

**THE ROLE OF WORKPLACE ETHICS AND EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT IN
DYNAMIC ECONOMIES.**

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Abstract

Ethical practices in the workplace and workforce commitment is a vital determinant of firm's performance in rapidly changing economies characterized by rapid pace of uncertainty. This paper explores the interplay between ethical workplace practices and workforce commitment, relying on secondary data from journals and policy documents. The study highlighted the dimensions of ethical practices in workplace as integrity, fairness, transparency, accountability, and respect and dignity shows how they influence key elements of workforce commitment such as vigor, dedication, absorption, commitment, and discretionary effort. The findings suggest that ethical climates not only strengthen trust and psychological safety but also strengthens employee's willingness to contribute innovatively and sustainably, even in volatile milieu. The study underscores that workforce commitment serves as a mediating mechanism through which ethical practices translate into adaptive strength organisational outcomes, including adaptability, innovation capacity, sustainability, and stakeholder trust. By synthesizing existing evidence, the paper contributes to the theoretical and practical understanding of how organisations in rapidly changing economies can leverage ethical values to strengthen engagement and achieve long-term competitiveness. The review concludes with implications for managers and policymakers stressing the need for continuous

reinforcement of ethical standards and the design of engagement strategies that align with evolving economic realities.

Keywords: Workplace Ethics, Employee Engagement, Organisational Resilience, Dynamic Economics, Ethical Climate.

Introduction

In today's globalized and unpredictable economy, where organisations operation is defined by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity which are commonly referred to as dynamic economies (Teece, 2022). Within these challenging contexts, an organisation's capacity to remain resilient and sustain its performance heavily depends on its ethical foundations and the degree of employee engagement. Workplace ethics act as the moral framework guiding corporate decisions, actions, and culture by promoting fairness, accountability, transparency, integrity, and respect in business operations (Trevino & Nelson, 2021). When employees perceive organisational practices as supportive and fair, they are more likely to demonstrate stronger emotional and psychological commitment to their work, leading to higher engagement and organisational resilience (Rai & Agrawal, 2023).

Workplace ethics involves the moral principles and values directing employee behaviour and shaping organisational relationships, thereby fostering trust and credibility both internally and externally (Kaptein, 2019). These ethical elements are integrity, fairness, transparency, accountability, respect, and dignity which serve as the foundational structure of a responsible organisation (Brown & Trevino, 2021). Integrity ensures consistency and honesty; fairness promotes equity and impartiality; transparency enables open communication; accountability fosters responsibility; while respect and dignity reinforce inclusivity and appreciation for individuals (Valentine et al., 2019). Collectively, these factors determine employees' perceptions of the ethical climate in their workplace and significantly influence their engagement and resilience.

Employee engagement, conceptualized by Kahn 1990 and further developed by Schaufeli and Bakker 2004, is a multifaceted construct that encompasses vigor, dedication, and absorption. Vigor signifies enthusiasm, energy, and mental resilience a work, dedication embodies passion, pride, and commitment; while absorption reflects deep concentration and immersion in work tasks (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Modern perspectives have expanded this framework to include commitment and discretionary effort as key dimensions that promotes proactive behaviour and organisational loyalty

(Saks, 2019). Such attributes do not only drive productivity but also act as buffers against challenges in turbulent economic environments.

In dynamic economies, resilience is a critical outcome of ethically grounded and engaged workplaces. Resilient organisations demonstrate adaptability, innovative capability, sustainability, and stakeholder trust (Carmeli et al., 2023). Adaptability reflects agility in responding to external disruptions, innovation capacity signifies the ability to generate and apply new ideas, sustainability ensures long-term value creation, according to (Trevino & Nelson, 2021) requires individuals to adjust their behaviour and decision-making in order to align with the changing organisational values. Consequently, the interaction between workplace ethics and employee engagement serves as a strategic driver for building resilience, enabling organisations to thrive amid volatility and competition. Therefore, understanding how workplace ethics and employee engagement contribute to organisational performance in dynamic economies provides essential insights into sustaining productivity, improving morale, and promoting long-term resilience. This study aims to explore the interconnections between ethical practices, employee engagement, and organisational resilience within the context of rapidly changing economic conditions. The statement of the problem is that, the contemporary business landscape is marked by constant disruptions brought about by globalization, technological innovation, economic instability, and evolving labour trends (Teece, 2022). In these dynamic economies, organisations face relentless pressure to remain competitive, innovative, and sustainable. However, increasing economic volatility, frequent ethical breaches, growing mistrust, and low employee morale expose fundamental weaknesses in sustaining ethical integrity and continuous engagement (Kaptein, 2019; Valentine et al., 2019). Although both ethics and engagement are widely acknowledged as essential to organisational success, their combined role in promoting resilience and adaptability has not been thoroughly examined or empirically validated. Many organisations, particularly in emerging economies, struggle to institutionalize ethical practices that are both adaptable and robust. This is as a result of weak accountability systems, favoritism, lack of transparency, and disregard for fairness and respect often erode employee confidence and engagement (Brown & Trevino, 2021). Ethical misconduct or unethical practices, which are actions that are illegal or morally unacceptable by the larger society that damages internal cohesion, undermines trust, and threatens organisational reputation and sustainability (Bonner et al., 2017). Even with increased awareness of ethical leadership and governance, translating values such as integrity, fairness, transparency, accountability, and respect into consistent daily practice remains a persistent challenge (Trevino & Nelson, 2021).

