



## Developing employees' trust in management through ethical leadership

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### ABSTRACT

The study aimed to explore the impact of ethical leadership on the level of trust employees place in their management and administrators. To substantiate the theoretical framework, an extensive review of relevant literature was conducted. Employing an assessment and correlational research design, the study encompassed the employee population of the Divine Word College of Laoag through a comprehensive surveying process. The data collection instruments comprised rigorously validated questionnaires sourced from reputable studies by Yukl et al. (2013) and Seok et al. (2015).

The findings revealed a notably high perception of ethical leadership and a strong level of trust among employees towards management. Moreover, the correlation coefficient analysis indicated a significant and positive relationship between ethical leadership and employees' trust in management.

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## Introduction

Managing an organization involves a range of skills, encompassing not just hard skills but also soft skills like fostering strong relationships with colleagues and management. Developing these soft skills is crucial for effective management. Central to these relationships is the foundation of trust. Smith (2019) notes that a lack of trust can harm the workplace severely, leading to dysfunction. Studies by Ning and Jin (2009), Botwe et al. (2016), Brown et al. (2015), Thielsch et al. (2018), Rahayuningsih (2019), and Joo et al. (2022) highlight the positive effects of trust on performance, communication, job satisfaction, and organizational behavior. Conversely, a deficit of trust, as noted by Smith (2019) and Thielsch et al. (2018), leads to dysfunctional and strained relationships, increased turnover intention,

communication breakdown, and work disengagement.

Building organizational trust is fundamental to successful leadership, involving trust between leaders and employees and among peers. Leaders play a pivotal role in fostering this trust, with studies by Seok et al. (2015), Norman et al. (2010), Farmanesh and Zargar (2023), and Islam et al. (2020) emphasizing the importance of competence, positivity, integrity, and transparency in leaders. Ethical leadership, as suggested by Javed et al. (2018) and Zhang et al. (2018), significantly influences employees' trust, prompting investigations into its impact on trust levels within different organizational settings.

The current research focuses on assessing the level of ethical leadership and its effect on employees' trust in management, prompted by observations that management often overlooks the significance of ethical leadership and trust within the organization. The study's structure comprises an introduction, literature review discussing relevant theories, research methodology detailing the design and instruments, data presentation and analysis, results, implications, and a conclusion.

## ***Literature review***

### ***The concept of leadership and management***

The confusion between leadership and management often leads individuals to misuse these terms interchangeably. This confusion impacts behavior and roles within a workplace, affecting productivity and relationships. Distinguishing between the two is crucial. Leadership involves providing a vision, and implementing it through collaboration and empowerment, while management focuses on planning, organizing, and controlling to achieve set objectives (Abun, 2018).

Authors define leadership in various ways: from providing vision and direction (Bennis & Nanus, 1985), shaping, and sharing a vision (Handy, 1993), to establishing direction and motivating individuals (Conger, 1992). These definitions emphasize the leader's role in setting long-term direction and implementing it through collaboration and empowerment (Bennis & Nanus, 1985).

Similarly, management is defined diversely. Stoner (1995) sees it as the process of planning, organizing, leading, and controlling organizational efforts, while Koontz and Weihrich (1988) highlight getting things done through organized groups. Management involves planning, organizing, leading, and controlling work toward achieving organizational goals (Stoner, 1995), utilizing resources, and influencing human action for goal achievement (Fayol, 1984; Haimann & Scott, 1970).

The distinction between leadership and management is encapsulated in the notion that managers do things right while leaders do the right things (Bennis & Nanus, 1985). Managers focus on efficient operations, while leaders drive change by creating a vision and empowering others to achieve it. Both involve working with people and influencing them but with different emphases (Wajdi, 2017; Liphadzi et al., 2017).

Characteristics of effective leadership include having a clear vision, inspiring others, leading by example, stimulating ideas, and making changes (Boynton, 2016). Baker (2014) proposes a leadership/management continuum based on vision, strategy, operations, and tactics, where leaders create a shared vision while management translates strategies into operations.

