Assessing Barriers to Implementation of Employee Code of Conduct: A Case of Lusaka's Public Schools

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ABSTRACT: This study assessed the role and significance of employee code of conduct in steering ethical behavior and improving organizational outcomes, particularly in public educational institutions. The questions of the study were: what are the main barriers to the effective implementation of the Employee Code of Conduct in public secondary schools in Lusaka District? What mechanisms are currently in place to enforce the Employee Code of Conduct in these learning institutions? And how do these barriers affect the integrity and performance of the public schools? The study employed a mixed-methods approach with random and purposive as sampling techniques while pragmatism was the underpinning philosophy. By integrating both quantitative and qualitative methods, this research aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the roles of leadership, reward systems, and organizational culture in ensuring adherence to ethical behavioural standards by educators. The study population included teachers, regulators, sub-sector unions, and educational administrators of the schools. The sample size was Three Hundred and Fifty-three (353) with an 85% (300) return rate. The secondary data was from documents, written records, research publications, annual publications from the MoE, and any other readily available information that the researcher(s) came across including legislative, strategic plans, and policy documents, performance metrics, ethical codes etc., while primary data was collected using questionnaires, interview schedules and focus group discussions. Findings revealed a high level of awareness among employees though understanding and adherence varied across staff categories, with inconsistent enforcement being a noted challenge. Employees acknowledged the positive impact of the code of conduct on school culture and professionalism but suggested improvements in policy clarity. To address these challenges, it was strongly recommended that refinement of the code of conduct be done, enhancing training on ethical decision-making, and establishing regular monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

KEYWORDS: Employee Code of Conduct, Ethical Behavior, Public Institutions, Enforcement Mechanisms, Disciplinary Procedures, Organizational Outcomes.

1. INTRODUCTORY BACKGROUND

Globally, codes of conduct are essential for outlining the anticipated standards of behavior within organizations. They play a crucial role in fostering ethical cultures and ensuring compliance with both internal policies and external regulations. From the perspective of Brenner and Molander (2021), ethical behavior and adherence to a code of conduct are fundamental to the effective operation of any organization. They emphasize that Employee Codes of Conduct are not merely formalities but critical frameworks that delineate expected behaviors and ethical standards for employees. These codes play a vital role in guiding decision-making processes and fostering a consistent standard of conduct, which, in turn, promotes a culture of integrity and accountability. By establishing clear ethical expectations, organizations can enhance trust among employees and stakeholders, ultimately leading to improved organizational performance and sustainability.

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) No. 4 emphasizes ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all. Central to this goal is the role of teachers, whose professionalism and ethical behavior are critical for delivering quality education. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2021), educators must adhere to ethical standards and professional conduct to foster an environment conducive to learning. This commitment not only enhances educational outcomes but also models the values of respect, integrity, and responsibility for students, thereby shaping the next generation's moral compass.

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Moreover, the socio-economic significance of employee codes of conduct cannot be overstated. They contribute to the creation of ethical workplaces, which in turn enhance employee morale, job satisfaction, and overall organizational performance (Smith & Kouchaki, 2021). Effective codes of conduct also help mitigate risks associated with unethical behavior, such as legal penalties and reputational damage, thereby safeguarding the organization's long-term sustainability (Erwin, 2011).

In state-owned organizations, the implementation of an Employee Code of Conduct is particularly crucial due to the public accountability and transparency required in these institutions especially with regards to delivery of quality services. These organizations play a vital role in delivering public services and maintaining public trust, making it imperative to ensure that ethical standards are upheld (Smith, 2020). Ethical codes of conduct for teachers play a crucial role in fostering a positive educational environment and ensuring quality education service delivery. According to Lunenburg (2021), these codes establish clear expectations for professional behavior, guiding teachers in their interactions with students, colleagues, and the community. By adhering to these ethical standards, teachers create a safe and respectful atmosphere conducive to learning, which is essential for students' academic success and personal development. Furthermore, a well-defined code of conduct helps prevent misconduct and enhances accountability, thereby reinforcing the integrity of the educational system.

In Zambia, the codes of conduct for public service employees are governed by several legislative and policy frameworks. The Public Service Code of Ethics outlines the principles and standards of behavior expected from public service employees (Office of the Secretary to the Cabinet, Zambia, 2023). Additionally, the Parliamentary and Ministerial Code of Conduct Act (1994) establishes ethical guidelines for members of the National Assembly and ministers (National Assembly of Zambia, 1994). These codes emphasize integrity, accountability, and transparency, and provide mechanisms for addressing violations through administrative and judicial punishments.

Despite the existence of codes of conduct, the Ministry of Education in Zambia has faced challenges in ensuring compliance among its employees. Reports of integrity violations, such as teachers engaging in misconduct during working hours, highlight the gaps in the implementation and enforcement of these codes (Diamond TV, Zambia Reports, ZNBC, 2023). For instance, two teachers were found drinking beer during working hours and had not been reporting for work since 2019. The historical context of these issues can be traced back to the broader challenges faced by the Zambian education system, including rapid population growth, high demand for education, and limited resources (University of Zambia, 2024). These factors have contributed to the difficulties in maintaining high ethical standards among public service employees.

