

Ethical Leadership and the Mitigation of Unethical Pro-Organizational Behavior

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Abstract

Unethical Pro-Organizational Behavior (UPB) is a complex organizational phenomenon where employees indulge in unethical behavior with the aim of serving their organizational interests. Even though the motive behind such a type of behavior can be considered loyal to the organization, there exist several ethical, reputational, legal, and operational risks associated with such behavior. Ethical leadership serves as an important factor when it comes to defining the norms and expectations of employees about ethical behavior through integrity, setting up ethical standards, promoting accountability, and providing ethical decision-making guidelines. This study explores the role of ethical leadership in reducing UPB based on theoretical perspectives of ethical leadership, organizational behavior, moral decision-making, and organizational ethics. A conceptual and qualitative approach was taken into consideration in order to find the important relationships and mechanisms related to ethical leadership and unethical pro-organizational behavior through the use of literature. It was revealed that role modeling, communication, equitable treatment, accountability, and ethical boundaries can decrease the rationalization of unethical behavior performed in favor of the organization. The paper also focused on the fact that commitment needs to go along with ethical responsibility to avoid the misunderstanding that loyalty can provide an excuse for unethical conduct. Thus, the results of the paper have a conceptual basis and can be used to improve ethical leadership and the organizational environment.

Keywords: Ethical Leadership, Unethical Pro-Organizational Behavior, Organizational Ethics, Ethical Climate, Moral Awareness, Employee Behavior, Ethical Decision-Making.

Introduction

Ethical Leadership and the Context of Organizational Ethics

Ethical leadership is exemplified through proper conduct via integrity, justice, openness, accountability, communication, and decision-making. Ethical leaders establish norms for ethics, practice ethics, reward appropriate conduct, and address breaches thereof; hence, they influence employees' perception of appropriate conduct at work (Ahmed & Khan, 2023; Ahmad et al., 2024; Miao et al., 2013). Ethical leadership will enhance the level of moral awareness and responsible decision-making; however, it is not enough to deter all unethical conduct. One such example is where excessive loyalty to the firm leads to unethical conduct being perceived as good for the firm (Ahmed & Khan, 2024).

Ethical leaders can create an atmosphere in which employees feel free to raise issues about ethics. It is essential to ensure the consistency of what leaders say and do in order to build trust and establish certain ethical standards. In addition, ethical communication and equitable treatment will allow the company's staff to recognize the need to achieve organizational objectives without neglecting any of the ethical, legal, or professional standards. Leaders can create such an atmosphere by promoting the use of voice by employees, making adequate responses to ethical problems, and applying ethical standards in a consistent manner at all organizational levels. Ethical leadership will also have an impact on organizational culture by incorporating ethical principles into daily decision-making and interpersonal relationships.

Ethical leadership will also play a role in the way that organizational priorities are interpreted by staff members in times of stress or uncertainty. If leaders repeatedly send the message that ethical values are non-negotiable, then the staff member will not interpret the high performance standards that are required as an excuse for rule violations. Clear messages regarding appropriate behavior, in addition to accountability, can aid employees in separating legitimate dedication from that which risks legal or reputational jeopardy.

The impact of ethical leadership is also determined by how well ethical values are integrated into the systems used in managerial practices. The recruitment process, appraisals, incentives, promotions, and discipline systems must reflect the same values that have been communicated by the higher-ups in the hierarchy. If a system of management focuses solely on results without regard for means, then the employee receives mixed messages.

Unethical Pro-Organizational Behavior and Its Organizational Implications

UPB stands for Unethical or Illegal Behaviors carried out purposefully in order to gain an advantage or ensure protection for the organization. The behaviors may be in the form of concealment of issues, manipulation of information, deception of stakeholders, or deviation from set processes. Organizational identification, performance pressure, organizational loyalty, managerial expectations, and lack of ethics control mechanisms are some of the factors that may cause such behavior (Mishra et al., 2022).

Moral disengagement may also help individuals rationalize their unethical behaviors by making themselves feel that their unethical behavior would benefit the organization. Performance-based reward schemes and overemphasis on organizational goals may cause employees to place the interests of the organization ahead of their ethical considerations. While UPB may provide some immediate advantages to organizations, there is a possibility of negative implications, such as damage to reputation, monetary penalties, regulatory repercussions, lack of trust among stakeholders, and normalizing unethical behavior. Furthering the practice of UPB may undermine the integrity of the organization and its leaders and lead to a loss of confidence in organizational processes. If such practices become normal, then the individuals in the organization will slowly start to believe that such unethical practices are required or are even acceptable within the organization.

UPB is likely to become even harder to spot because employees will always defend themselves by saying that they were carrying out those activities on behalf of the organization and not because of personal interests. This makes the practice appear less harmful within the organization, especially when it helps achieve short-term goals, ensures good reputation, or prevents any bad news about the organization from reaching external stakeholders. Repeated tolerance of the practice may erode the ethical lines.

There are additional organizational implications that arise from UPB practices, apart from the obvious legal and financial repercussions that may come from them. When employees see that people are getting rewarded for doing something unethical, they are less likely to speak up against it and have any faith in the leaders' integrity. All of this leads to reduced psychological safety, less organizational trust, and more violations. Organizations require prevention strategies that are able to address self-serving activities and loyalty-driven unethical behavior.

