

## Personal and Corporate Integrity

### Reflections on a Grossly Misunderstood Builder and Destroyer of Worlds

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Why is it that integrity, like the whole topic of ethics, is becoming so highly challenging to attain and maintain in business life that managers either consciously or subconsciously try to avoid it?

Part of the answer may lie in the fact that they have not been given the education and the tools to address it; another part of the answer may lie in the trend towards digitalisation, evidence-basing and atomism in general which leave little room for non-quantifiable phenomena such as integrity; a further part may lie in the sheer and often underestimated complexity of what integrity means in today's world.

At the same time, journalists and individuals

who may wish to harm us seem to seek out the slightest potential infringements of integrity and ethics and report on them in a way which can cause very serious harm to the reputation of individual managers and their organisations, sometimes with fatal consequences.

In this and other articles, we hope to provide a series of insights which enables senior management in particular to address and resolve the increasingly complex challenges which integrity poses.

Starting with a case-study, we will then proceed to unravel various examples and then, in the second section, discuss how to resolve them.

The Chairwoman of the Supervisory Board could not control her temper when her brother, currently the company's CEO, came to tell her that he was going to give his own son a job in the Finance Department:

“Absolutely out of the question. Never, never, never. If you do that, John, then I will sell my part of the company and probably force the sale of all of it.”

John cowered, looking shocked and intimidated. He had expected some resistance from his sister, but not quite such an explosion of anger. As he often did in such situations with his sister, he deliberately went on the defensive and tried to appease:

“I have every right to employ Jimmy. As you know, he needs a job. He has finished his degree-course ... will probably get a very good grade this time around ... but no employer will take him due to his illness. Jane and I have talked it through with him ... it was his own idea, by the way, ... and the job would only be a low grade one in

the Finance Department. It is not a senior job, so it wouldn't affect our written agreement. By the way, my successor has already agreed to Jimmy getting the job. Come on, Susan. What's the matter? Just calm down and let's talk it through sensibly."

Susan repeated her original statement, with even greater emotion than before, and added:

"Look, John, I gave in to Mother, I let you take over the CEO function after my ten-year stint and I let you have your way with your ideas about the company vision and its strategy, not to mention your changes to our corporate culture. Now, we are losing more and more money every day. This would never have happened if Father hadn't died so early ... and Mother never was a businesswoman anyway. The annual turnover is now down to 350 million and we have made no profit for the last three years ... in other words, ever since you have been in charge. We are also just about to lose a very costly court case which you got us into and, now, you come with this ... the very last straw. Never, never, never."

She went to her office, got her car-keys and drove off, visibly fuming with rage.

Later that evening, Susan got a phone call from John, but ended the call as soon as she realised that he was still defending his right to give Jimmy a job in the company.

Susan's husband, Stephen, asked her what the phone-call was all about and, over dinner, succeeded in getting her to change her mind about Jimmy. Neither of them liked Jimmy as a person, both had serious doubts about his ability to work and concentrate for long periods of time. They also doubted that he could get significantly better grades in his university exams than he did the year before. A key issue for them both was the danger of Jimmy ruining the reputation of the family within the organisation if he were to work there, even though he was a highly intelligent young man. Having always had qualms about John's astuteness for business, his managerial style and "where on earth he had been leading the company for the past three years", Susan was concerned that, if Jimmy was given the position, he could feed financial and other sensitive information back to his father following his departure as CEO, which would be in two months' time. Most of all, she feared that John might try to interfere in her own strategic guidance and management of the new CEO. The latter was not an analytic, administrator-type like John, but someone who was reported to have an excellent track record as an entrepreneurial leader. This is what Susan had realised the company needed, someone much more like herself, and this was her principal reason for selecting him. In Susan's mind, John's strategy which had been focussing on solar-power technology and aimed to radically down-size their traditional core business in hydraulic pumps needed to be reversed as soon as possible. Despite the gravity of these concerns, Susan slowly came around to the idea that, since it was a family company after all, and since John had mandated their own son, Sammy, with some considerable consultancy work for the company, she should be fair and considerate towards her nephew, particularly because of his unfortunate psychological condition. She agreed with Stephen that integrity should come first and that, with immediate effect, she should stop trying to veto Jimmy's appointment. Susan phoned John the same evening to inform him of her change of mind in the interests of the family.

