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## **How do people judge (an appearance of) a Conflict of Interest and the used Defence Strategies? A research into the effect of an appearance of Conflict of interest and the used Defence Strategies on perceptions about politician's Integrity**

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# How do people judge (an appearance of) a Conflict of Interest and the used Defence Strategies?

A research into the effect of an appearance of Conflict of interest and the used Defence Strategies on perceptions about politician's Integrity

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## Chapter 1 - Introduction

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### 1.1 Problem definition

Public trust is an important part of any democratic system. The government needs its citizens' trust to function properly and make policy they think is best for the country. An example of this need could be drawn from the COVID-19 pandemic, in which, ministers needed to convince all citizens to adhere to the recommended government guidelines to stop the virus from spreading rapidly. Pak et al. (2021) found that stricter government restrictions increase the compliance to these guidelines. This effect seems to be twice as big however, if there is a high public trust in government and the perception of its truthfulness.

This is just one example of why public trust in government is important. Relevant in this field of research is what influences trust in government. Denhardt (2002) emphasizes the importance of the connection between trust and integrity in the relationship between the government and its citizens. In any interpersonal relationship involving trust, you “*gamble upon the capability of the individual actually to be able to act with integrity*” (Denhardt, 2002, p. 72). The relationship between the government and its citizens is no exception. Trusting the government start with trusting its officials to act with integrity. Public officials are, however, often faced with complex moral issues. These could be related to basic human morality, acting honestly and fairly, or to legal prohibitions like conflicts of interest or providing financial disclosure (Denhardt, 2002). This thesis will further focus on a specific legal prohibition, ‘conflict of interest’.

In the Netherlands, the national parliament has set a code of conduct, consisting of five rules, concerning the integrity rules of members of parliament. First, a member of parliament must practice his function independently and to serve the public interest. Second, gifts or favours may not be accepted if they are aimed to influence the practicing of the function. Third, one should meet the registration obligations for the side activities and incomes, interests that could reasonably be considered relevant, trips where all or part of the travel- and retention costs are paid, and gifts and benefits valued over 50 euros. This rule also states that even the appearance of a conflict of interest should be prevented. Fourth, a member of parliament does not use information he received in function for his personal interest. If necessary, he guarantees the confidential nature of the information. Fifth, the Member of Parliament acts in accordance with the other set integrity rules, like the rules concerning improper conduct (TK, 2021).

The Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations (BZK) has set a similar code of conduct concerning the integrity of public servants, which emphasizes that government officials need to have integrity because of their responsibility to civilians and their exemplary role of how one should act. This code of conduct states that a conflict of interest (translated from Dutch) “... occurs, when you are a public servant yourself. This could also be the case when not you yourself, but your partner, friend or acquaintance has an interest in that decision. You will have to prevent conflict of interest or even the appearance of it from happening” (BZK, 2019, p. 5). This shows that the government expects its public servants to not just prevent actual conflict of interest but also even the appearance of it.

If a politician is accused of an integrity violation, like acting with a conflict of interest, this could have a negative effect on perceptions people have about its character traits, integrity, and competence (Basinger, 2018). The effect on people’s perceptions about integrity will be examined in this thesis. Perceptions about integrity may be influenced by the act (what integrity violation the politician is accused of) and the used defence strategy. These perceptions can be aimed at the politicians as a person, their role, and the system they are part of (Kempenaar, 2020). Politicians trying to prevent negative perception by the public often use defence strategies. These defence strategies come in various forms, like a denial or an apology, and may influence perceptions about the politician in different ways (Benoit, 2015; Schönbach, 1990). The aim of this thesis is to find the possible effects of being accused of a conflict of interest and the used defence strategy on perceptions about a politician’s integrity. More concrete, the following question will be attempted to be answered:

#### 1.1.1 Research question

*To what extent does a supposed Conflict of Interest and/or the Defence Strategy of politicians influence how their integrity as a person, of his or her role, and of the system they are part of, is judged by the public?*

### 1.2 Scientific relevance

The most commonly known and clear example of unethical conduct is probably corruption. To have integrity, however, requires more than just not being corrupt. For example, the work by Huberts (2018) shows that there are many forms of unethical conduct. He also emphasizes the complexity of considering someone or something integer or not. He finds that integrity is about acting in accordance with relevant moral norms, rules, and values. Following this reasoning,

even corruption is not always unethical. Integrity is clearly a more difficult concept than it appears to be and researching perceptions about integrity could therefore give valuable insights.

Lasthuizen et al. (2011) is one of the first articles that tried measuring the acceptability of different types of integrity violations. This acceptability is measured by asking the opinions of officers in a police force about different types of unethical conduct. Limitations in this study are the very specific group measured, and a lack of specification *who* performed the unethical conduct. Benoit (2015) greatly developed the theory about defence strategies (or as he calls it; image repair strategies). He formed a typology with forms of image repair strategies, which will be used in the analysis of this thesis. Some additions to this typology will be derived from the taxonomy of a very similar subject by Schönbach (1990). This will hopefully give a better understanding of the effectivity of certain strategies in repairing the image of a politician. While Benoit (2015) researched all threats to the image of a politician or organization, this thesis will focus on image threats after an integrity violation by politicians. Organizations will not be included.

This research will build more directly on the thesis by Kempenaar (2020). In her thesis, she tries to get a better understanding of how the concept of integrity is shaped and how it is used in public debate in the wake of scandal. Like Kempenaar (2020), the focus in this thesis is on the behaviour as well as the defence strategies politicians employ when they are accused of integrity scandals, in this case conflicts of interest, and what effect both the act and the defence have on people's perception of political integrity. Doing this, hopefully a better understanding of different kinds of scandals could be obtained.

This thesis will add to the literature concerning perceptions about integrity. It will explore the perceptions of politicians as a person, in their role or the of the system as a whole in two cases of appearances of conflicts of interest. The results from this analysis could then be compared to other types of unethical behaviour in future research or used to research conflicts of interest further.

### 1.3 Societal relevance

A democratic political system is not sustainable if it does not have the support of a majority of its citizens. Loss of this support will lead to underlying discontent, which if not handled in a sufficient manner, could lead to a demand for potentially radical changes. When the dissatisfaction with the political system endures for a longer period of time, it implies that the needs of the citizens are not met. Then, their discontent could be seen as an indicator of dissatisfaction with the quality of life they are experiencing (Miller, 1974).



In an indirect democracy, legitimacy of political and administrative institutions and actors is largely based on trust. People grant their sovereignty to these institutions and actors, trusting their mandate will be handled appropriately (Christensen & Lægheid, 2005). The level of trust in governments is influenced by perceptions of public sector integrity (Nolan-Flecha, 2017). Good integrity values could build trust by using power and public resources ethically, create more open dialogue between government and stakeholders and guarantee the reliability and consistency of government actions. Also, the importance of public figures, like political leaders is emphasized as they are expected to “*lead by example*” (Nolan-Flecha, 2017). As these public perceptions of integrity are important, it is useful to get a better understanding of what these perceptions are when politicians get into scandals. Do they lose trust?

If the act of a conflict of interest has serious impact on the public trust in the politician as a person, his or her role or even the system as a whole, it could be very relevant for the formulation of policy concerning government integrity. Rules about conflict of interest may for example have to be changed or made clearer to politicians. If the defence strategies a politician uses in the case of an appearance of a conflict of interest particularly impact the public trust, it may be relevant for the politician to know which strategy he could best employ in order to lose as little trust as possible. For other actors involved in the societal debate, it could be useful to know what defence strategies are employed in which situations. If for example media outlets have a better understanding of these defence strategies, they could better recognize them and point them out to the public.

Furthermore, integrity is a contextual and contingent phenomenon. This means that it is, respectively, dependent on environment and a changing phenomenon. Because of this, what is seen as integer, could change over time, per place, person, group, or organization. It is determined by the public moral; “*all conceptions about right and wrong, meaningful and meaningless, valuable and valueless that are perceived to be self-evident*” (Kerkhoff & Overeem, 2018, p. 100). Since integrity is a changing and contextual concept, it is good to determine the *current* perceptions in the chosen *context* (politics in the Netherlands) to get a better understanding of it. Possible integrity violations could also trigger change in perceptions about good governance and integrity. It sparks debate where differing opinions come forward, which could uncover where, when, and how norms and values get determined again and how integrity gets marked out (Kerkhoff and Overeem, 2018, p. 101). If it is clear what and to what extent is seen as undesirable behaviour, one could better determine what kind of policy fits certain behaviour.

## Chapter 2 - Theoretical framework

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*In this section, an overview of various scientific theories, relevant around the researched subject, will be provided. Using these theories, concepts of the research question will be explained and defined, and hypotheses will be formulated to help answer the research question.*

### 2.1 Integrity

#### 2.1.1 Definition

To be able to answer the research question, it is first necessary to have a good understanding of the meaning of the concepts in the research question. To define integrity, the definition by Huberts (2018, p. 20) will be used: *“the quality of acting in accordance or harmony with relevant moral values, norms, and rules”*. This definition still leaves room for interpretation because it does not demarcate which moral values, norms, and rules that make-or-break integrity. This might be nearly impossible to determine, so the broad definition makes sense. Where rules are easier to determine, it is helpful to get a better understanding of what moral values and norms are precisely.

Morality is about what is right and wrong, good, or bad. There is a difference between moral values and moral norms. Moral values are beliefs that influence the choice of actions by an individual or the collective, because they contribute to the judgements about what is good. Moral norms are more prescriptive. They *tell* us what is good and what is bad (Huberts, 2018).

If a policy outcome is considered ethically wrong, this does not necessarily mean that the responsible public officials have not acted in an integer way. *“...integrity concerns behaviour, process, and procedure (in a broad sense). It is not about the content of the output or the societal results (outcome)”* (Huberts, 2018, p. 20). Thus, the content of the decisions, policies or laws is not important in evaluating whether a politician acted in an integer way. If you want to make statements about the integrity of the government, you have to focus on the *“moral quality”* of the governance process (Huberts, 2018).

#### 2.1.2. Integrity violations

When policies are executed and the outcome is disappointing, people will be held accountable for this outcome. There are two broad types of issues in this context: unpopular decisions and personal misconduct (ethical or criminal) (McGraw, 1990). Where McGraw (1990) decided to

focus on the unpopular decisions, this thesis will research a form of personal misconduct: integrity.

Something is considered an integrity violation when the relevant moral values, norms and rules are broken. There are various types of integrity violations that have different characteristics and effects. They also differ in the degree to which they violate the relevant moral values, norms, and rules. These differences are relevant in establishing policies to limit all types of violations effectively. Moreover, differentiating between types of integrity violations prevents all forms of misconduct to be considered in a binary way; that it is either an integrity violation or it is not. This is an oversimplification of reality (Lasthuizen et al., 2011). Different types of misconduct receive different types of moral judgements. Lasthuizen et al. (2011) researched these differences by establishing a typology of integrity violations. They tried measuring the frequency in which these violations occurred and the moral judgements, or degree of acceptability that these violations received within a policy force in The Netherlands. In this thesis, an attempt will be made to add to this debate by looking at a specific type of integrity violations; conflicts of interest, and how this is perceived by the public instead of the police force.

Elections are specific occasions in which public's disapproval of politicians becomes apparent is during elections. If a politician is not re-elected, this could be a sign that he or she did something the public did not like. Basinger (2018) researched the effects scandals have on the perceptions of voters about the subject's character traits, integrity, and competence. The article finds evidence suggesting that scandals have a negative impact on the perceptions of voters of the character and competence of the person involved in the scandal. However, such scandals had a far greater impact on the voters' perceptions about the integrity of the person. While scandals do affect voters' choice directly, a lot of this impact might be explained by a shift in perceptions about the integrity of a person or a party.

### 2.1.3 Defence Strategies

In this thesis, the existing theory on defence strategies will be updated. Important in this debate are the works of Benoit (2015) and Schönbach (1990), which will be explained here first.

Benoit (2015) wrote a book about threats to the image of people and organizations and when that image is damaged, how this could possibly be repaired. Doing this, he added to the image repair theory (Benoit, 2015, pp. 1-3). Someone's image could be threatened when that person is blamed for an act that is considered offensive. Therefore, a threat to someone's image contains two components, which are related to beliefs and values. The first component is blame.

To blame someone for doing something, one needs to *believe* that he actually did it. If someone is blamed for doing something, that person could respond by rejecting or reducing blame, which might alter the beliefs of other people about the blame of the act. For an act to be offensive, one needs to have a negative *value* associated with this act. If someone is blamed for an act and people consider this act offensive, that person could respond by reducing the offensiveness of the act. That way, one could try to alter the values people associate with the act (Benoit, 2015; pp. 10-11). In the cases of this thesis, politicians are accused of a conflict of interest. The accusers might believe that the politicians did act while their interests were conflicted and could associate this act of a conflict of interest with a positive, negative, or neutral value.

The image repair theory by Benoit contains two key assumptions. The first assumption states that communication should be conceptualized as a goal-directed activity. If someone communicates, this is with the purpose of attaining certain desired goals. This is the same for image repair messages which have the purpose of dealing with threats to the person who communicates about it (Benoit, 2015, pp. 14-16). The second assumption states that maintaining a positive reputation is an important goal in interaction. If this reputation or image is threatened, people will try to defend themselves, for example by offering explanations, defences, justifications, rationalizations, apologies, or excuses for the undesired behaviour (Benoit, 2015, pp. 16-19). When someone is trying to repair one's image, he does so to attain different kinds of goals. One goal may be to repair their reputation, while the other goal may be to prevent criminal charges and/or civil lawsuits. Ethically, the most correct form for repairing an image for someone who is guilty would be to confess and apologize. This may be useful to repair the reputation but may not help by avoiding criminal or civil action against this person. One's reputation is however so important to people, that threats to this reputation are often strong incentives for using image repair strategies, even if they conflict with other goals. When someone's reputation is attacked, this attack is built up from two components: an act occurred that is undesirable (1), and the attacked person is responsible for that action (2). These components correspond with the earlier mentioned components of an image threat with the associated values and beliefs. The reputation of a person is only threatened if the relevant audience believes both of these components are true (Benoit, 2015, p. 20). In the cases of this thesis, it is therefore relevant whether the citizens of The Netherlands find a conflict of interest undesirable (1) and whether they believe that the accused politicians did indeed act with a conflict of interest (2).

Schönbach (1990) and Benoit (2015) both established a scheme with types of defence strategies. Schönbach (1990) made an extensive list of possible reactions of actors who have

to account for certain actions when managing conflicts and preventing escalation. His taxonomy includes almost 150 types that are divided into four main categories: concessions, excuses, justifications, and refusals. Benoit (2015) formulated a typology of image repair strategies consisting of five main categories: denial, evasion of responsibility, reducing offensiveness, corrective action, and mortification. For this thesis, both articles will be used, but the typology by Benoit (2015) will form the base. From the work of Schönbach (1990), peripheral concessions and refusals will be added to the list. This aggregation is adopted from the thesis by Kempenaar (2020) so that this thesis is able to build on that research.

To start off, the typology by Benoit (2015) will be explained. The first category in this typology is **denial**. If someone decides to defend himself by using a denial, one could simply deny having performed the act one is accused of, which is known as a *simple denial*. This could make people wonder who did in fact do the act he was accused of. This could lead the accused to use another variant of denial: *shifting the blame*. If one accuses someone else for the act, the attention may be (partly) shifted away from oneself (p. 22-23). Arendt et al. (2017) have performed a meta-analysis of image repair, apologia and crisis communication literature containing 110 articles published in the period 1986-2016 (30 years). They find that while the simple denial was the most commonly used strategy throughout their analysis, it was also the most unsuccessful strategy. In 62% of the cases featured in the articles, the use of this strategy failed to minimize damage or repair the reputation.

The second category is **evasion of responsibility**. In this strategy, someone tries to evade or reduce his or her apparent responsibility for the act. This strategy comes in four forms. In the first form, *provocation*, the accused may claim that he did perform the act, but that it was provoked by another wrongful act. The goal here is to get the provocateur to be held responsible instead of the accused actor. The second form of evasion of responsibility is *defeasibility*. Here, the accused states having had a lack of information about or a lack of control over important influencers of the situation. If the accused is indeed perceived to have handled with imperfect information or control, one may not be held fully responsible. The third form is making an excuse based on *accidents*. By explaining that the offensive act was not performed on purpose, the accused could reduce the apparent responsibility for the offensive act. The fourth and last form is justifying the act based on *good intentions*. Again, the act is not denied, but has been performed with good, rather than, evil, intentions. People who have tried to do well may receive less blame than those who intended to do badly (Benoit, 2015, pp. 23-24). Arendt et al. (2017) consider the strategy of evading responsibility to be a successful and effective strategy. This

strategy should however not be combined with denial as this combination seems to be an unsuccessful approach overall.

The third category Benoit (2015) distinguishes is **reducing offensiveness**. Instead of trying to deny or reduce blame for the act, in this strategy one attempts to reduce the negative feelings the audience experiences with the act. This strategy comes in six forms. The first is *bolstering*, where the accused tries to mitigate the negative effects of the act by strengthening the audience's positive feelings for the actor. The accused could for example relate to positive attributes they possess or positive deeds from the past. Doing that, the accused hopes "*to add new beliefs (or remind the audience of forgotten beliefs) that are associated with positive values*" (p. 24). The second form is *minimization*. Here, the accused tries to limit the amount of negative affect that is associated with the offensive act by trying to convince the audience that the act is not as bad as it might first appear. Thirdly, there is *differentiation*. When this form is practiced, the accused tries to reduce the offensiveness of the act by comparing it to similar but less desirable actions, which might make the act in question look less offensive. The fourth form is *transcendence*. In this form, the act is placed in a different context by the accused. Robin Hood is provided as an example. While he stole possessions from the rich, which is an offensive act, he did this in the context of helping the poor and suppressed. The fifth form is *attacking the accuser* with the aim of reducing the credibility of the source. The accused could create the impression that the accuser deserved what befell him or the accused could divert the attention of the audience away from oneself. The last form is *compensation*. By compensating the victim, the accused attempts to offset the negative feeling arising from the offensive act (Benoit, 2015, pp. 24-26). Reducing offensiveness is the second most-used strategy and within this category, bolstering and minimization the most used forms in the analysed sample by Arendt et al. (2017). It was however not very successful with a success rate of about 50%. They find that this strategy is often used in crises involving political power. In these cases, the form 'transcendence' is the most used and also a successful choice.

The fourth category in the typology by Benoit (2015, p. 26) is **corrective action**, where the accused promises to resolve the problem. The accused may for example assure that changes will be made to prevent the act from happening again. This can be done without admitting guilt. Arendt et al. (2017) consider this the most successful strategy to handle a crisis with a success rate of 57%. It is the third most common strategy in their sample.

The fifth and last category formulated by Benoit (2015, p. 26) is **mortification**. When this strategy is employed, the accused admits his wrongful act and apologizes. If the audience believes the apology is sincere, the image may be repaired. There seems to be no scientific

agreement about the best way to apologize. An apology could provide in an acceptance of blame and expression of regret or remorse or a request for forgiveness. Arendt et al. (2017) find that mortification could be useful in combination with other image repair strategies to make them successful. Furthermore, mortification may be advisable when someone who is guilty of an act does not face legal action. That way, the accused may prevent other negative consequences.

As mentioned before, two additions will be made to this typology: ‘peripheral concessions’ and ‘refusals’ as formulated by Schönbach (1990). When **peripheral concessions** are used, the actor is willing to do some concessions, but does not admit responsibility, guilt, mistake, shame, or embarrassment, nor does he show expressions of regret. Peripheral concessions are subdivided in three forms, but in this thesis, only two will be used (Schönbach, 1990, p. 188):

1. *Willingness to report on the event in question without excuses, justification or refutational comment.*
2. *Acknowledgement of negative aspects of the failure event, but no concession of own involvement.*

The other category that will be added is **refusal**. This category is added because it offers two forms of reactions that could be useful in the analysis. In the taxonomy of Schönbach (1990, p. 193), these forms are listed under the subcategory of refusal: evasions and mystifications. In this thesis, they will just be listed under refusal, however. The two forms are:

1. *Irrelevant talk*
2. *Silence*

For clarity, the defence strategies from Benoit (2015) and Schönbach (1990) will be presented in the tables underneath. In addition, the examples formulated by Kempenaar (2020) will be used to put the defence strategies in practical perspective.