1.1. Problem Statement

Despite government putting in place codes of conduct for public service employees, the number of integrity violations in the country remains high (Hughes, 2012; Transparency International, 2018). The Ministry of Education (MoE) in Zambia has faced significant challenges in enforcing these codes effectively. Recent reports indicate that indiscipline among public service employees in the MoE is a pervasive issue. For instance, a study revealed that 67% of teachers identified the home environment as a prominent source of indiscipline, leading to various forms of misconduct (University of Zambia, 2024). Additionally, the Education Statistics Bulletin (2020) highlighted cases of absenteeism, tardiness, and other forms of misconduct being prevalent among teachers. Moreover, a study by Arar et al. (2022) highlights that ethical behavior among teachers directly correlates with student engagement and academic achievement. By maintaining high standards of professionalism and integrity, teachers can build trust and rapport with their students, which is essential for creating a supportive learning environment. This alignment with SDG No. 4 reinforces the idea that quality education is not solely about academic content but also about nurturing ethical leaders who can contribute positively to society.

While there is extensive literature on the importance of codes of conduct, there are notable gaps in understanding their implementation and effectiveness in public institutions. For example, Lindner (2014) emphasizes that successful implementation of codes of conduct requires a participatory development process and strong leadership, yet many institutions lack these elements. Furthermore, Svara (2022) points out that public administration has struggled to articulate and enforce clear ethical standards, leading to inconsistent application of codes. These gaps highlight the need for further research to identify effective strategies for implementing and enforcing codes of conduct in government ministries. Persistent misconduct among public service employees can erode public trust in government institutions, undermining their legitimacy and effectiveness (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2024). The school system can also fail to deliver on society's expectation as its mirror as human capital development will be a far-fetched dream. This study, therefore, aimed at assessing the barriers to implementing the Employee Code of Conduct in Public-Sector Institutions with Lusaka District as a case study.

1.2. Study Objectives

- To analyze the key barriers to the effective implementation of the Employee Code of Conduct in public secondary schools in Lusaka District.

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- To assess the existing mechanisms in place for enforcing the Employee Code of Conduct.
- To examine the effect of these barriers on the overall integrity and performance of the schools.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

The implementation of the Employee Code of Conduct in public-sector institutions is crucial for maintaining ethical standards and ensuring effective service delivery. However, various barriers hinder the effective enforcement of these codes, particularly in the education sector. This literature review explores the key barriers to the implementation of the Employee Code of Conduct in public-sector institutions, with a specific focus on public secondary schools in Lusaka District, Zambia. The review examined the roles of leadership, reward systems, and organizational culture in influencing the effectiveness of these codes, providing a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and potential solutions for improving ethical standards in the public sector.

2.2. Empirical Review

2.2.1. Barriers to Effective Implementation of Employee Codes of Conduct

Sakyi & Bawole (2009) examined the barriers to the implementation of the code of conduct in the public sector across five Anglophone West African countries, including Ghana, Nigeria, Gambia, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. Their study found that deficiencies in code implementation were primarily due to a lack of clear guidelines and procedures, insufficient training, and inadequate communication of the codes to employees. However, the study did not explore the long-term impact of these deficiencies on organizational performance, leaving a gap in understanding the broader implications of poor code implementation.

Transparency International (2014) Transparency International's report on implementing codes of conduct in public institutions highlighted several elements crucial for successful implementation, such as strong leadership, participatory development processes, and effective monitoring and enforcement mechanisms. While the report provided a comprehensive overview of best practices, it lacked empirical data specific to the education sector in Zambia, which is a critical gap for understanding the unique challenges faced by public secondary schools in Lusaka District.

Jimenez (2019) Jimenez's research focused on the ethical behaviour of public sector employees and the role of leadership in enforcing codes of conduct. The study emphasized the importance of exemplary leadership in fostering an ethical organizational culture and found that leaders who model ethical behaviour significantly enhance code compliance among employees. Despite these insights, the study did not address the specific barriers to code implementation in educational institutions, which limits its applicability to the context of this research.

2.2.2. Existing Mechanisms for Enforcing the Employee Code of Conduct

Chêne's (2013), work discusses the role of leadership in embedding codes of conduct within a wider integrity management framework. It argues that leaders must be involved from the development stage to ensure successful implementation. The study offers practical recommendations for involving leaders in the development process, however it does not address how to overcome resistance from leaders who may not prioritize ethical behaviour. Holm and Lillywhite (2003), examined the role of leadership in shaping organizational norms and culture. It emphasizes that leaders must demonstrate commitment to ethical behaviour to ensure the effectiveness of codes of conduct. The study provides a detailed analysis of the relationship between leadership and organizational culture. It lacks recent data and does not explore the impact of leadership changes on the sustainability of ethical practices.

