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# A Meta-Analysis of the Impact of Ethical Leadership and Islamic Work Ethics on Ethical Work Behavior

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**Abstract**: Ethics plays a vital role across all fields. However, significant attention has been directed toward addressing citizen complaints about unethical behavior in public and private institutions. These complaints primarily concern corruption and unethical conduct in the execution of duties and service delivery. This article systematically reviews 11 theoretical and empirical journal articles focusing on ethical work behavior in public and private institutions. The selected studies were evaluated based on the following themes: (1) the impact of ethical leadership on ethical work behavior, (2) the role of Islamic work ethics in shaping ethical work behavior, and (3) the methodological approaches employed in studies of ethical leadership, Islamic work ethics and ethical work behavior. Relevant articles were identified using university electronic databases, such as Scopus and Emerald Insight and meta-analytical techniques were applied to systematically analyze and synthesize the literature. The findings indicate that both ethical leadership and Islamic work ethics have a significant positive effect on ethical work behavior. Furthermore, studies have utilized both quantitative and qualitative methods to explore workplace ethics. Future research directions are discussed in the subsequent section.

**Keywords:** *Ethical work behavior, ethical leadership, Islamic work ethics, meta-analysis*

## 1. Introduction

The ethical behavior of employees has become a significant global concern, as numerous organizational failures have been attributed to ethical issues among staff. To mitigate unethical practices in the workplace, organizational leaders play a crucial role. Leadership quality significantly influences organizational morale and ethical standards. Consistent emphasis on effective leadership models and adherence to high ethical values by leaders is essential. Research indicates that ethical leadership strongly impacts employees' ethical behavior (Hassan & Ha, 2022; Oe & Yamaoka, 2022; Wright et al., 2016). Key aspects of ethical leadership include empowering and motivating subordinates, fostering open communication, modeling appropriate behavior, treating employees fairly, and building trust Brown et al., (2005). Additionally, ethical leadership encompasses power sharing, role clarification, and moral integrity (Eisenbeiß & Brodbeck, 2014). Thus, ethical leadership is a critical determinant of ethical behavior within organizations.

Ethics are governed by a set of principles and rules that serve as benchmarsk to evaluate whether a particular behavior is good or bad. Research suggests that Islamic work ethics (IWE) positively influence employees' behavior in the workplace by promoting noble values such as honesty, flexibility, generosity and responsibility (Yousef, 2001). Similarly, Abeng (1997) highlighted that organizations could achieve high levels of productivity and competence by adopting an Islamic ethical framework to guide their operations. However, despite the advancement of IWE, most studies on work ethics focus on Western perspectives, particularly Protestant Work Ethics (PWE). The limited attention given to IWE has fueled ongoing debates about its impact on employee's ethical behavior in different contexts. Consequently, this paper aims to explore three key objectives: first, to assess the influence of ethical leadership on ethical work behavior; second, to examine the impact of Islamic work ethics on ethical work behavior; and third, to identify the methodological approaches used in studying ethical leadership, Islamic work ethics, and ethical work behavior.

### Ethical Work Behavior

Ethical behavior, at its core, involves acting with integrity, openness, and equity in one's actions and interactions. The perception of what constitutes honest and fair conduct is deeply rooted in an individual's core principles and values (Driscoll et al., 2019). Studies consistently highlight that values significantly influence an individual's personal and professional character (Trevino et al., 2006), shaping their decisions and actions

across various settings, including the workplace (Wang & Hackett, 2015). Although ethics has long been a prominent focus in scholarly research (e.g. Ford & Richardson, 1994), recent emphasis has shifted toward understanding ethical workplace behavior, particularly how it relates to ethical leadership and personal factors such as religious beliefs.

## 2. The Influence of Ethical leadership on Employee Ethical Behavior

Growing public awareness of ethical scandals involving prominent leaders – such as politicians and executives in both public and private sectors – has placed increasing pressure on the organization and their leaders to uphold ethical behavior. Acting ethically is crucial for leaders to maintain credibility and effectively influence employees across all levels of an organization (Brown et al., 2005). Furthermore, research suggested that ethical leadership can significantly shape a leader's career trajectory. For instance, studies indicated that leaders who demonstrate ethical practices are more likely to be considered for senior roles, particularly in organizations with a strong ethical culture (Rubin et al., 2010).

