



**INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF NOVEL RESEARCH
AND DEVELOPMENT (IJNRD) | IJNRD.ORG**
An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

UNDERSTANDING VIRTUE IN THE WORKPLACE

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ABSTRACT

In the workplace, virtue plays a crucial role in fostering an ethical and sustainable organizational culture. It encompasses moral qualities such as integrity, empathy, justice, humility, and accountability, which shape behaviour and guide decision-making. This study combines theoretical and empirical perspectives on workplace virtue, investigating its conceptual underpinnings, practical implications, and influence on organizational success. The study utilizes a mixed-method approach, integrating a review of existing literature with survey-based empirical data. The findings suggest that organizations that prioritize virtues tend to have higher levels of employee engagement, job satisfaction, and overall success. The study ends with suggestions for HR-led programs aimed at fostering virtue and improving productivity and ethical culture within organizations.

Keywords: Virtue, workplace ethics, organizational culture, employee well-being, ethical leadership, Positive Organizational Scholarship, virtue ethics, social exchange theory.

INTRODUCTION

Virtue in the workplace encompasses a collection of moral and ethical attributes that shape individual conduct and establish the organizational culture. Companies that incorporate virtue into their workplace culture cultivate trust, ethical decision-making, and long-term sustainability (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012). Cultivating virtues like integrity, responsibility, humility, and justice not only enhances individual

performance but also fosters a positive work environment where collaboration and ethical conduct flourish.

As concerns about unethical behaviour in corporate environments continue to rise, the significance of virtue in fostering ethical organizations has become more evident. Ethical lapses, workplace disputes, and leadership challenges have prompted a focus on cultivating a workplace culture centered around virtuous behaviour. According to Peterson and Siegelman (2004), companies that prioritize character strengths and ethical virtues tend to have happier and more engaged employees. Additionally, social exchange theory proposes that employees respond positively to virtuous treatment by demonstrating increased loyalty and commitment (Youssef & Luthans, 2007).

The purpose of this study is to investigate the significance of virtue in organizations, its theoretical underpinnings, and its influence on workplace culture and performance. Through the examination of real-world data and academic theories, the study emphasizes the significance of virtue in promoting sustainable business achievements and cultivating ethical work cultures.

The Concept of Virtue in Organizations

Virtue has been a topic of philosophical and ethical discussion for many years, with thinkers like Aristotle and Confucius highlighting its significance in individual and societal welfare (Hartman & Desjardins, 2018). In the organizational setting, virtue encompasses qualities like integrity, empathy, and justice. Humility, and responsibility (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). These virtues impact decision-making processes, workplace dynamics, and the overall success of organizations.

Core Virtues in the Workplace

- **Integrity** – Encourages honesty, transparency, and ethical behavior (Ng & Feldman, 2015). Studies suggest that integrity fosters long-term trust between employees and management, leading to a more stable workplace culture.
- **Empathy** – Enhances teamwork and employee well-being (Rego, Ribeiro, & Cunha, 2010). Empirical research has shown that organizations that promote empathy experience higher employee morale and lower turnover rates.
- **Justice** – Ensures fairness and equity in workplace policies (Becker & Kernan, 2016). A study by Becker and Kernan (2016) found that employees who perceive fairness in their organization are more engaged and productive.
- **Humility** – Encourages continuous learning and collaboration (Hendriks & Vriens, 2020). Research indicates that humble leaders contribute to a culture of openness and knowledge-sharing.
- **Accountability** – Promotes responsibility in achieving organizational goals (Cameron, 2012). Accountability-driven workplaces report higher efficiency and performance outcomes.

