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Integrity: What it is and Why it is Important

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“Integrity” has become a concept and topic with more prominence in research on government and governance, as well as in actual policy making at all levels. This contribution will address basic questions about integrity. What views and interpretations of “integrity” can be distinguished? Eight different views will be summarized, with additional reflection on the underlying basics of an integrity “approach” and on its relationship with concepts/views with “ethics” or “corruption” or “good governance” in the center. It will be concluded that integrity is a crucial concept for an understanding of governance. Not as an alternative for “ethics theory and approaches” but to be embedded in existent “approaches” and theory development. In that sense it belongs on the agenda for further progress in these fields of study, in particular in empirical research on the actual significance of integrity and ethics in governance (“empirical turn”).

Keywords: integrity, ethics, good governance, corruption

“Integrity” has become a concept with more prominence in research on government and governance, as well as in actual policy making at all levels. In this contribution for the journal *Public Integrity*, whose name illustrates the importance of the topic, a number of basic questions about integrity are addressed. The main question concerns the meaning of the intriguing concept, what is “integrity?” Everybody desires it, but what exactly is being longed for and talked about? A review of the literature (Huberts, 2014) led to at least eight different views that will be summarized in the next sections, with additional reflection on the underlying basics of an integrity “approach” and on its relationship with concepts/views with “ethics” or “corruption” or “good governance” in the center.

It will be concluded that integrity is a crucial concept for an understanding of governance. Not as an alternative for many challenging “ethics theories and approaches” in the field but to be embedded in existent “approaches” and theory development. This presupposes that moral values and norms are important to describe and explain the behavior of governance actors. That topic should be a challenging one for future research that presupposes an “empirical turn” in the research that already focuses on ethics and integrity.

INTEGRITY OF GOVERNANCE

This article will focus on the integrity of government and governance, but the concept obviously has become more important in all sectors of society, including the academic community.

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Research integrity and academic integrity have become important topics (Bretag, 2016; Macfarlane, Zhang, & Pun, 2014; Steneck et al., 2015), as we all want to be seen as academics with high standards of integrity in research and teaching. That includes feeling really shocked when our integrity is questioned, in that we are similar to all other professionals, including those who are involved in governance.

Governance is nowadays a popular concept that relates to power; authority; politics; policy; administration; government; steering; management; and organization (Bevir, 2009; Fukuyama, 2016; Kettl, 2015; Kjaer, 2004; Rose-Ackerman, 2017). In this article governance is seen as “authoritative policy-making on collective problems and interests and implementation of these policies” (Huberts, 2014, p. 68). Governance is about addressing collective problems and interests, possibly by one actor but also by a network of public and private actors. A second important element is “authoritative,” a term referring to the relation between the governing actor(s) and the collectivity involved. It presupposes support and legitimacy of the organization or community whose problems and interests are addressed, the relation to Easton’s (1953) famous definition of politics as the authoritative allocation of values of course not being coincidental.

The literature on the policy process (Easton, 1965/1979) and “governance” adds that different phases and aspects can be distinguished (input with demands and support; throughput or how the system deals with input in order to establish output; the policy output; as well as actual effects or results of the output: outcome). In all phases, ethical controversies and debates are apparent, obviously also on policy content and outcomes. All policy areas involve choices about good and bad, about social equity, social justice, and other crucial values, including policy areas with very intense discussions about the rights or wrongs (e.g., war and peace; immigration; abortion; euthanasia), frequently fueled by religious convictions. The ethics of the content of decisions, policies, and laws, with a focus on the consequences or results of policy, should nevertheless be distinguished from the “moral quality” of the political or governance process (how policies are made, decided on, and implemented).

Integrity

What is integrity? What characterizes the integrity of a person, functionary, or organization?

What characterizes, for example, politicians acting with integrity, what is an “integritous” politician?¹ In the literature on ethics and integrity, it is possible to distinguish at least eight perspectives (Huberts, 2014, pp. 39–44) using the keywords wholeness and coherence; professional responsibility; moral reflection; value(s) like incorruptibility, laws and rules; moral values and norms; and exemplary behavior. These will be summarized, followed by a reflection on their content and some clarification of the chosen perspective.

