WCES-2011

Ethics and leadership skills in the public service

Sonia Haq*

Assistant Professor, Department of Public Administration, University of Chittagong, Chittagong, 4331, Bangladesh ,Department of Political Science and Public Administration, Hacettepe University, Beytepe, Ankara, 06532, Turkey

Abstract

The deteriorating situation of ethics in public administration–all around the globe– has made it a burning issue. Although ethics cannot be learned, it can be developed. Among various other approaches, improving leadership skills can prove to be effective in promoting ethics. Skilled and committed leadership can set ethical standards. Learning and mastering various technical, conceptual and interpersonal skills and other skills like emotional and social intelligence enable public servants to diffuse and establish core ethical values in the organization. The leadership skills and their role in promoting ethics have been discussed here for a better understanding of the subject.

© 2011 Published by Elsevier Ltd. Open access under CC BY-NC-ND license.

Keywords: Public Service Ethics; Leadership; Leadership Skills; Technical Skills; Conceptual Skills; Interpersonal Skills; Emotional Intelligence; Social Intelligence

1. Introduction

The importance of ethics in public administration has long been neglected until recently. The deteriorating situation of ethics in this field –all around the globe– has made it a burning issue. Recent ethical scandals both in the public and private sectors have influenced scholars, national and international organizations to take a deep interest in this matter. Efforts have been made to promote ethical standards of the public servants. Among various other approaches, improving leadership skills can prove to be effective in promoting ethics in public service. Hart (2001) believes ethics cannot be effective without proper leadership. With the increasingly competitive nature of global economy and other surrounding pressures, the array of required leadership skills has also expanded (Montgomery, 2003). Leaders guide the members of the organization toward the goals of the organization. It is one of the main responsibilities of a good leader to ensure that the functions of the organization are performed in an ethical manner. This paper discusses the concepts of ethics, leadership and leadership skills and attempts to present the role of leadership skills in enhancing ethics in the public service.

* Sonia Haq. Tel.: +9-05069759792; + 88-01712647042; fax: +0-000-000-0000 .
E-mail address: sonia_hk22@yahoo.com.

2. Ethics in the Public Service

Ethics is a must for public administrators. Public policies have a direct effect on the citizens. Therefore ensuring ethics in the public service is a crucial matter. According to Rosenbloom (1989) ethics can be considered as a form of self-accountability or an "inner check" of the conduct of public administrators. Ethics are statements, written or oral, that prescribe or proscribe certain behaviours under specified conditions (Nigro & Nigro, 1989, p.37). Public service ethics encompasses a broad and widening range of principles and values. According to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (1999) these include objectivity, impartiality, fairness, sensitivity, compassion, responsiveness, integrity, accountability, transparency, selfless devotion to duty, protection of public interest. Ethical dilemmas generally take place around administrative discretion, corruption, accountability, nepotism, interest group pressure, information secrecy, policy complicacies etc. Skilled leaders can play a significant role in introducing and nurturing the values of ethics and resolving these ethics related quandaries.

3. Leadership and Leadership Skills

Generally, leadership is the process by means of which a person persuades and guides the members of the group or organization towards the achievement of its objectives (Yukl, 1989; Greenburg and Baron, 1997). Norms and values are initiated from the leader, which is then developed and maintained also by the leader (Grosenick & Gibson, 2001). Leaders set examples for ideal behavior which is followed by the organization. They are the trend setters and founders of organizational culture. The success of ethics programs in any organization lies with committed leadership (Lewis, 1999; Hejka-Ekins, 2001). Leadership skills, along with increasing the effectiveness of the administrative leaders, also tend to promote ethics. According to Katz (2009), skills are not innate but they can be learned, developed and are evident in performance.

3.1. Technical Skills:

Technical skills involve methods, processes, procedures, or techniques which lead to better understanding of and expertise on a particular matter (Katz, 2009). These skills include factual knowledge regarding the rules, structure, management systems, and employee characteristics of the organization. It also includes knowledge concerning the organization's products and services like technical specifications, strengths and limitations. Technical skills are gained from an amalgamation of formal education, training and job experience. A good memory and ability to learn helps effective managers to acquire technical skills quickly from various sources of the organization. In order to instruct and guide subordinates and steer the organization in a planned way, the knowledge about products and procedures is a prime requirement (Yukl, 2001; Cook, 1998). These skills lay the foundation for inspiration, innovation and strategic planning.

