

*Original Research Article*

# Ethical Practices of Registrars for an Enhanced Code of Conduct

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Abstract

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**Ethical conduct is an important ingredient in the leadership facet of any educational institution. Since schools are considered social systems, the need for a humanistic approach in administrations is highly expected alongside. Registrars, as educational leaders, should take an active role in such undertaking. This exploratory research aimed to elicit best practices and insights to enhance an existing code of conduct for registrars. Three experienced local and foreign registrars were purposefully selected and asked to reflect on their experiences and highlight important aspects affecting ethical practice. Values such as honesty, integrity, teamwork, discipline and mutual respect emerged as important standards that have guided their administrative careers. These virtues are essential in the daily transactions of their respective department. Subsequently, role modeling also emerged as an important feature. By leading the way, registrars can positively influence the workplace and the academic community. Findings of the study led to the development of an enhanced code of conduct for registrars and can be used as benchmark material for other professions as well.**

**Keywords:** Administrative ethics, Educational administration, Ethical leadership

## INTRODUCTION

Service efficiency and effectiveness is apparently emphasized at every level of contemporary leadership in any organization. This allows organizations to keep up with the demands of the market they are servicing. Hence, improving staff and organizational performances is an important undertaking for all leaders (Mousakhani et al., 2012). To successfully execute these challenges, key reforms in the values of leaders have to be considered. Walumbawa (2011) has affirmed that ethical leadership is a key ingredient in the improving staff performance. Staff performance is enhanced and improved when leaders incorporate the values of honesty, determination,

flexibility, truthfulness, trustworthiness, intellectuality and audacity and responsibility (Guillen and Gonzalez, 2001).

The school, as a social system, highlights the need for humanistic approach in administration (Bursalioglu, 1994). For school leaders to make a valid and acceptable decision, they are bound to expectations and worldview of their subordinates, as well as their leadership value systems (Pehlivan, 1998). This can have a significantly positive impact to instructional quality (Easley, 2008), enhance employee efficacy (Bass, 1985) and change organizational norms, values and attitudes (Conger, 1999; Kanungo, 2001). Furthermore, educational

administrators need to exhibit ethical behaviors because they are expected to formulate sound policies and objectives (Barnard, 1938), engage in organizational planning (Page and Tornow, 1987), and provide the organization's strategic vision (Smidt, 1998).

There are various accounts of unethical behavior in higher education institutions. These unethical behaviors may originate from students and institutional members. Rampant violations of the code of ethics within an education institution posit questions on the integrity and legitimacy of the higher education system. Corollary to this is the need for a reform. Several challenges face the movements towards reforming the ethical behavior of people in the education institution. More so, it is doubly hard to improve the ethical standard if the education structure itself needs ethical repair.

In his study entitled, *Ethical Leadership in Higher Education: Evolution of Institutional Ethics Logic*, Hanson (2009) explored how the interaction of member work-related ethical beliefs and knowledge, perceived pressures, and other institutional entities, influenced the evolution of institutional ethics logic over time. They will be influenced and enable a holistic approach to ethics reform. It examined the realities of the faculty population of a religiously affiliated university. It explored the types and collective strength of ethics logic entities, and their dynamics set within a leadership complexity network. In this study, a conclusion that ethics logic held in different context agent-by-agent enables leaders to shift was derived. The changes to structure either by adding or removing nodes such as people, things, links or relationships create immediate change of nodal values such as centrality, between-ness, etc. This could tighten network robustness, or fracture faculty from a single aggregate into multiple clusters and isolated members. Furthermore, the diffusion of knowledge and beliefs changes with the removal of influential enabling leaders, creating drops in the speed and capacity with which beliefs and knowledge are shared among members. Finally, the change to ethics logic holds serious implications to the changes in ethics logic dynamical processes.

It is presumed that ethics in the education institution should emanate from all the members especially from the leaders down to the instructors before one expects students to embody these principles. However, it is distressing to note that there are members of education institutions that do not adhere to the ethical standards. Amsale et al. (2016) revealed in his study on ethical behaviors of educational leaders participated by instructors, department heads, college deans, academic quality assurance officers, ethical officers, vice president and president that leaders in the sample universities practiced ethical leadership moderately. These leaders even failed to demonstrate ethical leadership practices at expected level. They have been found to demonstrate

low multicultural competence, altruism, and modeling ethical behavior. In fact, most teachers in public universities considered their leaders to be unethical and unfair in their dealing with the former.

