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## Ethical leadership and work ethics: modelling a solution for leadership challenges in the Nigerian church

*Bolarinwa, Adebayo Oluwasegun & Ojelabi, Isaac Kehinde*

## Abstract

*The role of leaders cannot be belittled in any society or organisation, this is based on the fact that the strength of a body or structure rest largely on the type of leaders that pilot affairs of such organisation. Church leadership in modern day is laced with various disheartening realities like corruption, favoritism, nepotism, among others. It is alarming to perceive that many Church leaders today tend to have neglected their primary duties and this have directly taken toll on members and workers in the Church with less diligence becoming the order of the day in many Christian circle and organisation. Making a cursory assessment of the status quo, this paper adopts an evaluative research method to assess the necessity of practically inculcating work ethics and ethical leadership by leadership of modern day Church which will in turn serve a modeling purpose for the larger community. The study concludes that ethics of work is an essential paradigm to bring into consideration in regulating excesses and lapses in the modern day Nigerian Church. The study therefore recommends that pastors are to take leadership more importantly having a great effect on their Churches and also on the broader society.*

*Keywords: Work Ethics, ethical leadership, Nigerian Church, leadership development, leadership challenges*

## Introduction

Leaders are ladders called into a huge responsibility of working towards the wellness and progressiveness of their organization (Clinton, 2012). Church leadership is saddled more with responsibility of managing the affairs of the Church and their influence extends beyond the four walls of the Church, impacting the broader community. But the modern times have seen a negligent of the ethical expectation of the tasks and duties of a pastor, with focus on other things which were originally not part of the work description of the pastoral office. Babatunde (2013) opined that, the failure of focusing

primarily on the duties of being a leader of the people have led to various conflict, issues bending on tussle for power which is unhealthy for the development of the Church as a whole.

This challenge tends to commence with leaders of the Church and has equivocally spread to be in operation among members of the Church as quest for various leadership portfolios have become of serious tussle due to the wrong reasons. The misnomer in the Nigeria Church is reflective in the spread of corruption, idleness, favouritsm and lack of diligence in disposition of responsibilities. These traits are misrepresentation of the identity of the Church as exemplified in the early Church and the discharge of their duties as a Church. This trend of weakening the identity of the Church in the 21st century calls for urgent attention and reorientation towards diligence.

This study channels a new part of encouraging diligence with work as a solution for leadership disputes and contest. Each leader must understand that leadership duties are encompassing and demanding than the applause which is always projected as benefits of being a leader. Therefore, in the quest to manage leadership disputes, focusing on work is a diversification of concentration on tussle for power, the study will help to therefore realise that being diligent to work automatically programs an individual for leadership avenues and opportunities.

## Ethics of Work in Perspective

Ethics of work could be seen as the moral principles and values that guide an individual's behaviour and decision-making in a workplace. The ethics of work is considered in this section of the paper directly as focused on dutifulness of working organisation rather than as a Church setting, this is essential to the goal of this study to therefore infer ethics of work afterwards into the setting of the Church as a format that is veritable and adoptable even in the settings of the Church.

A work ethic is a virtue founded on diligence and hard labour. It is a conviction that work has moral value and can improve character (Arifin and Putra, 2020). Reliability, initiative, and the desire to learn new abilities are all components of the term. Theoretically, employees with strong work ethics ought to be chosen for promotions, better jobs, and greater responsibilities. This simply points to the fact that, the subject of discourse is an essential requisite for being seen and applauded in a place of work.

Employees with poor work ethics could not be considered to be worth the money they are paid by their employers, and they should not be given more responsibility or promoted. Any organisation that wants to succeed must have a strong work ethic. Their internalized work norms to accomplish

the desired outcomes are reflected in their work ethic. Each leader has certain traits related to their work ethic. While a leader with a strong work ethic will fulfil his obligations with complete dedication, a leader without a strong work ethic may often work carelessly (Ani, Kirana and Purnamarini, 2024).

Adopting a work ethic is seen as a productivity tactic that promotes raising the calibre of work (Iskamto., 2023). An organisation's culture is greatly influenced by workplace ethics, which are the moral principles that specify proper behaviour in the workplace. Businesses that uphold their ethical standards may observe that their employees trust one another to act morally, which can increase employee loyalty and performance, attract new hires, and make their clients proud to do business with them.

