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NOTE

INTEGRITY IN ORGANIZATIONS: BEYOND HONESTY AND CONSCIENTIOUSNESS

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In previous literature on employee selection, leadership, and organizational trust, scholars have identified integrity as a central aspect of work behavior. However, despite important contributions, their work often has confused integrity with other concepts (especially honesty and conscientiousness) and has treated integrity as either a morally neutral or relativistic phenomenon. The philosophy of "Objectivism" solves these problems by providing a definition of integrity that distinguishes the term from related concepts and by integrating integrity into an objective code of morality. I discuss the implications of this perspective for the study of integrity in organizations.

In the literature on organizational behavior and human resource management, scholars have paid considerable attention to the topic of integrity. In work on employee selection, researchers have examined integrity as a predictor of job performance and counterproductive behaviors (for a review, see Ones, Viswesvaran, & Schmidt, 1993). In addition, leadership theorists and researchers have found that integrity is a central trait of effective business leaders (Bass, 1990; Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991; Yukl & Van Fleet, 1992). Finally, interpersonal and group relationship theorists have identified integrity as a central determinant of trust in organizations (Butler & Cantrell, 1984; Hosmer, 1995; Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995). Although these scholars have provided important insights into the role of integrity in the workplace, I contend that the conceptualization of integrity in their literature is underdeveloped. The central purpose of this article is to offer a more meaningful conceptualization.

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A BRIEF SUMMARY AND CRITIQUE OF PRIOR LITERATURE

As noted by previous authors in the area of employee selection, "integrity tests" measure numerous variables, including acceptance of convention, dependability, depression, drug avoidance, energy level, honesty, hostility, job commitment, moral reasoning, proneness to violence, self-restraint, sociability, thrill seeking, vocational identity, wayward impulses, and work ethics (Ones et al., 1993; Sackett, Burris, & Callahan, 1989). Not surprisingly, controversy has arisen with respect to the construct validity of these tests. Some authors have argued that scores on integrity tests represent conscientiousness or some linear composite of conscientiousness and other traits associated with the Big Five theory of personality (Collins & Schmidt, 1993; Ones et al., 1993, 1995). Others disagree. For instance, Rieke and Guastello conclude the following: "The construct of . . . integrity remains vague and ill-defined after more than 50 years of research" (1995: 458). Camara and Schneider concur:

> We remain concerned about the underlying construct measured by integrity tests. As the construct becomes increasingly broadened (e.g., becomes a composite of three constructs from the Big Five), we question whether there is adequate evidence of validity for the specific construct of interest—integrity—that is subsumed within the broader construct(s). (1995: 459)

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In their meta-analysis of the Big Five, Barrick & Mount (1991) note that there is disagreement as to the meaning of conscientiousness: conscientiousness has been interpreted variously as conscience, conformity, dependability, will to achieve, and value for work. Given this confusion, defining integrity as conscientiousness may result in trading in one poorly understood concept for another.

In discussing traits related to leader effectiveness, Yukl and Van Fleet state, "Integrity means that a person's behavior is consistent with espoused values and that the person is honest and trustworthy" (1992: 151). This definition implies that integrity and honesty are largely synonymous. A deeper analysis of integrity will show that this is not necessarily so. Further, work on leader traits has not fully addressed the issue of the moral justifiability of principles to which one is committed. For a review of this literature, see Yukl (1989), especially Chapter 9.

In describing the relationship between integrity and the development of interpersonal trust, Butler and Cantrell (1984) define integrity as the reputation for truthfulness and honesty of the trusted person. Hosmer (1995) incorporates this definition into his notions of trust in organizations. One limitation to this definition is that, as with much of the literature on leadership, it equates integrity and honesty. As I discuss below, honesty and integrity, although related in some ways, are conceptually distinct. Mayer and his colleagues have advanced the work on integrity and trust by clarifying, "The relationship between integrity and trust involves the trustor's perception that the trustee adheres to a set of principles that the trustor finds acceptable" (1995: 719). Thus, these authors recognize that integrity involves an individual's commitment to principles.

