

Curbing Corrupt Practices through Office Ethics in Selected Public Organizations in Nigeria

Silas-Dikibo, I. Deborah (*MABEN, MWIWA & MNAFAK*)

&

UKATA, Philip Festus (*FIPMD, MABSEN, MISMN, MABEN, MTRCN, MECRTD*)

Department of Office Technology and Management,

School of Business and Administrative Studies,

Captain Elechi Amadi Polytechnic,

Rumuola, Port - Harcourt.

Email: ukata4mephilip@yahoo.com, phillip.ukata@portharcourtpoly.edu.ng

DOI: 10.56201/jpaswr.v7.no1.2022.pg86.98

Abstract

This study adopted a descriptive research design in describing “Curbing Corrupt Practices Through Office Ethics in Selected Public Organizations in Nigeria”. The justification for adopting descriptive research design was because the study adopted qualitative research approach to synthesize opinions of scholars on the said topic. The amalgamated opinions were used to address the major and specific objectives as well as the research questions of this study. The study finds out that office ethics are set of codes, values, and rules that help to determine the right choices and behaviour in the office setting which are based on how to live a good life, our rights and responsibilities, moral decisions of what is good and bad, and the language of right and wrong. It was also discovered that the consequences of corrupt practices include but not limited to eroding the moral fabric of society, violating the social and economic rights of the poor and vulnerable, undermining democracy, subverting the rule of law, retarding development, and denying the benefits of free and open competition. This study also finds out that office ethics can be used as a tool against corrupt practice in public organizations by displaying honesty, integrity, promise-keeping and trustworthiness, loyalty, fairness, concern for others, law abiding, commitment to excellence, leadership, and accountability. Punishing of offenders adequately and in accordance with the laws establishing the office.

Keywords: *Curbing Corrupt Practices, office ethics, corrupt practices, public organizations, corruption*

Introduction

An office is generally a room or other area in or around a building where an organization's employees perform administrative work in order to support and realize the goals of the organization (En.wikipedia, 2020). Office is also place where clerical, administrative and managerial functions in relation to the office are carried out for the purpose of achieving the

organization`s objectives (Ukata and Nmehielle, 2020).

Ethics is based on standards of right and wrong that prescribe what humans ought to do, usually in terms of rights, obligations, benefits to society, fairness, or specific virtues. Ethics has to do with what your feelings tells you are right or wrong. Being ethical is doing what the law requires. Ethics consists of the standards behaviour our society accepts (Manuel, Claire, Thomas and Michael, 2010). Ethics is system of moral principles. They affect how people make decisions and live their lives. Ethics covers the following dilemmas: (1). how to live a good life (2). our rights and responsibilities, (3). Moral decisions - what is good and bad, and (4). The language of right and wrong (British Broadcasting Cooperation, 2020). Ethics, for example, refers to those standards that impose the reasonable obligations to refrain from rape, stealing, murder, assault, slander, and fraud. Ethical standards also include those that enjoin virtues of honesty, compassion, and loyalty; which include standards relating to rights, such as the right to life, the right to freedom from injury, and the right to privacy accepts which are carried out in every office (Manuel, Claire, Thomas and Michael, 2010).

Office ethics are set of codes, values, and rules that help to determine right choices and behaviours in the office setting. There may be different office ethics, depending on each office but are most based on the core values the office wants to express and wants employees to follow. Numerous things may be included in office ethics (WisegEEK, 2020). These core values of office ethics tell people how to behave. There are some office ethics that are apply to almost all offices, at least in theory. It is usually considered wrong to take office supplies for home use, stealing, embezzlement of funds, defrauding, and express rudeness on the phone or in person to customers, and/or to behave in any manner that violates regional employment laws. These behaviors may lead to either warnings or firing, including imprisonment, depending on the abuse committed. Various organizations both public and private embrace office ethical practices and behaviours to increase productivity and uphold integrity, while setting a penalty for workers who default workplace ethics (Formpl, 2020). These ethics are implemented by employers to foster both employee-employee relationship and employee-customer relationships. An organization may decide to put these ethics into writing or not which are meant to be followed (Ukata and Nmehielle, 2020).

