

**INTEGRATING INSTITUTIONAL LOGICS INTO ETHICAL LEADERSHIP: A  
CROSS-LEVEL PROCESS MODEL**

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## **INTEGRATING INSTITUTIONAL LOGICS INTO ETHICAL LEADERSHIP: A CROSS-LEVEL PROCESS MODEL**

Although there is promising potential for incorporating institutional logics to understanding ethical leadership, the dynamics and integrative mechanisms for doing so remain a major gap in the current literature. This paper offers a holistic and comprehensive framework for integrating institutional logics into ethical leadership, which is the cross-level process model. We offer three phases in explaining the mechanisms. Phase 1 focuses on institutionalisation phase (macro to micro) where the culturally embedded institutional orders such as family, religion, state, market, profession and community can provide reference points for the sensemaking choices and actions of individuals. Phase 2 subsequently focuses on problematisation phase (micro to micro and micro to macro) where it explains how leaders activate associated institutional logics and make sense of them to make ethical decisions and mobilisations. The final stage - Phase 3 focuses on adaptation phase (macro to macro) in which the ethical practices can lead to institutional change and stability. Detailed analysis of these stages and cross-cultural implications are offered.

**Track:** Leadership and Leadership Development

**Keywords:** ethical leadership; cross-cultural; institutional logics; cross-level process model

## Introduction

Increasingly, the litany of corporate scandals, poor governance and reward for failure in the last two decades or so have prompted a quest for a better understanding of failure (Amankwah-Amoah, 2016, Lukason and Laitinen, 2019) and how best we can instil values and ethos of ethical leadership (EL) into organisational leaders. Specific ethical scandals that have emerged in different nations, industries and organisations across the globe including accounting fraud (Enron, Worldcom, Lehman Brothers), emissions cheated test (Volkswagen), sexism (Uber) and oil spill (Deepwater Horizon). These exemplify lapses in leadership and lack of in-depth insights of values of ethics in our leaders. Current body of research on EL, however, tend to focus on Western case studies and Western ethical philosophies and leadership (Mahsud, Yukl, and Prussia, 2010, Piccolo et al., 2010, Walumbwa and Schaubroeck, 2009), and thereby neglecting ethical cross-cultural dilemmas that bring different challenges and dilemmas for corporations and how they are led. For instance, Foxconn - an Apple's manufacturing partner in China has had reported instances of very poor working conditions that have contributed to employees' suicides and protests (Fullerton, 2018). Vietnam which is a South-East Asian nation where it also experiences more wildcat strikes than any other nations in the region, predominately in Taiwanese and Korean MNCs (Siu and Chan, 2015). Vietnamese have urges to revenge to harsh treatment not in the same way as their Chinese counterparts because within the Vietnamese psyche there is a strong sense of injustice and willingness to act on it.

There are currently two main orientations in EL: mainstream orientation and critical orientation (see Figure 1). The mainstream orientation focuses on social scientific approach and philosophical approach. While social scientific approach investigates how individuals model EL and how followers perceive ethical behaviours from their leaders, philosophical approach draws on a set of normative models from moral philosophies and theories to outline a leader's duties and responsibilities (Liu, 2017b). Studies in mainstream orientation are dominant in empirical studies, however much of the literature on the topic is based on western philosophical worldviews and theoretical frameworks (Eisenbeiss, Van Knippenberg, and Fahrback, 2015, Liu, 2017b). The majority of research on EL has been conducted in the U.S. (Avey, Palanski, and Walumbwa, 2011, Avey, Wernsing, and Palanski, 2012, Dust et al., 2018, Moore et al., 2019) and Western Europe such as Netherlands (Den Hartog and Belschak, 2012, Kalshoven, Den Hartog, and De Hoogh, 2011) and Belgium (Stouten et al., 2010, Waldman et al., 2017). Although there are increasing studies of EL in other countries such as China (Zhang, Zhong, and Ozer, 2020, Zhu et al., 2019), Jordan (Suifan et al., 2020), and Nigeria (Babalola et al., 2019, Mostafa and Abed El-Motalib, 2020), studies remain limited and fragmented. The commonly employed theoretical perspective to interpret EL in cross-cultural context is the "national cultural dimensions" research, including the GLOBE project (Hofstede, 2011, House et al., 2004). In recent years, the "interdisciplinary integrative approach" has featured more prominently (Eisenbeiss, 2012, Lawton and Páez, 2015) by incorporating different dimensions to reflect significant complementary principles of EL so that it can be applied in different sectors and contexts. On the other hand, the mainstream research has been criticised by critical (phenomenological) researchers for being individualised, de-contextualised and depoliticised (Braga et al., 2019, Liu, 2017b). Liu (2017a) and Edwards et al. (2019) advocate that the mainstream orientation has been for a long time naturalised and romanticised as rational, powerful and pragmatic, highly falling on a masculinist view. They thus call for an ontological, embodied, and contextually-based turn of ethics in organisations through the recognition of otherness, differences and connection (Dale and Latham, 2015, Kenny and Fotaki, 2015). It seems the cross-cultural and integrative approaches towards EL can address the

call of phenomenological research as these take on a more contextual based-approach. However, despite the analytical benefits of these there are a number of limitations and drawbacks associated with each.

