

Ethical Leadership and Employee Performance: A Study of Ughelli North and South Local Government Areas of Delta State

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Abstract

This study investigated the impact of ethical leadership on employee performance in Ughelli North and South local government councils of Delta State. The study adopted a cross-sectional research design and a structured survey instrument was used to collect data from a sample of 328 workers randomly selected from Ughelli North and South local government councils. This study was anchor on Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) Theory. The theory hinges on the tenet that leaders cultivate a variety of relationships with their subordinates, ranging from low-quality (out-group) to high-quality (in-group) relationships. The amount of information interchange, trust, competence, dedication, role clarity and work satisfaction are all increased by high-quality LMX. The study four hypotheses were tested at 0.05 levels of significance. Data were analyzed using Statistical Analysis System (SAS 9.2). Pearson correlation coefficient and regression Analysis were used in testing the hypotheses. Findings revealed that ethical leadership (ethical guidance, fairness, role clarification and trust) had positive and significant impact on employee performance. The finding also showed that there was significant relationship between ethical leadership and employee performance in Ughelli North and South local government councils of Delta State. The study concluded that ethical leadership in terms of ethical guidance, fairness, role clarification and trust are imperative for the employees' performance in local government councils in Delta State. The recommended among others that local government leader in Delta State should ensure that all employees participate in ethics training programs. This will serve as an opportunity for employees to learn and evaluate the impact of ethical guidance on employee and organizational performance.

Keywords: ethical leadership; employee performance; leader-member exchange theory

Introduction

Based on the principle of reciprocity, which is entrenched in the social exchange theory, ethical leadership is placed as the moral trait of public sector organization leaders (Mitonga-Monga, 2020). Ethical leaders are bound to generate positive energy and outcomes for the employees because they perceive them to be fair, just and trustworthy. Therefore, employees who believe their leaders are fair tend to be motivated and satisfied (Fan, Li, Mao & Lu, 2021). Usually, leadership qualities should encourage or discourage employees in performing their duties. However, one of the basic problems in many organizations, especially in developing countries, like Nigeria, is encouraging people to work, amid superior officers' bossiness and government officials' corrupt practices (Abdulkareem & Ramli, 2021), low wages, and poor conditions of service. Therefore, the alternative open to employees to choose from in an organization determines whether the ethical qualities of a leader will become a critical factor that causes certain behaviours for employees to be effective. Ethical leadership, as established, is the act of leaders knowing what is right and wrong and abiding by what is right. The foundation of moral leadership is the mental inspiration model, in which the leader mediates the interaction between productivity, goals, ambition, and relations with the personnel. According to Chi, Lan and Dorjgotov (2012), the indirect effect of ethical leadership on increasing effectiveness predicts a characteristic of moral identity. Tu, Lu and Yu (2017) argued that public sector leaders must serve as role models when it comes to matters of trust and integrity since they govern how the public sector does its business. They must ensure that their actions are not detrimental to society's values, but rather achieves the benefit of individual needs.

In general, ethical leaders in the public sector are supposed to set an example for their followers by acting in a way that upholds morality. This strategy aids in raising followers' moral consciousness, which results in an enthusiastic team, a great level of job satisfaction, and enhanced performance in the provision of services. Moral leaders were first seen as honest and trustworthy moral beings (Hassan, Wright & Yukl, 2014). They are also recognized as principled decision makers who care more about the common good of the workforce, business and society. Employees assume leaders are dedicated to them when they think they care about them and act in their best interest. Ethical leaders use balanced actions to hold followers accountable after informing them of the benefits of ethical action and the costs of doing otherwise (Ouakouak, Zaitouni & Arya, 2020; Qing, Asif, Hussain & Jameel, 2020). By soliciting ideas from employees -

without any form of self-censorship, these leaders are also interested in establishing relationships of trust with their followers. By cultivating employee perspectives, ethical leaders can create deep personal relationships that transcend specific economic exchange agreements, enabling high-quality leader-member exchange and employees' performance (Shareef & Atan, 2018).

Ethical scandals have become almost commonplace in today's world. Recently, a lot of attention has been placed on ethical leadership, corporate governance, corporate performance and corporate reputation by researchers and corporate organizations. This is due to the corporate corruption that occurred among corporate giants. Other factors were unethical practices by employees, management and other stakeholders. The persistence of unethical and illegal activities by top managers in both restructured corporate organizations like Arthur Anderson, Enron, Worldcom, Tycon, Qwest, Adelphia and Satyam and other corporate giants is a pointer that code of ethics is not enough for an organization to be ethical (Tamunomiebi & Orianzi, 2019). Obicci (2015) argue that the public sector in Uganda is confronted with a number of challenges, primary among which is the dearth of unethical leadership. Leadership is not a new phenomenon, yet it has become a critical factor of competitive advantage in management economy. The transition to organization growth is about the effectiveness in scale of leadership in relation to other factors of production. As an invaluable entrepreneurial factor, leadership directs and relocates other factors of production. Leadership is at the epicentre of managing performance of employees. The post independence political economy of Nigeria has been largely characterized by bureaucratic and political corruption, clientelism, looting of national treasury, destabilizations of labour force, political violence and high level of poverty, alienation and derivation.

