

BASIC STRATEGIES AND METHODS OF PREVENTION AND CONTROL OF CORRUPTION

Mihail Prodanov

Burgas Free University

Abstract: *The article examines the main strategies and methods that are useful and appropriate to reduce corruption in various organizations from the public and private sectors. The proposed approaches are based on a four-component model of corruption, proposed by the author in another previous publication. The strategies that are considered in the article are related to the component of mediating factors - subjective and objective. While the strategies for combating corruption address the objective mediating factors, the proposed methods are aimed at assessing personal integrity as a subjective factor mediating corrupt actions. Several of most common methods which can measure personal integrity are described.*

Key words: *corruption, integrity, strategies to reduce corruption, methods of assessing personal integrity*

ОСНОВНИ СТРАТЕГИИ И МЕТОДИ ЗА ПРЕВЕНЦИЯ И КОНТРОЛ НА КОРУПЦИЯТА

Михаил Проданов

Бургаски свободен университет

Резюме: *Статията разглежда основните стратегии и методи, които са полезни и подходящи за намаляване на корупцията в различни организации от публичния и частния сектор. Предложените подходи се основават на четири-компонентен модел на корупцията, предложен от автора в друга предходна публикация. Стратегиите, които се разглеждат в статията, са свързани с компонента на опосредстващите фактори (медиаторите) – субективни и обективни. Докато стратегиите за борба с корупцията разглеждат обективните опосредстващи фактори, предложените методи са насочени към оценка на личния интегритет като субективен фактор, опосредстващ корупционните действия. Описани са няколко от най-често срещаните методи, които могат да измерват личния интегритет.*

Ключови думи: *корупция, интегритет, стратегии за ограничаване на корупцията, методи за оценка на личния интегритет*

1. Introduction

Corruption is a complex phenomenon that is unfortunately inherent to human civilization and has a negative impact on public relations. Corrupt behaviour is a type of „counterproductive behaviour“ and corrupt behaviour itself can be defined as „abuse of power – economic, political and administrative, which leads to personal or group benefits at the expense of the rights and legitimate interests of individual, the specific community or the whole society“ (Prodanov, 2008). There is one index that is indicative of situation with corruption worldwide – The Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI). CPI is accessible for free

from the annual report of *Transparency International*. The CPI ranks 180 countries (including Bulgaria) and territories around the world by their perceived levels of **public sector corruption**, scoring on a scale of 0 (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean). This shows that most countries are failing to stop corruption. According to the 2024 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), the global average remains unchanged for over a decade at just **43 out of 100**. More than two-thirds of countries score below 50 in ranking (not scoring). Despite concerted efforts and hard-won gains by some, **148 out of 180** countries have made no significant progress against corruption or have declined since 2012, which strongly indicates that they have serious corruption problems. What is more, in 2024, Bulgaria falls by as many as 9 places in the ranking (from **67**- 2023 to **76** – 2024 out of 180) with score **43**, that is 2 points less than 2023 (45 in 2023 out of 100) (<https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2024>). That's why it seems that the importance of this topic doesn't diminish over the years. The current paper is based on the structural-functional model of causality that attempts to describe the main components, mechanisms and processes related to the corruption as a complex phenomenon. According to this model, four main components have to be taken into account addressing corrupt behaviour: they are *predispositions* for such behaviour (corruption), *mediators* (or moderators), *cognitive processes of decision making* and *consequences* of corruption (Prodanov, 2023, p.100-108). So, the strategies to fight with this very serious problem have to relate to the components mentioned above. Strategies for controlling corrupt behaviour can be general (universal) for all type of organizations in which the predispositions for corrupt behaviour are available, but they can be specific for some of them - for example, for police structures there are strategies that are applicable only in the sphere of police activity. We should keep in mind that on this topic we need to pay attention not only to universal aspects of this social problem but to very specific details which characterise separate organisations. In fact, the strategies are mainly oriented towards those variables of the model that have *mediating functions* – the *organizational environment, leadership and personal integrity*. So, If the predispositions for corrupt actions are available, two groups of factors that mediate corrupt behaviour can be indicated: objective and subjective. **Objective factors** are factors of the environment as mentioned above (organisational, family environment and circle of friends). The mechanisms of their influence are in focus by social learning theories. Briefly, these mediators are:

