



Global Advanced Research Journal of Social Science (GARJSS) Vol. 1(7) pp. 142-151, December, 2012 Special Anniversary Review Issue
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Review

A Theoretical Guideline to define Transparency and Accountability in Public Organizations

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Accepted 10 December, 2012

Over the past decade many schools of public administration in the United States have introduced courses on professionalism and ethics in their curricula. This initiative is motivated in part by two factors. The first one is that increasingly the press has been reporting cases of improper conduct by public servants in all three levels of government, federal, state and local. The second factor is the realization by all the schools that even the best training in the different areas of administration may not be enough to ensure the long-range success of their alumni. Even those former students who have received the best education have not been able to use advantageously their professional skills when they got involved in situations of improper behavior that tarnished their reputation. It is becoming obvious that a strong ethical awareness is necessary for effective organizational performance. In order to make this awareness easier, the paper examines the similarities and differences in the concepts or in the usage of the terms “integrity”, “moral” and “ethics”. It reviews the original interpretations of these terms by the classic philosophers whose works are fundamental for a greater appreciation of contemporary ethics. Finally, the paper discusses why a clear understanding of the terms integrity, moral and ethics is very important for practitioners in the field of public administration.

Keywords: Integrity, moral, duty theories, duty ethics, consequentialist ethics.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade many schools of public administration in the United States have introduced courses on professionalism and ethics in their curricula. Some of these schools even included a course on administrative ethics in the list of required core courses in their master degree programs. The agency that gives national accreditation to the schools of administration, NASPAA (National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration) has been strongly encouraging its members to do so. This campaign is motivated in part by two factors. The first one is that increasingly the press has been reporting cases of improper conduct by public servants in all three levels of government, federal, state and local. The second factor is the realization by all the schools that even the best

training in the different areas of administration may not be enough to ensure the long-range success of their alumni. Even those former students who have received the best education have not been able to use advantageously their professional skills when they got involved in situations of improper behavior that tarnished their reputation. It is becoming obvious that a strong ethical awareness is necessary for effective organizational performance. The best way to improve transparency and accountability in public organizations is to enhance the need for public servants to be aware of what might or might not constitute an ethical violation. In order to make this awareness easier, the paper examines the similarities and differences in the concepts or in the usage of the terms “integrity”, “moral” and “ethics”. It

reviews the original interpretations of these terms by the classic philosophers whose works are fundamental for a greater appreciation of contemporary ethics. Finally, the paper discusses why a clear understanding of the terms integrity, moral and ethics is very important for practitioners in the field of public administration.

For centuries philosophers have been trying to understand, explain, categorize, and label human conduct and the rationales behind our actions for the sake of a better understanding of what is right, just, good, and true and for the development of guiding principles for proper action. The answers continue to spur discussions and disagreements and there is still not a universally accepted way of analyzing ethical situations (Hatcher and Aragon, 2000, Brockett and Hiemstra, 2004). As a society we believe that people should be trustworthy and fair in their dealings with each other. We expect behavior that promotes the welfare of individuals, organizations, and communities. Yet, issues of ethics make the headlines on a regular basis nowadays. Worried about the image of their professionals, organizations and professional associations develop and enforce codes of ethics to protect the public and their own interests. Codes of ethics postulate that the core values of a profession represent its basic beliefs and goals and that adherence to a set of standards for work-related conduct requires a personal commitment to act ethically and individual responsibility to aspire to the highest possible standards of conduct and ethical practice. Some have criticized professional codes of ethics as a conspiracy to defend the special interests, privileged status, and power of a profession with little vested interest in the welfare of the public (Carlson, 1988, Cunningham 1992). Examples abound of how codes of ethics have legitimized improper behavior in the past and have served as an instrument to crush ethical dissenters within the professions. For instance, in 1982, fearful of losing authority, prestige, and income, the Law Society of British Columbia, in accordance with its codes of ethics, took disciplinary actions to prevent lawyers from offering competitive fees for their services after a group of lawyers had begun to offer lower fees to the public than those set by the bar associations (*Vancouver Sun*, 1982 as cited in Carlson, 1988). Carlson (1988) provides an example of how a Canadian surgeon who publicly charged as unethical the practice of anesthesiologists to move "back and forth between two ongoing operations and [render] full billing for their attendance at each" (Carlson, 1988, p. 163) was not protected by the code of ethics of the Canadian Medical Association. The medical elite, adhering to the unwritten code of professional culture, which protected personal income and prestige, silenced the dissenter by informally banishing him from practice.

