

## CORRUPTION CHARACTERISTICS

A ground-breaking study in 1989 focused on public service accountability around the world, and stated that:

"One of the fundamental concerns of the modern state is the manner in which power and authority are wielded by those who govern in the name of pursuing societal goals and objectives. ... It is obvious that the more society is administered, the more power is concentrated in the hands of ministers and public servants. [Through the performance of their several and various roles as] ... crusaders, policy makers, social change agents, crisis managers, program managers, ... public relations experts, ... spokespeople ... in addition to the traditional functions of government, ... public servants and their ministers have acquired enormous power.

Generally, public officials and their organizations are considered accountable only to the extent that they are legally required to answer for their actions. ...

Within [a global context of public concern and political responsibility] ... public service accountability involves the methods by which a public agency or a public official fulfills its duties and the process by which [it or he/she] is required to account for such actions. Viewed [*in this way, public accountability is*] ... a [*broader*] strategy to secure compliance with accepted standards and as a means to minimize the abuse of power and authority."

Joseph G. Jabbara and O. P. Dwivedi, eds., Public service accountability: A comparative perspective, Kumarian, West Hartford, CN (USA), 1989, pp. 1, 5. [emphasis added.]

The major element of public accountability was thus identified as countering public officials' power by holding them legally responsible for their conduct. The UN, of course, does not meet this test, since it places itself above the laws that govern the rest of mankind. Furthermore, corruption is not just fraud and theft -- it has many behavioral aspects, which means that it can and does occur, and must be dealt with, in any organization or office on a firm but fair, and ongoing, basis, as well-expressed in a 1990 book:

"This volume seeks to address [public servants, students preparing for careers in public service, and] scholars ... who seek ... to clarify our understanding of ethical issues and options. We also hope that a wider public might take interest in a work which addresses the urgent tasks of combating corruption and encouraging ethical behavior in the public service.

The [contents] focus primarily upon those ethical problems and topics which are associated with the concept of corruption and its cousins -- lying, evasion of

**accountability, and the abuse of authority.** We recognize that there are other dimensions to the field of ethics, but the problems covered here are, we believe, central to the subject and ... merit this emphasis."

William L. Richter, Frances Burke, and Jameson W. Doig, eds., Combating corruption, Encouraging ethics: A sourcebook for public service ethics, American Society for Public Administration, Washington, DC, 1990, Preface. [emphasis added.]

In the ensuing years since these two analyses were published, corruption has received much greater recognition and analysis worldwide as an urgent topic, not least in the new UN Convention against Corruption (see Other Major Problems .) Perhaps the best and most robust "template" for analyzing corruption patterns in public organizations, however, is still the one provided by Caiden and Caiden in 1977. They begin by observing that:

"Individual and systemic corruption

Although [the literature has increasingly] recognized corruption as a social fact, ... [analysts] have continued to think of it in individual terms.

The conceptions ... do not appear to stretch to encompass the significance of ... systemic corruption -- a situation where wrong-doing has become the norm. ... Such systemic corruption is found today in many countries and jurisdictions ... The key is not so much the techniques of organizational method, e.g., bureaucracy, as organizational goals and the qualities necessary to support and maintain them, viz., honest administration and public accountability. ... "

Systemic corruption has not been subject to much specific research. ... **Systemic corruption occurs whenever the administrative system itself transposes the expected purposes of the organization, forces participants to follow what otherwise would be termed unacceptable ways, and actually punishes those who resist.** Deviant conduct is so institutionalized that no individual can be personally faulted organizationally (not morally) for participating, and dysfunction is actually protected."

Gerald E. Caiden and Naomi J. Caiden, "Administrative corruption", in Richter, William L, Burke, Frances, and Doig, Jameson W., eds., Combating corruption, Encouraging ethics: A sourcebook for public service ethics, American Society for Public Administration, Washington, DC, 1990, pp. 61-69 [pp. 66-67], originally published in Public Administration Review (USA). 37:3, (May-June 1977), 301-309. [emphasis added.]

The Caidens then provide an excellent and still very robust and relevant "template" of characteristics of systemic corruption in an organization. IO Watch would like someday to develop and present a detailed matrix showing how this template fits the UN and its performance and accountability problems. For the present, however, the following quote lists the factors that the Caidens identified, and then indicates relevant subsections of this IO Watch archive in brackets:

"In systemic corruption:

(a) the organization professes an external code of ethics which is contradicted by internal practices;

[see [Accountability and transparency in the UN](#) , [Staff Rights?](#) , and the [UN Code of Conduct](#) .]

(b) internal practices encourage, abet, and hide violations of the external code;  
[ see, among others, [Non-implementation of the resolution](#) , [The Winner: "Free the Managers"](#) , [OHR \(Mis-\)management](#) , including [Hodgepodge of rules](#) and [Monitoring](#) , [Piercing the Cloak of UN Impunity](#) , and in this subsection, [Management culture deterioration](#) .]

