

Ethical Leadership and Organisational Discipline: A Case Study on a Telecommunication Organisation in Oman

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the impact of ethical leadership dimensions (ethical role modelling, reward and punishment, and communicating about ethics and values) on organisational discipline in Omantel, a telecommunication organisation in Oman. Using random sampling, data was collected from employees working at Omantel, Dhofar Governorate. Additionally, a multiple regression analysis was used to investigate the impact of ethical leadership on organisational discipline. The study's results showed that only two dimensions of ethical leadership, namely ethical role modelling and communicating about ethics and values, had an effect on organisational discipline, whereas reward and punishment had no significant effect on organisational discipline.

Keywords: Ethical leadership, organisational discipline, Omantel, Oman.

1. INTRODUCTION

There are differences in the literature regarding ethics in organisations (Brown & Trevio, 2006), which is due to the increasing spread of business scandals and unethical practices both inside and outside the organisations (Colvin, 2003; Mehta, 2003; Mendonca, 2001). This suggests that qualified leaders armed with good morals are necessary (Dradkeh & Al-Mutairy, 2017).

Recent research showed how ethical leadership reduces destructive behaviours and immoral practices, such as absenteeism, organisational cronyism and integrity violations (Hassan et al., 2014; Huberts et al., 2007; Mayer et al., 2009; Riaz & Zaman, 2018). On the other hand, research also revealed how ethical leadership enhances and positively affects healthy behaviours and activities, such as organisational commitment, job satisfaction, employee ethical behaviour (Lu & Lin, 2014), total quality management (Ekriem, 2012), trust (Van den Akker et al., 2009), administrative creativity (Alshaier, 2017), organisational performance (Butt et al., 2016) and employee well-being (Rantika & Yustina, 2017; Yang, 2014).

Organisations can survive, grow and succeed not only by having the required technology, capital and facilities but also by having human resources that are committed to accomplishing their goals (Madiawati & Pradana, 2016).

Moreover, the recruitment and selection of the right person for the organisation is a result of leadership. If the human resources manager recruits the wrong person, this will be due to their unethical actions because they knew that the organisation required a more capable person than the person who they recruited. This type of issue falls under the criteria of leadership ethics, the implementation of which makes the job a discipline (Lu & Lin, 2014).

The employees who do not behave according to the set rules and policies are punished or receive penalties from the organisation. Unpredictable behaviour is unacceptable within the organisation; therefore, the company needs to develop rules to ensure employees' discipline (De Roeck & Farooq, 2018) and that employees maintain the proper performance levels (Kusasih & Tridayanti, 2020).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Ethical leadership

Brown, Treviño and Harrison (2005) defined ethical leadership as a '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'. Furthermore, Resick et al. (2006) defined it as leading the subordinates in a manner that respects their dignity and rights.

Trevino et al. (2000) suggested the dual pillar method of ethical leadership, which differentiates between a moral person who has certain traits (integrity, honesty and trustworthiness), behaviours (does the right things, is open and concerned about

people) and decision-making skills (strong values, fair) and a moral manager who has the following roles:

Ethical role modelling: Ethical managers set a good example for the subordinates to follow on both professional and private levels (Weaver et al., 2005). By observing their leaders' behaviour, subordinates can learn what to do and what not to do. They will copy everything, both moral and immoral, from their leaders (Kaptein, 2002).

Reward and punishment (reinforcement): To ensure the repetition of moral conducts and refrain from immoral conducts, moral leaders must reward appropriate conducts and punish the negative deviations. This will guarantee the commitment of followers (Brown et al., 2005; Lasthuizen, 2008). Grojean et al. (2004) revealed that rewarding behaviours that support ethical standards will help when making ethical decisions and spread the moral culture within the organisation.

