Ethical Leadership: Descriptive Literature Review of the Diverse Influence and Development of Ethics upon Public Sector and Military Leaders, Followers, and Organizations

Stephen M. King

Steve Firestone

Harold Henkel

Brian Moore

STEPHEN M. KING
VIRGINIA BEACH, VA, USA

STEVE FIRESTONE
VIRGINIA BEACH, VA, USA

HAROLD HENKEL
VIRGINIA BEACH, VA, USA

BRIAN T. MOORE
VIRGINIA BEACH, VA, USA

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Abstract

Literature reviews are a significant tool for examining the breadth and depth of a selected body of literature. Although there are many types of literature reviews, ranging from narrative to meta-analysis, this article uses a descriptive review. Descriptive reviews are extremely useful for examining a body of literature, highlighting key areas of interest, particularly as it addresses a specific research question, or is directed toward a particular purpose. This article utilizes a descriptive review of ethical public leadership, both in civilian and military organizations, particularly focusing on two critical areas of interest: theme identification and issue development. Four key themes were identified: leadership trust, organizational environment, relationship between employee and workplace attitudes, and ethical competence. Our review elicited several key issues reflected in the ethical public leadership literature: leader behavior relationship, employee or follower behavior, education, development, and training, and organizational awareness. In addition, four corollary issues emerged: influence of military leadership behavior, geographic distribution of study populations, distinct array of leadership positions, and methodological diversity. Our primary conclusion is that ethical public leadership research, particularly focusing on our four key issue areas, is present in all public organizations, civilian or military, crosses organizational, cultural, and geographic boundaries, and utilizes multiple types of methodologies. In summary, while we recognize limitations to our review, and point out key areas for future research, we contend public leadership is and should continue to be a fertile and significant area for ethics research and development.

Introduction

Ethical leadership is at the forefront of public concern. Week after week, it seems, scandals, violations of ethics codes, increased employee dissatisfaction, and decreased organizational trust, directly or indirectly tied to a lack of leadership grounded in normative principles and

values, fill the mainstream and social media. For example, the level of public trust in governance institutions has plummeted over the last six decades (Pew Research Center, 2022). In addition, the increasing division of ideas is often fueled by elected and unelected leaders, intent on promoting individual agendas and pushing ideological positions, all, it seems, at the expense of pursuing the greater good (Dimock & Wike, 2020; Dionne, 2012). The average citizen, employee, and worker not only desire leadership they can trust to do what is right and good, but also accept responsibility for actions and behavior that fall short (Plant, 2018; Resick et al., 2011). To address these shortcomings, scholars have sought to examine not only the individual leader, their leadership status, and the leadership process (Gini, 1997), but also intentionally examine the cause-and-effect relationship between ethical principles and values and themes, such as individual and organizational trust (Mozumder, 2018).

The importance of ethics, and ethical leadership in the public leadership field, including professional graduate programs, is unquestioned (King et al., 2021). Thus, the advancement of scholarly research in ethical leadership (Treviño & Brown, 2014), particularly public leadership (Van Wart, 2003, 2013), is more acute and wide-ranging than ever. Definitional clarity (Brown & Mitchell, 2010; Brown & Treviño, 2006; Mayer et al., 2012), skills development (Haq, 2011), focus on enhanced behavioral and organizational trust (Mihelic et al., 2010; Neubert et al., 2009), and inclusion of moral descriptors for leaders and leadership (Ciulla, 2014; Treviño et al., 2000) are but a few of the research veins being mined. In addition, the diversity of methodological techniques and tools is also evident (Crosby & Bryson, 2018). Correspondingly, with this increase in research studies on ethical leadership, there is an increasing number of literature reviews outlining the progress made (Lemoine et al., 2019; Vogel & Masal, 2015).

Purpose of Research Project
This project evolved out of a long-term goal to critically identify, describe, and assess various and diverse characteristics of published scholarly articles on the general topic of ethical public leadership. Although philosophical ethics has roots dating back to the Ancients (e.g., Plato and Aristotle), practical ethics—applied to public leadership—have only been studied over the last 30-40 years. One way to pursue this goal is the adoption of literature reviews. Literature reviews, which range from narrative (Baumeister & Leary, 1997) to scoping (Malila et al., 2018), to systematic (Gupta et al., 2019) to meta-analysis (Bedi et al., 2016), provide insight, understanding, and focus on the specific literature under analysis. Descriptive reviews (Burns, 2017), which is the focus of this project, not only summarize the literature on a particular topic but also provide integrative details, often adopting search protocols and use of thematic analysis (Yang & Tate, 2012) to provide a rigorous descriptive detail of the subject matter.

Our purpose for employing a descriptive literature review is to reveal, examine, and describe several key characteristics of ethical public leadership studies (broadly defined), including theme development, research purpose, study population, methodological diversity, and distinction of findings. The leading question is, "What are the distinct and diverse themes of ethics upon public leadership?" We specifically identify, describe, and discuss four key themes that we believe reflect the influence and role ethics have upon the position, function, and behavior of public leadership (e.g., leader behavior, employee, follower behavior, education, development and training, and organizational awareness). In addition, we highlight four corollary themes reflective of the various studies under review (e.g., evidence of military leadership and its distinction or similarity with civilian public leadership, the geographic

distribution of studies, population distinctions, and methodological diversity). To accomplish this task, we follow the basic stages attributed to conducting a descriptive literature review: overview of the subject, discussion of methodology employed, literature search, discussion of findings, and conclusion, including limitations and future research (Pautasso, 2013).

Distinctive Characteristics of Public Leadership

The leadership literature published yearly is voluminous. While the largest percentage of this literature focuses on the private sector, more recently, however, primarily within the last two to three decades, there has been substantial attention on administrative or public sector leadership (Morse et al., 2007; Orazi et al., 2013; Van Wart, 2003, 2013; Van Wart & Dicke, 2016; Virtanen & Tammeaid, 2020), distinguishing between purpose, motivation, and outcomes compared to private sector leadership. This is not to be confused with political leadership (Kellerman, 1986, 2012), where emphasis focuses on ideological and political value contexts. Instead, administrative, or public leadership, is leadership practiced in complex public environments — integrative and interlocking rather than solely hierarchical. Public leadership is influenced by a myriad of forces and factors, ranging from the Constitution, laws, and rules to informal and formal organizational constrictions and institutional influences (Getha-Taylor et al., 2011). Public leadership is leadership largely practiced by non-elected officials in several different public sector organizations, who have significant authority and influence in the procedural and substantive influence upon the administration of public policies (Van Wart, 2003).

