

Diverse Ethical Challenges Facing Today's Public Administrators

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Portraying the Nature of Corruption Using an Explorative Case Study Design

What is the nature of corruption in Western democracies? To answer this research question, the authors study 10 Dutch corruption cases in depth, looking at confidential criminal files. The cases allow them to sketch a general profile of a corruption case. The authors offers nine propositions to portray the nature of corruption. They conclude that corruption usually takes place within enduring relationships, that the process of becoming corrupt can be characterized as a slippery slope, and that important motives for corruption, aside from material gain, include friendship or love, status, and the desire to impress others. The explorative multiple case study methodology helps to expand our understanding of the way in which officials become corrupt.

What is the nature of corruption? Before we can address our main research question, we must first answer another question: How can the nature of corruption best be studied? We argue here that more *qualitative*, contextually based research on corruption is needed (also important for anticorruption policies), research with special attention to the necessary and sufficient conditions of corruption in a particular case.

In this article, 10 Dutch corruption cases are studied in depth. One of the things the explorative case study design allows us to do is study *the way* in which some public officials become corrupt. The study leads to nine propositions on the nature of corruption.

The Importance of Context

Something about the nature of corruption can be learned from the numerous quantitative studies that have been done on the correlations between certain variables and corruption (for a good overview, see Jain 2001; Lambsdorff 1999). A substantial amount of literature states the conditions of culture and the structure of organizations under which corruption is more likely to occur. For

example, La Porta et al. (1999) found a positive correlation between total government transfers and subsidies (total redistributive activity) and corruption; Treisman (2000) found a positive impact of state intervention on corruption; and trust has been negatively correlated with corruption (La Porta et al. 1997). This list of examples is by no means comprehensive.

However, in much correlation and regression research on corruption, corrupt behavior seems to be caused by factors beyond individual control. Corruption is studied outside its own unique context. In a sense, the corrupt agent "disappears" along with the corruption that is being studied (cf. Schinkel 2004, 6). This leads to the study of factors or variables that are certainly relevant to our understanding of the nature of corruption, but it draws attention away from the corrupt practices and the corrupt agent. Quantitative research does not seem to tell the whole story about the nature of corruption; it necessarily ignores the characteristics and details of the context of each corruption case. Quantitative research cannot account for contingency, which is so important for social research—especially corruption research—because of the complexity of the phenomenon of corruption. It also says little about the causes of corruption (De Graaf 2006). After all, something of the agent "has to be retained in order not to lapse into an endless teleology without Telos of causes causing other causes serving other causes and so forth" (Schinkel 2004, 6–7). Even though most research shows that there is a strong negative correlation, for example, between gross domestic product and corruption, no causality can be derived from this (Lambsdorff 1999); correlations do not provide

causal links. Furthermore, quantitative research seldom leads to clear policy advice. How do we curb corruption and make anticorruption policies by simply knowing that poverty causes corruption? Currently, there is much confusion in the literature

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1 about which anticorruption methods work under
2 what conditions (Anechiarico and Jacobs 1996).¹
3 Anechiarico and Jacobs (1996) point to the possible
4 trade-off between imposing strict controls on the
5 behavior of officials and the costs of these controls in
6 efficiency and innovativeness.

8 Detailed case studies of corrupt officials, the method
9 chosen for this article, allow the researcher to study
10 the *process* through which people become corrupt. As
11 a result, the case study methodology adds to quantita-
12 tive research. According to Anechiarico and Jacobs,
13 “Using focus groups and case studies would generate a
14 mass of data that, when analyzed and organized, will
15 probably provide a way to move forward with policy
16 experiments” (1996, 198). In case studies, attention
17 can be paid to the individuals within their culture and
18 organization. In this article, corruption cases are stud-
19 ied within their context, which means research in the
20 tradition of Anechiarico and Jacobs (1996), Della
21 Porta and Vannucci (1997), and Höffling (2002).
22 Research methods used in this tradition include judi-
23 cial investigations, interviews, and newspaper-based
24 data banks (cf. Ahmad and Brookins 2004).

26 Corruption, the central concept of our study, must be
27 defined before the research methodology can be ex-
28 plained. Great attention has been paid in the literature
29 to the question of what corruption “is” (e.g., Alemann
30 2004; Génaux 2004; Rose-Ackerman 1999). The
31 phenomenon has been interpreted and defined in
32 many ways. Insightful contributions on this include
33 the pioneering work of Hoetjes (1982, 1998, 2000) in
34 the Netherlands and, internationally, that of Bull and
35 Newell (2003), Caiden (1991,
36 2001), Heidenheimer and
37 Johnston (2002), Heywood
38 (1997), and Sherman (1974).
39 Here, we use the following
40 definition: Public officials are
41 corrupt when they act (or fail
42 to act) as a result of receiving
43 personal rewards from interested
44 outside parties (Huberts and
45 Nelen 2005). This definition has been leading in the
46 empirical research that we will present. An important
47 element of the definition is that, in this article,
48 corruption always includes an interested third party.
49 An accountant who steals (without help from other
50 people) from her organization, for example, would
51 be seen as committing fraud, not corruption. Also
52 important is the element of “personal rewards,” which
53 include nonmonetary rewards, and the consideration
54 that, as a result of these personal rewards, an act (or
55 failure to act) of a public official is influenced.

57 In much of the literature (e.g., Fijnaut and Huberts
58 2002), a distinction is made between the nature of
59 corruption in lower-income countries and in higher-

income countries; low salaries and poor working
conditions greatly improve the chances of corrupt
instances. Here, we concentrate on corruption in
high-income countries, where it is much the exception
to behavior (Caiden 2001, 27). All the data come
from the Netherlands. This means that the nature of
corruption in this study is first of all about that coun-
try, but we see the cases as exemplifying the corrupt
official, his or her (organizational) situation, and his
or her corrupt relationship in Western democracies:
“high-income” societies with stable, highly institu-
tionalized political systems. Therefore, the proposi-
tions coming out of the data will be compared with
the relevant international literature.

