INTEGRITY AND ITS ANTECEDENT: A UNIFIED CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF INTEGRITY

Manjit Monga*
University of South Australia, Australia

ABSTRACT

Integrity often appears in management and business ethics literature as a coveted much sought after personality trait for leadership effectiveness. There is lot of discussion and debate about what integrity means and what acting with integrity entails but there is no agreement amongst scholars about it. This paper addresses this issue, and presents a unified conceptual framework to better understand integrity. It draws from various conceptualisations of integrity discussed in management and business ethics literature and argues that integrity has a moral facet which acts as an antecedent of integrity. The unified conceptual framework integrates and reconciles various conceptualisations of integrity found in management and business ethics literature. In doing so, the paper first discusses non-moral / morally neutral conceptualisation of integrity also known as objectivist view and its limitations. It then discusses various notions in the broad stream of current management and business ethics literature and develops the unified conceptual framework for understanding integrity. It makes a theoretical contribution by advancing the understanding of the concept of integrity at individual level in management literature.

Key words: integrity, virtue, ethics, morality, normative, objectivism

Corresponding Author’s Email Address: Manjit.monga@unisa.edu.au

INTRODUCTION

Integrity often appears in management literature in relation with leadership qualities and effectiveness. It is a pervasive and sought after ideal amongst managers and employees alike. It has been a subject of discussion amongst practitioners and researchers, however, there appears to be no consensus in literature on the meaning of integrity and what does it entail (Becker, 1998; Parry and Proctor-Thomson, 2002; Palanski and Yammarino, 2009). Some scholars equate integrity with actions that demonstrate high moral and ethical standards, for example De George (1993); others like Jensen (2009) call it an ethically and morally neutral term and equate it with the law of gravity. Researchers like Brown (2005); Kaptein and Wempe (2002) and Srivastva et al (1989) emphasise relationships and inclusion in their view of integrity. Koehn (2005) considers integrity as a pre-condition for being human and Yulk and Vanfleet (1992) define a person with integrity as honest and trustworthy. These definitional ambiguities and uncertainties make integrity a contested topic in management literature. Koehn (2005, p125) very rightly observes, ‘the term “integrity” is bandied around but never defined’, and a number of scholars have called for a satisfactory unifying perspective on this important aspect of business ethics, for example, Audi and Murphy (2006).

In this paper I address this issue through constructing a unified conceptual framework to better understand integrity, drawing from various aspects and features of integrity discussed in management and business ethics literature. I argue that integrity has intrinsic and extrinsic characteristics. It has a moral facet which acts as an antecedent of integrity. I build upon Maak’s (2008) seven conditions of integrity by incorporating various conceptualisations and features of integrity highlighted in literature. In doing so, I first discuss the objectivist notion of integrity which rejects the moral aspect of integrity and defines it as a morally neutral notion and its limitations. Then I discuss various notions of integrity in the broad stream of current management and business ethics literature on integrity and develop the unified framework for better understanding integrity.

