



## A Systematic Literature Review On The Impact Of Ethical Leadership On Employee Job Performance

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Article History	Abstract
Received: 10 January 2024 Revised: 25 January 2024 Accepted: 09 February 2024	This paper meticulously explores ethical leadership through a systematic literature review, unravelling its intricate dynamics in organizational contexts. It navigates diverse dimensions, including theories, measurement scales, and outcomes. The Scopus database was chosen to collect 311 papers, which included the theme of this paper, between the years 2005 and 2023. Out of which, 48 publications were chosen for in-depth analysis, following the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews (PRISMA) protocol. The study's findings highlight the crucial importance of incorporating ethical leadership, not only in influencing overall employee performance but also in serving as a catalyst for various factors that play mediating or moderating roles within organizational frameworks. The global landscape, particularly in Asian countries like China, Pakistan, Malaysia, and Indonesia, underscores a growing emphasis on ethical leadership, evident through active engagement in studies exploring its practical applications. Empirical findings endorse the positive impact of ethical leadership on performance outcomes, advocating for an expanded scope, including those in India. This paper not only underscores the significance of ethical leadership but also provides valuable insights for future research.
CC License CC-BY-NC-SA 4.0	<b>Keywords:</b> Ethical leadership, Organizations, Employee performance, systematic review, PRISMA.

### 1. Introduction

In the contemporary globalized landscape, dynamic economic challenges, technological advancements, global market competitiveness, and the demand for multifaceted skills characterize the business environment. Establishing and sustaining a positive work climate becomes imperative in motivating employees to attain both their professional and personal goals. Leadership, as a significant influencer in fostering employee well-being amidst evolving work climates, must consider the specific circumstances and requirements of the business (Heresy and Blanchard, 1988). Traditional leadership concepts have evolved, necessitating a strategically integrated approach to enhance employee performance and efficient management (Iqbal, Anwar, and Haider, 2015).

Numerous studies highlight the advantages of ethical leadership in curbing harmful behaviors and unethical practices. The impact of ethical leadership on others' conduct significantly influences employee job performance, as evidenced by a plethora of literature (Brown, Trevino, & Harrison, 2005). Over the past two decades, corporate scandals such as Enron, WorldCom, Nortel, AIG, and Lehman Brothers have underscored ethical issues in leadership, emphasizing the need for a fundamental discussion on ethics within organizations (Fulmer, 2004). Instances of unethical and toxic leadership exploiting systemic loopholes for personal gain have eroded trust and commitment, emphasizing the importance of ethical leadership in organizational culture. Ethical leadership, encompassing positive qualities like integrity, honesty, reliability, justice, motivation, and altruism, is recommended to address challenges both within and outside organizations (Bachmann, 2017). Leaders, acting as role models, significantly influence employee behavior, advocating for an ethical leadership style to meet organizational challenges. Extensive research in the past decade has generated a substantial body of literature on ethical leadership and its profound impact on employee job performance.

This paper explores the crucial role of ethical leadership in enhancing job performance effectiveness through a systematic literature review that analyzes key studies. The primary objective is to present a comprehensive summary of the impact of ethical leadership styles on employee performance, both as individuals and within the teams, encompassing theories, dimensions, measurement scales, and outcomes. By meticulously examining the correlation between ethical leadership and job performance, the paper strives to provide reproducible results for future studies, thereby contributing to the ongoing discourse on ethical leadership.

## **1.1 Literature review**

### **1.1(a) Ethical leadership**

Trevino et al. (2000) initially introduced the concept of ethical leadership, a notion that has evolved gradually over time. The assumption underlying organizational ethical approaches is that leaders, when held accountable, should emphasize fairness, honesty, and integrity. Brown et al. (2005) systematically conceptualized the intertwining concepts of "leadership" and "ethics" to formulate the construct of ethical leadership. According to their research, ethical leadership is defined 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."

While ethical dimensions are present in various leadership paradigms, such as transformational leadership (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1997), servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977), and authentic leadership (Avolio & Gardner, 2005), they may not fully elucidate the impact of a leader's ethical practices and decisions on subordinates within the organization. This underscores the significance of ethical leadership style as an individual factor. Bouckennooghe et al. (2015) argue that Ethical Leadership is a "valid leadership construct" rather than merely a component of core leadership behaviors like "transformational, authentic, and transactional." There is an increasing focus on managers' ethical behavior in the workplace, as suggested by Kuntz et al. (2013), who describe Ethical Leadership as a value-based and people-oriented leadership style that promotes ethical standards through rewards and communication.

Resick et al. (2011) explored the significance of ethical leadership from Asian, American, and European perspectives. Examining Asian countries such as Taiwan and China, they found that hierarchical relationships prevail, where the bond between leaders and subordinates is deemed as valuable as that between a father and son. Similarly, the ethical values upheld by leaders are mirrored in their subordinates, influencing their attitudes, behaviors, and performance outcomes.

## **1.2 Theoretical Background**

In any discourse on leadership, the moral and ethical values of a leader are invariably deemed a prerequisite for effective leadership. This places leaders in a distinctive position, fostering an ethical environment within the organization and shaping employees' behavior and attitudes. In the existing body of literature, ethical leadership is examined through the lenses of social learning theory and social exchange theory.

Social learning theory, as proposed by Bandura (1977), asserts that individuals acquire new behaviors and attitudes by closely observing and imitating the conduct of others through direct observation. Emphasizing the importance of leaders as attractive and trustworthy role models, this theory posits that ethical leaders, by adhering to ethical standards, influence their followers to do the same. Utilizing rewards and punishments, ethical leaders effectively control the behavior of their followers, leading to increased accountability at work as followers adopt the principles and conduct of their moral role models (Brown & Trevino, 2006). Enzle and Anderson (1993) further highlight that accountability fosters performance-related outcomes, such as enhanced work motivation and high task performance.

