Integrity leadership

P Pillay
School of Public Leadership
Stellenbosch University

ABSTRACT

According to the World Bank (1994:12), good governance is "epitomized by predictable, open and enlightened policy making; a bureaucracy imbued with a professional ethos; an executive arm of government accountable for its actions; and a strong civil society participating in public affairs; and all behaving under the rule of law". Good governance requires strong leadership and an ethos of integrity. In the South African public sector, there is currently a serious shortage of leadership with integrity. Great leaders model integrity by being honest and by doing what is right, irrespective of the circumstances. The concept is used as a term indicative of virtue. Integrity emanates from the Latin word "integer", a mathematical term referring to whole numbers. Integrity thus means something that is truly holistic, complete. Leading with integrity implies a combination of the two words: leading completely. This article examines the principles of good governance and seeks synergy between good governance and leadership. It describes leadership with integrity as a key to combatting the nature and extent of corruption in the South African public sector.

INTRODUCTION

South African citizens are becoming increasingly aware of unethical practices in public governance which result in public distrust. Examples of distinctly unethical leadership behaviour and practices that occur in the public service include corruption, bribery, conflict of interest, fraud, nepotism, patronage, maladministration and favouritism. The exposure of public sector scandals in the media and in official reports highlight the need to address the discrepancy between the desired and the actual levels of ethics and integrity, particularly among public sector leaders.

Corrupt and deviant behaviour is not always impulsive or accidental. Small and Dickie (1999) argue that managers who demonstrate values such as integrity, trust and justice become the most beneficial to an organisation in the long term. Palanski and Yammarino (2007:177-179) express similar sentiments, based on empirical studies. Hence, in this article, it is argued that managers who display these qualities should be considered critical for improving leadership.

Covey (1999:61,108) describes integrity as "honestly matching words and feelings with thoughts and actions, with no desire other than for the good of others", and Gardner (1993:33) uses a similar description. The concept has particular relevance to leaders, but, although many scholars have debated and continue to debate the leadership role of values in general and integrity in particular can play in leadership, few have attempted explore empirically what role integrity plays in leadership effectiveness (Palanski and Yammarino 2007:178).

Through its potential for improved effectiveness, integrity in leadership can contribute to the achievement of good governance. Good governance currently forms a critical component of the global agenda aimed at improving public sector performance, so it needs to be explored as a starting point for any interrogation of integrity and leadership and integrity leadership. Against this background, this article examines the principles of good governance and explores the synergy between good governance and leadership. Furthermore, the article identifies integrity leadership as a key to combatting the nature and extent of corruption in the South African public sector.

GOOD GOVERNANCE

In the 1980s, new institutions and network scholars reintroduced the construct of governance as part of the process of bringing the state back in (Evans, Rueschemeyer and Skocpol 1985). However, unlike in its previous forms, the concept was no longer primarily associated with the exercise of political power by governments (Kjaer 2004:3). Instead, governance came to refer to a process of decision-making in which sovereignty is distributed among governmental and non-governmental elements that participate in a political decision-making process that is not and cannot be controlled from the centre (Kooiman 2003; Krickert, Klinjn and Koppenjan 1997; Pierre and Peters 2000; Sorenson and Goethals 2006).

In the 1990s, governance came to mean almost everything in the sphere of the State and public domain, because scholars in the new institutionalist and network tradition define the term very broadly to refer to all stages of the dynamic processes of political decision-making. According to Kooiman (1993:2), governing describes "the activities of social, political and administrative actors that can be seen as purposeful efforts to guide, steer, control or manage (sectors or facets of) societies and governance is the pattern that results from these governing activities". March and Olsen (1995:6) define governance even more broadly as a process of setting, applying, and enforcing rules. This definition provided "common ground to all of the different perceptions of governance" (Kjaer 2004:14).

Rhodes (1996:653) in *The Oxford handbook of governance* distinguishes six uses of the term: the minimal state, corporate governance, New Public Management, good governance, a socio-cybernetic system, and self-organising networks.

