

FIXING SOCIETY
An Ethnographic Study of Fixers in the Philippines

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ABSTRACT

Deep in the core of corruption in the Philippine bureaucracy is the phenomenon of fixing, which continues to remain unexplored in anticorruption discourse and intervention.

Drawing from the theoretical constructs of dark social capital and network analysis, the study establishes how fixers operate and influence the bureaucratic procedures in government, as well as how they reinforce and are being reinforced by bureaucratic corruption. The study also offers a schematic framework on the anatomy of fixing in the Philippines that shows the continuum and dimensions of fixing activities, shifting roles and networks, indigenous terms and signals used in fixing, and various types of fixing that emerge through informal, shadowy and sometimes syndicated networks of fixers. The author duly suggests several recommendations along vertical reforms and horizontal transformation, as well as areas for further research, to help address the problem of fixing in the Philippines.

This study neither offers an illusion that fixing will stop nor takes delight in narrating the stories of those involved in it. But as the title suggests in a double meaning (fixing society), ours is a country of fixers and there is a need to fix the problem of fixing.

Chapter I INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Study

THERE HAVE BEEN SEVERAL VIEWS that explain the causes of poverty in the Philippines. There are those who point to the kind of politics that stand in the way of genuine development. There are also those who argue against the government's neoliberal economic policies which impede, rather than promote, economic growth. Others are very specific on the factors that reinforce the country's poverty --- foreign intervention and foreign debt (Constantino 1979 and Simbulan 1982), religion (Garcia 1993), population (Concepcion 2004), elitism (Bello *et al* 2004), the lack of education (David 2005) and corruption. While these views have valid grounds on their own, this study would like to highlight the extent and impact of corruption to the country's well-being. This study not only pursues the deleterious implications of corruption to the developmental welfare of the country, but also brings up the phenomenon of fixing in government as a serious problem that cultivates the inability of the bureaucracy to provide public service and implement development programs.

The central objective of the study is to establish the culture of fixing as a vital issue of corruption afflicting the government bureaucracy. If the Philippine government is serious in addressing corruption in government, it has to take a good look at why and how fixers exist and persist in several national government agencies and local government units. This study suspects some twists in fixing,

and attempts to unearth them by investigating the social capital and social networks of fixers. After comprehensive analysis of the problem, several insights and recommendations are offered to various stakeholders.

Development and corruption

Corruption gravely impedes genuine development and dreadfully damages developing countries (Mauro 1995; Hines 1995; Kaufmann 1997a; Bardhan 1997; Tanzi 1998; Wei 1997 and 1998; Kaufmann and Wei 1998; Rose-Ackerman 1975, 1978 and 1998; World Bank 1997a and 1997b; Klitgaard 1998; Batalla 2000; Reinikka and Svenson 2001; World Bank 2000; and Conti 2004). Wei (1998) is more explicit while Conti (2004) is shocked for the Philippines:

“Countries with high corruption levels have poorer economic performance.... [because of] reduced domestic investments, reduced foreign direct investments, overblown government expenditure, distorted government expenditure away from education, health and the maintenance of infrastructure, towards less efficient but more manipulatable public projects” (Wei 1998:2).

“The corruption take is utterly shocking. It could have funded the building of hundreds of thousands of classrooms and the hiring of so many teachers for the education of millions of Filipino children. It could have improved the interconnection of the country’s islands with modern infrastructure consisting of good roads, railway system, seaports, airports and bridges..... Such a huge amount of money stolen from the nation could have provided a comprehensive health and medical insurance coverage for every Filipino. It could have substantially empowered Filipino farmers and fishers with the construction nationwide of farm-to-market roads and the setting up of post-harvest as well as cold storage facilities. It could have funded several rounds of salary increases for government employees. It could have been translated to a vast network of micro-credit facilities to energize small entrepreneurs. And it could have built so many housing units for legions of homeless Filipinos” (Conti 2004:8-9).

In the midst of escalating global poverty, especially among 3rd World countries, there is no debate that corruption plays a compelling influence as an inhibitor of genuine development. However, there is little causative evidence showing that if a country is corrupt, it is bound to be poor. Or conversely, if it is poor, it is corrupt. The cross-country surveys on corruption perception indices beginning in 1995 (cf: Transparency International 1995-2004) interestingly reveal that most of the poor countries, mostly in Asian and African continents, demonstrate very serious problems of domestic corruption. While there is no saying that developed countries are not corrupt, there is a strong indication that it will be very difficult for poor countries to rise and develop without eradicating corruption. Unlike their counterparts in the 1st World, 3rd World countries have low incomes, inadequate safety nets and nil surplus savings to cushion or mitigate the adverse effects of corruption. This further deepens their underdevelopment as investments for basic services in health, education, and social welfare are forfeited.

