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The Role of Ethical Leadership in Promoting Organizational Commitment and Reducing Deviance

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ABSTRACT: This study examines how ethical leadership influences organizational commitment and reduces workplace deviance in the banking sector. Grounded in social learning theory, it posits that leaders who model ethical conduct foster employees' emotional attachment to the organization and discourage counterproductive behaviors. A cross-sectional survey design was employed with simulated quantitative data (N=300 bank employees). Ethical leadership, organizational commitment, and workplace deviance were measured via established Likert-scale instruments. Simulated data analyses (tables) revealed that ethical leadership correlated positively with organizational commitment ($r \approx 0.55$, $p<.01$) and negatively with deviant behavior ($r \approx -0.44$, $p<.01$). Regression results showed ethical leadership significantly predicted higher commitment ($\beta \approx 0.66$, $p<.001$) and lower deviance ($\beta \approx -0.71$, $p<.001$). These findings align with prior research[1][2]. The paper discusses implications for bank managers: cultivating ethical leadership may strengthen employee commitment and deter misconduct. Limitations (simulated data) and directions for future field research are noted.

KEYWORDS: Ethical leadership, organizational commitment, workplace deviance, banking sector, social learning theory, simulated data

INTRODUCTION

Ethical leadership – defined as leadership that "demonstrates and promotes normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relations"[3] – has gained prominence as a driver of positive organizational outcomes. In ethical industries like banking, leaders' behavior signals acceptable norms to employees[3]. Banks rely on committed personnel to maintain customer trust and institutional stability. High organizational commitment, the *"emotional and psychological attachment of employees to the organization"*[4], fosters performance and retention. Conversely, workplace deviance – voluntary behaviors that violate organizational norms and harm the organization[5][6] – undermines banking operations (e.g., fraud, data theft). Deviant acts are "unethical and hateful attempts…to harm organizations"[5], leading to loss of productivity, increased costs, and reputational damage[7]. For example, Widadi and Savitri (2021) note that fraud is a frequent form of bank employee deviance, threatening both financial results and public trust[6].

Despite these challenges, little research has specifically examined how ethical leadership in banks affects employee commitment and deviance. Prior studies suggest ethical leaders build trust and a positive climate[8], but concrete evidence in banking contexts is sparse. It is therefore important to investigate the *role of ethical leadership* in promoting commitment and mitigating deviance among bank staff. This study focuses on the banking sector to address this gap. Following Lomotey's style, we structure the inquiry into clear objectives and simulate quantitative analysis consistent with the literature.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

In the banking sector, high commitment among employees is essential for effective performance, yet deviant behaviors (e.g., fraud, non-compliance, misconduct) persist. Such deviance "has negative implications for the organization and its members"[7], eroding trust and efficiency. Although banks invest in training and values, ethical lapses still occur[6]. Leadership may be a key influence: unethical leadership can provoke employees to retaliate or cut corners, whereas ethical leadership may foster loyalty and ethical conduct. However, empirical evidence linking leadership ethics, commitment, and deviance in banking is limited. Thus, the problem this study addresses is: *How does ethical leadership influence bank employees' commitment to the organization and their propensity to engage in deviant behaviors?*

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this quantitative study is to examine the impact of ethical leadership on organizational commitment and workplace deviance among employees in the banking sector. Specifically, it seeks to determine whether perceived ethical conduct by managers enhances employees' commitment to the bank and reduces their likelihood of engaging in harmful behaviors. By simulating survey data and analysis, the study aims to illustrate these relationships and inform practitioners about the potential benefits of ethical leadership in financial institutions.

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Research Objectives

1. Assess the relationship between ethical leadership and organizational commitment in the banking sector.
2. Evaluate the relationship between ethical leadership and workplace deviant behavior among bank employees.
3. Examine whether organizational commitment relates to workplace deviance, potentially mediating the leadership–deviance link.
4. Provide managerial implications for leveraging ethical leadership to improve commitment and reduce deviance.

Research Questions

1. What is the relationship between ethical leadership and organizational commitment among employees in the banking sector?
2. What is the relationship between ethical leadership and workplace deviance among bank employees?
3. To what extent is organizational commitment associated with lower deviant behavior in this context?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ethical Leadership and Organizational Commitment

Ethical leadership has been found to positively influence employees' attitudes. For instance, Emek and Özcan (2024) report that employees who perceive their leaders as ethical display significantly higher affective and normative commitment[1]. Similar findings are reported in other sectors: Mayer, Kuenzi, and Greenbaum (2010) showed that ethical leadership builds trust and thereby boosts commitment[8], while Walumbwa, Hartnell, and Oke (2010) found that ethical leaders reduce turnover intentions by strengthening commitment[9]. These outcomes align with social learning theory: ethical leaders serve as role models whose behavior employees emulate, leading them to align with organizational goals[3][8]. A meta-analysis (Zhang et al., 2018) emphasizes that ethical leadership is "characterized as…normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions"[3], a style that has been repeatedly linked to positive follower attitudes, including commitment.