Today, there is very low level of professional ethics and accountability in governance and administration of affairs in Nigeria as a prerequisite for organization management and coverage of ethically-based scandals has highlighted the wide-ranging effects of unethical behavior on the part of large organizations. Such behavior typically affected millions of people and was unlikely to have occurred without the presence of other ethical issues, including but not limited to institutionalize lying. On a smaller scale, the behavior of people in local government councils might have had similar, though less publicized effects. Also, empirical studies on the effects of ethical leadership on employee performance are relatively scanty local government administration and as such, this study investigate the effect of ethical leadership on employee performance in Ughelli North and South local government councils of Delta State. The specific objectives are to:

- i. Assess the relationship between ethical guidance and employee performance in Ughelli North and South local government councils of Delta State.
- ii. Explore the relationship between fairness and employee performance in Ughelli North and South local government councils of Delta State.
- iii. Investigate the relationship between role clarification and employee performance in Ughelli North and South local government councils of Delta State.
- iv. Explore the relationship between Trust and employee performance in Ughelli North and South local government councils of Delta State.

Research Hypotheses

These null hypotheses guide this study

1. H₁: There is no significant relationship between ethical guidance and employee performance in Ughelli North and South local government councils of Delta State.
2. H₂: There is not significant relationship between fairness and employee performance in Ughelli North and South local government councils of Delta State.
3. H₃: There is not significant relationship between role clarification and employee performance in Ughelli North and South local government councils of Delta State.
4. H₂: There is not significant relationship between Trust and employee performance in Ughelli North and South local government councils of Delta State.

Literature Review

Ethical Leadership and Employee Performance

Quite substantial works on moral leadership and related fields as they impact on performances have been well documented for in-depth theoretical analysis and academic refinements. However, while avalanche of extant literature reviewed addressed the subject from aggregate perspectives only, skeletal studies have been undertaken to examine moral leadership from a more dis-aggregated perspectives. Dissecting leadership from normative perspective, Eromafuru (2021) has conceived morality as an integral offshoot of leadership and that deontological reasoning provides a sound basis for attractive leadership theories. The author's argument hung on objectivity of universal moral principles as the legitimate basis of a sound understanding of moral leadership. The moral-right view established the need to respect and protect the fundamental rights of people. The right of people to life, liberty and fair treatment must not be trampled upon. However, this right can create a too formal work setting which many scholars have criticized on the ground that it hinders efficiency. And lastly, the justice view is based on the belief that ethical decisions treat people impartially and fairly according to guiding rules and standard. This approach evaluates the ethical aspects of any decision on the degree to which it is equitable for everyone affected. Justice practice could lead to an attitude of entitlement and reduces productivity (Obicci, 2015). Sadler (2004) describe moral sensitivity as the tendency for an individual to recognize that some aspects of an issue possess moral implications. He opines that a person must be sensitive to the moral implications of a particular situation or issue in order for that person to engage in moral reasoning-

or moral behavior. This suggests that moral sensitivity involves interpreting reactions and feelings of others, understanding causes and consequence chains of events and how these may affect the involved parties. It also requires having empathy and role taking skills in order to become aware that a moral issue is involved in a situation. Thus, the recognition of moral principles, rules or guidelines is very necessary for one to make an ethical decision which is the solid foundation of employee performance (Abiodun & Siddiq, 2013; Adam Huming & Hassan, 2022).

Leadership is considered a major factor that has an indisputable influence on employee performance in any kind of organization. But how employees perform under different kinds of leadership has been a point of contention among researchers and scholar alike. Studies have shown that employee performance increases under an extraverted leadership when employees are passive, and if employees are proactive result will be opposite (Ogbonna & Harris, 2000; Eromafuru, 2021). Better improvement of employee performance is a clarion call for organizations in the midst of continual rising challenges due to scandals and unethical behaviors. According to Alam, Hoque and Oloruntegbe (2010), public leadership must guide decisions and actions for sustainable quality services from public institutions. Dorasamy (2010) asserts that the credibility of public institutions can easily get eroded due to absence of leadership adhering to acceptable standards. Employees are pivotal assets without whom the intended goals of any organization may not be achieved. Employee performance can be increased if they are led by ethical leaders (Bello, 2012). Usually, leadership qualities should encourage or discourage employees in performing their duties. However, one of the basic problems in many organizations, especially in developing countries, like Nigeria, is encouraging people to work, amid superior officers and government officials corrupt practices, low wages, and poor conditions of service. Therefore, the alternative open to employees to choose from in an organization determines whether the ethical qualities of a leader will become a critical factor that causes certain behaviors for employees to be effective (Oladimeji & Abdulkareem, 2022).

Ethical Guidance and Employee Performance

The moral perspective factor of ethical leadership agitates for the behavior of leaders to rest on moral and ethical standards only. By these, the leaders would be able to stress moral values and purpose in their decision making. They will also be able to clarify to followers how tasks and efforts of each member contribute to the achievement of important goals (De-Hoogh & Den-Hartog, 2008). Luthans and Avolio (2003) contend that this type of behavior implies an integrated form of self-regulation. It requires reflective thought and attendant actions, which according to Lunday and Barry (2004) is a decision making necessity influenced and prompted by guidelines. Without such guidelines, decision making and ethicality characterized by impetuosity and precipitousness is more likely to occur. Ethical leaders that demonstrate the highest moral standards and ethical conduct in their everyday talk, actions, decisions and behaviours make those under them in the organization to follow suit. Ethical guidance involves communicating ethics, clarifying ethical rules, promoting and rewarding employee ethical behaviour (Toor & Ofori, 2009). Ethical guidance pertains to the leader's communication about ethics, explanation of ethical rules, and promotion and reward of ethical conduct among subordinates (Kalshoven et al., 2011). With ethical guidance, the leader clearly explains integrity-related codes of conduct, integrity behaviours expected from employees, provides integrity guidelines, ensures that employees follow codes of integrity and clarifies the likely consequences of possible unethical behaviour (Men, 2015). However, Khalid and Bano, (2015) in analysis of the relationship between supervisor's ethical guidance and employee task initiatives established that the relationship was insignificant. Nonetheless, Saeed, Shakeel and Lodhi (2013) ethical guidance had a positive and significant on employee performance. Ethical leaders always adopt high standard of morality that endear them to make proper choices when confronted with an ethical dilemma. Therefore, it can be concluded that moral perspective influence employee performance (Obicci, 2015).

