

# The Airbus bribery scandal: A collective myopia perspective

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## Abstract

Drawing on collective myopia as a lens, we explore the infamous Airbus bribery scandal to show how the executives of the global aircraft manufacturer, through their actions and behaviours, institutionalised the payment of bribes to secure contracts. Data for the inquiry consist of publicly available court-approved documents, company website and internal emails, and newspaper articles on the scandal. Unpacking the bribery scheme operated by Airbus, we found that bribing of foreign government officials and airline executives to secure contracts was part and parcel of the firm's organising strategy. In this regard, the organising practices of Airbus actively encouraged employees to break its own bribery compliance policies which they employed as smokescreens to cover their illegal activities. Building on our findings, we developed a collective myopic-bribery framework outlining how the collective myopia in organising drove the bribery activities at Airbus. The implications of the findings for theory and practice are outlined.

## KEYWORDS

Airbus, bribery, collective myopia, organising practices, scandals

## INTRODUCTION

In a recent court case, the Queen's Bench Division of the Southwark Crown Court approved the largest global bribery settlement between Airbus SE and the UK Serious Fraud Office (SFO). The €3.6 billion mulct included fines that were to be paid by the European aerospace giant to authorities in France and the United States for failing to prevent bribery in five jurisdictions including Malaysia, Taiwan, Ghana, Sri Lanka and Indonesia. Following in the steps of bribery scandals involving global firms such as Enron, Rolls-Royce, Mabey and Johnson, Siemen and BAE systems, the Airbus bribery scandal has become one of the many high-profile bribery scandals involving multinational enterprises (MNEs) operations in foreign markets (Hanson, 2020; Zagaris, 2020). The prevalence of these bribery scandals has reignited scholarly interest in exploring how the historical, socio-economic and organisational context within which MNEs operate may facilitate (or impede) this repugnant and ethically questionable practices (Collins et al., 2009; Mishina et al., 2010; Xu et al., 2018). An emerging consensus points to executive hubris,

organisational member's cognitive awareness of moral issues, situational stimuli and personal ambitions of key decision makers, and the natural tendency to abuse discretionary power and autonomy (Aquino & Reed, 2002; Butterfield et al., 2000; Sarpong et al., 2019). However, these arguments only go far enough to reinforce the long-held belief that the purveyors of illegitimate practices are, essentially, individual actors or a group of colluding individuals within organisations.

Recasting discussions on bribery in terms of organising practices, the emerging literature has re-directed attention to agent's engagement in corruption and how their sense of what constitutes an unethical practice may fuel bribery in organising (Greve et al., 2010; Frost & Tischer, 2014; Troisi et al., 2021). Eddleston et al. (2020) in their study on family firms engaged in bribery found that in contexts where bribery is a regular course of business the continuous enactment of graft actively moulds organisational members' perception of the act as a self-sustaining social norm. The explanation Eddleston and colleagues advance here is that the organising practices of family firms are deeply entrenched in a family social context such that members are only

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able to make sense of the business environment through the collective lens of the family. Also, Frost and Tischer (2014) in their conceptualisation of collective corruption from routines-as-practice perspective argued that ‘corruption is constituted by the actors’ subjective understandings of how things should be done, and the action based on this understanding’ (Frost & Tischer, 2014, p. 194). They further emphasised that organisations, through their power to align the subjective understandings of employees with company’s goals, ‘influence the sense-making process indirectly to encourage corrupt behaviors’ (Frost & Tischer, 2014, p. 201). These arguments thus suggest that the mainspring of bribery in organisations is reposed in the organising routines and practices of the organisations themselves.

In this paper, we follow Eddleston et al. (2020) and Frost and Tischer (2014) to argue that organising contexts and architectures (Sarpong et al., 2013; Sarpong & Maclean, 2016) of organisations creates a subjectively construed understanding of the ethical standards that influence members to perceive deviant actions as a procedural norm. We further argue that the organising practices of the organisation in the form of organising contexts and architectures are a function of the cognitive structures of the organisation. Therefore, bribery is an organisational meta-habit that exists on the substrate of the organisational cognitive structures that shape members’ choices and actions in their everyday organising practices (Gioia, 1992; Sarpong et al., 2013). On this basis, we also wish to argue that there is still very little understanding, either implicitly or explicitly, about how the organisational cognitive structures, which serves as effective guide to perceiving and interpreting the contours of organising systematically, shape choices and actions in engaging in bribery. In our efforts to fill this lacuna, we focus on the now famous Airbus bribery scandal as a prototypical case where a variety of recognised patterns of organisational members actions, taken-for-granted everyday routines, and practices combined to institutionalise bribery in organising. We then go further to draw on ‘collective myopia’ (CM) as a meta-theoretical lens to provide a comprehensive account of how illegitimate praxis, ingrained dispositions and activities of organisational members combine to fuel and perpetuate bribery in organising.

Our study makes two main contributions to the literature on bribery and corruption in organising. First, while previous studies have focussed on explaining how individual traits and ambitions may facilitate bribery in organising, our study goes further to shed light on how a variety of recognised patterns of organising practices may operate in combination or serially to legitimise and institutionalise bribery in organising. Second, providing insight into the routines, cognitions and choices of organisational members at the centre of the Airbus scandal, our ‘CM’ approach offers an alternative interpretive lens to theorize and empirically examine how organisational members, within the contingencies of

organising, may come to lose their sense of judgement: a potentially blinkered view of understanding how the ‘thrill of the chase’ in everyday organising could ‘blind the pursuers of the catch’ in the race to creating and capturing value.

The remainder of the paper will unfold as follows. First, we present a concise overview of the existing literature on bribery and corruption, after which we introduce CM as a theoretical lens to explore bribery in organising. Second, we discuss Airbus SE and the bribery scandal in their foreign business operations. Following this, we describe our methodological toolkit used for this empirical study. Finally, we discuss the findings from the study, highlight our contributions and provide directions for future research, and conclude by way of summarising our key findings.

## BRIBERY AND CORRUPTION IN ORGANISING

Occupying analogous intellectual space with concepts such as under-the-counter deals, palm greasing and backhand, bribery is widely referred to as the practice of offering gifts, usually in the form of money, to individuals or organisations for favours which the payer is not legally entitled to (Steidlmeier, 1999; Méon & Sekkat, 2005; Shchetinina, 2018). Thus, bribery involves an informal exchange of favours with the motive to convert anonymous relationship into one that is based on friendship and a sense of personal obligation in order to reduce or eliminate conditions that are perceived as obstacles to the flow of business (Theobald, 2002; Eddleston et al., 2020). In this regard, bribery is perceived to be a ‘grease in the wheels of commerce’ as it helps to reduce bureaucratic procedures and eases the flow of economic activities (Méon & Sekkat, 2005; Baughn et al., 2010; Eddleston et al., 2020). Nonetheless, bribery is also regarded as a ‘sand on the wheels of commerce’ and a damper to efficiency as it imposes pressure on the cashflow of firms that are keen on paying bribes in exchange for immediate gains (Méon & Sekkat, 2005; Gilbert & Sharman, 2016; Ramakrishna Velamuri et al., 2017; Eddleston et al., 2020). At the macro level, bribes paid to win contracts distort economic growth due to the act usually favouring inefficient firms while competent counterparts are bullied out of competitive bidding (Méon & Sekkat, 2005; Gilbert & Sharman, 2016). In addition, scarce resources end up in less optimum use as corrupt government officials tend to misappropriate public funds to areas of development where bribery is lucrative (Baughn et al., 2010; Kasuga, 2013).

