

## Ethical Leadership Antecedents Review: Call for More Research Contextualization & Proposition of Conceptual Framework

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## **Ethical Leadership Antecedents Review: Call for More Research Contextualization & Proposition of Conceptual Framework**

### **Abstract**

Ethical leadership has been investigated as a standalone area because of scholars' notable focus on ethical leaders' behaviors instead of examining other leadership styles' (e.g., transformational, transactional, charismatic leadership) ethical dimensions. The present article reviews ethical leadership literature focusing on variables driving its emergence. The area with most hanging fruits is the role of individual traits (e.g., personality traits, Kalshoven et al. 2011; and moral identity, Mayer et al. 2012) in shaping ethical leadership. However, still little is known about context's contribution in understanding leaders' important ethicality. To address this gap, based on Johns (2006) context framework, we have recognized and classified existing antecedents from a context stand, and analyzed their effect on ethical leaders' emergence. Yet, the empirical research body exploring contextual variables is focused on specific areas and is not systematic. At discrete context level, organization's characteristics (e.g., ethical climate, organizational justice) and social network have important credits in forming ethical leadership with a deficient focus on omnibus contextual variables. Our review raises calls for considering three main avenues. Firstly, we encourage more research about omnibus contextual factors specifically "when" and "who" to make the story telling about ethical leadership predictors more comprehensive. Secondly, since they are nested within the omnibus context, discrete contextual factors might be considered for their possible moderating effect on the investigated relationship. Thirdly, as contexts are dynamic, interactionist approach between omnibuses and discrete contextual variables can offer meaningful discussions about ethical leadership. A framework (figure 2) is proposed enclosing individual traits and contextual factors impacting ethical leadership.

**Key words:** Ethical Leadership, Leaders' Ethicality<sup>1</sup>, Individual Traits, Omnibus and Discrete Context.

**JEL Classification:** D23, O15

**Paper Type:** Theoretical Research

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<sup>1</sup>*It captures the level to which leaders are perceived as "moral person" and "moral manager" Through considering "executive reputation and ethical leadership" matrix introduced by Trevino, Hartman, Brown, 2000.*

## 1. Introduction

In today's tumultuous environment characterized by globalization, democratization, and technological advances, ethics and moral values have become of great importance. For example, in the US, Enron, WorldCom, ImClone, Adelphia and Tyco Companies' executives have been involved in corruption cases. In Russia, unethical behaviors including corruption and extortion impact businesses and government (as cited in Al-Khatib et al, 2016). Hence, in recent years, managers and researchers started investigating ethics management. "Ethics sensitivity" has become an area of concern when leadership conformity has been questioned and corporate governance was lowly trusted (Fulmer, 2005). Leaders tend to be a significant driver for ethical guidelines and moral conformity in the business environment. Yet, some people might believe that ethics are confidential, and they do not have to do with management. "The truth is, however, just the opposite; ethics have a lot if not everything to do with management/leadership. And managers' behavior is disseminated throughout the corporations and their behavioral standards are the crucial part of corporate climate, and when stabilized, culture." (Mihelic, 2010, pp: 31).

In this era, and business environment, ethical leadership has become an area of attraction not only for managers but also for researchers. Since then, research started to extensively examine ethical dimensions in the workplace. Brown, Treviño and Harrison (2000) were the first to explore the ethical leadership conceptual basis from organization members' perspective although ethical dimensions have been primarily rooted in transformational and charismatic leadership styles (Bass and Avolio, 2000). Their main objective is to understand the ways ethical leadership links to other variables in its nomological system (Brown et al. 2005), and to contribute into understanding the universality of ethical leadership style.

Ethical leadership has emerged as a separate leadership style since scholars have been more triggered with ethical behaviors (Brown et al. 2005; De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008, 2009; Kanungo, 2001). Accordingly, ethical leadership was conceptualized, and defined as "the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making" (Brown et al. 2005: 120). Social learning and social exchange perspectives provide further insights on the way ethical leadership manifests, and thus its construct and mechanisms. Inside organizations, followers view ethical leaders as legitimate, credible, and attractive role models. This is because ethical leaders display appropriate normative behaviors based on altruism norms, and they explicitly communicate ethics messages and reinforce ethical standards through reward and punishment.

Therefore, ethical leaders' behaviors are demonstrated to impact followers' behavioral outcomes (i.e., work engagement, intrapreneurship (Özsungur, 2019); job satisfaction, organization commitment, cynicism, and job embeddedness (Karim and Nadeem, 2019); Task performance and turnover intentions (Lee et al. 2019); feedback- seeking (Gong et al. 2019); followers' unethical behaviors (Paterson & Huang, 2018); organizational citizenship behavior (Tourigny et al. 2017)). To date, an extensive attention is oriented towards investigating outcomes of ethical leadership leaving a little to understand about its antecedents. Except from Brown et al. (2005) and Mayer et al. (2012), few studies have attempted to review and examine antecedents of ethical leadership.

Our review addresses this identified gap in the literature, and answers the following questions: (1) what does explain the important level of ethicality of some leaders? (2) what type of categorization we can attribute to these determinants? (3) to which extent context effect over ethical leadership emergence is considered in the existing body of research? (4) what are the new research avenues that can further explain leaders' ethicality?

In the present article, we review ethical leadership literature to identify and examine

Variables predicting leaders' important ethicality. Our reading of ethical leadership literature reflects that an uneven attention has been shown towards ethical leadership predictors. Therefore, we consider categorizing those determinants from a context stand, and propose future research areas. The main objective of this paper is first to provide a review of the existing and emerging antecedents of ethical leadership inside the working environment, second to categorize these predictors with a specific focus on context-based antecedents, and third to spot areas for further contributions and last to propose an integrative framework of ethical leadership antecedents.

## **2. Ethical Leadership Construct and Its Theoretical Foundations**

Trevino et al. (2000) were the first to investigate ethical leadership construct. Their definition is based on a contrast between both philosophical and social scientific approaches towards ethical leadership. From a normative perspective, philosophers defined ethical leadership based on what ethical leaders are required to do. Ciulla (2004) primarily links ethical leadership to the fact of preserving and respecting people's rights and dignity. On the other hand, ethical leadership has been investigated based on social scientific literature that intersects leadership and ethics. Therefore, researchers linked leaders' effectiveness to perceived leaders' personal traits including honesty, integrity, and trustworthiness (as cited in Brown and Trevino, 2006). In addition, cognitive-based trust, referring to exercising mutual care and concern and showing reliability and dependability, has been coupled with effective leadership. In line with this logic, Trevino et al. (2003) have conducted an exploratory study to critically study ethical leadership concept. As conclusions, ethical leadership has been tightly related to personal characteristics namely honesty, integrity, trustworthy, fairness. This is referred to as "moral person" aspect, which reflects "the leaders' personal traits, character and altruistic motivation" (Brown and Trevino, 2006, p: 597). The second aspect of ethical leadership is called "moral manager" reflecting leaders' measures and efforts to impact followers' ethical and unethical conducts.

