BETWEEN TRADITION AND MODERNITY: NAVIGATING ETHICAL LEADERSHIP IN JORDAN'S HYBRID ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

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Abstract

This study investigates the evolving dynamics of ethical leadership within Jordan's public sector, focusing on the Ministry of Water and Irrigation as a representative case. Through an ethnographic methodology involving in-depth interviews and participant observation, the research explores how leaders navigate the intersection of traditional socio-cultural norms and modern managerial frameworks. The findings reveal that ethical leadership in Jordan operates within a hybrid moral system, where formal values such as procedural fairness and institutional accountability coexist with—and are often challenged by—informal obligations tied to tribal loyalty, kinship networks, and communal expectations. Gender and

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generational shifts further complicate this ethical landscape, as younger and female leaders increasingly advocate for transparency, meritocracy, and gender equity. The study highlights the necessity of adopting a culturally responsive, pluralistic understanding of ethical leadership that reflects the complex realities of Jordanian organizations. These insights have practical implications for leadership development programs and contribute to the broader discourse on ethical leadership in non-Western contexts.

Keywords: Ethical Leadership; Tribalism; Socio-Cultural Values; Gender and Generational Shifts
Discipline: Cultural Anthropology, Ethnography

Absztrakt

HAGYOMÁNY ÉS MODERNITÁS KÖZÖTT: AZ ETIKUS VEZETÉS ÚTJA JORDÁNIA HIBRID SZERVEZETI KULTÚRÁJÁBAN

A tanulmány a jordániai közszférában az etikus vezetés fejlődő dinamikáját vizsgálja, a Vízügyi és Öntözési Minisztériumra, mint reprezentatív esetre összpontosítva. A mélyinterjúkat és résztvevő megfigyelést magában foglaló etnográfiai módszertan segítségével a kutatás azt vizsgálja, hogyan navigálnak a vezetők a hagyományos társadalmi-kulturális normák és a modern vezetési keretek metszéspontjában. Az eredmények azt mutatják, hogy a jordániai etikus vezetés egy hibrid erkölcsi rendszerben működik, ahol a formális értékek, mint például az eljárási méltányosság és az intézményi elszámoltathatóság, együtt léteznek a törzsi lojalitáshoz, a rokoni hálózatokhoz és a közösségi elvárásokhoz kapcsolódó informális kötelezettségekkel – és gyakran megkérdőjelezik azokat. A nemi és generációs változások tovább bonyolítják ezt az etikai tájképet, mivel a fiatalabb és női vezetők egyre inkább az átláthatóságot, a meritokráciát és a nemek közötti egyenlőséget szorgalmazzák. A tanulmány kiemeli az etikus vezetés kulturálisan érzékeny, pluralista értelmezésének szükségességét, amely tükrözi a jordániai szervezetek összetett valóságát. Ezeknek a felismeréseknek gyakorlati következményei vannak a vezetőfejlesztési programokra nézve, és hozzájárulnak az etikus vezetésről szóló szélesebb körű diskurzushoz a nem nyugati kontextusokban.

Kulcsszavak: etikus vezetés; törzsiség; szociokulturális értékek; nemi és generációs változások
Diszciplina: kulturális antropológia, néprajz

Introduction

Leadership is not a culturally neutral phenomenon. The ways in which leadership is understood, enacted, and evaluated are profoundly shaped by the socio-cultural and historical contexts in which organizations operate (House et al., 2004; Northouse, 2018). This cultural embeddedness is particularly evident in the realm of ethical leadership, where values such as justice, integrity, responsibility, and legitimacy are filtered through different cultural logics and social expectations (Den Hartog et al., 1999; Resick et al., 2006). In Western societies, ethical leadership is typically rooted in individual responsibility, formal procedures, merit-based systems, and rule-based accountability (Brown & Treviño, 2006; Treviño et al., 2003). In contrast, in more collectivist and tradition-oriented societies, such as those in the Arab world, ethical leadership often derives its legitimacy from collective obligation, relational trust, social mediation, and loyalty to kinship or tribal networks (Hutchings & Weir, 2006; Muna & Zennie, 2010). While global leadership research is expanding, most empirical studies still reflect Western-centric assumptions, which may obscure or misrepresent how ethical leadership actually functions in other socio-

cultural contexts. To build more inclusive theories, it is essential to account for how different societies prioritize parallel values—for example, where Western frameworks emphasize merit and procedural fairness, non-Western frameworks may prioritize social equity and relational balance.

