Causal Factors and Enabling Factors in Public Integrity

A Focus on Leadership, Institutions, and Character

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Abstract

The growing recognition of the threat posed by ethical violations accounts for the attention being given to public integrity programs in different parts of the world. The focus of the programs is mainly on the demarcation of ethics boundaries, the elaboration of codes of acceptable conduct in public life, and the role of leadership in championing the cause of ethical compliance and punishing deviations. This article argues that while ethical codification and leadership might suffice in upholding the ideals of public service in some countries, achieving a consistently high ethical standard in countries on the negative side of the "rectitude scale" requires that the rudiments of public morality be instilled in the entire citizenry. For the latter set of countries, therefore, "going back to basics" is a prerequisite for the success of ethical codification, enforcement, and monitoring efforts as well as the effectiveness of the complementary leadership acts.

Contemporary integrity programs proceed on the assumption that leadership support for ethical codification and enforcement, together with the establishment of a network of anti-corruption institutions, is all it takes to combat the scourge of corruption. A contrary view is that a leader is only human—a person who, in making ethical choices, is liable to confuse the right with the wrong, and whose judgment tends to be shaped by fleeting circumstances. As argued in this article, resolving integrity issues in some societies, particularly, where consensus on right and wrong is lacking, requires going beyond leadership and engaging society at large in an ethics dialogue.

I am grateful to the anonymous PI reviewers for their helpful comments. However, all residual errors are mine. Also, the views expressed in this article are mine and are not necessarily shared by the United Nations or any of its agencies.
Nature, Magnitude, and Significance of the Ethics Challenge

The first challenge in tracking ethical compliance or violations is one of definition. While rules have been developed that make it possible to assess the rationality of decisions taken by public officials, there is as yet no foolproof method of evaluating the integrity and fairness of their decisions. A recent case provides an illustration. The head of the United Nations tribunal for Rwanda, Carla Del Ponte, refused to renew the contracts of seven African and Indian prosecutors, citing incompetence as her reason. The dismissed attorneys, for their part, termed the decision a racist act (CNN.com/World, May 15, 2001). As individuals with rigorous legal training, the parties to the dispute would undoubtedly prepare briefs, enter pleas, and marshal evidence in support of their positions. Knowing what is at stake—reputation, power, and position—they would be unsparing in the use of factual information, highlighting what favored them, and downplaying, if not altogether stonewalling, awkward pieces of data. To vindicate their positions, they will be generous with facts, even if, at times, this means being economical with the truth. This is what rational individuals do: they channel means toward preferred ends. In contrast, their ethically inspired counterparts are likely to obliterate the distinction between self and others, and agonize over right and wrong. Ethical dilemmas are not limited to the personnel-selection process, but are closely intertwined with decisions taken in contract and procurement, customs and excise, tax administration, revenue collection, law adjudication and enforcement, and service-delivery agencies.

Despite its pervading influence on human life, ethics did not enter into the discourse of public administration until the 1970s, when the Watergate scandal revealed the scale and depth of corruption perpetrated at the highest level of government in the world’s leading democracy, the United States. It is true that contemporary public administration started with a normative theory of good government; that is, if the contributions of the scientific-management scholars and advocates of clean government in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in the United States are discounted. Woodrow Wilson’s celebrated essay on the study of administration made no pretense to absolute scientific neutrality. The aim of administrative study, according to Wilson (1887, pp. 197–98), was “to discover, first, what government can properly and successfully do (ends), and secondly, how it can do these proper things with the utmost possible efficiency and at the least possible cost either of money or of energy (means)” (emphasis added). <<Are the terms “ends” and “means” your interpolations? If so, please change parens to brackets.>>

Up to the 1970s, it was generally believed that only the developing countries of Africa, Southeast Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East were confronted with an ethical challenge—more so as they were invariably “traditional” societies just setting out on the journey to development and modernization. Primordial loyalties were still too strong in such societies to allow the public service to imbibe the norms of probity, professionalism, political impartiality, accountability, transparency, and responsiveness. Accordingly, the development-administration movement focused on ways of eliminating “ecological” barriers to the assimilation of the “rational,” mostly Anglo-Saxon norms of public administration (La Palombara 1971, pp. 172–77; Lerner 1958, p. 405; Riggs 1964, pp. 100–105).

The Watergate scandal dispelled the illusion that the mature democracies were ethically aboveboard. The collapse of communism in the former Soviet Union and
Eastern Europe further revealed that ethical concerns now transcend cultural, political, or religious divides. Today, corruption is on the public agenda in places where it was once discussed in hushed tones. It accounts for the change of regimes or the defeat of once-powerful political parties in countries as far apart (in terms of space, stage of development, cultural and religious belief) as the Netherlands, Israel, Turkey, India, South Korea, Colombia, the Philippines, Nigeria, Japan, Italy (Klitgaard, 1988, p. 10), and most recently, Germany. The European Union, which, as a donor institution, tends to be most uncompromising when faced with the possibility of corrupt handling of aid resources, was itself embroiled in a corruption scandal leading to the dismissal of high-ranking officials. Institutional corruption has been detected in city police organizations in the United States, Germany, and Great Britain. The Enron collapse epitomizes the corruption challenge facing the private sector, and underscores the relevance of the otherwise well-worn saying, “all that glitters is not gold.”

It is necessary to note that not every kind of malfeasance falls under the heading of corruption. Homicide, high treason, robbery and kidnapping, fraud, forgery, and embezzlement are heinous crimes, but they are not ethical violations. The laws forbidding criminal conduct are so clear and the procedure for detecting transgressions so precise that deciding on guilt or innocence tends to be relatively easy. The prosecution’s task is accomplished once the motive, or intent, is established and the opportunity is successfully correlated with the illegal act. This is not to say that an act that is criminal cannot simultaneously be unethical. Conflict of interest is an example of a crime that is indistinguishable from an ethical violation. Similarly, destruction of evidence by a police officer or a court official is an act that is both criminal and unethical.

