



Ethical Commitment - the Most Reliable Weapon in Fighting Corruption

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Abstract: In the present study we intend to reach and to formulate the importance of ethical commitment of the future civil servants, an issue that the schools of public administration, and not only them, should consider in developing their curriculum. Our working assumption is that in Romania, during the years a line was not drawn in what it concerns the corruption. The lack of knowledge on what ethics means and which are the consequences of the lack of it can induce the idea that we do not know how to fight against corruption. The hypothesis that led us to the study was that the public system, through its human resources and specific relationships, can increase the risk of inducing, directly or indirectly, the corrupted stereotypes.

Keywords: integrity standards, responsibilities, trust, professionalization

1. Introduction

Almost twenty years ago research and concern on corruption was a small field. Currently, however, a large number of editorials, surveys and reports are published every week and month. This development partly reflects an increased public concern for the problem.

Generally speaking, and theoretically, it is recognized that the governments in poor countries are also the most corrupted. This is one of the few clear empirical results of recent research studies on corruption. As far as Romania is concerned, we cannot say that it is a poor country, it is only a country that still tries to make the transfer from absolutism to a market economy. Corruption is the agent that often undermines the importance of formal institutions in strengthening of democracy and good governance.

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There are strong arguments and evidence that well-functioning legal, administrative and social institutions are necessary requirements for development. In a state based on the rule of law public administration plays an important role, it is the 'key keeper' of stability and adaptability. Public administration and its civil servants as policy implementers are called in to put in practice the legal standards, but they can be influenced by the phenomenon of corruption either directly, from the different stakeholders or indirectly through politicians (local and central).

The "dark face" of public administration is corruption which together with bureaucracy can keep a state in a continuous crisis. The World Bank's "multipronged" anti-corruption strategy (2000) brought to fore the civil service reform as one path necessary to be implemented in order to diminish corruption. The future of public administration is in the hands of our students.

We cannot conceive a civil service reform without taking into consideration the ethical commitment of our next generations of civil servants. Ignoring the development of public administration on ethical coordinates will force us to ignore the fact that civil servants are people, not only implementers. They have their own values surging from different backgrounds and their desire to assert professionalism cannot be reduced to conformity. Professional fulfilment is part of human fulfilment and self-esteem condition.

The ethics area of government is particularly sensitive because its main aim is to maintain public confidence in the functioning of institutions, trust without which democracy is only a bad political show. The public interest is based on a moral framework which promotes values such as: personal dignity, freedom, respect for law and order. These moral values are studied at ethics, a science that pay attention to their historical development, to their content, to their role in the social life and to moral conduct.

All schools of public administration around the world have tried to train the most competent people, professionals in public administration. However, we do not know to what extent they are prepared to act ethically, especially because transitional countries (such as Romania) have always complained of inability to attract the best trained civil servants.

Ethics as subject of study was integrated in the Romanian (NSPSPA) public administration curriculum in the 3rd year, the last year of the bachelor degree, when the students already know the 'secrets' of public administration. Our main theme

will be the ethical commitment of the future civil servants which together with transparency can be used as weapons against corruption.

In this regard we will determine if, in our days, the ethical commitment is one of the students' competences. Moreover, we will focus our attention on students' opinions about the relevance of this competence on the labour market. And taking into consideration that they are in a program offered by a university, we will seek to find out to what extent the later one can help them to acquire/improve their ethical commitment.

In order to whole our investigation, we intend to establish, through the eyes of future civil servants, which are the values that public administration should promote. Once established, we will endeavour to create the matrix of ethical commitment.

This research will hold a discussion on corruption articulated with the ethical commitment. It will aim to demonstrate the (non) consolidation of the ethical commitment as a tool for the (non) diminishment of corruption. We will see that corruption in public administration involves several factors which are interconnected in one and the same process, such as politics, pay system, motivation and quality of life.

2. Methodological Framework

The post-communist transition is characterized by the preponderant power distribution for the benefit of political power and by the lack of trust and confidence which makes democracy a bad political show. In this show, public administration is called in to keep the stability of the state and to guard (through the implementation process) together with justice, the rule of law.

In our investigation of ethical commitment approach in public administration, we used a complex research strategy that combined both quantitative and qualitative research methods.

