

# Emotional Intelligence as Preventive Strategy for Curbing Corruption: Towards a Model for Building Governance Integrity

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## Abstract

Emotional Intelligence relates to competencies that work in synergistic clusters to influence positive outcomes. Academic research in interdisciplinary areas suggests that the construct of emotional intelligence can be applied across diverse areas such as corruption and governance. Integrity as a component of emotional intelligence paves, the way for properly assessing institutional needs as well as adjusting greedy expectations of individuals in society thereby curbing corruption. Corruption is the misapplication of public assets for private gains and the major obstacle against good governance architecture. A strategy for curbing it is therefore imperative to enhance governance integrity characterized by transparency and accountability in public office. This paper therefore, evaluates the relationships between emotional intelligence as a strategy for curbing corruption and enhancing governance integrity, because corruption as a social pandemic continues to undermine good governance around the world. Using qualitative technique of the survey research design and involving 215 participants the paper advocates that emotional intelligence is a preventive strategy for curbing corruption. The result of the investigation indicates that emotional intelligence is crucial in reducing corruption and building governance integrity. This paper offers suggestion about how future study could help in reducing corruption through emotional intelligence, and recommendations for implementation, to improve performance excellence, public confidence and social justice.

## Keywords

Public Policy, Social Pandemic, Interdisciplinary Areas, Moral Soundness, Preventive Strategy, Environmental Situations, Academic Glory, Useful Management Technique

Received: August 25, 2020 / Accepted: September 27, 2020 / Published online: November 6, 2020

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## 1. Introduction

Thirty years ago Peter Salovey and John Mayer publicized the concept of emotional intelligence in a seminal paper and describing it as a form of intelligence resting firmly in the tradition of pure intelligence and as an ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings' and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and action [1]. Despite the academic glory brought about by this definition, the erudite scholars later, redefined the construct as the ability to perceive emotions, integrate

emotions, to facilitate thought, understand emotions and to regulate emotions to promote personal growth [2]. However, Goleman [3] proposed that emotional intelligence comprised of four mega-factors of self-management, self-awareness, social-awareness, and social skills that enhances knowing what one is feeling and being able to handle those feelings effectively, being able to be creative as well as sensing what others are feeling and handling relationships effectively. Over these years also, Bar-On [4] developed a unique model of emotional intelligence vis-à-vis his theory of emotional social intelligence, and devised a measure that provides an

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estimate of one's emotional and social intelligence. After further research, Goleman [5] in addition to his earlier definition considers emotional intelligence as an important skill in various aspects of human endeavour. This proposition incorporates the attributes of integrity, truthfulness, trustworthiness, self-control, discipline, among others, as qualities for building effective institutions, and thus, giving his model the shape of a theory of performance. For example, discipline leads to integrity which paves the way for assessing institutional needs, conscientiousness, innovation, ensuring participation, adjusting individual expectations, as well as adaptability. Adaptability means being sensitive to unique situations and to use skills to enhance positive outcomes. These emotional intelligence competencies can form the basis of a preventive strategy for curbing corruption and enhancing governance integrity. Corruption is the misapplication of public assets for private gains and is the major obstacle to governance integrity. Governance integrity is a reflection of good governance characterized by discipline and integrity. The absence of discipline paves the way for corruption which often seeks to undermine good governance, leads to crisis and the collapse of organizations or public bureaucracy [6]. Corruption creates a sophisticated network of operatives and sharing just not only rewards but also its proceeds at the expense of governance integrity. There is growing evidence and increased public awareness that corruption has almost become a generic issue in bureaucratic governance and requiring a preventive strategic approach. Corruption undermines public policy, rules and regulations, and even laws, and like a virus by-passes remedial measures. Therefore, any preventive strategy for curbing the virus must focus on multiple key elements that can help in building governance integrity such as emotional intelligence competencies. For example, Paterson and Chaudhuri [7] suggest that improving good governance requires reduced discretion, improved confidence and integrity, enforcement of rules and regulations, improving the enabling environment, as well as improving on discipline. They emphasize that openness with regard to information dissemination is a critical tool for making decisions more objective and thus consistent and transparent, improving accountability and efficiency. Openness or participation is necessary because traditional decision making often relies strongly on official status, experience, and with significant use of subjective rather than objective criteria and discretion that provide the window for corrupt behaviours.

### 1.1. Research Problem

With corruption increasingly undermining governance integrity around the world, emotional intelligence as an index of competencies can become the basis of a preventive strategy for curbing it and building governance integrity.

