

CORRUPTION

Over the past two decades, corruption worldwide, in both the public and private sphere, has become quite widely recognized as the most damaging disease that any organization must confront, and a serious public policy problem that must be addressed at the local, national, and international levels.

This subsection explores the dimensions and significance of corruption and of anti-corruption actions. It begins with the excellent introductory quotes below, and then explores the evolution of corruption observations in the general administrative literature, followed by a compilation of quotes on corruption issues and problems in the United Nations over the years.

"[O]fficial corruption ... thrives on darkness and invisibility. It is anonymous and unmeasurable. It is rooted in the very human vices of greed and lust for power through wealth ...

Corruption is colorless, shapeless, odorless, collusive, secret, stealthy, shameless. Even when it becomes pervasive, it still retains those qualities. ...

In today's globalized, democratized, informatized world, incorruptible governments can be constructed only using incorruptible citizens as their bricks and mortar."

Jim Wesberry, as quoted in Gerald E. Caiden, O.P. Dwivedi, and Joseph Jabbra, Chapter 1, "Introduction" by the editors, in Where Corruption Lives, Kumarian, Bloomfield, CN (USA), 2001, pp. 1-13 [1.]

"The essays in this book ... probe the whys and wherefores of contemporary corruption. They raise deeper philosophical issues about the nature of this particular form of human wrongdoing, how people confront it, and what they expect others to do about it. If other forms of misbehavior, once commonplace and legitimate, have become increasingly unacceptable, why does corruption persist and expand? ...

One message that comes through ... is not so much that people do not know what to do about corruption as that they tend to lack sufficient will, fortitude, stamina, resolution, and persistence to do anything about it. ...

This book [attempts to] ... throw light on the most important concerns. ... [It] has something for everyone, ... from the simple concerns of fairly clean governance in one part of the world to the worries of citizens experiencing very dirty governance in another. from long-term institutional failure to short-term success, from the pessimistic to the optimistic, from the circumspect to the ambitious, from the half-hearted to the resolute, from the idealistic to the pragmatic. All of these reflect the current state of the art."

Gerald E. Caiden, O.P. Dwivedi, and Joseph Jabbra, eds., Chapter 1, "Introduction", in Where Corruption Lives, Kumarian, Bloomfield, CN (USA),

"In this imperfect world, corruption is bound to be happening somewhere; no country is exempt. ... What are the major current concerns about corruption?

First ... is business bribery, which is rampant throughout the world and endemic in all transactions, public and private.

Second, and related ..., is the large amounts of money being laundered worldwide ...

Third, related to dirty money, is organized transnational crime, particularly the operation of crime syndicates and drug cartels, which cross borders at will ...

Fourth is the growing influence of money in political life ... to secure [votes] ... and obtain favored treatment through bribes and other personal rewards; ... manipulate mass media ...; [by] asset-stripping ... to obtain public resources [cheaply] ...; and tax avoidance and evasion. ... what is new is the sophistication and ingenious devices employed to prevent common knowledge of political corruption, the spin placed on illegal political contributions when exposed, and the condescension in official circles toward the public -- as if everybody does it ...

Fifth is yet another traditional form of corruption, kleptocracy, where public resources are viewed as private spoils, state largesse is seen as a personal gravy train, and ... [p]ublic office is a means of self-enrichment with no holds barred. ...

Sixth is the embarrassing situation of the non-governmental organizations, ... Some NGOs are ... beyond the reach of public accountability mechanisms. While some are indeed noble and heroic, others have become fronts for organized crime or merely self-aggrandizing, rewarding themselves handsomely for outcomes hardly worth the bother."

Gerald E. Caiden, Chapter 17, "Corruption and democracy", in Caiden, Gerald E., Dwivedi, O. P., and Jabra, Joseph, eds., Where Corruption Lives, Kumarian, Bloomfield, CN (USA), 2001, pp. 227-243, [232-235].

"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. In systemic corruption:

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

(b) internal practices encourage, abet, and hide violations of the external code;

- (c) non-violators are penalized by foregoing the rewards of violation and offending violators;
- (d) violators are protected, and when exposed, treated leniently; their accusers are victimized for exposing organizational hypocrisy, and are treated harshly;
- (e) non-violators suffocate in the venal atmosphere; they find no internal relief and much external disbelief;
- (f) prospective whistle-blowers are intimidated and terrorized into silence;
- (g) courageous whistle-blowers have to be protected from organizational retaliation;
- (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;
- (i) collective guilt finds expression in rationalizations of the internal practices and without strong external supports there is no serious intention of ending them;
- (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.

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

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. 66-68], originally published in Public Administration Review (USA). 37:3, (May-June 1977), 301-309. [emphasis added.]

"One of the most perplexing problems in public administration today [is] **how to reform chronically corrupt agencies ... [in this case] the New York City school custodial system ... that has resisted decades of reform efforts. ...**

... traditional corruption controls do not allow for organizations whose cultures are so deviant and whose missions have become so twisted that managers can barely recognize conduct that is deviant and employees regard wrongdoing as their right. ...

[Success elsewhere, in Chicago!] suggests ... **three broad reform strategies**. The **first** is to launch tough, publicized law enforcement initiatives that include investigations, compliance and fraud audits, and punishment for wrongdoers. ... welcoming outside prosecutors ... can be crucial to changing a deeply deviant culture. ...

The **second** strategy is to oust as much of the dominant coalition as possible, not just the top layers, and any work rules that block reform. ...

The **third** strategy is to hold managers accountable for performance ... and to provide meaningful consequences for failure. ...

Without such minimal reform strategies, merely tightening existing controls, issuing more rules or instituting shallow reorganizations in chronically corrupt agencies will merely create the illusion of change without the reality."

Lydia Segal, "Roadblocks in reforming corrupt agencies: The case of the New York City school custodians", Public Administration Review, July/August 2002, vol. 62, No. 4, pp. 445-460 [445, 456-457.] [emphasis added.]

Perhaps only coincidentally, both the New York school system and the UN are controversial and prominent New York features. While the UN may have a greater or smaller number of conscientious staff, IO Watch believes that it too has far too many bad managers, and their hangers-on, who engage freely in mismanagement, misconduct, and abuse of authority.

The UN has thus far provided only public-relations illusions of good UN management and oversight. There have been scarcely any sanctions for [higher-level] wrongdoers or a crackdown on their impunity, despite increasingly embarrassing UN management scandals in late 2003 and early 2004. Meanwhile, staff-whistleblowers, who were specifically encouraged by the General Assembly a decade ago, have been consistently intimidated and punished.

This new expansion of an already-entrenched impunity of UN managers is discussed in the rest of this IO Watch archive section, and analysed in more detail in the other major sections on the rule of law, inadequate UN oversight, and recent developments .