**Ethical Leadership**

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When faced with challenging circumstances when there isn't always a clear 'correct' way to proceed, ethical leadership is continually honoring these ideals and choosing to do what's right rather than what's convenient (Kothuri, 2023). Additionally, moral excellence and a sincere concern for the welfare of both individuals and the larger community can be used to describe ethical leadership. In its simplest form, ethical leadership is the manifestation of moral principles and values in a leadership position, influencing not just the behavior of the leader but also the culture of the business and society at large (Kothuri, 2023).

Any social innovator must practice ethical leadership because it gives them the confidence to make difficult choices, act in ways that reflect their goals and values as leaders, and bravely challenge the status quo. At its foundation, ethical leadership is defined by several essential values and characteristics that direct leaders in their choice-making and interpersonal relationships. These values include accountability, empathy, justice, honesty, integrity, and a dedication to the greater good. The welfare of their followers comes first for ethical leaders, who also push for openness and moral behavior and work to develop an inclusive, trusting workplace environment.

Companies that invested in ethical decision-making frameworks before the epidemic were found to be able to make "quicker, better, and more consistent decisions" when presented with difficulty, according to the 2021 Ethics Study (Jenn, 2022). In contrast, individuals who had ethics that were as deeply ingrained as the paper they were written on struggled "without the tools to navigate the crisis." Every Table, a company that makes healthy food easily available, is an illustration of how ethics guide strategic choices. Throughout the pandemic, Every Table stepped up its "Pay it Forward" effort, urging consumers to contribute to the cost of meals for those in need (Jenn, 2022). Although this choice had a wider effect and received favorable coverage, the company's prior ethical leadership enabled them to be quick and efficient in their choices.

**The Elements of Ethical Leadership**

A solid ethical foundation is the foundation of ethical leadership. Since leaders must first understand their values, beliefs, and biases before they can effectively lead others with integrity, it starts with self-awareness and introspection (Lang, 2023). This self-awareness enables leaders to recognize future ethical conundrums and handle them according to moral principles.

The foundational and initial component of ethical leadership is personal values and integrity. Identifying who you are and why your values are so essential to you in the world is one of the first steps toward ethical leadership (Lang, 2023). The world is full of choices, no matter how trivial, that will put your morals to the test in the most unanticipated manner, according to Jo-Ann Tan, director of Acumen Academy.

Integrity is the cornerstone of ethical leadership. Leaders need to have a strong sense of morality and a firm commitment to moral standards. This includes being sincere, telling the truth, and being consistent in both words and deeds. The integrity of ethical leaders sets the standard for the entire organization and serves as a model for ethical behavior.

The next aspect of ethical leadership is redefining success. Understanding guiding ideals and, more crucially, acting by them are necessary for ethical leadership. Bavidra asserts that "redefining success is being in service of something greater than yourself." Sometimes going against what is expected of you means standing up for what you believe in. It takes guts to change your definition of success, regardless of criticism or opposition that might result from your decision (Lang, 2023).

Ethical Guidelines are also a crucial element of ethical leadership. To help them make decisions, ethical leaders frequently refer to well-established ethical frameworks or ideologies. These frameworks offer a methodical way to assess the ethical effects of diverse decisions. Utilitarianism, which emphasizes increasing general happiness, and deontology, which emphasizes obedience to moral obligations and principles, are two examples of popular ethical systems (Saha, et al., 2022).

**Crucial Features of Ethical Leadership**

Several crucial characteristics that influence a leader's behavior and relationships with others make up ethical leadership. These qualities promote trust among stakeholders and help to create a positive organizational culture. The qualities of a person or organization that exhibit respect and responsibility are called ethical traits. People who exhibit these qualities typically make fair leaders and foster a positive work atmosphere (Saha, et al., 2022). For this reason, particularly if you're interested in progressing into a leadership position, it can be useful for you to learn about the characteristics that mesh with the mission statement of your current business.

Honesty and transparency are the first two essential qualities. Ethical leaders communicate openly and sincerely. They don't use trickery, false information, or manipulation. Instead, even when giving unfavorable news, they communicate clearly and honestly. Internally, transparency fosters credibility and confidence.

The team may trust ethical leaders more since they are more inclined to be honest at work. Honest leaders might provide dependability and open communication. Additionally, they might openly offer corporate updates and other criticism (Saha, et al., 2022). Although leaders occasionally encounter sensitive material, being an honest leader entails disclosing as much as you can, especially to those who ask.

