

THE DYNAMIC EVOLUTION OF COMMUNICATION ETHICS

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Purpose: This literature review examines how ethical communication influences organizational behavior, leadership effectiveness, and business success. It highlights best practices for transparent communication strategies in professional settings, emphasizing the role of digitalization, leadership, and symmetrical communication in shaping workplace ethics.

Design/methodology/approach: The study employs a Critical Literature Review (CLR) to synthesize research on leadership, ethical communication and its digitalization. Articles from Google Scholar, Emerald, and Cambridge Journals were selected using keyword-based searches, focusing on literature from 2015-2024.

Findings: Ethical communication plays a vital role in workplace culture, leadership effectiveness, and corporate sustainability. It can enhance employees' trust, engagement, and social capital through transparent approach. Meanwhile, digitalization introduces new ethical challenges, including technology-driven bias, misinformation, and data privacy concerns, requiring clear guidelines. Ethical crisis communication is crucial for mitigating reputational risks and maintaining trust. Additionally, two-way symmetrical communication fosters inclusivity, fairness, and accountability within organizations.

Research limitations/implications: The study is limited to English-language sources and does not include empirical data. Future research should incorporate qualitative and quantitative methods, such as surveys and case studies, to expand knowledge based on these findings.

Practical implications: The review provides strategies for leaders and HR professionals to integrate ethical communication frameworks, improve employee engagement, stakeholder trust, and decision-making process. Organizations must also develop ethical guidelines for technology-driven communication to mitigate bias and misinformation risks.

Social implications: This study also contributes to corporate social responsibility (CSR) by highlighting how ethical communication promotes workplace fairness, diversity, and responsible corporate governance. Ethical leadership and transparent communication positively impact employee well-being and public trust.

Originality/value: This study synthesizes ethical communication, leadership, and digitalization in workplace reality. It is relevant for academics, business professionals, and policymakers aiming to embed ethical principles into communication strategies for long-term success.

Keywords: Communication ethics, communication evolution, ethical problems, communication technologies.

Category of the paper: Literature review.

1. Introduction

Communication is a fundamental aspect of human interaction, enabling individuals to share ideas, build relationships, and achieve common goals. It involves not only the clear transmission of messages but also the acknowledgment and verification of those messages (Paguio, Jackling, 2016). Beyond spoken language, communication encompasses both verbal and non-verbal cues, making it a dynamic and multifaceted process (Kaiser, Kuckertz, 2023, Sampaio et al., 2022). Moreover, communication allows people to transcend their existing perspectives, facilitating personal and professional growth through interaction (Meyer, Hühn, 2020).

In organizational settings, communication plays a crucial role in establishing legitimacy, building stakeholder trust, and reducing uncertainty (Kaiser, Kuckertz, 2023). It is a fundamental mechanism for ensuring an organization's survival and is integral to achieving strategic objectives (Kaiser, Kuckertz, 2023). Effective and transparent communication fosters trust, encourages knowledge sharing, and strengthens the sense of community among employees by promoting active engagement and dialogue (Alizadeh, Dirani, Qiu, 2021). All employees should be recognized as valuable talent, as they possess the potential to contribute innovative ideas (Reinert, Debebe, 2023). Furthermore, networking and effective communication are essential for generating social capital, which is vital for organizational success (Akbari et al., 2017).

As communication evolves, rapid advancements in technology have significantly reshaped the reality, forcing organizations to adapt to new communication methods (Killingsworth, Flynn, 2016). The increasing integration of social media within organizations has disrupted traditional corporate control, transforming internal communication structures (Madsen, Andersen, 2024). Additionally, global trends such as digitalization, shifting stakeholder expectations, and an emphasis on efficiency and risk management will continue to shape the future of communication within organizations (Zerfass, Verčič, Wiesenberg, 2016).

Employees today expect communication to be transparent, direct, and useful, particularly in times of organizational change (Einwiller, Ruppel, Stranzl, 2021). Generation Y, commonly referred to as Millennials, emerged in an era characterized by relative economic prosperity, rapid advancements in electronic communication, and globalization. Millennials generally prioritize flexibility and freedom, particularly in terms of achieving a balance between work and personal life (Self, Gordon, Jolly, 2019). Compared to earlier generations, Millennials, in particular, seek more frequent and immediate feedback from their supervisors, reflecting a shift in workplace expectations (Hess, 2020). This generation also favors a flatter, team-based work environment over traditional hierarchical structures and views rigid (like 9-to-5) schedules as outdated, given the increasing flexibility enabled by technology (Hess, 2020). A well-established diversity climate further influences how employees perceive and communicate with one another, shaping workplace interactions and behaviors (Goby, Nickerson, David, 2015).

