

The Teabag of Trust

Ali Darwish, PhD
American University of Sharjah

"When you know a thing, to hold that you know it, and when you do not know a thing, to acknowledge that you do not know it—this is knowledge."—Confucius, Analects, bk. ii., c. xvii.)

When was the last time you counted the teabags in a teabag box? Probably never, but after reading on, a teabag box might never look the same again. In most things, we take at face value what companies, manufacturers and suppliers tell us their products are what they claim them to be. We never question their integrity or the trust we place in them or their products. Should we do for whatever reason; shattered trust can never be mended. Like companies, individuals build their reputations on their integrity and on the level of trust that is established between them and the people they deal with, and this goes for personal relationships as well as for professional and social relations. To establish trust, it takes an effort by both parties to show goodwill and to prove that they mean well—and to give each other the benefit of the doubt. Trust, however, is not something that can be promoted or stated. Trust no one who says, "Trust me" is an ancient wisdom. But if you do not trust anyone, no one will trust you. Yet trust is premised on integrity, without which it cannot be built. Simply put, you cannot trust someone with no integrity and be sure they will not violate your trust. Let us explore why.

Trust and integrity

As a prerequisite for trust, integrity has been defined as "adherence to moral and ethical principles; soundness of moral character; honesty".¹ In other words, integrity is consistency between one's actions and one's values and principles. A person with integrity is one who does not compromise his or her own virtue because of outside influences². So in addition to the elements of morality and ethics, we have the element of virtue. Each one of these elements: morality, ethics and virtue, is overloaded and requires a definition of its own. The question of what is ethical and what is not and whether one's actions being consistent with one's own definition of morality classifies one as having integrity, has been argued full circle elsewhere. In a world of relativism, it is often said that morality is relative to the person, situation and culture. Our social development defines our understanding of morality and informs our acquisition of the norms, standards and practices of society from childhood, reinforced all the way throughout adulthood. As Fletcher (1966) reminds us, moral decisions can be legalistic, antinomian (lawless or unprincipled) or situational, and all three approaches play their part in moral choices. Ethics on the other hand seek to establish impartial and impersonal universal laws about morality and to guide our actions, which could be obligatory, right (simply actions that are not wrong), forbidden (actions that are wrong), supererogatory (actions that are good

but not obligatory), suberogatory (actions that are bad but not forbidden), and permissible (actions that are morally acceptable).³

Indivisible whole

But integrity is an indivisible whole and one cannot have integrity in one situation and no integrity in another, no matter how small or trivial it might seem. Imagine the following situation. You are sitting in a departmental meeting unaware that your manager has been recording the meeting for the past thirty minutes. Suddenly, he announces to everyone in the room that he has been recording the meeting, claiming that he forgot to inform the attendees at the outset that he was going to record the meeting—an oversight on his part? Incensed, you vehemently protest that the meeting was being recorded without your informed consent. Defiantly, the manager puts it to the vote—after all this is the age of canned, imported and parachuted democracies—and your multinational colleagues with no exception vote in favour of recording the meeting. Apparently, most people would have no problem with their participation being recorded without their consent irrespective of their nationality or social and cultural backgrounds although they might be reluctant to leave a recorded telephone message. The principle of safety in numbers and balance of power seems to be in operation in these circumstances. But would you trust your manager again? Would you give him the benefit of the doubt or the doubt of the benefit of a flawed integrity? People seem to have become desensitized towards integrity, especially when individuals with no integrity are rewarded instead of punished for betraying the trust placed in them. No one wants to be the fall guy or the standard-bearer in a seemingly lost battle because institutionalized corruption drives people working within the system to uphold honour among thieves and to show solidarity and collegiality of a kind. Despite the claims of accountability and governance, people in the higher echelons of power invariably seek to cover up the follies of their subordinates who are only there to serve their interests and the interests of their superiors. Managers would invariably side with managers in the hierarchy of the organization and grievances are seen in this light of them and us bipolarity despite the claims of eliminating this organizational malaise in recent years. But a superior man, according to the Chinese philosopher Confucius, is a man of integrity; not a man of power. And if you don't have integrity, no other virtue that you may have matters. As Carter (1998) confirms, integrity is “a virtue without which the others have no meaning. Integrity helps us understand what is right and do it, even where there is a cost: if I have no integrity, there is no point in asking me what I stand for” (Carter, 1998, p. xii).

