UNDERSTANDING LEADERSHIP STANDARDS AND ETHICAL PRACTICES IN CRIMINAL JUSTICE

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ABSTRACT

Through a review of contemporary criminal justice literature the present study provides a concise analysis of standards expected of good leaders and the ethical practices associated with quality leadership. It notes that like criminal behavior, theories such as biological, learning, and developmental theories have been propounded to understand moral and ethical behavior. One of the findings of the study is that ethical practices on the part of leaders are crucial in any criminal justice organization to ensure the healthy growth of such organization. Furthermore, it is the position of the study that unethical practices can erode the confidence given by the society to the officials of the criminal justice. The study concludes by noting that leadership in every organization, especially criminal justice, should adopt leadership practices that motivate and encourage employees to strive for ethical performance in their duties and functions.

Keywords: Criminal justice, ethical practices, leadership standards, morality

INTRODUCTION

The definition and assessment of leadership has been of interest to social scientists for many decades. The former New York City Mayor, Rudolph Giuliani (2002) utilized leadership slogans, especially by using the phrase, “I’m responsible”, while US military posited that a good leader must be proficient in conceptual skills or knowing how to think. Similar issues have been addressed by Salas, Cannon-Bowers and Weaver (2002) in their work on training Command Teams. These conceptual skills include adaptability, flexibility, and versatility, among others.

Leadership is a valued commodity in all types of organizations, both public and private (Vito & Higgins, 2010). As a result, many criminal justice agencies, including various police departments in the United States have both sought and treasured effective leaders. Police leaders are expected to be competent managers who inspire their followers to do effective work in the pursuit of organizational goals. It is also important to note that a discussion of leadership has become necessary, especially among the criminal justice agencies, because the quality of leadership directly affects the quality of performance of the subordinates (Haberfeld, 2006).
It has been stated that law enforcement leaders have significant influence both within their communities and their organizations (Miller, Watkins & Webb, 2009). Thus, an examination of leadership among criminal justice agencies is necessary. It can be argued that leadership positions require the balancing of basic and conflicting values in competitive and volatile circumstances. The ability of a police leader for example, to survive, and hopefully excel in this environment requires a constant ability to adapt in order to cope with changing pressures, mandates, and focus (Miller, Watkins & Webb). The importance of ethical and quality leadership among criminal justice agencies has been further established by Useem and Piehl (2006) with the argument that in contrast to the predictions of many, the prison build up in the United States did not lead to chaos behind the prison walls due to the fact that political and correctional leadership made prison institutions more effective.

The purpose of the current study is to enhance an understanding of leadership standards and ethical practices among criminal justice agencies such as the police and correctional institutions. The current study may therefore have implications for criminal justice agencies personnel including their leaders, researchers, policy makers and administrators seeking viable research strategies in attempt at improving leadership practices and ethical standards among different criminal justice organizations. Therefore, this study contributes to existing literature by seeking to provide a better understanding of leadership as a viable criteria to improving services delivery among criminal justice agencies.

METHODS

The current paper used an exploratory research design with the intention of providing a good understanding of leadership and ethical practices associated with quality leadership as it pertains to the field of criminal justice. Information was gathered through both traditional and computer-based criminal justice literature; and the analysis of historical and current issues, trends, and insight to the mechanisms of instituting ethical standard in criminal justice agencies across the United States.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Standards of Good Leadership

Discussion of standards of good leadership is important because good leadership provides the frame work to understand whether a leader is performing or not while at the same time it provides an avenue to assess the ethical practices that are expected from those in leadership positions. Krimmel and Lindenmuth (2001) posited that leadership theories can be divided into six frameworks that include: great man theories, which posited that leaders have a natural ability to lead, the environmental theories, which believed that the process of leadership is a function of time, place, and circumstance, and the exchange theories, which defined process of leadership as an exchange of mutual rewards. According Krimmel and Lindenmuth, other leadership theories
constitute the *humanistic theories*, which took into consideration the individual and organization interest, the *interaction-expectation theories*, which argued that a leader’s ability is usually meant to facilitate response from subordinates, and *personal-situational theories*, which placed special emphasis on the individual and the organization.

Scholars have further argued that some of the standards expected from good leaders include the ability to motivate their followers, to transcend self-interest for the sake of organizational goals and values, to raise their need level up from security and safety to self-esteem or autonomy, and to share with the organization a common vision of the importance of the leader’s goals or values for the future of the organization (Villiers, 2003; Vito & Higgins (2010). it is expected that leaders should be able to motivate followers to achieve more than they thought possible, strengthen their commitment to the organization, and induce feelings of trust, admiration, loyalty, and mutual respect.

It is important to note that police executives have been encouraged to routinely recognize that leadership can be exercised at any level in the department. This has influenced Haberfeld (2006) to defined police leadership as the ability to make a split-second decision and take control of a potentially high-voltage situation that evolves on the street. Haberfeld also pointed out that line officers are the true leaders on the streets because they use their leadership skills in daily encounters with the community and police executives. As a result, policy makers need to realize the importance of their leadership role in the community. Similarly, Baker (2006) noted that police managers exercise effective leadership in different ways, depending upon their rank in the department. Baker contend that those in senior leadership positions should spend their time developing and sharing the vision for the organization, charting the journey by establishing strategic objectives, and practicing collaboration and delegation of tasks.

