ENHANCING MORAL ETHICS IN ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN KENYA: THE CASE OF SAFARICOM LIMITED

Alfred Ong'era

PhD, Lecturer, School of Business, Strathmore University,

P.O. Box 59857, 00200, City Square, Nairobi, Kenya

aongera@strathmore.edu

Abstract

The place and relevance of ethics continues to gain traction within the realm of organizational leadership. Ethics leaders prioritize the interests of the organization as well as those of the followers before theirs. Furthermore, ethical leaders chose right over wrong and they do not compromise their values and morals for personal gain. These leaders act as role models to their subordinates and are revered by their followers. This review focuses on what kind of ethical behaviour a leader portrays towards employee, and the impact it has on the employees and the organization. Leadership is as an important role in fostering ethical conduct in organizations. Ethical leaders often embrace a wider set of human values and act in accordance with them, serve as role models by influencing ethical values through their behaviour, think about long term consequences, draw backs and benefits of their decisions. These kinds of leaders more often translate internalized values into action, serves others, stands up for what is right, straightforward, respects each individual and strives for fairness. The article argues that organizations that consistently exhibit ethical behaviour have leaders who demonstrate good conduct and do what is right. Therefore, the article examines the construct ethical leadership and the roles played by leaders in shaping ethical performance in organisations.

Keywords: Ethics, leadership, morals, values, leadership performance, code of conduct, stewardship

INTRODUCTION

The construct of ethics has gained considerable traction in the organizational leadership literature owing to its centrality in leadership performance. However, application of ethics in the day-to-day management of enterprises appear to be on the decline if information on fraud is anything to go by. For instance, Suh and Shim (2020) found that many commercial banks suffer from internal fraud, signifying that corporations are mismanaged from within, particularly by top management teams who do not ascribe to the prescribed codes of moral ethics. Many organizations are mired with allegations of nepotism and cronyism, which have watered down the tenets of organizational leadership, such as trustworthiness, transparency, and accountability (da Silva et al., 2019). Furthermore, misappropriation and pilferage of resources in both public and private sector entities have been cited as some of the pointers to the declining state of ethical leadership (Kazemian et al., 2019). This raises the role or criticality of moral ethics in any organizational setup since it will elevate the level of leadership performance, which is sine qua non for organizational performance.

It is in times of ethics scandals either in business, government, private institutions, when we question who is an ethical leader? Our lives are shaped by two kinds of things; the circumstances in which we find ourselves and the choices we make. Ethics comes in through the choices we make (Thompson, 2010). Ethics are norms of conduct, code of values and moral principles that distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour (Resnik, 2015). It connotes that, there are certain behaviours that are acceptable and unacceptable in certain situations. Ethical behaviour is therefore, which is morally accepted as good and right as opposed to bad and wrong. According to the utilitarianism theory of determining right and wrong, argues that the right thing to do is that which offers the greatest benefit to the greatest number of people involved. Therefore, organizations ought to have a leader who is a source of ethical guidance for the employees and responsible for moral development (Treviño et al., 2014). A leader who often embrace wider set of human values and act in accordance with them, serve as role models by influencing ethical values through their behaviour, think about long term consequences, draw backs and benefits of their decisions.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

There is remarkable evidence in the mainstream organizational leadership literature on the essence of ethics. Studies in the present literature (see, among others, Haar et al., 2019; Lumpkin & Achen, 2018) point to moral ethics as an important predictor of successful organizational leadership. For instance, leaders who exhibit moral ethics respect everyone in the organization whether they are their superiors or subordinates (Ciulla et al., 2018). Far from

this, many commercial and noncommercial enterprises appear to negate the aspect of moral ethics (Jones, 2019). From the perspective of corporate governance, many organizations have breached the codes of conduct that provide the rules of doing business (Ciulla, 2020). Besides nonadherence to the business ethics, such as corporate social responsibility and corporate transparency, there appears to be many cases of dishonesty in many enterprises, such as false claims in their marketing or advertisement (Suh & Shim, 2020). To that end, it seems that without moral ethics, leadership performance in many corporates will not live to the expectations of the public nor to the prescribed business codes of ethics and conduct.

