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Ethical Leadership and Its Impact on Sustainable Performance – An Exploratory study of the Opinions of Employees at Al-Mustaqbal University

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Abstract: The research aimed to reveal the nature of the role that ethical leadership can play in achieving sustainable performance. The importance of the research was that it was applied in one of the most important service sectors in Iraq in general, which is the higher education sector, as well as to address a realistic problem represented in the investigation of the research sample organisations About achieving the highest levels of sustainable performance, as the research came to fill a knowledge gap represented by the scarcity of Arab or foreign studies to the knowledge of the researcher, which dealt with the relationship between research variables in one hypothetical model. The gradient was distributed to the university's employees, who numbered (110) individuals. (86) audited and measurable questionnaires were retrieved. The descriptive analytical method was used in analysing the

data based on the statistical analysis program spss v.26 and SmartPLS. The researchers also used a set of statistical measures in order to analyse the data and the reach results. The research has reached a set of results, most notably the existence of an Impact and connection relationship between ethical leadership and sustainable performance. The results indicate that paying attention to the development of ethical leadership capabilities can achieve sustainable performance in government and private institutions. Additionally, the research sample college seeks to benefit from ethical leadership behaviours to achieve sustainable performance, and its top leaders are fully aware of the necessity of following the ethical leadership approach in managing the college to reach high levels of sustainable performance.

Keywords: Ethical leadership, sustainable performance, Al-Mustaqbal University, employees.

Introduction

Leadership styles have always been the focus of researcher's attention, and studies have taken to test the leadership style in influencing the performance of employees and the institution in general. In recent years, concepts of multiple styles of leadership have emerged, including ethical leadership. On information, respect and principled decision-making (Negiş Işık, 2020). This research attempted to test the impact of ethical leadership on sustainable performance. Jami et al. (2023) states that ethical practices, if they are adopted by leaders in the organisation, affect the performance of employees and will make them feel little by little that they are obligated to apply these ethics in their work, and this is what It will achieve a better level of work and achieve sustainable performance. Ethical leaders who enjoy honesty, empathy, and informed judgment can influence employees by practicing appropriate behaviour based on ethical actions (Hayat Bhatti et al., 2020). Ethical leaders also gain the trust of followers and provide a moral environment based on good morals (Wen, 2021). The research aims to clarify the concepts and implications related to ethical leadership and its impact on sustainable performance, analyse the contributions and conceptual foundations of the main research variables, as well as to explain how to employ ethical leadership in achieving sustainable performance. The research aimed to illustrate the concepts and implications related to ethical leadership and its impact on sustainable performance, analyse the contributions and conceptual foundations of the main research variables, and clarify how to employ ethical leadership in achieving sustainable performance.

Research Problem

In response to the escalating challenges in the business landscape, an increasing number of researchers are delving into the subject of unethical leadership. Some of these researchers inquire, "What characterises poor leadership, how does it manifest, and why is it of significance?" In their writings on "leadership through fear" and in their examination of recent catastrophes as case studies of "avarice and organisational breakdown," these scholars extract valuable insights. While these analyses are indeed vital, it is also important to take a positive approach and study examples of leaders that can teach a lot about the merits of ethical leadership (Pless, 2007). In recent years, there has been a notable surge in the demand for leaders who bear a heightened responsibility not only towards their business organisations but also towards the environment, society, and a diverse array of stakeholders. Ethical leadership has become imperative in a work environment where trust and legitimacy have been eroded by unethical transgressions in various manifestations. This increasing recognition of the imperative for responsible leadership has brought effective corporate governance to the forefront. Several factors contribute to this heightened need for enhancing governance, there are scandals and collapse of global organisations, financial crises in addition to many cases of mismanagement, lack of accountability and unethical behaviour (Maritz et al., 2011, p. 102). As there is still an urgent need for more applied research to reveal ways to activate the dimensions of ethical leadership in the short and medium term,

as well as the need for more empirical studies that reveal the impact of diverse environments, culture and different social groups on shaping performance sustainable.

From the above, the research problem can be summarised by raising the following question: What is the impact of ethical leadership on achieving sustainable performance?