However, behavior that is purely unethical is not always easy to pinpoint or to prosecute. By its very nature, corruption is a crime planned and executed in the darkest reaches of the mind. To that extent, the motive is difficult to establish, and any evidence linking opportunity with the act may at best be circumstantial, at worst a huge fabrication. For example, if a female aspirant to a position fails at the interview, all the male panelists who once complimented her on her looks come under immediate suspicion. If a top government official’s relation wins a lucrative contract, it is all suddenly because of family connections. If a customs inspector impounds imported items, this is read as a signal demanding a ransom payment (variously described as a bribe, kickback, extortion, family-support allowance, baksheesh, tea money, or facilitation payment).

**Unveiling Ethical Violations**

An ethical violation emerges in its true form when, on the basis of the information provided, evidence can be adduced that *manifest* plans have been vitiated by *latent* and arbitrary moves—specifically, that approved codes or rules have been ignored to attain personal ends or manipulated to frustrate public intentions. While laws, rules, and regulatory codes set out what a public servant must do to avoid punishment, empirical evidence indicates that these behavior guides are rarely used in decision-making or taken seriously by top management (Bowman 2000, p. 675).

Following from this, establishing or proving allegations of corruption requires going beyond *formal, legal* stipulations to a critical assessment of the purity of the
decision-maker’s motive, that is, the degree of a decision’s compliance with basic moral as well as legal and professional standards. Considering the powers conferred on the average decision-maker by the bureaucratic ethos of hierarchy, secrecy, and executive discretion, this is a herculean task. To prove that an impugned decision has been vitiated by an impure motive, the aggrieved party has, as a minimum condition, to tender evidence showing in clear terms that a particular act does not accord with the rules governing it and, for reasons not provided for under the rules, has side-tracked due process. This underestimates the creative and rule-mani
cipulation capacity of officials who are determined to hijack the decision process for private ends.

All the same, and provided that freedom of information laws are enacted and independent adjudication bodies are established, it is possible to verify cases of corruption. Let us, for instance, revisit at least one of the three hypothetical cases cited above, the frustration of the woman who flunked the job interview. She may be in the same situation as the unsuspecting individuals who respond to vacancy announcements that are meant, not to solicit applications (as the vacancies have already been filled ahead of the announcements), but to fulfill legal or procedural requirements. An applicant for a faculty position was so frustrated by the lack of transparency of the recruitment process that she demanded to know who had been selected and the criteria applied by the selection body (Career Talk, April 20, 2001, Chronicle.com/jobs/2001/04/2001042001c.htm). She notes that “as a woman and a racial minority, I am aware of being used to superficially comply with some internal or external diversity statistics.”

Suffice it to say that every action taken before, during, and after the issuance of formalistic vacancy announcements will anticipate the possibility of disputation and will therefore be pretextual. A pretextual action puts a cloak of legality on an illegal decision, in effect spraying aromatic perfume in large doses before polluting the air with foul, rotten substances. Its primary aim is to put nosy individuals off the scent. It is to the government office’s corrupt management of interpersonal or intergroup transactions what match-fixing is to competitive sports. Joseph’s case study on goings-on in a public service department may at first appear fictional, but it clearly depicts realities as far as pre-textual decision-making in public bureaucracies is concerned (Joseph 2001, pp. 285–87).

Consequences of Ethical Violations

Depending on its form and gravity, corruption is capable of rewarding indolence and penalizing hard work, undermining morale and esprit de corps, compromising a nation’s external security, threatening internal order and stability, and generally slowing down the pace of economic growth and sustainable development. While some observers (e.g., Bowman 2000, p. 683) view ineptitude and ethical crookedness in the same light—that is, as equally harmful—others regard the latter as a greater threat than the former. Incompetent officials, after all, can be easily spotted, sent for training, threatened with demotions if they show no signs of improvement on the job, or simply sidelined in substantive decision-making. Their ethically flawed coun-

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terparts operate with stealth, go through stages of denial, adopt stratagems to cover their tracks, and, unless picked up on the agency’s ethics radar, commit maximum damage with minimum effort. As Klitgaard puts it (1988, p. 3), corruption threatens “agency missions and the broader goals of national development.” Certainly, corruption is at the root of the illegal importation of arms and ammunition into, and thus the destabilization of political and social order in, a number of African countries (Cornwell and Potgieter 1998, p. 8). When applicants have to rely on the intervention of a godfather to secure places for them in the police force, they are likely to remain beholden to their benefactors and to sell law-enforcement favors to the highest bidder. When the judiciary is rotten, law and order breaks down, while life and property remain constantly at risk. Traffic-control officers who retail driving licenses in return for easy money expose themselves, members of their families, and other road users to the risks of reckless driving.

Of course, it may be and has been argued that corruption serves a purpose of some kind (Leff 1979, pp. 329–33). First, it greases the wheels of commerce by allocating goods “according to willingness and ability to pay.” Second, the favors dispensed in an otherwise corrupt system are part of larger “arrangements” to bring about the integration of diverse communities. Third, when the rules prove to be too inflexible and suffocating, managers cannot achieve programmed objectives unless they operate outside the rules and apply creative solutions to problems. In any case, the central thesis of the New Public Management is that only the managers, as the organization leaders, have the professional knowledge to decide who is best fitted for what position or how resources could be most “productively” allocated (Osborne and Gaebler 1992).

