



ETHICAL DILEMMAS OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS: THE CASE OF BUAYAN DISTRICT, DIVISION OF GENERAL SANTOS CITY

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Abstract

In every organization, leaders are faced with various ethical dilemmas on a daily basis as they balance their own ethics with the institution's policies and practices leading to pressures among administrators on what is the right thing to do, especially if they are torn between two possible moral imperatives.

The purpose of this research is to find out the ethical dilemma as experienced by school administrators in terms of: (a) decision making (b) conflict of interest, and (c) engaging in inappropriate behavior. The study also wants to explore the patterns or themes occur in the ethical dilemmas that arise for contemporary educational administrators in their day-to-day work and how this school administrators respond with the challenges of ethical dilemma they faced in exercising their role as head of the school.

The methodology of this study is qualitative case study, that is, it is not guided by hypotheses but by issues and problems that the study seeks to answer in an up-close, in-depth, and detailed examination of a particular case anchored on the real-life context of ethical dilemma. Data were obtained through qualitative research technique- the in-depth interviews of key informants.

Major findings of the study revealed that the ethic of care and the ethic of profession are the dominant guiding ethical perspective among school administrators in Buayan District. Thus, the teachers and other people's interest other than self-interest form part in dealing with ethical dilemma.

Keywords: *Ethical Dilemmas; Case Study; Buayan District; School Administrators; Division of General Santos City*

1. INTRODUCTION

The term ethics is a fashionable term and it is possible to see it in almost all professions. Ethics in education, especially in school administration, deal with the educational actions that take place in school. Schools are educational organizations and administrators play a vital role in managing schools. The success of an institution and the degree of achievement of educational objectives depend on the principals and its effective governance with ethical standards.

Ethical organizations and ethical problems are part of everyday life in schools. The daily program of education administrators is full of ethical dilemmas and moral decisions. As thoughtful professionals, school leaders know that the decisions made and the values underlying those decisions are full of moral implications for the entire school community.

Over the years, majority school leaders have struggled to maintain the highest ethical behavior as supporters of students, teachers and parents and are committed to providing high-quality education for students. Much of their effort has been based on their increased moral and ethical awareness and commitment (Kemman, 2019). Despite their ethical efforts, school leadership and administration have become more daunting challenges for more talented school leaders, who have been under

increasing pressure to reach much higher expectations to improve the over-all performance of the school, regardless of circumstances.

It is important to remember that schools have never been islands, able to avoid the effects of emerging trends in society in general. However, it is equally important to understand that schools are now subject to the impact of global changes to which stakeholders require rapid local responses. Schools are subject to many changes today and, with schools becoming increasingly self-managed environments, the principal has started to feel more pressure on his shoulders when dealing with ethically complex situations (Oduol and Cornforth, 2019).

The ethical leadership of school heads is of great importance to educational organizations, the most important responsibility of the school, which necessarily follows that school administrators should have an ethical perception of school administration. Therefore, the study will look into the ethical dilemmas as experienced by the school heads in Buayan District in this division of General Santos City.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This chapter presents the research design, locale of the study, research informants, data gathering instrument and data analyses used in the study.

The design used in this research endeavor is the qualitative case study, an approach to facilitate exploration of a phenomenon within the context of ethical dilemma among school administrators.

To ensure the internal and external strengths, validity and reliability and to reduce potential biases within the research in a way to increase validity, strength and interpretative

potential of the study, decrease the biases of researchers and provided more the analyses, a triangulation method was employed anchored on the literature, interviews and observations.

The study was conducted in three (3) public schools in Barangay Ligaya under Buayan district in the division of General Santos City, namely: Ligaya Elementary School, Ligaya High School and Johnny Ang National High School.

Informants of the study were the three (3) principals and three (3) assistant principals of the aforementioned public schools in Buayan district.

Key Informants Interview (KII) and observations were utilized in collecting information of the study using a structured questionnaire to explore in every dimension the experiences of ethical dilemmas among school heads.

The researcher's own understanding, perception and conceptual orientation were reflected in the process and results of data analysis (Miles and Huberman, 1994). The overall process of generation, selection, interpretation and explanation of any descriptive data can become the process of "*the interpretations of the interpretations*" (Miles and Huberman, 1994: 9). Thus, aimed to produce a 'descriptive explanation' (Mason, 1996, 2002) of the issues in the light of the research questions.

Thematic Coding and Analysis were also applied in the study in the obtaining data based on the responses of the informants.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The word ethics may be simply defined as the science of right and wrong, the science of moral principles, the science of moral judgment and conduct. It not only analyzes, classifies, describes and explains human actions as good or bad (Kizza, 2007) but also helps us know why and on what bases our judgment of human action is justified.

Ethical issues are part of everyday life in schools. They frequently arise from decisions which require value judgements about doing the right thing, or saying the good or best thing in a particular situation. Although doing the right thing seems easy enough most times when an ethically difficult situation arises, it may cause individuals to examine their ethics in practice.

In a school context, the principal mainly faces pressures creating dilemmas in their decision making, conflict of interest and engaging in inappropriate behavior where it requires their ethical personal judgement.

