

INTEGRITY VS CORRUPTION: A MODEL OF CAUSALITY

Mihail Prodanov

Burgas Free University

Abstract: *The article presents a theoretical model explaining the causal relationships and mechanisms of corrupt behaviour. Basic constructs such as „counterproductive behaviour“ and „integrity“, which are directly related to the topic of corruption, were examined. The model analyses, first of all, Predispositions for corrupt behaviour - human needs, the opportunities and, the third - situation of pressure to corrupt. These three groups of predispositions generate „The Overall potential for corruption“. Some of the depicted three groups of factors have long-term potential, other of them – short – term potential. The next component of the model includes Mediators (or moderators), which are subjective and objective in nature. These factors play a role as transmitters that might release (unleash) acts of corruption or may diminish the likelihood about that. Then, cognitive processes of decision making and their role about the outcome of the impact of the above mentioned components are examined. Finally, the importance of the type of the consequences of the corrupt (or non-corrupt) acts for whether it will manifest itself in the future is explained, not only in relation to the perpetrator himself, but also for their impact on other employees from the environment. At last, the verification of the model was carried out, addressing only one of the independent variables, which is a factor for corrupt behaviour - namely, personal integrity. For this purpose, the repertory grids method was used. The results prove that as lower is the level of personal integrity so statistically greater is probability that the relevant employee will commit a corrupt act.*

Key words: *corrupt behaviour, counterproductive behaviour, integrity, personal integrity, repertory grids method.*

Introduction

Although it sounds like a cliché, but it is truth that corruption is a public „ulcer“ that can cause enormous damage to people. A relatively small part of society benefits itself from the corruption, but this is at the expense of the majority. If we apply the „Pareto principle“ (Vilfredo Pareto is an Italian economist and sociologist), it could be said that 20% of people are responsible for 80% of the corrupt actions. Unfortunately, this claim can't be verified. Nevertheless, the damages from the corruption can be visible more immediately and happen in the short term, affecting individuals and organizations; in other cases it could be said that corruption sets „ticking bombs“ as far as the negative consequences manifest themselves in the long term – a recent example is the earthquake in Turkey in February 2023: we could claim, that thousands of casualties could have been avoided if housing construction had been compliant according to regulations. The lack of control by government officials (corruption is the likely cause, as Turkish authorities have arrested more than 600 people on suspicion of corruption by the end of February) has led to tragedy for thousands of people. Therefore, it could be said that casualties and destruction by earthquake in Turkey in February 2023 were largely due to corruption.

Corruption is a complex phenomenon that is unfortunately inherent to human civilization and has a negative impact on public relations. In a psychological perspective, corruption is an interaction between two sides (individuals, groups) who have mutual benefit from this interplay. Here, the attention is mainly focused on the behaviour of that party in the corrupt interaction, which is the receiver (recipient) of „benefits“ offered by the other party in order to perform certain illegal „services“.

The 2022 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), from the annual report of *Transparency International*, shows that most countries are failing to stop corruption. The CPI ranks **180** countries 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). The global average remains unchanged for over a decade at just 43 out of 100. More than two-thirds of countries score below 50, while 26 countries have fallen to their lowest scores yet. Despite concerted efforts and hard-won gains by some, **155** countries have made no significant progress against corruption or have declined since 2012. Therefore, nevertheless how much is worn and clichéd the topic of corruption may be, it remains one of the most painful negative topic on the agenda of human civilization (<https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2022>).

In the paper, the main constructs „corruption“ (corrupt behaviour) and „integrity“ are defined. A structural model is presented, including the main concepts through which the causal relationship between integrity and corruption could be explained. The components „personal(personality’s) integrity“ and „environmental factors“ (the environment), which determine the corrupt behaviour of the human individual in his role as an employee of state organisations and the administration, are examined in more details.