Integrity is intuitively understood as it is informed by the conscience, but it is rarely articulated. People provide definitions but no descriptions; and definitions are always changing in response to social changes. As Killinger (2007) rightly observes, very little has been written on integrity despite the fact that morality and ethics remain popular topics in recidivist postmodernity—where the world seems to have abandoned time-honoured ideals and values in favour of momentary living and

survival and have returned to a pre-civilized state, where torture and abuse are condoned and rationalized in the name of the greater good. In such a dishonest world, insensitivity, lack of decorum, incivility and pure belligerence reign supreme, backed up by litigation and clad with beguiling notions such as solidarity, collegiality and mentoring that maintain the balance of power for those who are already advantaged by dishonesty and lack of integrity. According to Killinger, integrity is the internal state of being that guides us towards making morally wise choices, contrasted with morality and ethics which are externally imposed values defined by socially agreed upon standards as serving the common good.⁴

The integrated self and dissonance

Integrity, as such, is about the integrated self; the consistency and continuity of one's psychological life. However, no one can be fully integrated with one's self—one cannot be fully integrated or completely lack integration because as Cox, La Caze, & Levine, (2003) contend, integrity is rooted in and thrives on conflict since without conflict of commitments, values and desires, to act as safeguards, there can be no integrity or questions concerning integrity. The conflict and quest for integration creates cognitive dissonance, which occurs when there is an irreconcilable mismatch between values and behaviour and when there is a direct threat to one's integrity due to this kind of irreconcilability. Cognitive dissonance is necessarily a temporary state of conflict within oneself between what has come to be known in western thinking as conscience—the instinctive or indoctrinated firewall that prevents social viruses from destroying the integrity of the self—and the person's behaviour that is inconsistent with his or her values as informed or dictated by his or her conscience. It may also be a state of conflict between one's first-order desires to do what is inconsistent with one's values and higher order desires to want not to do what is inconsistent with one's values.⁵ To eliminate or decrease the inconsistency that occurs between the knowledge a person holds as values and principles and his or her actions is to restore a healthy and harmonious state of cognition. In most situations, cognitive dissonance is eliminated or reduced by invoking the moral role—that is by appealing to a higher authority outside one's own purview, such as appealing to religion, law, or observed practice. In the preceding example of the departmental meeting recording, observed practice and work policy are evoked to justify the act of recording the meeting without consent. A further rationalization by senior management is that the practice is allowed on the grounds that it is aimed to help the note-taker with note-taking. So on the face of it, instead of addressing the competence issue of the individual, the organization's culture has been changed by allowing or reinforcing such practice to become the acceptable norm. These rationalizations lower the threshold of dissonance and make previously immoral or unethical acts acceptable norms and practices and subsequently erode the integrity of individuals who subscribe to these acts. In such a state, individuals with a low integrity threshold seek to reduce dissonance through changing their perception of the cause of dissonance rather than their behaviour that is inconsistent with their values and beliefs and by looking for examples and “role”

models—politicians, religious leaders, sportsmen, actors, celebrities—that can be used to justify and reconcile the inconsistency. What is good for one is good for another and the more accomplices and like-minds the easier it is to reconcile the dissonance. Former US President Bill Clinton's declaration at his televised impeachment trial "I had no sex with that woman!" sums it all up. To reduce the dissonance, the definition of the act may even be changed to accommodate the dissonant behaviour rather than accept that the behaviour is inconsistent with the conventional or accepted definition of the act. This happens all the time. The boundaries of definitions shift and overlap in order to reconcile the dissonance, whether at the level of the individual or the level of the legislator. The definitions of acts such as sex, fornication, adultery, treason, justice and the like become loose definitions relative to the situation. After all, in postmodernity, different people live in different realities. The dynamic nature of language owes so much to this human proclivity to reconcile the dissonance that exists between values and behaviour. Words continually change meanings and meanings expand to cater for this aspect of human development and social change. Indeed, the transformation process that words undergo from current to archaic and obsolete is in part due to this social phenomenon. Cognitive consistency is important for maintaining or restoring one's emotional and psychological equilibrium when confronted with conflict between two opposing or competing choices. Changing one's perception of the causes of dissonance by convincing oneself that the act is not inconsistent with one's held beliefs or values and, as alluded to earlier, by changing the definitions of the inconsistent act is a way to restore equilibrium at the expense of integrity, which for all intents and purposes, may be subjected to the same change of definition.

