Ethical Dilemmas in African Human Resource Management: A Literature Review

*Hadija Matimbwa, PhD
ORCiD: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9577-1702
Department of Business Management, Mbeya University of Science and Technology, Tanzania
Email: hadija.matimbwa@must.ac.tz

Mugisha Kamala, PhD
ORCiD: https://orcid.org/0009-0001-6362-094X
Department of Business Studies, Tanzania Institute of Accountancy, Tanzania
Email: mugisha.kamala@tia.ac.tz

*Corresponding author: hadija.matimbwa@must.ac.tz

Abstract: In the African context, the management of human resources (HR) involves the navigation of intricate ethical issues influenced by a myriad of social, cultural and economic factors. This study, based on systematic literature review, scrutinized ethical dilemmas in Human Resources Management in Africa. Specifically, the study assessed the areas within HR practices that are predisposed to unethical conduct and identified the core ethical issues prevalent in organizations, thereby giving rise to ethical dilemmas. The study utilized a systematic qualitative synthesis, employing the nomothetic-based content analysis, to scrutinize data extracted from 65 journal articles. The findings delineate two primary domains in which HR practices are susceptible to unethical conduct. The first is the management of core HR functions, such as recruitment, performance appraisal and remuneration, which are vulnerable to unethical practices like favoritism and corruption. The second domain involves balancing the often-conflicting interests of employers and employees. Four primary ethical issues emerged as significant sources of dilemmas: bribery and corruption, misconduct (physical, verbal, and sexual), nepotism and discrimination. These challenges suggest a pressing need for transparent, merit-based recruitment processes and regular ethics training HR professionals to navigate the complex landscape of organizational and employee interests. Implementing gender and diversity policies is crucial in addressing discrimination based on gender, ethnicity or disability. Additionally, establishing robust whistle-blowing mechanisms can enable employees to report unethical conduct confidentially, thereby strengthening organizational integrity and fostering a more inclusive professional environment. Comprehensive ethical frameworks will not only mitigate dilemmas but also enhance the overall credibility and effectiveness of HRM practices in the African context.

Keywords: Ethical Dilemma; sexual harassment; employment practices; nepotism; corruption; favoritism.

Introduction

The management of human resources is unequivocally regarded as a system in which participants actively pursue individual and group objectives (Matimbwa & Wole, 2023; Valecha, 2022; Kacmar et al., 2016). This system is specifically designed to optimize the organization's performance in delivering services aligned with its strategic goals (Johanson, 2009). The Human Resources Management (HRM) department

traditionally oversees the management of personnel within organizations, with a primary focus on the establishment and implementation of policies (Collings & Wood, 2009). In most cases, organizations maintain a distinct HRM department or unit, commonly referred to as the Human Resources (HR) Department/Unit. Its fundamental functions encompass recruitment, training and development, performance appraisal and the administration of compensation, including the management of pay and benefit systems (Joshua, 2019; Pham et al., 2013).

The incorporation of ethical considerations into HRM is fundamentally significant, particularly in the context of leadership. Ethical leadership plays a pivotal role in establishing trust and fostering accountability within an organization, thereby cultivating a culture characterized by transparency and integrity. Leaders who prioritize ethics demonstrate a propensity for making decisions that not only serve the interests of the organization but also contribute to the betterment of society while averting harm and upholding principles of equity. Ethical leadership also functions as a guiding principle, inspiring employees to conduct themselves with integrity, consequently augmenting team cohesion and organizational performance. Through the integration of ethical values, leaders play a crucial role in cultivating a sustainable and constructive work environment, thereby fortifying the prospects of long-term success. When an organization conducts itself with ethical integrity, it can enhance its reputation and long-term viability. Conversely, engaging in unethical practices may lead to legal disputes, financial setbacks and strained relationships, ultimately contributing to organizational failure (Valecha, 2022). The impact of ethics on the organization's effectiveness, reputation and sustainability cannot be overstated (Valecha, 2022; Kacmar et al., 2016; Bayraktaroğlu & Yılmaz, 2012).

An ethical dilemma arises when an individual is confronted with a decision-making situation that involves a conflict between moral principles. In such instances, there is no clear right or wrong answer and each possible choice carries both positive and negative ethical implications. Ethical dilemmas often require individuals to weigh conflicting values, such as truthfulness versus allegiance, equity versus empathy or self-interest versus the common good (Matimbwa & Ochumbo, 2019). The significance of understanding ethical dilemmas in HRM cannot be

overstated. Ethical dilemmas in HRM often arise from the dual role of HR managers as advocates for both employers and employees, requiring them to balance the interests of both parties. This delicate balance necessitates HR managers to act as partners to both employees and managers (Ulrich, 1997 in Venyšová, 2015). Consequently, instances of biased recruitment practices have been observed in countries such as the U.S. and the U.K., where HR professionals sometimes prioritize organizational interests over fairness, resulting in discriminatory hiring practices based on race or gender (Fryer, 2018; Van Buren & Greenwood, 2013). In diverse global contexts, HR managers are frequently confronted with ethical dilemmas related to recruitment practices and employees' privacy. Within Africa, partiality and bias arising from familial or tribal associations can significantly sway hiring decisions, resulting in unjust practices (Mufanechiya & Mufanechiya, 2018).

Studies carried out in Asian regions focused on ethical issues surrounding compensation and benefits, especially in terms of gender-based pay discrepancies. These concerns require a careful balance between cost-effective organizational practices and fair treatment of employees (De Gama, 2012). On the other hand, European countries, like Germany, have stringent data protection regulations that require HR managers to handle ethical considerations related to employee data with precision (Ryan, 2006). The worldwide technology industry is encountering increasing difficulties concerning privacy violations, particularly in performance management systems that incorporate surveillance. This situation has raised concerns about employee autonomy and trust. In the realm of HRM, ethical dilemmas frequently arise, presenting HR managers with challenging decisions. Common moral dilemmas within HRM encompass such areas as recruitment and selection, safeguarding employees' privacy, structuring compensation and benefits, managing performance, executing disciplinary measures, promoting workplace diversity and navigating labor relations (Fryer, 2018; Van Buren & Greenwood, 2013; De Gama, 2012; Ryan, 2006).

