Beat: Business

Why do Most Anti-Corruption Programs Fail?

What goes wrong?

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USPA NEWS - With estimated cost of about five percent of the global GDP or USD 2.6 trillion annually, corruption is the top most concern of most governments. It is more alarming for the anti corruption bodies to realize it only growing at an exponential rate. This requires them to be more strengthened in response, and put more emphasis on the enforcement and compliance.

Many governments and big organizations are coming up with anti-corruption initiatives to handle the problem. However unfortunately, most of these initiatives are failing at an increasing rate too. This increases the severity of the matter and makes it worse.

What goes wrong? What is that makes these anti corruption programs fail and that too so miserably. While there is no magic want solution to guarantee success, there are various common problems, which if properly taken care of, can decrease the chance of failure to a great extent.

Here are some of those problems that managements need to be aware of when going about implementation of an anti corruption program.

Lack of Political Will and Commitment
Leadership is what encompasses the heaviest influence on the organizations ethical values. Making an anti corruption initiative into success and also its failure, are both dependent on how competent those on the top are. It requires commitment and genuine concern to be able to roll out an effective anti corruption program.

Doing it for the sake of face saving or just because it is required, might not be enough to ensure its success. Therefore, in addition to making it a priority, sufficient political will is required to combat this evil. Mostly those on the top turn a blind eye when a questionable measure is undertaken to meet the goals and targets due to the pressure.

Using Generic Policies in All Circumstances
While corruption might be a generic problem, there is no single solution to combat it. Due to the Differences in beliefs, cultures and norms, what is acceptable in one country or society might not be as appropriate in another especially when talking in terms of corruption.

Usually anti corruption, programs include a factor approach. Which means a checklist is used to include activities and actions that should be undertaken in a particular anti corruption initiative. These might be generic and not be designed keeping in view the specifics of that particular region. These “¨one size fits all´ strategies do not incorporate these differences and factors as stated above.

An effective initiative has to be customized keeping in view all the factors that come into play according to the socio political scenario of the region. In other words, you need to have flexibility.
The basic foundation of an anti corruption framework should be based on a similar set of principles, however the individual steps for going about it in different circumstances should be tailored to meet the current context of the scenario.

Failure to strongly enforce the penalties
The penalty for misappropriating the money should be far more then the gains that one would be able to fetch if he or she were successful. Failure to effectively and strongly enforce heavy sanctions on the wrongdoers directly undermines the credibility of an anti corruption initiative.

For example, an executive of a large organization supported corruption and was given a golden handshake rather than him having to go through court cases and negative publicity. This automatically portrays the message that corruption proved to be beneficial rather than being detrimental to the one who committed it. This happened to an organization in South Africa. While this solution might have deemed fit in that scenario, but this was followed by increased cases of corruption in the region because a clear negative message

was sent across.

Consistent enforcement of penalties and sanctions needs to be in place if the problem of corruption has to be eliminated effectively. As this is the only thing that can fight this evil the best.

Not considering the “˜design-reality gap´
Many anti corruption initiatives fail in their implementation phase only and some only last until right after the implementation. If the cause is traced back, in most cases it is deduced that the mismatch between the expectations from the project and the realities on the ground is the reason. The larger the gap between these two is, the higher the risk of failure there will be.

For an anti corruption program to be successful, there needs to be a clear understanding of the “˜who and how´ while it is still being designed. Here usually two kinds of problems are faced. First, those responsible for designing the program do not hold enough knowledge or understanding of the ground realities. Secondly, the design objectives are not in line with the real objectives. As a result, there is an overestimation of what the program can actually achieve.

It should be ensured that those responsible for implementation are also included in the design phase, or vice versa. This and breaking the overall objectives down into several smaller objectives will reduce the distance between the design and the reality and ensure a successful implementation.

Inadequate Training:

Training is a component that is highly essential for any anti corruption campaign to be successful and all the actions being adequate for that matter. Leaders believe that having policies of anti corruption is enough in itself to implement the program and neglect the adequate training required to master it.

Just like behavioral change is at the key to corruption control, training is an important component to an effective anti-corruption initiative. Teams and those in authority need to understand what constitutes corruption for the particular area they are in and what behavior might be deemed as corrupt or unethical.

If are not aware of these, they will not be aware of the warning signs and red flags for the corruption being prevalent. Similarly not being equipped to act or react upon noticing a wrongdoing will make the key resources for anti-corruption, useless.

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