Despite the wide acceptability of emotional intelligence as a dispositional variable capable of enhancing positive behaviours and promoting good governance many governance institutions are yet to fully understand how to employ it to achieve institutional success. As a result of this lingering problem, the present study sought to blow the trumpet that the application of emotional intelligence as a preventive strategy can curb the incidence of corruption and lead to enhancing governance integrity. This problem cannot be over-emphasized in a situation where high profile public officers are involved in accusations and counteraccusations of corruption while government believes in transparency and accountability, as fighting against corruption and the recovery of Nigeria's looted resources have become integral components of state public policy [8]. This is also important because according to Okogie [9] the current level of corruption is dangerous; and the anger of the people may lead to a violent uprising whose consequences cannot be foreseen [10-12].

### 1.2. Research Objective

This study was carried out to explore the relationship between emotional intelligence as a preventive strategy for curbing corruption and building governance integrity.

### 1.3. Research Questions

Do you think emotional intelligence can help in curbing corruption?

Is curbing corruption necessary in building governance integrity?

Does moral soundness lead to governance integrity?

Can obedience to rules enhance governance integrity?

Can conscientiousness enhance public policy formulation?

Does poor public policy implementation lead to curbing corruption?

Is probity an indication of good governance?

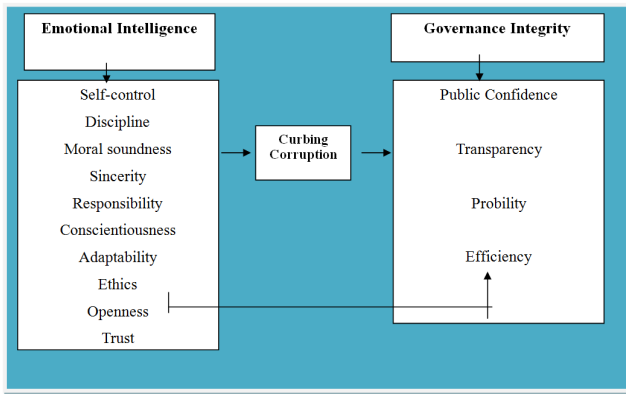
Is sincerity an ingredient of ethical behaviour?

Does openness encourage participation?

Is adaptability necessary for enforcement and compliance with rules for performance?

### 1.4. Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework is the nature of the study and shows the interrelationship of the major variables with the research problem. It is often expressed in form of a model. A model is representative of reality and usually leads to theory building. The model for the present study is shown in figure 1.



Source: Author Designed (2020).

Figure 1. Emotional Intelligence and Governance Integrity Model.

There is huge academic evidence in the literature that corruption remains a major impediment against governance integrity or good governance for decades. As ways of checking the virus continue to be explored by both researchers and other professionals, no one can seriously challenge the assumption that emotional intelligence can make meaningful in-road in curbing corruption and paving the way for public probity. This assumption is plausible because a critical building block for good governance is a focus on curbing corruption and improving public management and administrative mechanisms necessary for governance integrity. For example, according to Doig [13] good government provides an accountable administrative and a responsible government characterized by effective control of corruption. He further explains that governance, defined as the use of political authority and the control over society and the management of its resources for social and economic development therefore, incorporates not only the integrity, efficiency, and economy of government but its effectiveness as measured by the ends to which government organization and activity are directed. It is the legitimate expectation of the people and society that governance integrity demonstrated through public confidence, transparency, accountability and efficiency should not be in any doubt to achieve desirable outcomes. In the quest for high positive emotional intelligence behaviours including flexibility or adaptability means being sensitive to the environment and using the appropriate behaviour patterns to motivate group members to enhance decision-making processes, public policy formulation, implementation, as well as promoting compliance with rules, regulations, ethics and ultimately promoting governance integrity. As a practical contribution, the conceptual framework suggests that emotional intelligence influences reduction of corruption and increases the tendency to build governance integrity. It proposes a useful management technique for promoting positive behaviour and governance integrity.