It is important to integrate ethical values into organizations as they play a crucial role in improving organizational performance (Fryer, 2018). However, despite the implementation of ethical policies and laws, unethical behavior in HRM is frequently observed in organizations globally (EACC, 2016;

Chaubey, 2014). Experience on this matter can be drawn from various countries. In the United States, the persistence of discrimination in hiring and promotions is notable despite the legal provisions set forth by the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Dobbin & Kalev, 2018). In India, despite the existence of anti-corruption laws, the prevalence of bribery and nepotism in recruitment, particularly within government sectors, remains pronounced (Chaubey, 2014). Similarly, in Kenya, documented instances of widespread corruption in recruitment within public institutions persist, notwithstanding the presence of ethics codes (EACC, 2016). Furthermore, Brazil continues to grapple with persistent workplace discrimination against women and minorities, despite the robust labor laws in place (Mello & Fleury, 2017). The aforementioned global experiences serve as evidence that unethical human resources practices persist as a concern, even within environments that have formally implemented ethical frameworks. These experiences underscore the challenges involved in aligning policy with the practical implementation of ethical human resource management. The prevalence of unethical issues in HRM has prompted compelling inquiries related to ethical dilemmas.

The prevailing discourse on unethical conduct within organizations lacks a thorough examination of HR practices, such as recruitment, performance appraisals and promotions, which are particularly susceptible to ethical challenges. This gap results in uncertainties regarding the manifestation of these ethical predicaments in real-world HR scenarios (Owojuyigbe, 2021). Furthermore, while studies underscore overarching ethical concerns like corruption and discrimination, they neglect the everyday dilemmas faced by HR professionals, including ensuring fairness, the mitigation of organizational pressures and the resolution of conflicts of interest (Winstanley & Woodall, 2000).

The prevailing literature on HR ethics predominantly focuses on Western perspectives, disregarding the impact of cultural and regional factors on ethical challenges in HR practices, particularly in Africa (Mufanechiya & Mufanechiya, 2018a). This oversight results in a knowledge gap on the variation of ethical dilemmas across diverse cultural contexts, underscoring the necessity for more comprehensive, region-specific research. In-depth studies in these underexplored areas would yield valuable insights into the vulnerabilities of HR practices and present actionable measures to augment global ethical standards in HRM.

Literature Review

This section presents the definitions of key concepts, outlines the various classifications of ethical dilemmas and elucidates the theoretical framework that underpins this study. Through the integration of intricate terminologies and diverse perspectives, the section aims to facilitate a comprehensive exploration of the intricacies surrounding ethical dilemmas within organizational contexts. The theoretical underpinnings serve as a robust framework for analyzing the manifestation and navigation of ethical dilemmas in professional settings.

Definitions of Key Concepts

The term "ethics" has its roots in the Greek word "ethikos," which means character or custom (Venyšová, 2015). It includes inquiries into what is morally good and bad, right and wrong, fair and unfair, and just and unjust (Suresh 2011 in Venyšová, 2015).
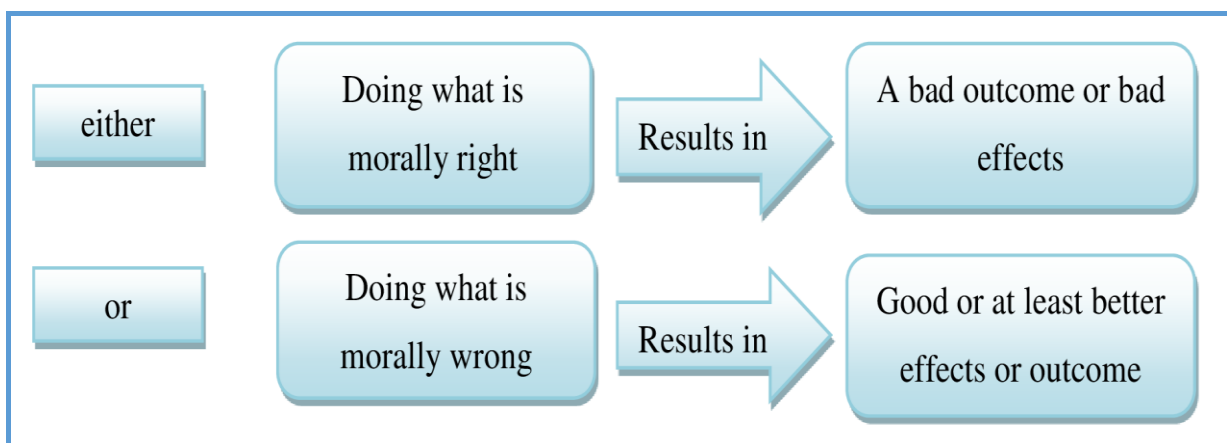

Figure 1: Structure of Ethical Dilemma

In the HRM sphere, "ethics" pertains to the principles, values, and standards of conduct that govern HR professionals' engagements with employees, managers, stakeholders and the organization (Greenwood, 2007; Pennington et al., 2007; Legge, 2005). Adhering to ethical standards is deemed crucial by HR managers in fostering trust, advancing fairness and cultivating a positive work environment. It also plays a vital role in building organizational reputation and ensuring compliance with legal standards (Adelekan & Bussin, 2018).

Fernando (2009) defines ethical dilemma as a moral predicament necessitating a choice between two equally undesirable alternatives. Likewise, Trevino and Nelson (2010) characterized an ethical dilemma as a scenario involving conflicting important values, rights or responsibilities, requiring a decision between equally unpleasant options. Figure 1 (Fernando, 2009 in Venyšová, 2015) serves as an illustrative representation of Fernando's (2009) conceptualization of the ethical dilemma.

Types of Ethical Dilemmas
In his 2016 study, Scott outlined three ethical dilemmas encountered by HR managers in African organizations and institutions. The first pertains to the need for discernment, requiring HR managers to navigate challenging situations with limited information, even when they have the authority and management support. The second ethical dilemma arises when an HR manager's professional judgment conflicts with their obligation to comply with employer requests. Lastly, conflicts of interest occur when an HR manager's personal interests clash with their obligations as the employer's representative (Scott, 2016).

