even criminal mafia (Harisalo and Stenvall 2001; Harford 2008).

Why research institutions and organizations? Citizens have much more connections with administrative institutions and organizations than with political, representative institutions and organizations. Experiences from administrative actions have a direct connection to thoughts about the political system on the whole. (Rothstein 2005, 108-109)

Empirical findings

In Figure 2, the citizens' estimation of the trustworthiness of 19 Finnish public institutions and organizations are presented in three different categories. To us, the results are not outstandingly surprising. Compared to previous surveys of other countries (Listhaug 1984: 114; Warren 2006: 165), the figure indicates that the police (police officers), the legal system (judges) and the education system (teachers, professors) and also the military (military officers) are highly ranked. The results of Harisalo and Stenvall (2001) are similar to our results: police and military at the top, and media and science in third and fourth place in Finland. In the World Values profile study (Borg et al. 2007), it turns out that from 1981 to 2005, public trust in the police and military has got even better. We share the opinion that as long as citizens trust in public institutions, the whole society works better.

Our survey indicates that citizens trust strongly in such public sector organizations and social institutions as the police, universities and polytechnics, elementary and comprehensive schools, the military and hospitals and health centres. Surprisingly among public corporations, The Finnish lottery monopoly also belongs to the top five.

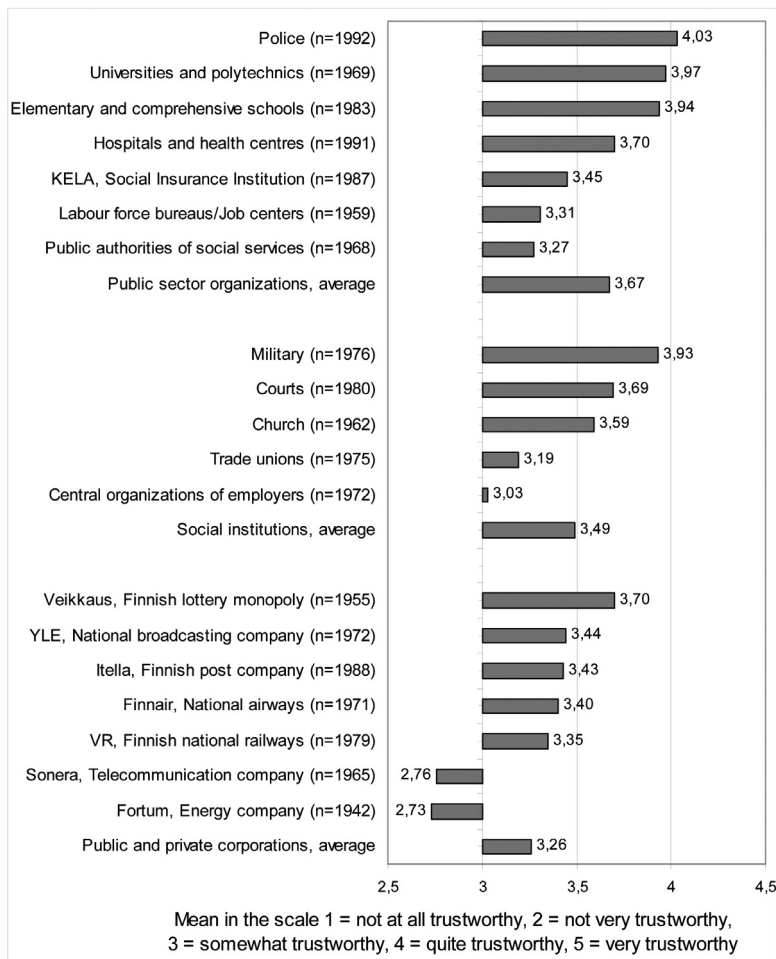
In the personal (individual) stories of the questionnaire, the majority of criticism

concentrated on the social insurance institution, the health care system and labour force bureaus. Even so, all these institutions and organizations enjoy moderate public trust. The percentage shares of quite and very trustworthy are several times higher than the shares of not very or not at all trustworthy (Appendix). Because most of these institutions and organizations represent branches of the administration, the figures in fact give a broader conception of trust in the Finnish politico-administrative system.

