



Public Service Ethics and their Impact on Improving the Quality of Public Service

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Abstract: The public service often suffers from various negative phenomena such as weak performance, poor quality of public service, lack of efficiency, absence of a sense of responsibility, weak communication, and indifference, among others. Any reform in the field of public service depends on the public employee, as they are the ones who provide services to citizens. Therefore, in order to improve the quality of public service, it is essential to focus on the behavior and ethics of the employee and work on reinforcing adherence to them. These ethics represent a necessary entry point for establishing good governance in managing the public sector, improving its services, reducing manifestations of administrative and financial corruption, and developing the organizational environment of the administration.

Keywords: Public service, public employee, professional ethics, quality of public service.

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Introduction:

The subject of professional ethics is a relatively modern topic that has garnered significant attention from many researchers and specialists across various departments and sectors, due to the increasing prevalence of unethical practices in administrative work and their rapid spread across different organizational levels within public administrations. These practices may include bribery, embezzlement, conflicts of interest, influence peddling, abuse of position, favoritism, ethical scandals, disclosure of confidential information, and other behavioral deviations among employees.

The public sector suffers from ethical issues among employees and widespread manifestations of financial corruption, such as receiving bribes or gifts, favoritism and nepotism, embezzlement, extortion, abuse of influence, or misuse of authority to achieve personal interests at the expense of the public interest in most public institutions. These also include fraud, receiving commissions, and manipulating public contracts and government deals, among others.

These practices and manifestations lead to a decline—or complete absence—of commitment to ethical rules, which in turn impacts economic and social development programs.

Given that human resources are a crucial element in effecting change, it is essential to pay attention to the employee, provide guidance, and reform behavior in line with the rules of public service ethics. These ethics are a necessary entry point and a foundational pillar for establishing administrative governance, enhancing efficiency and effectiveness in service delivery within the public sector, reducing administrative and financial corruption, and improving the administrative organizational environment.

Main Research Problem:

Based on the above, the core problem of this study concerns the impact of ethics on improving the quality of public services and on the sound and rational management of public administration by instilling the principles of administrative governance and curbing corrupt practices: *How do public service ethics influence the improvement of public service quality?*

It is clear that the study addresses the relationship between the ethics and values of public employees and the weakness in performance and efficiency in delivering public services across various institutions and administrative facilities, as well as the level of quality of those services. This is based on the premise that

a public employee, from the moment of appointment, is responsible for delivering services with the required quality, and in case of failure, bears responsibility for their mistakes.

Importance of the Study:

- To understand the concept of public service ethics and the concept of public service itself.
- To explore the sources of public service ethics and identify the duties or components that constitute them.
- To determine the impact of public service ethics on the quality of public service and the dimensions of commitment to them.

Objectives of the Study:

- Increase citizen satisfaction with services provided by the public sector.
- Raise the level of governmental performance through continuous monitoring and evaluation.
- Achieve equality and equal opportunity among citizens in receiving public services.
- Promote integrity and transparency in the use of public authority and the performance of public duties, to reduce administrative and financial corruption and prevent the misuse of power for personal gain.
- Uphold the principle of accountability and answerability of employees in adherence to laws and regulations.
- Develop and review solutions or mechanisms within public institutions to implement ethical policies and regulations.

StudyHypotheses:

- Public service ethics lead to commitment in performing tasks, which in turn results in the delivery of public services, since ethics influence individual behavior just as much as scientific concepts and theories do.
- The efficiency and effectiveness of an employee are linked to ethics and high ideals, which motivate the employee to improve performance and develop both cognitive and behavioral skills.

Methodology:

The descriptive-analytical method was adopted by describing the concept of public service ethics and investigating its sources, clarifying the job-related duties of employees as stated in laws and regulatory texts, and defining the concept of public service. The relationship between these elements was then analyzed and synthesized in order to reach a set of findings and recommendations aimed at instilling ethical values in employees to improve their performance and efficiency in addressing problems, serving the public interest, and preserving public funds.

Study Structure:

To address the main research problem, the study was divided into three main sections. The first section discusses public service ethics, the second examines the quality of public service, and the third attempts to link the two concepts and define the dimensions of their relationship.

