



## ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE OPEN ACCESS

# Ethics Professionalism As The Basis Of Competence For Officials In Public Service (Case Study In Civil Service)

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### ABSTRACT

This research analyzes ethics and professionalism in the Public Service with the objective of understanding how the competence of employees influences the quality of public services. This methodology uses descriptive qualitative methods to explore the principles of integrity, impartiality, transparency and accountability to manage abuses of power, discrimination and nepotism.

Research results show that professionalism considers technical capacity, work attitude, discipline, effective communication and commitment to good work; evidence shows that technical competence alone is not sufficient without ethical integrity. The integration of ethics and professionalism is identified as complementary factors that determine the efficiency, effectiveness and trust of the people in state institutions. Monitoring mechanisms such as inspections, annual reports, public whistleblowing systems and disciplinary sanctions are important to prevent ethical violations and ensure accountability. Priority strategies to strengthen ethical culture include integrity leadership, continuous training, meritocracy, fair reward-sanction system and valuing citizen trust. It is recommended that strengthening ethics and professionalism in the public service is a prerequisite for good governance, legitimacy of the State and improving the quality of public services in Timor-Leste.



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### INTRODUCTION

The public service is a benchmark for successful governance, including in Timor-Leste, which has continued to strive to build good governance since independence in 2002. The Government recognizes that high-quality, prompt, transparent, and equitable public service is not only a constitutional obligation but also a reflection of the state's commitment to citizenship. Their rights and basic rights increase public trust in government institutions. Professional ethics is a fundamental basis for civil servant competence in public service. Professionalism shows the capacity and attitude of employees at the technical, communication and leadership levels, to respond to community needs. When ethics and professionalism are the basis, then the competence of officials will be complete, which helps to promote trust between citizens and state institutions. Often, citizen distrust of public institutions arises because officials do not show ethical and professional behavior. Therefore, the implementation of the principle of ethical professionalism will be important to increase the quality of public services, ensure social justice and contribute to national development. Ethics and professionalism are an important basis for ensuring employee competence in public service. In the reality of modern administration, it is not only technical capacity that determines the quality of public service, but also ethical behavior that reflects integrity, responsibility and transparency. According to this view, ethics of professionalism will be a fundamental orientation to give direction to officials in the time they perform state obligations to the people.

Professionalism is the attitude and behavior that shows the dedication, integrity and capacity of an employee to perform his or her duties. According to Hoyle (1975), professionalism is "a standard and value that makes professional distinguishable from ordinary work." In the public service, professionalism shows technical capacity, effective communication, and obedience to state regulations. Bureaucratic Ethics Max Weber (1947) believed that bureaucracy is a modern administrative system that must be based on legal-rational authority. Weber emphasized that bureaucratic officials must work according to: impartiality, formal rules, clear hierarchy, and ethical behavior that is independent of private interests. In the Timor-Leste context, Weber's principles can be a theoretical basis for avoiding nepotism, favoritism or corruption in the public service. Public Service in Timor-Leste According to Law N.º 8/2004, Statute of the Public Service (as amended in later laws), civil servants have a duty to: serve with loyalty to the state, respect legality, impartiality and transparency, preserve confidentiality, avoid conflicts of interest, promote public interest services. This law shows that ethics and professionalism are not only academic ideals, but also legal obligations for civil servants in Timor-Leste.

The people of Dili City expect state officials to provide services oriented to the public interest, uphold integrity, and maintain professionalism in all interactions with citizens. Professional civil servants are not only required to master working procedures, but also to have strong communication skills, empathy for the needs of service users, perspective on the concept of the New Public Service Commission, which places civil servants as servants of citizens, not mere administrators of administrative procedures. On the ground, strengthening the ethics and professionalism of civil servants is an urgent need, given continued reports of complaints of unfriendly employee behavior, service delays, and practices that reduce transparency. Competence, individual performance success is mainly determined by core competencies that encompass knowledge, skills, values, and

positive work attitudes. Without strong ethics and professionalism, the quality of public service will struggle to achieve the desired standard.

Despite adequate infrastructure and regulations, civil servant training is not only a technical agenda but also a strategy to build public trust in government. Ethical and professional civil servants will positively represent the state in the eyes of the public and will also be the driving force for inclusive, equitable, and sustainable public service. Ethics is important and crucial in shaping people's behavior in the workplace oriented towards the public interest, while professionalism ensures that employees are committed and knowledgeable to perform their duties according to standards. In this context, research on Ethics and Professionalism as the Basis of Employee Competence in Public Services in the Public Service Commission is crucial to understand the extent to which this aspect has been internalized in the performance of civil servants and how they impact the quality of public services received, which is linked to Article 450 of the Code of Ethics. (2024:30) states that Civil Servants, in their behavior, will obey the Code of Ethics of the Public Service.

In the practice of public service delivery in Timor-Leste, various challenges related to the integrity, professionalism, and ethics of public officials persist. This phenomenon is reflected in numerous cases of ethical violations, poor service quality, and a tendency toward abuse of authority, which has resulted in a decline in public trust in government institutions. This situation is a serious concern, given that public service is a key pillar in realizing good and democratic governance. Ideal public service should prioritize public interests over personal or group interests. Public officials are required to demonstrate personal integrity, authenticity, and sincerity in carrying out their duties, and to continually strive to improve their competencies through ongoing education and training. In a legal context, every public official is obliged to comply with applicable laws and regulations and carry out their duties and obligations with full responsibility. They must also respect court decisions and refrain from discriminatory actions, including gender-based discrimination, and from any form of harassment or violence in the workplace. Within this framework, the research on "Ethics of Professionalism as the Basis of Competence for Officials in Public Service" is highly relevant and important. This research aims to analyze how the principles of ethical professionalism can serve as the basis for competence for public officials in the delivery of public services in Timor-Leste.