Examples of ethical behaviours in the workplace include; obeying the company's rules, effective communication, taking responsibility, accountability, professionalism, trust and mutual respect for your colleagues at work. These include obeying the law establishing the organization. Some of these office ethical behaviours are also accountability, professionalism, trust as well as refrain from stealing and fraud which serve as tools against corrupt practices and ensures maximum productivity output at work or agency.

Nigeria's foremost agency in the fight against corruption, the Independent and Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) defines corruption as "bribery, fraud and other related offences" (Eshemitan, 2015). The World Bank has observed that a situation where public officials accept, solicit or extort bribes, or where private agents actively give bribes to circumvent public policies and processes for competitive advantages or profit, amounts to corruption (Anti Corruption Academy of Nigeria, 2017). The emphasis on the two definitions above is on bribery. Chambers 21st Century Dictionary defines "bribe" as a gift, usually money, offered to someone to persuade them to do something

illegal or improper”. Bribe occurs within the context of the giver and the receiver, it paves the way for the giver to be favoured in whatever he/she is looking for; regardless of the rules and procedures. The receiver of the bribe is also under compulsion to deliver what the giver has asked, whether or not the giver merits such thing (Anti Corruption Academy of Nigeria, 2017).

Transparency International (TI) defines corruption or corrupt practices as “the abuse of public office for private gain”. It literally means dishonest and illegal behaviour exhibited especially by people in authority for their private benefit (Kazeem, 2017). The following three elements were identified in office corrupt practices: (1) That the behaviour must be forbidden by law, rule, regulation and ethical standard; (2) It must involve misuse of the officer’s official position; and (3) The reward must be in money or money’s worth.

The rise of public administration and the discovery of oil and natural gas are two major events believed to have led to the sustained increase incidence of corrupt practices in Nigeria public offices. Efforts have been made by various governments to minimize corruption through the enactment of laws and enforcement of integrity systems but with little or no success (Wikipedia, 2020). Greed, ostentatious lifestyle, customs, and people's attitudes are believed to have led to corrupt practices. Another root causes are tribalism and nepotism. Friends and kinsmen seeking favour from officials most a time imposed strains on the ethical disposition of the officials as these kinsmen see government officials as holding avenues for their personal survival and gain. Many public office holders in Nigeria seems to have always forgotten office ethics including oath of office or better still refused to obey and practice office ethics in Nigeria (Okoye, 2012).

Therefore, the reason for this study “Office Ethics As A Tool Against Corrupt Practices In Nigeria: A Case Of Selected Public Organizations.” Although many scholars have written about corruption and corrupt practices in Nigeria, but it seems no attention has been given to how to use office ethics as a tool against corrupt practices in Nigeria. Moreover in public organizations, this is one of the reasons this study is highly justified, especially now that a lot of probes are going on in Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) and North East Development Commission (NEDC).

As the corruption allegation against the Interim Management Committee of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) rages on, the commission has claimed that it spent N81.5 billion within seven (7) months (October 2019 to May 2020) as against media reports that the money was spent within six (6) months (January 2020 to July 2020) (Chike, 2020).

The commission, while dismissing the media report as false, information from the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), had it that N81.5 billion was actually spent by the Interim Management Committees of the NDDC between October 29, 2019, and May 31, 2020. NDDC was set up because of the failure of OMPADEC. Among other factors that accounted for the failure of OMPADEC which gave birth to NDDC are corruption; lack of transparency and accountability; lack of participation of the communities in the conception, political interference in the operations of the agency; conflict of interests; award of contracts to incompetent contractors; and lack of monitoring and supervision of contracts, yet they persist (Chike, 2020).