The second perspective regarding ethical leadership is a multi-dimensional one. Through building on the behavioral dimensions initially defined by Brown et al. (2005), researchers (De Hoogh and Den Hartog, 2008 and 2009; Kalshoven et al. 2010) constructed ethical leadership on a multi-dimensional basis. This implies that ethical leadership is constructed based on different behavioral dimensions (view figure 1). Yet, it is worth mentioning that the multi-dimensional concept has been developed based on the construct initiated by Brown et al. (2005).

For its theoretical basis, a set of social science theories have been utilized to explain ethical leadership mechanisms and the way an ethical leader impacts his/her followers. Thus, ethical leadership has been conceptualized based on social learning theory (Bandura, 1977, 1986). Ethical leaders are viewed as role models reflecting ethical conducts, and their behaviors are reproduced by their followers (Brown et al. 2005). For leaders to be considered as ethical ones and impact followers' conducts, they have to be viewed as genuine, credible, and attractive (Brown et al. 2005). To achieve this, (1) ethical leaders continuously display normative appropriate behaviors including honesty, and they are driven by altruistic motives enclosing fairness and concern for others. Ethical leaders also have to draw followers' attention toward ethics messages through being involved in explicit communication process and capitalize on reward and punishment to reinforce such messages.

The social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) has also been used to explain ethical leadership inside the working environment. Based on Gouldner (1960), reciprocity is the main principle of social exchange. If one person performs a beneficial behavior towards another one, a compulsion to reciprocate dutiful conduct (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005) is evoked. To better explain reciprocity in ethical leadership process, researchers (Blau, 1964) make a difference between transactional (focus on economic exchange like resources in general) and socioemotional (driven by interchange of interpersonal behaviors like trust and fairness) social.

Exchange basis. Ethical leadership is projected to manifest through socioemotional basis as ethical leaders tend to be perceived as fair, trustworthy (Brown and Trevino, 2006). In other words, since ethical leaders are found to treat others in a fair way and to be motivated by altruism, followers are expected to reciprocate in a way that profits their leaders and organizations (Mayer et al. 2009).

**Figure 1:** *Ethical Leadership Dimensions*

1. **Fairness** - Behave with integrity and fairness. They are honest, trustworthy, and transparent. They also make just decisions, and they are accountable for their actions.
2. **Power sharing**- Provide employees with voices. Allow them to participate in the decision-making and listen to their concerns and ideas.
3. **Role clarification**-Set goals performance, and detail responsibilities and expectations for their subordinates.
4. **People oriented**- Care and be concerned with their subordinates including their needs.
5. **Ethical guidance**- Hold the responsibility of communicating ethics, detailing the organization's ethical guidelines, and supporting and rewarding ethical behaviors inside the working environment.
6. **Environment orientation**- Be aware about the consequences of their decisions on the benefits of their society through focusing on sustainable issues.
7. **Integrity**- Be engaged in promise to keep and consistent behaviors

*Source :* Brown et al. (2005) & Kalshoven et al. 2011

### 3. Methods

To conduct this review, we have considered both unidimensional and multidimensional ethical leadership constructs that have been used in different empirical articles. We conceptualize ethical leadership as both personal and interpersonal behaviors in addition to decision-making, which refers to leaders' need to reflect ethical awareness and emphasize decision results (as cited in Akivou et al. 2011). In addition, we have contemplated leaders throughout various managerial positions inside organizations (e.g., executive leaders and direct supervisors).

#### 3.1. Conducting the Review

To review the literature, we firstly conducted an initial screening through using search engines (i.e., Google scholar). Secondly, we used Scopus database to consider exclusively articles published in journals indexed by Scopus. This latter comprises different journals; hence, we prioritized preeminent ones (e.g., Academy of Management Journal, the Leadership Quarterly, Journal of Business Ethics, Personnel Psychology). We have used a set of key words such as "antecedents", "predictors", "ethical leadership", "organization levels". Consequently, the preliminary search generated a total of 219 articles that have been published during a timespan from 2000 to the first quarter of 2021. Yet for the objective of this review, articles that have examined ethical leadership outcomes have been excluded. To be included in the review (1) articles need to be peer-reviewed, (2) to empirically examine direct or indirect impact of variables on ethical leadership emergence, and (3) to be published in English. Adopting these selection criteria, 40 articles have been retained and used for the purpose of this review.

### 4. Review Findings and Discussion

For the most part, research efforts have focused on examining the role of individual traits (e.g., Kalshoven et al. 2011; Mayer et al. 2012; Jordan et al. 2013) in predicting ethical leadership. Nonetheless, little attention is allocated to contextual variables' influence on ethical leadership. Our review adds recently investigated individual traits to the list and classify.

context-oriented antecedents to open avenues for further research and contribution. Figure 2 presents a framework enclosing individual traits and contextual variables.

#### **4.1. Individual- Level Predictors of Ethical Leadership**

A review of ethical leadership empirical research reflects that most of predictors are classified at individual level. They represent leaders' characteristics including their attributes of social responsibility (De Hoogh and Den Hartog, 2008), personality traits (Kalshoven et al. 2011), moral identity (Mayer et al. 2012), neurobiological attributes (Waldman et al. 2017) and leader attributes (Rahman et al. 2019).

##### **4.1.1.1. Leader Social Responsibility**

Being triggered by lack of empirical research relating to leaders' personal characteristics, De Hoogh and Den Hartog (2008) investigated the relationship between ethical leadership and a set of characteristics that belong to a general section of attributes called social responsibility. Based on Winter's (1992a) measuring tool, social responsibility encloses five features: moral–legal standard of conduct, internal obligation, concern for others, concern about consequences, and self-judgment. Accordingly, De Hoogh and Den Hartog (2008) formulate their expectations on the fact that ethical leaders tend to engage in moral behaviors since they are driven by an inner obligation (Kanungo & Mendonca, 1996). Hence, the same leaders are viewed to have moral principles. In addition, De Hoogh and Den Hartog (2008) postulate that ethical leaders are driven by altruistic motives, and they are self-judging through being concerned with their decisions' outcomes. In line with these expectations, De Hoog and Den Hartog found that leaders' social responsibility is a predictor for ethical leaders' behaviors, and it positively impacts the combination of ethical leadership scale features. Talking about the five facets of social responsibility, internal obligation is found to be mostly linked with ethical leadership. However, being socially responsible as a leader was found not to share significant power with their subordinates except for non-profit organizations where leaders are expected to adhere to altruism motives.

