

PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF EXPLORING INTEGRITY CULTURE DURING COVID-19 IN ETHIOPIA

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Abstract

Integrity is a common issue regardless of level of economy and conditions. The aim of this study was to explore what integrity looks like in Ethiopia during COVID-19. The study philosophical stances will be objectivist ontology and critical realist epistemology. To achieve the objective of the study, the qualitative phenomenological method will be applied to illustrate the issue. The necessary data was collected from purposively selected stakeholders by using semi-structured interview and observation as well document analysis for the secondary data. The study revealed there is a problem of awareness about the pandemic specifically in rural areas of the country, there is also a problem on existing media making the pandemic their prior issues, the business ethics are highly violated and leaders of political parties prioritizing issues of election rather than pandemic. Commonly prioritization of the current worldwide pandemics is what expected from different stakeholders in the country.

Keywords: *Phenomenology; Integrity; Ethiopia; COVID-19*

1. Introduction

In the current dynamic environment modern organizations face challenges to “do the right thing” and ensure organizational effectiveness as the result of system volatility (Lawler and Worley, 2006; Armenakis and Harris, 2009). To deal with such a complex and dynamic environment, organizations need organizational system integrity. Cameron et al., (2004) consider that the ethical factors in organizations can be measured by organizational integrity among other four factors such as organizational forgiveness, organizational trust, organizational optimism, and organizational compassion. Thereby, to develop beneficial cooperation between persons and organizations, it is required trust-generating integrity (Axelrod, 1984).

Shafter, et al. (2016) also stated as Integrity is the most valued and respected quality of leadership and one of the most important management skills organization need to attain. Integrity is an organization functioning consistently with the purposes and values for which it was created (Molina, 2016). Along these lines, it is crucial for an organization to effectively articulate its mission and values for its members to internalize and integrate them into day-to-day work. It is expected from management and leadership of the organization to formulate strong system integrity for the aligned implementation of organizational policies that institutionalize ongoing moral improvement within and between organizations (Petrick & Quinn, 2000).

Hence, to avoid the possibility of what Hicks (2007) terms “systemic ethical failure” in organization, it is important to sustain an ethical organizational culture framework for maintaining and promoting organizational management integrity and for understanding and managing people in organizational settings. Therefore, improving integrity has become a major concern in the organizations including the public sectors. Public servants assist in the supervision of public resources, perform policy-making functions, and interact with citizens. In this sense, fostering integrity and prevent unethical behavior in the public sector are essential in sustain confidence in government and its institutions also helps to guard against the abuse of powers (Thompson, 1992) regardless of comforting the Integrity slogans on the home page of the company website and main organizational principles.

Simons (2008) has argued that integrity is the main feature that touches every aspect of a business. Great strategies are nothing if they cannot be implemented perfectly (Pearce & Robinson 2010). According to WITSEN CHURCHILL “price of greatness is responsibility” so great strategies can only be formulated and implement with responsible Management and leadership. There are abundant of studies within the Ethiopian context regarding the

problem of public and private sectors in relation to their customer and complaint handling mechanism, service quality, competition; effect, role and impact of management and leadership in organizational performance and commitment. However, there is lack of empirical study that assessed from integrity perspective and during pandemic. However, it is currently during COVID-19 observed in Ethiopia increasing levels of unethical business activities, illegal acts, suspicion and leader malfunction (Pilot survey, 2019). Lacks of integrity leads partiality on service providing, problem on service they provide, service delay, usually changing rule and regulation, concerned body of organization act abnormally, declining performance because of previous leader transferred to another position and a single change have constraint on function of organizations. Organizations in Ethiopia is not exceptional. A culture of integrity adds value to the firm.

The true measure of integrity in a firm is not comforting slogans on the home page of the company website, but how employees feel about whether top management and how customers feel about the organization, through its actions and behaviors, is living up to the promise in words and reason for establishment. The purpose of this survey was to describe what integrity seems like in Ethiopian during COVID-19 Pandemic.

Specifically, the study will try to address: -

- To assess the societies awareness towards COVID-19 in Ethiopia
- To analyze the role media played during the pandemic
- To identify the current integrity status of business sectors in Ethiopia
- To identify the current integrity status of leadership in Ethiopia

2. Research Methods

Philosophy impacts upon management research because research based on a different philosophy can produce a different result. Since it will not only influence how research is going to be conducting but also the criteria by which it should be evaluated (Cassell & Johnson, 2006). Mingers (2003) describes that ontology is the assumption about the nature of reality and taking a stance on ontology is to recognize the existence of different types of objects and relations while a stance on epistemology is to recognize that there are different ways of knowing the world. Therefore, the study philosophical stances will be objectivist ontology and critical realist epistemology. Since Media, Business unit and leadership is an objective entity that the researcher decided to adopt an objectivist stance to the study of integrity.

The study epistemological stance will be critical realist (Saunders, et al., 2009). Critical realists argue that what we experience are sensations, the images of the things in the real world, not the things directly. Business and management research are concerned with the social world in which we live. It is better to agree with writers such as Bhaskar (1989) who identify with the epistemology of critical realists which states we will only be able to understand what is going on in the social world if we understand the social structures that have given rise to the phenomena that we are trying to understand. In other words, what we see is only part of the bigger picture. Further, the critical realist's position that the social world is constantly changing is much more in line with the purpose of business and management research which is too often to understand the reason for phenomena as a forerunner to recommending change. That is the reason critical realist epistemology will be applied for this study.

