

Public Administration Ethics in the Czech Republic*

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Abstract

This article introduces the results of the first survey of Czech civil servants specifically targeting the domain of public ethics. The survey serves a double purpose: to provide data relevant for the development of a tailor-made ethics training programme for public officials, and to answer two research questions: (1) What are the main factors influencing the core values in Czech public administration? (2) Does the existence of ethics resources contribute to an improved ethical climate in the Czech public administration as perceived by public officials?

The findings show that an ethical code is the most widespread, but often the only, ethics instrument implemented in Czech public administration and that the code is not used effectively. The results also confirm a positive but weak influence of the number of ethics resources on the perception of the existence of ethical problems, and a slight direct correlation between a higher number of resources and the perception of positive ethics development in the workplace. No support is found for the assertion that the more ethics resources are used by the organisation, the greater is the importance of the organisational culture for decision-making. This empirical research illustrates that – unlike in other countries of the former Eastern Bloc – ethics has been a low-priority agenda in Czech public administration and that enhancing ethical standards, and thus increasing citizens' trust in public services, will be a long-term process. Leadership and leading by example, alongside ethics education and training, are the avenues to pursue.

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Introduction

Since the fall of communism in 1989, the Czech Republic has undergone major system changes in political, legal, economic, and social spheres. However, the necessary transformation of public administration¹ towards professionalization and depoliticisation encountered significant political resistance. Consequently, the government's commitment to passing a civil service act that would have introduced the core elements of modern governance in 2002 was not fulfilled, resulting in the Czech Republic missing the wave of reforms that began in the "new member states" following European Union (EU) accession requirements. The performance of public administration has been rather low, lagging behind the private sector development and stunting growth in the country's competitiveness and population welfare. Bearing in mind the statistical weaknesses of composed indicators used for ranking countries, comparative studies by the EU, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), as well as Global Competitiveness Reports (Schwab 2013–2018; EU 2018) place the Czech Republic in the last third of EU/OECD member states. For example, indices calculated for the EU 28 member states in 2017 rank the Czech public sector performance 21st and government effectiveness 17th. The implementation of good governance principles is also rather weak as confirmed by the 15th rank for the rule of law and 17th rank for accountability (Spacek/Nemec 2018).

In the Czech administrative culture, following the classical continental European culture, the legality principle and legal perspective have dominated the performance (efficiency) principle. According to Spacek and Nemec (2018), a rigid legalistic approach and a formalised direction of administrative activities still prevail. In this context, the existence of rigid codes of belief is widespread².

It was only after the strong insistence by the EU accompanied by sustained pressure from the media, Non Governmental Organizations (NGO's), and oversight organisations that the Civil Service Act modernising the state administration was passed in 2014, entering into force in 2015. Clearly, the enormous delay is not the only problem, as significant compromises undermining the originally envisaged level of ambition were made during the legislative procedure. More-

1 Since 2003, a decentralised system has been in place, including the central and local levels. At the local level, some delegated state administrative and self-governance functions are performed.

2 Confirmed by the Uncertainty Avoidance Index in Hofstede's assessment of national culture (Hofstede 2017).

over, the government made continuous efforts to further weaken the not fully independent and professional character of the civil service.

In this context, it is not surprising that the attention paid to ethics has been only marginal. Empirical research focusing on the main factors of the social effectiveness of Czech public administration, such as strategic management, coordination, operational management, ethics and integrity and communication, finds that ethics and integrity is the weakest area (Bohata et al. 2018a, b).

Like in Slovakia, ethics in the Czech Republic has been closely associated with, and sometimes even reduced to, the adoption of a code of ethics (Remisova et al. 2019). The government's first initiative in addressing ethical issues and enhancing trust in public administration was the Ethical Code of 2001, the purpose of which was to serve as a non-binding instrument for public sector employees and as general code from which specific codes could be developed. Although some offices adopted their own versions with a set of basic rules covering legality, impartiality, transparency and professionalism, there is no evidence indicating that the codes were enforced (Pellar 2007). As no follow-up assessment was envisaged, it is not possible to examine the role of this initiative in establishing/improving ethical standards. Ten years later, a new code was adopted as part of the government's anticorruption strategy. In principle, it only repeated some provisions of the General Labour Code and administrative regulations; it established no additional obligations. The recommendations encompassed legality, impartiality, economy, efficiency, professionalism, transparency, swiftness, confidentiality, conflict of interest and corruption. Again, it was a non-binding internal rule, with no monitoring or evaluation taking place. As stipulated in the Civil Service Act, a new code emerged in 2015 in the form of a legally-binding civil service regulation setting "ethical rules for state employees", but because of the speed of its creation and adoption, the quality of the code is rather poor. The main principles in the code address legality, professionalism, adequacy, swiftness, efficiency, and public behaviour. The major weaknesses are found in the code's overly legalistic and unbalanced character skewed towards detailing certain obligations already covered by the Act, namely with regard to conflict of interest and corruption. Focusing on these two problems can be interpreted as significantly narrowing the civil service ethics. Moreover, the code does not reflect the hierarchies across the bureaucracy and different duties and responsibilities at different levels. It deals exclusively with the behaviour of individuals with no importance attached to the civil service culture (Bohata 2019). Currently – based on a broader debate – the code is undergoing a revision, and unlike in the past, its active promotion is envisaged.