One concrete example that can be observed is the persistence of discriminatory practices in public services based on political, cultural, or religious background. This discrimination not only violates the principle of justice but also has the potential to widen social inequalities in society. This situation is further exacerbated by cases of corruption involving public officials, which ultimately result in a decline in the quality of public services and increased public dissatisfaction. This factual situation indicates that there are still weaknesses in the application of ethics and professionalism among public officials. Ethics is the fundamental foundation that guides the behavior of public officials in carrying out their duties and responsibilities. By adhering to ethical principles, public officials can understand how they should behave towards the public, colleagues, and the institutions where they work. Ethics also plays a crucial role in preventing abuse of power, favoritism, and discrimination in public service. The implementation of ethics and professionalism in public service also has a significant impact on the relationship between the state and society. When public officials demonstrate integrity and professionalism in every action and decision they make, the public will feel more trusting and willing to actively participate in various government programs. This public trust is crucial for creating a harmonious relationship between the government and society, as well as supporting good governance. Conversely, if public officials fail to demonstrate ethics and professionalism, this will lead to public distrust, dissatisfaction, and even resistance to the government.

Ethical and professional public officials will always strive to provide the best, fastest, and most targeted service according to the public's needs. They will also avoid all forms of abuse of authority, corruption, and other unethical practices that could harm the public.

In a theoretical framework, public service is a manifestation of the state's function in meeting public needs and maintaining social legitimacy (Easton, 1965). The state is responsible for providing adequate public services and building citizen trust. In this context, the ethics and professionalism of public officials are crucial operational foundations, as the quality of public services determines the government's credibility and legitimacy in the eyes of the public (Easton, 1965). Public organizations, as open systems, must be able to interact with their environment, absorb inputs in the form of resources, transform them into outputs in the form of services, and respond to changes (Katz & Kahn, 1978). The internal dynamics and management style of public institutions are strongly influenced by the principles, structures, and behaviors demonstrated by public officials in carrying out their duties.

The scientific management theory proposed by Frederick Taylor (1911) emphasized the importance of efficiency and standardized procedures in public service. Henri Fayol (1916) also emphasized that management principles such as planning, organizing, coordinating, and controlling are crucial for creating orderly public services. Meanwhile, Max Weber (1947), through his bureaucratic theory, emphasized that public officials must

operate according to formal rules, hierarchy, and impartiality to avoid favoritism or nepotism. The humanist theory proposed by Elton Mayo (1933) suggests that motivation and human relationships in the work environment significantly influence the quality of public services. Modern theories, such as those proposed by Katz & Kahn (1978) and Christopher Hood (1991), through his New Public Management, highlight the importance of inter-agency coordination, innovation, and community orientation as keys to successful public services. Public service itself is defined as the fulfillment of the desires and needs of the public by state administrators (Sinambela, 2007 in D. Erlianti, 2019). Public service is the provision of services to meet the needs of individuals or communities with an interest in the organization, in accordance with established rules and procedures. Pasolong (2010 in D. Erlianti, 2019) states that public service is an activity carried out by individuals, groups, or organizations, either directly or indirectly, to meet the needs of the community. Ratminto & Winarsih (2010) emphasize that public service encompasses all forms of service, whether in the form of public goods or public services, which are the responsibility and implemented by government agencies at the central, regional, or state-owned or regional levels, to meet the needs of the community and implement statutory provisions. In the implementation of public service, ethics serves as a moral guideline that directs the behavior of public officials to align with the values of honesty, justice, integrity, and the public interest (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2003). Ethical public officials not only comply with administrative procedures but also prioritize the interests of the community. Sadhana in A. W. Oroh, N. Pioh, & G. Undap (2017) states that ethics requires public officials to understand the basic principles and standards that must be applied in the work environment and to in benchmarks of acceptable behavior. Bertens in H. M. Bisri & T. B. Asmoro (2019) defines ethics as a set of moral values and norms that serve as guidelines for individuals or groups in regulating their behavior. Darwin in H. M. Bisri & T. B. Asmoro (2019) also emphasizes that bureaucratic ethics is a set of values that serve as a reference or guideline for human actions in public organizations. The competence of public officials encompasses not only technical knowledge and skills but also moral and ethical dimensions reflected in professional attitudes. Marnisah, Riukore, Habaora, & Susanto, in J.R. Riukore, F. Habaora, & L. Marnisah (2022), stated that professionalism is an individual's ability to carry out tasks according to their field and level, as well as the alignment between their abilities and the needs of the organization. Dimensions or indicators of professionalism include altruism (the courage to sacrifice and put the interests of others first), commitment to excellence, tolerance, integrity and character, respect for all people, and a sense of responsibility. All of these indicators are highly relevant in developing the competency of public officials capable of providing the best service to the public.

According to Dwiyanto (2006), the public function is the provision of government services and facilities to meet the basic needs and rights of citizens. The quality of public services reflects the effectiveness of the bureaucracy and the legitimacy of the government. The World Bank (1992) emphasizes that good governance principles such as transparency, accountability, participation, and effectiveness are the foundation of government legitimacy. Moore (1995) adds that public value is created when services are directed towards public satisfaction and well-being. In this regard, government institutions function as formal structures that regulate the behavior of public officials, establish norms and procedures for service delivery (Keban, 2014). As part of these institutions, public officials have a dual role: carrying out administrative functions while ensuring the implementation of ethics and professionalism in every service provided (PNUD, 2020). Strengthening ethical institutions and organizational culture is a primary prerequisite for consistently implementing public official competency in public service.

