

#### 4.2.5. Corruption of personality

##### (1) *Corruption of personality – academic articles research*

Research articles about corruption of personality are revealing very interesting specific characteristics which, either combined or not, could explain some corrupt behaviours among people, often varying from minor to severe forms of corruption. Before offering an in-depth analysis of personal or personality characteristics of some people which could explain their inclination to corruption to a certain extent, first it will be considered important to offer some insights into corruption metaphors.

One of them is that corruption occurs gradually, being by excellence a process which can be described as a *slippery slope* – meaning that some people “progressively neglect the interests of other individuals while pursuing selfish interests” and thus “slide into ”corruption” (Köbis et al., 2017, p. 1). On the other side, there is the metaphor describing corruption as a *steep-cliff* process – “meaning that corruption occurs when people seize a one-time opportunity for severe corruption” (Köbis et al., 2017, p. 1).

In a wider sense, corruption practices are seen as ethical transgressions, done by people who are constantly in search of maximizing material self-interest while keeping a positive image of themselves. From this point of view, while people commit minor ethical transgressions, they are more able to maintain a positive moral view of themselves. On the other hand, while people commit more severe acts of corruption, they are not able to maintain the same level of morality and require an update of their self-concepts, being caught in what is known to result in the *slippery slope*. At a certain point within the process, corruption might become normalized and the graduality of corruption actions is more evident – people tend to be engaged in more and more severe forms of corruption once the process starts. Or, as it is argued, “the *slippery-slope effect* may increase unethical behaviour by facilitating one’s propensity to morally disengage across a series of gradually changing ethical decisions” (Welsh et al., 2015, p. 115).

The other, a somehow opposing metaphor of corruption, that of the *steep-cliff*, suggests that people tend to be overwhelmed and very tempted to accept certain “chances” which might appear as golden opportunities. Large benefits, usually coming in a very short period, are extremely tempting. This severe corruption behaviour might further translate into other similar types of behaviours, mainly because it seems to be more easily rationalized than the others, small steps from the metaphor explained above. The principle “once does not count” seems to apply here, thus leading people untroubled by the moral self-concept (which can, sometimes, be psychologically demanding). A single act of corruption requires less intentionality and planning than repeated behaviours (Köbis et al., 2017, p. 9).

Another relevant metaphor regarding corruption linked as well to corruption of personality, and thus important to be taken into account and to be included in the Museum is that corruption sometimes behaves like a *self-fulfilling prophecy*. According to Corbacho et al. (2016, p. 1077), the central claim of this metaphor

is that the individual returns to corruption represent a function of the perceived corruptibility of the other members of society. Empirically, this implies that if one was to exogenously increase beliefs about societal levels of corruption, willingness to engage in corruption should also increase.

Generally, when talking about the reasons why certain people are more inclined and even decide to engage in corrupted behaviours, there are mainly two types of arguments – both referring to the role the individual assigns to the community. For some people, the community's role might be in the background; the community is regarded as the entity which is investing individuals with norms and sanctions for possible illicit behaviours, but not operating directly on an individual level. For others, the community's role might be at the forefront, meaning that individual choices of illegal behaviour are almost meaningless without any reference to the choices of the community (sometimes similar choices). Here, illicit behaviour is regarded as an intrinsically social phenomenon (Corbacho et al., 2016).

In short, these two scenarios refer to the ways people perceive the communities to which they belong. Specifically, while the

first implies that holding individual moral values and expectations about punishment, constant beliefs about the societal frequency of corruption should hold little sway over decisions about corrupt action. The second view holds the opposite: The higher individuals perceive the level of corruption in society to be, the more inclined they will be to engage in corrupt behaviour themselves. In this latter scenario, corruption behaves as a self-fulfilling prophecy (Corbacho et al., 2016, p. 1078).

This latter scenario which refers to corruption as a self-fulfilling prophecy is also linked to one idea which is constantly referred to in the literature about corruption – the idea that *corruption breeds corruption*. In this context, Ghatak and Iyengar (2014, p. 122) start from the very circulated idea that corruption might be interpreted either with reference to the legal or the moral angle. In terms of morality, things are not that simple in the sense that the perceptions of morality vary according to the culture in society, to its dynamics. In terms of legality, things are also complicated: what is illegal is not always immoral/ amoral (see also the examples regarding the corruption of language in Nazi Germany). Therefore, taking into account either one or both references to corruption, this might result in wrong characterizations of certain situations as corrupted behaviours:

For example, if corruption has to be equated with morality, the son/daughter who does not take proper care of his/her old parents should also be considered as corrupt. Again, if a car illegally enters a one-way road for the malfunctioning of traffic lights, that incident cannot be taken as a case of corruption<sup>1</sup>

