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A Critical Review of Ethical Practices in the Public Sector of Saudi Arabia

Abstract

Governments and agencies around the world are continuously seeking new ways and measures to promote the establishment of efficiency and efficacy leading to development of quality deliverance of public services. Saudi Arabia is of no exception. In this paper we examine, ethical practices in Saudi Arabia and especially, as they relate to employment practices. We identified current practices, provide an analysis of these practices, and provided suggestions in which they can be improved to achieve higher levels of efficiencies.

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Introduction

Administration ethics is an important field of study since the mid-1970s, undoubtedly motivated by the paradigm of the New Public Administration that placed the issue on the agenda of public administration. The recent paradigm of Reinventing Government has also an imperative position in ethical concerns (Cooper, 2001). Given that, work and literature about this subject have largely expanded and its application to practice became quick while rich evidence appeared all over the world.

Furthermore, we are in an era where high profile lapses by public-sector leaders in ethical and moral judgment are frequently exposed, citizens have come to expect increasingly higher standards of ethical conduct as a broad range of activities are now viewed as immoral (Bowman, 1990). Increasing awareness and changing societal values have been linked to the public's interest in ethics management (Maesschalck, 2004). Accordingly, citizens have become more assertive and demanding toward leaders in the public-sector showing less tolerance for leaders' mistakes, shortcomings, and structural challenges. As such public leaders are generally expected to meticulously conform to standards higher than those aligned with personal morality (Lewis, 1991). Thus public leaders can often find this expectation to maintain collectively high and even idealistic levels of ethical responsibility to be quite overwhelming.

Purpose of Research

The common method in attempting to deal with the ethical responsibility of public officials has been the promulgation of codes, policies, and other guidance standards. Accordingly, there has been a proliferation of scholars and practitioners attempting to address the issue of ethics within

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public administration through ethical recommendations, suggestions, and various guidance principles. As promoted by Cooper (2001), ethics in public administration is not a transient concept but has proven to be an approach which has shown a great deal of sustainability which is fundamental to the area of public administration.

This paper will i) examine the general context to practice ethics in the general profession,ii) examine the constitutive ethics of general service, iii) discuss the principles of conduct of the general service, iv) examine the establishments and procedures taken to promote the high standards of conduct, and v) discuss the prevention of misconduct and how they can be identified and managed. Much focus is placed on these factors as they relate to employment practices in the public sector of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA).

The determinants of ethics in public administration with regard to the individual attributes of public/civil servants include ethical decision-making skills (Richardson &Nigro, 1987), mental attitude (Bailey, 1964), virtues ((Dimock, 1990; Dobel, 1990)and professional values (Van Wart, 1998). Secondly, the organizational structure dimension is explained by clear accountability, collaborative arrangements, dissent channels, and participation procedures (Denhardt, 1988; Thompson, 1985). Third, the political organizational culture includes artifacts, beliefs and values, and assumptions (Schein, 1985). Leadership is important in the development, maintenance, and adaptation of organizational culture (Scott, 1982; Schein, 1985; Ott, 1989).Ethical behavior is encouraged when organizations have a climate where personal standards and employee education are emphasized, where supervisors stress the truth, and where employees regularly come together to discuss ethical problems (Bruce, 1995, 1994). Finally, societal expectation includes public participation, laws, and policies.

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Principles of Ethics

For this research, we will concentrate on the two leading models- (ethics of the sovereign good and ethics of the service of goods) that are involved with ethical thoughts and actions within the public sectors. Furthermore, we will also compare and contrast them with the collaborative ethics that were mentioned above. It has to be kept in mind that we are not taking any particular or specific approach but rather will be taking the modern understanding of could be called "vulgar Kantianism" or a "vulgar utilitarianism" (Harmon, 2005).

The only substantive way for ethics to influence behavior or vice versa in Saudi Arabia would have to occur though the road of Islamic religion. This pathway is not as difficult, constricting, or worrisome as it may appear for two main reasons. First, considerable commonality exists between secular and Islamic ethics. Normative ethics, duties, and obligations have much in common between the two types of ethics. Second, Islamic scholarship throughout its history has foundnodifficultyinincorporatingadvancesinmedicine,economics,andsociology.Thisis facilitated by well-known principles of Islamic jurisprudence principles, which are used in producing a religiously approved opinion (i.e., fatwa) of ethical nature on new and emergent life issues (Tamim, Hejaili, Jamal, al Shamsi, & Al Sayyari, 2010).As Bhuin, Abdul-Muhmin, & Kim (2002) explained, it is important for the private and public sectors to understand consumer attitudes toward ethical business practices, government regulations, consumer rights and interrelationships in SaudiArabia.

Ethics of the Sovereign Good

The ethics of the sovereign good is nothing but the set of guidelines based on which an individual acts. The ethics of the sovereign good is identified to be a set of values from which the

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different views on 'what is good' can be judged. It can be commonly seen in real world scenarios that many people have different versions of the same ethical concept. People try to twist the concept to fit their needs based on their conception of the "good". Therefore it is important to identify the viewpoint that holds the true spirit of the ethical guidelines.

Ethics of the Service of Goods

The values that are promoted by the ethics of the service of goods are mainly efficiency and maximization of the inputs to outputs. Basically there are three aspects which are important when it comes to the service of goods.

