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Ethical leadership: A social learning perspective for construct development and testing

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Abstract

Leaders should be a key source of ethical guidance for employees. Yet, little empirical research focuses on an ethical dimension of leadership. We propose social learning theory as a theoretical basis for understanding ethical leadership and offer a constitutive definition of the ethical leadership construct. In seven interlocking studies, we investigate the viability and importance of this construct. We develop and test a new instrument to measure ethical leadership, examine the proposed connections of ethical leadership with other constructs in a nomological network, and demonstrate its predictive validity for important employee outcomes. Specifically, ethical leadership is related to consideration behavior, honesty, trust in the leader, interactional fairness, socialized charismatic leadership (as measured by the idealized influence dimension of transformational leadership), and abusive supervision, but is not subsumed by any of

these. Finally, ethical leadership predicts outcomes such as perceived effectiveness of leaders, followers'™ job satisfaction and dedication, and their willingness to report problems to management.



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Keywords

Leadership; Construct development; Ethics

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