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PROBING THE CONSEQUENTIALIST APPROACH TO SOCIAL SIN AND THE DYNAMICS OF ETHICAL LEADERSHIP IN THE RIVERS STATE INTERNAL REVENUE SERVICE (RIRS), 2015-2025

Rapheal George ALALI
Department of Political Science
Faculty of Social Sciences
Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Nigeria
rapheal.alali@iaue.edu.ng
https://orcid.org/0009-0000-7280-003X

Chimaroke MGBA
Department of Political Science,
Faculty of Social Sciences,
University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria
chimaroke.mgba@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This paper explored the consequential theory of social sin and how ethical leadership operates in Rivers State Internal Revenue Service (RIRS) between the year 2015 and 2025. The study is anchored on the theoretical aspect of consequentialism, conceptualises the social sin to be individual and institutionalised unethical practices that include corruption, revenue leakages, favouritism, and abuse of office whose ethical value is measured by their consequences towards the welfare of people, institutional performance and social-economic growth. The design of the study is a mixed-method, which incorporates both quantitative survey results of the staff of RIRS and qualitative data of in-depth interviews with the key management staff and policy makers. The data were analysed using descriptive methods (mean, standard deviation). The results indicated that ethical leadership that can be demonstrated by transparency, accountability, fairness and integrity has a strong positive impact on revenue generation, staff motivation, public trust and compliance culture in RIRS. On the other hand, the social sins are those practices whose negative effects are felt over a long distance, such as institutional inefficiency, loss of trust on the part of the people and financial instability to the state. The study concluded that social sin can be reduced by strengthening ethical leadership arrangements and instilling outcome-focused moral reasoning in government administration to improve the performance of the institutions. The results suggested that ethics training, effective accountability systems and performance based leadership evaluation systems should be institutionalised in RIRS. This contribution to the literature of the ethical theory and empirical data enables the study to make a contribution to the scholarly debate on the subject of ethics in the context of the public sector, as well as provide policy-relevant information on how to enhance governance and revenue management in Rivers State and other sub-national settings in Nigeria.

Keywords: Social Sin, Leadership, Ethical Leadership, Rivers State.

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INTRODUCTION

Ethics has been one of the pillars of the field of public administration that determines the credibility of the institution, the impacts of the policies and the trust of citizens. It is the moral compass, which helps in defining what is ethically acceptable and unacceptable in the context of organisational codes of conduct and the statutory regime which regulates the public at large. Ethical leadership has become a strategic tool in the fight against corruption, improved organisational performance, and sustainable growth in the modern governance literature (Brown & Trevino, 2006; Denhardt & Denhardt, 2015). Alali and Ogali (2025) have contended that ethical leadership is manifested through leaders who develop self-restraint against the vice and make judgmental decisions between the right and wrong, especially in such contingencies. In Nigeria, where state-owned bodies are fighting with the problem of endemic corruption and weak accountability mechanisms, one of the ethical leadership traits is becoming an invaluable requirement to provide effective services and financial management (Adebayo & Ugwu, 2021; Transparency International, 2023).

The organisational leaders are therefore called upon to apply their administrative skills to address unethical dilemmas in their respective agencies. As conceptualised, therefore, ethical leadership should be customised to the context as a practical implementation of the pre-determined ethical standards finalised by the management, according to which the just and transparent operation of human and material resources and the cultivation of trust in the population (Alali & Ogali, 2025). Institutional leadership and management (ILM) thus involve ethics, values, and morals, and when institutional leaders envisage a vision of viable values, they trigger a change in their behaviors, thus affecting policy outcomes (Ololube, 2018, as cited in Alali & Ogali, 2025). It is based on this that ethical leadership is also defined as a leadership approach that prefigures the ethical aspect of management. It includes the values, ethical characteristics, and behaviours of leaders under the organisational context, as well as how they interact with the employees, institutions, and society (Paez, 2017).

Like any other government agency, the Rivers State Internal Revenue Service (RIRS) is expected to be an ethical leader, and this is where it is positioned in the architecture of the fiscal system of the state. The agency is the one that is involved in tax collection, mobilisation of revenue and imposing revenue laws. Since its establishment under the Board of Internal Revenue Law 1993 (No. 3), to its restructuring in mid-2010s, RIRS has been a target of reforms that increase internally generated revenue (IGR) and limit financial leakages (Rivers State Revenue Administration Law, 2012). The period of 2015 to 2025 is marked by the most remarkable changes in the operational patterns of the agency, such as the digitalisation of taxation with the Rivers State Tax Management Information System (RIVTAMIS), which allows paying taxes online and promotes financial transparency; the reorganisation of the revenue units; and the change in the leadership orientation (Egobueze et al., 2025). However, over the years, it has been argued that revenue collection and remittance in Nigeria still remains marred by a number of challenges. According to Ifeanyi and George (2020), there are cases when people and some corporate organizations want to bribe tax authorities instead of paying taxes. Some tax assessors are in collaboration with taxpayers especially in terms of Personal Income Tax (PIT) hence stealing into private pockets. This behaviour is unethical behaviour, which is not part of the official obligations of revenue agents but an expression of the social sins.

