

Conceptual perspectives on integrity in Public Service

D Sing

University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

ABSTRACT

Meeting public service ideals have to be supported by high levels of integrity. While legislative, institutional and administrative measures exist, it is the view of the author that having a keen grasp and understanding of the conceptual (tools of thought) foundations of integrity will enhance the implementation of these measures. The various notions, meanings and definitions of integrity suggest that it is a self-reflecting, continuous learning and anticipatory process. It is a condition embedded in the disposition to achieving intrinsic worth as a means and as an end, pursued with an ethical and moral compass as well as authentically, courageously and credibly. The outcome is the unswerving and dedicated performance of duty in conformity with the prevailing measures and consistent with espoused, interwoven, integrity-related values such as: trust, honesty, commitment, loyalty, responsibility, humility and wisdom.

"My life is an individual whole, and all my activities run into one another ... My life is my message" M.K. Gandhi (quoted in Goree 2006:63).

INTRODUCTION

In order to be in congruence with the conceptual focus of this article, that is, to facilitate understanding and grasping different interpretations of a phenomenon in a systematic and meaningful manner, the focus, initially is on public service ideals. This discussion is followed by an exposition on the understanding of integrity. In the final part of the article emphasis is on integrity – related values.

PUBLIC SERVICE IDEALS

Socrates (quoted in Goree 2007:10) stated: "Not life, but a good life is to be chiefly valued". Pant (2003:20) argues that "... (Public servants) have to serve the people because that is the only purpose for which they can and they ought to exist. Every ounce of their energy, their intellect,

their capacity has to be surrendered to the devoted service of their masters, the public. This has to be their all-consuming passion, and their guiding mission. It needs a full missionary approach for results to be abiding and sweet, and to carry succour and service and light and hope (to all people)". The words of Socrates and Pant serve as a catalyst to reflect on what ideals public service ought to be striving for. As a concept, process and activity, public service constitutes a major feature and quality of human civilisation, – as social and political creatures, they are driven and impelled to ensuring human welfare. Establishing public service as a continuous, sustainable and selfless endeavour to ensure that all members of the public experience and enjoy a high quality of life, living and livelihood (Farazmand 2002:127; Basu 1994:4).

This philosophy is embedded in the South African Constitution of 1996, which is the supreme law in the land. It requires public service to subscribe to and uphold democratic values such as: participation, ethical and moral behaviour, consultation and transparency. Moreover, these requirements bind public service to a rights-based and benevolent imperative, thus prioritising values such as human dignity, altruism, equality and justice. Therefore, observance of and adherence to these values became a mandate for measuring and monitoring success of the constitutional order. The Preamble to the South African Constitution, for example, is regarded as an inviolable instrument of instruction to those who wield public power in public service, which is a complex and complicated process (Gildenhuys and Knipe 2001:123; Devenish *et al.* 2001:486-493; Krishna Iyer 2003:491). Argyriades (2003:527) asserts that total dedication to the public interest is fundamental, and not its opposite, which is particularistic. Therefore, the duty of the public servant is to help facilitate, explain, represent, defend and realise this public interest with utmost integrity (Argyriades 2003:527). Even more perplexing for the well-meaning and responsible public servant, is when he/she must act quickly in unclear, hard-to-define and difficult to classify concerns and issues on which the law is silent and confusing, and the contexts and situations are ambiguous and complex (Lewis 2012:443). Another cautionary note for the dedicated and faithful public servant expressed by Mavalankar (2003:16) is that: "Enforcing adherence to laws, though essential, is sometimes likely to be oppressive, if stress is laid on mere adherence to the letter of the (law); there has to be a liberal and human approach. The (law) will have to be observed, but their interpretation and enforcement has to be, on the basis of service to the common man. This interpretation has to follow the spirit of the law and not necessarily the letter". The faithful public servant in trying to act quickly in situations where the law is silent and confusing, and in situations where the spirit of the law takes precedence over the letter of the law within the integrity imperative of "indivisible whole" (congruence between thought, action and deed) must have the sagacity to know when to commit a particular action or deed. This sagacity to know is based on the ability to grasp and evaluate the different features in order to determine which features count and which do not. This often explains why some public servants fail and some succeed notwithstanding seeming unlikelihood (Rajagopalachari 2003:35).