## 2. Literature Review

Corruption now assuming the dimension of a social pandemic can be traceable to lack of good leadership in bureaucratic governance. Various interventions including legal remedies, in the forms of prevention and enforcement are yielding results slowly, and require a more fundamental approach from the psychological, emotional and behavioural perspectives. This suggests that attempts towards curbing corruption requires the active presence of people who exhibit great commitment, initiative, integrity as well as positive behaviours in positions of trust such as governance. Commitment and enforcement enhance strategy for curbing corruption because corruption thrives when government does not have committed people at the level of leadership and thus lacks the ability to formulate and implement critical public policy and to enforce its own rules. According to Kisubi [14] if honesty is accorded respect then the key building block is in place to provide a window of transparency to assure the public of building governance integrity. The concept of emotional intelligence involves creativity and intentionality, enhancing the abilities to use multiple non-cognitive resourcesto envision new ideas, find alternative and effective new ways of doing things, as well as the ability to consciously make decisions consistent with achieving personal and professional goals and values [15]. Influential intelligence theorists make a distinction between intellectual and emotional capacity. For example, Gardner’s [16] model of multiple intelligences (MIs) is composed of seven kinds of intelligences, including two *personal* varieties: Knowing one’s inner self and social adeptness. This translates to understanding what a person is feeling in a situation, and using such information to guide decision-making, having realistic emotions in relationships, and accurately reading social situations and networks, interacting smoothly, and using such skill to persuade, lead, and providing illumination, and suggesting co-operation, unity of policy and sincerity of purpose. These skills are synergistic with cognitive abilities and the more complex the administrative or management position, the more emotional intelligence matters, and a deficiency in these abilities can hinder the use of whatever technical expertise or intellect a person may possess. The aptitudes people need to succeed start with intellectual horsepower and emotional competence, to realize the full potential of their talents. Also, a major reason for people not being able to realize their full potential relates to emotional incompetence. Emotional competence is a learned capability based on emotional intelligence and necessary for quality performance in complex positions. Among the emotional intelligence competencies important for achieving optimal result include, recognizing one’s emotions and their effects, knowing one’s strengths and limits, impulse control,

discipline, honesty and integrity, demonstrating responsibility, flexibility in adapting to different and changing environmental situations, drive to meet standards of excellence, as well as empathizing at the organizational level [17-27]. It is safe therefore, to suggest that curbing corruption and building governance integrity require sound public policy formulation and implementation [28, 29].

### 2.1. Emotional Intelligence and Public Policy Formulation

Formulating public policy requires conscientiousness to guide government and lead to governance integrity. Generally, a policy relates to a system of principles to help the leadership of a business or government organization in objective decision-making. On the other hand public policy can be defined as the relationship of a government and its environment. Public policy formulation is the foundational basis for governance integrity and at that level requires a high dose of emotionally intelligent behaviours to reduce the incentives for corruption which undermines good government. The major public policy makers include the legislature, the executive, the judiciary and other administrative agencies of government, like the National Universities Commission (NUC) the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), among others. These arms and agencies of government must demonstrate competence in sufficient frequency to enhance accountability and transparency in governance. For example, in Nigeria, the National Assembly (NASS) could be regarded as a primary public policy formulating body, and the integrity of their decisions determine the level of governance integrity. The members of the NASS hold their positions in trust for the people who elected them therefore; they are expected to exhibit high levels of self-control, discipline, creativity and honesty in efforts to build governance integrity. There is huge academic evidence that governmental corruption in many countries relate to deep emotional challenge as reflected in fraudulent public policy formulation, such as the so-called *budget padding*, fraudulent and irresponsible behaviours by public officers that result to bad governance [30]. The need for emotional intelligence or emotional education as regards public policy formulation cannot be overemphasized because the public policy making bodies should be sensitive to the needs of the people and to provide direction to promote governance integrity. For example, public policy may either be positive or negative in form. Positively, it may involve overt government action to effect a particular problem, negatively, it involves a decision by government officials not to take action, to do nothing. This negative perspective provides the opportunity for huge governmental corruption, often involving presidents, governors, ministers, and others that conspicuously erode the integrity of public governance

[31-33].

### 2.2. Emotional Intelligence and Public Policy Implementation

Public policy implementation is based on law and is often authoritative. It therefore has legally coercive quality that the policies of private organizations do not have. Public policy implementation embraces the administration of the law through which various actions, rules, regulations, procedures and techniques work in synergy to put adopted public policies into effect in an attempt to achieve goals and to protect governance integrity. Public policy implementation requires no less than a conscious effort by public officers whose main concern should be to protect the integrity of government through the public policy framework. Once a policy option is adopted it must be implemented. Policies do not guarantee success no matter how elegant on paper, unless they are translated into action through efficient and effective implementation. Giving effective action to policy is fundamental because any public policy not implemented is useless and gives room for corrupt practices that may result to the matters of unspent budgetary allocations, of which the monetary values disappear into private pockets. Negative actions of this nature reduce the ability and capacity of government in achieving its goals, losing public confidence, and undermining its integrity. Governance involves large scale administrative bureaucracy resulting to complications in public policy implementation, therefore public officers in the civil service, political executive, legislature and the judiciary who have responsibility for public policy implementation must demonstrate completeness in emotional intelligence competencies and to take curbing corruption as a social responsibility. Public policy includes not only the decision to enact a law on some topic, but also subsequent decisions relating to its implementation and enforcement. Public policy implementation requires commitment and leadership skill to enhance clear and consistent objectives for effectiveness. Social responsibility is an emotional intelligence element within the interpersonal sub-factor defined as the ability to identify with the social environment, or community, group and to co-operate with others. Bar-On [34] opines that social responsible people possess 'social consciousness' and a basic concern for others, which is manifested by being able to take on group and community-oriented responsibilities. It is associated with accepting others, acting in accordance with good conscience and upholding social-rules [35-39].