As the prevalence of corruption in the Czech Republic has been assessed as high³, the government has adopted several rather comprehensive anticorruption documents since the end of the 1990's. In particular, the 2013 strategy "From Corruption to Integrity" stressed the importance of an anticorruption climate and the role of ethical norms. The strategy envisaged a proactive approach in communicating and implementing the code of ethics, including appropriate training for civil servants. The most recent document created for the 2018–2022 period mentions the need to introduce also other instruments of ethical infrastructure⁴, emphasising the importance of training and enhancing responsibility. However, so far there has been a very weak coordination between various initiatives at the governmental level, with many conceptual documents being created but not implemented. Due to this malfunctioning of the state, the envisaged approaches to fighting corruption and enhancing the integrity of public administration have not been integrated into the strategy of modernizing the sector. Consequently, intentions to build a modern governance system have not materialised.

Compared with other post-communist countries, mainly the frontrunners in modernising their public administrations – including fostering ethics and integrity – such as Slovenia and the Baltic states (Palidaukaite 2005; Kooskora/Virkoja 2015; Stare/Klun 2016; Rybnikova/Toleikiene 2019), the lack of political will among Czech politicians to learn from the experience of other countries⁵ and to transform the state administration is obvious. This situation, accompanied by the low prestige of public officials, is also reflected in the sphere of education and training, which can undermine prospects for the future. Currently, there is no comprehensive study programme to prepare public officials to effectively operate within the European administrative space. In the Czech Republic, public administration is not regarded as a fully-fledged study area; no educational institutions offer degree programmes in the field. The training that is available for public officials can hardly make up for the knowledge and capabilities that would be acquired through professional studies. Currently, training courses are organised by various bodies of the civil service and are designed primarily to help employees pass required civil service exams. As courses are not coordinated, no training exists that would provide employees with common, fundamental aspects of the civil service (including ethics and integrity). The situation in the sphere of self-governance is rather different, though, with courses for self-governance officials being provided centrally by the Institute of Public Administration. However, these courses focus primarily on the legislation in place and their

3 Corruption perception indices rank the Czech Republic below the EU average.

4 The need for more instruments was mentioned in a document adopted by the government for the first time, including the term "ethical infrastructure".

5 In this respect, a lack of inspiration from other countries reforming their public administrations was found in Hungary, Poland and Slovakia (Mazur 2020).

scope is rather limited. To our knowledge, the only course offered in the field of ethics and integrity concentrates on corruption.

Clearly, the ethics agenda in Czech public administration has been neglected, or at best has attracted marginal attention. Until very recently, no debates among professionals and stakeholders have taken place. Indeed, the term *ethics* has been perceived with some suspicion and its understanding, often linked to “moralising”, has been unclear. *Ethics management* is still not used as a concept, and even terms such as *ethics infrastructure*, *ethics programme* and *policy* are rarely used. However, these facts should not be interpreted as indicating a low ethical/moral awareness of public officials. The research presented in this article reveals that they are indeed concerned about ethical problems and interested in debates on values and ethics, as well as in ethics training.

Theoretical background

Scholarly work on administrative ethics and its application to practice is very broad. Since the 1980s, when public management and administrative ethics came to focus, a wide variety of issues have been addressed. A schematic overview including examples of relevant references is provided in Table 1.

Table 1: Issues in public administration ethics addressed in the literature

Issue	Author(s)
Application of ethical theories, principles, and frameworks	Rohr 1989; Chapman 1993; Sheeran 1993
Morality and right conduct	Cooper 1982; Hart 1984; Hassan et al. 2014
The role of values and virtues	DeRosia 2010; DeVries/Kim 2011
Integrity in public agencies	Carter 1996; Becker 1998; Huberts 2014, 2018
Good governance	Agere 2000; Brinkerhoff/Goldsmith 2005; Argyriades 2006; Vigoda-Gadot 2007; Demmke/Moilanen 2011; Villoria et al. 2013; Cowell et al. 2014; Huberts 2014; Fukuyama 2016
Empirical research in public policy	Bruce 1998; Bowman/Knox 2008; Demmke/Moilanen 2011
Ethical codes and other instruments creating the ethical infrastructure	Bertok 1999; Beeri at al. 2013; Raile 2013
The ethical climate	Arnaud 2010; Shacklock et al. 2011; Simha/Cullen 2012
Major ethical problems in public administration	Hanekom et al. 1990, Klitgaard 1991; Palidauskaite 2005; Rose-Ackerman/Palifka 2016; Torsello 2016
Guides in practical ethics	Moody-Stuart 1994; Cooper 2001; Searing/Searing 2016

