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## Article

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## Team Level Antecedents and Consequences of Ethical Leadership: A Review and Future Directions

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The current study conducted a comprehensive review of previous studies that have examined the antecedents and consequences of ethical leadership at the team level. The methodology focused on elucidating theories pertaining to the concept of ethical leadership, with the aim of proposing new theories that can be used to explain relationships related to ethical leadership, specifically the theories of signaling and attribution. The current paper also emphasizes the importance, in future studies, of utilizing modern theories to expand the concept of moral leadership and achieve a more comprehensive understanding of its dynamics. The incorporation of theories such as signaling theory and attribution theory can provide valuable insights into the mechanisms and processes underlying ethical leadership. The analysis results revealed that ethical leadership at the group level has predominantly been unexplored, presenting researchers with opportunities to uncover novel findings and leaders with prospects to enhance their effectiveness. The study presented new variables regarding the antecedents leading to ethical leadership, including internal factors such as leader ethical voice and external factors such as a cynicism climate. It also presented new variables regarding the consequences of ethical leadership at the group level, such as group sanctioning, group cooperation, and group social undermining.

**Keywords:** Ethical leadership, antecedents, consequences, signaling theory, attribution theory, team level

**JEL:** M12, M19, M51, M54

William C. Powers, Dean of the Texas School of Law and leader of the Enron investigation team, testified before the United States Congress and presented reasons of the Enron's collapse. He attributed responsibility for the significant aftermath of the Enron collapse to a range of factors, with unethical leadership being highlighted as the primary factor (Treviño and Brown, 2004). Powers' testimony serves as a clear example of the expected ethical behavior from leaders and their role in maintaining an ethical atmosphere within their organizations (Frazier and Jacezko, 2021; Gok *et al.*, 2023; Peng and Kim, 2020). Research on the concept of ethical leadership has seen a surge in interest due to a rise in notable ethics-related controversies (Banks *et al.*, 2021). Previous research has addressed ethical leadership from various perspectives, examining how leaders' behavior adheres to ethical standards and benefits stakeholders (Yukl *et al.*, 2013).

However, despite recognizing the significance of ethical leadership, several notable issues persist, carrying implications for both theory and practice (Banks *et al.*, 2021). Specifically, prior studies have predominantly focused on exploring the outcomes associated with ethical leadership. These studies have demonstrated that ethical leadership positively influences organizational citizenship behaviors, organizational commitment, and innovative work behaviors (Javed *et al.*, 2018; Musenze and Mayende, 2023; Neubert *et al.*, 2013), while reducing counterproductive work behaviors (Zhang, 2012). Regrettably, there has been limited interest in understanding the reasons behind leaders engaging in ethical behaviors and followers perceiving some leaders as ethical while perceiving others differently (Banks *et al.*, 2021; Bedi *et al.*, 2016).

Despite the crucial role of understanding the antecedents of ethical leadership in comprehending the factors contributing to its development and practice within organizations, our current understanding in this area remains relatively constrained (Rahaman *et al.*, 2019). Additionally, exploring the antecedents provides a deeper understanding of ethical leadership (Frazier and Jacezko, 2021) and facilitates the establishment of an ethical culture. Consequently, the paper aims to address this gap by expanding the existing research on the antecedents of ethical leadership. To achieve this, it conducts a comprehensive review of previous studies examining the antecedents of ethical leadership and proposing additional antecedents that warrant investigation in future research.

Secondly, what sets previous studies apart is their predominant focus on examining ethical leadership primarily at the individual level (e.g., Rahaman *et al.*, 2022). However, there is a noticeable scarcity of research adopting a group-level perspective, despite the potential theoretical and practical benefits it offers. By deepening the understanding and facilitating the implementation of ethical leadership in organizational contexts, leaders can concentrate on fostering a positive ethical climate within teams (Mansur *et al.*, 2020). This emphasis on the team level which enhances team dynamics, collaboration, and cohesion, ultimately leading to improved overall team performance. Notably, Banks *et al.* (2021) and Bedi *et al.* (2016) highlight the need for future research to explore the antecedents and consequences of ethical leadership specifically at the team level. Therefore, the present study aims to address this gap by reviewing previous studies that have examined the consequences of ethical leadership at the team level and proposing additional consequences that should be investigated in future research.

Thirdly, A noteworthy observation in prior studies is their predominant reliance on social exchange and social learning theories (e.g., Frazier and Jacezko, 2021), which somewhat restricts the perspective on ethical leadership. Considering the comprehensive and multifaceted nature of ethical leadership, there is a need to broaden the range of theories employed to gain a more comprehensive understanding (Banks *et al.*, 2021). Thus, the current study aims to address this limitation by proposing other modern

theories that should be explored in future research. Based on the previous explanations, the current study aims to conduct a comprehensive review of the antecedents and consequences of ethical leadership specifically at the team level. By examining existing research, the paper seeks to identify any gaps or areas that have not been adequately explored within this context. This analysis will provide valuable insights into the research landscape and highlight specific areas that require further investigation in future studies. By addressing these research gaps, it can contribute to the advancement of knowledge in the field of ethical leadership at the team level.

Following the aforementioned introduction, the literature review section delves into an overview of the concept of ethical leadership. It expounds on the dimensions of ethical leadership. Moving forward, it presents the significance of studying ethical leadership. This literature review serves as a foundation before delving into the concepts of antecedents and consequences of ethical leadership at the team level. Moving forward to the third section, the paper will review the methodology of conducting review type research to explore the gaps. Firstly, the study will elucidate theories related to the concept of ethical leadership in an attempt to propose new theories that can expand its understanding and application. By exploring existing theories, this section aims to propose new theories that can be used to explain relationships related to ethical leadership and enhance our comprehension of ethical leadership. Next, it will examine the antecedents and consequences of ethical leadership at the group level in an attempt to identify research gaps that need to be addressed by future researchers. This section aims to shed light on the factors that contribute to ethical leadership and the outcomes it produces within groups. Then, the paper proceeded to the fourth section, which presents the study's results. These results were derived from the paper's methodology and encompass a clear identification of gaps, as well as future recommendations. Then, it proceeded to the fifth section, which discusses the implications of the research. Subsequently, the sixth section encapsulates the conclusion of the paper. Finally, the limitations and future directions of the study are presented.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The current section reviews the literature on ethical leadership, encompassing its concept, dimensions, and importance, with the aim of providing a broader understanding of ethical leadership. This literature review serves as a foundation before delving into the concepts of antecedents and consequences of ethical leadership at the team level.