A substantial body of research has addressed several strains that reinforce the propensity for organisations to engage in such illegitimate practice (Uhlenbruck et al., 2006; Martin et al., 2007; Lee et al., 2010; Sikka & Lehman, 2015; Cuervo-Cazurra, 2016). The extant

research conceptualises bribery as a market consisting of both demand side, where officials request for bribe before exercising their duty, and supply side where bribes are offered in exchange for favours (Ashforth et al., 2008; Law, 2015; Sikka & Lehman, 2015; Cuervo-Cazurra, 2016). Within this market for bribery, cultural norms and institutional structures are deemed the mores that drive its viability and efficiency (e.g., Sanyal & Samanta, 2004; Baughn et al., 2010). Here, insider information is outrageously valuable to firm survival as gaining competitive advantage is dependent on firms' ability to secure good connections with government officials and bureaucrats (Lambdsdorff, 2004). The asymmetric nature of information flow between business organisations and bureaucratic intuitions as well as the complexity of regulatory environment further strengthens the viability of this market (Lambert-Mogiliansky, 2002; Svensson, 2005). This lack of transparency in the operations of government institutions coupled with bureaucratic delays thus creates the convenience to offer bribes to ease and expedite bureaucratic processes, reduce transaction cost or even create the opportunity for bureaucratic support needed for organisational survival (Cuervo-Cazurra, 2016; Sartor & Beamish, ). Furthermore, bribery is fuelled by the level pervasiveness of corruption in the countries in which organisations operate (Uhlenbruck et al., 2006; Martin et al., 2007; Lee et al., 2010; Eddleston et al., 2020). Both Martin et al. (2007) and Uhlenbruck et al. (2006) are in congruence that the pervasiveness of corruption in host countries renders bribery as fully institutionalised part of commerce. In this regard, bribery is galvanised when corrupt officials who benefit from the act in such countries are able to denounce culpability and escape punishment (Eddleston et al., 2020).

Elsewhere, a growing consensus in the literature suggests that bribery is not always facilitated by the mere existence of a 'market' where demand and supply forces of bribery interact (Ashforth et al., 2008; Eddleston et al., 2020). Rather, the quest to advance personal ambitions, usually by top management executives, also drives organisations to engage in illegal conducts (Harris & Bromiley, 2007; Mishina et al., 2010; Sarpong et al., 2019). Sarpong et al. (2019) in their empirical study on the Mabey and Johnson bribery scandal found that hubristic syndrome influences executives of organisations to develop a sense of grandiosity and infallibility thereby inducing them to ignore the scandalous downside of engaging in unethical activities. Similarly, Mishina et al. (2010), using various psychological processes and cognitive theories, argued that high aspirations and expectations of top managers in organisations impel them to engage in illegal conduct in order to avert self-disappointment and to maintain or exceed their subjectively construed performance standards. Engrained in this sense of self, ethically bankrupt upper echelons of organisations rationalise their actions by justifying that

their illegal conducts contribute to the growth of the organisations they control (Ashforth et al., 2008). Hence, their unethical conduct appears legitimate, which in turn propels them to engage in such practices to satisfy their individualistic motives (Anand et al., 2004; Kouamé, 2019; Eddleston et al., 2020).

In keeping with these arguments is the view that the panacea to eliminating corrupt organisational practices is to oust corrupt individuals from organisations. On the contrary, other scholars have argued that unethical conducts are often encouraged by organising practices that place premium on high performance standard thereby creating the incentive for members to engage in corrupt behaviour to meet such expectations (Ashforth & Anand, 2003; Pinto et al., 2008). Several studies have established a fine link between illegitimate conducts and organisational practices that prioritise collective pursuit of organisational interest by setting stretched goals, tying compensations to performance level, granting autonomy in job roles and exercising less expenditure controls (Pinto et al., 2008; Harris & Bromiley, 2007). This implies that an organising template or framework that is designed to narrowly focus on economic gains becomes a purveyor of illegitimate practices. Thus, the moral compass of the organisation may misguide members to preclude consideration for ethics, morality, legitimacy or legality of conduct from their prevailing decisions (Moore & Gino, 2013; Gilbert & Sharman, 2016). In this sense, the cognitive structures upon which decisions and actions of the acting agents of such organisations are based are said to be deficient of ethical ingredient (Gioia, 1992; Greve et al., 2010). Consequently, unethical practices transcend into what Ashforth and Annand (2003, p. 4) would describe as 'a property of the collective'. In keeping with these arguments, we draw on 'CM' as a theoretical lens to delineate on how illegitimate organising practices, specifically bribery, come to labelled as a 'collective property' of organisations.

## COLLECTIVE MYOPIA IN ORGANISING

The term 'myopia' in optometry science refers to a visual disability condition where a person(s) suffer from short-sightedness or near-sightedness (Fredrick, 2002; Maskell & Malmberg, 2007). This optical deficiency makes one lose the ability to see farther and restricts vision to close objects. This medical term has in recent times assimilated into the diction of organisational studies, and it is used to describe a situation where organisations prioritise on the present without consideration for the future, or even for retrospection into the past (see Ridge et al., 2014; Opper & Burt, 2020). In this sense, an organisation that lacks foresight is said to suffer from temporal myopia (Michel & de La Croix, 2000; Opper & Burt, 2020).

An extensive use of the term however describes an organisational cognitive framework or structure which

helps members to understand their prevailing environment but prevents them from engaging in active thought and analysis of their actions. As now phrased 'CM', describing an organisation as collectively myopic implies that the organisational members can make sense of the context in which they operate; however, they lack the ability to reflect on the emerging patterns of the organisation as a whole (Chikudate, 1999; Wong, 2005). CM syndrome affects organisational cognitive structures and leads to failure to consider the consequences of members' action in the imminent moment on the future of the organisation. This organisational phenomenon is however grounded in unquestionable conformity to normative standards and ongoing organising patterns which is nurtured in an intersubjectively construed reality (Chikudate, 2002). This reality then entraps collective thinking in the narrow frames within which an organisation interpret the world around them and conduct their activities accordingly (Abolafia & Kilduff, 1988; Chikudate, 2015). Therefore, the judgement of organisational members is constrained by their fellow members' frame of mind or lens for reasoning.

Consequently, CM limits or impedes organisation's capacity to envisage signs of opportunity or perilous outcome of their decisions and conduct (Catino & Patriotta, 2013). Thus, integration of cross functional opinion in making strategic decisions, such as market selection and mode of entry and exit, may be flawed (Moore et al., 2007). Also, it may render members unobjective and collectively blind to unethical practices that may lead the organisation into condemnatory conditions (Chikudate, 2002). In addition, it may lead to a 'single-loop' organisational learning, which is considered as the underlying cause of undesired level of organisational knowledge (Wong, 2005). In this regard, CM becomes the blinders that confine organisational rationality to a subjective construction of reality and prevents thoughts from straying away for the narrow scope of reasoning. This narrow organisational cognition in turn becomes the 'common sense' (Schutz, 1967) or the 'normacracy' (Chikudate, 2015) in the organising structures or schemas of the organisation—the rationale upon which judgements of all acting members of an organisation are collectively shaped or defined (Gioia, 1992). And as this organising template of the organisation continues to depart from the objectively defined ethics and morality of society (Chikudate, 2015; Gioia, 1992), members become collectively responsible for the destructive outcome of their actions.

Generally, members could disengage from CM by departing from the established organisational practices and procedures (Wong, 2005). However, such departure requires fundamental change in organising practices and routines to facilitate redefinition and delegitimisation of the organisational normacracy (Oliver, 1992). Thus, a reweaving of the organisational cognitive structure that influences members' perception and ongoing patterns of

action (Gioia, 1992; Secchi & Cowley, 2021) is consequential for eluding CM. It is worth noting, however, that this change is dependent on the organisational members' ability to engage in self-confrontation with problematic situations through individual 'reflexivity' and reconstruction of social reality (Beck, 1994; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). In other words, members who have the competence to activate a retrospective overview of the collective reality are consequential for a deliberate switch in the organisational 'cognitive gears' towards a transcendent state outside the ongoing organising script or rationale (Harris & Cronen, 1979; Louis & Sutton, 1991; Gioia, 1992). However, this change is usually not achieved as the intense socialisation into organisational norms confine practical reasoning to a 'predefine patterns of conduct' (Wong, 2005, p. 329). Thus, members are unable to change the collective lens for reasoning, thereby conforming to a sense of shared reality and 'procedural validity' (Chikudate, 2000; Schutz, 1967).

