

# Ethical Leaderships

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## บทคัดย่อ

ในปัจจุบันนี้เป็นที่รู้กันทั่วไปแล้วว่าผู้บริหารระดับสูงหรือผู้นำในองค์กรเป็นจำนวนมากมีความเกี่ยวข้องกับพัวพันกับกิจกรรมต่าง ๆ ที่ไม่ถูกต้องตามหลักจริยธรรม กิจกรรมเหล่านั้นมีผลกระทบอย่างมากต่อชีวิตของผู้อยู่ใต้บังคับบัญชาต่อชะตากรรมของพวกเขาและต่อชะตากรรมของประเทศชาติ ดังนั้นจึงเป็นการดีอย่างยิ่งที่จะได้พิจารณาตรวจสอบความคิดความเข้าใจเกี่ยวกับความเป็นผู้นำที่มีจริยธรรมเนื่องจากมีข้อจำกัดบางอย่าง ผู้เขียนจึงมุ่งเจาะเฉพาะบางลักษณะของความเป็นผู้นำที่มีจริยธรรม โดยเฉพาะอย่างยิ่งประมวลจริยธรรมของผู้นำที่มีจริยธรรม ตัวแบบในการทำการตัดสินใจที่ถูกต้องตามหลักจริยธรรม ทฤษฎีความเป็นผู้นำที่มีจริยธรรมบางทฤษฎี เกณฑ์ที่ใช้ในการประเมินความเป็นผู้นำที่มีจริยธรรมค่านิยมของผู้นำที่มีจริยธรรมและวิธีการส่งเสริมการปฏิบัติให้ถูกต้องตามหลักศีลธรรมในองค์กรต่าง ๆ

ผู้เขียนมีความคาดหวังอย่างสูงว่า บทความนี้จะมีประโยชน์อย่างมากต่อผู้อ่านทั้งหลาย โดยเฉพาะอย่างยิ่งผู้บริหารและผู้นำในองค์กรภาครัฐและภาคเอกชน

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## **Abstract**

As it is widely known presently, a great number of top executives or organization leaders are involved in unethical activities. The activities have great impact on the lives and fate of subordinates as well as the nation. Thus it is essential to examine conceptions of ethical leadership. Due to some restraints, the writer focuses on some aspects of ethical leadership notably the code of ethics of ethical leaders, models for making ethical decisions, some theories of ethical leadership, criteria used for evaluating ethical leadership, values of ethical leaders, and ways to promote ethical practices in organizations.

The writer has high hope that this article would be of great use to all readers particularly executives and leaders of public and private organizations.

**Keywords :** ethics, leadership

Today a great number of top executives of organizations in the modern world (both in the public and private sectors) are involved in unethical activities. Needless to say, this kind of activities has a substantial impact on the lives of followers and the fate of an organization as well as a nation. So it is deemed highly essential to examine conceptions of ethical leadership. A general understanding of ethical leadership includes, *inter alia*, the following: nurturing followers, empowering them, and promoting social justice. Ethical leadership encompasses efforts to encourage ethical behavior as well as efforts to stop unethical practices. Ethical leaders make efforts to build mutual trust and respect among diverse followers and to seek integrative solutions among stakeholders with competing interests. Furthermore, ethical leaders do not foster distrust or play favorites to gain more power or achieve personal gain (Yukl, 2013).

### The Code of Ethics and Ethical Leaders

It is of paramount importance that ethical leaders have to strictly abide by the code of ethics. In the case of ethical leaders in public organizations, leaders are obligated to commit themselves to the following principles:

**(1) Serve the public interest.** For example, exercising discretionary authority to promote the public interest; opposing all forms of discrimination and harassment; involving citizens in policy decision-making; and exercising compassion, benevolence, fairness and optimism.

**(2) Respect the constitution and the law.** This simply means that ethical leaders are bound to perform the following functions: understanding and applying legislation and regulations pertaining to their professional roles; working to improve and change laws and policies that are obsolete; preventing all forms of mismanagement of public funds; promoting constitutional principles of equality, fairness, representativeness, responsiveness and due process in promoting citizen's rights.

**(3) Demonstrate personal integrity.** Ethical leaders are committed to the following: maintaining truthfulness and honesty and to not compromise them for personal gain; guarding against conflict of interest; taking responsibility for their own errors; and conducting official acts without partisanship.

**(4) Promote ethical organizations.** In this regard, ethical leaders are supposed to be engaged in the following activities: enhancing organizational capacity for open communication, creativity, and dedication; establishing procedures that promote ethical behavior and hold individuals and organizations accountable for their conduct; and promoting organizational accountability through appropriate controls and procedures (Henry, 2004).