However, evolving community standards of right and wrong influence the nature of professional ethics. Advances in technology, globalization, restructuring, environmentalism, and social responsibility increasingly

push ethical awareness and ethical behavior as a long-term strategic goal for professional associations and organizations. As a result, organizations are institutionalizing ethics through a variety of explicit (codes of ethic, ethics training, ethics offices, ombudsmen, hotlines, newsletters, and committees) and implicit (organizational culture, ethical leadership, rewards, promotion, and performance evaluation) methods (Jose and Thibodeaux, 1999). Maintaining that the professions develop codes and standards of ethics to ensure professional status and monopolistic control over an area of social interaction (Carlson, 1988) is at least outdated. Today, ethics shape and define the nature of professions (McDowell, 2000), ethical bearing and integrity are the measure for professional credibility (Bowman, 1998), and there is a growing consensus that our society faces a crisis in professional ethics due to professionals' failure to deliver social services that protect social values (McDowell, 2000).

Morals, Ethics, and Integrity Defined

Discussions about ethical conduct revolve around the words morals, ethics, and integrity. Kidder (2005) states that morals, ethics, and integrity explain some of the world's greatest successes and failures. Sometimes the words are used interchangeably and sometimes they are used to define different aspects of human conduct. Knowledge and understanding of morals, ethics, and the importance of integrity is essential for identifying, resolving, and avoiding ethical issues. The following paragraphs define morals, ethics, and integrity and review the original interpretations of these terms by the classic philosophers whose works are fundamental for a greater appreciation of contemporary ethics in order to provide a framework for understanding why these concepts are the foundation of professional ethics, why a good and honest character does not ensure ethical behavior, and why public administration needs a system of professional core values to guide practice (Janinska and Garcia-Zamor, 2006).

Morals

The root of the word *morals* come from the Latin word *mos* (plural *mores*), which originally meant "fervent striving", "courage". The semantic gradually changed to mean "conquering of one's environment by rules", "usage", "custom" (Walther, 2004). The Webster's Dictionary (1996) defines *mores* as the "folkways of central importance accepted without question and embodying the fundamental moral views of a group". *Moral*, hence, is defined as concerned with or pertaining to principles of right conduct or the distinction between right and wrong (Webster's Dictionary, 1996). It also

means good and virtuous, teaching or illustrating good behavior (Oxford Dictionary, 1985). *Morals* refer to the accepted customs of behavior in a society and to the individual's acceptance of and practice in relation to these customs. Covey (1998) compares moral principles with the compass that orients and directs people so they do not get lost and argues that moral agents need an internal moral compass to guide their behavior. "A compass has a true north that is objective and external, that reflects the natural laws or principles... Principles are proven, enduring guidelines for human conduct. They are objective, basic, unarguable" (Covey, 1998, p. 28).

Morality is a socially constructed linguistic concept that names and defines the sum of accepted conventional principles or standards of right or wrong conduct in a culture or a society (Walther, 2004). Gert (2002) states morality can be used either descriptively or normatively and how it is defined has a great significance for moral theory. The descriptive definition of morality refers to a system of morals or a code of conduct put forward by a society or some other group, e.g. a religion (Christian morality) or a political organization (Nazi morality), or a code of conduct accepted by a person as a guide for behavior (Gert, 2002). The descriptive definition of morality implies that morality and moral principles are space and time-bound human inventions and more than one system of moralities and moral principles, even conflicting systems, may exist side by side (Walther, 2004). Examples are moral values that differ from culture to culture such as attitudes about abortion, polygamy, homosexuality, and human sacrifice (Fieser, 2003).

Empirical studies have found that people across social groups and across cultures share similar core values that lay the foundation for proper conduct. Examples of universal moral principles are respect (regard for the worth of people), non-malevolence (not causing harm to other people), benevolence (willingness and readiness to help others), integrity (honesty, sincerity, uprightness), justice (fairness, recognition of merit), utility (taking these actions that bring about the greatest good for the greatest number of people), double effect (deciding what to do if a good action will lead to unintended and unavoidable bad consequences), responsibility and caring, courage, wisdom, hospitality, and peace (Kidder, 1994). Hence, the normative definition of morality refers to a universal guide to behavior that all rational persons would put forward for governing the behavior of all moral agents (Gert, 2003). Covey (1998) states that even though people do not always live in harmony with these universal principles, they agree about their intrinsic value and want to be managed by these principles because they guarantee stability in a society. Such principles are aligned with people's expectations of behavior promoting the welfare of individuals, organizations, and communities. Walther (2004) contends that morality and

ethics originate in two different capacities of the human mind – morality in human understanding and ethics in human reasoning – therefore the two concepts are not synonymous and exchangeable. The next section discusses the meaning of ethics and provides an overview of some ethical theories.