The attempt to rehabilitate corruption is not likely to succeed. In particular, the economic argument cannot be sustained in view of the issues of public morality raised by the willingness-to-pay and ability-to-pay concepts, and the conflict between the two. If willingness to pay is the basis of the law-enforcement function of government, drug trafficking, homicide, and other forms of social transgression would be redefined by the forces of supply and demand, compelling society to drastically revise its notions of right and wrong. Most existing crimes would have to be taken off the statute books, as the police and judiciary assigned the prosecution and adjudication tasks by society would already have been put on the payroll of new, mostly affluent private employers—employers that might not share society’s concern for the sanctity of life or the inviolability of personal property rights. And where ability to pay is the decisive factor, the poorest and weakest segments of society would have to forgo their human and civic rights, since only those endowed with the resources would have the ability to pay for access.

As for the argument that corruption serves as a tool of national integration, nothing could be farther from the truth. Experience reveals that national integration is the last thing on the mind of the dispenser of political spoils or managerial favors. As a matter of fact, the national-integration argument ignores the possibility that the authority conferred on a political decision-maker might be misused depending on the decision-maker’s transient mood and innate character (an issue discussed in greater detail below). By placing the power of patronage in the hands of a few, corruption transfers resource-allocation decisions from the competitive, open market to, at best, a fickle-minded oligopoly, and at worst, a self-seeking monopoly. The accompanying distortions in political resource allocation lead to the impaired functioning of
political communities, just as they result in market failure in the economic sphere or performance shortfalls in formal organizations (Dwivedi and Jabbra 1989, p. 2). Specifically, the lack of correlation between contributions and rewards breeds large-scale political discontent, constitutional crises, civil strife, and, in extreme cases, irredentism.

The managerial pitch for corruption is the least defensible. Professionalism is the central theme in management. Where its opposite, favoritism, rules, jobs will go to the least competent, contracts will be awarded to firms without the slightest idea of how to proceed, and laws would be applied arbitrarily with the gratification of private desires in view. In a corrupt system, perpetrators of crime would be turned loose while their victims languish in jail.

If the rules governing a particular decision are cumbersome or obsolete, the most logical thing to do would be to have them openly debated prior to embarking on a review and amendment process. To allow individuals the freedom to decide when to comply with the rules is to confer unlimited license on buccaneers without a prior guarantee of successful or beneficial innovation (Balogun and Mutahaba 1999, p. 195). In any case, the rules are a means to the buccaneer’s ends. They are liable to be cited approvingly when they conform to the buccaneer’s wishes, but thrown out the window as soon as they serve as a restraint on arbitrary action.

A minimum degree of trust is essential to the success of any cooperative endeavor (whether it is business, government, or marriage). Trust can only be sustained if there are rules defining the rights and obligations of the parties to a compact and serving as a check on opportunism or perfidy in interpersonal relations (Rowthorn 1999, pp. 664–66). It is the rules that encourage each party (e.g., the worker in relation to the employer, a citizen in relation to government, and business partners in general) to invest time, energy, and resources on joint enterprises confident that the other party could not exit from commitments without paying a price. Where individuals are free to renounce obligations, different parties would spend more time looking for external opportunities and escape routes than in consolidating internal gains.

In response to the contention that the manager knows best who is fit for what job or how resources ought to be allocated, it should be stressed that modern organizations are too complex to be successfully run as personal fiefdoms. More often than not, they require a whole range of knowledge, skills, and aptitudes that are definitely beyond the reach of a single individual or a narrow circle of officials. Suffice it to say that a system whose fate hangs on personalities rather than rules is bound to disintegrate on the exit of its “strong man.”

The Methodological Quagmire

It is obvious that public service ethics is an enigma. As a value-loaded concept, it does not readily lend itself to rational, scientific analysis. Its meaning also changes with the circumstances. What is ethical at one point may be monstrous behavior at another. Attributes deemed praiseworthy in capitalist countries will in all probability be roundly condemned as decadent in communist societies (Klitgaard 1988, p. 3). Among the various ethnic communities of Nigeria, it is bad to commit murder or adultery, it is ungodly to tell lies or steal, but all these moral rules apply only within a narrow, sharply defined circle of people (Balogun 1982, p. 51). Citing the Ibo as an
example, Basden (1966, p. 36) observes that if a crime is perpetrated outside the town area, the criminal who returns safely with large amounts of booty “will be congratulated on his success.”

The preceding analysis raises a fundamental question: Who is best placed to decide what is right or wrong—that is, to distinguish between ethical and unethical conduct? Is it the individual public employee, the government as the employer, or society at large? The next section focuses on the individual, and particularly on the link between the morality of individuals and of the organization of which they are members.

In Pursuit of Public Integrity: Resolving the Employee-Employer Tension

Public integrity is an issue of dominant concern in many parts of the world today. In response to threats posed by the spread of corruption in public life, one country after the other (from Eastern Europe, through the Middle East, to Sub-Saharan Africa) has embarked on ambitious reform programs and instituted measures aimed at empowering government leaders to combat the menace. Indeed, the basic thrust of New Public Management (NPM) is the “empowerment of managers to manage.” It is the contention of this study that the trust that contemporary reform programs repose in leadership is, in the context of the integrity challenge facing some countries, misplaced. The response of an individual left to make ethical choices (whether a leader or a follower) is likely to be relativist rather than perfectly ethical.

