Title: The effects of integrity on ethical behavior: experimental evidence

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Abstract:

The aim of this study is to understand the concept of integrity holistically and its effect on ethical behavior. Currently, most of the literature on integrity argues that the construct means the consistency between words and actions—form integrity (Audi & Murphy, 2006; Palanski & Yammarino, 2007; Simons, 2002). Given the ethical scandals that continue to rock the business world, there is a growing realization that the integrity construct should not be limited to form integrity only (Bauman, 2013; Rae & Wong, 2004; Schlenker, 2008). As such, this research extends the integrity construct to include a moral dimension—content integrity. Therefore, this study attempts to explore the influence of the two dimensions of integrity (form and content) on ethical behavior.

The purpose of the study was achieved through the use of an experimental research design. The experiment involved the manipulation of the two dimensions of integrity (form and content) using scenarios and then observing the results to determine the effects of different levels (low and high) of each dimension on ethical behavior. More than 700 participants from two different countries (Philippines and Chile) in three sample groups took part in this study. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to answer the research hypotheses of the study and SPSS was used for the data analysis.
Results from the analyzed data show significant effects of content integrity on behavioral intentions. Interestingly, this did not depend on form integrity or the ethical orientation of an individual. Furthermore, behavioral intentions were not affected by differences in levels of form integrity, which suggests that mere consistency between words and deeds does not help to reduce unethical behavior. In addition, it was found that an individual’s ethical orientation, particularly relativism, affects an individual’s intentions to engage in unethical behavior. One of the obvious implications of the above findings is that where ethical behavior is concerned, businesses should go beyond the current literature in defining the construct of integrity and extend it to include a moral dimension. It is to their detriment if they do not do so because leaders can possess integrity (form) and still behave unethically.

The findings within this study should further research interest in the field through the promotion of research into the purposes of the two dimensions. For example, if form integrity does not influence unethical behavior, why then is it important for organizations to persevere with it and what is its role in limiting unethical behavior? Furthermore, the issue of relativism—where participants are relative, they are more likely to behave unethically. The field of integrity is wide open for further research because the changing nature of the world will require different understanding of the construct. It is argued in this study that integrity needs a content dimension to complement its form dimension. Further developments from researchers may add a different dimension to the understanding of the integrity construct.