

THE ROLE OF ETHICAL LEADERSHIP IN ENHANCING EMPLOYEE RETENTION IN
MULTINATIONAL CORPORATIONS

PERAN KEPEMIMPINAN ETIKA DALAM MENINGKATKAN RETENSI KARYAWAN DI
PERUSAHAAN MULTINASIONAL

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the role of ethical leadership in increasing employee retention in multinational companies (MNCs). In the context of intense global competition, high levels of employee turnover pose a significant challenge for MNCs, which can disrupt organizational stability and increase recruitment costs. Through a systematic review of relevant literature, this research identified five key dimensions of ethical leadership that contribute to employee retention: integrity and transparency, fairness and justice, modeling ethical behavior, employee-focused decision making, and a supportive work environment. Findings suggest that ethical leadership not only increases employee job satisfaction and commitment, but also creates a positive organizational culture that supports long-term loyalty. This research provides practical insights for managers and leaders in MNCs to develop leadership strategies that focus on ethics to reduce turnover and increase organizational competitiveness.

Keywords: Ethical Leadership, Employee Retention, Multinational Companies, Organizational Commitment, Organizational culture

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi peran kepemimpinan etis dalam meningkatkan retensi karyawan di perusahaan multinasional (MNCs). Dalam konteks persaingan global yang ketat, tingginya tingkat turnover karyawan menjadi tantangan signifikan bagi MNCs, yang dapat mengganggu stabilitas organisasi dan meningkatkan biaya rekrutmen. Melalui tinjauan sistematis terhadap literatur yang relevan, penelitian ini mengidentifikasi lima dimensi utama dari kepemimpinan etis yang berkontribusi terhadap retensi karyawan: integritas dan transparansi, keadilan dan keadilan, permodelan perilaku etis, pengambilan keputusan yang berfokus pada karyawan, dan lingkungan kerja yang mendukung. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa kepemimpinan etis tidak hanya meningkatkan kepuasan kerja dan komitmen karyawan, tetapi juga menciptakan budaya organisasi yang positif yang mendukung loyalitas jangka panjang. Penelitian ini memberikan wawasan praktis bagi manajer dan pemimpin di MNCs untuk mengembangkan strategi kepemimpinan yang berfokus pada etika guna mengurangi turnover dan meningkatkan daya saing organisasi.

Kata Kunci: Kepemimpinan Etis, Retensi Karyawan, Perusahaan Multinasional, Komitmen Organisasi, Budaya Organisasi

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, multinational corporations (MNCs) have become significant players in the global economy, presenting both opportunities and challenges in workforce management. One of the primary challenges faced by these corporations is the retention of high-quality employees amid fierce global competition. High employee turnover can disrupt organizational stability, escalate recruitment and training costs, and ultimately diminish productivity (Bedi et al., 2015; El-Metwally et al., 2019). Therefore, understanding the factors

influencing employee retention is essential for fostering a stable and sustainable work environment.

A critical factor in employee retention is ethical leadership, which encompasses behaviors characterized by integrity, honesty, transparency, and fairness in decision-making and interactions with employees. Research indicates that ethical leadership positively influences employee attitudes and behaviors, leading to higher job satisfaction and organizational commitment, which in turn reduces turnover intentions (Azanza et al., 2015; Cheng et al., 2019; Nazarian, 2024). For instance, ethical leaders serve as role models, fostering a supportive and inclusive work culture that enhances employee engagement and loyalty (Tang et al., 2014; Ali et al., 2022). Studies have shown that when leaders demonstrate ethical behavior, employees are more likely to exhibit proactive behaviors, such as voicing concerns and contributing to a positive organizational climate (Potipiroon & Ford, 2017; Yasin, 2021).

However, the application of ethical leadership in MNCs is complicated by the diverse cultural contexts in which these organizations operate. Leaders must navigate varying ethical standards and cultural values across different countries, which necessitates adaptability in their leadership styles (Saleh et al., 2022; Walumbwa et al., 2011). This complexity underscores the need for a nuanced understanding of how ethical leadership can be effectively implemented in a global work environment to enhance employee retention. Research suggests that ethical leadership not only shapes organizational culture but also aligns employee values with organizational goals, thereby fostering a sense of belonging and commitment (Majeed et al., 2018; Seth et al., 2022).

