Int J Ethics Soc 2024; 6(2): 53-61

10.22034/ijethics.6.2.53

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF Ethics & Society

Original Article

New Institutionalism and Ethical-Cultural Analysis of Administrative Corruption in Iran

Behrouz Rezaei Manesh[1], Hossein Aslipour[1], Hadi Khanmohammadi[1], Pouya Poormaghodsian[2*]

1. Department of Public Administration, Allameh Tabatabai University, Tehran.
2. Ph.D. Student of Public Administration, Human Resources, Allameh Tabatabai University, Tehran.

Corresponding Author: Pouya Poormaghodsian, Ph.D. Student of Public Administration, Human Resources, Allameh Tabatabai University, Tehran. E-mail: pouyapoormoghadasian@gmail.com

Received 28 Oct 2023 **Accepted** 04 Dec 2023 **Online Published** 26 Jul 2024

Abstract

Introduction: Administrative corruption is a global problem and the biggest obstacle to reform in any country and the biggest obstacle to progress. Corruption is the violation of existing laws to secure personal interests and profits, and it is often referred to as a severe organizational disease. This research seeks to identify the moral and cultural rules and norms underlying administrative corruption in Iran based on the theory of modern institutionalism.

Material and Methods: This research is of qualitative type and in terms of method, "qualitative content analysis" and data collection method is also based on "review of documents". The research community included cases related to administrative corruption in the courts of Tehran province, which were investigated and resulted in conviction. Among them, 19 cases were randomly selected. Data were analyzed by coding method.

Results: The findings of the research showed the impact of 19 open codes, which the researcher classified into 4 core code categories, and the conceptual model of the research was formed.

Conclusion: The results of this research show that "individualistic and materialistic institutional environment", "corrupting institutional environment", "legitimization" and "institutionalized organizational corruption" are considered as factors and institutional norms underlying administrative corruption in Iran. To deal with and prevent administrative corruption in society, organizations should be institutionalized based on moral values and administrative health beliefs.

Keywords: *Ethics, Administrative corruption, New institutionalism, Institutionalization*

How to Cite: Rezaei Manesh B, Aslipour H, Khanmohammadi H, Poormaghodsian P. New institutionalism and ethical-cultural analysis of administrative corruption in Iran, Int J Ethics Soc. 2024;6(2):53-61. doi: 10.22034/ijethics.6.2.53

INTRODUCTION

"Administrative corruption" means the misuse of government goods and facilities for personal use, which causes investments to be directed to an unproductive path, aggravation of poverty, political instability, and the destruction of the moral and legal system of society (1). Administrative corruption is a painful reality in all countries, from developed to developing countries, and it is one of the most important topics in the literature and research of "public administration" (2). "Transparency International Organization" (2022), which has offices in more than a hundred countries and prepares its annual reports based on the survey of public administration, ranks countries according to the level of corruption among public officials using the "perception of corruption" index. In terms of the global corruption perception index in 2022, Iran has been ranked 147 out of 180 countries and has dropped 17 places compared to 2017 when it was ranked 130.

The Department of Criminal Justice and Crime Prevention of the United Nations (1997) has

Copyright © 2024 Rezaei Manesh B. et al. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License(http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