### **Ethical Leadership Concept**

Ethical leadership (EL) is defined as follows: "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” (Brown *et al.*, 2005: 121). Khuong and Nhu (2015) argue that ethical leadership is characterized by a leader who is honest, loyal, focused on purpose, goodness, social justice, personal strength, humility, integrity, decision-making based on virtue, and influences their staff to act ethically. The following section provides a summary of definitions of ethical leadership from previous studies, as presented in Table 1.

The definition	Study
It is a leadership style that acknowledges followers' needs, values, and ethics while also assuming a greater responsibility for helping workers address conflicts by understanding their motivations.	<i>Burns (1978)</i>
It expresses leaders' support for workers in managing conflicts and implementing changes by emphasizing values within an environment characterized by stability, trust, and care. This style of leadership also involves assisting followers in their journey through change.	<i>Heifetz (1994)</i>
He defined it as encompassing a set of characteristics present in leaders, such as honesty and trustworthiness. However, it goes beyond these traits to encompass a deep understanding of the fundamental aspects of altruism, including the ability to make sound moral choices and to comprehend and analyze ethical dilemmas for more effective resolution of ethical issues.	<i>Treviño &amp; Brown (2004)</i>
It involves influencing ethical values by clearly articulating the organizational values that employees should embrace, spreading these values throughout the organization, adhering to them in daily behavior, and fostering a high level of respect.	<i>Daft (2004)</i>
It reflects the capacity of administrative leaders to demonstrate appropriate standard ethical behaviors through their actions and interpersonal relationships and to encourage subordinates to exhibit these behaviors.	<i>Brown et al. (2005)</i>
It represents a type of leadership that upholds the rights of others and is characterized by four dimensions, integrity, altruism, and motivation.	<i>Resick et al. (2006)</i>
It involves the act of demonstrating empathy for the appropriate standards that govern the actions of others and their personal interactions. This process aims to enhance the guidance and communication processes in providing support for others.	<i>Segon (2007)</i>
It is the practical manifestation of normatively appropriate behavior through personal actions, interpersonal relationships, and the reinforcement of this behavior among workers via two-way communication.	<i>Ponnu and Tennakoon (2009)</i>
It reflects the capacity of administrative leaders to demonstrate appropriate standard ethical behaviors through their actions and interpersonal relationships and to encourage subordinates to exhibit these behaviors through two-way communication and in decision-making.	<i>Brown and Mitchell (2010)</i>
The leader's ability to influence their followers is determined by their awareness of seven dimensions: fairness, integrity, ethical direction, people orientation, power sharing, clarity of roles, and continuous attention.	<i>Kalshoven et al. (2011)</i>
To promote normatively acceptable behavior among subordinates, leaders should engage in (a) living by the ethical standards they preach and having a belief in justice, (b) demonstrating normatively acceptable behavior through personal actions and interpersonal interactions, and (c) providing relevant information through communication, reinforcement, and two-way decision-making.	<i>Javed et al. (2018)</i>

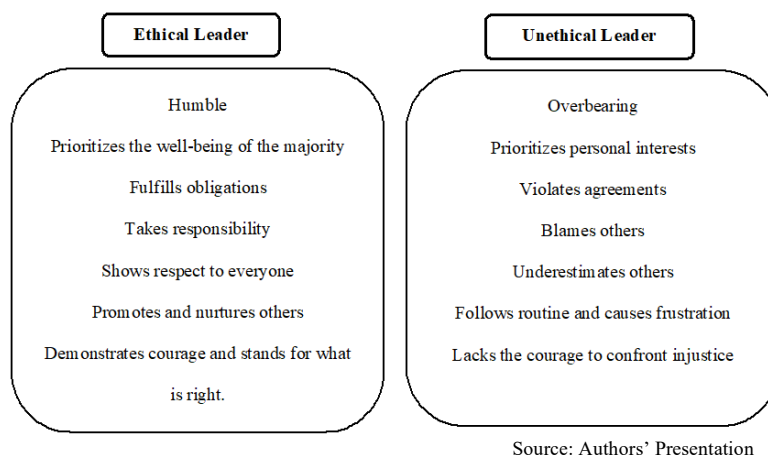
Source: Authors' presentation

**Table 1. Definitions of Ethical Leadership**

The definitions of ethical leadership emphasize the importance of leader's ethical behavior and serving

as role models for followers (Banks *et al.*, 2021). Brown *et al.*'s (2005) study is considered one of the first to develop a procedural scale and definition of ethical leadership, due to a lack of accuracy in prior definitions. The definition of ethical leadership has evolved beyond just modeling ethics to include reinforcing subordinates' ethical behaviors through clarification, highlighting, and two-way communication (Mansur *et al.*, 2020; Yukl *et al.*, 2013). Ethical leaders pay attention to workers, grant them the right to express opinions, and establish moral standards (Banks *et al.*, 2021), as well as reward ethical behavior and penalize deviations (Ciulla, 2004). They also make just decisions that serve as examples and discuss these with followers (Bedi *et al.*, 2016; Mansur *et al.*, 2020).