Fairness and Employee Performance

Fairness refers to the judgment by individuals of whether an outcome and/ or the process to reach an outcome are reasonable, acceptable, or just (Xia, Monroe & Cox, 2004). Fairness refers to impartiality, treating others in a right and equitable manner, and making principled and fair choices. Fairness has become an essential form of ethical leadership behaviour since these leaders are selfless and have integrity, trustworthiness, and honesty, and reliability, they are equally responsible for their actions (De-Hoogh & Den-Hartog, 2008). Fairness is when an individual feels he or she has been treated justly. Fairness invokes the principle that people are treated according to their rights (Goldman & Cropanzano, 2015). Fairness of treatment received from authorities has an important influence on people's attitudes and behaviour such as good work performance (Van-Knippenberg, De-Cremer & Van-Knippenberg, 2007). In their study, Collins, Mossholder and Taylor (2012) found out that fairness had a positive significant influence on employee performance. However, Khalid and Bano, (2015) reported that supervisor's fairness had an insignificant relationship with individual's task initiatives. Nevertheless, Selvarajan, Singh and Solansky, (2018) revealed that all dimensions of fairness positively related to performance of employees. Similarly, Sugianingrat, Yasa, Sintaasih and Subudi, (2017) established that fairness had not direct influence on employee performance. Wu, Sturman and Wang, (2013) indicated that overall, fairness was a positive significant predictor of employees' job performance. However, while all the other scholars reported positive significant relationships between fairness and employee performance, Khalid and Bano, (2015) and Sugianingrat et al. (2017) did not.

Lasthuizen (2008) avers that moral managers consistently reward morally appropriate conduct and punish deviations (fairness). This ensures that followers meet the moral standards and know what is considered immoral conduct. Good moral behavior should be rewarded publicly to send the message that conformity to ethical standards and values is desired. If unethical behavior is punished, it may prevent such behavior in the future and function as an example to others that deviation from ethical values, principles, and standards will not be tolerated. An ethical leader will not reward immoral behavior, even though it may lead to success, in order to send out the message that success is

not solely defined by its final outcome but also by how that outcome is achieved. The use and effect of rewards and punishment on employee performance seem to go deeper than simply attaching a pleasant tone to an activity. Inasmuch as it is not inhibitory in its effects but is positively reinforcing, the actual reward and punishment permits more freedom of actions and accountability by the individual employee (Obicci, 2015).

Role Clarification and Employee Performance

Role clarification is the degree to which required information is provided about how the employee is expected to perform his or her job (Lynn & Kalay, 2016). With role clarification, there is clarifying of expectations and communicating openly so that followers understand what is desired and expected of them (Katuramu, Byarugaba & Mugizi, 2016). Role clarification leads to role clarity which is important for better individual job outcomes (Lynn & Kalay, 2016). Role clarification allows employees to realize their expectations and to show if their performance is equitable. De-Hoogh and Den-Hartog, (2008) stress that role clarification helps employees not to worry unnecessarily about unclear expectations and how employees can contribute to the achievement of organizational objectives meaningfully and effectively. In an empirical study, Celik (2013) revealed that the indirect and direct effects of role ambiguity on job performance were significant. Lynn and Kalay, (2016) found out that role clarity was not significantly related to team performance. Samie, Riahi and Tabibi, (2015) reported that there was a positive significant relationship between role clarity and general efficiency of the employees. Thangavelu and Sudhahar, (2017) reported existence of a significant correlation between role clarity and employee job performance. However, while all the other scholars found a positive and significant relationship between role clarity and job performance, Celik, (2013) and Lynn and Kalay (2016) did not.

Trust and Employee Performance

Trust is a sacred and emotional relationship between people; the expectation of faith that individuals have on the organization and leadership. Trust is the foundation for constructive conflict, goal commitment, personal accountability, and achieving collective goals. Trust is a positive expectation that another will not act opportunistically (Darcy, 2010). This is the expectation of others in words, actions or decisions. According Bello (2012) there are two types of trust; conditional and unconditional trust. Conditional trust is a situation whereby both parties are willing to transact with each other as long as each behaves appropriately and uses a similar interpretive scheme to define situation. Whereas conditional trust is characterized by the shared values that structure the social situation and become the primary vehicle through which individuals experience trust. Theorists have also identified three types of trust in organizational relationship; deterrence based, knowledge based and identification based. Deterrence trust is based on fear of reprisal if the trust is violated. Individual act in accordance with what they say because of the consequence. Knowledge trust is based on the behavioural predictability that comes from a history of interaction. The identification based trust is on mutual understanding of each other's intentions and appreciation of the other's wants and desires (Robbins, Judge, Millett & Waters-Marsh, 2008). Trust is an important issue in organizations that has effect on performance, and if broken is likely to have serious adverse effect. Employee trust in leaders will likely result to increase in employee compliance with organizational rules and laws, facilitate the implementation of organizational change; and improve employee contributions in terms of performance, intent to remain and civic virtue behaviour (Ponnu & Tennakoon, 2009).

