

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ENVIRONMENT, ETHICAL VALUES AND THE NIGERIAN PUBLIC SERVICE

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ABSTRACT

Enhancing and maintaining public trust in the institutions of government is fundamental to the work of public servants. Ethical values provide the basis for judgments about what is important for the organization to succeed in its core business. It is against this backdrop that this paper takes a cursory look at the role played by the socio-economic environment on people's performance in the organization. It established that an individual's ethical development occurs before entering an organization. It however concluded that it is essential for organizations to identify and establish ethical standards through rules and regulations. The Public Service Rules (2008) and the Civil service Handbook provides these rules for public officers in Nigeria.

Keywords:

INTRODUCTION

Organisations, whether in the public or private sector involve groups of people differentiated by their work, physical space or levels of authority, all working towards achieving common and agreed purposes. Within the ever changing environment, organizations are faced with challenges along three key dimensions - structure, people and value. With respect to people, which is the second dimension, there is need to reflect on how to make optimal use of this most significant resource of the organisation - its personnel and their commitment. In managing organizations, there is need to understand the effects of heredity, institutions and environment on human behaviour. Every society has its language, family and social structure, customs, values, music, art, religion and culture. These institutions are characteristically human and tend to be transmitted by similar means in every society. Group membership and instruction, status, role and interpersonal relationships are the means by which the socio-cultural environment exerts its influence on individual development. This paper therefore examines how the environment influences man through its life stages and how man as an organizational resource should be able to utilize ethical values positively in achieving organizational results.

LIFE STAGE AND PERSONAL VALUES

The life stage model proposes that there is a universal sequence of human development throughout the human life cycle. Each life stage is distinctive in terms of its cognitive, emotional and behavioural experiences. Over the course of one's life, there is a widening

of concern from one's physiological and security needs (childhood); to personal identity and independence (adolescence); to one's success in relationships -- both business and personal (young adulthood); then to caring for others and societal interests (middle adulthood); and finally, to spiritual wisdom about the meaning and contribution of one's life (late adulthood). Sequence of life stages can be identified as stated below:

- Childhood and adolescence (0-19 years) is a period of biological, psychological and social growth and learning of the values and competencies necessary for being a responsible and independent adult.
- Early adulthood (20-39 years) is one of experimenting and making important decisions about career, life style, and personal relationships. Critical developmental tasks involve developing the capacity for love and intimacy as well as learning how to be a self-sufficient adult.
- Middle adulthood (40-59 years) is a period of personal mastery and assuming leadership in family, work, and community social systems. One major theme of middle adulthood is caring for others and being a stable, responsible, compassionate and productive member of society.
- Late adulthood (60 years and older) is a period of stewardship, mentoring and passing on values to younger generations as one contemplates the meaning and contribution of one's life.

The two life stages that are most relevant in terms of the careers in organizations are, early adulthood and middle adulthood. For many, the transition into middle adulthood involves re-evaluating earlier life choices and either recommitting to these or creating a new life structure that better meets one's values and needs. While also an important life stage, late adulthood is likewise not particularly relevant to this organization-based study as this is a period during which individuals retire from their formal work roles.

MAN AND HIS ENVIRONMENT

The environments that influence or determine plants and animals also mould human nature. However, the generality of men are rather less concerned with these environments and more with the vital human forces or factors fatefully shaping man. According to Keshav (1997) man's real environment is men. He noted that it is social behaviour that conditions human development in any crucial sense of that term. And what is it that moulds social behaviour - ideas, beliefs, notions, biases, presuppositions? A child is born to all these and his unfolding character and physical nature reflects his mental inheritance. This is his real environment. All outwardly observable behaviour, all notable action could be traced to habits planted or shaped by belief.

Changes in man's environment as they grow go to condition and influence man. Some factors are only the outer determinants that passively shape man. The social environment including family, friends, school, and neighbourhood also influence our behaviour. The active element is the conscious shaping of the individual from man's own beliefs about himself, his nature, and his destiny. It is these attitudes that

determine man's relations to his time and life (Figure 1). The state and nature of human awareness at a point of time in a cultural milieu are all important in the moulding or adapting of man to the total environment.

