



## Ethical Leadership and Accountability: Technology Innovation

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Submitted : 27-02-2024; Reviewed : 12-05-2024; Accepted : 14-05-2024

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### Abstract

This article aims to investigate the relationship between ethical leadership, accountability, and the transformation towards technological innovation to drive sustainability. The research employs a literature review of 82 articles from multidisciplinary databases, focusing on the interaction between ethical leadership principles, accountability, and their impact on innovation. The main findings indicate that ethical leadership emphasizing moral values is crucial in enhancing technological innovation by promoting accountability. Ethical leadership tends to shape moral identity and create an ethical environment, positively impacting organizational performance. Meanwhile, accountability is a critical element of maintaining and creating broader value. This research provides guidance for leaders, researchers, and policymakers. Maintaining a balance between ethical leadership, technological innovation, and accountability is an effective strategy to ensure sustainable development for a country. Implementing solid ethical leadership and technological innovation practices is crucial in responding to accountability and building societal trust.

**Keywords:** Ethical Leadership; Accountability; Technology Innovation

**How to Cite:** Baba, C.N. (2024). Ethical Leadership and Accountability: Technology Innovation. JKBM (Jurnal Konsep Bisnis dan Manajemen). 10 (2): 151-163

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## INTRODUCTION

Innovation has been widely recognized as a significant factor in enhancing a company's prosperity and advancing a nation's economy (Townsend et al., 2019). Hence, researchers have consistently emphasized the importance of comprehending the factors that facilitate or hinder innovation within organizational contexts. In today's rapidly evolving business landscape, marked by dynamic environments, globalization, swift technological advancements, and shortened product life cycles, companies must continually seek novel approaches and innovative products to maintain a competitive edge in the market. However, achieving successful innovation relies on multiple factors at both individual and organizational levels. Despite abundant research on the correlation between various leadership styles, creativity, and organizational innovation, this study area remains relatively underexplored.

Previous research has acknowledged leadership and governance principles in facing the challenges of the times (accountability) as a significant driver of fostering creativity and a pivotal factor influencing innovation at the organizational level (Agarwal et al., 2022; Certo, 2021). The establishment of an innovative environment that fosters excellence and creativity in scientific research as the foundation for comprehensive social development and the creation of new technologies that attain international leadership (Galaby & Abdrabo, 2020). Given the growing emphasis on organizational ethics, it is valuable to understand how leaders can enhance their accountability through ethical approaches (Tu et al., 2019) and the influence of ethical leadership styles on organizational results.

The importance of effective governance principles cannot be overstated when fostering public trust (Larson, 2020). Accountability requires governance systems, while stakeholders' perspectives on accountability are the only accessible option for organizations, including leadership. This article focuses on ethical leadership's essential role in promoting technological innovation by implementing accountability. Effective leadership entails not only responsibility for strategic decisions but also taking concrete steps to ensure that technological innovation is prioritized, encouraged, and efficiently implemented. The idea of accountability pertains to a collaborative dynamic where numerous individuals engage in showcasing, assessing, and assuming accountability for attaining results that align with collectively established standards, encompassing both the results and the approaches employed (Frey-Heger & Barrett, 2021).

Moreover, it encompasses creative adaptations in accounting practices and accountability (Palepu et al., 2020). Therefore, diversity is beneficial, contributing to accountability and forming broader values (Mongelli et al., 2019; Cascio, 2021). This research aims to delve deeper into the relationship between ethical leadership and the transformation towards technological innovation with accountability.

In line with the research focus, this article provides a deep understanding of the positive impact of ethical leadership in enhancing technological innovation with accountability. Leaders feel compelled to use feedback, such as technological innovation, to improve performance (Lee et al., 2019). According to Casenave & Klarmann (2020), accountability is defined as adherence and fulfilment of personal responsibilities and awareness of obligations to others to justify actions. As presented by (Sun et al., 2024), previous research consistently shows that organizations led by leaders who uphold ethical values and accountability tend to perform better. However, a research gap still needs to be filled to understand in more detail how effective technological innovation can be generated through the interaction between ethical leadership and accountability.

