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## The Influence of Ethical Leadership on Lecturers' Job Involvement

NazidaAbd Ghani

Kamaruzaman Jusoff

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# Academic Leadership Journal

## 1. Introduction

The establishment of polytechnics in Malaysia was to fulfill the needs of providing education and practical knowledge to help the nation producing semi-professional workers in various disciplines such as engineering, commerce and hospitality. Leadership is an important component that contributes towards the success of any education institution. Better and advance leadership practices are needed in order to improve the status and standard of environment on campus (Zaharah, 2004). According to Cunningham and Cordeiro (2000), effective leaders must be able to understand all elements of educational administration in the process of building the education excellence and translating it into teaching and practices. Simkins (2005) states that the world is dominated by the idea that leadership is a factor or the only factor that can guarantee the success or failure of any organization – be it a school, a college or a university.

Any bad or good consequence is the result of the behaviors of the individual or the leader in the organization. According to Kanungo and Mendonca (1996), it is the people but not the organization that can bring harm or benefit to the organization. Even if employees are responsible in the attainment of the organizational goals, leaders are always accountable in setting the direction and the standard behaviors of the people in their organization.

The issue of ethics has been highlighted in almost all disciplines including education (Winston, 2005). Ethical practices that began in business, law and medical started to immerse into education (Rucinski & Bauch, 2006). In education, leaders' actions need to be governed by ethical guidelines compounded with democratic societal values (Calabrese, 1989). Yoder-Wise (2005) proposed that the concept of ethical leadership should be integrated into education provided to other people.

Leaders are responsible to instill ethical culture in their organizations. According to Johnson (2001), one of the responsibilities that should be taken in leading organization is building and maintaining positive ethical culture. Majority of researchers in corporate culture have identified that higher rank organizational leaders are the most influential people that determine the cultural tone in the organizations (Robertson & Schlegelmilch, 1993).

Ethical behaviors in any organization can be enhanced by the presence of effective and good leaders. As mentioned by Mendonca (2001), leaders need to be more sensitive to their moral obligations. He argued that leaders should become role models to their followers in terms of work and ethical behaviors. A lot of corruptions due to unethical behaviors can be avoided if decision-makers and administrators show good examples (Wadhwa & Davar, 2000). Therefore, ethical behaviors and ethical leaders are needed to build ethical organizations (Aronson, 2001).

Leadership, according to Kanungo and Mendonca (1996), can be viewed from two perspectives. First, leadership can be viewed as a set of role behaviors to maintain cohesiveness in the organization. Second, leadership can be viewed as a process or strategy to influence the followers' belief and

behavior to attain organizational objectives. These role behaviors and influence strategy have long term impact on the followers when they are viewed as moral motives and ethical actions (Kanungo & Mendonca, 1996; Mendonca, 2001).

Kanungo and Mendonca (1996) proposed that leaders are responsible for the moral climate of their organization which reflects the moral development of the leaders as well as their followers. The moral development of the followers can be facilitated by the leaders through the morally appropriate influence strategies and motives. The leaders' moral development is the result of their own character formation. Therefore, Kanungo and Mendonca (1996) conceptualized ethical leadership in three dimensions – the leader's motives, the leader's character formation and the leader's influence strategies. Based on the work of Kanungo and Mendonca (1996), Kanungo (2001) proposed a graphic model that shows the relationship among the three dimensions.

*Motives.* An obvious motive in ethical leadership is the altruistic intention of leaders that benefits others than the leaders themselves. Leaders are considered ethical when they display altruistic acts that reflect their intention to benefit others beyond themselves (Kanungo & Mendonca, 1996). Leaders with altruistic motives identify with and respect their followers. Ciulla (2006) defines altruism as a type of motives and the highest level of behavior that contradicts to one's own self interest.

