
ETHICS AND MORALS: A LESSON FROM AKHISM FOR DEVELOPING ECONOMIES OF AFRICA

ETİK VE AHLAK: GELİŞEN AFRIKA EKONOMİLERİ İÇİN AHİLİKTEN BİR DERS

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Abstract

The paper theoretically shaded light on ethical and moral conditions of developing economies of Africa and draw relevant moral lessons from Akhism as an organizational model that used ethics and morals to spur economic development and maintained societal harmony in the later part of Seljuk and Ottoman Empire for close to 710 (1205-1915) years. During that period, a fair distribution of income was achieved, consumers were protected from exploitation and substandard goods and social capital was realized. All as a result of ethical leadership and the Akhism living a moral life style both in public and private. The paper also proposed a unified theoretical frame work for developing ethical and moral decision making process for leaders and managers in both public and private institutions. As a step into achieving moral agency, in order for them to make moral decisions that are critical in the process of transition to democracy and maintenance of social harmony and peace hence economic development of African.

Key words: Ethics and Morals, Akhism, Africa

Özet

Bu çalışma teorik olarak, Afrika'nın gelişmekte olan ekonomilerinin etik ve ahlaki koşullarına ışık tutmaktadır. Selçuklu Devletinin son yıllarından Osmanlı İmparatorluğunun son yıllarına kadar 710 (1205-1915) ekonomik gelişmeyi teşvik etmek ve toplumsal uyum sağlamak için ahlak ve etik değerleri kullanılan örgütsel bir model olarak Ahilikten dersler çıkarmaktadır. Ahilik döneminde adil bir gelir dağılımı sağlanmış, tüketiciler yanıltılmaktan ve düşük kaliteli mallardan korunmuş ve sosyal sermaye kazanımı önemsenmiştir. Bu yaklaşımlar, etik liderliğin kamu ve özel alanda ahlaki bir yaşam tarzını yansıtan Ahilik'in bir sonucudur. Kamu ve özel kurumlarda görev yapan yönetici ve liderlere, etik ve ahlaki karar verme sürecine yardımcı olmak için öneriler sunulmuştur. Ahlaki olgunluğa ulaşmaya yönelik bir adım olması; Afrika'nın ekonomik kalkınmasına katkı sağlaması ve bu süreçte sosyal uyum ve barışın korunması adına ortaya öneriler koyulmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Etik ve Ahlak, Ahilik, Afrika

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1. Introduction

Ethics and morals are significant elements of social life. It is inconceivable for a society to exist long enough without causing chaos in the absence of ethical and moral codes of conduct. Since humans are social being, their interaction with each other cannot be avoided, and these interactions between people determines the social harmony prevalent in any community or nation. It is this social harmony that creates social capital; an important ingredient for economic development.

The hi-tech era in which we live today, although good for economic development, it has brought about numerous challenges that are threatening to destroy the very essence of Social Capital Development. Among the many challenges experienced today especially by leaders, managers and organizations; both public and private, is maintaining ethics and morals in management and decision making processes (Daft, 2010:391-2). The failure by both private and public institutions to put into practice morals and ethical values in their everyday activities is a root cause of many economic problems we face today such as; inequitable income distribution, sale of fraudulent goods, endemic corruption, bribery, poverty, loss of trust and general hopelessness on the part of the citizens. This is threatening the establishment of democracy, peace, social capital and civilized societies. This situation is more acute in under developed economies of Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe (Kabureka, 2014). In this paper, the focus was on the under developed economies of African although some relevant examples were drawn from the developing economies.

Corruption as an unethical and a moral vice for example is endangering democracy, social peace and harmony in many economies of Africa. As the report from Nigeria presented at Davos World Economic Forum 2016 in Iran indicated that; more than 50 people including former government officials were involved in corruption activities that led to the loss of 9 billion United States of American dollars from the national treasury (Kerry, 2016). In addition to that, a study of 100 largest United States of American corporations found that; 40 percent of them have recently been involved in activities that can be considered unethical. A similar trend can also be traced in other countries such as Germany and Japan (Daft, 2010:389).