### ***Ethical leadership and its dimensions to be measured***

The effectiveness of a leader extends beyond knowledge, skills, and financial capital; ethical behavior is equally crucial (Yukl, et al., 2013). However, defining ethical leadership varies among authors. Kanungo (2001) and Brown, Trevino, and Harrison (2005) emphasize ethical behavior's positive impact, focusing on good effects on others, integrity, fair treatment, and promoting ethical conduct. Ethical leaders serve as role models, guiding and rewarding ethical behavior (Brown, et al., 2005; Trevino, et al., 2003).

Dimensions of ethical leadership proposed by various authors (Kalshoven, et al, 2011, Wulumbawa, 2008, Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006, Craig and Gustafson,1998) diverge, creating conceptual confusion. De Hoogh and Den Hartog (2008) expanded dimensions to seven, including fairness, power sharing, role clarification, people orientation, ethical guidance, integrity, and concern for sustainability. However, Yukl, et al. (2011) and Yukl, et al. (2013) critiqued these dimensions, highlighting only three as relevant: fairness, integrity, and ethical guidance. They suggest a focus on honesty, consistency, ethical communication, fairness, altruism, and ethical guidance for accurate measurement.

Yukl, et al. (2006) developed a unidimensional Ethical Leadership Questionnaire (ELQ) encompassing honesty, integrity, fairness, altruism, consistency of behavior, ethical communication, and providing ethical guidance, consolidating relevant dimensions found in previous studies. They argue against a multidimensional approach and recommend a more focused measure for ethical leadership.

In agreement with Yukl, et al. (2013), the current study adopts the unidimensional Ethical Leadership Questionnaire by Yukl, et al. (2006), acknowledging its concise representation of relevant dimensions of ethical leadership. The effectiveness of a leader extends beyond knowledge, skills, and financial capital; ethical behavior is equally crucial (Yukl, et al., 2013). However, defining ethical leadership varies among authors. Kanungo (2001) and Brown, Trevino, and Harrison (2005) emphasize ethical behavior's positive impact, focusing on good effects on others, integrity, fair treatment, and promoting ethical conduct. Ethical leaders serve as role models, guiding and rewarding ethical behavior (Brown, et al., 2005; Trevino, et al., 2003).

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### ***The effect of ethical leadership on the organization***

Numerous studies explore the impact of ethical leadership on organizational outcomes. Bhatti et al. (2021) confirm that ethical leadership influences project success through trust and knowledge sharing. Ashfaq et al. (2021) and Chinwe et al. (2017) highlight how ethical leadership affects employee work engagement mediated by self-efficacy and organizational commitment. Similar findings by Malik et al. (2016) and Nauman and Qamar (2018) support the idea that ethical leadership enhances employee performance and productivity.

Qing et al. (2020) and Yozgat and Mesikiran (2016) echo this positive correlation, linking ethical leadership to job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Kim and Brymer (2011) as well as Guo (2022) emphasize how ethical leadership influences manager satisfaction, commitment, and firm performance. Rantika and Yustina (2017) reveal a connection between ethical leadership and employee well-being, mediated by psychological empowerment.

Conversely, studies like Schyns and Schilling (2013) show the detrimental impact of destructive leadership on counterproductive employee behavior. This behavior, noted by Shen & Lei (2022), Sypniewska (2020), and Bagyo (2018), has negative consequences for organizations, employees, and stakeholders. Bagyo (2018) specifically links counterproductive behavior to reduced employee engagement and performance, while Kilic and Gonsel (2019) emphasize how poor leadership diminishes workplace performance and productivity, impacting employee behavior and abilities.

### ***The concept of interpersonal trust collective trust***

Understanding trust involves recognizing its various dimensions. Definitions from sources like Merriam-Webster and McLeod (2020) align in describing trust as reliance on someone's competence and reliability. Trustworthiness, distinct from trust, embodies the qualities that make an individual trustworthy.

Trust, as Mishra (1996) explains, involves vulnerability based on belief in another's competence, openness, concern, and reliability. It's not solely about competence but also about honesty and the absence of harm. Such trust is established through proven competence, honesty, and reliability.

In interpersonal relations, trust unfolds in cognitive and affective dimensions (McAllister, 1995). Cognitive trust stems from rational reasons and consistency in behavior and words. Affective trust

evolves from emotional involvement developed over time. Trust in workplace teams fosters cooperation, enabling open communication and acceptance of mistakes within a safe environment (Edmondson, 1999). It encompasses both cognitive and affective dimensions, crucial for effective teamwork (Jones & George, 1998; Erdem & Ozen, 2003).