3.2. Conceptual Skills:

Conceptual skills include analytical ability, logical thinking, concept formation, inductive and deductive analysis. According to Yukl (2001) conceptual skills involves good judgment, prudence, insight, creativity and the ability to make decisions in complex situations. Conceptual skills have been measured with a variety of different methods, including aptitude test, situational tests, interviews and critical incidents.

Conceptual skills are required for effective planning, organizing and problem solving. In order to achieve a proper coordination, administrators need to understand the functioning of various parts of the organization and how they interrelate and interact with each other. "Cognitive complexity" (Yukl, 2001) – the ability to identify complex patterns of relationship and forecast future event from current developments- is required in this case.

Managers also need the skill to predict the affects of external environmental changes on the organization. Effective administrative leaders rely on a combination of intuition and conscious reasoning in confronting the various decision making problems of the organization. The ability to learn and adapt to change is a prime

requirement for achieving conceptual skills. 'Metacognition' (Flavell, 1979; Yukl, 2001) is helpful in this case. It refers to the ability to impartially and intricately analyze ones' own cognitive processes and find ways to improve them. These abilities enable leaders to learn from mistakes and alter their assumptions and beliefs.

3.3. Interpersonal Skills:

Interpersonal skills include knowledge about human behavior and group processes, ability to understand the feelings, attitudes and intentions of others, and ability to clearly and credibly correspond. This category of leadership skills also include 'the skills required for coordination of actions of oneself and others (Gillen & Carroll, 1985; Mumford, Marks et al., 2000), and negotiation skills to reconcile differences among employee perspectives and establish mutually satisfying relationships (Copeman, 1971; Mahoney, Jerdee, & Carroll, 1963; Mahoney et al., 1965; Mintzberg, 1973), and persuasion skills to influence others to more effectively accomplish organizational objectives (Katz, 1974; Mintzberg, 1973; Yukl, 1989)' (as cited in Mumford et al 2007 p, 157).These skills help to influence people and thereby makes dissemination of views and information easy (Northouse, 2009). This enables the leader to solve problems in a constructive and effective manner.

3.4. Emotional Intelligence:

Emotions are strong feelings which even after the intensity fades, is likely to linger on as a positive or negative mood. This can sometimes adversely affect leadership behavior. Emotional Intelligence (EI) can help to resolve this situation. EI can be defined as the degree to which people are accustomed to their own feelings and to the feelings of others (Yukl, 2001). It refers to the ability to put together emotions and reasons in such a way that emotions are used to assist cognitive processes and emotions are rationally managed. EI includes skills like self-awareness, communication skills, empathy and self-regulation through which leadership traits can be learned (Goleman, McKee, and Boyatzis, 2002).
EI helps leadership role in solving complex problems, better decision making, time management and crisis management. Self awareness enables the leader to be aware of ones own demands and reactions to certain situations. Therefore it assists in the evaluation of alternative solutions. Self-regulation helps to maintain enthusiasm and optimism. Strong social skills which are necessary to develop cooperative interpersonal relationships are regarded as empathy. For example, the ability to listen attentively results in effective communication and conveys appreciation and positive regard.

3.5. Social Intelligence:

Social intelligence is the ability to determine the requirements for leadership in a particular situation and select an appropriate response. It consists of perceptiveness and behavioral flexibility (Yukl, 2001). Social perceptiveness means the ability to understand the needs, problems and openings of the organization. It also includes the ability to understand the characteristics of the members, social relationships and collective processes that tend to influence the organization (Northouse, 2009). Behavioral flexibility is the ability and enthusiasm to change one's behavior to adjust requirements of new circumstances.