What do we call corrupt behaviour? Corrupt behaviour is a type of „counterproductive behaviour“. Therefore, a definition of what means „counterproductive behaviour“ have to be given first: **Counterproductive** is a work behaviour of a member of an organization that explicitly (obviously, unambiguously) contradicts the declared organizational goals. Not only the prospective, ultimate **goals** are important, but also the **means to achieve** them. There are different forms of counterproductive behaviour – *absences (unjustified)* and *turnover (non-constructive)*; *risky behaviour* (leading to occupational accidents); *theft and embezzlement (by personnel)*, *violence at the workplace*, *the use of intoxicating substances* (alcohol, drugs); *sexual harassment* (in its various forms – from physical actions to verbal „suggestions“ and „hints“) and also *corruption* (Mullins, 2017; Jex, Britt, 2008).

Corrupt behaviour itself can be defined as „abuse of power – economic, political and administrative, which leads to personal or group benefit at the expense of the right and legitimate interests of the individual, the specific community or the whole society“.

What is integrity? According to psychologist K. Murphy, „integrity“ means: Behaving in ways that reflect broadly-shared values regarding (Murphy, 2000; Murphy, 2017):

- Trustworthiness;
- Honesty;
- Unwilling to take advantage of others.

Integrity as behaviour is the antithesis of counterproductive behaviour - therefore antithesis of corruption. There are several important aspects related to the definition of the concept „integrity“:

- ✓ We usually think of integrity as a characteristic (pattern) of the individual, but this is an over-simplification – *almost everyone would show integrity in some situations and as opposite - almost everyone would be dishonest, untrustworthy and willing to take advantage of others in other situations;*

- ✓ Actually, people do differ in the extent to which they show integrity across a range of situations. High level of integrity means honest behaviour across a wider range of situations;
- ✓ We could infer that the **higher levels of integrity are, the lower probability for corrupt acts is.**

1. A Causal model.

The presented model has four main components: first, there are factors that motivate and make possible the perpetration acts of corruption. They are the *predispositions* for such behaviour.

2.1. Predispositions.

Human needs - they are the basis of all human activity. The satisfaction of any need is connected either with a desire to experience pleasure (achieving something pleasant, some benefit) or with a desire to avoid something unpleasant (fear, pain, harm, etc.). Man is created in such a way that he can never feel himself 100% satisfied. Therefore, the state of some degree of dissatisfaction motivates the individual's activity and is inherent to human nature. In some sense, the human individual can be defined as „suffering creature“ because he must make efforts to satisfy his needs. In motivational terms, corruption is behaviour to satisfy some need for both sides of communication – like a deal.

The opportunities that arise from the work role and position in the organization - different people occupy different positions and fulfil different roles in the organizations where they work. Corrupt actions can only be carried out by those officials, employees and workers who have a **certain power - economic, political, and administrative;**

A situation of pressure to corrupt - this is a situation in which an individual or groups offer benefits (or threaten (inflicting fear)) on given officer(worker) in order to commit corrupt acts.

These three groups of predispositions generate „**The Overall potential for corruption**“! Some of the depicted above factors have long-term potential, other of them – short – term potential.

2.2. Mediators (or moderators).

If the predispositions for corrupt actions are present, two groups of factors that mediate corrupt behaviour can be indicated:

Subjective factors (also named *personal integrity*) – these factors are related to characteristics of personality:

- ✓ 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));
- ✓ Personality's traits:
 - **autonomy** (opposite for the submissiveness, obedience and blind loyalty);
 - **consciousness** or „strong Super-Ego“;

Objective factors – these are factors of the environment (organisational, family environment and circle of friends) (in focus by social learning theories):

- ✓ **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 (Bandura, 1986);
 - Most instances of corporate corruption involve large numbers of active or passive participants and rarely are a result of a few „bad apples“;
 - 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. **Note! If abuse (corruption) is institutionalized, employees are hardly going to believe that management efforts to reduce dishonesty are sincere:**
- Reproducing ethical behaviours is important – to what extent and how the boss stands for the ethical norms – see A. Bandura’s Social Learning theory: 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;
- *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;
- Manager who says „I want results and I don’t care how you get them” actually invites dishonesty.

