

# Ethical Leadership and Inclusive Workplaces: Advancing Diversity Through Values-Based Management

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## ABSTRACT

Ethically based leadership is becoming increasingly important as organisations become more diverse and complex. As the driver for diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) in organisations, ethical leadership using the principles of integrity, fairness, accountability and moral decision making, creates a foundation to develop a culture of inclusiveness and a positive diversity climate in organisations. The process of creating an inclusive workplace using ethical leaders, and the impact of that on employees (attitudes, behaviours and perceptions of inclusion and equity) has been examined through the synthesis of existing literature on ethical leadership (theory), social learning theory and organisation justice theory. In particular, ethical leaders set inclusive norms, reduce bias and discrimination (via building trust) and promote equitable behaviour throughout increasingly diverse workforces. This chapter will also examine the role that values-based and responsible leadership play in addressing structural inequalities and supporting marginalised groups in organisations. For both theoretical and practical implications, this chapter adds to the growing body of literature linking ethical leadership with DEI outcomes and provides insight for leaders, organisations and policy makers on integrating ethics into DEI initiatives. Finally, this chapter identifies key challenges and future directions for the development of ethical leadership in the service of inclusive and equitable organisations.

**Keywords:** Ethical Leadership, Values-Based Management, Inclusive Workplace, Diversity, Equity, Inclusion (DEI), Organizational Culture, Leadership Ethics, Diversity Climate, Psychological Safety, Organizational Justice.

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## Introduction

Post-2018 there has been a growing expectation from stakeholders that organizations will conduct themselves ethically and exhibit socially inclusive behavior; as a result, there is increased emphasis and focus on ethical leadership and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) as areas of research for both organizations and leadership. Stakeholder expectations are high; therefore, organizations must respond by

developing policies and practices that promote ethical conduct (including moral leadership, values-based leadership, responsible leadership, and integrity-based leadership) and create an environment of fairness and trust within the organization[1]. Likewise, diversity and inclusion have transitioned from compliance-oriented to a strategic imperative, as such will impact the legitimacy, innovation, and sustainability of the organization. Specifically, ethical leadership is defined

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as the manner in which leaders conduct themselves ethically, and through this, ethical leaders will develop and promote ethical behavior, values, and standards within the individuals that follow them. Furthermore, through the cultivation of an organizational culture that promotes fairness and transparency, establishes accountability, and demonstrates respect for others, ethical leaders are able to provide their followers with a foundation of trust and respect, as well as influence how diversity will be perceived, managed, and experienced in the workplace. Additionally, through ethical leadership, individuals and organizations can create inclusive work environments by decreasing bias and discriminatory practices, creating inclusive climates of equity and psychological safety, and creating the potential for meaningful inclusion of diverse individuals in the workplace[2].

Over the last twenty years, there has been increased academic interest surrounding concepts of diversity such as inclusion, equity, workforce diversity, inclusive workplace practices, and diversity climate. While diversity unites individuals with different backgrounds, identities, and viewpoints, the benefits of diversity are affected by how leaders create an environment that promotes a culture of inclusion and fairness. If leaders do not subscribe to a values-based/ethical approach to leadership, then their commitment to diversity will likely be mere window dressing and may ultimately do little to redress issues of systemic inequality or exclusionary norms. Thus, researchers have been looking at the intersection of ethical leadership and diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) to study the manner in which leadership values and actions impact the implementation of other DEI principles in an organization[3].

Despite this growth in scholarship surrounding this intersection of ethical and DEI leadership, there is still a wide breadth of studies that are conducted at this intersection; studies vary within this area regarding the theoretical underpinnings of ethical leadership and diversity-related outcomes, and, therefore, have different uses of different methods to measure these variables in different settings. In addition, due to the rapid increase in published articles related to this area of study, it is difficult for both academics and practitioners to identify and comprehend the major themes that prevail in DEI research, the key authors that write on these topics, the methodological approaches that dominate investigations of ethical leadership, and the areas where research gaps exist. Given this lack of comprehensiveness and consistency in the current body of research literature available on

this topic, there is an urgent need for a more comprehensive and systematic review of the literature on this area of research and recommendations for future research directions[4].

Using bibliometric analysis, researchers can systematically and objectively trace the development and layout of a field of research's knowledge base. Bibliometric analyses also leverage the vast quantity of research literature from credible sources, such as Scopus, to provide insights into the patterns and trends found within published works. These analyses are especially useful in multi-disciplinary areas like ethical leadership and diversity, equity, and inclusion, where the body of knowledge tends to be spread out between leadership studies, organisation behaviour, human resource management, ethics, and diversity management[5].