According to Kasulis (2002), integrity is impersonal in the sense of appealing to logical reasoning and empirical observation that can be verified by others. Integrity is also external in the sense of one being a discrete entity that is connected with other entities where the connection does not alter the state of the entity. Integrity is purely intellectual, purely conceptual, and open.⁶ In this sense, integrity is not influenced by emotions. It is rather rational appealing to the intellect. It is also transparent and unambiguous. You either have integrity or you don't. There is no middle ground. It is consistent across all human activities. One cannot have integrity in one situation and no integrity in another. Integrity is to act the same when no one is watching you except your own conscience. For example, in most countries, littering is against the law. If you have integrity, you do not observe the law only when the police are not around to enforce it or when you know it is safe to break the law. You observe the law even when no one is looking because your actions are informed and guided by your sense of integrity; by upholding the principles and values that you believe in and which are in agreement with most members of your society. Imagine the following teacher-student situation. At the end of a class, your students approach you and ask you to teach them in the next semester. You know who their teacher will be although it has not been announced. You diplomatically refer the students to the department head. A couple of days later the teacher who is supposed to teach the class the following semester receives an unsigned typed note

slipped under his office door telling him that the students want you to teach them and that you don't mind that. The note warns the teacher to watch out. It turns out that one of your students has written to the department head asking if you could teach the class next semester. No one knew who the teacher next semester was going to be except you, the department head and the other teacher. You never told the students who the teacher was going to be and the other teacher was not aware of the students' request. Where is the weakest link in the chain? A cloak and dagger approach to management is one "visible" sign of cracked integrity.

Doing the right thing for the right reason

Integrity is doing the right thing for the right reason, but when the real reason is disguised by rationalization and moral-rule justifications, the right reason becomes obfuscated and the naked truth is no longer naked. Imagine the following situation. Another department head sees you sitting with a colleague having lunch. He invites himself to join you and you welcome him. Knowing there are problems in your department, he inquires about the situation. When you and your colleague, having trusted him, start telling him about the things that are causing problems, he backs off claiming that he does not want to get involved in collegial gossip as it is unprofessional. The same person then goes to your department head and tells him about the conversation that has taken place. His behaviour exhibits inconsistency and lack of integrity, by setting you and your colleague up and leading you on to open up and then claiming it to be unprofessional to gossip about other colleagues and by selling you out to your own manager. Would you trust that person again?

Lack of integrity can be very serious and sometimes tragic. Imagine the following situation. A healthy middle-aged woman undergoes a routine laparoscopy for a suspected gallstone. During the procedure, the doctor inadvertently lacerates the hepatic artery; a major blood vessel in the liver. Realizing what he has done, he sends the patient home. Nine hours later, the woman dies of a massive internal haemorrhage. The doctor's lack of integrity did not compel him to do the right thing to try to save the woman, who trusted him with her life. Instead, too scared to face the consequences of his negligence, he sends her home to die. Lack of integrity can also be seen in the behaviour of managers recruiting or deciding the future of their employees. In the early 1990s, many companies faced financial difficulties in the recession that Australia had to have. One company began retrenching "surplus or redundant" employees, wave after wave over two years. In deciding who should go and who should stay, senior management began to draw a list of the employees who would be given the pink slip. Astonishingly, in at least one division, the criteria for firing employees had nothing to do with their competence or the company's need to retain employees with specific skills and knowledge to enable it to recover. Instead, looks, gender, getting along with other employees, and mateship were among the main selection criteria for giving employees the boot. Lack of integrity does not stop there. In a job interview, the interviewing manager at a large utilities company left the side door of his office ajar. In the adjacent room sat a former colleague of the

interviewee in another company listening to the conversation with the objective of confirming what the interviewee was saying during the interview. Managerial tactics of this unprofessional and unethical nature are practised all the time and are clear evidence of lack of integrity and dishonesty among managers from first line all the way to the top. These are senior managers who in public brag about core values, missions and visions for their companies.

As Carter (1996) points out, integrity is not the same as honesty although integrity is contingent on one displaying a measure of honesty. He contends that one can be honest without being integral since integrity demands a difficult process of discerning one's deepest understanding of right and wrong and further requires action consistent with one's realization of what is right and what is wrong. Honesty does not require consistent action with the knowledge one might hold.