OBJECTIVIST VIEW OF INTEGRITY

The various views on the meaning of integrity can be broadly divided into two streams in scholarly and practitioner literature on integrity – one that incorporates morality and ethics explicitly and the other which defines integrity as a morally and ethically neutral term. Integrity as a morally neutral term commonly known as
the philosophy of objectivism, was pioneered and popularised by Ayn Rand (1961, 1964, 1967, 1982, 1989, 1990). Objectivism holds that reality exists as an objective absolute and is independent of human feelings, wishes and hopes or fears. It considers achieving happiness as the ultimate moral goal of human life. In order to achieve this goal, human beings should live by objective principles and reason is man’s only means of perceiving reality, his only source of knowledge, his only guide to action and his basic means of survival (Rand, 1961; Peikoff, 1991). More lately Becker (1998) and Locke and Becker (1998) proposed a definition of integrity from objectivist perspective, which included an objective code of morality. A morally justifiable code of principles and values is one that promotes the long term survival and well-being of individuals as rational beings (Becker, 1998). They define integrity as loyalty in action, to a morally justifiable code of principles and values, that promotes the long term survival and well-being of individuals as rational beings (Jacobs, 2004). Becker explained that objectivism covers the three main concerns of philosophy: metaphysics, epistemology and ethics. Metaphysics has three main axioms - first, that reality exists; second, that human beings possess consciousness and third, that contradictions do not exist in reality. Epistemologically, in objectivist philosophy, knowledge exists when a person grasps facts of reality via either perceptual observation or conceptualisation (Rand, 1990). In other words, valid concepts are objective and are based on direct experience with reality. Ethics is deemed to be a value which one acts to gain. A person must judge and select values because he or she is a mortal, goal directed volitional being, therefore, must choose and pursue values in order to live successfully. Drawing on these central tenets of objectivism, Becker defines integrity as the principle of being principled, practicing what one preaches regardless of emotional or social pressure and not allowing any irrational consideration to overwhelm one’s rational convictions (1998, p. 157). Addressing the moral side of values, he argues that integrity is commitment in action to a morally justifiable set of principles and values, where the criterion for moral justification is reality - not merely the acceptance of the values by an individual, group or society. According to the philosophy of objectivism, the ultimate standards of morality are survival and happiness. There are some concerns about the objectivist notion of integrity. The pursuit of self-interest for survival in the objectivist view implies rejection or at least moderation of consideration of social relationships, benevolence or altruism. Furthermore, because it rejects any form of subjectivism; it disregards the role of feelings and intuition as they relate to individual bias and action. Rand’s brand of objectivism is vastly rejected in academic literature. Not surprisingly Becker (1998) and Locke and Becker’s (1998) objectivist definition of integrity generated heated debate amongst scholars (Barry and Stephens, 1998; Orlitzky and Jacobs, 1998) who highlighted the limitations of these definitions. Scholars like Jacobs (2004) maintain that, objectivism fails as a philosophical basis for integrity because of its fundamentally flawed conception of human nature and their unfounded concept of the individual as prior to and fully distinguishable from the social and their understanding of reason as an enterprise wholly of the self’ (p 217).

Jenson (2009) argues that integrity is a morally neutral term like the law of gravity. According to him integrity is a necessary condition for anything or anyone to perform at optimum level, ‘Integrity, without it nothing works’, (Jenson, 2009, p 16). He further contends that integrity exists in positive realm and is distinct from normative concepts like morality or ethics which exist in normative realm. He defines integrity ‘as a state or condition of being whole, complete, unimpaired, unbroken, sound, in perfect condition’ (p 18). He argues that integrity is a necessary condition for workability and it provides unambiguous access to the opportunity for superior performance, regardless of how the performance is defined. When applied to an individual, integrity is defined as a person’s word being whole and complete; in simple terms it is about, ‘honouring your word, nothing more and nothing less’. (p 16). Honouring your word is explained as - you either keep your word, or as soon as you know that you will not, you inform those who are counting on your word that you will not be keeping your word, and clean up any mess you have created as a consequence of not keeping your word. Jenson further argues that honouring your word is an actionable pathway to being trusted by others and paves way for the three virtue phenomena of morality, ethics and legality by making these standards a part of one’s word. It is also a route to creating whole and complete social and working relationships through being trusted by others. The model has been criticised because this concept of integrity can be applied to both a tyrant as well as an ethical person (Bauman, 2013; Audi and Murphy, 2006; Palanski and Yammarino, 2007). It will be absurd to say that a tyrant is a person of integrity because he or she is true to his or her word and stands by his or her convictions.

In the next section I discuss the normative view of integrity which includes morality as an important ingredient of integrity.

NORMATIVE VIEW OF INTEGRITY

The normative view of integrity dominates academic literature on management and business ethics, though there is no agreement on the definition of the concept. It is used to represent a range of ideas and constructs; and it
often overlaps with terms such as morality, ethics, conscientiousness, honesty and trustworthiness (Lowe et al., 2004; Palanski and Yammarino, 2007). The common thread between moral and non-moral definitions and meanings of integrity is the notion of completeness or wholeness. For example George in his writings provides three distinct dimensions of integrity – honesty, commitment to ethical standards and wholeness (George, 2003; George and Sims, 2007). Other authors such as Lowe et al. (2004); Worden (2003), Kaptein (2003, 1999) and Trevino et al. (2000) also relate integrity with wholeness.