Against this background, three related explanations become instructive in our CM perspective on bribery. First, CM suggests that organisational cognitive structures are designed to socialise members to conform to the ongoing organising practices thereby creating and nurturing intense groupthink. Second, this unity in organisational member's information processing and decision-making capabilities in turn serve as blinders that confine the eyes of the mind of the members to an intersubjectively construed reality that precludes all other concerns to the periphery of organisational objectives. Third, the cognitive structures of the organisation remain unchanged as the narrowly construed reality becomes the normative standard for judging both previous and current actions and decisions. Thus, in conceptualising the unethical practices at Airbus in their foreign operations, we argue that CM undergirded the operational norm, which encouraged members of the company to engage in the payment of bribes to secure contracts. To elucidate the centrality of CM in the organising practices of Airbus SE, we unpack how the bribery scheme was executed at the blindside of their own compliance policies and highlight the extent to which the unethical conduct was woven into the organising templates of the company.

## THE CASE OF THE AIRBUS BRIBERY SCANDAL

Airbus SE is an aerospace company that designs and manufactures helicopters, military transports, satellites and launch vehicles. The company, known as the European Aeronautic Defence and Space Company NV in its early years of establishment, was founded by a consortium among three nations including France, Britain and Germany, in 1967 (Airbus, 2021). Through acquisitions and merges of numerous aerospace companies in the European aviation industry, the company has over

the years metamorphosed in venture type and names such as Airbus Group NV in 2014, Airbus Group SE in 2015 and its current name Airbus SE in 2017 (Airbus, 2021; SFO, 2016a). Airbus SE operates in about 180 locations around Europe, Asia, and America and is regarded as one of the largest manufacturers of commercial aircraft in the world. The company has over 12,000 direct suppliers globally and provides jobs to roughly 13,300 employees around the world. Between 2011 and 2018, Airbus recorded a turnover ranging between €49 billion and €66.5 billion, and a gross profit within an approximated range from €1.5 billion to €5 billion (SFO, 2020a). Touted as a leader in the global aerospace industry, Airbus SE (Airbus) pride themselves with robust anti-corruption and compliance procedures, and adherence to global trade regulations and ethical practices. In 2012, Airbus was awarded Anti-Corruption compliance certificate for the design of its elaborate business ethics provisions and anti-bribery compliance programme (SFO, 2020d).

However, in August 2016, news of Airbus' involvement in bribery and corruption surfaced when the UK SFO announced that it had opened criminal investigations into allegations of fraud at the company (SFO, 2016b). The SFO's investigations into the bribery scheme was initiated on notice from the UK Export Finance (UKEF), a government body where Airbus obtains export credit financing, and Airbus, after the UKEF's investigations revealed cases of corruption in the operations of Airbus' Business Partners (BP) (Airbus, 2020; SFO, 2020b). After a 4-year long

probe into the company's operations, Airbus was indicted for failure to prevent payment of bribes to secure high-value contracts for their Commercial and Defence and Space divisions in five jurisdictions including Ghana, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Taiwan and Indonesia (SFO, 2020b, 2020c). News of the scandal was widely reported in various newspapers and online portals (see appendix A for details) including a UK newspaper, 'The Guardian', which highlighted on the court fines amounting to €3.6 billion and tagged the Deferred Prosecution Agreement between Airbus and the SFO as the largest anti-corruption settlement in history (Pegg & Evans, 2020). The news article further reported that a Strategy and Marketing Organisation (SMO) unit, set up by Airbus in 2008 at its French headquarters to manage BPs in relation to the sale of commercial aircraft, had been responsible for orchestrating and executing the company's bribery activities.

In January 2020, the SFO announced that the €3.6 billion mulct, which was approved by the Southwark Crown Court, was to be disgorged as follows: €991 million to be paid to the SFO; €2,083,137,455 to Parquet National Financier (PNF) of France; and €525,655,000 to the US Department of Justice (DoJ) and US Department of State (Airbus, 2020; DoJ, 2020a; SFO, 2020b), as the jurisprudence of the case spans these countries. Although Airbus did not received credit for voluntarily disclosure, the company was commended for accepting foul in their operations and committing to cooperate with authorities during the investigations (Airbus, 2020; DoJ, 2020a). Figure 1 shows a prototypical summary of



Source: SFO (2020)

FIGURE 1 Summary of the Airbus bribery scandal

the Airbus bribery scandal as was operated within five operating countries.

In Ghana, Airbus was purported to have offered a sum of €5 million in commissions to their intermediaries with the motive to induce officials of government of Ghana to procure Airbus military transport aircraft (Emmanuel, 2020; SFO, 2020d). A similar approach was used in Indonesia when agents of Airbus paid \$3.3 million to employees of Garuda/Citilink, the national airline of Indonesia, who had significant influence in the company to purchase 55 Airbus aircraft (Jakarta Post, 2020; SFO, 2020d). In Taiwan, Airbus rewarded two of their intermediaries a sum of \$14,335,000 for successfully influencing TransAsia Airway to purchase 20 Airbus aircraft (Edgar, 2020; SFO, 2020d). Also, in Sri Lanka Airbus offered an amount of \$16.84 million to the wife of an executive of Sri Lankan Airlines to purchase 10 aircraft and to lease additional four airplanes. The company was also accused of making payments amounting to \$50 million, with additional \$55 million on offer, to a sport team jointly owned by two executives of AirAsia and AirAsia X airlines in Malaysia (Krishna & Lee, 2020). The airline companies jointly ordered a total of 586 aircrafts from Airbus (SFO, 2020d). Table 1 presents a summary of illicit payments made by Airbus SE to their third-party agents and intermediaries.

## DATA SOURCES AND ANALYSIS

We developed our contribution in the context of the Airbus bribery scandal covering the countries reported to be directly involved in the scandal, Ghana, Indonesia,

Sri Lanka, Taiwan and Malaysia. Following protocols for social science research with internet-based data (Arora et al., 2016), we employed an extensive set of webpage archival materials on the Airbus bribery scandal as our data sources. We began the data collection process by relying on google web search engine and inspected the official websites of the UK SFO and Airbus. The following keywords and search strings were applied on the search engines: *Airbus OR Airbus bribery\* OR Airbus bribery scandal OR Airbus graft case AND investigations OR Airbus investigations OR court fines*. The process returned a total of 123 media reports on the bribery case. A screening and selection process which was independently conducted by the authors led to the removal of duplicates and all media reports on the Airbus scandal published between 2016 and 2020 ( $n = 98$ ). Further screening led to the removal of other media reports on the bribery scandal that did not specifically mention any of the five jurisdictions we focussed on ( $n = 9$ ). We also retrieved documents from the SFO and Airbus websites, including original text of the approved court judgement and press releases ( $n = 8$ ). A summary breakdown of the data sources and information retrieved is presented in Table 2.