Ethical considerations in communication are equally critical. Ethical communication is inherently rooted in truthfulness, requiring accuracy and avoidance of falsehoods or misrepresentations (Killingsworth, Flynn, 2016). Leaders play a pivotal role in fostering an ethical climate within their organizations, not only through their communication but also through their actions (Ehrich et al., 2015). Ethics in organizational settings extends beyond individual behavior to encompass relationships, shaping individuals' awareness and responsibility to act ethically (Yağmur, 2022). Encouraging ethical communication helps organizations uphold fundamental moral values such as human rights, fairness, and diversity (Alizadeh, Dirani, Qiu, 2021).

As organizations continue to navigate an increasingly interconnected and rapidly changing world, the role of communication remains more vital than ever. Whether in shaping workplace culture, fostering collaboration, or maintaining ethical standards, effective communication serves as the foundation for organizational success.

Given the critical role of communication in organizational success, ethical considerations have become increasingly important in shaping workplace interactions. As communication methods evolve, particularly with the rise of digitalization and shifting employee expectations, organizations face new ethical challenges that impact transparency, trust, and accountability. To explore these complexities, this article examines three key research questions: **(Q₁) What are the key ethical challenges in modern organizational communication, and how do they impact transparency, trust, and accountability in the workplace?** **(Q₂) How has the digitalization of workplace communication influenced ethical standards, and what strategies can organizations implement to maintain ethical communication practices?** and **(Q₃) What role do leaders play in fostering an ethical communication climate, and how does ethical leadership influence employee engagement and organizational culture?** By addressing these questions, this study aims to provide a deeper understanding of the ethical implications of communication and the strategies organizations can adopt to ensure ethical and effective communication practices.

2. Methods

This study employs a Critical Literature Review (CLR) as its methodological approach to assess the existing body of knowledge concerning the value of communication within organizations. CLR enables researchers to systematically summarize, critique, and synthesize scholarly works, allowing for the identification of gaps and areas that require further investigation. By using this structured method, the study highlights both the strengths and limitations of prior research, offering a comprehensive perspective on the topic.

To gather relevant publications, sources from the fields of management, economics, and human resource management were selected. The databases chosen for this review included **Google Scholar**, **Emerald**, and **Cambridge Journals**, as they provide a broad and diverse range of scientific articles in the study's area of interest. The author selected these databases due to their extensive coverage of research within the field under analysis. A combination of specific keywords was used to ensure a comprehensive search, including “**communication**” /AND/ “**ethic**”, “**culture**”, “**team management**”, “**evolution**”, “**management**”, “**challenges**”, “**team ethics**”, “**technology**”, and “**role**”. Boolean operators were employed to refine search results, ensuring relevance while maintaining the focus within the study's scope.

To determine the relevance of articles for inclusion in this study, the following selection criteria were applied: (1) The primary focus of the paper had to be **communication** or **communication ethics**. (2) Articles needed to address communication-related **challenges**, **evolution**, or **ethical concerns**. (3) Research had to originate from a variety of disciplines, ensuring a diverse perspective. (4) Selected articles were required to reflect **recent developments** in workplace environments and be no older than **15 years**, with most sources published between **2015 and 2024**. (5) Only articles written in **English** were included, as it remains the most widely used language in scientific literature.

The initial search provided **3,873 results**, demonstrating the breadth of the inquiry. To refine the dataset, a three-stage selection process was applied:

- 1) **Screening of Titles and Abstracts:** In the first phase, titles and abstracts were reviewed to assess their alignment with the research focus. This step led to the exclusion of 3,098 papers, primarily due to their limited relevance, such as discussions of unrelated communication topics.
- 2) **Verification of Eligibility:** The remaining **675 articles** were further evaluated against the established inclusion criteria. At this stage, **589 papers** were removed for lacking direct relevance to the core research themes, particularly those discussing general aspects of communication without emphasis on ethical value or organizational influence.
- 3) **Full-Text Analysis:** The final **86 articles** underwent an in-depth review to assess their contribution to the research questions. Ultimately, **30 publications** were identified as highly relevant for a detailed analysis, as they specifically addressed the ethical dimensions of communication, its organizational influence, and cultural considerations.

This methodological approach has some limitations. Potential selection bias may arise from database choices, and the exclusive reliance on English-language sources could lead to the omission of valuable studies published in other languages. To overcome these constraints, future literature reviews could broaden the scope by incorporating additional databases and including multilingual searches to enhance the inclusivity of findings.

