

Ethical Leadership and Employee Performance: A Systematic Literature Review of HRM Perspectives

Kepemimpinan Etis dan Kinerja Karyawan: Tinjauan Literatur Sistematis tentang Perspektif Sumber Daya Manusia

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ABSTRACT

Ethical leadership plays a key role in improving employee performance by promoting integrity, transparency, and fairness in the organization. This research aims to explore the relationship between ethical leadership and employee performance in various industries using a systematic literature review (SLR) approach. The PRISMA method was used to identify, select, and synthesize relevant articles from leading international databases. The results of the analysis show that ethical leadership is consistently positively related to employee performance through mediation such as employee involvement and organizational citizenship behavior. This research suggests that implementing ethical leadership tailored to industrial contexts can increase employee engagement and productivity, and suggests longitudinal studies and further research to understand the long-term and contextual effects of ethical leadership.

Keywords: Ethical Leadership, Employee Performance, Human Resource Management.

ABSTRAK

Kepemimpinan etis memainkan peran kunci dalam meningkatkan kinerja karyawan dengan mempromosikan integritas, transparansi, dan keadilan dalam organisasi. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi hubungan antara kepemimpinan etis dan kinerja karyawan dalam berbagai industri dengan menggunakan pendekatan systematic literature review (SLR). Metode PRISMA digunakan untuk mengidentifikasi, menyeleksi, dan mensintesis artikel-artikel relevan dari database internasional terkemuka. Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa kepemimpinan etis secara konsisten berhubungan positif dengan kinerja karyawan melalui mediasi seperti keterlibatan karyawan dan perilaku kewarganegaraan organisasi. Penelitian ini menyarankan bahwa penerapan kepemimpinan etis yang disesuaikan dengan konteks industri dapat meningkatkan keterlibatan dan produktivitas karyawan, serta menyarankan studi longitudinal dan penelitian lebih lanjut untuk memahami efek jangka panjang dan kontekstual dari kepemimpinan etis.

Kata Kunci: Kepemimpinan Etis, Kinerja Karyawan, Manajemen Sumber Daya Manusia.

1. Introduction

Ethical leadership is a crucial factor in influencing employee performance in organizations. Various studies have shown the positive impact of ethical leadership on employee performance through various mediating factors. Adawiyah et al. (2022) emphasize the mediating role of employee engagement and Organizational Citizenship Behavior (PKO) in linking ethical leadership with improved employee performance. Similar research by Sari et al. (2022) discuss how ethical leadership, along with factors such as organizational culture and compensation, can result in better employee performance.

Furthermore, research by Dogbe (2024) highlights that ethical leadership contributes to building a strong ethical culture within organizations, which in turn improves employee ethical behavior and performance. This finding is supported by Kia et al. (2019), which shows a positive relationship between ethical leadership and employee performance according to their

roles in various organizational contexts. In addition, Marisya (2023) emphasizes the significant influence of ethical leadership and transformational leadership on employee performance, illustrating how ethical leadership can inspire employees to demonstrate ethical behavior and improve their performance. Furthermore, Ullah et al. (2021) identified a positive relationship between ethical leadership and employee innovative performance, further underscoring the importance of ethical leadership in driving positive outcomes.

Overall, the existing literature consistently shows that ethical leadership positively influences employee performance by increasing commitment, engagement, motivation, ethical behavior, and organizational culture. Ethical leaders, by promoting ethical values, create a supportive work environment that facilitates employee well-being, job satisfaction, and overall performance.

Ethical leadership has become an important focus in human resource management (HRM) studies because of its significant impact on employee performance. Ethical leadership, defined as leadership practices characterized by integrity, transparency, and fairness, plays a key role in establishing a supportive and productive work environment. In the context of HRM, ethical leadership can influence various aspects, ranging from employee motivation to job satisfaction, which in turn has a direct impact on individual and organizational performance. Therefore, a deeper understanding of how ethical leadership is implemented and its effect on employee performance is critical.

This topic has particular relevance in human resource management because HRM serves as the primary link between organizational policies and employee behavior. In an increasingly complex business environment, integrity and ethics in leadership are crucial factors that influence employees' perceptions of their company. While there is a wealth of research highlighting the importance of ethical leadership, there is a void in the literature regarding how implementing these principles specifically impacts employee performance across industries. In addition, although there is some research that touches on this topic, studies that integrate various industry perspectives in HRM are still limited.

The identification of this gap indicates that previous research has not comprehensively explored the relationship between ethical leadership and employee performance in broader and diverse contexts. Most existing research tends to focus on specific contexts or specific industries without considering variations that may occur in other industries. This creates an opportunity to explore more deeply how factors such as organizational culture, industry type, and different HRM practices may moderate the relationship between ethical leadership and employee performance. Further discussion of this phenomenon is important to enrich understanding and academic contributions to this increasingly relevant topic.

