

2022

Phenomenological Exploration of Followers' Lived Experiences and Their Perception of Ethical Leadership

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Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Saad R. Maklad

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Walden University

2022

Abstract

Phenomenological Exploration of Followers' Lived Experiences and Their Perception of
Ethical Leadership

by

Saad R. Maklad

MBA, Everest University, 2014

BS, Arab International University, 2010

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Management

Walden University

May 2022

Abstract

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of followers under unethical leadership in private and public organizations in the United States. Data collection involved interviewing 20 participants from private or public U.S. organizations with open-ended interview question. Participant selection was limited to followers and frontline employees who directly contact stakeholders.

Utilitarianism, Adams's equity theory, social learning theory, stakeholder theory, and Eudaimonia were the conceptual frameworks used to guide this study. The data analysis process in this phenomenological study consisted of using the two-cycle analysis and the modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method. The findings demonstrated eight overarching themes: (a) emphasizing morality, (b) issues of honesty, (c) lack of accountability, (d) fairness in making decisions, (e) responsibility of ethical leaders, (f) stakeholders' wellbeing, (g) humility as an abdication of power, and (h) issues of approachability.

Implications for social change of this study include fairness to followers, honest leadership, organizational success, and enhanced corporate social responsibility. Positive economic and social change in private and public organizations suffering from unethical leadership could be gained by selecting leaders who are willing to embrace ethical conduct.

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Dedication

I would like to thank God for keeping his hands upon me and giving me the strength to complete my doctoral journey. If it had not been for God on my side, where would I be. This work is dedicated to my parents, Riyadh and Seham Maklad, for whom I finish this degree, thank you for all the work you put in to help me, I am forever in your debt and love you more than I could ever tell you.

This work is also dedicated to my brother Rabie, I cannot thank God enough for having you by my side inspiring me to be a better person and pursue a better future. This work is also dedicated to my sisters, Aber, Entisar, Ola, Manar, Madeline and Shiraz, who have supported me along the way and continuously demonstrated through words and through actions the importance of education and learning. Special thanks go to my wife Yara for your loving support, understanding, and encouragement throughout this elongated doctoral journey. To Dr. Eiad Maklad, thank you for inspiring me to continue this journey in leadership and organizational change and modeling extraordinary mentorship and guidance. Finally, I dedicate this work to my wonderful son, Ahmad, my greatest blessing, let my academic work be your inspiration to change the world.

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world” –

Nelson Mandela

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) reported 807 enforcements due to ethical violations in 2015 (U.S. SEC, 2015). In the United States, SAC Capital agreed to pay security regulators \$602 million for improper actions by former employees (Lattman, 2013). The continued unethical behavior of leaders has caused followers and communities to suffer the consequences, which supports the importance of studying ethics in business and leadership. The term *leader* may describe one who occupies a high organizational position or possesses specific characteristics or qualities that enable them to influence others (Silva, 2014). The ethics of leadership revolve around the leader's responsibility to address the interests and wellbeing of their followers. According to Hollingworth and Valentine (2015), the ethics of leadership directly affects employees. I conducted this study because there was a gap in the extant literature on ethical leadership, which has focused mainly on leaders' views.

Background of The Study

There is extensive research on ethical corruption and unethical leadership associated with leaders' social responsibility; it has become a focal topic in popular media and academic literature in the past decade (Mayer et al., 2012; Wang et al., 2017). However, only a few researchers have focused on the perception of the followers when studying ethical leadership. The issue of ethical behavior among leaders and followers has been a persistent one (Odeneye, 2017). In response, researchers have started to focus on the relationship between leader and follower due to the recognition that the

transformational leadership style does not address positive change's moral or ethical objectives (Dierendonck, 2011).

The study of ethics goes back to ancient Greek philosophers like Plato (380 BC), Socrates (as cited in Plato & Aristophanes, 1984), and Aristotle (350 BC), and each philosopher expressed a unique perspective in discovering ethical standards. Although researchers have studied ethical leadership in different contexts, they have agreed that leaders must behave according to specific ethical standards to achieve justice and fairness and create a positive social impact. Procedural justice, trust integrity, dependability, and organizational commitment may mediate the positive impact of leadership on organizational growth (Katou, 2015).

Socrates and Plato believed that outstanding leadership comes from great followership—that is, great leaders know how to follow because great leaders were once humble followers. According to the social exchange view, ethical leaders demonstrate fairness and caring for followers. In turn, followers feel obligated to reciprocate and act according to the ethical leader's expectations (Brown & Treviño, 2006; Brown et al., 2005; Ko et al., 2017). Aquinas (C.E. 1227-1274), much like Aristotle, argued against tyrant leaders and advocated for ethical leadership exemplified by individual rulers, kings, or monarchs through their character and virtues (Aquinas, 1988, pp. 14-29). According to Malakyan (2015), Although, commanding and obeying were two different things for him, Aristotle's believed that the good citizen should be capable of both, knowing how to govern like a freeman and obey like a freeman, since "he who has never learned to obey cannot be a good commander" (Aristotle, 350 B.C.E./1999, p. 57).

The importance of ethical leadership has been revealed in the past decade through the continued unethical behaviors of leaders. Incidents such as Wells Fargo's undefined accounts and Volkswagen's emission test scandals have brought ethical leadership to the forefront of management research. These scandals have negatively affected the world economy. These unethical behaviors have partly been blamed on the gross unethical practices of organizational leaders (Verschoor, 2015). According to Mesdaghinia et al. (2019), what is common among high-profile corporate scandals such as Enron, WorldCom, HealthSouth, Volkswagen, General Motors, and Wells Fargo may have been bottom-line mentality, which involves a single-minded pursuit of financial profit while ignoring ethical considerations. As a result, the concept of ethical leadership has emerged as a prominent theme in the empirical leadership literature, with a dramatic increase in related research since the mid-2000s (Ko et al., 2017).

The role of ethics in leadership studies is significant for organizations to consider. Leadership without ethics and integrity can be harmful to the organizational stakeholders and society (Ahmad et al., 2017). Treviño et al. (2003) found that ethical leadership is not only associated with a leader's traits (e.g., honesty, integrity, and trustworthiness) and ethical behaviors (e.g., openness, concern, fairness, and ethical decision-making) but is also linked to value-based management (e.g., setting ethical standards through communication and rewards), which emphasizes the importance of ethics in management (Ko et al., 2017). In addition to the several moral characteristics that leaders must possess to behave ethically, ethical leaders also practice moral management, actively influence their employees to be conscientious of ethics, and encourage employees to act morally.

Ethical leadership directly affects followers' behavior, which may have implications for commitment and empowerment. According to (2017), scholarly interest in the study of ethical leadership has increased because organizational failures are seen partly as a direct result of unethical behavior of leaders (Taylor & Pattie, 2014), aided by the collaboration of followers, due to fear of retaliation. In fall 2013, leaders at JP Morgan Chase made the most significant corporate settlement in U.S. history when they paid the federal government \$13 billion (Emery, 2016). The company leaders acknowledged that bank personnel had misrepresented to the public about numerous residential mortgage-backed securities. In recent times, several researchers have pointed out that the concept of ethical leadership is distinct from other types of leadership. Such scholars have emphasized the difference between leadership concepts, arguing that ethical leadership describes a distinct phenomenon, both on the conceptual and empirical level (Brown & Treviño, 2006; Brown et al., 2005; Ko et al., 2017). Followers' fear of retaliation and leaders' unethical behavior represented by recent scandals have encouraged scholars to increase their interest in studying the unethical side of leadership. A great deal of attention has also been dedicated to the idea that a leader who prioritizes ethics can create more ethical conduct within an organization (Brown & Treviño, 2006).

By being ethical, leaders have a direct impact on the behavior of their followers. Brown et al. (2005) argued that ethical leaders first affect their followers' behavior by serving as role models. Leaders are charged with the task of applying justice and fairness and improving the performance of an organization. According to Malakyan (2015), the vast majority of leadership and followership literature continues to view leading and

following behavioral functions as static and parallel to each other. The shared values between leaders and followers and their organization can boost commitment, enhance collective performance, and develop loyalty among employees (Joseph, 2016).

Ethical leadership motivates employees to be exceptional and fosters innovation (Brown & Treviño, 2014). Ethical leadership in organizations has direct implications for societal growth, observable in organizational commitment to social, environmental, and financial success (Eisenbeiss et al., 2015). The potential for ethical leadership in bringing about positive social change to the individual, the organization, and society cannot be discounted (Odeneye, 2017). Ethical behavior among leaders and followers has been a persistent issue since ancient Greek and Western philosophy (Plato & Aristophanos, 1984; Russell, 1983). Ethical leadership can shape the behavior of followers, which may have implications for commitment, innovation, and empowerment. According to Emery (2016), ethical behavior may enable workers to feel an alignment between their values and the business. Ethical behavioral guidelines in the workplace often include placing an elevated level of importance on the dedication and the belief that all organizational leaders specify acceptably versus unacceptable behavior when hiring employees (Yammarino et al., 2013).

Researchers demonstrated the different viewpoints of philosophies in addressing the subject of ethical leadership. These authors emphasized that leaders should behave in a certain way and within specific ethical parameters to be effective. Johnson et al. (2019) observed that people tend to make leader-based attributions in individualistic societies, even when followers are involved in results (Thoroughgood et al., 2016).

DesJardine (2016) addressed many social and environmental issues that require companies to make long-term investments. As a result, companies can withhold benefits from others or create widespread harm for others. Webster (2017) claimed that an increased interest in ethics does not appear thus far to have had a widespread constructive influence on the conduct of business leaders. Ethical leaders care about employees, help them solve problems, and pay attention to the sustainable development of enterprises, have a strong sense of ethics and corporate social responsibility (Liu & Zhao, 2019).

Despite the extensive works reviewed about the phenomenon of ethical leadership, a gap in the available literature remains. Emery (2016) addressed ethical behavior, claiming that it may enable workers to perceive alignment between their value and the businesses. This author also addressed the need for ethical guidelines in the workplace. Hegarty and Moccia (2018) discussed why leaders behave unethically, including shareholder pressure for growth, striving to achieve stated goals, impending financial losses, and ignorance.

Despite the work reviewed about the phenomenon of unethical leadership, a noticeable gap in the literature has persisted. The current study's findings may enhance the understanding of the ethical leadership phenomenon from followers' perspectives because studies on ethical leadership are conducted using leaders as research participants. According to Heres and Lasthuizen (2012) and Odeneye et al. (2018), most previous studies on ethical leadership were conducted using leaders as research participants, which has skewed the results.

Problem Statement

Ethical violations in corporate America continue unabated; the SEC reported 807 enforcements due to ethical violations in 2015 (U.S.SEC, 2015). Despite the pressure that has been put on leaders to behave ethically, new unethical behaviors continue to emerge. The impact of scandals such as those experienced by Wells Fargo and Volkswagen supports the importance of studying business ethics and ethical leadership (Demirtas & Akdogan, 2015; Odeneye et al., 2018; Zhu et al., 2016). The general problem was that leaders have overly brief time horizons and a bias for immediate gratification; in addition, many leaders are willing to behave unethically without considering the impact on relevant followers (DesJardine, 2016; Odeneye et al., 2018). Brief time horizons can lead to short-termism, defined as "decisions and outcomes that pursue a course of action that is best for the short term but suboptimal over the long run" (Lavery, 1996, p. 826).

Ethical scandals in organizations such as Wells Fargo and Volkswagen threaten the position of many senior corporate managers and jeopardize the financial survival of some organizations (Clarke & Bassell, 2014). In addition, leadership misconduct has resulted in high costs to governments and consumers through massive unemployment, significant declines in the gross domestic product, and the mortgage foreclosure crisis (Rowe, 2018). Moreover, unethical leadership behavior undermines the welfare of society and the environment.

The consequences have raised the ethics profile, and the problem is reflected in a gap in research. Previous scholars have focused mainly on exploring ethical leadership from the perspective of leaders as research participants, while few researchers have

explored the perspective of followers as research participants. Consequently, the understanding of the ethical leadership phenomenon has been biased in favor of leaders (Freiwald, 2013; Odeneye et al., 2018). The specific research problem that I addressed through this study was that some leaders lack the willingness to apply ethical conduct to achieve organizational success.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of followers under unethical leadership in public and private organizations in the United States. I focused on followers as research participants because they constitute a significant bridge between internal and external stakeholders in any organization with the possibility to broaden their knowledge of ethical leadership. The implications for positive social change from the results of this study may enhance current knowledge about the characteristics of ethical leadership and encourage future research on ethical and unethical leadership, which may create a better understanding of the relationship between unethical leadership and the wellbeing of others.

Research Question

What are followers' lived experiences with unethical leadership behavior and performance?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual frameworks that I used to guide this study included different concepts in ethics like utilitarianism, eudaimonia, stakeholder theory, and Adams's equity theory. I synthesized various concepts, ideas, and beliefs from these models to form the

conceptual framework that guided this study (see Maxwell, 2013; Odeneye et al., 2018). For example, the concept of eudaimonia can be defined as "an ethical model which maintains happiness is reached through virtue", for Aristotle, eudaimonia is the highest human good, the only human good that is desirable for its own sake (as an end in itself) rather than for the sake of something else (as a means toward some other end) (Duignan, 2020). Utilitarianism and eudaimonistic models are conceptual frameworks used to compel organizations and leaders to ensure their decisions and policies, ensure the happiness of their followers, and facilitate their highest performance (Jones & Felps, 2013).

According to Socratic philosophy (as cited in Plato & Aristophanes, 1984), eudaimonia is a concept in ethics. I used eudaimonia to enrich the conceptual framework in this study. This philosophy focuses on how to live and how to act considering virtue and knowledge. According to Huta and Waterman (2014), "In eudaimonic philosophies, the principal focus is on activity reflecting virtue, excellence, the best within us, and the full development of our potentials" (p. 27). This model represents the well-being of an individual and reflects the conceptual side of unethical leadership in this study, as it negatively affects the welfare and dignity of followers. On the other hand, utilitarianism focuses on the most significant number of followers by emphasizing the interest of the leader in ensuring the wellbeing and dignity of others.

The concept of justice is another framework that I used to inform this study. Philosophically, justice is the concept of proportion between a person's actions and their ultimate success. Plato paid particular attention to the concept of justice; he used the

word "Dikaisyne" for justice, which comes extremely near to the word "morality" (as cited in Plato & Aristophanes, 1984). According to Easter (2019), the concept of justice as fairness is based on the premise that giving each person what they deserve would result in an overall sense of justice and fairness.

The stability of any group, including society, depends on the extent to which the group members feel that they are being treated justly (Easter, 2019; Rawls, 1971). This concept is based on the principle that leaders must ensure justice and fairness for their followers; taking credit for other's work, shifting blame, accepting corruption, and the promotion of less competent for political reasons are all examples of unfair and unethical leadership behavior.

The concept theory of Adams's equity is a conceptual framework used to balance the followers' efforts toward work and the results they get in return; fairness is essential for frontline employees who put in the effort and sweat to improve their lives (Adams, 1965). Van Niekerk and Van Niekerk (2013) examined a framework that defines ethical leadership as a combination of several validated leadership theories. I used the concept theory of Adams's equity in this study, as it relates to the fact that leaders must be knowledgeable of all direct and indirect actions of the organization and their effect on stakeholders. In addition, leaders must ensure worker motivation and fairness and reward their contributions.

Stakeholders are especially important for the success of an organization. The organizational products and services get to the customers through the frontline employees, so their actions impact their success. Stakeholder theory is used to analyze

business issues from the perspective of the stakeholders and the impact that such matters may have on stakeholders, directly or indirectly (Harrison et al., 2015). According to Stakeholder theory – or at least, early formulations of it – instead of managing the firm in the best interests of stakeholders only, managers should seek to “balance” the interests of all stakeholders, where a stakeholder is anyone who has a “stake”, or interest (including a financial interest), in the firm

Employees in private and public organizations cannot benefit from ownership profit sharing, so ethical leaders have to provide other motivations such as being overly concerned about the wellbeing of employees, their job satisfaction, wants, needs, and their participation in achieving the organizational objectives. Therefore, I used stakeholder theory as a conceptual framework in this study, through which I enhanced understanding of the unethical leadership phenomenon from the follower's perspective.

I focused on the conceptual framework in this study to better gather natural data from participants and better overcome the phenomenon's complexities in finding the right participants. In this study, I enabled the participants to describe how they were affected by the phenomenon freely. A phenomenological approach was appropriate to understand such experiences of followers. The concept/phenomenon is the system of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs, and theories that supports and inform my research and is also an essential part of this study's design (Easter, 2019; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

I ensured that participants' information would not be published. By conducting single face-to-face interviews, I strove to ensure that they had the opportunity to express themselves comfortably and freely, which enhanced the quality of the collected data. In

selecting participants, I focused on frontline employees who are always in contact with stakeholders, excluding any managerial levels.

Nature of the Study

I used a qualitative methodology to conduct this study to explore unethical leadership from the follower's point of view in private and public organizations. The open-ended nature of the research question in studying the unethical side of leadership behavior aligned with using a qualitative methodology to conduct this study. Face-to-face interviewing was the primary data collection method that I used to understand the ethical leadership phenomenon. I used the perceptions of followers in the interviews to integrate my understanding of ethical leadership with my desire to conduct this study. I used a qualitative research methodology to understand the complexities of the unethical leadership phenomenon and allowed the participants to express their experiences and thoughts.

According to Miles et al. (2014), researchers using the qualitative method may use various approaches, depending on need and context. These approaches are case study, ethnography, phenomenology, narration, and grounded theory. As I conducted this study to allow followers to express their perception of ethical leadership phenomenon as a lived experience, I used a phenomenological approach to conduct this study. I focused on the frontline employees in corporate America who directly contact stakeholders.

Phenomenology has a philosophical and methodological trajectory that shares commonalities with other qualitative research strategies. One of its most distinguishing features is the peculiarity of its philosophical base, which is embedded in the

phenomenological concept of *Lebenswelt* (Lifeworld)—the world of everyday lived experience (Anosike et al., 2012). According to Kvale (1983), the "interview is probably the most powerful tool to achieve an understanding of the experiences lived by another person" (p. 48). The number of participants depends on how deeply the researcher delves into the issue and their willingness to evaluate the impact of the problem on participants. To ensure the quality of data that I collected and ensure that I thoroughly analyzed the issue, the target sample size was 20 participants.

I relied on criterion sampling to sort and identify 15 to 20 participants, or until data saturation occurred. These participants had a minimum of 7 years of experience working in private and public organizations and were in direct contact with stakeholders. As frontline employees are the bridge between leadership and other external stakeholders who might be affected by unethical leadership behaviors or decisions, I excluded any employees pursuing or currently held management positions.