There remains a significant gap in cross-cultural leadership research that systematically explores how ethical leadership is conceptualized and practiced in non-Western contexts (Hofstede, 2001; Gelfand et al., 2007). Scholars have increasingly called for leadership studies that not only compare cultures but also reveal the unique, context-specific mechanisms that shape organizational life and ethical decision-making in various parts of the world (Jepson, 2009; Jackson, 2012). The Middle East, and Jordan in particular, remains underrepresented in this literature despite its distinct socio-political landscape, where Islamic ethical norms, tribal loyalties, and the pressures of globalization coexist and frequently collide.

In Jordan, ethical leadership operates within a hybrid cultural and institutional framework. On one side, leaders are expected to uphold Islamic values such as justice (ʿadl), trustworthiness (amāna), and consultation (shūrā), which continue to inform both public discourse and community expectations (Kamali, 2008; Abou El Fadl, 2001). Additionally, tribal affiliations and relational obligations exert considerable influence, often shaping leadership behavior through informal social norms and expectations of loyalty (Clark, 2018; Yom, 2014). On the other side, the increasing penetration of global managerial standards, economic liberalization, and the rise of urban professional classes have introduced formalized expectations of transparency, procedural fairness, and merit-based governance (Harrigan & El-Said, 2009; Baylouny, 2006). These competing value systems create a unique ethical terrain where Jordanian leaders must navigate dual moral logics: one rooted in tradition and relational obligations, and another aligned with modern organizational principles and global ethical standards.

The central aim of this article is to explore how Jordanian leaders negotiate these tensions and how ethical leadership is both enabled and constrained within this hybrid socio-cultural landscape. By focusing on Jordan as a case study, this research contributes to a more differentiated understanding of ethical leadership that moves beyond universalist models and foregrounds the importance of cultural specificity. Through this analysis, the article also seeks to inform leadership practice in similarly complex cultural environments where tradition and modernity coexist, often in tension.

Ethical Leadership Across Cultures: The Influence of Socio-Cultural Values

Ethical Leadership in Western Theoretical Frameworks

The dominant models of ethical leadership are largely developed within Western societies, where ethical behavior in organizations is frequently framed through formal structures that emphasize universal principles such as honesty, fairness, transparency, and accountability (Brown & Treviño, 2006; Resick et al., 2006; Northouse, 2019). Ethical leaders are expected to promote consistent rule-following, demonstrate integrity, and treat followers with dignity and fairness (Eisenbeiss, 2012). These models often derive from deontological and consequentialist ethics that prioritize individual accountability and codified organizational policies over relational obligations (Resick et al., 2011; Kalshoven et al., 2011).

The GLOBE study (House et al., 2004) is among the most comprehensive investigations of leadership across cultures and reveals that while certain dimensions of ethical leadership—such as integrity, altruism, and collective motivation—are widely valued across societies, their interpretations and

expressions are shaped by local cultural logics. Leadership models associated with modern, institutionalized societies tend to emphasize low power distance, individual responsibility, and formal procedural fairness, often discouraging favoritism or personal influence (Resick et al., 2006). In contrast, leadership practices in societies that retain stronger ties to traditional value systems—such as those found in parts of the Arab world and other collectivist cultures—are often grounded in relational ethics, social obligation, and communal trust. These differences suggest that while ethical leadership may share universal dimensions, its enactment is deeply embedded in the socio-cultural contexts that define legitimacy and authority.

Western-centric theoretical frameworks of ethical leadership—particularly those rooted in individualistic, low power distance, and procedural value systems—often overlook localized leadership forms that emphasize family ties, kinship obligations, and communal responsibility. These frameworks, while influential in shaping global leadership discourse, may inadequately capture the normative expectations and moral logics that guide leadership behavior in more collectivist and tradition-oriented societies (Hutchings & Weir, 2006; Al-Husan et al., 2014). As a result, their universal applicability has been increasingly questioned in non-Western contexts, where ethical leadership is frequently defined by social harmony, informal mediation, and relational accountability rather than formal rules and abstract principles.

Relational Ethics and Leadership in Arab Societies

Ethical leadership in Arab societies is deeply entwined with communal, religious, and tribal structures that emphasize relational ethics, loyalty, and social harmony (Hutchings & Weir, 2006; Yom, 2014). Unlike the individual-centric models of the West, Arab cultures tend to prioritize collective well-being and the fulfillment of social obligations, often embodied in practices such as wasta (Cunningham & Sarayrah, 1993; Hutchings & Weir, 2006). Wasta, frequently mischaracterized as nepotism in Western discourse, is perceived locally as a moral duty that reinforces social solidarity and affirms a leader's commitment to their familial and tribal networks (Loewe et al., 2008).