Research Methodology

Because not much is known about the nature of cor-
ruption in high-income countries, an explorative and
inductive research strategy was chosen (cf. Eisenhardt
1989; Glaser and Strauss 1967; Höffling 2002). Spe-
cifically, a multiple case study design was used, which
focuses on understanding the dynamics present within
single settings (Eisenhardt 1989; Herriott and Firestone
1983; Yin 1989) in order to generate theory in the
shape of propositions (Gersick 1988; Harris and
Sutton 1986). This method is fitting when not
much is known about the phenomenon that is being
researched or when the phenomenon is so complex
that neither the variables nor the exact relationship
between the variables is fully definable (Hoesel 1985),
as is the case in research on the nature of corruption.
Case studies offer the advantage of richer details of
actual cases and their contextuality. Coupled with the
within-case analysis is a cross-case search for patterns
(Eisenhardt 1989, 540). Doing a
multiple case study conforms to
the conclusion of Menzel after
reviewing the body of empirical
research conducted on ethics and
integrity in governance: “The
research strategies for ethics
scholars should include greater
methodological rigor with per-
haps less reliance on survey re-
search methods. Such rigor, of course, could include
contextually rich case studies as well as trend or longi-
tudinal analyses that were largely absent from the
studies examined in this paper” (2003, 35).

Selection of the Cases

In this article, each case represents one corrupt public
official and includes all the wrongdoings of that indi-
vidual. The cases for this research were selected from
the files of the National Police Internal Investigation
Department, known in the Netherlands as *Rijksrecherche*,
or RR. The RR plays a leading role in investigating
corruption in the Netherlands. When the public
prosecutor in the Netherlands is confronted with a
corruption case, he or she usually notifies the

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Coordination Commission of the RR (CCR).² Therefore, all more or less important corruption cases in the Netherlands are evaluated by the CCR. The commission then determines whether independent investigation by the RR is warranted.

Between 2000 and 2003, 30 instances of suspected corruption (according to the definition given earlier) were filed. We put aside active files (to avoid any influence on ongoing investigations) and those that were dismissed because no evidence of corruption was found. Of the remaining 12 files, three were rejected. One involved an accused official who had worked at a Dutch embassy on another continent; the other two files could not be located at the time of the research. Of the nine studied files, one involved numerous suspected officials. In this particular file, two officials (who did not know each other) were studied individually, meaning that, in total, 10 corruption cases were studied. This is an acceptable number, according to Eisenhardt: “[W]hile there is no ideal number of cases, a number between 4 and 10 cases usually works well . . . With more than 10 cases, it quickly becomes difficult to cope with the complexity and volume of the data” (1989, 545). Given the way the 10 cases were selected, they should be characteristic of the more important corruption cases that are being discovered and investigated in the Netherlands. Table 1 characterizes the positions of the 10 public officials.

Research Techniques

As can be seen in table 1, all of the corruption cases took place in sectors known to be vulnerable to corruption: immigration and naturalization; police; embassy; and housing, spatial planning, and infrastructure (Hoetjes 1998; Klitgaard 1988). The activities expected by the external party (the briber) of the official were not surprising either: two policemen sold confidential information; three officials misused power in decisions involving immigration status or visas; five officials favored external parties in the pro-

Table 1 The 10 Cases

Number of Cases	Position
2	Employees of the National Immigration and Naturalization Service
2	Policemen
2	Aldermen
1	Employee of a European foreign embassy
1	Civil servant in the Service for Public Buildings of the Department of Housing, Spatial Planning and Environmental Affairs
1	Civil servant in the Department of Public Works, head of the realization of the works in a Dutch province
1	Municipal official in the sector of spatial planning

cess of granting contracts and commissions. Eight of these officials were male; two were female. Their ages ranged between 25 and 65. The cases were spread throughout the Netherlands.

On average, researching the criminal files of each case required two days. The files contained various types of information, such as taped telephone conversations, official reports, suspect interrogations, and witness interviews. The last two, in which the suspects and their respective organizations were extensively discussed, proved especially helpful to this study. Also, 15 interviews were conducted with the respective case detectives and their superiors to gain more insight into the accused officials and their organizational context. In addition, we studied all available public sources, such as newspaper articles and verdicts of the court.

Heuristic of the Research

To find cross-case patterns, Eisenhardt suggests using techniques that force investigators to go beyond initial impressions:

Overall, the idea behind these cross-case searching tactics is to force investigators to go beyond initial impressions, especially through the use of structured and diverse lenses on the data. These tactics improve the likelihood of accurate and reliable theory, that is, a theory with a close fit with the data. Also, cross-case searching techniques enhance the possibility that the investigators will capture the novel findings which may exist in the data. (1989, 541)

Usually, researchers in multiple case studies face immense quantities of data. Here, we followed the suggestion of Miles and Huberman (1994) to use a “monster grid.” On one axis of the grid are the 10 officials, and on the other are variables from a literature review that were determined to be useful to the study of the nature of corruption (important sources for the latter include Hoetjes 1982, 1998; Höffling 2002; Huberts 1998; Nelen and Nieuwendijk 2003). Hoetjes (1982) pointed to characteristics at the level of the individual, the group, the organization, society, the economy, and public life as explanatory factors.