EXPLAINING INTEGRITY

According to the *Encarta World English Dictionary* (199:974) integrity means: possession of strong principles (My principles determine my thoughts and actions); completeness and



individualness (The territorial integrity of a nation); and wholeness (Approval of irregular, expenditure will undermine my integrity). *The Oxford Dictionary* (cited in Verhezen 2008:144) explains integrity as the condition of being unified (I try to be congruent in what I think, say and do); unimpaired (Not for a moment will I compromise my integrity) or sound in construction (My integrity will not be tarnished).

It is an accepted phenomenon in organisations (public service departments) and for individuals (public servants) to struggle to gain, maintain and promote congruency with work values, morality and ethics. Irrespective of what our personal and organisational principles and beliefs are, it is inevitable that all will be faced with challenges imposed by restraining and opposing forces. This results in thoughts, actions and deeds contrary to predetermined intentions and resolutions and prevailing legislative, institutional and administrative measures¹ (Covey 1999:48). It causes the break down and the prevention of the building of foundations for integrity in public service life (Ayeni 2010:3-4).

Concerns to ensure integrity in public service life is not a recent phenomenon. It can be traced back to at least the Greek and Roman times (Davis 2003:12). In Plato's Republic public servants were envisaged to be perfect gentleman, diligent and well-behaved. And, while being "gentle to their fellows (they must be) fierce to their enemy" (Gadgil 2003:21). Besides, being beyond and above reproach and criticism, behaviour must "...like Caesar's wife ... be above suspicion" (Pant 2003:19).

However, modern day public service world-wide operating in a highly technological and crowded information-filled context is currently facing integrity concerns and issues emanating from *inter-alia*: rising corruption, national security, environmental quality, service-delivery protests, decreasing confidence, increasing negative attitudes towards democratic behaviour and open disregard for and disrespect towards public representatives and public servants (O'Toole and Meier 2011:21; Rose and Lawton 1999:ix; Davis 2003:213). In the case of South Africa, it is accepted that the Constitution lays the foundation for attaining and promoting integrity in public service through legislative, institutional and administrative measures.

Notions, meanings and definitions of integrity include, *inter-alia*: "our conception of a good life" (Kekes (1993:96) quoted in Verhezen 2008:44); "a desirable virtue" (Verhezen 2008:135); "... the real pleasure in exercising integrity in dealing with others is the discovery of integrity itself" (Beebe 1992:15); "... a psychological construct impacting on workplace behaviour..." Barnard *et al.* 2008:40; "... a psychological and ethical wholeness, sustained in time ..." (Grudin in Beebe 1992:17); "realisation and soundness of moral principles"; (Avasthi and Maheshwari 1992-1993:28); "... intrinsically embodies a reference to others (members of the public and colleagues) that entails a social component relevant for organisations (public service departments)" (Verhezen 2008:136); "(conscientiously adhering to legal instruments, policies or codes of conduct) regardless of emotional or social pressure, and not allowing any rational consideration to overwhelm one's rational conviction" (Becker (1998:157) quoted in Bloisi *et al.* 2003:48); and it "... (is) something one pursues not something one has an attribute or moral trait" (Verhezen 2008:143). The various notions, meanings and definitions seem to suggest that integrity could be explained as self-reflecting, continuous learning and anticipatory process and condition embedded in the disposition to achieving and promoting intrinsic worth as a means (fair, dependable) and as an end (corrupt-free public service). It is pursued with an ethical and moral compass as well as authentically, courageously and credibly with the outcome being, the unswerving and dedicated

performance of duty in conformity with prevailing legislative, institutional and administrative measures and consistent with espoused, interwoven, integrity-related values such as: trust, honesty, commitment, loyalty, responsibility, humility and wisdom (Verhezen (2008); Fisher and Lovell (2009), Schermerhorn *et al.* (2008); Covey (2006); Barnard *et al.* (2008).

