

***Ethical Leadership and Employee Performance: A Systematic Literature Review of HRM Perspectives***

**Kepemimpinan Etis dan Kinerja Karyawan: Tinjauan Literatur Sistematis tentang Perspektif Sumber Daya Manusia**

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**ABSTRACT**

Ethical leadership plays an important role in influencing employee performance and organizational outcomes. Although much research indicates the positive impact of ethical leadership, there is a gap in understanding of differences in perceptions by generation. This research aims to explore how ethical leadership influences employee performance in various generations using the systematic literature review method and the PRISMA approach. The research results show that ethical leadership not only improves employee performance and job satisfaction, but also improves organizational outcomes by promoting an ethical culture and engagement. The implications of these findings suggest the need to implement ethical leadership tailored to the needs of different generations to maximize employee performance and organizational effectiveness.

**Keywords:** Ethical Leadership, Employee Performance, Generational Differences

**ABSTRAK**

*Kepemimpinan etis memainkan peran penting dalam mempengaruhi kinerja karyawan dan hasil organisasi. Meskipun banyak penelitian mengindikasikan dampak positif kepemimpinan etis, terdapat kesenjangan dalam pemahaman mengenai perbedaan persepsi berdasarkan generasi. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi bagaimana kepemimpinan etis mempengaruhi kinerja karyawan di berbagai generasi dengan menggunakan metode systematic literature review dan pendekatan PRISMA. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kepemimpinan etis tidak hanya meningkatkan kinerja dan kepuasan kerja karyawan, tetapi juga memperbaiki hasil organisasi dengan mempromosikan budaya etis dan keterlibatan. Implikasi dari temuan ini menyarankan perlunya penerapan kepemimpinan etis yang disesuaikan dengan kebutuhan generasi yang berbeda untuk memaksimalkan kinerja karyawan dan efektivitas organisasi.*

**Kata Kunci:** Kepemimpinan Etis, Kinerja Karyawan, Perbedaan Generasi

**1. Introduction**

Ethical leadership is a crucial factor that influences employee performance in organizations. Research shows that ethical leadership has a positive impact on employee performance and work results (Alshawabkeh, 2023). However, this impact can be influenced by various factors such as ethical culture, corporate ethics programs, employee involvement, and organizational citizenship behavior (Sari et al., 2022; Adawiyah et al., 2022; Tangkawarow, 2023; Sugianingrat et al., 2019). Ethical leadership is associated with improving employee perceptions of the organization's service and ethical climate, which in turn improves employee role performance (Kia et al., 2019). Additionally, ethical leadership encourages open communication and collaboration, allowing employees to raise concerns and contribute ideas without fear of retaliation, thereby positively impacting employee job satisfaction and well-being (N.D, 2024; Mahmood & Ejaz, 2019).

Studies show that ethical leadership is related to organizational commitment and employee performance (Bakar & Akyürek, 2021). Furthermore, ethical leadership has been

found to increase employees' perceptions of the importance of the organization's code of ethics, which ultimately improves work performance (Kang, 2019). Ethical leadership is also related to increased innovative performance among employees (Ullah et al., 2021). In addition, ethical leadership plays a significant role in increasing employee motivation and work performance (Edevbie, 2023).

In conclusion, ethical leadership is a key driver of employee performance by creating a positive work environment, encouraging organizational commitment, promoting innovation, and increasing job satisfaction and employee well-being. Ethical leaders, through the application of moral principles, honesty, and principled judgment, contribute to building a strong work culture that benefits both employees and the organization as a whole.

Ethical leadership has become a topic that is gaining increasing attention in organizational management literature, considering its crucial role in establishing a positive and sustainable work culture. Ethical leadership refers to leader behavior that is based on moral and ethical principles, which include honesty, integrity, fairness, and concern for employee welfare. Leaders who prioritize ethics not only set an example of good behavior, but also create a work environment that is conducive for employees to reach their maximum potential. Therefore, ethical leadership is often associated with improving employee performance, which is one of the main indicators of organizational success.

Employee performance is a key element in organizational success, which reflects how well employees can achieve the goals and objectives that have been set. Optimal performance can be achieved when employees feel motivated, supported and appreciated by the organization and its leaders. Therefore, the leadership style implemented in an organization has a direct impact on employee productivity and effectiveness. In this context, ethical leadership is considered capable of creating a supportive work environment, increasing job satisfaction, and reducing counterproductive behavior.