Employees are unlikely to follow leaders that are perceived to be dishonest and may likely take advantage of them. Studies have shown that greater trust exists in organizations when employees perceive an organizational climate as ethical. Trust within an organization can contribute to creating greater efficiencies in relationships between managers, subordinates, and top level executives (Leo, 1996). Organizational initiatives to improve trust often generate long term benefits. A good example of a corporate culture which focuses on quality and ethics is Starbucks. Starbucks has won a number of ethics awards and has been recognized as a role model of social responsibility. Trust is vital to all organizations and it is expected that ethical leaders demonstrate behavioral consistency between words and actions; treat all employees fairly without violating human rights (Bello, 2012).

Theoretical Framework

Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) Theory

A number of theoretical grounds can be explored to explain the relationship between work ethics and employee's job performance. The Labour process theory which was originally formulated by Karl Marx (translated in 1976) and expanded by Newton and Findlay (1996) argued for how management can move away from the belief in work too job holders' behavior and establish control mechanisms at their disposal. According to them, management is constantly seeking ways to improve the effectiveness of control mechanisms to achieve job performance. This in a way promote what work behavior will bring about desired level of job performance in the form of work ethics. Although the theory fall short in explaining what makes work ethics to be strong or weak. The agency theory clarifies this by asserting that for any organization to experience and enhance its workers performance, the workers activities must be well guided through work ethics. Otherwise known as principal agent theory indicates that principals (owners and managers) have to develop ways of monitoring and controlling the activities of their agents (workers). The theory envisaged certain problematic areas and demand proper clarification of work in terms of objectives and expectation and setting up of feedback mechanism to measure performance. This theory promotes how to ensure compliance of employees to job description, discipline, integrity, team work and quality. However, this study was anchor on Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) Theory.

LMX Theory hinges on the tenet that leaders cultivate a variety of relationships with their subordinates, ranging from low-quality (out-group) to high-quality (in-group) relationships. The amount of information interchange, trust, competence, dedication, role clarity and work satisfaction are all increased by high-quality LMX. A low-quality LMX, on the other hand, results in low levels of contact, little support, formal relationships, unproductive conduct, psychological disengagement, employee turnover, lower levels of job satisfaction, and increased job stress (Fan et al., 2021). Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) Theory by Graen and Uhl-Bien, (1995) underpins the relationship between ethical leadership and employee job performance. LMX proposes that supervisors establish relationships with subordinates that range on a continuum from lower to higher quality exchanges. Low LMX relationships are mainly based on economic exchange between the employer and employee (time is exchanged for money) (Tummers & Bronkhorst, 2014). High-quality LMX relationships represent commitment to one another, a willingness to support one another, and confidence in the other's loyalty (Martin, Eptropaki, Thomas & Topakas, 2010). When the supervisor and subordinate share a high-quality LMX relationship experience, the leader is likely to provide outcomes desired by subordinates, such as interesting tasks, additional responsibilities, and larger rewards and the subordinates reciprocate with commitment to work and loyalty to the leader (Mugizi, Bakkabulindi & Bisaso, 2015). A high-quality relationship between supervisors and employees is crucial for performance at work. Ethical leadership in terms of fairness, power sharing, role clarification, and people oriented behaviour, integrity and ethical guidance is a high exchange relationship and this thus promotes job performance (Volmer, Niessen, Spurk, Linz & Abele, 2011). Based on the principle of reciprocity, which is entrenched in the LMX theory, ethical leadership is placed as the moral trait of public sector organization leaders. Ethical leaders are bound to generate positive energy and outcomes for the employees because they perceive them to be fair, just and trustworthy. Therefore, employees who believe their leaders are fair tend to be motivated and satisfied (Fan et al., 2021).

Criticism of the Theory

Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) Theory is not without criticism. LMX theory has evolved based on the fundamental assumption that leadership is potentially different for each leader-follower relationship. As such it does not make theoretical or practical sense to use average leadership style to describe the behaviour of any given leader because a leader's behaviour is likely to differ depending on the follower (Dansereau, Graen & Haga, 1975; Graen, 1976). Leaders treat followers differently according to LMX theory, and followers do not always see their leader in the same way. Consequently, the issue of consensus among followers in the same workgroup may be especially relevant to LMX research. Although traditional leadership approaches that emphasized an average leadership style would expect to find consensus in a workgroup (followers agreeing on their view of the leader's behaviour), LMX theory makes no such claim. Empirical research also supports this basic assumption of LMX theory that there is significant variance in follower ratings of their relationship with the same leader (Graen, 1976; Hofmann, Morgeson, & Gerrass, 2003). Work-based relationships, especially those involving a superior, are important considerations in any organizational context. Gerstner and Day (1997) noted that one's relationship with a leader or boss is a lens through which the entire work experience is viewed. In relationship-based leadership theories such as LMX any differences in the evaluation of the same leader's behaviour are thought to reflect real differences in the relationship between leader and follower. This implies that a leader's behaviour often varies among a group of followers as a function of different interpersonal relationship qualities that develop between the leader and followers (Sherony & Green, 2002).

Tekleab and Taylor (2003) reported that leaders tend to report a higher overall mean and lower variation in their LMX ratings than followers. This could contribute to a low correlation between leader and follower ratings of LMX and provide evidence of LMX disagreement as leader and follower report different mean levels of their relationship quality. Scandura, Graen, and Novak (1986) proposed that leaders may be reluctant to differentiate between their followers and therefore their ratings may be subjected to the effects of social desirability and restriction of range which may affect followers' job performance. Therefore, leaders and followers have different perceptions of how much each party contributes to the relationship based on, (a) differences in biased perceptions of own and other's contributions, (b) differences in perspective taking, and (c) differences in access to own and other's behavior. These factors relate to the extent to which leaders and followers think their standards for each role are met by the other as well as by themselves, and hence explain how disagreement can still persist in cases where these standards are the same thereby affecting workers performance.

