

Ethical Issues and Problems in Organizations: Nigeria as a Case Study

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Major research paper submitted to
The Faculty of Human Sciences and Philosophy,
School of Ethics, Social Justice and Public Service, Saint Paul University,
In partial fulfilment of the requirements
For the degree of Master of Arts in Public Ethics

Ottawa, Canada
December 2022

Abstract

This research study explored the occurrence of unethical practices among leaders of organizations in Nigeria despite their knowledge and skills in ethics and morality. The research's background is the prevalence of unethical leadership practices that results in massive personal, organizational, and societal losses that affect the future of Nigeria negatively. Kohlberg's moral development theory is the study's conceptual framework explaining the acquisition of ethical values and the teleological utilitarian theory is the theoretical framework for interpreting the ethical behavior and concerns among leaders in Nigerian organizations. The study reviewed existing interviews and surveys of organizational leaders and, where relevant, incorporated the input of employees that directly addressed leadership behavior and decision-making. The research was consequential not only for offering an in-depth understanding of the ethical crisis in Nigeria's leadership from an organizational perspective but offered possible solutions to curb the menace. The results revealed a broader understanding of ethics and unethical leadership behaviors among Nigerian leaders. Organizational factors that contributed to unethical leadership behaviors included the lack of a governance structure, environmental and cultural influences, poor accountability, lack of or inadequate consequences for offenders, and organizational breaches of psychological contracts. Recommended solutions include exploring the gaps in person-organization dynamics and revisiting the punitive measures for individuals involved in unethical leadership.

Acknowledgment

Firstly, praise and thanks be to the Almighty God, the author of knowledge and wisdom for his love and showers of blessings throughout my research work.

I would also express my deep sincere gratitude to my research supervisors and lecturers, Dr. Mathew R. McLennan, Ph.D., Dr. Rajesh C. Shukla, Ph.D., and Dr. Richard Feist, Ph.D., who assisted me in so many ways complete this research work. I sincerely appreciate and gratefully acknowledge your contributions.

To my mentor, Barrister Tony Erhabor, thank you for your support and guidance. To my relatives and friends, who in one way or another shared their support, either morally, financially, or physically, I say thank you.

In addition, to my lovely kids, thank you for your patience, understanding, cooperation, and love shown to me. Finally, to my late husband, Vitus Nnebue, I appreciate the support and privilege you offered in my academic pursuit in life. I am grateful.

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Ethical Issues and Problems in Organizations: A Nigeria Case Study

Section 1: Introduction

Despite their having awareness, knowledge, and skills of ethical codes and conduct, employees, and especially leaders, of Nigerian corporations, continue to demonstrate increasing instances of unethical organizational practices (Odole 1). Consequently, these behaviors result in underperformance among organizations. Ethical misconduct affects both public and private organizations through conflicts and resource misuse (Jude 50). Investigation into the cases of unethical conduct among Nigerian organizations reveals an association between unethical practices and poor strategic focus, poor leadership, and exposure of individuals to ethical violations (Odole 1). Unethical conduct in Nigeria is prevalent even among senior-ranking leaders. For instance, then-Senator Idris Kuta's panel in 2006 found then-senate president Dr. Chuba Okadigbo guilty of partaking in an almost \$150 million bribe in relation to a contract award (Odole 1). These high-profile cases within firms and public entities suggest a broader and systemic issue affecting Nigeria and other developing nations, and encompassing multiple characters. These unethical cases often point to collaborative efforts between these leaders and employees of various sectors, including the banking system's leaders who are knowledgeable regarding ethical behavior and conduct. Often, the leaders reflect the broader firm culture, such that unethical leadership breeds unethical conduct within corporations (Jude 50). In light of the understanding of the pivotal role of leadership in an organization's ethical culture, this study delved deeper into exploring the ethical practices of leaders, who serve as role models in their respective workplaces.

Unethical practices and mannerisms help to characterize and contextualize ethical concerns within organizations by depicting the incidence of unethical conduct, as well as

revealing the internal and external influences on moral behavior. Some scholars investigate the involvement of Nigerian firms' leaders in unethical practices despite a broader knowledge set and skills in ethical leadership knowledge (Nwosu 37). However, emerging theories and findings on consequence-based leadership in organizational leaders in Nigeria reveal the need to explore the causes of unethical practices and behaviors among leaders in Nigeria's organizations (Odole 115). Therefore, this research aimed to answer the question: "what factors are responsible for causing the involvement of leaders of organizations in Nigeria in unethical practices despite prior knowledge and skills concerning ethical conduct?" A study on the causal factors of unethical leadership behaviors in the Nigerian organizational context was critical to addressing the side effects of unethical conduct, such as moral disengagement among employees, and to help firms achieve higher ethical efficacy (Odole 1). The following subsections comprise a background section on ethical challenges, a statement of the assumptions and limitations inherent to this study, as well as an assertion of the problem statement. Furthermore, the section outlines the overarching conceptual framework and conclude with a discussion of the study's significance.

1.1 Background

Organizations are integral actors in societies and shape the communities in which they operate. Therefore, unethical behaviors among leaders affect individuals, organizations, and the broader society. Leadership refers to both a practical skill and discipline about the capability of an individual to guide individuals, teams, and even organizations (Adefolami). The entire discipline of leadership, regardless of the office or jurisdiction, remains significant because of its capacity to influence other societal acts. Leadership approaches vary due to broader social influences, such as the dominant beliefs that differentiate Eastern and Western societies (Adefolami). In Nigeria, leaders serving in both public and private organizations have an obligation to diverse

stakeholders. The social nature of human interactions places leadership as a significant and impactful practice. Odole posits that the environment affects the leadership practices of individuals since the leaders always interact with their surroundings (2). Therefore, broader organizational characteristics are likely to influence leadership styles that Nigerian leaders adopt and implement, and possibly explain the causal factors for engaging in unethical behavior despite knowledge to the contrary.

Besides exploring various types of leadership and environmental influences on leadership styles, the concept of ethics in leadership warrants attention. Nigeria has made headlines in local and global news for unethical conduct of various types and measures by organization leaders (Odole 2). Unethical conduct affects the leaders and others in society. For example, accountants who exhibit unethical conduct result in resentment and distrust among clients (Adefolami). Also, unethical accountants may experience distancing among members of society due to lost trust or lack of confidence in their ability to act in the interest of the public. Therefore, unethical conduct not only affects the implicated individuals but also their professions, organizations, and society (Adefolami). In Nigeria, a salient area for ethical misconduct in public institutions is the area of financial management. Senator Idris Kuta's case suggests that leaders often seek massive financial rewards by exploiting their positions of influence (Odole 1). Financial incentives also unite the interests of leaders and the business actors who compromise to achieve mutual gains. Notably, some Nigerian leaders act ethically in discharging their duties within the workplace. However, some of the individuals in leadership positions within organizations in the country discard accountability and integrity in favor of economic and monetary advantages (Nwosu 38). Variations among leaders and the tendency to pursue unethical conduct for some short-term gains warrant a further inquiry into how these individuals pursue morally discordant practices.

While it is critical to acknowledge unethical conduct at the personal level, this research contextualized these practices within an organization.

Scholars point out the harmful impacts of unethical conduct in organizations. For instance, an article by Ratley outlined that standard organizations lose about 5% of their annual revenue to unethical behavior and fraudulent activities (Odole 4). The nature of these misconducts often comprises collaborations among various stakeholders at the expense of the firm. For example, organizational leaders may collaborate with external agents, such as those in the banking system, to organize, execute, and cover up a fraudulent scheme. Unethical conduct that also breaks the country's laws may negatively affect involved leaders, stakeholders, and host organizations. Widespread unethical practices that prove detrimental to the public often attract legislative measures that make these acts criminal (Adefolami). Besides the legal framework, organizational policies and guidelines contain some ethical standards for specific professions and roles. Developed professions require and rely on practitioner compliance with legal and ethical standards (Adefolami). Any actions to the contrary often subject the individual, organization, and other stakeholders to devastating consequences that may implicate their personal and professional reputation and resources. Despite the multitude of studies exploring the impacts of unethical behaviors by leaders of organizations in Nigeria and globally, there is a need to first understand the origins of such behavior. Therefore, research into causal factors of unethical conduct in organizations and workplaces by leaders with adequate skills and knowledge of ethical conduct is significant in helping design solutions.

