Conceptual perspectives on factors and considerations for enhancing ethical governance in Public Administration

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ABSTRACT

Throughout the world, establishing and promoting a proper foundation for ethical governance in public administration has become in itself, a daunting challenge, given the constantly changing internal and external environments impacting on public administration. The goodness of ethical governance in public administration can be enhanced through conceptual perspectives on factors and considerations– such as values as ethical anchors; ethical organisational culture; ethical foundations of decision making; ethics in leadership; and responses to ethical issues. These conceptual perspectives can contribute to discovering and identifying what is in the public interest; perpetuating assured and consistent individual and collective behaviour by aligning own values to those underpinning ethical governance in public administration; making judgments and assessments which can be articulated and justified in any institutional or public forum, through deep self-reflection, engagement and dialogue; and realising and understanding that individual and collective behaviour in day-to-day practice may have their roots or origins in some ethical dispute, ethical question or tension.

"(Governance) is essentially the study of contextual influences that shape the practices of public administration, rather than the study of public administration." (Frederickson H.G. 2007:283)

INTRODUCTION

In order to understand the complex and vibrant landscape and scope of ethical governance in public administration in a logical and meaningful manner, the focus initially of this article, is on public administration and ethical governance. This is followed by the enhancing factors

and considerations for ethical governance in public administration. These encompass values as ethical anchors; ethical organisational culture; ethical foundations of decision making; ethics in leadership; and responses to ethical issues.

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND ETHICAL GOVERNANCE

Public administration as a system, machinery and practice operating in a public setting, is as old as human civilization and, according to Frederickson and Smith (2003:1), "(a)ll the great events in history were probably achieved by what we would today call public administration (- the work of government) " . The person who conceived, designed and constructed in 2680 B.C., The Great Pyramid of Cheops was a public administrator. Joseph, a courtier, too, was a public administrator – he advised the Pharaoh, *correctly so*, to plan for a seven– year famine (Starling 2008:28). Given the fact that the content ascribed to the concept of governance could be at variance in relation to application, purpose and contextual details, as well as the governing instruments utilised (Van der Waldt 2012:8; Frederickson 2007:285), the explanation of public administration as a philosophy of art and governance by (Kumar and Singh 2013: xiii), serves as a point of departure for this article. Ethical governance as a contextual influence may be regarded as a dynamic, interactive and interconnected representation of the manner, determination, commitment, grace, craft, depth and equanimity and principles. It is through these that the public administration system, machinery and practice promote the ultimate goal of serving the public interest by creating conditions to enable a high quality of life and livelihood for all people. The goodness of ethical governance is concerned with the extent to which individual and collective behaviour and action are considered appropriate and acceptable, as captured in some questions- such as, (Stanwich and Stanwich 2009: 2-2, Ngu 2000:1) :

- Is the behaviour or action consistent with overall duties and objectives? Are there any glaring contraventions and deviations?
- Does the behaviour or action acknowledge and respect the basic rights of individuals who will be impacted upon? Has there been evidence of any bias, prejudice or partiality?
- Would the behaviour or action be regarded as being the best practice in a specific situation or circumstance? Was there evidence of good faith?
- Is the behaviour or action congruent with and match entrenched beliefs and values? Were they fair justifiable and reasonable?

FACTORS AND CONSIDERATIONS

Good ethical governance defines an ideal which can be difficult to achieve in its total reality. Nevertheless, it is an ongoing journey towards the ideal situation. It never stops or makes a halt (Kumar and Singh 2013:115). It is difficult in reality to realise ideals – such as d*o the right things at the right time for the right reasons; being good and doing good; feeling and doing the moral good, to serve first; the moral feeling – to serve first; and dealing and engaging with citizens from different social, economic and cultural variations on an equal basis* (Greenleaf

2002; Dierendonch and Patterson 2010; and Ngu 2000). However, progress towards the ideal may be propensed by factors and considerations – such as values as ethical anchors; ethical organisational culture; ethical foundations of decision making; ethics in leadership; and responses to ethical issues.

Values as ethical anchors

The notion of anchor connotes the following: *to keep something in place; dependable; a sense of stability; and attachment* (*Encarta World English Dictionary* 2009:63). If ethics is considered as a value that is used to interpret whether actions or behaviour is acceptable or not, then this value serves as an anchor that provides a sense of dependability and stability, as well as a bedrock for the interpretation (Fisher and Lovell 2009:175).

Values may be regarded as a means for organising attitudes, guiding behaviour and actions, as well as being as distinctive, enduring and influential, with the focus being on what is *desirable* in public service life (Spranger in Gibson *et al.* 1994:118; Quick and Nelson 2009:136). Two sets of values, referred to as instrumental (means-oriented) and terminal values (ends-oriented), were distinguished and developed by Milton Rokeach (Roodt 2009:100). While, terminal values indicate an enduring belief that desirable end-state of existence is worth striving for, instrumental values reflect an enduring belief in the preferred ways of behaving in all situations. Therefore, instrumental values serve as a means to achieve desired end-states or terminal values (Kreitner 1995:14; Schermerhon *et al.* 2008:35).