Research Importance

This research focused on the environment of service organisations, as some variables that had an impact on the management of the organisation were analysed. This research provided an overview about the variables (ethical leadership, sustainable performance) and their relationships, and the results of this research will benefit the Ministry of Higher Education and the universities under its responsibility and supervision regarding how to deal with ethical behaviours, and how to take advantage of the capabilities of workers to provide the best services to beneficiaries. Moreover, the importance of the research can be summarised as follows:

The importance of the research was as follows:

- The originality of the research, as it deals with ethical leadership as a base variable that did not receive sufficient attention by researchers, which is what makes researchers engage in it empirically to study the relationship between moral leadership and sustainable organisational performance.
- This research contributes to addressing the obstacles that may face service organisations in terms of following the ethical leadership style that contributes to the development and strengthening of organisational behaviours.
- The ethical leadership style contributes to enhancing sustainable performance, as the research focuses on how service institutions, including the research sample organisation, activate positive organisational behaviours through the dimensions of ethical leadership.
- The research provides a contribution to providing a theoretical framework for its variables, by presenting summaries of researchers' ideas in the field of ethical leadership and sustainable performance.
- The research seeks to try to increase the awareness of those in charge of the organisation in question of the importance of adopting the ethical leadership style as a work philosophy in the organisation and how it affects the behaviour of employees.
- This research seeks to shed light on service organisations, which are one of the most important sectors at the level of the country and the region.
- It is possible to benefit from the current research in taking corrective actions for the organisation of the research sample in an appropriate manner by following the dimensions of ethical leadership to improve the workplace.

Research Aim

This research seeks to identify the dimensions that drive ethical leadership and its impact on sustainable performance as a dependent variable through:

- the concepts clarifying and implications related to ethical leadership and their impact on sustainable performance as well as in analysing the contributions and conceptual pillars of the main research variables.
- the moral leadership employment of the organisation by obtaining new knowledge that contributes to the desire to activate sustainable performance.
- researching and analysing the nature of the interrelated relationship between the research variables in the research sample organisation, and benefiting from the results of this relationship for the purpose of relying on it, drawing practical conclusions and making

recommendations that serve the research sample organisation, the sector in which it operates, and society as a whole.

Literature Review

The Concept of Ethical Leadership

Bowers (2009) stated that ethics was a science that deals with the behaviour insofar as it was considered right or wrong, good or bad. The posed questions became: approved by whom morality? And right or wrong according to whom? Ethics is defined as "...principles of correct behaviour or a moral value system", Ethical leadership has experienced significant development and growth, evolving from its origins in the early 1980s to the point where it is currently acknowledged as a noteworthy leadership theory. Although the incorporation of ethical leadership into a comprehensive domain of leadership theory is relatively recent, there has been a rising body of empirical research examining ethical leadership and its consequences on individual or group performance in work settings, as well as the factors that precede ethical leadership (Suifan et al., 2020). In theory, ethical leadership includes principles of ethics expressed as ethical behaviours (Hayat Bhatti et al., 2020). Ethical leadership is defined as showing appropriate behaviour in normative terms through personal actions and relationships with subordinates and motivating employees to adopt and apply ethical concepts (Ren et al., 2020). Hence, ethical leadership appears as behavioural patterns exhibited by leaders who act with integrity, justice, and confidence in accordance with ethics at all times (Al Halbusi et al., 2021). Thus, the ethical leader is an ethical paradigm that generates ethical behaviour, decision-making, and pro-social behaviour in subordinates (Hunter, 2012). It displays qualities such as integrity, trust, and honesty (Kim & Vandenberghe, 2020). The second pillar refers to whether the actions of the individual as an ethical manager represent ethical behaviour, make fair and balanced decisions, express role expectations consistent with organisational goals, and show sincere care for subordinates (Zaim et al., 2021). And to adjudicate effectively in behaviours through Rewarding ethical actions, behaviour, and measure in ethical behaviour in the workplace (Saleem et al., 2020). The ethical leader displays ethical management through communication and compensation for ethical behaviour (Brown & Trevino 2014). Ethical leadership is based on normative ethical principles identified as subsidiarity approach, deontology approach, or virtue approach and that ethics has evolved to become an essential component of modern business (Negiş Işık, 2020). Ethics within leadership concepts has been associated with a philosophical perspective directed at the question of how leaders should act to clarify this, and the ethics system provides an understanding of morality and how to behave in a morally correct manner as a member of society. There has been little empirical research on the variable of ethical leadership or outcomes that are affected by ethical leadership (O'Leary, 2016). From the above, ethical leadership can be defined as "the process of behaving in proportion to provide benefit to others and refraining from any behaviours that lead to harm to others".