For a better view over the ethics issue in the recruitment of future civil servants, we have used documentary and content analyses and as tools of investigation – the questionnaire and the observation system. We have considered that, these set of methods and tools are going to help us in collecting relevant information and data necessary for our research. Through the documentary analysis, we have studied

documents relating to ethics in the public sector. By the structural analysis of public administration we have identified corruption patterns in public administration. In order to find out the ethical commitment we used the questionnaire. For the survey we selected students from various levels of training, such as students in public administration and European administration – 1st and 2nd year, National School of Political Studies and Public Administration, in economic engineering – 1st year, Faculty of technological engineering, Transylvania University, Brasov and students in Management and IT – 3rd year, Politechnic University, Bucharest. The last two categories of students we regarded as having great potential in working in the Romanian public system even when they were asked if they want to create their own business, most of them answer yes (5 - the highest level). Moreover, because the future of public administration is a technological one (e-administration), we have to start to take into consideration and those students which are studying IT. Likewise, for the implications that our study is reaching, we took into consideration and the students who are going to work in the private sector, considering that they are going to be the future partner of public administration and will interact directly with it.

It will be wrong to think that teaching ethics, only to public administration students, we will increase the ethical commitment of the future civil servants and undermine corruption. All the programs have to contain at least one subject about ethics because as we know in public administration actions are varied and can influence the entire state system and more the citizens' approach.

The observation system was used at the courses and seminars held with the questioned students. We would like to mention that only certain features deemed important for our investigation, in terms of defining ethical commitment in the public sector, were selected.

3. The Theoretical Approach of Ethics

3.1. Ethical Theories

The moral values which support the democratic society are studied at ethics, a science that pays attention to their historical development, to their content, to their role in the social life and to the moral conduct.

The development of ethical theories dates back to Plato and Aristotle. The roots of the word ethics are in the Greek word *ethos* that means “customs”, “conduct” or

“character”. So, ethics is concerned with the kinds of values and morals that an individual or society finds desirable and with the virtuousness of individuals. Ethical theory provides a system of rules or principles that guides us in making decisions about what is right or wrong and good or bad in particular situation. (Northouse, 2007, p. 342)

Ethical theories can be thought as falling within two broad domains: theories about conduct (teleological and deontological theories) and theories about character (virtue-based theory). *Teleological*¹ theories try to answer questions about right and wrong by focusing on whether a person’s conduct will produce desirable conduct, in this sense we are looking at the results or outcomes because they determine the behaviour. Regarding the moral conduct we can identify three different approaches. One of them is the *ethical egoism* which states that a person should act so as to create the greatest good for her or himself. Ethical egoism is common in some business contexts (where they seek to maximize the company profits) but not in the public sector. The *utilitarianism*, the second teleological approach, states that we should behave so as to create the greatest good for the greatest number. According to this theory the morally correct conduct is the one that maximizes the social benefits and minimize the social costs. (Schumann, 2001) Closely related to utilitarianism and the opposite to ethical egoism is *altruism* which suggests that actions are moral if their primary purpose is to promote the best interests of the others even against its own interest.

The *deontological*² theory, analyses whether the action itself is good. Telling the truth, being fair and respecting others are actions inherently good, independent of the consequences. The deontological perspective focuses on the actions, on the moral obligations and responsibilities to do the right thing.

Besides teleological and deontological theories which are looking at the behaviour or conduct of a civil servant, a second set of theories approaches ethics from the point of view of *human’s character*. These theories are called virtue-based³ theories and their main idea is that the virtues are rooted in the heart of the individual and in his or her disposition (Pojman, 1995). Furthermore people can be taught by their families, communities and/or schools to be morally appropriate human beings, people can learn and develop good values. Based on the Aristotle

¹ From the Greek word *telos*, meaning “ends” or “purposes”.

² Derived from the Greek word *deos*, which means “duty”.

³ The Greek term associated with these theories is *aretic*, which means “excellence” or “virtue”.

writings, a moral person demonstrates the virtues of courage, temperance, generosity, self-control, honesty, sociability, modesty, fairness and justice (Velasquez, 1992). Civil servants should develop virtues such as perseverance, public-spiritedness, integrity, accountability, fidelity, empathy and humility. (adapted after Velasquez, 1992)

It is in our responsibilities to help followers to assess their own values and needs in order to raise them to a higher level of functioning, to a level that will stress values such as justice, equality, honesty and respect.