The option, however, of insights and novel findings based on other variables emerging from the data was left wide open. The cells of the grid are not filled in with numbers but with verbal comments and citations (Swanborn 2003, 16). From this grid, patterns (in the form of propositions) were derived, which were then juxtaposed with the empirical data. This inductive process was repeated many times before the final analysis was written. According to Eisenhardt,

From the within-site analysis plus various cross-site tactics and overall impressions, tentative themes, concepts, and possibly even relationships emerge. The next step of this highly iterative process is to compare systematically the emergent frame with the evidence from each case in order to assess how well or poorly it fits with case data. The central idea is that researchers constantly compare theory with data—iterating toward a theory which closely fits the data. A close fit is important to building good theory because it takes advantage of the new insights possible from the data and yields an empirically valid theory. (1989, 541)

“corporate crime” (e.g., Blankenship 1993; Shover and Bryant 1993).

Research Findings

The Individual

Motive. Proposition 1: Next to material gain, the most important motives for officials to become

corrupt are friendship or love, status, and making an impression on colleagues and friends.

Next to material gain, the most important motives for officials to become corrupt are friendship or love, status, and making an impression on colleagues and friends.

In eight of the corruption cases that were studied, material gain played a role. It is notable that in most of these cases, the financial reward was small.⁴ Furthermore, in at least five of the eight cases, other motives played an impor-

tant role, especially a combination of achieving status and impressing others. In all of the cases, trust and friendship also played important roles. (We present more on this in the section on the relationship between the briber and the corrupt official.) We did not find any evidence that the financial rewards were shared with colleagues to buy their silence.

In two cases, the corrupt official acted out of nonpecuniary motives, namely, out of love or friendship for the external actor. As we will discuss later, in the relationship between the corrupt official and the briber, trust is important. What is notable in these two cases (both involving female officials) is that the relationship of trust was not used to transfer bribes; rather, the relationship was the bribe—friendship or love was the bribe. The following detective’s statement, which concerned a Dutch embassy official who had issued visas on false grounds to her boyfriend’s friends, is typical: “She did it because of love for her boyfriend and perhaps a bit out of humanitarian motives. She just fell for the wrong guy who promised her a lot, like a marriage that never came. She never received money for the corrupt acts. Her reward was love, if you can call it that.”

In the eight cases in which money played a role, it is notable that all involved men. In the two cases in which the corrupt officials were women, there are no indications of financial rewards. Thus, in this study, no corruption cases involving bribes were found with women as the main suspects. The interviews with detectives and experts indicate that the percentage of male suspects in corruption cases is much higher than one would expect on the basis of the male/female percentage split in sectors that are susceptible to corruption; in almost all criminal corruption investigations involving pecuniary bribes, men are the suspects.

In the reiterative process, seven expert interviews were used to gain maximum confidence in the external validity of the propositions.³ The experts were given a chance to comment on the propositions and research findings, helping to make sense of the data. Where possible, the propositions were compared with the existing literature on the nature of corruption.

To illustrate the findings, some details of the cases will be discussed. Unfortunately, anonymity requirements prevent an in-depth presentation of the case stories.

Structure of the Research Findings

In the remaining pages, the research findings on the nature of corruption derived from the 10 cases will be presented. The discussion is organized as follows: (1) the individual corrupt official, (2) his or her organizational context, and (3) the relationship between the briber and the corrupt official. At the beginning of each section, propositions emanating from the material will be presented. Then the data from our study will be presented and discussed. Finally, we juxtapose the propositions with the existing knowledge (in the public ethics and corruption literature) about the nature of corruption in Western democracies. The body of research on corporate corruption (e.g., Ashforth and Anand 2003; Brief, Buttram, and Dukerich 2001) will be included, which is also (partly) covered in management studies under such concepts as “corporate illegality” (e.g., Baucus 1994), “organizational misbehavior” (e.g., Vardi and Weitz 2004), “unethical behavior in organizations” (Brass, Butterfield, and Skaggs 1998), or “ethical decision making behavior” (Treviño and Youngblood 1990), and in criminology under such concepts as “white collar crime” (e.g., Croall 2001; Sutherland 1983; Weisburd et al. 1991), “occupational crime” (e.g., Clinard 1983), or

1 The files offer little information on how the officials
2 look back on their wrongful actions. But in those
3 cases in which information was obtainable, the main
4 complaint was, not surprisingly (Ashforth and Anand
5 2003; Sykes and Matza 1957), that the negative con-
6 sequences of their actions (court punishment, loss of
7 job, loss of status) were disproportionate to the gains
8 from their misconduct. The literature also shows that
9 the agent rationalizes and legitimizes the corrupt
10 behavior and does not regard it as corrupt. “One of
11 the most intriguing findings in the white collar crime
12 literature is that corrupt individuals tend not to view
13 themselves as corrupt” (Anand, Ashforth, and Joshi
14 2004, 40). All five types of neutralization techniques
15 that perpetrators of crimes use to legitimize their
16 behavior were found in the 10 cases (Ashforth and
17 Anand 2003; Sykes and Matza 1957).

18
19 Proposition 1 is not surprising. Earlier research has
20 concluded that corrupt officials are not simply after
21 material gain (Nelen and Nieuwendijk 2003, 43–
22 44); the official could also be seeking higher social
23 standing, excitement, or an outlet for frustration. In
24 the related literature, a few examples of antecedents
25 mentioned as contributing to property deviance in
26 organizations include feelings of frustration
27 (Analoui and Kakabadse 1992), insecurity or bore-
28 dom (Hoetjes 1998), dissatisfaction with work
29 (Mangione and Quinn 1975), and feelings of injus-
30 tice (Hollinger and Clark 1983). When discussing
31 the motives of corrupt officials, a whole range of
32 different and competing criminological theories can
33 be applied to gain insight. Cusson (1983) distin-
34 guished 13 goals of perpetrators of crimes; other
35 theories, such as social control theories (Hirschi
36 1969), differential association theories (Sutherland
37 1983), and rational choice theories (Cornish and
38 Clarke 1986), also pay attention to factors that can
39 keep people from criminal activities. However, what
40 is clear from the research using all these different
41 criminological theories is that stating that the cor-
42 rupt official is after material gain is an
43 oversimplification.

