Value Receptivity Among Academic Managers: Supporting the Millennium Development Goals’ Social Responsiveness

Eliezer Niyonzima, Novembrieta Sumil, Tindi Seje, Nakimuli Amina, Richard Asingwire

Abstract
A focal point about the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is social responsiveness. In support of this noble direction, the United Nations Academic Impact (UNAI) conceived its principles of commitment for its projects by aligning with higher education institutions activities and research towards intellectual social responsibility to realize the MDGs by highlighting on the reciprocal relationship between education and sustainable development. This study portrayed value receptivity and social responsiveness in terms of measuring the ethical integrity of academic middle managers from selected private higher education institutions in Kigali, Rwanda, East Africa. The findings revealed low level of value receptivity due to some challenging ethical practices.

Keywords: ethical integrity, social responsiveness, value receptivity

1. Introduction
Ethical integrity is manifested in various forms. According to Rwandan local media, academic impurities come from lecturers, middle level managers and students (East African Business Week of 23 February 2009, New Times of 9 March 2009). Common unacceptable work related behaviors in academic institutions range from using the organization’s resources such as stationery, printers, computers and internet for personal business (Chene and Mann, 2011).

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There are some who use institutional resources to help their friends or relatives. This scenario is not only true but indeed a reality occurring in any organization or institution where there are individuals or groups working.

An organization’s social responsibility or moral responsibility to people outside the organization directly affected by its actions is defined by ethics (Robbins, 2002). Value based practices imply the right behavior at any given time such as at home, work and when dealing with individuals and groups. Value receptivity for good behavior among employees is expected to be an ought to do if the individual employee and organization has to maintain its reputation and goodwill to its customers (George & Jones, 2002). In this study, value receptivity among academic middle managers was determined through measuring their ethical integrity.

2. Review of Related Literature
2.1 The Theory of Deontology
This study was based on the Theory of Deontology or the Ethics of Duty. Deontology or the ethics of duty theory regards duty as the basis of morality (Boss, 2002). According to deontologists, the rightness of an action depends wholly or in part on the motives from which they are performed and not on consequences (Boatright, 2003).

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) was one of the most influential deontologists (Cahn & Markie, 1998). He argued that people should do their duty purely of the good will, not because of rewards or punishment or other consequences. Kant developed two formulations of the categorical imperative. The first was formulated as follows: Act only on that maxim by which you can at the same time wish that it should become a universal law. The second says: “So act to treat humanity, whether in thine own person or in that of any other, in every case as an end in itself, never as a means only” (Boss, 2002, p. 23).

Sir William David Ross (1877-1971) also contributed to the development of deontology theory. He came up with a list of seven prima facie duties, that is, moral duties that may be overridden by stronger moral claims (Cahn & Markie, 1998).
2.2 Value Receptivity and the MDGs Social Responsiveness

Value receptivity is inherent in the United Nations Charter. From a global mindset, the MDGs value based social responsiveness are well supported by an integral sector of the United Nations called the United Nations Academic Impact (UNAI) whose commitment principles aligned with higher education institutions support the MDGs social awareness drive such as poverty and hunger reduction, universal primary education, gender equality, reduction of child mortality, maternal health, fighting HIV/AIDS and other diseases, environmental sustainability, global partnership for development (MDG, 2000).

To impress on value based social responsibility, the UNAI implements through education the MDGs utilizing its commitment principles related to human rights such as freedom of inquiry, opinion and speech; equal educational opportunity regardless of gender, race, religion or ethnicity: acquiring the skills and knowledge necessary for the pursuit of higher education; building capacity in higher education systems across the world; encouraging global citizenship: advancing peace and conflict resolution; addressing issues of poverty; promoting inter-cultural dialogue and understanding, and the “unlearning” of intolerance (UNAI, 2010).

2.3 Value Receptivity through Ethical Integrity

Farrant (1980: 90-91) provides useful information about ethics and values where he states that “ethical and other values are always in greatest flux in a society whose structure is undergoing change”. Proceeding to reflect on the influence of society, Farrant (1980: 91) makes individuals contemplate that the “social environment is a powerful force for developing the attitudes and beliefs of an individual. The strength of his standards in these depends entirely on how firmly they have become established as habits. The more deeply they become entrenched as habits, the longer they are likely to persist and the more resistant they will be to social counter-pressures”.

Dubinsky and Richter (2009) identified four levels of ethical integrity. The first is the low level of ethical integrity (25-49%), the second is the medium level of ethical integrity (50-69%), the third is the high level of ethical integrity (70-89%) and the last is the very high level of ethical integrity (90-100%).
Managers or leaders with a low level of ethical integrity are characterized by little or no active leadership, involvement or accountability regarding ethical integrity. They assume that their private moral code is adequate to lead others. They talk down to employees treating them as children (Dubinsky and Richter, 2009). They often or always tell lies to please others or to avoid conflict. They put their personal interests above all and they are always or often inconsistent in applying rules and regulations (Johnson, 2010). According to Dubinsky and Richter (2009), people with low level of ethical integrity are rated below 50% in Global Ethics and Integrity Benchmarks.

At medium level of ethical integrity, managers view promoting ethical conduct as part of their responsibilities and are held accountable for their own ethical behavior. They also understand that there is a direct connection between “tone from the top” and whether their institutions enjoy a positive reputation for ethics (Dubinsky and Richter, 2009). The issues of telling lies to please others or to avoid conflict, putting their personal interests above all and inconsistency in applying rules and regulations affect them at less than 50% (Johnson, 2010). Further, Dubinsky and Richter (2009) contend that people with medium level of ethical integrity are rated between 50% and 69% in Global Ethics and Integrity Benchmarks.

