



## Enhancing Ethical Decision-Making in Public Administration Through Ethics Training and Organizational Culture

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### Abstract

*It is crucial in the area of public administration since the decision, in question, influences the public's confidence, the administration, as well as the general welfare. This paper discusses ethics training with an intent of providing insights into the effectiveness of this measure in ethical decision making among public administrators, not ignoring the aspect of ethical education in raising awareness, and sharpening the skills of practical ethical decision making among the employees. Employing a purely qualitative approach, data were captured using purposively chosen participants who had undergone through ethics training programmes in their administrations. Analysis by themes indicated that ethics training helped the participants to reason ethically and identify solutions to ethical issues. Nevertheless, the research also found some barriers: resistance to change, regarding training in ethics as unnecessary, and lack of resources in enterprises. Equally as important, organizational culture was identified as a major factor influencing the success of the ethics training which proved that the organisational culture when supportive with leadership had a great contribution to the effectiveness of the training but when hierarchical bureaucratic it acted as a barrier. In this research, gaps concerning the context which shapes the effects and the practical application of ethics training in public administration are discussed. It also emphasise the relevance of integrating organisational practices by ethical principles and, therefore, the development of a socially responsible culture that may guarantee sustained ethical implementation and practices. The research results offer practical implications for policies to augment the ethics training programs within and across organizations.*

## Introduction

Ethical determination making is the cornerstone of potent public management touching on governance, coverage formulation and public acceptance. In creating a structure of public carrier, need for moral conduct is drastic due to the implication of choice in citizens' lives as well as the credibility of institutions. This piece aims at discussing the centrality of ethics training in the models of moral reasoning for the public administration, strengths, weaknesses and future implications. Public management, as a subject, has several moral demanding situations since it is located in managing public property and catering for various social pastimes. Misconduct on this domain has potential for serious consequences from loss of public credibility to felony and economic implications (Lund & Sarin, 2021).

Therefore, increasing moral selection-making among public administrators becomes essential no longer simplest for organisational conformity but also for the general properly-being of society (Bish, 2023). The ethics schooling packages will be to provide public administrators with knowledge, skill, and virtues required to handle ethical issues appropriately (Shafritz et al., 2022). These applications often contain features that are: case studies, role-gambling physical activities, and ethical theories and frameworks discussion (Jones et al., 2022). These

tasks are an effort to elicit contributors in a critical reflection and ethical reasoning since its purpose is to develop a moral focus and responsibility within the lifestyle of public business corporations (Schuurbiens, 2020). The question of whether ethics education in public administration is effective has been of interest to researchers. Some gains focusing on such packages show that they may improve both ethics, and information; nevertheless, their effects on actual decision-making processes are rather ambiguous (Okougbo et al., 2021).

Some of the elements that affect the influence of ethics education projects entail organizational way of life, leadership assist, and integration of ethical guidelines into everyday practices (Al Halbusi et al., 2021). Also, the practice of ethics education also depends on the context in which it is implemented (Alsos et al., 2023). Public directors function in the complex settings that are defined by political influences, bureaucratic processes, and more than one stakeholder interest (Rosenbloom et al., 2022). They condition how ethical dilemmas and choice-making solutions play out as well as dictate the formats whereby ethics training must fit into the public sphere (Casali et al., 2021). The primary challenges students encounter while developing their own ethics schooling packages are also present, and they have the potential to challenge the success of the intervention (Nartiningrum & Nugroho, 2020).

These are resistance to alternate, perceived irrelevance of ethics to activity capabilities, and confined sources for sustained education efforts (Malhotra et al., 2021). Some of the challenging scenarios identifying moral issues in public administration require time and energy, critical assessment, and engagement by organizational leaders to integrate moral concerns into the fabric of public administration practice (Fuertes et al., 2020). Nevertheless, the specified demanding situations call for ethics education as a promising approach to advancing ethical choice-making in public management (Mentzelopoulos et al., 2021). In that case, it is possible to state that those programs which provide directors with the instruments to identify and conform to ethical issues as opportunities and address them appropriately, contribute to development of the organizational culture built on higher sense of responsibility and ethical standards within public corporations (Rizos & Bryhn, 2022).

They also enable people to practice Ethics at the same time as designing the challenges of Public Service shipping (Bhatt, 2022). This brief discussion determines the tone for a discussion about the role of ethics in enhancing moral decision making in public administration (Trevino & Nelson, 2021). It is with this usage of present-day practices, demanding situations and effects that this study seeks to contribute to the discourses on powerful governance and ethical leadership in the public sector. Who is coming in contact with the ethics education; who is in the driver's seat, hence, who controls the message targeted at promoting moral conduct that keeps the public trust in authorities' institutions?

