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**The Role of Ethical Guidance in Achieving Excellence in Government
Institutions: An Applied Study on the Government of Fujairah, United Arab
Emirates**

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed to analyze the role exercised by ethical guidance in enhancing institutional excellence within the Government of Fujairah by exploring leaders’ perceptions of ethical leadership practices and their mechanisms of implementation, and by interpreting how these practices are reflected in excellence outcomes. The study adopted a qualitative approach through interviews conducted with (15) directors and officials occupying leadership positions across various departments affiliated with the Government of Fujairah in the United Arab Emirates. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis supported by NVivo software. The findings indicated that (48%) of leaders considered ethical guidance to be associated with the leader serving as a role model in adhering to laws and organizational codes of conduct. Moreover, (35%) of leaders emphasized that ethical guidance is not sufficiently expressed in an institutionalized manner, but is often understood through personal experience. Additionally, (68%) confirmed that leaders exercise a role-model function through compliance with rules, job discipline, and respectful interaction. The study recommended developing the performance evaluation system to include both quantitative and qualitative indicators of leaders’ ethical behavior—such as fairness in task distribution, transparency in decision-making, and respect for employees and clients—thereby transforming ethics from a moral value into a professional requirement.

Keywords: *ethical leadership, ethical guidance, ethical practices, institutional excellence, Government of Fujairah, United Arab Emirates.*

INTRODUCTION

Ethical guidance constitutes one of the fundamental pillars of modern governance systems due to its central role in regulating organizational behavior and entrenching values of integrity and responsibility within the workplace. Contemporary literature confirms that government organizations adopting a clearly articulated ethical approach to management achieve higher levels of transparency and fairness and ensure greater alignment between their decisions and institutional values. Ethical guidance represents a continuous leadership practice manifested in decision-making processes and in the manner of dealing with employees and clients (Al-Habashneh, 2023). Al-Otaibi (2024) argues that ethical guidance enhances the efficiency of governmental bodies by reducing deviant behaviors, strengthening discipline, and directing resources toward priorities

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more closely related to the public interest. It also contributes to creating an organizational environment in which employees perceive their actions as governed by clear values such as justice, respect, transparency, and accountability. Suleiman (2019) further maintains that such an ethical environment reduces internal conflicts, raises morale, and strengthens public trust in government institutions as entities serving the public good.

Institutional excellence represents a strategic framework aimed at improving overall organizational performance through the adoption of innovative practices, process development, and enhancement of service efficiency. Many countries have adopted global excellence models such as the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) model, which emphasizes leadership, strategy, customer focus, and innovation. Institutional excellence reflects an organization's capacity to achieve sustainable performance outcomes and competitiveness while delivering higher value to stakeholders and society and developing employees' capabilities (Al-Zahrani, 2023).

Mustafa (2024) indicates that ethical guidance contributes to achieving excellence in government institutions by directing leaders' and employees' behavior toward practices aligned with justice, transparency, and responsibility. A leader who exercises ethical guidance enhances discipline, limits misconduct, and improves professionalism in dealing with the public, thereby positively affecting service quality and its societal impact. Ethical guidance also enables the development of a trust-supportive organizational culture and commitment key elements for achieving institutional excellence in the public sector.

Despite the advancement witnessed in government institutions in the United Arab Emirates, the achievement of institutional excellence remains influenced by leaders' ethical conduct and the manner in which values are promoted within the governmental work environment. Recent literature confirms that the absence or weakness of ethical guidance leads to declining decision quality, increased misconduct, and reduced public trust. Kaptein (2020) found that leadership ethics are directly associated with improved compliance and professional behavior, while Mayer et al. (2020) demonstrated that ethical leadership reduces deviant behavior and increases organizational discipline. Habberfeld & Clarke (2023) showed that the quality of public services rises in institutions adopting clear leadership values, and Morgan & Trinity (2020) confirmed that public trust in governmental institutions depends significantly on employees' ethical behavior, not merely on professional competence.