A dominant perspective, Montefiore and Vines (1999, p. 9) concluded, is in line with the meanings of the Latin *integras*: intact, whole, harmony, with integrity as “wholeness” or completeness, as consistency and coherence of principles and values. Another view sees integrity as professional wholeness or responsibility (including a view with a focus on taking into account the environment): “integrity means that a professional exercises his tasks adequately, carefully and responsibly, taking into account all relevant interests” (Karssing, 2001/2007, p. 3).

Other perspectives focus on one or more other specific values (Dobel, 1999, 2016); for example, incorruptibility; honesty; impartiality; accountability (as also in many codes of

conduct). A view that fits into this category relates integrity to virtues, with integrity as acting in line with virtues such as wisdom; justice; courage; and temperance (Becker & Talsma, 2016; van Tongeren & Becker, 2009).

Other views are more characterized by the relationship between integrity and morals; in other words, what is right and wrong, good or bad. The first sees integrity as open reflection on morals (Carter, 1996). Three other viewpoints see integrity more as an umbrella concept, one that combines sets of values that are relevant for the official being judged. Among these is the more legal view that seems attractive because of the clarity of laws and rules on what matters (Lee & Rosenbloom, 2005; Rosenbloom, 2011), following up on Rohr (1989) with the focus on “constitutional or regime values” (pp. 4–5).

The next perspective argues that a broader interpretation is necessary, also because the “law” does not offer clear guiding principle for many aspects of actual decision making and implementation processes in government and governance, with an interpretation therefore in terms of complying with the relevant moral values and norms (see, e.g., Becker, 1998; Fijnaut & Huberts, 2002; Thomas, 2001; Thompson, 1995; Uhr, 1999). This interpretation, of course, comes close to “a general way of acting morally” and “morality” (Brenkert, 2004, p. 5), or, as De George (1993) put it, “[a]cting with integrity is the same as acting ethically or morally” (p. 5).

The last and eighth view stresses that integrity is something to strive for—integrity as the “stuff of moral courage and even heroism” (Brenkert, 2004, p. 5), which means that it “stands for complying in an exemplary way with specific moral standards” (Van Luijk, 2004, p. 39).

Behavior and Process Versus Outcome

How do views on integrity relate to the characteristics of governance summarized previously? All interpretations of integrity focus on the behavior of the participants in governance in decision making and decision implementation. That is, it does not concern everything in politics and governance; integrity concerns *behavior*, *process*, and *procedure* (in a broad sense). It is not about the content of the output or the societal results (outcome).

The ethics of the content of decisions, policies, and laws, with a focus on the consequences or results of policy, should thus be distinguished from the “moral quality” of the governance process. To simplify: a government can decide to go to war (or not) or to limit immigration (or not) with or without a process of policy and decision making (and implementation) in line with the valid moral values and norms for that process.

Integrity as Moral Quality

In this article, integrity is seen as the quality of acting in accordance or harmony with relevant moral values, norms, and rules, a choice based partly on some of the arguments already put forward. A concrete illustration, however, might help to clarify the choice. For example, what line of reasoning is appropriate when discussing the integrity of a member of the national government, a cabinet minister or secretary of state (Huberts, 1998, 2014, pp. 44–45)?

In judging the integrity of a government minister, one should concentrate on his or her behavior as a politician; hence, a first element of integrity is whether the minister is consistent and whole, not changing viewpoint every day or saying one thing and doing something

else. Without doubt, opportunists with weak knees lack integrity. Nevertheless, consistency or wholeness is not sufficient. Some ministers are highly consistent in misusing their authority and are supported by an extensive network that relates them to their environment. Thus, a corrupt minister can still be behaviorally consistent and fully integrated into a corrupt environment. Therefore, as this example shows, an integrity judgment always raises the moral dimension, the question of what is considered right and wrong.

Yet this moral dimension must go further than the minister's own moral values and norms. Individual perceptions of integrity often are limited to assessing behavior in terms of one's personal values. In research among police officers, including 43 in-depth interviews by journalists (Naeyé et al., 2004), officers stressed that "it's a kind of feeling; being able to look at yourself in the mirror" while others referred to "character and the values one is brought up with" (pp. 99–100). Another example of a rather prominent interpretation of integrity (by politicians) is the ability to explain and defend behavior when it is published on the front page of a (national) newspaper (Kaptein, 2002, p. 14).