Research Problem, Objectives, Scope, and Significance

The research sheds light on the problem of the trade-off between retaining employee loyalty and practicing ethics. Ethical leadership and its role in solving the problem of UPB are discussed. To that end, the characteristics of a leader such as integrity, fairness, openness, accountability, ethical communication, and role modeling are taken into consideration. Other aspects covered in the research include organizational culture, ethical climate, moral awareness, organizational identification, pressure on performance, and accountability system. The research takes into account the role played by ethical standards, reporting mechanisms, and leadership in helping employees act properly when there is a contradiction between organizational interests and ethics.

Special attention is paid to the necessity of making employees realize that organizational commitment does not mean sacrificing their ethical and professional standards. The importance of the study is in gaining insight into how the process of leadership and organizational management is able to promote commitment and productivity of employees while at the same time maintaining high ethical, legal, and professional standards. The study offers the conceptual framework that will allow one to comprehend the role of leadership behavior, the moral process of the employee, and the organizational environment in the development of responsible behavior of employees in the workplace. It is also possible to use the results of the study in order to create certain leadership practices, ethical policies, reporting systems, and accountability procedures within the organization in order to minimize the risk of UPB.

The research problem is significant in that although organizational loyalty is always seen as something desirable, over-identification with organizational aims might occasionally lead to unethical behavior. It is possible for employees to think that being loyal means withholding information about organizational problems, deceiving stakeholders, and even overlooking unethical behaviors because protecting organizational interests is justified in that way. Thus, this study aims at investigating the thin line between constructive organizational commitment and ethical behavior which is unethical due to giving priority to organizational interests over legal, professional, or moral principles.

It is also important that this study connects leadership behavior, employee moral reasoning, and organizational systems within one theoretical framework. While unethical practices based on UPB phenomenon are usually seen from the standpoint of individual unethical behavior, in this research organizational ethical climate, accountability systems, pressure on performance, and messages coming from the leadership will be taken into consideration as well.

Literature Review

Ethical Leadership and Its Theoretical Foundations

Ethical leadership is another concept in organizational behavior that highlights the fact that leaders play an integral role in helping their employees understand proper workplace conduct. Ethical leadership entails behaving honestly, responsibly, fairly, transparently, and with integrity. Other qualities include being responsible and caring about the well-being of employees and other stakeholders through actions and decisions (Miao et al., 2013). Ethical leadership is highly related to the Social Learning Theory because it implies that employees learn certain behaviors from their observations of credible role models.

Leaders who constantly practice ethical behavior can influence their subordinates to adopt these same standards of behavior. Additionally, employees observe how the leaders behave when faced with ethical situations, organizational pressure, and misconduct (Lian et al., 2022). Nevertheless, the connection between ethical leadership and UPB may be complicated. Miao et al. explored whether this connection is linear or curvilinear, while other researchers emphasized its paradoxical nature. It should be noted that social exchange theories assume that if there is trust, fair treatment, and a supportive environment in the relations between leaders and their subordinates, responsible behavior will occur. Ethical leaders set high standards for behavior, create accountability, and make sure that organizational goals are achieved ethically (Wang & Li, 2019).

Ethical leadership can also be analyzed from the perspective of role modeling and reinforcement interaction. Not only what leaders do but also which actions are being reinforced or not, or even penalized is observed by employees. If ethical behavior is always acknowledged, and unethical behavior is always taken into account irrespective of the results, employees will have the impression that the company's values are real. This approach enhances the mechanism of social learning, according to which leaders influence their followers through their behavior.

Social exchanges further imply that ethical leaders may build relations of reciprocity based on the principles of trust, justice, and mutual respect. Employees, feeling themselves justly treated, are more likely to act responsibly and take into account the long-term effects of their actions. Nevertheless, the very strong relationship of trust and commitment

may become the issue when employees consider it a matter of course to follow an ethical leader without question. This means that it is crucial for ethical leaders to encourage moral autonomy and critical thinking of their followers.

Unethical Pro-Organizational Behavior and Its Drivers

Unethical pro-organizational behavior (UPB) is unethical conduct carried out with the intention of promoting, defending, or developing the organization (Farasat & Azam, 2022; Zeng et al., 2025). In contrast to behavior that is driven largely by self-interest, UPB could arise due to organizational allegiance, reputation considerations, solidarity among employees, accomplishment of organizational goals, and competitive advantage. Various circumstances could lead to UPB, such as identification with the organization, pressures arising from performance requirements, unrealistic targets, competitiveness, supervisors' demands, and excessive concentration on outcomes (Mishra et al., 2022; Asheghi et al., 2021).

Identification with an organization may boost the commitment of employees toward organizational goals, and organizational context may shape their reactions to demands (Lee et al., 2022). Moreover, moral disengagement could help employees rationalize their unethical behavior if they feel that such behavior is in the interest of the organization. The employees can downplay the possible impact of their behavior or think that unethical behavior is essential for the success of the organization (Tang & Li, 2022; Basaad et al., 2023; Lian et al., 2022). Leadership behavior, organizational culture, and ethical norms might also affect the tolerance towards unethical behavior. While UPB may be beneficial in the short run, it may bring about various negative consequences (Mishra et al., 2022).

Performance pressures may be another key motivation for UPB if workers feel that organizational goals outweigh ethical behavior. Unrealistic organizational objectives, competition in the reward system, and the fear of failing can increase the probability of people justifying their inappropriate behavior because of the necessity of protecting their team or organization. If top managers focus on outcomes without paying attention to ethical processes, workers may interpret unethical behavior as legitimate.

