



# How to build a pro-integrity culture in public sector organisations

## Guidance material

This guidance material provides information on building a pro-integrity culture within public sector organisations. A pro-integrity culture means making integrity a core value that influences everything the organisation does, from how individual employees behave to the design of organisational systems and practices. In this culture, public sector employees are motivated to uphold integrity as an important part of their work.

While personal integrity guides individual actions, a pro-integrity culture encourages all employees to be accountable for their decisions and to act in the public's best interest. Integrity involves more than just avoiding corruption; it means creating an environment where corruption is difficult to achieve. This ensures that those trusted by the public act ethically and put the public interest first.

A common problem in building pro-integrity cultures is that what organisations say about their integrity values does not match what they actually do. This may lead to a culture where the focus is on paper compliance, rather than living by integrity values.



## Key components of a pro-integrity culture

The Australian Public Service Commission (APSC) identifies the below three foundational elements as essential for cultivating a pro-integrity culture.

### Awareness

Regular communication about integrity issues and open discussions can create a shared understanding of pro-integrity culture among employees. When staff recognise integrity risks and the importance of ethical decision-making, they are better equipped to demonstrate consistent and honest behaviour, which builds trust, especially during tough decisions.

### Capability

To empower public sector staff to address integrity challenges, organisations must provide training and support. This includes resources for ethical decision-making and opportunities to practice applying ethical principles in daily work.

### Accountability

Implementing clear systems for addressing integrity concerns and consistently applying ethical standards across all levels reinforces an organisation's commitment to integrity. Encouraging a 'speak up' culture, where employees feel safe and confident to report any ethical concerns, is crucial in this regard. These measures signal that ethical behaviour is a shared value, contributing to a respected workplace and long-term success.

In summary, integrity is not built through a single action; it develops over time through consistent and transparent behaviours. When organisations promote awareness, build capability, and maintain accountability, they create a strong foundation for a pro-integrity culture.

## Building and sustaining a pro-integrity culture

Creating and sustaining a pro-integrity culture is an ongoing process that requires commitment at all levels of an organisation. Here are key strategies for building and maintaining such a culture:

### Leadership and communication

Leaders' actions and words set the standard for everyone else. When leaders consistently demonstrate their commitment to integrity, it sends a powerful message throughout the organisation about what is expected and valued. Effective communication is equally important, as it helps to reinforce the importance of integrity and keeps everyone informed about the organisation's efforts in this area. Leaders should:

- Model ethical behaviour in their actions and decisions.
- Regularly talk about the importance of integrity and transparent communication.
- Encourage staff to take responsibility for their actions.
- Create a workplace where staff feel safe discussing ethical concerns.
- Make sure organisational practices match stated values to avoid 'box-ticking'.

Good communication solidifies the organisation's commitment to integrity. This means:

- Creating a clear code of ethics that reflects input from employees across teams and fits the organisation's values.
- Keeping staff updated on integrity initiatives, their results and the methods used to measure their effectiveness.
- Providing opportunities for open discussions about ethical issues.
- Being transparent about decision-making, especially for tricky ethical situations.



## Embedding integrity in organisational processes

For a pro-integrity culture to fully develop, it needs to be more than just a set of rules or guidelines. Integrity should be woven into the fabric of an organisation's daily operations and decision-making processes. This integration ensures that ethical considerations become a natural part of how the organisation functions, rather than an afterthought or a separate initiative.

This can be done by:

- Considering integrity in hiring and promotions.
- Including integrity in performance reviews and staff recognition.
- Setting up simple systems for reporting integrity concerns. These should allow for external stakeholders to also report integrity matters anonymously.
- Regularly checking and improving integrity measures.
- Using data to spot potential integrity issues and assessing how well initiatives are working.

## Continuous reinforcement and evaluation

Building a pro-integrity culture is not a one-off task but an ongoing process and a shared responsibility that involves every employee, not just leaders. It requires constant attention, reinforcement and evaluation to ensure it remains strong and effective. To maintain and strengthen a pro-integrity culture organisations should:

- Offer regular training on ethical decision-making and integrity.
- Recognise staff who champion integrity.
- Regularly check the organisation's integrity culture through surveys and focus groups.
- Be willing to amend strategies, if required, based on feedback and organisational needs.
- Create a culture where mistakes are seen as chances to improve, not reasons to punish.

This product was prepared based on findings from desktop research and stakeholder consultations from IBAC's 2024 Public Sector Strategic Assessment. All information contained in this document should not be considered as evidence for, or accusations of, corruption.

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