Theoretical Foundations of Virtue in Organizations

1. **Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS):** POS emphasizes the role of positive practices in improving workplace outcomes (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012). Research within POS suggests that virtue-driven organizations demonstrate resilience and adaptability during crises.
2. **Virtue Ethics Theory:** Rooted in Aristotelian philosophy, this theory emphasizes moral character in decision-making (Hartman & Desjardins, 2018). A study by Peterson & Seligman (2004) highlights how virtue ethics influence leadership development.
3. **Social Exchange Theory:** Suggests that organizations demonstrating virtuous behavior enhance employee loyalty and commitment (Youssef & Luthans, 2007). Empirical studies have shown that when employees perceive fairness and virtue in management practices, they exhibit higher job satisfaction and organizational citizenship behavior.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

To examine the importance of virtue development in the workplace and assess its impact on employee well-being and organizational performance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

- **Ethics and Excellence: Cooperation and Integrity in Business by R. C. Solomon (1992)**

Solomon (1992) advocates for a virtue-based approach to business ethics, asserting that ethical conduct should be deeply ingrained in the culture of a company rather than merely a requirement imposed externally. He emphasizes the significance of collaboration, honesty, and ethical behaviour in achieving long-term business prosperity. This viewpoint corresponds to the ideas put forth by Di Fabio and Saklofske (2019), who emphasize the significance of virtuous organizational practices in enhancing employee well-being and performance. Solomon's focus on ethical leadership and community involvement aligns with current conversations on corporate social responsibility and stakeholder-centric business approaches. His work remains a timeless classic.

This book makes a significant contribution to our understanding of how organizations can achieve long-term success by prioritizing ethical excellence.

- **MacIntyre, A. (1984) – After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory**

MacIntyre (1984) offers a thorough analysis of contemporary ethical theories, asserting that moral discussions have become disjointed because of the erosion of a common moral heritage. He promotes the revival of Aristotelian virtue ethics, highlighting the significance of practices, customs, and moral stories in cultivating ethical character. His work is considered foundational in virtue ethics, shaping conversations on moral philosophy, leadership, and organizational ethics by emphasizing the significance of moral excellence over rule-based ethical approaches.

- **Hursthouse R. (1999) – On Virtue Ethics**

Hursthouse (1999) expands on the Aristotelian virtue ethics, asserting that virtues act as practical guides for

making ethical choices. She evaluates deontological and consequentialist theories, asserting that moral virtues play a crucial role in resolving ethical dilemmas. Her work has a major impact on applied ethics, particularly in the realm of business ethics, as she proposes that ethical leadership should be rooted in the cultivation of character rather than strict adherence to rules or cost-benefit analyses.

- **Peterson, C., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2004) – *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification***

Peterson and Seligman (2004) classify universal virtues and character strengths, offering a framework to comprehend how moral qualities impact both personal and societal welfare. Their categorization of virtues, encompassing wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence, has been extensively utilized in the fields of psychology and organizational behaviour. Their research is highly significant in the field of leadership studies, highlighting the importance of character strengths in creating ethical work environments and promoting employee well-being.

- **Treviño, L. K., Weaver, G. R., & Reynolds, S. J. (2014) – *Behavioral Ethics in Organizations: A Review***

Treviño, Weaver, and Reynolds (2014) analyses research on behavioural ethics in organizations, exploring how personal, organizational, and situational factors influence ethical decision-making. They stress that ethical behaviour is primarily shaped by cognitive biases, social influences, and corporate culture, rather than being solely determined by moral values.

Principles: their research is vital in understanding the practical challenges encountered by ethical leaders and developing strategies to promote ethical behaviour within organizations.

- **Wright, T. A., & Goodstein, J. (2007) – *Character is not “dead” in management research: A review of individual character and organizational-level virtue***

