
Corruption in Polish Organizations

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Abstract:

Purpose: The primary purpose of the paper is to define the roots, causes, and other issues related to the phenomenon of corruption in Polish organisations as well as to provide recommendations as to how corruption may be prevented in Polish.

Design/Methodology/Approach: A social survey, questionnaire-based research and statistical analysis methods as the Mann-Whitney U test and Kruskal-Wallis test.

Findings: The paper shows significant correlations occurring for differences and correlations by socio-economic characteristics of the respondents and the corruption problems uncovered by the research. The conclusions present the corrupt and corrupted persons in the Polish organisations. Their characteristics result from the statistical analysis. In addition, a statistical characteristic of an employee of a Polish organisation who represented an anti-corruption stance is shown.

Practical Implications: The paper helps to understand the essence and problems of corruption and, also the ways of preventing it in Polish organisations. The work has practical significance for people in power – managers, civil servants and politicians.

Originality/Value: With the Corruption Perception Index and Democracy Index values increasingly unfavourable for Polish organisations, and the resulting status of “flawed democracy”, effective anti-corruption management practices must be found.

Keywords: Corruption perception, power, Corruption Perception Index.

JEL Classification: D73, D78, M14.

Paper Type: Research study.

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1. Introduction

The paper delves into corruption which constitutes a form of social pathology, and presents the opinions of the employees of organisations from south-eastern Poland concerning this issue. The presented considerations are related mainly to the management of organisations, but they have an interdisciplinary nature, because they also touch upon the problems of psychology, sociology, cultural anthropology, ethics and political science. Such an approach to the problem of corruption results from the need to describe this phenomenon using various perspectives and scales, human-oriented, organisation-oriented, region-oriented and society-oriented.

The paper is primarily addressed to decision-makers wielding power in Polish organisations and bearing social responsibility – i.e., to individuals with managerial responsibilities (managers, civil servants and political leaders). The second group of recipients of this paper are the remaining participants of socio-economic life, on whose awareness and attitudes depends the elimination of corruption from social and economic life and the development of the democratic system, i.e. the ecosystem of a law-observing state. This paper may also be treated as a tool to increase the civic awareness in many social groups such as managers, employees, customers, patients, voters etc. It is also a collection of rational arguments that may be used to explain to people with low awareness why corruption is undesirable and harmful.

The manner in which individuals perceive corruption is associated with their own attitudes towards it, which as a consequence influences how corruption develops or how it is prevented. In view of that, the issues tackled in the paper are important and worth discussing. The paper helps to understand the roots of corruption as well as the causes and problems linked to it, as far as Polish organisations are concerned. Furthermore, the paper points out to the steps that may be taken so as to prevent it. The primary purpose of the paper is to define the roots, causes, and other issues related to the phenomenon of corruption in Polish organisations as well as to provide recommendations as to how corruption may be prevented in Polish organisations.

2. The Roots, Causes, and Problems Associated with Corruption – Literature Review

The notion of corruption has already been approached and accounted for in ancient times, whereas the phenomenon of corruption occurs both in poor and rich countries. Contemporarily, the discussion on corruption gains ground in areas such as, law, moral philosophy, and social sciences – including economics and political science. In Polish, the word corruption appeared in the mid-1600s and derives from the Latin word *corrumpere*, meaning to rot or bastardise. In a similar vein, the word *to corrupt* in English, means to spoil, rot, or pervert.

In everyday life, although corruption is associated with bribery, its meaning spans a larger context. Corruption is approached as a form of pathology, which needs to be

eliminated (Lewicka-Strzałecka, 2012; Pietrzykowski, 2009). It is accounted for as the abuse of power or public authority for one's private – or group – gain, e.g., for an economic organisation or an institution (Lewicka-Strzałecka, 2012). Corruption is also associated with ways of acting or practices conducted so as to make use of opportunities provided by the social roles or positions held by individuals, so as to acquire socially unaccepted benefits.

It means that a corrupt person (a corruptee) performs a social role, for instance holds public office, and/or has authority and decision-making power and uses that role (function, power, decisiveness, status, position) in an illicit and independent manner so as to acquire certain benefits. A corruptee falls in line and acts against and abuses their social role (function, position, authority) whereas a corrupter takes advantage of it (Giezek, 2014; Ageeva *et al.*, 2016).