Trevino and Nelson (2010) identified six common ethical dilemmas in the business context: 1) interpersonal issues in the workplace such as privacy, discrimination and harassment, 2) conflicts of interest arising from relationships with individuals or organizations, 3) the appropriate use of corporate resources, including vehicles, finances and reputation, 4) managing fundamental HR functions such as hiring, promotion, termination, performance evaluation and discipline, 5) navigating the challenges of a diverse workplace, and 6) balancing competing stakeholder interests when managing stakeholders. The maintenance of privacy, prevention of harassment and promotion of fairness in HR processes are integral to building and maintaining trust and morale within an organization. Unchecked conflicts of interest and the misuse of resources can lead to a lack of transparency, damaging both reputation and financial standing. In addition, the complexities of a diverse workplace require leaders to ensure equal treatment for all while also balancing stakeholders' interests through ethical leadership. These challenges necessitate ethical leadership, as it plays a central role in influencing organizational success and nurturing a culture of trust.

Ethical dilemmas in HRM include personal, professional and organizational considerations. Personal factors involve the individual values of HR professionals, which may come into conflict with company policies. Professional considerations revolve around upholding ethical standards, such as confidentiality and fairness in recruitment and discipline. HR professionals must also align themselves with organizational goals and culture, often leading to conflicts, such as balancing cost-saving measures like layoffs with the ethical treatment of employees. Effectively managing these dilemmas requires maintaining integrity, transparency and fairness across all areas to foster trust and uphold the organization's values. According to Wooten (2001), ethical dilemmas in HRM that apply to HR managers are categorized into five groups: 1) misrepresentation and collusion, 2) misuse of data, such as confidentiality breaches, 3) manipulation and coercion, where HR managers use unethical tactics to influence or control employees, 4) value and goal conflict, which occurs when there are differences in values and objectives among stakeholders within an organization, and 5) technical ineptness, referring to the lack of necessary technical skills, knowledge, or competencies among HR professionals.

Theoretical Underpinnings
The study is based on Kant's (1985) deontological ethics, as developed by Immanuel Kant in 1785. According to this ethical framework, the morality of an action is determined by its adherence to rules and duties rather than its consequences. Two key principles from Kant's ethics are particularly relevant to this study. The first is the "Duty and Moral Law," which posits that actions are morally correct if they are performed out of duty and in compliance with universal moral rules. The second is the "Categorical Imperative," which suggests that actions are morally permissible if they can be universally applied and respect the inherent humanity of individuals. Kant's theory holds

particular significance for HRM due to its focus on employee rights, privacy and fairness. Winstanley and Woodall (2000) emphasized the relevance of Kant's theory in HRM practices such as safeguarding personal information during interviews, ensuring equitable treatment in diversity management and protecting employees' rights through measures like flexible work schedules and whistleblowing safeguards. This ethical alignment emphasizes the importance of upholding fairness and integrity within HR practices, ensuring that decisions are guided by moral principles rather than solely by outcomes.

Kant's deontological ethics is highly relevant to the field of HRM as it provides a moral framework that prioritizes duty and fairness, independent of outcomes. In the context of HRM, critical decisions often revolve around employees' treatment, hiring procedures and workplace conduct, all of which demand adherence to universal moral principles. This is related to Kant's "Duty and Moral Law" principle, where HR managers are morally obligated to ensure equitable and respectful treatment of both employees and applicants to ensure alignment with ethical standards. The principles outlined in the text emphasize the importance of HR practices that prioritize confidentiality in interviews, impartial performance evaluations, and unbiased hiring and promotion processes. By prioritizing moral obligations, HR departments are encouraged to develop policies that are not only legally compliant but also inherently fair and respectful of individual rights (Kant, 1785).

The "Categorical Imperative" within Kantian ethics underpins ethical HRM by emphasizing the need for HR actions to possess universal applicability. This dictates that the regulations and criteria applied to one employee must be consistently applied to all, thereby encouraging fairness and preventing instances of bias or discrimination. For instance, the decision to discipline or terminate an employee should be rooted in objective standards that could be equally applied to any individual in comparable circumstances. The principle of honoring the inherent dignity of individuals is consistent with HR responsibilities in managing diversity and inclusion, where ensuring equitable treatment is paramount. Kantian ethics serves to ensure that HR policies uphold a work environment rooted in fairness, trust and respect for all employees, safeguarding their rights to privacy, freedom of conscience and ethical treatment. This framework significantly contributes to the enduring integrity and prosperity of the organization.

Methodology

Design

The study was conducted using a systematic review design that incorporated multiple methodologies to identify pertinent literature. The primary focus was on ethical dilemmas within the field of HRM, achieved through a targeted search across various electronic databases, including Web of Science, CAB Abstracts, Scopus and Google Scholar. This systematic review approach facilitated a structured examination of ethical issues in HRM, ensuring a comprehensive collection of relevant literature. The study employed the qualitative synthesis approach, specifically utilizing nomothetic content analysis to identify and analyze recurring patterns, themes and trends associated with ethical dilemmas. The coding scheme and content sources were carefully selected in alignment with the study's objectives, enabling the generalization of findings across diverse contexts. This methodological approach facilitated a comprehensive examination of ethical dilemmas within the field of HRM.

Sources of Data

To gather comprehensive data, a targeted sampling approach was utilized, involving the identification of relevant literature from 62 peer-reviewed journals and reports. Search terms such as "ethical dilemmas," "moral challenges," "human rights concerns" and "Africa" were employed to facilitate this process. Furthermore, backward and forward snowballing techniques were used to broaden the scope of the literature search. This sampling strategy facilitated an exhaustive exploration of both primary and cited literature, thereby enriching the depth and breadth of the analysis.

Treatment of Data

The study utilized nomothetic content analysis (an approach of investigating a number of literature from previous scholars in order to be able to generalize findings) to methodically process the gathered data. This process involved coding the text-based data and organizing it into overarching themes and patterns that could be applied across different scenarios. The study thoroughly analyzed and interpreted the data to ensure alignment with the study's objectives, with a specific focus on identifying prevalent ethical issues within Human Resource Management.