Brown et al. (2005) describe ethical leadership as the display of morally appropriate behavior through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, coupled with fostering such behavior among followers via open communication, reinforcement, and sound decision-making. This definition underscores ethical leadership as the embodiment of ethical behavior by leaders, focusing on actions that aim to support and benefit employees. Various leader behaviors have been identified as key aspects of ethical leadership. For instance, Resick et al. (2011) highlighted attributes such as integrity, ethical awareness, a focus on community and individuals, inspiring and empowering others, and maintaining accountability for ethical standards. Similarly, other research points to behaviors like fairness, honesty, consistency, integrity, encouraging ethical behavior in others, showing concern for employees, enabling participation and sharing authority as hallmarks of ethical leadership (Eisenbei & Brodbeck, 2014; Kalshoven et al., 2011).

### Islamic Work Ethics and Ethical Work Behavior

Islamic Work Ethics (IWE) is rooted in the teachings of the Qur'an and Sunnah, guiding interpersonal relationships and workplace behavior according to Islamic principles. IWE emphasizes two key elements: performing tasks to the best of one's ability and doing so to please Almighty Allah while meeting socio-economic needs. The philosophy of IWE also upholds the principle of prioritizing public interest over self-interest when conflict arises (Beekun, 2006).

The core components of IWE include individual effort, dedication, social relationships, creativity, and a sense of responsibility (Usman Khurram & Shahzad Khurram Khan, 2015). Research has shown that IWE significantly influences employees' attitudes, enhancing job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and job involvement, and fostering positive workplace behaviors (Hayati & Caniago, 2012; Khan et al., 2015; Murtaza et al., 2016; Rokhman, 2010). Supporting this, a quantitative study by Khadijah et al. (2015) involving Malaysian employees found that dimensions of IWE – such as effort, teamwork, honesty and accountability – strongly predict ethical work behavior among employees.

Scholars have long debated the comparison between Islamic Work Ethics (IWE) and the Protestant Work Ethic (PWE) as proposed by Max Weber in 1985. PWE emphasizes values such as frugality, individualism, discipline and hard work. Controversy arises from Weber's assertion that Muslim societies lack the capacity to develop their economies. He argued that concepts like Sufism in Islam, which discourages materialism, might hinder the development of a capitalist mindset akin to PWE (Rokhman, 2010).

However, Weber's claim has been contested, as Islamic teachings view work as an integral part of life and a potential contributor to economic progress. Supporting this rebuttal, a study by Arslan (2000) compared British and Turkish managers using PWE traits. The findings revealed that Turkish managers outperformed their British counterparts in all PWE characteristics. This evidence undermines criticisms of IWE regarding economic behavior and highlights its compatibility with economic development (Arslan, 2001).

Additionally, numerous scholars argue that Islamic values, beliefs, and perspectives shape the work attitudes and management practices of Muslim employees (Ali, 2009; Ali & Al-Owaihan, 2008; Randeree & Faramawy,

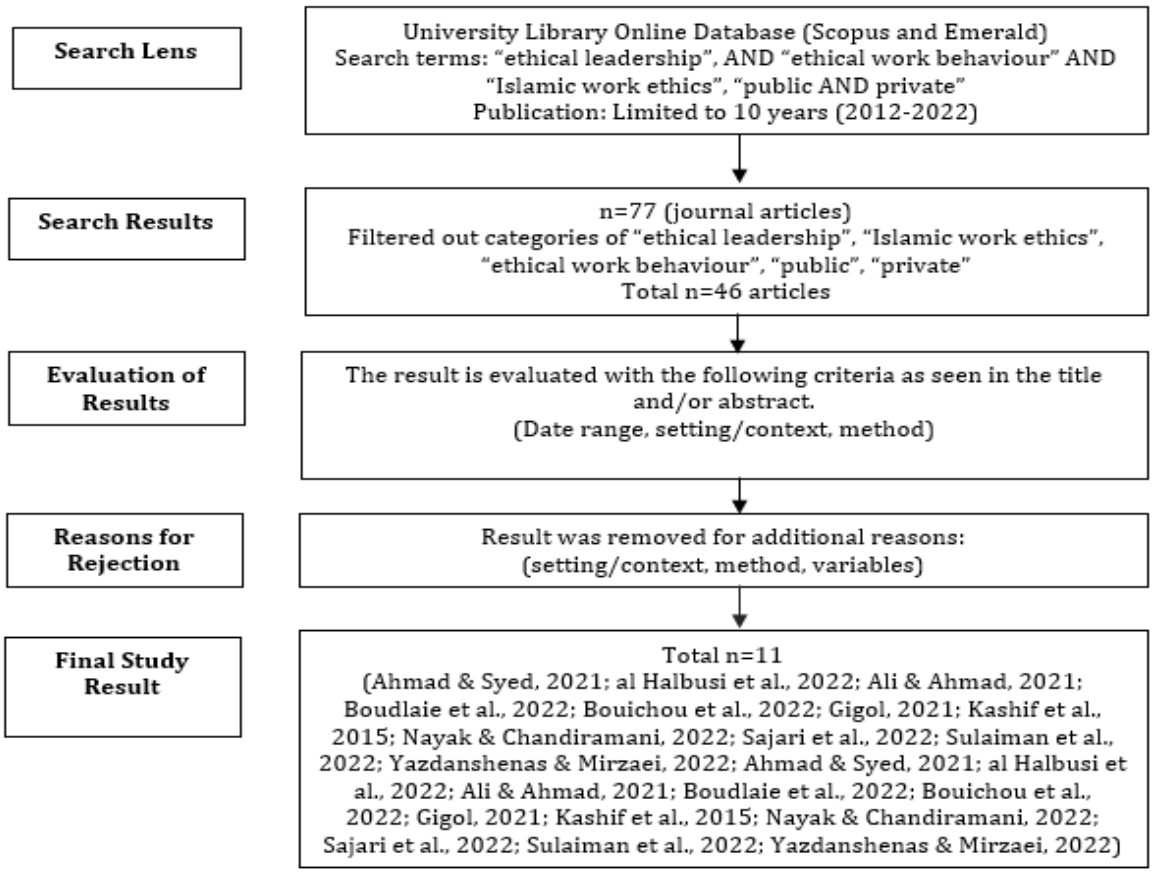
2011). Rokham (2010) describes Islamic Work Ethics (IWE) as a set of moral principles and values related to work that distinguish between right and wrong from an Islamic perspective. These principles emphasize ethical behavior in the workplace, grounded in Islamic law and teachings rather than cultural influences.