✓ **Organizational Norms are Crucial:** people who knowingly break the rules often think they are doing the right thing (because the other significant people from the close environment do the same) – according to the social learning processes. Most instances of corporate corruption involve large numbers of active or passive participants and rarely are a result of a few „bad apples“. And also, perceptions for existing of informal norms is a strong determinant of rule-breaking;

✓ **Leadership issues:** swift and visible leadership action early in the cycle of organized corruption can be effective, but leaders will have a difficult time influencing subordinate behaviour if abuse becomes institutionalized. Given that, if abuse (corruption) is institutionalized, employees are hardly going to believe that management's efforts to reduce dishonesty are sincere. *Modeling (copying)* ethical behaviours is important as Bandura's Social Learning theory stands for. Bandura found that according to Social Learning theory, models are an important source for learning new behaviours and for achieving behavioural change in institutionalized settings (vicarious learning) (Bandura, 1986). *Rewarding, condoning or ignoring* illegal acts greatly increases the likelihood that they will occur and become part of the culture of the organization. *Communication from high-level officers to leaders closer to the action* (e.g., lower-level officers, non-

commissioned officers) *is critical*. Shop-floor visibility makes a substantial difference especially for the government organizations. And last, but not least – the general attitude of managers about aims of the official's performance when manager says „*I want results and I don't care how you get them*“, actually invites dishonesty.

✓ **Culture:** *self-centred (selfish) and group-centred national character* facilitates flourishing and spreading of corruption. People of these cultures are focused largely on either interests of their social identity's group or their own interests rather than on social problems and prosperity of society as a whole.

Referring to the police, Walker considers two categories of control strategies: external to the police institution and internal, which aim changes in the structure of police activity (Walker, Katz, 2013). Certainly, this categorization can be applied for many organisations.

2. Types of basic strategies

2.1. External strategies

The external strategies include ways to influence and reduce corruption using approaches and methods that are external for organization by nature. They are:

- *Public opinion* – mobilizing public opinion might be the first step towards reforms, as far as corruption cannot be eradicated if large number of social groups tolerate it. Public support is the necessary „backbone“ for changes, it encourages as honest officials as those corrupt officials who have decided to change, to testify and to continue „forward“;

- *The scandal* - the revealing corruption is an important way of mobilizing society. A scandal usually involves dramatic cases of wrongdoing. As an event in the social space, it is going along with mass media participation, followed by the expression of opinions by prominent citizens, political figures or journalists themselves. Most often, the immediate result of the scandal is the demand for resignations. However, scandals are temporary events. After the initial „noise“, the interest quickly declines, the media turns to other new topics and the public „memory“ quickly forgets what happened. Therefore, the scandal can only create the conditions for reforms, but it cannot sustain them;

- *Special commissions of inquiry* – these commissions are created at a higher level of political hierarchy. They would have an effect if they are politically independent, so that they to be free from relations with the corrupt politicians. Moreover, their work must be transparent and public. Special commissions face the limitations that are relevant to all external strategies. If we talk about the police structures, the following difficulties can be pointed out: first, the people in these commissions often do not have direct knowledge of the conditions in the particular structure. In addition, the arrival of the unwanted „guests“ causes a spontaneous resistance of the majority of officers and activates the natural attitude of the policemen to „tighten the ranks“, to deny the existence of corruption, not to „snitch“ on colleagues and reject cooperating in the investigation. All such commissions have faced the difficult problem of acquiring information from the „source“ that only those people who work in the certain police structure can provide. Usually only a few officers agree to cooperate, but these police officers subsequently suffer significant losses - they face the hostility of their colleagues and even encounter threats to their lives as well. Therefore, these commissions often gather the information through interrogations, using methods of special intelligence tools and double agents. Also, after collecting evidence against corrupt officials, these evidence are made public, which in turn causes the displeasure of human rights organizations, which assess such actions as undermining the legal rights and freedoms of citizens, as they still have not gone through the relevant court procedures.