Management faces the challenge of fostering collective trust, an organizational perspective that complements interpersonal trust (Rousseau et al., 1998). Collective trust emerges from shared perceptions and affect about trustworthiness rooted in multiple social exchanges within a group (Forsyth et al., 2015).

Building a culture of trust involves providing credible evidence for decision-making (Bucero, 2012). Collective trust impacts organizational effectiveness (Holm & Nystedt, 2010; Gray, 2016), significantly influencing school effectiveness in contexts like that of teachers (Tarter & Hoy, 2004; Hoy et al., 1992).

### ***The importance of interpersonal and collective trust on the organizational outcomes***

Interpersonal trust and collective trust significantly impact organizational dynamics. While trust lacks a universally agreed-upon definition, it fundamentally involves believing in someone or a group's reliability (Gambetta, 1988). Interpersonal trust refers to vulnerability and belief in another individual (Ma et al., 2019), which, when shared collectively, becomes organizational and sociological (Lewis & Weigert, 1985).

Management is advised to cultivate both interpersonal and collective trust for enhanced performance (Yuan et al., 2021). Research demonstrates the influence of interpersonal trust on workgroup performance and job satisfaction. Dirks (1999) highlighted trust's motivational impact on work processes, while Bakiev (2013) and Ugwu and Maduagwu (2018) found a significant correlation between interpersonal trust and workgroup performance. Interpersonal trust extends beyond job satisfaction, affecting decision-making, feedback receptiveness, and employee empowerment (Guinot et al., 2014; Ul Hassan et al., 2012), suggesting trust-building practices to boost productivity and organizational commitment (Six, 2007).

Developing interpersonal trust involves strategies like competency enhancement, team interdependence, and group rewards, fostering trust-based teams that drive cooperation and organizational behavior (Bulinska-Stangrecka & Bagienska, 2019; Asamani, 2015).

Similarly, collective trust significantly influences individual and organizational performance. Studies indicate that collective trust fosters high-responsibility norms among employees, improving customer service and sales performance (Deutsch- Salamon & Robinson, 2011; 2008).

It influences team performance and organizational effectiveness, highlighting the importance of nurturing trust climates within organizations for favorable outcomes (Morrisette & Kisamore, 2019;

Gray, 2016; Dirks & Ferrin, 2001). Improving workplace trust emerges as a crucial means to enhance organizational performance (Buenaventura-Vera & Gudziol-Vidal, 2020).

### ***Employees' trust in management***

Employees' trust in management, also known as organizational trust, is the collective faith employees have in the reliability, honesty, and fairness of management (Wang et al., 2018). Trust is defined as employees' willingness to align their attitudes and actions with organizational leaders (Mayer et al., 1995). It is built over time through consistent and respectful behavior that benefits employees (Taylor, 1989, in Baird & St-Amand, 1995).

Collective trust in management yields positive outcomes. Studies by Deutsch-Salamon and Robinson (2008, 2011) and Dirks and Ferrin (2001) emphasize the impact on the development of high-responsibility norms and accountability, influencing organizational performance. Research by Amoah-Binfoh et al. (2016) and Rahman et al. (2021) highlights the connection between low trust, managerial practices, and overall performance.

Seok et al. (2014) identified factors contributing to employee trust: status privileges, competency, benevolence, worker- leader relationships, and department head integrity. In their subsequent study, Seok et al. (2015) emphasized competency, integrity, and work relationships as crucial elements affecting trust. Hill and Lineback (2019) argue that trust is built on managerial competency, technical knowledge, operational expertise, and political acumen. Additionally, trust is influenced by character, integrity, and good intentions (Covey, 2009).

