

Character and cops: Ethics in policing (AEI studies)

Integrity in organizations: Beyond honesty and conscientiousness

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NOTE

INTEGRITY IN ORGANIZATIONS: BEYOND HONESTY AND CONSCIENTIOUSNESS

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

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

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A BRIEF SUMMARY AND CRITIQUE OF PRIOR LITERATURE

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

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

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