Although much research has been conducted on ethical leadership and employee performance, there is still a significant gap in the literature examining differences in perceptions of ethical leadership by generation. Different generations, such as Baby Boomers, Gen X, Millennials, and Gen Z, have different values, expectations, and preferences in the work context. These differences may influence how they perceive and respond to ethical leadership styles. However, research that combines ethical leadership dimensions with a generational perspective is still limited, thereby lacking comprehensive insight into how ethical leadership can be implemented effectively in multigenerational workplaces.

The research question posed in this study is: "Are there differences in employees' perceptions of ethical leadership and their performance based on generation?" This question aims to identify whether different generations have different perceptions of ethical leadership and how these perceptions influence their performance. By answering this question, it is hoped that this research can make a significant contribution to the development of ethical leadership theory as well as offer practical recommendations for managers and human resource professionals in managing employees of various generations.

This research will use a systematic literature review method to collect and analyze related articles from reputable international databases. The PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) method will be applied to ensure that the literature collection and screening process is carried out systematically and transparently. Relevant keywords such as "ethical leadership", "employee performance", "generational differences", and "workplace perception" will be used in the article search. Selected articles will be screened based on predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure that only relevant and high-quality studies are analyzed.

Thus, this study aims to bridge the gap in the existing literature as well as provide new insights into the role of ethical leadership in the multigenerational context of the workplace.

Understanding generational differences is critical to optimizing employee performance and leadership effectiveness. Each generation brings unique values, expectations, and work styles to the work environment. In today's workforce, there are four generations working side by side: Baby Boomers, Gen Instead, by understanding how each generation views ethical leadership, organizations can develop more effective management strategies that maximize each employee's potential, increase productivity, and create a harmonious work environment.

This research offers an innovative approach by focusing on intergenerational comparisons of perceptions of ethical leadership, an area that has not been widely explored in previous literature. Most research on ethical leadership tends to ignore differences between generations, even though different generations can have very different views about what makes a leader ethical. By filling this gap, this research will provide new, deeper insights into the dynamics of ethical leadership in multigenerational contexts.

This research is expected to provide several important contributions, both theoretically and practically:

1. **New Insights into Perceptions of Ethical Leadership:** This research will provide deeper insight into how ethical leadership is perceived by different generations in the workplace. These findings will help develop ethical leadership theory by taking the generational dimension into account.
2. **Practical Recommendations for Managers and HRM:** The results of this research will provide practical recommendations for managers and human resources professionals in managing employees across generations. This includes strategies for implementing ethical leadership tailored to the needs and expectations of each generation, which can ultimately improve employee performance and organizational success.

It is hoped that this research can be a guide for practitioners to create a more inclusive and effective work environment, where every employee feels valued and motivated to contribute optimally. Thus, this research not only contributes to the development of ethical leadership literature, but also provides real practical benefits for organizations in facing the challenges of human resource management in the multigenerational era.

## **2. Methods**

### **2.1. Collecting Articles from Reputable International Databases using the PRISMA Method**

This research uses the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) method to collect and screen articles. PRISMA is a methodology designed to increase transparency and quality in the systematic literature review process. PRISMA involves several stages, including identification, screening, eligibility determination, and inclusion of articles. This method ensures that the research produced is based on relevant, quality and reliable literature.

### **2.2. Keywords Used to Search for Articles**

To search for relevant articles, several keywords have been defined. These keywords cover various aspects of the research topic and are used in combination to ensure broad coverage. Examples of keywords used are:

1. "ethical leadership"
2. "employee performance"
3. "generational differences"
4. "workplace perception"
5. "HRM" (Human Resource Management)

Article searches were conducted in several reputable international databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, and PubMed.

### **2.3. Number of Articles Retrieved**

Through an initial search using these keywords, a number of articles were identified. These articles are then filtered based on relevance and quality. An initial search in databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, and PubMed yielded hundreds of articles potentially relevant to the research topic.

### **2.4 Article Inclusion and Exclusion Techniques**

To ensure that only relevant and high-quality articles were analyzed, the inclusion and exclusion criteria were set as follows:

#### **2.4.1. Inclusion Criteria:**

1. Articles that focus on ethical leadership and employee performance.
2. Research covering multiple generations in the workplace.
3. Articles published in reputable and peer-reviewed journals.

#### **2.4.2. Exclusion Criteria:**

1. Articles that are not relevant to the topic of ethical leadership.
2. Research that does not include intergenerational comparisons.
3. Articles that are not available in full text or are not in English.