First, Tung and Stahl (2018) argue that the “national cultural dimensions” research tends to be overly simplistic as it is based on a surface level taxonomy. The “national cultural dimensions” perspective is prescriptive in the way it assigns certain forms of thinking and behaviour to broadly conceived of cultural categories such individualism/collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, etc. Second, the “interdisciplinary integrative approach” (IIP) (Eisenbeiss, 2012) is the combinations of both normative and empirical-descriptive approaches, acting as normative reference cues for ethical behaviours. However, the IIP tends to assume that EL is logical and analytical inclined in the way that leaders make ethical decisions based on predefined rights and rules. It also draws on GLOBE project study which is similar to the “national cultural dimensions”. This fails to situate leaders in ethical complexities of societal and institutional causes, as well as the social interaction and connection. Therefore, missing from the current literature is a deeper understanding of EL in a cross-cultural context, or more broadly an approach where EL is socially constructed and contextually negotiated through individuals’ interpretations, interactions and experiences. There requires a holistic and nuanced lens that capture and encompass cultural heterogeneity, stability and change in understanding EL.

To address these shortcomings in the current literature, we develop a conceptual framework to capture the key features of the issue and outline new research area. Specifically, this paper explores how we can integrate institutional logics (ILs) into the study of EL to address the call of critical approach on a more contextual and phenomenologically based approach. We offer a rethinking of cross-cultural EL from a geographical dominance to a more cultural, historical and interactional approaches. First, the ILs capture individual differences, organisational culture and societal-level forces to provide a more nuanced and holistic approach in which to understand the phenomenon (Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury, 2012). Second, we apply the ILs perspective (Gümüşay, Smets, and Morris, 2019; Thornton et al., 2012) to not only fulfil the cross-cultural perspective on EL but also resolve the reliance on masculinist view of mainstream research, as well as replies to the call of a more socially constructed and contextually-based approach.

The paper starts with a review of EL and its features and cross-cultural perspective. This is then followed by outlining existing theoretical approaches towards cross-cultural EL. Then the different ways for incorporating ILs into cross-cultural EL is examined. Implications of the conceptualisation are also examined.

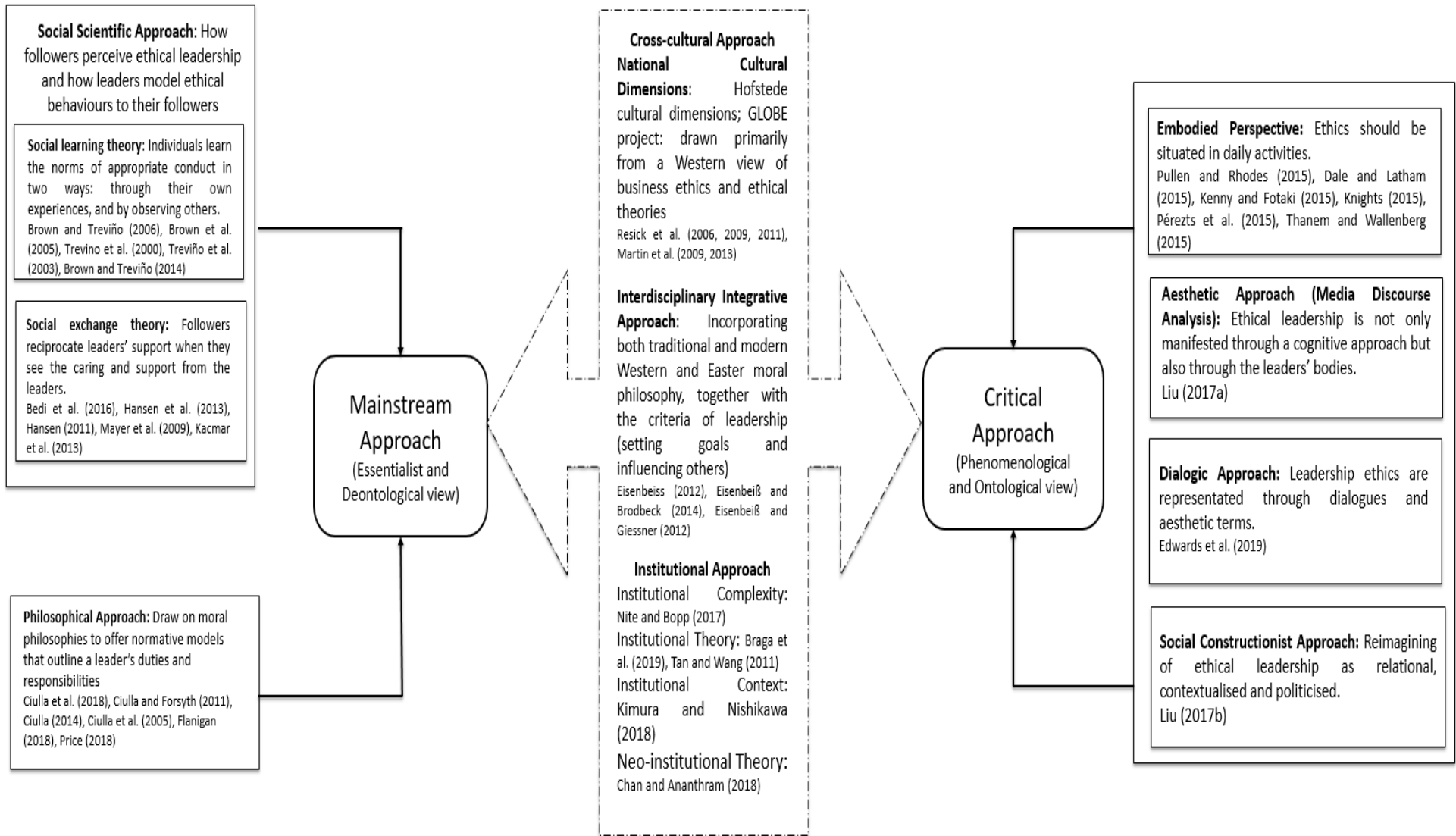
## **1 Ethical Leadership**

There are increasing orientations towards EL literature, dividing in mainstream orientation and critical orientation (Figure 1). The mainstream orientation holds a rationalist and essentialist view that ethical leaders must possess and execute behaviours that are at least considered as universally “right”. For example, these characteristics include honesty, fairness, compassion, integrity and altruism (Bedi et al., 2016, Brown and Mitchell, 2010; Brown and Treviño, 2006). This mainstream literature reflects that ethical leaders are thought to possess certain moral characteristics, being influenced by a set of pre-determined values, and having power to create and enforce an organisations ethical climate. Within these mainstream studies, there are two dominant approaches: social scientific approach and philosophical approach (Figure 1).