Ethical Considerations

The review strictly adhered to ethical research practices by methodically selecting credible, peer-reviewed sources and upholding academic integrity in citation and referencing. Every data source was thoroughly and ethically reviewed to eliminate bias and guarantee the utmost objectivity of the findings.

Results and Discussion

This section presents findings that address two fundamental inquiries: 1) Human resources (HR) practices that are most susceptible to unethical conduct within African organizations, 2) Fundamental ethical issues prevalent in organizations that give rise to ethical dilemmas. The analysis thoroughly examined these areas, offering valuable insights into the potential compromise of HR functions and the identification of prevalent ethical challenges. These findings lay a solid foundation for effectively addressing these vulnerabilities.

Two Areas in Human Resources which are Most Susceptible to Unethical Practices

After reviewing the literature, it is evident that HR practices in African organizations are vulnerable to unethical behaviors in two main areas: Area I and Area II. Area I hinges on how HRs manage their organizational functions (Githui, 2011; Erasmus, 2018; Sang & Kirui, 2019; Owojuyigbe, 2021a; Mahapa & Matela, 2024) while Area II focuses on HRs' efforts to balance the interests of employers and employees (Masanja, 2018).

Area 1:
Unethical Practices when HR Handles Organizational functions

HR professionals face ethical challenges because unethical behaviors involving a variety of tasks are ingrained in daily operations. These responsibilities include recruitment and staffing, managing performance, terminating employees, employee relations, training and development, remuneration and reward and compensation and benefits (Githui, 2011; Erasmus, 2018; Sang & Kirui, 2019; Owojuyigbe, 2021a; Mahapa & Matela, 2024). Findings show that compensation and reward, performance management and appraisal, and hiring and staffing are the most vulnerable to unethical behavior in HR practices (Erasmus, 2018; Sang & Kirui, 2019; Owojuyigbe, 2021b).

HR professionals are in charge of hiring and staffing, which involves developing job descriptions, finding applicants, holding interviews and making hiring decisions (Noe et al., 2017). HR managers are usually under pressure to select applicants with particular histories or qualities when carrying out this duty, which might result in discriminatory hiring practices (Sang & Kirui, 2019; Chibaya, 2021). Legal frameworks, cultural norms, and economical situations are the root causes of these pressures. For instance, Chibaya (2021) avers that when hiring school teachers in Zimbabwe, familial ties are taken into account. Likewise, Barr and Oduro (2002), Ofori (2007), Baffour et al. (2019) and Mahapa & Matela (2024) maintain similar position.

Biases in performance evaluations pose significant ethical challenges for HR professionals when managing and appraising employees (Erasmus, 2018; Sang & Kirui, 2019; Chibaya, 2021). These issues often stem from broader systemic and cultural obstacles encountered by HR in numerous African organizations. They manifest when nepotism, favoritism or personal relationships take precedence over merit in the hiring process (Mufanechiya & Mufanechiya, 2018a), when there is a lack of transparency in performance management procedures (Migiro & Taderera, 2011), when corruption is present (Transparency International, 2021) and when performance management criteria are inconsistently applied (lack of standardization) (Akinbowale et al., 2013; Juma, 2015).

In some organizations, the areas of remuneration and reward are highly prone to unethical behavior related to human resources practices. Remuneration and reward encompass the compensation and incentives specifically designed to attract, motivate and retain employees. Remuneration comprises basic salary, bonuses, overtime pay and commission, while rewards encompass both monetary and non-monetary benefits (Armstrong & Taylor, 2023). Extensive literature indicates that remuneration and reward systems in numerous African organizations are particularly disposed to unethical conduct. This vulnerability is primarily attributed to systemic and contextual factors, including economic instability, lack of regulatory enforcement, and cultural norms. These factors result in significant payment disparities and unequal benefits distribution, thereby uncovering gender pay gaps and unequal compensation practices within some African organizations (Adelekan & Bussin, 2018).

Areas 2:

Unethical practices when HR attempts to balance the interests of employers and employees

The literature review scrutinized a domain within which HR practices in African organizations are vulnerable to unethical conduct. Prior research, exemplified by Masanja (2018) in his work "Moral and Ethical Dilemma for Administrators at Higher Educational Institutions in Arusha Tanzania," outlined scenarios in which HR functions are exposed to unethical behaviors. These scenarios encompass the interplay between organizational interest and self-interest, the balance between administrative and employee interests, the dichotomy of performance-driven and people-centric approaches, the tension between strict policy adherence and judicious leniency and the juxtaposition of moral and legal considerations.

The term "organizational interests" relates to the goals and objectives that serve the collective benefit of the organization while "personal interests" encompass the individual goals and benefits pursued by members of the organization. Masanja (2018) highlighted the presence of a conflict between prioritizing organizational interests and self-preservation. Similarly, Matimbwa et al. (2018) observed that administrators are well aware of the challenges associated with balancing administrative interests and employee interests.

Administrative interest refers to the strategic objectives prioritized by the organization's administration, including the pursuit of operational effectiveness, the attainment of corporate goals, the sustenance of profitability and the assurance of regulatory adherence (Reilly, 1998). Employees' interest denotes the encompassment of employees' needs, aspirations and welfare, including equitable remuneration, job security, professional development, work-life equilibrium and a conducive work environment (Johnson & Beehr, 2014; Matimbwa and Wole, 2023). Balancing adherence to policy with a degree of leniency poses a significant ethical challenge (Masanja, 2018). Adherence to policy involves strictly following established rules and guidelines to ensure consistency and fairness. Considerable leniency under these circumstances allows for flexibility and exceptions based on individual circumstances. The author highlights the ethical dilemma the HR professionals encounter in navigating between these two approaches.

Additionally, the conflict between moral and legal considerations is identified as another potential area for unethical practices. Moral consideration involves upholding ethical principles and personal or societal values regarding right and wrong (Killen & Smetana, 2008) while legal consideration involves adherence to established laws, regulations and legal frameworks. Masanja (2018) suggests that finding a balance between the two can be quite challenging, often placing HR professionals in ethical dilemmas when making decisions.

