

## Work and leadership ethics in selected hotels in Owerri, Imo state, Nigeria

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### Abstract

The study investigated the work ethics that pose great challenge to hotel managers today and the evaluation of leadership ethics and principles within which future hotel managers must function. This survey study was conducted in the metropolitan city of Owerri, the capital of Imo State Nigeria. Twelve hotels were randomly selected for the study. A total sample of 120 were purposively drawn from among the management staff of the selected hotels to whom copies of the questionnaire were administered to each and interview conducted on. A five point likert rating scale and a bench mark of 4.0 mean ( ) score were used on a 15 point scale of leadership ethics. The study disclosed that the work ethics that pose great challenge to hotel managers today in the city to be lack of commitment to work among the young staff, theft, mistreatment of others, lateness, shifting of blame to others and poor motivation. The study also revealed that managers of those hotels hardly engage hotel employees into frequent conversation about ethics and organizational values. Managers should proactively adopt creative and integrated approaches to address those problems posing great challenge to them as well as engaging employees in discussions about ethics and organizational values. Hotel managers should always lead by examples by doing the right thing for others to follow.

**Keywords:** Work ethic, Leadership ethics, hotel managers, hotel employees, Owerri, Imo State.

### 1. Introduction

Ethics are principles or rules that control the behavior of people in an environment. Business ethic is a behavior that all business stick to. Ethic in the business community is a code of word for a set of rules of correct conduct in the sense of things one must do in order to avoid trouble with the law or with one's associates (Ibekwe and Inyanga, 2001) [3]. Ethics refer to the desirable and appropriate values and morals according to an individual or the society at large (Reynolds, 2009) [4]. According to Ciulla (2003) [2]. Ethics refers to what we should do and what we should be like as human beings as members of a group or society, and in the different roles that we play in life.

For better understanding of the concept, it is necessary to borrow the words of Apostle Paul in his letter to the Philippians chapter four verse eight, "Finally brothers whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, if anything is excellent, or praiseworthy, think about such things" (New International Version Bible). In other words, ethic is a philosophical thinking about morality, moral problems and moral judgment. The terms 'ethical' and 'moral' are often used as equivalent to 'right' or 'good' and as opposed to immoral and unethical (Frankene, 1993) [5].

Work ethic is a value that defines work as an important virtuous and a source of dignity. Work is inherently good and people should work even if their financial situation does not require it (Miner, 1988) [6]. Work ethic has its central theme that the individual moral duty is to be industrious continuously; to earn his salt; and the harder one work, the more moral he is supposed to be. In other words hard work is the means of demonstrating worthiness in terms of self-discipline, rejection of worldly pleasures and righteous success. Work ethics is a collection of values and behaviours which people feel are moral appropriate for the work place. Some these values and behaviours are

attitude, attendance, teamwork, organizational skills, appearance, productivity, initiative, honesty and respect (OPERON, 2015) [12]. Work ethic links job with sense of responsibility and respectable adulthood. It involves self-discipline with an organization a time schedule for activities and the necessity to demonstrate particular competences (Elmer, 1978 [14]. in Igbojekwe, 2001) [7].

On the other hand, leadership ethics are a set of moral beliefs and principles that are related to leadership ([www.wisegeek.com/what-are-leadership-ethics.html](http://www.wisegeek.com/what-are-leadership-ethics.html)) (Accessed on 05/05/2013) [8]. Ethics of leadership expect leaders to be honest, open, and truthful to their followers. When leaders are found to have lied, trust goes out of the window. Trust is an essential leadership ethic. Leadership ethics refer to fair management practices powered by strong principles. Ethical leaders set a reasonable yet high standards for their followers to which they also adhere ([www.wisegeek.com/what-are-leadership-ethics.html](http://www.wisegeek.com/what-are-leadership-ethics.html)) (Accessed on 05/05/2013) [8]. Ethical leadership covers character/integrity, altruism, collective motivation and encouragement (Resick, Hanges, Dickson, and Mitchelson (2006) [13]. in Brown Trevino (2006) [1]. Teamwork, dedication and dependability are some common leadership ethics that tend to be much appreciated by followers. Leading by example is absolutely necessary to promote a teamwork environment of ethics. Ethics and leadership effectiveness go hand in hand. A leader who is not concerned with the people who work for him or her will not be effective. Discriminating against an employee due to his or her colour, gender, sexual orientation, age or other personal factor is not only illegal but unethical. Unethical leadership occurs when managers act out of personal sense of morals or on emotions such as jealousy or anger rather than what is best for the company. An ethical leader is not perfect but he or she is team oriented and embraces fair

work-place policy ethics (www.wisegeek.com/what-are-leadership-ethics.html) (Accessed on 05/05/2013) [8].