Getha-Taylor et al. (2011) cited "three broad lenses" through which public leadership is viewed: "character of public leadership, function of public leadership, and jurisdiction of public leadership" (p. 86). First, the character of leadership "...reflects the normative commitments and resulting behaviors of individual leaders" (Getha-Taylor et al., 2011, p. 87). This lens highlighted the ethical and moral intentions, behaviors, and actions of public leaders. Second, the function of public leadership referred to the "policy development, implementation, and monitoring" of policy issues (Getha-Taylor et al., 2011, p. 88). Third, the jurisdiction of public leadership referred to the "formal boundaries, specifically organizational...such as legal authority" by and through which public leadership operates. As we alluded to earlier, public leadership's jurisdiction is no longer only vertical (i.e., within a Weberian context) but horizontal as well (i.e., integrative and interconnected); thus, its influence is more robust and penetrating. We agree with these distinguishing characteristics or lenses through which public leadership operates and views administrative-democratic reality. Each is critical for helping to explain the role and influence of public leadership. However, for our purposes, we restrict our examination to the character, or values-based lens, through which the influence of ethical factors is most prominent.

Ethics and Public Leadership

What is the influence of ethics on public leadership? First, let's define ethics. Ethics is about "character" (from Greek *charaktêr*) and "customs" (from Latin *consuetudo*). Joanne Ciulla (2005), a long-time ethical leadership scholar, wrote, "The study of ethics is about what we should do and what we should be" (p. xi). She argued that the critical "definition question in leadership studies," including public leadership, as we have identified and defined it, is not "what is leadership?" Instead, it is "what is good leadership?" For Ciulla (1998), the heart of good leadership is ethics (p. 18). Ethical leaders not only embody personal character traits—

traits they have learned and developed over time, such as empathy, concern, courage, etcetera—but also demonstrate, discuss, and model these traits in the organization, through decision-making, or when personally engaging with employees and workers. It is here the manifestation of these ethical traits, behaviors, and actions contributes to establishing an ethical environment, one that permits the kind of work and leader-follower relationships that produce results and create an environment conducive to developing and sustaining personal and organizational ethos. As Ciulla (2005) noted, "Ethical leadership is…a constant quest to keep a perspective on who they [leaders] are, how they relate to the group, and to whom they have obligations" (p. 9). Let's review four such distinct influences.

Trust
When trust in government declines, the "capacity of public institutions [including leadership] to govern effectively diminishes as well" (Denhardt, 2002, p. 65). Recent studies demonstrate that if increasing public trust is a goal of public organizations, then enhancing "administrative integrity" is a critical intermediate factor to promote (Fox et al., 2015; Wang & Van Wart, 2007). Further, trust in local ethical leadership, such as city management, is enhanced when the public has high expectations of ethical leadership and their behavior. Research shows that if local public leaders desire to see an increase in public trust in local government, then local leaders should act ethically by encouraging and modeling honest behavior, transparency, and loyalty, specifically directed toward promoting the greater public good (Feldheim & Wang, 2004). The mediating role of ethical leadership is an authoritative influence in the public organization, including encouraging followers (employees) to assume a direct and persuasive initiative, particularly in promoting organizational or employee initiatives (Lee, 2016), enhancing the work environment (Engelbrecht et al., 2017), and improving "employee well-being, citizenship behavior, and perceived organizational performance" (Mozumder, 2018, p. 167). A trusting relationship between employees and leadership contributes to more than just improving performance results; trust builds and strengthens leaders and followers, knitting them together in a bond of confident reliance.

Organizational Environment
Does ethical leadership matter in government administration and service? The answer is an unequivocal "yes." Several studies demonstrate that ethical leadership impacts positive views toward organizational commitment (Hassan et al., 2014; Neubert et al., 2009). Hassan et al. (2014), for example, studied 161 managers in a large state government agency and examined over 400 various reports, including personnel records, with which to measure employee absences. Controlling for several factors, such as various employee characteristics, procedural fairness, and supportive leadership behavior, the authors found ethical leadership contributed to reducing worker absences and had an overall positive influence on employees' commitment to the agency's goals and purposes, including reporting ethical problems. Additional literature suggested ethical organizations are ethical because of several factors, such as following rules and laws or demonstrating various aspects of ethical leadership both vertically and horizontally in the organization (Downe et al., 2016; Jurkiewicz & Giacalone, 2016; Yeboah-Assiamah et al., 2016). Further, ethical public leaders in government and hybrid organizations, such as nonprofits, "placed greater value on being altruistic, concern for the greater good, and being responsive and transparent" (Heres & Lasthuizen, 2012, p. 441). The presence and persistence of ethical leadership positively influence organizations,

creating a work environment that is conducive to more than just producing results; it produces an environment that is inviting, creative, and innovative.

Relationship Between Employees and Workplace Attitudes
Critical for the success of public organizations is the work attitude and behavior of employees. A main contributing factor for enhancing employee attitude and behavior is ethical leadership. In addition, public organizations, including military as well as civilians, strive to meet high organizational standards for employees (Immel, 2016). For example, in an early survey study of local government employees in two Florida cities, Menzel (1992) found many employees unaware of various state and local ethics rules and regulations. Decades later, however, Beeri et al. (2013) found that both ethical leadership and implementation of an ethics program contributed to higher and more sensitive awareness on the part of employees toward an implemented code of ethics and to making ethically relevant decisions. In addition, more recent studies show a definitive correlation between ethical leadership and enhanced racial diversity, which tended to positively influence an employee's satisfaction of their job" (Moon & Jung, 2018). Employees and workers flourish in an environment where trust, integrity, transparency, honesty, and other character-based values and virtues are present.

Ethical Competence, Education, and Leadership
We have demonstrated that ethical leadership can act as both an antecedent and mediating variable (Pucic, 2015), whether related to individual behavior (e.g., employee response to leadership) or exemplified in the workplace environment. In other words, ethical leadership can and often does act as a substantive and effective influence on individual and organizational variables. Our fourth influence suggests two final questions: (a) Is ethical leadership itself impacted by competencies, whether skills or values, and exhibited by individuals in the organization (Cooper & Menzel, 2015), and if so, what is the relationship between ethical competence and ethical leadership? (b) Should ethics education and training courses and programs be required to develop either or both ethical and technical competencies (Heres & Lasthuizen, 2012)? Again, the answer is "yes," to both questions.