## 3. Methodology

This review utilized a meta-analytic approach to assess the impact of ethical leadership and Islamic Work Ethics (IWE) on employee's ethical work behavior. This method has been widely applied across various disciplines, including medicine, ecology, social sciences, business and more. Meta-analysis helps to consolidate findings from previous research, offering valuable insights for designing future studies by summarizing existing knowledge and identifying areas for further investigation.

This study examines published research articles from 2012 until 2022 related to the influence of ethical leadership and IWE on ethical work behavior. Firstly, using online database library services, a computer-based search was undertaken for published studies with the keywords of "ethical leadership", "ethical work behavior", "Islamic work ethics", "public" and "private" institutions. The search process used Scopus and Emerald Insight databases provided via the university's online library. The search was limited to the title, year of publication, and article type (journal article). The result of the first steps was the creation of 77 articles. This result included only relevant published articles to maintain the reputation of the findings. Then, for the second stage, the articles were downloaded to enable the researcher to determine a full-access paper. However, out of 77 articles, only 46 articles can be accessed. The last step is a filtering process to ensure the article does meet the context of employees in a public or private institution. Any irrelevant context such as non-employed individuals and students is eliminated in the final stage. Then the articles were filtered again to match specific content criteria. At the end of this stage, there were a total of 11 articles. All those 11 articles were thoroughly read and reviewed.

**Figure 1: Meta-Analysis Step**



## 4. Results

### The Influence of Ethical Leadership and Islamic Work Ethics on Ethical Work Behavior

Table 1 is a selection of publications that describe the influence of ethical leadership and Islamic work ethics on the ethical work behavior of employees.

**Table 1: Selected articles on ethical leadership, Islamic work ethics, and ethical work behavior**

| No | Author/years | Title | Findings |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Kashif et al., (2015) | Bringing Islamic tradition back to management: A new Islamic Dawah-based framework to foster workplace ethics | Findings from this study stated that the older and younger generations of workers put different emphases on Islamic work ethics and ethical behavior. The older generation stimulates the practice of Islamic work ethics meanwhile the younger generation is more likely to establish their understanding of Islamic values. |
| 2. | Boudlaie et al., (2022) | Investigating the effect of humility of Muslim leaders on the moral behaviors of followers and spirituality at work in Islamic Society | The results indicated that leader humility has a strong and positive influence on moral conduct in the workplace and has been shown to positively impact employee's work ethics. |
| 3. | al Halbusi et al., (2022) | Do ethical leaders enhance employee ethical behaviors? Organizational justice and ethical climate as dual mediators and leader moral attentiveness as a moderator: Evidence from Iraq's emerging market | The findings of this article align with a Western theoretical framework while introducing a new perspective tailored to Muslims in the emerging Arabic Market. Subordinates are likely to adopt the values of ethical leadership as a way to enhance their focus on organizational justice and moral awareness, aiming to achieve greater peace and happiness. At the same time, ethical leadership will impact ethical behavior and offer practical insights for fostering a more ethical environment, strengthening corporate social responsibility (CSR), improving leader-member exchanges (LMX) advancing business ethics, and boosting economic potential in a globally competitive market. |
| 4. | Yazdanshenas & Mirzaei, (2022) | Leadership integrity and employee's success: role of ethical leadership, psychological capital and psychological empowerment | This study was conducted to explore the impact of ethical leadership on employees' psychological empowerment and psychological capital. The results reveal that leader integrity and ethical leadership positively influence employee success, with psychological capital and psychological empowerment acting as moderating factors. Additionally, leader integrity indirectly affects employee success by shaping employees' perceptions of ethical leadership. |
| 5. | Nayak & Chandiramani, 2022 | A crisis that changed the banking scenario in India: Exploring the role of ethics in business | This case study was carried out to examine the role of business ethics and transparency in a remote working setting within the banking sector. The results indicated that fostering ethical behavior requires organizations to |