Pollock (2010) identified six standards expected from a good leader based on the standards promulgated by The American Society for Public Administrators in 1979. The first is the need for standards that include responsibility and accountability, which will help the administrators recognize their own strengths and weaknesses as a well as that of their subordinates. From the same perspective, Souryal (2007) states that institutional professionalism is only as good as the ethics and integrity of the managers who claim them. Therefore, it would be contradictory or impossible to expect subordinates to behave ethically, or for leaders to demand integrity from correctional officers when leaders in the prison system and those occupying positions of authority violate state policies with impunity, reveal classified information, and or use inmates for private pursuits (Souryal, 2007).

An important standard is the need for leaders to be dedicated and committed to the philosophies of the organization and to operate within the established laws and codes of behavior expected of them. From this perspective, Souryal (2007, 2009) posited that organization decisions, rules, and policies should be made solely on logical reasoning, while leaders making new rules or policies
should as a matter of importance consider the good of the policies, how the policies can enhance
the organization, and what would be done if the policies were found to be wrong.

Dynamism is an important standard expected of a good leader in criminal justice. Miller,
Watkins and Webb (2009) pointed out that leadership positions require a balance of basic values
in a competitive and volatile environment. Therefore, the ability of every leader to be successful
in the performance of duties and functions requires a regular ability to adapt in order to cope
with changing pressures, mandates, and focus (Rowe, 2006). Closely related to the need for
dynamism is the requirement that a quality leader should be knowledgeable and skillful about his
or her job. The importance of this can be attributed to the fact that without keeping abreast with
the latest technology in their profession, the quality of an individual’s leadership will be doubted.
Leadership can only be relevant when those assigned with leadership roles regularly attend
necessary training and refresher courses to keep them updated (Chapin, Brannen, Singer &

Characteristics of a good leader in criminal justice include flexibility, adaptability, and versatility
(Miller, Watkins & Webb, 2009; Schafer, 2010). In effect, it is important for good leaders to be
versatile in different areas of leadership such as, strategic planning, legal issues, labor relations,
gender issues, media relations, social issues, and law enforcement matters. Leaders with these
qualities will be able to perform leadership role effectively, particularly when providing
guidance to their subordinates (Schafer). Using the social construction theory, Silvestri (2003)
posits that police organizations are the sites at which gender is specified, where the cult of
masculinity common in police organizations is created and maintained, and where female-
oriented approaches to problem solving have historically been ostracized.

**Importance of Ethics in Leadership in Criminal Justice**

For the purpose of this discussion, ethics will be defined as the motivation that is based on ideas
of what is right and wrong. According to Fashornati (2005), ethics are often linked to a branch of
philosophy that seeks to discuss concepts based such as what is good and bad, right or wrong, or
just and virtuous. The foundation of being ethical is on learning the right thing to do when faced
with many possible situations. Pollock (2010) explains that the discussion of ethics is important
when discussing leadership, especially among criminal justice agencies, due to the fact that
leaders and professionals who work in the field are faced with many situations throughout their
day-to-day duties that require them to make choices that can be right or wrong. As criminal
justice agents, their roles and duties revolve around public trust and their power over others,
which can appear arbitrary if not used ethically (Haberfeld, 2006; Souryal, 2009).

The need to ensure that leadership, especially among the criminal justice agencies is grounded in
ethical practice has never been more important than it is now with current issues of corruption,
brutality, racial discrimination, and harassment associated with law enforcement officials in
many communities (Chan & Dixon, 2007). Effective leadership is one of the important factors
associated with the positive reform that took place at New South Wales Police Services in United Kingdom (UK), which stamped out corruption and other vices from the organization and improved their services (Chan & Dixon, 2007). Furthermore, as public servants who have a duty to the society they serve and coupled with the enormous power and authority, leaders should ensure that law enforcement officials exhibit high standards of moral and ethical responsibility (Pollock, 2010).

Ethical practice teaches leaders to understand the line of division between friendship and organizational integrity; the client’s interests and organizational efficiency and goals; and finding the demarcation line between personal interest, feelings, biases, and other professional standards of their job (Pollock, 2010). In this regard, it is expected that every leaders in the law enforcement agencies will be able to avoid unethical behavior in the performance of their duties. This is important taking into consideration the life and death decisions that are associated with the performance of their duties. For example, police officers that work in society and enforce the laws have the power to deprive people of their liberty, the power to investigate, the power of taking part in undercover operations, and issuing tickets. When police officers as agents of the criminal justice system are not subjected to ethical practices arbitrariness could result. This could lead to a misuse of justice and wrongful lawsuit against the government (Chan & Dixon, 2007; Pollock, 2010).