These unethical and immoral acts are so demoralizing, destructive, disempowering to the citizens and clients in a way that it has a contagious effect on human behavior and leads to vicious cycle of such problems as: Fueling of national crime by opening up the vacuum for anti-social behavior that encourages violent extremists groups to source out for recruitment, destroys nations and states by removing faith in legitimate authorities, drives up the cost of public services for the local tax payer and turns the entire national budget into a feeding trough for a privileged few, disempowers opportunities for honest and accountable investment thereby making business more expensive to operate, facilitates environmental degradation, contributes to human trafficking and undermines community welfare and harmony to mention (Kerry, 2016).

In this vein, this paper attempt to draw some important ethical and moral lessons from an organizational point view. Where Akhism is used as a success model of how ethical and moral leadership in social life significantly contributed to both social and economic development. In the process, some moral and ethical decision making aid or tool from relevant theories is suggested for both leaders and workers in public and private business. In the hope that when incorporated into

the functioning systems of these nations and businesses, it can help reverse the worsening trend, promote ethical and moral decision making process in both political-administrative and corporate culture, such that democratic deliberations are advanced and civilized societies are constructed. In short, the paper will act as a lesson drawing tool that may benefit especially the under developed nations if taken into practice. As Francis Bacon once said, “knowledge is power”, “only if it is applied” added the Einstein.

2. Ethics and Morals

Since the turn of 19th century, the world has experienced rapid continuous changes in all spheres of life. Specifically, some of the changes being faced by especially leaders and managers in organizations today are: globalization, intense competition, rigorous ethical scrutiny, the need for rapid response, the digital workplace, and increasing diversity (Daft, 2010:7). These changes put strain on ethics and moral values; one of the most important component of a prosperous community, nation and organizations. Hence, calling for leaders and managers in both private and public organizations to adapt appropriately to the new needs. One of which is the continuous ethical and moral scrutiny from the public as a result of its seeming breakdown within businesses and public offices.

According to Dessler, (2013:461) and Daft, (2010:389), Ethics refers to codes of moral principles and values governing individuals or group behavior in relation to decision making as to what is wrong or right. Morality on the other hand refers to a society’s highest accepted standards of behavior. Ethical behavior can therefore be equated to a moral responsibility in social life. A society’s ethics and morality, or view of what is right and wrong is shaped by its national culture, religious heritage, family background, individual character, the environment and historical background among other things (Mamuti, 2013:239; Şahin, Öztürk, Ünalmiş, 1999:803; Dessler, 2013:461 and Daft, 2010:389). Ethical and moral standards guide behaviors of individuals and groups and violating them often makes one becomes anti-social, ashamed and remorseful.

Although Ethical and moral values involves normative judgement and decision making; therefore are personal by nature and unique to each individual, group, organization and society, there are many areas of consensus and overlaps. The universally accepted moral standards that cuts across all communities include but not limited to acts such as: murder, lying, slander and corruption (Daft, 2010:391; Dessler, 2013:462; Mamuti, 2013:239 ; Gilman, 2005:4). Ethics and morals concepts are also closely related to the concept of Human Rights; as violating them may lead to the former. That is why for every business, the concept of ethics is integrated within the concepts of human rights (Şahin, Öztürk, Ünalmiş, 1999:803).

3. The Ethical And Moral Conditions Of African Economies

Laws, societal norms and values among other things shape the local environment within which each individual acts, such as a person’s community, family, and place of work (Daft, 2010:389). The social capital necessary for economic development of any community is a byproduct of this socio-cultural factors. The economic and political success of any community or nation is closely related to a well-established social peace and harmony. Which explains why the internal social conflict in less developed countries is greater than that of the developed countries which have managed to secure

social peace and harmony (Mamuti, 2013:241-242). Here, Social capital refers to the quality of interactions among people or simply goodwill (Daft, 2010:374). A society or organization with a high level of social capital is friction free. This frictionless situation helps to facilitate the smooth functioning of the community. In relation to businesses or organizations, Social capital relates to both corporate culture and ethics.

The social insecurity in under developed economies can be attributed to problems such as; corruption, threats to democracy, human rights, and the rule of law, inadequate pay, salary compression, uneven distribution of public wealth, wide income gap and poorly trained personnel who lack professionalism in handling their duties. In short, unethical leadership style that is compounded with high level of ethical lapses and immorality in decision making process.