Today ethics in business have become a fundamental issue in every business. It is worthy of note that the success of every business enterprise is a function of ethics adopted and practiced in it by the business owners, management and staff of a given business establishment. Managing ethics has been a serious challenge for hospitality managers.

Uncertain times are now on the increase due to unethical behaviour. Unethical issues common in hospitality establishments include negligence towards staff welfare; ethnic and gender conflict, quarreling among employees; lack of commitment to work by employees, employees not adequately rewarded or motivated; pilferage, lateness, etc. These are among the numerous issues on ethics that militate the progress productivity and fortunes of hospitality establishments. The purpose of the study is to;

Identify the work related ethical issues that are of serious concern to hotel managers  
 Assess hotel's leadership ethics.

## 2. Methodology

This was a survey study conducted in the metropolitan city of Owerri, the capital of Imo State. The approach was used to determine the work-related ethical issues that are of serious concern to hotel managers as well as assessing leadership ethics in hotels.

A total samples of 120 were purposively drawn from among the management staff of the selected hotels operating in Owerri metropolis on the basis of the quality of management staff and standard of operation. Twelve hotels were randomly selected for the study, both questionnaire and interview schedule were employed to collect data from all the respondents.

The 12 principles suggested by Joseph institute in Ethics (JIE, 2013) [9]. Were used to assess hotel's leadership ethics within which future manager must function. The researcher incorporated the last three additional principles found to be essential for the study. This brought the whole to a total of 15 principles applied by the researcher in the study to assess the hotel's leadership ethics.

The assessment was accomplished using five point likert rating scale. The rating ranges were: excellent (5); Good (4) Fairly good (3); Poor (2) and Very poor (1). A bench mark of 4.0 mean ( ) score was used for accepting a particular opinion as significant. Hence, any response with a mean ( ) score below 4.0 was rejected while any response with a mean ( ) score of 4.0 and above was considered as significant and accepted for that reason. Also, simple percentages were used to analyze data collected on the work-related ethical issues that are of serious concern to hotel managers.

## 3. Results and discussion

**3.1 Question (1):** The respondents were asked to identify work-related ethical issues that are of major concern to them in their establishment.

The respondents identified a number of work-related ethical issues that are of serious concern in their establishments. The issue have been listed according to priority of concern as; lack of commitment to work, theft, mistreating others, lateness, shifting blame to others and poor motivation. The results as revealed by the study were grouped and presented in table 1 as the percentage of total number of respondents to the topic.

**Table 1:** Ethical issues of Greatest Concern

| Ethical issues             | Percentage |
|----------------------------|------------|
| Lack of commitment to work | 78         |
| Theft                      | 71         |
| Mistreating others         | 55         |
| Lateness                   | 50         |
| Shifting blame to others   | 47         |
| Poor motivation            | 22         |

**Source:** Field survey, 2013.

The first in the list was lack of commitment to work. Managers reported that hotel employees, particularly young ones exhibit non-challant attitude to their work. They appear to be unwilling to work hard and give their time and energy to their job. It is common to find a staff on duty to be playing games, browsing or making unimportant calls with their cell phones instead of paying maximum attention to duty. The use of cell phones has become a serious distraction to young hotel workers. According to their managers, many of the young staff do not take job as a career. This agrees with the report of Stevens (2009) [10]. That young people saw their job not as a career or responsibility but only as a means to purchase a desired object.

The second in the list of the work-related ethical problem that is posing a great challenge to hotel managers was thefts. This ranges from stealing small items like soap, tissue paper, cutlery and condiments for cooking by taking them home. Others include stealing of money by not accounting properly the proceeds from sales as well as consuming hotel food and beverage secretly without permission.

Mistreating others was the third ethical work problem mentioned by hotel managers. Hotel managers complained that hotel employees mistreat others by spreading malicious gossip about fellow workers, being hostile and rude to them. Hotel workers lack respect for each other. Other anomalous behaviors amongst the workers include quarreling, jest-making, abusing by using derogatory language against others and scolding.

The next in the list of work-related ethical problem was lateness. Time clock abuse has become a common tradition among employees. A hotel staff who comes to work between 25 minutes to 35 minutes after the appointment time is not considered to be late. An employee who fails to arrive on time to work without perceiving as being late will always find it difficult to change the habit. This agrees with Stephens (2009) [10]. Who said that not arriving to work on time appears to be a cultural problem that can be solved by communicating expectations clearly?