Van Miltenburg et al. (2014), compared the effectiveness of individual versus collective decision rules in implementing punishment and reward systems in public goods games. It finds that individual decision rules lead to higher contribution levels compared to collective decision rules. The study uses experimental methods to provide empirical evidence on the effectiveness of different sanctioning systems. It is limited to laboratory settings and may not fully capture the complexities of real-world public institutions. From the Zambian perspective, in a bid to try and enhance professional behaviour, conduct, and practice of teachers / employees within the education sector, government established the Teaching Council of Zambia (TCZ). The Teaching Council of Zambia (TCZ) is a statutory body under the Ministry of Education. It was established in 2013 pursuant to the Teaching Profession Act No. 5 of 2013 to provide for the regulation of teachers, their practice and professional conduct. The council investigates and disciplines teachers who engage in misconduct or do not meet the required standards (TCZ Website, 2025). This, notwithstanding, there are still cases of indiscipline among the educators which threaten the provision of quality education.

While the cited studies collectively underscore the critical role of leadership in the effective implementation of codes of conduct, several gaps remain. There is a need for more recent empirical studies that quantify the impact of leadership on code adherence. Research should explore how cultural differences affect leadership styles and the implementation of ethical codes. Future studies

should investigate strategies to overcome resistance from leaders who may not prioritize ethical behaviour. There is limited research on how changes in leadership affect the long-term sustainability of ethical practices. By addressing these gaps, future research can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the barriers to effective implementation of codes of conduct in public institutions.

2.2.3. Effect of Barriers on the Overall Integrity and Performance of the Schools

Zhu et al. (2023), investigated the effects of contingent reward (CR) and contingent punishment (CP) on compliance behaviour. The study found that CR can increase compliance behaviour by enhancing self-esteem and reducing anxiety, while CP may have the opposite effect. The study provides a detailed analysis of the psychological mechanisms through which CR and CP influence compliance behaviour. The study focuses on the role of artificial intelligence in moderating these effects, which may limit its applicability to traditional public institutions.

In addition to promoting professionalism, ethical codes of conduct serve as vital tools for imparting moral values to learners. As highlighted by Campbell and Whetstone (2022), teachers who model ethical behavior based on these codes can significantly influence students' character development. By demonstrating principles such as respect, fairness, and responsibility, educator's help cultivates a culture of ethics within the classroom that extends beyond academic learning. This moral framework not only shapes students' understanding of right and wrong but also prepares them to become responsible citizens in society (Campbell & Whetstone, 2022).

Li et al. (2021), explored the impact of reward and punishment expectations on employees' compliance behaviour. It finds that reward expectations can increase compliance behaviour, while punishment expectations may decrease it. It provides a comprehensive analysis of the different impacts of reward and punishment on compliance behaviour. It does not explore the long-term effects of these systems on organizational culture and employee morale.

2.3. Gaps in the Literature

The review of recent studies on the barriers to effective implementation of codes of conduct in public institutions—specifically focusing on lack of exemplary leadership, ineffective reward and punishment systems, and unsupportive organizational culture—reveals several significant gaps that warrant further investigation. While these studies have been done in other countries and in different sub-sectors, Zambia's education sub-sector (secondary schools) still has little to no systematic studies conducted to this effect. Therefore, there is need to carry out a study to bridge this gap as a way of resolving the long standing problem in the public service.

2.4. Theoretical Frameworks

This study was anchored on four theories:

2.4.1. Institutional Theory

Institutional theory holds that institutions are shaped by their organizational environment, which includes norms, values, and regulations (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). In the context of employee code of conduct, institutional theory advocates that public sector institutions may face barriers to effective implementation due to conflicting institutional norms and values. For example, the code of conduct may conflict with existing cultural norms or values within the institution, leading to resistance from employees (Scott, 2001). This resistance may be basis for violation of the same to the detriment of the sector.

2.4.2. Transformational Leadership Theory

Transformational Leadership Theory posits that leaders can inspire and motivate employees to exceed their own self-interests for the good of the organization. Transformational leaders are characterized by their ability to bring about significant change by fostering an environment of trust, admiration, loyalty, and respect. Leaders who exhibit transformational qualities can effectively implement codes of conduct by inspiring and motivating their employees to adhere to ethical guidelines (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Transformational leaders can cultivate a supportive organizational culture by promoting values such as integrity, accountability, and transparency. This can help overcome the barrier of unsupportive organizational culture. Numerous studies have shown that transformational leadership is positively associated with organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and ethical behavior among employees (Avolio & Yammarino, 2013).

2.4.3. Social Cognitive Theory

The social cognitive theory suggests that behavior is influenced by cognitive processes, such as attitudes, beliefs, and expectations (Bandura, 1986). In the context of employee code of conduct, social cognitive theory suggests that employees' attitudes and beliefs about the code of conduct can influence their behavior and compliance. Barriers to effective implementation may arise from employees' negative attitudes or misconceptions about the code of conduct, which can lead to resistance or non-compliance (Gagne & Deci, 2005).

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Effective reward and punishment systems can enhance employees' motivation to comply with ethical standards by reinforcing positive behavior and deterring misconduct. Research has demonstrated that perceptions of organizational justice, which are central to Social Exchange Theory, are strongly linked to employee compliance and ethical behavior (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005).

