English Summary

Corruption has enormous detrimental consequences for people around the world. Reducing it requires evidence-based policies. Although a rich and diverse literature from various disciplines such as economics, political science and sociology exists that mostly looks at corruption on the macro level, social psychological research studying the micro-determinants of corrupt behavior is almost non-existent. In the quest to fill that gap, this dissertation makes theoretical, methodological and empirical contributions:

Theoretical: A theoretical chapter discusses the definition of corruption and introduces a new conceptual framework that models the decision to engage in corruption as a social dilemma. It distinguishes two types of corruption dilemmas: *individual* (e.g. embezzlement) and *interpersonal* corruption (e.g. bribery), both entailing different, at times even opposing, social psychological mechanisms.

Methodological. As a novel behavioral paradigm, the dissertation presents a corruption game that models a typical bribery transaction. The game allows experimental research into the situational, social, and personal factors that shape corrupt behaviour.

Empirical. The empirical contributions are summarized in three empirical chapters. First, three studies using the corruption game illustrate that the perception of what others do (descriptive norms) and not necessarily what is considered acceptable (injunctive norms) drives corrupt behavior: "I bribe because others are doing it too, even though I know it is wrong". Second, two experiments show that the physical presence of a (non-punishing) other person reduces unethical behavior in general and corruption in particular – even when the other person is a friend or can co-benefit from the unethical behavior. Third, four experiments are reported that examine how corrupt behavior unfolds over time. The results challenge the popular explanation of how severe corruption emerges, namely the slippery-slope metaphor postulating that corruption occurs gradually. Instead the results revealed a higher likelihood

of severe corruption when participants were directly given the opportunity to engage in it (abrupt) compared with when they had previously engaged in minor forms of corruption (gradual). Neither the size of the payoffs, which we kept constant, nor evaluations of the actions could account for these differences. At times the road to severe corruption is not a slippery slope but a steep cliff.

The dissertation concludes with a General Discussion that embeds these contributions in a bigger context, asking: what are the novel insights gained? How can they help to curb corruption? And what are avenues for future research into social psychological factors of corruption?