Ethical and moral lapses in organizations and government institutions are a chronic problem world over. For instance, a public poll carried in the United States of America found out that 79 percent of respondents believed that questionable business practices are widespread, less than one-third also think that most Chief Executive officers (CEOs) are honest. The same sentiment is echoed in other part of the world too; as a meager 15 percent in Germany consider business leaders trustworthy (Daft, 2010:8). The situation is worse in under developed economies of Africa.

The governmental and private institutions that are most infested with unethical tendencies in Africa are, but not limited to, education and sports, the news, the police, judiciary and election agencies. The example of corruption and unethical cases that are undermining the development of especially african economies are numerous. The following few from Uganda gives you an insight into how deep the ethical and moral decay has entrenched.

It is reported that, the Ugandan government institution of police, Electoral commission, the judiciary and Uganda Revenue Authority (URA) are considered as the least trusted by majority citizen as they have been involved in high profile corruption scandals. Such headlines as these; "Suspected robbers claim to have bosses in Police force" in one of the country's leading newspaper confirms this assertion, (Nakabugo and Taremwa, the Observer March 10, 2017).

Attorney General (AG) of Uganda in his annual report of 2013 to the Parliamentary Public Accounts Committee (PAC) URA officials to be held responsible for financial indiscipline which led to the questionable payment of 12.9 billion Ugandan shillings for goods and service inclusive of (VAT) Value Added Tax (Mugerwa, 2014). These expenditures were made without due respect to the procurement procedures hence amounting to ethical lapse.

There is a general public outcry and condemnation of the controversial and unethical reward of Uganda shillings 6 billion by the President of Uganda in what is known as the "Presidential handshake" to selected 42 officials of URA for winning two tax disputes against Heritage Oil and Gas and Tullow Uganda. Where Uganda retained about United State of American dollars 434 million in the case with Heritage Oil and Gas and 250 million dollars from a settlement capital gain tax dispute that arose following Tullow's farm down of 66.6% of its stake to France's Total and China's CNOOC (Musoke, 2017). These rewards were unethical decision by the President, contrary to financial re-embusement procedures. The beneficiaries are full time government employees who were doing the job for which they are paid for and therefore did not deserve extra payment. In fact

the case was also handled by a foreign law firm that was paid for by the government. As this was happening, a section of the country is facing hunger, famine and drought that was causing death and the ministry for disaster preparedness had no funds to rescue the situation. Corruption by nature is contagious when not checked.

Another report from Uganda indicated that a Pentecostal Church Pastor fraudulently sold his locally grown rice which he labelled as 'holy rice' at an exorbitant price of 50,000 Ugandan shillings per kilogramme (15US\$); more than 14 times the market price of 3500 Ugandan shillings (Ainebyoona, 2017). Traditionally churches and other religious institutions are built on the spirit of developing human beings and their livelihood through construction of schools, hospital and other humanitarian projects. However there are many profit oriented and exploitative religious institutions emerging with out any governmental check into their activities. These group do transactions of business nature in the disguise of gifts hence avoiding and evading taxes which is both criminal and unethical for institutions which are supposed to be the champions of ethics and morals.

Similar cases are reported every day in many other african countries like kenya, Nigeria, South Sudan to mention but few. African countries are frequently cited among the most corrupt countries of the world. In most of these countries, without bribes, it is difficult to get service in government institution. The language commonly used to ask for bribe is, "kitu kidogo in kiswahili (give some thing small).

Most African economies have structurally well designed codes of ethics, anti-corruption agencies, legal and regulatory prohibitions on certain practices in their governance and management systems of both private and public institutions. For example, most of these countries have an active independent anti-corruption commissions and ministries for issues to do with ethics, morals and integrity. These internal structures are reinforced by many other non-governmental organizations either affiliated to United Nation or other bodies like Human right watch, Transparency International and international integrity whistle blowers and development partners such as; African Development Bank. These structural initiatives are necessary, but not sufficient for the development and promotion of ethics and ethical leadership inclusive of moral agency in both public service and private institutions. The implementation of measures by these institutions are also very weak and lacks moral agency.