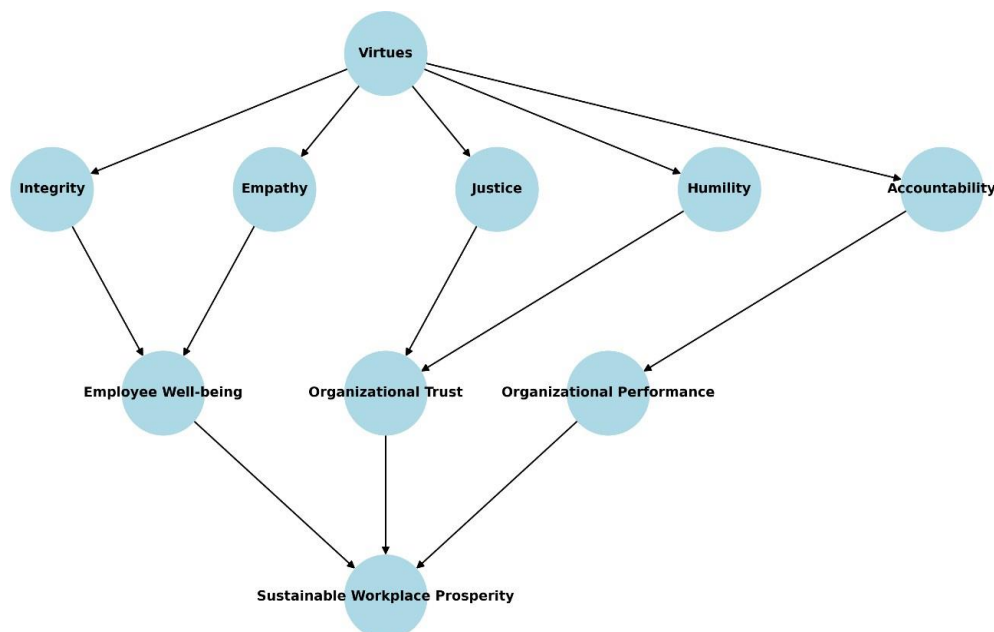
Wright and Goodstein (2007) question the idea that character has become less important in management studies, asserting that individual character and organizational virtue are still essential for making ethical choices and being effective leaders. They stress that leadership based on character cultivates trust, ethical conduct, and sustainable organizational achievements. Their work contributes to the incorporation of virtue ethics in the field of business ethics and human resource management.

- **Rego, A., Ribeiro, N., & Cunha, M. P. (2010) – *Perceptions of Organizational Virtuousness and Happiness as Predictors of Organizational Citizenship Behaviors***

Rego, Ribeiro, and Cunha (2010) examine the relationship between perceptions of organizational virtuousness and employee happiness, and how these factors impact organizational citizenship behaviors (ocbs). They discover that employees who believe their organization is virtuous are more inclined to engage in voluntary, helpful actions that contribute to the workplace. Their research strengthens the notion that cultivating an ethical and positive work environment not only benefits employees' well-being but also enhances the overall performance of the organization.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The study suggests a theoretical framework that suggests workplace virtues influence employee well-being, organizational trust, and performance, ultimately contributing to the establishment of a sustainable workplace environment. The model illustrates the connections between these elements. The diagram illustrating this conceptual framework was designed using Smartpls.



RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research methodology encompasses the structured approach employed to carry out a study. It encompasses the principles, strategies, and techniques utilized to gather, analyse, and interpret data. It offers a systematic method for addressing research inquiries, guaranteeing the reliability and validity of the findings. A comprehensive research methodology provides a clear framework for the research design, data collection methods, sampling techniques, and analytical tools, enabling researchers to obtain objective and meaningful outcomes.

This research project utilizes a quantitative method, employing Likert scale-based survey questions, to investigate the influence of virtue in the professional environment.

Research Design

To collect numerical data on workplace virtue and its influence on employee performance and organizational culture, a cross-sectional survey methodology was employed. The research design was structured to ensure in-depth analysis of how virtuous behaviours impact employee well-being and organizational success.

Sample and Population

- **Target Population:** HR professionals and employees from diverse industries, ensuring representation across multiple organizational structures.

- **Sampling Technique:** A stratified random sampling approach was utilized to ensure diverse representation based on industry, job role, and organizational hierarchy.
- **Sample Size:** A total of 118 respondents participated in the study, providing statistically significant insights.

Data Collection Methods

Primary data was collected through structured surveys featuring Likert scale-based questions. The survey was distributed electronically to HR professionals and employees across multiple organizations.

Survey Instrumentation

The survey questionnaire included 10 items measured on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). The questions aimed to capture perceptions regarding virtue development, ethical behavior, and its impact on workplace culture and performance.