When John told Jane, his wife, and Jimmy about Susan's change of mind, they both smiled and expressed their gratitude.

Neither Jimmy nor Jane had the courage to admit that they had met up with Susan's husband, Stephen, in town for a coffee that afternoon: they had explained to him how desperately Jimmy needed a job in order to reduce the financial burden which his years of study had been causing and, most of all, to pay off several large debts to various friends and colleagues, debts which he had apparently been hiding from his father.

In this case-study, which has only slightly been adapted from a real-life situation, we can see how a manager is faced with the dilemma of either crossing some ethical red-lines in order to safeguard corporate integrity and, in so doing, jeopardising her personal integrity or, alternatively, putting her personal and family integrity first and thus jeopardising the integrity of the organisation.

As with 'neutrality' which we have discussed elsewhere, one of the challenges for anyone who seeks and needs to be a role-model of integrity is that the beholder is the one who will make the decisive judgement, not the one being observed. 'Integrity' is a perception through the eye of the beholder or, more accurately, a moral value-judgement which is generated by one or more observers based on what it is that they interpret – or choose to interpret – to be the motives behind the observed behaviour and the extent to which these interpreted motives are aligned with the observers' own pertaining understandings of what is ethical behaviour and what is not. In the case-study, we read that

*'John cowered ... As he often did in such situations with his sister, he deliberately went on the defensive ...'*

If we were Susan and we were aware that John often behaved in this way, we could possibly interpret there to be a motive of emotional manipulation behind his behaviour. Such an interpretation could lead us (as 'observers' of this record of the events) to question John's integrity since manipulative intent is regarded by many of us as being unethical<sup>1</sup>. Confronted with what we have interpreted to be emotional manipulation, might we ourselves then – in Susan's position – remain true to our own feelings and burst out in anger? If we were to do so, we would not fall into the integrity trap ourselves, i.e. we would not compromise our personal integrity by yielding to John's submissive behaviour and by adapting our own behaviour to his. Or might we be equally manipulative, even towards our very selves, by repressing our natural emotions and by trying to be perceived by anyone watching us as a role-model for calm, collected, professional behaviour? In this case, we, too, would end up in the integrity trap since we, like John, could be deemed by an observer to be guilty of consciously manipulative behaviour. Under these circumstances, both we and John could regard each other's motives to be manipulative and, therefore, lacking in integrity<sup>2</sup> which, in turn, could lead to even more complex dynamics

<sup>1</sup> Other observers, for example of Machiavellian disposition, may find no ethical fault in behaviour which appears to be aimed at generating a personal advantage.

<sup>2</sup> Unless both we and John share an understanding of integrity which allows us both to behave manipulatively, i.e. without our integrity being perceived by our counterpart as violated, while perceiving our own behaviour as being manipulative.

than the case-study currently suggests – dynamics which are not uncommon in everyday business and private life.

As the case-study unfolds, we read Susan saying

*“Look, John, I gave in to Mother, I let you take over the CEO function after my ten-year stint and I let you have your way with your ideas about the company vision and its strategy, not to mention your changes to our corporate culture.”*

In these lines, we can interpret that, several years ago, Susan had quite probably consciously behaved in such a way as to be regarded by her mother as behaving with integrity – i.e. behaving with loyalty towards her family and her brother – but that, in all truth, she was aware that she had acted against her own inner conviction of what constitutes ethical behaviour which would constitute a breach of her personal integrity. Thus, we would interpret her motives to be such that she had consciously jeopardised the company’s successful track-record, the livelihoods of its employees, the well-being of its clients and suppliers in allowing her brother to take over and change the company’s course: moreover, she had knowingly harmed the company’s corporate integrity by allowing a strategy to be implemented which lacked alignment between her own strategic convictions and those of her brother in their respective corporate functions.

Whilst, as is often the case in everyday business-life, the reasons for the company’s negative trends could be portrayed to be outside Susan’s or John’s field of influence, we, as observers of Susan, might easily come to the value-judgement that, as Chairwoman of the Board,

- a. her personal motives were not aligned with her functional responsibility to safeguard the company’s corporate integrity,  
and/or
- b. she had lacked personal integrity in veering from her inner conviction and in acting nepotistically at the expense of the company  
or, at best,
- c. she had acted with misguided integrity from any or all of these viewpoints.