2.4.4. Organizational Culture Theory

Organizational Culture Theory examines the values, beliefs, and norms that shape the behavior of individuals within an organization. It posits that a strong, positive organizational culture can significantly influence employees' attitudes and behaviors. This theory is directly relevant to addressing the barrier of unsupportive organizational culture. It emphasizes the need for a cohesive and supportive culture that aligns with the organization's ethical standards and codes of conduct (Schein, 2010). Role of Leadership: Leaders play a crucial role in shaping and maintaining organizational culture. By promoting ethical values and behaviors, leaders can create an environment that supports the implementation of codes of conduct. Studies have shown that a positive organizational culture is associated with higher levels of employee engagement, job satisfaction, and ethical behavior (Denison, 1996).

These four theories: Institutional, Transformational Leadership, Social Cognitive, and Organizational Culture provide a comprehensive theoretical and conceptual framework for understanding and addressing the barriers to effective implementation of codes of conduct in public institutions. By focusing on exemplary leadership, fair reward and punishment systems, and supportive organizational culture, these theories offer valuable insights and practical strategies for enhancing ethical behavior and compliance within organizations.

2.5. Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework is a visual or written representation of the relationships between variables, concepts, and theories that guide a research study (Miles & Huberman, 1994). It provides a foundation for understanding the research problem, identifying relevant variables, and developing hypotheses or research questions (Creswell, 2014). It is a versatile analytic tool applicable in a variety of contexts. It is used to make distinctions between concepts and arrange them in a logical order (Ravitch & Riggan, 2012). In this study, the conceptual framework will be represented by leadership, reward systems, and organizational culture as independent variables which affect the effective implementation of the ethical code of conduct as the dependent variable.

Figure 1 below shows the study's conceptual framework with attendant variables. These will be operationalized below to demonstrate their interrelationship.

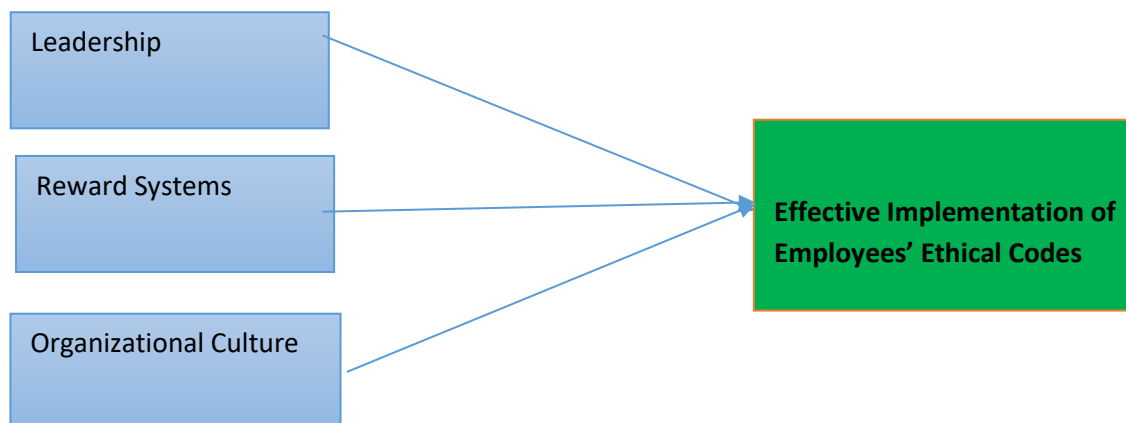**Independent Variables**   **Dependent Variable**

Figure 1:Conceptual Framework
Source: Author's Design (2024)

2.5.1. Exemplary Leadership

Transformational leaders who exemplify ethical behavior and communicate the importance of ethics can foster a culture of compliance (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Effective leaders can also empower employees to make ethical decisions and provide resources for ethics training (Yukl, 2010). The absence of leaders who model ethical behavior and uphold the standards set by the codes of conduct directly affect the implementation of ethical codes. Transformational Leadership Theory supports the idea that leaders who model ethical behavior can inspire employees to follow suit, thereby enhancing the implementation of codes of conduct (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Avolio & Yammarino, 2013).

2.5.2. Reward and Punishment Systems

Reward systems that recognize and reward ethical behavior can strengthen a culture of compliance (Eisenhardt, 1985). Nevertheless, reward systems that prioritize performance over ethics can create conflicts of interest and undermine the effectiveness of ethical codes (Kerr, 1975). Social Exchange Theory highlights the importance of fair and consistent reward and punishment systems in fostering compliance and ethical behavior (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005).

2.5.3. Organizational Culture

A strong ethical culture that emphasizes values such as integrity, transparency, and accountability can support the effective implementation of ethical codes (Schein, 1992). Conversely, a culture that tolerates or encourages unethical behavior can undermine the effectiveness of ethical codes (Anakwenze & Okpara, 2011). Organizational Culture Theory emphasizes the need for a cohesive and supportive culture that aligns with the organization's ethical standards and codes of conduct (Schein, 2010; Denison, 1996).

