## Introduction

If one made a list of major problems we are dealing with today, I am sure that *corruption* would not make it into the top five, perhaps not even in the top ten. Mankind is now focused on other issues, such as terrorism, world hunger, global warming, poverty, or sending a manned mission to Mars. Why should we analyze corruption, when the todo-list holds plenty of items that have a greater priority? I believe the answer is simple – if we take any of the 'real' problems and break it down into smaller components, we'll see that corruption is a rather popular element, featuring in the majority of cases. Eventually, one concludes that either by eliminating corruption, or by minimizing its effect, humanity will be able to achieve better results, evolving faster and smoother.

The above makes it obvious that this issue has to be taken seriously, which is why this essay will try to analyze corruption, in order to figure out how to deal with it using today's means.

## What is corruption?

A good way to start this quest is to attempt to define corruption. The importance of having a definition should not be neglected; otherwise it will be quite difficult to aim at a target we cannot see.

> Corruption is a phenomenon that occurs as a consequence of certain personal or professional traits *(such as incompetence or greed)*; it expresses itself via abuse of privilege or status; it yields in negative effects *(such as unfair competition or poor productivity)* either for an individual, or for an enterprise, or for society as a whole.

That was an effort to come up with a generic definition that would encompass corruption of all shapes, sizes, colours and flavours. However, the result is rather blurry and ambiguous; what qualifies as a *'certain trait'*? And what is a *'negative effect'*?

If I try to narrow it down and decrease the level of abstraction, I will end up with something which will not cover some specific cases *(i.e. one can provide an example which does not seem to be an instance of corruption according to my definition, yet any person would call that 'corruption')*.

Does it mean that the right answer would be *"it depends"* or *"I'll know it when I see it"*? Does it mean that there is no unified definition for 'corruption'? My best guess is that we should

admit that coming up with a good definition is non-trivial, and the optimal approach is to invent one ad-hoc for each context, depending on the circumstances.

The problem should be further extended by pointing out that individuals are very different, and that each of us is biased by our past. On one hand, diversity prevents us from becoming a monoculture[1], on the other, it means that everyone's personal views will vary from region to region, thus a universal definition may not exist at all. We can't pursue everyone into following the same guidelines and having the same ideals; an attempt to achieve that may result in a society which is perfect for a sequel to Orwell's *"Nineteen eighty four"*.

One man's nightmare is another man's dream; one people's enemy is another people's hero. Having said that, are we still sure we can identify corruption when we see it? Corruption itself must be broken down into parts that will be examined individually, this is the only way to objectively understand what it is.

## The adverse effects of corruption

Corruption affects us all, even if we do not personally sense its presence. When we are young, it does not have a direct impact upon us, since our parents absorb the shocks of the outside world themselves. But as we grow older, we become exposed to a wide range of activities and processes, this gives us first-hand experience with corruption.

One's first encounter is usually at school, when they notice that teachers have a different attitude towards some pupils. It is then when we start asking ourselves *"why did he get a better mark?"*, *"why did the teacher put less pressure on her than she put on me?"*, or *"why was I assigned the most difficult task?"*… Sometimes the answer is obvious – *"he was better"*, *"I am more prepared for complex tasks"*; but sometimes the answer eludes us.

Questions are usually followed by attempts to answer them: *"is it because she is prettier than me?"*, *"is it because their family is richer than ours?"* etc. At that point, we learn that sometimes life can be unfair.

Unfairness is not yet corruption, most of the cases that happen to young pupils are labelled *'corruption'* because of their inability to judge things properly.

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[1] A society so homogenous, that a single threat can destroy or severely destabilize it.

Real experiences take place in high-school, and they become more evident and more serious in universities. I am not sure whether this *(i.e. 'academic corruption')* happens at a global scale, but it is likely that this applies to most ex-Soviet states, as well as to other states at the same level of economical development. It is also safe to assume that the phenomenon occurs in wealthier states too, because I will later point out that the causes of corruption are not only economical, but also psychological.

Academic corruption has marked me in many ways, it made me see the world in a different light, and it made me doubt the brightness of our society's future. On the flipside, it made me aware of the existing problems; it convinced me that I have to permanently improve myself in order to get ready for adulthood.

Throughout the university years, I was affected indirectly by the fact that so many of my colleagues shouldn't have made it to the university in the first place. Their skills are way below the minimal threshold *(for a student)*, which drags the 'sum of intelligence' down. I may seem arrogant, and I may be naïve, but I am sure that had my colleagues been more like me, I would have achieved much better results, and I would have become much better qualified in the disciplines that we studied. Professors could have put more pressure on us, but they did not, because if they did, many students would fail. If students fail, it is economically unreasonable to support a class with a small number of people in it, unless the price of education is allowed to go sky-high.