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|---|---|---|---|
| | | | provide consistent, predefined frameworks embedded with moral considerations. |
| 6. | Sulaiman et al., (2022) | The role of religiosity in ethical decision making: A study on Islam and the Malaysian Workplace | The research was carried out among Malaysian employees from both the public and private sectors. It examined five factors influencing the connection between Islamic religiosity and ethical intention: perceived importance of ethical issues, moral judgment, ego strength, spiritual intention and conscience. The findings revealed that conscience was the only factor mediating the relationship between religiosity and ethical intention. |
| 7. | Ahmad & Syed, (2021) | Meta-characteristic of Islamic ethics and moral consistency in Islamic Banking | This study emphasized that consuming Islamic products can encourage consistent moral behavior over time. The findings revealed that the lack of key meta-characteristics in Islamic ethics – such as *ubudiyah* (devotion), *akhirah* (afterlife accountability) and *tawado* (humility) – leads to moral inconsistency, manifesting as unethical behavior. In conclusion, the Islamic ethical framework fosters ethical behavior while deterring unethical practices. |
| 8. | M. F. M. Ali & Ahmad, 2021 | Relationship between leader integrity, religiosity and Islamic work ethics: A conceptual model | This study explores the connection between leader integrity, religiosity, and Islamic work ethics within a business organization. The findings suggest that leader integrity plays a significant role in enhancing the Islamic work ethics of subordinates. |
| 9. | Sajari et al., (2022) | Factors influencing the level of ethics and integrity in the Malaysian public sector | The study focused on Chief Integrity Officers (CIOs) to examine the factors affecting ethics and integrity in the Malaysian public sector. The findings reveal that the competencies, work performance, and ethical climate fostered by CIOs significantly influence the overall level of ethics and integrity. CIOs are vital in cultivating and sustaining a transparent ethical environment to uphold high moral standards. |
| 10. | Gigol, (2021) | Leadership, religiousness, state ownership of an enterprise and unethical pro-organizational behavior: The mediating role of organizational identification | This study aims to determine whether organizational identification mediates the relationships between state-owned enterprises, authentic leadership, religiosity and unethical pro-organizational behavior. The findings indicate that state ownership of enterprises, authentic leadership and religiosity are associated with higher levels of organizational identification. |
| 11. | Bouichou et al., (2022) | How Corporate Social Responsibility Boosts Corporate Financial and non-financial Performance: The Moderating Role of Ethical Leadership | This research was carried out among private companies in Morocco. The results indicate a strong positive relationship between corporate social responsibility (CSR) and organizational performance. Additionally, ethical leadership contributes to enhancing both the financial and non-financial performance of the organization. |

Various studies conducted by researchers on the topic of ethics. Table 1 above presented previous studies on ethical work behavior and/or ethical behavior that have been studied in many countries within the context of public and private institutions. The result has presented the strong influence of ethical leadership and Islamic work ethics on the ethical behavior of employees. The similarities of all findings view that ethics is an important aspect of the success of individuals and organizations. However, as far as the researcher is concerned, no studies in the Western context undertake the concept of religiosity from the Islamic work ethics perspective. As a result, there is potential utility of the Islamic work ethics concept being developed in a non-Muslim context as Islamic work ethics can be adopted as it prioritizes noble values such as preserving human dignity and emphasizing obedience and diligence at work.

