ETHICAL PUBLIC LEADERSHIP SURFING THE COVID 19 TERRAIN

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ABSTRACT

As individuals, leaders have sufficient power and influence to make decisions with and through others. Ethical leadership is premised on constructive collaboration which benefits society as a whole rather than selected group interests or self-interests. In promoting the good of the whole, ethical leaders demonstrate fairness, commitment and holistic behaviour. Likewise, ethical leaders during times of crisis like COVID 19, need to augment the health and well-being of their constituents which can be severely impacted. Nurturing positive influence during a pandemic can be challenging, considering competing needs in multiple contexts. However, managing such complexities requires a framework that is informed by taking cognisance not only of national interests, but also global interests considering that global interconnectivity requires a global will to pursue actions which do not marginalise certain communities. Therefore, the requisite holism underpinned by an ethical framework must drive ethical leadership, especially when pandemics are globally impacted. It is ultimately ethical leadership which can lead humankind out of the pandemic crisis, since authentic concern for healthy and protected people can eventually create economic, social and political value for the world.

Keywords: Entrepreneural Leader, SMEs, COVID.

INTRODUCTION

The COVID 19 global pandemic has impacted almost every facet of our daily lives. It is widely believed that the pandemic is worse than any other global crisis previously experienced. While there has been inconsistent and uncoordinated global responses, it is anticipated that the impact will be more significantly destructive in developing economies because of constrained capacity to deal with the emerging challenges associated with the pandemic. While there has been pressure to reopen economies and to relax lockdown stipulations, global leaders also have to ensure ethical decision making as the crisis unfolds. When public leaders undertake leadership, there is a tacit or explicit expectation that as leaders they will be accountable for whatever happens within their constituencies.

Since ethical leadership in the public sector directly affects citizens and is the cornerstone for the provision of essential services to citizens who are not only dependent on government, but are also the subjects of government, public sector responses to the pandemic has to be underpinned by responsibility, impartiality, accountability and integrity. In the absence of this, wastage of public resources, distortion of programme achievements and inefficiency may result in public service instability during and post pandemic. Further, consideration also needs to be given to the notion that unethical leadership can imply an „accumulating process‟, where the more unethical a system is, the more it produces a downward spiral of malpractice (World Bank 2010:5). Unethical behaviour, lack of accountability, fraud and corrupt practices have become so institutionalised and pervasive throughout the world , that is even convenient to also speak of an

ethics crisis in the public sector. Thus, while responding to pre-existing global challenges prior to the global pandemic, global leaders need to pay attention to another added dimension impacting the social, political and economics spheres of life. Therefore, it is imperative that the performance of public leaders complies with ethical practices, in the interest of accountable public services serving the common good of all. This has to be driven by ethical standards, policies and laws under any circumstances and in any context.

Cheteni & Shindika (2017) argued that ethical leaders are aware of ethical issues and consistently nurture an attitude of moral obligation and responsibility. In pursuing ethical leadership, public leaders need to demonstrate normatively appropriate conduct in their communication, actions and relationships (Yukl et al., 2013). It can be argued that ethical leadership can be construed as a distinct leadership style in itself, as leaders need to choose between the bad and the good, between altruism and self-interest.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Nurturing an Ethical Climate

Leadership has the potential to harm or benefit the well-being of citizens, since it is a fundamental part of the human chronicle of working and living within society. As a complex moral phenomenon based on trust, fairness, emotion, honesty and obligation, ethical leadership challenges the privileges, influence and power associated with leadership. Since leaders have or are given influence, power and responsibility for others, their actions impact people‟s fears, hopes and expectations. Hence, ethical leadership among public leaders is magnified because the stakes of their actions is more severe within the public sector environment.

So what are some of the fundamental antecedents for nurturing an ethical climate?