Similarly, employee engagement variables demonstrated through vigor, dedication, absorption, commitment, and discretionary effort, plays a vital role in enhancing organisational effectiveness and resilience (Saks, 2019) Nevertheless, engagement levels often remain low in many organisations

due to insufficient ethical leadership, job insecurity, and poor communication systems (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017), Employees who perceive unethical behaviour or unfair treatment typically disengage, leading to decreased productivity, higher turnover, and diminished creativity (Valentine et al., 2019). Moreover, achieving resilient outcomes, such as adaptability, innovation, sustainability, and stakeholder trust which requires not just material resources but also ethically grounded engagement mechanisms (Lengnick-Hall et al. 2011). The absence of these mechanisms reduces an organisation's ability to recover from disruptions, respond to environmental changes, and retain stakeholder confidence. Despite the theoretical links among ethics engagement, and resilience, organisations in dynamic economies often treat them as distinct management areas instead of interrelated strategic tools for sustainable growth, this has created a hiatus that highlights the need for a comprehensive understanding of how ethical workplace practices and employee engagement collectively enhance organisational resilience in volatile economies. Addressing this research and practical hiatus is critical for enriching academic perspectives and providing actionable strategies for organisations striving to remain both ethical and competitive in unpredictable markets. The objectives of the study is as follows; To explore the relationship between ethical practices in the workplace and workforce commitment in dynamic economic contexts, to explore how ethical practices influence organisational trust and long-term employee commitment, to identify the role of engagement in enhancing adaptability and competitiveness in volatile environments, and to propose an integrated framework linking ethics and engagement to organisational adaptive strength. The significance of the study is configured into theoretical, practical and for policy makers. Theoretically, this explore contributes to organisational behaviour and business ethics scholarship by clarifying how ethics and engagement reinforce each other. Practically, it guides managers and human resource (HR) practitioners in embedding ethics into leadership and governance while cultivating engagement for competitiveness. For policymakers in emerging economies, it highlights the systemic benefits of ethical practices in the workplace for inclusive growth and institutional trust. The scope of this study covers organisations in rapidly changing economies characterized by globalization, technological disruption, and institutional volatility. Empirical evidence is drawn from both advanced (eg. US, UK.) and emerging economies (e.g., Nigeria, India, Brazil) to capture cross-cultural patterns

Literature Review

In today's fast-changing business environment, workplace ethics and employee engagement are essential for maintaining organisational success, resilience, and competitiveness. Dynamic economies are marked by technological advancements, market uncertainties, and shifting employee expectations that require firms to establish strong ethical foundations and foster meaningful engagement to remain innovative and adaptable (Schaufeli, 2017). The connection between ethics, engagement, and resilience forms a vital mechanism that supports sustainable performance and

stakeholder confidence (Den Hartog, 2015). Workplace ethics include the principles guiding moral conduct, sound decision-making, and organisational practices. Five primary dimensions of workplace ethics are integrity, fairness, transparency, accountability, and respect and dignity. Integrity refers to adherence to moral values and consistency between speech and actions (Trevino et al., 2014). Which builds the foundation for trust and an ethical organisational culture. Fairness, on the other hand, is maintaining psychological contract and driving employee engagement (Saks, 2019) he further added that fair treatment is perceived as the organisation meeting their obligations, stimulating the employee to respond with dedication and discretionary effort. Harrison and Barney (2021) emphasized that transparency is establishing high collaborative relationships with stakeholders, as it mitigates uncertainty and enhances mutual understanding. Accountability is the need to assign responsibility for harm caused by autonomous systems that require the system to be transparent and explainable (Danks & London, 2020). Lastly, respect and dignity underscore the recognition of employee's inherent worth and rights, encouraging mutual trust and psychological safety (Clark, 2020). Together, these ethical constructs promote a positive climate that strengthens engagement, commitment, and productivity even in volatile economies.