Communicating about ethics and values: In this method, the leader influences the moral behaviour of their followers. The leader must disseminate the moral principles and values among the followers, clarify anything necessary to understand the tasks, norms and role expectations and provide them with guidance to complement their actions (de Hoogh & den Hartog, 2008; Piccolo et al., 2010). Ethical leaders usually encourage their followers to take part in the decision-making process and listen to their suggestions and concerns through mentoring and continuous development (Khuntia & Suar, 2004). Additionally, they are open (extraverted) and solve their employees' problems (Huberts et al., 2007). Moral leadership values transparency in all behaviours and activities, providing the followers with the reasons behind the decisions (Heres & Lasthuizen, 2012)

2.2. Organisational discipline

There are varying definitions of organisational discipline, and it is an important factor that supports the quality of human resources (Fahlepi, 2020). Some definitions focus on the management actions that encourage employees' compliance with organisational rules and standards, such as Werther and Davis' (1993) definition. Others focus on the employee's awareness and willingness to comply with the regulations and norms of the organisation to improve the quality and amount of work (Elçi & Alpan, 2009; Fitria, 2019).

Calhoon (2008) stated the following three distinctive characteristics of discipline: first, it is an action of self-control (adhering to rules); second, discipline is a negative approach (refraining from undesired activities); and third, discipline is a penal approach (punishment for the wrong activities).

2.3. Ethical leadership and organisational discipline

Previous studies discussed the impact of leadership and ethical leadership on organisational discipline. Saragih et al. (2018) revealed the positive impact of ethical leadership on Indonesian telecommunication employees' discipline, and Liyas (2017) studied the bank sector and found that leadership had a significant impact on employee work discipline. The influence of leadership on employee discipline was analysed by Fitria et al. (2019), where they discovered a positive, significant impact of leadership on employee discipline.

Many studies explored the impact or relationship of ethical leadership on or with organisational variables, such as followers' behavioural outcomes, e.g. job satisfaction and affective commitment (Ghahroodi et al., 2013; Lotfi et al., 2018; Toor and Ofori, 2009; Zhu et al., 2004). Babalola et al. (2018) examined the impact of ethical leadership on workplace conflicts, focusing on relationship, task and process conflicts. Bhana and Bayat (2020) analysed the effect of ethical leadership on employees' effective work practices represented by employees' relationships, performance and behaviour, whereas Kalshoven et al. (2011) examined its effect on organisational citizenship behaviour. In addition, trust and commitment among employees were tested as dependent variables for ethical leadership by Mohiuddin and Hossain (2016) and Van den Akker et al. (2009). Ekriem (2012) found that the levels of applying total quality management were influenced by ethical leadership behaviours in hospitals. The impact of ethical leadership on moral community and change was analysed by Sama and Shoaf (2007), Neubert et al. (2009) and Ali and Altaei (2018).

The following hypotheses are suggested based on the literature review to examine the proposed impact of ethical leadership on organisational discipline:

H1: Ethical role modelling has an impact on the organisational discipline.

H2: Reward and punishment have an impact on the organisational discipline.

H3: Communicating about ethics and values has an impact on the organisational discipline.

