

**THE EFFECTIVENESS OF ETHICAL LEADERSHIP ON EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE:
SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW**

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Abstract

This paper's goal is to develop an appropriate systematic literature review of the research that has investigated how ethical leadership affects employees' performance within an enterprise. The growth of multinational corporations provides a new dimension to the investigation of leadership that takes into account the effect of diverse country cultures. This systematic literature review analyzed publications and articles published within the last decade (2009- 2020). Based on the overall research of the 19 analyzed studies top managers, leaders, and supervisors are supposed to set a good example for their team members and employees by modeling ethical behavior. The effectiveness of top managers and leaders on employees and their performance has been thoroughly investigated in many research. All hypotheses were supported by the data collected from 19 papers, which showed that ethical leadership improves employees' in-role job performance. These findings have important research and practical consequences. Additionally, since ethical leadership is seen to be essential in enhancing the accepted business strategy in the achievement of organizations' objectives and goals, this research will concentrate on the effects of an ethical leadership style on the performance of employees.

Keywords: Ethical leadership, Employee performance, organization culture, Systematic Literature Review.

Discipline: leadership theory

Absztrakt

AZ ETIKUS VEZETÉS HATÁSA A MUNKAVÁLLALÓK TELJESÍTMÉNYÉRE: SZISZTEMATIKUS SZAKIRODALOM-FELDOLGOZÁS

A tanulmány célja, hogy a szisztematikus szakirodalom-feldolgozás módszertanát alkalmazva, választ kapjon arra, hogy az etikus vezetés milyen formában befolyásolja a munkavállalók teljesítményét. A kutatás során a 2009 és 2020 között, a témában angol nyelven megjelent 19 tudományos munka elemzésére került sor.

Kulcsszavak: Etikus vezetés, munkavállalói teljesítmény, szervezeti kultúra, szisztematikus, szakirodalom-feldolgozás

Diszciplína: vezetéselmélet

Introduction

Governance of corporate professional culture plays a significant role in the world of business and is an essential component of organizational success from an anthropological and business perspective. The new values in today's world have imposed many challenges in front of business organizations, the most important of which is the ethical view and the social responsibility entrusted to them. Leadership, like so many fields in applied ethics, leadership has its own set of problems arising from the roles that leaders perform as well as their obligations to followers and other people. (Ciulla, 2018), especially in the relationship between the leader and employees and based on the role of the leader manager in practicing values based on justice, integrity, honesty, and objectivity in distributing tasks and duties, performing tasks, and evaluating employees (Bouckenooghe et al., 2015; Ruiz-Palomino et al. 2011). Furthermore, leadership is ethically difficult and challenging because it demands the leader to control himself, his ego, and his use of power (Ciulla, 2018).

In the management literature, morality and ethics have received much more attention in the contemporary business context. Emerging companies today contribute significantly more to the

creation of substantial personal benefits and organizational profitability. Businesses across the globe would gain greatly from the new concept, which obliges them to adopt moral and ethical considerations as essential tools for the health of their firms. Both public and private businesses should adopt the concept of ethical leadership to achieve global socioeconomic expansion in order to fulfill the expanding demand for workplace and organizations ethics. Furthermore, today's business leaders need to rethink and reevaluate what they are offering, how they operate a business, who might be new participants to achieve better performance, new services, products, and so on (Guo, 2022).

Anthropology is a social science that investigates how people's social environments affect their emotions, values, attitudes, performance, behaviors, and other aspects of their lives (Tian & Zhou, 2012). Since this frequently takes place in a cross-cultural setting, anthropology frequently has a comparative and global focus.

Anthropology and business are intimately connected and impossible to disentangle because modern business is tightly tied to cultural development, technical change, and societal advancements. Business anthropology became popular and was

first applied in the late nineteenth century (Baba, 2012), Business anthropology's significance has expanded rapidly since the 1980s, both within the field and outside of it in the realm of public life (Jordan, 2010). It has also been demonstrated that traditional anthropological research techniques such as ethnography, interviews and observation suitable for business research (Walle, 2002).

An anthropological approach to leadership studies allows the use of research tools and methods that seriously consider socio-cultural dynamics. Leadership principles are primarily universal and for that reason do not pay too much consideration to the functioning of local culture and society and its organizational impact (Johnson, 2007). However, modern business is closely linked to the cultural and social determinants of producers and consumers. It is for this reason that the anthropological research method of exploring these specific contexts is increasingly becoming the focus of contemporary management science.

