



ETHICAL LEADERSHIP AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN ORGANISATIONAL MANAGERIAL PRACTICE

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Abstract

This article presents a conceptual review of ethical leadership and corporate social responsibility within managerial practice. It argues that ethical leadership cannot be reduced to individual integrity alone, but must be understood in relation to organisational structures, decision making processes, and patterns of interaction with stakeholders. The discussion explores how moral values such as honesty, fairness, and social concern are embedded in managerial choices regarding resource allocation, employee treatment, and engagement with communities and the environment. Particular attention is given to the alignment between formal policies, such as codes of conduct, and everyday leadership behaviour. The article highlights the need to integrate financial indicators with non financial criteria, including employee well being, environmental stewardship, and respect for human dignity. By synthesising key conceptual strands, the paper outlines a framework in which ethical leadership and corporate social responsibility are seen as mutually reinforcing dimensions that guide organisations towards morally accountable forms of governance and long term organisational legitimacy.

Keywords: ethical leadership, corporate social responsibility, organisational ethics, fairness, moral values, stakeholder relations, governance.

Introduction

In recent decades, the discourse on leadership in organizations has undergone a significant shift. Leadership is no longer understood merely as the ability to direct resources to achieve economic goals, but is increasingly linked to moral accountability toward various stakeholders. Moreover, in the present era, companies must be smart in adapting to remain competitive in this expanding world (Aidan Bin Abdullah et al., 2021). Organizations face public demands for business activities to align with the values of justice, honesty, and concern for the social impact of every managerial decision. Amidst these dynamics, the ethical quality of leaders has gained stronger scrutiny. Ethical leadership is seen as the foundation that influences how organizations respond to issues of employee rights, environmental sustainability, and relations with surrounding communities. Thus, managerial ethics has moved from the realm of normative discourse to the realm of practical demands attached to organizational legitimacy. This is consistent with the view that ethical leaders serve as normative guides who significantly enhance organizational citizenship behavior through social influence and observational learning (Babalola et al., 2019).

The development of ideas regarding corporate social responsibility has further strengthened the demand for leadership oriented toward moral values. The concept of accountability is no longer limited to shareholders but extends to employees, customers, suppliers, local communities, and future generations. It is crucial for a leader to understand the basics of how people within the office behave and work together (Darmawan, 2013). Leaders are expected to consider the dimensions of distributive justice in profit management, employee welfare, and the environmental impact of company operations. In many institutions, social responsibility is beginning to be formulated in codes of ethics, codes of conduct, and various social programs. Nevertheless, these formal documents only become meaningful when translated into day-to-day managerial decisions. At this point, the integration between ethical values and leadership practices becomes a decisive area.

In modern organizational practice, ethical leadership is understood as a combination of individual moral character and the institutional systems that support it. This is because the true nature of each individual and the way a leader behaves will largely determine whether employees feel satisfied

and can perform well (Mardikaningsih & Darmawan, 2012). Integrity, honesty, consistency, and moral courage form the foundation of leader behavior, yet the effectiveness of these values depends on the organizational context characterized by competitive pressure, financial performance demands, and stakeholder expectations (Brown & Treviño, 2006). The perspective of organizational ethics asserts that ethical leadership cannot be reduced to personal morality alone but must be realized through formal policies, reward systems, and an organizational culture that internalizes the values of social responsibility (Treviño, Hartman, & Brown, 2000). When organizations emphasize only efficiency and short-term profits, leaders tend to face dilemmas between moral compliance and economic performance pressures. Conversely, organizations that integrate ethical values into their business strategy provide normative legitimacy for leaders to make decisions that consider justice, sustainability, and the long-term interests of stakeholders (Freeman, 1984). This integration is crucial because an ethical organizational culture acts as a moderator that strengthens the relationship between leadership style and long-term sustainability performance (Saleem et al., 2020).

