

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

Ethical Awareness in Public Administration

A graduate project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of Master of Public Administration in Public Sector Management and Leadership

By

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Abstract

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Unethical decision-making by public administrators has contributed to the on-going democracy problems in the United States. Each individual has their own perspective in public sector values, individual behavior, and code of ethics that impact their decision-making process. Public sector organizations do vary in how they manage organizational behavior, code of ethics, and training and development for public administrators. This research is needed to better understand public administrators state of ethical consciousness and if ethics does aid public administrators in their decision-making process. Four components of ethics, public sector values, role of a public administrator, code of ethics, and strengthening ethical behavior will be examined. A quantitative method approach using a Likert-type survey questionnaire will be administered to public administration employees from the Los Angeles County's Department of Mental Health (DMH) via email. The findings from this research will aid public sector agencies to overcome challenges related to unethical decisions made by public administrators. Having a better understanding on how to manage decision-making in the public sector can lead management to communicate and have a better understanding of their employees.

Introduction

Corruption, self-interest, and greed are becoming more common in public administrators and the public sector today, more so than ever (Lynch & Lynch, 2019). Of those public administrators who reported witnessing unethical violations, one-third (30%) did not report it (Hassan et al., 2014). Unethical decision-making by public administrators occurs every day in the public sector and can have long lasting ramifications in our society. Challenging public administrators to think rationally and becoming more objective is critical to understanding and improving ethics. Evaluating sources from previous research into this topic can help by identifying appropriate criteria specific to the public administrators ethical decision-making process. In addition, learning from past recent research does show us that both the public sector and public administrators continue to have on-going issues in ethical decision-making. Researching can give us a deeper look and understanding of the perspectives into this topic. This study will explore how the components of ethics including public sector values, role of an administrator, code of ethics, strengthening behavior and on the job ethics training can help aid in the process in creating an ethical public administrator.

Previous research has concluded that organizations who are in front of the decision-making curb can mitigate unethical decision-making through promoting, strengthening, and maintaining ethical behavior in public administrators. Public sectors that have successful in-house training programs have a high probability improving public administrators ethical decision-making process (Schröter & Röber, 2015). But of course, this is easier said than done. Carrizales (2019) noted that it is the public sector who is ultimately responsible for incorporating practices and promoting cultural competency. Both the public administrator and public sector organization each have an individual and organizational responsibility amongst each other.

Cultural competency creates accountability and responsibility into having a better understanding of public sector values. The issues that arise from previous literature suggest that public administrators and public sector organizations at times can be on opposite ends of the ethics spectrum which in turn produces unethical decision-making. The difficulty is that one particular official ethical approach will not suite all public administrators (Gilman, 2014). Research also suggested that ethics along with various codes of ethics often at times contradict one another (Gilman, 2014). A code of ethics often provokes opposing views and are often criticized for being too specific and contradicts ethics itself (Svara, 2014). On the other hand, a code of ethics is needed as this specifies unacceptable and acceptable behavior in organizations (Svara, 2014). The current study will address the limitations of previous studies on how the public sector can successfully implement ethical components and foster good practices in public administrators. In addition, public sector organizations can strengthen and maintain ethical behavior through new innovative approaches and by being more actively engaged in recognizing individual behavior.

A quantitative method approach was used for this study utilizing a Likert-based structured survey questionnaire. The survey will consist of 20 questions that will measure various components of ethics. This research will study a subset of 1,200 randomly selected participants from all public administrators employed at the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health (DMH). For the data collection a cross-sectional study will be appropriate as it benefits include a quick turnaround and considered feasible. All data collected will be over a 3-week period in the month of September 2022.

This study proposes that public sector organizations need to take a more proactive approach in strengthening ethics in their employees. Policy implications that will emerge from this study will be new innovative approaches in public sector departments in conducting ethical

trainings. This study investigates ethical awareness in the public sector and the role of how ethics contributes to decision-making in public administrators. Because of continued unethical choices that are made every day in the public sector it is imperative that a new approach in applying and maintaining ethics be established. Ethical decisions are made when both the organizations and individual are fully engaged in ethical practices. Policy implications can include adopting new innovative approaches to ethical trainings in public the public sector. In addition, new policies can emerge for both the organization and individual regarding ethics training with the intention to focus on ethical awareness and its relation to the decision-making process. These policy implications can be beneficial to both public sector management and organizations in understanding why public administrators make unethical decisions. Understanding how ethics can be used to make the right decision will create a more efficient productive employee and organization overall. Previous literature will examine the challenges that face both public administrators and the public sector when making ethical decisions and will examine how to get a better understanding of these disparities.