44
45 **Process of Becoming Corrupt. Proposition 2:**
46 Officials “slide down” toward corruption; most
47 processes of becoming corrupt can be considered
48 a slippery slope.

49
50 In almost every case studied here, the process of be-
51 coming corrupt can be characterized as a gradual one,
52 a slippery slope. Granted, the official has to jump the
53 initial hurdle, but after the first corrupt act, corrup-
54 tion becomes easier to enter into, and it appears to be
55 hard to stop the practice. During one interrogation, a
56 detective painted a picture of an official gradually
57 sliding down the slope. The accused official recognized
58 himself in that picture. In the section on the relation-
59 ship between the briber and the corrupt official, we

shall see that corruption is rarely limited to one
corrupt act.

Corruption rarely evolves from the personal prob-
lems—financial, for example—of the official. In no
case studied here was there a conscious cost–benefit
calculation as to whether to accept bribes or not. The
nature of the process was more a slippery slope, with
eventual amazement and frustration regarding the
official’s behavior. There is hardly any literature on the
process of becoming corrupt in the public administra-
tion literature. In the corporate literature, however, the
processes of becoming corrupt are very similar to the
slippery slope metaphor (see, e.g., the process model
of Brief, Buttram, and Dukerich 2001). Compare the
slippery slope metaphor with Darley: “The essence of
the process involves causing individuals, under pres-
sure, to take small steps along a continuum that ends
with evildoing. Each step is so small as to be essentially
continuous with previous ones; after each step the
individual is positioned to take the next one. The indi-
vidual’s morality follows rather than leads” (1992, 208).

Character. Proposition 3: Often corrupt officials
have dominant and strong personalities, know how to
“get things done,” take or get the freedom to do things
independently, and overstep formal boundaries of
authority.

When we look at the characters of the 10 officials, it is
no surprise that we notice many differences among
them. However, some common characteristics can be
found (the difficulty of capturing a person’s personal-
ity in a few words notwithstanding). Of note is that
most of the corrupt officials hardly seem to have dull
personalities (table 2). Most descriptions in table 2 are
quoted literally from the criminal files of the sus-
pected officials and are primarily found in the ac-
counts of interrogations of witnesses, such as friends
and colleagues. Some are from our interviews with the
investigating detectives (who, of course, had intensive
contact with the officials).

What is notable is that in seven of the 10 cases, the
corrupt officials had strong and dominant personali-
ties. In two other cases (table 2, lines 7 and 8), the
officials had less strong personalities, characterized by
the desire to impress and sensitivity to status. Often
the corrupt officials were described as “smooth talkers”
who knew how to convince people. Other key words
were “communicative,” “very direct,” “flamboyant,”
“open,” and “flair.” The corrupt officials were the types
of employees whom the organization could always call
on because they had the characteristic of “being able
to fix things”; they were more responsive than others
(“I’ll take care of that for you”). A typical remark
made by a former colleague of a suspected official is as
follows: “[He] was worth his weight in gold for the

Table 2 The Personalities of the 10 Corrupt Officials

	Comments
1	A very conscientious woman, very knowledgeable in her department. Very neat and friendly, but she did keep a slight distance from her colleagues. She changed dramatically in a short period.
2	Very noticeable. Someone who liked to be the center of attention. Extravert. Extravert clothing.
3	A dominant man.
4	When there was a problem—with the politicians, for example—he took care of it.
5	A dominant man. Much focused on material things and appearance. He had an enormous persuasive force. A hard worker. As a friend, he could be very sympathetic. Hot-tempered, can explode at any minute.
6	Works hard, also for his own political party. Does much on his own, is a macho, a colorful person. His political position was his life. Manipulated many things in his life.
7	A good, “enthusiastic” official. Works very independently. Macho, likes to make an impression. Likes fitness, broad shouldered, muscular, always a suntan, often with sunglasses. Likes gadgets.
8	Macho. Likes Bullterriers and reptiles.
9	A quiet family man, spends a lot of time with his family. A sly dog. A fast and smooth talker.
10	Loves luxury goods, gadgets, Jaguars, art. Always sharply dressed. Very polite and complacent. Has a ready flow of words, and is very patient and convincing. Vain, intelligent, and strong personality.

team. He had many contacts and knew how to draw the right conclusions quickly.”

Within their organizations, the corrupt officials operated fairly independently, activity to which their organization or superiors did not object. Furthermore, they often eschewed rules and proper procedures, meaning they sought out boundaries of authority and formal competence. Whereas others, following proper procedure, would have involved political authorities in decisions, many of the corrupt officials tried to sidestep that. Notable, however, is that during their defense in court, their compliancy was brought back into the picture to prove that the corrupt act could not have taken place: “I’m innocent because I didn’t even have the authority to do what I’ve been accused of.” One convicted official made a typical statement: “I had no formal authority to decide about granting contracts.” Earlier, Braithwaite (1989) claimed that organizational structures are often contrived to insulate managers from blame, creating “plausible deniability”—for example, by a focus on performance goals coupled with minimal oversight and documentation (Ashforth and Anand 2003, 8).

Because the personalities of corrupt officials are hardly ever considered in quantitative research, not much is known about them (cf. Nielsen 1984). Also in qualitative research (Ahmad and Brookins 2004; Anechiarico and Jacobs 1996; Della Porta and Vannucci 1997; Höffling 2002), this aspect has received little attention. In the organizational misbehavior literature, however, significant relationships have been reported between certain personality traits and workplace delinquency (Ashton 1998; Ford and Richardson 1994; Griffin, O’Leary, and Collins 1998; Raelin 1994; Treviño 1986). However, these studies focus mainly on variables such as cognitive moral development, locus of control, Machiavellianism, or low self-esteem—variables for which we have no data in our study.