defined administrative corruption as follows. "Bribery and any other behavior attributed to people who have been entrusted with responsibilities in the public or private sectors and violating their duties related to their dignity and job status as official officials, private sector employees, independent agents in order to achieve Illegal and incorrect benefits for themselves or other people (3). In the proposed bill for improving the health of the administrative system and combating corruption in the Islamic Republic of Iran (2010), a definition relatively similar to the definition of the United Nations has been presented. In this bill, corruption is defined in such a way that the same text was approved in 2013. Any behavior (whether act or omission) by any real or legal person, individually, collectively or organizationally, that intentionally and with the aim of obtaining any direct or indirect benefits or advantages for themselves or others and by deviating from or departing from Sharia rules or the laws of the country that cause harm to the interests, resources or public health or a group of people are considered corruption. Kaufman, one of the leading experts on administrative corruption, has given the following definition: Administrative corruption is the exploitation of government offices for personal gain (4). In the Law on Improving the Health of the Administrative System and Combating Corruption, administrative corruption is any act or omission by any real or legal person, individual, collective or organization, which intentionally and with the aim of obtaining any direct or indirect benefit or privilege himself or someone else or cause damage to property, interests, resources or public health and safety or a group of people such as bribery, bribery, embezzlement, collusion, misuse of administrative, political position or position, facilities or information, illegal receipt and payments from public resources and deviation from these resources towards illegal allocations, forgery, destruction or disappearance of administrative and financial records.

The new institutionalism has paid special attention to the challenge of administrative corruption. Modern institutionalism defines the institution very broadly and considers its scope to be very broad. Based on this, from the point of view of modern institutionalism, an institution is a social relationship or behavior that is taken for granted and can be predicted (5). This definition includes not only the rules and norms, but also the symbolic and cognitive systems that are placed in the lower layer of these norms and rules. The cognitive system is of great importance because it creates a "perceptual framework" that determines how the members of the organization interpret the data and information of the environment. Based on this, common knowledge determines which choice is rational and understandable, and which behavior is considered possible and practical, and finally, which options are considered by actors. In fact, institutions influence behavior not only by what a person should do, but also by determining how a person can imagine his action in a given situation (6). When actors are faced with choices, they orient themselves according to the experiences gained from previous comparable situations according to the standards of behavior that are transmitted to them from culture and society. People search for appropriate behaviors and what is appropriate for a particular person in a situation is determined by political and social institutions and is transmitted through socialization (7). Therefore, new institutionalists emphasize that institutions create paths in which solutions are sought (6).

In general, it can be said that the new institutionalism emphasizes three components in the definition of the institution. Social existence, durability and process are the three characteristics that shape the institution. In this sense, the institution is a social entity that takes a

stable and durable form in the process of being institutionalized and becomes a model for social actions and behaviors. To be more precise, it forms social behaviors. This social entity, which is referred to as an institution, covers a wide territory and can include norms, values, ideas, traditions, intellectual and thought systems, and even culture itself (8). The desired definition of modern institutionalism destroys the concept of separation between institution and culture. This has two important consequences: First, it challenges the distinction that many political scientists make between institutional explanations based on organizational structures and cultural explanations based on the understanding of culture as shared tendencies and values. Second, this approach is interested in redefining culture itself as an institution. This reflects a "cognitive turn" within sociology itself. Turning from formulations that link culture exclusively to tendencies or values to formulations that consider culture as a network of habits, symbols or patterns that provide patterns and frameworks for behavior (7).

Considering the fundamental role of moral and cultural contexts and the beliefs, values and norms of society in the occurrence of administrative corruption and the importance of institutionalism in the analysis and understanding of administrative corruption, current research is trying to identify the values, beliefs, norms and institutional environment that are the foundation of administrative corruption in Iran based on the "ethical and cultural analysis of administrative corruption in Iran from the perspective of new institutionalism". Therefore, the main question of this research is, what are the moral, cultural and institutional rules and norms underlying administrative corruption in Iran?

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The current research is of a qualitative type using the "qualitative content analysis" method, which analyzes any type of communication content (speech, texts, books and articles, newspapers, pictures, interviews, websites, etc.) that is classified. The research community included cases related to administrative corruption in the courts of Tehran province, which were investigated and resulted in conviction. Among them, 19 cases were randomly selected. The characteristics of the sample are presented in tables 1 to 4.