In Jordan, leadership within tribal frameworks is evaluated by a leader's capacity to mediate disputes, secure resources for their community, and uphold obligations rooted in kinship and social reciprocity. These expectations form an unwritten system of mutual support and loyalty, where leaders are judged not only by their formal authority but by their ability to maintain social cohesion and fulfill communal responsibilities.

Relational ethics in Jordanian organizations are further reinforced by religious values that emphasize the leader's duty to act with compassion, justice, and loyalty to their community (Ali & Al-Owaihan, 2008). However, as Al-Husan et al. (2014) argue, the interpretation of these Islamic ethical principles is often shaped by tribal norms and local power structures, which may prioritize family and social obligations over institutional fairness.

Islamic Ethical Foundations and Leadership Responsibilities

Islamic ethical thought, as derived primarily from the Qur'an and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (Hadith), provides a distinctive framework for leadership. It emphasizes core principles such as moral accountability before God, justice (ʿadl), consultation in decision-making (shūrā), and trustworthiness (amāna) (Beekun & Badawi, 2005; Kamali, 2008). These values are not only rooted in religious scripture but have also been reinforced through centuries of Islamic legal and moral philosophy. Together, they promote a holistic vision of leadership that aligns personal conduct with both

spiritual responsibility and the well-being of the broader community.

However, the practical application of Islamic leadership ethics in Jordan is not uniform. Scholars such as Abou El Fadl (2001) and Kamali (2008) highlight that while Islamic texts advocate for fairness and accountability, local cultural practices—particularly those related to tribalism—can influence how these ideals are operationalized in organizations. For example, leaders may justify preferential treatment of family or tribe as fulfilling Islamic obligations of community care, even when such practices conflict with formal institutional procedures (Ryan, 2010; Yom, 2014).

Islamic leadership is also closely tied to the legitimacy of moral authority. In Jordan, this is often mediated by state religious institutions such as the Ministry of Awqaf, which regulates public religious discourse and promotes moderate interpretations of leadership ethics (Clark, 2018). Nonetheless, tensions persist between the religious ideals of justice and the practical realities of tribal loyalty, social stratification, and political patronage (Baylouny, 2006).

Emerging Generational Shifts and the Rise of Procedural Ethics

Recent empirical studies reveal a significant shift in ethical leadership expectations among younger generations and urban professionals in Jordan. Data from the World Values Survey (2014–2018) and the Arab Barometer (2022) indicate that Jordanians under 30 are increasingly prioritizing meritocratic principles, procedural fairness, and institutional transparency over traditional kinship-based and religious leadership criteria. Specifically, the Arab Barometer (2022) reports that only 37% of Jordanians under 30 believe that religious leaders should influence government decision-making, compared to 55% of those over 50. Furthermore, the Center for Strategic Studies (2019) found that 58% of young Jordanians prioritize professional competence over religious credentials when evaluating ethical leadership.

These generational shifts are also reflected in organizational life. Harrigan and El-Said (2009) argue that the growth of multinational corporations and international NGOs in Jordan has fostered the adoption of more formalized human resource practices, performance-based evaluations, and transparent promotion mechanisms. Additionally, the Jordanian Department of Statistics (2021) documents a steady increase in female workforce participation, which has further accelerated demands for gender equity, procedural clarity, and merit-based decision-making in leadership structures. These trends suggest that the traditional moral economy of leadership is being challenged by a growing segment of the population that values institutional integrity and ethical consistency over social allegiance.

Hybridization of Ethical Leadership in Jordan

The coexistence of traditional relational ethics and emerging procedural fairness has produced a hybrid ethical leadership model in Jordan. Leaders now operate within dual moral frameworks that often present conflicting expectations (Baylouny, 2006; Ryan, 2010; Clark, 2018). In multinational corporations, international NGOs, and urban private-sector organizations, leaders are increasingly held to global ethical standards that prioritize meritocracy, accountability, and transparent governance (Harrigan & El-Said, 2009). Conversely, in rural areas, family businesses, and public institutions with entrenched tribal influence, leaders continue to be evaluated based on their ability to honor social commitments, manage informal networks, and provide preferential access to resources for their community (Cunningham & Sarayrah, 1993; Hutchings & Weir, 2006).