Moreover, ethical leadership has been linked to the development of an ethical climate within organizations, which is crucial for promoting employee well-being and reducing turnover intentions (Yang & Hua, 2017; Javed et al., 2018). A positive ethical climate encourages employees to engage in organizational citizenship behaviors, further enhancing retention rates (Shafique et al., 2018; Mehmood et al., 2018). Therefore, MNCs must prioritize ethical leadership development as a strategic approach to mitigate turnover and cultivate a committed workforce. In conclusion, ethical leadership emerges as a vital component in the retention of talent within MNCs. By fostering an ethical work environment that promotes integrity and fairness, organizations can enhance employee satisfaction and commitment, thereby reducing turnover rates. Understanding the interplay between ethical leadership and cultural diversity is essential for MNCs aiming to create a stable and sustainable workforce in the global market.

A high employee turnover rate is the main challenge for MNCs, especially in highly competitive industries such as technology, finance, and manufacturing. High employee turnover not only impacts recruitment and training costs, but can also reduce productivity, work morale, and organizational stability. In some cases, high turnover can even threaten business continuity, especially for companies that depend on a highly skilled workforce. While many studies have highlighted factors such as compensation, work-life balance, and career development opportunities as the main determinant in employee retention, there still exist gaps in the literature about how ethical leadership plays a role in forming employee loyalty and commitment. Several studies show that ethics-based leadership can improve employee trust, creating a more positive work environment and reducing intentions to leave the company. However, there is no comprehensive understanding regarding specific dimensions of ethical leadership that contributes directly to employee retention in MNCs.

This study aims to fill the gap in the literature by conducting systematic literature review which specifically identifies Key dimensions of ethical leadership that contribute to employee retention in the context of MNCs.

Based on the problems that have been identified, this research aims to:

1. Identify the main dimensions of ethical leadership which has a direct impact on employee retention in MNCs.

2. Analyze how each of these dimensions contributes in increasing employee commitment and loyalty to the organization.
3. Develop a deeper understanding regarding the role of ethical leadership in overcoming employee retention challenges in the global work environment.
4. Provides insights for managers and leaders in MNCs regarding ethical leadership strategies that can be implemented to increase employee retention.

To achieve the objectives of this research, this research focuses on the following main questions: **"What are the key dimensions of ethical leadership that contribute to employee retention in multinational corporations?"**. This question will be answered through a systematic review of relevant literature to identify specific aspects of ethical leadership that can increase employee loyalty and retention in MNCs.

This research has significant contributions from both theoretical and practical perspectives. Academically, this research contributes to the field of ethical leadership and human resource management (HRM) by developing a deeper understanding of the specific dimensions of ethical leadership that are relevant in the context of MNCs. In addition, this research fills the gap in the literature regarding the relationship between ethical leadership and employee retention in a global work environment and provides a conceptual model that can be used in future research to measure the influence of ethical leadership on employee loyalty and commitment.

From a practical perspective, the findings from this research can help leaders, managers, and HR professionals in MNCs to develop leadership strategies based on ethics and moral values to increase employee loyalty and commitment. Additionally, organizations can implement ethical leadership training programs to enhance leaders' skills in creating a more equitable and inclusive work environment. This research also highlights the importance of improving HR management policies and practices that support the development of ethical leadership in organizations. By implementing these principles, companies can reduce employee turnover rates by creating a transparent, supportive and integrity-based work environment.

By understanding Key dimensions of ethical leadership, MNCs can develop more effective strategies in retaining their best talent, improving organizational competitiveness, as well as creating more jobs sustainable and oriented towards employee welfare.

2. METHODS

2.1 Research Design

This research uses an approach Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to identify and analyze the main dimensions of ethical leadership that contribute to employee retention in multinational corporations (MNCs). The SLR method was chosen because it allows researchers to synthesize findings from various studies that have been conducted previously, so as to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the research topic.