Enacting Values

Ethical leadership is the demonstration of value enacted conduct through communication, reinforcement, actions and decision making (Cotton, Stevenson & Bartunek, 2017). Such values must be consistently enacted, reinforced and supported so that they become an integral part of the public sector culture. This entails the ethical conduct of public leaders extending beyond mere compliance with legislative and statutory frameworks, as it also entails association with contextual actors like shared perspectives of stakeholders. Thus, while there may be expected behaviours for ethical conduct, there cannot be overly simplistic prescriptions for ethical leadership as cognisance must also be taken of ethical leadership as a perceptual phenomenon. Likewise, Keck et al. (2020) argued that as higher ranked officials, public leaders are expected to use their power to control resources responsibly, offer fair treatment beyond what is mandated and cannot use the one size fits all approach in leading ethically. Such a multidimensional focus draws on ethics being consistently espoused, without prejudicing any constituent especially in crisis situations when competing demands accelerate.

Relativistism, moral equity and contractualism

Ethical decision making can emanate from three perspectives: relativistic, moral equity and contractualism (Conrad, 2013). The relativistic perspective centres on the ethical appropriateness of decisions within the context of moral standards of the organization. Moral equity is motivated by decisions based on fairness, righteousness and justice, while contractualism focuses on job obligations (Conrad, 2013). All three perspectives within the

public sector supports the notion that ethical leadership has to conserve ethical values within and beyond the public sector environment. In doing so, extensive research points to the consistency between the level of moral development and actions of leaders substantially influencing the organizational climate (Cheteni & Shindika, 2017). Additionally, leaders reinforce an organizational ethical climate by establishing priorities, finding solutions for the common good of all and engaging in consistent behaviour. Relatedly, Yukl et al. (2013) contended that behaviour intended to enforce ethical standards such as integrity and honesty consistent with actions espousing values; fairness in rewards and decisions to motivate proper behaviour; and behaviour that shows compassion, kindness, and concern for the needs and needs of others are important ethical principles.

Public Interest

Public interest, an integral element of ethics management, plays a significant part in shaping the public sector ethos for quality public service delivery. Pubic leaders need to pursue the cause or interest of others. Loss of tax revenue, reduction in production investment and growth, inadequate aid programmes, and an unattractive environment for foreign investments require more rigorous oversight to ensure a commitment to public interest. A true leader seeks the advantage of those being served, ensuring that self-interested conduct and conflicts of interest are addressed while performing their altruistic responsibilities (Ciulla et al., 2018). Public interest entails an altruistic desire to serve the public, without sacrificing the welfare of the wider community.

It can be argued that public interest, as a necessity for accountability, provides a sense of common direction and an ethical framework for public leaders to be credible. The basis for credibility and trust is the conduct of leaders. Neglect of public interest negatively impacts on the maintenance of high standards of integrity, dignity, honesty and impartiality in performing public duties, prioritising of public needs, and maintaining public support and respect for government. It is the duty of public leaders to ensure that there are no impediments to achieving common good. Walking the ethical talk demonstrates a commitment to public interest because it sets the boundaries and defines the direction of what has to be done, how it should be done and where one stands on the ethical platform (Stout,2005) . This necessitates setting aside self-interest, so that all actions contribute to the common good, especially during times of crisis. It can therefore be argued that any activity directed toward the delivery of public services starts with actions underpinned by ethical public administration. Failure to sustain an ethical public service negates public accountability and good governance which are integral for sound public administration.

Ethical Leadership and the Pandemic Crisis

Human suffering has grown during the crisis, with devastating pessimism over the prospects of recovery. The pandemic has created anguish over the availability of resources affecting the quality of life, especially that of the underprivileged. There is now an even greater emphasis on using public resources both efficiently and effectively for the primary benefit of every member of the public. This has to be considered in the context of existing wrongness of specific actions including the misuse of public property, nepotism, corruption, bribery, conflict of interest, inefficiency and ineffectiveness. Government in the face of already existing unethical practices, can no longer continue with weak control mechanisms for accountability, responsibility and good governance. Thus, during periods of crisis, the leader is expected to

respond to public needs with a sense of empathy, respect and trust. Such conduct augments the presence of ethics, since Frunza (2017) argued that crisis situations are often of an ethical nature and should therefore be responded with ethical leadership in the spirit of diminishing existential suffering during periods of crisis like COVID 19. Additionally, when nations are threatened during times of crisis, public leaders are foregrounded as those responsible for finding solutions. It often during times of crisis that challenges to leadership arise and when ethics is more thoroughly judged (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014).

