

Optimizing the effects of ethical leadership in school on teachers' team cohesion and efficiency

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Abstract

Excellence in school leadership is related to the development and success of school education because school leadership is the heart of the school. The way a leader presents outstanding leadership and wise action in terms of school management innovation is an emerging educational issue worth discussing in the new century. For this study, 360 questionnaires were distributed to teachers in universities in Taiwan and collected by email. A total of 297 valid questionnaires were recovered, with a recovery rate of 83%. The results of the study showed that (1) a school leader's ethical leadership has a positive impact on team cohesion and efficiency on teachers, (2) a school leader with the ethical characteristics of integrity and honesty evokes mutual trust and concern among teachers to further identify themselves with the team and enhance team cohesiveness and efficiency, and (3) a school leader with the ethical characteristics of integrity and honesty evokes mutual support and collaboration among teachers who are show high willingness and collaboration acts to involve in team affairs. It is expected that the results of the current study can help school leaders conduct excellent and effective leadership so as to facilitate teachers' instruction, students' learning, and administrative operation as well as lead the school to create an educational impact and cope with educational competition in the new era.

Subject Classification: 91B42, 91B99, 91E30.

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1. Introduction

In the 21st century, countries around the world are committed to educational reform to promote overall national quality and national competitiveness. School leadership plays a critical role in educational reform. Excellence in school leadership is related to the development and success of school education because school leadership is the heart of the school. The way a leader presents outstanding leadership and wise action in terms of school management innovation is an emerging educational issue worth discussing in the new century. Throughout the entire work environment, the leader determines organizational goals and behaviors, as well as the factors that influence employees, such as goal setting, evaluation, and resources. Obviously, the leader plays a primary role in setting organizational goals. An effective leader is the critical factor in achieving organizational objectives, and a leader with excellent leadership skills is linked to the survival and development of a country. For this reason, a leader represents a great power and visible position for an organization. Education is the task of educating a person in a century. School leadership, as the core of school education, is conducted to ensure the quality of students' learning through school administration. A school leader must also take effective action to ensure a smarter school. The desire for school leadership is ubiquitous to the emphasis in education and mass society. In the pursuit of operational efficiency, both individual and team efforts in an organization are key factors in the promotion of competitiveness. The overall performance of a school requires individuals and teams to work in collaboration to achieve organizational objectives. In an era where teamwork is paramount, the willingness of individuals to contribute to the team and the cohesion of the team is a key factor in the overall performance of an organization. Previous research on leadership behavior and team cohesion focused on sports related fields and mainly studied transformational leadership and paternalistic leadership to test the effects on team cohesion. It is observed in this study that scholars used to define team cohesion as leaders' traits such as incentive, encouragement, and setting a good example. According to the description of ethical leaders in previous research, a leader should establish vision, concern about subordinates' demands, show empathy towards subordinates, listen to subordinates' voice, encourage morale, and awaken subordinates' potentials. Accordingly, this study explored the impact of school ethical leadership on teachers' team cohesion and efficiency [1]. with the expectation of helping school leaders in excellent and effective leadership

in order to improve teachers' instruction, students' learning, and administrative procedures as well as leading the school to make an impact and cope with educational competition in the new era.

2. Review of Literature

Zhao et al. [2] revealed that leadership behavior can effectively predict team cohesion. When an employee in a team perceives the leader's leadership behavior, it significantly affects the team's satisfaction and cohesion. In a team led by an excellent leader, employees exhibit better team cohesion because the leader promotes morale and sets consistent work goals [3]. Most previous research on leadership focused on transformational leadership and paternalistic leadership, but team cohesion cannot be simply explained by these two types of leadership behavior [4]. The previous literature explained that employees in an organization imitate the leader's behaviors to meet the moral standard. Therefore, a leader needs to present characteristics such as fairness, honesty, and consideration to become the object of imitation by others [5]. Accordingly, a leader should match back up his words with actions and keep his promises. An ethical leader possesses such characteristics to empower subordinates, help them become suitable leaders, awaken their potentials, and promote their value for self-development and encourage others' growth [6]. Therefore, this study hypothesized the following. Ethical leadership has significant and positive effects on team cohesion (H1).