I individually interviewed 20 participants; this expanded the breadth of the research and enhanced my ability to understand how individuals experience the phenomenon under study thoroughly. I employed several strategies to ensure a high quality of the data collected by providing informed consent for participants for any information provided to build mutual trust. I provided the opportunity for participants to send their feedback via email and any follow-up questions after conducting the interviews. I prepared an interview guide before the interviews to ensure that I asked the same key questions to all participants. In analyzing the data, I hand-coded the data

following the steps of phenomenological data analysis set forth by Moustakas (1994). I used hand coding to enhance my familiarity with all the data details.

I used the transcendental as a type of phenomenology to enhance my understanding of the unethical leadership phenomenon as a lived experience from followers' perspectives. Transcendental phenomenology was based on the work of Moustakas (1994), who believed that the researcher's personal experience should be bracketed using *epoché*. Researchers Achieve *epoché* by addressing any personal experiences or assumptions before conducting the research and be able to distinguish such them from the lived experiences of followers. This involves delineating one's personal experience of the phenomenon being studied and focusing on participants' experiences.

Phenomenology is the study of lived experience or the life world (van Manen, 1997). A hermeneutic approach would not have been ideal for this study because it is used to focus more on the researcher's personal experience. Transcendental phenomenology based on Moustakas (1994) provides a systematic approach to analyzing data about lived experiences. The transcendental design involves identifying a phenomenon as a lived experience of different participants, with the researcher bracketing out their personal experiences. In this study, participants who have experienced the phenomenon of ethical leadership in one way or another had the opportunity to share what they experienced and how they experienced it contexts (see Moustakas, 1994). I conducted face-to-face interviews as the primary data collection method in this study. There are several sources for collecting data in a qualitative study,

such as observations of the phenomenon, documents, or interviews. Of these, the interview is the most powerful tool to understand the experiences lived by another person (Kvale, 1983).

Although multiple data sources are encouraged in the qualitative study, I relied primarily on individual interviews as a source of data, which enhanced the credibility and quality of the data that I collected. The primary participants of this study were frontline employees who were in direct contact with other stakeholders in a private retail organization in Tampa, Florida. I focused only on followers and excluded any individuals with managerial positions. Other possibilities that I considered for data collection included information from public datasets, a review of social media websites, or data from the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR).

Definitions

The study's terms included those related to unethical leadership phenomena, followers, and organizational success. Every term can have different interpretations, and knowledge of these interpretations is essential to understand this research. Readers can use the defined terms to better understand the phenomenon of unethical leadership in the context of this study. I used the following critical technical terms in this study.

Dignity: This describes the pride and respect that individuals hold for their self-worth and self-esteem. Dignity is an essential principle in the human rights discourse; the word "dignity" derives its original meaning from the Latin word *dignitas*, conveying honor and respect (Staffen & Arshakyan, 2017).

Ethics: Ethics describes the moral principles governing individual behavior and aligning behavior with group norms and expectations (Staffen & Arshakyan, 2017).

Ethics is a normative distinction between studying individuals' right and wrong behaviors and their implications for a group, organization, or society.

Employees' performance: Completing work and achieving the organization's objectives is called performance. The performance of organizations depends on the leaders and their culture set in the organizations (Saeed & Mughal, 2019).

Ethical leadership: According to Khokhar and Zia-ur-Rehman (2017), "Ethical leadership is defined as the demonstration of normatively suitable behavior through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the propagation of such behavior to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making" (Brown et al., 2005, p. 25).

Follower: This term describes people who are influenced by the opinion of, and carry out, the orders and instructions of leaders, regardless of the extent to which these coincide with their will (McLaren, 2013).

Leader: Generically and inclusively, this term defines all individuals—managers and leaders—in positions of authority and power who can influence others to do what they may or may not ordinarily want to do (Bischak & Woiceshyn, 2016).

Leadership: According to Ho and Lin (2016), leadership is when the leader influences others to reach a common goal. Leaders provide a blueprint for a company's organizational culture and usually have more power and control than followers (Brown & Treviño, 2006).

Moral disengagement: Morally disengaged leaders do not visibly display ethical action or promote ethical standards and are therefore not perceived as ethical leaders. Followers with low moral disengagement (i.e., high moral engagement) are more likely to be sensitive to the ethicality of their leaders. Conversely, when leaders display a lack of moral engagement, morally engaged followers will subsequently evaluate them harshly as unethical leaders (Ko et al., 2017).

Moral identity: Moral identity acts as a self-regulatory mechanism, leaders with moral solid identity act in ways consistent with their morals. Moral identity has been shown to predict ethical leadership. As a central part of a person's self-definition, moral identity motivates individuals to act as moral persons (Ko et al., 2017).

Organizational culture: This is defined as the set of those values, beliefs, ideas, norms, and attitudes which are helpful to bind the employees and organization (Saeed & Mughal, 2019).

Organizational justice: The perception that leaders are ethical increases followers' perception of organizational justice because fairness demonstrated by ethical leaders is an essential element of organizational justice (Ko et al., 2017).

Transcendental phenomenology: This is a qualitative research design. A thorough understanding of a given phenomenon can be reached by describing the lived experiences of individuals who have experienced the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1997).

Unethical conduct: The destruction or near-destruction of the followers' self-esteem for the leader's benefit makes transactional leadership highly unacceptable to the

dignity of people and can therefore be taken as unethical social conduct (Brown et al., 2005).

Rights: These are the basic human privileges of the individual and the civil liberties conferred by society (Sison et al., 2016).

Wellbeing: This term refers to the welfare, good, satisfaction, security, and happiness of an individual (Levine & Boaks, 2014).

Assumptions

I made several assumptions in this study that might be difficult to prove. Clarifying assumptions is necessary to identify the possible threats to my research design and avoid confusion among readers. The following assumptions were the basis of this study. First, I assumed that the president of the organizations I selected was a transformational leader. Second, I assumed that the participants in this study would answer all questions honestly and disclose all information about their lived experiences under unethical leadership. Participants may be concerned about the possibility that their information would be released or that their openness would result in unpleasant consequences from their superiors. To overcome such barriers, I assured participants of the confidentiality of their demographic information and interview responses.

Furthermore, I expressed my position in the organization and explained to participants that I was conducting this research to achieve a positive social impact. I assumed that participants clearly understood the purpose of the research and the characteristics of unethical leadership behavior in the organization, as most participants had enough experience in the organization. I also assumed that some of them have lived

an unethical leadership behavior in one way or the other. I focused on participants that were more likely to seem from poor communities with the lowest level of education because I assumed that this would enhance the quality of the data collected. The population is more ethically vulnerable.

Some participants may be genuinely concerned about the possibility that information could revert to their superiors with possible unpleasant repercussions, leading to the withholding of pertinent information Odeneye (2017). To ease such fears, participants were informed of my status as their colleague to consolidate camaraderie and necessary rapport with research participants. I further assumed that some participants might not continue participating in my research after starting the interview process and asking the interview questions for several reasons. It was essential to convince participants of the importance of this study and the impact that this study may have upon their lives and greater society. I made sure to deliver such expectations with dignity and enthusiasm without biasing the study results.

Scope and Delimitations

The research problem that inspired this study is the unethical leadership phenomenon from followers' perspectives. Through this study, I explored the characteristics of unethical leadership from followers' perspectives, as previous studies on the unethical leadership phenomenon have primarily centered on leaders' perspectives. According to Simon and Goes (2013), delimitations are restrictions/bounds that researcher have imposed before the study's inception to shorten the study's scope. Stakeholders are critical and are essential for organizations to achieve success. Focusing

on followers in conducting this study underscores their importance within the organization. This concept constitutes delimitation as followers are the frontline employees in constant contact with other stakeholders; understanding unethical leadership phenomena from their point of view is very important to achieve fairness and justice within organizations.

Narrowing the study topic to focus on followers as research participants enabled me to contribute to the body of knowledge in leadership and management. Focusing on studying the characteristics of unethical leadership from followers' perspective will ensure followers' rights and leaders' responsibilities toward respecting such rights. Furthermore, the use of transcendental phenomenological design in the qualitative study could be a delimitation because other researchers conducting similar research topics could have used quantitative or mixed research methods. I anticipated that the readers would have to judge the transferability of this research for future studies.

Limitations

Limitations are matters not within the researcher's control and conditions that may restrict the scope of the study or affect the outcomes (Easter, 2019). For example, studying unethical leadership in a private organization is more open to understanding the phenomenon than in a public organization. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics indicated that in 2018, 7.2 million employees in the public sector belonged to a union, compared with 7.6 million workers in the private sector. The use of both private and public organizations to conduct my research expanded the generalizability of the study, as

previous researchers have focused more on private or public organizations in conducting their studies.

Leadership researchers have studied the ethical leadership phenomenon from the perspective of leaders and managers. They have concentrated on the possibility of no further replication besides focusing on managerial level perspective in this phenomenon. To better understand the phenomenon of unethical leadership, I explored the lived experiences of followers and from their perspectives. Research on this topic must be ongoing, primarily when ethical leadership scandals have consistently occurred during the past decade. According to Emery (2016), leaders in 41% of U.S. organizations do not view unethical behavior as a risk to their business (Ethics Resource Center, 2012).

One primary weakness in this study was focusing on only one public or/and one private organization to analyze unethical leadership phenomenon; this restriction caused difficulty recruiting participants for interviews. To ensure the confidentiality and credibility of the data collected, I chose a private organization where I work with participants. Although the quality of data might be affected, I anticipated that my being part of the organization and sharing the same lived experience would be a rich source of information. Ensuring a clear separation of my role at the institution from my role as a researcher may also be challenging.

To overcome any possible limitations, such as the personal relationship between participants since they know each other, I focused on separating participants who do not know each other in diverse groups. According to Simons et al. (2015), generalizability—and, by implication, transferability—constitute a potential source of limitation in any

study. Another example of a limitation is when selected participants may not answer truthfully. A research study usually depends on human experiences, personal observations, and gathering data from a limited number of individuals or cases; therefore, the findings and outcomes cannot always be applied to larger populations (Easter, 2019).

Significance of the Study

In the proceeding section, I consider the significance of the current study. I first review the anticipated contributions to theory and practice. I then emphasize the importance of addressing the problem identified in the literature to extend current empirical knowledge.

Significance to Practice

The study may make a significant contribution to the field of leadership. Ethical standards were what the clear majority had accepted as good (Easter, 2019). In this study, I focused on frontline employees (followers) because most research studies primarily in ethical leadership focused on leaders as research participants. Followers under unethical leadership believed that innovative ideas have been traced to ordinary managers, ethical leadership is better positioned when ensuring the welfare and dignity of followers. Followers are less likely to show commitment to a leader who is not ethical.

This study may assist policy makers, scholarly community, and practitioners in developing entrepreneurial leadership programs to improve organizational performance. Followers will not provide the best performance under an unethical leadership and leaders who are only concerned about personal attainment will not get the full cooperation and loyalty from followers. The manner in which a leader acts and thinks

influences individuals internal and external to the organization. In order to effectively lead the organization, the leader must make decisions and model behaviors that are ethical in nature (Jones, 2015).

Significance to Theory

The study may contribute to filling a gap in the literature because most ethical leadership studies have been conducted using leaders as research participants instead of followers; this created a lack of understanding of the consequences of the phenomenon because there is a possibility that leaders may hide some of the attributes of ethical leadership to clear their image. As a result, scholars have suggested that future research should explore the phenomenon of ethical leadership from the viewpoint of followers (Yang, 2014). The study contributed to the existing theory by studying ethical leadership phenomenon phenomena differently.

Significance to Social Change

This study may enhance the reader's understanding of ethics in leadership because followers will voluntarily deliver their great ideas and effort to their leaders if they know they are committed to protecting their dignity and wellbeing. According to Odeneye (2017), employees may be unwilling to show the same commitment and enthusiasm that will bring about innovation (Szczepanska-Woszczyna, 2014) to a leader who is not ethical and is disinterested in their welfare. Furthermore, the findings of this study may address the short-termism problem in leadership, focusing on corporate profits while ignoring the organization's social responsibility. The enhanced understanding of the

phenomenon of ethical leadership may ensure that leaders do not merely focus on corporate profit but social justice and environmental issues.

The potential implications for positive social change were consistent by the scope of the study may have valuable implications for helping leaders avoid ethical failures. The importance of this study on ethical leadership on the society may reflect in the possibility of enhancing the overall gross domestic product (GDP) where followers will be more productive and improving corporate social responsibility (CSR). Social change may enhance attitudes, behaviors, laws, policies, and institutions (May et al., 2014).

Summary and Transition

In this chapter, I introduced significant issues related to the unethical behavior of leaders in organizations. The chapter included an introduction to the research problem by presenting recent scandals that reflected the unethical behavior of leaders. Focusing on followers' perspectives as research participants is an effective strategy to understand the phenomenon of unethical leadership and prevent leaders from swaying the truth. The chapter included a summary of the entire study, including the purpose of the study and how I conducted the study.

The next chapter of this study includes a detailed review of the current body of knowledge about the phenomenon of unethical leadership as exhibited in the extant literature. Chapter 3 includes the methodology used to conduct this study and the data collection and analysis procedures. Chapter 4 reports the data that I collected and the results that I obtained to outline the essence of the phenomenon under study. Finally, in

Chapter 5, I present a complete analysis of the outcomes, implications for practice, and contributions to the knowledge from this study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this study, I explored the lived experiences of followers under unethical leadership in private and public organizations in America. In this study, I focused on frontline employees (i.e., followers) as research participants because limited research has been conducted to address this matter. The problem that I identified in this study is that ethical violations in corporate America continue unabated, and unethical leadership behaviors persist. Despite the pressure that has been put on leaders to behave ethically, new unethical behaviors continue to emerge. Consequently, the understanding of the ethical leadership phenomenon has been swayed by leaders (Odeneye, 2017). The implications for positive social change from the results of this study may be the enhancement of current knowledge about the characteristics of ethical leadership and encourage future research on this phenomenon which will prompt a better understanding of the relationship between unethical leadership and the wellbeing of others.

I conducted the literature review by focusing on followers as research participants because they constitute a significant block in any organization and are the least researched. The literature review involves demonstrating possible areas where the study may contribute to existing knowledge of unethical leadership phenomena. This study, like that conducted by Odeneye et al. (2018) using frontline employees and by Treviño et al. (2003) using executives, may broaden the follower's knowledge and understanding of ethical and unethical leadership behavior. Furthermore, the findings of this study may contribute to the well-being of others in bringing about positive social change. Through the literature review, I provide a historical understanding of the ethical leadership

phenomenon, the motivation of followers, the satisfaction of stakeholders' needs, and their implications for social change.

A literature review includes a critical understanding of the extant research done in a particular area and the contribution to the available knowledge. The literature review enhances the quality of current research by identifying areas of prior scholarship to prevent duplication and identifies the gaps in research and conflicts from previous research. By conducting this literature review, I identified the current knowledge trends and areas in which I could contribute to the wealth of knowledge in the unethical leadership phenomenon.

I conducted this literature review using primary sources such as peer-reviewed journals, articles, dissertations, books, and governmental websites. In addition, I accessed an extensive number of articles and journals through the following Walden University research databases: Business Source Complete and Sage Publications. I used academic research keywords and phrases to navigate through Walden University databases, including *ethical leadership*, *unethical leader*, *unethical leadership behavior*, *followers*, *stakeholders*, *frontline employees*, *employee satisfaction*, *ethical conduct*, and *unethical scandals*.

Literature Search Strategy

The literature review consisted of primary sources such as peer-reviewed articles, journals, dissertations, books, and local government websites. I conducted a systematic literature search using Walden University Library and focused on the following databases: Business Source Complete, Academic Search Complete, Sage Premier, and

ProQuest Central. In addition, I focused on other academic journals such as the Academy of Management Journal, Journal of Business Ethics, Journal of Human Value, and the Leadership Quarterly. I determined the relevance of articles using phrases and keywords such as *stakeholders, attributes, theory, decision-making, ethical leadership, unethical leader, Plato on ethics, CSR, and scandals*.

There are several techniques a researcher can use to conduct a literature review; such techniques can be presented by different methods, including narrative, empirical, and meta-analysis methods. I conducted my literature review focusing on the narrative technique, which allows the audience to see the issue from a different perspective and enhance their understanding of the unethical leadership phenomenon. In addition, through the narrative technique, I presented relevant research from a different point of view to help the reader to understand the topic from different angles.

Conceptual Framework

I created the conceptual framework for this study using stakeholder theory, Adams's equity theory, and different concepts in ethics. The conceptual framework, according to Miles and Huberman (1994), is defined as "a visual or written product, one that may explain, either graphically or in narrative form, the main highlights that are the key factors, concepts, or variables-and the presumed relationships among them" (p. 43). Concepts, ideas, and beliefs can be bundled to form a conceptual framework used to guide a study (Maxwell, 2013; Odeneye et al., 2018).

Utilitarianism and eudemonistic models are conceptual frameworks used to compel organizations and leaders to ensure their decisions and policies, ensure the

happiness of their followers, and bring out the best of them (Jones & Felps, 2013).

Although the framework provided by Voss is a thorough examination of the characteristics of an ethical leader, they both noted that it is open to interpretation, and it may not be a complete concept to argue.

The eudaimonia model in Socrates's philosophy is another ethical concept that was part of the conceptual framework in this study. This philosophy focuses on how to live and act considering virtue and knowledge. According to Huta and Waterman (2014), “In eudaimonic philosophies, the principal focus is on activity reflecting virtue, excellence, the best within us, and the full development of our potentials” (p. 78). This model represents the well-being of an individual and reflects the conceptual side of the unethical leadership phenomenon, which negatively affects the welfare and dignity of followers.

The concept of utilitarianism is the most well-known of the ethical theories of utilitarianism, which evolved from the political philosophies of Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, who sought to achieve the greatest good for the greatest number (Driver, 2014). The concept of utilitarianism was related to this study because a leader might pursue a practical view of ethics that would seek the greatest good for the greatest number. Utilitarianism focuses on the greatest number of followers by emphasizing the interest of the leader in ensuring the wellbeing and dignity of others (Odeneye et al., 2018).

Adams's equity theory is a conceptual framework to balance between the employee's efforts toward work and the results they get in return; fairness is essential for

frontline employees who put the effort and sweat to improve their lives (Adams, 1965). Van Niekerk and Van Niekerk (2013) examined a framework that defines ethical leadership as a combination of several validated leadership theories. Adams's equity theory relates to the current study in the fact that leaders have to be knowledgeable of all direct and indirect actions of the organization and their effect on stakeholders. In addition, leaders have to ensure worker motivation and fairness and reward their contributions. Reward and recognition are Adams's fair outputs. In other words, if an employee feels like they are doing great work, they have to feel that they are being recognized for it.

Stakeholder theory as a conceptual framework contributes to an understanding of unethical leadership phenomena from employees' perspectives to enrich the current knowledge about the phenomenon. In addition, stakeholder theory adopts a forward-looking perspective to understand how managers can prioritize and address stakeholders' claims to improve the firm's ability to create value (Freeman, 1984). Stakeholders are very important for the success of an organization; the organizational products and services get to the customers through the frontline employees, so their actions impact the organization's success.