Some of the key elements impacting ethical leadership during crisis situations like COVID 19 are discussed below.

Ethical Sensibilities

In crisis situations, like COVID 19, the values of public leaders are placed under scrutiny. As power is the quintessence of public leadership, it is associated with reputation, authority and ethical reasoning. In using their power to act, it is perceived that public leaders would embrace legitimacy, integrity and responsibility. In doing so, their actions are motivated by ethical sensibilities. According the Bauman (2013), such actions act as a social glue rather than perpetuating a character assassination during times of crisis. Likewise, Bauman (2013) asserted that maintaining the social glue also importantly is needed to maintain confidence in public leadership, as character assassination can be intense, fierce and destructive during times of crisis. Thus, unless government responds with effective measures within an ethically recognised framework, the legitimacy of government responsiveness to the crisis will fall by the wayside.

Complexities of Contexts

Ethical leaders under diverse situations must have a convincing vision, which is worthy of emulation and can lead to ethics related outcomes. Any intervention during a pandemic may take my forms, varying in their goals, contexts, targets and scope. Ethical leaders consider the brutal facts of the reality of the crisis and look at things from a critical and dispassionate perspective. While being optimistic, they also need to be realistic and accountable. Therefore, ethical issues cannot be generalised as the complexity of contexts with different stakeholders with different needs may give rise to varying responses to public sector interventions (Hurlimann et al., 2017). For example, cross sectoral collaboration between the food industries, social support to alleviate poverty and the removal of environmental barriers can be beneficial in raising awareness of ethical perspectives which are sensitive to different contexts. Therefore, such collaboration can be construed as doing something which is better than doing nothing at all. However, this viewpoint implies that while there could be no beneficial outcomes, but without trying it is not possible to know the outcomes. From an ethical perspective, risks and benefits must be carefully assessed to minimise controversies and debates. Also, ethical leadership calls for adaptation, collaboration and participation from various sectors. Without such considerations, ethical impacts may not receive the necessary attention (Gupta et al., 2015).

Balancing Human Rights

The intimate connection between health and non-health security shows the need for governments to use an ethical lens when responding to such pandemics as the satisfaction of human rights is of paramount importance. Sometimes leaders have to compromise their own

moral principles to fulfil their obligations to others or cannot pursue the high moral ground because the lives of people are at stake. For example, there is a common call for safety, fewer infections, decrease mortality rates, access to food and opening up of economies. Relatedly, Kevany (2014) speaks of the economic value of health improvements during times of pandemics. In other words, coordinated global actions can bring added value in terms of reducing mortality rates, improving health and igniting the prospects for a return to healthy investments. There is a need for leaders to strike a balance, have a strategy that enables countries to bounce back, similar to the US sinking every Japanese ship that bombed Pearl Harbour in 1945. Considering that these are some of the ethical problems of leading, the dirty hands syndrome may subject leaders to difficult choices when all the options are bad. In such instances, moral compromise is inevitable when the stakes are high. However, difficult choices should be informed by moral obligations to the public in the case of ethical public sector leadership. Relatedly, Nayak (2016) showed that sometimes leaders break some norms to achieve goodness, doing what is right and taking action to achieve common good. In such cases legitimate and credible behaviour must be reflected in honesty, openness and reinforcement. In this regard, Conrad (2013), argued that making the right decisions should always fall on the ethics side, fully considering that sometimes the consequences can have adverse effects on other performance determinants.

Managing Competing Demands

The COVID 19 pandemic has placed intense financial and economic strains on global economies. It cannot be disputed that while rising unemployment and poverty have been exacerbated by the crisis, governments are under increasing pressure to manage escalating uncertainty and the commensurate social, economic and political challenges. The damaging effects of the global pandemic has intensified pressure on public leadership to sustain its role in delivering quality public services in responsible and accountable ways. For example, the pandemic has impacted global value chains in that problems associated with employment, economic growth and environmental security have been compounded. More so, global value chains operating in emerging economies which have diverse stakeholder groups has brought with it recurrent ethical dilemmas. Arguably, as posited by the stakeholder theory, public leaders have a responsibility toward the public who are collectively dependent on public services (Gardner, 2018). Since any global crisis may negatively impact the relationship between governments and society, it is imperative that ethical conduct supports social, economic and environmental well-being. Ensuring ethical conduct, especially during times of crisis, is a stabilising device in society, reinforces public trust and demonstrates the credibility of leaders to maintain conciliatory fairness and justice. A win-win relationship with stakeholders is dependent on the extent to which stakeholder expectations are fulfilled, especially during times of crisis.

