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# Does Ethical Leadership Reduce Workplace Corruption? A Quantitative Analysis of Organizations in the UAE

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**ABSTRACT**

Although the UAE has implemented various policy-level and institutional frameworks to combat corruption. While qualitative research has been conducted, quantitative empirical work is very rare on how leadership especially ethical management affects views of corruption in UAE. This cross-sectional quantitative study, consists of survey questionnaire gathered data from 300 employees who participated voluntarily across both private and public sectors in the UAE. SPSS version 25 was used to analyze the results via reliability, descriptive, and inferential analysis. The reliability via Cronbach Alpha was (0.9). For $H_1$, statistically significant negative association between ethical leadership scale (ELS) and workplace corruption perception (WCP) was evaluated ($r = 0.358$, $P < 0.01$). For $H_2$ transparency has a significant positive effect on lowering corruption perception ($\beta = 0.343$, $P < 0.001$), while accountability has a negative yet significant effect ($\beta = -0.138$, $P = 0.016$) partially accepting $H_2$. For $H_3$ statistically significant positive relationship between perceived integrity and WCP ($r = 0.309$, $P < 0.01$) was observed. The results show that leadership in ethics are crucial in both public and private sectors in UAE, yet cannot stand alone. It is affected by management, its work culture, and employee's involvement. It is important to set ethical rules to make sure that leadership anti-corruption policies appropriately. The findings demonstrate how EL influences the workplace corruption and supports initiatives to combat corruption. However, transparent leaders possessing integrity may not always foster an anti-corrupt perception on employees.

**Keywords:** Ethical Leadership, Workplace Corruption, Transparency, Accountability, Integrity, Anti-Corruption Policies
**JEL Classifications:** M14 - D73

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The workplace can be viewed as a microcosm of society, reflecting the broader ethical and governance frameworks that govern interpersonal interactions. Workplace corruption raised as a critical concern for organizations worldwide, with implications for financial performance, employee morale, organizational reputation, and overall governance (Rahman, 2025). Collectively, these components form the foundation of organizational culture, influencing employee behavior, fostering accountability, and promoting equity. Organizations must understand the intricate interplay between ethics and governance if they are to ensure sustainability, employee well-being, and productivity. In addition to encouraging economic efficiency, excellent governance and commitment to moral values promote work cultures in which employees willingly participate positively, feel valued, and contribute in long-term success (Iguodala-Cole, 2025). Accountability and transparency are ensured by ethical leadership (EL), and employee behavior and decision-making are guided by ethical standards. Transparency, accountability, and justice are improved by strong ethical standards and well-organized governance, all

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of which support organizational stability (Kyambade and Namatovu, 2025). Transparency and accountability are also closely associated with organizational reporting and the broader responsibility of organizations to provide information about their social and ethical performance (Gray, 2001).

It is suggested corporations put in place transparent, unambiguous governance fameworks that prioritize justice and accountability, both of which are critical for upholding social order and averting disputes at work. As public scrutiny increases, especially in environments experiencing rapid economic development and modernization, the leadership's responsibilities in nurturing ethical conduct becomes paramount (Barker, 2025). By encouraging ethical conduct, culture of integrity, honesty, and responsibility can be shaped. Recognizing that our actions may have unanticipated repercussions is crucial, which makes system thinking an effective analytical tool. Many organizational components interact and impact moral decision-making (Lapatoura, 2025). Integrity is the foundation of good leadership. In leadership builds trust and respect, fosters a healthy work environment, and drives organizational success. Decent leadership prioritizes moral ideals including honesty, justice, equality, responsibility, and respect (Abdulai et al., 2025). In recent decades, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has become a great power in international trade and economic growth (Ojumu et al., 2025).

Strengthening public and private sector governance has been a major priority for the UAE, which is renowned for its rapid economic expansion and development into a regional corporate hub. Nevertheless, issues with workplace misbehavior and organizational integrity violations persist despite the UAE's dedication to anti-corruption (AC) systems. Influence is the foundation of leadership and decisions-making constitutes huge influence on both innovativeness and humanity as a whole. The application of ethics, judgments, plus communication is the basis of ethical management. Characteristics of EL include modeling moral behavior for followers and being a moral boss and individual. One of the most important ways moral leaders may impact culture and set an example of moral behavior is through decision-making. It has gained significant attention as a potential mechanism to reduce corruption and unethical practices in the workplace (Shiundu, 2024; Treviño et al., 2003). By placing a strong emphasis on accountability, fairness, and transparency, ethical leaders establish of essential morals, and an ethical climate as an important organizational component (Farouk and Jabeen, 2018).

### 1.1. Problem Statement

Although the UAE has implemented various policy-level and institutional frameworks to combat corruption. Jordan has implemented a comprehensive AC strategy for the public sector. Despite implementing AC legislation and bodies, public trust in the government exists poorly, and the nation's corruption ranking does not upgrade (Al-Saleh, 2016). While qualitative research has been conducted, previous studies have examined corruption through legal and policy lenses. However, quantitative empirical work is very rare on how leadership especially ethical management affects views of corruption in UAE firms.

### 1.2. Rationale of the Study

Given the UAE's multicultural workforce and its drive toward Vision 2031 for transparency and sustainability, understanding how EL can mitigate corruption is both timely and essential. The UAE has two different legal systems: The civil law system, founded on secular ideas, and the Sharia law system, based on Islamic principles. The government of the UAE is still focused on diversifying the economy in order to reduce its susceptibility to exterior influences. This goal is in line with the UAE's "*We the UAE 2031*" vision, that places a high priority on sustainable transportation, green infrastructure, industry, and food. Creating a high level of living in UAE is one of their 2031 goals is to appeal authorities after other countries. As the UAE is perceived as a friendly and inclusive environment, people from all over the world have been enticed to the country by its embrace of cultural variety. Reducing corruption requires this ethical paradigm (Fauzi and Rahayu, 2024). By statistically analyzing the relationship framework between perceived workplace corruption and EL behaviors, this research intends to fill the empirical gap. The results will have applications in the establishment of organizational policies, ideas for leadership development (LD), and AC tactics.