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed-methods approach to assess the barriers to effective implementation of the Employee Code of Conduct in public-sector institutions, specifically focusing on public secondary schools in Lusaka District. By integrating both quantitative and qualitative methods, this research aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the roles of leadership, reward systems, and organizational culture. The quantitative component involves the collection and analysis of numerical data through structured survey questionnaires. This allowed for the identification of significant patterns and relationships among measurable variables, thereby providing insights into the extent and impact of the identified barriers (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Complementing this with the qualitative component that included semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with key stakeholders. This approach facilitated a deeper exploration of the contextual and experiential aspects of the barriers, offering nuanced perspectives that can inform strategies for improving the implementation of the Employee Code of Conduct (Patton, 2015). The most suitable research philosophy for this study was pragmatism. Pragmatism emphasizes the practical application of research findings and focuses on the problem at hand rather than the methodologies or theoretical underpinnings alone. This philosophy is particularly relevant for studies aiming to address real-world issues, such as the barriers to the effective implementation of the ethical code of conduct from the Zambian context. Pragmatism allows researchers to use a variety of methods to understand the problem from multiple perspectives, facilitating comprehensive solutions (Creswell, 2014). The study population included teachers, regulators, sub-sector unions, and educational administrators of the schools. The sample size was Three Hundred and Fifty-three (353) with an 85% (300) return rate. The secondary data was from documents, written records, research publications, annual publications from the MoE, and any other readily available information that the researcher(s) came across including legislative, strategic plans, and policy documents, performance metrics, ethical codes etc., while primary data was collected using questionnaires, interview schedules and focus group discussions. Data were analyzed through SPSS for quantitative and content analysis for qualitative while simple random and purposive were sampling techniques.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Perceived Barriers to the Effective Implementation of Employee Code of Conduct in Public Secondary Schools of Lusaka District

The findings from this theme provide valuable insights into the perceived barriers to the effective implementation of employee code of conduct in secondary schools. The discussion synthesizes the key results across several dimensions relate to awareness, sensitization, availability, enforcement, disciplinary processes, and organizational culture. These barriers, though complex, collectively hinder the intended impact of the ethical code and contribute to a work environment where adherence to professional standards is inconsistent. Studies by Greenfield and Jensen (2019) similarly highlight that systemic barriers such as weak enforcement and lack of awareness often undermine the practical utility of codes of conduct. In addition, the barriers not only affect the implementation of the codes but also influence the broader educational objectives, including service delivery, student outcomes, and institutional credibility.

4.1.1. Awareness and Knowledge of Employee Code of Conduct

A significant proportion of respondents (81%) indicated awareness and knowledge of the employee code of conduct in their profession. This high level of awareness suggests that foundational knowledge of expected behavior exists among employees, which is crucial for fostering a culture of ethical conduct. However, awareness alone does not guarantee that the code is actively adhered to. Social cognitive theory emphasizes that learning and adherence to ethical standards require not only awareness but also reinforcement through observation, modelling, and feedback in real-world contexts. The presence of a well-understood code does not necessarily translate into compliance unless reinforced through continuous engagement, practical guidance, and

supportive institutional frameworks. Similar findings by Carrasco et al. (2021) indicate that awareness is merely the first step toward behavioral change, which requires robust institutional mechanisms to translate knowledge into practice. This highlights the importance of not only educating employees about the code but also ensuring they understand its practical implications and are held accountable for upholding it. When awareness is not accompanied by actionable guidance, there is a risk of superficial understanding, which may result in the failure to implement the ode effectively in everyday work practices.

4.1.2. Sensitization about Employee Code of Conduct in the Teaching Profession

Despite the reported awareness, only a minority (33%) of respondents agreed that there is sufficient sensitization about the code of conduct in the teaching profession. This discrepancy highlights a potential gap in efforts to educate and reinforce ethical standards among educators. Transformed leadership theory posits that leaders who actively communicate and exemplify ethical values can inspire employees to internalize these principles. Sensitization is a vital process in making ethical standards a living practice, ensuring that educators not only know the rules but also internalize the values behind them. Without ongoing sensitization programs, codes of conduct risk becoming mere formalities rather than active guiding principles. Literature by Schmidt et al. (2020) emphasizes that continuous sensitization fosters deeper understanding and greater alignment with institutional values. Without ongoing sensitization programs, codes of conduct risk becoming mere formalities rather than active guiding principles. This gap suggests the need for more robust, continuous sensitization strategy, where the code of conduct s regularly discussed, exemplified by leadership, and integrated into professional development programs. Without this continuous reinforcement, even well-intentioned educators may struggle to align their behaviours with the standards set out in the codes.

4.1.3. Prevalence of Code of Conduct Violations

The survey results suggest a widespread perception (67%) that violations of the code of conduct are prevalent within the district. This finding underscores the need for improved adherence to ethical standards and more robust mechanisms for monitoring and addressing misconduct. Similar research by Petersen and O'neil (2020) reveals that the perception of frequent violations often correlates with weak enforcement systems and limited accountability measures. Organizational culture theory highlights that when ethical breaches are normalized, they erode the shared values necessary for maintaining a high standard of conduct. The perception of frequent violations indicates a failure in the oversight systems, which may contribute to a culture of leniency where unethical behavior becomes normalized. This calls for the implementation of more rigorous monitoring systems, regular audits of behavior, and the mechanisms for employees to report violations safely. Moreover, when violations are not adequately addressed, it creates a cycle where other employees may feel emboldened to disregard the code, further worsening the issues. Strengthening accountability frameworks, such as peer reviews, anonymous reporting channels, and follow-through on consequences, could help reduce violations and support a culture of adherence to the ethical guidelines.