THE CONSTRUCT OF ETHICAL LEADERSHIP IN ORGANIZATIONS

For those working with organizations that deliver service often grapple with the challenge of ethical issues. For instance, organizations provide products and services that are way below the quality in the market. (Lawton et al., 2013). According to Bolden (2004), leadership is a complex construct open to subjective interpretation. Bolden states that leadership may either be viewed as the consequence of a set of traits or characteristics possessed by leaders or leadership as a social process. Scholars define leadership differently, some view leadership as the focus of group processes, personality perspective, a behaviour, power, transformational process or a skill.

According to Grint et al. (2016), leadership is concerned with direction setting, change movement and persuasion. In contrast, Northouse (2013) conceptualizes the construct of leadership as a process whereby an individual influence a group of individuals to achieve a common goal. Elsewhere, Kruse (2013) defines leadership as a process of social influence, which maximizes the efforts of others, towards the achievement of a goal. Kruse argues that leadership has nothing to do with seniority, titles, personal attributes and management. Therefore, from Northouse and Kruse definition of leadership; leadership is a process, and not a trait that resides in the leader, it involves social influence in relation to how the leader affects the followers, maximizes the efforts of others in a group to accomplish a common goal.

Ethical leadership emphasizes on leaders' character, integrity, ethical awareness and collective orientation which promotes organizational interests over self-serving interests (Resick et al., 2011). According to Brown et al.(2005), define ethical leadership as a leaders' demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions, and interpersonal relationships and the promotion of such conduct through two-way communication, reinforcements and decision making. The definition proposes that the action of leaders is important in promoting good conduct and fostering ethical culture in an organization and also

the leader's personal moral credibility in enhancing the effectiveness of formal ethics regulation in organizations (Downe et al., 2016).

Ethical leadership maybe equated to stewardship. Block (2013) associates ethical leadership to stewardship, which is the ethical responsibility to act on behalf of others, to honour responsibilities of service rather than pursuing one's own self-interest. Research on ethical leadership shows that ethical leadership has positive implications for both the employees and the organization, increased willingness of employees to report problems, greater employee job satisfaction, lower levels of work deviance and increased trust in organisational leaders both from employees and the public (AlShehhi et al., 2020). As a result, ethics contributes to employee commitment and trust, to investor loyalty and trust, to customer satisfaction and trust and contributes to profit (Mohanty et al., 2015). According to Gardner (2008), a person with an ethical mind should therefore question, "what kind of a person, citizen and worker do I want to be? If all workers in my profession adopted the mind-set I have and did what I do, what would the world be like?"

Ethics is a key component of good governance. It is important because it has significant potential to affect public trust in all forms of government. Ethical behavior for professionals is applied through the use of codes of conduct (Weinberg, 2014). Codes of conduct are written framework used by organizations to specify and shape what is regarded as appropriate conduct. The use of code of conduct forms a component of ethical leadership (Demmke, & Moilanen, 2012). However, the success of ethics code in organizations is dependent on the culture of the organization where people do the right thing when faced with dilemmas and the leaders' role on the implementation of the form and the content of the code of conduct (Hassan, 2015). Leaders are aware that the adoption of an ethics code can be effective in increasing awareness of ethical principles and a useful management tool in enhancing an ethical culture within an organization (Downe et al., 2016). However, the ethics code may be rendered useless if it is not interpreted and translated into actions by leaders for the followers to adopt.