Kernaghan's (2003:712) categorisation of public-service values include the ethical category consisting of the following: integrity, fairness, accountability, loyalty, excellence, respect, honesty and probity. Applying Milton Rokeach's thinking in public service life, then achieving corrupt-free society may be regarded as a terminal value, and Kernaghan's category of public-service ethical values may be considered as instrumental values. In South African public service life, the end value as indicated in the Preamble to the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*, 1996, would be: "Improve the quality of life of all citizens and free the potential of each person". Then, the facilitating instrumental values as indicated in Chapter 10 of the Constitution, 1996 on public administration would be: "Services must be provided impartially, fairly, equitably and without bias [(Section 195(1)(b). However, Fisher and Lovell (2009:175) caution: "It is not just what values are that matters, but also how important these values are to us". Considering that ethics is inextricably connected to values, Kernaghan (1996:16) asserts that the focus of ethics "is not only with distinguishing right from wrong and good from bad but also with the commitment to do what is right and what is good".

Ethical organisational culture

Culture is a complex concept comprising a set of shared core values, shared assumptions, shared experiences, principles, ideals, beliefs, attitudes and expectations, which have been invented, learned, evolved, and transferred over time, to enable individuals and organisations to deal with, and adapt to interlinked internal and external challenges, issues and problems which impact on public service life (Daft 1999:183; Jones and George 2003:98; Hunter 2010:22).

Not all aspects of culture are readily apparent–though, they may aim at giving meaning, purpose and direction to individuals, organisational members, and to the wider public service

life. Although, organisational culture cannot be tangibly written as in the case of vision and mission, it can be regarded as consisting of three levels (Daft 1999:183 Schermerhorn *et al.* 2008:369). As one moves from **level one** through to **level two** and **level three** or the deeper one gets, it becomes difficult to discover, but, the importance and significance of an aspect grows (Schermerhorn *et al.* 2008:369).

At level one or the surface level, the focus is on "the way we conduct our daily business", based on experience, and some aspects can be observed as they emerge in day-to-day practices, while other aspects may be discovered from stories and significant case incidents in the *institutional memory* of the organisation. This could be regarded as visible or conscious aspects of the expression of culture. At the second level, the move towards the invisible and unconscious aspects starts. Principal cultural aspects that emerge are shared values, shared ideals and shared expectations. The emphasis is on *shared* which suggests that there is joint thinking and understanding as to what is acceptable practice and what is not. At the third level – the deepest level – shared common assumptions which reflect the taken-for-granted truths that individuals share because of their joint experiences, emerge. As these assumptions become more ingrained, they become less exposed to questioning–individuals are not conscious of the assumptions that serve as guides to their behaviour and conduct as well as patterns interpersonal and social interaction within and outside the organisation (Stanwich and Stanwich 2009:153–154; Daft 1993:183; Schermerhorn *et al.* 2008:369). However, the impact of cultural strength and weakness, as well as the culture gap needs to be considered (Daft 1999:187–188). If the consensus is widespread among individuals as to the significance and importance of specific values and the manner of practice, the culture is regarded as being strong and cohesive and embedded in certainty. If the culture is considered weak and not ingrained in certainty, then it is considered to be of little or no concern amongst individuals. A cultural gap is premised on the organisation's congruency and alignment with the needs of the external environment. This may be the result of the values and manner of practice being based on the past. A culture gap is therefore, the difference between actual values and practices and the desired ones. It is suggested that optimum organisational effectiveness (and in public service life can be achieved) if, there is a fit and link with the external environment (Daft 1999:186–187). While, it is argued that it is extremely difficult to unbundle and isolate the various cultural patterns, doing so, nevertheless, facilitates reflection on why culture invades and infuses every aspect of public service life, and has thereby been regarded as the soul of public service life (Schermerhorn *et al.* 2008:370; Slocum and Hellrigel 2009:458).

The creation and promotion of an ethical organisational culture in public service life in South Africa is a requirement (Public Sector Integrity Management Framework. http://www. dpsa.gov.za). If organisational culture is an essential ingredient or the soul of public service life, then it should be able to deal with a number of concerns, at a strategic and on a day-to-day basis, in ethical reasoning, and moral awareness and actions. The concerns could be (Denhardt and Denhardt 2009:411; Doble 2007:173–174):

- To what extent have my ideals and expectations of promoting maximum benefit to all members been achieved through and organisational ethos that encourages integration of multiple voices and working across sectors to deal and cope with complex inter and muti-sectoral issues and problems?
- Did the consequences of my actions as a public servant, unconsciously marginalise the less powerful members of the public? Did I serve all members of the public, impartially?

- Do I always consider that public service is a special calling, and irrespective of my background or qualification, I am a guardian of a public trust?
- Is the organisational culture strong or weak in dealing with political and social pressure?
- Is there a threat to some principles which are being compromised in identifying and articulating public interest?
- To what extent are members of the public are provided with goods and service equitably, fairly and impartially?
- Was my conscience in just practices satisfied in treatment and process?
- How wide is the gap between what is proposed and what really occurs? Did, for example, my attitude influence whether or not my actions were adapted to meet the reasonable requests of the public, and did I engage and respond to public deliberations?
- Were any principles and values distorted and subverted to pursue individual personal interest at the expense of the public?
- Did I abuse my office position for personal gain?

In day-to-day activities at the operational level, it is expected that an ethical organisational culture will consciously or unconsciously and openly or subtly be concerned about and prevent certain risks (Avasthi and Shriram 1992:391; 399; Stanwich and Stanwich 2009:153):
- false or misleading information being circulated to members of the public;
- suppressing vital facts and information of public importance;
- improper manipulation and falsification of data, information and reports;
- violation of workplace health and safety rules, and employee rights to privacy;
- hostile work environments–such as sexual harassment and bullying;
- carelessness with information that is personal, private and confidential;
- making misleading statements to the media and other public service departments;
- turning a blind eye to actions which are acknowledged and have known to be wrong;
- allowing offenders to continue with their misdeeds and allowing the performers of misdeeds not to subject to any punishment; and
- accepting bribes or *speed money* to expedite the process in movement of files and communication pertaining to decisions through the administrative system.