Ethical leadership is closely related to efforts to reduce power gaps that potentially lead to the abuse of authority. In many organizations, leaders hold control over information, resource allocation, and strategic decisions. This imbalance demands self-control mechanisms and value-based supervision. Beyond leadership, regulations regarding the environment must also be strictly obeyed so that everything runs in balance (Nuraini et al., 2021). Procedural justice in the decision-making process, transparency in communication, and respect for the dignity of every individual are important indicators of ethics-based leadership. At the same time, corporate social responsibility requires leaders to acknowledge that business decisions have moral implications for the affected parties, including groups not directly present in the management meeting room. Recognition of these moral implications requires leaders to have high ethical sensitivity to balance conflicting interests among diverse stakeholders (Zhu et al., 2019). This understanding encourages leaders to go beyond self-interest and narrow group interests.

Within this framework, the integration of ethical values, justice, and social concern in managerial leadership practices becomes an increasingly

relevant theme. On one hand, there is hope that ethical leadership can strengthen public trust, increase employee commitment, and drive organizational sustainability. If employees feel supported and well-led, they will usually be more loyal and feel a greater sense of responsibility toward their workplace (Darmawan & Mardikaningsih, 2021). On the other hand, reality shows that various manipulative, discriminatory, and exploitative practices are still found in various institutions. The gap between moral discourse and operational practice raises questions regarding the extent to which ethical values are truly internalized in the way leaders think and act. A theoretical study of ethical leadership and corporate social responsibility is needed to examine how the integration of these values ideally takes place within the managerial sphere. Empirically, ethical leadership has been found to correlate positively with employee work engagement, which in turn minimizes the intention to leave work due to moral dissatisfaction (Kaffashpoor & Sadeghian, 2020).

A prominent problem relates to the tendency to reduce ethical commitment to a symbolic device. Many organizations develop vision and mission statements and codes of ethics that rhetorically highlight values of integrity and social concern. Essentially, companies need to provide encouragement and create a good working atmosphere so that everyone is willing to work wholeheartedly (Jahroni et al., 2021). However, without consistent leadership support, these documents remain mere ornaments that do not guide strategic decisions. Leaders may use ethical language as an external communication tool, while internally continuing to prioritize considerations of efficiency and profit alone. The discrepancy between the moral narrative and actual practice causes an erosion of trust among employees and other stakeholders. This problem shows that the integration of ethical values in leadership is not sufficiently measured by the presence of written policies but needs to be examined at the level of concrete practice. This phenomenon of "decoupling" or the separation between formal policy and actual practice is often triggered by institutional pressures that force organizations to merely appear ethical for the sake of social legitimacy (Ogunfowora et al., 2022).

Another problem relates to the tendency to personalize the success and failure of ethical leadership. Public discourse often focuses on charismatic leader figures or individual scandals, as if ethical issues depend

only on the strength of a specific person's character. In fact, making employees feel professional and providing the right direction greatly helps increase their love for the organization (Ernawati et al., 2020). Such an approach closes off the view of the structural dimensions that shape managerial behavior, such as incentive systems, supervision patterns, and internal competitive cultures. Consequently, when ethical violations occur, the organizational response tends to stop at replacing individuals without addressing the underlying institutional framework. From an organizational studies perspective, the understanding of ethical leadership needs to link the personal dimension of the leader with the configuration of values, rules, and social practices that structure collective action. Therefore, ethical leadership must be understood as a relational and systemic phenomenon involving the interaction between leaders, followers, and the broader organizational context (Suifan et al., 2020).

The urgency of conducting a literature study on ethical leadership and corporate social responsibility stems from the need to systematically organize various ideas scattered in scientific writings, corporate policies, and public discourse. We all know that employees who feel happy with their work and are well-trained will certainly produce more satisfying work (Mardikaningsih & Putra, 2021). Without a clear conceptual mapping, discussions on leadership ethics can easily get trapped in slogans or normative guidelines that are poorly connected to organizational dynamics. A literature study allows for the construction of an argumentative framework regarding how ethical values, justice, and social concern can be integrated into managerial leadership practices, from the level of vision to operational procedures. This study is expected to provide a more structured rationale for developing leadership models aligned with contemporary social accountability demands. Through comprehensive literature mapping, organizations can identify mediation mechanisms that link the ethical behavior of leaders with the success of corporate sustainability strategies (Saha et al., 2020).