Good governance is another term with many definitions and interpretations. According to the World Bank (2012:xii), the construct of good governance refers to a policy strategy that emphasises the roles of the political, administrative and economic values of legitimacy and efficiency in the functioning of the public sector (Kersbergen and Van Waarden 2004) . The World Bank (2012:17) prescribes a list of normative criteria relating to good governance to be fulfilled by countries that receive its aid. There are four dimensions of good governance,

namely, an efficient public service, an accountable administration, a reliable judicial system, and a balance between the government and those governed.

The rise of the term good governance follows the renewed scholarly interest in the state. Kaufmann, Kraay and Mastruzzi (2008:12-13) redefine the term more broadly as "traditions and institutions by which authority in a country is exercised" and they have identified six dimensions that are relevant: voice and accountability, political stability and the absence of violence, government effectiveness, regulatory quality, rule of law, and control of corruption. The role of leadership in good governance can be better understood by examining some of these principles.

PRINCIPLES OF GOOD GOVERNANCE

Voice and accountability imply that all managers in the public sector are "held responsible for carrying out a defined set of duties or tasks, and for conforming with rules and standards applicable to their posts" (OECD 2010:14). In this context, freedom of expression, freedom of association, and the free media are important in ensuring that people can participate in a meaningful way in the pursuit of truth, honesty and integrity (Kaufmann *et al.* 2008:21–22).

Effectiveness and efficiency are considered core features of good governance. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD 2010:13) defines effectiveness as the extent to which the previously stated objectives of an activity have been met. The World Bank (2012:7) attaches a different meaning to the term, as it operationalises government effectiveness through the quality of public services and whether a government is credibly committed to its policies. The World Bank requires governments to provide services that meet certain quality standards, and it refers to the importance of efficiency (World Bank 2012:8). The European Union (EU) and United Nations (UN) both emphasise the importance of effectiveness in combination with efficiency, based on clear objectives (European Commission 2011:3). To the UN (1997), this means that institutions produce results that meet the needs of society and make the best use of the resources at their disposal, including the sustainable use of natural resources and protection of the environment.

According to the EU, the OECD, the UN and leading scholars, openness and transparency are core elements of good governance. The EU applies the term "openness" to communicating to the public the decisions of EU institutions and national governments. The OECD (2010:28) proffers a similar definition:

> [T]ransparency refers to an environment in which the objectives of policy, its legal, institutional and economic framework, policy decisions and their rationale, data and information related to monetary and financial policies, and the terms of agencies' accountability are provided to the public in a comprehensive and accessible way to those who will be affected by decisions.

Rule of law is a principle listed by the OECD, the World Bank and the UN. The EU (2001) does not mention rule of law in its list of good governance criteria, but presupposes its presence in its *European governance – A White Paper*. The OECD (2010:20) stresses the importance of the rule of law but fails to provide a definition. The World Bank (2012:12) operationalises the rule of law broadly as the extent to which agents have confidence in

and abide by the rules of society, and in particular the quality of contract enforcement, the police, and the courts, as well as the likelihood of crime and violence. The UN (1997:27) argues that good governance requires an independent judiciary and an incorruptible police force that can enforce fair legal frameworks impartially. The law and the way it is upheld in a society have an impact on the political decision-making process and are therefore included in lists of good governance principles.

Good governance plays an important role in providing an enabling environment if the principles underpinning it are in place. In South Africa, there is some feedback on good governance, in that it is commented on as part of the development indicators, through the items Tax Returns, Audits, Corruption Perceptions, Budget Transparency, Public Opinion on Delivery of Basic Services and Ease of Doing Business (RSA 2010).

ETHICAL AND MORAL VALUES IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

Ethics and public service values are important elements comprising the "body and soul" of public administration (Menzel 2003:14). Accordingly, several scholars and practitioners have sought to identify and understand the ethical responsibility of public administrators. The literature, in addressing the moral and ethical obligations of public administrators, suggests that public sector obligations arise from three different realms, namely, respecting the processes that legitimate the actions of public officials, serving the public interest, and treating colleagues and subordinates with respect, honesty, integrity and fairness (Moore 1976; also cited in Cooper 2007:19).