This tendency to defend and justify oneself is understandable but is contrary to the position that one cannot be the judge of one's own integrity. Thus, a minister for the environment who promotes a trusted friend with a professorship in environmental policy analysis to secretary general of his ministry may see this promotion as the morally right thing to do. S/he may be convinced that the appointment is in the best interest of the department, and may even see it as a duty to influence the appointment process to ensure the right result. Or, what about a minister who sees it as "morally appropriate," if not obligatory, to keep secret a report about brutal interrogation methods by his troops in Afghanistan? Ministers, like other functionaries, may be able to morally defend such behavior to themselves (and on the front page if necessary), but, at the end of the day, they cannot be the judges of their own integrity. Officials acting with integrity would not appoint friends without independent review or cover up misconduct. It is others—for example, the population that the minister represents, parliament, and the party—who must decide whether the minister acted with integrity (Huberts, 2014, p. 45).

The moral dimension also goes beyond comparing the minister's behavior with one (or some) specific value(s). For example, the minister of defense referred to above did not break any law (lawfulness), acted reliably, was honest and sincere toward his department and cabinet colleagues, and was concerned with the effectiveness of his ministry and the reputation of his troops during an important and dangerous mission. Obviously, therefore, several values were being cherished. Yet integrity is not about one or more values: an official's behavior is integritous when it is ethical in a more generic sense. It is not that laws and codes do not matter: in a democracy, they are supposed to reflect society's ethics. However, the judicial framework is not always applicable to the behavior being judged. Moreover, much behavior, such as that during private time, is unregulated, and sometimes the law can contradict the society's dominant values concerning a public official's behavior. The correct perspective, therefore, must include the more informal norms and values that are relevant for judging behavior, norms, and values that clarify what is right and wrong in given circumstances (Huberts, 2014, pp. 45–46).

These norms and values, however, do not, in the chosen perspective, state what is exemplary and admirable; rather, to conclude that a person's behavior is integritous, it suffices that the behavior be right and defensible from a moral perspective. Nelson Mandela, for example,

is admired for his courage and integrity. However, that type of courage and behavior is not demanded from all politicians. Indeed, expecting public functionaries to live up to saintlike expectations would seem counterproductive (how many would be left?), unrealistic, and strange. Rather, people in power, as well as people in general (including researchers), are permitted to make mistakes, including in a moral sense.

The previous reflection on the different views on integrity hopes to clarify the chosen perspective. In this article, integrity is seen as the quality of acting in accordance with relevant moral values, norms, and rules. That is, of course, not an original approach. Much of the literature on integrity considers integrity to be synonymous with being moral or ethical, which is, to a certain extent, in line with the presented perspective. What is often missing then is a clarification. What, for example, is a value or norm, a moral value or norm, a valid moral value or norm?

Moral

Defining integrity in terms of the accordance with relevant moral values, norms, and rules requires precise understanding of what a *moral* value, norm, or rule is; of what is meant by ethics, morals, and morality. Despite agreement that both concern “right and wrong” or “good and evil,” different interpretations of the terms abound, especially in the realm of philosophy and the study of ethics. In this article the terms “ethical” and “moral” are almost always used as synonyms, both denoting the principle of right and wrong in conduct (Thompson, 1985), acknowledging that “ethics” is also seen as the study of such principles (Huberts, 2014, pp. 49–50).

Kaptein and Wempe (2002, p. 40–42) distinguished six features exhibited by moral pronouncements. They concern “right and wrong” (a normative judgment that expresses approval or disapproval, evokes shame or pride), but they also appeal to the general consent; are not a matter of individual taste; apply to everyone in similar circumstances and involve the interests of others (interpersonal); and the interests at stake are “fundamental” (2002, p. 42).

Thus, not all values and norms are relevant for ethical or moral judgments. Ethics are not, for example, concerned with what is beautiful (aesthetics), what is conventional (etiquette), or what works (science and technology; e.g., “ISO norms”—worldwide proprietary, industrial, and commercial standards developed by the International Organization for Standardization). Integrity is about “moral” norms and values, those that refer to what is right or wrong, good or bad. The features also refer to a general consent with relevance for everyone in the same circumstances. That relates to “valid” moral values and norms.

In sum, morality and ethics refer to what is right or wrong, good or bad. They concern values and norms that people feel rather strongly about, because serious interests are involved that affect the community of which they are a part. Values and norms are the basis for judgment and decision making. The roles they play, however, are different. A “value” is a belief or quality that *contributes to judgments* about what is good; right; beautiful; or admirable. Values thus have weight in the choice of action by individuals and collectives. A norm is more specific. Norms *tell us* whether something is good or bad, right or wrong, beautiful or ugly. For types of behavior, they answer the question “what is the correct thing to do?” (De Graaf, 2003; Fijnaut & Huberts, 2002, pp. 10–11; Van der Wal, 2008, pp. 10–12).