Survey Questions:

1. Virtue development is essential for maintaining a positive workplace culture
2. Employees who demonstrate virtues like integrity, responsibility, and empathy perform better in their roles.
3. Ethical behavior and virtue-driven decision-making contribute to higher job satisfaction.
4. Organizations that emphasize virtue development create a more inclusive and collaborative work environment.
5. Virtue-based training programs should be a key part of employee development initiatives.
6. My organization conducts regular ethics and values training for employees.
7. HR-led mentorship programs play a vital role in reinforcing virtue-based leadership.
8. Performance appraisals in my organization include an assessment of ethical behavior.
9. HR promotes an open-door policy to encourage employees to report unethical practices without fear.
10. My organization has clear policies against unethical behavior, and violations are addressed effectively.

Ethical Considerations

The study adheres to the following guidelines to maintain ethical standards:

- ❖ **Informed consent:** Before filling out the survey, participants are made aware of the study's objectives and their legal rights.
- ❖ **Anonymity and confidentiality:** To preserve participant privacy, no individually identifiable information is gathered.
- ❖ **Voluntary participation:** Participants are free to leave at any time without facing any repercussions.

❖ Data security: Every response is safely saved and used only for study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Empirical Findings

The survey results indicate a high level of consensus that cultivating virtues is crucial for fostering a positive work environment. Key findings include:

- employees who exhibit virtues such as integrity and empathy tend to perform better in their roles
- ethical behaviour and virtue-driven decision-making contribute to higher job satisfaction and organizational performance
- The company's commitment to sustainability is evident in its efforts to reduce waste and promote eco-friendly practices

Statistical Analysis Average Agreement Scores:

- Virtue development importance: ~1.82
- Employees with virtues perform better: 1.80
- Virtue fosters collaboration and inclusivity: 1.84
- HR-led mentorship enhances leadership: 1.88

These findings confirm that virtue-driven HR practices significantly enhance performance, job satisfaction, and organizational culture.

Interpretation

- Virtue development strongly correlates with workplace well-being.
- Ethical workplaces report better employee engagement and satisfaction.
- Organizations should invest in HR-led virtue development programs to sustain ethical and high-performing work cultures.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance virtue development in the workplace:

1. **Implement Virtue-Based Training Programs:** Organizations should design comprehensive ethics and values training for employees to strengthen virtue-based decision-making.
2. **HR-Led Mentorship and Ethical Leadership Programs:** Establish structured mentorship programs to reinforce virtue-based leadership among employees and managers.
3. **Performance Appraisals with Ethical Considerations:** Integrate ethical behavior assessment into employee performance evaluations to ensure virtue-driven workplace practices.
4. **Promote an Open-Door Policy:** Encourage employees to report unethical practices without fear of

retaliation, reinforcing a culture of trust and accountability.

5. Develop Clear Anti-Unethical Behavior Policies: Establish well-defined policies against unethical practices and ensure violations are addressed effectively.

CONCLUSION

This research emphasizes the significant impact that the cultivation of virtues has on organizational environments, highlighting its direct effect on employee well-being and overall organizational success. When organizations prioritize virtues like ethical conduct, integrity, and accountability, they establish a work environment that not only promotes positivity but also greatly improves employee engagement and satisfaction.

One of the significant findings is the influence of leadership that is guided by virtues. Leaders who consistently demonstrate and promote these virtues are more likely to earn the trust and respect of their team members. This trust is crucial for fostering an environment where open communication flourishes, resulting in improved collaboration and innovation. When employees feel safe and appreciated, their morale rises, leading to increased productivity and a stronger sense of teamwork.

Additionally, the study's findings underscore the importance of organizations integrating virtue ethics into their fundamental policies and human resources practices, as this approach ensures long-term sustainability and success. By incorporating these values into their daily operations, companies can foster a culture that values openness, fairness, and ethical conduct.

This not only attracts top talent but also helps retain employees, as individuals are increasingly seeking workplaces that align with their values and contribute to a positive work culture.

In summary, dedicating resources to the cultivation of virtues is not only a moral obligation, but it also provides a competitive edge. Companies that adhere to these principles are likely to experience not only improved employee well-being but also enhanced performance, resilience, and a stronger reputation in the marketplace.

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