Ryan (2010) describes this as a form of moral flexibility where leaders strategically navigate between formal institutional ethics and informal

relational obligations. In many Jordanian organizations, formal processes such as competitive hiring and objective performance evaluations coexist with behind-the-scenes negotiations that accommodate social expectations tied to family, tribe, or religious affiliation.

This ethical pluralism not only shapes leadership behavior but also influences employee perceptions of fairness and organizational justice (Al-Husan et al., 2014; Moussawi & Jawad, 2020). In some contexts, employees may accept or even expect relational decision-making as part of ethical leadership, while in others, especially among younger and urban employees, such practices are increasingly perceived as unjust or corrupt.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative ethnographic research design to explore how ethical leadership is perceived and practiced within the Ministry of Water and Irrigation in Jordan. Ethnography is particularly suited for this investigation as it facilitates an immersive, holistic understanding of organizational culture, social interactions, and underlying values in their natural setting (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). Unlike quantitative methods that might measure ethical attitudes or perceptions, ethnography allows the researcher to observe and interpret the subtle, often tacit, ways that cultural norms and institutional policies intersect in everyday leadership practices (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011).

Site Selection and Rationale

Water management is a strategically vital sector in Jordan, and the Ministry of Water and Irrigation is characterized by a complex organizational environment where political, social, and cultural factors converge (Al-Ali, 2014; Yom, 2014). This setting offers a unique vantage point to analyze how ethical leadership unfolds amid the tensions between modern managerial ideals and traditional relational expectations.

Focusing on a single organization permits the researcher to engage in prolonged fieldwork, building trust with participants, and capturing detailed, contextualized accounts of leadership dynamics. This depth-over-breadth approach is ideal for unpacking the hybrid ethical frameworks that shape behavior in Jordanian public institutions.

Data Collection Methods

To ensure a rich and multifaceted understanding of ethical leadership practices within the Ministry of Water and Irrigation, data were collected through multiple qualitative methods designed to capture a wide spectrum of experiences, perceptions, and behaviors.

Participant Observation: The researcher was embedded within the organization over a sustained period, attending leadership meetings, staff briefings, and informal social settings such as coffee breaks and departmental gatherings. This method generated a wealth of data on both verbal and nonverbal communication, hierarchical interactions, implicit norms, and the informal handling of ethical dilemmas. Field notes were used to document how ethical tensions manifested in real-time decision-making, interpersonal negotiations, and conflict resolution processes.

*Semi-Structured Interviews***:** A total of ten in-depth interviews were conducted with a purposive sample that included senior leaders, mid-level managers, technical experts, and frontline staff. These interviews aimed to generate nuanced insights into how individuals perceive ethical leadership, how they reconcile formal organizational rules with tribal or familial obligations, and how they experience dilemmas at the intersection of traditional and modern value systems. Each interview lasted between 45 and 90 minutes, was audio-recorded with informed consent, and followed a flexible guide to allow

participants to elaborate on personal experiences and interpretations.

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed an iterative thematic approach as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). Initial coding was informed by the literature on ethical leadership and socio-cultural values in Jordan (e.g., Kamali, 2008; Yom, 2014). Codes were then refined and supplemented by emergent themes identified during fieldwork, such as the role of wasta (social mediation), gender dynamics, and leadership adaptability.

The study is guided by the following four research questions, which also structure the results and analysis chapters:

1. How do leaders in Jordanian public organizations navigate tensions between formal institutional rules and informal socio-cultural obligations?
2. How do leaders reconcile multiple ethical frameworks—including religious, tribal, and bureaucratic norms—when making leadership decisions?
3. How are gender roles and expectations negotiated in the perception and practice of ethical leadership?
4. How do generational differences shape understandings of ethical leadership in a transforming bureaucratic culture?

By organizing the empirical findings around these four questions, the study seeks to illuminate the cultural underpinnings of ethical leadership and the ways in which leaders mediate between competing moral demands in a hybrid organizational context.

Results

This study explores how ethical leadership is enacted within Jordan's Ministry of Water and Irrigation, focusing on four interrelated themes that correspond directly to the research questions: navigating formal and informal obligations, ethical pluralism and leadership flexibility, gender dynamics in leadership, and generational shifts in ethical expectations. These themes reveal the complexity of ethical leadership in a hybrid organizational context shaped by both bureaucratic norms and traditional social structures. Each theme highlights the tensions leaders face in balancing institutional rules with tribal customs, religious ethics, gendered expectations, and intergenerational perspectives. Grounded in ethnographic observation and interview data, the results reflect how ethical leadership is contextually negotiated and culturally embedded, offering insight into the distinctive leadership landscape of Jordan's public sector.

