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RECONCEPTUALIZING ETHICAL LEADERSHIP WITHIN NEO-CHARISMATIC LEADERSHIP THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE: IMPLICATIONS FOR BUSINESS ETHICS AND ORGANIZATIONAL PRACTICE

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Abstract
This literature review combines sightings from more than a few academic fundamentals on ethical leadership comparing it with neo-charismatic leadership theories, and commenting on its implications for possible organizational outcomes and practices. It reconnoiters how ethical leadership is conceptualized and operationalized, drawing its progression through manifold theoretical standpoints. The study also draws linkages with key constructs such as corporate social responsibility (CSR), social entrepreneurship, entrepreneurship, and social entrepreneurship. Additionally, it highpoints the role of essential ethical principles such as transparency, integrity or veracity, and accountability in handling ethical policymaking within organizations. The evaluation accomplishes by observing models for socially accountable and maintainable business practices that poise ethical influence with profitability. Finally, this review aims to provide a holistic understanding of the current state and future guidelines of ethical leadership in business and social initiative settings.
Keywords: *Ethical Leadership, Ethical Principles, Business Ethics, Neo-charishmatic models, CSR, Entrepreneurship, Social Entrepreneurship*

1. Overview

Early leadership academic theoretical viewpoints, such as behavioral and contingency slants to leadership, concentrated on coordinating increased throughput, effectiveness and efficiency in corporate settings. In dissimilarity, later neo-charismatic leadership prototypes, like transformational, transactional, and charismatic leadership styles, appeared in answer to handling with instability, ambiguity, complication, and obscurity environments, converging on stimulating vision, steering superior competitive pressures, and developing flexible and sustainable business performance. Contrariwise, subsequent to the global monetary catastrophe, the major alarm was not simply attaining effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability, but also regenerating trust in followers through honest leadership (Alimo-Metcalfe et al., 2013).

The repercussion of ethical leadership in modern organizational was pushed further, with the rising emphasis on accountability and enivironmental sustainability, social entrepreneurship and corporate social responsibility.

In a world discolored by business scandals and ethical letdowns, the implication of ethical leadership has never been more untiring. Ethical leadership—rooted in belief, equality, honesty, transparency, and a genuine apprehension for stakeholders —has protracted increasing grasp in organizational research and practice due to its influence on employee behavior, organizational culture, and sustainable performance (Brown & Treviño, 2006).

This paper purposes to draw out a comprehensive analysis of ethical leadership theories and frameworks. Additionally it discovers the reasonable roles ethical leadership plays within

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH JOURNAL FOR SOCIAL STUDIES
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Volume No: 02 Issue No: 04 (2025)

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and social entrepreneurship. Lastly, it examines the direct and indirect effects of ethical leadership on corporate practices. The resolve of this literary work is not only to combine existing theories but also to high spot critical openings and offer new prospects for future research and practice.

1.1 Aims

The objectives of this chapter are structured around five primary aims:

1. To analytically review the introductory theories of ethical leadership.
2. To investigate the operationalization of ethical leadership and its influence.
3. To assess the purpose of ethical leadership in managing social entrepreneurship resourcefulness.
4. To reconnoiter the overall influence of ethical leadership on business performances, follower commitment, and stakeholder commitment.
5. To identify potential future research paths.
6. To propose the research breaks and future directions for ethical leadership with consequences for CSR and social enterprises.

The call for ethical leadership has never been more crucial, given rising misgivings around corporate misconduct, injustice, and unpardonable business practices. Ethical leadership, as a theory, has expanded significant academic thoughtfulness over the past two decades and is now fundamental to discussions on corporate governance, leadership development, and business sustainability (Brown & Treviño, 2006; Kalshoven et al., 2011b). The convergence of ethical leadership with themes such as corporate social responsibility (CSR), entrepreneurship, and social enterprise suggests a need for a more assimilated appraisal that includes all these domains.

2. Research Approach

This research employs a systematic qualitative literature review procedure to blend theoretical perspectives and empirical evidence on ethical leadership, its dimensions, and its usefulness for sustainable business practices. The review tries to ensure methodological rigor, as commended in systematic literature review practices (Tranfield et al., 2003). Having restricted admittance to subscription-based databases, this study integrates publicly available and open-source sources to endorse transparency and reproducibility (Snyder, 2019).

To collect relevant literature, the search strategy is focused on keywords such as “ethical leadership,” “corporate social responsibility,” “social entrepreneurship,” and “ethical business practices.” Peer-reviewed research papers, working papers, and open-access book chapters are included, provided they focus on ethical leadership within corporate and social enterprise settings. Non-scholarly editorials and articles sources, lacking a theoretical or empirical basis, are excluded to uphold the academic steadfastness of the review.

Following the selection, a thematic analysis approach is incorporated for creating diverse forms of research literature (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This method facilitates the documentation of recurrent concepts, interactive patterns, and theoretical tendencies across studies, streamlining a profounder understanding of how ethical leadership functions within different organizational ecosystems. Thematic analysis involves methodical coding, theme formation, and interpretive synthesis of concepts, making it best for exploring constructs like leadership, ethical leadership (Nowell et al., 2017). A manually organized literature matrix is used to organize and classify sources into thematic fields such as ethical leadership models, CSR alignment with ethical

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH JOURNAL FOR SOCIAL STUDIES
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Volume No: 02 Issue No: 04 (2025)

leadership, leadership in social enterprises, and stakeholder impact of ethical practices, etc. An effort is made to confirm both vertical (within-theme) and horizontal (cross-theme) integration of findings.