Table 1: Gender of participants

Gender	Frequency	Percentage frequency
Female	1	5.26
Male	18	94.74
Total	19	100

Table 2: Mean age of participants

Mean	Median	Mode	Min.	Max.
42.89	42	39	29	72

Table 3: Marriage status of participants

Marriage status	Frequency	Percentage
Single	0	0
Married (without child)	15	26.31
Married (with child)	14	73.69
Total	19	100

Table 4: Job position of participants

Position	Frequency	Percentage
Expert	2	10.5
Financial expert	7	36.8
Manager	2	10.5
Board of Directors	2	10.5
Company inspector	1	5.2
Without any organizational position	5	26.5
Total	19	100

In this research, the "document review" method was used to collect information. In relation to administrative corruption, the source of information was the cases presented in the branches of justice execution in Tehran city, and the researcher has collected the necessary information by directly visiting and attending the branches of the courts and studying these cases. Finally, the data were analyzed by coding method.

RESULTS

The first stage of data analysis in qualitative content analysis is called "open coding" during which categories and their characteristics are discovered. After the documents are written down, the researcher goes through them line by line to find codes. This process helps to inductively reveal ideas and concepts by focusing on the data. In the open coding stage, the raw information is broken into separate codes and finally categories are formed. Table 5 shows the concepts obtained from the examination of the convicts' cases, which show the moral and cultural contexts of administrative corruption in Iran.

Table 5: Results of open coding

Rows	Concepts derived from open coding
1	Knowing and manipulating the accounting computer system and mastering the financial systems
2	Ignorance of other colleagues about financial systems
3	Abuse of the concept of dignity
4	Handiness of documents
5	Forgery of documents
6	Absence of meritocracy
7	Abusing the trust of others
8	Old accounting system
9	Lack of supervision
10	Deceiving others by putting a mask of wealth on the face
11	Access to financial resources
12	Being the head of credits
13	Cost of living, financial hardship and need for money
14	Work experience and familiarity with work procedures
15	Violation of laws and regulations
16	Low conscience
17	Lack of empathy
18	Pretending to infiltrate offices
19	Trust as an employee

Coding separates the researcher from the level of experience and the grouping of codes provides the basis for the emergence of theory. A code gives the researcher an abstract view of the totality of data that before coding seemed disconnected and separate. Nominal codes conceptualize experimental materials of the field of study and "theoretical codes" conceptualize the

relationships between nominal codes to form hypotheses and theories. In table number 6, the categories obtained from theoretical coding are displayed.

Table 6: The results of data analysis and categories obtained from theoretical coding

Rows	Categories obtained from theoretical coding
1	Materialistic and individualistic institutional environment
2	Corrupt institutional environment
3	Institutionalized organizational corruption
4	Legitimization

1. *Materialistic and individualistic institutional environment*

Unlike old institutionalism, which focused more on the internal environment of organizations, modern institutionalism studies emphasize the "institutional environment" outside of organizations. And one of the prominent and important characteristics of these studies is its conceptualization of institutional environments that impose norms and rules created by the government, professional and occupational associations, and other organizations on organizations. The importance of these norms and rules in modern institutionalism is due to the provision of lenses through which actors view the world and the real classification of the structure of action and thought (7). And such elements are ready to limit the path and content of organizational actions within an organizational field by providing regulations for organizations (9). In the context of the relationship between organizations and the institutional environment, one of the main and fundamental claims in modern institutionalism is that the institutional environment shapes organizational structures, actions and processes (7). And as organizations adapt to the institutional environment, an institutional field is likely to experience severe pressure for uniformity (10, 11). By studying the case of the convicts, it is concluded that he existence of institutional norms and values of "materialism" and "individualism" in the institutional environment of Iranian organizations lead to the formation of organizations in which people have excessive greed. and to secure their personal interests and gain social respect only through the acquisition of material manifestations at any cost. People in these organizations learn that just riding a certain car or living in a certain neighborhood is valuable and earns social respect. As a result, the existence of such institutional norms in the institutional environment of Iranian organizations causes administrative corruption.