Leaders and managers with high level of ethical integrity almost always demonstrate ethical awareness. They are conversant with the vocabulary of ethical analysis and regularly act in ways that are consistent with the institution’s values. They often make speeches or statements relating to ethical integrity to a variety of groups and provide coaching about ethical integrity to others. Ethical awareness, analysis and action are routinely incorporated into selection, performance evaluation, and promotion decisions (Dubinsky and Richter, 2009). Telling lies to please others or to avoid conflict, putting their personal interests above all and inconsistency in applying rules and regulations affect them at less than 25% (Johnson, 2010).

Managers with a very high level of ethical integrity feel that they are accountable for supporting ethical integrity at an individual and organizational level. They are seen as role models and emphasize the importance of ethical integrity as a core organizational value and strategy. They provide consistent, visible leadership and are committed to ethical integrity as a foundation for organizations’ culture (Dubinsky and Richter, 2009). They are never affected by unethical
practices such as telling lies to please others or to avoid conflict, putting their personal interests above all and inconsistency in applying rules and regulations (Johnson, 2010).

In 2006, the International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) conducted a research project on “Ethics, Corruption and Decision-Making in Education” and a report entitled “Corrupt Schools, Corrupt Universities: What Can Be Done?” that was published in 2007 (International Institute for Educational Planning, 2007). The findings of that study highlighted low level of ethical integrity characterized by many forms of unethical practices or corruption in developed countries as well as in developing ones. Unethical practices mentioned in the study include: ghost teachers, absenteeism, illegal fees, favoritism/nepotism, discrimination, private tutoring (including use of school resources for private purpose), sexual harassment or exploitation, bribes or favors during inspections, manipulation of data, selecting/suppressing information, irregularity in producing and publishing information. This persistent low level of ethical integrity was closely related to poor decision-making (International Institute for Educational Planning, 2007).

The above study identified various factors conducive to unethical practices in education. Some of these are the absence of clear norms and regulations, lack of clear procedures in supervision and disciplinary matters, low management capacity, poor public information. To conclude, in its analysis, IIEP (2007) claims that those factors are linked to the decision-making and management structure of the education system.

Sledge and Pringle (2010) also carried out a study on ethical integrity in Norfolk State University and Christopher Newport University. They found a prevalent low level of ethical integrity and attributed it to the fact that there was no policy aiming at promoting ethical integrity in universities. That situation had affected the corporate world in general and had resulted in what they termed “era of scandals and fraud” (p.9).

3. Methods and Techniques

This research collected quantitative data elicited from 136 middle level managers using a researcher structured questionnaire and employing the descriptive survey design.
In a Likert scale, situations requiring answers on how often it occurred to them were reflected. The respondents had to choose from never (1), sometimes (2), often (3) and always (4). The data were processed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

4. Findings and Interpretations

To determine the value receptivity of the academic managers through the level of ethical integrity, points were assigned: a respondent who never answered to a tempting situation was given 1 point, the one who answered sometimes was given 0.5 point and the one who answered often or always was given 0 point. Then the points were added together. The respondents who scored below 5 points were rated with low level of ethical integrity, 5-6 points with medium level of ethical integrity, 7-8 points with high level of ethical integrity and over 8 points with very high level of ethical integrity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>47.4</td>
<td>47.4</td>
<td>60.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>30.1</td>
<td>30.1</td>
<td>91.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very high</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
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Majority of the respondents had a low level of ethical integrity (47.4%); 30.1% had a medium level; 13.5% had a high level and 9% had a very high level. The overall picture revealed that 72.27% violated copyright laws; 80.19 % used institutional resources such stationery, printers and time in their personal businesses; 86.13% always allow employees under their supervision use those resources as the managers could do it themselves, and 65.34% always altered facts from reports. At a certain minimal/medium level these practices were noted: telling lies (55.44%); giving jobs to candidates who performed poorly to the detriment of the best ones (39.60%); tolerating students’ cheating (47.52% ), tolerating employees’ violation of regulations (77.22%); not advertising vacant posts for all prospective candidates to see (53.46%), and not keeping professional secrets (70.29%).
The findings of this study were congruent with the studies conducted by the International Institute for Educational Planning (2007) and Sledge and Pringle (2010). Both these studies found prevalent low level of ethical integrity in schools and universities. While Jackall, 1989; Perrow, 1986; Posner and Schmidt view middle managers facing moral dilemmas when their values are not congruent with their higher level command.

5. Conclusions

Confined to the five private higher learning institutions in this study, value receptivity or the ability to recognize constructive social values among academic middle managers was a big challenge as empirically evidenced by a low level of ethical integrity. Therefore, invoking value led academic institutions must not be underestimated.

6. Recommendations

The concerned academic institutions must endeavor to propagate and inculcate value based mission statement and codes of conduct/ethics to create a sustainable social responsibility and morally behaved corporate citizens. This could be done through attitude and behavior inventories at recruitment and selection phase; comprehensive orientation on values at work; regular enhancement seminars and workshops; appraisals of behavior and performance in the workplace and professional counseling schedules all year round.

The quality assurance units of institutions of higher learning and the African quality assurance network should establish guidelines to implement and monitor constructive personal and social values in the academe. Curriculum developers should incorporate ethics as a basic foundation course for all academic programs.

Since the study was conducted only in selected academic institutions, an expansion of a similar study to majority of the higher learning institutions would be an advantage where the generated evidence-based information could contribute to the evaluation on the implementation of the UNAI-MDGs globally and socially attuned awareness drive.
References


