



**OBTC 2017 at Providence College
June 14th – 17th, 2017**

Submission Template

SUBMISSION GUIDANCE

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Submission Template for the 2017 OBTC Teaching Conference for Management Educators

1) Title, Abstract & Keywords

In your abstract, please include a brief session description (not to exceed 100 words), and three to four keywords. If your proposal is accepted, this description will be printed in the conference program.

Title: Grand Ethical Challenges and Management Education: A Moral Intensity Approach

Abstract:

This session calls participants to arms in the fight to solve society's grand ethical challenges, specifically political corruption. Using the dimensions of moral intensity as an organizing framework, we seek to demonstrate how management educators can highlight the deleterious effects of political corruption, which are not obvious at the point of transaction, to raise moral awareness and increase the likelihood of moral behavior beyond graduation. Participants will discuss how this approach can be adapted to address a variety of ethical issues. Participants will also receive a list of online tools, articles, and other links to assist in implementing this approach.

Keywords: Moral intensity, political corruption, grand challenges

2) Teaching Implications:

What is the contribution of your session to management pedagogy/andragogy? Specifically, please include your learning objectives, and describe what management and/or teaching topics are relevant to your session, and why. Also, include theoretical, disciplinary, or theoretical foundations that will help reviewers understand how your ideas fit within the broader field of management.

Political corruption is a millennia old phenomena with wide-ranging and well-documented negative social effects, especially at the macro-economic level. Instead of focusing solely on high-level antecedents and outcomes, we seek to shift the framing of the issue by using conceptualizations of moral intensity as an organizing framework for understanding the continued plague of political corruption. Jones (1991) supplemented previous ethical decision making models by proposing an issue-contingent framework of ethical decision making. His framework rests on the idea of moral intensity, which seeks "to capture the issue-related moral imperative in a situation" (Jones, 1991: 372). Using this issue-contingent approach, we posit that, at the point of transaction, the negative effects politically corrupt activities are not felt, while, unfortunately, the benefits are. This could lead to perceptions that political corruption is an issue of low moral intensity, which could then lead to students ignoring the topic and managers engaging in political corrupt activities.

Linking dimensions of moral intensity to learning objectives

As noted, perceptions of political corruption might be influenced by moral intensity. Moral intensity is a multi-dimensional construct consisting of the magnitude of consequences, social consensus, probability of effect, temporal immediacy, proximity, and the concentration of effect. The following section discusses how each dimension can be linking to specific learning objectives.

Magnitude of Consequences.

Jones (1991: 374) defines the magnitude of consequences of the moral issue as "the sum of the harms (or benefits) done to victims (or beneficiaries) of the moral act in question." The key here is to focus on the "sum of the harms" of the macro-economic ills associated with higher levels of corruption, such as lower economic growth and greater income inequality, among others. Specifically, at the point of transaction, those involved with politically corrupt activities may not be aware that even simple bribes, when compounded across an economy, can have substantial negative effects. Hence, the learning objective here is to improve students' understanding that their actions once they are in the global workforce have consequences beyond a single transaction, and that, when compounded, these actions can affect the well-being of important stakeholder groups.

Social Consensus.

Jones (1991: 375) defines social consensus as "the degree of social agreement that a proposed act is evil (or good)." Culture is a "taken for granted" institutional force (Scott, 2008) that shifts the social consensus around values that enable politically corrupt activities. Political corruption might therefore be perceived as containing no immoral aspects and being socially acceptable (Husted, 1999). Hence, the learning objective here is to increase student's understanding that actions they perceive as socially acceptable might be morally questionable when looked at objectively or with a different cultural lens.

Probability of Effect.

The probability of effect for a moral issue reflects the probability that the act will occur and produce the predicted harm (Jones, 1991). Jones (1991) notes that the expected value (perceived benefit – perceived cost) of an action influence the probability of effect. The perceived benefits of engaging in political corruption may depress any lingering concerns with the side effects of those behaviors in the broader human development context, thus leading to a lower perceived probability of effect. As a result, the learning objective here is to reduce this misperception and ensure that students understand that political corruption will result in negative consequences to individuals and society.

Temporal immediacy

Temporal immediacy refers to the time lag between the occurrence of the moral or immoral act and its consequences. Jones (1991) suggests that acts with more immediate consequences have greater moral intensity. The nature of the ills associated with political corruption contributes to a perception of lower moral intensity, as the temporal immediacy of political corruption is very low and generally incrementally cumulative, making the impact of a single act seem quite negligible. Hence, the learning objective here is centered around the broad effects that take extensive time to work through the system. This should enable students to understand that delayed negative effects are severe and clearly linked to political corruption.

Proximity.

Proximity is the "feeling of nearness that the moral agent has for victims of the evil act in question" (Jones, 1991: 376). As the ills of political corruption are widely scattered, specific victims of political corruption are often not known. As a result, the moral intensity of political corruption is likely perceived to be low. Hence, the learning objective here is concerned with the psychological, cultural, social, or physical nearness an actor has for the victims of the unethical act.

Concentration of the effect.

"The concentration effect considers the inverse function of the number of people affected by an act of given magnitude." (Jones, 1991:377) or simply the number of people affected by an act. While many people are affected by the broad, societal-level negative outcomes of political corruption, this harm is widely dispersed and is generally unable to be pinpointed to specific victims who could then be identifiable to the actors in political corruption. The lack of clearly identifiable victims reduces the moral intensity of an act and enables individuals to engage in political corruption. Hence, the learning objective here is to ensure that students can clearly identify the victims of political corruption and understand how the victims are affected by it.