INTEGRITY-RELATED VALUES

These values, according to Brillantes and Fernandez (2011:55) contribute to “public service ethos” and must be construed as being interrelated and interwoven as well as equal partners. As Beebe (1992:32) asserts: “... integrity presuppose(s) a connection with ourselves that permits an ethical connection to everything else in the universe”.

Trust

According to the *Encarta World English Dictionary* (1999:2030) trust means: “... confidence in the reliance on good qualities, especially truth, honour or ability (and taking something or somebody on trust means) to accept ... as true and honest without checking this is the case”. It can therefore be implied that trust connotes interrelationships and influence in a social setting. It is a process and not a single event involving observation, experience, consideration of risk and vulnerability. It represents feeling of optimism and enthusiasm or pessimism and uncertainty about other individuals. Being a personal issue, it differs from one person to another as well as being either persisting or short-lived (Rossouw 2002:149).

In an organisational context (groups of people working towards a purpose) collaborative, co-operative and beneficial trust outcomes (internal and external to the organisation) cannot be attained without trust. And, as a catalyst as well an interweaving, cementing and bonding agent, it keeps intact all relationships within and outside the organisation. Manifestations are in the form of tangible, concrete and identifiable outcomes (Scarnati 1997:25).

However, a fundamental concern that continues to emerge is how trustworthy an individual is in all relationships (Covey 2006:49). As Gerard Arpey (in Covey 2006:49) asserts: “The only way to build trust professionally or personally is by being trustworthy”. Trustworthiness means displaying and projecting a reputation for adhering to one’s words, promises and commitments and responsibilities, that propense other individuals to have confidence in, and dependence on, what one says and does – personal trust (Rossouw 2002:156; Barnard *et al.* 2008:45). Impersonal trust in contrast, connotes trust in institutions or social practices. The reasoning is based on the assumption that if one goes to a public service department to apply for a passport, one will be given due consideration; in a coffee shop staff will expect that one will pay for the coffee. This form of trust is normally taken for granted, without it public service departments and coffee shops could not function. As a basic form of trust, if abused, can lead to the questioning of such practices. It is a fundamental ingredient of social interaction (Rossouw 2002:150).

A distinction is also made among types of trust models. Deterrence-based trust emphasises the fear of reprisal, if there is a violation of trust. Inconsistent actions can totally destroy relations. In terms of knowledge-based trust, the focus is on predicable behaviour and consistency emerging over a long period of time. The premise for identification-based



trust includes, strong emotional ties underscored by mutual understanding, appreciation and acknowledgement of each other's intentions, desires and wishes (Robbins and Decenzo 2004:331-332; Robbins 2005:173). The notion that individuals will do what they promised is the foundation of the calculus-based trust model (Lewicki in De Vries 2005:40).

Trust is also linked with "social capital" (interacting resource and infrastructure), which embodies for example, the important catalysing role of public institutions and civil society working in concert to provide assurances and commitments that enable trust to serve as a lubricant to impel collaborative and cooperative endeavours. The emphasis is less on *only* conferring the role to individuals (Brillantes and Fernandez 2011:61). Another association with trust is "governance capital" (Brillantes and Fernandez (2011:61). One understanding of governance is the institutional underpinnings of public activity which, *inter-alia*, enable the exercise of political, economic as well as administrative authority to govern and manage public affairs (Grindle 2010:2; UNDP (1997:9) in Brillantes and Fernandez 2011:61). However, the notion of good governance demands, *inter-alia*: accountability, transparency, consultation, participation, rule orderly actions and interactions in public activities as well as in politics (World Bank 1995 in Grindle 2010:2; Asian Development Bank (1995) in Brillantes and Fernandez 2011:61). From these notions, it can be argued that it involves much "trust" from the public to entrust government with the authority to take decisions that must improve, *equally*, the quality of life for all citizens (Brillantes and Fernandez 2011:61).

Public trust provide leeway for programmes, methods and procedures in carrying out various tasks in the public interest. The trust of the public allows governments to be bold in instituting innovation and creativity in formulation and implementation, thus, securing the maximum benefit to the public resulting in their willingness to cooperate and participate in terms of time, expertise and resources in order to make programmes workable and meaningful (Brillantes and Fernandez 2011:61). As Covey (2006:304) asserts: "Restoring trust on (the individual level) and the societal level means rebuilding trust in countries, institutions, industries, professions and in other people generally. It includes counteracting suspicion and cynicism and replacing it with contribution, value creation and ethical behavior".

