Influencing Corrupt Networks

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Introduction

In recent years the world has been highly attuned to corruption and the fight against it. It is a social issue that affects every country to varying degrees. The prominence of indexes such as the Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index and the Heritage Foundation and Wall Street Journal’s Index of Economic Freedom attests to the current importance placed on acknowledging corruption and combating it. Corruption consists of a complex network of people who rely on powerful relationships and personalities, closely resembling other types of dark networks. Furthermore, corruption relies on the ability of individuals to manipulate other individuals. Because of this, social network analysis has great potential to aid effective combating of corruption.

The social and behavioral science communities, who focus on the study of relationships between different persons, find corruption interesting for its relational complexities. Negotiation represents a blended field of these academic communities, which specializes in the influence of people and relationships. Current techniques tend to limit a negotiator’s analysis to subjective mappings of relationships and networks. Social network analysis, however, offers a more objective way to analyze complex hierarchical structures with asymmetric configurations [1, pp. 155] thereby revealing key players and key relationships that can be used to diminish corrupt practices. Thus, the combination of systematic negotiation and social network analysis can offer a unique tool set for both analyzing networks and influencing the particular practices of a network.

Systematic negotiation, a particular understanding of negotiation theory, is a macro level approach to effectively influencing others. Its holistic approach for measuring a complex situation in order to effectively manage and influence it provides a gamut of responses for the complex and challenging arena of corruption. If a possible initial step in combating corruption is embracing the rule of law, then the need to change or manage society’s perception of corruption and a culture of lawfulness becomes critical. A systematic approach to negotiation lends itself to approaching such a broad but precise attempt at influence. Furthermore, network analysis and systematic negotiation working in tandem create a synergistic team: each complements the other. Merging network analysis with systematic negotiation has the potential to empower the negotiator with the framework and tools necessary to effectively influence corrupt systems and their members.
Corruption

Corruption is the abuse of power for personal gain by people in positions of entrusted power [2]. It is a highly complex issue that requires a creative strategy to be properly combated. Over the years several countries have struggled with corruption within their societies, and one in particular stands out from the others in its effectiveness.

In 1973, Hong Kong was a highly corrupt state. Corruption was “systemic throughout the government, [and] even the private sector operated in the same manner of making extensive use of “guanxi” (connections) and bribery [3, pp.122].” Since then, however, Hong Kong has not only turned the corner, but has exceeded expectations and as of 2010 held the rank of 13th least corrupt state according to the Corruption Perceptions Index [2].

In the article “Changing a Culture of Corruption: How Hong Kong’s Independent Commission Against Corruption Succeeded in Furthering a Culture of Lawfulness,” Richard LaMagna analyzes how Hong Kong was able to change its culture of corruption acceptance. According to LaMagna, there were four main reasons the Chinese in Hong Kong engaged in corrupt practices: to get their fair share, to level the playing field, in order to survive, and because of traditions that viewed certain corrupt practices as acceptable [3, pp. 123]. With these reasons in mind, Hong Kong adopted a three pronged approach to eradicating its corruption problem. The Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) was responsible for the implementation of these prongs, which are enforcement, education, and prevention. Since its implementation, “the ICAC has been successful in changing the culture of corruption [3, pp. 131].” Key to the enforcement aspect of the ICAC’s plan was removing the responsibility for enforcement (i.e. investigation and prosecution of suspected corruption) from the police (who were already corrupt), and placing the responsibility under the purview of the ICAC, which “was empowered to report directly to the governor…[and] was given broad power of arrest, detention, bail, and search and seizure [3, pp. 125].” Of course, checks and balances were instituted, with oversight of the ICAC by multiple institutions.