Organizational identification may work as a double-edged sword as well. It can motivate workers to be committed, cooperative, and engaged in extra-role behavior; however, high levels of organizational identification can decrease workers' willingness to question organizational policies. Workers will defend the organization even if it acts against ethical considerations. Therefore, it is essential for organizations to encourage identification with certain limitations.

Ethical Leadership, Organizational Culture, and Employee Moral Behavior

Ethical leadership is closely interrelated with the general organizational environment. The leader affects the organizational culture through making decisions, communicating with other people, rewarding people, and dealing with any misconduct (Almasarwah et al., 2025). When the leader constantly exhibits ethical behavior, the ethical principles can become the organizational norms (Nkosi et al., 2025). The ethical climate gives employees directions on how to behave in ethical dilemmas, as well as promotes honesty, fairness, responsibility, and accountability. Ethical leaders help create such an environment by communicating ethical standards and acting ethically themselves (Wang & Li, 2019).

Alternatively, organizations that overlook or even reward unethical behavior can reduce the level of moral awareness of employees and make it more likely that UPB will occur (Farasat & Azam, 2022). The organizational culture can be such that it helps or hinders the ethical standards articulated by the leaders (Nkosi et al., 2025). The process of organizational identification and commitment might also influence the relationship between ethical leadership and employee behavior (Almasarwah et al., 2025; Asheghi et al., 2021). Ethical leaders can enhance the level of moral awareness by engaging in ethical dilemmas discussion, encouraging employees to think about the possible outcomes of their actions, and stressing the right way of realizing organizational goals.

Ethical leadership has to be embedded within an organizational context in order for it to bring about behavior change among leaders' subordinates. If the organizational systems provide rewards for reaching targets by any means necessary or overlook rule-breaking by outstanding employees, the positive message of integrity sent out by individual leaders can clash with employees' perceptions. Ethical leadership should be accompanied by organizational policies, reward schemes, and internal controls in order for ethical standards to remain consistent.

Employees can learn to act ethically by openly addressing ethical issues and their organizational implications. Special training programs, ethics forums, reporting mechanisms, and reflection on organizational decision making can alert individuals of loyalty-related ethical issues. With employees being prompted to voice their concerns regarding dubious practices, ethics can become a component of decision making processes at organizations.

Leadership Mechanisms for Mitigating UPB and Research Gap

Ethical leadership can be instrumental in reducing UPBs via ethical role modeling, transparency in communications, fairness, accountability, and enforcement of ethical standards. Ethical leaders can create a conducive environment for reporting any unethical behaviors and have systems in place to deal with unethical behavior. Performance management systems must take into account ethical behavior along with production and financial performance in order to ensure that the results are not more important than the ethical standards. Employees may need help from training and ethical decision-making to recognize instances where their loyalty towards an organization does not align with law, profession, or society. Ethics communication can assist in creating an acceptable line separating appropriate organizational commitment from unethical behavior done in the name of an organization.

While there have been many studies conducted regarding ethical leadership and unethical workplace behavior, there still remains a need to investigate further to determine how ethical leadership responds to unethical behavior driven by organizational motives. There needs to be greater emphasis placed on the relationship between ethical leadership, ethical climate, moral awareness, accountability, and organizational identification in order to better promote organizational commitment without compromising ethical boundaries. This is the foundation upon which an integrative framework can be established for mitigating UPB.

Leaders practicing ethical behavior could minimize UPB through the establishment of accountability systems that consider both performance and the means used to attain it. Performance assessment and incentive systems should incorporate ethical behavior, compliance, ethical communication, and stakeholder consideration among their evaluation criteria. This minimizes chances of workers viewing unethical behavior as ethically acceptable in case it leads to good organizational performance.

There is also a need for increased alignment between ethical leadership and organizational control. The behaviors of the leadership alone might not be enough in case of poor reporting systems, inconsistent punishments of misconduct, and fear of being retaliated against by the employees who make such reports. Future researches should look into how ethical leadership relates to ethical climate, moral awareness, whistle-blowing system, organizational identification, and performance pressure. An integrated approach will help explain how organizations can sustain organizational commitment while minimizing UPB.

Theoretical Framework

Social Learning and Social Exchange Perspectives of Ethical Leadership

Social Learning Theory helps us understand how ethical leadership impacts employee behavior in terms of observation and role models. Employees learn from the behaviors of leaders as examples of what to do at work. Honest and ethical leaders who are accountable and transparent teach the employees to be like them. The employees can learn from how leaders deal with different situations where there is an ethical dilemma.

The Social Exchange Theory implies that a fair and trustworthy relationship between leaders and employees may encourage the latter to behave responsibly and ethically. When employees feel they are being treated fairly by leaders, it is likely that they will be able to develop trust and responsibility towards the organization. It is also possible to say that such relationships may help employees to behave according to the norms of an organization without going against the ethical rules.

Social Learning Theory further notes that followers are more inclined to mimic leaders if these leaders are viewed as credible, consistent, and influential. Therefore, effective ethical role modeling cannot merely be occasional references to integrity but must consist of repeated displays of ethics in day-to-day decision-making, conflict resolution, employee evaluation, and handling of misconduct. Followers watch for consistency in ethical expectations towards top performers, senior management, and ordinary workers. Consistent enforcement of ethical standards sends employees a message that behaving responsibly matters irrespective of short-term effects on the organization.

