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## EMPLOYEES' PERCEPTION OF SUPERVISOR'S ETHICAL LEADERSHIP BEHAVIOR in Public Universities of Ethiopia located in Amhara Region.

Aman Abdie<sup>1</sup>,

Research Scholar,  
Andhra University, Visakhapatnam

Prof. D. Lalitha Rani<sup>2</sup>

Professor,  
Andhra University, Visakhapatnam

### Abstract

*The purpose of this study was to assess the level of Supervisor's ethical leadership behavior and practice based on the perception of employee's in the public universities of Ethiopia located in Amhara Region. Descriptive survey research design with quantitative method was employed for it fits the purpose of the study. Data was collected from staff in the sample public universities. Accordingly, 425 staff participated in the study. Stratified random sampling was used to determine the proportion of the respondents. Convenience method was mainly used to distribute the Questionnaires for the respondents. Among the data analysis tools t-test and ANOVA were used to analyze the data. In the sampled public universities the leaders practice leadership in a less moderate manner. The result indicated that the supervisor's ethical leadership behavior and practice are less moderate. Employees' perception of their leader's ethical leadership behavior did not vary based on their gender, work experience, and educational level. Hence, it is suggested that academic leaders in the public universities need to provide regular ethical leadership training and development opportunities at each management level for its leaders. Moreover, the public universities have to establish ethical leadership centers that conduct regular conference and experience sharing with other similar institutes.*

**Key Words: Supervisors Ethical Leadership, Public Universities, Employee's Perception.**

## **Introduction**

Repeated unethical practices and scandals in business, government, higher educational institutions, sports, non-profit organizations, and even religious organizations led scholars and organizations towards the study of Ethical leadership. Ethical leadership as distinct leadership style gained recognition very recently (Treviño & Brown, 2006; Sinha & Mishra, 2011, Mihelič, Lipičnik, & Tekavčič, 2010).

Different scholar's defined Ethical leadership in different ways (Yukl, Mahsud, Hassan, & Prussia, 2011). The most common definition is given by Trevino & Brown (2005). They defined ethical leadership as "the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making" (Treviño & Brown, 2006). The authors intentionally used "Normatively appropriate behavior" in the definition in the conceptualization of ethical leadership to address the social, political, cultural, and other perspective in which the subject is treated (Rhode, 2006). Ethical leadership discussion focuses on the ethics of the leader, the ethics of what the leaders do and the ethics of organizational context in which the leaders carry out what they ought to (Mihelič, et al., 2010; Brown & Trevino, 2006; Ciulla, 2005). Several research and theories suggested that individual leader's ethics are the central component of ethical leadership practice (Trevino & Brown, 2004)

According to Brown et al., (2005), being fair, principled decision maker, behaving ethically in their daily lives are the personal characteristics of ethical leaders. The researchers tried to identify moral person and moral manager aspects of ethical leadership based on their qualitative research. Based on their qualitative findings, the researchers developed a 10 item instrument to measure perceptions of ethical leadership, the ethical leadership scale.

Normatively appropriate conduct which is being an instrument for the organizations to show what is perceived as right and what is perceived as wrong can be seen on Ethical leaders at all levels in the organization. Employees' perception of their ethical leader's behavior may motivate them to show the corresponding moral behavior to their perception. According to Trevino & Nelson (2011), ethical leadership may not be always explicitly visible in the organization. However, leaders can develop a reputation of which value will be expected from their employees through its influence.

An ethical leadership style is characterized as participative where the leader acts as a role model and shares its power with subordinates (Brown et al., 2005). Bandura's (1963) social learning theory is the base for explaining Ethical leadership construct. This theory states that employees learn from rewards and punishment, hence based on the extent of the reward or punishment they try to copy the ethical behavior of the leaders as a role model. Ethical leaders can be role models through actively interacting with employees, listening to them, and by showing their norms and values in their action, communication and behavior (Brown et al., 2005).

Whether a process, outcome or decision is perceived as ethical depends on the receiver's judgment and follower's normative appropriate conduct, or general social norms. The conclusion that something is right or wrong is therefore partly subjective, but people in the same culture have a generally shared normative appropriate conduct and attitude. Ethical leadership is based on followers' perceptions of their leaders' ethical behavior (Brown, et al., 2005).