We also observed that the legal remit of the case extended beyond the United Kingdom (UK) to include authorities in the United States (US) and France. In this regard, we did a further search on the official websites of the US Department of Justice and PNF of France where we found three ( $n = 3$ ) additional documents. This was necessary to identify the jurisprudence of the case and to have an extensive understanding of the scale at which bribery scheme was orchestrated. Our data identification, screening and selection process depicted in Figure 2

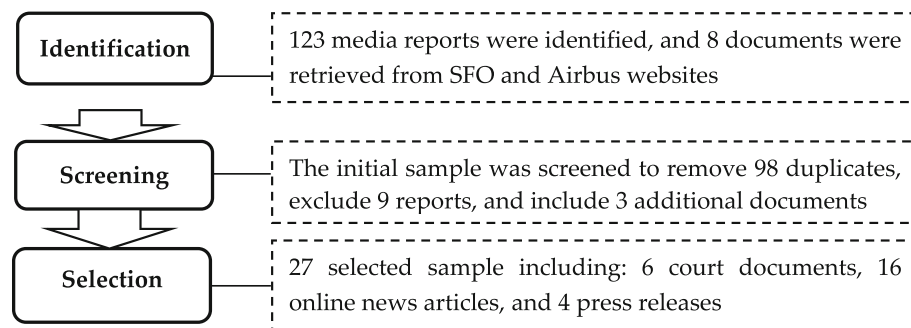
**TABLE 1** Summary of illicit payments

Country	Time period	Illicit payments	Aircraft
Ghana	2009–2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>€3,909,756.85 to be paid to BPs</li> <li>€1,675,000 to intermediary failed</li> </ul>	Three (3) C-295 Military transport
Sri Lanka	2013–2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>\$2 million of \$16.84 million to Wife of SLA Executive's straw company</li> </ul>	Six (6) A330 Four (4) A350 Four (4) A35-lease
Indonesia	2011–2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>\$1,954,796 to Garuda/Citylink airlines executives and their families</li> <li>\$1,351,915 to sports company jointly owned by executives of Garuda airline, and the wife</li> </ul>	Forty (40) A320 Fifteen (15) A330
Taiwan	2010–2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>\$2,432,500 to intermediaries and their companies</li> <li>\$11,902,500 to company of intermediary and Executive of TNA</li> </ul>	Two (2) A330 Six (6) A321 Twelve (12) A321 neo
Malaysia	2011–2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>\$50 million sponsorship to sports team jointly owned by executives of the airline companies</li> <li>\$55 million on offer</li> </ul>	Two (2) A330–300 Three (3) A330–200 Sixty (64) A321 neo Nine (9) A320 neo Sixty (60) A300–900 neo

Source: SFO (2020, p.13–36).

**TABLE 2** Data sources and information retrieved

#	Data sources	Quantity	Information retrieved
1	Airbus website	2	Company history, press release
2	Court documents	6	Court ruling, illicit payments, bribe recipients, number of ordered aircrafts, email conversations, case background, aggregated financial performance of Airbus
3	Major online news articles	16	News on the bribery scandal, country-specific response to the scandal
4	SFO and DoJ websites	8	Court documents, press release, case background

**FIGURE 2** Identification, screening and selection of data materials

resulted in a final sample of 27 documents. The weblinks of the selected sample are shown in appendix A. Our eclectic data sources helped us to develop a rich and much more nuanced insight into the Airbus SE bribery case and served to improve the robustness of our theorising (Tee & Gawer, 2009).

Our initial textual analysis began by thoroughly reading and probing statements in internal emails made available in court documents that appeared to qualify certain actions, activities and dispositions as contributing or supporting bribery in organising. These key statements and reported actions were then employed as our basic social process (Glaser & Holton, 2005) to systematically work through the entire data set to identify salient patterns and themes that tacitly or explicitly suggest deviance in practice. Following a qualitative inductive approach (Gioia et al., 2013), we constantly and iteratively cross-checked all the identified themes and patterns to explore their salience and meaningful connections with the existing literature on bribery to improve their reliability. We then drew insights from our chosen theoretical lens, CM, to develop our middle-range generative explanatory theory (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2019; Jaccard & Jacoby, 2019) on how bribery became perpetuated in the everyday organising at Airbus. Finally, in our effort to improve the inter-rater reliability of our data (Belur et al., 2021), we invited a faculty member with global sales experience and a professional lawyer to verify our interpretation of the materials and legal documents. An aggregation of the theoretical explanations led to three main themes, labelled: *intense groupthink*, *peripheral*

*blindness* and *'cog' in cognitive gears*. In the next section, we present the fine details of the Airbus bribery scandal, highlighting the role of Airbus executives, employees and other stakeholders in orchestrating the bribery scheme on the blindside of the law.

## UNPACKING THE AIRBUS BRIBERY SCHEME

Airbus operates through BPs or agents who provide services as intermediaries between the company and its potential buyers (SFO, 2020d). These BPs are managed by the SMO through its subdivision, SMO International (SFO, 2020b). Also, the SMO is tasked with the responsibility to manage Airbus's International Market Development (IMD) projects which was initiated to help increase Airbus' international footprint and secure viable business for the company's commercial aircraft division (SFO, 2020d). The SMO works closely with the Company Development and Selection Committee (CDSC), particularly during the period Airbus was indicted for malfeasance (SFO, 2020b). The CDSC had no definite composition but had occasional membership of Airbus' Chief Financial Officer, Chief Strategy and Marketing Officer and Chief Compliance Officer, and in attendance at their various meetings were the SMO International Compliance Officer, Head of International Relations, General Counsel and other top management executives (SFO, 2020b). The mandate of the CDSC and its subcommittee was to validate BP appointments and

payments, and to ensure that BPs operations were in consonant with Airbus' compliance policies (DoJ, 2020a; SFO, 2020b). The stratagem of the bribery operations is unpacked in Figure 3.

An internal email revealed in court shows that the BPs provided feedback on their business engagement with Airbus customers and often called on SMO to aid them in the bid to secure the business deals:

We have had some good meeting with [Air-Asia Executive 1] this weekend in Singapore. AirAsia X is willing to take 25 A330-300s starting in 2015. ... But as you can imagine, [AirAsia Executive 1] is insisting on the early payment of his sponsorship. We owe 10 mud in both Jan 2014 and 2015. He wants it paid now ... The incremental A330s will generate a follow-on sponsorship so we need SMO involvement ... (SFO, 2020d)

This communication suggests that the SMO and the CDSC were pivotal to the bribery scheme that was operated at Airbus. An internal forensic audit into the operations of SMO and CDSC also revealed significant breaches in Airbus' own compliance policies and floundering IMD projects (SFO, 2020b). Our data suggest that these breaches included appointment BPs who were not independent of the Airbus' customers and who had no prior experience in the airline sale business (SFO, 2020d). A bribery scheme, cocooned in the operations of the two key units of Airbus, was orchestrated in a web of complex engagements through direct appointment of BPs who were close associates and relations of Airbus

customers. These intermediaries received indirect bribe payments through commissions, sponsorship deals with companies that were owned by BPs or influential figures in the procurement process, and direct monetary inducements (DoJ, 2020a; SFO, 2020b). In return, the BPs were to influence customers to secure high-valued contracts for Airbus and retain—albeit unfair—business advantage (DoJ, 2020b; SFO, 2020d). To successfully execute this illegitimate stratagem at the blindside of Airbus' own compliance structures and international trade regulations, the SMO, working closely with the CDSC and other senior employees of Airbus, concealed the identity of some of their BPs, colluded with BPs to produce dud documents to corroborate and disguise illicit payments, and presented fudged reports to auditors (DoJ, 2020b; SFO, 2020d). In an email correspondence between an executive of AirAsia and Airbus' intermediary, a request was made to disguise a sponsorship deal for the airline executive's sports team as grants. The Airbus intermediary responded saying

I just need to show something serious for auditors. To be honest [Airbus employee 5 [very senior]], and [Airbus employee 6 [very senior]] and I don't care what it is. (SFO, 2020d)

Although the content of this email does not state the exact documents that were produced to disguise the deal, it clearly shows the extent to which the unethical operational system in Airbus systematically encouraged their employees to trivialise the precariousness of their actions. Thus, working with third-party agents to falsify