**Table 2.01***Benoit's typology of image repair strategies (Benoit, 2015, p. 28)*

General strategy	Tactic	Example*
<b>Denial</b>	<i>Simple denial</i>	"I did not steal money from the public"
	<i>Shift blame</i>	"I did not commit fraud, but he did"
<b>Evade responsibility</b>	<i>Provocation</i>	"I did embezzle money, but a friend forced me to do so"
	<i>Defeasibility</i>	"I did receive a gift, but I did not know I was obliged to declare it"
	<i>Accident</i>	"I accidentally told him some confidential information"
	<i>Good intentions</i>	"I broke the rules because I had the intention to help someone"
<b>Reduce offensiveness</b>	<i>Bolstering</i>	"Think of all the times I put the public interest above my private interest"
	<i>Minimization</i>	"I stole some money, but it was very little"
	<i>Differentiation</i>	"I did not steal money, I just borrowed it for a while"
	<i>Transcendence</i>	"I did bribe a criminal, but it was aimed to protect the higher goal of the public's safety"
	<i>Attack accuser</i>	"This politician accuses me of waste of resources, but look at all the times he committed fraud"
	<i>Compensation</i>	"Because I discriminated you, I will donate a sum of money to an NGO combatting discrimination"
<b>Corrective action</b>		"Because I stole €1000, I will pay it back"
<b>Mortification (Apology)</b>		"I'm so sorry I treated you indecently. I regret intimidating you"

Note. \*The examples used are taken from the thesis by Kempenaar (2020)

**Table 2.02***The four reactions of Schönbach's list of possible reactions during escalation or conflict (Schönbach, 1990, p. 188)*

General strategy	Tactic	Example*
<b>Peripheral concessions</b>	<i>Willingness to report on the event in question without excuse, justification or refutational comment</i>	"I have heard of the accusations at my address"
	<i>Acknowledgment of negative aspects of the failure event, but no concession of own involvement</i>	"Embezzlement of money is indeed, a severe violation of integrity"
<b>Refusals</b>	<i>Irrelevant talk</i>	"Are you enjoying today's weather?"
	<i>Silence</i>	..**

Note. \*The examples are taken from the thesis by Kempenaar (2020)

\*\* How silence will be measured, will be explained in Chapter 3



Kim et al. (2004) have researched how trust could be best repaired after a trust violation. The effects of responding with an apology are compared to those responding with a denial, where the focus is on the relationship between managers and its employees. This could still be interesting for this article, as the relationship between politicians and citizens is comparable. In representative democracies, like The Netherlands, the relationship between politicians and citizens could be characterized as a principal-agent relationship. Politicians receive a mandate from citizens to govern on their behalf. This makes citizen/voters the principal and politicians the agents. The payoffs of the principal depend on the performance of the agent (Lanza et al., 2020). While employees do not give a mandate to the manager, they are also dependent on his performance for their own wellbeing; therefore, this thesis assumes that the relationship is comparable.

To get back to the article by Kim et al. (2004), they find that repairing trust might be more difficult than building trust. When someone's trust is violated, the basic assumption of trust 'trustworthy until proven otherwise' does not go anymore (p. 104). In addition, people who violate trust do not only need to re-establish positive expectations but also overcome negative expectations. Lastly, the information about the violation may be remembered as an important event, which keeps reinforcing the low level of trust despite the efforts of the trust violator trying to demonstrate his trustworthiness. The results of the studies done create some assumptions about what repair strategies a violated party could best use. Trust seems to be repaired more effectively when the mistrusted party apologizes for the trust violations concerning matters of competence but denied being guilty of violations concerning matters of integrity (Kim et al., 2004). For violations concerning integrity, it is also important if there is evidence for the guilt of the trust violation. If there is evidence of guilt, it is better to apologize. If there is not, it is better to deny being guilty (Kim et al., 2004). Therefore, when researching defence strategies used after integrity violations, it may be relevant that denying guilt could be more effective in repairing trust than apologizing, given that there is no clear evidence of guilt. If a politician is accused of an integrity violation, but there seems to be no evidence of his guilt, he could gamble that this evidence will also not be forthcoming later on and deny guilt. If the evidence does however emerge later on, his denial could cause worse impact on his trust repair than apologizing in the first place.

Castellani & Bertolotti (2013) researched a defence strategy that is not included in the formed typology. They looked at the effect of politicians using counterfactual defences when criticized on the social judgements that those politicians face. Counterfactual defences are not focused on the negative event itself, but on possible alternatives to this outcome. One suggests

what the hypothetical outcome could have been, when something in the past would have been done differently. An example the article gives is “*If I would have studied harder, I would have passed the test*” (Cattelani & Bertolotti, 2013, p. 1).

When people are confronted with a counterfactual explanation, their explanation of a certain event and how they attribute responsibility could be influenced. The authors find that a counterfactual may be more convincing and lead to more positive evaluation of a defending politician. This could be explained by the fact that the counterfactual creates the impression that the defending individual is less responsible for the negative outcome (Cattelani & Bertolotti, 2013). Though their experiment did not have enough validity to capture the full reality, the outcomes are still interesting and may be worth testing in other situations. In this thesis however, this defence strategy will not be included in the analysis in order to keep the analysis as similar to the original analysis by Kempenaar (2020) as possible.

#### 2.1.4 Person, Role and System

From the paragraphs above, it has become clear that different judgements could be expected for different integrity violations (acts) and different defence strategies. There is however another distinction that could be made, namely at what the judgements are aimed: a person, role and/or system.

McGraw (1991) formulated a typology of political accounts. Political accounts are forms of defence strategies. She makes a distinction between excuses and justifications, which are very similar to what Benoit (2015) calls, respectively, evade responsibility and reduce offensiveness. McGraw (1991) describes them as tactics to eliminate personal problems by countering the judgements made about the politician as a person. From this, the first target of judgements is formed: the politician *as a person*.

Huberts (2018) seems to be more focussed on someone’s integrity *in the role of a politician*. He gives the example that a minister of environment promotes a trusted friend, who also has the relevant degrees for the job, to secretary general of his ministry. The minister may think it is a morally right thing to do as that friend is fit for the job and he knows he can trust him, which is in the best interest of the department. However, for an official in his function to be considered to have integrity in this case, he would not appoint friends without first having them reviewed by an independent institution. Otherwise, this action would be considered to be influenced by a conflict of interest. This shows that there is a difference between the integrity of a politician as a person and the integrity of someone in the role of a politician.

The third form is also derived from the work of Huberts (2018). He stated that integrity “refers to the moral quality of the governance process, which is important for the legitimacy and credibility of (public) power” (p. 27). If integrity is important for the legitimacy and credibility of (public) power, this means that the judgements of people about *the system* are likely to be influenced by integrity violations as well.

Kempenaar (2020) followed this reasoning and was the first researcher who combined integrity violations, defence strategies and following judgements aimed at person, role, and system, which is also the strategy in this thesis. The distinction made analytically, which will be used in this thesis too, is the following (Kempenaar, 2020, p. 17-18):

- **A/B1: Judgements concerning the *person* him or herself**  
→ Example: “Based on this act/defence strategy, I find this person good/bad.”
- **A/B2: Judgements concerning the person in his or her *role***  
→ Example: “Based on this act/defence strategy, I find this politician good/bad.”
- **A/B3: Judgements concerning the *system* of which the person is part**  
→ Example: “I find this politician’s act/defence strategy a symptom for a good/bad system.”

## 2.2 Conflict of Interest

### 2.2.1 Definition

In this thesis, the focus will be on a specific form of a possible integrity violation: a conflict of interest. For conflict of Interest, the definition by Boyce & Davids (2009, p. 9) will be used: “A conflict of interest is any conflict between the personal or private interests of a public officer and the officer’s duty to act in the public interest.”

The *interests* of the public official can include those of the people close to him, like family and friends, but also those of associates or organizations he or she works for. Those interests could be financial, like receiving money or goods, but also non-financial, such as influence and loyalty. Other non-financial interest could be based on subjective or ideological biases or personal beliefs (Boyce & Davids, 2009, p.9). These last three are however only relevant for public servants and not really for politicians, as it is expected from politicians to have some kind of ideology and personal beliefs, because of which people who agree with them have voted for them.

The *conflict* in conflict of interests appears when “*the public official could be influenced or could be reasonably perceived by an outside observer to be influenced, by a private interest when performing an official duty*” (Boyce & Davids, 2009, p. 9). Therefore, it is not only important if a conflict of interest is proven and proven to have actually influenced a certain outcome. Perceptions play a role too. They state that this is because public trust is closely tied to the issue of integrity. This trust could already be lost if private interests are *seen* to be of influence. Stark (2000) states that it would be fair to penalize public officials legally or morally for “*mishandling political optics as well as political realities*”, which also shows emphasis on the importance of “*how things look*” (Stark, 2000, p. 17). If you follow this reasoning, politicians themselves are responsible to prevent doubts over a possible conflict of interest of their person, from occurring. Davis (2011, p. 573) made an ethical argument about a conflict of interest where he formulated three reasons why it could be objectionable and when they could be held accountable for this. First, it is morally objectionable when someone is negligent in responding to its own conflict of interest. We could expect that someone who works on another’s behalf, knows the limits of its own judgement when these limits are obvious. It is often clear when there is a conflict of interest, but it is less clear how much it affects one’s judgement. If someone is unaware of his own conflict of interest, he did not take enough care in acting on behalf of someone else. Second, Davis (2011, p. 573) argues that if the subject does know he has a conflict of interest, but the person who relies on the judgement of that subject does not, this is also morally objectionable. Because the subject allows the relying person to believe that he is more reliable than he really is, this is a betrayal of trust. Third, even if the subject informs the relying person about his conflict of interest, his judgement is still less trustworthy. Davis (2011, p. 573) however says that this is more a technical problem, relating to the competence of making the right judgement, where the other two were moral objections.

The last component of the definition is the acting in the public interest. This is defined as “*obligations in regard to administration, ethics, and performance, in accordance with recognized public sector principles and values*” (Boyce & Davids, 2009, p. 9).

Reed (2008, pp. 8-9) clarifies the distinction between a conflict of interest and corruption because those two often get mixed up. Corruption refers to a certain *action*, while a conflict of interest refers to a *situation*. It is possible to be in a situation of conflict of interest without actually behaving corruptly. Corruption *is* an action that could be a wrongdoing, while a conflict of interest only gives the *potential to engage in* an action that could be a wrongdoing.

### 2.2.2 Conflict of Interest and Integrity

Conflict of interest is a commonly known form of potentially immoral behaviour in public service, and it has earlier been recognized as playing a role in the decline in perceived standards of conduct in public office (Boyce & Davids, 2009). One of the most fundamental expectations people have for public officials is that they perform their duties in a fair, neutral, and unbiased way. Boyce and Davids (2009) state that therefore conflict of interest could damage the performance of almost all functions in the public sector. The following elements are at issue: good public administration, public accountability, confidence in public sector integrity, and the trust, which citizens have in governments, official institutions, public officials, and democratic systems more broadly. This corresponds with the judgements about the *system* that was earlier formulated in this thesis (and derived from the work by Huberts (2018)). Therefore, it is likely that a conflict of interest could result in judgements being made about the system where the accused politician is a part of.

Lasthuizen et al. (2011) distinguish between two types of conflict of interest in their typology. The first type considers conflict of (private and public) interest through gifts. Here, the personal interest interferes with the public/organizational interest because of gifts, services, assets, or promises taken. The second type considers conflict of (private and public) interest through side-line activities. Here, the interference of interest is due to the jobs or activities practiced outside the organization. The cases used in this thesis are both examples of the first type. In the first case, there appears to be a conflict of interest as a family member seems to be favoured at the appointment of a job. In the second case, there appears to be a conflict of interest as someone who has an influence on the composition of the candidate list of a political party, has a relationship with one of the candidates put on the candidate list. In the next chapter, these cases will be explained more thoroughly.

## Chapter 3 - Data and method

### 3.1 Research design

This thesis will build on the thesis by Kempenaar (2020). To make the analysis as consistent as possible, the research design will be quite similar. Apart from Kempenaar (2020), no research has been done on the effects of using certain defence strategies after integrity violations. In her research, one case was about a conflict of interest: Anne-Will Duthler. She finds that relatively few judgements were made about Duthler's personal integrity, but many about the integrity of the system. She explained that this tendency was influenced by the ongoing debate about the integrity of the VVD and the senate.

In this thesis, only conflict of interest cases will be researched. It will be interesting to see if judgements in these cases will focus more on the person or role integrity of the accused politicians or also on the system.

In an attempt to answer the research question, an in-depth analysis of two conflicts of interest cases will be performed. With the given time frame, this seemed to be the best option to get the best results. As mentioned before, not much research has yet been done in this subject, so a lot of it is still exploratory and will need a careful look at a variety of perceptions about the subject. This explains the choice to do an in-depth analysis.

#### 3.1.1 Case selection

When selecting the cases for this thesis, a couple of things were relevant. To start off, the cases needed to have the characteristic of affairs or scandals. Cases with these characteristics cause a lot of fuss and often lead to big societal outrage. Societal or public debates are likely to arise in which the integrity of public officials or public organisation could be under discussion (Kerkhoff & Overeem, 2018, p. 20). This is useful for the thesis where public perceptions about integrity are attempted to be captured.

The cases will consist of conflict of interest scandals that occurred in The Netherlands. The time period of interest will be the 2010s. By using recent cases, it will hopefully be easier to find relevant sources where this case is covered. In addition, integrity is a concept that is subject to change over time (Kerkhoff & Overeem, 2018, p. 13). Therefore, recent cases may capture the best understanding of the concept of integrity at this moment. Furthermore, to replicate the research by Kempenaar (2020) it is required that the cases are also covered on online platforms *Joop* and *GeenStijl*, which started in 2009 and 2003 respectively.

Not only *Joop* and *GeenStijl*, but also the newspapers NRC and *De Telegraaf* should have written about the case. By doing this, this thesis also tries to prevent a data collection bias, because now the sources used are not based on personal preferences or beliefs but are just used to ensure a better replication of the work by Kempenaar (2020). In the case of Tichelaar however, much more data could be found in the *De Volkskrant*, because they had a part in the investigation of the case. Therefore, this thesis will use *De Volkskrant* instead of the NRC. Since, *De Volkskrant* has similar left-leaning characteristics as the NRC, this should not make a (big) difference for the results.

In the table underneath, the used cases are presented. In the next chapters, these cases will be explained and after that analysed.

**Table 3.01**

*Schematic presentation of the Conflict of Interest cases used in this thesis*

Case	Function	Party	Still in office?
Jacques Tichelaar (2017)	Commissioner of the King (CdK) (Drenthe)	PvdA	No
Marjolein Meijer (2018)	Chairwoman	GroenLinks	No

*\*Note: The word Commissioner of the King comes from the Dutch word Commissaris van de Koning and is abbreviated to CdK,*

### 3.2 Operationalization of the variables

In this paragraph, the main variables that are under investigation will be operationalized.

#### 3.2.1 Independent variables: Conflict of Interest & Defence Strategy

The first independent variable in the research question is a supposed *conflict of interest*. The variable is present when a politician is accused of a conflict of interest.

The second independent variable is *defence strategy*. To research the independent variable, the earlier explained typology of Benoit (2015), extended with two defence strategies derived from the taxonomy of Schönbach (1990) will be used (see Table 2.01 & 2.02 in paragraph 2.1.3 of this thesis). In the analysis, it will be determined what defence strategies have been employed by Tichelaar and Meijer after they were accused of acting with a conflict of interest. The defence strategy ‘silence’ could use some more specification. What is meant with silence here, is that the politician decides not to respond to a certain accusation. He or she

could either only respond to other (parts of the) accusations or not respond at all. If this is the case, it will come forward in the analysis.

### 3.2.2 Dependent variable: Judgements about integrity

Judgements are assumed to be part of the public opinion. For the dependent variable, this thesis tries to capture this part of the public opinion by researching judgements being made about integrity. The public opinion could be seen either as the sum of individual opinions or as a collectively constructed entity where the public is a collective (Kempenaar, 2020). For this thesis, it is assumed that individuals have opinions about accusations of conflict of interest and the defence strategies employed by the politicians who received these accusations. Some of these opinions should contain judgement.

A variety of opinions will be researched. Price (2008, p.16) identified varying actors that are relevant for the development of public opinion, which are used to categorize the different societal groups that are researched. In the table underneath, these actors are presented:

**Table 3.02**

*Actors relevant in the development of public opinion (Price, 2008, p.16)*

Political leaders	Technical Experts
Interest groups	Reporters and editors
Attentive publics	Mass audiences

However, the opinions from interest groups and technical experts are not included in this thesis, because of the limited time given. In addition, there will be no specific distinction made between attentive public and mass audiences. These actors will be combined into ‘general public’. The following will be the actual categories of actors used in this thesis:

- Political leaders
- Reporters and editors
- The general public

Different platforms will be used to capture the varying judgements of these three groups of actors. First, the judgements by political leaders will be searched on Twitter with a focus on the political leaders of the parties represented in parliament. In case the political leader was not the spokesperson on the relevant topic or when another member of parliament is relevant for the topic, these members of parliament will be considered too. In the case of Tichelaar, also the judgements by representatives in the Provincial Council will be researched as this appearance



of conflict of interest was relevant on a regional level. In addition, the Twitter accounts of the political parties will be researched. Moreover, relevant statements by political leaders on online news platforms will be added to these tweets. Furthermore, data will be collected from official publications from the Dutch parliament like the notes of plenary sessions and from the summary of the debate in the Provincial Council.

Second, the judgements by reporters and editors will be derived from two newspapers with big audiences in the Netherlands. The first newspaper is *De Telegraaf*. This paper is known to hire right leaning journalists and columnists, which also attracts a relatively right leaning audience. The second newspaper is *De Volkskrant*. The characteristics of this paper are more on the left side of the political spectrum. Because of this, the judgements of *De Volkskrant* are likely to be different from those of *De Telegraaf*. The focus on two newspapers makes sense with the chosen in-depth analysis strategy. More judgements from the same papers could be analysed and compared than would have been the case if more papers were researched. Not only published articles, but also published columns and letters from readers will be researched.

Third, the judgements by the general public will be derived from two online forms of participatory journalism: *GeenStijl* and *Joop*. More specifically, the comments placed under articles on these websites will be researched and analysed. To ensure that the comments are actually about the researched appearances of conflicts of interest, only news articles with a direct link to those or a direct link to the employed defence strategies will be used. *GeenStijl* and *Joop* are roughly comparable to *De Telegraaf* and *De Volkskrant* respectively, when considering the place on the political spectrum. Like *De Telegraaf*, *GeenStijl* usually hires right leaning journalist and columnist and attracts a relatively right leaning audience, where *Joop* could be characterized as more left leaning, like *De Volkskrant*. That two sides on the political spectrum are covered, does not mean that the full public opinion could be captured using this method. It does however give a more diverse perspective than would have been the case when a more casual/mainstream platform would have been used. Both platforms attract many comments on published articles, which is useful to get enough data for the analysis. Using these platforms is interesting as participatory journalism is able to show public opinions instead of only opinions from newspapers. Therefore, it adds a new perspective to the research of judgements about integrity (Kempenaar, 2020). From the picked articles, the 20 earliest comments will be analysed with the intent of capturing the opinions people have themselves about the act instead of just repeating earlier comments.