Principles of Ethical Leadership

Metcalf (2011) points out that ethical leaders are more than just a relationship from top management. They lead with love. Ethical leadership is successful when adhered to four principles:

- Mutual relationship with their subordinates
- A leader's passion comes from empathy
- Real leaders serve and support
- Honesty is essential to ethical leadership

The moral leaders place great emphasis on qualities such as love, self-control, humility, and sacrifice, which align with the principles of idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration. Ethical leaders assume the role of role models and establish well-defined ethical standards, consistently adhering to them. Moreover, they proactively

communicate these ethical standards, recognising and rewarding employees who align their behaviour with the prescribed ethical guidelines (Aloustani et al., 2020).

Characteristics of ethical leadership

An ethical leader has a set of characteristics as follows (O'Leary, 2016; Saleem et al., 2020).

- Ethical leaders behave altruistically in leading employees.
- These ethical leaders are the ones who work for the betterment of other employees.
- The literature has shown that leaders should be more concerned from the employees' point of view than their ethics. If workers see that these leaders have credibility, moral charisma, and legitimate goals, their behaviour will follow suit.
- That these leaders need to maintain and maintain a high level of integrity. If leaders maintain these qualities, they will maintain the interest of their employees and influence their behaviour.

When an ethical leader practices these values on a daily basis, he is largely responsible for creating good relationships based on consistent ethical behaviour. This behaviour is one of honesty, fair treatment, and consideration for others (Freire & Bettencourt, 2020, p. 312).

Dimensions of Ethical Leadership

According to Kalshoven, et al. (2016) the dimensions of ethical leadership are as follows:

- People-orientation: caring, respecting and supporting followers
- Power sharing: allowing followers participating in decision-making and to listen to their ideas and concerns
- Attention to sustainability: caring for the environment and stimulating recycling.
- Ethical counselling: Communicating about ethics, explaining ethical rules, and promoting and rewarding ethical behaviour
- Role clarity: Clarify responsibilities, expectations, and performance objectives
- Integrity: consistency of words and actions, keeping promises

The Concept of Sustainable Performance

The performance is also viewed as a state of an organisation's competitiveness which is reached with a level of effectiveness and efficiency. The performance is the relationship between the cost and value of the benefits obtained. As for sustainability, the concept of sustainability emerged approximately three decades ago in response to the growing global environmental challenges, particularly those associated with energy and natural resource management. Fundamentally, the Human Environment Conference in Stockholm in 1972 marked the pivotal moment when it became acknowledged that human actions were playing a role in environmental harm, posing a significant threat to the future of humanity. Sustainability is currently one of the leading strategies to increase value for organisations, The most widely referenced definition of sustainability is one that involves fulfilling the current generation's needs while preserving the capacity of future generations to fulfil their own needs (Castellani & Sala, 2010; Chardine-Baumann & Genoulaz, 2014; Zackrisson et al., 2017). Sustainability is alternatively defined as a prudent equilibrium between economic advancement, environmental guardianship, and social equity (Wicher et al., 2019). energy consumption, stakeholder satisfaction, and financial outcomes (Malik et al., 2021). The theoretical meaning of the term sustainability is equivalent to permanence and means durability, stability and eternity (Kazemian et al., 2016). A business and investment that seeks to use best business practices to meet and balance the needs of current and future stakeholders and this includes a series of complex tasks to provide a competitive outcome in the short term while helping to protect and preserve human resources (Rani, 2018), organisations have to maintain and develop economic, social and environmental capital base while actively contributing to sustainability in the political sphere (Elijido-Ten, 2017, p. 960). Sustainable performance management

