

## **An Assessment of Managerial and Leadership Competencies and Ethical Climate of Local Government Chief Executives and Senior Managers in the Municipality of Santa Maria, Bulacan: Basis for Good Governance**

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**Abstract.** The research is about the assessment of the managerial and leadership skill and the ethical climate of the chief executives and senior managers in Santa Maria, Bulacan, Philippines. Graft and corruption and other unethical practices are rampant in the Philippines, affecting the effective delivery of public service to the people even with the introduction of reforms in the government, and the existence of the laws and different policies. It is at this point that change in public administration must lean towards reformation of people in government service. The focus of this study was the local government units, because they are the front liners in the delivery of goods and services to the public. With devolved powers from the national government, the local government officers specifically chief executives such as mayor and barangay chairmen, together with senior managers of their respective units, are expected to work in an ethical climate, to manage their work, people, and environment effectively and efficiently leading them towards the achievement of their goals consistent to the Philippine Development Plan 2017-2020. The study utilized descriptive design and percentage frequency distribution. Data were collected by means of a survey questionnaire. It is self-assessment based on competencies and indicators in the survey-questionnaire and using the same set of questionnaire, the same local officials were evaluated by their respective constituents. The study confirmed that managerial and leadership competencies and ethical climate are essential qualifications in good governance.

**Keywords:** managerial competencies, leadership competencies, ethical climate, local government

### **Introduction**

Philippines is ranked 35th from among the most corrupt countries in the world in 2016 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), signifying a worst scenario in Philippine governance. According to the records of Ombudsman's Finance and Management Information Office, the number of administrative and criminal cases against erring local government officials range from 2,697 in 2015 to 2,799 in 2016. There were 1,700 cases filed against city/municipal officials, 892 against village officials, and 204 cases against provincial officials which signifies that the local government units are the forerunners in the graft and corruption cases (Dalipe, 2017). The swelling numbers of these cases are boggling and damaging to the reputation's government development plan.

The current administration focuses primarily in providing a people centered, clean, and effective governance. The main agenda is to diminish corruption, provide an efficient and effective public service, improve governance, and empower civil service and citizens (Philippine

Development Plan 2017-2022). Laws such as the Anti-Graft and Corrupt Practices Act or the Republic Act (RA) 3019, The Government Procurement Reform Act or RA 9084, and the Code of Conduct and Ethical Standard for Public Officials and Employees have been constant reminders to all government officials and employees that they are elected, appointed, or hired as public servants providing goods and services to people with honesty and integrity.

Despite the administration's reform and the existence of the law, graft, corruption and other unethical practices are still rampant, therefore, affecting the effective delivery of public service to the people. Personal incentives, dishonesty, power grabbing, incompetence, and willingness to act in exchange for money and personal interests are the prevailing features of public service in the Philippines (Sable, 2015).

At this point, the change in public administration must lean towards reformation of the actors who played the lead roles in government service. In a research study conducted in United States Federal Agencies, there were undeniable demands for public managers (political leaders and senior executives) to adopt innovative strategies to maximize human resource capacities (Ugaddan, Reginald G & Park, Sung Min, 2014). Thus, there is a call for revisiting mission, goals, and assessing the qualifications of political leaders and senior managers in the government to heed the need for an effective and clean civil service.

Reliable government requires a formidable leader and a skillful manager who possesses indisputable competence and integrity. Management skills involves systems and hierarchy while leadership deals with people and its culture. For this reason, government leaders national or local must be effective in both areas, being a leader and a manager (Dukakis, Michael S & Portz, John H., 2010). However, good governance is more than just the need for a manager-leader to restore the faith of the people in government. There must also be high regard to integrity and ethics.

Ethics is the right conduct exercise by government officials from department heads to rank-and-file employees (Oyelana, Akeem A.; Kang'ethe, S.M., 2016). There are five ethical climates, citing the works of Martin and Cullen: caring or concern for others; independent or a person own personal moral beliefs; law and code or the organizations' decision-making observing external codes; rules or prevailing rules and conduct; and the instrumental or the organizations' decision based on its personal interest (Wesarat, Phathara-on; Sharif, Mohmad Y.; Halim, Abdul; Majid, Abdul, 2017). The involvement of ethics in public administration leads to a sustainable public administration which harvests productive and effective results. Ethical reasoning is the answer to the complexities of a situation and may provide a feasible solution. Hence, it means that ethics is the need of the public in case of difficult scenario (Almutairi, Hezam; Mahmood, Arahad, 2014).