Application of the Theory to the Study

The theory explains that leader-member exchange influences the performance of the employees (Olannye, 2021). Leaders who tend to be ethically upright to support their subordinates command followership. Ethical leaders show a strong commitment to the organization ethical codes, standards, goals and principles; therefore, they motivate other employees to do the same (Treviño & Brown, 2005). They become mentors, command respect and trustworthiness, and are more likely to increase their organizations' image (Yasin, 2021). Ethical leaders that are strong exhibit dedication to the long-term success of their organizations by prioritizing the trust of their long-term stakeholders by adhering to high ethical principles. They also foster trusting situations where subordinates are more inclined to adopt comparable committed behavioral patterns (Vasudevan & Aslan, 2022). Therefore, local government councils' leaders should set the foundation for role modeling and emulative processes that can lead to workers' emulation of their leaders' committed examples.

Ethical leaders should focus on moral values and fairness in decision making, consider the impact of organizational decisions on the outside world, and clearly communicate to employees how their actions at work contribute to the overall goals of the organization. Ethical leaders help give meaning to their employees' work and ensure that organizational decisions are based on sound moral values (Piccolo, Greenbaum, Den Hartog, & Folger, 2010). From the forgoing, it is important for local government councils in Delta State to ensure that the expectation that management will

live up to its obligation in dispensing justice and improving staff well-being will re-invoke staff's discretionary positive attitude to work while a negative perception of same will breed resentments, ill-feelings, and staff negative attitude to work. To maximize the value of the exchange management, staffs are to minimize actions that undermine the group effectiveness while maximizing actions and behavior that preserve the collective stake of the group. LMX theory has been hailed as one of the hallmarks of organizational efficiency and effectiveness (Northouse, 2010). Also, organizations that put LMX theory into practice largely attain their goals (Olanbye, 2021).

The implication of LMX theory to this study is that the behaviour displayed by management in the workplace in relating with subordinates and performing managerial roles is germane in encouraging openness and honesty to reduce unethical behaviours and ensuring effectiveness and efficiency in the running of the public sector organizations like local government institutions. This is because ethical leaders are always making efforts to incorporate moral principles in their beliefs, values and behavior; they are committed to higher purpose, prudence, pride, patience, and persistence (Khuntia & Suar, 2004). Unlike the other leadership theories, LMX focuses on the nature and quality of the relationship between the leader and his/her subordinates and not on the characteristics of effective leaders. The main idea behind LMX is for the leader to develop many quality relationships with subordinates. These high quality relationships will in turn boost the subordinates' job satisfaction, job performance, and organizational citizen and as this could also lead to increase productivity and attainment of organizational goals (Northouse, 2015). The application of LMX theory in local government councils in Delta State will enhance employees' performance.

Research Methods

This study is basically a cross-sectional survey research design. According to Akuezuilo and Agu (2003), a survey research generally collects data from the defined population to describe the present opinion, status, benefits and view of the population using the variables under study. The researcher decided to adopt the design because it requires active, willful and mutual involvement of the researcher and respondents in the data collection processes. This means that it involves mutual interpretation and participation where the researcher elicits the needed information from willing respondents. The use of cross-sectional survey method enables the researcher used questionnaire to obtain information from the respondents. It also enables the study used representative sample to draw a conclusion about a population of the study. The total projected population of this study was 730,900 persons. This is broken down as follows, as at the June 2022, the total population in Ughelli North local government was (439,500) and the total population in Ughelli South local government was (291,400) (National Population Commission, 2022). The procedure for deriving the sample size for the study is followed as hereunder using Taro Yamane formula:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where N = Population size,
 n = Sample sized,
 e = Sampling error

Given the population size of 730,900 and with a sampling error of 5 percent, the required sample size is computed as:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{730,900}{1 + 730,900(0.05)^2} = 389.78 \text{ Approximately}$$

Consequently, a sample size of three hundred and ninety (390) will be used.

Table 1: Sample Selection

Local Government Area		Sample (No of questionnaire to be distributed)
Ughelli North	$\frac{439,500 \times 390}{730,900} =$	235
Ughelli South	$\frac{291,400 \times 390}{730,900} =$	155
Total		390

Source: Author's Computation, 2023

Data collected from the questionnaire was collated, coded and imputed into the Statistical Analysis System (SAS 9.2) for data analysis. Percentages and frequency will be used to analyze the demographic data content of respondents which include gender, age, marital status and education, while Pearson's coefficient of correlation and linear regression will be employed to test the hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance. These are found suitable for the nature of the study of this work.

Results and Discussion

Bivariate Analysis (Test of Relationship)

The bivariate analysis involves the test for the bivariate relationship between the dependent and independent variables. The decision rule which applies for all bivariate test outcomes is stated as follows: where $P < 0.05$, reject hypothesis on the basis or evidence of insignificant relationship and where $P > 0.05$, accept hypothesis on the basis of significant relationship between the variables.