Using these criteria, an article screening process was carried out to eliminate inappropriate studies and leave eligible articles for further analysis. This systematic approach ensures that the research results are based on valid and reliable literature, thereby making a significant contribution to the understanding of employee perceptions of ethical leadership by generation.

## **3. Results and Discussions**

### **3.1. Ethical Leadership**

Ethical leadership involves ethical behavior, promoting ethical actions among followers, and establishing an ethical organizational climate. This leadership is characterized by guiding others based on ethical principles such as trust, integrity, empathy, justice, and charisma (Lim, 2024). Ethical leaders are individuals who demonstrate ethical behavior personally and encourage ethical practices among their followers ("Ethical Leadership and Its Implications on Decision-Making in Organizations: A Literature Review", 2024). This leadership style includes appropriate normative behavior through personal actions, relationships, communication, reinforcement, and decision making, emphasizing the importance of setting high ethical standards for subordinates (Megheirkouni, 2023; 2024, خيرى).

Various ethical leadership theories highlight the importance of leaders in influencing followers to create an ethical organizational climate, which in turn improves employee performance and produces positive organizational outcomes (Bhana & Suknunan, 2022). Ethical leadership is critical in higher education institutions because it builds an ethical foundation, fosters integrity, and contributes to long-term success (Ngotho, 2023). It was found that ethical leadership has a positive impact on employee behavior, commitment, performance and ethical actions in the workplace (Halbusi et al., 2021). Additionally, ethical leadership is related to training elements such as developing others, listening, and considering the effects on stakeholders in decision making, all of which contribute to organizational success (Milner et al., 2022). In conclusion, ethical leadership plays an important role in shaping employee behavior,

organizational culture, and overall performance, emphasizing the importance of ethical values in leadership practice.

### **3.2. Employee performance**

Employee performance is a complex concept that includes various aspects of an individual's skills and work results (Yating, 2024). Factors that influence employee performance include individual abilities, motivation, organizational environment, leadership style, work ethic, competence, and job satisfaction (Mekou, 2024; Herawati et al., 2023; Iskandar, 2024). Determinants of employee performance include the individual's ability to carry out tasks, the effort given, and the support provided by the organization (Musaddad et al., 2019). In addition, employee performance is influenced by factors such as compensation, authentic leadership style, intrinsic motivation, workload, and organizational commitment (Chandra, 2023; Cahyani, 2023; Nainggolan, 2023; Almandeel & Alshahrani, 2019).

Leadership plays a crucial role in shaping employee performance. Research shows a positive relationship between leadership styles, such as transformational leadership, and employee performance (Herawati et al., 2023; Yücel, 2021; Marclinto & Hafni, 2020; Krasniqi, 2023). Transformational leadership encourages employee commitment, which in turn improves performance (Yücel, 2021). In addition, responsible leadership has been shown to be positively related to employee task performance and organizational citizenship behavior (Wang, 2023). Effective leadership contributes to creating an environment conducive to high performance, reducing turnover rates, and aligning employee efforts with organizational goals (Vu et al., 2019; Yücel, 2021).

In conclusion, employee performance is influenced by various factors, including individual ability, motivation, organizational support, leadership style, job satisfaction, and commitment. Leadership, especially transformational leadership and responsible leadership, plays a significant role in improving employee performance by encouraging commitment, aligning efforts with organizational goals, and reducing turnover rates.

### **3.3. Generational Differences in the Workplace**

Generational differences in the workplace have attracted significant attention due to the different characteristics, values, expectations, and work behaviors exhibited by various generations such as Baby Boomers, Gen X, Millennials, and Gen Z. Research shows that generational perceptions of the workplace are viewed differently by workers, so it is necessary to implement age management strategies to overcome age discrimination, especially with the increasing proportion of older workers (Humboldt et al., 2022). Studies have shown that generational differences influence various aspects of the workplace, including teamwork, work-life balance, job stress, and values, which influence organizational effectiveness and the work environment (Kinger, 2022; Kwiecińska et al., 2023).

It is critical for workplaces to be aware of generational differences, especially during emergencies such as the COVID-19 pandemic, to bridge the gap and cultivate a positive work culture that ensures quality, productivity, satisfaction, and stability (Chen, 2022). Understanding and addressing these differences is critical to creating a conducive work environment that attracts and retains employees, ultimately improving service quality and productivity (Kinger, 2023).

