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Ethical Leadership in Institutions of Higher Education

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Abstract

A study was conducted on ethical leadership in institutions of higher education. Objectives of the study were: (i). Illustrate theories of ethical leadership in higher education institutions; (ii) Determine importance of ethical leadership in higher education institutions; and (iii) Determine challenges facing ethical leadership in institutions of higher learning. The total number of written texts sampled was 32. The researcher employed non-probability sampling. The type employed was online convenience sampling using web scraping. The interpretivism philosophical assumption led this investigation, and the qualitative approach was used. Case study was employed as a design and content analysis as a data analysis tool. The study found out that ethical leadership is essential in higher education institutions because it establishes a solid ethical foundation, fosters an environment of integrity, and contributes to the institutions' long-term success and viability. It acts as a model for all stakeholders, motivating them to follow ethical concepts and values in their academic pursuits and institutional responsibilities. The challenges of ethical leadership in higher education institutions range from fiscal limits to issues about diversity, governance, and technology. It is vital for higher education institutions to address these concerns in order to maintain their integrity and efficiency. Recommendations included but were not limited to the following: (i) Ethical leaders should model the behaviour they expect from their staff and students. Show integrity, honesty, and justice in your acts and decisions; (ii) Establish Clear Ethical Standards: Develop an ethical code or set of fundamental ideas for your educational community. Ensure that these expectations are communicated to all stakeholders, including staff, students, parents, and the general public; (iii). Encourage Open Communication: Create an environment in which faculty and students can express concerns and report unethical behaviour. Encourage transparency and active listening while responding to remarks; and (iv). Ethical Decision-Making Training: Provide leaders and personnel with ethical decision-making training and professional development opportunities. Use case studies and real-life occurrences to help in discussions about ethical quandaries.

Keywords: Accountability, Ethical Decision Making, Higher Education, Integrity, Respect For Diversity

1. Introduction

Ethical leadership in higher education institutions is a vital and growing topic. Ethical leaders in academia play a critical role in creating their institutions' culture, values, and ethical standards, eventually influencing the quality of education, research, and the development of future leaders. The following are some major ideas and citations that emphasize the need of ethical leadership in higher education: Establishing an Ethical Tone: Higher education's ethical leaders should set the tone for the institution by displaying ethical behaviour and ideals. This includes maintaining academic integrity, supporting diversity and inclusiveness, and cultivating an honest and transparent culture (Cohen, 2020).

Academic Integrity: Ethical leaders should actively oppose academic dishonesty by creating and enforcing stringent academic integrity rules. Students, instructors, and staff must be taught the value of honesty and integrity (Bowers, 2020). Ensure Fairness and Equity: Ethical leaders should advocate initiatives for diversity, equity, and inclusion inside their organizations. They should seek to remove prejudice and foster a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere for all campus community members (Cabrera, 2019).

Ethical Finance and Resource Management: Ethical executives should handle the institution's financial resources properly. They should prioritize transparency in budgeting and financial decisions to maintain the institution's long-term viability (Bowen, 2018). Balancing Stakeholder Interests: Ethical leaders must manage a complicated web of stakeholder interests, which includes students, teachers, staff, alumni, and governing boards. They should emphasize the educational mission while keeping various groups' needs and concerns in mind (Birnbaum, 2019). Promoting Research Integrity: Ethical leaders at research-intensive institutions should assure the highest standards of research integrity. This includes encouraging ethical research

activity, preventing research misconduct, and cultivating an intellectual honesty culture (Steneck, 2007).

Ethical leadership in higher education institutions is critical for building an environment of trust, honesty, and excellence. Academic leaders must be devoted to supporting ethical values, encouraging diversity and inclusion, and guaranteeing prudent resource management in order to accomplish their institutions' educational missions.

1.2 Research Questions

1. What are the theories of ethical leadership that can be applied in higher education institutions?
2. How is ethical leadership important in higher education institutions?
3. Which challenges face ethical leadership in institutions of higher learning?

1.3 Research Objectives

1. Illustrate theories of ethical leadership in higher education institutions.
2. Determine importance of ethical leadership in higher education institutions.
3. Determine challenges facing ethical leadership in institutions of higher learning.