Because of these difficulties, experts on the subject have come to the conclusion that internal strategies to control corruption can be much more effective.

2.2. Internal strategies

They are related to the organizational dynamics of the organizations:

- *The leader's behaviour* – the formal leader is one of the main factors for positive reforms. He must state categorically that corruption will not be tolerated and active approach will be taken against such violations. Successful leaders are those who stand for a firm anti-corrupt attitude boosted by appropriate actions. The dilemma facing police administrators, for example, is related to the question of where to „draw the line“ because not all acts of corruption are equally serious. However, the removal of „small gifts“ often gives rise to hidden dissatisfaction and demotivates employees, who can easily justify them with compensation for the insufficient benefits for the responsible and risky work they do. Moreover, sometimes these gifts are simply imposed on the some employees. However, those police chiefs who have effectively fought corruption take the position that no gifts, even the smallest, can be tolerated. The argument against „gifts“ is based on the belief that they are the „small step“ that creates conditions for greater corruption. Opponents of this view believe that anti-corruption efforts should focus on serious forms of abuse of official position, and small „slips“ are so diverse and insignificant that they cannot be disturbing;

- *Honesty and consistency* (between words and deeds) – a large part of the subordinates' mistrust of their superiors stems from the contradiction between the declared principles of honesty, on one hand, and the ascertained facts testifying for official violations – on the other (Davis, Rothstein, 2006);

- *The system of rewards and punishments* – to a large extent the morale of the employees depends on how the management treats suspected or proven in corruption officials. One way to maintain high morale is to reward honest employees. Under conditions of corruption, honest officials lead an extremely lonely existence and are isolated from others. For example, most police officers believe that reporting corrupt practices would put at risk their careers. Peer pressure and an unfair career promotion process make employees tacitly accept and/or be silenced in case of corruption of their colleagues. If the honest are not rewarded, it would make it easier for new employees and those who were previously honest to become corrupt because they may come to a conclusion that „everyone is doing it“ and/or „if I don't do it, I can't to compete with others and get promotion upwards“. Therefore, an effective means is to reward the police officers who refused bribes, as well as those who reported the bribery of other colleagues. The „reverse side of the coin“ is also important - that violators have to be promptly sanctioned. This reinforces beliefs in a fair rules, also it acts preventively, and can be extremely valuable for socialization of the punished official, especially in cases of a single act of corruption. Suggestion is that the objective punishment would give a chance to reconsider what was done and change in thinking and behaviour;

- *Improving the administration* – The corruption flourishes mostly in poorly managed organizations where lines of authority are unclear and monitoring is minimal. Administration can be improved in several ways. The traditional approach is towards greater centralization of decision-making. However, this is justified only in those spheres and structures where the conditions for corruption are greatest. The modern administration emphasizes on increasing the number of control units - these are the so-called internal investigation units. They get their strength from two sources: first, from the support of the head of the structure, who must fully get behind decisive action against violations, and second, such an internal unit must have sufficient resources to carry out its mission successfully.

• *Influencing Personal Integrity* – First of all, we need to define the concept „integrity”: *integrity* means behaving in ways that reflect broadly-shared values regarding trustworthiness, honesty and unwilling to take advantage of others. So, integrity as behaviour is the **antithesis** of counterproductive behaviour (therefore **antithesis of corruption** given that corruption is one of the types of counterproductive behaviours). Considering *Subjective factors* that determine acts of corruption (also defined as *personal integrity*), these factors are related to characteristics of personality itself. There are two groups, which relate to:

- ✓ *Values, Attitudes, beliefs* (for example, the beliefs in justice – generalized or specific (related to the job satisfaction and commitment to the organization of the employee concerned));
- ✓ *Some traits of Personality* (they will be defined below).