##### **4.1.1.2. Leader Personality Traits (Big Five Personality Traits)**

Research efforts have been directed towards investigating the relationship between leaders' personality traits and ethical leadership using the Big Five model of personality factors (McCrae and Johns 1992). Findings reveal that intellectual openness and extraversion do not relate to ethical leadership. Yet, conscientiousness and agreeableness are found to be important. For ethical leaders' conducts dimensions, conscientiousness is found to be the strongest personality trait in terms of correlation with role clarification. In other words, trustworthy, accountable, and responsible leaders are considered as ethical leaders with a focus on role clarification behavior thanks mainly to their transparency and explicit communication about goals and expectations (Kalshoven et al. 2011). On the other hand, conscientiousness does not link with fairness behavioral dimension. This is explained by the fact that conscious leaders are more tasks and achievement oriented (self-oriented as claimed by Moon, 2001) rather than people oriented (Kalshoven et al. 2011). The other crucial predictor of ethical leadership is agreeableness as it positively correlates with fairness and power sharing behaviors. Agreeable leaders that are described being kind, gentle, people-oriented and driven by altruism (see McCrae and Costa, 1987) are seen as ethical, faire and share their power. Regarding emotional stability, Kalshoven et al. (2011) concluded that it positively relates to ethical leadership and role clarification but only when leader- member relationship is controlled. In other words, only when there is a mutual respect, support, trust, and informal influence, both leaders and followers have the same perspectives and interpretations, which might result in not perceiving stress, impulsive and unstable actions as unethical behaviors (Kalshoven et al. 2011, p:361). This urges for more.

Consideration of leader-member relationships in further research about ethical leadership.

#### **4.1.1.3. Leader Moral Identity**

Cognitive social conception of moral identity is used to verify for the link between ethical leadership and moral identity. This latter is defined as “a self-schema organized through a set of moral trait associations” (Mayer et al. 2012, p: 152). In addition, through capitalizing on Aquino and Reed’s (2002) conceptualization of moral identity, Mayer et al. (2012) has expected a positive relationship between both moral identity symbolization and internalization and ethical leadership. Moral identity symbolization reflects the extent to which people exhibit they acquire moral characteristics through their actions (Aquino and Reed, 2002). Moral internalization encloses moral qualities that are part of a person’s self-concept. The study findings reflect that there is a positive relationship between leaders’ moral identity and ethical leadership. In other words, leaders who have a moral identity (symbolized and internalized) will be engaged in ethical behaviors. Leaders indicating moral attributes through moral decisions are viewed as ethical leaders. In addition, they are found to reflect high moral internalization capturing moral traits that are part of the leaders’ self-concept. Those are leaders that emphasize ethical conducts and punish unethical one and avoid immoral behaviors.

#### **4.1.1.4. Executive Leader Cognitive Moral Development (CMD)**

Jordan et al. (2013) have questioned direct relationship between executive leaders’ moral reasoning and subordinates’ perception of their leaders’ ethicality. Their research interest is driven by the important role played by executive leaders in impacting ethical culture and atmosphere through defining ethical and strategic lines (Jordan et al. 2013). Based on previous studies (Mayer, Kuenzi, Greenbaum, Bardes, & Salvador, 2009), it is found that ethical leadership tends to cascade from executives to lower sections of organizations thanks to leaders’ engagement in ethical leadership practices.

Executive leaders’ moral reasoning is captured by cognitive moral development (Kohlberg, 1969), a construct reflecting the cognitive configuration and norms capitalized on when analyzing and dealing with ethical matters. Kohlberg reveals that individuals experience cognitive moral reasoning development through three levels: pre-conventional, conventional, and post-conventional one. Individuals in *pre-conventional* level adopt an ego-centric way of thinking and their reasoning is highly driven by avoiding punishment and looking for rewards. They also view moral values and norms as imposed by their external environment. *Conventional* ethical thinkers are impacted significantly by ethical standards of their surroundings including family, peers, and society in general. They are less self-centered, but others oriented. They seek agreement with their environment and reflect loyalty to their surroundings. At higher levels, *posts-conventional* logic goes beyond from what is adopted in conventional one to reflect universal understanding of right and justice. For instance, a post-conventional individual reflects universal and consistent moral values. Hence, Jordan et al. (2013) have proven a direct positive relationship between executive leaders’ cognitive moral reasoning and their followers’ perception toward ethical leadership. Based on social learning theory, executive leaders that reflect a high level of cognitive moral reasoning considering justice, rights and followers’ well-being is more likely to be perceived as ethical attractive role models.

On another side, authors study a more intricate relationship linking both leaders and followers’ ethical reasoning with perceptions of ethical leadership practices. Results reflect that divergence between leaders’ and followers’ moral reasoning significantly impacts leaders’ ethicality. When leaders reflect a more sophisticated moral reasoning in comparison with their subordinates, they are strongly viewed as ethical leaders. Executives are perceived as ethical leaders as they can differentiate themselves from their followers and thus being observed based on their normative behaviors including direct communication regarding ethics matters and

conducts and concern for employees.

#### **4.1.1.5. Leader neurobiological attributes (Defaults Mode Network)**

Through joining moral psychology and neuroscience, and being driven by moral self-theory, Waldman et al. (2017) advance understanding of ethical leadership antecedents. They argue that moral self “involves an amalgam of mental activity, and thus implicates a complex system of brain functioning in moral self-regulation, such as that promoting ethical leadership.” (p. 3). They have advanced fatherly their contribution considering neuroscientist conclusions regarding the partial neurobiological foundations for moral self. This latter is defined as a multifaceted system of personal moral features including moral orientations and beliefs as well as the disposition guiding moral conducts (Jennings, Mitchell, and Hannah, 2015). To investigate self-linked operating (e.g., moral self), neuroscientists have used Defaults Mode Network of the brain (DMN). It is a web of interconnected parts of the brain that are posited to explain individual differences (e.g., predispositions and behaviors). The DMN is activated when the brain is awake yet at rest (e.g., daydreaming, memory recalling, and future picturing). The findings of the study reflect that leader’s ideology (contact of idealism and relativism) partially intervenes in explaining the impact of leaders’ brain Default Mode Network (DMN) in predicting ethical leadership.

#### **4.1.1.6. Leader Attitudes**

In an attempt to fill in a gap in literature about ethical leadership antecedents, Rahman et al., (2019) questioned the role of leaders’ attitudes in predicting their important level of ethicality. Through drawing on planned behavior theory (Ajzen, 1991), they have hypothesized that three main variables, which are critical to plan behavioral changes, can significantly explain ethical leadership. Plainly (1) attitudes describe the positive or negative assessment a person might attribute to a behavior. Yet, (2) subjective norms link to what other individuals perceive as an acceptable conduct, and (3) perceived behavioral control captures individuals’ level of control over themselves in conducting a specific behavior. Rahman et al. (2019) have demonstrated that when leaders express a positive attitude towards ethical behaviors and reflect a high ability to control themselves, they have high intention to act ethically, which in turn results in ethical leadership. These findings extent systematic understanding of the way leaders’ personal characteristics predict leaders’ ethicality.

