

Independent Commission Against Corruption

i-Relay Youth Integrity Project 2013/2014
Project-based Report

“Decision-making of young people in integrity
challenges and practical advice on smart
decisions”

Wong Derek Chun Ki

Lai Larry Fu Wai

Hung Zach Hoi Shun

Yung Shirley Ho Yee

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Contents

1. Introduction
2. Objective
3. Literature review
4. Data Collection
5. Data Analysis
6. Discussion
7. Conclusion
8. References

1. Introduction:

While it is often heard that ‘teenagers are the future pillars of the society’, adolescence integrity has always been the center of focus from different social institutions like the mass media, educational organizations and the government. The government has also put huge amount of resources for the better development of teenagers to train potential talents in sports, music and arts (Scott, 2010).

Yet, according to the statistics from the Census and Statistics Department and the Hong Kong Police Force in 2012, despite the fact that the overall juvenile crime rate has been slightly decreasing over the past ten years, certain crimes like ‘Access to computer with criminal or dishonest intent’ and ‘Shoplifting’ have increased by twenty seven and thirty four percent respectively (Chui and Lo, 2013). In addition, the number of university plagiarism cases has been rising since 2000. While the above statistics may not be accurately reflecting the reality in the society, the adolescence honesty and moral standard seem to be declining, and this situation appears to be alarming and worth the time for investigation.

2. Objective:

In this project, investigation will be focusing on the decision-making situation of young people, when facing integrity challenges like the use of computer, the temptation against plagiarism, illegal software and music download. Through literature research and questionnaire, different risk factors like peer pressure, convenience, chances of getting caught and excitement seeking; and protective factors like moral value and standards, and consequences for punishments will be examined and ranked in the corresponding situations.

After analyzing the factors, practical advice will be recommended on smart decisions when dealing with the tempting circumstances. It will include the thinking and rationalization process during decision making; as well as suggestions for avoiding integrity temptations in the daily life. This project aims to provide adolescent the background understanding on the importance of integrity and suggest recommendations for fighting against temptation; especially for university undergraduates.

3. Literature review:

Design of the questionnaire

The background of the questionnaire is inextricably bound to the undergraduates. A number of common practices which are too arguable to be illegal but immoral are proposed. Things like helping others to sign attendance, referencing others literature without citation are included in the questionnaire. Designing questions using conventional wisdom would be an optimal solution to our problem of getting as much as we can from the respondents but not irritating them (Krosnick and Presser, 2010). Simple questions will be asked and rating scales will be provided for respondents. We simply ask for gender, age group, how often they commit the immoral practices, and reason for doing so.

Decision-making of young people in integrity challenges

When one is making a decision, the driving forces behind such action are often tangled and complicated. Young people are no exceptions, especially when they have obtained relatively less life experience than the ones that have stepped into adulthood (Nutt and Wilson, 2010). This literature review mainly places its focus on factors that influence integrity among youths when making decisions. From the literature, there are mainly three types of factors.

The first type of determinant, we call it the historical or distal factor, is about the education one receives (Mumford et al., 2007). Jasanoff mentioned this factor in 1993, explaining that poor mentoring from other agents, such as parents, media and peers, would cause a poor conceptualization on the social norms of integrity among youths on integrity (Jasanoff, 1993).

The second type of determinant, we call it the immediate factor, is about competition. Goldberg and Greenberg mentioned this factor in 1994, explaining that people would deviate from integrity as they want a better allocation of rewards and resources (Goldberg and Greenberg, 1994). It can also be interpreted as a form of protecting self-interest. The third factor also belongs to immediate factor mentioned by the above researchers. Peer pressure also plays an important role, such that conformity or compliance is easily performed under the pressure from friends.

The third type of determinant, we call it the environmental or extrinsic factor, is about poor coping. The research conducted by the team in University of Oklahoma mentioned this factor, explaining that poor interactions within groups, such as receiving feedback ambiguity, would cause a higher chance to make dishonest decisions among youths. The fifth factor is mentioned by Elizabeth Cauffman and Larence Steinberg, which is about the probability of receiving a negative consequence. To avoid punishments, the liability youths bears and the protection they are entitled to, are two major considerations in decision making for them (Mumford et al., 2007).

