



THE ROLE OF ETHICAL VALUES ON EMPLOYEE PRODUCTIVITY - A CASE STUDY OF THE CIVIL REGISTRATION DEPARTMENT IN ZAMBIA

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Abstract

Ethical leadership and values are paramount in guiding organizational behavior and shaping a culture conducive to productivity and integrity. This manuscript delves into the profound impact of ethical values, such as integrity, honesty, excellence, respect, and teamwork, on employee productivity within organizations, with a special focus on the civil registration department in Zambia. Through a comprehensive literature review and observational study, this research highlights the critical role ethical values play in enhancing employee performance, fostering a productive work environment, and facilitating effective public service delivery. The study reveals that a lack of adherence to ethical standards contributes to inefficiencies, public dissatisfaction, and a tarnished organizational reputation, as evidenced by the challenges faced by the civil registration in Zambia. By examining the principles of ethical leadership and the significance of integrity, honesty, respect, and excellence, the manuscript underscores the necessity of embedding ethical values within organizational practices to advance employee productivity and organizational success. The findings advocate for the implementation of ethical leadership, transparency, accountability, streamlined processes, and stakeholder engagement as strategies to rejuvenate public service delivery and rebuild public trust. This research contributes to the broader discourse on the integral relationship between ethical values and organizational performance, offering practical insights and recommendations for public service organizations striving for excellence and integrity in their operations.

Keywords: *ethical values, performance, productivity, respect, culture, teamwork, Integrity, honesty, excellence.*

1. Introduction

1.1 Background Information

The Sustainable Development Goal (SDG), Target 16.9 specifically aims to "provide legal identity for all, including birth registration" by 2030. Civil registration is crucial for establishing legal identity and ensuring that individuals access their rights and services effectively. It also helps governments plan and implement policies and programmes to address the needs of their populations. Therefore, improving civil registration systems is essential for achieving SDG 16 and ensuring inclusive and sustainable development.

Given the aforementioned, the civil registration offices in Zambia are mandated by law (as stipulated in the Birth and Death Registration Act Cap 51, the Adoption Act Cap 50, the Marriage Act Cap 54, and Statutory Instrument no. 44 of 2016) to administer the issuance of birth and death certificates, National Registration Cards, passports, and other civil registration documents.

There has been widespread public dissatisfaction regarding the inefficiency and ineffectiveness of public service personnel at registration offices in Zambia. Citizens are frequently subjected to lengthy queues, ambiguous procedures, and time-consuming processes when seeking passports and other civil registration documents. Despite expectations for timely processing, civil registration documents often experience significant delays, resulting in missed opportunities for important business engagements, educational pursuits, and employment prospects.

The above issue stems from a deficient working culture among public servants at the registration offices, where ethical values are disregarded, and illicit practices such as bribery and corruption are tolerated. Hence, there is a pressing need to assess the impact of ethical values on employee productivity.

1.2 Ethical Values and Employee Productivity

Establishing a clear vision and purpose for the organization is of utmost importance (Malik, Awais, Timsal, & Qureshi, 2016). Having a direction for the organization provides members with a sense of purpose. Ethical values, a moral philosophy cultivated by businesses, serve as guiding principles for employee behavior. To reach the intended destination, ethical values are indispensable as they outline how the organization will attain its strategic goals and objectives. Desired behavior, conducive to organizational prosperity, stems from ethical values that foster a culture of diligence and competitiveness.

Ethical values serve as a compass for the organization, guiding its conduct ethically and lawfully, thereby maintaining its integrity and reputation (Dey, Bhattacharjee, Mahmood, Uddin, & Biswas, 2022). Adherence to ethical values ensures compliance with legal provisions. To be effective, ethical values should be clearly articulated rather than implied. They ought to be documented in the organization's code of ethics, with every member having access to and awareness of it. Essentially, the creation of ethical values requires proactive leadership. Ethical leaders cultivate an ethical workforce (Koronios, Kriemadis, Dimitropoulos, & Papadopoulos, 2019). Additionally, ethical values instill a positive outlook in employees, fostering peak performance and job satisfaction.