They are logic of reciprocity, its view of the collective, and its criteria for judgment. It can also be clearly seen that the ethics of the sovereign good are mainly targeted towards the market. At the very core, service of goods is based on mutual exchange. Basically it assumes that people are rational and have the freedom to choose what goods or services they want. For all of the above-mentioned, the research will seek to compare practices in Saudi Arabia and North America and Europe. It must be noted that all Saudi citizens are Moslems, and a large portion adhere strongly to Islamic teachings. Because Islamic teachings pervade a Moslem's daily actions and thoughts, ethics in general are seen through the prism of Islam (Tamim et al., 2010).

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Results

The results of inquiries of ethics in the public sector focus on seven different factors. The first describes the context to practice ethics in the general profession. The second describes the constitutive ethics of general service. The third focuses on the principles of conduct of the general service. The others focus on the establishment and procedures taken to promote the high standards of conduct.

The answer can be as follows:

First: General service in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia is divided into two sections:

1- Government general service: this service is done by official permanent employees in steady jobs such as civil service regulation and military service regulation (officials regulation – individuals regulation) and some special regulations such as judgment regulation, teaching board members regulation and others, as there some employees performing part of these services complying with labor regulation.
2- Companies and establishments employees: companies that provide direct services as such as (telecommunication, water, and electricity) and such companies have private regulations as their employees comply with labor regulation.

Second: for the government employees – general sector "employees be nominated according to specified conditions set by civil service regulation" such as (worthiness, goodness of conduct and behavior, health fit, having required qualifications for the post, not condemned before in punishment or moral, honesties crime except at least three years

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passes for the judgment, not terminated from the government services for disciplinary reasons except at least three years passes for the judgment)."

Also regulation consists of many obligations and impermissible things to the employee of general service, obligations stated in article (11): "employee should be lofty of all what breaching the job ethics and dignity either in the workplace or outside, and should be tactful in his behavior with public, his leaders, colleagues, and people under his leadership, spend the time of work for his post tasks , do the orders assigned to him in strict way and honesty in the limits of regulations and instructions", as the regulation in its article (12) prohibited the employee to use the abuse and receipt or request bribe in any kind of what is stated in the anti-corruption regulation, or receipt of gifts and donations or other directly or in mediation for the purpose of temptation , and discloser secrets of his post even after leaving the work ; also article (13) stated that employee should refrain of performing trade directly or indirectly or participate in establishing firms or accept to be in their board of directs or any job in such firms or commercial shop, as well as in the article (14) of the regulation , employee is not allowed to combine between his post and practicing another profession .. ; in the article (15) each employee is responsible of his actions as he responsible of his good conduct and behavior in the work in the limit of his specialization , also regulation included the salaries , allowances , remuneration , compensations and end of service allowances; also those employees have special discipline bylaw in case of financial or administrative violations called employees discipline regulation.

Third : for companies of general benefit such as (telecommunication , water , and electricity) such employees followed up through their management teams and ministries

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that supervise their work and have their own bylaws which with regard to their salaries, financial remuneration and incentives, as well as forbidden deeds and the employees who break the law be punished according to what included in punishment bylaws in such companies as per labor regulation.

Fourth: an evaluation of profession performance bylaw is included to assess the general service employee in the government. An annual report must be prepared about the employee performance, tracking his/her behavior, good acting in work and direct him/her accordingly.

Fifth :there are bylaws according to them the employee shall be punished in case of violations against his profession such as bribery, contravene against the general fund, abusing and falsification in the official prints.

Sixth : in addition to the self-monitoring made by the government executive authorities , there are some other control bodies such as (control and investigation authority, general control council, national authority of corruption fighting, human rights authority, investigation and general claims, ministry of finance, and ministry of civil service) each in its specialization monitoring and follow up with regulations execution and investigate with any of the employees in the government sector in case of violation or contravene during performing his job.

Seventh : government authorities conducting training and developing means and using the recent techniques in order to promote their general performance as well as its employees by providing them with training opportunities inside and outside , and benefit from some of consulting bodies aiming to promote the general service performance in the authority.

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There is a high committee for the administrative organizing in the kingdom called "high committee of the administrative organizing" its location at the general management – concerned authority, government employees training.

Discussions

As Al-Khatib, Rawwas, &Vitell(2004), concluded in their previous study, relationships with one's employees, co-workers, or superiors create ethical dilemmas. They found that people "perceive all ethically challenging situations as unethical and had significant differences among themselves regarding the ethical perceptions of self, as compared to perceptions of peers', and top managements," p. 309.

Understanding the different ethical practices as they relate to employment practices provide a general knowledge for leaders and citizens of KSA as well as others from around the world who conduct business and interactions with representatives from the public sector in Saudi Arabia. While these general practices are noted, the leaders within the public sector are able to critically reflect on current practices to understand and identify areas for improvement to gain higher levels of efficiencies and increase employee productivity.

Globally the concept of privatization has been promoted in new public administration. It is seen that this concept is related to the measures which promote establishment of efficiency and efficacy leading to development of quality deliverance of public services (Radhika, 2012). While, we are not necessarily advocating any changes in this paper, any relevant

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strategies for maximizing efficiencies and fulfilling stakeholder expectations would need to be considered.

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