Trust is also regarded as "... a social good to be provided just as much the air we breathe or the water we drink. When it is damaged, the community as a whole suffers and when it is destroyed, societies falter and collapse" (Sissella Bok (1998:xxx) quoted in Starling 2008:165). Creating external trust with the public is essential to optimum cooperation and participation in formulation, implementation and evaluation of public policies (Kenneth Ruscio in Behn (2001) cited in Starling 2008:165). Infusion of a high level of trust in government activities will not necessarily eliminate the mechanisms of accountability. However, it can contribute to less intrusion, use of discretion; and a greater willingness and openness to delegate (Kenneth Ruscio in Behn (2001) cited in Starling 2008:165).

Public servants have to be aware that granting, allocating and withdrawing trust has been regarded as critical to survival throughout the ages (Gobillot 2008:113). Trust can also be taught, learnt and built as Kouzes and Posner (2007:227) remark: "Be the First to Trust". Building trust involves *inter-alia*: self-disclosure, openness to influence as well as sharing information, knowledge and experience that encourages reflection as well as supporting a sense of reciprocity noting, the fact that: *Trust is contagious* (Kouzes and Posner 2007:227-234).

The continuing challenges for South African public servants are to reflect and realise that public power is based on trust, as the compulsion for trust as an essential value in integrity-centric behaviour is embedded in the Preamble to the Constitution: "Believe that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, united in our diversity". This is an inviolable instruction.

Honesty

The *Encarta World English Dictionary* (1999:802) refers to the term honesty as "... the quality, condition, or characteristic of being fair, just, truthful and morally upright...truthfulness, candour or sincerity". One view is that in order to realise the significance of honesty, the opposite of dishonesty be considered (Northhouse 2004:315). The descriptors could include, the following: deceitful, misinterpreting, bias, conspiring, framing, gamesmanship, superficial, pointless activity, self-perpetuation, self-serving, stalling, stonewalling, half-truth, double-talk and tampering (Caiden 1991:492)².

Behaving honestly has the impact of breeding and promoting trust, and therefore, if there is "...more trust in society, the better the society functions" (Starling 2008:165). A fundamental aspect of honesty is being true to yourself *first*. Dubiousness, deceit and pretence, manipulation and deliberately creating a false and wrong impression undermines not only an individual's credibility, but, also establishes the breeding ground for cynicism and distrust among citizens toward government, when the truth finally emerges and is revealed in the public domain (Van Rensburg 2009:60; Scarnati 1997:24). By exposing convictions truthfully in day-to-day actions, individuals encourage and command respect, loyalty, commitment and productive intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships. Honest individuals are ingrained with basic principles and consistently and continuously apply them in practice (Daft 1999:62-68). As Mahatma Gandhi states (quoted in Covey 2006:69): "To believe in something and not to live it, is dishonest". Dishonest behaviour sows the seeds of being seen as unreliable, uncommitted, undependable and unworthy of trust. Honest conduct is not only about telling the truth. It concerns being open, fully representing and interpreting reality. However, there could be times when telling the complete truth may be destructive and counterproductive. Therefore, a balanced approach may be necessary to be open and candid while, at the same time monitoring the appropriateness of the disclosure (Northhouse 2004:315). Exposing honest behaviour is considered more than *just* not deceiving. It means involving a wide set of behaviours which include: not promising what you cannot deliver; not misinterpreting reality; not hiding behind spin-doctored evasions; not preventing obligations from being fulfilled, not evading accountability, as well as not compromising responsibility for the respect of human dignity of people while engaged in the "pressures" of work life (Dalla Costa (1998) in Northhouse 2004:315). The words of George Orwell (in Van Rensburg 2009:60) may be appropriate: "In a time of universal deceit, telling the truth becomes a revolutionary act".