However, a serious problem with Mayer and his coauthors' viewpoint, which represents a common view, is the moral relativism it implies. Moral relativism holds that there are no absolute, valid moral principles but, rather, that all ethical principles are valid relative to individual choice or cultural norms. This is a form of subjectivism: the philosophy that concepts, principles, and values are created (rather than discovered) via inner psychological processes (Peikoff, 1991). Drawing upon McFall (1987), Mayer et al. distinguish between *personal integrity* (whereby an individual adheres to some—any—set of principles) and *moral integrity* (whereby a person adheres to principles deemed acceptable by "the trustor"). This view makes integrity an arbitrary matter, because the authors assume principles and values are subjective, relative, and socially constructed. The only difference between the two ostensible forms of integrity is the source of subjectivity: "personal integrity" refers to one's own personal subjectivism, whereas "moral integrity" refers to someone else's subjectivism. Based on this perspective, even someone like Hitler could have integrity. That is, as long as one consistently acts according to *any* set of principles (e.g., promotion of the master race) one has personal integrity. And, as long as one consistently acts according to a set of principles acceptable to some individual or group (e.g., other Nazis), one has moral integrity. Thus, this approach would put into the same moral category Hitler and, say, an honest, fair business person. If adopted, such a perspective would make the concept of integrity meaningless, for it would subjugate morality to personal or public opinion—even if such opinion were incorrect or evil.

In summary, previous theorists and researchers of employee selection, leadership, and trust have acknowledged that integrity is an important aspect of work behavior. There are, though, two important limitations to their work. First, there is substantial confusion about the meaning of integrity. Is integrity simply another name for honesty, conscientiousness, or a composite of personality traits? Or is integrity a distinct concept that deserves its own attention? This confusion is a problem because it leads people to use the same term when meaning different things. Also, discrepant definitions produce different measures, which, in turn, produce conflicting empirical findings. Second, there is little discussion of the moral dimension of integrity within the reviewed literature. More troubling is the moral relativism evident in some of the writings. This is a problem because it leaves researchers and practitioners with no rational, objective way to evaluate individuals' integrity. I turn now to a conceptualization that addresses these limitations.

THE NATURE OF INTEGRITY: AN OBJECTIVIST ACCOUNT

Ayn Rand's (1961, 1964, 1967, 1982, 1989, 1990) philosophy of "Objectivism" covers the central concerns of philosophy, including metaphysics

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(the nature of existence), epistemology (the nature and means of human knowledge), and ethics (the nature of human values and the identification of a code of values to guide human choices and action). Objectivism is relevant to my purposes because it provides a foundation for a more adequate definition of integrity and for elucidating the issue of morality as it pertains to integrity. There are, of course, other approaches to morality, including utilitarianism (e.g., Mill, 1957), deontology (e.g., Kant, 1956), relativism (e.g., Wong, 1985), and postmodernism (e.g., Rorty, 1979). These approaches, along with others, have received considerable attention in the business ethics literature (e.g., Brady, 1985; Donaldson & Dunfee, 1994; Gatewood & Carroll, 1991; Jansen & Von Glinow, 1985; Jones, 1991, 1995; Trevino, 1986). It is not my purpose here to assess the various approaches or to settle disagreements among those espousing them. Rather, I choose to present a perspective—Objectivism—that has not received attention in the business ethics literature.

Like other philosophies, Objectivism has had its share of critics, including those who have labeled the approach "illogical," "elitist," and even "totalitarian" (e.g., King, 1984; Matson, 1984; Nozick, 1971), but I believe such arguments are effectively refuted by the Objectivist camp (e.g., Binswanger, 1991; Den Uyl & Rasmussen, 1978, 1984; Machan, 1984; Peikoff, 1982, 1991). I offer the Objectivist approach to integrity with the hope that this will provoke new insights, rational discourse, and debate among business scholars.