2. *Corrupt institutional environment*

Another factor and norms of the institutional environment that causes administrative corruption in Iran through a uniform process based on the theory of modern institutionalism is "fading the stigma of administrative corruption". "The ugliness of administrative corruption" as a moral value means that administrative corruption actually causes people's unhappiness not as a bad or illegal act but as an "ugly" and "unpleasant" act. Because if a person does a wrong action, it is still not a reason for others' displeasure, and they may even praise that action as "cleverness and opportunism" (1).

An ugly act is a wrongful act that is considered negative mostly in terms of social norms and values or collective morality. If this act is in conflict with the moral standards and collective values and at the same time contradicts the official law, the tolerance of the ugly act in the society will be much less. And the guilty person not only faces legal punishment, but he and his family and children have to pay a lot of dignity in front of people (friends, acquaintances, school

and work environment) (12). Based on modern institutionalism, the disappearance of the ugliness of administrative corruption when it is presented as a norm in the institutional environment and as a social model can lead to the formation of similar organizations through organizational compliance with institutional rules and norms (7). The result of this homogeneity is the disappearance of the stigma of administrative corruption in organizations that follow the rules and norms of the institutional environment.

What is deduced from the investigation of the cases is that in various organizations, when the convicted person has easy access to all kinds of administrative corruption, and this access has a legitimate and legal appearance, he commits administrative corruption without feeling any dignity cost which shows the institutionalization and removal of corruption in the institutional environment of Iranian organizations.

The disappearance of ugliness and the institutionalization of corruption in the institutional environment causes people in a range of organizations that follow that institutional environment to strongly seek to find and take advantage of the smallest opportunity to secure personal benefits.

3. Institutionalized organizational corruption

Based on modern institutionalism, when actors are faced with choices, they orient themselves according to the experiences gained from previous comparable situations and according to the standards of behavior that are transferred to them from culture and society. People search for appropriate behaviors and what is appropriate for a particular person in a particular situation is determined by social institutions and transmitted through socialization. Therefore, new institutionalists believe that institutions create paths for choosing solutions (13) and one of the important characteristics of an institution is its durability and process (11).

In this regard, one of the important characteristics of administrative corruption is that its perpetrators are often middle-aged people who have committed administrative corruption for the first time in their middle years. Because after entering the organization, they have been exposed to institutionalization and the cognitive process of creating and transmitting meaning, and during that, they have learned institutional norms and methods of cheating or circumventing that business. And they have become familiar with the opportunities that that job has given them to commit corruption (14). Therefore, on the basis of modern institutionalism, it can be concluded that administrative corruption is institutionalized in Iranian organizations, because a person without a history is gradually led to commit administrative corruption by going through the process of socialization and familiarization with institutional rules and norms.

4. Legitimization

One of the special characteristics of those convicted of administrative corruption is to gain legitimacy and trust by following institutional rules and norms (15). Based on the studies of new institutionalists, people are looking for legitimacy rather than efficiency in carrying out organizational activities. And by following the institutional rules and norms, it brings legitimacy and good will towards itself, and this gaining of legitimacy brings trust and creates grounds for committing administrative corruption (16). Because following institutional norms and rules leads to gaining legitimacy and gaining trust towards the members of the organization (9).

Most of the convicts of administrative corruption by following values such as "influential", "being religious and believing" and "behaving according to norms" which attract legitimacy always gain the trust of other people and commit administrative corruption.

Figure 1: Institutional rules and norms of administrative corruption in Iran based on the theory of modern institutionalism

DISCUSSION

Administrative corruption is a very complex and challenging concept in Iran's public administration literature that needs to be looked at from different aspects and viewpoints. The mass of researches conducted in the past have only focused on one-dimensional economic and structural approaches and by neglecting interdisciplinary and sociological analyzes they have not been able to be effective in preventing and treating administrative corruption in Iran. In particular, Iran's position in terms of the global corruption perception index in 2022 has dropped seventeen places compared to 2017, and the situation of administrative corruption has become much worse. Therefore, the present research tried to identify the institutional factors and norms that cause the institutionalization of administrative corruption in Iran by presenting an interdisciplinary analysis based on the modern institutional approach.