If people don't belong in a university, why do they so desperately try to get there? Simple – because it seems that one can't life a prosperous life unless they have a document that confirms they were students[2]. I should further elaborate on this, and assert that the cause of the problem is the government, which should guarantee a decent life to every citizen; after all, not all of us are rocket scientists – this does not sound impressive, but it is true, and we have to admit it *(more details about this will be provided in the next chapters)*.

What were the other effects of academic corruption? It never felt good to see how some students skip classes all the time, yet they manage to pass the exams 'automagically' and still be enrolled in the university the next semester. It doesn't take a genius to figure out that they either blatantly cheated on the exam, or bribed their way out *(this especially applies to cases in which a student does not even attend the exam)*. Things like these cannot go unnoticed, I start asking myself philosophical questions about fair-play, honesty and the story of mankind. Is it right that

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[2] This 'official paper' will then be used to get a decent job with the help of a corrupt clerk.

students are not treated equally? One day these people will graduate and become doctors who heal our children, engineers who design our nuclear power plants, architects who build our bridges, or politicians who lead us. This is just the tip of the iceberg, but it is tough enough to dampen my spirits and cast a shadow of doubt on my optimism; I have to reconsider my lifetime objectives.

Why do the teachers still expect us to respect them after all these obvious things happen? Is it really the fault of the lecturer? Or is somebody from the upper layers of the academic hierarchy foul? As I wrote earlier, some students should not have been enrolled in the first place, so maybe the problem lies within the pre-university educational system?

The conclusion is that corruption is an utterly complex organism with a great deal of tight connections; it is a *'dependency hell'*. If you try to remove it, you realize that cutting off a few branches may not be enough; sometimes you have to pull out everything, even the **root** itself.

I emphasized 'root', which should give us a rough estimation of how 'easy' it will be to solve the problem. Moreover, we are a part of the organization which we are trying to eradicate; this makes the entire plan questionable. Is it really a smart thing to cut the branch on which we stand? Can we do this without shooting ourselves in the foot? It is a classic catch 22.

## A standard solution to a standard problem

There is no need to persuade you that corruption is not good; however, I hope I succeeded in convincing you that finding a solution is tricky, and that even if we find one, it will take a long time to put it into practice, therefore corruption will not vanish instantly in a cloud of stardust.

What have we tried so far?
- *Laws and law enforcement* – a good approach, but not as good as we hoped it would be. Corruption still exists and it does not seem to plan to change its mind. Then there is the classic dilemma – *"who will guard the guards?"* This solution provides a short-term or mid-term result, but eventually we are back at square one.

- *Anonymous tips* – this is usually used in conjunction with the first approach. Naturally it would seem that this is a good mechanism to notify the authorities about suspect activities. The existence of the Internet should make this approach even more popular. But there is no visible result, because the importance of a voice is inversely proportional to the size of the crowd; also, who is the one responsible for examining these anonymous reports? What if that person is

corrupt? What if the anonymous tips were just a stupid prank or one's unorthodox way of handling competition on the free market? This solution may work in some circumstances, but in a heavily corrupt society it will most likely fail.

- *Vigilante justice* – this seems to be fairly efficient, except that they will only deal with the problems that affect them directly; they will deal with them their way *(which does not necessarily follow the word of law)*; and they will deal with problems which they **think** are problems *(i.e. those may only be problems from their prejudiced point of view)*.

Biased or not, however, these are solutions that can help defeat corruption, and they should not be abandoned.

## A non-standard solution to a standard problem

Our methods have to be changed; otherwise we are stuck in an infinite loop. The solutions I propose are mostly based on self-improvement, which means that we can bring them to life ourselves and personally take part in the healthy evolution of our society. I will also illustrate how corruption can be defeated by means of organizational undertakings.

In order to proceed, we have to figure out what the prerequisites of corruption are: **demand**, **supply** and **favourable circumstances**. From this point, it is clear that we can influence the system in three ways, by controlling the demand *(i.e. the citizens who use the services of a corrupt clerk)*, the supply *(the corrupt clerks themselves)*, or the circumstances in which the action takes place.

- *Demand* is the most difficult to control, since we know that there will always be students who know nothing but want everything, or people with money and no ethics. Therefore the solution lies within our conscience – read books, improve yourself, learn to tell right from wrong, and try to do things the right way. It is too late to educate an adult with a mentality that has already formed; but this can still work if we take our time to have conversations with our children. One cannot change the whole world, but one can change themselves, and at least a couple of close friends. The change will propagate from generation to generation, and have a remarkable long-term effect. If we were able to attach ourselves to religion, why aren't we able to attach ourselves to 'not being corrupt'?