Academic integrity

In a less insalubrious yet equally serious context, studies of academic integrity have so far focused on students and issues of plagiarism and dishonesty. Cheating in the classroom and examinations seems to be the sole interest of those who concern themselves with this aspect of academic life. But academic integrity, it can be argued, goes beyond the conduct of students in the classroom or in exams. It must also encompass the professional and academic conduct of faculty towards one another and towards their students and intellectual property in general. So in addition to the requirement of personal integrity, individuals who practice or profess an academic subject are also constrained by the integrity of their subject.⁷ However, there seems to be a prevalent assumption that teachers, especially those in higher education, are noble and honourable scholars who are above suspicion and reproach. They are a kind of unique breed of human beings who have integrity and honour. This may be so up to a certain point, but when we closely examine the conduct of these so-called scholars, we soon discover the fallibility of human beings and the myth of nobility and honour among scholars.

Plagiarism, or intellectual theft, is considered a shameful act that only students are prone to commit. That is why universities all over the world, those leading and those trailing behind, have anti-plagiarism policies to deter potential perpetrators and punish those who are actually caught red-handed. However, some of the recent threats to academic integrity arise from the immense financial and economic impact of scientific research and from the new ethical questions of modern scientific research.⁸ But competition and rivalry and claim to fame also drive academics to lose their integrity. Imagine the following situation. A doctoral researcher submits his dissertation for examination. The dissertation goes out to three examiners, all blind to the student. One examiner recommends awarding him the degree, another after minor changes and the third examiner fails the student outright. The university upholds the third examiner's recommendation and fails the student. On close examination, the third examiner turns out to be one whose work was critiqued by the student. Here is an open and shut case of conflict of interest. Yet the examiner

used her position of power to fail the student in order not to legitimize his criticism of her work. Conflict of interest is an area where integrity can be seriously tested yet not given enough attention. According to Kennedy-Glans, Schulz, & Schulz (2005), allegations of conflict of interest are not limited to corporate relationships with politicians, but extend to relationships between corporations and academia. However, the hidden face of conflict of interest is the relationship between academics, examiners and unsuspecting students as the preceding example illustrates. Breach of trust and abuse of power are often met with an indignant response on the part of universities in less than honourable and admirable solidarity that these are noble scholars who are above reproach or suspicion. But the fact is that teacher plagiarism and conflict of interest happens all the time, especially where politics are allowed to influence the teacher's attitudes and decisions.

To this end, let us define academic integrity as conduct consistent with a set of values that cover learning, teaching, research and service. In this light academic integrity is defined as a commitment to five core values: honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility.⁹ These values have been recognized as prerequisites for academic life to enable academic institutions to develop and flourish.¹⁰ Within the same context, integrity, collegiality, collaboration and professional solidarity are concepts that have been tossed into the fray of discussion. But these are as widely confused as they are invariably abused by the powers that be and those who benefit from the crumbs they drop. What passes as collegiality and collaboration often takes different forms¹¹; and therein lurks the potential of manipulation and abuse. "There is no such thing as real or true collaboration or collegiality".¹² Collegiality is supposed to bring people who share the same beliefs and ideologies together to work towards collective goals.¹³ And birds of a feather flock together. Imagine the following situation. Alison is an established, widely published multidisciplinary scholar. She joins a reputable university in one field, but her reputation precedes her. Bill, an insecure professor in a neighbouring department, insinuates to his subordinate, Henrietta, to review one of Alison's recent books. So Henrietta, who claims to have expertise in the subject-matter of the book, asks Alison for a review copy of the book and Alison unsuspectingly gives her a copy. On a couple of occasions, Henrietta indirectly discusses trivial aspects of the book with Alison, who doesn't give a second thought to Henrietta's passing remarks. A few weeks later, Alison bumps into Henrietta in the car park, and Henrietta, with a quivering lower lip, a sign of insecurity, dishonesty and deceit, tells her that the review has been written and submitted to the publisher. Why hasn't Henrietta shown or discussed the book review openly and directly with Alison? Usually, in the spirit of the so-called collegiality, scholars reviewing the work of colleagues within the same educational institution discuss aspects of the review with the colleague concerned, seek clarifications and check whether their review or comments are fair and whether the author is fairly represented. After all, it is the work that is being reviewed and not the author. But the assumption is that a bad book review can destroy an author's reputation or at least undermine her chances to get ahead at her own university. Communications with the author of the work to clarify certain issues or readings are

