ETHICAL LEADERSHIP
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15 FEBRUARY 2018

Chairperson of Council of the Tshwane University of Technology, Dr Bandile Masuku
Vice-Chancellor and Principal of the University, Professor Lourens van Staden
Members of the Executive Management Committee of the University
Distinguished guests
Ladies and Gentlemen
All protocol observed

INTRODUCTION

1. I am pleased to have this opportunity to present a paper at this Council Workshop on the critical issue of ethical leadership. The quest for ethical leadership comes at a time when the expectations of the citizens of our country about the performance and conduct of public administration are very high and their frustrations are expressed through service delivery protests. It also comes at a time when there is widespread reporting about fraud, corruption, the abuse of power and in general the use of public office and power for private gain. This means that those working within the public administration need to be very mindful at all times of the trust accorded to them by the citizens they serve and the need to live up to those expectations.

2. I must congratulate the Chairperson of Council, Vice-Chancellor and Principal of the University, and Members of the Executive Management Committee of the University for holding this important discussion as it shows that the University is not only concerned about teaching and learning, but that also about issues of morality, integrity and the common good of our people.

CONCEPT OF ETHICAL LEADERSHIP

3. To ideate a workable and objectively identifiable or determinable or operationable concept of Ethical Leadership is a formidable challenge. Both adjective and described noun are superficially understood; but on deeper reflections they denote intractable phenomenal human behavioural patterns. Leadership is a concept much more than that of a leader as is an influence
process within a social context or milieu.

4. Ethics is derivative from approved or acceptable societal norms or values of a particular historical conjuncture. The normative foundations of any society are generally in flux of different degrees of speed, depth and pervasiveness. What is ethical soon becomes only important in the heart of the beholder. How to objectify and socialise this becomes challenging.

5. Another case for complexity is due to the fact that since ethics express values of particular culture and nations of the world bear different cultures, can there be universality with respect to ethical leadership? It would appear that we are faced with the case of the globalisation of the local and the localisation of the global.

6. The westernisation of ethics and ethical behaviour is part of the perennial efforts by the West to universalise what in fact is a particularistic western experience. In cultural terms this takes the form of ethnocentrism (Western Culture being viewed to be superior to other cultures). What is universal and what is not (local) about the concept and operationalization of Ethical Leadership? Time and context matter.

ETHICS

7. In essence ethics represent an individual’s personal beliefs regarding what is right and what is wrong and obviously there is a socialisation process involved here when a leader behaves ethically it means he/she is acting according to specific social norms. We should be mindful of the fact that social norms are a part of the culture of the society and its peoples; are held or observed at different degrees of intensity; are subject to change and are influenced by various contingencies (context factors). In a society experiencing cultural and/ or normative changes, what should be considered ethical behaviour?

8. What can or is considered ethical behaviour is reckonable at these hierarchies: private individual, organisational/ institutional context, state/ government settings, and societal level. This is a one country consideration. To be added here is a world perspective.

9. Individuals, organisations, societies/ countries/ state-
governments have core behaviours that alludes to optimisation or maximization of self-interest. Various ethical codes of behaviour are invoked using various international institutions to normatise and universalise certain ethical conducts (in conducting business, in managing international relations, in running state/government affairs, in dealing with various international commons such as, the sea, air, etc.). Self-advantaging and self-aggrandisement are persistent behavioural urges or motives that threaten ethical behaviour in these contexts of human existence and endeavours.

10. The Categorical Imperative Principle exhorts individuals to act in such a way that their actions can be used as a universal standard. This is important for leaders to lead on ethical behaviour so that others can follow.

LEADERSHIP

11. Leadership is not the same as a leader. The latter emphasises position in organisational hierarchy or group. But leadership is a legitimate power induced process of influence. This means that Ethical Leadership is not just self-serving individuals but aims at influencing followership groups to adopt certain codes of behaviour and be intrinsically satisfied (self-rewarding and self-reinforcing in terms of behaviour): to act such that their actions can be standard of ethical behaviour for others.

12. The categorical imperative principle applies to leadership and this is what the topic is about, in other respects: This must happen at different hierarchies and heterarchies of our country, nation, public and private sector institutions. Also at individual leader level as standard of exercising leadership or playing leadership roles that others can emulate.

13. An ethical leader will among others, have the following characteristics or virtues:

13.1 To observe and respect the rule of law, that is all actions and decisions must be within the parameters set by the Constitution and the rule of law
13.2 Honesty
13.3 Courage
13.4 Integrity
13.5 Values of uBuntu, responsibility, accountability, fairness and
transparency

13.6 To subjugate the personal interests to those of the people

14. It is important for leaders to understand that “Ethics live at the heart of all human relationships and hence at the heart of the relationship between leaders and follower”\(^1\).