Literature Review

Public administrators are considered public servants and oversee various public services at the local, state, and federal levels to the public in the most effective way possible. In addition, public administrators are responsible for strengthening society by providing various diverse administrative roles in the public sector such as policy analyst, fiscal administration, contract monitoring, program evaluation to name just a few. Members of the public depend on public servants to be ethical, fair, equitable, and fully committed to providing public service. Unfortunately, public administrators are not ethically conscious in their decision-making process and the public sector needs to be more actively engaged and accountable in their corrective action to this issue. Reforms by the public sector will need to include reeducating and replacing positions with public administrators who know and practice “good government” (Rusaw & Fisher, 2017).

The literature review will first identify understanding public service values such as ethics, community member participation, and cultural competency. Secondly, a background on the role of a public administrator will educate and bring awareness on why public servants are required that all stakeholders are treated fairly, and equitably. In addition, this literature review identifies evidence on how a code of ethics can help strengthen individual and organizational ethical behavior in developing and creating a more ethical public administrator.

Understanding Public Sector Value

Public sector values and advancing the public interest are at the forefront for public sector organizations. Molina and McKeown (2012) noted that public service standards state that public administrators’ values include pursuing the public’s interest through the use of accountability and

transparency; serving in an efficient and objective manner; acting ethically to put the public first and demonstrating selflessness, equity and deference when dealing with community members and public servants. Early public administrators were considered “value-free” with a strength in the commitment to promote efficiency while democracy was of little interest. In the first half of the twentieth century public administration has developed more expectations that demonstrate values that support the public and elevate government performance (Svara, 2014).

Past research has found and described that human value towards community members and colleagues are extremely important to public administrators in forming and establishing positive relationship (Molina & McKeown, 2012). Understanding public sector values gives a fundamental understanding for public administrators that can guide them in making better ethical reasoning decisions. Administrative ethics is of central importance to public service value. Ethical public administrators respond to the public interest and gives due consideration to questions related to efficiency and effectiveness that make for a good society (Molina, 2015). Ethics, moral reasoning, and advancing the public’s interest all help steer public administrators in effectively resolving various conflicts effectively, efficiently, and ethically all in the pursuit of the public’s interest.

Community members’ participation is at the heart of understanding public sector value. Community members have a set of rights and responsibilities that have the power to drive democratic and socio-economic change through participation. According to research by Adres et al. (2016) public administrators must understand of who the population of community members are prior to governing. The community members-government relationship has changed status over the generations as “captive audience” of public administration to now active “customers”. The evolution of technology has bridged the gap of public service and the public interest which

have brought more involvement from community members as they are the major stakeholder in the democratic process. According to Svava (2014), public administrators should subordinate their own personal loyalties and interest to the public. More broadly, every action and decision made in the public sector should advance the public interest.

The practice of cultural competency is critical in the public sector for organizations and its relationships between public agencies and the public (Carrizales, 2019). Cultural competency can be beneficial as it creates administrative accountability and responsibility into having a better understanding of public sector values. Public administrators can utilize cultural competence through achieving effectiveness while valuing diversity. Beneficial outcomes in cultural competency have led to a new number of increased initiatives in the public sector (Carrizales, 2019). Overall, better ethical decision-making in organizations can be attributed to cultural competency.

Similarities in research found that public administrators have a shared responsibility in commitment such as advancing the public interest while encountering common challenges. Some differences that can be found in past research can be predicated on generational differences and global influences that impact ethical decision-making. This study seeks to understand public sector values and factors that influence the relationship between public administrators and advancing the public's interest (Molina, 2015). More expanded research is needed today as public sector values continually change due to factors such as the passage of time, new technology, laws, legislation, global changes, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Community member participation, ethics, and cultural competency are some of the major components in understanding public sector values and how they play a role in creating an overall ethical public administrator.

The Role of a Public Administrator

The role of a public administrator is to bridge the gap between government and the public by serving the public, beyond oneself. Respecting the constitution and the law, promoting ethics, and accountability are just some of the principles that exist with the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA) which advances the art and science of public administration. Gilman (2014) suggested that a code of ethics is a way to maintain individual responsibility by providing a way to see your ethical reflection.

Today's modern public administrators are faced with much more complex challenges than in the past with factors such as economic global influences, generational gaps, demographic changes, etc. Osborne and Gaebler (1993) argued that public institutions in the past do not have the ability to serve us well today, and that modern changing environments require institutions to be extremely flexible. In addition, Molina (2015) has found that today's public administrator focuses more on organizational interest and individual interest rather than the public's interest. The extent to which public administrators meet their goals serving the community members and improving social welfare depends on public employees' attitudes and behaviors (Raile, 2013).