Audi and Murphy (2006) have a different view and describe integrity as an “adjunctive virtue” like courage, which is not morally good in itself, but a quality that can strengthen moral character and behaviour. To stand up for what is right in an adverse environment requires courage, and so, it is an important ingredient for achieving overall moral uprightness. According to them, in integrational sense, integrity is not a self-sufficient ethical standard and is an adjunctive virtue, which is important for adherence to high moral standards, facilitates moral reasoning and ethical conduct.

Palanski and Yammarino (2007) conducted a comprehensive review of management literature on integrity and found that integrity has been defined in five ways in management literature-

- Integrity as wholeness
- Integrity as consistency of words and actions
- Integrity as consistency in adversity
- Integrity as authenticity or being true to oneself and
- Integrity as moral or ethical behaviour

**Integrity As Wholeness**

Integrity as a word originates from the Latin adjective *integer*, meaning whole or complete. Etymologically integrity means oneness or wholeness and can be applied to a variety of situations. It can be applied to an object, machinery, natural environment and also to human beings. When applied to an object such as a piece of art, it can mean intactness, completeness or purity; when applied to wildland or wilderness, it indicates the most intact natural environment, undisturbed wild natural areas left on the planet earth. The Webster’s new World Dictionary describes integrity as, ‘the quality or state of being complete: unbroken condition; wholeness; entirety’ and “the quality or state of being of sound moral principle; uprightness, honesty and sincerity’. Indeed this meaning captures the spirit of ‘integer’; and thinking about how it unfolds into a ‘person of integrity’, the image that comes to mind is that of a person who acts in accordance with high moral standards, does so consistently even when challenged by unfavourable/adverse circumstances which may result in personal losses. The Oxford dictionary defines integrity as, ‘quality of being honest and having strong moral principles’, ‘the state of being whole and undivided’. In management literature integrity often appears in relation with leadership qualities and has been a subject of discussion amongst practitioners, researchers and philosophers. A number of scholars like Badaracco and Ellsworth (1992), Koehn (2005), Lowe et al (2004), Trevino et al. (2000), Worden (2003), Kaptein (2003, 1999) George (2003), George and Sims (2007) and McFall (1987) include wholeness as an integral aspect of integrity. Integrity as wholeness also suggests that there are multiple aspects/ parts or dimensions to it, which must be integrated to result in the state of wholeness. If we apply this meaning to human beings, it is almost synonymous to character and is captured by Soloman very aptly as a supervirtue (1992, 1999). According to him, integrity is a supervirtue, which is a synthesis of virtues working together to form a coherent character, an identifiable and trustworthy personality. For him integrity characterises moral courage, the will and willingness to do what one knows one ought to (1992).

When applied to human beings, integrity normally means a virtue and is used for someone who acts in accordance with high moral standards, does so consistently even when challenged by unfavourable adverse circumstances which may result in personal losses. The Oxford dictionary defines integrity as, ‘quality of being honest and having strong moral principles’, ‘the state of being whole and undivided’. In management literature integrity often appears in relation with leadership qualities and has been a subject of discussion amongst practitioners, researchers and philosophers. A number of scholars like Badaracco and Ellsworth (1992), Koehn (2005), Lowe et al (2004), Trevino et al. (2000), Worden (2003), Kaptein (2003, 1999) George (2003), George and Sims (2007) and McFall (1987) include wholeness as an integral aspect of integrity. Integrity as wholeness also suggests that there are multiple aspects/ parts or dimensions to it, which must be integrated to result in the state of wholeness. If we apply this meaning to human beings, it is almost synonymous to character and is captured by Soloman very aptly as a supervirtue (1992, 1999). According to him, integrity is a super-virtue, which is a synthesis of virtues working together to form a coherent character, an identifiable and trustworthy personality. For him integrity characterises moral courage, the will and willingness to do what one knows one ought to (1992).