The presence of stakeholder theory in leadership and organizational change is in the relationship between the behavior of leaders and its impact on the performance of followers. Previous scholars have explored the harmful impact of unethical leader behavior through promoting unethical practices and reducing followers' pro-organizational behaviors (Gan et al., 2020; Knoll et al., 2017; Zuber, 2015). According to

Odeneye (2017), stakeholder theory is used to analyze business issues from the perspective of the stakeholders and the impact that such matters may have on stakeholders, directly or indirectly (Harrison et al., 2015).

Employees in private and public organizations cannot benefit from ownership profit sharing, so ethical leaders must provide other motivations such as being overly concerned about the wellbeing of employees; their job satisfaction, wants, and needs; and their participation in achieving the organizational objectives. Stakeholder theory is one common way to capture moral rights and ethical responsibilities (Brown & Treviño, 2006). In contrast, few researchers have pointed out that applying shareholder theory in organizations proved its efficiency and effectiveness; when traditional economic organizations are unable to meet stakeholder expectations, other business models such as employee-owned firms could become an optimal solution as they are expected to address social and economic performance simultaneously (Narvaiza et al., 2016).

Leaders have the mandate to protect and ensure the survival of an organization by providing stakeholders who are critical to the operation of the organization some sort of ownership. Shareholder theory could be applied as a business model that promotes worker participation at the highest level by bringing together participants in ownership with participation in management and control; it is a model that generates wealth and quality employment wherever the activity is carried out, and it has shown itself to be a business model that is valid both in times of crisis, guaranteeing employment and the continuance of the company, and in times of economic growth, as a collective learning model (Fernández & López, 2018). The stakeholder theory benefits both organizations

and stakeholders. I adopted this theory to guide this study as a management strategy representing a conceptual framework that will improve my understanding of the unethical leadership phenomenon from the follower's perspective.

Using this conceptual framework, I was able to gather natural data from participants and overcome the phenomenon's complexities in finding the right participants. In this study, I enabled the participants to freely speak up as they were affected by the phenomenon, participants who have been experienced the unethical leadership phenomenon in one way or the other, and a phenomenological approach was very appropriate to understand such experiences by followers. The concept/phenomenon was the system of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs, and theories that support and inform my research and are an important part of my design (Easter, 2019; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

By conducting single face-to-face interviews, I was able to assure the participants that their personal information would not be published. As a result, the participants could express themselves comfortably and freely, which enhanced the quality of data collected. In this study, I focused on frontline employees who contact stakeholders, excluding those employed in managerial positions.

Literature Review

Enhancing the knowledge of leadership and the unethical side thereof depended on understanding its ethical foundation. The concept of leaders and leadership goes back to the fourth century BC, where philosophers like Plato and Aristotle theorized Western society's ideas on leadership and focused mainly on power and survival and the battle

between emotion and reason (Zhang, 2016). According to Demirci (2019), one can trace the concept of organizational ethics and virtues related to business back to the early years of Western philosophy. Ethics explores the concept of morality and the foundations of moral values; it explores how and why people behave in certain ways. Normative ethics seek to establish moral standards on what is good or right (Demirci, 2019).

According to Solomon (1992), Aristotle was best known for his emphasis on cultivating virtues. His moral philosophy can be coupled with business ethics, as he wrote much about the ethics of exchange. The notions of knowledge and virtue represent Socrates's concept of ethics. The eudaimonic life consists of acting the right way, and evil results from ignorance. Plato indicated that people do everything for the sake of happiness and need nothing beyond happiness; wisdom is both the highest good and the ability to use other goods well and beneficially.

Plato posited that virtue is related to happiness and cited that the highest human good is systematic knowledge of the good together with the virtues identical to or entailed by that knowledge (Shaw, 2015). Aristippus's ethics asserted that the basis of pleasure that is the end is not pleasure in general, or pleasure over the long term, but immediate pleasures. For this reason, Aristippus believed that the end is not happiness because happiness is the sum of particular pleasures. The Epicurean concept of ethics is a moral theory that is the prominent hedonistic theory in the ancient world; Epicurus held that pleasure is the sole intrinsic good and pain is intrinsically bad for humans.

While Plato and Aristotle maintained that virtue is constitutive of happiness, Epicurus cited that virtue is the only means to achieve happiness (Perry, 2014).

Happiness is understood as a continuous experience of pleasure that comes from freedom from pain and mental distress. Stoics ethics identified happiness with virtue, and by virtue, they mean such moral virtues as justice, moderation, and courage, all of which are required for happiness. The perfect inner tranquility virtue strives for will only be achieved in the afterlife (Tornau, 2019). Augustine replaces the ancient definition of virtue as “right reason” (as in Stoicism) or “activity in accordance with reason” (as in the Aristotelian tradition) with a definition of virtue as love of God or, in later texts, as love of God and neighbor.

Augustine’s method was based on the idea that human reason and philosophy are useful only to those who already have faith (Tornau, 2019). He believed that even if he was mistaken about nearly everything, he thought to be true, one inescapable truth remained. The general pattern of his argument is the Augustinian ascent from the external to the internal and from the senses to God; but since human reason is, whether by nature or due to its fallen state, hardly capable of knowing God, Augustine this time is obliged to interrupt and re-start the ascent several times (Tornau, 2019). In the tradition of the conception of ethics from a religious standpoint, St. Augustine equated morality with the love of God. In contrast, William of Ockham derived morality as the law of God, which requires absolute compliance (Osborne, 2007).

Another era in ethics in leadership was the Machiavellian immoral ethics, which was part of the problem when organizational leaders started to adopt this posture. The term “Machiavellian” or “Machiavellism” find regular purchase among philosophers concerned with a range of ethical, political, and psychological phenomena, regardless of

whether or not Machiavelli himself invented “Machiavellism” or was in fact a “Machiavellian” in the sense commonly ascribed to him (Nederman, 2019). Given their propensity to behave amorally and manipulate others, it is not surprising that Machiavellian employees commit a wide variety of unethical, counterproductive behaviors at work (Dahling, 2012; Gunnthorsdottir et al., 2002; Hegarty & Sims, 1979; Tang & Chen, 2007). The failure of the Machiavellian model to consider stakeholders’ interests is part of the problem that necessitated the current study. The most influential medieval thinkers were Thomas Aquinas, whose work responds to a fundamental difficulty in Plato and Augustine’s views (Brown, 2019).

Thomas Aquinas and others had little interest in Augustine’s Platonism, and there was a certain tension between the medieval tendency to look for a teachable philosophical and theological system in his texts and his own way of philosophical inquiry that was shaped by the ancient tradition and left room for tentative argument and was open to revision (Tornau, 2019). Aquinas distinguished between acts of a man from human acts—that is, acts that are activities from humans—and found that nonhuman agents are not the same as human acts, which proceed from knowledge and will. Unlike some of his forerunners in philosophical psychology, Thomas thinks that each and every human being has his or her own agent intellect by which he or she can “light up” the phantasms in order to actually understand a thing. Here we can contrast Thomas’ view with those of St. Augustine of Hippo, Ibn Sina [Avicenna], and Ibn Rushd [Averroes], all of whom think God or some non-human intellect plays the role of agent intellect (Brown, 2019).

Kant's deontological ethics and utilitarianism are the main moral theories on modern virtue ethics (i.e., the modern era), Kant's ethics deontological in the sense that one has to obey the duties and obligations which derive from his supreme principle of morality, that is, the Categorical Imperative: "Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law" (Kant, 2005, p. 33). According to Bentham (1962), to measure the right action by applying a hedonistic calculus that determines the action's exact utility, Bentham claimed that the duration and intensity of pleasure and pain are of utmost importance and even possible. In this nonexhaustive historical review of ethics, I described the diversity and insight in the traits that have survived in modern interpretations.

The modern era was predicted by the relationship between ethical and unethical leadership and the concept of management. Leadership is a process that is not specifically a function of the person in charge. Instead, leadership is a function of individual wills and individual needs, and the result of the dynamics of collective will is organized to meet those various needs (Burnes & By, 2012). Furthermore, leadership is different from management in that managers pursue stability, while leadership is all about change (Barker, 2001).

Based on the ancient philosophies like Plato, Aristotle, and Socrates, leaders were more toward acting in ethical manners and maintaining different conceptions of the standards of ethics. In contrast, the continuous unethical behaviors and misconduct in organizations are unabated. Unethical acts in leadership are often hidden from view, which makes the study of the relationship between leaders and misconduct difficult. This

viewpoint depicts the moral leader as a selfless individual committed to the survival of society. On Aristotle's view, for example, the virtuous person sees reasons for acting that the non-virtuous do not and that arguably are not there to be seen absent the effects of virtue (Berryman, 2019).

Underestimating the role of ethics in leadership can be harmful to organizations and stakeholders. Whenever the issues related to ethics come into discussion, the ethical behavior of leaders has captured the attention of scholars and practitioners (Ahmad et al., 2017). There are various definitions for unethical leadership; Brown and Mitchell (2010) defined unethical leadership as "behaviors conducted, and decisions made by organizational leaders that are legal and violate moral standards, and those that impose processes and structures that promote unethical conduct by followers" (p. 11). Avella (2017) defined leadership based on the leadership aphorism that states, "Managers do things right, but leaders do the right thing" (p. 13). But what constitute the "right" thing will vary (and sometimes conflict) depending on the ethical theory that drives the decision or action.

Every concept in leadership is liable to be defined as in most management concepts, ethics and integrity are the heart of the leadership. They should be taken seriously for the business's success and long-term survival (Ciulla, 1998). Bad leaders are most frequently intolerant of criticism, unwilling to compromise their beliefs and actions. They frequently surround themselves with "yes men" who seek to ingratiate themselves with management and reinforce the leader's ego (Clements & Washbush, 1999). A dominating leader's power allows followers whose views align with those of top

management to feel empowered (often filling a previous void); at the same time, they are protected (by that same power) from negative consequences when following inappropriate directives (Chatterjee & Pollock, 2016). While leadership is a highly researched organizational phenomenon, ethical leadership has been primarily investigated through philosophical and normative perspectives (Benevene et al., 2018).

Ethics and morality in leadership have a tremendous connection that could positively or negatively affect followers. According to Ahmad et al. (2017), leadership ethics and morality have long been discussed in normative terms in philosophical work (Ciulla, 1998). Still, scholars' recent descriptive work in the social scientific terms inspired more research in leadership ethics (Kalshoven et al., 2011). The concepts of ethical leadership and the moral identity of leaders should be discussed more explicitly because of the adaptation of ethical leadership behavior for reasons other than a genuine interest in ethical norms and values. According to Skubinn and Herzog (2016), leaders might be impressed by the empirical results above that correlate ethical leadership to organizational citizenship behavior or work engagement. They might try to use ethical leadership as a “method” to achieve these aims, to ultimately improve economic outcomes.

Understanding cultural differences in the leadership process is very crucial for the success of organizations. House et al. (2013) found that the members of a society develop a cognitive template of preferred leader traits and behaviors and that leaders tend to behave in a manner that is consistent with the expectations of their respective societies. Establishing an ethical climate within organizations is a leadership responsibility to

eliminate negative behavior. Organizational culture positively relates to corporate leadership and governance (O'Connor & Byrne, 2015). Leadership can shape an organization's culture, and a culture of effectiveness can help increase employees' readiness to change. Leadership with a weak organizational culture lacks consistent communication, which leads employees to behave in a manner inconsistent with the organization's priorities.

Researchers have agreed that culture directly affects ethical leadership; they often define organizational culture as "the way we get things done" (White & White, 2017). According to Idris et al. (2015), lack of effective organizational culture and poor cultural integration affect organizational performance and decrease shareholders' return. Culture in organizations is a set of norms that shape how individuals and leaders behave and adapt to results. Organizational culture includes the norms that the members of an organization experience and describe as their work settings (Schneider et al., 2013).

Leaders can negatively impact the organizational culture by following time horizons focusing on meeting an immediate earning objective. Launching an ethical culture in organizations is a vital job of a moral leader. These actions by leaders could result in long-term consequences and weak organizational culture where "decisions and outcomes that pursue a course of action that is best for the short term but suboptimal over the long run" (Lavery, 1996, p. 826).

Researchers have agreed that leaders' actions directly impact followers' behavior; thus, leaders have the responsibility to establish an ethical climate within the organization and reduce the barriers of cultural diversity. Establishing an ethical climate within an

organization is important for enhancing positive employee behavior and eliminating negative behaviors (Karabay et al., 2018). Organizations have to seek ethical leadership in selected individuals to prevent bribery and corruption, as having an unethical leader within an organization may negatively affect other individuals' behaviors. Ethical leaders who ensure justice and fairness for their followers play a significant role in how followers devote their time, efforts, and commitment to their job and larger organizational objectives (Joseph, 2016).

Another variant in the definition of ethical and unethical leadership is that a social consciousness in leadership is essential; an ethical leader is socially conscious and responsible toward the wellbeing of others and the environment. For organizations to achieve sustainability, they must prioritize questions that affect stakeholders. A debate between researchers about the amount of responsibility and level of accountability of a leader toward other stakeholders has been occurring; Friedman (1970) argued that organizational leaders should have both responsibility and accountability to shareholders/owners, but not to other groups that might be said to be stakeholders of a firm, while Waldman et al. (2020), acknowledged that it is fine to have a sense of responsibility toward other stakeholders (e.g., "society"), as long as actions taken in the realm of CSR are instrumental in terms of serving the needs of the only stakeholder type to which leaders should be accountable—that is, shareholders/owners.

Leaders need to focus on the needs of stakeholders to enhance the competitiveness of the organization and achieve a positive social impact. This debate has developed into an argument between scholars who believe in the means or behaviors of

leaders that seems “right” by their very nature. In contrast, the other focuses on the ends or achieving what is “good.” According to Letwin et al. (2016), utilitarianism emphasizes the creation of good consequences (e.g., “the greatest good for the greatest number” is one version), thus becoming the touchstone for classifying a behavior as moral. Attention should be given to the fact that there are other stakeholders than employees; sustainability in organizations has become an essential aspect that leaders have to attain and believe that such stakeholders are affected by their ethical or unethical actions.

Leaders should establish effective strategies to prioritize stakeholders needs, ranging from primary to secondary and internal to external. Achieving justice and fairness for all stakeholders is a moral implication due to the distinction between extremes of “legitimate” and “illegitimate” stakeholders (Hill, 2017). This study focuses on followers who are relevant stakeholders of organizations because organizational decisions affect others, including families and society.

The development of leadership comes from ethics. There are several implications for CSR carried by the definition of ethical leadership from followers' perspective; ethical leadership and their decisions directly affect the behavior of followers and the overall direction of organizational citizenship behavior. According to Ullah et al. (2017), ethical leadership comes to be the prime channel through which individuals and firms for which these individuals' effort to develop morality. According to social learning theory, people learn manners through care, observation, and mock role model (Bandura, 1977). Fontrodona et al. (2017) made this clear by arguing that organizations need a

foundational understanding of ethics, so the firm serves all parties involved without harming any group.

Leaders have the peak stages of position and power in the organization; therefore, they are likely to be examples for followers by presenting fair treatment, honesty, liability, respect for others, and suitable mode and conduct. An ethical leader is attractive, authentic, and credible (Ullah et al., 2017). Effective leadership is visionary leadership; leaders have to be visionary by having the capacity “to see” to enable the organization and followers to achieve their highest potential. Leaders are responsible toward stakeholders. For leaders to be visionary, they can apply several moral assumptions about their responsibility toward their followers. A vision encourages individuals to make a deep personal investment, risk failure, and cooperate with others to pursue outcomes demanding constant learning (Ndalamba et al., 2018). Collins (2001) argued that the leader must understand that “[g]ood is the enemy of great” (p. 14) and cited that a leader must empower and direct an organization to achieve world-class competence.

A visionary leader acts for the benefit of the organization and its followers. Pfeffer (1998) observed that the duty of leaders extended far beyond simply developing a great plan and that the distinguishing characteristic and obligation of a leader’s vision was his or her ability to put that plan into action. Being a visionary leader means recognizing the need for others to grow and create opportunities for organizational change. Ndalamba et al. (2018) found that a visionary leader who treats followers as valued assets, establishes a learning culture within their organization, and empowers followers to become contributing partners in the organization, will achieve improved

organizational performance and followers' commitment. Organizational commitment means shared vision, defined as a mutual understanding between leaders and followers to put their hands together and achieve organizational success. Leaders cannot achieve their visions and goals without the support and cooperation of followers.

Followership Element in Leadership

The leadership process consists of leaders and followers, and both are fundamental elements because there is no leadership without followers. The perspectives of followers have been minimized in historical leadership research, except the role of followers has given more attention to recent research. According to Prilipko (2019), while the concept of leadership has been widely researched for decades, followership, as its vital component, has been given scant attention until recently. Leaders and followers form the foundation of organizations. They are dependent on the presence of the other for organizational operations (i.e., accomplishing goals and tasks) through a collaborative leader-follower relationship (Johnson et al., 2019).

An argument arises that research on ethical leadership that focuses solely on the leader without including followers is incomplete; scholars have argued leadership cannot be fully ethical without recognizing the importance, characteristics, and complexities of followership because employees are more often in follower roles than leaders in various situations (Raffo, 2013). The performance of effective followers is represented by being adaptable to change, where a follower must be flexible and open to change and can handle uncertainty caused by this process. According to Saeed and Mughal (2019), it is

believed that leadership plays a very important role in the organization to increase followers' performance, also called employees (Khan et al., 2017).

The role of followers in the organization is as important and effective as leaders', even though the nature and function of great followers are less understood than a great leader. Often, the actions of the leader, right or wrong, are valued more so than the actions of the followers within organizations; however, it has been shown that the followers play an equally important, active role in the leadership process (Prilipko, 2019).

Characteristics of Ethical Leadership

Leadership being ethical or unethical, has real elements that can be identified. Researchers debate what makes a leader ethical; Waldman et al. (2020) answered this question with leader accountability, suggesting a new direction regarding how some leaders might take personal ownership or internalize accountability toward others. Letwin et al. (2016) have supported utilitarianism in leadership because it seems to explain leaders' performance and promotability above and beyond their ethical leadership behavior.

The characteristics of ethical leaders will affect organizational performance and the followers' behavior; leaders who claim to be committed to the needs of a broader set of stakeholders but use the firm's CSR engagement instrumentally to maximize shareholder value face the risk that stakeholders will detect their "moral fakery" or "moral decoupling" (Pfeffer, 2016, p. 664) and sanction the company's moral deceit (Waldman et al., 2020). While some scholars have focused on transformative leadership, others use the term "ethical leadership;" these different elements and characteristics of

ethical leadership will be outlined in the subsequent sections to better help build knowledge about the phenomenon of unethical leadership.