4.1.4. Enforcement of Employee Codes by Administrators

A significant majority (64%) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that there is weak enforcement of the employee code of conduct by administrators. This perceived laxity in enforcement could undermine the credibility and effectiveness of the codes in promoting desired behaviors. Transformational leadership theory underscores the importance of leadership in enforcing and modelling ethical standards. Thompson et al., (2022) similarly emphasizes that consistent enforcement is critical to embedding ethical norms within organizational culture. Without strong, consistent enforcement, employees may perceive the codes as unenforceable or irrelevant, which weakens their authority.

Effective enforcement requires administrators to act decisively when weakens their authority. Effective enforcement requires administrators to act decisively when violators occur and to apply appropriate sanctions to deter future misconduct. The lack of strong enforcement often results in a culture of impunity, where employees feel that violations will not result in tangible consequences. To address this, administrators must ensure that disciplinary processes are clear, transparent, and consistently applied, sending a strong message about the importance of maintaining ethical standards. This can be further enhanced by leadership that exemplifies ethical behavior and demonstrates a commitment to upholding the code of conduct at all times.

4.1.5. Role Models and Organizational Culture

The overwhelming majority of respondents (77%) agreed or strongly agreed that the lack of positive role models affects the implementation of employee codes. Similarly, a large majority (97%) believed that organizational culture significantly influences the effective implementation of these codes. Research by Goldstein and Levine (2021) confirms that role modelling by leadership significantly enhances ethical adherence by demonstrating expected standards in practice. These findings highlight the critical role of employee codes. Similarly, a large majority (97%) believed that organizational culture significantly influences the effective implementation of these codes. These findings highlight the critical role of leadership and organizational norms in shaping ethical behavior outlined in the code, it is unlikely that employees will adhere to the same standards. Organizational culture, including the values promoted by leadership, plays a pivotal role in determining how the code is perceived and applied.

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According to transformational leadership theory, leaders who model ethical behavior inspire employees to emulate these values, creating a ripple effect that strengthens adherence to codes of conduct. Positive role models within the institution can inspire others to follow ethical practices, whereas a lack of such role models can foster an environment where unethical behaviors is tolerated. Building a culture that prioritizes ethics, supported by leaders who model these values, is essential for the effective implementation of the code of conduct.

4.1.6.   Administrative Bureaucracy and Clear Guidelines

There is notable dissatisfaction with administrative processes elated to disciplinary actions, with a majority (82%) agreeing that there is excessive bureaucracy and a lack of clear guidelines for punishing code violations. These bureaucratic hurdles may contribute to delays and inconsistencies in addressing misconduct. Excessive bureaucracy in the disciplinary process can lead to frustration and a sense of helplessness among employees, who may perceive the system as inefficient or unfair. Institutional theory highlights the need for well-structured, formal processes that are consistently applied to ensure compliance and trust in administrative systems. Streamlining the process and ensuring that clear guidelines are in place for handling violations would help expedite disciplinary actions and ensures that they are conducted fairly and transparently. According to Stevens and Clark (2020), streamlined processes and clear guidelines improve trust in administrative systems and foster greater adherence to ethical standards. A more efficient and responsive administrative system would also build trust in the process, making employees more likely to report misconduct and comply with the ethical guidelines.

4.1.7.   Clarity of Penalties for Violators

A significant majority (98%) of respondents agreed and strongly agreed that there are no clearly defined punitive penalties for code violators. This ambiguity in consequences could weaken he deterrent penalties for violations are essential for creating a sense of accountability. Social cognitive theory suggests that clear and consistent consequences for unethical behavior reinforce the behavior norms expected in an organization. When employee is unsure of the penalties they may face for unethical behavior, they may be more likely to disregard the code of conduct as highlighted by Ruiz and Palmer (2019), who stress the importance of transparent consequences for fostering accountability. By establishing clear and transparent penalties for violations are essential for creating a sense of accountability. When employees are unsure of the penalties they may face for unethical behavior, they may be more likely to disregard the code of conduct. By establishing clear and transparent penalties, educational institutions can enhance the effectiveness of the code of conduct, ensuring that employee understand the consequences of their actions and are deterred from engaging in unethical behavior.

4.2. Existing Mechanisms for Enforcing the Employee Code of Conduct

4.2.1.   Formal Policies

The study revealed that public secondary schools in Lusaka District operate within a framework of formal policies and guidelines provided by the ministry of education. These policies outline the expected ethical standards and the procedures for addressing violations. However, respondents noted significant gaps in their practical implementation. One participant stated, "The policies are there, but not everyone is familiar with them or takes them seriously." This aligns with institutional theory, which posits that the presence of formal rules alone is insufficient without proper enforcement and internalization within organizational practices.