In this section I first offer a brief overview of Rand's theory of ethics. Second, I present and explicate the Objectivist conceptualization of integrity. Finally, using this conceptualization, I clarify how integrity is different from related concepts, especially honesty and conscientiousness.

Overview of Objectivist Ethics

To understand Objectivist ethics, one must first understand the underlying metaphysics and epistemology. At the metaphysical level Objectivism starts with axioms—that is, fundamental truths that are self-evident by means of direct perception. These axioms form the base of all further knowledge and cannot be denied without self-contradiction (Rand, 1957, 1990; Peikoff, 1991). The three primary metaphysical axioms of Objectivism are as follows: (1) reality exists (i.e., the external world is objective and real—not an illusion or merely a function of social consensus), (2) human beings possess consciousness (i.e., the faculty of perceiving reality), and (3) contradictions do not exist in reality (i.e., any entity has a unique, noncontradictory identity). Two important corollary axioms are (1) reality exists independent of consciousness (i.e., consciousness is a faculty for perceiving reality—not inventing it) and (2) human beings have volition (i.e., the capacity to think or not to think and, correspondingly, to choose among alternative courses of action). For validations of these axioms, see Binswanger (1991), Peikoff (1991), and Rand (1990).

Regarding epistemology, Objectivism maintains that, because humans are conscious, volitional beings, they must rely on reason in order to perceive reality effectively (Rand, 1964). Objectivists define "reason" as the cognitive faculty for organizing perceptual data in conceptual terms using the principles of logic. Since reason is an individual's only source of knowledge, Objectivism rejects faith or emotions as a means of knowledge. This philosophy also rejects the view that certainty or knowledge is impossible. Knowledge exists when a person grasps facts of reality via either perceptual observation or conceptualization—that is, by cognitively integrating perceptual concretes into lower-order abstractions and then integrating lower-order abstractions into higher-order ones using a specific method (see Rand, 1990). This view holds that valid concepts are objective—that is, based on direct experience with reality (Peikoff, 1991; Rand, 1964, 1990).

Rand's theory of ethics follows from her metaphysics and epistemology. According to Objectivism, a value is that which one acts to gain and/or keep. A person must judge and select values because he or she is a mortal, goal-directed, volitional being—and, therefore, must choose and pursue values in order to live successfully. In other words, the alternative of life or death creates the necessity for human beings (and other living organisms) to hold values. Because "it is only the concept of 'Life' that makes the concept of 'Value' possible" (Rand, 1964: 17), the ultimate value and, hence, proper standard of human ethics is a person's life—that is, the individual's long-term survival and well-being. To meet this standard a person must hold cer-

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tain other values, including reason, purpose, and self-esteem. The implications of specifying life as the ethical standard are as follows: every human being is an end in himself or herself—not a means to the ends of others; a person must live for his or her own sake, neither sacrificing self to others nor others to self; and individuals must work for their own rational self-interest, with the achievement of their own happiness as the highest moral purpose of their lives (Peikoff, 1991; Rand, 1961, 1964, 1982, 1989, 1990).

Following from the above premises, Objectivists identify a number of virtues (the actions by which one gains and keeps values). Rationality is the recognition and acceptance of reason as human beings' only source of knowledge, only legitimate judge of values, and only valid guide to action. As such, rationality is the basic virtue—that is, the most fundamental requirement of living successfully. The corollary virtues (not an exhaustive list) include honesty, independence, justice, productivity, pride, and integrity.[1] These virtues are expressions of rationality and, hence, are inextricably linked; one cannot undermine one without undermining the others. For instance, Locke and Woiceshyn (1995) have illustrated how dishonesty in business corrupts rationality, productivity, and pride. The ethical standard for all moral values and virtues is the same: that which furthers the long-term survival and well-being of individuals as rational beings is ethical, and that which threatens these is unethical (Peikoff, 1991; Rand, 1957, 1964, 1989, 1990).