However, this methodology is not without limitations. Limited access to high-impact journals may lead to the exclusion of essential literature, while dependence on open-access materials may introduce partiality in terms of geographical exemplification or discipline-specific perspectives. Additionally, the absence of programmed tools such as NVivo or ATLAS needs manual data coding, which, while transparent, may affect the consistency and depth of the thematic categorization. Despite these challenges, the adopted manual approach actions to conduct a orderly method for conceptual fusion and adds expressively to the works on ethical leadership.

3. Ethical Leadership

Ethical leadership is defined as the application of normatively appropriate demeanor through personal activities and interpersonal connections, and the preferment of such behavior to followers through two-way communication, substantiation, and decision-making (Brown et al., 2005). This view was earlier introduced by Trevino et al. (2003), which assimilates personal morality and value-based managerial behavior.

Ethical leaders are considered both moral individuals and moral managers. They not only establish integrity and fairness but also actively support ethical behavior among followers through role modeling, ethical communication, and setting behavioral expectations (Brown & Treviño, 2006; Treviño et al., 2000).

Ethical leaders serve as role models who inspire ethical behavior among followers by cultivating an atmosphere of justice, trust, and accountability (Resick et al., 2006).

3.1 Ethical Leadership Theoretic Basics

Two primary theories reinforce ethical leadership. **Social Learning Theory** (Bandura, 1977) proposes that ethical leaders act as role models. Followers imitate leaders' ethical behaviors by discerning actions and the consequences leaders impose (Brown et al., 2005). **Social Exchange Theory** (Blau, 1986) expounds that Ethical leaders nurture trust and fairness, prompting followers to reciprocate with positive behaviors like organizational citizenship and loyalty (Brown & Treviño, 2006).

Ethical leadership draws on a variety of theoretical grounds, combining elements of moral philosophy, organizational behavior, and psychological theory. Among the initial and most extensively mentioned models is the effort extended by Brown et al. (2005)**,** who conceptualized ethical leadership as a form of leadership that highlights ethical principles such as fairness, role modeling, and reward systems to facilitate ethical conduct. Their model recognized a groundwork by assimilating social learning theories with **e**thical decision-making models, signifying that followers perceive and imitate ethical behaviors projected by leaders (Bandura, 1977; Blau, 1986).

Treviño et al. (2000) broadly elaborated on the concept of ethical leadership in two distinct yet interrelated dimensions: the *moral person* and the *moral manager*. The former includes traits like honesty, fairness, and altruism, while the latter focuses on actively endorsing ethical conduct through corroboration, communication, and accountability structures. Ethical leadership is further defined as the demonstration and promotion of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions, interpersonal relationships, and two-way communication (Brown et al., 2005).

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH JOURNAL FOR SOCIAL STUDIES
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Volume No: 02 Issue No: 04 (2025)

Gini (2013) and Kanungo & Mendonca (2001) affirm that ethical leaders prioritize collective well-being over personal gain, supporting moral standards in decision-making. These philosophical roots are reflected in behavioral models, where ethical leadership impacts followers through role modeling and value diffusion.

3.2 Contrast with Other Leadership Theoretical Viewpoints

While ethical leadership is distinctive, it shares thematic overlaps with other leadership theories, such as the following:

3.2.1 Transformational Leadership

Though ethical leadership intersects with other leadership styles, particularly **transformational leadership**, scholars like Brown and Treviño (2006) emphasize that ethical leadership is distinguished by its focus on **moral management**, explicitly endorsing ethical conduct and holding followers answerable for ethical violations. Unlike transformational leadership, which centers on vision and inspiration, ethical leadership emphasizes **principled behavior and decision-making** grounded in moral values. Burns (2006) initiated transformational leadership as morally uplifting, particularly through "inspirational motivation" and "idealized influence." Ethical leaders, having transformational leadership characteristics, serve as moral role models and inspire follower change (Riggio et al., 2010). Stouten et al. (2012) argue that ethical leadership integrates both transactional and transformational components but ranks ethical behavior as its core decree.

3.2.2 Rest's Four-Component Model

Rest's (1986) Four-Component Model of Moral Behavior summarizes the psychological steps individuals take to act ethically. First, **moral sensitivity** involves identifying the ethical dimensions of a situation and understanding how actions influence others. Second, **moral judgment** refers to deciding what is right by gauging choices based on moral reasoning. Third, **moral motivation** is ordering ethical values over personal goals. Lastly, **moral character** is the inner strength and persistence needed to follow through on moral decisions, even in the face of obstacles. Together, these four components explain how people move from ethical awareness to ethical action. Rest's (1986) Four-Component Model of Moral Behavior offers similarities for the ethical leadership framework. This association helps elucidate how leaders decode ethical cognition into organizational behavior, providing a process ideal for ethical conduct (Mayer et al., 2012).