With further reflection and a little creative speculation, we could consider the possibility that John’s new strategy might have been much in-line with market developments, i.e. he had realised

- that his father’s original strategy and product-lines had no future

and

- that a change was crucial for the company’s success, even though it might need some time to complete the change process and reap the benefits.

In such a case, we could lead ourselves to question the integrity of Susan’s motives in consciously undoing John’s intended re-orientation of the company i.e. undoing his re-alignment of its ‘central pillars’ and *modi operandi* – including, possibly, changes to the four pillars of ethics, culture, vision and strategy and their alignment

- ‘merely’ because of her own loyalty to her father’s legacy
- or
- in an attempt to restore her personal integrity in the eyes of observers who were cognisant of her inner convictions.

Such speculation could lead us once again to an interpretation of misguided integrity on the part of Susan on several counts.

A further aspect of integrity which can be seen to manifest itself at this point is that of untouched-ness, or ‘purity’. Whether we are referring to a human being, to an organisation, to some other organism, to a material object, to a thought or to what is termed ‘intellectual property’, there is an understanding of integrity in certain ethical contexts which requires their ‘being’ to be pure, i.e. not to be touched or tainted, at least without explicit willing consent by the relevant party and assuming that such consent is based on that party’s possession of and/or access to the appropriate power of judgement. Once their original pristine state, their purity, is deemed to have been illegitimately touched, i.e. not respected, then their integrity can be regarded as having been violated and, consequently, as being lost – possibly irretrievably so. In the case-study above, the company’s integrity – in this particular sense of the term – could be deemed to have been violated if changes were interpreted to have been made without the willing consent of, at least, the proprietors (see below). Whilst we do not have enough information to discern who are even the factual owners of the company under discussion, certain sets of assumptions would allow us, as observers, to judge the changes which were implemented (or intended) by John, by Susan – or by both – as violations of the company’s corporate integrity. The assumptions which would need to be validated for such a judgement to be made would necessarily include, of course, not only factors such as the distribution of shares at the ownership level of the company, but also the cultural and ethical nature of the relation between the ownership, the supervisory board, the executive management and the institutionalised role-

understandings and codes of behaviour within the company. For example, is the culture a hierarchical one or do all the employees share the same status of stakeholdership as the proprietors and thereby need to give their willing consent to any fundamental changes? Does the corporate culture allow for the son of one of the owners to come in as a consultant and impact on the changes? For more detailed treatments of the latter topics, the interested reader is referred to previous articles.

The next section of the case-study allows us to make value-judgements about the integrity of Susan and her husband. What were the motives behind Susan’s emotional outbursts? Why did she reject John’s idea of employing Jimmy? Were they an attempt on her part to restore both her own personal integrity and the corporate integrity of the company? This latter interpretation would certainly be arguable if we were to interpret her motives as consciously acting with resolve, remaining true to her inner convictions, eradicating nepotism, restoring the company’s corporate integrity and reputation and putting the interests of the employees and suppliers above those of her family, of her brother and of her nephew.

However, following the emotional outbursts, she seems to have allowed herself to be convinced by Stephen that the ethically correct thing to do would be

- a. not only to put Jimmy’s infliction above her personal convictions but also
- b. to act fairly in the light of the fact that John had given their own son, Sammy, a mandate to work for the company.

In Stephen’s eyes, integrity would be violated, not by what could be seen by others as a motive of nepotism, but by his wife failing

to act with sufficient sympathy, empathy and fairness; integrity for him is interpretably not about corporate success, but about acting with compassion. Possibly, Stephen is less sensitised to the differentiation between personal and corporate integrity and to the challenges of harmonising them than his wife. This would, in turn, make Susan's integrity dilemma even more complex since she may feel that her primary loyalty must lie with her husband rather than the organisation. Of course, if she were to unite with her husband's understanding of integrity, we are left – when viewed from a corporate perspective – with little option but to interpret that she has fallen back into the misguided integrity trap. Furthermore, her behaviour in switching from an outright emotional rejection of Jimmy to an expression of compassionate acceptance towards him and her brother can be regarded as inconsistent over time – and thereby as impairing her integrity once more.