The preceding is a greatly abbreviated description of Objectivism; for a comprehensive presentation, see Peikoff (1991). I turn now to a fuller discussion of the Objectivist view of integrity.

Integrity as Loyalty to Rational Principles and Values

Objectivists define integrity as loyalty, in action, to rational principles (general truths) and values (Peikoff, 1991: 259; Rand, 1964: 52). That is, integrity is 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.

Two aspects of this definition require elaboration. First, integrity is not a matter of words alone; it requires *acting* in accordance with rational values. This should not be taken to mean that integrity eliminates the possibility of personal change. A person with integrity, although unwilling to change his or her values due to irrelevant factors (e.g., social pressure), must be willing to change as his or her knowledge increases. As Peikoff puts it,

> It is not a breach of integrity, but a moral obligation, to change one's views if one finds that some idea he holds is wrong. It *is* a breach of integrity to know that one is right and then proceed (usually with the help of some rationalization) to defy the right in practice. (1991: 260)

Thus, people with integrity may change their minds (e.g., alter their values or change certain goals) but only for a good reason.

The second aspect of the Objectivist definition requiring elaboration is that integrity involves acting in accordance not with *any* value system but with a *morally justifiable* one. As Peikoff asserts, integrity "does not mean loyalty to arbitrary notions, however strongly one feels they are true. . . . Integrity means loyalty to one's knowledge, to the conclusions one can prove logically" (1991: 261). This statement is especially relevant because it points to the Objectivist basis for moral justification. Predicated on Rand's theory of ethics, a morally justifiable code of principles and values is one that promotes the long-term survival and well-being of individuals as rational beings. In this sense truly moral values are objective because the touchstone for morality is survival as a rational being, and survival as a rational being is a phenomenon that has reality independent of the opinions of observers. Also, moral values are objective in the sense that, like other valid concepts, they are conceptualizations derived from sense perception or experience with actual objects and conditions. Therefore, contrary to McFall's (1987) and Mayer et al.'s (1995) arguments, integrity requires more than adherence to some arbitrary set of values (personal integrity) and more than adherence to a set of values acceptable to some other individual or group (moral integrity). Integrity is commitment in action to a morally justifiable set of principles and

[1] Readers interested in the detailed derivation of these virtues and a fuller discussion of the relationships among the virtues should see Chapter 8 of Peikoff (1991).

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values, where the criterion for moral justification is reality—not merely the acceptance of the values by an individual, group, or society. Because survival and happiness are the ultimate standards of morality, life—not subjective opinion—is the foundation of integrity.

Integrity, Honesty, and Conscientiousness

As I noted in the introduction, a number of views of integrity in the organizational behavior literature essentially equate integrity with honesty; some researchers use the labels "honesty tests" and "integrity tests" interchangeably in the area of employee selection, and those undertaking work on trust and leadership often treat honesty and integrity as synonymous (e.g., Butler & Cantrell, 1984; Hosmer, 1995; Yukl & Van Fleet, 1992). However, although the concepts are related, honesty and integrity are not the same thing. Honesty is the refusal to pretend that facts of reality are other than what they are. Hence, one difference between honesty and integrity is that "honesty is the recognition of the fact that you cannot fake existence [i.e., facts regarding the external world]," whereas "integrity is the recognition of the fact that you cannot fake your consciousness [i.e., facts regarding one's true principles and values]" (Rand, 1957: 1019). Said another way, honesty requires that one not use one's consciousness to distort reality, and integrity requires that one not betray the convictions of one's consciousness in action. Further, in the Objectivist philosophy, integrity involves acting according to a code (integrated system) of morally justifiable principles. One of these principles is that, except in cases of self-defense (e.g., lying to a thief), honesty is in a rational person's best interests. To have integrity, though, one must also adhere to other rational principles (e.g., regarding independence, justice, and productivity). Therefore, honesty is a necessary but not sufficient condition for integrity.