Core Ethical Issues in African Organizations that Lead To Ethical Dilemmas

Within this study, ethical issues represent situations or challenges that give rise to conflicts between moral principles or values, consequently leading to ethical dilemmas. The study delineates four fundamental ethical issues that frequently engender ethical dilemmas within numerous public and private organizations across African nations. These include: 1) bribery and corruption, 2) instances of physical, verbal and sexual abuse, 3) nepotism (favoritism) and 4) discrimination.

Bribery and Corruption

Bribery and corruption are widely recognized as significant ethical concerns in African organizations, giving rise to substantial ethical dilemmas. Numerous scholars have emphasized the prevalence of these issues in both the public and private sectors (Abiodun & Oyeniyi, 2011; Parboteeah et al., 2014; Bonga et al., 2015; Zhuwau & Shumba, 2018; Chibaya, 2021). A study conducted by Mufanechiya and Mufanechiya (2018) revealed instances of bribery in the recruitment processes within Zimbabwean educational institutions. Research identified cases where teaching positions were offered to unqualified candidates in exchange for financial gain. Similarly, Owojuyigbe (2021c) found that recruitment in Nigerian government institutions frequently involves nepotism and bribery, leading to a decline in trust within the system. Two specific areas are particularly vulnerable to bribery and corruption. The first is the recruitment and staffing processes, which frequently entail the allocation of positions based on personal relationships or illicit payments, rather than on merit or qualifications. Zakumumpa et al. (2022) substantiated this assertion through a study conducted in Uganda, which posited that individuals wielding financial or political influence are afforded preferential treatment in recruitment processes, thereby engendering disparities in opportunities. Second,

corruption can exert influence on promotions and salary increments, as employees are at times compelled to offer bribes or concessions to secure career progression. A study on public healthcare establishments in Nigeria by Onwujekwe et al. (2019) exposed that employees occasionally resort to unethical practices in pursuit of career advancements, thereby detrimentally impacting morale and productivity in public health facilities.

Additionally, Kirya (2020) asserts that these illicit practices distort the labor market by undermining meritocracy and perpetuating inefficiencies in resource allocation. This ultimately results in diminished organizational productivity across various sectors. In Tanzania, research conducted by Bonga et al. (2015) identified corruption within public services, including promotions, as a significant impediment to talent attraction and a contributor to reduced institutional efficacy. This persistent bribery not only compromises workplace integrity but also hinders organizational advancement and equity, thus perpetuating a cycle of distrust.

Physical, Verbal and Sexual Abuses

In the context of the workplace, physical abuse encompasses behaviors such as hitting, pushing or any form of physical intimidation targeted at employees. Verbal abuse includes insults, threats and raising one's voice at employees. Sexual abuse involves unwelcome sexual advances, harassment, inappropriate physical contact or any behavior of a sexual nature (Eslick et al., 2011. Literature review reveals that incidents of workplace violence, particularly physical abuse, have been recorded in the mining, construction and agriculture sectors, where challenging working conditions can precipitate physical abuse (Burke, 2018; Kapur & Sharma, 2019). Instances of sexual abuse or harassment are most commonly reported in African organizations, impacting women's safety and workplace equality (Nana, 2008; Moagi, 2023). It's important to note that sexual abuse in the workplace is often manifested in the recruitment, staffing process, promotion and advancement while physical and verbal abuse may be more visible. According to the 2021 report by the International Labor Organization (ILO), sexual harassment is identified as the most prevalent problem across various sectors in Africa, affecting both individuals and organizational culture (ILO, 2021).

For example, In South Africa's mining industry, there have been extensive documented cases of physical abuse and dangerous working conditions, resulting in harmful labor practices (Burke, 2018). Similarly, in Ghana's construction sector, inadequate safety regulations have ultimately resulted in incidents of physical violence against workers (Kapur & Sharma, 2019). In Nigeria, Fapohunda and Azeez (2022) assert that sexual harassment not only constitutes a breach of workplace equality but also has a detrimental impact on organizational culture by fostering unsafe environments for women. Moreover, in Kenya, the agricultural sector has reported incidents of both physical and sexual harassment, particularly among female farm workers (Moagi, 2023). The International Labor Organization (ILO) (2021) stresses that sexual harassment is a pervasive issue throughout Africa, affecting numerous sectors and undermining both individual well-being and broader organizational ethics.

Nepotism and Favoritism

Nepotism and favoritism present significant ethical challenges within African organizations, leading to complex moral dilemmas. Nepotism involves the preferential treatment of relatives, family members or associates (e.g., tribe members) in matters such as job allocation, promotions and other advantages, irrespective of their qualifications. Favoritism, on the other hand, covers the bestowal of special treatment upon specific individuals based on personal biases or relationships. These practices undermine the principles of merit and fairness within the organizational context, posing ethical dilemmas that require careful consideration and management. The existing literature indicates that nepotism and favoritism are rooted in traditional and cultural values that prioritize familial connections and allegiance. These values often conflict with ethical standards in human resource management. Ogbonna and Harris (2006) noted that in certain African organizations, cultural inclinations manifest as preferential treatment in recruitment, promotions and other professional opportunities. Mufanechiya and Mufanechiya (2018b) demonstrated the presence of nepotism and favoritism in the hiring of teachers and admission of students in Zimbabwe.

Nepotism and favoritism pose significant ethical challenges in numerous African organizations, leading to ethical dilemmas in HRM. These practices are often influenced by traditional and cultural

values that prioritize familial and communal loyalty over meritocracy. For instance, according to Sang and Kirui (2019), ethnic and tribal affiliations significantly impact employment practices in Kenya, where hiring and promotions often prioritize these relationships over qualifications. Similarly, in Nigeria, Ajayi and Ojo (2022) discovered that nepotism and favoritism affect the recruitment process in both the private and public sectors, with political connections frequently playing a critical role. In a study conducted in Zimbabwe, Mufanechiya and Mufanechiya (2018a) illustrated the prevalence of nepotism in the education sector, impacting the recruitment of teachers and student enrollment processes, particularly in rural areas where traditional hierarchies hold significant sway.