3.2.4 Servant Leadership

Greenleaf (1977) described servant leaders as those who serve and develop others, appealing to followers' moral compass and long-term growth-predominantly focusing on their moral and ethical development. Thereby inclusion of ethical conduct in servant leadership highlights its correspondence with ethical leadership.

3.2.5 Authentic Leadership

Luthans and Avolio (2003) proposed authentic leadership rooted in self-awareness, relational transparency, and internalized moral perspective, which is basically a reflection of ethical behavioral dimensions.

3.2.6 Spiritual Leadership

Fry (2003) emphasized inner motivation derived from spiritual well-being, faith, and vision, offering a transcendental ethical orientation comparable to ethical leadership (Fry et al., 2011).

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH JOURNAL FOR SOCIAL STUDIES
ISSN Online: 3006-4686, ISSN Print: 3006-4678
Volume No: 02 Issue No: 04 (2025)

Despite these overlaps, ethical leadership is unique in its moral management, focusing on actively guiding others in ethical behaviors through transactional tools like rewards and sanctions (Brown & Treviño, 2006). Recent scholarship has shown that ethical leadership increasingly draws on ideas from **authentic leadership** (Avolio & Gardner, 2005) and **spiritual leadership** (Fry, 2003). These frameworks add layers of emotional intelligence, self-awareness, and transcendent purpose to ethical leadership theory. In this view, ethical leaders are not just rule-followers but purpose-driven individuals who cultivate meaning, community, and compassion in their organizations.

Avolio and Gardner (2005) argue that authentic leaders are inherently ethical because their behavior is rooted in self-awareness and internalized moral perspectives. Such an intersection results in a more humanized, transparent, and relationally grounded leadership style.

Ethical leadership is a robust, multidimensional construct offering benefits for individual, group, and organizational levels. While it shares similarities with transformational, servant, and authentic leadership, its unique focus on moral management makes it a distinct domain.

Toor and Ofori (2009) tested ethical leadership within the Full Range Leadership Model and found that it is positively correlated with transformational leadership dimensions but negatively associated with laissez-faire leadership and transactional organizational cultures. This confirms the notion that ethical leadership fosters openness, innovation, and trust, values crucial for sustainable business practices.

Moreover, Stouten et al. (2012) emphasized that ethical leaders uphold the "cardinal virtues" of prudence, courage, temperance, and justice, ensuring long-term legitimacy and ethical consistency within business environments. These frameworks align ethical leadership not just with compliance, but with value creation and moral purpose, facilitating the growth of social enterprises and meaning in corporate culture.

3.3 Operationalization and Measurement

Ethical leadership has been empirically measured using the following constructs:

- **Ethical Leadership Scale (ELS)** by Brown et al. (2005) remains the most widely used tool (Ko et al., 2018). It gauges behavioral manifestations of ethical conduct in leadership roles very concisely and comprehensively.
- **Ethical Leadership at Work (ELW)** scale operationalized by Kalshoven et al. (2011b)**,** ethical leadership into seven discrete and quantifiable dimensions including “fairness, role clarification, power sharing, people orientation, integrity, ethical guidance, and concern for sustainability”. This multi-dimensional construct integrates the individual and interpersonal manifestations of ethical leadership, offering a robust model for both research and practical application.

3.4 Precursors of Ethical Leadership

The concept of ethical leadership can be approached from different perspectives like its precursors, moderators, mediators, and most importantly the results it generates for a corporate entity. Ko et al. (2018) through a meta-analysis provide a comprehensive framework for ethical leadership categorizing studies into antecedents, mediators, moderators, and outcomes. Antecedents include individual traits like integrity and empathy, while mediators such as trust and psychological safety explain how ethical leadership translates into positive outcomes like employee engagement and reduced deviance.

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH JOURNAL FOR SOCIAL STUDIES
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Volume No: 02 Issue No: 04 (2025)

As per the meta-analysis offered by Ko et al. (2018) the antecedents of ethical leadership can be categorized into two broad categories:

- **Leaders' Features:** Personality characteristics like "agreeableness, conscientiousness, and emotional stability" (Kalshoven et al., 2011a); "high moral identity" (Mayer et al., 2012); and "low moral disengagement" (Bonner et al., 2016); "leader's interactional justice" (Zoghbi-Manrique-de-Lara & Suárez-Acosta, 2014) predict ethical behavior. On the other hand, neuroticism does not indicate ethical leadership since it does not embody positive role modelling (Kalshoven et al., 2011a).
- **Situational Effects**: Ethical role modeling from mentors and top managers, as well as organizational climate and justice, influence ethical leadership development (Brown & Treviño, 2014; Mayer et al., 2009) may serve as contextual influencers of ethical leadership.

3.5 Consequences of Ethical Leadership

Ko et al. (2018) identified five broad classes of outcomes:

I. **Follower Ethical Performance:** Citing several studies, Ko et al. (2018) concluded that ethical leaders try to reduce misconduct through their words and actions and also try to encourage a moral voice.

II. Ko et al. (2018) identified several work-related outcomes focusing on **job and task outcomes at the individual level,** including job satisfaction, commitment, engagement, and performance. Citing several studies in this respect, it was posited that such outcomes evolve as followers try to reciprocate or emulate the ethical behaviors of their leaders.