From an organizational perspective, integrity or ethical behavior is not only related to corrupt or dishonest behavior but also involves the qualities or characteristics of individuals or organizations that reflect the ability to act following moral principles, norms, and regulations accepted by institutional members and society (Waheed et al., 2019). Additionally, it is seen as a matter of consistency and alignment between organizational goals, values, individual beliefs, and individual behavior (Ahmed Iqbal et al., 2020). Therefore, it directly impacts ethical actions, decisions, or decisions within an organization, and management plays a significant role in shaping an organization's integrity (Georgiadou et al., 2024). The difference between previous research and this article lies in the focus on technological innovation as a direct result of ethical leadership and strong accountability. The novelty of this research lies in the emphasis on organizational transformation towards technological innovation in response to future demands. In this research, the research issue is not only an internal organizational issue but also a national issue that needs to be addressed. Case studies on the role of ethical leadership in achieving technological innovation through accountability will provide a deep understanding. A balanced combination of personal and managerial authority is required to support leadership (Al Halbusi et al., 2023). Individuals who have demonstrated these abilities have successfully developed emotional intelligence and have various leadership styles that can be applied. Influential

leaders can improve team performance, quality, and safety and encourage technological innovation (Areneke et al., 2023).

Cheffi et al., (2023) identified several leadership characteristics, including adapting to moral principles and values, demonstrating a high level of ethics, upholding integrity, honesty, and conviction, having vision, showing appreciation, enthusiasm, dedication, empathy, fairness, kindness, forgiveness, courage, compassion, listening attentively, providing motivation, being inspirational, honesty, multidimensionality, and flexibility towards change. Based on several studies, these characteristics are significant in understanding how research issues become problems that must be addressed for the nation's benefit. A leader's reputation influences the level of official accountability systems related to their choices and behaviors (Rouault & Albertini, 2022). Using contextual analysis, this research will demonstrate how ethical leadership can significantly enhance technological innovation and accountability for organizational benefits and the country's overall welfare. The theory of integrity concepts has been discussed in the context of ethics and various fields, including organizational behavior, human resource management, psychology, and leadership (Tran & Paparoidamis, 2021).

The main objective of this article is to explain the relationship between the role of ethical leadership in enhancing technological innovation and accountability (acting as a mediator). Thus, this article aims to guide leaders, researchers, and policymakers in addressing increasingly complex challenges. By understanding the interconnection between ethical leadership, technological innovation, and accountability, this article wishes to pave the way for sustainable development in the country.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

The literature review is conducted to integrate existing studies on technological innovation with leadership concepts. This approach involves literature investigation, synthesis of information, pattern identification, and development of theoretical models according to previous literature, as suggested by Snyder (2019). The method recommending a three-stage process: preparation, review execution, and recording of evaluation results.

In the preparation stage, an approach is developed to identify relevant literature. Initially, we identified terms related to leadership for searching, technological innovation, and accountability through initial literature exploration. This research methodology includes six separate searches to connect electronic terms with leadership. We used logical

connectors "AND" to prevent separate results by electronic search or leadership investigation. The databases "Scopus," "Web of Science (Core Collection, All Databases)," and "Google Scholar" were chosen for their multidisciplinary content, covering various fields such as administration, commerce, engineering, computer science, and information systems. When verifying the review, we defined search functions in each database to ensure the best data results, considering appropriate search options for each database.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria were established during the preparation stage to ensure that our results were limited to journal articles and did not include books, conference papers, or other sources. We restricted the search to writings written in English to ensure readability. Our review protocol also required us to filter initial documents into accessible articles and eliminate duplicates from individual searches.

After the initial search, we introduced additional exclusion criteria and applied them based on the qualitative assessments of the summaries and published journal articles. Articles focusing on health and education or articles related to the public/government sector were not considered for inclusion in narrowing down the search results to the business context. We also excluded articles retrieved from search databases that did not cover studies on leadership and technological innovation. Additionally, non-English articles and other publication types were excluded based on the author's assessment.

After the initial search, relevant articles cited in the exploration results were added to address exploratory questions, after the initial research. Our criteria for assessing the additional article quality varied to accommodate contributions from specific contexts, such as conference proceedings or other texts that might have been missed. The last group of articles underwent a coding process based on a focus on the dimensions of ethical leadership and technological innovation. Another classification, "organization," was made for articles that focused on the perspective of ethical leadership and technological innovation and related to comprehensive accountability processes involving the entire company. The inductive method by Mayring (2020) was then used to code and extract leadership characteristics from the final articles, grouping them based on recognized patterns and themes. These patterns provide an organizational framework to summarize leadership and technological innovation keywords with accountability. Additionally, leadership characteristics specifically relevant to ethical leadership are outlined.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The initial database search yielded 1,107 articles, meeting the established criteria. After removing duplicate and inaccessible articles, the remaining count was 704. Applying the established quality criteria resulted in the rejection of 640 articles after qualitative assessment. Although the initial search only specified "English," four documents had to be excluded due to language quality evaluation. Additionally, ten search results were not chosen as they were not journal articles. Of the 626 articles that did not meet the qualitative assessment due to their content, 372 were unrelated to the business environment, particularly concerning strategies unrelated to the health or education sectors. Ultimately, this method yielded 52 articles, excluding those that did not specifically discuss the topic of technological innovation (54), articles that did not emphasize leadership (119), and articles that lacked a relationship between accountability and leadership topics (71). After identifying an additional 30 relevant articles in the search results, the final collection consisted of 82 articles.

