ETHICAL LEADERSHIP IN CROSS-CULTURE

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Abstract

   The existing ethical leadership literature reflects a Western-based private sector perspective, implying a compliance-oriented view of ethical leadership. Developing a more comprehensive understanding of how ethical leadership is viewed in the Western and Eastern cultural clusters, as well as the private and public sectors, is crucial because today's leaders must lead ethically across cultures and sectors more and more. Addressing this issue, the present study explores how employees from Eastern cultures define ethical leadership and which characteristics they associate with ethical leaders. A qualitative study was conducted through interviews this study conducted 10 confidential individual interviews with leaders and employees in a public organization in Jordan. The findings indicate that while there may be similarities with Western perspectives on ethical leadership such as honesty; respect, fairness, and justice, there are also distinct characteristics and priorities that reflect the unique socio-cultural context of the region like religiosity, accountability, responsibility, and trustworthiness.

   Keywords: Ethics, Ethical leadership, cross-culture, organizational culture
   Diszcipline: Cultural Anthropology, Ethnography

Absztrakt

ETIKUS VEZETÉS A KULTÚRÁK KÖZÖTT

   A meglévő etikus vezetési szakirodalom a magánszektor nyugati szemléletét tükrözi, ami az etikus vezetés megfelelésorientált szemléletét feltételezi. Az etikus vezetés megítélésének átfogóbb megértése kulcsfontosságú a nyugati és keleti kultúrkörökben, valamint a magán- és közszférában, mivel a mai

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vezetőknek egyre inkább kultúrák és ágazatok közötti etikus vezetést szükséges alkalmazniuk. Jelen tanulmány azt vizsgálja, hogy a keleti kultúrákból származó alkalmazottak hogyan definiálják az etikus vezetést, és milyen jellemzőket társítanak az etikus vezetőkhöz. A kvalitatív tanulmányt interjúk segítségével készítette el a szerző, mely során 10 bizalmas egyéni interjú felvételére került sor egy jordán állami szervezet vezetőivel és alkalmazottaival. Az eredmények azt mutatják, hogy bár vannak hasonlóságok az etikus vezetés nyugati szemléletével, mint például a becsületesség, tisztelet, tisztesség és igazságosság, de vannak olyan sajátos jellemzők és prioritások is, amelyek a régió egyedi szociokulturális kontextusát tükrözik, mint például a vallásosság, elszámoltathatóság, felelősség és megbízhatóság.

Kulcsszavak: etika, etikus vezetés, kultúrák közötti kapcsolat, szervezeti kultúra.

Diszciplína: kulturális antropológia, néprajz

Introduction

Over the years, ethics has been one of the hottest topics in social sciences, philosophy, and business practices. Ethics holds a significant place in academia, society, and various professional fields due to its philosophical underpinnings, practical relevance, and its role in shaping moral behavior and decision-making. The subfield of philosophy called ethics covers a wide range of disciplines, from economics to anthropology. Content of the concept of ethics varies from nation to nation according to cultural and religious norms, as well as regional, national, historical, and environmental variables (Göçen, 2021).

Cross-cultural comparative studies are crucial in today's multicultural world, as the leading organizations in various industries are multinational, with employees from many countries. Within the set of comparative studies, the specificity of ethical attitudes in the context of cultures is key, as knowledge of these attitudes can reveal the ethical responsibilities that leaders from different cultures demand of the organizations they lead (Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2020). In an era marked by globalization and increasing interconnectivity, the landscape of leadership and organizational management has evolved significantly (Thomas, 2002). As organizations expand across borders, engage with diverse communities, and embrace multicultural workforces, the importance of ethical leadership in cross-cultural contexts has gained unprecedented attention.

The fusion of ethics and leadership within a cross-cultural framework has become not only a strategic necessity but also a moral imperative in the pursuit of sustainable success and harmonious coexistence (Javidan et al., 2006).

The overall point of examining culture and ethical leadership in a business setting is that practices that may be considered acceptable, and perhaps, ethical in one culture, may conflict with viewpoints on ethical practices in another, and therefore it is a priority for researchers to examine the impact of different cultures on ethical leadership (Carroll, 2004; Donaldson & Dunfee, 1999).