Gouldner's (1960) principles of social exchange theory suggest that individuals feel compelled to reciprocate admirable actions when they perceive kindness and fairness from others. Wang et al.'s (2020) study indicates that ethical leaders, through two-way communication, can foster a superior-quality leader-member exchange (Leader Member Exchange), as supported by Brown & Trevino (2006), Kalshoven et al. (2011), Hartog (2015). Walumbwa et al. (2011) provide evidence that ethical leadership improves leader-member exchange, subsequently enhancing employees' job performance. De Roeck & Farooq's (2018) study underscores that a leader's choices and actions must align with their values and beliefs. Consequently, an ethical leader can establish a robust bond of trust and empathy with their team, contributing to exceptional performance and achievements for the organization (Manzoor et al., 2019).

**Table:1** Ethical Leadership Dimensions identified by the researchers

Researchers and the year	Dimensions
Kanungo and Mendonca (1996, 1998)	conceptualized three dimensions of EL – (a) leader's motivation, (b) leader's influence strategies, and (c) leader's character.
Trevino et al. (2003)	Introduced two dimensions- (a) Moral Person, and (b) Moral Manager
Resick et al. (2006)	(a) Character, (b) integrity, (c) altruism, (d) collective motivation, and (e) encouragement.
Lee and Cheng, 2010	(a) Personal Ethics (b) Interpersonal behaviours (c) Articulation of ethical standards (d) Ethical knowledge Implicit by nature
Kalshoven et al. (2011)	(a) people orientation, (b) fairness, (c) power sharing, (d) concern for sustainability, (e) ethical guidance, (f) role clarification, and (g) integrity.
Fehr et al. (2015)	(a) care/harm, (b) fairness/ cheating, (c) loyalty/betrayal, (d) sanctity/degradation, (e) authority/subversion, and (f) liberty/oppression.

**Table: 2** Measurement Scales of ethical leadership

Researchers	Year	Scale	No. of items
Brown et al.	2005	Ethical Leadership Scale (ELS)	10 items
Spangenberg & Theron	2005	Ethical Leadership Inventory (ELI)	101 items
Kalshoven et al.	2011	Ethical Leadership at Work Questionnaire (ELWQ)	38 items
Tanner et al.	2011	Ethical Leadership Behavior Scale (ELBS)	35 items
Zheng et al.	2011	Ethical Leadership Measure (ELM)	14 Items
Yukl et al.	2013	Improved Ethical Leadership Questionnaire (IELQ)	15 items
Shakeel et al.	2020	Broader Ethical Leadership Scale (BELS)	48 items
Bakar & Connaughton	2023	Ethical Leadership Communication Scale (ELCS)	15 items

Various quantitative measures have been devised to evaluate ethical leadership styles, with Brown et al. (2005) pioneering the creation of the first scale, known as the Ethical Leadership Scale (ELS). Despite the proliferation of measuring scales over the years, the ELS stands out as one of the most versatile and widely utilized tools, owing to its brevity and applicability across diverse situations. The original ethical leadership scale has undergone adaptations into different languages, such as Italian and German, demonstrating robust reliability and validity (Zappala and Toscano, 2020; Rowold et al., 2009). A meta-analysis conducted by Bedi et al. (2016) further affirms the high reliability of the ELS.

## 2 Outcomes of ethical leadership

### 2.1 Job Satisfaction

The intersection between ethical leadership and job satisfaction has garnered considerable attention among researchers, prompting numerous studies to delve into the specific work behaviors of employees within organizations (Neubert et al., 2009; Kim and Brymer, 2011; Munir et al., 2012). As defined by Ma et al. (2003), job satisfaction represents an affective orientation related to the job, encompassing various benefits—both monetary and non-monetary, job security, interpersonal relationships, individual work interests, and social connections. The absence of any of these facets tends to result in employee dissatisfaction. Ethical leaders, characterized by qualities such as integrity, fair treatment, and honesty, wield a positive influence that contributes to the well-being and job satisfaction of their subordinates (Stouten et al., 2013). Kim and Brymer's (2011) study specifically found that the ethical attitude exhibited by hotel managers significantly enhances job satisfaction and affective commitment among hotel employees. This, in turn, correlates with improved employee performance and reduced turnover intentions, highlighting the pivotal role of an ethical hotel manager in the long-term success of the establishment. Ahmad and Umrani's (2019) study further concluded

that leaders establishing ethical standards exert a positive influence on employee behavior and attitudes, ultimately fostering job satisfaction. Additionally, Freire and Bettencourt's (2020) research revealed a substantial impact of ethical leadership on job satisfaction and work-family conflict. The ethical values and beliefs upheld by leaders exert a profound influence on employees, elevating job satisfaction levels and significantly reducing work-family conflict among individuals employed in Portuguese public health institutions.

## 2.2 Organisation Citizenship behaviour

Organizational citizenship behavior, delineated as a factor contributing to enhanced job performance rather than an integral part of the reward system, has been a subject of empirical research establishing its significant relationship with ethical leadership (Zainal, 2019; Ko et al., 2016; Tse & Chiu 2014; Nemr & Liu, 2021; Seth et al., 2022; Shareef & Atan, 2019). Ethical leaders, by cultivating an environment characterized by care and respect, engender positive interactions between supervisors and subordinates, thereby influencing organizational behavior (Mayer et al., 2009).