To provide an overview of the broad literature in the field, several authors have surveyed academic articles to glean the main themes (Menzel 2015). In his research on ethics and integrity in public administration covering the first decade of 21st century, Menzel (2015) finds that **the ethical environment, policy ethics and ethics management** receive the greatest attention. The prevalence of these topics can also be observed in the recent literature (Stare/Klun 2016; Rose-Ackerman 2017; Rothstein/Sorak 2017; Webley/Johnson 2016; Fukuyama 2016, Zemanovicova et al. 2019) accompanied by integrity, which has become a prominent concept in research on governance and policy making (Huberts 2018; Demmke 2020; Schweizer 2020). Nevertheless, public administration ethics is a dynamic field as it needs to respond to a changing reality (Moghrabi/Sabharwal 2018) and to new challenges, including the emergence of turbulent problems, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

The above themes have become a concern also for policymakers and administrators recognising that, to enhance their credibility and meet citizens' expectations, modern administrations must significantly reduce unethical behaviour and increase ethical standards. Governmental actions in this area can be characterised by the OECD normative activities in administrative ethics and integrity. Initiatives that introduced a system of checks, sanctions, and constraints on discretionary decision-making aiming at reducing opportunities for corrupt behaviour developed in the 1990's have not proven satisfactory. Over time, these rather *ad hoc* solutions consisting of the adoption of individual measures have been replaced by a systemic approach emphasizing the prevention and anticipation of possible problems. Ethics has become part of a broader integrity concept, which can be explained as a consistent alignment of, and adherence to, shared ethical values, principles, and norms in the everyday operation of an organisation (OECD 2017). In this way, integrity has become an umbrella for all ethics-enhancing initiatives, including combating corruption.

The OECD created a normative integrity framework covering instruments, processes, and structures/actors to help operationalise and consistently apply this concept (OECD 2018a). Its individual elements depend on the context in which the framework is applied, i.e., the internal context defined by the climate and culture within each public administration organisation, and the external one given by the environment of the entire public sector and the type of governance (OECD 2018a). In this respect, not only does the legal system of a country and the institutional framework of public administration, including the civil service act, play a significant role, but so does the tradition and wider setting of exercising public power. At the core of integrity is an ethical choice based on the moral reasoning of individuals, influenced by society and various groups to which individuals belong. For this reason, an effective integrity policy necessitates the cultivation of an environment in which the established parameters and norms of behaviour are strictly required, with noncompliance sanctioned (OECD 2018b).

Methodology

Scholars who study the effectiveness of approaches to ethics advancement in organisations use different terminology when describing a set of instruments and processes, be it ethical/ethics infrastructure, programme or policy. Despite slight variations, the content is very similar. In this article, we stick to the term infrastructure as defined by Fernandez and Camacho (2015). They identify three elements that contribute to ethics infrastructure: formal, informal, and leadership. According to Stare and Klun (2016), behaviour and decision-making are usually influenced by ethics infrastructures and ethical climates in organisations. The issue of ethics is relevant in two respects: the existence of appropriate tools, which create the ethical infrastructure of the organisation, and familiarity with and the understanding of the existing ethics infrastructure by public officials. An ethical climate was originally defined as the shared perception of what correct behaviour is and how ethical situations should be handled in an organisation (Victor/Cullen 1998). Various typologies and frameworks have been developed to define and measure the ethical climate in organisations (Martin/Cullen 2006; Raile 2013; Newman et al. 2017). Some take a broader perspective, such as Arnaud (2010), defining ethical climate as a concept reflecting the content and strength of the prevalent ethical values, norms, attitudes, feelings, and behaviours of the members of a social system. Raile (2013) establishes that there are predictable sources influencing the ethical climate, and public officials can simultaneously contribute to shaping the ethical climate and its perceptions. The mutual relationship between the formal and informal elements and measurement of impacts of ethics instruments on the ethical climate have been the subject of extensive empirical research, but the results are somewhat ambiguous. Bowman and Knox (2008) find no positive relationship between ethics codes and the ethical climate. Demmke and Moilanen (2011) identify that ethics instruments are more effective if implemented in a strong ethical climate.

Berri et al. (2013) prove the idea suggested by Menzel (1995), Schwepken (2001), Requena (2003), Martin and Cullen (2006) and other scholars that leadership plays a decisive role in fostering ethics and affecting employees' perceptions about the work environment. However, mixed results are found regarding the relationship between the other ethics resources covered by their model (awareness of the code, involvement of officials in ethical decision-making) and the organisational outcomes. Attempting to fill the gap in examining the impact of infrastructure on the climate, Stare and Klun (2016) prove that, in Slovenia, education is an important factor of the climate. Their analysis also shows the importance of values and leadership in eradicating unethical behaviour.

