

ETHICS AND VALUES IN NIGERIAN PUBLIC SERVICE: AN OVERVIEW

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Abstract

This paper attempted to uncover the maxims of ethics and values and how they can be promoted in public service. The study was anchored on the expectancy theory and theory of reasoned action. Qualitative research method was adopted with secondary data as the major sources of data collection. Data were contently analyzed. Findings revealed a high prevalence of sheer negligence of ethics and values in the Nigeria public service occasioned by lack of integrity among public servants and the complex nature of corruption coupled with some extant cultural problems. Conclusively, Proper ethical and value - oriented behaviour dictates that public servants act in such a way that best serves the interests of the public. The study recommended among other things the strengthening of competent disciplinary bodies to investigate allegations bordering on violation of code of ethics and values and to treat such as serious misconduct inviting sanction.

Keywords: Ethics, Values, Public Service

Introduction

Edward, Banfield (1858) in Obiora, Ike (2017) writes, in all countries of the world, the crisis of social values is at the Root of Economic Under-performance of the poorer societies and nations. There is a correlation between High Ethical Standards and Economic Development. The higher the ethics and discipline the more progressive a people and its economy. A society which allows its people to indulge in corruption cannot develop economically. Curbing corruption requires political will, public confidence, adequate time, resources, dedication, and integrity. It is a fact that the Nigerian society is facing tremendous ethics and value crisis today due to personal greed, selfishness, indifference to others, conflict of interest, laziness, etc. These have brought about large scale corruption in almost all spheres of life- personal and public, economic and political, moral and religious. Over the years, there has been erosion of the essential social, moral, and spiritual ethics and values and an increase in cynicism and nihilism at all levels. Francis, F (1997) writes that "the difference between poor and rich societies is the difference in Social Capital". Social Capital according to Francis refers to high stock of values like honesty, loyalty, trust, integrity, discipline, hard work, etc.

The public service is responsible for, among other things implementing the policy decisions of the government. The Nigeria public servants are mandated to abide by conduct rules otherwise known as public service rules which are in the nature of dos and don'ts. Ethics and value are meant to prescribe standards of integrity and conduct that are to apply to public service. Code of ethics and values cover such issues as; public comment, release of information, integrative role of public services, and continuous improvement through professional socialization and team work. According to the Second Administrative Reform of India in its 4th report (2007), 'the crux of ethical behaviour does not lie in bold words and expressions enshrined as standards, but in their adoption in action, in sanction against violation. Ethics and values help give public servants a vision, a purpose and an idea to strive for in the course performing their duties. A high standard of ethics and values among public servants is necessary to set example for the larger populace.

Problem Statement

In the words of Odum (2000) "there is a seemingly ethical void in Nigeria public service". Over the years, the media has been awash with cases of; causing loss to the government by negligence, moral turpitude, acceptance of gift, misappropriation of public funds, abnormal delay in settlement of compensation claims to displaced persons, acceptance of illegal gratification in recruitments, postings, transfers, secondments, and promotions, under-assessment of income tax for pecuniary gains, claiming of false travelling and house rent allowances, irregularity in granting of import and export license, etc all being perpetrated by Nigerian public servants. According to David (2016), Scandals involving public officials have often captured world attention. Most of these scandals are as a result of the deteriorating ethical behaviours of the public officials who have indulged themselves into all sorts of malpractices.

These bring to the question of the position of the extant code of ethics and values of public service. It is this question that this paper wishes to answer.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study is to uncover the maxims of ethics and values in public service and determine how they can be promoted in Nigeria public service. The specific objectives are to;

- i explore and inculcate in public servants the ethical principles and moral values necessary for effective work performance.
- ii assess the level of adherence or non adherence of code of ethics in the Nigeria Public service.
- iii determine ways of enhancing high ethical and value oriented public service in Nigeria.

The Concept of Ethics and Values

Ethics refers to a system of moral principles or rules of behaviour (Oxford dictionary, 7th edition). Ethics are well based standards of right and wrong which prescribe what individuals ought to do usually in terms of rights, obligations, benefit to the society, fairness, or specific virtues. In public service, ethics refer to the professional code of morality expected of civil servants in the civil service. They constitute the moral fiber of civil servants and regulate the conduct and behaviour of different classes of civil servants. As Laxmikant (2007), puts it 'they provide rules of the game'. Thus, misconducts which are not permitted in the public service are unethical conducts. Values refer to beliefs about what is right and wrong and what is important in life. They are those enduring beliefs that influence the choices people make among available means or ends. They are those things that are vital to or valued by someone or organization. They are what public servants and the general public see and judge to be right. They constitute the moral, professional, and ethical attributes of character which must be instilled in the members of the public service. In the words of Obiora, Ike (2017), ethics is about values and values are not merely utopian".