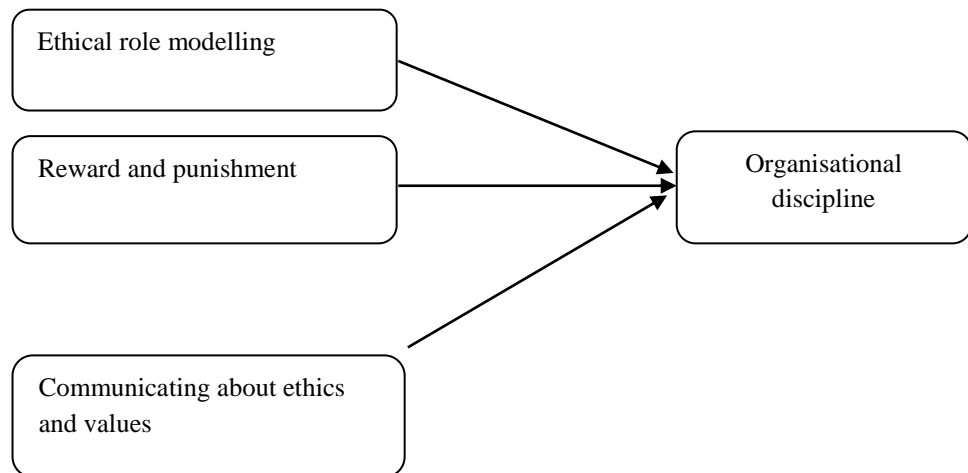


Figure 1: Proposed theoretical model

3. METHODOLOGY

The aim of the current study is to investigate the impact of ethical leadership on organisational discipline in the telecommunication industry in the Sultanate of Oman, focusing on Omantel, which is the first and largest telecommunication mobile service provider in Oman (Omantel website, 2020). The study sample consisted of employees and management at Omantel in the Dhofar region, and the total sample size consisted of 150 managers and employees. One hundred questionnaires were randomly distributed to respondents over two sessions. In the first session, the management of the Omantel Salalah branch only approved distributing 50 questionnaires for confidentiality; however, the researcher then got approval to distribute the rest of the sample. All distributed questionnaires were completed by the respondents; therefore, they were valid for the statistical analysis. The survey method that was used to collect the data was distributing questionnaires to the respondents during official working hours at Omantel Salalah. The questionnaire consisted of the following three sections: the first section included demographic data about the participants; the second section included questions about ethical leadership based on Brown et al. (2005); and the third section included questions about organisational discipline based on Alotaibey (2013). The Likert 5-points scale was used to format the survey questions, and the answers were ranked from (1) strongly disagrees to (5) strongly agree. The data obtained from the survey was analysed using SPSS 25.0 software. Most statistical tests, such as frequencies, reliability analyses, correlation and multiple regression analyses, were used independently.

3.1. Respondents

The frequency and percentage were used for the demographic variables of the respondents in the current study, as shown in Table I. Approximately 37% of respondents were females, which reveals Omantel's aim to recruit females. Recruiting young employees is another strategy that was revealed from the high percentage of employees (70%) who were less than 35 years old, which offers staffing opportunities for graduates who have up-to-date knowledge. Most of the respondents were from managerial staff who were aware of moral issues and practices.

Table I: Frequencies of Demographic Variables

Variables	Categories	Number	Percentage
Gender	Male	63	63.0
	Female	37	37.0
Age (years)	Less than 25	14	14.0
	25–35	56	56.0
	35–45	20	20.0
	Above 45	10	10.0
Position	Employee	42	42.0
	Supervisor	37	37.0
	Manager	21	21.0
Total		102	100%

3.2. Reliability, standard deviation and mean

Table II shows that all variables in this study have high levels of reliability, as Cronbach's Alpha values were very high, ranging between 0.85–0.94. All dimensions of ethical leadership were available at high levels; the highest one was ethical role modelling (3.97), and the lowest one was reward and punishment (3.68). The discipline of Oman Tel employees was at a high level (3.96), and the standard deviation of all variables was less than 1, except for discipline, which was slightly more than 1.

Table II: Mean, Standard Deviation and Cronbach's Alpha

No	Variables	M	SD	Cronbach Alpha
1	Ethical role modelling	3.9700	.62692	0.85
2	Reward and punishment	3.6800	.90319	0.94
3	Communicating about ethics and values	3.7400	.94409	0.93
4	Discipline	3.9550	1.07754	0.92

3.3. Correlation

The correlation among ethical leadership dimensions and discipline was examined using the Pearson test. The results showed a strong, positive, significant relationship between communicating about ethics and values and discipline (.786) at the 0.01 level. Moreover, the correlation between reward and punishment and discipline was low (.197).