Similarly, Njoroge and Kinyanjui (2020) found indications of favoritism within Kenya's public service sector, where familial connections and personal relationships often dictate promotions and leadership appointments. In Lesotho, Mahapa and Matela (2024) observed that Small, Medium, and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs) frequently resort to nepotism, resulting in the recruitment of underqualified personnel, thereby hindering organizational progress. Furthermore, Ogbona and Harris (2006) highlighted that certain African countries integrate cultural values deeply into workplace dynamics, leading to favoritism in critical decision-making processes such as promotions and hiring, often bypassing formal qualification standards. These instances underline the widespread prevalence of nepotism and favoritism within African organizations, which perpetuate ongoing ethical challenges in Human Resource Management.

Discrimination

Discrimination poses a significant ethical challenge in African organizations, giving rise to ethical dilemmas. It involves unfair or unjust treatment of individuals based on factors such as race, gender, age, sexual orientation, religion or disability (Williams, 2004; Thomsen, 2017). In Africa, discrimination is prevalent in the workplace and is often linked to ethnicity, gender, religion and age. Many organizations demonstrate discrimination in their recruitment, rewards, training and performance evaluation of employees (Sang & Kirui, 2019; Mahapa & Matela, 2024). In Kenya, ethnic discrimination is prevalent in recruitment and promotion processes, where it has been reported that ethnic favoritism in both government and private sector hiring has heightened due to clear preferential treatment towards specific ethnic groups (Nyaga & Kimani, 2019).

In Zimbabwe, gender-based discrimination is notably common within the agricultural sector, where women are frequently underpaid and are often deprived of leadership positions despite their substantial contributions to production. Persistent gender-based wage disparities and the frequent exclusion of women from decision-making processes are evident in Zimbabwe (Chingarande, 2018). These instances underpin the widespread prevalence of discrimination across Africa and its adverse effects on organizational dynamics. According to Wa Gĩthĩnji (2015) and Douglas et al. (2017), ethnicity plays a significant role in shaping hiring and promotion practices. Women in numerous African countries face workplace hurdles, such as unequal pay, limited opportunities for career growth and exclusion from certain job sectors (Nomadolo, 2017; Patience, 2018; Obor & Okoebor, 2021). Additionally, disability discrimination is common in Africa, where individuals with disabilities often encounter obstacles in accessing employment opportunities and reasonable workplace accommodations (Ntamanwa, 2015; Fourie & Botes, 2018; Kaswa, 2022).

Conclusions and Recommendations
Conclusions
This study has identified two specific areas within HR practices that are susceptible to unethical conduct, resulting in what the study terms ethical dilemmas. These areas include area 1, where HR personnel manage organizational functions and area 2 which involves HR professionals striving to harmonize the interests of employers and employees. The study concludes that unethical practices may emanate from HR professionals' activities during the execution of their routine tasks or when they act as intermediaries between employees and management, endeavoring to advocate for the interests of both parties.

The study identified four fundamental ethical concerns predominant in African organizations: (1) bribery and corruption, (2) physical, verbal and sexual abuse, (3) nepotism and favoritism and (4) discrimination. Consequently, various African organizations exhibit limited trust and foster toxic work environments due to the persistent nature of bribery and corruption. These unethical practices

significantly undermine workers' morale and productivity within the organizational framework. Moreover, the attainment of organizational success and employee satisfaction is adversely impacted by the prevalence of nepotism, favoritism and discrimination. Therefore, discriminatory practices have significantly compromised the cultivation of a positive workplace culture within numerous organizations.

Recommendations

Addressing ethical dilemmas in HRM within African organizations requires the implementation of transparent and merit-based recruitment processes. This is crucial due to rampant challenges such as corruption, nepotism, and favoritism. Enforcement of anti-corruption policies, especially in recruitment and promotions is recommended to ensure that positions are filled based on qualifications rather than personal connections. For this to be partly achieved, regular ethical training for HR professionals is important to equip them to effectively navigate challenges, such as balancing organizational interests with employee welfare. Furthermore, the advancement of gender and diversity policies is of paramount importance in addressing prevalent workplace discrimination based on gender, ethnicity and disability within African organizations. For all this to be achieved, it is imperative to conduct regular assessments of equitable compensation frameworks to rectify the gender pay gap and ensure just remuneration for all employees. Finally, workplace challenges discussed in this study can be mitigated by establishing robust whistle-blower mechanisms for the confidential reporting of unethical conduct, thereby fortifying organizational integrity, minimizing ethical dilemmas and fostering a more inclusive professional environment across various sectors.

REFERENCES

Abiodun, F. O. and Oyeniyi, M. A. (2011). Bribery and Corruption in African Organizations: Ethical Implications for HRM. Journal of African Business Ethics, 5(1), 201-215.

Adelekan, A. and Bussin, M. (2018). Gender Pay Gap and Compensation Disparities in African Organizations. Journal of African Business Management, 14(3), 123-140.

Ajayi, M. A. and Ojo, A. A. (2022). The impact of nepotism and favoritism on recruitment processes in Nigeria's public and private sectors. Journal of Human Resource and Leadership, 8(2), 125-139.

Akinbowale, M. A., Lourens, M. E., & Jinabhai, D. C. (2013). Role of performance appraisal policy and its effects on employee performance. European Journal of Business and Social Sciences, 2(7), 19-26.

Armstrong, M., & Taylor, S. (2023). Armstrong's handbook of human resource management practice: A guide to the theory and practice of people management. Kogan Page Publishers.

Baffour, K., et al. (2019). Recruitment Practices and Ethical Considerations in African Organizations. Journal of African Social Sciences, 12(2), 101-119.

Barr, A. and Oduro, A. (2002). Ethnicity and Education in Ghana: The Role of Social Networks. Journal of Development Economics, 67(2), 321-340.

Bayraktaroğlu, S. and Yılmaz, A. (2012). Ethical dimensions of HRM practices: An empirical study in Turkey. Journal of Business Research, 5(3), 112-125.