Trust in public and private corporations strongly depends on the individual organization. As private corporations, Fortum and Sonera did not enjoy trust, but Finnair and Itella did. Trade unions and the central organizations of employers did not enjoy as much trust as traditional public organizations and institutions. If the value “3” is considered as the turning point for “trust” (≥ 3) and “less trust” (≤ 3), the average of each group is clearly higher than 3, and only two private corporations remain under the mean value.

Figure 2.

Trust in Finnish public organizations and institutions: the views of citizens.



Moreover, one question of the six statements of democracy in our survey dealt with trust among the Finnish politicians. The following statement was set: Local politicians are more reliable than politicians at the national level. More than 30 percent agreed with the statement and less than 30 percent disagreed. In that specific question, the difference was not remarkable. The majority of respondents was more or less neutral. They did not agree or disagree.

When asking about the trust in institutions and organizations, we are basically interested in the trustworthiness of the whole political system. We should keep in mind that our survey was carried out at a time when exceptional unclarity occurred in the political life in Finland. For instance, the private lives of prime and foreign ministers were continually discussed in the media. The limits of their privacy were tested. Investigative journalism was left aside, and public debates became more or less sensational. The prime minister felt that his privacy was infringed upon, and the case is considered in court. The foreign minister lost his political confidence, and was forced to resign and leave the Government after a heavy public debate.

In our questionnaire forms, several comments were made about these issues. We suspect that those incidents might have had an influence on citizens' attitudes in our survey. Due to the time period of the survey implementation, the impact of views of the citizens is more short- than long-term.

Gender, working history and education as background factors – do they matter?

Is it possible to explain the reactions of respondents by different variables? Some tentative findings are worth highlighting. As mentioned earlier, the data was processed through three background variables: gender, working history and level of education. We have calculated the percentage shares of statements for each group. We report here the differences we consider to be worth mentioning because the result strikes us as remarkable or surprising.

First, if the gender of the respondents is considered, women express higher trust in the majority of asked institutions and organizations: health care, the military and the Finnish lottery monopoly were more trusted by men than women.

Secondly, if the working history of the respondents is considered, three main groups are identified: those whose working history is 1) in the public sector, 2) in the private sector, 3) both in the public and private sectors. Working history as a background variable gives a couple of significant differences between groups. Those who have worked in the private sector clearly expressed the highest trust in the military and the Finnish lottery monopoly in comparison with the other two groups. Generally, however, those working in the public sector trusted the organizations and institutions asked about the most. One reason may be that with a long working history in the public sector, you are familiar with how the system works and you feel sympathy to the whole sector, not only to your own branch.

Thirdly, the level of education brings out a couple of opposing views between respondents. It became evident that respondents with more education had significantly more trust in courts than respondents with less education. On the contrary, respondents with less education felt more confidence in the majority of the Finnish

public and private corporations.² The less educated also clearly trusted trade unions and central organizations of employers more than respondents with more education.

3. Integrity violations

Integrity violations can vary from corruption to unethical social behavior in the working environment. Integrity violations are divided to cover corruption, fraud and theft of organizational resources, conflicts of interest, the abuse and manipulation of information, discriminatory treatment and the waste of organizational resources (Kolthoff et al. 2007, 408-409; OECD 2007).

Connected to trust, another issue deals with particular integrity violations, as described in Figure 3 (see also Appendix). Two fundamental types of integrity violations are described here. Bribes, theft and fraud belong to the serious forms of corruption, and the rest of integrity violations are typical of maladministration, bad governance etc. The grouping is basically the same as used by Vartola and af Ursin (1987, 239) in their research report. We also wanted to avoid the strong normative stress. But even if the other integrity violations are not considered to be as grave as the serious forms of corruption (for example bribery), it does not mean that they are acceptable features of administrative and political system.

