

LEADERSHIP Excellence

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Integrity

It has four dimensions.



by Al Watts

MOST LEADERS PROFESS to value integrity in their official statements—and regulations are passed to ensure it—but are we getting any better? A KPMG poll shows that 76 percent of workers had observed misconduct in the last 12 months—and half of them said that *what they had observed would cause public distrust if discovered.*

Where are we going wrong? Perhaps we're viewing integrity too narrowly. We are used to hearing about integrity in the context of *morality* and *ethics*, but it also means being *whole*, *sound*, or *complete*—concepts that speak to leadership. We need to integrate these definitions—knowing that *the same integrity that contributes to ethical cultures also increases engagement and effectiveness (profitability).*

What does that kind of integrity look like? I see four dimensions of integrity that, when managed well, contribute to ethical, engaging, and effective cultures:

1. Identity—factors that contribute to *who we are, what we value, our purpose and where we wish to go.* Lacking a solid grasp of their core strengths and weaknesses, leaders are likely to make strategic blunders. *Blindness* to soft spots in culture or character can also contribute to ethical missteps; narcissistic leaders who are impervious to critical feedback are cases in point. *Identity shortcomings* that reduce engagement include lacking a meaningful mission or clear values. People want to *stand for something and feel that they're contributing to a worthwhile purpose.* Purpose engenders a moral discipline that engages people.

2. Authenticity is about *trueness, truth, and transparency.* Authentic organizations are true to their purpose and values; customer and worker loyalty take a hit when brands fail to deliver on their promise or when customers and workers hear one thing but experience another. Likewise, leaders' trustworthiness and effectiveness are blunted when their *deeds and creeds* are inconsistent. Shortcomings around truth-telling and transparency contribute to ethical failures. Superior capabilities for *facing ugly truths and having courageous conversations about them* contribute to competitive advantage.

3. Alignment. Wholeness means *coherence*—pieces fit, or are aligned, and systems and processes connect in service to the mission and to customers. Who comes aboard, who stays or goes, metrics, performance management, and pay send messages about *the main thing* and expectations. When messages are inconsistent, people become confused about priorities, energy gets wasted, and results suffer. As Upton Sinclair said, *"It is hard to get someone to understand something when their pay depends on them not understanding it."* Motivational posters or lectures about safety on an oil rig, for example, can't compensate for shortcuts taken in the interest of *what people get paid for*—volume and speed.

Harmony is a key aspect of alignment. Differences—in roles, backgrounds and perspectives—are sources of value if managed properly; Margaret Fuller, a 19th century women's rights activist, said "Harmony exists in differences, if only the same key note governs both parts." Harmony, in that regard, means sincere efforts by leaders to align and reconcile their views in the interest of higher principles, missions, and values.

4. Accountability. The desire for more accountability entails "seeing it, owning it, solving it, doing it" as Roger Connors writes. It means *delivering on promises*—be they commitments to achieve goals, showing up to meetings on time, or living the brand promise. Accountability includes ownership of responsibility for resources that we consume and for the impact of our decisions and actions. In a more transparent marketplace that is *greening* worldwide, stewardship is not only ethical, but *increasingly appealing.*

Accountability requires measuring what matters. To get where you want to go, you need to know where you are now. Our *Leadership and Organization Integrity Surveys* are designed to give you a fix on how you are navigating these four dimensions. You indicate the degree that you believe 40 statements. Here are a few: *We have a clear sense of purpose. People freely share thoughts and opinions. We pull together—people are not working at cross purposes. We use a balanced set of measures—not just financial ones—to determine if we're on course. Leaders model the stated values.* Survey results serve as a catalyst for conversations about integrity gaps—and how they can be closed.

As U.S. senator Alan Simpson noted: *If you have integrity, nothing else matters; if you don't have integrity, nothing else matters. LE*

Al Watts is founder of inTEgro, a consulting firm focused on strategic planning, OD and senior team coaching, and author of *Navigating Integrity*. Visit www.integro-inc.com.

ACTION: *Develop the four dimensions of integrity.*