Promoting Ethical Human Resource Management Practices in Work Organisations in Nigeria: Roles of HR Professionals

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Abstract

This paper has become imperative in view of the on-going Federal Government's initiative in charting an ethical roadmap for Nigeria. Ethics permeates all aspects of our national life and human resource management profession is no exception. Ethics refers to the principle of conduct governing an individual or a group. This paper examines ethical HRM practices in work organisations in Nigeria and the roles of HR professionals in promoting ethical practices with a view to achieving employee well-being, satisfaction at work and organisational performance. Based on theoretical and practical insights, the authors x-ray an array of unethical human resource management practices in work organisations in Nigeria. To combat unethical HR practices in the workplace, the authors enjoin HR professionals in line with top management to put in place ethical policies and codes and to constantly embark on ethical training of workers at all level as well as the institutionalisation of whistle blowing policy in their organisations.

Keywords: Ethics, Human Resource Management, Work Organisation, HR Professionals.

1. Introduction

This paper has become imperative in view of the on-going Federal Government's initiative in charting an ethical roadmap for Nigeria. Ethics permeates all aspects of our national life and human resource management profession is no exception. "Ethics refers to the principle of conduct governing an individual or a group" (Dessler, 2008, p.553). Ethical decisions always involve two things. First, they involve normative judgements. A normative judgement implies that something is good or bad, right or wrong, better or worse. Second, ethical decisions involve morality. Morality is society's accepted standards of behaviour. Moral standards address behaviours of serious consequences to society's well-being such as murder, lying and slander. They cannot be established or changed by decisions of authoritative bodies like legislatures (Dessler, 2008).   According to Yalokwu (2002, p.395), "ethics is the principle of conduct that govern a person or a group. Ethical people are trustworthy, fair and impartial; they respect the rights of others and are concerned about the impact of their actions on society. Unethical people, on the other hand, are selfish and unscrupulous, they will say or do whatever is required to achieve their personal interests or ends."

Ethics is a branch of philosophy, concerned with analysing what is right or wrong in people's behaviour or conduct. Ethics and morality are terms that are often used interchangeably in discussions of good and evil. Ethics comes from the Greek word 'ethos' meaning character. The term ethics is usually applied to persons. Moral comes from the Latin word 'moralis' meaning customs or manners. The term 'morality' is usually applied to acts and behaviour.
According to Nwachukwu (2009, p.18), ethics may be seen as the "science of conduct." It involves learning what is right and doing the right thing. Thus, when discussing the rules and principles that define right and wrong conduct, one is dealing with ethics. Ethical concern is pervasive in all human actions, decisions and interactions. Ethics in the workplace may be defined as knowing what is right or wrong in the workplace and doing what is right.

Dessler (2011, p.30) defines human resource management "as the process of acquiring, training, appraising, and compensating employees, and of attending to their labour relations, health and safety, as well as fairness concerns". Human resource management entails the branch of management concerned with the management of people at work. HR professionals are concerned with ethical standards in three ways: their conduct as professionals, the values that govern their behaviour, and the ethical standards of their firms. Ethics in human resource management are the policies and values that serve as operational guidelines for the management of people at work. Managing human resources often requires ethical decision making in which fairness plays a role.

The objective of this paper is to examine ethical HRM practices in work organisations in Nigeria and the roles of HR professionals in promoting ethical practices with a view to achieving employee well-being and satisfaction at work as well as organisational performance.

2. Literature Review

Attempt is made in this section to review some theoretical underpinnings and ethical issues germane to human resource management. The study leans heavily on three predominant ethical theories. These are the utilitarianism or utilitarian, rights, and justice theories.

2.1 Utilitarianism or Utilitarian theory

This theory requires that the decision maker takes into cognizance the consequences or outcomes of an action and seek to maximise the greatest good for the greatest number of those affected by a decision. For instance, should a company wind up its business and lay off its workers? When using a utilitarian perspective, the decision maker considers the consequences or outcomes of winding up on all relevant stakeholders by weighing the cost and benefits of the action. In the foregoing example, those affected may include the company itself (since lay- off   may improve its bottom line by dramatically reducing plant overhead and employee payroll expenses); the company's shareholders, the company's employees, and the host community where the business is located. One might argue that the greater good is served if some workers are immediately laid off ensuring the immediate financial viability of the company. Yet others might reason to an ethical solution that requires all employees to take a slight pay cut so that workers are not laid off and the plant remains open, thus achieving the greatest good for the greatest number of people affected. Utilitarian theory is also called consequentialist theory.

2.2 Rights theory

According to Nwachukwu (2009, p.19) "rights view of ethics is concerned with respecting and promoting individual liberties and privileges such as the right to privacy, freedom of speech, life and safety". A decision maker who considers a rights perspective would consider the entitlements of those affected by a decision. There are economic rights affecting the displaced employees and the host community in question, as well as the rights of the laid-off employees to be informed of the potential plant closing. These rights may be in opposition to the managers' right to act freely in a way that could be understood as acting responsibly, by closing the plant and thus benefiting the remaining employees of the company and the company's investors. A rights reasoner might provide ample notice to the workers of the layoffs so that they could seek other employment. Or the rights reasoner might consider the economic rights of the community and actively seek a buyer for the plant in the hope that it would remain open and continue to employ the workers.

2.3 Justice Theory

According to Dessler (2008), organisational justice has three components- distributive justice, procedural justice and interpersonal (interactional or interactive) justice. Interpersonal justice entails the manner in which managers conduct their interpersonal dealings with employees, the degree to which managers treat employees with dignity as opposed to abuse or disrespect. To treat people justly is to deal with them fairly and equitably. Adams (1965), distinguished between distributive and procedural justice. Distributive justice refers to how rewards are distributed. People will feel that they have been treated justly in this respect if they believe

that rewards have been distributed in accordance with their contributions, that they receive what was promised to them and that they get what they need. Procedural justice refers to the ways in which managerial decisions are made and HR procedures are managed. People will feel that they have been treated justly if management's decisions and procedures are fair, consistent, transparent, non-discriminatory and properly consider the views and needs of employees. HR professionals   who consider a justice perspective may focus on either the equitable distribution of the benefits and costs resulting from the plant closing and employee layoffs (distributive justice) or the maintenance of rules and standards (procedural justice). For the distributive justice reasoner, the ethical decision process would focus not only on the benefits incurred by the company and its investors through the plant closure and layoffs but also on the significant harms or costs imposed on those employees laid off from work and the host community as well as businesses negatively affected by the plant closing.

The procedural justice reasoner would focus on the preservation of the social contract that exists between the employer and employees or would seek to minimise the harm imposed on the powerless (the employees and the host community) by the powerful (the employer and investors). The procedural justice reasoner would argue that the employees, community officials, and local business leaders should have a voice in this decision since they are significantly affected by the decision. The decision maker may decide that a more just action would require the company to assume greater financial responsibility by providing job training and outplacement services for the displaced employees. The company could consider making some type of economic contribution to the host community to soften the blow of a reduction in the tax base or economic activity in the area. Just decisions require fairness, equity, and impartiality on the part of decision makers, particularly with respect to the ultimate burdens and benefits that will accrue from the decision.

3   Ethical   Issues in Human Resource Management

3.1   Ethical Issues in Recruitment and Selection

Recruitment is the process of announcing job vacancies with a view to attracting a pool of qualified applicants to fill up vacancies in an organisation. It is regarded as a positive process. Taylor (2008, p.214) posits that "recruitment involves actively soliciting applications from potential employees which is considered a positive activity that requires employers to sell themselves in the relevant labour markets so as to maximise the pool of well-qualified candidates from which future employees can be chosen."According to Etomi (2002), recruitment is concerned with the process of attracting a sufficient number of individuals with the right profile in terms of qualifications, experience, skills and other relevant attributes to indicate their interest in working for the organisation. Recruitment is the process of generating a pool of qualified applicants for organisational jobs (Mathias & Jackson, 2004).

Selection is the process of evaluating those who have been searched for and obtained through recruitment with a view to deciding whether they can be employed or not. It is also the process of choosing the individual or individuals who best meet the job-related criteria. "Selection is a decision-making activity: the psychological calculation of suitability" (Price,

2004, p.408). Taylor (2008, p.214) posits that "selection techniques are used to decide which of the applicants is best suited to fill the vacancy in question." Etomi (2002) opines that selection is concerned with identifying the candidates from the recruitment pool who best meet organisational requirements for employment, it is also the process through which those who are recruited are winnowed down to the few who are hired. According to Yoder and Staudohar (1982, p.169) "selection is the process in which candidates for employment are divided into two classes – those who will be offered employment and those who will not." While recruitment is a positive activity, by contrast selection is viewed as a negative process or activity in so far as it involves picking out the best of the bunch and turning down the rest (Taylor, 2008, p. 214). The following are unethical practices in recruitment and selection.

- **Discrimination:** Discrimination includes any distinction, exclusion or preferences made on the basis of race, sex, age, religion, national origin, pregnancy/child birth, familial/marital status disability, sexual orientation, HIV/AIDS, prior arrest/conviction record to mention a few which has the effect of nullifying or impairing equality at work (Aturu, 2005). Discrimination on the basis of age, sex, race, marital status, religion, state of origin, disability, ethnicity, HIV/AIDS victims are unethical practices in recruitment and selection.

- **Sexual Harassment** :
Sexual harassment is a violation of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, 1964. The Act defines sexual harassment as unwelcome sexual advances, request for sexual favours, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature. Forms of sexual harassment include: physical assault (ranging from touching to serious assault); verbal and/or written harassment (jokes, offensive language, gossip); visual display (posters, graffiti, obscene gestures); coercion (pressure for sexual favours); intrusion (pestering, spying, following). Sexual harassment occurs at work when: submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an individual's employment or when submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as the basis for employment decisions affecting such individual or such conduct has the purpose or effect of substantially interferring with an individual's work performance or creating intimidating, hostile or offensive working environment (Milkovich & Boudreau, 2004).

- **Unfair Recruitment and Selection Practices:** Such as nepotism, favouritism, god fatherism, Federal character principle and quota system. Asking for bribes prior to and after recruitment and selection exercise. Lack of realistic job preview as well as non‑ disclosure of the positive as well as the negative characteristics of the job to applicants at the point of entry into the organisation which could lead to undue expectations and could cause frustration and eventual turnover. Giving preference to job candidates on the basis of the university attended is unfair practice. Employment tests that are culture-bound should be examined to see if they are culture fair. That is, if they contain items that can be equally answered by all nationalities. Such tests should be related to the position being considered.

- **Negligent Hiring:** Employing prospective candidates without proper and adequate background checks or reference.

- **Age Discrimination in Employment:** The purpose of recruitment is to attract the best qualified candidates for satisfactory job performance. It does not make good business sense to

deliberately exclude suitably qualified candidates on the basis of age in advertisements. This amounts to age discrimination which is an unethical recruitment practice, except age is a bonafide occupational qualification.

3.2 Ethical Issues in Compensation and Reward Management

Staff remuneration or "pay affects the way people work in terms of how much and how well" (Yoder & Staudohar, 1982, p.329). Most conflicts at work could be explained by poor pay and other pay- related issues. The outcome of pay dissatisfaction may include lower job performance, increase grievance, incessant absenteeism or presenteeism as well as labour turnover. On the other hand, excessive compensation costs can reduce an organisation's competiveness and its ability to provide jobs (Pattanayak, 2010). Sound compensation policy should create a balance between satisfaction and competiveness. Pay is a contractual phenomenon, as the payment of salaries and wages is an indication of a relationship and transaction between the employees and employers. It is a consideration or quid pro quo which is extended to employees for services rendered. Staff remuneration otherwise called compensation refers to the totality of both the financial and non-financial rewards that an employee receives in return for his/her labour or services to an employer or organisation. It includes the basic pay, incentives and numerous financial and non-financial benefits (Banjoko, 2006). "Compensation is what employees receive in exchange for their contribution to the organisation" (Pattanayak, 2010, p.284). According to Flippo (1984) compensation connotes the adequate and equitable remuneration of personnel for their contribution to organisation objectives. Flippo identified three components of compensation such as: basic wage or salary (to attract qualified candidates); variable compensation (to motivate job performance); and supplementary fringe benefits (to retain talented staff). The essence of sound remuneration policies therefore is to attract, motivate and retain skilled staff.

The concept of total remuneration and total reward are well explained by Armstrong (2009). Total remuneration encompasses basic pay, incentives and benefits. In otherwords, total remuneration entails financial rewards. Synonyms for financial rewards are transactional, direct, tangible, monetary, pecuniary and extrinsic rewards. Non-financial rewards encompass recognition, praise, work itself, advancement, and training/development opportunities. Synonyms for non-financial reward are relational, indirect, intangible, non-monetary, non-pecuniary and intrinsic rewards. The summation of total remuneration (financial) rewards and non-financial rewards equals total rewards. In otherwords, total remuneration is a microcosm of total reward. According to Armstrong and Murlis (2004, p.11), "the total reward concept emphasises the importance of considering all aspects of reward as an integrated and coherent whole". Thus total reward is holistic in nature.

Adam (1965) was the first to develop the idea of equity in compensation to solve the problem of inequity which may lead to job dissatisfaction. Worker/employees in any organization want equitable returns for their contribution to the organization (i.e. fair deal, fair pay for fair day's job). The extent of pay equity, fairness, periodicity and regularity are all ethical issues in compensation management. More so, organisations should ensure equal pay for work of equal value. According to Howe (1995,p.70), "pay should not be based on age or age related criteria but should reflect the degree to which an individual meets the required standards of

satisfactory job performance and the value of their contribution to the overall objectives of the organisation." Reneging on company pension agreements is unethical.

3.3 Ethical issues in Training and Development

The concept of training has been variously defined. According to Obisi (1996) citing Steinmetz (1969) training is viewed as a short – term process utilizing a systematic and organized procedure by which non-managerial personnel learn technical knowledge and skills for a definite purpose. Thus, training is specific and directional. Fajana (2002) views training as the process that involves developing skills and learning concepts, rules or attitudes in order to increase effectiveness on a particular job. Armstrong (2001) defines training as the formal and systematic modification of behaviour through learning which occurs as a result of education, instruction, development and planned experience.

The concept of development has been variously defined. According to Obisi (1996) citing Steinmetz (1969) development is a long term educational process utilizing a systematic and organized procedure by which managerial personnel learn conceptual and theoretical knowledge for general purpose. Thus, development is generic, non-directional and all encompassing.   Armstrong (2001) views management development as being concerned with improving managers' performance in their present roles and preparing them for greater responsibilities in the future. Thus, from the above we can confidently conclude that while training is designed for non-managerial personnel, development is designed for managerial personnel.

The following are some unethical training and development practices: training for training's sake without a demonstrated need, improper evaluation of training and development, paying lip service to training and development, negative training and development philosophy, training employees who curry favour or embark on boss massaging or kissing up, training programme viewed by trainees as a form of holiday from work as well as training based on discrimination on the grounds of sex, age, ethnicity or closeness to ones boss.

3.4   Ethical issues in Promotion, Transfer and Staff Separation

Promotion refers to a shift from a level of lesser responsibilities to that of higher responsibilities, oftentimes with increase in pay. Rao (2005) views promotion as an upward movement of an employee from current job to another that is higher in pay, responsibility and organisational level. Promotion is an advancement or upward movement of an employee within an organisation to a position of greater authority and responsibility, more prestige and status and increased pay. It is a vertical movement in rank, pay and responsibility (Ojo, 1998). Promotion confers on beneficiaries enhanced status, better pay, increase responsibilities and better working conditions.

There can of course be "dry promotion"; where an employee is moved to a higher level job without increase in pay. According to Fajana (2002), dry promotions do not involve a higher remuneration. Higher remuneration when implemented as a result of general adjustment in wages/salaries does not imply a promotion. This could be termed up-gradation. Promotion is slightly different from up-gradation which implies minor enhancement in pay in tune with the

limits imposed within a particular grade. Mamoria, Gankar & Pareek (2007) opine that dry promotions are those which are given in lieu of increases in compensation. Promotion encourages employees to remain committed and loyal to their jobs and organization. Organisations adopt different bases of promotion, contingent on their management philosophy, size of the organisation and nature of business. The well established bases of promotion are seniority and competence or merit. These are expatiated upon below:-

- **Competence or merit-based promotion:** - This promotion occurs when an employee is promoted because of superior or superlative performance in the current job. Merit implies an individual's knowledge, skills, abilities and other characteristics (KSAO) as measured from an employee's educational qualifications, experience, training and past employment history.

- **Seniority- based Promotion:** - Seniority means the relative length of service in an organisation. Promoting an employee who has the longest length of service is often widely welcomed by trade unions, because it is some what objective. It is easy to measure the length of service and judge the seniority. There is no room for favouritism, discrimination and nepotism.

  Transfer refers to lateral / horizontal internal mobility. Transfer is viewed as a change in assignment in which workers move from one job to another at the same level of the hierarchy, requiring similar skills, involving approximately same level of responsibility, same status and same level of pay. A transfer does not imply any ascending (promotion) or descending (demotion) change in status or responsibility (Rao, 2005). But transfer can be the result of promotion. Transfer could also involve a change of environment or relocation. A transfer implies horizontal or lateral movement of an employee to another job at the same level; there is no increase in pay, authority or status. To this effect, transfer cannot act as a motivational tool. However, promotion which is an upward vertical movement has in built motivational value, as it elevates the status and power of an employee within an organisation (Rao, 2005).

Mamoria, Gankar and Pareek (2007) view separation as cessation of service with an organisation. Gomez-mejia, Balkin & Cardy (2001) citing Polsky (1999) posit that an employee separation occurs when an employee ceases to be a member of an organisation. Employees' separation occurs when the employment relationship is determined or ended and employees leave the organisation. According to Fajana (2002), separation represents negative recruitment. When an employee leaves, his/her departure may create an added task for recruitment. Separations are generally costly. Separation decisions can be initiated by the employer as lay-offs and discharges; but they can also be initiated by the employee as resignations and retirements.

Separation could be voluntary and involuntary. Voluntary separation is initiated by employees, often when the organisation still requires their services or would prefer to keep them; while involuntary separation involves an action initiated by an employer, often with employees who would prefer to stay (Noe, Hollenbeck, Gerhart & Wright, 2004). Voluntary separation takes the form of retirement and resignation whilst involuntary separation takes the form of layoffs and discharges. In general, organisations endeavour to avoid the need for involuntary separation and to minimise or reduce to the barest minimum voluntary separation, especially

among top performers in view of the astronomical costs involved in replacing leavers. Promotion based on favouritism and god fatherism as against competence is unethical. Transfer based on favouritism and god fatherism as opposed to objectivity is unethical. Promotion and transfer based on discrimination on the grounds of sex or others characteristics of employees is unethical. Terminating employees without due process in the disciplinary procedure is unethical.

3.5 Ethical issues in Performance Appraisal

Rao (2005, p.336) opines that "performance appraisal is a method of evaluating the behaviour of employees in the work spot, normally including both the quantitative and qualitative aspects of job performance". Dessler (2008, p.336) views performance appraisal as any "procedure that entails setting work standards, assessing employee's actual performance relative to those standards, and providing feedback to the employees with the aim of motivating him/her to eliminate performance deficiencies or to continue to perform above par". The aims of appraisal according to Fajana (2002) are three folds: appraisal entails historical review of employees' performance; it is a means for distributing rewards as well as a means for determining training and development needs. Manoharan, Muralidharan and Deshmukh (2009) posit that performance appraisal (PA) is an important management tool to assess employees' efficiency in the workplace, and may be defined   as a structured formal interaction between a subordinate and supervisor that usually takes the form of a periodic review   which could be annual or semi annual   to evaluate   work performance

According to Noe, Hollenbeck, Gerhart and Wright (2004), performance appraisal has been bedevilled by a lot of errors such as: Halo effect: This involves the rater giving the employee superlative or impressive rating on one factor and then using this to influence positively rating on all other factors. That is first impression is the last impression. Horns effect: This is the opposite of the halo effect. This is a rating error that occurs when the rater responds to one negative aspect by rating the employee low in other aspects. Strictness error: This is a rating error committed when the rater consistently gives employees very low ratings. Leniency error: Some raters are by nature too liberal, while others tend to be lenient in their rating of employees. Recency error: This is a tendency of many evaluators to give much more weight to the recent behaviours of the employees than past behaviour. Central tendency: It is the most commonly found error. It is the tendency of most raters to give average ratings to all employees. This may be due to the fact that a very high rating or a very low rating could invite questions, criticisms or explanations.

It could also be due to the fact that the rater lacks sufficient knowledge about the employee's job performance. Errors of variable standards: This results from the use of different standards of performance in the course of rating employees' performance. Miscellaneous biases: There may be some built – in biases in the minds of the rater, based upon his/her own perception of things. For instance, a German subordinate may be rated higher because of the rater's belief that all German people are quality–oriented people. Other biases may be based on the grounds of race, sex, appearance, religion, country of origin, favouritism and nepotism. In view of the aforementioned pitfalls, many workers have perceived performance appraisal

in a negative light.

Facteau and Craig (2001) observe that a number of studies conducted over the years indicate that supervisory ratings are often plagued by a host of problems including halo effect, leniency, intentional manipulations , race, gender and age biases. Based on these limitations efforts to examining alternative rating sources such as peer, subordinate and self-rating such as the 360- degree appraisal and upward appraisal are gaining currency. Thus, for appraisal to be effective and ethically-based, the above errors should be avoided by raters. More so, appraisal system should be open and not confidential so that employees can have feedback on their performance ratings as well as their strengths and weaknesses.

3.6 Ethical issues in Health and Safety at Work

Health and safety policies and programmes are concerned with protecting employees and other people affected by what the company produces and does; against the hazards arising from employment or their links with the company. Safety programmes deal with the prevention of accidents and minimizing the resulting loss and damage to people and property. Occupational health programmes deal with the prevention of ill-health arising from working conditions. Occupational health programmes are designed to minimize the impact of work related illness arising from work. Particular attention needs to be exercised on the control of noise, fatigue and stress.

The elimination of hazards is the responsibility of everyone employed in an organization, as well as those working there under contract. But the onus is on management to achieve and indeed go beyond the high standard in health and safety matters required by legislation.

Written health and safety policies are required to demonstrate that top management is concerned about the protection of the organizations employees from hazards at work and to indicate how this protection will be provided.

- **Health and Safety Audits**

A safety audit will examine the whole organization in order to test whether it is meeting its safety aims and objectives. It examines hierarchies, delegation, policy making and implementation as well as all areas of safety programmes planning. Safety audits can be conducted by safety advisers and/or consultants/or HR specialist. The purpose of the audit is to generate action. Those conducting the audit will have to assess priorities and costs and draw up action programme for approval by the board.

- **Health and Safety Inspections**

Health and safety inspections are designed to examine a specific area of the organization – in order to locate and define any faults in the system, equipment, plants or machines or any operational error that might be a danger to health or the source of accidents. Health and safety inspections should be carried out on a regular and systematic basis by line managers and supervisors with the advice and help of health and safety advisers. "Health they say is wealth" The state of health of a worker can affect his/her productive capacity. Hence, occupational health and safety is important for the following reasons: it maintains and

improves the employee's performance both quantitatively and qualitatively, it reduces employee absenteeism and turnover, it saves cost in terms of money and time, it improves productivity and it is a legal requirement. Industrial establishments can take two types of measures to protect workers health against occupational hazards. This can be categorised as follows: Preventive measures and   curative measures

Preventive Measures- These are based on the philosophy that "prevention is better than cure" The preventive measures to protect employees against occupational health hazards may include but not limited to the following:

- Pre-employment medical examination
- Periodic post selection medical examination
- Removal of hazards conditions to the extent possible
- Surveillance of special classes of workers such as women and aged employees who are exposed to health hazards
- Emergency treatment in case of accidents
- Education of workers in health hazards
- Education of workers in health and hygiene
- Training in first-aid to workers
- Proper factory lay-out and illuminations
- Proper and efficient disposal of refuse and treatment of plants
- Proper scheduling of work with adequate rest
- Provision of health and safety gadgets

Curative Measures- These measures begin once a worker actually suffers from ill-health or sickness or diseases or accidents. The curative measures include the following

- Adequate and timely medical treatment
- Allowing the employee adequate period of recuperating
- Allowing the needed best medical treatment from outside hospitals
- Adequate compensation in case of injury

The following are unethical practices in health and safety at work

- Non-compliance with safety regulations at work
- Non- provision of safety gadgets at the work premises
- Lack of health and safety inspections
- Lack of health and safety training and manuals
- Lack of first- aid- box and medical facilities at work
- Invasion of employees' privacy at work: disclosure of medical records
- Discrimination against HIV/AIDS victims at work

3.7 Ethical issues in Communication at Work

In all human endeavours communication plays pivotal roles. Miscommunication or misunderstanding can have deadly consequences. Thus, no group or organisation can exist without communication. The word 'communication' is derived or originated from the Latin word 'communis' meaning common. Communication is the process of transmitting information and meaning from one person to another with the message being understood by the recipient. Communication involves the act of imparting a common idea or understanding

to another person.   In the world of business or work, communication refers to the process by which employers and employees or managers and managees interact and transmit information to one another for the effective performance of their duties and to further the basic purpose of the organisation. In the world of business, communication is both internal and external. We can rightly say that communication is the lifeblood of all human groupings and businesses. Communication is a very important subject to any manager. Managing is getting things done through others, a task which requires the human resource professionals to communicate with other people. All estimates concerning the percentage of time allocated to communication processes are quite high, ranging from 75 percent to 90 percent of our working hours. Five percent of this communication time is spent in writing, 10 percent in reading, 35 percent in talking and 50 percent in listening (Flippo, 1984). The following ethical issues in communication should be observed by HR professionals:

- Avoid over reliance on rumour mills and grapevines as sources of   official information
- Convey true information as against falsifying certain information. One may be acting unethical if one divulges confidential information of the organisation to its competitors or outsiders.
- Do your best to be truthful at all times.
- Do not intentionally promise what you can not deliver.
- Do not stretch the truth or mislead others.
- Do not withhold information someone else needs
- Always apply the golden rule that states: do unto others, as you would have them do unto you (Yalokwu, 2002, p.397)**.**

3.8 Ethical issues in Labour/ Management Relations

Akpala (1982) opines that labour relations or labour–management relations connotes a relationship between worker, not as individuals but in their collective identity, and the employer. The concept, labour relations is narrower in scope than industrial relations, because, it concerns the internal arrangement between employers and the unions in a bi-partite relationship. Their activities would seem to exclude the possible intervention of the government as umpire in the employment relations regulations. When such intervention by the government as a third party occurs, the relationship becomes more involved and is known as industrial relations. Industrial relations is regarded to be wider than labour relations. Fashoyin (1992) posits that labour relations, as distinct from industrial relations, can be defined as the day to day relationship between union members and manager in the workplace, with particular emphasis on the implementation and enforcement of the collective agreement. Unethical practices in labour- management relations include: Unfair labour practices by both the employers and the unions on behalf of their members e.g. engaging in sweetheart agreements. Non-implementation of collective agreements or renewal of expired agreements. Invasion of employees' privacy at work: restroom and office surveillance, workplace searches and monitoring off-duty conduct and lifestyles. Management's violation of employees' rights at work with impunity. Deputation and exclusion of employees from decision making processes affecting their work. Subjecting employees to longer working hours as opposed to the normal hours of work as well as victimisation of union officials because of their

involvement in strike actions.

Fig.1   Diagrammatic Representation of HRM Ethical Issues
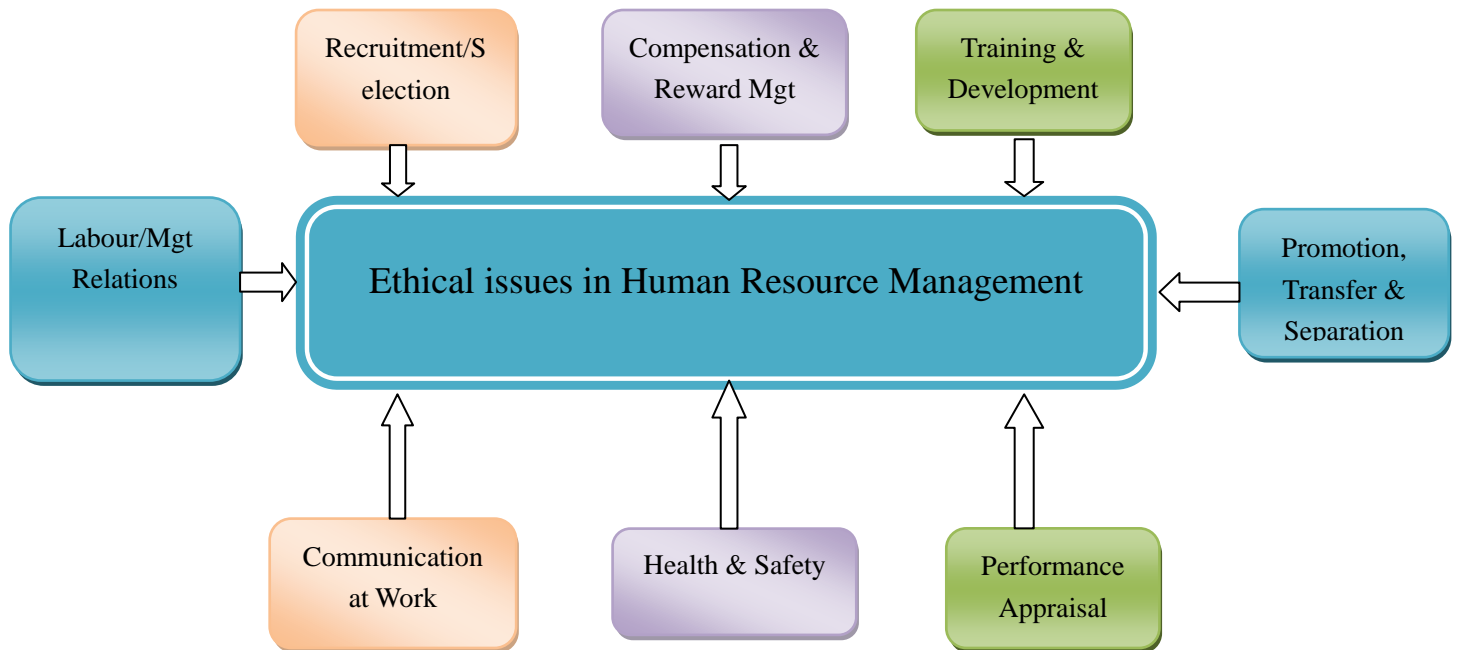
Source: Developed by the Authors

4. Combating Unethical HR Practices

To combat unethical HR practices in the workplace, the HR professionals in line with top management could put in place:

- **Ethical Policies and Codes:** This is a document that spells out the standards the organisation expects its employees and management to adhere to. Although, having a code does not guarantee ethical behaviour (Dessler, 2008). In general, ethical codes do have a positive impact on employees' and management ethical behaviour. This code should incorporate the required standards and values in all HR practices in the organisation.

- **Ethical Training:** Organisations should encourage ethical training of their employees and management team. This is imperative to constantly remind them of management expectations as well as cultural values expected of them. Families, religious bodies and professional institutes are expected to play significant roles in this respect.

- **Whistle blowing Policy:** Organisations should put in place whistle blowing policy. Whistle blowing can help reduce the occurrence of unethical behaviour on the part of employers. Whistle blowers are individuals usually employees who use procedural or legal channels to report incidents of unethical behaviour to the public or legal authorities.

5.   Conclusion and Implications for Policy

This paper set out to examine ethical HRM practices in work organisations in Nigeria and the roles of HR professionals in promoting ethical practices. Ethics permeates all aspects of our national life and human resource management profession is no exception as all HR functions have ethical underpinnings. The need for ethical training at all levels is imperative for HR

professionals and it is hoped that the Chartered Institute of Personnel Management of Nigeria which is the professional body charged with the mandate to regulate human resource management profession in Nigeria will be the vanguard in the promotion of ethical behaviour of its members. It is hoped that the on-going initiative of the Federal Government in charting an ethical road map for the citizenry will yield the expected results.

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