### 1.3. Research Objective

The goal is to determine how EL influences workplace corruption evaluation in UAE firms. The study looks at this association to see if leaders who practice ethical behavior can influence workplace corruption views among their employees. To evaluate characteristics of ethical leadership, such as integrity, transparency, and accountability reduces views of corruption in the workplace. Research on EL investigates both theoretical and practical implications for improving governance and organizational development in the UAE.

### 1.4. Research Questions

RQ1: Does EL significantly influence the level of perceived workplace corruption in UAE organizations?

RQ2: Which ethical leadership dimensions are most predictive of lower workplace corruption perceptions?

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Organizational success, in the long run, is essentially dependent on its capabilities; thus, it has always been a source of significant concern for both the academic and managerial communities. A wide range of assumptions and perspectives have been incorporated into the theoretical paradigms for developing a successful organization. Some define success as establishing successful corporate strategy management and structure, others as developing strong management systems and human processes, and yet others as producing high-quality product (Singh and Bhandarker, 1990). Since employees affect an organization's competitiveness, organizational commitment it is closely linked to leadership skills that help employees feel appreciated and generate a culture at work that supports their goals and perspectives. However, a variety factors influence an firm's performance, and employees' dedication to the company minimizes their desire to leave in order to perform productively and devotedly (Paillé et al., 2011).

## 2.1. Ethical Leadership Theories

A unique approach to evaluating EL is developed and tested by Brown et al. (2005). They examined the link between EL and other variables and discovered that it predicts significant employee outcomes. Brown et al. (2005) developed the notion of ethical leadership, which places an emphasis on leaders' ethical behavior and their role in encouraging such behavior among their subordinates (Brown et al., 2005). EL is essential for reducing corruption by minimizing corruption in organizations in developing countries. It is especially needed in companies that do not yet have a just reward system. In order to deter and promote ethical behavior, managers should also account staff unethical practices, appreciate for their honesty, and have clear communication (Bashir and Hassan, 2020).

### *2.1.1. Transformational leadership*

The foundation of a business's social responsibilities lies in solid ethical principles. Corporate leadership is liable for this foundation since they are in charge of creating organizational culture and principles. An ethical turnaround is typically necessary when a leadership process breach occurs or when a transition-economy company enters the global market (Puffer and McCarthy, 2008). Character is important in leadership. This is not to deny that excellent people can lead to moral disaster or that terrible people can bring forth good things. Instead, leadership serves as a moral compass, and ultimately, a moral compass that reads truth is better for both individual growth and the collective good. Leadership needs to be based on moral principles in order to be genuinely transformative (Bass and Steidlmeier, 1999).

The most studied leadership approach in both Chinese and Western contexts is transformational leadership, which may be used in a range of cultural and national contexts (Sun et al., 2017). Transformational leadership focuses on inspiring and motivating followers to move beyond individual interests, embrace a shared vision, and contribute to meaningful organizational change (Parker Ellen, 2022). This is a modern leadership style whose goal is to positively influence followers. In his research on political leaders, James MacGregor Burns created the notion of transformational leadership, which is being applied to corporate analysis. Burns defined leadership as transactional or transformational. It was discovered that leaders may engage in "fake" change leadership (Goethals and Allison, 2016).

To build the strategic and ethical foundations of true transformative leadership, deception, dishonesty, and deception are examined in relation to transcendence, agency, and trust, with an emphasis on value congruence, collaborative action, power, persuasion, and corporate governance. (Hackett and Wang, 2012). Transformational leadership encourages empowerment in the workplace. Enhancing job satisfaction and reducing unfavorable outcomes contribute to job satisfaction. Less unfavorable outcomes are generally associated with occupational satisfaction (Boamah et al., 2018). The positive relationship between transformational leadership and employee job satisfaction has also been supported empirically, although the strength of this relationship may vary according to the reward mechanisms adopted within the organization (Puni et al., 2018). Such leaders push their followers to put the organization's needs ahead of their own. Transformational leaders often view these crises as chances for change, inspiring followers to pursue a new vision. Leadership competence is crucial at every step of business reorganization if the process is to effectively achieve strategic goals (Bass and Avolio, 1994a; 1994b).

Employees are required to retain their jobs and develop their skills through improved good governance traits in a very demanding work environment. Good governance, in particular, has emerged as a critical priority for workers. This is primarily due to the fact that good governance is typically measured by how well employees demonstrate important qualities such as accountability, transparency, effectiveness, commitment, and integrity, which allow them to avoid wrongdoing and influence public satisfaction through the quality of services they provide. One critical factor impacting employees' excellent governance has garnered a lot of attention: Transformative leadership. One of the primary goals of leadership style is to inspire and motivate personnel to conduct good governance. It greatly increases the excellent employee governance (Mohamad et al., 2014).

### *2.1.2. Servant leadership*

In 1970, Robert K. Greenleaf, who had read Herman Hesse's 1956 short work Journey to the East, came up with the contemporary term "servant-leadership" in his article "The Servant as Leader." Greenleaf came to the conclusion after reading this narrative that the main lesson was that a great leader's brilliance was largely dependent on their first becoming a servant and gaining experience as one (Greenleaf, 2013; Kincaid, 2012). In his groundbreaking work, Robert Greenleaf claimed that servant leaders naturally prefer to serve others than being served, which opens doors for followers to develop behavior of services (Luthans and Avolio, 2003). Greenleaf's conception of servant leadership subsequently influenced the development of contemporary leadership thought by placing service to others at the center of the leader–follower relationship (Spears, 1995, 1997). According to Laub (1999), the traits of a servant leader are stewardship, humility, interpersonal acceptance, authenticity, and empowerment and development of others (Laub, 1999).