Throughout our review, the most hanging fruits area is leaders’ traits. Indeed, most of empirical efforts have focused on investigating the effect of individual characteristics ethical leadership. As summarized in table 1, scholars’ interest has ranged from examining the role of leaders’ attributes of social responsibility (i.e., De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008), to personality traits (i.e., Kalshoven et al. 2011), moral identity (i.e., Mayer et al. 2012), and cognitive moral development (i.e., Jordan et al. 2013) in predicting leaders’ ethicality. In more recent efforts, other researchers have been triggered by more sophisticated yet realistic ethical leadership determinants such as Brain’s Default Mode Network. Nonetheless, little attention has been attributed to contextual variables to comprehensively understand ethical leadership construct in organizational environment.



**Table 1:** Summary of the Individual Level Predictors of Ethical Leadership

Authors	Antecedents/ Predictors	Ethical Leadership Construct Dimension	Relationship	Scope of Analysis
<b>De Hoogh &amp; Den Hartog, 2008</b>	Social responsibility using Winter, (1992a) conception.	-Ethical leadership behavioral dimensions: morality and fairness, role clarification, and power sharing	-Social responsibility links positively to ethical leadership and two-dimensional behaviors: morality and fairness, and role clarification. -Internal obligation is mostly linked with ethical leadership. -Social responsibility does not link to ethical leadership except for non- profit/ or voluntary type of organizations.	<b>Personal Characteristics</b>
<b>Kalshoven et al. 2011</b>	Personality Traits adopting the Big Five Model personality factor (McCrae and Johns1992).	-Ethical leadership unidimensional construct (Brown et al. 2005) also other ethical behavioral dimensions: fairness, power sharing and role clarification.	-Conscientiousness positively correlates with ethical leadership and role clarification. -Agreeableness positively correlates ethical leadership, fairness, and power sharing. - Emotional stability positively correlates with ethical leadership and role clarification only when LMX is controlled. - Intellectual openness and extraversion do not relate to ethical leadership	<b>Personal Characteristics</b>
<b>Mayer et al. 2012</b>	Moral Identity by adopting a cognitive social conception.	-Ethical leadership unidimensional construct (Brown et al. 2005)	-Moral identity symbolization positively relates to ethical leadership. -Moral identity internalization positively relates to ethical leadership.	<b>Personal Characteristics</b>
<b>Jordan et al. 2013</b>	Executive Leader's Cognitive- Moral Development (CMD).	-Ethical leadership unidimensional construct (Brown et al. 2005)	-Executive leaders' cognitive moral reasoning is directly and positively related to followers' perception of their leaders' ethical leadership. -Divergence between leaders' and followers' moral reasoning is important and significantly impacts leaders' ethicality.	<b>Personal Characteristics</b>
<b>Waldman et al. 2017</b>	Brain's Default Mode Network.	-Ethical leadership unidimensional construct (Brown et al. 2005)	-leader's ideology (contact of idealism and relativism) partially intervenes in explaining the impact of leaders' brain Default Mode Network (DMN) in predicting ethical leadership.	<b>Personal Characteristics</b>
<b>Rahman et al. 2019</b>	Leaders' attitudes using the planned behavioral changes (Ajzen, 1991).	-Ethical leadership unidimensional construct (Brown et al. 2005)	-When leaders express a positive attitude towards ethical behaviors and reflect high ability to control themselves, they have high intention to act ethically, which in turn results in ethical leadership	<b>Personal Characteristics</b>

*Source:* developed based on the literature review

## **4.2. Avenues for Further Research**

In one of their reviews of literature to advance understanding of ethical leadership, Brown, and Mitchell (2010) have pointed out *emotions* as one of promising trends in organizational behavior research. And they have argued that research about ethical leadership is not fully emphasizing the weight emotions might have in explaining relationships. Previous research (e.g., Tangney, Stuewig, & Mashek, 2007) discussed the role played by emotions in ethical judgement within human brains. Furthermore, most recent research efforts (e.g., Jack, Boyatzis, Khawaja, Passarelli, and Leckie, 2013) “suggest that the regulation of emotions is inherent to, and essential for, effective decision-making.” (Waldman et al. 2017, p. 15). Accordingly, leaders lacking emotional control might not engage in an ethical decision-making. Thus, allowing emotions to disrupt their ability to deal with moral issues and dilemmas. These findings open an avenue for future investigations about emotions in predicting ethical leadership. However, in a very advanced level, we suggest focusing on organizational cognitive neuroscience. A research area that considers using neuroscience methods to advance understanding of organizational events (e.g., ethical leadership), thus allowing the use of broader frameworks (i.e., conceptual, and analytical) (Senior et al. 2010). In addition, using neurological evaluation would result in superior measurement validity (e.g., ecological validity) that is not obtained through using the conventional methods (i.e., surveys).

Considering neurological operations, relevant brain regions is one of its aspects. In brain activity theory, utilized in behavioral events (e.g., ethical leadership), it is useful to identify crucial part(s) or hemisphere(s) of brain that are responsible for capabilities necessary to produce the central leadership style (Waldman, et al. 2017). In this line, Lindquist et al. (2012) identified network of the brain, named psychological constructionist approach, producing psychological and behavioral events. They advanced that some of these networks might be important to measure aspects of emotions, hence, providing a basis to investigate the neurological foundations of ethical leadership.

## **4.3. The Impact of Context on Ethical Leadership Emergence**

Studies have extensively focused on leaders’ characteristics to critically explain their important level of ethicality. Nevertheless, we can realize that little attention has been attributed to context influence on ethical leadership. This conflicts with calls to contextualize research to advance organizational behavior area (Johns, 2006). Based on Rousseau and Fried, "contextualization entails linking observations to a set of relevant facts, events, or points of view that make possible research and theory that form part of a larger whole" (as cited in Johns, 2006, pp 386). The important influence of contextualization is not restricted to leadership determinants, which is the case of our article. Yet, it can be extended to the leadership process and outcomes as well. Recently, leadership context is becoming one of the appealing areas of investigation to fill in a literature gap as there is no “agreement regarding what constitutes the context for leadership.” (Oc, 2018, p.1). For instance, reviewing the literature about antecedents of ethical leadership reflects some contextual factors, yet leaving a room for other determinants to further understand ethical leadership construct.