**Discussion**

This review intends to assess the influence of ethical leadership and IWE on ethical work behavior in the context of public and private institutions. Results from a literature search within the year 2012-2022 identified 11 studies. Out of the 11 studies selected, the majority of studies on ethical behavior employed a quantitative approach (n=9) and only two studies from Kashif et al., (2015) and Nayak & Chandiramani, (2022) employed a qualitative study. The findings of the literature search are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2: Findings of literature search (2012-2022)**

| Method | Frequency | Author (s) |
|---|---|---|
| Qualitative | 2 | Kashif et al., (2015); Nayak & Chandiramani, (2022) |
| Quantitative | 9 | Ahmad & Syed, (2021); al Halbusi et al., (2022); Ali & Ahmad,( 2021); Boudlaie et al., (2022); Bouichou et al., (2022); Gigol, (2021); Sajari et al., (2022); Sulaiman et al., (2022); Yazdanshenas & Mirzaei, (2022) |

All of the selected studies show similarities in that ethical work behavior leads to positive long-term effects for employees such as job satisfaction, job performance, good human relations, and a high level of accountability. Moreover, past research has identified the influence of ethical leadership also may contribute to the ethical work behavior of employees. Ethical leaders will view ethics as an important aspect of their work. They believe that ethical behavior is important to ensure the overall success of the organization. It has been discovered through the findings of previous research that ethical leaders have a significant impact on their employees' trust. Because trust is the quality that ethical leaders must possess, ethical workers will not exist in an environment where there is an untrustworthy leader. Thus, employees regard ethical leaders as individuals who consistently put moral concerns and prioritize ethics. Consequently, the employee will constantly look for ways to ensure moral principles introduced by ethical leaders are accepted and followed.

This review identifies two studies conducted in qualitative research. There is a scarcity of qualitative research about ethical behavior issues. In summary, Kashif et al., (2015) used a qualitative approach to study Islamic tradition in management development based on the Islamic Dawah framework. Given the absence of literature to propose a framework based on Islamic tradition, an interpretative approach opted for this study as the concept has not been grounded by theory, and a details analysis of the phenomenon is needed. An interview was conducted with 40 leaders. To draw a relevant conclusion, participants from a varied range of backgrounds were chosen for the study sample. The respondents are a mix of young and old leaders, individuals acquainted with Islamic practices, and members of the general public who may not be well-versed in practicing Islam.

Meanwhile, a study by Nayak & Chandiramani (2022) employed a qualitative case-study approach as a method. Case studies are good for describing, comparing, evaluating, and understanding different aspects of a research problem. The author of this research aims to explore the importance of business ethics, information sharing, and transparency by scouting the case of the banking industry in India. Researchers expose several fraud mismanagement cases in the Indian banking sector and draw a finding that ethical conduct is required as a mechanism to prevent the incident.

Looking at the past studies on IWE, there is a utility to embarking on the concept of IWE in organizations that will result in consistent performance of ethical behavior in employees. Apart from that, findings reveal that IWE

emphasizes justice and generosity in the workplace, and views engagement in economic activities as an obligation. Therefore, as a comparison, unlike PWE, the IWE places more emphasize on intention than the result. To conclude, the IWE promotes ethical conduct and prevents unethical conduct.

## 5. Agenda for Future Research and Conclusion

Theoretically, the role of ethics has been examined in diverse situations and contexts. However, based on this meta-analytic review, a few suggestions for future research direction have been identified. First, for methodological approach, future studies could employ mixed-method studies and multi-level studies. Mixed-method studies combining qualitative and quantitative approaches are good to execute as ethics involve behavior that portrays the values upheld by the individual. Most questions in the quantitative approach are self-reported questionnaires resulting in response bias. Even though the qualitative approach does have some weaknesses, especially discrepancies in interpreting the data, mixed-method studies might balance out the limitations of each method.

Secondly, a multi-level study should be carried out to allow the effects of variables at different levels of analysis. Ethics has been researched at individual and organizational levels. Variables at the organizational level can be a strong predictor to influence the individual level. The result of this meta-analytical review signifies the strong influence of ethical leadership on the ethical work behavior of employees. This shows that a multi-level study can be a good methodology for future research to assess the effects of other constructs at a different level of organizational hierarchy.

## Conclusion

This study aimed to achieve three main objectives. First, it reviewed existing theoretical and empirical research on the impact of ethical leadership on employees' ethical work behavior. The findings highlight that leaders significantly shape employees' attitudes, with ethical leaders serving as role models and inspiring ethical actions among their team members. The second objective was to assess the influence of Islamic work ethics on employees' ethical work behavior. Empirical evidence shows that Islamic work ethics contribute to positive organizational outcomes and foster ethical behavior in the workplace. Finally, the third objective was to analyze the methodological approaches used in previous studies on ethical leadership, Islamic work ethics and ethical work behavior. A methodological gap was identified, prompting future researchers to provide recommendations and explore new avenues for advancing research on ethical work behavior.

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