Lamenting the situation, President Buhari recently said that "you just cannot say you spent so many

billions and when the place is visited one cannot see the structures that have been done". Similarly, the Minister of Niger Delta Affairs, Godswill Akpabio, told Journalists in November 2019 that the NDDC has not performed up to expectation eighteen (18) years after it was established. Government regulations are burdensome for businesses, and bribes and irregular payments are often exchanged. Diversion of public funds is so common that an audit in December 2016 found and removed 50,000 "ghost workers" from the government's payroll, leading to savings quoted of USD 636 million. In connection to this case, eleven main suspects have been referred to in the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (Ganintegrity, 2017).

The House of Representatives also resolved to investigate the alleged sleaze and misappropriation of N100 billion at the North East Development Commission (NEDC). The Lower Chamber mandated the Committees on Finance, Procurement, and NEDC to exhaustively investigate these allegations and report back in eight weeks. Moving the motion, Elumelu noted that the North East Development Commission Bill was signed into law in October 2017 by President Muhammadu Buhari to replace other initiatives such as the Presidential Initiative on Northeast (PINE) and Victims Support Fund (VSF) and the board of management inaugurated in May 2019 (Rotimi, 2020; Kaniye, 2020). "Elumelu observed with concerned that the corrupt practices include high handedness by the Managing Director, Mohammed Goni Alkali, over inflation of contracts, awards of non-existent contracts, massive contract splitting and flagrant disregard for the procurement laws in the award of contracts.

James (2020), Delta Lawmaker posited and expressed worry that there are allegations of how the Managing Director and his close associates diverted funds meant for the commission to purchasing choice of properties in highbrow neighborhoods of Abuja, Kaduna, and Maiduguri to the detriment of the suffering refugees and infrastructural development. He was also worried that there are allegations of how the Minister of Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Management, Sadiya Umar Farouk was said to have entered into an unholy deal with the managing director of the commission to illegally withdraw the sum of N5 billion from the account of the commission to purchase military vehicles without any recourse to the board. An act which completely disregards the country's procurement laws. These are all offices corrupt practices. Therefore the reason for this study "curbing corrupt practices through office ethics in selected public organizations in Nigeria". The selected public organizations are Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) and North East Development Commission (NEDC).

Statement Of Problem

Dated back to pre-Nigerian Independence, the Nigerian public office holders have been involved in a lot of allegations of corrupt practices. The cases of Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and North East Development Commission (NEDC) among others are very prominent as they have not been able to meet the expectations of their regions, Nigerians and the reasons they were established despite the huge amount assigned to them for projects implementation. It seems many of the public office holders have forgotten or better still refused to abide by the various office ethics because of their selfish gains, as such engaging in corrupt practices against their office ethics; which has led to underdevelopment and poverty. This is why this study "curbing corrupt practices through office ethics in selected public organizations in Nigeria" was designed. This study only focused on

consequences of the types of corrupt practices and ways office ethics can be used as a tool against these types of corrupt practices carried out in the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and North East Development Commission (NEDC) of Nigeria.

Purpose Of The Study

The main purpose of this study is to investigate "curbing corrupt practices through office ethics in selected public organizations in Nigeria". The specific objectives of the study are to:

1. Find out the consequences of the types of corrupt practices carried out in the Niger Delta Development Commission, Economic and Financial Crimes Commission and North East Development Commission.
2. Find out ways office ethics can be used as a tool against the types of corrupt practices carried out in the Niger Delta Development Commission, Economic and Financial Crimes Commission and North East Development Commission.

Research Questions

The under stated research questions were stated to guide the researcher(s) this study:

1. What are the consequences of the types of corrupt practices carried out in the Niger Delta Development Commission, Economic and Financial Crimes Commission and North East Development Commission?
2. What are the ways office ethics can be used as a tool against the types of corrupt practices carried out in the Niger Delta Development Commission, Economic and Financial Crimes Commission and North East Development Commission?