Corrupt behaviours and violence constitute the two activities that destroy an individual's moral power, authority, and integrity. An individual who due to such reasons becomes a criminal, starts to be treated as a criminal. In order to achieve more, such a person feels pressurised to proceed with that kind of behaviour and in consequence becomes even more violent. In that manner, corrupt behaviours and violence may gain in their intensity and the social damage may increase. On the other hand, it is also possible to enter into dialogue and seek balance between the two conflicts of values, owing to the democratic manner of exercising power. Psychologically speaking, the basis for combating and preventing corruption lies in human maturity – their decisiveness, self-esteem, and effectiveness (Bandura *et al.*, 2003; Bandura, 2009).

Political and public-administrative corruption aims to gain political power which is used for personal purposes. In Poland as well as in other democratic countries, corruption-related threats occur as a fusion of organised crime with authorities and economic entities. Growing corruption destroys democracy and leads to its replacement by authoritarian, “strong-arm” ruling of those in power (Kotnarowski *et al.*, 2014). At the top of state power, this may further result in kleptocracy, which is a form of ruling “with corrupt rulers who do not care about the welfare of the state” (Słownik języka polskiego PWN, 2021).

Democracy is a system that inhibits corruption, while dictatorship is a form of government that perpetuates corruption. An analogy may be made between decentralisation and centralisation of power as well as transparency and the lack thereof as far as the management of organisations is concerned. Corruption is harmful and threatens “the rule of law, democracy, human rights, violates the principles of social fairness, slows down economic development and threatens the stability of democratic institutions, and the moral foundations of society”, as stated in the Preamble of the Criminal Law Convention on Corruption (Kotnarowski *et al.*, 2014). Citizens of a country where corruption is noticeable may not use terms such as “rule of law” and “well-functioning democracy” with regard to their homeland

(Kamiński, 2010). Corruption decreases the level of civic trust in state institutions.

Destruction of democratic values of the state – such as the principle of tri-partition of power – the separation of legislative, executive and judicial powers, civil rights, freedom of speech, access to independent media and information – harms the rights of citizens and promotes corruption in state institutions. Nations and organisations with cultures that tolerate corruption lose ethical allies e.g., investors, strategic partners, suppliers, customers, clients.

International studies show that the highest number of victims of corrupted public officials may be observed in former Eastern Bloc countries such as Latvia, Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine and Poland as well as Croatia, Slovakia and Romania. This problem did not affect the countries of Western Europe. In the former Eastern Bloc countries, corruption is caused by interrelated causes such as (Pospieszyl, 2010; Kojder, 2002):

- Legal culture of the society – the legal system is defective and there are difficulties in carrying out the enforcement of law. The habit to use corruption-related practices is ingrained in the society because individual goals may not be achieved otherwise,
- Availability of goods – legally guaranteed access to all, including sought-after, goods to which the actual access is limited. Distribution of goods is done on a discretionary basis,
- Efficiency of controlling institutions – there is a high degree of state control over citizens and low citizen control over those in power, including public officials. Institutions act as advocates in their own cause.

Economic corruption is used to make profits at the expense of losses incurred by the company's management, suppliers, customers, consumers, state authorities, the economy etc. The most popular forms of corruption, as described in the literature, are: bribery, embezzlement and theft, fraud and extortion. Less popular forms of corruption include collusion, abuse of discretion (cronyism, gift giving, nepotism and clientism), and improper political donations (Stachowicz-Stanusch *et al.*, 2012).

Anti-corruption activities constitute an important factor under conditions of globalisation and geopolitical risk, as far as the credibility of Polish companies and institutions is concerned (Gurtowski *et al.*, 2011). Thus, it is in the interest of national economy to eliminate corruption from socio-economic life, as it lowers the credibility and attractiveness of the country for investors (Lewicka-Strzańska, 2012; Przesławska, 2016).