### 3.3 Data collection

The collection of data is done through random assignment. The researcher does not have an influence on what politicians, journalists or people from the ‘general’ public made judgements about the appearances of conflicts of interest or defence strategy that got media attention. Furthermore, the cases are not selected through personal interests, but because they fit the research design and are covered on all relevant platforms. This prevents a bias from influencing the research, which is favourable for the internal validity of this thesis. What is intended to be measured – judgements by the before mentioned actors – will actually be measured. However, the news and internet platforms are not randomly selected, which means that the conclusions could only possibly say something about the judgements from journalists from those newspapers and the judgements from commenters on those internet platforms. Since the researcher has no control over the assigned subjects, this thesis could be characterized as an observational research.

To ensure the reliability of this thesis, it is well recorded how the data is collected. To start off, a relevant time period is determined for both cases. In the Tichelaar case, this time period is from 25 February 2017 to 30 September 2017. For the Meijer case, the relevant time period is from 1 June 2018 to 18 May 2019. Furthermore, the used search terms are recorded. A useful search term is for example the combination of the following aspects of the case: **last name of the accused politicians, political party, relevant keyword**. In the first case this would be for example, **Tichelaar + PvdA + Huize Tetrode** and in the second case **Meijer + GroenLinks + Relatie**. The relevant websites for judgements of politicians are Twitter and archives from the national parliament and the provincial council of Drenthe. Judgements by reporters/editors are derived from the database of LexisNexis and the judgements by the public are derived from the online platforms *GeenStijl* and *Joop*. This means that only publicly available sources are used. In addition, the usernames of people commenting on *GeenStijl* and *Joop* are not shown to ensure anonymity.

In the Tichelaar case, most information is derived from the articles by *De Volkskrant* and *Dagblad van het Noorden*. For example, a letter by Tichelaar to the Provincial Council was not made public, but these newspapers had laid their hands on it. In their articles, they publish quotes from his letters, but also some indirect statements by Tichelaar. One should always be careful with these kinds of interpretations by the media as they may be biased. As it is the only information available, it will still be used in this thesis, but the possibility of a bias must not be forgotten.

In the Meijer case, most factual information is derived from the research by *EenVandaag* and the official statement by GroenLinks. From the statement by GroenLinks, only the facts will be used and not the opinions.

### 3.4 Data analysis

This thesis pursues a qualitative research. The aim is not to find out if there are causal links between certain integrity violations or defence strategies and certain judgements about the integrity of accused politicians. Instead, this research explores *what* judgements are made after an appearance of a conflict of interest and the following defence strategies. These will then be categorized as either positive, neutral, or negative. This approach means that the external validity will not be very high, as the results are not generalizable to a bigger population. However, this is not necessary in an exploratory research like this. If for instance a judgement turns out to occur often, it is possible in later research to find out if there are in fact causal links present.

What is considered to be a defence strategy in this research is based on scientific research as presented and explained in the previous chapter. It is however sometimes open for interpretation if some statements really fit the description from these defence strategies. This could be seen as a bias. This is compensated by presenting the explanations and actual quotations that are provided in the appendix. That way, the interpretation by the researcher could be checked.

## Chapter 4 - Analysis 1: Jacques Tichelaar – the redecoration of Huize

### Tetrode

#### 4.1 Case description

On 25 February 2017, Dutch newspapers *De Volkskrant* and *Dagblad van het Noorden* published an investigation into the assignment of the redecoration of ‘Huize Tetrode’. Huize Tetrode is a national monument, which is situated in the city of Assen and owned by the corresponding province: Drenthe (Van den Berg, 2017). In 2015, the province wanted a redesign of the interior of Huize Tetrode. At that time, ‘Projectenbureau Drenthe’ was the user of the building. The director of this organization, Henk Klaver, appointed an interior designer from Assen to advise about the redecoration. She presented her advice on November 2, 2015, after which she signed a contract for the job. The deal was sealed, and the designer could proceed in the redesign of Huize Tetrode. A few days later however, this took a curious turn.

On November 5, Klaver received an email from the housing coordinator of the province that the Commissioner of the King (CdK) of the province of Drenthe had appointed a different interior designer to advise about the redecoration job. While he is politically responsible for the building management, it is unusual that the CdK interferes in the execution process. The CdK at that time was Jacques Tichelaar and the interior designer he asked for advice was Karin Klinkenberg, his sister in law. Due to this familial relationship, this intervention in the process created the appearance of a conflict of interest. In the end, his sister in law received 3.105 euros for the advice. The passed designer, the one appointed earlier appointed by Klaver, received a compensation of 3.500 euros (Van den Berg & Bodde, 2017b). This case has a clear appearance of conflict of interest when using the earlier mentioned definition by Boyce and Davids (2009). There is good reason to believe that Tichelaar could have been influenced in his decision to intervene in the assignment of the design project, by his personal interest of helping his sister in law.

The code of conduct set by the Provincial Council of Drenthe aimed at the Provincial Council, the Provincial Executive, and the Commissioner of the King forbids a conflict of interest. In the code of conduct set in 2014, which was active when the Tichelaar case occurred, it has a specific rule for familial relationships:

*“An administrator with familial- or friendly relationships with a provider of services or goods to the province, deprives himself from participation in the decision-making about the assignment in question”* (PSD, 2014, p. 3).

It also states, “*In case of private-public collaborations, the administrator prevents the (appearance of) bias in opposition to fair competitive relationships*” (PSD, 2014, p.3).

#### 4.1.1 An earlier appearance of conflict of interest in 2013

It is not the first time that Jacques Tichelaar caused the appearance of a conflict of interest. This is relevant, because it may influence the fuss created in the new conflict of interest case and influence how people judge the integrity of Tichelaar as a person, or in his role as CdK. Therefore, it is part of the ‘Tichelaar case’ as a whole.

This earlier appearance of a conflict of interest occurred in 2013, when he mediated in a conflict between the municipality of Coevorden and Jos Wijland, who was an entrepreneur in the catering industry. Jos Wijland was the brother of Tichelaar’s soon to be wife Koosje and also the husband of Karin Klinkenberg, who was the subject of the conflict of interest case mentioned above. Wijland claimed to be entitled to 1.5 million euros of the municipality of Coevorden, because the municipality did not honour existing commitments about the development of the area around the castle of Coevorden, which was then used as a hotel and restaurant. The castle did not attract a sufficient number of guests, which got Wijland into financial trouble. Tichelaar acted as a mediator on two different occasions. When this information leaked, Tichelaar stated that he only acted as a facilitator in a neat and integer way. In addition, he said that he did not interfere into the content of the matter and that the familial relationship he had with Wijland was not relevant (Van den Berg & Bodde, 2017b). This appeared to be untrue after the investigation by *De Volkskrant* and *Dagblad van het Noorden*. Several sources told them that Tichelaar pressured to municipality outside of the conversations to compensate his brother in law. In addition, a letter by Tichelaar to the Provincial Council from 2013 was brought to the light, where he admitted his interference was not right and he promised never to act as an intermediary again in the future where a family member may be involved (Van den Berg & Bodde, 2017b).

#### 4.1.2 Responses by Tichelaar to the accusations

The first official response Tichelaar gave was published together with the article by *De Volkskrant* and *Dagblad van het Noorden*. When these papers asked Tichelaar to respond to the accusations at his address, he denied having acted with a conflict of interest. He explained: “*For the redecoration of the Landschapszaal (a room in Huize Tetrode ed.), a design had earlier been asked, which did not meet the requirements. The new job appointment and the*

*further preparation/execution of it has, as usual, been executed under official mandate.”* (Van den Berg & Bodde, 2017a).

Tichelaar stated that he *“did not put his sister in law forward and did not ask for her advice”* and that *“it was later in the process that it became clear to the civil service that it concerned a family member* (Van den Berg & Bodde, 2017a).

A few days after the publication of the article, Tichelaar wrote a letter to the Provincial Council where he admitted to the contrary of his first response, namely that he *did* put his sister in law forward for the redecoration design. He explained that the redecoration of Huize Tetrode in 2015 was not really getting going and because of this: *“the commissioner quickly asked to realise the design after all and mentioned a couple of names, namely Klinkenberg-SO and Roodbergen Dolfma”*, but *“never had the intention to act in a guiding way”* (Van den Berg & Bodde, 2017c). Both firms were in the end appointed for different aspects of the redecoration. Moreover, he stated, *“The Council (of the Provincial Executive ed.) and the commissioner in particular deeply regret the arisen commotion”* (Van den Berg & Bodde, 2017c).

The next Wednesday, on 1 March 2017, after he sent his letter to the Provincial Council, the Provincial Council held a meeting about the matter. The meeting took the form of a trial under the name ‘Proces opdrachtverlening herinrichting Huize Tetrode c.a.’. First, the parties represented in the Provincial Council had to give their opinion about the matter after which the CdK was allowed to give a response. The SP and the PVV both suggested Tichelaar should resign as CdK. Other parties also expressed their displeasure about the course of actions by the CdK and some stated that it appeared more like he did act with a conflict of interest than that it was really out of his hands. They however first wanted to hear Tichelaar himself before jumping to conclusions. After Tichelaar had the opportunity to explain his actions and the members of the Provincial Council had the opportunity to ask him questions, the meeting was suspended for some time. After the suspension, Tichelaar concluded that the trust in him was *“completely insufficient”* to stay in his position. Therefore, he decided to resign immediately (PSD, 2017b).

#### 4.2 Defence strategies employed by Jacques Tichelaar

In this paragraph, a closer look will be given to the defence strategies Jacques Tichelaar used after he was accused of acting with a conflict of interest. His first defence strategy came forward in his response to the article by *De Volkskrant* and *Dagblad van het Noorden*, which was published together with the article (Van den Berg & Bodde, 2017a). His second response could be derived from his letter to the Provincial Council, which was not published in full by the

Provincial Council but is cited in *De Volkskrant* (Van den Berg & Bodde, 2017c), and the emergency debate that followed (PSD, 2017a). The more detailed analysis of the defence strategies employed by Tichelaar could be read in Appendix A. For now, the main findings of this analysis will be presented. These findings will be categorized under the identified defence strategies.

#### 4.2.1 Simple denial

After the research performed by *De Volkskrant* and *Dagblad van het Noorden*, they asked Tichelaar for a response to the accusations. Tichelaar had a clear strategy at this point: denying everything. He stated, *“I have not put my sister-in-law forward and have also not asked her to advice about the redecoration of Huize Tetrode”*. He kept denying by stating: *“It was later in the process, when the agreements about the first presentation were made, that it became clear to the civil service that it concerned a family member”* (Van den Berg & Bodde, 2017a). While he might have hoped that this would put an end to it, this was not the case. The article sparked a lot of commotion and debate. In the end, it led to an emergency debate in the Provincial Council. In this debate he does recognize that he put his sister-in-law forward; *“I should never, really never, have mentioned the company of my sister-in-law* (PSD, 2017a, 1:08:35), but still stated that he only knew she was appointed later in the process: *“To me ... it was not known that that was executed, already on that moment, by...the company Klinkenberg”* (PSD, 2017a, 1:25:50).

#### 4.2.2 Good intentions

Before the emergency debate, Tichelaar decided to write a letter to the Provincial Council. The defence strategies in this letter were very different from the earlier denials he used in response the newspapers.

To start off, Tichelaar explained that he only had good intentions when he involved himself in the redecoration process of Huize Tetrode. He stated that the redecoration of Tetrode just would not commence. Therefore, he writes: *“the commissioner quickly asked to realise the design after all and mentioned a couple of names, namely Klinkenberg-SO (The organization from his sister-in-law ed.) and Roodbergen Dolfsma”* (Van den Berg & Bodde, 2017c). By making this statement, he probably means that he just wanted to speed up the redecoration process, because it took too long. He also tried to show his good intentions more directly by saying: *“The commissioner never had the intention to act in a guiding way at the job*

*appointment of the official organization or any organization whatsoever*” (Van den Berg & Bodde, 2017c).

In the emergency debate, Tichelaar again took the opportunity to express his good intentions to the Provincial Council. Contrary to the other times he used this strategy however, this time he recognized having made mistakes, but tried to evade responsibilities by explaining that he only had good intention when he did it. He told the Council: *“I should never, really never, have mentioned the company of my sister-in-law. Although it was intended to be an example, a suggestion, it was unhandy and stupid. I should have recognized this earlier, but because it was never my intention to influence, the realization of recognition came too late”*. (PSD, 2017a, 1:08:35). One might conclude that he is not fully responsible since he did not want to influence the process; it makes sense that he was not aware of his sister-in-law actually being appointed for the job.

#### 4.2.3 Mortification (apology)

In the letter Tichelaar wrote to the Provincial Council, he also tried to apologize to some extent. He wrote, *“The Council (of the Provincial Executive ed.) and the commissioner in particular deeply regret the arisen commotion”* (Van den Berg & Bodde, 2017c). He does not really apologize for his actions here, but he does show he regrets that it has sparked so much commotion. Therefore, it also looks like the *shift of blame* defence strategy. Because he clearly shows regret however, this thesis decides to gather it under the apology strategy.

In the following emergency debate, Tichelaar opens with a similar reasoning: *“Chairperson, you said it yourself: a debate about my actions. I regret that deeply. Not good for Drenthe, not for the citizens, not for the politics and not for my function. Chairperson, it moves me deeply”* (PSD, 2017a, 1:04:50). Interesting here is that Tichelaar himself mentions the impact the appearance of a conflict of interest could have on the system (Drenthe, the citizens, the politics) and on his role. These are two researched aspects in this thesis: judgements being made about Tichelaar in his role as CdK and on the system as a whole. It will be interesting if other actors make the same connection when making judgements about his actions or defence strategy. Later in his plea, he made another clear apology, this time aimed specifically at the chairperson: *“Chairperson, and that is not easily said: I want to humbly apologize, because like me, you suffer from this as well. And I therefore humbly apologize doubly”* (PSD, 2017a, 1:07:49).



#### 4.2.4 Differentiation

Another defence strategy Tichelaar seemed to be using was differentiation: “*According to Tichelaar, he did not break the code (of integrity ed.). He however writes that he did put his sister-in-law forward to an official without mentioning the familial relationship*” (Van den Berg & Bodde, 2017c). The audience that the act is not as bad as it might first appear. The third form is *differentiation*. When differentiation is performed, the accused compares the act to similar but less desirable actions to make the act under attention look less offensive. While Tichelaar admits he did put his sister-in-law forward, he also stated that he did not break the code of conduct about integrity. If he did not break the code, apparently, the code gets broken for other, less desirable acts than this one.

#### 4.2.5 Corrective action

Tichelaar also clearly wanted to show that he already took or wanted to take action in the future to fix the problems that his appearance of a conflict of interest created. In his letter to the Provincial Council, he stated that as soon as he knew that his sister was involved in the project, he and other people involved took action: “*The job was not expanded, but got completed, because of the noticed familial relationship*” (Van den Berg & Bodde, 2017c).

He also tried to get empathy in the emergency debate by repeatedly stating that he will improve himself in the future and that he will take action to prevent it from happening again: “*I want to learn from my mistakes and put effort into restoring trust*” (PSD, 2017a, 1:06:18); “*I want to work on restoring the lost trust*” (PSD, 1:09:22); “*But I hope you can recognize that I take this very seriously. I want to learn from my mistakes*” (PSD, 2017a, 1:11:00).

#### 4.2.6 Bolstering

The last defence strategy this thesis identified, is bolstering. In the emergency debate, Tichelaar stated the following: “*I realise that qualities like decisiveness are also my pitfall. Characteristics like hands-on, acting, getting results; could also work against you*” (PSD, 2017a, 1:09:22). By summing up his qualities, he probably tries to remind the Provincial Council why he was such a good CdK. By underscoring some of these characteristics he may have tried to reduce offensiveness for the act, as they are normally known as qualities of his.

### 4.3 Judgements on the Tichelaar case

In this paragraph the actual judgements made on the Tichelaar case will be analysed. In every sub-paragraph, the findings from a different source of public opinion will be presented. First, the judgements identified in the Dutch newspapers will be covered. Judgements found in articles by *De Volkskrant* will have the ID ‘VK##’, while *De Telegraaf* will have the ID ‘TG##’. In the second subparagraph, the responses of politicians will be covered. These will be subdivided into three categories: responses to news outlets (POLN##), responses in official documents (POLO##) and responses by politicians on Twitter (POLT##). The last subparagraph will cover the comments on the online platforms *GeenStijl* (GS##) and *Joop* (J##).

All judgements can be found in the supplemented Appendix C using those ID’s. In this Appendix, the original Dutch texts are also presented. It is good to keep in mind that some judgements were made before he wrote a letter to the Provincial Council (February 28<sup>th</sup>) and/or before the emergency debate (March 1<sup>st</sup>). This is noticeable in responses to his defence strategy, which differed over time, and whether people think there is just an appearance of conflict of interest or that it is according to them proven. From the APA reference, the date of the publication of the articles could be derived, which could help by determining what information was present and what defence strategies were employed at that point.

#### 4.3.1 Judgements in the national newspapers

##### 4.3.1.1 *De Volkskrant*

On NexisUni, fifteen articles about the Tichelaar case were found with 6 containing judgement on his integrity. Four articles contained judgements about Tichelaar’s actual appearance of a conflict of interest (the act) and also four on his defence strategies after being accused of that act. Two of these articles contained judgements about both the act and the defence strategy, while both types also have two articles that only judges either the act or the defence strategy.

##### 4.3.1.1.1 Judgements on the act

In total, nine judgements were identified that are aimed at the act of Jacques Tichelaar. From this, two were specifically aimed at Tichelaar as a person. VK4 put emphasis on the fact that Tichelaar is an experienced manager and should know better, saying: *“it should be clear for an experienced manager like Tichelaar that his integrity is unavoidably at stake when he acts for the benefit of relatives...”*. VK14 says somewhat of the opposite, stating: *“I would say that...he is way too smart to risk his job, name and life, the full Jacques, in fact - for a nepotic*

*insignificance.*". So, where VK4 thinks Tichelaar probably knew better, but did it anyway, VK14 instead emphasizes the fact that he may not have known better, because if he did, he would not have performed the act.

Furthermore, two judgements were also aimed at Tichelaar in his role as CdK. VK4 stated the following: *"Tichelaar will have to...apologize humbly to continue his second term as Commissioner of the King in a credible way"*. So, his credibility could only be restored after a humble apology after his appearance of conflict of interest, according to this article. VK7 pointed out that *"... it is not the first time that Tichelaar interferes in a matter where a family member is involved"*, referring to the Coevorden case.

Two judgements were not specifically aimed at his person or role. VK14 described the act as a "nepotic insignificance". VK15 seemed to question whether Tichelaar had bad intentions with his act: *"The case of Tichelaar is odd, because the sum of money was very small"*.

At last, three judgements about the act were linked to the system where Tichelaar is part of. VK14 stated: *"They (managers ed.) do it because that is how they always do it. It is in the culture. Everyone does it."* And further in the same article, it stated: *"That is how I see him to be honest...a personification of a culture"*. So, the article made a negative judgement about the system as a whole and Tichelaar was part of that system. VK15 also concluded that there were some fundamental problems in the system, stating: *"In the end, bureaucratic experts serve the public interest and not politicians...The bureaucratic model by Weber is increasingly abandoned. Officials do not have a certain status anymore. They are more rotating (between jobs ed.) non-experts, who only serve the politics. In this situation, you will only have to wait for the next Tichelaar."* Because of these problems in the system, cases like Tichelaar were likely to happen again, according to this article.