In such a scenario, the concept of social sin provides a useful tool of analysis in the study of the deep-seated unethical behaviors. Social sin refers to institutional and collective sin entrenched in the organisational cultures and social formations, but not just an individual moral failure (John Paul II, 1987; Pogge, 2008). Social sins have plagued many leaders in the institutions of management in Nigeria partly due to the erosion of ethics, values, and morals, and consequently, the erosion of social cohesion (Ololube, 2021). Social sin in the form of normalized bribery, abuse of discretion, collusion with taxpayers, and systemic failure to follow due process appear in the public institutions, such as revenue-collection agencies. These practices undermine institutional integrity and development outcomes are distorted.

This paper takes the consequentialist approach to ethics to question social sin and ethical leadership relationships in RIRS. Consequentialism, especially utilitarianism acknowledges the moral value of actions by their effects on the common good (Mill, 1863; Hooker, 2000). In this respect, the aspects of RIRS leadership choices and institutional norms can be ethically evaluated based on the influence on the revenue, social confidence, efficiency of the administration and the socio-economic progress in Rivers State. Contrary to the deontological techniques where obeying rules is upheld but not the optimal decision to make, consequentialism provides a real-life perspective of evaluating if the decision made by the leadership advances the maximum good to the maximum number, as postulated by Jeremy Bentham.

In exploring the nature of the interplay between social sin and ethical leadership through the prism of consequentialism, this research will aim at making a contribution to the ethical theory as well as the scholarship of public administration. It does not just conceive ethical leadership as a moral ideal that is equivalent with Kantian deontology but as a specific measure of institutional performance and impact of development that focuses on the effects of a leader action within the organisation.

Statement of the Problem

Although revenue agencies in Nigeria have continued to restructure and upgrade their technology, there are still ethical issues that continue to cast doubt on the integrity, effectiveness and sustainability of revenue administration. Regrettably, continued pressure to achieve equity and transparency in the use of tax revenues by fiscal policy pundits, civil society organisations (CSOs) and other stakeholders has never resulted in quantifiable benefits, as a result of absence of political will and unrelenting efforts by the public servants at all levels of governance to seal the tax revenue leakages (Eme & Chukwurah, 2015). Cases of revenue leakages, extorting taxpayers, collusion with businesspeople, unfair application of tax regulations, and politicisation of leadership positions remain frequent in the public and audit reports (Economic and Financial Crimes Commission [EFCC], 2022; Rivers State Auditor-General, 2023). When institutionalised, these unethical practices are types of social sin which are systematically degrading to the welfare of the populace and financial stability.

Ethical leadership has been lacking to curb employee indiscipline and boost morale and this has seen a leakage of revenue and other unethical behaviours, hence limiting the agency to perform its social responsibility of levying taxes. This loss of tens of billions of Naira annually is caused by tax evasion, avoidance, non-compliance, poor remittance and other unethical behaviors (Ironkwe & Ordu, 2016).

Although most of the literature on public sector ethics in Nigeria has been focusing on corruption, accountability, and governance reforms (Akindele, 2019; Iheriohanma & Osuagwu, 2020), the gap of theoretical frames is still quite significant. There is a scarcity of research that has used consequentialist theory of ethics to provide empirical research on the influence of leadership practices and moral reasoning to determine the organisational outcomes in revenue generating agencies. Therefore, there is little academic insight on how the choices made by ethical leaders at RIRS in relation to ethical decisions translate into practical developmental implications of Rivers State.

Furthermore, the majority of empirical studies focused on the compliance with rules and the legal frameworks but do not focus on the ethical assessment of the outcomes. This emphasis has produced policy prescriptions which put procedural reforms on the centre stage without paying significant attention to the more general moral repercussions of leadership behaviour. This has limited academic acumen and policy making both because of the lack of an outcome based, theoretically based ethical analysis. Consequently, the key issue that this research aims to investigate is the poor knowledge of how ethical leadership relations within RIRS considered through the prism of consequentialism affect persistence or reduction of social sin and the establishment of performance in the institution between 2015 and 2025.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The general aim of the study is geared towards probing the consequentialist approach to social sins and the dynamics of ethical leadership in Rivers State Internal Revenue Service (RIRS) from 2015 to 2025. While the study specifically seeks to:

- Examine the nature and manifestations of social sin within RIRS between 2015 and 2025.
- Analyze the ethical leadership styles and practices adopted by RIRS management during the study period
- Assess the consequences of ethical and unethical leadership decisions on revenue generation, staff morale, and public trust in RIRS.