As organizations grow and expand, it is critical for leaders in multicultural organizations to understand how the rules, behavior, patterns, values, and attitudes of business in one culture differ from another. The proliferation of global companies raises the question of whether leadership theories can be applied universally across various cultures, or whether cultural specificities need to be taken into account in order to lead effectively. Managers of international companies who function across national borders have little guidance on how to adapt to different cultures in order to lead effectively (Hill, 2002)

Understanding the perception of people from different cultures is essential to the success of

effective team-building and team function. Additionally, with researchers establishing universally ethical characteristics, leaders who learn to express the same ethical behaviors in different manners can help establish better relationships with their subordinates and give their organization a potential competitive advantage.

The Purpose of this Study

This article delves into the intricate tapestry of ethics and ethical leadership as they intersect with the multifaceted world of cross-cultural dynamics. It explores the challenges and opportunities inherent in leading and managing across different cultural backgrounds while upholding ethical principles.

By examining this intersection, this study aims to shed light on the complex, yet pivotal, role that ethical leadership plays in navigating the ethi-cal dilemmas, values conflicts, and cultural varia-tions that emerge in diverse workplaces. In the dearth of research available in this area, studies are often based on a Western perspective and do not take into consideration the various intricacies of other cultural views (Resick et al., 2006).

Therefore, there is a need to examine how ethical leadership is perceived in countries that are not based on Wes-tern culture. Based on the following research ques-tions, this study sought to explore the basic charac-teristics of ethical leadership in Islamic Middle Eas-tern culture. What is the perception of ethical leadership in non-Western countries? What are the similarities and differences in the content of the concept of ethical leadership in organizations in Western and Eastern countries?

A qualitative study was conducted through 10 semi-structured interviews with managers and employees in one of the organizations in the Middle East, Jordan to obtain data on this question.

The Theoretical Background of Ethical Leadership

Human society is based on ethics, which is also essential for the creation of laws and social norms as well as for directing our actions and choices. It offers a framework for individuals and groups to think about what is reasonable and decent, and it aids in the resolution of challenging moral dilemmas in a variety of spheres of life. Examining the ethical approaches that have remained the same or have evolved over the ages would be crucial in this context, as it might provide valuable insights into the ways in which the essence of ethics varies across history and between cultural contexts.

Ethos, which means "habit or character" in Greek, is the root of the philosophical term ethics. Ethics is the body of moral principles and values that define what is good and wrong in an individual's or a group's behavior. The public finds it morally and legally acceptable when people behave ethically, according to Trevino (1986).

The core questions of ethics have always been what defines good and bad behavior, what morally justifies a certain course of action, and how individuals and society arrive at these conclusions. According to Sims (1992), ethical behavior is defined as acts that, rather than being considered "bad" or "wrong," are ethically "good" and "right" in a particular circumstance. According to philosophical concepts, it focuses on clarifying and characterrizing ethical standards and actions, implying that certain acts are acceptable or undesirable (Minkes et al., 1999).

According to Thomas (2002), ethics is a broad term that refers to a set of rules that determine what is good and what is bad. A general conception of ethics would include three main philosophies (Thomas, 2002):

1. Utilitarianism examines the effects of decisions and looks for the greatest attainable

balance between good and bad.

2. According to the deontological perspective, every individual is a unique being with significant rights that should be upheld.

3. Cultural relativism promotes respect for the ethical norms and cultural systems of others. It is improper to impose one's own standards on others (Fritzsche & Becker, 1984; Thomas, 2002).

Culture and ethics

Contemporary anthropologists define culture as "an ideational system," which refers to "what humans learn, not what they do and make" (Keesing, 1981, 68-69). According to Geertz (1973, 145.), "culture is the fabric of meaning in terms of which human beings interpret their experiences and guide their action". The term "culture" refers to everything that influences the behavior and mental health of a specific group of people. It is about how a group of individuals perceive and represent life and the universe to themselves (Geertz, 1973). Culture becomes a crucial component in the process by which multinational managers try to lead their teams and organizations. A group's common beliefs and values that provide its members purpose and behavioral guidelines are referred to as their culture. Culture strongly influences people's ability to think ethically and their attitudes towards ethics. "There are global variations in ethical principles due to a variety of factors such as social and political dynamics, historical customs, and religious beliefs." (Campbell et al., 2010, 129.).

