

Psychosocial determinants of corruption

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ABSTRACT

Psychosocial determinants of corruption were recommended in order to give emphasis that corruption is innate in nature in which discontentment and security take place as a motivating factor; why a certain person commits corruption. The researchers used Maslow's hierarchy of needs which determines the self-actualization as the higher needs of man or a belief that he or she was fully used all his or her potentials as a result of full satisfaction. In sociological and psychological perspective, man has its own individual characteristics, ability to perceive what is right and what is wrong as well as the ability to observe and adopt what is being observed. As determinants of corruption, two theories are anchored by Bandura's Observation Learning Theory: (1) The Freudian theory which asserts man's id, ego and superego; and the (2) second theory eventually imitates observable anti-social acts which would immediately satisfy their needs. Derived propositions are the following: (1) people with low sense of guilt will eventually imitate observable anti-social acts that would immediately satisfy their needs; (2) some people prefer to commit corrupt acts because it has greater payoff but with less threat on legal punishment; (3) individual with great sense of his moral conscience can achieve self-actualization; (4) actualized people will never engage in corruption; and (5) self-actualized people are incorruptible.

Keywords: *psychosocial, corruption, self-actualizer*

I. INTRODUCTION

Corruption is one of the primary problems and concerns in many underdeveloped and developing nations. Substantial portion of funds allocated to spur social and economic activities in the countries are siphoned into the pockets of few individuals, thus resulting into substandard delivery of goods and service in the countries. The United Nations (2009) estimated that roughly 25 % of the national budgets of countries listed as among those with high corruption incidences remain unaccounted for and end up in the personal custody of highly

authoritative individuals. While governments of the countries have passed laws and ordinances imposing stiff sanction on individuals convicted for corruption, the situation has essentially remained the same over the years. Government interventions that target the symptoms of corruption rather than the cause of corruption are and will always remain ineffective. The dimension of corruption committed in the sphere of the legal economy are possibly obvious but that may, indeed be seen to be more reasonable for the study of corruption on the interactional level. This paper attempts to

explain the psycho-social causes of the prevalence of corruption with the end-in-view of providing a more effective strategy to combat corruption on a national scale.

Corruption is most commonly defined as the misuse or the abuse of public office for private gain (World Bank, 1997; UNDP, 1999). It can come in various forms and a wide array of illicit behavior, such as bribery, extortion, fraud, nepotism, graft, speed money, pilferage, theft, and embezzlement, falsification of records, kickbacks, influence peddling, and campaign contributions (Klitgaard, n.d.). On the criminological study of Huisman and VandeWalle (1999), corruption is a symptom of deep rooted economic and political weakness and start coming in the legislative and judicial system of the country. In the democratic environment, "corruption" is widely expressed in different forms of action and social behavior as a form of culture. Unfortunately, here in the Philippines our legal provisions do not provide any definition of graft and corruption. However, the Anti-Graft and Corrupt Practices Act (Republic Act 3019) enumerates certain punishable corrupt practices of public officers. Our courts of law do not generally prescribe clear-cut definitions of the terms "graft" and "corruption" since they may be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to contain all the elements of the different types of graft and corruption in one sweeping generalization.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Personality (innate) Factor. At the individual-level, a person's propensity to be corrupted is related to his contentment and feeling of security. Guiltiness is an innate factor. As to define guilt it is realizing you have done wrong, usually for some particular sin but because of less spirituality of human or less of deeper understanding in God's law and truth; people tend to do sinful acts and do not even make a realization out of the sin they made. Realization and conscience are innate and part of human's ability in perceiving what is right and wrong. Spiritual aspect of man is personal yet it needs guidance and follow-up, because as human as we are, we find it hard to understand contentment and seek personal security that may lead us to be

corruptible beings. Geni (1999) attested that it is a general misconception that the prevalence of corruption is at the level of high status in society. In fact, corruption has a good deal at the low-level from the local government employees to community personnel. On Balko (2001), corruption practices flourished in systems where employees have a high job security but the level of professionalism is low. Corruption is also often attributed to the low salaries of civil servants. This scenario portrays *need driven* (satisfying basic requirements for survival) or *greed driven* (satisfying desires far from status and comfort that salaries cannot match).

