

Renewal of Work Ethics as Sine-Qua-Non To Promoting of Good Governance among Civil Servants in Rivers State

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Abstract

This study examined renewal of work ethics as sine-qua-non to promoting of good governance among civil servants in Rivers State. The population for the study is 122 civil servants drawn from 10 sampled Ministries. A structured questionnaire made up of seven items which address background variables of the civil servants, causes of unethical behaviours, perception of the existence of unethical behaviours and ways of improving work ethics was used. A test-re-test was done to establish the reliability of the instrument and a reliability coefficient of 0.88 using Pearson Product Moment Correlation was obtained. Data collected was subjected to analysis using frequency distribution. Three research questions were posed for the study. Results obtained from the study revealed that 98.4% of civil servants agreed that civil servants engage in unconcern attitude toward government job. 85.3% of them engage in embezzlement of public funds especially the senior staff. Similarly, 78.6% of respondents admitted that civil servants get to work late. The study also indicated that greed, delay in salary, poor moral and academic background are causes of unethical behaviours. Based on the findings the study recommended disciplinary measures on any worker caught engaging in unethical behaviour. Creation of ethics committee in all government ministries and departments of check workers conduct, funding of all ministries should be properly carried out by government.

Keywords: Work ethics, good governance, civil servants.

INTRODUCTION

One of the issues that have not received enough attention in Rivers State's quest for good governance is the need for renewal of work ethics among public servants. This is the gap in democratic discourse that this paper intends to fill. Therefore, this paper sheds-light on the need for renewal of work ethics particularly among civil servants in Rivers State who always work with politicians as government comes and goes. It also defines what work ethics of average Nigerian workers, and provides explanation for the present state peoples' attitude to work, its remedies and the implications of work ethics for good governance.

What is work Ethics?

To adequately define "work ethics," it is important to split the word into two, i.e. "work: and "ethics" before we marry them together. It is difficult to define and accept a generalized definition, because of different views from different scholars and/or historical background and various meanings attached to it by various authors. However, Dictionary defines work as a job or

activity that one does regularly to earn money. (Webster, 2002). As a form of activity, work is the act of doing something that needs to be done. It also means a duty. This makes it a subject of ethical rules.

According to Lillie (1961). Ethics simply means moral rules or principles of behavior for deciding what is right and wrong, moral rule or moral principle refers to a standard of good behavior expected of members of the society. Ethics is also seen as a set of moral principles or values; the principles of conduct governing an individual or group. Without going into too much detail society expects its members to behave in a certain way and not to behave otherwise. This brought about what is understood as moral values and moral vices or positive values and negative values respectively. Positive values which cut across every facet of man's life are manifested in acts of honesty, discipline, dedication to duty, tolerance, justice, love, hard work, sincerity, impartiality humility, hospitality, endurance, prudence, etc. Conversely, negative value is just the opposite of positive ones (Omogbe, 1993) are demonstrated in form of indiscipline, idleness, laziness, injustice, intolerance, arrogance, dishonest etc. It is important to note that while the society encourages its members to adhere to positive values; it discourages them to obtain from negative values because they debar success, sustenance, maintenance and progress of society (Omogbe, 1993).

Similarly, ethics is a set of standards by which human actions are determined to be right or wrong (Dwivedi as cited by Omar, 2004). Ethics could simply mean a matter of what is good or what is bad in terms of conceptualization and discernment between the two as well as the making of choices between the two as occasion arises. It deals with the burdens or moral values, duties, obligations and expectations which each of us necessarily bears as we go about our daily lives strictly minding our own business but simultaneously impacting on other people and their affairs. Therefore, the search for ethics is the search for moral standards (Touo, 2002).

In the light of the above definitions, work ethics could be defined as moral rules or a principle in relation to work; or it refers to moral rules guiding behavior of workers in relation to the work they do, upon which they earn salaries or wages. In a broader manner, work ethics deals essentially with moral values associated with the following facet of work, worker, work place, working condition, work experience, work force, work clothes, working implements or instruments, working practice, working hours, working relationship, working class, working day, working girl, working group, working area, work room, work permit, working order etc (Grint, 1991). If we relate moral values to work, it implies that work ethics demands that workers should be punctual at work place, co-operate with co-workers, work hard to justify their salaries, contribute their quotas to the progress of work they are employed to do. In additions, workers need to be honest, straight forward and sincere in discharging their duties responsibly, they need to endure hardship when the need arises as often dictated by the nature of the work they do.