III. **Family and Life Satisfaction**: Ethical leadership positively affects work–life balance and familial relationships (Liao et al., 2015; Yang, 2014).

IV. **Leader Consequences**: Ethical leaders are viewed as more effective and promotable (Rubin et al., 2010).

V. Quoting the findings of several studies, enhanced firm performance, OCB engagement, and increased levels of organizational justice, along with nurturing of an ethical organizational climate are often witnessed as positive **Organizational Consequences** (Ko et al., 2018).

3.6 Mediating and Moderating Instruments

Ethical leadership's influence operates through individual & organizational level facilitators and regulating mechanisms (Ko et al., 2018):

- **Individual-Level Mediators**: Psychological safety, moral efficacy, and follower–leader relationship quality are just a few individual-level facilitators of ethical leadership outcomes. Several models emphasize the role of ethical climate as a mediating factor between ethical leadership and outcomes such as employee commitment, trust, and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). Neubert et al. (2009) found that ethical leadership significantly predicts ethical climate, which in turn influences employee attitudes and performance. Similarly, Den Hartog and De Hoogh (2009) argued that leaders who foster ethical climate empower employees to engage in moral reasoning and act with integrity. Ethical climate also shapes how employees interpret ambiguity and pressure, offering them a moral compass. Leaders who maintain consistency between

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH JOURNAL FOR SOCIAL STUDIES
ISSN Online: 3006-4686, ISSN Print: 3006-4678
Volume No: 02 Issue No: 04 (2025)

stated values and organizational practices build not just ethical environments but also psychological safety (Walumbwa et al., 2011).

- **Organizational Mediators**: Culture of justice and value-ridden culture, ethical climate, and shared group norms, to name a few, work at the organizational level as mediators.
- **Moderators** include follower characteristics (e.g., moral attentiveness), leader–follower distance, and organizational politics (Kacmar et al., 2013; Tumasjan et al., 2011).

4 Corporate Social Responsibility-CSR, Entrepreneurship, and Social Entrepreneurship: Connections with Ethical Leadership

In the context of CSR and stakeholder engagement, ethical leadership frameworks also intersect with stakeholder theory (Freeman, 2010). Leaders are increasingly seen as stewards who must balance the interests of multiple stakeholders—shareholders, employees, communities, and the environment. Ethical leadership thus becomes the vehicle through which stakeholder justice, inclusivity, and long-term value creation are enacted (Maak & Pless, 2006).

Stakeholder-oriented ethical leadership rejects the narrow profit-maximization model in favor of shared value and participative governance, thus linking leadership to sustainability and social impact. In order to appreciate possible linkages between the concepts, let us begin by defining the same.

4.1 Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

CSR refers to a company's obligation to contribute to sustainable economic development by working with shareholders, employees, their families, the local community, and society at large to improve quality of life (Carroll, 1991). It goes beyond legal compliance and profit maximization to include environmental custodianship, social justice, and ethical labor practices (Aguilera et al., 2007).

4.2 Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship is generally defined as the process of planning, initiating, and running a new business, often to solve market-based problems or create value-added products or services. Entrepreneurs are typically characterized by their ability to innovate, take risks, and respond to opportunities in dynamic environments (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000).

4.3 Social Entrepreneurship

Social entrepreneurship combines the risk-taking and innovation linked with entrepreneurship with an assignment to solve social problems as well. Unlike traditional entrepreneurs, social entrepreneurs measure attainment of goals by the impact they create in terms of fairness, accessibility of products and services to underprivileged, disadvantaged groups, marginalized communities, economically deprived and lower-income populations, socially excluded people or customer base, and human development rather than financial returns alone (Dees, 1998).

A comparative analysis is conducted between ethical leadership as revealed in CSR-driven corporations and mission-focused social enterprises. The former underlines amenableness, sustainability reporting, and stakeholder management, while the latter highlights social innovation, community inclusiveness, and long-term community influence.

Research by Lee and Kelly (2019) studied to understand how cultural dimensions of leadership affect ethical practices in entrepreneurial corporate settings. Following sections further elucidate the role of ethical leadership in hybrid business scenarios, where both profit and social purpose are embedded.

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH JOURNAL FOR SOCIAL STUDIES
ISSN Online: 3006-4686, ISSN Print: 3006-4678
Volume No: 02 Issue No: 04 (2025)

4.4 Corporate Social Responsibility in addition to Ethical Leadership

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is commonly understood as a corporation's initiatives to take responsibility for its effects on environmental and social well-being. The foundational framework by Carroll (1991) introduces CSR as a four-component paradigm: **economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic responsibilities**. Carroll highlights that ethical responsibility goes beyond compliance with laws and profitability—it is about doing what is right, just, and fair, even when not required by law.

Aguilera et al. (2007)**,** explicates that organizations implement CSR to respond to multiple stakeholder expectations. Ethical leaders play a key role in shaping CSR strategies that mesh with corporate's ethical values and societal needs. When ethical leadership is present, CSR becomes **authentic** and pervasively beneficial for all stakeholders, rather than a shallow public relations contrivance.