The problem becomes more evident considering the nature of governmental work, which requires the highest levels of integrity and accountability amid rising public expectations and higher service quality standards. The absence of clear ethical guidance may negatively affect discipline, public interaction, and decision quality, thereby influencing the government institution's capacity to achieve institutional excellence related to performance and readiness to address emerging changes. Accordingly, a scientific and practical need emerges to explore the ethical leadership role in achieving institutional excellence within the Government of Fujairah.

This study gains direct practical importance as it aligns with the strategic directions of the Government of Fujairah 2024–2027, which emphasize strengthening integrity and professionalism and developing leadership capable of achieving institutional excellence. The expected findings may identify the ethical practices most influential in institutional performance excellence and determine the factors supporting or hindering the implementation of ethical guidance. This would assist in designing specialized leadership programs that enhance decision quality and professional conduct and support leadership efforts to strengthen public trust and improve customer experience, thereby enabling higher levels of efficiency and excellence in services provided to society.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ethical Guidance in Government Institutions

The theoretical framework addresses the conceptual foundations of ethical guidance as one of the leadership approaches that directs leaders' behavior and influences the integrity and quality of institutional work. It also reviews the concept of institutional excellence and its main components that form a benchmark for performance effectiveness in security institutions. The framework then proceeds to analyze the relationship between ethical guidance and excellence by clarifying how ethical leadership practices are reflected in employees' behavior and the level of institutional performance excellence within departments affiliated with the Government of Fujairah in the United Arab Emirates.

Ethical Guidance

Ethical guidance refers to leaders possessing and demonstrating internal ethical standards and values rather than acting primarily in response to external pressures. Authenticity reflects leaders' capacity to achieve harmony with themselves and with their broader followers in order to promote cooperation inside and outside the organization. Accordingly, leaders' values should be consistent with generally accepted values in the surrounding organizational environment (such as society or government policies). A significant part of self-regulation therefore operates in accordance with accepted ethical rules (Al-Saqr, 2023).

Individuals with high levels of self-regulation manage their behavior in alignment with ethical standards. Leadership is considered ethical if the individual's internal values are ethical, if it is perceived as such by others, if managers' behavior aligns with their own values, and if leaders' conduct corresponds with the ethical norms prevailing in society (Al-Abed, 2024).

Ethical guidance constitutes a core attribute of the authentic leader's personality, serving as the value-based compass guiding decisions and priorities. A leader characterized by ethical guidance does not merely pursue results but adheres to justice, integrity, and respect in all actions, exercising authority in accordance with higher moral principles. The authentic leader believes values are not theoretical slogans but practical behaviors translated into daily conduct, thereby becoming an ethical role model (Al-Masoudi, 2022).

It can therefore be concluded that ethical guidance represents the essence of authentic leadership, reflecting the leader's commitment to a value system derived from personal conviction rather than external pressure or situational considerations. The authentic leader is measured not only by decision-making competence but also by the consistency of behavior with principles of justice, integrity, and respect for human dignity.

Ethical guidance represents a central pillar in modern leadership, particularly in institutions requiring high levels of discipline and professionalism. The ethical leader does not merely direct performance but acts as a behavioral model contributing to the formation of a work culture that respects values and ensures decisions align with justice and integrity (Hijazi, 2024). Literature indicates that ethical guidance manifests in a set of daily leader behaviors—largely intangible yet deeply influential on the work environment and the level of institutional excellence achieved—namely (Al-Otaibi, 2024):

1. **Leader behavioral role modeling:** Ethical role modeling is among the most prominent ethical guidance practices; employees expect the leader to embody the values required of the team. This includes compliance with laws and procedures, respect for others, transparency in decisions, and avoidance of favoritism or bias.
2. **Fair and transparent decision-making:** Justice in decision-making directly affects the work climate, as employees feel their efforts are valued and professional standards apply equally to all. This appears in clear criteria for task distribution, accountability methods, and evaluation and promotion policies.
3. **Ethical communication based on candor and respect:** Ethical guidance relies on clear communication that respects employees' professional dignity. Leaders avoid authoritarian or ambiguous styles that create tension and uncertainty. Ethical communication includes constructive feedback, recognition of employees' efforts, and emphasis on professional conduct when dealing with the public.
4. **Promoting employees' ethical responsibility:** Ethical guidance encourages employees to make responsible decisions aligned with laws and institutional values. This includes training employees to handle difficult situations, emphasizing integrity, and encouraging reporting of professional misconduct without fear.
5. **Demonstrating human concern and appreciation:** Ethical guidance is also reflected in leaders' attention to employees' human aspects, including work conditions, psychological needs, and emotions during task performance. This involves active listening, providing support when needed, and treating all individuals with dignity and respect.