Ghatak and Iyengar (2014, p. 124) argue that people in general inherently have some individual traits which force them to adopt certain practices of corruption. Accordingly, in a social scenario, people tend to function based on two main traits which could explain their engagement in

corruption practices: the individual tendency towards ‘getting away without getting caught’ (GAGC) and the Step-Up-Tendency (SUT). The first tendency – GAGC – refers to the fact that “human beings generally try to rationalize their actions up to a point where they can see themselves as a decent or ‘moral’ human being” (Ghatak & Iyengar, 2014, p. 124). They do not want to look like a severely corrupted person, but they cannot stay away from dishonest behaviours. Thus, the majority cheat a little and stop cheating at the moment when they cannot justify their corrupt behaviour or feel they cannot maintain a positive self-image. The second one – SUT – is a widely spread tendency among individuals in service:

For those who take pride from their works, who own their works, and attach values to their works, they mainly exercise this tendency by increasing the key parameter of their reputations. For example, a professor in an elite college does it by writing more papers, by recruiting more graduate students under supervision, by collaborating with famous researchers, to climb up the ladder of the concerned field, to own good publications, to get job offers in better colleges and to establish a reputation among the peers (Ghatak & Iyengar, 2014, p. 124).

Against this background, besides people who feel pride in their jobs, some do not. In their case, they seem to mix up the two paths and choose the least resistant to reach higher positions. At this point, the two authors ask about the situation when the path of least resistance does not fulfil the latter type of human beings with the necessary elevation they have anticipated. Their answer is that, in such a situation, they necessarily succumb to corruption, extortion, bribery and various other conducts that abuse the public office for private gain (Ghatak & Iyengar, 2014, p. 124).

Here is the moment when the authors introduce the idea that *corruption breeds corruption*. Mainly based on the two above-mentioned individual tendencies – GAGC and SUT – once entered within a specific service/ sector, certain practices of corruption act like “a malignant cell of cancer that breeds itself to cover the whole body. The problem of self-breeding is very similar to what happens for malignant cells in the case of cancer” (Ghatak & Iyengar, 2014, p. 125).

With reference to this very contested metaphor about corruption which breeds corruption, Torfason et al. (2013) offer an interesting perspective regarding the link between tips and bribes. According to the authors, for some, it may seem strange to associate corrupt behaviours, such as bribery, with altruistic behaviours, such as tipping. However, as the authors note, tips and bribes are very similar in the sense that both are gifts intended to strengthen social bonds and each is offered in conjunction with advantageous service. The main difference between the two types of gift are in connection to the temporal dimension: tips follow the rendering of a service, whereas bribes precede it (Torfason et al., 2013, p. 348). If following this line of thought, then the idea that corruption feeds corruption might get higher proportions. One possible explanation might be linked to what was explained earlier in the text, namely to the idea that unethical behaviour might develop gradually, just as described in the *slippery-slope* metaphor regarding corruption (Gino & Bazerman, 2009). This type of behaviour might, in turn, be associated with certain low levels of subjective wellbeing, happiness, and general life satisfaction (Tavits, 2008).

Another important model referring to corruption takes into account the prospection processes involved in these different acts of corruption; prospection refers to the ability to mentally simulate and evaluate the pleasurable or painful nature of future events, which, in turn, crucially influences the course of further actions and behaviours. Against this backdrop, researchers talk about *corruption as a social dilemma*, broadly defined as situations in which short-term self-interest is at odds with longer-term collective interests (Köbis et al., 2016). The authors formalize corruption dilemmas as an extension to social dilemmas dealing with shared resources, that is common pool resource dilemmas. These can take the form of take-some dilemmas (common resource dilemmas) or give-some dilemmas (public goods dilemmas). In a common resource dilemma, a group extracts from a shared resource – for example, common fishery. The group seeks to avoid overuse so that the resource will not be depleted. Conversely, in a public goods dilemma, a group of people contributes to the provision or maintenance of a shared good – for example, tax payments to sponsor the public infrastructure. The group has to ensure tax payments and avoid free-riding so that the common contribution can sustain the public infrastructure. In the original formulations of these two common pool resource dilemmas, each member of the group decides individually and freely how much to contribute and/ or how much to use for the common good. Extensive research shows that free decisional structures lead to common resource depletion. One crucial reason for this “tragedy of the commons” lies in the incapability of each individual to adequately foresee the long-term collective costs that are caused by pursuing immediate self-interest—for example, to overfish the common fishery grounds (Köbis et al., 2016, p. 72).

