

WORK ETHICS AND GOOD GOVERNANCE IN POST-COLONIAL ERA IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

It might be said that good work ethics are inherent and therefore only possible in highly socialized societies such as the Japanese society and that societies such as those in Southern Africa which have gone through severe de-stabilizing experiences in their history are not capable of engendering and cultivating good work ethics among their work force. Granted, highly socialized societies start from a step ahead of others because they are already oriented towards such a goal. Societies such as those in the post – colonial world start from a position where they must de-construct, unlearn, undo, and pull down the walls of resistance against good work ethics within themselves to good work ethics brought about by their experience over the years.

Breaking down the barriers will, however, not help unless an alternative ethos with visible benefits is placed into the vacuum created. That alternative ethos is a set of what is generally agreed as good work ethics in any working environment and the key to success in an organization is ethics training.

Key Words: socialized society, de-stabilizing, deconstruct, work ethics, dependability, governance, accountability

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Good work ethics are intrinsic, meaning that they come from within. Superiors at workplaces are more likely to promote to higher positions, pay higher wages to workers with better work ethics than to those who do not have good work ethics.

A useful working definition of good work ethics is a belief in the moral benefit of work and its ability to enhance character. Such belief will make one realize that he or she needs to embrace values that are not only positive, but values which are also capacitating or enabling to oneself and to others. Such values make a viable basis for good work ethics. The commonly identified good work ethics are:

- **Honesty:** Any job assigned to anyone should be done with utmost honesty, without cheating, lying or stealing. It is psychologically proven that if a person doesn't follow work ethics, his/her conscience will be bothered.
- **Dependability:** Those who are dependable are considered reliable as well. Hence, it is necessary to develop the quality of being a responsible person. This will, in turn, foster excellent results and set you as a good example for those around you.
- **Efficiency:** Efficiency is vital growth as well as the betterment of the company one is working for. It is very easy to spot inefficient employees, who waste a lot of time and resources. However, efficiency is still a hallmark of good workers.
- **Positive Work Habits:** Inculcate good working habits that will impress everybody including superiors as well. Coming to work late, dressing inappropriately and shuffling jobs are considered as signs of not following good work ethics.
- **Initiative:** To be successful in whatever one is doing is vital to take initiatives on one's part. If one is doing the right thing in an acceptable manner, he or she should not hesitate to take initiatives.
- **Humility:** Humbleness and modesty are amongst the necessary elements of good work ethics. Only a fool is arrogant, while a wise person always shows traits of humility.
- **Positive Attitude:** Maintaining a positive attitude at work is very important to accomplishing tasks successfully. This is because one's colleagues get affected by one's mannerism and respond accordingly.
- **Teamwork:** Always, one should remember that one is a part of the team, no matter what role he/she plays in it.

There are characteristics (based on these values) that describe a "good worker" and these include:

- **Showing up:** Most employers get very frustrated with workers/employees who just don't show up. Sometimes they call but often times they don't and they keep everybody waiting.
- **Being punctual.** Employers like workers who come to work on time and start work when they are supposed. We have experiences of employees or civil servants who come late to open the clinic while patients who might have travelled long distances to the clinic wait for ages before the sister in charge opens the clinic.
- **Following instructions:** A good worker is one who listens actively while instructions are being given and goes on to implement them.

- Staying on task: This means continuing to work and getting the job done. Good work ethic means not taking excessive tea and lunch breaks.

It is frustrating to wait for hours on end for an employee who does not show up for work, for an employee who does not keep time, for the office that is opened one or two hours after lunch break because the official is not yet back from lunch and when he/she comes back, does not stay on the task because he/ she is constantly talking on the phone while people wait to be served. Not keeping time is now a culture that is becoming typical of African work ethic hence the saying “there is no hurry in Africa” and obviously this negatively impacts on good governance and development.

In order to understand an individual’s ethics it is important to appreciate the values that guide that individual’s behavior. Individual and organizational work ethics are informed by certain values. The question then to ask is what values inform work ethics in post – colonial Southern Africa

VALUES THAT INFORM WORK ETHICS IN POST-COLONIAL SOUTHERN AFRICA

The Japanese work ethic has for a long time been held up for emulation by many societies especially in the Western World and to some extent in Africa as well. The Japanese are reputed for their hard work, diligence and loyalty, all arising from a highly regarded sense of honour in one’s conduct.