**Table 1.** Stage of Article Screening Process

Stage	Number of Articles
Initial Database	1,107
Inaccessible	403
Quality Assessment	640
Language Quality Check	4
Non-Journal Articles	10
Business Irrelevant	372
Topic Specificity	54
Leadership Emphasis	119
Accountability Link	71
Additional Relevant	30
Final Collection	82

(Source: Processed Research Data)

Subsequently, these 82 articles were categorized into the three pre-established categories: "ethical leadership," "technological innovation," and "accountability." Articles related to technological innovation primarily focused on development and marketing dimensions using digital means. The main themes from the leadership perspective are ethical leadership and attitudes. Most articles did not explicitly emphasize the perspective of ethical leadership and technological innovation but instead focused on the entire transformation process, grouped as "organization." Most findings from the literature review (57 articles or 62%) were related to "innovation," further classified as "ethical leadership" (23 articles or 25%), with the least mentioned perspective being "accountability," totaling 12

articles (13%). The initial conclusion is that the current literature focuses more on leadership aspects and their impact on technological innovation within accountability.

**Table 2.** Distribution of Articles

Category	Number of Articles	Percentage (%)
Ethical Leadership	23	25
Technological Innovation	57	62
Accountability	12	13
Total	92	100

(Source: Processed Research Data)

### **Ethical Leadership**

Two significant aspects currently under research focus in the digital economy are corporate ethics and corporate social responsibility. These aspects are triggered by the belief that corporate leaders must cultivate ethical behavior to conduct business accountably, especially in implementing increasingly sophisticated technology (Kumar et al., 2024). Chauncey & McKenna (2023) have highlighted that the growing understanding of leadership and ethics has evolved alongside increasing concerns about ethical issues in business, particularly in addressing escalating disinformation activities. Ethical leadership is a critical driving factor for sustainable business that significantly benefits the organization.

Research conducted by the Ethics Research Center (ERC) in Washington found that high-quality individuals are attracted to organizations implementing ethical business management (Lin et al., 2023). Rai et al., (2023) emphasize the crucial role played by ethical leadership in maintaining good employee performance, which can result in increased company revenue.

Amidst various recent scandals affecting the technology business sector, such as the Cambridge Analytica scandal on Facebook and the massive data breaches at Yahoo affecting users, companies in the digital business realm must adopt practices that balance stakeholders' wealth and organizational profitability ethically and socially responsibly. Therefore, organizations require a deeper understanding of ethical leadership in managing technological innovation.

Ethical leadership has the potential to be interpreted as "demonstrating normatively appropriate conduct through interpersonal relationships and personal actions, as well as using two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making to promote such behavior among followers" (Kalra *et al.*, 2023). In other words, morally correct behavior, in line with norms, reflects the ethical aspects of a leader, involving positive attributes such

as honesty, fairness, and trust in monitoring their behavior, along with using punishment and rewards for subordinates.

Rai et al., (2023) emphasize the importance of holding individuals accountable for their activities by using disciplinary actions to prevent unethical behavior and incentive structures to motivate norm-conforming behavior within the company. In theory and application, ethical leadership is considered to have the capacity to proactively manage morality, often called moral identity (Zhang et al., 2023). Moral identity seeks to motivate leaders to have moral schemas guiding their daily behavior, with acceptance of the expectations and well-being of others. For example, moral identity has the potential to be predicted as a determinant associated with pro-social behavior, such as contributions and philanthropy, which can be inversely linked to unethical behavior, such as dishonesty (Ma et al., 2023). Leaders with high moral standards, understand their responsibilities, and live by principles and values contribute to societal improvement (Zhao et al., 2023).

From a stakeholder perspective, ethical leaders can maintain and develop positive relationships with all crucial stakeholders. They can establish rewards to inspire, encourage respectful cooperation, and demonstrate dedication to implementing responsible and sustainable transformations, both internally and externally, within the organization (Dwivedi et al., 2024). Ethical leaders, for example, often create a healthy, safe, and fair work environment for employees, and they have a moral responsibility to provide safe goods and services to customers. They also maintain transparency in communicating about the potential risks of products and services while prioritizing customer safety. Regarding communities and society, ethical leaders are expected to be aware of the impact of their organizational decisions on the community and the surrounding environment. This is because the primary goal of ethical leadership is to achieve collective well-being, such as organizational legitimacy, and ensure sustainable business practices (Hidayat-ur-Rehman & Alsolamy, 2023).