Different corruptive or integrity violations have taken place in Finnish public administration since 2000. Among public officials³ and individual public servants, cases of unethical behavior have dealt with bribery and fraud, misuse of public office, doubts of discrimination such as sexual harassment, complaints of mismanagement and lack of control. The cases have occurred at universities, local government, third-sector organizations, state government and public sector companies. In most cases, public servants were suspected of integrity violations, but were not sentenced for any crime. However, the discussion in newspapers and other media has been lively around the different corruption cases. As described earlier, Finland has fallen from the top to the sixth position in the newest Transparency International CPI-index.

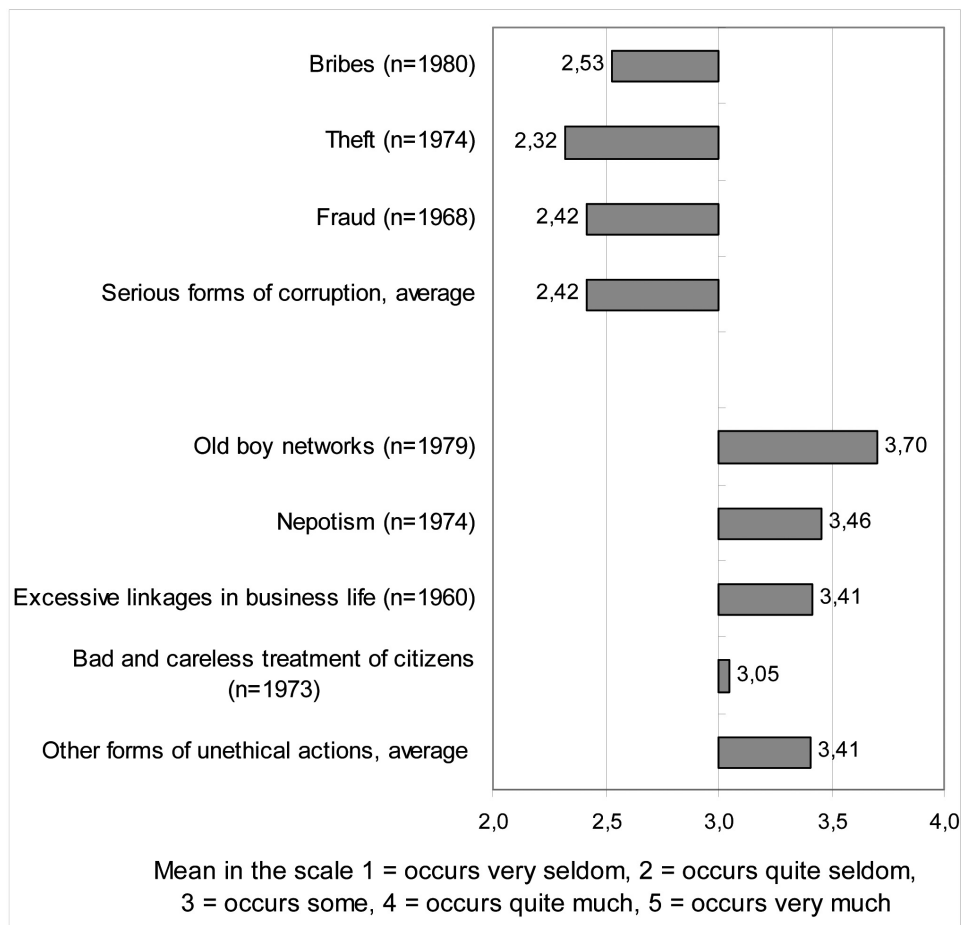
In Figure 3, the main finding is that the judgement of citizens is not very harsh. In the eyes of citizens, the serious forms of corruption are found much more seldom than the other types of integrity violations. Besides, the differences between different types of integrity violations are relatively big.

² Despite the background variable under study, the least drastic opinions (the lowest standard deviations) were found in the universities and polytechnics and elementary and comprehensive schools and the most drastic opinions (highest standard deviations) were almost regularly found in the church and trade unions.

³ As a term, 'public officials' refers here to the whole of the 'politico-administrative system', which includes both national and local 'politicians' and 'public authorities'.

Figure 3.

Integrity violations: the views of citizens.