The Philippines has become notorious in corruption issues (Santiago 2001:137). Once in a while, Filipinos are favorites of corruption scandals at home and abroad. News of exposés appear everyday, while the cases filed, if ever, are still wanting of solution. As part of the eleven most corrupt countries in 2004, the Philippines is not exempt from the adverse economic and social effects of corruption.

As it strives to break free from the shackles of massive poverty, the Philippines needs to include in its agenda serious measures to combat corruption as part of its development programs.

What is corruption? ¹

“Corruption is an age-old problem, probably dating back to as early as the Biblical times, when the Serpent deceived Adam and Eve into eating the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Paradise. The deception of the Serpent speaks of the apparent distortion and seeming bribery that deviate from the integrity and purity of humanity” (Amorado 2003: 5).

In the ancient times, the Greeks referred to corruption as “*luō*, *stasis*, *metabolē* and *diaphthora*² which imply the loss of form and the process of change that such loss entails” (Saxonhouse 2000:12). The precursor of corruption emanated from the Greek *corruzione* and the Latin *corruptus* and *corrumpere*, which stand for the “deterioration of government and in the quality of governance” (Machiavelli and Polybius in Hirschman 1997 as cited in Saxonhouse 2000:4). Since then, corruption has evolved into the concept of deviating from the purity and integrity of governance and government structures.

¹ This is an enhanced version of an article entitled “Evolving Definitions of Corruption” by Ronnie V. Amorado that previously appeared in *Ehem! A Manual for Deepening Involvement in Combating Corruption* (2nd edition) by the Philippine Province of the Society of Jesus – Committee on the Evangelization of Culture, 2003; pp. 5-6.

² Upon further check in the internet search engines for the English transliteration, *luō* means to loosen or to break up; *stasis* is a state of slowing down or stagnation; *metabolē* is a change, alteration or mutation; and *diaphthora* is corruption (*diaphtherin* is to corrupt). They all suggest that something is destroyed, deriorated or astrayed. The Latin *Corrumpere* is also to destroy; it implies the destruction (*rumpere*) of the heart (*cor*).

In his regular column *The Public Lives*, the sociologist and journalist Randolph S. David cleanly defines corruption in accord with the ancient notion:

“I’ve sometimes wondered why corruption is the word used for acts of dishonesty committed by people in positions of trust. Corruption means debasement, decay, deterioration, weakening. These terms are usually applied to metal and, in particular, to living matter. So, what is it that decays, deteriorates, or weakens in corrupt people?... I think that what corruption signifies when applied to human behavior is the weakening of instincts --- in this case, the instinct for honesty. On this simple instinct depends many of our social institutions. Instincts are sources of energy, and corruption is energy in decline” (Philippine Daily Inquirer, p.A15, December 5, 2004).

At present, most of the definitions view corruption as the abuse of power for private gain and enrichment. Other concepts emanate as derivatives of this notion. For instance, corruption is seen as a behavior that deviates from the formally prescribed duties of a public role because of private and pecuniary gains (Nye 1967 and Scott 1972 in Saxonhouse 2000:4-5). It is also the use of public office where an official, who is entrusted by the public to carry out a task, engages in some sort of malfeasance for personal enrichment (Bardhan 1997 in Saxonhouse 2000:5). Others ascribe to the notion that corruption is the abuse of official power for private gain (Kaufmann and Siegelbaum 1997) or the misuse of power by any government official or other person in a position of power and influence for material reward or personal gain (Klitgaard *et al* 1995; World Bank 2000 and Transparency International 2003). Normally, the abuse or misuse entails a behavior of impropriety on the part of the officials, in which they improperly or unlawfully enrich themselves and those close to them.