This may sound utopian, which is why I will shift to other things **we** can do before you dismiss this essay. Why is there a demand for corruption?

- People are lazy and we always look for shortcuts *(i.e. fast and easy solutions)* – shortcuts must be avoided if they go against the law. Sometimes shortcuts are taken because we are afraid that *'the right way will be the hard way'*, fear should never force us into taking the wrong path, therefore we should always try to do the right thing before giving up or taking such a shortcut;

- Sometimes we are dumb and we don't think several steps ahead – therefore not taking into account that our actions may be illegal or they will have undesired consequences. We should never hurry unless there is actual pressure that forces us to behave so, if there are no constraints, never do things in haste;

- Sometimes we do things because others do them – a thousand lemmings **can** be wrong[3], which is why we should independently weigh every decision, evaluate the risks and the benefits before acting. This is probably the most frequent cause; just like *"an eternally repeated dream would certainly be felt and judged to be reality"*[4], many people doing wrong, can become normality;

- We should care about others. Not only that it results in us and our actions being less egoistic, but it also means that we should help a friend when they need assistance, before they decide to recur to corruption. It works with strangers too; a voice in a crowd will not be heard, but it **will** be, if the group is small;

- *Supply* - the ability of a corrupt clerk or an organization to fulfil the request of a consumer *(which can be an individual or another organization)* using illegal ways. As in the previous case, the race is only with yourself.

Being employed in a company, we must never demand a client to do more than the rules require; anything beyond that is abuse of privilege. Forcing someone to recur to corruption is worse than being corrupt *(it aggravates the problem by spreading and further tightening the connections within the system of corruption)*, thus greater penalties should be applied in such cases.

One should never accept offers to do things illegally. The first step may be small, but eventually the error will accumulate and result in a personal catastrophe *(and it can affect other people too, depending on the hierarchical status of the corrupt employee)*.

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[3] This is a reference to a classic computer puzzle game, which featured characters that would blindly go forward, even if there are obstacles or dangers in their path.
[4] Friedrich Nietzsche, in *"On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense"*

The supply/demand-related solutions are solely based on self-improvement, and can be generalized in a principle – *act as if everything you do will be made public*. They are very efficient when implemented, but their drawback is that they only work if everybody *(especially those who hold key-positions in society)* applies them. Previously I described that humanity is heterogeneous, therefore we can make an educated guess and predict that those methods will not work; not today, not on this planet, at least not yet. But maybe they will, if not used alone? After all, we still have our third factor.

- *Circumstances* – the government, the state-controlled institutions, the system in which we exist, we can control it as well. In the given context, I will simplify the problem by generalizing the state and its sub-systems into one entity – *"them"*. It should be noted that *'they **are** us and we **are** them'*, people who control the state are mortals like us, and they are elected by us. This means that the aforementioned *'individual solutions'* apply here too.

    - Removing the financial incentive to become corrupt is a good start. Employees should be motivated to follow the guidelines, while the guidelines should be reasonable. Salaries must be paid on time and they should match the amount of work done by the employee;

    - Proper handling of corrupt employees. If a teacher or a judge failed to perform their duties because of corruption, should they be permanently banned from exercising their profession? No, this is wrong; a better way to deal with this would be to manage the human resources in such a way that they 'cannot do harm'. A math teacher caught taking a bribe is still good at maths, while a corrupt judge still knows the laws. It brings us to the logical conclusion that the ex-teacher can probably be switched to writing math manuals or performing calculations in a technological company, while the ex-judge can teach law in a college. The trick is to isolate the faulty person from those who can corrupt it by controlling the surrounding environment *(in the case of the teacher – there will be no students to take bribes from; in the case of the judge – there will be no criminals who blackmail them or obscure political figures exerting pressure)*. This strategy cannot be put into practice all the time; after all, we don't have an unlimited supply of jobs, but I am sure that this method can improve the current state of things.

        A slightly similar phenomenon already occurs in today's businesses, it is described by *the Dilbert principle* – the essence of which is that an incompetent employee is promoted multiple times, until they reach a position from which they cannot do any harm to the company. It works, but it is not an optimal solution, because corporate resources are invested in a black hole *(it sucks things in, but it won't spit anything out)*.

The method can be refined by changing the employee's type of activity in a way that they are of no danger **and** are productive.