Ifemesia (1985) stated that dedication to duty is an aspect of discipline which is spoken of in this manner:

A dedicated man is the kind of man who would work for others as eagerly as he would work for himself. He is the kind of man, whom countless people will count on for advice. He is the kind of man who wants more out of his effort than money-yet

he is too more thoughtful, too sensible, to under estimate his own value.

We need to add that dedication to duty involves adherence, allegiance, commitment, devotion, enthusiasm, faithfulness, fidelity, loyalty, single-mindedness, and zeal.

Good governance and its connection with work ethics. Governance relates to decisions that define expectations, grant power, or verify performance. It consists either of a separate process or of a specific part of management or leadership processes (Lawal, 2003). Sometimes people set up a government to administer these processes and systems. Good governance, according to Ayantayo (2012), had eight major characteristics of which are participatory, consensus oriented, accountability, transparency, responsibility effective and efficient, equitability, inclusive and in accordance with the rule of law. Three of these, which are immediately germane to our discussion, are effectiveness and efficiency, accountability and transparency.

Effectiveness and efficiency in the act of governance means that processes and institutions produce results that meet the needs of society while making that best use of resources at their disposal. This also covers the sustainable use of natural resources and the protection of the environment. Public officers are expected to take the lead in effective and efficient service delivery, which ultimately would bring about good governance. Effective service delivery theoretically and practically also entails carrying out one's job responsibility responsible, providing specified service as at when due, rendering the job prescribed duty/duties without fear or favour, adjusting to operational time frames to provide the most basic needs and devoting attention to the extent of the services required within the specific state, bearing in mind its level of socio-economic and political stability.

Accountability is a key requirement of good governance on the part of public officer. In order to enhance good governance, it becomes all the more important for public officers to be accountable to the public and to their institutional stakeholders, especially the public who will be affected by its decisions or actions. We must add that accountability cannot be enforced without transparency.

Transparency means, that all the activities of public officers and any decisions taken and their enforcement are done in a manner that follows rules and regulations. It also implies having a clean slate in the administration of governance. The activities of public officers should be made open to the public in such a manner that information is freely available and directly assessable to those who will be affected by such decisions and their enforcement. It also means that enough information is provided in easily understandable forms and media.

Statement of the Problem

In recent times, there have been concerns about the decline in quality, values and public morality among public servants in government departments and ministries in Nigeria. There have also been a lot of unethical issues of great concern among public servants such issues include laziness, indolent, unconcerned, indiscipline, lack of commitment, absenteeism, arrogance, dishonesty, intolerance and corruption and infidelity. Engagement in these behaviours is increasingly recognized as a pre-eminent problem in our public sector. This indicates neglect to the ethical requirement, for the promotion of good governance as well as

undermines the primary role of good governance in Nigeria. This attitude would result in decline in productivity only to produce dishonest and unscrupulous leaders.

However, engagement in unethical behaviours may as well depend on public servants' perception of these unethical issues. Therefore, civil servants' perception of the existence of these unethical behaviours among civil servants, what they consider as the causes of unethical behavior, which unethical behavior tend to have negative impacts on good governance and views on strategies to improve ethical conduct among civil servants are questions which the study seeks to answer. Knowledge gained could be used to determine the ethical standards of civil servants for good governance.

Purpose of the Propose

The broad purpose of the study is Renewal of work ethics as sine-qua-non to promoting of good governance among civil servants in Rivers State. The specific objectives include:

1. To determine the causes of unethical behavior among civil servants.
2. To examine perception of the existence of unethical practices among civil servants to promoting good governance.
3. To ascertain ways of improving work ethics among civil servants to promoting good governance in Rivers State.

Research Questions

1. What are the causes of unethical behavior among civil servants to promoting good governance in Rivers State?
2. What unethical practices exist among civil servants to promoting good governance in Rivers State?
3. What are the ways of renewing or improving work ethics among civil servants to promoting good governance in Rivers State?

Methodology

The study is conducted in Rivers State. The following Government Ministries are used. They are Ministries of: Agriculture, Environment, Finance, Power, Energy and Natural Resources, Urban Development, Health, Works, Special Duties and Education. Each of these ministries are headed by commissioners and assisted by Permanent Secretaries. A total number of 122 civil servants from the 10 sampled Ministries (out of 26 – Agriculture, Budget and Economic Planning, Chieftaincy and Community Affairs, Commerce and industry, Culture and Tourism, Education, Energy and Natural Resources Employment Generation and Empowerment, Environment, Finance, health, Housing Information and Communication, Justice, lands and Survey, Local Government Affairs, Power, Social Welfare and Rehabilitation, Special Duties, Sports, Transport, Urban Development, Water Resources and Rural Development, Women Affairs, Works and Youth Development), participated in the study.

