

Thinking about corrupt thinking

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The main objective of this dissertation is to understand the cognitive mechanisms and psychological processes underlying corruption. In particular, this dissertation explored the decision-making process underlying corrupt behavior and the determinant factors that contribute to the process. In this part, I will discuss the social and scientific impact of the findings of this dissertation.

As the main funder of this dissertation, the Indonesian government may benefit from the findings in this dissertation. The Indonesian government has invested a large amount of money in reducing corruption in Indonesia. For instance, the country has invested 1.3 trillion rupiahs (about US\$6.3 million) through the *Komisi Pemberantasan Korupsi* (KPK, corruption eradication commission) in 2021 (Saputra, 2020). Although the KPK has implemented multiple programs to reduce corruption in Indonesia, the additional insights produced by this dissertation could aid future initiatives.

Our findings show that the form of corruption determines multiple aspects of the decision-making process. For example, in the evaluation stage of this process, participants who applied false policy/administrative procedures believed that their behaviors were not corrupt. Meanwhile, participants who engaged in bribery mostly considered that the behaviors were common practices and they would not be caught. Therefore, rather than develop a general intervention for all types of corruption, KPK should tailor specific interventions to the particular form of corruption (van Doorn et al., 2018). For instance, as participants who engaged in bribery mostly considered their behaviors to be common practice which would not be caught, intervention programs for bribery need to focus on improving the ethical climate in organizations so that people understand that every unethical behavior, including bribery, will be punished. This could help to prevent the possibility of bribery becoming a socially accepted norm (van Gils et al., 2017). In contrast, as participants who applied false policy/administrative procedures largely believed that their behaviors were not corrupt, intervention programs should distribute information about corruption laws to decrease the ambiguity of rules and increase the salience of ethical criteria (Ayal et al., 2015).

Notably, this dissertation indicates that some people engaged in corruption unintentionally or because they felt pushed to do so. For example, they did not know that the acts were corrupt or that their leaders had involved them in the corruption process; thus, they relied on others when corrupt decisions were made. Therefore, employees should be made more aware of and critical toward decisions that may potentially be related to corruption. Psychological interventions to improve awareness, such as mindfulness-based techniques (Eby et al., 2019), may help employees to make more informed and less corrupt decisions. Mindfulness interventions have been suggested as a way to increase awareness and self-regulation (Brown et al., 2007; Leyland et al., 2019). In such interventions, individuals do mindfulness practices—such as the body scan and mindful breathing exercises—to bring attention to external and internal stimuli, focus on present-moment experiences, and develop their open-mindedness (e.g., Nübold & Hülshager, 2021). These skills may help employees be more aware of the decision-making processes that they engage in and consequently prevent them from unintentionally or unwillingly engaging in unethical behaviors (Hong, 2020) such as corruption.

The findings in this dissertation illustrate that ethical leadership could effectively reduce corruption. Thus, one practical implication is to design and implement training courses to promote ethical leadership and improve managers or leaders' awareness of organizational corruption. The literature features few reports on ethical leadership training. One exception is a feasibility study that conducted ethical leadership training across a six-week period with student participants (Eide et al., 2016). The training involved two main parts: a leadership practice part where the participants worked on a minor ethics project to stimulate ethical mindfulness, and a web-based reflection part where participants answered reflection questions and received feedback from a coach (Eide et al., 2016). While the authors found that the training was generally effective, they highlighted a need to expand the concept with new ethical leadership skills and habits (Eide et al., 2016). Ethical leadership training could be developed based on the ethical leadership literature (Brown et al., 2005). For instance, the training could focus on two dimensions of ethical leadership: *moral person*, which refers to the ethical leader's qualities as a person, such as honesty, integrity, fairness, concern for others, and behaving ethically; and *moral manager*, which refers to how ethical leaders use their position to promote ethical conduct to their followers, whether through rewards, punishments, and/or role modeling (Brown et al., 2005; Treviño et al., 2000). Applied properly, ethical leadership could eventually improve the organization's entire ethical climate and reduce corruption.