As it therefore applies to public office, corruption is defined as “a dysfunctional and pathological condition in the bureaucracy that negates the accomplishment of its constitutional mandate of promoting public interest” (Sosmeña 1995:14). It is a “purposive behavior which may be a deviation from an expected norm but is undertaken nevertheless with a view to attain material or other rewards. It occurs in a social context, the most immediate of which is the organization, which is the source of an official’s authority or discretion” (Alfiler 1986 in Cariño *et al* 1986:29). But while it puts the public sector at the center of corruption discourse, the World Bank is also cognizant of the corruption in the private sector. It has recognized that as a “frequent source of bribes for public officials, the private sector shares the responsibility for corruption” (WB 2000:6)

Batalla (2000:8) concurs when he denotes the “misuse or abuse of public office for private gain both in government and the private sector.” He goes further to state that the “use of public office has been identified with gaining and maintaining economic, political and social power.” He also identified a wide range of corrupt practices and illicit behavior to include bribery, extortion, fraud, nepotism, graft, speed money, pilferage, theft, embezzlement, falsification of records, kickbacks, influence peddling and campaign contributions. The Asian Development Bank (ADB), for its part, accentuates its definition of corruption to include and emphasize the misuse of public or private office for personal gain. It defines corruption as “a behavior on the part of officials in the public and private sectors, in which they improperly and unlawfully enrich themselves and those close to them, or induce others to do so, by misusing the position in which they

are placed”³ (ADB 2000:5). This definition underscores the role of the private sector in seriously reinforcing the problem of corruption.

The Oxford Dictionary defines corruption as the “perversion or destruction of integrity in the discharge of public duties by bribery or favor” (cited in ADB 2000 and Saxonhouse 2000) and the “inducement to wrong by improper or unlawful means” (Webster’s Dictionary as cited in ADB 2000). This view is particularly supportive of Angeles (1999:3) where corruption is seen as an “infraction or violation of the mandated and institutional norms of duty and responsibility for personal and private gain.”

In all these definitions, government is seen as a major arena of corrupt and corruptible behavior. This notion also extends to the private sector, because its own systematic or institutionalized corruption will eventually affect its relationships and transactions with government. “When corruption becomes endemic, it will respect no borders and spread like a virus” (Moratalla *et al* 1999:15). Indeed, like termites that destroy from the inside, and like a metastatic cancer that infects and rapidly spreads to the others (Alatas 1991; Coronel 1998), corruption will breed and intricately contribute to and pervade among other problems in society: poverty, criminality, drug addiction, diseases, calamities and even wars. Corruption therefore cannot be isolated from other social problems.

³ Kaufmann (1997) speaks of kleptocracy when government officials and employees use the resources of the government to enrich themselves and their associates; when corruption is state-sanctioned and has become pervasive and corrosive.

The Philippine's National Anti-Corruption Framework and Strategy (2000) also expands the definition of corruption as graft to mean as the acquisition of gain through dishonest and questionable manner in general.

Lim and Amorado (2002:12) cite several other views. Corruption is a "behavior of public officials which deviates from accepted norms in order to serve private ends" (Huntington 1968:59 in Coronel 1998:10); "the practice of using the power of office for making private gain in breach of laws and regulations nominally in force" (Andreski 1968:92 also in Coronel 1998:10) and one that is "systematically and actively supported by members of the organization through their direct participation in the corrupt act by covering for it and in the sharing of the rewards generated through the process" (Alfiler 1986 in Cariño *et al* 1986:28; also in Lim and Amorado 2002:13).

Corruption in the Philippines

It has been a widely and strongly accepted notion that corruption is enormously harmful to development. Its effects are even more damaging to developing countries, where massive poverty abound, because these countries bear and suffer the cost of corruption and lose the opportunities for genuine development. It also destroys the fundamental political, economic and cultural foundations of a society. As a developing country, the Philippines is hardest hit by corruption.

Several estimates show that corruption eats up a significant portion of the country's annual income in the Gross National Product (GNP) and the annual budget in the General Appropriations Act (GAA). Some also compute the cost of corruption as eating up a very big portion or exceeding the country's foreign debt and it is likewise robbing much needed resources from frontline service agencies. Corruption also afflicts the private sector. 2 out of 3 business companies bribe the government in their official transactions. Meanwhile, the Philippines stands as the 11th most corrupt in the whole world, and the 3rd most corrupt in the Southeast Asian region, and the 2nd most corrupt in the East ASEAN Growth Area (EAGA) region. And disgustingly, 2 of the 10 most corrupt world leaders are Filipinos. Further details of the state of corruption in the Philippines are presented in Chapter II of this study (Review of Related Literature and Conceptual Framework).

