

Life Skills for Ethical and Responsible Administrative Governance

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Abstract

Ethics plays a crucial role in the actions of every administrator and life skill Education. The practicality of conduct is never sufficient in itself; unless a course of action can be adequately explained on ethical grounds, it is not a responsible act. The full meaning of responsibility requires both ethical and practical accountability. This ethical responsibility creates beneficial activities that contribute to the effective functioning and governance of both public and private administrations. The transformative potential of life skills education in fostering responsible and ethical administrative practice which is explored in this paper. By equipping administrators with essential life skills such as critical thinking, empathy, and problem-solving, we can promote more effective and accountable governance. Responsibility, respect, and human values are essential in administration, as they guide decision-making, shape organizational culture, and foster relationships. It mainly discusses the significance of life skills education for administrative practice along with strategies for integrating life skills into administrative training. This paper highlights innovative approaches to integrate life skills into administrative training and discusses the implications for building transformative citizenship in a non-harmonized world.

Keywords: Integrity, Accountability, Responsibility, Transformative citizenship, Ethical Administration, Life skills.

Introduction

Every action of Governance is always carrying moral weight. But how? Ethical Governance does not begin with grand statements or heroic reforms. It must start earlier. In those unseen frameworks we build, in the norms public servants internalize. In fact, it begins in those very small, routine, everyday actions. Every single administrative action of a civil servant takes is an act of building trust. In this sense administrative ethics is the silent foundation of

governance. Without administrative ethics governance becomes mechanical.

In an era marked by administrative complexity, public scrutiny, and ethical crises, governance systems across the world face challenges of corruption, misuse of power, and erosion of public trust. Responsible governance requires more than formal rules and accountability mechanisms; it demands ethically grounded administrators capable of reflective judgment and moral responsibility. Life skills play a crucial role in shaping such administrators by enabling them to internalize ethical values and translate them into everyday administrative conduct.

Through this paper it can explore how life skills contribute to ethical administrative practice and empower responsible governance. It emphasizes that ethical governance is not merely a structural or procedural outcome but a human-centered process dependent on the moral competence of public officials.

As the definition of Administrative ethics is a moral compass of Governance. It is not confined to practice honestly or practicing virtues like integrity. It's more than that, and it is very hard. Administrative ethics refers to the practice of ethical principles in daily work by public officials and institutions. Administrative ethics in public governs how power is exercised, how decisions are made, how trust is won or lost, that is the crux of administrative ethics. Speaker of Administrative ethics Terry L. Copper reminds us that “Ethical Public Administration requires seeing governance not only as technical task, but as a moral endeavor.”¹

Responsible Governance

It refers to a system of administration that is transparent, accountable, participatory, equitable, and responsive to public needs. It emphasizes adherence to ethical norms, rule of law, and public welfare while ensuring effective service delivery. Ethical conduct of administrators is central to responsible governance, as public officials act as custodians of public trust.

Governance failures often arise not due to absence of laws but due to ethical lapses and lack of moral judgment among decision-

¹ Cooper, T.L. (3rd. ed; 1990). *The Responsible Administrator*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, California, p.3

makers. Hence, cultivating ethical sensitivity and responsibility through life skills becomes a governance imperative.

Responsibility is a key concept in developing an ethics for the administrative role. Responsibilities are found in the behaviour of an individual's activities. Responsibility and role are both closely connected. In the discussion of responsibility, the 'Role' of any individual is the major part that each and every step passes through. 'Role' plays much impact to the responsibility. Both the term 'Role' and 'Responsibility' are important for the public service delivery. Any service does not complete without taking responsibility by Individual or administrator or organizer. Gibson Winter observed that: "Responsibility is a relatively new term in the ethical vocabulary, appearing in the nineteenth century with a somewhat ambiguous meaning. The term evaluates action and attributes it to an agent; it does so in lieu of cosmic or natural structures of obligation. The historical awareness of the 19th century, the scientific and technological revolutions, and the fails of metaphysical systems had undermined fixed notions of obligations. The term 'responsibility' was a way of filling this gap by defining the scope of accountability and obligation in contexts of law and common culture."²