From a Social Exchange point of view, ethical leadership could foster reciprocal relationships through development of perceptions of respect, support, and procedural fairness. Employees who have experienced honest communication and been treated fairly may become more trusting of management and ready to voluntarily engage in organizational activities. Nevertheless, such reciprocation should not go as far as uncritical loyalty. Ethical leaders should promote open criticism of controversial organizational practices and airing of grievances even if such grievances cause inconvenience to the organization.

Moral Disengagement, Pro-Organizational Motives, and Ethical Decision-Making

Moral disengagement is one of the factors that provide an explanation of why employees are able to justify their immoral behavior, believing that they are doing what is good for the organization. It is because employees might minimize the negative impact of their decisions, shift the responsibility, or believe that such immoral decisions are necessary for achieving the organizational goals. In addition, it is because employees tend to perceive any actions as morally acceptable if they believe that it is in favor of the organization and in order to achieve significant organizational goals.

Pro-organization motivations like loyalty, organizational identification, and organizational reputation can become the reasons for UPB when the organizational benefits outweigh ethics, legality, and professionalism. While organizational commitment is a driving force of good behavior of employees, excessive loyalty causes employees to overlook immoral actions in their attempts to protect the organization. That is why organizations should set the limits between proper commitment and immorality done in favor of the organization.

Ethical decision-making calls on individuals to reflect upon fairness, legality, transparency, and responsibility in terms of their actions. It also requires thinking about the potential consequences that decisions will have on employees, stakeholders, and organizations. Ethical leadership can help to decrease moral disengagement by means of developing ethical policies, discussing ethical issues, being accountable, and demonstrating good role models. It is also important to set clear expectations and provide an opportunity for raising ethical questions for employees.

It would become easier to encourage moral disengagement among workers because the environment within organizations provides them with easy justification for their actions. Phrases such as ensuring protection of the organization, meeting urgent deadlines, acting in favor of others at work, and avoiding tarnishing the organization's reputation might make employees believe that their actions were necessary and acceptable. Continuous use of such justifications might reduce sensitivity to ethical implications of their actions among employees. Hence, organizations should recognize the kind of reasoning used to justify unethical conduct and counter this process before it becomes part of the culture.

It is possible to facilitate the decision-making process through provision of systematic means for evaluating different responsibilities. For example, the process of decision-making might require employees to consider the individuals involved, public justification of action, adherence to legal and professional standards, as well as alternatives that are likely to achieve the same result without ethical compromises. Ethics training using realistic organizational scenarios would help employees identify situations where there will be conflict between organizational goals and stakeholders' interests.

Integrated Ethical Leadership Framework for Mitigating UPB

The model incorporates the views of leadership, social, and moral perspectives to understand how ethical leadership can contribute to mitigating unethical pro-organizational behavior (UPB). Practices of ethical leadership such as role modeling, open communication, fairness, accountability, responsible decision-making, and expectation setting will improve the ethical environment as well as moral awareness among employees. These practices ensure that employees understand that organizational objectives need to be achieved using ethical and responsible means.

Employee-level factors, including organizational identification, pro-organizational motivation, moral awareness, and moral disengagement, also affect ethical behavior. Although organizational identification and loyalty might help in fostering commitment, they can also lead to UPB when employees prioritize organizational goals over ethical considerations. Moral awareness will help employees realize the ethical consequences of their behaviors, while low moral disengagement will prevent justification of unethical behavior.

Organizational factors like organizational culture, accountability systems, performance standards, communication systems, and leader-subordinate relations may further influence the development of these relations. The existence of a good ethical climate in an organization encourages employees to voice their concerns, act ethically, and make ethical decisions. Hence, it is important to emphasize that ethical leadership must not only foster organizational commitment but also set the limits of acceptable behavior. On the whole, the combined approach demonstrates that leadership behaviors, employee morality, and organizational environment can be linked to the reduction of UPB.

Moreover, the integrated model implies that the minimization of UPB is based on the congruence between leader's conduct, moral processes at the individual level, and organizational systems. Leaders can send the right signals regarding values, but their signals could be undermined by the fact that performance systems do not measure how results were gained even though they reward only the outcomes of performance. Hence, ethics needs to be integrated

in performance appraisal, promotions, incentives, discipline and risk management. Consistency between leader signals and organizational systems will help improve the ethical climate and reduce uncertainty regarding ethics.

This theoretical approach also acknowledges the importance of the employee voice and accountability as key mechanisms linking ethical leadership to lower levels of UPB. The employee needs to be given a chance to use reliable channels for posing questions, expressing doubts, and obtaining ethical advice without being afraid of any retaliation. Leaders need to address such problems in a constructive way, as the mere presence of reporting mechanisms cannot provide psychological safety. If the ethical role model, moral awareness, voice, accountability, and organizational control work collectively, the organization will be able to preserve its commitment and performance while ensuring that pro-organizational intentions are ethical and professional.