However, since stakeholder claims maybe conflicting, competing and may differ in urgency, public leaders need to prioritise among very heterogeneous stakeholder groups. Clarke & Boersma (2017) argued that the failure of leadership to remedy problems associated with heterogeneous stakeholder groups is reflected in such problems intensifying during the pandemic. More so, amidst growing fraud and corruption impacting the availability of public resources, a greater focus on ethical leadership has drawn attention. Therefore, the growing complexities facing the public sector can be addressed from an ethical lens, with actions and decisions being consistently supported by ethical standards under varying circumstances.

Congruence between value for money and effective service delivery

In adopting a "walk the talk paradigm", public leaders should enforce decisions in the common interest of society. Ethical leadership which prioritises public interest invariably makes public institutions responsive to public needs and optimally utilizes resources amidst competing demands. Thus, in responding to the expectations and needs of citizens as individuals or interest groups, public leaders must ensure that decisions and actions are informed by a congruence between value for money and effective public service delivery. Within the context of a global crisis like the COVID 19, citizens need to be confident that outcomes driven governance within a service oriented culture permeates all aspects of public governance. In doing so, the basic elements of good governance (accountability, predictability, transparency and participation) play an indispensable role in mutually supporting and reinforcing ethical leadership. In support, Collinson (2014) argued that both the internal and external public sector environments must be responsibly managed to protect the general public from the adverse effects of any crisis, especially the poor who are increasingly reliant on quality public services.

Further, the global health pandemic has not spared the impact on both developed and developing economies, affecting labour markets; the manufacturing of goods and services; the strength of currency exchanges; imports and exports; deceleration of economic growth; decreased tourism revenue; and reduced social services. This has placed increased pressure on development objectives, especially in emerging economies where the welfare of the vulnerable, low income workers and unemployed have been progressively destabilised (Schoen, 2017). With the accompanying rising poverty and inequality, public leaders have been implored to strengthen the capacity of their economies to grow, improve economic efficiency and support sustainable growth. Apart from the economic responses, social needs like adequate health care and social support grants cannot be neglected. Thus, from a social responsibility stance, government has to continuously and consistently support the provision of social services to protect the vulnerable. Any response to mitigate the effects of the pandemic has to be devoid of a greed nurtured culture, which exploits limited resources for purposes of self-interest. Strategies to constrain the negative impact of the pandemic calls for prioritising public needs, so that the continued perpetuation of poverty, poor ill health, unemployment and marginalization of people can be halted.

Duty to Care

Mallia (2015) claimed that any crisis can overwhelm public systems and may require rationing of scarce resources. Despite limited resources, ethical considerations such as the duty to care cannot be ignored. Public leaders have a moral obligation to provide care during any crisis. In this regard, Mariaselvam & Gopichandran (2016) claimed that ethical standards during any crisis must address what type of response is rolled out, when, to whom and where. Such an approach is a deviation from standard public service delivery as it is a response to a pervasive crisis such as COVID 19. Thus, the bedrock for ethical preparedness during any crisis is openness, fairness, accountability and transparency in resource allocation; the protection of human rights; and promoting the health and safety of all people.

Further, there needs to be a balance between duty to care and doing the greatest good for the greatest number of people. This can be challenging considering the relative nature of ethical considerations and lack of consensus across global contexts. Likewise, it has been widely claimed that humanitarian crisis response during the 2010 Haiti earthquake, 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami and 2014 Ebola pandemic was wrought with ethical distress (Mariaselvam & Gopichandran, 2016). Some of the criticisms that emerged included prioritizing the worst off as

most appropriate, extreme resource constraints, inability to save the most lives possible, distress and the scope of human suffering under extreme austerity (Mallia, 2015). Thus, scarce resource allocation during any crisis must focus on how such resources are allocated rather than whether they should be allocated, since how to provide the best standards of care is part of the accountability response of public leadership. In responding with accountability, it is the duty to plan for appropriate standards of care during crisis situations (Schultz & Annas, 2012). Similarly, Mallia (2015) opined that failure to plan can be construed as undermining the duty to provide the best and appropriate care possible during crisis circumstances. In such instances, the ethical obligations of public leadership are not pursued, since the moral significance of planning has been ignored (Mariaselvam & Gopichandran, 2016).