Axis One: Public Service Ethics

This axis addresses both the concept of public service ethics and its sources through the following two parts:

First – The Concept of Public Service Ethics:

In this section, we examine the concept of public service and the civil servant, as well as the concept of ethics, to ultimately reach a definition of public service ethics and the main factors behind the spread of unethical practices in the public sector.

1. The Concept of Public Service and the Civil Servant:

A. The Concept of Public Service:

The Algerian Constitution stipulates that access to public service is a right for citizens.¹ Public service is a general service performed by workers for individuals and the state within a specific legal framework, aiming to achieve the public interest in the state's administrative apparatus and its public branches and local groups.² Public service is defined as a civil position requiring its holder to perform specific duties and responsibilities. A position can be either occupied or vacant, and it is not affected by the person holding it.³ It is also defined as a set of interrelated operations, duties, and responsibilities aimed at implementing decisions made to manage public affairs, provide services, operate facilities, monitor private activities, protect the market, and safeguard public funds.⁴

B. The Concept of a Civil Servant:

There are many doctrinal and judicial views defining a civil servant. The prevailing consensus in both jurisprudence and court rulings is that a civil servant is "every person legally entrusted with performing a permanent job in a public facility directly managed by the state or a public legal entity, through a permanent appointment to a position within the administrative organization of that facility."⁵ A civil servant is therefore any person appointed by the competent authority affiliated with the state or a public legal entity to a permanent position and on a permanent basis.⁶ According to Ordinance No. 06/03 on the General Statute of Public Service in Algeria, Article 04 considers a civil servant to be any agent appointed to a permanent position and integrated into one of the administrative levels of central administrations, decentralized external services under these central administrations, local authorities, public administrative institutions, and public institutions of a scientific, cultural, professional, or technological nature. Any public institution whose employees may be subject to the provisions of the General Statute of Public Service, as per Article 02, is also included. This law does not apply to judges, military personnel, or members of parliament.⁷

2. The Concept of Ethics:

It is difficult to define ethics precisely and comprehensively, despite a general consensus on the importance of ethics as an ideal human value that all human societies seek to instill in their cultural systems and individual behaviors. It is worth noting that the message of Islam is fundamentally an ethical message. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: "I was sent to perfect good character."⁸

Linguistically, ethics (Arabic: "akhlaq") is the plural of "khuluq," which refers to a person's disposition or innate character, reflected in their words, actions, behavior, and attitudes. According to *Al-Mu'jam Al-Waseet*, ethics refers to a state of the soul that naturally produces either good or bad words and actions without premeditation.

Terminologically, scholars have provided various definitions of ethics, and it is commonly agreed among researchers that ethics in public service refer to the principles, values, or standards used to judge behavior as praiseworthy or blameworthy. Employees should exhibit praiseworthy behavior to achieve the organization's goals with the highest efficiency and effectiveness.⁹

In public service, ethics refer to the standards of conduct related to what employees should do, reflecting the values of society.¹⁰ Ethics govern the behavior of individuals or groups in matters of right and wrong in different contexts, and of good and bad in various situations. They represent a universal human language that transcends religion or ideology. Religions emphasize and reinforce ethical behavior and urge people to practice it, regardless of language or cultural differences. All societies aspire to values such as truth, justice, and honesty.¹¹

3. The Concept of Public Service Ethics:

Public service ethics encompass the totality of values, principles, and commitments that employees should uphold while performing their duties. These ethics are influenced by the laws, customs, culture of society, and the nature of the profession. They are also defined as the employee's commitment to legally assigned duties, including respect for the applicable laws and regulations, respect for societal values and traditions, avoidance of bias, and working for the public good. They also involve safeguarding organizational secrets, punctuality, and adhering to work hours to achieve maximum productivity.¹² Another definition describes public service ethics as a set of values and principles that establish optimal standards for job performance and are essential for relationships with superiors, subordinates, colleagues, and service recipients.¹³

4. Key Factors Behind the Spread of Unethical Practices in the Public Sector:

Some of the most significant factors that lead to the spread of unethical behavior and disciplinary—or even criminal—offenses include:

- Low salaries and purchasing power of employees, unfair distribution of bonuses and incentives, lack of moral support, disregard for employee needs, and failure to address their concerns.
- Lack of employee participation in decision-making, ineffective workplace communication, resulting in a diminished sense of shared responsibility and job attachment, leading to feelings of alienation and disconnection.¹⁴
- Weak or authoritarian administrative leadership that fosters negative behaviors such as laziness, disobedience, avoidance of responsibility, and lack of innovation.¹⁵
- Leniency in holding employees accountable, and the absence of deterrents when violations occur, encourages continued offenses and negative behaviors such as absenteeism, tardiness, negligence, and irresponsibility.¹⁶