## **Statement of the Problem**

Being moral and role model for followers and the organization they lead is required of every leader in the current situation of the world. (Mihelič, et al., 2010). The need of ethical leadership is advocated not only to cure ethical failures but also as an instrument to promote productive behaviors of employees in an organization.

According to Hanson (2009), even though education is basically a moral activity, unethical behaviors are the day to day happenings in every educational system. Hence, these unethical conducts and the benefits of ethical leadership towards effectiveness called ethical leadership in the educational system.

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The educational system needs to introduce change to put the issue of ethics at the center of all their activities.

The last ten years Ethiopian transformation plan has led towards a massive expansion of Higher Education Institutions. The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Higher education proclamation stated that Ethiopian public universities should work, among other things, towards the promotion and maintenance of justice, fairness, and rule of law in institutional life (FDRE, 2009). The proclamation intends to provide direction to the universities to be ethical models for the students and the community in which they are located.

Some studies conducted by MOE (2010) indicated that there are critical signals of unethical behaviors in the educational sector in general and universities in particular in Ethiopia. Hence, the need for ethical leadership assessment in public universities is required.

This study therefore aimed is to investigate the perception of employees about their organization's ethical leadership. Summarizing the above, the research question of this study will be: How employees perceive their leaders in terms of practicing ethical leadership? Specifically, the following basic research questions have been raised to guide the study:

1. How do employees perceive the ethical leadership behaviors of their immediate supervisors?
2. Are there differences in employees' perception of leaders' ethical behavior and practices as a function of gender, educational level and years of experience?
3. Is there a significant difference between the Administrative and academic staffs perception of their immediate supervisor's ethical leadership?
4. Is there a significant difference between sample public universities in terms of leaders' ethics/ethical behavior?

## **Objectives of the Study**

The general objective of this study was to assess employee's perception of their immediate supervisors/ leader's ethical leadership behavior and practice. Specifically:

- To examine employees' perceptions about the ethical leadership behaviors of their immediate leaders/supervisors
- To examine whether employees' perceptions of ethical leadership behavior and practice vary depending on sex, educational level and years of experience?
- To identify the similarity or difference in ethical leadership perception among sample public universities
- To provide suggestions that may improve ethical leadership practices in public universities alternative solutions based on the findings

## **Research design and Methodology**

To attain the purpose of the study a descriptive survey design is used in this study. This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional research, approach which focuses on the statement of basic questions, collect data from sample respondents representing the total population, and provide answers for basic questions. A descriptive survey design was used to conduct this study.

**Sources of Data** - primary source of data were used. Employees (Academic and administrative staff) at the three public universities were the primary sources of data; they provided the required information by using the questionnaire adopted for this purpose to measure the perception of employees on their leader's ethical leadership behavior.

**Sample Size and Sampling Techniques**- The sample respondents for the study were drawn from the total of 9695 academic and administrative staff in the selected public universities. Stratified random

sampling was employed to determine the proportion of respondents under each stratum for this study. Convenience method was used to distribute questionnaire for respondents in each stratum.

**Data Gathering Tools** - In order to gather first-hand information standardized questionnaire were adopted and administered. Ethical Leadership Scale (ELS) questionnaire developed by Brown (2005) were used to collect information from the selected employees in the three public universities. This scale combines different ethical leadership behaviors, which is related to giving trust, involving employees in decision making and acting fair. This scale was validated and showed high internal consistency ( $\alpha > .90$ ) in several studies (Walumbwa, et al., 2008). A sample item in this research was: "My supervisor discusses business ethics or values with employees". Items were measured on a five-point Likert-type response scale ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5)

To check the reliability of the instrument Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of reliability was calculated and found to be  $\text{Alpha}=0.886$ . According to Ozdamar (1997), if Cronbach's alpha ranged from a low of 0.80 to a high of 1.00 questionnaires were quite reliable, so the reliability of the test prepared was considered to be sufficient.