For the South African public servant the Constitution offers an invigorating and inspiring stimulus to realise honest behaviour as an invaluable component of integrity in public service. Various sections of the Constitution provide the beacons to propense this, for example, *respect, heal, build, and improve*. The challenge is to realise this considering the fact that public service is a human activity carried out *by human beings for human beings*.



Commitment

Commitment in the *Encarta World English Dictionary* (1999: 383) means obligation (something that takes up time and energy), dedication or devotion to a cause, person or relationship as well as a previously planned arrangement that cannot be avoided. In stressing the importance of commitment Covey (1999:61) asserts: “If we can’t make and keep commitments to ourselves as well as to others our commitments become meaningless. We know it, and others know it. They sense our duplicity and become guarded”. Commitment also connotes perseverance by the individual and relative strength of identification to attain what the individual committed to himself/herself to doing, and the individual’s duties and responsibilities. The commitment has to be attained and cannot be violated despite difficult circumstances (Barnard *et al.* 2008:40; Dessler 2004:500). For the public servant, it demands meaningfully keeping commitments on a daily basis to the public, fellow public servants and to legislative and institutional structures.

Kouzes and Posner (2007:56–57) argue that personal values drive commitment and constitute the route to commitment *not* organisational principles. They further argue individuals who have properly clarified and defined values are better able and prepared to make choices based on principles. This also applies to deciding whether the principles of the organisation are consonant with the principles of the individual. However, Covey (2006:209) reasons that although commitment can be regarded as the quickest route to build trust, violating and avoiding commitments are the quickest way in which trust can be destroyed. Therefore, one has to be careful with the commitments one makes. Making impulsive, vague or elusive commitments are contrary to being careful about making commitments. Caution has to be exercised about explicit and implicit commitments as well, because violation can result in destroying trust and causing withdrawal of trust (Covey 2006:217–219).

For the South African public servant the Constitution forms the bedrock for commitment in public service. The Preamble provides a cogent requirement for commitment to the people of South Africa. It states “... (I)mprove the quality of the life of all citizens and free the potential of each person;” This implies that public servants must be fully aware of the consequences of making, keeping, avoiding and violating commitments—a cogent factor in integrity-centric conduct. As Covey (2006:218) asserts: “To violate them causes doubt, suspicion, cynicism, and distrust that rust the wheels of progress. To keep them generates the hope, enthusiasm, confidence and trust that increase momentum and lubricate accomplishment of results”.

Loyalty

The meaning of loyalty implies a strong sense of feeling of duty, devotion, bonding, attachment and responsibility to a person, cause or institution. However, it is argued that in deciding and reflecting on what action is necessary in a situation or context, a loyal person needs to consider whether he or she is loyal to the *right* things (*Encarta World English Dictionary* 1999:148; Spritzer 2000:205; Fisher and Lovell 2009:203). For example, in a marriage, loyalty can range from a high level to a low level in which the effort is on *just* the performance of actions in compliance with the agreed contract (Snell (1993:82) in Lovell and Fisher 2009:203–204).

Loyalty also connotes “unthinking faithfulness” (Fisher and Lovell 2009:203) and “unquestioning conformity” (Snell (1993:82) in Fisher and Lovell 2009:203). In both the mind-sets individuality is suppressed, individual arguments and perspectives are ignored and one has to accept what one is required to do (Snell (1993:82) in Fisher and Lovell 2009:203). Thus, there is “...no opportunity for developmental openness (which would allow an individual to develop their own values and ethical reasoning)” as Fisher and Lovell (2009:204) claim. Caution is necessary to guard against “blind loyalty” which may arise from only fear, convention, self-interests or sectarian interests (Spitzer 2000:205). Individuals may experience conflicting loyalties which may cause them to choose between organisational loyalty, loyalty to professional associations, loyalty to broader society or to themselves as well as their families (Fisher and Lovell 2009:205). For the public servant this could be very demanding, considering the fact that loyalty requires being faithful, dutiful and devoted unswerving in allegiance and focus on the best interests of the organisation (Kouzes and Posner 2011:6). The critical question for the public servant will be: “Is my sense of duty strong enough to override my personal or other loyalties” (Avasthi and Maheshwari 1992-1993:287). Thus, it is an invaluable consideration in assuring integrity in public service.