*Character.* The leaders' character formation will produce the development of the leaders' moral through their moral practices in everyday life. Leader's character is an important factor that makes the leaders trustworthy as well as attractive to others. The habitual practice of virtue forms the leaders' character and enables them to serve as role models for their followers. (Kanungo & Mendonca, 1996). Among the traits that reflect ethical leaders are integrity, committed to organizational goals, and openness to criticism (Khuntia & Suar, 2004). Moorhead and Griffin (2001) suggested that how far a person can influence another person's behavior determines the real leader.

*Influence strategy.* The third dimension of ethical leadership is the influence strategies practiced by the leaders. Leaders who practice influence strategies such as giving empowerment and encouraging followers are considered more ethical compared to those who exercise control in their organization (Kanungo & Mendonca). According to Kanungo (2001), empowerment which is the most outstanding influence strategy of ethical leadership is the effect of moral justification resulting from the moral altruism. Empowerment practices such as showing confidence in followers' ability, giving encouragement to followers in attaining objectives and portraying good behaviours will increase confidence among the followers (Kanungo, 2001). According to Rejai and Phillips (2004), leaders empower followers and transform their vision into reality.

The main objective of leaders' behaviour is to influence actions in the organization through the behaviours of members in order to achieve a certain organizational objective (Kanungo & Mendonca, 1996; Kanungo, 2001). Previous research have looked into the relationship between ethical leadership and work output (examples: hospitals and manufacturing) in the medical and business settings but the researcher has not come across any study that examines the influence of ethical leadership on work attitudes of lecturers in the education settings especially in Malaysia.

In this study, ethical leadership refers to the lecturers' perception to the good and right attitudes or actions practiced by the heads of department. Ethical leadership is manifested on three dimensions i.e. leaders' motives, leaders' behavioral strategies that have influence on followers and leaders'

character (Kanungo & Mendonca, 1996). Character refers to the perception of lecturers on the ethical traits or character possessed by the heads of department.

Motives refer to the extent of the lecturers' perception towards the heads of department altruistic actions that are motivated for and care about other people. Motives also refer to the lecturers' perception on the heads of department's actions that place the interests of others before their own personal concerns.

Empowerment refers to the lecturers' perception on the strategies, practices or approaches by the heads of department in their effort to increase lecturers' self-efficacy. Empowerment also refers to the extent to which lecturers feel that they are involved in setting the goals and decision-making and the extent to which lecturers feel that their heads of department guide, advise and encourage them to try innovative ideas in carrying out their work.

Lodahl and Kejner (1965) defined job involvement as the level of employee's psychological identification of an individual with his work or the importance of work to the individual's self-image. Kanungo (1982) defined job involvement as a cognitive evaluation or belief about the extent to which the job can fulfill the individual's current needs. Robbins and Coulter (1996), on the other hand, defined job involvement as the level at which the employee feels that he/she is identified with his/her job and participates actively in his/her work and perceives that his/her work is important to him/her.

Saleh and Hosek (1976) suggested that job involvement is a complex concept based on cognition, action and feelings. There are four different conceptualizations of the construct of job involvement. A person is involved

i) when work to him is a central life interest,

ii) when he actively participates in his job,/p>

iii) when he perceives performance as central to his self-esteem, and

iv) when he perceives performance as consistent with his self-concept (Saleh & Hosek, 1976).

The lecturers' job involvement refers to the extent to which the lecturers feel that they have psychological identification with their job at polytechnics. Job involvement reflects the lecturers' feeling about their relationship with their job. Job involvement also refers to the lecturers' belief about the extent to which their job are important and able to fulfill their current needs (Kanungo, 1982; Lodahl & Kejner, 1965).

The main objective of this study was to examine the influence of ethical leadership on lecturers' job involvement. This study was also carried out to identify the level of job involvement of the lecturers and to identify the relationship between ethical leadership and lecturers' job involvement.

## **2. Method and materials**

### *2.1 Sampling*

This study involves 302 lecturers from five polytechnics in Malaysia. The sample comprised 120 male and 186 female lecturers. A majority of the lecturers (47.7%) hold bachelors degree and 43.5% hold

masters degree. The remaining 8.8% hold diploma as their highest academic achievement.