3. Literature review – Ethical communication in light of organizational success

Effective communication is a fundamental aspect of ethical leadership, organizational success, and interpersonal relationships. As communication evolves - both in traditional and digital contexts - it presents ethical challenges that must be carefully navigated. This literature review explores key themes surrounding ethical communication, including its historical foundations, role in leadership, impact of technology, and challenges posed by cultural diversity. Additionally, it examines how communication can foster inclusivity within teams, the feasibility of meeting all stakeholder expectations, and the ethical consequences of contemporary communication challenges. By providing a comprehensive understanding of how ethical communication influences organizational behavior and leadership effectiveness, this review highlights best practices for conducting transparent and responsible communication strategies in professional settings.

3.1. Evolution of Communication and Ethical Implications

The study of ethics has deep historical roots, originating from religious traditions, philosophical doctrines, and cultural norms that have evolved over centuries (Alizadeh, Dirani, Qiu, 2021). Ethics, broadly speaking, is defined as *a system of moral principles by which human actions may be judged as good or bad, right or wrong* (Alizadeh, Dirani, Qiu, 2021). Within an organizational context, ethical principles serve as the foundation for behavioral standards, promoting honesty and integrity while discouraging self-serving actions (Alizadeh, Dirani, Qiu, 2021).

The term ethics itself is derived from the Greek word *ethos*, which represents the collective character, values, and moral sentiment of a society (Alizadeh, Dirani, Qiu, 2021). This foundational understanding of ethics has shaped the way individuals and societies engage in moral reasoning and ethical decision-making. Aristotle, a key figure in ethical philosophy, emphasized that morality is not merely about following rules but about cultivating virtue as "excellence in the human soul" (Anderson, Ichiho, 2017). His virtue ethics framework, which has received significant attention from philosophers and business ethicists, has also found its place in organizational studies (Meyer, Hühn, 2020).

These ethical foundations extend into modern organizational settings, particularly in leadership and communication. Aristotle's concept of the 'Golden Mean', which suggests a balance between extremes, remains a useful lens for ethical decision-making in leadership (Kantar, Bynum, 2021). Ethical behavior in leadership is not simply about compliance with policies but about fostering a culture of moral integrity within organizations (Lei, Do, Le, 2019). Ethical leaders shape organizational culture by consistently upholding and reinforcing ethical standards through communication (Lei, Do, Le, 2019). Leadership, ethics, and trust are now

recognized as three critical attributes that determine the effectiveness of senior communicators within an organization (Killingsworth, Flynn, 2016).

Effective communication serves as the primary mechanism through which ethical considerations are conveyed and reinforced within an organization. Managers, for instance, dedicate approximately two-thirds to three-fourths of their time to verbal communication (Lounsbury et al., 2016). Moreover, research indicates that ethical leadership explicitly emphasizes "two-way communication", allowing for open dialogue and trust-building within organizations (Yağmur, 2022). Expressing ethics as a continuous and central value through an effective communication system not only prevents unethical behaviors but also helps uncover their underlying causes (Yağmur, 2022).

Beyond internal communication, ethical decision-making at the executive level shapes not only an organization's internal culture but also its external reputation. Leaders do not merely shape their organizations - they are also shaped by them in a cyclical process that reflects their ethical choices (Bridges, 2018). Ethical executives must consider not only personal values but also their company's mission, culture, and broader financial objectives when making decisions (Bridges, 2018). Furthermore, when managers integrate ethical considerations into their decision-making processes, they contribute to building social capital and fostering ethics-centered relationships (Akbari et al., 2017).

In times of crisis, ethical leadership and communication become even more critical. Organizations that prioritize ethical internal communication foster mutual social exchange and enhance trust among employees (Einwiller, Ruppel, Stranzl, 2021). When executed effectively, crisis communication does more than just provide information - it conveys symbolic social resources that reinforce employee commitment and support (Einwiller, Ruppel, Stranzl, 2021).

Aristotle famously linked rhetoric to ethics, emphasizing that persuasive communication should promote human excellence rather than manipulation (Meyer, Hühn, 2020). Likewise, modern leaders must harness communication as a tool for ethical influence within their organizations. Ultimately, communication and ethics are deeply intertwined. Ethical leadership relies on effective communication to inspire trust, uphold integrity, and create a culture of accountability.

3.2. Technology and Ethical Challenges in Communication

Building upon the ethical foundations established in leadership, the rapid rise of digital communication has introduced new ethical challenges, requiring a reevaluation of traditional principles in a technologically interconnected world. The Internet has facilitated unprecedented global connectivity, making ethical discrepancies across cultures more apparent (Kantar, Bynum, 2021). Digital interactions among individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds often lead to 'transculturation', a process where ethical perceptions shift as cultural values converge and evolve (Hite, Daspit, Dong, 2015). However, this adaptation is not uniform, and ethical standards that are widely accepted in one cultural context may be perceived differently in

another, leading to potential conflicts in cross-cultural communication (Alizadeh, Dirani, Qiu, 2021). Ultimately, people may not recall specific words or actions, but they will remember the emotions and feelings they experienced as a result of those interactions (Nahmad-Williams, Taylor, 2015).