The application of anthropological research methods can help business leaders and administrators to foster better working relationships among employees who are increasingly likely to represent different cultures, religions, age groups, ethnicities, and genders in the global business world. Of course, the complexity results from the fact that different ethical precepts are held by people from different cultures, and that many ethical concepts are not generally accepted. While everyone agrees that murder, theft, and other morally wrong actions are wrong, attitudes on other matters, like the ethics of animal testing, vary depending on one's faith, society, as well as individual beliefs. Additionally, there may be occasions when it runs against to one moral concept and another. For instance, you might cherish freedom of expression, but what if an employee uses it to offend others? Therefore, upholding one's ethical beliefs while being cognizant of the complexity of some ethical issues, being

considerate of the various viewpoints of the workforce, and being capable of resolving conflicts are all components of ethical leadership. So how can moral leaders uphold moral principles while in office and how do they foster an environment where such principles are respected?

Leadership in various cultures by being aware of the rules, principles, and methods of decision-making. This approach is advantageous for organizations that operate in multiple countries because it aids in the development of an understanding of how to interact with colleagues from various backgrounds. Furthermore, a better understanding of colleagues' national cultures can aid in the creation of workplace unity and harmony. For example, when employees understand their colleagues' cultural norms, they can be more sensitive to understand the differences in communication styles.

Organizational leaders and staff members must be aware of the variations and parallels among cultural expectations when performing their jobs (Resick et al., 2006). The leader is viewed as the center of a company's strategy because all policies and operational procedures implemented later by a leader in the business will affect perceptions, culture, and the organization as a whole in the future.

Leadership is recognized as a key factor that indisputable influences employee performance in any sort of business (Ogbonna & Harris, 2000). However, researchers and academics have disagreed over how workers respond to different styles of leadership (Gadot, 2006). Effective leadership, according to Detert et al. (2007), assists staff in identifying and sharpening their contributions to the organization's success. Even though many leadership theories have been proposed to date professionals and scholars are still searching for solutions to failed leadership.

The growth of multinational corporations provides a new dimension to the investigation of leadership that takes into account the effect of diverse country cultures.

Attention had to be directed towards another type of modern leadership style, which is the "ethical leadership" style. Ethical leadership is an unclear notion that includes several different characteristics (Yukl & Becker, 2006). A recent theoretical concept of ethical leadership has been suggested that may provide a solution (Brown et al. 2004; Trevino et al., 2003).

Ethical leadership represents standards and principles that are essential behavior for leaders since the ethical leader is the one who carries ethical messages that influence the views and behaviors of others through their awareness of the moral advantages that he possesses. This is linked to the mutual trust between him and his employees and is based on acting with integrity and honesty and taking fair and balanced decisions according to clear evaluation criteria, in addition to instilling a spirit of responsibility and commitment among the workers as their awareness of these ethical values indicates the controls of actions to carry out the required performance and positive interaction.

The most significant resource for a company is its workforce; without them, goals and objectives might not be achieved. Employee performance, according to Mwita (2000), is a crucial multi-character factor that aims to produce results that are closely related to the organization's predetermined goals. Employee performance can increase under ethical leadership, according to studies (Bello, 2012). Numerous studies have been conducted to evaluate how ethical leaders might enhance workforce productivity. Ethical leadership may act as a mediator in the relationship between corporate culture and employee outcomes, (Toor & Ofori 2009).

Despite the growing emphasis on ethics in business, the results of ethical leadership have only been the subject of a small but growing number of scientific studies. Even little is known about the psychological processes that underlie moral leadership. In fact, the psychological mechanisms by

which a leader's motivating impacts affect followers have received relatively little study in the leadership literature as a whole. This is unfortunate because research into these processes can advance both our knowledge of ethical leadership and our efforts to produce ethical leaders and employees.

The broadest definition of ethical leadership is the adoption of moral behavior, motivating individuals to start both direction relationships communication and making decisions (Brown et al., 2005).

Ethical leadership improves organizational performance by incorporating moral principles into an organization's processes. An individual's behaviour and deeds are strongly influenced by the development of appropriate ideas, values and beliefs (Rabie & Malek, 2020).