However, it is noted that even there is a well-developed ethical structure where personal values play a vital role in determining ethical behavior. The results further showed that unethical behavior in politics can be overcome by ethical leadership and permanent education in the field of values and ethical behavior. Hence, the process of introducing ethical climate should start from a good leader (Stare, Janez; Klun, Maja, 2017). As a result, having good governance is dependent

on the managerial, leadership skills and the existence of ethical climate in the public sector, local or national. Thus, it is imperative that an assessment must be conducted among government officials, and employees, specifically, the chief executives and senior managers of the local government units. These public servants are bound to work seamlessly to achieve sustainable development.

The study aims to focus on local government units because they are the front liners in the delivery of goods and services to the public. Through decentralization, powers are re-distributed, resources are re-allocated and facilities are deployed to the different local units including the power to create and broaden their sources of revenue needed to carry out their duties and responsibilities as public servants. With these devolved powers from the national government, the local government officers specifically the chief executives such as governors, mayors, and barangay chairmen together with the senior managers of their respective units are expected to work in an ethical climate, and manage their work, people, and environment among others effectively and efficiently leading them towards the achievement of their goals consistent to the Philippine Development Plan 2017-2020. Thus, they are the core of public administration, and the heart of good governance.

The focus of the research is one of the municipalities of Bulacan, which is Santa Maria (Figure 1, 2 & 3). It has a land area of 9,092 hectares and a population of 256,454. It has three highly urbanized barangays namely Poblacion, Bagbaguin, and Santa Clara and categorized as one of the leading financial centers in Bulacan. Santa Maria's total assets amounts to Php 1 billion with a revenue of Php 560 million based on the report of the Commission on Audit last 2016. Moreover, it prides on having one of the lowest poverty rates in the Philippines, 4%. (Bulacan, n.d.)

**Figure 1**  
**The Map of the Province of Bulacan**



(Bulacan Province, 2016)

**Figure 2**  
**Map of the Municipality of Santa Maria**



(Wikipedia, 2018)

Nonetheless, good governance is radiated not only from the income, population or landmass but from the managerial, leadership skills and ethical values of the people manning the province to provide an accountable, transparent, and responsive public service and regain the trust of their respective constituents.

**Figure 3**  
**Boundary Map of the Municipality of Santa Maria**



(Wikipedia, 2018)

## **Problem Statement**

This study was primarily designed to assess the managerial and leadership skill and the ethical climate of the local chief executives and senior managers of the municipality of Santa Maria, Bulacan. It was intended to determine the managerial and leadership competencies of the local officers through indicators namely: leadership, clear purpose and vision, responsiveness to the needs of the people, partnership development/external relationship building, skilled and committed people, effective process and systems, management of resources, and organizational learning, innovation and change. Furthermore, it was proposed to know the capabilities of the government officials to observe and promote values of ethical climate such as integrity, professionalism, respect for diversity and accountability. Finally, it attempted to determine if possession of managerial and leadership skills and ethical climate sufficient basis for good governance.

## **Significance of the Study**

The study aimed to serve as a gauge to know the performance of the local chief executives and senior managers in the Municipality of Santa Maria and guide the Department of Local Government, and Civil Service Commission in determining the efficiency and competencies of the local government chief executives and senior managers. The study will also serve as tool for the Filipino people and government to know the capabilities of their public servants and make the necessary actions in case of incompetence. Furthermore, the academe and researchers will benefit by anchoring future researches on this study.

## **Methodology**

A quantitative approach was utilized because it is more steadfast and detached. The study also adopted percentage frequency distribution because it is effectively useful in stating survey responses and other data. The study population were the chief local executives namely the mayor, all barangay chairmen, and senior managers in the municipality. It also used simple purposive sampling in selecting respondents from among the constituents in each barangay to avoid the odds of having bias respondents.

There were two sets of questionnaires used, first was self-assessment survey questionnaire for the chief executives and senior managers and second was a survey questionnaire for the constituents of the barangay. The first one used importance (high, medium and low) and personal progress (undeveloped, learning and proficient) as the level of measurement. The second set used a 5 point Likerts scales from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

The results were measured based on previous studies on the leadership competencies and ethical climate and then, data were compiled, classified, and analyzed using the percentage frequency distribution.



## **Theoretical and Conceptual Framework**

A paper was made underscoring that the success of public manager is based on skill triangle, which refers to three different types of competencies: technical, leadership, and ethical. It went further by identifying five competence areas of public sector managers, which are task competence, professional competence in subject area, professional competence in administration, political competence, and ethical competence (Jalocha, Beata; Krane, Hans Peter; Ekambaram, Anandasivakumar; Prawelska-Skrzypek, Grazyna, 2014). This paper emphasized the competencies mentioned are the most important skills of public servants to meet the demands of public sector employers.

