

Evaluating The Impact Of Ethical Procurement Practices On Occupational Health And Safety In Public Sector Organizations

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Abstract

Ethical procurement has increasingly become a strategic necessity for public sector organizations globally. As governments seek to ensure accountability, transparency, and social responsibility in public spending, the connection between procurement practices and occupational health and safety (OHS) outcomes has gained scholarly and policy attention. This paper evaluates the impact of ethical procurement practices on OHS in public sector organizations. It highlights how adherence to ethical principles in procurement including fairness, integrity, transparency, and sustainability contributes to improved workplace safety, reduced hazards, and enhanced employee well-being. Using a conceptual and analytical approach, the paper draws from global and Nigerian experiences to establish the significance of integrating ethical procurement standards with health and safety management systems. The study concludes that ethical procurement is not only a compliance requirement but also a preventive strategy that mitigates occupational risks while ensuring organizational sustainability. Recommendations are made for policymakers and administrators to institutionalize ethical procurement standards within OHS frameworks for effective implementation.

Keywords: *Ethical procurement, occupational health and safety, public sector, transparency, risk management, sustainability.*

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I. Introduction

Public sector organizations worldwide are under increasing pressure to adopt ethical and sustainable procurement practices. Procurement, being a critical function in public administration, influences economic efficiency, environmental sustainability, and social welfare (Thai, 2019). In the Nigerian context, where government spending accounts for a significant portion of GDP, ethical procurement is central to ensuring that public resources are used responsibly and effectively. However, procurement decisions also have indirect yet significant implications on occupational health and safety (OHS) outcomes (Adeyemi & Adebayo, 2021).

Ethical procurement practices ensure that goods and services are sourced in a manner that respects human rights, promotes safety, and avoids harm to workers and the public. Conversely, unethical procurement such as favoritism, use of substandard materials, or disregard for compliance—can expose employees and contractors to occupational hazards. For example, the procurement of defective equipment or unsafe construction materials can lead to accidents, injuries, or fatalities (ILO, 2020).

This paper evaluates the impact of ethical procurement practices on occupational health and safety in public sector organizations, with particular reference to Nigeria. It examines the conceptual framework of ethical procurement and OHS, identifies interlinkages between the two, and discusses empirical findings and policy recommendations for sustainable practice.

II. Conceptual Clarifications

Ethical Procurement Practices

Ethical procurement refers to purchasing activities that uphold fairness, transparency, accountability, and integrity throughout the supply chain (CIPS, 2022). According to the Chartered Institute of Procurement and Supply (CIPS), ethical procurement ensures that suppliers and contractors adhere to legal, social, and environmental standards. This involves avoiding conflicts of interest, bribery, discrimination, and environmental harm, while promoting fair competition and respect for human rights (Ambe & Badenhorst-Weiss, 2012).

In the public sector, ethical procurement is often codified through national regulations and international guidelines such as the United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC) and the OECD Procurement Principles. In Nigeria, the Public Procurement Act (PPA) of 2007 establishes the legal framework for ethical procurement in government institutions.

Occupational Health and Safety (OHS)

Occupational health and safety refer to policies, practices, and procedures aimed at ensuring a safe and healthy working environment (WHO, 2018). OHS encompasses preventive measures that protect workers from physical, chemical, biological, and ergonomic hazards. The International Labour Organization (ILO, 2020) emphasizes that occupational safety is not only a moral obligation but also a legal and economic necessity, as poor safety practices can lead to productivity losses, compensation costs, and reputational damage.

Ethical Procurement and OHS Nexus

The relationship between ethical procurement and OHS is grounded in the principle of responsible sourcing. When public sector organizations procure products or services, their decisions influence working conditions across the supply chain. Ethical procurement demands that suppliers comply with OHS standards, provide safe equipment, and adhere to labor laws (Utting, 2021). In this sense, procurement is a tool for enforcing workplace safety indirectly, ensuring that only qualified and compliant contractors are engaged.

III. Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Stakeholder Theory and the Triple Bottom Line Theory.

Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 1984) posits that organizations must consider the interests of all stakeholders—including employees, suppliers, and the public in their decision-making processes. In the procurement context, ethical practices safeguard stakeholder trust by ensuring fairness and reducing occupational risks associated with unsafe procurement.

Triple Bottom Line Theory (Elkington, 1997) emphasizes three dimensions of sustainability: economic, social, and environmental. Ethical procurement integrates these dimensions by promoting economic efficiency (value for money), social justice (fair labor practices), and environmental stewardship (sustainable sourcing). A strong OHS culture aligns with the social aspect of sustainability, reinforcing the ethical duty to protect workers' lives and well-being.

IV. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative review approach by analyzing secondary data from journal articles, government policies, international standards, and case studies on ethical procurement and OHS. The analysis synthesizes data from reputable sources such as the World Health Organization (WHO), International Labour Organization (ILO), and the Nigerian Bureau of Public Procurement (BPP).

The review focuses on identifying the link between ethical procurement implementation and health and safety outcomes across various public sector settings, particularly infrastructure, energy, and meteorological agencies.