Nguyen's (2023) study underscored the pivotal role of ethical leadership in shaping the organizational citizenship behavior of public servants in Vietnamese government organizations. Serving as ethical role models is crucial for ethical leaders to foster an atmosphere of interpersonal citizenship behavior at work. Brown and Trevino (2006) delved into the effects of ethical leadership, emphasizing its potential to facilitate ethical decision-making, influence prosocial or citizenship behavior, and even impact counterproductive, negative, or anti-social employee behavior. Shin (2012) found that the ethical leadership of a CEO significantly influences employee perceptions of ethics, influenced by an ethical climate, a crucial factor in determining organizational citizenship. Correspondingly, Zhang et al. (2019) established a positive influence of ethical leadership on organizational citizenship behavior. Mo & Shi (2017) discovered a positive association between ethical leadership and organizational citizenship behavior, highlighting how an ethical leader's creation of a fair and just work environment nurtures the bond between supervisors and subordinates, ultimately contributing to the accomplishment of organizational values and goals. Consequently, this fosters organizational citizenship behavior.

## 2.3 Corporate social responsibility

Ethical leadership stands as a pivotal driver of corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives, with several researchers contributing to the discernment of the positive relationship between ethical leadership and CSR (Saha et al., 2020; Tian, Liu, & Fan, 2015; Wu et al., 2015; Pasricha, 2018). Organizations actively practicing ethical leadership not only embody social responsibility but also integrate it as a vital component of their ethical culture. According to Kanungo (2001), virtuous behavior, intrinsic to an ethical leadership style, entails actions that benefit others while preventing harm within the organization. The behavior of supervisors toward stakeholders significantly shapes employees' perceptions of the organization, with subordinates' views on CSR strongly influenced by the ethical leadership style of their immediate supervisors (Vlachos et al., 2013; Hemingway and MacLagan, 2004). Tourigny et al. (2019) affirmed, in alignment with various research studies, that ethical leadership plays a pivotal role in raising awareness and shaping employee perceptions of CSR. Investigating the correlation among ethical leadership, corporate social responsibility (CSR), and organizational performance, Zhu et al. (2014) employed stakeholder theory and discovered that ethical leaders not only demonstrate ethical conduct personally but also adeptly convey these principles to their subordinates. The ethical principles and guidelines upheld by leaders have a favorable influence on stakeholders' views of CSR, consequently leading to an improvement in overall firm performance. Furthermore, the ethical leader's values and convictions are instrumental in sustaining the motivation of a diverse range of stakeholders. Kim and Thapa's (2018) study revealed that employees who perceive their supervisors as ethically strong and work within an environment shaped by ethical leaders exhibit more engaged CSR practices. Aftab et al. (2021) investigated and affirmed the positive association between ethical leadership and CSR, subsequently influencing job performance outcomes.

## 2.4 Organisational Commitment

Numerous researchers, elucidating the significance of organizational commitment, have established it as a crucial precursor to ethical leadership (Brown and Trevino, 2006b; Khuntia and Suar, 2004; Kim and Brymer, 2011; Kanungo and Mendonca, 1998; Loi et al., 2015). Organizational commitment, defined as an individual's aspiration to identify and achieve organizational goals while maintaining membership in a specific organization, is fostered by ethical leaders who cultivate an environment encouraging employees to embrace and consistently apply ethical values (Valentine and Barnett, 2003). Allen and Meyer (1996) delineated three



components of organizational commitment—namely, affective, normative, and continuance commitment. This study explores how a leader's ethical values, trust-building initiatives, and promotion of ethical practices contribute to organizational commitment (Ponnu and Tennakoon, 2009). Hassan et al. (2013), aligning with previous findings, established a significant link between ethical leadership and organizational commitment, emphasizing its importance in achieving results and reducing turnover intentions and work absences. A study in Malaysia discovered a positive correlation between ethical leadership and organizational commitment. In a study conducted by Kim and Vandenberghe (2020) investigating the relationship between ethical leadership and organizational commitment, it was found that ethical leadership exerts a strong impact on affective and normative commitment through the mediating role of perceived organizational support. The study also emphasized that the ethical consistency in leaders' behavior significantly influences subordinates' commitment to work. Similarly, a study by Abuzaid (2018) in the banking sector revealed a positive correlation between ethical leadership and organizational commitment, particularly in terms of affective and normative commitment.

## 2.5 Work engagement

In the realm of literature, a multitude of researchers have explored the relationship between ethical leadership and work engagement (Islam et al., 2023; Naeem et al., 2020; Sarwar et al., 2020; Habiba et al., 2019). Employing the job-demand resource theory, they have consistently found a positive impact of ethical leadership on work engagement (Christian et al., 2011; Mckenna and Jeske, 2020). Engaged employees consistently emerge as the most productive and efficient contributors to organizational success, with their level of engagement intricately linked to the trust and credibility of their leaders (Hartog and Belschak, 2012). The integrity and credibility of ethical leaders significantly influence their employees, fostering a meaningful connection. A study highlighted that, for achieving sustainability and organizational growth, ethical leadership serves as a crucial antecedent to work engagement, positively enhancing the state of employee engagement. Utilizing the Job Demand Resource Theory, the research sought to understand the essential function of ethical leadership in fostering work engagement within a dynamic business setting. Consistently, results from the investigation carried out by Engelbrecht et al. (2017) demonstrated a favorable correlation between the ethical integrity of leaders and the trust and work engagement levels of staff. Furthermore, the delegation of decision-making authority to employees emerged as a contributing factor to heightened work engagement, with ethical leaders fostering transparent communication and offering opportunities for decision-making.