The purpose of writing this literature study is to develop a structured conceptual description of ethical leadership in relation to corporate social responsibility. Specifically, this paper aims to explain how the values of ethics, justice, and social concern can be directed as the foundation for managerial decision-making, resource management, and the management of

relationships with stakeholders. From a theoretical perspective, this study is expected to clarify the relationship between ethical leadership discourse and the idea of corporate social responsibility. From a practical perspective, the resulting description is expected to serve as a reference for decision-makers, organizational policy designers, and management educators striving to develop more morally responsible leadership practices.

Method

This article is prepared as a qualitative literature study oriented towards the development of conceptual reasoning. Dawson (2002) views research methods as a set of procedures that help researchers organize the study steps systematically, from formulating questions to presenting results. In line with this view, the research questions were formulated regarding the integration of ethical values and social responsibility in managerial leadership, after which keywords related to ethical leadership, organizational justice, social concern, and corporate social responsibility were established. Reading sources were traced in the form of books, journal articles, and other academic documents relevant to these themes. Crowther and Lancaster (2012) emphasize the importance of coherence between research objectives and the selection of reference materials, so the selection process was conducted by considering the relevance of arguments and the breadth of theoretical explanation.

Sevilla (1992) reminds us that reading-based research requires a clear framework so that researchers do not get trapped in directionless source collection. With this consideration, the reading materials were grouped into several thematic clusters, including the definition and characteristics of ethical leadership, the concept of corporate social responsibility, the relationship between managerial ethics and justice in organizational policy, and normative studies on corporate social concern. Crowther and Lancaster (2012) highlight the importance of establishing an analytical structure that allows readers to follow the researcher's flow of thought, while Dawson (2002) emphasizes the need for a transparent explanation of how the researcher connects various ideas. By integrating these views, this literature study is treated as a process of building arguments step-by-step, moving from the explanation of basic concepts toward a synthesis regarding ethical leadership and corporate social responsibility.

Result and Discussion

Ethical leadership is a leadership approach that places moral values, integrity, social responsibility, and the principle of justice as the primary foundation in the process of decision-making and organizational management (Sharma et al., 2019). Ethical leaders are not only oriented toward achieving organizational performance and results but also ensure that all actions, policies, and interpersonal interactions are conducted honestly, transparently, and with respect for individual dignity. Essentially, solid teamwork and good relationships between members greatly help the organization maintain its quality of work (Putra et al., 2021). Ethical leadership significantly contributes to the creation of a positive organizational climate and enhances organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) through the mechanism of trust (Bedi et al., 2016). In the modern management perspective, ethical leadership is understood as a combination of moral role-modeling and the ability to direct organizational members toward shared goals through practices that are fair, accountable, and free from the abuse of power. The leader acts as a role model who builds an organizational culture based on trust, compliance with norms, and commitment to the public interest and long-term organizational sustainability.

Indicators for measuring ethical leadership are reflected in the actual behavior of the leader in performing their leadership functions, including consistency between words and actions, honesty in organizational communication, the ability to make fair decisions without discrimination, responsibility for policy consequences, openness to criticism and subordinate participation, protection of organizational members' interests, and commitment to professional values and ethical work standards (Yukl et al., 2013). Furthermore, the atmosphere in the workplace and the employees' ability to complete their tasks also greatly influence the final outcome of their work (Arifin & Mardikaningsih, 2021). Ethical leader behavior has been proven to mitigate counterproductive work behaviors and increase emotional employee engagement (Den Hartog, 2015). Additionally, ethical leadership can be observed through the level of subordinates' trust in the leader, perceptions of organizational justice, the quality of mutually respectful work relationships, low levels of ethical conflict within the organization, and the creation of a psychologically safe

work environment so that organizational members are encouraged to work honestly, responsibly, and with an orientation toward the common good.

