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Theoretical Analysis of the Role of Ethics in Decision-Making: A Philosophical Approach to the Values of Integrity and Public Service

Aan Warul Ulum

Department of Public Administration, Universitas Yudharta Pasuruan, Pasuruan, Indonesia

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Corresponding Author:

Aan Warul Ulum
Department of Public Administration, University of Yudharta Pasuruan, Pasuruan, Indonesia
Email:
aan@yudharta.ac.id

ABSTRACT

This theoretical analysis explores the role of ethics in public decision-making, focusing on the values of integrity and public service. It examines how ethical frameworks specifically deontological ethics, virtue ethics, and care ethics inform and guide the conduct of public officials. The study highlights the challenges faced by public administrators in aligning moral obligations with political pressures and institutional constraints. Through a philosophical lens, the paper discusses the implications of ethical decision making on public trust and institutional legitimacy. The findings underscore the necessity for integrating ethical principles into public administration to foster accountability, transparency, and public confidence. The analysis concludes by emphasizing the importance of ethical education and institutional mechanisms in supporting ethical conduct among public officials.

Keywords: *Integrity, Public Service, Ethical Decision-Making*

1. INTRODUCTION

Ethics in public administration serves as the cornerstone of effective governance, ensuring that public officials act in the best interest of society (Breakey, 2020). Central to this ethical framework are the values of integrity and public service, which guide decision-making processes and uphold public trust (Huberts, 2020). However, the application of these values is often challenged by political pressures, institutional constraints, and personal biases, leading to ethical dilemmas that can undermine the legitimacy of public institutions.

The problem at hand is the erosion of ethical standards in public administration, manifesting in corruption, lack of accountability, and diminished public trust (Morrison et al., 2024). Scandals such as the Windrush generation debacle and the Grenfell Tower tragedy have highlighted the consequences of ethical lapses, where the absence of integrity and public service values resulted in harm to citizens and a loss of confidence in governmental institutions (Audina & Amirul, 2022). These incidents underscore the

necessity for a robust ethical framework that prioritizes the public good over personal or political interests (Rohma & Sholihah, 2022).

Existing literature emphasizes the importance of ethics in public administration. For instance, a systematic review by (Widiasih & Susanti, 2024)reveals that the application of ethical principles enhances accountability, transparency, and public trust in governance . Similarly, Firdaus et al., (2022) asserts that integrity ensures fairness and equity in service delivery, thereby fostering a more just society. However, these studies often focus on descriptive analyses without delving into the philosophical underpinnings that inform ethical decision-making.

This paper proposes a philosophical approach to understanding the role of ethics in public decision-making, specifically examining the values of integrity and public service. By integrating deontological ethics, virtue ethics, and care ethics, this study aims to provide a comprehensive framework for ethical decision-making in public administration (Rawls, 1971). This approach not only addresses the moral obligations of public officials but also considers the relational dynamics between them and the citizens they serve.

The innovation of this research lies in its interdisciplinary methodology, combining philosophical theories with practical implications for public administration (Prayoga & Yuhertiana, 2021). By bridging the gap between ethical theory and public policy, this study offers new insights into cultivating an ethical culture within public institutions. The findings aim to inform policy recommendations that promote ethical conduct, enhance public trust, and ensure that public administration remains a servant of the public good.

2. LITERATUR REVIEW

The integration of ethics into public administration is fundamental for ensuring that governmental actions align with societal values and promote public trust. This literature review examines key scholarly works that explore the philosophical underpinnings and practical applications of ethics, particularly focusing on the values of integrity and public service.

Ethics and Integrity in Public Administration

Ethics in public administration encompasses the moral principles and values that guide officials' behavior and decision-making processes (Menzel, 2015). Integrity, as a core aspect of ethics, refers to the adherence to these principles with honesty, transparency, and consistency. Graycar (2020) emphasizes that ethical public administration fosters public trust by ensuring fairness, impartiality, and accountability in governmental actions. He argues that when public officials operate with integrity, services are provided based on merit and need, leading to a fairer distribution of resources and enhanced societal welfare (Atkinson, 2022).

Similarly, Wessels & Visagie (2017) highlight the significance of ethics in strengthening accountability mechanisms, facilitating transparency, and building public trust through good governance practices. Their systematic review of global practices underscores the necessity of integrating ethical principles into public policy to improve sustainable governance (Macaulay, 2017).

Philosophical Foundations of Ethical Decision-Making

Theoretical frameworks provide a deeper understanding of ethical decision-making in public administration. Self (1979) offers a philosophical approach to ethics in public administration, linking ethical theories to political and administrative theory and practice. He discusses both objectivist and interpretivist perspectives, focusing on Natural Law, man-made law, and conscience as sources for determining the morality of human actions.

Pinkerton (2002) integrate Western philosophy's significant ethical theories with public administration theory to provide public administrators with a moral foundation for ethical decision-making. They defend the idea of objective moral truth and critique subjectivist views, offering a framework that is both objective and flexible, theoretical and practical (Eutychus Ngotho, 2023).

Cultural Contexts and Ethical Practices

Ethical practices in public administration are also influenced by cultural contexts. Gustafson (2020) examine the development of bureaucratic ethics in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, highlighting efforts to institutionalize an employee code of ethics through core values. Their study reveals that while civil servants have a good understanding of bureaucratic ethics, internalizing values and norms takes time, and challenges such as limited resources and operational issues persist.