## **Method**

SACRA is a common method applied in qualitative research in analyzing and interpering data collected out of a structured pattern. It is especially useful when analyzing qualitative research as it allows, following a standard procedure, to evaluate the studies' methods, data collection and analysis, and reporting. However, the method used in this study can be described as the SACRA which represent Sampling, Access, Context, Reflexivity and Analysis, where all elements can be deemed as essential for evaluation of qualitative research.

Here is a detailed review of the SACRA method as applied to the study on the role of ethics training in enhancing ethical decision-making within public administration:

The sampling strategy is one of the primary criteria to start the assessment of the conducted qualitative investigation, how and with what extent of detail the data was obtained. In the present study, purposeful sampling was used, which is advantageous because it focuses on

identifying participants with prior experience or that can provide information about the research area. This approach helps in avoiding a set of people who are partially involved in ethical decision making within public administration.

The actual participants of the study included fifteen public administrators working in different sectors of the government, which gives significant variation in the research data. By purposively selecting participants at the strategic management level and employees in the middle of the organizational hierarchy, the objectives of the study are comprehensive because they reveal the nature and impact of ethics training. That is why, at the same time, it would be advisable to increase the sample size in the future research to increase the generalization of the results or include participants from other regions on different governmental levels.

Permission is the process through which the researcher gets authorization to conduct the study amongst the participants and how the researcher relates to the participants. In this study, access was gained either through professional contacts or organizational affiliation that probably assisted in identifying potential participants with practical experience in ethics training. The study gave specific guidance on the processes of obtaining participants' consent prior to engaging them in the study. While conducting the research, the participants were informed, on the various rights including their right to confidentiality, regarding the intention and purpose of the research.

Interviews were also used concurrently with the study and focus group discussion implies that the researcher interactively engaged the participants. This could have been useful in substantiating group ideas on both ethics training and the whole process of decision making. Nonetheless, problems with regard to access might lie in the fact that participants might be less willing to disclose personal experiences on ethical issues or stories due to issues of anonymity.

In qualitative research, context is important more so in the process of data collection and appropriately analyzing them. The study gives insight into the context where the participants exercise their knowledge and skills to work in public administration organizations that have inherent politics and where the employees come with different priorities and goals across the organizations which makes the decision-making process to have two different sounding for the same problem. This context is important because these external factors impact the ethical decision-making process and thus, ethics training has to be understood in these respects.

However, the study compares these contextual challenges in detail and considering more details about the specific government departments or institutions, the participants were drawn from would have provided more context to the findings. For example, if participants served in local government environment and as opposed nationwide environment, such a factor could influence the application of ethics training and its resultant efficacy.

Sociology this aspect is known as reflexivity it is the way the researcher can look out for the effect of his/her own background, experiences, and other factors which can bring about particular perspective. In this study, it is seen that ethical issues are taken into consideration by the researcher as participant identification number is used and participation is voluntary. Reflexivity also appears to have been used methodologically; the researcher selected semi-structured interviews and focus groups enabling participants to express themselves in order to minimise bias from the researcher.

However, even more extensiveness in the explication of reflexivity in the study would increase the forms of the openness of the research process. For example, the researcher could have provided a tentative map of her stereotypic views on ethical issues at the early stage of the research when making choices of questions to be asked or later when interpreting the data.

The study utilized thematic analysis method to analyse the interview and focus group data because this approach is commonly used in research to identify topics of interest from a large pool of data. The approach is also applicable for this research questions because it gives flexibility and depth in explaining the effects of the ethics training on decision making process. The conceptual phases that have been proposed in research include data familiarisation, coding of the data, development of themes from the data and even interpretation of data imply systematic analysis.

Another advantage of the thematic analysis is the ability to look at the micro and macro level simultaneously at personal accounts and general factors that influence choice making within an organization. However, the study seems to lack thorough explanation and elaboration in explaining the procedures of coding. Firstly, how were the codes generated and secondly, how was it possible to classify the codes in to themes? More on that, the analysis would have provided the reader with a clear understanding on how the conclusions were arrived at concerning the data.

## **Result and Discussion**

Everyone also acknowledges that ethical decision making is a basic principle of public administration and affects the quality of governance, public trust and policy institutions. Consequently, ethics training has become an important instrumental necessity for preparing practically oriented public administrators for ethically challenging situations inherent in their work contexts. However, several issues regarding such training remain to be answered among which include the actual effectiveness of the training, and the variables that influence outcomes of the training when implemented on actual working systems. These research questions intend to fill these gaps by examining the satisfaction of effective ethical awareness among public administrators, who have been trained on ethics, concerning sensitivity and decision-making. Received responses of the participants of the study allow to present strengths and weaknesses of ethics training and illustrative contextual factors that influence its effectiveness. The remainder of this paper provides an analysis of the findings that emerge from the interviews conducted, with these findings classified by themes that reflect the complexity of ethics training in public administration.