### *Beyond Representation: The Limits of Diversity Without Ethics*

When we think about increasing the workplace diversity, there is a misconception that simply hiring people from diverse backgrounds into organizations will result in inclusiveness. Many organizations view diversity as simply increasing the numerical representation of various races, genders or some other underrepresented groups to solve systemic inequalities. In reality, there are many studies showing that without inclusive leadership and ethical leadership practices, diversity will not only not address inequity but will have a tendency to magnify and increase tensions between employees, create new layers of social categorization and reinforce existing power imbalances. Because of the potential for leaders' poor leadership practices to inadvertently reproduce forms of exclusion through biased decision-making, unequal access to resources, and silencing of minority voices, employees from marginalized groups often experience a paradox of diversity[6]. they are seen by other employees as visible and accepted as part of the group but their contributions and opinions are often not valued and taken seriously. While some may say that this is a failure of the diversity strategy, it is actually the failure of ethical leadership to address injustice, challenge bias, and hold people accountable for their ethics. Ethical leadership shifts the focus from managing differences to protecting the dignity of every individual. To do so, it demands that all leaders become aware of how the organizational structure, norms, and daily routines construct advantages for some groups and disadvantages for others. Ethical leadership is also inherently political and moral, as it requires leaders to

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redistribute voices, challenge existing power structures, and confront inequity where they find it[7]. *Ethical Leadership as a Moral Architecture for Inclusion*

Ethical leadership principles are based on four normative principles—Honesty, Fairness, Accountability and Caring for Others—and they emphasize ethical behaviour in all company's interactions. Ethical leaders demonstrate their ethical responsibility through their words and actions to model a high level of integrity to their employees. Ethical leaders provide clarity in terms of ethical expectations through the way they communicate with employees. They also ensure that their employees are being held accountable for their actions, which reinforces ethical behaviour within the workplace[8]. The behaviours that ethical leaders display in their leadership contribute positively to the Diversity Climate of their organisation. The diversity climate in an organisation is how the employees perceive their work culture in relation to equitable treatment, inclusion and opportunity. Ethical leaders are instrumental in creating and enhancing the diversity climate by helping employees understand and interpret the organisational values in times of conflict, difference and ambiguity around morality. Ethical leaders create an inclusive workplace by addressing discriminatory behaviours, providing fair procedures, and giving underrepresented groups an opportunity to express their opinion. Ethical leaders provide an environment where employees feel safe and protected when they express themselves freely and without fear or repercussion. Ethical leaders not only promote inclusion but show moral courage to take a stand against exclusion, even when it is not popular to do so. Ethical leaders prioritise ethics over expedience and create an expectation within the organisation that Inclusion is non-negotiable and is integral to the organisation's integrity. By fostering trust within the organisation, ethical leaders provide the foundation to support Inclusion in a diverse workforce[9].

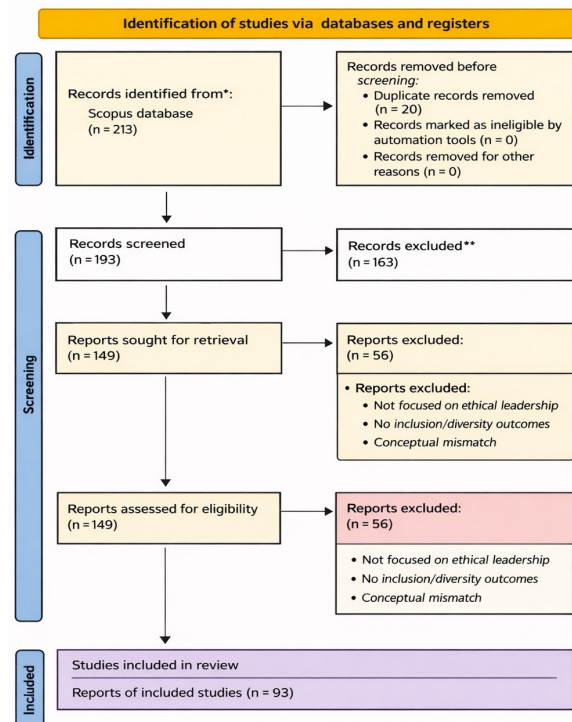


Fig. 1 Prisma Model

### Bibliometric Methodology

This research employs a bibliometric research design that aims to provide an organised framework and analyse the trends and patterns of research as well as to determine the intellectual contributions of publications at the intersection of ethical leadership and diversity, including diversity context, inclusion, equity, workforce diversity, inclusive workplace, and diversity climate. Bibliometric assessment provides an objective approach to evaluate scientific literature (published articles) using quantitative methods, which reduces the possibility of bias introduced by narrative review assessments[10].