Analyses of the ethical behaviour of individuals indicate that one of the potential factors influencing ethical behaviour is gender. Interestingly, numerous studies analysing the differences in morality and ethics between men and women exam-

ine mainly the general population (Gilligan 1982; Gilligan et al. 1988), and the private sector (Dawson 1992; Ford/Richardson 1994; Sikula/Costa 1994; White 1999; Izraeli/Jaffe 2000; Glover et al. 2002). According to Stedham et al. (2007) they do not offer much insight into the theoretical underpinnings of the findings, and the results are somewhat inconsistent. However, they support the view that women exhibit, or are expected to have, moral identities stronger than men (Kennedy et al. 2017). So far, limited attention has been paid to the gender factor in public administration (White 1999; Tatevik 2014). Nevertheless, even on this small scale, there are indications that gender differences underlie the disparities in ethical behaviour, and higher degrees of moral development have also been found among women.

The ultimate objective of our project was to develop an ethics training programme for public officials in the Czech Republic. To gather necessary evidence, we conducted a survey aimed at assessing existing ethics instruments and gaining an understanding of the relevant factors of individual decision-making, as well as the ethical climate. In addition to that, we used the data to answer two research questions (RQ):

RQ1: What are the main factors influencing the core values in Czech public administration?

RQ2: Does the existence of ethics resources contribute to an improved ethical climate in the Czech public administration as perceived by public officials?

Thus, our approach was rather pragmatic, and its ambition limited by the purpose.

The methodology was based on a rather simple research model inspired by Beeri et al. (2013) examining the impacts of an ethics programme for public servants in Israel on ethical and organisational outcomes. The ethics programme in their study encompasses several elements that represent ethics resources, and they analyse the relationship between these resources and outcomes. Similarly, our research model explores the relationship between ethics resources and outcomes in Czech public administration⁶. Due to the high share of female administrators, gender and the position in the organisation are considered where relevant. The following resources within public administration organisations are considered:

- understanding of ethics and identification of ethical values;
- existence and awareness of ethical codes, education and training, whistleblowing, ethical leadership, and other potential resources (elements of ethical infrastructure);
- existence of a debate on ethics and ethical values.

6 At the state and local levels.

The research model also draws on the OECD integrity framework. The resources cover not only the “traditional” ethical infrastructure but are defined more broadly. We are interested in the way the resources affect the attitudes of individuals and the ethical climate, and in the degree of importance assigned to these resources by the officials who address practical ethical problems. The resulting attitudes of individuals and the ethical climate are taken as outcomes.

The quantitative empirical research was conducted in the period of August-October 2018 using the Computer Assisted Web Interview (CAWI) methodology. The survey consisted of 30 questions covering five topical areas: 1) understanding of ethics and identification of core values, 2) perceived significance of major ethical issues/integrity violations, 3) ethics management tools, 4) organisational culture, and 5) ethical climate.

Due to the low willingness of public officials to participate in surveys and to answer sensitive questions, the random sample was biased towards officials rather concerned about ethics in public administration. A total of 737 anonymous respondents provided their subjective opinions, including 626 members of state administration representing all ministries and 111 members of self-government and local governments representing all regions of the country (their smaller portion was expected). Regarding the positions in administration, 70 % were rank-and-file officers, 24 % mid-management officers, and the remaining 6 % higher-management officers. The sample consisted of 34 % men and 66 % women, reflecting quite well the gender composition of the administration with women representing 75 % at the central level and 72 % at the local level.

For the regression analysis, the IBM SPSS programme was used. To address the research questions, in relevant cases, frequencies of nominal characteristics were expressed by contingency tables, with the associations of two verbal characteristics being subsequently determined. In instances of proved relevance, the power dependence based on Pearson’s contingency coefficient (P) was calculated. (The closer the value to 1, the higher the dependence.) The cogency of the relationship of observed variables was determined by comparing an empirical coefficient (square contingency χ^2) with the chosen significance level $p = 0.05$ (or more precisely $p = 0.01$).

Logistic regression was used to test the nature of the relationships between the dependent variable and one or more independent variables. The outcome variable was binary (coded 0 and 1). Categorical variables with three or more categories were re-coded as dummy variables with 0/1 outcomes.

Results

Ethics, ethical problems, and values

This paragraph presents the major results stemming from the survey addressing RQ1.