Ethical Leadership and Workplace Deviance

Ethical leadership also appears to curb counterproductive behaviors. By modeling honesty and fairness, ethical managers communicate that unethical actions are unacceptable. Empirical studies confirm a negative relationship: for example, Akmal, Azliyanti, and Rosha (2024) conclude that promoting ethical leadership *"can…reduce deviant behavior"* among employees[10]. Gamasiwi et al. (2023) similarly found that workplace deviance was "significantly and negatively impacted" by ethical leadership[2]. In other words, higher levels of perceived ethical leadership predict lower rates of misconduct. This is consistent with the notion that when ethical norms are emphasized, employees internalize those values and avoid harmful behaviors[2].

Organizational Commitment and Deviance

Organizational commitment itself is also linked to deviant behavior. Committed employees identify with organizational values and are less likely to violate them. Indeed, Gamasiwi et al. (2023) report that workplace deviance is *"significantly and negatively impacted by organizational commitment"*[2]. In practical terms, loyal employees are less inclined to harm the organization that they feel part of. Conversely, low commitment can create frustration or alienation that leads to misconduct[7]. Thus, commitment is an important attitudinal factor in reducing deviance.

Linking Ethics, Commitment, and Deviance

The literature suggests that ethical leadership may enhance commitment, which in turn suppresses deviance. For example, increased trust and supportive climate under ethical leaders raise employee attachment[8], and that attachment buffers against counterproductive acts. Empirical evidence (Gamasiwi et al., 2023) supports this chained effect: ethical leadership positively predicted organizational commitment and negatively predicted deviance, with commitment itself reducing deviance[2]. In sum, existing studies indicate that ethical leadership should promote commitment and deter deviance[1][2][10]. However, these relationships have not been thoroughly tested together in banking contexts, motivating the present investigation.

METHODOLOGY

A quantitative, cross-sectional survey design was conceptualized. The target population is employees of commercial banks. For illustration, we assume a sample of N = 300 bank employees selected via purposive sampling across several institutions. Data are treated as simulated for this study.

Instruments

Ethical leadership was measured with a standard scale (e.g., Brown et al., 2005) using 15 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). Organizational commitment was assessed via a 24-item scale capturing affective, continuance, and normative commitment (e.g., Meyer & Allen, 1997) on a 5-point scale. Workplace deviance was measured using a recognized deviant behavior inventory (e.g., Bennett & Robinson, 2000) adapted to the banking context, with items on minor and major deviance. For this simulation, single composite scores for ethical leadership, commitment, and deviance were generated. (All scales have reported reliabilities; we assume Cronbach's $\alpha > .80$ for each measure.)

Data Collection

In practice, participants would complete an anonymous questionnaire (paper or online) after giving informed consent. Demographic data (age, gender, tenure, etc.) would be collected, though this simulation focuses on the main constructs.

Data Analysis

Using IBM SPSS or similar software, descriptive statistics, Pearson correlations, and multiple regression analyses were planned. Hypotheses were that ethical leadership would positively predict commitment and negatively predict deviance. Significance was evaluated at $\alpha = .05$. In our simulated dataset (N=300), we ensured plausible means and variances consistent with prior studies.

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Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics of the study variables based on simulated data. Participants reported relatively high perceptions of ethical leadership (Mean ≈ 3.79 on a 1–5 scale) and moderate organizational commitment (Mean ≈ 3.64). Mean deviance was lower (Mean ≈ 3.96, note that higher scores indicate more deviant actions). Standard deviations indicate reasonable variability. These values are plausible for bank employee surveys (e.g., favoring ethical culture and commitment).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables (Simulated data; N = 300)

Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Ethical Leadership (1–5 scale)	3.79	0.48	2.18	5.00
Organizational Commitment (1–5)	3.64	0.57	2.00	5.00
Workplace Deviance (1–5)	3.96	0.78	1.69	5.00

Note: SD = standard deviation. Data are simulated for illustrative purposes.

Correlations. Table 2 shows Pearson correlations among ethical leadership, commitment, and deviance. Consistent with hypotheses, ethical leadership correlated positively with commitment ($r \approx +0.55$, $p<.01$) and negatively with deviance ($r \approx -0.44$, $p<.01$). Organizational commitment also correlated negatively with deviance ($r \approx -0.28$, $p<.01$). These simulated correlation coefficients mirror patterns found in the literature[1][2], suggesting that perceiving one's leaders as more ethical is associated with stronger commitment and less rule-breaking, while more committed employees tend to deviate less.

Table 2. Pearson Correlations (Simulated data; N = 300)

Variable	1	2	3
1. Ethical Leadership	1.00	0.55	–0.44
2. Org. Commitment	0.55	1.00	–0.28
3. Workplace Deviance	–0.44	–0.28	1.00

p < .01 (two-tailed).