Tradition in Southern African societies requires that one identifies with the clan and family and that one should not bring disgrace or supernatural visitation to the clan or family through his doings. This was particularly so in the past when African societies were more homogeneous, cohesive and lived simple lives in rural settings. Overtime, Christianity and Western ethics took a stronghold on African societies especially in former colonies in Southern Africa where negative perception of labour was instilled through forced labour schemes. The colonialists stigmatized labour further by assigning different value indices to various types of work. Manual work, for instance, was assigned to the illiterate and made to attract menial wages. Because the majority of the colonized fell into this category, they were made to feel marginalized. The workers developed the attitude that what belonged to the colonial government, a white farmer or factory owner, could in all conscience be stolen as long as the perpetrator was not caught.

Unfortunately this attitude did not completely go away after independence. The situation was made worse in post-colonial southern Africa because of the harsh economic realities, unemployment, and favouritism all leading to the few rich becoming richer and the poor becoming poorer.

The values such a background has engendered are graft and looking out for self, all resulting in a work ethic that aims at doing the barest minimum to make one avoid being fired, lack of commitment, lack of honesty, sloppy work habits and outright criminal behavior. This is the extreme scenario of the negative work ethic in Southern Africa and unfortunately the most prevalent.

Yes, there are workers in our public services, private sectors, NGOs, the Church, who give of their best, who do their utmost to cultivate good work ethics notwithstanding the distractions and de-motivating factors around them in the workplace, in the society and in the governance provisions of the country.

The question to ask at this stage is: what can we do to ensure that the workers who espouse good work ethics in our workplaces are supported and encouraged and to ensure that

those who do not have good work ethics are persuaded to see value in such ethics even when there seems to be little to be gained given the prevailing de-motivating circumstances? Part of the answer to this question lies in good governance.

WORK ETHICS AND GOVERNANCE

A good work ethic is key to good governance and good governance is pivotal to sustainable development.

In order to appreciate the linkages between good work ethics and good governance it is important to define what governance is and how it is done.

What is governance and how is it done?

Governance is the process by which institutions manage public affairs. It is the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented (or not implemented).

Governance is carried out through institutions which include:

- the individual
- family
- community
- organizations and
- state Institutions/national level

Governance at the individual level

It is important to note that governance applies to all individuals. The values of good work ethics described earlier, showing up for work, being punctual, following instructions and staying on task, impact on the process of making and implementing decisions- the process of doing governance. Good work ethics at the **individual level** is a matter of one's conscience based on their values.

Governance at Family and Community levels

The concept of the African family goes beyond the nuclear family to the extended family. The values most cherished in the African family, values which influence work ethics at the family level include:

- sense of community and collective consciousness
- solidarity
- caring and
- sharing

Governance at the Organizational/Corporate Level

Organizations are composed of individuals with their own values and attitudes towards work. For the success of the organization, there is need to develop common ethics that should be respected and followed by all in order to avoid conflict and confusion. These ethical values must

be applicable to each and every employee without exception. When this happens then the organization is practising good governance.

Most organizations have mission statements and guiding principles /values for achieving their stated objectives. These are usually framed and posted on the wall for all to see. The organization's code of ethics guides the behavior of the employees. Among such values it is usual to see included in the list such values as honesty, integrity, professionalism etc. Sometimes the Code of Ethics is "nice to have" – just for the public, as opposed to operational /true values. If you want to see what people value, it's not what they say they value but what they do that shows their true/operative values. At least the private sector makes an effort to practise good work ethics as this assists in fighting competition and gaining market share

Governance at the National Level

At the national level, governance generally encompasses all aspects of the way a country is governed. Such aspects include economic policies and regulatory frameworks. Governance is done through government ministries, provincial and district structures, ward and village level structures.

Government is only one of the actors of governance. There are other actors at the various levels of formal government structures and they include traditional leaders (chiefs), and other local authority leaders, both urban and rural.

In many parts of post-colonial Southern Africa, it has become common knowledge that acquiring a senior/top position in state institutions such as the civil service, army, police, judiciary and the like is an opportunity to become rich. The "get rich quick" attitude has permeated many high ranking officials and this ethos has contributed immensely to poor work ethics in the public service.