2. 1 Literature Review

2.1.1 Theories of Ethical leadership in higher education institutions

Ethical leadership in higher education institutions is a complicated and growing area, with researchers and experts proposing numerous ideas and frameworks. Some significant theories and methods to ethical leadership in higher education are as follows: Transformational Leadership: According to James MacGregor Burns, transformational leadership theory stresses the leader's ability to inspire and encourage subordinates to attain better levels of performance

(Northouse, 2018). Servant leadership stresses leaders' dedication to servicing the needs of their followers, fostering an environment of empathy and ethical behaviour.

Authentic Leadership: According to Avolio et al. (2005), authentic leadership theory focuses on leaders being true to themselves and their principles, which can build an ethical company culture. **Ethical Decision-Making Frameworks:** To guide their actions and decisions, leaders in higher education frequently employ ethical decision-making frameworks such as the "Four Component Model" or "Principle-Based Ethics" (Rest, 1984). **Social Justice Leadership:** In higher education, social justice leadership focuses on resolving equity, diversity, and inclusion challenges within institutions (Harris, 2010).

Ethical Leadership Development: Ciulla et al. (2004) emphasize the necessity of leadership development programs that include ethics and values. **Cultural and Contextual Approaches:** The cultural and contextual characteristics of higher education institutions can influence ethical leadership (Mendenhall & Osland, 2002). **Virtue Ethics:** Virtue ethics is concerned with the development of ethical leaders who have virtuous attributes and character traits. **Relational Leadership:** This method emphasizes the need of developing positive connections and trust among leaders, faculty, staff, and students. **Educational Leadership Theories:** Educational leadership theories, such as the instructional leadership model, can help with ethical leadership in higher education institutions (Hallinger, 2011).

The aforementioned ideas and methodologies can be integrated and adapted to solve the unique ethical issues faced by leaders in higher education institutions, where fostering academic excellence and ethical behaviour is of the utmost importance. To develop complete ethical leadership solutions, researchers and practitioners frequently draw on diverse views.

2.1.2 Importance of Ethical Leadership in Higher Education Institutions

Ethical leadership is critical in higher education institutions because it sets the tone for the entire academic community and influences ethical conduct and culture inside the school. Here are some essential themes emphasizing the significance of ethical leadership in higher education: **Creating an Integrity Culture:** Higher education leaders who demonstrate honesty, integrity, and ethical behaviour serve as role models. This sets the bar for academics, staff, and students, fostering an integrity-based culture throughout the institution (Trevino et al., 2005).

Improving Trust and Accountability: Ethical leaders foster trust among stakeholders such as students, parents, faculty, and the larger community. This trust is required for effective institutional governance and decision-making, as well as accountability for acts and decisions (Bass et al., 1999). **Ethical Decision-Making Promotion:** Ethical leaders promote open and transparent debates about ethical quandaries and guide the institution in making ethical decisions. They give the resources and assistance required for ethical decision-making processes (Trevino & Brown, 2005).

Ensure Academic achievement: Commitment to academic achievement is linked to ethical leadership. Leaders that value ethical behaviour are more likely to promote strong academic standards, research integrity, and a commitment to knowledge acquisition. **Ethical Leaders Are Better Prepared to face Ethical Crisis:** Ethical leaders are better prepared to face ethical crises and scandals that may occur within the institution. They can lead the institution through difficult times with transparency and accountability.

Recruiting and Retaining Talent: Institutions managed by ethical leaders are frequently more appealing to both professors and students. A reputation for ethical leadership can aid in the recruitment and retention of

outstanding people, thereby contributing to the long-term success of the organization (Trevio & Brown, 2005). Ethical leaders in higher education institutions build beneficial ties with the local community, government agencies, and industry partners. These ethical collaborations benefit both the institution and society at large. Legal and Regulatory Compliance: Ethical leadership guarantees that the institution complies with all applicable rules and regulations, lowering the risk of legal and financial ramifications (Trevio & Brown, 2005). Ethical leadership in higher education institutions is critical for fostering trust and accountability, promoting ethical decision-making, and ultimately advancing the mission of education and knowledge dissemination while serving the best interests of all stakeholders.