Hart (1984) argues that public administration is a *moral endeavour* that requires special moral obligations and unique moral character. Similarly, Stewart (1995:488) notes that "the role of a public administrator carries a kind of moral weight not found in private sector counterpart roles". Dobel (1990:354) points out that "public officials need a complex array of moral resources to exercise discretion", and that adequate discretion by public officials "should be seen as an iterative process among three mutually supporting realms of judgement". Leaders in the public sector are expected to maintain a level of morality and integrity which serves the interests of society, and at the same time, to demonstrate personal responsibility, diplomacy and truthfulness.

INSTILLING ETHICAL VALUES IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR THROUGH AN INTEGRATED APPROACH TO LEADERSHIP

According to Antonakis, Cianciolo and Sternberg (2004:302), in leadership one can observe morality magnified, and this is why the study of ethics is fundamental to our understanding of leadership.

Understanding and maintaining ethical values in the public sector through an integrated approach to leadership is reflected in the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific's (UNESCAP's) model of good governance, which lists eight characteristics of good governance – it requires leaders to be accountable, transparent,

responsive, equitable and inclusive, effective and efficient, follow the rule of law, and be participatory and consensus-oriented (UNESCAP 2002).

Ethics can be defined as an internal set of moral codes and reasoning based on societal and prescriptive norms. Hence, ethical appropriateness with regard to leader-behaviour is often evaluated in terms of abstract and highly idealistic concepts regarding an individual's prescriptive beliefs of how leaders ought to behave (Maesschalck 2004:5).

In an era where high profile lapses in ethical and moral judgement by public sector leaders are frequently exposed, citizens have come to expect increasingly high standards of ethical conduct in a broad range of activities, displaying a synergy between leading and acting (Bowman 1990). Accordingly, citizens have become more assertive and demanding towards leaders in the public sector, showing less tolerance for leaders' mistakes and shortcomings, because they generally expect public leaders to conform to standards higher than those aligned with personal morality (Lewis 1991). Gawthrop (2005:241) suggests that "as international government systems become more commonplace, the responsibility for promoting the ethical-moral values of democracy rests more directly on the public managers and policymakers of democratic systems".

Goss (1996:573) argues, with good reason, that in the last two decades or so, there has been a deluge of works on the subject of ethics, particularly the ethics of those in government service. Numerous writers have identified ethical problems in government and have called for moral reform and the enactment of ethics, laws and codes, positing what the components of a bureaucratic and democratic ethos for public administration ought to be.

Applying ethics in leadership roles

Ethical behaviour often has a great deal to do with reconciling interests, with the moral principles behind the choices made in conflict situations. It requires a critical analysis and deliberation that leads to choosing one option over another. Although there are many approaches to making ethical choices, all essentially reflect on how choices shape us as being either good or bad, and whether an action we take will be harmful to someone or something (Van Aswegen and Engelbrecht 2009).

Wisdom of leadership

Trauffer, Bekker, Bocarnea and Winston (2010:23) describe leadership wisdom as a quality that can often save a sinking ship by redirecting it. It is too late for the captain of the boat, or the leader of the business, to retreat to consult the "know how" books once an unpredicted storm arrives.

Day (2000:123) suggests that effective leadership is about developing the self, which "requires an intelligent head and an intelligent heart". There is some agreement that both the head and heart are always connected to the experience of thinking (Smythe and Norton 2007:111), and that there is a need to explore the dimension of leadership that goes beyond "know how". Simpson and French (2006:249) argue that "leadership is evoked precisely in moments or situations where we do not know what we are doing, or where we are going, or how to get to where we want to be". Endres, Chowdhury and Milner (2009) require leaders to be decisive in situations that demand "swift and nimble action". Lawler (2005:227)

concludes that leadership is "inherently a chaotic, irrational, emotional phenomenon", while Pye (2005:47) aptly captures the need for flexibility, discernment and working in ambiguity by describing leadership as "sense-making in action".

Quality of Leadership

Bennis and Goldsmith (1997) in their seminal book *Learning to Read* describe four qualities of leadership that create and engender trust. These four qualities are vision, empathy, consistency and integrity. Leaders who are trusted demonstrate these four characteristics: they have vision for the organisation that is clear, attractive and attainable; they have unconditional empathy for those who live in the organisation; their positions are consistent, and their integrity is unquestionable.