Based on the leadership literature (Bass et al., 1987), we expect that ethical leadership would cascade through different levels of management and influence group behaviors in organizations. For instance, the ethicality of top management influences employees at lower levels, such as supervisors, who then directly influence their own employees' (un)ethical behaviors (Mayer et al., 2009). This is particularly relevant for the Indonesian government, which struggles to fight corruption at different levels of public organizations. Through the ministry of internal affairs, the government may encourage leaders at different levels of public organizations, such as ministers (Indonesian: *mentri*), governors (*gubernur*), mayors (*wali kota*), heads of sub-districts (*camat*), and heads of villages (*kepala desa*) to develop ethical leadership skills through training courses. Ethical leadership training might also be relevant for political parties in Indonesia, as most public organization leaders represent political parties.

Regarding Machiavellianism as a personal factor, the findings corroborate that it is positively related to corruption and can hinder the effectiveness of ethical leadership in reducing corruption. Thus, HR managers or recruitment committees could avoid recruiting individuals who score high on Machiavellianism. However, more research is needed to design an assessment that can detect individuals with high Machiavellianism in the selection process. Although scales of Machiavellianism are generally valid, it might not be easy to measure Machiavellianism during the selection because high-scoring individuals tend to manipulate their answers in socially accepted ways (Belschak et al., 2018). Indeed, one study showed that Machiavellianism is positively associated with the use of deceptive impression management tactics during job interviews (Roulin & Bourdage, 2017). Thus, selection processes should rely on multi-source methods or measures with less socially desirable answering, such as peer-ratings (Malesza & Kaczmarek, 2020). In addition, researchers could pursue

an innovative measure using digital work simulations (Dubbelt et al., 2015). In such simulations, individuals are confronted with several work-related ethical dilemmas and the items are constructed as dialogues between participants and simulated characters in the simulations (see Dubbelt et al., 2015). Measuring Machiavellianism with simulations produces less social desirability bias than measuring via self-reports (Dubbelt et al., 2015).

With regard to its scientific contribution, this dissertation emphasizes the cognitive processes involved in corrupt decisions in order to advance our understanding of the mechanisms that underlie such unethical behaviors. Research on unethical behaviors has typically focused on moral cognitive effects (e.g., moral disengagement, Moore et al., 2019) as an underlying mechanism, which prioritizes the influence of individual and situational factors on (un)ethical behaviors. Responding to the call to differentiate between automatic and deliberate information processing in the moral domain (Tenbrunsel & Smith-Crowe, 2008), this dissertation advances our understanding of *how* the determinants of corruption translate into corrupt decisions.

In addition, this dissertation's multi-method approach may provide a useful roadmap for studying corruption. Corruption research typically uses lab experiments and scenario studies, which suffer from several disadvantages such as ecological validity (Armantier & Boly, 2012). By applying multiple methods, this dissertation improves the methodological rigor and robustness of the findings in the corruption literature. Thus, by providing information related to methodological issues, such as procedures and analytic strategies for different study designs, future studies may gain valuable insights from this dissertation to study corruption. For example, one of the designs used in this dissertation, the weekly diary study, received very positive feedback when presented at the 5th Interdisciplinary Corruption Research Forum in Bergen, Norway, in 2021. As a corruption researcher at that forum affirmed, a weekly diary design is a novelty in corruption research. If expanded upon, the method could reveal new insights that complement those from classic lab experiments.

I attended several conferences in order to disseminate the knowledge in this dissertation, such as the 19th conference of the European Association of Work and Organizational Psychology (EAWOP) in Turin, Italy in 2019 and the 3rd Interdisciplinary Corruption Research Forum in Gothenburg, Sweden in 2018. In addition, one of the empirical chapters in this dissertation was published in a scientific journal, *Frontiers in Psychology*, in 2020. Furthermore, I shared the findings of this dissertation in a webinar for laypeople, organized by the Faculty of Psychology of the University of Merdeka Malang in Indonesia in 2021, which was attended by general audiences and civil servants in Indonesia. In the near future, the findings of this dissertation will also be disseminated at the annual national seminar organized by KPK. Finally, as a lecturer at the University of Merdeka Malang in Indonesia, I will share the insights of this dissertation with my students through teaching activities. For instance, the findings are particularly relevant to the topic of organizational misbehavior, which I have covered for several semesters in an Industrial and Organizational Psychology course.

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