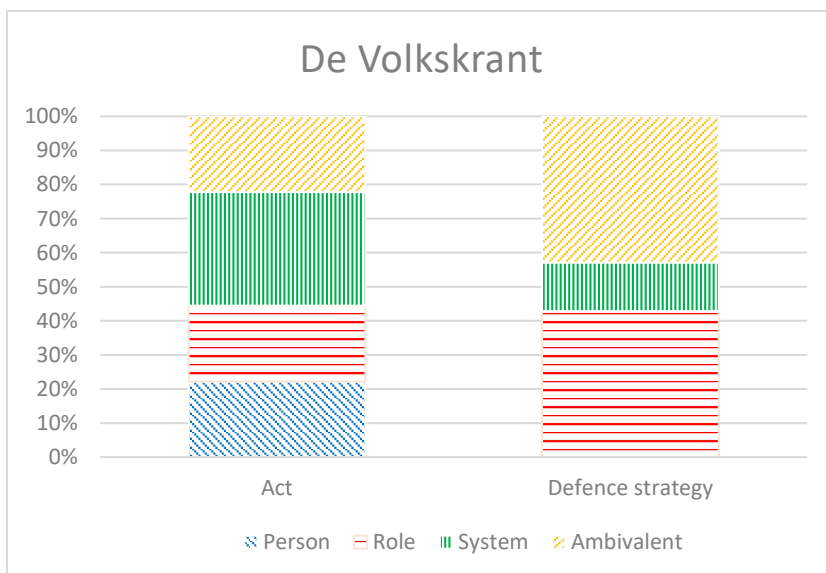
#### 4.3.1.1.2 Judgements on the defence strategies

A total of four articles judged not (only) the act of Jacques Tichelaar, but (also) his defence strategy. They contain seven judgements, with none of these judgements aimed at Tichelaar as a person. Three judgements were aimed at Tichelaar in his role as CdK, all of which come from the same article. VK10 judges the simple denial, which Tichelaar used in response to questions by *De Volkskrant* and *Dagblad van het Noorden*. This judgement came after the emergency debate where Tichelaar stepped down from his function, which may have influenced this article in classifying the earlier denial as a lie: *"After the publication of Dagblad van het Noorden and De Volkskrant, the commissioner kept denying having broken the integrity rules. With that lie, he disqualified himself definitively"* (VK10). More specifically was the loss of integrity in his

role put forward in another statement: *"From that moment, it was clear that under no circumstances would he be maintainable as the figurehead of Drenthe "*(VK10). Lastly, the article judged the apology Tichelaar made later on, stating that the harm had already been done: *"It was not until Tuesday when he admitted having put the company of his sister-in-law forward. It was too little, too late."*(VK10).

Three judgements did not seem to point specifically at person or role and were therefore classified as ambivalent. Two articles also judged the earlier denial by Tichelaar negatively and both also classified the denial to be a lie: *"...Tichelaar tried to clear the air by lying about the appointment of his sister-in-law in the media...and I don't think the choice for this lie was very rational"* (VK14) and *"That he denied this (conflict of interest ed.) did not help him"* (VK11). Another article did not refer to one type of strategy specifically, but rather judged his overall defence: *"His evenly weak as emotional defence..."* (VK10).

One article made a negative judgement about the earlier denial of Tichelaar, linking it to the integrity of the system as a whole. More specifically, it involves the human nature: *"Sadly, we know that lying is not part of the governance culture, but part of the human nature"* (VK15). Therefore, this article does not blame Tichelaar personally for his lying but expresses his sadness that the lying is in the human nature.



**Figure 1**  
Summary of the judgements in *De Volkskrant*

#### 4.3.1.2 De Telegraaf

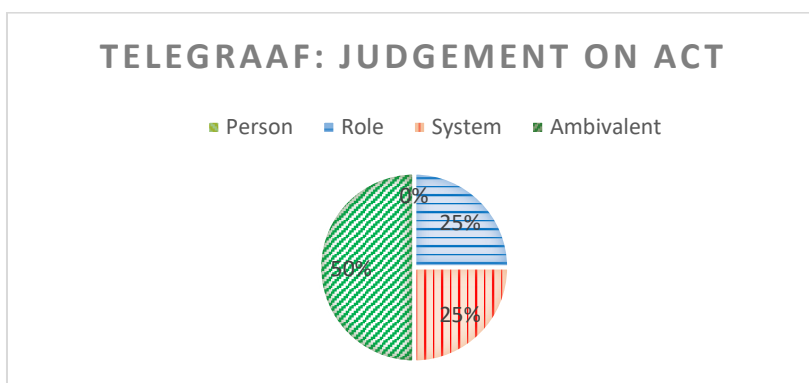
When collecting data on the Tichelaar case, 10 articles were found, with three containing judgements on integrity. In total, four judgements on integrity were identified, all of which were aimed at the act. Interestingly, no judgements regarding his defence strategy were identified.

##### 4.3.1.2.1 Judgements on the act

From the judgements on the act, none were aimed specifically at the integrity of Tichelaar as a person. One neutral judgement was made about his role as CdK, stating that in other jobs helping friends is a good thing, but: *“If you are a Commissioner of the King however, the opposite will happen as it would be called a conflict of interest”* (TG6).

Two judgements can be classified as ambivalent, both of which come from the same article. Both judgements are positive, with one looking at the outcome of the act: *“The costs were no more than 3100 euros. Seems neat to me.”* (TG7) and the other comparing it to the situation of television, which is supposed to be worse: *“On television I see more shameless nepotism.”* (TG7), which seems to mean that the author of the article tried to reduce the offensiveness of the act.

One judgement was aimed at the system as a whole: *“Again, we get to know a humiliating practice of a high official in function...The antics he performed in his function form the basis for the common thinking about politics and the bureaucracy”* (TG8). This article stated that his actions fit in the political and bureaucratic system.



**Figure 2**

Distribution of the judgements on act in *De Telegraaf*

#### 4.3.1.3 Conclusion about the judgements in the newspapers

When comparing the judgements from *De Volkskrant* and *De Telegraaf*, there appear to be some differences. Where the judgements in *De Volkskrant* are relatively evenly distributed

between judgements aimed at the act (9) and the defence strategy (7), are none of the judgements in *De Telegraaf* aimed at the defence strategy. This is interesting, as all of the articles from *De Telegraaf* containing judgement on integrity, are written after Tichelaar's resignation (on March 1). The defence strategy Tichelaar used seemed to have no effect on their perceptions on integrity, or at least not big enough to make it worth mentioning. Another interesting difference is that in *De Telegraaf*, one positive judgement was given at the case, while none were positive in *De Volkskrant*.

**Table 4.01**

Summary of the data analysis of the newspapers

<b>Summary</b>				
	Number of articles	Containing judgement on integrity	Containing judgement on act	Containing judgement on defence strategy
<b>De Volkskrant</b>	15	6	6	4
<b>De Telegraaf</b>	10	3	3	0

<b>Judgement on act</b>					
	Total	Person	Role	Ambivalent	System
<b>De Volkskrant</b>	9	2	2	2	3
<b>De Telegraaf</b>	4	0	1	2	1

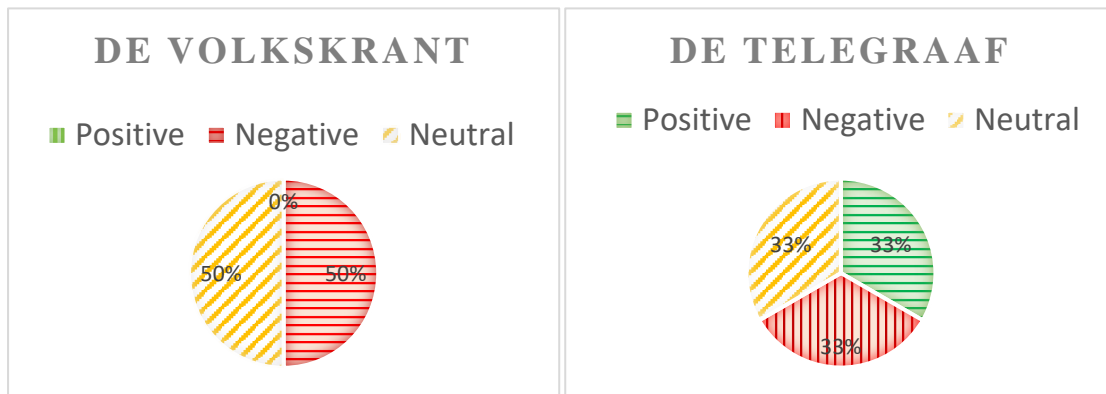
<b>Judgement on defence strategy</b>					
	Total	Person	Role	Ambivalent	System
<b>De Volkskrant</b>	7	0	3	3	1
<b>De Telegraaf</b>	0	0	0	0	0

**Table 4.02**

Comparing the judgements from *De Volkskrant* and *De Telegraaf* articles.

	Positive	Negative	Neutral	Total*
<b>De Volkskrant</b>	0	3	3	6
<b>De Telegraaf</b>	1	1	1	3

\*Note: System integrity is excluded from this table as all judgements about the system are either neutral or negative (in the sample). The goal in this table is to see whether there is a difference in positivity between the papers.



**Figure 3**

Comparison of the judgements from *De Volkskrant* and *De Telegraaf*

#### 4.3.2 Judgements by politicians

##### 4.3.2.1 Twitter

Not many politicians responded to the case of Jacques Tichelaar. Four Tweets were put out by accounts of political parties represented in the Provincial Council, containing statements by their representatives. These statements are mostly quoting from the emergency debate on March 1, but will still be presented here, because they apparently thought it was relevant enough to put it on the local party's Twitter. This adds up to five judgements about integrity, all of which are aimed at the act. No statements on the case by national politicians were found on Twitter.

##### 4.3.2.1.1 Judgements on the act

All judgements on the act of Tichelaar were negative. One judgement was aimed at the integrity of Tichelaar as a person. In a statement by Van der Tol (faction leader of D66), she questions how Tichelaar could make the same mistake again, presenting three options: "*Self overestimation, stupidity or arrogance?*" (POL2), which are linked to personal characteristics with a negative annotation.

Via the Twitter account of the SP faction in Drenthe, a judgement by Moinat (faction leader of SP) on the role of Tichelaar. He stated that Tichelaar should resign after his conflict of interest: "*@wim2103 (SP) (Wim Moinat ed.) hopes that the Commissioner of the King will make the only right choice and submit his resignation to the government.*" (POL1). Another statement containing judgement on Tichelaar in his role as CdK came from Van der Tol (D66) and was put on the party's Twitter account. She questions how this could happen again: "*How is it possible that the Commissioner of the King makes the same blunder again.*" (POL2). A statement by another representative of D66, Van Dalen, was also put on the party's Twitter account: "*If deputy Bijl is responsible for purchases, then why does the Commissioner of the*

*King get involved?"*(POL3). So, he stated that Tichelaar interfered in a decision that wasn't his responsibility.

A last judgement could be derived, again, from a statement by Van der Tol on the party's Twitter account, this time not aimed at the person or role specifically. Therefore, the following was classified as ambivalent: *"Integrity does not have a price tag. 3000 euros is no futility."*(POL4). So, she stated that it does not matter that just a small money sum was involved, it was still an integrity violation.

No judgements by politicians were found on Twitter that were aimed at the integrity of the system.

#### 4.3.2.2 Official documents

In the archives of the Dutch national parliament, no statements by politicians were found concerning the case of Tichelaar. Therefore, official documents of the Provincial Council of Drenthe were researched. The emergency debate about the case, was not written down or not publicly available, however. The Provincial Council did however put out a summary, containing statements with judgements about integrity from the parties represented. Ten contributions were derived from this summary, all of which contained judgements on integrity. In total, these contributions contained 29 judgements on the act and 2 judgements on the defence strategy.

##### 4.3.2.2.1 Judgements on the act

None of the judgements were aimed at the integrity of Tichelaar as a person. Eighteen judgements were aimed at him in his role as CdK. It is relevant to know that all of these statements were made before Tichelaar responded to questions. At this point, five judgements about the integrity of the role could be classified as neutral. His own party, the PvdA, emphasized that no decision about a possible resignation should be made before Tichelaar could respond: *"It must be considered whether the integrity code has been broken and if restoration of trust is possible. The representatives await the response by the commissioner"* (POLO4). This means that to the PvdA the appearance of a conflict of interest alone was not enough to make him resign. CDA, CU and SterkLokaal had similar opinions on the matter. CDA stated: *"The representatives first want to check the facts before they decide and wait for the response by the commissioner"* (POLO6). The same goes for CU: *"The representatives await the response by the commissioner before making a judgement"* adding specific information they



need, before making a judgement: *“The representatives question the information supply and the possible breaking of the integrity code.”* (POLO8). SterkLokaal emphasized that with an integrity affair like this, the focus should be on trust, stating: *“SterkLokaal state that the discussion is about integrity and trust. Therefore, the question is: is there enough trust in the commissioner?”* (POLO10). SP and VVD made very similar neutral judgements about his role as CdK: *“The commissioner... has an exemplary function.”* (POLO1) and a summary of the statement by VVD: *“The VVD also points at the exemplary function of the Commissioner of the King.”* (POLO2).

The other judgements aimed at the integrity of the role, were all negative. SP, 50PLUS and D66 emphasized that he had made mistakes before. The SP stated: *“The commissioner has been warned before (referring to the Coevorden case ed.)”* (POLO1), D66 stated: *“It is the second integrity violation of this commissioner”* and *“The family of the commissioner is involved again”* (POLO5). 50PLUS took it a bit further, stating: *“the problems are connected to the systematic denial of facts by the commissioner”* (POLO9). This last judgement seems to be aimed at a defence strategy. Since it does not mention the defences Tichelaar used in this case, but his way of practicing his function in general, it is classified in this thesis as a judgement on Tichelaar in his role as CdK. Three parties questioned if he lived up to his information duty; whether he should have told the provincial council about his familial relationship with Klinkenberg. The representatives of D66: *“question whether the commissioner kept his active information duty.”* (POLO5), where the representatives of CU *“question the information supply and the possible breaking of the integrity code.”* (POLO8) and 50 PLUS said: *“The Provincial Council has not been taken seriously”* (POLO9). Moreover, some judgements linked the appearance of a conflict of interest to a loss of trust in him, where the earlier mentioned statement by SterkLokaal only mentioned trust to be relevant. SP stated: *“The trust in the Commissioner of the King is damaged”* (POLO1). GroenLinks said: *“Managers should be able to reflect on cases like this”* (POLO7) and they seem to have doubts whether they trust Tichelaar could do this. According to GroenLinks: *“The legitimacy of the function of the commissioner is damaged”*. At last, two parties already concluded that Tichelaar should resign, with the SP saying: *“the right choice for the commissioner is to file his resignation”* (POLO1), The PVV *“questions the integrity of the commissioner and pushes him to file a request for resignation to the minister”* (POLO3)

Some parties made statements about the concepts ‘conflict of interest’ and ‘integrity’ itself, without linking it to the integrity of the person or the role. The SP and the VVD mentioned that even the appearance of a conflict of interest should be prevented, stating respectively: *“The*

*appearance of a conflict of interest should always be prevented*” (POLO1) and *“the ‘moral antenna’ should also be sharply tuned to prevent the appearance of a conflict of interest”* (POLO2). CDA described integrity as a binary concept; it is either there, or it is not there: *“there is no alternative for transparency and neither for integrity; having a little integrity is not possible”*” (POLO6). GroenLinks, stated that *“Commissioner has the appearance of a conflict of interest against him”* (POLO7). At last, SterkLokaal called for the Provincial Council to be considerate in cases of an appearance of a conflict of interest like this one, stating: *“the representatives of the Provincial Council must search for the truth in an integer way, and they ask for correct behaviour of their colleagues during this debate.”* (POLO10).

Three judgements were aimed at the integrity of the system. CDA denounced the whole situation, stating that *“Negative imaging does not do justice to the effort of the Provincial Council”* (POLO6). CU linked it to trust in politics: *“the whole situation is bad for the trust in politics”* (POLO8). D66 took it a bit broader, saying: *“Creating attention for Drenthe in this way, damages the province, the politics of Drenthe and its inhabitants, according to the representatives”* (POLO5).

#### 4.3.2.2.2 Judgements on the defence strategy

In the emergency debate, two judgements were made concerning the defence strategy of Tichelaar. D66 judged the integrity of his role, mentioning the earlier apology in the Coevorden case: *“The commissioner has apologized for his involvement in the case of Coevorden, but did not live up to it”* (POLO5). Because Tichelaar was involved in a conflict of interest again, his earlier apology was clearly questioned. The PVV also judged his role but referred to his defence in his letter to the parliament, without identifying a specific strategy: *“the distrust of the representatives has increased after the informal explanation by the commissioner”* (POLO3).

#### 4.3.2.3 News

The last source of judgements by politicians considered in this thesis, is the news. In the news, six articles were found containing eight judgements on integrity. All of these judged the act and not his defence strategy.

#### 4.3.2.3.1 Judgements on the act

To start off, one politician positively judged the integrity of Tichelaar as a person A deputy of the same party as Tichelaar (PvdA) stated: *“And I know that Tichelaar values integrity highly”*(POLN2).

Furthermore, four judgements were aimed at the integrity of the role of Tichelaar. Party mate and then Minister of Finance Dijsselbloem, made a neutral judgement on the matter, on the day of the publishing of the revealing article by *De Volkskrant* and *Dagblad van het Noorden*: *“that the position of his party mate is damaged if the messages are correct. But he emphasizes that he did not know exactly what was going on”* (POLN1). Three other politicians judged the integrity of his role after Tichelaar stepped down as CdK. National party leader Asscher and Chairman Spekman from the PvdA made a, probably pre-arranged, statement, by both calling his decision *“sensible”* (POLN4, POLN6). Prime Minister Rutte (VVD) stated that he *“respects the decision by Tichelaar”* and added that *“Drenthe deserves a commissioner that has the trust of everyone”* (POLN5).

The earlier mentioned Bijl also made the only ambivalent statement, questioning: *“whether the integrity of the commissioner of the king is really at stake”* (POLN2).

At last, two judgements were aimed at the integrity of the system as a whole. Van der Tol (provincial faction leader D66) emphasized that it is one of the many integrity problems in Drenthe, saying: *“This is not the first file that shows that we are as a small province, big in bothersome matters”* (POLN3). To another news outlet, the same politician stated also linked it to all parties and the elections in Drenthe: *“This impacts all politicians, this close to the elections”*(POLN4).

**Table 4.03**

<b>Summary</b>					
	Total amount of T/Od/N*	Containing judgement on integrity	Containing judgement on act	Containing judgement on defence strategy	
Tweets	4	4	4	0	
Official documents	10	10	10	2	
News	6	6	6	0	
<b>Judgement on act</b>					
	Total	Person	Role	Ambivalent	System

<b>Tweets</b>	5	1	3	1	0
<b>Official documents</b>	27	0	18	6	3
<b>News</b>	8	1	4	1	2

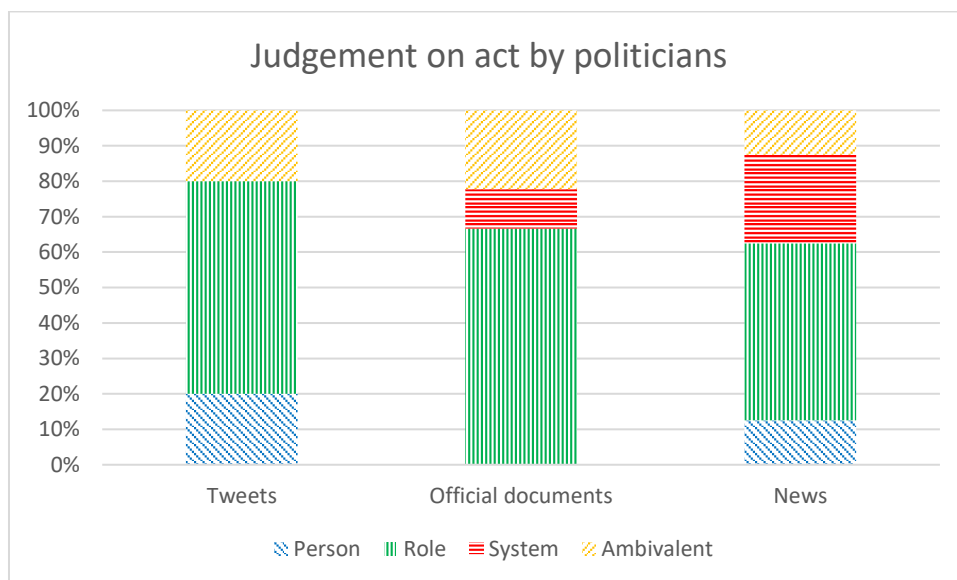
**Judgement on defence strategy**

	Total	Person	Role	Ambivalent	System
<b>Tweets</b>	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Official documents</b>	2	0	2	0	0
<b>News</b>	0	0	0	0	0

\*Note: one article could contain more than one judgement

\*\* Tweets/ Official documents/ News

Summary of judgements by politicians: Tweets, Official documents, and news



**Figure 4**

Comparison of judgements by politicians on the act at different sources

*4.3.2.4 Conclusion about the judgements of politicians*

The first thing that comes forward from the analysis, is that the researched sources contained very little (only 2) judgements by politicians on integrity with reference to the defence strategies. This could probably be partly explained, by the fact that most of his defence took place in the emergency debate, while the sources mostly contained statements of before his defence in this debate. He did however already use defence strategies in his response to the

article and in his letter to parliament. This did however not provoke politicians to make integrity statements about this defence, apparently.