The foundations of **Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Ethics** were laid by Norbert Wiener, regarded as the "founding father" of the field, whose pioneering work established the principles for navigating ethical dilemmas in digital interactions (Kantar, Bynum, 2021). Expanding on this foundation, James Moor introduced the concept of logical malleability, emphasizing that the flexibility of digital technology creates 'policy vacuums' that necessitate ethical surveillance (Kantar, Bynum, 2021). To bridge these ethical gaps, Moor introduced 'Just Consequentialism', a framework that balances the consequences of digital policies against principles of justice, embedding ethics into technological advancements (Kantar, Bynum, 2021).

These ethical considerations have become particularly relevant as businesses and entrepreneurs increasingly rely on digital platforms for stakeholder engagement. Digital communication plays a crucial role in reducing uncertainty and fostering trust among stakeholders, particularly in highly competitive or crisis-prone environments (Kaiser, Kuckertz, 2023). Entrepreneurs and businesses use digital tools not only to maintain visibility but also to build relationships and demonstrate ethical responsibility in their interactions (Kaiser, Kuckertz, 2023). In times of crisis, ethical communication becomes even more essential, as inadequate or misleading messaging can harm both an organization's reputation and stakeholder trust (Kaiser, Kuckertz, 2023).

To navigate these challenges, organizations must proactively embed ethical principles into their digital communication strategies. One approach is the development of a robust 'Code of Ethics', which serves as a guiding framework for ethical conduct in digital spaces. A well-structured ethical code sets clear expectations for employee behavior, ensuring that online interactions align with corporate values and broader societal norms (Mazza, Furlotti, 2020). Furthermore, workplace ethics are typically reinforced through formal codes of conduct, which outline acceptable digital communication practices and provide employees with the tools to make ethical decisions in a rapidly evolving technological landscape (Alizadeh, Dirani, Qiu, 2021).

Ultimately, as digital technologies continue to reshape communication dynamics, ethical considerations must remain at the forefront. Ethical codes are generally followed because individuals perceive adherence as the morally correct course of action (Ramakrishnan et al., 2022). However, individuals with a lower work ethic may be more likely to engage in risky behaviors, such as disregarding acceptable use policies that are designed to safeguard an organization's systems (Ramakrishnan et al., 2022). At that time, ethical leadership, guided by frameworks such as 'Just Consequentialism', offers a structured approach to addressing the moral dilemmas that arise in digital spaces. By prioritizing transparency, accountability,

and cross-cultural awareness, organizations can uphold ethical integrity in digital interactions, fostering lasting trust in an increasingly interconnected world.

3.3. Cultural Differences and Ethical Pitfalls in Communication

Ethical decision-making is a critical component of leadership, influencing both organizational success and employee morale. Ethical decision-making follows a structured cognitive process: individuals first recognize the moral implications of a situation, then form a judgment, establish ethical intent, and ultimately act accordingly (Alizadeh, Dirani, Qiu, 2021). This multi-step process highlights the importance of ethical awareness and accountability in leadership roles. Leaders must not only assess the immediate consequences of their decisions but also consider the long-term implications for their organizations, stakeholders, and broader society. Ethical decision-makers, therefore, take into account an organization's mission, values, culture, and financial objectives when making critical choices (Bridges, 2018).

Leadership style plays a pivotal role in shaping ethical cultures within organizations. Transformational leadership, in particular, fosters a reciprocal relationship between leaders and followers, enhancing ethical awareness and motivation at all levels (Akbari et al., 2017). By prioritizing collective interests over individual gains, transformational leadership fosters a culture rooted in justice, equality, and accountability (Akbari et al., 2017). Through consistent ethical conduct, transformational leaders serve as role models, inspiring employees to integrate moral reasoning into their professional decisions.

Beyond leadership, corporate culture significantly influences ethical behavior within an organization. An organization's culture comprises deeply ingrained traditions, shared beliefs, and collective values that guide decision-making processes (Bridges, 2018). However, while a strong ethical culture can reinforce positive behaviors, certain work environments may pressure employees to compromise their personal ethical values - particularly when unethical actions go unpunished or are implicitly rewarded (Bridges, 2018). This underscores the need for corporate leaders to actively shape and monitor organizational culture, ensuring that ethical standards remain a priority.

A well-established ethical culture contributes to employee engagement and trust, strengthening social capital within an organization. Leaders who uphold ethical principles and accountability-whether in public or private sectors-facilitate communication networks, enhance transparency, and cultivate mutual trust (Akbari et al., 2017). Furthermore, ethical leadership and open communication channels have been linked to increased employee engagement, as organizations that prioritize transparency and integrity foster a stronger sense of commitment among employees (Einwiller, Ruppel, Stranzl, 2021). This demonstrates the critical interplay between ethics, leadership, and employee morale-where ethical leadership not only enhances decision-making but also improves workplace dynamics and organizational stability.