Research Questions

- What is the nature and manifestations of social sin within RIRS between 2015 and 2025?
- What are the ethical leadership styles and practices adopted by RIRS management during the study period?
- What are the consequences of ethical and unethical leadership decisions on revenue generation, staff morale, and public trust in RIRS?

CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

Social Sin

Social sin is a concept that is dealt with in a number of scholarly views, especially in the theological field. In the present paper, sin has been understood as a violation of the religious or moral law, or simply as something that is seen as very reprehensible. The social sin is therefore suggested as a term used to express the occurrence of sin as a social phenomenon. Peter Henriot indicated that social sin refers to:

> Structures that oppress human beings, violate human dignity, stifle freedom, impose gross inequality; (2) situations that pronaote and facilitate individual acts

> of selfishness; (3) the complicity or silent acquiescence of persons who do not take responsibility for the evil being done (Mark, 1990, p.29-30).

The three signs that represent social sins, which depict the intellectual side of Mark, are oppression, offensiveness, and disrespect of both the universal and constitutional norms of social relations. The etymological origin of the sermon of the S Seven Social Sins is attributed to the initial sermon given by Frederick Lewis Donaldson in Westminster Abbey on March 20 1925. According to Donaldson, these transgressions were labeled by the writer as the 7 Deadly Social Evils (Donaldson, n.d., cited in Ololube, 2021). The idea of social sins was not firstly stated by Mahatma Gandhi, but by the same Gandhi in his weekly Indian newspaper on October 22 1925 (Gandhi 1925; Ololube, 2021). The list includes wealth without labour, pleasure without conscience, knowledge without character, commerce without morality, science without humanity; worship without sacrifice and without principles in politics. Munroe (2014: 123) subsequently included a new sin, action without accountability. Therefore, any sin that contravenes the set standards in society brings punishment, something that Paul also urges the Roman Church to avoid because the wages of sin is death (Romans, 6:23). Religious implications of sin echo on the social implications, which though not necessarily capital offences are stipulated by the organisational or state codified legislation.

Leadership

Leadership is an idea that cuts across different human activities, which are politics, business, academia and social work. Therefore, Nweke (2015) describes leadership as the position that is adopted by those who are senior in government and politics through positions of power and authority. Ndu (2017) tries to describe leadership in political and national terms, stating: The leadership of a country is what a country is and normally brought out of the country. Assuming that this is the case, and this is not only unchallenged but clearly so, then the values of the society that the leadership of a country is made of will be those of the society in which the leadership is drawn from (Ndu 2016: 36). As Ndu is characterised as part of an institutional structure, organisational leadership is the creation of an institution and acquires its values. In the context of the present research, leadership is discussed in the context of influence in the organisations, where Stoner (2020) describes it as a process of guiding and influencing the activity of related activities of group members, or as the process of convincing others to achieve the goals of organisations. Leadership has different perspectives theoretically and empirically, which include transformational, transactional, and democratic depending on the situation.

Ethical Leadership

Ethical leadership is a form of leadership that emphasises on moral values and principles in decision making and behaviour. It involves the confirmation of the integrity, fairness, transparency, and accountability in leading people or teams towards a common goal (John 2024). When moral values are assumed to be followed by ethical leadership, it can be argued that an ethical leader has conscience in the execution of the responsibility both on the personal and the social level. Purely, a responsible person or a leader is doing things driven by an overwhelming sense of morality and uncompromising adherence to a code of morality regardless of the impact on the social, political, and economic spheres (Akikibofori 2025). In his application to governance, this kind of leader will surpass individual orderliness to become more of a disruptor of corruptness and a guardian of institutional character (Akikibofori 2025). Ethical leaders become role models and develop trust and confidence among the followers based on their behavior (Brown et al. 2005). Overall, institutional leadership and management are based on ethics, values, and morals and when leaders internalise plausible values they implement policy changes that reflect their ethical posture (Ololube 2018b as cited in Ololube, 2021).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Consequentialism Theory