One major weakness in the institutions is the lack of political will and commitment to "walk their talk". Most of the leaders are not moral agents themselves. The president of Uganda reportedly said, "... I hear some people saying that I am their servant; I am not a servant of any body.....I don't do it because I am your servant..... if any body thinks you gave me a job, he is deceiving himself..." This is in contrast to what he said on 29 of January, 1986, "... the sovereign power in the land must be the population, not the government. The government should not be the master, but the servant of the people," (Muzoora, 2017). These bring to life Robert Denhardt's (1993:242) remarks that, most public organizations are reluctant in promoting ethical behavior and yet ethics and morals lies in public interest which embodies the common good, signifies obligation and accountability, and symbolizes reason and responsibility.

Therefore, ethical training in decision making and reinforcement with moral agency and leadership are highly needed to invoke a reconfiguration of political-administrative and management systems required by 21st-century governance and management standards.

4. Akhism

Historically, Akhism is a term used to refer to an organizational system that existed in Anatolia (present day Turkey) from the later days of Seljuk Empire around 1205 to the later days of Ottoman Empire around 1915 when it was finally disbanded (Durak and Yücel, 2010; Mamuti, 2013:243; Özsoy, 2015; Gündüz, Kaya and Aydemir, 2012; Güneş and Güneş, 2012:183 and Ülger and Ülger, 2005:51). It started as an association of craftsmen and artisans who were faced with stiff competition in the market from their Byzantine counter parts. Later on was transformed into nationwide organization charged with the responsibility of standardizing products and protecting both employee and consumer rights. In short it played the role of; public moral school, bureau of standards, cooperative society and vocational institution in the Anatolia. Majority of these craftsmen were believed to have been Turk immigrants from various part of Central Asia and Arabic peninsular, fleeing from the first Mongolian invasion into Anatolia (Güneş and Güneş, 2012:183).

There are two theories connected to the origin of the word Akhism. One group postulate that it imaged from the Turkish word Akı meaning bravery, heroism, courageousness. While the other group believes that the term has an Arabic origin from the word Akhi meaning brotherhood (Durak and Yücel, 2010; Bayram, 1991:131; Özsoy, 2015; Gündüz, Kaya and Aydemir, 2012; Güneş and Güneş, 2012:183 and Ülger and Ülger, 2005:49). Both of the meaning seems to be valid as at that time period, the Arabic language had much influence on the Anatolian Turkish as part of Islamic cultural influence on the Anatolians. The most important thing is that Akhism no matter what the origin of the word, signified an alliance or 'brotherhood' of Anatolian Artisans and Craftsmen who showed an unprecedented level of ethics, morality and professionalism in work life between Twelfth and Nineteenth centuries (Ülger and Ülger, 2005:49;).

It is generally believed that, the organization that impacted on the socio-economic and political progress of the Anatolians for over 600 years was founded by Ahi or Akhi Evran (Durak and Yücel, 2010; Özsoy, 2015; Gündüz, Kaya and Aydemir, 2012; Güneş and Güneş, 2012:183 and Şahin, Öztürk, Ünalı, 1999:801), who lived in Central Anatolian city of Kayseri as a leather Tanner. He began by gathering 32 members of his profession, related tradesmen and artisans. He was inspired by Sufism or Tasawwuf (mysticism); an Islamic ideology of living by purifying the heart from bad manners and characters (Anadolu, 2001 as cited by Şahin, Öztürk, Ünalı, 1999:801). However, he differed in his practice of Sufism from Mawlana Jalaludeen Rumi, a well-known Sufi scholar of Anatolian era (Şahin, Öztürk, Ünalı, 1999:801).

This means that Islamic religion with a blend of Turkish culture, shaped the core values of his practices in terms of ethics and morals. For it is a known fact that, human behavior is a byproduct of many factors such as; geographical location, climatic conditions, politics, demographics, history, social environment, culture and religion. In the case, Islam had a bigger influence on morality and behavior of the Akhism than any of the above mentioned factors (Mamuti, 2013:239).

Ethics and moral virtue such as: integrity, generosity, hospitality, tolerance, altruism, respect and love for people, solidarity, justice, equality, humility, living a devout life, having sense of shame, avoiding lying and drunkenness, and abstinence from adultery were some of the basic principle on which Akhism was founded (Mamuti, 2013:242; Durak and Yücel, 2010; Özsoy, 2015; Gündüz, Kaya and Aydemir, 2012; Güneş and Güneş, 2012:183 and Ülger and Ülger, 2005:51). These principles are important in leading both a moral and ethical life in one's private and working life, as they help one stay true to the common good and maintain societal harmony; an important element of economic development.

