LEADERSHIP ETHICS IN PRACTICE: EMPLOYEES' EXPERIENCES OF INTEGRITY AND HYPOCRISY IN PUBLIC-SECTOR ORGANIZATIONS IN PAKISTAN

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Abstract:
This study explores the ethical dimensions of leadership in Pakistan's public-sector organizations, with a focus on how employees perceive and experience integrity and hypocrisy in leadership practices. It examines the gap between stated ethical values and actual behaviors, highlighting how inconsistencies influence employee trust, motivation, and organizational engagement. Using a qualitative research approach, data was collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns and themes. The findings reveal that while ethical leadership is recognized and valued in theory, its practical implementation is often undermined by favoritism, selective rule enforcement, and political interference. Organizations that fail to demonstrate ethical consistency risk weakening employee morale and fostering a culture of disengagement. In contrast, efforts to align leadership behavior with ethical principles contribute to stronger internal trust and institutional credibility. The study underscores the need for systemic reforms and employee-centered approaches to promote ethical leadership in the public sector.
Key words: Leadership, Ethics, Integrity, Hypocrisy, Organization

1. Introduction

As public-sector institutions in Pakistan face increasing pressure to deliver efficient services and maintain public trust, the ethical conduct of leadership has become more important than ever. Leadership ethics defined by principles such as honesty, fairness, accountability, and respect are foundational to how employees experience their organizational environment. While the presence of ethical leadership can inspire trust, motivation, and commitment among employees, the opposite hypocrisy or the gap between preached values and practiced behavior can lead to disillusionment, disengagement, and institutional decay. This study explores how employees working in Pakistan's public-sector organizations interpret and experience the realities of ethical leadership, particularly in relation to integrity and hypocrisy.

1.1 Ethical Leadership in Organizational Practice

Ethical leadership is not only about personal morality but also about the consistency between words and actions. Leaders are expected to model ethical behavior, treat employees fairly, and reinforce a culture of transparency and accountability. In theory, ethical leadership leads to stronger employee morale, better performance, and enhanced organizational legitimacy. In practice, however, especially in the context of public-sector institutions in Pakistan, the situation is far more complex.

Public-sector leaders are often caught in the crossfire of bureaucratic norms, political interference, and systemic inefficiencies. While they may publicly espouse ethical values such as merit, justice, and service they may simultaneously engage in favoritism, patronage, or manipulation of rules for personal or political gain. This duality creates confusion for employees, who struggle to reconcile the values communicated from the top with the behaviors they observe daily. The result is what scholars refer to as ethical dissonance, a disconnect that undermines employee trust and challenges the credibility of leadership.

1.2 The Socio-Political Landscape

Pakistan's public-sector landscape is marked by historical legacies, institutional rigidity, and ongoing political instability. Despite numerous administrative reform initiatives and anti-corruption campaigns, public institutions continue to suffer from low performance, weak accountability mechanisms, and a widespread perception of ethical decline. Leadership in this environment is often shaped less by merit and competence and more by political affiliation, seniority, or loyalty to certain power structures.

Employees working within such systems often observe a culture of *selective integrity*, where ethical standards are applied inconsistently. Those in leadership positions may demand commitment to public service values while themselves circumventing processes to serve personal interests. This culture not only demoralizes employees but also stifles innovation, suppresses whistle blowing, and fuels an organizational climate where survival often requires silence or complicity. In this setting, ethics become a contested domain one where employees must constantly navigate between principle and pragmatism.

1.3 Ethical Hypocrisy and Employee Experiences

One of the central concerns in public-sector leadership ethics is the phenomenon of ethical hypocrisy, where leaders present a virtuous image outwardly but behave contrary to those values in practice. For employees, ethical hypocrisy can be especially damaging. It creates confusion about what behaviors are truly valued, encourages double standards, and breeds cynicism. Employees who enter the workforce with a strong sense of moral purpose may quickly find themselves disillusioned, particularly if promotions and rewards appear to be driven more by connections than by performance or integrity. This study focuses on how employees respond to these contradictions. Some may choose to withdraw emotionally from their work, others may resist quietly or speak out, while many may normalize or rationalize unethical behavior as part of the organizational culture. These responses have profound implications for morale, performance, and institutional sustainability. By capturing these lived experiences, this research seeks to illuminate the real-world impacts of ethical leadership (or its absence) in the public sector.