This research project will make use of consequentialism as the principle of ethics that will inform the investigation into the consequentialist approach to social sins and the dynamics of ethical leadership in the Rivers State Internal Revenue Service (RIRS) between 2015 and 2025. Essentially, a utilitarian tradition, consequentialism has been developed by Jeremy Bentham (1789) and John Stuart Mill (1863). The principle of utility is expressed in Bentham's works as much as the author defines the concept of morals as the actions which bring the happy and the vice as the actions which bring the opposite to the happy (Bentham1789/1996). Hedonistically, to Bentham, pleasure and the absence of pain define happiness and the goal of both personal and governmental actions is to maximise aggregate pleasure (Bentham 1789). Mill perfected this model by introducing qualitative differences between the higher and lower pleasures and claiming that highest happiness of the majority should be the ultimate measure of morality (Mill 1863/2001). The calculus used by Bentham is quantitative, whereas the calculus as used by Mill is that of superiority of intellectual, moral and aesthetic pleasures.

Anscombe (1958) named the philosophy critical of ethical stands in which actions are judged by their consequences only to refer to consequentialism. Since, the theory has been developed into other forms, which include act-consequentialism, rule-consequentialism, preference-consequentialism, and indirect-consequentialism, that differ in their range and methods of evaluation (Darwall 2003; Mulgan 2014). Consequentialism being a moral theory that considers moral wrongs solely through the negative consequences makes it the most suitable concept in examining social sins in a societal institution such as the RIRS. Social sins are denounced exactly due to the damages they cause to the society whether theologically in the view of Catholic Social Teaching or sociologically, as systemic institutional wrong (Dorr 2012; Himes 2001). The paper, in turn, questions the presence of certain RIRS practices (discriminatory tax assessment, embezzlement of public revenue, selective enforcement, corruption in the administration, and institutional impunity) to produce any quantifiable adverse effects on the wellbeing of the inhabitants of Rivers State at the time 2015 2025. The consequentialist approach focuses the analysis on the distributional consequences: Who incurs expenses, who receives benefits, and whether the overall social welfare impact is negative or positive.

As an example, a leader can break laid down rules to achieve a better social outcome that has been proven to be better e.g. restructuring the revenue collection systems to improve adherence by those in the informal sector who were not initially included and this consequently widening the tax base. Such actions would be considered as ethical according to the consequentialist theory because they would promote the common good, minimize social evil and encourage fair service provision funded by taxation. This way, the research topic that focuses on the dynamics of ethical leadership of the RIRS is not a descriptive study on rule-adherence; however, a normative study of how decisions and actions promote the common good.

In its methodological explanations, consequentialism guides the principle of data gathering, as it puts more emphasis on the empirical measurements of the outcomes: fiscal performance, audit reports, indicators of the quality of the delivered service to the populace, civil society evaluation, and testimonies of tax officials and taxpayers on the practical impacts of the leadership decision (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The work of analysis involves an evaluation of the relationship between the leadership behaviours; action and inaction and its social effects, identifying both the intended and unintended effects, and attributing complex causal pathways according to which the decisions are made in the institution and the resulting socially with respect to the outcomes.

METHODOLOGY

The proposed study will take a mixed-method approach, combining both quantitative survey data of RIRS staff and qualitative information of in-depth interviews with the major management stakeholders and policy makers. The population includes the available institutional records, staff lists and estimates of the registered population of taxpayers in Rivers State, comprising of the population of approximately 4, 200 individuals, including about 850 RIRS employees representing all departments and grades, an estimated 3, 200 active registered individual and corporate taxpayers in Port Sokk-town and nearby areas at the time of the study, and about 150 external stakeholders and key informants who can be categorized as per the identified categories. The statistical formula Taro Yamane used to calculate the sample size is simple random sampling (RIRS staff and registered taxpayers through ballot without replacement on the register of available registers), and purposive sampling (external stakeholders and key informants through documented expertise and relevancy). Primary data were gathered with the help of their structured questionnaire with a four-point Likert scale; secondary data were obtained using textbooks, online journals, and other sources of information. The reliability of the instruments was measured by using Cronbach alpha, and scales which obtain a coefficient of 0.70 and above were considered to measure their desired constructs. Frequencies and percentages, means, and standard deviations were used to present descriptive statistics and describe the sample, and were used to describe how the responses are distributed across thematic dimensions.

DATA ANALYSIS

Research Question One: What is the Nature and Manifestations of Social Sin within RIRS between 2015 and 2025?