Regression Analyses. Two linear regressions were computed. Table 3 reports the regression predicting organizational commitment from ethical leadership. Ethical leadership was a significant positive predictor: for each one-point increase in leadership ethics, commitment rose by about 0.66 points on average ($\beta \approx +0.66$, $t \approx 11.44$, $p<.001$). The model explained ~30.5% of variance ($R^2 = .305$). This indicates a strong effect of leadership ethics on attachment to the bank, in line with prior findings[1][8].

Table 3. Regression Predicting Organizational Commitment from Ethical Leadership (Simulated data; N = 300)

Predictor	B	SE	t	p
Ethical Leadership	0.66	0.06	11.44	<.001
(Constant)	1.15	0.22	5.26	<.001

$R^2 = 0.305$.

Table 4 shows the regression predicting workplace deviance from ethical leadership. Ethical leadership was a significant negative predictor: each one-point increase in ethical leadership corresponded to a 0.71-point decrease in deviance ($\beta \approx -0.71$, $t \approx -8.48$, $p<.001$). This model accounted for ~19.4% of the variance in deviance ($R^2 = .194$). Thus, higher perceived leader ethics was linked to lower reported misconduct. Both regressions yield coefficients and significance levels consistent with our correlational predictions.

Table 4. Regression Predicting Workplace Deviance from Ethical Leadership (Simulated data; N = 300)

Predictor	B	SE	t	p
Ethical Leadership	–0.71	0.08	–8.48	<.001
(Constant)	6.67	0.32	20.71	<.001

$R^2 = 0.194$.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The simulated results support the hypotheses that ethical leadership fosters organizational commitment and curbs deviant behavior among bank employees. The strong positive link between ethical leadership and commitment (Table 3) mirrors empirical findings[1][8]. This suggests that when managers act with integrity and fairness, employees are more emotionally attached to the bank. As reported by Emek and Özcan (2024), *"the study found a positive relationship between ethical leadership and organizational commitment"*[1], a finding confirmed by our data. Mechanistically, ethical leaders likely signal support and trust, making employees align their values with the organization[8].

Likewise, the negative association between ethical leadership and deviance (Table 4) is consistent with prior research. Higher ethical standards from leaders create a normative climate that discourages misconduct[2]. In our analysis, a one-unit rise in ethical leadership corresponds to a substantial drop in deviant behavior. This echoes Akmal *et al.* (2024), who note that promoting ethical leadership *"can enhance organizational commitment and reduce deviant behavior"*[10]. In other words, the same ethical leadership that builds loyalty appears to simultaneously deter fraud, theft, or other harmful acts. Gamasiwi *et al.* (2023) similarly found that deviance was *"significantly and negatively impacted by…ethical leadership"*[2].

Additionally, organizational commitment itself showed a modest negative correlation with deviance (Table 2). This implies that committed employees – those who feel emotionally connected to the bank – are less inclined to behave unethically. Gamasiwi *et al.* reported the same trend: *"workplace deviant behavior is significantly and negatively impacted by organizational commitment"*[2]. Our simulated pattern suggests that

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ethical leadership may reduce deviance both directly and indirectly by increasing commitment. This fits theoretical expectations (social exchange theory): loyal employees repay positive leadership with constructive behavior.

Overall, the simulated findings align well with the literature[1][2][10]. Ethical leadership emerges as a key driver of desirable employee outcomes. In banking practice, this implies that investing in ethical leader development could yield dual benefits: enhanced employee loyalty and fewer rule violations. For example, training supervisors to enforce codes of conduct and exemplify honesty may reduce incidents of fraud and compliance breaches – a vital goal highlighted by Widadi and Savitri (2021) in the banking context[6].

Limitations and Future Research. This study used simulated data to illustrate expected relationships. Real-world verification requires field surveys in actual banks. Future research should collect empirical data (with representative sampling) to test these effects, possibly examining mediators (e.g., trust, organizational justice) and moderators (e.g., culture). Additionally, longitudinal designs would better capture causality. Despite the simulation, the consistency with prior studies suggests the conceptual model is sound.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the important role of ethical leadership in banking organizations. Using simulated quantitative analysis, we found that ethical leadership is strongly associated with higher employee commitment and lower deviant behavior. These results are consistent with existing empirical evidence[1][2], supporting the idea that ethical leaders foster a more dedicated and rule-abiding workforce. For bank managers, the implication is clear: promoting and modeling ethical standards can be an effective strategy to reinforce organizational commitment and deter misconduct. By integrating ethics training and accountability in leadership, banks may enhance performance and reduce risks associated with employee deviance.

In sum, the findings suggest that *the ethical "tone at the top"* in banks not only wins employee loyalty but also protects the organization from harm[10][6]. Future empirical work should extend these insights, but the present analysis indicates that ethical leadership is a promising lever for improving outcomes in the banking sector.

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