Ethical Leadership and Administrative Competence: A Study of Ethiope East and Ethiope West Local Government Areas of Delta State, Nigeria

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Abstract. *Unethical and administrative corrupt practices have emerged as part of the criticisms leveled against local governments in Nigeria. Perhaps, the problem of employees' apathy and lack of effort to perform the core functions of a modern state is not simply a matter of laziness; rather, there are often healthy reactions by normal people to an unhealthy environment created by unethical leadership. This underscores the importance of ethical leadership in influencing administrative competence. It is against this backdrop that this study examines the relationship between ethical leadership and administrative competence in Ethiope Easst and Ethiope West Local Government Areas of Delta State, Nigeria. A cross-sectional survey research design was adopted and data was collected via a survey of 177 respondents randomly selected from a population of 317 employees of the Ethiope East and Ethiope West Local Governments. Data collected were analyzed using correlation and linear regression analysis with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 23. The results of the study revealed that there is a significant relationship between ethical leadership and administrative competence of employees. The study also showed that ethical leadership exerts a positive and statistically significant effect on administrative competence in Ethiope East and Ethiope West Local Government Areas of Delta State, Nigeria. Based on these findings, the study concludes that ethical leadership has significant influence on administrative competence. The study therefore recommendes among others that local government leadership should rewards ethical conduct and discipline unethical conduct by exhibiting ethical behaviour that promote administrative competent.*

Keywords: Ethics, Leadership, Administrative Competence, Trust, Development performance.

INTRODUCTION

Ethics is concerned with the moral principles that determine what is right or wrong conduct. Determination of what is right or wrong behaviour is not an easy task as such, the task is complicated by the fact that the criterion of judging what is right or wrong is neither absolute nor universal, but varies, depending on the person, place and time. If this be the case, why do we need ethics in our workplace and even as an administrator? (1) it promotes administrative competent, (2) it help administrator to arrive at decisions more quickly, (3) it leads to more consistency in decision-making, (4) it can reveal the value dimension of a decision that would otherwise seem value free and (5) it makes more reflective judgments one that can be defended in public. Bok, 1990 cited in Cheteniand Shindika (2017:5) affirmed that "before the Second World Ward, strengthening and building the character of students through moral education was considered an important aspect in one's intellectual life, but the idea had faded in public administration in a society that increasingly encouraged tolerance rather than commitment to a single set of moral guidelines that promote administrative competent". Also, Menzel (1997:520) posits that "education in ethics had helped public officials deal with challenges of moral issues at work. More importantly, ethical educators developed an awareness of ethical issues and cultivated an attitude of moral obligation and personal responsibility in pursuing a career in the public service". Thus, ethical behaviour to a large extent is a function of individual mental attitudes which he/she developed while working in a group and within a social system (e.g organization). The responsibility for developing the right attitudes and values for ethical behaviour rests primarily on the individual public servant who perceived his/her leader to use an ethical lens, makes ethical decisions, consider others' well-being when making decisions and treats other fairly, communicates the importance of ethics and holds others accountable for acting ethically (O'Connell & Bligh, 2009).

As a potential solution to corruption, incompetent and lack of moral values in organizations, a comprehensively discussed concept is ethical leadership (Cheteni&Shindika, 2017). According to Brown, Trevino and Harrison (2005:120), ethical leadership is "the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making". Kanugo (2001:258) perceived ethical leadership as "a pressure exerted on officials to choose between the good and the bad, referred to as altruistic and egoistic motives.

Thus, leaders can improve development performance by influencing the competence and performance of their subordinates through ethical behaviours, such as expressing a convincing vision, leading by example, and the use of symbols, rituals, ceremonies and stories (Yukl, 2008). Thus, for leaders to be perceived as ethical leaders and to influence ethical related outcomes, subordinates must perceive them as attractive, credible and legitimate (Brown *et al.*, 2005). In the view of Tannner, Brugger, Schie, Van and Lebherz (2010), the demonstration of ethical leadership in work settings increases the likelihood of administrative competent and commitment. This is because contemporary public administration needs competent public servants who area able to make sense of the ambiguity inherent in the job. Therefore, the important of ethical leadership in any organization, especially local government administration cannot be overemphasized.