Hence, it could be posited that the educational leaders in public universities failed to meet the standards and expectations of ethical leadership. It is recommended therefore that the academic leaders in the public universities need to be provided with leadership development opportunities. Moreover, public universities can establish leadership development programs that enable leaders to continually update themselves and practice ethical leadership at the expected level.

In line with this development programs for leaders is the need to include ethics as component of leadership education curricula. This is attested by Bowen et al. (2006) in their study, *Including Ethics in the Study of Educational Leadership* where they enumerated reasons why ethics should be included in leadership preparation and gave suggestions why ethics should be infused in leadership education classes. Instructors of these courses must make the conscious decision to include ethics as part of the course content. Having no initiative to do this, the vision for ethics as an intentional component in any course can be significantly compromised.

All educators and non-academic personnel in every institution are required to operate under a code of ethics which is intended to guide their professional conduct in the field. Schools are perceived to be ethical organizations that embody ethical principles and guide each student to be a person of integrity. It is therefore a fundamental part of self-evaluation process to ensure that these ethical principles are ingrained in the education system of the institution.

Adherence to moral standards in educational institutions is a required commitment for every member of the academe. Specifically, the school registrars also are expected to apply a set of ethical norms in the conduct of their function and serve morally to the best of their ability.

The aforementioned studies highlighted the importance of ethical practice among school administrators, in general and shed light on ethics in a more structural level. However, an in-depth, reflective and perceptive chronicle about the administrative practices, core values, ethical orientation and decision making are not adequate to help school registrars operationalize the tenets of good ethical practice. Thus this, research aimed to:

1. Explore the insights of experienced registrars in the management of their departments.
2. Develop a benchmark material that will disseminate best practice in the ethical administration of the registrar's department.

3. Help formulate and promulgate a more effective and evidence-based code of conduct for the said school administrators.

## METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a non-experimental, exploratory research design that explored the professional core values, ethical orientation, decision-making process and innovativeness of the three registrars from three purposively-selected higher education institutions: a regulated health professions institute in Sta. Cruz, Manila, and an autonomous university in Ermita, Manila.

The interview questions were derived from previous relevant ethics studies conducted among executive of other industries. These benchmarked questions were designed to obtain rich and meaningful insight from experienced registrars in the management of their department.

Upon identification of the respondents, an invitation to join the study was given. The registrars were given the option to answer the questions via e-mail or through a structured interview. The interview process was conducted at their convenience. Data collection started on August 1, 2017 and ended on September 16, 2017. Recurring themes were identified and supported by an aggregate of narratives. Consent was obtained from the participants and codenames were assigned in the process of data encoding and presentation. Data were kept confidential.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### *Profile of the Participants*

The chosen co-researchers were experienced registrars in their respective educational institutions. Their insights served as the fundamental inputs which answered the research questions that became essential to the formulation of the enhanced code of conduct for registrars. The investigators collected individual descriptions of each informant relevant to this study. Anonymity was observed thru converting their personal identifiers (i.e. names) into code names to protect and preserve the privacy of the participants.

### *Resource Person 1*

The first resource person is a former registrar of a health professions institute in Sta. Cruz, Manila. She served her function as the head of the Registrar Department for ten years. Her solid experience in managing student records paved way for her to become the school directress of an

educational institute. Currently, she is now a member of the Senior High school faculty in a public secondary school.

### *Resource Person 2*

The second resource person is a registrar of an autonomous university in Ermita, Manila. She has been part of this educational institution for almost 30 years. Her combined experience in the academe and in handling of academic records became a springboard for her to become the head of the Registrar Department. Through her leadership, the Registrar Department of the university has set a good example in terms of productivity and integrity.

### *Resource Person 3*

The third resource person is a registrar of a Chinese university specializing in teacher education. She has been in the registrar leadership position for almost 20 years. Her passion and dedication serves as a guiding principle in her function as a department head.