OBSERVATIONS ON ETHICAL LEADERSHIP IN SOUTH AFRICA

15. The South African Constitutional framework in Chapter 10 provides for values and principles that relate to public administration such as, a high standard of professional ethics, transparency and accountability\(^2\). Ethical Leadership is important both in the public and private sector.

16. It is always important to understand the effects of cultural changes with what is considered as expected behaviour of leaders (including who should or should not be a leader). Positive and negative reinforcements are important motivators for repeat or stop to particular behaviour. Unethical behaviour that is not sanctioned or punished through time gets elevated to a position of acceptable/tolerable behaviour and this gets repeated because of such indirect reinforcement. The South African government system and its leadership may be said to be suffering from this reinforcement effects.

17. The South African situation can be characterised by following factors which tend to de-emphasise the importance of Ethical Leadership or ethical behaviour in general:

17.1 The pressure exerted by the legacy of apartheid, the experiences of poverty, inequality, racism and unemployment divert attention of leaders and their followers/subordinates to the importance of ethical behaviour.

17.2 African culture is under siege and undergoing rapid changes which have settled everywhere with the ends justifying the means in a number of situations.

17.3 Globalisation of the economies, culture and influx of people with various cultures from outside the country generally speaking do influence the values in the culture reflective of our ethical behaviour or moral qualities. The ethical norms and values we

\(^1\) Ciulla, JB. 2004. Ethics, the heart of leadership. Quorum Books

\(^2\) Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, Chapter 10, section 195
adhere therefore do get over influenced by other values and cultures that we interact with and one only hopes that we would also be able to influence the norms and values of other cultures.

18. Then we may be in agreement with Thomas that “An ethical leader is a person living up to principles of conduct that are crucial for him. To be an ethical leader one needs to adhere to a more universal standard of moral behaviour”.

19. In South Africa, the Comprador Bourgeoisie as part of efforts to escape poverty at all cost has been led to almost complete neglect in considering the moral dimensions of their actions aimed at acquiring public resources by hooks or crooks. Through resultant ostentatious behaviour such acts have demonstratory effects to follow and motivate further unethical acquisitions of public resources.

20. What becomes important in promoting ethical behaviour starts with building consciousness amongst leaders? We can draw lessons from the inscription on Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe’s grave which reads as follows: “True leadership demands a complete subjugation of self, absolute honesty, integrity and uprightness of character and fearlessness, and above all, a consuming love for ones people”. As Prof Kondlo has opined, “true leadership can be attributed to leaders who are led by their conscience and consciousness”. In the absence of leaders who have conscience and consciousness, the fibre of society is corroded and economic development is negatively affected.

21. The prevailing culture of “it’s our turn to eat” and “we were not in the struggle to be poor”, is eroding the moral fiber of the post-apartheid South Africa. This culture is exacerbated by a leadership that has a total disregard for the institutions established to enforce and maintain the rule of law. Then President Nelson Mandela emphasised this in his opening address to Parliament in 1999 that:

“Our hope for the future depends on our resolution as a nation in dealing with the scourge of corruption. Success will require an acceptance that, in many respects, we are a sick society. It is

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perfectly correct to assert that all this was spawned by apartheid."^6

REINFORCEMENT TO ETHICAL LEADERSHIP

22. Universities should provide courses on Ethics and Ethical Leadership. This material is best provided in an integrated manner in other courses. In addition to this integrated approach separate course(s) can be taught. This, of course assumes the importance of teaching culture at lower and higher institutions of learning. The big question of course is: which culture? Such culture must provide ethical standards to be observed and achieved in various individual and organisational endeavours opening in the country. The social environment must equally be exposed to such teachings.

23. There must be a way society can pronounce its non-approval of unethical behaviour and unethical leadership over and above legality or resorting to litigation.

WHAT PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTOR INSTITUTIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA SHOULD DO?

24. Leaders must remove/clear any areas of moral and ethical ambiguities within organisational affairs.

25. Formulate ethical behaviour guidelines including those affecting leadership and have this distributed and seminared and also conduct training.


27. Set up ethics ombudsperson and committees.

28. Ethical issues should be part of strategic conversations within organisations/ institutions.

29. They should build a climate of ethics by doing the following:

29.1 Send a clear message that ethics is a driving force of the

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^6 President Nelson Mandela, Opening address to Parliament, 1999.
organisation not an exception.

29.2 Establish sensible, clearly communicated values and commitments.

29.3 Use the values and factor them into routine decision-making and day-to-day organisational activities.

29.4 Make sure all systems and structures reflect and reinforce the values-consistent application.

29.5 Hold everyone accountable for their actions and decisions.

29.6 Demonstrate your commitment to ethics by your own behaviour. It is important to note that the behaviour of leaders do shape the organisational culture.

30. In conclusion given the research capacity at this University, I would like to suggest that we collaborate on efforts to build ethical leadership in our society. This means that we should operationalise our Memorandum of Understanding by partnering on matters of mutual interests for example, research and holding joint lectures/ seminars/ roundtables on key issues in the country.