The relevance of these research findings is further strengthened in the current context, where Timor-Leste is facing various challenges in governance and public service delivery. These studies provide a clear message that Timor-Leste needs profound reform within the public apparatus, prioritizing professional ethics, along with increasing technical capacity and motivation. Current trends indicate that while technical competence has received attention, ethics remains a key factor in building transparent, accountable, and professional public institutions. Therefore, this research is highly relevant for providing public policy strategies that emphasize integrity, neutrality, and professionalism to address the challenges of governance in Timor-Leste.

Thus, it can be concluded that the integration of ethics and professionalism is the primary foundation for building the competence of public officials in Timor-Leste. Without strong integration between these two pillars, efforts to improve the quality of public services will be difficult to achieve. Therefore, this study seeks to analyze in depth how ethics and professionalism can form the basis of public official competence in public services in Timor-Leste, and to provide strategic recommendations for strengthening both aspects to achieve quality, transparent, and accountable public services.

## THE METHOD

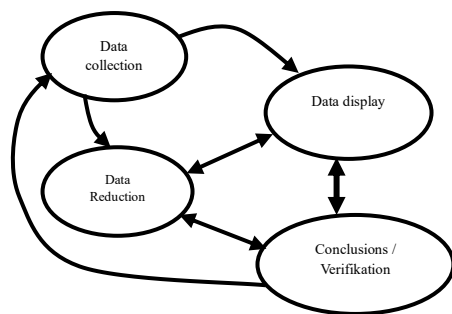
Based on preliminary observations conducted at the Vera Cruz Administrative Post Office in Dili, it was found that there is still a mismatch between expected competency standards and the reality on the ground. Some public officials have not been able to demonstrate a

consistent professional attitude, especially when facing situations that require quick and accurate decision-making. To understand this phenomenon more deeply, this study uses a qualitative approach with descriptive methods. According to Mukhtar (2013:10), qualitative research involves an interpretive approach to the world, meaning that researchers study research objects in their natural settings, seeking to understand the meanings individuals attach to the phenomena that occur. In this study, the research method used is descriptive qualitative, which aims to observe phenomena occurring at the research location with real-world facts that correspond to actual conditions. The primary objective of this research is to understand "Professional Ethics as the Basis for Official Competence in Public Service" at the Vera Cruz Public Service Commission, Dili Municipality.

This research also refers to Sugiyono's (2017:7) opinion, which states that qualitative research methods are often referred to as artistic methods because they seek to build a high level of trust while simultaneously meeting internal market requirements and the need to create a legal environment conducive to the harmonious development of literary and artistic works in society, particularly in the context of rights. The research location chosen was the Public Service Commission of the Vera Cruz Administrative Post, Dili Municipality, with a primary focus on the implementation of professional ethics related to the competency of officials in public service. The research informants consisted of the Public Service Commissioner, the Director of the Public Service Human Resources Program, and two other public officials, bringing the total number of informants involved in this study to four. Informants were selected purposively, considering their positions and roles in the public service process within the Vera Cruz Administrative Post, Dili Municipality.

The data collection techniques used in this study included observation, interviews, and documentation. According to Sugiyono (2017:224), data collection techniques are a very strategic stage in research, as the primary goal of research is to obtain data. Therefore, in this study, the researcher sought to collect data from various relevant sources. Observation techniques were used to directly observe the behavior and interactions of public officials in providing services to the public. Nasution, in Sugiyono (2017:226), states that observation is the foundation of all science, while Nawawi and Martini (1992:74) emphasize that observation is the process of systematically observing and recording elements that emerge within a phenomenon or research object. Documentation techniques were also used as a complement to data collection. Hamidi (2004:72) states that the documentation method involves information obtained from important institutional or organizational records, as well as from individuals. Sugiyono (2017:240) adds that documents can be written notes, drawings, or monumental works by anyone. In this study, the documents collected included statistical data on the presence of public officials at the Vera Cruz Public Service Commission, Dili Municipality, as well as documents related to ethics and professionalism relevant to the officials' competence in public service. The research instrument used in this qualitative study was the researcher herself. Sugiyono (2017:222) states that in qualitative research, the primary instrument or tool is the researcher herself. Therefore, researchers must possess high levels of validity to enable them to conduct in-depth research in the field.

The data analysis technique employed in this study refers to the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, as explained by Sugiyono (2017:244-246). Data analysis in qualitative research is conducted interactively and continuously until the data obtained is deemed saturated.



Miles Huberman, 1994

Data analysis activities include data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions/verification. Data collection is conducted concurrently with the data analysis process, allowing researchers to immediately perform data reduction, namely selecting and focusing on data that is important and relevant to the research objectives. Data presentation is done in the form of narratives, schemas, or relationships between categories, making it easier for researchers to understand and draw conclusions from the data obtained. Conclusions are drawn continuously throughout the research process,

ensuring that the research results accurately reflect the reality in the field. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, this research is expected to make a significant contribution to the development of public service theory and practice, particularly regarding the application of professional ethics as the basis for official competence. The results of this study are also expected to serve as a reference for policymakers in formulating strategies to improve the competence of public officials, thereby creating high-quality, transparent, and accountable public services.