In the following part, we present and discuss these contextual factors. However, and to critically understand their impact on ethical leadership and to spot avenues for future studies; it is useful to classify them. For this objective, we will adopt Johns’ (2006) definition of context, and thus we will capitalize on its dimensions. His approach is a systematic organization and categorization of contextual factors that are found to significantly impact human conducts, hence providing insights about the way such factors effect can be examined in organizational studies. As a first step, we will describe John’s model and the different dimensions of context. Then, considering the literature, context-based antecedents of ethical leadership will be discussed and categorized. This will provide more systematic comprehension of the context

impact, and open areas for further studies through spotting gaps and reflecting on the complexity of some factors that are nested within other level of analysis.

Johns (2006) quotes Cappelli and Sherer description of context as “the surroundings associated with phenomena which help to illuminate that [sic] phenomena, typically factors associated with units of analysis above those expressly under investigation” (p.386). And proceeds with deducing that organizational attributes represent context for members and external surroundings is a context for the organization itself. His approach views context as situational factors, enclosing both opportunities and constraints, significantly tailoring human actions and conducts. Yet, his main contribution is context conceptualization as two dimensions: (1) omnibus context and (2) discrete context that are not necessarily independent from each other. The omnibus context is holistic in nature as it encloses a large set of contextual and environmental factors. Johns describes omnibus context as “entities that comprise many features or particulars.” (p. 391) to answer *what, who, where, when* and *why* questions of a story told in a research paper. Into other terms, omnibus context captures crucial evidence about characteristics of a specific context. For instance, the *who* element portrays the demographic and occupational context (i.e., gender in the workplace) concerning both direct targeted sample of research and their surroundings. In addition, omnibus context-oriented studies might investigate impact of economic, societal conditions, national culture on studied relationship.

However, discrete context, based on Johns (2006), relates to “specific situational variables that influence behavior directly or moderate relationships between variables” (p. 393). It refers to distinct contextual factors including task, physical, social contexts, and lately adding temporal context as one of discrete contextual factors (Oc, 2018). Importantly, discrete context can be seen as nested within omnibus one in a way that it mediates the impacts of omnibus contexts, or it interacts with omnibus contextual variables to critically understand targeted behavioral outcomes (Johns, 2006). For example, considering a direct research participant’s occupation can result in conclusions about his/her social and physical organizational environment, thus, to be used for critical understanding of attitudes and conducts (Johns, 2006).

#### **4.3.1. Social Context**

Social context is one of the discrete contextual variables. It refers to features of the social atmosphere in an organization including social influence, and both social density and structure. Social density describes positions of others in social networks while social structure refers to categorization and differentiation in social environment based on gender, social class, tenure for instance. Social context captures characteristics of groups, organization (e.g., culture climate), and social networks (e.g., social density and structure). Referring to ethical leadership literature, scholars have focused on investigating factors predicting important ethicality levels of some leaders (e.g., Brown and Trevino, 2013; Qin et al. 2017; O’Keefe et al. 2019).

Most articles reviewing ethical leadership literature name the second cluster of antecedents (e.g., role modeling cultural and ethical context) as situational factors (Brown and Trevino, 2006; Brown and Mitchell, 2010). Also referred to as external factors, situational variables pertain to capture external environment to individuals (leaders in this article) and expect them to have an impact on targeted relationship. Based on literature, there are growing research efforts that have investigated the impact of context on ethical leadership emergence. For example, leaders’ ethicality level is found to be shaped by their role models as well as their interaction with other individuals in organizations (executive leaders and subordinates) as detailed below.

##### **4.3.1.1. Role Modeling**

Being embedded in social learning theory (Bandura, 1991), research reflects that moral judgment and conducts are significantly shaped by role modeling. It is a process through which

Individuals identify themselves with others and learn from them. Keeping in mind the ambiguity and insufficient knowledge associated with ethical matters, individuals observe their significant role models for guidance (Kohlberg, 1969; Trevino, 1986).

Claiming that ethical role models can be found in different forms, Brown and Trevino (2013) believes that ethical leadership can be shaped by three different types of ethical models: (1) childhood models (e.g., parents & teachers), (2) career models (e.g., career supervisors), and (3) top management. Research reflects that supervisors are considered as role models thanks to their positions and status, which make them attractive (Gibson, 2003). Nevertheless, position and authority are not enough, and ethical supervisors need to be competent, accountable and care givers (Brown et al. 2005). Consequently, they are viewed as credible, which make them in turn more attractive to learn from (Brown and Trevino, 2013).

Moreover, based on Weaver et al. (2005), ethical role modeling is a “side-to-side” phenomenon (as cited in Brown and Trevino, 2013). Employees would learn from ethical role models with whom they have interacted closely and got to observe their behaviors in terms of decision-making and leadership style. Third type of modeling is top managers. Based on the “cascading effect”, Mayer et al. (2009) reveal that ethical leadership is transmitted to down levels of management in organizations. Others believe that top management impacts other management layers through some tools such as ethical culture (Schaubroeck et al. 2012).

Study results reveal that there is no major impact of having childhood ethical model on ethical leadership. Yet, this relationship is moderated by age. Ethical childhood models positively link to perceive ethical leadership for young leaders. This is likely because childhood learning is more recent (Brown and Trevino, 2013). Yet, this provides leaders with good foundations to become ethical leaders as at this stage leaders acquire virtues (e.g., honesty, trust) that are part of a moral person. On the other hand, career ethical role model is found to significantly predict ethical leadership. In other words, leaders claiming to have ethical career models are viewed as ethical leaders by their followers noting that age tends to moderate this bond. Indeed, positive relationship between career ethical models and subordinates’ ethical leadership ratings becomes stronger among older leaders in comparison with young ones. This is because as leaders advance in their careers, they are exposed to numerous ethical role models, and they learn conducts (e.g., emphasizing ethical standards) from working environment (Brown and Trevino, 2013). However, no support has been found regarding the relationship between top management ethical modeling and perceived ethical leadership.

#### **4.3.1.2. Subordinates and Supervisors Interaction**

Through challenging the assumption that an ethical leader reflects the same level of ethical leadership towards all his/her subordinates, Qin et al. (2017) suggest that both subordinates’ and supervisors’ characteristics (e.g., moral identity) are important determinants of supervisors’ ethical leadership. Through capitalizing on person-supervisor fit research, Qin et al. (2017) claim that (in)congruence between supervisors’ and subordinates’ moral identity significantly drives supervisors’ ethical leadership via negative sentiments. Researchers hypothesize that when supervisor’s and subordinate’s moral identity match, good interaction and low supervisor’s negative feelings are generated. They add that a match/miss- match between supervisors’ and subordinates’ moral identity indirectly impacts supervisors’ ethical leadership toward subordinates through the sentiments generated.

The results of this research reflect that a divergence between supervisors’ and subordinates’ moral identity generates supervisors’ negative sentiments explained by both parties’ conflicts regarding ethical matters. However, in case of congruence, negative feelings are higher when the alignment of supervisors- subordinates’ moral identity is at low levels in comparison with high alignment level. This is because when both supervisor and subordinate have high levels of moral identity, they have more tendencies to be engaged in pro-social activities and face less.