4.2.2.   Supervisory Structures

Supervisory structures, such as school boards, head teachers, and disciplinary committees, were identified as critical for monitoring and enforcing the employee code of conduct. However, respondents highlighted that these structures are often underutilized or lack the authority to take decisive action. One interviewee observed, "Supervisors sometimes hesitate to address violations because they fear backwards or lack the necessary support." Transformational leadership theory suggests that leaders who inspire and motivate their teams can create an environment where ethical behavior thrives. Thus, empowering school leaders with both the training and authority to enforce the code effectively could enhance the role of supervisory structures.

4.2.3.   Audits

Audits and inspections by the Ministry of Education were also identified as mechanisms for ensuring compliance with ethical standards. However, their effectiveness was reported to be limited due to infrequency and a lack of follow-up actions. One respondent noted, "Audits are rare, and even when violations are identified, the consequences are not always clear re consistent, "this reflects organizational culture theory, which emphasizes that inconsistent accountability practices can erode the shared values and norms needed to maintain ethical behavior. Regular and transparent audits could help embed a culture of accountability within the teaching profession.

4.2.4.   Training Workshops

Training workshops and sensitization programs were reported as existing but insufficient mechanisms for educating educators about the code pf conduct. Only 33% of respondents agreed that there is adequate sensitization on the topic. One participant

stated, "Many teachers don't fully understand the code or its importance because training sessions are rare and often superficial," social cognitive theory underscores the importance of continuous learning and reinforcement in shaping behavior. Regular workshops, combined with opportunities to observe and model ethical practices, could significantly improve educators' understanding and commitment to the code of conduct.

4.2.5. Promotions Linked to Adherence to the Code of Conduct

The perception that promotions are not tied to adherence to the Code of Conduct was widely reported among respondents. This aligns with systemic issues identified earlier, such as the subjective nature of promotion criteria. As one participant lamented, "promotions seem more influenced by personal connections than professional conduct, which demotivates these of us trying to adhere to the rules." Research by Bass & Avolio (1994) on transformational leadership theory highlights the motivational impact linking career advancement to ethical behaviour. When promotions are perceived to be based on merit and adherence to professional standards, they serve as a powerful incentive for compliance. Conversely, subjectivity in promotion processes erodes trust and discourages employees from prioritizing ethical behavior. Establishing transparent, ethics-based promotion criteria can reinforce the importance of adhering to the code of conduct and improve organizational morale.

4.2.6. Incentives for Adherence to the Code of Conduct

A staggering 93% of respondents disagreed, and 4.5% strongly disagreed, that incentives are provide to employees who adhere to the code of conduct. Only 5.5% agreed or strongly agreed with this view. This lack of incentives represents a missed opportunity to reinforce positive behavior and cultivate a culture of accountability. Incentive programs, whether monetary or non-monetary, are proven mechanism for fostering ethical behavior. Wright et al. (2018) emphasize that rewards for compliance enhance employee motivation and reinforce ethical standards. As one teacher observed. "We are expected to follow the rules, but there is no recognition when we do. It feels like it doesn't matter." Introducing recognizing programs, such as awards for exemplary ethical conduct or performance-based bonuses, could address this gap, providing tangible reinforcement for adherence to the code.

4.2.7. Annual Performance Appraisals Including Code of Conduct Adherence

The study found that 67% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that annual performance appraisals include adherence to the employee code of conduct, while only 33%% agreed or strongly agreed. This suggests that many schools lack structured appraisal systems that incorporate ethical adherence as a key metric. Research by Kaplan and Norton (2019) on balanced scorecards supports the integration of ethical metrics into performance evaluations to align individual behavior with organizational values. Organizational culture theory emphasizes that specific, measurable goals tied to organizational values drive employee performance. One administrative admitted, "Performance appraisals are done sporadically, and adherence to the code is rarely a focus. It's more about academic outcomes." By including ethical behavior as a component of appraisals, schools can systematically track compliance and incentivize adherence to the code of conduct

In summary, while formal policies, supervisory structures, audits, and training workshops provide a foundation for enforcing the employee code of conduct, their effectiveness is hindered by gaps in implementation, leadership challenges, infrequent accountability practices, and limited opportunities for capacity building. Addressing these issues through the integration of institution, transformational leadership. Social cognitive, and organizational culture frameworks could significantly enhance the enforcement mechanisms and foster a stronger commitment to ethical behavior among educators.

4.3. Effects of the Barriers to Codes Implementation on Institutional Performance

A majority of respondents, 207(58%), strongly agreed that the ineffective enforcement of the ethical code negatively impacts service delivery in the sub-sector, while 29(23%) agreed with this view. Conversely, 30(9%) disagreed, 8(2%) strongly disagreed, and 17(5%) remained neutral. These findings suggest that the ineffective enforcement of the code of conduct has the potential to adversely affect service delivery within the sub-sector.

4.3.1. Higher Failure Rate among Learners in Public Secondary Schools can be partly Linked to Inadequate Enforcement of the Ethical Code of Conduct.

There were 299(85%) of the respondents who strongly agreed that the higher failure rate among learners in public schools can partly be linked to the inadequate enforcement of the ethical code of conduct, while 54(15%) agreed to the view. Thus, these results indicate that the failure rate among the learners in public schools can be partly be linked to inadequate enforcement of the ethical code of conduct.