Table 1. Number of respondent or Informant

No	Informador	Kuantidade
1	Komisaris Funsauun Publiku	1
2	Diretór Rekursu humanu Funsauun Publiku	1
3	Funsionariu Funsauun Publiku	2
Total		4

Besides observation, another approach used to delve deeper into issues of ethics and professionalism among public officials is through interviews. Esterberg, as cited in Sugiyono (2017:231), defines an interview as a meeting between two people to exchange information and ideas through questions and answers, resulting in communication and the construction of shared meaning on a specific topic. In this study, systematic interviews were conducted with public officials and service users in the Vera Cruz administrative area of Dili to obtain a more comprehensive picture of their perceptions and experiences regarding the application of ethics and professionalism in public services. These interviews also aimed to identify factors that hinder and encourage the development of public officials' competencies based on ethics and professionalism. Hamidi (2004:72) states that the documentation method is a technique for collecting information derived from important records of institutions, organizations, and individuals. Sugiyono (2017:240) adds that documents can be written notes, drawings, or monumental works by anyone. In the data collection process, research instruments play a crucial role. Sugiyono (2017:222) emphasizes that in qualitative research, the primary research instrument is the researcher themselves. Therefore, researchers are required to possess high levels of self-validity, both in terms of knowledge, skills, and attitudes, when conducting research in the field. After the data was collected, the next step was to systematically analyze the data. Bogdan in Sugiyono (2017:244) defines data analysis techniques as the process of systematically searching and organizing data obtained from interviews, field notes, and various other materials, so that it can facilitate understanding and produce conclusions that can be informed to others. Sugiyono (2017:245) adds that data analysis in qualitative research is carried out from the beginning of data collection until all data is collected within a predetermined period. Miles and Huberman in Sugiyono (2017:246) explain that activities in qualitative data analysis are carried out interactively and continuously until the data obtained is deemed sufficient. Data analysis activities include data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions/verification.

## RESULT, ANALYSIS, DISCUSION NAD IMPLICATION

### 1) General description of research site area

From a democratic perspective, public officials are required to always prioritize the values of justice, integrity, and transparency in every action and decision they make. In an effort to address this challenge, the Government of Timor-Leste, through the Public Function Commission, has implemented various regulations and legal instruments aimed at strengthening the application of ethics in public service. One strategic step taken is the implementation of a Code of Ethics and Conduct for Public Officials, Disciplinary Regulations, and a professional behavior monitoring system to ensure that every public official carries out their duties in accordance with established ethical standards. These legal instruments are based on Law Number 8/2004 concerning the Statute of Public Functions, which has been amended through various relevant decrees, explicitly regulating the rights, obligations, and behavioral norms of public officials within the state administration. The implementation of these regulations not only aims to provide clarity regarding the moral and professional context that every public official must understand, but also to avoid subjective judgments in decision-making and public relations. The Public Function Commission regularly conducts outreach and orientations with ministries and other public institutions to provide a comprehensive understanding of ethical standards, service processes, accountability mechanisms, and the consequences for disciplinary violations. These efforts are crucial for raising collective awareness of the role of public officials as servants of the state, not recipients of privileges. Continuous outreach allows public officials to understand firsthand how the law is implemented in service practice, how they must respond to public needs, and the consequences of failing to comply with applicable regulations. This can improve the quality of governance, strengthen public trust, and enhance the image of public administration in Timor-Leste. This demonstrates that ethics in public service is a key foundation that guides public officials in carrying out their duties with responsibility, integrity, and transparency.

The Public Function Commission has established a structured oversight mechanism through routine inspections, analysis of annual reports from public institutions, and a

public complaints system that ensures transparency in the process of monitoring the behavior of public officials. This system allows the public, civil society organizations, and public officials themselves to report suspected ethical violations or abuse of authority within the public administration. Each case of violation will be evaluated based on objective evidence, and decisions will be made based on applicable laws and regulations, including the Public Function Statute and Disciplinary Regulations. Sanctions imposed are not based on individual interests, but rather on the severity of the violation, which can range from reprimands, warnings, suspensions, and even dismissal from public office. This process aims to ensure the principles of fairness, impartiality, and transparency, and to avoid favoritism, discrimination, or political interference. With consistent application of the law and the same standards, public administration can be more trustworthy, and the public can feel that the state does not grant privileges but rather upholds justice for all citizens. The ideal condition is the creation of a public service environment grounded in professional ethics, where every public official is able to carry out their duties and responsibilities with integrity, transparency, and accountability. In such an environment, the public will feel confident that government processes are conducted fairly, without manipulation or favoritism, thereby strengthening the culture of good governance in Timor-Leste. Therefore, the promotion and practice of ethics in public administration are essential factors in strengthening public trust in government institutions and ensuring that public services are truly oriented toward the public interest.

### 1.1 Priority strategy to demonstrate and promote ethical culture in public administration.

One notable event is the varying levels of professionalism among civil servants, as expressed by Sr. Jose Tello, Commissioner of Funsauun Publiku, who stated that the current level of professionalism among civil servants is not yet uniform, despite progress made through standardized recruitment and ongoing training. This indicates that there is still a gap between the ideal state, namely the creation of a professional, high-integrity, and ethical bureaucracy, and the actual conditions on the ground, where ethical practices have not yet fully become part of the daily work culture of civil servants (Source: Sr. Jose Tello. (2025). "Hala'o entrevista iha loron Sexta Data. 17/10/2025"). Leadership with integrity must be a concrete model of behavior, not only instilling the principles of integrity as a core value but also implementing them in daily practice. Such leadership will create a conducive organizational climate, encourage transparency, and prevent opportunistic behavior and abuse of power. When a leader is able to make fair and responsible decisions, employees under him will be encouraged to carry out their professional roles appropriately and in accordance with applicable ethical standards (Source: Sr. Jose Tello. (2025). "Hala'o entrevista iha loron Sexta Data. 17/10/2025"). Through ongoing training, employees will better understand their social responsibilities, obligations to the public, and the limits of their authority. The implementation of a fair reward and sanction system is also crucial in maintaining the discipline and motivation of civil servants. Rewards can be given in the form of promotions, public recognition, training opportunities, or other career benefits. Meanwhile, sanctions must be applied firmly to each violation, commensurate with the severity of the violation, to prevent recurrence of violations or abuse of authority. Thus, a fair reward and sanction system will foster a disciplined, motivated work environment oriented toward achieving optimal performance (Source: Sr. Jose Tello. (2025). "Hala'o entrevista iha loron Sexta Data. 17/10/2025").

