

INTEGRITY



Integrity is all about dedication of one or more persons to the pursuit of a moral life, and about the intellectual responsibility in seeking to understand the demands of such a life. - acting rightly without grossness of moral error, or an unreasonableness of judgement. As a concept, integrity cannot be confined to personal life. When it does spill over into Public and Professional life, it necessitates even by those in positions of official power, the avoidance of any unwarranted exceptions to rules which must have a universal application. In the Practice of a Profession however, this means a substantive procedural willingness to follow guidelines, accept rulings from fact finders, share and examine evidence, and exercise good faith to arrive at equitable outcomes in the conduct of the daily business of life. Read on to know more...



CA. Y. M. Kale

(The author is Past President (1995-96) of the ICAI and currently Group President, Corporate Governance & Development, Hinduja Group India. He can be reached at yashodhankale@gmail.com)

Etymology and Usage

Integrity is most often used as equivalent to honesty, accuracy, opposite of hypocrisy, or, in the sense of consistency in ethics, unity, purity, unspoiledness, uncorruptedness, congruence with observation, to account for discrepancy, and to alter lack of harmony by keeping matters intact.

Although *integrity* means all of the foregoing and much more, yet, its etymology is simple. It comes from the Latin *integritas* and the French *integrete*, *i.e.* the condition of having no part or element taken away or seen to be lacking. In other words, undivided state of completeness or a condition of never having been violated, remaining unimpaired in the original state of soundness, innocence and a sinlessness in complete freedom from moral decay with all virtue intact.

The word was also used in Geology as seen in the early works, - 'the integrity of the cones shows that the country has not been agitated by violent earthquakes'. Later, the word came to be used in the geographic sense of preserving integrity and independence of countries. Finally, came the currently prevalent predominant hue of integrity of faculties in the sense of personal sanctity, and a mind divested and purged of greed with the objective of financial and similar integrity. An exact equivalent of integrity in any of the Sanskrit roots which support words of similar meanings in Indian languages is difficult to find. Either there are exact equivalents for integrity when used in the sense of *Entireness* like the Sanskrit words, *Sampurnata*, *Akhandatva*, *Abhinnavatva* and *Sakalya*, or there are equivalents of integrity when used in the sense of probity and uprightness for which the corresponding Sanskrit words would appear to be *Pramanikatva*, *Pramanya* and *Satva*.

The Latin root of integrity from which the English language also begets the word *integer*, emphasises not only wholeness, but acting according to principles that are claimed to be held. Thus, integrity as a virtue encompasses accountability and moral responsibility as its tools, and single absolute morality as the goal rather than a vague assertion of correctness in moralistic terms of good to maintain the intactness of a moral stance. The cardinal prerequisite in achieving such an objective is that the process is not based on subjective whims but rational principles which enjoin that everything that an individual does or believes in, derives from a single core. So much so, that right and wrong ways of acting are discerned even at personal cost, because integrity is seen as the fundamental principle of information assurance.

Such assurance, at times projects beyond the informational level, and attracts other dimensions popularising usage of the expression 'integrity' in fields as far apart as Structural Engineering, Artistic Licence, Intellectual Debate, and in the domain of Professional Discipline.

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At the informational level, integrity is used in a sense, which is the opposite of wilderness - vital to Databases, Control Systems, Professional Works, and Treatises on Reporting, with shades of meaning that reflect purity, co-ordination with un-intruded completeness, and Order. These underpinnings of the word integrity apply to behaviour in many different contexts, and curiously, are not limited only to contexts which may be of central importance to those required to think and act.

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Moral Root

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As a concept, integrity cannot be confined to personal life. When it does spill over into Public and Professional life, it necessitates even by those in positions of official power, the avoidance of any unwarranted exceptions to rules which must have a universal application. Personal ethics must not only subserve Public life and Professional Conduct, but there is an overriding duty even in the pursuit of ethics not to act according to any rule that one would not wish to see universally applied and followed. Equally, there must be a refusal to engage in any behaviour that evades responsibility or which even indirectly obstructs any attempts to uncover episodes in public, business and professional life in order to arrive at the truth. This kind of objective integrity as distinct from pure personal integrity requires a grasp of real moral obligations and a person who claims integrity cannot therefore afford to be morally mistaken and attribute this to the lack of integrity in another with whom he evinced substantial though not total moral agreement, but could not display the character to disagree strongly. In such space, true integrity requires the claimant not to signal agreement in an ambiguous manner unless there has been deliberation confronting all relevant doubts, until these are resolved consistent with the objective of intellectual virtue exercised in pursuit

of a morally good professional life within terms as narrowly defined as possible under the circumstances. This discrimination needs to be unambiguously applied to all moral predicaments, that may arise in the course of the discharge of one's profession.

In the Practice of a Profession however, this means a substantive procedural willingness to follow guidelines, accept rulings from fact finders, share and examine evidence, and exercise good faith to arrive at equitable outcomes in the conduct of the daily business of life. At a personal level, there must be disinclination to hide any perceived negative or adverse aspects of the results of one's examination. At the same time, there must be no reflex impulse to report upon the misbehaviors and deviances of others especially with a view to justify one's own past or future conduct. The same feature needs to manifest in business in conduct towards competitors, in drawing the line to ensure ethical behaviour and against going beyond it, in conniving at fudging numbers, massaging graphics, or setting & operating standards to maintain visual integrity and even establishing brand positions.