As a Personal Duties, we must take responsibility for ourselves before we can fulfill our obligations to society. This entails looking after our emotional and physical well-being, pursuing personal development, and making moral decisions. Being responsible people makes us important members of society because we provide a good example for others to follow. It is crucial to keep in mind that individual well-being is the foundation of society well-being. For the administrator, Responsibility is the high bone of duty and obligations. Terry L. copper mentions in his book '*THE RESPONSIBLE ADMINISTRATOR*' that 'Responsible administrators must be able to account for their conduct to relevant others such as supervisors, elected officials, the courts, and the citizenry, which means being able to act in a ways that are consistent with their inner conviction as professional guardians of the public good.'³ There have been seen two types of approach of Responsibilities; these are objective

² IBID, p.20

³IBID,p.21

accountability for conduct and subjective congruence. Responsible administrator includes both with one's professional values. Ethics is the most basic way to fulfill both types of responsibilities. The Responsible Administrator's ultimate goal is not to impose a specific set of public service principles, but to shed light on the ethical predicament of public administrators and encourage creative thought about it.

Life Skills and Their Ethical Significance

Life skills are psychosocial abilities that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of life. In the context of public administration, life skills acquire ethical significance as they shape attitudes, behavior, and decision-making patterns of administrators.

Key life skills relevant to ethical administrative practice include:

Integrity and Honesty: Integrity is that much good practice when no one is observing but still a person is doing best to his own respective duties. That is pure and perfect towards his job. Integrity is the virtue of consistency that means to behave in accordance with ethical principles; act in good faith, intellectual honesty and fairness. Integrity demands that an individual follows his or her principles even when doing so hard at a real cost. A person of integrity is commonly understood to be one who is morally aware. He takes action that is consistent to personal values on a regular basis even it may be a great personal sacrifice. But there may be raises issues like Ethical blindness, it is call Pluralistic ignorance.

On the other hand *Honesty* is to demonstrate a high level of professionalism and loyalty to the Organization, its mandate and objectives. Professional commitment is the will to remain in a profession and the sense of duty and dedication to it. Another way to describe it is the act of mentally or emotionally committing to an organization's strategy. It is a exceptional skill of discipline like Fulfilling deadlines, Exhibiting leadership abilities, Asking for comments, Learning new abilities, Offering assistance, Exchanging concepts etc. A strong commitment to work can lead to opportunities for employee growth and a love of what you do. High levels of commitment can also increase workplace productivity.

Critical and Ethical Thinking: Evaluating policy choices and administrative actions in terms of justice, fairness, and public interest.

Public Interest is always above self-interest. Here question arises how can we implement ethics in Public administration? By keeping Public interest at the superiority or at the superior junction ethics could be implemented in public administration. An administrator's priority should be to fulfill public interest. He should oppose all forms of discrimination and harassment which is made at out to the public. He should perform his duty honestly, and should never compromise with his duty because of any personal gain or corruption and also over and above performing the duties for the better of the society. He should also respect the constitution and law. Therefore, his duties should be performed within the boundary of law and constitution. Administrator should also protect right to know because public has the right to know about working of the Government. Therefore, it should protect their right to information, and should also involved citizens in the decision making policy. Because ultimately, the decision he is making for the betterment of the citizen only. So it should involve them as well while they are making the decision.

Emotional Intelligence (EI): It is managing emotions, understanding others, and fostering empathetic governance. It very essential know about the ethical decision making. Here question arises how EI impacts on ethical decision making? When we talk about Ethical decision making it's all about decision making is based on moral framework, decision making based on moral values. Every single decision we make is not only about values. There will be an emotional component also. Every time of making any decisions it's not only impacts on me or you, it impacts others. That's where one of the most important emotional skills comes in. That is being Empathetic. Here, Empathy means being sensitive to other emotions, being sensitive to others feelings, appreciating what other going through. That's what empathy is all about.

Accountability and Responsibility: *Accountability* can be defined as being answerable that is being able to give an account. These are of two types – 'Hard or Involuntary Accountability' and 'Self or Voluntary Accountability'. Involuntary accountability refers to the kind of accountability that is imposed as a legal, organizational or societal requirement (Externally Imposed). On the other hand, voluntary accountability is something that the Department engages in on its own terms and of its own volition (Voluntary Disclosure). This presents a more positive, proactive approach to accountability in

which departments' activities manage its reputation by fulfilling its responsibilities towards its various stakeholders.