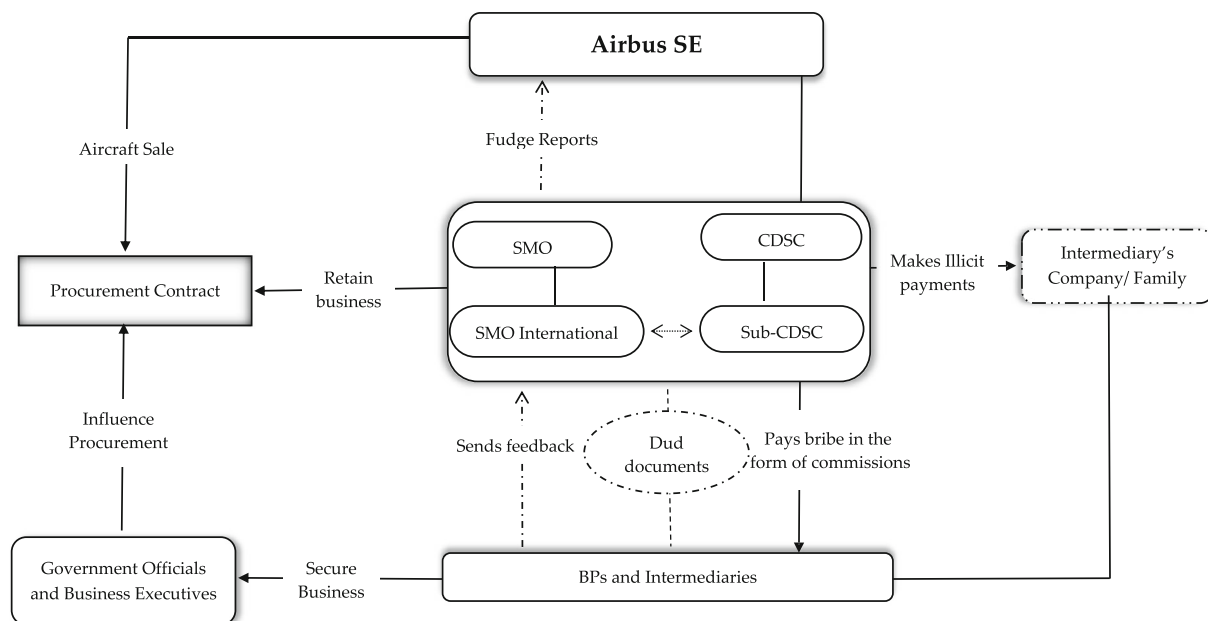


FIGURE 3 The Airbus bribery scheme



documents and bribe government officials and company executives including their families to win contracts shaped Airbus' *gestalt*. In an email communication between a member of the SMO and a BP, where recommendations were being made on how payments would be channelled to executives of TransAsia Airlines (TNA), coded language and aliases were used to conceal the identity of the intermediaries and the recipient of the funds. In the email, the Airline executive was aliased a 'patient' while reference was made to the intermediary and SMO executives as 'Dr Fu' and 'Dr Brown' respectively:

With ref to the patient, please be advised that [sic] Dr Fu is researching the prescription protocol and will revert shortly. Sincerely, Dr Fu

Medications and dosages prescribed by Dr Brown 1. Mar 08, 2011 – 54,0 mg 2. Aug 01, 2011 – 47,0 mg 3. Sept 01, 2011 – 50,00 mg 4. Nov 16, 2011 – 62,0 mg 5. Feb 01, 2012 – 62,0 mg 6. Mar 02, 2012 – 68,0 mg 7. Apr 09, 2012 – 50,0 mg 8. May 01, 2012 – 37,0 mg

Medications dispensed by Dr Fu 1. 54,0 – mg this prescription filled, but under the new protocol should have been 37,8 mg 2. 47,0 – mg this prescription filled, but under the new protocol should have been 32,9 mg 3. 50,0 – mg this prescription filled as 47,0 mg, but under the new protocol should have been 35,0 mg 4. 62,0 – mg this prescription filled, but under the new protocol should have been 43,4 mg

RE: 5-8 below and all previous medications are pending clarification of dosage limits by Dr Brown Prescriptions pending clarification: 5. 62,0 mg or 43,4 mg? 6. 68,0 mg or 47,6 mg? 7. 50,0 mg or 35,0 mg? 8. 37,0 mg or 25,9 mg? Regards, Dr Fu. (SFO, 2020d)

It was later revealed in court that the 'medical' prescriptions corresponded to the dates and amounts on invoices issued from Airbus to TNA. Realising the lengths to which Airbus executives could go to hide their bribery activities and the extent of moral deficiency pervading the entire operations in company, Dame Victoria Sharp, President of the Queen's Bench Division, wrote in her judgement:

The seriousness of the criminality in this case hardly needs to be spelled out. As is acknowledged on all sides, it was grave. The conduct took place over many years. It is no exaggeration to describe the investigation it

gave rise to as worldwide, extending into every continent in which Airbus operates. The number of countries subject to intense criminal investigation by the various agencies, and the scale and scope of the wrongdoing disclosed in the Statement of Facts demonstrate that bribery was to the extent indicated, endemic in two core business areas within Airbus (SFO, 2020b)

Clearly, the routinised corrupt practices had Airbus's *eyes put out* to the jeopardising consequences of their actions. In this regard, we observe that all acting agents, including top management of the company, were engrained in the cognitive structures of the organisation that collectively shaped their organising patterns without a deliberate effort to switch cognitive gears (Gioia, 1992; Wong, 2005). In the next section, we explicate how CM played out in the organising practices at Airbus.

## COLLECTIVE MYOPIA AS PLAYED OUT AT AIRBUS

The concealment of unethical practices at Airbus and the scale of the bribery operation suggest a normative organisational cognitive control was operating as a blocking mechanism to restrict moral imagination and ethical decision-making from functioning. Our CM perspective on bribery, therefore, allows us to unpack and theorise how the variety of taken-for-granted organising practices at Airbus operated to constrain ethical thinking and legitimised bribery. In this regard, we develop heuristic framework that depicts how CM influence organisations to engage in bribery and corruption. As shown in Figure 3, the fundamental antecedent to bribery in organising is identified as the desire to enhance organisational objectives such as obtaining business advantage and gaining a greater market share. To fulfil this objective, organisations may set stretched goals for employees and operated results-oriented system by tying all compensations to high performance and achievement of the set operational goals (SFO, 2020b). In addition, a siloed system of organising system may be adopted to allow employees the autonomy and discretion to pursuit organisational goals. These organising practices thus makes it difficult to detect unethical practices that, in turn, encourage members of organisations to take advantage of their operational space to engage in graft to achieve their targets (Pinto et al., 2008). Drawing on CM as a lens, we observe that these organising practices at Airbus led to a situation where employees and executives of the company were socialised to believe that the existential role of the organisation is simply to achieve business objectives. In tandem with this groupthink phenomenon is the loss of sight on ethics and legality of conduct that was displaced to the periphery of Airbus' operational

goals. The loss of peripheral vision rendered the company ethically blind to the deviant conducts of their partially detached operational units. And with their moral compass adrift (Moore & Gino, 2013), the employees and agent of the company held the belief that breaking the law by breaking their own compliance policies, and organising bribery schemes, all to survive in the competitive environments in which they operate is fair. As a result, a critical scrutiny of their actions could not be activated to redirect their course as there was a 'cog' in the organisational cognitive gears. Airbus therefore sailed on the wheels of CM, and the outcome was their involvement in corrupt practices where kickbacks were paid to secure businesses, information were concealed and reports were falsified to obscure misconducts. We now discuss how each of the three identified themes of CM, as depicted on Figure 4, lines up well with the organizing practices that fuelled bribery at Airbus.

## INTENSE GROUPTHINK

The organising context within which the Airbus bribery scheme was operated suggests that the employees and agents of the company were inculcated in a shared embodied operational norm. They were trapped in a default mode of organisational cognition that led them to nurture a sense of shared reality and social validity (Brodbeck et al., 2007; Esser, 1998). Hence, individual member's sense of rationality was centrally organised around their shared understanding of procedural standards grounded in their own myopic perception of the reality. The organisational members involved in the bribery operation therefore relied on a bias appraisal of their conducts that decoupled their actions within the organisation from the external social and intuitional environment within which their actions were ethically evaluated

(Anand et al., 2004; Keig et al., 2015). This idiosyncratic construction of the social normative in turn plunge them into a state where members of the organisation came to believe in an inherent morality of their conduct and unanimity of the collective action (Janis, 2008). As a result, they developed an illusion of immunity from detection which propelled them to break the rules in the face of clear warnings. As revealed in the approved court judgments, the seriousness and endemic nature of the Airbus bribery operations which extended to every continent where the company operates suggests an existing 'corporate culture which permitted bribery by Airbus business partners and/or employees to be committed throughout the world' (SFO, 2020b, p. 18). This implies that the acting agents and employees of Airbus had collectively developed a strong sense of immunity which encourage them to falsify reports to conceal their dealings (SFO, 2020b). The robustness of the bribery operation is further emphasised when an internal investigation into the operations of the intermediaries was hampered by the key units involved in the bribery (SFO, 2020b).