Space to Maneuver. Proposition 4: More “business type” public officials brings the risk of more corruption.

In many files, colleagues in the corrupt official’s direct surroundings found the official’s overstepping of the boundaries of authority remarkable but decided not to report anything or speak to their superiors. What might have played a role in this decision was the corrupt official’s popularity among his or her colleagues. The corrupt officials were often controversial, but they were also popular. One reason for this was that “they’re easy going.” In general, the corrupt officials did their jobs effectively and efficiently; because they got the job done, they commanded respect. This, in turn, created space to maneuver and perhaps to act corruptly within that less-controlled space. Reporting suspicions of wrongdoing colleagues is presented more fully in the next section.

Critics of New Public Management warn against certain types of managers in public administration. The type of corrupt official described in this section—the one who places value on having informal authority and results—fits with the type of manager that New Public Management calls for. In the literature, many scholars have warned that introducing management styles from the private sector into the public sector also introduces the danger of corruption and integrity violations (Bovens 1996; Frederickson 1997; Gregory 1999; Hoetjes 1991; Jacobs 1992; Wittmer 2000). In that light, it is interesting that the type of manager who is focused on results is typical in our 10 corruption cases.

The Organization

Supervision. Proposition 5: In most corruption cases, supervision of the corrupt official is not strong.

In each of the criminal files of the 10 cases, complaints can be found about the direct superior’s or the organization’s executives’ failing to supervise the corrupt official. In the corrupt aldermen’s cases, there

1 were many complaints about a weak city council and/
2 or mayor and fellow aldermen; in the cases of the civil
3 servants, there were complaints about the direct line
4 managers. In one case, management asked the (eventually corrupt) official to be careful about having
5 private contact with his business associates. In another
6 case, the corrupt official was asked to make a list of his
7 additional jobs. In both cases, the officials ignored the
8 requests, management forgot about them, and the
9 action was therefore inconsequential. As one inter-
10 viewee said of a corrupt official, “My former colleague
11 was not under enough control of management. They
12 just let him be. In our organization, there were no
13 clear rules on how to be held accountable for one’s
14 responsibilities. He was poorly directed by his superi-
15 ors; otherwise, he would not have become corrupt.”
16 Indeed, in several files, the corrupt officials themselves
17 complained about their former superiors; they felt
18 they had not been adequately protected by their supe-
19 riors from the seductions of wrongdoing.

22 In no case did the organization pay much attention to
23 integrity policies. Integrity was not an issue—at least
24 not until the corruption case surfaced. This is remark-
25 able, as all the cases took place in sectors that are
26 known to be vulnerable to corruption.

28 Proposition 5 comes out of the 10 corruption cases
29 and is firmly rooted in the literature. The involvement
30 of leadership and supervision is considered of highest
31 importance to prevent corruption, as is setting a good
32 example (e.g., Ford and Richardson 1994; Hoerjies
33 1982, 1998; Petrick and Quinn 1997; Treviño et al.
34 1999). According to Ashforth and Anand, “Leaders
35 do not have to actually engage in corruption to serve
36 as role models: rewarding, condoning, ignoring, or
37 otherwise facilitating corruption—whether intention-
38 ally or not, or explicitly or not—often sends a clear
39 signal to employees” (2003, 7). What is also notice-
40 able is that the control procedures were inadequate in
41 most of the 10 cases. In the organizational misbehav-
42 ior literature, Ackroyd and Thompson (1999) have
43 stated that employee misconduct is mostly the result
44 of oppressive as well as lax controls.

46 **Organizational Structure. Proposition 6:** In most
47 corruption cases, management has not promoted a
48 clear integrity policy.

50 There were many differences between the organiza-
51 tions studied and their structures—hardly surprising,
52 as among them were police organizations, municipali-
53 ties, the central government, and an embassy. Yet
54 certain mechanisms that have to do with control in
55 the organizations are notable. In several cases, the
56 administrative organization was not in order or was
57 not taken seriously. A colleague of a suspected official
58 said, “We had much freedom in our work. Procedures
59 were sidestepped; there was not much control, et

cetera. This gave [him] the opportunity to do what he
did. Now, rules have been sharpened. Now it’s not
possible anymore.”

Control was inadequate in every organization. In
several cases, civil servants were, independent of
anyone else in the organization, able to decide on
matters of great importance to external parties, such
as granting construction contracts or issuing green
cards. In the few cases in which a formal control
system was in place, in practice it was merely titular.
In many of the cases, the civil servant had held the
same position for a long time. Furthermore, as
noticed earlier, in most cases, there was no clear
accountability.

To explain the failure of control, the criminal files
many times refer to “special circumstances of the
organization.” The National Immigration and
Naturalization Service (IND), for example, grew
substantially in a relative short period of time,
leading to high work pressure and tensions. In other
cases, leadership changed many times (and therefore
employees hardly knew who was who in the organiza-
tion), or there was high political tension that led to
mistrust and confusion. A factor mentioned many
times is that pressure to perform was high in the
organization. For example, many houses had to be
built in a municipality in a relatively short time.
The responsible civil servants received signals
from their political superiors that the speed of the
decision process was more important than its quality.
Apparently, this makes an organization vulnerable to
corruption. In another case, the failure to control was
the result of a recent retrenchment policy that had
cut several control functions.

Many scholars have pled for integrity policies in gov-
ernmental organizations. However, what such a policy
should exactly entail differs from scholar to scholar
(see Anechiarico and Jacobs 1996; Pope 2000; for an
interesting case study on the management of integrity
that goes beyond ethical codes, Van Blijswijk et al.
2004).

Organizational Culture. Proposition 7: Because
of loyalty and solidarity, colleagues are hesitant to
report suspicions of another’s corrupt activities.