In these terms, we should first answer the question is it reasonable to carry out trainings to enhance personal integrity? Obviously, training that is carried out with programs focusing issues related to corruption is relevant despite the fact that dishonesty, crime and abuse does not typically result from lack of knowledge of the rules and procedures. Thus, training should focus on:

- ✓ Skills for overcoming pressure to break the rules(so called assertiveness);
- ✓ Ethical awareness;
- ✓ Attitude to respond effectively when abuse is witnessed (Mullins, 2017).

• *Recruiting for Personal Integrity* – The importance of incorporating assessments or predictions of integrity in recruitment and personnel selection depends on:

- ✓ Organizational norms: integrity assessment is most critical when norms tolerate some dishonesty;
- ✓ Opportunities for and consequences of dishonest acts;
- ✓ Target of dishonesty: against the organization vs. for the organization. We may define two types of dishonesty: Offenses directed against the organization (employee theft, sabotage, corrupt acts of officials) & Offenses committed for the organization (valid for business organizations: corporate corruption, white-collar crime).

3. Methods of measuring personal integrity

3.1. Integrity tests (questionnaires)

Provided that it became clear that personal integrity is very important predictor for noncorruptive behavior decreasing likelihood of perpetration acts of corruption, we need to describe some of most frequently used approaches and methods that aim to assess those individual characteristics which are related to subjective moderators of corruption. The most common group of methods is Integrity Tests. By nature, these tests are psychological psychometric questionnaires. We may outline several important features of these tests (Murphy, 2000; Murphy, 2017):

- ✓ They are used to reduce theft and counterproductivity (corruption as well);
- ✓ Most widely used in retail, banking and when selecting officials of Government administration;
- ✓ Largely American, but used in UK, European Union, Israel, etc.;
- ✓ Integrity tests are rare for managers or executives (by the way, soft treatment of managers and executives is inconsistent with what we know about the scope of the problem - base rate is low for executives, but damages are very large).

Integrity tests are offered in two types: either „overt integrity tests” or „covert integrity tests”. The first type (Overt Tests) measure:

- ✓ *Admissions of dishonesty;*
- ✓ *Perceptions on own or others’ dishonesty;*
- ✓ *Norms regarding: counterproductive behavior, theft and dishonesty;*
- ✓ *Punitive attitudes toward dishonesty;*
- ✓ *Rumination about dishonesty.*

The items of overt integrity tests should assess objectively the above aspects of thinking, special attitudes regarding dishonesty and reflections on relevant experience of the examined persons.

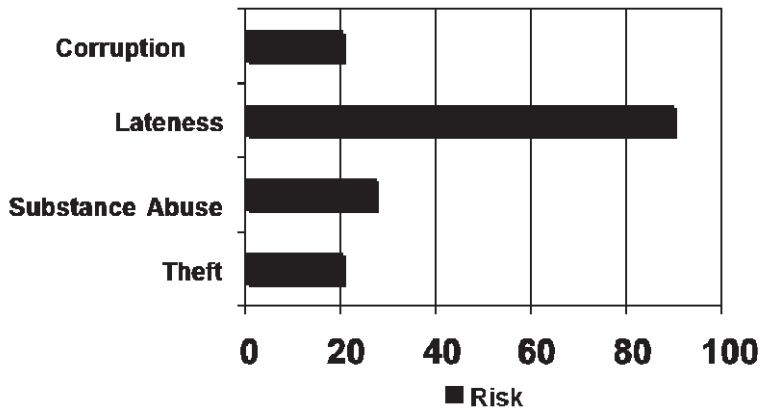


Figure 1. Scoring Integrity Tests (Overt)

Usually, the results of the overt integrity testing illustrate the probability of risk of perpetration counterproductive acts – risk assessment (Figure 1). Figure 1 depicts one example of potential results for a certain employee after evaluation with an overt integrity test.