Values are what define individuals, institutions, cultures and people. They are "a set of principles or standards of behaviour regarded as desirable, important and held in high esteem by a particular society in which a person lives, and the failure to hold them results in blame , criticism or even outright condemnation" Ike, O (2016). Thus, values guide persons to do the right things, act morally, be morally sound, and give meaning and strength to a person's character. Ethics and values are inter-related and are often used inter-changeably. Ethics which are founded on values are vital codes of human conduct. Ethics promote harmonious life of integrity. It is also said to be a general framework within which harmonious societal development can be easily achieved. Ethics deal with the integrated development of human personality. It touches the human person, human dignity, and all the obligations that flow from the nature and dignity of human person in relation to oneself, others, colleagues, and the society

at large. Ethics focuses the attention of people on the ultimate human goal which influences all good values to replace every evil value in the society.

Maxims of Ethics and Values

Every government prescribes codes of ethical conduct expected to be followed by public sector officials. "These ethical conducts are generally guided by those judgments that are taken to be in accord with equity, justice, fairness, and fair-play, (Ndukwe, 2016). Thus, they are expected to conform to codes of conduct stipulated by the government so as to work in tandem with the interest of the citizens whom they serve. The maxims of ethics and values are those conducts which public administrators should aspire to imbibe. These maxims include but not limited to the following:

Respect: A popular saying has it that when wealth is lost, nothing is lost. When health is lost, something is lost. When character is lost, all is lost. But when shame is lost nothing else can be salvaged. Public administrators are enjoined to show respect for others. This flows from the duty to put others first and avoidance of prejudice or unlawful discrimination. They should have a proper sense of their own dignity and integrity. They should value themselves as professionals and as human beings. Rao (2012) adds that they should lead a life of high personal standards of social behavior and avoid behaving in ways that bring discredit upon themselves, colleagues, and their ministries or departments. They should show genuine respect by viewing other people as individuals of genuine worth, regardless of their ethnicity, gender, social background or sexual orientation. Generally, administrators should treat all persons with fairness, justice and equality and respect individual differences, rights and freedoms. Above all, democratic governance operates within a framework of laws that sets the boundaries of government action. Public servants should therefore understand and apply laws and rules that affect their profession, work to improve counterproductive laws and policies, establish procedures for proper handling of public finances, support financial audits of MDAs, protect privileged information, and promote constitutional principles of due process, equality and fairness.

Integrity: Integrity is the courage to do what is right in all circumstances. As Brain, Koslow (1999) captures it, "it is about personal wholeness, consistency, authenticity, and commitment to values and principles-in all daily interactions and activities". Public administrators should show high level of moral courage, responsibility, honesty, and justice. "Moral courage entails the conviction to carry out what one believes to be right, even though it might be unpopular or dangerous and the personal cost might be high" Royal Air force, (2008). Thus, Integrity is demonstrated by propriety in one's personal life. Public administrators should eschew deceit, dishonesty, or breaches of trust or confidence. Responsibility in the public service requires that people in position of authority are fair and consistent at all times. They should maintain consistency between their public and private thoughts and avoid blaming circumstances for their lack of results but accept responsibility and recommit to the actions necessary to produce the intended results. In 2003, cited in Ike (2017), Nelson Mandela once said those who conduct

themselves with morality, integrity, and consistency need not fear the forces of inhumanity and cruelty. Integrity exists when the stated intentions and results match. A person of integrity practices just behavior and treatment. The most effective discipline is self discipline which comes from within oneself. Thus, public administrators should ensure that there is fairness of treatment for and that justice is done and seen to be done without favour. Public trust in public office is a central feature of contemporary debate. Propriety is essentially a central feature of public life and it is certainly the major driver in building public trust in our public service. Public servants should put the obligations of the service above their own personal interests.

Excellence: Public administrators should ensure the highest standard of quality in administrative decisions and actions and should not compromise with standards of convenience or complacency. They should adhere to total quality management. They should strengthen individual capabilities to act competently and ethically and encourage the professional development of others. By striving for excellence, public administrators would be able to show a sustained desire for continuous improvement and innovation. Excellence also entails that public servants should exercise care in leadership and fulfill the welfare of the citizens. Every public administrator should strive to achieve and maintain the highest professional standards which will enhance both the competence and cohesion of public service.

