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SUBJECT: Case Study on comparing and contrasting the Ethics Codes for the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) and the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA)

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RECOMMENDATION(S) FOR ACTION

Upon careful review of the codes of ethics of the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) and the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA), I adopt the ICMA code of ethics to guide my career as a public administrator.

BACKGROUND

Public servants in democratic societies globally are to work along the lines of determining codes of ethics like neutrality, transparency, and accountability; however, most public sectors in developing countries like Ghana lack these basic codes of ethics. The public sector in Ghana is plagued with many administrative lapses that have necessitated the need for me to adopt and embrace certain codes of ethics that will guide my career and effect a change in my country. The codes of ethics of ASPA have been there since 1984 and revised in 2013. In 1924, the ICMA codes of ethics was adopted by the ICMA membership and was amended in June 2020.

ANALYSIS

I am attracted to both the ASPA and the ICMA codes of ethics because their tenets speak a lot to some ethics that the public servants in my country, Ghana, lack. It also gives me a sense of direction, as some of these tenets are values, I consciously lived by growing up.

My review of the ASPA and the ICMA codes of ethics reveals certain similarities and differences between them. To begin with the similarities, first, the promotion of public interest is emphasized in both the ASPA and ICMA tenets 1 and 4, respectively. Promoting the public interest here means public servants should work diligently and selflessly. They have to ensure that their services benefit all citizens.ⁱ Secondly, both emphasize that public servants should keep the citizens in the know regarding community issues. Public servants are to encourage the citizenry to participate in governmental affairs. They are also to provide services to the public in quality and in a friendly manner. This is found in tenets 9 and 3 of the ICMA and ASPA codes of ethics, respectively.ⁱⁱ Again, they both emphasize in their 5th tenet that public servants should assist elected and appointed officials professionally by giving them candid advice and pointing out flaws to them if need be.

I also identified some key distinctions between the two. First, ASPA tenet 2 emphasizes that the public servant should live by the constitution and the law that governs their country. Code 4 also states that public servants should strengthen social equity; these tenets are not explicitly stated in the ICMA code of ethics.ⁱⁱⁱ

A few of the ICMA tenets stand out to be the most influential that guide my career path. First, tenet 3 that asserts, “Demonstrate by word and action the highest standards of ethical conduct and integrity in all public, professional, and personal relationships in order that the member may merit the trust and respect of the elected and appointed officials, employees, and the public.”^{iv} In this regard, as a public servant, I would conduct my services to the public with the highest form of integrity in a professional manner. This would help me gain the trust and respect of the citizenry as a whole.

Second, tenet 11, which posits, “Handle all matters of personnel based on merit so that fairness and impartiality govern a member’s decisions, pertaining to appointments, pay adjustments, promotions, and discipline”^v I adopt this tenet because in my country Ghana, meritocracy plays little to no role in decisions, appointments and promotions. This is due to the “winner takes all” political system. Appointments and job recruitments are not on the grounds of meritocracy but rather based on one’s party being in power or who exactly knows you. I personally experienced this situation during my service as a teaching and research assistant at the University of Ghana, Political Science department. When opportunities came for data collection to aid the lecturers with research, mostly the graduate assistants put in charge of the personnel recruitment gave the opportunities out to their friends who were not working with the department. This was because of the monetary value the opportunity came with hence the teaching assistants who are supposed to gain experience from the opportunity are left dry. Indeed, the Political Science Department of the University of Ghana is political, and this is one of the reasons I did not like my stay there.

Again, Tenet 12 of the ICMA code states, “Public office is a public trust. A member shall not leverage his or her position for personal gain or benefit”^{vi} I adopt this tenet because it reminds me of an unpleasant experience in Ghana. The public servants in my high school ‘Krobo Girls’ Presbyterian Senior High school’ extort money from alumni who go for their transcripts, testimonials and certificates. They do this due to the urgency with which most alumni came for the documents. The terrible aspect of it is the way they make it seem like the right procedure to follow. In my case, I refused to pay the money I was asked to pay, not because I could not afford it but because I knew it was not right. As a deliberate punishment, the service was delayed.

Meanwhile, my friend I went with kept chastising me for not paying the money because it led to us leaving the school as late as 5 pm when we got there as early as 7am. This is something that would take less than 10 minutes to deliver, as there was no one else in the queue.

CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATION(S) FOR ACTION

In conclusion, I adopt the ICMA over ASPA code of ethics because of its professional and intense nature. From my research, I learnt that the ICMA kicks members out when they go contrary to the tenets and this is done publicly, however ASPA does not do so publicly. I also believe there is a whole lot of change that needs to be in effect in my country's public service and I can only make it better for my upcoming generation to be the better person.

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END NOTES

ⁱ Box, R. C. (2015). *Public service values*. M.E Sharpe & ICMA, “ICMA Code of Ethics (Amended June 2020)”

ⁱⁱ Box, R. C. (2015). *Public service values*. M.E Sharpe & ICMA, “ICMA Code of Ethics (Amended June 2020)”

ⁱⁱⁱ Box, R. C. (2015). *Public service values*. M.E Sharpe

^{iv} ICMA, “ICMA Code of Ethics (Amended June 2020)”

^v ICMA, “ICMA Code of Ethics (Amended June 2020)”

^{vi} ICMA, “ICMA Code of Ethics (Amended June 2020)”