Ethical leadership requires individuals who are educated, developed, and trained in the practice of ethics, demonstrating actions and behaviors that treat employees with respect and empathy. An ethically competent leader, for example, "…encompasses a set of knowledge, skills, and attitudes and abilities…to adequately deal with moral challenges…" (Cooper & Menzel, 2015, p. 63). How is this competence measured and evaluated, whether at the individual, organizational, or even systemic levels (Plant, 2018)? Is it taught within a traditional MPA 'ethics in public administration' course? We believe it is possible, given that other professional fields, such as nursing, incorporate highly "structured education and training programs in ethics… [and measure] its effects on moral distress" (Sporrong, K. S., 2007, p. 825). Still, ethical competence often competes for attention with other competencies, such as "task, substantive policy issues, politics, and administration" (Virtanen & Tammeaid, 2020, p.333), forming a diverse and intense ethics and training course and/or program for budding professional administrators and managers (Yoder & Denhardt, 2019). Professional codes of ethics, such as adopted by professional organizations, like the American Society of Public Administration (ASPA), are critical not only for providing guidance to specific aspects of ethical legal, administrative, and managerial conduct, but also for displaying a broad range of administrative issues (Plant, 2019).

Research Methodology

This ethical leadership descriptive review (Kellerman & Webster, 2001) identified various and diverse empirical studies in ethical public leadership, globally in public sectors, including traditional public administration organizations, as well as the military. Like scoping reviews, for example, we used search protocols that provided standardization and objectivity for the selection of literature (Moher et al., 2009; Peters et al., 2015). The selection and review process included the following phases: (a) identification, (b) screening, and (c) theme development (Moher et al., 2009, pp. 876–877; Saldana, 2021). First, the identification phase included searching publicly accessible commercial and military databases (Table 1) using keywords and criteria (Peters et al., 2015, p. 144). The keywords included moral leadership, ethical leadership, leader, public, public sector, public service, public organization, public administrator, administrative leadership, and military leadership. The criteria included articles published between 1990–2021, peer-reviewed, English language, U.S., and foreign governments (national and local), military (all branches), public (not exclusively private or nonprofit), and empirical (no articles solely devoted to theory, philosophy, or other literature reviews), including qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. Two researchers searched commercial databases, while the other two searched military databases. We imported all identified articles from commercial and military databases into RefWorks and removed duplicates in preparation for the screening phase (Moher et al., 2009, p. 876; Peters et al., 2015, p. 144).

Table 1: **Academic and Military Databases**

Commercial	Military
ABI/Inform Complete	Air University, Civilian Leadership Development, Eaker Center for Leadership Development: www.airuniversity.af.edu/Eaker-Center/DAFCS/Article-Display/Article/2030096/leadership-development/, https://fairchild-mil.libguides.com/AULIMP
Academic Search Complete	Center for the Army Profession and Leadership: https://capl.army.mil/
Business Source Complete	Solider Support Institute https://www.ssi.army.mil/
Emerald Premium eJournals (formerly Emerald Insight)	Strategic Studies Institute at the Army War College
Homeland Security Digital Library	United States Air Force Academy (https://www.usafa.edu/character/jcld/) Journal of Character and Leadership Development
International Security & Counter Terrorism Reference Center	United States Army War College Press (See "Articles and Editorials") (https://press.armywarcollege.edu)
JSTOR Arts & Sciences I - XV	United States Army War College Press Parameters (quarterly academic journal, https://press.armywarcollege.edu/parameters/)
Military & Government Collection	United States Marine Corps University: https://www.usmcu.edu/Academic-Programs/Lejeune-Leadership-Institute/Marine-Leader-Development/
Military Database	U.S. Air Force Research Laboratory (https://www.afrl.af.mil/wrslibrary/)
Political Science Complete	U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences (https://ari.altess.army.mil/)
Political Science Database (1985 - current)	U.S. Defense Technical Information Center (https://discover.dtic.mil)
Project MUSE	US Marine Corps University Research Library (https://www.grc-usmcu.libguides.com/library)
ProQuest Central	US Naval Postgraduate School Dudley Knox Library (https://www.library.nps.edu, https://library.nps.edu/alumn)
Sage Journals	US Naval Research Laboratory (https://www.navy.mil)

ScienceDirect	
Taylor & Francis Online	
Wiley Online Library	

Second, we anticipated using the RefWorks collaborative function during the screening phase to continue filtering articles for the theme development phase. However, we exported all articles into a Microsoft Excel file for screening due to a software malfunction in RefWorks' collaboration function. We evenly divided the articles among the four researchers and reviewed each article, first by the abstract and then by the full text (Peters et al., 2015, p. 144). Each author labeled the articles as include (I), maybe include (M), exclude (E), or duplicate (D). Although we used RefWorks to eliminate duplicates before the screening phase, the remaining articles imported into Excel had residual duplicates. We repeated the screening process for four cycles, rotating researchers to validate the article labeling of the previous researcher.

Third, in the final theme development phase, we exported the remaining articles into a Microsoft Word table to identify article elements, codes, and themes by dividing the articles by the four researchers (Peters et al., 2015, p.145; Saldana, 2021). The elements included (a) author(s), year of publication, and country of origin; (b) purpose; (c) study population and sample size; (d) methodology; and (e) key findings, which were crosschecked by each researcher. The researchers used Elemental Coding methods for the first cycle coding to identify 166 initial codes (Saldana, 2021, p.148). During the second cycle coding, the researchers reduced the first cycle initial codes to 26 pattern codes (Saldana, 2021, p. 322) under four themes. Each researcher crosschecked codes and themes until reaching a unanimous consensus.