Practical advises

Promoting integrity is essential for establishing a proper moral standard among youths. Therefore, it is necessary to take appropriate measures against any factors that prevent youth's integrity in decision making.

It is crucial to weight the values of possible options when making a decision. According to Anne Thompson, being attentive and sensitive to values and beliefs is indispensable when safeguarding integrity (Thompson, 2004). Reflect before choosing an option with apparent benefits over the ones with no obvious attractions. In addition, long- term measurements can also re- shape the general impressions on integrity among young people (Thompson, 2004). For instance, increase the exposure of young people to integrity- related information.

4. Data collection:

We designed an online questionnaire which was divided into 2 parts (A and B). The questionnaire was distributed to our friends through different media such as Facebook and Whatsapp etc. The targeted age was set from 16 to 25 which represent the age group of adolescents.

There were total 22 questions and all are multiple-choice questions. Part A was about personal information which include 2 questions concerning the age and gender of the respondents. Part B was about the integrity challenges that teenager may face in their life. This part included 20 questions. 10 different immoral and dishonour scenarios containing 10 different integrity challenges were provided through 10 questions. The respondents needed to rank their frequency (from 0 to 5) of the conducting such behaviors in last year. 0 represents they never had that experience. 5 represents they always conducted such behaviors. Another 10 questions in Part B is about the reasons why they conducted such behaviors. Thus, the driving force behind the dishonor behaviors can be analyzed. There were 11 choices including the choices of “other” which they needed to specify the reason out of the 10 pre-set answers. They can choose more than one option in this part.

5. Data analysis:

i. Respondents' information:

The data were collected in 2 weeks and finally 100 responses were received. Two-third of the respondents were female and the rest one-third were male. Most of them were aged from 18 to 23 which accounted for 89%.

ii. Integrity challenges- Scenario questions:

It is surprising that 98% of the respondents have tried pirated music download and 86% of them used pirated software. Most of them claimed that it is convenient to download pirated music and software in the Internet. Individual interest is another major reason for them to do so because such downloading is free of charge so they can save money. Even they know it is law-breaking, they said that there is low risk of getting caught.

Additionally, 82% of the respondents have made up data for their assignments/ reports/ essays/ journals. Similarly, 73% of them have plagiarized or copy without citation in their assignments/ reports/ essays/ journals. Of which, 31% of them said it is convenient. 18% of them were due to laziness and 13% claimed that there is low risk of getting caught.

There are some scenarios that occurred occasionally. Of which, 64% had experience of pretending to be ill in order to take sick leave. Apart from that, helping friends or classmates to take attendance in the tutorials or lectures accounted for 59%. Cheating in tests or examinations accounted for 45%.

On the other hands, some scenarios occurred in a relatively low frequency. Among which, 36% had experience of picking up lost articles or money in the street. Apart from that, there were only 16% of the respondents said they have stayed overnight without approval in other's hall and 14% of the respondents claimed they have used forged documents such as invoices or receipts for making false claims of any expenses.

All in all, 4 major risk drivers for conducting immoral and dishonourbehaviours were identified through the 10 scenarios questions which can be divided into 4 categories. These include conformity, individualism, system and loopholes and rules and values which affect youth's decision making when there is an integrity challenge.

iii. Limitations:

As the survey was distributed personally, there may be a bias in choosing participants. The samples collected were probably limited to our friend zone and social circle. As a result, most the respondents may be highly educated and doing their bachelor degree in the University of Hong Kong. Thus, the education background may be not broad enough and limited to university students. Also, there was the same constraint in the age group. From our survey, 89% of the respondents aged from 18-23. However, the general age group for teenagers should be 16-25. Therefore, the bias in the ages may lead to inaccurate results.

iv. Improvement:

In order to obtain accurate results that can represent the general adolescents, the participants of the survey should be selected randomly. Instead of inviting our friends to take part in the survey, it is suggested that the questionnaires should be published in different public media such as Facebook, Weibo and different online forums ect. Thus, teenagers from different ages and education groups such as secondary students and other college students can participate in the survey. This may probably give rise to more accurate and confident results.