Ethics and ethical problems

According to the majority opinion, ethics is complementary to law, representing rules stricter than those of the law setting the minimal requirements of society. This view is shared by 52 % of respondents. The differences between men (62 %) and women (47 %) are noteworthy, and an even greater percentage (73 %) is found among managers. However, the conviction that ethics stands for complying with both the letter and spirit of the law (41 % of respondents, 35 % men and 44 % women) is significant, and among higher managers, ethics is perceived as such by 24 % of respondents. While 4 % of respondents identify ethics with the letter of the law, 3 % do not know how ethics could be characterised.

Ethical problems in public administration are perceived rather differently by men and women, the differences according to the gender of respondents are statistically significant – Standardized Coefficients Beta 0.106, T -2.8, Sig. 0.01. While men consider the most serious problems to be the difficult definition and explanation of the public interest, formal fulfilment of tasks, and efforts to foster the views of a superior regardless of whether right or wrong, women point out the misuse of office and corrupt tendering. Agreement can be observed in views on advancing personal interests to the detriment of the public interest (one third of respondents believe this is a serious problem). Respondents from the local level of administration assess corruption and clientelism, as well as fostering private interests, as more serious than respondents from the central level.

Czech society is generally known as tolerant to conflict of interest, which is corroborated by this research given that only less than one quarter of respondents regard this problem as grave. In the case of public officers, 10 % of them do not see any ethical problem in their work.

Table 2 displays the descriptive statistics of independent variables that correlate with the dependent variable, Perception of the development of ethics in public administration.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of independent variables of regression analysis

Independent variable	Percentage	Male	Female
Corruption, clientelism	31.6 %	31.1 %	31.9 %
Vaguely defined public interest	23.9 %	31.5 %	20.0 %
Misuse of official position	22.8 %	17.1 %	25.7 %
Formal fulfilment of tasks	35.1 %	40.6 %	32.3 %
Manipulation of tenders	21.6 %	15.9 %	24.5 %

Table 3 shows the effects of the independent variables – Corruption, Clientelism; Vaguely defined public interest; Misuse of official position; Formal fulfilment of tasks; Manipulation of tenders – on the prediction of the dependent variable, Perception of the development of ethics in public administration. Only two variables in Table 3 have a statistically significant influence on the prediction of the understanding of ethics:

- conviction that formal fulfilment of tasks is a major ethical problem,
- officer's gender.

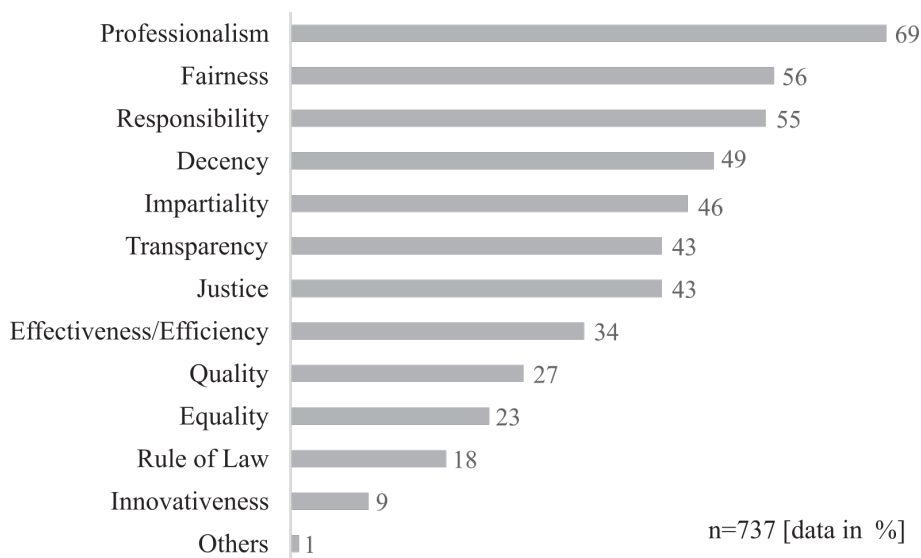
All respondents who perceive the formal fulfilment of tasks as a crucial ethical problem, and men participating in the survey, more often than participating women, understand ethics as a complement to the law, representing standards higher than those laid down by the law.

Table 3: Regression analysis of ethical problems and the perception of ethics development

Predictor	Non-standardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
Constant	2.618	0.106		24.7	0.000
Corruption, clientelism	-0.049	0.047	-0.039	-1.0	0.30
Unclear public interest	0.079	0.051	0.059	1.5	0.13
Misuse of office	-0.080	0.052	-0.059	-1.5	0.12
Formal fulfilment of tasks	0.108	0.047	0.090	2.3	0.02
Manipulation of tenders	-0.072	0.052	-0.052	-1.4	0.17
Gender	-0.128	0.046	-0.106	-2.8	0.01
Position	0.064	0.036	0.066	1.8	0.08

Values

Although 83 % of respondents confirm the key importance of values, only a narrow majority believe that values are known in their organisation. The complete ranking of values is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Values in order as perceived by respondents.