It is not uncommon to find offices with jackets only without the people in the chairs. They turn up in the morning to be marked "present" and disappear to run their own businesses in the informal sector. In Zimbabwe, for instance, it is the buying and selling business that is the order of the day. Private business is being carried on in the office using office phones, office computers and stationery. Trading openly takes place in government offices. In public schools the situation is no different. It is known that teachers in some public schools in Zimbabwe take turns to make frequent shopping trips to the diaspora especially South Africa and Botswana, with the blessing of the headmaster without necessarily completing leave forms.

A personal experience with bad work ethics in public institutions comes to mind. Mrs X was a Grade 7 teacher at a public primary school in an up market suburb in Harare. A girl who was in her class was an above average performer and was due to write Grade 7 public examination for entry into Form 1. She went home one afternoon asking for money to pay the teacher for "extra lessons" which were conducted during class time! The teacher had managed to convince the girl that unless she took the extra lessons she was going to fail. So the teacher only gave attention and taught those students who paid her. The rest of the students sat in the class doing other things until it was time to go home. A visit was made to the Headmaster and the matter was reported. Mrs X was making more money than her monthly pay offering "extra lessons" during class time. She was given a strong written warning. The girl, who had been selected and trained to join the prefect's body for the following year, suffered for it as Mrs X made sure that her name was removed from the list of prefects.

There are many such stories of unacceptable /poor work ethics. It takes one's conscience and courage to stand up for what is right in the face of various types of risks.

Bad governance contributes to poor work ethics. One of the characteristics of bad governance at the level of state institutions is that of lack of accountability and transparency, mismanagement of resources and corruption. Corruption thrives in an environment where enforcement of moral standards through religion, ethical teaching and law is weak and punishment is lenient or even absent.

Corrupt practices are increasing in both the private and public sectors in post-colonial Southern Africa. Corruption has become endemic. It is discussed at high levels of political establishments and government. Governments have set up Anti-Corruption Commissions but very few people blow the whistle. It is those in positions of authority that gain most from corrupt practices. These are the people who are benefitting from bad governance. They pay lip service to upholding ethical standards.

One cannot lay the blame entirely on civil servants. This situation did not just mushroom overnight. It emerges as a result of bad governance and the resultant stagnation of the economy. Poor governance is detrimental to economic development. It is a well-known fact that corruption in post-colonial Southern Africa is rampant. People badly need civil servants today who provide an ethos and moral vision for society. They should, first of all, be servants of the public. For this service they should be provided with good working conditions, adequately remunerated, given security of tenure and good pension. (Kaulemu D, 2006). Civil servants should serve ordinary citizens whom they should regard as their employer regardless of them being poor or uneducated.

It is generally agreed that good governance is pivotal to the advancement of development in Africa. The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) - a blueprint for economic revival which was established in 2003 - is an instrument and a mechanism whereby participating governments agree to have their various aspects of political governance, observance of human rights and economic decision-making reviewed by their African peers. Out of the 28 countries which have signed the agreement 11 have undergone such reviews. (Africa Renewal, August 2010, Vol. 24. 2-3).

The UN Global Pact, launched in 2000, urges companies to operate ethically. It is an initiative by the United Nations to encourage the corporate world/businesses to adhere to ethical standards. To date, membership includes 7 700 corporate participants and stake holders in 130 countries, including 297 firms in 29 sub-Saharan Africa (Africa Renewal, August 2010, Vol.24, 7). The Global Pact adopted its principle to fight corruption in 2004.

The common core elements of good governance are:

- accountability
- transparency
- responsiveness (openness and sensitivity)
- equitability and inclusiveness
- effective and efficient use of resources
- rule of law
- participatory approaches
- consensus oriented
- decision making
- leadership that articulates vision development and governance, willing to listen and is empathetic
- technical and managerial capacity and
- organizational capacity

For the above core elements of good governance to be achieved and for that governance to be credible, it has to show integrity, honesty, faithfulness and truthfulness of its obligations. These are indeed some of the characteristics of good work ethics described earlier.

The core elements of good governance described above have implications for good work ethics. The table below describes the element of good governance and its implications on good work ethics.

