ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

The Degree of Practicing Professionalism in Ethiopian Academia

Linguistics

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ABSTRACT

The present paper (an ongoing research) calls forth an immediate attention of all the academic and non-academic staff responsible for knowledge and human resource management towards enforcing utmost professionalism at workplace especially in university domain of Ethiopia. The paper has twofold concerns; firstly, it conducts a concise ethnographic case study of the university staff to explore the degree of practicing 16 vital components of professionalism. The findings of the research reveal some striking facts as a part of which 15 components have emerged as areas of concern or lacking areas as they are not being practiced up to satisfactory degree, i.e. (70%) set as a yardstick in the concerned research. Secondly, based on the 15 lacking areas, the author recommends a Fifteen Dimensional Protocol (FDP) as remedial measures to enhance the degree of professionalism by prescribing and proscribing rules of thumb for the working staff and the management of the universities.

1. Introduction

Gone are the days when a system (academic or non-academic) used to run in a lackadaisical manner with stereotyped professionals of established knowledge. There has been a huge paradigm shift from established knowledge to new knowledge in the recent years. Due to the changes in office technologies at international level and due to social, political and demographic changes at the national level, the restructuring of Ethiopian public organizations to accommodate these new changes became crucial (Tesfaye, 2011). In today's huge proliferation of new knowledge and high competitions, our systems are in dire need of professionals or professional skills of higher caliber. If we wish to think of excelling, we need to think of professionalism in every walk of life. Today, professionalism has become a universal culture and is often defined as the strict adherence to a blend of several components in any working environment. Professionalism, as a part of this research, is expected to be defined as a blend of 16 components: {Accountability, Altruism, Aptitude, Communication, Conflict Management, Decision Making, Dress Code, Eagerness to excel, Empathy, Motivation, Hygiene, Integrity, Fitness, Reliability, Reward, and Time Management} because these components are believed to be the fundamental indicators to professionalism.

The term professionalism, readily, evokes two intertwined concepts: (profession and professional) to our cognition in which professionalism plays the role of axis around which the success of profession and professional revolves which has been depicted in the following gear diagram (figure-1).

Figure Function of Professionalism

2. Objectives

The present paper can be viewed as an initial interpretive and recommendatory report of an ongoing ethnographic perception-study (opinion survey) to explore the degree of practicing professionalism by the staff and the management of Ethiopian universities. Since professionalism is a decisive factor for work and result, the idea of writing the present paper grew out of my serious concern viewing the declining professionalism in Ethiopian academia. In the light of declining professionalism which deprives us from attaining our set goals the paper sets three objectives.

1. To assess the professional behaviour and work ethic of the employees and the systems.

2. To explore the degree of practicing sixteen vital components of professionalism: {Accountability, Altruism, Aptitude, Communication, Conflict Management, Decision Making, Dress Code,, Eagerness to excel, Empathy, Motivation, Hygiene, Integrity, Fitness, Reliability, Reward, and Time Management} by the university staff.

3. To recommend a Fifteen Dimensional Protocol (FDP) as remedial measures to enhance the degree of professionalism.

3. Methods of the Study

To meet the first objective as stated above, an ethnographic perception study was conducted firstly at Haramaya University to explore the degree of practicing professionalism by its staff and the systems. It is imperative to mention here that the present study is guided by or based on the pattern of the Principles of Professional Behaviour as contained in the Canadian Medical Association Code of Ethics. For the present study, two major data collecting tools were employed in two stages: In the first stage, a face to face (unstructured interview) was made with the participants of the study which comprised 55 teaching and non-teaching staff and 12 students' representatives.

Since, unstructured interview is characterised by a flexibility of approach to questioning (Kothari, 2004) and it uses the central technique of collecting information in case of exploratory research studies, so it was deliberately used firstly to explore the possible areas of unprofessionalism by getting prompt and natural response from the participants. Secondly, the participants were given two sets of close-ended questionnaire as it was intended to generate statistical result. The first set of questionnaire, which contained the list of 16 vital components of professionalism, was aimed at making three types of observation or perception in the form of A: (PSO-Participants' Self Observation), B: (POC-Participants' Observation about Colleagues), and C: (POS-Participants' Observation of the Systems). The specimen of the questionnaire can be seen in the following table-1.