## *2.2 Ethical Leadership Scale*

The scale used to measure ethical leadership was adapted from the study of Khuntia and Suar (2004) and comprised 22 items that covered the dimensions of empowerment, motive and character. The researcher conducted an exploratory factor analysis and a confirmatory factor analysis to identify the number of ethical leadership dimensions. Identifying the number of factors is very important in a study (Knight, 2000).

Confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to confirm that ethical leadership comprises three different dimensions. This model was also developed to detect any multicollinearity among the maintained three dimensions of ethical leadership. Multicollinearity is said to exist when two or more variables have high correlations with each other (Hinton, 2004). Based on the model, the correlation between empowerment and motive is .91, whereas the correlation between motive and character is .93, and the correlation between empowerment and character is .81. The correlation values of .93 and .91 exceed the suggested cut-off value of .90 by Hair et al. (2006). Therefore, it can be concluded that multicollinearity exists between the empowerment and motive and between motive and character. However, after motive and character are combined (labeled as character/motive), the correlation coefficient between motive and empowerment is .88 which is lower than the cut-off value suggested by Hair et al. (2006). The factor loadings for the items in this scale range from .63 to .88 with  $p < .001$ . These factor loadings are considered as 'good' since they exceed .50, the value suggested by Bagozzi and Yi (1988) as acceptable cut-off factor loading value. These factor loadings also confirm the convergent validity of the items in this scale. Convergent validity is supported by the significant values of factor loadings of items for each construct (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988).

The Cronbach alpha values for empowerment and character/motive are .93 and .94 respectively. The Cronbach alpha value for overall scale is .96, which is similar to the value reported by Khuntia and Suar (2004) in their study i.e. .96. This value is higher than the suggested cut-off value .60 by Sekaran (1992) and higher than .80 to .90 cut-off alpha value as suggested by Roberts et al. (2006). Therefore, it can be concluded that this scale has high internal consistency and is reliable to measure the ethical leadership construct.

The job involvement scale, adapted from Kanungo (1982), is widely used (Yang, Kao & Huang, 2006). Reliability analysis using SPSS version 15.0 shows that the coefficient of Cronbach alpha for job involvement is .80. Based on the Cronbach alpha value if item deleted, the reliability coefficient can be improved to .83 if item 2 (For me, my job is only a small part of who I am) is dropped. Next, a confirmatory factor analysis using AMOS 7.0 was conducted on the scale to confirm that the job involvement construct is unidimensional.

## **4. Results and Discussion**

The level of job involvement is determined by the mean score. This mean score is calculated by dividing the summation of the score for each item in the ethical leadership measurement with the number of items in the scale. The range of the value is categorized into three levels (high, moderate and low levels) based on the size of the class interval as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1 Determination of Levels**

Level	Class Interval
High	5.00 – 7.00
Moderate	3.00 – 4.99
Low	1.00 – 2.99

More than half of the lecturers (54.2%) reported that their level of job involvement is at a moderate level. About 42.5% of lecturers reported high level of job involvement while 3.3% reported low level of job involvement. The mean and standard deviation for job involvement are 4.70 and .91 respectively. This shows that the level of lecturers' job involvement is moderate. Table 2 below shows the level of job involvement.

**Table 2 Level of Job Involvement**

Variable	High Level		Moderate Level		Low Level		Mean	S
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency			
Job Involvement	130	42.5	166	54.2	10	3.3	4.70	.9

The Pearson correlation analysis as shown in Table 3 depicts that ethical leadership has a low positive relationship with job involvement ( $r = .180$ ,  $p < .01$ ). The relationship between empowerment dimension and job involvement is identified as low positive relationship ( $r = .186$ ,  $p < .01$ ). The character/motive dimension has been identified as having low positive relationship with job involvement with the correlation coefficient of .282 at .01 significance level. As a conclusion, ethical leadership (overall and by dimensions) has a significant relationship with job involvement at .01 significance level.