Some researchers in the area of employee selection have suggested that integrity tests, in fact, measure conscientiousness. Within the framework of the Big Five theory of personality, conscientiousness "reflects dependability; that is, being careful, thorough, responsible, organized, and planful," and it also "incorporates volitional variables, such as hardworking, achievement-oriented, and persevering" (Barrick & Mount, 1991: 4). Collins and Schmidt argue that their integrity test measures conscientiousness, "because as a group the most heavily loaded scales measure personal values, behavioral control, sense of duty and responsibility, and risk-taking behavior" (1993: 308). Ones et al. suggest that integrity tests measure general conscientiousness, and they also state, "Conscientiousness reflects such characteristics as dependability, carefulness, and responsibility" (1993: 680).

The differences in the above definitions underscore my point that the concept of conscientiousness is not clearly understood. Nevertheless, a common theme in most of the definitions is that dependability is a central component of conscientiousness. A conscientious person is, at least, careful, responsible, and organized. Note, however, that conscientiousness is a principle: it reflects the general belief that carefulness, responsibility, and organization are preferable modes of conduct. My analysis shows that valuing conscientiousness is not enough to warrant ascriptions of integrity. As I have discussed regarding honesty, to have a degree of integrity a person must act on a code of morally justifiable, rational principles—not merely on a single principle. Further, the concept of conscientiousness appears to have both morally laden and morally neutral elements. For instance, responsibility could be related to integrity insofar as it involves dependably doing what one has promised to do. However, being careful and organized may be partially stylistic in the sense that people can vary widely on these dimensions without violating moral principles. For example, the stereotypical absent-minded professor might be rather careless (misplacing things) and somewhat disorganized (not writing down ideas or plans) but still have high integrity by acting in accordance with moral values and virtues (e.g., reason, purpose, and independence). In summary, although the morally laden element of conscientiousness may be pertinent to integrity, the morally neutral elements are not.

APPLICATION AND DISCUSSION

As I discussed previously, it is unclear what current integrity tests actually measure (Camara & Schneider, 1995; Rieke & Guastello, 1995). Objectivists specify what measures of integrity *should* assess: the extent to which a per-

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son acts on rational principles and values. This is true whether integrity is being measured for purposes of selecting employees, determining trustworthiness, or evaluating leader attributes. Thus, a theoretically sound measure of integrity is urgently needed. Given my arguments that integrity is not synonymous with honesty or conscientiousness, conventional integrity tests will not do. Examples of prima facie valid integrity items are (1) I value (reason, purpose, and self-esteem); (2) I am (rational, honest, independent, just, productive, and proud); (3) my values, goals, and behavior are congruent; and (4) I am willing to do whatever is necessary to live according to my most cherished values.

Because these kinds of items may invoke a social desirability response bias, researchers should consider including measures of self-deception and impression management (such as those developed by Paulhus, 1984, 1988), along with integrity measures. Also, use of ratings of integrity by others (e.g., supervisors or peers), rather than self-report, should reduce concerns for self-serving biases and method variance. Finally, where possible, researchers should assess actual behavior consistent with morally justifiable principles and values (e.g., in work simulations and assessment centers).

In terms of practical implications of integrity in the workplace, consider these examples:

- An entrepreneur who accepts the return of a product that was "unconditionally guaranteed." The moral principles in this illustration are truth in advertising and fairness to customers. These principles are rational because a business cannot, in the long run, succeed by lying and being unjust to customers. The business owner has demonstrated integrity by acting in accordance with the principles of truthfulness and justice.
- A manager who refuses to succumb to social pressure to provide performance appraisals based on factors other than performance. The moral principles here are independence of judgment, productivity, and fairness. These principles are expressions of rational self-interest, because the manager cannot effectively manage if her decisions are biased by social pressure, her subordinates are unproductive, or the reward system is unjust. The manager has shown integrity by refusing to base performance appraisals on politics rather than on her best objective judgment.