Global will and COVID 19

Any global crisis like COVID 19 can threaten global health, development, peace and security, as articulated by the United Nations in its 2016 G7 Summit of the need for a "one health" strategy and "vision for global health" (United Nations, 2017). This is further reinforced by the UN Sustainable Development Goals which advocates universality and ensuring no one is left behind. Likewise, some of the pillars of global health like the Oslo Declaration and United Nations Resolutions provide guidelines to ensure global health governance is driven by good intentions. However, while such guidelines have been globally adopted, there has to be more deep level mining of factors impacting ethical global responses as discussed below.

Integrated Global Response

Global risks are accentuated by a confluence of other risks like population density; economic inequality; climate change; and global mobility of people and goods. Alongside these threats and the need for high level political attention, public leadership is faced with mandates challenged by resource constraints. Such global vulnerabilities can be compounded if public leadership is not drawn by preparedness and timeous responsiveness (Gostin & Friedman, 2017). This in itself speaks to compelling ethical reasons for public leadership to act, considering that pandemics can cost global losses of almost $6million in the 21st century (United Nations, 2017). Such losses can leave a dark stain on ethical leadership, considering public leadership decisions are informed by diverse political, social and economic interests.

Additionally, when citizens find that the various dimensions of humanitarianism are not prioritized, there is the risk of the political calculus being severely condemned. As a consequence of diverse values, needs and expectations, public leaders should adopt a more integrated global approach to ensure more responsible leadership and to narrow the gap between what is globally right and wrong and what is ethically acceptable behaviour in the global realm (Waldman & Balven, 2014). Such ethical reflexivity, embraces more holistic deliberation on ethical thoughts, emotions, actions, affection and critical reasoning which invite practices supporting constant interrogation and re-evaluation. In this regard, Amoureux, 2016 argued that such deliberation and engagement rejects a myopic obsession with "us" rather than "us and them". Likewise, Brown, Trevino & Harrison (2005) argued that leaders should act as agents of global benefit, especially during times of crisis, when balancing conflicting goals becomes an integral part of their function. Similarly, Knights and McCabe (2015) contended that conflicting goals not only threatens global cooperation but also communicative action.

National versus Global Interests

Global interconnectivity now obliges leaders to think about the lives of those outside their immediate communities to ensure global harmony. This is an imperative, since communities are interdependent and interconnected across multiple settings under global conditions. This acknowledges that while the nation is an important consideration, it cannot be an exclusive focus to the detriment of other nations in a globally connected world. In doing so, some may argue in favour of maximising happiness, but this may favour certain communities. While it is difficult to adopt any universalist or relativist approach to ethical practices in meeting diverse global demands, Steger (2018) argued that the collective dimensions of global processes driven by ethically relevant role players like governmental and non-governmental institutions must be seriously considered. In such instances, ethical responsibilities are not only driven by individuals but also by institutions. Thus, Amoureux (2016) claimed that this requires ethically negotiating various aspects of interconnectivity and interdependence based on openness, tolerance and respect. This is important, since issues like inequality and social exclusion are constantly changing in their characteristics and consequences. However, addressing such issues at multiple levels is no easy task, considering global belligerency and antagonism underpinning political and economic competition.