Ethical foundations of decision-making

Ethical questions in public service life concern whether individuals ought to carry out certain actions or activities or not–whether those actions are wrong or right, good or bad; vicious or virtuous; beneficial or harmful; blameworthy or praiseworthy; rewardable or punishable; or urgent or deferrable, and so on. While it is important to gain an understanding and appreciation of these questions or issues–what ultimately matters, is solving them (Chryssides and Kaler 2004:12).

Decision-making is an organisational mechanism to find possible solutions as this process involves making choices. Each step in the process is a linked choice grounded in ethical foundations (Schermerhorn *et al.* 2008:299). An ideal decision-making process includes as the **first step,** recognising and defining the nature of the moral problem [Moral problem statement]. This is enabled through core values and fact gathering. This moral issue definition

is influenced by factors – such as how, does it impact on the decision-maker's own interests? Which stakeholders and role-players are impacted upon? What are the underlying core values that need to be addressed and considered to analyse the issue? What are the facts concerning the issue that the decision-maker should know? The **second stage** focuses on identifying and generating potential alternatives or options to solve the problem, based on ethical considerations. For example in the utilitarian model of ethics, action is to be taken in such a way that the greatest good is secured and achieved for the greater number, and therefore, such a decision is regarded as morally justifiable. The emphasis is on the maximisation of good and the minimisation of harm. In applying the utilitarian model consideration has to be given to, for example, how this action will create good and prevent harm, and the short and long-term consequences and outcomes of the action. It could be reasoned for instance, that the health needs of rural people can best be served in the short-term by using mobile clinics as a service-delivery mechanism. Consider that in terms of the rights-model of ethics denying or violating a legitimate entitlement to a particular public good or service, can be regarded as an unethical decision. The reason is that the individual was not treated with dignity and as an equal and free person. For example, it would be an unethical decision to ignore the right of safe access by the disabled to public buildings. In terms of the justice model, granting a person what he/she deserves, fairly and impartially, is the main premise. For example, application for a social grant should not be rejected on arbitrary grounds – such as race, religion or political affiliation. Distributive justice, another type of justice, requires fair and impartial distribution of benefits across society. A redistributive type of justice requires fairness and impartiality in awarding blame or punishment. However, the decision-maker also has to be cognisant of intuition and experience. In the **third stage,** the *best* alternative or option is considered. For each of this, an ethical judgment or evaluation will be made based on which are, and would be acceptable in terms of moral values and beliefs of the decision-makers, the public service as a whole, as well as other stakeholders and role-players. During the **fourth stage,** *the putting* into practice stage, the different ethical judgment options of the third stage are weighted against each other to determine the optimum solution to the moral issue. Through this reflection process, the decision-makers determine a morally acceptable and implementable resolution to the issue. What may be useful and advantageous is to establish a logical and systematic, description and explanation of the rationale behind the choice of the option (Jones and George 2003:91; Stanwich and Stanwich 2009:19; Starling 2008:193–194; Griffin 2009:125; Bloisi *et al.* 2003:497–498).

Considering the fact that ethical (moral) issues cannot necessarily be packaged in clear cut ways and given the prevalence of a plurality of interests and concomitant conflicts among a variety of stakeholders and role-players, the following questions can sharpen the decision-maker's ethical sensitivity and moral awareness (Bloisi *et al.* 2003:493; Fisher and Lovell 2009:139–140; Stanwich and Stanwich 2009:21,162; Starling 2008:194):

- What emotions and intuition are in conflict?
- What deeply rooted values that are part of my being, will not be compromised under any circumstances?
- What creative and innovative ideas, as well as astuteness and shrewdness, can be developed to guide the decision-making process?
- Is the decision congruent with the highest accepted values, norms and standards in the public service life environment?

- Does the decision agree with the decision maker's religious beliefs, personal principles, and sense of responsibility?
- Do the decisions harm the less powerful?
- Are the rights of others violated in the attempt to obtain self-fulfillment?
- Are adopted values that enable virtuous behaviour such as kindness, compassion, truthfulness and temperance recognised?
- Would the people with whom personal relationships exist – such as friends and family, as well as public servants, understand and approve the actions when they become known? How would be their attitude be interpreted?
- If this action is subject to public scrutiny, will the decision still be perceived as correct, and this is what should have been done, and were the accepted and recognised steps followed?
- Would an act be positively (feel good) and negatively (feel bad) interpreted, if the decision maker would be placed *in the shoes* of those affected by the decision?
- Would an act be regarded negatively or positively, if the decision was to become a universal principle which will be applied in all similar situations in public service life, even to the decision maker?
- Will the ethical development of individuals, communities and the public service collective be stifled by the decision?
- How well or badly would be the debate, discussions and arguments about the decision be conducted? Were the relevant stakeholders and role-players be considered, and to what extent?