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive research design in describing the variables under investigation "curbing corrupt practices through office ethics in selected public organizations in Nigeria". The justification for adopting descriptive research design was because this study adopted qualitative research approach to synthesize opinions of various scholars on the topic "curbing corrupt practices through office ethics in selected public organizations in Nigeria". The amalgamated opinions academics were used to address the major and specific objectives as well as answer the research questions of this study.

Also, the specific objectives were used to form the headings which were systematically explained and addressed the problem of the study based on the reviewed literatures to obtain reliable results and draw a valid conclusion with recommendations.

Reviewed Related Literatures

Consequences Of Corrupt Practices In The Selected Public Organizations In Nigeria

Prosper, Sylvanus, and Stephen (n.d.) outlined the following as the negative consequences of corruption:

1. Retardation of Economic Growth

Corruption lowers investment and retards economic growth

2. Misallocation of Talent

Where rent seeking proves more lucrative than productive work, talent will be misallocated.

People will be lured to rent seeking rather than productive work.

3. Limitation of Aid Flows

Where corruption is rampant, donor agencies are unwilling to put in their money

4. Loss of Tax Revenue

Revenue is lost through tax evasion or claiming improper tax exemptions

5. Adverse Budgetary Consequences

When corruption is rampant budgeted amounts will not deliver the required services

6. Negative Impact on Quality of Infrastructure and Public Services

When public contracts are procured through a corrupt system, it results in lower quality of infrastructure and public services. Negative Composition of Government Expenditure: Corruption often tempts government officials to choose government projects less on the basis of public welfare than on the opportunity they provide for extorting bribes. Under such a situation, large projects, whose exact value and benefit are difficult to monitor, usually present lucrative opportunities for corruption while returns on teachers' salaries and textbooks could be zero for the same set of officials. As the Chairman of Transparency International, Peter Eigen correctly noted, corruption does not just line the pockets of political and business elites; it leaves ordinary people without essential services such as life saving medicines and deprives them of access to sanitation and housing.

Other Consequences Of Corruption

Some scholars and researchers have advanced the views that corruption has both positive and negative consequences. The positive consequences include political development or modernization and economic advancement and integration (Ugoani, 2016). Ironically, these are more or less the same areas where it is said to have negative consequences. The positive consequences may be for a few people and limited impact on the economy but the negative consequences profoundly undermine the economy and wellbeing of the people. Corruption has serious negative consequences at the international, national and individual level, even though some people may have had the temerity to ask, in the course of arguments, whether the money or resources misappropriated belongs to one's father as in: "Is the money or resources your father's own?"

Office corrupt practices also has the following negative consequences:

- ❖ Erodes the moral fabric of society
- ❖ Violates the social and economic rights of the poor and vulnerable
- ❖ Undermines democracy
- ❖ Subverts the rule of law
- ❖ Retards development, and
- ❖ Denies the benefits of free and open competition (Transparency International, 2016).

In addition, the Independent Commission against Corruption (ICAC) of Australia, noted that "globally, the World Economic Forum has estimated that the cost of corruption is about US\$2.6 trillion a year. The impacts of corruption disproportionately affect the most vulnerable people in society. Widespread corruption deters investment, weakens economic growth and undermines the rule of law."

Marshal (2011) summarized the following negative consequences of office corrupt practices as:

- Low foreign investment
- Reduced economic growth

- Shift from productive to less productive activities
- Greater inequality and high incidence of poverty
- Reduced efficiency of foreign aid; and
- Currency crises.

Other consequences of corruption include:

- Unemployment and underemployment
- Infrastructural decay
- Poor quality and delivery of public projects
- Poor public services
- Production and sale of substandard goods
- Incompetent political leadership
- Image/Reputation Bashing

The greatest consequence of corruption is perhaps the ones felt by the individual and more specifically, the poor members of the society. This is because the poor are wholly dependent for government for housing, health care, security, welfare, education among others. When these things are not provided or insufficient, they are the most affected. Some of the consequences of corruption to the individual are:

- Infant mortality due to lack of basic vaccines
- Illiteracy
- Lack of access to health care
- Accidents due to bad roads, bad drainage systems, etc.
- Unemployment
- Low life expectancy
- Homelessness
- Poverty
- Diseases
- Death of individuals like pensioners (Transparency International, 2017).