### Data Source and Search Strategy

A key reason that Scopus was chosen as the data source for this bibliometric analysis is that it provides comprehensive indexed peer-reviewed journals focused on many of the domains of interest to this study such as Leadership, Management, Ethics and Organizational Studies at a high quality level. Scopus has high indexing standards, and inclusive of detailed bibliographic metadata, which provides the appropriate information necessary for bibliometric analysis[11]. A structured boolean query was used for performing the literature search and was applied to the titles, abstracts, and author keywords. The search string included the terms "ethical", "leadership", "moral leadership",

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"values-based leadership", "responsible leadership" and "integrity-based leadership" as well as the terms "diversity", "inclusion", "equity", "workforce diversity", "inclusive workplace" and "diversity context". This represented both broad conceptual coverage while being thematically specific to this bibliometric investigation. Bibliometric analysis also only included English language literature to maintain consistency in understanding the data[12].

### *Criteria for inclusion and exclusion*

To ensure the academic validity of the research, the following types of documents were included: a) peer-reviewed journal articles; b) review articles in journals; and c) conference proceedings published, respectively, up until the catalogue was placed in the latest complete year available in Scopus at the time that the data were collected. To maintain the academic quality of the research, editorial comments, book reviews, notes, or any other non-academic document were excluded. Further, any duplicate/copies or records with missing critical bibliographic information were eliminated from the data cleaning process. Final analysis was based on the dataset of articles that specifically examined the intersection of leadership ethics with diversity; equity; inclusion; etc., in the context of organisations[13].

### *Data extraction and preparation*

All of the bibliographic data (e.g., author information, year of publishing, name of journal, abstract, keywords, number of citations, and author affiliations) was extracted from Scopus via the CSV export functionality. The data cleaning and pre-processing steps were applied to standardise the author name, affiliation, and keyword data so that the accuracy of the analysis performed was increased. The terms used in this study to describe DEI were harmonised across multiple synonyms and variations (i.e., DEI would refer to "diversity, equity, and inclusion") in order to decrease the level of semantic fragmentation.[14]

### *In Conducting Bibliometric Analysis Techniques*

The research utilized two types of bibliometric techniques, descriptive (biographical analysis) and relational bibliometric analysis (citation analysis). The descriptive method was employed to chart yearly publications, most prolific authors and institutions, countries producing high numbers of articles, and journals identified as having the highest impact. The relational technique identified which articles had been cited the most frequently and examined the intellectual underpinnings of the field. Through an examination of co-authorship, this research sought to reveal collaboration patterns among authors and institutions.

In order to identify the dominant areas of research in this field and the developing areas of research, keyword co-occurrence analysis was used as a way to determine thematic structure. Mapping keywords, authors, and sources through network visualization allowed for an examination of how the conceptual evolution of this field has occurred over time[15].

### *Analytical Tools*

Analyses carried out using bibliometric techniques were performed with the aid of specialized software tools such as VOSviewer and Biblioshiny (Bibliometrix, Version 0.8.0). These tools are well established in bibliometric research, allowing for the visualization of bibliometric networks and therefore provide a means of providing methodological openness and reproducibility[1, 7].



**Figure. 2**

### **Literature Review**

This chapter is a systematic literature review (SLR) of the literature related to ethical leadership/inclusive workplaces. It looks at how the application of values-based management activities promotes diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). The sources for this SLR are Scopus-indexed peer-reviewed articles published between 2014 and 2025, and the review complies with the PRISMA guidelines in order to provide transparency, replicability, and methodological rigor. Ethical leadership has been identified as an important factor for increasing inclusion by providing employees with psychological safety, employee voice, and a sense of belonging (particularly when ethical HR practices and transparent governance are used in conjunction with values-based management systems)[16]. In addition, the use of thematic analysis has uncovered consistent links between ethical leadership and positive employee and diversity outcomes; however, the degree of effectiveness will differ depending on the industry, organization size, and cultural context. The TCCM (Theory–Context–Characteristics–Methodology) framework has been used to identify key trends

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regarding the research on ethical leadership and its effect on DEI (e.g., heavy reliance on Ethical Leadership and Social Learning theories; geographic concentration on Western economies; and predominance on quantitative, cross-sectional designs). Uncovered in the review were the following gaps: limited longitudinal research; underrepresentation of emerging economies; weak integration of ethical leadership with values-based management; and a lack of intersectional analyses. The evidence presented in this chapter supports the conclusion that ethical leadership is a critical contributor to advancing workplace inclusion, while at the same time, there are still many opportunities for continued theoretical, contextual, and methodological advancement in this area[17].