Bonga, W. G., Chiminya, J. and Mudzingiri, C. (2015). Corruption and Its Impact on HR Practices: A Zimbabwean Case Study. Journal of African Economic Studies, 8(1), 45-60.

Burke, R. J. (2018). Abuse and Violence in the African Workplace: HR Ethical Considerations. Journal of African Industrial Relations, 13(2), 64-81.

Chaubey, D. S. (2014). Corruption in the Indian Government sector: An ethical concern. Journal of Business Ethics, 120(3), 353-365.

Chibaya, G. (2021). Nepotism and Bias in Zimbabwe's Educational Institutions: The Ethical Implications. Journal of African Education Studies, 28(1), 33-49.

Chingarande, S. D. (2018). Gender-based disparities in Zimbabwe's agricultural sector: An analysis of wage gaps and leadership exclusion. Journal of Development Studies, 54(4), 571-586

Collings, D. G. and Wood, G. (2009). Human Resource Management: A Critical Approach. Routledge, London.

De Gama, N. (2012). Compensation and benefits in Asian corporations: Ethical challenges. Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources, 50(1), 43-60.

Dobbin, F. and Kalev, A. (2018). Why diversity programs fail and what works. Harvard Business Review, 96(6), 53-60.

Douglas, K. E., Harcourt, P. and Harcourt, P. (2017). Prevalence and pattern of workplace violence and ethnic discrimination among workers in a tertiary institution in Southern Nigeria. Open Access Library Journal, 4(03), 1.

EACC. (2016). Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission Report on Corruption in Kenya Public Service. Kenya Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission.

Erasmus, B. (2018). Ethical Dilemmas in HR Practices: The South African Perspective. Journal of African Human Resource Management, 22(2), 98-112.

Eslick, G. D., Koloski, N. A. and Talley, N. J. (2011). Sexual, physical, verbal/emotional abuse and unexplained chest pain. Child abuse & neglect, 35(8), 601-605.

Fapohunda, T. M. and Azeez, O. A. (2022). Gender and Workplace Equality in Nigerian Organizations. Journal of African Gender Studies, 14(2), 102-119.

Fernando, A. (2009). Business Ethics and Corporate Governance. Pearson Education India.

Fourie, L. and Botes, A. (2018). Disability discrimination in the South African workplace: the case of infertility. The International Journal of Human Rights, 22(7), 910-932.

Fryer, R. G. (2018). Race and Economics: Discrimination in Recruitment and the Workplace. Economic Journal, 128(1), 209-232.

Githui, D. (2011). Challenges and Ethical Dilemmas in Human Resource Management. Journal of African Business Ethics, 7(3), 129-148.

Greenwood, M. (2007). Ethical Analyses of HRM: A Review and Research Agenda. Journal of Business Ethics, 81(2), 411-423.

International Labour Organization (2021). *Violence and harassment in the world of work: A guide on Convention No. 190 and Recommendation No. 206*. Geneva: ILO. Available at ILO Research Repository.

Johanson, J.-E. (2009). Strategy formation in public agencies. Public Administration, 87(4), 735-750.

Johnson, T. and Beehr, T. (2014). Organizational Interests Versus Employee Interests: Ethical Dilemmas in HR Practices. Journal of Business Ethics, 9(2), 223-240.

Joshua, S. (2019). Modern HRM: Tools and Techniques for Organizational Success. HR Management Review, 11(3), 23-40.

Juma, D. (2015). Ethical Challenges in Performance Management in African Organizations. Journal of African Business Ethics, 6(2), 93-110.

Kacmar, K. M., Bachrach, D. G., Harris, K. J. and Zivnuska, S. (2016). Fostering team creativity: The roles of leader-member exchange (LMX) and team-member exchange (TMX). Journal of Organizational Behavior, 31(1), 64-79.

Kant, I. (1785). Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals. Cambridge University Press (Modern Edition).

Kapur, D. and Sharma, G. (2019). Workplace Violence in African Industries: HRM Challenges. International Journal of HRM Studies, 16(4), 82-99.

Kaswa, D. M. (2022). Assessing the level of inclusion of disabled people in the labour market (Doctoral dissertation, IAA).

Killen, M. and Smetana, J. G. (2008). Moral Versus Legal Considerations in Decision-Making: Ethical Issues in HR. Journal of Ethical Psychology, 32(1), 67-83.

Kirya, M. T. (2020). Promoting anti-corruption, transparency and accountability in the recruitment and promotion of health workers to safeguard health outcomes. Global health action, 13(sup1), 1701326.

Legge, K. (2005). Human Resource Management: Rhetorics and Realities. Palgrave Macmillan.

Mahapa, T. and Matela, N. (2024). Ethics in HRM: Small, Medium, and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs) in Lesotho. African Business Ethics Journal, 14(2), 54-70.

Masanja, M. (2018). Moral and Ethical Dilemma for Administrators at Higher Educational Institutions in Arusha, Tanzania. Journal of African Business Administration, 9(4), 77-95.

Matimbwa, H. and Wole, O (2023). Influence of User Characteristics on the Effectiveness of LGAs' Human Resource Information System in Tanzania. East African Journal of Management and Business Studies 3(1), 79-92.

Matimbwa, H, Ayugi J. and Ndekwa A, G (2018). Recruitment and Selection Criteria of NMB PLC

Branches in Mbeya Region: An assessment of Influence on performance in Financial Institutions in Tanzania. Journal of Business Management and Economic ResearchVol.2, Issue 4, 2018. ISSN 2602-3385

Matimbwa H and Ochumbo A (2019). Academic Staff Motivation and Retention in Higher Learning Institutions in Tanzania. Evidence from Selected Universities in Iringa Region. *Journal of Business Management and Economic Research (JOBMER) Vol 3 Issue 6, ISSN: 2602-3385.*

Mello, C. and Fleury, M. (2017). Gender discrimination in the Brazilian labor market. Brazilian Business Review, 14(4), 32-50.

Migiro, S. O. and Taderera, M. (2011). Ethics in Performance Management Systems in African Organizations: A Case Study. African Journal of Human Resource Management, 5(3), 74-90.