For leaders to be resilient, consistency with moral principles is essential. A leader's moral character is just as important as their managerial skills and strategic influence. According to the claim, ethical leadership is about having people in positions of authority who are morally accountable, visionary, and honest (Sharma et al., 2019). However, this ethical component affects the conduct of the employees and staff members, affecting their motivation, satisfaction, and performance.

In the present paper, we deal with a systematic literature review. The systematic literature review method makes it possible to combine and reinterpret the findings of investigations that are carried out independently by several researchers on a certain topic. As a result, research conducted on a particular topic at various times, locations, and sample sizes can be examined holistically, leading to more reliable conclusions. According to Greenhalgh's (1997) definition of a systematic literature review, it is an examination of the literature that uses simple, repeatable procedures to comprehensively examine all relevant contributions on a particular topic. The investigation of ethical leadership in relation to employee performance is examined in this existing systematic review from

the perspectives of the research questions, research hypotheses, research language, and year of publication. The subject of ethical leadership is handled in various organizations. In this context, the findings of studies undertaken in firms over the previous decade to investigate the relationship between ethical leadership and employee performance have been synthesized. Therefore, to give a thorough analysis of the data gathered, the following research topic will be studied in this review. The question is: “Is the ethical leadership style affect employee performance?”

Methodology

Systematic Literature Review (SLR) is frequently compared to traditional literature reviews due to being objective, repeatable, systematic, complete and because the method is presented in the same way as for conducting empirical studies (Weed, 2005). Systematic Literature Review (SLR) originates in the fields of health care, medicine, and public policy, where it has been used to assemble the most credible evidence to apply to decisions on clinical practice and public policy. (Cook et al. 1997; Tranfield et al. 2003). A systematic Literature Review (SLR) is used in leadership and management to give openness, simplicity, accessibility, as well as impartial and comprehensive reporting on a particular subject (Thorpe et al. 2006). According to Klassen et al. (1998), a systematic Literature Review (SLR) is “a review in which there is a comprehensive search for relevant studies on a specific topic, and those identified are then appraised and synthesized according to a predetermined explicit method”.

Search Strategy and Data Sources

This study used a systematic literature review method, which is a secondary study approach in which all relevant studies relating to a topic domain

are identified, explored, and interpreted (Webster & Watson, 2002). Several databases, including Science Direct, Research Gate Elsevier, and Springer, were selected to narrow the scope of previous research on the effect of ethical leadership on employee performance and increase the chances to find relevant studies. Google Scholar and Google Search are also used to conduct a broader search on topics. The research used ethical leadership, impact, and employee performance as keywords to carry out the automatic search in the databases.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The chosen publications and articles that will be examined in this systematic review ought to include the following:

1. Research in the field of ethical leadership and its impact on employee performance.
2. The studies that are published in English between (2009-2020).
3. The articles whose sample consists of employees, supervisors, managers, and employees working in different organizations. However, in this study, only one master’s thesis and articles published in journals were included in this systematic literature review.
4. The ethical leadership issue in all types of businesses is addressed in this study.

Articles were excluded if the article failed to address the effect of ethical leadership on job organizations’ performance and employees’ performance or if the abstract, findings or discussion parts of the relevant study failed to include any of these four basic elements.

Sample

The key words listed in the section above on inclusion and exclusion criteria were used to locate papers and publications. In total, more than 23

articles were gathered; however, after duplicates were removed, there remained 19 quantitative studies from samples from various countries that met the initial inclusion criteria.

The majority of the study samples came from business organizations in the both public and private sectors and across a range of industries, with only a few examples from other contexts such as universities. The sample sizes were very different, with participant numbers ranging from $n = 62$ (Toor & Ofori, 2009) to $n = 677$ (Khuong & Quoc, 2016).

Although the focus of ethical analysis in all studies and searches is a hierarchical leadership level, for example, CEOs, Managers, Leaders, and Supervisors, all these levels are hereafter in this research referred to as “leaders” —to be simplified, where the distinction is not relevant).

In this paper, the sample was identified as 1. Sample size in this paper was defined as the number leaders and supervisors in two studies.2. Sample size was defined as the number of employees and followers (10 out of 19 studies). Furthermore, 7 studies targeted both employees and leaders to evaluate the effect of leaders’ ethical leadership on the performance of their employees.