The social scientific approach (social learning theory and social exchange theory) examines how ethical leaders are perceived from their followers who will view leaders as role model and decide to reciprocate that. Brown et al. (2005, p. 120) define EL 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”. This definition is grounded in social learning theory which means that all aspects of EL can be deduced from direct and indirect experience. Brown and colleagues’ definition of EL reflects the aspect of a “moral person” and a “moral manager” (Trevino et al., 2000, Zhu et al., 2019). A “moral person” is characterized in terms of the leader’s personal traits, character and altruistic motivations. A “moral manager” is the key for EL to gain ethical reputation as it focuses on how leaders’ behaviours attract their employees in organisations. There are huge empirical studies following Brown et al.’s EL construct, investigating that EL generate significant outcomes in both individual and organisational level, such as turnover intention (Babalola et al., 2016), team performance (Walumbwa et al., 2012), and organisational performance (Wang, Feng, and Lawton, 2017).

The philosophical approach offers a set of normative models from moral philosophies to outline a leader’s duties and responsibilities. Flanigan (2018) critiques the social scientific approach of only assuming that respondents are accurate judges of whether a leader to acts ethically, lacking insightful paths to moral knowledge and reasoning. The author argues a person’s belief about what to do should be justified based on moral reasons. Riggio and colleagues (2010) contend that EL should be reflected through the lens of the characterological perspective and Aristotle’s ethical principles. Similarly, Wright and Quick (2011) supported that the character-based approach recognizes the importance of personal and moral qualities (i.e., being courageous, forgiving and self-control) for the attainment of individual betterment and fulfilment. The logic of the above studies on EL is underpinned in moral philosophies of Aristotle’s virtues ethics and Kant philosophies.

However, the mainstream research on EL provides a narrow view of what it means to be an ethical leader, neglecting that leadership is a social construction where “what is morally relevant to one individual at a given place and point in time often varies drastically from what is morally relevant to another individual in another place at another point in time” (Fehr et al., 2015, p. 184). It only focuses on the cognitive dimensions of EL with a fixed-context and universal view. Employing a media discourse analysis, Liu (2017a) pointed that EL is underpinned by a masculine orientation, which can be seen in the way it is dis/embodied from its historical, social, cultural, economic and industrial contexts. Therefore, the critical research starts to emerge, taking a more phenomenological and ontological perspective. Critical research argues that ethics should be situated among daily activities (Clegg, Kornberger, and Rhodes, 2007). Employing a feminist, communitarian and corporeal approach to ethics, Liu (2017b, p. 359) views EL as “occurring in the space between people, embedded in context and exercised via a collective political project towards the goals of equality, justice and emancipation”. Leaders are not only individuals with certain traits and characteristics, but they are also embedded in a social system and moral agency of integration, engagement and negotiation.



**Figure 1:** Ethical Leadership and its theoretical lens

## **1.1 Cross-cultural perspective in Ethical Leadership**

The cross-cultural perspective seems like a bridge between the two main orientations as it focuses on a more contextually based approach. However, the current approaches limitedly rely on a fixed cultural category with national (geographical) dependence, as well as being static in understanding the interrelationship, power dynamics, tensions and paradoxes of EL.

### *1.1.1 National Cultural Dimensions*

One of the most popular and enduring approaches to theorise EL has been the “national cultural dimensions” perspective, i.e. the GLOBE project (Hofstede, 2011, House et al., 2004). The GLOBE project is primarily drawn on Western view of business ethics and ethical theories. Its application to EL has been to identify the differences and similarities in leadership mindsets whereby different cultures endorse different ethical values. For example, perceptions of EL in Confucian Asian countries when compared with Anglo/Germanic countries converge and diverge in a number of important ways (Resick et al., 2011). Resick et al. (2011) found their participants from the USA, Ireland, Hong Kong and Taiwan contend the most important attributes of an ethical leader are “integrity” and “self-discipline”, whereas only half the participants from China and Germany believed these attributes were important. Additionally, managers from China, Hong Kong and Germany identified “consideration and respect for others and a collective orientation” was the second most important attribute, diverging with those from Ireland, USA and Taiwan who otherwise said it must be “accountability”.

The “national cultural dimensions” offer an analysis of EL within different cultures from around the world by providing culturally specific explanations that encompass both convergence and divergence at the national and cluster level. It has provided scholars with an initial understanding of how ethical behaviours related to leadership are shared within cultures, while acknowledging that differences exist in others. However, the “national cultural dimensions” perspective stands an essentialist view, being etic dominant with a large focus on national (geographic) categorisation (Schedlitzki et al., 2017). Tung and Stahl (2018) argue that it has the potential to paint an overly simplistic picture and set of conceptualisations, which is incomplete and relies too heavily on a dimensional based model of culture. It fails to consider of the dynamic and constantly evolving nature of national cultures, the specific aspects of organisational culture and societal institutions (Hartog, 2015). Cross-cultural ethical research has long relied on this model in the absence of other appropriate alternatives.