In the higher level of religious context, self-actualized people are incorruptible. Individuals who are deeply contented with their lives and who feel secure about their social and economic status will not be vulnerable to corruption. The satisfaction will depend on how he inclines himself with acts that define goodness in attending to his needs. For an individual to survive he must of course to eat, drink and have a place to live. Eventually, these basic needs were added as man learned to think greater than his survival. A known theorist in the name of Abraham Maslow categorizes the human needs as: (1) physiological (food, water and sex); (2) safety (shelter); (3) belongingness (connection to others); (4) self-esteem (achievements); and (5) self-actualization (contentment). According to him, thwarting of basic needs leads to some kind of pathology that can result in people lying, cheating, stealing, even killing or feeling of dissatisfaction. Maslow contends that very few people can step to the highest form of need, the self-actualization. A very essential component of this postulation relates to the fact that even if one attains the upper-level needs, the lower or more basic needs are deprived; the person ignores the higher needs in order to address the basic one Jung's (2012) view states that man's thinking by nature is embedded in past, present and future: it consists of consciousness and unconscious elements which he called tendencies. This contradictory tendency and impulse must be into harmony with each other. He theorized that self-actualization is achieved when a harmony on the tendency and impulse of an individual exist but

self-actualization must be sought and it does not occur automatically.

Sociological and Psychological Perspective of Corruption. According to Freud (2000), a well-defended personality may never breakdown unless placed in environment circumstances that participate on stress and lead to an exacerbation of defensive mechanism. As an individual, man is more vulnerable if conflicts and fixations that occur earlier in life. At this time being the more dependent on immature defenses in dealing with anxiety. Immature defense is created by one's ego, a personality structure that governs a person to do or act something in response to his needs. This phenomenon takes place during the nurturing stage of a child to become a full grown person. The type of nurture that an individual had can influence his way of thinking and decision making. An individual may become corrupted when from the start of his growth, corrupt acts have been observed from the parents and eventually or unconsciously became a part of the nurturing process. This shows that man's corrupt behavior can be a product of imitating others or learning illegal way of thoughts. This may disturb the mental balance of the individual.

On the other hand, people who are likely to be observed with corrupt behavior are individuals who have strong characteristics and most likely those with high-level status. A person's social status can drive one towards illegal path. Bandura's Observational Learning Theory (2000) argues that much of what we learn is obtained by observing others. This is more efficient than learning through direct experience because it spares countless responses that might be followed.

Essentially, the psycho-social perspective of this phenomenon (corruption) should be linked with the innate and outward behavior of a person. Myers (1994) stresses that nice people also become corrupted through excessive social pressure. He advocated that good and dirt free man may modify his or her behavior on the basis of community and family pressure and consequently pursue a wrongful path. External influences can lead one to conform to the group norms or obey a perceived authority figure. Conformity to this context can be

defined as changing one's behavior or beliefs to match those of other individuals or group members due to unspoken pressure.

Bandura (2001) identifies four main processes that are crucial for observation learning: attention, retention or representation, behavioral production and motivation. In order to learn through observation, one must attend to the model. Factors that regulate attention include the frequency with which the individual must be able to make some representations of what they have witnessed in memory. Behavioral production involves the process of converting the mental representations into appropriate actions. Lastly, observational learning is most effective when observers are motivated to an act the modeled behavior. The motivation of such individual may depend on whether they encounter a situation in which they believe that the response is likely to lead favorable consequences for them.

Favorable consequence may come from a legal or illegal action. If one individual observed that there is a prevalence of a corrupt act in their workplace that leads to a favorable consequence, then he or she would join them or would just do the same. The person may just think "*I'm just following them, anyway everybody is doing it.*" Such act will be fully realized especially if the individual does not perceive the consequence of his action as a threat to his interest. Antonova (2013) emphasizes the role of society and environment in law enforcement, and allege that the negative practices of high ranking police officers may influence their subordinates to engage in unethical behavior. This situation may lead to higher tendency of corruption in the police parlance.