Second – Sources of Public Service Ethics:

The sources of public service ethics are diverse. The most important source is Islamic religion, followed by the laws and regulations governing public service, which define professional misconduct and its disciplinary and criminal consequences. Other sources include family, society, educational institutions, and more. The principles and values that form the foundation of public service ethics originate primarily from religion. Therefore, the behavioral guidelines that govern an employee's conduct within the administration are no different from those that regulate personal behavior in society.

1. Public Service Ethics in Islam:

Whether in the public or private sector, the Muslim is entrusted with their job and must exhibit good moral conduct in fulfilling their professional duties according to Islamic teachings from the Qur'an and Sunnah. As the human soul is prone to evil, deviation, and desire, Islam outlines the ethics that a working Muslim or employee must embody, including:

A. Honesty and Integrity: An employee entrusted with their job must perform their duties honestly, fairly, and proficiently. They should avoid lying, work sincerely, respect work hours, and use time efficiently.

B. Patience: A Muslim employee should remain patient at work, not reacting with anger or impulsiveness, and should endure workplace pressures.

C. Diligence: The Muslim employee should adhere to the specifications and conditions of work in terms of quality, speed, timing, quantity, and cost. Good performance is essential in a Muslim's life.

D. Protecting Public Interest: Employees must safeguard their income source and workplace as a matter of public trust.

E. Proper Appearance and Speech: Employees should use kind words when dealing with superiors, colleagues, and citizens, maintaining mutual respect and a presentable appearance.¹⁷

2. Public Service Ethics in the Civil Service Law:

The duties and responsibilities of employees in public and executive administrations are defined by a set of laws and regulations aimed at achieving institutional discipline and maintaining public interest and funds. These laws help improve service quality for citizens through clear performance indicators.¹⁸ These laws seek to regulate social and behavioral relationships, aligning with ethical standards.¹⁹ The Civil Service Law mandates that employees uphold professional ethics by avoiding any action incompatible with their duties, even outside of work. They must exhibit good manners and respectful behavior in their relationships with superiors, colleagues, subordinates, and public service users.²⁰

Among the ethical or professional duties required by the Civil Service Law, we highlight:

A. Positive Duties:

According to Ordinance No. 06/03 of the Civil Service Law (Articles 40 to 54), public employees must:

- **Perform their duties and obey authority:** Employees must respect state authority and fulfill their tasks with honesty and impartiality according to current laws and regulations.²¹ They must adhere to integrity and avoid favoritism, ensuring respect for laws and proper use of work time, as citizens may resort to unethical means like bribery or favoritism if services are delayed.²² Obedience to superiors is required within the hierarchical structure of public administration. All civil service laws, including Algeria's, mandate this to ensure unified administrative functioning.²³
- **Protect administrative documents and assets:** Employees must safeguard administrative documents and resources and are prohibited from using them for personal purposes.²⁴

B. Negative Duties:

Among the prohibitions for public employees:

- **No dual employment:** Article 43 states that employees may not engage in any profit-generating private activity. All professional effort must be devoted to their assigned duties.²⁵ Exceptions exist only through legal authorization, such as for academic, artistic, or consulting activities related to their main job (e.g., university professor-lawyer, or clinical doctor).²⁶ This restriction protects employees from suspicion and preserves the status of public service. The goal is not to deprive employees of improving their living conditions but to shield them from conflicts of interest, as they represent the image of the state.²⁷ Also, the public interest demands that employees remain independent in their duties and avoid personal relationships that may compromise their objectivity.²⁸ Criminal laws prohibit employees from gaining personal benefits through their job to prevent exploitation for private gain.²⁹
- **Confidentiality:** Professional secrecy covers everything an employee learns during or because of their job and its official relations.³⁰ The principle of confidentiality allows the administration to keep its activities private while limiting individuals' access to administrative procedures—especially those that concern them.³¹ Employees may only disclose secrets with written authorization from a competent authority.³² Employees are also prohibited from soliciting or accepting gifts or benefits, directly or indirectly, in exchange for services related to their duties.³³ Such behavior tarnishes the public service's reputation and affects decision-making impartiality and fairness in service delivery.
- **Avoid abuse of public activities:** Employees must not abuse their rights to strike, protest, or union participation in a way that leads to conflicts of interest or divided loyalties.³⁴