South African public servants like their international counterparts, will have to deal with loyalty dilemmas such as, those advocated by (Hunt 1995:12):

- Reconciliation of official obligation to personal conscience.
- What action to take when it is believed that there is subversion of public interest.
- Having the right to question the actions of senior public servants and political superiors.
- Questioning whether, his/her views be subordinated in the interests of the state – especially interest that have been determined by responsible and accountable politicians who have been elected through a democratic process.

Responsibility

Responsibility is a difficult concept to pin down (Miewald 1978:237). For Barnard *et al.* (2008:45) responsibility in the wider sense connotes acceptance of responsibility by the individual for his/her goals and aspirations as well as strengths, weaknesses and limitations. It also connotes accepting responsibility for choices one makes and the consequences for one’s action. It is further concerned with the acceptance of responsibility for other people or institutions, their interests as well as the individual’s role in interrelationships with them, people and public (Barnard *et al.* 2008:45).

In an institutional context responsibility can indicate the “freedom of the will” that forms the basis to cause something (Harmon 1995:6). In practice this would mean: “Director X was responsible for obtaining approval for staff posts despite stiff competition” (Harmon 1995:6; De Leon 2008:351). Accountability is another shade of meanings for responsibility. This suggests that individuals are answerable to higher institutional authority for their actions (in performing a task or assignment). Again in practice this would mean: “For the month of June I am responsible to the senior administrative officer for all passport approvals” (Harmon 1995:6; De Leon 2008:351). A further nuance is obligation, which suggests that moral reasoning and moral action are impelled and determined by their correspondence to principles and values originating from sources external to the agent – the causer of actions.



In practice this would mean: “I feel responsible to ensure that there is no violence in our meeting with the service-delivery protestors (Harmon 1995:6; De Leon 2008:351).

To clarify the often synonymous usage of the terms *responsibility* and *accountability*, it is argued while accountability refers to systems of formal and informal external controls over individual behaviour, responsibility refers to individual behaviour being subject to internal control based on the individual’s principles, values and beliefs (De Leon 2008:350). While from a practice perspective, responsibility on the one hand, focuses on obligations, willingness, honesty and trustworthiness, accountability, on the other hand, emphasises reporting, controlling and answerability (Salminen 2006:176). It is asserted by Van Rensburg (2009:21-22) that: “Willingness to be held accountable is the obvious consequence of acceptance of responsibility In its most positive sense, accountability is about asking others for their help in defining own responsibility”. Covey (1999:49) is of the view that accountability breeds *response-ability* which connotes the individual’s ability to offer a response peculiar to any circumstance, condition or situation. The positive impact is that the individual’s commitment becomes more impelling and powerful than moods, emotions and circumstances. Being *responsible* enables the individual to keep promises and resolutions made. Bauer (in Harmon 1995:126) draws a cogent conclusion: “Genuine responsibility exists only when there is genuine responding”.

Discussion on responsibility can be viewed from two perspectives namely, the traditional (rationalist) and modern (Miewald 1978:237; Harmon 1995:1–11). The traditional view emphasises that the responsibility of the public servant must be imposed by external power such as: the legislature, executive and judiciary (Miewald 1978:237). A modern view raises the following question: *Must* all activities be subject to external control? It is argued situations (for example, work in the field) cannot be closely and continuously monitored and evaluated. Staff should be given the opportunity to be creative, innovative, flexible and entrepreneurial (De Leon 2008:351). The focus on strict enforceability of the traditional view cannot be achieved according to the modern view. The reasons are that human beings by their very nature are not necessarily passive, compliant or prone to conformity with predetermined expectations, conventional morality, or being intimidated or deterred by known sanctions or rules and penalties (Greenleaf 2002:306). Individuals are also amenable to striking a balance between the necessities of expertise and talents with requirements of the public interest (Miewald 1978:237). In terms of the modern view *just* functioning according to the rules and regulations without flexibility and discretion is not necessarily responsible behaviour. Public servants must also be understood as self-reflecting and holistic thinkers in a human community as being ethically and morally aware of their pursuit of the greater public good (Salminen 2006:171; De Leon 2008:352).

