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THE ROLE OF ETHICAL LEADERSHIP IN SHAPING A POSITIVE AND SUSTAINABLE ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

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Abstract - *The increasing complexity of business competition requires organizations to establish a strong foundation to ensure the continuity of their operations. Organizational culture is a crucial element that determines the direction and performance of an organization, as it serves as a behavioral guide for all members. Ethical leadership emerges as a key factor in shaping a positive organizational culture, since leaders act as role models who set the expected behavioral standards. This study aims to examine the role of ethical leadership in building a positive and sustainable organizational culture and to analyze the relationship between leadership styles grounded in moral values and the work climate created within organizations. The method employed is a literature review that collects and critically evaluates relevant scholarly sources. The findings indicate that the application of ethical leadership fosters a fair, honest, and respectful work environment, which in turn shapes the mindset and behavior of organizational members in a more constructive direction. The main conclusion of this study is that consistency in applying moral values is the primary determinant of maintaining a positive organizational culture over the long term. This study contributes to the advancement of knowledge in organizational behavior and management and provides practical guidance for leaders and managers in creating healthy and productive work environments.*

Keywords: Ethical leadership, organizational culture, work climate, moral values, organizational sustainability, leader behavior, work environment.

INTRODUCTION

The dynamic development of the organizational environment creates new demands for every entity to adapt and maintain its existence in the long term. A phenomenon observed today is that an increasing number of organizations realize that success cannot be measured solely in financial terms, but also by the quality of the work environment and the relationships established among individuals within it. A positive organizational culture becomes a valuable asset that is difficult for others to imitate, as it is formed from the interactions and values shared by all members of the organization (Osodlo et al., 2021). This shift requires organizations to pay attention to the behavioral aspects and values held by leaders, as these factors determine how the work environment is shaped and how organizational members behave in carrying out their assigned tasks. Internal flexibility and rapid responses to changes in external situations are crucial prerequisites for an institution's operations to remain relevant (Darmawan, 2021). Furthermore, the organization of a healthy culture also contributes significantly to maintaining the continuity of contributions and the career mobility of experienced workers within the system (Darmawan, 2020).

One of the main issues emerging in organizational management practice is that many leaders still prioritize achieving target results without considering moral and ethical aspects in every action taken. This leadership style often places organizational interests above everything else, leading to behaviors that ignore the principles of fairness and honesty in interactions with organizational members. This issue results in negative impacts, where organizational members feel unappreciated and distrust the policies set by the leader (Ostwal, 2017). Consequently, the resulting work environment becomes unconducive, characterized by a low sense of togetherness, high levels of conflict, and a decrease in members' motivation to provide their best contributions. This lack of trust is often triggered by unclear assessment indicators and minimal involvement of personnel in periodic evaluation processes (Darmawan, 2021). This condition will ultimately hinder organizational performance and threaten its operational sustainability in the long term (Ahmed, 2015). Another adverse effect is the risk of losing top talent due to the failure to fulfill adequate social security and welfare facilities (Oluwatosin et al., 2021).

Another issue of significant concern is the continuing lack of understanding regarding how leadership grounded in moral values can shape a positive and sustainable organizational culture. Many leaders assume that the application of ethical values is merely theoretical and difficult to implement in work situations under pressure to achieve results (Rahman et al., 2020). In fact, if applied consistently, ethical values will create a stable and harmonious work environment, where every organizational member feels comfortable working and interacting with others. The sense of fairness in the work environment also needs to be supported by an objective and transparent reward system to ensure that work commitment is maintained (Darmawan & Marsal, 2021). Such a work environment will encourage the emergence of responsible and

mutually supportive behaviors, which will ultimately enhance overall organizational performance (Bansal & Kumar, 2018). This conducive atmosphere is proven effective as a stimulus to increase satisfaction while honing the technical competencies of staff in the field (Mardikaningsih & Putra, 2021). This lack of understanding causes many leaders to fail to utilize the potential of ethical leadership as a tool to build a strong and sustainable organizational culture.

