

INTEGRITY MATTERS



Issue 13

Information is everywhere – it is data, statistics, policies and opinions. We need information to perform our roles and, as public officers, we are responsible for using it appropriately. Upholding this responsibility is vital to preserving public trust.

In this edition of Integrity Matters, we explore some of the challenges with workplace information and introduce some practical ways an organisation can ensure it is used for its intended purpose. We also encourage organisations to provide information to us through notifications.

As always, our Misconduct Prevention team is available to work with you to identify misconduct risks and design appropriate prevention strategies.

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Upcoming workshops

The Commission has eight free workshops on offer across the State in March, including two sessions of the popular **Managing and Investigating Misconduct** workshop. These sessions are filling up fast, so get in quick!

Check out the flyer linked below or contact us for more information.

Link: [Integrity Training March 2020 flyer](#)

Custom training

From small teams to whole organisations, our consultants can design and deliver a training plan to suit your needs. Contact us today for more information.

The challenges with work information

How can information be misused?

Workplace information is available to help us do our jobs - and it should be used with care. Misuse of information can occur in a variety of ways, from deliberate misuse to a genuine lack of understanding.

The Commission has dealt with a number of complaints of inappropriate use of information, including:

A public officer routinely accessed information about estranged family members and passed the information onto their partner.

Just because you can access information, doesn't mean you have a right to.

Another public officer routinely accessed information on a business system out of personal interest.

Here, the officer gained no new information but the inappropriate access lead to a

substantial sanction.

Out of genuine concern, a public officer improperly shared a community member's home address with a member of the public.

While this may appear to be for the interest of the community member, such action is inappropriate, can be misconstrued and may amount to misconduct.

No harm, no foul?

Misuse of information can have a significant impact on the trust that the community has in us as individuals, in our organisation, and in the public sector as a whole.

While some misuse is obvious, such as breaching confidentiality or using it for personal gain, there are times when inappropriately accessing work information may seem harmless.

Consider:

You want to send a card to a friend for her birthday, but can't remember her address. What if you checked her file at work?

Your new neighbour looks familiar. What if you searched his address at work to figure out where you know him from?

It might seem like accessing information does no harm but should you be doing it?
Work information should be used only for work.

Prevention strategies for your organisation

It's important that employees have a clear understanding of collecting, storing, accessing and disclosing work information. Your organisation can put strategies in place to ensure appropriate use, including:

Clear expectations and regular communication

Setting and communicating clear expectations can support staff to make better decisions and help build a culture of openness.

The Commission previously investigated a complaint that arose from a lack of clarity regarding whether specific information was confidential. Our investigation found no evidence of misconduct, but the confusion created a perception of misconduct within the organisation, which damaged the reputation of a public officer.

CONSIDER:

- How do you expect staff to handle information at your organisation?
- How is this communicated?

STRATEGIES:

- Discuss use of information at employee inductions
 - Send regular organisation-wide reminders
 - Support managers to discuss use of information with staff
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Relevant policies and procedures

Policies and procedures can help set expectations and guide staff, but they need to be relevant, practical and easy to find. They should focus on solving real issues and support staff to make the right decisions with confidence.

CONSIDER:

- Is proper use of information embedded in your policy framework?

STRATEGIES:

- Review your policy framework and identify opportunities to consolidate, create or improve
 - Use your organisation's policy position to form a set of key messages
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Business systems

Ageing technology might be a barrier for many organisations, but it doesn't mean you can't actively work to minimise the potential for unauthorised or improper access.

CONSIDER:

- What information do your systems hold?
- Do you have control measures in place to prevent or detect improper or unauthorised access?

STRATEGIES:

- Review your system access and audit processes
- Set up a regular auditing process

Spotlight on information use

In 2018, the Commission released a report into an own-motion investigation into the management of information in Tasmania Police, which is relevant to the entire Tasmanian public sector.

It explains that organisations should have simple and clear policies and procedures, adequate information security measures, and should cultivate good organisational culture and awareness.

Public sector organisations must also be prepared to enforce their policies and procedures, through either the disciplinary or legal system as appropriate.

Link: [*Own-motion investigation into the management of information at Tasmania Police. Integrity Commission*](#)

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In a recent research report, the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission (IBAC) Victoria provides analysis of the risks and prevention opportunities associated with public sector information.

Link: [*Unauthorised access and disclosure of information held by the Victorian public sector. IBAC Victoria*](#)

Notifications help us to help you

Do you manage misconduct allegations or undertake misconduct investigations? We encourage you to notify us.

Notifications help us to:

- identify and monitor Tasmanian misconduct risks, and
- identify opportunities to build capacity and provide support, including misconduct management training, resources and advice

A simple process

Submitting a notification is a valuable step to include in your misconduct management process and getting started is easier than ever using our new online form. Contact us for more information.

Link: [Submitting a Notification web page](#)

Link: [Integrity Commission Notification Form](#)

Investigation status updates

Check out the latest assessment and investigation status updates on our website:

Link: [Assessment and Investigation Status Updates web page](#)

Recent integrity training

Congratulations to the organisations who worked with us on delivering integrity training since December:

- Burnie City Council
- Central Coast Council
- Department of Education
- George Town Council
- King Island Council
- Local Government Association of Tasmania
- Macquarie Point Development Corporation

- Tasmanian Health Service
- Tasmania Police
- West Tamar Council

Reaching over 400 public officers from a range of areas, the sessions generated discussion around the organisations' misconduct risk areas and provided an opportunity to explore prevention strategies.

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Council-wide training at George Town

Congratulations to George Town Council for participating in organisation-wide Integrity and Fraud Control training in February.

Staff, managers and elected representatives were engaged, energetic and thoughtful participants in workshops that spanned two days. By listening to and collaborating with one another, they demonstrated their respect for each other's expertise, knowledge and understanding, and were able to share the different perspectives that are so important to good decision-making.

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