Organizational culture also needs to be improved to better value meritocracy, meaning that employee achievement and capacity should be the primary consideration in decision-making, rather than political connections or friendships. This strategy aims to ensure that the public administration being built is strong, transparent, and capable of instilling trust in the Timor-Leste community. Thus, every civil servant is expected to contribute optimally to realizing good governance and a focus on quality public services (Source: Sr. Jose Tello. (2025). "Hala'o entrevista iha loron Sexta Data. 17/10/2025").

Efforts to improve the capacity of civil servants also include induction training for new employees, which is crucial for providing a clear understanding of the duties, responsibilities, administrative structure, and standards of ethical behavior that must be prioritized in public service. This induction training helps new employees adapt to the organizational system, institutional culture, and working mechanisms within the government. Because new employees are part of a new generation of professionals, this initial training also serves to prevent inappropriate behavior and ensure that employees understand the purpose of the service they are supposed to provide to the public (Source: Sr. Jose Tello. (2025). "Hala'o entrevista iha loron Sexta Data. 17/10/2025").

These areas It is crucial to ensure that employees are not only able to respond to day-to-day situations but also have the capacity to contribute to the development of sustainable public policies. These trainings help employees understand how to manage state resources responsibly and transparently, how to plan public programs aligned with government plans, and how to implement services that directly benefit the community (Source: Sr. Jose Tello. (2025). "Hala'o entrevista iha loron Sexta Data. 17/10/2025"). These capacity-building efforts also involve training partnerships with international institutions, such as government organizations, international universities, and technical training institutions. These partnerships can bring new expertise and best practices from

other countries that have developed public services at a more advanced level. Through international knowledge exchange, Timor-Leste's civil servants can gain new references, learn modern methodologies, and broaden their professional perspectives to respond to administrative challenges in an era of change. This can directly contribute to strengthening governance and consolidating effective and reliable public services (Source: Sr. Jose Tello. (2025). "Hala'o entrevista iha loron Sexta Data. 17/10/2025").

In general, the actual conditions faced by the public administration in Timor-Leste indicate that although there has been progress in standardizing recruitment and ongoing training, the level of professionalism among civil servants remains uneven. This presents a challenge in building a strong ethical culture within the bureaucracy. Therefore, a priority strategy is needed that not only demonstrates but also promotes a culture of ethics comprehensively at all levels of the organization. This strategy should include strengthening leadership with integrity, ongoing training and development, implementing a fair reward and punishment system, and improving the organizational culture towards a meritocratic orientation.

### 1.2 Public institutions to motivate employees to work with professional commitment and responsibility

According to Mr. Jose Tello as Commissioner of the Public Service said that, Ethics in the public service guides the character and behavior of employees when performing professional duties. Ethics is the moral guide that determines how officials treat people, make administrative decisions, and handle public responsibility. Through the principles of integrity, honesty, justice and transparency, employees can show that their services are given to the public interest, not to personal interests or groups. This contributes to create trust between the people and the State, because the moral conduct of officials is a mirror for the people to judge the quality of public administration.

Professionalism provides the basis for technical skills, public sector knowledge, administrative competence, and operational capacity in the development of programs and services. Provisionalism helps employees respond to work challenges with efficiency, good planning, and evidence-based decision-making. When ethics and professionalism are integrated with a fair balance, employees become competent, integrity and responsible, in accordance with the standards of law and principles of good governance. This is the foundation to improve the quality of public services and move to strengthen reliable public administration in Timor-Leste. (Interview on Friday.17/10/2025)

### 1.3 Daily work experience, to practice the principle of respect and transparency of service

According to Mr. Manuel de Jesus as a staff in the public service said that, in my daily work, I practice respect by listening as good to people who come to seek assistance or information. I respond to them with appropriate language, do not devalue people, and do not speak in an offensive tone. Transparency is applied by providing clarity about administrative procedures, documents required, and steps to be taken. I also said the estimated processing time, so that people do not feel doubt or anxiety while waiting for the results of the service. These practices are important because they help improve public trust and strengthen the integrity of the public service. (Interview conducted on Wednesday 22/10/2025)

Sr. Vitor Amaral as a staff in the public service said that, In my daily work, I serve with patience, do not appreciate people's time and make them feel good in the process. I show respect, by treating everyone equally, without discrimination based on relationship or social status. Transparency is applied by providing information that is fair, clear, and free from manipulation or misinformation. I ensure that the public understands the purpose of the service and the applicable legal limitations. Accordingly, the relationship between officials and citizens becomes more professional, reliable and stable. (Interview conducted on Friday 24/10/2025)

### 1.4 Examples of real situations where ethical decisions are made to avoid favoritism or discrimination

According to Mr. Manuel de Jesus as a staff in the public service said that, The example I encountered is when a colleague asked to give priority to his family in the queue of service. I respectfully reject this request, because public service is not based on personal interest or personal relationships. I explained that the service procedure must follow the order of arrival, to ensure justice for all. When service is compromised by favoritism, public trust can decrease and suspicion arises. Therefore, equal treatment for all becomes a fundamental principle for the integrity and credibility of the institution. (Interview conducted on Wednesday 22/10/2025)