Because more data was collected from judgements on the act, this is more interesting to take a close look at. Looking at figure 4, one could clearly see that in all sources, most judgements by politicians are aimed at the integrity of the role of Tichelaar. In the news, relatively many judgements were also aimed at the integrity of the system. No hard conclusions could be connected to this however, as there were only six statements containing judgements on integrity in the news, most of which came from Tichelaar's own party and two different statement from the same faction leader (D66).

#### 4.3.3 Judgements by the 'general' public

##### 4.3.3.1 *GeenStijl*

*GeenStijl* published one article about the case of Tichelaar on their website, which generated a total of 127 comments, from which the first 20 comments are analysed in this thesis. From these, 13 contained judgements on integrity with a total of 19 judgements. The article by *GeenStijl* was published before the emergency debate where Tichelaar resigned.

##### 4.3.3.1.1 Judgements on the act

From the 19 judgements in total, 18 were on the act. To start off, four of these judgements were aimed at the integrity of Tichelaar as a person. One commenter judged him personally stating *"it is not the first time Tichelaar does something like this"* (GS14). Because it is not clear whether he talks about other wrongdoings as CdK or in another function, the thesis classified this to be aimed at the integrity as a person. All other judgements of the integrity of Tichelaar came from one commenter. These were also more clearly personal attacks: *"Unbelievable blah blah-type of guy"*, *"pretended leadership"* and *"Go away, you pig"*(GS20).

Just one of the analysed comments judged the role integrity, saying *"Only the government could fire the commissioner... Well, government, show your strength. Give this man an instant dismissal"* (GS4). According to this commenter, a CdK should be fired after an appearance of conflict of interest.

Furthermore, two comments contained judgements that were not clearly aimed at the integrity as a person or at the role. One of these judgements was somewhat positive, stating: *"that is favouritism and is perceived within politics as very normal. It is what it is, but less damaging than [after which he summed up some things, he perceives to be worse]*(GS15). The

other comment said: *"The King must intervene. Commissioner of the King..."*(GS18). The thesis can only conclude from this that the commenter wants *something* to happen.

At last, but certainly not least the judgements on the integrity of the system, which includes by far the most judgements: 10. A lot of commenters perceived the PvdA to be the problem: *"It is in their genes! [then provides a link to an article of another PvdA member involved in an integrity violation]"*(GS2), *"This is very normal for the PvdA, right? They see it as a national duty to take everything away"* (GS3); *"Members of the PvdA are connected through corruption. Time for this gang of thugs to be closed down"* (GS5); *"Is this not just levelling, and that is the festivity. Therefore, the PvdA allows him to stay. This is because they do appreciate festivities like this, they are easy to invoice."*(GS10), and one comment also involving the VVD: *"Parties like PvdA and VVD demand integrity from other people, while they are not integer themselves"* (GS11). One commenter went even further, involving all established political parties: *"The grand 'strucincidents (probably structural incidents ed.) in the top of the established political parties show an easy fact. Within these political parties, a culture of despotism, clientelism, and corruption exists"* (GS16). Two judgements were made on 'the typical professional manager', thereby involving almost every manager: *"This is the prototype of a professional manager"* (GS20) and *"they are not ashamed of anything"* (GS19). Two judgements were the most fundamental about the integrity of the system, with one calling it *"The next case in that 'Corruptocracy' (probably corruption+ocracy ed.)* (GS19), while the other stated that: *"In a democratic rule of law state, these (the established political parties) should be called criminal organizations. In the Netherlands it is called respectable. Taint of treason..."* (GS16).

#### 4.3.3.1.2 Judgements on the defence strategy

Just one comment contained judgement that was classified to be aimed at Tichelaar's defence strategy: *"He tried to make an official responsible for his mess. That is probably worse than a bit of corruption, lying and deceiving"* (GS14). This seemed to refer to the 'shift of blame' strategy and the integrity of Tichelaar as a person. This is interesting, because this thesis did not identify Tichelaar using the shift of blame strategy anywhere. What the commenter might have been referring to is a part of the statement from Tichelaar's in his first response: *The new job appointment and the further preparation/execution of it has, as usual, been executed under official mandate.*" (Van den Berg & Bodde, 2017a). Though this did not seem to contain any blame and was rather just an explanation, the commenter might have interpreted this differently.

#### 4.3.3.2 Joop

Like *GeenStijl*, *Joop* also dedicated only one article to the case of Tichelaar and it was also published before his resignation. This generated 17 direct comments, 12 of which contain judgement on integrity. In total, 29 judgements on integrity were identified.

##### 4.3.3.2.1 Judgements on the act

To start off, just no judgements were aimed at the integrity of Tichelaar as a person. However, 13 judgements were aimed at the integrity in his role as Commissioner of the King. One commenter, more specifically pointed at a case where Tichelaar would have acted with a conflict of interest before: *“pay attention to Tichelaar who as commissioner of the King should be above the parties, very recently personally made sure at the debate with the party leaders, the one from 50Plus was rejected, while it this party had a similar position in the polls as PvdA?”* (J10). He suggests that Tichelaar favoured his own party here. Other commenters put emphasis on the way Tichelaar exercises his function, which is described to be as a potentate: *“Sjaak, who rages through the provincial house as a potentate”*(J9); *“Sjaak is a potentate...”* (J15). Interestingly however, both comments come from the same account, with J15 probably being used to put more emphasis on this opinion. The commenter also added to his first comment that Tichelaar *“knows everything better”* and *“put his hand to many things”* (J9) and that he thinks he is above the law: *“We are above the law, right.”* (J1). Another commentor did something similar, in a very long argument with four different judgements on the integrity of his role: *“Tichelaar should be dropped by the PvdA”* (1) *“It is like a regent from another caste...somewhat of a sun king as a boss, administrator or manager”* (2) *“People like this should not be in power. They cause a lot of damage and terrorise their surroundings”* (3) *“In their profile they are not fit as a Commissioner of the King in Drenthe”* (4). More commenters thought Tichelaar should resign after his conflict of interest: *“take your bags and stop with this function”* (J6) *“get this man away!”* (J15), with one saying he should have resigned after the earlier conflict of interest case: *“Unbelievable that he got the chance to do it a second time. He should have been sanctioned with a resignation the first time (Coevorden, ed.)* (J8). Since Coevorden was also quite a scandal and he talks about just one other instance, it seems reasonable to assume that the commentor meant that case.

Some judgements were not clearly aimed at the integrity of Tichelaar as a person or at his role and are therefore classified as ambivalent. One commenter stated he acted in undesirable way before but was never caught: *“Well... unfortunate when you get caught once.*

*It will go well without press or someone else finding out*” (J6). Because it is not clear what wrongdoings the commenter referred to, it is classified as ambivalent. Some comments discussed the concept of conflict of interest itself and how it should be dealt with. One commenter emphasized that it was not in fact a conflict of interest: *“This is not a conflict of interest, this is called corruption”* (J8). How it should be dealt with, was proposed *“A law should be formed to end practices like this once and for all”* (1), *“Conflict of interest, corruption and fraud of civil servants should be punished with a lifelong exclusion of government jobs and administrative functions”* (2) (J4). Another commenter also made two ambivalent statements, saying: *“The man is the type of manager that one should never appoint”* (1) *“stupid mistakes, like this one from Tichelaar”* (2) (J17).

Moreover, nine judgements were aimed at the integrity of the system. One commentator linked the affair to a decline of trust in politics: *“Not that weird that the trust in the government keeps declining”* Two other commenters thought the problem was common in his party; the PvdA: *“The PvdA seems to be on their way to make a serious and promising attempt at a passing the VVD in the semi-official charts of integrity violating.”* (J3) and *“Oh well, The PvdA taking community money. What exactly is surprising there?”*(J5). Another comment suggests that the bureaucracy around Tichelaar may be the problem, suggesting to: *“research the people involved around this decision. Why would an 'advice' by the Commissioner of the King, who says he does not have a say in the matter, be followed, causing great costs”* (J14) Some commentators thought conflicts of interest were not punished enough, which causes reoccurrence: *“Up to now, they always get away with it”* (J4), *“But oh well, as has been memorised before underneath (in earlier comments ed.), redundancy pay it is then...”*(J9). At last, there are also judgements pointing at more fundamental problems. One describes considers Limburg and Drenthe to be corrupt: *“Limburg and Drenthe...the banana provinces of Holland, for and by their family, and the rest are supporters”*(J11). Two more of this type of judgements come from one commenter making a long argument about undesirable managers, like Tichelaar is according to him: *“The type of regent like Tichelaar is becoming extinct, but it still very stubborn. I know dozens of examples from education, healthcare, and government”* (1) *“People who think it is typical for old politics, are wrong...Wilders is like a sun king who only takes supporters around him and I think the far most dangerous regent is Trump”* (2) (J17).



#### 4.3.3.2.2 Judgements on the defence strategy

Just one judgement was identified to be aimed at the defence strategy. More specifically it was aimed at his earlier denial: "*Tichelaar denies having advised*" (J14), after which he explained how it was probably not true that he did not advise on the matter.

#### 4.3.3.3 Conclusion about judgements by the 'general' public

Much like the judgements by politicians, did the judgements in the comments on *GeenStijl* and *Joop* rarely point at the defence strategies employed by Tichelaar. The articles on these websites were published after Tichelaar's letter to the Provincial Council, but before the emergency debate, which may explain this for some part. The judgements on the act give an interesting contrast, however. In the comments on *GeenStijl*, judgements on the integrity of the system are dominant, with about 60% aiming their judgements at this. With 30%, judgements aimed at the system are also well represented at *Joop*, but a far higher percentage (about 50%) is aimed at the role of Tichelaar at this platform. This last category represents less than 10% of the judgements at *GeenStijl*

**Table 4.04**

Summary of comments by the 'general' public: *GeenStijl* and *Joop*

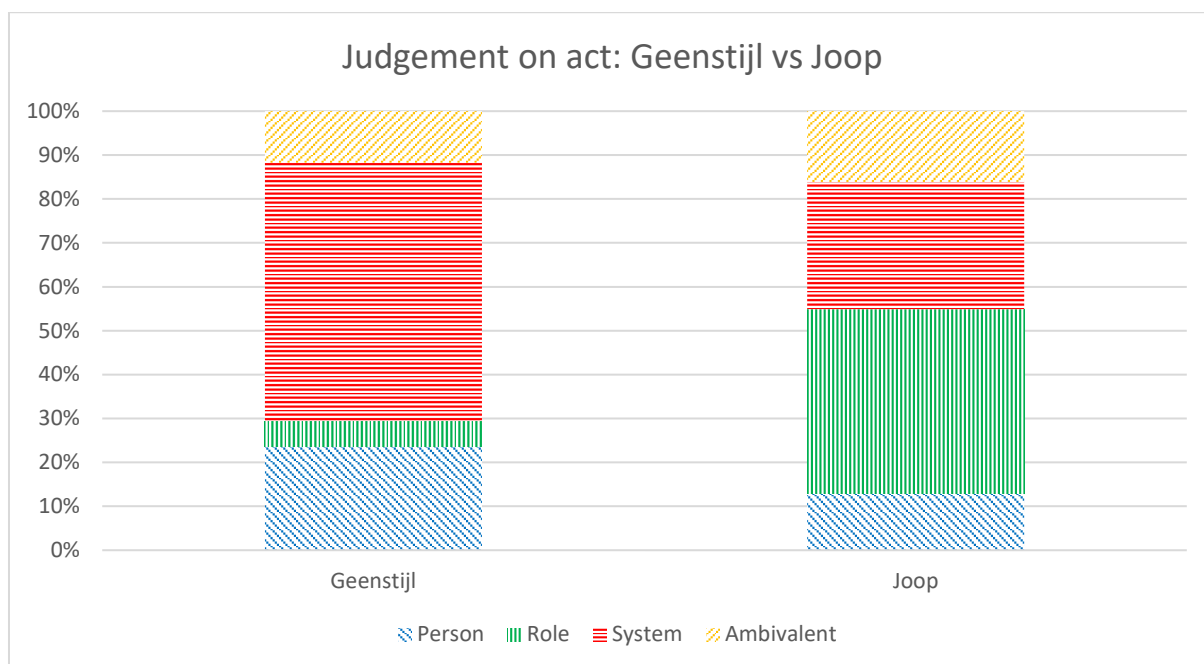
		Summary			
		Number of comments	Containing judgement on integrity	Containing judgement on act	Containing judgement on defence strategy
<b>GeenStijl</b>		20	13	13	1
<b>Joop</b>		17	12	12	1

		Judgement on act				
		Total	Person	Role	Ambivalent	System
<b>GeenStijl</b>		17	4	1	2	10
<b>Joop</b>		31	4	13	5	9

		Judgement on defence strategy				
		Total	Person	Role	Ambivalent	System
<b>GeenStijl</b>		1	1	0	0	0
<b>Joop</b>		1	0	0	1	0



**Figure 5**

Distribution of the judgements on act on the online news platforms

#### 4.4 Reflection on judgement aimed at integrity of the Person, Role or System

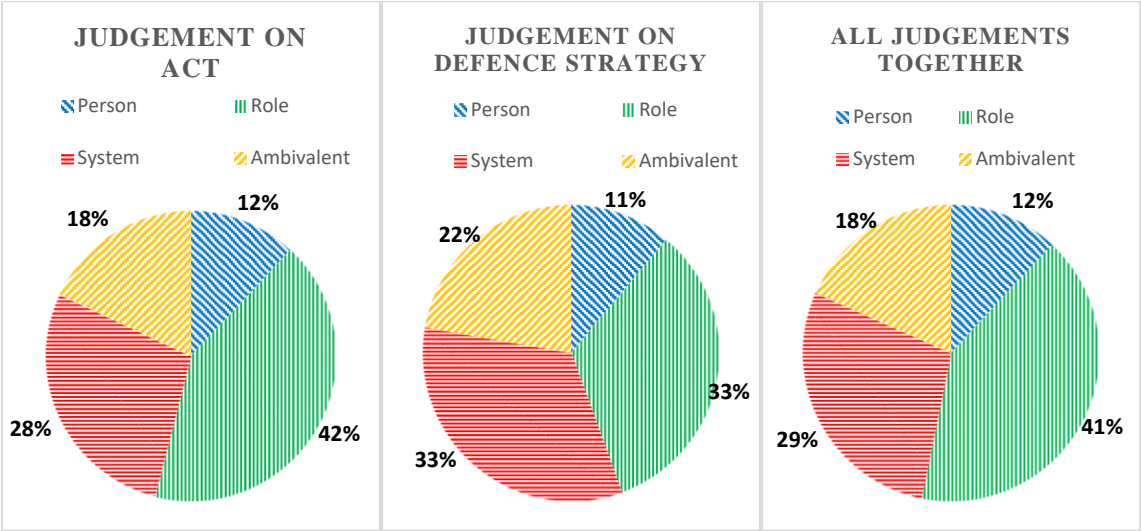
In table 4.05 and figure 6, one could see that two categories of integrity judgement were overrepresented in the judgement of former Commissioner of the King Jacques Tichelaar: role and system. Where these categories were identified just as often in the judgements on defence strategy, was there a notable difference in the judgements on the act. Here, judgement aimed at the integrity of Tichelaar's role occurred 14% more than judgement aimed at the system. Perhaps the many judgements on the integrity of his role could be explained, because the case was pretty clear: if he had helped his step-sister, then he had done something that was not allowed in his role and in the end. It was therefore clear that his function was at stake and in the end Tichelaar himself saw no different option than to resign.

Moreover, comments on both online platforms, *GeenStijl* and *Joop* contained relatively a lot of judgements aimed at the integrity of the system (50% and 30% respectively). This was almost always in a negative way. The newspapers and the politicians judged the system a lot less. When they did, it was usually a neutral judgement that it hurts the province of Drenthe or the Provincial Council instead of blaming the system for the integrity violation.

**Table 4.05**

Summary of all judgements made on the Tichelaar case

	Total	Person	Role	System	Ambivalent
Judgement on act	103	12	42	28	18
Judgement on DS	9	1	3	3	2
<b>Together</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>20</b>



**Figure 6**

Judgements in the Tichelaar case on Person, Role and System integrity

4.5 Reflection on judgement on the defence strategy

Not a lot of articles, contributions or comments contained judgement on the defence strategies employed by Tichelaar, as could be seen in table 4.06. The defences strategy that received the most attention was his simple denial. He employed this strategy when *De Volkskrant* and *Dagblad van het Noorden* asked him to respond to the article they made on his appearance of a conflict of interest. He denied the accusations and told them that he had not put his stepsister forward. This resulted in some negative judgements when it turned out that he had in fact put his stepsister forward. For some, it was the reason he could not stay in his position, for example: “After lying, it was not possible to maintain as commissioner of the king” (VK10), while another was milder and more perceived his ‘lie’ to be the consequence of the human nature: “Lying is part of the human nature, you cannot blame the system” (VK14). Furthermore, some judgements were aimed at his apology. One negatively judged his integrity due to his earlier apology in the Coevorden case, where he apologized for getting a family member involved and

said he would not let that happen again: *“The commissioner apologized for the earlier integrity violation in Coevorden but did not live up to it”* (POLO5). Moreover, a lot of the defence strategies that were recognized by this thesis, seemed to have received no integrity judgement at all, good intentions, differentiation, corrective action, and bolstering. Therefore, they did not seem to be very successful at restoring perceptions about his integrity. Also, some judgements were not clearly aimed at a specific defence strategy, for example: *“His defence was weak and emotional”* (VK10). Those are put in table 4.06 under ‘Not specified’.

At last, maybe the most interesting conclusion about the defence strategies is that all judgements on his defence strategies were negative, which could mean that the defence strategies he employed only worked against him.

**Table 4.06**

Judgements about defence strategies in the Tichelaar case

	De Volkskrant	De Telegraaf	Politicians	GeenStijl	Joop	Total
<b>Articles, contributions, or comments judging defence strategy</b>	4	0	2	0	1	7
<b>Simple denial</b>	4	0	0	0	1	5
<b>Good intentions</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Mortification (apology)</b>	1	0	1	0	0	2
<b>Differentiation</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Corrective action</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Bolstering</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Not specified*</b>	1	0	1	1	0	3

*Note.* one article may address >1 defense strategy

\* Aimed at the defence strategy, but not clear at what strategy

#### 4.6 Conclusion about perceptions on integrity

Concluding about the integrity in the case of Tichelaar, the opinions differed, mostly on the question whether Tichelaar should be held responsible for just the appearance of a conflict of interest or that he should only resign if a conflict of interest is actually proven. In the national newspapers, not much talk was about Tichelaar needing to resign in the judgements on the act,

but overall, most articles concluded that acting with a conflict of interest is bad. Interestingly, such conclusions about Tichelaar needing to resign, were to some extent present in articles of *De Volkskrant*. These did however not come from his act, but from his defence strategy. His simple denial, where he probably tried to repair his integrity, caused a call for his resignation there: *"From that moment, it was clear that under no circumstances would he be maintainable as the figurehead of Drenthe "* (VK10).