encompasses the managerial process aimed at securing and utilising resources in an efficient and effective manner to achieve an organisation's economic, social, and environmental objectives. It serves as a robust management framework that bridges the gap between social and environmental management with business management and competitive strategy. Furthermore, it integrates environmental and social data with economic information, facilitating comprehensive reporting on sustainability (Crutzen, 2011). There are three levels of performance that must be subject to continuous change and improvement within the organisation in order to achieve sustainable performance, which is the strategic level, the methodological practical level, the operational level, where the principles of Sustainable development within the vision and mission of the organisation and a statement of its strategic importance. At the operational level, organisations implement environmental management systems and report on the sustainability of their operations in annual sustainable development reports. Organisations tend to place increasing importance on social responsibility and charitable projects that they undertake, either in terms of methodology, which is a work Fundamental to most organisations, which are not excluded from sustainable performance. Moreover, organisations are increasingly responsible for their impacts implemented on society, the environment and the economy after a long period of work (Labuschagne & Brent, 2005, p. 360). The primary goal of sustainable performance is to reach the highest Levels of efficiency and effectiveness in performance, optimal utilisation of resources in the organization and value creation to stakeholders and to achieve integration between financial and societal performance, organisations need to enhance their performance in the field of sustainability, which requires achieving positive economic, social and environmental performance in the long term. Sustainability management involves balancing goals between the three pillars of sustainability, which are social, environmental and economic (Kazemian et al., 2016; Khan et al., 2021). And among the goals of sustainable performance are compliance with some voluntary initiatives and charitable work that is not related to the core business, as well as taking advantage of scarce resources, cost effectiveness, customer satisfaction, rewarding suppliers, attracting and retaining talented employees, and enhancing the reputation of the organisation (Rezaee, 2018). In addition to contributing to environmental safety, social welfare, and economic resilience (Jilani et al., 2020). Therefore, organisations develop and apply practices that focus on obtaining and maintaining economic and competitive advantages while reducing the environmental burden and increasing social prosperity as well as the effective use of energy and materials to reduce operating costs, reduce pollution, and provide a safe work environment (Kravchenko et al., 2019). The sustainability competencies that the organisation needs to achieve sustainable performance are three aspects of the competencies that are represented by practical knowledge, values and skills, and these make the organisation ready to take responsibility and the individual is able to participate in issues related to sustainability and address them and perform tasks with extreme accuracy and high speed (Ofei-Manu & Didham, 2018, p. 1175). From the above, sustainable performance can be defined as the ability of organisations to find a balance between profit-oriented goals and relevant social and environmental goals in managing their operations.

Dimensions of Sustainable Performance

The goals of sustainable performance imply a great need to achieve a balance between the three main dimensions (economic, social and environmental) which are known as TBL (Afum et al., 2020; Chavez et al., 2020; Tasleem, et al., 2019).

- *Economic sustainability performance:* The economic dimension of sustainable performance is related to productive and financial organisational performance (Iqbal et al., 2020b). Metrics such as profit, costs, employment and return on investment are frequently used to assess economic performance (Abbade, et al., 2014). By focusing on reducing the cost of treatment; focus on reducing distribution cost; reduce the cost of energy consumption; cost reduction; low cost of waste treatment; focus on increasing market share; focus on recycling revenue; And focus on the revenues of green products (Awan et al., 2022; Siddh, et al., 2018), and financial variables

are the most dominant factors to reach the sustainable performance of organisations, and changes in these factors can change the performance of organisations (Iqbal et al., 2020a). Performance effects of financial sustainability are determined by net assets, fixed cost, operating cost to net interest income, and earnings per share (Asghar, et al., 2020).

- *Social Sustainability Performance:* The social facet of sustainable performance becomes evident when scrutinising variables like education, accessibility to social services, health, overall well-being, social cohesion, and quality of life (Shahzad et al., 2020). Organisational actions that influence these aspects of society can be regarded as contributions to social performance (Abbade, et al., 2014). By focusing on market demands such as contributions to a product of value to society, standard working conditions, or worker safety with an emphasis on wages and training. As well as employee diversity (the employee community includes women, minorities, employees with disabilities, etc.) donations to the community and increased social welfare (Siddh, et al, 2018).
- *Environmental sustainability performance:* The environmental dimension pertains to the ecological consequences of regulatory practices. Evaluation measures include the reduction of gas emissions, water usage, air pollution, energy consumption during production, damage to the natural environment, and the management of solid waste, all of which are employed to assess environmental performance (Abbade, et al., 2014; Indriastuti & Chariri, 2021). As well as reducing production losses and reducing consumption of toxic and harmful substances (Siddh, et al, 2018). Sustainable environmental performance aims to preserve the environment and reduce damage to it. It also focused on the safe disposal of packaging materials (Hayat Bhatti et al., 2020).