The same authors try to explain the most important psychological factors involved in corruption dilemmas. Therefore, they analyse both the intrapersonal (cost-benefit calculations, self-control, guilt) and interpersonal psychological factors (social norms, trust), in the attempt to offer a comprehensive view about corruption as a social dilemma. The table below is very illustrative:

<b>Individual Corruption</b> Involves one corrupt agent	<b>Psychological Dynamics</b> Power holder facing corruption dilemma	<b>Interpersonal Corruption</b> Involves multiple corrupt agents
Less complex: no other corrupt agents that influences cost-benefit prospection	<b>1. Prospection of costs and benefits</b>	More complex: corrupt partners obscure cost-benefit prospection
Victim as only reference group for the feeling of guilt  Guilt proneness reduces chances of individual corruption	<b>2. Guilt</b>	Multiple possible reference groups for the feeling of guilt  Guilt proneness can reduce or increase chances of interpersonal corruption
Prevents impulsive corrupt acts  Less important for repeated corruption	<b>3. Self-control</b>	Prevents impulsive corrupt acts  More important for repeated corruption
Serves as a heuristic for corrupt decision  No secondary dynamic	<b>4. Social Norms</b>	More important heuristic for corrupt decision  Secondary dynamic: emergence of corrupt social norms
Undermines societal trust  Does not require interpersonal trust	<b>5. Trust</b>	Undermines societal trust  Requires interpersonal trust

Table 5. Corruption as a social dilemma (Köbis et al., 2016, p. 73)

At the same time, it is important to mention here the references to the academic association between corruption and postmaterialist values. Even if it is more a matter of how corruption is linked to culture, we believe that postmaterialist values could give some directions towards certain individual-level traits which might lead people to get engaged in corruption actions. Previous studies assume a negative association between postmaterialist values and corruption. According to Kravtsova et al. (2016, p. 2)

This assumption is based on two theoretical considerations. First, postmaterialism is linked to civic activism, support for democracy and transparency, generalized trust, social justice, and impartiality [...]. As all these qualities are in opposition to corruption, one can expect that post-materialists tend to disapprove of corruption more than materialists do. Second, people who express materialist views often live under relatively insecure conditions. They may have no access to quality public services, including medical care and education, or they need to defend themselves and their families against “the grabbing hand” of the state [...]. In this case, corruption may be accepted and tolerated as a means to cope with insecurity.

As noted by Johnston (2005, p. 121), “poverty, insecurity and the need for protection, often associated with materialist values, nurture corruption”. Similarly, corruption and clientelism are used as a personal security mechanism when formal institutions do not work. Postmaterialists, in turn, tend to live under more secure conditions and thus have fewer reasons to resort to corruption (Kravtsova et al., 2016, p. 2).

### *Personality and corruption – individual vs. national level*

One interesting approach which explains to some extent corrupt behaviour at either individual or national level is that which takes into account the personality traits. In terms of individual personality traits, many converging lines of research have suggested that there are five main factors underpinning personality traits: neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. Neuroticism (the opposite end of which is known as emotional stability) describes individuals’ tendencies to be depressed, anxious, emotionally erratic and lacking self-esteem. Extraversion is composed of traits of sociability, dominance, and activity. Openness to experience describes individuals’ tendencies to be interested in learning, new ideas, culture, and aesthetics. Agreeableness describes individuals’ tendencies to be kind, polite and nurturing. Conscientiousness is composed of traits of achievement striving, cautiousness, dependability, and orderliness. Thus, these five factors constitute the Five-Factor Model of personality. Considerable research has explored the relationship between these five personality factors and counterproductive work behaviours (CWBs), a domain of behaviours containing corruption (Connelly & Ones, 2008, p. 356).

The same authors suggest that there are some recent studies which link CWBs to conscientiousness, agreeableness, and integrity. In a study referring to the relationship of the Big Five traits with organizational deviance (CWBs that are harmful to the organization) and

interpersonal deviance (CWBs that are harmful to other co-workers), the authors suggest that agreeableness and conscientiousness were strongly related to measures of CWBs; however, these correlations diverged slightly when interpersonal deviance was compared with organizational deviance. Conscientiousness correlated more strongly with organizational deviance than with interpersonal deviance, whereas agreeableness correlated more strongly with interpersonal deviance than with organizational deviance (Connelly & Ones, 2008, p. 356). In other terms, depending on the type of personality traits, some people are more inclined to engage in a certain type of corrupt behaviour – either in an interpersonal relationship or in a work-related one.