3.2. Principles of Ethical Civil Servant

The importance of the ethical principles has been discussed in a variety of subjects such as business ethics (Beauchamp & Bowie, 1988) or leadership education (Komives, Lucas & McMahon, 1998). These principles provide a foundation for the development of civil servants ethical features: respect, service, honesty and community. (Northouse, 2007)

According to the Romanian legislation, the guiding principles for the professional conduct of the civil servants are:

- supremacy of the constitution and the law;
- priority of the public interest;
- equality of treatment;
- professionalism;
- impartiality and independence;
- moral integrity;
- the freedom of thought and speech;
- honesty and justice;
- opening and transparency.

As Immanuel Kant argued, it is our duty to treat others with respect. We do not have to treat the others as means; they also have personal goals, desires and values. Respect includes giving credence to others' ideas and confirming them as human beings. Respect means that a civil servant listens closely the citizens; he/she is emphatic and tolerant of the opposing points of view. It means treating his/her colleagues and citizens in ways that confirm their beliefs, attitudes and values and according to the legal provisions. In a state that stipulated in the Constitution that

the rule of law is one of the main principles of its organization, public administration and its employees (the civil servants) are called in to respect the law in the implementation process.

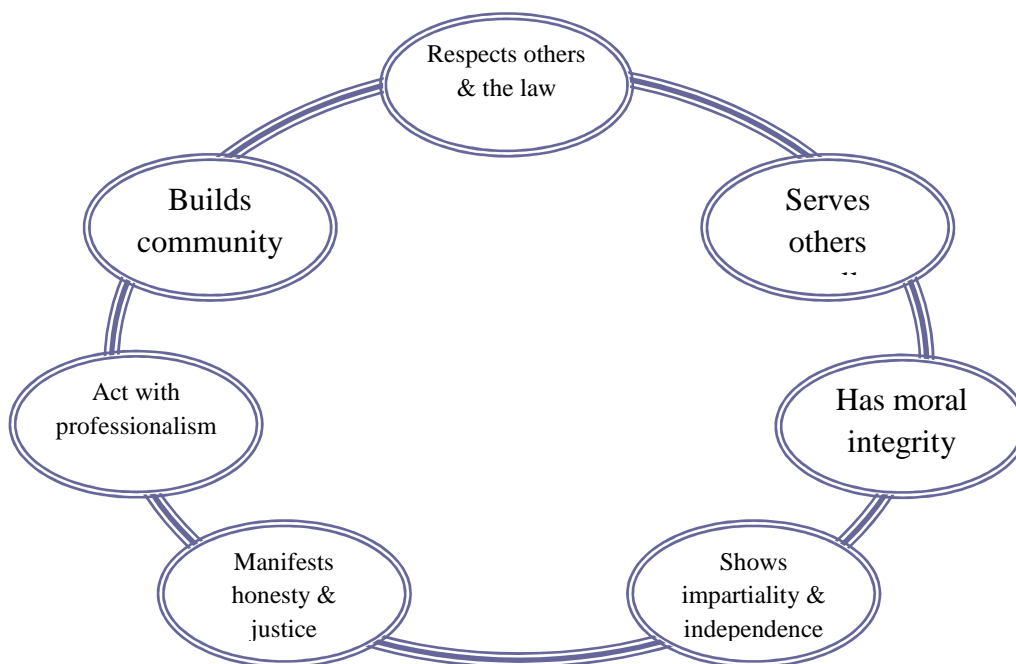


Figure 1. Principles of ethical civil servant

Source: Adapted after Northouse, 2007, p. 350

The civil service principle is clearly altruistic; the civil servant should place the citizens' welfare foremost in their plans. The civil servants ethical responsibility to serve the others is more or less similar to the Hippocrates oath. That is why we support the idea that a civil servant should swear 'not to hurt or produce any injustice to the citizens' and not just to respect the law. The idea behind service is contributing to the greater good of the others.

The civil servants should treat all (colleagues, citizens) in an equal manner; no one should receive special treatment or special consideration except when their particular situation requires it. Justice demands that civil servants place issues of fairness at the centre of their decision making. Rawls (1971) stated that a concern with issues of fairness is necessary for all people who are cooperating together to

promote their common interests. All the civil servants' decisions should be impartial and independent, without any interference from politics or other stakeholders.

