

# EGOS 2022 (Vienna) Sub-theme 59:

## Studying Organizational Corruption and Wrongdoing: Opportunities and Unrealized Potential

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## Call for Papers

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Organizational corruption and wrongdoing are no new phenomena, but cases from Enron to Siemens to FIFA to Volkswagen have repeatedly dominated the news over the last two decades (Clemente & Gabbioneta, 2017). Wrongdoing includes issues such as corruption, fraud, conflicts of interest, tax evasion, anti-competitive behavior, environmental pollution, and human rights abuses (Palmer, 2012; Palmer et al., 2016). While the negative consequences of issues like corruption, including challenges for economic growth, the proper functioning of governments and corporations, and trust in societal institutions are widely known (Castro et al., 2020), the seeming inability to effectively fight or even end wrongdoing has often led to frustration and cynicism (Misangyi et al., 2008).

Applied to the context of corruption, organizational wrongdoing refers to the “misuse of an organizational position or authority for personal or organizational (or sub-unit) gain, where misuse in turn, refers to departures from accepted societal norms” (Anand et al., 2004: 40). Indeed, when acknowledging that societal norms – and perceptions about their misuse – may differ (1) across contexts and (2) vary over time, the persistence of corruption appears less surprising: Regarding (1), the risks of being involved in corruption have multiplied during the process of globalization, with internationally operating organizations facing a variety of jurisdictions and stakeholder expectations, values and interests (TI, 2018). What is right or wrong, use or misuse may hence differ across social contexts, but also across societal observers (or: ‘social control agents’), independent of the perpetrators’ intent (Palmer, 2012: 242). Regarding (2), what is perceived as right or wrong may also vary over time. For example, in an instance where the legal became illegal, the bribery of foreign officials was tax-deductible in Germany until it became legally forbidden in 1999 (Schembera & Scherer, 2017). In an instance where the illegal became legal, commerce surrounding cannabis was long forbidden in Canada until it was legalized in 2018 (DOJ, 2018).

Due to its dynamic and complex (heterogeneous & locally contingent) nature, it is evident that organizational wrongdoing goes beyond a universal and static black-and-white distinction of legal versus illegal behavior, but results from processes of social construction that are subject to change and contestation (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Slager, 2017). More precisely, corruption and other issues of organizational wrongdoing may constitute social phenomena that are negotiated in the course of a dynamic process of observers' interpretation, sensemaking, and framing (Haack & Schoeneborn, 2015; Lange & Washburn, 2012; Weick, 1995). While from such a social constructivist perspective, the full eradication of "corruption" or "wrongdoing" becomes less likely, and even less wishful if it would mean the strict global universalization of cultures, norms and values, efforts to tackle corruption become ever more important given their need to continuously explore opportunities and unrealized potential in a constantly changing environment. Therefore, this sub-theme is designed to stimulate discussions about dynamic interactions of corruption or other types of wrongdoing across different levels of analysis, ranging from organizational leaders and organizations in industrial, national, or international contexts to the societal context of wrongdoing across systems (e.g., industry, sports, and education) (Ashforth et al., 2008; Bitektine & Haack, 2015; Weber & Glynn, 2006).

We also explicitly invite submitters to explore avenues of renewal once organizational wrongdoing is detected or disclosed (Pfarrer et al., 2008; Schembera & Scherer, 2017). Many organizations have responded to allegations of wrongdoing by installing massive compliance departments and standardization processes, arguably at the expense of social and cultural controls (Lange, 2008). However, this has not only led to radical organizational change but also to the emergence of unintended consequences, trade-offs, and non-achievement of envisioned anti-corruption goals (Schembera et al., 2017; Wijen, 2014). Perspectives that critically address the role of compliance or policy-practice coupling and achievement or means-ends coupling in global governance are thus appreciated (Bromley & Powell, 2012). For example, technological innovations in the age of digitalization seem to boost transparency and accountability and hence play a crucial role in between compliance and achievement (Halter et al., 2009; Osrecki, 2015).

We propose to take the next step in exploring the nature, causes, and potential fixes for bad behavior within and by organizations by calling for a systematic application of dynamic and flexible approaches to addressing organizational wrongdoing. We are responding to the widespread agreement among organization scholars that addressing the complex challenges in tackling organizational wrongdoing in an ever-changing global business environment calls for new responses from organizational scholarship and practice. Successful responses are likely to be based on innovative and continuous approaches that build in the flexibility to respond to changing environments.

Inspired by the EGOS 2022 Colloquium theme, we invite conceptual and empirical (qualitative and quantitative) submissions that may address, but are not limited to, questions like:

- How realistic is a "perfect" – corruption-free – business environment in today's era of globalization and digitalization?
- How wishful is a "perfect" – corruption-free – business environment if it would mean the strict global homogenization of cultures, norms and values?

- If the formulation of “perfect” anti-corruption policies seems impossible in opaque contexts, how can actors make best use of the “beauty of imperfection”? How is organizational wrongdoing constructed and attributed (over time)?
- What are the implications of wrongdoing and organizational responses to wrongdoing for organizational legitimacy?
- May some corporations grease their wheel of change and growth by benefitting from a “beauty of imperfection”? What is the role of, e.g., small, entrepreneurial and/or family-owned firms in this regard?
- What are the corrupt processes (or other wrongdoing issues) across different levels of analysis, and why do they change over time?
- What are the dynamics of decoupling (policies from practices, and means from ends) in tackling organizational corruption and wrongdoing?
- How does a global scandal or crisis, such as the global health crisis caused by Covid-19, foster corruption or reveal its “beauty” in tackling it?
- How can information and communication technologies such as Blockchain or artificial intelligence help fight and prevent corruption and wrongdoing, e.g., by increasing transparency across transactions? What are the dark sides of such technologies?
- What are promising new methodological approaches in studying corruption and wrongdoing?

We are confident that this sub-theme provides a much-needed forum for interested scholars to present and discuss their research, engage in a meaningful exchange of ideas, and explore innovative methodological approaches to study organizational wrongdoing from a variety of perspectives.

SUBMISSION INFO: [https://www.egos.org/jart/prj3/egos/main.jart?rel=de&reserve-mode=active&content-id=1630409885853&subtheme\\_id=1604725620734](https://www.egos.org/jart/prj3/egos/main.jart?rel=de&reserve-mode=active&content-id=1630409885853&subtheme_id=1604725620734)

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