Research Methodology

This axis included the method by which the research questions were formulated, which represent its intellectual problematic. It also included an explanation of the research hypotheses and its hypothetical scheme. It will also provide an explanation of the research variables, the type of research methodology that will be followed, its limits, its community and its sample:

Procedural Definitions

Table 1

Procedural Definitions of Research

Concept	variable	Category
Exemplify morally sound conduct through individual actions and interpersonal interactions, and bolster this conduct among followers via bidirectional communication, positive reinforcement, and decision-making	Ethical leadership	independent variable
Caring ,respecting and supporting followers	✓ Orientation towards people	dimensions
Facilitate follower engagement in decision-making processes and attentively consider their ideas and concerns.	✓ power sharing	
Caring for the environment and promoting recycling	✓ Attention to sustainability	
Communicating about ethics, explaining ethical rules, and promoting and rewarding ethical behaviour	✓ moral guidance	

Clarify responsibilities, expectations, and performance objectives	✓ Clarity of the role	
Consistency of words and deeds, keep promises	✓ integrity	
The organisation's capacity to embrace changes in the business environment, implement current best practices, and attain as well as sustain exceptional competitive performance.	sustainable performance	dependent variable
This term alludes to the comprehensive economic advancement of an organisation while ensuring that it does not have adverse effects on the social, environmental, and cultural dimensions of a society	▪ Economic sustainability performance	dimensions
A proactive approach to managing and identifying the business's influence on employees, value chain workers, customers, and local communities.	▪ Social Sustainability Performance	
Conscientious engagement with the environment aimed at preventing the depletion or deterioration of natural resources and ensuring enduring environmental quality.	▪ environmental sustainability performance	

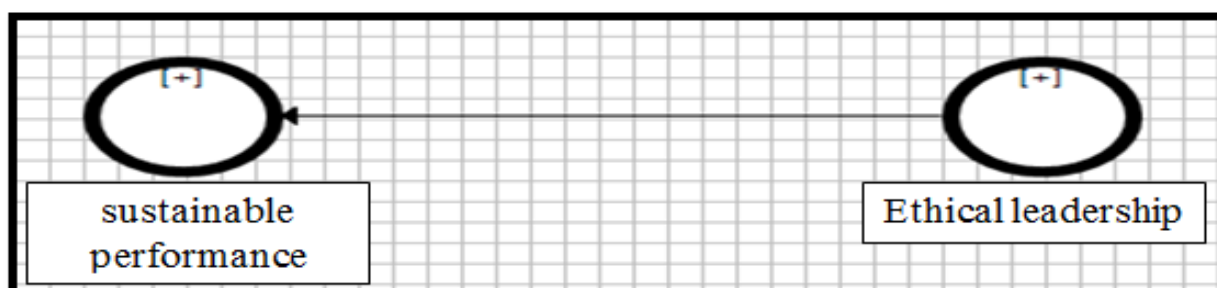
Source: Prepared by the researcher.

Research Hypotheses

Based on the intellectual foundation of the study, and with the aim of accomplishing its objectives and addressing its research questions, the following hypothesis has been constructed: Ethical leadership has a significant, statistically significant effect in achieving sustainable performance (Figure 2).

Figure 2

The Hypothesis of the Research



Source: Prepared by the researcher.

Sample / Participants / Group of the research

The limits of the research included the following:

- Human limits: As the research included a sample of employees in the organisation, a survey was directed towards them. The researcher aimed to select a random sample of employees from the administrative positions that required leadership skills in the Al-Mustaqbal University College. These positions include deans, assistants, heads of scientific departments, middle and lower-level leaders, and departmental and section responsible individuals. A total of 110 questionnaires were distributed directly to the sample through personal interviews, and the questionnaire sections were fully explained to them. Later on, the questionnaires were retrieved, and 86 of them were valid for analysis. The data was analysed using the SmartPLS program.

- Spatial limits: the study was limited to Al-Mustaqbal University College, which was affiliated with the Iraqi Ministry of Higher Education.
- Temporal limits: which are represented in the period of practical preparation of the research in the organisation in question, which included the duration of the initial visits to diagnose the research problem, this comprised the timeframe for the initial visits to diagnose the research problem, the duration required to gather essential research data, and the period allocated for distributing and retrieving questionnaires. This timeframe spanned from February 2022 to the early part of June 2022.
- Scientific Boundaries: The research has been meticulously delineated with clear objectives, significance, and inquiries, all confined within the boundaries of its variables.

