

Impact of Ethical Leadership on Organizational Commitment & Productivity in India

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This study aimed to explore how ethical leadership in the Indian context impacts the commitment of employees and the perceived productivity of the firm. This study employed a quantitative method using a cross-sectional survey design to assess 564 employees working in 7 organizations covering the service sector industries in north India. A non-probability, convenience sample was obtained from this population group. The study examined the potential of ethical leadership to foster higher levels of organizational outcomes and found that employees led by highly ethical leaders reported greater organizational commitment and perceived productivity.

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Introduction

Repetitive incidents of frauds and scams in the large corporate houses and industries have made researchers, practitioners and academicians to reflect upon the prevalent leadership styles and practices and to find the missing link. The top executives of corporate organizations contributed to the recent credit crisis by resorting to fraudulent decisions that artificially inflated profits to increase compensation (Bello, 2012). For instance, WorldCom's Bernie Ebbers; Ken Lay, Andrew Fastow and Jeffrey Skilling of Enron; Dennis Koslowski of Tyco and RamalingaRaju of Satyam, are some leaders, who led their organizations to financial scandals (Shirur, 2011). Hence, it is important to guide managers by articulating and communicating unambiguously regarding what is right and what is not (Maheshwari & Ganesh, 2006). They must decide concerning what is "right" or ethical to do. That is one of the reasons why the emphasis upon ethical behavior in organizations is quite noticeable over the recent years. Ethical behavior in business is a complex interaction of organizational factors, personality characteristics, and societal information signs

which have a positive effect on long-term profitability (Herndon, Fraedrich & Yeh, 2001). Such a perceived ethical context should prompt positive employee attitudes that reflect greater contentedness with job tasks, duties, and responsibilities (Hunt, Wood, & Chonko, 1989). Consequently, developing an ethical environment should be a key approach for enhancing employees' connections with work and positive employee attitudes and behaviors are impending signs of increased job performance (Tanner, Brügger, Van Schie & Lebherz, 2010). Despite these, ethical leadership and job attitudes are interrelated and still subject to investigation in different settings. Consequently, this study investigated the impact of ethical leadership on perceived productivity of organization. In addition, the relationships between ethical leadership, positive job attitude (organizational commitment) and productivity were explored in a separate partial mediated model.

Leadership & Ethics

Upadhyay & Singh (2010) concluded that leadership is the most important factor to implement ethical policies in the organization. Marcy, Gentry and McKinnon (2008) recommended that a leader should nourish a specific strategy to virtuously influencing the followers. In the literature available one can find the innumerable definitions of leadership.

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Leadership in the organizational context is defined as, "ability of an individual to influence, motivate, and enable others to contribute toward the effectiveness and success of the organizations of which they are members" (House, Wright & Aditya, 1997:184). This definition is almost the crux of the different leadership definitions in general.

Often, due to the conflicting interests of diverse stakeholders, managers in organizations face the dilemma of recognizing the righteous decision as perceived by the stakeholders. "Ethics" in simplest terms means moral conduct for living a 'good' life in a 'good' society (Singh, 2001:9). More specifically, Poulton (2005:4) demarcated ethics as, "a societal discussion of what ought to be considered for overall human well-being, including the broader concepts of fairness, justice and injustice, what rights and responsibilities are operable under certain situations, and what virtues a society admires and wants to emphasize.

In order to face the dilemma of identifying the righteous decision due to conflicting interests of different stakeholders, then to guide by articulating and communicating clearly, concerning what is right and what is not, appropriate structures and policies are required (Maheshwari & Ganesh 2006). These guiding policies come under business ethics. It emerges from a series of ethical discussions that began in the early 1970s in the United States about the social responsibilities of business (Green & Donovan, 2010). Business ethics examines ethical principles and moral or

ethical problems that arise in a business environment (Solomon, 1991). According to De George (2011:16), "Business Ethics as a field is defined by the interaction of ethics and business. Business ethics is as national, international or global as business itself, and no arbitrary geographical boundaries limit it". When the leader demonstrates the morality in actions the employees follow the blueprints and organization also gets recognition for its ethicality towards society. The related perspective phenomenon of ethicality carries the prominence in creating an ethically strong business atmosphere for sustainable social and economic growth.