Table-1: Prerequisite Questionnaire to Understand and Observe the Components of Professionalism

| COMPONENTS		All the questions raised below start with 'To what degree'
1. Accountability	A	accountability is practiced by you at the workplace?
	B	accountability is practiced by your colleagues at the workplace?
	C	accountability is practiced by your system for the holistic growth?
2. Altruism	A	altruism is practiced by you?
	B	altruism is practiced by your colleagues?
	C	altruism is practiced by the system?
3. Aptitude	A	you grade your aptitude?

		B	you grade your colleagues' aptitude?
		C	your systems are concerned about the aptitude of the employees?
4.	Commu nication	A	your verbal and non-verbal communication are effective?
		B	you grade your colleagues for their communicative competence?
		C	you are content by the systems' communication with the employees?
5.	Conflict Manag ement	A	you manage conflicts at your workplace?
		B	your colleagues manage conflicts at workplace?
		C	the systems resolve employees' conflicts?
6.	Decisio n Ma king	A	you are content with your decision making ability?
		B	your are content with your colleagues' decision making ability?
		C	you grade your systems for their decision making on main issues?
7.	Dress Code	A	you find your dress code up to mark?
		B	you find your colleagues' dress code up to mark?
		C	the system is concerned about the positive impact of dress code?
8.	Eagern ess to excel	A	you aspire to groom in academia?
		B	your colleagues aspire to groom in academia?
		C	you find your systems aspiring for excellence?
9.	Empath y	A	empathy is practiced by you?
		B	empathy is practiced by your colleagues?
		C	empathy is practiced by your system for the holistic growth?
10.	Motivat ion	A	you feel motivated to work?
		B	your colleagues feel motivated to work?
		C	the systems motivate employees positively for academic growth?
11.	Fitness	A	you find yourself mentally and physically fit to work?
		B	you find your colleagues mentally and physically fit to work?
		C	the systems orient staff for mental toughness & physical fitness?
12.	Hygien e	A	you pay attention on your hygiene and cleanliness?
		B	your colleagues pay attention on their hygiene and cleanliness?
		C	your systems pay attention on hygiene and cleanliness?
13.	Integrit y	A	you practice honesty and integrity in your work?
		B	your colleagues follow honesty and integrity in their work?
		C	honesty and integrity are practiced by your systems?
14.	Reliabili ty	A	you find reliability in you?
		B	you find reliability in your colleagues?
		C	you find reliability in your systems?
15.	Reward	A	you are satisfied with the reward?
		B	your colleagues are satisfied with the reward?
		C	the systems are concerned about the reward of the employees?
16.	Time Manag ement	A	you accomplish your task punctually?
		B	your colleagues accomplish their task punctually?
		C	the systems accomplish their tasks on time?

To enlist the exact degree of practicing the 16 components in terms of percentile, the participants were given the second set of questionnaire with 10 options of varying degree, i.e. {10%, 20%, 30%, 40%, 50%, 60%, 70%, 80%, 90%, and 100%}. The research made a yardstick of 70% as a satisfactory degree of practicing the concerned components.

4. Results and Analysis:
The perception study using the above questionnaire brought out many significant results. The overall degree of practicing the sixteen components by (A) and (B) was found to be satisfactory, as illustrated in the following charts (figure-2 and figure-3) respectively.
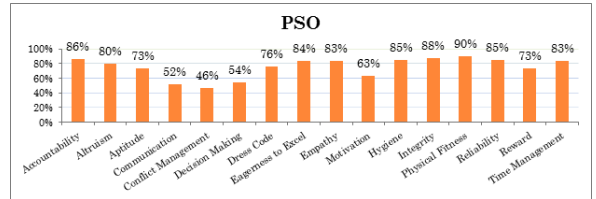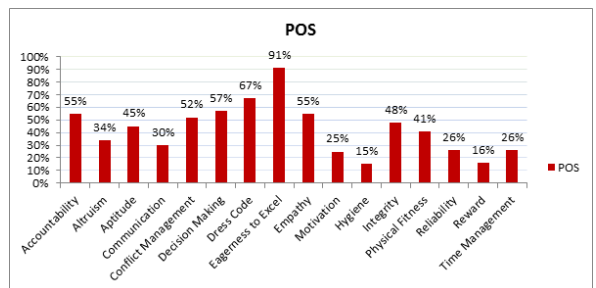