To reinforce ethical behavior, organizations often implement formal mechanisms such as ‘Codes of Ethics’ and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives. Establishing a clear ethical framework helps organizations set expectations for employee behavior, reducing ambiguity and promoting accountability (Alizadeh, Dirani, Qiu, 2021). Additionally, CSR initiatives serve as an extension of ethical leadership, ensuring that organizations uphold their moral obligations not only internally but also in their external relationships with stakeholders and communities (Alizadeh, Dirani, Qiu, 2021). When organizations integrate ethical principles into both internal policies and external engagements, they enhance their reputation, foster stakeholder trust, and create a more sustainable ethical business model.

Ultimately, sustaining an ethical culture, fostering employee engagement, and enforcing ethical policies ensure that organizations embed ethics into their leadership and operational strategies, securing long-term trust and success.

3.4. Ethical Communication and Business Success

The role of ethical communication extends beyond cultural considerations to directly influence overall business success. A workplace that fosters ethical and transparent communication enhances employee engagement, trust, and overall organizational performance (Alizadeh, Dirani, Qiu, 2021). However, ethical communication goes beyond transmitting information accurately; it demands transparency, fairness, and openness to feedback, fostering an inclusive and participatory workplace (Killingsworth, Flynn, 2016). Enhancing employee commitment through effective communication and ethical leadership has been shown to improve job satisfaction, reduce turnover, and increase dedication to organizational objectives (Akbari et al., 2017). Consequently, organizations that prioritize ethical communication practices create an environment that nurtures trust, social capital, and long-term loyalty among employees (Akbari et al., 2017).

Public relations plays a crucial role in shaping public perception and reinforcing an organization's commitment to integrity and ethical responsibility (Killingsworth, Flynn, 2016). Beyond strengthening relationships with external stakeholders, ethical public relations and corporate communication enhance internal reputation management, boosting employee confidence in leadership (Killingsworth, Flynn, 2016). Organizations rely on strategic communication to foster mutual understanding between businesses and their stakeholders, ensuring that corporate values align with public expectations. Ethical public relations and corporate communication strategies help organizations navigate ethical dilemmas while preserving stakeholder trust (Killingsworth, Flynn, 2016).

At the core of ethical communication lies managerial transparency, which significantly influences employees’ ability to interpret their work environment and make informed decisions (Einwiller, Ruppel, Stranzl, 2021). To be perceived as ethical and trustworthy, organizational communication must exhibit key characteristics such as timeliness, completeness, accuracy, and clarity (Einwiller, Ruppel, Stranzl, 2021). When managers prioritize transparent

communication, employees experience greater job satisfaction and stronger alignment with corporate values, reinforcing ethical work cultures. Additionally, formal managerial communication strategies provide employees with the necessary tools to navigate ethical challenges, reducing ambiguity and fostering responsible decision-making (Einwiller, Ruppel, Stranzl, 2021).

A key approach to ethical communication in business is symmetrical communication, which promotes a balanced and open flow of information between managers and employees. Two-way symmetrical communication serves as a mechanism for listening, responding to concerns, and ensuring inclusivity in decision-making (Yağmur, 2022). When employees feel their voices are heard, they develop a stronger sense of identification with the organization, leading to increased workplace cohesion and ethical engagement (Einwiller, Ruppel, Stranzl, 2021). Moreover, symmetrical communication fosters a participatory corporate culture, where power dynamics are balanced, and employees are encouraged to engage in ethical decision-making (Yağmur, 2022).

Beyond its internal impact, ethical communication shapes broader corporate responsibility efforts, as organizations that prioritize ethical transparency are better equipped to address societal concerns and enhance corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives. Ethics, however, is not merely about adhering to a fixed set of policies; rather, it is a continuous and evolving practice that requires proactive engagement and ethical leadership (Ehrich et al., 2015). Those in leadership and oversight roles bear the responsibility of ensuring fairness, accessibility, and ethical decision-making within their organizations (Anderson, Ichiho, 2017). Embedding ethical communication into corporate culture enables organizations to foster trust, achieve long-term success, and make a meaningful societal impact.