Table 2 Pearson Correlation Coefficients

		Ethical guidance	Fairness	Role clarification	Trust	Employee performance
Prob > r under H0: Rho=0	Ethical guidance	1.0000	.7338** <.0001	.8360** <.0001	.7402** <.0001	.7321** <.0001
	Fairness	.7338** <.0001	1.0000	.9059** <.0001	.7429** <.0001	.8993** <.0001
	Role clarification	.8360** <.0001	.9059** <.0001	1.0000	.8615** <.0001	.9184** <.0001
	Trust	.7402** <.0001	.7429** <.0001	.8615** <.0001	1.0000	.7762** <.0001
	Employee performance	.7321** <.0001	.8993** <.0001	.9184** <.0001	.7762** <.0001	1.0000

** Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Source: Statistical Analysis System (SAS 9.2), 2023

According to the data presented in Table 2, the correlation between ethical guidance and employee performance showed a strong positive relationship ($r = 0.7321$), indicating that the greater the ethical guidance the greater the job performance of workers in Ughelli North and South local government councils of Delta State, the relationship between ethical guidance and employee performance is significant ($p < .0001$). Considering the relationship between fairness and employee performance, Table 2 showed a strong positive relationship ($r = 0.8993$) between fairness and employee performance. It also reveals that the relationship between fairness and employee performance was significant ($p < .0001$), which means that as the practice of fairness increases; the more employees performance.

The relationship between role clarification and employee performance as presented in Table 2 showed that role clarification and employee performance had a strong positive relationship ($r = 0.9184$), indicating that the greater the role clarification the greater the performance of workers in Ughelli North and South local government councils of Delta State, the relationship between role clarification and employee performance is significant ($p < .0001$). According to the data presented in Table 2, there is a strong positive relationship ($r = 0.7762$) between trust and employee performance. It also reveals that the relationship between trust and employee performance is significant ($p < .0001$), which means that as the practice of trust increases, the performance of the employees to the Ughelli North and South local government councils of Delta State increases.

Effect of Ethical Leadership on Employee Performance

Since correlation does not imply causation, a simple regression analysis was performed to verify the influence of ethical leadership and employee performance in Ughelli North and South local government councils of Delta State. The simple regression analysis which was conducted at 5% level of significance was used to further test hypotheses formulated for this study. Summary results are presented below.

Table 3: Ethical Guidance and Employee Performance in Ughelli North and South Local Government Councils of Delta State

Parameter Estimates					Model Summary ^b	
Variable	Label	Parameter Estimate	Standard Error	T. Value		
Intercept	Intercept	0.5035	0.0488	15.2000	R ² -Square	0.9612
	Ethical guidance	0.8690	0.0361	57.7093	Adj. R ² -Square	0.9433

Source: Statistical Analysis System (SAS 9.2), 2023

a. Predictors: (Constant), Ethical guidance.

b. Dependent Variable: Employee performance.

Table 3 reveals the degree of influence of ethical guidance on employee performance, it shows that ethical guidance has 96.12 percent impact on employee performance while the remaining 3.88 percent is explained by other exogenous variables that are excluded in the model but could also influence employee performance. The adjusted R² of 0.9433 means the explanatory power of the independent variable is very high. The statistical relationship between ethical guidance and employee performance is presented thus: Employee performance = 0.5035 + 0.8690 ethical guidance. This

regression equation shows that ethical guidance has positive impact on employee performance. From the regression equation above, the value of the constant term (intercept) is 0.5035. This simply implies that if ethical guidance is held constant, the employee performance is 0.5035. The value of ethical guidance coefficient is 0.7385. It shows that a unit increase in ethical guidance will cause a 0.8690 increase in employee performance. It suffices to infer that ethical guidance has positive impact on employee performance in Ughelli North and South local government councils of Delta State.

Table 4: Summary of Regression Analysis of the Effect of Ethical Guidance on Employee Performance^a

Source	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F- Value	Pr > F
Model	1	89.6670	4.9906	1205.4510	<.0001
Error	326	6.9074	0.1342		
Corrected Total	327	96.5744			

Source: Statistical Analysis System (SAS 9.2), 2023

Decision Rule

We reject the null hypothesis if the value of F calculated is greater than the value of F tabulated (F cal>F tab), otherwise accept it. At 95% level of significance ($\alpha = 0.05$), the F tabulated is given as: F at 0.05, (1, 327) = 2.2490.

Decision

Since F calculated = 1205.4510 > F tabulated = 2.2490. We reject the null hypothesis. In conclusion, the results of the regression confirm with 95% confidence that ethical guidance has positive effect on employee performance in Ughelli North and South local government councils of Delta State.

Table 5: Fairness and Employee Performance in Ughelli North and South Local Government Councils of Delta State

Parameter Estimates					Model Summary ^b	
Variable	Label	Parameter Estimate	Standard Error	T. Value		
Intercept	Intercept	0.4922	0.0376	13.3708	R ² -Square	0.8319
	Fairness	0.7553	0.0309	44.9350	Adj. R ² -Square	0.8124

Source: Statistical Analysis System (SAS 9.2), 2023

- c. Predictors: (Constant), Fairness.
- d. Dependent Variable: Employee performance.

Table 5 reveals the degree of influence of fairness on employee performance, it shows that fairness has 83.19 percent impact on employee performance while the remaining 16.81 percent is explained by other exogenous variables that are excluded in the model but could also influence employee performance. The adjusted R² of 0.8124 means the explanatory power of the independent variable is very high. The statistical relationship between fairness and employee performance is presented thus: Employee performance = 0.4922 + 0.7553 fairness. This regression equation shows that fairness has positive impact on employee performance. From the regression equation above, the value of the constant term (intercept) is 0.4922. This simply implies that if fairness is held constant, the employee performance is 0.4922. The value of fairness coefficient is 0.7553. It shows that a unit increase in fairness will cause a 0.7553 increase in employee performance. It suffices to infer that fairness has positive impact on employee performance in Ughelli North and South local government councils of Delta State.