Roy Godson’s exploration of fighting corruption is similar to Richard LaMagna’s. In contrast to LaMagna, though, Godson’s roadmap to fighting corruption is not specific to a particular country. Rather, he takes a broad view of how to fight corruption so it is possible to apply the techniques to many countries. Godson outlines the methods and principles required to initiate an effective anti-corruption campaign and he discusses the institutions and beliefs found in a corruption-free society. The institutions and beliefs Godson cites are a culture of lawfulness, meaning the “mainstream culture, ethos, and thought in a society are sympathetic to the rule of law [4, pp. 92],” where rule of law is defined as “everyone – irrespective of race, creed, color, gender, family background, or economic, social, and political circumstances – is to be treated uniformly [4, pp. 93].” For the rule of law to be followed and for a culture of lawfulness to flourish, people must believe they are better off and will lead a higher quality of life in system where legal norms “are a fundamental part of justice or provide the gateway to attain justice [4, pp. 93].”

The methods and techniques used to eliminate corruption and to foster a culture of lawfulness are implemented through three types of institutions: civic and school-based education, centers for moral authority, and the media. While all three sectors working synergistically are necessary for maximum effect, the one with the most potential for influence and with the most
applicability to non-secular state is providing the centers for moral authority. For example, Afghanistan, a deeply Muslim country where imams and other religious leaders play an important and public role and who are “centers for moral authority [4, pp. 95]” (Godson’s term religious leaders), stand to make a strong impact on Afghan views about corruption and the necessity for a culture of lawfulness.

Godson argues that the “basic elements of a culture of lawfulness can be built...within one generation [4, pp. 92].” To support this claim, he cites the examples of Hong Kong and Sicily in the 1970’s and 1990’s and also mentions the anti-corruption efforts along the US-Mexico border, Republic of Georgia, and Botswana. Given the examples Godson cites, i.e. countries with a tradition of or precedent for rule of law, the applicability of his approach may be limited in countries that do not have a similar foundation.

**Social Network Analysis**

Relationships underpin social network analysis. They allow analysts to define a structure of an organization based upon various types of relationships. This type of modeling of an organization is powerful because it establishes a way to measure flow within an organization as defined by these different relationships. Studying the flow constructs and resulting properties of a network allows for the identification of key network properties, which can be used to interpret, understand, affect, and influence a network.

Specific application of social network analysis has been broken down into understandable objective measurements and representations. Moreover, basic social network analysis training exists, which allows a wide variety of individuals to grasp the geometric and topological insights provided into an organizational network via social network analysis. One specific initiative, the *Advanced Network Analysis and Targeting Course* helps users gain an understanding of key network dynamics, potential target value, effective handling of key networks, and the assessment of actions on a network [5]. Such training and its current military applications attest to its potential to be taught and understood, as well as applied. Therefore, it is realistic to assume that negotiators are capable of studying and effectively incorporating such techniques into their strategies for influence with particular emphasis on affecting corruption.

Network analysis aids the understanding of dark networks, which use “formal and informal ties to conduct licit or illicit activity [6, pp. 5].” Such understanding generated from current studies in combination with basic network analysis techniques and systematic negotiation influence would further enhance efforts of dark network research to change “the environment to make it a mismatch [for] how a network operates [6, pp. 5].”

Negotiators can use the information of such network analysis courses and network analysis to further assist their effectiveness. They would be able to specifically tailor their practice to nodes which prove to have high levels of important attributes and attempt to manipulate these specific elements of a network to produce the desired end results within a network. Furthermore, application of social network analysis is applicable to the specific topology of dark networks.
LaMagna’s three prongs – enforcement, education, and prevention – along with Godson’s three types of institutions – civic and school based education, centers for moral authority, and the media – all have different leaders at their helm and different methods and pathways for bringing about change most effectively. Using social network analysis, the key players and pathways within the prongs and institutions can be identified, thereby providing negotiators with the decision makers they must influence in order to be successful. Identifying and then surgically targeting these people will likely allow for a more efficient means of combating corruption because negotiators will have to influence fewer people, leaving the indigenous decision makers to deal with the rest of the population with whom they wield more influence.