1.4 The Need for a Bottom-Up Ethical Lens

Most research on leadership ethics tends to focus on the behaviors, values, or traits of leaders themselves. However, this top-down approach often misses the voices of those most affected by leadership decisions employees. Understanding how employees perceive ethical leadership is essential for creating more ethical institutions. It is through their eyes that we can assess whether leadership ethics are truly practiced or merely performed.

This study adopts a qualitative, employee-centered approach to explore ethical leadership in practice. It aims to answer the following key questions: How do employees define ethical leadership in their own words? What specific actions do they identify as signs of integrity or hypocrisy? How do their experiences with leadership ethics influence their trust in the organization, their motivation to work, and their willingness to raise concerns? By centering employee narratives, this study contributes to a richer, more grounded understanding of leadership ethics. It highlights the tension between formal values and informal practices, between institutional codes and everyday realities. In doing so, it offers a more nuanced picture of ethical leadership one that reflects the complexities of real organizational life.

1.5 Bridging the Gap Between Principles and Practice

The challenge of ethical leadership in Pakistan's public sector lies not in the absence of codes or declarations but in the failure to implement them consistently. Bridging the gap between ethical

ideals and lived realities requires more than policies or training sessions it demands cultural change, systems reform, and, above all, listening to those who experience the impact of leadership decisions most directly.

This research hopes to contribute to that effort by surfacing employee perspectives that are often overlooked in public-sector discourse. By understanding how employees interpret acts of integrity and hypocrisy, organizations can begin to redesign leadership development programs, re-evaluate performance criteria, and build systems that encourage ethical behavior at all levels. Ethical leadership must be more than symbolic it must be demonstrated, experienced, and reinforced throughout the organization.

Ethical leadership in Pakistan's public sector is both a necessity and a challenge. As organizations face mounting scrutiny from the public and increasing internal pressures, the behaviors of those in leadership positions matter more than ever. This study seeks to uncover how employees interpret and navigate the ethical landscape of their organizations, especially when confronted with contradictions between stated values and actual practices. By giving voice to employee experiences, it offers insights that can inform both policy and practice, and ultimately support the development of more ethical, responsive, and resilient public institutions in Pakistan.

1.6 Research Questions

Q.1 How do employees define and understand ethical leadership in the context of public-sector organizations in Pakistan?

Q.2 What specific behaviors do employees identify as integrity or hypocrisy in public-sector leadership?

Q.3 How do employees react to ethical inconsistencies in leadership, and how do these reactions influence their trust, motivation, and engagement at work?

1.7 Significance

This study holds significant value in understanding how ethical leadership is perceived and experienced by employees in Pakistan's public-sector organizations while much research focuses on leadership traits and top-down ethical frameworks, this study shifts the lens to employee experiences, offering a bottom-up perspective on integrity and hypocrisy in practice. In a socio-political context marked by bureaucracy and political interference, exploring these lived realities is crucial for identifying gaps between ethical ideals and workplace realities. The findings can inform leadership development, promote ethical organizational cultures, and guide policy reforms aimed at enhancing accountability and employee trust. Additionally, this research contributes to the broader field of business ethics by offering context-specific insights from the Global South, where cultural and institutional complexities often shape ethical behavior differently from Western models.

1.8 Hypothesis

- Employees who perceive higher levels of leadership integrity exhibit greater organizational trust and commitment.
- Perceived ethical hypocrisy in leadership negatively impacts employee motivation and job satisfaction.
- Employees in politicized public-sector environments are more likely to rationalize unethical leadership behavior as a survival strategy.