Navigating Formal Institutional Rules and Informal Social Expectations. A central theme that emerged is the persistent tension between formal institutional policies and informal social obligations. In the Jordanian public sector, ethical leadership is not assessed solely by adherence to codified rules and procedures, as commonly emphasised in Western ethical leadership models (Brown & Treviño, 2006; Treviño et al., 2000). Rather, leaders are expected to uphold relational obligations tied to family, tribe, and broader social networks (Clark, 2018; Yom, 2014). This dual expectation creates a space where leaders must constantly weigh the consequences of privileging formal institutional integrity over informal communal responsibilities. The interview question, "Can you describe a situation where you had to choose between following formal procedures and honoring social or tribal obligations?" consistently elicited narratives that demonstrated this ethical tension. The importance of this question lies in its capacity to reveal the lived complexities that are often obscured by formal organizational charts or policy manuals. It became evident that ethical leadership in this setting is as much about managing relational risks as it is about enforcing procedural standards First, we write down the

method, then the result. Interview participants frequently described situations where they were compelled to balance procedural fairness with social loyalties, particularly in hiring, promotions, and resource allocations. For example, one participant explained the social repercussions of rejecting employment requests from tribal leaders, noting that such refusals could damage long-term alliances critical for organizational harmony and social capital.

Participants frequently described ethically ambiguous situations where upholding formal rules came at the cost of alienating powerful social actors. One senior official recounted, *"There was a time when I refused to hire someone recommended by a tribal sheikh because they didn't meet the qualifications. For months after that, my relationship with the local community suffered. I was seen as disrespecting the tribe, even though I was just following the law."* Another participant remarked, *"Sometimes the 'right' thing to do officially is the 'wrong' thing socially. If I ignore a tribal favor, I risk losing trust, and that can lead to bigger conflicts later, both in the ministry and in my own neighborhood."* These excerpts exemplify how ethical leadership decisions are often negotiated between institutional accountability and the informal moral economy of tribal and communal expectations.

This theme underscores that in hybrid governance systems like Jordan's, ethical leadership cannot be understood through procedural compliance alone. It requires cultural fluency and relational sensitivity, where moral authority is built through a continuous negotiation between formal norms and social legitimacy.

Ethical Pluralism and Leadership Flexibility. A second emergent theme is the prevalence of ethical pluralism and the need for leadership flexibility in navigating competing moral frameworks. Leaders in the Ministry of Water and Irrigation often operate within a complex ethical landscape where formal state regulations, tribal customs, Islamic values, and personal moral judgments coexist and sometimes conflict. Unlike universalist models that emphasize a single ethical code (e.g., integrity, fairness, transparency), leadership in this context involves adapting to diverse moral expectations and dynamically selecting the most contextually appropriate ethical approach (Beekun & Badawi, 2005; Hutchings & Weir, 2006). To explore this, participants were asked the question: *"How do you decide what is the 'right' thing to do when formal rules, religious values, and social expectations conflict?"* This question proved essential for uncovering the cognitive and ethical strategies leaders use to reconcile divergent obligations. The importance of this question lies in its ability to illuminate not only what leaders value but also how they prioritize competing ethical standards under pressure.

Interviewees shared that ethical decisions are rarely straightforward and often involve "weighing values" depending on who is involved and what is at stake. One mid-level manager explained, *"There are times when the law says one thing, but my religion or my conscience tells me something else. For example, delaying a decision to avoid harming someone's dignity—even if it's inefficient—feels more ethical to me."* Another participant said, *"I try to follow Islamic values and government rules, but if my community expects something else, I must find a middle path. That's what leadership means here—balancing, not just enforcing."*

These reflections highlight how ethical leadership in Jordan is not based on rigid adherence to a single moral code but on interpretive judgment that takes into account the specificities of each situation. The ability to adapt while maintaining credibility across various constituencies—state, religion, and society—emerges as a core ethical competency in this context. This finding challenges the applicability of standardized ethical leadership models and underscores the importance of culturally responsive leadership practices in hybrid organizational environments.