Research suggests that public administrators are under more pressure to continually improve all aspects of service delivery due to continuous emerging issues and potential problems. Globalization has challenged the ability of public administrators with added layers of complexity. This complexity brings more challenges to the public sector (Adres et al., 2015). The make-up of creating an ethical public administrator consists of a broad range of components (e.g., values, code of ethics, ethical behavior, etc.) that can help support ethical consciousness and professional development at all levels of government. Rusaw and Fisher (2017) found

evidence that professional development takes place over time and across different occupational levels.

Code of Ethics: Upholding Ethical Standards

The founders of the government expected public servants to uphold the constitution and be “public spirited”. Ethics is central in practicing administration in government. Establishing a code of ethics in public administration is challenging for the public sector (Svara, 2014). As public administrators exercise discretionary authority that impacts the public interest, there is evidence that a code of ethics does allow public servants to make and improve overall better ethical decisions (Gilman, 2014). The creation and adoption of a code of ethics was established in 1981, by the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA) with the purpose to increase awareness in ethical principles for all levels of government. The difficulty for public administrators is that a particular approach to ethical standards varies from his or her colleague (Gilman, 2014), which essentially impacts decision-making. Svara (2014) noted that establishing a clear-cut standard that guides individual behaviors have been challenging. Continuous research in other components within ethics such as ethical leadership, various ethical codes, and who upholds the ethical standards in the public sector will suggest how much of these respective components are needed to create an ethical public administrator. Gilman (2014) noted that ASPA’s code of ethics is a process and should not be considered an end.

Existing evidence suggested that leadership in government often fails at achieving desired ethical standards (Hassan et al., 2014). Given the complexity of the topic, few studies have examined the effects of ethical leadership. This research is set to examine public administration literature by assessing how ethical leadership facilitates positive outcomes in

public administrators (Hassan et al., 2014). Menzel (1995) suggested that a strong ethical climate in respective organizations can lessen management's perception of wrongdoing. In addition, building ethical capital within public organizations can improve overall perceptions of government activity. Improved mass views of ethical climate might result in better performance and more positive discussions of ethics in the public sector (Raile, 2013). This can be very insightful to our research as it suggests that ethical leadership is a main component in the development and maintenance of ethics. Hassan et al. (2014) found that ethical leadership increases subordinate willingness for public administrators to report unethical problems. In addition, reporting unethical misconduct can encourage participation to others in the public sector to also take appropriate action which can increase and strengthen employee's confidence through organizational leadership presence.

Ethical consciousness and decision-making are an essential fundamental part of public administration. Articulating and upholding ethics standards in the public sector has been debated over its appropriateness, content, and adoption of a code (Svara, 2014). Public administrators across the field of public administration have a shared and individual responsibility in his or her view of ethics (Svara, 2014). With different codes of ethics (e.g., ASPA, organizational, professional, individual etc.), various leadership approaches (e.g., directive, middle-of the road, etc.), and practices across the field of public administration; this has shown to cause controversies and leave employees with an ambiguous interpretation while making decisions that will possibly affect the wellbeing of others.

While using a code of ethics is critical and at the heart of public administration Gilman (2014) suggested that different and various versions of codes can be contradictory. This is a concern by scholars as administrators are bounded legally to their organizational code, but

elements of other codes can conflict with one another and impact an individual's decision-making process. This study provides evidence and suggest that if leadership, supervisors, and individuals can collectively wrangle the differences and contradictions amongst different codes we can achieve higher organizational service delivery through analyzing performance outcomes. This can also be utilized as a measurement tool which can be used to our advantage in understanding what components of ethics are being misappropriated when making ethical decisions in the workforce.

Svara (2014) argued that taking a more active measure is essential in upholding and advancing ethical standards in the public sector. Superiors and colleagues need to collectively and individually make efforts to stay committed to integrity and professional development. This can be accomplished by accounting for and understanding that there is a distinction between organizational "culture" and "climate". Most research tends to discuss cultures as value-based and stable with organization specific outcomes between individuals and environments (Raile, 2013). On the other hand, work climates are considered temporary, more controllable, and easier to measure. Professional standards and ethics can be tangled with 'thou shalt' and 'thou shalt not', as many public sector organizations have done. But the ultimate responsibility on who upholds ethical standards ultimately falls back on the individual public administrator.

