Volume: 10 Issues: 77 Special Issue [October, 2025] pp. 770 - 776
Journal of Islamic, Social, Economics and Development (JISED)
eISSN: 0128-1755
Journal website: www.academicinspired.com/jised
DOI: 10.55573/JISED.107760

REVISITING INTEGRITY: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF CONVENTIONAL AND ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVES

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Article history

Received date	:	25-8-2025
Revised date	:	26-8-2025
Accepted date	:	27-9-2025
Published date	:	16-10-2025

To cite this document:
Zakaria, A. (2025). Revisiting integrity: A comparative analysis of conventional and Islamic perspectives. *Journal of Islamic, Social, Economics and Development (JISED),* 10 (77), 770 – 776.

Abstract*:* *Integrity is universally acknowledged as a fundamental value throughout cultures; however, its meanings differ based on the moral context in which it exists. This paper provides a conceptual explanation of integrity by integrating two significant perspectives: conventional secular and Islamic. Conventional thought regards integrity as the alignment between values and behaviours, highlighting autonomy, consistency, accountability, and professional responsibility. From the Islamic viewpoint, integrity is defined by amanah (trust) and sidq (truthfulness), emphasising it as both a religious obligation and an inherent trait of character. The two perspectives emphasise the importance of truthfulness, trustworthiness, and integrity for leadership and organisational legitimacy, yet they differ in their foundations; secular anchors integrity in human autonomy, whereas Islamic views integrity within the context of divine accountability. By integrating these perspectives, the paper illustrates that integrity serves as both a personal virtue and an institutional necessity. This paper enhances contemporary scholarly conversation by demonstrating how integrity can function as a unifying virtue in both secular and religious contexts, with practical consequences for leadership credibility, organisational trust, and ethical involvement.*

Keywords*:* *Integrity, Conventional, Islamic.*

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Introduction

Integrity has long been recognised as a fundamental element of moral life and an essential requirement for trust in personal, professional, and institutional contexts. Across different societies, it is invoked to describe dependability in character, consistency in behaviour, and credibility in leadership. Failures of integrity, whether in civic life, business, or politics, are commonly linked to corruption, organisational failure, and the decline of public trust (Omar, 2015; Muhamad Hanapiyah et al., 2021). As such, integrity has become not only a philosophical concept but also a practical requirement for social stability and organisational sustainability (Palanski & Yammarino, 2007).

Despite its significance, integrity is far from univocal. In conventional stance, integrity is typically framed as coherence between principles and actions, emphasising autonomy, authenticity, and accountability. This view has been developed through philosophical traditions such as virtue ethics (Gentry & Fleshman, 2020), Kantian ethics (Johnson & Cureton, 2024); and utilitarianism (Driver, 2025), and more recently expanded in organisational studies where integrity is tied to professional responsibility and leadership credibility (Brown, 2005; Audi & Murphy, 2006). In Islamic thought, integrity is articulated through a constellation of ethical concepts, of which *amanah* (trust) and *sidq* (truthfulness) are most prominent. These terms capture integrity as both a sacred responsibility and a quality of character that ensures sincerity, reliability, and moral accountability (Kamali, 2012).

While there are numerous works on integrity in secular contexts and a growing body of literature on integrity in Islamic scholarship, comparative inquiry regarding the meaning of integrity with emphasis on practical implications, appears to be limited (Abdul Aziz & Ahmad, 2019; Al-Aidaros et al., 2013; Shuhari et al., 2018; Wan Mokhtar et al., 2021). The aim of the paper is therefore to provide a conceptual examination of the meaning of integrity from both conventional and Islamic perspectives. By engaging these perspectives together, the paper offers a richer account of integrity that not only clarifies its philosophical foundations but also demonstrates its practical implications, particularly for leadership, organisational life, and global ethics.

Integrity in Conventional Thought

The conventional understanding of integrity often begins with the idea of 'wholeness' (Brown, 2005). Derived from the Latin *integras* (ten Have & Patrão Neves, 2021), the term typically implies coherence, unity and congruence between an individual's values, principles, and actions (Brown, 2005; von Eschenbach, 2012) and moral sense of honesty and probity (ten Have & Patrão Neves, 2021). Williams (2002) highlights that integrity is the condition of being true to oneself, avoiding fragmentation in one's moral life. Whilst Hursthouse and Pettigrove (2018) view integrity as part of moral character, and it is the consistent embodiment of virtues of honesty, courage and justice. Collectively, these understandings frame integrity as primarily concerned with inward coherence and personal authenticity.