Human fickleness probably explains the tendency of ethics programs to target, not the individual, but factors external to the individual. The focus of such programs is on what Bowman (2000, p. 674) terms the “moral minimum”—the minimum moral standards that a public official is expected to attain. The effectiveness of this minimalist approach may, ironically, hinge on the subsistence of opposite conditions—the adoption of the “moral maximum” or developmental integrity formula. This later option consists of measures aimed at advancing the public interest (Bowman 2000, p. 674). Above all, the developmental approach thrives on leadership commitment to integrity, and on the adoption of policy and institutional measures to enthroned public service virtues and ideals (Adedeji 1992, p. 4; De George 1982, p. 12; Jurkiewicz and Brown 2001, pp. 2–3).

That leadership is critical to the success of integrity programs is beyond doubt. Leadership is behind the success of Hong Kong’s “quiet revolution” (de Speville 1998, p. 30). It is the leadership category that would institute most of the measures that the World Bank (1997, p. 99) deemed necessary in “restraining arbitrary and corrupt behavior” in the provision of essential services, such as guarantees of judicial independence, separation of powers, and the strengthening of internal and external oversight mechanisms. Without leadership, the ethics infrastructure that the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development deems crucial (OECD 1997) will either fall apart or remain largely dormant.

Yet, important as it is, leadership does not provide all the answers to the domi-
nant ethical questions. Indeed, it may turn out to be too fragile a structure on which to construct the integrity super-structure. In Hong Kong’s specific case, anti-corruption measures succeeded not so much because of a leadership commitment to integrity as the public acknowledgement of the benefits of clean government—that is, the recognition on the part of the generality of the people that “honesty pays” (de Speville 1998, p. 29). In contrast, and notwithstanding the draconian anti-corruption law promulgated by the Nigerian government in 2000 as well as the hype preceding it, top officials of the same government have been alleged to be involved in routine bribery of a key watchdog institution—the press (Time, April 15, 2002, p. 49). \[<<if possible, cite this article by name of author and add to References>>\]

Leadership is, particularly in societies or institutions lacking a clear ethical guide, a necessary but insufficient condition for the successful construction or reconstruction of the integrity infrastructure. Where the leaders are genuinely committed to change, every action taken under their supervision will further the cause of ethics. Conversely, a declaration of commitment to ethical rebirth may, in ethically diverse settings, serve as a cover for the perpetration of the worst form of ethical violations. It all boils down to individual orientation or character. The time and the resources invested by the leadership class on the construction of an ethics infrastructure will come to naught unless and until the appropriate values and ethics are internalized in the average citizen and public official (Dicke and Ott 1999, p. 513; Dwivedi 2001, pp. 2–5). In place of leadership’s monocentric approach, there is need for the wide diffusion of ethical values and the rapid “cloning” of an ethically inclined citizenry. The question is how to proceed in translating a vision of integrity into a people’s way of life.

The contemporary approach to public service ethics proceeds on the assumption that the state, as the embodiment of the common weal, is the institution endowed with the moral legitimacy as well as the legal authority to legislate and enforce standards of acceptable behavior. Flowing from this assumption is the hypothesis that the moral code enacted by the state as their employer is the arbiter and legitimate authority when employees look for a guide on what is the right, as against wrong, conduct (Hart and Hart 1992, pp. 80–107; Jeavons 1994, p. 184–207).

It is true that the individual public official is not a free agent. Whether in liberal democracies or in authoritarian systems, the state reserves the right to set standards of acceptable conduct and expects its edicts to be obeyed. It may declare as unethical or downright criminal any actions that are inconsistent with the prevailing moral or legal code. All the same, as long as internal conflicts of law are not swiftly resolved, the ethically flexible public official will continue to have a wide latitude to pursue personal goals at public expense.

A Tale of Two Ethics: Ethical Profile Sketching

The upshot of the preceding analysis is that public service codes by themselves provide but only a poor guide to the conduct of public officials. This requires that the conflict between the ethics of the state and the moral inclination of each public official be bridged. Superimposed on this conflict is the conflict embedded in the
individual character. Indeed, at both the micro (individual) and macro (state) level, ethics is best understood as a constant struggle between right and wrong, with the outcome of the confrontation being decided neither by the state nor by leadership, but by the prevailing social forces. The dual and conflicting influences operating on the human mind explain the individual’s vacillation between rectitude and decadence. The average human being is at one and the same time endowed with the loftiest and basest instincts. This is how the Qur’an (95:4-6) puts it: “Surely, we [the Creator] have created man in the best form. Then we returned him to the lowest of the low.” In like manner, the Bible (Genesis 3:22) narrates man’s fall from grace as follows: “And the Lord God said, ‘The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil.’ ”

In essence, therefore, no one is all good or all bad. The same individual is capable of displaying contradictory emotions and traits, depending on circumstances. While psychology (Freudian and neo-Freudian) generally describes the attributes of a well-adjusted, as against a neurotic, personality, it has so far been unable to penetrate the fortress of conflicting human values. Psychology can paint a whole range of human emotions, but, focusing as it does on the mind, it cannot pass judgment on human choices. At any rate, by placing the human ego at the center of its analysis, Freudian and neo-Freudian psychology encourages the individual to look out for himself, even if at the expense of others.

This is not to say that science has no room for judgment. Indeed, the anatomy of the brain reveals that the association areas of the cerebral cortex are responsible for human thought, learning, language, judgment, and personality (Solomon, Schmidt, and Adragna 1990, p. 443). However, the judgment that science is capable of making is of a material, factual, analytical, practical, and situation-specific kind. Science fails us when we need it to answer value-laden questions and reconcile differences that are, by nature, irreconcilable.

All the same, and applying reason as an arbiter, it is possible to suggest a whole range of values that could serve as a basis for the construction of ethical indicators. This is the rationale behind attempts to assess the performance of corporate leaders against the Machiavellian Scale (Mach V) developed by Christie and Geis (1970) and the Moral Judgment Scale developed by Kohlberg (1969).