Ethics

Ethics is (a) a theory of moral knowledge which concerns itself with ethical language and its uses and conventions" (Almond, 1999, p. 2), and (b) the study of moral principles and the reasons that govern our moral choices and decision. Ethics, ethical, and moral are sometimes used interchangeably due to the semantics of the words. Ethics derives meaning from the ancient Greek word *etho* which originally meant "dwelling together", "to be used to something". The ancient Greek word *ethos*, also derived from *etho* meant "custom" or *moral* in Latin, which explains why the words are used as synonyms.

Velazques, (2002) defined ethics as the study of human conduct in terms of what is right or wrong, what is worth doing, and what should not be done. Ethics is primarily concerned with shedding light on the question of what should count as morally good behavior, of what is the good life, and providing the justification of rules and principles that may help to assure morally good decisions. To this end it employs arguments and theories in order to convince others that certain claims are the best ones to hold (Liszka, 1999). In light of this definition of ethics, ethical theories are generally grouped into metaethics, normative ethics and applied ethics. Metaethics examines the origin and meaning of ethical principles and concepts, focusing on the issues of universal truths and the role of reason in ethical decision-making (Fieser, 2003). Normative ethics searches moral principles that regulate proper conduct and against which all actions are judged. Applied ethics searches solutions to practical and controversial ethical problems. Applied ethics "gives greater attention to context and to the detailed texture of the situations in which ethical problems arise" (Almond, 1999, p. 3). Applied fields such as medicine, business, public service, education, and science deal with controversial issues by consulting normative theories and weighing evidence before arriving at a solution to an ethical issue.

Following is a brief discussion of three normative ethical theories, virtue ethics, duty ethics, and consequentialist ethics to help with an understanding of modern ethics, how it came about, and why it is important for practitioners in the civil service. Many writers on the history of ethics agree that these three normative ethical theories are at the core of ethical conduct and moral decision-making nowadays.

Virtue Ethics

Classic ethical/moral theories were grounded in the notions of virtue, in Greek *excellence*, happiness, and the soul. The ancient philosophers Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle advocated the development of virtuous traits of character through moral education. They focused on judging the actor and the qualities of character. A virtuous person was a role model, an ideal of a moral character. The qualities of character a virtuous person possessed were qualities that others praised and approved in a person. These qualities of character were subconscious and habitual and guided the actor in doing just actions. Plato emphasized four cardinal virtues: courage (the strength and fortitude to persevere), temperance (self-discipline and control of unruly human passions and appetites), wisdom (common sense, the ability to make the right choice in specific situations), and justice (the ability to be fair, honest, and to keep one's promises).

Aristotle based his moral theory on the virtuous way of life. Conditions for acquisition of virtues were feelings, capacities for feelings, and dispositions. Aristotle argued that true virtues were actually a perfect mean between extreme traits of character and predisposition for an appropriate action (Fieser, 2003). Extreme traits were vices. For instance, too much anger was vice because it equaled rage. Similarly, excessive fear was vice because it equaled cowardice. Achieving balance was the goal. For Aristotle reason was the highest virtue because it helped the individual to find the perfect mean, i.e. it helped the individual to regulate his or her feelings and emotions and to exhibit moderation. Virtue theories, sometimes called ethics of individuality, dominated the philosophical thought until the 19th century when alternative theories were generated.

Contemporary ethical theory defines virtues as acquired morally good dispositions of one's character that speak about our ability to exercise reason in our activities and to act according to general moral principles. Contemporary virtue ethics also advocates moral education and stresses the importance of developing good habits of character such as courage, temperance, justice, respect, trustworthiness, honesty, integrity, reliability, responsibility, fairness, caring, and generosity and exhibiting them in the everyday situations human life sets before us (Josephson, 1998; Velasquez, 2002). Virtue ethics holds that we should not acquire bad traits of character such as cowardice, insensibility, injustice, egotism, and self-complacency. From the point of view of virtue ethics, an action is morally right if it exhibits virtues. It is morally wrong if it exhibits vices. The professions advocate virtues and values as the essence of the individual professional (Brockett, 1988, Hatcher, 2002, Brockett and Hiemstra, 2004).

