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TITLE: ETHICAL LEADERSHIP IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

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ETHICAL LEADERSHIP IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR: AN AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE

Developmental Paper

ABSTRACT

Ethical leadership is a descriptive and predictive approach that engages behaviours that are beneficial to followers and not detrimental, by inculcating moral principles into their beliefs, values and actions through ethical decision-making processes. Several studies have seen positively related the concept of ethical leadership to effective followers, commitments, organisational citizenship behaviours and organisational performance within the scope of the private organisation. Furthermore, a large proportion of works have focused on the examination of the behavioural benefits and influence of ethical leadership within the western perspective and excluded the skills perspective and challenges facing the development of the concept. While not a relative new concept, the concept within the African perspective is nascent.

This developmental paper provides preliminary findings on the concept of ethical leadership from the African perspective with a focus on sub-Saharan Africa. In this study, methodology adopted were clearly stated, initial findings were presented, and further development provided.

Track: African Studies, Leadership and Leadership Development

INTRODUCTION

The concept of ethical leadership while not relatively new within the context of literature in recent times have focused on the behavioural aspects, it's mediators and impact on followers, performance in mostly private based organisation (Brown & Mitchell, 2010; Brown & Trevino, 2006; Brown, et al., 2005; Eisenbeiss, 2012; Demirtas & Akdogan, 2015; Giessner & Quaquebeke, 2011; Kavathatzopoulos, 2012; Mihelic, et al., 2010; Yukl, et al., 2013; Piccolo, et al., 2010). These studies have provided solid foundations for work done within the field in recent years, there exist limited research done on the perspective of skills and tools for the development of the concept within the body of literature. Though ethical leaders are said to possess ethical attributes, behaviours and traits, it is highly essential leaders possess the right skillset to manage followers to attain these goals within these organisation (Heres & Lasthuizen, 2013).

While ethical leadership is driven by the centrality of moral principles and core values, to be considered an effective leader, one must possess ethical competence or skills and behaviours to foster follower commitment, motivation to foster organisational goals (Kavathatzopoulos, Jordanis, 2012; Heres, Leonie and Lasthuizen, Karin 2013). Prior works have attributed the mediation of certain skill as important instruments or mediation to organisational values, firm reputation and organisation performance (Zhu, 2014; Brown et al., 2005; Ncube & Wasburn., 2006; Nikoi., 2008; Kacmar et al., 2013; Ellis, 2016; Harvey et al., 2013; Haq, 2011; Kavathatzopolous, 2012; Rubin et al., 2010) but these works have only addressed these skills on the basis of its use and not on what are the skillset necessary for the development of an ethical leader. Studies within literature have adopted a behavioural approach using social identity theories highlighting key behaviours of ethical leaders such as role clarification, fairness and power sharing (Kalshoven & Den Hartog, 2009) studies on the skills approach to ethical leadership development are limited and few theoretical works have only identified and addressed some number of skills necessary for an ethic based style of leadership in the public service (Haq, 2011).

This paper is to identity the growing challenges and gaps facing the implementation of ethical leadership within the public sector and identify the necessity for skills essential to mitigating these issues and providing efficient work performance within the Nigerian public service. perspective. It is based on a study of individuals within leadership positions (managerial and supervisory roles) with vast years of experience and knowledge within the Oil and Gas sector with a minimum of 3 to 5 years in authoritative and management.

LITERATURE REVIEW

ETHICAL LEADERSHIP

Amid the growing amount of ethical matters arising from organisations, researchers and scholars alike have become increasingly conscious that ethical leadership is essential (Gerpott, et al., 2017; Avey, et al., 2012; Chen & Ho, 2016; Drover, et al., 2012). Brown, et al., (2005) posits ethical leadership as the ability for a leader to demonstrate normatively appropriate conducts through one interpersonal relationships and personal actions, and the promotion of such conduct towards followers through a two way communication, reinforcement and decision making. Unlike other forms of leadership, ethical leaders are expected to have a central core of moral and ethical values, possess behaviours i.e. Altruism, role clarification, fairness and power sharing (Kalshoven & Den Hartog, 2009) and are perceived as role models by followers (Brown, et al., 2005). Due to their exhibited level of high moral standards, they are regarded as trustworthy individuals based on integrity and are emulated by their followers (Brown & Trevino, 2006; Demirtas & Akdogan, 2015; Chen & Ho, 2016).

