

MANAGEMENT REVIEW

Management without theatre.

ROLE

THE ETHICAL LEADER

A good person is not yet an ethical leader, how ethics flows from the top to the front line, four reputations, the overlap with transformational leadership, the ten questions of the scale, and a card for one decision.



904

employees in 195 departments: the ethics of top management reached them through their own supervisors.

MAYER ET AL., 2009

INSIDE

COVER STORY

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NO. 78 · ROLE

In this issue

Most managers think of themselves as decent people. The research on ethical leadership asks a harder question: does the team know it, and does the way the team is led show it? A reputation for ethics is built in front of others, or not at all.

Linda Treviño and colleagues found two pillars behind that reputation: the moral person and the moral manager. Crossed, they give four reputations, and only one is ethical leadership. In 195 departments the ethics of top management reached employees through their supervisors. Ethical leadership overlaps strongly with transformational leadership, yet still predicts behaviour beyond it. The ten-item scale shows what employees look at.

Stiven Janaqi EDITOR · STIVEN CATALYST

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HOW TO READ THIS ISSUE

Figure

Every figure has its source and year at the foot of its page.

Our reading

Where the editors interpret rather than the research, it says so.

Practice

The steps and the card are proposals to try, not research results.

COVER STORY

A good person is not enough

Linda Treviño, Laura Hartman and Michael Brown interviewed senior executives and corporate ethics officers about what makes an executive known as an ethical leader (2000). The answer was a reputation that rests on two pillars.

Moral person

Traits: honesty, integrity, trustworthiness

Behaviours others can see

How decisions are made

Moral manager

Role modelling, in view of others

Rewards and discipline

Communicating about ethics and values

The first pillar is about who you are, the second about what you make of the team. A leader can be honest in private and still leave employees unsure what is expected of them, because ethics is never part of how the work is led.

OUR READING

The team cannot see your conscience. It sees what you reward, what you correct and what you talk about.

Source: Linda K. Treviño, Laura P. Hartman & Michael Brown, California Management Review 42(4), 2000 (via Abstract and summaries)

The pillars as the article's abstract and later summaries give them; we could not see the article, nor how many people were interviewed.

THE NUMBERS

How low it flows

David Mayer and colleagues asked whether ethical leadership at the top reaches the people who do the work, or stops at the level below (2009).

904

employees surveyed

195

managers, in 195
departments

THE TRICKLE-DOWN THE STUDY TESTED

01

Top management

its ethical leadership

02

Supervisor

their ethical leadership

03

The group

less deviance, more helping

Ethical leadership at both levels went with less deviance in the group, such as breaking rules or harming colleagues, and with more voluntary help. The effect of the top ran through the supervisors.

OUR READING

The front line reads the company's values from the person it reports to.

Source: David M. Mayer, Maribeth Kuenzi, Rebecca Greenbaum et al., *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* 108(1), 2009 (via Abstract)

Survey data at the level of groups: links, not causes. The examples of deviance are ours. We read the abstract and summaries, not the article.

THE MODEL

Four reputations

Treviño and her co-authors set the ethical leader against three alternatives: the unethical leader, the hypocritical leader, who in their words talks the talk but doesn't walk the walk, and the ethically neutral leader.



OUR READING

Silence is not neutral for long. Where nobody talks about how results are reached, the number is heard as the only rule.

Source: Linda K. Treviño, Laura P. Hartman & Michael Brown, California Management Review 42(4), 2000 (via Abstract and summaries)

The four types follow the article's abstract and summaries; placing them on two axes and the short texts in the cells are the editors'.

[More in the essay](#)

Leading people without losing the person

WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

Ethical, or simply a good leader?

Julia Hoch and colleagues pooled the studies on the newer leadership styles and asked how far each overlaps with transformational leadership, the style that inspires and sets an example (2018).

CORRELATION WITH TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP, CORRECTED P

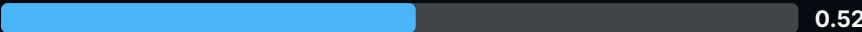
Authentic leadership



Ethical leadership



Servant leadership



For most outcomes ethical leadership added little beyond transformational leadership. Thomas Ng and Daniel Feldman (101 samples, 29,620 people, 2015) found it still predicted performance, helping and counterproductive behaviour, if weakly in some cases; trust in the leader carried the link to attitudes and performance.

OUR READING

Inspiring and ethical are not the same thing. In the surveys they are mostly found in the same leaders.