3.5. Contemporary Communication Challenges and Ethical Consequences

Despite the benefits of ethical communication, modern business environments present complex challenges. Ethical scandals in corporate settings have highlighted the importance of establishing robust ethical frameworks that guide organizational behavior and decision-making (Nedelko, Mulej, Potocan, 2017). However, ethical breaches occur when individuals prioritize personal gains over ethical principles, resulting in conflicts of interest and reputational damage (Nedelko, Mulej, Potocan, 2017). The application of business ethics is often influenced by situational and procedural factors, including corporate priorities and the personal or professional interests of stakeholders, which can complicate ethical decision-making (Nedelko, Mulej, Potocan, 2017). In such cases, transparent communication serves as a critical safeguard, fostering employee engagement and helping to prevent ethical breaches before they escalate into crises (Einwiller, Ruppel, Stranzl, 2021).

When organizations fail to communicate effectively during crises, the consequences can be severe, affecting both employees and the broader corporate reputation. Ineffective crisis communication can erode employee morale, drive higher turnover rates, and escalate workplace

conflicts, underscoring the essential role of ethical leadership in maintaining stability (Einwiller, Ruppel, Stranzl, 2021). Ethical leaders not only provide clear and timely communication but also offer emotional support by actively listening to employees' concerns, addressing their needs, and expressing gratitude for their resilience during challenging periods (Einwiller, Ruppel, Stranzl, 2021). By reinforcing trust-based relationships, ethical leadership ensures that employees remain engaged, motivated, and committed to the organization's ethical principles (Yağmur, 2022). Ethical leaders do more than just uphold moral standards - they proactively guide employees through ethical dilemmas and embed ethical decision-making into corporate culture (Yağmur, 2022).

While ethical communication is fundamental to business success, it is not always possible to satisfy every stakeholder. Stakeholder communication is inherently complex, as different individuals and groups hold unique expectations, values, and cultural perspectives, making it challenging to craft messages that resonate equally with all (O'Mathúna, Hunt, 2020). Nevertheless, by prioritizing transparency, fairness, and ethical consistency, organizations can maintain trust and integrity, even in the face of competing stakeholder interests (O'Mathúna, Hunt, 2020). The fundamental goal of ethical communication is to promote a "good life" shared with others, upheld through just institutions and fair communication practices that transcend individual biases (O'Mathúna, Hunt, 2020).

As communication continues to evolve due to technological advancements and cultural shifts, maintaining ethical standards is more important than ever. The rise of digitalization and shifting stakeholder expectations have transformed the role of corporate communicators, requiring them to act as change consultants and ethical guides within organizations (Zerfass, Verčič, Wiesenberg, 2016). In this interconnected business landscape, communicators must ensure that structured and transparent communication strategies align with broader corporate responsibility efforts while navigating the ethical dilemmas brought about by globalization (Zerfass, Verčič, Wiesenberg, 2016).

In today's fast-evolving digital and global business landscape, ethical communication is not just an asset - it is a necessity for sustaining trust, ensuring accountability, and fostering responsible corporate practices. The presented sections explored how these ethical considerations manifest in real-world communication practices and identified strategies for fostering responsible and inclusive communication in professional settings.

4. Discussion

Building on the literature review, this section critically examines the key findings concerning ethical communication in organizations. The discussion is structured around the three core research questions posed in the introduction: **(Q1) What are the key ethical**

challenges in modern organizational communication, and how do they impact transparency, trust, and accountability in the workplace? (Q₂) How has the digitalization of workplace communication influenced ethical standards, and what strategies can organizations implement to maintain ethical communication practices? and (Q₃) What role do leaders play in fostering an ethical communication climate, and how does ethical leadership influence employee engagement and organizational culture?

4.1. The Role of Ethical Communication in Organizational Success

Ethical communication is a cornerstone of organizational integrity, employee engagement, and trust-building. A well-defined ethical communication framework fosters a positive corporate culture, encourages transparent decision-making, and reduces the risk of ethical breaches (Alizadeh, Dirani, Qiu, 2021). This research highlights that many ethical violations do not arise from deliberate misconduct but rather from a lack of ethical awareness, emphasizing the need for ethics education and leadership development initiatives (Alizadeh, Dirani, Qiu, 2021). Employees who operate within an environment that prioritizes moral responsibility and open communication tend to exhibit higher levels of job satisfaction, loyalty, and commitment to organizational goals (Akbari et al., 2017).

Organizations that fail to uphold ethical communication standards risk significant reputational damage and internal discord. Ethical scandals typically emerge when corporate decision-makers prioritize short-term gains over long-term ethical responsibilities (Bridges, 2018). The role of leadership in shaping an ethical culture cannot be overstated, as executives are responsible for instilling corporate values, ensuring compliance, and maintaining ethical consistency (Bridges, 2018). Research further suggests that organizations with strong ethical foundations outperform those with weak ethical oversight, particularly in areas of employee trust, stakeholder relations, and brand reputation (Bridges, 2018).