Accordingly, ethical leadership guidance constitutes an integrated behavioral system forming the invisible framework directing institutional performance. By reinforcing role modeling, fairness, ethical communication, responsibility, and equitable accountability, institutions can build a strong work culture that supports discipline and improves performance quality.

Excellence in Government Institutions

Excellence is defined as an advanced stage of quality and institutional superiority characterized by performance grounded in leading administrative principles, including results orientation, delivery of distinguished services, influential leadership, and management based on data and facts, in addition to process improvement, human resource engagement, continuous innovation, and successful partnership building (Al-Sheikhi, 2023). Institutional excellence, according to Al-Zahrani (2023), refers to a set of activities reinforced by every individual within the organization with the aim of strengthening achievements while emphasizing the workforce as the structural core of the organization. Abdulhadi (2023) explains that excellence is reflected in an institution's superiority over global best practices in performing its functions and creating positive, interactive relationships with clients alongside understanding competitors' capabilities and analyzing the surrounding environment. Abdulmuttalib (2022) adds that excellence stems from the strategic exploitation of opportunities, proactive planning, and commitment to a clear vision based on defined objectives and adequate resources, with a focus on achieving optimal performance.

Abdulhadi (2023) further confirms that business excellence produces superior outcomes through clarity of vision, goal setting, planning, and execution, leading to success in both professional and practical domains.

Al-Sheikhi (2023) classified business excellence into three main dimensions:

1. **Excellence through organizational practices:** adopting effective strategic planning, commitment to a clear vision, and rational resource utilization to achieve effective performance.
2. **Excellence through outperforming similar organizations:** integrating business results with interaction across the internal and external environment to achieve distinction and leadership.
3. **Excellence through exceeding customer expectations:** improving services beyond client expectations so the organization becomes a benchmark through balanced strategies focusing on all stakeholders.

Accordingly, business excellence represents the embodiment of efforts and practices that produce distinguished outcomes for clients, employees, and society, grounded in strategic leadership and efficient resource management.

Outstanding institutions, according to Odat (2024), are those capable of optimally utilizing available resources, performing activities according to the highest standards, adopting a knowledge-sharing culture, operating in a team spirit, promoting transparency and accountability, and building strong partnerships.

In light of literature and prior studies, including Al-Zahrani (2023) and Al-Adinat (2024), achieving institutional excellence is neither a simple task nor a temporary stage attained without

organized effort; rather, it is a continuous process requiring the collective efforts of all employees within a framework of conscious and sustainable teamwork. These studies demonstrate that excellence management is based on strategic administrative orientations aimed at establishing a motivating organizational culture that fosters excellence and improves the institution's capacity to achieve superior and sustainable qualitative performance. Odat (2024) also emphasizes that adopting institutional excellence has become a strategic necessity for contemporary institutions, especially within a dynamic environment characterized by rapid change. Organizations are required to respond by developing their organizational structures, strengthening human capital, and embedding an adaptive and innovative organizational culture. Effective utilization of information technology is likewise a central pillar in achieving excellence, as digital technologies have become essential for improving service quality.

The UAE Government Excellence System Guide – Second Edition (GEM 2.0, 2020) confirms that institutional excellence directly enhances the performance efficiency of government institutions and improves service quality provided to clients. It also serves as a fundamental driver of economic and social growth by establishing an organizational environment based on teamwork and promoting values of initiative, innovation, and institutional belonging, thereby encouraging employees toward greater dedication and collective achievement.