Ethical leadership and its effect on administrative competence has been subject of discourse among public administrators and social scientists in the last two decades. But very insufficient number of studies in this area has been conducted in Nigeria and no recent study has been conducted to empirically examine the relationship and the effect of ethical leadership on administrative competence in the public service sector of Delta State. To bridge this knowledge gap, this study sought to examine the relationship and the effect of ethical leadership on administrative competence in Ethiope East and Ethiope West Local Government Areas of Delta State, Nigeria.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Concept of Administrative Competence

Administrative competence can be defined as the capacity of a state administration to perform the core functions of a modern state as well as create an enabling environment for the different actors in promoting development in a state (Adamolekun, 2006). That is, competent administration would be expected to ensure the continuity of the state or local government council, provide or facilitate the provision of quality service delivery and be accountable to both the political leadership of successive elected governments and the sovereign people. The critical importance of a competent administration in the discussion of the governance of a modern state can be illustrated by the fact that almost without exception, the incapacity of a state or local government administrators to ensure the continuity of the state or local government councils within the state is a strong evidence of a failing or failed state. Drawing on existing public

administrative literature, there are six key factors widely acknowledge in discussing administrative competence. These are: (i) merit-based recruitment and promotion, (ii) administrative accountability (iii) strategies for budget management (iv) Communication and (vi) adaptability.

Efficient and Effective service Delivery

The Primary purpose of a public service in a modern state is the delivery of quality public goods and services to the citizenry. The administrative machinery of the state or local government councils is expected to provide some services directly, others through partnerships with the private sector, non-governmental organizations or communities. Also, there is increasing emphasis on the need for the administration of a modern state to provide an enabling environment for private sectors and civil society organizations that seek to provide quality services to the public. Notwithstanding, the role of other actors in service delivery, the role of the governmental administrators is essential (Olowu, 1999). Thus, it is when a governmental administration is able to both deliver quality services, service as an enabler and credible partner of other actors that development performance is enhanced. To improve the quality of service delivery, a governmental administration could use a combination of the following methods: Surveys of selected public services, citizens' charters and programme evaluation (World Bank, 2004).

Merit-Based Recruitment and Promotion

Commitment to Meritocracy is almost always accompanied by an emphasis on professionalism and continuous learning for public officials. From Mandarin China to Modern France, a merit-based public service scores high in performing the core public functions of a state, all things being equal. However, in almost every modern state, there is a need to combine a commitment to meritocracy with ensuring some degree of representativeness. That is, taking into consideration gender, ethnicity, race and geography. In countries that have established public or civil service commissions are to serve, at least in theory, as merit protection institutions (Nigeria Constitution, 1999).

Administrative Accountability

Administrative accountability refers to the responsiveness of appointed public officials to the elected political executive as well as to the public or the governed. Because of their permanency of tenure and expertise acquired in order to cope with the explosion in scientific and

technological knowledge, administrative officials are in a position of power vis-à-vis the layman politicians for the most part in the executive and legislative branches. The officials are also in a position of power vis-à-vis the citizens they are expected to serve; their activities cover a very large area of the citizens' life from cradle to the grave. And it is also the case that some of these officials could abuse their office for selfish ends. Example, for personal and family enrichment. To deal with these challenges, various measures are used, in varying combinations, to restrain and check the behaviour of administrative or appointed officials with a view to preventing the abuse of their positions of power. Some accountability or control measures are within the administrative machinery such as measures focused on financial management and procurement, and others are external such as judicial control, legislative oversight and the watchdog role of the media and civil society groups.In general, an unaccountable administration would tend to be corrupt and be a drag on development efforts while an accountable administration would tend to be relatively honest and development-oriented (Adamolekun, 2006).

