

Thinking about corrupt thinking

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Summary

Corruption is an essential topic for research considering its detrimental impact on organizations and society. Especially in countries where the prevalence of corruption is high, corruption is an important agenda of organizations and governments. Prior research on corruption is dominated by a macro-level perspective that explains corruption based on country-level factors. Although corruption is important, research on corruption at the micro-level is still lacking. Extending prior studies at the micro-level, this dissertation focuses on intra-individual cognitive processes and some factors that contribute to those processes. Particularly, this dissertation qualitatively explores the decision-making processes underlying corruption among participants who were convicted of corruption. Furthermore, the other studies in dissertation quantitatively examine several determinants (i.e., ethical leadership and bottom-line mentality, BLM) that may influence corruption, as well as its underlying mechanisms (i.e., thinking styles) and a relevant boundary condition (i.e., Machiavellianism). The research models were tested using several methodological designs.

Chapter 2 presents a qualitative study using an informed grounded theory approach with real perpetrators of corruption as participants. Building on a general decision-making model, this chapter explores four stages of the decision-making process underlying corruption: problem recognition, information search, evaluation, and behavior. Regarding the problem recognition stage, the study's findings revealed three goals that motivated participants to engage in corruption: personal, organizational, and social goals. Regarding the information search stage, our findings indicated that most of the participants searched for information about corruption (corruption-focused content), such as whether corrupt behaviors would lead to any negative consequences. Other participants also searched for options other than corruption to achieve their goals. They attained that information from various sources: intrapersonal sources (e.g., based on their own experiences and knowledge), interpersonal

sources (e.g., colleagues for other organizations), and impersonal sources (e.g., legal authorities and media).

Regarding the evaluation stage, Chapter 2 highlights that participants engaged in corrupt behavior for two reasons: pull and push factors. Pull factors include positive evaluations of the corrupt behavior, such as seeing the corrupt behaviors as safe or would not be noticed, or relatively common. In contrast, push factors included participants becoming involved in the corruption due to others (e.g., supervisors), relying on the decisions of others, or coming to see the corrupt behavior as the only solution for attaining their goals. Finally, regarding choices or behaviors, participants engaged in several forms of corruption, ranging from the well-known (e.g., bribery and embezzlement) to the rarely acknowledged (e.g., assisting corruption processes and applying policy/administrative procedures incorrectly). By analyzing interrelations between these stages, this study suggests that each form of corruption could affect different aspects of the decision-making process. For example, most participants who engaged in bribery and embezzlement expressed pull factors in the evaluation stage, such as considering whether the corrupt behavior was safe and common practice. On the other hand, participants who had assisted in the corruption process (and especially those who were not aware that their actions related to corruption) mostly claimed push factors in this stage, such as following the instructions or heeding the decisions of others. Ultimately, our findings in this chapter provide evidence that the decision-making underlying corruption proceeds through different stages.

Chapter 3 presents the findings of two studies (a field survey and a lab experiment) that examined the negative relationship between ethical leadership and corruption, its underlying cognitive mechanism, and its boundary conditions. Particularly, this chapter proposes the following hypotheses: ethical leadership negatively influences followers' corrupt behavior, and this effect is mediated by followers' intuitive thinking style and moderated by

followers' trait Machiavellianism. The two studies support our hypothesis suggesting that ethical leadership can reduce employees' corrupt behavior. Interestingly, the experimental study revealed that the negative effect of ethical leadership on employees' corrupt behavior is mediated by intuitive thinking style. In addition, both studies indicated that ethical leadership interacts with employees' Machiavellianism to influence their corrupt behavior. However, the interaction patterns were not consistent across the two studies. Whereas the survey study shows that ethical leadership has the strongest relationship with corruption when employees' Machiavellianism is high, the experimental study shows the opposite results: ethical leadership has the strongest effect on corruption when employees' Machiavellianism is low. Overall, the findings in this chapter confirmed most of the hypotheses and demonstrated that under a specific situation, such as ethical leadership, employees think more intuitively in the corruption decision-making process and consequently engage in less corruption.

Chapter 4 presents a diary study conducted over five consecutive weeks examining the following hypotheses: BLM is positively associated with bribing behavior in corruption situations, and further, that this association is mediated by thinking styles (i.e., intuitive and rational) and moderated by trait Machiavellianism. The results did not reveal a significant relationship between BLM and corruption at a within-level analysis. Likewise, we did not find support for thinking style as a significant mediator nor Machiavellianism as a moderator. In short, the study failed to find evidence for most of the hypotheses. Notably, most of the participants did not experience corruption situations within the five-week period; thus, this study featured a limited sample and small diary entries ($N=32$; 70 week-level data entries). Therefore, these results warn future research studying corruption using a diary design to recruit more participants and consider a longer duration of diary study to capture more corruption situations. Although this chapter did not confirm most of the study hypotheses, it

provides new insights into methodological issues in the literature by studying corruption with a novel design.

Finally, Chapter 5 provides a general discussion of the dissertation's findings and their theoretical, methodological, and practical implications for understanding corruption. The studies presented in this dissertation, using different methods, reveal that people perform cognitive processes before engaging in corruption. Such cognitive processes are reflected by people engaging in different stages of decision-making and thinking styles in corruption situations. Situational factors (such as ethical leadership and awareness of whether the actions are related to corruption or not) could determine how people think and decide in such situations. These findings may provide insights for organizations and governments that design anti-corruption programs. Of course, the studies reported in this dissertation have strengths and limitations. Thus, Chapter 5 also discusses these issues comprehensively and provides recommendations for future research.