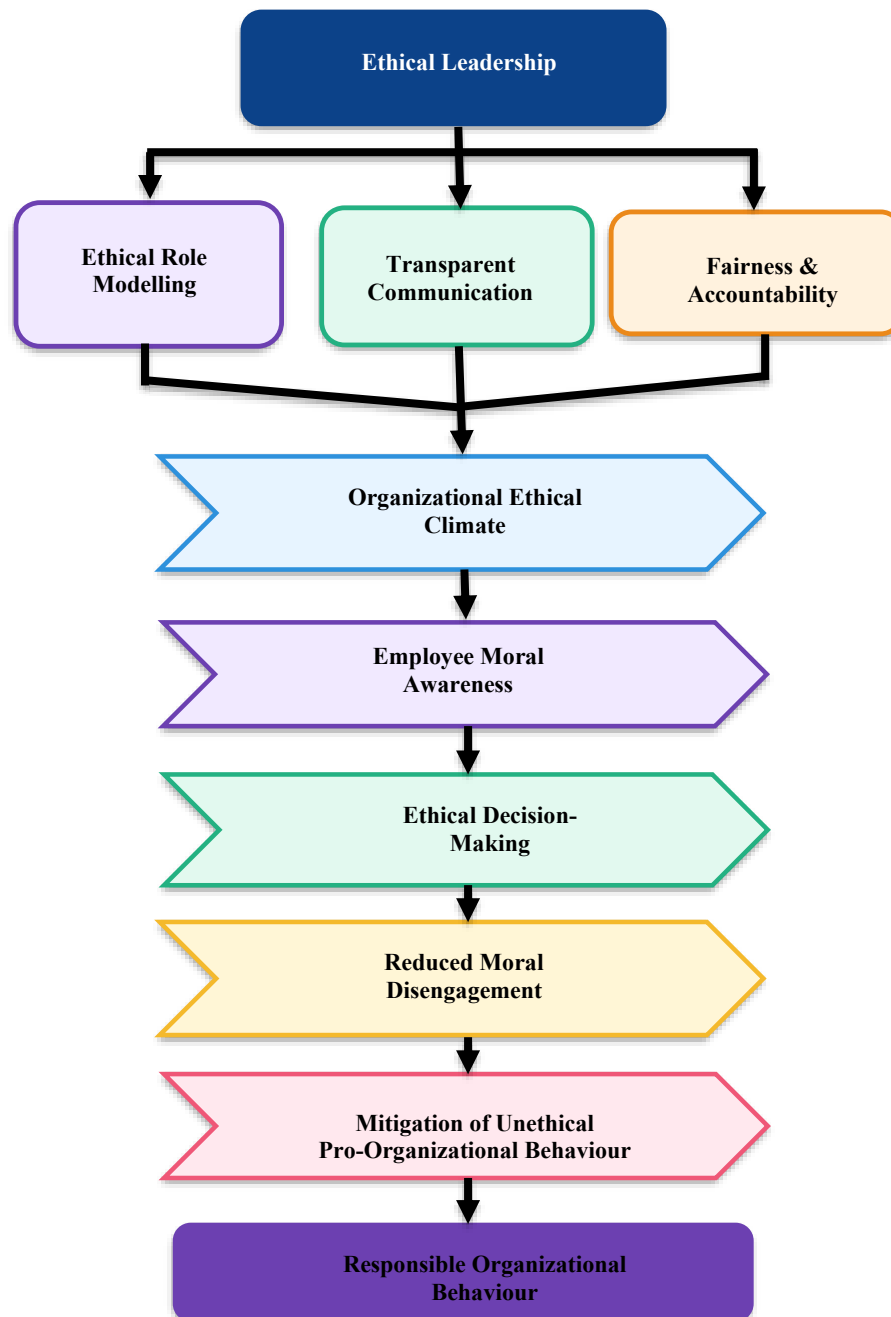


Fig. 1: Integrated Ethical Leadership Framework for Mitigating Unethical Pro-Organizational Behavior (UPB)

Fig. 1 depicts how ethical practices like role modeling, clear communication, justice, and accountability contribute to a positive ethical organizational culture and increase employees' moral awareness, which is essential for making an ethical decision and preventing moral disengagement in order to minimize UPB.

Research Methodology

Research Design, Data Sources, and Literature Selection

The research employed a conceptual qualitative research design to explore the connection between ethical leadership and the reduction of unethical pro-organizational behavior (UPB). A literature review was performed on the basis of available literature rather than through primary data collection. Ethical leadership, UPB, organizational ethics, ethical climate, moral awareness, moral disengagement, organizational identification, employee behavior, and ethical decision-making constituted areas of interest for the literature. Sources related to the research topic were chosen considering their relevance, theoretical contribution, and methodological aspects. The literature chosen was analyzed and categorized in relation to ethical leadership practices, UPB determinants, employee-related factors, organizational factors, and mitigation techniques.

The literature was also analyzed in order to reveal recurrent themes, theoretical approaches, and connections between leadership practices and employee behavior. Specifically, the influence of ethical leadership on employees' perceptions of appropriate behavior, as well as organizational conditions that facilitate or restrain ethical behavior, were analyzed. The interaction of organizational loyalty, performance expectations, and ethical accountability under UPB was also taken into account.

Conceptual qualitative research design is justified in this study due to the fact that it allows for combining theoretical interpretations and prior findings as opposed to estimating statistical relationships on the basis of primary data. It will be possible to analyze ethical leadership and UPB within various constructs such as leadership behavior, employee moral reasoning, organizational identification, ethical climate, and accountability systems. In this way, the research will be able to produce a broad description of how ethical leadership may prevent employees from unethical behavior they believe to be beneficial for the organization.