Ethical values prioritize the education of the heart over the education of the mind. Unlike mere intellectual knowledge, they delve into the realm of emotions, empathy, and moral compass. Employees who embody these values serve as beacons of inspiration, encouraging others to

dream ambitiously, expand their knowledge, and take decisive action. As they lead by example, they naturally attract like-minded individuals, gradually cultivating an environment where ethical behavior is not only encouraged but also embraced. This collective commitment to ethical conduct establishes a robust framework for organizational culture, fostering trust, collaboration, and sustainable growth (Kelidbari, Fadaei, & Ebrahimi, 2016).

1.3 Ethical Leadership and Employee Productivity

Yang and Wei (2017) ascertain that leaders wield significant influence over the performance and productivity of employees. This is very important to note considering that ethical leadership, rooted in strong moral and ethical principles, diverges from traditional leadership theories that prioritize goal attainment over ethical processes. Unlike these theories, ethical leadership emphasizes not only achieving organizational goals and objectives but also the ethical means by which they are achieved. Ethical leaders prioritize meeting goals in a morally upright manner, ensuring maximum adherence to the principles of good governance (Malik, Awais, Timsal, & Qureshi, 2016).

Ethical leadership prioritizes ethical values over personal gain, guiding both thoughts and actions (AlShehhi, Alshurideh, Kurdi, & Salloum, 2020). This entails that ethical leaders promote organizational processes aligned with values such as integrity, excellence, and honesty. The goal of ethical leadership is to safeguard the integrity of organizations by steering clear of improper practices that hinder growth and development. Ethical leadership instills ethical values in subordinates, leading to favorable outcomes (Setiawan, Junaedi, & Chandra, 2021). The core purpose of ethical values is to advance the success of an organization while operating within legal boundaries. Ethical leadership is considered a superior leadership theory due to its heightened emphasis on ethical processes in achieving results (Ouakouak, Zaitouni & Arya, 2020).

1.4 The Significance of Integrity in Enhancing Employee Productivity

In the dynamic landscape of modern organizations, the concept of integrity stands as a cornerstone for fostering a productive work environment. Integrity, often associated with honesty, trustworthiness, and ethical behavior, plays a multifaceted role in shaping employee productivity.

One of the primary ways in which integrity drives productivity is through the establishment of trust among employees (Konadu et al., 2023). When individuals consistently demonstrate integrity in their actions and decisions, they earn the trust of their colleagues, supervisors, and clients. Trust forms the bedrock of effective teamwork and collaboration, it encourages open communication, knowledge sharing, and synergy among team members. With trust in place, employees feel empowered to contribute their ideas and expertise, leading to more innovative solutions and efficient task execution.

Integrity guides employees to make ethical decisions, even in challenging circumstances (Purwanggono, 2023). By upholding ethical principles such as fairness, honesty, and respect, employees contribute to the creation of a positive work environment where everyone feels valued and respected.

Integrity also manifests itself in the form of accountability, where employees take responsibility for their actions and outcomes (Rosmi & Syamsir, 2020). When individuals demonstrate accountability, they contribute to a culture of ownership within the organization.

Consistency is another key aspect of integrity that influences productivity (Sulaiman, 2023). Employees who consistently demonstrate integrity in their behavior and performance build a

reputation for reliability and dependability. Consistent performance minimizes disruptions and delays, allowing teams to meet deadlines and deliver results promptly.

Organizations that prioritize integrity not only attract top talent but also build a strong reputation in the marketplace (Syamsir, 2022). A reputation for integrity enhances the organization's brand image, instilling confidence among customers, partners, and investors. A positive reputation contributes to increased customer loyalty and brand advocacy, driving revenue and growth (Rosmi & Syamsir, 2021). This entails that, employees feel proud to be associated with an organization that upholds high ethical standards, leading to higher levels of engagement, commitment, and productivity.

In addition to the above, integrity promotes a harmonious work environment characterized by open communication, mutual respect, and constructive conflict resolution (Jayanti & Syamsir, 2019). When employees feel safe and valued, they are more likely to focus their energy on productive tasks rather than interpersonal issues. A supportive work environment reduces stress and minimizes conflicts, allowing employees to collaborate effectively and achieve their goals with greater efficiency.

1.4 Honesty and Employee Productivity

In the intricate web of workplace dynamics, honesty emerges as a fundamental ethical value that underpins employee productivity (Wendler, Liu & Zettler, 2018). Honesty, characterized by truthfulness in words and actions, plays a pivotal role in shaping organizational culture and driving productivity.