A structured questionnaire was used in the collection of data. The questionnaire is made up to seven items which addressed background variables of the civil servants, causes of unethical behaviours, perception of the existence of unethical behaviours, and ways of improving work ethics among civil servants in Rivers State. The questionnaire was vetted by experts in Measurements and Evaluation. Modifications were made based by their comments. A test-

retest was done to establish the reliability of the instrument. A reliability coefficient of the result shows an r-value of 0.88 using Pearson Product Moment Correlation. Data collected was subjected to analysis using frequency distribution.

Results:

Result indicates that 30% of the respondents were from Ministry of Agriculture, 6% Ministry of environment, 6% Finance, 8% Power Energy and Natural resources 4%, Urban Development 10%, Health 10%; Ministry of Works 5%; Special Duties 7% and Ministry of Education 14%. Findings also show that 82% of the respondents are Junior Staff while 18% are Senior Staff.

On gender, result shows that the respondents consisted of 50.8% females and 49.2% males, 98.4% of the civil servants sampled agreed that civil servants engage in unconcern attitude towards government job; 85.3% of them agreed that civil servants especially the senior ones engage in embezzlement of public funds, whereas 14.7% disagree embezzlement of public funds. 78.6% of respondents admitted that civil servants get to work late, 65.6% agree that one can hardly get anything from government secretariats without greasing the palm of those in charge of what one wants.

64.6% of respondents admitted that government officials especially women engage in “PP” – private (Business) Practice such as selling of wares and domestic needs both within and outside their offices. 49.2% of the respondents agree that officers demand sexual relationship as a means of fast tracking their promotions while 32.8% of the respondents opined that officers engage in extortion of money for employment.

Factors	% Response
Quest for money	24.6
Poor moral and academic background	11.5
Greed	19.4
Lack of remuneration/motivation/ delay in salary	18.9
Lack of job ethical orientation	11.2
Moral decadence in the society	10.9
Leadership	3.5

Table I: Causes of unethical behaviour among civil servants to promoting good governance in Rivers State. (n=122).

As shown in table1: 24.6% of the respondents perceived that quest for money, Greed by 19.4% and lack remuneration/motivation/delay in payment of salary by 18.9%. Result also indicated that poor moral and academic background by 11.5%, lack of job ethical orientation by 11.2% are factors (causes) contributing to unethical behaviours. Moral decadence in the society and leadership were also perceived as contributors to unethical behaviours by 10.9% and 3.5% respectively.

Unethical practices	% Response
Unconcern attitude towards government job	30.1
Embezzlement of public funds	29.1
Get to work late (lateness to work)	13.3
Can hardly get anything without greasing the palm	9.8
Women engage in private (Business) practice (PP)	8.2
Demand for sexual relationship to fast trade promotions	6.8
Extortion of money for employment	2.7

Table 2: Unethical practices among civil servants (n=122)

Table 2 above shows that 30.1% of the respondents indicated that civil servants exhibit unconcern attitude towards government work which has negative impact on promoting good governance. This was followed by embezzlement of public funds as perceived by 29.1% respondents, lateness to work (get to work late) according to 13.3% respondents, can hardly get anything without greasing the palm as indicated by 9.8% of the respondents, women engage in private (Business) practice (PP) as shown by 8.2% respondents, demand for sexual relationship to fast track promotions as indicated by 6.8% respondents and extortion of money for employment by 2.7% respondents.

Ways	% Response
Re-orientation of civil servants on Work Ethics	4.1
Adequate remuneration/motivation/prompt payment of salary	36.1
Proper disciplinary measures to defaulters	16.4
Recognition and reward to hard work, commitment and honesty	6.5

Table 3: Ways of resending or improving work ethics (n- 122). Result shows that 41% of the respondents indicated re-orientation of civil servants on work ethics was considered the major strategy to encourage ethical conducts for the promotion of good governance, 36.1% was of the opinion that adequate remuneration, motivation/ prompt payment of salary could help, 16.4% indicated proper disciplinary measures to defaulters, while 6.5% indicated recognition and reward to hard work, commitment and honesty as strategies for improving ethical conduct of civil savants to promoting good governance.

Discussions

Existence of unethical behaviors among civil savants

Respondents attested to the existence of unethical behaviors among civil servants. This implies that it is clear that practicing such behaviours has become a preeminent problem in the civil service commission. This could be attributed to faulty thinking and impression of most of them by saying “we don’t need to sweat while doing government work” (Ayantayo, 2012). Invariably, most workers see government work as “nobody’s business.” This finding could be explained partly due to general societal decadence.