As a result, in an increasingly globalized world, where ecosystems and societies have to cope with complexity and multiple cultures, ethics is becoming increasingly important and likely to be a source of conflict. It is not only ethics in general that poses a challenge, but also the different moral beliefs of employees from different backgrounds within companies. In the course of day-to-day ope-

rations, there are many points in the life of organizations where ethical conflicts can arise between management and their subordinates from different cultures (Campbell et al., 2010, 129..**)**

Accordingly, culture is a shared experience among group members and has the power to influence behavior and how individuals view their environment (Chen, 2005). This has a significant impact on their performance and corporate well-being. Culture reflects moral and ethical beliefs. Norms and values, which are closely related to ethics are defined as the middle layer of culture by Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (2012). Hofstede and Minkov (2010) refer to the moral circle as a group of people who consider themselves to be one group. They state that the moral circle does not only affect symbols, rituals, and heroes but also our values.

Ethics in Organizational Culture

The core component of any cultural system is ethics. From an institutional standpoint, ethics are the values, norms, and customs that make up shared cultural framework or script of an organization. Malinowski (1944) defined ethics as the set of principles that people organize around in order to follow or join existent groups.

The study of ethics focuses on how choices affect particular people. It also includes researching people's moral convictions, social interactions, and legal and moral obligations. Ethical guidelines and practices are heavily incorporated into business operations. In a narrower sense, ethics in an organizational setting can be understood as an honest discussion of the principles and issues that are most important to the stakeholders and the outcome. It is, in a sense, a continuous process of exploring, validating, and evaluating one's own ideas and beliefs (Freeman & Stewart, 2006). The most common way to characterize ethical behavior in an organizational setting is to talk about the

moral standards of senior managers (CEOs) and the organizational culture to which they contribute significantly (DeGeorge, 1986).

According to Cameron and Quinn (2011), an organization's culture is represented in its values, prevailing management and leadership philosophies, language and symbols, processes and routines, and success criteria that define its identity. Organizational culture emerged as a business phenomena in the early 1980s, sparked by authors who proposed that corporate culture was critical to organizational performance and could be managed to increase a company's competitive advantage (Baker, 2002). Managers play a significant role in studies on business ethics due to their ability to create and uphold an organization's moral atmosphere (Vidaver-Cohen,1998) and consequent influence over the success or failure of organizational ethics (Trevino et al., 2008).

According to Gill (2011), corporate culture and business ethics are created and disseminated by the owners of the organization and maintained by their successors, so it is management that is responsible for their diffusion. He further argues that the decline of the organizational culture is the result of the actions and behavior of the leader.Ethics is important for organizations' employees, but it's especially important for managers as it's a reflexive practice that helps leaders realize the consequences of their actions (Binns,2008).

Ethical leadership in an organization

In the business world, the last decade of the 20th century and the first decade of the 21st century witnessed a terrible collapse of ethical norms (Crosbie, 2008). Global crises and ethical scandals, primarily connected to the business sector, have influenced the focus of ethics studies in the mainstream media toward the business sector. Ethical leadership has become a "hot topic" in organizational practice due to the intense discussions about ethical crises in business ethics (Eisenbeiss, 2012). Leadership is essential in ensuring the successful completion of tasks in both the private and public sectors. According to some authors (e.g., Demirtas et al., 2015; Alshawabkeh, 2023), ethical leadership has a positive impact on the meaningfulness of employees' performance, which in turn improves employees' work engagement and organizational identification while decreasing workplace discord and organizational cynicism.

The concept of ethical leadership in management refers to leaders who uphold moral principles both in their personal and professional capacities as managers of organizations (Gabriunas, 2017). It is believed that CEOs set the "tone at the top" that influences an organization's strategy as well as its ethical climate and culture (Freeman et al., 1988).

Since Ethical leadership and effective leadership are inextricably linked (Sotirova, 2018), organizational leaders who want to manage effectively should include and demonstrate moral values in their daily operations.

Nowadays, as more organizations use foreign employees, they need to under-stand ethics from a cross-cultural perspective. Ethical imperialism and cultural relativism are two extremes that can be used to describe the major issue that arises when ethics is not understood from other cultural viewpoints or when local morality is overemphasized (Sotirova, 2018).