The writing of formal ethical codes is not sufficient step towards implementation of ethical behaviour in organizations (Mihelic et al., 2010). Ethics should be ingrained in each and every pore of organizational life where the ethical actions and behaviour of top management are consistent with what they teach, leaders "walk the talk" (Bello, 2012). Therefore, the appropriate and desired behaviour is enhanced through culture and socialization process of the new employees. Leaders serve as role models for their followers and demonstrate the behavioural boundaries set within an organization (Caldwell, 2018). The more the leader "walks the talk" the higher level of trust and respect he generates from followers. Jensen et al. (2009) states that the codification of ethics in documented statements acting as a basis for communication and

regulation of ethical issues can never fully capture and direct how decisions should be made across the diversity of situations. Therefore, applying ethical values and principles to contexts often entails further reinterpretation. Moreover, there is potential for values and principles of good governance to conflict, tensions may arise between integrity, transparency and accountability.

Solving ethical issues when they arise in organizations is vital. However, when such ethical issues are encountered people choose to be silent. Gentile (2010) tries to find out what impedes people to stay silent when encountered with ethical issues despite the organization having code of conducts to guide on how to solve such encounters. First, the excuse it is a standard practice that everyone in the organization does it on a daily basis; Second, individuals attempt to find an apology in the phrase, it's not a big deal; Third, the phrase, it's not my responsibility, particularly if it's a young employee; Lastly, people using the phrase I want to be loyal, people feel there is a conflict between doing what is right and being loyal to the leader and co-workers. Therefore, having ethics code of conduct is not sufficient enough to guarantee ethical behaviour in an organization. Leaders should encourage employees by leading by examples and influencing the behaviour of people around them as people learn by observing and emulating attractive and credible role models (Bello, 2012; Downe et al., 2016).

Greater performance within organizations can be greatly achieved by leaders exhibiting qualities that will influence employees to work harder by setting ethical standards and holding followers accountable for ethical conduct (Mohanty et al., 2015). Leaders must rely on their inner voice, the natural feelings that one wants to serve (Spears, 2010). According to Spears, the ideal form of leadership is the servant leadership, being in relationship with others, which is away from the autocratic and hierarchical models of leadership. Emphasizes that, servant leadership involves others in decision making, is strongly based in ethical behaviour, and enhances the growth of workers while improving the quality of organizational life. A servant leader therefore, displays certain characteristics that are of importance to the development of effective leadership in an organization such as; active listening, potential for healing one self and one's relationship and of others, self-awareness, reliance on persuasion in making decisions, thinks beyond day-to-day realities, and committed to the growth of people and serving their needs (Albert & Spears, 2012).

Furthermore, Caldwell and Dixon (2010) contend that love, forgiveness and trust are critical values of the modern leader. Likewise, Pellicer (2008) defines love as a commitment to the welfare, growth to one's self or of another. This same commitment within work context is a quality present in an ethical leader. The most obvious thing that leadership and love have in common is the act of caring about the welfare of others. Therefore, leaders who love those

whom work with, recognize that authentic caring creates higher commitment, greater synergy, increased creativity and improved quality (Caldwell, 2018). Scholars have recognized that love has a profound positive impact in leader-follower relationships within the context of the modern organization (Dierendonck & Patterson, 2015). Additionally, although organizations expect profit and rely on people to accurately and efficiently accomplish intended tasks, mistakes may occur and forgiveness is vital.

In the words of Caldwell et al. (2009), forgiveness is a noble quality for a compassionate and effective leader, it involves accepting and looking past the faults of another. But this does not mean excusing followers from being accountable. Forgiving allows a person to regain self-esteem and allows people to work comfortably together. Forgiving others and forgiving oneself encourages the culture of taking risks and being creative for organizations to achieve their potential (Lennick & Kiel, 2016). Therefore, leaders have the responsibility of creating a culture in organizations whereby individuals are willing to forgive others mistake by encouraging creativity, rule breaking and personal initiatives, when doing so, it should be consistent and ethical with the organizations mission and goals (Collins & Hansen, 2011). Consequently, trust is the in-depth of personal commitment and it is achieved by leaders when they honour the expectations of others (Hayes et al., 2015). Trust is associated with credibility, consistency and honesty in trust-based relationship. Ethical leaders should treat people right, have a high level of moral development and play fair (Caldwell & Hayes 2007). The act of trusting the leaders from the followers is critical in an organizational setting since it empowers and communicates that the leader believes in their abilities, hence the employers are more willing to take risks (Krasman, 2014).