- Eliminate the human factor when it is not mandatory. State systems tend to be composed of long chains of people. Each human in the pipeline increases the total amount of time to get things done, and is a potential 'weak link' *(either they are already corrupt, or they are easily going to be convinced to become corrupt by a persuasive and rich client).* By minimizing the number of people in such a pipeline, we speed up the process, and make it less corruption-prone. The idea is to never use a person where a computer can do the job, and to avoid adding redundant people to a group that works fine.

- Do **NOT** attempt to resolve the problem by applying new surveillance technology and monitoring personnel. This method has multiple drawbacks.

First of all, it will not actually resolve the problem, because all the illegal contacts will simply happen in a place where there are no cameras or microphones. Moreover, these surveillance tools can be used to manipulate the watchers, by telling them what they want to hear or showing them what they want to see, while the 'real action' happens elsewhere.

Second – even if there is an effect, it will be caused by people's *fear* of getting caught, rather than by their unwillingness to commit a crime. In other words, surveillance will **not** minimize the *supply,* nor the *demand* – these factors are still there, and it will not take long until somebody finds a loop-hole in the system.

Finally, there is a thin line between monitoring organizations for security reasons and becoming a "Big Brother state" which invades the privacy of its citizens. We should never trade our freedoms in for 'security'. There is also a great risk, if the technology ends up being controlled by the wrong people, it will be used against us, refuting the goals of its initial design. The history of humanity is familiar with cases in which technology and power were severely abused; therefore we should avoid solutions that have the potential to end up in a disaster.

## Conclusion

Most of the anti-corruption mechanisms applied today are *reactive* measures; this means that they deal with the consequences of corruption **after** it has manifested itself. In contrast, some of the mechanisms I described are of a different nature, being *proactive*. The difference is that they prevent corruption from happening, by removing the incentive to become corrupt, as well as the factors favourable for the occurrence of corruption within an organization.

Proactive defence mechanisms should be preferred, as they are superior to their reactive counterparts. Of course, they are not the silver bullet that will suddenly convert Earth into paradise, but I am certain of the fact that they should be our next logical step. Implementing these methods does not mean that the current methods should be discarded; both approaches will be used together, because this is more appropriate for a society where corruption already exists. Perhaps in the future things will change dramatically and reactive measures will not be needed at all. My current guesstimate is that both of them will be used throughout the entire existence of mankind *(due to the subtleties of the human psyche – fear is a driving force, and we will probably never get rid of it)*.

The contents of this essay have been summarized and represented graphically as a mind-map. It allows you, my dear reader, to see all the ideas on one page, which is much easier to memorize and to share with your friends and colleagues.

The items marked with a **flag** are those which you can control yourself, either as an individual, or as the leader of a team or of an entire company. These are the items that should capture your primary focus.

The items marked with a **red X** are beyond your control, they are the concern of the state or that of the top managers *(in other words – "them")*. However, it does not mean that your role is nullified, the least you can do is try to avoid ending up in situations you cannot control.

The best way to predict the future is to implement it *(David H. Hansson, programmer)*.

# Corruption

## Effect

- impact
  - immediate
  - long-term
- scale
  - global
  - local
  - individual

## Solutions

- individual
  - don't rely on corruption
  - don't become corrupt
  - point out corruption cases
  - convince your friends to follow your example
  - educate your children properly
  - vigilante justice
- state controlled
  - establish laws
  - enforce laws
  - prosecute
  - eliminate incentives to become corrupt
  - HR management
    - re-locate problematic employees
    - place them where they can do no harm
    - automate processes (eliminate the human factor)

## Encounter

- direct (personal)
- indirect (via friend or relative)

## Showstoppers

- can get caught
  - warning
  - serious punishment
    - fired / expelled
    - retrogradation
    - banned from practicing a profession
    - prison
    - economic penalties
- will feel bad about it
  - hate one's self
  - not being a role model for children
  - criticized by parents and friends
  - fear to get caught, paranoia

## Cause

- Greed
- Incompetence
- Blackmail
- Poverty
- Lack of experience
- Human error
- ???
- Profit

## Prerequisites

- Demand (consumer)
  - all legal approaches failed
    - a fast result is needed
    - others did it
    - they do it all the time
  - a legal approach will definitely fail
    - just taking a "shortcut"
    - personal belief (they do the right thing)
    - reasonable failure
    - unreasonable failure
- Supply (employee)
  - own fault
    - blackmail
    - force majeur
  - greed
  - accidental error
  - need of money (poverty)
  - evil personality
  - personal belief (they do the right thing)
  - incompetence
  - forced by superiors/circumstances
  - "accumulated error" (too late to do the right thing)
- Favorable circumstances

## Definition

- Biased
- Context-dependent
- Inexisting