Public sector employees have a broad understanding of ethics education foundation acquired through academics. Svara (2014) added that a safe democracy rests on the shoulders of universities through educational courses in higher education. Organizations also have a responsibility to maintain and promote responsible behavior in their employees. Public servants that are assigned leadership positions will have more positive outlook of ethical climate as opposed to those that are in a non-leadership position (Raile, 2013). In addition, organizations

today more so than ever are more in-tune with the leaders that are appointed to leadership positions. Raile (2013) suggest that positive ethical views can be accrued by individuals in a leadership position and used to improve views throughout the public sector. Even though public administrators have a fundamental knowledge of ethical awareness it is the appointed leadership positions responsibility to set the “ethical tone” which plays a role in influencing the ethical climate and serves as a model for ethical decision-making.

Strengthening Ethical Behavior

There is a challenge that is facing public administration in figuring out how to maintain ethical behavior and knowing who is responsible for upholding these standards. This section of the literature review will examine how behavior (i.e., individual, organizational, and situational), motivation, and ethical training & development in unison with each other can be applied to strengthen ethics in public administrators.

Individual, organizational, and situational behaviors are all ingredients that contribute to ethics and creating an ethical democratic public administrator. Public sector organizations are a fertilization ground of a multitude behavior types. Organizations are a world of behaviors that can be controlled through the basis of law, intentions, purposes, and reasons, all which impact and change behavior into action (Czarniawska, 1997). This is significant to our research because it introduces that accountability and individual behavior is central into understanding how ethics connects to creating an ethical public administrator. Individual behavior needs to be flexible and not locked into one approach when resolving problems. Northouse (2021) added that behavioral flexibility is the capacity where one behavior adapts and changes considering other perspectives in the organization. Organizational behavior is defined as an interdisciplinary field dedicated to understanding and managing people at work (Kinicki & Fugate, 2015). Public administrators

today more than ever need to be able to have the ability to manage people at work if needed, along with managing oneself. Employers are now looking for people who have the ability to collaborate and get along with others. Organizational behavior is also understanding how values and attitudes affect work related outcomes. Every individual has their own values and ideals. Consequences of not addressing unethical behavior in the workplace can create a toxic unethical environment. Understanding and researching organizational behavior can help us understand why and how public administrators make ethical decisions. Organizations that have managers who exhibit ethical leadership decrease unethical behavior and influence attitudes and behaviors of public administrators (Hassan et al., 2014). Czarniawska (1997) found that when failures are more frequent than success, institution failure occurs. Situational behavior as it names implies, requires that public administrators adapt their styles to different situations and demands (Northouse, 2021).

In order to attract ethical public administrators, the public sector needs to understand what motivates an individual to pursue a career in public service. Motivation includes both extrinsic and intrinsic factors. A study completed by Bullock et al. (2015) concluded that public institutions may not solely be responsible for public service motivation. The personal and professional experiences underpin the elements of public service motivation (Henstra & McGowan, 2016). A mix of respective motives engage and drive individuals desire to value social services. Bozeman and Su (2015) argued that motivation consist of attitudes, intentions, the desire to continue or discontinue to serve and time and effort. In other words, everyone's motivation is not identical and varies. Public service motivation refers to values, attitudes that motivate, and engage behaviors that benefits the best interest in society (Gould-Williams et al., 2015). Organizational commitment to motivation is essential. Bullock et al. (2015) suggested

that if public administrators' express motives in helping others that benefits society as a whole there can be reasons to predict employee's commitment.

Ethical training and development don't end after an individual's academic success. In fact, it's only the beginning. Governments need effective strategies in recruitment and retention based on the understanding of what is the driving force in motivating potential employees who chose the career path of a public sector employee (Henstra & McGowan, 2016). Public service motivation varies from individual to individual that both include extrinsic and intrinsic factors. Organizations today, are doing what they can to promote ethical training and professional development.

Summary

The literature indicates that the development of ethical behavior can be controlled by public organizations regarding reinforcing ethical codes of conduct through formal training and education. If we look at how public agencies are making the news today, it often involves ethical failures. Understanding the behavior and how ethical decision-making in public servants can be strengthened is a growing concern among public administration employees (Menzel, 2015).

Several components of ethics are needed and no one determining component is solely responsible in creating an ethical public administrator. The literature suggests that each public administrator will articulate their own obligations and responsibilities differently from one another. The gap in research suggest that organizations can do more in strengthening ethics along with maintaining ethical behavior. As a result, challenges continue to arise in public administration. According to Lynch and Lynch (2019), public administrators engage in "evil acts" without knowing that they are acting unethically because they think what they are doing is

ethical. Svava (2014) noted that embracing responsibility, along with a broad set of obligations that demonstrate character, promote the public interest, and advance justice are all part of the duties of public administrators. Ethical values should be used as a handrail in guiding principles for public administrators, and if followed accordingly organizations could essentially produce harmonious results and relationships along the way (Chaffey, 2019). The study has shown that when public sector organizations are proactive in ethical learning and trainings this improves ethical decision-making amongst public administrators. In addition, organizations that have a better understanding of ethical components can improve ethical consciousness in public administrators.