The problem with these two scales lies in their a priori assumption of a unilinear, progressive, and incremental development of ethical attributes in the individual, an assumption that produces a dichotomy between individuals who are “rightly guided” and their ethically flawed neighbors. Based on this assumption, Jurkiewicz and Brown contend that the ratio that really counts is that between an individual’s ethical reasoning capacity and exercise of power. They further argue that ethical reasoning capacity and effective exercise of power are positively correlated (Jurkiewicz and Brown 2001, pp. 7-8). These conclusions are not supported either by logic or empirical analysis. Power does not always co-exist with morality, and powerless is not always synonymous with moral turpitude. Instead, morality and the lack of it constitute an integral, sometimes indistinguishable, part of the individual—whether rich or poor, high or low, leader or follower, seeker or seller of favors, giver or recipient of bribes, and, naturally, accuser or accused! As argued in this article, what counts is neither the P/E ratio nor the individual’s hierarchical position, but character, as reflected in the individual’s perceptions of, and reactions to, the prevailing circumstances.

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This is where lies the relevance of the contribution of Imam Abu Hamid Muhammad Al-Ghazzali, a rationalist and leading Islamic philosopher. In his landmark work entitled *Ihya Ulum al-Deen* (Revival of the Sciences of Religion), he attempted centuries ago to employ formal and empirical methods in outlining a universal code of ethics. His starting point is the Qur’an, which traces human behavior to the state of the heart (as against the mind or the brain). The assumption is that if the heart is blind, the clinically healthy eye will not see. If the heart is dead, the sensory and discriminatory organs will become totally dysfunctional.

Following this syllogism, Al-Ghazzali distinguishes between two states of the human heart: the detestable or “diseased,” and the “praiseworthy” (Faris 1962, pp. 41–46). The former condition is brought on by the individual’s responses to external stimuli. Where the heart is diseased, the responses will take the form of lust, avarice, hypocrisy, envy, haste, impatience, fear of death or poverty, discontent, deceit, conceit, arrogance, obdurancy, constant fault-finding, paranoia, xenophobia, or the tendency to exult over successes and lapse into despair over setbacks. According to Al-Ghazzali, these detestable states of the heart stand between the individual and true happiness, and explain the frequent deviation from ethical codes.

In contrast to the detestable states are what Al-Ghazzali terms the praiseworthy states of the heart. Among these are fortitude, gratitude to, and fear of, God, contentment, endurance in the face of adversity, recognition of one’s obligations under all circumstances, truthfulness, humility, penitence, contrition, courage in the face of danger, and preservation of emotional balance (i.e., refusing to exult over gains and mourn losses, since gains and losses are preordained).

Distinguishing between right and wrong is a hazardous exercise. Atheists and agnostics will certainly feel uncomfortable about the association of good conduct with God. Even believers will not always agree on the relevance of certain religious injunctions or the applicability of the Ten Commandments. Still, Al-Ghazzali’s classification is likely to prove useful at least in identifying ideal character types, and ultimately in developing ethical indicators.

Table 1 presents snapshots of individuals in different hypothetical situations, ranging from the purely hostile, through the competitive, to normal, day-to-day, interpersonal situations. It also categorizes individual choices as either praiseworthy or detestable, that is, as ethical or unethical. Besides providing clues to the ethical orientations prevailing in an organization or a community, such a classification serves the practical purpose of establishing a systematic framework for comparing the integrity requirements of posts with the character profiles of current and prospective incumbents. With the framework as a point of departure, it should be possible, for instance, to identify jobs requiring courage—jobs from which survival freaks, sycophants, and bootlickers could reasonably be excluded. Similarly, the framework clearly rules out like-minded evaders of responsibility in the staffing of offices assigned the task of implementing anti-corruption measures—measures demanding fortitude and firmness of purpose—until the individuals concerned have participated in training, counseling, competency evaluation, and post-reassignment programs. Finally, it is possible to infer from the character attributes listed in the table that while greed may be good for capitalist accumulation, it is likely to have negative ethical consequences when combined with other blameworthy impulses, such as dishonesty, callousness, conceit, cynicism, paranoia, hypocrisy, and impenitence.