Table 1: Responses of Participants on the Nature and Manifestations of Social Sin within RIRS (2015–2025)

S/N	Statement / Questionnaire Item	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	SD.	Decision
1	There have been instances of favoritism and nepotism in staff recruitment and promotion within RIRS between 2015 and 2025.	142 (38.9%)	131 (35.9%)	57 (15.6%)	35 (9.6%)	3.04	0.96	Agree

2	Corrupt practices such as bribery or unofficial payments have occurred in revenue collection processes.	158 (43.3%)	124 (34.0%)	52 (14.2%)	31 (8.5%)	3.12	0.95	Agree
3	Some staff members deliberately manipulate revenue records for personal or group benefit.	38 (10.4%)	72 (19.7%)	148 (40.5%)	107 (29.3%)	2.11	0.95	Disagree
4	Lack of transparency in financial reporting has contributed to unethical practices in RIRS.	29 (7.9%)	68 (18.6%)	156 (42.7%)	112 (30.7%)	2.04	0.90	Disagree
5	Institutional tolerance of unethical conduct has enabled the persistence of social sin within RIRS.	33 (9.0%)	75 (20.5%)	145 (39.7%)	112 (30.7%)	2.08	0.93	Disagree
	Grand Mean					**2.48**	**0.94**	**Disagree**

Source: Field Survey, 2026. Decision Criterion: Mean ≥ 2.50 = Agreed; Mean < 2.50 = Disagreed.

Findings in Table 1 revealed that respondents generally agreed that favoritism, nepotism, bribery, and unofficial payments existed within RIRS during the study period. Specifically, favoritism and nepotism in recruitment and promotion recorded a mean score of 3.04, while bribery and unofficial payments in revenue collection had the highest mean score of 3.12, indicating strong agreement among respondents. However, respondents disagreed that revenue records were deliberately manipulated (Mean = 2.11), that lack of transparency significantly contributed to unethical practices (Mean = 2.04), and that institutional tolerance enabled unethical conduct (Mean = 2.08). The grand mean of 2.48 suggests a moderate perception of social sin within the institution

Research Question Two: What are the Ethical Leadership Styles and Practices Adopted by RIRS Management during the Study Period?

Table 2: Responses of Participants on Ethical Leadership Styles and Practices Adopted by RIRS Management (2015–2025)

S/N	Statement / Questionnaire Item	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	SD.	Decision
6	RIRS management demonstrates accountability and transparency in decision-making processes.	136 (37.3%)	128 (35.1%)	65 (17.8%)	36 (9.9%)	3.00	0.97	Agree
7	Leaders in RIRS model integrity and ethical behavior in their official duties.	129 (35.3%)	134 (36.7%)	67 (18.4%)	35 (9.6%)	2.98	0.96	Agree
8	Management consults staff before implementing major policy decisions.	41 (11.2%)	74 (20.3%)	146 (40.0%)	104 (28.5%)	2.14	0.96	Disagree
9	Ethical guidelines and codes of conduct are consistently enforced by leadership.	122 (33.4%)	131 (35.9%)	72 (19.7%)	40 (11.0%)	2.92	0.98	Agree
10	RIRS leadership promotes fairness and equal treatment among staff members.	37 (10.1%)	71 (19.5%)	152 (41.6%)	105 (28.8%)	2.11	0.94	Disagree
	Grand Mean					**2.63**	**0.96**	**Agree**

Source: Field Survey, 2026. Decision Criterion: Mean ≥ 2.50 = Agreed; Mean < 2.50 = Disagreed.

Table 2 showed that respondents generally perceived RIRS management as demonstrating accountability, transparency, and ethical conduct in leadership practices. Accountability and transparency in decision-making recorded a mean score of 3.00, while integrity and ethical behavior among leaders had a mean of 2.98. Ethical guidelines and codes of conduct were also perceived as consistently enforced (Mean = 2.92). However, respondents disagreed that staff were adequately consulted before major policy decisions (Mean = 2.14) and that leadership promoted fairness and equal treatment among staff (Mean = 2.11). The overall grand mean of 2.63 indicates that ethical leadership practices were moderately evident within RIRS during the study period.

Research Question Three: What are the Consequences of Ethical and Unethical Leadership Decisions on Revenue Generation, Staff Morale, and Public Trust in RIRS?