THE CASE OF SAFARICOM

Safaricom PLC is a listed Kenyan mobile network operator. Being the largest telecommunications provider in the country, and one of the most profitable companies in East and Central African region. Services offered in the company include: mobile telephony, mobile money transfer, consumer electronics, ecommerce, cloud computing, data, music streaming, and fibre optic services. The company is well-known as the home of M-Pesa, a mobile banking SMS-based service (Safaricom, 2019). Making reference to Safaricom annual report (2017), the company has a strong and effective governance system, where the responsibility for good governance lies within the board of directors. According to African Growing Enterprises, the company adheres to its obligations as a public listed entity in Kenya. It complies to various regulations such as the Constitution of Kenya, Capital Markets Authority (CMA) Code of Corporate Governance Issuers of Securities to the public, Nairobi Stock Exchange and the

ethical standards prescribed in the company Code of Conduct. The company's code of conduct binds both the directors and the employees. They are all expected to act with honesty, integrity and fairness in all their dealings. In line with fighting unethical and fraudulent behaviour, the company has a whistle blowing policy that protects individuals who speak out. The policy is managed by an independent, accredited external institution and the information gathered is reported to the ethics and audit committee on a quarterly basis (Safaricom, 2017).

Safaricom PLC is one of the most profitable companies within the East and Central African region under the custodianship of the then CEO Bob Collymore who held the position for almost nine years (Tuwei & Tully, 2017). According to Safaricom annual report on financial year 2028/2019, it reported 63.4 billion, which is 14.7% net profit. Collymore had over 30 years' experience in the telecommunications world and was one of the most celebrated business leaders in the country. He became the CEO in 2010 when Safaricom subscribers were 13.5 million with 21,000 agents across the country and as at December 2018 the company had surpassed 30 million customers (Capital Business, 2019). Collymore joined Safaricom at a time when there was stiff competition in the marked, however he was dedicated to grow the company (Owino, 2019). Communications Authority of Kenya second quarter sector statistics report 2018/2019 highlighted that active mobile subscribers in the country stood at 49.5 million. The report shows that Safaricom leads in the market share for mobile subscribers at 63.3%. Referring to the statistics, Safaricom was considered to be the most preferred mobile service provider in the country.

According to Albert and Spears (2012), state that a good leader is who strives to build a community. A leader who impacts the society by helping those in needy backgrounds. Collymore, used his power to lead Safaricom into uplifting others through investing in arts, music and the youth (Kwalanda, 2007). This led to the establishment of Safaricom Jazz music festival in 2014, which promoted and nurtured the Kenyan jazz music and all the proceeds would go towards supporting Ghetto Classics, a non-profit, community-based programme that seeks to transform the lives of youth from underprivileged backgrounds by introducing them to the world of live jazz and classical music and equipping them with skills and opportunities to succeed (Owino, 2019).

According to the Public Officer's Ethics Act (POEA) No. 4 of 2003, public officers have been required to declare their income, assets and liabilities under part IV of POEA. Juma (2015) states that Collymore raised the bar of transparency and accountability by declaring his wealth and disclosing it to the public. Sarkozy (2015) applauds the great and bold move demonstrated by Collymore, this shows the urge of being transparent and an accountable leader given that POEA (2003) expressly states that wealth declaration forms filed by public officials, their spouse

and dependent children shall not be published or in any way made public except with written authority of the relevant commission. Declaration of wealth by leaders is an important feature to be emulated by other employees towards the fight against corruption. According to Business Today (2015), Mr Collymore declared his wealth which is net worth of Ksh. 277 million in cash, properties and shares and an average salary of Ksh. 9 million per month. Collymore states that the move was part of the private sector initiatives in the fight against corruption that has permeated in the country. His move was further embraced by Joshua Oigara the KCB CEO, whose assets are worth 350 million (Kulundu, 2015). Declaration of wealth is in line with leaders advocating for transparency and accountability in their organizations (World Bank, 2013).