Strategies for Budget Management

This refers to the ability to accurately and thoroughly utilize office technology and to demonstrate practical knowledge of information management, e-mail management, budget process management and privacy protection issues administrative officials (Sacerdoti, El-Masry, Khandelwal& Yao, 2005).

Communication

Communication in the context of this paper refers to clearly conveying and receiving of messages to meet the need of all. This involves listening, interpreting and delivery verbal, non-verbal, written and electronic messages. That is, demonstration of ability to provide explanation and/or options to resolve difficult or confrontational situations (Sarcerdofi*et al*., 2005).

Adaptability

This refers to personal willingness and ability to work cooperatively and productively with others to achieve results and also adapt to change even when there is ambiguity and applies special techniques to manage situation involving state or change (North, 1990).

Ethical Leadership

Ethical behaviour and strong character are essential qualities which determines the credibility of a leader in giving meaningful influence (Piccolo, Greenbaum, Hartog&Folger, 2010; Putu, Ni, Desak& Made, 2017; Kang, 2019). According to Moreno (2010:98), ethical leader is "a person

who is consistent between words and actions.That is, ethical leaders are able to influence their subordinates by consistent behaviour and act in conformity with their words". Brown *et al.* (2005:120) defined ethical leadership as "the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement and decision-making". This definition suggests that ethical leader set example for subordinates and withstand any temptations. This support the assertion of the Freeman and Steward, 2006 cited in Bello (2010:230) who post that ethical leader is "a person with right values and strong characters that set examples for others and withstand temptations". Trevino, Brown and Hartman (2003) affirmed that ethical leaders are honest, open to novel ideas, trustworthy and strictly follow social norms, display ethical and values in their personal and professional lives.

Resick, Hanges, Dickson and Mitchelson (2006) identified six key attributes that characterized ethical leadership which include (i) ethical awareness, (ii) character and integrity, (iii) community/people-orientation, (iv) encouraging and empowering,(v) managing ethnical accountability and (vi) motivating. Similarly, O'Connell and Bligh (2009) identified the following nine attributes that characterized ethical leadership which include (1) consider others well-being when makings decisions and treats others fairly, (2) communicates the importance of ethics, (3) acts ethically or role models ethical behaviour, (4) holds others accountable for acting ethically, (5) uses an ethical lens, (6) gives priority to long-term decision-making (7) understand himself and those he work with (8) always involves in ethical decision-making and (9) offers training and support for subordinates on how to act ethically in the workplace. In a similar vein, Freeman and Stewart (2006) identified the following characteristics of ethical leaders to include but not limited to (a) take a charitable understanding of others values, (b) he/she on organizational success rather than on personal ego, (c) he/she create a living conversation about ethics, (d) make tough calls while being imaginative, (e) he/she find the best people and develop them, (f) he/she create stakeholder support and societal legitimacy and (g) he/she acts as the articulation and embodiment of the purpose and values of the organization.

Local Government Administration in Nigeria: An Overview

The genesis of the local government system in Nigeria dates back to the pre-colonial era and the formative period of large-scale kingdoms and powerful empires in the country. The existence of provincial systems, which operated in Borno and Oyo empires as well as the emirates system of

Sokoto caliphate exhibited rudimentary conception of local government administration (Minna, 1993 cited in Ugwu, 2003). In these areas, there were smaller districts, villages and wards that were subject to the kingdom and emirates government. These smaller levels of government could be described as local government. A review of the history of local government in Nigeria shows that local governments across the country have a long episode of trial and error. All through history, local governments have attempted to reconcile participation of indigenous people in their own administration with the needs for an efficient delivery of external services.