## 2.6 Trust

Trust is conceptualized as 'one's expectations, assumptions, or beliefs about the likelihood that another's future actions will be beneficial, favorable, or at least not detrimental to one's interests' (Robinson, 1996). Leaders' behavior is anticipated to wield a substantial influence on instigating employees' trust (Dirks and Ferrin, 2002), as employees perceive the leader as an ambassador for the organization. Ethical leaders, by fostering an open and proactive communication environment regarding organizational decision-making and expectations, demonstrate their concern for employees, thereby establishing a foundation for employee trust in the organization (Xu, Loi, & Ngo, 2016). The quality of leader-member exchanges serves as an indicator of the level of trust (Blau, 1964). When employees view their leader as ethical, fair, and trustworthy in exchanges, they align their actions with their leader's ethical code of conduct and perform in accordance with the organization's expectations. Tan and Tan (2000) found that trust in a supervisor, when reciprocated, initiates a flow of trust in the leader. Brown et al. (2005) established a positive relationship between ethical leadership and employee affective trust. A study by Leh and Abdullah (2014) explored trust behavior towards leaders in educational organizations, delving into trust and organizational commitment to enhance the understanding of ethical leadership and employee job performance. Another study in an Indonesian hotel highlighted the positive impact of organizational trust on employee performance, where ethical work and developed leadership abilities contributed to increased job knowledge (Lay et al., 2020).

## 2.7 Turnover intentions

Turnover intention, reflecting an employee's willingness to leave their workplace, involves a three-phase process encompassing psychological, cognitive, and behavioral aspects preceding departure. In the literature, turnover intentions exhibit a negative association with ethical leadership. The leader's creation of a conducive work environment, incorporating benefits like rewards and incentives, motivates employees to remain connected to the organization. When leaders establish an ethical climate characterized by fairness and honesty, it positively impacts subordinates, reducing their intention to leave. Ethical leaders, serving as role models, cultivate an environment of values and beliefs, resulting in decreased turnover intentions (DeConinck, 2015;

Elçi et al., 2012; Demirtas and Akdogan, 2015; Benevene et al., 2018; Lin & Liu, 2017). A study in Iraq's public universities demonstrated that ethical leadership is positively associated with organizational citizenship behavior and negatively influences turnover intentions (Shareef and Atan, 2019). Similarly, a study determined the negative relationship between ethical leadership and turnover intention. Ethical leadership not only fosters ethical behavior within an organization but also positively impacts employee attitudes and actions, facilitating the achievement of shared workplace objectives and enhancing work attachment. Additionally, dissatisfaction and a stressful job environment were found to result in withdrawal intentions among employees (Amponsah-Tawiah et al., 2016). According to Effendi et al. (2021), individual beliefs and actions are strongly influenced by how employees interpret their work environment positively, aiding them in coping with job-related issues and decreasing turnover intentions. Another study's findings suggest that the association between ethical leadership and turnover intention is mediated by an individual-type ethical climate, implying that employees in a favorable ethical climate are less likely to decide to leave (Saleh et al., 2022).

## 2.8 Job performance

Human capital stands as the most invaluable resource for achieving organizational goals, with employee job performance serving as a crucial indicator of its effectiveness. As posited by Otley (1999), organizational performance is inherently tied to the performance of its employees. Each employee possesses both acquired abilities and natural skills, acting as dual motivators for optimal organizational performance (Sarmiento & Beale, 2007). Employee performance, defined as the adept completion of tasks while judiciously utilizing available resources, is fundamental to organizational success (Jamal, 2007). Performance evaluation serves as a vital tool for gauging the achievements of employees within an organization. The impetus for employees to excel is intricately linked to their leaders. Leaders who treat employees fairly, honestly, and acknowledge their performance are likely to cultivate a high-performing environment. In support of this, Bouckennooghe et al. (2015) concluded that the moral and ethical behavior exhibited by leaders is a key mechanism shaping followers' in-role job performance. A wealth of prior research has underscored the pivotal role of ethical leadership in enhancing employee job performance (Shafique, Kalyar, & Ahmad, 2018; Kim and Brymer, 2011; Walumbwa, 2011; Liu et al., 2013; Yang and Wei, 2017).

The existing literature supports a positive relationship between ethical leadership and job performance, mediated through various channels such as organizational commitment, job satisfaction, organizational citizenship behavior, work engagement, corporate social responsibility, and employee trust (Kim and Brymer, 2011; Neubert et al., 2009; Zhang et al., 2019; Hartog and Belschak, 2012; Aftab et al., 2021; Kim and Vandenberghe, 2020; Lay et al., 2020; Tan and Tan, 2000; Dirks and Ferrins, 2002).

## 3. Methodology

The authors of this paper, in order to report their research work in a comprehensive manner and to provide a rationale for future studies, have adopted a systematic literature review approach based on the "PRISMA - Preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analysis framework". A Scopus database was used for the review of this paper, which included a number of supplementary sources to collect information in both quantitative and qualitative terms. The paper included in the studies published between the year 2005 to 2023. For obtaining results, inclusion and exclusion criteria have also been applied.

