



Katalin Pallai: Dependency Corruption¹

Imagine a young democracy, where the monarch of a neighbouring country sends gifts to the members of the parliament (wine, cigars, delicacies, gadgets, jewels...). These gifts improve the quality of life of the representatives. They know their lives have improved thanks to the gifts. They come to like this better quality of life. Slowly they even get accustomed to it. Naturally, they do not want to lose this source of gifts. They develop a sixth sense to assess what aspects of their work threaten the existence of the source. They start to avoid those issues. They always try to ensure their decisions serve the republic, but are also not against the will of the neighbouring king. Do you think they may get into conflict with their own nation's interests in some decisions? (On the basis of Lawrence Lessig: Republic, Lost, 2011)

What can happen in such a situation? Is it possible that the gifts of the king diverted the representatives from public interest? Yes, that may have easily happened. They may have well passed decisions that were suboptimal for their own people when they also wished to please the king. The transition was probably hardly noticeable, but the diversion actually occurred, and the gifts slowly became part of their daily lives. They would have missed them if they had ceased to exist. Lessig describes this as dependency status. (Dependency similar to the addiction to alcohol or drugs.) Dependency develops slowly, but once it is there, it becomes a “normal state”. Withdrawal causes pain, serious problems and severe symptoms of deprivation. Therefore, the dependant resorts to the source of dependency again and again, even if they know they should not. According to Lessig’s simile, “they have a monkey sitting on their shoulders”, who instructs them to do things that seem to be irrational to the dependant, which common sense dictates are undesirable.

It is not only an individual that can become dependent; organisations may also become entangled in dependency-based relationships, which may divert them from their original goals. For a dependent public administration body limiting stakeholders’ access to information seems to be the “rational” strategy. That can lead to burning the bridges that connect them to citizens in order to render their dysfunctional aspects less visible. A dependent organisation that burns the bridges between the community/citizens and itself, in addition to deviating from public interests, violates further principles of democracy, such as transparency and, as a result, accountability.

This reasoning helps us understand that it is not only evil and mean intentions may lead to corruption, it also emanates from various external impacts, influences. There is not only ill will: unnoticed entanglement and unintended involvement also exist. Integrity is the ability to withstand such external influences; it is a state in which the organisation and its members behave in line with their declared objectives. (No monkey is sitting on any of the shoulder of the organization or its employees.) And integrity management aims to define in a systematic manner what an organisation could do to become more resistant to external influences, bearing in mind the purpose and objectives of the organisation.

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