At this juncture, we propose that the inner wrestlings which managers undergo in constantly trying 'to be seen to be doing the right thing' by people at work and at home consume amounts of mental and emotional energy which can be grossly underestimated. How does one, as a manager, remain constantly true to oneself in a social environment where one's integrity is decided by other people? As expounded elsewhere, ethical dissonance can make us seriously ill – and even lead to suicide – which, in itself, illustrates that ethical compromise is both an inherently contradictory term and, depending on the degree of dissonance, an unsustainable mental state.

Returning to the story, it ends with an interesting twist and heightened complexity concerning Susan's task of safeguarding both personal and corporate integrity. The formulation of the text leaves us, as readers /

observers, with certain options and plenty of scope for interpretation based on our personal experience and ethics.

When we consider the way in which Stephen behaved towards his own wife, we may lead ourselves to question his personal integrity. He seems not have been honest with her. Was this possibly out of sympathy towards Jimmy? Did he have compassion for Jimmy because he was afraid of his father? Was John a 'control freak' who left Jimmy no personal space and was Susan just as much a control freak as her brother and perhaps her father?

Then, we can lead ourselves to question John's wife's integrity towards her own husband. Is she being equally dishonest, for similar reasons?

Also, we can make interpretations about Jimmy's motives and question the integrity in his behaviour and motives towards his father. What sort of person must he be to hide his debts from his father, but nevertheless press him for a job in the company – knowing full well that he will not be able to perform in an adequate form and that he will thereby undermine his father's standing?

Perhaps we can lead ourselves to speculate about the integrity of John's motives towards his son, Jimmy, by allowing him to take on a function which could well expose his illness and weaknesses?

To conclude our reflections on integrity so far, we, as readers/observers, have some potential choices to make. Should we excuse lacking or misguided integrity, should we condemn it or should we condone it. Should we address integrity in all its facets proactively or should we circumvent it? There is also the issue of how we can remain true to ourselves when the integrity of our behaviour and motives is decided by other people.

Further, how should we undertake change which we deem to be necessary in the interests of an organisation's sustainability and resilience and, at the same time, safeguard both the purity facet of its corporate integrity and that of the alignment of any changes to its ethics, culture, vision and strategy? Finally, how can we prevent others from using the 'integrity argument' as a weapon against us, as is so often done in the worlds of business, politics and social life to dismantle the reputation of individuals and organisations?

A facet of integrity and ethics which does not manifest itself in the case-study but is equally important for addressing some of the central questions raised above, is that of hypocrisy. For many of us, condemning, excusing or approving the behaviour of others seems to come easily: our ethical competence enables us to make value judgements very quickly concerning what we interpret to be the motives which lie behind other people's behaviour. The value judgements which we make and feel most strongly about tend to stem from ethical values which we have internalised at a level which we term 'deep-ethics' and which have become part of how we define ourselves.

For example, when we read the following paragraph:

*'Neither Jimmy nor Jane had the courage to admit that they had met up with Susan's husband, Stephen, in town for a coffee that afternoon: they had explained to him how desperately Jimmy needed a job in order to reduce the financial burden which his years of study had been causing and, most*

*of all, to pay off several large debts to various friends and colleagues, debts which he had apparently been hiding from his father.'*

some of us might very quickly generate thoughts along the following lines

*How can Jimmy and Jane not have the courage to do the right thing? ...*

*This is downright cowardly and manipulative on top!*

*And Jimmy surely must have a bad conscience because of the fact that he kept his debts secret from his father ... surely there is some sinister reason for doing so.*

Thoughts such as these could be closely linked to an inner, self-defining conviction such as

*I would never do such a thing myself.*

The latter could well be true, of course – until, one day, we were to find ourselves in a situation in which we feel it wiser to keep a seemingly insignificant secret in order to spare someone else significant pain or embarrassment. If we were to be found out and challenged about keeping that secret, we might argue inside our mind that

*It was, of course, a particular situation which was totally different from normal ones<sup>3</sup>.*

If necessary, we might try to circumvent or justify the inherent hypocrisy in as credible a manner as possible to the person who was challenging us in order to prove our ethical competence and thereby our integrity. We