Furthermore, there are still differing views regarding the mechanisms of how ethical leadership influences the formation of a positive and sustainable organizational culture. Some studies show that ethical leadership has a significant direct impact on the quality of organizational culture, whereas other studies suggest that this impact is influenced by various other factors, such as individual characteristics and the existing organizational structure (Faheem et al., 2021). These differing views lead to ambiguity regarding the extent to which ethical leadership can contribute to the formation of a positive organizational culture, as well as how other factors influence that relationship (Khayru et al., 2021). This also creates difficulties for organizational leaders in determining the appropriate steps to implement ethical leadership in order to achieve the expected goals of building a conducive work environment. The combination of the readiness of employees' personal capacity and a healthy workplace situation becomes a determining variable underlying optimal performance achievement (Arifin & Mardikaningsih, 2021).

This research is based on the Ethical Leadership Theory developed by Brown et al. (2021). This theory explains that ethical leadership is a leader's behavior characterized by the application of moral values in every action and decision taken, as well as the ability to influence organizational members to act in accordance with the same principles. According to this theory, ethical leaders act fairly, honestly, transparently, and care for the well-being of organizational members, while also encouraging the creation of a work environment that values diversity and supports the development of every individual's potential. This theory emphasizes that ethical leadership plays an important role in determining the norms and values shared within an organization, which subsequently become the foundation for forming a positive and sustainable organizational culture. This alignment of moral standards serves as an important basis for improving the quality of life of workers while ensuring that the evaluation process runs fairly (Eddine et al., 2021).

Based on a review of various previous studies, there is still a gap in understanding regarding the processes involved in the formation of an organizational culture influenced by ethical leadership. Some studies focus on the relationship between ethical leadership and organizational performance in general without providing sufficient explanation of the mechanisms involved in shaping the mindset and behavior of organizational members. Meanwhile, other studies discuss organizational culture separately without examining in depth the role of ethical leadership as a primary driver in the formation of that culture. This gap makes it difficult for organizational leaders to understand the steps that need to be taken to implement ethical leadership in order to build a positive and sustainable organizational culture. An approach that integrates the fulfillment of material rights, the adjustment of task loads, and clear job characteristics is a fundamental aspect that has not been extensively reviewed in an integrated manner (Djazilan & Darmawan, 2020).

Another problem that arises is the lack of understanding regarding the factors that can strengthen or weaken the influence of ethical leadership in shaping a positive and sustainable organizational culture. Although many studies show that ethical leadership has a positive impact on organizational culture, there are still many organizations that apply this leadership style but do not achieve the expected results. This indicates that there are specific factors that determine whether the implementation of ethical leadership can proceed effectively or not, yet these factors have not been sufficiently identified and explained in the various studies conducted thus far. A lack of understanding in this area makes it difficult for organizational leaders to prepare themselves and determine the appropriate strategies for implementing ethical leadership within their respective work environments. Individual emotional stability and the ability for self-control management in the workplace are suspected to be internal factors that also influence the success of these interactions (Irfan & Darmawan, 2021).

Organizations that possess a positive organizational culture will enjoy high levels of job satisfaction and member retention, while a sustainable organizational culture ensures that shared values and norms are maintained even when there are changes in leadership or existing organizational structures. Ethical leadership is a primary factor that can create both conditions; therefore, a deep understanding of the role of this leadership will assist organizations in developing more effective management systems to achieve desired goals. Furthermore, this study is also expected to contribute to the development of knowledge in the fields of organizational behavior and management, as well as serve as a reference for future research addressing similar topics.

Based on the background and problems described, the problem formulation in this research is: how does the role of ethical leadership shape a positive and sustainable organizational culture, and what is the relationship between leadership styles grounded in moral values and the organizational work climate that is created? The objective of this research is to examine the role of ethical leadership in shaping a positive and sustainable organizational culture, and to analyze the relationship between leadership styles grounded in moral values and the organizational work climate that is created. This objective is structured in alignment with the established problem formulations, ensuring that each goal provides a clear answer to the issues being faced. This study is expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of the ethical leadership concept and its impact on organizational culture and work climate, as well as provide useful guidance for organizational leaders in implementing appropriate leadership styles to achieve organizational success.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research employs a literature study method aimed at collecting, examining, and synthesizing various information sources relevant to the study topic to gain a comprehensive and systematic understanding. This method was chosen because it allows the researcher to examine various previously conducted studies addressing ethical leadership, organizational culture, and work climate. Through this method, the researcher can identify various views, findings, and concepts developing regarding the role of ethical leadership, as well as develop a complete understanding of how leadership styles grounded in moral values can shape a positive and sustainable organizational culture. This method is considered appropriate for the research objective, which seeks to compile summaries and analyses from various previously conducted studies to provide a clear picture of the phenomenon being studied.

