

The Importance of Ethical Leadership in Human Resources Management and its Relationship to Employee Ethical Behavior (Case Study of Human Resource Management in Samarinda City Government)

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ABSTRACT: This study examines the influence of Ethical Leadership in Human Resource Management (HRM) on employees' ethical behavior, using the case of the Samarinda City Government. Drawing on Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory, the research posits that HR leaders serve as behavioral models whose actions are observed and emulated by employees, shaping organizational ethical norms. A quantitative approach with a cross-sectional correlational design was employed to investigate the relationship between employees' perceptions of ethical leadership (independent variable) and their self-reported ethical behavior (dependent variable), while controlling for demographic variables. Data were collected through structured questionnaires administered to 300 permanent employees across various service units in the Samarinda city administration. Pearson correlation analysis revealed a statistically significant positive relationship between perceived ethical leadership and ethical behavior ($r = 0.45$, $p < 0.001$). Further, multiple regression analysis showed that ethical leadership significantly predicted employees' ethical behavior ($\beta = 0.42$, $p < 0.001$), even after controlling for demographic factors. These findings confirm the relevance of Social Learning Theory in public sector organizations and emphasize the crucial role of ethical leadership in fostering an ethical work climate. The study highlights the need for public institutions to strengthen ethical leadership practices within HRM to promote integrity and ethical conduct among employees.

KEYWORDS: Ethical Leadership, Ethical Behavior, Human Resource Management, Social Learning Theory

I. INTRODUCTION

Due to globalization and growing competition, organizations have to achieve revenue targets, while also address the ethics surrounding a decision. One of the most important components to achieve organizational goals is ethical leadership. And, this leadership is not only concerned with the outcome but the processes, paying attention to moral standards and social responsibility too.

The Ethical Leadership's role in human resource management (HR) is crucial nowadays since HR is the most critical resource of any organization. Ethical leaders cultivate a constructive organizational culture and boost motivation while fostering an environment that encourages collaboration and innovation. Adopting ethical leadership helps to minimize conflicts, enhance employee commitment within the organization, and improve organizational image and public perception.

Furthermore, ethical leadership assists in addressing the moral issues that come up in relation to HR management, such as discrimination, exploitation, and injustice. Through ethics, leaders are able to resolve organizational concerns in a better and more equitable manner; thus, fostering improvement in performance at all levels of the organization. In this sense, knowing and applying the doctrines of ethical leadership facilitates the formation of an enduring and responsive organization.

As a branch of management, Human Resources (HR) focuses on ethical leadership in the context of developing an organization's ethical culture. Today, where there is greater scrutiny and even greater expectation of ethical conduct of businesses, leaders have to assume the critical role of custodians of ethical frameworks within the organization. Leaders don't just manage employees; they profoundly control perceptions and conduct regarding ethics with the use of standard policies and daily practices. If an HR leader overlooks ethical issues and their implications, it could trigger an erosion of trust, a toxic culture, and consequential unethical behavior that undermines a firm's reputation. For that reason, it is very important to find out how Ethical Leadership functions and what its impacts are.

This study will explore the extent of the implementation of ethical leadership in the Samarinda City Government environment. As is known, the Samarinda City Government is currently carrying out massive development in various aspects. The success or failure of the implementation of this development will depend greatly on the leadership pattern implemented in the Samarinda City

The Importance of Ethical Leadership in Human Resources Management and its Relationship to Employee Ethical Behavior (Case Study of Human Resource Management in Samarinda City Government)

Government environment. Especially specifically, how the leadership pattern is implemented in human resource management, because the development process will involve all potential human resources, which in this case is the State Civil Apparatus (ASN) in the Samarinda City Government environment.

This study adopts Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory as the primary framework to understand the mechanism of ethical leadership influence in human resource management. This theory suggests that individuals, including employees, learn appropriate behavior through observation and imitation of models, especially authority figures such as leaders. Ethical leaders serve as role models whose actions are observed and replicated. Through the processes of modeling, indirect reinforcement, and social norm formation, leadership actively shapes standards of ethical behavior. Therefore, this study aims to empirically investigate the relationship between employees' perceptions of ethical leadership in human resource management and their ethical behavior.