Bureaucratic corruption

Systematic corruption in the bureaucracy has become a very serious and pervasive problem afflicting many, if not all, agencies of the Philippine government. Many studies show how bureaucratic corruption erodes and destroys the effective and efficient functions of government agencies and institutions (Alfiler 1986 in Cariño *et al* 1986; Klitgaard *et al* 1995; Sosmeña 1995; Varela 1996). Klitgaard (1995 in Sosmeña 1995:14) aptly views bureaucratic corruption as a bureaucratic dysfunction that prevents the bureaucracy to accomplish its mandated functions and institutional goals. In essence, bureaucratic corruption is

a perversion of the bureaucracy, eventually leading to its decay and structural destruction. The Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (PCIJ) defines bureaucratic corruption as one “which occurs in the civil service, among the corps of state officials and employees who run the day-to-day affairs of government” (Coronel and Kalaw-Tirol 2002:10). It proceeds further describing the concept, to wit:

“Bureaucratic corruption may involve low-level government employees who are given small amounts as grease to speed up transactions, such as for licenses or permits. It may also involve higher-level officials such as district or provincial highways engineers, or members of bid committees who get substantial cuts or commissions for awarding government contracts to favored firms” (Coronel and Kalaw-Tirol 2002:10-11).

Bureaucratic corruption has a derivative form in the concept of the so-called bureaucratic delay, or more popularly known as bureaucratic red tape. The concept was introduced by Charles Dickens and popularized by Thomas Carlyle, and whose origins can be traced back to the practice of government officials in England in the 17th century. The practice used to be the habit of these officials of arranging and tying official documents with red ribbons before working on them. But both Dickens and Carlyle were denouncing the very slow response of the British bureaucracy to address the social problems plaguing England during that time. Since then, especially during the start of the 19th century, the concept of red ribbon (or red tape) has become the symbol of official delays, government delays, bureaucratic layers, bureaucratic sluggishness and bureaucratic corruption (Ehem!

2003).⁴ Indeed, in a survey in 2002 by the Hong Kong-based Political and Economic Risk Consultancy (PERC), the Philippines is cited together with Indonesia “as having a pattern of worsening bureaucracy that is most common among the rest of Asia awash with rules and red tapes” (Philippine Daily Inquirer February 24, 2002).

When the German Sociologist Max Weber (1864-1920), the acknowledged Father of Bureaucratic Organization, developed the concept of bureaucracy, he was contemplating of the most efficient form of organizational relationships which could be used by states and governments, business, military and academic organizations among others. Weber thought of the formal and elaborate bureaucratic design as therefore the most efficient, organized and rational form of organizational relationship (Hall 1963 in Kast and Rosenzweig 1979; Tendero 1993; Panopio and Rolda 2000). Bureaucracy has also been used as a condition in a continuum, rather than in absolute sense of being present or absent (Hall 1963 in Kast and Rosenzweig 1979). This condition of continuum exists in so-called bureaucratic dimensions that describe a good bureaucracy, to wit:

1. division of labor based on functional specialization
2. well-defined hierarchy of authority
3. system of rules covering the rights and duties of positions
4. system of procedures for dealing with work situations
5. impersonality of interpersonal relations
6. promotion and selection for employment based on technical competence

⁴ Philippine Province of the Society of Jesus – Committee on the Evangelization of Culture. 2003. *Ehem! A Manual for Deepening Involvement in Combating Corruption* (2nd edition) Philippines: Ateneo de Davao University – Research and Publication office.

As a condition of continuum, the ideal bureaucracy is characterized by all the identified dimensions, while less bureaucratic organizations would only demonstrate some of these dimensions in lesser degree.

Bureaucracy therefore aims at putting the house in order, to provide standard rules and procedures, to guide and harmonize people's relationships, and to basically guide people's behavior in organizations. Bureaucracy also implies a system of penalties, where deviation from the standard rules and procedures are strictly discouraged or accordingly punished. This system is a necessary component to ensure the coherence of bureaucracy. "By origin, bureaucracy is a formal structure which organizes and coordinates the various functions of large number of individuals engaged in a common activity. The bureaucracy is a rationally organized structure designed for problem solving...and getting things done because the structure provides for control and discipline in meeting the organization's goals" (Ayson and Reyes 1993:372).

But for many people, "bureaucracy is perceived as connoting "narrowness, rigidity, and red tape.... a system of administration marked by constant driving for increased functions and power, by lack of initiative and flexibility, by indifference to human needs or public opinion and by a tendency to defer decisions to superiors or to impeded action with red tape" (Ayson and Reyes 1993:371).