Duty Theories

While the focus of the ancient philosophical discourse was on the individual and the traits of character displayed, modern moral theory shifted the focus to the actions of the individual, the circumstances around the actions and how actions are judged moral or immoral (Parry, 2004). Duty theories, also called deontological (from the Greek *deon* = duty) or nonconsequentialist theories, were popularized by the German philosopher Samuel Pufendorf and the British philosopher John Locke in the 17th century, by the German philosopher Immanuel Kant in the 18th century, and by the British philosopher W. D. Ross in the early 20th century. These philosophers base morality on principles of obligations and duties to our selves and to others, and imply that consequences are not as important as the moral nature of the deed. Duties to our selves include preserving our life, pursuing happiness, and developing our talents. Duties to others include benevolence, keeping promises, not harming other individuals, improving the conditions of others, acknowledging other people's rights of life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness.

Locke's approach to duty ethics is better known as rights theory. Rights are individual entitlements to something which impose prohibitions, requirements, and protection on us against encroachments by others and by society (Velasquez, 2002). Kant agreed with Pufendorf and Locke regarding our moral duties and rights, but he argued there is a categorical imperative, a core principle of duty that mandates an action, regardless of one's personal desires (Fieser, 2001). W. D. Ross (1930) argued that our duties reflect our actual moral convictions and that we intuitively know what duty to choose in conflicting situations. Duties demand from us to respond to expectations of rational and moral performance and to demonstrate accountability, integrity, trustworthiness, respect, and caring (Josephson, 1998).

Duty ethics implies we should be able to stand by the decisions we make with a sense of integrity and commitment, regardless of the consequences. For example, when one evaluates an educational activity, one is determining the quality, feasibility, and desirability of the activity (Stufflebeam, 2001). Stakeholders of the evaluation may try to coerce the evaluator to report only favorable outcomes. However, scared of being perceived as difficult to work with or uncooperative, the program evaluator may choose to produce a desirable evaluation in order to secure employment (Sisco, 1988). But if addressed in a code, established professional values about conducting evaluations could protect the evaluator and could give him or her the choice to clearly state upfront the professional duties and responsibilities he or she adheres to. Moreover, the American Evaluation

Association has written guiding principle and expects practitioners who affiliate with the evaluation profession to adhere to these principles. A code of ethics will help set forth principles and regulations that deontological ethics encourages and prescribes even though it will not replace experience in moral reasoning and ethical decision making, which characterize the professional life of public servants (Chandler, 2001). Nevertheless, Chandler (2001) states that most people prefer to function in organizations and environments characterized by “deontologically unambiguous circumstances” (p. 192) with clear messages of what is right and honorable behavior. Public servants who work in organizations with strong ethics and continuous reinforcement of ethical guidelines deal with ethical issues with less frustration because the ethical guidelines explicitly state what has to be done. Left without guidelines, public servants struggle with uncertainty and the decisions they make may not be in the best interest of the stakeholders involved.

Duty ethics has its major weakness, however. A major problem with duty ethics is ideology and idealism. Idealists may be called true deontologists since they truly and honestly believe there are no other ideals better than theirs. For example, some religious education programs espouse idealism and create bias or hatred. Recently an internal review of the US Army Force Academy at Colorado Springs was conducted because of suspected religious bias and discrimination against non-evangelical cadets. The internal review examined the religious practices of some overzealous faculty members and coaches who had used the classroom as a forum for “spiritual development”, i.e. religious proselytism of non-Evangelical cadets (Institute for Global Ethics, June 27, 2005, volume 8, No. 25). This incident demonstrates that idealists may have no consideration for the context in which things happen and a lack of awareness of the harm they inflict or the unfavorable consequences for other people.

Consequentialist ethics

Consequentialist ethics or teleological ethics (from the Greek word *telos* meaning end) focuses on the consequences of our actions for us and/or for other people, measuring right and wrong actions by their favorable or unfavorable outcomes (Hatcher and Aragon, 2000). Consequentialist principles base the decision whether an action is good or bad on weighing its good and bad outcomes. Teleological ethics is generally classified into utilitarianism, ethical egoism, and ethical altruism. The most popular subdivision of consequentialism, utilitarianism, posits that an action is morally right if the social cost and benefits of that action are more favorable than unfavorable to everyone.