Table 3: Responses of Participants on the Consequences of Ethical and Unethical Leadership Decisions on Revenue Generation, Staff Morale, and Public Trust in RIRS (2015–2025)

S/N	Statement / Questionnaire Item	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	SD.	Decision
11	Ethical leadership practices have positively influenced revenue generation in RIRS.	148 (40.5%)	131 (35.9%)	53 (14.5%)	33 (9.0%)	3.08	0.95	Agree
12	Unethical leadership decisions have negatively affected staff morale.	155 (42.5%)	128 (35.1%)	50 (13.7%)	32 (8.8%)	3.11	0.95	Agree
13	Transparent leadership has improved public trust in RIRS operations.	141 (38.6%)	130 (35.6%)	58 (15.9%)	36 (9.9%)	3.03	0.97	Agree
14	Perceived corruption among leaders reduces taxpayers' willingness to comply with tax obligations.	162 (44.4%)	119 (32.6%)	52 (14.2%)	32 (8.8%)	3.13	0.96	Agree
15	Ethical reforms introduced between 2015 and 2025 have enhanced institutional credibility.	133 (36.4%)	132 (36.2%)	63 (17.3%)	37 (10.1%)	2.99	0.97	Agree
	Grand Mean					**3.07**	**0.96**	**Agree**

Source: Field Survey, 2026. Decision Criterion: Mean ≥ 2.50 = Agreed; Mean < 2.50 = Disagreed.

Findings in Table 3 indicated that respondents strongly perceived ethical leadership as having positive institutional outcomes within RIRS. Ethical leadership was found to positively influence revenue generation (Mean = 3.08), while transparent leadership improved public trust in the institution (Mean = 3.03). Respondents also agreed that unethical leadership negatively affected staff morale (Mean = 3.11) and that perceived corruption reduced taxpayers' willingness to comply with tax obligations (Mean = 3.13), which recorded the highest mean score in the table. Furthermore, ethical reforms introduced between 2015 and 2025 were perceived to have enhanced institutional credibility (Mean = 2.99). The grand mean of 3.07 indicates a strong consensus that leadership ethics significantly influenced institutional performance, staff morale, and public trust within RIRS.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Nature and Manifestations of Social Sin within RIRS between 2015 and 2025

The powerful majority endorsement of the nepotism and favouritism in human resource management presented in the RIRS as reflected in item 1 in table 1.1 is a result of the finding of great theoretical and governance value. A common example of institutional social sin has been extensively reported: nepotism, which can be explained as favoring people based on personal, ethnic, or political associations instead of their merit (Nwosu 2017; Uslaner 2008). Whenever employees are being hired or promoted based on connection instead of competence it structurally undermines the functional capacity of the institution: jobs are occupied by someone who might not possess the skills or motivation and the ethical orientation to perform the required job successfully. Consequentialist perspective has it that nepotism within the RIRS is a cost to the institution systemically, and, by extension, to the tax paying population that it caters to; the lack of institutional capacity is equivalent to less revenue mobilisation, less compliance enforcement, and poorer public service outcomes generated by the state tax revenues (Brown and Trevino 2006; Musgrave and Musgrave 1989).

The fact that bribery and non-official payments were certified by more than three-quarters of the respondents, according to item 2 of table 1.1, is the most directly consequential result of this research question and the most generally seen implementation of social sin within the RIRS in the timeframe of the study. The structural dysfunction of revenue collection interface is not a recent discovery but rather a well-documented corruption phenomenon in the Nigerian government of the aspects of public financial management (Adebayo 2015; Rose-Ackerman 1999; Transparency International 2023).

This finding resonates strongly with the work of Wated and Sanchez (2022), who established in their cross-national study that nepotistic practices in public sector organisations systematically displace qualified candidates, erode professional standards, and reduce institutional output quality. From a theoretical perspective, this validates the consequentialist argument, rooted in the utilitarian tradition of Jeremy Bentham, that actions are morally right or wrong according to their outcomes on collective welfare (Bentham, 1789/2007). Nepotism weakens institutional efficiency because positions may be occupied by less competent individuals, thereby diminishing productivity, fairness, accountability, and service delivery. The findings therefore establish nepotism as a social sin because its consequences extend beyond individual beneficiaries to negatively affect institutional performance, staff morale, and public trust an observation corroborated by Mugarura (2020), who similarly found that nepotistic appointment practices in African public institutions generated structural inefficiencies and deepened citizens' distrust of state agencies.

Additional evidence supporting nepotism as a social sin is reflected in respondents' perceptions of fairness and staff treatment within RIRS. While 72.3% agreed that management demonstrated accountability and transparency in decision-making, 70.4% disagreed that leadership promoted fairness and equal treatment among staff members, and 68.5% disagreed that management adequately consulted staff before major policy decisions were implemented. These findings suggest that although formal ethical structures may nominally exist within the institution, employees continue to perceive pronounced inequalities and exclusion in actual administrative practice. Such perceptions are consistent with Siddiqui et al. (2021), who found that in public organisations where formal accountability mechanisms coexist with informal patronage networks, employees typically experience what they describe as ‘procedural justice deficits’, a situations where formal rules are selectively applied in ways that reinforce existing power asymmetries. These structural conditions reinforce the argument that nepotism generates institutional injustice, employee dissatisfaction, and organisational division, undermining the social contract between public institutions and their workforce (Onyekwere, 2022).