Bribes

To an ordinary citizen, the term corruption is mainly connected to serious forms of wrongdoing, such as bribery. The OECD report (2007) specifies the main elements of bribery as: 1) offering, paying or promising, 2) financial or some other kind of advantage, 3) direct or indirect, promised or paid to official, family member, organization or company, 4) undue, 5) purpose to offend against a law, and 6) obtaining or retaining business.

In the 2007 ministerial report, Finnish public officials considered bribery to be the most unethical way of action. Making decisions without appropriate preparation and sitting on data/information, unnecessarily delaying issues, scheming in appointments of the office, and the unwillingness to regenerate were mentioned at the top of the list of the most unethical procedures. Bribery is in a league of its own; the other actions mentioned are to be categorized more in administrative corruption. Civil servants express that they relatively regularly or occasionally meet unethical behav-

ior and corruption-related issues in their daily work. Forms of grand corruption, such as bribery, are rare. (Ministry of Finance 2007, 39-40, 56, 78)

How is the state of affairs in the eyes of citizens? We start by asking whether there is a bribery problem in Finnish public administration. According to our survey data, the closer figures of bribes are as follows: 47 % of respondents considered that taking or giving bribes occurs very or rather seldom and 16 % rather or very frequently. The relatively high percentage of bribery occurring occasionally (37 %) is rather alarming. Besides, altogether 16 % estimate that bribery occurs rather or very frequently. When compared with the opposing alternatives, the focus of the responses is still in the alternatives very or rather seldom.

Theft and fraud

How are theft and fraud separate from bribery? Theft, peculation, and fraud involve the taking or conversion of money or other property or items which are valuable. It concerns an individual who has access to them through position or employment, but is not entitled to them. In the cases of embezzlement and theft, the person entrusted takes the property. Fraud consists of the use of false or misleading information to bluff the property's owner to relinquish the property voluntarily. In legal definitions, theft means taking property or cash, but in other definitions, it also covers other immaterial values such as the stealing of information. (Langseth 2007, 11)

The situation seems to be better than in the estimates about bribery. In the survey data, 59 % of the respondents judged that theft occurs very or rather seldom and only 9 % rather or very frequently. In the case of fraud, the figures were 56 % and 12 % respectively. The majority of citizens estimate that theft and peculation occur either very little or quite little. It is a little surprising that bribery was estimated to be more common than theft or fraud. Fraud is estimated to be more common than theft and peculation. Still about one third of the citizens estimate that theft and fraud exist occasionally.

In the above-mentioned unethical cases, such as bribery, theft and fraud, the state of affairs is generally positive in Finnish public administration. But it does differ from one administrative branch to another. According to the annual Science Barometer in Finland, citizens' trust in science and scientific institutions has remained comparatively high from year to year. The general picture is not totally clean anymore. For example, from 2000 to 2007, there have been a couple of cases of heavy integrity violation in the university sector. These cases were widely discussed in the Finnish media. In higher education institutions, the evidence was obtained of receiving bribes, tax fraud and misuse of public office. This has led to trials, and few of the accused were sentenced to prison and/or to paying remarkable financial compensation. Some other individual persons from the higher education sector were also accused; the cases were processed legally, were publicized and got a lot of publicity, but the claims were completely dropped in court. However, the individuals were stigmatized as 'baddies' in the eyes of society.

Old boy networks and nepotism

The other group of unethical actions starts with old boy networks and nepotism. Old boy networks are structures which affect society, indirectly or directly, in decision-making. Nepotism does not relate to the self-interests of an official directly, but to the interests of someone near him or her, such as a family member, a member of the political party, a tribe member, or a member of the same religious group. Favoritism is based on several things, such as race, religion, geographical factors, political affiliation or personal and organizational relationships (clubs, associations). Favoritism has another side, too: the discrimination of certain groups. (Langseth 2007, 13)

The question of old boy networks has been widely discussed in Finland. Our survey confirms the importance of the issue in public debate. According to the results of our survey, 8 % of the respondents estimated that old boy networks exist very or rather seldom and 60 % estimated rather or very frequently. The corresponding percentages from nepotism were 14 and 49 (see Appendix). It seems like citizens feel old boy networks to be the most influential form of corruption in Finland. Comments and stories in the open-ended questions support this conclusion. Ethically it is very serious that 60 % of Finnish citizens think that old boy networks affect the society either rather or very frequently. Correspondingly, the figures of nepotism are also rather critical. Compared with the figures of bribes, the emphasis on responses is opposite: responses are emphasized in the alternatives of rather and very frequently compared with the opposite alternatives.

