

Chapter 46

Attitudes toward Bribery: A Case Study of Brazil

Robert W. McGee
Fayetteville State University, USA

ABSTRACT

This chapter summarizes the theoretical and empirical literature on attitudes toward bribery and then proceeds to examine the opinions of 1,483 Brazilians on the issue, using the data from the most recent World Values Survey. The study finds that although Brazilians are strongly opposed to bribe-taking in general their opposition is less than absolute in many cases. An examination of some demographic variables highlights some of these cases.

INTRODUCTION

A number of studies have examined various aspects of bribery. Most studies have been theoretical, although some have been at least partially empirically based. Very few have focused on ethical issues. Even fewer have examined the Brazilian case. The present study aims to fill this gap in the extant literature. The current study is an empirical study of ethical attitudes toward accepting a bribe using survey data.

The ethics of bribery can be subdivided into the following four categories:

- The ethics of offering a bribe
- The ethics of paying a bribe that has been solicited

- The ethics of accepting a bribe that has been offered
- The ethics of soliciting a bribe

The present study examined the issue of accepting a bribe in the course of business.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

General

Philips (1984) discussed the distinctions between bribery and extortion and concluded that business leaders who engage in bribery to further their long-term interests are amoral. Carson (1987) replied to Philips and takes the position that accepting a bribe is always wrong because it violates an implicit

or explicit promise or understanding associated with one's role. Colombatto (2003) examined why corruption is tolerated and concluded that corruption can at times be a rational response to institutional failures. Salbu (2001) discussed different philosophical approaches to ethical issues, such as the deontological approach of Kant and the teleological approach of Mill and Bentham.

Goel and Rich (1989) examined the economic incentives for taking bribes and concluded that the probability of being convicted and the severity of punishment tend to deter bribe-taking, whereas relatively low salaries and high unemployment tend to encourage it. Mocan (2008) conducted a study of 49 countries and found that highly educated and high income individuals have a higher probability of being solicited for a bribe by government officials, and that males were a more frequent target of bribery. One reason given was because males were more active in the economy and would therefore have more exposure to government officials. James (2001) challenges the notion that bribe taking is always unethical and suggests that when the agent in a principal-agent relationship takes a bribe in exchange for doing something that is against the principal's interest, it constitutes an unethical act.

Johnson (2009, 2010) suggests that bribery can sometimes be beneficial to consumers, and that the practice might not be unethical in cases where the principal consents to the agent's engaging in such activity. Kaufmann and Wei (2000) asked whether grease money might speed up the wheels of commerce and concluded that firms which pay more bribes spend more time negotiating with bureaucrats and have a higher cost of capital. Roy and Singer (2006) examined particular types of bribery and analyzed the ethics of participating in certain kinds of transactions. They raised issues such as the ethics of bribing a jailer to release a convicted murderer in a legitimate regime, and whether it was ethical to bribe someone in an oppressive regime to free a prisoner from a concentration camp.

Sanyal and Samanta (2004) examined data for 19 countries and found there was a positive correlation between countries where bribe-taking was highly prevalent and those that were more likely to offer bribes. The propensity to give bribes was determined by economic factors such as per capita income and degree of economic freedom in the country. Some studies have examined bribery in connection with the broader topic of corruption (Banerjee, 1997; Bardhan, 1997; Bardhan & Dilip, 2006; Fisman & Gatti, 2002; Guriev, 2004). Banerjee, Hanna, and Mullainathan (2012) attempted to measure corruption.

Particular Business Practices

Several studies have examined particular business practices that might be considered a form of bribery. Aalberts and Jennings (1999) examined slotting fees, the practice of payments to retailers for displaying their products. Bernardi and Vassill (2004) conducted an attitude survey to determine views on several ethically questionable practices, and whether ethical lapses could lead down a slippery slope the desensitize those involved regarding ethical conduct. A follow-up study by Bernardi, Witek, and Melton (2009) expanded on the earlier study and tested the premise that small deviations from ethical behavior might lead to larger deviations. Chen, Yasar, and Rejesus (2008) examined the factors that influence the likelihood of firms paying bribes to public officials. Clarke and Xu (2004) examined the payment of bribes to utilities in 21 transition economies in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, and concluded that the incidence of bribe-taking can be reduced by privatizing the industry and increasing competition. Miller, Grodeland, and Koshechkina (2000) studied attitudes of health care staff in several post-communist countries and found that extra gratuities were a common practice in exchange for services.

Steidlmeier (1999) assessed the cultural and moral differences between gift-giving, bribery, and

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