### **Improvement in Ethical Awareness and Sensitivity**

One of the most significant findings from the study was the improvement in ethical awareness and sensitivity among public administrators as a result of ethics training. Participants across different sectors of public administration reported that the training sessions were instrumental in helping them recognize and understand ethical issues more clearly. This increased awareness was attributed to the comprehensive nature of the training programs, which included discussions on ethical theories, role-playing exercises, and analysis of case studies that illustrated complex ethical dilemmas.

The semi-structured interviews provided valuable insights into how participants perceived changes in their ethical awareness. one participant stated,

*"Before the training, I didn't really think about the ethical implications of my decisions it was mostly about getting things done efficiently. The training made me realize how important it is to consider the ethical consequences of my actions, not just for me but for the organization and the public."*

This quotation highlights a shift in the participant's perspective from a task-oriented approach to one that is more reflective and considerate of broader ethical impacts.

Another participant noted,

*"The role-playing exercises were particularly helpful. They allowed us to see different sides of the same issue and think about how our decisions would affect others. It was eye-opening to realize how easy it is to make decisions that seem right at the time but are actually unethical."*

This quote emphasizes the practical application of ethics training and its role in developing sensitivity to ethical nuances. The exercises not only provided a space to practice decision-making in a controlled environment but also created opportunities for participants to discuss and debate ethical principles, which deepened their understanding and awareness.

Furthermore, the context-specific scenarios used in the training programs were seen as crucial for linking ethical concepts to real-world situations. As one participant described,

*"The training sessions included case studies that were very relevant to our work like conflicts of interest and accountability. Discussing these cases helped us see how easily ethical boundaries could be crossed without realizing it."*

This statement reflects the direct impact of contextual relevance in enhancing ethical sensitivity, allowing participants to relate theoretical knowledge to practical scenarios they encountered in their daily work.

Overall, the findings from this study suggest that ethics training programs in public administration can effectively enhance ethical awareness and sensitivity by providing a structured environment for critical reflection, engaging participants in interactive learning methods, and linking ethical theories to practical decision-making scenarios. This improvement is crucial for fostering a culture of integrity and accountability in public service, where administrators are better equipped to navigate ethical challenges and make decisions that uphold the public trust.

### **Application of ethical principles in everyday decision-making**

The application of ethical principles in everyday decision-making was another key outcome of the ethics training for public administrators. Prior to the training, many participants reported that they were often unaware of the ethical dimensions of their routine decisions. However, after completing the ethics programs, they expressed greater confidence in applying ethical frameworks to guide their choices in day-to-day tasks. This shift is particularly important in public administration, where decisions can have significant, long-lasting impacts on both individuals and communities.

According to the interviews, several participants indicated that they now felt more capable of identifying ethical issues in their daily work. One participant shared,

*"Before the ethics training, I would make decisions based on standard procedures or what seemed to be the quickest solution. Now, I stop to think about whether my actions align with ethical standards and how they affect others in the community."*

This statement reflects how ethics training encouraged participants to adopt a more reflective approach to decision-making, considering ethical principles like fairness, justice, and accountability in their daily tasks.

Moreover, many participants reported using ethical decision-making frameworks, which were part of their training, to guide their choices. As one participant explained,

*“We were taught different decision-making models that helped me structure my thoughts, especially when faced with dilemmas. I now ask myself if a decision will be just, transparent, and in the best interest of the public.”*

This quotation highlights the practical utility of the ethical frameworks introduced during the training, showing how these models provided participants with tangible tools to integrate ethical considerations into their everyday work.

Furthermore, the ethics training led to an increased sense of accountability in decision-making. One participant stated,

*“I’m now more aware of how even small decisions can affect public trust. I make an effort to communicate my decisions more clearly to others and ensure they align with our ethical guidelines.”*

This response underscores the broader application of ethical principles, particularly the awareness that public administrators are accountable not only to their supervisors but also to the citizens they serve. It demonstrates that the training not only enhanced the individual’s ethical sensitivity but also fostered a culture of transparency and responsibility within the organization.