Professor Sherlito Sable's research gave us a process maturity framework which provided three levels of moral ascendancy and the corresponding stages of public ethics maturity. The first level of moral ascendancy is the compliance as public servants as compelled by law. This is also the first stage of public ethics, formation stage. It aims to inculcate into the minds of public servants the need to follow laws, and rules and the agency head oversees that these are strictly complied. Level of integrity and transformations are the succeeding stages where good character is expected to develop into an entrepreneurial behavior where the role of the agency head is more of a manager. A public servant must make an investment for him to outshine in the performance of his function. Afterwards, there is the internalization of public norms and rules referred to as institutionalized good character and meta-formation stage. It is at this stage where culture of ethics is very evident and giving importance to needs of the people and prioritizing service to the public are the ultimate goal of the organization (Sable, 2015). Agency heads must be the role model of good governance and be an example of an ethical public servant and such transformation of local officials into an ethical leader-manager requires determination and conviction not only of the person himself but also of the institution.

As Dr. Alex Brillantes, Jr. pointed out, it was in the reformation of institutions, processes and procedures that an institution can be at par with the private sector in terms of standard of performance and, changing the mindset of the people are important factor in achieving the vision of good governance. The people will regain their trust to the government if they could see the character of a transformational leader to those in power. Thus, it will result into the active engagement of the citizen in order to restore the trust and build integrity in the government (Brillantes, Alex, Jr. ; Fernandez, Maricel T., 2011).

Civil Service Commission Memorandum Order No. 05 provided the minimum required proficiency / competency level for leadership position in the government. The competencies are as follows:

1. Building collaborative, and inclusive working relationships;
2. Managing performance and coaching for results;
3. Leading Change;

4. Thinking strategically and creatively;
5. Creating and nurturing a high performing organization.

By and large, the office of Human Resources Management of United Nations provides an organizational development tool which stated the following indicators: clear purpose and direction, effective process, skilled and committed people, well-managed resources, response to client needs and partnership development, accountability and organizational learning, innovation and change, to determine the competencies of government officials. They also provided values namely integrity, professionalism, and respect for diversity anchored on climate of trust and openness (Office of the Human Resource Management).

The competencies above-mentioned together with previous researches were used as the basis of the researcher in the assessment of the managerial, leadership skills and the ethical climate of the local chief executives and senior managers of the municipality of Santa Maria.

The researcher processed the inputs using competencies such as leadership, clear purpose and vision, responsiveness to community needs, partnership development/ external relationship building, skill and commitment, and well-managed resources as provided in the questionnaire and ethical values such as integrity, professionalism, respect for diversity and accountability. The variables were validly assessed to determine the existence of good governance, as shown in the paradigm of the study (Figure 4).

**Figure 4**  
**Paradigm of the Study**



The input-process-output was completed or by producing an assessment tool which the government can use in evaluating the performance of their local chief executives and senior managers. Such tool can be the basis of the current administration in determining the extent of assistance they can give to the local officials in providing better quality public service.

## **Literature review**

### **A Manager and a Leader in Public Sector**

The possession of managerial skills is necessary in running the affairs of the government as they manage people, budgets, organizations, programs, stakeholders, information, communication and more (Rosenbloom, David H.; Kravchuk, Robert S.; Clerkin, Richard M., 2015).

Asumeng identified list of competencies for effective performance are as follows: business skills or the technical competence; intrapersonal skills or the indicative of the “core self-evaluations”; interpersonal skills or the initiating, building and maintaining skills; and the leadership skills or the ability to influence or motivate other people. In his study, it appeared that the foregoing were not the only skills needed for managerial competencies, hence researched and provided evidences that career and mentoring skills are also important and summed it up as holistic-domain model (Asumeng, 2014).

In an assessment made by Rasa Pauline, it appears that it is imperative in modern administration to have leadership development because current political and economic conditions are complicated, uncertain and unpredictable, thus it demands leadership skills to untangle the complexities of contemporary organization. The study suggests that the new leadership development must be based on cognitive, social, emotional, and behavioral competencies coupled with managerial traits such as self-awareness, openness, self-confidence and creativity founded on the findings that managers have the strongest expression of emotional and social intelligence competencies (Paulene, 2017).

Leadership is needed to provide an effective and workable plans and programs. The leader must be characterized with confidence, empowerment, vision span and good behavior, modest life, shared vision and will serve as an agent in reforming an institution. The re-engineering of the public sector relies on the transformational leaders and the active participation of the people (Brillantes, Alex, Jr. ; Fernandez, Maricel T., 2011).

Thus, in order to effect reforms in the public administration, engaging the civil servants is an important factor and with a transformational leader at hand, there will be an efficient and effective delivery of government services especially in the local government units.

### **Ethical Climate in Public Administration**

The leadership and management skills is inevitable to attain success in any institution or organization but in a study conducted in Uganda, the finding shows that strong ethical environment is vital in preventing manager's failures in projects and that after gathering data, it appears that there is a positive relationship between managerial competence and ethical climate (Arinaitwe,



Alice; Mwesigwa, Rogers; Anyongyeire, Asaph, 2016). In another article it was stated that bad administration of funds are the main ethical issues, so a public manager must know not only issues and dilemmas but must also provide for proper human resources and an adequate compensation program (Puiu, 2014).