When applied to human beings, integrity normally means a virtue and is used for someone who acts in accordance with high moral standards, does so consistently even when challenged by unfavourable adverse circumstances which may result in personal losses. The Oxford dictionary defines integrity as, ‘quality of being honest and having strong moral principles’, ‘the state of being whole and undivided’. In management literature integrity often appears in relation with leadership qualities and has been a subject of discussion amongst practitioners, researchers and philosophers. A number of scholars like Badaracco and Ellsworth (1992), Koehn (2005), Lowe et al (2004), Trevino et al. (2000), Worden (2003), Kaptein (2003, 1999) George (2003), George and Sims (2007) and McFall (1987) include wholeness as an integral aspect of integrity. Integrity as wholeness also suggests that there are multiple aspects/ parts or dimensions to it, which must be integrated to result in the state of wholeness. If we apply this meaning to human beings, it is almost synonymous to character and is captured by Soloman very aptly as a supervirtue (1992, 1999). According to him, integrity is a supervirtue, which is a synthesis of virtues working together to form a coherent character, an identifiable and trustworthy personality. For him integrity characterises moral courage, the will and willingness to do what one knows one ought to (1992).

When applied to human beings, integrity normally means a virtue and is used for someone who acts in accordance with high moral standards, does so consistently even when challenged by unfavourable adverse circumstances which may result in personal losses. The Oxford dictionary defines integrity as, ‘quality of being honest and having strong moral principles’, ‘the state of being whole and undivided’. In management literature integrity often appears in relation with leadership qualities and has been a subject of discussion amongst practitioners, researchers and philosophers. A number of scholars like Badaracco and Ellsworth (1992), Koehn (2005), Lowe et al (2004), Trevino et al. (2000), Worden (2003), Kaptein (2003, 1999) George (2003), George and Sims (2007) and McFall (1987) include wholeness as an integral aspect of integrity. Integrity as wholeness also suggests that there are multiple aspects/ parts or dimensions to it, which must be integrated to result in the state of wholeness. If we apply this meaning to human beings, it is almost synonymous to character and is captured by Soloman very aptly as a supervirtue (1992, 1999). According to him, integrity is a supervirtue, which is a synthesis of virtues working together to form a coherent character, an identifiable and trustworthy personality. For him integrity characterises moral courage, the will and willingness to do what one knows one ought to (1992).

When applied to human beings, integrity normally means a virtue and is used for someone who acts in accordance with high moral standards, does so consistently even when challenged by unfavourable adverse circumstances which may result in personal losses. The Oxford dictionary defines integrity as, ‘quality of being honest and having strong moral principles’, ‘the state of being whole and undivided’. In management literature integrity often appears in relation with leadership qualities and has been a subject of discussion amongst practitioners, researchers and philosophers. A number of scholars like Badaracco and Ellsworth (1992), Koehn (2005), Lowe et al (2004), Trevino et al. (2000), Worden (2003), Kaptein (2003, 1999) George (2003), George and Sims (2007) and McFall (1987) include wholeness as an integral aspect of integrity. Integrity as wholeness also suggests that there are multiple aspects/ parts or dimensions to it, which must be integrated to result in the state of wholeness. If we apply this meaning to human beings, it is almost synonymous to character and is captured by Soloman very aptly as a supervirtue (1992, 1999). According to him, integrity is a supervirtue, which is a synthesis of virtues working together to form a coherent character, an identifiable and trustworthy personality. For him integrity characterises moral courage, the will and willingness to do what one knows one ought to (1992).
defining integrity purely as consistency between words and actions or explicit promise keeping also means that the promise can be of unethical or immoral nature. For example, I give my word to a potential contractor that in return of a kickback he/she will be given the contract. Can I be called a person of integrity because I kept my word and gave away the contract in return for a kickback? It will be an absurd thought which does not really align with the meaning and spirit of integrity. Therefore, integrity cannot merely be a consistency of words and actions; the content of the word and consequent actions must also be taken into consideration.