These ethical and moral principle which acted as ethical cord in Akhism was inculcated into the followers and the community through a continuous educational system embedded with strict discipline and code of conduct extracted from the Islamic sharia and the local culture (Mamuti, 2013:239). The training and educational system extended from the members to interested villagers, aiming at preparing one for both societal and professional work life (Ekinci, 2011:36-37). Those wishing to become members of Akhism, they had to negotiate through several stages of study; apprenticeship, stooge, foreman and master, each taking not less than 2 years depending on how fast one learns, and behaves at workplace. Upon satisfying all the requirement of becoming a professional, a ceremony is organized to permit one to start a business. As long as one is not permitted to start a business or has no diploma from his own workplace, he is not able to achieve mastership. This shows that the system is not result oriented but process oriented (Ülger and Ülger, 2005:54).

The subject of study included vocational knowledge, religious, social and behavioral science. This is because they believed that a vocational professional education without moral and ethical foundation found in religious and social studies is incomplete. For morals and ethics guides ones behavior at work place and in the community. Aim of production in Akhism was to maximize social benefit and not so much profit driven as seen today (Mamuti, 2013:240-241). This is why Akhism was considered a 'school of morals' with traces of cooperative basing on human behavior, good morals and personality (Ülger and Ülger, 2005:50).

Generosity and love for fellow humanity regardless of creed, religion and sect, was seen in many social responsibility works of Akhism. Akhis operated a number of lodges to serve travelers and wayfarers. Profits made from business would also be ploughed back into communal activities like helping the orphans, neighbors and the disadvantaged. As helping others was considered both a religious duty and moral responsibility. In this way envy, hatred, theft, inequitable income distribution, sale of the fraudulent goods, corruption, bribery and poverty as social vices were amply checked. In effect there was prosperity for all. It was reported that, when Akhism was active, the total export of Ottoman Empire (Turkey) in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was greater than its imports that even European countries of France and Italy borrow from it while Great Britain would send industrial spies to learn from the Empire (Mamuti, 2013:242 and Ülger and Ülger, 2005:52).

5. Ethical And Moral Lessons From Akhism

Much as the world has progressed economically, there are many areas that has instead seen a deterioration. One of the area that has seen deterioration in standards is ethics and morality. The prevalence of many social vices partially gives insight into ethics and morals decay in private and public life. Although there are constant call to workers and leaders to be professional and moral in decision making, it has not yield much success. Akhism in Anatolia was a success story as far as discipline, morals and ethical behavior in professional and private life of workers was concerned. Below are some of the ethical and moral lessons that made Akhism the success story it was.

It is reported that, there were 740 set of rules that governed the daily professional and private life of workers under Akhism although not all are mentioned. Most researches tend to summarize these ethical and moral lessons into few phrases, while others tend to divide them into six general themes of three 'open and closed ethical behaviors' (Ekinci, 2011: 4; Şahin, Öztürk, Ünalmiş, 1999:802-803).

Among the three close things are: Your hands should be closed so as not to steal, terrorize and victimize others; Your tongue should be closed so as not to lie, defame, gossip, and insult; and Your waist should be closed so as not to dishonor others. And the three open things are: Your hand should be open to helping the needy; your door should be open to guests and the needy and your dining table should be open to feeding the poor and needy (Şahin, Öztürk, Ünalmiş, 1999:802-803).

The following are some of the few principles selected from the 740 sets of rules that were significant in guiding the behavior of Akhism (Ülger and Ülger, 2005:50): Earn legitimately; spend moderately; measure justly; produces useful goods; have good temper and good morals; be truthful and trustworthy both in personal and business life; tell the truth without hesitation even if it is against your own self and immediate family members; avoid hatred and envy; be faithful to the contract, the promise and love; show act of generosity; treat others with respect and honor; help your neighbors; stay away from conceit and prejudice; be fair and just even if it is against yourself or kinsmen; do not expect return for any goodness you do to others, work with sincerity and a smiling face towards people; show goodness to even those who act in evil; give importance to friendship, do not forget friends and stay in brotherhood; protect and take care of the ones under your servitude; give and be satisfied with the less and thankful for the plenty; avoid wicked in talking and behavior; educate oneself continuously in gaining new abilities; be knowledgeable and use your knowledge for the benefit of the society; be in peace with society; and treat people in a way that you want to be treated (Ülger and Ülger, 2005:50; Güneş and Güneş 2012:185; Şahin, Öztürk, Ünalmiş, 1999:802-803). To summarize the level of morality under Akhism, the anecdote below may give insight.