The 18th century British philosopher Jeremy Bentham developed the act-utilitarianism which considers the

consequences of our actions to determine whether an action is morally right or wrong. Most actions produce both harms and benefits. The criterion for judging an action right is the net balance of good over harmful consequences. In this sense, act-utilitarianism in fact tends to justify wrongdoings for the sake of social benefit. According to act-utilitarianism it is permissible to harm people if the overall effect is good for a majority of people. For example, information gathering methods such as torture and eavesdropping have been justified by credible national security arguments even though these techniques have raised profound human rights objections and have threatened the U. S. moral authority abroad (Kidder, 2005). Similarly, act-utilitarianism justifies unjust wars and killing of soldiers and civilians for the presumed benefit of a majority of people. A most recent example is the controversial war in Iraq, which George W. Bush and his administration instigated based on a lie about Iraq’s weapons for mass destruction. George W. Bush and his supporters have since tried to justify the war on legal and moral grounds in an attempt to mitigate the public in the U. S. and abroad who criticize it as immoral, illegal, and unethical.

John Stewart Mills (1806-1873) developed the rule-utilitarianism to address the problems with act-utilitarianism by postulating that an action is morally right if it conforms to established rules for proper behavior. Thus, ethical rules of conduct are a prerequisite for good public service and policymaking. However, rule utilitarianism can inflict harm to people and violate human rights if the adopted rule or policy is flawed. Apartheid, which institutionalized and justified racial discrimination in South Africa, is an example of a flawed policy. Another example is Zionism, which sought to achieve a Jewish majority in Palestine and to establish a Jewish state on as much of the land as possible. Although many Israelis recognized the moral dilemma posed by the policy, the majority either tried to ignore the issue or to resolve it by force. Thus, the conflict with Palestine worsened and grew instead of being resolved.

Ethical egoism promotes the personal welfare of the individual with or without consideration of the consequences of an action for other people. Ethical altruism promotes the welfare of everyone else but the agent performing the action. As Pops (2001) states, consequentialist/teleological approach to administrative ethics differs over what kinds of goods are to be measured.

In the context of public administration, teleologists often have in mind such values as the achievement of public policy goals and the related services that are delivered (health care, education, national defense and so forth), satisfaction of citizen demands, or (on the darker, Machievellian side) the acquisition and maintenance of personal influence”. (p.195)

Duty ethics, virtue ethics, and consequentialist ethics are often in conflict but at the same time they are tightly

correlated. An understanding of these normative ethical theories is essential for moral behavior, reasoning, and decision-making. Utilitarianism forces us to make moral judgments based on relevant costs and benefits to society. But as rational human beings we must also act according to principles and rules that protect the rights, needs, and welfare of individuals. We should also strive to be role models and to exhibit moral qualities and virtuous character. Therefore, it is important to take into account different moral theories and moral standards when judging whether the consequences of an action are good or bad. In this vein, applied ethicists suggest we develop and employ a holistic strategy of systematic inquiry into duty, utility, justice, rights, and caring in order to capture all factors when we make moral judgments on the consequences of an action. Kidder (1995), for instance, compares ethical decision making with a cost-benefit analysis aimed at determining who will benefit and who will be hurt from an action and then measuring the intensity of this benefit before making a final decision. In some situations utility will override conflicting rights, standards of justice or demands of caring, and vice versa (Velasquez, 2002). What counts will be whether the behavior maximizes the overall good and capitalizes positive consequences both for the society and the individual.

Integrity

Integrity is like the weather: everybody talks about it, but nobody knows what to do about it. Integrity is that stuff that we always want more of...Hardly anybody stops to explain exactly what we mean by it, or how we know it is a good thing, or why everybody needs to have the same amount of it. Indeed, the only trouble with integrity is that everybody who uses the word seems to mean something slightly different. (Carter, 1998, p. 22)

This quote sheds light on the diversity of the concept and its many uses such as wholeness of character, commitment to one's intentions and promises, and standing for something (Cox, La Caze, and Levine, 2001). The Latin root of the word integrity is *integer* and means whole, undivided, in its entirety. The Webster Dictionary (1996) defines integrity as the wholeness, adherence to moral and ethical principles, soundness of moral character, honesty. The Oxford Dictionary (1985) defines it as the quality of being honest and upright in character. Moral philosophy is concerned with integrity as one of the most valued virtues or qualities of character and how integrity is maintained throughout a person's life. In this aspect, integrity means "there are no divisions in an ethical person's life, no difference in the way she makes decisions from situation to situation, no difference how she acts at work and at home, in public and alone" (Josephson, 1998, p. 14). Personal integrity is a process rooted in core ethical values, which shapes itself across a

lifetime (Kidder, 2005). Personal integrity implies consistency through one's behavior and moral life, no matter how tempting and conflicting the circumstances may be. A person of integrity will resolve a conflict in a way that keeps his or her integrity intact.