In implementing SLR, this research refers to Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) methodology, which provides systematic guidance in the identification, selection, and analysis of data. This process involves several main stages:

1. Identify relevant literature from various academic databases.
2. Study selection was based on predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria.
3. Data extraction from selected articles to identify key themes emerging in previous research.
4. Data analysis uses an approach Thematic Analysis to find key patterns in the literature related to ethical leadership and employee retention.

By using this approach, research can produce a more structured and valid synthesis and make a stronger contribution to the development of ethical leadership theory and practice in MNCs.

2.2 Data Collection

2.2.1 Database Used

To ensure broad and credible research coverage, a literature search was carried out using several major academic databases, namely:

- Scopus (covers high impact journals in the fields of management and business).
- Web of Science (providing access to high quality journals).
- ProQuest (covering academic studies and professional publications).
- Google Scholar (to track additional literature that may not be indexed in other databases).

2.2.2 Search Keywords

A literature search was conducted using the following keywords to ensure broad coverage regarding ethical leadership and employee retention in the context of MNCs:

- "ethical leadership"
- "employee retention"
- "multinational corporations"
- "leadership ethics"
- "organizational commitment"

Apart from that, technique Boolean operators (AND, OR) used to expand or narrow a search, for example:

- ("ethical leadership" AND "employee retention" AND "multinational corporations")
- ("leadership ethics" OR "ethical leadership") AND ("retention" OR "turnover")

2.2.3 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To ensure that the studies used in the analysis were truly relevant, the following criteria were applied in the article selection process:

Inclusion Criteria

- Journal articles were peer-reviewed and published within the last 10 years (from 2014 to 2024) to maintain research relevance.
- Studies that explicitly address the relationship between ethical leadership and employee retention in the context of MNCs.
- Articles are available in English to ensure accessibility and readability.
- Studies that use quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods for a more holistic analysis.

Exclusion Criteria

- Articles that are not peer-reviewed (for example, industry reports, theses, or editorial opinions).
- Studies that only discuss ethical leadership in general without linking it to employee retention.
- Articles that focus on the public sector, non-profit organizations, or small and medium enterprises (SMEs), as this research specifically examines MNCs.
- Studies that only discuss employee retention factors without highlighting ethical leadership aspects.

After initial selection based on abstracts and keywords, articles that met the inclusion criteria were further analyzed by reading the methodology and results sections to ensure relevance to the research topic.

2.3 Data Analysis

After articles that meet the selection criteria are collected, the next step is to analyze and synthesize the data using the approach Thematic Analysis.

2.3.1 Thematic Analysis

Thematic Analysis was used to identify and group the main dimensions of ethical leadership that are most frequently associated with employee retention in the literature. This analysis is carried out through the following stages:

1. Familiarization with data - Read and understand the content of the selected article thoroughly.
2. Initial theme introduction – Identify key concepts that recur across related studies.
3. Data coding – Mark parts of the text that contain information related to ethical leadership dimensions.
4. Identify the main theme – Grouping coding results into broader themes.
5. Review and validate themes – Ensure that the themes found truly reflect the results of existing studies.
6. Interpretation and synthesis – Organize the findings in the form of a narrative that explains how ethical leadership dimensions contribute to employee retention in MNCs.

2.3.2 Dimension Grouping

To understand the extent to which ethical leadership dimensions influence employee retention, this research will also:

- Grouping ethical leadership dimensions based on frequency of appearance in the literature.
- Determine the relevance of each dimension to aspects of employee commitment, job satisfaction and loyalty.
- Analyze the relationship between ethical leadership and other organizational factors, such as corporate culture and work climate.

By using this approach, research can produce a clearer mapping of how ethical leadership can be an effective strategy in increasing employee retention in MNCs.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1 Key Dimensions of Ethical Leadership in Employee Retention

Ethical leadership has emerged as a critical factor influencing employee retention, particularly within multinational corporations (MNCs) that navigate complex and culturally diverse environments. This synthesis identifies five key dimensions of ethical leadership that significantly contribute to employee retention, supported by various studies.