Table III: Correlation Among Ethical Leadership Dimensions and Discipline

	1	2	3	4
Ethical role modelling	1			
Reward and punishment	.085	1		
Communicating about ethics and values	.307**	.209*	1	
Discipline	.369**	.197*	.786**	1

* $P < 0.05$, ** $P < 0.01$, $n=100$

3.4. Multiple regression analysis

A multiple regression analysis was used to test the hypothesis. Table IV shows that role modelling has a significant impact on discipline ($B = .242$, $T = 2.174$, $P < 0.05$), which means that we can accept the H1 hypothesis. As reward and punishment had no impact on organisational discipline, H2 was rejected ($B = .042$, $T = .558$, $P > 0.05$). H3 was accepted to confirm the effect of communicating about ethics and values on organisational discipline, as its statistical values were $B = .834$, $T = 10.989$, $P < 0.001$. The R-Square value for the total ethical leadership's facets was about 64% of organisational discipline among the sample members, and the F value (42.04) indicated the validity of the study model at a significant level (0.001).

Table IV: Multiple Regression Analysis

Independent Variables	B	T	R	R ²	F
Ethical role modelling	.242	2.174*			
Reward and punishment	.042	.558			
Communicating about ethics and values	.834	10.989***			
Discipline			.799	.639	42.04***

* $P < 0.05$, *** $P < 0.001$, $n = 100$

4. DISCUSSION

The findings of the statistics show that ethical leadership dimensions (ethical role modelling, reward and punishment and communicating about ethics and values) were available at high levels, i.e. the managers and employees of Omantel have a good awareness of ethical practices and rules, which in turn, builds a moral and healthy environment among Omantel staff. This result is consistent with Saragih et al. (2018), who found high levels of ethical leadership in an Indonesian telecommunication company. Similarly, discipline among Omantel staff and management was found at high levels. Additionally, the results showed a strong, positive correlation between ethical leadership and organisational discipline. These findings suggest that if the organisations' managements want to increase organisational discipline, they should follow ethical leadership in the workplace.

The current findings have several implications for leaders who aim to create a work environment where employees can work according to the regulation rules, which will cause their behaviours to match the organisational discipline. Specifically, leaders could serve as ethical role models for employees to demonstrate the desired levels of

organisational discipline. When the employees have a high orientation toward work ethics, through communication with their ethical leaders, they feel that they are responsible and obligated to perform their job. Therefore, the leaders' ethics affect employee discipline at the Indonesian Telecommunication Company (Saragih et al, 2018). Ethical leadership at all levels within the organisation increase commitment to the organisation and create an overall ethical climate (Kottke & Pelletier, 2013; Ruiz-Palomino et al., 2011)

Zoghbi-Manrique-de-Lara and Suárez-Acosta (2014) found a positive relationship between workers' perceptions of ethical leadership and interactional justice towards colleagues. Ethical leadership was found to be positively related to the ethical behaviour of employees (Koh & Boo, 2001). Tu and Lu (2013) confirmed the positive relationship between ethical leadership and innovative behaviours of workers. Moreover, Rubin et al. (2010) examined how ethical leadership behaviours helped 96 leaders to get promoted.

To support the employees' discipline, leaders must remain in contact with their followers through effective and continuous communication, dialogues and discussions. Van den Akker et al. (2009) found that communicating using ethics and values was important to keep the employees' trust. Additionally, communicating using ethics and values helps leaders to handle any problems and avoid the consequences from negative repercussions (Yukl, 2013). Moreover, it boosts collaborative work with management to increase job effectiveness (Mohrman et al., 1995).

1. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE STUDIES

This study has several limitations, such as other aspects that need to be addressed in future studies. This study only examines the effect of ethical leadership on organisational discipline; therefore, future studies may examine other constructs, such as work justice, quality of work life and organisational culture. Second, as this study follows the quantitative approach for examining moral and behavioural variables, future researchers may try to use both quantitative and qualitative approaches to get more reliable results. Third, as this study is limited to the telecommunication sector, future researchers could examine other sectors, such as the manufacturing, education and medical sectors, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the above limitations, the findings of this study contribute significantly to the literature of ethical leadership and organisational discipline.

2. CONCLUSION

The current study revealed that ethical leadership factors are present at high levels at Omantel. Additionally, organisational discipline is available at high levels among Omantel employees and management. Ethical role modelling and communicating about ethics and values has a significant impact on organisational discipline, whereas reward and punishment does not affect organisational discipline at Omantel.

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