Several aspects of Nigerian society may encourage or cause unethical conduct and behavior among leaders in private and public organizations. As a developing nation, Nigeria is ill-equipped to effectively monitor systems and design policies to deal with unethical practices

(Odole 3). Resource limitations and competing socioeconomic initiatives result in substandard and poorly implemented policies and monitoring systems. This enables and encourages leaders to exploit the weak monitoring environment and ineffective policy design to engage in fraudulent and unethical activities. Like other developing nations that struggle with poor leadership, Nigeria needs to secure its future by preparing mechanisms for leadership preparation (Oluwayemi *et al.* 574). Systems for both selecting leaders and training them to possess relevant qualities, such as integrity, are essential to achieving ethical leadership, transparency, and accountability in Nigeria and other developing nations.

The weaknesses of the Nigerian state also affect the incidence of unethical leadership behavior. Unethical leadership behaviors, such as bad governance, throughout Nigeria's history, continue to challenge the achievement of national integration (Kalagbor and Deinibiteim 46). Opara asserts that the state's characteristics include low leadership levels and poor ethical standards and values (15). These state traits feature in governance, scientific production, technology, and industrialization. Therefore, workers in Nigerian organizations may suffer from poor payment, inhuman treatment, and poor working conditions. Nigerian organizations face little pressure to improve their leadership ethics to improve the welfare of workers (Opara 15). Despite abundant resources, Nigeria has historically suffered from unethical leadership: the history of selfish leaders, corruption, and debauchery that characterizes national leadership has existed in Nigeria since 1960 and continues to affect societal development (Bankole and Olaninyi 24). The mindset of most Nigerians exudes society-wide selfishness, where everybody wants to be in leadership regardless of their ability and skills (Dike 4). Therefore, a changing perception among Nigerians and leaders is essential to revolutionize leadership structures from their current ossified states. Although it is challenging to change attitudes among societal

members, this study proposes measures like enacting an effective punitive framework that alter the mindset of unethical leaders by increasing the cost of engaging in the behavior.

Furthermore, there are challenges in the work environments that may push leaders into acting unethically. For instance, an individual's psychological contract, which entails unwritten mutual attitudes and beliefs between entities about duties and the mannerism of performance, has the potential to affect the execution of their roles (Odole 4). Within public organizations, leaders who are otherwise knowledgeable about ethical standards and morality may instead engage in unethical behaviors when they perceive a negative work environment. These leaders are likely to overlook the expectations intrinsic to their roles. Notably, the psychological contract is responsible for attaining functional behavior among employees and leaders in organizations (Odole 4). However, a failure to realize the contract results in moral disengagement among employees. Consequently, the individuals engage in behavior contrary to expectations and knowledge of ethics to compensate for what they believe the organization owes them. Independent and interconnected forces all predispose, cause, and encourage unethical behaviors among leaders.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Nigeria suffers from massive resource misappropriation due to fraudulent and unethical behavior among public and private organizational leaders. There is a significant tendency among leaders to pay only lip service, and never translate their commitment to integrity, accountability, and transparency into action (Nwosu 42). The weak sensitivity to ethical concerns in the country exacerbates this condition, resulting in highly corrupt behaviors across public and private leadership. For instance, state executives and local government chairpersons in Nigeria continue making personal gains from corrupting the state (Nwosu 41). The government of Nigeria

implicated organizations such as Halliburton in bribery scandals where amounts of up to USD 180 million were paid to top-ranking Nigerian officials to secure contracts for construction and engineering projects (Odole 4). The confirmation of this allegation pointed to the ongoing unethical practices of massive proportions among Nigerian organizational leaders. Also, Nigeria experienced a USD 242 fraudulent case comprising local financial institutions and leaders in consortium with a Brazil-based bank (Odole 5). Despite the stark evidence indicating the persistence and enormity of unethical behaviors by Nigerian officials within organizations, there is a need to inquire further into the factors that encourage such conduct despite knowledge to the contrary by the leaders. This research aimed to review extant literature and interviews on the causative factors of corrupt and unethical conduct among organizational leaders in Nigerian-based organizations despite the leaders' awareness of ethical behavior.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

This research's purpose was to investigate the factors that cause or encourage leaders of organizations in Nigeria to act in unethical mannerisms despite their being knowledgeable and skillful about ethics. The research took on a qualitative approach comprising a review of interviews with leaders of organizations in Nigeria. This approach made sense for its timesaving aspect and presents the opportunity to sample data from multiple studies and organizational settings. Therefore, the research did not comprise a specific number of leaders but broadly captured the existing literature and interviews on the causes of unethical behavior among Nigerian organizational leaders. A key contributing study to the analysis included Odole's research that interviewed 12 leaders from Nigeria's telecommunications sector (5-6). While the review sought to focus on the perceptions of leaders themselves, the interviews of organizational workers, such as the 40 employees and 10 focus group teams from Oti's study (1), also provided

more depth to the arguments. Therefore, this research conducted a review of existing interviews of organizational leaders and relevant findings from interviews with organizational employees on their leaders' experiences with unethical behavior.

1.4 Research Question

What are the causal or encouraging factors of unethical behavior among Nigerian organizational leaders despite their overall awareness and knowledge of ethics and moral standards?

1.5 Conceptual Framework

Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development comprised this research's conceptual framework due to the centrality of morality in ethical behavior and misconduct. The theory outlines the various stages of developing morality and moral reasoning (Cherry). Kohlberg's three stages of moral development reveal the belief that not all individuals attain the highest moral reasoning. Preconventional morality is the first stage and mostly comprises a decision-making rationale influenced by expectations or rewards and consequences or punishment (Cherry; Odole 6). The conventional morality stage entails an acceptance of social rules on morality. Here, individuals internalize views adopted and shared by society and role models, pursue approval, and shy away from blame (Cherry; Odole 6). Lastly, individuals come to understand abstract principles of morality in the post-conventional morality stage. According to Fang et al., individuals who reach this stage tend to engage in actions that maximize the greatest good for the greatest number of individuals (2). This assertion implies the critical role of moral development in explaining the variations among individuals in terms of moral reasoning. Therefore, only individuals who can grasp the abstract meanings of ethics can live by a set of moral standards, such as justice.

This theory is essential in exploring how people come to think about morality and ethics. While critics point out a discrepancy between moral thinking and actualized moral behavior, the theory offers an understanding of the factors that influence decisions on moral choices and the effect of reasoning on behavior (Cherry). This research, therefore, assumes a natural progression in moral reasoning. Therefore, an exploration of organizational factors that result in unethical behavior, despite a developed moral reasoning capacity in the leaders, helped determine the pertinent solutions relevant to achieving social change. Addressing these organizational influences improves the likelihood of actualizing moral reasoning into behavior in day-to-day decision-making and actions among organization leaders in Nigeria.

1.6 Significance of the Study

The research exposed fundamental issues at the nexus of leadership and organizations that facilitate and cause unethical conduct by knowledgeable and skilled leaders in Nigeria. A key significance is that the compilation of knowledge from interviews with actual leaders and employees helps to peek beneath the obscurity surrounding ethical decision-making and managerial discretion (Oti 3). Therefore, the results offer a realistic review of the motivations behind unethical practices by leaders in Nigeria. In addition, the review of interviews help explore local and cross-border influences and considerations that affect leaders' engagement in unethical behavior within their organizations (Oti 4). Complexities within organizations due to dynamic relationships and roles with people, entities, and the broader business environment suit organizations as case studies of Nigerian society. Furthermore, Bandura's social efficacy and social cognitive theories offer insight into how comprehension of environmental factors that encourage unethical decision-making by leaders helps them to become self-aware (Odole 12). This awareness is essential for leaders in Nigerian organizations to overcome moral

disengagement and to strengthen moral regulatory capacities at personal levels to achieve social change in Nigeria. Improved leadership is essential to bettering the Nigerian sociopolitical economy.