Communication and Conflict Resolution: Engaging with stakeholders transparently and resolving disputes ethically. A conflict of interest occurs when an individual's personal interests- family, friendship, financial or social factors could compromise his or her judgment decisions or actions in the workplace. As definition, 'Public interest means the welfare of society as a whole. Public interest can be universal, in that it includes all decisions and actions, or particular, in that it is specific with no general significance.'⁴

Interest includes all those influences, emotions and loyalties that could influence a public functionary and compromise the exercise of his or her competent judgment. Conflict of interest involves a clash between influences of this nature and the interests of the public that the functionaries serve. According to Williams, conflict of interest denotes a situation in which an employee has a private financial interest sufficient to influence, or appear to influence, the exercise of his or her public duties and responsibilities. The concept is applicable not only to situations where a conflict of interest actually exists, but also to situations where it appears to exist.⁵

These skills enable administrators to align personal values with institutional ethics.

Life Skills as a Foundation for Ethical Administrative Practice

Ethical administrative practice involves applying moral values in policy formulation, implementation, and public service delivery. Life skills serve as practical tools that help administrators face ethical dilemmas such as conflicts of interest, discretionary decision-making, and pressures from political or economic forces.

For instance, critical thinking enables administrators to question unjust orders, while empathy ensures that policies remain sensitive to marginalized sections of society. Emotional intelligence helps manage stress and power responsibly, preventing authoritarian

⁴ https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007/978-3-031-17299-1_2323

⁵ Mafunisa, Dr. M.J. 'CONFLICT OF INTEREST: ETHICAL DILEMMA IN POLITICS AND ADMINISTRATION', South African Journal of Labour Relations: Winter 2003

tendencies. Thus, life skills transform ethical ideals into lived administrative behavior.

Relevance in Contemporary Public Administration:

Globalization, digital governance, and increasing citizen awareness have intensified ethical expectations from public officials. Modern administrators operate in environments where transparency and accountability are constantly monitored. In such contexts, technical competence alone is insufficient; ethical competence rooted in life skills becomes essential.

Training programs that incorporate life skills and ethical reasoning can enhance professional integrity, reduce corruption, and improve public trust. Ethical governance reforms, therefore, must focus on human capacity-building alongside institutional restructuring.

Strategies for Integrating Life Skills in Governance

To empower responsible governance, life skills should be systematically integrated into administrative systems through:

- Ethics-oriented training and capacity-building programs
- Inclusion of life skills in civil service education and leadership development
- Mentoring and role-modeling ethical behavior within institutions
- Performance appraisal systems that value ethical conduct

Such measures can institutionalize ethical sensitivity and reinforce responsible governance practices.

These life skills are can be practicing by very essential principles. This moral document refers to any administration or governance with the understanding that in spirit and principle, the Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct applies to every individuals who are collaborate with administration, not withstanding their contractual or remuneration status. These principles could be discussed in brief as –

Respect is required for the dignity, worth, equality, diversity and privacy of all persons. In the case of service deliberation, it is important to give respect the dignity, worth equality, diversity, and privacy of all present. Maintain a professional atmosphere that is characterized by positive working relationships and a courtesy and mutual respect atmosphere. All the administration expects to respect

and value difference. And it is also important to practice treat others with courtesy and respect in any public services.

On the other hand Social principle includes Equity, Access, Participation, Transparency, Accountability, Rule of law, Efficiency and effectiveness, Human Rights etc. which may guide an administrator to run a society or state administration. Here, *Transparency* is Openness and clarity in government operations, policies, and decision-making processes builds trust and allows for public scrutiny.

The ethics of authoritative command, as a utilitarian system for J.S Mill "the greatest good for the greatest number".⁶ Good or happiness is term used to indicate a positive ratio of pleasure to pain in Bentham's philosophy, which is where it originates. Be aware that this is an open-ended, imprecise, and substantive view of the good. This naturally leads to a procedural perspective on how it should be accomplished. It is, to use a term, procedural utilitarianism, which holds that following the right procedures will result in the greatest good.