The results of this research, which analyzed the qualitative content of nineteen cases of administrative corruption convicts that were processed in the judgment enforcement branches of the courts of Tehran province and resulted in the issuance of verdicts show that the institutionalization of the "materialistic and individualistic institutional environment" in Iran causes organizations to conform and conform to the institutional norms of materialism and individualism and the formation of organizations in which people only seek to maximize personal profit without considering the interests of others. This factor provides the basis for committing administrative corruption. This result is consistent with the findings of some researches (17, 18).

Also, the findings of this research showed that the existence of a "corrupting institutional environment" which is associated with the disappearance of the stigma of administrative corruption, especially in situations where the perpetrators have access to all kinds of administrative corruption through the conformity and uniformity of organizations, causes the formation of administrative corruption. in Iranian organizations. This finding

is consistent with the results of some researches (1).

The results of this research also show that most of the convicts of administrative corruption are middle-aged people with no criminal history who have been exposed to institutionalization and the cognitive process of creating and transmitting meaning due to the existence of "institutionalized organizational corruption". And during that, they have learned the institutional norms and ways of cheating or circumventing in that business, and they have become familiar with the opportunities that that job has given them to commit corruption. Therefore, it can be said that institutionalized organizational corruption is one of the reasons for committing administrative corruption in Iran, and this result is consistent with the findings of some researches (18, 19).

The findings of this research also show that most of the convicts of administrative corruption always gain the trust of other people through "finding legitimacy" and following institutional values and norms such as "influential" "being religious and believing" which attract legitimacy and commit corruption. Because in the theory of modern institutionalism, people are searching for legitimacy in carrying out organizational activities, and by following institutional rules and norms, they gain legitimacy and goodwill towards themselves, and in this way, they commit administrative corruption. This finding is consistent with the results of some research (20).

The findings of this research show that "materialistic and individualistic institutional environment", "corrupting institutional environment", "institutionalized organizational corruption" and "legitimization" are considered as factors and institutional norms of administrative corruption in Iran. Therefore, based on the approach of modern institutionalism, it can be concluded that in order to prevent and treat administrative corruption, it is necessary to institutionalize anti-corruption values and use cultural tools to promote them.

Based on the results of this research, the following suggestions can be made for future research:

1. Analysis of how to prevent the institutionalization of materialistic institutional environment in Iranian society.
2. Analysis of how to prevent the institutionalization of individualistic institutional environment in Iranian society.
3. Analysis of how to prevent the institutionalization of the corrupting institutional environment in Iranian society.
4. Analysis of how to prevent the institutionalization of organizational corruption in Iranian society.

CONCLUSION

Corruption is a problem that has plagued institutions and organizations in all eras and formed the core of many scientists and political thinkers. Administrative corruption, as one of the most general forms of corruption, is a phenomenon that crosses the boundaries of time and place, and with this feature, it neither belongs to a specific time nor to a specific society.

In fact, it can be said that administrative corruption is a common phenomenon of governments. That is, since human activities took an organized and coherent form, from that time, administrative corruption has also appeared as an inextricable part of the text of the organization. Therefore, corruption can be considered as an unwanted child of the organization, which has arisen as a result of various interactions within the organization and also due to the interaction between the organization and its environment.

The results of this research show that "individualistic and materialistic institutional environment", "corrupting institutional environment", "legitimization" and "institutionalized organizational corruption" are

considered as factors and institutional norms underlying administrative corruption in Iran. To deal with and prevent administrative corruption in society, organizations should be institutionalized based on moral values and administrative health beliefs.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In order to observe ethical principles and for the confidentiality of information, it was avoided to name the companies, and by introducing the references, the scientific, ethical and trusteeship principles were observed.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interests.