Morality in Leadership

An ethical leader must be moral; this aspect depicts integrity and honesty. It also depicts the leader's effort to influence the ethical behaviors of followers through promoting ethical standards and disciplining unethical behaviors (Wang et al., 2017). An ethical leader treats others with dignity and respect and sees them as ends, not as means (Eisenbeiss, 2012), while Treviño et al. (2003) argued that leader justice orientation concerns the nondiscriminatory treatment of others concerning gender, nationality, religion, and socio-economic status. According to Skubinn and Herzog (2016), it is clear that there can be differences in how individual leaders treat their followers, in more or less instrumental ways, showing more or less respect for them as ends in themselves.

A moral leader aspect of ethical leadership behavior explains how leaders use their managerial power and leadership position to encourage and promote ethical standards. Morality must be an important part of the ethical leader's self-concept and the guiding principle for every course of action (Ahmad et al., 2017; Giessner et al., 2015).

Honesty in Leadership

An ethical leader must be honest and trustworthy, as doubt and mistrust may undercut perceptions of ethicality. Furthermore, ethical leaders must be disciplined and eager to face the challenges that might face them and their followers. According to Ahmad et al. (2017), ethical leaders personify certain traits such as honesty, integrity, truthfulness, openness to input, respect and principles in decision-making, and concerns

for others (Treviño et al., 2003). Trust and honesty in leadership are essential to gain loyalty and respect from followers; the honest and ethical leader will find ready followers willing to abide by directives to achieve organizational objectives.

Accountability in Leadership

By being socially responsible, ethical leaders believe in their accountability toward their organizations and followers. According to Waldman et al. (2020), responsible leadership is an orientation or mindset taken by people in executive-level positions toward meeting the needs of a firm's stakeholders. As such, it deals with defining those stakeholders, assessing the legitimacy of their claims, and determining how those needs, expectations, or interests can and should best be served. Leaders who lack accountability mainly establish an environment where trust is dominant. Ethical leaders hold others liable for their unethical actions by being accountable for compliance with laws and ethical standards. According to Odeneye, (2017), the accountability of the ethical leader should not be taken for granted; instead, necessary checks, balances, and oversights should be established to curb possible excesses.

Fairness in Leadership

Leaders have to be fair toward their organizations and followers. Fairness in decision-making has been positively identified with the ethical leadership construct. According to Crews (2015), a concept in social exchange proposes that ethical leaders' fair and caring behavior towards followers is associated with lower employee counterproductive behavior. Ethical leaders are honest, responsible, and trustworthy individuals who hold them fair to their organizations and followers. According to Crews,

ethical leaders are characterized by honest, honesty, trustworthiness, fair-minded, and care about the welfare of others.

Ethical leaders listen to their followers and understand their needs and concerns. Leaders may not be aware of all the dilemmas and issues throughout the organization. By giving followers the right to talk and participate, such dilemmas and issues can be brought to the reader's attention and resolved. Leaders should not be unapproachable, reducing equality and fairness to followers. Bailey and Madden (2016) found that unfairness and injustice can make work feel meaningless. These authors found evidence of a lack of distributive justice (i.e., anticipated pay or pay rise not forthcoming) negatively impacting the concept of meaningful work. They also found evidence of the negative impact of procedural injustice, such as bullying and lack of opportunities for career progression.

Responsibility in Leadership

Being an ethical leader enlarges the set of responsibilities to handle. Ethical leaders are responsible for their organizations, followers, and resources. Responsibility of ethical leadership can be identified in leaders' compliance with laws, rules, and regulations. According to Pasricha et al. (2018), ethical leaders express their fundamental beliefs and call attention to the ethical consequences and long-term risks associated with decisions that go against the interests of various stakeholders; in doing so, they bring into underway role modeling and a learning process (Bandura, 1977; Brown et al., 2005) that gives an impetus to the pursuit of social responsibility initiatives by individuals in the organization.

Responsibility in ethical leaders has tremendous implications for the effective management of the organization's resources, including their allocation and use (Odeneye, 2017). Ethical leaders must be conscious enough to make the right decisions, especially for this study included frontline employees, excluding those relevant to stakeholders; ethical leaders share relevant decisions with stakeholders and seek their advice in setting rules and making decisions to benefit the organization. Followers emulate their leader as an important role model when the leader is willing and able to go beyond the regular call of duty to exhibit maximum performance. Ethical leaders endorse a broad stakeholder-centric view of the organization. Therefore, they hold importance, specifically in the current context of the social enterprise, as they would ensure that practices undertaken attend to the enterprise's primary objective of stakeholder value maximization (Pasricha et al., 2018).

Stakeholders' Wellbeing

Ethical leaders' actions embody honesty, accountability, trustworthiness, loyalty, fairness, and respect for others. Leaders must establish mechanisms to identify the different needs of their stakeholders. Ethical leaders cater to the welfare of their stakeholders and demonstrate compassion for others. When the leader is perceived as trustworthy and able to create a trusting organizational climate, employees feel safer and productive and respond with loyalty to the organization and their leader (Karabay et al., 2018). Scholars have found that an ethical work climate means less conflict between followers and their leaders; a leader's responsibility is to ensure the welfare and safety of the organization and followers.

Followers must feel justice and safe to speak up against any unethical behavior towards them or the organization. Leaders have to ensure the security of such individuals if they decide to speak against unethical actions. According to Karabay et al. (2018), most employees may choose to remain silent against the unethical behavior of colleagues or managers in their workplaces. This can be related to many factors like fear of losing their job, lack of opportunity to express their ideas to their managers, or lack of organizational culture (Elçi et al., 2014).

Humility in Leadership

Ethical leaders do leadership more than they talk about leadership; humility in ethical leadership recognizes that leaders do not have all the means to solve every problem of the organization on their own. Ethical leaders aim to explore, analyze, and improve situations using others' insight and contribution. According to Patelli and Pedrini (2015), the ethical leader is not interested in painting a picture of a hero but quietly brings about change beneficial to all. This character of an ethical leader results in gaining followers' commitment and loyalty. Organizations with leaders who demonstrate a moral commitment to the growth of others are more profitable than those with leaders who do not demonstrate this same commitment (Ndalamba et al., 2018). Ethical leaders share decisions in dilemmas with their followers, so they make them feel like part of the organization. When employees participate in the organizational decision-making process, they become more responsible and accountable for their actions (Denison, 1990).

Approachability of a Leadership

Ethical leaders are always approachable by their followers; organizations with proper communication between leaders and followers are more likely to succeed and achieve long-term objectives. Communication in ethical leadership entails stipulating acceptable norms and punishments that deviation may bring (Demirtas & Akdogan, 2015; Odeneye et al., 2018). Scholars have agreed that managers' failure is due to followers' confusion caused by a lack of communication. Ethical leaders can establish a legitimate stakeholders' environment within their organizations; such an aspect can be established by creating an ethical code of conduct.

Legitimate stakeholders are "those groups to whom the firm owes an obligation based on their participation in the cooperative scheme that constitutes the organization and makes it a going concern" (Brown et al., 2005, p. 65). Ethical leaders give their followers the right to speak, whether in good or bad situations. Yıldız (2019) brought a perceived organizational justice concept into research. It is affected positively if employees are given the right to speak and participate in decisions and constructive and informative explanations during performance evaluations. Perceived organizational justice affects employees' attitudes, forming organizational behaviors that shape organizational performance. Similarly, individuals' cognitive and emotional perceptions of the level of communication satisfaction in the organization are measures of behavior and performance.

Communication within an ethical organizational environment must be effective and efficient (Yıldız, 2019). Organizational communication practices are the frontrunner

to communication satisfaction. If communication resources meet employees' informational needs in an organization, the employees will feel satisfied with communication (Chan & ve Lai, 2017). Ethical leaders value communication with their followers, and within the organization, they concentrate on the tone and mode of the communication. They establish a professional strategy to develop this aspect. Ethical leaders should never stop learning and being tutored in the art of effective communication. Researchers have shown that followers tend to show high performance if they are satisfied with the level of communication with their leader. According to Yıldız (2019), employees' organizational perceptions are assumed will turn into individual attitudes, behaviors, and performance, and individual performance will affect the organization.

Leadership Development Program

According to research, some leaders lack the willingness to apply effective, ethical conduct to improve organizational performance; the professional development of leaders has been ineffective, with research demonstrating that 75% of organizations do not find their leadership development programs to be effective (Jinadasa, 2015). Although organizations should establish a training program to promote an ethical leadership skill in leaders, a leader may have all the necessary skills, intellect, and experience associated with effective leadership; however, an underlying cause responsible for their ineffectiveness may be that they sabotage themselves, albeit unconsciously, and are unable to lead effectively.

The focus of an effective leadership development program should be toward the ethical side of leadership and the consequences of unethical behavior. According to Holt et al. (2018), although leadership is increasingly seen as a source of competitive advantage or a strategy component, many organizations lack fully equipped employees to assume leadership positions (Johnson et al., 2019). As a result, leadership development programs have increased in popularity; however, the difficulty in developing employees with the right skills and abilities needed to rise to leadership positions within organizations is also understood (Ortega et al., 2013). Therefore, addressing the implications of leadership development programs may be escalated to; an organizational level where investing in regular training in ethical leadership will benefit the organization and followers, and a societal level where a positive social impact will be achieved.

Researchers have argued that ethical or servant leadership implications may have developed in an individual from childhood and, where it is lacking, can be acquired through relevant training (Odeneye, 2017). According to McKim and Velez (2017), leadership development should be linked to specific learning experiences. According to Holt et al. (2018), the factors that are instrumental in leadership development program are the impact on a person's view of leadership that results from his or her childhood and adolescent development, the impact of formal education on how people learn and their perspectives on training, and on-the-job experiences which are critical, especially those that improve the leader's knowledge. Organizations should pay attention to the ethical behavior of individuals in the selection and hiring process of leaders or provide the necessary training and development to improve the ethical posture of exiting leaders,

offering ramifications for how an organization is perceived in society (Odeneye, 2017).

In addition, organizations that provide opportunities for growth to their employees will be better able to identify those with an aptitude for leadership.

Ethical Leadership Perspectives

The concept of ethical leadership has emerged as a prominent theme in the empirical literature on leadership, with a dramatic increase in related research since the mid-2000s (Ko et al., 2017). Essentially, ethical leadership is the act of doing what is right versus doing what is wrong. Ethical leadership perspectives are defined as how leaders view their ethical leadership versus ethical conduct.

Stakeholder Relationships

As organizations endeavor to become more successful, a healthy relationship between stakeholders and their organization plays a significant role in developing a successful organization. Leaders have a significant role in the way their followers devote their time, efforts, and commitment to (a) their job and (b) how they extend their support to achieving organizational objectives (Joseph, 2016). Leaders can potentially inspire the actions of their followers by improving the quality of the leader-follower dyadic relationship (Graen et al., 1977).

High-quality relationships will lead to high levels of trust and increased communication channels, which offer some positive benefits for both followers and the organization. For example, the relationship between leaders and followers in the workplace determines employee performance, satisfaction, retention, loyalty, and commitment (Shaw, 1997). In addition, the relationship between leaders and followers

has a significant impact on their organization; the shared values between leaders and followers and their organization can boost commitment, enhance collective performance, and develop employee loyalty (Joseph, 2016).

Ethical Decision-Making

Organizational researchers have become more interested in understanding the effect of ethical decisions in organizations and leaders' ethical behavior. Effective decision-making affects an organization's positive or negative direction. Ethical leaders are willing to allow their followers to participate in the decision-making process; ethical leaders are the ones who are willing to make ethical decisions for the well-being of others without expecting a reward. According to Yıldız (2019), giving employees the right to speak to express their thoughts on organizational processes will strengthen their perception of procedural justice. Employees who acquire information about organizational processes and take the initiative in making decisions and influencing organizational processes achieve greater outcomes (Viswesvaran & ve Ones, 2002).

Leaders being ethical are willing to make effective decisions that uplift others and society. Therefore, making ethical choices is an integral duty in civil society and a good organizational citizen (Snyder, 2016). In this study, I focused on the lived experiences of followers under unethical leadership; the ethical violations of leaders have continued unabated; leaders have overly short time horizons and a bias for immediate gratification. In addition, Timming (2015) argued that participation in decision-making is not distributed equally across groups of employees.

Baker et al. (2016) focused on followers' perceptions of their abilities, which prompts them to perceive themselves as having the potential for serving in a leadership role. Organizations should provide the right environment for leaders to make ethical decisions in bad situations. In cases of moral decision-making, individuals may overlook or minimize the implications of negative long-term consequences, such as punishment, if ignoring the possible results decreases stress in the short term (Snyder, 2016).

Organizational Change

Effective leadership shapes the organizational culture to prepare followers to adapt to change. According to Metwally et al. (2019), the success of change initiatives may face a barrier in employees' response, especially when they lack the readiness to change. The growths of any organization are contingent on a leader's ability to respond and adapt to change; ethical leadership is responsible for ensuring readiness to change and ensuring such change is fair by reducing uncertainty. An ethical leader strives to establish an atmosphere of trust within an organization, prepare followers to adapt to changing environments and ensure that change does not affect organizational behavior and performance. People are said to be resistant to change (Metwally et al., 2019); this resistance might be due to their inability to adjust their behavior, skills, and commitment to meet the new requirements. In addition, they may not possess skills related to a readiness to change.

Ethical leaders are more toward establishing an ethical environment within organizations. When leaders are trustworthy, employees' perceptions of oneness increase (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Followers need to feel their leadership highly values them to

achieve effective change. Thus, in situations where ethical leaders are consistent in word and deed, trustworthy, and people-oriented (Kalshoven et al., 2013), employees are more likely to do their best on behalf of their organizations. One form of doing their best for the organization is to offer a positive response when the organization is changing (Metwally et al., 2019).

Implementing a successful and effective change requires stakeholders' assistance and acceptance of such change; the ethical leader's rapport-building capability and concern for stakeholders will be germane in garnering necessary support for change (Odeneye, 2017). In addition, readiness to change implies proactiveness and a positive attitude toward change (Vakola, 2014), and mental or physical preparedness to participate in any change by performing actions that will improve, alter, vary, or modify something (Madsen et al., 2005). Such a positive response is more likely to be developed among employees under ethical leadership conditions that generate social exchange processes and inspire their social identity (Metwally et al., 2019).

Moral Disengagement

The continuous unethical behavior of leaders has served as an example in arguments that unethical leaders may be culpable for the unethical behaviors of followers. Leaders play a significant role in the way their followers devote their time, efforts, and commitment to two areas: (a) the responsibilities of their job and (b) their support to achieving organizational objectives (Joseph, 2016). According to Ruhnka and Boerstler (1998), courts have placed a legal burden on organizational leaders for employees' unethical behavior based upon their duty to supervise employees.

Understanding that leaders implicitly condone unethical behavior may only be useful for determining guilt, but it is unclear how leaders' influence translates into follower unethical behavior. The leader's influence on moral disengagement processes may provide another way to understand the psychological processes through which leaders achieve their influence.

In moral disengagement, Bandura (1999) presented individuals as moral agents who “refrain from behaving in ways that violate their moral standards” (p. 35). Through the behaviors they model, leaders may also influence individual moral disengagement processes. Thus, when one observes a leader behaving in a manner that condones unethical behavior, they will be more likely to morally disengage. In contrast, those who observe ethical behavior will be less likely to morally disengage (Palmer, 2013). According to Krylova et al. (2017), the concept of a moral judgment to structure future thinking about followers' reactions to leaders' transgressions may overcome many of the gaps mentioned above in the current understanding of followers' reactions leaders' wrongdoing. Leaders are the source of social influence that might affect one's ethical efficacy beliefs and moral disengagement processes.

Gender Inequality

Gender inequality and gender discrimination remain very real challenges for women workers in general, and especially so for women striving for leadership positions; Reaping the benefits of female leadership relies on an organization's ability to combat the numerous barriers female leaders face that male leader often do not, including gender-based discrimination, implicit bias, and unfair performance evaluations (Offermann &

Foley, 2020). The problem of gender inequality has been increasing even in the academic community, where individuals are more knowledgeable and educated and the institutional policies that block women's progress in the marketplace.

To end this gender inequality requires ethical leaders who will empower and treat women fairly by adopting policies that bring women's issues to the forefront with equal pay and job opportunities. Offermann and Foley (2020) argued that all organizational leaders face moral and ethical dilemmas. So, a leader's ability to act ethically can have a significant impact on various important outcomes. Most popular leadership theories recognize that how leaders approach ethical dilemmas and the extent to which they exhibit ethical behaviors are integral aspects of leadership effectiveness.

Ethical leaders are thought to be more than "moral managers" who inspire ethical behavior from their subordinates; they are also expected to be "moral persons" who act ethically because that is who they are across contexts (Treviño et al., 2000). For example, ethical leaders would not take advantage of the role of women in the family to lessen their chance to compete for leadership roles and positions; women take time off from work for several reasons such as pregnancy, infant care, and supporting elderly family members. Another reason that threatens the stability of women's jobs is sexual harassment, which may prevent women from aspiring or attaining leadership positions. Unethical behaviors of individuals in positions of authority could lead them to use their elevated status to solicit sexual favors from subordinates in exchange for promotions and recognitions. Ethical leadership duties require that leaders address and identify any sexual harassment, unfairness, and gender inequality that might occur.

Job Satisfaction

The apparent concern of ethical leaders for others' wellbeing, especially employees, will ensure that they are thorough in guaranteeing job satisfaction (Odeneye, 2017). Researchers have argued that unethical behaviors of leaders have a direct impact on job satisfaction and the performance of followers. In contrast, others have linked followers' job satisfaction with the environmental setup. The influence of leaders and their behavior on audiences is undeniable (Yıldız, 2019). On the other hand, ethical leaders with the roles of moral managers increase the perceived organizational justice. Ensuring job satisfaction for followers is part of leaders' social responsibility. Businesses are already socially responsible when they meet the expectations of the black ink—that is, operate within the law in the balanced best interest of direct stakeholders (Nerenz, 2018).

Erdiaw-Kwasie et al. (2017) emphasized a corporate stakeholder orientation connected with corporate social performance practices that influence stakeholders' silence and attitude towards social performance practices of firms. These practices must include stakeholders in organizational decisions and communications to achieve job satisfaction. For example, achieving job satisfaction for followers require mutual coordination between leadership and followers; employees with affective commitment are less likely to quit their job and present a lower level of absenteeism; in other words, there is evidence that the desire of individuals to contribute to organizational goals is influenced by the nature of the psychological ties that bind them to the organization.

An ethical leader is willing to motivate others to change their behaviors; the values the ethical leader espouses influence and modify the behaviors of followers (Zhu et al., 2016). By being ethical, leaders can encourage followers to prioritize the organization's interests despite their interests. Committed followers are willing to sacrifice their conveniences when they believe that such actions will further the interest of their organization.