Ethical Leadership

Leaders are the most renowned faces of the organization, wear the crown of success and bear the responsibility of failures on their shoulders (Saini & Singh-Sengupta, 2016). Matters like having power on enduring matters, determining the organization policies, control over rewards and punishments, influencing employees put leadership into a responsible zone. For this reason ethically sensitive leaders are needed in time of financial crises, global injustice, climatic change, cultural insensitivity, employee racial and sexual discrimination and in the period of corporate financial irregularities (Bello, 2012).

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An ethical leader is a person with "right values" and "strong character" that

set examples for others and withstand temptations (Freeman & Stewart, 2006:2). Furthermore, Trevino and Brown (2005:80) specified that ethical leaders are likely to influence their followers to engage in ethical conduct and to refrain from unethical conduct by way of multiple processes that rely on both transformational and transactional approaches to leadership. More precisely the term was defined by Brown, Trevino and Harrison (2005:120) as "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".

This earlier dialogue about ethical leaders show that they clearly give messages to their followers about the expected behavior, and it is also consistent with the social learning and social exchange perspective (Trevino & Brown, 2005). Thomas Aquinas (as cited in Knights & O'Leary, 2006) suggested that all moral questions will lead to a virtue analysis, leading back to character and organizationally ethical leadership includes a deliberated scheduling process so that policies decision making processes, consultation, accountability and ethical standard and ongoing assessment and monitoring are in place to ensure ethical practice by the leader and the follower.

Organizational Commitment

Organizational commitment has been demarcated and measured in several methods. "Attitudinal organizational com-

mitment is the strength of an individual's identification with, and involvement in, a particular organization (Leong, Furnham & Cooper, 1996).” Further Ongori (2007) described employee commitment as an effective response to the whole organization and the degree of attachment or loyalty employees feel towards the organization. According to Akintayo (2010), “employee commitment can be defined as the degree to which the employee feels devoted to their organization.”

Individuals with low levels of commitment do not put their hearts into the work and mission of the organization and more concerned with personal success and also more likely to look at themselves as outsiders and not as long – term members of the organization; an attractive job offer elsewhere is very likely to result in their departure (Irefin & Mechanic, 2014). Employees with high commitment to an organization realize themselves as an integral part of the organization. In the similar vein Steers (1977) found that employee commitment is directly related with the company turnover. Steers (1977) also established that more committed employees wish to terminate from the organization at minimum level and highly committed employees, to their organization, work hard in performing their tasks that will increase their positive attitude towards the organization and this will ultimately increase the productivity of the organization which results in higher organizational performance. On the basis of these arguments for present study, organizational commitment is taken as a dependent variable for ethical leadership.

Productivity

Productivity has evolved over the past century and is now an enduring feature when focused on an organization of the future. Productivity is part of achieving excellent performance and at the organizational level, productivity has been an integral part of business success and strategies (Phusavat, 2014). It is a measure of the efficiency of a person, machine, system, etc., in converting inputs into useful outputs. It is computed by dividing average output per period by the total costs incurred or resources expended in that period. Tangen (2002) stated in his research that manager's opinions on the meaning of productivity were strongly influenced by the performance measures and even many of the managers believed that they fully understood what productivity meant, but at the same time they found difficulties in clarifying the dissimilarities between productivity and parallel terms, for example profitability that was mostly seen as the same thing as productivity. Organizational productivity indicates the efficiency with which input is turned into output in an organization. It is typically expressed as an output–input ratio or the efficiency with which inputs are transformed into outputs (goods and services) (Kopelman, Brief & Guzzo, 1990; Anderson, Fornel and Rust, 2007).