## 3. Research Design

The qualitative technique of the survey research design was adopted for the study. The method was used because it offers

the different variables the opportunity to be properly observed and measured. A researcher-designed 5-point Likert-type questionnaire adapted from the Schutte, et al [40] Emotional Intelligence Scale was used to collect data. As a qualitative approach, the study relied on primary data generated through questionnaire administration. The target composed of civil servants associated with public policy formulation and implementation. The purposive sampling

method was used to select the sample for the study, while the sample size of 215 was determined by the sample ratio concept. Data were analyzed by descriptive statistical method using figures, tables, percentages, frequencies, and mean for easy understanding. Decision rule for the mean cut-off point for the analysis of frequencies was set at 3.00 points, in order to determine the relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and governance integrity (GI).

### 4. Presentation of Result

**Table 1.** Characteristics of Respondents (n=215).

S/N	Description	Category	Total	Percentage
i	Sex	a) Female	85	39.54
		b) Male	130	60.46
ii	Education	a) Diplomas	60	27.91
		b) Degrees	105	48.84
		c) Others	50	23.84
iii	Age	a) 18–30 years	95	44.19
		b) 31–70 years	120	55.81
iv	Experience	a) below 10 years	70	32.56
		b) 10–20 years	80	37.21
		c) 21–35 years	65	30.23
v	Level	a) Low	75	34.88
		b) Middle	55	25.58
		c) High	85	39.54

**Table 2.** Analysis of Frequencies, Mean, Decision Mean and Grand Mean for Responses to Research Questions (n=215).

S/N	Restatement of Research Questions	Scores					Row Scores	No of Resps.	Mean	Decision–mean @ 3 points	Grand mean
		SA	A	A	D	SD					
		5	4	3	2	1					
i	Emotional Intelligence can help in curbing corruption	90	80	2	1	42	820	215	3.81	True	3.49
ii	Curbing corruption is not necessary in governance integrity	5	10	3	7	190	278	215	1.29	False	
iii	Moral soundness helps to build governance integrity	95	85	1	2	32	854	215	3.97	True	
iv	Obedience to rules enhances governance integrity	75	93	4	3	40	805	215	3.74	True	
v	Conscientiousness is necessary in public policy formulation	105	80	2	1	27	880	215	4.09	True	
vi	Dishonest public policy does not lead to curbing corruption	110	70	3	2	30	873	215	4.06	True	
vii	Probity is not a sign of good governance	3	10	4	2	196	267	215	1.24	False	
viii	Sincerity relates to ethical behaviour	115	75	2	1	22	905	215	4.20	True	
ix	Openness leads to participation	120	65	5	2	23	902	215	4.19	True	
x	Adaptability is critical for enforcement and compliance with rules	130	60	2	2	21	921	215	4.28	True	

**Table 3.** Calculation of Grand Mean.

S/N	Items	Mean
i	Emotional Intelligence can help in curbing corruption	3.81
ii	Curbing corruption is not necessary in governance integrity	1.29
iii	Moral soundness helps to build governance integrity	3.97
iv	Obedience to rules enhances governance integrity	3.74
v	Conscientiousness is necessary in public policy formulation	4.09
vi	Dishonest public policy does not lead to curbing corruption	4.06
vii	Probity is not a sign of good governance	1.24
viii	Sincerity relates to ethical behaviour	4.20
ix	Openness leads to participation	4.19
x	Adaptability is critical for enforcement and compliance with rules	4.28
xi	Grand mean calculated as 349/10x1	3.49