Extensive research works have examined the positive roles of ethical leadership in followers voice (Zehir & Erdogan, 2011), reduction of business incurred cost (Bouckenooghe, et al., 2015), core job characteristics (Piccolo, et al., 2010), performance both at the individual and the organisational level (Bello, 2012; Bouckenooghe, et al., 2015; Demirtas & Akdogan, 2015), voice efficacy and organisation's performance in the private sector (Bello, 2012; Kim & Brymer, 2011; Walumbwa, et al., 2011; Piccolo, et al., 2010; Bouckenooghe, et al., 2015; Zehir & Erdogan, 2011) highlighting aspects of organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB) and corporate social responsibility (CSR) as key factors. Furthermore, some works have attributed the positive effect and trickle-down influence of top management ethical leadership through the mediating role of supervisors in fostering employee involvement, commitment and in the long run performance (Mayer et al., 2009). Ethical leadership embodies trusts and integrity from their followers which drives follower's effectiveness and commitment towards tasks given and achieving the end results for the organisation (Gerpott, et al., 2017). In summation, these works all positively link ethical leadership to both follower effectiveness, development and organisational performance.

While these works have yield positive outcomes on organisational management and performance output, vast bodies of these works can be attributed toward the private sphere of business (for-profit). Limited empirical research studies have examined the effect of ethical leaders influence on the public sector (Heres & Lasthuizen, 2012; Bormann, 2017; Khuntia, et al., 2004). Furthermore, majority of works are geared towards the western and eastern demography with a shortage in empirical studies on the impact of ethical leadership on the African perspective. There exists a vast amount of gap within the research community and scarcity of empirical studies in relations to ethical leadership from the sub-Saharan region, most research article from this region (mostly African perspective) have solely been on the conceptual spectrum. While few works have attributed and compared the concept of ethical

leadership from several geographical perspectives (Resick et al, 2006; Eisenbiess, 2012; Eisenbiess & Brodbeck, 2014), these works only highlight the personal attributes of an ethical leader or the concept of ethical and non-ethical leadership among these geographical arrays. Further empirical research works is highly necessary to proffer better understanding of the African cultural values, norms and understanding of what constitute morality and ethicality in the private and public organisation and impacts or effects on ethical leadership.

While these are key benefits, there are growing concerns facing the negative aspect to the side of improper inculcation of ethical leadership. Some works have highlighted few issues in literature (Gok et al., 2017; Stouten et al., 2013; Greenbaum et al., 2015; Brown & Mitchell, 2010; Evans et al., 2016, Quade et al., 2017; Babalola et al., 2016; Miao et al., 2013).

METHODOLOGY

This cross-sectional study adopted a qualitative approach to research gathering. An interview-based method of data gathering was implemented within the duration of the field study which was carried out between the period of June 2019 and July 2019. Based on the qualitative nature of this research study and the core of attaining and extracting qualitative data from participant, a face-to-face mode or fashion of carrying out interviews was utilized. This work provides a total number of 25 individual interviews in leadership and managerial roles within the selected public sector. This paper centered on top-level management individuals and supervisors within public sector institutions. Core emphasis is placed specifically within the scope of public sector institutions within the developing world and targets supervisors and Top-level management with significant amount of years and experience within the sector. Considerations were based on beliefs, experiences, or knowledge relevant to the research questions in the selection of participants. For attainment of a successful research, each response was weighed on participant's positions (criteria mid-senior roles and senior roles) such as managers of public institution (Kaplan & Maxwell, 1994; Thomas, 2006). This is essential based on the number of years spent in the public sector.