An international institution that has been studying corruption since 1996 is Transparency International. Once a year it publishes the Corruption Perception Index – abbreviated as CPI (Transparency International, 2012-2020). In the CPI ranking for 2020 (Table 1), Poland was ranked 45th out of the 180 countries under study

(Transparency International, 2021). Table 1 presents the scores that Poland has achieved in the years 2012-2020, with 100 points being potentially the best score. Transparency International's ranking shows that in terms of corruption, the situation in Poland has been deteriorating for more than four years (Transparency International, 2012-2020). The same conclusion comes from the Democracy Index, with Poland scoring 6.85 in 2020. For more than 10 years, the system in Poland has been categorised as flawed democracy. Since 2010, the Democracy Index has declined by 0.2 for Poland; while in 2020, Poland fell short by 1.16 to be categorised as full democracy (The Economist, 2021).

Table 1. *Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) in Poland and ranking by Transparency International (TI) from 2012 to 2020.*

Year	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012
CPI – point result	56	58	60	60	62	63	61	60	58
Place in the ranking	45	41	36	36	29	29	36	38	41

Source: Transparency International, 2012-2020.

Poland fights corruption in cooperation with other countries (Nowak, 2008). Among other things, Poland has been a member of the “GRECO” Group of States against Corruption since 19 May 1999. Among the 40 member states of the Council of Europe, on 27 January 1999 Poland signed the Criminal Law Convention on Corruption. Moreover, on 4 November 1999, 32 member states of the Council of Europe signed the Civil Law Anti-Corruption Convention and Poland ratified it on 11 September 2002 (Wypych, 2003).

In 2018, Polish government institutions took 998 actions to combat corruption: Police (908), Border Guard (42), Central Anti-Corruption Bureau (32), Military Police (11), Internal Security Agency (3), National Tax Administration (2), Central Anti-Corruption Bureau, 2020). In addition to the above-mentioned institutions, the elimination of corruption in Poland is handled by: the Ministry of Justice, General Prosecutor's Office, Prison Service, Stefan Batory Foundation, and more than several other non-governmental organisations (Central Anti-Corruption Bureau, 2020; Lewicka-Strzańska, 2021).

In 2018, there were 2220 suspects in crime cases related to corruption, of which 2016 were Poles, mostly men (Central Anti-Corruption Bureau, 2020). Individuals most frequently suspected of corruption offences in Poland, by age, are people who are over 50 years old (799), based on the range, 30-39 years old (557), 40-49 (544), 21-29 (285) and under 20 years old (35) – a total of 2220 suspects were recorded in 2018 (Central Anti-Corruption Bureau, 2020). Studies conducted on corruption in other countries show that extensive work experience facilitates the decision to commit corruption-related crimes (Sriyana *et al.*, 2017), which coincides with Polish statistics.

In 2018, the areas of corruption-related investigations were, law enforcement agencies, army (117), customs and tax administration (35), government administration (20), economic sector (15), local government administration (15), state-owned companies (8), the judiciary (5), parliamentarians (3), health service and pharmacy (3), education (2), EU programs (2), financial institutions, supervisory authorities (1) (Central Anti-Corruption Bureau, 2020).

Generally, using the year 2018 as an example, it may be assumed that a statistical most frequently corrupted or corrupting individual in a Polish organisation was a middle-aged man with Polish citizenship. Out of 226 anti-corruption proceedings, more than 51% involved law enforcement agencies, including the military; more than 15% involved customs and tax administration; more than 8% involved government administration; and the remaining cases involved private enterprises, local government administration and other socio-economic entities.

The highest number of corruption-related offences in Poland in 2018 was registered in the Kujawsko-Pomorskie Province (7149), and the lowest – in the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Province (386) (Central Anti-Corruption Bureau, 2020).

Apart from institutions fighting corruption, in Poland there are also organisations such as public opinion research centres that conduct regular surveys regarding how corruption is perceived by Polish citizens. These include Centre for Public Opinion Research (CBOS) and TNS OBOP (Lewicka-Strzałecka, 2018). The CBOS research, conducted in May 2017 and based on a representative random sample of 1,034 adult inhabitants of Poland, shows that for the majority, i.e. for as many as 76% of the respondents, corruption was a big social problem, whereas one third of the respondents (31%) considered corruption to be a very big problem. The following conclusions were also drawn from the afore-mentioned research (Centre for Public Opinion Research, 2017a; 2017b):