Relatedly, Steger (2018) responds with global cohesiveness as a possible approach, but argued that collectiveness, inclusivity, unity, equality and shared power must be drivers of coherent ethical justification. In this way, ethical affections are widened to humanity as a whole, but must be predicated on the assumption that global interest and experiences are constantly changing and will require continuous compromises, finding new common ground and constructing new understandings of the imperative to live together in global harmony. Therefore, global leaders need to develop common understandings of different situations, shared assumptions of ethical conduct and agree on courses of action regulated by shared norms. From an ethical standpoint, such integrated and coordinated actions of leaders touches on facilitating an understanding of and agreement on widely accepted values such as tolerance of homosexuality and the inclusion of ethnic minorities in politics. Knights and McCabe (2015) argued that the influence and power of leaders is a potential leverage to encourage adherence to commonly shared values, especially when communication is open and integrated. Global leaders should be able to contribute a rational voice and willingness when dealing with ethical issues associated with human rights, respect and dignity during times of crisis. Such responsible leadership, according to Scherer (2015) is fostered by a diversity of voices through deliberation about ethical issues. This is critical because the plurality of values and heterogeneity of interests require constant negotiation of responses to support higher levels of consensus.

Addtionally, as argued by Jones (2014), leadership is an ethical phenomenon requiring leaders to lead consistently and coherently with integrity across competing and conflicting contexts. As argued by Steger (2018), world leaders are often caught between nationalism and globalism. Some may argue, like Trump that each nation should look after their own political and economic interests, while others may sympathetically argue in favour of "others". While many states are unprepared for the consequences of global connectivity such as being hostage to global investors, others have reaped the benefits of globalization. This has resulted in the "us and them" syndrome, advancing social inequalities and capital exploitation (Amoureux, 2016). Linked to this wicked division are conflicting responses to human rights, security, economic marginalization, financial rescue, environmental issues and exploitative labour conditions, global mobility and cultural diversity. This has given rise to perplexing ethical controversies steeped in

a contradictory, complex and uncertain global world which may become more exacerbated during times of crisis. Any attempt to avert such consequences impacting ethical conduct must consider the common good of all, without undermining the needs of the global civil society and governments. As contended by Steger (2018), global connectivity has become a permanent feature of how we think and live, affecting most areas of our existence. Such connectivity brings with it vulnerability, risks and opportunities. As such global shifts have given rise to the need for new ethical consciousness, acknowledging the need to negotiate new types of ethical concerns. For example, people need to be reassured of security at local and global levels, because global interconnectivity has created uncertainties and turbulence about governance and citizenship. Relatedly, Amoureux (2016), contended that growing mistrust, fear, polarization and fractures in global relationships calls for more settling ethical leadership, reviving a climate of collegial politics, social cohesiveness and economic equality.

Facilitating ethical actions within a spatial–temporal global context

From the perspective of serving public needs, it can be challenging since public leaders are exposed to heterogeneous social, political and cultural values globally (Voegtlin, 2015). Therefore, public leaders must be aware and consider the consequences of their actions on all stakeholders during times of crisis, to ensure that they avoid harm and execute good amidst competing and complex needs. More so, the global dimension reflects multifaceted ethical boundaries which global leaders must consider within the context of diversity. Cultivating and facilitating ethical actions within a spatial–temporal global context must be informed by open and extensive communication among global leaders. This places high demands on leaders managing diverse needs and interest, while attempting to ensure ethical leadership at the local, national and global levels (Pearce et al., 2014). Public leadership is obligated to mitigate the negative outcomes associated with pandemics, while helping citizens to cope during times of crisis. During times of crisis, adaptation is critical like working remotely and practicing social distancing. It is not a situation of the survival of the fittest, but rather adapting to new situations helps with survival.

However, competing conflicts will invariably arise like opening up economies to attempt to ameliorate some of the economics losses can be accompanied by increased spread of the virus. Thus, commitment and will both locally and globally is required for collective responses in all spheres impacted by COVID 19, without promoting one sphere at the expense of the other. Further ethical leaders, must be able to show empathy and help to heal global, national, local and individual wounds. This is a responsibility thrust upon leaders, as seen in Obama‟s visit to Charleston after the mass church murders and Queen Elizabeth‟s speech about the pandemic. Comparatively, Trump‟s continuous iteration of the pandemic‟s impact on the economy can be considered more a reflection of his personal agenda than any outreach to unify the nation with a common purpose. This sands away the credibility, trust and integrity of leaders, especially during times when the nation and the world needs them for consolation (Kevany, 2014).