Followers expect rewards and recognition from the leaders for their sacrifices and hard work. This view is utilitarian in perspective as it means that the collective interest or the greater good of the organization is given preeminence over individual concerns (Odeneye, 2017). Ethical leadership can empower followers' performance, job satisfaction, and commitment. It can also increase creativity within the organization and encourage followers to feel a sense of responsibility toward the contribution to the growth of their organization.

Positive Social Impact

One of the responsibilities of leadership to satisfy their implications for the development of society. Bettering societies and improving economic growth has to be a part of the organizational vision; the vision statement of one major corporation is "To create a better everyday life for the many people," while another is "To inspire humanity" (Nerenz, 2018, p. 11). The development of societies could be achieved by preventing the dominance of large organizations; there should not be any interconnection between the society's potential with the survival of specific organizations. Disconnecting the power of

organizations from controlling society will enhance the ability to achieve positive social impact, social justice, and reduce poverty.

Waldman et al. (2020) agreed on the need for accountability for leaders and responsibility to improve society; responsibility on the part of leaders can be distinguished from accountability. The former refers to a felt sense of obligation on the part of leaders to serve the needs or interests of a set of stakeholders. Accountability goes one step further regarding experiencing repercussions if those needs or interests are not well served and committing to taking steps to rectify the situation. Ethical leaders are responsible for deploying organizational resources most efficiently; thus, leaders should be open and honest about their instrumental/strategic approach to CSR and responsible leadership, more generally, so there is no doubt about their authenticity (Waldman et al., 2020).

Ethical leadership that aims for a positive social impact will also benefit the political side. Society can benefit greatly from ethical leaders who are willing to take action and make decisions responsibly. This responsibility of ethical leaders will reduce the prevalence of politicians and prevent them from being interested only in personal benefits and abuse of powers. Fairness, justice, environmental protection, and the growth of society are among the priorities of an ethical leader. According to Odeneye (2017), ethical leaders in the political arena, in their generous disposition about being genuinely concerned about the wellbeing of others, may strive for the eradication of poverty, global peace, and the avoidance of war.

Presently, leaders' actions toward attaining their personal and organizational goals disregarding the effect of such attainment of stakeholders and society, are still unabated and continuous; ethical leaders are willing to address and identify stakeholders' issues and bring positive social change. According to Cote (2018), ethical leadership has gained popularity and has captivated the attention of the public, corporations, and academic institutions due to unethical behaviors resulting in corporate scandals. When they shift their behavior positively toward society, ethical leaders will be able to prevent economic and social problems from occurring while blaming organizational leaders' unethical behaviors. Ethical leaders not only are responsible toward their organizations, stakeholders, environment, and greater society, but also for preventing any unethical conduct that might occur; responses to unethical conduct in organizational, political, or social settings often focus on the role of leaders in facilitating or encouraging such behavior (D'adda et al., 2017).

The gap in the Literature

Leaders have overly short time horizons and a bias for immediate gratification. Leaders are willing to behave unethically without due consideration of the impact on relevant followers; short time horizons can lead to short-termism, defined as "decisions and outcomes that pursue a course of action that is best for the short term but suboptimal over the long run" (DesJardine, 2016, p. 15; Laverty, 1996, p. 826). Despite extensive research in ethical leadership literature, most qualitative studies have focused on the leaders' perspective in studying ethical leadership. Several studies have used leaders or

managerial individuals as research participants like Guay et al. (2019) and Khokhar and Zia-ur-Rehman (2017).

While some leaders appear to lack the willingness to apply ethical conduct to improve, leaders have swayed organizational performance, the understanding of the unethical leadership phenomenon. Excluding followers, who constitute a significant population directly affected by ethical leadership and should be allowed to express their understanding, may limit available knowledge on the phenomenon (Odeneye, 2017).

The consequences have raised the profile of ethics Zhu et al. (2016), which has become a problem that is reflected in a gap in research where the scholarly literature has focused mainly on exploring ethical leadership from the perspective of leaders as research participants while only a few researchers have focused on the perspective of followers as research participants. Followers are a major part of any organization and society; they constitute the larger population in any organization. Consequently, they have the right to express their opinions and share their perspectives on the phenomenon of unethical leadership. The findings from this current study (interpreted in detail in Chapter 5) extended previous literature through demonstrating the perceptions of followers toward the key traits of an ethical leader. The findings indicated a focus upon the following eight themes:

1. Morality is a key finding in this study since majority of the participants agreed on the concept of developing an ethical leadership style by emphasizing morality. A moral leader can adopt justice by giving each person what he or she deserves. Justice has been explained by

philosophers as the concept of proportion between a person's deserts and the good and bad things that befall in between. In support of this theme, participants expressed the belief that a moral leader should ensure justice and fairness for their followers.

2. Honesty is also a key finding in this study which will increase the quality of a decision-making process. An ethical leader makes right decisions by being honest and truthful; as a result, followers will learn to be honest when they see their leader behave in this manner.
3. Accountability is a finding in this study which indicates that ethical leaders are the ones who believe in their accountability toward their organization and followers. Leaders who lack accountability are more likely to establish unfair environment and lack of trust. Ethical leaders also hold others liable for their actions by being accountable for their actions. This finding will enhance accountability among decision makers by making them realize that they will be responsible for their actions and decisions.
4. Fairness as a finding in this study is considered as important as stakeholders' wellbeing in ethical leadership. Stakeholder theory, eudaimonia, Adams's equity theory, and social learning theory were the conceptual frameworks used to guide this study. These theories were particularly relevant to the theme of fairness. Participants explicitly

demonstrated their views about fairness in leadership. Participants believed that an ethical leader has to be fair to his followers and society.

5. Responsibility of leadership where the conceptual frameworks that apply to this finding are stakeholder theory, eudaimonia, and utilitarianism. An ethical leader is willing to admit their mistakes and shortcomings--not only their achievements. In addition to admitting their weaknesses, ethical leaders can find the right people to make up for it.
6. Stakeholders' wellbeing in relation to the conceptual framework of stakeholder theory and eudemonia; this theme indicates that ethical leaders' concern about stakeholders' wellbeing has been found to affect the performance of employees. This finding proved that followers would have better performance when their leaders are concerned about their wellbeing.
7. Humility is another finding of this study, demonstrating an ethical leader is humble and respects the values of others. In addition, an ethical leader is friendly and peaceful. The conceptual frameworks that underpin this theme are eudaimonia and social learning theory. Participants have shown the importance of an ethical traits from childhood, through school and the professional environment.
8. approachability another finding that derived from Theme 10 where Participants believed that an ethical leader has to be perceived as approachable by their followers. Proper communication between leaders

and followers is critical to attaining organizational goals and achieving long-term objectives. More than 10 participants discussed the effect of the lack of communication on managers' failure in organizations. The conceptual frameworks that are most relevant to this theme are stakeholder theory, social learning theory, and Adams's equity theory.

Summary and Conclusions

The continuous unethical actions of leaders to attain their personal and organizational goals have led researchers to realize the importance of ethics. The findings outlined in this literature review indicated how important ethical leadership is even after several studies have been conducted within a short period. The literature review went back to the ancient Greek philosophers studying ethical leadership, demonstrating Plato's and Aristotle's concepts in ethics; the popularity of studying ethics in leadership has been continued, and researchers have attempted to understand ethical leadership from various perspectives. The literature review has focused on the unethical side of leadership from followers' perspective and addressed the characteristics of ethical leadership, including morality, honesty, accountability, fairness, responsibility, wellbeing, humility, and approachability.

Applying ethical conduct and encouraging ethical leadership in organizations and societies has marked organizational and social responsibilities for leaders toward the society, stakeholders, and organization. This literature review focused on the social responsibility of leaders and the importance of adopting ethical principles and standards while aiming to achieve organizational goals. This chapter also identified the different

terms used in this study. I addressed the relationship between followership and leadership, which resulted in the gap in research that inspired this study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of followers under unethical leadership in public and private organizations in the United States. The focus of this phenomenological study was on followers as research participants because they constitute a significant stakeholder in any organization. The implications for positive social change from the results of this study may enhance current knowledge about the characteristics of ethical leadership and encourage future research on ethical and unethical leadership, which can enhance the understanding of the relationship between unethical leadership and the wellbeing of others. Ethical leaders set the tone in an organization by displaying, communicating, and reinforcing appropriate behavior (Steinbauer et al., 2014).

In this chapter, I offer a detailed explanation of the research method and particular design that I used to conduct this study. I explain my main responsibilities and why I chose a qualitative phenomenology research design. I discuss my main role as the researcher and justify the manner of selecting participants and collecting data. The chapter includes a description of the specific methodology, including the logic in selecting participants, the procedures for recruitment, and data collection and analysis processes. In this chapter, I also address the study's ethical issues, trustworthiness, research credibility, and transferability.

Research Design and Rationale

In the following section, I present the research method and design that guided this study. I review the justification for the chosen research design. I also illustrate why these were chosen in comparison to other possible methodological approaches.

Research Method

Ethical leadership is the main phenomenon of this study. An ethical leader is one who has the ability to be conscious of and uphold the dignity and wellbeing of their followers. According to Schwandt (1994), researchers attempt to make sense out of, or interpret experience from, the perspectives of those who lived it. Scholars have recently conducted studies in ethical eldership using both quantitative research methods (Wang et al., 2017) and qualitative research methods (Odeneye et al., 2018). While my focus in this research was an exploration of the phenomenon of unethical leadership, knowledge of the variables and theory base within the phenomenon was very limited; this study was not about measuring relationship among variables, which made the use of the quantitative method inappropriate.

A qualitative research methodology was suitable for this study. I had the ability to demonstrate the unethical leadership as a phenomenon with a focus on followers as research participants. I adopted a qualitative methodology in this study because I was able to study issues pertaining to ethical leadership in rich detail and greater depth (see Crews, 2015). According to Moustakas (1994), attempting to understand the phenomenon from the perspective of different participants enhanced the identification of patterns and themes as they emerged.

Face-to-face interview was the primary data collection method that I used to conduct this study. There are several sources that may be used to collect data in a qualitative study, including observations of the phenomenon, documents, or interviews. According to Kvale (1983), an interview is the most powerful tool to achieve an understanding of the experiences lived by another person. My use of interviews in this study enhanced the credibility and quality of the data collected. I conducted interviews with individuals face-to-face; in contrast to virtual interviews, which meant that I was able to observe nonverbal cues that may be pertinent to a further understanding of the phenomenon studied (Odeneye et al., 2018).

Research question and audience are important in the choice of methodology. The qualitative approach was appropriate because the research question was open-ended, in contrast with the closed-ended questions that are typical in quantitative research. Studies that address *how* and *why* questions are better addressed using the qualitative method (Odeneye, 2017; Yao, 2014). The research question in this study centered on the understanding of feelings, emotions, and experiences of research participants about the phenomenon of unethical leadership. The primary distinction between qualitative and quantitative methods is the research question; because the research question was open-ended, a qualitative approach was more appropriate for this study. This is in contrast to a quantitative study, in which the research question is usually closed-ended.

As a doctoral study, the intended audience of this study is the academic community (see Odeneye, 2017). The audience is very important in the choice of a methodology; the fresh and plural approaches associated with the qualitative method are

useful in studies that give voice to the oppressed. This approach is also useful for studies providing an in-depth understanding of societal issues, and those that lead to the emergence of new and valuable insights (Freeman et al., 2015).

Research Approach

Within the qualitative method are several potential designs, including case study, grounded theory, narrative, phenomenology, and ethnography; I selected the phenomenological design for this study. The grounded theory approach was not relevant to this study because the intent of grounded theory is to go beyond description in order to generate a theory. The narrative approach was not appropriate either because narrative research is focused on the narratives of an individual. An ethnographic study is about a group that shares the same culture.

The ethnographic approach would not have been appropriate for the study because participants may come from diverse cultural backgrounds, and they may not share the same culture. Because this study was not about understanding a culture and its influence, ethnography was inappropriate (see van Manen, 1982). Case study researchers are concerned with developing an in-depth analysis of a program, an event, one case, or multiple cases. Setting parameters for limiting a case study in a timeframe, proper environment, and other relevant dynamics may be problematic. These limitations to the case study approach may impinge negatively on a thorough understanding of the phenomenon of ethical leadership (Odeneye, 2017).

Given the purpose of this study, I determined that the phenomenological approach was suitable to conduct this study. Phenomenological researchers focus on understanding

the essence of the lived experiences of individuals. In this study, I aimed to understand the lived experiences of followers under unethical leadership.

Research Design

Through the use of transcendental phenomenology to explore the lived experiences of followers under unethical leadership, I ensured the grounded nature of the phenomenon supported by experiences. There are different themes that can be identified from the lived experiences of followers. Transcendental phenomenology was the most suitable qualitative research design to enhance the understanding of the phenomenon through description of the lived experiences. According to Moustakas (1994), using the transcendental design in phenomenology allowed the phenomenon to be perceived from a fresh, enlightening, and unique dimension. I served as an interpreter in describing the experiences of followers. The view of the researcher cannot be excluded entirely from the findings; as much as the researcher's opinion is necessary, the primary focus must be on the views of participants.

The findings about the unethical leadership phenomenon in this study are more relatable because this research was conducted based on the lived experiences of followers. According to Moustakas (1994), this method leads to the identification of the essences or essential structure of the phenomenon studied. The use of epoché in transcendental phenomenology allows researchers to suspend any assumptions about the phenomenon being studied and focus on the experiences of the research participants (Moustakas, 1994). Epoché is a valuable tool that enhances the credibility and objectivity of research findings (Odeneye, 2017).

Role of the Researcher

For a phenomenological study, the role of a researcher is to bring the lived experiences of individuals into words in data collection and to try to understand those experiences; the status of the researcher and ethical implications need to be known before data collection process starts. In this study, I focused on one private and one public organization from the perspective of only followers. The research participants in the selected private organization are my colleagues; the majority of them are frontline employees, and they do not hold any managerial positions within the organization. The recruited participants had all been employed in the same organization for more than 7 years.

I served as a data collection instrument for this study. My role was as a research instrument and observer to collect data, as I work for the same organization as participants. I analyzed the data after conducting face-to-face interviews with participants. My role in this research was to establish a trustworthy and confidential environment in which participants were protected and their information was secured.

To enhance objectivity in data collection, I focused on colleagues from different departments than mine inside the organization. I excluded any friends or family members from participating in this study. Through these measures, I enhanced objectivity and ensured formality in the interaction between the participants and myself. I established and maintained a professional relationship with participants by applying informed consent to ensure to them that their information was very confidential, especially in the selected public organization. I maintained a professional and courteous relationship with

participants in order to reduce the issues related to power throughout the research process, and participants voluntarily participated in the research. Selecting participants from the same organization where I work could have created potential ethical problems; however, the use of informed consent prevented such ethical issues from occurring and kept names and information confidential.

Considering other ethical issues that may occur, I scheduled any face-to-face interviews outside business hours when the organization is closed to avoid causing any interruption within the organization. Financial considerations are another source for ethical dilemmas in research. I did not obtain funding for this study in the form of a research grant from any organization. The organization did not sponsor my research or reimburse me for any tuition and expenses that I spent on this doctoral program. These facts enhanced my ability to prove my research and findings and avoid the pressure that could provide my findings because I had received no favors either from the organization or any executives or other employees within the organization.

The approval number given by Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) for this study is 04-21-21-0553205. I was bound to honor the duty toward participants and IRB members to conduct a legitimate a responsible study. I ensured that the study was credible and avoided any questionable results; there was no offer of financial considerations or incentives of any kind to recruit research participants in this study. I sent a thank you and appreciation letter to all participants for sharing their time and effort.

Methodology

Despite the different methods and approaches that scholars have used to investigate the phenomenon of ethical leadership, the qualitative method is a commonplace to understand the aspects of this phenomenon first. Qualitative method of inquiry is often used when a researcher is trying to understand a concept of phenomenon while the quantitative method is appropriate to discern relationship among variables or test a theory. According to Maxwell (2013), the qualitative method creates a deeper understanding of the meaning of ethical leadership as experienced in particular contexts. The focus of this study on followers as research participants, as a population less researched, was better to explore qualitatively in order to understand the phenomenon of ethical leadership. The open-ended nature of the research question of this study made the qualitative method most suitable to explore the research problem (see Maxwell, 2013).

Participant Selection Logic

Through this study, I intended to understand the phenomenon of unethical leadership from the perspective of followers. The population for this study included frontline employees, excluding the ones holding managerial positions. A population is a group whose individual members meet the same criterion or criteria familiar to all group members (Odeneye, 2017). I selected a sample of 20 participants from a private and public organization in the United States. The sample represented followers in direct contact with other stakeholders such as customers. I excluded any employees who held managerial or supervisory positions from the population.

In this research, I focused on frontline employees who had experienced the phenomenon of unethical leadership. Frontline employees provide a bridge between the organization, its leadership, and other external stakeholders. According to Moustakas (1994), participants in a phenomenological study must have experienced the same phenomenon. According to Odeneye (2017), considering the contextualization of this study in the conceptual framework of stakeholder theory, these frontline employees are not only stakeholders themselves but form a vital point of connection between different stakeholders, including government, managers, customers, taxpayers, contractors, and suppliers.

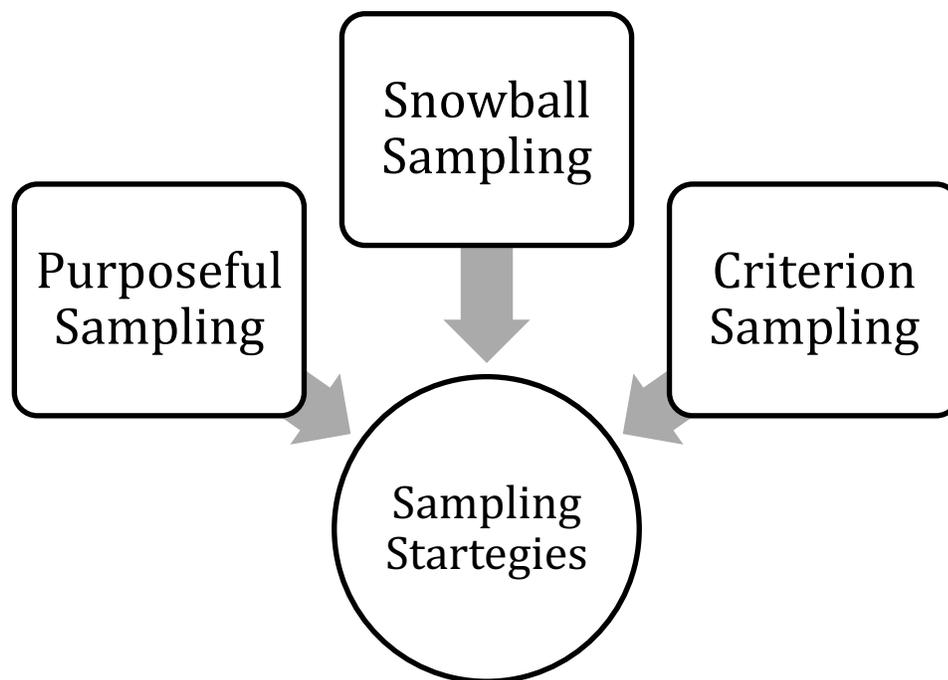
The use of a sample of the population is essential. Researcher would strive to keep a sample bias free environment by screening in the respondents needed; recruiting a sample that represented one target in qualitative study (Easter, 2019). Merriam (1998) showed that purposeful sampling assumes that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned (p. 61). To gather the participants for this qualitative study, I relied on a purposeful sampling strategy to sort and identify 15 to 20 participants or until data saturation occurs. Purposeful sampling relies on variations that require the researcher's knowledge and skill to choose the one that is most fitting to the study.