### *On Leadership Core Values as Registrar*

Thematic analysis of the responses of the resource persons revealed that the main guiding principles in the management of the registrar department are *honesty*, *integrity* and *teamwork*. They verbalized that honesty and integrity in the office helped in delivering quality and credible services to internal and external customers. Further, *discipline*, *mutual respect* and *role modeling* also emerged as essential ingredients for a successful department leadership. They also affirmed that a culture of professionalism and respect is fundamentals in implementing administrative policies and practices and that these values help to improve group cohesion.

### **Honesty**

Resource Persons 1 and 2 stressed the importance of honesty and integrity in their workplace. These values are important to have effective and efficient operations. Specifically, Resource Person 1 stated that the virtue of honesty affected the image of her department and of the school:

*“A forgery case concerning an undergraduate (who didn’t pass the AHSE curriculum) who presented or submitted forged school credentials in relation to her application for immigration to Canada as a caregiver. The Embassy of*

*Canada had to verify the authenticity of the documents and I/we had to be very careful in giving the correct and complete information. It was quite difficult because it would not only affect the integrity of the student and the school, but the whole nursing industry or health care industry of the Philippines as well."*

Resource Person 2 also verbalized indirectly the importance of honesty in managing and issuing student records:

*"The transition of our management had left some formal documents that were not signed by the previous registrar. This caused repetition and duplication of work on our part because we have to make another copy of it and have it signed by the present registrar. Of course, we also have to monitor that these unsigned documents were disposed properly, to avoid confusion and misrepresentation."*

### **Integrity**

All Resource Persons underscored the significance of maintaining the veracity and accuracy of the student records and the right attitude in the workplace. Resource Person 1 declares:

*"The primary ethical principle that I religiously apply is the "Maintenance of the INTEGRITY of the Registrar Department – both the staff and the school/student records that we keep and issue. It is imperative to say that a department's integrity would reflect how efficient and effective a department could have become. If each employee carries within him a spark of integrity, it would help the whole department deliver the most credible and quality output."*

Resource Person 2 also underlined the importance of maintaining integrity in student records. She suggests:

*"To improve the quality of our services and to better protect the integrity of our documents, I recommend that student records be scanned and digitized. Backups of these digitized records should be made to ensure that copies are available whenever there is a breach in these papers."*

The administrative experience of Resource Person 3 is attested by the way she administers and delivers truthful service to her constituents. She recounts:

*"Firstly, registrars need to set a good example. By strict self-discipline, we influence and convince our staff authentically in the conduct of their duties. Secondly, a*

*sense of responsibility and having the courage to take responsibility guides me in executing my leadership roles as a registrar. As a leader, we must bear the corresponding responsibility, understand the responsibility and courage to bear it."*

### **Teamwork**

All resource persons acknowledged that a group working in harmony is important because it keeps the process intact. This core value can be promoted in a number of ways including distribution of professional development opportunities to the team. As a registrar, Resource Person 1 says:

*"Registrar staff should be given an opportunity to attend conventions, further studies, and other trainings that would help them innovate new ideas and prevent them from being stagnant in their work."*

Also, Resource Person 2 relates:

*"The ethical principle that guided me in the administration of the Registrar Department here in this university is conducting our work in the spirit of respect for everyone. We believe that when respect is aired into our duties, every transaction in our group will be efficient and that the professional growth and development of each member will be considered."*

This is also highlighted by Resource Person 3:

*"One is through correct style of study, and to constantly improve the quality of capacity. Learning is an important way to improve the quality of the ability, but also the basis for doing a good job."*

*Second, democracy and unity, to maintain harmony. Democracy and unity are inseparable, and only good at unity, good at cooperation, in order to mobilize a positive factor, and thus make a difference."*

### **Discipline**

Though it only came from one Resource Person, the virtue of discipline is worth including in this analysis. The importance of promoting discipline, according to Resource Person 3 would result into better working conditions and output. She says:

*"Registrars need to set a good example. By strict self-discipline, we influence and convince our staff authentically in the conduct of their duties."*

## Mutual Respect

Even if this virtue was mentioned only by Resource Person 2, mutual respect is worth mentioning and including in the list. She articulates:

*"We believe that when respect is aired into our duties, every transaction in our group will be efficient and that the professional growth and development of each member will be considered."*