Furthermore, the politicians did also not fully agree with each other, but most parties first wanted to hear Tichelaar out before making conclusions about him needing to resign or not. Only PVV and SP already pushed him to resign before Tichelaar could explain himself in the debate. It seemed like these parties thought the appearance of a conflict of interest was enough for him to resign.

Moreover, both the online platforms, *GeenStijl* and *Joop*, only published an article before the debate where Tichelaar resigned and therefore the comments were only in the appearance of his conflict of interest. Still many commenters concluded that he needed to resign because of this.

In the end, to the Provincial Council, a big part of the question whether Tichelaar could stay or not seemed to be about the trust in him. A loss of trust was also the reason that Tichelaar resigned eventually. He concluded himself that the trust in him was "completely insufficient" (PSD, 2017b) and decided to resign.

At last, not a lot of judgements were aimed at the defence strategy of Tichelaar. Those that were, were all negative. It therefore seemed like they only made him lose credibility. Therefore, it may have been better not to use those specific defence strategies or use other ones.

## Chapter 5 – Analysis 2: Marjolein Meijer – a secret relationship

### 5.1 Case description

The second analysis will consider the case of Marjolein Meijer. Marjolein Meijer had a secret relationship with Rik Grashoff. This relationship was probably secret because both already had a relationship with other partners. Their secret was well hidden, until a parliamentary reporter saw them kissing at a bus stop (De Telegraaf, 2018).

Meijer was the chairperson of the political party GroenLinks since 2016. Rik Grashoff was a member of parliament for the same party. On 1 June 2018, *EenVandaag* published an article on their website, about her and Rik Grashoff, who was a member of parliament for the same party. The article was written as a result of questions they asked GroenLinks about a supposed relationship between Meijer and Grashoff, after a reporter saw them at the bus stop. As chairperson of the party, Meijer was responsible for the composition of the candidate list for the elections of the Dutch parliament and for performance appraisals of members of parliament. After these questions about a relationship and an appearance of conflict of interest, GroenLinks confronted the members of the party, after which they confessed to having concealed their secret relationship for a year. After this confession, GroenLinks decided that Meijer could stay in her position as chairperson but would not take part in the performance appraisals anymore. For Grashoff, it meant that this would be his last term as a member of parliament. GroenLinks did however not identify indications that their relationship had resulted in a conflict of interest yet, because their relationship had started after the elections (EenVandaag, 2018).

This changed after a joint meeting between the party's board (where Meijer was a part of) and the supervisory board on June 5<sup>th</sup>. In this meeting, it became clear that the secret relationship did not start in April 2017, like they told GroenLinks when they were confronted earlier, but already before the elections in March 2017. This led to a breach of trust with the party, after which both Meijer and Grashoff resigned (GroenLinks, 2018).

In this case, two people are involved: Meijer and Grashoff. The focus will however be on Marjolein Meijer because it was her interests that conflicted. In his function, Grashoff did not have an influence on the performance appraisals or the composition of the candidate list of GroenLinks for the Dutch Parliament, while Meijer did. Therefore, judgements on integrity, will only be included if they do not directly involve Grashoff. If it points at both Meijer and Grashoff at the same time, it will be included, because then it involves the act and not specifically Grashoff or his function.

## 5.2 Defence strategies employed by Marjolein Meijer

The paragraph about defence strategies will be a lot shorter for Meijer than was the case with Tichelaar. Meijer gave no public statements about her relationship with Grashoff, and no sources could be found where she uses defence strategies. Only two strategies were used, which will be explained here.

### 5.2.1 Simple denial

When Meijer was confronted with an appearance of a conflict of interest by GroenLinks, she first denied having acted with a conflict of interest around 1 June 2018. She said her relationship started in April 2018, which was after the elections, which would mean that she had not yet acted with a conflict of interest. This fits with the simple denial strategy, as described by (Benoit, 2015).

On 5 June 2018, GroenLinks had another conversation with Meijer, and this time she admitted that in the week before “not the whole truth had been told” (GroenLinks, 2018). It became clear that they had a relationship since the end of 2016, which was before the elections. Because of this, the media were in agreement that the “simple denial” was in fact a lie (De Volkskrant, 2018; Lengton, 2018; RTL Nieuws, 2018; NU.nl, 2018).

### 5.2.2 Corrective action

When Meijer was first confronted with the appearance of a conflict of interest, before she admitted the real duration of her secret relationship, she proposed herself to stop taking part in the performance appraisals of members of parliament. This in order to prevent an actual conflict of interest from happening (EenVandaag, 2018). This fits with the corrective action strategy as described before because she shows she wants to prevent the appearance of a conflict of interest to remain and to prevent the relationship from having a negative influence on her acting.

## 5.3 Judgements on the Meijer case

In this paragraph the actual judgements made on the Meijer case will be analysed. In every subparagraph, the findings from a different source of public opinion will be presented. First, the judgements identified in the Dutch newspapers will be covered. Judgements found in articles by *De Volkskrant* will have the ID ‘VK1##’, while *De Telegraaf* will have the ID ‘TG1##’. In the second subparagraph, the responses of politicians will be covered. These will be subdivided

into three categories: responses to news outlets (POLN1##), responses in official documents (POLO1##) and responses by politicians on Twitter (POLT1##). The last subparagraph will cover the comments on the online platforms *GeenStijl* (GS1##) and *Joop* (J1##).

All judgements could be found in the supplemented Appendix D using those ID's. In this Appendix, the original Dutch texts are also presented.

### 5.3.1 Judgements in the national newspapers

#### 5.3.1.1 *De Volkskrant*

On NexisUni, three articles about the Meijer case were found with 2 containing judgement on integrity. One only contained judgement about Meijer's actual appearance of a conflict of interest (the act), and 1 contained judgement on both the act and her defence strategy.

##### 5.3.1.1.1 Judgement on the act

In total, three judgements on integrity were aimed at the act of Meijer. No judgements were aimed at the integrity of Meijer as a person, but one of these judgements was aimed at the integrity of Meijer in her role as chairperson of GroenLinks. VK101 made a neutral judgement about the act by questioning how Grashoff got his position in the Dutch parliament, saying: "*Therefore, Grashoff became vulnerable for the question how he obtained his position as a member of parliament*". Since Meijer was responsible for the composition of the candidate list in her role as chairperson, it is aimed at the integrity role.

No judgements were classified as ambivalent, but one was aimed at the integrity of the system. VK102 had the following title: "*A painful affair for GroenLinks as a whole*", which emphasized that the integrity of GroenLinks was hurt.

##### 5.3.1.1.2 Judgement on the defence strategy

When analysing the defence strategies, one neutral judgement was identified, which was not clearly aimed at the integrity of Meijer as a person or in her role as chairperson and is therefore classified as ambivalent; "*Meijer did not only keep silent about their relationship but also lied about the duration*" (VK102). In this statement, the simple denial is emphasized to be a lie.

#### 5.3.1.2 *De Telegraaf*

The data collection of the Meijer case in *De Telegraaf* generated 9 articles, with three containing judgement on integrity. One of these articles only contained judgement on the act of Meijer and



2 contained judgement on the act as well as judgement on her employed defence strategy. In total, 14 judgements were identified.

#### 5.3.1.1.1 Judgement on the act

From the judgements found, 10 were aimed at the act of Meijer. None of them were aimed at the integrity of Meijer as a person or in her role as chairperson of GroenLinks. One judgement was classified as ambivalent. I complained that the act did not get any consequences: *“The concealed affaire did not get any consequences”* (TG101). This seemed to emphasize that more consequences should follow from this apparent conflict of interest.

The other nine judgements were aimed at the integrity of the system. All of them were negative or neutral judgements about the party of Meijer: GroenLinks. One judgement mainly emphasized that the case negatively influenced the party, saying: *“It is a new stain on the green party”* (TG103). One explained the secret relationship because of their membership at the party, stating: *“Members of GroenLinks like to find love in their own circle”* (TG101). Two judgements implied that GroenLinks had integrity problems before, saying: *“GroenLinks struggles with their own integrity again”* (TG101); and *“Scandals are nothing new for the green party anyway”* (TG103). One also implied that it had happened before and added that GroenLinks is not well at handling such crises: *“While for the public, the party tried to downplay the case and push it away, did it cause internally, as is often the case at a GroenLinks-crisis, a lot of panic”* (TG106). Three judgements stated that GroenLinks is a hypocrite party, because it often judged other parties with integrity problems, while they had a lot of problems themselves: *“The party who likes to lecture others, struggles regularly with their own integrity”* (TG101); *“Double standards from the party of Klaver exposed”*(TG103), and *“Just the party of the world improvers, the raised finger and the outrage always ready, is where they forget automatically that the enemy does not come from outside, but from inside the green 'friend group'. The truth always comes later”* (TG106). One neutral judgement compared the party to the VVD, questioning whether GroenLinks will be judged as hard as them: *“In previous years, a lot has been written about members of the VVD, which is justified. But what will people say about a party like GroenLinks...?”* (TG106).

#### 5.3.1.1.2 Judgement on the defence strategy

In total, three judgements were made on one of the defence strategies employed by Meijer: simple denial, classifying it to be a lie. While none were aimed at her integrity as a person, was

one aimed at her integrity in her role: "...the chairperson, who is supposed to guard integrity of her club, lies..."(TG106). The judgement emphasized that the chairperson of a party is an important factor in ensuring integrity in the party. That of all people she violated integrity by lying, made it worse according to this judgement.

The other two judgements were classified to be ambivalent and made judgements about the simple denial by Meijer which it classified as a lie: "*Party chairperson Marjolein Meijer and member of parliament Rik Grashoff turn out to have started a loving relationship, about which they blatantly lied to the party top*" (TG101). The other emphasized that were first the focus was on the appearance of a conflict of interest, this focus shifted towards the lie by Meijer: "*The duo had a secret relationship, which was going on for first a year and later a year and a half...The appearance of a conflict of interest made way for a loss of trust*" (TG106).

#### *5.3.1.3 Conclusion about the judgements in the newspapers*

The first interesting observation when comparing the two newspapers, is that *De Telegraaf* covered the case a lot more than *De Volkskrant*. However, when looking at the articles that actually contain judgement, the differences are not quite as big: three versus two articles. The judgements on the act in *De Volkskrant* are evenly spread over role and system integrity. This is different at *De Telegraaf* where judgement of the system is absolutely dominant with 90% of the judgement. Furthermore, the judgements on the defence strategies were all talking about the simple denial and most of them (three out of four) were classified to be ambivalent. A last interesting observation is that where *De Volkskrant* only made neutral judgements about the case, did *De Telegraaf* only judge the case negatively.

**Table 5.01**

Summary of the results from the national newspapers

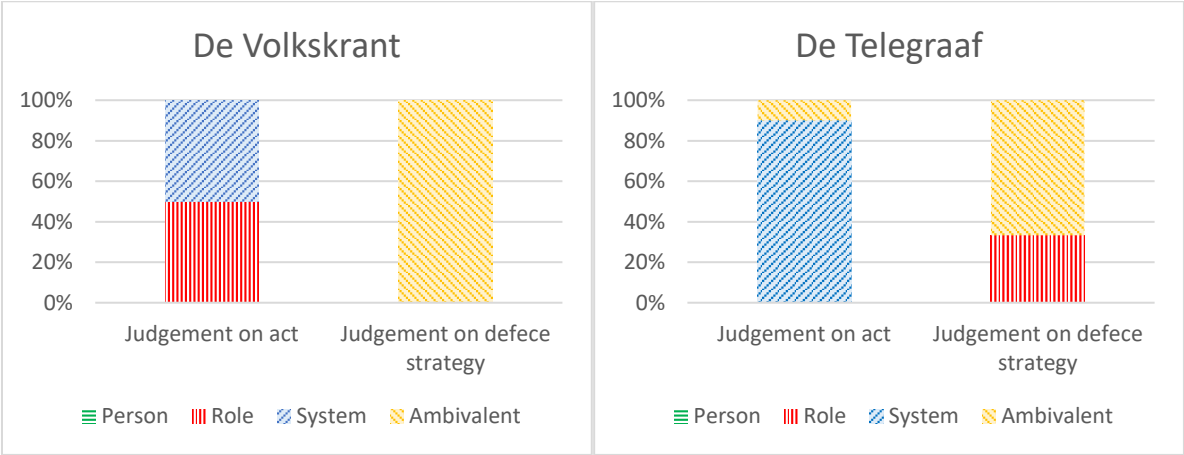
<b>Summary</b>				
	<b>Number of articles</b>	<b>Containing judgement on integrity</b>	<b>Containing judgement on act</b>	<b>Containing judgement on defence strategy</b>
<b>De Volkskrant</b>	3	2	2	1
<b>De Telegraaf</b>	9	3	3	2

<b>Judgement on act</b>					
	<b>Total</b>	<b>Person</b>	<b>Role</b>	<b>System</b>	<b>Ambivalent</b>
<b>De Volkskrant</b>	2	0	1	1	0
<b>De Telegraaf</b>	10	0	0	9	1

<b>Judgement on defence strategy</b>					
	<b>Total</b>	<b>Person</b>	<b>Role</b>	<b>System</b>	<b>Ambivalent</b>
<b>De Volkskrant</b>	1	0	0	0	1
<b>De Telegraaf</b>	3	0	1	0	2



**Figure 7**  
Distribution of the judgements in the national newspapers

5.3.2 Judgements by politicians

5.3.2.1 Twitter

Not a single tweet of a politician commenting on the case was found. It is difficult to say why this was the case; maybe they thought it was up to the party GroenLinks itself to judge their members or maybe they were afraid that it would cause attention to be put on integrity problems

in their own parties. They also might just not have cared enough to put out a tweet. This is all just guessing however, while the answer remains unclear.

#### 5.3.2.2 Official documents

One document containing judgement was considered to fit this subcategory of judgements by politicians. Party leader Jesse Klaver sent an e-mail to all members of GroenLinks, commenting on the matter. This letter was later published on the website of GroenLinks. This document contained one judgement aimed at the act and one aimed at the defence strategy.

##### 5.3.2.2.1 Judgement on the act

Klaver made one judgement on the act of the act of Meijer. The judgement was neutral and aimed at Meijer as a person: *"It is not up to other people to judge the love between two people. About whom feels something for who"* (POLO101). So, the act itself was not judged negatively by Klaver. This might already have been clear from the fact that Meijer was not fired in the first place; when it was not clear yet that she had lied about the duration of the relationship.

##### 5.3.2.2.2 Judgement on the defence strategy

While Klaver made a neutral judgement about the act of Meijer, he negatively judged her simple denial after it turned out to be a lie, stating: *"If then it turns out that not the whole truth has been told, that the relationship emerged earlier, than that trust is betrayed."* (POLO101). So, due to her earlier defence strategy, Klaver found that the mutual trust was not enough anymore. It ended in the resignation of Meijer (and member of parliament Grashoff).

#### 5.3.2.3 News

Four politicians reacted in some way to the case of Meijer, three of which made a judgement about integrity. Two politicians judged the act as well as the defence strategy, while one only judged the act of Meijer.

##### 5.3.2.3.1 Judgement on the act

In total, four integrity judgements about the act of Meijer were made. None of the judgements on the act were aimed specifically at the integrity of Meijer as a person or in her role. Two were classified to be ambivalent. Member of parliament Bart Snels only commented on the case, by saying what he thought about the whole situation: *"I am fed up with it"* (POLN104). The other

ambivalent judgement came from Klaver in an interview to the NOS, where he basically repeated the statement he made in the official mail to his party members: *“Again: who you fall in love with, who you love, who you hang out with; those are private matters. I really don't think others should judge about that.”* (POLN101).

Two judgements were aimed at the integrity of the system. Klaver made a neutral judgement, emphasizing that the resignations of Meijer and Grashoff after the integrity scandal, did not affect GroenLinks negatively, stating: *“our party; our movement is so much bigger than one leader or those members of parliament”* (POLN101). Paul Smeulders, who replaced Grashoff as a member of parliament of GroenLinks, stating that it was not good for GroenLinks, stating: *“Of course, it is kind of a weird day. For me it is very festive, but for the party it is not.”*(POLN102).

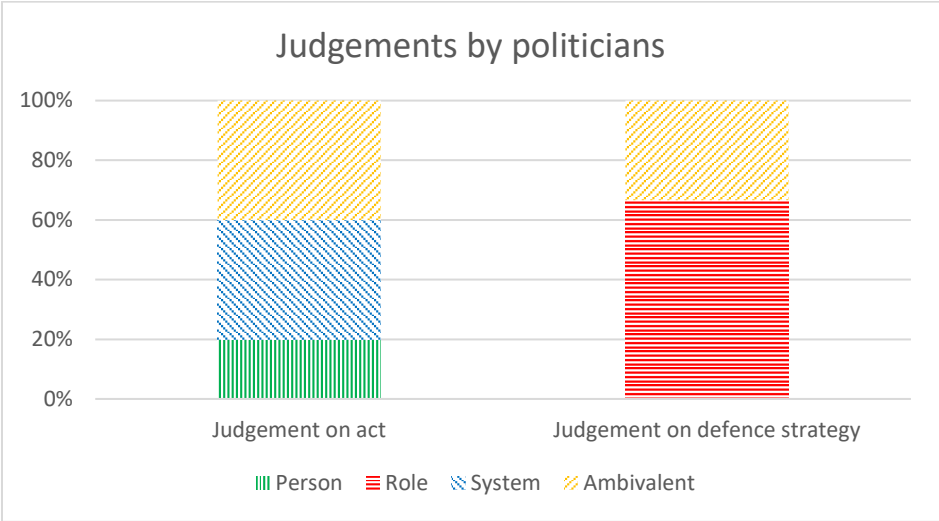
#### 5.3.2.3.1 Judgement on the defence strategy

Two judgements were made about the defence strategies employed by Meijer, both of which come from party leader Jesse Klaver. None of these judgements were aimed at the integrity of Meijer as a person or at the system. He did however judge the integrity of Meijer in her role as chairwoman, emphasizing that the trust was lost after the simple denial by her, which later turned out to be a lie: *“What is important in a close team and in such an organization, is that people talk the truth. And when that does not happen, well, then you have a trust issue.”* (POLN101). So, in her function, where she worked in a close team, they could not function well anymore after lying to the party top. The other judgement, classified as ambivalent, was aimed at her other defence strategy: corrective action. In a neutral statement, Klaver stated that Meijer (and Grashoff) drew their own conclusion: *“they have drawn their own conclusion: ‘well, we actually cannot function well anymore.’”*(POLN101).

#### 5.3.2.4 Conclusion about the judgements of politicians

When researching the judgements of politicians on the Meijer case, the first thing that is interesting, is that not a lot of statements by politicians are made about the case. No politician put out tweets, it has not been covered in a debate of the Dutch parliament and only a few politicians spoke some words to the media. The only statements that are made, are by members of Meijer's own party. An interesting observation, is that where none of judgements about the act are not aimed at the integrity role of Meijer, are most of the judgements on the defence

strategy aimed at this. This makes sense though since she had to resign because she lied to the party top.



**Figure 8**  
Distribution of the judgements by politicians of all sources combined

**Table 5.02**  
Summary of the judgements of politicians

<b>Summary</b>				
	<b>Total amount of T/Od/N*</b>	<b>Containing judgement on integrity</b>	<b>Containing judgement on act</b>	<b>Containing judgement on defence strategy</b>
<b>Tweets</b>	0	0	0	0
<b>Official documents</b>	1	1	1	1
<b>News</b>	4	3	3	1

<b>Judgement on act</b>					
	<b>Total</b>	<b>Person</b>	<b>Role</b>	<b>System</b>	<b>Ambivalent</b>
<b>Tweets</b>	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Official documents</b>	1	1	0	0	0
<b>News</b>	4	0	0	2	2

<b>Judgement on defence strategy</b>					
	<b>Total</b>	<b>Person</b>	<b>Role</b>	<b>System</b>	<b>Ambivalent</b>
<b>Tweets</b>	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Official documents</b>	1	0	1	0	0
<b>News</b>	2	0	1	0	1

\*Tweets, official documents or news

### 5.3.3 Judgements by the 'general' public

#### 5.3.3.1 GeenStijl

The website GeenStijl wrote two articles about the Meijer case. 40 comments posted under these articles were analysed. From these comments, six contained judgement on integrity. This seemed a bit low. This might be due to the way that GeenStijl presented the case. They put little emphasis on the appearance of a conflict of interest, while they dedicated a lot of the article to Meijer and Grashoff sharing the bed. A lot of comments referred to this, but not to the appearance of a conflict of interest. The six comments containing judgement on integrity generated a total of eight judgements, all of which are aimed at the act.