1.9 Delimitation of the study

This study is delimited to public-sector organizations operating within Pakistan and focuses specifically on the perceptions and experiences of employees regarding ethical leadership. It does not include private-sector institutions, military bodies, or non-governmental organizations, as the ethical dynamics and leadership structures in these entities may differ significantly. Additionally, the study is limited to mid- and lower-level employees rather than top-tier executives, to capture grassroots-level insights into integrity and hypocrisy in leadership. The research is qualitative in nature, relying on in-depth interviews, and does not aim to provide statistical generalizations. Geographically, data collection is restricted to selected urban regions due to accessibility constraints. These boundaries are set to ensure focused analysis and to provide a manageable scope within the available time and resources, while still generating meaningful, context-specific findings.

1.10 Data collection:

In this qualitative study, data collection is centered on gathering in-depth insights into employees' experiences and perceptions of ethical leadership within public-sector organizations in Pakistan. The primary method of data collection will be semi-structured interviews, which allow for consistency across interviews and flexibility to explore emerging themes in detail. This method is well-suited for exploring complex and subjective phenomena such as perceptions of integrity, hypocrisy, and ethical behavior in organizational settings. A purposive sampling strategy will be employed to select participants who have substantial experience working in public-sector institutions, particularly at mid- and lower-tier levels where leadership decisions are most directly felt. The sample will include employees from diverse departments, ensuring variation in roles, age, and years of service, to capture a broad spectrum of viewpoints. Approximately 15 to 20 participants will be interviewed, depending on data saturation that is, the point at which no new themes are emerging.

Each interview will last between 45 to 60 minutes and will be conducted in either English or Urdu, depending on the participant's preference. Interviews will be audio-recorded (with informed consent) and later transcribed for analysis. A semi-structured interview guide will be developed, containing open-ended questions that address the core research themes: definitions of ethical leadership, perceptions of integrity and hypocrisy, and the emotional and behavioral responses to ethical contradictions. All data will be collected in a confidential manner, ensuring participants' anonymity and privacy. The data collection process will adhere strictly to ethical research guidelines, with participants given the right to withdraw at any point. This approach ensures that the data collected is both rich in content and ethically sound, enabling a deep exploration of the ethical dynamics within Pakistan's public-sector organizations.

2. Literature review

Ahmad & Mehmood et al. (2024) conducted a study titled *"Investigating How Emotional Labor in Service-Oriented Jobs Contributes to Interpersonal Conflicts and Employee Well-being"*. This research focused on the impact of emotional labor on employees in service sectors such as hospitality, healthcare, and customer service. Using survey data from 200 employees, the study found a strong link between emotional labor and increased burnout as well as reduced job satisfaction. However, it also revealed that organizational support can help reduce these negative outcomes, highlighting the importance of supportive workplace environments for employee well-being.

Ahmad (2025) in his study *"Exploring the Relationship between Leadership Styles and Employee Motivation in Remote Work Environments"* examined how different leadership approaches

influence employee motivation, engagement, and productivity in remote settings. The findings indicated that transformational leadership, through trust-building, effective communication, and autonomy, significantly boosts motivation and commitment, while transactional and laissez-faire styles showed limited effectiveness.

Ahmad (2025) conducted a comparative analysis in *"Leadership Styles in the 21st Century: A Comparative Analysis of Transformational and Transactional Leadership"*. This qualitative research assessed the impact of both leadership styles on employee motivation, job satisfaction, and engagement. The study concluded that transformational leadership has a more substantial and positive effect on employee performance, while transactional leadership appears less effective in contemporary organizational settings.

Ahmad, N.R. & Ullah, I. et al. (2025) in their study titled *"Investigating Stress, Burnout, and Organizational Factors Contributing to Psychological Well-being at Work"* explored the relationship between workplace stress and employee mental health. Data from 350 participants collected via quantitative surveys revealed a strong negative correlation between stress and well-being. The research emphasized that leadership style and workplace culture play a critical role in managing stress and burnout, suggesting the need for mental health and support initiatives.

Ahmad (2025) conducted the study *"Digital Marketing Strategies and Consumer Engagement: A Comparative Study of Traditional vs. E-Commerce Brands"* to explore how businesses use digital platforms to engage consumers. The findings showed that e-commerce brands outperform traditional brands by using advanced digital tools, personalized content, and data analytics to build consumer relationships, while traditional businesses often rely on broader, less targeted marketing strategies.