According to research, the culture society is linked to variations in ethical sensitivity and personal values (Jackson, 2001). One of the well-organized cross-cultural studies on ethical leadership was Resick et al.'s (2006) study, but it was primarily centered on Western-based leadership and ethics literature. According to Sotirova (2018), a lot of the work in ethics is based on the perspective of a Western economy, and the field of research needs to be expanded in order to compare cultures, values, and ethical systems in a more accurate and thorough manner.

Ethical leadership in cross-culture

According to Michalos (2008), one's perspective determines what is considered East or West, or even modern times. Western nations, the majority of which practice Christianity, are recognized as being in or close to the European Union and the American continent. Accepted as Eastern countries are those that are east of the European Union and Asia, with a majority Islamic population. According to Eisenbeiss (2012) cultures, customs, and faiths all have a big influence on how ethical leadership is developed. According to Eisenbeiss (2012), cultures, customs, and faiths all have a big influence on how ethical leadership is developed. The findings of Eisenbeiß and Brodbeck (2013) highlight shared ideals that are fundamental to both ancient and contemporary moral philosophies: honesty, humanity, fairness, responsibility, and sustainability.

According to Eisenbeiß and Brodbeck (2014), ethical leadership is perceived by both Eastern and Western samples as involving characteristics like honesty, integrity, concern for sustainability and responsibility, and people orientation. Some of these characteristics are also present in this cross-cultural study.

Göçen (2021) claims that as both Western and Eastern educational groups share more similar beliefs than different ones about ethical leadership, their perceptions of ethical leadership do not appear to be very different. The four main categories that both groups support are justice, fairness, honesty, and respect. The Eastern sample's emphasis on sincerity, religious behavior, accountability, and lack of partiality, and the Western sample's emphasis on rationality, cooperation, and listening skills, differ slightly.

Comparatively speaking, Middle Eastern societies tended to support collective motivation and encouragement less than other societies did. Some understanding of these results might come from a closer examination of the cultural norms and leadership styles of these societies. Initially,

opinions of what makes a good leader may vary. In Middle Eastern countries, for instance, Power Distance is highly prized as a cultural trait (Gupta & Hanges, 2004). Consequently, individuals are more receptive to centralized decision-making, more inclined to follow leaders' instructions, and less inclined to challenge their leaders' decisions (Dickson et al., 2003). Additionally, in Middle Eastern societies, maintaining one's integrity and conserving face are highly valued. A leader's capacity to be perceived as an effective leader by peers and subordinates is significantly impeded when their reputation is damaged, which will probably result in further difficulties for the person. Furthermore, social networks of interrelated interactions form the foundation of Middle Eastern society (Hutchings & Weir, 2004). Second, in contrast to other nations, Middle Eastern standards and expectations may have different qualities and behaviors that define moral leaders. Middle Eastern societies have strongly ingrained Islamic religious beliefs in many facets of daily life (Hutchings & Weir, 2004).

The findings of this study will further contribute to the cross-cultural literature and examine how ethical leadership is viewed in the Middle East countries.

Methodological Background of Ethical Leadership Research.

In order to fill the gaps in the literature about the perceptions of ethical and unethical leadership in Eastern cultures as well as in the public and social sectors, Eisenbeiß and Brodbeck (2014) opted for a qualitative exploratory manner. Likewise, this study went with a qualitative exploratory strategy. According to Cooper and Schindler (2014), applying qualitative methodologies provides in-depth details on the participants' perspectives of the target topic and permits investigation into the significance of the participants' experience. Conducting semi-structured interviews with leaders and employees

from a variety of societal and sectoral cultural backgrounds seemed to be the most appropriate way to collect rich information and maximize unbiased insights. These interviews would allow participants to discuss in-depth their ideas, opinions, and perceptions of ethical leadership as well as their personal experiences with both ethical and unethical leadership.