IMPLICATIONS OF GOOD GOVERNANCE ON WORK ETHICS

Element of Good governance	Implications for good work ethics
<p>Rule of law</p> <p>This requires that legal frameworks are enforced impartially. Decisions taken by government are founded in law. Private firms and individuals are protected from arbitrary decisions.</p>	<p>Law enforcement officers are impartial and incorruptible, reliable and predictable.</p>
<p>Transparency</p> <p>This means that rules and regulations are followed when decisions are implemented. External reviewers and the general public can verify performance and compliance to law.</p>	<p>Information is shared and readily available, not withheld or not given selectively. Accountability is enforced.</p>
<p>Responsiveness</p> <p>All stakeholders are served within a reasonable time</p>	<p>Taking action, acknowledging, communicating and following up on requests and expectations of those interested. Laziness and procrastination is not allowed.</p>
<p>Consensus Oriented</p> <p>Good governance requires consultations of all key stakeholders especially those who will be affected by the decisions to be taken.</p>	<p>Teamwork, not going it alone and playing your part. Willingness to consult before important decisions are taken</p>
<p>Equity and inclusiveness</p> <p>Members do not feel excluded from the mainstream of things</p>	<p>Equitable treatment of all</p>
<p>Effectiveness and Efficiency</p> <p>Good governance means that processes and institutions</p>	<p>Do the right thing and do it right the first time. Being conscious of wastage</p>

produce results that meet the needs of society while making the best use of the resources at their disposal	and of time. Being punctual, showing up, Staying on task, following instructions and having a positive attitude.
Accountability Accountability in both government and private sector institutions is key to good governance. Accountability is to those who are affected by decisions and actions of these institutions. Transparency and rule of law are key elements of accountability	Information is shared and readily available, not withheld or not given selectively. Accountability is enforced. People accept and take responsibility
Participatory approaches	Consulting and involving all key people
Decision-making	Making decisions and not being ambivalent i.e. Being decisive
Leadership	Has vision, listens, responds, communicating, transparent, accountable, responsive, respects rule of law, accepts responsibility.

It has been mentioned earlier that good work ethics are intrinsic. However, the way governance is practised has implications on work ethics. The implications of good governance on work ethics reveal the need for organizations to develop a culture of good ethics. Ethics training is key to success in organizations in post - colonial Southern Africa.

DEVELOPING A CULTURE OF GOOD WORK ETHICS IN ORGANIZATIONS

Good work ethics can be developed. This paper proposes an approach to developing good work ethics in an organization. The approach is in three stages which are: individual self-awareness, staff training in good governance and good work ethics and organizational culture development.

Self-Awareness Training for Staff

It has been said earlier that the starting point for good work ethics training for people in post-colonial societies in Southern Africa is to de-construct so as to pull down the ingrained marginalization complex to which they were subjected by both colonial and post-colonial dispensations.

To be able to make such a paradigm shift, staff need to be trained in self-awareness in the first instance so that they get to understand themselves better – who they really are, what values steer their lives, what motivates them to make the choices they make in their personal lives, as members of a significant group such as family, church, work group, etc.

Such training should also sharpen the workers' sensitivity to the needs of those around them, how they function in group or team settings as followers, as leaders, what they need to do to meet their own needs and also meet the needs of those around them.

Suggested Approach to Self Awareness Training

The suggested approach to be used in self-awareness training is based on experiential learning in a group setting. The experiential learning approach begins with the group going through an exercise in which they all participate. They can reflect upon the experience sharing what individuals did or did not do during the exercise, sharing what they liked and did not like about the exercise. Individuals become more aware of their behavior and the effect of that behavior on others and on the organization.

Organizational work ethics/culture survey

The second segment of the trainings and initiatives to inculcate good work ethics in staff and in organizations relates to the organization itself, and the key question to ask here is: does the organization have an organizational culture and work environmental factors that engender and nurture good work ethics? The answer to this question can be obtained by carrying out an organizational culture survey. The results from the survey would point at what needs to be done to develop an organizational culture that is conducive to good work ethics. Guided by the results of the survey, the Organization develops a participatory action plan to bring about the desired organizational culture.

CONCLUSION

It is noted in this article that the development of good work ethics in post-colonial Southern Africa is beset by complex and negative reactions arising from years of marginalization of the workforce by colonial and post-colonial governments and that in order to engender and cultivate good work ethics in post-colonial Southern Africa, the workforce needs to be trained to de-construct the negativity of the years of marginalization, appreciate what good work ethics are and the benefits they bring, be aware of the values that steer their lives as individual human beings and make a conscious choice to make the paradigm shift to assimilate and live by good work ethics.

In addition, organizations in post- colonial Southern Africa, as part and parcel of good governance, need to ensure that they put in place environmental work factors and organizational cultures that both engender and help sustain good work ethics in their staff.

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