This research seeks to answer the key question: "How does the application of ethical leadership principles influence employee performance in the context of human resource management in various industries?" This question is not only relevant from a theoretical point of view, but is also of practical importance, given the need for effective and ethical leadership strategies in facing modern business challenges. This research was designed to answer the existing gap by using a systematic literature review approach which allows collecting and analyzing data from various published studies, so as to provide a more holistic picture of the relationship between ethical leadership and employee performance.

The urgency of this research lies in the fact that in the era of globalization and digitalization, pressure on organizations to maintain integrity and ethics in leadership is increasing. Employees, as the main asset of an organization, are increasingly demanding a work environment that not only supports productivity but also upholds ethical values. This research has the potential to provide valuable insights for HRM practitioners and organizational leaders in developing policies that support ethical leadership and improve employee performance.

The novelty of this research lies in its approach that integrates diverse industry perspectives in evaluating the impact of ethical leadership. This study differs from previous

research which is often limited to one sector or industry, by broadening the scope of analysis to cover a variety of different industrial contexts. In addition, the use of the systematic literature review method allows this research to identify and analyze trends, patterns and gaps in the existing literature comprehensively.

It is hoped that this research contribution can enrich the literature on ethical leadership and employee performance by providing broader and deeper empirical evidence. It is hoped that the findings from this research can provide guidance for the development of leadership theory and HRM practice, as well as assist leaders and practitioners in designing effective and ethical leadership strategies. In addition, this research can also contribute to the development of organizational policies that are more responsive to ethical challenges in an evolving business environment.

2. Methods

This research uses a systematic literature review (SLR) approach with the aim of identifying, selecting, and synthesizing relevant studies regarding the relationship between ethical leadership and employee performance in the context of human resource management (HRM) in various industries. The data collection process was carried out through searching for articles from reputable international databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, and ProQuest. These databases were chosen because they provide access to high-quality scientific journals that have been rigorously reviewed, thereby ensuring the validity and credibility of the information sources used in this research.

Article searches were carried out using the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) method, which is the international standard for conducting systematic reviews. PRISMA is used to ensure that the article search and selection process is carried out transparently and systematically. The steps in PRISMA include identification of articles, initial screening, selection based on inclusion and exclusion criteria, and finally, analysis of the selected articles. Each article found through the initial search is critically evaluated to determine its relevance to the research question that has been formulated.

Keywords used in the search included “ethical leadership,” “employee performance,” “human resource management,” “ethical leadership,” and “employee performance.” A combination of these keywords is used to ensure that all relevant articles, both in English and other languages, are included in the search. This search process yielded a number of articles which were then further filtered to ensure that only truly relevant and high-quality studies were included in the analysis.

From the initial search, a number of articles were obtained which were then filtered based on predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Inclusion criteria include the type of study (for example, empirical study or literature review), publication period (articles published within the last five to ten years), language (articles written in English), and relevance to the research question that has been formulated. Articles that meet these criteria are then examined further to ensure their quality and relevance.

Exclusion criteria were applied to eliminate articles that did not meet established standards, including articles that were not peer-reviewed, studies with weak methodological designs, and articles that were not relevant to the research topic. This process resulted in the final selection of a number of articles that will be analyzed in depth in this literature review. The selected articles are then analyzed to identify patterns, trends and gaps in the existing literature, as well as to answer the research questions that have been formulated.

Through the use of the rigorous and systematic PRISMA method, this research ensures that the results obtained have a high level of validity and reliability, so that they can make a significant contribution to both the development of theory and practice in the field of HRM.

3. Results and Discussions

3.1. Definition and Concept of Ethical Leadership

Ethical leadership is a fundamental aspect of organizational management that involves directing individuals based on ethical principles and values such as trust, integrity, empathy, justice, and charisma (Lim, 2024). Ethical leadership is characterized by leaders who not only demonstrate ethical behavior personally but also encourage ethical behavior among their followers ("Ethical Leadership and Its Implications on Decision-Making in Organizations: A Literature Review", 2024). This concept is closely related to values-based management, where leaders apply moral values in their personal lives and manage morally by influencing followers to realize and act in accordance with ethical values (Runtuwene & Kristanto, 2022). Leaders who practice ethical leadership highlight fairness, transparency, and integrity, which in turn encourage positive social interactions with employees, increasing engagement and job satisfaction (N.D, 2024).