Integrity is often used synonymously with honesty. Carter (1998) cautions that a person of integrity is always honest but an honest person may have little integrity because integrity demands more than just honesty. Carter (1998) states integrity requires three steps: "discerning what is right and what is wrong, acting on what you have discerned, even at personal cost; and saying openly that you are acting on your understanding of right and wrong" (p.23). Reflection on why we believe an action is right or wrong is what distinguishes a person of integrity from an honest person.

Importance of Morals, Ethics, and Integrity for Public Administration

The discussion of the terms moral, ethics, and integrity shows that the terms refer to and explain different philosophical concepts, but these concepts are interrelated parts of one complex whole that deals with right and wrong human conduct. Professional ethics requires that practitioners in all fields be knowledgeable of the concepts and their importance to the practice of a profession. Public administrators have the obligation to behave in ways that benefit society. Disregard for professional duties and social responsibilities erode public confidence in public administrators, diminish the common good, and undermine the foundations of a democratic society.

Importance of Morals

Morals pertain to the principles of right conduct or to the distinction between right and wrong. Hence, a moral person is a person who is virtuous and acts according to the general moral principles of the society in which that person lives. In professional settings, a moral person strives to conform to the system of moral principles of the professional group. Public administrators come from diverse social and cultural backgrounds and interact with people from diverse, sometimes opposing world-views.

Morality is defined as the set of norms through which societies historically define behavior that is viewed as good or bad, as acceptable or not by the community (United Nations, 2000). It refers to what is judged as right, just, or good originating from social practices. Public administration officials are expected to have strict moral principles; that is a classical characteristic of bureaucracy. It is something that the general public expects from those who govern, serve and represent us at all levels of government. It's a fact that nothing is more

damaging to the reputation of a top civil servant than being accused of corruption or even of lenient moral principles.

There are two basis of recognition for a public official: technical capability and reputation or honor. Because of this, a firm adherence to moral principles is essential to a civil servant; not doing so and violating ethical standards would result in a damaged reputation; in some cases even the end of very successful careers. For a political figure, morality is critical. Since election and re-election to office depends on popular support, it's of the utmost importance for politicians and public administrators in general to lead a moral and ethical lifestyle.

Job security is another defining trait of civil service that is carefully looked at by public officials. It is definitely an aspect that is highly impacted by an individual's morality and personal behavior. It is a trait associated more with the lower levels of government, since upper levels of government have a tendency to feel more personally secure and willing to take more risks. Senior public administrators have traditionally avoided risk; causing them to agree to a lower compensation than their counterparts in the private sector and less power than politicians in substitute for much greater job security. As a consequence morality and security go hand-in-hand. A strict moral code improves the possibilities of further career development and job security for civil servants. Nevertheless, this does not necessarily prevent corruption, dishonesty and deceitfulness among public administrators. Corruption will take place more frequently in an environment where the bureaucracy lacks professionalism and organizational ethics; a place where rules and regulations are not clearly defined; bureaucracy's checks and balances are not enforced; and finally where a political regime is more authoritarian resulting in less freedom of the press, weaker opposition parties, a weaker civil society, and fewer mechanisms of social control and participation (United Nations, 2000).

A new science of morality is beginning to uncover how people in different cultures judge moral dilemmas, identifying the factors that influence judgment and the actions that follow. These studies suggest that nature provides a universal moral grammar, designed to generate fast, intuitive and universally held judgments of right and wrong. In an experiment on the Moral Sense Test (moral.wjh.harvard.edu), a site presenting various moral dilemmas where there are no clear-cut answers that obligate duty to one party over the other, people with different backgrounds, including atheists and those in faith, respond in the same way (Hauser, 2008).