Apart from the four principles cited above, ethical leaders should have some core ethical values including trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring and citizenship. These six, core ethical values were dubbed “Pillars of Character” by Josephson (1995).

### **Models for Making Ethical Decisions**

According to Goetsch and Davis (2006), ethical leaders use the following models when making decisions:

**(1) Categorical imperative model.** With this model, right is right, wrong is wrong and there are no gray areas.

**(2) Doctrine of the mean model.** This model points out that moderation is ethical.

**(3) Golden Rule model.** This model is based on the Golden Rule that says “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”

**(4) Equal freedom model.** According to this model, organizations have the freedom to behave as they wish unless their actions infringe on the rights of stakeholders.

**(5) Full – disclosure model.** With this model, if the organization could explain its actions to the satisfaction of a broad cross section of stakeholders, the actions are deemed ethical.

**(6) Market – ethical model.** In the context of business, any legal action that promotes profitability is ethical.

**(7) Organizational ethic model.** If the leader of an organization has adopted a set of guiding principles that ensure ethical behavior, it could be said that the organization is an ethical organization and the leader is an ethical leader.

**(8) Proportionality ethic model.** When making decisions, the leader must make sure that the good outweighs the bad.

**(9) Professional ethic model.** This model is based on the principle of peer review. It states that a decision is ethical if it can be explained to the approval of a broad cross section of professional peers.

From my perspective, the 9 models mentioned above can be used by leaders in the public sector and the private sector except that the models seem to fare much better in the private sector.

### Theories of Ethical Leadership

Several prominent theories have a strong emphasis on ethical leadership. These include transforming leadership, servant leadership, authentic leadership and spiritual leadership (Yukl, 2013).

**On the theory of transforming leadership,** it stated that “leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of morality and motivation.” These leaders seek to raise the consciousness of followers by appealing to ideals and moral values such as liberty, justice, equality, peace and humanitarianism, not to baser emotions such as greed, jealousy, or hatred (Burns, 1978). Followers are elevated from their “everyday selves” to their “better selves”. Transforming leadership is an influence process between individuals, but it is also a process of mobilizing power to change social systems and reform institutions. The leader attempts to shape, express and mediate conflict among groups of people. (Burns, 1978)

**On the theory of servant leadership,** Greenleaf (1977) proposed that service to followers is the primary responsibility of leaders and the essence of ethical leadership. In the workplace, leaders help others to accomplish shared objectives by facilitating individual development, empowerment, and collective work that is consistent with the health and long-term welfare of followers. A servant leader must attend to the needs of followers and help them become healthier, wiser, and more willing to accept their responsibilities. Service includes nurturing, defending, and empowering followers.

**On the theory of authentic leadership,** the theory emphasizes the importance of consistency in a leader’s words, actions, and values. Additional aspects of authentic

leadership include positive leader self-awareness, and a trusting relationship with followers. Authentic leaders have positive core values such as honesty, altruism, kindness, fairness, accountability, and optimism. These core values motivate authentic leaders to do what is right and fair for followers, and to create a special type of relationship that encompasses high mutual trust, transparency, guidance toward worthy shared objectives, and emphasis on welfare and development.

**On the theory of spirituality leadership**, according to Fry (2003), spirituality comprises two essential elements in a person's life: (1) transcendence of self-manifest in a sense of "calling" or destiny; and (2) the belief that one's activities, including work, have meaning and value beyond being instrumental for obtaining economic benefits or self-gratification (need for power, achievement, esteem). Both elements involve **altruistic love and faith**. Altruistic love is associated with values such as kindness, compassion, gratitude, understanding, forgiveness, patience, humility, honesty, trust, and loyalty. Faith is associated with values such as optimism, confidence, courage, endurance, persistence, resilience, and serenity.

### Criteria for Evaluating Ethical Leadership

The criteria that can be used to evaluate ethical leadership are the following: (1) Use of power and influence. (2) Handling diverse interests of stakeholders. (3) Development of a vision for the organization. (4) Honesty and integrity of leaders. (5) Risk taking in decisions and actions. (6) Communication of relevant information. (7) Response to criticism and dissent from followers. And (8) development of follower skills.

Based on the above criteria, an ethical leader is bound to perform the following functions or duties: (1) Serves followers and the organization. (2) Attempts to balance and integrate them. (3) Develops a vision based on the needs, values and ideas of the followers. (4) Acts in a way that is consistent with espoused values. (5) Is willing to take risks and actions to achieve mission and the vision. (6) Makes a complete and clear disclosure of information about events, problems and actions. (7) Encourages critical evaluation to find better solutions. And (8) uses coaching, mentoring, and training to develop followers. (Yukl, 2013).