The purpose of this study is to explore integrity through illustrating it from a society, media, business unit and leaderships perspectives so as to contribute to the concept of integrity during the pandemics, an inductive and qualitative research approach is well suited. Further, to achieve the objective of the study, the phenomenological method will be applied. Thus, to conduct this study both primary and secondary data's will be collected. The primary data source was 20 population from societies, Media (Public, Private and social media), 20 population from Business Units and Government body, while, the sources of secondary data were strategic plan document of the Government related to Pandemics, Internets and journals. The potential data collection method were observation and Telephone interview. Convenience sampling were used to reach the target population. After the data is collected the researcher tried to make the data ready for analysis. Tracy (2013) advocates forms of data analysis and interpretation in case study research as follows: Categorical aggregation form, the researcher seeks a collection of instances from the data, hoping that issue-relevant meanings will emerge. It is a process of pulling the data apart and putting them back together in more meaningful ways. Also, the researcher establishes patterns and looks for a correspondence between two or more categories. This study will follow categorical aggregation forms of data analysis and interpretation since result can be analyzed for important themes. Themes are identified by the frequency

with which the same term (or a synonym) arises in the narrative description. The themes may be useful in discovering variables that are relevant to potential explanations (Zikmund, et al., 2009). Also, while conducting this study Qualitative research Validation and Reliability will be checked. Creswell (2013) consider “validation” in qualitative research to be an attempt to assess the “accuracy” of the findings, as best described by the researcher and the participants. Internal validity refers to correct mapping of the phenomenon with findings. This is through triangulation which is make use of multiple and different sources, methods, investigators, and theories to provide corroborating evidence. So, Integrity is evaluated through collaborating evidence from different sources to shed light on perspective. Further, prolonged engagement and persistent observation in the field will takes place to check for misinformation that stems from distortions introduced by the researcher or informants. External validity refers to generalizability of findings. To assure the generalizability of the study the researcher will collect the information from target population which is interdependent group systematically as it describes the detail of the participants or setting under study using strong action verbs, and quotes. While Reliability in qualitative research refers to the stability of responses and is closely related to replicability. Reliability will be assured through asking question of the same concept. All necessary requirements were considered will collecting the data. The research results discussed, analyzed and reported without actually side with the participants on issues that emanated from spending considerable time with them.

3. Results and Discussions

From the telephone interview undertaken with respondent’s majority of them replied as they are more or less aware about the COVID-19 from different Medias and volunteers since they are found where frequency of radio and Television program is appropriately reaches. Almost all of the respondents describe as the first two weeks awareness creation was focused only on hand wash. For this a lot of volunteers are participating on street hand washing program. Every body was wash and move here and there, the road was a full of journeyer because of the school and government organizations was closed. Some of the respondents also informed as they meet those don’t know about the pandemics in the cities and additionally, their family in the country side haven’t any awareness about the COVID-19.

Majority of respondents raised as it was difficult for them what ministry of health announced about keeping social and physical distance as the result of its difficulty with our living standards, culture and lack of infrastructures. Inadequacy of water supply, difficulty of getting sanitizers and its expenses was what raised by the respondents and observed in Ethiopia. This implies as societies specially those have access for information are aware about the COVID-19 in spite of difficulty of getting necessary materials.

Also, the role that played by Medias whether it is private, public or social media was the issues that interviewed. The respondent’s thanks those media that works day and night for creating awareness to the societies about the pandemics. The result from the interview undertaken with some media and respondents the role that was played by media are aware the societies through: Producing and distributing short films, Debates and Discussion with health professionals and societies, informing the existing gap of government. However, the program designed to distribute for societies are up to their frequency coverage, not reachable at country side specially where no power.

It is also observed as there was a media that forgotten the current worldwide pandemics and focused on political issues. This implied as there is shortage of media coverage on pandemics in Ethiopia. There are the media in the country those are not properly participating on reason for what the media is established.

Additionally, business unit was considered while interview was undertaken. Majority of the respondents indicated as business ethics was violated during this pandemic as the result of business organization increase the price of products, secrete the products to form shortage in the markets, selling low quality products and contrabands COVID-19 protection materials. Almost all respondents indicated as what business units did to his societies are out of culture and unethical. This shows as business units in the country didn’t respect the Integrity slogan they attached on their website or basic principles.

Lastly, interview and observation result with respect to leadership. Majority of respondents replied as what leaders of different political parties crying about this year national election rather than the pandemic is out of mind. Some of respondents raised whom this political parties going to lead? There are also leaders that cares about societies day and night specially Addis Ababa Mayor that systematically leading the city by preparing food bank, encouraging the

investors to invest on protection materials. One of the respondents raised unethical and corrupted individuals with those was appointed to check whether private and public organizations readiness to protect the COVID-19. It also observed as sanitizers, foods donated by government and non-governmental organizations for those unable to buy and consume are illegally distributed. This shows as leaders are not properly serving the people they represented. Based on the study result the following recommendation is provided
Awareness creation activities should be continued, specially in rural areas of the country.
Necessary materials to protect societies from pandemics should available.
The government should encourage the investor those producing protection materials.
Media should be stand with the societies.
Political parties should give priorities for the pandemics.

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