Chapter 10
Tools for the Diagnosis of Corruption Symptoms in Government Entities:
The Colombian Case

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ABSTRACT

This chapter describes, through a phenomenological analysis, the experiences of a group of 18 selected executives, advisors, and professionals from public organizations in Colombia, who have either participated in or observed corrupt practices up close. The purpose of this analysis is to design a diagnostic tool for identifying characteristics elements that serve as an indicator of corruption risks in public entities. To achieve this goal, in accordance with the phenomenological method, the interviewees were asked to narrate their experiences, which were reduced to eidetic categories using an inductive coding approach. Categories were then organized into a textural narration that exposed the noema. Finally, the results were interpreted by identifying 13 characteristic elements in 4 typical corrupt behaviors. From these, a Likert scale instrument was developed to diagnose symptoms of corruption to be applied in public entities as a complement to the traditional risk assessment systems within the audit and control processes.

INTRODUCTION

This study defines organizations as complex social systems in which an individual's behavior is determined by the social system in which they interact (Schein, 1994, p. 6). Social structures define the roles, responsibilities, and capabilities of individuals that make them up through culture understood as "a dynamic phenomenon that surrounds us at all times, being constantly enacted and created by our interactions with others and shaped by leadership behavior, and a set of structures, routines, rules, and norms that guide and constrain behavior" (Schein, 1994, 2004, p. 1). From this perspective, public corruption can be studied as behavior (Nye, 1967) that comprises a set of individual decisions and collective actions aimed at accepting or participating in unethical conduct.

In this context, this research starts from the premise that a detailed description and analysis of the individual and collective mechanisms performed by members of an organization when participating in corrupt actions will allow the establishment of the symptoms of a corrupt social structure and, consequently, developing effective tools to detect and control irregular actions in organizations. The identification, description, and analysis of corrupt behaviors of a specific group of public officials were carried out using the phenomenological method (Husserl, 1962) as follows: first, 18 government officials were interviewed in-depth, and they were asked to narrate their life experiences around acts of corruption experienced or observed in their daily lives. Once the narratives were transcribed, the eidetic reduction was carried out using inductive coding. The resulting categories were then organized into a textural narration that exposed the noema. Finally, the results were interpreted to develop an instrument for diagnosing corrupt symptomatology in organizations.

The results of this approach to the symptoms of corruption in government organizations are presented in two stages: in the first, the fieldwork results are shown, in which the constructions and meanings of the interviewed public employees around their life experiences about corruption. In the second stage, characteristic elements of the corrupt behaviors referred to by the interviewees were identified emerging some typical corrupt behaviors*: Integrity in Public Procurement (overpricing and biased contracting practices), Clientelism and Patronage, Bribery and Facilitation payments*, which were analyzed contrasting them with relevant corruption literature. As a final result, a tool is proposed for identifying corruption risks for applying organizational internal control processes and audits of government organizations.

This proposal, rather than conflicting with the tools currently used by auditors to assess the effectiveness of internal control systems, such as those offered by the Committee of Sponsoring Organizations of Treadway (2017), becomes a complement to enrich and make their control and governance work more effective. In particular, it strengthens risk-based auditing, which is based on the identification of common symptoms in individual and collective corrupt behaviors within government organizations. Ultimately, the tool is useful for detecting corruption risks and evaluating organizational culture.

THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF CORRUPTION

According to the collective corruption approach (Ashforth & Anand, 2003; Palmer, 2008), there are four-phase process through which corruption is institutionalized in an organization:

The Initial Decision or Act: top executives make irregular decisions and use organizational mechanisms to create an unethical environment that protects themselves from blame. They achieve it through the separation of information and processes into procedural subunits focused on goals, the use of general

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