Literature search should be consistent with the goals and objectives of the study and should focus on sources that deal with ethical leadership, UPB, organizational ethics, moral disengagement, ethical climate, and other employee behaviors. Theoretical as well as empirical studies will be taken into consideration to make sure that the conceptual discussion is based on relevant theoretical models and organizational practices. Literature will be arranged according to its relevance to the study, contribution to theoretical framework, and relation to the research model developed in the project.

Key Constructs, Thematic Analysis, and Relationships

Ethical Leadership was considered as the main construct for analysis along with UPB as the primary behavior of interest. Important dimensions of leadership were integrity, fairness, transparency, ethical leadership role modeling, accountability, communication, and responsible decision-making. Some other important aspects were Ethical climate, organizational culture, moral awareness, moral disengagement, organizational identification, pro-organizational motivation, relationship between employees and leaders, and ethical decision making.

The themes that were found were then classified into those related to leadership, employees, and organizations in order to have a better understanding of their relation to UPB. The analysis will examine the extent to which ethical leadership will enhance ethical awareness, responsible decision-making, and set boundaries for behavior on the part of employees. On the other hand, it will examine the role of moral disengagement, organizational identification, performance pressure, and lack of accountability in justifying unethical behavior. The results are organized under the categories of leadership influence, moral processes on the part of the employee, organizational context, and reduction of UPB through various means.

Thematic analysis would also allow the research to be extended beyond a merely descriptive literature review through uncovering some patterns in interaction between ethical leadership and other variables at the level of individuals and organizations. Themes related to leadership include role modeling, fairness, transparency, accountability, communication, and responsible decision making, whereas themes concerning employees include moral awareness, moral disengagement, organizational identification, and pro-organizational motives. Organizational themes involve ethical climate, culture, performance pressure, reporting procedures, and accountability systems. The grouping of such themes allows exploring the extent to which UPB arises out of individual moral reasoning, organizational pressure, leadership, or all of these combined.

Connections between the constructs in the theory will be analyzed in an integrative fashion rather than as separate associations. Ethical leadership will be associated with higher moral awareness, ethical climate, and responsible decision making, and lower levels of conditions facilitating moral disengagement and unethical justification. Meanwhile, high organizational identification and pro-organizational motivation might lead to constructive commitment and ethical risk in relation to different levels of accountability and ethical boundaries.

Table 1: Key Constructs and Factors Influencing Unethical Pro-Organizational Behavior (UPB)

Construct / Factor	Main Role	Relationship with UPB
Ethical Leadership	Sets ethical standards through integrity, fairness, and role modeling	Discourages unethical behavior
Ethical Climate	Guides acceptable workplace conduct	Discourages unethical behavior
Moral Awareness	Helps employees recognize ethical issues	Reduces unethical justification
Ethical Decision-Making	Promotes fair and responsible choices	Supports ethical behavior
Moral Disengagement	Allows employees to justify unethical actions	May increase UPB
Organizational Identification	Builds loyalty and commitment	May increase UPB when loyalty overrides ethics
Accountability	Ensures responsibility for decisions and misconduct	Creates boundaries against UPB
Ethical Communication	Clarifies ethical expectations and concerns	Reduces ambiguity and rationalization
Performance Pressure	Increases focus on organizational results	May encourage unethical behavior
Organizational Culture	Reinforces ethical values and workplace norms	Can strengthen or weaken ethical behavior

Table 1 summarizes the major organizational and individual determinants, their functions, and their connection to UPB. It emphasizes that organizational and individual factors such as ethical leadership and good organizational settings can minimize UPB, whereas moral disengagement and performance pressures could lead to increased UPB.

Conceptual Framework Development and Evaluation Criteria

An integrative conceptual framework for explaining the potential of ethical leadership in addressing UPB has been developed from a review of literature and thematic analysis. Ethical role modeling, transparency in communication, fairness, accountability, and setting ethical expectations were identified as important practices for leaders. On the other hand, ethical climate, moral awareness, moral disengagement, pro-organizational motives, organizational culture, pressure to perform, organizational identification, and accountability systems were identified as important influences on UPB. The framework has been assessed in terms of conceptual clarity, theoretical consistency, relevance, practicality, and comprehensiveness. All these dimensions ensured that the framework had adequate conceptual definition, was theoretically consistent, relevant to the problem of UPB, and practically useful.

In addition to the focus on the connection between leadership, ethics, and individual performance, the framework takes into account the interaction between leadership practices, employees' moral process, and organizational system instead of viewing them as isolated factors. Though ethical leadership has an impact on the employees directly via role models and communication, its influence can also depend on the ethical climate, accountability, and organizational pressures that exist in the organization. Thus, the framework explains the possible variation of the influence of similar leadership practices on the performance of employees depending on the context of their work and moral and organizational consciousness.

Evaluation of the framework should include the feasibility of applying the proposed relationships in practice. Conceptual clarity means that all constructs are clearly described, whereas theoretical consistency proves that the relationships proposed are in compliance with Social Learning Theory, Social Exchange Theory, and moral disengagement approaches. Practical relevance includes the possibility of using the framework for leadership development programs, ethics training, performance management, and reporting system. Comprehensive character of the framework is shown in its representation of both preventive and corrective measures for UPB.