CSR is also connected to trust, legitimacy, and long-term business sustainability. Ethical leadership enriches employee commitment in CSR activities, promoting a culture of accountability and social impact (Pless & Maak, 2011).

Ko et al. (2018) maintained that ethical leadership augments CSR through three streams: role modeling, stakeholder engagement, and ethical climate formation. Leaders who prioritize ethics encourage socially responsible activities across divisions and ensure alignment with broader stakeholder prospects.

In a study by Mayer et al. (2009), ethical leadership was found to meaningfully reduce unethical behavior and endorse CSR-aligned actions through a trickle-down model, where top management's ethical conduct influenced mid-level managers and, finally, frontline personnel. This flowing effect is crucial in diffusing ethical standards throughout organizations' echelons.

Additionally, ethical leadership has the capacity to strengthen internal CSR (e.g., employee well-being, fair labor practices) and external CSR (e.g., environmental sustainability, community engagement) activities. This twin impact supports long-term reputational and financial performance, as organizations increasingly face pressure to demonstrate social accountability.

Pasricha et al. (2018) provided one of the few empirical analyses linking **ethical leadership to CSR** within social enterprises. They found that ethical leadership directly improves CSR and indirectly does so by fostering **organic cultures**—specifically, **clan and adhocracy cultures**—that support values alignment, innovation, and participative decision-making. This study confirmed the mediating role of culture in translating leadership behavior into socially responsible practices.

Silvestri and Veltri (2020) offered a **multi-level framework** linking CSR, leadership, and **sustainable entrepreneurship**. It was found that **leaders play a critical role** in defining the organization's approach to CSR and steering environmental and social challenges. Their framework highlighted that leadership effects both the internal culture and external sustainable development objectives, predominantly in socially adverse conditions.

Coker et al. (2017) presented a **conceptual model** linking **national leadership culture** to social entrepreneurial activity, grounded in GLOBE's six leadership dimensions. They theorized that **charismatic, team-oriented, participative, and humane-oriented cultures** enhance social entrepreneurship, while **self-protective and autonomous cultures** hinder it. Their work

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH JOURNAL FOR SOCIAL STUDIES
ISSN Online: 3006-4686, ISSN Print: 3006-4678
Volume No: 02 Issue No: 04 (2025)

underscored the influence of **social context and national leadership ideals** on individual entrepreneurial motivations.

Übius and Alas (2009) reconnoitered how **organizational culture types**—using Cameron and Quinn's Competing Values Framework—predict CSR across eight countries. Their large-scale empirical study found that **clan, hierarchy, and adhocracy cultures** positively correlated with CSR outcomes (both in terms of addressing social issues and stakeholder interests), while **market cultures** had a narrower impact. The research also exposed how **national culture shapes dominant organizational culture types**, underpinning that CSR is both structurally and culturally embedded.

4.5 Entrepreneurship in addition to Ethical Leadership

Entrepreneurship refers to the aptitude to recognize, create, and exploit opportunities in a way that brings value—usually economic—to stakeholders. Scholars like Shane and Venkataraman (2000) reasoned that entrepreneurship comprises more than business creation; it is about **identifying and acting upon opportunities** under conditions of uncertainty. While traditional entrepreneurship focuses on **innovation, risk-taking, and profit generation**, ethical leadership leads an important dimension: **moral decision-making.** Entrepreneurial leaders often face **ambiguous ethical situations** where values-based judgment is critical. Ethical entrepreneurship involves making choices that are not only economically sound but also **socially and environmentally responsible**.

Stephan and Pathak (2016) presented **Culturally-Endorsed Implicit Leadership Theories (CLTs)** as a more proximal driver of entrepreneurial activity than broad cultural values. Their cross-national study found that **charismatic and self-protective CLTs** positively influence entrepreneurship by balancing the ethical need for cooperation with competitiveness. These culturally grounded leadership ideals explain why entrepreneurial behavior varies significantly across national contexts, beyond what cultural values like collectivism or uncertainty avoidance can predict.

Lindquist and Buttazzoni (2021) explored **open innovation units** within public sector institutions, positioning them as **adhocracies** within traditional bureaucratic settings. These units—innovation labs, behavioral insight teams, and data visualization groups—share common goals of transformation, flexibility, and experimentation. Despite structural challenges, their incorporation into public service systems has allowed agile policy development and innovation, facilitating implementation of **adhocracy culture** in bureaucratic settings.

4.6 Ethical Leadership in addition to Social Entrepreneurship

While CSR is largely entrenched in traditional corporate structures, social entrepreneurship accentuates the creation of social value through innovative, mission-driven ventures. Ethical leadership is central to social entrepreneurship as it ensures that social objectives remain prioritized alongside financial sustainability.

Social entrepreneurship merges the goals of traditional entrepreneurship with social value creation**.** According to Dees (1998)**,** social entrepreneurs act as change agents in the social sector by adopting a mission to create and sustain social value, recognizing and pursuing new ethical opportunities to serve that mission, engaging in a process of continuous innovation and learning, and acting boldly without being limited by resources.