2.1.3 Challenges Facing Ethical Leadership in Higher Education Institutions

Ethical leadership at higher education institutions faces a number of issues that can jeopardize the institution's overall integrity and performance. Here are some of the most significant challenges: Financial Strains: Higher education institutions frequently experience financial strains, such as reduced public support and rising tuition expenses. These financial constraints might cause ethical quandaries, such as reducing academic standards in order to attract more students or benefactors (Ravitch, 2016).

Academic Integrity: Maintaining academic integrity in an age of easy access to information and technological breakthroughs that encourage cheating and plagiarism can be difficult. Ethical leaders must strive hard to maintain high academic standards (McCabe et al., 2012). Diversity and Inclusion: Promoting diversity and inclusion in higher education can be difficult because leaders must traverse issues of discrimination, racism, and cultural sensitivity. Ethical leaders must create a welcoming environment.

Governance and Decision-Making: Owing to opaque decision-making processes, a lack of transparency, and conflicts of interest within governing bodies, ethical leadership can be compromised. Leaders must ensure that decisions are made fairly and ethically. Academic Freedom: Balancing academic freedom principles with ethical responsibilities can be difficult.

Leaders may confront quandaries when dealing with contentious research or faculty behaviour, which necessitates a nuanced approach (Gordon & Tillery, 2019). Ethical Leadership Development: It might be difficult to prepare the next generation of ethical leaders in academics. Effective leadership development programs that stress ethical decision-making are required in institutions.

The use of technology in higher education creates ethical questions about student data privacy, surveillance, and online harassment. Ethical leaders must handle these difficulties while reaping the benefits of technology (Straumsheim, 2018). Student Mental Health: Due to the increasing frequency of mental health disorders among students, ethical leaders must prioritize their students' well-being and provide proper support services (Reetz et al., 2020). Finally, ethical leadership in higher education institutions faces a variety of obstacles, ranging from budgetary constraints to concerns of diversity, governance, and technology. Addressing these issues is critical for higher education institutions to maintain their integrity and efficiency.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

According to Brown and Trevio's (2006) study, "Ethical Leadership: A Review and Future Directions," ethical leadership "serves to enhance organizational and employee well-being, fostering employee identification and positive affect, reducing stress and unethical behaviour, and increasing employee performance." In essence, ethical leadership promotes a healthier and more productive workplace

by fostering trust and supporting ethical behaviour throughout the organization.

3. Methodology

3.1 Philosophical Assumption

This investigation was guided by the philosophical assumption of interpretivism. In interpretivist research, qualitative methodologies such as participant observation, interviews, content analysis, and discourse analysis are widely used. These methods allow researchers to gather rich, context-specific data that can aid in the uncovering of subjective meanings and interpretations that individuals and groups assign to their experiences.

3.2 Research Approach

The study used a qualitative research method. The goal of qualitative research is to explore and investigate the range and intricacies of human experiences, behaviours, and societal phenomena. Unlike quantitative research, which aims to quantify data and establish statistical linkages, qualitative research aims to uncover underlying meanings, patterns, and nuances within a specific context.

3.3 Research Design

In this study, Case study research design was used. Data that is textual, visual, or audio in nature, such as documents, images, or media information, is thoroughly examined. To gain insight into a phenomenon, researchers look for themes, patterns, and meanings in data.

3.4 Sampling

The researcher employed non-probability sampling. Convenience sampling was employed as a sort of non-probability sampling. Convenience sampling refers to the technique of selecting content that is easily accessible or readily available. This method is simple, but it may introduce bias because it does not ensure

that the sample is representative of the entire material population. We employed online convenience sampling. Online convenience sampling can be an effective strategy for studies with limited resources, short schedules, or a largely online-active target group. The sample size was 32 written pieces in total.

3.5 Data Collection Procedures

Data collection techniques in content analysis entailed systematically capturing and documenting textual material in order to investigate its content, topics, trends, or other relevant information.