While a focus on private morality provides a clue to an individual’s likely re-
### TABLE 1
Character Types Classified by Responses to Situations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>“Praiseworthy,” ethical reaction</th>
<th>“Detestable,” non-ethical response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hostile, risky, challenging</td>
<td>Fortitude, perseverance, unswerving devotion to a cause, firmness of purpose</td>
<td>Desertion, cowardice, timidity, renunciation of faith, apostasy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Unstable and hostile environment, state of tyranny and oppression</td>
<td>Asceticism, contentment</td>
<td>Greed, lust for earthly possessions and honors, overindulgence, fear of poverty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Scarcity-affluence cycle</td>
<td>Courage under fire, valor</td>
<td>Desertion, cowardice, fear of death</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Life-and-death choices</td>
<td>Fortitude, perseverance, stoicism, determination to tackle problems, mental balance</td>
<td>Despair, tendency to exult over successes, and be broken-hearted over failures or setbacks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Uncertainty, unfamiliar terrain/challenges</td>
<td>Tolerance, objectivity, craving for consensual solutions to challenges</td>
<td>Xenophobia, paranoia, bias, interest in maximizing own gains at expense of “others” attribution of own problems to “enemy plots”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Diversity (of race, religion, gender, thought, political leaning, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competitive</td>
<td>Favorable inclination toward fair competition</td>
<td>Endorsement of competition only when assured of personally favorable outcome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Competitive environment</td>
<td>Discomfort at sight of institutionalized discrimination and built-in favoritism</td>
<td>Staunch defence of quotas, set-asides, and discriminatory practices where these serve own interests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Fairness of competitive rules</td>
<td>Interest in consistent rule interpretation and application</td>
<td>Insistence on interpretation and application that only suit own interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Consistency in interpretation and application of rules</td>
<td>Refusal to take personal advantage of knowledge of competitive rules</td>
<td>Search for shortcuts as well as rule-manipulation ideas and opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Access to knowledge of, and information on, competitive rules</td>
<td>Initiation of immediate action to close loopholes</td>
<td>Constant lookout for loopholes and escape clauses in rules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Loopholes in competitive rules</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situation</td>
<td>“Praiseworthy,” ethical reaction</td>
<td>“Detestable,” non-ethical response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------</td>
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<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Timing of changes in competitive rules</td>
<td>Opposition to change designed to help or hinder a specific case</td>
<td>Impatience with rules that block personal desires or appear too difficult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Information flow and transparency of decisions</td>
<td>Disposition toward information sharing in general, and, in particular, toward free flow of information on processes leading to competition outcomes</td>
<td>Embargo on information, placement of trusted and pliable lieutenants in key positions to stonewall sensitive information, hypocritical endorsement and cynical embrace of openness in decision-making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Miscellaneous/Interpersonal</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• interdependent-reciprocal relationships</td>
<td>Observance of obligations, constant search for win-win solutions to problems, interest in reciprocal sharing of gains and costs</td>
<td>Evasion of obligations, search for opportunity to maximize own gains at expense of others, blind rejection of transaction outcomes deemed personally unfavorable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• affective relationships</td>
<td>Love, compassion, sensitivity, benevolence</td>
<td>Hate, sadism, callousness, malevolence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• relationship based on trust and confidence</td>
<td>Integrity, truthfulness, consistency, and loyalty</td>
<td>Artifice, deceit, hypocrisy, and betrayal, no permanent friends, but “enemies of the moment”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• evaluation of self-worth vis-à-vis others</td>
<td>Humility, selflessness, altruism</td>
<td>Arrogance, narcissism, conceit, egoism, egocentricity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• fallibility-remorse-correction nexus</td>
<td>Acknowledgment of own limitations, contrition, atonement</td>
<td>Self-righteousness, obduracy-impenitence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Accountability for lapses</td>
<td>Acceptance of formal and vicarious responsibility</td>
<td>Evasion of responsibility, constant search for scapegoats</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
sponses to ethical situations, it does not tell the whole story about public integrity. This is because individuals are never alone. Like the agency of which they are members, they are invariably part of a wider community. The latter may be a primary group, such as a family, clan, tribe, nationality, or a religious, secular, or agnostic community. The individual may also belong to secondary associations, such as a business firm or a public service agency. Besides, public morality is itself an aggregate of individual ethics. The question is, Which molds the other: the individual’s or the society’s notion of right and wrong? The next section attempts to answer this question.

Cross-Cultural Comparison of Integrity: Society-Individual Linkages

Proceeding from the premise that the individual character is a blend of good and evil, one would expect society (as a collection of individuals) to be evenly split between rectitude and decadence. In other words, the typical human society would be divided into two opposing but equally strong camps, one advocating ethical uprightness, the other glorifying corruption.

This two-way classification may oversimplify the link between the individual and society. According to some observers, it is society that shapes the individual, not the other way round. They hold that in explaining the course and direction of political development or the ethical pattern noted at a particular point in time and space, it is necessary to play down the role of the individual, and specifically of leadership. The individual (whether leader or follower) is a transient and insignificant factor compared to the dominant historical forces and the prevailing economic and political circumstances (Allen 1995, pp. 301–20).

Societies and Corruption Rankings

The argument that identifies society as the senior partner in society-individual relations is quite compelling. It is based on the logic that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. No attempt will be made here to falsify this view. In any case, the “clash of civilizations” is most frequently interpreted as a conflict between moralities or world-views: capitalism versus communism, fundamentalist Islam or Christianity against secularism, faith against atheism, consumerism versus environmental sustainability.

Following the same holistic approach (while steering away from idiosyncratic or cultural-superiority claims), one can test a whole range of propositions establishing causal relationships between, on the one hand, the prevailing historical, cultural, economic, and political conditions, and, on the other, a particular society’s placement on the rectitude scale.

In tracking the incidence of corruption across cultures or countries, the practice up to now has been to ask panels of experts or focus groups in the business community and in civil society to assess the integrity of specific components of public policy. The corruption-perception indices developed by Transparency International and the World Bank, for instance, rely heavily on the responses of those who, because of their daily interactions with governments the world over, are assumed to be sufficiently knowledgeable about the level and magnitude of corruption. This is the rationale behind the worth placed on the opinions of business executives and risk analysts.

Useful as the conclusions from such exercises may be, the methodology has seri-
ous limitations (Schwella 2001, p. 384). For a start, it takes a narrow view of corruption, since it excludes non-business forms of ethical violations. Second, it starts with the assumption that public officials are ipso facto corrupt and their clients are saints. This assumption overlooks the possibility that private business firms, the key participants in the corruption-perception research, may, in an effort to expedite transactions, be the initiators, rather than helpless victims, of corrupt acts. Evidence abounds that private corporations in different parts of the world have made huge donations to political parties in anticipation of one party coming to power and making decisions affecting the corporate fortunes. Third, the most fatal flaw by far in contemporary corruption research is, as noted above, the routine and a priori association of the average government official with sleaze and the client with rectitude. Proceeding from the presumption of the official’s guilt, corruption-perception studies invariably turn to business firms and risk analysts (the accusers, judges, and jury) for the “evidence” required for a conviction.