Data Analysis

The researcher adopted a set of scales to measure the study variables, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Set of Measures Adopted to Measure the Study Variables

the scale	number of paragraphs	The dimension	variable
Kalshoven et al. (2016)	3	Orientation towards people	Ethical leadership
	3	power sharing	
	3	Attention to sustainability	
	3	moral guidance	
	3	Clarity of the role	
	3	Integrity	
Tasleem et al. (2019)	5	Economic sustainability	sustainable performance
	5	Social Sustainability	
	5	Environmental sustainability	

Source: Prepared by the researcher.

The researchers aimed to modify the measures used in the current study by removing some paragraphs that are not appropriate for the current study site and do not serve the study's objectives. They also aimed to make the scale smoother and more accurate by deleting repetitive paragraphs that provide similar results and reducing the number of questions so that the respondent does not feel bored or tired from the large number of questions posed.

The researcher relied on a set of measures to measure the variables of the study, and as shown in Table (1), a five-graded Likert questionnaire was relied upon, and appropriate statistical tools were used to analyse the answers of the sample, as it relied on the arithmetic mean, standard deviation, and relative importance, and in order to reach the results to determine the nature and direction of the relationship, the SmartPLS statistical analysis program was used.

Research Results

The research relied on descriptive analysis, including measures of central tendency and dispersion, and Partial Least Squares Modelling (PLS-SEM) was used through the SmartPLS program.

The Descriptive Analysis

Table (3) presents the descriptive analysis of the scale, utilising the mean as a measure of central tendency and the standard deviation as a measure of data dispersion. The results from the mean indicated that all the statements pertaining to the moral leadership variable exceeded the theoretical mean of (3) on the Likert five-point scale. This observation signifies the prevalence of all items related to the variable within the organization being examined. Similarly, the statements associated with the sustainable performance variable also surpassed the theoretical mean, affirming the prevalence of this variable within the organisation under study. Moreover, the descriptive analysis results indicated minimal standard deviation values, underscoring the accuracy of respondents' responses and their comprehension of the statements.

Table 3

Descriptive Analysis of the Scale Items

standard deviation	SMA	Paragraph	The dimension	variable
0.791	3.971	X1-1	Orientation towards people	Ethical leadership
0.829	4.382	X1-2		
0.754	4.382	X1-3		
0.798	3.927	X2-1	Power sharing	
0.888	4.044	X2-2		
0.667	3.941	X2-3		
0.753	4.029	X3-1	Attention to sustainability	
0.822	4.265	X3-2		
0.907	3.794	X3-3		
0.736	4.103	X4-1	Moral guidance	
0.758	4.191	X4-2		
0.859	4.088	X 4-3		
0.709	4.033	X5-1	Clarity of the role	
0.669	4.300	X5-2		
0.594	4.317	X5-3		
0.614	4.400	X6-1	Integrity	
0.709	4.033	X6-2		
0.406	4.169	X6-3		
standard deviation	SMA	Paragraph	The dimension	variable
0.992	3.978	Y1-1	Economic sustainability performance	sustainable performance
0.789	4.380	Y1-2		
0.736	4.103	Y1-3		
0.758	4.191	Y1-4		
0.754	4.382	Y1- 5		
0.703	4.100	Y2-1	Social Sustainability Performance	
0.658	4.150	Y2-2		
0.621	4.133	Y2-3		

0.556	4.400	Y2-4	environmental sustainability performance
0.859	4.012	Y2-5	
0.458	4.181	Y3-1	
0.475	4.164	Y3-2	
0.736	4.103	Y3-3	
0.758	4.191	Y3-4	
0.646	4.170	Y3-5	

Source: SmartPLS outputs.

Note. SMA= Mean

Hypothesis Testing

The effect hypotheses are examined by assessing the path coefficients within the structural model, and an evaluation of the structural model is conducted using least squares modelling, as outlined in Table 4 following the methodology described by Hair Jr et al. (2021).

Table 4

Criteria for Evaluating the Structural Model

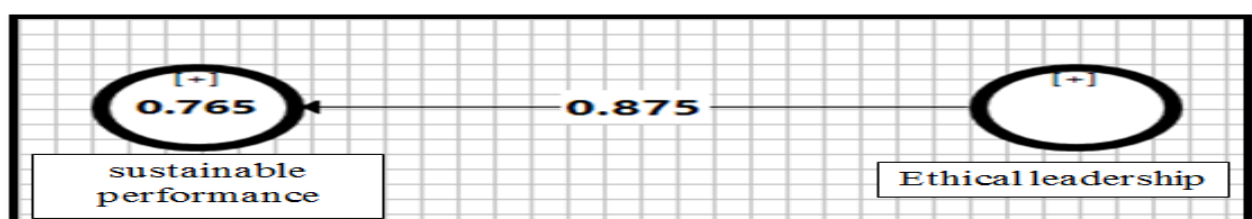
Threshold (permissible limit)	Standard	
≤ 1.96	T value	Path coefficient significance
≥ 0.05	P value	
0.25poor, 0.5 medium, 0.75 high	R ²	Interpretation coefficient

Source: Prepared by researchers based on Hair Jr et al. (2021).