4.2. Digitalization and Its Ethical Implications in Communication

The rapid digitalization of workplace communication has introduced new ethical dilemmas. technology-driven communication tools, real-time messaging platforms, and remote work models have redefined corporate interactions, requiring organizations to rethink traditional ethical communication policies (Kantar, Bynum, 2021). The use of technologies in workplace communication, particularly in automated decision-making and chatbot interactions, raises concerns about bias, misinformation, and ethical accountability (Kantar, Bynum, 2021). Ethical considerations in technology deployment should include transparency in algorithms, ensuring unbiased communication outputs, and maintaining human oversight in critical decision-making processes (Kantar, Bynum, 2021).

Moreover, data privacy and digital surveillance present ethical challenges, as employees and stakeholders increasingly demand clarity regarding how their information is collected, stored, and used (Mazza, Furlotti, 2020). Organizations must adopt ethical digital policies that prioritize data protection, informed consent, and accountability to mitigate the risks associated with unethical surveillance and data misuse (Mazza, Furlotti, 2020). Research suggests that digital ethics frameworks, such as those proposed by Simon Rogerson, offer structured guidance for aligning digital communication with ethical principles, ensuring responsible corporate digitalization strategies (Kantar, Bynum, 2021).

As technology-driven communication tools continue to evolve, organizations must not only develop policies for transparency and accountability but also establish oversight mechanisms to prevent bias and misinformation. Without these safeguards, digital communication strategies may inadvertently perpetuate ethical blind spots, leading to a loss of stakeholder trust and regulatory scrutiny.

4.3. Ethical Leadership and Its Impact on Workplace Communication

Leadership is one of the most influential factors in shaping an organization's ethical communication climate. Ethical leaders serve as role models, reinforcing principles of transparency, integrity, and fairness (Ehrich et al., 2015). Employees perceive ethical leaders as trustworthy and just, leading to higher levels of engagement, morale, and commitment (Ehrich et al., 2015). The role of ethical leadership extends beyond compliance - it requires active promotion of ethical dialogue, accountability, and social responsibility (Alizadeh, Dirani, Qiu, 2021).

Ethical leadership has also been linked to enhanced social capital within organizations (Akbari et al., 2017). Leaders who cultivate trust-based relationships foster a positive work environment, strengthening collaboration, ethical decision-making, and employee retention (Akbari et al., 2017). Furthermore, positive leadership approaches, such as transformational and virtuous leadership, promote an organizational culture of excellence, integrating virtue ethics, universal moral principles, and utilitarian ethics to guide communication practices (Anderson, Ichiho, 2017).

4.4. Crisis Communication and Ethical Challenges

Ethical communication plays a crucial role in crisis management, where transparency and empathy are essential to maintaining stakeholder trust (Einwiller, Ruppel, Stranzl, 2021). Poor crisis communication can lead to employee disengagement, reputational damage, and internal uncertainty (Einwiller, Ruppel, Stranzl, 2021). Organizations that implement clear and ethical crisis communication strategies - including informational and relational crisis communication - are more likely to retain employee trust and mitigate reputational harm (Einwiller, Ruppel, Stranzl, 2021).

Failure to uphold ethical crisis communication not only affects internal employee morale but also erodes public trust, potentially leading to long-term reputational harm and financial consequences. Therefore, ethical leaders must prioritize open dialogue during crises, allowing employees to voice concerns, seek guidance, and feel supported (Yağmur, 2022).

4.5. The Importance of Symmetrical Communication in Ethical Decision-Making

Organizations that promote two-way symmetrical communication encourage a culture of openness, trust, and employee empowerment (Yağmur, 2022). Ethical decision-making is inherently a dynamic and interactive process, where communication serves as the foundation for moral reasoning, co-orientation, and ethical dialogue (Yağmur, 2022). The effectiveness of ethical communication is strongly correlated with employee engagement, organizational trust, and ethical leadership practices (Lei, Do, Le, 2019).

Researches highlights that organizations fostering symmetrical communication experience higher employee morale, reduced unethical behavior, and improved organizational identification (Yağmur, 2022). This approach ensures that employees feel valued, heard, and included in ethical decision-making processes (Yağmur, 2022). Furthermore, symmetrical communication serves as a mechanism for social exchange, where ethical leadership and transparency positively influence workplace culture and ethical conduct (Yağmur, 2022).

Ethical communication is central to the long-term success of organizations, shaping employee trust, leadership accountability, and corporate transparency. The influence of digitalization, ethical leadership, and crisis communication highlights the evolving nature of ethical challenges in modern business environments. Organizations that prioritize symmetrical communication, enforce ethical communication technology policies, and cultivate an ethical leadership culture are more likely to navigate these challenges successfully. As communication continues to evolve, future research should focus on empirical case studies to further explore the real-world application of ethical communication frameworks in diverse organizational settings.