### ***Conceptual framework***

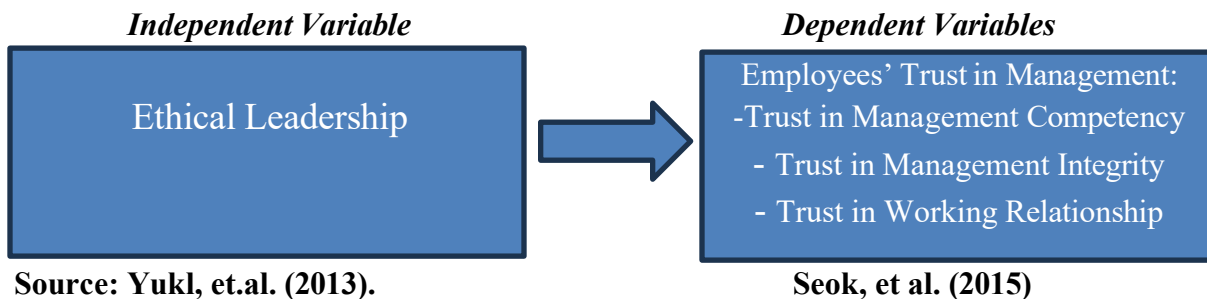


Figure 1: the conceptual framework explains the correlation between ethical leadership and employees' trust in management. Ethical leadership affects the trust of employees

### ***Statement of the problems***

The study examined the effect of ethical leadership on the employees' trust in the management. It specifically seeks to answer the following questions:

- 1. What is the ethical leadership of administrators?**
- 2. What is the employees' trust in management in terms of:**

- a. **trust in management competency;**
- b. **trust in management integrity;**
- c. **Trust in a working relationship?**

### **3. Is there a relationship between ethical leadership and employees' trust in management?**

#### ***Hypothesis***

Studies have shown that ethical leadership affects the organization. It establishes a positive environment with productive relationships among the individuals, teams, and the overall organization. Establishing an ethical relationship with these groups will produce positive outcomes (Buye, 2021) and it also affects the job commitment and job satisfaction of the employees (Elci, et al. 2012) and behavioral changes of the employees (Yang, 2022). Based on these findings, the current study hypothesizes that ethical leadership affects employees' trust in management.

#### ***Scope and delimitation of the study***

The study limits its investigation to the effect of ethical leadership on the employees' trust related to three dimensions namely trust in management competency, trust in management integrity and trust in working relationships. The respondents are taken from all employees of the Divine Word College of Laoag, Ilocos Norte.

#### ***Research methodology***

The foundation of any scientific research hinges on a well-chosen research methodology. This study meticulously detailed its research design, data gathering tools, target population, study location, data collection methods, and statistical data analysis techniques to ensure precision and reliability.

#### ***Research design***

The study adopted a quantitative approach, employing a descriptive and correlational research design. Descriptive research focuses on characterizing phenomena without delving into causation, aiming to outline the "what" rather than the "why" of the subject being studied (Baht, 2020). This method was utilized to gauge the level of ethical leadership and its impact on individual work performance among employees at Divine Word College of Laoag Ilocos Region. It serves to profile, detail frequency distributions, and describe characteristics of individuals, situations, or relationship variables, essentially capturing the essence of "what is" about the data (Ariola, 2006, as cited by Abun, 2021).

#### ***The locale of the study***

The locale of the study was Divine Word College of Laoag. The college is in the province of Ilocos Norte.

#### ***Population***

The population of the study was composed of all employees and faculty of Divine Word College of Laoag. The total enumeration sampling was used and 132 faculty and employees were taken as respondents of the study.

### ***Data gathering instruments***

The study adopted validated questionnaires of Yukl, et al. (2013) on ethical leadership and Sheok, et al. (2015) on employees' trust in management.

### ***Data gathering procedures***

During data collection, the researcher sought permission from the president of the college to distribute the questionnaires on-site. They personally met with the president and employees to request their participation in answering the questionnaires. Retrieval of the completed questionnaires was coordinated between the President's representative, the researcher, and the college faculty and employees.

### ***Ethics review***

The study does not involve human subjects. Nonetheless, the researcher followed appropriate procedures prior to distribution of questionnaires

### ***Statistical treatment of data***

Aligned with the study's descriptive and correlational design, both descriptive and inferential statistics were employed. The weighted mean gauged the level of ethical leadership and employees' trust in management, while Pearson r measured the correlation between ethical leadership and employees' trust.

The following ranges of values with their descriptive interpretation will be used:

<b><i>Statistical Range Descriptive Interpretation</i></b>	
<i>4.21-5.00</i>	<i>Strongly agree/Very High</i>
<i>3.41-4.20</i>	<i>Agree/High</i>
<i>2.61-3.40</i>	<i>Somewhat agree/Moderate</i>
<i>1.81-2.60</i>	<i>Disagree/Low</i>
<i>1.00-1.80</i>	<i>Strongly disagree/Very Low</i>

### ***Data presentation and analysis***

The data are presented in the tables and follow the sequence of the statement of the problems and followed by analysis.