TABLE 1
Types of Integrity Violations

1. corruption: bribing
2. corruption: favoritism
3. conflict of interest (gifts, jobs, etc.)
4. fraud and theft of resources
5. waste and abuse of resources
6. break rules/misuse power (also for the organization)
7. misuse and manipulation of information
8. indecent treatment (intimidation, discrimination)
9. private time misconduct

Ethics (Theory) and Integrity

Integrity is about the ethics of behavior of everyone involved in governance. It is argued that it is a relevant concept for an understanding of governance. To avoid misunderstanding: the integrity perspective is not an alternative for “ethics theory” including the work on administrative ethics; these theories and approaches are much broader with moral or ethical reflection on all aspects and phases of governance (Lewis & Gilman, 2012; Menzel, 2016; Svava, 2015). The integrity perspective is meant to be embedded in existent “approaches” and theory development.

INTEGRITY (AND INTEGRITY VIOLATIONS) IN CONTEXT: CORRUPTION

In line with the integrity framework, an integrity violation concerns behavior that violates the relevant moral values and norms. What can go wrong and what actually goes wrong in governance? And how does this relate to international research with a focus on “corruption” (Anechiarico, 2017; Bland, 2014; Bull & Newell, 2003; Graycar & Smith, 2011; Heywood, 2015; Johnston, 2005; Klitgaard, 1988; Mungiu-Pippidi, 2015; Rose-Ackerman, 2006; Rothstein, 2011; Sampford et al., 2006), although there is broader research as well, highlighting different types of unethical behavior or integrity violation in public administration (De Graaf et al., 2018; Lewis & Gilman, 2012; Menzel, 2016; Salminen, 2010; Svava, 2015; also Hardi, Heywood, & Torsello, 2015)?

Table 1 presents a first idea of the types of behavior seen as integrity violations. The (validated) typology was developed step by step, building on several bodies of knowledge in police corruption and integrity research, integrity of governance research, and, for example, also organizational misconduct research (Huberts, 2014; Lasthuizen, Huberts, & Heres, 2011; Vardi & Weitz, 2004).

Why is the focus on integrity (violations) instead of on the appealing concept of corruption (Huberts, 2007; Huberts, Lasthuizen, & Peeters, 2006)?

The first and most obvious reason is that a focus on the moral dimension of (the behavior of) individuals, organizations, and even countries (and what behavior violates relevant moral values and norms), by definition begs for a broad framework. Although it is certainly worthwhile to know more about the amount of bribery and favoritism in government and administration (corruption), it is also important to discover more about such violations as waste and

abuse of (public) resources; discrimination; improper use of authority; and private time misconduct. It thus seems advantageous to distinguish clearly between subtypes of “corrupt” or “unethical” behavior (or integrity violations).

How does this relate to basic definitions of corrupt behavior in the literature? The first, and most specific, interprets corruption as acting in a particularistic interest because of advantages promised or given and thus includes bribery (often found in legal frameworks) but also influence peddling, kickbacks, and forms of favoritism and conflict of interest. The second interprets corruption in line with the definitions in use by international anti-corruption organizations: corruption as the abuse of office for private gain (Pope, 2000; also central in the impressive work by Transparency International on the topic, including the Corruption Perception Index, <https://www.transparency.org/>). These definitions portray corruption as a breach of moral behavioral norms and values involving private interests but do not see the presence of a third party or interest as conditional (which brings fraud, theft, and embezzlement under the corruption “umbrella”). The third, and broadest, definition views corruption as synonymous with all types of wrongdoing by functionaries in terms of acting contrary to the public interest. In its broadest form, corruption then becomes synonymous with the vices, maladies, and sicknesses of politics and bureaucracy. In this latter definition, corruption is identical to unethical behavior or the violation of integrity. This interpretation is doubtful though, because the essence of corruption gets lost (its relationship with private interest) and because doing so would not solve the problem but only move it. That is, when everything that is unethical is called corruption, it then becomes crucial to distinguish between subtypes of corruption in order to cope with the diversity of moral misbehavior or integrity violations (e.g., discrimination and manipulation of information).

INTEGRITY IN CONTEXT: A WESTERN BIAS?