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities help form a stronger bond between employee and corporation (Black, 2006). They boost morale and can help both employees and employers feel more connected with the world around them (Lee & Kotler, 2013). According to Lee and Kotler, define CSR as a transparent business practice based on ethical values, legal requirements compliance and respect for the community, people and the environment within which the business operates. CSR is one area where companies make use to gain competitive advantage in the market place (Ismail, 2009). According to the Annual Report and Group Accounts (2012), states that Safaricom has partnered with various organizations to improve the lives of Kenyan communities. Focusing in areas identified by the government and various policies as being critical to economic development. Among the projects the company has supported are in the areas including: economic empowerment, education, environmental conservation, health, water, sports and arts, music and culture (Safaricom annual report, 2010). According to the company's annual report on CSR 2010, the company is dedicated in employee engagement to participate in community activities in regard to the company's slogan for CSRs "Passion for the World around us". The company also launched the initiative World of Difference initiative a platform which provides opportunity to the staff to offer their technical and professional skills to selected funded projects. According to Kwalanda, (2007), on the research of CSRs at Safaricom limited, explains the reasons behind the particular CSR choices that Safaricom makes. The main influence on the choices the company makes is to better the society in which it operates, therefore, it mainly focuses in areas identified by the government as being key to development. The company realizes that business can only thrive well if the society in which it operates is thriving, and therefore it strives to make the society in which it operates a better place.

According to Mwancha and Ouma (2017), CSRs initiatives at Safaricom have proven to be beneficial in a number of ways. In their research on effects of CSR initiatives and performance in Safaricom show that there is strong relationship between CSRs and the

company's sale, market share and the brand. Safaricom was ranked among the top employer in the telecommunications industry across the globe and in Kenya (Forbes, 2018). It was ranked number 67 in the Forbes Global 200 list of World's Best Employers. Safaricom hires more people with disabilities as part of its Diversity and Inclusion Programme. In line with international Day of Persons with Disabilities (2017), Safaricom introduced the M-Pesa Interactive Voice Response (IVR) service to allow visually impaired customers to access M-Pesa without having to share their PIN numbers for assistance (Safaricom, 2017). Consequently, the company has various concepts like Blaze for the youth; "Twaweza" which means when we come together great things happen, which has changed the lives of so many people and also the "Niko nawe kila wakati" initiative; the "Niko na Safaricom" drive that ensured every part of Kenya was covered by the network coverage. The success of these initiatives and projects became successful under the leadership of Bob Collymore (Owino, 2019).

According to research done by Tiri et al. (2015), their study shows that virtual team leaders motivate team member to achieve project objectives to a very great extent. Their findings state that leaders in project teams, promote understanding, find solution facing team, encourage achievement, respect the views of others, influence trust, appreciate differing views of others, motivate and share the projects vision with team members to achieve project objectives to a very great extent. Ethical leaders therefore, serve as role models of the kind of behaviour required to attain the organizational vision, and champion the project throughout the company (Bello, 2012), and Bob Collymore is an example of such a leader who successfully managed Safaricom until his demise.

CONCLUSION

Organizational success goes hand in hand with employee's ethical conduct. Ethics and competitiveness are inseparable. No organization will be successful with people behaving unethically; such as satisfying personal needs and career objectives, de-emphasizing development to keep followers weak and dependent on the leader, lacking courage to confront unjust acts, and withholding help and support. Therefore, ethics is vital for any successful organization and it is the leader's role to act as a role model for the followers to imitate what is right and good, to be able to realize the mission and goals of the organization.

SCOPE FOR FURTHER STUDIES

There is need for robust studies that will use empirical approaches in establishing the association between moral ethics and organizational leadership. Use of statistical techniques will test the strength and the direction of the relationship. Furthermore, it's important to delve

into what more can be done to enhance moral ethics and the role of ethical leadership in driving organizational performance as measured by employee and customer satisfaction, attrition rate, among other indicators.

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