Informants of the Study

Informants of the study were the three (3) principals and three (3) assistant principals of the aforementioned public schools in Buayan district.

SCHOOL	INFORMANTS
Ligaya Elementary School	1 (Principal) 1 (Assistant Principal)
Ligaya High School	1 (Principal)
Johnny Ang National High School	1 (Principal) 1 (Assistant Principal)
Total	5 Informants

Decision Making

Educational leaders may often be faced with choices that require them to make decisions. All these decisions may not have any clear-cut resolution and are likely to be highly problematic. That’s why; principals may frequently face with ethical dilemma (Cranston et al., 2003). In short, an ethical dilemma comes out from a situation that requires a choice among competing sets of principles, values, beliefs, perspectives. An ethical dilemma is not a choice between wrong and right. It is a choice between two rights as it was stated by Rushworth Kidder (1995). Decision making is a crucial process for school administration. In a school context principal is the main decision maker in the school. Therefore, an ethical or unethical decision directly affects school climate positively or negatively. As enunciated by one of the school heads in Buayan district:

“Di maiiwasan na malagay ka sa situation na kailangan mamili, just like for example, alam naman natin na bawal ang internal agreement when it comes to service credit pero I still allow it, bakit? to consider also the effort of teachers exerted na if iprocess ang service credit hindi naman maapprove. So, I came up to a decision of internal arrangement”.

(It cannot be avoided to be placed in situation wherein you have to decide, just for example, we know that internal agreement is not right when it comes to service credit but why I

still allow it? Because, I need to consider also the effort exerted by the teachers where if we going to process their service credit for extra service rendered, it will not be approved. So, I came up with e decision of allowing the internal arrangement).

Another principal elucidated:

“Sometimes kailangan mo mag decide talaga kagaya ng if the teacher gusto lumabas sa school for personal reason, kahit alam mo may klase siya mapipilitan ka nalang pipirma ka nalang sa kanilang pass slip because that personal reason is important to them”.

(Sometimes there's a need to decide like for instance, if the teacher wanted to go out even though he/she have a class you will be forced to sign their pass slip because maybe that personal reason is important to them).

It is undeniable fact that school administrators have to consider all the consequences of their decisions.

“Alam natin mali yong decision natin sometimes, pero whatever the result kailangan lang natin panindigan”.

(We know that our decision sometimes is wrong, but whatever the result of that decision, what matters is we have to stand for it).

In making decision despite the fact that it could place the school administrator to imminent danger by giving their teachers human consideration. School administrators portraying attitude are in cognizant to the ethic of care by taking into consideration the sacredness of human relationships focusing on trust, loyalty and empowerment (Alford, 2009). Of course, ethic of care characterized as a common relationship between people wherein the welfare of all is inextricably related to the welfare of others, so that caring for others is, in fact, caring for one same. Ethic of profession also manifest in the exhibit responses of school administrators in a situation called ethical dilemma since in making decision the best interests of the teachers are taking into consideration.

Conflict of Interest

All school personnel, of course, are responsible for creating and maintaining a community conducive to academic, emotional and social learning, but the principal is the primary architect and promoter of the values and standards that ensure everything and everyone in the school function in accordance to the highest ethical standards (Harsh and Castor, 2007).

One of the ethical dilemmas encountered by school administrators has something to do with conflict of interest, a situation in which a person, such as a public official, an employee, or a professional, has a private or personal interest sufficient to appear to influence the objective exercise of his or her official duties (Fieser, 2017).

In an interview conducted a school assistant principal mentioned

“Conflict of interest especially sa mga leader is anchored kung saan makikinabang ka, wala lng makakalaam atin-atin lng, kagaya ng hiring of teachers. Mostly, sa mga nahahire is of course pinapaboran ng mga hiring officials maybe because kamag-anak nila or mayroon silang makukuha in return og pagtanaw ng utang na loob”.

(Conflict of interest especially to the leaders is anchored to where they can take advantage. It just between you and me, example is those who have been hired (in DepEd) as teachers. Mostly of newly hired teachers are those favoured by the hiring officials and many of them if not relatives are someone, they just returned favor).

Another school assistant principal mentioned:

“...kagaya ng principal dito, yang mga nagtitinda sa canteen is all her relatives, including the school staff- security guard and messenger, are also related sa kanya.”

(...like for instance our principal here, those who are selling in the canteen are all her relatives, including the school staff- security guard and messenger are also related to her).

It is evident that conflict of interest encountered among school administrators form part in an ethical dilemma they are experiencing in the exercise of their duties and responsibilities are governed by self- interest which is cognizant to the belief of Thomas Hobbes that self- interest was the driving force behind all human conduct. In his words, *“of the voluntary acts of every man the object is some good to himself”* (Leviathan, 14.8).

It is also noticeable among school administrators despite the fact that mostly of those conflict of interest in their profession directed by self- interest there is still the feeling of concern towards those they are giving the favors.

“Nakakaawa kasi sila that is why I am giving them the opportunity to earn or to work to have a stable income”.