**Methods of Data Analysis** - The data collected from the questionnaires was first edited, coded and feed into a computer for further analysis. In the analysis of the data, the SPSS 20 for Windows package program was used. Descriptive statistics such as frequency tables, percentages, mean, and standard deviation were used. Independent sample t-test was computed to test significance variations between perceptions of respondents on their supervisor's ethical leadership based on gender and employee type (administrative staff and academic staff). ANOVA test was carried out to investigate if there were any statistically significant differences between the perceptions of the participants on their supervisor's ethical leadership based on educational qualification, year of service and the public university they work in. The inferences were made by comparing the results of each group of the participants. Finally, generalizations were made based on the final results of the study.

## RESULTS

Data presentation, analysis, and interpretation will be done on this part of the study. Ethical leadership scale was used to gather data from 450 Academic and Administrative employees, which are selected using stratified random sampling, of the three public universities. 96.7 % of the sample respondents submitted their response. However, 0.02 % of the staff responses were excluded due to invalid responses. Thus, 425 employees were included in the analysis.

### Characteristics of the Respondents

Data were collected from the participants regarding their sex, educational level, university they work, employee type (Academic or administrative staff) and years of services. The demographic data are presented and displayed as follows:

**Genders of the respondents-** out of a total of 425 participants, 323 of the participants (76%) were male, and 102 of the participants (24%) were female. At a glance looking to the figure one can say that the study lacks gender proportionality. However, the problem is not associated with sampling rather the overall female participation in the study area is low.

**Work experience of Respondents** - Almost half of the participants (202 or 47.55%) of the respondent served between 2-5 years. The lowest number of participants (7 or 1.65%) of the respondents came from the long-serving category (more than 15 years of work service). As can be seen, the work experience of respondents possess the appropriate mixture required to evaluate a leader and will result in critical response based on their relationship with their immediate supervisors.

**Educational Qualification of respondents**- the majority of the study participants held First Degree (n=180, 42.4%). And Master’s degrees (n = 173, 40.7%). The rest (n=63, 14.8%, and n=9, 2.1%) of the respondents has diplomas and Ph.D. as their educational qualifications.

**Employment Categorization of respondents** - 226 (53.2%) of the respondents are administrative staffs and the rest are academic staff. It indicates that the composition of employees in the sample data is in respect to the composition of the target population.

**Analysis and Interpretation**

**Employee’s perception of their immediate supervisor’s Ethical leadership**

Table 1 presents the perception of employees about their supervisors’ ethical leadership. For the purpose of the analysis, the mean values were interpreted as follows. According to the staffs’ opinions about their supervisors’ ethical leadership, it can be claimed that leaders to some extent showed the ethical leadership behaviors in practice. The response average (31.29) indicates that supervisor’s ethical leadership is perceived as being moderate even if it is near to low performance. As indicated by the standard deviation value (SD=7.89), the level of supervisor’s ethical leadership practice is moderate with a possible range of being low and moderate.

**Table 1 – Summary of respondent’s perception of supervisor’s ethical leadership**

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
SEL	425	31.2941	7.88631
Valid N (listwise)	425		

Source: Survey Data, 2016

**Employee’s perception of their Supervisors ethical leadership based on Gender classification**

**Table 2 – Employees perception of Supervisor’s Ethical leadership based on Gender**

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
SEL	Female	102	30.6863	7.68821	.76125
	Male	323	31.4861	7.94990	.44234

**Table 3 - Independent Samples Test**

		Levene’s Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
SEL	Equal variances assumed	.090	.764	-.893	423	.373	-.79979	.89592	-2.56081	.96122
	Equal variances not assumed			-.908	174.481	.365	-.79979	.88043	-2.53746	.93788

Table 2 and Table 3 present the findings regarding the differences in the employee’s perceptions of their leaders’ ethical leadership behaviors in terms of the sex of respondents. An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare supervisor’s Ethical leadership based on the respondent’s gender. There was no significant difference in the scores for Female (M=30.67, SD=7.69) and Male (M=31.49, SD=7.95) conditions; t (423) = -0.893, p = 0.373. These results suggest that gender does not have an effect on creating difference on participant’s perception of their immediate supervisor’s ethical leadership. Specifically, participants’ gender does not have any relation in affecting their perception of supervisor’s ethical leadership.