Sr. Vitor Amaral as a staff in the public service said that, Another real situation is when people want to need help to leave without a queue because he knows the employee. I follow the list of registration and rules of service and do not change the decision because of personal relationships or external influence. This principle is important to prevent discrimination, because everyone has the same right to public services. I say that laws and regulations guide the process, not individual will or prison situations. If we put

consistency in decisions, then public confidence will increase and administrative culture will improve (Interview on Friday 24/10/2025)

#### 1.5 The importance of professional attitude and language communicates with citizens

According to Mr. Manuel de Jesus as a staff in the public service said that, Professional attitude in the public service is an important factor because it determines the image of the institution itself. When officials speak with respect, appropriate posture, and do not use offensive language, people feel safe to know their rights. to establish a reliable relationship between public administration and citizens. In the long run, this practice can increase public trust and credibility of the State. (Interview conducted on Wednesday 22/10/2025)

Sr. Vitor Amaral as a staff in the public service said that, Professional attitude and appropriate language make a big difference in the way people receive services. When employees treat people well, people feel that they are valued and respected. citizens become harmonious, because interaction is based on trust and openness. The final consequence is that the people will see the institution as a responsible, professional, and reliable structure. . (Interview conducted on Friday 24/10/2025)

#### 1.6 Pressure political influence, to control service behavior

Sr. Vitor Amaral as a staff in the public service said that, Political pressure I face through clarity about the legal means, so as not to frustrate or need to be sympathetic. I follow formal procedures at work, follow administrative steps that are documented and justified. I do not make decisions based on personal relationships, favoritism or unofficial instructions as this may attack the integrity of the service. This principle helps to ensure equal treatment for all and prevent suspicion or conflict of interest. In this way, the institutional authority will receive the respect of the people, and the working atmosphere will be clear, objective and professional. (Interview conducted on Friday 24/10/2025)

#### 1.7 Level of professionalism of civil servants to serve the people

According to Mr. Manuel de Jesus as a staff in the public service said that the level of professionalism now in the public sector is not uniform, because employees have different capacities and attitudes. There are good aspects, such as responsibility and presence, but other parts are not consistent. Communication capacity needs to be improved, because the wrong words or approach can make people do not understand the procedure. Time management also needs attention, so that people do not wait too long or feel not prioritized. These improvements can increase efficiency and public confidence in the institution. (Interview on Wednesday 22/10/2025) Sr. Vitor Amaral as a staff in the public service said that, In my opinion, the level of professionalism in the public sector is now classified as medium, not less and not very high. There are employees who work well, but the system does not provide good motivation or appreciation for results. It is necessary to improve the supervision mechanism, to ensure that the language is done according to standards and does not enter repetitive errors. Appreciation and professional motivation are important to encourage employees to work with dedication. Standardization of service quality is the key to people receiving equal treatment in all public departments (Interview on Friday 24/10/2025)

#### 1.8 Technical and administrative competence most important to provide efficient service

According to Mr. Manuel de Jesus as a staff in the public service said that, Important technical competence is knowledge of laws, regulations, and administrative systems applied in the institution. Because the law is the basis for officials to determine decisions with clarity and justice, not according to personal opinion. Communication skills are also fundamental, because employees must give simple and easy to understand explanations to the people. Good communication can avoid misunderstandings and prevent people from feeling ignored. All of which makes technical competence the foundation for becoming a public servant. (Interview conducted on Wednesday 22/10/2025) Sr. Vitor Amaral as a staff in the public service said that, administrative competence such as organizing documents, time management, and service flow is essential for the work to run normally. Document organization is important to avoid losing information or delays in processing. Time management helps to prevent long waits and increase service efficiency. Technical competence such as knowledge of administrative software systems also supports the process. When technical and administrative competence work together, the service does not stop and people feel professional service. (Interview conducted on Friday 24/10/2025)

#### 1.9 Limited factors and need to prioritize improving professionalism in the public sector

According to Mr. Manuel de Jesus as a staff in the public service said that this limitation is related to the lack of effective supervision in the work environment. In the absence of regular guidance and monitoring, services are not clearly directed and there is no mechanism to identify areas where it needs to be fixed. Lack of supervision can affect productivity and quality of results, because people do not feel direct responsibility for the

task done. The work atmosphere also becomes less coordinated, with inefficient communication between leadership and team members.

Therefore, the main priority is to invest in capacity and continuous training for staff. Regular training can increase technical knowledge and leadership competence, to reinforce professionalism. The ultimate objective is to make the work efficient, transparent, and sustainable (Interview on Wednesday 22/10/2025)

Sr. Vitor Amaral as a staff in the public service said that another limitation is the lack of motivation among employees, which results from the absence of constructive feedback and valuation of individual efforts. Many people feel that their work is not recognized and their contributions are not valued. Such a situation can cause employees to lose initiative, creativity, and dedication. In the long run, not having a feedback and mentorship system can create distance between leadership and team members, making for an uninspiring work environment.

Important priorities are to improve leadership, promote mentoring and implement clear and fair evaluation. Effective leadership must convey direction, motivate the team, and offer constructive feedback geared toward continuous improvement. Mentoring programs can help new members learn from senior experience, and a clear evaluation system can ensure that every employee understands the goals, expected results, and areas for improvement. These measures will increase motivation, transparency, and quality of service in the institution. (Interview conducted on Friday 24/10/2025)

#### 1.10 The impact of people's trust when employees practice ethics and professionalism at work

According to Mr. Manuel de Jesus as a staff in the public service said that, When public service is performed with ethics and professionalism, people feel trust and respect the institution. These attitudes provide assurance to citizens that the administrative process is carried out in accordance with the law and the principles of justice. This trust is important because it can reduce suspicion, favoritism, and corruption in the working relationship. Clear language, appropriate behavior, and equal treatment are the basis for building good relations with the people. In the long run, this contributes directly to improving state-citizen relations and increasing the credibility of public administration. (Interview conducted on Wednesday 22/10/2025)

## 2) Discussion and Interpretation of Data

Based on the results of interviews with the Public Service Commission (KFP), Director of Human Resources, and civil servants showed that ethics and professionalism are the fundamental basis to ensure transparent, responsible and reliable public service in T love-East.