**Table 3 Pearson Correlation Coefficient between Ethical Leadership and Job Involvement**

Variable	Job Involvement
Overall Ethical Leadership	<b>.180(**)</b>
Empowerment	<b>.186(**)</b>

Character/Motive	.159(**)
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\*\* correlation is significant at .01 level (2-tailed)

To study the influence of ethical leadership on job involvement, analysis of linear regression was used. In this analysis, job involvement was fixed as dependent variable or criterion whereas ethical leadership was the independent variable or predictor. The result of the analysis as shown in Table 4 below shows that overall ethical leadership has a significant relationship with job involvement ( $F_{1, 304} = 10.230$ ,  $p < .01$ ). R value is .180 while  $R^2$  is .033. Adjusted  $R^2$  is .029. This adjusted  $R^2$  value shows that 2.9% variance in job involvement is explained by its linear relationship with ethical leadership after taking into account the assumption of fixed-effects model.

**Table 4 Linear Regression Analysis of Ethical Leadership on Job Involvement**

Variable: Ethical Leadership

R	.180
$R^2$	.033
Adjusted $R^2$	.029
Standard error	.898

**ANOVA (b)**

	<i>Sum of Squares</i>	<i>Df</i>	<i>Mean Square</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Regression	8.243	1	8.243	10.230	.002(a)
Residual	244.956	304	.806		
Total	253.199	305			

a Predictor: Ethical Leadership

b Dependent Variable: Job Involvement

**Coefficients (a)**

Variable	Regression Coefficients	Significance
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	B	Standard error	$\beta$	t	p
(Constant)	3.800	.286		13.274	.000
Ethical Leadership	.181	.057	.180	3.198	.002

a Dependent Variable: Job Involvement

The results of the analysis show that ethical leadership is a significant predictor of job involvement ( $t_{305} = 3.198$ ,  $\beta = .180$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Therefore, it can be concluded that job involvement is a function of ethical leadership. The beta value of .180 shows that when ethical leadership increases by one standard unit, job involvement will increase by .180 standard unit.

The linear regression equation that is formed based on the regression coefficients is as follows:

$$Y = .181X + 3.800$$

where

Y = job involvement

X = ethical leadership

This regression equation shows that a change of .181 in job involvement is estimated for every unit change in ethical leadership when all other factors are constant. The intersection or constant value of 3.800 is the estimated job involvement of a lecturer when the ethical leadership score is zero.

Next, multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to study the influence of each dimension of ethical leadership on job involvement. In this analysis, the empowerment and character/motive dimensions were set as predictors while job involvement was the dependent variable. The result of the analysis shows that both the dimensions have significant relationship with job involvement,  $F_{2, 303} = 5.470$ ,  $p < .01$ . The value of R and  $R^2$  is .187 and .035 respectively. The adjusted  $R^2$  of .028 shows that 2.8% variance in job involvement is explained by the combination of ethical leadership dimensions after taking into account the assumption of fixed-effects model. The result of the analysis shows that both dimensions are not significant predictor of job involvement (empowerment:  $t_{305} = 1.742$ ,  $\beta = .173$ ,  $p > .05$ ; character/motive:  $t_{305} = .170$ ,  $\beta = .017$ ,  $p > .05$ ). Table 6 below shows the result of the multiple regression analysis.