The training's impact on everyday decision-making was also reflected in how participants navigated ethical challenges. One participant noted,

*“There were situations where I had to choose between personal interests and what was ethically right for the public. The training helped me prioritize the public good over personal gains.”*

This quote illustrates how ethics training helped administrators to balance competing interests and make decisions that serve the broader public interest rather than individual or departmental concerns.

### **Challenges Faced When Applying Ethics Training to Real World Dilemmas**

Despite the positive outcomes of ethics training, participants encountered significant challenges when applying their learnings to real-world dilemmas. These challenges often stemmed from the complexity of public administration environments, characterized by bureaucratic constraints, political pressures, and competing interests among stakeholders. While ethics training provided foundational knowledge and tools, participants highlighted the difficulties in translating these principles into practical solutions in their work settings.

One of the most commonly cited challenges was the lack of organizational support for ethical practices. As one participant remarked,

*“Even though I feel more prepared to make ethical decisions after the training, it’s difficult when the organizational culture doesn’t prioritize ethics. Sometimes, we are pressured to achieve results quickly, and ethical considerations are seen as a barrier.”*

This quotation underscores the disconnect between individual awareness and organizational priorities. Many public administrators found themselves in situations where the focus on efficiency or political goals undermined the application of ethical principles.

Another challenge was navigating the gray areas in ethical decision-making, where clear solutions were not always apparent. One participant noted,

*“Some dilemmas don’t have a clear right or wrong answer. balancing budget constraints with delivering essential services often requires compromises that feel ethically uncomfortable.”*

This statement highlights the inherent complexity of ethical dilemmas in public administration. Training programs, while useful in theory, cannot always prepare individuals for the nuanced and context-specific nature of real-world challenges.

Participants also pointed to external pressures from stakeholders as a significant obstacle. A participant shared,

*"There are times when political figures or influential stakeholders push for decisions that conflict with ethical guidelines. It's hard to stand firm when your job security or future projects depend on their approval."*

This response illustrates how external influences, such as political interference or lobbying, can create ethical tensions that are difficult to resolve without jeopardizing personal or professional relationships.

Limited resources were another common challenge mentioned during interviews. For example, one participant stated,

*"We often don't have the time or resources to fully analyze the ethical implications of every decision. The workload is overwhelming, and we're forced to make quick choices, which sometimes leads to ethical oversights."*

This reflects the practical constraints faced by public administrators, where time-sensitive decisions and resource limitations hinder thorough ethical evaluations.

Lastly, resistance from colleagues or supervisors was identified as a barrier to applying ethics training. One participant explained,

*"Not everyone in the organization has undergone the same training, so when I try to advocate for ethical practices, I sometimes face pushback or indifference from others."*

This response highlights the importance of widespread organizational adoption of ethics training to create a unified approach to ethical decision-making.

### **Influence of organizational culture on the effectiveness of ethics training**

The effectiveness of ethics training is significantly influenced by the organizational culture within which public administrators operate. While training programs can provide foundational knowledge and ethical frameworks, their impact is often contingent upon whether the organization supports and reinforces ethical behavior. A misaligned or unsupportive organizational culture can diminish the practical application of ethical principles learned during training.

Several participants highlighted how organizational priorities often overshadow ethical considerations. One participant shared,

*"Our organization emphasizes achieving targets and outcomes, sometimes at the expense of ethical practices. Even though the training emphasized transparency, it's hard to practice it when the culture prioritizes results over processes."*

This statement underscores how a results-driven culture can undermine the application of ethics by valuing efficiency and performance metrics over integrity and accountability.

Moreover, a lack of ethical role models within the organization was identified as a barrier to implementing ethics training. Another participant remarked,

*"If senior leaders don't demonstrate ethical behavior, it becomes challenging for others to follow suit. The training was helpful, but without leadership buy-in, it feels like we're on our own."*

This insight highlights the importance of ethical leadership in shaping an organizational culture that supports ethical decision-making. When leaders fail to model ethical practices, it creates a disconnect between the training and workplace realities.

Participants also discussed how entrenched norms within their organizations posed challenges to ethical behavior. One participant noted,

*"There's an unspoken rule here that you don't question the decisions of higher-ups, even if they seem ethically questionable. The training taught us to speak up, but the culture makes it risky to do so."*

This response illustrates how hierarchical or authoritarian organizational structures can discourage employees from addressing or resolving ethical concerns, thereby limiting the impact of ethics training.

Another significant cultural factor was the openness to change within the organization. As one participant explained,

*"The training encouraged us to implement new ethical practices, but many colleagues resisted, saying, 'This is how we've always done things.' It's hard to break through that resistance."*

This quote highlights the inertia present in organizations that are resistant to adopting new ethical standards or practices, which can hinder the integration of ethics training outcomes into daily operations.

