

Developing Ethical Leadership: The need for Ethical and Behavioural Knowledge

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Abstract:

Leaders are critical to organisational success providing vision, direction, and use power, influence, and role modelling to impact employee behaviour to enable organisational goals achievement (Karauri & Kyongo, 2024; Khan, Amin & Saif, 2025; Kouzes and Posner, 2023; Daft et al., 2023; Lussier and Achua, 2023; Goleman et al., 2017).

Leadership subjects are critical components of virtually all post graduate business programs. However, research demonstrates that specific business and leadership ethics subjects in are somewhat non-existent across Europe, the UK and Australia (Segon, Booth & Roberts 2024, Navarro, 2008, Corneilius et al. 2007) Christensen, Peirce, Hartman, Hoffman & Carrier, 2007; Matten and Moon (2004a). Yet Australian qualifications accredited by the national human resource management institute, supposedly develop key ethical competencies, seemingly without content (Segon, Booth and Roberts, 2024). Engaging in ethical reasoning or devising ethical processes requires an understanding of ethical concepts and theories (Foy 2002; Segon, Booth, Beshah and Pearce, 20). Surprising results given the growing calls for: –more ethical leadership behaviour and ethical decision making in organisations (Bachmann, 2017), stronger organisational ethics and actions that demonstrate moral commitment. Much of the literature on leadership seems to focus upon the tactical and personality dimensions of successful leadership i.e. Hersey and Blanchard's situational theory, Vroom contingency approach etc., (Robbins et al. 2004; McKenna, 1999). As pioneers of the Emotional intelligence movement David Caruso and Peter Salovey suggest “The emotionally intelligent manager’s moral perspective is, we hope, well developed” (Caruso and Salovey, 2004, p. 171), suggesting that management and leadership often assume an acquired moral perspective rather than including it as part of formal education and development.

This paper will provide evidence that business ethics is not a common feature of postgraduate management education and consequently pose the question: How can we expect leaders to acquire and demonstrate ethical competence if it is not part of their formal management and education? It will then review common models of both leadership and ethical leadership to establish the extent of