Table 2: **Flow for the Identification, Screening, and Theme Development Phases**

Phase	Articles	*n*
Identification	Public Administration articles	568
	Military articles	193
	Total articles remaining	761
Screening	Duplicate articles	135
	Excluded articles	592
	Total articles remaining	36
Theme Development	Excluded articles	5
	Total articles include	31

In summary, the researchers identified 761 articles from publicly accessible commercial and military databases. The four researchers screened 761 articles to identify 36 articles meeting the criteria for theme development (*see Tables 4–7*). The researchers excluded five additional articles during the theme development phase (*Table 2*). Finally, the researchers used the 31 remaining articles to extract 161 initial codes and combine them into 26 pattern codes for the emergence of four themes: (a) leader behavior; (b) employee, follower behavior; (c) education, development, training; and (d) organizational awareness (*see Table 3*).[1]

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[1] Five citations each appear in two separate tables. We agreed that their general findings were relevant for two theme areas; thus, we listed these five articles twice. So, not counting the duplicates, our total number of articles examined equaled 31. The citations include Berman, E. M., & West, J. P. (1994) in Tables 6 and 7; Hassan, E., Wright, B. E., & Yukl, G. (2014) in Tables 4 and 5; Lu,

Table 3: **Themes and Codes**

#	Themes	Codes
1	Leader Behavior	Service; Decision making; Role-modeling; Integrity Collaborative; Commitment; Moral reasoning; Authentic
2	Employee, Follower Behavior	Engagement; Commitment; Ethical behavior Inclusion; Culture; Competence
3	Education, Development, Training	Performance; Management; Role modeling Implementation; Measurement; Productivity
4	Organizational Awareness	Openness; Effectiveness; Identification Accountability; Culture; Ethical codes

Table 4: **Leader Behavior**

Author(s), Year of Publication, Country of Origin	Purpose	Study Population and Sample Size	Methodology	Key Findings
Karsten, N., & Jacobs, S. P. (2022). Moral person or ethical leader? A longitudinal quantitative analysis of councilors' integrity requirements for Dutch mayors (2008–2019). *Public Integrity, 24*(3), 267-279	To find the importance of moral norms and values in governance and into what is expected of ethical leaders	Dutch mayors in 349 cities (mayors not elected; appointed by local commission to administrate)	Quantitative; longitudinal analysis	Attention paid to integrity requirements for mayors, both as moral persons and as ethical leaders, decreased between 2008 and 2019.
Cook, C., Shambach, M., Zukauskaite, G., Pate, E., & Born, D. (2021). Public leadership with a moral purpose: A phenomenological view. *Journal of Character and Leadership Development, 8*(1)	Understand processes by which the organization fosters peer relationships to moral purpose and leadership	Various branches of U.S. military/ 25 total fellows	Qualitative; phenomeno-logical analysis	Importance of peer relations within the fellowship cohort; growth in understanding of moral leadership and moral purpose
Ndalamba, K., & Esau, M. (2020). An exploratory study into the understanding and awareness of leadership ethos and its inherent critical success factors by public sector officials in the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) and the Ministry of the National Economy (Econat) *International Journal of Public Administration, 43*(1), 60-72	Examine understanding of public sector leaders about Leadership Ethos (LE) and its inherent Critical Success Factors (CSFs) in policy implementation process	16 senior South African public officials in Dept of Trade and Industry (DTI) and 13 officials from Ministry of National Economy (ECONAT)	Quantitative; survey and semi-structured interviews	Leaders at the DTI and the ECONAT do not sufficiently demonstrate an awareness of LE and its inherent CSFs in the practice of leadership
Lowery, C. (2020). Moral literacy and school leadership: Perceptions of principals in southeast Ohio on the ethics of decision-making. *Journal of Educational Administration, 58*(1), 112-127	How school leaders in the Appalachian region of Southern Ohio use moral literacy to make decisions when facing ethical issues	10 U.S. school principals	Qualitative; in-depth, open-ended interviews	School leaders' moral literacy supported by ethical identity, ethical sensitivity, moral justice and responsibility, and practicing ethics

X. (2014) in Tables 4 and 5; Yeboah-Assiamah, E., Asamoah, K., Bawole, J. N., & Buabeng, T. (2016) in Tables 4 and 5; and Cook, C., Shambach, M., Zukauskaite, G., Pate, E., & Born, D. (2021) in Tables 4 and 6.

Slack, N. J., Singh, G., Narayan, J., & Sharma, S. (2020). Servant leadership in the public sector: Employee perspective. *Public Organization Review, 20*(4), 631–646. Fiji	Explore how servant leadership affects public sector employee engagement, organizational ethical climate, and public sector reform	159 Fiji Islands Maritime Safety Administration (FIMSA) employees	Qualitative; exploratory In-depth interviews	Lack of employee familiarity with servant leadership resulted in different levels of employee acceptance of servant leadership
Olsen, O. K., & Espevik, R. (2017). Moral antecedents of authentic leadership: Do moral justice reasoning, self-importance of moral identity and psychological hardiness stimulate authentic leadership? *Cogent Psychology, 4*(1), 1382248	Explore intra-psychological moral processes as potential antecedents of authentic leadership (AL) behavior	139 Norwegian naval officers.	Quantitative; stepwise hierarchical regression analysis.	Study suggests mature moral reasoning and moral motivation represent important aims for leader selection and development among emergency leaders
Downe, J., Cowell, R., & Morgan, D. (2016). What determines ethical behavior in public organizations: Is it rules or leadership? *Public Administration Review, 76*(6), 898-909	To examine how personal and managerial factors combine to influence ethical conduct	English local government councils/ 353 members	Qualitative; multiple case study design	Leaders promote and reinforce good standards of conduct; leadership displayed ethical leadership
Felix, C. O., Ahmad, A. H. B., & Arshad, R. B. (2016). Examining ethical reasoning and transformational leadership style in Nigeria public sector. *Sage Open, 6*(2), 2158244016635256.	Determine degree of moral judgment and Transformation Leadership (TFL) behavior as perceived by followers	400 employees of the Kebbi State public service	Quantitative; cross-sectional analysis sectional	Positive and significant statistical relationship between cognitive moral development (CMD) and TFL style
Reiley, P. J., & Jacobs, R. R. (2016). Ethics matter: Moderating leaders' power use and followers' citizenship behaviors. *Journal of Business Ethics, 134*(1), 69-81	Investigate the importance of ethics by identifying followers' perceptions of leaders' ethics moderated the relationships found between the leaders' use of power and the followers' contextual performance behaviors	365 US Air Force Academy cadets	Quantitative; hierarchical regression analysis	Followers' perceptions of leaders and leaders' perceived power to influence followers relate to followers' behavioral outcomes
Yeboah-Assiamah, E., Asamoah, K., Bawole, J. N., & Buabeng, T. (2016). Public sector leadership-subordinate ethical diffusion conundrum: perspectives from developing African countries. Journal of Public Affairs, 16(4), 320-330	Study explores how ethics among public leadership could trickle down on the conduct of public employees	Two cases studies: Ghana's National Service Scheme syndicate, and Congo political and administrative officials, during administration of Mobutu Sese Seko	Qualitative; content analysis of these literature sources	Subordinates' perception and experience of superiors' behavior tend to create a kind of organizational 'ethical groupthink,' spanning the rank and file (e.g., administrative officials) in organization
Cherkowski, S., Walker, K., & Kutsyuruba, B., (2015). Positive leadership: Animating purpose, presence, passion and play for flourishing in schools. Journal of Educational Administration, 58(4), 401-415	Examine how ethical leadership impacts follower behavior	177 school principals from across Canada	Qualitative; research – survey; both structured and open-ended questions	Modeling moral agency is important for encouraging others to engage personal moral agency
Hassan, S., Wright, B. E., & Yukl, G. (2014). Does ethical leadership matter in govern-	Examine how ethical leadership impacts follower behavior.	161 supervisor and 415 subordinate	Quantitative; survey research;	Ethical leadership likely to increase subordinate