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH JOURNAL FOR SOCIAL STUDIES
ISSN Online: 3006-4686, ISSN Print: 3006-4678
Volume No: 02 Issue No: 04 (2025)

Stouten et al. (2012) noted that ethical leaders in social enterprises often symbolize servant leadership and authentic leadership characteristics, highlighting ethical values such as altruism, humility, and inclusivity. These traits are critical for gaining stakeholder trust and sustaining engagement in resource-constrained environments.

Weerawardena and Mort (2006) projected a **multidimensional model of social entrepreneurship** based on grounded theory from nine nonprofit case studies. They identified six core dimensions that define social entrepreneurship: **innovativeness, proactiveness, risk management, sustainability, social mission**, and **environmental responsiveness**. These dimensions were theorized within both **rigid restraints** (e.g., mission and sustainability) and **dynamic restraints** (e.g., environmental turbulence). Their model places social entrepreneurship as an adaptive and ethical strategic behavior.

Lee and Kelly (2019) examined the cultural dimensions of ethical leadership and social entrepreneurship, enlightening that humane-oriented leadership—characterized by empathy and selflessness—is positively correlated with successful social undertakings. Their study features the need for ethically responsive leadership frameworks that can adapt to different social and economic contexts.

Muralidharan and Pathak (2018) found that **transformational CLTs and societal sustainability** jointly predict the likelihood of individuals becoming social entrepreneurs. Their multilevel study showed that transformational leadership promote social entrepreneurship, especially when societal sustainability is weak, suggesting that such leaders often compensate for institutional deficiencies. Their follow-up research (Muralidharan & Pathak, 2019) extended this model by incorporating **government effectiveness and societal trust**, arguing that these institutional factors, alongside **charismatic and participative leadership ideals**, create an enabling environment for social entrepreneurship. The study's theoretical framework confirms the **importance of institutional configuration** in shaping social enterprise activity.

Nicholls (2009) proposed the concept of **Blended Value Accounting**, a form of reporting that reflects not just financial performance but also social and environmental outcomes. Based on five case studies, he showed that social entrepreneurs use flexible and strategic reporting mechanisms to align with stakeholder expectations, gain legitimacy, and access resources. Reporting becomes both an **accountability tool and a symbolic object**, communicating the values and mission of the social enterprise while navigating institutional pressures.

Lee and Kelly (2019) reinforced the idea that **leadership culture influences social entrepreneurship**, demonstrating through international data that countries with **low self-protective leadership ideals** foster greater social entrepreneurial intent. Their findings emphasized that **ethical and participative leadership values** at the societal level create a more fertile environment for mission-driven entrepreneurial behavior.

Moreover, ethical leadership enhances the scalability and impact measurement of social enterprises by promoting transparency, accountability, and participative decision-making—traits necessary for legitimizing social innovation and attracting funding.

Bouckaert and Van den Heuvel (2019), in their book on **servant leadership and social entrepreneurship**, argued that the **will to serve**, rooted in spiritual and ethical foundations, is essential to authentic social entrepreneurship. They positioned servant leadership as a moral

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH JOURNAL FOR SOCIAL STUDIES
ISSN Online: 3006-4686, ISSN Print: 3006-4678
Volume No: 02 Issue No: 04 (2025)

compass that aligns enterprise activities with broader societal good, fostering humility, stewardship, and mission-aligned decision-making.

Social entrepreneurship is inherently value-driven. The above literature indicates that **ethical leadership** is central to successful social entrepreneurship. Leaders in this domain must demonstrate ethical values like authenticity, compassion, accountability, and the like since their actions directly affect vulnerable populations.

From the above discussion associations can be drawn between CSR, entrepreneurship, and social entrepreneurship. Unlike CSR, which can be seen as a corporate strategy layered onto existing business models, social entrepreneurship builds social purpose into the core of the enterprise**.** Ethical leaders in social ventures are often evaluated not by financial success alone, but by their impact on poverty, education, health, or environmental justice.

Although CSR and social entrepreneurship share ethical underpinnings, they often differ in scope and application. CSR typically exists within profit-maximizing firms, while social entrepreneurship aims to address systemic issues through market-based mechanisms. Yet, ethical leadership serves as a bridging construct that integrates the strengths of both concepts.

Toor and Ofori (2009) suggested that ethical leadership can alter CSR from a responsive, compliance-based strategy to a proactive enabler of social innovation. Likewise, Ko et al. (2018) maintained that ethical leadership confirms that social entrepreneurs retain ethical clarity amidst growth pressures and shifting stakeholder demands.

Ethical leadership serves as a coalescing context across these domains, ensuring that purpose, process, and people are considered in decision-making. Leaders who model ethical behavior build credible institutions**,** capable of lasting impact—be it in for-profit, hybrid, or purely social enterprises.

5 Ethical Principles and Standards in Corporate Policymaking

The principle of ethical leadership lies in the application of enduring moral and ethical values to guide behavior, relationships, and strategic decision-making. Values such **as** integrity, transparency, fairness, accountability, and social responsibility not only fortify ethical leadership but also contour organizational culture, stakeholder trust, and sustainable outcomes.