Table 6: Summary of Regression Analysis of the Impact of Fairness on Employee Performance^a

Source	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F- Value	Pr > F
Model	1	69.5480	4.4760	1180.5823	<.0001
Error	326	6.3504	0.0758		
Corrected Total	327	75.8984			

Source: Statistical Analysis System (SAS 9.2), 2023

Decision Rule

We reject the null hypothesis if the value of F calculated is greater than the value of F tabulated (F cal>F tab), otherwise accept it. At 95% level of significance ($\alpha = 0.05$), the F tabulated is given as: F at 0.05, (1, 327) = 2.2490.

Decision

Since F calculated = 1180.5823 > F tabulated = 2.2490. We reject the null hypothesis. In conclusion, the results of the regression confirm with 95% confidence that fairness has positive impact on employee performance in Ughelli North and South local government councils of Delta State.

Table 7: Role Clarification and Employee Performance in Ughelli North and South Local Government Councils of Delta State

Parameter Estimates					Model Summary ^b	
Variable	Label	Parameter Estimate	Standard Error	T. Value		
Intercept	Intercept	0.3878	0.0318	9.857	R ² -Square	0.8136

	Role clarification	0.5921	0.0276	39.460	Adj. R ² -Square	0.8017
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Source: Statistical Analysis System (SAS 9.2), 2023

e. Predictors: (Constant), Role clarification.

f. Dependent Variable: Employee performance.

Table 7 reveals the degree of influence of role clarification on employee performance, it shows that role clarification has 81.36 percent impact on employee performance while the remaining 18.64 percent is explained by other exogenous variables that are excluded in the model but could also influence employee performance. The adjusted R² of 0.8017 means the explanatory power of the independent variable is very high. The statistical relationship between role clarification and employee performance is presented thus: Employee performance = 0.3878 + 0.5921 role clarification. This regression equation shows that role clarification has positive impact on employee performance. From the regression equation above, the value of the constant term (intercept) is 0.3878. This simply implies that if role clarification is held constant, the employee performance is 0.3878. The value of role clarification coefficient is 0.5921. It shows that a unit increase in role clarification will cause a 0.5921 increase in employee performance. It suffices to infer that role clarification has positive impact on employee performance in Ughelli North and South local government councils of Delta State.

Table 8: Summary of Regression Analysis of the Effect of Role Clarification on Employee Performance^a

Source	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F- Value	Pr > F
Model	1	61.7633	4.2759	109.4718	<.0001
Error	326	5.8906	0.0390		
Corrected Total	327	67.6539			

Source: Statistical Analysis System (SAS 9.2), 2023

Decision Rule

We reject the null hypothesis if the value of F calculated is greater than the value of F tabulated (F cal>F tab), otherwise accept it. At 95% level of significance ($\alpha = 0.05$), the F tabulated is given as: F at 0.05, (1, 327) = 2.2490.

Decision

Since F calculated = 109.4718 > F tabulated = 2.2490. We reject the null hypothesis. In conclusion, the results of the regression confirm with 95% confidence that role clarification has positive effect on employee performance in Ughelli North and South local government councils of Delta State.

Table 9: Trust and Employee Performance in Ughelli North and South Local Government Councils of Delta State

Parameter Estimates					Model Summary ^b	
Variable	Label	Parameter Estimate	Standard Error	T. Value		
Intercept	Intercept	0.5572	0.0510	11.6107	R ² -Square	0.9708
	Trust	0.7988	0.0395	56.243	Adj. R ² -Square	0.9570

Source: Statistical Analysis System (SAS 9.2), 2023

g. Predictors: (Constant), Trust.

h. Dependent Variable: Employee performance.

Table 9 reveals the degree of influence of trust on employee performance, it shows that trust has 97.08 percent impact on employee performance while the remaining 2.92 percent is explained by other exogenous variables that are excluded in the model but could also influence employee performance. The adjusted R² of 0.9570 means the explanatory power of the independent variable is very high. The statistical relationship between trust and employee performance is presented thus: Employee performance = 0.5572 + 0.7988 trust. This regression equation shows that trust has positive influence on employee performance. From the regression equation above, the value of the constant term (intercept) is 0.5572. This simply implies that if trust is held constant, the employee performance is 0.5572. The value of trust coefficient is 0.7988. It shows that a unit increase in trust will cause a 0.7988 increase in employee performance. It suffices to infer that trust has positive impact on employee performance in Ughelli North and South local government councils of Delta State.

Table 10: Summary of Regression Analysis of the Influence of Trust on Employee Performance^a

Source	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F- Value	Pr > F
Model	1	90.3428	5.3207	127.5214	<.0001
Error	326	7.7569	0.0365		
Corrected Total	327	98.0997			

Source: Statistical Analysis System (SAS 9.2), 2023

Decision Rule

We reject the null hypothesis if the value of F calculated is greater than the value of F tabulated (F cal>F tab), otherwise accept it. At 95% level of significance ($\alpha = 0.05$), the F tabulated is given as: F at 0.05, (1, 327) = 2.2490.

Decision

Since F calculated = 127.5214 > F tabulated = 2.2490. We reject the null hypothesis. In conclusion, the results of the regression confirm with 95% confidence that trust has positive influence on employee performance in Ughelli North and South local government councils of Delta State.