To achieve these objectives, this study uses a quantitative approach with a cross-sectional correlational design. Data were collected through a questionnaire survey from 300 permanent employees in various organizations in Indonesia. The main variables measured were employee perceptions of Ethical Leadership (independent variable) and self-reported employee ethical behavior (dependent variable), controlling for relevant demographic variables. This study specifically tests the hypothesis of a positive relationship between Ethical Leadership and employee ethical behavior, as implied by Social Learning Theory, in order to provide empirical evidence on the importance of the role of HR leadership.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Ethical Leadership represents a leadership approach that relies on robust moral principles and ethical standards. Leaders with ethical principles show genuine integrity and honesty along with fairness and respect for others while expressing concern for their well-being. They take accountable actions while evaluating how their decisions affect all stakeholders. Ethical Leadership requires guiding through honest practices and fairness which includes attention to all stakeholder interests. (Brown & Treviño, 2006).

Ethical Leadership focuses on doing the right thing, even when it is difficult or unpopular. They create an organizational culture that encourages ethical behavior and punishes unethical behavior. (Ciulla, 2004).

Ethical leadership plays a crucial role within HR management since it establishes the core principles that define organizational policies and both employee behavior and organizational culture. Leaders who prioritize integrity and fairness alongside responsibility establish trust-filled work environments and increase employee engagement while reinforcing organizational cultures centered on ethical principles. (Luhar & Kurhade, 2025).

Experts have identified several key dimensions of Ethical Leadership, including:

- **Honesty and Integrity:** Ethical leaders demonstrate honesty and transparency throughout their actions. These individuals maintain their ethical standards without sacrificing them for personal benefits. (Brown et al., 2005)
- **Fairness:** Ethical leaders maintain fairness and equality for all individuals without discrimination based on race, religion, gender or social status. They create equal chances for success for all individuals and maintain respectful treatment toward everyone. (Treviño et al., 2000)
- **Respect:** Ethical leaders respect the rights and dignity of all people. They listen to others' opinions, value differences, and create an inclusive and supportive environment. (Kanungo, 2001)
- **Caring:** Ethical Leaders are concerned with the welfare of others. They are interested in creating a healthy work environment, free from stress and creating a safe platform for professional as well personal development of their employees. (Gilligan, 1982)
- **Accountability:** Ethical leaders take responsibility for their actions and their consequences. They admit their mistakes, apologize, and take steps to correct the situation. (Paine, 1994)
- **Role Model:** Ethical leaders lead by example. They demonstrate ethical behavior in all their actions and inspire others to do the same. (Kouzes & Posner, 2002)

Like It has been stated above that this study adopts the Social Learning Theory proposed by Albert Bandura as the main theoretical basis in this study. The described theory proposes that learning takes place socially by observing others and replicating their behavior through modeling. The behavior of individuals, particularly employees, develops through observation of others like authoritative figures within Human Resources (HR) who demonstrate appropriate and ethical conduct. The basic assumption of this theory is that most individual behavior is obtained from learning outcomes through observation of the behavior displayed by other individuals who serve as models. Thus, it is understood that ethical leadership is able to influence employees or followers if the leader can implement moral values as a moral identity and is able to provide an example/model for followers through reinforcement and observational opportunity. The basic reason for this theory is that people will learn through direct experience and also observation. (Robbins & Judge, 2007).

This theory asserts that behavior is learned from the environment through observational learning, making leadership actions crucial in setting ethical standards. The concept of modeling in Social Learning Theory becomes particularly relevant. It explains how ethical leadership serves as a salient role model for employees. Employees can replicate ethical behaviors when leaders set consistent

The Importance of Ethical Leadership in Human Resources Management and its Relationship to Employee Ethical Behavior (Case Study of Human Resource Management in Samarinda City Government)

examples through their ethical actions and decisions while emphasizing the significance of ethics. Employees follow this behavior learning process which requires them to pay attention to the leader, remember the actions, reproduce the actions they observed and find motivation to adopt these behaviors because of indirect reinforcement when leaders reward ethical behavior.

Vicarious reinforcement and punishment (Suyatno, et.al. 2023) are important mechanisms in Social Learning Theory that relate to ethical leadership in HR. Employees observe the consequences of their leaders' actions as well as the actions of their coworkers. When ethical behavior by a leader or colleague is rewarded or positively recognized, employees are more likely to adopt similar behavior (indirect reinforcement). Conversely, observing punishment or negative consequences for unethical behavior will deter employees from engaging in such behavior (indirect punishment), reinforcing the ethical norms espoused by HR leadership. Social Learning Theory can be linked to the development of an organizational ethical climate fostered by HR leadership. Ethical leaders, through their actions and communications as described by the theory, contribute significantly to shaping employee perceptions of acceptable behavior within the organization. Leaders reinforce the principles of Social Learning Theory through continuous modeling of ethical conduct combined with explicit ethical standards and accountability mechanisms that drives the embedding of ethical dimensions in daily practices, processes of decision making at all levels. To sum up, Social Learning Theory when applied in the area of Ethical Leadership in HR function means that being ethical is more than just having ethical traits it is living trait and reenforcing that ethic behaviors. Leaders, acting as primary social models, significantly influence employees' ethical attitudes and behaviors through observational learning, modeling, and managing consequences. Therefore, the theory provides a powerful framework for understanding how leaders can effectively promote and instill ethical practices throughout an organization in order to increase ethical behavior.