Decisions taken in public service life must play an effective role in enhancing ethical reasoning and moral awareness. However, there is another underlying related contributor, ability – an exceptional talent to discover cause and effect, arrange facts, thoughts and assumptions, and how to investigate issues and offer solutions for implementation – all with deep personal conviction. Abilities that play a pertinent role in ensuring sound ethical decision-making include the following (Stanwich and Stanwich 2009:104):
- identification, recognition and understanding of the impact of all issues that are potentially related and connected to the issue/incident/dilemma/ problem;
- Untangling separating and isolating of the critical underpinning elements of the morally relevant facts and information;
- Separation and consideration of the morally relevant issues/problems as compared with the morally irrelevant issues/problems for any given set of circumstances;
- Commitment to carry out research or gather facts and information.
- Having the courage of one's conviction to elicit outside assistance as the situation requires.
- Formulation and presentation of a rational, systematic, unbiased and morally defensible conclusion given the facts and information for any set of circumstances.
- Justification and defence of a decision, as well as the capacity to implement the decision.
- Use of past experiences and intuition to revise and question one's moral framework.
- Development, maintenance and monitoring of a consistent moral framework.

Decision-making is a means rather than the ends, the end in public service life is serving and promoting the public interest or human welfare (Gibson *et al*. 1994:608). As a response

born out of a dynamic process, it is influenced by several factors – such as differing value judgments; the individual's morality; changing internal and external public service environments; organisational culture; and the ethical or moral issue in question (Robbins and Decenzo 2004:55). An example of an issue could be preventing public service life from social capture – a form of corruption. Other intertwined factors that impact on decision-making complexity, include the following: multiple criteria, issues, environments, intangibility, risk and uncertainty, long-term and short-term implications, and general day-to-day organisational disfunctioning (Kreitner 1995:229–230; Schermerhorn *et al.* 2008:301–302). Another noteworthy factor that influences the decision-making process is heuristics. It is regarded as a method or means of discovering something. Described as cognitive devices such as – "mental tricks of the trade" or "rules of thumb", and used almost unconsciously, they contribute to simplifying the decision-making process. This is achieved by limiting the need for the generation, evaluation and further options. Embedded in the idea of discovering things, is also the notion of trial and error discovery. This practice of heuristics is in contrast to the logical, rational systematic analysis and evaluation of all appropriate facts and information (Fisher and Lovell 2009:181).

Currently regulating and managing ethical concerns in South African public service life, is immensely challenged. Consideration of the ethical foundations and the various questions pertaining to ethical reasoning and moral awareness in decision-making could strengthen attempts to deal with the challenges. The words of Spaeman (1998:62–63 in Fisher and Lovell 2009:36) can serve as inspiration:

> *"In every human being there is a predisposition to develop a conscience, a kind of faculty by means of which good and bad are known."*

Ethics in leadership

Actors in public service life have to be involved in leadership practice in order to ensure a high quality of life, living and likelihood for all members of the public. Leadership involves influencing individuals and groups of individuals towards achieving the objectives and goals of the organisation (public service department). It involves motivating, directing, galvanising, energising, revitalising and mobilising individuals and groups of individuals continuously. Daft (1999:369) argues that if leadership is regarded only, as a set of practices with no concern for good or bad, right or wrong and harm or benefit, then it would be *amoral*, in that practices are neither moral nor immoral, but ethically lackadaisical (Daft 1999:369; Kreitner 1995:144). However, all leadership practices can be embedded in a moral dimension because practices can be used to pursue good or evil, right or wrong, benefit or harm;– because leadership is ultimately a human interactive process (Daft 1999:369), and "(w)e lead by being human. We do not lead by being corporate or being institutional" (Paul Hawken in Van Rensburg 2009:17). Leaders as human actors, ought to be cognisant of this cogent assertion by Albert Schweitzer (in Van Rensburg 2009:45):

> *"Ethics, too, are nothing but reverence for life. That is what gives me the principle of morality, namely, that good consists in maintaining, promoting and enhancing life, and that destroying, injuring and limiting life are evil".*

Whatever the choices that leaders make and how they respond in a given situation or circumstance, they are informed, directed and guided by their ethics (Northouse 2004:302). But, Bauman (1994:14) (in Fisher and Lovell 2009:36) aptly cautions: "… no one else but the moral persons themselves must take responsibility for their own moral responsibility". *Moral leadership* enriches the life of others by consistently and continuously: using power to unselfishly serve others, first; considering others equal to self; listening first to affirm and empower others; inspiring and enhancing trust by being trustworthy; being averse to falsehood, as well as being firm without weakness; instilling optimism, hope and resilience; and encouraging, as well as nourishing others to become *whole* by being congruent in thought, action and deed (Schermerhorn *et al.* 2008:280; Daft 1999:367;375; Du Plessis 2009:177). While, *moral leadership* focuses on enhancing and enriching the life of others, *immoral leadership* is regarded as detracting the life of others by: being aloof, callous, cold, ruthless, insensitive, arrogant; lacking commitment; betraying trust; having implicit prejudice, as well as subtly promoting favouritism; using power for personal gain; denouncing opposing views; openly humiliating others; and cheating by claiming credit for others' actions – all actions contrary to distinguishing between right or wrong, good or bad, benefit or harm, as well as doing good, right and creating benefit, and meaningfully seeking what is true, just and fair (Daft 1999:367;375; Kreitner 1995:5; Stanwich and Stanwich 2009:22–33). Again, a cogent caution:

> All good (right/benefit) is hard. All evil (wrong/harm) is easy. Dying, losing, cheating and mediocrity is easy. Stay away from easy. (Scott Alexander in Van Rensburg 2009:57).