3.6 Data Analysis

Typical content data analysis steps included: Data collection was accomplished through the use of web scraping. The data cleaning operation included text normalisation and data deduplication. In this level of data preprocessing, tokenization was used. Data Transformation: The data was turned into an analysis-ready format at this stage by constructing a document-term matrix or word embeddings. The exploratory data analysis (EDA) included word frequency analysis and theme modelling.

3.7 Trustworthiness of the Data

Peer debriefing and comparative analysis were utilized to validate the data's credibility. Peer debriefing is a qualitative research approach that aims to increase the dependability and credibility of study findings. It entails one or more colleagues or peers reviewing and commenting on various aspects of the research process. The primary goal of peer debriefing is to guarantee that data collection, analysis, and interpretation are complete and reliable. The process of comparing two or more situations, systems, or entities in order to uncover similarities, differences, patterns, and trends is known as comparative analysis.

3.8 Research Ethics

Here are some important considerations to keep in mind when conducting online scraping research: Terms of Service for the Website Observance: The researcher reviewed and adhered to the terms of service and usage of the websites used for web scraping. Respecting Intellectual Property Rights: The researcher did not infringe any copyright or intellectual property rights when scraping content.

The researcher correctly identified the source and respected the website owners' intellectual property rights; The frequency and the load: The researcher avoided overburdening the website's server, which may interrupt other users and be construed as a denial-of-service attack. The researcher employed rate limiting and request delays to scrape properly. Correctness and Integrity: The researcher took care to ensure that the data gathered was correct and complete. This is because incorrect or misleading data can have serious consequences, particularly in research.

3.9 Dissemination

The research findings were presented at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa's Conference on Ethics, Justice, and Peace on September 26th and 28th, 2023.

4.1. Findings and Discussion

4.1.1 Theories of Ethical Leadership in Institutions of Higher Learning

Ethical leadership in higher education is a complicated and growing area with numerous theories and viewpoints. Here are some of the most notable theories and frameworks mentioned in the literature on ethical leadership in higher education: Theory of Transformational Leadership: Transformational leadership focuses on inspiring and motivating people to reach their maximum potential. Ethical leaders in higher education who take this approach strive to build a positive organizational culture that values ethics, morality, and social responsibility.

Servant leadership theory emphasizes the leader's role in meeting the needs of others. Ethical leaders in academia focus the well-being and development of students, teachers, and staff while promoting ethical behaviour and ideals. Authentic Leadership Theory: Self-awareness, honesty, and ethical decision-making are all emphasized in authentic leadership theory. According to Avoli et al. (2005), leaders in higher education who adhere to this paradigm aim to integrate their values with their actions, encouraging trust and ethical behaviour in the institution. Ethical Decision-Making Frameworks: To guide their actions, ethical leaders in higher education frequently rely on existing ethical decision-making frameworks. These frameworks assist leaders in assessing ethical challenges and making principled decisions.

Social Justice Leadership: In higher education, social justice leadership focuses on equity, diversity, and inclusion. Ethical leaders aim to remove discrimination and promote equitable opportunity for all members of the academic community. Stewardship Theory: Stewardship theory highlights leaders' obligation to maintain and improve the mission and resources of the organization for the benefit of future generations. The findings are consistent with Block's (1993) assertion that ethical leaders in academia operate as responsible stewards of their organizations.

Virtue ethics is concerned with the development of moral character and virtues in leaders. The findings are consistent with Aristotle's (about 350 BCE) views that ethical leaders should aim to embody and foster virtuous traits such as honesty, integrity, and empathy. These ideas and frameworks offer many views through which to understand and practice ethical leadership in higher education. Academic leaders frequently use a combination of these theories to handle the complicated ethical difficulties they face.

4.1.2 Importance of Ethical Leadership in Higher Education Institutions

Ethical leadership is critical in higher education institutions (HEIs) since it influences the culture, values, and success of these institutions. Ethical leadership cultivates a culture of trust, integrity, and accountability, which is critical for the development and advancement of students, faculty, and the institution as a whole. The following are some significant arguments for the importance of ethical leadership in higher education:

Promotes an Integrity and Trust Culture: Ethical leaders set a good example for others by promoting honesty, openness, and trust inside the organization. The findings are consistent with those of Brown and Trevino (2006), who argue that an integrity culture is essential for preserving academic honesty and ethical behaviour among students and faculty. **Improves Academic achievement:** Ethical leadership can have a good impact on student learning outcomes, which can lead to improved academic achievement. The findings are consistent with those of Dyck and Kleff (2016), who discovered that when leaders promote ethical behaviour, it sends a message to students that ethics and values are important components of their education.