Moagi, R. (2023). Sexual Harassment in Kenya's Agricultural Sector: HR Implications. Journal of African Labour Studies, 18(1), 39-58.

Mufanechiya, T. and Mufanechiya, A. (2018a). Nepotism and favoritism in the Zimbabwean public sector. Journal of Public Administration, 32(3), 45-60.

Mufanechiya, T. and Mufanechiya, A. (2018b). Nepotism in Zimbabwe's Education Sector: An Ethical Challenge. Journal of African Educational Research, 9(1), 44-59.

Nana, K. (2008). Sexual Harassment in African Workplaces: The HR Response. African Journal of Human Rights, 9(1), 11-25.

Njoroge, G. W. and Kinyanjui, S. M. (2020). The role of favoritism in Kenya's public service sector: A study of promotion and leadership appointments. African Journal of Public Administration, 12(4), 201-218.

Noe, R. A., Hollenbeck, J. R., Gerhart, B., & Wright, P. M. (2017). Human Resource Management: Gaining a Competitive Advantage (10th ed.). McGraw-Hill Education.

Nomadolo, P. (2017). Women in African Workplaces: Ethical Issues and HR Challenges. Journal of Gender and Development in Africa, 12(1), 45-67.

Ntamanwa, F. L. (2015). Factors leading to the low employment rate of people with physical disability in Tanzania: A Case study of Temeke Municipal Council (Doctoral dissertation, The Open University of Tanzania).

Nyaga, J. and Kimani, M. (2019). Ethnic favoritism and its impact on recruitment and promotion in Kenya's public and private sectors. Journal of African Studies and Development, 11(3), 74-86.

Obor, D. O. and Okoebor, R. (2021). Gender Discrimination in the Workplace: The Nigerian Experience. Industrial Sociology, Industrial Relations and Human Resource Management. Awka: Fab Educational Books.

Ofori, D. (2007). Ethical Challenges in African Organizations: The Ghanaian Perspective. Journal of Business Ethics, 16(3), 78-90.

Ogbona, E and Harris, L.C (2006). The dynamics of employees relationships in an ethnically diverse workforce. Human Relations 59(3), 379-407

Onwujekwe, O., Agwu, P., Orjiakor, C., McKee, M., Hutchinson, E., Mbachu, C., & Balabanova, D. (2019). Corruption in Anglophone West Africa health systems: a systematic review of its different variants and the factors that sustain them. Health policy and planning, 34(7), 529-543

Owojuyigbe, B. (2021a). Ethical Perspectives in HRM: Global and Regional Considerations. Journal of Business Ethics, 134(3), 211-225.

Owojuyigbe, B. (2021b). HRM and ethical dilemmas: An African perspective. Journal of Management Ethics, 10(1), 15-29.

Owojuyigbe, B. (2021c). HRM in Africa: Ethical Perspectives and Practices. Journal of African Business Studies, 10(4), 175-188.

Parboteeah, K. P., Weiss M & Hoegl M (2014). The Impact of Bribery and Corruption on HR Practices in African Organizations. Journal of Global Business Ethics, 14(3), 233-248.

Patience, A. U. (2018). Religion, Women and Gender Discrimination in the workplace: The Status of the African woman. International Digital Organization for Scientific Research IDOSR Journal of Arts and Management, 3(3).

Pennington, A., Edwards, L. and Stanley, R. (2007). HR Ethics in a Globalized World: Challenges and Solutions. Cambridge University Press.

Pham, A. M., Nguyen, T. L. and Do, P. Q. (2013). The Role of HR in Organizational Development: A Case Study Approach. Asian Journal of Business Management, 5(2), 112-121.

Reilly, P. A. (1998). Balancing flexibility—meeting the interests of employer and employee. European journal of work and organizational psychology, 7(1), 7-22.

Ryan, L. V. (2006). Employee privacy and performance management: Ethical considerations in the digital age. Business Ethics Quarterly, 16(2), 77-98.

Sang, L. and Kirui, M. (2019). Ethical Issues in HR Management: Recruitment and Performance Management Challenges in Africa. Ethics and HRM Review, 15(1), 62-79.

Scott, J. (2016). Ethical Dilemmas in HRM: The African Context. Journal of African Business Ethics, 3(1), 45-60.

Thomsen, F. K. (2017). Discrimination. In Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics.

Transparency International. (2021). Global Corruption Perceptions Index: Insights into African Organizations. Transparency International Publications.

Trevino, L. K. and Nelson, K. A. (2010). Managing Business Ethics: Straight Talk about How to Do It Right. John Wiley & Sons.

Valecha, A. (2022). Ethical Leadership in Human Resource Management. International Journal of Human Resource Studies, 12(2), 13-25.

Van Buren, H. J. and Greenwood, M. (2013). Ethics and HRM in the modern economy. Journal of Business Ethics, 111(1), 73-84.

Venyšová, M. (2015). Ethical Issues in Human Resource Management: Global Perspectives and Local Insights. Ethics in HRM Research Journal, 9(2), 32-48.

Wa Gĩthĩnji, M. (2015). Erasing class/(re) creating ethnicity: Jobs, politics, accumulation and identity in Kenya. The Review of Black Political Economy, 42(1-2), 87-110.

Williams, W. E. (2004). Discrimination. In The Encyclopedia of Public Choice (pp. 477-481). Boston, MA: Springer US.

Winstanley, D. and Woodall, J. (2000). Ethical issues in contemporary human resource management. Palgrave Macmillan.

Wooten, K. C. (2001). Ethical dilemmas in HRM: Classifications and Case Studies. Journal of Human Resource Management, 22(4), 341-360.

Zakumumpa, H., Maniple, E. and Kirya, M. T. (2022). Curtailing corruption in the recruitment of public sector health workers in Uganda. In Integrity of scientific research: Fraud, misconduct and fake news in the academic, medical and social environment, Cham: Springer International Publishing, 5(7), 275-280.

Zhuwau, C. and Shumba, S. (2018). Ethical Dilemmas in HR Practices: A Case of Corruption in Zimbabwe. Journal of African Governance, 10(2), 189-206.