Within the discussion of Public Interest it can be relatable to some classical and contemporary philosophical traditions which are majorly connected to this study of matter. These classical and contemporary philosophical traditions- such as utilitarianism, deontology, virtue ethics, institutionalism, and perfectionism- shape administrative values, decision-making, and public service conduct. Together, these philosophical traditions provide the moral foundations that guide ethical decision-making, shape administrative values, influence policy and institutional design, and balance efficiency with justice and human welfare- showing that public administration is fundamentally a philosophical and ethical enterprise.

(i) *Institutionalism Philosophy*: It seeks to justify existing practices by pointing out that, in conflicting situations, administration chooses an alternative by intuition. In other words, what the administrator actually does is an intuitionist, the solution which seems to him the right course of action under given circumstances. For example, an ethical dilemma or two rights where administrators have to make decisions on the basis of intuition. Institutionalism

⁶ Mill, J.S. (1859). *On liberty*, Yale University Press New Haven and London,p.1

significantly enriches the philosophy of public administration by emphasizing the central role that institutions- formal structures, rules, norms, and cultural practices- play in shaping administrative behavior, governance processes, and policy outcomes.

In its modern form, including new institutionalism, the philosophy broadens to incorporate sociological, political, and normative dimensions of institutions. It stresses that institutions influence not only how decisions are made but also how administrators think, interpret rules, and interact with citizens. This contributes to the philosophy of public administration by showing that administrative action is shaped by deeper cultural values, shared beliefs, historical legacies, and path-dependent processes. Institutionalism also underscores the importance of accountability mechanisms, checks and balances, and organizational culture in promoting ethical and effective governance.

(ii) *Perfectionism*: The administrator views the public interest from the standpoint of promotion of excellence in all spheres of social activity. Public resources should be spent in such a way that the best members of society benefit from the expenditure. It favors excellence at the expense of social quality. In the context of public administration, perfectionism helps frame governance as a process aimed at elevating the well-being, competence, and moral condition of both the administrators and the citizens they serve. It suggests that administrative systems must promote environments where learning, ethical reasoning, and leadership development are ongoing. This makes it relevant for modern public-sector reforms that emphasize capacity-building, professional development, value-based leadership, and high standards of public service. Furthermore, perfectionism underscores that institutions should not merely enforce rules but create conditions that enable individuals to flourish as responsible and capable agents within the state.

From a normative standpoint, perfectionist philosophy enriches public administration by offering a vision of governance that goes beyond minimal compliance. It encourages striving toward ideals- justice, good governance, human dignity, and societal progress- making it a powerful philosophical foundation for ethical, transformative, and developmental public administration. In this way, perfectionism supports the pursuit of a continuously improving, morally grounded, and citizen-centered administrative system.

(iii) *Utilitarianism*: According to utilitarian Philosophy, public interest is when public policymakers are as much better as possible. So the public interest here is just in the augmentation of the net balance of social satisfaction that is Utilitarianism. Utilitarianism contributes significantly to the philosophy of public administration by emphasizing that the primary purpose of governance is to promote the greatest good for the greatest number. Rooted in the ideas of Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, utilitarianism provides a consequentialist ethical framework that evaluates administrative actions based on their outcomes rather than intentions. This approach helps public administration by offering clear criteria for decision-making: policies and administrative actions are considered ethical and justified when they maximize public welfare, minimize harm, and contribute to overall social well-being.

In practical terms, utilitarianism guides administrators to prioritize efficiency, effectiveness, and equity in the delivery of public services. It encourages evidence-based policymaking, cost-benefit analyses, and rational allocation of limited public resources to achieve the most beneficial impact. This aligns administrative practice with measurable social outcomes such as improved health, education, security, and economic opportunity. Utilitarianism also reinforces democratic values by compelling administrators to consider the broader community rather than the interests of a privileged few, thereby supporting fairness and inclusivity in governance.

Philosophically, utilitarianism strengthens public administration by linking ethical responsibility with tangible societal outcomes. It highlights that moral governance is not merely about following rules or cultivating virtues but ensuring that administrative systems genuinely enhance the collective welfare of citizens. This makes utilitarianism a powerful framework for justifying reforms, evaluating policy successes, and designing public programs aimed at maximizing social benefit. Thus, utilitarianism enriches the philosophy of public administration by grounding it in welfare-oriented, outcome-driven, and citizen-centered governance.