Employee engagement, typically understood as a psychological condition that fuels performance, serves as a bridge between workplace ethics and organisational resilience. Engagement dimensions include vigor, dedication, absorption, commitment, and discretionary effort (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Vigor represents high levels of energy and persistence at work, along with a readiness to invest effort in tasks. Dedication is that component of engagement that is characterized by feelings of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, challenge (Schaufeli, 2021), adding that it reflects a sense of pride in an individual's role, while absorption signifies deep state of cognitive concentration that is different from the affective state of dedication, though equally significant for forecasting high rate of work performance (Christian et al., 2023). Commitment goes beyond contractual responsibilities, according to (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2020) it is that reciprocal gesture employee demonstrates when they feel the organisation cares about their well-being thus, they show greater loyalty and affective commitment. Discretionary effort, on the other hand, is described as the result of high employee contributions that can strategically lead to a higher business performance and productivity (Harter & Adkin, 2022) this is often driven by ethical leadership and organisational trust. An ethically grounded workplace thus stimulates stronger engagement and alignment between personal and corporate objectives in fast-changing economies. The integration of sound workplace ethics and active employee engagement leads to resilient outcomes such as innovation capacity, adaptability, sustainability, and stakeholder trust. Adaptability is that capacity that enables an organisations to adjust to disruptions in the surroundings and differences in market circumstances, stressing its resilience on ambidexterity (Kocak et al., 2023), while innovation capacity involves the ability to facilitate and manage the knowledge creation process, which covert tacit knowledge into explicit

knowledge and visa-vise (Zhou & Nonaka, 2022), this allows for the continuous flowing of new ideas generation. Porter and Heppelmann (2019) argued that sustainability involves creating economic value in a way that also builds societal value as it addresses the needs problems. Similarly, stakeholder trust embodies the confidence of employees, customers, and partners in the organisation's reliability and moral integrity (Pirson & Turnbull, 2021). These outcomes illustrate how ethics and engagement reinforce organisational stability and competitiveness in dynamic environments.

In rapidly changing economies, ethics forms the moral backbone of organisations, while engagement transforms these ethical values into dedication, creativity, and performance. When combined, they nurture resilience as reflected in adaptability, innovation, sustainability, and trust that ensures long-term success and survival. Hence, ethical leadership and sustained engagement remain the dual pillars of organisations capable of thriving amid transformation. The interplay of the constructs is that ethical practices in the workplace remains a critical driver of organisational effectiveness in contemporary, dynamic economics, ethical principles such as integrity, fairness, transparency, accountability, and respect and dignity serves as the independent variables that establish trust and legitimacy in employer/employee relationships. According to Al Halbusi et al. (2021), ethical climates in organisation is steered by ethical leadership improves organisational commitment by regulating workers perception about organisational justice and this influence employee attitudes and behaviours. These ethical values become the moral foundation that shapes engagement levels within the workplace. However, ethical practices do not automatically result in adaptive strength outcomes. It is workforce commitment captured by vigor, dedication, commitment, absorption and discretionary effort, that ethics is translated into adaptive strength. Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) argue that engaged employees invest their full cognitive, emotional and physical resources in work tasks, thereby enabling organisations to thrive amidst uncertainty. This makes engagement a mediating or intervention mechanism that transforms ethical practices in the workplace into adaptive strength factors. The nexus between these variables or pathway of influence are; Integrity – Vigor, integrity fosters credibility and trust between employees and management. When leaders demonstrates consistency in works and actions, employees experience psychological and emotional safety, which energizes them to invest Vigor, the psychological and emotional strength needed to cope with demanding tasks (Christian et al, 2013). The next is Fairness – Dedication, where fair distribution of rewards, workload and opportunities strengthen employee's sense of justice, (Cropanzano et al., 2007) noting that perceived fairness nurtures dedication, where employees feel inspired, proud and motivated to contribute beyond minimum expectations. Transparency – Commitment where transparency in communication minimizes ambiguity and fosters trust in management decision. Eisenberger and Stinglhamber (2021) posit that organisations that provide employees with access to reliable and supportive information, gains effective commitment increase,