conventionally cited in the review to keep things above board. However, Henrietta's ulterior motive is to curry favours with Bill, her boss, who is seeking to undermine Alison through Henrietta's negative review and secretiveness. In this instance, collegiality and integrity have been compromised. But will Henrietta experience cognitive dissonance or some compunction for allowing herself to be a stooge or a patsy or will her own interests override any dissonance she might briefly experience? To reconcile the conflict that might arise from such an act, Henrietta will probably seek to elevate her act to a higher authority, which can be as simple as "the boss told me to do it"! But we all know the fate of the Nazi soldiers and officers who used a similar plea during the Nuremberg trials. Following orders does not relieve one from one's legal or ethical responsibility for one's actions that are in dissonance with acceptable norms of society. That is why in its global war on terror, the United States pre-emptively introduced legislation to protect its soldiers from any claims or accusations of war crimes. Moreover, if Henrietta's system of values has already been compromised, another fresh act of violation will not have any residual effects on her cognitive probity or low-threshold integrity, which is already compromised.

Academic institutions, such as higher education, are incestuously collegial institutions that run old boys' networks. Recruitments, favouritism and nepotism are rife in such institutions and competition is fierce. Buddies are appointed and promoted without the prerequisite qualifications. Take the story of a doctoral student who didn't have any experience as a teacher. On completing his degree, he was appointed as senior lecturer. Without previous teaching experience or practical professional experience—the adult student had been unemployed for a number of years, and without any major publications—this person became senior lecturer in a mysterious way. There are numerous similar examples. A journalist with a long experience is appointed as full professor without a PhD degree. Another one with only a BA is appointed as head of school. And yet another one jumps from senior lecturer to full professor with only half a book to his name. In Australia, the pattern of employment at universities has been to recruit from within the ranks of students, clones of teachers who are of dubious qualifications and equally suspect integrity or from a pool of friends and mates. Then you have the claim by these universities that they have received "a strong field of candidates", which leaves them unable to choose. But of course, there is nothing candid about some of these candidates; we all know that the position has already been earmarked for one of their cronies. As the popular Palestinian proverb says, "Our neighbourhood is too small and we all know each other", and the strong field of candidates is nothing but an illusion. In many situations, those recruiting new hires do not even meet the requirements of their own positions. Yet they are the ones who have the power to decide the outcome of applications, and no one can challenge them, and the whole animal body of the university gels together to support them. A typical response would be something like this: "After reviewing your application against the selection criteria, we regret to advise you that on this occasion your application has been unsuccessful." If not this time round, when will it be, and what selection criteria did the applicant not meet? And of course, they are so civilized as to give the applicant

their best wishes for the future and should they see another role advertised, they would welcome their application. But we all know it is just a load of nonsense. Certain universities have a certain racial profile for the incumbent they are seeking, if the position is not already earmarked—a profile that is assumed to attract students and inspire confidence. Even in the most multicultural societies such as Australia, those who do not fit that racial profile are automatically excluded from the process, and chances are that the applicant did not meet that particular unstated criterion. Certainly, there is no integrity in this case.

Of course, there is nothing wrong with hiring people with real experience and hands-on expertise to teach at university level. Otherwise, our teaching would be void of any real substance. But it is the lack of consistency that is questionable. Even within the same university, certain positions are ranked, requiring a PhD for example, while other similar positions across the floor are not ranked. What is the rationale behind this kind of inconsistency? There is none except to tailor the position requirements to the profile of the candidate or the person for whom the position is meant or earmarked in the first place. The recruiters have the ultimate say on who should be hired and who should not. Let's face it! Many incumbents of key positions at universities are of mediocre calibre—and they can only feel secure when the people they hire are either weaker than they are or are regarded as members of the same clique. A strong candidate or an outsider to the pack is immediately seen as a potential or real threat to their insecurities and is forthwith eliminated from the process. Dumb it down and you will be ok, is a comment by one university manager that tells it all. Employers want people who gel with the “team”, not people who stick out like a sore thumb and who highlight the ignorance and incompetence of their fellow “scholars”. Never outshine your master is law No 1 in the 48 Laws of Power.¹⁴ In fact, in most situations the overriding recruitment consideration is to hire people who work together as a team even if they are not exceptional or bright. “Teamwork” is more important and vital for the survival of the institution. And the blind shall lead the blind to the precipice. However, as Donald Cooper¹⁵ points out, we become the people we recruit. That is why those who recruit such people instinctively resist change by not hiring people who do not blend in with the “team” because change threatens their cosy setup. By nature, top performers want to effect change; that is their destiny; mediocre people don't, and that's their destiny too. And “if you hire mediocre people, they will hire mediocre people”¹⁶, to fulfil their destiny. But to dumb it down and turn a blind eye, so to speak, would violate one's own integrity. As Carter (1996) contends, to be honest is not enough and to protect one's integrity, it is necessary sometimes to get involved even if such involvement would mean making tough choices “to fight openly for what one believes to be true and right and good, even when there is risk to oneself. [...] morally committed citizens living integral lives must fight their way through life, strident activists in behalf of all their beliefs...” (Carter, Integrity, 1996, p. 11).