Causes of unethical behaviour among civil servants to promoting good governance

From views expressed by respondents, quest for money, greed and lack of remuneration/ motivation delay in payment of salary were considered by majority of the respondents as factors

contributing to engagement in unethical behaviours. This could be explained by the recent crave for material things and wealth as well as lack of commitment. With regarded to poor moral and academic background, Esejiegwu (2015) opined that it could be explained partly due to attendance to poor quality schools. It could be that some of the civil servants attended part time lectures and therefore, were not really grounded in the course, and it could also be that some of the lecturers were not well grounded in the course they are employed to teach. This observation was made by Esejiegwu (2015) who cited Akaah and Hund, (1994) and asserted that a person's ethical values and moral background determines to a large extent that moral judgment of what is good or bad and helps to handle ethical dilemmas. Other factors, as expressed by the respondents include lack of remuneration/ motivation, delay in salary. This could be explained by the inability to promptly pay salaries, give incentives and grants as well as poor conditions of services. For instance, poor housing transportation problems, prevalence of get-rich quick attitude among Nigerians, poverty, lack of supervision and poor enforcement of work ethics and the group norms and cultural values of the society and religious statement (Batstore , 1988). This observation gave support to that made by (Kuna, 2005). (Igboozurike, 2006, and Babalola, 2006 in Ezejiegwa, 2015). Unethical practices among civil servants impart to promoting good governance.

From the response, “unconcern attitude and embezzlement of public funds were seen by a large proportion of the respondents as unethical behavioral practices that could have negative impact to promoting good governance. This could be attributed to the fact that some Nigerian workers assume that civil service is a place where money could be made. Such behaviors could have disturbing impact on promoting good governance.

On ways of improving ethical conduct or renewal of work ethics to promoting of good governance.

Respondents are of the opinion that Nigerian workers both old and young need regular re-orientation on work ethics. This is because it could be that some workers have forgotten and or are ignorant of the work requirement. As expressed by the respondents, adequate remuneration/ prompt payment of salary and motivation could help improve ethical conduct among civil servants. This is important because others tend to do what is right when it is valued and rewarded.

According to Ayantayo (2012) the role of government in inspiring workers to adhere to work ethics is enormous. First, the government needs to pay fair wages and salaries to her worker. Fair wages is difficult to define because of its ambivalence. But to our mine, fair wage is the one sufficient to keep a worker and his family at a reasonable level of life beyond bare existence. That is, wages sufficient for a worker to feed himself and his family very well, buy a car, build a house, and possess other domestic facilities which will enhance him good living. Whatever he buys with his wages is devoid of desire for materialism.

When a worker is well paid, he has the potential to adhere to work ethics than otherwise. It is in this account that Yanketovich (1989) argues that work should be a rewarding part of life of and not a form of drudgery. In addition to the above, there is a need to motivate workers in their workplace. The fact is that if workers are motivated to work, they are bound to work efficiently and reasonably. The motivation, we have in mind could be intrinsic or social. Intrinsic motivation is manifested by programme of job enrichment, job rotation, and the giving of feedback about performance. This will lead to an increase in the rate and quality of work and in

job satisfaction of the individual. In the same vein, a worker can be socially motivated by giving him part of the productivity bonus, the creation of profit sharing co-partnership, giving of award (cash or kind) praises and honour to workers who excelled morally in his place of work (Vroom, 1955).

Conclusion

It is important to note at this juncture that all the methods of renewal of work ethics highlighted in this study have positive implication for the implementation of good governance. It is our opinion that if workers are made happy and worker to work harder than before, there would be a return to genuine and high adherence to work ethics, more than before, there will be respect for dignity of labour. In fact, the level of workers productivity and efficiency would increase. Invariably, this would bring good image for the nation, for the workers themselves and the government. Result of the study have indicated that Nigerian workers exhibited some unethical behaviours such as unconcern attitudes towards government work, embezzlement of public funds, lateness to work among others and such factors as quest for money, poor moral and academic background, greed (covetousness) moral decadence in the society, etc are contributing factor to workers engagement in unethical conduct and prompt payment of salaries motivation is to be urgently carried out. This could help restore integrity, respect for values and good moral conduct among Nigerian workers in Rivers State.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. Advocates disciplinary measures on any worker caught engaging in unethical behaviors.
2. State civil services commission should create ethics committee in all government ministries and department to check on workers conduct.
3. Government should be committed towards funding all the ministries properly.
4. Workers found lacking in knowledge should be re-examined and may be sent on workshop for training in their area of specialization. Grants and sponsorship to conferences should be encouraged.

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