**Negotiation Frameworks, Concepts, and Tools**

Negotiation is the process by which two or more parties attempt to satisfy their own interests by searching to find and develop a mutual agreement [7, pp. 1]. There are many types of negotiation strategies and each has an appropriate time, place, and purpose. A common characteristic amongst many negotiators is a lack of a defined purpose and approach. A systematic approach to negotiation, however, requires the negotiator to clearly define the purpose upfront and to deliberately consider all choices and actions. In this type of a negotiation approach, the negotiator is more likely to reach the desired outcome or, when they do not, be equipped with a framework for understanding why they failed.

What makes network analysis a useful addition to the negotiation process, especially with regard to influencing corrupt individuals and groups, is the idea that because negotiation is a joint problem solving process dealing with two or more parties, a network is undoubtedly created. To motivate a party, or parties, to participate in the negotiation process, two assumptions are made. First, a network means interpersonal connections which open pathways for connecting with new human resources thus helping to create options for success. Second, if one party in the negotiation is equipped to lead the negotiation in a systematic manner there is an increased likelihood that others involved will follow suit. These two assumptions are critical because they suggest that a negotiator who acts purposive in considering the nature of relationships and using that knowledge to impact their negotiation approach will be more effective in directing both the process and the outcome of the negotiation.

A systematic approach to negotiation begins with the utilization of the seven-element model developed by the Harvard Negotiation Project [7, pp. 2]. The seven-element model defines every type of negotiation as the combination (or absence) of seven different characteristics: interests, alternatives, options, legitimacy, commitments, communication, and relationships [8, pp. 175]. This framework enables the negotiator with a simple yet robust framework to define and measure success, prepare, consider choices during a negotiation, and review negotiations. The systematic negotiator will recognize that the key to choosing the most effective manner in which to negotiate depends upon the circumstances surrounding the negotiation as well as the desired outcome.

In *Getting to Yes*, Fisher, Ury, and Patton discussed a specific negotiation strategy that they believed was most effective in highly complex situation involving multi-parties, multiple issues, critical relationship concerns, and high stakes substantive issues [9, pp. xix]. They called this form Principled Negotiation. It uses all seven elements (in contrast, for example, to another
common form, Positional Bargaining, which only uses two elements: alternatives and commitments) in a particular sequence and specific way. Initially, Principled Negotiation focuses on relationship to build rapport and establish trustworthiness, and communication to create joint understanding of the problem and each party’s perspective on the situation. It then considers the interests, not positions, of each party involved working to create options that satisfy those interests. The assessment of possible options is done through using legitimate standards. Finally, a move toward a commitment or alternatives is made. The goal is not to reach an agreement but, rather, to create a good choice for all parties between a fair, clear, actionable commitment and their alternatives to a negotiated agreement (what they can do apart from the parties involved in the negotiation). Unlike other negotiation methods, the process becomes easier when more of the parties involved understand the principles. Negotiators that practice Principled Negotiation are able to utilize common ground as well as both visible and hidden differences to create the most value [10, pp. 8-9]. Additionally, a common result of principled negotiation is the growth of a stronger relationship between parties, with an effective precedent established for future interactions. In the context of corruption, Principled Negotiation appears to be a reasonable choice as a negotiation strategy.

A number of tools have been developed specifically to help the principled negotiator. The Currently Perceived Choice (CPC) tool helps improve communication and revealing of the other party’s interests by working to understand why the other party might be rejecting a proposal [10, pp. 34]. The purpose of the CPC is to take “into account not only the message [one party has] been sending but all other factors as well,” to include “how do the pros and cons of that decision appear to [the other party] [8, pp. 49]?” The answers to those question make it possible to deduce why they are currently declining the proposition, specifically what fears, needs, concerns, and motivators are not currently being met. Furthermore, the CPC helps to generate creative thinking by forcing one party to examine the situation from the eyes of another party. This creative thinking often helps create options, opening new possibilities for solutions and agreements.