Based on the theoretical basis that has been described above, the theoretical framework in this research is schematically as follows:

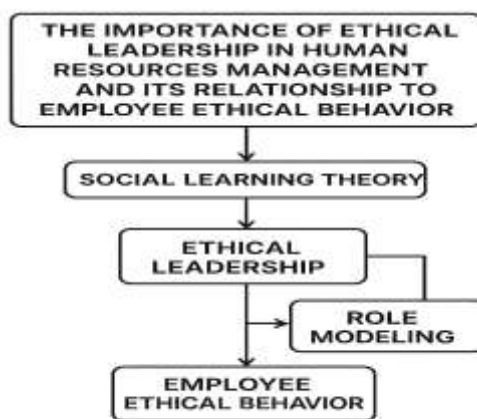


Figure-1. Theoretical Framework

III. METHODS

This study adopts a quantitative approach to investigate the relationship between employees' perceptions of ethical leadership in Human Resource (HR) management and their ethical behavior in the workplace. The research design used is correlational, aimed at identifying and measuring the strength and direction of the relationship between the Ethical Leadership variable (as an independent variable) and employee ethical behavior (as a dependent variable). Data collection was conducted cross-sectionally, where data from participants were collected at a certain point in time. This approach was chosen because of its efficiency in collecting data from a relatively large sample and its ability to describe the associations between variables as they exist in the organizational context when the research was conducted.

The independent variable in this study is Ethical Leadership, which is operationalized based on employee perceptions of the extent to which leaders demonstrate ethical behavior, communicate ethical expectations, and consistently apply ethical standards, in line with the modeling concept in Social Learning Theory. The dependent variable is employee ethical behavior, measured through self-report or peer assessment of adherence to the code of ethics, honesty, and integrity in daily work. Several control variables such as employee age, tenure, type of job, and size of organization will be measured and included in the analysis to control for their potential influence on the relationship between Ethical Leadership and employee ethical behavior.

Meanwhile, the target sample size was set at 300 respondents. This number was determined based on considerations of adequate statistical power to detect a statistically significant correlation between the Ethical Leadership variable and employee ethical behavior, even after controlling for demographic variables. This calculation assumes a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$ and a power of 0.80 to detect a medium effect size.

The Importance of Ethical Leadership in Human Resources Management and its Relationship to Employee Ethical Behavior (Case Study of Human Resource Management in Samarinda City Government)

Primary data collection in this study will be conducted through the distribution of structured questionnaires to predetermined samples. This questionnaire is designed to measure employee perceptions of ethical leadership, their own ethical behavior in the workplace, and relevant demographic data as control variables. The use of questionnaires allows for the collection of standardized data from a large number of respondents efficiently. The questionnaire will be presented in an online format using a digital survey platform to facilitate distribution and completion, but a printed questionnaire option is also provided to accommodate respondent preferences or limited access to technology in some participating organizational units.

To test the research hypothesis regarding the relationship between Ethical Leadership and employee ethical behavior, Pearson correlation analysis (r) will be used. This analysis will measure the strength and direction of the linear relationship between the perceived score of Ethical Leadership and the score of employee ethical behavior. Furthermore, multiple regression analysis will be applied to test the effect of Ethical Leadership on employee ethical behavior after controlling the effects of demographic variables (age, tenure, education, gender, type of job, size of organization). The level of significance (α) used for all hypothesis testing is set at $p < 0.05$.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents and Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables

Participants in this study amounted to 300 permanent employees who were successfully collected from various organizations in Indonesia, in accordance with the target sample that had been set. Demographic analysis showed a relatively balanced gender composition, with a proportion of men of 52% and women of 48%. The majority of respondents were in the productive age group, namely between 25 and 40 years (65%), indicating that the sample was dominated by employees in the middle stage of their careers. This age distribution is relevant to understanding the perceptions of the current main workforce.