Leadership Questionnaires

In summary, in terms of ethical leadership, all of the studies used Brown et al. Ethical Leadership Scale (2005), after the development of the Ethical Leadership Scale (ELS) by Brown et al. (2005), in studies with a quantitative approach, the vast majority of researchers employed this instrument. Ethical Leadership Scale (ELS) items' content can be characterized as deontological and morality in nature, with specific formulations of the significance of values, moral and ethical principles in Ethical Leadership (e.g., “Sets an example of how to do things the right way in terms of ethics”; “Has the best interests of employees in mind”;

“Conducts personal life in an ethical manner”, or “Defines success not just by results but also the way that they are obtained”). As was previously mentioned, contributions to this field of study mostly consist of emphasizing the significance of Ethical leadership based on its effects.

Employees’ performance Questionnaires

Most studies had seven items adapted from various scales of extra-role performance (McNeely & Meglino, 1994; Van Dyne et al., 1994; Moorman & Blakely, 1995; Smith et al., 1983). And a 5-item scale originally developed by Williams and Anderson (1991), and later extended in the Chinese context by Hui, Law, and Chen (1999) was utilized to measure task performance.

Result and Discussion

The main results through the analyzed studies and articles are as the following (shown this in table 1)

Ethical leadership has a direct and indirect effect on the employees’ performance. It was supported by most, if not all, research those 19 publications that were selected and gathered all agreed that there was, in fact, a direct and indirect positive relationship between ethical leadership and employees' performance.

Furthermore, employees perform their best when they are properly treated; this conclusion is supported by practically all of the publications that show that performance improves when employees are treated well. As predicted, the impacts of ethical leadership on employees' performance are moderated by loyalty, trust, commitment, job security, and efficiency. The theoretical contributions made by this study to the connection between ethical leadership and employee performance are significant.

Table 1. Result data table of included articles. Compiled by the Author.

Author /year	Content of sample	Results
Zehir, C., & Erdogan, E. (2011)	employees	Ethical leadership effect positively and directly on employee performance
Bello, S. M. (2012)	leaders	Ethical leadership effect positively and directly on employee performance
Khuong, M. N., & Quoc, T. H. (2016)	employees	Ethical leadership's effect positively and directly on employee performance also has a positive indirect effect of ethical leadership on employee job performance through employee job satisfaction and employee work motivation
Sheraz, A., Zaheer, A., & Nadeem, M. (2012)	leaders	Ethical leadership mediates the positive relationship between organizational culture and employee performance ethical leaders promote a supportive culture in organizations.
Ponnu, C. H., & Tennakoon, G. (2009)	employees	There is a significant relationship between ethical leadership behavior and employee's organizational commitment and positively associated with employees' trust in leaders which effect indirectly on employee performance
Park, C. H., Kim, W., & Song, J. H. (2015)	employees	Ethical performance and leadership effect directly on employees' behavioral performance, also ethical leadership has a positive indirect effect on performance through psychological ownership
Malik, M. S., Awais, M., Timsal, A., & Qureshi, U. H. (2016)	employees	Ethical leadership has a positive direct impact on the performance of employees
Shafique, I., N Kalyar, M., & Ahmad, B. (2018)	employees	Ethical leadership effect directly employees' performance and indirectly through employee job satisfaction
Liu, J., Kwan, H. K., Fu, P. P., & Mao, Y. (2013)	employees and leaders	Ethical leadership positively directly affects employee performance, also indirect effect through workplace friendships and subordinates' traditionality.
Weng, L. C. (2014)	employees and leaders	Ethical leadership and behavior are positively and directly associated with the service performance of their followers.
Bataineh, M. T. (2020)	employees	Ethical leadership has a positive and direct effect on employee job performance
Toor, S. U. R., & Ofori, G. (2009)	employee	Ethical leadership positively and directly affects employees' performance and outcomes.
Kelidbari, H. R. R., Fadaei, Ebrahimi, P. (2016)	employees	Ethical leadership affects employee performance positively and indirectly through intermediary variables such as leader-member exchange, self-efficacy, and organizational identity.
Mo, S., & Shi, J. (2017).	employee and leaders	Ethical leadership effect employee task performance positively and indirectly mediated by trust in leader and surface acting.
Bouckennooghe, D., Zafar, A., & Raja, U. (2015)	employees and leaders	There is a positive indirect relationship between the ethical leadership of the leaders and followers' in-role job performance, through mediator factors such as follower-leader goal congruence and psychological capital.
Ahn, J., Lee, S., & Yun, S. (2018)	employees and leaders	Ethical leadership directly and positively affects employee performance.
Kang, S. W. (2019)	employees and leaders	Ethical leadership effect positively and indirectly on followers' work performance mediated by followers' perceived salience of the ethics code
Yates, L. (2011)	employees	There is a positive indirect relationship between a leader's ethical leadership and employee job performance, through mediator factors such as job satisfaction and organizational commitment.
Obicci, P. A. (2015)	employees	There is a positive and direct effect of ethical leadership on employee performance.