While it is essential that influence is the ability to change the behaviour or viewpoint of others, ethical concerns may arise when manipulation is used to influence the behaviour and viewpoint of others (Kreitner 1995:464; Stanwich and Stanwich 2009:145). Manipulations may manifest in *wrongness* or *bad*–such as conspiring, distortion, subversion, selfishness, exaggeration and highhandedness (Stanwich and Stanwich 2009:145; Caiden 1991:492). Influence tactics that can be used alone or jointly is embedded in the ability of the leader to exercise the right sort of tactic at the right time, depending on the situation and circumstance (Kreitner 1995:464). The right influence tactics are: rational persuasion; inspirational appeals; ingratiation; pressure coalition; and upward appeals and exchange (Kreitner 1995:464). If verbal actions (written and unwritten) are considered as fundamental ways of exercising influence tactics, then considerations should be given to a significant remark on ethical wisdom expressed by (Clarence Gazalot in Stanwich and Stanwich 2009:147):

> Words can be powerful tools to convey meaning and purpose, but when they are empty, misleading, and thoughtless, they create a permanent and destructive disconnect among employees (public servants), customers (members of the public) and management.

Leadership is not a command and control position, and not necessarily, the prerogative and domain of a few members at the top of the organisational hierarchy (Kramer 2003:133; Broussine 2003:176). Importantly, *close leaders* can be found at all levels of the organisation, and are not the territory of a few *distant leaders* (senior staff at higher levels). (Gold *et al.* Munford 2010:11). Leadership is embedded in that leaders make a change and cause

differences in terms of behavior and viewpoints of others. This could not be possible without the presence and actions of leaders. Therefore, the ethics of prudence and wisdom emphasise the obligation of the leader to develop and achieve personal mastery, as well as to attend to the context of a situation or circumstance. Through deliberation and reason, as well as thoroughly considered judgment and evaluation the leader has to identify concrete and definite outcomes and impacts that conform to desired and acknowledged standards, which are definable and, are durable, in order to ensure optimum public service life (Dobel 1998:74–75). However, to enable meaningful ethical reasoning and moral awareness, leaders ought to take cognisance of concerns such as (Stanwich and Stanwich 2009:103; Northouse 2004:303–316; Dobel 2007:166; Denhardt and Denhardt 2009:136–137):

- To what extent are my actions inherently good, irrespective of the consequences?
- Does the leader have the moral right to act? If so, does the action not violate the rights and further promote the moral rights of others?
- Does the leader consider beneficence in my action? Has the decision addressed who will benefit from the actions? Has non-malfeasance been taken into account to address who will be harmed by my actions?
- Does the leader reflect in the influencing tactics that individuals may not consent to the approach followed? Does the leader respect and consider that there are differing views?
- How is a just and fair rationale influenced in the distribution of finite resources to meet competing needs?
- How are the influencing tactics used – such as inspirational appeals and rationale persuasion to ensure that preference should be given to what is right rather than who is right?
- Is tolerance shown for ethical lapses on the condition that the individual be given the opportunity to reform and is rendering account enforced for the consequences of inactions and actions?
- To what extent does the leader honestly and fairly reflect upon and consider the dissenting views or are the words of the most powerful and influential within or valued within the organisation unquestioningly complied with and adhered to?
- How does the leader influence and engage in committed, discourse and collaborative action in order to nourish citizen engagement; respond to citizen deliberation; and aspire to and embed a higher and broader ethical and moral purpose in public service life?
- How can the leader inspire and appeal to individuals, organisations and social collectivities – such as civil society, to embark on critical learning activities that create an environment that enables them to realise and decide for themselves how to promote ethical behaviour?
- Does the leader really know him/herself? To what extent are the virtues and vices of the leader really understood.? Does the leader reflect on the impact of them on public service life?

The South African public service, the Constitution,1996 which is the supreme law of the Republic lays the foundation to promote ethical reasoning and moral awareness in leadership. For example, reference is made in the Preamble to the Constitution to: "Recognise the injustice of our past"; "Believe that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, united in its diversity"; and "Improve the quality of life of all citizens and free the potential of each person".

Inspiration and caution abounds in the words of William Shakespeare's Hamlet (Stanwich and Stanwich 2009:7): "This above all: to thine ownself be true, And it must follow, as the night the day, thou can't not be false to any man".

Responses to Ethical Issues

It is argued that ethical or unethical decisions are not made by public institutions, but by individuals who have the ultimate responsibility for the decisions made (Stanwich and Stanwich 2009:25). It is asserted that public institutions exist in time. They together, with their responsibilities, exist prior to public servants exercising responsibilities and will exist after public servants depart from the scene. Public servants as holders of public trust and wielders of public power are temporary charges of the responsibilities of public institutions, and in exercising responsibilities, they will have to react to ethical concerns (Dobel 2007:166; Fisher and Lovell 2009:222).

Fisher and Rice (1999) (in Fisher and Lovell (2009:222–231), advocate eight categories of responses to ethical issues in the work environment (in public service life) stating that responses include what individuals say, how it is said and how they behave–thus, recognising ethical issues; ways of thinking about the issues; and likely or possible actions. In order to describe and explain the responses or stances that individuals use to classify ethical issues in working life (public service), they use a matrix format. The eight categories of responses/ stances are: *ethical neutrality; ethical awareness*; *ethical convention*; *ethical puzzle*; *ethical problem*; *ethical dilemma*; *ethical cynicism and caprice;* and *ethical negotiation*. Figure 1 (in Fisher and Lovell 2009: 223) is indicated below (Figure 1) with minor adaptations.