Integrity As Consistency In Adversity

The third meaning of integrity in literature is about consistency in adversity (Duska, 2005; McFall, 1987; Paine, 2005; Posner, 2001; Worden, 2003; Carter, 1996). This aspect of integrity implies the presence of a choice or choices, which may influence integrity. Conceptually, this view of integrity overlaps with consistency between words and actions, but they are distinct. Consistency in adversity adds an essential condition, which is the presence of adverse circumstances, temptations, or challenges for integrity to occur (McFall, 1987; Carter, 1996). The reasoning behind this is that a person of integrity maintains moral steadfastness and does not get swayed away by temptations or choices even at a personal cost. The willingness and preparedness to accept negative consequences for themselves is seen as an important test of a person’s integrity. McFall (1987) goes to the extent of saying that if there are no adversities, choices and temptations involved, then there is no integrity. Thus integrity involves moral, philosophical and practical endeavour which requires considerable consistency in a manager’s behaviour (Badaracco and Ellsworth, 1992). In nutshell, according to this notion of integrity, a person of high integrity will withstand temptations and adversity, and stand up to their moral standards, their word, values and beliefs, which is a vital/ essential feature of integrity. This can be regarded as an essential feature of integrity, but by itself it does not fully encompass the meaning of integrity. It is critical that the nature of the values and principles be defined along with the content of the word given.

Integrity As Authenticity

Authenticity is another meaning of integrity found in management literature which means being true to oneself (Calhoun, 1995; McFall, 1987; Cox et al., 2003, Howell and Avolio, 1995; Paine, 2005; Baccilli, 2001; Rawls, 1971; Koehn, 2005; Peterson and Seligman, 2004; Lowe et al., 2004; Morrison, 2001; Posner, 2001; Kaptien, 1999, 2003; Yukl and VanFleet, 1992). Being true to oneself means consistency between espoused values and enacted values. This conceptualisation of integrity overlaps with consistency in adversity and consistency of word and actions definitions of integrity as it means to act in accordance with a person’s espoused beliefs and values no matter what the circumstances or consequences of the actions. It implies that a person may appear to be acting in accordance with their beliefs and values but it may not necessarily be the case. It makes it impossible for others to determine if the person is acting in compliance with their deeply held values or not. For example, a CEO of an organisation implements social and environmental sustainability initiatives because he or she actually believes it is their moral obligation as a participant in the social system to contribute to sustainability or because the initiative will help build the company’s stock value and reputational capital for the business, or because it is trendy and looks good. There are various typologies given to this dimension of integrity. For example, Palanski and Yammarino (2007) call this aspect - personal integrity. Personal integrity means the alignment of one’s words, actions and internalised values, as different from public integrity, which is the alignment of one’s words and actions only. Peterson and Seligman (2004) call it private and public aspects of integrity. This highlights the intrinsic nature of integrity, where only the person him or herself can determine if he or she acted with integrity. It is clear that for integrity to occur, there needs to be a unification of personal integrity with public integrity.

Integrity As Moral Or Ethical Behaviour

The fifth meaning of integrity found in management literature includes the moral component and views integrity as moral or ethical behaviour. Ethics and morality are both normative concepts as they deal with matters related with making a judgement between what is good or bad, and the right versus wrong. Morality refers to the society’s standards of right and wrong behaviour for people within that society; while ethics refers to the normative set of values that apply to all members of a group or organisation. Thus both morality and ethics relate to desirable and undesirable behaviour (Jenson, 2009). A number of scholars have associated integrity with morality in some respect, for example honesty (Den Hartog and Koopman, 2002; Peterson and Seligman, 2004; Newman, 2003; Posner, 2001; Trevino et al., 2000; Yukl and VanFleet, 1992; McFall, 1987), justice and respect (Baccilli, 2001; Bews and Rossouw, 2002; Den Hartog and Koopman, 2002; Rawls, 1971), empathy/ compassion (Koehn, 2005; Lowe et al., 2004) and being trustworthy (Baccilli, 2001; Trevino et al. 2000, Paine, 2005; Den Hartog and Koopman, 2002). Some authors have associated it with a general sense of morality and
ethics (Baccilli, 2001; Badaracco and Ellsworth, 1992; Carter, 1996; Batson et al., 1999; Becker, 1998; Lowe et al., 2004; Mayer et al. 1995; Newman, 2003; McFall, 1987; Maak, 2008). Striving to achieve integrity is at once a moral, philosophical and practical endeavour and suggests a sense of moral soundness (Badaracco and Ellsworth, 1992). Murphy (1999) argued that fairness, trust, respect and empathy are the core virtues of integrity. Parry and Proctor-Thomson (2002) argue that integrity should be based on morally justifiable set of values and not on an arbitrary set of values chosen by an individual. Palanski and Yammarino (2007) highlight that in integrity literature, ethics or ethical behaviour and morality or moral behaviour refer to actions which are in accordance with socially acceptable standards of moral behaviour. Based on their review and analysis of various interpretations and meanings of integrity in management literature, they proposed that integrity should be considered as a virtue in the domain of moral philosophy.