In his book *The ethical imperative*, Dalla Costa (1998) stated that being honest means more than not deceiving. For civil servants, being honest means not to promise what you cannot deliver, not to evade accountability, not to suppress obligations and to respect another's dignity and humanity.

Ethical civil servants need to pay attention to civic virtues, they have to attend to more than their own mutually determined goals. They need to attend to the community's goals and purpose.

4. The Romanian Idea of Corruption

Corruption is perceived as a real enemy of democracy, for legality and for social and judicial equity, destroys the principle of an efficient administration, wearing down the free market concept and puts in danger the stability of the State institutions. (Cărăușan, 2005)

Corruption, as we already know, is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon with multiple causes and effects, as it takes various forms and functions in different contexts. The phenomenon of corruption ranges from the single act of a payment forbidden by law to an endemic malfunction of a political and economy system. The problem of corruption is seen either as a structural problem of politics or economics, or as a cultural and individual moral problem. The definition of corruption consequently ranges from the broad terms of 'misuse of public power' and 'moral decay' to strict legal definitions of corruption as an act of bribery involving a public servant and a transfer of tangible resources. (Cărăușan, 2005)

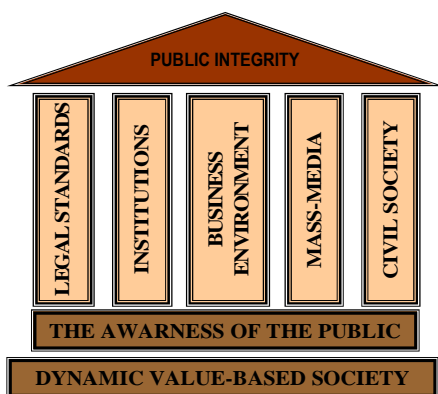


Figure 2. The Public Integrity House

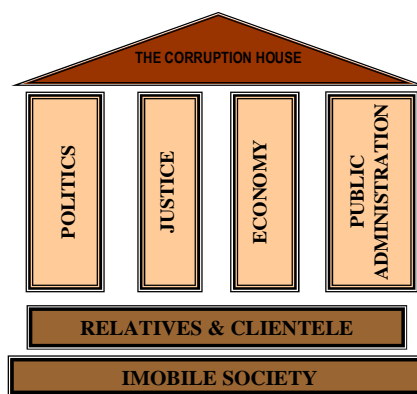


Figure no. 3: The Corruption House

The Romanian social values have suffered many changes after the transfer of power (1989), the culture was different; we are now in the situation to find and to discover other cultures and for the first time we find out about the political culture and the administrative one. The Romanians have not been concern to see what happens beyond their own interests and, to understand that a false moral conduct may cause a ruin in the public integrity house later on (see Figure 2¹). From this ruins the society was able to build another level, another house that was easy to be built but it is not so easy to be knocked down, the corruption house (see Figure 3). (Cărăușan, 2005)

The moral conduct of the society may take us under the sign of corruption. Corruption, understood in this broader term, has been called ‘social exchange’ and social corruption. Social corruption is conventionally understood as an integrated element of clientelism. (Médard, 1998)

Not only once, we heard that the Romanian mentality had its fault in this negative movement. Romanians are used to pay their civil services twice; even if not at the same value (bunches of flowers, packs of cigarettes etc.). All of these would not have been not possible if the legal standards, the institutions, the business environment, the media and more important, the civil society had not indulged in this state of facts. (Cărăușan, 2005)

¹ Adapted after (Pope, 2002, p. 118).

The four pillars that were called to support the house of corruption were the result of the diminished importance of the public integrity, and, more importantly, of the public trust in the State and in its institutions. Consequently, the politicians, the justice, the public administration and the economy have suffered the influence of the phenomenon and even worse, they create some forms of this phenomenon.

5. Building a Professional Public Administration

Any organized profession includes resistance to change within its very principles of organization: it possesses institutional inertia (Smith, pp. 411-412). Changes like those which interfere in transition countries in times of crises can make professionals abandon their career for something more simplistic. Unfortunately, that is the situation in Romania, none of the professionals wants to assume the responsibility of conducting the state administration. Public administration is unable to attract the best trained civil servants.