Underlying this intense groupthink and power, we argue, is the rationalisation of unethical practices that pervaded the entire organisation. According to Frost and Tischer (2014), unethical practices find its own legitimacy in organisations through corruption routinisation mechanism that result from the vagueness of aspects of routines. In this regard, bribery is perpetuated due to a misconception of the normative rules that bound the practices of the organisation. However, this divergence between the ethical rules and the employee or acting agent's sensemaking of the rules could be purposefully widened in order to achieve organisational goals (Frost & Tischer, 2014). As a result, the enactors of graft perceive their actions as being supportive of the economic goals of the organisation thereby legitimising the act to become a common culture (Frost & Tischer, 2014;

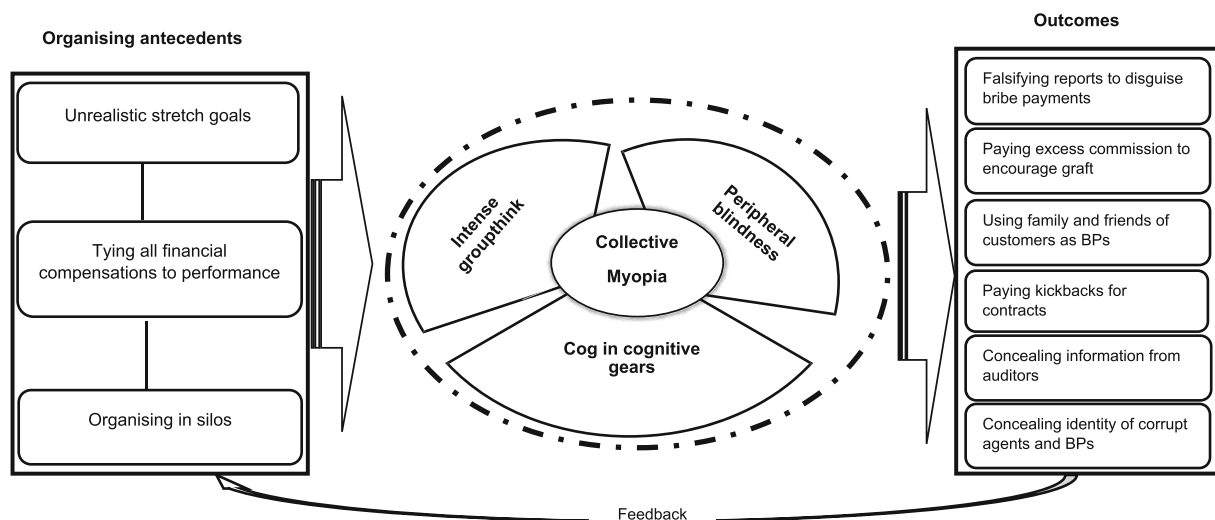


FIGURE 4 A collective myopic-bribery framework

Sarpong et al., 2019). Ashforth and Anand (2003, p. 17) in their conceptualisation of this corruption legitimisation mechanism as '*rationalising ideologies*' also argued that agents involved in the perpetuation of graft discount the validity of the general normative rules by reconciling their deviant actions with the universalistic norms. The subjective validation of misconduct bolsters the acting agents to continuously engage in illegitimate practices, thereby normalising the practice (Eddleston et al., 2020). Collectively, this erroneously construed procedural legitimacy becomes the schemata upon which organisational patterns of action are defined (Geiger & Koch, 2014; Gioia, 1992). Furthermore, the arrant reliance on the winnings from these illegitimate practices to achieve business objectives fuels this legitimisation process (Anand et al., 2004). Our analysis of the Airbus case suggests that the company had for a very long time banked on the rewards from their BPs operations to achieve their objective to increase international footprint and to secure businesses in numerous jurisdictions (SFO, 2020b). For instance, in a memorandum of understanding signed by the SMO on behalf of Airbus, and executives of AirAsia, US\$16 million was paid by Airbus to enhance penetration of their products in Malaysia (SFO, 2020b). The bribery scheme at Airbus was successfully executed as the key units in the operation, SMO and CDSC which was armed with a US\$ 300 million budget (SFO, 2020d), had an unalloyed discretion and autonomy in their operations. Thus, being aware of their apparent centrality to the achievement of organisational goals, these operational units and other acting agents involved in the bribery scheme rationalised, normalised, and legitimised their unethical conduct without a critical scrutiny or reflection on their actions. As such, they were fixated on pursuing the 'noble cause', thereby losing sight of the ethical or moral consequences of their actions.

## PERIPHERAL BLINDNESS-IN-ACTION

Airbus had set out clear strategic objectives for the CDSC, SMO and BPs, limiting their operational focus to securing and retaining high-valued contracts abroad to increase international footprint of the company. With these goals being the focal attention of the two key divisions, every other social concern became what Cunha and Chia (2007, p. 560) would describe as 'a shadow on a wall which retreats each time we seek to directly approach or grasp it'. This implies that once the dominant operational objectives relinquished social legitimacy and ethical standards into the periphery, it became almost impossible to internalise such ethical standards into the already transgressed operational patterns. It is however worth noting that Airbus had established robust anticorruption structures, the reason for which they were awarded Anti-corruption certificate in 2012 (SFO, 2020b). Nonetheless, as the scope of operational

objective had been narrowly geared toward achieving business goals, their organising practices became infested with unethical conducts (Doig et al., 2007). Thus, Airbus may have drawn some ethical diligence from social reality but left this reality behind them, hence creating the opportunity for corrupt practices to galvanise (Ashforth & Anand, 2003). They lost awareness of their apparent deviation from ethical and moral standards; the fulcrum around which sustainable growth blossoms (Agarwal & Bhal, 2020; Butterfield et al., 2000; Palmer, 2008).

Against this background, we argue that the dominant logic in the operational patterns of Airbus lacked sensitivity to the periphery (Prahalad, 2004). With ethical considerations obscured in the blind spot of their operational strategy and objectives, it required less conscious effort to carry through with corrupt practices. This continuous practice of unethical conduct however created some level of operational efficiency in the bribery scheme. Taking a rather radical line of argument on the Airbus bribery operation, we observe that the SMO's appointment of family and friends of Airbus customers as intermediaries was an effective strategy as they were able to successfully secure some business for the company. Also, clear boundaries and division of role helped to expedite their operations. This outlook on the Airbus bribery scheme is however consistent with scholarly assertion that fractionating bribery schemes in organisations makes members unaware of their conduct until their individual roles are synchronised to produce the outcome (Ashforth & Anand, 2003; Darley, 1992). However, we argue that underlying this moral oblivion is the preclusion of issues of ethics and legitimacy from operational culture of Airbus. Consequently, a transmutation process was triggered, which led all members developing a 'new normal' routinised corrupt practices (Eddleston et al., 2020; Frost & Tischer, 2014).

We observe from the case that a trade-off between ethics and Airbus' operational goals appeared rather unlikely as they had selectively focussed on enhancing their business objectives. The agents of the company were apt to adopt all available means to achieving the business objective as huge compensations were tied to the realisation of these goals. All aspects of the Airbus operations indicates that they were prepared to commit to any form of monetary inducement to secure business advantage. With this embedded in their organising scripts, any attempts to veer attention to the periphery would mean leaving their goals in a blind spot—a new periphery (Day & Schoemaker, 2004). However, borrowing from the analogy by Day and Schoemaker (2004, p117), we contend that Airbus need not have fallen in a trap 'looking for their loss keys near a streetlight'. Given their robust compliance policies and regulation, there should have been a pronto switch in the organisational cognitive gears to reverse their flight path from the kloof of ill repute they were heading.