### *1.1.2 Interdisciplinary Integrative Approach*

The IIP (Eisenbeiss, 2012) has emerged as an alternative in which to understand EL from a cross-cultural perspective. This approach incorporates principles from ancient and modern western and eastern moral philosophies, coming up with four orientations: (1) human, (2) justice (3) responsibility and sustainability, and (4) moderation. Human orientation refers the form of respect for the dignity of others, altruism and serving others. Justice orientation reflects fair decisions without favouring towards or discriminating against others. Responsibility and sustainability

orientation take the form of environment and community orientations, referring that leaders will place their concern for the success and welfare of the society and environment. Finally, moderation orientation relates to the temperance and humility and balanced leader behaviour in that leaders need to balance between organisational objectives and stakeholder interests. Eisenbeiss (2012) argued that the current literature on EL (i.e., Brown et al, 2005) has only touched upon humane and justice orientation, while her four orientations “reflect a cross-disciplinary and intercultural view of the normative foundation of EL and consider both the leadership components of setting goals and influencing others” (p.794).

In a more recent article, Eisenbeiss and Brodbeck (2014) drew on a cross-sectional approach to investigate perceptions of ethical and unethical leadership from a cross-cultural context. Their findings revealed that EL in Eastern regions tend to be more associated with modesty than Western regions. EL in public sector organisations tends to be more associated with kindness and compassion than in private ones. Eisenbeiss and Giessner (2012) drew on another set of multi-level factors to interpret the development and maintenance of EL in organisations by invoking three different factorial levels including: (1) society, (2) industry and (3) intra-organisation. Societal factors include the degree in which human rights in a society are respected such as responsibility, justice, humanity and transparency. Industry factors include the degree to which an organisation seeks to protect the interests and integrity of stakeholders towards environmental complexity. Finally, intra-organisational factors such as organisational ethical infrastructure influence EL.

These multilevel approaches provide a more integrative cross-level understanding of EL, however, they are only limited on certain dominant moral philosophies from Western and Eastern countries with fragmented factorial levels of society, industry and intra-organisations. This therefore lacks deeper understanding of the individual differences, organisational culture and societal-level forces (e.g. family, state, religion, market, law, education) (Thornton and Ocasio, 2008).

## **2 Ethical Leadership and Institutional Logics**

A few studies have started to view EL from an institutional perspective, arguing that the current research tends to cover only a few countries and neglect the effects of institutions (Chen, 2010, Tan and Wang, 2011). For example, although Japan has integrated its business ethics to the globalisation process, its unique of culture has impacted the aspects of business ethics that feature in their institutionally driven process (Kimura and Nishikawa, 2018). The Keidanren policy impacted the way Japanese managers see EL by instilling a compliance practice in Japanese business society. In another study employing ILs perspective, Nite and Bopp (2017) argued that the conceptualisation of EL is subjected to certain institutional complexities, which leads to competing and conflicting prescriptions and differing ethical frameworks. Chen (2010) supports that institutional context with internal and external factors has a significant impact on EL and this vary between countries and cultures. The study pointed the institutional environment in which firms operate, such as pressures and practices from CEO, subordinates, shareholders, financial analysts, and the financial press can have a great influence on the level of misreporting behaviours in financial organisations.

There are different institutional approaches, ranging from neo-institutional theory (Chan and Ananthram, 2018) to Scott’s institutional theory (Braga et al., 2019; Chen, 2010) and institutional complexity (Nite and Bopp, 2017). In this study, we integrate ILs (Thornton et al., 2012) to offer a



more holistic and nuanced understanding of EL in a cross-level context. Our assumption is that ethical behaviour and its manifestation in managerial leadership can be understood by analysing a country's unique institutional context and the influence this has on an individual's cognition.

## **2.1 Institutional logics**

In this context, ILs is defined as “the socially constructed, historical patterns of cultural symbols and material practices, including assumptions, values, and beliefs, by which individuals and organizations provide meaning to their daily activity, organize time and space, and reproduce their lives and experiences” (Thornton and Ocasio, 2008, p. 101, Lok, 2010). The power of the ILs approach is that it views EL from both a sociological and psychological perspective as well as seeking to understand ethical attitudes and behaviours based on the influence of its traditional established roots as well as a rapidly changing global economy and culture. The theory of ILs stemmed from institutional theory, which rose to prominence in the 1970s (Alford and Friedland, 1985, Friedland and Alford, 1991, Jackall, 1988). Institutional theory has been the commonly applied in the fields of political science and organisational studies; in the latter to understand how organisations remain stable and maintain themselves over time.

Institutional theory has been complimented more recently with new institutionalism or neo-institutional theory, which focuses on the evolution of societal institutions and its impact on organisations (Valle-Cabrera, 2006). It views organisations and the context they operate in are mutually constituent, as well as interact and influence each other. An important principal here is that organisations have been found to mimic one another in order to compete and achieve success where there is emphasis on homogenisation and the adopting of shared business models, which is referred to as institutional isomorphism (Beckert, 2010, DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). Organisations behave in this manner in order to avoid uncertainty and ambiguity. However, an over-emphasis on institutional isomorphism on the part of organisations and their leaders neglects the constantly changing environment they find themselves in (Lounsbury, 2008). Therefore, ILs is a “systematic approach to the study of cultural heterogeneity” (Thornton et al., 2012, p. 170).

The theory of ILs is based on the principle that cognition and behaviour in organisations are shaped by broader sociocultural forces via a range of societal institutions (e.g. family, state, religion, market, law, education). The efficacy of the theory lay in its ability to capture the thinking and behaviour of leaders, while taking into account an organisations culture and the societal institutions that influence it. Therefore, ILs acts as both a meta-theory and a method of analysis (Thornton and Ocasio, 2008).

