

Bad apples and careless workers - notions of risk in corruption reform

A J Shaw¹

1.

Director, Shaw Idea Pty Ltd and Ph D Candidate, Sustainable Minerals Institute, University of Queensland, Brisbane, Queensland, 4072. Email: andrea.shaw@uq.net.au

Key words: corruption, OHS, risk management, mining governance, Afghanistan.

ABSTRACT

Despite decades of effort, corruption scandals still plague the mining industry and represent a significant barrier to public support for mining developments. Why do formal governance systems fail and how can anti-corruption processes be more effectively embedded throughout a mining organisation?

OHS reform in the mining industry provides a useful comparison to investigate what kinds of strategies might have more hope of working to support embedding sound anti-corruption approaches in mining organisations. While there have been failures in the OHS domain as well, the mining industry takes OHS much more seriously now than even 20 years ago. One important strength has been the shift in focus from careless workers to underlying systemic risk. This has allowed mining enterprises to address risks before they cause harm and supported technological change in the industry.

Unfortunately, the equivalent focus in corruption reform has not occurred. Despite efforts to increase transparency, such as the EITI, reforms still focus on efforts to identify corrupt individuals and prosecute these “bad apples”. Corruption risk management is still in its infancy and does not receive the same support or attention as corruption prosecutions.

Afghanistan provides a telling example: it epitomises a jurisdiction with apparent good intentions facing significant barriers to operationalising them. A recent corruption risk assessment of Afghanistan’s Ministry of Mines and Petroleum undertaken by the author demonstrates the significant challenges of addressing corruption risks rather than corruption cases. What can we learn from the OHS domain to change this?