V. Ethical Procurement Practices In The Public Sector

Public sector procurement plays a pivotal role in ensuring that projects and services meet health and safety standards. Ethical procurement ensures the following principles are upheld:

1. **Transparency:** All procurement processes should be open and accountable. Transparent bidding processes minimize corruption and ensure only competent contractors with safety records are selected (OECD, 2021).
2. **Fairness and Integrity:** Ethical procurement requires fair evaluation and selection of suppliers, preventing undue influence or bribery that may lead to the selection of substandard contractors (Ambe & Badenhorst-Weiss, 2012).
3. **Compliance with Standards:** Ethical procurement enforces compliance with health, safety, and environmental standards. For example, contractors must demonstrate compliance with ISO 45001 (Occupational Health and Safety Management Systems).
4. **Sustainability Considerations:** Ethical procurement prioritizes suppliers who adopt environmentally friendly and socially responsible practices (Elkington, 1997).
5. **Accountability:** Procurement officers and project managers must be held accountable for decisions that compromise safety or lead to occupational incidents.

VI. Impact Of Ethical Procurement On Occupational Health And Safety

Ethical procurement practices have a multi-dimensional impact on OHS, particularly in the following areas:

Reduction of Workplace Accidents

Selecting contractors who comply with OHS standards reduces accidents and injuries. Studies by Adeyemi and Adebayo (2021) reveal that unethical procurement, such as awarding contracts to unqualified firms, significantly increases accident rates in public projects.

Promotion of Safe Work Environments

Procurement officers influence the safety culture by mandating safety certifications during tendering. This ensures that only organizations with effective safety management systems are engaged (ILO, 2020).

Prevention of Corruption-Related Hazards

Corruption in procurement often leads to the purchase of substandard materials or equipment, which can endanger workers.

Ethical procurement eliminates such risks through transparency and accountability mechanisms (OECD, 2021).

Strengthening Legal and Institutional Compliance

Ethical procurement ensures compliance with legal frameworks like the Nigerian Public Procurement Act (2007) and international conventions on labor and safety. Compliance minimizes occupational exposure to risks arising from negligence or cost-cutting practices.

Enhancement of Organizational Reputation

Organizations that uphold ethical procurement and OHS standards enjoy improved public trust, which enhances employee morale and productivity (CIPS, 2022).

VII. Challenges Of Implementing Ethical Procurement For OHS

Despite its importance, several challenges hinder the effective integration of ethical procurement and OHS in public sector organizations:

1. **Corruption and Political Interference:** In many developing countries, political influence compromises the integrity of procurement decisions (Ogunlana, 2020).
2. **Limited Capacity and Training:** Many procurement officers lack the knowledge to assess suppliers' compliance with OHS standards (Ambe, 2019).
3. **Weak Monitoring Mechanisms:** Inadequate auditing and follow-up limit the enforcement of ethical and safety requirements.
4. **Resource Constraints:** Budgetary pressures may lead organizations to prioritize cost over safety compliance.
5. **Lack of Institutional Coordination:** Disconnection between procurement, safety, and environmental departments leads to policy inconsistency.

VIII. Case Study: Ethical Procurement And Safety Compliance In Nigeria's Public Sector

The Nigerian Meteorological Agency (NiMet) provides a case example of how ethical procurement can influence workplace safety. The agency's procurement of meteorological equipment, such as weather radars, sensors, and calibration tools, follows the Public Procurement Act (2007).

Before installation, a **Job Hazard Analysis (JHA)** is conducted to identify risks associated with each equipment type, ensuring that suppliers adhere to both ethical and safety standards (Hussaini, 2024). By enforcing supplier prequalification and performance monitoring, NiMet ensures that contractors meet OHS requirements. Such alignment between ethical procurement and safety policy reduces equipment-related hazards and ensures safe installation practices.

IX. Policy Implications And Recommendations

1. **Institutionalize OHS Criteria in Procurement Guidelines:** Government procurement regulations should include mandatory OHS compliance requirements.
2. **Capacity Building:** Training programs for procurement and safety officers should emphasize ethics and risk assessment.
3. **Integration of Monitoring Systems:** Establish audit units that monitor both procurement integrity and safety compliance.
4. **Public Accountability Mechanisms:** Strengthen whistleblower protection and digital procurement platforms to enhance transparency.
5. **International Collaboration:** Public institutions should align procurement and OHS standards with ISO and ILO frameworks to ensure global best practices.

X. Conclusion

Ethical procurement is a powerful instrument for promoting occupational health and safety in public sector organizations. By integrating ethical standards into procurement processes, governments can prevent workplace hazards, enhance employee welfare, and ensure efficient use of public resources. The Nigerian experience, particularly through agencies like NiMet, demonstrates that the synergy between ethical procurement and OHS can drive institutional sustainability and operational excellence. Therefore, adopting ethical

procurement is not merely a compliance issue it is a strategic imperative for safeguarding workers and promoting organizational integrity.

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