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<sup>3</sup> Depending on the situation at hand, we may feel different ethical values to be conflicting with one another, e.g. whether to unwaveringly tell the truth or to avoid causing someone pain at all costs. Sometimes, such an ethical conflict can be resolved in the blink of an eye by unconsciously referring to an internalised hierarchy of ethical values which indicates the right choice; in other cases, multiple systems of such values may be at play and result in a veritable ethical dilemma.

might also attempt to apologise or explain why our behaviour was inconsistent with what we had done or said previously since a perceived lack of congruence over time in our behaviour can be interpreted as an expression of divergent and/or possibly insincere motives, which can consequently impair our reliability and trustworthiness – and consequently, in many, if not all, ethical contexts, our integrity.

Negative value-judgements such as ‘inconsistent behaviour’, ‘misguided integrity’, ‘a lack of alignment of corporate pillars or mod operandi’, ‘violated purity’, ‘hypocrisy’ as also ‘cynicism’ reveal, of course, why it is crucial to us that those in positions of particular responsibility are perceived to act with integrity, i.e. because of our need for reliability, predictability, trustworthiness and conformity with our own expectations and values. These characteristics are essential for people in virtually all walks of life, including senior managers, who are expected to be ethical role-models at all times – and not least in times of widespread turmoil and distress. Reliability, predictability and trustworthiness are characteristics which, like integrity, allow little tolerance. They are virtually incompatible with ‘greyness’: a manager is either reliable or not, is predictable or not, is trustworthy or not, has integrity or not.

However, alongside the expectations which we have of managers, there is also a reality which probably few people have been educated to integrate into their minds and emotions. It is this reality which causes energy-consuming ethical dissonance and tension within and between people, namely that the world inside and outside us is not mono-ethical – and has not been so for hundreds, if not thousands, of years. Conditioned, as we are, however, to think and behave mono-ethically, i.e. with a high level of ethical

competence, we categorise certain types of thoughts, behaviour and motives as being either ethical or unethical. This has the consequence that if the motives which beholders interpret to underlie our behaviour are

- not ethically aligned among themselves, i.e. are incongruent, e.g. hypocritical, and/or
- not aligned with the beholders’ own ethics and/or expectations

then our integrity will, with a high degree of likelihood, be impaired.

Reasons for the fact that we are mono-ethically conditioned are expounded elsewhere, but, in general terms, we can recognise

- a sense and purpose in that mono-ethically offers reliability, predictability, trustworthiness and certainty to those who have been conditioned to need it, and
- that the above definition of the concept of integrity is a product of that conditioning.

In beginning to recognise the veritableness of the multi-ethicality which pertains inside us and around us, we gain the possibility to slowly escape from some of the mental and emotional confines which the conditioning of mono-ethicality necessarily creates. We will then become aware that a concept like ‘hypocrisy’ – as we have known it until now – gradually loses its meaning as we cease to judge ethically diverse behaviour through the lens of mono-ethicality. The same applies to ‘sarcasm’, ‘cynicism’, ‘double standards’ as well as to ‘integrity’ and to what we have termed ‘misguided integrity’.

Whilst it is cognitively relatively easy to understand that the challenges which arise from

the mono-ethical concept of integrity can be overcome, or indeed avoided, through recognising multi-ethicality, the internalisation of that recognition can represent a new and significant challenge. The process of internalisation involves and necessitates a development of our interethical competence. This competence enables us to function or mediate at the interface between differing ethical standpoints without experiencing or expressing any personal, mental or emotional resonance or dissonance with any of the pertaining standpoints<sup>4</sup>. In developing our interethical competence, our ethical neutrality will also unfold, thus gradually eradicating a core element of our self-understanding hitherto and dissolving our need for the form of certainty which mono-ethicality has been providing. Vivid examples of a person who enabled herself to function outside the bounds of certainty, at the interface between ethical standpoints, are to be found in the memoirs of Gisela Perl. An incarcerated Jewish gynaecologist in Auschwitz from 1944 to 1945, she describes how she carried out the medical operations and tasks demanded of her by Josef Mengele and in parallel terminated the lives of born and unborn babies while momentarily saving the lives of their mothers<sup>5</sup>. Conceivably, she found herself at the interface between conflicting ethical standpoints, such as the following:

- to murder a human being is a preordained, absolute moral wrong
- to murder a human being is legitimisable contingent upon one's own assessment of the pertaining circumstances.