Conflicts regarding ethical behaviors, thus a harmonious interaction is established between these two. On the other hand, when supervisors'-subordinates' moral identity alignment is at a low level, they both lack pro social behaviors, which results in less good interaction and less mutual-appreciation (as cited in Qin, 2017). Another important conclusion is related to the mediating role this congruence tends to play in indirectly impacting supervisors' ethical leadership. Indeed, the results show that supervisors'-subordinates' moral identity congruence leads to less negative sentiments, thus influencing positively supervisors' ethical leadership.

#### **4.3.1.3. Organizational Ethical Climate and Organizational Justice**

In a recent study, O'keefe et al. (2019) have investigated the cascading effect of ethical leadership through different levels of management. Yet, this relationship is examined considering organizational climate and justice. In this study, ethical climate, an organizational variable, captures the perception individuals hold upon foundations for ethical decision-making (Victor and Cullen, 1988). Organizational justice is measured through considering only two of its dimensions (i.e., procedural justice and distributive justice). This research has the objective of verifying the significant role played by context into explaining ethical leadership emergence. Unexpectedly, results show "that the higher and lower-level ethical leadership association was stronger when ethical climate and organizational justice were negative." (O'keefe et al. 2019, p.14). This is explained by climate strength referring to the agreement of participants regarding their perception of ethical climate. The findings above reveal that when there is a weak consensus (i.e., weak situation) concerning ethical climate and organizational justice among individuals (junior ones); ethical leaders are viewed as a significant source (i.e., role models) for ethical assistance. In contrast, high consensus in perception of ethical climate is identified within senior leaders making the ethicality of their leaders less significant in explaining their ethical leadership. These results are explained by another social contextual variable (Johns, 2006), which is leaders' tenure.

The above empirical studies have significantly contributed to the literature through examining the role of social contextual variables in the emergence of ethical leadership. The impact of the role modeling for example can be classified as a direct social influence ethical leaders experience from their career mentors. Indeed, ethical role models are viewed as credible and attractive; hence, their behaviors in terms of decision-making are closely observed and sponged by subordinates. For this learning process to take place, a side-to-side situation needs to be experienced by career mentors and subordinates (Weaver et al. 2005). In the same study, age is a moderating variable in the examined relationship pertaining that as individuals advance in their careers, they are exposed to several ethical role models and different learning situations, thus making their ethicality level more important.

In the study of O'keefe et al. (2019), research efforts have been directed towards a unique contribution. Indeed, the impact of senior leaders' ethicality on the emergence of junior ethical leaders has been verified considering moderating effect of social contextual factors (i.e., ethical climate and organizational justice). Consequently, they postulate that ethical leadership of senior leaders (higher level) begets the one of junior leaders (lower level) within organizations identified by positive ethical climate and organizational justice (i.e., distributive, and procedural justice). Unpredictably, results have shown that begetting process of higher-lower ethical leadership takes place yet within environment with weak ethical climate and organizational justice. Yet, this relationship tends to differ based on leaders' tenure, hence, verifying for another contextual social factor. Through focusing on discrete context (e.g., social context) to examine factors pertaining to ethical leadership advent, this work contributes to the literature. Consequently, we can conclude that ethical leadership emergence does not depend solely on the type of social contextual variable (i.e., positive, or negative ethical climate); yet the strength of the situation (i.e., weak, or strong consensus among individuals' perceptions) has to be

verified.

In a very different approach, Qin et al. (2017) have investigated the interaction of supervisors and subordinates moral identities, and its results in terms of predicting ethical leadership. Because “leaders do not live and act in a social vacuum.” (Qin et al. 2017, p.2); subordinates are the most important stakeholders throughout the leading process, and they inexorably influence their leaders’ behaviors (i.e., ethical leadership). Accordingly, Qin et al. (2017) focus on a more realistic perspective regarding ethical leadership toward subordinates, thus investigating leaders’ ethicality level through considering both leaders and subordinates moral identities. In prior studies (Mayer et al., 2012), moral identity has been investigated as a predictor (personal characteristic) for ethical leadership. Yet, in Qin et al. (2017) work, interaction between supervisors and subordinates moral identities can be classified as a contextual social aspect as it involves a certain dependence between leaders’ outcome (i.e., ethical leadership) and subordinates’ actions (i.e., moral identity). This dependence has been postulated in the interdependence theory (Kelley et al. 2003), “one of the few extant theories to provide a comprehensive analysis of interpersonal structure and processes.” (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2008, p. 2050). This theory focuses on the interpersonal features of social context that exist within the interdependence of outcomes for instance.

Most of empirical efforts to examine the impact of context on ethical leadership emergence are classified at the discrete level (see figure 2). More specifically, social context variables significantly contribute into explaining leaders’ important ethicality. Through adopting different approaches, scholars have verified for the role of direct social influence (i.e., role modelling) and organizations’ characteristics (i.e., ethical climate and organizational justice) in shaping ethical leadership. Another noteworthy conclusion links to the strength of the situation. Indeed, leaders’ ethicality is not exclusively driven by the type of social context variable (i.e., positive, or negative ethical climate), yet it is significantly determined by the intensity of the situation referring to the level of consensus when it comes to individuals’ perceptions.

**Table 2: Summary of context-based Predictors of Ethical Leadership**

Authors	Antecedents/ Predictors	Ethical Leadership Construct Dimension	Relationship	Scope of Analysis
<b>Brown and Trevino, 2013</b>	Ethical Role Models including three forms namely childhood role models, career mentors and top management.	-Ethical leadership unidimensional construct (Brown et al. 2005)	-Having had a career ethical role model positively links to subordinates perceived ethical leadership. -This relationship was moderated by leaders' age. This bond is stronger for older leaders in comparison with young ones.	Discrete Context- Social Contextual Variable
<b>Qin et al. 2017</b>	Supervisors- Subordinates (in)congruence in moral identity.	-Ethical leadership unidimensional construct (Brown et al. 2005)	-Incongruence of supervisor– subordinate moral identity results in supervisor negative sentiments toward subordinates. -In comparison with alignment at high levels of moral identity, supervisors reflect higher negative sentiments toward the subordinate when supervisor–subordinate moral identity is aligned at low levels of moral identity. - Low negative sentiments generated by moral identity congruence impacts supervisors' ethical leadership.	Discrete Context- Contextual Variable Social
<b>O'keefe et al. 2019</b>	Ethical leadership of senior leaders.	-Ethical leadership unidimensional construct (Brown et al. 2005)	- Senior ethical leaders are viewed as a significant source (i.e., role models) for ethical assistance when there is a weak consensus (i.e., weak situation) concerning ethical climate and organizational justice among junior leaders. - A high consensus in perception of ethical climate is identified within senior leaders making the ethicality of their leaders less significant in explaining their ethical leadership.	Discret Context- Social Contextual Variable