driving them to remain loyal to the goals of the organisation. Another is Accountability – Absorption where accountability structures ensure that roles, responsibilities and performance expectations are clearly defined. Bakker and Demerouti (2018) explain that this clarity enables employees to become absorbed in their tasks, losing track of time due to deep concentration and immersion. Respect and Dignity- Discretionary Efforts, this is when employees who feel respected and valued are more inclined to exert discretionary effort, the voluntary behaviours that are not formerly required but benefit the institution. (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2021) illustrates that re-organisation of dignity creates reciprocity prompting employees to go the extra mile. The adaptive strength outcomes interplay of ethics and engagement generates organisational adaptive strength in rapidly changing economies, this gave birth to four critical outcome variables, which are Adaptability- Integrity develops adjusting strategies and processes in response to environmental events (ChungLick 2011), also Innovations Capacity- Fairness and dedication encourages psychological safety and creativity, enabling employees to voice and implement novel ideals. Also Sustainability- Transparency and commitment provide the foundation for long-term strategic practices that sustains organisational survival during crises (Dylick & Muff, 2016). Stakeholders Trust - Accountability and respect for dignity reinforces credibility, reliability, and respect for strengthening relationships with internal and external stakeholders (Hosmer, 1995). Hence, the causal Pathway highlights that ethical practices in the workplace alone cannot guarantee adaptive strength but when filtered through workforce commitment, they yield organisational adaptability, creativity, sustainable growth, and stronger stakeholder trust is critical in a rapidly changing economies where change and uncertainty is a norm (Teece, 2022). More so, Integrity-Vigor-Adaptability, is that integrity establishes credibility and psychological safety (Trevino et al., 2014). This safety fuels vigor, as employees feel energized to invest their effort in their roles (Schaufeli & Baker 2014), vigor in turn fosters adaptability, enabling workers to redirect their energy toward change management and flexible response (Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011). Fairness-Dedication-Innovation Capacity, fairness in reward and decision-making enhances perception of justice (Bakker & Demerouti, 2018). This fairness nurtures dedication, where employees feel inspired and proud of their work (Christian et al., 2011), dedication translates into innovation capacity, as motivated employees generate and implement creative solutions (Kocak et al., 2023). Transparency-Commitment-Sustainability, transparency in communication builds trust and mitigates uncertainty (Meyer & Allen 1997), this leads to stronger commitment, where employees identify with organisational goals (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2021), Commitment underpins sustainability as loyal and engaged employee sustain long-term practices (Dyllick & Muff, 2016). Accountability, Absorption, Stakeholder Trust, accountability clarifies roles and performance expectations, preventing role ambiguity (Bakker & Demerouti, 2018), this clarity drives absorption, where employees become deeply engrossed in task (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004), the resulting reliability enhances stakeholder's trust, as consistency signals integrity to internal and external

partners (Hosmer, 1990). Respect/Dignity and Discretionary Effort are Cross Cutting adaptive strength Respect and dignity fosters reciprocity and mutual recognition (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2021). This generates discretionary effort, or extra-role behaviours that are not contractually required but freely given (Organ, 1997). Discretionary effort strengthen all adaptive strength factors simultaneously adaptability, innovation, sustainability and trust, making it a cross cutting driver of adaptive strength in rapidly changing economies.

The empirical relationship between ethical practices in the workplace and workforce commitment in rapidly changing economies has received increasing scholarly attention. Prior studies affirm that ethical practices serve as the foundation for positive employee attitudes and behaviours that sustain organisations in volatile contexts. For instance, ethical practices in the workplace have been shown to strengthen trust. Psychological safety, and organisational commitment, all of which are critical in turbulent environments (Brown & Trevino, 2021; Khan et al., 2021). Bakker and Demerouti (2018) further illustrate that workforce commitment thrives in ethical climates where integrity, fairness, and respect are institutionalized. In line with this, Olowookere, et al. (2021) found out that ethical practices in Nigerian organisations enhanced employee commitment, which contributed to sustainability and stakeholder trust.

These findings suggest that ethical practices in the workplace not only influence immediate workforce commitment but also serve as stabilizing mechanisms for adaptability and adaptive strength in rapidly changing economies.