The main dimensions of ethical leadership include demonstrating ethical behavior, integrity, and accountability in the decision-making process (Castro, 2024). Ethical leadership emphasizes the importance of leaders in providing moral guidance to employees, making ethical messages stand out in the organizational context, and distinguishing themselves from ethically neutral backgrounds (Griech, 2023). Ethical leaders are individuals who make the right moral decisions based on reason and balance, which supports the creation of a positive ethical climate and fosters self-awareness and moral perception (Jamil, 2023).

In addition, ethical leadership is characterized by fairness, honesty, openness, values, and trust, which are essential in supporting knowledge management processes and ensuring positive outcomes, especially in difficult times such as the pandemic (Çelik & Sağsan, 2022). Consistency in ethical leadership is crucial, regardless of whether this is apparent among follower groups, as it has a significant impact on employee performance and organizational outcomes (Olley, 2021). Integrity plays an important role in shaping ethical leadership behavior and encouraging adherence to moral principles and standards (Din, 2023).

Overall, ethical leadership is a complex and multifaceted concept, which involves leaders embodying ethical values and principles, encouraging ethical behavior within the organization, and building positive relationships with employees. By demonstrating integrity, fairness, and transparency, ethical leaders can create a culture of trust, respect, and inclusion, ultimately improving overall organizational performance and results.

3.2. Ethical Leadership Models and Theories

Ethical leadership is a fundamental aspect of organizational management that focuses on upholding ethical values and principles in leadership behavior. This leadership involves designating appropriate behavior through personal actions, establishing positive relationships, and encouraging ethical behavior among followers (Apas, 2021). This leadership style, characterized by fairness, transparency, and integrity, increases social interactions between leaders and employees, ultimately driving increased engagement and job satisfaction in the organization (N.D, 2024). The ethical leadership model emphasizes the importance of maintaining relationships that are based on ethical values and principles, providing a good example for organizational members, and creating an ethical climate within the organization (Çayak, 2022).

Theoretical models of ethical leadership highlight the importance of factors such as fairness, transparency, and integrity in leadership behavior. These models suggest that ethical leadership positively influences employee engagement, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment through mechanisms such as social exchange, role modeling, and ethical behavior (Wang et al., 2020; Kim & Vandenberghe, 2021). Ethical leadership differs from authentic leadership in that it prioritizes ethical behavior over relational transparency and self-awareness (Mostafa et al., 2020). In addition, ethical leadership is also associated with positive outcomes

such as increased organizational engagement, reduced workplace deviation, and increased employee performance (Mostafa & Shen, 2019; Bhana & Suknunan, 2022).

Research has shown that ethical leadership plays a crucial role in shaping organizational culture, promoting integrity, and contributing to long-term success and sustainability (Ngotho, 2023). This leadership is very important in higher education institutions because it sets an ethical foundation and promotes integrity in the academic environment (Ngotho, 2023). Ethical leadership practices are related to personal ethics, deontological leadership, and resolving ethical dilemmas, which emphasizes the importance of ethical values in organizational leadership (Sánchez, 2024). In addition, ethical leadership models have been integrated into various fields such as engineering ethics, public administration, and team leadership, demonstrating their flexibility and applicability in various domains (Fraga, 2021; Lasso et al., 2021).

Overall, ethical leadership models and theories offer a framework for understanding and applying ethical values in leadership behavior. By promoting fairness, transparency, and integrity, ethical leadership fosters positive relationships, increases employee engagement, and contributes to organizational success. These models serve as guides for leaders in facing moral and ethical challenges, building an ethical climate in organizations, and encouraging ethical behavior among followers.

3.3. Employee Performance

3.3.1. Definition and Measurement of Employee Performance

Employee performance is a crucial factor for organizations because it directly influences their ability to achieve goals and realize their vision (Idris et al., 2023). Performance measurement methods, such as the Balanced Scorecard (BSC), play an important role in evaluating employee performance (Ramadhani et al., 2019). The BSC approach allows a comprehensive assessment, covering financial aspects and non-financial dimensions such as customer relationships, organizational structure, and internal competencies (Gambelli et al., 2021). This holistic evaluation is very important for organizations to continuously adapt and gain competitive advantage (Stojkić & Bošnjak, 2019).

Motivation and work enthusiasm have a significant impact on employee performance (Anggara et al., 2022). High levels of performance enable employees to effectively overcome challenges and carry out their responsibilities well (Anggara et al., 2022). Furthermore, research shows that training and development programs can increase employee effectiveness, stability, and engagement, which ultimately contributes to improved performance (Role of Training and Development on Employee Performance: A Quantitative Investigation, 2023).