Positive organizational cultures, on the other hand, were seen as enablers of ethical behavior. One participant shared a contrasting experience:

*"In our department, ethical discussions are encouraged, and leadership supports the decisions we make based on ethical reasoning. This made it much easier to apply what I learned in the training."*

This statement emphasizes the role of supportive and inclusive cultures in amplifying the effectiveness of ethics training. Environments that encourage dialogue, reflection, and ethical accountability provide fertile ground for training programs to take root and influence behavior.

This paper aimed at assessing the effectiveness of ethics training in enhancing ethical decision making in public administration with regard to the context that is faced with by public administrators while implementing the ethics on the latter. Through the research, the authors fill major theoretical and methodological lacunae in the literature on public sector ethics by describing the existing shortcomings of ethics training in the context of organisational factors and practical considerations.

Literature reviews have abounded in its theoretical underpinnings and the broad advantages of ethics training, including the level of ethical susceptibility (Casali et al., 2021). However, they fail to capture the real-world practices that hamper the use of training outcomes into public administration. This paper fills this gap by assessing the moderating roles of organizational culture and resource scarcity and the mediating role of political pressure on the effectiveness of ethics training. In contrast to prior studies which assume a direct correlation between training and ethical behavior (Okougbo et al., 2021), this study shows how individual, organization and contextual factors affect ethical decision making.

In agreement with the past works, the present study also supports the fact that ethics training increases ethical concern and vigilance. However, this study goes further than the previous findings to show that awareness does not necessarily translate to ethical practices. For example, participants reported increased awareness of ethical issues after the training sessions but found

it difficult to respond to such issues since the structures were not friendly. In alignment with Schuurbiens's (2020) call to consider ethical training as part of systems-level changes, the present insight raises the concern of where ethics training fits into the scheme of institutional transformations.

Whereas previous works explore its promise for enhancing the decision-making architecture (Malhotra et al., 2021), the present study offers data on its low effectiveness in organizations where those are in essence. Several of the participants also pointed out that political influence and organisational policies often compromised on ethical practice (Cvitanovic et al., 2021). This finding supports Bhatt (2022) who called for the need to implement flexible training models suited to public service environments. Thus, the revealed barriers indicate that respective ethics training should be complemented by organisational improvements that would protect administrators who attempt to implement the learned ethical principles at work from becoming targeted by whistleblowers (Kamoonpuri & Sengar, 2023).

This research provides an important contribution by identifying organizational culture as the variable of interest in predicting the effectiveness of ethics training (Lam et al., 2021). Therefore, unlike prior studies that acknowledge the impact of leadership and organisational culture (Al Halbusi et al., 2021) this work presents a qualitative analysis of the effects of cultural enablers and barriers on ethical practice. Study participants in conducive organisational setting propounded better championship of training principles hence supported Fuertes et al. (2020) assertion of requisite organisational leadership bear and ethical emulation.

The study elaborating on the issues including resistance and lack of resources to address them extends Schwartz (2020)'s observation by responding to some of the practical concerns involved in reflecting ethics in practice. Essential lessons learned from the participants include understanding the necessity for maintaining constant and consistent surveillance systems that encourage ethical practice (Chuang, 2021). These identified findings support prior literature that suggests ethics training requires a multi-pronged approach that includes changes in policy, leadership, and consensus assessments (Casali et al., 2021).

As a result of filling the research gap on the analyzed contextual variables of ethics training, this paper presents suggestions for practical improvements in public administration. Training objectives should be supported by ethical organizational cultures, something that Okougbo et al. (2021) recommend. Ethics should be incorporated in leadership development programs to show support for ethical processes at organizational level. Thus, the problem of ethics training should continue extensive case-based, participatory scenarios that naturally mirror real-world ethical problems, according to Bhatt (2022).

## **Conclusion**

This study highlights the critical role of ethics training in enhancing ethical decision-making within public administration, emphasizing its potential to improve ethical awareness, sensitivity, and the practical application of ethical principles. While ethics training equips public administrators with tools to navigate complex moral dilemmas, its effectiveness is deeply influenced by organizational culture, leadership commitment, and the integration of ethical values into everyday practices. The findings underscore the need for supportive environments that encourage ethical discussions, provide ongoing reinforcement of training outcomes, and address challenges such as resistance to change and resource constraints. By bridging the gaps identified in existing literature, this study demonstrates that ethics training can be a transformative tool for fostering integrity and accountability in public institutions, provided it is strategically aligned with organizational priorities and cultural practices. Future

research should explore the long-term impacts of ethics training across diverse contexts to further inform effective implementation strategies.

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