Accountability and Responsibility: Public administrators should be able to accept responsibility for their actions and decisions. They should hold themselves morally responsible for their actions and for the use of discretion while making decisions. They should timely, honest, comprehensive, and accurate information and advice to the elected and appointed officials and government. They should respond effectively to the demands and challenges from the internal and external environment and be able to adapt to environmental transformations. Fusion: Public servants should engender a fusion of individual, organizational, and social goals and imbibe in their behavior a commitment to achieving such a fusion. In a situation of conflicting goals, ethical principles should prevail over the administrator's choice made. What is expected of a public servant here is to ensure that the public interest comes first, and he does not advance his own personal interest at the expense of the public.

Transparency: Public servants should make decisions and implement them in a transparent manner so that those affected by the decision and those who may wish to appraise their rational would be able to understand the reasons for such decisions and sources of information on which such decisions were based.

Overview of Ethics and Values in Nigeria Public Service

Section 23 of the 1999 constitution of Nigeria as amended says "the national ethics shall be Discipline, Integrity, and Dignity of labour, social justice, Religious tolerance, Self- reliance, and Patriotism'. The civil service hand book contains code of ethics in government business to include; discipline loyalty, honesty, courage, courtesy, co-operation, tact, industry, avoidance of

delay, tidiness, helpfulness, and kindness. Nigerian public servants are trained to operate on laid down rules and regulations and to go by the rules and regulations. In abiding by these rules and regulations, public servants are largely expected to be very conscious of the ethics and values of the civil service which demand impartiality, neutrality, and anonymity etc. To enhance full compliance to these ethics and values, there are anti- corruption laws, financial regulation, public service handbook, etc which lay down what constitutes misconduct and serious misconduct for public servants. These ethics and values are inscribed to help check arbitrary civil servants, instill and promote in public servants a sense of administrative responsibility, establish and promote correct relations between citizens and public servants, and maintain high standards of conduct among public servants. They are also meant to control administrative power and discretion which cannot be controlled by formal laws, methods, and procedures.

Thus, it is expected that with high morals fostered and maintained through ethics and values, stability and harmonious relationship can exist between public servants and citizens, and between public servants and their political executives, and among the civil servants themselves. In the words of Dubhashi, (2012), "it is of utmost importance that public administration should be efficient but is even more important that it should be ethical. It is said of an individual that if character is lost, everything is lost. It could be stated about public administration that if ethics is lost, everything is lost". Despite the existence of this code of ethics and values in the Nigerian public service, research indicates that the Nigerian society still witnesses various cases of corruption, business malpractices, illicit operations, wheeling dealing, and unhealthy nexus between politicians and public administrators.

Towards Achieving Ethics and Values in the Nigerian Public Service

To enhance the adherence to ethics and values in the Nigeria public service it is high time Nigeria did the needful for optimum public service delivery. For one, there is need to infuse ethics and values into politics. Research has shown that the political executives are the greatest abuse of bureaucracy. There is high level of political corruption and encroachment into administration, leading to the quest for political survival at all cost. They manipulate the bureaucracy and its principles to achieve their party manifesto and personal biddings on the ground of being the direct representative of the people. All administrative discretions are affected by the whims and caprices of the political elites rather than the provisions of the public service rules, financial regulations, etc which also embody the code of ethics and values for public servants. As Linda Trevino (2007) has said "the total devaluation of moral values and ethical ideals in public life and administration today have given rise to the present day rat race for position, power, and pelf by any means, by crook than by hook". Infusion of ethics and values into politics in Nigeria will help make Nigerian political elites to demonstrate integrity. There is a wide gap between the credibility of political and administrative leadership. Progress can only be made when the political masters being the political heads of their ministries live above board. Political executives must demonstrate integrity and instill faith among their

subordinates about their fairness and impartiality. Thus, there is need to train and imbue in the political elites to pursue and respect ethical ways so that they can fulfill their campaign pledges.

In the words of Obasanjo, (1999) "Civil Service Rules by themselves will not lead to good governance if they are not backed by political will and the preparedness of government to impose total adherence to these rules to promote public good." Again, the relation between citizens and public administrators should be strengthened. Over the years, many well intentioned and technically sound programmes of government aimed at solving the societal problems have been frustrated by lack of popular acceptance and community participation. Public relations entail the establishment of a climate of understanding by interpreting the programme of government agencies to the public and vice versa. The purposes of this public relation are to supply information and to ensure co-operation between citizens and the public servants. Public servants are therefore enjoined to maintain good public relation. Alienation between the citizens and the public administrators undermines the legitimacy, effectiveness, and creativity of the public servants in Nigeria.