1.7 Assumptions

The assumption inherent in this research is that organizations share broad characteristics that define the obligations, boundaries, and expectations of the leaders. The research generalizes the leadership experiences across multiple organizations, regardless of size and sector. Furthermore, the research assumes that all interviews reflect a rather broad and similar environment for organizations. Thus, the study assumes no significant variations in the macroeconomic or other environments in which the organizations operate by the time of the interviews of the leaders or employees. In addition, organizational factors take precedence and have more significance compared to individual factors in ethical decision-making and misconduct. Lastly, the review assumes homogeneity in approach among the interviewers so that the results broadly reflect industry-wide factors that cut across various sectors and influence leadership decisions regarding ethical behavior.

1.8 Limitations

Multiple constraints belie this research. First, the use of secondary data limits the research in terms of the sample size and angle of questioning. Therefore, the extant interviews may not fully address the research question satisfactorily. Second, leaders and employees may not reveal the true extent of the problem due to the sensitivity of ethical misconduct and its possible impact on the individual and organization. Third, the leaders and workers may offer varying perspectives on the causative factors of unethical leadership.

1.9 Conclusion

In this section, the research outlined the introduction, followed by a background section and a discussion of the problem statement. Next, there was an outline of the study's purpose, research question, and conceptual framework. Lastly, the paper outlined the study's significance, assumptions, and limitations. The next section provides a pertinent literature review.

Section 2: Literature Review

The previous section underscored the prevalence of unethical behaviors among Nigerian organizational leaders and pointed out the need for literature exploring the causes of such misconduct. Most of the evidence overlooks the specific organizational factors that encourage leaders to participate in these behaviors despite being knowledgeable and skillful in ethics (Odole 16). This section explores the extant literature on ethics in organizations and workplaces in Nigeria under the main thematic area of ethics, with other subsections on leadership and morality. The interrelation of ethics, morality, and leadership was essential to understanding the importance of ethics in organizations, as well as exploring the differences between knowledge, skill, and actual behavior in ethical decision-making among leaders of organizations.

2.1 Ethics and Morality

Scholars variously defined ethics as a system of rules that governs the assembling of values and as standards or rules that dictate the behavior of individuals or professions (Odole 22). Overall, ethical standards align with general societal beliefs. Ethical conduct adheres to expectations and standards of acceptable behavior (Nwikina and Nwile 58). Unethical behavior does not meet societal standards and is thus wrongful behavior. In real-life settings, ethics and morality share a close association and are sometimes interchangeable. The Office of the Secretary to the Government of the Federation (OSGF), the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related

Offences Commission (ICPC), and the National Orientation Agency (NOA) define “ethics” as a system of moral principles (30). According to the agencies, ethics concerns itself with what is good for individuals and the collective. The OSGF et al. define “ethical culture” as one in which ethics is a part and argue that an organization’s ethical culture identifies whether a company is ethical or unethical (30). Chadegani and Jari observe that an organization’s ethical culture is a part of the many identifiable cultures of corporate entities that influence behavior and decision-making as organizations pursue their goals (51). The authors define a firm’s ethical culture as the shared beliefs about ethics among the members that advance ethical behaviors while discouraging unethical conduct (Chadegani and Jari 59). Therefore, morality and ethics are standards that closely reflect broader acceptable societal norms. Ethical conflicts and dilemmas often arise in situations where there are clashing interests, values, and beliefs of different stakeholders (Jude et al. 51). Ethical theories reflect broader conceptualizations of ethics and offer deeper insight into the relation of unethical behavior with individuals and organizations.

2.2 Teleological Utilitarian Ethical Theory

There are multiple theories of ethics. However, the one relevant to the research question of this study is the teleological utilitarian theory that offers insight into ethical behavior. Although there is no singular approach to or implementation of ethics among various individuals and corporations (OSGF *et al.* 30), the utilitarian theory provides a specific framework to analyze motivations and consequences of unethical leadership conduct in Nigerian organizations. The theory allows for a more specific, rather than a generalized, understanding of ethical skills and knowledge acquisition and adherence to or departure from ethical behavior because it focuses on the outcomes or consequences of an action (Marseille and Kahn 2). In the context of Nigeria

organizational leaders, utilitarianism will allow for a deeper understanding of how the behavior of leaders affects individuals and society.

The teleological utilitarian approach to ethics emphasizes the outcomes of decisions over the actions themselves. Here, the leader approaches moral obligations by determining the final goal as the most desirable path (Odole 23). Hedonism and utilitarianism comprise teleological theories. Hedonism places the significance of pleasure as the basis for good. On the other hand, utilitarianism works to maximize the good of the greatest number of individuals (Odole 23).

Teleological utilitarian ethical theories apply to transactional types of leadership, where leaders aim to please a maximum number of stakeholders and focus the benefit on the group rather than individuals. Basing ethical decisions on the outcomes is advantageous for organizations and leaders due to a collective effort among various parties to attain set goals. However, the ethical approach also leaves leaders vulnerable to unethical conduct as they pursue all means at their disposal to achieve organizational goals (Odole 24). Leadership efforts may overlook important stakeholders like employees to achieve certain outcomes. Therefore, focusing on the outcomes without consideration of the processes poses an ethical dilemma for leaders.

2.3 Ethical Leadership and Organizations

Ethical leadership refers to the use of social power by leaders to ensure that influence, decision-making, and actions reflect the best interests of all parties, minimize harm to them, and respect the rights of involved entities (Jude *et al.* 51). Ethics forms a part of the repertoire of tools leaders use to manage their organizations. The ethical approaches and standards of leaders and organizations can affect the morale and loyalty of employees (Adefolami). The ethical frameworks directly affect how leaders value and act upon the dignity and rights of others within the corporation. Besides outlining desirable behavior, leaders use ethical codes to spell out

punitive measures for dissenting employees (Adefolami). Ethical standards and leadership adherence to these principles directly affect organizational outcomes such as performance, employee morale, and even the overall culture by outlining permissible and acceptable conduct (Jude et al. 51). Ethical leadership offers direction to an organization. Previously, scholars argued that the chief executive officer's example and standards determine the moral health of their organizations (Jude *et al.* 51). Ethical leadership determines the survival of the organization by creating internal harmony and external legitimacy. Ethical leaders go beyond minimal regulation requirements to incorporate a broad array of corporate social responsibility objectives to improve the acceptability of their brands and the organization's reputation (Odole 53). In Nigeria, organizations whose leaders demonstrated ethical behaviors like leadership integrity, fairness, and power-sharing experienced stronger correlations with staff innovative behaviors like high standards of professionalism, togetherness, and transparent organizational cultures (Jibola 1). Ethical leadership explores, at the minimum, morality requirements that the codes, regulations, and legislation outline.

Nigeria's ethics and integrity policy express the interconnection between leadership and organizational cultures. For example, the policy document outlines the requirement for leading by example (OSGF et al. 12). The policy mandates all leaders in the private and public capacity to adopt practices and attitudes reflecting selfless service, trust, and accountability as they discharge their duties towards the national interest and public good. Moreover, it also states that private sector leaders should demonstrate behavior in alignment with the desired impact on their brands, companies, products, and services they deliver (OSGF et al. 12). These principles outline the general expectation and correlation of leadership as role models and organizational representatives. Furthermore, the policy position of the country ties ethical conduct to

professional standards. Employees and leaders in Nigeria, as well as the private and public sector organizations, should align their functions with the broader norms and operational structures to attain and preserve high levels of professionalism when discharging duties (OSGF et al. 21). Here, the policy outlines an expectation of leaders to commit to high standards in personal life and to go beyond the call of duty to achieve excellence, regardless of the personal cost (OSGF et al. 22). In other words, the organizational leader should place organizational needs above self during decision-making and action. The policy encourages decision-making that aligns with existing regulations, public interests, and guidance on acceptable private interests within the scope of the codes and the law.