Abdulmuttalib (2022) identified several characteristics that make the UAE Government Excellence System a unique model, most notably:

1. **Focus on innovation:** encouraging government entities to improve capabilities based on performance analysis and continuous learning practices, including community and stakeholder engagement.
2. **Smart service transformation:** improving government service delivery channels to provide an integrated customer experience through innovative digital tools.
3. **Achievement of institutional objectives:** aligning institutional capabilities with global best practices and measuring their effectiveness in achieving desired outcomes.
4. **Institutional performance management:** linking performance to societal happiness and organizational well-being to enhance the UAE's global competitiveness.
5. **Institutional sustainability:** managing institutional impact and measuring the sustainability of results and long-term effects.
6. **Consideration of governmental entity specificity:** designing a flexible framework that accommodates the different functions of each government entity and customizes criteria accordingly.
7. **Specialized task-based evaluation:** adopting assessment mechanisms conducted by domain experts to ensure accurate and objective evaluation.

The Relationship Between Ethical Guidance and Excellence in Government Institutions

Recent literature indicates that ethical guidance constitutes one of the fundamental drivers of institutional excellence, as it contributes to building a work environment in which professional behavior aligns with values of justice, transparency, and accountability (Al-Duwaan, 2021). In security institutions that daily handle emergency situations based on broad legal powers, ethical commitment becomes a central requirement to ensure the quality of security decisions and the integrity of procedures (Al-Saqr, 2023). Ethical guidance represents a major factor in enhancing professionalism within government institutions because it strengthens employees' sense of professional responsibility when dealing with the public or managing field situations. When a leader practices ethical guidance clearly through behavioral role modeling and fair decision-making, employees become more committed to professional conduct standards, resulting in higher-quality and more effective service delivery (Hijazi, 2024).

The influence of ethical guidance is also evident in fostering a motivating work environment. A leader who ethically guides the team creates an organizational climate that reduces conflict, limits deviant behavior, and enhances belonging and job satisfaction. Such an environment contributes to increased productivity and improved field performance quality. Moreover, fairness in evaluation and promotion, transparency in decisions, and equitable accountability are ethical elements that enhance internal trust between leaders and subordinates, which in turn reinforces employees' commitment to excellence standards (Al-Habashneh, 2023).

Finally, the relationship between ethical guidance and institutional excellence is a continuous interactive one, as ethical behavior forms the foundation upon which development and improvement strategies in government institutions are built. Institutions that successfully integrate ethical guidance into their organizational structures, leadership programs, and administrative policies become more capable of achieving sustainable outcomes in performance, innovation, and services (Al-Abed, 2024). Accordingly, ethical guidance is not merely a leadership practice but a strategic framework that ensures the sustainability of institutional excellence and enhances organizational readiness to address evolving governmental challenges.

RESEARCH GAP

The present study aligns with most previous studies in emphasizing the centrality of the ethical dimension in leadership and its role in improving institutional performance, whether reflected in organizational commitment as in Hijazi (2024), organizational loyalty as shown in Al-Abed (2024), or job performance quality as demonstrated by Al-Habashneh (2023). The study also agrees with the findings of Mustafa (2024) and Al-Zahrani (2023) in highlighting the positive impact of ethical values, organizational justice, and transparency in improving service quality and institutional excellence. Likewise, it corresponds with Morgan & Trinity (2022), which considered human and ethical values such as integrity, respect for the public, and professional communication as a foundation for excellence and quality in security services, demonstrating that ethical conduct within police institutions is a decisive factor in strengthening public trust.

However, the present study differs from most previous research in that it does not address ethical leadership as a broad framework; rather, it specifically examines ethical guidance as a daily leadership practice involving guiding subordinates' ethical conduct, clarifying ethical standards, and applying values in field situations. The study is also unique in being entirely qualitative, relying on semi-structured interviews with leaders and officials in the Government of Fujairah, whereas most prior studies such as Al-Abed (2024), Mustafa (2024), Al-Habashneh (2023), and Al-Zahrani (2023) adopted quantitative approaches using questionnaires and did not examine leaders' experiences through an interpretive qualitative methodology. Furthermore, the study focuses on a governmental institution characterized by a distinct organizational nature dealing with societal requirements different from the academic, health, or industrial sectors addressed in previous research. It also differs in its dependent variable, as it examines institutional excellence in its strategic dimensions rather than merely performance or satisfaction—an angle not qualitatively addressed in prior government-sector studies.