There is need to promote harmony and mutual trust among citizens and public servants. Good public relation will help to increase prestige, goodwill, and protect the public service by safeguarding it against unwarranted and unwanted attacks as well as remove the genuine complaints and grievances of the general public, thereby creating confidence and favourable opinion in the minds of the people towards the government. There is need for character – building. Administrative morality is a part of the society. According to George Simata (2004)) "the ethics of every profession will be found on close analysis to be not much higher and not much lower than the general decency of the nation as a whole. Their nature at the best is powerfully molded by the level of surrounding and prevailing civilization". In view of the above, the success of any government largely depends upon the effective collaboration of its citizens. Civic consciousness, patriotism, and discipline are needed for the progress of the country. Our educational system, National Orientation Agency, religious bodies, and the mass media should focus more attention to orientating the people towards character –building. People's character is the major catalyst to modernization, national development and effective public service delivery.

One of the major features of the civil service is impartiality. The prestige and reputation of the civil service depend largely upon the ethos, attitudes, and perception of its members. Public administrators are required to imbibe the principle of impartiality and consistency in the performance of their functions. Civil servants should remain impartial to avoid corruption, and favouritism. They should maintain dignity and authority of the public service and meticulously implement the policies and programmes of their political masters in line with stipulated laws, rules and regulations. As Nigeria is a diverse country, it is strongly expected that civil servants should show willingness to understand and be tolerant of different points of view, cultural

patterns, religious affiliations, and work habits. They should also be willing to work without prejudice, or bias with persons of all ethnic origin, region, state, local government, or community. To achieve these will require the conduct of high sense of judgment and restraint in all expressions of view in both the private and public life of public servants. Any expression which could be misconstrued as biased, intolerant, incisive, or hate speech especially in respect of ethnic, regional, or political issues with which the public service is confronted must be eschewed. Political neutrality is an essential ingredient of civil service in a democratic country of which Nigeria is one. "It requires that public administrators should render to their political masters free and frank advice impartially and without any political consideration. In so doing, civil servants should faithfully implement the decisions of the government whether such decisions are in consonance with their advice or not" Adebayo (2004). The concept of political neutrality engenders political confidence in administrators against political influence and also instills trust among ministers that their directives would be faithfully carried out. To adhere to political neutrality, public servants are reminded in section 4(e) of the public service rules that any civil servant who engages in partisan politics has committed serious misconduct which carries a penalty of dismissal if proven. Adopting new laws including code of conduct by itself will not go very far without implementing the spirit and the word as well as the political will.

Causes of Abuse of Ethics and Values in the Public Service

Several factors account for abuse of ethics and values in the Nigerian public service. Some of these factors are discussed below. Historically, in Nigeria abuse of ethics and values has its root in the colonial rule. British administration was not interested in the overall development of the country. Recruitment into the public service was lopsided in favour of the expatriates and only lower posts were offered to Nigerians with concomitant low salaries. To make ends meet, many Nigerians indulged in corrupt practices. Again, rapid urbanization and industrialization in our today's society has given rise to great emphasis on material possessions. Positions and economic power now determine the status and prestige of a person in the society. Public servants complain of low salaries and coupled with the current economic recession, both the rich and poor public servants now fall easy prey to corruption and sheer neglect of ethics and values as everybody wants to survive at all cost either by hook or crook. Universally, studies indicate that people are fixed into "having more" instead of becoming more" even when the acquirer remains dwarf in his or her personal and intellectual development.

In a society where the norm appears to be on making the money irrespective of the source of the money, the urge to appear prestigious by material possession has led those who have the opportunities to succumb to 'temptations'. Some public servants hide under the guise of bureaucracy to make their work complicated, cumbersome, and dilatory so as to encourage 'speedy money' or 'kick backs'. Reports abound whereby big businessmen, dishonest merchants, contractors and suppliers bribe civil servants so as to get undue favours from them. Prior to the approval of the whistle blower policy by the Nigerian government, lack of strong public

opinion against abuse of ethics and values in the Nigeria public service prevailed. People fear to report to government against corrupt officials. Instead they offer bribes to get their illegitimate claims accepted. To this end, the passage of the Whistleblower Act and subsequent provision of contact phone numbers and addresses for reporting cases of maladministration is highly welcome. Though there are many laws, rules, and regulations that guide the public service, research have shown that most of these rules and regulations are outmoded and provide insufficient penalties. It takes too much time to get corrupt public servants punished under the laws. Those found guilty of maladministration are not summarily tried and sometimes no strict punishment is given to the culprit. Reluctance of higher public servants to exercise disciplinary action against corrupt subordinates due to their collusion with them equally exacerbates the matter.