Ahmad (2025) in *"Exploring the Role of Digital Technologies in Enhancing Supply Chain Efficiency: A Case Study of E-Commerce Companies"* examined the role of advanced technologies such as AI, IoT, blockchain, and big data in streamlining e-commerce supply chains. The study revealed that these technologies enhance operational efficiency by improving inventory management, order processing, and real-time tracking, ultimately reducing costs and improving customer satisfaction.

Ahmad (2025) conducted research titled *"Financial Inclusion: How Digital Banking is Bridging the Gap for Emerging Markets"*, focusing on the role of digital banking platforms such as mobile banking and e-wallets in promoting inclusive financial systems. The findings highlighted that digital banking significantly reduces financial inequality by offering accessible, secure, and efficient financial services to underserved populations, including women and rural communities.

Ahmad (2025) in *"Model Bazaars Redefined: Punjab's Visionary Step to Authority Status for Public Welfare"* investigated the effects of restructuring Model Bazaars from a company-run to an authority-based model. The study concluded that this transition led to improved governance, transparency, and operational efficiency, thereby enhancing public trust and contributing positively to service delivery and citizen satisfaction.

Ahmad (2024) conducted a study titled *"Building Sustainable Business Practices: An Analysis of Entrepreneurial Strategies in the 21st Century"*, which focused on how SMEs in Pakistan integrate sustainability into their business strategies. The qualitative research found that businesses embracing sustainability gain competitive advantages, including improved brand reputation, customer loyalty, and profitability. Conversely, ignoring sustainability risks harming brand image and losing market relevance.

Ahmad (2025) in his study *"The Role of Neuromarketing in Shaping Consumer Behavior: How Businesses are Using Science to Drive Sales"* explored how neuromarketing techniques, such as emotional and sensory appeals, influence customer decisions. The research concluded that companies applying neuromarketing strategies saw improved customer loyalty and business performance, while those that did not utilize such methods struggled with customer trust and market presence.

Ahmad (2025) in *"Exploring Diversity and Inclusion in Business: Unlocking the Power of Diverse Teams"* examined how D&I practices influence organizational success. The findings showed that organizations actively promoting diversity and inclusion benefited from higher employee engagement, creativity, and overall performance. Those lacking D&I strategies, however, faced challenges such as low morale and reduced organizational effectiveness.

Ahmad (2025) conducted *"Consumer Loyalty in Pakistan's E-Commerce Market: A Qualitative Study of Repeat Buyers on E-Commerce Platforms like Daraz and OLX"* to investigate what drives repeat purchasing behavior in online marketplaces. Using interviews and focus groups, the research identified factors such as product quality, secure transactions, and reliable customer service as essential for building consumer loyalty in Pakistan's competitive e-commerce sector.

Ahmad (2025) performed a study titled *"Strategic Agility in Crisis: How Pakistani Businesses Adapt Financially to Global Disruptions and Market Shocks"*, where he explored how businesses adapt financially to crises. The qualitative research revealed that organizations rely on strategies like liquidity control, agile decision-making, external funding, and reallocation of resources to survive global market shocks.

Ahmad (2025) in his study *"The Impact of Fintech Startups on Financial Innovation and Stability in Pakistan's Evolving Financial Landscape"* examined how fintech startups are transforming Pakistan's financial sector. Using interviews and focus groups, the study highlighted that fintech contributes to financial innovation by improving service accessibility, enabling secure transactions, and enhancing financial inclusion. Sustainable growth in this sector depends on regulatory support, user trust, and continuous technological advancement.