3. Leadership Skills and Enhanced Ethics in the Public Service

Public servants have to exercise administrative discretion while performing their duties. 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. Leadership can have considerable effect on the enhancement of overall ethics in the public service. The administrative leaders should unswervingly take part in all the stages of ethics program - from planning to implementation- sincerely abide by the code of ethics and encourage ethical behavior in the organization by being role models (Hejka-Ekins, 2001). Different leadership skills can escalate the strength of the leader in achieving these purposes. Some of these skills are interrelated and therefore tend to have overlapping results. For example, social skills are essential to develop empathy, which is an integral

part of emotional intelligence. Figure 1 illustrates how leadership skills can enhance both individual and organizational ethical standards.
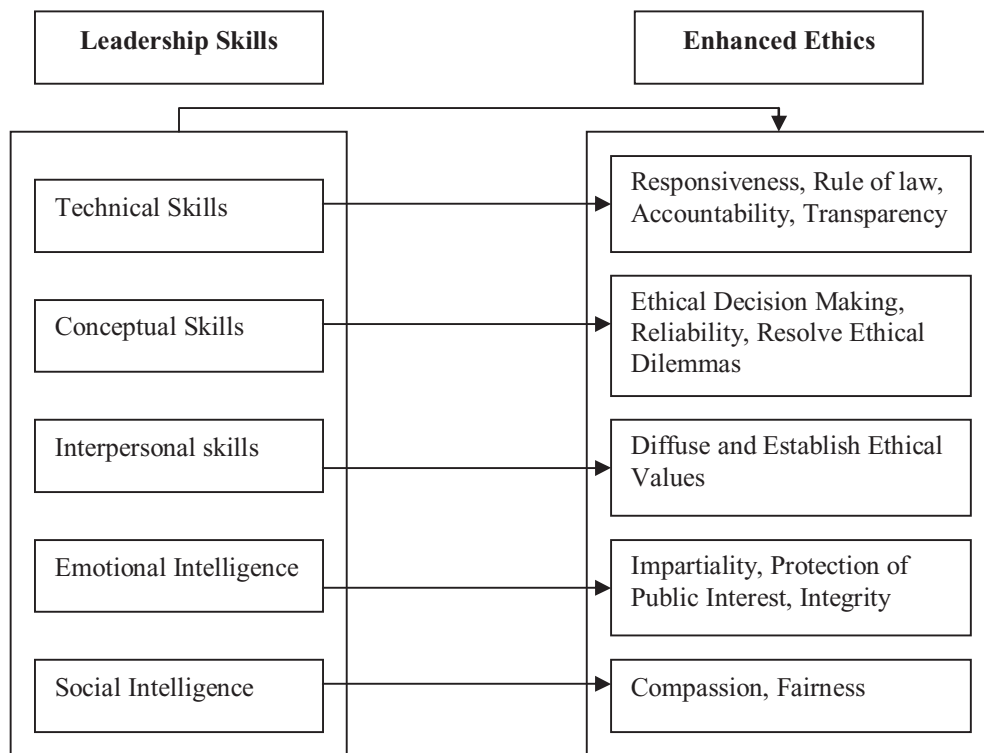

Figure 1: Leadership Skills Leading to Enhanced Ethics in the Public Service

Technical skills help the leader to become more efficient and responsive. These skills enable the leaders to independently take technical decisions and thereby detect any attempt of deception related to technical matters. Knowledge and regard for rules-regulations helps to establish rule of law, accountability and transparency. With sound understanding on rules and regulations the leader is more likely to work within the legal ambit. This reduces the risks of unethical behavior.

Conceptual skills support the leaders in effective planning, organizing and problem solving. These skills are highly essential to confront ethical dilemmas and conflicts of interest. Skills like these prepare leaders with good judgment and allow the leader to comprehend the consequences of any action beforehand. Thus controversial decisions can be avoided. These skills lead to ethical decisions and reliability.

Interpersonal skills and social intelligence make the transmission of ethical values in the organization smoother. They engender compassion and sensitivity which are favorable to the augmentation of ethics. Leaders possessing these skills can easily diffuse the core ethical values among the members of the organization. The leader can also motivate the officials to earnestly take up these values so that they become embedded in the culture of the organization. The practice of various interpersonal and social skills creates an open and friendly environment that motivates employees to expose wrong doings without fear.