Servant leaders, also known as transformational leaders, provide opportunities to help followers and peers achieve better levels of competence and potential while focusing on valuable ideas such as ethics, standards, and values. Originally assumed to be limited to non-profit organizations, the "to serve" attitude has subsequently spread to high-value enterprises whose primary goal is not only to serve but also to generate money (Bass and Avolio, 1994a). Servant leaders work with employees in their organizations to develop a sense of community. Using synergy in leadership, it is exceedingly difficult to develop a calm, trustworthy, and organized community within the organization (Herman, 2008). By defining objectives, solving challenges, keeping the present in mind, and developing a strategic vision for long-term sustainability, a servant leader puts the organization's future first. By putting followers' needs first, servant leadership promotes credibility and trust in the workplace. Servant leadership fosters a spiritually creative culture by stressing team and individual development through spontaneous interpersonal

and professional relationships, as well as the formation of caring institutions (Reddy, 2019).

Although the Journey to the East by Herman Hesse serves as the foundation for the servant leadership style, it can also enhance spirituality in corporate organizations. The connection between servant leadership, faith, and values has also been emphasized in the literature, particularly in relation to developing leadership practices grounded in service to others and ethical responsibility (Roberts, 2015). A servant leadership strategy can inspire workers and boost job satisfaction. An involvement-based company culture can support leaders in exhibiting servant leadership qualities, according to the study (Khan et al., 2015). Spiritual intelligence provides an additional foundation for servant leadership by encouraging leaders to connect their values and beliefs with service-oriented leadership practices and concern for others (Roberts, 2016). Employee job performance at work place is unquestionably maintained by the servant leadership approach since it gives them solid foundations to handle ambiguous circumstances. It fosters unity among staff members during times of crisis, which leads to improved performance. Positive serving conduct from a servant leader influences how well employees complete their tasks. In a rapidly evolving virtual workplace, supervisors who are leading teams should take this into account by participating in a serving behavior that provides guidance and establishes a clear path for the subordinates to follow. This might potentially result in improved performance outcomes. In order for each person to do tasks effectively, it is best to encourage their subordinates to have the essential independence and support that enable them to adapt in urgent circumstances or crises (Zada et al., 2022). Creating a better moral atmosphere is one way to fight corruption. However, company executives should be careful when interpreting followers' Machiavellianism as a thirst for corruption (Mart and Sabrina, 2023).

#### *2.1.3. Authentic leadership*

"*Authentic leadership may be thought of as a metaphor for professionally effective, ethically sound, and consciously reflective practices in educational administration. This is leadership that is knowledge based, values informed, and skillfully executed*" (Begley, 2004).

The development of authentic leadership has historical roots in longstanding ideas about authenticity, moral character, and self-awareness, which have progressively shaped its application to contemporary leadership theory (Novicevic et al., 2006).

Authentic leadership reflects authenticity, reliability and authenticity. That is, it conveys to the employee that their leader is the authentic, genuine as compared to others (Avolio et al., 2009; Bishop, 2013). Taking responsibility for one's own actions, including one's needs, goals, beliefs, feelings, and thoughts, is what Harter (2002) defines as authenticity (Harter, 2002). Authenticity involves multiple interrelated components, including self-awareness, unbiased processing of self relevant information, behavior that is consistent with one's values, and relational openness with others (Kernis & Goldman, 2006). A leader cannot claim to be a true leader just on his own. Authenticity can be determined by the experiences of subordinates' who work for and report to the leader. Only others can see your honesty. An authentic leader is defined as someone who is real, honest, and morally upright. According to the study, no one can claim that "I am authentic" because only others who follow them can (Goffee and Jones, 2005). According to a research, genuine leaders always behave in accordance with their core convictions and have a clear sense of purpose for their leadership. In addition to establishing a positive work environment, they lead with their hearts and minds (Kohnen, 2005). At the employee level, positive psychological resources are also associated with favorable workplace outcomes, with psychological capital demonstrating significant relationships with employee performance and job satisfaction (Luthans et al., 2007). Authenticity is an attribute. Leaders are of two types. While some are self-obsessed, toxic, and careless, others are true to themselves and always feel accountable for the actions of their team. It is not unusual for novice leaders to become so consumed with management and leadership tasks that they neglect their subordinates' needs and regard them as the least important (Kerfoot, 2006). The broader meaning of authenticity also emphasizes being true to oneself and maintaining consistency between one's inner values and outward expression (Trilling, 2009).

Humans are never completely authentic or inauthentic, therefore even though obtaining complete authenticity is desired, authenticity shouldn't be viewed as a binary decision (Erickson, 1995). The degree of an organization oppose personal change while carrying out their leadership and professional responsibilities is a marker of organizational authenticity, which is thought to be caused by the openness of the climate (Halpin et al., 1963). As a result, genuine leadership plays a crucial role in societal change. Numerous ethical scandals and corruption that lacks openness and a space for real people to work have hurt society. Therefore, adopting authentic leadership has a good impact on transforming society, whether that change is by eradicating corruption or enforcing ethical and positive leadership (Samwel Muguna, 2022).