Research Gap

Ethics is fundamental to the public sector and the purpose is for public administrators to be more thoughtful and thorough by being more aware of the different ethical dimensions of public service (Svara, 2014). Understanding public sector values, the role of a public administrator, a code of ethics, and ethical training and development are all mandatory ingredients that produce outcomes and performance related to the decision-making process. There is a lack of research on if a specific set of ethical components are more important than others when ethical decision-making occurs in public administrators. Is it the organizational leadership or individual public administrator responsibility when unethical practices occur in the workplace? Perhaps researchers are discouraged to look into the gap of this research because every individual has their own set of ethics, values, behavior, etc., that can conflict with organizational standards which in turn is very hard to measure and account for. Organizations are challenged to reform current ethical trainings and need to take a more proactive approach especially in the public sector. A more frequent and arduous set of ethical trainings can be the solution to domesticate unethical behavior.

Research Question and Aim

“Ethical Consciousness”, amongst public administrators is perhaps our greatest challenge within public administration. Organizations in the public sector do not always have the capability to understand the challenges public administrators are faced with and the need to tailor their leadership style for each subordinate. Organizations must build confidence, trust, and support amongst public administrators to make them feel comfortable with their work products and assignments. Even when unethical decision-making or issues occur, organizations must not scold or belittle staff, but rather, help them develop and rectify these mistakes and issues. Positive reinforcement and a positive attitude will go a long way, and public sector organizations must lead by example. This study seeks to address the following research question: How does ethics shape decision making in a public administrator? This study will examine if organizations are doing enough in their power to promote, strengthen, and maintain ethical decision-making for public administrators. The goal of this study can help assist management in the public sector to see where the gaps, strengths, and deficiencies are in the effort of improving ethics in the public sector.

Research Methods

This research will examine how ethics shape decision making in a public administrator and how it relates to the decision-making process in public administration. The research will use a quantitative research method conducted using a survey questionnaire completed by a random volunteer sample of employees that work for Los Angeles County - DMH. The following section details the methodological approach, study setting and population of interest, data collection procedures, and sampling design.

Methodological Approach

The methodological approach that will be used for this study will be the adoption of the quantitative methods approach. Utilizing a survey and sending a mass email distribution to the sample of participants will be the most appropriate approach due to the current COVID-19 pandemic. Because of time and cost constraints the survey will utilize a cross-sectional design as it is inexpensive and in return provides a quick turnaround response from participants. The cross-sectional design will give this study a snapshot for a specific time period with the data collected. The only eligibility criteria for this study are that all participants are current public administrators. No other demographic characteristics will be collected as ethical decision making relates to all public administrators.

Informed consent will be mandatory for this survey so that the participants are provided with enough information so that they can decide if they want to participate in the study. The survey questionnaire will be exclusively voluntary for all randomly selected participants. The participants will also have the convenience of responding to the survey over a three-week period. The email distribution and attached survey link will explain to participants that they will remain anonymous along with stating that all responses will be kept confidential. Participants also will

have the option to skip any question and can stop at any time from participating. Anonymous surveys are beneficial to this research as they can induce employees to participate and complete the surveys without the fear of being retaliated against for participating or giving honest responses.

The survey will list various ethics-based questions related to public administration in the public sector organizational setting. The survey questions will primarily focus on individual, organizational, and situational ethical behavior. An example survey questions can be, “I apply ethics in the day-to-day decision-making process?”. The survey will be formatted and setup utilizing a Likert scale style survey questionnaire. A Likert scale is appropriate for this study as it can be used as a systematic way to analyze and measure individual attitudes quantitatively. Survey scoring will show that higher scores equate to a greater degree of ethical understanding whereas lower scores will equate to a low degree of awareness in ethical decision-making.

Study Setting and Population of Interest

This research will study and survey randomly a subset of 1,200 public administrators that work for the Los Angeles County, DMH (located at 510 S. Vermont Ave., Los Angeles, CA 90020) to represent the population of all public administration employees at this agency. Overall, this research will need 300 out of 1,200 public administrators to complete the survey to meet the response rate goal of 25 percent. The subset of employees that will be randomly surveyed at this location will be a mix of upper/middle management employees along with lower staff employees. The reason for this specific site location is that the public administrators in the department are all located at this specific site which makes obtaining work email addresses from this location more convenient. Email addresses will be obtained through the assistance and approval of the DMH – Human Resource Bureau. The data collection will roll-out in September

2022, via on-line using “SurveyMonkey”. Survey Monkey ensures that confidential data is protected with encryption and enhanced security. These security features are also compliant with HIPAA. Receiving back responses from the survey with a mix of supervisory/non-supervisory position can help establish a baseline that can allow management to analyze and take corrective action regarding promoting, strengthening, and maintaining ethical decision-making in public administration. The goal of this study would help assist the public sector on how to reform “Ethics” in the public sector so that public administrators can make better ethical decisions while in turn mitigating unethical decision-making.