The data sources used in this research are various scientific literatures relevant to the study topic. The collected literature sources include national and international scientific journals addressing leadership, organizational behavior, human resource management, and business ethics. In addition, literature sources also include textbooks written by experts in management and organization, research reports published by reputable research institutions, and other scientific publications addressing factors influencing organizational culture and work climate. The researcher ensures that the literature sources used possess high credibility and have gone through a rigorous peer-review process, so that the information obtained can be accounted for in terms of its accuracy and can be used as a basis for conducting accurate analysis and synthesis.

The data analysis technique used in this research is thematic analysis, where information collected from various literature sources is grouped into primary themes corresponding to the study's focus. The analysis process is conducted by identifying main ideas found in each literature source, grouping them into relevant categories, and arranging them into a systematic and structured series of descriptions. This technique allows the researcher to compare and contrast existing views, as well as develop a complete synthesis regarding the role of ethical leadership in shaping a positive and sustainable organizational culture. This approach aligns with the view of Guest et al. (2020), who state that thematic analysis in literature reviews can be used to organize and present information logically, thereby providing a clear and comprehensive picture of the topic being studied.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Ethical leadership is understood as a leader's behavioral pattern that prioritizes moral principles in every action, decision, and interaction conducted with all members of the organization (Serrat, 2021). Brown (2007) describes ethical leadership as “the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making” (Tushar, 2017). Ethical leaders demonstrate consistency between the values they believe in and the behavior they exhibit, thereby serving as role models to be followed by every individual in the work environment. The principles held include honesty, fairness, responsibility, respect for others, and concern for collective well-being. This behavioral pattern serves as a reference for organizational members in determining how to behave and interact with others, thus creating uniformity in understanding and executing the norms applicable in the workplace. A shared understanding of the values held in high regard becomes the foundation for forming a strong and integrated organizational culture at all levels of the organization. The demand for the enforcement of these moral standards binds all elements regardless of their position stratification or the type of work existing within the system (Eddine & Darmawan, 2021). The robust internalization of values from this exemplary figure also becomes a crucial foundation for sustaining the integrity and productivity of senior workers amidst the dynamics of a changing era (Darmawan, 2020).

The application of ethical leadership contributes significantly to creating a positive work climate within an organizational environment. A positive work climate is characterized by mutual trust, openness, togetherness, and a sense of safety felt by every member of the organization (Bansal & Kumar, 2018). Ethical leaders create such a work climate through fair treatment of every individual, openness in communicating information, and consistency in applying existing rules. When organizational members feel treated fairly and valued as individuals, they feel comfortable expressing their opinions and ideas without fear of receiving unpleasant treatment. This sense of comfort then creates a conducive work atmosphere for communicating and collaborating with other organizational members. It is mentioned in Brown & Treviño (2006) and Mayer et al. (2009) that leaders who consistently demonstrate ethical behavior and make decisions based on moral principles build a foundation of trust and transparency (Kurniawan & Darmawan, 2021). Fair treatment regarding the basic rights of personnel directly strengthens internal stability and the quality of the work output produced (Gautama et al., 2021). Positive interactions stemming from this genuine leadership character are proven capable of fostering spontaneous initiatives from subordinates to work beyond the organization's formal standards (Mardikaningsih et al., 2022).