In a research published in 2010¹ we have noticed that a professional career is identified as the main motivating element to the accession in a public functions. For 65% of the people, the professional career ranks higher than the 'an assured of tomorrow' feeling and the salary. Even so, there is a majority that admits that the professional career is a path to access a public function. Most of the respondents, more precisely 47%, considered that they are not exactly attracted (moderate) to occupy such a job. Only 16% considered broadly that they feel attracted to become a civil servant. What was surprising, was the fact that even if they are students or graduates of public administration studies, they do not intend to have a career in civil services (11%).

The activity carried on by civil servants requires a balance of different specialisations. In Romania, it is well known that if you are an engineer you can find a place in public administration and if you are specialised in public administration, the private sector awaits for you. This discrepancy was created and

¹ Research presented at the NISPAcee Conference 2010, *The crisis of professional qualifications. Case study – Romania*, Mihaela V. Cărăușan. The data upon which the research was based were collected from 100 respondents – students and graduates of Schools of Public Administration in Romania, Bucharest.

according to the 2003 Report¹ of the National Agency of Civil Servants the civil servants that were specialised in public administration had only a percent of 0.76%. Meanwhile, the Romanian regulations established that to become a civil servant you have to have knowledge and studies on Public Administration (either Bachelor, Master or Doctorate). Anyhow, at that time the knowledge obtained as engineer were better used in public administration authorities than the one in administrative science. Even now, we observe that in public administration many engineers are working as civil servants, because after 2000 a chase for PA diploma started and they obtained the master or bachelor (even if they had one in Engineering) diploma in PA.

Changes in HRM in the public sector must be supported by the public administration reform, namely by the creation of a career system designed to attract in terms of pay and by providing guarantees in terms of planning and building a career. These two reforming actions can acquire reputation for public administration and the existence of real professional mobility. For example, to give a possible solution to improve the quality of public services, the employee should be recruited from the first 10% of graduates each year, but should also provide opportunities to build attractive careers.

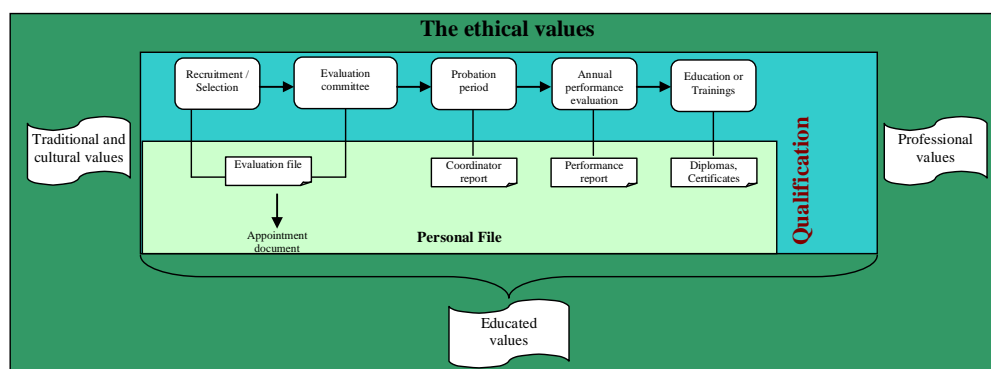


Figure 3. Civil servant’s career path and the implicated values

As we can see in Figure no. 4 the civil servants’ career can be divided into several stages: civil service recruitment, probation period, the appointment of civil

¹ National Agency of Civil Servants, 2003 Report, p. 37. (Engineers – 18816, Economists – 17537, Lawyers – 4268 and Specialised in public administration – 406).

servants, promoting civil servants and the professional performance evaluation system. Careers in civil service may be developed by promoting to a high public office. Promotion implies a higher pay and presupposes certain principles: competence, competition, equality, professionalism, motivation, transparency. A person can hold a public office, if certain conditions are reached, conditions relating to citizenship, residence, Romanian language, age, health, education, specific conditions for public service jobs, criminal record or dismissal from public office. A public service job is achieved through: promotion, transfer, redeployment, re-sparing and other means expressly provided by the Statute (Law 188/1999).