The various meanings of integrity found in the management literature fail to fully capture the meaning of integrity or wholeness. It makes it essential to identify and decipher various dimensions or aspects of integrity which when aligned and integrated form a complete whole – the state of integrity. Maak (2008) addressed this by taking a different approach and defined integrity as the meeting and alignment of seven necessary conditions, which when achieved form the undivided whole. These seven necessary conditions for integrity are:

- Commitment
- Conduct
- Content
- Context
- Consistency
- Coherence and
- Continuity

Maak (2008) explains commitment to be unconditional commitment to recognisable and desirable set of sound moral principles (McFall, 1987). Sound moral principles also imply that they cannot be just some arbitrarily chosen principles which are valued by a person, but need to be the right principles or they would not meet the criteria of integrity. It is expected of a person of integrity to stand up for all of their espoused values and principles (Calhoun, 1995). Conduct indicates moral behaviour or actions compliant with the ‘sound/recognisable/desirable’ moral principles to which unconditional commitment has been made by the person. For example, if I believe that everybody deserves respect and should be treated with respect, does it reflect in my behaviour and actions? Content encompasses the actual actions of the individual. Using the example of treating everyone with respect, content would mean what actions do I take for being respectful towards others. Are the actions taken in alignment with my beliefs and values, my responsibilities and obligations? The fourth condition - Context highlights the relational wholeness, which in the business context means being aware of the relationships with all the stakeholders, and consideration of the impact of the business’s decisions and actions on them. Brown (2005) is also supportive of this condition and argued that individuals need to be aware of all of the social relationships in which they live and operate. The fifth condition for integrity is Consistency and it represents both commitment and conduct, meaning consistency between words and actions. It is about promise keeping, living by your word, and walking the talk. It is about doing what you say you will do and not do what you say you will not do. The sixth condition – Coherence - requires alignment of espoused moral principles with the actions of the person. This condition emphasises the intention behind the actions essentially meaning that there should be consistency between espoused principles and the actions of a person. Continuity is the seventh condition, which is about persistently acting in line with integrity requirements over time. In order to achieve the state of integrity, one has to be perceived to be consistently acting in compliance with their espoused moral principles over a period of time and not just one of incidence or sporadic instances or when it suits. Therefore, integrity requires making a lifelong commitment towards sound moral principles, upholding them and enacting them throughout your life. Would this mean that once a person has committed to certain principles, there cannot be any change of principles? Managers working in a global business environment are almost sure to face cross-cultural challenges, in which case there might be a need to accommodate changes with the change in the cultural context. It should certainly not mean that these principles cannot change or new principles cannot be adopted. But whatever the change may be, the requirement to commit to sound moral principles, recognised by others as sound, must be met in order to accomplish integrity. Maak’s (2008) argument is that in order to meet the state of undivided wholeness - integrity - there should be the meeting and alignment of all of the seven conditions of commitment, conduct, content, context, consistency, coherence and continuity. In other words, the achievement and integration of these seven conditions will result in integrity, and these conditions are applicable at both individual and organisational level (2008). Maak’s (2008) conditions do cover some of unaddressed areas, for example, the inclusion of intention behind the actions which is not explicitly indicated in many definitions. He
has also included the content of the actions as an additional aspect to the consistency between words and actions.