## **2.2 Institutional logics and key pillars**

### **2.2.1 *Pillar 1: Societies as an inter-institutional system***

Pillar 1 recognises that societies can be seen as an inter-institutional system in which it allows us to understand an integration and multiple levels of ILs that influence and shape the cognition and behaviours of its actors, in particular organisations and individuals. Initially termed by Friedland and Alford (1991), the inter-institutional system (i.e. connected system) provides a macro-historical approach to social life and organisational studies (Lounsbury and Boxenbaum, 2013). The ILs perspective is more complete than the neo-institutional theory which for a long time limitedly

focuses on three institutional pillars such as regulative, normative and cognitive (Scott, 2003). The inter-institutional system is a set of connected multilevel subsystems where culture informs the practices, vocabularies and norms used within the society (Thornton et al., 2012). By integrating the symbolic and material dimensions, it is a theory of cultural heterogeneity in which the essence of culture is derived from the categorical elements of one or more of the seven institutional orders such as family, religion, state, market, profession and corporation (Friedland and Alford, 1991), with community is recently added by Thornton et al. (2012). Moreover, ILs perspective assists in understanding the ambiguities and uncertainties organisational leaders go through in their sense of self and practices when making interpretation and decision due to a set of conflicting and overlapping pressures of multiple logics, which is also called the institutional complexity (Greenwood et al., 2011).

The issue of complexity has found to be problematic when it comes to ethical reasoning and behaviours (Nielsen and Lockwood, 2018, Tan and Wang, 2011). For example, Skelcher and Smith (2015) proposed that plural ILs generate different forms of hybridity in public organisations. Chan and Ananthram (2018) documented the ethical challenges experienced by senior executives in a MNC in India, which resulted in frequent problems as the MNC sought to institute host country regulations, norms and expected behaviours. The authors found that Indian multiple ILs of bureaucratic and legal system, the nature of its emerging economy and broader social and cultural forces, in particular the role that religion plays in day-to-day life, strongly influenced how ethical behaviours were perceived by employees. Therefore, understanding the society as an inter-institutional system will allow us to investigate the overlapping and competing ILs that influence the ethical behaviours and decisions of organisations and their participants. In addition, it allows us to analyse different levels of institutions in different contexts, improving the deeper understanding and avoiding generalisations of EL in a cross-cultural context.

### *2.2.2 Pillar 2: The duality and causality of ILs*

Pillar 2 refers to a micro-processual approach where organisations and individuals are not only situated and influenced by the frames of references supplied by ILs, but their interaction, interpretation and negotiation opens agency for organisational structures and practices, leading to institutional change or stability (Lounsbury and Boxenbaum, 2013, Reay and Hinings, 2009, Zilber, 2002).

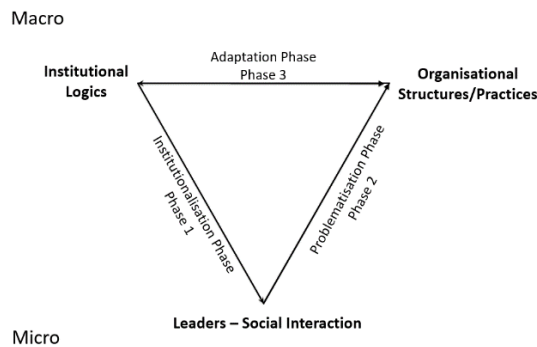
According to Thornton et al. (2012), there are ranges of ILs that can influence the decision and sense-making of individuals in an inter-institutional system. The ILs perspective thus assists to examine the availability and accessibility of individual's prior knowledge and experience which impact on how they recognize, attend, and activate the ILs to negotiate and communicate with their surrounding environment of social interaction. This process is called as an interpretive scheme (Hotho and Saka-Helmhout, 2017). This key pillar of ILs addresses the call of phenomenological approach of EL which argues to focus on a contextual and needs-based approach and interpersonal relationship (Dale & Latham, 2015; Liu, 2017a, 2017b; Pullen and Rhodes, 2015). Nielsen and Lockwood (2018) argue that as ILs influence ethical reasoning and behaviours through its normative assumptions and values, it impacts the way individuals choose to make a right decision in a context.

There is a need to analyse the underlying reasoning and interpretive schemes that influence leaders' thinking and behaviours from a micro level. According to Moberg (2006), leaders often fall prey to ethical blind spots due to overemphasise on their own perspective and neglect the opinions from the others. Individuals have been found to be less rational and deliberate towards unethical decision making due to their ethical blindness. Ethical blindness can be understood on three levels including individual sense making, the decision-making situation and the ideological context (Palazzo, Krings, and Hoffrage, 2012). In order to understand EL in different cultures there is a need to understand the underlying reasoning that influences interpretive schemes.

According to Tan and Wang (2011, p. 375) “the ILs of organizations in the same society embody the fundamentals of the prevailing ILs in the society, although organizations differ from one another in terms of the composition of the contending logics and the way that they practice these logics”. Individuals modify traditional/established ILs and create new ones based on their preferences, thus leading to institutional changes in terms of beliefs and values. Bévort and Suddaby (2016) used the method of ethnography to examine how individuals - accountants in a Big Four accounting firm interpret a set of competing logics when they move to managerial roles. The study found that considerable interpretive subjectivity and individual cognition are produced among individual professionals to make sense of their new managerial roles, thus calling for the future directions of research on ILs and individuals inside the organisations.