## Role Modeling

Leaders are expected to uphold high ethical and moral values and are expected to be role models to their constituents. Thus, they should display appropriate behavior worthy of emulation by giving rewards for commendable acts and discipline or sanction for unbecoming ones. This is underscored in the statement of Resource Person 1:

*"Core values are better inculcated by serving as role model to staff."*

Also, the aforementioned is emphasized by Resource Person 3, saying:

*"Firstly, registrars need to set a good example. By strict self-discipline, we influence and convince our staff authentically in the conduct of their duties. Secondly, a sense of responsibility and having the courage to take responsibility guides me in executing my leadership roles as a registrar. As a leader, we must bear the corresponding responsibility; understand the responsibility and courage to bear it."*

## On Registrar's Ethical Orientation

All resource persons identified their ethical orientation with deontologism. Though their statements did not directly pertain to such ethical orientation, it could be implied through their responses that they adhere to their duties as leader of the team/department and exude and ensure that educational records are handled with quality and integrity. This corresponds to being faithful to their duties as educational administrators. These resource persons consider their leadership to have intrinsic moral status. They perform their duties with a sense of obligation or when it stems from a sense of duty guided by reason. This is a mark of being a transformational leader because these people consider social obligations as higher moral duty because they serve the higher purpose of benefiting relevant stakeholders (the group or organization from which the leader is inseparable),

without any calculation of personal gain in return. This deontological orientation develops leaders who act with sense of duty and uphold moral excellence.

## On Improving Ethical Administration

The innovations suggested by the three resource persons are anchored in the core values they hold. These are summarized in the statement of Resource Person 1:

1. *Better security features of issued academic documents. Furthermore, academic or school forms of all institutions should contain uniform or identical details (eg. Transcript of Records forms vary from one school to another; some necessary information is not contained).*

2. *Improved online facility.*

3. *Forms and requirements coming from the Philippine schools mismatch the requirements from foreign institutions. It would be better if CHED or other institutions concerned would try to anchor all these forms to the foreign requirements or documents.*

4. *Registrar staff should be given an opportunity to attend conventions, further studies, and other trainings that would help them innovate new ideas and prevent them from being stagnant in their work.*

### Enhanced Code of Ethics for Registrars

Since there is already an existing Code of Ethics for school registrars advocated by the Catholic Educational Association of the Philippines (CEAP), the findings of this study suggest that the core values explored have to be integrated in the said existing code. Realizing the need for honesty and integrity as central in the management of the department, and its influence on the whole academic community, registrars are obliged to create a professional environment that would encourage the transmission of teamwork, discipline and mutual respect. Further, CEAP articulates that these educational leaders should "seek to deliver quality service that is courteous, efficacious and prompt." The following enhance code of conduct is proposed by the researchers to better promote ethical and professional climate in the registrar department:

## Code of Conduct for Registrars

### Professional Value 1: Resolute Honesty

a. Promoting a climate that exercises professional judgment

b. Refusing to use the office for personal ends

### Professional Value 2: Untarnished Internal and External Integrity

c. Preserving the dignity of the office

d. Exuding personal professional competence

e. Safeguarding the exchange of information

- f. Presenting an image representative of the school's excellent standards  
*Professional Value 3: Empowered Teamwork*
- g. Training staff according to school's vision, mission and objectives
- h. Sharing experience, knowledge, talents and skills freely with others.  
*Professional Value 4: Constructive Discipline*
- i. Adhering to government legislation and regulations in the conduct of operations
- j. Upholding the authority of the school when communicating with students, parents, teams and other stakeholders  
*Professional Value 5: Mutual Respect*
- k. Conducting work in the spirit of truth, justice, equality, respect and love
- l. Providing opportunities for every member of the registrar team to excel and lead  
*Professional Value 6: Exemplary Leadership*
- m. Initiating ethical and professional practices in the department
- n. Sustaining a workplace climate that recognizes and upholds morality

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This exploratory research supports current trends in leadership development toward reflective practice and ethics engagement particularly in administrator practice and leadership preparation. The study offers a visionary educational leadership insight where registrars and other administrators alike can benchmark and enculturate. Through research and engagement with registrars in this study, the goal of enhancing their professional code of conduct was achieved. Dissemination of the study findings may enable others to use the insights provided for discussion and reflection in their respective workplace.

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