##### 5.3.3.1.1 Judgement on the act

From the eight judgements aimed at the act, none were aimed at the integrity of Meijer as a person. Two were aimed at the integrity of her role as chairperson of GroenLinks. One of these was mostly not impressed by her strategic ability, stating: *“That was the person who led the biggest party of the opposition, right? The strategic insight of a fish stick”* (GS124). The other actually judged the case to be a conflict of interest, stating: *“Inappropriate not to inform about it, because of conflict of interest in the professional setting”* (GS114).

Furthermore, two judgements were classified to be ambivalent. One of these came from the same commenter as the last comment from the previous category: *“Other than that it is totally not interesting. It is only GroenLinks”* (GS114). Apparently, the commenter did not find a conflict of interest too important if the party in question is not relevant for him or her. Another commenter did not deem the act to be very shocking, describing it as *“something so insignificant.”* (GS133).

Moreover, four judgements were aimed at the integrity of the system. Two judgements were aimed at GroenLinks, one of which comes from the last commenter in the previous category and is aimed at GroenLinks. Because the commenter did not deem the act to be very shocking, he also did not agree with their punishment, stating: *“if they had ideals, they would not fire someone for something so insignificant”* (GS133). The other implied that GroenLinks is a hypocrite party, stating: *“The world of moralists is doing well. Conceited, they lecture the paupers but when it is dark, they squeeze their own kittens”* (GS137). It was not exactly clear what was meant by the last part of this comment; does it state that Meijer and Grashoff are punished wrongly or is it just to show that GroenLinks is a bad party? Either way, it seemed to

that the commenter did not find it fair that GroenLinks lectures other people about integrity. Another judgement compared the integrity problem to the problems at VVD, stating that Grashoff and Meijer would fit right in at that party: *“Rik and Marjolein could start at the VVD right away! They are extremely suitable candidates”* (GS131). The last judgement aimed at the system, was aiming at the whole government system, suggesting that they are not punished well enough: *“And now, Rik and Marjolein will get a different publicly funded job, because the State pays well.”* (GS130).

#### 5.3.3.2 Joop

The website *Joop* published one article about the case. This generated 19 direct comments with eight containing judgement on integrity. From this, six comments were on the act, one was on the defence strategy and one was on both the act and the defence strategy. This added up to a total of 11 judgements on integrity.

##### 4.3.3.2.1 Judgements on the act

None of the nine judgements on the act were aimed at the integrity of Meijer as a person, but three were aimed at the integrity of her role. Two of these judgements were negative and stated that after the act, the position of Meijer (and Grashoff) was untenable, stating: *“This is not ok, and them both resigning is fair”* (J114) and *“This is not ok, not allowed and it's not how things should be and therefore, the departure of both is the only right decision”* (J115). The last judgement was more neutral and stated that consequences should only follow if an actual conflict of interest is proven: *“Good consideration whether negative conflict of interest come up and if not and they function well; good, then everything is fine, it seems to me”* (J101).

Moreover, three judgements were classified to be ambivalent. Two commenters put the seriousness of the situation into perspective, making the following neutral judgements: *“we are all human and make mistakes. C'est la vie”* (J105) and *“It's not like they let themselves bribe by a rogue company”* (J111), with the last commenter adding another neutral judgement: *“In the end, an innocent relationship was fatal for two people and it could have been prevented”* (J111).

At last, three judgements were aimed at the integrity of the system. One judgement is aimed at GroenLinks in as positive way, stating: *“Well handled by GroenLinks, my compliments”* (J115). So, this commenter thought that it was good that GroenLinks did research if there really was a conflict of interest and when it was proven, they made sure Meijer resigned.



Another commenter negatively judged the integrity of all populist parties, which GroenLinks was apparently perceived to be part of. It stated: *"In all populist parties, sooner or later it's the same thing"* (J109). The last commenter judged the system as a whole, implying that Meijer was punished too harsh: *"Too bad that an apparent love blocks a political career. It is what it is"* (J106).

#### 4.3.3.2.2 Judgements on the defence strategy

Two judgements were made on the defence strategy of Meijer, with both referring to the simple denial. One of these was negative and aimed at the integrity of her role, stating: *"If you could come clean and you still tell a story, then it is indeed better for you to leave"* (J104). So, according to the commenter, the resignation was fair due to the simple denial that turned out to be a lie and not specifically because of the conflict of interest.

The other judgement was neutral and classified to be ambivalent. It questions why one would use a simple denial when lying: *"I don't get why one considered it necessary to lie about the relationship"* (J111).

#### 5.3.3.3 Conclusion about the judgements by the 'general' public

The first notable finding was that while a lot of comments from *GeenStijl* were analysed, relatively few contained judgements on integrity (just 15 percent of the analysed comments). Also, no judgements were aimed at the defence strategies employed by Meijer. Comments on Joop contained relatively more judgement on integrity (about 42 percent of the analysed comments). An explanation for this could be the presentation of the case by the online news platforms. *GeenStijl* wrote for the most part a provocative article about Meijer and Grashoff sharing the bed, which a lot of commenters talked about. *Joop* talked more clearly about the lying of the chairperson and that the case was sensitive due to the fact that Meijer was responsible for the composition of the candidate list.

Moreover, another interesting finding was that no judgements were aimed at the person integrity. Furthermore, when comparing the judgements on the act, it was interesting to see that the distribution over the forms of integrity is pretty evenly spread on both platforms. Just some more judgements were made on the integrity of the system at *Geenstijl* in relation the other forms.

Furthermore, there seemed to be a big difference in how people valued the integrity after the act or defence strategy. Most of the judgements of *GeenStijl*, 87% were negative, while this

was ‘only’ 33% in the case of *Joop*. The other 13% on *GeenStijl* were neutral. On *Joop*, neutral is the biggest group with 50% of the judgements. At last, where none of the judgements on *GeenStijl* were positive, were 17% of the judgements on *Joop* positive. Both of these positive judgements were talking about GroenLinks’ handling of the situation.

**Table 5.03**

Summary of the judgements by the online news platforms: *Geenstijl* and *Joop*

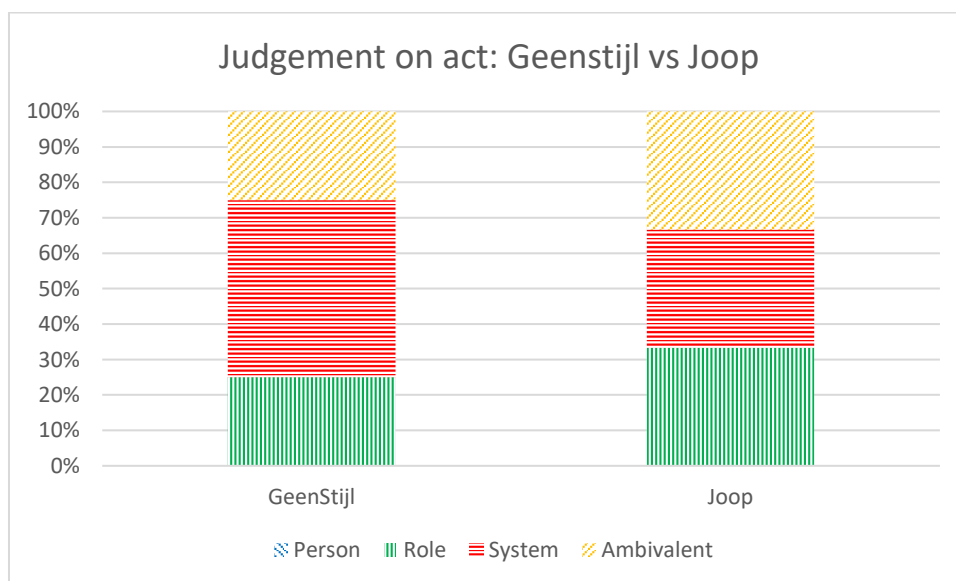
Summary				
	Number of comments	Containing judgement on integrity	Containing judgement on act	Containing judgement on defence strategy
<b>GeenStijl</b>	40	6	6	0
<b>Joop</b>	19	8	7	2

Judgement on act					
	Total	Person	Role	System	Ambivalent
<b>GeenStijl</b>	8	0	2	4	2
<b>Joop</b>	9	0	3	3	3

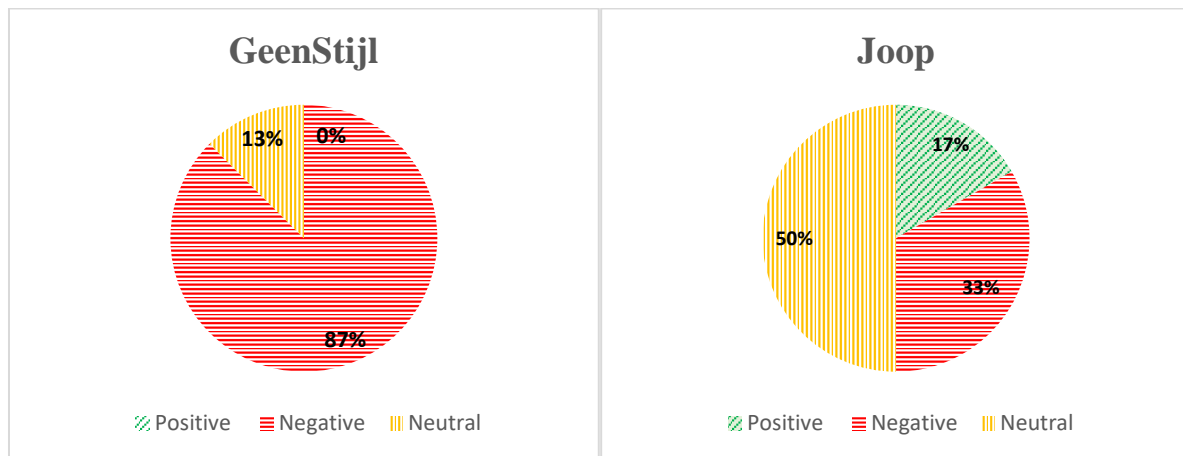
  

Judgement on defence strategy					
	Total	Person	Role	System	Ambivalent
<b>GeenStijl</b>	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Joop</b>	2	0	1	0	1



**Figure 9**

## Distribution of the judgements on act on online news platforms



**Figure 10**

Summary of the values on integrity given on the online news platforms

### 5.4 Reflection on the judgement aimed at integrity of the Person, Role or System

In table 5.04 and figure 1, one could see how all judgements combined are distributed over person, role, and system integrity. The first notable observation is that very little judgements were on the integrity of Meijer as person. In the Tichelaar case, this was also the smallest group, but it was still about three times bigger than in the Meijer case. Moreover, a lot of judgements are classified to be ambivalent, especially at the judgements on defence strategy. Therefore, it seemed like people struggled with distinguishing between Meijer as a person and Meijer in her role as chairperson of GroenLinks.

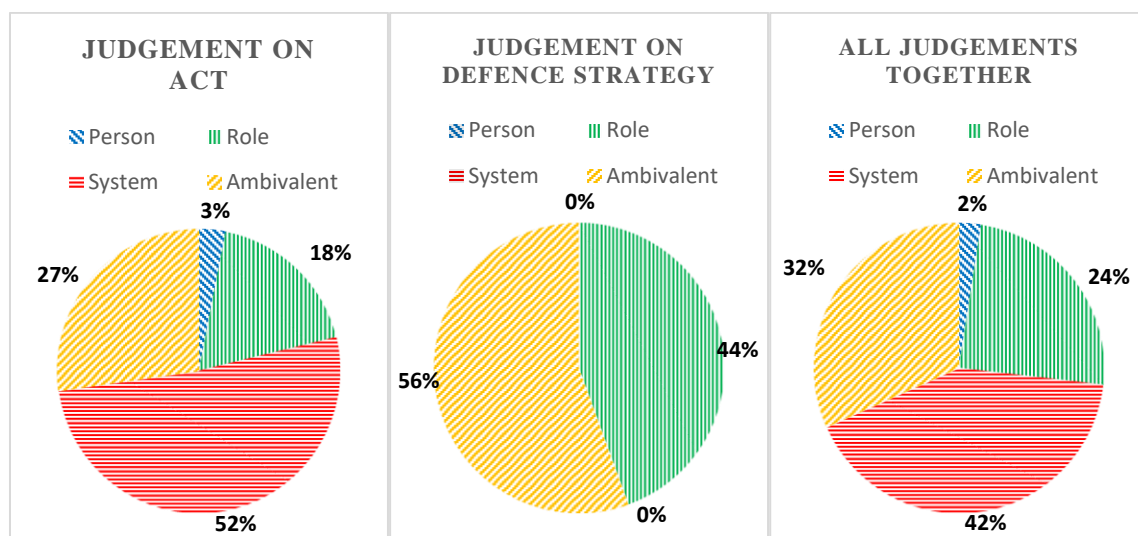
Furthermore, it was interesting to see that judgements on the act and judgements on the defence strategy were aimed at different types of integrity. For the judgements on the act, the dominant category was the integrity of the system with more than half of the judgements. Most of the judgements of the system had to do with the punishment of Meijer after the integrity violation. Some people found that GroenLinks acted well in the situation; *“Well handled by GroenLinks, my compliments”*(J115), while others thought she was punished too hard; *“if they had ideals, they would not fire someone for something so insignificant”*(GS133). Also, a lot of judgements aimed at the system were aimed at GroenLinks. Most of these came from the right-leaning newspaper and online platform; *De Telegraaf* and *GeenStijl*. At *De Telegraaf* it was by far the biggest category with 90% of the integrity judgements being aimed at the integrity of the system. Here are two examples: *“Just the party of the world improvers, the raised finger and the outrage always ready, is where they forget automatically that the enemy does not come*

*from outside, but from inside the green 'friend group'. The truth always comes later” (TG106) and "The world of moralists is doing well. Conceited, they lecture the paupers but when it is dark, they squeeze their own kittens" (GS137). For the judgements aimed at the defence strategies, apart from the ambivalent category, role integrity was the biggest group. All of these were about the simple denial strategy that later turned out to be a lie. The judgements stated that in her function, it is not ok to lie about things like the duration of her secret relationship.*

**Table 5.04**

Summary of all judgements on the Meijer case

	Total	Person	Role	System	Ambivalent
<b>Judgement on act</b>	34	1	6	17	8
<b>Judgement on DS</b>	9	0	4	0	5
<b>Together</b>	43	1	10	17	13



**Figure 11**

Judgements in the Meijer case on Person, Role and System integrity

### 5.5 Reflection on judgement on the defence strategy

In comparison to the Tichelaar case, relatively many judgements were aimed at the employed defence strategy in the case of Meijer. Were in the case of Tichelaar about 8% of all judgements were aimed at the defence strategy, were almost 21% of all judgement in the Meijer case aimed her defence strategy. Apart from one judgement, which was aimed at her corrective action strategy, were all judgement aimed at her simple denial. This defence strategy probably gained

a lot of attention, because it turned out to be a lie. Meijer lied about the duration of her relationship and this caused negative judgements about her integrity. In the case of Tichelaar, it was a little more dubious whether he really lied, because he made a lot of excuses in the process.

**Table 5.04**

Judgements about defence strategies in the Meijer case

	De Volkskrant	De Telegraaf	Politicians	GeenStijl	Joop	Total
<b>Articles, contributions, or comments judging defence strategy</b>						
<b>Simple denial</b>	1	2	2	0	2	7
<b>Corrective action</b>	0	0	1	0	0	1

*Note.* One article may contain more than one judgement

## 5.6 Conclusion about perceptions on integrity

In the Meijer case, it was pretty clear in most judgements that if the relationship between Meijer and Grashoff already started before the parliamentary elections, that would be an integrity violation with Meijer being responsible for the candidate list. For some she already lost integrity by keeping silent about the relationship in the first place. However a clear agreement about her needing to resign as chairperson of GroenLinks mostly arose after it became clear that when she was asked about the relationship, she lied about it. After this, apart from a few exceptions, did all judgements agree that her position had become untenable due to a breach of trust.

It is difficult to say what would have happened if she told the truth about the duration of the relationship in the first place. In that case, she would not have lied, but her interest would have been conflicted during the composition of the candidate list. Maybe she would have needed to resign because of this anyway. It is however clear that her employed defence strategy in the end did not repair her integrity.

## Chapter 6 – Conclusion and discussion

### 6.1 Answering the research question

This thesis explored the effect an appearance of a conflict of interest could have on people's perceptions about the integrity of a politician who is accused of it. It also researched whether a defence strategy could work in favour or against the politician trying to repair his image. To manage this, two cases of appearances of conflicts of interest have been researched. First, judgements were analysed, made after Commissioner of the King Jacques Tichelaar was accused of nepotism, for allegedly putting his sister-in-law forward for a redecoration project in Drenthe. After that, the same was done for the case of chairperson of GroenLinks, Marjolein Meijer, who was accused of having a secret relationship with a member of parliament for the same party. This could have meant that her interests were conflicted when she composed the list for the parliamentary election.

The analysis was done with the aim of answering the following research question:

*To what extent does a supposed Conflict of Interest and/or the Defence Strategy of politicians influence how their integrity as a person, of his or her role, and of the system they are part of, is judged by the public?*

The analyses have shown that overall, appearances of conflict of interest could negatively impact public's perceptions about integrity. Defence strategies appeared to have an impact too, especially in the case of Meijer. Her act was already perceived negatively, but this worsened when it turned out that she had lied about the duration of her relationship. If she would have spoken the truth from the beginning, maybe the practical result would have been the same; she would probably have to resign. However, lying about it might have had an even greater impact on her integrity than would otherwise have been the case. Moreover, an apology of Tichelaar in an earlier case of appearance of conflict of interest came back to haunt him. Because he was accused of acting with a conflict of interest again, the earlier apology was deemed to not be sincere.

Interestingly, the case of Tichelaar, active on a regional level of government, provoked more responses by the newspapers, politicians and the public than the case of Meijer, who was active on a national level of government. This could be due to the roles they had. Whereas Tichelaar was an important figure in the province of Drenthe, Meijer was mostly important within the party GroenLinks. This made it more of an internal affair. Another possible

explanation is that Tichelaar heavily defended himself publicly with his response to the newspapers and his defence in a debate of the Provincial Council. Meijer stayed more on the background, making no public statements about the matter herself. This could have made the conflict of interest case of Tichelaar easier to follow and more visible to outsiders.

Reflecting on the aim of the judgements on integrity, some notable things became apparent. First, in both cases not many judgements were aimed at the integrity of the politicians. A considerable amount of judgements were however classified to be ambivalent, which meant that it was not clear whether the judgement was aimed at the person or the role. This might compensate the difference for some part, but still the difference with the category 'role' was substantial. In the case of Tichelaar, this was even aimed at the most. This might for some part be due to the emergency debate which was held to decide whether he could stay as CdK. This generated a lot of judgements about his role. However, a debate only to decide upon this, showed how serious the matter was perceived to be and also that it was not yet a settled matter that he would have to resign after his appearance of a conflict of interest. This last thing was the same in the case of Meijer. At first, when she could potentially have acted with a conflict of interest, but it appeared like it had not actually happened, no real consequences were assigned to the matter. When a few days later it became apparent that her interests may already have been conflicted when it actually mattered, namely at the parliamentary elections, and also that she had previously lied about this, ended her career as chairperson of GroenLinks.