Sources: Julia E. Hoch, William H. Bommer, James H. Dulebohn et al., *Journal of Management* 44(2), 2018 (via Abstract; p from later reviews); Thomas W. H. Ng & Daniel C. Feldman, *Journal of Applied Psychology* 100(3), 2015 (via Abstract); Akanksha Bedi, Can M. Alpaslan & Sandy Green, *Journal of Business Ethics* 139(3), 2016 (via Abstract)

The scale runs from 0 to 1; p from Hoch et al. as later reviews report them. Bedi et al. (2016) link it with fair treatment by the leader (see No. 70); links were stronger in the public sector.

HOW IT IS MEASURED

Ten questions for the team

Michael Brown, Linda Treviño and David Harrison define ethical leadership as acting rightly oneself and promoting it in others through two-way communication, reinforcement and decisions (2005). Over seven studies they built a ten-item scale that employees fill in about their supervisor.

How they act

lives ethically in private too

can be trusted

decides fairly, in balance

has employees' interests in mind

listens to employees

What they promote

talks about ethics and values

sets an example of the right way

judges success also by how it was reached

asks: what is the right thing to do?

disciplines breaches of ethics

The ten items formed a single factor. In the original studies the scale predicted job satisfaction, dedication and willingness to report problems to management.

OUR READING

A boss can score well in the first column and stay silent in the second. That is the neutral leader of page 5.

Source: Michael E. Brown, Linda K. Treviño & David A. Harrison, *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* 97(2), 2005 (via Abstract; the items from later studies)

Items shortened and translated by us, from later studies that reproduce them; the two columns follow the two parts of the definition and are the editors' sorting.

TOOL OF THE ISSUE

The right-way card

One card per decision that tests the standard: a target under pressure, a shortcut, a complaint. Before pushing harder on a number, check how it is being reached.

01 The decision what it is, and who it affects

02 The right thing to do the question asked aloud, and the answer

03 How the result is reached what would make the wrong way faster

04 Who was heard the people who do the work, before deciding

05 What the team was told the standard and the reason, in one sentence

06 What was rewarded or corrected and whether the same would hold for anyone

Sources: Linda K. Treviño, Laura P. Hartman & Michael Brown, California Management Review 42(4), 2000 (via Abstract and summaries); Michael E. Brown, Linda K. Treviño & David A. Harrison, Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes 97(2), 2005 (via Abstract; the items from later studies)

A practice proposed by the editors, after the moral manager pillar of Treviño et al. (2000) and the items of the scale by Brown et al. (2005).

Open the tool: KPI Diagnostic

stivencatalyst.com/tools/kpi-diagnostic/

SOURCES AND METHOD

Every figure has a source.

The figures in this issue come from the sources below. The year shows how recent each one is.

Moral Person and Moral Manager: How Executives Develop a Reputation for Ethical Leadership

Linda K. Treviño, Laura P. Hartman & Michael Brown, *California Management Review* 42(4), 2000 · via Abstract and summaries
<https://doi.org/10.2307/41166057>

How Low Does Ethical Leadership Flow? Test of a Trickle-Down Model

David M. Mayer, Maribeth Kuenzi, Rebecca Greenbaum et al., *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* 108(1), 2009 · via Abstract
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.obhdp.2008.04.002>

Do Ethical, Authentic, and Servant Leadership Explain Variance Above and Beyond Transformational Leadership? A Meta-Analysis

Julia E. Hoch, William H. Bommer, James H. Dulebohn et al., *Journal of Management* 44(2), 2018 · via Abstract; p from later reviews
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206316665461>

Ethical Leadership: Meta-Analytic Evidence of Criterion-Related and Incremental Validity

Thomas W. H. Ng & Daniel C. Feldman, *Journal of Applied Psychology* 100(3), 2015 · via Abstract
<https://doi.org/10.1037/a0038246>

A Meta-analytic Review of Ethical Leadership Outcomes and Moderators

Akanksha Bedi, Can M. Alpaslan & Sandy Green, *Journal of Business Ethics* 139(3), 2016 · via Abstract
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-015-2625-1>

Ethical Leadership: A Social Learning Perspective for Construct Development and Testing

Michael E. Brown, Linda K. Treviño & David A. Harrison, *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* 97(2), 2005 · via Abstract; the items from later studies
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.obhdp.2005.03.002>

EDITORIAL METHOD

Each figure was checked for its year, its publisher and what exactly it measures. Where the publisher's page could not be opened, the figure was checked against independent summaries and is marked “via”. The editors' interpretation is marked “Our reading”. Figures that could not be confirmed are not in the issue.



MANAGEMENT REVIEW

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Every issue, one management question, checked against the best research.

ALL ISSUES

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