Leadership can be seen as an ongoing process where a person guides or influences a group to achieve a common goal. This view of leadership as a process means it is not something a person is simply born with, but something that happens through interaction between the leader and the people they lead. It shows that leadership is not a one-way act but a two-sided relationship. When leadership is defined this way, it becomes something that anyone can practice, not just those with official titles or positions. (Northouse, 2016)

Leadership is mainly about leading change. As the business world has become more challenging and unpredictable with rapid changes in technology, growing global competition, relaxed market rules, and changing populations the importance of leadership has grown. In this fast-changing environment, making small improvements is no longer enough. Organizations now need major changes to stay successful, which makes strong leadership even more important. On the other hand, management deals with handling complexity and was developed in response to the rise of large organizations during the 20th century. The effective management keeps operations organized and stable, ensuring consistent quality and profits. Without good management, organizations can become disordered and may not survive. Kotler (1990)

Leaders need to be aware of a wide range of events and trends that might affect their organization (Ginter & Duncan, 1990). One of the main responsibilities of senior executives is to stay updated on the external environment and recognize both risks and opportunities that could impact their

business. This includes understanding customer needs, supplier availability, competitor behavior, market trends, economic conditions, government policies, and technological changes. There are many ways to gather this information, such as reading government and industry reports, attending business and trade events, communicating with customers and suppliers, studying competitor products and public documents, and conducting market research. (Yukl, 2010)

3. Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative methodology to explore employees' perceptions and experiences of ethical leadership, particularly focusing on integrity and hypocrisy, in public-sector organizations in Pakistan. Qualitative research is appropriate for this study because it seeks to understand human behavior, experiences, and social phenomena in their natural settings. Unlike quantitative methods that aim for generalizability and numerical data, qualitative approaches prioritize depth, context, and meaning essential for examining the nuanced dynamics of leadership ethics. The study employs an interpretive phenomenological approach (IPA), which is particularly suited for exploring how individuals make sense of their lived experiences. IPA focuses on how people interpret and attach meaning to phenomena they encounter, making it an ideal framework for investigating how public-sector employees perceive ethical behavior, integrity, and hypocrisy in leadership. This approach allows the researcher to gain insight into the emotional and cognitive dimensions of participants' experiences within their institutional environments.

3.1 Sampling Strategy

The sampling method used in this study is purposive sampling, a non-probability technique commonly used in qualitative research to select participants who have rich, relevant, and diverse insights into the research topic. Participants are selected based on specific criteria: they must be current employees of public-sector organizations in Pakistan, have at least three years of work experience, and be willing to discuss their observations and experiences related to leadership ethics. To ensure a variety of perspectives, efforts are made to include participants from different departments, hierarchical levels, and geographic regions.

The expected sample size is 15 to 20 participants, although the final number will be determined based on data saturation, which refers to the point at which no new information or themes are emerging from additional interviews. This ensures depth and comprehensiveness in the collected data without redundancy.

3.2 Data Collection Techniques

The primary data collection method used is semi-structured interviews. This technique combines structured questions with the flexibility to probe deeper into participants' responses, allowing the researcher to explore unexpected topics that may arise during the conversation. The semi-structured format supports both consistency across interviews and responsiveness to individual narratives.

Each interview will last approximately 45 to 60 minutes and will be conducted face-to-face, via phone, or through online platforms (e.g., Zoom or Google Meet), depending on the participant's preference and location. An interview guide will be developed to ensure that all key research questions are addressed. This guide will include open-ended questions such as:

- "How do you define ethical leadership in your organization?"
- "Can you describe an incident where you observed integrity or hypocrisy from a leader?"
- "How did this experience affect your perception of leadership and your own motivation at work?"

Interviews will be conducted in either English or Urdu, based on the participant's comfort. All interviews will be audio-recorded (with informed consent) and later transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy in data representation.

3.4 Data Analysis Technique

The collected data will be analyzed using thematic analysis, a widely used method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within qualitative data. The process will follow the six-step approach proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006):

- Familiarization with data: Transcripts will be read multiple times to become deeply familiar with the content.
- Generating initial codes: Key phrases and statements relevant to the research questions will be coded manually or using software such as NVivo.
- Searching for themes: Codes will be grouped into broader themes that reflect shared patterns or meanings.
- Reviewing themes: Themes will be refined, merged, or split based on their coherence and relevance.
- Defining and naming themes: Each theme will be clearly defined, and illustrative quotes from participants will be used.
- Producing the report: The final analysis will connect the themes to the research questions and relevant literature.