## A 'COG' IN COGNITIVE GEARS

As emphasised in the approved court judgement 'it must have been apparent to others within Airbus that all was not well within SMO International ...' (SFO, 2020b, p. 18). However, concerns of the misconduct were only reported to the SFO after a third-party (the UKEF) investigation raised attention to issues of corruption in their BP operations (DoJ, 2020a). In this regard, we observe that members of the company did not develop the impetus to cry foul because the legitimacy of the ongoing organising practices was judged based on the outcomes of their previous decisions and action. In Ghana, for instance, Airbus offered €5 million to their intermediary on condition that they can secure business with the government. Although only €3,909,756.85 was paid to the intermediaries, they had previously been successful at securing a purchase agreement for the sale of two C-129 military aircraft for Airbus' Spanish Defence Subsidiary (SFO, 2020b). Also, in Indonesia, Airbus paid over US\$3.3 million, which was disguised as consultancy fees, to companies owned by executives of Garuda and Citilink airlines. From this deal, Airbus successfully secured and delivered a purchase order for 55 aircraft to the airline companies. More so, the lucrative proffers were significant in the success of the bribery scheme. On the efficacy of monetary inducements in fostering the enactment of corrupt practices, some scholars argue that participants of corruption engage in rational appraisal of the expected benefits and risks associated with their wrongful course of action (Palmer, 2008; Greve et al., 2010). Thus, organisational members involved in bribery, having an appreciable level of understanding of the inconsistencies between their conducts and ethical norms, engage in cost-benefit analysis and normative assessment of their actions. However, we argue that this rationality is limited to the cognitive boundaries within which the organisation operates. In the Airbus bribery scheme, the acting agents lacked the ability to initiate change in their modes of reasoning. They had the capacity to perceive the context within which they operated, but they were trapped in a narrow cognitive frame of reasoning which limited their ability to engage in careful evaluation and reflection of their actions. Thus, the cognitive gears that drove the operations of the organisation remained unchanged, which then led to their continuous engagement in the illegitimate practices.

With hindsight, repealing this cognitive trap which shaped the perception of the employees of Airbus looks a lot easier to action. However, *rocking the boat* does not only require an understanding of the prevailing situation but also a deliberate effort and moral courage to carry through. The intense groupthink and displacement of ethical concerns into the periphery created a robust operational system that actively resisted reorientation. Considering the trajectory of the Airbus bribery operation, we observe that the acting agents did not weigh up

their action to see whether they were what we label the *Gioia tripartite*: legal, ethical and moral (Gioia, 1992, p. 384). Like Gioia in the Pinto fire affair, the existing cognitive structures at Airbus did not internalise moral judgements into their operational norms. Hence, the employees and agents of Airbus, having had an inculturation into unethical procedural norm, did not recognise that their organising routines were antithetical to the 'idealist scripts' (Gioia, 1992, p. 387). In other words, Airbus inculcated their members into a devious operational culture that rendered them mindless (Sutcliffe et al., 2016) to perceive the ethical obligation to digress from the unethical norm. Thus, the operational scripts of Airbus infixed a cog in the organisational cognitive gears; hence, a departure from the unethical path was near impossible.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this paper, we looked at the organising practices that stoke up corruption in organisations. Specifically, we focussed on the theoretical mechanism that underlie the perpetuation of bribery in organising. Although for some questions bribery in organising has been explained using several conceptual approaches to capture the individual characteristic traits and organisational structures that spur the act into collective corruption (e.g., Anand et al., 2004; Mishina et al., 2010; Palmer, 2008; Sarpong et al., 2019), we argued that the extant literature do not fully illuminate our understanding of how the cognitive structures that influence the logics and contexts of organising precipitate this pestilence in organisations. In attempting to resolve this deficit in understanding we undertook two primary steps. First, we drew on a qualitative study of the bribery scandal involving Airbus SE, a European aerospace giant that manufacture and deliver commercial and military aircraft, among other services. Our case analysis revealed that at the heart of Airbus's foreign operations was a concealed bribery scheme which involved two key divisions in the company and their BPs. The stratagem of the bribery was to appoint individuals, who were close relations of potential Airbus customers, as intermediaries to channel illicit payments in order to influence them to procure Airbus aircraft. On some occasions, Airbus contracted the services of business owned by executives of airline companies as consultants and BPs and offered them lucrative commissions and sponsorship deals in return for high-valued contracts. Second, we intertwined the case of Airbus's bribery scandal with the theory of CM to demonstrate the theoretical mechanism underlying graft in organising. The theme of this theory, in relation to our study, is that acculturation into devious organisational practices obfuscate members from viewing unethical conducts as a deviation from the norm, but the norm itself. Thus, organisations are involved in bribery not because the acting members of those organisations

are genetically programmed to engage in unethical activities. Nor could it be wholly imputed to individuals or a group of elite individuals in organisations who abuse the autonomy of job roles by engaging in illegitimate practices to achieve their career ambitions. Underlying this hysteria, however, is a conformity to operational norms which in turn nurtures groupthink in organisations, precludes ethical issues to the periphery of operational objectives and renders organisational members mindless of their cognitive awareness of moral issues.

In this vein, our CM perspective on bribery in organising provides an overarching theoretical explanation on how organising practices and contexts systematically encourage the normalisation of graft. We propose that organisational culture is an indoctrinating mechanism that collectively shapes actions and rationality of members through unquestionable conformity to collective behavioural expectations. Therefore, illegitimate practices, through ongoing patterns of subjectification, manifest in organisational members' perception of normative standards and their conduct. We further propose that as organisational members imbibe the existing concerted procedural validity and cognitive structures upon which the contours of organising are defined, they plunge into a state of *mundane reasoning* (Chikudate, 1999, 2002), which forestalls reflection on the moral consequence of their actions and decisions. Therefore, our collective myopic-bribery framework helps to explicate the blocking mechanism hindering organisational members from reweaving the organisational cognitive structures and organising architectures to align with ethical and normative standards. The framework also emphasises that an organising culture that encourage the pursuit of 'particularistic goals' of the organisation at the expense of 'universalistic values' (Ashforth & Anand, 2003, p. 19) may drive its members to engage in illegitimate practices.

Our case analysis also provides practical diagnoses to tease out how organising practices and templates may fuel sleazy conducts, and to suggest ways by which organisations that have been involved in scandals could learn from history. In this regard, we provide some concrete guidance for practitioners to conceive and implement effective and manageable solutions to unethical practices. First, taken together our findings from the Airbus scandal, we enhance understanding of how groupthink may drive organisational members to perceive unethical conducts as a nondeviant behaviour. Also, we show how this phenomenon may cause organisational members to lose their peripheral vision on ethics and morality. The most significant part of the Airbus case is that there was a cog in the organisational cognitive gears which led to failure to engage in active reflection and analysis of their actions. Therefore, we suggest that organisations ought to encourage their employees practice systematic thinking to develop the moral cognition to recognise, refrain and raise red flags on unethical practices. Second, we argue

that although scandals have the potential to cripple morale, destroy reputation, and often stifle the ability to create and capture value in the short term, they also represent opportunities for organisational renewal. In this regard, we are of the view that evading and denying scandals can be self-defeating as organisations may risk losing the opportunity to confront and learn from the shadows of history in the form of corruption and bribery scandals (Gago-Rodríguez et al., 2020). Rather than evading them, we encourage organisations to take the 'path less travelled' by developing their own *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*—a pioneering idea developed by the German state to help it to collectively confront its citizens' complicity in the crimes committed by the Nazi regime (Schwarz, 2020). Confronting scandals through 'voluntary disclosures', for example, we surmise, would help organisations mired in such controversies to get a better grip with their own unethical past and, in turn, succeed in rehabilitating and (re)constructing its cognitive structures into one which is ethically hard wired.