The 1976 local government Reform Hand Book cited in Ugwu (2003:2), defines local government as "government at the local level exercised through representative councils established by law to exercise specific powers within defined areas. These powers should give the council substantial control over local affairs as well as the staff and institutional and financial powers to initiate and direct the provision of services and to determine and complement projects so as to complement the activities of the state and federal government in their areas, and to ensure, and through devolution of function to these councils and through the active participation of the people and their traditional institutions, that local initiatives and response to local needs and conditions are maximized. According to United Nations, 1980 cited in Ola (1984:7), local government is "a political division of a nation or (in federal system), state, which is constituted by law, and has substantial control of local affairs, including the powers to impose taxes or to exact labour for prescribed purposes. The governing body of such as entry is elected or otherwise locally selected". The Nigerian guideline for local government reform (1976) stipulated the following key functions of local government in Nigeria: (i) to facilitate the exercise of democratic self-government close to the local level of Nigerian societies, and to encourage initiate and leadership potential, (ii) to make appropriate services and development activities responsive to local wishes and initiatives by developing or delegating them to local representatives, (iii) to provide a two-way channel of communication between local communities and government and (iv) to mobilize human and materials resources through the involvement of members of the public in their local development.

In the context of this study, local government is defines as 'a government set up by a central authority or state government as a means of ensuring effective administration at the grass-root. In other words, a local government is a type of government that help either the central or state government to carry out effective administration of the country at the grass-root level. However,

for there to be effective administration and economic development in local governments, public administration at the local government level in Nigeria should be constructed not only as a managerial tool but also as a legitimate means for advancing the broader public concerns of equity and ethics.

Local government administration is one issue that has occupied a pride of place in the history of the Nigerian government and politics; being the link between the central (federal) and regional (state) governments and the local people. This is due to the significant role local governments' play in modern governance (Mukoro, 2019). According to king (1988:3) the local government unit is almost universally found in modern politics in both developed and developing nations. The local government continues to be a vital political issue. Unlike the other tiers of government can be adjudged as the most important tier of governance in Nigeria. This is based on the functions of this tier of government at the grass-roots. Apart from being the closest to the people, its functionaries are readily known and can easily relate and identify with the people (Mukoro, 2019).

Ethical Leadership and Administrative Competence

Ethics is a must for local government administrators. According to Rosenbloom, 1989 cited in Haz (2011:2793), ethics can be "considered as a form of self-accountability or an 'inner check' of the conduct of public administrators". Thus, public service ethics encompasses a broad range of principles and values. According to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 1999 cited in Haz (2011:2793), these include "objectivity, impartiality, fairness, sensitivity, compassion, responsivenessand integrity, selfless devotion to duty, accountability, transparency and protection of public interest. Ethical delemmas generally take place around administrative discretion, corruption, accountability, nepotism, interest group pressure, information secrecy, and policy complicacies" public servants have to exercise administrative discretion while performing their duties. However, public trust on the government depends on the manner through which these duties are carried out. Therefore, it is crucial to maintain ethical standards in the implementation of government functions. Ethical leadership has considerable effect on the enhancement of overall ethics in the public service (Hyka-Ekins, 2001). By exhibiting ethical behaviours, leaders in public sector inspire their followers to engage in what is right, good and just. This approach helps in elevating the moral awareness of the followers leading to a highly motivated workforce, high rate of job satisfaction, self-actualization and

increased effective service delivery. The primary role of this trajectory is to enhance the spirit of competence coupled with ethnical decision-making process that drives the public interest and societal expectations (Neubert, WU & Roberts, 2013; Atiya, Nasir &Schebaib, 2015).