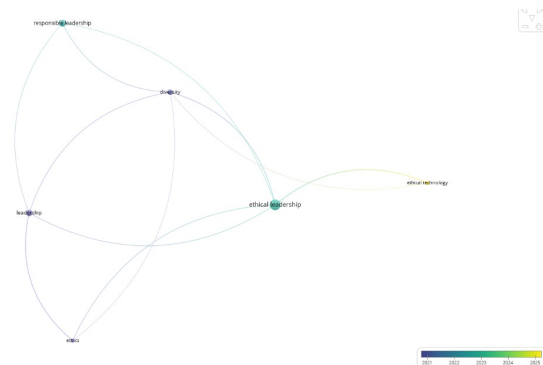
| TCCM Dimension  | Key Elements from Existing Literature                                                                                    | Dominant Trends Identified                                                                         | Research Gaps & Future Directions                                                                          |
|-----------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Theory          | Ethical Leadership Theory; Social Learning Theory; Social Exchange Theory; Stakeholder Theory; Resource-Based View (RBV) | Heavy reliance on Ethical Leadership and Social Learning theories; limited theoretical integration | Develop integrated multi-theory models; incorporate intersectionality and values-based management theories |
| Context         | Corporate, healthcare, education, public sector organizations; primarily Western economies                               | Strong concentration in North America and Europe; focus on large organizations                     | Expand research to emerging economies and Global South; examine SMEs, informal, and digital workplaces     |
| Characteristics | Leadership                                                                                                               | Ethical leadership                                                                                 | Explicitly operational                                                                                     |

|             |                                                                                                                     |                                                                                             |                                                                                                               |
|-------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|             | integrity, fairness, accountability; ethical climate; inclusive HR practices; employee belongingness and engagement | treated as a unidimensional construct; inclusion measured mainly through perceived fairness | ize values-based management; examine intersectional inclusion outcomes; study leader–follower value alignment |
| Methodology | Quantitative, cross-sectional survey designs; SEM and regression analysis                                           | Dominance of self-reported, single-source data; limited methodological diversity            | Employ longitudinal, mixed-method, experimental, and multi-level research designs                             |

**Table. 1 TCCM Dimension**

### Bibliometric Analysis

#### Keyword Co-occurrence Network



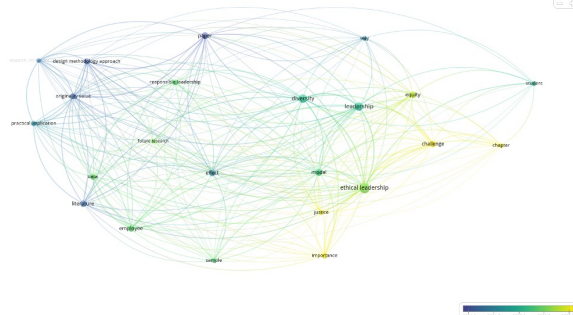
**Figure. 3 Keyword Co-occurrence Network**

In the form of a layered visualisation, the developments in scholarly research regarding Ethical Leadership and Diversity are clearly illustrated. Ethical Leadership is at the heart of this analysis due to its importance as a Research Theme as well as its significant impact upon several other Research Themes. The association between Ethics, Diversity and Responsible Leadership have created a large foundation for research into Ethical Leadership. Additionally, the emergence of Ethical Technology over the past few years has opened new avenues for academic inquiry in regard to

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investigating Ethical Leadership in Technology-based and Inclusive Organisations[18].

## Organizational Co-occurrence



**Figure 4. Organizational Co-occurrence**

An overlay of keyword co-occurrences visually displays the intellectual framework of research into ethical (moral) leadership. Ethical leadership is at its core of the research and is highly related to leader, diversity, equity, justice and responsibility (or being accountable). Historically, a bulk of the early research was focused on the designs, approaches and literature bases for such studies; however, more recent studies are centred around challenges, equitable treatment and ethical/moral leadership models, suggesting that the research theme is transitioning to be more oriented toward application, impact and inclusion[19].

