

Katalin Pallai: Integrity and integrity management¹

The concept of integrity

Integrity means principled behaviour. In private life, integrity means that a person has conscious and consistent values that guide his or her decisions and actions.

Besides personal level, integrity can also be interpreted at the level of organisations, or even the entire public administration system. In this case, again, it means that **the given organisation is operating along the values and principles it has expressed. For the public sector, this should mean the principles of democracy, and for public administration bodies, integrity should also be linked to the organisational goals and principles defined by the founder.**

“As far as organisations and institutions are concerned, the key aspect is that an integrity-based organisation performs its tasks in line with its intended purpose, and is operated in a transparent, accountable, decent, ethical, faultless and invulnerable manner. The behaviour of the individuals is consistent with the values and goals that are being followed, and the organisations and their associates take all necessary steps to do their work in compliance with those values.

For public administration bodies, integrity means that the relevant institution complies with the objectives of public interest as determined in the law establishing the body concerned (performance of public tasks). Thus, public administration bodies are clearly distinguished from other market players by the fact that the fundamental question regarding their operation is whether they observe their intended social function. Questions of economy or efficiency can only be evaluated afterwards.” (Klotz–Sántha, 2013: 16)

A public administration body operated evidently in conformity with its declared values establishes the conditions for taking on challenges related to corruption, and its operation creates confidence among citizens and clients. That reasoning is the basis of one of the key working definitions of institutional integrity:

“Public or organisational integrity is the set of characteristics that justify trustworthiness and generate trust among stakeholders.” (Integrity Action, 2012: 15)

“For persons working in the public sector, integrity means that the conduct and behaviour of the employee is consistent, at the given place and time, with the organisational ethos surrounding him or her. In the case of state and local government employees, integrity

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obviously means, first of all, perfect assimilation to the values of public service. In this respect, the requirements are defined by the Constitution, laws relating to public service, internal organisational and ethical standards, job descriptions, and, ultimately, the prevailing expectations of society. Accordingly, values are definitely represented by the following:

- *appropriate professional competence,*
- *impartiality and objectivity,*
- *compliance with the law,*
- *moral integrity, and*
- *primacy of community interests over private ones.” (Klotz–Sántha, 2013: 15–6.)*

Compared to the earlier anti-corruption approach based on rules (laws, compliance, punishment and deterrence), a new characteristic feature of integrity management is that it directs attention to the importance of value-based elements, as well. That is, given that the rule-based approach in itself failed to deliver all expected results, the strength of the rules must be increased. However, this should be accomplished not only by creating further rules or imposing stricter sanctions but also by improving value and rule awareness. Some of the most important elements in integrity management are: a clear value base, establishment and awareness of common values of the organisation, a balance of the rule-based and the value-based approaches to corruption and integrity, and strengthening integrity by continuously analysing and eliminating the risks and incidences of corruption and integrity deficits within the organisation.

Integrity is more than merely the lack of corruption. Integrity means reliability and a clear value base that is trusted by stakeholders. The emphasis is on preventing, rather than sanctioning corruption, as well as on establishing a way of operation that is transparent and in which corruption prevention is a shared commitment of stakeholders.

Integrity provides clarity and certainty to citizens and other stakeholders, reassuring them that the whole of the public sector (the political and executive power) and the public servants linked to them are working for public purposes consistently and transparently.

Integrity management

At the organisational level, integrity management means processes, instruments and structures ensuring the integrity of the organisation; at the level of the entire public administration system it refers to a set of tools ensuring that the system is working for the public good.

Integrity management in the public sector is based on four pillars: accountability, ethics, competence and the exclusion of corruption:

- **Accountability** means that the system allows stakeholders to track whether an organisation is doing what it is supposed to do, and responds to legitimate internal and external expectations.
- **Competence** is the sum of all professional skills that enable the organisation to do a good job.
- **Ethics** means that the organisation performs its activities ethically.
- In the formula below, “- corr” stands for the **exclusion of corruption: doing without corruption/with corruption controls.**

“a” in the formula refers to alignment. This means that integrity is a “function” of accountability, competence and ethics.

$$I = a (A, C, E) - \text{corr}^2$$

The formula illustrates that, although integrity was defined as a combination of rule-based and value-based operations that minimizes the vulnerability to corruption, and we maintain our position that ethical operation is a must, it should also be noted that ethical and well regulated operation in itself is insufficient to serve the public good. Professional competence is of the same importance as ethics. The organisation must have all the competences required for professional and efficient operation. Transparency and accountability, on the other hand, refer to the social control that prevents the organisation from losing its original focus and goals.

Furthermore, it must be noted that integrity is not an absolute category that is either present or absent. All organisations have a certain degree of integrity, and there is no organisation with perfect integrity. While perfect integrity cannot be reasonably expected, it is a justified requirement for an organisation to strengthen its integrity proactively and continuously analyse the changing environment as well as any new challenges the organisation may face due to those changes. This continuous analysis, feedback and (organisation) development results in the cyclicity of integrity management processes.