1. Bribes were mainly offered to “residents of the largest cities (16%), people with higher education (11%), respondents with monthly per capita income of PLN 2,000 or more (11%), and in professional groups – mostly to managers and well-qualified specialists (14%), middle-level employees (12%) and entrepreneurs (12%)”,
2. Between 2013 and 2017, the proportion of people declaring to have given bribes decreased from 9% to 6%. This group mainly included: farmers (12%), service workers (12%), and managers and specialists (10%). In the 1990s, the percentage of people declaring to have given bribes reached 20%,
3. Areas of social life where corruption occurs are: politics (48% of respondents’ opinions), health care (38%) and courts and prosecutors (32%),
4. Institutions where corruption occurs are: local government administration offices (30%), central offices and ministries (21%), state-owned

companies (17%), police (16%), private enterprises (12%), banks (5%), and education and science (2%),

5. The main reasons for bribery are: the desire to have things done properly (better and/or faster) (the number of indications increased from 55% to 61% between 2013 and 2017); a belief that bribes are expected by people who may have a particular matter done (the number of indications decreased from 33% to 27% between 2013 and 2017).

In the years 2020-2021, the COVID-19 pandemic raised the risk of corruption and corruption-related offences in Polish organisations (Tomaszewska-Michalak *et al.*, 2021).

3. Methods

The detailed characteristics of the conducted research on corruption in Polish organisations include:

1. The research team: O. Lozinski, T. Piecuch, M. Jankowska-Mihulowicz, K. Chudy-Laskowska, E. Szczygiel,
2. Research tool and its description: survey form (5 pages); survey questions on respondents' perception of corruption and organisational culture. The research was anonymous,
3. Research period: 5-15 March 2018,
4. Population surveyed: workers aged 20-65 years employed in different organisations (institutions and enterprises),
5. Research area: south-eastern Poland,
6. Description of statistical analysis: the identification of relationships between mixed characteristics was performed. Statistica 10. PL and Excel 10 programs were used in the research. The research was performed at the significance level $\alpha=0.05$. It is assumed that: when the test probability $p < 0.05$ there is a statistically significant relationship (indicated by*); $p < 0.01$ there is a highly significant relationship (**); $p < 0.001$ there is a very highly statistically significant relationship (***). The Mann-Whitney U test and Kruskal-Wallis test by ranks were used.

The opinions of 173 respondents on corruption in Polish organisations were examined. The criterion for the selection of the research sample was the availability of respondents, i.e., obtaining their consent to fill in the questionnaire. There were 93 respondents aged up to 35 years (54%), 78 respondents aged 36-55 years (45%) and 2 respondents aged 56 years and over (1%).

Among the respondents there were 82 men (47%) and 91 women (53%). The number of respondents living in the city (88) and in the countryside (85) was comparable. The education of the respondents can be characterized similarly, almost half had secondary education (84) and more than half had higher education (89). The percentage of respondents according to the income criterion was as follows: irregular

– 16; low: up to 1499 PLN – 11%; medium: PLN 1500-4999 – 71% and high: PLN 5000-9999 – 2.5%. Most respondents held executive positions (131 people, 76%) and 42 respondents were managers (24%). Most declared membership in a traditional church (151 people, 87%), 17 people had their own understanding of God (10%) and 5 respondents declared atheism (3%).

The structure of the questionnaire form included: a questionnaire and 10 thematic blocks referring to the issue of corruption. Partial results of the research on the differences in the perception of corruption by employees of organizations were presented below.

The main aim of the research was to determine the causes and problems of corruption in Polish organisations.

4. Results

A highly statistically significant relationship (test probability $p < 0.001$) was found for education and need for care from the government. Workers with secondary education had a higher need for care from the government than those with higher education ($p = 0.0006$). Statistically highly significant correlations ($p < 0.01$) were found for the following differences and correlations by socio-economic characteristics of the respondents:

1. Paternalistic perceptions of authority were more characteristic of workers living in rural areas than of those living in urban areas ($p = 0.0011$),
2. Paternalistic perceptions of authority were more characteristic of workers with secondary education ($p = 0.0012$),
3. Workers belonging to the traditional church expected the state to take care of them ($p = 0.0037$),
4. Atheists showed the greatest acceptance of electoral corruption ($p = 0.0038$),
5. Anti-corruption radicalism was higher among workers with higher education than among those with secondary education ($p = 0.0048$).