Where promotion is based on the number of publications a faculty member produces each year, the so-called contribution to knowledge is measured by successful submissions to so-called high-impact, peer-reviewed journals, where

networks of cronies with questionable integrity operate a “I scratch my back, I scratch yours” practice. Our contribution to knowledge is supposed to seek to improve the human condition and to make our lives and the future of our children and grandchildren better. But our scholarly endeavours will be meaningless if they are void of integrity. Scholars without integrity cannot improve the human condition; and no pursuit of knowledge void of honesty, veracity and fairness can redeem time-honoured values that have been abandoned. Solidarity derives from the sense of affiliation and belonging to a certain group. Professional solidarity is to stand united against external pressures that compromise the standards of the profession. However, running mafia-like operations to further the interests of cronies at the expense of real scholarly pursuits stands against the fundamental principles of scholarly work and the integrity of scholars. But what the heck is scholarly integrity anyway? In this kind of organized cronyism, we are bound to find the same names in the same journals with the same rehashed, regurgitated or recycled “scholarly” contribution to knowledge. In the words of one distinguished scholar commenting to me on another distinguished scholar’s work in the same field, the same thing has been recycled for the past thirty years. As Rovira & Orero (forthcoming) observe, there are few differences among various journals of their research corpus, and there is no significant variation over time. Their finding points to an incestuous, recycling phenomenon of knowledge. While most publishers claim they publish on merit, there is ample evidence that a great deal of high quality research is turned down by peer reviewers with no recourse by the author. The net result is that only the privileged few get their work published. A few years ago, I wrote a seminal paper on language acquisition of migrants in Australia. The publisher sent it out to two reviewers. One reviewer praised it to high heavens and one rubbished it. The sheer contrast between the two peer reviewers drove the editor to send it to a third reviewer, and eventually the paper was published. A couple of years later, one of the reviewers published a book on a topic closely related to the topic of my paper. Surprise! Surprise! The same story repeats itself. Peer reviewers seem to be endowed with supernatural wisdom and knowledge. A brilliant scholar in Arabic studies, specializing in the Omayyad era, submitted a paper on a scholar of that period to a peer-reviewed journal of Arabic and Islamic studies. Her paper was turned down on the account that the subject matter did not belong to the Omayyad era. Who decided that is only a matter of guessing, but competition and rivalry are fierce among peers.

I once sat in the office of a department head at an Australian university when he received a new book written by some writer, I can’t remember who. In a childlike manner, the first thing the department head did was to check the references section and the index. Pleased with his find, he turned the open book to another colleague and showed her that he was cited in the book—a pleasing and reassuring brownie point indeed that would earn him credit for future promotion to associate dean or dean or for securing a research grant or a conference trip. Supporting this observation, Rovira-Esteva & Orero, (forthcoming) contend that “the focus of research output these days seems to be restricted to getting articles published in

indexed journals and attending international conferences [...]. What seems to be a neat, tidy and accepted practice in the world of Science research has become a self-perpetuating hobbyhorse in the field of Humanities and Social Sciences". So as long as you are in the motion, the charade continues.