Pollock (2010) asserted that ethical practices are important. For example, prosecutors have the power to decide which case to charge to court, which cases will go to the grand jury, and how to prosecute and decide what types of crime to go after. These decisions expected to be made by prosecutors carry important weight in justifying the need for prosecutors to be subjected to the best ethical practices expected of their job. When a decision is not make with sound ethical practice, the negative impact on the individual and the society at large will be enormous. In the prison system, correction officers also make daily decisions that affect the life, health, and total well-being of the prisoners that they supervise. Pollock (2010) and Souryal (2007) suggest that when the practices of prison officials are not guided by sound ethical practices, the result could lead to law suits, prisoners rioting, and death, which usually leads to an unfavorable response from all stakeholders and the larger society.

**Prevention of Unethical Behavior among Criminal Justice Officials**

It has been argued by scholars that the best place to teach ethical behavior and morality among criminal justice agents is in the training or the academy (Chan & Dixon, 2007; Haberfeld, 2006; Pollock, 2010). According to Pollock, leaders should ensure that the education at the academy enforces the need to adhere to the "book" and not "the street” in their professional dealings (p.173). This has become necessary due to the enormous pressure that they can be subjected to by veterans in the field. Similarly, it is important for leaders to engage their officers in the importance of confronting immoral behavior among their colleagues and not to close their eyes
to any act detrimental to the goals and efficiency of the organization (Chapin, Brannen, Singer & Walker, 2008).

The learning theorists have argued that the best way to change criminal behavior and unethical behavior is to put practices in place that will ensure that such behavior change. This is because as a proponent of the deterrent theory will state, when there is certainty of punishment, the subcultures that give rise to unethical behavior will change. Therefore, it becomes imperative that punishment meant to address unethical behavior such as corruption in the criminal justice field must be certain and swift to discourage unethical behavior and opposition from line personnel (Alemika, 2003; Pollock, 2010).

The most important factor in preventing corruption, brutality, and other unethical behaviors among criminal justice agents is the need for leaders to create an alert and conscientious management group that not only forbade mediocre performance but also shunned corruption and other vices at all levels (Souryal, 2009). It is important to note that if the leaders and managers of prisons, police, or other criminal justice agencies would continue to forbid corruption, they would certainly diminish more of the ongoing unethical behaviors while at the same time reducing conflict between supervisors and subordinates when new policies to curb these unethical behaviors are instituted (Verma, 2008). According to Souryal, promoting such a commitment is both a prerequisite and a consequence of professionalism. Without it, the ideal of an ethical agency would not be possible, thereby making corruption and other vices among criminal justice agencies unavoidable.

CONCLUSION

The present study identified and discussed some of the important standards of good leaders and ethical practices associated with quality leadership. It analyzed the combinations of standards of good leadership and ethical practices that are capable of preventing conflict and curbing unethical practices between supervisors and subordinates when new rules are created.

The argument presented is that leadership in every organization, especially criminal justice, should adopt leadership practices that motivate and encourage employees to strive for ethical performance in their duties and functions. This is importance because it has the capability of ensuring high productivity. Similarly, it has been highlighted that organizations should continuously reevaluate those in leadership positions in order to achieve the goals and objectives of the agency as well as to minimize opposition and conflict between supervisors and subordinates when new rules and policies are establish to curb unethical behavior.

The present study has established the importance of ethical behavior among leadership in criminal justice agencies. For example, despite the usefulness of community policing in ensuring a strong and efficient partnership between the police and the community, this and other intended gains can be easily eroded from one unethical decision by a police officer. Therefore, the need
for effective leaders to guide against such unethical decision has become necessary (Alemika, 2003). Similarly, leadership in every organization must regularly ensure that supervisors and line personnel are aware of the expectations of ethical behavior and integrity expected from them by the organization. This is important if leaders want to set high standards of behavior for themselves and their subordinates. Additionally, it is the position of the present study that it is important for leadership at all levels to train, stress, and enforce organizational rules and policies in order to make sure that all personnel clearly understands the organization policies and guidelines of operation and rules of conduct to avoid conflict between supervisors and line personnel when new rules to prevent unethical behavior are created (Taxman & Gordon, 2009; Verma, 2008). Furthermore, leadership should always address misconduct and unethical behaviors in order to strictly deter future outbursts. Supervisors should be alerted, aware of their responsibilities and encourage their colleagues to immediately report any unethical behavior they see in the work place. Doing this will further strengthen the mechanism of preventing misconduct (Pollock, 2010).

An important practice expected of good leaders is the need to institute ethical education in their organization to eradicate unethical behavior. Furthermore, ethical education is important among all agencies in the criminal justice field because it will ensure that all members of staff are better equipped to avoid ethical violations and give them the chance to go through their career without any civil or criminal liability (Alemika, 2003; Pollock, 2010). This will in turn reduce the possibility of officers losing their jobs due to poor and unethical decision-making. In addition, it should be noted that among the consequences of unethical decisions and ineffective leadership lies the possibility of discrediting staff, lowering morale, and eroding the confidence that the general citizens have for the system.

REFERENCES