**Table: 3** Inclusion and Exclusion criteria

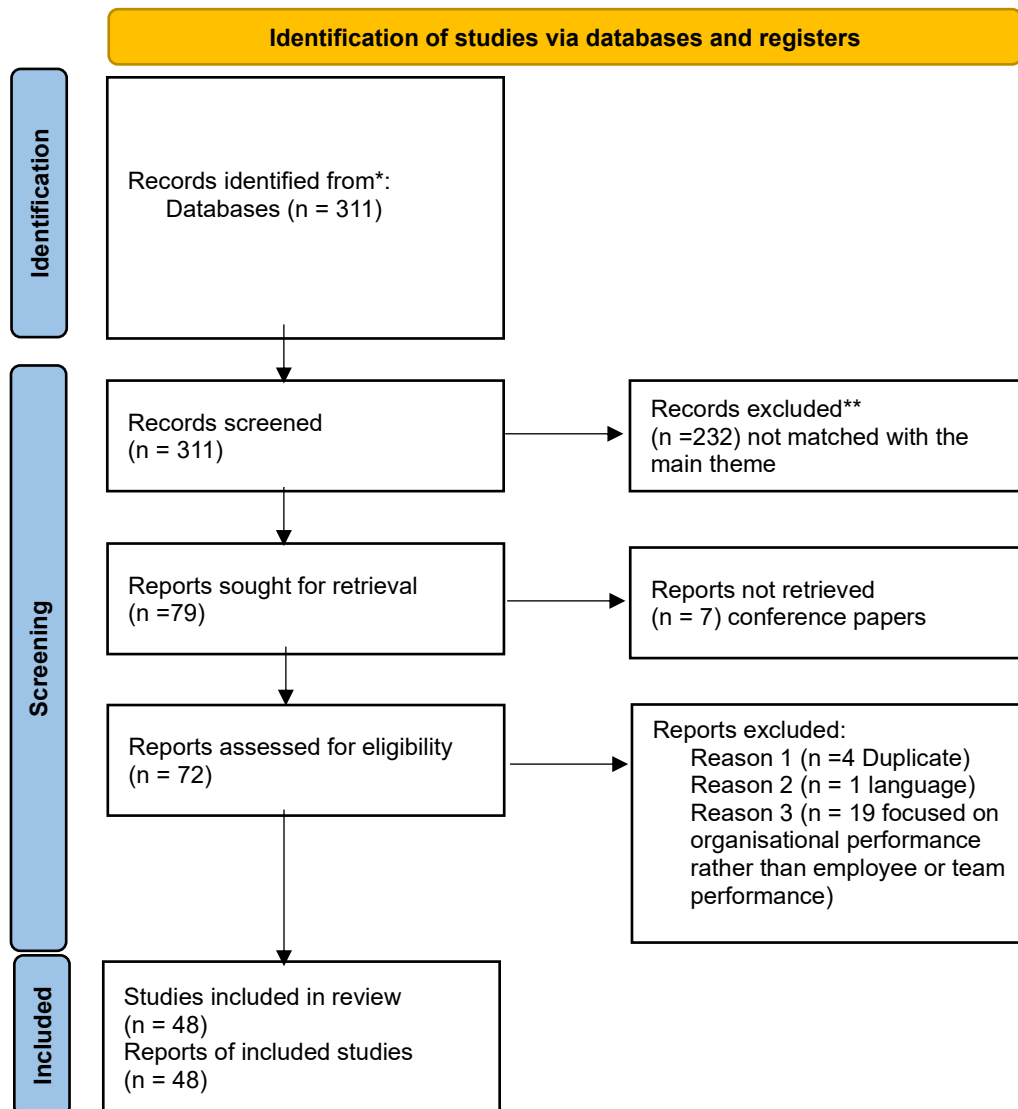
Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Paper should include the term "ethical leadership" and "employee performance" or "job performance" or "employee performance" or "team performance" or "work outcomes"	The effect of Ethical leadership on "firm performance" or "organizational performance" are used as a main theme
Articles that are conceptual, empirical, and editorial and are in English	Ethical leadership have not any impact/effect on performance of employees or have reverse relationship
Should also have all kind of mediator and moderator for establishing the relationship between ethical leadership and job performance, applied to any organization.	Either focused on "ethical leadership" or "job performance" and no direct relationship establish between ethical leadership and employee performance

### 3.2 Search criteria

The PRISMA selection process commenced with an extensive search using the keywords 'ethical leadership' and 'performance', generating an initial pool of 311 results from the Scopus database for documents published

between 2005 and 2023. Employing a meticulous approach, inclusion and exclusion criteria were rigorously applied, leading to the exclusion of 232 papers that did not align with the main theme of ethical leadership and employee job performance. Additionally, 7 papers were omitted as they were conference papers, resulting in a refined set of 79 papers. Within this subset, out of the total, 19 papers were specifically centered on the theme of firm or organizational performance, a subject not within the scope of this study aimed at analysing the impact of ethical leadership on firm or organizational performance. Further refinement involved the exclusion of 4 duplicate papers, and one paper in a language other than English, ultimately leaving 48 papers for detailed analysis in the study. This thorough and systematic selection process adhered to PRISMA principles, ensuring a judicious inclusion of literature that aligns precisely with the research focus.

**Figure: 1** PRISMA 2020 flow-diagram for new systematic reviews.



### 3.4 Detailed analysis of the studies

Below recorded information includes Author/s Name and Year of publication, Country of study, Industry examined, applied theory, Data source and methodology, Utilized mediator/s or moderator/s, and Conclusive findings of the study.