Katz (2009) affirmed that ethical leadership is strongly associated with administrative competence in public service. A study by Toor and Ofori (2009) revealed that ethical leadership play a mediating role in the relationship between employee outcomes (employee's job satisfaction, job commitment and competence, and job performance and organizational culture. The study shows that ethical leadership is more likely to bring about leader's effectiveness, willingness of employees to put in extra efforts to achieve organizational goals and objectives, employees' job satisfaction and an atmosphere for ethical leadership to flourish which ultimately lead to increased administrative competence, job performance and public trust. Thus, studies have shown that greater trust exists in organizations when employees perceived an organizational climate as ethical. Trust within public sector organization can contribute to creating greater efficiencies in relationship between leaders and their subordinates (Hart, 2001; Resick, Martin, Keating, Dickson, Kwan &Peng, 2011; Atiya et al., 2015). Ethical leadership is associated with positive influence on administrative competent (Haq, 2011; Cheteni&Shindika, 2017), intrinsic motivation (Piccolo *et al.*, (2010), employee willing to report problems (Brown *et al.*, 2005), job responses (Agbim, 2018; Grigoropoulos, 2019), positive influence on job performance and commitment (Saeed, Shakeel&Lodhi, 2013; Shafique, Kalyal& Ahmed, 2018) and employee's self-efficiency (Stacey, 2013).

Theoretical Framework

While there are several theories which might prove appropriate for a discourse of this nature, the social learning theory present us with heuristic tool for interrogating the central issue of this study. Based upon the work of Bandura (1977), the social learning theory rests on the assumption that through the experience and observation of others, employees can learn the standard norms of proper behaviour that elevates their effective organizational commitment and competence. The social learning theory focuses on the antecedents and the outcomes of ethical leadership (Bandura, 1977). It suggests that ethical leaders can be role models who are attractive and legitimate in the workplace. In learning a standard norms of proper behavior, employees emulate their attitudes, especially those who are seen to be attractive, sincere, open and honest (Brown *et al.*, 2005). Therefore, as a role model, leaders who have integrity and set high ethical

standards for themselves and their workforce are attractive and credible which create an ethically friendly work environment and empowered people (employees) to believe in their ability (administrative competence) to their job (Brown & Trevino, 2006). The relevance of the social learning theory to this study is based on its ability to justify that ethical leaders influence their workforce to learn their behaviours which promote employees' competence and increase their self-efficacy to maximize their work potential.

In line with the literature review, the following objectives and null hypothesis were formulated for this study

Objectives of the Study

    i.   To examine the relationship between ethical leadership and administrative competence in Ethiope East and Ethiope West local government areas of Delta State, Nigeria.

    ii.   To assess the effect of ethical leadership on administrative competence in Ethiope East and Ethiope West local government areas of Delta State, Nigeria.

Hypotheses of the Study

The following null hypotheses were formulated for testing:

H_1: There is no significant relationship between ethical leadership and administrative competence in Ethiope East and Ethiope West Local government areas of Delta State, Nigeria.

H_2: Ethical leadership does not have a significant effect on administrative compete4nce in Ethiope East and Ethiope West local government areas of Delta State, Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a cross-sectional survey research design. The study units for data generation were employees in Ethiope East and Ethiope West local government areas of Delta State, Nigeria. A sample size of 177 were drawn from a population of 317 workforce using a population of 317 workforce using Taro Yamene's (1967) sampling formula. The formula was given thus:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N\,(e)^2}$$

Where: n = sample size

        N = Target population (317)

E = level of significant (0.05 or 5%).

Out of the 177 copies of questionnaire administered, 153 were respondents, 82 were male employees and 71 were female employees. The research instrument used for this study was the structured questionnaire. This was a modified form of the research instrument used by Resick et al. (2006), was used to measure ethical leadership. Administrative competence scale was adopted from Gemora (2014). The items of measurement were rated on 5-points likert type scale which ranks respondents on a scale of (1) strongly agreed to (5) strongly disagreed. Crombach Alpha method was used to establish the internal consistency of the instrument as show in the table below.

Table 1: Reliability Statistics of Scale

Scale	No of items	Crombach's Alpha
Ethical leadership	10	0.793
Administrative competence	10	0.826

The results yield a coefficient of 0.793 and 0.826, which satisfied the general recommended research indicators (Crombarch, 1951). The questionnaire was also validated by experts in the faculty of social sciences. Hence, the researcher satisfied both reliability and validity of the instrument.