This systematic and transparent approach will help ensure the credibility and rigor of the findings.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethical integrity is a cornerstone of this study. Prior to data collection, participants will be provided with informed consent forms explaining the purpose of the study, their rights (including anonymity, confidentiality, and voluntary participation), and how the data will be used. Participants may withdraw from the study at any point without any negative consequences. All data will be securely stored, and personal identifiers will be removed during transcription to ensure privacy. Approval will be sought from a relevant Ethics Review Committee, and all ethical procedures will be in accordance with the guidelines of the American Psychological Association (APA) and the institution overseeing the research.

4. Data Analysis

This chapter presents the analysis of qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews. The primary objective of this analysis is to explore how employees working in public-sector organizations in Pakistan perceive ethical leadership, particularly focusing on the presence or absence of integrity and the experience of ethical hypocrisy. The analysis helps identify common patterns, beliefs, and experiences regarding ethical practices within public-sector workplaces. The method used for analysis is thematic analysis, which is one of the most widely used techniques in qualitative research. Thematic analysis allows researchers to identify, organize, and interpret key themes from rich, descriptive data. This approach is especially useful for exploring complex concepts such as leadership ethics, where people's views and experiences vary widely based on context and organizational culture.

The data collected through interviews was transcribed, reviewed, and examined systematically. The analysis followed an inductive approach, meaning themes were developed based on actual responses from participants rather than being predefined. NVivo software was used to manage data

coding and support theme development. This software helps in organizing, sorting, and linking data, making the process more structured and transparent.

4.1 Overview of Key Themes

The analysis of interview data resulted in the emergence of four major themes, each highlighting a different aspect of employees' understanding and experience of ethical leadership in the public sector. These themes are:

- Understanding of Ethical Leadership
- Integrity and Hypocrisy in Practice
- Employee Reactions to Ethical Contradictions
- Effects on Organizational Trust and Engagement

Each of these themes is supported by sub-themes and patterns that provide deeper insight into how ethical leadership is understood and experienced at various organizational levels. Tables have been used to summarize key elements of each theme for better clarity.

4.2 Understanding of Ethical Leadership

The first theme focuses on how employees conceptualize ethical leadership. The analysis showed that most employees defined ethical leadership as being fair, consistent, transparent, and accountable. Ethical leaders were expected to treat all employees equally, make fair decisions, and follow the same rules they expect others to follow.

Table 1: Summary of Ethical Leadership Characteristics

Characteristic	Description
Consistency	Acting in line with stated values and policies
Fairness	Treating all employees equally and without bias
Accountability	Taking responsibility for decisions and ensuring transparency
Respect for rules	Following organizational policies and procedures
Supportive behavior	Creating a respectful and positive work environment

This theme suggests that ethical leadership is not only about personal honesty or morality but also about professional behavior that promotes trust, equity, and a healthy organizational culture. Leaders are judged not just by what they say, but by what they consistently do.

4.3 Integrity and Hypocrisy in Practice

While the concept of ethical leadership was clearly understood by most participants, the actual practice of ethics in public-sector organizations was reported to be inconsistent. In some departments, integrity was visible through merit-based promotions, clear communication, and rule-based decision-making. However, many participants observed widespread hypocrisy, where leaders talked about ethics but did not follow ethical standards themselves.

Table 2: Indicators of Integrity and Hypocrisy

Aspect	Integrity Practice	Hypocrisy Practice
Rule Enforcement	Equal enforcement for all	Selective enforcement for certain individuals
Hiring and Promotion	Based on merit and qualifications	Influenced by favoritism or political pressure
Decision-making	Transparent and documented	Opaque or manipulated processes
Communication	Honest and clear communication	Symbolic or vague statements lacking sincerity

This theme highlights a gap between ethical ideals and actual behavior in many public-sector organizations. Ethical hypocrisy weakens employee confidence in the leadership and damages the credibility of ethical codes or policies. When there is a clear mismatch between what leaders claim and how they act, it becomes difficult for employees to take ethical values seriously.