Ways Office Ethics Can Be Used As A Tool Against Corrupt Practice In Public Organizations In Nigeria

Ethical values, translated into active language establishing standards or rules describing the kind of behaviour a public office persons should and should not engage in (Josephsononbusinessethics, n.d.). The following lists of principles incorporate the characteristics and values that most people associate with ethical behaviour.

1. Honesty

Office executives should be honest and truthful in all their dealings and should not deliberately mislead or deceive others by misrepresentations, overstatements, partial truths, selective omissions, or any other means.

2. Integrity

Public office executives should demonstrate personal integrity and courage of their convictions by doing what they think is right and in accordance with the law even when there is great pressure to do otherwise; they are principled, honorable and upright; they will fight for their beliefs. They should not sacrifice principle for expediency, be hypocritical, or unscrupulous.

3. Promise-Keeping and Trustworthiness

Public office executives are worthy of trust. They should be candid and forthcoming in supplying

relevant information and correcting misapprehensions of fact, and they should always make every reasonable effort to fulfill the letter and spirit of their promises and commitments in accordance with the law. They should not interpret agreements in an unreasonably technical or legalistic manner in order to rationalize non-compliance or create justifications for escaping their commitments.

4. Loyalty

Public office executives are worthy of trust as such they should demonstrate fidelity and loyalty to persons and institutions by friendship in adversity, support and devotion to duty; they should not use or disclose information learned in confidence for personal advantage. They should safeguard and use their ability in accordance with the law to make independent professional judgments by scrupulously avoiding undue influences and conflicts of interest. They should be loyal to their companies and colleagues and if they decide to accept other employment, they should provide reasonable notice, respect the proprietary information of their former employer, and refuse to engage in any activities that take undue advantage of their previous positions.

5. Fairness

Public office executives should be fair and just in all dealings; they should not exercise power arbitrarily, and not use overreaching nor indecent means to gain or maintain any advantage nor take undue advantage of another's mistakes or difficulties. Fair persons manifest a commitment to justice, the equal treatment of individuals, tolerance for and acceptance of diversity, they are open-minded; they are willing to admit that they are wrong and, where appropriate, change their positions and beliefs.

6. Concern For Others

Public office executives should be caring, compassionate, benevolent and kind; they should go with the Golden Rule, help those in needs, and seek to accomplish their business objectives in a manner that causes the least harm and the greatest positive good.

7. Respect For Others

Public office executives should demonstrate respect for the human dignity, autonomy, privacy, rights, and interests of all those who have a stake in their decisions; they should be courteous and treat all people with equal respect and dignity regardless of sex, race or national origin.

8. Law Abiding

Public office executives should always be laws abiding, rules and regulations relating to their office and business activities.

9. Commitment To Excellence

Public office executives should pursue excellence in performing their duties as well as be informed and prepared, and constantly endeavour to increase their proficiency in all areas of responsibility.

10. Leadership

Public office executives should be conscious of the responsibilities and opportunities of their position of leadership and seek to be positive, ethical in role models by their own conduct and by helping to create an environment in which principled reasoning and ethical decision making are highly prized.

11. Reputation And Morale

Public office executives should seek to protect and build the company's good reputation and the

morale of its employees by engaging in no conduct that might undermine respect and by taking whatever actions that are necessary to correct or prevent inappropriate conduct of others.