The adoption of a semi-structured opened-ended question-based interviews was utilized to acquire qualitative data for the success of this research project. The adoption of a semi-structured mode of data collection was driven by the necessity to acquire important and valuable information from correspondents drawn from broad themes from literature. In a semi-structured interview format, the interviewer adopted a conversational manner of posing a list of predetermined questions to the participant (Clifford, et al., 2016). For this research, determination of target sampling for the actualisation of the research target was focused on individual's presently occupying mid-level to senior positions in the Nigerian public sector. Critical emphasis was placed within the Oil and Gas industries of the public-sector drawing from both the upstream and downstream sector. The sample pool for these interviews included managers and supervisors from targeted organisations.

The time duration for each interview sessions for this study was between 30 to 60 minutes time gap with each participant or respondent. The researcher for each interviewee outlined the purpose of study, the content of the consent form, and the parameters for the interview. Furthermore, provision of signed consent was required from each interviewee prior to the commencement of the interviews. Based on the qualitative nature of this research study and the core of attaining and extracting qualitative data from participant, a face-to-face mode or fashion of carrying out interviews was utilized. Furthermore, taking cost, time, location and availability of research respondents the use of electronic video calling platforms was employed. This is also due to the nature and terrain for some supervisors working on offshore platforms or working from remote or offsite locations. Majority of the interviews was conducted in an office or facility that are free of distractions and which provides a level of confidentiality. This effective selection of the interview site or medium create an environment that allows individuals to speak freely and share ideas and thoughts related to the questions (Creswell, 2013; Bryman, 2004). For confidentiality and privacy purpose, the adoption and employment of pseudonyms for the transcription of interview manuscripts and the elimination of questions identifying the correspondent was done in order to further mitigates the harm by maintaining a strict level of anonymity for the participants. For the preliminary findings the adoption of MS -signifies the position of a manager and SS – supervisors were done to signify position and the number suffix was done to highlight the participant.

A thematic coding method approach was adopted (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Vaismoradi, et al., 2013). This involves the process of identifying patterns or themes within qualitative data for common threads that extend across an entire interview or set of interviews (Vaismoradi, et al., 2013). Several transcripts acquired were examined to identify key themes, concepts and categories. Codes were initially constructed using prior knowledge acquired from literature, experience on the path of the researcher and works done within the field of ethical leadership, to which codes emerged during the process of initial coding. The NVivo qualitative software was adopted for the purpose of recording, storing and managing the codes. The coding process is still ongoing.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS AND RESULTS

Several preliminary results were discovered from the field study. Participants in this research highlighted varying numbers of issues and challenges facing the inculcation of an effective ethical leadership framework within the Nigerian public sector. A key highlight which most of the participants addressed was the underlying problem of corruption within the public sector in Nigeria. While some addressed the presence of infrastructures to foster its effectiveness, these mechanisms are only attributed towards the human resources department and not the organisation. This was addressed by participant, a supervisor SS number (#SS1) who states the gap and ineffectiveness of ethical leadership in the Nigerian public sector quoted below.

“Ethical leadership is only existent within the Human resource department such as implementing rewards motivation systems for employees who perform but this does not exist at all within the operations side of the organisation. You might say it is only practiced by the HR but no other departments as people do not regard ethics to the full extent “. (#Supervisor [01]).

This stance is also supported by another manager MS14 within a different subsidiary of the public organisation who addresses issues of compromise and lack of regards for laid down ethic procedures.

“There used to be a time whereby leaders who hold moral standards and are perceived with high ethical values provide support and help in carrying the fellow workers along in providing direction. But interference from top government officials in power have seen employees with connections disobey directives from managers or fail to turn up for work or carry orders that supersedes ours. This is detrimental to one’s position as a manager and you’d not want issues with powers that be from the political spectrum.” (#Manager [14]).

Participants also highlighted a growing concern with regards to leaders and meeting up with the demands to meet certain targets set by top-tier management with limited resources and finances provided. This is addressed by a manager within production MS23.