4.3.2. Society Losses Confidence in the Public School System Due To Perceived Professional Misconducts among Educators

Out of the total respondents, 349(87%) agreed to the view that society losses confidence in public schools due to perceived professional misconduct among educators, and 54(13%) strongly disagreed. Thus, from the results it can be said that the society can lose confidence in public schools due to perceived professional misconduct among learners.

4.3.3. Whether Learners' Morals Are Compromised by Educators' Violations of their Professional Codes.

There were 278(79%) of the respondents who strongly agreed to the view that learner's morals are compromised by educator's violations of their codes. 40(11%) of the respondents agreed to the view, and 35(10%) disagreed to the view. Hence, the results show that the educator's violation of the code corrupts the morals of leaners. Thus, there is need to ensure that educators follow the code of conduct to avoid corrupting learner's morals.

4.4. Implication of Findings

This section synthesized the key results from the data presentation and analysis, discussing the implications of the findings in the context of existing literature. It highlighted the critical barriers to effective implementation, including deficiencies in code implementation, lack of exemplary leadership, ineffective reward and punishment systems, and unsupportive organizational culture. The discussion emphasizes the need for continuous sensitization, strong ethical leadership, clear enforcement mechanisms, and a supportive organizational culture. The section also explored the impact of these barriers on institutional performance, service delivery, and public trust in the education system.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Conclusion

The findings of this study highlight critical gaps and challenges in the implementation of the employee code of conduct within secondary schools in Lusaka District. Regarding awareness and sensitization efforts, while most employees are aware of the code of conduct, there is a lack of regular sensitization programs and structured platforms to reinforce ethical standards. This gap has resulted in limited understanding and engagement with the values behind the code, underscoring the need for consistent communication and training initiatives to integrate ethical principles into daily professional practices.

The role of organizational culture and leadership in fostering adherence to the code is evident, with the absence of positive role models and ethics-based promotion system posing significant barriers. Weak organizational norms and the perception of favoritism in promotions have undermined trust and motivation among employees. A culture of accountability and integrity, supported by ethical leadership and role modeling, is essential for reinforcing professional behavior. Linking promotions and incentives to ethical adherence can serve as a powerful motivator for compliance and restore confidence in organizational system. Finally, the study reveals that weak enforcement mechanisms and accountability structures are major impediments to the effective implementation of the code of conduct. Bureaucratic hurdles, inconsistent disciplinary actions, and the lack of clear, transparent penalties for violations contribute to a culture of impunity. Additionally, the absence of structured performance appraisals that include ethical metrics and the lack of recognition for adherence to the code hinder the creation of an environment that promotes ethical behavior. Addressing these issues requires clear enforcement guidelines, streamlined process, and mechanisms for accountability to ensure that ethical standards are upheld consistently across the organization. None adherence to these standards has affected the academic performance and morals of learners who service beneficiaries of the educational stakeholders.

5.2. Recommendations

5.2.1. Awareness and sensitization efforts

To address the gaps identified in awareness and sensitization, it is recommended that schools implement structured, regular sensitization programs on the employee code of conduct workshops, seminars, and periodic training sessions should be introduced to ensure that employees not only understand the code but also internalize the ethical values behind it. Additionally, incorporating discussions on the code of conduct into professional development and staff meetings can create a culture of continuous engagement. Clear communications channels, such as newsletters, posters, and digital platforms, should also be utilized to disseminate information about the code and its importance. These efforts will bridge the knowledge gap and reinforce principles across the organization.

5.2.2. Organizational culture and leadership

Given the influence of organizational culture and leadership, it is essential to strengthen ethical leadership and create a culture of accountability and integrity. Leadership must serve as positive role models by exemplifying ethical behavior and actively promoting adherence to the code of conduct. Promotion and career advancement should be transparently linked to compliance

with ethical standards to motivate employees and foster trust. In addition, introducing recognition and reward systems such as awards for ethical conduct or performance-based incentives can provide positive reinforcement and further encourage adherence to the code. Building a strong organizational culture that prioritizes ethics will inspire employees to align their behavior with professional standards.

5.2.3. Enforcement Mechanism and Accountability Structures

To overcome the challenges of weak enforcement and inconsistent accountability, schools must establish clear and transparent enforcement mechanisms for the code of conduct. This include developing streamlined disciplined disciplinary process with defined timelines and clear guidelines on penalties for violations. Performance appraisals should incorporate adherence to ethical standards as a key metric, enabling the systematic tracking of compliance. Additionally, anonymous reporting channels and peer-review systems can encourage employees to report violations without fear of retaliation. By ensuring consistent application of disciplinary measures and providing avenues for accountability, schools can create an environment where ethical behavior is both expected and enforced.

6.0. FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research and policy efforts should focus on multiple critical areas to cultivate a more ethical workplace environment within educational institutions. These efforts should prioritize enhancing awareness through targeted training programs, workshops, and campaigns that emphasize the importance of ethical behavior and the consequences of unethical practices. Strengthening enforcement mechanisms is equally vital, which involves establishing clear protocols for identifying and addressing unethical behaviors, ensuring impartial investigations, and applying consistent disciplinary measures.

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