REFERENCES

1. Rafi'poor F. The social cancer of corruption. 1st ed. Iran/Tehran: Sahami Enteshar Company. 2019. (In Persian).
2. Zarandi S. Designing a local model to fight against administrative corruption in Iran. [Ph.D. thesis]. Tehran/Allame Tabatabaei University. 2012. (In Persian).
3. LaFree G, Morris N. Corruption as a global social problem. In Handbook of Social Problems: A Comparative International Perspective (pp. 600-618). SAGE Publications, Inc. 2004. DOI: https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412973526
4. Moeinikia M, Gharib Zadeh R, Kazemi S, Gharibzadeh S. Analyzing the relationship between spirituality in the workplace and corruption; mediating role of professional ethics. Ethics in Science and Technology 2019; 14 (2) :92-98. DOR: 20.1001.1.22517634.1398.14.2.12.3
5. Kaufmann D. (1998). Research on Corruption: Critical Empirical Issues. In: Jain, A.K. (eds) Economics of Corruption. Recent Economic Thought Series. Boston: Springer, MA. 1998. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4615-4935-2_7
6. Glynn M A, D'Aunno T. An intellectual history of institutional theory: looking back to move forward. Acamy of Managemen Annals, 2023; 17(1). DOI: https://doi.org/10.5465/annals.2020.0341
7. Herranen O. Institutions in Neo – institutionalism. 1st ed. Germany: Springer. 2022. DOI: 10.1007/978-3-031-16481-1_3
8. Guy Peters B. Institutional theory.4th ed. England: Edward Elgar Publishing. 2019.
9. Sahin K, Mert K. (2022). Institutional theory in international business studies: the period of 1990- 2018. International Journal of Organizational Analysis 2022; (In Press). DOI: 10.1108/IJOA-09-2021-2945
10. Colander D, Hunt E. Social science: An introduction to the study of society. 1st ed. London: Routledge. 2022. DOI: https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003242390
11. Elliott A. Contemporary social theory: an introduction. 3rd ed. London: Routledge. 2021.
12. Elliott A, Lemert C. Introduction to contemporary social theory. 2nd ed. London: Routledge. 2022.
13. March JG, Olsen JP. The new institutionalism: organizational factors in political life. The American Political Science Review, 1984; 78(3): 734–749. https://doi.org/10.2307/1961840
14. Rogers A. Human behavior in the social environment: perspectives on development and the life course. 6th ed. London: Routledge. 2022.
15. Dodge M. Women and white collar crime. 1st ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson. 2020.
16. Guo Q, Zeng W, Shen J, Huang T, Ma K. Social trust more strongly associated with well-being in individualistic society. Personality an individual differences. 2022;188(1). DOI: 10.1016/j.paid.2021.111451
17. Risi D, Vigneau L, Bohn S, Wickert C. Institutional theory – based research on corporate social responsibility: bringing values back in. International Journal of Management Review, 2023; 25(1): 3-23. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/ijmr.12299
18. Montazeri M, Shool A. Effort for reducing administrative corruption as an ethical necessity: explaining the effect of employees' commitment. Ethics in Science and Technology, 2020; 14 (4) :148-154. DOR: 20.1001.1.22517634.1398.14.4.20.5
19. Safaei Shakib A, Sarshar S, Rostami Malkhalifeh R. Analysis of the relationship between ethical strategies and ethical environment on reducing administrative corruption: the mediating role of ethical piety. Ethics in Science and Technology 2023; 18 (1) :69-77. DOR: 20.1001.1.22517634.1402.18.1.10.7
20. Zareh Nyestanak M, Taheri Attar G, Habibi S, Amin Naeini M. The relationship between ethical leadership with administrative corruption: the mediating role of organizational justice. Ethics in Science and Technology 2018; 13 (3) :131-137. DOR: 20.1001.1.22517634.1397.13.3.18.4