Figure 2 Participants' Self Observation

It is noteworthy in the PSO chart above that except four components, i.e. (communication, conflict management, decision making, and motivation) the other components have been practiced above the satisfactory degree, i.e. 70%. Unlike PSO, half of the components in POC (participants' observation about colleagues) are being practiced below satisfactory degree and half of them above the satisfactory degree as illustrated in the following chart.
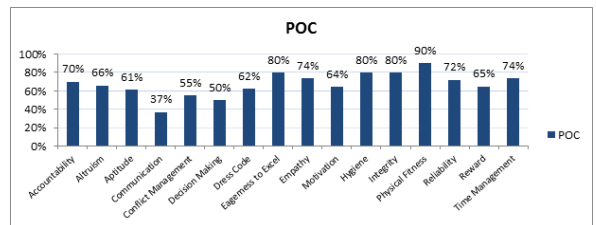
Figure 3 Participants' Observation about Colleagues

Viewing the above results, it is evident that the average degree of practicing the key components by PSO and POC is not very disappointing. But the question mark is raised over the system's degree of practicing the sixteen components as one can see in the following chart of POS (Participants' observation of the systems).

Figure 4 Participants' Observation of the Systems (POS)

If we look at the above result, we find that except one component, i.e. (eagerness to excel), all the other components are practiced below satisfactory degree (70%) by the system. Thus, there are fifteen problematic areas which are not practiced up to mark. It is noteworthy in the above chart that system's degree of practicing six components particularly *Communication, Motivation, Hygiene, Reliability, Reward,* and *Time Management* whose degree of practice are 30%, 25%, 15%, 26%, 16%, and 26% respectively is a matter of concern and greater debate. In these six lowly practiced components, it is imperative to highlight two lowest practiced components: hygiene and reward. Hygiene is the most neglected component with the lowest degree of 15% and reward is the second most neglected component with the second lowest degree of 16%. Thus, it reveals a huge dissatisfaction of the employees on the matter of reward or remuneration compensated by the systems or the super-systems.

4.1 Fifteen Dimensional Protocol:

Viewing the dismal results of the systems, two sets of FDP (Fifteen Dimensional Protocol) have been proposed as remedial measures to counteract 15 lacking areas. The first set of FDP is merely the graphical representation of 15 components as shown in the figure-5 below and the second set is the prescribing and proscribing rules for the respective components.

Figure-5 (Graphical Representation of FDP)

It is noteworthy in the Venn diagram graphical representation of the FDP that the edges of all the 15 components have not only been overlapped with the core concept of professionalism but also with one another which show that these components are not only integral parts of professionalism but also a cumulative driving force by mutually reinforcing one other to strengthen and enhance professionalism.

The second set of FDP is the textual manifestation of the respective components in the form of prescribing and proscribing rules based on the viewpoints of both the researcher and the participants as follow.

*   **Accountability** (Responsibility to someone or for some activity): Stop sluggishness. Ask employees to give in periodic reports about their actions and achievements.
*   Altruism (Realizing others' ideas and welfare): Respect everyone's ideas, opinions, and suggestions irrespective of their possible implementation. Don't crush novel ideas to appease one's personal ego.
*   **Aptitude** (Subject and general knowledge, enterprising ability, and leadership skill): Hold more and more competitive workshops on creativity and innovation. Recruit employees only after they meet required aptitude. Don't let unskilled or novice staff manage the system as they are potential threat to the system with their sloppy aptitude.
*   **Communication** (Verbal & Non-Verbal communication): Use a common lingua franca (preferably English) to avoid any communication breakdown among the staff. Let the seniors not use high-handedness with aggressive and demeaning body language to belittle juniors. Prefer face to face communication to email, telephonic, or other forms of tele-conferencing.
*   **Conflict Management** (Solving ethical issues): Avoid adversarial negotiation style and use preferably principled or creative negotiation to settle an issue. Don't find who causes problem rather look into why problem is occurring. Avoid majority voting, averaging, bargaining, or coin flipping. These do not lead to consensus in the interest of holistic growth of the system and the employees. Get individual ego out of management style; and solve the sensitive issues on time. Let the team create as they will support what they have created. Don't practice any discriminatory and harmful behavior based on cast, creed, tribe, region, religion, language etc. The respective managers should handle all five types of conflicts: (Inter-group conflict, Intra-group conflict, Relationship conflict, Inertia, and Substantive conflict) with great caution.
*   **Decision Making** (strategic management): Generate a variety