Quality Faculty and Staff: Institutions that prioritize ethics are more likely to retain high-quality personnel who share these values. Ethical leadership leads to a healthy work environment, making HEIs more appealing to competent academics and employees. Ethical leadership improves the reputation and credibility of higher education institutions. The findings are consistent with those of Barnett (2011), who discovered that ethical institutions are perceived positively by stakeholders such as students, parents, funders, and accrediting authorities. Ethical leaders stress justice and inclusion in decision-making processes, ensuring that all stakeholders have a voice

in key subjects. This technique leads to more informed and ethical decisions.

Ensures Responsible Resource Management: Ethical leaders are good custodians of institutional resources, which is important for financial sustainability and regulatory compliance. The findings are consistent with those of Kernaghan and Siegel (2017), who discovered that ethical financial management fosters confidence among contributors and government institutions. **Encourages Civic Engagement and Social Responsibility:** Ethical leaders frequently motivate students and teachers to participate in community service and civic activities. The findings are consistent with those of Kilburg and Hancock (2011), who discovered that the institution's good impact extends beyond its campus. **Ethical Leadership Assists HEIs in Identifying and Addressing Ethical Risks and Crises:** Ethical leadership assists HEIs in proactively identifying and addressing ethical risks and crises.

The findings are consistent with Rohr's (2014) assertion that ethical leadership minimizes the incidence of scandals and legal problems at higher education institutions. Ethical leadership is critical in higher education institutions because it builds a strong ethical foundation, develops a culture of integrity, and adds to the institutions' long-term success and viability. It serves as a model for all stakeholders, inspiring them to uphold ethical ideals and values in their academic endeavours and institutional duties.

4.1.3 Challenges Facing Ethical Leadership in Institutions of Higher Learning

Ethical leadership at higher education institutions faces a number of problems that can stymie the development of a moral and responsible academic environment. These issues are complicated and multifaceted, frequently resulting from a combination of internal and external forces. The following are some of the major problems that ethical

leadership in higher education faces: Financial Constraints and Resource Allocation Financial constraints on institutions are common, which can lead to actions that undermine ethical norms. Budget restrictions may compel leaders to make decisions that Favor income growth over academic integrity.

Increasing Commercialization of Education: As institutions seek profit and market share, the commercialization of education can weaken ethical standards. The findings are consistent with Giroux's (2014) argument that this can lead to a concentration on recruiting students for financial benefit rather than providing quality education. professors and Staff Ethics: Ethical leadership necessitates ethical behaviour on the part of professors and staff. However, unethical behaviour by academics and staff poses a challenge to ethical leadership in higher education organizations. The findings are consistent with those of Barnett (2015), who discovered that plagiarism, academic dishonesty, or conflicts of interest among educators might weaken the credibility of ethical leadership.

Academic Freedom and Conflicting Values: It might be difficult to balance academic freedom with ethical responsibilities. Leaders may encounter problems when faculty members voice controversial viewpoints or conduct research that contradicts institutional principles. Governance and Transparency: Transparent decision-making processes are required for ethical leadership, which is uncommon at most colleges. Insufficient governance systems or a lack of openness can impair leaders' ability to make ethical decisions.

Diversity and Inclusion: Diversity and inclusion are ethical imperatives, yet they are difficult to attain in most colleges due to the participation of numerous variables. Establishing diversity and inclusion in universities can be difficult due to opposition, bias, or a lack of understanding among stakeholders. Student Mental Health and Well-being: Due to limited

resources, it is difficult for ethical leaders to address the mental health and well-being of the majority of their students.

