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# Security Bureaucracies: The Psychology of Keeping and Divulging Secrets

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Abstract. This article describes aspects of the psychology of keeping and divulging secrets to inform policies of security bureaucracies' human resource managers.

The behavior of keeping a secret has a complex value within security bureaucracies. Security personnel are entrusted with keeping secrets based on security classifications, authorizations for special access, and a "need to know." If they do not keep secrets based on these criteria, they may face significant negative consequences. On the other hand, security personnel are entrusted not to keep secrets with those who meet the criteria of classification, access, and need to know--especially with personnel security and counterintelligence personnel. If they do not fail to keep a secret to people who meet these criteria, they may face significant negative consequences.

Human resource managers of security bureaucracies are faced with even more difficulty than that warranted by concurrent maintenance and induction of situationally dependent secret-keeping or divulging. For regardless of formal organizational consequences that may affect the probability of secret keeping and divulging, there are many other salient influences on the self-management of secrets.

Individuals keep or divulge secrets as a means of (1) reinforcing or modifying their conceptions of self or boundaries between self and other; (2) modulating intrapsychic conflict; (3) developing a sense of mastery and control over elements of the world; (4) modifying one's persona and "real self" as perceived in the eyes of others; (5) establishing a degree of closeness, intimacy, or linkage with others; (6) instrumentally obtaining political objectives; and (7) avoiding noxious, but nonconflictual, psychological sequelae (intrapsychic and interpersonal) contingent on how one chooses to manage a secret.

Moreover, human resource managers and the security bureaucracy may harbor de facto consequences for keeping or divulging secrets--consequences that may be incompatible, incommensurable, or contradictory with their formal schedule of consequences. (This is also the case for informal group and organizational dynamics within the bureaucracy). For example, doing the right thing according to bureaucratic policy may be doing the wrong thing for one's career. And although careerism is frowned upon according to most bureaucratic policies, it seems to be quite operative within the operational codes of many security personnel--including their personnel security and counterintelligence minders.

As with managing multiple layers of moral judgment within and among personnel, security bureaucracies' human resource managers are confronted with multiple contingencies affecting the management of secrets. To seek attenuation of intentional security violations based on inappropriate management of secrets, one may consult the relevant psychological literatures. However, those literatures are currently found wanting. (See Kelly, A.E. (1998). Clients' secret keeping in outpatient therapy. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 45, 50-57; Kelly, A.E., & McKillop, K.J. (1996). Consequences of revealing personal secrets. *Psychological Bulletin*, 120, 450-465; Lane, J.D., & Wegner, D.M. (1995). The cognitive consequences of secrecy. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 69, 237-253; Last, U., & Aharoni-Etzioni, A. (1995). Secrets and reasons for secrecy among school-aged children:

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