For South African public servants working in a development-orientated state context with its rights-based and rights-driven ethos, the understanding and practice of responsibility as a dynamic concept becomes imperative, as is stated in Harmon (1995: back cover) that: “... responsibility (is) a continuing struggle to integrate the requirements of institutional authority with the dictates of conscience and the unique contingencies of administrative situations”. Therefore, the “continuing struggle” is between achieving objective responsibility, that is, assuring responsiveness through institutional authority on the one hand, and achieving subjective responsibility that is, assuring responsiveness through the “dictates of conscience” (ethical and moral reasoning and action) on the other (Denhardt and Denhardt 2009:154).

These considerations can be invaluable both individually and jointly in securing integrity in public service.

Humility

Some writers on the subject cite dictionary meanings to explain *humility* as: a moderate or humble estimate of merits; lacking pretence; not believing that you are superior to others; free from vanity, egoism, boastfulness, and free from ostentation or showing extravagance (Strom 2003:9; Martinuzzi 2006:3). However, often humility is confused with timidity meekness, insecurity, diffidence and lacking confidence. It is definitely not a term for condescension, a sign of personal weakness that is, self-deprecating (Lawrence 2006:121). But humility *can be* meekness and *can be* timidity in a society or social system that values status, substance, personality over strength of character and results over depth and devotion (Strom 2003:10). This argument is supported by Martinuzzi (2006:1): "(Humility) is about quite confidence without the need or a meretricious selling over ourselves. It's about being content to let others discover the layers of our talents without having to boast about them. It's a lack of arrogance not a lack of aggressiveness in pursuit of achievement". However, humility must not be seen in a negative sense. Lack of arrogance does not imply shyness, self-pity, withdrawn or self-critical (Strom 2003:15). Not being caught up in arrogance implies that individuals are cognisant of the fact that relationships and organisations are governed by timeless principles (such as respect and dignity). They act in congruence with these principles. Becoming law into themselves is not what they seek (Covey 2006:64).

In order to orientate managers and leaders from the traditional association of humility with for example, meekness, insecurity, timidity and lack of enthusiasm, to a new view of humility called "neo-humility" has been suggested by Lawrence (2006:116). Worthy of reflection by public servants, *neohumility* characteristics include, *inter-alia*: respect for human dignity and diversity; willingness to acknowledge strengths and weaknesses and to learn to change; admitting mistakes and failures and turning them into success without engaging in covering up; and encouraging dissent and truth and a culture of finding solutions, based on mutual respect for dignity and trust (Lawrence 2006:116; 123). For day-to-day practice, the cardinal question would be: Do I have the requisite equanimity to be self-disciplined and detached from ego-rewards and ego-rage (Spitzer 2000:341)? This inner strength of character could be the strength of one whose world is bigger than his or her ego. It is the strength that enables an individual, to pursue a "noble dream in a noble way" (Strom 2003:10). This is noteworthy considering the fact that public service is considered first and foremost as a calling.

For the South African public servant Chapter 10 (Public Administration) of the Constitution embeds the notion of "neohumility". The challenge, however, is to realise and promote it on a day-to-day basis. The thoughts of Covey (2006:64) may serve as an inspiration: "A humble person is more concerned about *what* is right than *being* right, about *acting* on good ideas than *having* the ideas, about *embracing* the new truth than *defending* outdated position; about *building the team* than *exalting* self, about *recognizing contribution* than being *recognized* for making it". Humility could be the foundation of an inquiring mind in order to understand ourselves and others as well as the world around us with the necessary depth and insight, thus, opening the door to wisdom. (Strom 2003:13). Humility is invaluable in ensuring integrity in public service, a *human activity*.



Wisdom

Lexicon meanings of wisdom could be understood, as experienced knowledge that is needed and, is vital to making valid, reliable and sensible decisions and judgment, bonded to good sense (for example, in harmony with integrity requirements) and revealed in the actual decisions and judgments. Together with the power of critically, practically and beneficially applying wisdom which is the result of accumulated learning (*Encarta World English Dictionary* 2009:2136; *Concise Oxford Dictionary* in Strom 2003:170).