### 2.2. Workplace Corruption

In recent years, workplace corruption has been one of the most talked-about topics. Ongoing problems in the public and private sectors over the past few decades have increased interest in self-accountability as a way to combat corruption in the workplace (Ghanem, 2022). Despite being the consequence of informal actions, corruption undermines democratic institutions, inhibits economic growth, and harms companies' reputations and confidence (Campbell and Göritz, 2014). Corruption can exist in any sector. Poor individual income, low levels of democracy, and a lack of openness, all contribute to the spread of corruption in developing and rising countries (Aghion et al., 2010; Janardhanan and Nambudiri, 2019). Corrupt practices are prevalent throughout bureaucratic hierarchies and are mostly associated with the provision of public services in public organizations (Neveu and Kakavand, 2019). While corruption may hinder growth in affluent economies, it rises in developed economies as market monopolization levels rise (Amir et al., 2019; Schatz, 2013). Employees do, however, occasionally learn about corporate scandals where CEOs misuse their power for their own or their

company's gain (Freckleton et al., 2012). Under the premise that "the end justifies the means," corrupt leaders perceive themselves as fighting a war that upholds norms and values inside the company culture (Campbell and Göritz, 2014). Because of their position and authority, leaders and direct supervisors exhibit the traits of role models within the confines of their organizations (Neubert et al., 2013). Consequently, corrupt CEOs often cultivate a corrupt culture in their organizations (Bussmann and Niemeczek, 2019). Therefore, if subordinates think their bosses are corrupt and immoral, they are more inclined to act corruptly (Sampath and Rahman, 2019). In the UAE, the multicultural workforce and varying levels of ethical standards present unique challenges to addressing corruption at the organizational level.

### 2.3. Linking Ethical Leadership to Corruption Reduction

Research has demonstrated a negative correlation between unethical behavior and workplace deviance and ethical leadership. A study found a negative correlation between EL and corruption. The use of performance-based rewards is linked to fewer instances of corruption and that there is a higher negative correlation between EL and corruption when workers perceive that procedural fairness is lacking (Bashir and Hassan, 2020). Reducing corruption leads to a healthier workplace which occurs in the presence of an ethical environment (Entine, 2003). Corrupt practices and other behaviors inside a company whether public or private are likely to be influenced by its climate. Individual motivations for corruption, as a specific method of engaging in immoral action, may be influenced by the firm's ethical climate (Gorsira et al., 2018). EL reduces corruption by encouraging followers to naturally avoid it. It reduces corruption by engaging with followers' Machiavellianism (Manara et al., 2020). Both public and private sectors worldwide, not just in the UAE, must put policies in place that assist employees in improving their work habits and lowering the probability of participating in corrupt acts in order to uphold ethical standards. In order to improve their ethical behavior, corporate leaders must consider instituting self-accountability (Ghanem, 2022). Organizations should take into account their ethical culture while analyzing the reasons behind employee corruption and how to stop it. The ethical culture of their company shapes employees' social and personal norms around corruption. Employees' personal and social norms against corruption may be undermined by an egoistic workplace culture, which would encourage corruption. Companies can influence their ethical environment by, for instance, keeping an eye on the moral dilemmas that workers might face at work, promoting candid discussion of these problems, and highlighting the standards that the company believes should be applied when making decisions about these problems. The ethical climate affects corruption proneness, which in turn affects individual incentives for corruption as a particular type of immoral behavior (Gorsira et al., 2018).

However, despite the growing body of international literature on EL and workplace corruption, there remains a significant gap in empirical research conducted within Middle Eastern cultural contexts, particularly in the UAE that too in private and public sectors. Much of the existing literature is associated in Western countries, where leadership practices, institutional frameworks, and socio-cultural expectations differ significantly from those in the Gulf region. A UAE is an Islamic State its ethical standards differ significantly from those globally mentioned. Hence, conducting a quantitative study within this region not only fulfills a crucial gap in the literature but also offers implications for successful LD practices, AC strategies, and policy generation tailored to this region.

### 2.4. Hypothesis

$H_1$: Ethical leadership significantly reduces perceived levels of workplace corruption.

$H_2$: Leadership transparency and accountability are the most significant predictors of lower corruption perceptions.

$H_3$: Ethical leadership integrity negatively correlates with workplace corruption.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

### 3.1. Study Design

This study adopts a cross-sectional quantitative research design, consisting of survey questionnaire (Google Form) to collect data from employees across both private and public sectors in the UAE.

### 3.2. Sample Size

The population comprises employees working in UAE-based organizations. A stratified random sampling method was used to ensure a diverse representation of sectors such as healthcare, banking, education, and government. The sample size of the study was 300 respondents.

### 3.3. Data Collection

The survey was distributed electronically via LinkedIn, emails, and internal organizational channels. Participation is anonymized and all the participants filled the form voluntarily.

### 3.4. Questionnaire Format

- Section A: Demographic variables to gather demographic information of the participants in public and private sectors in UAE (Podsakoff et al., 2012).
- Section B: Ethical leadership scale (ELS) that is developed by Brown et al. (2005), the ELS is a validated 10-item instrument using a 5-point Likert scale based on the following items (Brown et al., 2005).
- Section C: Related Sub Sections to evaluate transparency, accountability and integrity (Brown et al., 2005; Kaptein, 2015; Palanski and Yammarino, 2007; Parris et al., 2016; Thompson, 2013).
- Section D: Workplace corruption perception (WCP), section developed by adapting items from Transparency International and academic literature. Measures the perceived prevalence and severity of corruption in the organizations to be assessed (Kakavand et al., 2020; Park and Blenkinsopp, 2009).
- Section E: Practical implications of EL in the UAE's public and private sector (Brown et al., 2005; Dodamgoda, 2024; Kakavand et al., 2020; Park and Blenkinsopp, 2009).