There are many diverse productivity measures. Using them depends upon the determination of productivity measurement and, in many instances, on the availability of data. Broadly, productivity measures can be classified as single

factor productivity measures (relating a measure of output to a single measure of input) or multifactor productivity measures (relating a measure of output to a bundle of inputs). Another distinction, of particular relevance at the industry or firm level is between productivity measures that relate some measure of gross output to one or several inputs and those which use a value-added concept to capture movements of output (Schreyer&Pilat, 2001). Classical economics discuss productivity improvements in terms of capital and labor, where increases in the productivity are generally considered the major source of economic growth (Anderson et al., 2007). Cited in Matthew (2007) Kopelman et al. claimed that unlike economists, who advocate measuring national productivity through total factor productivity, behavioral scientists make a case for partial factor measures of productivity such as labor, energy and materials. Studies examining the impact of culture, climate or human resource management on productivity examine partial measures of productivity that are indicative of total productivity and organizational productivity is a complex function of the productivity of different units, there is the tradition of examining the linkages between behaviors and productivity in literature (Matthew, 2007).

In this study, we have included the perceived view of productivity of organization. There are some reasons behind this take, the first one our targeted sample was of the managers, who were supposed to be highly aware of the productivity in different areas of the firm. Managers are

highly aware about the new technology, customer satisfaction, new products introduced because they deal with the subordinates as well as the customer directly. Furthermore, financial information is often freely shared with the managers but it is not available easily for the assessment of an outsider.

Hypotheses

Employee organizational commitment is often used as a measure of follower behavior which directly influences employee work performance. Ethical leaders constantly make efforts that incorporate moral principles in their behavior, values and beliefs embodying a commitment to higher organizational purpose enshrined through prudence, persistence and patience (Hsin-Kuang, Chun-Hsiung & Dorjgotov, 2012). It is conceivable that this constancy of behavior and positive environment found in ethical leadership is consistent with amplified employee organizational commitment. On this basis the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis H1: Ethical leadership is positively related to organizational commitment.

Brown and Trevino (2006) forecasted earlier that ethical leaders use moral dimensions to increase the productivity of the employees. Subsequently the entire investigation conveys that corporate ethical values play a dominant role to enhance ethical leadership and to increase employee performance for the achievement of the organizational goals,

which will automatically increase the organizational productivity, market share and performance (Sabir, Iqbal & Rahman, 2012) which prompted us to propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis H2: Ethical leadership is positively related to perceived productivity in organization.

Jeffrey Arthur (1994) also concluded that organizational performance will be enhanced by higher level of employee commitment and he found that productivity of the organization ultimately increased with the help of organizational commitment. Besides this, other studies have highlighted the significance of organizational commitment as predictors of productivity (Angle & Perry, 1981). Therefore the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis H3: Commitment of employees mediates the perceived productivity of organization.

Research Method

The main objective of this study is to observe the leadership of the managers conferring the ethical leadership survey and to observe how this independent variable is creating an impact on the perceived productivity of the surveyed organizations. The population of this research is service sector industries. The choice of the service sector is because of their large representation in the Indian corporate community due to the huge contribution not only in terms of the share in value addition but in employment also.

Selection of Measures

The questionnaire used in this study consisted of four sections. The first section sought to collect demographic information. The second section comprised constructs related to ethical leadership which referred to leadership style information that was having seven items adopted from Ethical Leadership Scale (Brown et al., 2005). The third section comprised information regarding the organizational commitment, adopted from Meyer and Allen (1991). Finally the productivity scale was adopted from Nyhan (2000). Depending on the nature of the questions, the scaling technique used was the Likert scale of 4, where the respondents indicated the extent of agreement or disagreement with the statements. The Likert scale, frequently called the method of summated ratings, is a widely accepted and adopted technique, and is highly reliable (Davis, 2005: 212). The questionnaire had clear instructions on how to complete it, the aim of the research, the issue of anonymity and confidentiality.

Sampling Design

A total number of 841 questionnaires were distributed for this study. Respondents were chosen from companies of telecom and banking, located in the northern India, representing service sector in the time frame of January to May of 2015. Of this number, 580 (response rate = 68.96%) were returned and 564 were analyzed. A non-probabilistic sampling method, namely convenience sampling was used in drawing samples for this study. The sample included 486 men (82.6%) and

the rest 78 were women (13.7%). Most of the respondents fall into the age group of 30-39(37.1%) and 40-49 (30.9%), least respondents belonged to the group of 60+ (.7%) and 21 -29 group (.7%). In terms of level of education possessed, 57.2% had attained a basic university bachelor's degree. Of these, 35.1% were having a diploma or an undergraduate degree.