As knowledge and experience are fused, individuals must take into account the wider world context and situation and not be embedded in a parochial mind-set with the focus being on pride, prejudice, ego and intellectual understanding, alone. The focused action of meaningful experience and knowledge must make a difference in our own lives, the lives of others and the world at large. Wisdom is not about the simple repeating of programmed, habitual responses ingrained in our lives. Fruitful wisdom obtains *first* by becoming responsible and deciding and accepting who we are and what we want to be, then deliberately and meaningfully reprogramming ourselves in congruence to that vision. Wisdom is not about being perfect. It embodies wholeness in our humanity. However, it is not about unquestioning acceptance and compliance. It should be the breeding ground for the shattering of paradigms, about our own thinking, nature and our own significance or non-significance in the universe. Reflection on life experiences and learning should be a source and prerequisite for beneficial and creative wisdom (Strom 2003:170–172). Wisdom practised with humility means that individuals acknowledge that they can learn from the expertise and talents of others and therefore, seek and encourage the contributions of others. In a modest manner, they create a learning environment and social climate that encourages innovation, experimentation and creativity (Van Dierendonck and Rook 2010:150).

Wisdom embodies two dimensions, the practical (suitable for day-to-day use) and philosophical (deep questions about the nature of reality (Rooney and McKenna 2008:711). Individuals engaging in wise actions and being conscious of the integrity imperative will "... need to draw on experiential richness and creative and imaginative fluidity and logical coherence and stability. Intellectual excellence, therefore requires theoretical reasoning tempered by intuition and influence as well as practical reasoning done with craftsmanship" (Rooney and McKenna 2008:711). For public servants, this would mean in their attempt to effect and promote what is ultimately "good" for the public (Kora-Kakabadse *et al.* 2001:209), they have to use and balance the benefits of experience gained in everyday work situations (implementing policy) with outcomes of deep, insightful and rigorous reasoning that explains a phenomenon (policy) – all to be done adroitly, that is, with special ability, adeptness and mastery without compromising integrity measures.

For the South African public servant working in a development-orientated state, the propensity for wisdom is embedded in various sections of the Constitution. For example, in Chapter 10 (Public Administration) provisions are made for *inter-alia*, the following: promotion and maintenance of professional ethics; responsiveness to public needs and public participation; impartially and fairness in service provision as well as accountability and transparency. The public servant has to reflect these concepts in order to ensure practical understanding and meaningful application within the prevailing integrity regime.

A daunting challenge for public servants who however, could be inspired by the word of Beverly Dunphy (quoted in Pitsis 2003:80): “Whenever I have come against a blank wall, it turned out to be the gateway to a new opportunity”.

CONCLUSION

The conceptual (tools of thought) focus of this article was to facilitate the understanding and grasping of different interpretations of the meanings, notions and definitions of integrity in the context of public service ideals. The premise is based on the view that implementation of legislative, institutional and administrative measures for integrity can be enhanced and strengthened by conceptual insights. Underlying the explanation of integrity is that it is, a dynamic, self-reflecting, continuous learning, an anticipatory process and condition embedded in the disposition to achieving intrinsic worth both as a means and as an end. It is pursued with an ethical and moral compass, authentically, courageously and credibly, with the final result being, the unswerving and dedicated performance of duty in conformity with the prevailing measures, and consistent with espoused, interwoven, integrity-related values such as: trust, honesty, commitment, loyalty, responsibility, humility and wisdom. The conceptual insights can strengthen and facilitate the joint action of legislative oversight bodies, civil society and the private sector to ensure that integrity is continuously maintained, promoted and monitored in public service life.

NOTES

1. Recently in line with international practice, The South African Department of Public Service and Administration published the *Public Sector Integrity Management Framework* which comprises *inter-alia*:

- Preamble
- Definitions
- Problem Statement
- Interventions
- Enforcement
- Alignment of Policies, Legislative and related Instruments
- Implementation Plan

Source: <http://www.dpsa.gov.za.doc>. (Accessed on 26/08/2013).

2. In his article “What really is Public Maladministration?”, Caiden provides in Table (1) Common Bureaupathologies. Most of the descriptors have been extracted from this table.

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