In light of the methodological limitations of contemporary perception studies, this article explores a new approach to the tracking of ethical violations. First, it assumes that corruption goes beyond the obstacles to private-sector growth (e.g., crooked judicial and law-enforcement mechanisms). Second, it is interested not only in the outcome of ethical violations, but also—indeed, more especially—in the symptoms and causes of the malaise. The discussion here contends that depending on the influences that affect them at any given time, societies are likely to fall into one of three broad ethical categories: the ethically sound, the totally decadent, and the ethically median. In other words, the “causes” of ethical violations are a function of the prevailing social forces. Above all, the study not only begins with a presumption of innocence, but attaches a lot of importance to the evidence provided by government officials (the “usual suspects”) as well as their clients and potential accusers.

The starting point in the analysis is the society. In times when belief in the retributive power of a Supreme Being is deep-seated, the inclination of societies will most probably be toward rectitude. Discounting past deviations from the norm, religion is likely to be a strong influence on human behavior in societies under traditional influences, and institutions (the family, schools, churches and synagogues) propagating values deemed acceptable to God or the Supreme Being would play crucial roles in the life of the people. As the “rational, systematic, and specialized pursuit of science” progresses, the existing belief systems would come under attack (Weber 1930, p. 15 and 27). However, until social change reaches a point at which a serious crisis of faith occurs, the erstwhile monastic values would continue to govern basic social transactions and to drive law-making as well as enforcement actions. Population distribution in this type of society (the ethically sound society) would then correspond to the one plotted on the graph shown in Figure 1. This hypothetical society would have, over a period of time, forged a broad measure of consensus on right and wrong.

With the exception of a few deviants (located within ABC along the x and y coordinates, the majority of the people (within CBDE) <<< pls confirm parens place-
ment would have no problem meeting society’s high ethical standards. Yet the economic gains made possible by technological development and religious monasticism would inevitably join forces to advance nonreligious and probably unethical and amoral causes in the once-pious community. The possibility can therefore not be ruled out of the ascetic ways of religion logging in unexpected benefits, that is, fanning the embers of materialism, spearheading an anti-religious revolt, and promoting sacrilege and profanity (Weber 1930, p. 175).

One may safely conclude that no society exists today that can lay an indisputable and undisputed claim to ethical flawlessness. When judged against the standards outlined in Table 1, no society on the face of the earth will emerge without some ethical low points. Affluent societies, in the process of wealth accumulation, may have begun with Figure 1 inclinations, but over time would have separated church from state, and would have promoted business practices that ridicule moral and ecclesiastical codes. Still, having started on a firm ethical base, Figure 1 type societies should have little problem responding favorably to a combination of the minimalist, developmental and professional-integrity measures discussed earlier (Bowman 2000, pp. 673–78).

It may be argued that secularism, whether in capitalist or noncapitalist societies, has produced a whole range of institutions to replace, or even build on, the faith-based ones. A legitimate research question is the extent to which individuals in these societies have the same type of reverence for temporal rules as the ecclesiastical codes once enjoyed.

Undoubtedly, no society is perfect. What is not so obvious is whether there are societies that can justifiably be pronounced totally and irredeemably corrupt. Some observers envisage the possibility of the perpetual struggle between social right and wrong ending up in favor of the latter at the expense of the former. To put it another way, perhaps the vast majority of people would find the ethical standards in the second column of Table 1 too high or too foreign, and so decide to move en masse to the third column: the amoral zone (see Figure 2). Where this is the case, most people will look out for themselves, convinced that the Almighty has better things to do than to show the slightest interest in the goings-on on planet Earth. In such circum-

![FIGURE 1](image-url)
stances, neither the minimalist nor the developmental nor even the professional strategy would prove adequate in meeting the public-integrity challenge.

Societies in the developing regions of the world are particularly liable to be torn between other-worldly (spiritual) obligations and this-worldly (material) pursuits. As societies emerging from tradition to modernity, they are under constant pressure to choose between faith in divine providence and direct (human) action. The religious orders will constantly harp on the former, while secular forces (particularly, literacy, urbanization, political mobilization, and modern means of communication) will be in league to promote the latter, that is, development, modernization, or progress. Where the this-worldly alliance has the upper hand, self-aggrandizement, greed, arrogance, one-upmanship, and artifice would be among the prized attributes. In contrast, in societies where religious asceticism remains a potent force, altruism, self-restraint, and unsung as well as unadvertised humanitarianism would be the guiding principles.

Every thing being equal, the battle between this-worldly and other-worldly orientations will, in a period of rapid transition, end in favor of the former. Unless steps are taken to reverse the trend, old ethical values will break down without a guarantee of being replaced with viable, secular, ones. This is the tendency which Figure 2 attempts to capture.

According to Laozi, a central figure in Daoist philosophy, “reversal is the movement of Dao” (Feng 1948, p. <?). In other words, when an action exhausts its momentum, a process of its negation commences. This is the case with corruption. It will continue to wax strong so long as confidence in the fairness of earthly institutions is shaken and the hope of an afterlife recedes. As time passes, however, revulsion against worldly decadence will gather strength, and the process for the rehabilitation of the long-discarded values of public-spiritedness, honesty, equity, and fairness will be set in motion. This is likely to be the case in societies where corruption has reached epidemic proportions and is perceived as a threat not only to the community’s existence, but also to its internal development and external prestige.