6. The Matrix of Ethical Commitment

Ethics education affects students' ethical awareness and reasoning and it also seems to yield the outcome or result of preparing students to think more ethically in business (Lau, 2010). That means that we should involve our students in all the problems that they have to solve during their academic time and afterwards. As Jiménez and Palmero (2007, p. 233) highlight, university teachers must uphold a prudent, teleologically responsible attitude.

According to Hall (1990) educational systems are products of the cultures they are embedded in and as a consequence, educators should be aware of the context in which teaching and learning is developed. More recently, Manikutty et al. (2007) consider culture as an all-pervading shared set of assumptions, values and behaviour, and a consequence is phenomena such as learning and studying, though taking place at the level of individuals, are also embedded in the logic of that particular culture. Thus, it is necessary to study how learning and teaching differ across cultures.

We begin by considering education as the avoidance of unemployment and the weapon against corruption. Higher education importance has a particularly powerful effect on the access to professional and managerial occupations. In Romania almost all academic institutions have public administration as a field of study, but not all of them have students. One of the critical differences among higher educational institutions is the nature of the professional tasks performed. In general they can be classified according to the academic degree programs offered and the professional qualifications of faculty. (Baldrige et al., p. 381) As it concerns the educated values, we consider important that ethics should be a subject compulsory to be studied at all educational level. The professional values are added

to the traditional and educated ones, and most of them are regulated in the Romanian civil service/civil servants' legal norms, e.g. legality, impartiality, objectivity, transparency, responsibility, concern for the interest of the citizens and hierarchical subordination.

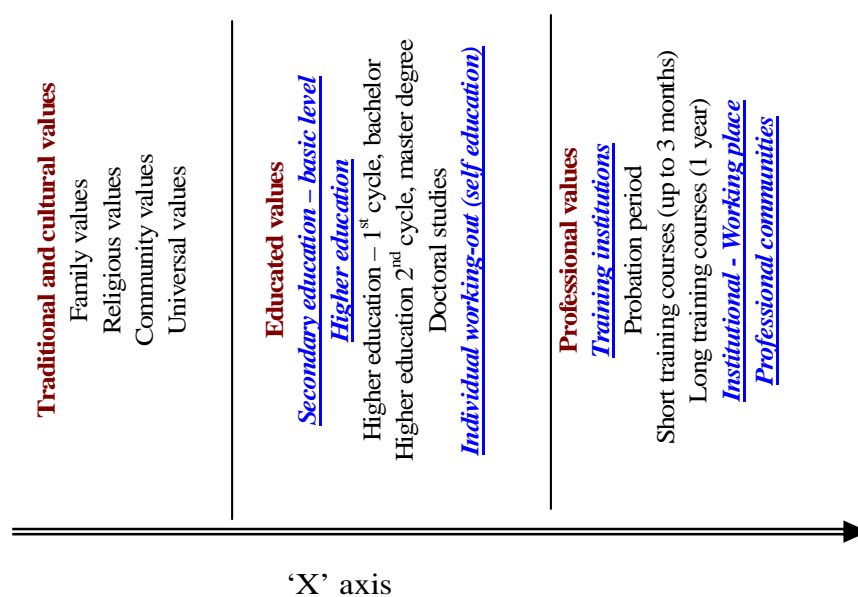


Figure 4. The axis of values

The education of human resources in public administration must distinguish between the necessary training for administrative functions - senior managers (who generally have a political nature), specialized administrative functions and the functions that need only medium training.

Regardless of how education is made, it is known that the value of an administration, its effectiveness, depends mostly on the people who compose it. But to obtain such professional competence, it is necessary that all institutions should provide education for government staff, should rather focus on one hand more on research than teaching, and, secondly, more on practice than theory.

Thus, education and training will be focused more on development and will cultivate the necessary skills rather than the automatic sending of knowledge often considered generally applicable. The literature is increasingly shaping a new

approach to the problems of the civil servant, whose qualification is considered the most important criterion in the appreciation of a public manager.

It is obvious that only achieving theoretical standards is no longer sufficient. Qualification, known also as Accreditation, is much more useful to a civil servant. The necessary qualities are: ability to manage, ability to communicate, strategic thinking, flexibility, vision, team building, accountability, citizens service, political savvy etc.