### **Technological Innovation**

As previously outlined, the development of technological innovation within a company is driven by ethical leadership, which then positively impacts the company's effectiveness. Moral leaders typically establish clear and robust ethical guidelines for their followers, convey ethical principles, set incentives in the realm of moral behavior, and enforce sanctions against unethical behavior (Weerawardena et al., 2021). Furthermore, ethical leadership can enhance the credibility and reputation of the company by emphasizing



ethical decision-making, especially in the context of strengthening relationships with stakeholders and investing in new technologies.

Companies implementing technological innovation under the guidance of strong ethical leadership often foster trust-based relationships with stakeholders. The level of trust leaders demonstrate in new technological innovations becomes a key factor in determining the success or failure of technological innovation efforts. In other words, ethically led companies with solid leadership must personally contribute to and actively engage in the company's long-term commitment to technological innovation (Dimakopoulou et al., 2024).

Research conducted by Wang and Zheng (2022) found a positive correlation between company performance and technological innovation following ethical leadership by leaders. Ethical leaders encourage followers to express views, advise on ethical issues, and facilitate job-related procedures (Pan et al., 2023). Providing opportunities to motivate followers to express their views and ideas can stimulate innovation in work by prompting employees to consider new perspectives (Islam et al., 2022). Conversely, the presence of inadequate ethical leadership alongside innovation in the technology realm within organizations can jeopardize and restrict organizational growth (Khan et al., 2023). Based on Siregar et al., (2023), ethically led leaders are dedicated and committed to pursuing and implementing technological innovations, ultimately creating enduring value for stakeholders.

Ethical leadership plays a significant role in implementing technological innovation within a company. This role is evidenced by the ability of ethically-minded leaders to establish clear ethical guidelines for their followers, enhance company performance, and strengthen relationships with stakeholders. Moreover, ethical leaders can stimulate innovation by providing opportunities for their subordinates to express their ideas and perspectives. However, the ineffectiveness of leadership lacking ethical considerations can jeopardize organizational growth and impede technological innovation efforts. Therefore, to achieve success in adopting technological innovation, companies must have leaders who are not only technically competent but also possess moral integrity and ethical values.

### **Accountability**

Bezuidenhout dan Ratti (2021) views responsibility as something that can be traded for an explanation, considering any explainable initiative as something accountable. This

perspective suggests that individuals or entities undertaking actions are obligated to provide justifications or explanations for their decisions or behaviors.

In contrast, Shin et al., (2022) regard the notion of accountability functions as steps designed to demand responsibility from providers of automated decision-making systems for the outcomes produced by their programmed decision-making. This perspective emphasizes the importance of establishing mechanisms to ensure that those who develop and implement automated systems are answerable for the outcomes generated by these systems.

Cech (2021) observe the concept of accountability through the lens of the education sector, stating that the effectiveness of specific indicators compared to simplicity heavily depends on the targeted educational groups (such as internal versus external monitoring). Xie et al., (2024) provide an insight into accountability within the education sector, emphasizing the contextual nuances that influence its effectiveness. They assert that the efficacy of specific accountability indicators, in comparison to their simplicity, is contingent upon the targeted educational groups, such as internal stakeholders like educators and administrators versus external entities like regulatory bodies or the broader community.

Accountability is an essential concept in ensuring transparency, fairness, and trust. In automated decision-making, accountability is necessary to ensure that system providers are responsible for the outcomes produced by their algorithms. It includes explaining how decisions are made and who is accountable if problems or negative impacts arise.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study explores the relationship between ethical leadership, technological innovation, and accountability in the context of the growth and development of a country. The main findings indicate that ethical leadership emphasizing moral values is crucial in enhancing technological innovation by promoting accountability. Ethical leadership shapes moral identity and creates an ethical environment, positively impacting organizational performance. Meanwhile, accountability is a critical element in maintaining and creating broader value.

The results of this research are expected to guide leaders, researchers, and policy-makers. Maintaining a balance between ethical leadership, technological innovation, and accountability is an effective strategy to ensure sustainable development for a country. Implementing strong ethical leadership and technological innovation practices is critical

to responding to accountability and building societal trust. Although this study provides in-depth insights, some limitations need to be considered. Additionally, geographical and cultural aspects can also be considered in the context of sustainability and innovation.

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