At the heart of the connection between honesty and productivity lies the establishment of trust (Wendler, Liu & Zettler, 2018). This entails that when individuals prioritize honesty in their interactions, they cultivate a reputation for credibility and reliability. Honest employees are inclined to work seamlessly together, resulting in enhanced problem-solving, innovation, and ultimately, greater productivity (Wendler, Liu & Zettler, 2018).

Furthermore, honesty intertwines closely with accountability, motivating individuals to take ownership of their actions and decisions (Bharucha, 2018). In an environment where honesty is valued, employees feel empowered to acknowledge mistakes, seek assistance when necessary, and learn from failures (Bharucha, 2018).

Transparent communication serves as another hallmark of honesty in the workplace. When leaders and colleagues communicate openly and honestly, it fosters clarity, alignment, and mutual understanding (Liu, Meagher, & Wait, 2022). Moreover, when employees feel comfortable expressing their ideas, concerns, and feedback without fear of judgment or reprisal, it cultivates a culture of psychological safety conducive to creativity and innovation. Clear and honest communication channels facilitate swift decision-making, problem resolution, and goal attainment, thereby enhancing overall productivity (Goswami, Agrawal, & Goswami, 2021).

In addition to the above, honesty enhances employee engagement and satisfaction by fostering an authentic culture (Strand, 2021). When employees perceive that their organization values honesty, they are more likely to feel motivated, committed, and loyal. Honest leaders inspire trust and loyalty among their teams, leading to higher levels of employee retention and discretionary effort. Engaged employees are passionate about their work, willing to go the extra mile to achieve organizational goals, and inherently more productive.

1.5 The Inextricable Link Between Respect and Employee Productivity

Respect, often regarded as the cornerstone of healthy workplace relationships, holds profound significance in driving employee productivity. Rooted in recognition, courtesy, and

consideration for others, respect fosters an environment where individuals feel valued, heard, and empowered to contribute their best efforts (Utin, & Yosepha, 2019).

At the heart of the relationship between respect and productivity lies the cultivation of a sense of value and belonging among employees (Nauman & Qamar, 2018). When individuals feel respected by their peers, supervisors, and the organization as a whole, they are more likely to develop a strong sense of belonging and commitment to their work. This sense of value fuels intrinsic motivation, leading employees to invest their time and energy into tasks with a heightened sense of purpose and dedication. Consequently, productivity is enhanced as employees are driven to achieve their goals and contribute meaningfully to the organization's success.

In addition to the above, Respect lays the foundation for collaboration within teams and across departments (Utin, & Yosepha, 2019). When individuals feel respected, they are more inclined to share ideas and engage in constructive dialogue with their colleagues. Respectful communication fosters a culture of trust, where diverse perspectives are welcomed and valued, leading to richer problem-solving and innovation. Moreover, respectful collaboration enhances coordination and synergy among team members, resulting in streamlined processes and higher levels of productivity.

Respect empowers employees by acknowledging their expertise, skills, and contributions. When individuals feel respected, they are more likely to be entrusted with greater autonomy and decision-making authority in their roles. This empowerment fuels a sense of ownership and motivates employees to take initiative and drive results independently. Moreover, when employees feel respected for their capabilities, they are more inclined to proactively seek out opportunities for growth and development, further enhancing their effectiveness and productivity in the workplace.

Respect serves as a potent antidote to workplace conflict and toxicity (Oteshova et al., (2021). When individuals respect each other's perspectives, boundaries, and differences, it fosters a culture of mutual understanding and cooperation. Respectful conflict resolution strategies, such as active listening and empathy, help to de-escalate tensions and foster constructive dialogue, preventing conflicts from escalating and disrupting productivity (Quierrez, 2020). Ultimately, respect contributes to the cultivation of a culture of excellence within organizations (Zongjun, 2019). Respectful leaders set the tone for the organization, modeling inclusive and respectful behavior that cascades throughout the workforce (Basahal, Jelli, Alsabban, Basahel & Bajaba, 2022). In such an environment, employees are inspired to bring their best selves to work, collaborate effectively, and strive for continuous improvement. As a result, productivity flourishes, and the organization achieves its goals with greater efficiency and impact.

As organizations navigate the complexities of the modern workplace, prioritizing respect remains essential for fostering a culture of engagement, innovation, and sustainable success (Utin, & Yosepha, 2019).