On the other hand, in terms of national personality traits, previous research has also found correspondence between national means on personality and Hofstede's national cultural dimension scores (Connelly & Ones, 2008, p. 358). Hofstede (2001) described four cultural dimensions: individualism/ collectivism (autonomy vs. assimilation with others), masculinity/ femininity (valuing achievements and competition vs. caring and emotional attachments), power distance (the salience of social hierarchy and the degree of inequality), and uncertainty–avoidance (the extent to which the unknown is seen as threatening). There is evidence that individualistic cultures tend to have higher mean levels of extraversion, and cultures high in uncertainty–avoidance tend to have higher means for neuroticism but lower means for agreeableness. Based on an article expressing the views of Hofstede and McCrae (2004), Connelly and Ones (2008, p. 358) offers some relevant examples:

For example, in individualistic cultures, opportunities for individual expression and individuals' autonomy are emphasized and, as a result, members of those cultures become more extraverted and more open than they might have otherwise been. In contrast, McCrae argued that the genetic effect of personality and the historical development of some genetic homology within cultures have produced these mean level differences across nations in personality scores that have likely existed for centuries. McCrae argued that these differences between nations' mean personality scores have affected the way cultures have historically developed societal norms and institutions. For example, a culture with individuals predisposed to be more dominant and outgoing (i.e., extraverted) would be less likely to emphasize conformity to the collective. Thus, this correspondence between national personality and culture is meaningful not only for validating measures of these national-level differences but also in suggesting anthropologically rich relationships between individual characteristics and the development of societies.

Put differently, besides some individual-level characteristics which might determine individuals to be more inclined than others to engage in some corrupt behaviours, there are some national-level characteristics, often embedded in a long historical tradition/ culture, which might shape people's behaviour in this sense.

In the following lines, the analysis will be focused mainly on the individual-level reasons which could drive people to engage in corruption acts. Mainly based on the *social learning theory*, according to which individuals' behaviour is acquired and sustained through (1) adopting definitions (evaluations of the behaviour as good or bad) via differential association with one's peers (friends, family, colleagues and civic organizations), (2) imitating such behaviour by peers, and (3) the positive reinforcement provided by past rewards for such behaviour,

a person is expected to engage in corrupt behaviour if he or she does not define corruption as morally or situationally wrong, but rather as a justified and acceptable model for exchange; and if he or she has been exposed to corrupt behaviour or at least perceives that such behaviour is widespread and, thus, approved (Tavits, 2010, p. 1261).

As the author notes, there are certain corruption situations which do not depend only on these social learning associated variables. Instead, there are cases in which “individual-level motivations are considered in combination with incentive structures” (Tavits, 2010, p. 1273), in order to get appropriate explanations regarding the reasons why some people get engaged in corruption acts.

Some other reasons which might determine people to engage in corruption acts are analysed by Roman and Miller (2014). They argue that, sometimes, kinship associations trump financial interests. Their argument, empirically tested, is that there are cases of corruption motivated by people’s inability to refuse blood relatives. In other terms, “kinship might be even more powerful than material gains in fostering corruption” (Roman & Miller, 2014, p. 784). Other reasons identified by the two authors are linked to the fact that some corrupt behaviours are in strong connection to the position a person holds. In other terms, individual-level corruption is highly dependent on the position in the community/ organization/ workplace; that is, some corruption behaviours are pardonable due to “ownership” of a certain position (Roman & Miller, 2014, p. 788). At the same time, Bashir and Hassan (2019, p. 2) “public officials’ motives for engaging in corruption, aside from personal gains, included friendship, higher status, and the desire to impress others”.

Other researchers investigated the influence of gender on corruption. There were some voices which claimed that women do have superior morality attitudes, which are in general associated with incorruptibility. However, these claims proved to be false in empirical studies; when exposed to opportunities and networks of corruption, women proved to act in a similar way as men did. Specifically, both male and female public servants engage in certain acts of corruption, such as nepotism and cronyism (Alhassan-Alolo, 2007, p. 236).

In another study, corruption is linked to the ability of a person (in this experiment, a public official) to reject a bribe. While objectively an official will always be able to reject a bribe, it may not be socially acceptable to do so, especially in societies where gift-giving is a standard part of social interaction (Czap & Czap, 2019). In other terms, corruption behaviour is not at all dependent on the individual-level traits, but rather context/ culture/ society dependent.

In conclusion, the relationship between corruption and personality traits is very complex, yet difficult to analyse and comprehensively understand. Nevertheless, in the lines above we have tried to review the massive literature to date on the topic and offer an image regarding, on the one hand, some of the most important corruption metaphors which could be linked to the concept of corruption of personality. On the hand, we have also tried to offer some academic literature justifications and empirically-based examples of the reasons why people start getting engaged in minor or severe corruption behaviours. The literature and examples above are to be completed and revised, mainly because they are linked to several complex concepts and phenomena from a wide variety of disciplines.