## Word Cloud

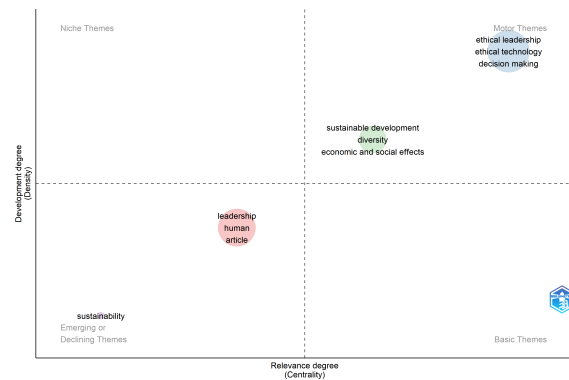


**Figure. 5 Word Cloud**

With emphasis on the terms "Ethical Leadership", "Leadership", "Ethical Technology", as well as "Decision-making", this word cloud reflects many of the Major Themes in Research pertaining to Ethical Leadership. The themes depicted in the word cloud display an emphasis on a Human-Centric Nature, Ethics, Education, Sustainability, and Diversity, and demonstrate that researchers are linking Leadership Ethics to Technology, Organizational Behavior, and Inclusive Practices[20].

## Clustering

### Thematic Map



**Figure. 6 Thematic Map**

The thematic map depicts how ethical leadership research is organized and analyzed in terms of their importance (centrality) and interrelatedness (density). Ethical leadership, ethical technology, and ethical decision-making are referred to as "motor themes" because they have the highest relevance and development. The themes of diversity and sustainable development are located within a "transitional" area, meaning they are emerging themes that have gaining importance. Other leadership themes are still considered to be "central" but have less development at this time than the motor themes. Lastly, sustainability represents an evolving theme, which means that there are additional research opportunities in this area[21].

## Discussion

The development of a wide range of diverse and inclusive workplaces through the use of Inclusive Values-Based Management Systems by Ethical Leaders is the primary role of Ethical Leadership in the modern Business World. Ethical Leaders show this through their commitment to Integrity, Fairness, and Accountability. Through the use of these values, Ethical Leaders create an environment where employees are psychologically safe, have a voice within the workplace, and are treated equally. This leads to an increase in Commitment and Engagement among diverse Employee Groups within the organisation. Therefore, by using Ethical Leadership and Values-Based Management Systems such as Transparent Governance, Ethical HR Practices, and Clearly Defined Organisational Values, organisations can develop Inclusive Organisational Structures/Processes rather than exclusively relying on the Ethical Leadership Behaviour of individual Leaders[8]. Numerous empirical studies have documented the positive impact of ethical leadership on a variety of employee outcomes such as job satisfaction, trust, engagement and belonging, especially for employees who are members of historically underrepresented groups. By creating an ethical workplace climate and practising fairness,

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organisations can reduce bias, minimise discrimination and foster collaboration and participative decision-making among employees. However, the impact of these leadership practices can be impacted by contextual variables; for example, the type of industry, size of the organisation and cultural norms. Most of the academic research conducted to date in Western economies. Therefore, additional research is necessary to determine the relationship between ethical leadership and organisational employee outcomes within emerging economies and diverse cultural contexts[5].

There is still a lot of room for improvement within the literature regarding (1) currently lacking longitudinal, experimental research on the long-term effects of ethical leadership on inclusion (2) A failure to incorporate multiple theoretical perspectives and (3) Lack of intersectional analysis of diversity (e.g. Gender, Race, Disability, Socio-economic status). Future research should utilize multi-level, mixed-method, and investigate how ethical leadership influences the development and enhancement of inclusive workplaces through the interaction of ethical leadership, organizational values and improved practices. Ethical leadership through values-approved management is not only morally responsible but also strategically supports the building of diverse and inclusive workplaces by bringing together the ethical components of an organization with its overall mission and strategic objectives to create a sustainable, inclusive work environment[22].

### **Practical Suggestions:**

#### *Integrating Ethical Leadership into Organization's Culture*

Organizations must follow a systematic approach to integrating ethical leadership principles throughout their hiring process, training programs, performance evaluation, and succession planning so that ethical leaders model fairness, integrity, and inclusiveness daily.