Another reason to focus on a broad spectrum of integrity violations relates to the international context of the “integrity of governance.” Many scholars question the Western or cultural bias in perceptions of corruption (De Graaf, von Maravic, & Wagenaar, 2010; Lawton, Huberts, & Van der Wal, 2016; Lawton, Rayner, & Lasthuizen, 2013; Mungiu-Pippidi, 2006). Sissener (2001), for example, in proposing an “anthropological perspective on corruption,” claimed that Western approaches to corruption are often exactly that: they are peculiarly Western, influenced as they are by Weber’s famous ideal type of bureaucracy and not easily applied to non-Western societies. In countries like Bangladesh, China, or Nepal, for instance, the public official who issues favors for a remuneration of some kind within an established network is not corrupt; his or her actions are simply a social obligation to help, and deals within the network are considered normal (Sissener, 2001). The definition issue thus raises questions of cultural bias. Andersson and Heywood (2009) argued that the concept of corruption is politically misused, claiming that the very concept has been increasingly instrumentalized for political ends since the end of the Cold War—most especially in those countries where corruption is perceived as a major issue (Huberts, 2014, p. 118).

How does this criticism relate to the proposed integrity approach (Huberts, 2014, p. 125)? Basically, the “integrity perspective” itself seems rather “Western” too, because in other parts

of the world the focus was and still is on corruption and fraud as the crucial integrity violations to address, as Khalid (2016) showed in his research on police integrity in Pakistan.

What might help though is that the broader focus brings more nuance in the evaluation of the integrity systems in the West and beyond. The integrity of government and governance involves a variety of violations, and serious bribery, nepotism, and patronage are rather exceptional in many “Western” countries. That makes other types of unethical behavior—for example, conflict of interest through sideline activities, fraud, and private time misbehavior—more decisive for the legitimacy and credibility of the political and administrative system.

In addition, research on internal investigations by governmental organizations has shown that the number of investigations of corruption specifically is limited compared with those of other violation types. The internal integrity investigations of Dutch regional police forces, for example, primarily concern types of integrity violations (Lamboos 2005; Punch, Huberts, & Lamboos, 2004) such as off-duty private time misconduct (including contacts with criminals; theft and fraud; home violence; and driving under the influence of alcohol); improper use of force; waste and abuse of organizational resources; abuse of information; and inappropriate demeanor, including discrimination and intimidation.

These findings are supported by comparable evidence from many other research projects; for example, on the reports of integrity violations to local government in the Netherlands (De Graaf et al., 2018) and on workplace misconduct in the government and the business sectors (Kaptein et al., 2005; Lasthuizen, 2008). The same conclusion can be drawn based on a wide body of research from other countries on misconduct occurring in the workplace (ERC, 2012).

These observations relate to the supposed Western bias of corruption and integrity research. There are differences between most Western countries and many countries in the developing world in corruption (reputation) research, but when the focus is only on corruption or bribing, this might overestimate the moral quality of politics and administration in the West and a broader framework might bring in some nuance. A framework on not only “corruption perception” but taking into account “integrity perception” may help to contradict too simple images of the integrity of governance in different parts of the world.

INTEGRITY IN CONTEXT: WHAT MATTERS AND WHAT HELPS

Another reason for focusing on a broad and complex integrity framework (rather than the narrower spectrum of corruption) relates to the diversity of the phenomena under study. There seems to be a need for differentiation and nuance when researchers reflect in research and policy on the causes of integrity violations (including types of corruption) and the effectiveness of anti-corruption and integrity policies. Phenomena such as bribery; patronage and favoritism; private time misbehavior; fraud; intimidation and discrimination; and so forth might be caused by different characteristics of the involved individuals, the organization (culture and structure), and the environment (De Graaf, von Maravic, & Wagenaar, 2010).

A broader framework also is relevant for reflection on what helps to protect integrity and prevent integrity violations, including corruption.