Data collection

A cross-sectional study will suite this research because of the benefits of being inexpensive and in addition provides a quick turnaround of responses. The researcher will prepare and send a mass email distribution to a subset of randomly selected employees in the department. The collection of cross-sectional quantitative data will be collected only once at the end of the 3-week survey questionnaire (see Appendix A) link provided by “Survey Monkey”. The data collected from the survey will give this research a snapshot in time over a 3-week period in September 2022.

The survey will consist of twenty questions that are ethics-based and will have questions related to a code of ethics, ethical behavior, ethical standards, and organizational ethical training in the workplace. A 5-point Likert scale will be appropriate for this study and will use the following scale: (1) Strongly Disagree, (2) Disagree, (3) Neither Agree or Disagree, (4) Agree, and (5) Strongly Agree. The survey questionnaire will consist of close-ended questions such as “I observe unethical behavior in the workplace daily.” and “A code of ethics help guide ethical decision-making.” The measurement of the scores will be that higher scores for each question

will indicate a greater degree of ethical understanding for employees whereas lower scores will indicate a low degree of awareness in the ethical decision-making process. The survey is user friendly and should only take a maximum of 10 minutes to complete the 20 questions on the survey. Participants will need to just click on the link in the email survey link which will take them directly to the questionnaire. Once all twenty questions are answered the participant will just need to press the “Submit” button after the last questions to complete the survey.

The survey questionnaire will strictly be voluntarily for all participants selected and will be conducted over a 3-week period. In addition, all participants will remain anonymous with the intentions for this research to collect as much information from everyone. Anonymity in surveys is beneficial as they induce participants to answer honestly without the fear of retaliation. If participants don't feel at ease with submitting this survey questionnaire they can simply choose not to respond. Possible problems that can be anticipated are possible low turnout responses in addition to possible technical issues accessing the survey link. The data collected through this survey will help this research predict net outcomes by combining and averaging each participants responses that relate to ethical behavior and reasoning. By understanding what triggers employees to act either consciously or unconsciously in the public sector this research can possibly help management reform current ethical practices in organizations.

Sampling Design

This research will use probability sampling as a completed list of potential participants are available for this research through the assistance and approval of the DMH – Human Resource Bureau. All data exports of participants information from Survey Monkey will be stored on an encrypted flash drive issued by the DMH to ensure security. In order to receive a complete list of participant work emails along with permission to send out a mass email

distribution prior approval will be needed by management and the DMH – Human Resources Bureau. Participants will be determined utilizing a simple random sampling research method so that everyone that is selected are randomly chosen with no bias intentions. Conducting the research in this fashion will help keep the integrity of the survey. Participants will randomly be selected through a computer technique that we will generate the random participants. Through the use of excel and utilizing an excel function called the “random formula” we can randomly generate a number to each email participant and run the formula to automatically populate a random unbiased selection of participants.

The answers provided by participants in the survey can help establish ethical behavior and awareness. This method of sampling aligns with the purpose of this research as we are trying to collect responses from all levels (e.g., executive, middle management, lower staff) of employees in the department. Randomly selecting participants can give this research an overall broad understanding of how the population views ethics and how they relate to the decision-making process. Given the specific study of this research we will use a subset of 1,200 randomly selected employees. The study will roll-out in the first week of September 2022, via online with the help of “Survey Monkey”.

A cross-sectional study will suite this research because of the benefits of being inexpensive and in addition provides a quick turnaround of responses. The information collected in the survey will give this research a snapshot in time for the period of September 2022. A 5-point Likert scale will be appropriate for this study where the overall scores will help bring an understanding on how much ethics plays into creating a more ethical public administrator.