Statistically significant correlations ($p < 0.05$) were identified in cases of the following differences and correlations by socio-economic characteristics of the respondents:

1. Higher anti-corruption radicalism was characterised by workers living in the city than those living in the countryside ($p = 0.0201$),
2. Employees living in the countryside were more willing to submit to legal authority than those living in the city ($p = 0.0201$),
3. The highest acquiescence to workplace corruption was found in the atheist group and the lowest in the group of workers attending a traditional church ($p = 0.0208$),

4. The need for care from the state was felt more by employees working in executive positions than in managerial positions ($p = 0.0213$),
5. Ambivalence towards corrupt situations was lowest among employees attending a traditional church and highest among atheists ($p = 0.0322$),
6. Employees with high incomes were less likely to idealize authority than employees with irregular, low and middle incomes ($p = 0.0451$),
7. Workers with high incomes were less critical of electoral corruption than workers with irregular, low and middle incomes ($p = 0.0462$).

The research allowed to conclude that there are no differences in the perception of corruption according to the gender and age of the respondents. The majority of the surveyed employees (73%) declared that they would not agree to their participation in official abuse, which would be induced by a superior. However, the remaining respondents considered that it was “not appropriate to refuse him” – consent was declared by 8% and partial consent by 20% of the respondents.

Consent to the payment of wages in violation of labour legislation (withholding of wages, incomplete payment of wages, wages in “envelopes”) was expressed by 13% of respondents, partial consent was declared by 21%, and 66% of survey participants disagreed with the form of corruption presented.

The next difficult problem of corruption in Polish organisations, discovered during the research, was formulated as follows: “In order to obtain a permit, a concession, a technical proof, a privatisation act and other similar documents, one has to either lose a lot of time or »stimulate« materially the relevant officials”. As many as 14% of respondents said they agreed with this pathology and 40% of respondents partially agreed and 46% disagreed.

5. Conclusion

The literature study shows that statistically in recent years, a middle-aged man with Polish citizenship has been the person most frequently corrupted or corrupting in a Polish organisation. The research completes the picture of an employee of a Polish organisation statistically susceptible to becoming a victim of corruption as, a moderately educated inhabitant of a village, belonging to a traditional church, holding an executive position, having irregular, low or average income, idealising people with power and feeling the need for care from the state. From the research conducted, there also emerges a picture of an employee of a Polish organisation statistically susceptible to corrupting others - this is a rural dweller of medium education, high income, who is an atheist.

Additionally, it can be noted that the high income of the respondents was a factor that reduced criticism of electoral corruption. The research shows that an anti-corruption attitude was held by a statistical employee of a Polish organisation with the following characteristics: a city dweller, having a higher education, belonging to

a traditional church, holding a managerial position, having a high income, not idealising people with power and having a relatively lower need for care from the state than other employees. Corruption is influenced by subjective factors, but also by situational factors. Therefore, the conclusions of the study also provide recommendations for the prevention of corruption for managers of Polish organisations.

The requirements, for managers, officials and political leaders, in terms of counteracting corruption have two interrelated dimensions. The first are the following legal challenges, the rule of law and respect for the law, striving to democratise organisational culture and eliminate authoritarian tendencies, e.g., the separation of powers, transparency – ensuring that citizens of the state and subordinates in organisations have public access to important and objective information, e.g., independence of the media from political forces, legal qualification of corruption as a criminal activity, ensuring control over people in power and conditions for the effective work of anti-corruption bodies, bringing justice to corrupt entities, increasing the competence and responsibility of political and public officials by providing appeal procedures, open recruitment of civil servants, preventing the creation of legal precedents, which over time may become rules that are harmful to individuals, social groups or society as a whole.

Legal requirements are complemented by social challenges such as, raising the standards of social life, reducing bureaucracy in the work of institutions, eliminating the situation of corporate dependence of employees on corrupt superiors, adherence to codes of ethics, increasing anti-corruption education and eliminating barriers to access to it, striving for safety and stability in social life – dialogue and democratic search for balance between conflicts of values and crisis resolution. When these postulates are implemented by those in power in Polish organizations, the phenomenon of corruption should decrease, and Poland's organizations and political system should achieve full democracy.

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