### 3.5. Ethical Considerations

Participants of the study were informed about the use of their responses to be used for academic purposes only, data

**Table 1: Internal consistency of variables of the study via cronbach's alpha**

| Names | Variables | Cronbach's alpha | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Ethical leadership scale (ELS) | ELS1 | 0.882 | 0.932 |
| | ELS2 | | |
| | ELS3 | | |
| | ELS4 | | |
| | ELS5 | | |
| | ELS6 | | |
| | ELS7 | | |
| | ELS8 | | |
| | ELS9 | | |
| | ELS10 | | |
| Transparency=T | T1 | 0.931 | |
| | T2 | | |
| | T3 | | |
| | T4 | | |
| | T5 | | |
| Accountability=A | A1 | 0.886 | |
| | A2 | | |
| | A3 | | |
| | A4 | | |
| | A5 | | |
| Integrity=I | I1 | 0.943 | |
| | I2 | | |
| | I3 | | |
| | I4 | | |
| | I5 | | |
| Workplace corruption perception (WCP) | WCP1 | 0.923 | |
| | WCP2 | | |
| | WCP3 | | |
| | WCP4 | | |
| | WCP5 | | |
| | WCP6 | | |
| | WCP7 | | |
| | WCP8 | | |
| | WCP9 | | |
| | WCP10 | | |

**Table 2: Samples reliability and validity via KMO and Bartlett's test**

| KMO of sampling adequacy | | 0.600 |
|---|---|---|
| Bartlett's test of sphericity | Approx. Chi-square | 813.335 |
| | df | 10 |
| | Significance | 0.000 |

confidentiality, anonymity and study's purpose was conveyed to the participants as well. As the study does not contain any human invasions therefore the study is exempted from International ethics committee approval.

## 4. RESULTS

The results were divided into several section namely, reliability, demographic, inferential and descriptive analysis.

### 4.1. Reliability Analysis

The reliability of the variables was evaluated via Cronbach's Alpha, as shown in Table 1 indicating significant values for each section.

**Table 3: Factor loadings of variable via extraction method**

| Factors | Extraction |
|---|---|
| ELS1 | 0.732 |
| ELS2 | 0.574 |
| ELS3 | 0.696 |
| ELS4 | 0.779 |
| ELS5 | 0.583 |
| ELS6 | 0.576 |
| ELS7 | 0.708 |
| ELS8 | 0.690 |
| ELS9 | 0.629 |
| ELS10 | 0.590 |
| ELS | 0.990 |
| T1 | 0.713 |
| T2 | 0.794 |
| T3 | 0.781 |
| T4 | 0.792 |
| T5 | 0.634 |
| T | 0.975 |
| A1 | 0.760 |
| A2 | 0.831 |
| A3 | 0.752 |
| A4 | 0.682 |
| A5 | 0.778 |
| A | 0.993 |
| I1 | 0.845 |
| I2 | 0.816 |
| I3 | 0.714 |
| I4 | 0.741 |
| I5 | 0.792 |
| I | 0.973 |
| WCP1 | 0.631 |
| WCP2 | 0.868 |
| WCP3 | 0.880 |
| WCP4 | 0.620 |
| WCP5 | 0.705 |
| WCP6 | 0.750 |
| WCP7 | 0.850 |
| WCP8 | 0.899 |
| WCP9 | 0.775 |
| WCP10 | 0.747 |
| WCP | 0.991 |

Extraction method: Principal component analysis

Data reliability of each computed variable (ELS, T, A, I and WCP) for performing inferential statistics was further assessed using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure (KMO) and Bartlett's Tests were applied to verify the reliability of the data. These tests evaluated significant results that the data were suitable for analysis shown in Table 2.

Factor loadings shown in Table 3 revealed that all variables exhibited values >0.5 that too near to 1.0 indicating validity of the data for further analysis.

### 4.2. Demographic Analysis

The study's population consisted of 300 participants from 3 public and 3 private sectors of the organizations in UAE. A higher proportion were female compared to male. The majority were in the 35-44 age group having advanced educational background. Half of the employees working in UAE are ay the entry-level designations. The private sector employees were more than the

public sector, working mostly in small organizations. Most of the employees have <1 year experience and most of them are form operations department.

**Table 4: Demographic statistics of the participants of the study (n=300)**

| Variable | Category | Frequency (n) | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gender | Male | 125 | 41.7 |
| | Female | 175 | 58.3 |
| Age | Under 25 | 33 | 11.0 |
| | 25-34 | 32 | 10.7 |
| | 35-44 | 159 | 53.0 |
| | 45-54 | 54 | 18.0 |
| | 55+ | 22 | 7.3 |
| Education | High school | 9 | 3.0 |
| | Bachelor's | 38 | 12.7 |
| | Master's | 105 | 35.0 |
| | Doctorate/PhD | 148 | 49.3 |
| Job role | Entry-level | 147 | 49.0 |
| | Mid-level | 88 | 29.3 |
| | Senior-level | 52 | 17.3 |
| | Top management | 13 | 4.3 |
| Sector | Public sector | 131 | 43.7 |
| | Private sector | 169 | 56.3 |
| Organization size | Small (1-50 employees) | 133 | 44.3 |
| | Medium (51=200) | 122 | 40.7 |
| | Large (201+) | 45 | 15.0 |
| Experience | <1 year | 90 | 30.0 |
| | 1-5 years | 66 | 22.0 |
| | 6-10 years | 62 | 20.7 |
| | 11-15 years | 52 | 17.3 |
| | 16+years | 30 | 10.0 |
| Department | Human resources | 83 | 27.7 |
| | Finance | 23 | 7.7 |
| | Operations | 93 | 31.0 |
| | Marketing/sales | 12 | 4.0 |
| | IT/technology | 38 | 12.7 |
| | Other | 51 | 17.0 |

**Table 5: Pearson correlation between ethical leadership and workplace corruption perception**

| Variables | ELS | WCP |
|---|---|---|
| ELS | 1.000 | 0.358** |
| WCP | 0.358** | 1.000 |
| Significance (2-tailed) | – | 0.000 |

As shown in Table 4, the demographic profile of the 300 participants reflects representation from both public and private sector organizations in the UAE. Female participants accounted for 58.3% of the sample, while males represented 41.7%. The largest age group was 35-44 years (53.0%), and participants with a doctorate/PhD constituted the largest educational category (49.3%). In terms of job role, entry-level employees represented 49.0% of the sample. Private-sector employees accounted for 56.3%, while 44.3% of the participants worked in small organizations. Regarding work experience, the largest group had less than one year of experience (30.0%), and Operations was the most represented department (31.0%).