In Business

The terms of virtue do not always lend themselves to precise definition in more complex areas of business and it may come to pass that persons of integrity may act immorally in fact, though not with intent, simply because they held mistaken views and erred on definitions. Aspects, Attributes, Professional Values, explained in terms of the broadest features, may suggest different interpretations of integrity not as a general character, or in the ordinary discourse of life, but in some philosophically important sense, and this could happen on some particularly important occasion guided by different intuitions, which spring out of, a formal relation one has to oneself, or out of those parts of oneself which are connected to relationships in the world which suggest acts that are substantively moral but with normative constraints. These situations are fewer when there is integration of self, maintenance of identity, standing for something, moral purpose, concern for high issues and a consistent exploration of virtue. Yet strength of will, intention and corresponding action may be essential in matters where acting on an intention gives rise to serious obstacles, and there is need not to evaluate the appropriateness or pros and cons of attitudes in the attempt to fulfill an intention in the face of opposition. But this requires clarity on the judgement of the state of affairs to be integrated within, so that the strength of will does not degenerate into

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a fatuous, stubborn and non-evaluative intransigence displayed by the deluded. An intelligent practical benchmark in dealing with such situations is not to ascribe integrity to people whose moral viewpoint is bizarrely remote from what commonsense would find intelligible or defensible as a reasonable moral point of view. For example, those who advocate discrimination in employment, whether gender-based or racial, or propose actions ranging from individual to mass deprivals may yet untiringly aver the correctness of their view, and the so called integrity of their personal character often sustained by an abstemious life. But such misguided integrity of extremes can be the repository of some of the most virulent detractions from integrity that have warped human minds.

This underscores the need outside the prescriptive meaning of Integrity, for measures of independent testing, of what may be officially approved or disapproved forms of Integrity, to safeguard against accusations of Form diluting Substance. So it is important for standards of Integrity to be judged by rigorous Supremacy of Professional Rules, Codes and Etiquette quite distinct from the expectations of prevailing Client Autocracy or Business Oligarchy of whatever nature, and be subject to the Supremacy of Law. Failing this, the Economic & Financial Systems and their Professional subsystems, can behave in much the same arbitrary manner as may be seen in societies that are neither democratic, nor law abiding.

In Reporting

In an increasingly complex world in which profit motive and market optimal considerations dominate almost every sphere, there is great need for increased independent reporting on more matters. So when persons charged with reporting, especially persons on whose reporting, society sets great store, postpone the reporting on one excuse or another, or abandon

the idea after one or more difficult experiences, their enthusiasm so diminished by their failure as to render invalid any further serious attempt to see their project through, or produce reporting that may no longer adhere to expected standards, there is loss of Integrity at Societal level.

Whether an essential ingredient of integrity is the capacity to overcome pressures, and outlaw certain inclinations with full force, and not merely subordinate the pressures, to positions that may be publicly endorsed, is an important question. There is a compelling argument that displaying strength of character in fully engaging with different parts of one's professional life to resolve conflicts which undermine professional character, can only be the sign of a person's integrity, and is certainly not indicative of any lack of integrity. Equally, there is a need not to confuse integrity with neatness and fastidiousness, but rather interpret it as holding steadfastly true to commitments, intentions, promises, convictions, relationships, expectations, trust, noble Causes & Ideals, principled projects, and public interest. An individual would of course, have the latitude to define integrity in terms of commitments that are central and important such that any clash or change thereto could be seen as a cop out, as also to specify the secondary commitments that may not be fundamental, and the abandonment of which may not lose grip on what gives integrity its identity and character. In the end, it does boil down to a judgement about the single minded pursuit of commitments balanced against the relative importance of various pressures that may conflict with those commitments.

Philosophies have often sought to arrange volitions in an hierarchy of first order and second order, and wholly integrated persons may be those that can achieve harmony and fully identify with the higher level volitions. Simply stated, there has to be a

Integrated persons would not normally fall victims to the conflict between doing and not doing, - the tedium, the boring things, the drudgery, implicit in the routine of each discipline - they would either resolve the conflict in some way, or endorse one set of inclinations by outlawing others. In other words, 'wholeheartedness' is inconsistent with unresolved incompatibles, and ambivalence in that behalf. Since self-conflict about values versus wishes, is a never ending process, clarity of knowledge is crucial, in so far as dilemmas and conundrums in a Profession are concerned.



deliberation and discrimination, between more and less worthwhile volitions. This may involve such matters as ranking success over fun. Integrated persons would not normally fall victims to the conflict between doing and not doing, - the tedium, the boring things, the drudgery, implicit in the routine of each discipline - they would either resolve the conflict in some way, or endorse one set of inclinations by outlawing others. In other words, 'wholeheartedness' is inconsistent with unresolved incompatibles, and ambivalence in that behalf. Since self-conflict about values versus wishes, is a never ending process, clarity of knowledge is crucial, in so far as dilemmas and conundrums in a Profession are concerned.

In an age where triumphant commerce has superseded the former colonial world, there is an intense desire to test the causal between Integrity and increased performance on the one hand, and Integrity and Quality on the other hand. The question is stark yet simple – Does Integrity howsoever complete, unbroken, unimpaired, sound, and in perfect condition, - achieve value creation for all stakeholders. That is what the Entrepreneur Businessman wishes to know. In today's global world, if a Hundred Top Businessmen together decide upon something as the right interpretation of Integrity in a given situation of what ought to be reported, there is a preponderance of probabilities, that ultimately, their interpretation of integrity would indeed be held to be right. This cluster concept with different lobbies overlapping is in a sense virtuous, but it is not one that is reducible to adhere to the workings of any single moral yardstick of either benevolence or courage, but may have a linkage with capacity. ■