The researchers agree that ethical leadership includes: 1) ethical leaders' behavior being based on standards that subordinates must accept (Bedi *et al.*, 2016); 2) ethical leaders justifying their behavior to followers and maintaining open communication (Segon and Booth, 2007); 3) ethical leaders adhering to ethical rules, establishing ethical standards, rewarding ethical behavior, and penalizing unethical behavior while considering the moral implications of their decisions and striving for fair choices (Banks *et al.*, 2021; Yukl, 2002); 4) the definition categorizes ethical leadership as a positive form of leadership (Musenze and Mayende, 2023); 5) followers perceiving ethical leadership as leaders embodying appropriate standard behavior through their actions, behaviors, interpersonal relationships, and developing these behaviors in subordinates through communication, reinforcement, and decision-making (Segon and Booth, 2007; Musenze and Mayende, 2023); and 6) ethical leadership transcending individual concerns and being a matter of principles governing human effectiveness, with effective leaders valuing themselves while committing to higher purposes and principles (Banks *et al.*, 2021; Yukl, 2002). Figure 1 delineates some characteristic behaviors of ethical and unethical leaders.



**Figure 1. The Difference Between Ethical and Unethical Leaders**

### **Ethical Leadership at Team Level**

The authors endeavor to formulate a definition of ethical leadership applicable to the collective or group level. Ethical leadership at the group level entails leaders directing and influencing their teams in a way that places emphasis on ethical conduct, integrity, and social responsibility. The authors outline key elements of ethical leadership at the group level.

Firstly, setting a positive example: ethical leaders act as role models for their team members by consistently demonstrating ethical behavior in their actions, decisions, and interactions (Mansur *et al.*, 2020). Secondly, creating a values-based culture: ethical leaders actively strive to instill a culture within the group that places a high regard on integrity, honesty, and ethical conduct (Bedi *et al.*, 2016). Thirdly, promoting transparency: leaders at the group level ought to prioritize transparency in both communication and decision-making processes, which serves to cultivate trust among team members and facilitates a comprehensive understanding of the reasoning behind decisions (Banks *et al.*, 2021). Fourthly, encouraging ethical decision-making: ethical leaders actively promote and encourage group members to participate in ethical decision-making (Mansur *et al.*, 2020). Fifthly, addressing unethical behavior: ethical leaders take a proactive stance in addressing any instances of unethical behavior within the group (Banks *et al.*, 2021). Sixthly, fostering inclusivity and diversity: ethical leadership actively promotes inclusivity and diversity within the group (Mansur *et al.*, 2020). Leaders achieve this by appreciating and respecting differences among team members, fostering an environment where everyone feels supported and included (Peng and Kim, 2020). Seventhly, encouraging open communication: ethical leaders actively foster an environment where team members feel at ease expressing their concerns and opinions. By promoting open communication channels, leaders create a space where potential ethical issues can be identified early on (Peng and Kim, 2020). By prioritizing these principles, leaders play a pivotal role in shaping a positive ethical climate within the organization, fostering an environment where ethical values are upheld and practiced by the entire group (Mansur *et al.*, 2020).

### **Dimensions of Ethical Leadership**

Through a comprehensive review of studies in the field of ethical leadership, researchers have identified various dimensions within organizations. Resick *et al.* (2011) identify six key themes of ethical leadership: 1) Accountability, which encompasses compliance with laws and regulations, personal accountability, and holding others accountable; 2) Consideration and respect for others, involving treating others with dignity and respect, being approachable, and exhibiting empathy and understanding (Bellingham, 2003); 3) Fairness and non-discriminatory treatment, including making fair, just, and objective judgments, as well as avoiding discrimination against others; 4) Character, comprising honesty, trustworthiness,

integrity, having a moral code, and practicing self-discipline; 5) Collective orientation (organization and social), focusing on leaders prioritizing the organization's interests over personal interests, assessing the long-term consequences of choices, safeguarding the firm's and society's interests, and acting responsibly rather than solely for profitability; and 6) Openness and flexibility, encompassing being a good communicator and listener, as well as being open to other viewpoints and diversity. Building on the work of Brown *et al.* (2005) and motivated by previous efforts in measuring ethical leadership, Kalshoven *et al.* (2011) develop a comprehensive, multi-dimensional measure of ethical leadership, known as the Ethical Leadership at Work Questionnaire (ELW), designed to assess ethical leadership in the workplace. The questionnaire identifies seven distinct ethical leadership behaviors, as illustrated in Table 2.

Fairness	Treating others in a way that is right and equal, making principled and fair choices, and not practicing favoritism.
People Orientation	Caring about, respecting and, supporting followers.
Role Clarification	Clarification of responsibilities, expectations, and performance goals.
Ethical Guidance	Communication about ethics involves explaining ethical rules, promoting ethical conduct, and rewarding it.
Concern for the Environment (Environmental Orientation)	Whether the leader cares for the environment and stimulates acts to conserve it, such as recycling.
Power Sharing	Allowing followers a say in decision-making and listening to their ideas and concerns.
Integrity	Consistency of words and deeds. Following through with the promises that one has made.

Source: Kalshoven *et al.* (2011)

**Table 2. Dimensions of Ethical Leadership**

According to Eisenbeiss *et al.* (2015), there exists a perception in some businesses that ethical firm leadership and firm performance are considered mutually exclusive. Drawing on the upper echelon theory, which suggests that organizational outcomes mirror CEO values, characteristics, and leadership behaviors (Bellingham, 2003), the authors propose that the influence of CEO ethical leadership is mediated by organizational ethical culture and moderated by corporate ethics programs within companies. Eisenbeiss *et al.* (2015) conceptualize ethical leadership as a higher-level construct with sub-components, as outlined in Table 3.

In the upcoming section, the researchers conduct a detailed analysis and discussion of the five dimensions of ethical leadership: morality, compassion, ethical envisioning, ethical empowerment, and managing ethics.

*Morality* : The first dimension focuses on the leader's moral character, as defined by Treviño *et*



People Orientation	Caring about, respecting and supporting followers.
Integrity	Consistency of words and deeds Following through with the promises that one has made.
Fairness	Treating others in a way that is right and equal, making principled and fair choices, and not practicing favoritism.
Responsibility	Having a long-term focus on organizational success, valuing responsibility, maintaining sustainable relationships with business partners, being concerned about the community, and protecting the environment.
Moderation	Being temperate and considerate, not always occupying the focus of attention, and finding a balance between extreme ideas, behaviors, decisions, and goals.