In Finland the old boy networks seem to be a bigger problem than expected on the grounds of reports of an offence (Korruptiotilannekuva 2008, 2). In the old boy networks, the services are not paid with money. Therefore the interdependence in these networks is different due to strong personal and informal linkages. If old boy networks and nepotism are a real and serious problem, what explains this?

We have a couple of assumptions. Perhaps the Finnish elite are more and more accustomed to cooperating through old boy networks. But one might doubt whether the networks fit in the other administrative structures and practices at the central and local levels. Because of the political favoritism which is widely spread in nominations to public office, citizens' attitudes towards nepotism and old boy networks are extremely negative.

Linkages in business life

Corruption commonly refers to acts that rest with public sector officials. The act can involve a transaction with a private sector actor, but the definition still concentrates on the public sector officials rather than the companies who pay the bribes. (O'Higgins 2006, 236) Public trust in public officials is among the important indicators of good governance. An excessive amount of linkages makes the public sector function more unreliably even if the public officials did not act against public interest when dealing with business life. The existence of these linkages is often a sign to citizens that there must be some dishonest business going on and that the old boy networks are working again.

In the eyes of the citizens, 13 % of respondents estimated that the excessive link-

ages occur rather or very seldom and 44 % estimated occurrence rather or very frequently. This result is not ethically flattering to politicians and public authorities. The recent events in Finland with relation to the financing of election campaigns from external sources are undoubtedly increasing citizens' suspicions concerning linkages in the business life.

Another important issue in the Finnish public discussion has been linkages in business life as a form of financing state and local elections. In Finland, the external financing of elections is regulated by a special law. The purpose of the Act on the disclosure of election financing from 2000 was to increase the transparency of election financing in order to clarify the possible personal interests of the candidates. The Act proved to be open to interpretations and gave room to a sort of secret behavior. Those who financed the leading candidates of the elections tried to support them anonymously and through special corporate arrangements. After that the public mess was ready.

In the law, there are no sanctions for those who do not make a declaration of more than 1,700 euros external financing, but basically, legal actions were not morally approved of by the public. Particularly the spirit of the law was broken by those who accepted the financial support without openness. Later, the names of donors were revealed and the donated sums of money turned out to be rather remarkable. The political parties in Government had received most of the financial support. The 'hidden' interplay between politicians and businessmen resulted in political consequences. The legitimacy of the political system was endangered, and the leading political parties gathered immediately in political negotiations concerning the election financing and the need of refining the rules of the game. Short-term measures of improving the ill-defined clauses in legislation were taken, and the Act was required to be renewed in the future.

Bad and careless treatment of citizens

As the last form of corruption, we will shortly discuss the bad and careless treatment of citizens. In the questionnaire form, the types of unethical treatment were not specified. With the term 'unethical treatment' we mean quite wide-ranging actions, including maladministration and mismanagement. The term maladministration is very wide and includes things such as delaying issues, incorrect actions or failure to take any action, failure to follow the procedures, failure to give information, misleading or inaccurate statements, inadequate consultation, and broken promises. Mismanagement is a form of maladministration. (Caiden 1991, 111)

The corruption-related cases investigated by the Finnish Ombudsman usually deal with delayed issues, insulting the principle of equality, negligence, improper justifications of decisions, lack of publicity, lack of hearing of the parties involved, discrimination, undelivered public notices, insufficient advice, and partiality. The investigations are based on the citizens' announcements. The names of complainants are not usually published, which increases the probability of denunciation. The amount of complaints has increased since 2003. The issues are categorized as maladministration or the like. (Salminen et al. 2007; Annual Reports of Ombudsman Office 2000-2006)

Statistically, citizens' estimations of public officials' bad and careless treatment of citizens are the following: Most of the citizens surveyed (48 %) feel that unethical

treatment occurs occasionally or once in a while. One-fourth of the respondents shared the opinion that unethical treatment takes place either rather or very frequently (26 %) or very or rather seldom (25 %). Numerous comments were expressed by citizens through the open-ended question of the questionnaire. However, comparing the estimates to the amount of complaints and the expressions in the open-ended questions, the estimates seem to be rather positive.