Despite continual calls to pay more attention to “what works” (Demmke & Moilanen, 2011; Huberts, Jurkiewicz, & Maesschalck, 2008; Lawton & Doig, 2006; Menzel, 2005),

knowledge of actual effects of integrity policies and policy instruments is still limited. More specific research on the effectiveness of policies is very much needed, despite overall insights on the state of the art (Huberts, 2014, p. 195–196) of research insights on integrity instruments, agencies, and systems. In summary, what seems to matter is

1. Placing integrity on the agenda. Integrity of governance means paying attention to the moral values and norms of policy making and policy implementation. Although many different instruments are available and multiple institutions can be created, a crucial starting point is that the integrity and anti-corruption issue is seen as important and placed high on the agenda.
2. The role of leadership. The fact that integrity concerns all members of an organization or system makes the involvement of leadership on all levels inherently important to policy success. This involvement is part of the aforementioned necessity to position integrity high on the agenda. Leadership, however, is no panacea. The extent to which different *types* of ethical leadership influence consciousness and behavior varies.
3. A central integrity actor helps. Research on agencies and systems has suggested that it is important to have specific institutions or actors that have integrity and anti-corruption as their primary task and responsibility. Having such an actor opens windows of opportunity and gives credibility to the topic.
4. Balancing strategies and excluding no one. On strategies based on compliance or values, on the focus on what goes wrong (violations) or on moral awareness (values), there is only one credible answer: doing both or balancing strategies is the most effective and both strategies are relevant for awareness as well as limiting wrong behavior. And these must concern all types of officials (politics, bureaucracy) at all levels (from elite to street level).
5. Reflecting on effectiveness. Existing institutions tend to be self-satisfied about their role, whereas supporters of the importance of integrity and anti-corruption sometimes seem to favor “the more, the better,” which can seriously undermine the credibility of integrity initiatives. Hence, more reflection and research on what works is essential, in terms of not only agencies but also instruments and systems. Such study should address possible positive *and* negative side effects, as Anechiarico and Jacobs (1996) did so convincingly for effectiveness.

A broader integrity approach seems crucial for further progress on knowledge of “what works” because it is probable that organizations or governments will have to develop specific policies against different types of integrity violations. When one wants to fight fraud, for instance, it might be effective to be strict and tough in terms of norms, leadership, and policies, but this toughness might lead to negative effects such as intimidation and discrimination (Lasthuizen, 2008; Lasthuizen, Huberts, & Kaptein, 2002). More specific research on the effectiveness of policies for different aspects of integrity is very much needed, despite the mentioned overall lessons on the state of the art. Research relies on the “one style does not fit all” approach, whether it is on leadership (Heres, 2014) or other instruments and strategies, and limits the possibilities for expanding knowledge about unethical behavior (content; causes; effects; solutions).

INTEGRITY IN CONTEXT: INTEGRITISM

Even though arguments were presented in favor of broadening the perspective from corruption to integrity, there also exists the danger of broadening the scope too much (Huberts, 2014). There are, as Caiden (1991) so convincingly argued, many bureaupathologies. Not all of these 179 should be considered integrity violations, however; a functionary can do something wrong and make mistakes, even stupid mistakes, without committing an integrity violation. Yet, when this distinction becomes too blurred, an organization loses sight of what is morally important and what is not, possibly leading to negative outcomes. For example, employees may become too afraid to risk doing anything wrong or may become paralyzed, with good reason, by the idea that making a mistake might lead to an investigation of their integrity. To avoid such repercussions, therefore, organizations must clearly identify their central moral values and norms and must develop organizational ethics that clarify what type of (moral) value or norm violation is considered serious enough to warrant an investigation of integrity. Although never easy, this undertaking is crucial for any organization that takes ethics and integrity seriously and that wants to prevent the oversimplification and/or overgeneralization or “integritism” (Huberts, 2014, pp. 127–128). Integritism refers to the misuse of the topic, to inappropriate accusations that functionaries did not act with integrity, without good reason and with a political or opportunistic background (trying to harm the opponent) or misunderstanding of what integrity is about (*moral* quality of policy making and not about the content and outcome of decisions).

INTEGRITY IN CONTEXT: GOOD GOVERNANCE

Integrity refers to the moral quality of the governance process, which is important for the legitimacy and credibility of (public) power. Procedural justice (Van Ryzin, 2011) and integrity do really matter for “good governance” but it is important to realize that there are more aspects and values relevant for good governance. These concern other values that are relevant for the governance process (responsiveness and democracy, lawfulness) as well as values that refer to the resulting policies (effectiveness of policies and actual societal outcome). Good governance concerns dealing with these often-conflicting values on process and outcomes, with thus a broader perspective than the “integrity” of the process. This leads to intriguing discussions in actual national and international policies on how to stimulate good governance in countries, but also opens up a challenging agenda for research. Rothstein (2011), for example, argued that impartiality of government is the crucial factor for societal progress. In contrast, Grindle (2004) presented the concept of “good enough governance,” acknowledging that many countries are not capable of fulfilling all good governance demands, with impartiality and integrity to be seen in the context of the development of (national) governance systems.