Cañedo (1995:90) further laments: “whenever there are failures in the effective delivery of government administrative services, more often than not, they are mostly associated with bureaucratic dysfunctions or impairments. In fact, bureaucracy has become synonymous with red tape or inefficiency.” Cañedo (1995) wittingly describes these dysfunctions as serious bureaucratic illnesses that develop into several stages known as bureaucratic indulitis and bureaucratic coma. “Indulitis shall be applied as the technical term for a bureaucratic disease that approximates Parkinson’s injelitis or palsied paralysis...it is a pathologic self-induced infectious and malignant bureaucratic disease that occurs as a result of a chemical reaction when a high concentration of incompetence combines with dullness, which in turn is a result of a dormant disease called indolence... The terminal stage is bureaucratic coma... where the organization, for practical purposes, is clinically dead” (Cañedo⁵ 1995:91-93) due to wanton failure and incapacity of the bureaucratic organization.

It is this very nature of bureaucracy that has also led to the ugly state of bureaucratic corruption. While corruption thrives because of lack of clear rules, it also cultivates in the presence of irrational and even conflicting bureaucratic procedures. Even the World Bank (1997b:20) recognizes that “the absence of rules facilitates the process of corruption as much as the presence of cumbersome and excessive rules does.”

⁵ Amusingly, he identified several prescriptions adapted from the Parkinson’s Law in order to cure bureaucratic illness. At the first stage of bureaucratic indulitis, a combination of “injecol” (inject the organization with small reforms) and “bornagin” (spiritual and ethical programs) may help. But as the illness advances to coma, what is needed is either “surgeonol” (more drastic reforms), or “exterminol” (exterminate or abolish the organization) when the illness is beyond cure. While witty, these symbolic prescriptions demand more serious thought in addressing the problem of bureaucratic corruption.

Bureaucratic rigidity or inflexibility therefore plays a major role in reinforcing bureaucratic corruption since the rules and procedures now become constrictions. These constrictions are translated in bureaucratic delays, impersonal and mechanical formality of transactions, as well as the resultant repression of creativity and flexibility that are not encouraged or provided by the permanent and inflexible nature of bureaucracy (Ayson and Reyes 1993; Tendero 1993; Calvert and Calvert 1992 as cited in Panopio and Rolda 2000). Bureaucratic corruption now helps people to move around these rules and procedures to avoid the constrictions (Cariño *et al* 1986).

Certainly, bureaucratic corruption departs from the goals of Weberian bureaucracy. Instead of bureaucracy establishing order in organizations, it has instead reinforced disorder, chaos and institutionalized corruption. And most unfortunately, bureaucratic corruption is very much endemic in the Philippine bureaucracy (Cariño *et al* 1986; Sosmeña 1995).

Fixing in the bureaucracy

Fixing has become the avenue of people to move around established bureaucratic rules and procedures. Fixers have become fixtures in most of the national government agencies and local government units in the Philippines. And while most of written literatures point to fixing as one of the manifestations and culprits of bureaucratic corruption, there is a need to look at it at another perspective, one that takes it as a surreptitious behavioral response of people to

cope and survive in the layered and constricted bureaucracy. Fixing also needs to be seen as an expedient but necessary reaction to bureaucratic corruption.

Fixers generally refer to persons who are hired to expedite a transaction for a principal (client). Ehem! (2003:100) describes fixers as “those believed to be able to circumvent the bureaucracy because of their connections with people working inside the bureaucratic system, or because they themselves are employed in the office.” Normally, the principal usually pays additional fees, or render other favors, for the fixing services.

While there is a need to later dig deeper on the different views and descriptions of fixers and fixing, it is important to recognize at this early that fixing in the bureaucracy has become one of the many issues raised against bureaucratic corruption.

B. Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to look deeper into the problem of fixing in Philippine society, especially in the Philippine government bureaucracy. While there are some literatures that define fixing and describe fixers as well, it is important to ethnographically understand the problem from the views of those who are directly involved in fixing. Further, this study hoped to pronounce that ultimately, fixing in particular and bureaucratic⁸ corruption in general can and should be checked and reduced, if not totally eradicated. While generally frowned upon, fixers are the least understood dwellers in the bureaucracy. This study seeks answers to the following questions:

1. What is fixing? Why do people fix, and why do people avail of the services of fixers? More importantly, how do fixers view fixing?
2. How does one become a fixer? What are some of the discernible patterns in terms of psychographic and demographic profiles of fixers, their methodologies and strategies, tools and techniques, ethics and ideology?
3. How do fixers sustain and nurture their influence in the government bureaucracy? What are their connections, associations and networks in various bureaucratic systems in government?
4. What can be done to address the causes of fixing and mitigate its consequences?

