

BOOK REVIEW

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Anticorruption The MIT Essential Knowledge Series

Abstract

The MIT Press Essential Knowledge series provides the reader with accessible, concise, yet interesting and completely up-to-date information. Each part was written by excellent experts on the subject, in a language understood by non-experts, too. In this way, the current research data and results in the field of each topic can be really used. Nowadays, it is not easy to find in the endless set of information obtainable on the World Wide Web those that essentially provide the fundamental knowledge on a particular topic. The MIT series fill a gap in this. The topic of the present volume of the series is the anticorruption, as a world phenomenon, its current development and situation. And the topicality of the current theme is perhaps duly justified by the following World Bank estimate: *‘Much of the globe is infected with corruption, sapping as much as 3 percent of annual per capita GDP in large swathes of Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Even North America is hardly immune. The World Bank says that \$1 trillion or more is lost each year to corruption, globally.’* (Rotberg, 2020).

Keywords: political corruption, prevention, case studies, leadership factor, transparency

Preface

This prominent publication is a professional feat, as it adequately provides a comprehensive picture of the current state of anti-corruption processes in the world in a transparent and comprehensible way. The author Robert I. Rotberg is the Founding Director of Harvard Kennedy School’s Program on Intrastate Conflict and Conflict Resolution. His main area of expertise represents the theory

of international relations, which he has been researching for many decades. Related to this theme, he has authored a number of books that discuss corruption in some context and its possible treatments. Two other works on this topic have been published by Rotberg: *The Corruption Cure* (2017) and the *Anticorruption: How to Beat Back Political and Corporate Corruption* (2018) edited by him in the special issue of *Daedalus*.

Review

The book consists of 272 pages, ten chapters, it reveals and analyzes the dominant forms of corruption, their background, and the key reasons for its development. Furthermore, it presents possible solutions and anti-corruption procedures and techniques. The author considers leadership and its use to represent the most crucial component of preventing and combating corruption. This leadership is ready to implement changes consistently to achieve the right political culture. ‘*The phenomenon of corruption has existed since antiquity; from ancient Mesopotamia to our modern-day high-level ethical morass, people have sought a leg up, a shortcut, or an end run to power and influence.*’ (Rotberg, 2020).

Summary of the chapters

The first chapter defines an internationally accepted concept of corruption: ‘*the abuse of public office for private gain.*’ (Rotberg, 2020). It compares with other definitions through practical examples, therefore proving the exact nature of the definition. Corruption is also highlighted as a contradictory process: it is currently strengthening the degenerative process of deepening poverty in the recipient countries. Petty corruption represents a minor but high-frequency phenomenon that pervades society as a whole. While the Grand Corruption represents a larger amount, but less concerned involved in corruption.

The next section presents international organizations that index and seek to categorize corruption, such as the Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) and World Bank’s Control of Corruption Indicator (CCI). However, categorizing each type of corruption is a complex task due to their differentiation. The official ranking did not change significantly in the last years, New Zealand, Finland, Denmark, Canada traditionally represent the elites of the list. The third chapter explains how the Nordic nations, New Zealand, and Canada, now all rated among the least corrupt in the world, were once overflowing with

corrupt practices, and how those were moderated and then largely extinguished (OECD, 2014). Chapter four extends the examination of how nations shifted from the corrupt to the non-corrupt sides of the ledger in South America and Central America, and particularly to the modern cases of Uruguay, Chile, and Costa Rica, the least corrupt governments in Latin America.

The following section presents the most important anti-corruption tools. Good practice shows that in addition to individual punishment, collective corruption-free habits need to be extended to society as a whole. Besides, a strong leadership capable of overseeing and adhering to, these best practices are needed. Strong leadership is the solution to amend. It presents the changes made based on the above through practical examples. Such are Singapore, Hong Kong, African Rwanda, or European Croatia. In these countries, determined leadership, with swift action, has achieved fundamental changes in anti-corruption activities. The anti-corruption successes of the Nordic countries, known as the Nordic example, are derived from a well-functioning social structure: *‘That means that they exhibit high levels of social trust, are wealthy with low levels of inequality, are well-educated, and expect integrity and openness from their politicians and civil servants.’* (Rotberg, 2020). In addition to the eminent Nordic countries, the author also presents successful anti-corruption good practices in South America. Like Uruguay, where 83% of the population did not encounter any administrative or other bribery (Rotberg, 2020). Social rejection of corruption has risen to standard levels in the most decent country on the continent.

In the fifth chapter, Rotberg sets out the framework needed to stop corruption: *‘Good laws, good investigative tools and techniques, diligent inspectors, committed ombudsmen, a completely free and active media, a properly functioning judiciary, and some new types of courts are essential. Conscientious and principled leadership is essential.’* (Rotberg, 2020). In detail he analyzes and presents the previous elements in common law regimes in the British Commonwealth and the United States. The following two chapters present well-functioning examples of sophisticated tools needed for transparency and official accountability through the Singapore and Hong Kong practices. The author points out that the operational effectiveness of transparency depends significantly on the system-wide cooperation of control tools. The latest technological innovations help to implement this properly and significantly. These innovations undoubtedly make it easier to gather and record credible evidence. In the penultimate chapter, the author names the leaders as clear responsible for the regulation of corruption. *‘Leaders set the tone and stage, persons in charge implicitly authorizing their subordinates to steal or cheat. Integrity or its absence, therefore seeps into the collective social consciousness either to make corruption*

an ongoing social practice.' (Rotberg, 2020). The author cites Botswana, New Zealand, Uruguay and Singapore as positive examples. In the latter, taxi drivers do not even accept the tip, which is a good indicator of the system-wide spread of the integral driving example.

Summary

In the ninth chapter, instead of usual summary, we find a very specific 13-step guide to a successful fight against corruption, of which Rotberg identifies political will as a key factor. This test encourages critically reviewing your organization's actual situation. To radically rethink the place of a given organization in the critical system outlined by the author. Especially useful and recommended for company managers and authoritarian leaders of bureaucratic organizations.

References

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