12. Accountability

Public office executives should acknowledge and accept personal accountability for the ethical quality of their decisions and omissions to themselves, their colleagues, their companies, and their communities. To ensure that every citizen can have complete confidence in the integrity of the Federal, State and Local Government Offices, including private organization, each employee shall respect and adhere to the fundamental principles of office ethical service as stated below (National Institutes of Health, n.d.):

- ❖ Public service is a public trust, requiring employees to place loyalty to the Constitution, the laws, and ethical principles above private gain.
- ❖ Employees shall not hold financial interests that conflict with the conscientious performance of duty.
- ❖ Employees shall not engage in financial transactions using nonpublic Government information or allow the improper use of such information to further any private interest.
- ❖ An employee shall not, except pursuant to such reasonable exceptions as are provided by regulation, solicit or accept any gift or other item of monetary value from any person or entity seeking official action from, doing business with, or conducting activities regulated by the employee's agency, or whose interests may be substantially affected by the performance or nonperformance of the employee's duties.
- ❖ Employees shall put forth honest effort in the performance of their duties.
- ❖ Employees shall make no unauthorized commitments or promises of any kind purporting to bind the Government.
- ❖ Employees shall not use public office for private gain.
- ❖ Employees shall act impartially and not give preferential treatment to any private organization or individual.
- ❖ Employees shall protect and conserve Federal property and shall not use it for other than authorized activities.
- ❖ Employees shall not engage in outside employment or activities, including seeking or negotiating for employment, that conflict with official Government duties and responsibilities.
- ❖ Employees shall disclose waste, fraud, abuse, and corruption to appropriate authorities.
- ❖ Employees shall satisfy in good faith their obligations as citizens, including all just financial obligations, especially those such as Federal, State, or local taxes that are imposed by law.
- ❖ Employees shall adhere to all laws and regulations that provide equal opportunity for all Americans regardless of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, or handicap (National Institutes of Health, n.d.).
- ❖ Ethics can be used as a tool against corrupt practices in public organizations by displaying honesty, integrity, promise-keeping and trustworthiness, loyalty, fairness, concern for others, law abiding, commitment to excellence, leadership and accountability.
- ❖ Punishing of offenders adequately and accordance with the laws establishing the office.

Some Of The findings Of The Study

From the reviewed literatures below are some of the findings:

1. Office ethics are set of codes, values, and rules that help to determine right choices and

behaviour in the office setting which are based on how to live a good life, moral decisions - what is good and bad. The consequences of corrupt practices carried out include but not limited to the following: (1) Erodes the moral fabric of society, Violates the social and economic rights of the poor and vulnerable, Undermines democracy, Subverts the rule of law, Retards development, and (Denies the benefits of free and open competition.

2. Office ethics can be used as a tool against corrupt practice in public organizations by displaying honesty, integrity, promise-keeping and trustworthiness, loyalty, fairness, concern for others, law abiding, and commitment to excellence, leadership, and accountability. Punishing of offenders adequately and in accordance with the laws establishing the office.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it is concluded that office ethics are set of codes, values, and rules that help to determine right choices and behaviour in the office setting which are based on how to live a good life, moral decisions - what is good and bad. The consequences of corrupt practices include but not limited to eroding the moral fabric of society, violating the social and economic rights of the poor and vulnerable, undermining democracy, subverts the rule of law and retarding development.

Office ethics can be used as a tool against corrupt practice in public organizations by displaying honesty, integrity, promise-keeping and trustworthiness, loyalty, fairness, concern for others, law abiding, and commitment to excellence, leadership, and accountability, well as punishing offenders adequately and in accordance with the laws establishing the office.

Suggestions

Based on the findings of this study, the following suggestions were made:

1. Public office holders should ensure they abide by the regulations, laws, principles and practices of the office they are holding. Office holders should know that public office is a public trust; as such it requires employees to place loyalty to the Constitution, the laws, and office ethical principles above private gain.
2. Employers and Employees of public offices should endeavour to display honesty, integrity promise-keeping and trustworthiness, loyalty, fairness, concern and respect for others, law abiding, commitment to excellence, good leadership, and accountability in all their dealings as way of curbing corrupt practices. Also, any defaulter should be adequately punished according to the law establishing the office to serve as deterrent to others.

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