Dishonesty and lack of integrity in academia are not confined to publishing in selected journals. They are also found in the evaluation of research. If a researcher does not pose a threat to the established schools of thought and the general intellectual malaise, and if he or she does not deal with mainstream theories and paradigms, he or she will not be delayed, obstructed or failed. For example, if a researcher in humanities and social sciences examines the position of the dot over the letter (i), or some exotic feature in some "inferior" language or culture, no scholarly evaluators would object. But should he or she examine or critique mainstream theories, rest assured that his or her work would not see the light of day, especially if the research is regarded as belonging to a certain race or nationality. It is all right to be a scholar in trivialities that do not have any impact on mainstream schools of thought. Such is the integrity of scholars and scholarly assessors. And there are those lackeys who serve their masters loyally and obediently and who are willing to be their master's voice and instrument of bias and corruption. Of course, there are always exceptions, but they are just that. So long as dissertations are submitted to the examination process with the student's name revealed to the examiners, chances are that bias and prejudice towards the student will occur. Ironically, in the same way as peer-reviews are conducted for "high-impact" journals, a double-blind examination process should go a long way towards safeguarding the students against unscrupulous low-integrity examiners.

The other side of the coin is grade inflation to please the students, especially in institutions that place too much emphasis on students' feedback on teacher performance. As Carter (1996) confirms, grade inflation is not something new, and many a good professor inflates the grades of their students to "avoid the guilty feelings that honest grading might generate, as well as a fear of being disliked by the students, or perhaps simply a fear of arguing with them" (Carter, *Integrity*, 1996, p. 80). To err on the side of the student when in doubt has always been a good policy. However, grade inflation goes beyond making sure the student is not treated or assessed unfairly. When grade inflation is combined with low teaching standards it becomes a critically serious problem that could in the long run derail the educational programs of the institution. Not only does it impinge on the professor's integrity, but it also undermines the status and credibility of the institution and does the students and society the greatest disservice. The net result is that students graduate from these institutions with hardly any serious learning and assume critical leadership positions that in turn create environments of low-threshold integrity. This self-perpetuating phenomenon runs in a relentless, self-justifying vicious circle.

Integrity: the teabag of trust

To bring the matter full circle, without integrity, trust cannot be built, but for integrity to be instilled in individuals, a culture of trust must be created. Low-trust institutions are perfect environments for dishonesty, deceit, and exploitation and integrity cannot be confined to a glossy brochure or an information kit. Where there is no integrity, there is always corruption, for corruption is the opposite of integrity as Carter (1996) reminds us. And corruption is getting away with things we know to be wrong. Once it has kicked in, corruption is not only contagious but also as Carter describes it, corrosive, and no amount of advertising can disguise the disease that silently eats away the last remnants of integrity. As my late mother used to say, the more you vouch for your integrity, the less credible you will sound. Alarmingly, as Killinger (2007) points out, the critical period most relevant to integrity happens between the ages of six and ten years when children are at school and their earlier expectations and responsibilities change. During this period, she goes on quoting Jerome Kagan, children “learn to develop standards of rational thought and behaviour, autonomy, honesty, and responsibility” (Killinger, 2007, p. 29). It seems it is too late for those people depicted in the preceding examples and for those with no integrity or with low-threshold integrity—all beyond redemption. In such a dishonest mediocre world, would you count the teabags in your teabag box the next time you make a cup of tea?

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About the Author

Ali Darwish PhD, MIS, MA, is a Media, Communication and Translation consultant and scholar. He has taught translation theory and practice and communication studies at Australian universities for several years and has published a number of books on media, communication and translation. Ali has worked as a business process management consultant for a number of years, with 35 years in major organizations worldwide. He is also the founder and chief editor of Translation Watch Quarterly, Australia’s premier international refereed journal of translation studies.

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Notes

¹ Online dictionary.com

² Kasulis, 2002

³ Fletcher, 1966

⁴ Killinger, 2007

⁵ After Harry Frankfurt, 1984, 1987

⁶ Kasulis, 2002

⁷ Noble, 1999

⁸ Noble, 1999

⁹ Center for Academic Integrity,

http://www.academicintegrity.org/fundamental_values_project/index.php

¹⁰ http://www.umuc.edu/distance/odell/cip/vail/faculty/AI_overview/ai_overview.pdf

¹¹ Hargreaves, 2000

¹² Hargreaves, 2000, p. 186

¹³ Hardy, 1996

¹⁴ Robert Greene and Joost Elffers, 1998

¹⁵ http://www.donaldcooper.com/Downloads/v2/PDF/ART_We_become_what_we_hire.pdf

¹⁶ Tom Murphy.