Source: Eisenbeiss *et al.* (2015)

**Table 3. Sub-Components of Ethical Leadership**

*al.* (2000). Ethical leaders often integrate moral principles into their ideas, values, and behavior (Khuntia and Suar, 2004). Elements of the leader's moral persona are measured through various dimensions, including "concern for morality and fairness" (De Hoogh and Den Hartog, 2008), "morality" (Zheng *et al.*, 2011), "integrity" (Eisenbeiss *et al.*, 2015), and "fairness" (Kalshoven *et al.*, 2011). This component incorporates Spangenberg and Theron's (2005) emphasis on trust and role modeling in ethical leadership.

*Compassion* : Several studies, including "People Orientation," emphasize a community- and people-oriented aspect of ethical leadership (Eisenbeiss *et al.*, 2015; Kalshoven *et al.*, 2011; Resick *et al.*, 2011). Leaders characterized as empathic, caring, sensitive, and thoughtful are considered ethical, underscoring the importance of being considerate of their followers (De Hoogh and Den Hartog, 2008; Eisenbeiss *et al.*, 2015; Spangenberg and Theron, 2005).

*Ethical Envisioning* : Pioneered by Spangenberg and Theron (2005), this dimension places emphasis on "creating and sharing ethical vision" and "stimulating across boundaries" by taking into account the organization's ethical image and fostering enduring relationships with stakeholders.

*Ethical Empowerment* : Spangenberg and Theron (2005) underscore the significance of education and competent management in employee empowerment, giving emphasis to autonomy, beneficence, nonmaleficence, and justice. This approach aligns with contemporary perspectives on ethical leaders who empower their followers, incorporating concepts like "power sharing" and "empowerment."

*Managing Ethics* : Expanding on Trevino *et al.* (2000), this dimension entails establishing ethical systems to promote ethical behavior, support personnel, and ensure accountability. Recognizing the significance of ethical structures and systems, leaders contribute to clarifying ethical expectations and are perceived as ethics coaches and mentors.

### Importance of Ethical Leadership

According to Brown *et al.* (2005), ethical leadership plays a crucial role in various outcomes, such as leader effectiveness, team satisfaction, willingness to report issues, and employee dedication. Brown and Treviño (2006) further suggest that ethical leadership is linked to higher follower satisfaction, commitment, motivation, ethical decision-making, and the encouragement of prosocial behavior. Den Hartog and Belschak (2012) demonstrate that ethical leadership reduces counterproductive actions by elevating work engagement. Ethical leaders foster altruistic conduct among organizational members through role modeling (De Hoogh and Den Hartog, 2008) and leading to greater commitment to the organization (Kanungo and Conger, 1993). Neves and Story (2015) find a clear link between ethical leadership and affective commitment, especially when leaders have a strong performance reputation. Employees exhibit the lowest affective commitment when leaders are perceived as lacking ethics, regardless of their personal performance track record.

Ethical leadership goes beyond shaping daily experiences, as De Hoogh and Den Hartog's (2008) interviews with CEOs reveal a positive association between ethical leadership and the effectiveness of top management teams, as well as a more optimistic outlook among subordinates. Neubert *et al.* (2009) establish that ethical leadership plays a pivotal role in shaping perceptions of the ethical climate, which in turn enhances job satisfaction and affective commitment. Den Hartog and De Hoogh (2009) also discover a positive correlation between perceived ethical leader behavior and trust, affective commitment, and normative commitment. Furthermore, Den Hartog and Belschak (2012) conclude that when employees perceive their leaders as ethical, they exhibit increased dedication, vigor, and absorption in their work, leading to greater personal initiative and reduced counterproductive behavior.

After reviewing the previous definitions of ethical leadership and recognizing its significance, the current paper strongly advocates for leaders to establish and cultivate an ethical code. The code of ethics serves as a guiding framework to uphold ethical standards within the organization, reflecting its core moral values (Den Hartog and Belschak, 2012). Leaders play a crucial role in facilitating the resolution of ethical dilemmas by crafting a comprehensive code of ethics that provides guidance and support for decision-making, illustrating the organization's mission, values, and principles (Den Hartog and De Hoogh, 2009). It establishes a link to professional performance standards and identifies ethical resources. The organizational code of ethics, rooted in values, ethics philosophy, and mission, must encompass standards of conduct, rules, and the commitment of leaders and senior management (Neubert *et al.*, 2009). It functions as an open disclosure of the organization's operations, guiding behavior, and serves as a communication tool reflecting public morality.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The current paper employed systematic review methodology to find out the relevant literature and to explore the existing gaps. The current paper reviewed all the theories found in previous studies, with the initial focus on elucidating theories pertaining to the concept of ethical leadership. The aim was to propose new theories that can be used to explain relationships related to ethical leadership and facilitate a broader understanding and application of this concept (Den Hartog and Belschak, 2012; Den Hartog and De Hoogh, 2009). Subsequently, a comprehensive review of previous studies of antecedents and consequences of ethical leadership at the group level was conducted, aiming to identify research gaps that necessitated attention from future researchers (Neubert *et al.*, 2009).

The study methodology was based on exploring and understanding the theories that had been examined in previous studies. The researchers set out to determine the type of each theory, its underlying principles, and how these theories were applied to understand the concept of ethical leadership. This approach helps provide a comprehensive perspective on ethical leadership and facilitates the proposal of new theories. In addition to studies related to the antecedents of ethical leadership and its consequences at the group level, the study methodology involved exploring and identifying the antecedents and consequences at the group level that had been examined in previous studies. The goal was to make a comprehensive inventory of all the antecedents and consequences of ethical leadership at the team level, and to understand the reasons for classifying those variables as either antecedents or consequences.

The research papers on ethical leadership were identified by searching specific databases and search engines, as explained in the next section. The studies were selected based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria outlined in Table 4. After the data extraction process, the relevant data were synthesized to examine the concept of ethical leadership. Following these detailed processes and the presentation of the findings, the paper suggests future research directions, and concludes the study. A holistic analysis was performed based on the primary studies to address the purpose of the research. The targeted studies were those that involved human participation and applied a range of methodological techniques, such as experiments, interviews, and surveys.