Figure 1: Managers perceptions of ethical issues – a framework
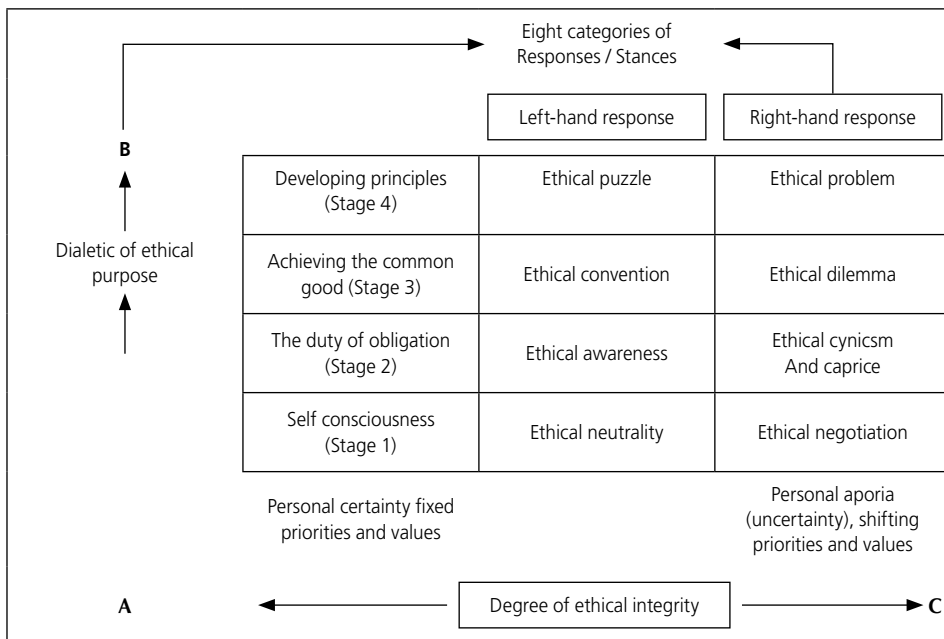
Source: Fisher and Rice 1999 in Fisher and Lovell 2009:223

Dialectic may be explained as the process of discussion and argument, and debate that is required to become apparent and possibly resolve contradictions and differing points of view (Fisher and Lovell 2009:32). At the extreme left (A) of the horizontal dimension axis (AC), the position represented is one of certainty, clarity and unambiguousness about values. At this point, the individuals understand ethical issues in an uncomplicated way, and therefore enabling what the individual should be circumspect about, and know what needs to be done in a situation or how an issue should be comprehended, analysed, evaluated and resolved. However, at the extreme right (C) of the horizontal dimension (AC), there is a likelihood of the individual not being able to think intelligently, and even places him/her in a situation of ethical uncertainty (aporia). In this condition, the individual will find it difficult to understand and reconcile an issue from a balanced perspective due to the multitude and diversity of views. Constantly changing their minds become the order of the day. A high degree of integrity is represented on the left-hand of dimension (A) and a low degree of integrity is represented on the right-hand dimension (C), if integrity is considered to mean the consonance and congruence between and individual's thoughts and actions on an ethical issue (Fisher and Lovell 2009:223). Therefore, the deduction is, recognising ethical issues and thinking about issues in ethical neutrality, ethical awareness, ethical convention and ethical puzzle category, will be on personal certainty, fixed priorities and values. However, this will not be the case in the ethical problem, ethical dilemma, ethical cynicism and caprice, and ethical negotiation category, in which personal uncertainty shifting priorities and values prevail. It is also argued that the responses in the left-hand section and the right-hand sections of Figure 1 have different implications. If the responses in the left-hand are taken, then there is a decisive choice of actions and consequent implementation. But, they could be unfair, inappropriate or irrelevant. In contrast, right-hand responses may be more responsive to the complexities of issues. However , they may also cause or lead to inaction and avoid an honest opinion or answer to an issue (Fisher and Lovell 2009:255–256).

On the vertical dimension axis are housed stages that covers the dialectical development and growth of an individual and conscious perspective of right and wrong. It captures and interprets a development in personal responsibility with the aim of enabling the recognition of prevailing ethical issues in the work environment and addressing them (Fisher and Lovell 2009:223). In the **initial stage** (stage 1), at the origin of the framework in terms of one's self-consciousness, the individual views and recognises his/her ethical/moral universe as a deeply personal one. While desiring to remain separate and apart from ethical issues in the wider world environment, they nevertheless accept responsibilities for themselves. This isolated approach is expressed by turning a blind eye to accepting moral responsibility, or taking a stand on right or wrong in the work place or in wider society. While, the individual's moral isolation could be an ideal, it cannot be sustained. It is contradicted and questioned by the clamorous demands of superiors, peers, colleagues, members of the public and civil society, to become engaged and involved. From this contradiction at the self-conscious initial stage, which is between an individual's sense of his/her moral worth and being quick to justify refusal to take a stand on moral issues, is born out the ethical sense of duty or obligation. **Stage 2** embodies and synthesises this contradiction. At this stage the emphasis of the response is on unswerving devotion to duty, based on his/her background and conscience, without much critical reflection. An important concern however, is carrying out one's duty could lead to not being aware that there can be a differing and contrary general

understanding of what duty is. The **third stage** of the dialectic which is in search for what is common, is a result of the lack of grounding and uniformity, and different views of the notion of duty. At this stage of the dialectic, that is, the search for common good (in the public service–this could be public good, public interest or human welfare), forms the foundation of moral certainty. In this stage, the focus is on attempting to reconcile competing ethical demands by using such concepts as: vision and mission statements; core organisational values; and quality of life, living and livelihood of people. Involvement in intense debate and discussion about values and priorities characterises this stage. The result of trying to establish agreement or consensus, or a common ethical convention, can cause or threaten to dissolve or fade into ethical plurality and dilemmas. The final or **fourth stage** of the vertical dimension is reached when or if, efforts at consensus and agreement building fail. In this final phase of the dialectic, which is about developing principles, the focus is on thorough self-analysis, discussion and debate. People aim to create their own set of moral precepts and values. At this dimension level, they have an appreciation and understanding of the fragmentation and plurality of the moral universe and make choices about how to respond or react. They may choose to live and function in baseless moral plurality or by playing with problems, or they consider and seek re-integration of fragments by logic, reason, deliberation and categorisation – how a jigsaw puzzle is done (Fisher and Lovell 2009:223–225).