The second type – Covert Integrity Tests, are also known as Personality-Based Tests. These tests attempt to assess the following characteristics of personality:

- ✓ *Thrill seeking (sensations seeking);*
- ✓ *Resistance to authority (nonconstructive and counterproductive);*
- ✓ *Conscientiousness (low level is indicative for lack of integrity);*
- ✓ *Agreeableness (low);*
- ✓ *Extroversion (very high).*

One very important issue regarding integrity tests is about their validation. Validity of integrity tests is proved by different ways. It turns out that scores on integrity tests are consistently correlated with:

- ✓ *Measures of counterproductivity;*
- ✓ *Measures of overall job performance;*
- ✓ *Measures of shrinkage (wastage, losses attributed to theft) (but, risk levels or score bands (cut-points) are hard to verify).*

Actually, integrity tests show levels of validity for predicting future performance that are comparable to other psychometric tests. And what should be highlighted is that validity is fairly similar across different types of tests.

3.2. Alternatives to Tests

There are another methods to measure personal integrity. One of them is *reference and background checks*. If the information in references is objective and true we can very well differentiate and recognise people with low levels of integrity. This should be useful not only in the process of selection personnel but in case of promotions as well. Unfortunately, we can't always rely on the references and background checks for many reasons. What makes these sources not such reliable information is related to subjective and objective reasons. Finally, we can't check out all important facts which are relevant to integrity.

As a rule, the only source which knows all available data is the person whom we have interest in. That's why the *Integrity interviews* are supposed to serve better in gathering much more and important data concerning personal integrity. In fact, the interviewee knows best of all other sources whether he (or she) has committed a serious offense, used drugs, committed any dishonesty, etc. That is why it is the person who can provide the most useful information about himself. Therefore, the problem is not where to look, but how to get the interviewee to tell the truth. In order for such an interview to be successful, it needs to meet certain criteria. Basically, this type of interviews has to implement some tactics. In addition to the universal requirements for a good interview, the integrity assessment interview has some features, which are mainly related to the inclusion of additional questions. These additional questions have the nature of projective, implicative, and exaggerating facts type of questions. The interviewer has to be enough skilful to apply different techniques to inspire rapport and persuade interviewee.

Another methods that could be useful to assess personal integrity are tools of *physiological or behavioural measures of deceptiveness cues (nonverbal and para-verbal)*. Polyphysiological method is suitable mostly in cases of **lie detection** and **guilty knowledge** (post factum, when individual has perpetrated counterproductive act already). But their efficiency decrease in cases of measuring personal integrity in general.

References

1. Bandura, A. Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory. NJ, Prentice-Hall, Inc.,1986
2. Davis, A., Rothstein, H. The Effects of the Perceived Behavioral Integrity of Managers on Employee Attitudes: A Meta-analysis. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 67(4), 2006, 407-419
3. Mullins, M. Integrity at Work. In: Rogelberg,S.(Ed.)The SAGE Encyclopedia of Industrial and Organizational Psychology, California, SAGE Publ.,2017, pp727-730
4. Murphy, K. Integrity testing. In: Rogelberg,S.(Ed.)The SAGE Encyclopedia of Industrial and Organizational Psychology, California, SAGE Publ., 2017, pp730-733
5. Murphy. What constructs underlie measures of Honesty or Integrity? In: Goffin,R. et al.(Eds) *Problem and Solutions in Human Assessment*, N.Y., Springer Science&Business Media, 2000, pp 265-283
6. Prodanov, M., Integrity vs. Corruption: a model of causality. In: *Annual of BFU*, XLVIII, 2023
7. Prodanov, M. *Morality and Corruption*, Sofia, AMI, 2008, p.102
8. Walker, S., Katz, Ch. *The Police in America*, NY, McGraw-Hill, 2013
9. <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2024>, retrieved 10.05.2025