As expressed by Paais and Pattiruhu (2020) Ethics go beyond what is needed by law. Although some behaviours, like discrimination or theft, are obviously illegal, ethics can help define ethical grey zones that may conflict with the company's principles and endanger the company's reputation. When employees see that a company's ethics are taken seriously and modelled by leadership, they are much more likely to hold themselves to those standards. Leaders have a significant impact on workplace ethics; they must not only establish ethical standards but also act ethically in their daily work (Sikorsky, 2018).

When executives behave unethically, employees may lose trust in the organisation's moral character and fail to report misconduct, which can escalate to more unethical behaviour and eventually become ingrained in the organization's culture. This emphasizes the impact of leaders commitment and consistency with work ethics on the subordinates.

## Ethical Workplace Behaviours

In the discourse about work ethics, the place of work and conduct is a better indicator of the ethics of employees and staff of a company or institution. Below are few ethics that should be checked in the quest for ethical standards at work place especially with the leader in focus, having in mind that leadership is of paramount effect in actualising work ethics. This detail as contained in this section of this paper will further help in transitioning the focus of members and leaders in a local Church to prioritise rightly rather than embark on unhealthy contests;

First is the ethical trait of transparency in operations and interactions. According to Skeet (2017), an ethical leader will be open and honest about their decision-making process, pausing to think through the decision's long-term implications and consulting with others who may be impacted. They may also utilise statistics or company principles to support their arguments.

Furthermore, the quest for accountability is another essential workplace ethical behaviour that should be adopted by people of various spheres and society (Bennett, 2000). Being accountable entails keeping one's word and taking responsibility for one's errors rather than avoiding it. By pointing out improper behaviour, confronting subpar performance, or challenging unethical decisions, workers in an ethical workplace will hold others accountable in addition to themselves.

Lastly on this note, condemning unruly behaviours and unethical conduct is essential to be adopted for greater good, speaking up in the face of wrong conduct in a place of work as well as in the Church will go a long way in contributing to the joint success of such organisation or forum. Creating an ethical workplace requires reporting unethical activity (Sikorsky, 2018). An employee should report unethical behaviour to a management, the company's ethics contact, or another channel specified in the company's code of ethics policy if they are uncomfortable addressing a leader or colleague about it.

## Ethical Leadership

Leadership is of paramount essence in actualising ethical values in a given society. Ethics of work can therefore be seen to come to play when leaders of a given society or organisation plays the ethical role personified and becoming an example or model for others to follow. Managers and executives who practise ethical leadership base their decisions on their core beliefs. Even if it doesn't help them or their company, they make sure their choices are in line with their moral convictions (Sikorsky, 2018). Therefore, rather than focusing on maximising profits and personal benefits, ethical leaders prioritise the welfare of people inside and beyond the organisation in order to contribute to the larger good.

Humans integrate normative attitudes through a "role-modeling process, by observing others and then imitating their behaviours" (Bandura, 1977). According to Bandura, "social learning theory is based on the idea that individuals learn by paying attention to and emulating the attitudes, values, and behaviours of attractive and credible role models." Therefore, ethical leaders must gain credibility and legitimacy in order to be regarded as role models.

Leaders are dotted with power because of their superior position within the company, which increases their authority and, thus, their appeal. But authority alone isn't enough to be attractive. According to research, followers find role models that treat others honestly and with compassion for their subordinates more appealing. Fairness is one of the most crucial elements of ethical leadership, therefore this improves followers' perceptions

of ethical leaders as trustworthy role models. As a result, followers are more inclined to look up to moral leaders for direction.

Furthermore, the fact that moral leaders not only uphold moral principles by setting clear guidelines, but also practise what they teach their followers, enhances their trustworthiness. "If models do not abide what they preach, why should others?" is a question Bandura (1986) posed on the credibility of leaders. Strong determinants for further influence on employees' behaviours are the role modelling position and the trustworthiness of ethical leaders. By demonstrating what is expected, rewarded, and punished, ethical leaders can significantly impact the ethical behaviours of their followers through role modeling Skeet, 2017). By observing which behaviours are rewarded and which are not, employees can learn by role modelling ethical behaviour. Ethical leaders are a significant and primary source of this kind of modelling since followers view them as trustworthy and appealing people. When subordinates observe actions they believe to be selfless and acceptable by the standard, they are more likely to pay attention to them.