Leaders play an integral role in enforcing ethical conduct and cultures in their organizations. Nwikina and Nwile made several recommendations for senior staff members to take on leadership responsibility within schools in Nigeria (64). First, leaders should establish and attend ethical training programs to outline and address grey areas. Second, leaders should model ethical behavior by acting with integrity at personal levels and the organizational capacity. Third, there is a need to both encourage and legitimate discussions of issues using the ethical framework lens. Fourth, the leaders should punish unethical behavior swiftly by reprimanding implicated persons. Fifth, school leaders should continually reaffirm their alignment with the organization's ethical standards and codes. Last, the senior leaders in Nigerian schools should be ready to make the hard calls, such as termination of employment, when necessary against those who act unethically. These recommendations, while designed with school settings in mind, can offer templates for leaders in non-educational settings to achieve compliance with ethical conduct. Workplaces can improve the ethical climate through ethics training, management clarification and support of ethical behavior, whistle-blower protection programs, and

maintenance of strong ethical cultures (Ugwu 23). Leaders should adhere to and model ethical conduct as individuals within organizations, and develop a tradition of integrity. Policies such as the *National Ethics and Integrity Policy* offer a starting point for the country's unified approach toward building a culture of accountability.

Jude *et al.* outline several ethical qualities that leaders of organizations should possess. Equity is a central aspect of ethical leadership, and comprises fairness in interpersonal relationships, creating fair working environments for subordinates, and respecting followers (Jude et al. 52). The principle of equity builds trust in organizations and results in higher commitment and loyalty among employees. Ethical leaders should value transparency. Direct availability and easy access to information by affected parties are indicators of transparency within an organization (Jude et al. 53). Openness and transparency provide information for probing possible misuse of power by the leader and help to remove the obscurity behind managerial decision-making within organizations. Accountability is another primary tenet of ethical leadership. According to Jude *et al.*, leaders in both private and public organizations should be able to account for the stewardship of authority and people (53). Accountability in financial decisions helps to evaluate the leadership capability of individuals. However, accountable leadership also evaluates the adherence of subordinates to set standards. Humility and fairness are a hallmark of ethical leaders. These leaders value the contributions of other people, obey the law, desist from corrupt practices, and restrain from self-serving and self-indulging behaviors (Jude et al. 53-54). An honest and fair leader avoids marginalizing others in the organization and achieves greater harmony with other workers and leaders.

2.4 Unethical Leadership in Organizations in Nigeria

The Nigerian government recognizes the reach of unethical behavior among leadership in private and public spaces. The country's ethics and integrity policy outline the erosion of citizens' trust in the country's governance owing to high corruption levels, lack of accountability and transparency, and a failure among leaders and employees to adhere to professional and ethical standards (OSGF et al. vii). The OSGF et al. argue that the officials in public organizations should act responsibly, avoid situations that create conflicts of interest, and avoid harm as maximum as possible (30). The policy document further outlines unethical behavior as acts that do not conform to the standards set by the organizational culture. Examples of such behavior include coming late to work, fraud, truancy, and absenteeism (OSGF et al. 33). There are other examples of unethical or wrong behavior, which include sabotage, destruction of official documents, corruption, the deviation from morality and honor, acting against the law, and stepping aside from the truth (Ugwu 20; Odole 22). Leaders are prone to various forms of unethical conduct while discharging roles in organizations.

National legislation outlaws some forms of unethical behaviors by leaders in Nigeria's private and public organizations. Legislation often covers unethical practices the government perceives as widespread and contrary to the public good (Adefolami). Such activities include discriminatory behaviors by leaders and exploitation of vulnerable groups, such as a failure to disclose high-interest consumer loans to vulnerable persons. The Nigerian government's National Ethics and Integrity Policy offers a standard that citizens can use to redress grievances legally using existing agencies and laws like the Public Complaints Commission, the Federal Competition and Consumer Protection Commission Act, and the National Human Rights Commission Act (OSGF et al. 27). Legislation is meaningful for creating expectations about

leadership behaviors and acting as a framework for accountability frameworks (Odole 52).

Legislation can only be effective if there are proper implementation processes and where the organizations submit to these requirements.

Besides the law, professional bodies also act as regulators of ethical behavior and misconduct among leaders and employees in Nigerian organizations. Professional codes are especially helpful in addressing some ethical concerns that cannot be legislated upon (Adefolami). For the financial and accounting professions and leaders, some of the local and international professional and regulatory bodies with pertinent and applicable codes of ethics include the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria (ICAN) and the International Federation of Accountants (IFAC). International standards available to public sector auditors include the International Public Sector Accounting Standard (IPSAS), and the International Organisation of Supreme Audit Institutions (INTOSAI) (Nwosu 43). The competitiveness and independence of auditors and accounting professionals are fundamental to identifying and correctly addressing unethical behaviors of leaders in organizations. Nwosu points out that widespread corruption poses challenges for professionals and erects barriers to professional standards (43). The cooperation of leaders with professional audits significantly improves the accountability processes in organizations. However, auditors who find themselves dealing with an unethical climate can cooperate with anti-corruption entities of the parastatals, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), and the Independence Corrupt Practice Commission (ICPC). However, the joint efforts of auditing and anti-corruption agencies are relevant to achieving a thorough investigation from the professional input of auditors and legal backup from the ICPC and EFCC (Nwosu 44). Professional codes offer frameworks for ethical behavior,

although organizations saddled with significant unethical influences may require additional measures for enforcing accountability.

Adefolami points out various loopholes that may excuse unethical behaviors among leaders. Some societal standards overlap with the law, making some unethical behaviors also illegal. However, some unethical conduct is also within legal bounds. Therefore, some leaders may pursue and alter some activities for selfish gain and justify their actions as not being illegal (Adefolami). However, societal disapproval may affect these leaders and their organizations in the long term. The abandonment of ethical tenets by leaders in Nigeria's public corporations often results in organizational conflict (Jude et al. 50). Some scholars point out poor remuneration policies of civil servants as encouragers of rampant unethical behaviors by public sector leaders (Okoli et al. 73). Although motivation by itself significantly improved the motivation of leaders and employees in public sector organizations, there was need to oversee other factors that support corrupt practices. Historical analysis of unethical employee behavior in Nigeria dates to colonial times when disgruntled employees who perceived their input as higher than the rewards pursued actions such as pilfering and embezzlement to make up the difference (Ugwu 20). Following independence, persisting oppressive leadership and policies within organizations sustained unethical worker behavior in organizations. Moreover, there is a need to revise the plethora of legislation that does not offer a unified approach to tackling various forms of unethical practices in Nigeria. However, progress in curbing unethical behavior demands vigilance among the oversight agencies.

Unethical behaviors by leaders have ramifications for the broader society. Prevalent unethical behavior breeds conflict and distrust among stakeholders (Ugwu 22). These conflicts affect the ability of the business to meet its mandate and grow. Consequently, the intense distrust

and suspicion impede economic growth, entrenches poverty in the society, and create a vicious cycle that feeds unethical behavior by individuals (Ugwu 22). Therefore, unethical behaviors stagnate society and deprive people of resources. The failure to follow the proper channels in employee selection affects the employment sector in Nigeria and the subsequent performance of the under-skilled or misplaced workers. In 2010, the University of Jos advertised for several positions of administrative officers. However, candidate selection processes revealed unethical decision-making by the leaders. Although there were other suitable applications, the university appointed an individual with an educational background in architecture (wizzy). Unethical recruitment activities are prevalent in many Nigerian public service departments and federal agencies. Reports of syndicates within the Nigerian Customs Service charging up to half a million naira for a fake employment offer and JUTH collection of N1000 from applicants before an aptitude test reveal some scandals that characterize the recruitment practices in some Nigerian organizations (wizzy). The social learning theory posits that employees learn from leaders and the environment in which they work, suggesting that unethical leadership influences permeate the organization and broader society (Oti 18). Therefore, a leadership that promotes unethical learning culture inadvertently fosters an unethical culture within the firms and society.