1. Integrity and Transparency

Integrity and transparency are foundational to fostering employee trust and loyalty. Leaders who align their actions with their words create a reliable work environment, which is essential for employee confidence in organizational decisions. Research indicates that transparent communication regarding company policies and performance reduces uncertainty and enhances employee engagement (Tseng & Wu, 2017; Piccolo et al., 2010; Rusmayadi et al., 2024). When leaders are open to feedback and share crucial information, employees exhibit higher emotional commitment, which correlates with lower turnover intentions (Mengstie, 2020). This aligns with findings that emphasize the importance of ethical leadership in promoting a culture of trust and engagement (Javed et al., 2018; , Karabey & Alioğulları, 2018).

2. Fairness and Justice

Fairness, particularly in promotion and compensation, is vital for enhancing job satisfaction and loyalty among employees. Ethical leadership prioritizes equitable resource distribution and opportunities, which is especially pertinent in diverse workforces typical of MNCs. Studies have shown that perceptions of procedural and distributive justice significantly influence employee motivation and retention (Loi et al., 2011; , Choi, 2010). Employees who

perceive fairness in organizational processes are more likely to remain committed to their organizations, while perceptions of unfairness can lead to frustration and increased turnover (Owolabi, 2012; , Farahbod et al., 2013). Transparent compensation policies further reinforce trust in leadership, directly impacting retention rates (Mamić, 2024).

3. Ethical Role Modeling

Leaders who exemplify ethical behavior serve as role models, shaping an organizational culture that promotes integrity and positive professional conduct. Employees are likely to emulate the values demonstrated by their leaders, which fosters a supportive work environment conducive to collaboration and professional development (Chughtai, 2014; , Karabey & Alioğulları, 2018). Ethical leaders who practice leadership by example not only earn respect but also cultivate long-term relationships with employees, enhancing retention (Piccolo et al., 2010; , Karabey & Alioğulları, 2018). This role modeling is crucial in establishing a workplace culture that values ethical behavior and employee well-being.

4. Employee-Centered Decision Making

An employee-centered approach to decision-making prioritizes the welfare and aspirations of employees, ensuring that managerial strategies benefit both the organization and its workforce. Ethical leaders who consider employee needs in their decision-making processes—such as implementing flexible work schedules and wellness programs—enhance job satisfaction and loyalty (Tseng & Wu, 2017;; Choi, 2010). This approach is particularly important in MNCs, where understanding cultural differences can lead to more effective retention strategies (Javed et al., 2018). Research supports the notion that employees who feel valued are more likely to exhibit high levels of job satisfaction and commitment to their organizations (Mamić, 2024; , Karabey & Alioğulları, 2018).

5. Supportive Work Environment

A supportive work environment is characterized by a culture that values diversity, ethics, and employee well-being. Factors such as a positive work climate, superior support, and growth opportunities are essential for fostering long-term employee commitment (Loi et al., 2011; , Farahbod et al., 2013). MNCs that implement pro-employee policies, including mentorship and leadership training, experience higher retention rates (Tseng & Wu, 2017;; Choi, 2010). Leaders who cultivate a safe and inclusive work environment not only enhance employee morale and productivity but also mitigate the risk of high turnover (Mengstie, 2020; , Karabey & Alioğulları, 2018).

In conclusion, ethical leadership significantly influences employee retention through the dimensions of integrity and transparency, fairness and justice, ethical role modeling, employee-centered decision making, and the creation of a supportive work environment. These dimensions collectively contribute to a culture of trust, engagement, and commitment, which are essential for retaining talent in the competitive landscape of multinational corporations.