#### 4.1. Discussion

The psychometric model in figure 1 was used to demonstrate that emotional intelligence is important in curbing corruption and at the same time paving the way for building governance integrity. This is an important contribution to emotional intelligence education because the issues of bad governance around the world relate to lack of integrity in public policy formulation and implementation that are often the prerogative of civil servants; therefore, the respondents were selected from their ranks as in table 1. In the last thirty years since the concept of emotional intelligence became popular in academic discussion due to the intellectual property of Professor Peter Salovey and John Mayer, it has been accepted as a potent construct across various areas of human endeavour. The analysis in table 2 showed that the greater percentage of the study sample thought that emotional intelligence is a prerequisite for curbing corruption towards building governance integrity, which is a reflection of government performance, effectiveness and efficiency. At a mean score of 1.29 it was refuted that curbing corruption is not necessary in building governance integrity, because anticorruption battle is a tough one, requiring commitment at the highest level of political leadership. For example, in Nigeria where top people in politics, judiciary, military, civil service, academia, and in the private sector have been convicted for corruption and over N980 billion recovered, it is important to state that the emotional intelligence factor of honesty is necessary in public life. Curbing corruption is among the factors predicting the subjective well-being of nations [41]. At a mean score of 3.97 it was found that moral soundness, a measure of emotionally intelligent behaviour leads to governance integrity. Moral and ethical behaviour minimizes irresponsible behaviours frustrating the ideals of good governance. Obedient to rules, regulations, and laws is a fundamental emotional intelligence ability that can influence the performance of government. At a mean score of 3.74 respondents agreed that obeying rules promotes governance integrity. In these difficult times governments around the world are having problems getting people to obey rules and regulations, and this can be improved through emotional intelligence [42]. Conscientiousness as an emotional intelligence skill provides the plank for effective public policy formulation and decision-making. This is necessary because the behaviour of people in top leadership positions influences the behaviour of others in the group or team [43]. By a mean score of 4.09 it was agreed that conscientiousness factor of emotional intelligence helps in public policy making [44]. Lack of honesty in public policy encourages public corruption in many places. This situation was confirmed by a mean score of 4.06. Public policy

making needs to be transparent to curb public corruption and to foster governance integrity [45]. At a dismal mean score of 1.24 it was vehemently denied that probity is not a sign of good governance. This supports huge evidence in the academic literature that probity, transparency and accountability are essential ingredients for good governance architecture [46-49]. Sincerity is a measure that relates to trustworthiness, ethical social responsibility and behaviour. This factor of emotional-social intelligence reinforces the desire for performance excellence. For example, in governance, performance excellence reflects public confidence and social justice. Earlier scholars found that emotional intelligence is critical for ethical behaviour [50]. Openness in terms of involvement, listening and communication are key emotional intelligence factors that improve group members participation and capable of enhancing the acceptability, popularity and integrity of governance. At a mean score of 4.19 it was agreed that openness generates sense of belonging, enhances the spirit of empathy which are critical elements of reputation management and governance integrity. Adaptability involves flexibility in handling change and necessary for enforcement and compliance with rules and regulations. With a mean score of 4.28 it was found that people with this emotional intelligence factor are good team players resulting to desirable outcomes. This ability involves thinking about a situation and finding a way to play the necessary role to achieve institutional objectives [51]. With a grand mean score of 3.49 over the decision-mean of 3.00 as in table 3, this study found positive relationship between emotional intelligence and governance integrity. This is the objective of the study.

#### 4.2. Scope of Further Study

Due to the growing levels of corruption and poverty in the world further study should examine the relationship between emotional intelligence and mental health of political leaders. This is necessary to ensure that those who aspire to lead are psychologically and emotionally sound to do so.

#### 4.3. Recommendations

Government and its ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs) should encourage emotional intelligence training for their employees so that they can have new ideas for handling government business.

Corrupt public officials should receive adequate punishment, including life jail to serve as a deterrent to others.

Anticorruption agencies should be composed of people of proven integrity to enable them work without compromise. In a country like Nigeria, where huge sums of money is lost to

corruption annually will not adequately achieve its mandate with regard to social welfare of the people.

Political leaders should appreciate that good politics promotes good governance based on principles of honesty and trust.

Promoting emotional intelligence will not only promote governance integrity but also the subjective well-being of a nation. This is a matter that requires leadership commitment.

## 5. Conclusion

Evidence from emotional intelligence studies in diverse areas shows that the construct has very positive influence over desirable outcomes. Through the factors of honesty, trustworthiness, consciousness and adaptability, it provides a model towards curbing corruption and increasing governance integrity. The qualitative survey research design was adapted for the study and this original result showed positive association between emotional intelligence and governance integrity.

## Acknowledgement

The author appreciates Professor Dele Olowu for his uncompromising advocacy against government corruption and for governance integrity in Africa.

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