**Table: 4** below shows details of relevant papers which are included in the study.

Sr. No.	Authors	Country	Industry	Theory	Data source	Mediating or moderating factors	Findings
1	Yang et al. (2023)	China	Hospitality	Social learning theory	Survey	Ethical climate and Self- efficacy	Finding revealed the positive effect of ethical leadership on the employee and team service performance.
2	Lee & Huang (2019)	China	Marketing		Survey	job embeddedness, Social Capital and human capital behavior development	The study found a negative link between ethical leadership and sales performance. noted that when ethical leadership contributes to high job embeddedness, it hampers the development of social and human capital, ultimately impeding sales performance.
3	Qabool et al. (2021)	Pakistan		social learning theory	Survey	self-efficacy and workplace climate	The findings indicate that Ethical leadership positively influences job performance, self-efficacy and work climate act as mediators for job performance, and work climate has a direct impact on safety compliance.
4	Ahmad et al. (2018)	Pakistan	Marketing	Social exchange theory and organisati on support theory	Survey	psychological contract fulfilment (PCF)	The findings suggest a positive association between ethical leadership style (ELS) and employees' Organizational Citizenship Behaviors (OCBs) and Counterproductive Behaviors (CP). Additionally, the study supported the predicted mediating role of Perceived Organizational Climate for Ethics (PCF) in the relationship between ELS and extra-role behaviors.
5	Wadei et al. (2023)	Ghana			Survey	self-efficacy and job autonomy	The study found that creative self-efficacy mediates the positive connection between ethical leadership and employee creative performance. Job autonomy was identified as a situational factor, moderating the relationship between ethical leadership and creative self-efficacy—indicating a stronger link when job autonomy levels increased.
6	Aftab et al. (2021)	Italy	Manufacturing	Social exchange theory	Survey	Corporate social responsibility	The results highlight a robust positive association between Ethical Leadership (EL) and Employee Job Performance (EJP) as well as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Notably, CSR has a positive impact on EJP. Additionally, the findings reveal a significant mediating role of CSR in the relationship between EL and EJP.
7	Kia, Halvorsen, & Bartram (2019)	Australia	Banking and finance service	Social learning theory	Survey	organisational identification, customer orientated behaviour, service climate, and ethical climate	A correlation is found between ethical leadership and in-role performance. Further the findings suggest that ethical leadership, when facilitated through ethical and service climates and organizational identification, plays a crucial role in enhancing in-role performance.
8	Yang & Wei (2017)	China		Social exchange and social learning theory	Survey	employee proactive personality and organisational identification	The findings indicate that ethical leadership positively impacts employee task performance mediating through organizational identification. Moreover, when employees exhibit a highly proactive personality, the positive relationship between ethical leadership and task performance becomes stronger, which moderates the effect of ethical leadership on employee task performance through organizational identification.
9	Byun et al. (2018)	South Korea	Electronics, automobiles , and telecommunication	Social learning theory	Survey	Social-loading	Results showed that ethical leadership from high-level leaders positively impacts low-level leaders, reducing employee social loafing and enhancing task performance. Additionally, it has been observed that low self-enhancement motives in low-level leaders strengthen the positive influence of ethical leadership from both high and low-level leaders on employee outcomes.
10	Eva et al. (2018)	China	Public sector	Social exchange theory	Survey	Percieved organisational support & duty orientation	Results revealed that percieved organisational support and ethical leadership moderated the relationship between duty orientation and followers outcomes such as job performance. There is a positive relationship between ethical leadership and job performance.



11	Lee, Kim, & Byun (2021)	South Korea		Social learning theory and Social exchange theory	Survey		A study revealed that the presence of organizational politics has a detrimental impact on ethical leadership, subsequently leading to adverse effects on both employee task performance and citizenship behavior.
12	Zhu et al. (2015)	Romania	Iron and steel		Survey	organizational and relational identifications	The research identified a positive indirect influence of ethical leadership on job performance, mediated by organizational and relational identification.
13	Walumbwa et al. (2012)	USA	Hospitality	Social learning theory and Social exchange theory	Survey	group conscientiousness and group voice.	The findings indicate that ethical leadership serves as a crucial predictor of in-role performance within groups, potentially contributing to enhanced overall organizational performance over time. The study further demonstrates that the relationship between ethical leadership and group performance is mediated by group conscientiousness and group voice.
14	Liu et al. (2013)	China	Manufacturing	Social learning theory	Survey	Workplace friendships	The results illustrate a positive association between ethical leadership and task performance mediated by workplace friendships.
15	Strydom (2021)	South Africa		Social cognitive theory	Survey	cultural value orientations (individualism-collectivism)	The findings indicated a positive correlation between ethical leadership and job performance. Additionally, the relationship between ethical leadership and job performance was not moderated by horizontal individualism-collectivism.
16	Eluwole et al. (2022)	Nigeria	Hospitality	Social exchange theory and Social learning theory	Survey	trust in organization, absenteeism, social loafing behavior	The results of the study demonstrated a positive relationship between ethical leadership and service recovery performance. Trust in the organization was identified as a mediating factor in this relationship, playing a role in mitigating both absenteeism and social loafing.
17	Shafique, Kalyar, & Rani (2019)	Pakistan	Chemical		Survey	perceived accident and perceived hazard	The findings indicate a positive correlation between ethical leadership and workers' safety performance, safety attitude, and task performance. Additionally, perceived accident likelihood moderates the impact of ethical leadership on safety performance and attitude, strengthening the association under high accident likelihood. Furthermore, perceived hazard exposure moderates the connection between ethical leadership and task performance, with increased hazard exposure diminishing the effectiveness of ethical leadership.
18	Song et al. (2023)	China		social identity theory and social cognitive theory	Survey	organizational identity and service climate	Discovered a positive correlation between ethical leadership and proactive customer service performance, with organizational identity serving as a mediator and service climate playing a moderating role.
19	Ullah, Kayani, & Mehmood (2020)	Pakistan	Information Technology	Social exchange theory	Survey	Employee voice	The findings from this study indicate a positive association between ethical leadership and employees' innovative performance. Furthermore, employee voice was identified as a mediating variable in the relationship between ethical leadership and innovative performance.
20	Huang & Paterson (2014)	China	Electronics retail		Survey	Group ethical voice & ethical culture	findings substantiate the claim that ethical leadership is positively correlated with group ethical voice. Additionally, hypothesized mediating mechanisms (ethical culture and group ethical voice efficacy) linking ethical leadership with group ethical voice were supported. Furthermore, research revealed that group ethical voice has a positive impact on ethical service performance.
21	Zhang et al. (2023)	China	Hospitaliy		Survey	Learning goal orientation & co-worker support	Ethical leadership shows no direct correlation with job performance but exerts an indirect