To sum up, various scholars have defined integrity as wholeness in many different ways discussed above. There are clear overlaps, similarities and differences in these definitions. In the next section I will develop a unified framework of integrity by drawing from various definitions found in the normative literature and building upon Maak’s (2008) seven conditions of integrity.

INTEGRATING NORMATIVE LITERATURE TOWARDS A UNIFIED FRAMEWORK

It is clear from the literature discussed in the previous section that integrity has intrinsic and extrinsic characteristics. For example, being committed to sound moral principles is very personal and innate by nature. Only I can truly know what I am committed to, what principles and values do I hold. Others can only infer and judge from my actions or believe what I tell them. The second important intrinsic factor here is ‘authenticity’ or ‘being true to one self’ or ‘coherence’ in Maak’s (2008) seven essential conditions of integrity. It is about the intention behind actions. A person may be perceived to be acting morally and in line with their espoused moral principles and values, but the intention behind the actions may not be consistent with those principles. It is difficult to discern by others, but only the person himself or herself truly knows what their real intentions were behind the actions at the time. It is a complex aspect to recognise or measure by the observer because only the individual him or herself will know whether their espoused and enacted values are aligned or coherent. Consistency of words and actions, consistency in adversity, context, continuity, conduct and content can be observed in the actions of an individual and hence extrinsic in nature. So it is argued that integrity has two dimensions- intrinsic and extrinsic. The intrinsic dimension includes commitment and adherence to the sound moral principles and acting in accordance with these principles. The seven essential conditions of integrity proposed by Maak (2008) encompass various definitions in the normative views in management literature-wholeness, authenticity, consistency of words and actions, consistency in adversity and moral or ethical behaviour. Applying the proposed two dimensions of integrity to Maak’s seven conditions of integrity, commitment and coherence will be included in intrinsic dimensions. Extrinsic dimension will include consistency, content, conduct, context and continuity. Conduct, content and context fall under the broader definition of integrity found in management literature as consistency in adversity. Although none of the three conditions explicitly state adverse situation or adverse consequences for the person, but being aware of the social context, social relationships and stakeholders in the organisational context, the content of actual actions, and that the actions are aligned with the sound moral principles held by the person, implies that the actions have to be right and responsible actions regardless of the consequences of actions. Then there are two remaining conditions- consistency and continuity. Consistency in Maak’s conditions for integrity means consistency of words and deeds. Words and deeds is one of the prominent definitions in both normative and objectivist views of integrity. For example Jenson (2009) defines integrity purely as honouring your word without explicitly laying out the content of the words and actions. His contention is that by honouring your word the moral side of things automatically play in, and it helps build trusting relationships. Similarly Kaptein (2003) argued that the integration of words and deeds result in a person being reliable. However, without explicit inclusion of morality of the action, simply honouring your word does not resonate well with the meaning and spirit of integrity. Continuity as a compulsory condition for integrity in Maak’s framework means consistently acting in compliance with the moral principles held by a person. It implies lifelong commitment to these deeply held values and beliefs, and consistently acting in accordance with them. This is partly aligned with consistency in adversity meaning of integrity found in management literature.

Clearly at the heart of the integrity is commitment and adherence to the right morals, values and beliefs recognised by others as sound moral principles. I propose that unconditional commitment to sound moral principles in Maak’s (2008) framework is an antecedent or precursor of integrity. One must be a person committed to sound moral principles, which are regarded by others as sound moral principles for the remaining six conditions- conduct, consistency, coherence, context and content to occur. Therefore, if a person does not hold recognised sound moral principles and values, the rest of the six conditions become redundant in terms of achieving integrity in the realm of moral philosophy. So, in the proposed framework, unconditional commitment to sound moral principles is a pre-condition for achieving integrity. It rules out the absurdity of calling the tyrants as persons of integrity as they do not espouse sound moral principles and unjustly rule over others. However, it also raises questions about what are the sound moral principles that one should be committed to and act on? Could the moral principles held by a person be recognised by the observer as sound moral principles
only if the observer happens to agree that their moral principles as sound? Can an observer disagree with the moral principles held by another and yet find them as a person of integrity? In a globalised world where managers deal with diverse stakeholders and operate in various cultural contexts, can one adhere to one’s own moral principles and respect cross-cultural differences at the same time? How can the differences in moral beliefs and standards with changing context be reconciled? In meeting these challenges and to ensure that their actions are ethically and morally sound, a manager must have the capacity for moral reflectiveness and be able to discern what is ‘different’ from what is simply ‘wrong’. For example, in the now infamous case of Ford Pinto, the application of cost benefit analysis in making decisions related with safety and serious risk to life was ‘wrong’ and the utilitarian approach to decision making stretched too far. Clearly in this case the ‘Right’ had the priority over the ‘maximising the outcomes’. The organisational policies must reflect this discretionary power to make decisions in morally and ethically challenging situations.