## 4.3. Inferential Analysis

Inferential analysis was applied to evaluate the hypothesis developed in the study. For $H_1$ statistically significant negative association between ELS and WCP ($r = 0.358$, $P < 0.01$) shown in Table 5. The result supports $H_1$ that increased levels of EL are linked with lower perceptions of workplace corruption among employees in both public and private sectors in UAE.

According to the regression test shown in Table 6, WCP is significantly predicted by EL ($\beta = 0.358$, $P < 0.001$). 12.8% of the variation in perceived corruption can be explained by the model ($R^2 = 0.128$) further accepting $H_1$.

Outcomes of Table 7 shows multiple regression analysis indicating the individual effects of transparency and accountability on WCP. Transparency is a significant positive predictor ($P < 0.001$), while accountability shows a significant negative relationship, suggesting complex dynamics between perceived accountability and ethical conduct of leadership. Leadership transparency and accountability explain 11% of the variance in workplace corruption perception, indicating a moderate effect size. Results prove that transparency has a significant positive effect on lowering corruption perception ($\beta = 0.343$, $P < 0.001$), while accountability has a negative yet significant effect ($\beta = -0.138$, $P = 0.016$), indicating that when leaders are authentic but possibly lack transparency, it may reduce perceived ethical clarity. Although both transparency and accountability significantly predicted WCP, transparency's effect was contrary to expectations rejecting $H_2$. While accountability was associated with reduced WCP, increased

**Table 6: Regression analysis results predicting workplace corruption perception from ethical leadership**

| Model summary | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Model** | **R** | **$R^2$** | **Adjusted $R^2$** | **Standard error of estimate** | |
| 1 | 0.358 | 0.128 | 0.125 | 0.907 | |
| **ANOVA[a]** | | | | | |
| **Source** | **Sum of squares** | **df** | **Mean square** | **F** | **Significance** |
| Regression | 36.001 | 1 | 36.001 | 43.733 | 0.000 [b] |
| Residual | 245.308 | 298 | 0.823 | | |
| Total | 281.308 | 299 | | | |
| **Coefficients of predictors in the regression model 1** | | | | | |
| **Predictor** | **Unstandardized B** | **Standard error** | **Beta** | **t** | **Significance** |
| (Constant) | 1.145 | 0.283 | — | 4.041 | 0.000 |
| Ethical leadership scale | 0.495 | 0.075 | 0.358 | 6.613 | 0.000 |

[a]Dependent variable: Workplace corruption perception. [b]Independent variable: EL scale

**Table 7: Predictive strength of leadership transparency and accountability on perceived workplace corruption**

| Model | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Model** | **R** | **R square** | **Adjusted R square** | **Standard error of the estimate** |
| 2 | 0.332 | 0.110 | 0.104 | 0.918 |

| ANOVA[a] | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Model** | **Sum of squares** | **df** | **Mean square** | **F** | **Significance** |
| 2 | | | | | |
| Regression | 31.073 | 2 | 15.537 | 18.440 | 0.000[b] |
| Residual | 250.235 | 297 | 0.843 | | |
| Total | 281.308 | 299 | | | |

| Coefficients of predictors in the regression model 2 | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Predictor** | **Unstandardized B** | **Standard error** | **Standardized beta** | **t** | **Significance (P-value)** |
| (Constant) | 2.410 | 0.277 | — | 8.694 | 0.000 |
| Transparency | 0.332 | 0.055 | 0.343 | 6.020 | 0.000[b] |
| Authenticity | −0.163 | 0.067 | −0.138 | −2.425 | 0.016[b] |

[a]Dependent variable: Workplace corruption perception. [b]Independent variable: Transparency and accountability

**Table 8: Pearson correlation between integrity and workplace corruption perception**

| Correlation | Workplace corruption perception | Integrity |
|---|---|---|
| WCP | 1 | 0.309** |
| Integrity | 0.309** | 1 |
| Significance (2-tailed) | - | 0.000 |

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

transparency increased WCP. Therefore, $H_2$ is partially accepted rather rejected suggesting a need to reconsider how transparency interacts with ethical awareness and reporting behavior in organizational contexts.

Results in Table 8 of correlation analysis shows a statistically significant positive relationship between perceived integrity and WCP ($r = 0.309$, $P < 0.01$). This contradicts $H_3$, which predicted a negative relationship thus rejecting $H_3$. Instead, the result suggests that in this sample, employees who perceived higher integrity in leadership also tended to acknowledge more corruption, which may indicate heightened awareness or disappointment. The regression results of Table 9 were statistically significant, explaining approximately 9.6% of the variance in workplace corruption perception. However, the positive beta coefficient ($\beta = 0.309$, $P < 0.001$) for integrity contradicts $H_3$, rejecting $H_3$.

The outcomes of Table 10 provide information regarding practical aspects of ethical leadership. LD almost half of the participants (42%) acknowledged that their employers employ a comprehensive strategy for LD that includes integrity-based assessments, merit-based promotions, and ethical training. Specific practices were highlighted by smaller number of respondents, such as the ethics-driven promotion criterion (22%), and ethical assessments (22.7%). For AC Strategies nearly 40% of participants revealed that their organizations support whistleblowers, and 27.3% supported ethical training, awards, and promotion, are carried out together. This indicates a rise in support for organized AC frameworks. For policy formulation (PF), 25% of respondents emphasized that efforts were made to integrate regulatory compliance and AC awareness into LD practices, and more than half of respondents (41.7%) revealed that their organizational policies are in line with the socio-legal and ethical environment of the UAE.

## 5. DISCUSSION

There are few cross-cultural studies of varying of leadership styles especially in the Middle East, however, studies evaluating the effect of such leadership practices on unethical behaviors are rare (Bealer and and Bhanugopan, 2014).