An effective performance measurement system, such as the BSC, is a valuable tool for organizations to measure and improve business performance (Horvathova, 2023). This system offers a structured approach to evaluating performance from a financial and non-financial perspective (Fitria et al., 2022). In addition, performance measurement is very important for decision making, ensuring accountability, and assessing goal achievement within the organization (Jatmiko, 2022). Overall, employee performance is a complex concept and requires careful measurement and evaluation. By utilizing performance measurement methods such as the Balanced Scorecard, organizations can gain a comprehensive picture of employee performance, allowing them to make informed decisions, increase accountability, and progress toward achieving organizational goals.

3.3.2. Factors that Influence Employee Performance

Employee performance is an important factor for organizations in achieving goals efficiently. Both internal and external factors have a significant influence on employee performance. Internal factors such as work motivation and personal competence are the main

determinants of employee performance (Chen, 2024; Song, 2024; Mesiya, 2019). Meanwhile, external factors such as leadership style, organizational culture, employee participation, and incentives also play a major role in influencing employee performance (Nkala & Malataliana, 2021; Asmi, 2023; Junaedi & Digdownseiso, 2023). Motivation, as a fundamental element in organizational behavior, is identified as a crucial factor influencing employee performance, with compensation being one of the main external motivators that directly impacts productivity (Yating, 2024). In addition, aspects such as job design, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment are also important in improving employee work performance (Song, 2024).

Furthermore, research shows that socially responsible human resource management can improve employee performance through organizational identification, where employees who have strong identification with their organization tend to exhibit behavior that improves their work performance (Lee et al., 2022). In addition, positive organizational activities related to corporate social responsibility can increase job satisfaction, which ultimately has a positive impact on employee performance (Story & Castanheira, 2019). Thus, a combination of internal factors such as personal motivation and competence, along with external factors such as leadership style, organizational culture, and incentives, collectively shape and influence employee performance in an organization. Understanding and managing these factors effectively is critical to optimizing employee performance and achieving organizational goals.

3.4. Relationship between Ethical Leadership and Employee Performance

Ethical leadership has been widely researched in relation to employee performance in various organizational environments. Previous research consistently shows a positive and significant relationship between ethical leadership and employee performance (Bakar & Akyürek, 2021; Alshawabkeh, 2023; Adawiyah et al., 2022; Dogbe, 2024; Kia et al., 2019; Marisya, 2023; Sabir, 2021; Zeng, 2024; Lee et al., 2024; ; Atayee, 2023; Mahmood & Ejaz, 2019; ; "The Influence of Ethical Leadership on Employee Silence", 2023; These studies highlight that ethical leadership positively influences organizational commitment, work performance, employee outcomes, employee engagement, job satisfaction, employee well-being, readiness for change, and innovative performance.

In addition, ethical leadership is proven to improve employee performance through various mediating variables such as organizational commitment, employee involvement, organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), intrinsic motivation, service climate, ethical climate, customer orientation, and intellectual capital. These mediating factors play an important role in explaining the mechanisms of how ethical leadership influences employee performance (Kia et al., 2019; Halvorsen et al., 2022; Tangkawarow, 2023; Sugianingrat et al., 2019; Xue et al., 2021; Ullah et al., 2021).

Additionally, ethical leadership is also associated with increased positive outcomes for employees by promoting trust in the organization, increasing job satisfaction, increasing employee voice, and reducing employee silence. Studies also show that ethical leadership can reduce negative factors such as moral disengagement and organizational politics, thereby increasing favorable employee outcomes (Lee et al., 2021; Mahmood & Ejaz, 2019). Overall, the existing body of empirical research provides strong evidence that ethical leadership is a key driver of employee performance across multiple dimensions. By cultivating ethics, trust, and engagement, ethical leaders can positively influence organizational behavior, attitudes, and ultimately performance.

3.5. Influence Mechanisms

Ethical leadership has been researched in depth and proven to have a significant impact on employee performance through various mechanisms. Research consistently shows that ethical leadership positively influences work performance by rewarding appropriate

behavior and setting clear expectations for ethical behavior (Ali et al., 2021). Additionally, research shows that ethical leadership is associated with increased work-related effort and job performance among employees (Onan et al., 2022). The relationship between ethical leadership and employee performance is often mediated by factors such as employee engagement and organizational citizenship behavior, where ethical leadership improves these aspects, thereby increasing performance (Adawiyah et al., 2022).