The present study gains additional significance through its direct alignment with the strategic directions of the Government of Fujairah 2024–2027, particularly regarding institutional excellence, the development of a supportive ethical culture, and the preparation of future leaders. These themes have not been previously examined within a unified framework combining ethical guidance and excellence in government institutions. The study's focus on leadership personnel therefore introduces a new knowledge dimension for understanding how ethical guidance is reflected in institutional excellence within the Government of Fujairah in the UAE.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How do leaders in the Government of Fujairah perceive the concept of ethical guidance, and what elements does it include from their perspective?
2. What ethical leadership practices are most prevalent in the Government of Fujairah, and how does their implementation influence employee performance?
3. How does ethical guidance affect the level of institutional excellence in the Government of Fujairah?
4. What institutional and organizational factors enhance or limit leaders' ability in the Government of Fujairah to practice ethical guidance, and how can these practices be developed to support the achievement of institutional excellence?

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study represents an important scholarly contribution to public-sector leadership, as it examines ethical guidance as one of the principal drivers of institutional excellence. It expands the existing body of literature, which remains limited in linking ethical leadership with levels of distinguished performance in government institutions. The study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

1. To analyze leaders' and officials' perceptions within the Government of Fujairah regarding the concept of ethical guidance and to identify its components from their perspective.
2. To explore the most prevalent ethical leadership practices in the Government of Fujairah and interpret how they are reflected in employees' performance and professional conduct.
3. To determine the extent to which ethical guidance is reflected in the level of institutional excellence in the Government of Fujairah.
4. To diagnose the institutional and organizational factors that enhance or limit leaders' ability to practice ethical guidance and to propose ways to develop these practices in support of achieving institutional excellence.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a qualitative approach as the most appropriate method for exploring leadership and behavioral phenomena that are difficult to measure quantitatively, particularly those related to ethical guidance in government institutions. This approach aims to understand the meanings leaders attribute to ethical practices and to interpret how these practices are reflected in levels of institutional excellence within departments affiliated with the Government of Fujairah.

To achieve this objective, the study employed an interpretive qualitative methodology, which allows for the analysis of leaders' lived experiences and the exploration of intangible ethical patterns in leadership behavior, as well as how these patterns are manifested in institutional performance excellence. Semi-structured interviews were utilized as the primary data collection tool due to their flexibility in enabling in-depth exploration of participants' experiences and interpretations of ethical guidance, its practical application, and its influence on achieving institutional excellence.

Study Population and Sample

The study population consisted of leadership and supervisory personnel within departments affiliated with the Government of Fujairah, as they are directly responsible for implementing ethical guidance practices and making decisions that influence institutional excellence levels.

A purposive sample of (15) directors and officials occupying leadership positions across various departments within the Government of Fujairah was selected based on specific criteria, including administrative and field experience, direct involvement in team leadership and ethical decision-making, and their capacity to provide an in-depth description of ethical guidance practices in governmental work and their contribution to enhancing institutional excellence.

Research Instrument

The study relied on semi-structured interviews as the principal data collection instrument due to their effectiveness in exploring leadership experiences and understanding ethical practices within governmental work. An interview guide was developed, comprising open-ended themes addressing leaders' perceptions of ethical guidance, the patterns of ethical behavior they practice,

and how these practices are reflected in employees' performance and the level of institutional excellence in the Government of Fujairah.

Interviews were conducted following participants' consent, recorded, and transcribed verbatim. The data were then analyzed systematically to identify central themes and interpretive linkages between ethical behavior and institutional excellence, enabling the derivation of in-depth findings and practical, applicable recommendations.