4.4 Employee Reactions to Ethical Contradictions

This theme addresses how employees respond when they notice contradictions between leaders' words and actions. The analysis identified three main types of responses: passive, adaptive, and active.

Table 3: Types of Employee Responses

Type of Response	Description
Passive	Employees emotionally disengage or withdraw from active participation
Adaptive	Employees accept the situation and avoid confrontation to maintain stability
Active	Employees raise concerns, report misconduct, or attempt to resist unethical behavior

Most employees chose passive or adaptive responses. These include avoiding involvement in controversial issues, staying silent about unethical behavior, or focusing only on basic job responsibilities. Active responses were relatively rare due to fear of retaliation, lack of support systems, or a belief that speaking out would not lead to any meaningful change. This theme reveals a sense of powerlessness among many employees. When ethics are inconsistently applied and unethical behavior is tolerated at higher levels, employees often feel that there is little benefit and sometimes personal risk in challenging the system.

4.5 Effects on Trust and Engagement

The fourth theme focuses on the consequences of ethical contradictions on employee trust and organizational engagement. The analysis found that when ethical leadership was lacking or inconsistent, employees' trust in their leaders and institutions decreased significantly. This also led to lower motivation and reduced willingness to contribute beyond minimum expectations.

Table 4: Organizational Effects of Ethical Inconsistency

Organizational Factor	Observed Effect
Trust in Leadership	Reduced due to inconsistency and lack of transparency
Motivation	Decreased due to perceived unfair treatment and double standards
Organizational Culture	Became defensive, cautious, and risk-averse
Team Morale	Lowered as unethical practices created divisions and frustration
Innovation and Effort	Declined because employees avoided taking risks or suggesting new ideas

This theme demonstrates that ethical leadership directly affects employee morale, teamwork, and institutional productivity. In environments where hypocrisy is common and ethical principles are not followed, employees often become disengaged and disconnected from organizational goals. Over time, this contributes to underperformance and limits innovation.

4.6 Cross-Cutting Issues

Beyond the four major themes, the data revealed two broader systemic issues that influence ethical leadership practices across public-sector organizations in Pakistan.

4.6.1 Influence of Political Interference

One recurring issue was political pressure affecting ethical decisions. Leaders in some organizations were unable to enforce rules fairly or make independent decisions due to political influence. Appointments, promotions, and transfers were often subject to political approval, limiting the ability of leaders to act in an ethical and impartial manner. This pressure created a situation where ethical values were secondary to political considerations, making it difficult to promote a culture of fairness or accountability.

4.6.2 Normalization of Unethical Practices

The second cross-cutting issue was the normalization of unethical practices. Over time, employees became accustomed to favoritism, selective rule enforcement, and lack of transparency. These practices were no longer viewed as unusual but rather as a routine part of organizational life. This normalization made it even harder to challenge unethical behavior, as many employees believed that change was unlikely or that such practices were part of the system. As a result, ethical leadership lost its meaning in practical terms, even if it remained present in official policies and mission statements.

Table 5: Cross-Cutting Issues and Their Impacts

Issue	Organizational Impact
Political Interference	Limits ethical independence of leadership decisions
Normalized Unethical Culture	Reduces accountability and weakens ethical expectations

These two systemic challenges contribute to a broader organizational environment where ethical leadership becomes difficult to practice and sustain.

Conclusion:

The findings indicate that ethical leadership, while valued in principle, is often undermined in practice by behaviors such as hypocrisy, favoritism, selective enforcement of rules, and external political pressures. These contradictions create a significant gap between formal ethical values and actual leadership behavior. As a result, employees experience confusion, disillusionment, and reduced trust in their leaders. This negatively impacts motivation, teamwork, and overall engagement, contributing to an organizational culture that often tolerates or normalizes unethical practices. The analysis also highlighted systemic issues, such as political interference and cultural acceptance of unethical norms that further complicate the promotion of ethical leadership. These insights provide a foundation for developing more context-sensitive strategies to strengthen ethical leadership, which will be further explored in the next chapter through discussion and practical recommendations.

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