Of the many leadership theories that exist today, there are a few that place significant emphasis on the type of people that leaders are, and the importance of character or elements thereof. One such theory is the Personal and Professional Leadership Perspective. Personal leadership begins with knowing where one stands now as a leader. Becoming a personal leader requires a person to become principle-centred and character-based, and to lead from the inside out (Covey 1999; De Braine and Verrier 2007:170).

Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee (2002) argue that effective leaders are emotionally intelligent. Furthermore, they argue that there is a neuro-scientific link between organisational success or failure and leadership, and that a leader's emotions are contagious. If a leader radiates energy and enthusiasm, an organisation thrives; if a leader spreads negativity and dissonance, it flounders.

THEORETICAL REVIEW OF INTEGRITY

Palanski and Yammarino (2007:171) found that there is no single unified, universally accepted definition of integrity, concluding that the "study of integrity suffers from three significant problems: too many definitions; too little theory and too few rigorous empirical studies. Integrity is supposed to be good for the organisation and to be an important trait of leaders (Kirkpatrick and Locke 1991; Kouzes and Posner 2002).

It is argued that people with high indices in integrity make excellent candidates for leadership positions, because they will not divert organisational resources, treat others unfairly or deceive themselves or others (Becker 1998). This is consistent with Badaracco and Ellsworth's (1990) earlier notion that value-driven leaders make decisions in line with the purported values of the organisation, and with Srivastva's (1988) emphasis on congruence, consistency, morality, universality and concern for others. It is also easier for them to convince others that they are worth following (Kouzes and Posner 2002), which in turn can lead to more innovation (Jassawalla and Sashittal 2002). Hence, it can be stated that leaders with integrity can influence others positively to facilitate desirable change.

Murphy (1999:27) argues that the five core virtues of integrity, fairness, trust, respect and empathy are especially relevant for the multicultural and multinational marketing context. Becker (1998) draws attention to the fact that the concept of integrity is generally treated as synonymous with honesty. Yukl and Van Fleet (1990:21) arrive at similar conclusions.

Kirkpatrick and Locke (1991) define integrity as correspondence between one's words and actions, a notion which Bekker (1998) defines as behavioural integrity, or how well people match their espoused values to their actual values.

Integrity and Leadership

Integrity is a concept commonly used within formal and informal discussions of leadership and organisational theory, but it is not clearly defined and understood (Rieke and Guastello 1995:47). For example, in the literature, words such as integrity, honesty and conscientiousness are often not differentiated and tend to be used as interchangeable terms. Indeed, Carter (1996:6) quips that integrity is a lot like the weather: everyone talks about it, but no one knows what to do about it. Nevertheless, integrity is a ubiquitous ideal in leadership: citizens clamour for it from politicians, employees desire it from their managers, religious faithful expect it from the clergy, and stockholders demand it from corporations.

Clearly scholarly interest in integrity is on the rise, but research in this area has thus far been limited by three primary problems, firstly, there is little agreement about the meaning of integrity; secondly, in spite of the popularity of the concept as a normative descriptor, there is actually little theory in existence about integrity in the management literature; and thirdly, there are relatively few empirical studies concerning integrity (Becker 1998; Parry and Proctor-Thomson 2002).

Domain of integrity

There is no dominant stream of integrity research in the field of leadership. Instead there appears to be a series of trickles. One of the possible reasons for this situation is the lack of clarity regarding the meaning or domain of integrity. The following groups of definitions muddy the waters:

- Integrity as wholeness
  Badaracco and Ellsworth (1990:29) define integrity as consisting of a manager's personal values, daily actions and basic organisational aims. Koehn (2005:132) goes as far as defining integrity as the precondition for being human. The use of the term integrity to denote wholeness conveys the idea that integrity is multi-faceted. When used in this way, integrity is almost a synonym for character.
- *Integrity as consistency of words and actions*
  An important aspect of integrity is a sense of consistency with regard to social behaviour. This concept has been operationalised by Simons (2002). When integrity is used in this manner, it is often assumed that words and actions remain stable and consistent across time and situations.
- *Integrity as consistency in adversity*
  Another aspect of integrity is unchanging behaviour in the face of adversity, temptation or challenge (Dusaka 2005; Paine 2005). Paine (2005:248) suggests that persons of integrity stand for something and remain steadfast when confronted with adversity or temptation. Likewise, Worden (2003:34) remarks that the hallmarks of integrity are a commitment to principled behaviour that is acted out in the face of adversity or

temptation at great cost to oneself. Carter (1996:23) points out that we admire those who stand up for their beliefs when they have something to lose.