"A tradesman opens his shop and makes his first transaction. Meanwhile a second customer arrives. The owner of the shop says to his next customer with sincerity, 'sorry to bother you brother, I pray that God gives you prosperity. I have made my first sale of the day. The next shop also has the goods you are looking for with the same price and features. Since my neighbor has not yet made any sales for today, you may purchase from him. This way, you will please him and I would have fulfilled the right of my neighbor upon me (Ülger and Ülger, 2005:55)."

In cases of gross violation of the moral and ethical code mentioned above by any member, varied punishment were met depending on the frequency and gravity of the breach. Some of the behaviors that would immediately call for punishment of a member or expulsion from the organization include among others: gossiping, slandering; boasting; arrogance; being tough and merciless; envy; nursing grudges and not forgiving; breaking a promise; lying; betrayal; being lustful; uncovering the misdeeds of others; being mean; backbiting and stealing (Ekinci, 2011:37-38, Şahin, Öztürk, Ünalı, 1999:803). Producing low quality substandard goods resulted in freezing out of the culprit. This gives background to the Anatolian idiomatic saying, throw the shoes on the roof (Şahin, Öztürk, Ünalı, 1999:803). In reference to Ahi Evran's act of throwing the shoes of any tradesmen on the roof if they are found involved in fraud or reduced the quality of their products. This act caused enormous shame on the trader or artisan and would lead to isolation, loss of revenue and trust from the customer and in the eyes of the society (Ülger and Ülger, 2005:53-54).

All these checks and balance in form of ethical and moral codes were aiming at preventing faults and wastefulness, creating teamwork and auto control mechanisms while motivating employees through continuous training to maintain good quality and give customers satisfaction. The competition that existed in the institution was quality oriented and the target was not to produce more in order to out-compete others, but to produce quality goods and maintain consistency in service delivery. In fact, the business catch phrase, 'the customer is our benefactor' has its origins in Akhism (Ülger and Ülger, 2005:53).

The following are some of the few living legacy and contribution of Akhism to the world business philosophy: in commerce and industry, it contributed to establishment of chambers of commerce and bureau of standards aiming at solving the industrial and business problems while protecting consumers by controlling quality of goods and services; contributed to formulation of labor unions and employees relations departments; fair competition to prevents undesirable monopoly and cooperatives. In these, we see Akhism system making significant contribution towards socio-economic flourishing of the then Ottoman Empire and the world in general (Mamuti, 2013:241).

Akhism with its ethical and moral standards, made it possible for the empire to attain an ideal society order. As there was balance between the production and the consumption, as well as labor and capital. This may look practically impossible in our world today because of our unceasing desires and needs for materialism which makes it impossible to be satisfied. Hence we witness unending wars, ecological drawbacks, and materialization of labor (Ülger and Ülger, 2005:55). However, through moral and ethical consciousness in production, business management and public service delivery as seen in Akhism, most of the socio-economic and political problems faced today can be alleviated especially in under developed economies of Africa.

6. Conclusion

In the periods during which Akhism was taking much active role in Anatolia, the right to a fair distribution of income, consumer protection and societal harmony was achieved. This laid foundations for national unity and economic development. These achievements were made as a result of well-developed and obeyed ethical codes and morals, which lies in the heart of practicing a profession and maintaining social harmony. Of course time have changed since then but the

notion of right and wrong still remains the same. Akhism as example of professional ethics and moral development has shown to us ethical and moral codes when put in practice by especially leaders can help create social capital.

In this paper with due respect to the lessons learnt from Akhism, we recommend for a reconceptualization of leadership as an integral part of ethical and moral transformation of under developed economies of African. We also maintain that both public servants and business personnel are moral actors whose decisions and discretion require consistent application of moral judgment to both the policy and managerial decisions they make. A mere obedience to hierarchical directives without ethical and moral consciousness is unhealthy for social capital development. We instead proposed a shift from compliance to integrity and moral consciousness in both private and public especially from leaders in Africa.

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