### **Article Search and Selection Strategy**

The following search strategy was employed to locate and select the relevant articles for this study. Various combinations of search strings were created to find the most pertinent research papers. These search strings were designed to capture the key concepts related to ethical leadership. Search strings included terms “ethical leadership,” “team-level ethical leadership,” “antecedents of ethical leadership,” “consequences of ethical leadership,” and related variations. Any search strings that did not yield relevant articles were not considered further. The article selection period for this study was from 2009 to

2022, as ample studies on the topic of ethical leadership had been published during this time frame. Three databases were utilized for data extraction: ACM Digital Library, Google Scholar, and Science Direct. These databases were targeted due to their reliability and authenticity, as the papers they contain have undergone peer review, thus indicating the quality of the research. All the publications in these databases consist of primary studies and literature reviews.

Inclusion Criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The abstract or title of the paper must have contained the relevant search string terms.</li> <li>• The paper must have involved human participation and be published in English.</li> <li>• The paper must have focused on theories, antecedents, or consequences of ethical leadership.</li> <li>• The methodology of the paper must have involved at least one of the following techniques: surveys or interviews.</li> </ul>
Exclusion Criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The following types of publications were excluded from the review: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Extended abstracts, conference proceedings, and summaries</li> <li>▪ Magazine features, short papers, and papers currently under review</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Additionally, papers published on topics such as politics, religion, healthcare, and drugs were also excluded from the study.</li> </ul>

Source: Authors' presentation

**Table 4. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria**

A total of 244 article titles and abstracts were examined to determine their relevance to the study. Of these, 133 articles were then excluded due to a lack of relevance. From the remaining 111 articles, 63 were ultimately selected based on an assessment of their content and applicability to the research. The studies were divided into studies related to theories of ethical leadership, studies related to the antecedents of ethical leadership, and finally studies related to the consequences of ethical leadership at the team level.

## RESULTS

### Theories of Ethical Leadership

Many prior studies predominantly focused on social exchange theory (Blau, 1968) and social learning theory (Bandura and Walters, 1977) (e.g., Frazier and Jacezko, 2021; Bedi *et al.*, 2016; Mansur *et al.*, 2020), thereby limiting the perspective on ethical leadership. The comprehensive and diverse nature of ethical leadership called for an expansion in the range of theories employed (Banks *et al.*, 2021). Before delving into the literature review of ethical leadership, it was crucial to gain a detailed understanding of the theories constituting the model and acquaint ourselves with the theories underpinning the concepts of ethical leadership. Values played a pivotal role in ethical leadership behaviors (ELBs), necessitating

the establishment of a means to communicate or disseminate these values to others. Therefore, the current study also assessed other significant theories within the domain of ethical leadership, although some had broader relevance than immediate application to ELBs. Banks *et al.* (2021) provided a concise summary of all these theories which are presented in Table 5 along with references to their seminal or key works. Additionally, we offered a brief overview of these theories, emphasizing their role in the context of ELBs.

Theory	Description
1. <i>Signaling theory</i> (Connelly <i>et al.</i> , 2011; Spence, 1978)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Disparities in information are evident between leaders and their followers.</li> <li>Leaders convey ethical signals through their conduct and attributes (e.g., moral emotions like shame, sadness, or righteous anger).</li> <li>Followers may exhibit diverse responses to these ethical signals.</li> </ul>
2. <i>Stakeholder theory</i> (Harrison <i>et al.</i> , 2010)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>According to stakeholder theory, leaders should cultivate an understanding of stakeholder utility functions.</li> <li>Ethical leaders are tasked with taking into account the interests of both immediate and long-term stakeholders.</li> </ul>
3. <i>Attribution theory</i> (Kelley and Michela, 1980)	Followers make judgments about the ethical conduct of leaders through attributions
4. <i>Social learning theory</i> (Bandura & Walters, 1977)	Social learning theory entails the mechanism by which leaders acquire ethical leadership norms by observing and emulating social role models.
5. <i>Social identity theory</i> (Brewer and Gardner, 1996; Tajfel <i>et al.</i> , 1979)	Social identity mechanisms result in a distinct interpretation of moral intentions.
6. <i>Social exchange theory</i> (Blau, 1968; Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Social interactions evolve as followers react to ethical leadership actions (signaling).</li> <li>Ethical leadership conduct can yield both advantageous and detrimental outcomes for stakeholders, but over time, it should contribute to positive effects on the whole.</li> </ul>
7. <i>Role congruence theory</i> (Ritter and Yoder, 2004)	Followers assess leaders' behaviors (signals) by considering whether they align with or deviate from normative expectations. Notably, expectations for female leaders may differ from those for male leaders.

Source: Banks *et al.* (2021)

**Table 5. Theories Supporting Ethical Leadership**

## Antecedents and Consequences of Ethical Leadership at Team Level

### – Antecedents of Ethical Leadership

Despite the extensive literature on ethical leadership, the understanding of its antecedents was rather limited (Frazier and Jacezko, 2021). Knowledge about these antecedents still lagged behind the comprehension of the outcomes of ethical leadership. Despite their pivotal role in understanding the factors contributing to the development and practice of ethical leadership within an organization, the grasp of antecedents remained relatively constrained (Rahaman *et al.*, 2019). Additionally, this unders-

tanding not only provided profound insights into ethical leadership (Frazier and Jacezko, 2021) but also contributed to the cultivation of an ethical culture. De Hoogh and Den Hartog (2008) confirmed that social responsibility was one of the antecedents of ethical leadership and was closely linked to morality, fairness, and role clarification. Walumbwa and Schaubroeck (2009) confirmed that leader characteristics, specifically, agreeableness and conscientiousness, were among the antecedents of ethical leadership.