Contrastingly, Adler (2001) explains that making an evaluation of a person's behavior out of context, and judging only their physical status, their environment or upbringing will be a mistake. Freud (2004) states that the Id personality dictates for individual needs. Maslow (2009) claims that thwarting of the basic needs creates anxiety. Adler (2001) relates this postulation as a condition of inferiority. This inferiority tends to serve a natural motivation factor or a driving force in every individual's life. Thus, out of individuals' inferiority

feelings are the source of all human striving towards self-growth, expansion or competence. Alder (2001) theorizes that people are driven by a lust for power and a need to dominate over others and the environment. Thus, it can be said that an individual's act for the satisfaction of his need is primarily motivated by personal, behavioral and environmental determinants. The environmental influence may only be a justification of one's behavior and a rationalization to dress up the flaws in one's self.

Maslow (2009), Freud (2004) and Bandura's (2001) theories can be the bases to a psychosocial approach in determining causes of corruption on an individual level and eventually lead to conceptualize an approach on how to become an incorruptible individual.

III. THEORY FORMULATION

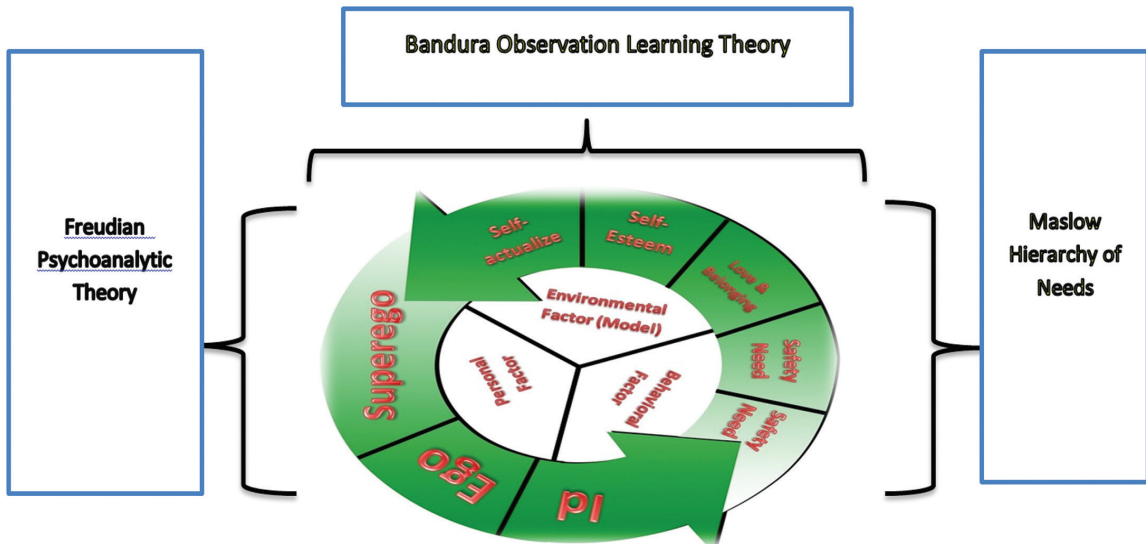
This section presents a minimal set of self-evident truth or axioms that would later be used to generate propositions and eventually develop the main theory of the study. The argument on root

causes of corruption is based on the query, *when can an individual become vulnerable to corruption?*

Basically man's behavior is influenced by personal, behavioral and environmental factors. This premise is primarily anchored on Bandura's Observational Learning, Freud's Personality Trait Structures and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.

Man by nature has needs from the basic to the higher needs (Maslow, 2009). Needs are governed by a human personality structure called the *id* that serves as motivator to satisfy one's needs (Freud, 2004). However, another personality structure the *ego*, deals with the demands of reality and lead a person make decisions. Such decisions are based on the *superego* that dictates which act is good or bad. This cycle guides a person to survive in his everyday living. The cycle of personality structures in satisfying man's needs may be affected or influenced by external factors such as, opportunity to cope with the needs, behavior of others that model how to satisfy the needs and pressures (Bandura, 2001). A framework of the interrelationship of the three theories is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Psychosocial Bases of Corruption



According to Freud (2002), our moral conscience only defines good behavior and sets rules which are considered bad. When we engage in actions that conform to goodness, we feel good about ourselves or proud of our accomplishments. When we do things that our conscience considers bad, we experience feelings of guilt. Sense of guilt is a product of struggle between ego and super ego, its degree is being affected if the individual is incapable of remorse after doing something which is considered to deviate from the social norms. Thus, our **Axiom 1 is: A person has the capability of doing bad things. He also has a sense of guilt.**