Furthermore, the sample size should be larger which further increases the confident level of the survey results statistically. For this reason, the duration of the survey should be lengthened in order to get more youths to take part in the survey.

6. Discussion:

i. Decision-making factors:

When an individual makes a decision, the propelling forces behind the decision are often complicated and intricate. While teenager's integrity has aroused concerns from different institutions like the education sector, it is important to discover the influential factors during the integrity challenges process so as to give practical recommendations to the teenagers. After investigating the results received from the questionnaire, we have come up with four major factors which will influence and affect the decision making process by teenagers when facing integrity challenges. The four factors are namely, conformity, individualism, system and loopholes, and rules are values.

Conformity:

Conformity is basically the biggest risk factor that tempts teenagers to fail into integrity traps. In the questionnaire, over a half of the interviewees who have helped friends to take attendance, admitted that peer pressure, norms and cultures in schools are the major reasons for conducting such behavior. According to the literature review, conformity is classified as the immediate factor which deviance acts are the result for better allocation of rewards like peer recognition. While teenagers treasure friends and value conformity in order to achieve the sense of attachment and personal identity within the institutions, it is not rare to witness teenagers risking themselves due to peer pressure and cultures. Many severe juvenile delinquency cases like drug trafficking for friends are based on this reason.

Individualism:

Apart from conformity, individualism ideas like personal interest and convenience are also factors that trigger the deviation from integrity by teenagers. It is another immediate factor based on Goldberg and Greenberg. Such classification agreed with the questionnaire results on situations like 'making up data', 'taking sick leave purposefully' and 'plagiarism'. Laziness and conveniences are the two dominant factors which make up to over sixty percent of the deviance reasoning. The interest of individual outweighs the moral standard; therefore, teenagers are likely to deviate from integrity. The rise of individualism is also in line with the rising number of plagiarism cases in universities over the world.

System and loopholes:

Other than the immediate factor, system and loopholes are considered as the environmental or extrinsic factor by Cauffman and Steinberg. According to the questionnaire, the other reasons which caused the deviant behaviors are 'utilization of grey areas and loopholes' and 'low chance of getting caught' for downloading private music, movies and software. The low probability of receiving negative consequences renders teenagers comfortable to deviate from integrity. It reveals that the swiftness of punishment; instead of the severity of punishment, is the concern of teenagers when facing integrity challenges. The existing lenient and loosely-monitored rules and regulations are accountable for the integrity problems for teenagers.

Rules and values:

Rules and values are the distal factor as suggested by Jasanoff. This helps in explaining why some behaviors like cheating in exams and picking up lost properties are not performed by most of the interviewees in the questionnaire. Some bigger integrity and moral issues set distinct boundaries and guidelines about right or wrong. The conceptualization of certain behaviors is clearly defined as acceptable and unacceptable. Therefore, integrity-challenges, especially towards the loosely-monitored behaviors, are the real 'threats' to the teenagers; but not the more serious offenses like cheating in exams.

ii. Practical advices recommended:

Think Twice Before You Act:

Individual interest refers to one's intrinsic ability to protect his/her own desire. In fact, it is somehow biologically structured to compete for resources to help survival. Nonetheless, education and cultural norms have incorporated a new mode of thinking in individuals- social interest. People flock into communities. Thus, gaining the chance of interacting with each other. In some scenarios, the betterment of the whole group has greater benefits than the betterment in oneself. For example, when representing a business group, whether you tell the truth can affect the sustainment of a trustworthy reputation of your group.

