

# **Ethical leadership and ethical voice: The mediating mechanisms of value internalization and integrity identity**

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Following a number of serious corporate scandals, a consensus has emerged in the literature that ethical leadership matters (Brown & Treviño, 2006; Mayer et al., 2012). Ethical voice is an employee behavior of particular interest in this context (Avey et al., 2012; Huang & Paterson, 2017). It refers to a form of expression that challenges, and seeks to change, the ethically inappropriate behaviors and practices of others (Huang & Paterson, 2017). We aim to extend prior research by focusing on employees' self-concepts and personal identities (Lord et al., 1999; Shamir et al., 1993) as possible explanatory mechanisms of the relationship between ethical leadership and ethical voice. We integrate leadership self-concept (e.g., Lord & Brown, 2001; Lord et al., 1999; Shamir et al., 1993) and social information processing (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978) theories and examine employee ethical voice as an important behavioral outcome and specifically propose two novel mechanisms of the relationship between ethical leadership and ethical voice, i.e., (a) followers' internalization of the organizational ethical values the leaders signal via their behavior, and (b) the subsequent implication of followers' self-concept, in particular aspects of the self that relate to ethics.

Ethical leadership has been defined 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" (Brown et al., 2005, p. 120). A fundamental underpinning of ethical leadership theory is that leaders are influential role models for normative and ethical behavior in organizational settings. Prior scholarly work has identified ethical leadership as a value-driven form of leadership that affects the self-concept and beliefs of followers (Den Hartog, 2015). Two important features of ethical leadership are (a) the visible demonstration of ethical practices and (b) the use of ethical communication (Greenbaum et al., 2015). We suggest that these two behavioral patterns expressed by ethical leadership both support followers' internalization of ethical values in organizations. We further contend that followers' internalization of organizational ethical values will then increase the salience of aspects of the followers'

self-concept that relate to ethics, due to employees' desire to achieve self-consistency. Ethical leaders, by facilitating followers' internalization of organizational values, further engage followers' integrity identity. Finally, On the other hand, internal values, self-standards and identities can become strong intrinsic drivers of ethical voice because the expression of ethical concerns can help individuals re-establish internal consistency and coherence.

Data was collected as part of a larger research project from two English police forces, to test the proposed relationships (Studies 1 and 2). We further utilized a third sample of working professionals recruited via the online platform "Prolific Academic" and a three-wave cross-lagged design to test the generalizability of the results of Studies 1 and 2 in a more general population and also to examine the possibility of reciprocal relationships. Study 1 tests our main hypotheses using a time-lagged sample of 972 officers and staff, whereas Study 2 tests hypotheses in a sample of 765 officers and staff matched with co-workers who rated their ethical voice. In Study 3, we used three-wave data of 448 working professionals and tested cross-lagged mediation effects. Across three studies, we found consistent empirical support for the hypothesized mediating model, which highlights the importance of ethical leadership for ethical value internalization, salience of follower integrity identity and ethical voice.

By doing this study, we add novel insights into ethical leadership influence processes and find evidence for the role of followers' values and personal identities as important mediators. We highlight the important role of value internalization as a mechanism via which ethical leadership influences followers' integrity identities and subsequently ethical voice behaviors. Organizations are thus encouraged to cultivate ethical leadership behaviors in managers. This can be achieved through senior leaders acting as ethical meaning makers (Ashford et al., 2009) and the provision of leadership development programs (Mayer et al., 2009). Organizations should invest in trainings to increase managers' awareness and knowledge of the ethical values and standards of the organization.



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