Gender Dynamics and Ethical Leadership. A third significant theme that emerged from the ethnographic and interview data concerns the influence of gender on ethical leadership practices and perceptions. In Jordan's hybrid organizational environment, gender remains a central axis along which power, responsibility, and ethical expectations are negotiated. Although formal policies support gender inclusion and non-discrimination, deeply rooted socio-cultural norms continue to shape how male and female leaders are perceived and how they navigate ethical dilemmas (Al-Khalidi, 2020; Hutchings et al., 2010). To investigate this dimension, participants were asked: *"Do you think male and female leaders face different expectations when making ethical decisions? Can you give an example?"* This question was critical in revealing not only disparities in expectations but also the strategies women use to assert ethical leadership within constrained spaces. The importance of this question lies in its ability to surface the subtle, and often unspoken, gendered dimensions of ethical authority and credibility.

Several female participants recounted experiences where their ethical decisions were scrutinized more harshly than those of their male counterparts. One female senior officer shared, *"When I refused a tribal recommendation that violated the policy, I was told I was being 'too rigid' and that a man in my position would have handled it more diplomatically."* Conversely, another woman explained that being perceived as morally upright sometimes worked in her favor: *"They expect me to be more honest, so I use that to build trust. But I have to be twice as careful because any mistake can be used against me."*

Male participants also reflected on the differential burdens placed on female colleagues. One manager commented, *"Women here must prove themselves not only as competent but also as morally impeccable—any perceived bias or mistake is magnified."* These accounts underscore the gendered asymmetries in ethical expectations and reveal how ethical leadership is not a neutral role, but one embedded in existing gender hierarchies.

Overall, the findings suggest that gender not only influences the perception of ethical behavior but also shapes how leaders interpret and respond to ethical challenges. In this context, ethical leadership for women often involves navigating a narrower moral path, requiring heightened awareness and strategic communication. This theme reinforces the argument that ethical leadership cannot be fully understood without attention to intersectional dimensions like gender, which mediate access to legitimacy, authority, and moral voice.

Generational Shifts in Ethical Leadership Perceptions. The fourth and final theme that emerged from the data concerns the generational differences in how ethical leadership is understood, evaluated, and enacted within the Ministry. These shifts reflect broader changes in Jordanian society, especially in attitudes toward authority, accountability, and institutional transparency. While older generations of leaders often emphasize loyalty, discretion, and hierarchical respect, younger professionals increasingly value procedural justice, meritocracy, and clarity of institutional norms (Barakat & Fakoush, 2020). To explore this evolving dynamic, participants were asked: *"Have you noticed differences between older and younger employees in how they perceive ethical leadership? How do these differences influence your work or leadership decisions?"* This question was central to identifying the impact of intergenerational value systems on ethical decision-making and leadership legitimacy.

Interview data revealed consistent contrasts bet - ween generational cohorts. A mid-level manager observed: *"The older generation tends to handle things quietly, behind the scenes—they think that's respectful. But the younger staff want transparency. They ask, 'Why was this person promoted? What criteria were used?'"* Such comments highlight the tension between tradition-

bound leadership styles and emerging expectations for openness and accountability.

A young engineer shared: *"When I reported a minor procedural violation, my supervisor told me, 'We don't make a big deal out of such things.' But for me, rules matter—not just personal connections."* This quote illustrates how younger employees are more likely to associate ethical leadership with fairness and institutional integrity, often clashing with informal norms that prioritize relational harmony or deference to seniority.

Senior leaders, meanwhile, acknowledged the shift but expressed concern about what they perceived as impatience or idealism among younger staff. One director remarked: *"They [the youth] don't understand that flexibility is necessary. Not everything can be solved by the book, especially in a society where relationships matter."* Such reflections underline the friction between a generation shaped by traditional ethical codes and a newer cohort advocating reformist principles grounded in rule-based thinking. This generational divergence indicates that ethical leadership in Jordan is not a static concept but a contested and evolving practice. The coexistence of traditional values and modern institutional norms generates a dynamic ethical landscape where leaders must continuously negotiate legitimacy across age groups. Recognizing these generational shifts is essential for understanding both current challenges and future trajectories of ethical leadership in hybrid organizational cultures.

Conclusion

This study explored how ethical leadership unfolds within Jordan's hybrid organizational culture, shaped by both formal institutional demands and informal social obligations. The findings reveal that ethical decision-making is deeply relational, as leaders must balance organizational rules with expectations rooted in kinship, tribal loyalty, and community norms. These dynamics are further complicated by emerging generational and gender shifts, which challenge traditional leadership patterns and introduce calls for greater transparency and equity. As such, ethical leadership in this context cannot be fully understood through Western-centric frameworks alone. The study underscores the need for culturally grounded leadership models that reflect the moral complexity of local contexts. By foregrounding everyday ethical dilemmas, this research contributes to a more nuanced and inclusive understanding of leadership in non-Western settings.

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