Due to their position within the organisation, their status, and their accomplishments, leaders have the ability to influence others' attitudes and outcomes. It is especially crucial for ethical leaders to communicate ethical values to followers by setting an example. Through observational learning, imitation, and identification, ethical leaders are more likely to be able to influence their subordinates' behaviours, but for these emulations to endure over time, they must be reinforced by a number of processes.

## Leadership in the Church

Leadership in the Church is crucial for guiding and nurturing the spiritual growth of its members. The duties of Church leadership could basically be traced to traced to Church ministers like Pastors, Prophets, Evangelists, among other men regarded as the fore frontiers of the Christian denominations and body. But beyond that, Church leadership spreads to every member of the Church one way or the other because, fellowship leaders, unit leaders, group leaders among other micro bodies that make up a local Church have leaders serving at those various capacities and this implies that they are also leaders. This section therefore discusses leadership broadly in the Church and not limited to only the clergy men of the Church.

The Sustaining Pastoral Excellence team (2005), was of the opinion that Church leadership aid in the inculcation and activation of corporate practices of a given denomination. They explained that, effective Christian leadership can be seen as a major process of helping the people to internalize in their corporate life, the practices that represent Christian living, communality

among other indications of the reality of Christ likeness and model for the local Church.

The early Church is known through the scripture for her representation of the model of Christ ranging from servant leadership to exemplary leadership being provided to the Church; Matthew 20:26-28, Mark 10:42-45, mentioned the Servant Leadership model of Jesus serving others with humility The Apostles provided practical leadership to the early Church and their leadership was effective and productive to the early believers as reflected and taught in the Acts of Apostles. The modern day Churches have experienced a twist in the operational values of the body faulting from the contemporary set of leaders. Many Churches have lost the value and identity of their founding patriarchs. This has evolved into modern Church leaders without genuine passion for their members but simply aimed at what they can earn or gain from the Church.

Christian leadership in contemporary times are filled with professional pastors who are only focused at getting their remunerations and benefit as their office deems. This has led to various issues in the Church ranging from conflict to tussle for power. A leadership conflict can be defined as a fierce or chaotic battle with the intention of using any means necessary to obtain a leadership position or post in defiance of established norms, procedures, or standards.

There are lawsuits in some Churches today because of leadership conflicts, which have pitted one denomination against another, one pastor against another, member against member, tribe against tribe, one social stratum against another, one region against another, children against parents, and so on. A few members of the Church today have used devilish tactics to obtain a particular office.

It is alarming today that, Church leaders like pastors, elders, deacons, among others are now wrongly conferred with less emphasis on the significance of the responsibilities but on the financial capabilities of the individuals. Title with no commitment is dominant in the 21$^{st}$ century Church and this has led to maligning the workforce of the modern Church since the major requisites for commitment are lagging in some leaders.

Conflict for power is one of the main causes of conflict in the Nigerian Church today, according to Awojobi (2013). People fight for positions of authority because they see it as a "do or die" situation. It seems like every Christian wants to be in charge and no one wants to be a servant. Some Christians even overthrow a leader in order to be appointed in their place. This problem is a antigrowth agent for the Church's development and progress.

## Leadership Challenges

A very common phenomenon in life that might be randomly said as relative to every institution is the case of challenges and this is also applicable in the context of leadership as it is not excluded from the issue. These challenges are majorly responsible for the failure of many leaders in their leadership capacity. Thus, some of thesewould be discussed as follows:

**Lack of Preparation:** Leadership is a position that comes with much responsibility and it calls for selflessness on the part of the leader. However, some leaders just find themselves in the position unpreparedeither through election or appointment as the case may be and on assuming the office, they just deal with things casually even when they ought to take it more seriously. (Gomes, nd), opined that"Leaders are expected to lead and do that very effectively and with this they are needed to have confidence. Since, confidence is a positive emotion that gives a forward thrust to life and living" Many of them failedbecause, "most of them have neither been formally trained nor had good role models" (Finzel, 1994). This obviously connotes that if a leader is not formally trained he could still learn from others depending on his willingness to study and build himself.