**Employee’s perception of their Supervisors ethical leadership based on educational qualification of respondents**

Table 4 below shows the perception of employees about the ethical leadership behavior of their Supervisors on the basis of the educational levels.

**Table 4-** Respondents perception of their immediate supervisors Ethical Leadership categorized by employee educational status

Education level	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	% of Total Sum
Diploma	30.7302	63	7.64580	14.6%
First Degree	31.0778	180	8.22481	42.1%
Masters Degree	31.7283	173	7.58603	41.3%
PhD	31.2222	9	9.20296	2.1%
Total	31.2941	425	7.88631	100.0%

**Table 5 – ANOVA - SEL**

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	61.125	3	20.375	.326	.807
Within Groups	26309.111	421	62.492		
Total	26370.235	424			

To measure the existence of a difference in the perception of employees on supervisor’s ethical leadership by employee’s educational qualification, one way ANOVA test was conducted. As Table 4 and 5 there was no difference in the perception of their supervisor’s ethical leadership based on employee’s educational qualification (Master Degree (Mean=31.73, SD=7.65) and Ph.D. (Mean=31.22, SD=9.20), Degree (Mean=31.08, SD=8.23) and Diploma (Mean=30.73, SD=7.65); F(3)=0.326, p=0.807. Based on the results respondents educational qualification does not have an effect on creating difference their perception of their immediate supervisor’s ethical leadership.

**Employee’s perception of their Supervisors ethical leadership based on employment type**

Table 6 and Table 7 present the findings regarding the differences in the employee’s perceptions of their leaders’ ethical leadership behaviors in terms of the respondent’s employee type.

**Table 6 – Respondents perception of their supervisors Ethical Leadership based on Employee type**

Empty	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	% of Total Sum
Administrative staff	31.3496	226	7.98481	53.3%
Academic Staff	31.2312	199	7.79257	46.7%
Total	31.2941	425	7.88631	100.0%

**Table 7 - Independent Samples Test on employees perception of their supervisor’s ethical leadership based on employee type**

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
SEL	.943	.332	.154	423	.877	.11840	.76752	-1.39022	1.62703
			.155	418.537	.877	.11840	.76663	-1.38793	1.62473

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare supervisor’s Ethical leadership based on the respondent’s employee type. There was no significant difference in the scores for Administrative staff/employee (M=31.35, SD=7.95) and academic Staff/employee (M=31.23, SD=7.79) conditions;  $t(423) = 0.154, p = 0.877$ . These results suggest that employee type do not have an effect on creating difference on participant’s perception of their immediate supervisor’s ethical leadership.

***Employee’s perception of their Supervisor’s ethical leadership based on respondents work experience***

Table 8 indicates the mean values of employee’s perception of their supervisor’s ethical leadership based on their year of experience. Table 9 compares/tests the existence of difference in the perception of supervisor’s ethical leadership based on employees year of experience.

**Table 8 – Employees’ perception of their supervisor’s ethical leadership based on respondents years of experience**

Experience in Years	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	% of Total Sum
Below 2 years	31.0789	76	8.59576	17.8%
2- 5 years	31.6634	202	7.74761	48.1%
6-10 years	30.2632	114	7.94678	25.9%
11-15 years	33.2692	26	7.04021	6.5%
Above 15 years	32.4286	7	4.57738	1.7%
Total	31.2941	425	7.88631	100.0%

**Table 9 – ANOVA - SEL**

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	262.665	4	65.666	1.056	.378
Within Groups	26107.570	420	62.161		
Total	26370.235	424			

To measure the existence of a difference in the perception of employees on supervisor’s ethical leadership by employee’s educational qualification, one way ANOVA test was conducted. As Table 8 and 9 there was no difference in the perception of their supervisor’s ethical leadership based on employee’s educational qualification (the mean scores of Supervisors ethical leadership are as follows: For less than 2 years (Mean=31.08, SD=8.60), 2-5 years (Mean=31.66, SD=7.50), 6-10 years (Mean=30.26, SD=7.95), 11-15 years (Mean=33.27, SD=7.04) and above 11 years (Mean = 32.43, SD = 4.56);  $F(4, 420)=1.056, p=0.378$ . Based on the results respondents service experience does not have an effect on creating difference on their perception of their immediate supervisors ethical leadership.