Discussion

A range of differences exist in public organizations amongst public administrators. These differences in combination with one another are what contributes to an individuals' ethical decision-making both positively and negatively. Every individual in the public sector essentially is equipped with their own personal toolbox of ethical components that make up a public administrator. Components such as public sector values, code of ethics, individual behavior, and continuous on the job ethics-based training are all part of the total sum that drives and steers the public sector organizations. It is imperative to understand these differences in each public administrator. By understanding the differences in each public administrator management in the public sector can take corrective action in helping to develop their respective weaknesses to improve their decision-making. This study will provide an understanding of how ethics can improve decision-making through looking at various ethical considerations, limitations, and expected results by public administrators. Better governance in the public sector is needed to take steps to improve public administrators ethical decision-making process. We are in an age where the public sector needs to actively manage ethics. Ethical decision-making can be hard to adapt and implement for public administrators and the public sector. Managing ethics along with a continued ethics education in the public sector will bring greater knowledge to public administrators who lack an understanding or fall victim to unethical decision-making.

Ethical Considerations

Ethics in public administration is defined as conduct of whether it is right or wrong for individuals and organizations. Ethics refers to a set of standards of right and wrong that public administrators should do, in terms of duties, principles, virtues that benefit society (Svara, 2014).

Ethics steers ones thinking and decision-making so that each public sector employee can conduct business and services in a responsible and public way. Ethical considerations for participants that are considered for this research study will be informed via email regarding the purpose of this study. This survey will not coerce anybody into participation as the research study is aiming to provide accurate, unbiased responses from the survey. The above-mentioned specific language will be outlined in the email so that each randomly selected participant is well informed of the ethical considerations that all responses will be kept strictly confidential.

Since this study involves employee participation and coordination between the research and randomly selected participants it is very important that this research establishes trust, respect, and transparency. Privacy and confidentiality will be established by the researcher through adding language that addresses these concerns in the body of the email prior to participants accessing the online survey. The research study will also encourage all participants to be open, honest, and transparent in answering each question so that the research collected can have the most accurate based responses as possible. The survey will not ask for any information such as name, age, gender, job-title, or employee number. The survey will be sent utilizing the blind carbon copy option when emailing out to participants to ensure privacy. In addition, email addresses used in this research will also be secured and housed in an encrypted flash drive issued by the DMH and stored in a locked filing cabinet. Any and all information that can be used to possibly link the survey responses to the individual participant will be published in aggregate form when this research becomes published. The importance of ethics and protecting individuals' information related to this research study survey is critical.

Limitations

Using the quantitative approach does present some limitations. Surveys can both be beneficial and ineffective. The survey questionnaire questions are strategically structured for easy understanding. But with that said, limitations still can surface from respective participants with individuals not really understanding the questions that are asked of them. Some participants may feel like they need to answer on what they feel like the organization should be instead of answering on what they feel on an individual level. In total, the survey can possibly lead to different interpretations and expectations for each response.

Other limitations in the survey can be the number of participants selected and the number of responses received back. This research is surveying out to 1,200 employees in the same department with the expectation that 25 percent respond back. With the survey being random this can lead to possibly some unevenness throughout the department in the random selection process. For instance, a possibility can occur where a respective division or bureau in DMH may happen to receive more participants from one division versus another division. This is a limitation as the survey will be top-heavy in some bureau/divisions in the building as opposed to others. For this research, the composition of participants consists of only public sector employees in the DMH. This research is searching for a broad understanding of ethical awareness amongst public administrators. Further research in this topic can further be explored in other compositions of participants such as race, gender, education marital status, etc., and how each impacts ethical decision-making which was not measured in the current study. The research and study do have its share of flaws, but the results from the survey overall are still credible and reliable in studying ethical consciousness in public administrators.

Expected Results

The research is expecting to receive back 300 respondents out of the 1,200 surveys sent out to participants. The expected result for this research is aimed to reach a typical survey response rate of 25 percent. The total expected survey responses received back will meet the goal that this research was initially expecting. The research concepts and relationships are predicted to produce results from the survey that indicate what areas of ethics need corrective action.

Responses received back from the survey questionnaire will be scored quantitatively and are expected to produce low to moderate scores in the following areas. Training and development responses are expected to score low. Expected findings will show that employees gave low priority to on-line training and the majority are not fully engaged in the training. Code of ethics questions expect to result in moderate scores that should alarm public sector organizations. Svara (2014) argues that better men, not more codes are needed to guarantee honesty and competence. The assumption is public administrators are confused between different various codes and in turn who is responsible in upholding the code of ethics. Individual and organizational behavior questions are predicted to result in moderate scores. The expected low to moderate scores in the above-mentioned areas can help public sector management close the gap and make necessary organizational improvements. The literature review has shown that a range of differences exist for each public administrator and public sector organizations. Various components combined together make up an ethical public administrator and no one component is overall responsible. According to Lynch and Lynch (2019), organizations that only use one type of ethics training for every situation is foolish. Public administrators have a definition of ethics that they carry around in their head. But the challenge is bringing this definition forward into the

consciousness of public administrators and to help strengthen the understanding of its meaning (Svara, 2014).