Hypothesis testing of the study. The main hypothesis states that “there is a significant impact of ethical leadership in achieving sustainable performance.” For the purpose of testing this hypothesis a structural model was built as shown in Figure (2) below:

Figure 2

The Structural Model for Testing the Study Hypothesis



Source: SmartPLS outputs.

Table 5

Results of the Evaluation of the Structural Model of the Study Hypothesis

R ² rate	Coefficient of determination R ²	Effect size f ²	The result	p Value	t Value	Path parameter	VI	path	Hypothesis
0.715	0.765	2.698	Acceptance	0	12.650	0.875	1	X→Y	H1

Source: SmartPLS outputs.

The findings, as displayed in Table (5), reveal that the path coefficient (direct effect) has reached a value of 0.875, and the determination coefficient R² (interpretation) stands at 0.765. These results signify the importance of the relationship, thereby supporting the acceptance of the study's hypothesis.

Discussion

The research that addresses ethical leadership and sustainable performance is still limited (Dey et al., 2022). This study offers many literary contributions, including that sustainable performance can be achieved through ethical leadership and ethical behaviours of the leader and employees (Adamu et al., 2023; Khan et al., 2019). The results of this study showed that there is an impact of ethical leadership in achieving sustainable performance, and the main hypothesis stating that ethical leadership has a statistically significant moral effect in achieving sustainable performance was accepted. This study differs from the study by Fatoki (2020) in terms of the strength of the impact of ethical leadership in achieving sustainable performance, as this study found that the strength of the effect was (0.765), while the study by Fatoki (2020) revealed the presence of an effect but not to a great extent.

This study agrees with the study of (Zaim & Budu, 2021) that ethical leadership leads to improved performance. The study (Ogaga et al., 2023) confirms that dynamic changes in the environment greatly affect the nature of the relationship between ethical leadership and sustainable development. Empirical evidence revealed that top leaders in the Faculty of Al-Mustaqbal Private University adopt the philosophy of ethical leadership in managing the educational institution, and their performance is geared towards sustainability. This study showed that the research sample of university employees agreed that the top leadership at the university cares about the feelings of the workers and empathises with their problems. The university's managers and officials spend a considerable amount of time personally communicating with various workers and students to identify and address their issues. As the upper management of the university allows for sharing decisions with subordinates and listens to their opinions in shaping goals, this study found that ethical leaders play a significant role in influencing employees, increasing positive behaviours, and promoting sustainability (Moore et al., 2019; Yang & Liu, 2022). This study found that environmental sustainability can be achieved through ethical leadership (Usman & Hameed, 2017). The ethical leader enhances the environmental behaviour of employees and thus achieves the goals of sustainable development (Shuya and Zainal, 2022).

This study has observed that the performance of the Al-Mustaqbal University College is heading towards sustainability through the senior leadership's focus on the environment and sustainable development issues. The university has included in its main objectives the care and protection of the environment and carries out activities related to the environment, such as workshops and seminars for employees and students, especially in terms of protecting the environment and using renewable energy. The university also encourages researchers to conduct research and studies related to sustainability. The university management is committed to placing stickers and signs that promote environmental protection, recycling, and green initiatives. According to the answers provided by the sample individuals in Table (3), the study results show that the university's management requires all employees to follow safety procedures and disseminates work regulations and guidelines to its members. The senior leadership of the university is characterised by honesty, neutrality, and credibility, as indicated by the answers of the sample individuals to the questionnaire items. They confirmed that the senior leadership of the university is trustworthy, reliable, and always fulfils its promises. All of the above means that the Al-Mustaqbal University College relies on the philosophy of good leadership in managing the university.