The method "think twice before you act" is specifically significant when you enter a situation in which law is present for determining to justify your behavior or not. In a more general sense, violating the law will have a severe consequence- being subjected to sentences, penalties, or leave a criminal record. Any youngsters violating the law will leave an irreversible mark on their lives and possibly affect their career paths.

The think twice method is an effective tool to be used among youths, from which they learnt to control their impulses, and weigh the drawbacks and benefits of their actions before making a decision.

Sunshine Test:

If you believe man are naturally good, you will feel guilty when you have done something bad. Having done anything immoral makes you walk towards the darkness. Cheating in exams should not be easy as you are afraid of being caught by teachers. Staying overnight in others dormitory should not be cool neither. Undoubtedly you must keep yourself hidden when doing such things. Just ask yourself whether you enjoy the life above board.

Attentive and sensitive to moral values:

Moral values are not as appealing as individual interest, assume there is no violation of the law. You would not be in trouble or discovered with the ignorance of moral values. However imagine everyone in the society does the same and it would be disastrous. It would be the day of chaos for mankind if morality doesn't serve as a buffer between right or wrong. Law is the basic standard of moral value. High moral values keep us away from stepping on the boundary of right and wrong. Being attentive and sensitive to moral values is good for the society, and morally unselfish.

7. Conclusion:

From the study, it has come to a conclusion that there are four major contributing factors that affect integrity of youths in decision making, namely conformity, individualism, systems and loopholes, and rules and values. From the factors, we found that the environment and personal backgrounds are two essential determinants. Therefore, we proposed three relevant suggestions to reduce the negative effects of the above factors.

The think twice method, the sunshine test and the advice on being more attentive and sensitive to moral values are a combination of methods to eliminate behaviors against integrity. It is observed that all three approaches have a common core value: pressure on youths. Youths must possess at least a minimum amount of self control to resist temptation from acting against integrity. This can be achieved by the above methods, such that pressure from self, the legal system, and the peers can be mounted on the youths. The pressure can therefore act as a barrier to prevent youths from misbehaving.

Youths are the pillars of the future society. They are the generation who carries with them great responsibility to contribute to the betterment of the society. A high moral standard should therefore be maintained. Integrity is an important moral value among all, as it substantially affects decision making among youths. It is hoped that the concrete measures observed and proposed in this study would be helpful in promoting integrity among youths.

[2,818 words]

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Integrity Challenges

The survey is divided into 2 parts. All the questions are compulsory. All information collected is treated confidentially and used only for the educational purposes (i-Relay" Youth Integrity Project, 2013).

*Required

Part A: Personal information

1. **Gender ***

Mark only one oval.

- M
 F

2. **Age ***

Mark only one oval.

- <18
 18-20
 21-23
 >23

Part B: Integrity Challenges

Below is a list of experiences which students may have experienced at some time or another. Please indicate the most appropriate answer for each experience based on your past months experience.

3. **Have you ever made up data for assignments/ reports/ essays/ journals? ***

Mark only one oval.

	0	1	2	3	4	5	
None	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Always

4. For what reason(s), you conducted this behavior? *

You can choose more than one option.

Tick all that apply.

- N/A
- Individual interest
- Peer pressure
- Convenience
- Laziness
- Low risks/ chances of getting caught
- Excitement seeking
- Norms and cultures
- Utilizing loopholes in the laws/ rules
- Public interests
- To avoid consequences and punishment
- Other:

5. Have you ever plagiarized/ copy without citation in your assignments/ reports/ essays/ journals? *

Mark only one oval.

	0	1	2	3	4	5	
None	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Always

6. For what reason(s), you conducted this behavior? *

You can choose more than one option.

Tick all that apply.

- N/A
- Individual interest
- Peer pressure
- Convenience
- Laziness
- Low risks/ chances of getting caught
- Excitement seeking
- Norms and cultures
- Utilizing loopholes in the laws/ rules
- Public interests
- To avoid consequences and punishment
- Other:

7. Have you ever helped your friends/classmates to take attendance in the tutorials/lectures for whatever reasons? *

Mark only one oval.