Three most significant values, Professionalism, Fairness, and Responsibility were selected for further analysis by means of the Logit model. This model explores the relationship between the dependent variables: Professionalism, Fairness, Responsibility, and the binary variables: Existence of a debate on values; Attendance at a debate on values; Interest in a debate on values, as well as the categorical variables: Identification with values; Debates on values; Assertion that values do not relate to professionalism; Gender; Age; Position; and Practical experience. The binary variables – representing questions and sociodemographic characteristics exhibiting the strongest influence – were identified using the Lagrange test. Results are shown in Table 4.

Women identify themselves more with values than men (Professionalism is statistically significant). Identification with values increases with a respondent's age, except for Responsibility, where it is strongest between ages 45 and 59, dropping again after age 60. Officers aged up to 44 years do not adhere to professionalism much. Table 3 reveals that the existence of debates on ethics (or interest in it if none are held) has a positive influence on the inclination to Professionalism while diminishing that to Responsibility. However, the respondents who attend such debates exhibit the opposite tendency. Respondents who agree fully with the assertion that "values should be debated in the organisation" have a less frequent inclination to Professionalism than officers who give this assertion only small or no credit (this is, however, no longer significant). Although increasing agreement with the assertion that "it is professionalism that is key in a given field and values are irrelevant" is conceptually linked with a higher

inclination to Professionalism, the model reveals a lower inclination to Fairness. A growing tendency to agree with this assertion does have a negative impact on responsibility, but the respondents who agree with this assertion strongly incline to Responsibility.

Table 4: Logit model analysing the relationships of the dependent variables Professionalism, Fairness, Responsibility with selected binary and categorical variables.

	Professionalism		Fairness		Responsibility	
	B	Sig.	B	Sig.	B	Sig.
Existence of debate on values	0.44	0.52	-0.01	0.99	-0.37	0.61
Participation in debate on values	-0.25	0.73	0.05	0.95	1.03	0.18
Interest in debate on values	0.24	0.27	0.36	0.09	-0.15	0.49
Identification with values		0.38		0.62		0.35
No***	0.24	0.78	-0.44	0.62	0.27	0.75
Rather no	0.47	0.31	-0.76	0.14	-0.40	0.41
Neither yes nor no	-0.44	0.14	0.00	0.99	-0.36	0.23
Yes	-0.14	0.47	-0.13	0.50	-0.38	0.05
Debates on values		0.07		1.00		0.70
No***	-0.62	0.63	-20.07	1.00	-0.26	0.84
Rather no	0.48	0.23	0.05	0.90	0.28	0.49
Neither yes nor no	0.76	0.01	-0.06	0.85	0.42	0.16
Yes	0.43	0.02	-0.03	0.87	0.17	0.39
Values do not belong to professionalism		0.24		0.02		0.56
No***	-0.48	0.34	1.39	0.02	-0.06	0.91
Rather no	-0.37	0.45	1.03	0.08	-0.28	0.57
Neither yes nor no	-0.17	0.74	0.77	0.21	-0.43	0.41
Yes	0.21	0.70	0.81	0.20	-0.44	0.43
Gender	-0.52	0.00	-0.09	0.62	-0.14	0.44
Age		0.01		0.24		0.29
18–29 years	-0.94	0.02	-0.68	0.07	-0.19	0.64
30–44 years	-0.84	0.01	-0.61	0.06	0.07	0.85
45–59 years	-0.28	0.41	-0.62	0.05	0.35	0.31
Position		0.07		0.25		0.27
Officers	-0.52	0.15	0.00	0.99	-0.25	0.49
Middle management	-0.13	0.73	-0.32	0.38	0.06	0.88
Experience		0.10		0.11		0.05
Up to 5 years	-0.47	0.04	0.44	0.05	0.57	0.01
6–10 years	-0.14	0.52	0.09	0.70	0.32	0.18
Constant	1.31	0.06	-1.08	0.14	-0.50	0.46

***low number of respondents

Both the “Significance of ethical problems in public administration” regression analysis (Table 3) and the “Values” Logit model (Table 4) correctly predict about two thirds of the observed values, on average. The modelled professionalism correctly predicts 457 of 737 cases, thus being the only model to correctly

predict more than one half of both observations “yes” (identification with the value) and “no” (no identification with the value).

To test the Common-Method-Bias (CMB), Harman's single factor score was calculated, in which all items (measuring latent variables) were loaded into one common factor. The total variance for a single factor proved that CMB does not affect the data, and hence the results.

Improvement in the ethical climate

In this paragraph, RQ2 is addressed using the survey results and their analysis.

Ethical code

For employees subject to the Civil Service Act, the ethical code is binding. However, 12 % of respondents have not heard about any such code, while 5 % say that they have none. Only 55 % of the respondents confirming the existence of the code think that all officers are familiar with it, 24 % do not think so, and 22 % do not know. Only 11 % of these respondents believe that observation of the code is being monitored, 61 % are of the opposite opinion, while 28 % do not know.