Data collected were analyzed using spearman's Rank correlation coefficient and linear regression analysis with the aid of statistical package for social science (SPSS) version 23.

Results

Table 2: Correlation Matrix

Variables		Ethical leadership	Administrative competence
Ethical leadership	Pearson Correlation sig. (2. tailed)	1	0.769** 0.000
	N	153	153
Administrative Competence	Pearson Correlation	0.769**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
	N	153	153

** Correlation is significant at 0.01 levels (2-tailed)

Table 2 shows the correlation coefficient between ethical leadership and administrative competence. There exists a significant positive high correlation between the independent (ethical leadership) and dependent (administrative competence) variables (r= 0.769, n =153, p< 0.01). This implies that ethical leadership has a positive and strong relationship with administrative competence. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Linear Regression Analysis

Table 3: Model Summary[b]

Model	R	R^2	Adj-R^2	Std. Error of the estimate
1	0.713	0.655	0.5404	0.293

a. Predictors (Constant), ethical leadership

b. Dependent variable: Administrative competence

Source: Authors computation, 2020

Table 4: ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of square	Df	Mean	F.	Sig.	Remark
	Regression	9.837	2	4.547	19.369	0.000[b]	Sig.
1	Residual	5.792	149				
	Total	15.629	151				

a. Dependent variable: administrative competence

b. Predictors: (constant), ethical leadership

Source: Author's computation, 2020

The linear regression results show (R^2) value of 0.655 which revealed that ethical leadership independently accounted for 65.5% of the variation in administration competence in Ethiope East and Ethiope West local government areas of Delta State, Nigeria. The F. statistics of 19.369 revealed that the model is statistically significant at 0.05 significant levels. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. Thus, ethical leadership has a significant influence on administrative competence.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

With respect to the first hypothesis, the study found that ethical leadership have strong and positive relationship with administrative competence in Ethiope East and Ethiope West local government area of Delta State, Nigeria. This finding is in agreement with previous studies (Haq, 2011; Cheteni&Shindika, 2017; Jatz, 2009). Also, based on the results of linear regression analysis, ethical leadership has significant explained 65.5% of variation in administrative competence in Ethiope East and Ethiope West local government areas of Delta State, Nigeria. Thus, the study have shown that ethical leadership exerts a positive and statistically significant effect on administrative competence. This finding is in agreement with the views of Hejka-Ekins (2001); Haz (2011); Neubert et al. (2013) and Atiya et al. (2015), that ethical leadership has considerable effect on the enhancement of overall ethics in the public service which promote the spirit of competence coupled with ethical decision-making process that drives the public interest and societal expectations.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study have revealed through its perceived findings that ethical leadership have a strong and positive relationship with administrative competence and that ethical leadership has a positive effect on administrative competence in Ethiope East and Ethiope West local government areas of Delta State, Nigeria. Based on the findings of this study, it isconcludes that ethical leadership has a significant positive influence on administrative competence. From the findings and conclusion reached in this study, the following recommendations were made to ensure administrative competence of workforce in public and private sector:

1. Local government leadership should reward ethical conduct and discipline unethical conduct by exhibiting ethical behaviour that promote administrative competence.

2. Organizational leaders especially in public sector should strive to hire ethical people. They should focus on ethical skills along with the technical skills in recruitment process. Information on potential employee ethical behaviour can be obtained from resumes, reference checks, integrity test and background checks.

3. Unethical behaviour such as favouritism, nepotism, seeking pressure by using official position, leaking or misusing government information or misusing organization's property for personal gain should be avoided by leaders. This will go a long way to help

followers develops the right mental attitudes while working in a group and within a social system.

4. Leadership should refrain from unethical behaviour that undermine employees' competence such as bribery, bureaucratic corruption, manipulation in purchase of machinery, property, equipment and services especially in public sector organizations.

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