Researchers have several purposeful sampling strategies to choose from: variation sampling, intensity sampling, snowball sampling, criterion sampling, homogenous sampling, critical case sampling, deviant case sampling, convenience sampling, stratified purposeful sampling, and emergent sampling. Based on the nature of my study, I decided

to use a mixed purposeful sampling strategy to enhance the credibility and richness of the data collected. In addition, using multiple sampling strategies provided me with flexibility in recruiting participants and collecting data.

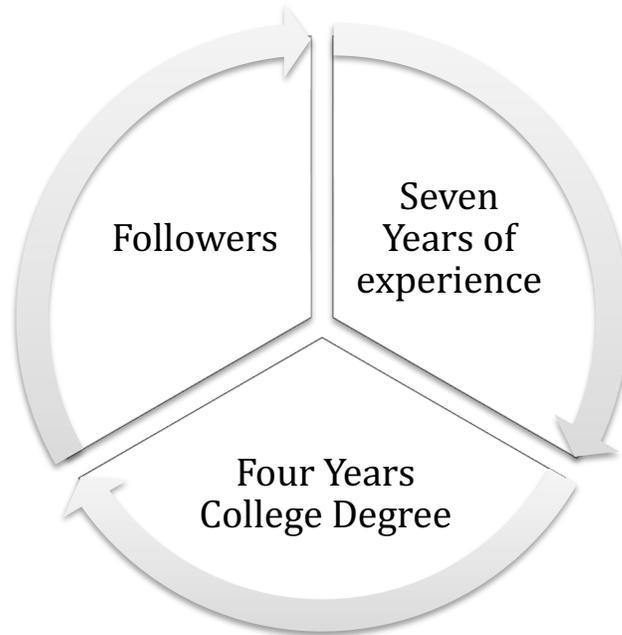
Figure 1

Multiple Sampling Strategies



Due to the nature of participants required to conduct this study, I applied a snowball sampling strategy during the initial data collection stage. Through this sampling criterion, I was able to sort and identify different and rich data sources (see Figure 1). In addition, participants were given a consent form to avoid bias, and such forms enabled them to make an informed decision about their participation in this study. Finally, my use of a snowball sampling strategy improved my identification of individuals who experienced the unethical leadership phenomenon as a lived experience.

After collecting the required data using a snowball sampling strategy, the data were further analyzed and subject to criterion sampling to ensure that the selected participants met specific parameters. Using a criterion sampling technique was beneficial to this study because participants were selected and sorted using a methodology that brings more efficient and effective information. These sampling strategies in selecting participants focused on frontline employees, excluding followers who hold managerial and supervisory positions; participants each had a minimum of 7 years of experience and held a 4-year college degree. Through a criterion sampling technique, I ensured that the participants shared the same job description, met the minimum requirements, and contributed beneficial information to the study.

Figure 2*Relevant Criteria That Participants Must Satisfy****Sample Size***

The target sample size was 15 to 20 participants, or until data saturation occurred. I selected this sample size based on the idea of using the qualitative method to ensure that the sample size was not so large as to undermine the comprehensive collection of data but sufficient to achieve saturation. In exemplifying sample size in a phenomenological study, Moustakas (1994) pointed out that Trumbull (1993) used 12 to 15 participants. In considering an organizational change in conjunction with the role of ethical leadership from the followers' perception, Odeneye (2017) explored the phenomenon from 20 followers' perspectives using a phenomenological design.

Differences in the sample sizes used in these recent studies confirmed that sample size is the researcher's prerogative and is informed by different parameters, including time, resources, validity, the intent of the study, and accessibility (Maxwell, 2013; Odeneye, 2017). The size of 20 ensured data saturation and fulfilled the Walden University Management School requirements, as reflected on the management annotated dissertation template for a qualitative study. The minimum number of research participants in a phenomenological study should be 20 (Walden University, n.d.).

Instrumentation

The data that I collected in this phenomenological study came mainly from open-ended questions in face-to-face interviews. The use of face-to-face interviews in data collection facilitated the communication between the researcher and participants and prevented any miscommunication during the interviews. The focus on an open-ended research question has improved the quality of the data collected by concentrating on the viewpoint of the participant without predetermining those point of view through prior selection of questionnaires. I worked consciously to reduce my subjectivity and enhance my objectivity and credibility through the study, and have focused on an epoché approach, which requires patience and attention to details. I prepared, recorded, and analyzed all data in this study.

Interview

Face-to-face interviews were a data collection instrument in this phenomenological study focusing on open-ended questions. According to Arsel (2017), interviews are helpful because they give voice to people's lives and their perceptions of

experiences necessary to them (Belk et al., 2013) and allow the researcher to understand the way they see the world (McCracken, 1988). The majority of researchers writing about interviews have cited that interviews should be conducted face-to-face; in the qualitative paradigm, interviews are often seen as one of the best ways to “enter into the other person’s perspective” (Oltmann, 2016, p. 12).

The face-to-face interview proved an efficient instrument to help me enhance the quality of data collected. Face-to-face interviews allowed me to decide which information to process during the interview itself. There are several face-to-face interviews, such as conversational, interview guide approach, and open-ended. In this study, I focused on the open-ended interview model, which ensured that all questions were similar and consistent between all participants and removed any possibility of bias.

Based on the extant literature on ethical leadership, I developed an open-ended interview question as an instrument in the data collection process. Open-ended questions improved the quality of data and elicited broad and thorough responses, unlike closed-ended questions, which can be answered with yes or no answers. The open-ended interview questions reflected the interest of the researcher, who viewed the participants’ experiences and behaviors pertaining to ethical decision making practices as inseparable (Moustakas, 1994). Developing a small open-ended research question as the question listed at the beginning of this chapter allowed the participant to express their opinions and feelings about the studied phenomenon. The research question in this study started with “what,” which allowed me to capture the point of view of other people without any bias.

I was the data collection instrument for this qualitative study; I prepared interview questions and conducted interviews. I also analyzed data myself, increasing the credibility of the data that I was looking to collect. Because I was studying the phenomenon of unethical leadership as a lived experience from followers' perspective, I needed to see and understand the studied phenomenon in a new way based on others' experiences (see Moustakas, 1994). An epoché approach was my focus. This approach requires patience, attention to detail, and openness. According to Moustakas, epoché is a way of looking and being.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Research data were collected using 20 separate interviews, or until data saturation occurred, with individual research participants; I conducted the interviews in a private organization where I work and a public organization focusing on followers as research participants. To ensure confidentiality, I met each individual separately in a private room in the premise of the organization; I ensured a private and confident environment for the participants. I aimed to explore the lived experiences of followers under unethical leadership and conducted meetings in the organization's premises, which enhanced the credibility of the data collected. According to Moustakas (1994), the context in which a phenomenon is encountered impacts the composite structural description, which is “a way of understanding how the co-researchers (participants) as a group experience what they experience” (p. 14).

I was the agent of data collection. I focused on observations and document reviews to conduct interviews with participants. An interview is probably the most

powerful tool to understand the experiences lived by another person (Kvale, 1983).

During the interviews, I asked open-ended research questions and addressed any subjectivity. This enhanced the quality of the data that I collected. Being an employee in the same organization increased my ability to collect quality information from participants and ensure a secure environment during interviews.

I focused on experiences that followers had already lived and experienced. Participants had the opportunity to express their opinions about this experience within one interview. I conducted interviews for 2 months, considering any unforeseen circumstances and rescheduling. The period of 2 months allowed me to review the data collected and record changes. I took weekends to summarize the questions and answers, code the collected data, and adapt accordingly.

The duration of the interviews varied depending on the amount of information that the participant was willing to provide, but I anticipated them to last between 15 minutes and 1 hour each. The duration of the interviews gave participants enough time to express their comprehensive information about the phenomenon of unethical leadership. In addition, because interviews were conducted after work, 1-hour interview should be enough for participants to consider their daily schedule. Ericsson and Simon (1984, p. 27) state that the “accuracy of verbal reports depends on the procedures used to elicit them and the relation between the requested information and the actual sequence of heeded information”.

I recorded the data collecting process during interviews using a digital device such as a smartphone. I notified the participants that interviews were recorded for quality

purposes and provided an informed consent form assuring them that their names and private information would stay confidential. I focused on voice recording only, excluding video recording for privacy purposes and participants' comfort. I used my notepad to capture any quality information by writing down the moment's time for a more accessible review over the weekend. Note-taking is aided by setting an interview protocol and procedures.

Follow-up was critical for this study to ensure that a minimum of 20 individuals participated, increasing the chance of data saturation. I predicted that cancellations and rescheduling might be an issue that I would need to address as a researcher; recruiting five additional participants helped me avoid any consequences. Cancellations might have affected the research outcome while recruiting additional participants and informing them that they might be contacted, filling any such gap. I notified participants that they might be contacted for follow-up questions. Still, they did not have to appear again for an interview, and such follow-up questions were conducted via email or over the phone. This step helped me develop data analysis in case of any unexpected transcription issues. I provided participants with a copy of their transcripts and sent an appreciation letter to all participants via email.

To ensure the quality of this research, I made significant efforts to ensure the data that I generated reflected the research question. I developed the interview questions to generate the type of data that is relevant to the research question. I guided this study by developing an open-ended research question and ensuring uniformity between the specific interview questions.

Data Analysis Plan

Data analysis is a challenging part of the research process in qualitative studies. Several techniques could be used to analyze data, including reading the interview transcripts, sorting similar concepts, and analyzing the data for perspectives. Coding was essential in this qualitative study; I used coding to sort the gathered data in a manner that enabled me to identify themes, patterns, and perspectives. The analysis included several steps like preparing the transcripts for review, coding the data into descriptions and themes, and validating the quality of data collected. In qualitative research, the codes were developed from past literature, surprising concepts from the interview transcript, and ideas that include significant conceptual perspectives in the study (Yin, 2014). I performed coding using NVivo software; using hand-coding would have required me to put more time and effort, while using this software was time-efficient. The popularity of NVivo among qualitative researchers stems from its importance of sorting, analyzing and retrieving data.

To ensure the quality of the research, I used both hand-coding and coding software; hand coding allowed me to capture the expression of feelings and emotions of participants in this qualitative study, which would have been challenging to do using aided software. The data quality was developed based on my ability to capture participants' feelings and emotions about the phenomenon. This process was achieved by hand-coding, which helped me identify the relevant themes. Using multiple data analysis sources provided a source of data triangulation, in which similar findings from multiple sources are grouped.

The seven-step phenomenological analysis advocated by Moustakas (1994) was the procedure for data analysis in this study. After identifying the themes, I used a technique called *horizontalization* as described by Moustakas to emphasize all the data collected. I focused on the seven-step phenomenological analysis procedure for data analysis in this qualitative study. Then I used a data reduction process to focus on the data relevant to the research question. By concentrating on the data relevant to the research question. These steps enhanced my ability to draw findings that summarize the meanings derived from the participants' lived experiences under unethical leadership.

According to Odeneye (2017), pattern coding at a second level was improved by using memo, journal, and analytic *memoing* to capture additional and highly relevant information about the collected data. I used the two-cycle analysis championed by Miles et al. (2014): "First Cycle coding is a way to summarize segments of data initially. As a Second Cycle method, Pattern coding is a way of grouping those summaries into a smaller number of categories, themes, or constructs" (p. 23).

Issues of Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, trustworthiness is the most important criterion for judging the quality of the of a research study, strategies to enhance the trustworthiness of the study include triangulation and member checking. Trustworthiness also refers to the degree of confidence in data, interpretations, and method used to ensure the quality of a study. According to Odeneye (2017), internal validity involves measures adopted by the researcher to assure the audience of the veracity of the findings of the study, enabling the reader to adjudge the work as trustworthy. It is possible to determine the trustworthiness

of a qualitative research by considering its credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility

The truth and credibility of qualitative data were enhanced by researchers describing their own lived experiences and the findings verified with participants; According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), qualitative research's trustworthiness is enhanced by its credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Lincoln and Guba explained credibility as the confidence that can be placed in the truth of the research findings. According to Korstjens and Moser (2018), credibility is the equivalent of internal validity in qualitative research; it is concerned with the aspect of truth-value. Researchers use several strategies to ensure credibility in qualitative research, such as prolonged engagement, discrepant-case analysis, persistent observation, peer review, member checking, triangulation, and member checking. I used several of these strategies to conduct this study.

In order to identify any unnecessary additions in this study, I facilitated a peer review by fellow doctoral students. I used a member check strategy in this study by sending transcripts of the interviews to participants for feedback; this strategy allowed participants to validate whether I had accurately interpreted the meanings of their answers. Data triangulation was secured using the various data sets that emerged throughout the analysis process: raw material, codes, concepts, and theoretical saturation (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Finally, I used negative or discrepant case analysis in this

study to determine the results and findings of other studies and highlight the relevance of the research.

Transferability

Transferability in qualitative study is the degree to which the results of qualitative research can be transferred to other contexts or settings with other respondents. The researcher facilitates the transferability judgment by a potential user through thick description (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I made attempts to enhance transferability in this study by providing a thick description of the participants and the research process including the method, data analysis, and findings. This strategy enabled the reader to assess whether the findings of this study are transferable to their settings (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Involving a detailed description in this study ensured its transferability while implying that the readers, not the researcher, made the transferability judgment. In addition, involving transferability in this study made it feasible for other researchers to determine the possibility of research replication in different research environments.

Dependability

Dependability is the stability of findings over time (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Dependability involves participants' evaluation, interpretation, and recommendations based on the study's findings, such that all are supported by the data as received from participants of the study. To ensure the findings in this study will be consistent and can be repeated, I promoted dependability by keeping a thorough "audit trail," in which I was responsible for providing a complete set of notes on decisions made during the research process, research meetings, reflective thoughts, sampling, research materials adopted,

emergence of the findings, and information about the data management (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

I diligently took notes during interviews, followed up with participants, and conducted member checking after the original interviews. I shared my interpretation with the participants and asked for their feedback to see if the meaning of their answers was captured accurately. Through these strategies, I ensured the dependability of this study and its findings.

Confirmability

Confirmability is another validity measure in qualitative study; it is the degree to which other researchers could confirm the research study's findings. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), confirmability is concerned with establishing that data and interpretations of the findings are not figments of the inquirer's imagination, but derived from the data. In addition, confirmability concerns the aspect of neutrality, or the need to secure the inter-subjectivity of the data. One of the strategies that I used to ensure confirmability in this study was giving close attention to the most relevant data to the research question.

Being the researcher and the data collection instrument, the possibility of subjectivity in the research cannot be overruled; using epoché, I avoided using my personal views as a researcher and data collection instrument and I reviewed the participants' responses as objectively as possible. Epoché is a Greek word referring to refrain from judgment or abstain from the everyday way of looking at things (Moustakas, 1994). Zhang (2016) argued that from the perspective of epoché, the everyday

understandings and knowledge of things are being set aside. In member checking, I allowed participants to confirm or contradict the interpretation of the meaning of their answers and provide feedback, which helped check the authenticity of data collected.

Ethical Procedures

The protection of human subjects through the application of appropriate ethical principles is important in any research study; in a qualitative study, ethical considerations have a particular resonance due to the in-depth nature of the study process (Arifin, 2018). For this study, I submitted a formal request to both private and public organizations to use the organization and participants to conduct research. To prevent any harm for participants or the organization itself, finding from this research excluded the names and information of participants and organizations. As a researcher, I provided an informed consent with the organization and participants to keep their names and information secret.

Face-to-face interviews were the primary data collection method for this study; because anonymity is not fully applicable in interviews, the names and identities were not used at any data collection and storage phase, as participants were given pseudonyms to protect their privacy. In addition, I advised the participants to use pseudonyms when addressing any other names to protect other organization members.

Participation in this study was voluntarily, and I obtained consent to improve the quality of data collection and ensure ethical procedures. According to Arifin (2018), the process of obtaining consent consists of the following: consent should be given freely (i.e., voluntarily), subjects should understand what is being asked of them, and involved persons must be competent to consent. I informed participants about the research, they

reviewed the information, and they had the power to decide whether to participate and decline after I provided a thorough explanation of the research process. I submitted the consent form to obtain the approval by IRB, which stated the objective of this research and its benefit to the research site and participants.

The data collection process was confidential and private; I ensured that the data collected during the interview process were securely stored and continued after reporting findings. Participants' names and titles, locations, data transcripts, and other personal identities remained anonymized. I preserved the confidentiality of the participants by not revealing their names and identity in the data collection, analysis, and reporting of the study findings (Arifin, 2018). I used hand coding and assisting software in data analysis process in this study; the collected data were stored in encrypted devices and password protected, hard copies and any written materials was securely stored in a secured cabinet in a locked room with no access to others to ensure adherence to legal requirements. I will store the written and electronic data for 5 years, as Walden University's IRB regulations require. Data disposal will occur after 5 years through shredding paper records and erasing records stored on a computer hard drive using a commercial software application designed to remove all data from storage devices.

Several measures were applied to address any ethical issues that may have arisen. First, I worked in the same private organization where the research was conducted; this study only included participants from different departments than mine to avoid any undue familiarity. I excluded any participants who held managerial or supervisory positions which avoided any power differential that might cause ethical concerns. Third, I

respected the privacy and confidentiality of participants by keeping their names and other personal information confidential. Fourth, I explained to participants the research purpose, procedures, and risks and the benefits associated with the study. Finally, I maintained a professional and natural relationship with all participants and ensured no supervisory relationship with any participant.

I ensured that there were no power issues or conflicts of interest in the relationship between research participant and me as researcher. Although I sent the informed consent as an invitation to potential participants by password-protected and secured email to educate them about the study, participants had a thorough understanding of the component of this study to decide whether they wanted to participate in this study. I obtained permission from senior leaders for both private and public organizations to conduct my research at the site. First, I submitted my formal request to obtain IRB approval from Walden University to conduct this research. After that I emailed potential participants the invitation letter in the form of informed consent. After that, I contacted those willing to participate and scheduled an interview.

Summary

This chapter included a description and justification of why a qualitative research method and phenomenological design were selected to conduct this study. The study's research question and philosophical assumptions were among considerations for selecting the qualitative method for this study. The purpose of this study toward understanding the emotions and lived experiences of research participants about the phenomenon of unethical leadership led me to apply a transcendental phenomenological approach.