**Table 6 Multiple Regression Analysis: Dimensions of Ethical Leadership on Job Involvement**

Variable: Dimensions of Ethical Leadership



R	.187
R <sup>2</sup>	.035
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.028
Standard error	.898

#### ANOVA (b)

	<i>Sum of Squares</i>	Df	<i>Mean Square</i>	F	p
Regression	8.823	2	4.412	5.470	.005(a)
Residual	244.376	303	.807		
Total	253.199	305			

a Predictor: Empowerment and Character/Motive

b Dependent Variable: Job Involvement

#### Coefficients (a)

Variable	Regression Coefficients			Significance	
	B	Standard error	$\beta$	t	p
(Constant)	3.769	.289		13.049	.000
Empowerment	.169	.097/p>	.173	1.742	.083
Character	.016	.093	.017	.170	.866

a Dependent Variable: Job Involvement

The beta value of .173 means that when empowerment is increased by one standard unit, job involvement will increase by .173 standard unit. On the other hand, the beta value of .017 shows that when character/motive is increased by one standard unit, job involvement will increase by .017

standard unit. As a conclusion, job involvement is not a function of both the empowerment and character/motive dimensions.

The regression equation formed based on the regression coefficients is as follows:

$$Y = .169 X_1 + .016 X_2 + 3.769$$

where

$Y$  = job involvement

$X_1$  = empowerment

$X_2$  = character/motive

The regression equation shows that a change of .169 unit in job involvement is estimated for each unit change in the empowerment when the character/motive dimension is held constant. A change of .016 is estimated in job involvement for every unit change in the character/motive dimension. The intersection or constant value of 3.274 reflects the estimated value of job involvement when the dimensions of empowerment and character/motive are zero.

As a conclusion, the results of the regression analyses suggest that ethical leadership is a significant predictor for job involvement ( $t_{305} = 3.198$ ,  $\beta = .180$ ,  $p < .01$ ). The result of multiple regression analysis shows that both dimensions of ethical leadership (empowerment:  $t_{305} = 1.742$ ,  $\beta = .173$ ,  $p > .05$ ; character/motive:  $t_{305} = .170$ ,  $\beta = .017$ ,  $p > .05$ ) are not significant predictors of job involvement.

Exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis utilizing principal component analysis with varimax rotation and Kaiser Normalization show that ethical leadership comprised three dimensions. This result is consistent with the proposed concept by Kanungo and Mendonca (1996). However, as there is multicollinearity between motive and character dimensions, the researcher has combined both dimensions. This combination is in accordance with the suggestion by Hinton (2004) to maximize the effects of independent variable on dependent variable (Hair et al., 2006).

The researcher labeled the combination as character/motive. Motive or altruistic intention i.e. putting others' interest first is combined with character dimension and can be explained by the ethical leaders' character that encourages the practices of moral principles (Harun, 2002). Furthermore, leaders with high character who demonstrate ethical behavior are leaders who are always concern about the effect of their actions on others (Aronson, 2003).

Next, second-order factor analysis using structural equation modeling confirms that the construct of ethical leadership comprised two dimensions. This finding is consistent with the empirical findings by Khuntia and Suar (2004) and Trevino et al. (2000).

This study finds that the level of job involvement is at a moderate level. This means the lecturers psychologically feel that they lack identification with their work. They perceive that their work as not so important and cannot fulfill their needs. This finding is consistent with that of Hamzah (1997) who finds that job involvement level of teachers as moderate (61.8%).

Correlation analysis shows that ethical leadership has low positive relationship with job involvement. This reflects that when the level of ethical leadership of their heads of department increases, the level of job involvement also increases slightly. Regression analysis shows that ethical leadership is a significant predictor of job involvement. The psychological identification of lecturers with their work can be increased when ethical leadership of heads of department is increased.

## 5. Conclusion

This study finds that ethical leadership comprises two dimensions, namely empowerment and character/motive. The level of lecturers' job involvement is found to be moderate, which reflects the lecturers psychologically perceived that they lack identification with their work. Ethical leadership is found to have low positive relationship with job involvement and a strong predictor of job involvement. The lecturers' job involvement can be increased when ethical leadership of heads of department is increased. The human resource management and administrators of polytechnics could make use of the findings from this study to plan and design effective development programs that promote ethical leadership among their heads of department as well as to enhance the lecturers' job involvement.

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