(iv) *Deontology*: Deontology, rooted in the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, holds that actions are morally right when they conform to established duties, principles, and rules—regardless of consequences. Applying this approach to public administration highlights the importance of adherence to constitutional values, legal

mandates, and administrative codes of conduct. It underlines that public administrators must act out of a sense of obligation to justice, equality, fairness, and respect for persons rather than pursuing outcomes driven solely by efficiency, convenience, or political pressure. In addition, Deontological approach can be a major part of discussion to implication in the study of Philosophy of Public Administration. In the context of philosophy of public administration, a deontological approach significantly strengthens the theoretical implications by emphasizing duty-based ethics as the foundation of administrative behaviour. Deontological approach is also known as Kantian approach. The foundation of duty based ethics was laid German Philosopher Immanuel Kant. Kant says that ‘Duty for duty’s Sake’, it represents the deontological ethics and the interpretation suggests that certain actions are morally required, irrespective of their effects on human well-being. For example an administrator or any soldier regardless follow order of his senior regardless of his own values.

From an implication standpoint, the deontological lens helps justify why administrative decisions must be grounded in ethical norms such as accountability, transparency, impartiality, and rule of law.

Virtue Ethics

Virtue ethics is an approach emphasizing the centrality of the role of character traits (Virtues) the possession of which is needed for an Individual to be good and live well. Guy Axtell and Philip Olson has mentioned in his article ‘RECENT WORK IN APPLIED VIRTUE ETHICS’ that ‘Virtue ethicist shows the moral importance of cultivating or dispositions such as generosity, courage, humility, friendship, love and honesty along with their associated moral sensitivities.’⁷ Again by mentioning the Farrelly and Solum’s article ‘Virtues Jurisprudence’ discusses about the area of Legal theory and moral philosophy contribute essays that campaign for an Aristotelian alternative to performance-based (Consequentialism) and right-based (deontological) numerative legal theories. Terry L. Copper mentions

⁷ Axtell, Guy and Olson, Philip. *RECENT WORK IN APPLIED VIRTUE ETHICS*, American Philosophical Quarterly, JULY 2012, Vol. 49, No. 3 (JULY 2012), pp. 183-203

in his book that ‘Ethics may be viewed from either or both of two major orientations: deontological and teleological. Deontological approaches to ethics focus on one’s duty to certain ethical principles such as justice, freedom, or veracity without regard for the consequences of one’s actions. Teleological ethics, in contrast, involves a concern for the ends or consequences of one’s conduct. This is the position most notably associated with utilitarianism and its calculus of the greatest good for the greatest number.’⁸

Public Service values are a set of principles that a public service agency should adhere to in discharging duties. In the discussion of values, displaying Integrity of a person must be open and honest in one’s dealings with others to follow rules and regulations guided by public service values. The implementation of enforcing law, public service values and rules of conduct even in difficult situations are the actions of Integrity. Displaying courage and conviction to make and stand by the right decisions even at significant personal cost. Integrity is a primary needy weapon to make good governance.

Conclusion

From an implications standpoint, virtue ethics helps highlight the importance of ethical training, value-based leadership, and the cultivation of civic virtues within administrative institutions. It suggests that reforms in public administration should not only focus on structural or procedural changes but also on nurturing a culture of moral excellence among officials. This approach reinforces the idea that a virtuous administrator is more likely to act fairly, resist corruption, show empathy toward citizens, and maintain good judgment in complex or ambiguous situations where laws or policies may not provide clear guidance. These virtues are crucial for promoting ethical leadership, fostering public trust, and ensuring responsible governance. This virtue, particularly emphasized in Aristotelian philosophy, involves the ability to make sound judgments

⁸ Cooper, T.L. (2000). *Handbook of Administrative Ethics*, MARCEL DEKKER, INC, pp.18-19

in complex situations, aligning actions with a vision of the public good. Ethical behavior in public administration is a vital component of successfully executing government policies. These Ethical dimensions are always the top priority in maintaining a good and healthy relationship between administrators and the public.

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