Theoretical Framework

This paper is anchored on two theoretical frameworks namely; the expectancy theory and the theory of reasoned action. Expectancy theory, also referred to as expectancy theory of motivation assumes that an individual will behave or act in a certain way because they are motivated to choose a specific behavior over other behaviors as a result of what they expect the result of that chosen behavior will be. The expectancy theory is a motivation theory first proposed by Victor Vroom (1964). The theory emphasizes the need for organizations to relate rewards directly to performance and to ensure that the rewards provided are those rewards deserved and wanted by the recipient. In essence, the motivation of the behavior selection is determined by the desirability of the outcome. Expectancy theory focuses attention on the mental processes regarding choice, or choosing. It expounds the processes which an individual undergoes to make an ultimate choice. The theory of reasoned action which was developed by Martin Fishbein and Icek Ajzen in 1967, and aims at explaining the relationship between attitudes and behaviors within human action.

TRA is used to predict how individuals will behave based on their pre-existing attitudes and behavioral intentions. An individual's decision to engage in a particular behavior is based on the outcomes the individual expects will come as a result of exhibiting such behavior. Thus, the theory serves to understand an individual's voluntary behavior. The ideas in this theory have to do with an individual's basic motivation to perform an action. According to the theory, intention to perform a certain behavior precedes the actual behavior. This intention is known as behavioral intention, and arises as a result of a belief that performing the behavior will lead to a specific outcome. Behavioral intention is important to the theory because these intentions "are determined by attitudes to behaviors and subjective norms". The theory of reasoned action suggests that stronger intentions lead to increased effort to perform the behavior, which also increases the likelihood for the behavior to be performed. From the two theories, one can rightly infer that the attitude of public servants is not determined by the enshrined code of ethics and values, but by expectancy and reasoned action.

Conclusion

Ethics and values are broader sets of principles that are designed to inform specific laws or government acts. They carry general obligations and devotion. They often capture a vision of excellence of what individuals and societies should be striving for and what they can achieve. Thus, they are almost the most important statement of civil expectation. They provide the framework that public servants use to carry out public responsibilities and constitute the fundamental mechanisms for ensuring professionalism and elimination of corruption. The Nigeria public service has continued to witness high level of nihilism occasioned by the philosophy of "anything goes". Report about many public servants indicates that of they lack ethical principles, values, patriotism, and principles of life. Evidence of financial misappropriation, misapplication, materialism, and acts of inferiority complex abound. For the Nigeria public service to be able to prove their mettle in successfully grappling with the problems arising from social and economic development, public servants must develop and abide by ethical standards and be value- oriented in the performance of their duties. They should exhibit selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness and show exemplary leadership. However, these theories are criticized on the ground that the reward in question could have a negative effect for the individual.

Recommendations

There is need to adopt and strengthen competent disciplinary bodies to investigate allegations bordering on violation of code of ethics and values and to treat such as serious misconduct inviting sanction. This has become necessary following the rampant cases of unethical behavior among public servants. Again, it is high time Nigerian government integrated ethics and values in the entirety of higher education policies and programmes as primary agenda for preparing the youth-future leaders especially prospective public servants for responsible leadership roles in the public service. In doing this, re-inventing traditional cultural wisdoms to integrate them as ethical values in higher education training would be very helpful. This is in view of the fact that the public service is dealing with people whose value base has been established. Government officials, particularly at lower level, are forced by poverty to regard office holding as a source of income which they would seek to maximize. Public services are rendered in exchange for extra money or services, which tend to be bad and slow if no bribe is offered. Hence, rise of pay becomes a basic way out in the wide spread bribery in the public service. Evaluation and simplification of the complicatedness of procedures in government offices will also help prevent delays and make public servants fully responsive to the needs of citizens. Equally very important is the need to ensure that pre- recruitment induction training of public servants includes as a vital component the values and standards concerning their future functions. The training programme should be encompassing with a mix of ethical issues, procedural rules, and practical situations. This will help in matching ethical values with the daily practices of the public service.

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