Poor motivation of workers was another ethical problem identified by hotel managers. There is high rate of labour turn over in hotel industry. Managers complained that most hotel workers do not see their job as a path to a better future and so do not put enough effort into their work because they were poorly motivated.

**3.2 Question (2):** Do you discuss ethics with employees? In response to that, the study revealed that most managers do not engage hotel staff into frequent conversations about ethics and organizational values. Employees have just few discussions with their managers about ethical standards (Stephens, 2009) [10].

In the assessment of leadership ethics, the researcher adapted the 12 principles given by Josephson Institute in Ethics (JIE, 2013) [9]. As a standard of measure or criteria for evaluation of

rules of behavior with which future hotel managers must function. Though the researcher included three (3) more principles to make it a total of 15 point factors for which the hotel managers were made to use for this assessment.

The study revealed as presented in table 2 that out of 15 principles used as factor indicators ten met the bench mark of 4.0 and above and therefore were accepted while five of them were rejected because they did not meet the bench mark of 4.0. The results indicated that the hotels have ethics of leadership for which leaders are expected to act in the best interests of their followers. The managers realized that they represent a company's core values and serve as role models to others. The factor indicators that met the bench mark of 4.0 included accountability, fairness, honesty, integrity, law abiding, leadership, promise keeping, reputation and consistency. Leaders are first expected to act consistently with their own vision and the value they claim to espouse. Business leaders who act contrary to the values they expected in others are met with cynicism and obstruction (Reynolds, 2009) [4]. The ethics of leadership also expect leaders to be honest, open, and truthful to their followers. When leaders are found to have lied, trust goes out of the windows.

Trust is also essential leadership ethic (Management Studyguide.com/leadership-ethics.html) (Accessed on 06/05/13)<sup>11</sup>. However, the five principles which were rejected for not meeting expectation or bench mark of 4.0 have been shown in table 2 in the areas of teamwork, self-discipline, respect for others, loyalty and concern for others.

**Table 2:** Assessment of Hotel's leadership ethics or principles for future hospitality managers

| S/no | Ethical principles of leadership | Total scores | Mean (scores) |        |
|------|----------------------------------|--------------|---------------|--------|
| 1    | Accountability                   | 494          | 4.12          | Accept |
| 2    | Commitment to excellence         | 511          | 4.26          | Accept |
| 3    | Concern for others               | 359          | 2.99          | Reject |
| 4    | Fairness                         | 523          | 4.36          | Accept |
| 5    | Honesty                          | 580          | 4.83          | Accept |
| 6    | Integrity                        | 545          | 4.54          | Accept |
| 7    | Law abiding                      | 491          | 4.09          | Accept |
| 8    | Leadership                       | 572          | 4.77          | Accept |
| 9    | Loyalty                          | 400          | 3.33          | Reject |
| 10   | Promise keeping                  | 426          | 4.38          | Accept |
| 11   | Reputation                       | 492          | 4.10          | Accept |
| 12   | Respect for others               | 408          | 3.40          | Reject |
| 13   | Consistency                      | 493          | 4.11          | Accept |
| 14   | Self-discipline                  | 366          | 3.05          | Reject |
| 15   | Teamwork                         | 462          | 3.85          | Reject |

**Source:** Field survey, 2013. 60.18 Ground mean Bench mark = 4.0  
Scores ≥ 4.0 = Accepted as significant having met the requirement.

#### 4. Conclusion and recommendation

The work ethics that give managers of hotels operating in the city of Owerri the greatest concern today have been revealed by the study as lack of commitment to work especially among the young ones; theft mistreatment of others, lateness, shifting blame to others and poor motivation. The study equally revealed that most managers hardly engage hotel staff into frequent conversations about ethics and organizational values. Finally, in the 15 point scale of leadership ethics or principles used in the study to assess the behavior within which a future hospitality manager must function, the study has shown that hotels in the city met all the requirements except in teamwork,

self-discipline, respect for others, loyalty and concern for others.

The work ethics as mentioned by the hospitality managers have not just posed a great challenge but have also become a plague to them. Therefore, the managers should proactively adopt creative and integrated approaches to address the problems. Managers should endeavour to engage hotel staff in frequent conversations about ethical standards. For instance, employees should be made known to why gossip or thefts hurts everyone, and what it means to be a staff member in the organization. This will not only make the employees to have sense of the company's ethical values but they will also have sense of belonging with organization. Hotel managers should always lead by examples or set the pace for others to follow by doing the right thing since they represent the company's core values and serve as role models to others.

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