Regarding sustainable performance, this research results showed that Al-Mustaqbal University College is striving to achieve sustainable performance by achieving economic, social, and environmental sustainability. The sample individuals' answers showed that the top leadership in the university is seeking to improve the university's financial performance, and the university owns a distinguished competitive position compared to competing private universities surrounding its location. The

university enjoys a good academic reputation and student demand for admission to the university. The university strives to implement the latest technological systems in admissions and education, and provides all the necessary equipment with high specifications. The university has won local and international awards and accolades that praise its high role and the efficiency of its faculty and researchers. The university also seeks to fulfil its obligations towards stakeholders and provides great services to the community. It enjoys a reputation and medical relationship with civil society organizations and is classified as one of the best private universities in Hilla, committed to social responsibility and achieving benefits for the community it serves. However, in terms of environmental performance, the university has a good record in environmental protection and reducing environmental risks and damage, as some of its departments rely on solar energy to provide electricity and have a file for resource management and efficient utilization. The ethical leader knows well how to invest and manage resources efficiently without wasting them to achieve sustainability (Tushar, 2017). The university treats its waste to reduce environmental pollution, and the university management is keen on providing green spaces, reducing risks, managing its facilities, which was confirmed by the respondents' answers.

This study's results converge with Tushar (2017) and agree with the existence of many variables that contribute to achieving sustainable performance through ethical leadership. One emphasises on the necessity of conducting further studies that discuss the role of ethical leadership in achieving sustainable development and the extent of the contribution of ethical leadership philosophy in obtaining the ISO sustainability certification. Future studies can also be conducted that link ethical leadership to the environmental management system.

Conclusions

The search results indicated that ethical leadership enhanced positive communication and interaction between management and employees, leading to an improved overall work environment. It also contributes to the increased employee satisfaction towards their jobs and the organisation as a whole, ultimately resulting in improved organisational performance, as well as promoting sustainable commitment among employees towards the organisation's goals and values.

The results also indicate a positive correlation between ethical leadership and sustainable performance, where ethical values and principles contribute to supporting sustainable decision-making. Ethical leadership also enhances trust between teams and management, as ethical leadership promotes trust and respect among different teams and between employees and management, which contributes to achieving better collaboration and a more homogeneous working environment. This leads to improving the overall image of the college and increasing its attractiveness to employees and students. Additionally, this philosophy of leadership works to stimulate innovation and development, as ethical leadership encourages the adoption of a culture that is open to sustainable innovation and development, which contributes to providing new and sustainable solutions to challenges. Overall, ethical leadership serves as an engine for sustainable performance and institutional growth. These results will be a strong foundation for adopting more ethical and sustainable-oriented strategies and policies in the Al-Mustaqbal University College.

Based on the above, a set of conclusions can be presented by relying on the theoretical and applied aspects of the research, as follows:

- Ethical leadership is an essential and basic pattern for organisations, and therefore attention to it and providing its quality factors will affect the continuity and growth of the organisation and contribute to its success.
- The results indicated that the research sample organisation has a great interest in the dimensions of ethical leadership, which means that they are fully aware of the importance of ethical leadership styles.

- Leadership methods and practices are considered according to the nature of the organization's ecosystem, and recent studies have proven that adopting ethical leadership is vital and effective in reducing effort, time and cost.
- The research reached a set of results, including the existence of a direct moral influence relationship between ethical leadership and sustainable performance
- The results proved the acceptance of the research scheme in varying proportions, and therefore it can be adopted.

After presenting the theoretical and applied conclusions, a set of recommendations can be identified, which can help the researched university:

- The necessity of providing the requirements for adopting ethical leadership and encouraging this practice as it contributes to achieving a direct impact on sustainable performance.
- Organisations within the Ministry of Higher Education should contribute to the process of better sustainable performance of society by publishing reports on their future initiatives and projects.
- The need to develop a proposed vision for the development of sustainable performance for the leadership of the organisation, the research sample in the light of the requirements of ethical leadership.
- If the organisation wants the research sample to maintain its sustainable performance, it should pay more attention to environmentally friendly organisational work and to conclude strategic agreements and partnerships with major international organisations with a good reputation.
- The organisation must be able to provide the best new and advanced services in order to improve its reputation, and enable it to work to support social relations between all and encourage cooperation and communication even outside working hours.
- The management of the organisation must consolidate the relationship with its employees so that they feel that they are of great value to it, and this gives an incentive for employees to be creative in their work and to develop ideas that make the organisation at a high level of progress.

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Conflict of Interest

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