“Yeah well, in order to do one, the worker is supposed to do his or her job right. The management is supposed to provide the necessary equipment and environment to carry his duty effectively. But in a case where an operator is to carry out an operation within the plant with a hand glove and there isn’t any hand glove. He is not required to go and do that thing with his bare hand; it is the fault of management not providing the necessary safe equipment to work with and not the fault of the worker. But if there are hand gloves and the worker carry out his checks and duties without the required safety equipment’s and there is an accident then he or she is liable to face disciplinary actions or sacked from the job as all have been provided for him (do you understand).” (#Manage [23]).

Participants also addressed the shortage of skills in navigating ethical situations as well as delivering organisational outcomes. There exists a shortage in terms of skills development and acquisition to foster organisational performance. This can also be linked to favoritism and nepotism on the part of government incursion in these public organisations. This is highlighted by manager 05 (MS05).

“There is the issue of Nepotism, I think this is the major drawback for performance and growth within this institution. It is very rampant and glaring within this public institution. There aren’t any regards for employing or retaining people on merit and skills within the organisation. People are employed and promoted based on you knowing people or you’re from a specific ethnicity. That’s why you see some people within a certain position who do not know the nature of the job or what to do with regards to responsibility. It is really discouraging seeing this as the best people are not picked or employed. This has been the cause of the drawbacks in this organisation moving forward.” (#Manager [05])

They recognised the issues facing leader’s skills with regards to trust, voice, integrity and prototypicality and how these affects performance of their respective organisation. This is stated by supervisor 01.

“Now also, there is the case of lack of Voice within the organisation. There isn’t any room for employee to voice out issues or question higher authority. If you do, you will face query or different challenges due to you voicing out. There are times higher authority issues a directive to do some things and you know within you some of these things are unethical in terms of practice but to challenge or voice out such to the top management can be of harm to your career or progression as a whole, also there isn’t any room for you to chip in some ideas or room to be innovative to solve problems due to the fear of been a target.” (#Supervisor [01]).

Similarly, manager 07 also addresses the issues of lack of skill set within the selected public sector organisation.

“We are not equipped with the skillset to do deal with issues to tackle nepotism or the avenue to not only question ethical issues arising from subordinates but also people within higher authority.” (#Manager [07])

Some participant addressed the issues regarding effectively communicating ethical values towards employees and lack of skills addressing follower’s ethical norms and beliefs. This can be seen from the comments of deputy manager 011.

“Why communication is an integral aspect as a leader in any given institution, there are certain issues facing communicating ethics and values in a public institution as this. You need to understand we are in a society were to do the right thing to move to the top is scarce. Now imagine communicating this to your team and been an example while individuals from other units are been promoted because they are cutting corners. It’s very difficult. Also, there are individuals who have a different belief to what is right as opposed to one’s own, how do you navigate this and effectively communicate this standard” (#Manager [011]).

FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

This paper has focused on the experience of ethical leaders highlighting their engagement and challenges within the public sector from the African perspective. While findings are limited at this stage, and thorough analysis of field data are ongoing in an attempt to make a theoretical leap and bridge the gap between conceptual theory and empirical data, some insights can be developed on the shortage of skills as a concern and the growing challenges facing the inculcation of an effective ethical leadership framework in the public sector. From the preliminary findings, it can be seen several themes are evident from the field research.

Some challenges identified can be categorically classified into skills deficiency and lack of instruments to foster ethical skills growth and development in the public sector. Furthermore, the lack of effective medium for communicating ethic values and its influence from top level to the subordinate level (Greenbaum, 2015) and the pressure to attain organisation’s outcomes and targets have driven ethical leaders to become amoral or unethical in the long run. #

While the critical analysis is currently in the progressive phase, it is highly essential further development of more themes is needed to better provide a clear picture of the challenges facing the Nigerian public sector and the implementation of an effective ethical leadership framework. To meet this, the following processes will be carried out before the conference date.

Development of codes, the figure 1 below gives the process to be adopted. Further generation of results and findings will be presented at the conference and result output will be utilized to generate a proposed effective skills framework of ethical leadership within the Nigerian public sector.

Step 1: Become familiar with the data,	Step 4: Review themes,
Step 2: Generate initial codes,	Step 5: Define themes,
Step 3: Search for themes,	Step 6: Write-up.

Figure 1: Framework for Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006)

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