5. Summary

Ethical communication is essential for organizational success, influencing trust, transparency, and employee engagement (Alizadeh, Dirani, Qiu, 2021). As workplaces become more digital and globally connected, ethical communication ensures accountability, corporate integrity, and strong stakeholder relationships (Einwiller, Ruppel, Stranzl, 2021). This study explores how ethical communication frameworks help organizations navigate emerging ethical challenges while maintaining professional and ethical standards (Yağmur, 2022).

A key finding is that ethical communication fosters a strong organizational culture, where leadership and employee engagement are enhanced through transparency and ethical decision-making. Ethical leadership plays a pivotal role in reinforcing corporate values and workplace integrity, leading to higher employee motivation and loyalty (Akbari et al., 2017). Organizations that prioritize ethics education and moral reasoning create an environment where employees make ethical choices in professional interactions (Alizadeh, Dirani, Qiu, 2021).

This study also highlights the ethical challenges posed by digitalization. Technology-driven communication, real-time decision-making, and data transparency concerns require companies to implement digital ethics policies (Kantar, Bynum, 2021). Ensuring responsible use of technology is crucial, as ethical lapses in digital communication may result in bias, misinformation, or breaches of trust (Mazza, Furlotti, 2020). Organizations must balance technological efficiency with ethical responsibility, ensuring that employees and stakeholders remain protected in the evolving digital space (Kantar, Bynum, 2021). Additionally, as Generation Z, which currently storm the labor market, is the most technologically proficient generation, organizations should consider leveraging technology in their training programs to align with their digital and ethical expertise (Self, Gordon, Jolly, 2019).

The role of ethical leadership in communication is another major focus. Ethical leaders serve as role models, reinforcing trust, fairness, and responsible decision-making (Ehrich et al., 2015). Transformational leadership enhances employee engagement, promoting ethical standards in daily interactions (Akbari et al., 2017). Since leadership significantly shapes corporate ethical frameworks, organizations must integrate ethical leadership principles into communication strategies and decision-making processes (Bridges, 2018).

Crisis communication is a crucial area where ethical considerations have a direct impact on stakeholder trust and organizational reputation. Failure to communicate transparently and ethically during crises can lead to employee disengagement and long-term reputational harm (Einwiller, Ruppel, Stranzl, 2021). Ethical crisis communication must be clear, timely, and empathetic, ensuring that employees and stakeholders feel supported and informed (Yağmur, 2022). More and more research suggests that balancing cognitive and emotional responses in crisis communication helps maintain organizational resilience and public trust (Einwiller, Ruppel, Stranzl, 2021).

Finally, this study underscores the importance of symmetrical communication in ethical decision-making and employee engagement. Organizations that implement two-way communication models create a culture where employees feel valued, involved, and motivated to uphold ethical workplace practices (Yağmur, 2022). Research also shows that ethical communication strengthens trust, enhances collaboration, and reduces unethical behavior (Lei, Do, Le, 2019). Transparency in workplace communication improves employee alignment with corporate values, fostering a more ethical and responsible work environment (Einwiller, Ruppel, Stranzl, 2021).

As communication continues to evolve in the digital era, organizations must remain proactive in addressing ethical challenges. Ethical leadership, responsible use of technology, and transparent crisis management are key to maintaining organizational trust and accountability (Bridges, 2018). By integrating strong ethical communication practices, companies can build a culture of trust, engagement, and long-term success in an increasingly complex business environment (Yağmur, 2022).

6. Limitations

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the research relies exclusively on English-language sources, which may result in the exclusion of valuable studies published in other languages. This linguistic limitation could impact the diversity of perspectives on ethical communication, particularly in regions where corporate ethics and communication practices differ significantly from Western norms.

Second, this study is theoretical in nature, as it is based on a critical literature review rather than empirical research. While the analysis synthesizes existing knowledge and highlights key insights, the absence of first-hand data collection means that the study does not provide direct evidence from organizations. Future research should incorporate qualitative and quantitative empirical studies, such as surveys and case studies, to validate and expand upon the findings.

Third, the study focuses primarily on corporate environments, with limited exploration of ethical communication in non-profit organizations, government institutions, or educational settings. Since communication ethics may vary across different industries and organizational structures, future research should broaden the scope to examine ethical communication across various sectors.

Finally, as workplace communication continues to evolve due to technological advancements and shifting employee expectations, this study's findings may become outdated as new communication trends and ethical challenges emerge in the nearest future. Upcoming research should adopt a longitudinal approach, continuously reassessing ethical communication frameworks in response to technological innovations and changing business environments.

By addressing these limitations in future studies, researchers can develop a more comprehensive understanding of ethical communication, ensuring that best practices evolve alongside organizational, cultural, and technological transformations.

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