2.5 Literature Gap

Despite the wide measures put in place by the government, professional bodies, and organizations themselves, unethical conduct by leaders in organizations in Nigeria remains prevalent (Jude et al. 55). Observers remark that training individuals on ethical awareness and standards do not translate to an actualizing of this behavior (Cherry; Adefolami). Therefore, codes and regulations exist to set standards to which leaders and professionals must adhere or risk censorship or membership withdrawal, among other punitive measures. Some scholars

argue, rightfully, that knowledge of morality through education in ethical theories and practices is integral to guiding the morality of managers' conduct (Oti 37). However, these assertions become problematic when the operational environment imposes a dynamic and challenging environment that pressures leaders to make unethical decisions. National development suffers in the hands of unethical public organization leaders whose actions reduce the availability of services to citizens and the funds necessary to achieve vital infrastructural networks to support growth and long-term sustainability (Ugwu 22). The current examples of unethical practices in Nigerian organizations warrant further exploration of the discord between morality and ethics knowledge and skills among leaders and the actualization of unethical behavior.

2.6 Conclusion

This section explored pertinent literature on moral knowledge and unethical practices by leaders in Nigeria. Kohlberg's theory of moral development, and other ethical theories, provide frameworks for exploring these gaps between knowledge and behavior. Importantly, the background supports the need to evaluate organizational insiders' perspectives on the prevalent problem of ethics in organizations in Nigeria.

Section 3: Research Methodology

This section elaborates on the methodology this research employs to understand the organizational factors that encourage leaders of organizations to participate in unethical behavior despite knowledge of moral and ethical conduct. The previous sections provided a background of the pervasiveness of ethical issues in Nigeria. The evidence pointed out the widespread vices among both private and public sector organizational leaders. The extent of unethical behavior in Nigeria includes even the senior-most leaders in the country. Such statistics reveal the need to pursue the subject of unethical conduct among leaders. Nigeria has made advancements in

addressing unethical behaviors through its national policy document that governs the conduct of leaders and employees in the civil service and provides guidelines for private sector employees and leaders. Nonetheless, scholars need to understand specific local organizational influences that enable unethical leadership behavior at rampant scales in Nigerian-based organizations. Therefore, this review offers insight into specific factors that seem to enable the persistent unethical behavior among leaders in Nigeria. The following subsections outline the research design, rationale, method, and concluding remarks.

3.1 Research Design

The research approach adopted for this study is the qualitative method. The qualitative research methodology is most appropriate because it offers a better understanding of leadership experiences and contextual factors that encourage unethical behavior. Researchers use qualitative research interviews to obtain subjective information from participants on specific experiences and topics (DeJonckheere and Vaughn 2). Researchers employ various types of interviews in their studies. Semi-structured interviews, for example, help researchers gather open-ended, qualitative data or explore sensitive and personal issues, as well as investigate a participant's beliefs, feelings, and thoughts on a specific topic (DeJonckheere and Vaughn 3). In these types of interviews, the interviewer modifies the wording and sequencing to fit the occasion. Researchers using this approach can either conduct face-to-face, in-depth, individual interviews, or perform them in brief, group settings, over the phone, by text, or by email (DeJonckheere and Vaughn 2). Each approach offers distinct disadvantages and merits.

This study does not interview participants directly but reviews a range of published individual and group interviews. The reviewed interviews provide qualitative data from the leaders' personal accounts (Odole 60) or a broader set of organizations' employees (Oti et al. 1).

The secondary analysis of data considers the context of the research, where provided by the initial authors, and methodology. Well-designed and conducted reviews are relevant for advancing knowledge by integrating perspectives and findings from multiple empirical studies, pointing out connections in the evidence, and identifying gaps in the empirical base (Synder 333). However, the rigor of the review is also critical to developing a quality and accurate synthesis that does not rely on biased sources only. Therefore, the review of existing interviews on unethical conduct in organizations in Nigeria facilitated a broader understanding of the practice and meet the objective of this study.

3.2 Research Design Rationale

A review of surveys and interviews provided an opportunity to gather and synthesize qualitative data from multiple sources pertinent to the research question. Although some researchers argue about the feasibility of using secondary qualitative data, scholars also point out that the secondary analysis of qualitative information provides for opportunities to answer different research questions in addition to increasing the statistical power and sample sizes (Ruggiano and Perry 82). Furthermore, this approach is also effective in minimizing the cost of data collection while maximizing output. Ruggiano and Perry recommend that researchers should have direct access to raw data for the evaluation of data quality (82). However, the data used for this research was obtained from the final versions of publications rather than the raw data sets, suggesting a limitation in the comprehensiveness of the discussion due to missed information. Nonetheless, the data obtained from the interviews was sufficient for offering an understanding of how organizational leaders in Nigeria participate in unethical conduct from multiple organizations and their leaders. Furthermore, the access to original data was likely to present ethical problems, such as de-identification concerns due to the personal nature of in-depth

interviews (Ruggiano and Perry 84). The review of interviews helps to explore existing conceptualizations of unethical conduct in organizations in Nigeria and offers possible solutions to the persistent yet harmful practices among unethical leaders.

3.3 Methodology

The research employs a qualitative methodology in its exploration of unethical conduct among leaders of organizations in Nigeria despite their knowledge and skills in morality. The approach offers a greater flexibility in exploring the perspective, meaning, and experiences of participants (Hammarberg and de Lacey 499). Qualitative approaches are relevant to the research question because it provides a platform for examining the concepts of unethical leadership behavior in Nigerian organizations by understanding the specific institutional factors by exploring the issue from the perspectives of the leaders and staff. The research does not focus on theory development. Rather, the emphasis is on amalgamating existing evidence from the participants' points of view. While the lived experiences of leaders would have been better representations of real-life experiences, the scarcity of evidence in the form of surveys and interviews on unethical leadership practices posed challenges for gathering adequate data. Therefore, the study took a broader approach to unethical leadership behavior in organizations in Nigeria. Data from actual individual experiences or accounts of other members of organizations were integral to building the evidence on enabling organizational factors of unethical leadership in Nigerian organizations. Following collection, there was a synthesis of the compiled data by drawing broader commonalities and variations in the accounts the respective researchers narrated.

3.4 Participants

This review of interviews did not directly sample participants or organizations in Nigeria. Instead, the author drew from all possible interviews of the organizational leaders or workers to

extract and synthesize information and perspectives on the practice of unethical behaviors within organizational contexts. The research aimed to draw the experiences of individuals associated with organizational settings to understand specific enabling organizational factors. While the perspective of leaders is most desirable, the perspective of workers is also critical since they often observe and work with leaders.

3.5 Data Collection

The data collection procedure of this research involves a search of pertinent scholarly and reliable articles interviewing members and leaders of organizations in Nigeria on ethics. Next, the researcher briefly reviewed these articles for their relevance to the research question. Eligible articles were then set aside, and information extracted based on their thematic contributions to the organizational facilitators of unethical behavior among leaders. The review of the interviews provides a synthesized framework for understanding unethical conduct within the organizational context.

3.6 Data Analysis Plan

Following the identification of relevant articles and extraction of information, the researcher notes the relevant highlights on causal factors. While the inclusion of members from initial studies in secondary data analysis improves the rigor of the study due to their familiarity with research methodology and data collection (Ruggiano and Perry 91), the data collection and analysis procedure only relies on the study's author. However, this approach does not significantly affect the quality of the results because the emphasis of the research was to synthesize broad organizational factors that encourage unethical leadership behaviors in Nigeria rather than develop any new theoretical foundations. However, future analysis should consider a

rigorous integration of interviews to develop a more significant conceptualization for basing further research on the subject.

3.7 Ethical Concerns

An IRB should review studies involving human subjects to determine exemption from further review or acceptance based on the treatment of the subjects, even for those using secondary data for analysis (Ruggiano and Perry 92). For this research, however, the secondary analysis is based on already analyzed data and not raw interview data. Therefore, an IRB review was not necessary since there was no direct interaction with subjects but rather a review of different interviews. Since there was no access to the whole interview data, there was little to no risk of ethical breaches in the form of the identification of subjects. Ruggiano and Perry highlight the importance of additional safeguards in initial consent forms of primary research studies where researchers would avail the participant data for secondary data analysis (93). In this case, the data collection from already analyzed interviews limits the risk of unethical data use. Therefore, secondary data analysis protocols should consider how consent forms for secondary data use and the potential for de-identified data factor in to protect the human subjects. An IRB review is not relevant in this review, since the emphasis of the review is on contextual factors in organizational settings rather than the individual behaviors of leaders.