C. Objectives of the Study

In general, this study aimed to address bureaucratic corruption by looking deeper into the problem of fixing. The aims of the study are four-pronged in accord with what Schram (2003) calls the major purposes for qualitative inquiry: descriptive aims, interpretive aims, explanatory aims, and emancipatory aims. As a matter of inquiry, this study intended to document and describe the unique experiences of fixers and the other stakeholders in their given set of circumstances (descriptive); to interpret and investigate important categories of meanings, symbols and strategies in fixing (interpretive); to explain and analyze the recurring themes and discernible patterns in fixing to the extent explicable without employing causative and correlational relationships (explanatory); and to generate recommendations and actions that will address the problem of fixing (emancipatory). As its four-pronged objectives, this study specifically sought to:

1. Develop a systematic theoretical and practical understanding of fixing in the Philippines by describing and looking into the social capital and informal networks of fixers (descriptive);
2. Explore and analyze the unique experiences of fixers and other stakeholders in fixing, their categories of meanings, symbols and strategies (interpretive);
3. Find out and analyze discernible patterns from these experiences, meanings, symbols and strategies (explanatory); and

4. Generate appropriate policy recommendations (executive and legislative) and institutional interventions based on the experiences and strategies of fixers, which will particularly address the causes and consequences of fixing and eventually contribute to the improvement of government service (emancipatory). The institutional intervention was aimed to propose more effective and efficient bureaucratic systems that are more prone to corruption and fixing.

D. Significance of the Study

With the stated objectives, this study offered a couple of significant contributions: to contribute to the efforts of addressing the culture of corruption by establishing a body of ethnographic knowledge and discernible patterns about fixers, and to enhance the initiatives against corruption by generating appropriate recommendations that will address the problem of fixing.

In establishing a body of ethnographic knowledge and discernible patterns among fixers, this study rendered an idiographic analysis (learning from the particular experiences of fixers) rather than a nomothetic abstraction (learning from the general experiences of fixers). The significance of the study is therefore located in the individual experiences of fixers without aiming at generalization and universal application of the discernible patterns.

Schram (2003:9) is again very useful henceforth by giving importance to the methodical “inquiry into the social world [which] calls for attentiveness to particulars.” He makes use of the concept of complex specificness as originally coined by Geertz (1973):

“Complex specificness conveys to the understanding that a researcher’s findings can be both specific and circumstantial. In this light, the complexity we seek to uncover as qualitative inquirers is understood by attending to the particular (and unpredictable) nature of events or cases, rather than to their general character and overall distribution. Depth, richness, and detail provide the basis for a qualitative account’s claim to relevance in some broader context” (Schram 2003:9).

For cross-validation, this study sought understanding on the problem of fixing via emic and etic ethnographic approaches (Garson 2004). The emic approach took the experiences of fixers, or those who are involved in fixing, as the primary sources of information. Meanwhile, the etic approach took the expert views and opinions of other stakeholders or those who are not fixers but have direct and first-hand knowledge about fixing. The stakeholders included in the study were selected officials and employees in government agencies, academicians, investigators, recipients of consummated fixing as well as victims of swindled fixing.

The study likewise offered to challenge the presuppositions of anti-corruption policies and programs in addressing bureaucratic corruption. This offer is hoped to help, in turn, those who are formulating and implementing policies and programs aimed at combating graft and corruption in the government sector.

Without being authoritative, this study also developed in the process a unique method of qualitative research by combining ethnography and undercover inquiry in generating information about fixers. Learning from PCIJ's investigative journalism⁶ and of Marx's undercover investigation, this study built on a method called undercover research or undercover ethnography. This appeared to be most useful for difficult research problems like corruption.

§

E. Limitations of the Study

There were several constraints though, which defined the parameters in the conduct of this study.

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1. As the focal topic of the study, fixing is herein limited to bureaucratic corruption and fixing practices in the government bureaucracy only. The study certainly recognized similar bureaucratic corruption in private organizations and institutions.
2. While fixing is very common and accepted in most government agencies as a reality, there are very limited studies and materials about fixers in the Philippines. This is one area of corruption that particularly remains unexplored in literature.

⁶ Several investigative reports of the PCIJ are very helpful: Coronel's *Betrayal of the Public Trust: Investigative Reports on Corruption* (2000), Balgos' *Investigating Local Governments: A Manual for Reporters* (2001); and Coronel and Kalaw-Tirol's *Investigating Corruption: A Do-It-Yourself Guide* (2002). On detection and prevention, Henderson's *Crimes of Persuasion: Schemes, Scams and Frauds* (1999) and Bertrand's *Fraud! How to Protect Yourself from Schemes, Scams and Swindles* (2002) are absolutely valuable.