Axis Two: Quality of Public Service

In this axis, we address the concept of public service and the concept of quality in order to reach a definition of the quality of public service, through the following sections:

First – The Concept of Public Service:

There are multiple perspectives on defining the concept of public or governmental service. Among the definitions, we mention the following:

Services are activities or benefits that one party can offer to another. They are intangible, meaning they are not physical, and they do not result in ownership of anything. Their provision is not associated with material production. They are also defined as activities that are perceptible through the senses and can be exchanged, provided by companies or institutions specialized in those services, or considered as service-oriented institutions. ³⁵A governmental service is an activity carried out by the state with the aim of achieving a public benefit and is offered to the public to satisfy general needs in service of the members of society. ³⁶The term "public" is added to "service" to give it the character of inclusiveness—ensuring that all people benefit from these services without discrimination. In other words, it reflects the state's commitment, through its branches and by virtue of its legal, technical, and financial powers, to provide such services. ³⁷Public services are classified into several groups, including:

- Services related to the entity or sovereignty of the state, such as security, defense, and justice;
- Services related to social stability, such as social insurance and social care for the needy;
- Services related to citizens' daily lives, such as issuing civil documents, commercial registration, etc.;
- Services related to quality of life, such as healthcare and education. ³⁸

Second – The Concept of Quality:

Linguistically, quality refers to conformity, agreement, or matching. The term originates from the Greek word *Qualities*, which means the nature of a person or object and its degree of solidity. Historically, the term "quality" referred to precision and excellence in construction. Quality is defined as the performance of a given process—whether productive or service-related—according to predefined, standardized criteria that represent the highest level of customer or beneficiary satisfaction.

In other words, quality is the total set of features and characteristics of a product or service that determine the extent to which it meets the customer's needs and satisfaction. Some go further to suggest that quality is not only about meeting customer needs and expectations but also about delighting the customer and earning their loyalty to the organization. ³⁹Quality management is a scientific approach to improving the performance of organizations and their employees, aimed at delivering goods and services that meet customer needs, expectations, and satisfaction. This is achieved through continuous improvement, employee training, teamwork, and involving customers in all stages of the work process. ⁴⁰

Some of the features of Total Quality Management (TQM) include:

- Reducing administrative procedures
- Mastering administrative operations
- Simplifying forms and procedures
- Increasing productivity
- Reducing customer complaints
- Promoting continuous improvement within the organization by focusing on customer service and satisfaction. ⁴¹

Third – The Concept of Public Service Quality:

The issue of service quality and how to measure it—particularly in the context of public service—is more difficult to assess compared to the quality of physical products. It is evaluated based on the comparison between customer expectations and the actual performance of the service. Modern public administration aims to ensure high-quality public services for individuals by reducing time, rationalizing and lowering costs, and adopting modern administrative thinking—such as Total Quality Management—and other innovative methods that have allowed public services to evolve, including the implementation of electronic administration.⁴²

Axis Three: The Impact of Public Service Ethics on the Quality of Public Service and the Dimensions of Their Relationship

Adherence to professional ethics has positive effects and implications on the employee, the job, and all levels of the organization. This is what we will address in this axis through the following sections:

First – The Impact of Public Service Ethics on the Quality of Public Service:

1. At the Performance Level:

Adhering to professional ethics leads to:

- Improved execution of job tasks assigned to employees and enhancement of their efficiency by directing employee behavior towards positively utilizing their abilities, motivating them to do so, fostering teamwork and organizational cooperation, and enabling freedom of opinion and positive thinking.
- Improving the work environment or organizational climate, which in turn positively influences task performance by increasing interest in work and the employee's willingness to take on responsibilities.
- Increasing trust in the administration or organization and strengthening its standing among citizens by respecting the rights and interests of citizens and clients in accordance with ethical standards.
- Maintaining the organization's competitiveness due to the influence of positive behavior on energy and mental capacity, and promoting transparency in the execution of assigned tasks.⁴³