		public sector employees in U.S.	records analysis	willingness to report ethical problems; critical for establishing ethical climate
Lu, X. (2014). Ethical leadership and organizational citizenship behavior: The mediating roles of cognitive and affective trust. *Social Behavior and Personality: An International Journal, 42*(3), 379-389	Examine the relationship between ethical leadership and organizational citizenship behavior in the public sector in China	150 supervisors and 150 public sector employees	Quantitative; survey research	Employees led by moral leaders exhibit more helpful behavior
Kellis, D. S. & Ran, B. (2013). Modern leadership principles for public administration: Time to move forward. *Journal of Public Affairs, 13*(1), 130-141	Determine how public managers supported by principles of authentic, transformational, and distributed leadership are better equipped to function in a crisis	US Federal Government Employees/ OPM/ 400,000/45 depts. (2008, 2010), 43 depts. (2006)	Quantitative; survey research	Values-based leadership theory provides strong foundation for developing leadership roles and expectations in public service
Resick, C. J., Martin, G. S., Keating, M. A., Dickson, M. W., Kwan, H. K., & Peng, C. (2011). What ethical leadership means to me: Asian, American, and Euro-pean perspectives. *Journal of business ethics, 101*(3), 435-457	Identify the meaning of ethical and unethical leadership held by managers in societies across Asia, North America, and Western Europe	185 managers from China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, United States, Ireland, Germany (mix of public and private mgrs.)	Qualitative; research study	Strong influence of cross-cultural ethical value engagement
Olsen, O. K., Eid, J., & Larsson, G. (2010). Leadership and ethical justice behavior in a high moral intensity operational context. *Military Psychology, 22*(sup1), S137-S156	Explore relationship between moral beha-vior in a high moral intensity context and leadership behavior in Norwegian naval officer cadets (N = 82)	82 Norwegian naval officers	Quantitative; hierarchical regression analysis	Data indicates strong component of ethical behavior embedded in both transactional and transformational leadership
Wang, X. & Van Wart, M. (2007). When public participation in administration leads to trust: An empirical assessment of managers' perceptions. *Public administration review, 67*(2), 265-278	Assess the argument that public participation enhances public trust	National survey of U.S. cities with populations of more than 50,000. 249 returned the surveys	Quantitative; survey research; regression analysis	Participation explains a significant amount of public trust. Two intermediate factors – ethical behaviors and service competence – significantly contributed to trust
King, S. M. (2006). The moral manager: Vignettes of virtue from Virginia. *Public Integrity, 8*(2), 113-133	Demonstrate how religion and spirituality are related, and that their interrelationship does not mean religion is dominant or institutionalized	Eight local public managers in Virginia (all males; seven white, one African American) from June to September 2000	Qualitative; in-depth, open-ended interviews	All eight city managers believed their religious faith or spirituality, coupled with adherence to basic virtues, was significant and influential in their performance as managers
Feldheim, M. A. & Wang, X. (2004). Ethics and public trust: Results from a national survey. *Public Integrity, 6*(1), 63-75	Examine the relationship between the ethics of civil servants and public trust	249 chief administrative officers from US cities with populations over 50,000	Qualitative; research: survey + random telephone interviews	Public trust increased through ethical values such as integrity, openness, loyalty, competence, and service consistency
Storr, L. (2004). Leading with integrity: A qualitative research	Determine how leadership integrity	18 leaders were selected from within	Qualitative; use of	Effective leadership correlates with

study. *Journal of Health Organization and Management, 18*(6), 415-434	impacts practices and outcomes	an acute hospital in England	Repertory Grid Analysis	integrity and the presence of integrity will improve organizational effectiveness
Berman, E. M., West, J. P., & Cava, A. (1994). Ethics management in municipal governments and large firms: Exploring similarities and differences. *Administration & Society, 26*(2), 185-203	Compares ethics management strategies of large cities and firms with the purpose of examining public-private sector differences	Pretest of 40 pub/priv. managers 427 public mgrs..; 636 priv. HR mgrs	Quantitative; survey research; regression analysis	Differences between the public and private sectors minimal; moral leadership by senior managers is most important strategy for improving ethics in both sectors

Table 5: **Employee, Follower Behavior**

Author(s), Year of Publication, Country of Origin	Purpose	Study Population and Sample Size	Methodology	Key Findings
Yeboah-Assiamah, E., Asamoah, K., Bawole, J. N., & Buabeng, T. (2016). Public sector leadership-subordinate ethical diffusion conundrum: perspectives from developing African countries. Journal of Public Affairs, 16(4), 320-330	Study explores how ethics among public leadership could trickle down on the conduct of public employees	Two cases studies: Ghana's National Service Scheme syndicate, and Congo political and administrative officials, during administration of Mobutu Sese Seko	Qualitative; content analysis of these literature sources	Subordinates' perception and experience of superiors' behavior tend to create a kind of organizational 'ethical groupthink,' spanning the rank and file (e.g., administrative officials) in organization
Newman, A., Allen, B., & Miao, Q. (2015). I can see clearly now: The moderating effects of role clarity on subordinate responses to ethical leadership, *Personnel Review, 44*(4), 611-628	Investigate whether subordinate perceptions of role clarity in job role influence relationship between ethical leadership and subordinate work behaviors	239 employees in the Chinese public sector	Quantitative; confirmatory factor analysis and hierarchical regression analysis	When subordinates perceived higher levels of role clarity, the positive relationship between ethical leadership and helping behavior was stronger
Hassan, S., Wright, B. E., & Yukl, G. (2014). Does ethical leadership matter in government? Effects on organizational commitment, absenteeism, and willingness to report ethical problems. *Public Administration Review, 74*(3), 333-343	To learn more about the potential benefits from ethical leadership in public sector agencies	161 supervisors and 415 subordinate public sector employees in U.S.	Quantitative; survey research	Ethical leadership is likely to increase subordinate willingness to report ethical problems; critical to establishing ethical climate in public organizations
Lu, X. (2014). Ethical leadership and organizational citizenship behavior: The mediating roles of cognitive and affective trust. *Social Behavior and Personality: an international journal, 42*(3), 379-389	Examine relationship between ethical leadership and organizational citizenship behavior in the public sector in China	150 supervisors and 150 public sector employees in a large metropolitan area in China	Quantitative; survey research	Employees who are led by moral leaders exhibit more helpful behavior through a reciprocal exchange relationship
Easley, J. (2008). Moral school building leadership: Investigating a praxis for alternative route teacher retention. *Journal of Educational Administration, 46*(1), 25-38. USA	Identify and explore factors and conditions of moral leadership that affect potential teacher retention	Students in New York City teaching fellows' program	Qualitative; focus group research	Teachers drawn to programs because of their moral ideas; responsive to moral leadership behavior