Secondly, an essential component of ethical leadership is accountability. Leaders accept accountability for their choices and deeds, acknowledging both their accomplishments and shortcomings. They do not deflect responsibility for their actions or avoid taking responsibility for them (Saha, et al., 2022). Fostering communication at work can contribute to the development of trust and responsibility. The likelihood of team members communicating with one another before issues arise may also be higher. For these reasons, encouraging a communicative workplace may be advantageous for people in leadership roles. Although many companies already have an open-door policy spelled forth in their employee handbooks, many individual leaders make sure their staff members are aware that this policy also applies to the door to their office.

Furthermore, Ethical leaders show compassion and understanding for their followers. They demonstrate genuine concern for others' needs and actively listen to their worries (Sarwar, et al. 2020). Empathy promotes a healthy work atmosphere and aids leaders in understanding the viewpoints of their team members. An ethical leader may encourage each team member to develop professionally and take charge of their career in the workplace. This could entail receiving credit for additional duties or learning how to make new contributions at work (Sarwar, et al. 2020). By fostering initiative, team members can see that their leaders value their contributions, viewpoints, and capacity for change.

Lastly, Strong decision-making abilities are a quality of ethical leaders, especially when dealing with moral conundrums (Sarwar, et al. 2020). They make decisions that are consistent with their moral ideals and values after taking into account the potential effects of their actions on all stakeholders. Accepting responsibility is another moral quality of successful leaders. Everyone makes errors, but a leader's capacity to take ownership of their own and, occasionally, the mistakes of their team contributes to the development of workplace ethics (Sarwar, et al. 2020). Leaders who are responsible can assist in using mistakes as teaching opportunities to avoid repeating them. Building dedication, openness, and trust in the workplace can also be facilitated by taking accountability for your actions as well as those of your team.

**Ethical Leadership Challenges**

There are difficulties with ethical leadership. Leaders frequently must make difficult decisions and carefully weigh complicated ethical challenges. It is possible to forget what your firm stands for as it develops. You might start to worry less about morality and concentrate more on your financial objectives. Growth might also make it challenging for you to make sure that all your staff members uphold the company's purpose, vision, and values. Knowing how to overcome some of the obstacles to ethical leadership will not only help you keep the public's and stakeholders' trust, but it could also prevent more significant issues down the road.

Diverse and conflicting values among different individuals leaving gray areas is one of the major challenges of ethical leadership. Leaders may come across circumstances where their own principles conflict with business goals or societal norms. It can be difficult to strike a balance between these contradictory objectives and uphold ethical integrity. Being in a position of ethical leadership can be extremely challenging. Doing the right thing in certain circumstances might not be as profitable for your company. Let's say, for illustration, that you run a construction company. You're prepared to grow, but new safety requirements demand that you update your company's equipment, which will cost you money. One could argue that since your current machinery is enough, deviating from the laws in this instance will boost profit and enable you to add to the number of jobs in the neighborhood. In other words, the goals outweigh the means.

Moreso, creating and establishing new Policies and procedures to be followed in a company is also another challenge in ethical leadership. According to Arvis Institute, ethical challenges and problems in business and the corporate sector can be complicated. You must create clear policies in the form of mission statements, rules, laws, and procedures to achieve clarity. Employees require written copies of the policies as soon as they are employed. These also need to be written in a style that is clear and devoid of vulnerabilities (Shafique, et al. 2020). If one is not sure where to start, try basing your company's mission and procedures on those of other successful or deserving businesses. A consultant can evaluate your company and help you choose the most effective strategy for dealing with the problem.

Additionally, the issue of accountability and consequences is one more obstacle to ethical leadership. Ethical leaders need to be willing to take responsibility for their actions, even if they have unfavorable effects. This calls for moral fortitude and a dedication to always doing what is right, no matter the consequences (Shafique, et al. 2020). If a manager establishes rules and regulations that all employees must abide by and then breaks them in some way, they should be held responsible and answerable to the staff for the reasons why.

**Impact of ethical leadership**

The effects of ethical leadership on people, organizations, and society at large are extensive. Effective ethical leadership adds several advantageous consequences. The person, the team, and the entire business may all benefit from a positive atmosphere with productive interactions when ethical leaders are in place. Positive results and advantages for moral leaders can result from nurturing relationships at each of these levels (Shafique, et al. 2020).

