The importance of integrity in both business and academia

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January 2024

Integrity plays an important role in both business and academia. The need for trustworthy and ethical behaviour cannot be over- emphasised. At the end of the day, integrity is at the very heart of our being – if we do not have it – we essentially have nothing.

The literature is filled with examples of what integrity is – how it can be achieved – how do you measure it and what are the essential traits of a person of integrity. In the context of this paper – the focus is on business and academia specifically.

What is integrity

By definition, it is about being honest and having a strong moral compass. The Cambridge Dictionary states – 'integrity (noun) is the quality of being honest and having strong moral principles that you refuse to change'.

Mind Tools provides a useful set of guidelines to assist with preserving integrity that include defining your values; analysing every choice you make; and encouraging integrity as much as possible – all sounding simple – but always a challenge if the truth be known.

The Australian Public Service Commission defines integrity as 'the pursuit of high standards of professionalism – both in what we do and what we say. It is the foundation of trust. Within this context is compliance, a value-based approach, institutional integrity and developing a pro-integrity culture.

Essentially integrity is about an honest, open and transparent approach supported by an appropriate moral set – that assists with navigating both smooth and rough waters.

In business

According to indeed.com (2023) – *business integrity* is the 'act of conducting business practices by following a moral and ethical framework. As with personal integrity, business integrity requires you to act with honesty and consistency and to hold yourself accountable for your actions, even when nobody's watching'. The notion of consistency is raised – and often neglected in these types of discussions. Consistency is essential to integrity – in that it provides a framework for treating everyone in the same way and dealing with issues, problems and sales in the same way each time. This generally promotes higher levels of customer satisfaction and higher rates of return custom.

Developing and maintaining integrity has a number of important business <u>outcomes</u> including -

When you act with business integrity you show people **that you can be trusted** – this in turn helps you build relationships with customers and co-workers alike. *You are likely to achieve higher levels of satisfaction and return business*;

Business integrity can **strengthen your reputation** – *this in turn usually results in better business options. Reputation (and maintaining it) is a vital aspect of business success and growth;*

In striving for excellence and integrity the process will **improve performance** – which in turn not only delivers quality results – but creates new and enduring options. *Much is written about continuous improvement – a key element of this ongoing process is honesty, consistency and integrity;*

When you demonstrate business integrity you often **increase job satisfaction** – this can be achieved at an individual as well as a group level. *It hardly needs saying – but high levels of job satisfaction have a huge impact on the success/failure of the business.*

BetterUp (2022) argues – 'having integrity means that you are honest, ethical, and follow defined moral principles. And integrity at work is about even more than honesty and respect. If an organisation has a true culture of integrity, that means employees take their commitments seriously, are proactive when they don't understand their responsibilities, and ultimately, are accountable for their results. As a result, the business thrives.'

Developing the all-important culture of integrity is fundamental to success - and often easier said than done. However, time and effort in this space will reap significant rewards – certainly in the longer term.

The seven <u>traits</u> associated with integrity are well worth considering and include –

Expressing gratitude for others – people with integrity are able to recognise that friends, co-workers and the larger community actually enhance their lives and as a result do what they can to thank and support those around them – this cannot be underestimated. *First hand I have received this kind of support whether verbally or in writing and it has certainly spurred me on to achieve better outcomes.*

Communicating honestly and openly – this includes being prepared to have hard and difficult conversations. *This is also about ensuring that all within the organisation are included in the conversation – often achieved through bulletins and newsletters – but they need to be frequent and informative at all times.*

Taking responsibility for your actions – that is being accountable for your actions – whether good or bad – this will include learning from your mistakes and accepting/admitting when you are in the wrong. *I have often reflected on the reality that you learn considerably more from your mistakes – they often help you to grow and appreciate the complexities of what you do and how you work with others.*

Respecting yourself and those around you – this includes accepting your own strengths and weakness and the same with those around you. *Coming to grips with strengths and weakness is never easy – but the benefit is significant.*

Helping those in need – wanting to help others with time, ability and even finances. *Supporting others is a vital aspect of integrity – and this can often be a simple acknowledgment or perhaps higher levels of support (including financial) as required.*

Demonstrating **reliability and trustworthiness** – knowing the importance of team work and ensuring that people are included and acknowledged. *One of the great people motivators is being appreciated – so in business it is essential to encourage and support those around you wherever possible. I speak with some certainty that*

money is a motivator – but being appreciated and acknowledged is significantly more important.

Showing **patience and flexibility** – overcoming hurdles and challenges with patience, flexibility and resilience.

If these outcomes can be achieved and these traits evidenced in the work place – the business will grow and so too will the individuals working within the organisation grow and develop. In some many ways it is a 'no-brainer'!

In academia

TEQSA (2023) believes *academic integrity* is 'the expectation that teachers, students, researchers and all members of the academic community act with honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility'. This is an all-encompassing view - that is not restricted to top students alone. The entire academic community needs to address the issue of integrity with an emphasis on the many facets.

The Australian National University (2023) furthers the understanding with – 'academic integrity is a core part of our culture as a community of scholars. At its heart, academic integrity is about behaving ethically. This means that all members of the community commit to honest and responsible scholarly practice and to upholding these values with respect and fairness. This of course relates directly to tertiary level study and activity, but again places an emphasis on the 'whole of community' aspect – or 'community of scholars' (students, teachers, researchers and support staff).

At the heart of the discussion is the view that integrity comes from an honest and ethical behaviour within the academic community – and being upfront about what is being said and what sources were used to form the opinions.

My own organisation has in place an *academic misconduct policy* that highlights the principles of dealing with alleged cases of misconduct; principles of academic misconduct; examples of academic misconduct; levels of academic misconduct; penalties; guidelines for reducing academic misconduct; and misconduct appeals. Though negative and punitive in nature it does emphasise the importance of integrity.

There is also a *student conduct policy* - which further reinforces the need for honesty and integrity.

We also have in place an *Academic Integrity Committee* (a standing committee of the Academic Senate) that meets regularly and deals with issues raised in a fair and appropriate way.

Further, staff and students are encompassed with additional policies on *copyright*; *intellectual property* and *conflict of interest*.

All policies can be located at – ubss.edu.au/About Us/Policies and Procedures

Integrity, then, remains integral to both business and academic activity – and represents a key aspect of appropriate behaviour in both industries - and within relevant sectors of both.

References

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UBSS - https://www.ubss.edu.au/

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