#### *Formalizing Organizational Values through Value-Based Management*

Organizations need to clearly articulate their organizational values through Human Resource (HR) policies that promote transparency and accountability; ethical decision-making processes that are transparent, visible, and provide an opportunity for employees to engage ethically; and accountability systems that ensure diversity and inclusion are not just an aspiration but a reality within their organization[23].

#### *Building Psychologically Safe Environments*

Managers must develop a culture that fosters psychological safety for all employees by creating environments where all employees feel comfortable sharing their opinions, providing feedback on issues that concern them, and reporting behaviours that violate company policies on ethics. This includes creating safe environments for employees who may be part of a marginalized or underrepresented group(s)[24].

#### *Creating Context-Specific Leadership Programs*

Organizations will find that effectiveness of ethical leadership programs will vary across industries and geographies. Therefore, organizations should develop ethical leadership initiatives based upon the contextual factors specific to the industry in which they operate, as well as the workforce composition, to maximize effectiveness[25].

#### *Continuously Assess and Monitor Leadership and Inclusion Initiatives*

When developing leadership and inclusion initiatives, organizations need to identify measures such as diversity metrics, employee engagement surveys, and assessments of ethical climate to monitor implementation progress in order to take evidence-based action to further enhance these efforts.

### **Theoretical development and Research Implications**

Multi-Theory Integration is being investigated by researchers to see how an evolving framework for understanding ethical leadership might mesh with/impact Social Learning Theory, Social Exchange Theory and Value Based Management theory. This will increase the total number of inclusion-based outcomes[26].

The Contextual Diversity of Ethical leadership More than just understanding how ethical leadership functions within a Western corporate structure, it is important to gather knowledge and data on the contextual diversity surrounding ethical leadership through researching the ethical leadership of emerging market, SMEs, informal and digital work environments[27].

### **Conclusion**

Incorporating ethical leadership into the practices of value-based management used by organizations will be important in establishing an inclusive work environment that is supportive of a diverse workforce. An ethical leader is able to create a culture of psychological safety through their advocacy of fairness, integrity and accountability. The creation of an environment that encourages both the recruitment and retention of diverse talent is essential in order to

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create opportunities for increasing employee diversity within any organization. Additionally, the ethical leadership model will allow for increased strength of the influence of the ethical leader on the creation of inclusive workplaces because this model incorporates numerous ethical principles into the governance of an ethical workplace. These principles are expressed through structured decision-making processes and through the HR function's ethical practices.

Literature already exists to demonstrate a positive correlation between ethical leadership and outcomes for employees and employee diversity; however, significant gaps still exist concerning research around the relationship between ethical leadership and employee diversity in developing countries. By combining multiple theoretical perspectives, multiple levels of ethical leadership, and various methodological approaches (e.g., longitudinal) to study the impact of ethical leadership on workplace inclusion, we will gain a clearer understanding of how ethical leadership can be utilized to promote sustainable workplace inclusion and growth.

Organizations should establish ethical leadership according to the organization's values. Establishing ethical leadership is a moral responsibility of employers. It is a major strategic advantage for employers to create inclusive, equitable, and high-performing work environments. Employers who commit to ethical leadership as part of their value-based management practices have a greater ability to recruit, engage, and retain a diverse, competent workforce; and they will have a competitive advantage due to the enhanced engagement of their employees.

### Limitations of the Study and Future Research

#### Directions

The findings of this study contribute to the understanding of how ethical leadership impacts workplace inclusion and diversity based on the practice of values-based management but also have limitations. Researchers are advised to consider that the sample populations represent specific geographic locations or types of organizations, thus limiting the generalizability of the results to other industries, cultures, or organization structures. Since the study employed a cross-sectional methodology, it is unable to provide evidence of causality between ethical leadership practices and workplace inclusion. The research relied on self-reports from participants regarding the prevalence of ethical practices within their organizations, and thus may exaggerate the extent of ethical practices and inclusiveness due to social desirability or bias of perception by individuals. The

study did not address how inclusive workplace climates can be influenced by middle managers and peer leaders, in addition to top leaders. Finally, the study did not adequately investigate the numerous mediating and moderating factors such as: organizational culture, psychological safety, employee engagement, and diversity policies that could impact the relationship between ethical leadership and workplace inclusion. Future research should address the limitations of this study by utilizing a longitudinal design to observe changes over time; conducting cross-cultural studies to identify both universal and context-specific processes; along with the integration of additional mediating and moderating variables.

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