Another research found out and concluded that integrity policy comes from indirect leadership through the development of ethical climates in the organization and public employees and managers consider their day to day decision as a basis of their correct behavior as found in the ethical climate (Erakovich, Rod; Kolthoff, Emile, 2016).

However, it is noted that even there is a well-developed ethical structure, personal values play a vital role in determining ethical behavior. The results further showed that unethical behavior in politics can be overcome by ethical leadership and permanent education in the field of values and ethical behavior. Further, the results emphasized on good leadership. Hence the process of introducing ethical climate should start from a good leader (Stare, Janez; Klun, Maja, 2017).

Ethical codes of conduct must be respected and recognized for an organization to be effective and efficient but commitment must be shown by top governing structure for it be realized and that junior managers have to take it seriously for the benefit of the public (Oyelana, Akeem A.; Kang'ethe, S.M., 2016).

### **Good Governance in Local Government**

Good governance must be observed by both national and local government. National government watch for the welfare of the entire country but the local units make sure that the needs and demands of their people is met.

Reinventing local government, each unit must pursue for political relevance and adoption of reforms a better service to the public, giving great impact on the lives of their respective constituents (Ocenar, Remigio; Cordero, Rosa; Prieto, Prejean). The role of the local government units' changes as the demand of the position changes and thus, the local government personnel must possess the skills and knowledge to provide better services to the public (Legaspi, 2012). Senior executives Service also known as the elite corps of the civil servants may affect the motivation and empowerment. In empowering leadership, it must allow the employees to know the significance of his work for the organization; recognizing competence and prospect for high performance; encourages self-determination in the work place and participation in decision-making (Ugaddan, Reginald G; Park, Sung Min, 2014).

### **Discussions**

#### **Self-assessment**

Results show that municipality mayor and senior managers give high importance on all qualifications of an effective and efficient public servant such as leadership, clear purpose and vision, responsiveness to community needs, partnership development/external relationship building, skill and commitment, and well-managed resources as provided in the questionnaire. On the other hand, ethical values such as integrity, professionalism, respect for diversity and

accountability are regarded as significantly high by the chief executives and managers. However, it is quite noticeable that the respondents are not certain as to the importance of an organization need-dictated relationships rather than hierarchy and politics. Thus, it can easily be assumed the existence of cronyism in the said organization. The findings also confirm that despite the number of years in service the respondents are still in the learning stage in their managerial and leadership competencies. They recognized the fact that exposure and experience is not a guarantee of proficiency as a public servant. The result also states that the respondents are confident of their ethical values on integrity, professionalism and accountability but they are not as consistent when it comes to the application of accountability standards.

The self-assessment by the barangay chairmen gave the impression that that they take their duties and responsibilities seriously as they give 100% importance on all of the above-mentioned qualifications of public servants. Being the front liner of public service the results of their personal progress in terms of being a leader, their purpose and vision, their response to the community needs and their partnership development or external relationship are very high. However, support system is still necessary as they considered themselves still in the learning stage in terms of their skills and commitment to people, effective processes and systems, management of their resources, and organizational learning, innovation and change. The ethical climate of the smallest local government units' leader suggests their willingness to learn despite their long experience and exposure as a public leader.

### **Assessment by the People of the Municipality**

Majority of the constituents-respondents agree and favor how their public servants serve them because for them the municipal chief executives and the senior managers possessed the leadership and managerial competencies. It denotes that their leaders do observe the values of integrity, professionalism, respect for diversity and accountability.

On the other hand, the people perceived their barangay chairmen better than their municipal leader and senior managers in terms of leadership, clear purpose and vision, responsiveness to the needs of the people and the external relationship building but equal weight were given with regards to skills and commitment to the people, effective processes and systems, management of resources and the organizational learning, innovation and change. They also think that their barangay chairmen deserved a favorable assessment in terms of integrity, professionalism, respect for diversity and accountability.

### **Conclusion**

Convincingly, the results convey that the mayor, senior managers, and barangay chairmen of the municipality of Santa Maria in the province of Bulacan possessed the competencies of an ethical manager and leader evidenced by the absence of derogatory records of the local officers and the continuous economic, social and political development of the municipality.

As exemplified by the Municipality of Santa Maria, to effectively and efficiently render good services and satisfy the needs of the people, there is a need to appoint and/or elect people with leadership, managerial competencies and with high regard to ethical conduct. In addition, local officials must open their doors to continuous learning for organizational and personal development, innovation and change because improvement of oneself and the organization are important factors towards the attainment of good governance. Further, it is of paramount importance for the government officials to have political will in policy making and in the implementation of a good law.

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