The private organization selected for this study is where I work with participants who had possible implications for my role as research and data collection instrument. Multiple sampling strategies like purposeful sampling, criterion sampling, and snowball sampling were used to select and sort participants and enhance the quality of data collected. In addition, an informed consent and privacy policy was used to reduce any ethical concerns. Data collection included face-to-face interview process separately with each participant using open-ended questions.

I used the seven-step phenomenological analysis method recommended by Moustakas (1994) in this study to improve the quality of findings. I addressed issues of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability to underscore the research's trustworthiness. I addressed ethical procedures to enhance the quality of the overall findings and acceptability of this study of unethical leadership phenomenon. I employed several such measures to improve the quality of findings of this study.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of followers under unethical leadership in public and private organizations in the United States. The general problem was the low incentivization for leaders' ethical behaviors, which impacts followers. The central research question that I developed to guide this study was: What are followers' lived experiences with unethical leadership behavior and performance?

The focus of this phenomenological study was on followers as research participants because they constitute a significant bridge between internal and external stakeholders in any organization with the possibility to broaden their knowledge of ethical leadership. The implications for positive social change from the results of this study may enhance current knowledge about the characteristics of ethical leadership, as well as encourage future research on ethical and unethical leadership. Such investigations can enhance the understanding of the relationship between unethical leadership and the wellbeing of others.

This chapter includes a discussion of the results, including the participant demographics, data collection, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Over the course of these sections, I describe the research setting, including any changes that influenced the setting. This chapter also includes the data collection context and procedures, the data analysis process, and the trustworthiness of the research.

Research Setting

The setting of this study was a private organization in the United States. Most of the participants in this study were concerned about ethical standards and whether their participation would enhance their employability. Participants in this study were frontline employees who are in direct contact with consumers, shared the same title, and possessed a 4-year college degree and a minimum of 7 years of experience (see Figure 2).

Participants in this study were a very rich source of data because they were followers who were not holding any managerial or leadership roles. I carried out this research through interviews that were conducted with participants in a natural setting to obtain an understanding of the phenomenon of ethical leadership.

I chose the qualitative approach based on the purpose of the study. I asked each participant the same broad questions that aligned with the research question. I obtained the detailed views from followers who participated in the study. As a qualitative researcher, I asked probing questions, listened to the answers, considered their implications, then asked more probing questions to reach a deeper level of understanding. This interview approach aligned with Easter's (2019) recommendations for conducting interviews to gain rich and informative data from participants.

Demographics

The sample of this qualitative phenomenological study consisted of 20 participants who were all followers in the same organization. I focused on participants with no managerial or leadership positions to ensure that I heard participants' opinions regarding the unethical leadership phenomenon. The importance of selecting followers

from the same organization was their shared experience, which I anticipated would enrich the data collected regarding the unethical side of leadership.

All participants were frontline employees who were in direct contact with external stakeholders; I excluded any followers in managerial or supervisory positions from the study sample. Participants in this study had more than 7 years of experience in the same field. Participant's ages varied, but their unique educational backgrounds bolstered the diversity of the collected data. Ethnically, four of the 20 participants were African Americans. Eight of the 20 participants were female, while the remainder were male. The diversity in gender and ethnicity among the sample enriched the data that I gathered for this study.

Table 1*Demographic Information*

Classification	Number of participants
Gender	
Male	12
Female	8
Age range	
21-30	1
31-40	7
41-50	6
51-60	4
61-70	1
70+	1
Education	
Bachelor's degree	14
Master's degree	5
Doctorate degree	1
Experience	
7-10	13
11-15	4
16-20	3
Ethnicity	
Caucasian	5
Hispanic/Latino	4
African American	4
White	7

Data Collection

I collected data from 20 total participants through face-to-face interviews. I collected data focusing on an open-ended standard research question, which ensured fairness to participants in the questions presented (see Appendix A). I determined that participants understood the research questions based on the replies received during the

face-to-face interviews. I conducted the interviews in an enclosed area in the premises of the organization to ensure privacy and confidentiality. The interviews lasted between 15 minutes to 45 minutes, with the majority lasting about 15 minutes each. Each participant received a summary of their answers to the interview questions. Participants performed member checking to validate the accuracy and completeness of the data collected. I recorded the interviews using a secure digital audio-recording unit.

Data Analysis

The first step of data analysis was to listen to the interview recordings. By listening to the data collected, I ensured the accuracy of the transcription of the data. Mistakes in written transcripts could have adversely impacted the meaning and interpretation of the data. I coded the data using an NVivo and hand-coding, which reduced the probability of missing relevant data. I randomly assigned a lettered pseudonym to each participant in order to ensure their privacy and confidentiality. The combination of hand coding and NVivo served as a form of triangulation. Analyzing data based on triangulation strategy enhanced my understanding of the anticipated complexity of the research context and lessened the chances of developing inaccurate assumptions, results, and implications about the phenomenon.

After interviewing 20 participants, I determined that data saturation had been attained. The first form of analysis that I used to arrive at themes in this study was the two-cycle analysis propounded by Miles et al. (2014); using the first cycle of analysis resulted in the identification of different codes as they emerged from the data, while using the second cycle of analysis resulted in emerging recurring patterns from which the

results of the study developed. Two-cycle data analysis form has facilitated my identification of patterns and similarities. I conducted the process of comparing and reexamining the emerging categories and themes using Rawls's justice as fairness theory (Rawls, 1971); this theory is based on the premise that giving each person what he or she deserves results in an overall sense of justice and fairness.

The next form of analysis that I employed was seven-step phenomenological analysis established by Moustakas (1994) in a modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method. By subjecting the data to those steps of phenomenological analysis, I enhanced my understanding of the phenomenon of unethical leadership from the perception of followers as a shared experience. First, through *epoché*, this required me to set aside my personal opinions about the phenomenon. Then, using phenomenological reduction, I bracketed the phenomenon in its pure form as a different notion (Odeneye, 2017). The transcendental phenomenology reduction, i.e., the step which brings up into an act of conversion, of changing from the natural view of the world to the more perfect and more comprehensive transcendental view of the world (Küng, 1975). I also synthesized the individual textural and structural components of the data into a group experience.

After analyzing the data from both forms, I identified eight overarching themes reflecting eight findings. These were as follows: (a) emphasizing morality, (b) issues of honesty, (c) lack of accountability, (d) fairness in making decisions, (e) responsibility of ethical leaders (f) stakeholders' wellbeing, (g) humility as an abdication of power, and (h) issues of approachability. New themes also emerged, such as democratic decision-making

and knowledge. In this section, I discussed these 10 themes in terms of how they explain followers' perspectives of ethical leadership.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

Credibility is an important factor in research, as it refers to the degree to which the audience will accept and agree to the findings of the study. The foundation of the credibility of this study lies the approval from the IRB of Walden University, the in-depth description of the process and results of this study, and the use of bracketing to monitor any personal bias. The fact that I work in the same organization as participants created the possibility of personal bias, which I acknowledged. In addition, I performed member checking by sharing a transcribed copy of participants' feedback with the participants.

Triangulation, member checking, and data saturation were the factors that I considered to address credibility in this study. I determined that data saturation had been achieved based on the fact that no new information emerged after 20 interviews. Using two forms of analysis, as Miles et al. (2014 and Moustakas (1994) suggested, resulted in data triangulation.

Transferability

I enhanced the transferability of study by providing a detailed and clear description of context of the research data collection and analysis. The results reflected the participants' answers to interview questions. Elaborating reporting of sampling strategy, methodology, data collection and analysis, results, and the hint of triangulation, enabled the possibility for others to replicate the study in similar context. The generalizability qualitative meant the extent to which the study results applicable or may be transferred to other contexts (Ulin et al., 2005).

Dependability

I will store the collected data securely and safely for 5 years following the completion of this study in order to facilitate dependability in the event of any audit. I will enhance dependability by providing detailed description of the process of data collection and analysis. Through this documentation, I will enable the study to be compared with future investigations on this topic. According to (Panda, 2019), the dependability measure checked for (i) the extent to which research questions clear and logically connected to the research purpose and design, (ii) the extent to which there are parallels across data source, and (iii) the extent to which multiple field workers have comparable data collection protocol. (Ulin et al., 2005)

Confirmability

The use of reflexivity enforced my continuous awareness that any action taken on my part may affect the outcomes of the study, especially given the peculiar circumstance of using my colleagues as research participants. Confirmability is an evaluation of the accuracy of the findings, interpretations, and conclusions based on the data collected. The use of bracketing, as Moustakas (1994) recommended, assisted me in reducing the occurrence of bias in this study.

Study Results

The research question of this study was: What are followers' lived experiences with unethical leadership behavior and performance? Following the data collection and analysis processes outlined above, I disregarded any data that was not related to the research question. Eight themes emerged to describe the perspectives of followers about

ethical leadership; I derived these from the analysis of over 300 important statements (see Table 2). Two additional themes emerged as identified by the participants in this study.

Table 2

Final Findings with Supporting Participants

Results	Total supporting participants ($N = 20$)
Lack of Accountability	19
Issues of Honesty	17
Emphasizing Morality	17
Fairness in Making Decisions	17
Democratic decision-making	16
Stakeholders' wellbeing	15
Knowledge	15
Responsibility of Ethical Leaders	12
Humility as An Abdication of Power	11
Issues of Approachability	11

Finding 1: Lack of Accountability

This theme indicates that ethical leaders are the ones who believe in their accountability toward their organization and followers. Leaders who lack accountability are more likely to establish unfair environment and lack of trust. Ethical leaders also hold others liable for their actions by being accountable for their actions. Ninety percent of the current study's participants see ethical leaders are responsible for their actions and willing to take accountability of their mistakes so they can present an example for followers to comply with laws and ethical standards. There were two participant statements that contributed to this theme. Participant F stated, "I think a real leader is the one who value accountability and apply it strictly, accountable leader is an ethical leader because he will not tolerate a bad behavior or wrong actions." Participant M stated, "I

believe an ethical leader has to be accountable even when followers make the wrong actions, I do believe that accountability has to start from the top in the role hierarchy and an ethical follower reflects an ethical leader.”

Finding 2: Issues of Honesty

A majority of the participants perceived an ethical leader to be honest, truthful, and forthright. Several participants explained that honesty is the most important characteristic; over 75% of participants ($n = 17$) provided support for this theme. An ethical leader makes right decisions by being honest and truthful; as a result, followers will learn to be honest when they see their leader behave in this manner.

Incentive, not only with money but with words, provide good job and knowledge, a good leader should not be dictating and telling how to do and what to do but also showing examples. An ethical leader doesn't abuse and it's not only on the main practices and should have expectation for the needs and wants of their employees, but that also represent honesty. (Participant B)

I expect from an honest and ethical leader a good communication and to be someone who respects the policies and procedures, honest, you can trust a leader who is dishonest or a thief, you cannot have that in any form of life. (Participant C)

I believe an ethical person or leader should be very honest with everybody. (Participant A)

Finding 3: Emphasizing Morality

A moral leader is able to adopt justice by giving each person what he or she deserves. Philosophers have explained justice as the concept of proportion between a person's deserts and the good and bad things that befall in between. In support of this theme, participants expressed the belief that a moral leader should ensure justice and fairness for their followers.

When I think about ethics I think about morals and when I think of morals it referred to as a moral Comus knowing what's right and what's wrong, how to communicate with people, how to make your decisions and telling the truth, basically being up front and honest. I think when a leader treats their employees with respect, I think you get respect back, so how you deal with people influences how people deal with you back it's like a mirror like a reflection and that represent being a moral leader. (Participant D)

An unethical leader is someone who has a bad moral system, they expect the wrong thing from someone, they ask people to do things that are maybe illegal or to lie. (Participant E)

Finding 4: Fairness in Making Decisions

Stakeholder theory, eudaimonia, Adams's equity theory, and social learning theory were the conceptual frameworks used to guide this study. These theories were particularly relevant to the theme of fairness. Participants explicitly demonstrated their views about fairness in leadership. Participants believed that an ethical leader has to be fair to his followers and society. Such a leader must also be careful when assigning

employees to supervisory positions, taking into consideration their educational and professional background. The following participants explained the importance of an ethical leader to be objective and fair in promotions:

An ethical leader is the one who leads with integrity and honesty, while unethical leader is the one who ask followers to do the wrong thing in order to achieve immoral goals. (Participant A)

The ethical leader is the one who is open to honest commination and fair in making judgments. The ethical leader is the one who make decisions based on mutual benefit with their followers. (Participant L)

I have been struggling to make my way through in my career in previous organizations because of the unfair environment that was created by our managers and supervisors who did not care about hard work and never valued a good employee, I like how this organization has valued my hard work and made me believe that I will get somewhere if I put the effort and work toward the success of this organization so we can grow together. (Participant G)

Finding 5: Democratic Decision-Making

The fifth theme indicates that decision-making process should be shared between leaders and followers. The majority of participants agreed that an ethical leader should not be autocratic and should instead involve others in the decision-making process. Over 80% of participants ($n = 16$) supported this theme, which is classifiable under the conceptual frameworks of utilitarianism, eudaimonia, and stakeholder theory.

I do not like the supervisor who acts like a boss, I believe in an ideal leader who creates a democratic environment and shares decisions with followers. An ideal leader is the one who creates a solution, share it, and then ask other employees for their input. (Participant B)

Before taking any actions that are based on one's perspective, a leader has to consult with other individuals in the organization to make sure the actions are in the right direction. (Participant I)

Finding 6: Stakeholders' Wellbeing

More than 80% of participants supported this theme. In relation to the conceptual framework of stakeholder theory and eudemonia, this theme indicates that ethical leaders' concern about stakeholders' wellbeing has been found to affect the performance of employees. Several participants expressed the importance of an ethical leader being fair and respecting others' opinions and ideas:

A caring leader is more likely to succeed and drive the organization in the right direction, I have been in several situations that I lost hope in my career because of actions that I consider unethical from my supervisors and managers especially in my previous careers, that got me to the point to believe in a caring leader who take care of their employees and their wellbeing. (Participant C)

I believe a moral and ethical leader should see followers as human beings and care about their wellbeing and their families; if the leader treats followers as numbers or tools to get more powerful than the organization will become chaotic. (Participant A)

Ethical and moral leader is the one who value employees and their efforts, the one who believe in them and treat them fairly, the one who appreciate the hard work and pay back to the community. (Participant F)

Finding 7: Knowledge

All participants agreed that an ethical leader must be knowledgeable and educated. The frameworks that apply to this theme are social learning theory and Adams's equity theory. Participants also believed that an ethical leader must be willing to listen and learn as much as they can. Their focus should be on academic knowledge as well as actions.

I expect from an ethical leader to be educated; I believe education is the way to create an ethical leader who values followers. I also believe that leaders have to start from the bottom of the organization and grow with it so they can always be aware of all the levels of the organization and value every follower disregarding their position. (Participant N)

Leaders have to be knowledgeable of all the aspects of their organizations stating from the bottom to the top so they can do their job correctly and benefit everyone. Leaders' knowledge has to exceed the daily tasks to their ability of managing money, so they make sure the organization is heading in the right direction. (Participant B)

An ethical leader has to be knowledgeable and educated otherwise they will create an environment where ignorance is dominant and that will take the organization down. (Participant H)

Finding 8: Responsibility of Ethical Leaders

Twelve participants indicated that an ethical leader is one who is willing to take the responsibility of taking care of the organization and followers. The conceptual frameworks that apply to this theme are stakeholder theory, eudaimonia, and utilitarianism. An ethical leader is willing to admit their mistakes and shortcomings—not only their achievements. In addition to admitting their weaknesses, ethical leaders are able to find the right people to make up for it.

Change is part of growth; an ethical leader has to be responsible to change and shape employee's readiness to change. When you have an open communication and open to a policy with your managers or your leadership then change would be well adapted to because they built that support so you have people who are responsible and you can communicate with, leaders who are honest and ethically inclined to any form of growth they already built that structure as a leader for your employees because of how your leadership skills are. (Participant C)

I think a leader has to be responsible by knowing their weaknesses and try to find the right people to make up to it. A responsible leader is the one who admits their mistakes and weaknesses. (Participant K)

Finding 9: Humility as An Abdication of Power

More than 10 participants demonstrated the importance of respect in ethical leadership. An ethical leader is humble and respects the values of others. In addition, an ethical leader is friendly and peaceful. The conceptual frameworks that underpin this

theme are eudaimonia and social learning theory. Participants have shown the importance of an ethical traits from childhood, through school and the professional environment.

I believe in a humble leader, the one who does not make you feel they are more important than you, but make you feel that you are important and value your efforts. I believe in the leader who value teamwork and appreciate that employees' hard work is a big role in getting leaders where they at in any organization. (Participant J)

A leader who treats with respect, gets respect back. (Participant D)

Finding 10: Issues of Approachability

Participants believed that an ethical leader has to be perceived as approachable by their followers. Proper communication between leaders and followers is critical to attaining organizational goals and achieving long-term objectives. More than 10 participants discussed the effect of the lack of communication on managers' failure in organizations. The conceptual frameworks that are most relevant to this theme are stakeholder theory, social learning theory, and Adams's equity theory.

I do believe that ethical leader leads by example and trains people to do things right, I believe that everything starts with leadership and a leader has to be approachable and willing to have open communication. Time over changes and we have to adapt so a leader must be able to adapt first to any change and then pass this change to followers. Unethical leader would be somebody is dishonest and does not have time to explain things thoroughly to people and be there to back them up. (Participant A)

Summary

The theme of accountability emerged as the most important theme in ethical leadership, followed by honesty, morality, and fairness. The use of the transcendental phenomenology helped me as researcher to see these themes from a new perspective, especially as I work in the same organization as the research participants. Additional themes have emerged from the findings of this study, such as democratic decision-making and knowledge. The results of this study supported the modern knowledge in the field of leadership and aided in identifying important areas in leadership, which may prove beneficial to the understanding the phenomenon of unethical leadership.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of followers under unethical leadership in public and private organizations in the United States. In this phenomenological study, I focused on followers as research participants, as they constitute a significant bridge between internal and external stakeholders in any organization. This approach is based on the work of Moustakas (1994), who believed that the researcher's personal experience should be bracketed through the use of epoché. This involves clearly distinguishing one's personal experience of the phenomenon being studied and focusing on the experiences of followers.

Using a qualitative method through transcendental as a type of phenomenology enhanced my understanding of the unethical leadership phenomenon as a lived experience from the perspective of followers. Through this approach, I set aside my preconceptions about the phenomenon of unethical leadership and be able to see and present it from the perspective of followers. Phenomenology is the study of lived experience or the life world (van Manen, 1997). Using a qualitative research methodology, I was able to face the complexities of the unethical leadership phenomenon and the study's participants had the opportunity to express their experiences and thoughts.