3.8 Summary

This section elaborated on the research methodology of the study. The research involved a collection and analysis of qualitative data to understand the factors that encourage unethical conduct among leaders in Nigeria-based organizations despite their skills and knowledge of morality and ethics. More significantly, the review of interviews does not access raw interview data from other researchers. This approach would call for a review by the IRB to protect human

subjects. However, the collected data was from the results and analyses sections of published documents. Therefore, the risk of unethical conduct towards the human subjects was low due to minimal opportunities for accessing de-identified data. Furthermore, the concerns about consenting for use of personal information for secondary analysis do not hold for this methodology since the authors do not access personal interview data from primary researchers. Therefore, the review of interviews offered the appropriate methodology for accessing broader literature and evidence on organizational factors that encourage unethical behaviors among organizational leaders in Nigeria.

Section 4: Results

This section presents the results of the various interviews that contributed to understanding unethical leadership in Nigeria's organizations. The following subsections outline the selected studies and the various features, including study aims, participant characteristics, research settings, and contributions to the research.

4.1 Selected Studies

The internet search for pertinent surveys and interviews yielded three relevant articles. The first article was Ebenezer Bankole Odoles's "Factors that Encourage Unethical Practices by Organizational Leaders in Nigeria" master's thesis from Walden University. The second article was Oluchi E. Oti's "The Challenges Of Ethical Behaviour In Realizing Positive Organizational Ethical Practice In Nigeria" submitted as a doctoral dissertation to the University of Liverpool. The third article by Dorothy Chukwudumebi Egbufor was titled "A Grounded Theory Approach to Understanding Ethical Leadership with School Leaders in Southern Nigeria: A Perspective of Three Primary Schools" and submitted as a doctoral dissertation to Howard University.

4.2 Research Objectives

The three studies' objectives aligned with the theme of organizational ethics and leadership. Odole's qualitative exploratory research used a case study design to investigate organizational factors that encouraged unethical practices by leaders in Nigeria despite their having skills and knowledge of ethics (77). Egbufor's qualitative study aimed to understand how school leaders in Southern Nigeria understood ethics and implemented ethical leadership behaviors in their daily roles (19). On the other hand, Oti sought to understand organizational challenges when seeking to institute ethical practice and recommend a roadmap to a more ethical organization (5). The connection between these objectives and leadership ethical behavior in organizational contexts makes them useful for the research.

4.3 Research Settings

Odole gathered data from organization leaders of two multinational industries in Nigeria (77). The organizations are based in Lagos, Nigeria. The two organizations operated in the telecommunication industry. One of the organizations was Nigerian-owned with a presence in 15 other countries while the other was an American-owned firm with local Nigerian operations and a presence in 52 countries (Odole 77). Oti interviewed employees at an organization (Oti 1). Egbufor based their research's organizational setting on schools in Southern Nigeria (84). These variations in organizational settings offer better insight into unethical leadership behavior in Nigerian institutions.

4.4 Participant Characteristics

Various authors sampled different population groups for their interviews. Odole, for example, had a sample of 18 participants by selecting nine participants each from the two organizations (Odole 78). The selection was purposeful. Participants ranged from lower-, middle, and top-level

based on years of experience. A majority of the participants were male ($N=16$) compared with female ($N=2$). Among the organizational employees in Oti's study, there were 40 participants and 10 focus groups (1). Egbufor's participants were nine individuals (85). Of these participants, there were three leaders, two lead teachers, and two assistant teachers. The points of view of these participants offered insight into leadership practices from an ethical viewpoint.

4.5 Data Collection Methodology

The sampled articles utilized varied approaches in data collection. Odole collected data using 12 open-ended semi-structured questions for the interviews (81). The average completion time of the interview for each participant was 40 minutes. The researcher received the participants' consent to record the interviews and then used Microsoft Excel to enter the raw data from each participant for each of the 12 questions. Oti used semi-structured in-depth interviews and focus group meetings to collect primary data (1). Egbufor interviewed the participants face-to-face using open-ended questions, in addition to observing the organizational activities in the schools (14). The data collection methodology is consistent with the studies' research objectives.

4.6 Contributions to the Research

Odole's research contributed significantly to this study because of the similarity in research questions. The study utilized the interview responses to produce four themes that offer an understanding of organizational factors that contribute to unethical leadership behavior despite leaders' skills and knowledge of ethics. Oti offered insight into the challenges of ethics in organizational settings and identifies possible avenues firms in Nigeria can adopt to improve their ethical culture (5). Egbufor's research offers insight into the operational ethics aspect in Nigerian organizations (14). The contribution of these studies was essential to developing a comprehensive understanding of unethical leadership behaviors in Nigeria.

4.7 Validity and Data Quality

Each study's quality and validity criterion differed. Odole took measures such as contacting experts from Walden University and using the feedback to design the interview questions and developing a neutral and internally consistent protocol (86). In addition, the multi-national nature of the organizations provided for the generalizability of data since the organizations incorporated perspectives of leaders working with local and international influences. Oti discusses the reliability of coding ethical themes, by using a qualified data analyst (67). Egbufor's study discusses its omission of reliability and validity assessments based on the grounded theory methodology (83). However, the authors invest in sharing how their research is worthy.

4.8 Data Analysis

The review of interviews offered various perspectives on unethical leadership behaviors in organizations in Nigeria. This study's findings comprised two major sections; i) the knowledge of unethical behaviors among leaders and ii) organizational factors that encourage unethical leadership behaviors. The organization of this section follows a thematic format for a better understanding of the factors causing unethical leadership behavior in Nigeria. This approach would then offer insight into the discussion of potential solutions to these organizational factors in the next section.

4.8.1 Awareness of Ethics and Morality among Leaders in Nigerian Organizations

Odole's interview provides insight into the perception of ethics and the acquisition of skills and knowledge by organizational leaders in Nigeria (89). Participants reflected an understanding of unethical leadership. All interviewed leaders (100%) revealed an understanding of unethical leadership in organizations (Odole 97). Common responses to the meaning of unethical behaviors reflected characteristics of leadership that circumvent structures and intentionally

denies subordinates their entitlement (Odole 92). In addition, the participants defined this type of leadership as unprofessional, manipulative, dishonest, and inadequate. Focus group interviews from school leaders suggested an understanding of ethics as a construct of good and bad behavior, and as a requisite for effective leadership:

“Ethics is the good and bad behavior of humans. As school leaders, we should show good examples to our teachers and pupils that we are building up. ... As leaders, you must set the standard for the teachers to perform ... We (leaders) should always live above board so that others will meet the standard and follow us. If a leader is not doing the right thing, then you cannot expect the people you are leading and you cannot correct them because you are not doing the right thing.” (Egbufor 173)

Leaders indicated their knowledge of ethics stemmed from organizational and professional training, as well as from their culture, upbringing, and other environmental influences like religious and career mentors. Admission of one of the leaders indicates varied influences on ethics knowledge and skills: “I acquired ethical leadership from home, religious leader and from career mentors. I got a lot of my skill from Career mentors” (Odole 98). These interview findings correspond with survey findings among teachers in Southern Nigeria. One respondent mentioned that “ethics and morality are the same because its roots are from culture as society in which the work organization is situated” (Egbufor 163).

4.8.2 Unethical Leadership Behaviors in Organizations in Nigeria

Various interviews pointed out a multitude of unethical leadership practices in Nigeria’s organizations. The participants reflected an acknowledgment of ongoing unethical practices and pointed out some of the organizational factors that may explain these incidents.

4.8.2.1 Lack of a Governance Structure

Egbufor's interviews with leaders of primary schools in Nigeria point out several factors that facilitate unethical leadership in Nigeria. One of the focus group responses on ethical problems highlights the challenges with the lack of a governing structure in realizing proper management of primary schools in Nigeria.