✓ **Culture:**

Self-centred national character facilitates flourishing and spreading of corruption. People of these cultures are focused largely on interests of their social identity’s group rather than on social problems and prosperity of society as a whole.

These factors play role as **transmitters that might release (unleash)** acts of corruption or may diminish likelihood of that.

2.3. Cognitive processes of decision making.

Finally, perpetration of corrupt acts depends on cognitive processing and decision making. Human being is thinking creature. Despite presumption that behaviour is influenced by factors depicted above, we should pay some respect to „free will” – everybody have choice to do or not to do („to be or not to be”). Cognitive processes of decision making include both the accounting for benefits vs costs in case of perpetrating as well as in what extent that acts confront the personality’s values, attitudes, beliefs (morality). Also, how deep the reflection on internal values is, it depends on self-awareness (self-consciousness). On the other hand, how assertive the individual would be against the corruptive pressure, it depends on his (her) autonomy.

2.4. Consequences.

The consequences of corrupt behaviour are important for whether or not it will be repeated, will occur in the future. When such behaviour has been reinforced, then it is more likely to occur in the future. Furthermore, according to **behavioural theory**, this would lead to the learning of behavioural patterns and the formation of attitudes that tolerate corruption. In opposite, when corrupt behaviour is punished somehow, it likely will extinguish. Also, when anti-corrupt behaviour is rewarded, employees reinforce positive attitudes (according to **behavioural theory**); therefore, it is important that such behaviour has adverse consequences for the perpetrator and corresponding punishments.

Also, when the corrupt act is sanctioned, the colleagues of the punished employee will learn vicariously that this type of behaviour is unacceptable; on other hand – when anti-corrupt behaviour is rewarded, the colleagues will build positive attitudes (principal of the **social learning theory**) (Bandura, 1986).

3. Verification of the model.

Verification of the model is difficult task because there are variables that researcher can hardly control or study. For example, we cannot always detect the committed acts of corruption because they are hidden (due to their illegal nature). Also, there are few people who would confess perpetration of such actions, as often times corrupt actions are „type of deal“ from which both sides of the deal benefit. Other difficulties arise in the operationalization of the variable „personal integrity“: how to assess those values, attitudes and traits that are relevant and have a bearing on what decision the certain individual would make in a situation of corrupting pressure. The third challenge in this regard is how to measure in what extent the environment facilitates the committing of corrupt crimes or how to control these factors, especially if this has to be done by an „external“ researcher to the environment.

I decided to utilize an option for verification that can be defined as a „quasi-experimental plan“. In quasi-experimental design of research, the researcher do not have complete control over the variables that would have an effect on the results of the study. What was the design in this particular case? Control was carried out on the independent variables „Organizational Norms“ and „Leadership issues“, by conducting research in the same Border Police Department responsible for land-border and checkpoint control and security on the Bulgarian-Turkish border. The Bulgarian-Turkish border is an external border of the European Union. The Border Police Department, which officers participated in the study, guards the so-called „green border“, as well as carry out checkpoint activity. Through that checkpoint there was very intensive traffic of trucks, buses and cars. It could be said that the officers of this police department were „energized“ significantly in the context of the three components of the model, which are predispositions for corruption. In addition, data from objective sources (including secret camera recordings using „special intelligence means“ and data from operational-technical tools) pointed out a significant spread of corrupt acts among employees – a vast number of the staff were identified as perpetrators of some type of corrupt actions (related to illegal migration, taking bribes, receiving „gifts“, participating in schemes for the distribution of received bribes, traffic of drugs, smuggling channels etc.).

The **independent variable of the research – personal (personality's) integrity**, was operationalized through the method of the so-called „internal barriers“. This method has two research stages (Prodanov, 2008).