The conflict of interest cases also caused people to make judgements about the integrity of the system as a whole. In the case of Meijer, this was even by far the biggest group. Instead of judging her as a person or in her role, a lot of people made judgements about her party; GroenLinks. Some of these judgements were positive about GroenLinks' handling of the situation, but most of them judged the integrity of the party negatively.

## 6.2 Future research

This thesis has given an exploration of the perceptions about integrity in the Netherlands for politicians accused of having an appearance of conflict of interest. It shows that researching cases like this could be useful to get a better understanding of how such cases are conceived in society and what people expect from the integrity of politicians. An in-depth research design makes it possible to really look at the details of the case and analyse what the aim of every judgement is and how it influenced perceptions about integrity. Integrity is a contextual and contingent concept, and thus an ongoing relevant topic of scientific research. However, it also

means that the results of this thesis only give a limited view on integrity perceptions. They could only be understood in this specific context. To get a better understanding of the broader perceptions about integrity, a lot more research could be done.

Moreover, this thesis builds on the thesis by Kempenaar (2020). It has used a similar research design to explore the topic further but used two new cases of conflict of interest. In her research, she carefully concluded that defence strategies may not always be an important influencer on the perceived integrity. From the results of this thesis, a different but also careful conclusion is drawn about the defence strategies. Though many more judgments were aimed on the act and not on the defence strategies, especially the case of Meijer showed how it could potentially influence your integrity negatively. Therefore, there is definitely still reason to keep researching this subject.

The online platforms used in this thesis; *GeenStijl* and *Joop* definitely give interesting insights into the perceptions of the more general public. They are however not quite representative of the average person. Especially commenters on *GeenStijl* often seemed to have either rather strong opinions or commented mostly with the aim of making people laugh. It would be interesting to add new sources of public opinion to scientific research. This could for example be Tweets by the public, comments under Facebook or Instagram posts or panel data. The online platforms used in this thesis did show that the public could have very different opinions on matters like this and in the end, what is seen as integer commonly should be a reflection of the public opinion.

At last, it could be interesting to explore what kinds of defence strategies are used in specific cases like this. While the typology built up from the works of Benoit (2015) and Schönbach (1990) is already quite an extensive list, are there still defences by politicians that do not fall under these categories. It could therefore be interesting to explore this further.

### 6.3 Practical use of this thesis

This thesis has given new insights into the perceptions of the public on integrity. Using comments of *GeenStijl* and *Joop* has played an interesting role in also exposing opinions of the more general public. A significant portion of the judgments aimed on integrity on these platforms are aimed at the integrity of the system. Therefore, the analysis of the comments on these platforms, seems to give rise to thinking that to some extent underlying discontent about the system may exist in the public. As was explained in the introduction, such discontent could lead to bigger problems if it is not handled appropriately. It is therefore important to keep an eye out for tendencies like this.



Another practical insight from this paper is that how a system responds to a conflict of interest could also influence perceptions about integrity of the system. The case of Meijer showed that some people thought GroenLinks handled it well, while others declared it to be bad. Also some judgments did not agree with the seriousness of the punishment the politicians received. They dedicated this to the system, where people who make big mistakes are easily able to get a new job. Whether this is fair, is up for discussion, but it is good to treat such cases with care.

At last, for politicians themselves, it may be advisable to be considerate about your defence strategy when you are accused of a conflict of interest as it could potentially influence perceptions about your integrity negatively.

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## Appendix A: Defence strategies Tichelaar

**Table A.01**

*Summary of the defence strategies used by Tichelaar*

Strategy	Example	Appendix A, paragraph
Simple denial	<i>"I have not put my sister-in-law forward"</i>	1,3
Good intentions	<i>"The commissioner never had the intention to act in a guiding way"</i>	2,3
Mortification (apology)	<i>"The Council (of the Provincial Executive ed.) and the commissioner in particular deeply regret the arisen commotion"</i>	2,3
Differentiation	According to Tichelaar, he did not break the code (of integrity ed.). He however writes that he did put his sister-in-law forward to an official without mentioning the familial relationship.	3
Corrective action	<i>"I want to learn from my mistakes and put effort into restoring trust"</i>	2, 3
Bolstering	<i>"I realise that <b>qualities</b> like decisiveness are also my pitfall. Characteristics like hands-on, acting, getting results; could also work against you."</i>	3

### A.1 Response to the article, before the publishing

Source: Van den Berg, J., & Bodde, A. (2017a, February 25). Hoe Jacques Tichelaar opnieuw de fout in ging. *De Volkskrant*. <https://www.volkskrant.nl/nieuws-achtergrond/hoe-jacques-tichelaar-opnieuw-de-fout-in-ging~b37814a1/>

"Ik heb mijn schoonzus niet voorgedragen en ook niet gevraagd te adviseren over de herinrichting van Huize Tetrode. Voor de herinrichting van de Landschapszaal was eerder een ontwerp gevraagd, dat niet aan de wensen voldeed. De nieuwe opdrachtverstrekking en de verdere voorbereiding/uitvoering daarvan is zoals gebruikelijk verder onder ambtelijk mandaat uitgevoerd. Pas later in het traject, bij het maken van de afspraken voor de eerste presentatie, werd ambtelijk duidelijk dat het om familie ging. Op 17 november 2015 was het college uitgenodigd voor een bezichtiging/presentatie van het concept-ontwerp door Klinkenberg SO [De bedrijfsnaam van Karin Klinkenberg, red.]. Ik was hier als vertegenwoordiger van het college, als bestuurlijk gebruiker van de Landschapszaal."

**Table A.02**

*Defence strategies in response to the newspapers*

	<b>Defence strategy</b>	<b>Remarks</b>	<b>English translation of highlighted words</b>
<b>1</b>	Simple denial	Denial of the act	<i>“I have not put my sister-in-law forward and have also not asked her to advice about the redecoration of Huize Tetrode”</i>
<b>2</b>	Simple denial	Denial of the act	<i>“It was later in the process, when the agreements about the first presentation were made, that it became clear to the civil service that it concerned a family member”</i>

## A.2 Letter to the Provincial Council

This letter was not published in full, but *De Volkskrant* and *Dagblad van het Noorden* did have it in their possession, and they presented the main components and quotes from the letter.

Source: Van den Berg, J., & Bodde, A. (2017c, February 28). Tichelaar geeft toe: ik opperde toch schoonzus voor restauratie provincie-gebouw. *De Volkskrant*.

<https://www.volkskrant.nl/nieuws-achtergrond/tichelaar-geeft-toe-ik-opperde-toch-schoonzus-voor-restauratie-provincie-gebouw~bee8f98e/>

In de brief aan de Staten beschrijft Tichelaar dat de herinrichting van Tetrode in 2015 niet op gang kwam. Hij schrijft in de brief: 'Hierop heeft de commissaris gevraagd met snelheid alsnog een ontwerp te realiseren en een aantal firma's genoemd, te weten Klinkenberg-SO en Roodbergen Dolfsma.'

'De commissaris heeft geen moment sturend willen optreden in de opdrachtverlening van de ambtelijke organisatie aan welk bedrijf dan ook. Het optreden van de CdK is ook niet als sturend ervaren door de ambtelijke organisatie. (...) Het college, en in het bijzonder de commissaris van de Koning, betreurt de ontstane commotie zeer.'

De integriteitscode van de provincie schrijft voor dat een bestuurder zelfs de schijn van belangenverstrengeling moet vermijden. Volgens Tichelaar heeft hij die code niet geschonden. Wel schrijft hij dat dat hij zijn schoonzus voor een zakelijke opdracht heeft voorgedragen aan een ambtenaar, zonder de familieband te vermelden.

Toen die duidelijk werd 'is overlegd tussen de commissaris en de ambtelijke organisatie', staat in de brief. De opdracht werd vanwege de geconstateerde familieband niet verder uitgebreid, maar afgerond.

**Table A.03***Defence strategies in the letter to the Provincial Council*

	<b>Defence strategy</b>	<b>Remarks</b>	<b>English translation of highlighted words</b>
<b>1</b>	Good intentions	To speed up the process	In the letter to the Provincial Council, Tichelaar describes how the redecoration of Tetrode in 2015 just would not commence. He writes: <i>“Therefore, the commissioner quickly asked to realise the design after all and mentioned a couple of names, namely Klinkenberg-SO and Roodbergen Dolfma”</i>
<b>2</b>	Good intentions	Just trying to help	<i>“The commissioner never had the intention to act in a guiding way at the job appointment of the official organization or any organization whatsoever.”</i>
<b>3</b>	Mortification (apology)	Apologize for the commotion	<i>“The Council (of the Provincial Executive ed.) and the commissioner in particular deeply regret the arisen commotion”</i>
<b>4</b>	Differentiation	He tries to differentiate between acting with a real conflict of interest and what he did.	According to Tichelaar, he did not break the code (of integrity ed.). He however writes that he did put his sister-in-law forward to an official without mentioning the familial relationship.
<b>5</b>	Corrective action	When it became clear that there was a possible conflict of interest, his sister-in-law was taken from the job	<i>“The job was not expanded, but got completed, because of the noticed familial relationship”</i>

## A.3 Emergency debate

Source: Provinciale Staten Drenthe (PSD). (2017a, March 1). Proces opdrachtverlening herinrichting Huize Tetrode c.a. [Video]. Archived recording of a debate of the Provincial Council of Drenthe.

<https://www.drentsparlement.nl/Vergaderingen/Provinciale-Staten-PS/2017/01-maart/15:00/PROCES-OPDRACHTVERLENING-HERINRICHTING-HUIZE-TETRODE-c-a>



1:04:50 “Voorzitter, u zei het zelf al: vandaag een debat over mijn handelen. Dat betreurt ik ten zeerste. Niet goed voor Drenthe, niet voor de burgers, niet voor de politiek, niet goed voor jullie en ook niet voor mijn ambt. Voorzitter het doet heel veel met me. Voor u staat een aangeslagen, maar niet verslagen iemand. De kritiek op mijn ambt uit de media neem ik zeer serieus. De beeldvorming rondom de mens doet me zeer. Als je dat constateert, dan kan/moet de vraag bij jezelf zijn; kan/wil ik wel verder? Kan ik een balans vinden tussen de fouten die ik heb gemaakt en het traject naar de toekomst?

1:06:18 “Ik wil leren van mijn fouten en ik wil me inzetten voor vertrouwen. Dat kost tijd, maar daar wil ik me voor inzetten. Die weging; kan en wil ik verder, worden bij mij ten volle beantwoordt met ‘ja’.

1:06:55 “Het beeld, ik zeg niet de feiten, het beeld is nu: ‘Die Commissaris; die draait en liegt’. Het beeld is nu; het bevooroordeelen van familieleden. Het beeld is nu; niet integer handelen. Het beeld is nu: schijn van belangenverstrengeling. Ik kan me daar in de media bij foutieve fouten niet tegen verzetten en daarom sluit ik me aan bij een aantal collega’s. Dat het goed is dat dit debat in openbaarheid plaatsvindt en dat ik ook kan zeggen wat ik wil zeggen

1:07:49 “Voorzitter, en dat is maar niet zo uitgesproken: ik wil u een nederig excuus aanbieden, want u heeft er net als ik zelf een enorme last van. En ik bied u dan ook dat nederige excuus dubbel en dwars aan.

1:08:35 “Ik had nooit, maar dan ook nooit de naam van het bedrijf van mijn schoonzus moeten noemen. Ook al was het door mij bedoeld als een voorbeeld; een suggestie, het was onhandig en stom. Dit had ik meteen moeten erkennen, maar omdat het nimmer mijn bedoeling was geweest om te beïnvloeden, kwam het besef van erkenning te laat.

1:09:22 “Ik realiseer me dat kwaliteiten als daadkracht ook mijn valkuilen zijn. Karaktereigenschappen als handen aan de ploeg, doen, resultaten boeken; kunnen ook tegen je werken. Dus ook de stoere uitspraak: ik zou het zo weer hetzelfde doen. Nee dus. Ik leer dat ik hier veel scherper rekening mee moet houden. Ik wil aan het werk om dat geschonden vertrouwen te herstellen. Maar dat kan ik niet alleen; daar heb ik u bij nodig. Maar ik heb ook begrepen dat als ik daadwerkelijk meen wat ik zeg, dan zal ik veel meer gebruik moeten maken van collegiale toetsing: dilemma’s voorleggen; waar loop ik tegenaan? En is het wel verantwoord om dat in je post als commissaris dat alleen te doen?

1:11:00 “Maar ik hoop dat u wil aannemen dat het mij ernst is. Leren wil ik van fouten in het belang van deze provincie.”

1:25:50 “Dan: 17 november. 17 november wordt het college uitgenodigd om kennis te nemen van een presentatie in Huize Tetrode, eindelijk. Mij, en dat is gevraagd door een aantal mensen, was niet bekend dat dat was uitgevoerd, op dat moment al, door, in dit geval firma Klinkenberg. Mij is ook niet op 13 november door de teamleider gemeld: ‘weet je wel dat dat een familielid is? Die samenloop van omstandigheden vond plaats op 17 november in Huize Tetrode. We waren daar voor de keuze geplaatst, en dat is een gesprek geweest tussen de

teamleider en ondergetekende, voor het feit dat het een familielid was en wat nu te doen? Optie 1: het terugdraaien van de opdracht. Dat kon dus niet meer, want de opdracht was uitgevoerd. Een aantal van u heeft gezegd: ‘ja, maar er is sprake van een vervolgoopdracht in de richting van februari. De werkzaamheden zijn wel in februari gedaan, maar die lagen opgesloten in de opdrachtverstrekking aan dat bureau op 15 oktober. Het was dus de opdracht die al in de opdracht stond. En die is op een later moment; 15 februari, uitgevoerd à raison, zoals dat ook keurig stond voormeld in de krant, voor 900 euro. Maar was geen nieuwe opdracht, was geen aanvullende opdracht, was een opdracht die uitgevoerd is door haar op basis van de opdracht die ze reeds had.

**Table A.04**

*Defence strategies in the emergency debate*

<b>Defence strategy</b>	<b>Remarks</b>	<b>English translation of highlighted words</b>
<b>1.</b> Mortification (Apology)	Regrets the commotion	<i>“Chairperson, you said it yourself: a debate about my actions. I <b>regret that deeply</b>. Not good for Drenthe, not for the citizens, not for the politics and not for my function. Chairperson, it moves me deeply.</i>
<b>2.</b> Corrective action	Learn from mistakes	<i>“I want to learn from my mistakes and put effort into restoring trust”</i>
<b>3.</b> Mortification (apology)		<i>“Chairperson, and that is not easily said: I want to humbly <b>apologize</b>, because like me, you suffer from this as well. And I therefore humbly <b>apologize doubly</b>”</i>
<b>4.</b> Good intentions		<i>“I should never, really never, have mentioned the company of my sister-in-law. Although it was <b>intended</b> to be an example; a suggestion, it was unhandy and stupid. I should have recognized this earlier, but because it <b>was never my intention</b> to influence, the realization of recognition came too late.”</i>
<b>5.</b> Bolstering	He may be trying to reduce the offensiveness of the act, by underscoring that some of his characteristics are normally qualities of his,	<i>“I realise that <b>qualities</b> like decisiveness are also my pitfall. Characteristics like</i>

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		even though they now caused him to make a mistake	<i>hands-on, acting, getting results; could also work against you."</i>
<b>6.</b>	Corrective action	Learn from mistakes	<i>"I want to work on restoring the lost trust"</i>
<b>7.</b>	Corrective action		<i>"But I hope you can recognize that I take this very seriously. I want to learn from my mistakes."</i>
<b>8.</b>	Simple denial	He says he did not know his sister-in-law actually got the job until later in the process	<i>"To me ... it was not known that that was executed, already on that moment, by, in this case, the company Klinkenberg."</i>

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## Appendix B: Data collection

### B.1 Case 1: Tichelaar

Data was collected from the sources mentioned in the table underneath, using the corresponding search terms. The relevant time period for this case is from 25 February 2017 to 30 September 2017.

**Table D.01**

Data collection Jacques Tichelaar

Source	Search Term	Data base
De Volkskrant	Tichelaar “Huize Tetrode”	NexisUni
De Telegraaf	Tichelaar	NexisUni
Politicians (Twitter)	Tichelaar	Twitter
Politicians (Official documents)	Vergadering van Provinciale Staten van Drenthe woensdag 1 maart 2017	Drentsparlement.nl
Politicians (News)	Jacques Tichelaar	Google
GeenStijl	Tichelaar	GeenStijl
Joop	Tichelaar Huize Tetrode	

### B.2 Case 2: Meijer

For this case, the relevant time period is from 1 June 2018 to 18 May 2019

Source	Search Term	Data base
De Volkskrant	Marjolein Meijer	NexisUni
De Telegraaf	Marjolein Meijer	NexisUni
Politicians (Twitter)		Twitter
Politicians (Official documents)		Groenlinks.nl (official statement to party members)
Politicians (News)		Google, NexisUni
GeenStijl		GeenStijl
Joop		Joop

## Appendix C: Data analysis Tichelaar

Appendix see can be found in the supplementary material: 'Appendix C\_Judgements about Jacques Tichelaar'

## Appendix D: Data analysis Meijer

Appendix D can be found in the supplementary material: ‘Appendix D\_Judgements about Marjolein Meijer’

## Appendix E: Response Klaver in the media to the Meijer case

The party leader of GroenLinks, Jesse Klaver, responded to the NOS about the case of Marjolein Meijer. Because the full response was only in video format, it will be written out here. The data analysis will still be presented in Appendix D.

NOS. (2018, June 6). *Klaver: Het vertrouwen is beschaamd* [Video]. NOS.

<https://nos.nl/artikel/2235221-gl-voorzitter-meijer-en-kamerlid-grashoff-weg-na-liegen-over-relatie>

Jesse Klaver: *“Wat wel belangrijk is in een hecht team en in zo’n organisatie dat mensen de waarheid spreken. En als dat niet gebeurt, ja, dan heb je een vertrouwensprobleem. En dat hebben ze zelf ook zo geconcludeerd en daarom hebben ze hun ontslag ingediend.”*

NOS: *“Ze hebben hun ontslag ingediend zegt u, maar is hen duidelijk gemaakt dat ze dat moesten doen of hebben ze dat vrijwillig gedaan?”*

Jesse Klaver: *“Nee, ze hebben dat zelf gedaan, omdat duidelijk werd dat het vertrouwen zo was geschonden, dat je op die manier niet samen kunt werken. Nogmaals: op wie je verliefd wordt, van wie je houdt, met wie je omgaat; dat is een privékwestie. Dat vind ik echt niet aan andere om daarover te oordelen. Maar je moet er wel de waarheid over spreken als je in zo’n hecht team met elkaar samenwerkt, dan het realiseren van onze idealen. Als dat niet gebeurt, dan is het vertrouwen geschonden en ze hebben daarbij zelf ook de conclusie getrokken: ‘ja dan kunnen we eigenlijk niet goed verder functioneren’. En dat is heel pijnlijk voor henzelf, maar ook voor ons.”*

NOS: *“Hoe ernstig is dit voor GroenLinks? Want de fractie van 14 mensen, die telt nu nog maar twee Kamerleden met ervaring; u en Bram van Ojik. Alle andere zijn nieuwelingen.”*

Jesse Klaver: *“We hebben fantastisch getalenteerde Kamerleden...”*

NOS: *“Ongetwijfeld, maar ervaring hebben ze niet.”*

Jesse Klaver: *“We hebben hele goede Kamerleden hier en wat dit voor GroenLinks betekent: ik heb al zo vaak gezegd: ‘onze partij; onze beweging is veel meer dan één leider of die Kamerleden’. Nee, onze partij is zoveel sterker dan alleen de mensen die je in beeld ziet. Onze beweging staat als een huis en daar heb ik alle vertrouwen in”*