Concerning the unethical behavior of politicians, a few themes rose above the others. Citizens criticize that politicians tend to search for private gain instead of emphasizing the public interest. Sometimes they are greedy. The politicians are guilty of forgetting the concerns of citizens and prefer to concentrate on their own affairs and the party politics. Citizens also ask whether the politicians finally tell the truth. The promises made before elections are forgotten during the electoral period. If the private life of politicians is considered immoral, it is strongly condemned by citizens.

Background variables in focus

If a closer look is taken at the background variables of the respondents (gender, working history, and level of education), three more conclusions are evident. We calculated the percentage shares of statements for each group. We are reporting only differences we find remarkable or surprising.

First, in general, women estimate the asked corruptive behaviours to be more common than men. Only linkages in business life and unethical treatment of citizens received more critical assessments by men than women. But as far as old boy networks are concerned, gender assessment makes no exception, even if women have so far remained the 'outsiders' of such networks, they do not express their mistrust higher than men. If both trust and unethical actions are considered, differences exist between the female and male views. Women trust more in public institutions and organizations but compared to men, they estimate corruptive behavior to be more common in society. This finding is opposite to what we expected.

Secondly, between the education levels of respondents, there are dramatic differences in the estimations of bribery, theft and fraud. The less educated were twice as negative as the more educated. The findings are in opposition to the question of old boy networks. Respondents with more education estimated the question more negatively than those with less education. In the question of linkages, the attitudes were nearly similar.

Thirdly, if the working history of the respondents is considered, a statistical difference exists. Those who have worked in both sectors estimate that all forms of unethical actions exist more frequently than those who worked in the public or private sector only.

4. Conclusions

Summarizing the previous discussion, it is obvious that in the Finnish case public administration works rationally enough in the ethical sense. But, how to solve the relationship between trust and unethical behaviour? Some answers are available.

Our analysis of Finnish public administration was limited to these two research questions: 1) how trustworthy Finnish citizens estimate the public organizations, social institutions and public and private corporations to be; and 2) how frequently the different forms of corruptive actions take place in the citizens' estimation.

While citizens express their opinions, attitudes and expectations of trust and unethical actions, one may ask, how much it really matters. What might be the consequences of citizens' views of the public trust and integrity of the Government? Do these figures give any evidence to develop 'citizen-focused' ethical governance?

We are convinced that the findings of such large-scale citizen surveys as ours should be taken into consideration by the Finnish political elite and the leading reform drivers in the Finnish government. Plenty of evidence is at hand, but before that, more specific statistical analysis is required of the attitudes of citizens towards government and the interdependence of trust, accountability and openness. The respondents of the survey had a strong motivation to answer and had particular interest to influence political and administrative decision making. The citizens might often be heard but not listened to by those in power.

Ethical governance is based on trust. Among citizens, trust is a sort of general confidence in politicians and public authorities. Trust means both increasing trustworthiness and decreasing distrust. Trustworthiness was rather high among the institutions and organizations we describe in Figure 1. If organizations and institutions are no longer reliable, general trust is gradually decreasing. Ethical governance is based on model examples given by politicians and public authorities. If unethical cases in a society increase, citizens' confidence towards public officials staggers.

The Finnish public organizations and institutions so far enjoy the confidence of ordinary citizens. According to our analysis, trustworthiness seems to be relatively high. Estimations of integrity violations were rather moderate. The overall situation is still very good, but the basically positive judgment of citizens varies from one form of integrity violations to another. Is trust threatened by unethical behaviour?