As argued by Gostin & Friedman (2017), any global crisis calls for public leadership to not only focus on national interest but also on global public good. However, political dynamics have seen political leadership pull back on global solidarity as seen in the US and UK. Even prior to the pandemic, the USA‟s isolation policy against China and retaliation by Mexico against USA import tariffs on steel and aluminium impacted the world. Likewise, the Italian government‟s rejection of rescued migrants also highlights a deepening of unethical public leadership. Further, while such actions are claimed to be ethical, it risks emboldening global powers in the face of weak action from other powers. Additionally, since ethical leadership is

increasingly being considered relative, global powers feel freer to flaunt their authority. This is accentuated by global leaders adopting the ‟country first‟ approach and nationalism being used to defend global human rights (Kevany, 2014). If global powers cannot reclaim global values and champion them, then who will do so? Even the growing lack of faith in WHO has precluded the organization from fulfilling its global mandate. Further, the alcohol and tobacco industries during a pandemic can be construed as part of the problem and part of the solution. While the integrity of such industries may fuel distrust and place communities at risk, commanding the respect of citizens on the genuine role of such industries for economic growth can be fraught with difficulties (Gostin & Friedman, 2017). Thus, such global leadership challenges which significantly impact advances in health, human well-being and human rights must be addressed through global communicative action.

Authentic Leadership

As argued by Johnsen (2018), ethical leaders display authentic leadership, they are faithful to their true selves and display the moral foundations of positive leadership. Likewise, Liu & Baker (2016) asserted that during times of crisis, authentic leaders are the best placed to undertake morally correct actions as they know and trust their motives, values, purpose, strengths and weaknesses. Such awareness, according to Fairhurst & Connaughton (2014), enables authentic leaders to exercise self-regulation so that their values are aligned with their actions. This is critical, since the violation of ethical conduct implies some kind of harm and deliberate suffering caused to society.

Thus, core values like honesty, integrity and trustworthiness provide the basis for public leaders to act on their promises and perform beyond personal interests (Jacobs & Keegan, 2018). Failure to recognise core values can result in public leaders selling their souls for personal gain, which can be citied as a contributory factor to global scandals. Relatedly, Johnsen (2018) speaks of the moral compass guiding ethical leaders in pursuing the right thing to do. Similarly, public leaders need a sense of right and wrong, propelled by the moral compass when faced with ethical dilemmas. However, Kelly (2014) argued that values cannot be taken for granted, as it can be used to legitimize unethical deeds in the name of common good. One such example is the authorization by President Truman to drop the atomic bomb on the Japanese cities during World War 11. Therefore, it is important to understand that adherence to core values will not necessarily lead to ethical conduct, and while core values can serve good purpose it can also make leaders commit morally questionable actions.

Additionally, it can be posited that leaders need to broaden their responsibilities in view of pluralistic values, beliefs, interests and needs. However, identifying and justifying an ethical orientation in the face of such pluralism can be difficult. For example, differing expectations of what is right and wrong can erode the functionality of society, as leaders find it increasingly difficult to cater for complex demands embedded in conflicting economic, political and societal rationalities (Scherer, 2015).

CONCLUSION

It is widely accepted that improving public service delivery is a widespread public demand and central to the Millennium Development Goals. Improving ethical leadership is integral to achieving these goals. Despite laws and regulations guiding ethical leadership, challenges still remain and the global crisis further adds to already existing challenges that are

complex and not easy to address. The 21st century is increasingly associated with accountability, a new normal amidst arrogance of power and political emergencies. In this regard, Gostin & Friedman (2017) argued that there is a vacuum in ethical leadership at the local and global level, further impacting the pandemic crisis. If ethical atrocities already exist, an important question is whether a global pandemic can help to remake a positive case for reversing the normalization of unethical conduct.

Society has an expectation that they can rely on public leadership to meet their needs, especially during times of crisis. When expectations like ethical conduct is violated, the fabric of society is damaged, leading to alienation from public leadership and cynicism toward the political system in which people sought quality public service delivery and support. Success will require the establishment of strategies for addressing the weaknesses in existing governance capacity and accountability in the delivery of public services, strengthening enforcement and administrative control and successfully implementing ethical reforms. This becomes an imperative, since the global pandemic as an added challenge can spur on unethical leadership.

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