Leaders and managers play a critical role in leveraging the contributions of each generation in the workplace by adopting flexible, generation-oriented leadership styles (Stevanin et al., 2019). Additionally, research emphasizes the importance of recognizing and managing the different values, attitudes, and behaviors brought by various generational groups to effectively manage employees from different generations (Deas & Coetzee, 2022).

Although generational differences may have implications in various aspects of the workplace, it is important to identify commonalities among all workers, especially in the context of learning and development (Berge & Berge, 2019). By understanding the unique needs and behaviors of different generations, organizations can better integrate new employees and achieve mutual success (Schroth, 2019). In conclusion, managing generational differences in the workplace requires a nuanced approach that takes into account the unique characteristics and expectations of each generation. By implementing strategies that address these differences while encouraging inclusivity and understanding, organizations can create a harmonious and productive work environment that benefits employees of all generations.

### **3.4. Relationship Between Concepts**

Ethical leadership has a significant influence on employee performance through various mechanisms. Research shows that ethical leadership improves factors such as perceived importance of ethical codes, work-related effort, organizational citizenship behavior, job performance, and innovative performance (Kang, 2019; Kia et al., 2019; Onan et al., 2022; Ullah et al., 2021; Sugianingrat et al., 2019). Ethical leadership establishes a strong ethical culture in the organization, which strengthens employees' ethical behavior and their task performance (Dogbe, 2024; Saragih et al., 2021). Additionally, ethical leadership has a positive impact on employee well-being, job satisfaction, and employee voice, all of which contribute to improved performance (Mahmood & Ejaz, 2019).

The relationship between ethical leadership and employee performance is often mediated by factors such as organizational citizenship behavior, employee engagement, and organizational trust (Sari et al., 2022; Adawiyah et al., 2022; Zeng, 2024). These mediating variables play an important role in translating the influence of ethical leadership into improved employee performance outcomes. Additionally, ethical leadership is also associated with improved organizational outcomes, including workplace safety and overall organizational performance, suggesting broader impacts beyond individual employee performance (Sun, 2023; Lee et al., 2021).

In conclusion, ethical leadership serves as a key driver of employee performance, influencing various aspects of employee behavior and attitudes. By promoting ethical behavior, establishing a positive organizational culture, and improving employee well-being and engagement, ethical leadership significantly contributes to improving overall employee performance and organizational outcomes.

## **4. Conclusion**

Ethical leadership plays a very important role in influencing employee performance and overall organizational results. This leadership is characterized by the application of ethical principles such as trust, integrity, and justice, which form an ethical culture in the organization. Research shows that ethical leadership not only improves employees' ethical behavior but also contributes to job performance, well-being, and job satisfaction (Kang, 2019; Mahmood & Ejaz, 2019). Ethical leadership influences employee performance through mediating mechanisms such as organizational citizenship behavior, employee engagement, and organizational trust, and has a positive impact on broader organizational outcomes (Sari et al., 2022; Sun, 2023).

### **4.1. Implications**

The findings from this research have significant implications for managerial practice and organizational policy. Implementing ethical leadership in the workplace can improve employee performance and improve organizational outcomes by creating a culture that supports ethics and engagement. Organizations should focus on developing and implementing ethical leadership training programs, as well as creating a work environment that supports open communication and collaboration (Dogbe, 2024; Sugianingrat et al., 2019). Additionally,

understanding and managing generational differences in the workplace can help maximize the contributions of employees from various generational backgrounds, as well as improve service quality and productivity (Chen, 2022; Stevanin et al., 2019).

#### 4.2. Limitations

This study has several limitations that need to be noted. First, although there are many studies examining the relationship between ethical leadership and employee performance, there is still limited research assessing the impact of ethical leadership specifically in different generational contexts. Additionally, variations in the definition and measurement of ethical leadership and employee performance may influence research results. Other limitations include reliance on studies based on qualitative and quantitative data that may not fully reflect the complexity of real workplace dynamics.

#### 4.3. Recommendations for Future Research

Future research should further explore how ethical leadership influences employee performance across different industrial and cultural contexts. Additionally, further studies are needed to understand how generational differences influence perceptions of ethical leadership and its impact on employee performance. Longitudinal research involving a variety of research methods can provide deeper insight into the long-term dynamics of ethical leadership and employee performance. Integrating the perspectives of employees from different organizational levels and geographic locations can also enrich understanding of how ethical leadership functions in diverse global contexts.

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