Eight themes emerged from this study based on the perspectives of followers about ethical and unethical leaders. The themes included: (a) morality, (b) honesty, (c) accountability, (d) fairness, (e) responsibility (f) stakeholders' wellbeing, (g) humility,

and (h) approachability. The participants of the study identified two additional themes: democratic decision-making and knowledge. All the features and characteristics of ethical leadership discussed in the extant literature reviewed were reflected in the final themes of this study.

Interpretation of Findings

In this study, I focused on participants who had experienced the phenomenon of unethical leadership in one way or the other. The themes that emerged in this study have been identified in previous studies, which confirms the existing knowledge about the phenomenon of ethical leadership. The results of this study largely align with current research on the ethical leadership phenomenon; honesty, responsibility, humility, fairness, and stakeholders' wellbeing are five themes in this study that support prior studies on the phenomenon of ethical leadership. Brown and Mitchell (2010) stressed on conducting more research to better understand the implications of ethical leadership.

This study shares the mutual understanding of the aspect of ethics and moral conduct in leadership with prior studies. According to Cialdini et al. (2021), organizations should send strong signals regarding ethics in their communications to both leaders and employees. Communication to leaders may decrease their likelihood of engaging in unethical behavior, while communications to ethical employees may cause them to feel that their personal values align with those of the larger organization, which may reduce their psychological distress and decrease their chances of leaving the organization even when exposed to unethical leader behavior. Most of the themes that emerged in this study are the same as the aspects and attributes of ethical leadership

identified in previous studies, confirming the importance of the existing knowledge about the phenomenon. Both previous and current scholars studying the phenomenon of unethical leadership have agreed that there may be insidious long-term costs of unethical leader behavior to groups and organizations, and that behavioral ethics researchers may be underestimating the harm caused by such behavior (see Cialdini et al., 2021).

Researchers conduct studies in different disciplines to confirm existing knowledge about a specific phenomenon and generate new insights. Five of the themes that emerged in this study were the same as those obtained in previous studies as characteristics of ethical leadership, which supports the credence of the phenomenon of ethical leadership. This study has contributed to the existing knowledge about the ethical leadership phenomenon by identifying two new themes as attributes of ethical leadership: democratic decision-making and knowledge. The findings considerably bridged the gap in literature identified by Odeneye (2017) that a need exists to explore the phenomenon of ethical leadership from the followers' perspective because several studies have focused on leaders as research participants like Guay et al. (2019) and Khokhar and Zia-ur-Rehman (2017).

The current participants identified two additional themes and emphasized the importance of democratic decision-making and knowledge as an attribute of an ethical leadership, especially for followers who do not hold any managerial positions. Ethical leadership entails allowing the contributions to decision-making from followers, thereby enhancing the quality of decisions. Professional planners should practice resolving ethical conflicts between their private and professional ethical perspectives, as well as those

between the legitimacy of technical planning expertise and democratic decision-making (Lauria & Long, 2019). Through this study, I aimed to distinguish democratic decision-making and knowledge as final themes from other themes in order to attract needed attention to them. I concluded the key findings presented below from the themes that emerged from the data analysis.

Emphasizing morality was a key finding that I derived from Theme 3, which represented a moral leader who can adopt justice by giving each person what they deserve. Philosophers have defined justice as the concept of proportion between a person's deserts and the good and bad things that befall in between. In support of this theme, participants expressed the belief that a moral leader should ensure justice and fairness for their followers. Bennis and Nanus (1985) suggest that one of the responsible tasks for a leader is to enhance the ethics and morality of followers conduct.

The issue of honesty was a finding that I derived from Theme 2; a majority of the participants perceived an ethical leader to be honest, truthful, and forthright. Several participants explained that honesty is the most important characteristic; over 75% of participants ($n = 17$) provided support for this theme. An ethical leader makes right decisions by being honest and truthful; as a result, followers learn to be honest when they see their leader behave in this manner.

Lack of accountability was a key finding that I derived from Theme 1, which indicated that ethical leaders are the ones who believe in their accountability toward their organization and followers. Leaders who lack accountability are more likely to establish an unfair environment and lack of trust. Ethical leaders also hold others liable for their

actions by being accountable for their actions. Ninety percent of the current study's participants perceived an ethical leader as responsible for their actions and willing to take accountability of their mistakes so they can present an example for followers to comply with laws and ethical standards.

Fairness in making decisions was a key finding that I derived from Theme 4. Stakeholder theory, eudaimonia, Adams's equity theory, and social learning theory were the conceptual frameworks that I used to guide this study. These theories were particularly relevant to the theme of fairness. Participants explicitly demonstrated their views about fairness in leadership. Participants believed that an ethical leader must be fair to his followers and society. Such a leader must also be careful when assigning employees to supervisory positions, taking into consideration their educational and professional background.

Responsibility of ethical leaders was a finding that I derived from Theme 8; the conceptual frameworks that applied to this theme were stakeholder theory, eudaimonia, and utilitarianism. An ethical leader is willing to admit their mistakes and shortcomings-- not only their achievements. In addition to admitting their weaknesses, ethical leaders are able to find the right people to make up for it. According to Kim and Vandenberghe (2021), by virtue of their moral standards, ethical behavior and concern for employees' welfare, ethical leaders may fulfill these needs and clarify how job duties should be accomplished, which may foster perceived organization al support (Loi et al, 2015).

The theme of stakeholders' wellbeing was supported by more than 80% of participants. In relation to the conceptual framework of stakeholder theory and

eudemonia, this theme indicates that ethical leaders' concern about stakeholders' wellbeing has been found to affect the performance of employees. It has integrative and holistic ethical concern for the environmental and ecological wellbeing of national and international communities (Waddock, 2005, pp. 149-150).

Humility as an abdication of power was a finding in this study that represented an ethical leader as a humble person who respects the values of others. In addition, an ethical leader is friendly and peaceful. The conceptual frameworks that underpin this theme are eudaimonia and social learning theory. Participants indicated the importance of an ethical traits from childhood, through school and the professional environment. Vera and Rodriguez-Lopez (2004) consider the virtue of humility as a critical force for leaders and organizations that possess it, and a weakness for those who do not.

Issues of approachability was a key finding that I derived from Theme 10; I concluded that proper communication between leaders and followers is critical to attaining organizational goals and achieving long-term objectives. More than 10 participants discussed the effect of the lack of communication on managers' failure in organizations. The conceptual frameworks with the most relevance to this theme were stakeholder theory, social learning theory, and Adams's equity theory. According to Storr (2004), it was considered to be important that followers had regular contact with an approachable leader and were able to behave and express themselves freely.

Democratic decision-making was a finding indicating that decision-making process should be shared between leaders and followers. A majority of the participants agreed that an ethical leader should not be autocratic and should instead involve others in

the decision-making process. Over 80% of participants ($n = 16$) supported this theme, which is classifiable under the conceptual frameworks of utilitarianism, eudaimonia, and stakeholder theory.

Knowledge is a distinguished finding where all participants agreed that an ethical leader must be knowledgeable and educated. The frameworks that applied to this theme were social learning theory and Adams's equity theory. Participants also believed that an ethical leader must be willing to listen and learn as much as they can. Their focus should be on academic knowledge as well as actions. Socrates presented himself not as a master of knowledge but as a fellow learner working alongside of his students to share and gain insights from their perspectives (Malakyan, 2015).

Through these findings, I extended the current literature though demonstrating key themes regarding expectations of an ethical leader. Previous scholars have focused on ethical leadership from the perspective of leaders (Yang, 2014); however, I extended previous research by demonstrating viewership of leaders from the perspective of followers. Through this study, I aimed to achieve justice and fairness for followers, as well as to the sense of responsibility for leaders. When leaders and followers hold similar ideals, they are better equipped to predict the behavior of their counterpart (Meglino et al., 1989).

Leaders may now be able to realize that followers constitute the majority of the workforce in any organization. According to Byza et al. (2019), it is expected that a person-supervisor value congruence relates directly to affective commitment and job satisfaction and indirectly through followers' perceived empowerment. Scholars have

posited that value congruence between leaders and followers is positively related to followers' empowerment. Shared values, commitment, and empowerment is likely to remain elusive if leaders fail to meet the expectations of followers. Such expectations can be enhanced by leaders who exhibit the attributions of democratic decision-making and knowledge.

The conceptual frameworks for this study included different concepts in ethics like utilitarianism, eudemonistic, stakeholder theory and Adams's equity theory. Democratic decision-making was a new theme that emerged, and I contextualized using the conceptual framework of eudaimonia, stakeholders' theory, and utilitarianism. Other themes that I identified in this study related to the conceptual framework of social learning theory, such as knowledge and honesty. Followers may possess certain knowledge and experience before joining an organization and ethical leadership may energize followers toward further progression of knowledge. Being knowledgeable and displaying adroitness on the part of an ethical leader may inspire employees to aspire to do the same, based on social learning theory (Odeneye, 2017).

Limitations of the Study

One primary limitation in this study was focusing on only one public or/and one private organization to analyze unethical leadership phenomenon which has caused difficulty in recruiting participants for interviews. I selected one private organization as the research setting for this study which has limited the study to quality issues within the private sector only. Another limitation of this study is that the study focused only on followers as research participants excluding any followers with supervisory and

managerial positions. Because I work in the same organization as study participants, the data collection process was not as convenient as expected.

Recommendations

The results of this qualitative phenomenological study may benefit the academic community—including researchers, teachers, scholars, and students—by contributing to the growth of the existing knowledge in the field of leadership. This study will be available online in ProQuest dataset once accepted and approved by the dissertation committee. I will submit another compressed copy to several peer-reviewed journals for further dissemination. I intend to propagate the results of this study by presenting in conferences, engaging in organizational consultancy, and teaching in institutions of higher learning. This study may contribute to the society by establishing a better working environment because followers are more likely to pass their hard work and honesty to ethical leader who is known by protecting their wellbeing. The findings may be beneficial for corporate leaders by enhancing their understanding of ethics in leadership and their responsibility in protecting followers' dignity and wellbeing.

I identified areas in which future research may be needed. For example, future researchers should focus more on using followers as participants and focus on the unethical side of leadership. Through this study, I was able to reduce the gap in the literature, in which most ethical leadership studies have been conducted using leaders as research participants. Based on the outcome and possible limitations of this study, a need persists for future researchers to continue the initiative in this study by exploring the phenomenon of unethical leadership from the perspective of followers.

In order to enhance the understanding of the existing knowledge in the field of leadership, future research should give more attention to the role of followers and the importance of their perceptions on ethical leadership. The field of leadership has been extensively researched to deeply understand the influence placed by a leader on their followers through their interpersonal relationship (Ciulla, 2011). Considering the diversity of organizational stakeholders who could be affected by the actions of an unethical leadership, it may be important for future studies to acknowledge the importance of the understanding of the phenomenon of unethical leadership. Several stakeholders have suggested the relevance of studying ethical leadership. Recent studies add the concept of stakeholder perspective to ethical leadership where the leader relationship extends to all stakeholders may it be followers, customers, suppliers, contractors, government, and society (Paharia, 2019).

I provided a detailed description of the methodology and the process of data collection for future researchers to be able to apply this method in other settings, where applicable. Through this qualitative phenomenological research study, I addressed the phenomenon of unethical leadership from the perception of followers. The use of a qualitative research method in this type of study has the potential to expand the knowledge in the extant literature of ethical leadership.

Implications

The essence of this study is to positively impact society with positive and needed change. Previous scholars have focused more on the internal operations of the organizations, and few scholars have on the broadening of perspectives on the

implications of research on covering the entire society positively. Achieving a positive social impact upon society requires a progression from the individual to the organization and societal level. This study has to the potential of achieving a positive social impact on individual, organizational, societal, and academic level.

In terms of positive social impact on an individual level, this study has the potential to increase job satisfaction among employees. When leaders are concerned about the wellbeing and flourishing of their employees, this will make employees more satisfied with performing their duties. Ethical leadership can enhance the relationship and interaction between leaders and followers, leading to improved performance. Cooperation between leaders and followers defines how successful a leader is, as leaders need followers in order to achieve organizational goals. While leaders are ambitious and seeking personal success, this success is not possible to achieve without the cooperation of followers.

Followers may be better positioned when they are given the opportunity to use their innovative ideas and creativity and be part of the organizational success. Followers may no longer see the problem of the organization as the issue of the leader but may be willing to create new ideas and share the decisions in order to help the organization grow. The extent to which a leader is successful may depend on the level of cooperation received from followers, leaders need followers to be able to accomplish set of goals (Odeneye, 2017). Trust and honesty between leaders and followers represent the importance of building healthy relationship that leads the organization to a global growth.

This study may have implications for positive social change in the organizational dimension. Change is necessary for organizations to remain competitive and relevant in the face of dynamic social realities in the modern age of technology. It is more likely for followers to accept and support the implementation of change when the leader is perceived to be ethical. The ethical capability of leaders is required in order to achieve success regarding goal attainment, profitability, innovation, and competitiveness.

This study may also have implications on the societal level. Because ethical leaders are more focused on the wellbeing of others, the prevalence of CSR initiatives will increase in society. Leaders are obligated to set up communication mechanism with their followers to identify their needs and ensure CSR initiatives are effective. Moral leaders ensure a healthy relationship with their followers, which leads to commitment and innovation. This may create organizations with responsibility to their surrounding society and a commitment to growing GDP.

Ethical leadership may help in improving the society by eliminating corruption, the same corruption that led to the economic recession in 2008 and affected the whole world economy. Ethical leadership is an antidote to the practices of unethical leaders that could lead to an unfair society. By being honest, responsible, accountable, trustworthy, fair, caring, and truthful, leaders may be able to achieve social growth.

The findings of this study may increase leadership consciousness of the effects of their actions and behaviors on followers, as they may impact the ethical climate in the organization. Ethical leaders tend to build a relationship and communication mechanism that allows followers to provide formal feedback in the organization. This feedback tends

to establish a fairer environment between all management and institutional level in the organization. Followers have the right to grow and become future leaders, and leaders are more noble when they advise followers who are interested in becoming leaders.

Ethical leadership training is an example of the implications on the academic level, participants have all agreed on the importance of formal training in ethical leadership with implications for enhancing the knowledge of an ethical leader. Researchers have suggested techniques for teaching ethical leadership for graduate management classes so students may appreciate better the intricacies of being an ethical leader. Colleges need to understand the imperative to teach the fundamentals and complexities of ethical leadership in schools. Such ethical teaching should not be limited to business or management schools. The importance of ethical leadership training can be enhanced when schools realize that the leaders of most organizations are college graduates in diverse disciplines.

Rich education is a solution to unethical leadership, as most of the leaders and CEOs reached the higher level of their careers using their leadership skills from the knowledge acquired by education and honing such skills through progressive promotions. Ethics and ethical leadership must be taught at all educational levels. In addition, scholars should conduct more research on ethical leadership due to the increased unethical behavior of leaders toward their communities. Stories of unethical behavior such as Volkswagen's cheating on emissions tests or the fraudulent accounts at Wells Fargo are commonplace in modern media, and it is increasingly recognized that such unethical behaviors may be the norm rather than the exception (Bryant & Merrit, 2021).

The perception of ethical leadership has been impacted by culture constantly, society has to role to play in shaping a culture that is ethically centered. The basis of society is individuals and families; while culture is refined over time, society shapes the culture to reflect moral orientation. A societal moral culture can be built by ensuring behavioral norms among individuals, families, and society as whole.

Conclusions

This study may make significance contributions to the current research on the phenomenon of unethical leadership by focusing on the followers' perception and as research participants disregarding any individuals who hold any managerial or supervisory positions. The study included the main characteristics of ethical leadership, such as: morality, honesty, accountability, fairness, responsibility, stakeholders' wellbeing, humility, and approachability. In this study, I focused on presenting the perspectives on an ethical leadership in a very important areas such as: stakeholder relationships, ethical decision-making, organizational change, moral engagement, gender inequality, job satisfaction, and positive social impact. When leaders realize what followers expect from them, they are more ethical and committed toward achieving a positive social impact.

An understanding of the expectations of followers may raise the level of commitments of employees toward their organizational goals. The foundation of ethical leadership starts from the individuals and families as units on a society. Education is essential in enforcing ethics and ethical leadership training. Ethical leadership training

should be incorporated into the core curriculum, which will enable students to shape an ethical culture.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Title of Study: Phenomenological Exploration of Followers' Lived Experiences and Their Perception of Ethical Leadership

Date: _____ **Time:** _____

Location: A Private Organization in USA

Interviewer: Saad Maklad

Interviewee: _____

Interview Questions:

1. Based on your experience, what do you expect from an ethical leader and why? Bearing in mind that a leader could be anyone in position of authority.
2. Which best practices by leaders do you believe had the most positive impact within the organization?
3. From your perception, what would be your expectations of an ethical leadership?
4. Can you describe how will leadership shape the working environment within the organization? Also, how will ethical leadership enhance the satisfaction of followers and other stakeholders of the organization?
5. Based on your experience, how ethical leadership shapes employees' readiness to change and succeed?
6. Can you describe an unethical leader? Explain if your description of an unethical leader is based on a lived experience you had.
7. Are there any other issues that you like to discuss regarding the expectations or an ethical leadership?

Appendix B: Confidentiality Agreement

This agreement will be signed by Saad Maklad (Researcher) who will have access to confidential information during the course of his activity in collecting data for this research “Phenomenological Exploration of Followers’ Lived Experiences and Their Perception of Ethical Leadership”. The researcher acknowledges that such information must be confidential, and that improper disclosure of such information can be damaging to participants.

By signing this Confidentiality Agreement I acknowledge and agree to:

1. Keep all the research information shared with me confidential. I will not discuss or share the research information with anyone.
2. Keep all research information secure while it is in my possession.
3. I will not copy, release, sell or destroy any confidential information except as properly authorized.
4. I understand that names and any other identifying information about study sites and participants are completely confidential.
5. I understand that violation of the Confidentiality Agreement will have legal implications.
6. I understand that all the confidential information I will have access to including information about study sites and participants will be to the extent and for the purpose of performing my assigned duties on this research project.

Signing this document, I acknowledge that I have read the agreement and I agree to comply with all the terms and conditions stated above.

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____ **Name:** _____

Appendix C: Demographic Survey

Code: _____ (Research Purposes Only)

Name: _____

Gender: Male _____ Female _____

Job Title: _____

Ethnicity:

Caucasian _____ African American _____ Hispanic or Latino _____

Asian _____ American Indian or Alaskan Native _____ Pacific Islander _____

Education:

No College Degree: _____ Associate Degree _____ Bachelor's Degree _____

Master's Degree _____ Doctoral Degree _____

Age Range:

21 – 30 _____ . 31 – 40 _____ . 41 – 50 _____ . 51 – 60 _____ . 61 – 69 _____ . 70+ _____ .

Years with the Organization:

Less than 7 years _____ 5 to 10 years _____ 11 to 15 years _____ 16 to 20 years _____

Current Position:

Follower _____ Leader _____