Source: developed based on the literature review

#### **4.4. Omnibus Context in Ethical Leadership Literature**

In our literature review, we have noted that omnibus contextual variables are the most generally ignored research areas. In their attempt to answer calls for more research (e.g., Brown and Mitchell, 2010) about ethical leadership antecedents, Eisenbeiss & Giessner (2012) have advanced propositions about possible influence of multiplayer contextual variables (i.e., national culture, industry) on ethical leadership emergence. In a similar trend, Resick et al. (2006) are among the ones who tried to investigate this area. They have postulated that four dimensions of ethical leadership- character/integrity, altruism, collective motivation, and encouragement- are across cultures endorsed. In their following research, Resick et al. (2009) realized that culture dimensions (e.g., collectivism, uncertainty avoidance) represent contextual factors that influence the extent to which individuals view ethical leadership as important. However, despite these efforts, a lot is yet to explore about the influence contextual factors might have over ethical leadership development. Based on Johns (2006) context categorization, national culture reflects the “*where*” dimension of omnibus context. It refers to the location where ethical leadership takes place.

Regarding national culture, Resick et al. (2006, 2009) have capitalized on Global Leadership and Organizational Effectiveness framework (GLOBE) (House and Javidan, 2004). It investigates both national culture and leadership behavior across 62 cultures. Yet the study was not meant to have access to people’s assessment of ethical leadership. Hence, this presents an area for improvement for research efforts planning to investigate national culture impact on the emergence of ethical leadership.

The aforementioned empirical studies reflect that omnibus context dimensions effect on ethical leadership is the mostly ignored research area. Except from Resick et al. (2006, 2009) efforts to verify for ethical leadership endorsement in other cultures, other scholars (i.e., Eisenbeiss & Giessner, 2012) have only introduced propositions regarding ethical embeddedness, and announced possible contextual impact on leaders’ ethicality without having their suggestions empirically verified. Accordingly, we call for more scientific attention toward this area, and we expand potential contributions in this regard.

#### **4.5. Avenues for Further Research About Contextual Factors’ Effects**

Despite Resick et al. (2006 & 2009) efforts to approach national culture impact on ethical leadership, more research avenues can be identified. The only omnibus variable employed in ethical leadership antecedents research is “*where*” one. However, in addition to culture, there are other omnibus factors that belong to the “*where*” dimension including markets and institutions (Johns, 2006). Empirical research also postulates that organization type (i.e., voluntary, bureaucratic) drives the motives behind leadership behaviors and styles. Through combining McClelland (1975) motivation theory and Miner (1997) organizational sociology, Spangler, Tikhomirov, Sotak, and Palrecha (2014) postulated that leaders’ needs for power would overweight other needs in bureaucratic type of organizations, and that needs for achievement would dominate other needs in entrepreneurial type of organizations (e.g., startup). As cited in Oc (2018), transformational leadership is highly expected to emerge within public organization as opposed to private one and within non-profit structures. Accordingly, future research efforts might be directed towards exploring whether the organization type fosters the emergence of leaders’ ethical behaviors. In this regard, for instance, organization type can have a moderating effect over the prediction of ethical leadership, thus, investigating the impact of context on leaders’ behavioral dimensions. In a similar fashion, future research considering other aspects of organization such as corporate social responsibility can cultivate understanding of ethical leadership development and sustainability.

Always considering the omnibus context, exploring other of its dimensions can open areas for further investigations. For instance, the “*who*” aspect refers to demographics and



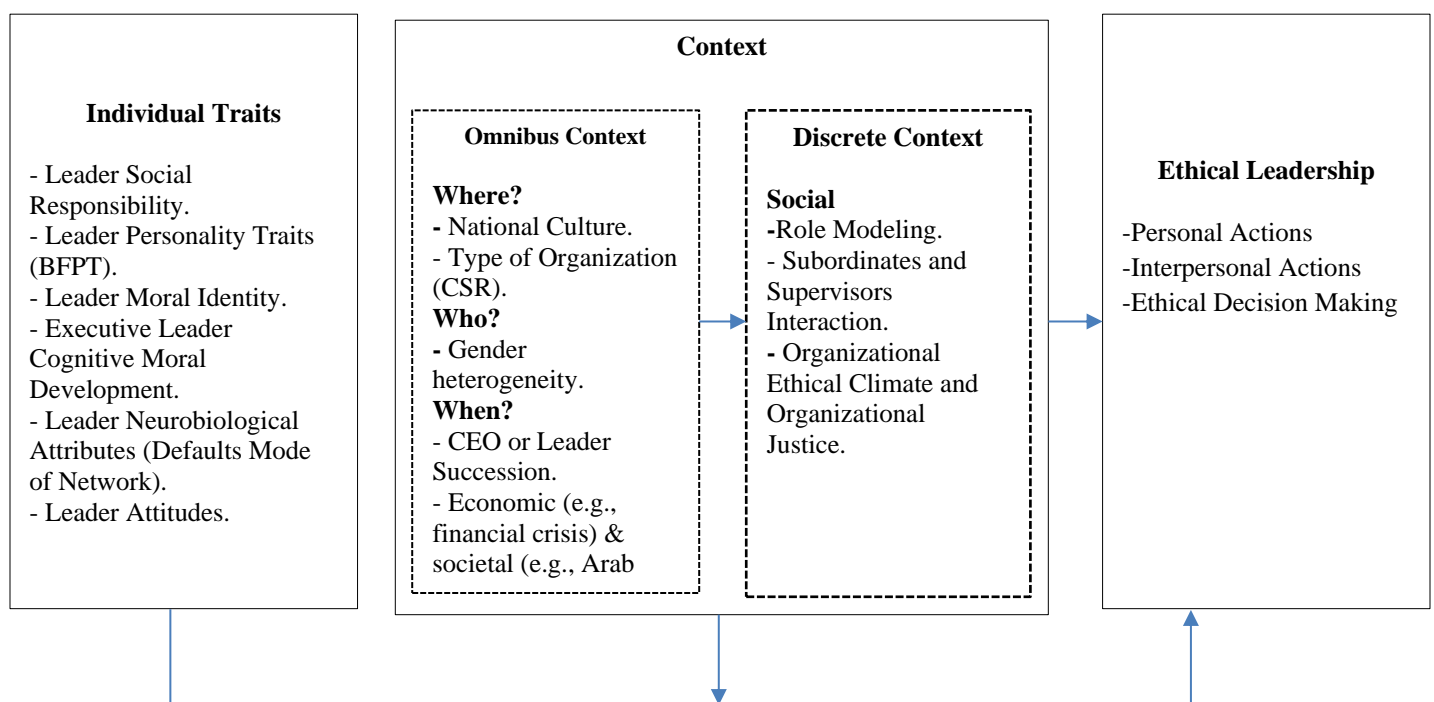
Occupational context where individuals interact (Johns, 2006). Indeed, considering the “*who*” dimension for ethical leadership research would cover all the important players in ethical leadership development and who constitute its context. For instance, gender arrangement is one variable of the “*who*” dimension. Most of leadership research emphasizing the gender variable “mainly explore its interactive effect with the leader gender on leaders’ evaluation and leader emergence” (Oc, 2018, p.7). Accordingly, it would be interesting to look at the type of contribution gender would have over the emergence of ethical leadership. For example, some leadership research (Hoyt, Johnson, Murphy, and Skinnell, 2010) have found that group’s gender heterogeneity represents some critical repercussions for female emergence as leaders especially when stereotypes are activated. In our suggestion for further research, gender might not be a direct predictor of ethical leadership, yet it might have a moderating effect over the emergence of ethical leaders specifically when group gender heterogeneity is lacking. In other words, some leaders might not be viewed as ethical leaders by their followers as these latter can be distracted by stereotypes. This would contribute to ethical leadership literature in a different way as it releases research areas focusing on boundary conditions for ethical leadership emergence.