Much information of the needed to adequately char-
acterize the culture of the organizations was absent
from the criminal files. However, something can be
said about certain aspects of organizational culture
that are mentioned in the literature as relevant to
corruption.

What is notable in the 10 cases is the firmness of the
relationships between the corrupt officials and their
bribers. In many of the cases, it was considered quite

1 normal within public organizations for officials to
2 have close relationships with external parties who
3 had interests in their decisions. One interviewee
4 noted that even though the police had strict rules
5 about association with external parties (such as
6 meeting criminal suspects when off duty), for other
7 civil servants, these rules did not exist. For civil
8 servants in charge of procurement, for example,
9 playing golf with contractors was not considered a
10 problem. Many in our sample argued that it is very
11 important to “maintain good relationships with
12 external parties.”⁵

13
14 As mentioned earlier, in most organizations, signals
15 of something “irregular” surfaced before the corrup-
16 tion case was discovered. Yet these signals were
17 somehow not properly dealt with. In organizations
18 with a culture in which breaking rules and receiving
19 gifts from external parties is considered normal, it is
20 not surprising that internal signals of integrity
21 violations are ignored. (In the next section, we call
22 this “corrupt networks.”) But in seven cases, the
23 corrupt officials operated independently. Colleagues
24 were kept out of it as much as possible. In those
25 cases, suspicions about the official’s direct organiza-
26 tional environment existed, but they were not re-
27 ported or passed on to superiors. From the
28 interrogations of colleagues of the suspected offi-
29 cials, it becomes clear that collegial loyalty and
30 solidarity play a major role in the decision not to
31 talk about or report any suspicions of wrongdoing.
32 To accuse a colleague, even with evidence, is not
33 something that is taken lightly. A former colleague
34 of an accused official said,

35
36 Certain things I found very strange and I talked
37 to a colleague about it. I told him that we
38 should do something about it, for example, tell
39 our superior; otherwise, we ourselves might be
40 doing something wrong. He disagreed and told
41 me that it was the responsibility of [the sus-
42 pected official] himself. After that conversation
43 I did nothing. I should note that three other
44 colleagues, namely . . . , also saw what I saw.
45 They also felt that it was the responsibility
46 of [the suspected official]
47 himself.

48
49 And as one detective said, “Often
50 when investigating a corruption
51 case, we hear from the colleagues
52 of the suspected official, ‘I am
53 not in the least surprised.’”

54
55 The detectives of the RR also
56 complained that cooperation is
57 not always entirely forthcoming
58 from the leadership and organization of an accused
59 official. This, they note, is something that has

changed over the last 20 years. According to the
detectives, managers in the public sector see them-
selves, more than they used to, as representatives of
their organization rather than representatives of the
public sector. Loyalty toward the organization and its
members is greater than loyalty toward the “public
interest.” In several cases, there were strong indica-
tions that the leadership of the organization of the
accused official feared negative press and therefore
thwarted the investigation. In one case, leadership
backed the accused for a long time, impeding the
investigation.

In the literature, much has been written about loyalty
and solidarity in police organizations (e.g., Crank and
Caldero 2000; Ewin 1990; Punch 1985; Skolnick
2002). Sometimes called a “code of silence,” it is
known to prevent the reporting of fellow wrongdoing.
The literature on the reporting of integrity violations
within organizations generally concurs that loyalty
and solidarity are important factors influencing the
reporting of wrongdoing of colleagues (e.g., Gorta
and Forell 1995; Lee, Heimann, and Near 2004;
Treviño and Victor 1992; Zipparo 1999). The same
conclusions have been formulated in the literature on
whistle-blowers (e.g., Greenberger, Miceli, and Cohen
1987; Miceli and Near 1984; Near and Miceli 1986).
This is confirmed in the 10 cases studied here. In the
Netherlands, Nelen and Nieuwendijk (2003, 58)
have noted that in organizational cultures in which
coworker relations are characterized by loyalty,
nonintervention, and conflict avoidance, the working
of internal and external rules on integrity issues might
be significantly impeded.

The Relationship between the Briber and the Corrupt Official

The Exchange of Favors; the Length, Initiative, and Nature of the Relationship; and the Interests of Bribers. **Proposition 8:** The relationship between briber and the official is most often enduring.

Strikingly, the corrupt official rarely receives a gift
for which concrete compensation is expected.⁶ In

almost all cases, there was no
clear quid pro quo. The classic
image of an official receiving an
envelope full of money with one
hand while signing with his or
her other hand a wrongly influ-
enced resolution holds no accu-
racy in any of the cases. A
former contractor (a briber who
became a whistle-blower) ex-
plained in one of the files:

“With [the corrupt official], we

had a gentleman’s agreement. He was allowed to do
all kinds of nice things at our expense, and, without

According to the detectives,
managers in the public sector
see themselves, more than they
used to, as representatives of
their organization rather
than representatives of the
public sector.

1 explicating it, he was expected to make decisions
2 which favored us. I never discussed it with him
3 specifically.”

4
5 In such an agreement, it is hard to define what is
6 expected of the official. This is one of the main prob-
7 lems for the detectives of the RR: They have to prove
8 what the corrupt official did wrong in exchange for
9 the gifts, the quid pro quo.⁷

10
11 In nine of the 10 cases, there was a long, institutional-
12 ized relationship between the briber and corrupt
13 official. In only one case did the official have several
14 short and superficial contacts with the bribers.