**Infallibility:** This is another major challenge of leadership. Sanders (1967), posited that, this could be traced to making judgement in a given situation. Spirituality does not guarantee infallible judgement". It is thus, seen that the human frailty is also having its effect on leaders in most cases and could affect in making discernment. This is suggesting therefore, that leaders ought to be very careful in making judgment and that is where the leadership quality of prudence (wisdom) should be effected. Many followers are just like wanting to cause downfall and confusion to the leaders and this will lead to the next point which is;

**Lack of co-operation by the followers:** This is a very serious challenge any leader would not want to come across as it would have been better for that individual not to have assumed leadership position. Reason is that, the followers' cooperation would make leading to be smooth as relationship is very vital in leadership. As expressed by Kareem (2017), leadership is said to be a relationship and this is clearly discovered and obtainable in the interpersonal relationship of leaders and followers. Followers in some cases could conspire against the leader and eventually cause the downfall of that leader. Thus, every leader has to create a mutual relationship that would help sustain

positive dealing with their followers.

**Division**: This is another major challenge that can hinder progress in leadership. There are cases of sectionalism, segregationalism and nepotism that can cause problems and be a huge challenge to leaders. This kind of challenge might be prevalent either in the Church or in the society. A typical example of the biblical illustration is the event that happened in the early Church where women had conflict based on tribal differences (Acts 6:1). In the Nigerian nation for instance, it could be said that, people are more conscious of their tribe than nationhood, (for example, a Yoruba man would rather refer to himself as a Yoruba man than a Nigerian and it would be obvious in his relationship with an Hausa or Igbo man) which is not ideal for a healthy leadership quality for the country.

**Anarchy:** This is a prevalent challenge encountered by leadership in the contemporary society. Everyone tends to want to live and act the way he or she wants to without considering its repercussion on the populace. People appear to be more of ethical egoists than being utilitarian and this is a great disadvantage to the progress of leadership (Heward-Mills, 2003). The case of anarchy as prevalent in the Church today is seen as one of the reasons responsible for the proliferation of Churches.People tend not to be satisfied with the way leaders are leading and instead of correcting the woes being encountered by the leaders of the Church, they would rather 'decamp' and establish a new Church which is for their own personal doctrine and this a major reason Churches have different forms of doctrine.

**Conflict Management:** management of conflict is another thoughtful engagement within the purview of leadership challenges.Various organisations experience controversy at various points, but it becomes the duty of the leaders to manage the conflict that could erupt in such setting (Imasogie, 2005). But many leaders today find it difficult to resolve the conflict that might sprung up between the led or between themselves and the led.

**Rigidity:** Finally on this note, leaders are to be firm in making decisions that concerns the Church. This is because the failure of a leader to have a definite position on matters in the society can lead to being taken for granted by followers. Being rigid does not imply that the leader is not corrigible but

rather, he is able to make a decision and stand by it without being easily influenced to change his or her stand on the issue. Therefore, leaders are to watch out for the various challenges they can come across in leadership, in order to have a successful ending after their time of leadership.

## Modeling Work Ethics as Panacea for Leadership Conflicts

In the quest to combat misplaced priority in the Church, focusing the attention of members and workers in the Church through focusing on work is a valid route to community progression in the Church rather than unhealthy contests or pursuits that have dominated leadership quest today;

The position of this study is consistent with the research conductedby Wahyuni (2019), as contained in the work ofAni, Kirana and Purnamarini, (2024),which also emphasized the significant impact of leadership style of a leader on employees but in this case, the style of leaders have direct effect and impact on lifestyle and perception of members and workers of the Church. Effective leaders are able to inspire and motivate their team members, foster open and clear communication channels, make sound decisions, manage their emotions effectively, and exhibit a strong sense of responsibility. Therefore, effective leaders create a favourable and conducive work environment that enables employees to perform at their best.

The adaptation of leaders to diligence in their duties as leaders in the Church, applying the principles of work ethics in the disposition of their responsibilities will go further in aligning their task and achieving the primary goal of the Church. When leaders are concentrated at their various duties, the varying port-folios calling for contest will become easy to feature and perform because the strength of each person will be obvious in their disposition of primary responsibility and that will provide the best personnel to serve in various designated advanced leadership position which is being unhealthily contested.