3. Since this study is non-nomothetic, it is improper to generalize the experiences of the fixers belonging to one agency with different branches in different locations. For example, the experiences of fixers in the central office of the land transportation agency differ from those in the regional offices. Or the styles in fixing in a public works regional office are unlikely similar in another regional branch. While this study was able to generate discernible patterns in fixing (idiographic), it made no attempt to establish a universal body of knowledge about fixers (nomothetic).
4. It was difficult to do a probabilistic statistical analysis on fixing based on sampled respondents since there was no established universe or population of fixers. Fixers exist as informal and underground agents without formal identification or inventory.
5. A very strong sub-cultural pattern of anonymity and secrecy among fixers exists. It was thus difficult to openly seek out for interviews informants who are actually fixing.⁷ This study is sympathetic to Alfiler (1986), Coronel and Kalaw-Tirol (2002) and Landry (2004)⁸ as

⁷ This affirms PCLJ's (2002) observation of secrecy as one of the difficult problems in analyzing and investigating corruption. Alfiler (1986) cited Quah (1979): "*any research on corruption in general and bureaucratic corruption in particular faces the serious limitations of ascertaining the actual extent of corrupt behavior among the population under study. This problem arises simply because such behavior is usually conducted furtively and is not legally or socially condoned*" (Cariño et al 1986:24).

⁸ In his studies of networks in China, Landry found out that no rational Chinese cadre would want to reveal willingly when it comes to issues of corruption and nepotism in the informal networks known as "*guanxi*" within the Chinese formal political structures. "*La guanxi*" literally means to "pull into a relationship."

they encounter the same difficulty in investigating issues of corruption. Rose-Ackerman (2001:3), a notable international academician and expert on anticorruption, also observes that “research on corruption is difficult because the perpetrators seek to keep their transactions secret.” Even Alatas (1999) hints of gathering as much confidential information as possible about the shady transactions in corruption through methodical observation that is not generally applicable in the conventional interviews, questionnaires and statistical analyses. In the course of the entire fieldwork for this study, a system of referral was principally employed to seek out informants and a strict covenant of confidentiality needed to be established to interview fixers (Briones 1979 as cited in Alfiler 1986 in Cariño *et al* 1986:25). This study is therefore obliged not to reveal the names of the respondents as well as the location of the agencies and offices where the informants are operating. Marx (1999b:4-6 and 2001:3-5) supports this strategy when he identified five reasons, *inter alia*, that require confidentiality or anonymity in research: (a) facilitate the flow of information and communication on critical public issues; (b) obtain information in which the respondents are assumed not to want to give publicly attributable answers; (c) obtain a resource or encourage a condition using means that involve illegality or are morally impugnable, but in which the goal sought is seen as the lesser evil; (d) avoid persecution; and (e) encourage experimentation and risk-taking without facing large

consequences, risk of failure or embarrassment since one's identity is protected. Adhering to these five reasons appear very dependable and useful in doing research on corruption through the experiences of fixers. Milde (2004) further affirms when he sounds off a privacy warning in conducting ethnographic research: "Be aware of privacy issues. You are writing a public paper. If you are observing a public setting, remember that your subjects didn't give permission, and avoid using real names or reporting anything personal...." (Milde 2004:2).

6. During the fieldwork, the study needed to slightly depart from the ethics of transparency about the objectives of the study. While some of the informants were notified of the first objective of ethnographically understanding the fixers, they had to be unaware of the other objective to generate recommendations that will lessen or address fixing in government. Had the informants known of this objective, which is eventually adverse to them, it would be difficult for the study to interview fixers and dig deeper into their beliefs, operations and practices among others. Further, because of the very sensitive nature of the identity of fixers, there were cases that the informants need not know entirely of the existence and purpose of the study. This is because of the concern about undue reactivity as raised by Fine (1994) in his "*Ten Lies of Ethnography*," where the informants withhold or give the wrong information if they have knowledge of the study. He suggests some critical judgment on the part of the researcher to be able