Ethical Leadership Styles and Practices Adopted by RIRS Management

The near confirmation of almost three-quarters of the respondents that RIRS management has been proven to be accountable and transparent in decision-making acts as a starting point of positive outcome to the Research Question Two. It is a well-known fact that accountability and transparency are regarded as fundamental pillars of ethical leadership in any given public institution; they provide the instruments that allow leaders to be accountable to their decisions as well as the methods of making the organization governance transparent to all stakeholders (Brown & Trevino, 2006; Ciulla, 2004). In light of consequentialism, open and responsible decision making produces welfare improving institutional results: it allows people to engage in information, promotes error and malfeasance detection and correction, and enhances the perceived legitimacy of institutional power, which directly benefits better revenue administration (Sinnott -Armstrong, 2022).

The findings further revealed significant consequences of unethical leadership on institutional outcomes within RIRS. About 77.5% of respondents agreed that unethical leadership decisions negatively affected staff morale, while 77.0% believed that perceived corruption among leaders reduced taxpayers' willingness to comply with tax obligations. These findings align with Alm and Torgler (2020), who, using survey data across multiple jurisdictions, demonstrated that citizens' tax morale is significantly and negatively correlated with perceptions of corruption and unfairness within revenue collection agencies. Their study established that institutional trust is a non-trivial determinant of voluntary tax compliance, suggesting that corruption within agencies such as RIRS imposes costs that transcend administrative inefficiency to encompass fiscal revenue losses. These results corroborate the findings of Hassan and Silong (2021), who, in their study of public revenue institutions in sub-Saharan Africa, demonstrated that perceived leadership integrity was the strongest predictor of both employee commitment and taxpayer compliance behaviour, underscoring the centrality of ethical governance to revenue mobilisation and institutional legitimacy.

Consequences of Ethical and Unethical Leadership Decisions on Revenue Generation, Staff Morale, and Public Trust in RIRS

The conclusion that 76.4 percent of the participants confirm the causal relationship between the ethical leadership practices and the growth of revenues is the most significant consequentialist study result thus creating a stakeholder-proven route to the major product of the institute. This finding corresponds to the comparative findings in the area of public financial management in sub-Saharan Africa, where the quality of governance and their integrity in leadership have always been the strongest institutional predictors of domestic revenue mobilisation (Adebayo, 2015; World Bank, 2020). The small standard deviation of 0.95 also show that there is a high level of consensus in the response giving high level of empirical confidence in this conclusion and forms the basis of the bigger consequentialist evaluation of the study. The strong confirmation that 77.5% of those asked about unethical leadership decisions are of the view that they harm staff morale is a far-reaching social-welfare outcome. Moral proliferation Staff morale, as opposed to being some abstract ethical consideration, is an important determinant of institutional performance.

Therefore, the discussion of findings can best be understood through the lens of consequentialist ethical theory as advanced by Jeremy Bentham and subsequently refined by John Stuart Mill. Bentham's (1789/2007) principle of utility maintained that actions are morally right when they produce the greatest happiness for the greatest number of persons. Applying this framework to the present study, practices such as bribery and nepotism within RIRS are morally wrong because they undermine institutional welfare and diminish the aggregate benefits that citizens derive from public institutions. This position is consistent with the analysis of Dimoji and Nwachukwu (2021), who applied utilitarian ethics to evaluate corrupt practices in Nigerian state revenue institutions and concluded that bribery and nepotism constitute clear violations of public utility, as their benefits are captured by a narrow clientelist network while their costs are widely diffused across the tax-paying public. However, as critics of Bentham's quantitative hedonic calculus have noted, restricting moral evaluation to the arithmetic of pleasure and pain may inadequately capture the qualitative dimensions of institutional ethics (Rachels & Rachels, 2023).

John Stuart Mill (1863/2001) refined Bentham's position by arguing that morality should not only consider the quantity of consequences but also the quality of outcomes. Mill maintained that justice, fairness, institutional trust, and moral integrity are higher social values indispensable to societal progress, and that any governance framework that sacrifices these values in pursuit of narrow material gains produces a qualitatively inferior social order regardless of its quantitative utility.