Table 6: **Education, Development, and Training**

Author(s), Year of Publication, Country of Origin	Purpose	Study Population and Sample Size	Methodology	Key Findings
Cook, C., Shambach, M., Zukauskaite, G., Pate, E., & Born, D. (2021). Public leader-ship with a moral purpose: A phenomeno-logical view. *Journal of Character and Leadership Development, 8*(1), 144-159	Examine processes by which an organization can foster development of fellows through intentional curricular processes	Various branches of U.S. military/25 total fellows	Qualitative; phenomenological analysis	Community and support of veterans helped many of the fellows avoid false sense of security, moving them toward educational growth
Parson, L., Weise, J., Tatum, K., Allison, M., & Farrell, R. J. (2019). Evaluating and assessing the Ethical Leadership Framework for Air Force leader development. *Journal of Character and Leadership Develop-ment, 6*(2), 50-63	Evaluate assessment plan for validation and implementation of Ethical Leadership Framework (ELF) for leader development in the Air Force	All Air University Students; United States. /No number given	Quantitative; survey research;	ELF encourages those within the organization to act ethically and encourages continual development of ethical leaders
Oge, D., & Burrell, D. N. (2012). Applied qualitative research analysis of military recruiter leadership behavior and the perpetuation and development of ethical behaviors. *Journal of Global Intelligence & Policy, 5*(9),92-106	Identify tools to promote ethical leadership behaviors for recruiters engaged in recruiting young men and women into the United States Army	18 U.S. Army personnel. 3 focus groups of 6 participants each – 18 total	Qualitative. focus groups questioning, examination, and analysis	Quality control checks and follow-up interviews to verify honesty and ethical practices should play a more prominent role in the recruiting process
West, J. P. & Berman, E. M., (2004). Ethics training in US cities: Content, pedagogy, and impact. *Public Integrity, 6*(3), 189-206	Examination of efficacy of ethics training in the public sector	200 city managers and chief administrative officers from US cities with populations over 50,000	Quantitative; survey research	Ethics training fosters a culture of openness, accountability, and performance, and is associated with increased productivity
Berman, E. M., & West, J. P. (1994). Values management in local government. *Review of public personnel administration 14*(1), 6–23.	Examine "values management" in American municipal governments, minimizing wrongdoing and increasing employee responsiveness	427 U.S. municipal managers from American municipalities with populations over 25,000	Quantitative; survey; logistical regression	Public personnel management in municipalities shifted focus from minimizing illegal acts to building trust among employees and public customers/citizens
Nickels, M. L. (1993). Ethical reasoning: A comparative Study. Army War College	Compare the impact for levels of moral reasoning of officer inmates and successful Army officers	50 total participants. 20 U.S. Army officers/students. 30 volunteers	Qualitative; Ethical Reasoning Inventory (ERI)	No significant differences between moral reasoning levels of the two groups, nor could ERI scores be explained by limited information collected on family, religious, and educational backgrounds

Table 7: **Organizational Awareness**

Author(s), Year of Publication, Country of Origin	Purpose	Study Population and Sample Size	Methodology	Key Findings

Fox, J., Gong, T., & Attoh, P. (2015). The impact of principal as authentic leader on teacher trust in the K-12 educational context. *Journal of Leadership studies, 8*(4), 6-18.	Exam if authentic leadership leads to trust yet is mediated through personal and organizational identification.	19 public and private schools in MD/398 teachers	Quantitative; descriptive and multi-linear regression analysis	Unlike organizational identification, personal identification is a mediator from authentic leadership to trust.
Beeri, I., Dayan, R., Vigoda-Gadot, E., & Werner, S. B. (2013). Advancing ethics in public organizations: The impact of an ethics program on employees' perceptions and behaviors in a regional council. *Journal of business ethics, 112*(1), 59-78.	Examined the relationship between ethics and performance in local governance.	Israeli regional government councils/ 108 employees,	Quantitative; survey research; regression analysis	Ethics program effective, resulting in greater awareness of ethics code, and increased inclusion of employees in Ethical Decision Making (EDM); improved Ethical Climate (EC).
Tsang, S., Burnett, M., Hills, P., & Welford, R. (2009). Trust, public participation, and environmental governance in Hong Kong. *Environmental Policy and Governance, 19*(2), 99-114.	Explore role of trust in environmental governance and its role in facilitating collective action through public participation in making decisions on environmental policies in Hong Kong.	Environmental professionals in Hong Kong/ 21 stakeholders	Qualitative; focus group discussions; analyzed through categorization of the key themes.	Expert trust diminishing, as third-party consultants not seen as competent in their analysis and unbiased in their interpretations.
Currie, G., & Lockett, A. (2007). A critique of transformational leadership: Moral, professional, and contingent dimensions of leadership within public services organizations. *Human relations, 60*(2), 341-370.	Examine English public service leadership, and effect on performance, and interaction with organizational context.	Phase I, 200/157 (quantitative regression analysis); school performance Phase II, 51 (qualitative) English (U.K.); principals	Quantitative; content analysis; interviews.	English secondary schools identified ineffective implementation of transformational leadership within public service organizations.
Berman, E. M., & West, J. P. (1994). Values Management in Local Government. *Review of Public Personnel Administration, 14*(1), 6–23.	Examine "values management" in American municipal governments as it relates to the minimization of wrongdoing and increased responsive-ness to employees, citizens, and customers of city services.	427 municipal managers from American municipalities with populations over 25,000	Quantitative; survey; logistic regression	Public personnel management in municipalities shifted focus from minimizing illegal acts to building trust among employees and public customers/citizens.