to strike a good balance between offering transparency and generating the correct information. There are cases that if the “subjects know the research goals, their responses are likely to be skewed” (Fine 1994:6). Thus, in the conduct of the study, there were some instances that the researcher held off information and kept the goals of the study from the informants, pretended as a decoy client, or conducted some concealed interviews, some with hidden tape recorder or spy digital camera for picture-taking. Here Marx (1995a, 1995b and 1995c) identifies some of the useful undercover tactics like feigning as decoys to infiltrate organized crime and corruption for intelligence collection purposes, whose end goal is preparedness and prevention. These tactics were also very useful in gaining access to fixers only in as far as this study aimed to understand them (for preparedness) and generated recommendations to address fixing (for prevention). To some extent, because of its sensitive nature, the study was somewhat similar to the covert methods of investigative researchers and journalists, undercover agents, deep penetration informers, spies and scouts, detectives and moles in generating information that are otherwise difficult to gather in conventional research methods.

G. Definition of Terms

This study came up with a glossary of terms on fixing in the Philippines by collecting all the indigenous vocabularies, metaphors and symbols from the fixers and other stakeholders. Citing Triandis (1994), Montiel (2002:16) re-echoes that “members who share a culture possess a common language used to communicate among themselves.” Maggay (2002) also highlights the subtlety of different verbal and non-verbal usage of communication among Filipinos as a culture. Fixers share a particular culture that contains its own set of words and symbols that transmit unique meanings in fixing and which are carried on by generations. Hornedo (1997) speaks of this phenomenon as the hermeneutics in the process of interpretation of words and symbols: “symbols do not only go beyond the limits of time and space, but they also grow like a continuing revelation over time” (Hornedo 1997:141).

Initially, the basic concepts were herein defined as to how they were used and treated in the study. These concepts were explained in detail in Chapter II (Review of Literature and Conceptual Framework), while the glossary of words and symbols were fully exhausted in Chapter V (Analysis).

Fixing refers to a surreptitious activity operating in a continuum of facilitation and falsification. There are many types of fixing in such continuum: facilitating or altering official documents (permit fixing); falsification of records (records fixing); physical misrepresentation or alteration of identification profiles (identity fixing); twisting the facts in news reports (news fixing/news twisting);

influencing the outcome of a legal case (case fixing); unauthorized claims of benefits and entitlements (claims fixing); swaying the results of a game (game fixing or sports match fixing); and controlling the commodity goods by manipulating the market values of such goods (price fixing).

A fixer is the person or agent of fixing. There are two types: the professional or full-time fixers, and the sideline or insider fixers. A fixer is a professional when he or she makes fixing as his or her main profession and primary source of income and livelihood. A fixer is full-time when he or she invests most of his or her productive time in fixing activities. A sideline fixer is one who does fixing as a part-time activity and one who earns additional income from fixing. Since this study is made in the context of fixing in the government bureaucracy, the insider fixers are the government officials and employees who serve as the insider connections and link to people outside of government. Since their work in government is their primary profession with a regular and fixed income, insider fixers are also sideline fixers. The professional and full-time fixers are those private individuals who are not connected or formally sanctioned by the government bureaucracy. Fixers take on different roles in different bureaucratic conditions, and these are later defined and analyzed in the study.

The principals are the individuals who avail of the services of the fixers. It is herein used interchangeably with clients, customers and the general public. A principal can be a recipient (when he or she benefits from fixers) or a victim (when he or she is duped or swindled by fixers).

Social capital is the aggregate real and potential value of a person by virtue of his or her connections and networks. The more connections and wider the networks are, the more social capital accrues to the person. **Informal networks** are an aggrupation of individuals interacting with one another on assumed norms of flexibility, trust and reciprocity among others, and not guided by the rules and regulations of the formal bureaucratic organizations. This study largely adopts the notions adopted by Granovetter (1973; 1983), Boissevain (1974), Bourdieu (1985), Coleman (1990), Putnam (1993; 2000) and Milani (2003) for social capital, and to Han (1983) and Waldstrom (2001) for informal networks.

The informal networks of fixers and principals have over time built and enhanced a different kind of social capital. This makes fixing a prevalent phenomenon in the government bureaucracy. The various types and forms of these networks were also later classified and analyzed in Chapter II of this study.

“Investigating corruption requires skill, patience, and a nose for wrongdoing..... While much more is known about corruption now than in the past, a lot more needs to be found out. Corruption thrives in secrecy, and part of the campaign against malfeasance is uncovering new information about corruption and building a body of knowledge that will help citizens and reformers come to grips with the problem. Unearthing information about corruption is the first step toward preventing it.”

Coronel and Lorna Kalaw-Tirol (2002) in *Investigating Corruption*.