### 2.3 A Process Path for incorporating ILs into ethical leadership

The key pillars of ILs perspective demonstrate that there is an opportunity of having a process path for incorporating ILs into understanding EL. EL not only develops over time (Shakeel, Kruyen, and Van Thiel, 2019) but also maintain and create new ILs that shape ethical decisions. Adapted to a cross-level model of ILs combining macro-micro and micro-macro level (Thornton et al., 2012, p. 85), we divide the process path into three phases (Figure 2). Phase 1 is the institutionalisation phase where we will analyse the multiple logics that are available, accessible and culturally embedded that influence on the cognition and perception of individuals (Figure 3). Phase 2 is the problematisation phase where we will analyse the interpreting framework that individuals go through to make decisions (Figure 4). Finally, phase 3 is the adaptation phase when organisations change and responses after the process of institutional complexities and individual social interaction, leading to adapted and institutional change (Figure 5).

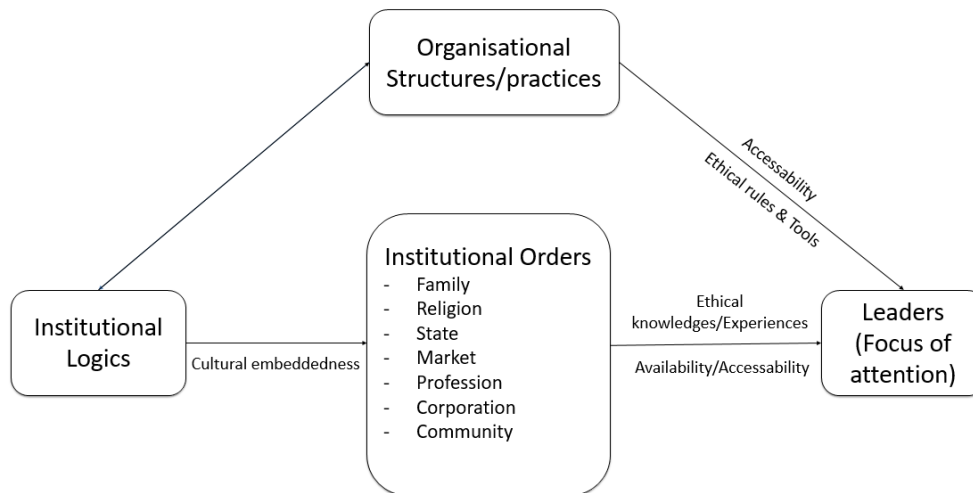


**Figure 2:** A cross-level model for incorporating *ILs* into EL

Building on Thornton et al. (2012), Figure 2 was developed as a cross-level model to integrate ILs into EL. Each phase will be discussed in below details. Phase 1 reflects the pillar 1 of the inter-institutional system in that the ILs perspective allows us to understand a range of different institutional orders from macro (societal level) which provide reference points for the sensemaking choices of individuals (Thornton et al., 2012). The institutional orders come from but not limited to family, religion, state, market, profession, corporation and community. By incorporating ILs into EL, we will understand which dominant ILs, including multiple contrasting and contradictory logics that are culturally embedded and shape the organisational structures and practices, as well as influence the focus of attention of leaders. The actions of the leaders will depend on their available and accessible ethical knowledge and work-life experiences. Leaders' ethical knowledge is available in their long-term memory and will be relied on for social interaction and interaction which is in stage 2. The cultural and situational context, for example organisational ethical climate (Kuenzi, Mayer, and Greenbaum, 2020, Kuntz et al., 2013, Ofori, 2009, Shin et al., 2015) that the leaders are embedded in will shape how certain ethical knowledge and information that is provoked and comes to their mind when facing certain ethical dilemmas.

**Proposition 1:** Ethical leaders' actions are more likely to depend on activation of prior or current ethical knowledge and experiences.

**Proposition 2:** The ILs are more likely to influence EL, mediated by leaders' ethical knowledge and experiences.



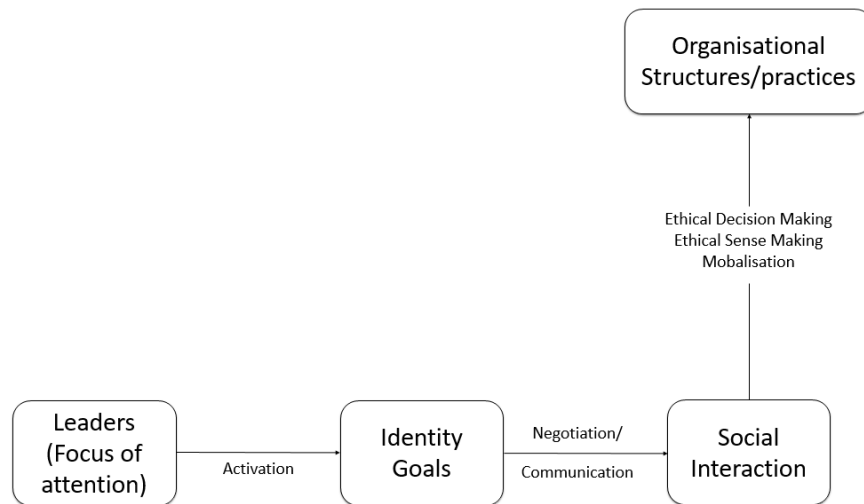
**Figure 3:** Phase 1 - Institutionalisation Phase (Macro to Micro) (Adapted to Thornton et al., 2012, p. 85)

Phase 2, which is the problematisation phase, reflects the key pillar 2 of duality and causality of ILs on organisations and individuals. First, from a micro-to-micro level, among their available and accessible ethical knowledge, leaders will choose to activate certain ILs to use in their social interaction. According to Thornton et al. (2012, p. 84), “the activation of each aspect of ILs is contingent on the applicability of accessible knowledge structures to salient aspects of the situation and the environment”. When certain ILs are activated, leaders will accordingly activate their identity and goals, negotiating and communicating it for social interaction. Second, from a micro to macro

level, leaders will make sense of ethical dilemmas and perceptions through the social interaction process, resulting in ethical decision making and mobilisation. This will then result in changes or stability in social practices and structures.