Mayer *et al.* (2012) found that moral identity symbolization and internalization served as antecedents to perceptions of ethical leadership. Kalshoven *et al.* (2011) delved into another set of factors influencing followers' perceptions of ethical leadership, namely five personality traits: leader Machiavellianism, personality characteristics, leader agreeableness, leader conscientiousness, and leader neuroticism. Additionally, Brown and Treviño (2014) emphasized the importance of role models as crucial antecedents for becoming an ethical leader, while Waldman *et al.* (2017) proposed that a leader's ideology, consisting of a combination of idealism and relativism, played a partial intervening role in elucidating the influence of the leader's brain default mode network (DMN) when predicting ethical leadership. Sharma *et al.* (2019) affirmed that the personality characteristics of leaders were vital antecedents to perceptions of ethical leadership. Rahaman *et al.* (2019) demonstrated that leaders who exhibited a positive attitude towards ethical behaviors and demonstrated a strong ability to exercise self-control were more inclined to have a heightened intention to act ethically. Consequently, this intention translated into the manifestation of ethical leadership.

Mansur *et al.* (2020) concentrated on another set of factors influencing followers' perception of ethical leadership, including leader moral courage and leader guilt. Additionally, Frazier and Jacezko (2021) validated that leader Machiavellianism was among the antecedents of perceived ethical leadership. Consequently, it was evident that the characteristics and behaviors exhibited by leaders in the work environment played a fundamental role in shaping followers' perception of ethical leadership (Banks *et al.*, 2021). Table 6 illustrated a summary of the antecedents of ethical leadership.

#### **– Consequences of Ethical Leadership**

At the group level, leadership entailed guiding individuals towards shared goals, a common direction, and a unified vision (Kozlowski and Ilgen, 2006). In group studies, leadership was crucial for group success (Varella *et al.*, 2012), Zaccaro *et al.* (2001: 452) asserting that "effective leadership processes were arguably the most crucial factor in achieving organizational team success." Recently, Kozlowski and Ilgen (2006: 107) characterized leadership as a "promising point of influence for enhancing team effectiveness." Furthermore, Varella *et al.* (2012) confirmed that social charismatic leadership contributed to improving group behaviors, leading to enhanced group outcomes in the work environment. Despite

this significance, studies exploring the relationship between leadership and group outcomes or behaviors within the work environment were noticeably scarce compared to those focusing on individual performance or behaviors (Bommer *et al.*, 2007).

Antecedents of Ethical Leadership	Author
Social Responsibility	Hoogh & Den Hartog (2008)
Leader Characteristics, Specifically Agreeableness and Conscientiousness	Walumbwa & Schaubroeck (2009)
Moral identity symbolization and internalization.	Mayer <i>et al.</i> (2012)
Five personality traits: Leader Machiavellianism, Personality Characteristics, Leader Agreeableness, Leader Conscientiousness, and Leader Neuroticism	Kalshoven <i>et al.</i> (2011)
Cognitive moral reasoning of executive leaders	Boyatzis <i>et al.</i> (2013)
Role Models	Brown & Treviño (2014)
Personality Characteristics of leaders	Sharma <i>et al.</i> (2019)
Leader Attitude	Rahaman <i>et al.</i> (2019)
Leader Moral Courage and Leader Guilt	Mansur <i>et al.</i> (2020)
Leader Machiavellianism	Frazier & Jacezko (2021)

Source: Authors' Presentation

**Table 6. Antecedents of Ethical Leadership**

### ***Consequences of Ethical Leadership***

At the group level, leadership entailed guiding individuals towards shared goals, a common direction, and a unified vision (Kozlowski and Ilgen, 2006). In group studies, leadership was crucial for group success (Varella *et al.*, 2012), Zaccaro *et al.* (2001: 452) asserting that “effective leadership processes were arguably the most crucial factor in achieving organizational team success.” Recently, Kozlowski and Ilgen (2006: 107) characterized leadership as a “promising point of influence for enhancing team effectiveness.” Furthermore, Varella *et al.* (2012) confirmed that social charismatic leadership contributed to improving group behaviors, leading to enhanced group outcomes in the work environment. Despite this significance, studies exploring the relationship between leadership and group outcomes or behaviors within the work environment were noticeably scarce compared to those focusing on individual performance or behaviors (Bommer *et al.*, 2007).

Transitioning to ethical leadership, ethical leaders served as role models of high moral values, supporting employees in addressing workplace challenges. Avey *et al.* (2010) indicated that ethical leadership enhanced both task and contextual performance of employees. However, this study did not advocate for a significant alteration in ethical leadership when transitioning from an individual to a group context. Instead, it proposed expanding ethical leadership research to include examinations of group-level dynamics and exploring various unexplored connections within the field. Additionally, Avolio *et al.*

(2004) proposed that such leaders served as personal exemplars of ethical standards and integrity. Consistent with the research of Craig and Gustafson (1998), positive responses from followers encompassed perceptions of the leader's selflessness, along with feelings of confidence and trust in the leader (Gottlieb and Sanzgiri, 1996). Therefore, leader values and ethics significantly influenced group behavior. Walumbwa *et al.* (2012) also supported the existence of a positive relationship between ethical leadership and work group performance.

Peng and Lin (2017) confirmed the positive relationship between ethical leadership, group in-role performance, and group helping behavior. Furthermore, Huang and Paterson (2017) established that ethical leadership positively influenced group ethical voice, contributing to ethical performance. However, Eissa and Wyland (2018) demonstrated that ethical leadership could moderate the relationship between work-family conflict (WFC), employee hindrance stress, and group social undermining, with the relationship being weaker in high levels of ethical leadership. Additionally, Zaim *et al.* (2021) identified a positive correlation between ethical leadership and team performance, with justice, wisdom, and temperance emerging as the most influential virtues. Most studies (e.g., Mansur *et al.*, 2020) focused on the connection between ethical leadership and certain group behaviors, such as group organizational citizenship behaviors (Group OCBs) and group helping behaviors. Finally, Martin *et al.* (2022) found that ethical leadership moderated the relationship between team performance, team efficacy beliefs, and social integration. Table 7 illustrated a summary of the consequences of ethical leadership at the group level.