Another characteristic feature of integrity management is that integrity is not necessarily built on the same way in every organisation. There is no universally applicable strategy for the improvement of integrity. At best, the fundamental elements of such strategies may be identical. **Each organisation must find its own way and the necessary steps to be taken for the optimal improvement of integrity.**

Strengthening integrity

There is no public administration body that operates perfectly. Each public institution has integrity deficits and is vulnerable to corruption. Ethical dilemmas may also arise from time to time during the work. Moreover, similarly to the way corruption phenomena are under constant change, the tools strengthening integrity must also change, responding to the shifts in corruption processes.

Strengthening an organisation’s integrity is not a one-time project but an ongoing process. It requires competency and expertise, the analysis of the risks of and vulnerabilities to corruption, and the development of tools, structures and processes that are capable of strengthening integrity. **In this system, transparency and accountability ensure that there is sufficient control and that confidence has a sound basis (i.e. it cannot be abused or misused).**

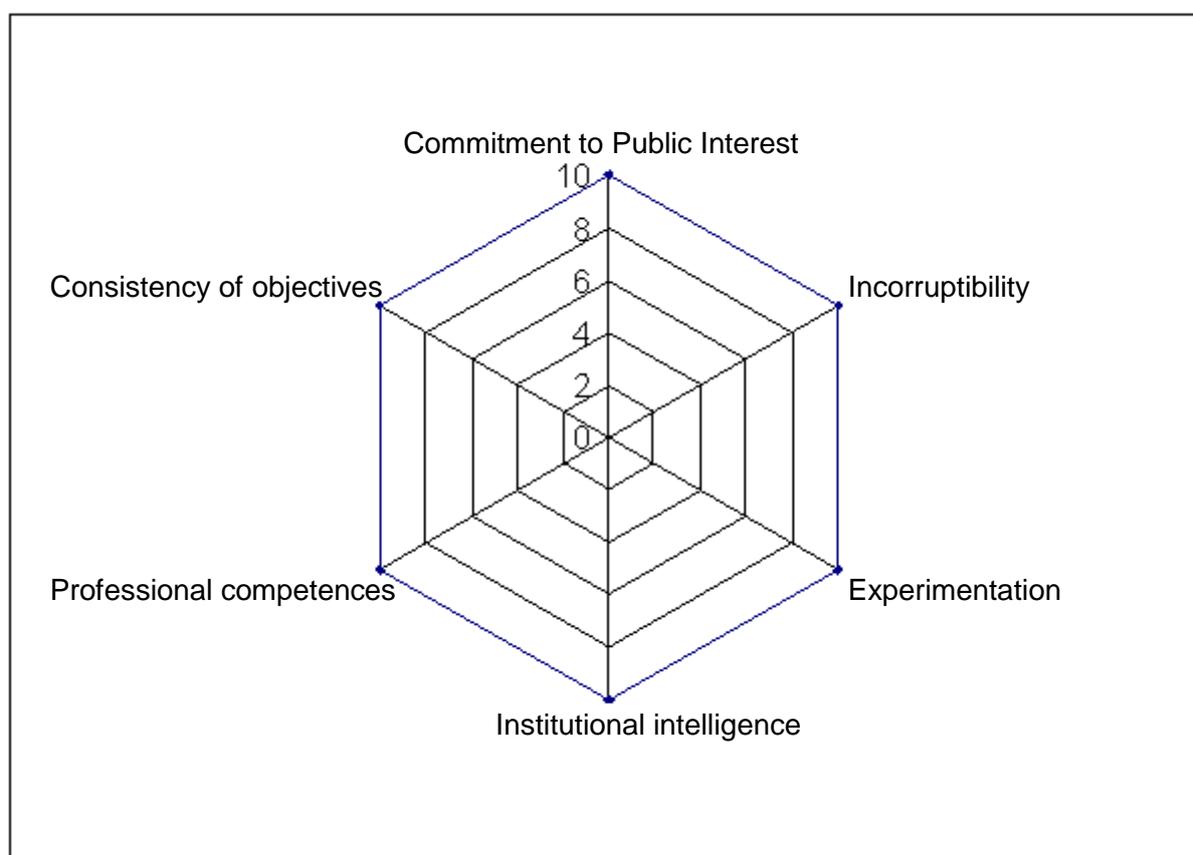
The competences necessary for the development of organisational integrity are summarised in the graph:

- **Commitment to public interest:** commitment to the service of the public interest and the clients.
- **Incunctibility** means that individual or group interests may never prevail over public goals.

² The formula was developed by Integrity Action

- **Consistency of objectives** means that the organisation and its members have developed a system in which the different organisational and individual goals and objectives are properly aligned with one another.
- **Professional competences** refer to the fact that, although integrity management is a comprehensive systematic approach, its practical implementation calls for technical competence and a high level of professional skills necessary for organisational activities and organisation development.
- **Experimentation and Innovation** as a competency is a part of integrity improvement because continuous development requires the establishment of a learning organisation and a kind of organisational openness and humility ensuring the constant analysis of risks and vulnerability, and the pursuit, testing and distribution of new solutions.
- **Institutional intelligence** is the sum of all competences that allow us to perceive and comprehend interdependencies in the operation of our organisation, to analyse the potential consequences of changes, and to create development strategies that are optimally suited to exploit the opportunities of the organisation.

Competences integrity-builder³



³ Scheme and term borrowed from Integrity Action