**Proposition 3:** Leaders’ identities and goals are likely to be activated for ethical social interaction.

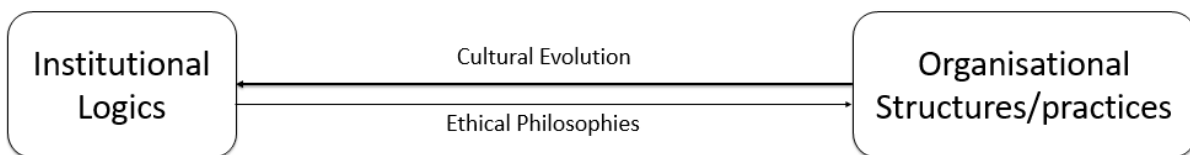
**Proposition 4:** Ethical social interactions are more likely to influence the organisational practices, moderating through leaders’ ethical sense-making.



**Figure 4:** Phase 2 - Problematisation Phase (Micro to Micro & Micro to Macro) (Adapted to Thornton et al., 2012, p. 85)

Finally, phase 3 which is the adaptation phase reflects both key pillars of ILs perspective where society is an inter-institutional system and its essences have dual and causal effects. In other words, after phase 1 and phase 2, ethical situated practices are selected and retained through processes of cultural evolution. From these evolution processes, ILs emerge at the levels of society, institutional field, and organisation, leading to institutional change or stability. The ILs also inform different ethical philosophies that can make changes in organisational structures and practices.

**Proposition 5:** Changes in organisational ethical practices are more likely lead to changes in ILs.



**Figure 5:** Phase 3 - Adaptation Phase (Macro to Macro) (Adapted to Thornton et al., 2012, p. 85)

### 3 DISCUSSION

The main purpose of this paper was to explore how we can integrate ILs into studying EL to address the call of critical approach on a more contextual and phenomenological based approach. We developed a conceptual framework to capture the key features of the issue and outline new research area. Until recently, mainstream research on EL is underpinned by a number of assumptions that EL is situated in a fixed context with certain predefined rights and rules whereby there are universal solutions (Braga et al., 2019). Therefore, in an increasing heterogeneous context ILs can be incorporated to a process path to understand EL in a cross-cultural context. The analysis led to identification of three stages. In Phase 1 the ILs perspective allows us to understand different multiple logics that can influence on the behaviours of EL. The ILs assists in investigating the antecedents that affects EL in a more systematic way. Contemporary studies have demonstrated that situational influences (society, industry and organisations) and individual characteristics influence the behaviours and manifestations of EL (Brown and Trevino, 2006, Eisenbeis and Giessner, 2012, Jordan et al., 2011).

However, these studies are fragmented, lacking a holistic view of the complexities of ILs. These mainstream research for a long-time argue that the minimal characteristics of EL should be honesty, fairness, power sharing and altruism (Fehr et al., 2015, Kalshoven et al., 2011, Treviño et al., 2003). Certain personal traits and virtues that influence the behaviours of EL, as well as the compliance and reliance with the pre-existing rules can be considered as only one simplest constituent part in this process of understanding EL. If it comes to cross-cultural contexts, what do these traits contextually mean remain ambiguous? Whether trust in America means the same as trust in China, as well as whether American managers attach the meaning of trust the same as Chinese managers do. For example, study has found that work experiences have a stronger effect on doctors' identities in Norway than in Finland due to a more intervention in the healthcare sector from central government in Norway, leading changes to ILs. This hence results in a larger and more hybrid management implementation in Norwegian doctors than their Finnish colleagues. Therefore, Phase 1 assists in investigating how ILs instil the frame of references for individuals through their own availability and accessibility of ethical knowledge and experiences in their life and work. This helps the analysis to be more contextually and culturally specific rather than fixed and universal.

Phase 2 addresses the calls of recent critical studies on moving beyond instrumental approach of developing measure and codes of ethics (Kalshoven et al., 2011, Riggio et al., 2010, Yukl et al., 2011) to a more interpersonal approach that focus on interrelatedness to otherness, differences and embodied experiences (Pérezts et al., 2015, Pullen and Rhodes, 2015). Rather viewing EL as relying on rights and rules to display ethics, understanding the process of negotiation and communication between leaders' identities and goals in the social interaction will enable us to understand how leaders make sense to their ethical decision. For instance, Shakeel et al. (2019) argued that different leadership styles are activated somewhere along the EL process timeline. Phase 2 helps us to closely examine the process individuals attach meanings to EL. Finally, Phase 3 is the result of Phase 1 and Phase 2 where institutional change and institutional stability may happen. Institutional change may occur when actors develop mechanisms of collaboration that support the co-existence of competing logics (Reay and Hinings, 2009).

### **3.1 Theoretical implications**

The ILs perspective helps to gain deeper knowledge in understanding EL from a cross-cultural perspective. First, the current dominant approach on cross-cultural EL which is the “national cultural dimensions” tends to focus mainly on surface level differences between countries and leadership styles (Beugelsdijk et al., 2015). This is problematic when used to understand ethical behaviour, which is influenced by deep seated beliefs, values and attitudes influenced by both historical and contemporary societal forces. ILs view ethical behaviours and leadership from both an historical perspective – i.e., what is a culture’s enduring philosophical worldview – and how these are influenced and in many cases challenged by contemporary global culture and the new technologies that transmit it around the world. The focus of ILs is on a detailed examination of enduring institutions and their values as well as newer ones that are growing in prominence. Each institutional order represents a governance system that provides a set of reference that precondition actors’ sensemaking choices. This contrasts with a reliance on a set of descriptive and normative concepts in the case of the “national cultural dimensions” research.