The Public Service Commission makes concrete implementation through the Code of Ethics and Conduct of Civil Servants, Disciplinary Regulations, and monitoring system to ensure standards of professional behavior. Socialization mechanisms, workshops, and introductory training provide clarity to employees about moral duties, legal responsibilities, and consequences for violations. In parallel, the public complaint system and regular inspection help KFP to monitor and investigate cases that do not comply with ethical standards, applying sanctions according to the seriousness of the violation. This process aims to strengthen justice, impartiality and transparency within public institutions.

Perspective Director of Human Resources, Sr. Mário Nunes, also confirmed that the promotion of integrity leadership is a priority, because good leaders can improve the organizational atmosphere, stimulate integrity and prevent abuse of power. Priority strategies include the implementation of meritocracy in recruitment, continuous training in ethics and administrative management, and the establishment of a fair reward and sanction system. The HR Directorate also uses international references such as the CPLP Code of Conduct, UN standards, and OECD guidelines to structure a Code of Ethics relevant to the Timor-Leste context.

On a practical level, officials such as Mr. Manuel de Jesus and Mr. Vitor Amaral said that the principles of respect and transparency are applied in everyday work through equal treatment for all, adequate communication, and clear explanation of administrative procedures. When faced with political pressure or requests for favoritism, they follow the Code of Ethics and regulate decisions according to law to ensure justice. These real examples show that ethical practice is not abstract, but manifests itself in daily decisions involving integrity and neutrality.

The analysis shows that the level of professionalism of civil servants is not uniform, but there is progress due to training and standardization of the recruitment process. Communication capacity, time management, and administrative regulations are areas that need to be prioritized to improve service quality. When ethics and professionalism are harmonized, the quality of public services will increase, corruption will decrease, and the credibility of the State will reach high. This shows that the integration of moral principles and technical empowerment is the basis for building a transparent, accountable, and people-serving public administration in Timor-Leste.

Based on the above analysis, the researcher can interpret that ethics and professionalism are two key elements that complement each other to establish accountable, transparent, and reliable public services in Timor-Leste. Ethics is not only defined as a set of normative moral rules, but as value guidelines that guide the behavior of bureaucrats in carrying out their duties and responsibilities to the community and the state.

This finding aligns with the Grand Theory of Public Administration Ethics proposed by Dwight Waldo (1952) and developed by Terry L. Cooper (1998). Waldo claims that ethics is a fundamental element in the practice of public administration, as moral values serve as a guide for bureaucratic decision-making. Meanwhile, Cooper emphasizes the importance of an ethical decision-making model in governance, where all actions of public administrators must be rooted in moral responsibility to the wider community. Based on this theory, it can be said that the implementation of the Code of Ethics and Disciplinary Regulations by KFP represents a concrete step to strengthen the system of moral values in the bureaucracy of Timor-Leste.

Institutionally, KFP has implemented several implementation mechanisms, such as socializing the code of ethics, training, workshops, and continuous development for new and existing staff. Further, the implementation of a public reporting system (public whistleblowing) and routine inspections are also crucial to ensure that any breaches of ethical standards are appropriately monitored and dealt with. These mechanisms demonstrate a form of ethical accountability, where moral and legal responsibilities go hand in hand. This concept aligns with Denhardt & Denhardt's (2000) view of the New Public Service/New Public Servis (NPS), which emphasizes that the primary duty of state officials is not only to serve citizens as "customers" but as "citizens" who have the right to be treated fairly, honestly, and with dignity. Thus, the orientation of public services in Timor-Leste changed from rule-based administration to value-based governance.

The importance of leadership with integrity and meritocratic system in strengthening bureaucratic professionalism. According to him, leaders with high integrity can create a healthy organizational climate, foster a sense of responsibility, and prevent the abuse of power in the workplace. Priority strategies implemented include merit-based recruitment, continuous training in ethics and public management, and proportional reward and sanction systems. This approach aligns with Freidson's (2001) theory of professionalism, which explains that professionalism is not only measured by technical skill but also by moral commitment to the values of public service, integrity, and social responsibility. Therefore, the policy of strengthening human resource capacity in Timor-Leste is consistent with the theory of modern professionalism.

Based on observations in the field, civil servants such as Mr. Manuel de Jesus and Mr. Vitor Amaral emphasized that the principles of respect and transparency are values that are consistently upheld in their daily work practices. They strive to treat the public fairly, explain administrative procedures clearly, and avoid political interference or nepotistic demands. These practices demonstrate an effective internalization of ethical values, where employees begin to consider the code of ethics not only a formal document but also a moral compass in their actions. This can be explained by Lawrence Kohlberg's (1981) theory of moral development, which states that individuals in the postconventional stage make decisions based on universal moral principles, rather than being pressured by external regulations. Thus, some civil servants in Timor-Leste have begun to achieve a high level of ethical awareness.

There is still variation in technical competence, communication skills, time management, and understanding of public administration regulations. This situation indicates the need for continuous professional development policies and measurable performance appraisal systems. This finding is consistent with the Good Governance Theory (UNDP, 1997) which emphasizes that good governance must be based on three main pillars: 1), transparency, 2), accountability, and 3), integrity. These three principles can only be effective when supported by professional, ethical human resources committed to the public interest.