							influence on nurses' performance via the mediator (learning goal orientation). Additionally, the relationship between ethical leadership and job performance is moderated by co-worker support.
22	Bouckenoo ghe et al. (2015)	Pakistan	Conglomerate	Social learning theory	Survey	Psychological capital and Goal congruence	The findings demonstrated a positive impact of ethical leadership on followers' in-role job performance, with this influence being clarified through the mediation of psychological capital and follower-leader goal congruence.
23	Malik et al. (2016)	India	Higher Education		Survey	Organisational values	Study uncovered that organizational values serve as moderators in the relationship between ethical leadership and employees' performance. These values further contribute to enhancing employees' work efficiency by supporting the ethical context set by leaders.
24	Weng (2014)	Taiwan	Banking	Leader-member exchange theory	Survey	supervisor-subordinate guanxi	Ethical leadership identified as the key factor influencing employee job performance through the moderating mechanism of supervisor-subordinate guanxi, which refers to a long-term interpersonal relationship.
25	Limpo et al. (2023)	Indonesia	Public and Private		Survey	Job satisfaction	Empowered and ethical leaders positively influenced job satisfaction, bridging predictor variables to job performance and organizational commitment. Job satisfaction played a crucial mediating role in the relationship between predictor variables (e.g., empowering and ethical leadership) and employees' commitment.
26	Castro-Gonzalez & Bande (2019)	Spain	Conglomerate		Survey	Corporate social responsibility and job satisfaction	The findings affirm a positive correlation between ethical leadership and salesperson performance, mediated by their perceptions of CSR and job satisfaction.
27	Ahn et al. (2018)	South Korea		self-verification theory and social exchange theory	Survey	Employee's exchange ideology	The findings indicated that ethical leadership acts as a mediator in the influence of leaders' core self-evaluation on employees' job performance. Additionally, the study revealed that employees' exchange ideology moderates the association between ethical leadership and job performance.
28	Mo & Shi (2017)	China	Pharmaceutical	Resource theory	Survey	Trust in leaders and surface acting	Indicated that trust in leaders and surface acting significantly mediated the relationships between ethical leadership and employee burnout, deviant behavior, and task performance.
29	Walumba et al. (2011)	China	Pharmaceutical	social exchange, social learning, and social identity theories	Survey	organisational identification, Self-efficacy, and Leader-member exchange	The study unveiled a positive and significant correlation between ethical leadership and employee performance, as assessed by their direct supervisors. This connection was entirely mediated by Leader-Member Exchange (LMX), self-efficacy, and organizational identification, while accounting for procedural fairness.
30	Peng & Lin (2017)	Taiwan	FMCG(fast moving consumer goods)	Social exchange theory and Social learning theory	Survey	group value congruence & Group trust	The study revealed a positive relationship between ethical leadership and group congruence, with group trust mediating between ethical leadership and group performance outcomes.
31	Badrinarayan et al. (2019)	USA	Marketing	Social exchange theory and Social learning theory	Survey	Competence, Gratitude, and Emulation	A study found that there is a positive relationship between ethical leadership and work behaviour performance, and that gratitude and competence enhance the relationship between ethical leadership and a salesperson's performance.
32	Bluhm (2013)	USA	Insurance	Social Exchange Theory and Affective Events Theory	Survey	Psychological capital	The results indicated a positive correlation between ethical leadership and both job performance and psychological capital, with psychological capital serving as a mediating factor in the dynamic interplay between ethical leadership and employee

							performance, encompassing both upward and downward shifts
33	Kang (2019)	South Korea		Social learning theory	Survey	Perceived salience of ethic codes	A positive correlation was discovered between ethical leadership and work performance, facilitated by the perceived salience of ethical codes
34	Radi et al. (2022)	Iraq	Sports		Survey	Psychological control	Discovered a direct correlation between the ethical leadership of coaches and improved athlete performance achieved via psychological control.
35	Ma et al. (2022)	China	Service	Social learning theory	Survey	perceived organizational virtuousness and mindfulness	Mindfulness and organizational virtuousness served as moderator or mediators, enhancing the positive connection between ethical leadership and employee service recovery performance.
36	Schwepker Jr. and Dimitriou (2021)	USA	Hospitality	Ethical decision-making theory and Ethical impact theory	Survey	Job stress and Ethical ambiguity	The findings indicate a positive correlation between ethical ambiguity and job stress, which, in turn, has a negative association with the performance quality of customer-contact employees. Additionally, perceived ethical leadership behaviors positively impact performance quality.
37	Ahmed (2019)	Jordan	Public	Social exchange theory	Survey	Psychological well-being	An affirmative correlation exists between ethical leadership and the performance of accountants, and this connection is mediated by the enhancement of psychological well-being.
38	Schwepker Jr. (2019)	USA	Marketing	Social exchange theory	Survey	trust in manager and ethical ambiguity	The study reveals that perceived ethical leadership affects salesperson performance by mediating trust in the manager and reducing ethical ambiguity. Positive perceptions of supervisor's ethical leadership enhance trust in the manager, positively impacting sales performance, while decreasing ethical ambiguity correlates with improved sales performance.
39	Ullan et al. (2022)	Pakistan	Manufacturing	Social learning theory and Social exchange theory	Survey	Social capital	The findings demonstrated the significant influence of ethical leadership on enhancing employees' innovative performance. Additionally, this study revealed that social capital acts as an intermediary factor in the relationship between ethical leadership and employees' innovative performance.
40	Huang and Chang (2021)	China	Service	employee engagement theory	Survey	Employee engagement	Higher perceived transformational, ethical, and participative leadership initially led to increased positive employee engagement behaviors, subsequently resulting in decreased counterproductive work behaviors.
41	Mo and Shi (2018)	China	Technology	Leader-member exchange theory	Survey	Promotive voice	Ethical leadership positively influences task performance via promotive voice, with a notable impact when leader-leader exchange is low.
42	Costa et al. (2022)	Portugal	Insurance, Education, Consulting, Technologies, Banking	social identity theory	Survey	organizational embodiment (SOE) and Organisational identification	Ethical leadership enhances organizational identification and extra-role performance, contingent on high levels of SOE; in low SOE, ethical leadership does not promote organizational identification, making SOE a crucial factor in the relationship.
43	Ullah et al. (2021)	Pakistan	Manufacturing		Survey	intellectual capital	Ethical leadership was observed to positively influence employees' innovative performance, with intellectual capital playing a mediating role in the relationship between ethical leadership and employees' innovative performance.
44	Chamtigü and Li (2021)	Thailand	Technology		Survey	Team learning	Ethical leadership positively directly influences team performance. The relationship is partly mediated by team learning processes, including information processing and storage/retrieval.
45	Yang, Seong, & Hong (2020)	Korea	public Electrical	Job demands-resources (JD) Theory	Survey	Creativity	The findings unveiled that ethical leadership and a high-performance work system exhibit a negative correlation with creativity, while demonstrating a positive association with task performance