Different schools of moral philosophy highlight distinctive features of integrity. Kantian emphasises autonomy; involves acting from rational duty in ways that can be universally justifies (Korsgaard, 2020) which positions integrity as fidelity to moral law, not merely subjective preference. Whereas, utilitarian stresses social value of integrity; consistency and reliability generate trust, enabling cooperation and promoting collective well-being (Singer, 2016). These two philosophies imply that integrity is both an inward condition of coherence and an outward practice that sustains social trust and ethical relationships.

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In modern organisational and professional contexts, integrity has taken on an even broader significance. It is not only a matter of personal consistency or moral duty but also a practical requirement for credibility, leadership, and institutional legitimacy. Simply put, it incorporates both an individual responsibility and an institutional imperative. It is thus unsurprising to note that contemporary discourse situates integrity as a multidimensional concept incorporating transparency, accountability, and alignment between declared values and enacted practices (Audi & Murphy, 2006).

Brown (2005) deepens the modern understanding of integrity by offering its conceptualisation as four interrelated themes of consistency, relational awareness, inclusion, and pursuing a worthwhile purpose. Consistency echoes the coherence between what one does and what one says (suggesting that doing and saying should belong to the same whole); relational awareness refers to a consciousness of the relations in which one participates (suggesting that individuals and organisations exist within networks of relationships and must be attentive to that relationships); inclusion emphasises openness to differences and disagreements (suggesting diverse perspectives and engaging spaces for dialogue and dissent); and pursuing a worthwhile purpose highlights the notion of goodness purpose with meaningful, socially beneficial ends (suggesting contribution to the wider social good) (Brown, 2005). Brown (2005) links classical philosophical notions with organisational realities, showing that integrity is both an individual virtue and an institutional capacity essential for leadership credibility, ethical culture, and long-term stability. Contemporary scholarship argues that in an era of globalisation, digital transparency, and heightened stakeholder scrutiny, integrity has become an essential survival value for organisations (Jelovac & Šuleić, 2024).

Integrity in Islamic Thought

In Islam, several Arabic terms are frequently associated with the meaning of integrity. These include *istiqamah* (uprightness and steadfastness), *ihsan* (excellence in conduct), *taqwa* (God-consciousness), *amanah* (trust), and *sidq* (truthfulness) (Kamali, 2012), all of which seem to suggest that integrity incorporates inward (self-consistency), outward (fulfilling one's obligations to others, and upward (accountability to God) domains. In the literature, *amanah* and *sidq* are observed as the frequent connotations used to represent integrity in Islam: the responsibility to carry trust faithfully (i.e. *amanah*) and the commitment to live truthfully (*sidq*).

Amanah is a concept that is ingrained with entrustment and responsibilities. It expects that individuals will act reliably in every aspect of life, whether personal or professional duties (Kamali, 2012). Someone who is *amanah* is one who can be relied upon, whose word carries weight, and whose actions align with their commitments. In a practical domain, *amanah* denotes circumstances of honesty in dealings, responsibility in professional roles, fairness in judgements, and transparency in leadership (Muhamad Hanapiyah et al., 2019; Shuhari et al., 2019). Breaches of trust (*khinayah*), such as corruption or negligence, are seen as serious failures of character that distort social and institutional order (Shuhari et al., 2019). In a similar view, Soomro et al. (2025) believe the importance of organisations as stewards of resources and leaders as custodians of public trust to embody the *amanah*. *Amanah*, hence, renders integrity an inherently relational quality that binds individuals and institutions to the trust vested in them by others.

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Sidq, on the other hand, represents the inner and outward truthfulness that sustains the reliability in carrying trust (i.e. *amanah*). According to Shuhari et al. (2019), *sidq* denotes beyond merely telling the truth. It involves sincerity of intention (*ikhlas*), honesty in communication, and consistency between inner convictions and outward behaviour (Shuhari et al., 2018). In other words, a person of *sidq* is not only free from falsehood but is also transparent, authentic, and morally coherent. Scholars highlight that *sidq* operates on multiple levels. At the intrapersonal level, it fosters self-honesty and moral coherence; at the interpersonal level, it enables trustworthy relationships; and at the institutional level, *sidq* underpins credibility whether in business, politics, or truthfulness in communication and decision-making (Wan Daud et al., 2014). In this view, *sidq* shall be seen as able to provide the moral depth necessary for sustaining credibility in both personal and organisational life.