In the educational system the knowledge about ethics should have to occupy an important place. The idea that ethics plays an important role in the diminishment of the corruption disease, make us try to find out the students' ethical commitment, the future ethical commitment of the future civil servants.

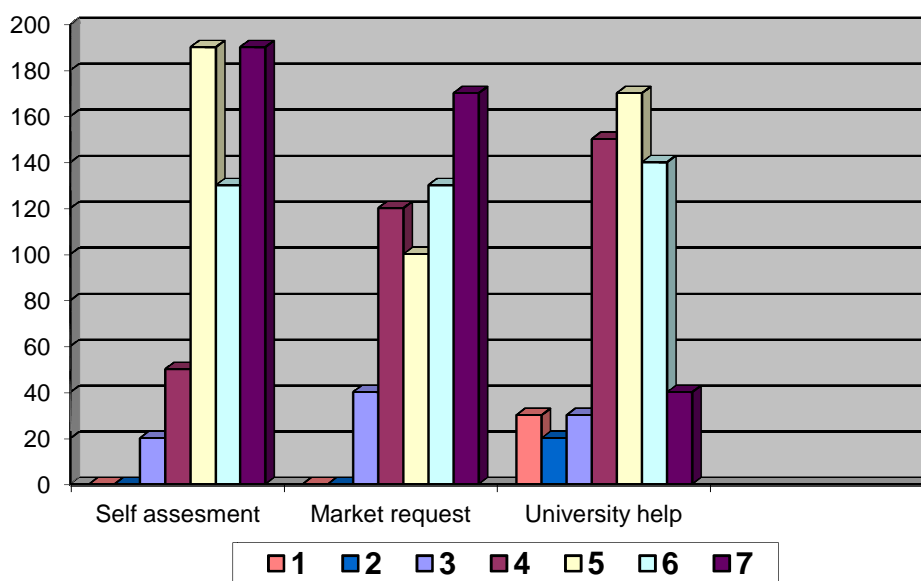


Figure 5. The students' ethical commitment

As we can see the self-evaluation¹ is either medium (32%) or high (33%). Most of those who have evaluated themselves at maximum also assumed that the ethical commitment is very important for the market (47%). But, out of them, only 16%

¹ The lower value was 1 = none. The higher value was 7 = maximum.

evaluate the help of the University at the highest level and the great majority (84%) at medium level. Even if the students are following a high education programme they do not consider that the University can help them in increasing their ethical commitment.

We can also notice that for those who have evaluated themselves with a high ethical commitment the trust in the others is lower with 1 or 2 points but they maintain the concern for quality at the same level. After observing the students' answers and their certainty that they have a high ethical commitment, we had to find out that they do not know which are the supported values for their ethics.

The layout of ethical values stretches on an axis from what is necessary – basic values and leads up to what is merely desirable or optional – professional values. The latter sometimes can be destructive in times of crises because the temptation of having a corrupted behaviour is higher. Depending on this axis we can locate a person considering how much he/she realises, how ambitious his goals are, namely how important it is to be qualified, to be part of the professional community, to be lined-up in an ethical or unethical group.

The capacity axis denotes the personal power/ability to pass from ethical egoism to utilitarianism and eventually to altruism; from the self interest concern to the concern for the interest of others; more precisely from traditions to professionalism. Combining the two dimensions of scope and strength in a single graphic, we will obtain a matrix similar to Figure no. 7. The matrix is divided into four quadrants, which have different consequences on the ethics of a civil servant, namely. Those from the first two quadrants are the ones who could be learn because they have a inclination for this, they are seen as having character. They are generous, courageous, and modest and show justice and fairness.

Quadrant I – risks to become altruist, experienced people who can solve any situation because they are qualified for public administration. They have high perseverance and empathy, they participate in professional bodies and they inspire the others to follow the same career path. In many cases they become the judge of the colleagues' ethics.

Quadrant II – utilitarian, willing people, they are educated and have a high level of integrity, they won their position by merit, they participate in professional bodies. They manifest public spiritedness. Consequently in this quadrant we can observe those people who have vested interests in holding their positions and show little inclination to job-changing. They have a strong build-in resistance to politics.

Moreover, they can produce resentments among those persons who view them as blocking their employment or promotion prospectus.