Discussion

After reviewing the 31 articles that met all the criteria for this study, the researchers identified four major themes reflective of the influence of ethical public leadership: (1) leader behavior, (2) employee/ follower behavior, (3) education, development, and training; and (4) organizational awareness. Our discussion follows.

Leader Behavior

Leadership behavior was by far the focus of most of the studies found on ethical leadership in the public sector (*see Table 4*). This category had twice as many studies as any of the other three themes. In hindsight, this result may have been suspected, given the preponderance of research, and writing in this area, but it was not programmed into the research method. This

allowed the research to continue without prejudice, thus demonstrating this result after numerous coding sessions. We discovered three important findings.[2] First, in employee or follower behavior, there was significant evidence showing leaders have a "critical role to play in the ethical disposition of organizational members" (Cherkowski et al., 2015; Hassan et al., 2014; Lu, 2014; Olsen et al., 2010; Slack et al., 2020; Yeboah-Assiamah et al., 2016, p. 327). Second, leaders modeled ethical standards for their employees, and among other variables, strengthened their level of trust (Berman & West, 1994; Downe et al., 2016; Feldheim & Wang, 2004; Kellis & Ran, 2013; King, 2006). And third, leader integrity was a key determinant in the enhancement of followers' development of their own personal integrity (Cook et al., 2021; Karsten & Jacobs (2022); Reiley & Jacobs, 2016; Storr, 2004).

Employee, Follower Behavior

The second research theme was employee/follower behavior (see Table 5). Ethical leaders tended to encourage subordinates' willingness to report ethical concerns (Hassan et al., 2014; Lee, 2016; Lu, 2014; Newman et al., 2015; Yeboah-Assiamah et al., 2016). Interestingly, and perhaps not unexpectedly, research showed a positive relationship between ethical leader behavior and reduction of deviant behavior among employees (Newman et al., 2015). This positive relationship underscored the importance of ethical leadership on follower behavior, such as employee retention (Easley, 2008). Mediating factors related to employee feelings, including trust and identification with leaders (Lee, 2016); follower perception of leader benevolence (Lu, 2014); enhancement of follower satisfaction related to leaders' performance; and followers' social behavior (Hassan et al., 2014).

Education, Development, and Training

The third research theme was education, development, and training (Berman et al., 1994; Cook et al., 2021; Nickels, 1993; Oge & Burrell, 2012; Parson et al., 2019; West & Berman, 2004) (*see Table 6*). What has been seen in leadership education and training is what we see in the specific field of ethical education (Nickels, 1993; West & Berman, 2004); namely, the type and quality of the education or training tends to vary, so the results found in the research are not typically definitive. (Cook et al., 2021; Nickels, 1993; West & Berman, 2004). However, the presence and influence of ethical education, development, and training correlated with the improvement of ethical leadership (Parson et al., 2019); and correspondingly, the lack thereof resulted in evidence of ethical failure (Nickels, 1993). The only mediating factor identified was the quality of peer relations inside development cohorts (Cook et al., 2021).

Organizational Awareness

The fourth research theme was organizational awareness (see Table 7). This theme focused on the role trust and ethical competence played in the public and nonprofit organization, particularly as it related to ethical leadership styles (Beeri et al., 2013; Berman & West, 1994). In addition, several studies linked authentic leadership and trust to organizational awareness (Currie & Lockett, 2007; Fox et al., 2015; Tsang et al., 2009). Further, studies also noted how trust in public officials impacted civic participation (Tsang et al., 2009); how ethics impacted

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[2] Although the following citations were generally reflective of "leader behavior," their findings were mixed, and did not directly reflect the three key findings identified. Therefore, they are not directly discussed. They include Ndalamba, K. & Esau, M. (2020), Lowery, C. (2020), Felix, C.O, Ahmad, A.H.B., & and Arshad, R.B. (2016), Resick, C.J, et al. (2011), Wang, X. & Van Wart, M. (2007), and Berman, E.M. & West, J.P. (1994).

organizational performance in the public sector (Beeri et al., 2013; Currie & Lockett, 2007); and the intentional efficacy of values management (Berman & West, 1994). Mediating factors included distrust among stakeholders (Tsang et al., 2009), follower identification (Fox et al., 2015), and employee resistance (Currie & Lockett, 2007).

Conclusion

Seventeen years ago, Brown and Treviño (2006), commented, "ethical leadership remains largely unexplored" (p. 595). This is no longer true. Ethical leadership, and its counterpart, moral leadership (Lemoine et al., 2019), are at the forefront of values-based research, research that examines the moral and virtuous context of leadership research (Heres & Lasthuizen, 2012; Treviño & Brown, 2014). As we have demonstrated, significant attention has been paid to the role that ethical leadership plays in the development of key individual and organizational variables, including leader behavior (e.g., trust), organizational awareness (e.g., environment), leader-follower relationship (e.g., employees and workplace attitudes), and educational, development, and training (e.g., competence). Before we discuss the limitations of our literature review and highlight future research opportunities, we note four ancillary items of interest or sub-themes.

First, we chose to include military-related research in this study on public leadership. While it could be argued that military organizations are different from public or governmental organizations, we did not notice a difference in the research performed, and we found the research on military organizations to be extremely valuable. The uniqueness of military leadership, whether between battlefield versus non-battlefield engagement, is not immune from the ethical development of moral principles and virtues exhibited within an organizational environment and between officer and enlisted personnel (Roberts et al., 2022).

Second, the studies' methodologies were diverse. We reviewed empirical studies in the following organizational and institutional environments: government (local, national, and global), military, hospitals, and public education to ensure informational reliability. Methodological diversity was a key element. Eighteen studies used quantitative methods (e.g., survey data, regression analysis, longitudinal, and comparative cross-sectional analysis, etcetera), 14 utilized qualitative methods (e.g., phenomenological analysis, structured and open-ended interviews, both in-person and by phone, and focus groups), and one utilized mixed methods.