1.6 The Impact of Excellence on Employee Productivity

Excellence and employee productivity are intimately linked within an organizational framework. When excellence is cultivated as a core value within a workplace culture, it sets a standard of performance that employees strive to meet or exceed (Mohamed et al., 2018). This pursuit of excellence inherently drives individuals to maximize their productivity levels. Employees who are committed to excellence take pride in their work and are motivated to deliver high-quality results consistently (Naser, Shobaki & Amuna, 2016). This commitment

often translates into increased focus, attention to detail, and a willingness to go the extra mile to achieve objectives efficiently and effectively. As a result, productivity levels naturally rise as employees channel their efforts toward delivering excellence in their tasks and responsibilities.

It is important to note that, a culture of excellence fosters continuous improvement (Areiqat & Al-Qaruty, 2023). Employees are encouraged to seek out better ways of doing things, identify areas for enhancement, and embrace new ideas and technologies. This proactive approach to problem-solving enhances the quality of work and streamlines processes, leading to improved productivity across the organization (Stoyanova & Iliev, 2017).

Additionally, excellence is often recognized and rewarded within organizations. Acknowledging and celebrating outstanding performance reinforces the importance of striving for excellence and motivates employees to maintain or surpass productivity levels (Stoyanova & Iliev, 2017). Whether through performance-based incentives, recognition programs, or career advancement opportunities, rewarding excellence reinforces desired behaviors and encourages sustained high productivity levels (Saeed, AlShafea, Nasser & Alasmari, 2022).

Excellence and employee productivity are intrinsically linked, with each reinforcing the other within a workplace environment (Puteh, Kaliannan, & Alam, 2016). This entails that by fostering a culture of excellence, organizations can cultivate a highly productive workforce, engaged, and committed to achieving exceptional results.

2. Methodology

To enhance the robustness of our analysis and ensure a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between ethical values and employee productivity within the public service context, a methodological approach employing triangulation with field data was adopted. This approach began with a systematic digital search using Google Scholar and Scopus databases, guided by Boolean logic principles. The initial search combined the keywords "Ethical Values" and "Employee Productivity," resulting in a preliminary dataset of approximately 10,000 articles. To refine this dataset and align more closely with our research focus, the term "Public Service" was added to the search criteria. This strategic inclusion narrowed the pool to a more manageable set of 43 articles, which were then meticulously reviewed for their relevance to our study's objectives. Only research articles published within the targeted timeframe of 2015 to 2024 were considered for the final analysis, ensuring the timeliness and relevance of the data reviewed.

To augment the literature review and introduce a level of empirical rigor, the research methodology was expanded to include field observations. This entailed a two-week immersive observation period within multiple branches of the civil registration department in Zambia. This immersion allowed the researcher to directly observe and engage with the work culture, operational dynamics, and the manifestation of ethical values and their impact on employee productivity in a real-world public service setting. The observation period facilitated the collection of qualitative data, providing rich, contextual insights that complemented the findings from the literature review.

The triangulation of data sources, combining comprehensive literature review findings with empirical field data, enabled a multidimensional analysis of the research topic. This methodological triangulation not only enriched the depth of the study's findings but also enhanced the reliability and validity of the conclusions drawn. Through this integrated approach, the research offers a nuanced understanding of how ethical values are

operationalized within public service organizations and their influence on employee productivity, informed by both theoretical perspectives and practical observations in the field.

3. Findings

Ethical Values at the Civil Registration Offices

Integrity, a pivotal ethical principle, is not consistently upheld at the civil registration offices. Wahyuni and Syamsir (2020) emphasize that integrity is fundamental for any organization, especially in the public service sector. Public officers at the civil registration offices do not adhere to moral and ethical principles. They are not transparent and do not prioritize the public interest over personal gain. They are not keen on combating corruption and illicit practices such as bribery, which undermine trust in public institutions and hinder efficient service delivery.

According to Mahendra (2023), excellence entails striving for the highest standards of performance and continuously improving processes to meet or exceed expectations. This is very critical and should be embraced by all well-meaning organizations. In the context of the civil registration offices, pursuing excellence means streamlining procedures, reducing bureaucratic red tape, and enhancing the quality and efficiency of service delivery that meets public needs and expectations (Shakeel, Kruey, & Van Thiel, 2020).