Consequences of Ethical Leadership	Author
Task and Contextual performance	Avey <i>et al.</i> (2010)
Work Group Performance.	Walumbwa <i>et al.</i> (2012)
Group In-role Performance, and Group Helping Behavior	Peng & Lin (2017)
Group Ethical Voice.	Huang & Paterson (2017)
Group Social Undermining	Eissa & Wyland (2018)
Group organizational citizenship behaviors (Group OCBs) and Group helping behaviors	Mansur <i>et al.</i> (2020)
Team performance	Zaim <i>et al.</i> (2021)
Team performance and Team efficacy beliefs	Martin <i>et al.</i> (2022)

Source: Authors' Presentation

**Table 7. Consequences of Ethical Leadership**

### Ethical Leadership: Signaling and Attribution Theories

As explained previously, most previous studies focused on social exchange theory and social learning theory. Therefore, the current study suggests that future research needs to expand the use of theories for a more in-depth understanding of ethical leadership. Specifically, it advocates for signaling theory



to take center stage as a novel theory for understanding the concept of ethical leadership and explaining the relationships related to it. Additionally, the research suggests adopting an attribution theory perspective in organizational sciences (Harvey *et al.*, 2014). Despite limited research on attributions within HR (Hewett *et al.*, 2019), this approach offers new insights into ethical leadership. The current study recommended future research contribute to the growing body of knowledge by extending the application of signaling theory and attribution theory to Ethical Leadership, addressing an area with limited prior research (Banks *et al.*, 2021). The following provides a brief explanation of signaling and attribution theories.

#### **– Signaling Theory**

Signaling, rooted in fields like evolutionary biology and economics (Spence, 1978), extended its influence to areas such as entrepreneurship, strategic management, leadership, and human resources (Banks *et al.*, 2021). The primary function of signals was to mitigate information imbalances (Bergh *et al.*, 2019). In the context of ethical leadership, signaling theory suggested that leaders could transmit ethical signals through their actions to various stakeholders, including followers. Ethical leadership behaviors (ELBs) served as these signals, requiring perceptibility to initiate the social influence process inherent in leadership. Signals could manifest in various forms, such as a leader's participation in charitable events or volunteer initiatives. While some ethical behaviors, like private donations, didn't rely on signaling, they didn't constitute leadership behaviors because leadership involved a social influence process that requires others to take notice. The effectiveness of signals depended on factors like signal visibility (e.g., intensity, strength, clarity) and variables such as the recipient's attention and interpretation (Connelly *et al.*, 2011).

#### **– Attribution Theory**

Attribution theory, as outlined by Kelley and Michela (1980), identified two categories of factors that influenced attributions: information concerning the stimulus and the general beliefs of perceivers regarding causes and consequences. In the context of ethical leadership, we emphasized the behaviors of leaders as a crucial source of information. Leaders' ethical signals were notable in the human resources context, forming the foundation for attributions. The second group of factors included general beliefs shaped by past and ongoing experiences. Therefore, both a leader's behaviors and the beliefs of followers were considered antecedents of followers' perception of ethical leadership.

Analysis of previous studies that dealt with the determinants of ethical leadership illustrated that numerous studies (Brown and Treviño, 2014; Frazier and Jacezko, 2021; Mansur *et al.*, 2020; Mayer *et al.*, 2012; Sharma *et al.*, 2019; Walumbwa and Schaubroeck, 2009) have explored some of the factors

contributing to followers' perceptions of ethical leadership, namely moral identity, role models, leader Machiavellianism, personality characteristics, leader agreeableness, leader conscientiousness, leader neuroticism, and leader's moral courage. Consequently, it is evident that the characteristics and behaviors exhibited by leaders in the work environment serve as fundamental precursors shaping followers' perception of ethical leadership (Banks *et al.*, 2021).

This paper recommends future research to expand the exploration of the antecedents of ethical leadership by investigating factors influencing followers' understanding of their leaders' ethical behaviors, such as the leader's ethical voice and cynicism climate. The establishment of ethical leadership significantly relied on a leader's ethical voice, involving continuous communication with followers and the embodiment of moral values. This ethical voice was expressed through behaviors directed at both lower and higher organizational levels (Huang and Paterson, 2017). Such communication strengthened followers' perception of their leader's authentic commitment to ethical conduct, solidifying its crucial role in how followers perceived ethical leadership. This aspect deserved further exploration and research. In contrast, a cynicism climate reflected a prevalent perception within the organization lacking integrity and authenticity (Hewett *et al.*, 2019). Originating from employees' overall impressions, this belief influenced their expectations regarding HR practices (Dean *et al.*, 1998) and undermined the credibility of initiatives aimed at promoting ethical leadership.

After reviewing previous studies that addressed the outcomes of ethical leadership at the group level, the researchers identified a set of research gaps. The study recommended that future research should aim to address these gaps. Studies exploring the relationship between ethical leadership and group performance (e.g., Zaim *et al.*, 2021; Peng and Lin, 2017) had predominantly focused on assessing group performance through individual evaluations. However, the current study suggested a different approach for future investigations. Instead of relying on individual assessments, we advocated for senior leadership and officials to evaluate group performance. The evaluation of group performance should be conducted by senior leaders, as it involved the comprehensive assessment of work quality, quantity, and overall performance.

It's worth noting that prior research had highlighted a relative scarcity of studies focusing on the relationship between ethical leadership and outcomes at the group level compared to the individual level. Many studies (e.g., Peng and Lin, 2017; Mansur *et al.*, 2020) exploring the connection between ethical leadership and group behavior had predominantly concentrated on topics like group organizational citizenship behaviors or group helping behaviors. There had been a noticeable shortage of studies examining the relationship between ethical leadership and other group behaviors, such as group cooperation, group sanctioning, and group social undermining. Additionally, some studies (e.g., Eissa and Wyland, 2018; Mostafa *et al.*, 2021) had not directly addressed the relationship between ethical

leadership and group social undermining. Therefore, the current study recommended that future research should contribute to the field of ethical leadership by investigating the impact of followers' perceptions of ethical leadership on group cooperation, group sanctioning, and group social undermining. Furthermore, it suggested exploring the impact of followers' perceptions of ethical leadership via group cooperation, group sanctioning, and group social undermining on group performance.