(I pity them that is why I am giving them the opportunity to earn or to work just to have a stable income.

Another informant mentioned *“alam ko kasi ang situation nila and they are the most in need”*. (I know their situation and they are the most in need). Thus, the ethic of care and ethic of profession still manifesting in situation where bounded between by what is right and what is wrong.

Engaging in Inappropriate Behavior

The educational program housed in a school organization is supposed to serve moral purposes. Today, moral leadership is essential for every organization of all types and in all corners of society. Administrators play a significant role in society as leaders and role models for today's students but future's leaders.

As a school administrator is not unusual to be entangled in a situation requiring a choice to be made between two options. One of these are engaging in inappropriate behavior.

As experienced by one of the informants of this study, mentioned:

“...diba mali naman talaga na kagalitan mo ang mga teachers in front of other teachers pero ako if may nagawa silang mali saan man kami abutin pinagsasabihan ko talaga sila wala na akong pakialam kahit maraming nakakakita or even nakakarinig”.

(It is wrong to talk to teachers in public whenever they made mistakes. But for me, I don't mind to correct them in public if they done something wrong. I don't care if there is someone who can see and hear me).

The same experiences are encountered by one of the school administrators in Buayan district that correcting teachers' mistakes is a necessity in order to reach the common goals of the organization. Thus, correcting them even in public places may be applied if necessary.

As what the saying goes, *praise in public, correct in private* must be applied by school administrators as a manifestation of good leadership. Although, some of school leaders engaging in this inappropriate behavior of correcting subordinates' mistakes without considering the place, still the point is to *“correct them”* and to *“guide them”* to what is supposed to be right (School Administrators during an interview conducted on 13 November 2020).

Based on the given data among informants, it is evident that despite of those inappropriate behavior manifested by school administrators, their argument is to correct teachers mistakes and this is an indication of care. Therefore, to say, school principals care for their teachers in a manner that if they make mistakes, there is a need of correcting them.

Patterns or Themes Occur in the Ethical Dilemmas that Arise for Contemporary Educational Administrators in their Day-to-Day Work

In organizations like schools, principal as the leader are faced with ethical dilemmas on a daily basis as they balance their own ethics with the organization policies and practices. These pressures leave them questioning, what is the right thing to do, especially if they hold two competing values.

Based on the qualitative data gathered the patterns or common themes among the responses of school principals and assistant school principals are focus on the ethic of care and profession. When faces on a situation (ethical dilemma) requires a *judgment call when there is more than one right answer and there is no win-win solution in which everybody gets everything they want* (Ethical Dilemma, 2009) school head tend to justify their actions based on concern and care with regards to the best interest of the teacher's welfare.

School Heads Response to the Challenges of Ethical Dilemma

When addressing something as complicated as an ethical dilemma, the complexity arises out of the situational conflict in which obeying would result in transgressing another based on two possible moral imperatives, neither of which is unambiguously acceptable or preferable.

In addressing the challenge brought about by the mentioned moral paradox, school head responded:

“Dapat talaga eevaluate lahat ng pros and cons and whatever the result of your actions handa ka at kaya mong panagutan”.

(It is a must that everything should be evaluated- the pros and cons and whatever the result of your actions you must be prepared and stand for it).

It is inevitable to face ethical dilemma. Thus, a leader must willing to face the consequences of the action or inaction and be prepared to justify it (Sekerka, 2009).

Additionally, another challenge of ethical dilemma is that it does not offer an obvious solution that would comply with ethical norms. Hence, it is imperative that being a leader *every situation must be carefully analyzed* (School Head Response during an interview) combined with prudence in choosing alternative that offers the greater good and the lesser evil (Ibid).

4. MAJOR FINDINGS

It is hereby recommended that there is a need for school administrators to check their leadership skills in the light of ethical leadership framework. The implications for school administrators indicate that ethics in school management plays an essential role in school. That's why it is important to have some ethical codes which were defined clearly and they should be shared with teachers, students, parents and other stakeholders. Establishing written ethical codes for school administrators may help them to make decisions with integrity, fairness, and in a more ethical manner especially about personnel issues.

Also, novice school administrators may get help from the veteran school administrators to resolve the ethical problems at schools. In this sense, policy-makers are responsible for ensuring an ethical environment at schools by raising awareness about the importance of ethical leadership.

Finally, a more in-depth study can be conducted to find out why more on the ethical dilemmas of school administrators in wider scope, as this study is essential to success of every organization.

5. CONCLUSION

On the basis of the findings, the conclusion and recommendations are hereby presented:

In a situation called ethical dilemma there is no purely mechanical procedure for determining which of our competing moral principles wins in the end, and we must rely on rational intuition to guide that decision. Aristotle made a similar point about our efforts to find the

virtuous mean between extreme vices: reason will guide us, not some formula. Thus, resolving moral dilemma is not an easy task but requires the chances of doing so are much better if we understand the underlying moral principles on both sides of the debate. But findings of the study led to conclusion that most the educational leaders, specifically school administrators, justify their actions as to the best interest of their teachers and people surrounding them manifested the ethic of care and the ethic of profession.

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