In order to facilitate the understanding of the eight responses in an everyday life context, rather than in a general perspective, (Fisher and Lovell 2009: 228–229) offer (Table 6.1, 228–230) a possible solution that provides the arguments and values arising from each response, as well as thinking about them, and likely actions or inactions (Fisher and Lovell 2009:227).

Underpinning the ethical neutrality category is that no action must be taken about a troublesome issue. The reason could be ethical closure which causes individuals to suspend their normal ethical standards and norms when they act as obstacles to getting the task done. For example, a public servant may not respond or keep quiet about concerns raised on unethical behaviour in the supply chain management process because it will disrupt work schedules that have been planned with enormous difficulty. In the ethical awareness category, a person may be uncomfortable or perturbed because of an issue that causes anxiety and offends his/her instinctively held values. For example, if one is objecting to the use of people as *just* means and thereby disregarding their human dignity. The action taken therefore implies assertion and acting upon one's values. Ethical convention categorisation focuses on applying accepted norms and standards, when it is reasoned that the issue can best be solved through this application. For example, this is evident in applying professional and organisational norms, which requires everyone to be treated equally, honestly and fairly. In the ethical puzzle category, there is no absolute technically correct or best solution to an ethical issue. However, sticking to and applying existing rules and regulations and not bending them to suit special cases, is the best response. While, the ethical problem category is a conundrum in which there is no best outcome or solution, if it is possible to propose or take action to solve the problem, the difficulty will not be removed. The reason being is that an issue categorised as a problem may involve differing values, and when treated in isolation, the ideal solution may present itself, but which, when taken in concert, it may fall into conflict. The likely action may be in terms of clarifying how the conflicts would lead to different decisions, and how they succeed or fail, and then acting in terms of one's best judgement. For example, there may be no need to formulate and enforce ethical codes because there is strong evidence to suggest that employees also

acted in an honest, accountable and transparent manner. In the ethical dilemma categorisation, dealing with ethical issues could result in unpleasant or painful choices. Choosing between options implies that an individual acting in terms of one set of conventional rules and norms will require breaking another set of norms and expectations. Breaking a set of rules require choosing to support one group's, interests and wishes, by accepting their underlying rules and values, but ignoring another group's interests by offending their rules and values. The consequences could be inaction or indecision. A positive approach would be to continue holding and promoting discussions on issues rather than resorting to closure. Encouraging the view that ethical issues must be discussed and debated within a holistic vision that subordinates fragmentation of issues in the interest of a united purpose – what is in the ultimate interest of the public should be the question. In the ethical cynicism and caprice cluster, unlike the ethical awareness category, which emphasises acting on what one's conscience says is right, the cynical person is devoid of acting according to the dictates of conscience. Cynics are of the view that ethical issues will be resolved in ways that are fundamentally congruent to the private and personal interests of the actors involved. No deliberate action is taken to improve matters. Matters are left to be unpredictably and impulsively solved. Apart from focusing on their selfish and safely withdrawn position, cynics endeavour to cast blame and snipe from the periphery at decisions and actions taken by the individuals. The reason for this is that these individuals are distorting and interpreting rules and norms to their own private advantage and interest. The mantra of the cynic is that public service is only about deceit, distortion and manipulation. In the ethical negotiation category, the focus is on the process followed when an individual is striving to protect and promote his/her self-interest, that is, dedicatedly doing his/her task, but finding themselves entangled in different views and values of powerful individuals, as well as pressure and interest groups. One example is, falling prey to international and national influence peddlers (Fisher and Lovell 2009:225–230).

The aim of the dialectic process is to highlight debate and resolve conflicting values arising out of the different stages for example, ethical problems, ethical puzzle, ethical negotiation and ethical dilemma. In the ethical dilemma cluster, the individual has to make a choice between two equally balanced alternatives, and choosing one alternative result in ignoring others (Murray 1997:112; Robson 1999:176–177). This quandary requires a strongly-based ethical solution grounded and supported by thorough ethical deliberation and reasoning. When an individual might hold conflicting views or is subject to conflicting views on ethical issues, different perspectives are suggested that may provide insights as to how to address them (Fisher and Lovell 2009:230–231):

- What has served as a catalyst or what triggered recognition of the issue as an ethical one?
- What is the proper course of action when ethical reasoning is applied to determine an ideal solution?
- What are expectations, demands, and critical concerns that other stakeholders and role-players in the situation wish to improve?
- What, in real practical situations, ought to be done in light of all the concerns, opportunities, threats and complexities, as well as options considered for action?

In the case of the ethical dilemma response, the following questions could enhance the dialectic (Spitzer 2000:231):

- What are the values and norms that could be violated on different sides of the dilemma?
- How are the values and norms ranked?
- What are the levels of harms and benefits on each side of dilemma?
- What are the quantities of benefit realised, and the harm caused on each side?