5.1 Integrity

Integrity is widely acknowledged in the literature as the foundation of ethical leadership**.** It refers to consistency between words and actions, adherence to moral principles, and the courage to uphold values even under pressure. According to Brown and Treviño (2006)**,** integrity in leadership fosters credibility and inspires ethical conduct among followers. When leaders consistently act with integrity, they become moral role models**,** signaling to employees that ethical behavior is not just encouraged but expected.

The extant literature cited here emphasized that integrity-based leadership improves organizational resilience and reinforces ethical decision-making in times of uncertainty. Resick et al. (2006) argued that integrity enhances stakeholder confidence, making it easier for leaders to implement long-term, justice-oriented policies without backlash.

5.2 Transparency

Transparency is the practice of openness in communication, decision-making, and information-sharing**.** It enables stakeholders—including employees, investors, and the public—to understand

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH JOURNAL FOR SOCIAL STUDIES
ISSN Online: 3006-4686, ISSN Print: 3006-4678
Volume No: 02 Issue No: 04 (2025)

organizational priorities, ethical standards, and processes. Transparent leadership reduces ambiguity, deters corruption, and increases accountability.

Scholars like Den Hartog and De Hoogh (2009) have shown that ethical leaders who practice transparency are more likely to be trusted and respected. In the context of CSR and social entrepreneurship, transparency ensures that social impact claims are authentic and verifiable, thus safeguarding the legitimacy of the organization.

Transparency is particularly crucial in settings with high moral complexity, where leaders must explain difficult trade-offs or justify controversial choices. The absence of transparency often correlates with organizational dysfunction, mistrust, and ethical erosion.

5.3 Fairness and Justice

Fairness, or procedural justice, is central to ethical decision-making. Ethical leaders are expected to ensure that decisions are made equitably, that rules are applied consistently, and that all voices—especially those of marginalized stakeholders—are heard.

Kalshoven et al. (2011a) highlighted fairness as a key dimension of ethical leadership, closely linked to employee satisfaction, retention, and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). Fair leaders avoid favoritism, distribute resources justly, and create mechanisms for feedback and appeal (Walumbwa et al., 2011).

In entrepreneurship and CSR settings, fairness translates into fair wages, ethical supply chains, non-discriminatory hiring, and inclusive business models. A strong sense of organizational justice can empower followers to engage in ethical voice behavior, allowing constructive dissent and moral concern to appear (Walumbwa et al., 2012).

5.4 Accountability

Accountability refers to being answerable for one's actions, particularly regarding ethical outcomes and impacts. Ethical leaders do not deflect blame; instead, they take responsibility for mistakes and foster a culture where accountability is shared and encouraged.

Accountability is identified as a critical link between ethical leadership and trust. When leaders and organizations demonstrate accountability, it reinforces credibility and invites stakeholder collaboration.

According to Mayer et al. (2012), ethical leadership requires the establishment of systems and norms that hold both leaders and followers to ethical standards. These include ethics committees, whistleblower protections, transparent evaluations, and integrity audits.

5.5 Social Responsibility

Social responsibility goes beyond individual morality to include a collective commitment to the well-being of society and the environment. Ethical leaders recognize that their decisions affect multiple stakeholders, and they act in ways that prioritize shared value over narrow profit motives.

In CSR and social entrepreneurship, this principle becomes operational through environmental sustainability, ethical innovation, and community investment. The literature cited here consistently links social responsibility to purpose-driven leadership, where profit is not abandoned but is pursued in a way that elevates human dignity and environmental stewardship.

5.6 Interconnectedness of Ethical Principles

The principles of leadership, integrity, transparency, fairness, accountability, and social responsibility do not function in isolation. They are symbiotic, one supporting the other, and all

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH JOURNAL FOR SOCIAL STUDIES
ISSN Online: 3006-4686, ISSN Print: 3006-4678
Volume No: 02 Issue No: 04 (2025)

forming a moral compass that guides ethical decision-making. Ethical leaders continually appraise situations through the lens of these principles, regulating procedures and strategies to reflect ethics and support rightfulness.

Moreover, organizations that institutionalize these principles are more likely to avoid ethical scandals, appeal socially conscious financiers, and shape loyal consumer bases**.** Entrenching these values into corporate governance and leadership practices is not only ethical, it is strategically beneficial**.**

5.7 Influence of Ethical Leadership on Ethical Corporate Practices

The impact of ethical leadership on ethical business practices is multi-dimensional. Ethical leaders shape ethical climates, define behavioral norms, and influence decision-making processes.

Mayer et al. (2009) confirmed that ethical leadership meaningfully reduces workplace deviant behavior and increases Organizational Citizenship Behaviors (OCB) through its influence on middle management. Their trickle-down model shows how ethical leadership balances relationships of all rungs of employees, confirming organization-wide adherence to ethical standards.

Ko et al. (2018) established that ethical leadership is positively connected with employee voice, whistleblowing, and ethical issue awareness behaviors. These behaviors are essential for preventing misdemeanors and endorsing a culture of transparency and accountability.

Moreover, ethical leadership diminishes risks associated with unwanted practices, such as litigation, reputational damage, and employee turnover. It fosters psychological safety, where employees feel enabled to speak up and encounter unethical behaviors without fear of retaliation (Brown & Treviño, 2006).