(c) non-violators are penalized by foregoing the rewards of violation and offending violators;  
[ see [The Winner: "Free the Managers"](#) and [Staff Rights?](#) ]

(d) violators are protected, and when exposed, treated leniently; their accusers are victimized for exposing organizational hypocrisy, and are treated harshly;  
[ see [Investigation efforts: Is the OIOS a fig leaf?](#) , [Inept "Administration of Justice" System](#)" , [Disappearing Whistle-blowers](#) , [Behind the Scenes](#) , and [Other Major Problems](#) .]

(e) non-violators suffocate in the venal atmosphere; they find no internal relief and much external disbelief;  
[ see [The Winner: "Free the Managers"](#) , [Staff Rights?](#) , [Inept "Administration of Justice" System](#)" , and [Management culture deterioration](#) ]

(f) prospective whistle-blowers are intimidated and terrorized into silence;  
[ see [Disappearing whistle-blowers](#) and [Suppressed whistle-blowers](#) ]

(g) courageous whistle-blowers have to be protected from organizational retaliation;  
[ see [Disappearing Whistle-Blowers](#) and [Suppressed whistle-blowers](#) : at present in the UN, quite simply, whistle-blowers are not protected at all]

(h) violators become so accustomed to their practices and the protection given them that, on exposure, they evidence surprise and claim innocence and unfair discrimination against them;  
[ see [Staff Rights?](#) , [Anti-harassment efforts](#) , [Unleashed Managers](#) , and [Piercing the Cloak of UN Impunity](#) ]

(i) collective guilt finds expression in rationalizations of the internal practices and without strong external supports there is no serious intention of ending them;  
[ see [Non-implementation of the resolution](#) , [The Winner: "Free the Managers"](#) , [UN Moral Values and Rectitude - For Others](#) , this entire subsection on [The UN, Alone and UNaccountable](#) , and [Management culture deterioration](#) .]

(j) those formally charged with revealing corruption rarely act and, when forced by external pressure to do so, excuse any incidents as isolated, rare occurrences.  
[ see [Corruption in the UN](#) , [Investigation efforts: Is the OIOS a fig leaf?](#) , [Unleashed Managers](#) , [Major Ongoing Flaws](#) , and [Other Major Problems](#) .]

The point to be stressed above all is that few corrupt practices can be conducted without collusion. ..."

Gerald E. Caiden and Naomi J. Caiden, "Administrative corruption", in William L. Richter, Frances Burke, and Jameson W. Doig, eds., [Combating corruption, Encouraging ethics: A sourcebook for public service ethics](#), American Society for Public Administration, Washington, DC, 1990, pp. 61-69 [p. 67], originally published in [Public Administration Review](#) (USA). 37:3, (May-June 1977), 301-309. [emphasis added.]

The Caidens end with an excellent overview of the complexity and dangers of systemic corruption, both for organizations like the UN and for society at large. This provides a good lead-in to the next two major subsections, on Other Major Problems and Answers: A Starting Point :

**Individual cases of corruption can be rooted out by the application of organizational sanctions. ... Systemic corruption cannot be handled so easily. There is no guarantee that if the most serious offenders are dismissed, or if everyone who is guilty is replaced, corruption will not persist. The old patterns will continue with new players. ... Moreover, in the wider society, systemic corruption impedes rather than aids change.**

- (a) Systemic corruption perpetuates closed politics and restricts access, preventing the reflection of social change in political institutions.
- (b) Systemic corruption suppresses opposition contributing to increasing resentment. Thus corruption, far from being an alternative to violence, is often accompanied by more violence.
- (c) Systemic corruption perpetuates and widens class, economic, and social divisions, contributing to societal strain and preventing cohesion.
- (d) Systemic corruption prevents policy change, particularly where this works against immediate market considerations. Individual or sectional interests are not the best guide to the public interest.
- (e) Systemic corruption blocks administrative reform, and makes deleterious administrative practices profitable, e.g., induced delays.
- (f) Systemic corruption diverts public resources and contributes to a situation of private affluence and public squalor, especially serious where affluence is confined to the few.
- (g) Systemic corruption contributes to societal anomie in shoring up or transmuted traditional values into inappropriate areas.
- (h) The effects of systemic corruption are not limited to a specific case: there is an accumulator effect upon public perceptions and expectations which subverts trust and cooperation far beyond the impact upon the individuals immediately concerned.
- (i) Systemic corruption is not confined to poor, developing, or modernizing countries, but found in all organizational societies."

**... In contemporary public administration, the issue is not so much individual misconduct in public, serious as that is, as the institutionalized subversion of the public interest through systemic corruption.**

Gerald E. Caiden and Naomi J. Caiden, "Administrative corruption", in Richter, William L, Burke, Frances, and Doig, Jameson W., eds., Combating corruption, Encouraging ethics: A sourcebook for public service ethics, American Society for Public Administration, Washington, DC, 1990, pp. 61-69 [pp. 67-68], originally published in Public Administration Review (USA). 37:3, (May-June 1977), 301-309. [emphasis added.]