Findings and Discussion

Ethical Leadership and Behavioral Influence

Leadership that is characterized as ethical can influence employee behavior and help in reducing UPB. A leader serves as an example through his/her actions, and such attributes as integrity, justice, transparency, accountability, and responsible decision-making set standards of behavior. What matters most is consistency of words and actions on the part of the leaders in the presence of performance pressures or moral dilemmas for employees. It becomes easier for the latter to comprehend and adhere to the standards of behavior if the former act ethically and consistently. Ethical

leadership may encourage responsible behavior via proper recognition and constructive feedback. Communication with the leader may allow employees to receive advice when making hard decisions. Thus, ethical leadership may make it possible to pursue organizational goals ethically.

Ethical leadership may also impact behavior by affecting the way employees understand what constitutes appropriate behavior within an organization. If leaders consistently show fairness, openness, and accountability in their actions, employees are receiving signals that ethical behavior is expected from them in their performance. On the other hand, if leaders ignore unethical behavior in case it leads to positive outcomes, employees will see such inconsistency as justification to put outcomes above ethical standards. Therefore, the legitimacy of ethical leadership largely depends on whether leaders consistently use ethical standards in both regular and stressful situations.

Behavioral influence is further enhanced if leaders provide employees with the means to consult about potential ethical issues prior to making decisions. Open-door policy, ethics sessions, coaching, and constructive feedback enable employees to identify potentially risky actions in terms of possible legal, professional, and stakeholder implications. Thus, such approaches turn ethical leadership into a participatory one reducing reliance on personal judgment of employees. In this way, employees are more likely to achieve organizational goals in a proper and ethical way.

Transparency, Fairness, and Accountability

Ethical behavior, justice, transparency, and accountability can help decrease uncertainty and prevent employees from resorting to unethical behaviors in the interest of organizational loyalty. Ethical codes that are clearly communicated, consistent application of rules and regulations, proper channels for filing complaints, and adequate response to any form of misconduct can foster employee confidence and set limits for UPB. Transparent communication will help employees comprehend the required behavior in situations where the interests of the organization conflict with their ethical duties. Ethical treatment can also motivate employees to ask questions and get clarification instead of acting unethically. Furthermore, accountability systems will ensure uniformity in ethical standards regardless of organizational level.

In this regard, transparency may serve to limit ambiguity by exposing organizational standards, criteria for making decisions, and ethics boundaries to its employees. When policies and decisions are made clear, it will become easier for employees to comprehend why some actions are justified and some are not. The relevance of transparency in this regard is particularly pronounced in cases when there are performance pressures, client expectations, and competition, and thus employees justify their unethical conduct in the name of organizational interests.

Finally, fairness and accountability enhance the legitimacy of ethical systems through their consistent implementation at all hierarchical levels. It means that organizational policies will have higher credibility with employees if top managers and best performers are subjected to the same rules as all other employees. In case of selective application of ethical principles, the effectiveness of an organizational climate becomes lower as misconduct is perceived as being tolerated if good results are achieved.

Moral Awareness and Ethical Decision-Making

Ethical awareness makes it possible for employees to see the ethical aspects of their decisions and not just what is good for the organization. Ethical decision-making ensures that considerations of fairness, responsibility, legality, stakeholder interests, and the consequences of actions are made. Ethical training, organizational guidelines, case studies, and chances for discussion of ethical issues will enable employees to act in the right way when the needs of the organization do not align with ethics. Ethical awareness can also make it less likely for employees to turn a blind eye to dubious actions just because of the immediate benefits of those actions to the organization.

Improvements in moral awareness would be facilitated if organizations assisted employees in recognizing the ethical aspect of decisions, not just in cases of clear wrongdoing. Employees might fail to see the ethical dimension of their work when it comes to being too focused on goals, deadlines, or allegiance to the organization. Ethical dilemmas, ethics checklists, stakeholder analysis, and structured reflection would enable employees to take into account the wider ramifications of their decisions and evaluate whether an intended course of action is ethically justified.

In addition, the process of ethical decision-making could be supported if employees were encouraged to weigh the alternatives before responding to a situation. Instead of framing ethical dilemmas in black-and-white terms as something to do or not to do, organizations could help employees evaluate various interests, risks, and outcomes. Such an approach will make it difficult for employees to find unethical behavior justified because there was no other option.

Organizational and Employee-Level Factors

Factors affecting UPB may include both organizational and individual ones. The organizational factors may consist of ethical climate, organizational culture, performance pressure, reward system, leadership style, reporting mechanism, and accountability. Individual factors may include organizational identification, moral awareness, ethical judgment, and moral disengagement. Inappropriate performance pressure, inadequate reporting mechanisms, fear of retaliation, unreasonable goals, and poor leadership style create an environment that motivates employees to engage in unethical practices. On the contrary, a positive ethical climate will assist employees to take appropriate actions in case of any ethical dilemma at work. Organizational identification should thus be considered in combination with ethical obligations in order not to use organizational loyalty as an excuse for unethical conduct. Continuous evaluation of working conditions will help organizations to detect the pressures and practices which increase the likelihood of UPB. Matching the reward system with both performance and ethics will additionally discourage inappropriate achievement of organizational objectives.

Organizational and employee factors tend to interact to influence the probability of UPB occurrence. For instance, while organizational identification does not guarantee unethical actions when an organization is characterized by ethical leadership and accountability, the same level of organizational identification becomes threatening when employees are under high pressure to perform and weak ethical controls exist. In other words, employees' motivations need to be assessed in the broader organizational context and not assumed to be separate reasons for unethical actions.