***Employee’s perception of their Supervisor’s ethical leadership based on Respondents University***

**Table 10 – Respondents perception of their immediate supervisor’s Ethical Leadership categorized by the University they work**

Code	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	% of Total Sum
Bahir Dar University	29.9705	237	7.57303	53.4%
Debre Markos University	34.7767	103	6.95635	26.9%
Debre Tabor University	30.7647	85	8.59907	19.7%
Total	31.2941	425	7.88631	100.0%

As indicated in the above table, employees of Debre Markos University view their supervisors more ethical (M=34.78) as compared to the other two universities. Bahir Dar university respondents result (M=29.97) indicates that their supervisor’s ethical leadership practice is at a low rate.

**Table 11 -ANOVA**

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1688.284	2	844.142	14.433	.000
Within Groups	24681.951	422	58.488		
Total	26370.235	424			

As it was indicated in the above one way ANOVA table (Table 11), we can conclude that the mean perception of Supervisors ethical leadership of Bahir Dar University is statistically significantly different from at least one of the sampled public universities ( $F_{2, 422} = 14.433, p < 0.001$ ). Note that the ANOVA alone does not tell us specifically which means were different from one another.

To see which mean are different from one another we conducted Tukey HSD multiple comparisons. The table (Table 12) below indicates the mean difference among the three sample public universities. There is a significant mean supervisor’s ethical leadership perception difference between Bahir Dar university employees and Debre Markos university employees, Between Debre Markos University and Debre Tabor University. Employees in Debre Markos University perceived their supervisor's ethical leadership better than the other two universities.

**Table 12 - Multiple Comparisons**

Dependent Variable: SEL

Tukey HSD

(I) Code	(J) Code	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Bahir Dar University	DMU	-4.8062*	.90257	.000	-6.9291	-2.6834
	DBU	-.7942	.96689	.690	-3.0684	1.4799
Debre Markos University	BDU	4.8062*	.90257	.000	2.6834	6.9291
	DBU	4.0120*	1.12069	.001	1.3761	6.6479
Debre Tabor University	BDU	.7942	.96689	.690	-1.4799	3.0684
	DMU	-4.0120*	1.12069	.001	-6.6479	-1.3761

\*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

### Summary of Major Findings

The analysis of the data obtained from employees of the selected sample universities indicates that leaders demonstrate less moderate performance in ethical leadership behavior and practice (Mean=31.29 and Standard Deviation=7.89). Based on the independent sample t-test and ANOVA test results, there is no difference in employee’s perception about their supervisors’ ethical leadership behaviors depending on respondent’s gender, years of experience and educational level. But there is a significant difference in the perception of their supervisors’ ethical leadership based on the employee’s universities.

### Conclusion

Based on the major findings of the study the following conclusions are made According to Kouzes & Posner (2007), employee’s needs to be fully confident in their leaders based on their belief in leaders’ strong character and solid integrity. Yukl (2010) describes the leader's influence on their followers is psychological and depends on the motive and perception of the followers in relation to the leaders’ action and the situation in which the influence occurs.

In line with this, most of the employees in the selected public universities were feeling that their supervisors are practicing ethical leadership in a low-moderate manner. Supervisors lack the ability to treat them fairly and equitably; less likely to be role models that will force employees to follow them. Hence, the result of the study indicates that lack of ethical behaviors of leaders found in public universities found in Amhara Region.

## Suggestions

Based on the major findings and conclusions of the study, ethical leadership practices in the public universities of Ethiopia in Amhara Region needs considerable attention. Ethical leadership development needs a long period of time to have a visible effect on the leader's personal behavior and its effect on followers. Hence, to benefit out of it, the public universities have

- To provide short term and long term training programs for supervisors in particular and leaders in the universities in general on ethical leadership behavior and practice.
- To establish ethical leadership centers in their organizational structure that preaches and teaches the benefits of being an ethical leader at every position in the organization.
- To conduct regular conferences on ethical leadership to widen up the understanding in the mind of the employees.

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