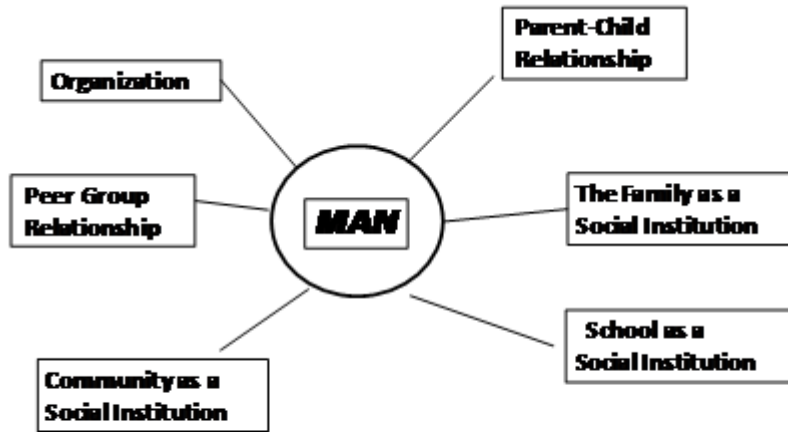


FIGURE 1: MAN'S INTERACTION WITH THE ENVIRONMENT AND ITS EFFECT ON VALUE AND ETHICAL FORMATION THROUGH LIFE STAGE DEVELOPMENT

Most of an individual's ethical development occurs before entering an organization. The influence of family, church, community, and school will determine individual values. The organization, to a large extent, is dealing with individuals whose value base has been established. This might imply that ethical organizations are those fortunate enough to bring in ethical individuals, while unethical organizations brought in unethical people. While the internalized values of individuals are important, the organization has a major impact on the behavior of its members, and can have a positive or negative influence on their values.

SOURCES OF ETHICAL VALUES

Values and ethics are central to any organization. Values are concepts. They are 'ideas' of what gives a sense of meaning or worth. Values are considered to be the preferences and priorities that create meaning and motivation in one's life. These ethical values have a variety of sources. Many are picked up from or indoctrinated into us during our developing years by parents, teachers, religious leaders, siblings, friends, coaches, bosses, the media, movies, books and personal experience. As these values are repeatedly experienced and reinforced over the years we evaluate them for their relevancy in our own lives. If the beliefs and the values they come to represent prove to consistently reassure us or provide meaning amidst an increasingly complex world, then we will adopt these values as our own. These adopted values and beliefs become part of our life and working preferences and will ultimately determine what is most important to us and why.

For officers in the public service ethical values are derived from Chapter 4 of the Civil Service Handbook, entitled "Code of Ethics in Government Business". The

Civil Service Handbook noted that in order to enhance the image and future of the service the following code of ethics should be borne in mind: discipline, loyalty, honesty, courage, courtesy, cooperation, tact, industry, avoidance of delay, tidiness, helpfulness, kindness, national consciousness, good image of the service efficiency and social justice. Furthermore, the current Public Service Rules (2008) has specifically in chapter three, Rules Nos 030301 and Nos 030401 which listed 22 specific acts considered as "Misconduct" which can lead to termination of appointment or retirement and 23 acts considered as "Serious Misconduct" which can lead to dismissal from service.

CONSEQUENCES OF DIFFERENCES IN VALUES AND ETHICAL BEHAVIOUR

It is rare, if not impossible, in life or in organizations to find two people whose personal values are an exact match. However, people with vastly different personal values often need to work together in the same organization. These personal differences can make professional relationships difficult. When this occurs, the organization's bottom line can suffer. Some consequences of differences in value among organizational members are:

Lack of Collaboration: People are drawn to people with similar values. However, employees usually don't get to choose their colleagues. Unfortunately, when employees don't have the same personal values, they may experience difficulties relating to each other. As a result, they may avoid anything that requires working together. They may also fail to share important information. Lack of teamwork due to differing personal values can impact the entire organization.

Conflicts: In the workplace, conflicts between employees can stem from differences in personal values.

Incivility: When employees' personal value differences result in clashes, incivility can ensue. Employees may resort to gossiping, name-calling and other behavior that is detrimental to organization and professional relationships. This is because personal values are such closely held beliefs that when a person feels his personal values are under attack, he may feel that he is under direct attack as a person.

BEHAVIOUR AND ETHICAL INFLUENCE IN ORGANIZATIONS

(Egri et al., 2000) stated that three dimensions that create a hierarchy of ethical influence behaviours are organizationally beneficial behaviours; Self-indulgent behaviours; and Destructive behaviours. These dimensions they noted serve as the basis for the value individuals bring into and are also guided by in an organization and these are explained as follows:

Organizationally Beneficial Behaviours: These are the standard prescribed and sanctioned behaviours for employees in organizations. They may be viewed as the "organizational person" approach to upward influence because these behaviours tend to be directly beneficial to the organization. Organizationally beneficial behaviours include working hard, volunteering, mentoring, developing good working relationships, getting the job done, and working overtime.

Self-indulgent Behaviors: These behaviors are self-serving for the individual within the organization. They epitomize the "it's me first" approach in that these behaviors show self-interest being above the interests of others or the organization. Whether they help or harm the organization is subject to interpretation and may be determined by the situation. Self-indulgent behaviors include supporting the views of important people, blaming others for mistakes, taking credit for others' work, and impression management.

Destructive Behaviors: These are extreme self-serving behaviors that directly hurt others, and often times, the organization. In many industrialized societies, these behaviors are illegal. They may be described as a coercive approach to gain influence because of the harm these behaviors can bring to others and the organization, and might be labelled as "burn, pillage and plunder" strategies. Destructive behaviors include blackmailing a co-worker, stealing documents, using listening devices, and hiring a criminal to hurt someone.