**Problem 1: What is the ethical leadership of administrators?**

**Table 1: Ethical leadership of administrators**

<i>Indicators: Ethical Leadership</i>	<b>Weighted Mean</b>	<b>Descriptive Interpretation</b>
1. Shows a strong concern for ethical and moral values	3.99	H
2. Communicates clear ethical standards for members.	3.96	H
3. Sets an example of ethical behaviour in his/her decisions and actions	3.87	H
4. Is honest and can be trusted to tell the truth	4.06	H
5. Insists on doing what is fair and ethical even when it is not easy	4.02	H
6. Talks about the importance of honesty and integrity	4.02	H
7. Can be trusted to carry out promises and commitments.	3.99	H
8. Holds members accountable for using ethical practices in their work	3.96	H
<b>Composite Mean</b>	<b>3.98</b>	<b>H</b>

Source: Yukl, et al., (2013).

Legend:

**Range of Mean Values Descriptive Interpretation**

4.21 - 5.00	strongly agree/Very High/VH
3.41 - 4.20	Agree/High/H
2.61 - 3.40	somewhat agree/Moderate/SWM
1.81 - 2.60	Disagree/Low/L
1.00 - 1.80	strongly disagree/Very low/VL

The data shows administrators' ethical leadership got an overall mean rating of 3.98, indicating an "agree/high" level. This means it's neither very low nor moderate, but rather high. Even individually, each indicator rates at this "agree/high" level. Past studies suggest that strong ethical leadership encourages good employee behavior, enhances organizational commitment and performance (Guo, 2022; Malik et al., 2016; Bahadori et al., 2021). It also influences organizational identity, seen in employees feeling free to share ideas, discuss issues, and boosts creativity (Hosseini & Ferreira, 2023).

**Problem 2: What is the employees' trust in management/administrators?**

**Table 2: Employees' trust in management in terms of management competency.**

<i>Indicators: Employees trust in management competency</i>	<b>Weighted Mean</b>	<b>Descriptive Interpretation</b>
1. My head of department shows confidence in task performance and administration	4.05	H
2. The ability of the department head is undeniable	4.00	H
3. My department head brings development to the department	4.02	H
4. I have confidence in the ability of my department head	4.04	H
5. My department head is my source of reference	3.98	H
6. My department head can make quick decisions	4.02	H
7. My department head is good at administration	4.02	H
8. My department head has a convincing appearance.	4.00	H
9. My department head has great experience in performing his/her tasks.	4.04	H
10. My department head is capable of delegating tasks to his/her employees.	4.04	H
<b>Composite Mean</b>	<b>4.02</b>	<b>H</b>

Source: Source: Seok, et al. (2015)

The data highlights that overall; employees’ trust in management regarding their competency achieved a composite mean rating of 4.02, indicating an "agree/high" level. This suggests that the trust isn't very low or moderate but rather high. Even when considered individually, all indicators maintain this "agree/high" rating. Hall (2021) emphasized that trust in management drives productivity, fosters collaboration, creativity, innovation, and aids conflict resolution. Giraldo (2021) also suggested a positive connection between trust in management and managerial competencies, stressing the need for management to develop and exhibit these competencies to earn employees' trust.

**Table 3: Employees’ trust in management in terms of integrity**

<b>Indicators: Trust in Management in terms of Integrity</b>	<b>Weighted Mean</b>	<b>Descriptive Interpretation</b>
1. My department head is very sincere in performing tasks and in making decisions for the department.	4.02	H
2. My department head is a disciplined person in task performance and administration	4.04	H
3. I like the ethical values department head	4.12	H
4. My department head has high integrity.	4.10	H
5. My department head always shows a good example to his/her employees	4.02	H
6. My department head is a person with high principles	4.06	H
7. The management department head is honest and truthful.	4.03	H
8. My department head respects his/her employees	4.00	H
<b>Composite Mean</b>	<b>4.04</b>	<b>H</b>

Source: Source: Seok, et al. (2015)

The data illustrates that overall, employees' trust in management's integrity scored a composite mean rating of 4.04, signaling an "agree/high" level. This suggests that management's integrity isn't very low, moderate, or very high but falls within the high range. Even when viewed separately, all indicators maintained the same "agree/high" rating. According to Simons (2002), leadership integrity instills followers with confidence and credibility. Amann and Stachowicz-Stanusch (2013) highlighted integrity as vital in creating people-focused organizations. Serrat (2017) stressed the role of managers in fostering integrity, as they serve as the architects of trust.