When asking officers what helps them resolve ethical problems, we find that they consider the code ineffective. Most prefer to draw on their previous experience (49 %) or the experience of someone else who has been in a similar situation (38 %), while 36 % of respondents say that they consult a lawyer and try to find support in the existing law, with an ethical code coming last (34 %). Someone else's experience is sought by a significantly higher percentage of male managers (60 %) compared to female managers (46 %).

The ethical code is the most widespread instrument and, according to 48 % of respondents, its efficient implementation would be significantly helped by an open debate on ethical problems. On the other hand, 45 % of respondents think that the personal example of a superior has more strength, with men considering a personal example much more important (56 %) than women (39 %). The third most frequent opinion (40 %) values ethical training and education most, with women more (44 %) than men (31 %). Managers are most convinced by an example of a superior (which could be interpreted simply as a sign of self-esteem).

Education and training

Awareness of ethics training courses is low, but officers do regard courses on ethics as helpful, with 70 % of the respondents who had no opportunity to attend any courses stating they would be interested. More interest in this regard was

shown by women, respondents dissatisfied with the development of the climate in the workplace, and respondents interested in debates on ethics and values.

Ethical leadership

The importance of ethical leadership receives considerable emphasis. An example set by a superior is seen as important by 98 % of respondents, more by women and mid-management. Nevertheless, only 5 % of respondents reported ethical leadership being actively exercised. Respondents from local self-governance would be in favour of appointing a person in charge of ethical issues in their offices.

Debates on ethics

Debates on ethical problems in organisations rarely occur. Only 21 % of respondents gave a positive answer when asked whether a discussion takes place, while 41 % said they did not know whether there were any. At higher levels, debates on ethics occur more frequently (42 %), with this frequency dropping in line with lower management levels; only 19 % of rank-and-file employees say that debates exist in their organisation, while 44 % are not informed about any debates occurring. Debates in local and self-governance organisations are rather exceptional. Officers, however, do show interest in discussions of ethical problems (72 % of respondents) at all levels.

The development of an ethical climate

The development of an ethical climate in the workplace is perceived as improving by almost one half of the respondents, while over one third (38 %) are of the opinion that it does not have a promising outlook. The concept of fostering general awareness of an ethical code by all employees in an organisation and the existence of a person in charge of ethical issues have a positive influence on the perception of development in the right direction. Conversely, the respondents' perception of the overall climate is influenced negatively by situations in which respondents would be forced to accept the ideas of their superiors regardless of whether this was right, followed by personal interests being prioritised to the detriment of the public interest, and by corrupt tendering for positions of higher public officers. 31 % respondents indicate that ethical problems in the organisation are being addressed more than before and thus the development of an ethical climate in the workplace is perceived as positive.

What helps to solve ethical problems

When facing ethical problems, the respondents mostly draw on the previous experience of someone else in a similar situation, consult a lawyer, or refer

to an ethical code. Respondents aged 60+, and those who are guided by personal attitudes rather than by the rules of the internal environment, place more importance on their own previous experience. Engagement in debates on ethical problems is mentioned most often as a potential instrument strengthening ethics. Interesting differences regarding the importance of previous experience exist between male and female managers. For 67 % of men and for 47 % of women, their own experience is important. Men also attach more weight to the experience of colleagues (40 %) compared to their female counterparts (29 %).

The importance of organisational culture and personal attitudes

Individual decision-making of our respondents depends on both personal attitudes (51 %) and the organisational culture (46 %). Interesting results have been obtained for the respondents' colleagues. They assume that 50 % of colleagues are guided by the rules in force in the organisation and its environment, 25 % are guided by their own conviction about what is right, 13 % are guided by the expectation of their environment, and 1 % of colleagues honour ethical rules regardless of the consequences this may entail.

The relationship between the use of ethics resources and ethics outcomes, i.e., whether and how the components of ethics resources contribute to an improvement in the ethical climate in public administration, was examined by means of statistical analysis. No evidence was found yet in the Czech context of a higher number of ethics resources (components of ethical infrastructure) leading to increasing the importance of organisational culture. Only very few significant results were obtained. The main outcome is an indication that the number of ethics resources used is in direct proportion to the positive perception of the development of ethics in an organisation and to the intensity of addressing ethical problems.

Table 5: Correlation of ethics resources to the perception of improvement in the ethical climate of public administration

	Pearson Correlation	Sig.2-tailed	Sig.2-tailed
Development of ethics in work-place	0.152	0.001	0.000
Number of perceived ethical problems in workplace	-0.79	0.089	0.045
Attention paid to ethics in the organisation	0.160	0.001	0.000

Table 5 shows that the number of ethics resources used influences the subjective perception of the existence of ethical problems (the more resources are used by

the organisation, the fewer the ethical problems). However, this influence is not statistically significant.