Ethical leadership in an organization is primarily related to a moral orientation that inspires how a leader views organizational goals (Demirtas, 2015). Leaders who place ethical values as the basis for consideration do not define success solely through indicators of profit, asset growth, or market share. They view the organization as a social entity that lives with and within society. This is just as important as how the community plays an active role in providing their voices and opinions for collective progress (Rojak et al., 2021). Within this framework, managerial decisions are always weighed based on whether those actions respect human dignity, avoid discriminatory practices, and do not cause harm to vulnerable groups. Research shows that the moral integrity of the leader is a primary predictor in the formation of organizational authenticity in the eyes of stakeholders (Lemoine et al., 2019). This perspective shifts the focus from short-term interests toward long-term accountability to the people and the social environment surrounding the organization (Borton & Wiseman, 2014).

The integration of justice values in managerial leadership is reflected in how leaders distribute resources and manage organizational processes fairly. Organizational justice theory distinguishes between distributive justice, which relates to perceptions of the fairness of outcomes, and procedural justice, which relates to the transparency and consistency of decision-making processes (Colquitt, 2001). We must also remember that appropriate wages and a comfortable working environment are keys to keeping employees enthusiastic about their work (Chasanah et al., 2021). Procedural justice enforced by ethical leaders is highly effective in reducing turnover intensity and increasing the intrinsic motivation of subordinates (Newman et al., 2014). Ethical leaders understand that perceptions of justice influence employee trust in the organization and shape the quality of long-term work relationships (Greenberg, 1990). When systems for compensation, promotion, and performance evaluation are implemented openly and non-discriminatorily, employees show higher levels of organizational commitment and work engagement. Conversely, experiences of injustice often trigger organizational cynicism, lower loyalty,

and increase the tendency toward deviant behavior in the workplace (Cropanzano, Bowen, & Gilliland, 2007).

The dimension of social concern in ethical leadership is evident in how leaders position the organization within a network of relationships with the broader community (Pastricha et al., 2018). This concern is not limited to incidental donations but is reflected in sensitivity to the impact of operational activities on the surrounding community and the natural environment. In today's digital business world, the way we manage information on the internet must also be done honestly and by following existing rules (Arifin et al., 2021). Leaders who apply an ethical leadership style tend to be more proactive in adopting substantive Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) policies rather than mere image-building (Saha et al., 2020). Leaders with a social orientation strive to ensure that production, marketing, and resource management policies do not cause unnecessary harm to other parties. They encourage the organization to engage in activities that strengthen community capacity, for example, through skill development programs, educational support, or strengthening small businesses. Thus, social responsibility is not approached as an additional burden but as part of how the organization asserts its legitimacy before the public.

In daily leadership practice, the integration of ethical values demands consistency between words and actions. Leaders often serve as behavioral benchmarks, meaning what they do carries more weight than the formal messages delivered in meetings or policy documents (Brown & Treviño, 2014). The culture within the office and the self-confidence of each worker significantly determine how well they will perform in the future (Hariyani, 2021). This behavioral integrity creates a "speak-up culture" where employees feel safe reporting violations without fear of retribution (Ko et al., 2018). When leaders demonstrate firmness in rejecting practices of gratification, nepotism, or information manipulation, those behavioral standards will gradually flow through all organizational units. All types of workers, whether office-based or in the field, certainly expect a balance between their work affairs and their personal lives (Eddine & Darmawan, 2021). Conversely, tolerance toward ethical violations, even if small and case-specific, sends a signal that moral values are negotiable for short-term interests. At this point, ethical

leadership requires the courage to bear short-term consequences to maintain the long-term integrity of the organization.

Ethical leadership is also realized through the quality of organizational dialogue that values moral openness and the courage to speak. The concept of psychological safety indicates that individuals are more willing to voice concerns or mistakes when the work environment supports expression without the threat of social or professional punishment (Edmondson, 1999). Ethical leaders build two-way communication, listen empathetically, and explain the rationale behind decisions transparently, allowing the organization to detect ethical risks from an early stage. Open dialogue initiated by ethical leaders is empirically proven to increase internal whistleblowing behavior due to the sense of security and organizational support (Bhal & Dadhich, 2011). This dialogic practice strengthens mutual respect and reduces intimidating power dominance. Through honest and reflective communication, the organization develops a collective ethical awareness that enables team members to be responsible not only for work targets but also for the moral implications of organizational actions (Habermas, 1984).