Common Moral Ground and Divergences

Both the conventional and Islamic perspectives regard integrity as indispensable for moral life. At their core, both traditions emphasise truthfulness, consistency, and trustworthiness. In conventional thought, integrity is seen in the expectation that individuals act in accordance with their professed values and uphold social trust through consistent moral behaviour (Williams, 2002). In Islamic thought, integrity manifests in *sidq* (truthfulness) and *amanah* (trust), which equally stress honesty, reliability, and the faithful fulfilment of obligations (Kamali, 2012). In practice, both perspectives underline that without integrity, interpersonal trust collapses, professional credibility erodes, and institutions lose legitimacy (Muhamad Hanapiyah et al., 2021; Omar, 2015; Shuhari et al., 2019). This shared emphasis indicates that despite different foundations, integrity functions as a universal moral currency across viewpoints. From the organisational context, both perspectives reject dishonesty and exploitation, implying that integrity is the bedrock of effective governance and sustainable organisations.

The divergences of the two perspectives lie in their grounding of accountability. In the conventional framework, integrity is grounded in individual autonomy and rational legislation (Korsgaard, 2020). The individual bears responsibility for aligning actions with self-chosen or rationally justifiable principles, and society functions on the basis of mutual trust built from this consistency. In contrast, Islamic thought anchors integrity in divine accountability (Shuhari et al., 2018; Shuhari et al., 2019; Wan Daud et al., 2014; Wan Mokhtar et al., 2021). Human are seen as trustees (*amanah*) before God, and their integrity involves living truthfully in relation to this sacred responsibility. This difference in grounding shifts the emphasis; for conventional secular, integrity validates the individual's authenticity and moral independence, while for the Islamic, integrity validates one's fidelity to divine trust and moral law. In the organisational context, the conventional secular justifies integrity in terms of social trust and professional ethics, whereas Islamic thought interprets integrity as a moral of trust before God and humanity.

Conclusion

Integrity, undoubtedly, is one of the most vital virtues for maintaining moral life, professional credibility, and institutional trust. Through the analysis, this paper demonstrates that, while the two perspectives share significant commonalities of emphasising truth, trustworthiness, and accountability, they, however, differ in fundamental ways that further deepen understanding of the concept. Precisely, these two perspectives offer more than parallel accounts; they form a complementary framework that facilitates a deeper understanding of integrity. While secular emphasises integrity as coherence, autonomy, transparency, and respect for diversity, Islamic thought, on the other hand, enhances the understanding by anchoring integrity in transcendent accountability and trust that connect personal, social, and spiritual spheres. Jointly, the two

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perspectives place integrity beyond being merely a personal virtue; they connote integrity as a comprehensive attitude towards life that sustains ethical order within individuals, organisations, and society.

This paper demonstrates that integrity is more than compliance or adherence to codes of conduct. In the conventional view, it underpins corporate culture, fosters trust with stakeholders, and supports long-term sustainability (Brown, 2005). According to Islamic view, integrity is inseparable from ethical stewardship, emphasising organisations as custodians of resources, treat employees with fairness, and avoid exploitative and corrupt practices (Wan Mokhtar et al., 2021). The two perspectives enlighten that integrity must be embedded at all levels, whether in policies, decision-making, and everyday practices, if organisations are to achieve both legitimacy and resilience.

In a world where secular and religious moral expectations increasingly intersect, appreciating the shared moral ground and distinctive emphasis of the two thoughts allows a richer discourse on integrity. It shall invites scholars to deepen theoretical inquiry, leaders to model trustworthy and ethical governance, and organisations to cultivate cultures of responsibility that serve both human and higher moral ends. Ultimately, integrity whether understood as consistency with one’s values or as trust and truthfulness before God and society provides the moral compass that guides both individuals and institutions. By integrating the conventional and Islamic perspectives, this paper demonstrates that integrity is at once personal, relational, and transcendent, offering not only a foundation for ethical philosophy but also a practical guide for leadership, organisations, and global moral discourse.

Acknowledgements
The author would like to express appreciation to the Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia for sponsoring the publication fee.

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