TO CONCLUDE AND REFLECT

A number of conclusions seem relevant in response to the basic questions. Integrity is an intriguing concept, with more prominence in (governance) practice and research. Everybody

desires it, it is crucial for all of us, which makes it important to clarify its meaning. Eight different views on integrity were presented, with additional reflection on the underlying basics of an “integrity perspective.” The basics are that integrity is about the moral quality of behavior in the process of governance, not about the content of decisions and societal outcomes. It concerns “moral quality,” the essentials of good or bad in how to operate, with reference to the “valid” moral values and norms in the eyes of the relevant publics. That makes it important to be aware of “integritism,” the misuse of the topic, with inappropriate accusations that functionaries did not act with integrity, without good reason, and with a political or opportunistic background.

This perspective relates to concepts/views with “ethics” or “corruption” or “good governance” in the center but it also offers specific elements for research and policy. Integrity is about the “ethics” or moral quality of everyone involved in governance. Is that behavior in line with the valid moral values and norms, with “valid” always referring to the context? Integrity is about the “ethics of behavior;” ethics of governance and ethics theory concern all aspects, including the ethics of policy content and the consequences for society (outcome).

What types of behavior in governance are in conflict with those moral values and norms? Corruption as private profit from public power clearly opposes those values and norms, but the integrity approach distinguishes more types of behavior that violate valid moral norms and values. These integrity violations also include possible conflicts of interest and favoritism (beyond bribing); misuse of information and power; intimidation and discrimination; and private time misbehavior. These are also more prominent in integrity scandals and investigations in many (Western) countries. When the focus is on only corruption or bribing, this might overestimate the moral quality of politics and administration in the West and a broader framework might bring in some nuance.

Another more theoretical argument seems relevant to differentiate between types of violations. What causes integrity violations, including corruption? What seems to help to prevent and curb them? More specific research is needed, for example on how the leadership strategies that help might have different consequences for different types of violations (Heres, 2014; Lasthuizen, 2008). By definition this also requires reflection on the strategies and policies that in practice might work to protect integrity and prevent violations. To progress, more research on both integrity violations beyond “corruption” and on the involvement of politics; public administration; civil society; and citizens in addressing and interpreting “integrity” and types of integrity violations is both challenging, and needed.

In addition, a number of critical remarks on the state of the art of this research and theory development on the “integrity of governance” seem relevant. Two related conclusions seem appropriate. More attention to ethics and integrity is justified by the current state of multidisciplinary (public) governance studies. “Moral values and norms” are often absent when scholars are involved in describing, explaining, and understanding the reality of governance and administration (the dominant focus is on goals and interests; biases and irrationality; institutions; and context and power). An “ethics and integrity turn” in the dominant fields of study is needed.

However, standard scientific work should also be a central focus for integrity and ethics researchers. It is presupposed that moral values and norms play a significant role in daily politics and administration and researchers are in that sense part of the “ethics industry.” Research that actually proves that importance, in comparison to other factors (goals/interests, context, power), is limited. An “empirical turn” in ethics and integrity research is needed.

That would include more empirical work on topics like the actual (lack of) importance of moral norms and values in governance, the effects of more and less ethical and integritous governance on output and outcome (good governance?), and the actual effectiveness of the integrity policies and systems (researchers tend to favor). That would also make the commitment toward improving the quality and integrity of governance more credible.

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This article is building on previous work, including a number of chapters of *The Integrity of Governance* (Huberts, 2014). That content is summarized and revised, taking into account recent literature. More references would be appropriate (as in the mentioned book), acknowledging the many “shoulders I am standing on,” but for reasons of readability, the number of references is limited. In addition I am grateful for the ideas and contributions of many colleagues, also at several ASPA, EGPA, and IIAS conferences, and of course the editors and reviewers of this important journal.

NOTE

1. In English the noun “integrity” has no accepted adjective. Carter (1996), for example, used the adjective “integral;” “integer” is common in French (*intègre*), German (*integer*), or Dutch (*integer*). Because the term “integer” seems inappropriate in English, and “integral” refers more to integrality than integrity, for now in English the term “integritous” seems most appropriate.

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