No support is found for the assertion that the more ethics resources are used by the organisation, the greater is the importance of the organisational culture for decision-making. However, note that, generally, Czech public administration organisations use too few resources such that a positive experience is missing. We have, however, registered a slight but clear direct correlation between the higher number of resources used and the perception of ethics development in the workplace.

Discussion

The specific design of the survey, which aimed primarily at identifying the training needs of public officers, limits the scope of potential comparisons with other countries, which we see as the major limitation of our approach.

While an international survey in 29 OECD member-states conducted in 1999–2000 (OECD 2000)⁷ showed that the most frequent among values are impartiality (24 countries), legality (22 countries) and fairness (18), followed by transparency (14), efficiency (14), equality (11), responsibility (11), and justice (10), in the Czech Republic, the ranking is rather different. Officers, who were offered to make an ordered choice of 5 values from a list inspired by the above OECD survey, consider professionalism the most important (69 %), but young officers value equality and justice more. Surprisingly, relatively low importance is given to the rule of law (18 %) despite the fact that, in the Czech Republic, a close relationship between ethics and law is generally perceived, with a prevailing legalistic approach to addressing ethical problems. The rule of law ranks first according to only 7 % of respondents. Interestingly, regression analysis suggests that women incline to values more than men, and this inclination increases with a respondent's age. Further, the results show that officers place considerable importance on professionalism, yet our survey does not use any exact definition of professionalism. Thus, professionalism may overlap with other values, being understood contextually as well as rather comprehensively, and may include ethical content. However, professionalism may also be perceived in a narrower, technical sense that precludes ethical content. We also note the finding related to the desire for equality indicated by younger respondents. Without giving undue importance to this finding, we may observe a positive shift from a mere fulfilling of tasks to a higher ethical awareness among the younger public officers.

Czech public officers are quite tolerant of conflicts of interest. This is, however, not the only difference compared to assessments found in the literature. For

⁷ Due to a delayed modernisation of Czech public administration compared to the OECD countries, older data is used on purpose.

example, Hanekom et al. (1990) identified the following most frequent ethical problems in the public sector: bribery, nepotism and theft; conflicts of interest; misuse of insider knowledge; use and abuse of confidential information for personal purpose; public accountability and corruption. The recent study by Zemanovicova et al. (2019) mentions nepotism, clientelism, corruption and conflicts of interest as the major ethical problems identified by Slovak public officers. In Czech public administration, formal fulfilment of tasks, clientelism and corruption, vaguely defined public interest and misuse of official position rank on top.

The existence of an ethical code itself rarely results in ethical conduct. In the process of introducing the ethical code in Czech public administration, not enough attention has been paid to the experience of other countries, though. When examining the situation in other former Eastern Bloc countries, (for example) e.g., Slovakia, Hungary, and Poland, the Czech Republic is clearly no exception in this regard (Mazur 2020).

Our results indicate that promoting ethics and integrity requires efforts to improve the ethical climate and the ethical competencies of officers. This finding accords with that of the Council for Public Service of the Slovak Republic, which conducted a large-scale survey in public administration (Zemanovicova et al. 2019). Our findings, albeit indirectly, also support the conclusion of Stare and Klun (2016) that, for a country that has undergone a profound transformation process, education is the most important element co-forming an ethical climate, and values and ethical leadership are crucial in cultivating an ethical climate.

Conclusion

Attention paid to ethics in Czech public administration has been very limited, and a narrow perspective prevails. Our research indicates that ethics infrastructure is underdeveloped. In fact, the only element – the ethical code – is not effective. It is not clear, however, to what extent this observation relates to the content of the code or to its insufficient enforcement, or to both. The recommendation to accelerate the implementation of other instruments of ethical infrastructure as the backbone of ethics management is thus obvious.

A major shortcoming discovered by the survey is the lack of ethical models and leadership at the highest levels of public administration. It is significant that ethical leadership, i.e., fostering values and conveying models of behaviour and moral decision-making, is considered by Czech public officers a crucial factor enhancing ethics in their organisations. It is comforting to note that there is considerable interest in debates and education on the part of officers who perceive ethics education and training as important factors moderating the development of an ethical climate. Thus, we conjecture that open debates, education, and ethical leadership are the avenues to pursue. These elements of ethical infrastructure

are likely to increase ethical awareness and develop moral competencies, thus improving the ethical decision-making and behaviour of public officials.

Fostering ethics and public administration integrity in line with the OECD recommendations is clearly a long-term process. Well-prepared training courses that respond to the current demands and needs of officers can and should stimulate the existing interest, and encourage and motivate officers to participate in building a modern public administration that operates with high ethical standards and is trusted by citizens.

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