The present research examined the correlation between the perceptions of the employees with regards to workplace corruption and the EL in UAE public and private sector. The findings that higher levels of EL are related to lower perceptions of workplace corruption. These outcomes are consistent with the previous research that focused on the critical role of EL in eradicating corruption from the organizations. A research highlighted that one of the most important aspects of preventing workplace corruption is ethical leadership. Long-term financial stability, enhanced staff morale, and enhanced reputations are all advantages for companies that place a high priority on EL (Kingsley, 2024). EL significantly reduces unethical activities such as corruption when ethical standards and accountability are encouraged (Huberts et al., 2007; Lasthuizen, 2008). A research conducted in Nigeria's public service sector revealed that EL has a positive impact on civil servants' ethical conducts hence mitigating corruption (David, 2012). These significant results confirm that EL is an important deterrent to corruption in workplaces in different organizational settings and cultures in UAE.

The present research revealed a complicated relationship between perceived workplace corruption, accountability, and leadership practices. Transparency acts as a significant positive predictor for increased WCP. The results partially accepting $H_2$ by showing that transparency is positively linked with WCP while accountability is negatively associated, partially rejecting the initial $H_2$ that both variables would reduce WCP. A study revealed that transparency without accountability is unable to bring about change, which could irritate employees and make them more distrustful of management (Fox, 2007). Ethical leaders lower the likelihood of corruption and unethical behavior by encouraging transparency, enforcing accountability, and cultivating an integrity culture (Kingsley, 2024). This is consistent with previous findings that open and visible communication in leadership are eradicators

**Table 9: Regression analysis for predicting workplace corruption perception from integrity**

| Model summary | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Model** | **R** | **R square** | **Adjusted R square** | **Standard error of the estimate** | |
| 3 | 0.309 | 0.096 | 0.093 | 0.924 | |
| **ANOVA[a]** | | | | | |
| **Model** | **Sum of squares** | **df** | **Mean square** | **F** | **Significance** |
| 3 | | | | | |
| Regression | 26.905 | 1 | 26.905 | 31.515 | 0.000[b] |
| Residual | 254.404 | 298 | 0.854 | | |
| Total | 281.308 | 299 | | | |
| **Coefficients of predictors in the regression model 3** | | | | | |
| **Model** | **Unstandardized coefficients** | | **Standardized coefficients** | **t** | **Significance** |
| | **B** | **Standard error** | **Beta** | | |
| 3 | | | | | |
| (Constant) | 1.923 | 0.197 | 0.309 | 9.777 | 0.000 |
| Integrity | 0.304 | 0.054 | | 5.614 | 0.000 |

[a]Dependent variable: Workplace corruption perception. [b]Predictors: (Constant), integrity

**Table 10: Practical implications of the study in terms of LD, AC and PF**

| Variable | Category | Frequency (n) | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| Leadership development (LD) | Leadership training for ethical decision-making | 40 | 13.3 |
| | Selection/promotion based on ethical actions | 66 | 22.0 |
| | Assessment on accountability, transparency, integrity | 68 | 22.7 |
| | All of the above | 126 | 42.0 |
| Anti-corruption strategies (AC) | Selection/promotion based on ethical actions | 39 | 13.0 |
| | Whistleblowing attitude encouraged | 120 | 40.0 |
| | Training and rewards for ethical leadership | 59 | 19.7 |
| | All of the above | 82 | 27.3 |
| Policy formulation in UAE context (PF) | Policies aligned with UAE's cultural, legal, and ethical framework | 125 | 41.7 |
| | Leadership encouraged to follow UAE regulations | 74 | 24.7 |
| | Training includes awareness of corrupt behavior | 75 | 25.0 |
| | All of the above | 26 | 8.7 |

to corrupt practices, however, alone cannot act as eradicators of corruption (Brown and Treviño, 2006; Hassan et al., 2013; Rawwas et al., 2013).The outcomes revealed that leaders who are seen as authentic may also involve in lowering WCP. Organizations foster government transparency as a critical step towards improving accountability and reducing corruption. Transparency is believed to inhibit corruption by expanding chances for accountability (Bauhr and Grimes, 2014). An study also discussed multiple factors of ethical culture have to be taken into account to reduce corrupt behaviors (Kaptein, 2011). Therefore, the results imply that transparency by alone is cannot be held responsible to reduce the WCP unless it is combined with strong accountability procedures and ethical practices.

The findings of this study present a critical paradox rejecting $H_3$ that posited a negative correlation between EL integrity and WCP. The results reveal a statistically significant positive relationship suggests that higher perceptions of leader integrity are associated with increased perceptions of corruption within the organization. This suggests that perceived integrity in leadership might paradoxically coexist with or draw attention to corrupt practices, potentially due to employees becoming more aware or critical of discrepancies between leadership rhetoric and reality revealed in transparency literature available (Brown and Treviño, 2006; Kaptein, 2011). However, there is positive correlation among WCP and integrity discovered in this study is consistent with recent research that EL might accidentally result in unethical or corrupt behavior. This phenomenon emphasizes the multifaceted role of upholding integrity may result in increased reporting of unethical activities, hence enhancing perceptions of corruption (Ahmed and Khan, 2023). The current study's results may be due the environments where corruption is widespread, leaders' integrity might highlight discrepancies between adopted values and actual practices, leading to heightened perceptions of corruption as argued by a researcher (Resick et al., 2009). If the organizational environment does not support ethical practices, leaders' integrity alone may not serve to reduce corruption perceptions. Discovering that it discourages integrity violations by fostering responsibility, transparency, and ethical culture. There is discussion of the ramifications for organizational initiatives to prevent unethical behavior and LD (Hashim et al., 2023). Therefore, positive correlation between ethical leadership, integrity and WCP observed in this study suggests that leader integrity, while essential, is not a magic potion for corruption. Instead, it may increase employees' awareness of ethical discrepancies, leading to higher reported perceptions of corruption.

