

1 Introduction

The generally accepted definition of corruption is the abuse of entrusted power for private gain.

A more detailed definition is found in the AS 8001-2021: Fraud and Corruption Control, definition 1.4.8

“dishonest activity in which a person associated with an organisation (e.g. director, executive, manager, employee or contractor) acts contrary to the interests of the organisation and abuses their position of trust in order to achieve personal advantage or advantage for another person or organisation. This can also involve corrupt conduct by the organisation, or a person purporting to act on behalf of and in the interests of the organisation, in order to secure some form of improper advantage for the organisation either directly or indirectly.”

Australian Standards. (2001)

The term ‘private gain’ can be misleading as people can act corruptly in order to further ideological aims. They may see their act as wrong, but necessary. They are concerned with the ‘big picture’ and justify their action as a pathway, i.e. the ends justify the means. In a sense there is a mathematics of consequence. The terrorist does not care about the ins and outs of bribery, their view is the larger moral picture.

As well, our concept of corruption is based on the pervading culture and norms. It may not translate well into other cultures. There is a subtlety to meaning. Although the group of people may nod in agreement when the topic of bribery, for example, is raised, what this means to each person could be very different. Professor Graycar uses the term ‘protean’. Just like the Greek myth of Proteus, corruption can take very different forms