15
16 In the latter case, an IND official issued green cards
17 and arranged marriages on false premises. It is not
18 clear from the files or the investigation who took the
19 initiative in this case. It likely was an interplay of
20 factors; once an official has a reputation in certain
21 social milieus “that he can be influenced,” interested
22 external parties will seek him out. In the case of green
23 cards, the bribers have no interest in maintaining a
24 relationship with the official because, once they have
25 the card, there is not much more the official can do
26 for them. This is, of course, different for construction
27 companies that deal with the officials who grant con-
28 tracts. In all the cases in which the bribers had an
29 interest in maintaining an enduring relationship with
30 the official, they succeeded.

31
32 In one case, there was a long relationship between the
33 “briber” and the official, but the corruption was lim-
34 ited to one incident. Briber is in quotes here because
35 there were probably no payments involved (the case
36 was dismissed by the public prosecutor). This case
37 revolved around friendship; the opportunity arose for
38 one friend to do the other a favor, and she obliged.
39 The briber has probably not called on the same friend
40 again in this way. Unlike the other eight cases, in
41 which there was an enduring relationship between the
42 briber and the official, this was not an enduring
43 *corrupt* relationship.

44
45 It is hard to say who took the initiative in the other
46 eight cases, precisely because the bribery took
47 place in an enduring relationship. In two cases, the
48 initiative was clearly taken by the official, in two
49 others, it was the bribers, but in most cases it re-
50 mains unclear.

51
52 Against the two aldermen in this study (who each had
53 at least one long, enduring relationship with a briber),
54 suspicions also existed that they had actively asked for
55 bribes when an opportunity arose in which they could
56 help a citizen with a permit or a decree. These alder-
57 men were working in small municipalities, were domi-
58 nant in the government of their municipality, and had
59 successfully received bribes over a long period of time.

Perhaps the step toward asking for a bribe, then, be-
comes small.

Corruption in nine of the 10 cases was part of a sta-
ble, enduring relationship. The briber and official
knew each other. Often they were “sort of” friends,
sometimes even more than friends. An impression of
the relationships is illustrated in table 3.

A characteristic of the nine enduring corrupt relation-
ships is confidentiality within the relationship and
secrecy toward outsiders. In such a relationship, trust
plays an important role. Both parties trust that one will
not jeopardize the other by breaking confidentiality.
The trust can be built on several aspects. Affection
(sexual relationship, love, friendship, family) can be the
basis. But trust can also be based on the fact that either
or both parties can be blackmailed. For example, one
official in our study was taken to a brothel by construc-
tion executives, a fact that he wanted to keep from his
wife. In such cases, extortion vulnerability is evident.

In this study, it is notable that parties used affection to
manipulate others. In several cases, former colleagues
and detectives (from interrogations and interviews,
respectively), mentioned that the briber had clearly
“used” the official and faked a close friendship. For
example, “[The official] and his bribers were friends in
the sense that he didn’t have any other friends. But he
didn’t go out with the bribers, or go with them on
holiday or anything. And now he has no contact with
them. It makes you wonder how close these friend-
ships were.” Closer study revealed that in eight of the
10 cases, the bribers and the officials probably are no
longer in contact.

Table 3 Briber–Official Relationships in the Nine Enduring Relationships

Number of Cases	Relationship
1	A love relationship in which the partner of the corrupt official came up with many relatives and friends in need of visas, which the official provided. The friends and family, who received the visas on false grounds, can therefore also be seen as (indirect) bribers.
1	The briber and official had been friends for a long time before the corruption incidents began.
2	Aldermen who were more or less friends with their bribers; in one of these cases, the alderman also tried to get bribes from persons he knew less well.
2	Policemen who received bribes from several persons whom they knew pretty well.
3	The bribers of the officials maintained contact with other bribers. The tableau of bribers in these so-called corrupt networks is much more unclear than in the other six cases.

In the six cases that could not be typified as corrupt networks, the *personal* interests of the briber were at stake. (In the few cases in which the briber represented a private business, he was the owner of that business.) This contrasts with the cases that were part of corrupt networks.

From the literature, it was already known that some form of trust must exist between the briber and the official. Höffling's (2002) comprehensive study of corruption cases in Germany came to the same conclusion. Corruption within superficial relationships is risky. After all, if the person who bribes the official is unknown, he or she cannot be sure the briber will maintain confidentiality. Some trust must exist in the relationship between briber and official. Therefore, for high-income countries, the lower-left cell in table 4 will rarely be populated.

Corrupt Networks. Proposition 9: Corrupt officials, including those who operate outside so-called corrupt networks, do not limit their corruption to one incident.

In three of the 10 cases, the corrupt officials were part of corrupt networks, which have two characteristics (cf. Höffling 2002). First, there is an enduring relationship between the briber and the official in which both parties trust each other. Second, the relationship between the official and the briber is part of a social system in which corruption is accepted and excused, sometimes even expected or demanded (Dohmen 1996). If an official in such a network is replaced by someone else, the (sub)system will attempt to mingle and socialize the new official into the system. Often there are penalties for those who work in corrupt networks but refuse to cooperate (cf. Anand, Ashforth, and Joshi 2004; Dohmen and Verlaan 2004; Meeus and Schoorl 2002). Because corruption within the network is accepted and excused, the corrupt acts do not require secrecy within their confines. Examples of this form of corruption include the recent scandal in the Netherlands in the building and construction industry and what Moody-Stuart (1997) calls "grand corruption." Ashforth and Anand (2003) propose a model that explains how corruption becomes normalized in organizations, and Brief, Buttram, and Dukerich (2001) explain how an ethically questionable

practice can become woven into the fabric of an organization (i.e., how the normalization and socialization processes work).

As mentioned earlier, in the corrupt networks of this study, there was no clear *quid pro quo*; the gifts of the bribers and the corrupt acts of the officials were not exchanged one for one. The officials were taken care of financially (or in kind through golf trips, dinners) over a longer period of time by the briber. And when the time came for them to do something for the briber, they were expected to do so.