Data Collection & Analysis

As an instrument the questionnaire has been selected because it can be helpful in getting data quickly and easily with lots of information from respondents in a nonthreatening mode, easy to administer among many people, inexpensive and most importantly the respondents can be anonymous. As briefed earlier the questionnaire consists of following 4 parts: Demographic Information, Ethical leadership Scale, Organizational Commitment Questionnaire and Productivity Scale. However, no identifying data were obtained on employees. The respondents were asked to evaluate their current/recent immediate supervisor and also indicate their level of commitment to the organization and the perceived productivity of the organization by completing the entire questionnaire.

Preceding the analysis, the collected data were reviewed for accuracy of data entry and missing responses. It was found that all data entries were within the possible range of 1 - 4 and there were no identifiable problems relating to outliers. MS Excel 2003 was used initially during data collection and then the data has been transferred to SPSS software program. The statistical tool SPSS v17.0 for Win-

dows was used as well as MS Excel 2013, to perform statistical analysis of the collected data. SPSS v17.0 was used to measure reliability and validity of the dataset as well as descriptive statistics was used. The validity of the data was measured with correlation whereas the reliability of the data was measured with Cronbach's coefficient alpha. Preliminary data analyses were performed to test for normality of the research variables, and to obtain descriptive statistics on demographic profile and the general characteristics of the respondents. Correlation matrix was produced to determine the relationships among constructs. Besides this, reliability analysis supported all sets of variables to determine whether they form an additive scale. This was to provide means to simplify the analysis and reporting the data by showing that the variables form a scale that is reliable to measure the construct.

Results

The reliability of the questionnaire was .87. The generally agreed-upon lower limit for Cronbach's Alpha is .70, although it may decrease to .60 in exploratory research. Total scores of the Ethical Leadership Scale, organizational commitment, and productivity surveys were calculated (Table 1), which was found satisfactory.

Table 1 Reliability Analysis of the Measured Construct

Questionnaires	Cronbach's alpha
Ethical leadership	.741
Organization commitment	.843
Productivity	.730
Total	.875

Mean and standard deviations of all the variables and factors used in this study were computed to examine the distribution of scores within each set of variables (Table 2).

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics for Variables

Variable	Mean	SD
Ethical leadership	20.85	3.43
Organizational commitment	36.99	5.67
Productivity	12.59	2.30

Before testing each hypothesis, further investigation of the data was per-

Table 3 Correlations among the Variables

Variables	Ethical Leadership	Organizational Commitment	Productivity
Ethical Leadership	1	.40**	.45**
Org Commitment			.52**
Productivity			

N = 564; **: Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Ethical leadership demonstrated a positive and moderate correlation with organizational commitment, $r(564) = .40$, $p < .01$. The regression findings (Table 4) also indicated support for Hypothesis H1 that employees led by highly ethical leaders exhibit greater organizational commitment.

formed. In order to study the nature of relationship among the factors correlations were computed. Usually the Pearson's Coefficient of Correlation test was conducted to determine if an association existed among the various variables. This process offered further insight regarding the data. Correlation results among organizational commitment, productivity and ethical leadership have been shown in Table 3. It has been evident that all the three variables studied were significantly correlated with each other positively.

The regression findings indicated support for Hypothesis H1 that employees led by highly ethical leaders exhibit greater organizational commitment.