If principles such as the above are in individuals' best self-interests, why do some people lack integrity? As discussed by Objectivists, there are a number of reasons (Peikoff, 1991; Rand, 1964). First, not everyone is rational. To act in accordance with rational convictions, one must *have* rational convictions. This requires that the individual know what he or she is doing and why. It also requires the discipline of purpose and a long-range course of action, selecting corresponding goals and pursuing them fervently, carefully choosing the means to one's ends, and making full use of one's knowledge. Therefore, because integrity is a manifestation of rationality, irrational people cannot have integrity.

Second, a person may lack integrity because of desires that are inconsistent with moral values. For instance, in the first example above, the entrepreneur might be tempted to snatch a quick profit by denying the return of the product. This temptation, by itself, is not immoral, as long as the owner does not act on the emotion but, rather, examines and acts upon his long-term interests by summoning the full context of his knowledge (i.e., all of the relevant information currently at his disposal). However, if the entrepreneur fails to call upon his rational mind, acting upon the whim of the moment instead, he will indeed lack integrity. The same is true when an irrational fear drives behavior. Integrity requires that reason—not emotion—be a person's primary guide. Similarly, an individual's integrity will be called into question if he or she does not put rational principles into practice simply out of inertia (the willingness to stick with the status quo merely because it is the status quo).

Third and finally, probably the most common reason a person may lack integrity is because he or she succumbs to social pressure. It would, for instance, have been a breach of integrity for the manager in the second example to have given inflated performance ratings as a result of threats of disapproval. Social pressure may come from numerous sources (e.g., coworkers, bosses, or clients) and take many forms (e.g., physical intimidation or verbal and nonverbal disapproval). Although a person with high integrity may enjoy approval (if he or she approves of the approvers), this individual will not allow popularity to take priority over rational convictions.

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What are the consequences of integrity within organizations? By definition, employees with high integrity are more rational, honest, independent, and just than employees with less integrity. This is true because a person of integrity understands that acting on principles of rationality, honesty, and so on leads to greater self-esteem and, hence, to his or her long-term survival and well-being (Rand, 1957, 1964). Therefore, such employees do not steal organizational resources, treat others unfairly (e.g., in making personnel decisions), or deceive themselves or others (e.g., regarding organizational missions or objectives). As pointed out by Kirkpatrick and Locke (1991), these employees are trustworthy and are excellent candidates for leadership—and followership—positions.

Locke (1997) asserts that there are three essential things an employer needs to know about a given job applicant: (1) Does the individual have the relevant knowledge, skills, and abilities to do the job (or the capacity to learn these readily)? (2) Will the person exert the necessary effort? (3) Does the person have good character? "Good character" means, at least in part, that the individual has integrity. This is directly related to performance on the job. Holding ability constant, people with higher integrity are more innovative and productive than those with lower integrity. This is because a person of integrity knows that innovation and productivity are central to life's purpose and, therefore, are in his or her rational best interests (Peikoff, 1991; Rand, 1943). Further, without integrity, ability and motivation are useless because the individual would use his or her skills and drive to deceive and evade rather than perform and produce, which would undermine the long-term effectiveness of both the employee and the organization.

In sum, employees with higher integrity are better workers than those with lower integrity (again, controlling for other performance-related variables). Therefore, ceteris paribus, organizations having more employees with high integrity are more likely to survive and thrive than are organizations with fewer such employees.

CONCLUSION

My primary purpose in this article has been to provide a more meaningful conceptualization of integrity than what exists in the literature on employee selection, organizational trust, and leadership. By considering the Objectivist definition of integrity, researchers and practitioners should be less likely to make the mistakes of treating integrity as a subjective, morally relative phenomenon and confusing integrity with related concepts. Ayn Rand's view advances previous definitions by offering an objective perspective of integrity that distinguishes integrity from such related concepts as honesty and conscientiousness. In addition, Rand's theory of ethics explicitly addresses the issue of morality. Indeed, in this perspective, morality is at the heart of integrity.

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