The systematic literature review results revealed that ethical leadership positively affected employee performance. When ethical leadership studies were examined, it was found that ethical leadership is associated with employee performance. However, there are ongoing discussions as whether this effect on student achievement is direct or indirect. Although some studies support that ethical leadership directly affects employee performance (Sabir et al., 2012), there are also some studies concluded that it has an indirect effect on employee performance (Khuong & Quoc, 2016). According to the findings of the systematic literature review, ethical leadership has a positive impact on employee performance. When studies on ethical leadership were examined, it was discovered that ethical leadership is related to employee performance. However, there is an ongoing debate about whether this effect on employee performance is direct or indirect. Although some studies support that ethical leadership directly affects employee performance, others conclude that it has an indirect effect on employee performance. According to (Sabir et al., 2012) ethical leadership, when practiced, can have a significant impact on employee performance. Previous research has shown that ethical leadership leads to self-sufficiency, employee motivation, and self-reliance wisdom, which leads to performance maintenance and achievement of the organization's goals. As a result, employees who are authorized by ethical leadership can be productive and raise the organization's performance level. Leaders should possess the moral principles, interpersonal skills, and capacities to complete many jobs as required by the organizations. Today, ethical leadership can help to build a moral society, and effective teams, increase employee and organizational performance and create a positive image of the country on a global level.

The components of work ethics enhance the employee's performance on the job (integrity,

equality, responsibility, and self-discipline). Additionally, all auditors should receive pertinent information from the company. To put it bluntly, managers should have authority over their staff, treat everyone equally, and rely on their team members to self-monitor the work they are given. (Bataineh, 2020). It has been suggested by Toor and Ofori (2009) that ethical leadership could play the role of a mediator in the connection between organizational culture and the outcomes experienced by employees. According to the findings, ethical leadership has a greater likelihood of resulting in greater leader effectiveness, employee willingness to put in extra effort, employee job satisfaction, and an environment climate that fosters the flourishing of ethical leadership, all of which lead to improved employee job performance.

Limitations

Despite the disciplined approach taken in conducting this systematic literature review, there may still be some limitations. This paper limited its search to English-language published articles in journals that were reachable and accessible by the authors' university library system. Thus, this systematic literature review did not include dissertations or articles published not in English but in another language. With the apparently global interest in ethical leadership that this research highlighted, it's possible that additional empirical studies are being published in another language that would support or refute some of the findings from this analysis. There are a few systematic literature reviews that may be used to evaluate the research methods employed in other disciplines, such as qualitative inquiry and cross-sectional investigations. A second limitation has to do with the lack of studies that use the anthropological approach and qualitative method no studies focused on the differences in ethical perspective would affect ethical leadership and employee

performance. All research in this review shares the common goal of examining the effects of ethical leadership. To stop unethical acts from occurring, it is essential to understand the causes of EL, but this field of study is still underdeveloped.

Implications for Future Research

More studies are required that focus on studies that use the anthropological approach and qualitative method no studies focused on the differences in ethical perspective would affect ethical leadership and employee performance. Furthermore more studies are required to bring a new dimension to the study of leadership by taking the influence of various national cultures into account.

Conclusion

This systematic literature review paper is scholarly and contemporary on the studying of the effect of ethical leadership on employee performance have been able to develop a real knowledge of some of the measures that should be managed to gather in the system to guarantee better performance at the workplace. The employees feel respected and appreciated when they are treated well and care is given. This approach will be essential in making sure that the employee can provide and perform better. According to the logic presented in the papers analyzed, it is ensuring employees can participate in the policies established in organizations is essentials essential to ensuring that they can appreciate their work and are motivated to do it. Organizational change strategies should put the employees at the forefront.

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