Gan et al. [7] instructed that cohesion should be correlated with objectives; this cohesion with tasks can lead team members to accomplish objectives collaboratively and promote team efficiency [8]. In this case, a company, with a profit or cost-oriented business model, can strengthen the team's problem-solving ability and show the characteristics of a syncretic decision by focusing on efficiency and promoting cohesion; it was found as suitable for general work teams [9]. Even a general department team can set common objectives, with the help of team members' responsibility for the unit's performance; however, a task with higher dependency requires more collaboration among team members [10]. In this case, the effect of team cohesion on team efficiency seemed to be more important. Mehmood, Jian, and Akram [11] study revealed that a team with high cohesion shows better team efficiency. Previous research also considered that a team with high cohesion can lead the members involve in team affairs to a higher extend and show lower absenteeism tendency.

As a result, the team achieves high collaboration on the execution of team tasks, higher satisfaction among organizational members, and higher commitment to team objectives to promote efficiency. Accordingly, the following hypothesis was established in this study. Team cohesion has remarkable and positive effects on team efficiency (H2).:

To discuss from the perspective of educational members, Xiao and Cooke [12] suggested that ethical leaders were expected to provide feedback to team members based on the reliable information in the teamwork process. This specific behavior obviously enhanced employees' self-efficacy. Several research studies on ethical leadership also stated that ethical leaders can conduct activities to educate employees through large amount of construction modules, and employees can learn to do the job well by watching managers' work. These considerations revealed that employees' self-efficacy can be improved [13]. Zhu et al. [14] pointed out the correlations between ethical leadership and self-efficacy. Since team efficiency was considered as the collective belief of team members in the organizational capabilities and task completion. Accordingly, a team was described as a set of individuals, an ethical leader can support the whole team by supporting individuals. Therefore, an ethical leader can reinforce the whole team's efficiency by supporting self-efficacy and developing team members' potentials to collaboratively work toward the goals and further promote team efficiency [15]. Therefore, this study can propose the following hypotheses: Ethical leadership has significant and positive effects on team efficiency (H3).

3. Methodology

I. Operational definition

(1) Ethical leadership

Kim, Schuh, and Cai [16] proposed two characteristics of ethical leadership model: fair treatment of subordinates, and positive moral management. Such characteristics can be classified into two dimensions in this study.

1. **Moral manager:** An ethical leader encourages normative behavior and stops immoral behavior by exchanging ethical and moral ideas with subordinates while punishing the immoral behavior with subordinates.
2. **Personal moral:** An ethical leader exhibits the necessary characteristics, such as fairness and trust.

(2) Team cohesion

According to Hui et al. [17], three different but correlated dimensions are important for team development.

1. Overall task: When a team has high work cohesion, each team member spend effort toward the mutual objectives of the team.
2. Team maintenance: When a team presents high social cohesion, team members can be friendly to each other, like the other, and accept the other as a member of the team to develop good interpersonal relationships in the team.
3. Individual satisfaction: More communication, friendliness, and collaboration among members can have a great impact on members achieving team objectives more effectively with more satisfaction.

(3) Team efficacy

Following to Huang, Yuan, and Li, [18], this study uses a single dimension, with 8 items, to measure team efficiency.

II. Research object

For this study, 360 questionnaires were distributed to teachers in universities in Taiwan and collected by email. A total of 297 valid questionnaires were retrieved, with a retrieval rate of 83%.

4. Results

I. Reliability and validity analysis

As a result of the factor analysis, two factors as “moral manager” (eigenvalue=2.423, $\alpha=0.88$) and “personal moral” (eigenvalue=2.839, $\alpha=0.86$) were extracted under the ethical leadership. The cumulative covariance explained was found as 78.447%.

After factor analysis, three factor values were obtained. “overall task” (eigenvalue=3.277, $\alpha=0.87$), “team maintenance” (eigenvalue=2.142, $\alpha=0.89$), and “individual satisfaction” (eigenvalue=1.865, $\alpha=0.90$) were extracted under the construct team cohesion. The cumulative covariance explained achieved 75.212%.

A single factor structure was found for team efficiency (eigenvalue=4.375, $\alpha=0.93$) after the factor analysis. The cumulative covariance explained reached 86.938%.

II. Correlation analysis of ethical leadership and team cohesion

The results of analysis conducted to test H1 (Table 1) revealed significant effects of moral manager (Beta=0.206^{***}) and personal moral (Beta=0.227^{***}) on overall task, remarkable effects of moral manager (Beta=0.214^{***}) and personal moral (Beta=0.198^{**}) on team maintenance, as well as notable effects of moral manager (Beta=0.223^{***}) and personal moral (Beta=0.237^{***}) on individual satisfaction. Considering these it can be stated that H1 was supported.