In the summer of 2023 The author of this study conducted 10 semi-structured individual interviews with leaders and employees in a public organization in Jordan personally until theoretical saturation was reached (Strauss & Corbin,1998). The average length of an interview was 45 min. The sole inclusion criterion for participation was full-time employees who were likely to be immersed in the cultural and organizational context. They represent a diverse range of backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives, providing a more comprehensive understanding of how morality is viewed within Eastern culture. Studying employees in a government ministry within Eastern culture helps gain insight into how ethics are perceived, understood, and practiced within the broader cultural context

According to McCracken (1988), interviews are a suitable method for obtaining information about cultural categories and common meanings. To go deeper into the researcher's areas of interest, pre-prepared semi-structured interview questions were used. These open-ended questions let the interviewee elaborate while keeping the conversation on the topic so the interviewer may use their time as effectively as possible. Every interview was taped and then transcribed for analysis.

In this study semi-structured interview protocol included general open-ended questions, as is typical of qualitative research (Spradley 1979). This study aimed to create a qualitative research procedure that was as close to Resick et al. (2011) as possible in order to ensure comparability. Therefore, participants were asked to use their own words and terminology to define behaviors, characteristics,

and inclinations that they connect with ethical or unethical leadership (Resick et al. 2011).

First, the interviewees were asked to describe their understanding of ethical leadership (i.e., "What is your understanding of ethical leadership?"). Subsequently, the interviewers were asked more detailed questions about their personal experiences with leaders they believed to be extremely ethical. These questions covered both specific traits and actions as well as significant instances of ethical leadership. For example, "If you now consider a leader you have met during your professional career and whom you have perceived as extremely ethical, what characteristics and behaviors characterized this leader? Please give a brief description of the first person that comes to mind. Would you kindly provide specific examples?" In the same manner, we asked participants about how ethical leader tries to understand and appreciate the worth of employees and how ethical leaders act to encourage desirable, ethically grounded responses in employees.

Research Results

In order to develop a more comprehensive understanding of how ethical leadership is viewed in the Western and Eastern cultural clusters, as well as the private and public sectors this study has been focused on analyzing the ethical leadership perceptions of the employees and leaders in a public organization in Jordan. Throughout the interview, respondents were asked questions to share their thoughts and perspectives on ethical leadership. Every respondent recognized the various elements and traits that influence employee performance and had a thorough understanding of ethical leadership and its traits. Various ethical leadership attributes were addressed during the interviews as essential leadership characteristics that will advance the organization and develop a successful organazational culture.

The content and value dimensions of the definition of ethical leadership

Trust, Honesty, Justice, and Respect: As part of the interview process, each respondent was asked about their views and understanding of ethical leadership. Honesty, trust, justice, and respect were referred to by approximately 100% of the respondents as essential ethical leadership traits. *„Ethical leadership promotes a high level of honesty, fair dealing, respect, and productivity through a sense of trustworthiness and honest decision-making. Honesty, trust, justice, and respect are strong foundations that direct employees' ethical beliefs, values, and decisions, which is the true essence of ethical leadership"*

Consistency, credibility, and predictability are components of both honesty and trustworthiness: *„Consistency is the definition of honesty it involves acting on your words, following through, and developing a pattern that leads people to believe what you say because, in the past, you have done so."* Interviewees characterized ethical leaders, as they are leaders who demonstrate honesty, trust, justice, and respect.

Role Modeling: Role Modeling was referred to by approximately 90% of the respondents as an essential ethical leadership trait. According to respondents, a leader is someone who shows respect for their subordinates in return; if a leader upholds ethics by rules and actions, staff members will follow them. Employees typically don't trust leaders they don't think are ethical. According to one of the respondents: *„Role modeling is highly impor-tant for all organizations. The leadership must set an example for employees to follow when it comes to ethical behavior."*

Religiosity: According to respondents, an ethical leader needs to be religious not just by saying prayers, but they have to demonstrate it through their behavioral actions. Religion recommends ethics and morality to its followers, which guides how they conduct their organization compared to others. In view of the respondent: *„Religious leaders are thought to have a deeper sense of ethical judgment. Religion offers a perspective for comprehending and differentiating between good and wrong."* In the same context, one of the respondents stated that: *„I believe that an ethical leader is, as Prophet Muhammad said, the best person you hire is the honest and trustworthy".* Religion can play a significant role in shaping ethical leadership by providing a moral framework, guiding principles, and values that inform leaders' decisions, behaviors, and interactions within the organizational context.