Third, the studies were not limited geographically. Research studies originated not only in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom, but included Indonesian and Asian nations (e.g., Fiji Islands, Hong Kong, China, Taiwan, and South Korea), African nations (e.g., Ghana, South Africa, and Congo) and several European nations (e.g., Ireland, Norway, The Netherlands, and Germany). The evidence of global research corroborates the literature stating that ethical leadership is not culturally bound (Cherkowski et al., 2015; Downe et al., 2016; Karsten & Jacobs, 2022; Kellis & Ran, 2013; Lee, 2016; Ndalamba & Esau, 2020; Olsen & Espevik, 2017; Resick et al., 2011; Yeboah-Assiamah et al., 2016).

And fourth, like the geographic disbursement seen in the research locations, a similar trend occurred in the specific occupation of participants. Administrative leaders and managers at all levels – including executive council members, public employees, military personnel, students, hospital administrators, and school principals – were some of the described populations found in the review. Like the geographic distribution of the studies, demographics

of ethical leadership are not confined to traditionally-defined government agencies and programs, but are widely dispersed across an array of public organizations and institutions (Berman & West, 1994; Fox et al., 2015; Haq, 2011; King, 2006; Neubert et al., 2009; Nicholls et al., 2015; Oge & Burrell, 2012; Van Wart, 2003; West & Berman, 2004). The result that more studies were focused on leader behavior appears to mirror the general progression of leadership theory over time (Northouse, 2019).

Limitations

Several limitations are worth noting. First, we did not examine in depth the relationship, if any, between the use of methodological procedures and research contexts related to ethical leadership. An important question to ask is: does the use of enhanced quantitative applications, including sophisticated regression analysis, impair more in-depth exploration of value expressions, whether in terms of leader-follower behavior, organizational awareness and environmental concerns, or even institutional integrity? A second limitation is we did not directly compare the methods and results between non-Western and Western studies. As we have demonstrated, there is a growing literature base of non-Western ethical public leadership studies. Comparing the use of methods and results, for example, between Western and non-Western studies, might provide greater insight into the development and application of ethical practices and moral principles and values between distinctly different cultures as well as public organizations. Third, we used a descriptive review as the tool for examining the literature. Although we used similar research protocols found in more sophisticated reviews, our results do not directly assess the potential breadth and depth of available literature. In effect, we only skimmed the surface of ethical public leadership. The use of enhanced techniques found in scoping reviews, for example, is necessary to map trends and categories of emerging literature within ethical public leadership.

Future Research

Key future research opportunities abound. First, more specifically, guided attention should be paid to the ethical developments of public leadership — especially leadership at the lower levels of organizations, or what Lipsky (2010) refers to as "street-level" bureaucrats. Clearly, leaders on the front lines of organizations – such as first responders, healthcare workers, social welfare associates, and public educators (including teachers and principals) – have increased discretionary authority (Vinzant et al., 1998). However, what is the relationship between ethical value behavior and development and use of discretionary decision-making (Loyens & Maesschalck, 2010)? Is it like ethical decision-making by top-level administrators and managers? If so, how? If not, why not? A second area for future research is to test Bozeman's (1987) publicness theory, particularly as it relates to ethical leadership. Bozeman's thesis stated that all organizations, whether labeled public, private, or nonprofit, are at their core public; that is, all organizations have a distinctive public purpose and value construct, such as the pursuit of the greater good. Is there a relationship between the publicness values and manifestations of ethical leadership, such as integrity, justice, transparency, fairness, etcetera (Van Wart, 1998)? In other words, is publicness an inherently ethical construct? If so, what are both the research and practical implications for bridging what Bozeman refers to as the public and private institutional divide? Finally, a third area is the continued development, both methodologically and substantively, of ethical public leadership in military services and academies (de Graaff et al., 2017). As we have described,

personnel, organization, leader-follower relationship, and education, training, and development are critical areas not only for the civilian public sector, but also for the military.

In summary, the need for ethical public leadership speaks to the continuing challenges facing public leaders. Values-based leadership points not only to the importance time-honored principles and virtues have in the shaping of relationships between public leaders and followers, but also in the character creation and development within organizations. Caldwell and Anderson (2017) summarized the situation when they argued that far too often, public leaders are "blinded by short-term interest," which calls into question "the moral and ethical rationales used by those to whom great responsibility has been given" (p. 54). Their responsibility is to pursue the greater good (Newswander, 2012), a responsibility that, if not fulfilled, has grave consequences.

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About the Authors

Stephen M. King

Dr. King received his Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of Missouri-Columbia in 1990. He teaches undergraduate courses in American Government, Public Administration, and Public Policy and graduate courses in Leadership and Administrative Ethics and Public Policy Analysis at Regent University. His current research agenda focuses on administrative ethics and ethical and moral leadership. His most recent book is *Ethical Public Leadership: Foundation, Exploration, and Discovery* (Routledge, forthcoming summer 2023).

Dr. King can be reached at smking@regent.edu.

Steve Firestone

Dr. Firestone joined the faculty of Regent University's School of Business & Leadership in January 2015 as an assistant professor and currently serves as director for the M.A. in Organizational Leadership. He is a U.S. Navy veteran with 23 years as an officer, naval aviator, and educator. As a pilot, he flew helicopters on two Arabian Gulf deployments and C-130s around the world on a variety of missions and deployments supporting worldwide fleet logistics requirements. He has extensive experience working with foreign military organizations, having served as a liaison officer to Mexico, Canada, and the Bahamas for six years. He graduated from Vanderbilt University with two B.A. degrees, one in History and a second in Political Science.

He has a Master of History from Southwestern Assemblies of God University. He earned an MBA from Embry-Riddle University and his Ph. D. in Business Administration, with an emphasis in Organizational Leadership, from Northcentral University. Dr. Firestone enjoys golfing, playing basketball, and cooking.

Dr. Firestone can be reached at sfirestone@regent.edu.

Harold Henkel

Harold Henkel is Head of Archives & Special Collections at Regent University Library. He earned a B.A. in Classics from the University of Rochester, an M.S. in Library Science from the Catholic University of America, and an MBA from Regent University. His research interests include online library instruction, reader services, strategic thinking, and moral leadership.

Harold can be reached at harohen@regent.edu.

Brian T. Moore

Brian Moore is a Ph.D. student at Regent University studying organizational leadership and human resource development. He earned a B.A. in Mathematics from The Citadel and holds an M.A. in Public Policy from Regent University. Brian is a U.S. Navy veteran with 28 years of active-duty service in special operations and foreign affairs. His research interests include servant leadership, transformational leadership, and mentorship.

Brian can be reached at briamoo@regent.edu.