In relation to social responsibility, ethical leadership demands a clear understanding of who constitutes the organization's stakeholders. Beyond capital owners and employees, there are customers, suppliers, the government, civil society organizations, and groups indirectly impacted by organizational activities. Morally sensitive leaders map these various parties and strive to identify the expectations and concerns that may arise (Voegtlin, 2016). Ethical leadership acts as a bridge between profitability interests and social expectations, where the leader's integrity is key in balancing stakeholder demands that are often in conflict (Maak & Pless, 2006). Considerations of stakeholder interests are then integrated into the process of formulating strategies and policies. In this way, managerial decisions do not focus exclusively on one group but instead attempt to consider a fair balance of interests.

Ethical leadership cannot be separated from the design of control systems and performance appraisals within the organization (Collins, 2010). If success indicators are oriented solely toward financial or quantitative achievements, the urge to ignore ethical aspects will grow stronger. Therefore, leaders oriented toward social responsibility seek to

include non-financial indicators in the appraisal system, such as employee satisfaction, service quality, compliance with environmental standards, and ethical behavior records. Reward systems that explicitly include ethical behavior criteria reinforce the signal that the organization values integrity just as much as productivity (Trevino et al., 1999). Policies on rewards and sanctions are designed so that behavior aligned with ethical values receives recognition, while violations of those values receive a proportional response. Such systemic adjustments help ensure that ethical commitment does not stop at the level of discourse.

The role of education and internal development becomes a strategic mechanism in strengthening ethical leadership as an organizational learning process. Ethics training programs, case discussions, and collective moral reflection help increase the capacity for individual moral reasoning as well as sensitivity to the social impact of business decisions (Rest, 1986). The perspective of organizational learning emphasizes that ethical values develop through the process of reflecting on experience and the exchange of knowledge within the organization, not just through formal regulations (Argyris & Schön, 1978). The effectiveness of ethics training in organizations depends heavily on the extent to which leaders demonstrate consistent moral role-modeling in daily work routines (Valentine & Godkin, 2016). By encouraging learning based on real dilemmas, leaders help employees understand the multidimensional consequences of their actions toward the organization, society, and the environment. In this context, ethical leadership functions as a catalyst for forming a learning organization that integrates moral responsibility into daily work practices.

Ethical leadership is also reflected in the way leaders respond to mistakes, whether committed by employees or arising from strategic policies (Thiel et al., 2012). Leaders who uphold ethical values do not cover up mistakes but acknowledge them openly and strive to make amends (Heifetz & Linsky, 2017). Defensive responses, blaming others, or manipulating information will damage credibility and trust. A leader's willingness to show vulnerability and admit ethical failures is a form of authentic leadership that strengthens the emotional bond and loyalty of subordinates (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). Conversely, the willingness to review decisions, repair damage, and learn from failure demonstrates moral maturity. This response is important not only for mending

relationships with external stakeholders but also for building an internal culture that values honesty and responsibility.

At a strategic level, ethical leadership directs the organization to link business goals with a broader social agenda (Kim & Thapa, 2018). For example, in the formulation of visions and long-term plans, leaders consider how organizational activities can contribute to improving the community's quality of life, reducing inequality, or protecting the environment. A strategic vision integrated with social responsibility creates sustainable competitive advantage by enhancing reputation and attractiveness to quality talent (Doh et al., 2011). Such an orientation encourages organizations to develop business models aligned with the values of justice and social concern. Thus, social responsibility is not interpreted as a philanthropic activity separate from core operations but is woven into the heart of the business model.

At the level of internal relations, ethical leadership also touches upon how leaders view employees as subjects with dignity and rights, rather than mere instruments of production (Nicholson & Kurucz, 2019). Ethically oriented leaders pay attention to occupational health, the balance between work and non-work life, and the right of employees to have a voice in matters that affect them. A servant leadership approach in an ethical context places the welfare of subordinates as a top priority, which in turn lowers levels of job stress and emotional exhaustion (Rivkin et al., 2014). Decision-making involving reorganization, termination of employment, or other significant changes is conducted with mature moral consideration, including honest communication and the provision of decent transition support. Thus, the values of care and justice are present even in the most sensitive policies.