Ultimately, whatever the decision, the individual person has to accept responsibility and accountability for ethical choices. However, it is argued that for some people it may be difficult to know, understand and recognise an ethical dilemma (Stanwich and Stanwich 2009:26). To facilitate possible resolution to this challenge, *red flags* could be considered. However, these red flags do not necessarily mean that ethical violation is taking place, but, it could suggest there is a potential for violation to take place. Being alert to and cognisant of the red flags will enhance the quality of the ethical choice most likely to be made (Stanwich and Stanwich 2009:27). Eight red flags could be considered (Stanwich and Stanwich 2009:27):
- It is too insignificant a matter for anyone to notice?
- It is too insignificant a matter for anyone to be harmed by my actions?
- It is necessary for me to follow this course of action for career advancement, but, one is uneasy and not comfortable with this course of action?
- Why should it be the exception, if everyone is doing it?
- It is hoped what was done is not found out by the relevant parties to the decision;
- It was done because the person was told to do it.
- I don't wish to disappoint a specific person, and that is why I am doing it.
- One person will not have to deal with the other person again, if the decision is taken.

In the category of ethical dilemma, there is the notion of relativism which may also be regarded as a technique of ethical reasoning. Its prominence is due to the absence of objective criteria to adjudicate the claims and counter claims of the dilemma (Rossouw 2002:66; Hosmer 2006:92). The underlying rationale behind ethical relativism is the belief that a plurality of ethical norms and standards, exist. Therefore, there cannot be a universal ethical norm or standard that can be applied to every individual organisation or situation. What may be considered appropriate in dealing with an ethical dilemma in one organisation or situation, may be inappropriate in another organisation or situation (Goree 2007:7; Rollin 2006:46–47; Fisher and Lovell 2009:229). Quinn (2006:60) argues that different individuals and groups can hold totally opposite views on an ethical issue and both can be right. In order to deal with difficulties presented by ethical relativism, Dellapartas *et al.* (2005:327) advocate that there are absolute ethical truths which everyone has to obey and appreciate, as well as subscribe to and apply without exception, at all times and in all settings. In this context, the absolute truth will be to bear an obligation, commitment, duty and responsibility for the ultimate well-being of the general public (Hosmer 2006:93).

In the public service, ethical action manifests in discretionary judgement which implies the involvement of a cognitive dimension on framing a situation or action and identify of significance (Dobel 2007:160). Unlike, non-discretionary actions which cannot be changed, that is, there are acceptable ways applicable for carrying out discretionary action because it grows and emerges from a condition that provides leeway for some freedom of choice and maneuverability for adapting to unique situations, at the same time it balances and

gives content and meaning to the criteria for acting (Dobel 2007:160; *Encarta World English Dictionary* 1999:1065). One reason for granting public servants discretion is to allow flexibility in decision-making in order that all relevant circumstances are considered. By virtue of the positions of public servants at the interface between citizens and the state, they have a significant impact on service delivery which involves actions–such as determining eligibility for disability grants or child support grants; exempting organisations and individuals from enforcement actions and; granting export permits. This discretion can create opportunities for ethical compromise–such as giving priority to family members who are social grants applicants (Corruption Watch. *Sunday Times*: Business Times 9 February 2014:12; Dobel 2007:154; Meyers and Vorsanger 2008:154). Corruption Watch (*Sunday Times*: Business Times 9 February 2014:12) cautions that strict and rigid adherence to rules and regulations (non-discretionary action) can be a cover up for corruption, for example, when import permits are refused on technicalities, with the main reason being that the public servant is seeking a bribe.

Ethical compromises can be rationalised in the following ways (Stanwich and Stanwich 2009:26):

- The employee has to do questionable actions to achieve the purpose of my task.
- The employee does not have the time and/or the resources (intellectual and/or material) to follow an ethical course of action.
- The employee's colleagues and peers expect him/her to engage in unethical behaviour.
- The employee's superior wants him/her to produce results, not excuses for things that cannot be done
- The employee believes his/her actions are neither wrong nor illegal.
- Other people would agree with the decisions that have been taken.
- No one will be able to identify between the employee's action and a more ethical course of action.
- The employee is hesitant to take the right course of action.

Ethics is not just recognising ethical issues, thinking about them, and as taking actions. Ethical responsibility is about being and doing what is taken to be right, not just presenting ideas or solutions (Stanwich and Stanwich 2009:25). The insights provided by the degree of ethical integrity, the dialectic of ethical purposes, as well as the response categories discussed, could enhance the ethical responsibility of public servants. They will begin to understand that: ethics is not just an abstract philosophical concept; it is not the sole belief that people will always be able to clarify right or wrong; it does not concern the belief that unethical people will be corrected by ethical individuals; education and training by itself will reduce unethical behaviour; and it is not based only on legal compliance (Stanwich and Stanwich 2009:23; Denhardt and Denhardt 2009:153).

CONCLUSION

Conceptual perspectives on the factors and considerations for enhancing ethical governance in public administration can contribute to discovering, identifying or clarifying *what* is in the public interest; promoting assured and consistent individual and collective

action and behaviour by aligning one's own values with those underpinning ethical governance in public administration; making judgements and assessments which can be articulated and justified in any institutional or public forum through deep self-reflection, engagement and dialogue; and realising and understanding that individual and collective action and behaviour in day-to-day practice, could have roots or origins from some ethical dispute, ethical question or tension.

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