46	AlShehhi et al. (2020)			Social learning theory and Social exchange theory	Conceptual		Found the positive effect of ethical leadership on workers' in-role job performance
47	Park, Kim, & Song (2015)	Korea	Public Non-Profit	Social learning theory	Survey	Psychological ownership	The findings indicated that ethical leadership significantly influences employees' psychological ownership, with its notable indirect impact on in-role performance being mediated through employees' psychological ownership.
48	White & Rezanian (2019)	Canada	Sports	Social learning theory and Social exchange theory	Survey	Accountability	The study shows a strong link between coaches displaying ethical leadership and the behavior and performance of student-athletes. Felt accountability plays a mediating role in the influence of ethical leadership on voice and performance.

#### 4.1 Findings

A comprehensive examination of various studies unequivocally establishes the constructive correlation between ethical leadership and performance. The affirmative impact of performance outcomes extends across both individual and group/team performances, underscoring the broad-reaching implications of ethical leadership. Also, a comprehensive examination brought to light that the preeminent theories employed in comprehending the intricacies of ethical leadership and its nexus with performance are the Social Exchange Theory and the Social Learning Theory. Furthermore, various mediators and moderators like corporate social responsibility, job satisfaction, workplace friendships, organizational identification, ethical climate, promotive voice, self-efficacy, employee engagement, social capital, creativity, accountability, psychological ownership, trust, job stress, social loafing, job autonomy, and many more have been identified as critical factors enhancing the intricate relationship between ethical leadership and employee performance. Notably, research indicates heightened global awareness of the significance of ethical leadership, with recent specific attention paid to Asian countries such as China, Pakistan, Indonesia, Korea, and Malaysia, where the importance of implementing ethical leadership in organizations has been acknowledged. Moreover, studies spanning various industries such as manufacturing, banking, service, pharmaceuticals, higher education, hospitality, and hotels have been conducted to assess the impact of leaders' ethical values on employee job performance. While the majority of studies have empirically tested the relationship between ethical leadership and employee performance, a limited number have delved into providing a conceptual and theoretical understanding, offering valuable insights into the nuanced positive relationship that exists between ethical leadership and employee performance.

#### 4.2 Conclusion

In conclusion, this systematic review illuminates the consistent and positive impact of ethical leadership on employee job performance, drawing insights from a comprehensive exploration of diverse literature. The pivotal role of human resources in organizational success is underscored, emphasizing individual performance contributions in determining overall achievement. The establishment of a fair and honest environment emerges as a critical catalyst for fostering positive employee attitudes, linking organizational culture and management practices to employee perceptions. The adoption of an ethical leadership style is presented as an imperative, particularly in the wake of global leadership scandals. The profound influence of employees' perceptions of their leaders on behaviour and attitudes is highlighted. An ethical work environment is seen not only as nurturing values of fairness and honesty but also as effectively communicating these principles, resulting in heightened motivation, job satisfaction, and ultimately, enhanced job performance.

Despite the universal relevance of ethical leadership across countries and industries, a notable observation is made regarding the limited empirical studies conducted in India. This identified gap signifies a unique opportunity for the application of ethical leadership styles in Indian organizational contexts. Consequently, a compelling need is emphasized for further exploration and research in the Indian context to deepen understanding of the nuanced interplay between ethical leadership and employee job performance. The imperative for a more comprehensive global approach to ethical leadership studies is stressed, acknowledging the distinctive cultural and organizational settings that influence its impact.

### 4.3 Recommendations

Building on the findings, it is recommended to include diverse industries of varying sizes in the Indian context for a comprehensive investigation. This inclusivity aims to capture the nuances of ethical leadership across different organizational structures and sectors. Additionally, the paper advises conducting longitudinal studies to meticulously assess the evolving relationship between ethical leadership and employee performance over an extended period. Such longitudinal insights can provide a deeper understanding of the sustained impact of ethical leadership.

Further enhancement can be achieved by introducing various moderators and mediators to discern the nuanced dynamics influencing the association between ethical leadership and employee performance. This approach seeks to identify the contextual factors that may enhance or diminish the impact of ethical leadership on employees.

### 4.4 Future Directions

Exploratory studies contrasting the impact on employee performance in the presence and absence of ethical leadership are suggested. These studies can contribute to a refined understanding of the specific outcomes linked to ethical leadership and its absence, providing insights into the importance of ethical leadership in shaping positive workplace dynamics. Moreover, researchers are encouraged to delve into the correlation between ethical leadership and human resource policies, specifically examining the integration of acceptable ethical values within organizations. This exploration aims to uncover how organizational policies can align with and reinforce ethical leadership principles, contributing to a more ethical and productive work environment. In summary, these refined research directions aim to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the multifaceted relationship between ethical leadership and employee performance. They provide a roadmap for future research endeavours that can further unravel the intricacies of ethical leadership, particularly in diverse cultural and organizational settings.

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