LD results showed nearly half of the population reported thorough LD procedures, such as training in ethical decision-making, ethical standards for advancement, and evaluations that prioritize

accountability, transparency, and integrity. These results are in line with other research conducted in UAE public sectors showing how crucial ethical LD is to establish a company's culture and reducing corrupt behavior (Farouk and Jabeen, 2018). Another research conducted in UAE private sectors also revealed that leadership has a significant impact on the ethics and in turn responsible for ethical business practices (Thomas, 2011). By setting an example and upholding ethical principles, EL is essential in encouraging ethical behavior in workers (Brown and Treviño, 2006). According to another study done in Muslim-oriented countries, local governments should implement measures to enhance their ethical behavior by taking into account the integrity of their organizations and collaborate with the government to alter public opinions regarding the integrity of the public sector (Hamoudah et al., 2021). As EL training enhances workers' perceptions of integrity and ethical conduct in companies (Kalshoven et al., 2013). Therefore, EL is critical for maintaining integrity, trust, and long-term performance when firms face new difficulties (Kingsley, 2024). For AC strategies, some participants claimed that training and prizes promote ethical leadership, while most of them highlighted whistleblowing practices. These results complement with the work in which ethical programs with whistleblower mechanisms significantly reduce organizational corruption perceptions (Kaptein, 2011). Furthermore, whistleblowing policies serve as important deterrents against corruption since they allow employees to disclose misconduct without fear of retaliation (Near and Miceli, 2016). Ethical leaders establish ethical standards to prevent corrupt activities through transparency. The findings show that EL entails more than just qualities like transparency and values-based inspirational leadership rather fosters transactional component, which includes influencing ethical behavior through communication and the reward system (Treviño et al., 2003). The PF results show that some participants prioritize leadership adherence to regulatory frameworks, and most of them think their organizational policies are in line with the cultural, legal, and ethical frameworks of the UAE. Conceptual frameworks and policies are implemented in UAE in which AC policies were generated in more effective when they take into account local cultural and legal contexts (Sarker et al., 2025; Sarker et al., 2023). Employers may be able to better control workers' attitudes and ethical judgments by implementing a variety of policies (Valentine and Fleischman, 2008). Although there are hindrances to ethical leadership, corruption risks can be extensively decreased by backing ethical training, LD, and prompt policies (Kingsley, 2024).

For UAE, the results become more complicated because it has both public and private sector emphasis. Official national policies such as the UAE Vision 2031, which aim for accountable, and AC leadership, are often associated with leadership integrity in the UAE public sector (TDRA, 2025). When public organizations put effort into training and compliance, administrative barriers can fur unethical practices. As far as the private sectors of UAE are concerned, improved management, governance, and leadership have led to an increase in production. At the same time, the findings showed that organizational strategies act as a bridge between management, leadership, governance, and increased productivity, as well as help maximize their interaction. It is concluded by the researcher that the leadership, management, and governance play the role of regulating agents in an organization. Therefore, strategies become crucial as they allow a business to grow rapidly, reduce challenges, increase productivity, and become more competitive (Halim et al., 2023). Embracing integrity-based leadership may be complicated for the UAE due to the presence of foreign workers and different cultural beliefs of everyone in the workplace (Aldarmaki, 2017). As a result, the findings show that leadership in ethics is crucial in both public and private sectors, but cannot stand alone. It is affected by management, its work culture, and employee's involvement. It is important to set ethical rules to make sure that leadership transparency truly decreases the sense of dishonesty at work. While a large majority of organizations implement specific ethical frameworks, there is still a gap which highlights the need for a more holistic combination of LD practices, AC efforts, and PF essentials. As ethical frameworks produce better results in eliminating workplace corruption, while partial or fragmented ethical programs limit their effectiveness (Kennedy et al., 2017). In both public and private organizations, the leader plays a crucial role as the primary motivator for either morally righteous or immoral activity. Acts of corruption are common when a corrupt boss is in charge, but when the leader is moral, workers are more likely to uphold the law and act morally. A strong ethical corporate culture that permeates all levels of the hierarchy and supports sustainable finance and objectives can help the company institutionalize the conduct of an ethical leader (Verne, 2023). The most recent research, highlights how UAE organizations must practically implement ethics at all levels in ways that are tailored to the local legal and cultural context (Treviño et al., 2006).

## 6. CONCLUSION

The study examined the relationships between EL involving transparency, accountability and integrity with workplace corruption perceptions in UAE's public and private sectors. The findings demonstrate how EL influences the workplace corruption and supports initiatives to combat corruption. However, leaders are transparent may not always be accountable of their actions. Moreover, leaders possessing integrity may not always foster an anti-corrupt perception on employees. Furthermore, a strong ethical culture, anti-corruption initiatives and legal frameworks for corruption are necessary for the eradication of corruption. The majority of organizations support whistleblowing, contribute policymaking and implement rewards systems to promote EL and prevent corrupt behaviors. Therefore, EL involving transparency, accountability and integrity is crucial to preventing corruption. By examining real-world examples and theories, it advances the understanding of how culture and leadership impact ethical behavior and workplace corruption perceptions of the employees in both public and private sectors of UAE.

However, the present research has several shortcomings as well. Studies that examined the perception of same group of employees at a single point. As the responses were self-reported employees may have skew their reports in a positive way leading to biasness. Using a variety of sources, including company documents and other people's viewpoints, can help reduce this bias. The study

cannot be applied to the global workforce because the population encompass only public and private sectors of UAE. On the basis of these results, it is recommended that future research concentrate on observing the same workforce over an extended period of time in order to better understand how their perceptions, corporate policies, and leadership evolve over time. Comparing the UAE to other nations in the Gulf Cooperation Council or other regions of the world could yield more insightful data. Organizations in various workplaces should also examine the effects of various LD initiatives and AC tactics.

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