- *Integrity as being true to oneself*

  This use of the term integrity is concerned with acting according to one's own conscience. It is related to the thought conveyed by the famous line in Shakespeare's tragedy *Hamlet*, "to thine own self be true". An example of this type of integrity could be an instance of a person choosing a profession on the basis of his or her desires and abilities instead of on the basis of pressure from another person, or of financial considerations alone.

- *Integrity as moral or ethical behaviour*

  Many authors relate integrity to a general conceptualisation of morality is some respect. The terms "ethics/ethical" and "morality/moral" generally refer to actions which are in accordance with socially acceptable behaviour. Some researchers have operationalised integrity as the absence of unethical behaviour. Badaracco and Ellsworth (1990:29) note that integrity suggests a sense of moral soundness.

INTEGRITY QUESTIONS AMONGST LEADERS

Some of the greatest leaders of history, regardless of their age, gender, race or platform, have one quality in common: absolute commitment to the principles they serve. Leaders with integrity are required to conduct themselves in a certain way through commitment to a code or standard of moral virtue, which prevents undesirable behaviour in thought, word or deed (Azuka 2009:11).

Consider the words of Nelson Mandela in 1963 as he faced charges of treason which carried a possible death penalty:

> 'During my lifetime I have dedicated myself to this struggle of the African people. I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination.
>
> 'I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony with equal opportunities.'
>
> He paused and looked at the judge: 'It is an ideal which I hope to live for and achieve.' Then, dropping his voice, he concluded: 'But, if need be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die.' (cited in Sampson 1999:192)

This portrayal of the belief and commitment to the public good for all clearly portrays the stature to which leadership can aspire and the need to connect the "head and heart". To be effective, a leader must understand and embrace a strong set of ethics, communicate them as a valued standard to colleagues and subordinates, and live by such standards (Azuka 2009:13).

Measuring integrity in leadership

Integrity develops out of repeated confirmation of self-worth and determination and is measured by one's actions. In essence, people with integrity are able to integrate the ethical leadership merits successfully into their daily transactions (Azuka 2009:13–14).

Integrity and transformation leadership

Most scholars consider integrity to be a requirement for ethical and effective leadership. It is a firm belief in good leadership that leaders should walk their ethical talk by living, and not merely verbally promoting, the organisation's value system and design. Leaders should personally demonstrate commitment and loyalty to the organisation by behaving and leading with integrity and by showing what it means to behave consistently and congruently with what they profess (Malan and Smit 2001:24).

Trustworthiness and integrity have been identified as essential aspects of effective transformational leaders (Palanski and Yammarino 2009:176). Leaders with integrity always encourage open and honest communication, particularly in discussions that concern decision-making.

CONCLUSION

After existing for centuries, governance has recently emerged as a salient concept. The principles of good governance serve as a catalyst to make us aware of the values that are considered important in any leadership setting. In this context, the desire to lead with fairness, justice and integrity requires a strong commitment to knowing oneself and to living in accordance with a clearly established set of core values and principles. Respecting one's self translates transcendently to showing respect to and for others. A leader must be flexible and open in numerous contexts so that the needs of the organisation can be effectively met, but integrity is not negotiable and must therefore be adopted as a way of life. Becoming a leader with a high level of integrity is a journey filled with challenges, errors and lessons, with rewards for the greater public good if this goal achieved, a legacy of good leadership that is grounded in integrity will have a lasting effect (Azuka 2009). Combining a solid foundation of ethics and integrity with flexibility in the face of challenges and problems is a key for leaders in facing the everyday problems of organisational life.

As a way forward, this article supports further research focused on good governance, leadership and integrity in the public sector.

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