The practical dealings of the authors in helping people to recognise differing ethical standpoints in various situations and develop their interethical competence have shown that most people will reach a limitation point which is defined by what we term their deep-ethics, i.e. the set of ethical values which are and need to remain immutable. The fact that Gisela Perl later tried to commit suicide may be an indication that she, too, could not come to terms with the violation of her own deep-ethics.

A present-day vivid example is that of the public prosecutor, Nicola Gratteri, in Calabria in Italy who has so dedicated himself to bringing the Mafia group known as the 'Ndranghetta to justice that his life has had to be closely protected by the police and personal bodyguards since 1989. From a telephone interview with the Financial Times<sup>6</sup>, he is quoted as saying

*I don't know the city where I live. I can't have normal relationships with people. I can't go to the cinema. I can't go for a walk or go to the beach six kilometres from my house. I leave in the morning, I eat in the office in the same room and go home.*

The author of the article continues:

*Gratteri's dedication has made him increasingly well known across Italy. Yet he lives out each day in the knowledge that death is stalking him.*

Ironically, the 'Ndranghetta have reportedly also been 'stalking death' in Calabria by anticipating the death of COVID-19 victims and

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<sup>4</sup> As we have discussed this matter in other articles as also that, in our understanding, neither interethical nor intercultural competence are to be equated with any form relativism, we refer the interested reader to those articles rather than repeating or further elaborating at this point.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Gisela Perl, *I was a doctor in Auschwitz*, International Universities Press, New York, 1948.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Miles Johnson (2020), *How the Mafia infiltrated Italy's hospitals and laundered the profits globally*, Financial Times, 9<sup>th</sup> July 2020 [online]. Accessible at <https://on.ft.com/2ZQFxCCL> (accessed on 10<sup>th</sup> July 2020).

pressurising relatives into using certain funeral companies by virtue of their infiltration of the hospitals and indeed the whole health system in the region.

In an interview given to [freepressonline.it](https://www.freepressonline.it)<sup>7</sup>, a local newspaper of Catania, Gratteri portrays himself to be acting in a world beyond ethical dilemma. The interested reader is recommended to read the article in its entirety.

To what extent a shareholder activist fund called Voce Capital Management finds itself beyond ethical dilemma is not clear from the information available in a report by the Financial Times<sup>8</sup> concerning Mark Watson, the Chief Executive of specialist insurer Argo Group. In a letter, Voce Capital Management writes as follows concerning Mark Watson:

*“His tastes in art, architecture, racing, yachting and luxury travel, among other things, are well documented, and he appears to be quite the bon vivant ... But we're deeply*

*concerned that Mr Watson's hobbies, pet projects and the cult of personality he apparently wishes to create for himself have commandeered and corrupted Argo's priorities.”*

Following the activist's initiative, the company was investigated by the Securities and Exchange Commission and Mark Watson was removed from office. Such attacks on the integrity of managers and their employers can raise the question as to the ethics behind the motives of those making the attack. In the case of a shareholder activist, one might speculate that the motives are driven by self-gain and the enhancement of self-reputation, i.e. what might be termed 'hypocritical' denigration of the integrity of others. In the case at hand, we have no information about the pertaining ethics behind the motives of Mark Watson, Daniel Plants, the founder of Voce, or their respective organisations.

A similar situation presents itself in our original case study:

A few days later and to everyone's surprise, Sammy wrote a strongly worded letter to both John and Susan declining any further mandates with the company after meeting with the new CEO on his own initiative and without any prior discussion with anyone else. In his letter, he writes:

*Having done extensive research into his professional and personal background and having found out that this 'very experienced entrepreneurial leader' has no successful track record at all; he has deliberately not declared certain very sensitive parts of his occupational history in his CV. Also, he is described by some people who know him privately as a narcissistic conman with absolutely no integrity. Well, I can confirm all of these points and, more seriously still, I have lost complete confidence in the way the family company is now being managed.*