Ethical leadership and corporate social responsibility also have a symbolic dimension that shapes the moral identity of the institution in the eyes of internal and external parties. A leader's actions in responding to social, environmental, and human rights issues serve as normative signals regarding the organization's core values (Carroll, 1991). Organizational legitimacy theory explains that consistency between public statements and internal practices is a primary requirement for the formation of stakeholder trust (Suchman, 1995). When a gap occurs between a leader's ethical rhetoric and the reality of organizational practice, it triggers a

perception of "decoupling" that can permanently destroy the organization's social legitimacy (Weaver et al., 1999). When leaders demonstrate real commitment to human values and sustainability, employees find it easier to identify with the organization and internalize those values as part of their professional identity. However, discrepancies between external symbolism and internal practice have the potential to create perceptions of organizational hypocrisy, which ultimately undermines moral credibility and lowers public and employee trust simultaneously.

In relations with external stakeholders, ethical leadership encourages transparent reporting practices regarding social and environmental aspects. Sustainability reports, for example, can be a means to convey commitment while acknowledging limitations and improvement plans. Ethically oriented leaders do not hide the facts of imperfection but use them as a starting point for continuous improvement (Alvesson & Einola, 2019). Transparency in non-financial reporting is a form of moral accountability that significantly increases organizational legitimacy and long-term investor trust (Cuadrado-Ballesteros et al., 2017). Thus, relationships with stakeholders are built on a foundation of honesty and respect, not merely image-building.

Ethical leadership possesses a strong reflective dimension. Leaders need to periodically review the basic assumptions underlying organizational policies and actions. Questions regarding the meaning of success, the ultimate goal of economic activities, and the relationship between the organization and the wider community become part of this reflection. The process of reflection helps leaders realize when an organization begins to slip toward a narrow orientation that ignores the moral dimension. The practice of self-reflection carried out by ethical leaders is vital to avoid "ethical blindness," where situational pressures can make leaders fail to recognize the moral dimensions of their decisions (Palazzo et al., 2012). Such reflection is ideally not done alone, but through a collective process with the management team and even involving certain external stakeholders.

Ethical leadership and corporate social responsibility can be seen as two mutually reinforcing dimensions. Ethical leadership provides the value foundation and moral compass for the organization, while social responsibility provides a frame of reference regarding the direction of that

moral commitment in its relationship with society and the environment. Studies show that ethical leadership acts as a key driver that transforms strategic intentions of social responsibility into tangible social performance results in society (Zhu et al., 2014). Without ethical leadership, social responsibility risks becoming a series of symbolic activities detached from core decisions. Conversely, without a social responsibility orientation, ethical leadership is easily confined within an internal scope without real contributions to the public sphere. Therefore, the integration between the leader's moral character and the organization's social agenda is crucial for creating shared value for all stakeholders (Waldman & Siegel, 2008).

Conclusion

The conclusion that can be drawn from this study is that ethical leadership and corporate social responsibility are two inseparable aspects of organizational management oriented toward moral sustainability. Ethical leadership is evident in a leader's value orientation, consistency between words and actions, management of internal justice, and sensitivity toward the impact of managerial decisions on various stakeholders. Corporate social responsibility provides direction for translating moral values into policies, programs, and operational practices that touch the surrounding environment and the broader community. The integration of both requires systemic adjustments to performance appraisal structures, dialogue mechanisms, and internal reflection processes. This literature study shows that strengthening ethical leadership cannot be separated from efforts to restructure organizational orientation toward the values of justice and social concern.

The implications of this study point to the need for a management development agenda that seriously incorporates the dimensions of ethics and social responsibility into education, training, and organizational system design. Leadership development programs need to place moral dilemmas, organizational justice, and social orientation as core materials, not additions. For researchers, this study opens space for empirical research testing various ethical leadership models across different types of organizations and sectors. For practitioners, this conceptual description can serve as a reference in reassessing current organizational policies, practices, and cultures. The suggestion that can be proposed is

the importance of a long-term commitment from top leadership to link organizational success with the realization of tangible justice values and social concern.

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