of possibilities and make priorities viewing the available resources to achieve the goals. Don't overlook instant advantage in the hope of distant benefits. Don't take any decision that may affect the solidarity of a workplace. Do not prolong any important decision.
*   **Dress Code** (formal, tidy, soothing, and un-provocative wear): Avoid pompous and untidy dresses as they prove distractive factor at workplace.
*   **Empathy** (Understanding others' feelings): Avoid any trait of displaying arrogance by patronizing inferiors. Establish a culture of unconditional positive respect.
*   **Fitness** (Mental Toughness & Good Health): Fitness here refers more importantly to mental toughness to meet the deadlines of the work and to meet insurmountable challenges in today's competitive world.
*   **Hygiene** (Cleanliness): The system should be sensible enough to work on this front as unhygienic conditions are never conducive for any activities of our life.
*   **Integrity** (The quality of honesty and oneness): Develop integrity amid employees and the systems; otherwise, an employee may lose all credibility in the system and vice-versa.
*   **Motivation** (Encouraging employees): All the mangers need to keep motivating their employees for their efforts and innovation to avoid any despair and unprofessional attitude in them and make them feel that they are improving and achieving more.
*   **Reliability** (Trustworthiness): Avoid lack of responsiveness and practice follow-through in accomplishing a task.
*   **Reward** (Remuneration): Since reward was found to be one of the highest dissatisfaction among employees, the system needs to look into this problem rationally as it causes immense adverse impact on the growth of the systems and the employees. Apart from due compensation, give exceptional periodic rewards to the high performing employees in order to motivate low performing employees.
*   **Time Management** (Proper way of planning, delegating, and prioritizing): Someone rightly said "managing time is managing life." Don't delay things as it aggravates the problem. At the same time, don't practice excessive rescheduling. Postpone the deadline only if the team is overstressed.

5. Conclusion:

Since, the system(s) is the centre of debate for poor practice of professionalism as a part of findings of this research, it is desirable to draw the kind attention of all the respective managers of top-level, middle-level, and first-level to ensure first they possess and practice the vital characteristics of managers. All the managers, in this regard, are advised to use the quantification opportunities presented by their information system to measure, analyze, and benchmark the performances of an individual, department, division, or entire organization (Marilyn, 2006). All the management employees of (planning, organizing, leading, and controlling) must ensure the system operates in the highest professional and ethical manner possible (Simon, 2002).

In our daily activities, we are more focused on learning and teaching course material and technical skills rather than professional skills. Hence, academia has more theorists and less practitioners of professionalism. Since, professionalism is not a widely discussed subject in academic arena; so, an immediate urgency is being felt to promote greater professionalism by setting up a training cell or unit in each university which could inculcate professionalism or organizational behavior (Langton, 2006) or culture in its employees. In addition, the concerned management should think over the dissatisfaction of reward. The salary for academician in Ethiopia does not satisfy the basic personal needs (Tesfaye, 2011). And this is one of the major reasons that professionalism is less practiced in academia because employees are not well compensated as in business sector.

Thus, practicing utmost professionalism is not a distant goal, it is well within our reach; the only requirement needed at this juncture is all the respective officials and staff should take a brief pause from

their work and not only introspect but also retrospect over the shortcomings in the concerned lacking areas and find a realistic and rational solution to enhance the work efficiency and the holistic growth of the systems and the employees.

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