DRIVING ETHICAL BEHAVIOUR WITH VALUES AND ATTITUDES

Driving ethical behaviour with values and attitudes requires that there be alignment among values, attitudes, and behaviour. Examples of this alignment between each of the virtuous values, associated attitudes, and behaviour as stated by Charles D. Kerns (2011) are offered in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Values -> Attitude -> Ethical Behaviour Chain

VALUE	ABB	ETHICAL BEHAVIOR
Wisdom and moderation	in omni rebus moderatio	in omnibus rebus moderatio
Justice	in omni rebus iustitia	in omnibus rebus iustitia
Prudence	in omni rebus prudentia	in omnibus rebus prudentia

WHY IDENTIFY AND ESTABLISH ETHICAL VALUES?

Effective organizations identify and develop a clear, concise and shared meaning of values/beliefs, priorities, and direction so that everyone understands and can contribute. Once defined, ethical values impact every aspect of an organization. It is important to support and nurture this impact or identifying values will have been a wasted exercise. People will feel fooled and misled unless they see the impact of the exercise within your organization. For ethical values to have an impact, it is suggested that the following must occur:

- i People demonstrate and model the values in action in their personal work behaviors, decision making, contribution, and interpersonal interaction.
- ii Organizational values help each person establish priorities in their daily work life.
- iii Ethical values guide every decision that is made once the organization has cooperatively created the values and the value statements.
- iv Rewards and recognition within the organization are structured to recognize those people whose work embodies the values the organization embraced.
- v Organizational goals are grounded in the identified ethical values.
- vi Adoption of the values and the behaviours that result is recognized in regular performance feedback.
- vii People hire and promote individuals whose outlook and actions are congruent with the values.
- viii Only the active participation of all members of the organization will ensure a truly organization-wide, value-based, shared culture.

PUTTING VIRTUOUS ETHICAL VALUES INTO PRACTICE IN TODAY'S SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

What can organizational managers do on a proactive basis to encourage ethical behaviour consistent with organizational performance? At least five practices are suggested that can help leaders steer their organizations toward ethical conduct.

These are:

- (a) First, managers must be very deliberate about who joins their organization. Many organizational leaders believe that selecting people for their values is as important as selecting for skill sets. Jim Collins underscores how long-term success depends on putting the right people in place. Larry Bossidy, (as CEO of Allied Signal), made people selection a top priority and considered it a key task of top management. Selecting people who share your virtuous values is critical to building an ethical culture and long-term organizational success.
- (b) Second, new personnel need to be socialized into the organization so as to advance virtuous values. Orientations are used to espouse the organization's values. As a way of promoting and influencing ethical behaviour, it is very powerful for new employees to hear managerial leaders espouse core virtuous values and see those values affirmed through the actions of others in the organization.
- (c) Third, any gap between knowledge about what to do and actual actions needs to be closed. If you know what is the right thing to do, just do it. This can be done through training.
- (d) Fourth, accountability and follow-up are critical in putting virtuous values into practice. Systems and procedures can remind people of commitments and help connect words or promises with deeds. In organizations with behavioural integrity, words and deeds count. When virtuous values are driving

behaviour, the alignment of words and deeds serves to advance the creation of an ethical work culture.

- (e) Finally, managerial leaders can positively impact the practice of ethical behaviour by fairly allocating organizational resources and linking them appropriately. All managerial leaders have five key resources to manage: people, money, capital assets, information, and time. Allocation of these resources and the process managers use to accomplish such distribution can create perceptions of equity and fairness, or inequity and unfairness. Managerial leaders who value justice and fairness are more likely to deal the cards fairly - thereby modeling ethical behaviour - than are those who do not.

CONCLUDING REMARK

We may think that people behave the way they do by choice, but in reality the environment plays a critical role. The environment has profound effect on behaviour. The environment, in relation to human beings, is the natural and man-made physical surroundings, the institutions, and the opinions and ideas that surround individuals. Obviously the environment is very important to people. It affects the way people live, down to the smallest detail. The distinctive and stable pattern of norms, values, statuses, and roles that develops around a basic need of a society is called an institution. The five major social institutions are the family, education, religion, the economic system, and Government. These five major institutions usually complement each other, and often their functions overlap. The first place to look in determining what is right or wrong is the environment which consists of the society. Virtually every society makes some determination of morally correct behaviours. Finally, if ethics and morality are important for groups and organizations, they should also be important for public officials. Given that public officers are operating within a democratic system, this confers upon them the obligation to carry out the will of the people (from the environment). However, public officers also have the responsibility to make moral choices consistent with their own values, and that may be in conflict with what they perceive to be the will of the people especially as it relates to public policy determination.

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