Importance of Ethics

Ethics is concerned with rational inquiry about human conduct. Human conduct is rational and intentional and implies there is a choice. Choosing a solution to a

problem involves rational formulation of a value judgment and intentional choice among available alternatives. Public administrators are expected to act rationally to maintain an equitable social order. The choices public administration practitioners make in terms of who should receive services, what should they receive, and whose demands should be prioritized have profound ethical ramifications. Gawthrop (1998) cautions public service is enticed by the simple theory that as long as public servants do not do that, which is considered wrong, they must be right. This theory distracts attention from the empirical realities that reveal the erosion of professional ethical-moral values and serves as a convenient quick fix for ethical issues. Thus, for example, the status quo of American democracy cherishes "individualism, independence, equal opportunity, and a Protestant-capitalist work ethic" (Merriam and Caffarella, 1999, p. 74).

Program planning is an important function of public administration that affects large numbers of citizens. Planning and implementing programs involve different stakeholders who may have different values and competing views of what is acceptable or not. Sork (1988) states that program planners typically make decisions to maximize benefits and minimize costs but how planners define benefits and costs is based on the planners' value system. Therefore, "actions considered ethical by one practitioner may be considered unethical by another, because each judges the moral costs and benefits of the action using a different personal value system" (Sork, 1988, p. 38).

Ethics is defined as "the norms and principles that provide the basic guidelines for determining how conflicts in human interests are to be settled and for optimizing mutual benefit of people living together in groups" (Huberts *et al*, 2002). Geuras and Garafalo also make reference to "ethical style" in their book and they have defined it as the individual mix of attitudes, beliefs, and values that make up each one of us and defines the perspective through which we plan and judge our actions and those of others (2005). Ethics is the foundation of integrity, a collection of values and norms, as well as moral standards or principles. Ethics often act as a code of behaviors or conduct. Such set of principles provides a framework for acting (Huberts *et al*, 2002).

Ethics is a rational undertaking and ethical principles provide logical rationalization for conduct. "Professional groups, although limited by moral norms, define their own ethics. Professional ethics will share values in common with society. Although the hierarchy of values will vary from time to time and from group to group, there is a general understanding of professional ethics" (United Nations, 2000). Public administrators constantly face ethical dilemmas, this requires for them to have certain skills in order to deal with such predicaments. In order to assist public administrators with ethical decision making, public agencies develop codes of ethics. An example of

such initiative is the American Society for Public Administration Code of Ethics which states that its members are to be committed to the following principles:

Serve the public interest – serve the public, beyond serving oneself.

Respect the constitution and the law – respect, support, and study government constitutions and laws that define responsibilities of public agencies, employees, and all citizens.

Demonstrate personal integrity – demonstrate the highest standards in all activities to inspire public confidence and trust in the public service.

Promote ethical organizations – strengthen organizational capabilities to apply ethics, efficiency, and effectiveness in serving the public.

Strive for professional excellence – strengthen individual capabilities and encourage the professional development of others” (Geuras and Garafalo, 2005).

Although codes of ethics are useful, they only serve as guidance, they are only meant to give broad direction, not any explicit information on how to deal with ethical dilemmas. Some of the concerns ethicists have regarding codes of ethics in public administration is that agencies tend to assume that they provide sufficient or effective direction to enable public administrators to exercise judgment in the public interest; and once organizations have developed or displayed a code of ethics, they have met their responsibilities (Geuras and Garafalo, 2005).

Ethical behavior is of the utmost importance to leaders in the public sector. As stated by Garafalo (2003) “we are interested in the virtues that leaders embody in their decisions and actions, and we are attentive to the effect that leaders have on the lives of their followers. Either explicitly or implicitly, we recognize that leadership bears an ethical burden”. Hence, ethics become essential to leadership because of the influence leaders have on their supporters, the need to connect with them in order to achieve mutual goals, and the impact leaders have on instituting organizational value. Consequently, leadership and ethical behavior should go hand-in-hand; it would be impossible to reflect on or discuss leadership without considering its ethical nature.

Importance of Integrity

Integrity is a pillar of one’s personal and professional life and conduct (Josephson, 1998). Negative consequences of professional conduct result from a failure to adhere to standards of ethical competence and social obligations

and from a failure to behave with integrity. Josephson (1998) states four enemies to integrity: (a) self-interest – things we want, (b) self-protection – things we don’t want, (c) self-deception – a refusal to view a situation clearly, and (d) self-righteousness – an end-justifies-the-means attitude (p. 15). The Stanford Encyclopedia of Psychology states that integrity, when used as a virtue term, “refers to a quality of a person’s character; it is also attributed to various parts or aspects of a person’s life” (Cox *et al*, 2008). A person with integrity is someone who acts consistently; decisions made regarding similar situations always follow the same pattern or logic. An individual who stands up for what he believes is said to be a man of integrity. It is a character trait often associated with honesty, sincerity, good judgment, and respect for others’ judgments as well. For a public administrator to act with integrity means to be true to himself, be consistent in his decision making process, act according to his moral standards; this builds reputation, which is a key component in a public official’s life and career. The integrity of public servants directly impacts their performance as well as the public perception of government credibility. Therefore, it is vital for a public administrator to act with integrity, honor his morals at all times, and be conscientious of those citizens whom he represents. Being fair and just, standing up for what he believes is right and beneficial to the public, are essential traits that build someone’s reputation. Without integrity, a public administrator is like a soldier without a shield, misfortune will eventually catch up to him.