Furthermore, ethical leaders serve as moral role models by promoting integrity, fairness, and ethical qualities, which in turn positively influence employee moral behavior ("The Influence of Ethical Leadership on Employee Silence", 2023). Ethical leadership also influences the ethical climate within the organization, which in turn impacts employee ethical behavior and performance (Halvorsen et al., 2022). Additionally, ethical leadership was found to improve creative performance among employees, with psychological safety playing a mediating role in creating an environment conducive to creativity (Wadei et al., 2020).

Studies also show that ethical leadership influences employee performance through organizational citizenship behavior, intrinsic motivation, and organizational commitment (Tangkawarow, 2023; Edevbie, 2023; Bakar & Akyürek, 2021). Ethical leadership is related to increased employee trust, fulfillment of psychological needs, and a sense of belonging, all of which contribute to improved performance (Zhang, 2023). Additionally, ethical leadership is associated with increased employee engagement, organizational citizenship behavior, and ultimately, better performance (Sugianingrat et al., 2019).

Overall, ethical leadership plays an important role in improving employee performance by promoting ethical behavior, creating a positive work environment, and encouraging creativity and engagement among employees. By embodying integrity, fairness, and ethical values, ethical leaders can positively influence employee behavior and performance, ultimately contributing to organizational success.

3.6. Different Industrial Contexts

3.6.1. Variations in the Implementation of Ethical Leadership in Different Industries

Ethical leadership plays an important role in various industries, influencing employee performance in different ways depending on the specific context. In the education sector, ethical leadership is associated with increased job satisfaction, emotional commitment, and prevention of burnout among employees (Puyo, 2022). Likewise, in the banking industry, ethical leadership has been proven to improve service climate, organizational identification, and customer orientation, which ultimately leads to improved employee performance (Kia et al., 2019). Additionally, in the hospitality industry, ethical leadership is essential to encourage service-oriented organizational citizenship behavior and effectively manage employee ethical behavior (Chan & Barlis, 2023).

In the garment and textile industry, the CEO's ethical leadership style influences the implementation of corporate social responsibility and directly impacts financial performance (Nguyễn et al., 2019). In the fast-food consumer goods sector, leaders who demonstrate ethical behavior and engage in inclusive decision-making are critical to improving employee performance (Tang, 2024). Furthermore, in the pharmaceutical sector, strategic leadership that builds an ethical environment is essential to promote ethical practices among employees (Amayreh, 2020).

The relationship between ethical leadership and employee performance is also influenced by factors such as workplace spirituality. In the Indian hospitality industry, leaders enhance workplace spirituality through ethical leadership behavior (Srivastava & Madan, 2022). Additionally, in the construction industry in Bangkok, Thailand, leaders who model ethical behavior inspire employees to prioritize corporate social responsibility, which impacts organizational performance (Fei, 2024). Overall, the application of ethical leadership varies across industries, with its effectiveness in improving employee performance depending on

industry-specific factors and organizational context. By establishing an ethical climate, promoting ethical behavior, and inspiring ethical practices, leaders can positively influence employee performance and organizational outcomes in a variety of industry settings.

4. Conclusions

Ethical leadership is a crucial element in improving employee performance in various industries. This concept involves leaders not only demonstrating personal ethical behavior but also inspiring and encouraging ethical behavior among their followers. Ethical leadership models and theories emphasize the important role of fairness, transparency, and integrity in increasing employee engagement, satisfaction, and performance. Various empirical studies have shown that ethical leadership is consistently positively related to employee performance through various mediating factors, such as employee engagement and organizational citizenship behavior. Variations in implementation across industries also suggest that ethical leadership can be adapted to meet the specific needs of industry and organizational context.

4.1. Implication

The application of ethical leadership has significant implications for managers and organizations. Leaders need to integrate ethical values in their daily practices to foster a positive work climate and improve employee performance. Organizations can leverage ethical leadership models to build organizational cultures that support integrity and transparency, which in turn can improve employee engagement and productivity. At the industry level, the application of ethical leadership must be tailored to the specific context to optimize its impact on employee performance.

4.2. Limitation

Studies of ethical leadership often face several limitations. One major limitation is variation in the definition and measurement of ethical leadership, which may impact the consistency of research findings. Additionally, much research tends to focus on specific industrial contexts, and thus may not fully describe how ethical leadership functions in various environments. Further longitudinal and experimental studies are needed to understand the long-term effects of ethical leadership and overcome methodological limitations.

4.3. Future Research

Future research needs to explore several areas to deepen understanding of ethical leadership. Longitudinal studies can provide insight into the long-term impact of ethical leadership on employee performance and organizational success. Further research should also consider contextual and industry-specific factors to understand how ethical leadership can be adapted for various environments. Additionally, research that integrates employee perspectives and uses a more diverse range of research methods can help enrich understanding of the mechanisms of influence of ethical leadership.

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