Trust serves as the core element built through the application of ethical leadership, forming the foundation for a positive work climate (Yanik, 2018). The trust bestowed by leaders upon organizational members creates a greater sense

of responsibility in carrying out assigned tasks, while the trust received by leaders from organizational members fosters respect and compliance rooted in awareness. When organizational members believe that their leader acts with honesty and fairness, they are confident that every decision made is intended for the good of the organization and the well-being of all its members. This sense of confidence allows organizational members to feel comfortable working and interacting with others in the workplace, thereby creating a conducive work climate that enhances overall productivity and performance. The trust that is built also enables the organization to face various challenges and changes more effectively, as all organizational members possess the conviction that the leader will guide them in the right direction (Mardikaningsih & Darmawan, 2022). This comfort rooted in trust can be optimized when moral virtues are integrated structurally into every phase of human resource development (Jahroni & Darmawan, 2021).

Transparency demonstrated by ethical leaders plays an important role in creating a fair and equitable work climate within an organizational environment (Chughtai, 2015). Ethical leaders communicate information relevant to the work openly to all organizational members, ensuring that every individual has a shared understanding of the goals, policies, and expectations set by the organization. This open dissemination of information prevents misunderstandings and speculation that could lead to distrust and conflict in the workplace. Furthermore, transparency ensures that every policy and decision made by the leader can be accounted for and understood by all organizational members (Gani & Darmawan, 2022). When organizational members understand the reasoning behind each policy and decision, they are more willing to accept and execute them effectively. This openness of information serves as a crucial bridge in unifying work perceptions, especially amidst the complexity of diverse individual cultural backgrounds (Hariani & Mardikaningsih, 2021).

Consistency in behavior demonstrated by ethical leaders also plays an important role in creating a stable and predictable work climate (Hegarty & Moccia, 2018). Ethical leaders behave in the same manner across various situations, allowing organizational members to understand what is expected of them and what they can expect from their leader. This consistency creates a sense of order and stability in the workplace, so organizational members can focus on the work being performed without worrying about unexpected changes in leadership behavior. This sense of stability also makes organizational members feel comfortable developing their potential and interacting with others in the work environment. When organizational members feel that the existing work environment is stable and predictable, they will find it easier to adapt to various changes that occur and be more motivated to work effectively. This certainty of attitude from management acts as a psychological shield that maintains staff work focus amidst uncertain external situations (Mardikaningsih & Darmawan, 2021).

Ethical leadership also creates a work climate that supports self-development and career growth for all organizational members (Sharma et al., 2019). Ethical leaders realize that organizational success depends on the capabilities and performance demonstrated by every individual who is a member. Therefore, ethical leaders strive to create a work environment that allows every organizational member to develop their abilities and potential optimally. Ethical leaders provide the support and guidance needed by organizational members to develop themselves, as well as provide equal opportunities for each individual to participate in training and career development provided by the organization. This support and the opportunities provided make organizational members feel valued and cared for, so they will be more motivated to work well and improve the abilities they possess. The leader's attention toward growth space and the fulfillment of proper rights is proven to suppress internal turmoil and the employees' desire to leave the institution (Mardikaningsih & Hariani, 2020).

The application of ethical leadership also has a significant influence on the formation of a positive organizational culture (Ouma, 2017). A positive organizational culture refers to a set of values, norms, and beliefs shared by all members of the organization and reflected in their daily behavior. The values contained in ethical leadership, such as honesty, fairness, and respect, become part of the core values shared within the organization. When leaders consistently apply these values in every action taken, organizational members will emulate the behavior shown and adopt it as part of the manner of behavior deemed correct and appropriate. This process of behavioral emulation then gradually changes the mindset and behavior of organizational members, creating uniformity in how organizational activities are viewed and executed. The positive psychological encouragement arising from this modeling process ultimately binds employees' emotional commitment to dedicate their energy fully toward organizational targets (Darmawan & Mardikaningsih, 2021).

Ethical leaders act as agents of change who steer the formation of organizational culture in a more positive direction (Morais & Moura, 2018). Through effective communication and consistent behavior, ethical leaders convey messages regarding the values held in high regard and the expectations held for the behavior of organizational members (Mardikaningsih & Darmawan, 2022). Within the framework of positive psychology, effective communication also serves as a means to build good relationships between individuals, their superiors, and colleagues, as well as to create an open and mutually respectful work climate (Eddine & Darmawan, 2022). These messages are then internalized by each individual and become guidelines for determining how to behave and interact with others. When the conveyed values align with the needs and expectations of organizational members, they feel driven to adopt those values and make them part of their personal identity. This internalization process is the primary key in forming a strong organizational culture, as internalized values will continue to be upheld and applied even in the absence of strict supervision from management.