The three cases in this study that typify corrupt networks all involved construction. The corrupt officials were always high on the bureaucratic ladder and could make decisions on important projects that involved large sums of money. The bribers were representatives of a private business, usually building contractors.

The types of relationships between briber and official are summarized in table 4.

Much support for and parallels with proposition 9 can be found in the body of research on corporate corruption. For example, Anand, Ashforth, and Joshi (2004, 47) argue that in many case studies of corporate corruption, the questionable behaviors began as isolated acts that gained momentum. And Brief, Buttram, and Dukerich state,

The notion that novice wrongdoers will be confronted with "pressures to persist" is consistent with a body of research on the escalation of commitment. This research demonstrates that decision makers who commit themselves to a course of action tend to add resources in support of that action in suboptimal ways in order to justify their initial decision . . . Thus, people may tend to repeat their participation in corrupt practices simply to demonstrate to others (and to themselves) that their initial involvement was legitimate. (2001, 488)

Conclusions

Nine propositions form the main conclusions of this article. They sketch a picture of the nature of corruption in high-income countries, specifically the

Table 4 Typology of Corrupt Relationships between Briber and Official

	Stability low: Corruption with brief interactions	Stability high: Corruption in an enduring relationship
Isolated corruption: Corruption as deviating behavior	Incidental isolated corruption (situational corruption) (one case)	Enduring isolated corruption ("intimate" corruption) (six cases)
Systematic corruption: Corruption as the norm	Systematic isolated corruption (daily corruption)	Enduring systematic corruption (corruption network) (three cases)

Source: Based on Höffling (2002, 78).

1 Netherlands. Because literature on corruption in high-
2 income countries is often divided into regions—the
3 United States, Northern Europe (which includes
4 Scandinavia, the Netherlands, and Britain), Southern
5 Europe (which includes Italy, Spain, and Greece),
6 Australia and New Zealand, and Japan—it would be
7 interesting to repeat this study in the different regions
8 to see whether the nature of corruption differs.
9

10 In the general literature on organizational misbehavior
11 (Vardi and Weitz 2004, 28), there is a debate as to
12 whether the decision to misbehave is more a function
13 of bad apples—the personal characteristics of
14 individuals—or of bad barrels—organizational
15 and societal variables (Brass,
16 Butterfield, and Skaggs 1998;
17 Treviño and Youngblood 1990).
18 The evidence from the multiple
19 case studies in this article supports
20 the argument of many social
21 researchers (cf. Hoetjes 1998;
22 Vardi and Weitz 2004, 28) that
23 neither the individual nor the
24 organizational and societal
25 perspective alone fully explains
26 corruption and that integrative
27 explanations are most useful in
28 explaining behavior in general
29 (e.g., Bourdieu 1990) and corruption in particular (De
30 Graaf 2006). It has to be noted, however, that because
31 we discuss mainly *cross-case patterns* here, we focus on
32 discussing *predisposing* causes of corruption, not so
33 much *triggering* causes of individual cases. In order to
34 explain corruption by identifying triggering causes, a
35 corruption case study design with more emphasis on
36 within-case analysis would be better suited.
37

38 In the literature on corruption, there is much specula-
39 tion on its nature, but there are hardly any empirical
40 qualitative studies on the nature of corruption.
41 Knowledge is aggregated far above the level of actual
42 corruption cases. This might be one reason for the
43 confusion in the literature on which anticorruption
44 methods work best and most efficiently. It may be
45 difficult to draw conclusions from detailed case stud-
46 ies, but in order to design effective anticorruption
47 policies, it is important to expand our knowledge
48 beyond what we know from quantitative research.
49 Anechiarico and Jacobs state, “The right mix of cor-
50 ruption controls will undoubtedly differ from govern-
51 mental unit and from agency to agency within the
52 same governmental unit. Moreover, the optimal mix
53 changes over time” (1996, 198). More corruption case
54 studies should help us with prescriptions and give us
55 more information on what the right mix of corrup-
56 tion control is under specific circumstances. Our
57 knowledge of the (profile of the) individual corrupt
58 official needs to be substantiated, as well as his or her
59 particular organizational context, relationship with
60

the briber, and process of becoming corrupt. In this
study, a general profile of a corruption case was cre-
ated from actual cases. One of the things the (explor-
ative) multiple case study methodology allows us to
do is advance the field by expanding our understand-
ing of the way in which corrupt officials become
corrupt.

Notes

1. The point about the uncertainty of the effective-
ness of anticorruption policies is an important one
that Anechiarico and Jacobs (1996) make in their
comprehensive classic study of New York City. It is
rich in detail and insights; the authors document
and analyze the manifold
liabilities of a vast range of
corruption control projects.
They show how corruption
control mechanisms, which
might make sense when
based on general research,
may not work in a specific
context.
2. Its members are the
chairman of the Council of
Procurators-General, the
head public prosecutor in
the National Office of the
Public Prosecutor, and the head of the National
Police Internal Investigation Department.
3. The interviews included a lawyer who had de-
fended many officials suspected of corruption,
two journalists who had written many articles
and books on corruption in the Netherlands, a
criminologist with much experience in corruption
research, an integrity consultant with much
experience with integrity violations in organiza-
tions, a whistle-blower, and an employee of the
Department of Public Works closely involved in
the public hearings of a large Dutch corruption
scandal.
4. There are exceptions. Most notably, in one case,
the official received an estimated 1.3 million euros
illegally.
5. The question remains whether this entanglement
between private and public partners is a typical
Dutch phenomenon (in Dutch culture, there is
much emphasis on consensus and cooperation).
6. The only exceptions are the cases in which visas or
immigrations status was expected.
7. A recent alteration of the law in the Netherlands
changed this. Now it has to be made plausible by
the accused official that the gift was not meant to
influence him or her.

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there is a debate as to whether
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individuals—or of bad barrels—
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