The distribution of respondents' tenure shows quite wide variation, with the average tenure in the current organization being 6.7 years ($SD = 4.2$ years). The majority of respondents (58%) have between 3 and 10 years of tenure, indicating that they have sufficient experience to assess HR leadership and the ethical context in their organization. In terms of education level, the majority of respondents are Bachelor's (S1) graduates at 70%, followed by Diploma graduates (15%) and Postgraduate (10%), the rest are high school graduates or equivalent.

The sample of this study successfully covered the representation of three service sectors provided by the Samarinda City Government, namely: basic services (35%), administrative services (40%), and service services (25%). Representation from various sectors is important to increase the generalization of findings regarding the role of Ethical Leadership. In addition, the distribution of organizational unit sizes also varies, including medium-scale organizations (50-250 employees, 45%) and large-scale organizations (>250 employees, 55%). The diversity of service sector backgrounds and organizational sizes enriches the context of the analysis of the relationship between the variables studied in this study.

Independent variable Descriptive statistics perception of Ethical Leadership Mean on Likert scale ($N = 293$) was 3.85 Standard Deviation (SD) = 0.72 Since the mean score, (which is >2.5 on a 5 point Likert scale) employees in the study population show a positive average perception of ethic behavior of their organization leaders for this study. Nevertheless, the standard deviation tells the variability of those perceptions across respondents on how HR leadership is ethical.

Descriptive analysis on self-reported employee ethical behavior (dependent variable), mean $\pm$ SD (95% CI) is relatively high of 4.15($SD = 0.65$) in the results for the dependent variable on a 5-point Likert scale.

The high mean is indicative that most respondents profess to be ethically acting at work fairly frequently (4 points Likert scale; mean = 4.0). This notwithstanding, it gives an initial indication of the extent to which employees behave ethically and we should build on this by contemplating when trying to interpret the score for social desirability bias (self-reporting).

The Importance of Ethical Leadership in Human Resources Management and its Relationship to Employee Ethical Behavior (Case Study of Human Resource Management in Samarinda City Government)

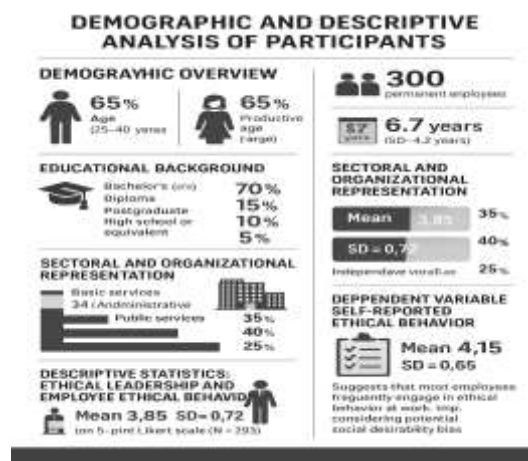


Figure-2. Analysis of Participant

2. Results of Reliability and Validity Tests of Research Instruments

Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.88 was the internal consistency for Ethical Leadership test (adapted from Ethical Leadership Scale; ELS). The present value is highly in excess of 0.70 for general acceptance, showing a very good level of internal consistency in questionnaire. This is suggesting that the items capturing perceptions of employee integrity, fairness in communication, ethical communication, and leader models together tap into one construct, reliability of this independent variable was supported.

Next, reliability analysis was conducted on the Employee Ethical Behavior scale measured through self-report. The calculation results showed a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.85. This figure also exceeds the minimum standard of 0.70, indicating that the items used to measure the frequency of employee ethical behavior, such as compliance with rules, honesty, and responsibility, have high internal consistency. The reliability of this scale is important to ensure that the measurement of the dependent variable in this study is reliable and stable between the items used.

The reliability test findings as a whole imply that the two main instruments in this study, Ethical Leadership Perception Scale and Employee Ethical Behavior Scale have a very good level of reliability (overall). By the way, high Cronbach's Alpha of 0.88 and 0.85 for two scales respectively acknowledge the internal consistency of measurement in research variables. Conceptually, these results give strong support to furthering data analysis to the level of testing hypotheses having high confidence in the questionnaire collected data quality.

Construct Validity of Instrument-constructed validity is another aspect to the instrument, that is we wanted to make sure that the scale is actually a valid measurement (vet worthy) for what we think it measures. Upon Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) of the reconfigured Ethical Leadership scale, the model fit the data well (e.g., CFI > 0.90, RMSEA < 0.08). It confirms that the factorial structure of the scale aligns well to the theoretical construct of ethical leadership.