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Orazio Vasta, *Chi è Nicola Gratteri, il magistrato a cui Napolitano impedi' di diventare Ministro della Giustizia*, [freepressonline.it](https://www.freepressonline.it), 26<sup>th</sup> December 2019 [online]. Accessible at <https://www.freepressonline.it/2019/12/26/chi-e-nicola-gratteri-il-magistrato-a-cui-napolitano-impedi-di-diventare-ministro-della-giustizia/> (accessed on 10<sup>th</sup> July 2020).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Sujeet Indap, *Argo affair is a warning for CEOs enjoying lavish perks*, Financial Times, 10<sup>th</sup> July 2020 [online]. Accessible at <https://on.ft.com/2W2wZaX> (accessed on 10<sup>th</sup> July 2020).

and again, we can only speculate on the ethics behind Sammy's attack on the integrity of his mother, his uncle, the aspirant CEO, as indeed that of the family company.

It is clear, however, that the use of the integrity-weapon can be highly destructive, and, is in itself an indicator of the ethics of both the attacker and the attacked. In some cases, the ethical systems of each party may be strongly dissonant and in other cases very similar. Equally clear is that a high level of the form of empathy which is concomitant with inter-ethical competence is required to even begin to address what is arguably one of the most powerful instruments of mono-ethicality. Assuming that 'attackers' such as Sammy do not possess such empathy since they would otherwise not use the integrity argument in a destructive manner, then it is only the attacked parties which, in such cases, could potentially minimise any damage to their public and private standing and their relations with the attacker. In reality, of course, damage to a party's public and private standing is very difficult, if not impossible, to reverse.

Referring back to the questions of

1. whether we should excuse, condemn or even approve lacking or 'misguided integrity', 'inconsistent behaviour', a 'lack of alignment of corporate pillars or modi operandi', 'violated purity' and 'hypocrisy'
2. whether we should address integrity in all its aspects proactively or circumvent it
3. how we can remain true to ourselves when the integrity of our behaviour and motives is decided by other people

4. how we should undertake change which we deem to be necessary in the interests of an organisation's sustainability and resilience and, at the same time, safeguard both the purity facet of its corporate integrity and that of the alignment of any changes to its ethics, culture, vision and strategy
5. how we can prevent others from using the 'integrity argument' as a weapon to dismantle the reputation of ourselves as individuals and also of our organisations?

we offer the conclusions that people such as senior managers who carry particular responsibility and who are expected to be ethical role-models

- a) require a level of ethical competence which allows them in mono-ethically conditioned environments to
  - think and behave as authentic ethical role-models
  - facilitate interpretations of their motives as being an expression of integrity
  - address all facets of integrity proactively where appropriate
  - avoid third-parties making value-judgements such as 'inconsistent', 'hypocritical' about them
  - instead, fulfil pertaining needs such as reliability, predictability, trustworthiness and certainty
  - facilitate change in the interests of sustainability and resilience with attention to all facets of corporate integrity such as purity and pillar-alignment

- b) require a level of multi-ethical competence which allows them in differing mono-ethically conditioned environments to
- facilitate interpretations of their motives as an authentic expression of integrity in each mono-ethically conditioned environment
  - address all facets of integrity proactively where appropriate
  - avoid value judgements about their thoughts and behaviour which do not fulfil the pertaining understanding of an ethical role-model
  - facilitate change in the interests of sustainability and resilience with attention to all facets of the pertaining understanding of corporate integrity
- c) require a level of interethical competence and concomitant ethical neutrality which allows them to
- behave primarily empathetically in all ethical environments as a genuine expression of being true to themselves
  - function and/or mediate at interfaces between differing mono-ethically conditioned standpoints without experiencing or expressing any personal, mental or emotional resonance or dissonance with any of the pertaining standpoints
  - facilitate the development of interethical competence in their organisations
  - facilitate change in the interests of sustainability and resilience with attention to all facets and implications of multi-ethicality.

### **Concluding words**

With a deliberate allusion to the words of J. Robert Oppenheimer, we question the legitimacy of the building of mono-ethical worlds, the use of integrity as a weapon in a world which is factually multi-ethical and the oversight in management education to equip people with the necessary levels of inter-ethical competence in order to take on positions of particular responsibility.

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