**Table 4: Trust in working relationship**

<b>Indicators: Trust in working relationship</b>	<b>Weighted Mean</b>	<b>Descriptive Interpretation</b>
1. My department head has good knowledge of my background	3.96	H
2. My department head spends time with his/her/her employees	4.06	H
3. My department head understands me well	3.98	H
My department head always discusses work-related issues with his/her employees.	4.03	H
<b>Composite Mean</b>	<b>4.00</b>	<b>H</b>
<b>Overall Mean Rating for Trust in Management</b>	<b>4.02</b>	<b>H</b>

Source: Source: Seok, et al. (2015).

The data in the table shows that overall; employees' trust in working relationships earned a composite

mean of 4.02, signaling an "agree/high" level. This rating indicates that trust in working relationships isn't very low, moderate, or very high but falls within the high range. When examined separately, each item received the same "agree/high" rating. Employees believe that their department head knows, understands, engages, and discusses work issues with them. Gerbasi et al. (2023) highlighted that workplace relationships significantly impact organizational achievement. Yan et al. (2021) noted that strong working relationships with leadership lead to energized, motivated, and focused employees dedicated to achieving goals.

**Problem 3: Is there a relationship between ethical leadership and employees' trust in management?**

**Table 3. Coefficients of correlation on the tests of relationships between ethical leadership and employees' trust in management (n=132)**

Employees' trust in management	Ethical leadership	
<b>Trust in Management Competency</b>	r	<b>.813**</b>
	(Sig. 2 -tailed)	.000
<b>Trust in Management Integrity</b>	r	<b>.788**</b>
	(Sig.2-tailed)	.000
<b>Trust in a Working Relationship</b>	r	<b>.740**</b>
	(Sig.2-tailed)	.000

\* Significant at .05 level of significance (2-tailed)

\*\* Significant at .01 level of significance (2-tailed)

The data shows a strong, positive correlation between ethical leadership and employees' trust in management competency, integrity, and working relationships. For every rise in ethical leadership, there is a parallel increase in trust across these aspects of management. Specifically:

***Ethical leadership and employees' trust in management competency***

The correlation coefficient of .813 suggests a strong, positive relationship between ethical leadership and employees' trust in management competency. This means that an increase in ethical leadership directly corresponds to an increase in trust in management competency, unit

***Ethical leadership and employees' trust in management integrity***

The correlation of .788 between ethical leadership and employees' trust in management integrity is highly significant, suggesting a strong, positive relationship. An increase in ethical leadership corresponds to increased trust in management integrity.

***Ethical leadership and employees' trust in a working relationship***

The correlation coefficient of .740 between ethical leadership and employees' trust in a working relationship indicates a highly significant, positive relationship. An increase in ethical leadership corresponds to a parallel increase in trust within working relationships.

## ***Results and discussion***

The study reveals a strong correlation between ethical leadership and employees' trust in management, underscoring the crucial role of ethical conduct in organizational success. Ethical leadership, defined by moral decision-making and integrity, significantly impacts employees' satisfaction and behavior (Moon & Jung, 2018; Abdullah et al., 2018; Freire & Bettencourt, 2020; Charoensap et al., 2019; Sarfraz et al., 2022). Conversely, unethical leadership leads to turnover, behavioral issues, and diminished well-being among employees (Smith et al., 2020; Bamberger & Bacharach, 2006; Fehr et al., 2019). Ethical leadership isn't merely a choice but a requisite for leaders aiming to advance organizational objectives (Imm, 2023; Terzieva, 2023; Brown & Mitchell, 2010; Resick et al., 2006).

## ***Conclusion***

The study aimed to assess how ethical leadership influences employees' trust in management. It discovered a strong correlation between high ethical leadership among administrators and trust in management among employees. This correlation confirms a significant relationship, affirming the study's hypothesis.

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