This gradual process of value cultivation simultaneously stimulates the emergence of adaptive learning patterns that strengthen the intellectual capacity of both individuals and groups (Kurniawan & Darmawan, 2021). This modification of behavioral governance acts as an innovative step in human resource management to boost the institution's competitiveness amidst global competition (Abdullah et al., 2021).

The fairness demonstrated by ethical leaders plays an important role in shaping a positive organizational culture (Hegarty & Moccia, 2018). Ethical leaders treat every organizational member in a fair and equitable manner, without discriminating based on position, title, or background. When leaders are perceived as fair in their treatment of employees, trust in them increases, which results in motivated and engaged employees (Sinambela et al., 2021). This fair treatment creates a sense of togetherness and solidarity among organizational members, as they feel that every individual has the same rights and obligations within the work environment. This sense of togetherness is then reflected in behaviors of mutual support and assistance among organizational members, thus creating a harmonious and productive work environment. The effort to unify visions through a sense of fairness is crucial for building solid cross-functional collaboration in achieving team targets (Fared & Darmawan, 2021). When fair treatment becomes the prevailing norm in the work environment, organizational members will feel comfortable collaborating and working together to achieve organizational goals. The accumulation of this sense of trust and ease of interaction forms strong social capital to realize comprehensive work quality assurance (Putra et al., 2021).

The honesty demonstrated by ethical leaders also plays an important role in shaping a positive organizational culture (Hegarty & Moccia, 2018). Ethical leaders convey information honestly and do not conceal matters that are important to organizational members. This behavior creates a culture of openness in the work environment, where every individual feels free to express their opinions and ideas without fear of receiving unpleasant treatment. This culture of openness allows for the exchange of valuable ideas and knowledge among organizational members, thereby creating a dynamic and innovative work environment. The conditioning of a barrier-free communication space must also be supported by the mastery of digital skills so that information distribution runs optimally (Arifin & Darmawan, 2021). When honesty becomes a highly upheld value, organizational members will feel more confident in the information conveyed and will find it easier to work together to achieve established goals. The freedom of expression facilitated by management transparency will, in turn, boost employees' self-efficacy in completing their responsibilities (Hariani, 2021).

The care demonstrated by ethical leaders toward the well-being of organizational members also contributes to shaping a positive organizational culture (Ouma, 2017). Ethical leaders do not merely focus on achieving organizational goals, but also attend to the physical and psychological well-being of every individual who is a member. The balance between professional demands and the fulfillment of personal space becomes a crucial factor in enhancing the inner job satisfaction of employees (Arifin et al., 2021). This behavior creates a culture of care in the workplace, where every individual feels that their well-being is an important concern for the organization. This sense of being cared for makes organizational members feel more comfortable and motivated to work effectively, as they feel that their presence and the contributions they provide have significant meaning to the organization. This culture of care also creates a mutually supportive work environment, where every individual strives to assist others who are experiencing difficulties. This behavior is considered essential because it can enhance the overall effectiveness of the organization (Darmawan, 2017). This is especially true given that employees are a determining factor for effective corporate implementation, alongside supporting facilities and infrastructure (Darmawan et al., 2020). Attention to the protection of well-being becomes urgent amidst shifts in the modern labor market that demand high psychological stability (Ishaq et al., 2021).

The application of ethical leadership also plays an important role in creating a sustainable organizational culture. A sustainable organizational culture refers to a set of values and norms that remain maintained and applied even when changes occur in leadership or existing organizational structures. Ethical leaders create a sustainable organizational culture by ensuring that the values held in high regard are internalized by every organizational member and become part of the prevailing work system. When these values have been integrated into the work system, they will continue to be practiced as part of routine and will not depend on the presence of a specific leader. This ensures that a positive organizational culture can be maintained and develop over time, allowing the organization to continue operating effectively in various situations encountered. This pattern of robust value institutionalization adopts the principle of governance sustainability, which has a direct impact on increasing long-term operational performance (Barzani et al., 2022).