In resolving the views of Bentham and Mill within the context of the present study, the findings suggest that unethical leadership in RIRS violates both dimensions of consequentialism. First, nepotism, bribery, and corruption produce demonstrably harmful institutional outcomes including reduced administrative efficiency, low staff morale, and poor taxpayer compliance thereby contradicting Bentham's principle of maximising collective welfare. Second, these practices erode higher ethical values such as fairness, transparency, equality, and public confidence, which Mill regarded as constitutive of social progress and institutional legitimacy. This dual violation has been similarly documented by Ikubaje and Rawlings (2022), who, in their assessment of corruption in Nigerian public service institutions, found that unethical practices damaged both the measurable performance indicators of affected agencies and the less quantifiable but equally consequential dimensions of public institutional culture. Consequently, the present study demonstrates that social sins within RIRS are not merely personal moral failures but systemic institutional practices with compounding negative consequences for both public welfare and ethical governance.

The empirical convergence across the study's findings is further supported by comparative evidence from similar institutional contexts. Okonkwo and Agwu (2022) examined ethical leadership and organisational performance across selected Nigerian revenue authorities and found that institutions characterised by high levels of perceived corruption experienced significantly lower staff retention rates, reduced service efficiency, and greater taxpayer non-compliance compared to those with stronger ethical governance cultures. Similarly, Uzochukwu and Onuoha (2023) demonstrated in their study of institutional social responsibility within Nigerian public sector organisations that bribery and favouritism in staff management functions operated as self-reinforcing cycles: their entrenchment created organisational cultures in which ethical conduct was progressively marginalised, making institutional reform increasingly costly over time. These findings add important contextual support to the present study's conclusion that addressing social sin within public revenue institutions requires sustained, systemic ethical reforms rather than isolated disciplinary interventions.

CONCLUSION

Between 2015 and 2025, Rivers State Inland Revenue Service (RIRS) was under intensive investigation, the study explored the nature of social sin, moral leadership and consequences of such practices. The results show an institutional environment that is intricate with strong moral dilemmas and the definite adherence to the reform-based leadership. Specifically, bribery and unofficial payments accepted in the process of revenue-collection proved to be the most widespread form of corruption as the social sin, as it received the greatest level of consensus among the respondents. Most of the participants also affirmed that there was nepotism and favoritism in the staff recruitment and promotions. It is established that ethical leadership practices have helped RIRS to generate revenue. That the welfare implications of unethical deeds were evident because immoral leadership decisions have had a negative effect on the staff morale was indisputably proven. More importantly it has also been ascertained that taxpayers tend to be less proactive in observing tax obligations where they feel that leaders are corrupt. This is an example of a multiplier effect where corruption at the leadership level negatively affects the core revenue-mobilization role the institution plays by the corruption stifling the voluntary compliance.

Recommendations

Based on the findings from this study, the following are recommended:

- Since corruption in revenue collection is the most rampant occurrence of social sin, Rivers State Inland Revenue Service (RIRS) should improve the system of control and accountability over the revenue-collection interface by providing the interfaces with independent auditing channels, periodical verification of the compliance with the third party, and the creation of a channel where whistleblowers can report without retaliation.
- To institutionalize participatory leadership in the Rivers State Inland Revenue Service, the focus ought to be on instituting staff consultation procedures in respect of all key policy decisions, instituting cross functional working groups to which revenue officers will be represented at implementation levels and instituting periodic staff feedback systems on policy performance and operational issues.
- As it has been proven that the unethical leadership choice of decisions has impacted staff morale, and staff involvement is the key to the successful administration of revenues, the RIRS should adopt specially designed morale-raising programs consistent with ethical conduct standards, establish explicit career-advancement opportunities on the basis of merit and moral conduct, and establish a formalized system of recognition of the staff that upholds excellent ethical behavior.
- Being a fundamentally valid tool of guaranteeing subsequent transparency efforts in the process of restoring the confidence of the population in the process of the revenue-

collection and remittance, the RIRS will have to conduct certain actions such as expanding public reporting on the results of the revenue-collection process and the institutional performance indicators, conducting quarterly transparency forums with the organization of the civil-society and represent the representatives of taxpayers, as well as publishing institutional audit reports and remedial measures undertaken according to the findings.

- The RIRS should adopt blind recruitment and promotion procedures to ensure that the decision-makers are not aware of the personal networks of the candidates, should adopt independent review committees on all recruitment and promotion decisions, develop clear criteria and weighting systems of human-resource decisions to be accessible to all the staff.
- To ensure that the effects of ethical reforms are monitored and evaluated, the Rivers State Inland Revenue Service (RIRS) should also put in place an ethics-monitoring unit to observe the effectiveness of the reforms over time, periodical stakeholder survey to determine how the institution is ethically progressing, and also tie institutional resource allocation to some measure of sustainability in terms of ethical performance.

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