Each component of ethics is basically a standard set of ingredients that make up an ethical public administrator. The literature review indicated that public administrators each carry their own unique measurements in ethics. This research made an effort to make the connection of where individuals and organizations need to address ethics so that it can be the driving force when making day-to-day decisions. The interpretation of ethics by public administrators can cause opposing views in the public sector at times. Until public sector organizations can figure out how to articulate clear ethical standards and develop internal protocols of who is upholding a code of ethics, unethical decision-making will continue in the public sector (Svara, 2014). Broadening and deepening the understanding of ethics can only help address the above-mentioned issues in the decision-making process of public administrators.

Conclusion

The biggest challenge in the public sector today is identifying what causes so many unethical decisions being made by public administrators. Unethical decision-making is becoming more normal than abnormal in the public sector today and should be considered alarming. Understanding why public administrators are not consciously aware of ethics can help both management and individuals prevent future unethical decision-making. Public sector management needs to act swiftly in taking corrective action in strengthening ethics and mitigating unethical decision-making in public administration for the good of society.

This research aims to answer the question of how ethics plays a role in creating an ethical public administrator. The literature review section provided a background on understanding if and how does ethics create and support ethical decision-making. The four major components of ethics focused on this literature review were public sector values, the role of a public administrator, code of ethics, and ethical behavior. In addition, different challenges that stem from individual behavior, motivation, lack of organizational training, and the importance of how public sector management should correct these issues.

A quantitative method approach for this study was used and participants were randomly selected to complete a Likert-based survey questionnaire about ethics in the workplace. This research utilized a probability sampling method so that everyone that is selected are randomly chosen with no bias intentions. The location for the research was selected for a single department building for the purpose of having a more controlled research study. All answers that were provided through the survey questionnaire were analyzed and produced low to moderate scores.

This study explored the connection between ethics and the role it plays in creating an ethical public administrator. The study suggests that the public sector needs to approach ethics in

a new innovative approach in order for public administrators to maintain ethical awareness in the public sector. Evidence based on the overall average scoring on the survey confirm that public sector employees are not fully engaged in organizational ethics training and are confused on how to apply various codes of ethics in the decision-making process. The low to moderate scores produced in this research can be used to bridge the gap in the previous literature. Ethical responsibilities are tied to both the individual and organization. Contributions from this research provides evidence that the public sector has a larger responsibility in advancing and maintaining ethical awareness.

Policy implications that this research might have can be the adoption of new innovative approaches to ethical trainings in public sector departments. For example, new policies in ethics training can primarily focus on employee ethical awareness and how it applies to the decision-making process. Public administrators have a broad understanding of ethics and how it relates to public administration, but it is up to the public sector to strengthen and maintain ethic at the organizational level. Public agencies that are behind the curb in addressing ethical awareness will continue to produce unethical decision-making. A better understanding of ethics and how it relates in supporting good practices can help managers in the public sector strengthen and motivate their subordinates.

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Appendix A

Survey Questionnaire

All responses and participants to this survey will remain strictly confidential and anonymous. Your employer will not know your responses or whether you participated. This survey is voluntary, and you can cease participation or skip any questions you do not want to answer.

Your participation will be used in this research study to determine ethical awareness in the field of public administrators and if ethics is responsible for shaping public administrators.

Please indicate how much you agree with the following statements:

Survey Questions	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. I observe unethical decision-making in the workplace daily.	1	2	3	4	5
2. A code of ethics help guides decision-making.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I maintain ethical behavior in the workplace.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I apply ethics in the day-to-day decision-making process.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I follow your organization's code of ethics.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Ethics are not for my profession.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I feel comfortable reporting ethical violations.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I often receive assignments that are out of my job classification.	1	2	3	4	5
9. Management is not interested in ethical decision-making.	1	2	3	4	5
10. I put the public interest before my personal interest.	1	2	3	4	5
11. Does your organization have annual ethical trainings?	1	2	3	4	5
12. Mandatory ethical trainings are helpful.	1	2	3	4	5
13. I feel like this is a good place to work.	1	2	3	4	5
14. I circumvent the flow process to meet deadlines.	1	2	3	4	5

15. I expect all employees to follow standards when completing task.	1	2	3	4	5
16. I reach out to management when dealing with an ethical dilemma.	1	2	3	4	5
17. When an ethical violation occurs, management reports the issue?	1	2	3	4	5
18. I see a gap between the organization and code of ethics.	1	2	3	4	5
19. I have noticed ethic problems in a respective Bureau/Division.	1	2	3	4	5
20. I believe the organization needs to improve their current ethics training.	1	2	3	4	5