Johns (2006) classifies context into an omnibus and discrete context pointing out the different characteristics of each. Yet, he emphasizes the fact that discrete context can be nested within the omnibus one. This implies that discrete contextual factors can play mediating role in explaining the impact of omnibus contextual variables on a particular behavior or attitude. Following this context portrayal, research gaps regarding the role of national culture (“*where*” aspect of omnibus context) in predicting ethical leadership can be filled in through considering discrete contextual factors. For instance, Jackson (2011) found that individuals’ attitudes towards ethics values differ based on cultural dimensions (e.g., collectivism vs individualism). Also, prior research (e.g., Vitell et al.1993) postulated that leaders in individualist cultures reflect less tendency to adhere to code of ethics or to respect ethical rules in comparison with collectivist cultures. Accordingly, aspects of organizational ethical ecosystem can be considered as potential mediators to verify the extent to which leaders can be perceived as ethical cross cultures. For instance, ethical climate constitutes a dimension of ethical environment. In contacts to ethical culture, ethical climate captures the way employees experience organizational environment based on the approaches adopted to handle things. Into general terms, organizational climate originates from values that are supported by top management and are articulated via rules, policies, and procedures. Indeed, as employees’ perception regarding these policies is mutual, then organizational climate emerges (Kuenzi, Mayer, Greenbaum, 2019). Being that said, ethical climate (social dimension of discrete context) might have a mediating impact over the relationship between national culture (“*where*” dimension of the omnibus context) and ethical leadership emergence.

Another area of impending contribution is the interactionist approach between the omnibus and discrete contextual variables in shaping ethical leadership. Some previous research (e.g., Trevino, 1986; O’Keefe, Catano, Kelloway, Charbonneau, and MacIntyre, 2016) have proposed models and supported the need to verify for the interaction between individual traits and situational factors. However, our review emphasizes the need to focus on context contributions. And it would be interesting to investigate the interactive influence of both omnibus and discrete contextual variables in shaping ethical leadership. Indeed, as contexts are described to be dynamic, alterations in the omnibus context might sculpt the discrete context in a specific way, thus in turn influencing leadership. For instance, “*when*” dimension of the omnibus context can capture these changes. According to Johns (2006), “*when* heuristic refers to the time (absolute and relative) at which the research was conducted, or research events occur.” (p. 391). And it is important to consider this dimension when examining ethical leadership research because events taking place in the macro part of the ecosystem can potentially impact the social

interactions that are part of leadership context. In this regard, Johns deems foremost organizational changes (e.g., CEO or/leader succession), and major economic (e.g., financial crisis), and societal (e.g., Arab spring) events as instances of time-sphere contextual variables. For example, prior research efforts (Mayer et al. 2009) have verified for cascading effect, also referred to as role-modeling, of ethical leadership between top management and their direct subordinates (low-level managers). Yet, results have been adopted regardless of context effects that can be produced for example by top management or CEO succession over the modeling process. Accordingly, we suggest examining ethical leadership emergence through modeling process yet during critical organizational timing and circumstances resulting from top management succession for instance. Hence, extending the same logic and considering the possible interactive influence of contextual variables will be an important move towards critically understanding ethical leadership development.

**Figure.2.** Framework Integrating Ethical Leadership Antecedents



*Source: Adopted from Oc, 2018*

## 5. Conclusion

Ethical leadership scholars have long conceded the scarcity of investigations to understand predictors behind leaders' important ethicality. Yet, in our review, we have realized that most of deployed efforts are oriented towards leaders' traits. However, less is known about the contribution context might add to systematic understanding of ethical leadership emergence. In contextual leadership article, Oc (2018) has postulated that "context makes a difference" (p.13), specifically when it comes to observing leadership dimensions. As reflected in our review, through using Johns (2006) context framework, we have recognized and classified existing antecedents from a context stand, and their effect on ethical leaders' emergence. Yet, we have noticed that this empirical research corpse exploring contextual variables is focused on specific areas and is not systematic.

Considering the discrete context, organization's characteristics and social network have important credits in shaping ethical leadership. Yet, other dimensions of the discrete context namely task, physical and temporal context are overlooked, which in turn represent potential areas for future research, only if they are systematically approached. On the omnibus level, with

few exceptions (e.g., Resick et al. 2006), no research attention has been given to other omnibus contextual factors specifically “when” and “who” to make the story telling about ethical leadership predictors more comprehensive.

As our review clearly reflects it, a considerable research attention should be given to ethical leadership contextualization. This will contribute into expanding our understanding of ethical leadership emergence through considering context effects. Our review presents a revision of the literature and identifies future research avenues in the hope of triggering meaningful discussions to contribute to the different gaps.

Although our review has been conducted considering a systematic approach, some limitations can be recognized. As part of our methodology, we have capitalized on articles published in English. However, given scholars interest in verifying for ethical leadership universality, research efforts available in other languages have not been included in the review scope. Accordingly, some empirical findings that would have supported the review conclusions probably have been missed. We therefore call for considering articles published in other languages than English to ensure a comprehensive understanding of ethical leadership emergence in other cultures, one of the literature gaps identified in our review. Secondly, like any other models, our suggested interactive framework is simplified to better meet the review objectives. We consciously did not cover other discrete context dimensions (i.e., physical dimensions, and temporal dimension) as part of Johns’ (2006) context categorization. This is mainly due to focus and simplification motives. Our review aims at examining existing empirical research body and presenting a complex reality in very simplest ways. Nevertheless, future studies intended to examine context impact on ethical leadership are highly urged to consider organizational ecosystem complexity to systematically understand ethical leadership construct in its most real terms.

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