So when the various definitions of integrity in the literature are integrated with Maak’s (2008) seven essential conditions of integrity requirements, the following framework emerges-

![Figure 1](image_url)

**Figure 1** depicts unified framework of individual integrity, incorporating various findings from management and business ethics literature.

Commitment to moral principles, values and beliefs made by a person are essentially intrinsic by nature and can only be inferred by others from the actions and behaviour of the person. The rest of the five elements - conduct, context, content, consistency and continuity are demonstrated in the actions of the person, are observable and perceived by others, therefore, are classified as extrinsic elements. There is a requirement of alignment and integration of the extrinsic and intrinsic elements which constitute the seven conditions in the proposed unified framework of integrity. The absence or compromise of any of the seven conditions will result in misalignment, and as a consequence, will result in behaviour or actions which do not meet the integrity requirements, because the misalignment will impair the wholeness. To sum it up, the unified framework of integrity depicts that espousing sound moral principles and values are a prerequisite to achieve the state of integrity. Thereafter, enacting on them and upholding them on ongoing basis will result in unimpaired wholeness – state of integrity. In doing so the person must meet the seven essential conditions of integrity identified as- commitment, conduct, coherence, context, consistency, content and continuity.
CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Despite much discussion and debate on the definition and meaning of integrity in scholarly literature on management and business ethics, there is a lack of agreement on the meaning of integrity. In this context, this paper makes a theoretical contribution towards better understanding of ‘integrity’. It analyses and reconciles the various notions of integrity found in scholarly management and business ethics literature and develops a holistic unified framework to better understand the illusive concept of integrity in management. It builds upon Maak’s (2008) seven conditions of integrity and integrates various notions of integrity found in literature to advance the understanding of human integrity. According to the unified framework, integrity has two dimensions - intrinsic and extrinsic. When applied to Maak’s (2008) seven conditions of integrity:

1. Intrinsic dimensions include – Unconditional commitment and coherence
2. Extrinsic dimensions include – Conduct, context, content, continuity and consistency

It argues that unconditional commitment to sound moral principles is an antecedent of integrity. It is a necessary pre-requisite to meet the other six conditions - conduct, context, consistency, coherence, continuity and content. The alignment of all of the seven conditions is essential to achieve the state of integrity or wholeness.

The unified framework proposed in this paper draws on management and business ethics literature, which predominantly consists of incongruent theory and not much empirical research. My next step is to use the framework as a starting point to develop a measure of integrity as ‘wholeness’ consisting of the seven essential conditions.

This framework has some practical implications for organisations. It can be used as a guide or checklist when framing organisational policies and procedures to facilitate achievement of integrity. It has implications for employers and human resource managers because if an employee’s personal values are not consistent with the organisational values it will be a huge challenge for that employee to act with integrity which can be detrimental to their health and productivity. It emphasises the need of alignment of personal values and organisational values in order for a person to act with integrity. Perhaps it is a good idea to include integrity tests in the recruitment and selection processes.

An important limitation for any empirical study on human integrity will be to study or examine an individual’s espoused moral principles. There is a possibility of unintended interplay of social desirability bias. Researchers will need to be mindful of this when designing a research project on integrity.

ENDNOTE

*I would like to thank my friends Associate Professor Claudine Soosay and Dr Sukhbir Sandhu for their valuable suggestions and continuous encouragement.

REFERENCES