Vedackumchery (2001) argues that impurity of the conscience increased the low sense of guilt of a person. A person gets to use of doing bad acts because his own judgment towards an act is not perceived as bad. Things are based on truth; people who often committed crime and any other deceit and impurities know the truth but were blinded with lies that lead them to skip out of their conscience, remove their sense of guilt and loss their fear in judgment and condemnation both in human or spiritual law. As individuals, we are aware that each of us is very vulnerable in different kinds of temptation that lead us to commit bad actions. Because of that vulnerability, we become immune and loss our sense of guilt. The situation above can lead to **Axiom 2: that people with low sense of guilt would likely tend to commit bad acts.**

People who do not feel guilty every time they commit bad acts cannot manifest an ill feeling or shame towards other people. According to Hedman (2013), guilt may not influence the social anxiety disorder (*ill*) of an individual; it can be hidden because the doer use to do acts that does not conform to the social norms. One can do anything and can be a strange advantage over the majority of people who are kept in line by their conscience. These people practicing corrupt acts will most likely remain undiscovered. This strengthens the desire of doing bad acts to satisfy their basic and security needs.

Axiom 3: People will imitate other behaviors/ actions if they perceived such actions as favorable to them. Beccaria (2008) argues that crime is an act of less work but greater pay off. Hence, corruption in general is categorized as a crime. It carries the same criteria of offering pleasure towards the individual. On the other hand, the *id* which observes the pleasure principle drives for an immediate satisfaction of the desire. Satisfaction of the desire is not always realistic or even possible. It rules entirely by the pleasure principle, one may find grabbing from other people's hands just to satisfy the craving. He may also imitate another's action/behavior if he perceives that the act is pleasurable which can satisfy his needs.

The above situation can lead to **Proposition which is individuals with low sense of guilt will eventually imitate observable anti-social acts that would immediately satisfy their needs.** When people in the environment are doing bad act, others may learn and follow the same. According to McLeod (2013), learning would be exceedingly laborious, not to mention hazardous, if people had to rely solely on the effects of their own actions to inform them what to do. Fortunately, most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling: from observing others, one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions, this coded information serves as a guide for action. They pay attention to some of these people (models) and encode their behavior. At a later time, they may imitate the behavior they have observed. On the principles of Felson and Clark (2010), some products offer more tempting crime opportunities. Corruption as a crime depends on two things: the presence of at least one motivated offender who is ready or willing to engage in a crime, and the conditions of the environment in which that offender is situated, to wit, opportunities for crime. According to Cohen, Felson, and Lane (2008), crimes require opportunity, but not every opportunity is followed by crime. A large part

of this assumption focuses on how variations in lifestyle or routine activities affect the opportunities for crime. Opportunity becomes the limiting factor that determines the outcome in an environment prone to crime because the offender generally has little or no control over the conditions of the environment and the conditions that permit particular crimes are often rare, unlikely or preventable. Thus, it can be assumed that **(Axiom 4) Acts of Corruption always offers opportunity to an individual.**

Satisfaction of the need is not always realistic or even possible. It is ruled entirely by the pleasure principle that we might find our self grabbing out what other people's hands to satisfy our own craving. People tend to commit crime if they perceived that it has only less risk (punishment) and greater reward out of that action (Becarria, 2008). Thus, it leads to the **proposition 2: That individual will engage himself in a crime of corruption if he finds that punishment towards such act is lesser than the favor he can get out of it.** There is another type of corruption that is consummated in a small scale which is called *Petty Corruption*. It refers to the modest sums of money usually involved, and has also been called "low level" and "street level". This kind of corruption is experienced

more or less daily in their encounter with public administration and services like hospitals, schools, local licensing authorities, police, taxing authorities and so on. People committing this are in authority where they can invoke discretion of judgment. This phenomenon attracts individuals who might offer bribes in lewd of the service needed.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs describes that self-actualizer is a person who is living creatively and fully using his or her potentials. In his study, Maslow found that self-actualizers share similarities whether famous or unknown, educated or not, rich or poor. Self-actualized people approve or disapprove certain actions quite instinctively. A person with high moral of conscience knows what is right from wrong and because of that, he highly reaches his goal in moral standard. Self-actualizer tends to fit on the profile in Figure 2. With these qualities it can be said with **Axiom 5: Individuals with self-actualize qualities will sustain their lifestyle with moral deeds.**