Specific resources for instructors to achieve learning objectives

The following section describes a wide variety of resources instructors can use to achieve the learning objectives. While some are targeted more towards one dimensions, we believe that they all address multiple learning objectives.

Instructors have a variety of national laws, international agreements, and supranational conventions at their disposal to frame this issue as one that is nearly universally decried. Two such agreements may be especially helpful for discussion. First, the **United Nations Convention Against Corruption** took effect more than a decade ago. Instructors can point to this to demonstrate the broad support in the international community for tackling political corruption. The **OECD Anti-Bribery Convention**, which came into force in 1999, is another resource that demonstrates broad international

commitment to eliminating political corruption. While these conventions are commonly discussed in textbooks that address this topic, compliance is typically the focus. Here, we seek to demonstrate that these conventions, along with a host of national anti-corruption laws, can be used to demonstrate the broad international consensus that politically corrupt activities are unethical.

An additional resource in demonstrating social consensus is **Transparency International**. Transparency International is a non-governmental organization dedicated to eliminating political corruption. Their Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) is perhaps the most dominant index used in political corruption research; however, their value here may lie in their “global movement” against political corruption. From an instructor’s perspective, this framing of the fight against political corruption as a “movement” provides further evidence to share with students that, despite what students may have taken for granted regarding politically corrupt activities, there is a broad social consensus that these activities are unethical.

Case studies

Instructors have a wealth of resources to demonstrate the harm that can come to organizations and individuals who engage in politically corrupt activities. Here, targeted current events and cases are helpful. One such news story is the **Siemens bribery scandal** from the last decade, which resulted in 1.6 billion dollars in fines for Siemens levied by the United States and Germany in 2008. While the bulk of what has been written about this scandal is now nearly a decade old, Siemens is still dealing with the consequences, as just last May they were ordered to pay fines in Israel related to this scandal. This story demonstrates that the harm one might expect could endure for nearly a decade.

Another recent story that is relevant here is the recent **crackdown on corruption in China**, which has received much attention in the press. This story has the added benefit of originating in a non-Western nation, which makes it also useful for establishing social consensus.

Up-to-date news related resources

In addition to specific news stories or current events, instructors can also use one or all of the three tools outlined below to provide students with a regular flow of corruption-related current events to drive this point home. First, instructors can suggest students **set up a Google Alert for keywords such as corruption, bribery**, and others. Students will then receive an alert when relevant and new content is posted. A second resource is **Transparency International’s email digest** of corruption news, where students can subscribe for free to receive a regular digest of corruption news. Lastly, the **Wall Street Journal publishes “Corruption Currents”** as part of its “Risk and Compliance” section. “Corruption Currents” provides a centralized location for corruption-related news stories from both the Wall Street Journal and other sources. Used

individually or taken together, these resources provide information that regularly details the fines, prison sentences, or other harm that those convicted of political corruption across the globe frequently face.

Additional suggestions

We also identified two additional tools to increase students' awareness of political corruption and those affected by it. First, **study abroad opportunities** offer one way for students from those countries with lower levels of political corruption to see firsthand how people in those countries with higher levels of political corruption are affected by this issue. One author's recent experience taking university freshmen to Spain on a short-term program provides one example. On that program, students' coursework was integrated with several company visits. On one such visit, a local business person described how disaffected many people were by what they perceived to be rampant political corruption. One example given detailed how public officials in coastal cities had taken bribes to allow building projects that obstructed views and access to the coastline where protections for existing homeowners had been in place, thus drastically decreasing the value of the existing homes. While coursework in the students' home country could go a long way in increasing perceptions of the moral intensity of political corruption, this one small but firsthand story put a face to the news, thus shrinking the psychological distance between the students and the victims of the corrupt activities.

However, study abroad experiences are not accessible to all students. A second resource for shrinking the proximity is the "**True Stories**" series of articles produced by **Transparency International**. This resource allows a student to select a variety of topics or a specific country, and then see corruption-related stories on that topic or from that country. This tool provides students from nearly any country the opportunity to see that corruption affects people in their home country, even if the overall scores are relatively good. This could harness the power of the cultural connection a student has with their own country to again shrink the distance between the politically corrupt activity and the victims of that activity.

3) Session Description and Plan:

What will you actually do in this session? If appropriate, please include a timeline estimating the activities will you facilitate: how long will they take, and how will participants be involved? Please remember that reviewers will be evaluating how well the time request matches the activities you'd like to do, and the extent you can reasonably accomplish the session's goals. Reviewers will also be looking for how you are engaging the participants in the session.

Timeline:

1. Discussion of current approaches for tackling grand ethical challenges such as political corruption by asking audience about their experience with the topic (5 minutes)
2. Introducing moral intensity and highlighting how it can be used to teach political corruption by linking learning objectives to each dimension (7 minutes)
3. Review specific resources for instructors in detail (15min)
4. Closing / Q&A (3 minutes)

4) Application to Conference theme:

How does your session fit with the overall OBTC theme of *Navigating the Changing Currents*?

The recent U.S. election results led to an increased focus on business ethics, as journalists discussed the potential conflicts of interest of a president-elect with extensive business holdings. This change in the domestic political currents provides perhaps the perfect backdrop for discussions such as those detailed above, and places this proposal well within the theme.

5) Unique Contribution to OBTC:

Have you presented the work in this proposal before? If so, how will it be different? Is this proposal under current review somewhere else? If so, please explain. How will your proposal be different for the OBTC conference?

This session has not been presented at OBTC or any other outlet.