Secondly, due to its key pillars of viewing society as an inter-institutional system, the ILs perspective provides a fully and holistic understanding of EL in cross-cultural context, covering all aspects of multiple logics that influence organisations and individuals such as family, religion, state, market, profession, corporation and community. It thus improves the integrative interdisciplinary approach (Eisenbeiss, 2012) which is fragmented in places. In addition, the ILs perspective bridges the gap between the mainstream (essentialist) research and critical (phenomenological) research on EL.

Finally, although the institutional orders inform the norms that influence the behaviours of organisations and individuals which is quite similar with the mainstream research, the duality and causality of the ILs allows for the partial autonomy of social structure and action, leading to institutional change or institutional stability. Therefore, EL is not only limited in a set of predefined rights and rules, it is a social process of negotiation, connection and interpretation of ethical knowledge and experiences. This essence of ILs thus acknowledge the openness to others that encounter engagement and heterogeneity instead of homogeneity (Knights, 2015, Thanem and Wallenberg, 2015).

### **3.2 Practical implications**

Failing to adapt EL to institutional context can lead to ineffective organisational governance. This is when EL becomes bad. For example, von Weltzien Hoivik (2007) concerned that unaddressed assumptions and biases in current research instruments such as Kohlberg’s Cognitive Moral Development Model and Hofstede’s Culture theory fail to properly capture the deeper understanding of a specific culture. The study discovered that Chinese managers realised the Western codes of ethics in MNCs made employees feel uncomfortable as these are thought to be too western and individualistic, which does not sit well with the traditional belief of collectivism in China. Chinese culture tends to value ethical values of Guanxi (interpersonal relationship), renqing (human feeling), and saving face. Failure to understand the Chinese culture have made doing business ethically in China so challenging. In another study, Yang (2014) figured that EL can even lead to unhappy workers due to the conflicts between the process of establishing EL in Chinese culture and the well-

being of the followers. This is when leaders perform strict and higher ethical conduct at work, but the Chinese employees prefer a culture of close-knit relationship and informal social interaction. This proves that EL may be good in one culture but can be bad in other culture. Understanding this, organisations can design appropriate codes of ethics that suit with the institutional context of its government, organisational climate, and followers. Managers will be aware of the institutions that impact on organisations, group or individual level to thus address ethical dilemmas in a strategic way. As there is no universal right or wrong approaches in EL (Braga et al., 2019), leaders in different cultures can manage ethical decisions in a more flexible way to suite their own circumstances instead of imposing inappropriate universal practices.

In addition, EL is largely divergent in different industries. In some industries there requires the ethics with body embodiment, but others may require straight-forward and strict ethical compliance. For example, in observations of French investment banks, study found that body sense and gut feeling are used as tools for anti-money laundering analysts to activate ethical evaluations and resist to continuous external pressures from difficult files or hostile Front Officers (Pérezts et al., 2015). Caring is important in ethical decisions of leadership in education or medical industries (Gabriel, 2015, Abreu-Pederzini, 2019), however, control and clear instructions are inevitable in military sectors (Waldman et al., 2017). Therefore, ILs perspective not only captures the cultural aspect of EL but also the process of interaction between leaders and their followers and society. Organisations can incorporate an ILs perspective to EL to promote the greater ethical treatment of workers through an organisations' strategy and human resource management (Eisenbeiss et al., 2015). Effective ethical managerial leadership has been shown to reduce staff turnover (Demirtas and Akdogan, 2015) and to increase employee wellbeing (Chughtai et al., 2015).

#### **4 LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

Given that this paper is conceptual and only focuses on EL and ILs, there are a number of limitations. First, we only approach two key pillars of the ILs perspective, which are viewing society as an inter-institutional system and the duality and causality of ILs. This assists in understanding cross-cultural EL as a holistic picture rather than geographically specific. However, acknowledging that ILs is a meta-theory, we suggest future research to explore other approaches in ILs for EL that we have not captured yet. For example, research can go deeper into the research domain of institutional complexity which has been receiving attention (Greenwood et al., 2011, Ramus et al., 2017, Waeger and Weber, 2019), institutional entrepreneurship (Greenwood and Suddaby, 2006, Tracey et al., 2011), and institutional work (Kraatz, 2009, Lawrence et al., 2011). Second, as our paper is conceptual, there requires empirical studies with a more specific context of a particular country, industry or organisation to test the relationship between EL and different factors of ILs. For instance, which kinds of ethical knowledge/experiences are activated in a certain situation? Which aspects of ILs yield stronger correlations with EL? Finally, further empirical researches are needed to test our five above propositions.

#### **5 CONCLUSION**

As current mainstream research is highly falling on empirically-tested studies with Western philosophies and Western contexts, there is a need for a more holistic and comprehensive view towards EL in a cross-cultural context. This paper aims to argue a new lens of approach in EL, in



particular the cross-level model through the integration of institutional logics in three main phases. Phase 1 provides an understanding of variety of multiple logics that can be incorporated to examine the drivers of EL, followed by phase 2 where it allows us to gauge in-depth the process that institutional logics are institutionally adopted and translated to leaders' behaviours. Phase 3 indicates how leaders' actions towards ethical dilemmas and practices can contribute to the maintenances, adaptations or modifications of the organisational broader practices and structures. The three phases are together forming an inter-institutional and multi-level system, as well as a reciprocal process to fully grasp the insights of EL.

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