Another crucial ethical value that could enhance the effectiveness and responsiveness of public departments in Zambia is honesty. Honesty is essential for building trust and credibility with the public (Bharucha, 2018). It involves being truthful in all communications and dealings. At the civil registration offices, accurate information to citizens is not promoted and thus members of the public are misinformed leading to public frustration. By fostering honesty, public service organizations can rebuild trust and confidence in their services while fostering positive relationships with the public (Mostafa, & Abed El-Motalib, 2020).

The public perceives a lack of respect from the civil registration when documents are not processed promptly. Additionally, public officers at this institution display rudeness and show little consideration for the public. Respect involves treating all stakeholders with dignity, fairness, and courtesy, regardless of their background or status (Zongjun, 2019). By fostering a culture of respect, public service organizations can improve the overall customer experience, enhance satisfaction levels, and promote a positive image of public service (Qing, Asif, Hussain, & Jameel, 2020).

In addition to promoting respect at Civil registration offices, there is a need to cultivate a sense of teamwork. It appears that individual employees prioritize their personal agendas, which primarily benefit themselves, rather than considering the organization's interests and the welfare of the public. Yousif Ali & Hasaballah (2020) point out that teamwork involves collaboration, cooperation, and mutual support among employees to achieve common goals. This is what is missing in most public service organisations.

Integrating teamwork with integrity, excellence, honesty, and respect can create a synergistic effect, where employees are empowered to uphold ethical values, pursue excellence in their work, communicate openly and honestly, treat each other and citizens with respect, and collaborate effectively towards common objectives. The role of integrity, excellence, honesty, respect, and teamwork is paramount in addressing the negative work attitude of the civil registration officers in Zambia. By prioritizing these values and integrating them into the organizational culture, public service departments can promote ethical behavior, improve

employee productivity, and enhance public service delivery, ultimately contributing to the well-being and satisfaction of citizens.

4. Conclusion

Ethical values drive employee productivity by setting high standards of performance and encouraging continuous improvement. When organizations prioritize ethical values, employees are motivated to go above and beyond in their work, striving to deliver outstanding results and exceed expectations. Ethical values are not just abstract concepts but powerful drivers of employee productivity and organizational performance. By prioritizing honesty, excellence, respect, integrity, and teamwork, managers at civil registration offices can create a work environment where employees feel empowered, motivated, and supported to perform at their best. As public service organizations continue to navigate the complexities of the modern business landscape, embracing ethical values will be essential for fostering a culture of trust, innovation, and productivity that enables sustainable success.

5. Recommendations

To address the ethical issues at the civil registration offices, several recommendations have been proposed. Firstly, promoting ethical leadership within the organization is paramount. This involves setting clear expectations for ethical behavior from senior management down to frontline staff, leading by example, and holding individuals accountable for upholding ethical standards. Additionally, strengthening training and development programmes for employees, focusing on ethical conduct, customer service excellence, and procedural efficiency, can equip staff with the necessary skills and knowledge to perform their duties effectively and ethically.

In addition to the above, clear communication of procedures for obtaining passports and civil registration documents to citizens, coupled with mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating service delivery performance, can improve transparency. Similarly, implementing anti-corruption measures, such as establishing internal controls, conducting regular audits, and enforcing strict disciplinary measures for individuals engaged in corrupt practices, is crucial to combating bribery and corruption within the department.

Furthermore, streamlining processes and reducing bureaucratic red tape are essential to improving service delivery efficiency. This entails changing some existing procedures with regard to obtaining civil registration documents and simplifying the requirements for citizens. In addition to the above, utilizing technology solutions, such as online applications and appointment scheduling systems, thus reducing lengthy queues, can further enhance accessibility and convenience for the public.

Apart from the above, fostering collaboration and teamwork among employees is also essential. Encouraging staff to work together towards common goals, recognizing and rewarding collaborative efforts, and promoting a sense of mutual support can contribute to improved service delivery outcomes.

Lastly, engaging with stakeholders, including citizens and other relevant parties, to solicit feedback and suggestions for improving service delivery at the civil registration offices is crucial. Establishing channels for regular communication and dialogue can help address concerns and identify areas for improvement, ultimately contributing to rebuilding public trust and confidence.

Therefore, addressing the cultural challenges at the civil registration offices in Zambia requires a comprehensive approach that encompasses promoting ethical values, enhancing transparency and accountability, streamlining processes, fostering collaboration and teamwork, and engaging with stakeholders. By implementing these recommendations, the civil registration

department can work towards improving service delivery efficiency and restoring public trust and confidence in the organization.

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