The tussle for power and leadership portfolio has result in serious catastrophe (Awojobi, 2003) in the modern day Church and this have seen incapable hands occupy leadership position since they got there through manipulative means. It becomes clear that a strong work ethic is essential to raising employee performance to unprecedented levels. Workers that continuously produce outstanding outcomes are those who demonstrate an unrelenting devotion to their work, driven by a contagious passion, steadfast discipline, a profound sense of responsibility, and the tenacity to endure in the face of obstacles; this categories of workers are to naturally emerge in places of

leadership and will dispense their duties significantly and progressively.

A Church leadership characterised by valid ethical leadership will serve the purpose of modeling for other members and workers in the Church to follow suit. Beyond the four walls of the Church, Church leaders are societal influencers and as such, this trait can be adopted by people outside the Church setting who are observant of the lifestyle and leadership style of the pastor or Church leader. As detailed by Caldwell and Dixon (2010), the collective impact of a leader modeling leadership through leadership style, work ethic, and ethical leadership cannot be overemphasised on follower's performance, this is undeniable, as these factors work in concert to create a powerful force that drives the Church body to unparalleled levels of productivity and success. This shows that these three factors are interrelated and support each other in creating a work environment that is conducive to improving employee performance. The idea propounded by this study align with the research conducted by (Brown & Trevino, 2006) , which collectively demonstrate the simultaneous impact of leadership Style, and work ethic reveled in performance of workers in the Church.

A leader, who is work inclined as seen in the work ethics is a propellant for initiative reasoning and creative thinking in the Church community, in this regards, everyone focuses on the progress and development of the Church as a whole. As posited by the trio of Ani, Kirana and Purnamarini (2024) the foundation of a work ethic is a spirit of initiative and diligence that propels a business forward. Work ethic has a significant positive impact on employees' performance, according to (Ghozali, 2016), who carried out earlier research. This suggests that a higher work ethic will result in a proportionate increase in Church growth and productivity, as opposed to combating each other due tussle for power.

Summarily from the above, work ethics can be imbibed in the Church through the following;

1. Mentorship: Experienced, Skilled and emerging leaders could be paired for guidance and support.
2. Training and Development: These can be provided through attendance at conferences, workshops, and online courses opportunities for leadership development.
3. Prayer and Spiritual Formation: Encouraging leaders to prioritize prayer, spiritual disciplines, and personal growth.
4. Accountability and Feedback: Provide enabling structures for regular feedback, accountability, and evaluation.

## Conclusion

Leadership in an organisation will determine the perception and extent of progress of such setting and this is directly practicable in the Church. The current unhealthy pursuit of power and contest among Church leaders and workers can be traced to the failure of prioritizing vital factors in the Church. The failure of recognising the importance of focusing on Church work for mutual growth and development have serve the purpose of hampering the general well-being of the Nigerian Church today and as such, the need for ethical leadership which leads exemplarily is essential in modern day Church.

Realising the pivotal role that a leader plays in an organisation, the Church leaders are to initiate exemplary leadership by becoming critical of their perception to primary responsibilities and duties as such the ethics of work is an essential paradigm to bring into consideration in regulating excesses and lapses in the modern day Nigerian Church. By adopting this format, the stability of the Church will be guaranteed with everyone staying diligent to their primary duties targeted at joint growth of the Church as a whole.

The study posits strongly, that the adoption of work ethics by leaders will have significant effect on members and other workers of the Church and this will in return lead to mutual benefit for everyone in the Church. Beyond this, the unhealthy tussle for power which is the order of the day, and which has served as a hindrance for growth in the Church can be combated. This will be evident in the clear distinction of commitment based on individual disposition of duties and beyond that, envy will be suppressed having in mind that the one saddled with the task is the best fellow to combat the situation.

## Recommendations

This study is primarily based on the Ethics of work and ethical leadership as panacea for leadership challenges in the Nigerian Church: A quest for modeling. Based on the above discourse, this paper recommends the following;

   i.  Pastors are to take leadership more important with the understanding that their actions have a great effect on their Churches and also on the broader society.
   ii. Church leaders and Pastors are to exemplify diligence and to applaud diligent workers in order to encourage those that are faulting behind in being diligent
   iii. Positions saddled with power are to be based on performances of Church workers and leaders. This will give room for diligence on

the part of the interested candidates.

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