2. At the Level of Organizational Loyalty:

Public service ethics affect organizational loyalty by fostering and strengthening it. This is due to citizens' sense of psychological and organizational compatibility with their jobs, and the resulting fair distribution of work burdens. It also stems from the deeply rooted psychological, moral, and ethical value that motivates employees to respond to the call of duty and justice. These feelings are inspired by the prevailing ethics in the organization—such as honesty and credibility—which resonate with the employees.⁴⁴ Maintaining public interest requires that individuals possess a proper level of loyalty to the administrative unit they work for, with an understanding of its policies, goals, and the objectives of society as a whole. However, such loyalty requires an atmosphere of justice, as the feeling of injustice leads to a decline in loyalty and the spread of negative practices. In such a case, personal interests dominate social relations at the expense of public interest, ultimately harming society as a whole.⁴⁵

Second – Dimensions of the Relationship Between Public Service Ethics and the Quality of Public Service:

1. Organizational Justice:

Organizational justice is closely linked to achieving the organization's desired goals. It is a value derived from the employee's perception of fairness and objectivity in the workplace. Justice is achieved when individuals or citizens perceive fairness in the way they are treated by the administration.⁴⁶

2. **Organizational Citizenship:**

This refers to out-of-role behavior that is not defined by the employee's job description. It is behavior that goes beyond the basic requirements of the job and is largely discretionary. It is performed by employees within the organization and benefits the organization as a whole.

3. **Administrative Governance:**

Governance in the public sector or in public service is based on numerous ethically grounded principles and rules that public employees must embody. Integrity, honesty, responsibility, and transparency—especially in interactions with service seekers—are among the core principles advocated by governance. Public service ethics support governance mechanisms in the public sector by facilitating monitoring, evaluation, and accountability to ensure efficient and effective performance on one hand, and the fair provision of government services on the other. ⁴⁷When public service ethics prevail, the goals of public sector governance are achieved—such as integrity and transparency in the use of authority and public funds, the realization of justice and equal access to public services, and the protection of public assets. An employee's sense of responsibility helps prevent all forms of corruption, which calls for accountability and oversight. ⁴⁸

4. **Establishing Ethical Charters in Administration to Regulate Employee Behavior in Public Service:** Many public administrations and organizations have established ethical charters that reflect their stance on acceptable and unacceptable behavior. The charter serves as a reference for employees when asked to perform work that conflicts with the organization's values. It helps employees and managers resolve work-related issues and assess the organization's goals and practices according to ethical standards to ensure they are aligned with the charter. ⁴⁹Professional ethics also help instill a sense of responsibility in new employees, enhance staff participation, and foster team spirit and cooperation in the workplace.

Conclusion:

Through this study, we conclude that public service ethics have a significant impact on improving the quality of public service by reducing the chances of administrative corruption in government jobs. Therefore, it is essential to promote public service ethics and combat corruption, whether through enacting regulatory and punitive legislation or by establishing supervisory and judicial bodies to implement accountability, integrity, and transparency mechanisms, alongside reviewing the professional ethics charter to ensure that state employees in all sectors adhere to moral values and ethical principles. State employees must adhere to ethical values and principles and hold accountable anyone involved in misconduct or corruption by reinforcing accountability, integrity, and transparency mechanisms. Among the key recommendations derived from this study to institutionalize employee commitment to public service ethics and foster ethical considerations in public service are the following:

- Apply the principles and rules of administrative governance and adopt e-governance and digitization, as they are foundational to enhancing public service performance and prioritizing public interest. They also empower oversight bodies, expand their powers to combat unethical practices, and make it easier for citizens to monitor employees by ensuring information is publicly accessible.
- Show no leniency toward public sector employees, especially those directly responsible for managing public funds and state assets, and hold them accountable by imposing strict penalties on those who commit ethical violations.
- Strengthen religious awareness, as Islamic law contains explicit texts urging good deeds and righteous work, promoting them, and condemning all forms of evil behavior while warning of their consequences.

- Focus on ethical and professional aspects in training and development programs to raise ethical standards by conducting the necessary research and revising policies and administrative procedures.
- Teach professional ethics in advanced stages of education by reinforcing their presence in curricula, aiming to instill ethical values in the younger generation and enhance their commitment to them.
- Adopt ethical charters in public administrations and support commitment to them. A public ethics charter is necessary to regulate employee behavior in terms of what is acceptable or not, and to help employees resolve work-related challenges.

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