## *(2) Corruption of personality – people’s perceptions research*

There is no reference to corruption of personality from the interviews conducted in the project.

### *3. Corruption of personality – Internet agenda research*

The first 5 results after searching for corruption of personality:

1. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00223980.2015.1107523?scroll=top&needAccess=true&journalCode=vjrl20>
2. [http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci\\_arttext&pid=S1516-44462019000100095](http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S1516-44462019000100095)
3. <https://juniperpublishers.com/pbsij/pdf/PBSIJ.MS.ID.555801.pdf>
4. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1069397108321904> - already analysed in the text above
5. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/let-their-words-do-the-talking/201808/the-psychopathology-corruption>

Surprisingly, four out of five first results from the Google search on corruption of personality returned academic articles. The fifth one is not an academic, but an article on a trustworthy blog.

The first article belongs to Agbo and Iwundu (2016). Mainly based on some psychologically oriented literature, the two researchers conceptualized corruption in terms of propensity. They explored possible personality and motivation determinants of this propensity. Results revealed that extraversion and conscientiousness positively and inversely predicted corruption tendencies. Furthermore, extrinsic motivation positively potentiates corruption tendencies, whereas intrinsic motivation was inversely related to corruption tendencies. Analysis of demographic variables revealed that males were more likely to be corrupt than their female counterparts. In general, their findings are consistent with the criminal behaviour literature, which strongly suggests that the study of corruption is indeed amenable to psychological theories and methods and that individual differences variables constitute important explanatory variables in this regard (information from the abstract).

According to the second academic article, belonging to Serafim and De Barros (2019),

an individual personality is an important element in the adoption of behaviours and attitudes, with several negative personality traits having been associated with morally and ethically questionable behaviours. In the same article, it is mentioned that certain disorders (such as antisocial personality disorder) are associated with aggression and criminality. In addition, the nuances of the various personality disorders often relate to different types of violent behaviour: borderline personality disorder is more associated with interpersonal aggression than is an antisocial personality disorder, which is a risk factor for “victimless” crimes, such as corruption. On the other hand, studies have shown that individuals with higher levels of conscientiousness,

according to the five-factor model, are less likely to engage in deviant behaviour. This observation is consistent with the theoretical model since conscientiousness mainly relates to the degree of organizational capacity and evaluation of the necessary steps to reach an objective, in addition to persistence and motivation in objective-oriented behaviour. Therefore, high levels of conscientiousness are related to a greater perception of

risk, which reduces criminal engagement (information from the body of the article).

The authors from the third article, Fagbenro et al. (2019), empirically analysed the impact of the Big Five model of personality in modelling people's attitudes toward corruption in Nigeria. Their main conclusions are the following:

extraversion has a significant positive relationship with the attitude towards corruption, there was a significant positive relationship between openness to experience and attitude towards corruption, there was also a significant negative relationship between conscientiousness and attitude towards corruption, furthermore, there was a significant positive relationship between agreeableness and attitude towards corruption. Finally, there was a significant positive relationship between neuroticism and attitude towards corruption (information from the conclusion part of the article).

The information from the fourth academic article is already present in the text above. It belongs to Connelly and Ones (2008), the authors who explained the model of corruption at the individual vs. at the national level.

The fifth article belongs to Schafer (2018) and is a blog article. Some interesting ideas linked to corruption of personality are:

Corrupt people and people who are susceptible to corruption are not happy. Happy people strive to maintain happiness. Unhappy people will do anything they can to become happy. Corruption serves as a means to obtain happiness through power. Power places one person or group above another person or group creating an illusion of happiness through control. Corruption only masks insecurities. Today's political and social environments are extremely vulnerable to corruption. The people who have power want to keep it and the people who do not have the power want to take power. Both groups often resort to corruption as a means to maintain the illusion of happiness and keep the power mask firmly in place to avoid facing their insecurities.

To conclude, trying to analyse the corruption of personality reveals an array of psychological mechanisms working both at the individual and the community's level. The reasons why people engage in corruption acts might be either personal or society-embedded. Or a combination of the two, in different proportions. Despite different views on this topic, there seems to be consensus that the study of corruption, in general, cannot be complete if personality traits (either individual or national) are ignored. The same consensus might apply to the Museum of Corruption, within

which this department (strongly connected to corruption of culture) should be given specific attention.

1 This might be a good example of corruption of data as well – leading, again, to the idea that the defined departments of corruption are interdependent.