CONCLUSION

For the past three decades, the ethics of the professions has gained momentum as virtually all fields of professional practice began to acknowledge and address the rights and responsibilities of customers, i.e. citizens and service providers, i.e. public servants and entrepreneurs (Gawthrop, 1998). One way of addressing these rights and responsibilities is the adoption of codes of ethics by professional associations and organizations which set forth expected norms for professional conduct. Professionals receive moral guidance from diverse sources that may promote different moral convictions and lead to inconsistent practices. Civil servants behave unethically if they deceive the public in some way. Instances of unethical behavior point to the need for self-regulation of the public service for the sake of its clientele. Individual morality alone may fail to protect the interests of a diverse public. Civil servants should be able to articulate what the public can expect from their services and what fundamental beliefs and ideas guide their practice. Sork and Welock (1992) contend a code of ethics would provide “the necessary guidance for ethical practice, exemplifying what the field as a whole considers right, wrong, or obligatory based on core values” (p. 119).

Those who continue to oppose rigid codes of ethics for the civil service profession as too restrictive should remember that our inner sense of right and wrong stipulates we know when to make an exception to the rules if we believe the rules are wrong.

Public and private organizations are promoting professional behavior and culture based on ethical thinking, ethical decision-making, and regular communication of ethical issues that maintain a supportive environment. But "the day-to-day ethical decision-making process is so complex and nuanced" (Cooper, 2001, p. 30) that any normative ethics consensus is loose and evolving around the nature and importance of different contexts. Thus, professional conduct implies that each individual has a basic understanding of what kind of behavior is morally acceptable and what is considered morally inadmissible even if within this framework lie a multitude of variables that quite often have their roots in the individual's own ethics (Garcia-Zamor, 2003).

Proper professional conduct implies knowledge of and adherence to the system of shared core values of the professional group. To be useful, however, the system of core values for civil servants would have to take into account the wide range of settings in which service delivery occurs, "the wide range of purposes that it is used to achieve, and the diverse ideologies and philosophical frames that guide the work of practitioners" (Sork and Welock, 1992, p. 116). Recognition of the diversity of values and beliefs will help public administrators to make informed ethical decisions. A code of ethics will minimize questionable practices since a code deals with shared values and the implications from acceptance and adherence to these shared values.

Public administrators must have clearly defined morals, be ethical on every circumstance and act with integrity at all times, on and off duty. A public administrator is always representing the citizenry; therefore adhering to personal morals, being ethical and having integrity it's a requirement that should constantly be present on every public servant. Public officials make a commitment to serve all constituents; it is their professional responsibility to do so in a morally acceptable and ethical way. Public administrators must also be aware that there are two main skills that will contribute to the success of their careers, one is technical expertise and the other is personal integrity, strong morals and ethical behavior. It is of the utmost importance for them to act accordingly; this will ensure the public confidence in their services. They must measure up to society's standards as well as stay true to their beliefs and morals. Government is often criticized and accused of being inefficient, ineffective, and corrupt. In order to improve the public's perception and opinion of bureaucracy, it's essential for public administrators to make ethical decisions, act with integrity, and have strong moral convictions. A public servant, who accepts bribes, takes dishonorable actions,

takes advantage of his position for personal benefit, and betrays the public trust is not worth of representing our citizens. The backbone of every public administrator is being ethical, act with integrity, and have incorruptible morals. The most important thing for any public organization is to make sure that they have a code of ethics on the wall, in the handbooks, and in training. Cooper (1998) argues that codes of ethics can project ideals, norms, and obligations. They can be inspirational, preventing lofty values and ideals. "Codes can establish an ethical status to which members of a profession may aspire the moral optimum rather than the moral minimum established by ethics legislation" (p. 151). Codes can also be tailored to agency-specific needs and circumstances and can help socialize employees into a profession.

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