“Who cares about primary schools in Delta? In Nigeria? We are here today but we don't even know who is responsible for primary schools and the welfare of primary teachers; leaders tell you to see the state workers; state workers say there are three tiers of government so who do you cry to for help?” (Egbufor 175)

The notable lack of governance structures does not only encompass public sector organizations and the government. Private sector organizations also suffer from poorly defined or implemented governance structures. For example, some participants reported that their organizations were unable to localize their policies and influence ethical practices in specific work settings (Odole 101). Global policies that lack specificity to local practice settings create opportunities for unethical leadership behavior. Multinational corporations, therefore, face an obligation to ensure that their policies for ethical behavior reflect the realities of their various branches' localities. Other participants observed that the absence of official communication and training channels within organizations fostered unethical behavior: “I think if we have a forum where we can share our experiences like these [ethical dilemmas], then people will not fall into those traps they can avoid” (Oti 74)

4.8.2.2 Environmental and Cultural Influences

Nigeria suffers from an unfavorable culture that encourages unethical behavior among leaders in all positions, including organizations. One organizational leader noted the prevalence of the

cultural influence on ethical misconduct among leaders: “The cultural environment is not favorable, due to the nature of the business we do, we are always exposed to unethical practices sometimes when dealing with Supplier, Business Partners, and Customers (SBC)” (Odole 101). Leaders acknowledged several instances where the culture and normative behavior swayed them towards unethical behaviors that were contrary to organizational policies. Of these interviewed leaders, the majority faced the challenge of extravagance based on cultural dictates (Odole 107). Others encountered demands for bribes to secure business deals or found themselves under contractor influences. Yet other leaders complained of the pressures from the competitive environment that led to using unethical means to get the work done within a competitive time: “The environment and competition too. You know if competition is doing something and deploying services and goods faster you come under pressure to deliver by hook or by crook” (Oti 80)

In Nigeria, many leaders and workers in organizations often cite the government and its officials as an impediment to ethical conduct. Specifically, the leaders often face the trap of engaging in bribery and corruption as a part of doing business in the country (Oti 79). These cultural influences span dealings with governments, businesses, politicians, army officials, and police officers. One employee remarked about the consequences that ethical leaders can face when dealing with an unethical culture: “ I have mentioned before about government contract in my previous organization...a new [government] official wanted kickback for the job we were bidding or else...my boss refused and of course we did not get the contract renewed” (Oti 80).

4.8.2.3 Poor Accountability

Another factor encouraging unethical leadership behavior is the unequal power relations that stem from the lack of an accountability structure. One respondent from a multinational

organization in Nigeria asserted that “office politics, secrecy, lack of transparency and resistance to reasonable investigation” among leaders results in persisting unethical leadership behaviors (Odole 105). Furthermore, a concentration of decision-making power on a single or small group of individuals limits accountability and promoted unethical behavior: “The use of contractors instead of staff, allows for unethical practices. This gives rooms for unethical leadership especially when such leaders have the sole power to choose which contractor gets the job” (Odole 106). Poor accountability structures, such as the lack of an external or internal audit, also encourage unethical behavior among leaders in organizations: “These managers were earning high salaries for years before they were caught and that was not until an external audit was done on staff” (Oti 75)

The respondent below revealed the tendency of organizational leaders in Nigeria’s education sector to become lax and withhold necessary support for teachers. Here, the respondent points out the failure of the government in enforcing accountability. Additionally, the interviewee reveals that the government itself threatens the individual with victimization, thereby encouraging many leaders to remain passive in fear of retribution. An accountable government is necessary for creating an accountability mechanism for senior leaders in Nigeria’s public sector.

“Teacher morale is down today due to the behavioral attitude of the government today; leaders are not as effective anymore for fear of victimization; no one cares about workers in education; general laxity, therefore anything goes; they had incentives for us, for almost eight years now they have stopped; hungry man going to work is not good.”

(Egbufor 175)

4.8.2.4 Lack of or Inadequate Consequences

Interview respondents pointed out the lack of consequences or the existence of inadequate consequences as factors encouraging unethical leadership behavior. In some organizations (28% of respondents), there are insufficient punitive measures for offending leaders (Odole 102). The failure to check unethical conduct among leaders creates a permissive environment that encourages misdeeds. However, organizations that implement punitive measures also do not seem to assertively take actions commensurate with the leader's misconduct, as an observation from one leader in Nigeria emphasizes: "Reaction to the leader's unethical practices is harsh because of the zero-tolerance policy. Some imbalances however still existed in the justice system. Often, the punishment does not commensurate with the offense, thereby not effecting any sense of deterrent" (Odole 102). Despite the policy and justice system's involvement, the challenges with enforcing the appropriate punishment to deter the behavior persist in Nigerian society.

Respondents point out the ineffectiveness of merely terminating a leader implicated in unethical conduct without further actions. For example, some leaders responded by saying that a simple termination does not deter unethical behavior among leaders, especially among those who embezzle lots of money and acquired properties through unethical means (Odole 102). An assessment of these remarks reveals that these leaders merely view the termination as a break to enjoy their loot:

"I think organizations generally should improve on two fronts, if a culprit is caught and let's take for instance an employee stole a large amount of money from the organization and he was only dismissed, no prosecution and no jail term, he or she will only go back home to enjoy the loot." (Odole 103)

Partly, the offenders in organizations go unpunished due to a culture of silence. Stigmatization and othering of whistleblowers or reporters of unethical behavior is a deterrent for using official channels to address misconduct. The fear of being labeled as a “rat” or being “cold-shouldered and snubbed” by others in the organizations for reporting unethical behavior encourages unethical leadership practices in Nigeria (Oti 84). Consequently, many people feel helpless while hoping the culprits come to justice:

“Reporting is a difficult thing to do when you are [in a certain role]...discretion is one of the utmost characteristics...you either work with the person or choose to resign ... You keep quiet and avoid being involved any further than you can. Distance yourself from the action as much as you can.” (Oti 85)

4.8.2.5 Organizational Breach of Psychological Contract

Breaches in the psychological contract happen when there are discrepancies in meeting the employees’ expectations (Odole 105). Employees and leaders in organizations often cite feeling violated and the resultant need to secure their futures as a reason for participating in unethical behaviors. The response from a respondent further explores the perception of injustices to workers as a breach of psychological contract:

“Another factor is the remuneration, if the remuneration is not commensurate with work done, this can lead employees or leaders to be involved in unethical practices. Another factor is "aging factors", for employees who has spent a long time in the company who are not well treated when they left, individual might be involved in unethically practices protecting their future.” (Odole 104)

In Nigeria, the laxity of the government and senior educational officials results in ethical dilemmas for school leaders who do not receive the appropriate financial support to handle their

work. The school leaders encounter challenges in running schools ethically due to shortages stemming from underperforming government and state officials: “Government is doing more harm to education; they will not pay teachers; they say education is free and only provide five textbooks for a class with 100 students; not enough seats or resources; no electricity or technology” (Odole 175).

Section 5: Discussion and Conclusion

In its abstract sense, the utilitarian perspective of ethics argues that something is good when the aggregate pleasure is greater than the aggregate pain. Utilitarian ethics aims to maximize the greatest good for the most people (Ikegbu and Diana-Abasi 122). The theory upholds two principles: utility and equality. The theory posits that all interests count equally and that an individual’s social standing does not make their pain less. In other words, the theory is critical for exploring inequalities that favors the allocation of resources among the wealthy at the expense of the poor (Marseille and Kahn 2). By judging every life as having an equal value, the utilitarianism framework is especially integral in Nigeria’s organizational context where inequalities are pervasive. For example, health infrastructure studies reveal urban-rural divides in terms of social amenities and infrastructure allocation, with most rural residents experiencing suboptimal health outcomes due to resource deprivation (Okoli et al. 2). Unethical leadership practices in Nigeria reflect various interests, which may uphold inequality and binary social standing in society (Ikegbu and Diana-Abasi 122). In effect, these unethical behaviors seem to oppose the general premise and principles of utilitarianism.