To begin with, High levels of employee morale and trust are fostered. Trust and confidence are fostered by ethical leaders among their followers. Morale and job satisfaction are raised when workers have faith in their superiors to act morally and in their best interests. Keeping a positive work environment is another crucial duty of a great, moral leader. By setting a good example, ethical leaders can persuade others to follow suit (Shafique, et al. 2020). People are typically impacted by the interactions that take place around them. The attitudes and productivity of coworkers may be influenced through good communication.

Furthermore, High standards are used to create and maintain organizational culture. The culture of an organization is significantly influenced by its ethical leaders. They create a culture of integrity, respect, and inclusivity in the workplace through their behavior and principles. The necessity of keeping a happy outlook at work has a lot to do with enhancing the general well-being of the company. The ability to respect one another and recognize one another's opinions can contribute to the development of a productive workplace (Shafique, et al. 2020). Communities of people working together in a respectful setting where they can develop personally, make friends, and contribute to the broader objective might result in an ethical organization.

In addition, Long-Term sustainability as well as a benefit to society. Making ethical decisions helps ensure that organizations are long-lasting. While making ethical decisions may not always yield immediate benefits, they frequently boost reputation, stability, and trust over time. Promoting moral behavior and social responsibility can have a significant positive impact on society. They might have an impact on public policy, stand up for social causes, and encourage moral conduct across the community.

**Illustrations of Moral Leadership**

Ethics in leadership are a practice that can be seen in leaders in the actual world, not just a theoretical idea. Here are some instances of ethical leadership in action:

Nelson Mandela is a well-known example of moral leadership, particularly in the post-apartheid era. Nelson Mandela is a legendary former president of South Africa. His leadership was distinguished by a dedication to forgiveness, reconciliation, justice, and equality, which was essential in bringing a very divided country together.

Mandela spent 27 years in prison for his participation in anti-apartheid movements, and at that period, his moral approach to leadership was most obvious. Mandela chose the route of rapprochement and forgiveness rather than holding onto resentment and looking for retribution. The peaceful transition to democracy in South Africa was made possible in large part by this choice (Qing, et al., 2020). The cornerstone of Mandela's leadership was his dedication to justice and equality. He fought for the elimination of apartheid, an established system of racial segregation, and worked to make South Africa a country where all citizens, regardless of race or origin, could have access to the same opportunities and rights.

Mandela's administration was also distinguished by his commitment to the values of democracy, human rights, and social justice. He aimed to create a society that was more inclusive and equal while also mending the scars of the past. Mandela's moral leadership changed not only South Africa but also the world, serving as a testament to the virtues of forgiveness and peace. His legacy serves as a reminder that moral leaders can effect significant change by pledging to pursue justice, equality, and peace.

Also, Mahatma Gandhi, often known as the "Great Soul," was a pivotal figure in the movement of India to become free of British colonial authority. He became a lasting icon of nonviolent resistance because of his moral leadership, which was defined by an unrelenting devotion to the truth, justice, and nonviolence (Qing, et al., 2020).

Gandhi's leadership philosophy was based on his support for "ahimsa," or nonviolence. He held the view that only through nonviolent means could real change be brought about, and that violence only breeds greater violence. Numerous nonviolent protests and campaigns took place under his leadership, notably the well-known 1930 Salt March in which he led tens of thousands of supporters to the Arabian Sea to demonstrate against British salt taxation.

Gandhi placed a strong focus on truth, or "satyagraha," which was a crucial component of his ethical leadership (Shafique, et al. 2020). He exhorted people to stand up for what they believed in despite hardship because he thought that the truth was a weapon more potent than any kind of force. Gandhi's dedication to justice and equality was also demonstrated by his tireless attempts to remove social inequities including the caste system, discrimination based on religion, and gender inequity. To create a society where everyone had equal rights and opportunities, he supported social reforms. In the end, Gandhi's moral leadership inspired movements for social justice and civil rights around the world in addition to India (Qing, et al., 2020). His legacy lives on as a reminder of the transforming potential of nonviolence, truth, and justice in the world.

**Conclusion**

A strong influence that modifies the behavior of people, organizations, and society at large is ethical leadership. It is defined by adherence to moral standards, forthrightness, responsibility, and a sincere interest in the welfare of others. Trust is fostered, a positive company culture is promoted, and social impact and long-term sustainability are all benefits of ethical leadership.

A technique that can be developed and perfected by self-awareness, training, and a strong commitment to ethical values, ethical leadership is not without its difficulties. In the end, ethical leadership is not only a quality that is desired in leaders, but also one that is essential for the improvement of both individuals and the world at large. They provide a legacy of integrity and constructive transformation as they lead their businesses and communities toward morally upright and responsible activities.

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