Jonathan Hughes’s and Jeff Weiss’s negotiation handbook, Making Partnerships Work, is essentially an all-in-one “toolkit” for understanding and working with others effectively. One of the tools they describe is the Three-Layer Model. The Three-Layer Model “provides a way for those working on a partnership interface to understand why behavior that appears incomprehensible or ill-intentioned might actually be reasonable in an organizational context different from [one’s] own [8, pp. 22].” This model is a spectrum which illustrates how to understand behavior from one end to the other; and how to predict behavior from the opposite end, back. At one end analyzing actions and behaviors is the first step, and analyzing underlying assumptions and values is the last. From the other end, the order is opposite when attempting to predict behavior which is slightly more of a preemptive strategy for spotting corrupt practices [10, pp. 22].

In the decision making process, each person develops their own common mental pathways for use in everyday reasoning. But because each person is unique in their own way, there will always be various perceptions when one thing becomes the focus of many. A lot of these perceptions stem from misguided beliefs, or false expectations we as humans tend to perceive as real. Consequently the Ladder of Inference, based upon the work of Chris Argyris, is another commonly used tool among negotiators [7, pp. 30], [11]. Essentially, this tool helps the negotiator dig down through conclusions and interpretations to the original information, thus
providing the ability to understand why the various sides can focus on the same given information, yet develop highly contrasted conclusions. Mutual understanding via extremely deep inquiry and powerful acknowledgment is the product this tool aims to provide. Even when the involved parties do not agree, reaching a deeper understanding of each party’s mental pathway remains possible.

Though much of what has been presented describes using strategic negotiation as a means to the end of corruption, there obviously exists within corruption a tendency to utilize illegitimate and “dirty” negotiation practices capable of derailing any progress. Dirty negotiation is the utilization of “deception, psychological warfare, and positional pressure tactics [6, pp. 130].” These techniques sabotage a negotiation and diminish the chances of developing a successful agreement between parties. Getting to Yes outlines several commonly used tactics and how they might be countered [6, pp. 130]. One approach is known as “spotting and changing the game [12].” This process defines which of the seven-elements are being used and in what way. With this knowledge it is then possible to either use those elements in different ways or use other elements to counter a strategy that is preventing a positive outcome. Spotting and changing the game will be incredibly valuable in fighting corruption because dirty negotiation tactics are, at their core, corrupt practices. These corrupt individuals will continually follow their same tactics, and by using this tool to uncover what those tactics are, a strategy can be developed to weaken these attempts.

Conclusion

Merging network analysis with systematic negotiation has the potential to empower the negotiator with the framework and tools necessary to effectively influence corrupt systems and their members. Network analysis is necessary to developing a more effective strategy for negotiators by identifying the key decision makers within the various societal institutions where corruption exists. A systematic approach to negotiation provides the negotiators with the tools they need to more effectively influence the key decision makers identified in the social network.

In the months ahead, this combining of negotiation (behavior influencing) systems with network modeling in order to develop a more effective means for both describing corruption and taking strategic action will be tested and measured. By blending social network analysis with proven negotiation approaches, a new model for combating corruption will result. The ultimate goal of this research is to build a typology (what, how, and in what sequence) for those individuals and groups who are most persuaded by an appeal to any one or more of the seven-elements (to their interests, creative solutions, fairness, etc). More specifically, this model will consider what does one need to appeal to in order to change the game with people of differing socio-cultural backgrounds who are involved in corrupt networks.

Corruption provides an extremely complex and complicated field of groups that need influencing for real change to occur. Having a model for how and what to appeal will better enable practitioners in the field to change corrupt practices. Developing a set of assessments to see how profiles of certain people link to different elements will further enhance effectiveness. Through field research and assessment designed to test these models, concepts, and tools, the result will be practical applications to increase effectiveness in corrupt societies both in Afghanistan and elsewhere.
REFERENCES