Studies reveal that dimensions of ethical practices in the workplace defined by integrity, fairness, transparency, accountability, and respect and dignity are strong predictors of workforce commitment. Brown and Trevino (2021) demonstrated that ethical leadership, which upholds integrity and fairness, creates trust and psychological safety, leading employees to exhibit higher vigor and dedication. In a related explore, Khan et al. (2021) found out that transparency and accountability in decision making fostered employee commitment and absorption, particularly in organizations operating in volatile sectors such as banking and healthcare in developing economies. Respect and dignity at work have also been linked to increased discretionary effort, with employees more willing to go beyond their contractual obligations when they perceive a fair and respectful workplace (Ugwu & Okafor, 2019). The mediating role of workforce commitment has been widely recognized as a mediating variable between ethical practices in the workplace and organizational outcomes. Schaufeli (2017) highlighted that vigor, dedication, and absorption are significantly strengthened when employees perceive ethical treatment, fairness, and accountability. Engagement thus acts as a psychological mechanism that translates ethical practices into positive behaviours. Ugwu and Okafor (2019), argued that Nigerian SMEs, showed that respect and dignity significantly

predicted discretionary effort, which in turn enhanced innovation capacity. Similarly, Adewale and Oyeniyi (2020) demonstrated that employee commitment and absorption mediated the relationship between ethical leadership and sustainability outcomes, showing that ethics indirectly drive adaptability and stakeholder trust through engagement.

Empirical studies further establish that the interplay between ethical practices in the workplace and engagement enhances organizational adaptability, innovation capacity, sustainability, and stakeholder trust. In a cross-country explore of Asian enterprises, Li and Zhang (2022) confirmed that ethical practices, when mediated by workforce commitment, significantly improved organizational adaptability in fast-changing markets. In rapidly changing economies, where firms must constantly innovate to remain competitive, discretionary effort and dedication derived from ethical environments serve as catalysts for innovation (Bakker & Demerouti, 2018). In the Nigerian context, Olowookere et al. (2021) reported that organizations that emphasized accountability and integrity experienced stronger stakeholder trust, mediated by employees' commitment and dedication. These findings align with global evidence that ethical climates strengthen sustainable performance in uncertain environments. Across different contexts, the empirical literature converges on the centrality of ethics-engagement dynamics in rapidly changing economies. Ethical practices strengthen fairness, transparency, and respect, which trigger workforce commitment dimensions such as vigor, dedication, absorption, commitment, and discretionary effort. In turn, these mediating variables strengthen organizational adaptability, innovation capacity, sustainability, and stakeholder trust. Thus, engagement serves as the critical bridge linking workplace ethics to sustainable organizational outcomes in rapidly changing economies (Adewale & Oyeniyi, 2020; Li & Zhang, 2022).

The Social Exchange Theory (SET) and Organisational theories are used as theoretical review. The core idea of the SET is about how Social relationships at work are exchanges of resources (tangible/intangible). When organisations act ethically (fairness, transparency, respect), employees perceive positive treatment and reciprocate with favourable attitudes and behaviours (commitment, discretionary effort). Relevance: Explains why ethical practices lead to heightened engagement employees reciprocate trust and equity with higher effort and attachment. (Blau, 1964). While the Organisational Justice Theory core idea is for employees to evaluate fairness across distributive, procedural, and interactional domains. Perceived justice predicts job attitudes and behaviours. Relevance: Fairness and respect/dignity (interactional justice) are central antecedents of vigor, dedication and trust-key engagement facets.

Conclusion and Managerial Recommendations

Ethical practices in the workplace form the foundation of a social environment that fosters engagement. In rapidly changing economies where uncertainty is a constant, ethical practices defined by integrity, fairness, transparency, accountability, and respect & dignity they sustain workforce commitment (vigor, dedication, absorption, commitment, discretionary effort). In turn, engaged employees are better equipped to provide adaptability, drive innovation, sustain sustainability initiatives, and sustain stakeholder trust. The integrated model presented here offers a theoretically grounded and operationally precise path for future empirical testing.

The managerial recommendations is that ethical practices should be Institutionalized this by way of developing clear codes of ethics, regular training, and accountability systems. Measurement of ethical climate should be embedded in periodic employee surveys. Invest in transparent communication: Especially during organisational change, timely and accurate information reduces anxiety and maintains absorption and vigor. Design engagement interventions: Use UWES-based diagnostics to identify engagement deficits and tailor interventions (job design, recognition, leadership development) to boost vigor and dedication. Align ethics with innovation and sustainability goals: Create cross-functional teams that marry ethical governance with experimentation and sustainability metrics.

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