Quadrant III – people with a higher education diploma (1st or 2nd cycle), people with theoretical knowledge and with political support. They are limited in their accession to the public function and for that they pay to keep their job. They manifest a high self interest and because they are politically recruited they also try to bring their own relatives in the system. In order to keep his position takes and gives and has its own clientele. In the same quadrant we can bring the qualified individual who is regarded as politically unreliable and, therefore banned from employment at their skill level, from the second and even the first quadrant.

Quadrant IV – people with basic education and usually they are caught in the traditional, cultural values; they dream to be in quadrant II or III but realise that they cannot because they do not possess the necessary knowledge and skills. So, he/she realises the importance of the other quadrants and try to buy its position. Also, they are trying to have their own clientele but they do not have enough support and appeal to those from quadrant III. They manifest strong build resistance to innovation and change and prefer the establish routine. They are politically tolerated and their life is their job.

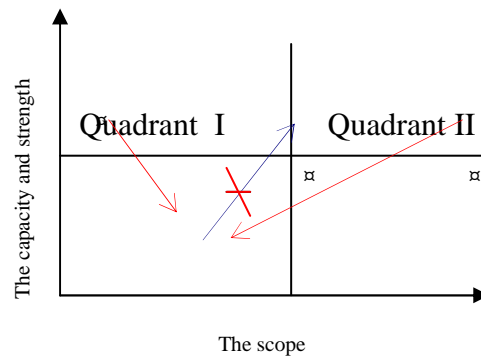


Figure 6. The ethical commitment matrix

Through education we should build ethical commitment in the students and to take them from quadrant III or IV to, at least, quadrant II, to the professional and ethical area of the public sector.

If you are in one of the quadrant, it does not mean that you can keep your place/job forever. For example, if you do not have anymore the political support you risk to pass from the quadrant III to quadrant IV. The financial crisis, the small amount of salary can make you become more egoist, you will think maybe “I want to live I do not care for the others”, so those from quadrant I or II can fall to quadrant III. Also, the education can produce a change in the matrix can take someone from quadrant IV to quadrant II, ‘no more bribe or no more political support’.

Not surprisingly, the position within the matrix depends on a number of objective and/or subjective factors including the stage of development reached, the market mechanisms, political considerations, the assignment system, family and personal connections, patronage, vested interests and individual’s attitudes.

7. Conclusions

Ethics and morals are regarded as being personal, and we do not want to be judged by the others about them. We also resist judging others. Maybe that is why only few questionnaires have been designed to measure the ethical commitment of the civil servants and less of the future civil servants. Rather than tell people what *to do*, attention should be directed toward telling people what *to be*, or helping them to become more virtuous. The theories should remind civil servants to ask themselves, “What is the right and the fair thing to do?” or “What would a person with moral values do?” The public interest is based on a moral framework which promotes values such as: personal dignity, freedom, respect for order and law.

Taking this into consideration and the fact that the business environment is a stakeholder for the corruption of public administration, we have to understand how important is to teach ethics to all students and not just to public administration students.

Promoting an education in ethics and training will help us to shape a comprehensive structure against corruption. But it will not be enough; we also should promote the citizens’ participation as an institutional mechanism to foster the society’s cooperation in the exercise of the government’s audit function. To build the integrity house after it was demolished it is much more difficult than it can seem. For that, first of all, we have to invest in education because through it we can build the society values and the ethical commitment of our future civil servants.

Certainly corruption is highly detrimental to the stability of all democratic institutions. It erodes the rule of law, it breaches fundamental rights and freedoms and it undermines the trust and confidence of citizens in the fairness and impartiality of public administration.

Education, in terms of ethics, will not be enough to diminish corruption. All the other measures incorporated in the World Bank's 'multipronged' anti-corruption strategy (WB, 2000) should be taken into consideration. Among the measures with high influence over the ethical commitment of the civil servants we should include: to adopt a fair salary scheme for civil servants and public employees and a redeployment scheme as well and to adopt a training strategy for public managers and civil servants at large, to promote the cultural change and the necessary values.

To really sum up, both research and surveys indicate that professional civil servants should be trained since University years. It should become any public administration faculty concern to instil these values and to find strategies to attract students to them. Once aware and schooled about the real meaning of ethical commitment, the student finds more chances to apply it in real life.

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