Where the campaign for rectitude appears to achieve the intended results, population distribution on the rectitude scale would begin to follow the normal pattern (see Figure 3). Specifically, a small fraction of the populace would ignore the reform message and stick to their bad old ways on the negative end of the scale. Another small proportion will consolidate their position on the positive side of the
scale, while the majority would fall in between the moral and amoral zones. It is to this majority that the opposing forces on the two ends of the scale will appeal from time to time for support. It is significant that Figure 3 accords with the central proposition put forward in this study—namely, that the individual is a blend of good and evil, and matters in the formation of public morality. In charting the way forward, therefore, as will be discussed in the next section, attention ought to shift toward accentuating the individual’s positive tendencies and neutralizing the negative ones.

Promoting Public Integrity: A Summation and a Research Agenda

The upshot of the preceding analysis is that public service ethics is too important to be left in the hands of a few individuals occupying leadership positions. When left alone, the average human being—leaders included—is not incapable of substituting self-interest for the general good. Public integrity is, in any case, very much like a seed. Whether or not it will grow and germinate depends largely on the soil in which it is planted. The soil, in this case, is the character type that has the upper hand in, and sets the moral tone for, an organization or society at large. Character formation, a product of the dominant sociohistorical forces, is therefore the causative factor in public integrity, with leadership and institutions performing an enabling role. It takes, at the minimum, a combination of character education and training, societal rules, a network of integrity-promoting institutions, and a dispersal of leadership roles among several competing centers, to bring individuals to the realization that they must of necessity fulfill obligations and answer to other individuals. The average human being is, after all, neither all Jekyll nor all Hyde, but a combination of both. This dual attribute poses serious challenges for policy as well as for research in the area of public service ethics.

The first challenge is that of concept clarification or boundary demarcation. It is sometimes assumed that since right is to wrong what daylight is to darkness ethical choices are always clear. Yet this may be a wrong assumption. A person who is dead

__FIGURE 3__

Population Distribution in a Normal Human Society

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Public integrity is . . . very much like a seed. Whether or not it will grow and germinate depends largely on the soil in which it is planted.
earnest about an anti-corruption crusade may not realize that lack of transparency, the doctoring of vacancy announcements, and canvassing for favors are manifestations of institutional corruption. From the research point of view, instruments need to be developed that can assess how well citizens and public officials understand the existing code of public service conduct and whether the code is internally consistent.

**Perception of Scale and Magnitude of Corruption**

In addition to soliciting cognitive responses on ethical codes, research instruments should incorporate a cluster of questions on how the respondents (i.e., citizens and officials) understand and perceive:

- The level and magnitude of corruption in government and in society.
- The consequences of ethical violations, as well as the need for, and feasibility of, anti-corruption measures.
- The agency/program/policy most susceptible to ethical violations.
- (For officials) the frequency with which rules are breached in the public service, in their ministry or department, and in their immediate work environment.
- Methods/tricks applied in circumventing rules, regulations, and procedures.

**Decision Audits**

In response to the challenges facing it, a government may provide leadership in enacting appropriate legislation (including freedom of information) legislation, establishing monitoring and enforcement institutions, and encouraging oversight and watchdog institutions to complement the formal anti-corruption efforts. Yet it is one thing for such measures to exist on paper, it is another for them to have the desired effect. Future research studies should reveal gaps between political and legal intentions, on the one hand, and realities, on the other. Decisions taken by public officials on various subjects (e.g., procurement, personnel selection, company tax administration) should be randomly selected with a view to auditing the degree of compliance with, or deviation from, established rules. These “decision audits” should serve as case studies and be presented along with the results of substantive ethics-compliance research.

**Individual Feeling of Empowerment in Anti-Corruption Campaigns**

As noted earlier, the success of anti-corruption programs hinges to a large extent on the role of individuals, whether they are in government or in civil society. If people see nothing wrong with ethical violations or deem themselves helpless victims of “the system,” even the most ambitious anti-corruption program will either fail to get off to a promising start or falter midway. Therefore, as suggested by Table 1, research instruments should accommodate a good number of questions on individual
character—specifically, on how the respondents perceive their role when confronted with miscellaneous ethical dilemmas. To cross-check responses to yes/no or other structured questions, the instruments should encourage respondents to recall occasions in the past when they were confronted with ethical choices, and to further recall how they resolved these dilemmas.

Explanatory Variables

The discussion so far has focused on ethical violations without going into the question of possible causes. Considering that very little is known about the subject, it would be a grave omission if the proposed research study makes no attempt to identify the *fons et origo* of corruption or ethical violations. We need to know whether, as frequently argued, human nature and religion have anything to do with ethical conduct. Perhaps the question should be broadened to include a comparison of the presumed with the actual impact of various forms of religious education, character training, and child-rearing practices.

In contrast to the religious angle, it may be desirable to test a whole range of hypotheses linking efforts on the secular front with success in the construction and operation of an ethics infrastructure. In the latter case, research instruments should solicit factual data not only on the ethics infrastructure established across countries, but also on demographic variables.

Consequences of Unethical Choices

While ethical violations and bureaucratic pathologies are somehow related, very little is known about the nature and direction of the relationship. It is obvious that corrupt allocation of resources has a negative effect on policy outcomes. Despotic and arbitrary exercise of power may also account for cases of nervous breakdown, alcoholism, neurotic and aggressive behavior, and intra-organizational conflict. Still, if for no other reason than to enrich our knowledge, the envisaged research project should attempt to establish a clear connection between the ethical choices made in different circumstances and the reactions that the choices trigger within the public service and without.

Conclusion

One message that this article attempts to convey is that no one size fits all when it comes to the design and implementation of integrity programs. Thus local authorities and international aid agencies are challenged to reflect on contemporary strategies and their applicability to vastly different and constantly changing environments. This is the rationale for the attention that the article gives to the soil in which the seeds of integrity are planted.

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