Emotional intelligence prevents the executive from taking emotionally biased unethical decisions. Hence it facilitates in maintaining impartiality and protection of public interest. Integrity can be intensified by means of self regulation and self awareness. A leader with high emotional and social intelligence can competently select the

appropriate and rational decision in critical situations. These skills allow the administrative leader to promptly response to new and diverse ethical issues.

4. Conclusion

Leadership skills facilitate the administrative leader to distinguish between ethical and unethical acts. Effects of some skills overlap others. Technical, conceptual, interpersonal skills along with emotional and social intelligence contribute to proper understanding of ethical dilemmas, ethical decision making and dissemination and establishment of ethical values. Leaders enriched with these skills can show the way towards enhanced ethics oriented public service.

References

Cook, M.J. (1998). Quality improvement through organizational development. *Total Quality Mnagement*, *9* (4-5), 35-37.

Copeman, G. (1971). *The chief executive and business growth*. London: Leviathan House.

Flavell, J. (1979) Metacognition and cognitive monitoring: A new area of cognitive-developmental enquiry. *American Psychologist, 34*, 906-911.

Gillen, D. J. & Carroll Jr., S. J. (1985). Relationship of managerial ability to unit effectiveness in more organic versus more mechanistic departments. *Journal of Management Studies*, *22*, 61−75.

Goleman, D. , Boyatzis, R., & McKee, A. (2002). *Primal leadership: Realizing the power of emotional intelligence*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School of Publishing.

Greenburg, J. & Baron, R. A. (1997). *Behavior in organizations*. New Jersey : Prentice Hall International, Inc.

Grosenick, L. E. & Gibson, P. A. (2001). Governmental ethics and organizational culture . In *Handbook of administrative ethics*. (pp. 243-261). (T. L. Cooper Ed.). New York: Mercel Dekker Inc.

Hart, D.K. (2001). Administration and the ethics of virtue. In *Handbook of administrative ethics*. (pp. 131-150). (T. L. Cooper Ed.). New York: Mercel Dekker Inc.

Hejka-Ekins, A. (2001). Ethics in in-service training. In *Handbook of administrative ethics*. (pp. 79-103). (T. L. Cooper Ed.). New York: Mercel Dekker Inc.

Katz, R. L. (2009*). Skills of an effective administrator* (Harvard Business Review Classics). MA: Harvard Business School Press.

Kee, J. E., Newcomer, K. & Davis, S. M. (2008). A new vision for public leadership: The case for developing transformational stewards. In *Innovations in Public Leadership Development*. (pp. 247-282). (R.S. Morse and T. F. Buss Eds.). New York: M. E. Sharpe Inc.

Lewis, C.L. (1991). *The Ethics Challenge in Public Service*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 9-14.

Mahoney, T. A., Jerdee, T. H., & Carroll Jr. S. J. (1963). *Development of managerial performance: A research approach*. Cincinnati: South-Western.

Mahoney, T. A., Jerdee, T. H., & Carroll Jr. S. J. (1965). The jobs of management. *Industrial Relations*, *4*, 97−110.

Mintzberg, H. (1973). *The nature of managerial work*. New York: Harper and Row.

Montgomery, V.W. (2003). Public sector leadership theory: An assesment. *Public Administration Review, 63* (2), 214-228.

Mumford, M. D., Marks, M. A., Connelly, M. S., Zaccaro, S. J., & Reiter-Palmon, R. (2000). Development of leadership skills: Experience and timing. *Leadership Quarterly*, *11*, 87−114.

Nigro, F.A. and Nigro, L.G. (1989). *Modern public administration* (7 th ed.). New York: Harper and Row

Northouse, P. G. (2009*). Leadership: Theory and practice* (5 th ed). London: Sage Publications Inc.

Rosenbloom, D.H. (1989). *Understanding management, politics and law in the public sector* (2nd ed.). NJ, Random House Inc.

United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. (1999). *Public service in transition: Enhancing its role, pofessionalism, ethical values and standards*. New York: UN.

Yukl, G. (1989). Managerial leadership: A review of theory and research. *Journal of Management*, *15*, 251−289.

Yukl, G. (2001). *Leadership in organizations* (5 th ed.). New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc.