A CRITICAL REVIEW OF ETHICAL INFRASTRUCTURE BASIC MODELS

Izabela Filipova Yonkova[1]

Abstract: The study aims to consider and analyze the main theoretical formulations with a high degree of influence on the ethics in public sector organizations. It also presents basic ethical concepts and defines a conceptual apparatus applicable to the sector. The elements included in the existing models of the ethical infrastructure are analyzed and critically presented through the methods of comparative analysis. Discussion questions are raised with regard to building ethical infrastructure in public sector organizations.

Keywords: ethics, ethical infrastructure, models, public sector
JEL: H83.

Introduction

Over the past decades, there has been an increase in academic interest and scientific research, addressing various ethical issues, relating mainly to the destruction of administrative ethics, respectively. L. Georgiev (Georgiev L., 2008) D. Bosaer, C. Demke (Bosaer & Demke, 2005), OECD (OECD, 2000), M. Perzanowska (Perzanowska. M, 2010), D. Sotirova, Sotirova, 2011) and other authors identify disadvantages of ethics in state administration, call for adopting, approving and implementing codes of ethics, examine and test specific ethical issues and hypotheses, insist on introducing ethics training for public servants immediately before taking office. These issues are mainly raised due to the fact that public authorities and public servants aim to defend the interests of citizens by implementing public policy in

[1] PhD student, Department of Strategic Planning", D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics – Svishtov, d010321247@uni-svishtov.bg

a manner consistent with the principles of democracy, accountability, publicity, efficient and appropriate spending of public resources. In addition, duties are particularly important to public servants, as they must work for the benefit of society, hence any breach of these principles, ethics or suspicions of unethical behavior destroys public trust in administration and poses a risk to the functions of institutions and the realization of public goals.

All these issues focus the research interest on various methods and mechanisms for improving ethics in public administration. Information flow includes topics such as corruption, conflict of interest and abuse of office. The public is particularly sensitive to them, and their manifestation does not seem to be sanctioned. Reactive behaviour in similar cases is not an effective control mechanism. Rather, proactive approaches should be the focus of action. However, in order to make an adequate choice, first it is necessary to clarify the factors affecting functions of organizations and having an impact on the ethical climate.

The aim of this article is to study the main theoretical formulations, with a high degree of influence on the functions of ethics in public sector organizations.

The following tasks are set:

1. To formulate basic concepts in ethics and define a fundamental conceptual apparatus applicable to the sector.

2. To study theoretical formulations in the field of ethical infrastructure models.

3 Comparative analysis of the elements included in the individual models and raising discussion questions related to building ethical infrastructure in public sector organizations.

The methods used in the study are as follows: content analysis, critical and comparative analysis.

1. Ethical issues in the public sector

Public administration carries out its activity through making everyday management decisions, which are characterized by rationality, discretion, expediency and are a prerequisite for exercising state power and satisfying public needs. The resulting responsibility

and the implementation of these decisions in practice requires justification, effectiveness, correct and adequate assessment, as well as ensuring that these decisions and the actions arising from them are based not only on legality but also on established ethical principles and standards.

The formulation of basic concepts directly or indirectly related to ethics in public administration presupposes their unambiguous definition in order to ensure a correct interpretation of ethical relationships.

A. Andronicean (Andronicean, 2009, pp. 20-21) points out that the the term '**ethics**' is difficult to define, and people's views on ethics are changing, which determines the variety of definitions characterizing ethics. The word 'ethics' has its origin in Greece. In philosophy, for example, ethics determines what is good for individuals, and the society establishes the nature of the duties people owe to themselves and to each other. Amundsen and Vicente Pinto de Andrade also bind ethics to the moral nature of action, noting that it "refers to the principles by which to evaluate behaviour as right or wrong, good or bad" (Amundsen & Pinto de Andrade, 2009). Silvia Mineva's definition of ethics is characterized by comprehensiveness – "Ethics today usually means knowledge, learning, and also philosophical research (reflection), respectively, the understanding of ethos as morality: as morals, customs, standards for everyday behaviour as well as a set of our duties, the performance of which determines our actions, the seal of selflessness and adherence to principles, when we perform them voluntarily, guided by our sense of duty and responsibility to our own conscience" (Mineva, 2013, p. 20). Nikolay Arabadzhiyski defines the concept of ethics as "a set of rules that transform and implement generally accepted ideals and ethos in the daily practice of employees" (Arabadzhiyski, 2005, p. 9). D. Bosaer and C. Demke (Bosaer & Demke, 2005) bind ethics to the issues of individual and organizational performance of public servants and call for monitoring the relationship between unethical behaviour and poor work performance.

Ethics, ethical behaviour, ethical standards, values and norms and the functions of ethics in state administration are the main elements that should be present in the discussions about good governance, effective and democratic administration. In specialized

literature an opinion can be found that a negative opinion exists in the society about the functions of ethics in administration. It is for this reason that H. Hristov, P. Pavlov and P. Katsamunska note that the issues of ethics in public administration are particularly relevant, which "is a result of the steady trend of increasing the deficit of public trust in public administration" (Hristov, Pavlov, & Katsamunska, 2007, p. 211). In their study, D. Bosaer and C. Demke (Bosaer & Demke, 2005) point out that more and more citizens believe that the development of ethical values and ethical behaviour in public administration lags behind public perceptions and, in addition, even the media presentation of ethical issues in administration is usually negative. A similar opinion is shared by L. Georgiev (Georgiev L., 1999), who notes that this lack of trust raises doubts not only about the legal functions of administration, but also about the ethical ones. Everyday life is rich in examples giving grounds to claim that despite the high requirements for ethical behaviour imposed by people on public administration employees, ethical principles are violated on a daily basis and the behaviour of public servants is often contrary not only to ethics, but also to norms. Suspicions of corruption pressure, conflict of interest, political bias, misuse of funds, official position, lack of transparency, accountability, etc. are part of public life. According to D. Bosaer and C. Demke, it is these ethics violations that give rise to the belief that crime, corruption, abuse and other forms of unethical behavior are increasing while trust in the public sector is declining (Bosaer & Demke, 2005, p. 4). Nikolai Arabadzhiyski's opinion is similar, noting that the lack of ethics, especially with regard to public administration, is much more noticeable than its presence (Arabadzhiyski, 2005).

To study all these specific issues concerning the problems of ethics in public administration, the concept of **administrative ethics** has emerged in literature. Regarding its nature, Emilia Kandeva (Kandeva, 1998), D. Bosaer, C. Demke (Bosaer & Demke, 2005) note that historically there is no common understanding of the nature of administrative ethics. Emilia Kandeva gives the following definition: "A specific type of professional ethics related to public administration, summary and reflection of moral values in the activities of public servants. (Kandeva, 1998)". D. Bosaer and C. Demke define it in a similar way: "Public ethics can be defined as a set of common values and norms in public administration. The moral nature of these norms

refers to what is judged to be right, wrong, good or bad behaviour" (Bosaer & Demke, 2005, p. 17). Ethical norms are recommended rather than mandatory. However, they are essential for the functions of any socio-economic organization. K. Denhardt (Denhardt, 2009, pp. 145-146) points out that ethics encompasses the standards by which behaviour is assessed, with some **standards of behaviour** being almost universally valued – honesty, respect for others and reliability – while those violating these ethical standards are negatively assessed. She points out that sometimes the standards, by which we evaluate behaviour are influenced by the profession, position or relationships of the person performing the action. Compliance with these standards ensures the establishment of an ethical administration where public servants are guided not only by the rule of law but also by ethics as fundamental values. "Furthermore, the ethical content in administration is created and tested through commitment and the extent to which it reflects the basic principles that make it public, namely: legal certainty, accountability, openness, transparency and predictability, efficiency, effectiveness and equality" (Georgiev L., 2008, p. 3).

The basic principles of ethics for the functions of administration are implemented in basic standards of behaviour in the public sector. According to the OECD (OECD, 2000), the system of standards of behaviour is necessary to determine the expected behaviour of public officials. In addition, these standards reflect general guidelines and regulation of the functions and relationships in administration, compliance with which ensures objectivity, equality and efficiency that, in turn, are the basis of ethical relationships. These standards are reflected in the applicable legislation in the sector: the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria, the Civil Servants Act, the Administration Act, the Financial Management and Control in the Public Sector Act, the Civil Servants Code of Conduct.

The basic principles that give the ethical image of a public administration and its employees are as follows:

- ✓ The principle of legality – a fundamental legal principle, guaranteeing the legal functions of administration.
- ✓ The principle of loyalty – expressed in the requirement that public servants when exercising their power have to be guided by the interests of the state, to work for the benefit of the state and for achieving public goals.

✓ The principle of protecting the rights and legitimate interests of citizens reflects the democratic nature of administration. Public servants must protect the rights and freedoms of citizens and meet the legal demands of citizens.

✓ Political neutrality – public servants should perform their duties impartially, without showing political bias.

In addition to the principles mentioned above, the principles of responsibility, impartiality, good faith, openness, equality, accountability, fellowship and approachability, etc. can also be added.

On the one hand, we give account of the fact that observing these principles in each action and function is a complex process. On the other hand, it is the only way to ensure an adequate and working ethical environment in administrations. The article advocates that ethical environment is closely bound to ethical infrastructure.

It should be noted that ethics and its impact on socio-political life is influenced by a number of internal and external factors. "The latter usually reflect the process of pressure in the country. The most important external factors are: limited resources, demands of citizens, increased attention to administration, reorganization of state and local government and administration, strong independence of administrative units, operational independence in the actions of administration, responsibility of public authorities, interaction between public and private sectors, modern changes in social and moral norms and internationalization of administration"(Arabadzhiyski, 2005, p. 15).

More and more often, in scientific literature, the focus is on internal factors, which are combined into a relatively new concept that entered specialized literature at the beginning of the 21st century, namely '**ethical infrastructure**' (World Health Organization, 2008). Its unifying role ensures the interaction between internal ethical factors in a way providing synergy and contributes to building an ethical culture within a particular administration. Combined in a well-structured ethical infrastructure, moral values and ethical principles are considered to have a significant sustainable impact on the professional behaviour of public servants and the effectiveness of organizations.

When studying the scientific literature it becomes clear that there is not an unambiguous definition of the term 'ethical infrastructure'. Apart from the lack of a generally accepted definition in specialized literature, there is also a lack of general opinion regarding the content

of ethical infrastructure models and this gives ground for new research. Different authors give different definitions of the concept, depending on the semantic framework in which they consider the concept. M. Perzanowska, for example, binds infrastructure to the application of ethical management concepts in organizations and defines it as “a coherent system of decisions leading to ethical actions in public administration” (Perzanowska. M, 2010, p. 213). Tenbrunsel, Crowe и Umphress (Tenbrunsel, Crowe, & Umphress, 2003) propose a definition of ethical infrastructure that includes organizational elements contributing to the ethical effectiveness of organizations, their impact and integration. OECD binds infrastructure to managing ethical behaviour in organizations and states that “a well-functioning ethics infrastructure supports a public sector environment which encourages high standards of behaviour” (OECD, 2000, p. 23).

The authors argue for the need to build an adequate ethical infrastructure that provides an environment for ethical behaviour and work of public sector employees. Despite the differing views on infrastructure components, researchers focus on the efforts that need to be made to create an appropriate ethical climate in organizations encouraging ethical behaviour. This means that the application of rules and regulations, the imposition of sanctions and control mechanisms are not enough to uphold ethical principles. Efforts must be made to take appropriate measures to ensure the implementation and enforcement of legislation. On this basis, it is possible to ensure the construction of adequate ethical infrastructure, which can be interpreted as a complex mechanism of ethical standards and practices that “provides an environment for the overall functioning of administration according to universal human and social values and norms” (Parashkevova & Yonkova , 2021, p. 182).

2. Ethical infrastructure models

Several widespread models of ethical infrastructure exist in scientific literature reflecting the need to improve ethical behaviour in the public sphere. Building an appropriate ethical environment in administration largely depends on the chosen model. Therefore, it should be noted that models of ethical infrastructure should be

understood as a set of different organizational elements. When interacting, they form the nature of ethical infrastructure. These elements exist and act independently in an organizational unit. However, when interacting, they form a complex system that affects the ethical relationships in organizations – the ethical infrastructure.

One of the most common models of ethical infrastructure is that of Emilia Kandeva. She points out that "ethical infrastructure contains the internal factors affecting or even determining ethics within the administrative system itself" (Kandeva E., 1998, pp. 344-345). Clarifying the content of the elements emphasizes their positive impact on organizational functions. However, it should be noted that the model has a theoretical rather than practical orientation and it does not examine the possible negative manifestations or distortions of organizational processes that could occur as a result of its application. The model includes 9 elements.

The next model is proposed by Lyudmil Georgiev (Georgiev L., 1999), which is to a great extent similar to the one offered by Emilia Kandeva in scope and content. The different thing is that in addition to the impact of the elements on the functions of administration, it also emphasizes the functions the ethical infrastructure performs. L. Georgiev's model includes 8 elements.

Emel'yanov & Shtir'ov (Emel'yanov & Shtir'ov, 2011) present the ethical infrastructure as a complex system containing nine elements. Each of them contributes to its construction by complementing and strengthening the other elements. The content of the model is similar to the models that Kandeva and Georgiev offer, although their significance and scope from the point of view of organizations are different.

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2000, pp. 23-25) proposes an infrastructure model that differs from the presented ones. Each of the elements included in the model is characterized by independent action, although together, the individual elements interact positively to achieve the necessary organizational impact and build an ethical organization. The model also raises the question of the functions of individual elements, namely the functions of guidance, management and control. The model has a practical application and includes eight key elements.

A study by Ann Tenbrunsel, Kristin Crowe, and Elizabeth Umphress (Tenbrunsel, Crowe, & Umphress, 2003) presents a theoretical model of an organization's ethical infrastructure. This model differs significantly from the models discussed so far in terms of its content, The fact that in addition to presenting the elements of infrastructure, the authors seek to clarify their relationship and the way they predetermine organizational ethics should also be pointed out. In the scientific paper cited, they study the relationship between ethical infrastructure and ethical behaviour in an organization. This gives the model high practical applicability and usefulness. Structurally, the model consists of 3 systems.

Although Fernandez and Camacho (Fernández & Camacho, 2015) present an infrastructure model developed for small and medium-sized businesses, organizations, whether public or private, show differences and similarities at the same time. For this reason, we can assume that after adapting it, this model can also be applied in the public sector. The model consists of 5 interrelated components, and the authors explicitly emphasize that the effectiveness and efficiency of these elements depend mainly on internal organizational factors such as size and structure of organizations, field of activity, leadership values, etc.

Another model that was not created for the needs of the public sector, but which can be used in the construction of such, is the model of the World Health Organization (World Health Organization), proposed for the pharmaceutical sector (World Health Organization, 2008, p. 8). The World Health Organization offers a model of ethical infrastructure consisting of 9 elements. Apart from the model completeness, it is also useful in terms of its content – most of the elements aim at fighting corruption. The first three elements are based on a disciplinary approach operating through administrative procedures and legal sanctions. The other six elements operate through a value approach. To be effective in tackling corruption, the ethical infrastructure must integrate both approaches into a coherent and balanced system.

The existing models include an extremely wide range of elements. A similarity can be sought between some of them, if not in the conceptual apparatus, then in the content and interpretation. However, some are also radically different from each other and even interpret some of the elements in a completely different way (see Table 1).

Table 1.
Elements of the ethical infrastructure, as part of the authors' views on the content of the models

Elements of the ethical infrastructure	**Author of the ethical infrastructure model**						
	E. Kandeva	L. Georgiev	Emel'yanov, Shtir'ov	Organization for economic co-operation &development	Tenbrunsel, Crowe, &Umphress	Fernandez, Camacho	World Health Organization
Political will / leadership / commitment	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Control and accountability	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Responsibility and incentives	✓						
Conditions of organizing civil service / Working conditions	✓	✓	✓				
Fair and equal treatment of employees	✓						
Salaries and wages	✓						
Security	✓						
Training	✓						
Ethics Codes/ Codes of Conduct	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
Legal framework		✓	✓	✓			
Professional socialization		✓	✓	✓			✓
Coordinating bodies		✓	✓	✓			
Involving the public in public investigations		✓					
Reporting and supervision			✓				

Ethical verification			✓				
Civil society				✓			
Conditions supporting public services				✓			
A framework of moral values and ethical principles							✓
Established anti-corruption legislation							✓
Established administrative procedures							✓
Mechanisms for whistle-blowing							✓
Sanctions on reprehensible acts							✓
Mechanisms for collaboration between existing anti-corruption agencies							✓
Management, coordination and evaluation of an ethical infrastructure							✓
Formal systems (Communication, surveillance and sanctioning systems)					✓	✓	
Informal systems (Communication, surveillance and sanctioning systems)					✓	✓	
Organizational climate (Climate for ethics, respect and climate for procedural justice)					✓	✓	
Leadership						✓	
Ethical culture						✓	

The models include a different number of elements, the main aspects being related to the personal integrity and professional ethics of management and staff covered by the Financial Management and Control Act and the COSO model. It should be noted that 5 of these 7 models reflect the need to regulate the ethical behaviour of employees through codes of ethics/codes of conduct at organizational level. These are the models proposed by E. Kandeva, L. Georgiev, Emel'yanov and Shtir'ov, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development and the one presented by the World Health Organization. The authors have a similar understanding of the content and meaning of the Codes in the context of the ethical infrastructure. Other researchers emphasize the need for political commitment to ethical issues, control and accountability, and professional socialization. This view is represented in 4 of the presented models, those offered by E. Kandeva, L. Georgiev, Emel'yanov and Shtir'ov, and the model specified by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development. These models, except for the latter, draw attention to the importance of the conditions for organizing the civil service, as well as of the legal framework and the bodies coordinating ethics.

Formal systems, informal systems and organizational climate are fundamental elements, presented and discussed in detail in 2 of these 7 models – those proposed by José Luiz Fernández and Javier Camacho. A similarity exists in terms of the definitions they give for these elements. Formal systems are those that are documented and can be verified by an independent observer, while informal ones are hidden, invisible and the information in them flows informally. The authors of both models point out several sub-elements that are applicable to formal and informal systems. In the model offered by Ann Tenbrunsel, Kristin Crowe and Elizabeth Umphress these sub-elements are: communication systems, surveillance systems and sanction systems, and in the model presented by José Luiz Fernández and Javier Camacho – communication, training and management.

In the model proposed by Ann Tenbrunsel, Kristin Crowe and Elizabeth Umphress organizational climate is defined as the perceptions of the members of an organization. Three of its structural elements are also mentioned: a climate for ethics, respect and procedural justice, which are interconnected and in dynamic interaction. José Luiz Fernández and Javier Camacho give a similar

definition of ethical climate. However, they do not discuss the element in detail.

All other elements, such as the framework of moral values and ethical principles, the applicable anti-corruption legislation and administrative procedures, the mechanisms for whistle-blowing, the application of sanctions for reprehensible actions, the mechanisms for cooperation between existing anti-corruption agencies, the process of governance, coordination and ethical infrastructure assessments are covered in only one of the models, the model proposed by the World Health Organization, and have not been studied enough in scientific literature.

However, the fact that the search for a comprehensive and well-functioning ethical infrastructure continues indicates that currently no excellent model exists to meet the requirements of practice and ensure a high level of ethics in the work processes in the public administrations sector.

The diversity of the authors' views raises a number of controversial questions in the construction of ethical infrastructure in public sector organizations. For example, whether to move in the direction of creating a unified model or to seek close specialization to a specific organization are decisions that need to be made at central level. The same is true of the question of the model's scope – whether to be wide in terms of the elements included, or, conversely, to be with minimal coverage. These decisions are complex in terms of subject matter and need to be put up for debate before a wide panel of experts.

Conclusion

Ethical issues are complex and multifaceted. The applicable aspect of ethics is understood and interpreted in different ways. This requires the search for new tools for integrating ethics into organizational culture of executive administrations.

Clarifying the elements that will be included in the functions of an organization is key to ethics. Creating a comprehensive model of ethical infrastructure is not an end in itself. Rather, the aim is to outline those aspects that are a must in an organization in order to ensure its ethical functions. This should not be done through constant control,

sanctions, penalties or coercion. On the contrary, it is necessary to create a model that delicately adjusts the relations and processes in administration, which directs and limits the risks of violating ethics and stimulates its upgrading to new dimensions. The model structure should be based on a pre-defined framework clarifying the main elements, characteristics, features, objectives that will be achieved and integration into the overall management system of public sector organizations. The executive authorities in the person of Directorate "Administrative Modernization" and the Good Governance Directorate under the structure of the Council of Ministers and the Control Methodology and Internal Audit Directorate under the Ministry of Finance should be committed to defining a similar framework.

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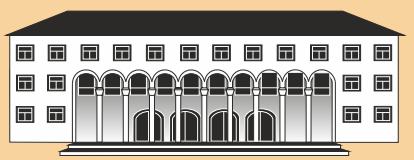

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