Ethical business practices sustained by ethical leadership are not only morally sound but also economically helpful. They improve customer loyalty, investor confidence, and regulatory compliance, making them critical for sustainable business success.

6 Deduction

This wide-ranging synopsis of ethical leadership theories, and related constructs—CSR, social entrepreneurship, and moral business principles—establishes that ethical leadership is not a particular trait or practice, but rather a multipronged and developing discipline. Across the studied works, ethical leadership appears as a values-driven, relational, and accountability-based approach that pursues not only to monitor individual behavior but to outline entire organizational cultures.

The incorporation of moral principles such as integrity, transparency, fairness, and social responsibility into leadership models provides both direction and strategic benefit. Ethical leaders act as promoters for organizational legitimacy, innovation, and sustainable development. They influence not just internal dynamics like employee trust and engagement, but also external perceptions of corporate citizenship and long-term resilience.

Corporate Social Responsibility and social entrepreneurship further spread the extent of ethical leadership beyond profit-centric purposes. Together, they offer practical mechanisms through which leaders can embed ethical values into business models, stakeholder relations, and societal outcomes.

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH JOURNAL FOR SOCIAL STUDIES
ISSN Online: 3006-4686, ISSN Print: 3006-4678
Volume No: 02 Issue No: 04 (2025)

The literature also discloses a deep link between ethical leadership and organizational outcomes. Studies such as Neubert et al. (2009) promote that Ethical leadership strengthens ethical climate and enhances job satisfaction and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB); Leadership is seen as rooted in virtue ethics, promoting prosocial behavior. Studies such as Neubert et al. (2009) complement Kalshoven et al. (2011) by reinforcing the role of ethical climate as a mediator **of** leadership outcomes. These organizational outcomes are further influenced by cultural and relational variables, as emphasized by Resick et al. (2006, 2011) and Fry (2003), who introduce spiritual leadership to enhance intrinsic motivation and ethical behavior.

Resick et al. (2006) build on Bandura's modeling theory and proposed that Ethical leadership is prevalent globally but interpreted differently depending on cultural values (e.g., collectivism vs. individualism); thus, leaders must understand cultural variations to promote ethical behavior effectively across contexts. Resick et al. (2011) further elaborated that Ethical leadership is universally valued, but its expression varies culturally. Collectivist cultures emphasize relational aspects, while individualist cultures emphasize personal integrity and consistency. Resick et al. (2011) complement Resick et al. (2006) by reinforcing the global scope of ethical leadership**,** while Mayer et al. (2012) focused more on internal traits.

Walumbwa et al. (2011) highlight that ethical leadership promotes group conscientiousness and group voice, which enhance group-level performance; thus, Ethical leadership indirectly influences outcomes via group-level psychological mechanisms. Thus, Walumbwa et al. (2011) build on Brown et al. (2005) but focus on team dynamics**,** not just individual outcomes.

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) and stakeholder engagement emerge as vital themes. Aguilera et al. (2007) and Pless and Maak (2011) position ethical leadership as a driver of CSR, emphasizing stakeholder justice and inclusivity. These perspectives align with Dees (1998) and Nicholls (2009), who advocate for integrating ethical purpose into entrepreneurial ventures, redefining success in terms of blended value.

Several works also examine structural and cultural systems that support ethical leadership. Treviño and Nelson (2021) and Shacklock (2007) demonstrate that formal ethics programs and informal trust-building mechanisms must operate together to sustain ethical behavior. Uhl-Bien et al. (2014) add to this by focusing on followership, highlighting that leadership outcomes are co-constructed through ethical interactions with followers.

Finally, this literature review shows that while ethical leadership begins with individual moral conviction, its greatest strength lies in the systemic transformation of structures, strategies, and cultures**,** paving the way for more just, inclusive, and sustainable enterprises.

7 Boundaries and Prospective Investigation Guidelines

The section concludes by identifying research gaps such as the lack of longitudinal studies on the impact of ethical leadership, the need for culturally adaptable leadership models, and the integration of ethical leadership within digital and AI-driven workplaces. Recommendations are made for incorporating mixed-method approaches, global comparative studies, and policy-oriented research to explore such gaps.

Despite its many benefits, the implementation of ethical leadership is not without challenges. Contextual factors such as organizational culture, industry norms, and cultural diversity influence how ethical leadership is perceived and practiced (Stouten et al., 2012). Future research

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH JOURNAL FOR SOCIAL STUDIES
ISSN Online: 3006-4686, ISSN Print: 3006-4678
Volume No: 02 Issue No: 04 (2025)

should explore these variations to develop more nuanced, context-sensitive leadership models in manifold settings.

Measurement also remains a limitation. While instruments like the Ethical Leadership Scale (ELS) have been widely used, they may not capture the full spectrum of ethical leadership behaviors in diverse cultural or industry settings (Ko et al., 2018). Future studies should incorporate qualitative methods and longitudinal designs to enrich understanding in diverse cultural settings.

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QUALITATIVE RESEARCH JOURNAL FOR SOCIAL STUDIES
ISSN Online: 3006-4686, ISSN Print: 3006-4678
Volume No: 02 Issue No: 04 (2025)

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