Thus, organizations should assess the existence of structural and motivational pressures that can lead to UPB. Heavy workload, high goals, competition among rewards, ambiguity of ethical standards, and threat of punishment are some of the conditions under which employees would find their unethical actions justified. Such conditions could be revealed through surveys of employees, ethics audits, reports, and performance system review. Apart from attitude change, certain organizational practices need to be changed as well.

Implications for Responsible Organizational Behavior

The results show that organizations need to consider ethical behavior as an integral part of organizational performance and make sure that their goals and objectives are not achieved in an unethical way. Role modeling, transparency, equity, responsibility, ethical communication, and responsible decision-making should be included in leadership training. Organizational commitment can be maintained while reducing UPB with the combination of responsible leadership, organizational system functioning, ethical awareness of employees, and a proper ethical climate within the organization. Responsible behavior can be reinforced within the organization by implementing responsible leadership, policies, reporting channels, protection from retaliation, and help for employees facing ethical dilemmas. Ethical issues can be included in the recruitment process, leadership training, performance appraisal, and reward systems. Regular monitoring of ethical climate and employees' issues is very helpful in identifying emerging problems and preventing unethical behavior in organizations.

In order for organizational behavior to be responsible, there must be an understanding of how success is defined not only in terms of the outcome but also in the process of reaching the desired result. A system for evaluating organizational performance based solely on the outcomes may subconsciously discourage workers from taking ethics into consideration. The inclusion of ethical practices, stakeholder responsibility, transparency, and compliance into performance assessment can be effective means to reinforce the idea of ethics as an integral part of organization performance.

Organizations should implement the idea of a continual ethics management process instead of depending merely on one-time training and written codes. Leadership reviews, feedback from workers, ethics communications, reportings, and organizational climate monitoring can be used in identifying new risks that emerge in changing working conditions. Ethics can be integrated into the recruiting process, training, performance evaluation, promotion, and rewards system to maintain consistency in making people work towards organizational objectives within ethical and professional boundaries.

Conclusion

It can be argued that ethical leadership is of great importance in addressing UPB by laying down ethical standards and helping individuals respond to organizational pressures and ethical problems. This research found that ethical behavior in organizations, such as ethical role modeling, transparency, fairness, accountability, and ethical communication, can increase employees' moral awareness and motivate them to make ethical decisions. Ethical conduct by leaders will help employees understand that organizational success needs to be achieved without undermining ethical, legal, and

professional norms. The research identified some of the factors affecting UPB, which include not only organizational but also individual aspects such as ethical climate, organizational culture, performance pressure, organizational identification, moral awareness, and moral disengagement. Thus, organizational loyalty and commitment need to have ethical limits so that employees would not consider organizational interests as reasons for behaving unethically.

The results also underline the significance of developing and continually improving ethics training to increase employees' capability to face ethical problems. Ethics should be considered an integral part of evaluating employees' performance, rewarding, making decisions, and other aspects of organizational activities. Ethics should not be treated as a distinct organizational process. Giving employees the opportunity to voice any suspicious behavior and raise ethical issues would contribute to building integrity within the organization. Monitoring of organizational climate and leadership behavior could assist in identifying the conditions that encourage employees to engage in unethical behavior.

Generally, decreasing UPB is a result of the integrated efforts of ethical leadership, organizational systems support, moral awareness of employees, accountability, and ethical climate creation. Through integrating the concept of ethical responsibility in the process of leadership and organizational functioning, companies are capable of encouraging ethical behavior among employees without having their organizational commitment compromised. Consequently, ethical leadership can play a vital role in the development of such a working environment when employees realize that commitment to the organization and ethical responsibility go hand in hand. Such close alignment between leadership behavior, organizational policy, employee expectations and ethical values can bring about a high level of organizational trust, credibility and sustained performance. The conducted conceptual study forms the foundation for future empirical studies that could explore the relationship between ethical leadership and UPB. In particular, future research can focus on the examination of leadership interventions, ethics training, reporting mechanisms and accountability practices and their role in UPB reduction.

The study results also indicate that organizations should approach ethical leadership as a continuous duty on the part of managers, and not as a reaction to specific instances of unethical behavior. Ethical norms have to be constantly reinforced through communications of leaders, managerial decisions, personnel training, and organizational processes. The more often individuals find that the same ethical norms are always being applied, the more they will realize that behaving responsibly is an essential organizational requirement, not just a mere formality.

The other crucial implication here is that there is a need to improve the linkage between employee voice and accountability. There is a need for safe and credible ways of providing consultation and reporting concerning matters that may run contrary to any form of professional or ethical standard. These systems become even more efficient when employees have an assurance that any concern raised will be handled appropriately and without any form of retaliation. Thus, there is a need to integrate the reporting mechanisms with the necessary managerial support, confidentiality measures, and fair investigation procedures.

There is also a need to extend the above framework through research on how various contextual variables can impact the relationship between ethical leadership and UPB. The variables can include but not be limited to industry type, organizational size, cultural environment, leadership level, pressure for performance, and ethical climate strength. Further longitudinal and mixed methods research on how the practices of ethical leadership impact the moral reasoning of employees and their behaviors can prove very useful. Such research will enable one to establish what organizational mechanisms can be used to reduce UPB without compromising the commitment of employees and organizational performance.

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