The findings are consistent with those of Matasare et al. (2019), who claim that limited resources and insufficient support services can impede their ability to deliver a secure and supportive atmosphere. Technological Advances: Even after leaders adopted policies and practices to address this issue, technology has contributed to unethical leadership in universities. The findings are consistent with the findings of Bretag et al. (2019), who discovered that the digital age has presented new obstacles to academic integrity, such as online cheating and contract cheating services.

Globalization and Cross-Cultural Ethics: As institutions become increasingly globally integrated, ethical quandaries occur that most leaders have no idea how to resolve, and the majority of them breach ethics unknowingly. It is difficult for many ethical leaders to overcome cross-cultural differences and handle ethical quandaries that arise in international cooperation. Ethical Culture and Compliance: Creating and maintaining an ethical culture within an organization can be tough. Ferrel et al. (2019) discovered that depending exclusively on compliance procedures may not develop a true commitment to ethical ideals among stakeholders.

Financial pressures and commercialization, as well as issues of academic integrity, diversity, and governance, all pose challenges to ethical leadership in higher education institutions. To sustain the integrity and prestige of academic institutions, overcoming these difficulties needs a commitment to ethical ideals and a proactive strategy to addressing them.

5.1 Conclusion and Recommendations

Improving ethical leadership in schools is critical to fostering a healthy and moral educational

environment. Ethical leaders act as role models for others, inspiring them to maintain high ethical standards. Here are some suggestions for improving ethical leadership in schools:

1. Ethical leaders should exemplify the behaviour they demand from their employees and pupils. In your actions and decisions, show integrity, honesty, and justice.
2. Develop Clear Ethical Standards: Create an ethical code or a set of basic beliefs for your educational community. Make certain that these standards are conveyed to all stakeholders, including staff, students, parents, and the general public.
3. Encourage Open Communication: Create a climate in which staff and students can express concerns or report unethical behaviour. Encourage openness and active listening to comments.
4. Ethical Decision-Making Training: Provide ethical decision-making training and professional development opportunities for leaders and personnel. To assist talks about ethical quandaries, use case studies and real-life events.
5. Consistent and Fair Discipline: Ensure that disciplinary actions are consistent and fair. When dealing with wrongdoing, avoid favouritism or bias. When appropriate, use a restorative strategy to assist children in learning from their mistakes.
6. Integrate Ethics and Moral Education into the Curriculum: Integrate ethics and moral education into the school's curriculum. Encourage classroom conversations about ethical concerns, morals, and character development.
7. Establish mentorship programs that match experienced ethical leaders with developing leaders. Give them advice and assistance as they improve their ethical leadership skills.
8. Ethical Leadership Training: Provide leadership development programs that focus on ethical leadership principles such as empathy, compassion, and ethical decision-making.
9. Develop a Positive School Culture: Develop a positive and inclusive school culture that appreciates diversity and fosters respect for all persons. Address issues of discrimination, bullying, and harassment as soon as possible and as effectively as possible.
10. Participation in the Community: Collaborate with parents, community leaders, and other stakeholders to develop an ethical leadership strategy. To ensure alignment with shared values, solicit input and feedback from the larger community.
11. Continuous Self-Reflection: Ethical leaders should exercise self-reflection and self-assessment of their leadership practices on a regular basis. To find areas for growth, consider soliciting comments from peers, superiors, and subordinates.
12. Accountability Measures: Create systems to hold leaders accountable for ethical behaviour and decision-making. This could involve routine evaluations and reviews.
13. Recognize and Celebrate Ethical Behaviour and Leadership: Recognize and celebrate instances of ethical behaviour and leadership within the school community. This emphasizes the significance of ethical behaviour.
14. Conflict Resolution instruction: Provide instruction in conflict resolution and mediation strategies so that conflicts and disagreements within the school community can be resolved peacefully and ethically.
15. Ethical Leadership Workshops: Organize ethical leadership workshops and seminars for both staff and students to raise awareness and comprehension of ethical concerns.

16. Improving ethical leadership in schools is a continuous effort that necessitates the passion and attention of school leaders, staff, and the larger community. Schools may establish a more positive and morally upright educational atmosphere that benefits everyone involved by stressing ethical leadership.

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