Axiom 3, Axiom 4 and Axiom 5 **derived the Proposition 3: that an individual who has self-actualized qualities will only imitate moral acts and avoid immoral acts (corruption).**

Figure 2. Self- Actualize Qualities

Self- Actualized People	
1. Efficient perception of reality	Ability to perceive other people correctly and efficiently, to see reality as it is, rather than as they wish it to be.
2. Comfortable acceptance of self, others, nature	They respect and esteem themselves and others. They are not, however, self-satisfied but are concerned about discrepancies between what is and what might be or should be in themselves, others, and society.
3. Spontaneity	They are not externally motivated or even goal-directed- rather their motivation is the internal one of growth and development, the actualization of themselves and their potentialities.

4. Task Centering	They are mission-oriented, often on the basis of a sense of responsibility, duty, or obligation rather than personal choice. This characteristic would appear to be related to the security and lack of defensiveness leading to compassionateness.
5. Continued Freshness of application	They are ready and willing to learn from anyone. Learning from them is not the end but the beginning of continuous application from all they've learned.
6. Continued freshness of appreciation	The repeatedly, though not continuously, experience awe, pleasure, and wonder in their everyday world.
7. Fellowship with humanity	Deep interpersonal relations with others. They are selective, however their circle of friends may be small, usually consisting of other self-actualizing persons, but the capacity is there. They attract others to them as admirers or disciples.
8. Comfort with solitude	The quality of detachment; the need for privacy. It is perhaps related to a sense of security and self-sufficiency.
9. None-hostile sense of humor	Their sense of humor was the spontaneous, thoughtful type, intrinsic to the situation. It does not involve hostility, superiority, or sarcasm.
10. Peak experience	They have experiences of ecstasy, awe, and wonder with feelings of limitless horizons opening up, followed by the conviction that the experience was important and had a carry-over into everyday life.

A person with the sense of morality will always do the right thing and he highly reaches his goal in a moral standard. Guevara (2010) defines moral as the sense of doing what is good. A person with a sense of morality will always maintain goodness in every act he or she does because if he can do even a single immoral act, he will feel guilty about it.

Proposition 4: *Self-actualized people are incorruptible.*

In the history, people like Albert Einstein and Aristotle are credited for achieving some levels of self-actualization. They may not be fully achieved it but there are some criteria or manifestation on how to achieved on the levels of self-actualization.

People who reach self-actualization are open- minded, creative, and use all his means of the talents and potential he has and does it in morally upright way. Those potentials are used

to in perceiving things which are right. They are utilized as a tool in reaching those desires and goals without any acts of corruption.

With the aforementioned propositions anchored from the theory of Freud, Bandura and Maslow, the Theory of Incorruptibility is formulated. **Theory of Incorruptibility** is a theory that explains how an individual can prevent himself to commit corrupt practices from the individual to a national scale. Psychosocial study of corruption paves way to understand how an individual can be vulnerable to very single simple of acts of corruption. With these understandings, the researchers are able to seek out on how to prevent an individual in engaging such act.

IV. HYPOTHESIS

The following hypotheses were drawn from the axioms and propositions.

Hypothesis 1: *the higher the threat of legal punishments for corruption the greater the fear of individual to commit such act.*

Hypothesis 2: *the higher spiritual learning and the greater foundation on individual's moral conscience the higher achievements of self-actualization.*

Hypothesis 3: *The higher sense of being self-actualized, the greater possibility to be incorruptible.*

V. CONCLUSION

The psychosocial determinant of corruption lies within innate, psychological and environmental aspects which simultaneously occur within an individual. To deal with these phenomena, a multiple approach must be employed considering the dimensions which contribute in the development of desire of the individual for corrupt acts. It also appears that to avoid acts of corruption, one must fully achieve self-actualization. However, it is impossible for an individual to achieve it because human is vulnerable to the pleasure offered by corruption.

Acts of corruption vary on different levels. The level of self-actualization is inversely proportionate to the different forms and level of corruptions. By adopting, practicing and internalizing these levels, this may deter the individual to engage in corrupt practices.

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