Table 1
Analysis of ethical leadership to team cohesion

Dependent variable→	Team Cohesion					
Independent variable↓	Overall Task		Team Maintenance		Individual Satisfaction	
	Beta	P	Beta	P	Beta	P
Ethical leadership						
Moral manager	0.206	0.000 ^{***}	0.214	0.000 ^{***}	0.223	0.000 ^{***}
personal moral	0.227	0.000 ^{***}	0.198	0.002 ^{**}	0.237	0.000 ^{***}
F	25.433		31.527		36.317	
significance	0.000 ^{***}		0.000 ^{***}		0.000 ^{***}	
R ²	0.225		0.278		0.334	
adjusted R ²	0.202		0.259		0.312	

** p<0.01, *** p<0.001.

Data Source: This study compiled

III. Correlation analysis of ethical leadership, team efficiency, and team cohesion

(1) Correlation analysis of ethical leadership and team efficacy

The results of analysis conducted to test H3 (Table 2) showed significant effects of moral manager (Beta=0.238^{**}) and personal moral (Beta=0.251^{**}) on team efficacy. Therefore, H3 was supported.

(2) Correlation analysis of team cohesion and team efficacy

The results of analysis conducted to test H2 (Table 2) revealed remarkable effects of overall task (Beta=0.243^{**}), team maintenance (Beta=0.229^{**}), and individual satisfaction (Beta=0.216^{**}) on team efficacy. According to the results, it is safe to claim that H2 was supported.

Table 2
Analysis of ethical leadership and team cohesion to team efficacy

Dependent variable→	team efficacy			
Independent variable↓				
Ethical leadership	Beta	P	Beta	P
Moral manager	0.238	0.000***		
Personal moral	0.251	0.000***		
Team cohesion				
Overall task			0.243	0.000***
Team maintenance			0.229	0.000***
Individual satisfaction			0.216	0.000***
F	37.512		41.275	
Significance	0.000***		0.000***	
R2	0.362		0.388	
Adjusted R2	0.351		0.371	

*** p<0.001.

Data Source: This study compiled

5. Discussion

In conjunction with complicated technologies, an individual can hardly support the operation of a school, but requires teamwork to ensure better competitiveness of a school organization. Teachers engage in unregulated behavior in school organizations, such as actively supporting colleagues and focusing on the school organization, cohesion among teams is a major consideration. In this case, an organization should promote team cohesion to increase teachers' willingness to contribute to school organization automatically without rules and regulations. For instance, if school leaders often listen to and care about team members and encourage team members, teachers show better identification to the school organization, be more willing to exhibit certain behaviors without organizational regulations (e.g., voice behavior), and focus on the school organization without compromising harmony for their own benefit [15]. With harmonious team members, team cohesion can be enhanced to facilitate teachers' team commitment and promote team efficiency [14]. It was also revealed that the influence of school ethical leadership can be recognized by teachers in teams and it can provide clear vision and objectives to improve teachers' work enthusiasm. Teachers who perceive

such positive emotional climate will be glad to work in the workplace environment and happy to collaborate and interact with other colleagues to promote team cohesion. The promotion of member cohesion to a team can increase team efficiency and lead teachers to collaboratively work toward the objectives to reinforce team cohesion to the school and achieve higher team efficiency.

6. Conclusion

Based on the research findings, previous research on the relationship between leadership behavior and team cohesion focused on the transformational leadership and paternalistic leadership [4], and only discussed the influenced of sport teachers' ethical leadership behavior on athletics. This study, with ethical leadership as the argument, proves the positive effects of ethical leadership on team cohesion [3], [6], revealing that school leaders' ethical leadership behavior can positively affect teachers' team cohesion and efficiency. Obviously, a school leader with personal ethical characteristics of integrity and honesty can lead teachers to perceive mutual trust and care and further identify themselves with the team to improve team cohesion and efficiency. A school leader therefore should show the features of ethical leadership to facilitate the unity and identification among teachers and further promote school cohesion and efficiency. Research also discovered positive effects of team cohesion on team efficiency [10], [11]. In other words, high team cohesion in the operation process can form mutual aid and cooperation among teachers. Teachers who are more willing to show high collaboration on team relations can more easily receive high satisfaction in the completion of team tasks and show higher vision on team objectives to promote team efficiency. Previous studies also indicated that a team with high cohesion showed lower costs for communication and cooperation as well as worked with higher efficiency.

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