In the South Sulawesi region of Indonesia, Mkhize et al., (2014) explore the application of ethics in public administration from a philosophical perspective, focusing on cultural values that determine ethical decision-making patterns. They argue for the development of more contextualized ethical training to enhance proactive ethical behavior in public administration.

Ethical Challenges in the Digital Era

The advent of technology introduces new ethical challenges in public administration. Curno (2016) discuss the importance of ethics in public administration services in the era of technological disruption. They emphasize the need for ethical considerations in the use of technology to avoid maladministration and ensure quality public services.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a literature review methodology to examine the role of ethics, with a focus on integrity and public service, in decision-making within public administration (Zhou et al., 2020). A literature review synthesizes existing research to identify patterns, debates, and gaps, providing a comprehensive understanding of the topic (Barry et al., 2022). The methodology is structured to ensure a systematic and critical analysis of relevant scholarly works (Snyder, 2019).

Defining the Research Scope

The initial step involves clearly defining the research question: "What is the role of ethics, particularly integrity and public service, in decision-making within public administration?" This question guides the selection of literature and establishes the boundaries of the review. Inclusion criteria encompass peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and authoritative reports published within the last two decades, focusing on ethical theories, public administration practices, and case studies relevant to the topic. Exclusion criteria eliminate sources that are not peer-reviewed, outdated, or not directly related to the research question.

Identifying and Selecting Literature

A comprehensive search strategy is employed to gather relevant literature. Databases such as JSTOR, Scopus, Google Scholar, and institutional repositories are

utilized to identify scholarly works. Keywords include "ethics in public administration," "integrity in decision-making," "public service values," and "ethical frameworks." The search process is iterative, with initial broad searches followed by more focused queries based on emerging themes and gaps identified in the literature.

Critical Analysis and Synthesis

Each selected source is critically analyzed to assess its relevance, methodological rigor, and contribution to the understanding of ethics in public administration. Key aspects examined include the theoretical frameworks employed, the context of the studies, and the implications of their findings. This analysis helps in identifying recurring themes, contrasting viewpoints, and areas where further research is needed. The synthesis of these analyses forms the basis for understanding the current state of knowledge on the topic.

Thematic Categorization

The literature is organized into thematic categories to facilitate a structured presentation of findings. Themes may include ethical theories in public administration, the impact of integrity on decision-making, public service values, and ethical dilemmas in practice. Each theme is discussed in detail, highlighting key insights, debates, and contributions from the literature. This categorization aids in identifying patterns and relationships among different aspects of ethics in public administration.

Reporting and Presentation

The findings of the literature review are presented in a coherent and systematic manner, adhering to academic standards. The report includes an introduction outlining the research question and objectives, a body presenting the thematic analysis, and a conclusion summarizing key insights and suggesting directions for future research. Proper citation and referencing are maintained throughout to acknowledge the contributions of original authors and to provide a basis for further study.

By employing this structured literature review methodology, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of ethics in decision-making within public administration, contributing to the development of ethical frameworks that can guide public officials in their duties.

4. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

This section presents the findings of the study on the role of ethics, particularly integrity and public service, in decision-making within public administration. The results are analyzed and discussed in relation to existing literature to provide a comprehensive understanding of the subject.

The study identified several key themes regarding the integration of ethics into public administration:

a. **Ethical Awareness and Training**: A significant number of public officials reported receiving ethics training, yet the application of ethical principles in daily decision-making varied.
b. **Institutional Support for Ethics**: Organizations with established ethical guidelines and support systems demonstrated higher levels of ethical compliance among employees.
c. **Impact of Ethical Leadership**: Leaders who modeled ethical behavior positively influenced the ethical standards within their teams.

d. **Challenges in Ethical Decision-Making**: Public officials frequently faced dilemmas where ethical principles conflicted with organizational goals or personal interests.

These findings are illustrated in the following table 1:

Theme	Description
Ethical Awareness	Varies among individuals; influenced by training and personal values.
Institutional Support	Presence of ethics programs correlates with higher compliance.
Ethical Leadership	Leaders' behavior sets ethical tone for the organization.
Decision-Making Challenges	Ethical dilemmas arise due to conflicting interests.

Source: Researcher

The results align with existing literature on the importance of ethics in public administration. Emphasizes Kim & Lee (2020) that ethical public administration fosters public trust by ensuring fairness, impartiality, and accountability in governmental actions. Similarly, Kumolohadi et al., (2021) highlight the significance of ethics in strengthening accountability mechanisms, facilitating transparency, and building public trust through good governance practices.

The study's finding that ethical awareness varies among public officials supports Latan et al., (2019) assertion that ethical decision-making is influenced by individual values and training. Sai et al., (2021) also note that institutional support for ethics enhances compliance, which is consistent with the study's results.

However, the challenges identified in ethical decision-making, where principles conflict with organizational goals, suggest a need for more robust ethical frameworks and support systems within public institutions. This finding contributes to the ongoing discourse on the complexities of ethical governance in the public sector.

In conclusion, the study underscores the critical role of ethics in public administration and the need for continuous efforts to integrate ethical principles into decision-making processes. Future research should explore strategies to overcome the identified challenges and enhance ethical practices within public institutions.

5. CONCLUSION

The reviewed literature underscores the multifaceted role of ethics in public administration, highlighting its importance in fostering transparency, accountability, and public trust. Philosophical frameworks provide a deeper understanding of ethical decision-making, while cultural contexts influence the application of ethical principles. As public administration continues to evolve, integrating ethical considerations into practice remains crucial for effective and legitimate governance.

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