Table 4 Standard Regression Analysis of Ethical Leadership Predicting Organizational Commitment

	R	R ²	Â	SE	B	t	Sig
Ethical Leadership	.40	.15	.65	.06	.40	10.22	.000

Ethical leadership was also positively connected to perceived productivity of organization, $r(564) = .45$, $p < .01$. The correlation values (Table 3) suggest support for accepting all three hypotheses

in the study. Ethical leadership was positively associated with each dependent variable, although to differing degrees. Ethical leadership was able to account for 15 % ($R^2 = .15$) of the variance of

organizational commitment. the β value tells us that the predictor (Ethical Leadership) is having positive relationship with the dependent variable. (Table 4)

Table 5 Standard Regression Analysis of Organizational Commitment Predicting Productivity

	R	R ²	B	SE	B	t	Sig
Org Commitment	.52	.26	.21	.01	.51	14.27	.000

Table 6 Standard Regression Analysis of Ethical Leadership and Organizational Commitment Predicting Productivity

	R	R ²	B	SE	B	T	Sig
Ethical Leadership	.55	.33	.198	.025	.295	7.882	.000
Org Commitment			.162	.015	.399	10.678	.000

So the rise in ethical leadership will give a rise to organizational commitment. According to regression (Table 4) the ethical leadership ($\beta = .65$) is a significant predictor of employee organizational commitment. The standardized beta value for ethical leadership is .40 which shows that it has considerable impact. In the case of hypothesis 3 when we have taken organizational commitment as a predictor variable we found that organizational commitment was accounting 26% of variance in perceived productivity. Beta value ($\beta = .21$) tells us that organizational commitment is having significant impact on the value of perceived productivity (Table 5).

Beta value tells us that organizational commitment is having significant impact on the value of perceived productivity.

It is clear that organizational commitment mediates the perceived notion of productivity in employees. The model

summary in Table 7 gives R, R², adjusted R², the standard error of estimate (SEE), F change and corresponding significance levels. In the regression model above, productivity is predicted from ethical leadership and organizational commitment. This output shows that ethical leadership and organizational commitment explains 33% of the variance in productivity for this sample.

R² is close to adjusted R² because there are only two independent variables. R² change is the same as R² because the variables were entered at the same time (not stepwise or in blocks), so there is only one regression model to report, and R² change is change from the intercept-only model, which is also what R² is. Since there is only one model, “Sig F Change” is the inclusive worth of the model. Significant F statistics indicates the significance of the overall model. Correlation between average scores of ethical leadership and organizational commitment and their respective productivity was 0.58 at the p value of 0.00.

Table 7 Model Summary Table

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. error of the estimate		
1	.582	.339	.337	1.87908		
Model	R ² change	F change	Df1	Df2	Sig F change	Durbin Watson
	.339	144.00	2	561	.000	1.74

Conclusion

The study contributes to improvement in awareness of the application of ethics in leadership theory in the place of work. Early researches on ethical leadership tested whether or not a relationship exists between ethical leadership and employee performance which also established significant association between ethical leadership and measures of employee and organizational outcomes. This study also accepts the positive relationship and offers further understanding by testing to see if ethical behavior of leaders impacts on the followers’ organizational commitment, and productivity in the Indian context. Both organizational commitment and productivity variables tend to impact employee performance. The findings from this study support the theoretical concept that ethical leadership does transform employee organizational commitment which led to positive impact on perceived productivity. The ethical leader has the ability to affect followers’ approaches and conducts. Ethical leaders can influence the followers, foster positive employee attitudes and behaviors. These, in turn, are potential indicators of employee performance (Tanner et al, 2010). This empirical study supports the premise that ethical lead-

ership leads to positive employee attitudes and conducts.

Ethical leaders can influence the followers, foster positive employee attitudes and behaviors.

Though the findings offer some new insights in to the Indian context, the research has its limitations as the study examined perceived behaviors of individuals at only one point in time and used the self-report method. This is the major limitation of this study - the same source bias; data for all the variables were collected only from the subordinates. Further research can be done by considering leader and subordinate sets. It would be helpful for future researchers to conduct similar testing with some modifications, such as other-rating rather than self-rating instruments. Another major limitation of this study relates to its sampling method that is convenient sampling technique, which is one of the non-probability methods. Even though, samples can be drawn quickly and economically, respondents drawn by convenient sampling may be the result of self-selection bias. Additionally, an extended and more representative sample which includes respondents from all walks of life, that is not restricted to higher educated participants or one

geographic area, is recommended for future studies. Apart from this for future research employee outcomes other than commitment such as job satisfaction, employee engagement etc. should be taken to predict the organizational performance.

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