The citizens estimate that old boy networks, nepotism and excessive linkages in business life as corruption forms exist quite frequently. According to the citizens' considerations, the serious forms of corruption play a relatively minor role in the public realm (see Figure 3). At least temporarily, the political scandals explain the decreasing figures in trust in politicians and public servants. In spite of citizens' attitudes and predispositions towards government and services, without necessarily any real personal experience, the respondents strongly appeal to reform, e.g. ethically dysfunctional old boy networks and nepotism.

If public officials' excessive linkages in business life are becoming more usual in the society, we expect that it will sooner or later interact with trust: first at the level of politicians and then at the level of public sector organizations and institutions. Openness and transparency as ethical values are threatened. Where is the dividing line that makes linkages too excessive? Should it be defined through a fixed sum of money or through the amount of citizens' trust in the politico-administrative system?

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Appendix

The two selected questions of the citizen survey.

Research Project: Citizens First? Ethical Governance in Terms of Citizens 2008-2010.

Q 7. How do you consider the trustworthiness of the following Finnish institutions and organizations?	not at all trustworthy (%)	not very trustworthy (%)	somewhat trustworthy (%)	quite trustworthy (%)	very trustworthy (%)	Total (%)
1. Courts (n=1980)	3.3	7.9	19.0	55.8	14.0	100
2. Hospitals and health centres (n=1991)	1.6	6.4	22.8	58.5	10.7	100
3. Public authorities of social services (n=1968)	3.8	14.8	36.6	40.6	4.2	100
4. Labour force bureaus/Job centres (n=1959)	4.4	13.1	35.2	42.1	5.2	100
5. KELA, Social Insurance Institution (n=1987)	4.1	12.4	26.9	47.2	9.4	100
6. Church (n=1962)	5.6	7.8	24.3	46.2	16.1	100
7. YLE, National broadcasting company (n=1972)	4.8	10.8	29.7	45.0	9.7	100
8. Military (n=1976)	1.6	3.9	19.1	50.2	25.2	100
9. Police (n=1992)	1.7	3.7	13.4	52.7	28.6	100
10. Elementary and comprehensive schools (n=1983)	0.5	2.2	17.7	61.8	17.9	100
11. Universities and polytechnics (n=1969)	0.5	1.8	15.9	63.6	18.3	100
12. Itella, Finnish post company (n=1988)	4.2	12.8	28.0	45.7	9.4	100
13. VR, Finnish national railways (n=1979)	2.4	13.8	36.0	42.0	5.8	100
14. Sonera, Telecommunication company (n=1965)	10.8	28.1	38.0	21.0	2.1	100
15. Fortum, Energy company (n=1942)	14.1	26.1	35.3	21.7	2.8	100
16. Veikkaus, Finnish lottery monopoly (n=1955)	2.6	6.8	26.1	47.0	17.5	100
17. Finnair, National airways (n=1971)	2.9	12.9	33.3	43.2	7.7	100
18. Trade unions (n=1975)	6.0	17.2	35.0	35.4	6.4	100
19. Central organizations of employers (n=1972)	7.0	19.3	41.5	28.5	3.7	100

Trust and Integrity Violations in Finnish Public Administration: The Views of Citizens

Q 12. Please estimate the ethical level of the political system.	occurs very seldom (%)	occurs quite seldom (%)	occurs some (%)	occurs quite much (%)	occurs very much (%)	Total (%)
1. Taking or giving bribes (n=1980)	18.0	29.3	37.2	12.5	2.9	100
2. Theft (n=1974)	18.8	40.3	31.8	8.0	1.1	100
3. Fraud (n=1968)	16.8	38.6	32.7	9.9	1.9	100
4. Old boy networks (n=1979)	1.4	6.8	31.8	40.2	19.8	100
5. Nepotism (n=1974)	2.1	11.8	37.3	35.7	13.1	100
6. Bad and careless treatment of citizens (n=1973)	3.1	22.4	47.8	20.4	6.4	100
7. Excessive linkages in business life (n=1960)	2.2	11.3	41.8	32.3	12.3	100