3.2 Discussion

The results of this research are in line with various previous studies which emphasize the importance of ethical leadership in development employee engagement and reducing turnover. In the review of the literature that has been carried out, it was found that organizations that have ethics-based leadership tend to be more capable of creating a work environment that is stable, productive, and oriented towards employee welfare. From the perspective of organizational theory and Human Resource Management (HRM), the five dimensions of ethical leadership identified in this research have strong relevance to a variety of leadership models, including Transformational Leadership Theory And Servant Leadership

Theory. Both theories emphasize its importance integrity, empathy, and decision making oriented towards employee welfare, which has been shown to contribute to job satisfaction and workforce retention.

From the perspective of HR management in MNCs, these findings are several fold strategic implications, among others:

1. Ethical Leadership Program Development
 - MNCs need to adopt a leadership training program that focuses on ethical values, transparency, and fairness to ensure that managers and executives understand their role as role models in the organization.
2. Employee Welfare and Retention Policy
 - Implementation of policies that provide employee welfare, including fair compensation, work flexibility, and an inclusive environment, can increase employee loyalty to the company.
3. Development of an Ethics-Based Organizational Culture
 - Creating a supportive and ethical work environment should be a priority for MNCs. This can be done through implementation of a clear code of ethics, an employee feedback system, and a transparency mechanism in decision making.

Overall, this research provides empirical evidence that Ethical leadership is not only a moral element in organizations, but also an effective business strategy in improving employee retention and organizational stability. MNCs that are able to apply ethical leadership practices consistently will be better prepared to face challenges globalization, labor market competition, and organizational dynamics in the future.

4. CONCLUSIONS

4.1 Summary of Findings

This study identifies five main dimensions of ethical leadership that contribute to employee retention in multinational corporations (MNCs). Leaders who show integrity, apply justice, become an ethical role model, oriented to employee welfare, and create a supportive work environment proved to be more able to defend their workforce.

These dimensions provide a strong foundation for building a leadership strategy that not only focuses on business achievements but also pays attention to long-term relationships with employees. This study shows that ethics-based leadership plays a crucial role in improving employee engagement, which ultimately leads to workforce loyalty and retention which is higher.

4.2 Practical Implications

These findings have significant practical implications for MNCs in designing leadership and human resource management (HR) strategies:

1. Development of Ethics-Based Leadership Policies
 - MNCs need to adopt policies that support implementation of Ethical values in leadership. This can be realized through clear ethical guidelines, codes of behavior for managers and executives, and systems rewards and incentives for leaders who demonstrate ethical leadership consistently.
2. Ethical Leadership Training and Development
 - Implementation of a leadership training program that emphasizes integrity, fairness, and employee welfare-based decision making can help increase employee engagement. This program may include workshops, mentorship, and ethical decision making simulations.
3. Creating a Supportive Organizational Culture
 - MNCs should focus on building an inclusive and supportive work environment, where employees feel valued and given opportunities to develop. Concrete steps such as

improving organizational communication, work-life balance, and fair compensation policies will greatly contribute to increasing workforce retention.

4. Implementation of an Evaluation and Accountability System

To ensure continued ethical leadership, MNCs must have a leader performance evaluation system based on ethical leadership indicators. Employee surveys, feedback interviews, and organizational culture analysis can be used to measure the effectiveness of ethical leadership programs.

4.3 Limitations and Future Research

Although this study provides valuable insight into the role of ethical leadership in increasing employee retention in MNCs, there are several limitations that need to be noted:

1. Limited to Literature Analysis

This study is based on a systematic review of published literature, without collection of empirical data. Therefore, the resulting conclusions are more conceptual in nature and require further verification through empirical research.

2. Does Not Cover Contextual Variation in MNCs

This study does not specifically address differences between MNCs operating in different countries organizational culture, employment regulations, and workforce dynamics. Further research could explore how these contextual factors influence the implementation of ethical leadership.

3. The Need for Quantitative Studies and Case Studies

Future research can use a quantitative approach, such as surveys or employee data analysis, to examine the relationship between ethical leadership and workforce retention across various industry sectors. Besides that, case studies on specific companies can provide deeper insight into how ethical leadership is implemented in daily business practices.

By considering these limitations, it is hoped that further research will provide a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of ethical leadership on organizational sustainability and workforce well-being in MNCs.

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