	0	1	2	3	4	5	
None	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Always

8. For what reason(s), you conducted this behavior? *

You can choose more than one option.

Tick all that apply.

- N/A
- Individual interest
- Peer pressure
- Convenience
- Laziness
- Low risks/ chances of getting caught
- Excitement seeking
- Norms and cultures
- Utilizing loopholes in the laws/ rules
- Public interests
- To avoid consequences and punishment
- Other:

9. Have you ever tried any methods to cheat in tests/ exams? *

Mark only one oval.

	0	1	2	3	4	5	
None	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Always

10. For what reason(s), you conducted this behavior? *

You can choose more than one option.

Tick all that apply.

- N/A
- Individual interest
- Peer pressure
- Convenience
- Laziness
- Low risks/ chances of getting caught
- Excitement seeking
- Norms and cultures
- Utilizing loopholes in the laws/ rules
- Public interests
- To avoid consequences and punishment
- Other:

11. Have you ever stayed overnight without approval in other's hall? *

Mark only one oval.

	0	1	2	3	4	5	
None	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Always

12. For what reason(s), you conducted this behavior? *

You can choose more than one option.

Tick all that apply.

- N/A
- Individual interest
- Peer pressure
- Convenience
- Laziness
- Low risks/ chances of getting caught
- Excitement seeking
- Norms and cultures
- Utilizing loopholes in the laws/ rules
- Public interests
- To avoid consequences and punishment
- Other:

13. **Have you ever pretended to be ill in order to take sick leave for whatever reasons? ***

Mark only one oval.

	0	1	2	3	4	5	
None	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Always

14. **For what reason(s), you conducted this behavior? ***

You can choose more than one option.

Tick all that apply.

- N/A
- Individual interest
- Peer pressure
- Convenience
- Laziness
- Low risks/ chances of getting caught
- Excitement seeking
- Norms and cultures
- Utilizing loopholes in the laws/ rules
- Public interests
- To avoid consequences and punishment
- Other:

15. **Have you ever tried pirated music download? ***

Mark only one oval.

	0	1	2	3	4	5	
None	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Always

16. For what reason(s), you conducted this behavior? *

You can choose more than one option.

Tick all that apply.

- N/A
- Individual interest
- Peer pressure
- Convenience
- Laziness
- Low risks/ chances of getting caught
- Excitement seeking
- Norms and cultures
- Utilizing loopholes in the laws/ rules
- Public interests
- To avoid consequences and punishment
- Other:

17. Have you ever used any pirated software? *

Mark only one oval.

	0	1	2	3	4	5	
None	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Always

18. For what reason(s), you conducted this behavior? *

You can choose more than one option.

Tick all that apply.

- N/A
- Individual interest
- Peer pressure
- Convenience
- Laziness
- Low risks/ chances of getting caught
- Excitement seeking
- Norms and cultures
- Utilizing loopholes in the laws/ rules
- Public interests
- To avoid consequences and punishment
- Other:

19. **Have you ever picked up lost articles/ money in the street? ***

Mark only one oval.

	0	1	2	3	4	5	
None	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Always

20. **For what reason(s), you conducted this behavior? ***

You can choose more than one option.

Tick all that apply.

- N/A
- Individual interest
- Peer pressure
- Convenience
- Laziness
- Low risks/ chances of getting caught
- Excitement seeking
- Norms and cultures
- Utilizing loopholes in the laws/ rules
- Public interests
- To avoid consequences and punishment
- Other:

21. **Have you used forged documents such as invoices/ receipts for making false claims of any expenses? ***

Mark only one oval.

	0	1	2	3	4	5	
None	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Always

22. For what reason(s), you conducted this behavior? *

You can choose more than one option.

Tick all that apply.

- N/A
- Individual interest
- Peer pressure
- Convenience
- Laziness
- Low risks/ chances of getting caught
- Excitement seeking
- Norms and cultures
- Utilizing loopholes in the laws/ rules
- Public interests
- To avoid consequences and punishment
- Other:

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