Table-1. Reliability and Validity Test

Instrument	Cronbach's Alpha	Reliability Interpretation	Validity Evidence	Key Indicators
Ethical Leadership Scale (adapted ELS)	.88	Very good internal consistency	Construct validity supported through CFA	CFI > .90, RMSEA < .08
Employee Ethical Behavior Scale (self-report)	.85	Very good internal consistency	Construct validity supported through factor analysis and content validity (literature-based item development, pilot testing)	Meaningful item clustering

Both instruments demonstrated reliability exceeding the minimum threshold of .70. The Ethical Leadership Scale showed factorial validity through CFA, whereas the Employee Ethical Behavior Scale was supported through factor analysis and content validation. Collectively, the results confirm that the instruments are reliable and valid for measuring the intended constructs.

3. Correlation Analysis between Perception of Ethical Leadership and Employee Ethical Behavior

In this study, how workers see their bosses' ethics was linked to how they act at work. We used the Pearson r to check this link. Study outcomes: The test showed a strong, positive tie ($r = 0.45$, $p < 0.001$). When workers think their HR leaders are good at ethics, they tend to show better work behavior. This link is not too weak or too strong, but it is important enough to note.

The link score of 0.45 shows a good, halfway strong tie between how we see Ethical Leadership and how workers act ethically. This good way backs the idea that when bosses are seen as honest, fair, and clear about right rules, workers often show better right acts.

The Importance of Ethical Leadership in Human Resources Management and its Relationship to Employee Ethical Behavior (Case Study of Human Resource Management in Samarinda City Government)

The strong stats proof ($p < 0.001$) makes us sure that this link we see is real and not just by luck, but it shows a steady trend in the group of studies looked at.

The link found fits with Bandura's idea, called Social Learning Theory. This idea says that people pick up ways to act by seeing and copying them, mainly from those in charge. Here, good leaders are key examples. Workers watch how these leaders act rightly and often start to act the same way. The strong link helps the thought that seeing good leaders helps shape good acts in workers through copying in the work area.

The not too strong link ($r = 0.45$) shows that Ethical Leadership matters, but it's not the only thing that shapes how workers act on what's right or wrong. Other things like the whole moral feel of the place, group push, rules of the firm, and the workers' own values also count. Yet, this link still puts a light on how big a part Ethical Leadership has in why workers in this study act the way they do on ethics.



Figure-3. Relationship Between Variables

4. Regression Analysis of the Influence of Ethical Leadership on Employee Ethical Behavior

The findings from detailed testing show that the way we look at Ethical Leadership has a big effect on how workers act ethically. This was proven after we took into account different personal details of each worker. The numbers show this effect is real and strong ($F(7, 292) = 16.82, p < 0.001$). This test could make clear about 28.7% (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.287$) of why workers do what they do in terms of ethics. This amount of clarity shows that Ethical Leadership, when mixed with other key details, helps us a lot to see why workers act right or wrong at their job.

More specifically, the coefficient from the regression results demonstrate that perception of Ethical Leadership yields significant and positive effect on employee ethical behavior ($\beta = 0.42, p < 0.001$). The beta coefficient is positive that suggests the more employees perceive of their leader's Ethical behavior, the higher rate of ethical behavior they do report. The results of this are still significant when the effects of control variables (age, length of tenure, gender, education level, type of job held, size firm on board) were accounted for in the analysis model.

This result goes well with Bandura's Social Learning Theory, which is the base of this study. The big impact of Ethical Leadership ($\beta = 0.42$) backs up the thought that leaders are role models whose actions are seen and copied by workers. When leaders always show and talk about ethical rules, this really helps push workers to take on the same actions by watching and learning. This highlights how key it is to model good behavior to build an ethical feel in a group.

When we look at the control parts in the study, we see that most things about people do not change how workers act in right or wrong ways when we check at the $p < 0.05$ point. Only the time spent at the job ($\beta = 0.11, p < 0.05$) does matter. A bit more time on the job means they act a bit more right. Even so, the impact of a Good Leader in being right or wrong is still way bigger than the other parts we checked in this study.

Table-2. Summary of Findings: Ethical Leadership & Employee Ethical Behavior

Aspect	Key Findings	Statistical Evidence	Interpretation
Overall Effect	Ethical Leadership strongly influences employee ethical behavior.	$F(7, 292) = 16.82, p < 0.001$; Adjusted $R^2 = 0.287$	About 28.7% of employee ethical behavior can be explained by Ethical Leadership + control variables.