In the first stage, more than 400 police candidates answered the question „*Why you wouldn't take a bribe (if you have become a police officer)*“. Their answers were analysed by content analysis according to the **criterion of semantic similarity**, and thus a list of 48 reasons for refusing a bribe had been compiled. After a factor analysis using the method of principal components, a total of **11 items with the greatest „weight“ were extracted, divided into 4 main factors: „conscientiousness“, „reliability, consistency“, „expectation of negative sanctions“ and „pride“**. I called these items „*internal barriers*“ against corruption.

In the second stage of the research, the method of „repertory grids“ (according to George Kelly, Fay Francella and Don Bannister) had been used, since it is the most reliable for the study of similar constructs related to sensitive topics for the individual. This method includes the procedure of the structured interview, using two groups of items - *elements and personal constructs* (Fransella et al., 2004; Bell, 2003). As constructs had been applied 9 „internal barriers“(without two out of nine that refer to the „negative sanctions“ factor - „*Because I will be caught and punished*“ and „*Because my relatives will condemn me for*

this“; these two „barriers” are of a different type and cannot be formulated as constructs in the repertory grid). I added two more: „*Resembles me in his/her way of thinking and behaving (Self-esteem)*“ and „*Tends to benefit himself when there is a convenient case and would take a bribe*“. The „**elements**“ of the repertory grid consist of real characters from the family, friends and business circles of the subject concerned. The participants evaluated each of the elements according to each separate construct. Thus, a „**grid**“ with esteems on all constructs had been obtained, which was processed statistically by factor analysis. Here I will provide information on only a part of the results that are relevant to the model verification.

Table 1

Comparative analysis based on the „Euclidian distances“ between so called „barriers“ and the construct *Tends to benefit himself when there is a convenient case and would take a bribe* – *Doesn't tend to benefit himself when there is a convenient case and wouldn't take a bribe*

Groups	Corrupt officials(identified) (means)	Non-corrupt officials (unidentified) (means)
<i>Constructs</i>	<i>Construct related to corruption</i>	<i>Construct related to corruption</i>
<i>Self-esteem</i>	24,62	15,75
<i>Honest, tells the truth</i>	23,17	12,57
<i>Keeps rules and regulations</i>	17,75	9,80
<i>Organized, likes to have order</i>	14,18	13,60
<i>A consistent, principled person</i>	19,03	9,54
<i>Reliable, keeps his promises</i>	20,54	20,37
<i>Considers his decisions, does not act impulsively</i>	17,35	13,89
<i>Experiences empathy</i>	16,58	8,31
<i>A proud man with dignity</i>	22,29	12,12
<i>Self-Ideal</i>	24,39	14,87
Mean	19,99	13,08
t – criteria Student	6,30	P = 0,000

From the above table, it is clear that for all „internal barriers“ there are differences in the means of the compared constructs among participants of two groups, and in the „corrupt“ group all values are greater in comparison to the „non-corrupt“ group. Inspection of the distribution of „Euclidean distances“ shows that distribution is near to normal (parametric type), making it possible to use the **Student's t-test statistic**. Comparison of means of Euclidean distances between the main and control groups points out statistically significant differences (**t = 6.30; p = 0.000**). The conclusion of the research is that: the smaller are distances between internal barriers and the construct related to corrupt behaviours, the stronger will be the *cognitive dissonance* experienced by the employee into situation of corrupt choice. **The stronger the cognitive dissonance between the internal barriers and the corrupt decision, the less likely the employee will commit a corrupt act.**

4. Conclusions

The reasons for the corrupt behaviour are deeply rooted, both in the social structure of human relations and in the culture of society, but they also have their determinants in the characteristics of the human personality. Nevertheless, it is possible to reduce the likelihood of corruption done by employees in organizations. In this context, the aim of this article should also be considered as addressing the basic causes about counterproductive behaviour, and for corruption in particular what could serve to develop valid and effective prevention and control programs that would lead to less damages for ordinary people, business organizations, the administration and society as a whole.

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