## Values of Ethical Leaders

Based on theories of ethical leadership, it could be said that an ethical leader should have the following values: (1) **Integrity:** Communicates in an open and honest way, keeps promises, acts in ways that are consistent with espoused values, and accepts for mistakes. (2) **Altruism:** Enjoys helping others, is willing to take risks, focuses on the needs of others rather than his or her own needs, and volunteers for service activities that require extra time. (3) **Humility:** treats others with respect, avoids status symbols and special privileges, emphasizes the contributions by others when a collective effort is successful. (4) **Empathy and healing:** Helps others cope with emotional distress, acts as a mediator, encourages forgiveness and reconciliation after a divisive conflict. (5) **Personal growth:** Facilitates the development of individual confidence and ability, provides learning opportunities despite a risk of mistakes, provides mentoring and coaching when needed, and helps people learn from mistakes. (6) **Fairness and justice:** Encourages and supports fair treatment of people, opposes attempts to deceive people or to violate their civil rights. (7) **Empowerment:** Provides an appropriate amount of autonomy and discretion to subordinates, and encourages them to express concerns of dissenting views without becoming defensive (Yukl, 2013).

## Ways to Promote Ethical Practices in Organizations

By and large, leaders can do many things with a view to promoting ethical practices in organizations. Nielsen (1989) has provided some guidelines for ethical leadership. The guidelines are specified below.

(1) **Set clear standards for ethical conduct:** Leaders can set standards and guidelines for dealing with ethical issues, provide opportunities for people to get advice about dealing with ethical issues, and initiate discussions about ethical issues to make them more salient. Moreover, leaders can recognize unusual examples of ethical conduct as well as use appropriate disciplinary procedures for any violations of ethical standards.

(2) **Model ethical behavior in your own actions.** To lessen unethical behavior, it is deemed highly essential for the leader to model proper behavior so that followers can follow suit. Leaders can do a wide variety of things to promote honesty, fairness,

mutual respect and transparency. A leader's own actions provide an example of ethical behavior to be imitated by people who admire and identify with the leader.

**(3) Help people find fair and ethical ways to resolve problems and conflicts.**

One important leadership function is to help frame problems by clarifying key issues, encouraging dissenting views, distinguishing causes from symptoms and identifying complex interdependencies. Leaders can facilitate problem solving by helping their subordinates get information, by identifying points of agreement and disagreement, and by encouraging people to find integrative solutions to conflicts. It is important to proceed at a pace that people can tolerate, because if pushed too fast, people may resort to defensive avoidance mechanism.

**(4) Oppose unethical practices in the organization.** Examples of opposition to unethical practices include refusing to comply with unethical assignments or rules, making complaints to higher management, threatening to publicize unethical practices to outsiders, and actually revealing unethical practices to outsiders or a regulatory agency. Opposition to unethical practices is usually a risky course of action. Speaking out against injustices and opposing unethical practices may put one in danger of retaliation by powerful people in the organization.

**(5) Implement and support programs to promote ethical behavior.** Examples of typical features of ethical programs include a formal code of ethics, an ethical committee responsible for developing policies and practices, methods of reporting ethical concerns to the ethics committee, ethics education programs, methods to monitor ethical behavior, and disciplinary processes to deal with unethical behavior.

According to a study (Weaner, et al., 1999), top executives with a strong concern for ethical behavior are more likely to implement ethical programs, and the scope of the programs is likely to be broader. The types of leadership values associated with the use of ethical programs are: treating people fairly, doing what is right, ensuring justice is done, and so on. The research also indicates that responsibility for ethics is taken seriously by all executives not simply delegated to staff professionals.

## Cultural Values, Laws and Professional Standards

Ethical leadership is in large measure influenced by cultural values, social norms, legal requirements and professional standards in countries where an organization is located (Svensson and Wood, 2007). It is fairly convenient for managers to oppose unethical practices when there is a strong and explicit support for such opposition and the standards for unacceptable behavior are clear rather than ambiguous (Reynolds, 2006). It is extremely difficult to discourage unethical behavior in countries where bribe and kickbacks, gender and religious discrimination, child labor abuse, deceptive advertising, sexual harassment, and falsifying accounting records to evade taxes are widely accepted practices in organizations. Top executives, political leaders, religious leaders and opinion leaders in universities, the news media, and professional associations all can play a dominant role in helping to establish clear ethical standards and a strong concern for the social responsibility in private and public organizations.

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