Discussion

This study examined the causal link between ethical leadership and employee performance in Ughelli North and South local government councils of Delta State. With respect to hypothesis one, the finding reveals that ethical guidance had positive effect on employee performance in Ughelli North and South local government councils of Delta State. The finding also shows that there is significant relationship between ethical guidance and employee performance. This study's finding agrees with Khalid and Bano (2015); Oladimeji and Abdulkareem (2022) that ethical guidance contributes to employee performance in workplace. This finding is consistent with Mugizi et al. (2019) study on ethical leadership and job performance of teachers in secondary schools in Kyabugimbi Sub-County in Bushenyi District in Southwestern Uganda. Their study result revealed that ethical guidance had a positive and significant influence on job performance of teachers. Khademfar and Amiri (2013) Marija et al. (2016) collaborating with this finding argue that ethical guidance positively affects employee performance in Malaysian organizations. Therefore, to promote the desired level of job performance, the workers activities must be well guided through work ethics. With respect to hypothesis two, the study showed that fairness had positive and significant impact on employee performance in Ughelli North and South local government councils of Delta State. The study also revealed that fairness had significant relationship with employee performance. This finding was supported by the findings of Mugizi et al. (2019) which revealed. That fairness had a positive and significant influence on job performance of teachers. Collins et al. (2012) collaborating with this finding, argue that fairness promote worker's efficiency a factor that is sine qua non for excellent performance. Collins et al. (2012) further argue that good or excellent performance of an individual employee is related to strong work ethics of fairness.

With respect to hypothesis three, the study revealed that role clarification had positive impact on employee performance in Ughelli North and South local government councils of Delta State. As predicted, the study further showed that role clarification and employee performance had a strong positive relationship. This result is consistent with earlier studies of Joseph (2010); Celik (2013) and Mugizi et al. (2019). Mugizi et al. (2019) found that role clarification had a positive and significant influence on job performance of teachers. Celik (2013) contend that role clarification influence the quality of employee job performance. Samie et al. (2015) in their study found that there was a positive significant relationship between role clarity and general efficiency of the employees. Wiwik et al. (2021) reported existence of a significant correlation between role clarity and employee job performance. However, while all the other scholars found a positive and significant relationship between role clarity and job performance, Obicci (2015) contend that ethical leadership positively affects performance when leaders emphasize moral values and goals in decision-making procedures. Also, they clarify to their employees how they can contribute to achieving important company goals and improving their performance.

With respect to hypothesis four, the study showed that trust has positive influence on employee performance in Ughelli North and South local government councils of Delta State. It also reveals that the relationship between trust and employee performance was significant. This finding is consistent with Bello (2012) views that trust is an important issue in organizations that has effect on performance, and if broken is likely to has serious adverse effect. Employee trust in leaders will likely result to increase in employee compliance with organizational rules and laws, facilitate the implementation of organizational change; and improve employee contributions in terms of performance, intent to remain and civic virtue behavior. Low levels of trust can result in organizational decay as relationships deteriorate political strife, infighting, and general inefficiency result; organizations with little or not trust have no basis for future success. The finding was also in line with Adam et al. (2022) who found that there is statistically significant positive relationship between ethical leadership style and job satisfaction among employees at the Ghana education service. The results further showed a significant mediating effect of trust in the relationship between ethical leadership and employee job satisfaction. Thus, organizational leaders should encourage employees by leading by examples; they have the responsibility to define organizational norms and values, live up to expectations and encourage their followers to adopt same.

Conclusion

Ethical issue is a worldwide phenomenon. It is an important issue to local government councils and local government leaders must take proactive measures. Ethical leaders are perceived as having a broad ethical awareness and concern for all stakeholders which includes employee. Therefore, local government leaders must create an ethically friendly work environment for all employees, communicate ethical issues, serve as role models and put mechanism in place for the development of responsible employees. It is expected that local government leaders who exhibit ethical behaviour would be more likely to consider the needs and right of employees and treat them fairly. Ethical leadership is more likely to bring about leader's effectiveness if followers perceived leader's good moral image, willingness of employees to put in extra efforts, employees' job satisfaction, and an atmosphere for ethical leadership to flourish; which will ultimately leads to increased employees' job performance. **Moreover**, regression analysis revealed that ethical guidance, fairness, role clarification, and trust had a positive and significant influence on employee performance in Ughelli North and South local government councils of Delta State. Ethical leadership is associated with positive influence on employee performance. The findings theoretically imply that employees perceive ethical leadership as important because

ethical leaders often give meaning to work, implant moral standards, and underline the impact of tasks on achieving individual and overall organizational performance. More so, subordinates under ethical leaders perceive their work to be more meaningful, significant, and challenging, which significantly increases their motivation for the work. In conclusion, it can be deduced that ethical leadership in terms of ethical guidance, fairness, role clarification and trust are imperative for the employees' performance in local government. Based on the findings of this study, the researcher recommended as follows:

- i. Local government leaders should ensure that all employees participate in ethics training programs. This will serve as an opportunity for employees to learn and evaluate the impact of ethical guidance on employee and organizational performance.
- ii. Leaders should make decisions that promote and compensate employees who are not only good on what they do but also have sound relationship and have developed reputation with co-workers. This will go a long way to create ethical climate fairness.
- iii. Local government leaders should intensify effort to offer role clarification. This will go a long way to ensure that ethical practices are carried out throughout the organization and promote good practices in the world of work.
- iv. Local government leaders should reward ethical conduct and discipline unethical conducts. This will serve as fairness to employees. This will go a long way to create an ethically friendly work environment of trust.

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