Reactions to unethical and ethical behaviors

A system that encourages moral behavior is created by ethical leaders using rewards and punishments to hold individuals accountable to norms as one employee put it: *„Ethical leader Listens to what employees have to say and Makes fair and balanced decisions and Ensures that employees are promoted in the organization because they show ethical behavior".*

Also punishes ethical violations when one of the leaders was asked about the way of acting towards unethical actions he answered: *„Reprimands, blame and punish employees who show unethical behavior".* In this way, they convey to employees how individuals win and lose in the organization.

Perceived ethics-related behaviors within the organization

Perceived ethics-related behaviors within an organization are crucial indicators of its ethical climate and culture. These behaviors encompass a wide range of actions, decisions, and interactions that employees perceive as ethical or unethical within the organizational context. *„By prioritizing ethics and integrity in their leadership approach, ethical leaders contribute to the development of a positive ethical climate and culture within the organization."*

Ethical leaders perceive ethics-related behaviors within the organization by assessing their alignment with values, impact on stakeholders, consistency with organizational culture, adherence to standards

and policies, promotion of ethical decision-making, demonstration of ethical leadership, recognition and reward of ethical behavior, and commitment to continuous improvement and learning.

Ethical leader tries to understand and appreciate the worth of employees. Ethical leaders recognize the intrinsic value of each employee and strive to understand and appreciate their worth in several ways such as Being sensitive to employees' feelings and perspectives, Listening deeply, taking an active interest in employees' concerns, and Being able to change their mind or direction as long as the ethical foundation remains secure

By understanding and appreciating the worth of their employees in these ways, ethical leaders foster a positive work environment where employees feel valued, respected, and motivated to contribute their best efforts to the organization's success.

Most respondents perceived ethical leadership as a set of values including honesty, trust, respect, role modeling, employee attitude, organizational justice, and religiosity. Some respondents connected ethics with religion and pointed out that key leadership characteristics are honesty and trustworthiness. In their view, they believed that leaders' personal, religious, and ethical values also play an essential role in cultivating work ethics, organizational culture, and employee performance.

Ethical leadership is perceived in various ways across different cultures, including those in the Islamic Middle East. While Western perspectives on ethical leadership often emphasize principles such as transparency, accountability, and individual rights, perceptions in the Middle East may be influenced by cultural, religious, and historical factors. Here are some key considerations:

1. Islamic Values: In the Middle East, ethical leadership is often framed within the context of Islamic values and principles. Leaders are expected to demonstrate qualities such as justice, integrity, and accountability, which are deeply rooted in Islamic teachings.

2. Authority and Respect: Leadership in Middle Eastern cultures often involves a strong emphasis on authority and respect for hierarchy. Ethical leaders are expected to command respect through their actions, decision-making, and adherence to societal norms and traditions.

3. Trust and Reliability: Ethical leaders in the Middle East are expected to be trustworthy and reliable, fulfilling their promises and commitments to their constituents. Trust is a crucial aspect of leadership, and ethical behavior is essential for maintaining trust and credibility.

Overall, Ethical leadership in the Islamic Middle East is shaped by a combination of cultural, religious, and historical factors. While there may be similarities with Western perspectives on ethical leadership such as honesty, respect, fairness, and justice, there are also distinct characteristics and priorities that reflect the unique socio-cultural context of the region like religiosity, accountability, responsibility, and trustworthiness.

Conclusion

In summary, ethical leadership across cultural boundaries in the modern international economy continues to raise fundamental questions. As many companies and businesses continue to expand across borders, ethical disagreements and conflicts arising from contradictions in organisational culture and cultural identity are a regular occurrence (Carroll, 2004). Global views on ethical leadership are influenced by a range of social forces and factors, and researchers are challenged to explore these interrelationships (Jackson, 2001). In many ways, we are only at the beginning of this journey, and the goal is not to find answers but to find the right questions with which to address these dilemmas. According to Resick et al (2006), business leaders will find it increasingly difficult to maintain ethical

leadership across cultural boundaries and to manage conflicts arising from cultural differences. Nevertheless, the pragmatic implementation of cross-cultural ethical leadership remains a key task in fostering friendly and productive business partnerships that have a significant impact on the efficiency, productivity, formal and informal functioning of the members of the organization.

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