The Importance of Ethical Leadership in Human Resources Management and its Relationship to Employee Ethical Behavior (Case Study of Human Resource Management in Samarinda City Government)

Aspect	Key Findings	Statistical Evidence	Interpretation
Main Predictor	Perception of Ethical Leadership	$\beta = 0.42, p < 0.001$	Positive effect: higher perception of leader's ethics $\rightarrow$ higher employee ethical behavior.
Control Variables	Most personal factors (age, gender, education, job type, firm size) were not significant .	$p > 0.05$	These variables do not meaningfully affect ethical behavior.
Significant Control	Tenure (length of time in job)	$\beta = 0.11, p < 0.05$	Longer tenure slightly increases ethical behavior, but effect is weaker than leadership.
Theoretical Support	Bandura's Social Learning Theory	Leaders as role models	Employees learn ethical behavior by observing and imitating ethical leaders.
Key Insight	Ethical Leadership is a much stronger predictor than demographics or tenure.	$\beta = 0.42$ vs. $\beta = 0.11$	Modeling ethical behavior is essential for building an ethical workplace.

On the whole, the data from this study show a strong, real link between good moral lead roles in HR handling and the making of right work acts in staff. After noting key details like age and gender, the proof still stands strong, backing the main guess. This tells us that it's key for groups to work on and push for strong moral lead roles as a top plan. Doing this can lift the level of work morals at the place where people work.

5. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The results of this study back up the importance of Social Learning Theory in showing how Ethical Leadership links to how workers act in terms of ethics. The clear link and big impact found match well with the key idea of Bandura's theory that people pick up ways from watching others. Leaders, as top figures in a work setting, act as main models whose actions are seen and may be copied by workers, more so about the ethics rules wanted in the business world.

In Social Learning Theory, the idea of modeling is key to making sense of these results. When leaders always show honesty, fairness, and right ways to talk, they give a good model of how to act for workers. This process, where workers watch, keep, and copy good behavior, shows why good views of Ethical Leadership are closely linked with workers saying they behave ethically. Leaders make norms with what they do, not just with rules on paper.

Social Learning Theory shows us how people learn by seeing others get rewards or punishments. Workers not only watch what their bosses do, but also what happens to them or other coworkers when they act right or wrong. If leaders clearly give rewards for good acts and punish bad ones, it makes people learn by watching. This helps workers pick up good habits and stay away from bad ones. Also, the results show that Ethical Leadership helps make an organization's good ethics by social learning. Leaders who always act right and use fair ethical rules help to make a common view among workers on what actions are okay and praised. This mood, made by good leaders, turns into a social space that backs up the use of good values in the day-to-day work of the workers.

In real use, this work shows how key it is for groups to put first the building of good lead ways in HR handling. This means not just picking heads who are honest, but also giving them non-stop teaching on how to make good choices and how to share good rules. By using the thoughts of Social Learning thought, groups can help their leaders really bring in a way of good acts and boost good ways in all team members all the time.

V. CONCLUSION

This study clearly shows a strong link between how workers see their leaders' ethics and how they act in their jobs. The data ties these ideas with a fair strength ($r=0.45, p<0.001$), and this link gets even clearer when we look at more data ($\beta=0.42, p<0.001$). This proves that ethical leadership makes a big difference, even when we think about different ages and backgrounds of the workers. These results meet the goal of the research by showing clear facts on how key ethical leadership is in HR in making workers act right, no matter where they work.

These results back up Bandura's Social Learning Theory well. They show that bosses seen as good do act as key examples. When workers see and copy their acts, it fits with the idea of modeling. The big impact of being a good leader means that watching and soft rewards matter a lot in spreading good rules. So, good leaders help form what people think is right and wrong, and this helps make a good moral air at work by way of social learning.

The real use of this study shows that it is key for groups to put getting good, true leaders first in managing people. This means picking leaders with care and keeping them learning about honesty, how to make right choices, and how to share true rules. With leaders who always act right as their examples, groups can really bring in a way of being right and get workers to act right too. But, the limits of the study's design say that we need more long-term studies to look closely into how true leadership causes workers to act rightly.

The Importance of Ethical Leadership in Human Resources Management and its Relationship to Employee Ethical Behavior (Case Study of Human Resource Management in Samarinda City Government)

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