Therefore, it can be concluded that ethical practices and professionalism in the public sector of Timor-Leste have shown positive progress. Institutional efforts such as the development of a code of ethics, strengthening the oversight system, and developing human resource capacity serve as the foundation for building a clean and responsive public administration. Synchronizing moral principles (ethics) and technical capacity (professionalism) is a key factor in creating an efficient and integrity-based bureaucracy. From a theoretical perspective, this situation illustrates the process of bureaucratic transformation into a humanistic and equitable public service model, as idealized in The New Public Service Paradigm.

With this harmonization of theory and practice, ethics and professionalism are no longer just normative slogans but begin to function as instruments for changing bureaucratic culture in Timor-Leste. Through a commitment to integrity, meritocracy, and public accountability, it is hoped that Timor-Leste's bureaucracy will be able to develop into a system of government that the people trust and become an example of good public governance in the region.

### 3) Implications of Research Findings

The results of this study on the application of ethics and professionalism in the public service in Timor-Leste reveal several important implications, both theoretically, practically, and in public policy. These findings imply that ethics and professionalism are not only ideal normative values, but also begin to function as operational pillars to establish a transparent, accountable, and public interest-oriented bureaucratic culture.

#### 3.1. Theoretical Implications

Theoretically, the findings of this study strengthen and extend the broad theory of public administration ethics as proposed by Dwight Waldo (1952) and Terry L. Cooper (1998), who affirm that ethics is an essential element in the practice of public administration. Moreover, these findings also reinforce the New Public Service theory (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2000), which focuses on public service based on values and citizen participation. The fact that public officials in Timor-Leste have begun to prioritize transparency, accountability, and social justice indicates that the public service paradigm has shifted from a bureaucratic rule-based model to a value-based service model. In other words, the results of this study contribute to strengthening the theoretical foundation that integrating ethics and professionalism can increase public trust and the effectiveness of government administration.

#### 3.2. Practical Implications

In practical terms, the findings of this study indicate that the consistent application of ethics and professionalism can improve the quality of public services and strengthen institutional integrity. Practices such as providing outreach, ethics training, implementing public reporting mechanisms, and regular inspection by KFP have proven to be effective in fostering moral awareness among civil servants. The civil servants interviewed—such as Fr. Manuel de Jesus and Ir. Vitor Amaral showed that the values of respect, transparency (openness), and neutrality have been internalized in everyday work behavior.

This has a direct impact on increasing public trust in public institutions and reducing the practice of abuse of authority. When public officials begin to resist political pressure and favoritism, it signals a shift in organizational culture toward more ethical and professional bureaucratic behavior. Thus, the findings of this study show that continuous capacity development and ethics training are essential for human resource development in the public sector.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

### 1) Conclusion

Based on the analysis and discussion of the application of ethics and professionalism in the function of the public service in Timor-Leste, it can be concluded that these two aspects are the main foundation for building a transparent, accountable, and reliable public administration. Ethics are not only ideal moral principles, but also serve as practical behavioral guidelines for each public servant in performing their daily duties, making decisions, and interacting with the public:

- The implementation of the Code of Ethics and Disciplinary Regulations of the Public Service Commission (KFP) shows concrete steps to strengthen bureaucratic integrity and professionalism. Efforts such as outreach, training, and a strict oversight system demonstrate the state's commitment to inculcating the values of accountability and justice at all levels of the public apparatus.
- From a human resource management perspective, this study confirms that leadership with integrity and a meritocratic system are key to building an ethical and productive work climate. The Human Resources Directorate plays a crucial role in ensuring that the recruitment, training, and performance evaluation processes are conducted fairly and oriented towards enhancing the capacity and moral responsibility of civil servants.
- Empirically, field practice shows that a number of civil servants have begun to implement the values of respect, transparency, and neutrality in their daily work. This is an indicator of a shift in organizational culture towards a more ethical and professional bureaucracy.
- Therefore, it can be concluded that the integration of ethics and professionalism is a primary prerequisite for the establishment of an effective, fair, and trustworthy public service. When these two principles work in harmony, the quality of services improves, corruption decreases, and the state's credibility with the people becomes stronger.

## 2) Recommendation

Based on the research findings and their implications, several recommendations can be made as follows:

### 2.1. Strengthen Public Ethics Education and Training:

The Government, through the Public Service Commission (Public Service Commission), needs to expand its continuing education program on ethics and professionalism. This training is not just a ceremony, but is integrated into the career development system of employees, using case study methods and moral reflection relevant to the public service context in Timor-Leste.

### 2.2. Implement Meritocracy and Ethics Evaluation System

The recruitment and promotion process should be based entirely on meritocracy, not personal relationships or political pressure.

### 2.3. Strengthen Oversight and Accountability Mechanisms

KFP, together with related institutions such as the General Inspectorate of the Public Service (State Inspectorate General), needs to improve the effectiveness of public reporting mechanisms and the protection of whistleblowers. It is crucial to ensure that any violations are dealt with transparently and fairly without political interference.

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### 2.4. Develop Ethical Leadership at All Levels

The government needs to prioritize the development of integrity-based leadership in all public institutions. Ethical leaders not only serve as moral role models but are also key drivers in creating an honest, fair and accountable organizational culture.

### 2.5. Interinstitutional Collaboration and International Learning

The Human Resources Development Directorate and the Human Resources Development Coordination Council (HRC) can strengthen collaboration with international institutions such as the CPLP, OECD, or UNDP to enrich ethical standards and public management systems. Adopting best practices from other countries can accelerate the strengthening of governance based on moral values and professionalism.

### 2.6. Focus on Technical and Social Capacity Development

The government also needs to focus on improving employees' technical skills, such as public communication, time management, and mastery of administrative regulations. When technical skills and moral values are developed simultaneously, public services will be more efficient and humane.

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