Notwithstanding the theoretical and practical contributions of this study, we hint that they are not meant to be exhaustive. Thus, we direct future research to explore some concerns. First, while our focus has been on the organisation-level phenomenon (Greve et al., 2010), we acknowledge that the organising logic of the atomised individual who wields the power to direct and shape the organisational cognitive maps is pivotal in the routinisation and normalisation bribery as an acceptable practice. Therefore, we direct future research to explore how the degree to which organisational leaders resonate with normative rules or standards may distinctly, or in tandem with the organising contexts, shape an organisations' perception of unethical conducts. Second, our collective-myopic bribery framework also draws attention to organising antecedents that may drive organisations into a state of CM, thereby fuelling illegitimate practices. We believe, however, that the basic insight of our analysis could be extended or redirected to examine how temporal bias in organising strategies could obfuscate organisational members from engaging in forethought about their actions in the imminent moment. In this regard, we direct future research to draw on temporal myopia (see Michel & de La Croix, 2000; Opper & Burt, 2020) as a theoretical lens to provide some insight into the nexus between temporal strategies and the perpetuation of graft (Kouamé, 2019; Walsh & Seward, 1990). Third, we invite future academics to draw on CM to unpack other bribery scandals (see recent bribery scandals involving Alexion Pharmaceuticals, Alstom Indonesia and Novartis) to serve as a litmus test to assay its rigour in offering generic explanations to bribery and corruption in organising.

In closing, we have sought to extend our understanding of how bribery comes to be labelled and perpetuated in everyday organising, and its implications for doing business in fast changing business environment

characterised by complexity, ambiguity and unrelenting competition to creating and capturing sustainable value. Perhaps the most important contribution of our study lies in our effort to providing a clear explanation that the locus of unethical practices in organising lies not in the consciousness of individual actors of an organisation but in a cluster of practices which render organisational members collectively myopic.

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are derived from public domain resources. These data were derived from public domain resources. The weblinks to these resources are provided in Appendix A.

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## APPENDIX

## Weblinks of online data sources included in the analysis

#	Source	Weblink
1	Airbus	<a href="https://www.airbus.com/company/history.html#Historyindepth">https://www.airbus.com/company/history.html#Historyindepth</a>
2	Airbus	<a href="https://www.airbus.com/newsroom/press-releases/en/2020/01">https://www.airbus.com/newsroom/press-releases/en/2020/01</a>
3	Airbus	<a href="https://www.airbus.com/en/newsroom/press-releases/2020-01-airbus-reaches-agreement-in-principle-with-french-uk-and-us">https://www.airbus.com/en/newsroom/press-releases/2020-01-airbus-reaches-agreement-in-principle-with-french-uk-and-us</a>
4	Aljazeera	<a href="https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2020/1/28/airbus-reaches-settlement-with-france-uk-us-for-corruption">https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2020/1/28/airbus-reaches-settlement-with-france-uk-us-for-corruption</a>
5	BBC News	<a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-51277946">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-51277946</a>
6	Bristol Live	<a href="https://www.bristolpost.co.uk/news/bristol-news/airbus-fined-36bn">https://www.bristolpost.co.uk/news/bristol-news/airbus-fined-36bn</a>
7	Citi Newsroom	<a href="https://citinewsroom.com/2020/02/a-breakdown-of-the-airbus-bribery-scandal">https://citinewsroom.com/2020/02/a-breakdown-of-the-airbus-bribery-scandal</a>
8	Financial Times	<a href="https://www.ft.com/content/f7a01a60-442b-11ea-abea-0c7a29cd66fe">https://www.ft.com/content/f7a01a60-442b-11ea-abea-0c7a29cd66fe</a>
9	France 24	<a href="https://www.france24.com/en/20160807-uk-launches-corruption-investigation-airbus">https://www.france24.com/en/20160807-uk-launches-corruption-investigation-airbus</a>
10	Graphic Online	<a href="https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/general-news/ghana-news-airbus-confesses-paying-bribes-to-ghana-during-mills-mahama">https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/general-news/ghana-news-airbus-confesses-paying-bribes-to-ghana-during-mills-mahama</a>
11	Jakarta Post	<a href="https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2020/05/09/former-garuda-boss-sentenced-to-eight-years-for-bribery">https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2020/05/09/former-garuda-boss-sentenced-to-eight-years-for-bribery</a>
12	Malaysiakini	<a href="https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/509165">https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/509165</a>
13	Malay Mail	<a href="https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2020/02/02/airbus-bribery-claims-anti-corruption-watchdog-wants-airasia-sc-to-hold">https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2020/02/02/airbus-bribery-claims-anti-corruption-watchdog-wants-airasia-sc-to-hold</a>
14	Reuters	<a href="https://www.reuters.com/article/us-airbus-probe-airasia/malaysia">https://www.reuters.com/article/us-airbus-probe-airasia/malaysia</a>
15	Serious Fraud Office	<a href="https://www.sfo.gov.uk/2016/08/08/airbus-group-investigation">https://www.sfo.gov.uk/2016/08/08/airbus-group-investigation</a>
16	Serious Fraud Office	<a href="https://www.sfo.gov.uk/download/airbus-se-deferred-prosecution-agreement-statement-of-facts">https://www.sfo.gov.uk/download/airbus-se-deferred-prosecution-agreement-statement-of-facts</a>
17	Serious Fraud Office	<a href="https://www.sfo.gov.uk/download/airbus-se-deferred-prosecution-agreement-statement-of-facts">https://www.sfo.gov.uk/download/airbus-se-deferred-prosecution-agreement-statement-of-facts</a>
18	Serious Fraud Office	<a href="https://www.sfo.gov.uk/download/airbus-se-deferred-prosecution-agreement-statement-of-facts">https://www.sfo.gov.uk/download/airbus-se-deferred-prosecution-agreement-statement-of-facts</a>
19	Serious Fraud Office	<a href="https://www.sfo.gov.uk/download/airbus-se-deferred-prosecution-agreement-statement-of-facts">https://www.sfo.gov.uk/download/airbus-se-deferred-prosecution-agreement-statement-of-facts</a>
20	The Conversation	<a href="https://theconversation.com/airbus-flying-high-on-the-wings-of-corruption-131711">https://theconversation.com/airbus-flying-high-on-the-wings-of-corruption-131711</a>
21	The Economic Times	<a href="https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/business/airasia-ceo-tony-fernandes-steps-aside-amid-bribery">https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/business/airasia-ceo-tony-fernandes-steps-aside-amid-bribery</a>
22	The Guardian	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/business/2020/jan/31/airbus-to-pay-record-3bn-in-fines-for-endemic-corruption">https://www.theguardian.com/business/2020/jan/31/airbus-to-pay-record-3bn-in-fines-for-endemic-corruption</a>
23	The Telegraph	<a href="https://www.telegraph.co.uk/business/2020/01/31/airbus-paid-bribes-16-countries-win-airliner-deals">https://www.telegraph.co.uk/business/2020/01/31/airbus-paid-bribes-16-countries-win-airliner-deals</a>
24	TTG Asia	<a href="https://www.ttgasia.com/2020/02/04/former-srilankan-airlines-ceo-nabbed-over-airbus-bribery-scam">https://www.ttgasia.com/2020/02/04/former-srilankan-airlines-ceo-nabbed-over-airbus-bribery-scam</a>
25	US Department of Justice	<a href="https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/airbus-agrees-pay-over-39-billion">https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/airbus-agrees-pay-over-39-billion</a>
26	US Department of Justice	<a href="https://www.justice.gov/opa/press-release/file/1241466">https://www.justice.gov/opa/press-release/file/1241466</a>
27	US Department of Justice	<a href="https://www.justice.gov/opa/press-release/file/1241491">https://www.justice.gov/opa/press-release/file/1241491</a>