5.1 Contextualizing Unethical Leadership Behavior in Nigerian Organizations within the Teleological Utilitarian Theory

The surveys and interviews reflect a high level of understanding and awareness of ethics among various organizational actors in Nigeria, including leaders. The understanding of ethics in the organizational context emphasizes action ethics rather than abstractions, especially among school leaders who contextualized ethics in terms of responsibilities and actions (Egbufor 176).

Leadership is an integral part of management in organizations, and therefore critical to organizational effectiveness and performance. Therefore, an understanding of ethics among leaders and organizational members results in the social harmony of members through group conformity as they aspire to and adhere to a conventional morality (Opara 17). It is fundamental for leaders to be aware of, believe in, and practice ethical standards set by the organization, government policy, and society in general to achieve the greater good. Despite a personal awareness of ethics, the data showed various instances where leaders' actions were incongruent with their skills and knowledge of ethical conduct.

Several organization-related aspects encourage unethical conduct, including the lack of a governance structure, cultural and environmental influences, poor accountability mechanisms, inadequate or absent punitive measures, and organizational breach of the psychological contract. An analysis of these experiences demonstrates the impact of unethical leadership behavior on the public welfare of organizations and the state. Utilitarianism aimed to minimize harm and achieve happiness based not on an agent's subjective perspective, but the objective definition based on the vast majority (Ikegbu and Diana-Abasi 128). Based on the interview and survey accounts of the various organizational actors in Nigeria, persisting cultural and environmental pressures often tempt leaders to prioritize the selfish interests of individuals or the organization rather than the

society's good. Odole remarked that the utilitarian ethical perspective might justify a wrong means if it leads to the desired end, which is the greater good (Odole 24). Where one considers the organization as the entire community of stakeholders, then pursuing avenues such as corruption or using other means to meet deadlines and remain competitive may seem justifiable, even under the utilitarian ethical perspective.

However, organizational leaders cannot merely ignore their contributions to broader society. A conceptualization of the just society suggests the "guarantee of equality of rights and liberty for all" as well as creating conditions for allocating the greatest benefit to members of the society who are least advantaged (Ikegbu and Diana-Abasi 124). Therefore, organizational leaders in Nigeria should not only consider personal or organizational interests and fail to accommodate broader societal concerns when evaluating whether the outcomes of their actions achieve the greater good (Ikegbu and Diana-Abasi 126). Some scholars argue that the premise of morality goes beyond group or personal gains to consider broader societal interests (Okagbue 35). In Nigeria, scholars largely attribute the prevalence of unethical behaviors to personal failures among leaders at the expense of systemic factors that uphold undesirable conduct. For instance, leaders in local councils arguably fail to achieve good governance and critical socioeconomic development because of being unwilling or unable to take on the responsibility or set an example personally (Enwereonye et al. 29). Although personal roles exist to uphold ethics, these perspectives often overlook organizational contributors that facilitate ongoing unethical behaviors. A failure to address these enablers and encouragers of unethical leadership practices in organizations and the public service results in a loss of trust in public institutions due to persisting resource misappropriation to advance self-interest (Enwereonye et al. 30-31). The

teleological utilitarian theory offered some insights into encouraging ethical leadership behaviors in public and private organizations.

5.2 Solutions to Unethical Leadership Behaviors

The evidence suggested that leaders in Nigeria are highly ethically aware, although multiple organizational forces present dilemmas that may push them toward unethical decision-making. The first solution is to reconsider person-organization dynamics in private and public institutions in Nigeria. Psychological constructs such as self-continuity impact unethical business decision-making. Leaders of organizations with low levels of future self-continuity tend to engage in higher levels of unethical leadership behaviors (Iheanacho 36). Organizations should encourage a broader appreciation among employees of how personal goals interact with broader organizational and societal ambitions in the long term. Arigu and colleagues point out the need to ensure that employees fit with their roles and jobs within organizations to ensure high organizational commitment levels. A previous study comparing information system professionals compared with other professionals found a higher level of found higher organizational commitment but less ethical commitment in terms of hacking and software piracy (Oz 137). The teleological utilitarianism theory, however, explains how organizational commitment may excuse the use of unethical means to obtain certain ends (Odole 24). Unethical pro-organization behavior Nonetheless, organizations should consider fulfilling their obligations to all stakeholders, including the leaders, to minimize the temptation to misappropriate resources for selfish gain. School leaders, for example, cite the need for sufficient remuneration from the government (Egbufor 167). Organizations should empower and set expectations for their leaders to build an ethical climate, lead by example, and create a system for continuous communication of the firm's values (Sawyer 96). Arguably, organizations should consider meeting the

expectations of leaders and employees to minimize the need to use alternative means to compensate for that goal.

There is a need to evaluate the consequences or punitive measures meted out to unethical leaders in Nigeria. The country ranked 12 out of 12 examined OPEC countries, a situation arising from poor leadership, corrupt practices, and unethical conduct among public sector leaders (Gberevbie et al. 7) Nigeria lost US\$76.13 million or 11.8 billion naira between 2007 and 2009 to theft from officials dealing with the subsidy on petroleum products (Gberevbie et al. 6). Fifty percent of global companies do not report or investigate the worst fraud and unethical incidents (Hassan et al. 3). Propositions for strict and immediate punishment for unethical leaders and their organizations aim to achieve greater compliance with professional and ethical decisions (Okoli et al. 73). Punitive measures in Nigeria should especially ensure that the resources are recovered, thereby removing the incentive for plundering massive assets for later personal enjoyment. Organizations need to localize policies and develop robust ethical appraisal activities, including using external audits, to mitigate unethical leadership practices that arise from the lack of consequences (Odole 109). Industry stakeholders need to re-evaluate how both public and private organizations should redefine optimal outcomes of leadership to develop a conducive climate that encourages ethical behaviors. However, organizations are in a unique position to deter unethical leadership engagement by enforcing stringent punitive measures for actions that harm the society and majority of organizational stakeholders.

5.3 Conclusion

Nigerian organizational leaders display a range of unethical behaviors despite being skilled and knowledgeable about ethics. In Nigeria, unethical leadership is costly to individuals, organizations, and society. Unethical behaviors among leaders are also prevalent among national

leaders in the public sector. The environment in the country supports unethical conduct across the public and private sectors. This research considered leaders as role models in society and aimed to investigate why leaders engage in unethical conduct despite their awareness of morality. Specifically, the research examined supportive organizational factors that encourage unethical leadership practices in Nigeria's organizations.

Nigeria is known for its unethical conduct among leaders, especially in financial dealings. Financial losses deprive organizations of resources and result in the stagnation of societal development. Therefore, there have been numerous efforts implemented to achieve transparency and accountability. Legislative measures in Nigeria aim to address far-reaching activities like fraud that endanger the progress of society. However, Nigeria's status as a developing nation presents multiple challenges, such as poor monitoring and implementation frameworks.

The results of the research reveal that the leaders were aware of ethical leadership. They described unethical behavior as manipulative, inadequate, dishonest, and manipulative and often described ethical leadership in the context of implementing one's duty. Organizational factors that encouraged unethical leadership behaviors comprised the lack of a governance structure resulting in poor enforcement mechanisms, environmental and cultural influences that emphasize unethical traits such as extravagance and financial gains, and poor accountability due to unequal power relations. Other challenges include the lack of or inadequate consequences as well as the organizational breach of the psychological contract, which encourages individuals to take matters into their own hands.

From the utilitarian ethical perspective, it is possible to understand and even uphold unethical conduct such as giving kickbacks for company gain if it results in positive outcomes for organizations and employees. However, the results of unethical leadership are detrimental to

Nigerian society as a whole. Therefore, the aggregate pain is higher than the aggregate pleasure. The recommended solutions to the problem of unethical behaviors include revisiting person-organization dynamics in Nigeria to ensure organizations meet the needs of workers to ensure high commitment and lessen the desire among individuals to secure their future using scrupulous means. In addition, Nigeria needs to evaluate its punitive measure since most leaders would steal and later enjoy their bounty after release from jail or work. Intensive and urgent measures are critical to improving Nigeria's leadership to achieve much-needed socioeconomic development.

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