The consistency of leaders in applying ethical values becomes the primary key to maintaining a sustainable organizational culture. When leaders consistently apply the values held in high regard in every action taken, organizational members will understand that those values are an inseparable part of the organization's identity. This understanding prompts organizational members to strive to maintain and apply those values in every activity performed, even when facing difficult or high-pressure situations. Consistency in the application of ethical values also prevents deviations from the established norms, because every action taken is always measured based on its conformity with the values held in high regard. This firm moral commitment from leadership reflects a tangible manifestation of social responsibility in managerial practice (Rojak & Darmawan, 2021). This ensures that a positive organizational culture can be maintained over the long term.

Ethical leadership also creates a self-monitoring mechanism that plays a role in maintaining a sustainable organizational culture. When ethical values have been internalized by every organizational member, they possess the self-awareness to act in accordance with those values without needing to be strictly supervised by management. This self-awareness creates a monitoring system that runs automatically, where every individual monitors their own behavior and that of others to ensure conformity with the values held in high regard. This self-monitoring mechanism is more effective than formal supervision conducted by management because it occurs continuously and involves all organizational members. This autonomous moral awareness will ultimately form an independent work ethic and hone interpersonal skills within the daily task ecosystem (Mardikaningsih & Sinambela, 2021). This ensures that a positive organizational culture can be maintained and develop over time.

The application of ethical leadership also has a positive impact on overall organizational performance through the formation of a positive and sustainable organizational culture. A positive organizational culture creates a conducive work environment for increasing the productivity and performance of organizational members, while a sustainable organizational culture ensures that high performance can be maintained over the long term. When organizational members feel comfortable and motivated to work, they are able to complete assigned tasks more quickly and accurately, thereby increasing achieved productivity. Furthermore, a positive organizational culture also encourages the emergence of responsible and innovative behaviors, which will help the organization face various challenges and changes occurring in the surrounding environment. However, it must be kept in mind that the organization must also ensure that workloads remain balanced and provide fair rewards for employee efforts so that the additional contributions provided do not have a negative impact on their well-being (Sinambela & Darmawan, 2022).

In general, the review of various literature sources demonstrates that ethical leadership plays a crucial role in shaping a positive and sustainable organizational culture. A leadership style grounded in moral values creates a fair, honest, and respectful work environment, which subsequently influences the mindset and behavior of organizational members in a constructive direction. The relationship established between leaders and employees, based on mutual trust and respect, serves as the foundation for a conducive work climate and a strong organizational culture. The success of ethical leadership depends on the leader's ability to understand and consistently apply the values embedded in ethical leadership in every action and decision. The application of this leadership style provides significant long-term benefits for organizational development.

CONCLUSIONS

Ethical leadership has a significant role in shaping a positive and sustainable organizational culture. A leadership style based on moral values creates a fair, honest, and respectful work environment, which then becomes the foundation for a conducive work climate. Values upheld by ethical leaders, such as honesty, fairness, and care, are internalized by organizational members and serve as guidelines for daily behavior. Consistency in applying these values is the key to maintaining a positive organizational culture over the long term, ensuring that the values remain intact even when organizational structures or leadership change.

Future research is recommended to conduct empirical studies that examine the relationship between ethical leadership and positive, sustainable organizational culture across different types of organizations and industrial sectors. Such studies could identify contextual factors that influence the effectiveness of ethical leadership, including organizational size, member characteristics, and external environments. In addition, future research may develop more comprehensive models that explain the mechanisms linking ethical leadership to organizational culture formation and test the role of mediating and moderating variables that may affect this relationship. Longitudinal studies are also suggested to observe the development of organizational culture over extended periods.

For organizational leaders, the findings of this study imply that the adoption of ethical leadership is a strategic step toward building a positive and sustainable organizational culture. Leaders need to understand and apply ethical values in every action and decision, while serving as role models for all organizational members. Leaders should also establish systems and policies that support the application of ethical values, such as fair performance appraisal systems and open mechanisms for expressing opinions. For organizations, the findings highlight that investing in the development of ethical leadership capabilities provides substantial benefits in creating a conducive work environment and enhancing overall organizational performance in the long term.

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