## CONCLUSION

The current study begins by delving into the pertinent social scientific literature that explores the concept of ethical leadership. The paper's focus includes elucidating theories that shed light on ethical leadership, and we introduce the theories of signaling and attribution to broaden the understanding of this concept. It investigates the antecedents and outcomes of ethical leadership at the group level. The heightened interest in ethical leadership, fueled by prominent failures, prompts organizations to seek insights into selecting, developing, and retaining ethical leaders. Likewise, business schools aim to optimize methods for teaching students to embody ethical leadership qualities. Recent advancements in construct and measure development enable leadership scholars to swiftly integrate ethical leadership into their research agendas. Beyond academic considerations, there is a moral imperative for researchers to contribute to improving the ethical performance of leaders. Additionally, given the intrinsic link between ethical leadership and effective leadership, scholars with diverse motivations and interests are likely to find the topic of ethical leadership compelling.

This study contributes to the understanding of ethical leadership by exploring its antecedents and outcomes at the group level. By incorporating theories of signaling and attribution, we provide a broader perspective on ethical leadership and its implications. The findings of this study have practical implications for organizations seeking to cultivate ethical leadership and improve ethical performance among their leaders. Furthermore, the research highlights the importance of integrating ethical leadership into leadership development programs in business schools. Overall, the study underscores the significance of ethical leadership in promoting organizational ethics and offers insights for future research in this area.

## IMPLICATIONS

The research on team-level antecedents and consequences of ethical leadership has significant implications for both theory and practice. Theoretical implications involve advancing our understanding of leadership by highlighting the importance of team-level dynamics in the ethical leadership process. It also emphasizes the importance, in future studies, of utilizing modern theories to expand the concept

of moral leadership and achieve a more comprehensive understanding of its dynamics. The incorporation of theories such as signaling theory and attribution theory can provide valuable insights into the mechanisms and processes underlying ethical leadership. The analysis results revealed that ethical leadership at the group level has predominantly been unexplored, presenting researchers with opportunities to uncover novel findings and leaders with prospects to enhance their effectiveness. The study presented new variables regarding the antecedents leading to ethical leadership, including internal factors such as leader ethical voice, and external factors such as a cynicism climate. It also presented new variables regarding the consequences of ethical leadership at the group level, such as group sanctioning, group cooperation, and group social undermining. A limited number of studies have explored how ethical leadership influences the attitudes and actions of followers within a group context (Hannah *et al.*, 2011). This research paves the way for numerous future studies that can delve into the influence of ethical leadership on group outcomes. This study significantly deepens our comprehension of these dynamics and fills critical knowledge gaps.

Practically, organizations can benefit from the findings by developing and implementing ethical leadership training programs that focus on team-level dynamics. Such programs can foster a culture of integrity and promote positive ethical conduct within teams. Leadership development programs should address team-level dynamics and include training modules on ethical leadership to equip leaders with the necessary skills to effectively promote and uphold ethical standards within their teams. Organizations should also prioritize the selection and composition of teams based on ethical values and behaviors, enhancing the likelihood of ethical leadership emergence and positive team ethical outcomes. Aligning performance management and reward systems with ethical leadership behaviors and team ethical conduct can further reinforce the importance of ethical behavior and create a positive ethical climate within teams. Transparent and participative decision-making processes within teams, involving team members in ethical decision-making and encouraging discussions about ethical dilemmas, can also contribute to a positive ethical climate. In summary, the research on team-level antecedents and consequences of ethical leadership has theoretical implications for advancing leadership theories and practical implications for guiding organizational practices. It also highlights various future research directions that can further enhance our understanding of ethical leadership in teams.

## LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The majority of studies included in the review have utilized cross-sectional designs, which present a limitation in establishing causal relationships between team-level antecedents, ethical leadership, and team outcomes. To overcome this limitation, future research should employ longitudinal designs that

allow for the examination of these relationships over time. Longitudinal studies would provide more robust evidence of causality and enhance our understanding of the temporal dynamics involved. Another limitation is the reliance on self-reported data in many of the studies. This introduces the potential for common method bias and social desirability effects. Solely relying on self-report measures may compromise the objectivity of the findings and introduce response biases. To address this limitation, future research should consider incorporating multiple sources of data, such as objective performance measures or independent observer ratings, to provide a more comprehensive and accurate assessment of ethical leadership and team outcomes. It is important to acknowledge these limitations and exercise caution when interpreting the findings and implications of the reviewed studies. Understanding their potential impact on the results can help researchers and practitioners make informed decisions and interpretations.

To further advance the understanding of team-level dynamics of ethical leadership, future research should address the following directions: First, conducting longitudinal studies will allow for the examination of the causal relationships between team-level antecedents, ethical leadership, and team outcomes over time. This will provide more robust evidence and deeper insights into the temporal dynamics involved in ethical leadership processes within teams. Second, incorporating multiple sources of data, such as objective performance measures, peer ratings, or supervisor assessments, can help overcome the limitations of self-reported data. This approach will provide a more comprehensive and accurate assessment of ethical leadership and its impact on team outcomes. Third, conducting experimental studies can offer valuable insights into the causal mechanisms underlying ethical leadership in teams. By manipulating team-level antecedents and examining their effects on ethical leadership and team outcomes, researchers can gain a clearer understanding of the dynamics at play. Fourth, investigating additional contextual factors that may influence ethical leadership at the team level, such as organizational culture, industry characteristics, or team composition, can enhance our understanding of the boundary conditions and contingencies of ethical leadership. By pursuing these future directions, researchers can build upon the existing knowledge and further advance our understanding of team-level dynamics of ethical leadership. This will provide practical implications for organizations and guide leadership development efforts.

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