Data Analysis Procedures

The interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis supported by NVivo software, which serves as an advanced tool for managing and systematically coding qualitative data with precision. The data were processed through a sequence of methodological steps that included the following:

1. **Open coding:** to extract initial concepts related to ethical guidance and its leadership practices.
2. **Axial coding:** through which similar codes were grouped into broader categories reflecting recurring organizational patterns in leaders' behavior.
3. **Development of main themes:** aimed at interpreting the relationship between ethical guidance and the level of institutional excellence.

NVivo facilitated the tracking of relationships among thematic categories and the development of coding maps illustrating the linkages between ethical practices and performance outcomes. This enabled an in-depth analysis contributing to a clear conceptualization of the role exercised by ethical guidance in enhancing institutional excellence within the Government of Fujairah.

DATA ANALYSIS RESULTS

Research Question One: *How do leaders in the Government of Fujairah perceive the concept of ethical guidance, and what elements does it include from their perspective?*

The interview data indicate that leaders' perceptions of ethical guidance within the Government of Fujairah range from a general understanding grounded in values and professional conduct to a deeper interpretation focused on directing decisions and daily practices in accordance with standards of justice, integrity, and accountability. Approximately (62%) of participants described ethical guidance as "doing the right thing even in the absence of supervision," while (48%) associated it with the leader serving as a role model in adhering to laws and organizational codes of conduct. Additionally, (40%) emphasized clear communication regarding what is permissible and impermissible within the work environment as a central component of the concept. This reflects variation in levels of understanding, yet simultaneously demonstrates a clear presence of ethical values as a governing framework for leadership behavior.

Regarding the core components of ethical guidance, thematic coding conducted using NVivo revealed that the most frequently cited element was justice (71%), followed by respect for clients'

rights (66%), and transparency in decision-making (53%). Furthermore, (47%) of participants indicated that fostering a work environment that preserves employees' dignity constitutes a key dimension of ethical practice. These findings suggest that ethical guidance is viewed as a practical leadership exercise closely linked to daily interactions with subordinates and clients. The results also reveal a relative conceptual gap, as approximately (35%) of leaders confirmed that ethical guidance is not sufficiently institutionalized or formally articulated, but is often understood through personal experience. This highlights a clear need to develop structured guidelines that enhance conceptual clarity and promote consistent implementation.

Research Question Two: *What ethical leadership practices are most prevalent in the Government of Fujairah, and how does their implementation influence employee performance?*

The interview findings revealed that the most prevalent ethical leadership practices in the Government of Fujairah revolve around three principal dimensions: fairness in treatment, professional role modeling, and transparency in decision-making. Approximately (74%) of participants indicated that fairness constitutes the primary pillar of ethical leadership behavior, whether in task distribution, performance evaluation, or conflict resolution. Meanwhile, (68%) confirmed that leaders exercise a role-model function through adherence to rules, job discipline, and respectful interaction. Furthermore, (55%) of participants highlighted transparency—particularly in decisions related to human resources—as a prominent institutional practice that strengthens trust between leaders and subordinates.

Thematic coding using NVivo also showed that practices such as active listening, respect for privacy, and providing moral support to employees appeared at rates ranging between (41–49%), indicating a broad spectrum of ethical practices despite variations in their intensity across different departments.

Regarding the impact of these practices on employee performance, the majority of participants (78%) agreed that fairness and transparency enhance job commitment and reduce internal conflicts, clearly improving the quality of daily task execution. Additionally, (63%) of leaders reported that ethical role modeling increases employee motivation and encourages adherence to higher standards of discipline and professionalism. NVivo analysis further revealed a perceived relationship between ethical guidance and reduced operational errors, as (46%) of participants observed a decline in undesirable behaviors within teams led by individuals demonstrating consistent ethical conduct. The most prominent effect, however, was reflected in improved work climate and strengthened perceptions of fairness and institutional belonging, which positively influenced overall performance and enhanced institutional excellence within the organizational units analyzed.

Research Question Three: *How does ethical guidance influence the level of institutional excellence in the Government of Fujairah?*

The interview results demonstrated that ethical guidance represents a central driver of institutional excellence within the Government of Fujairah. Approximately (72%) of participants agreed that

ethical practices contribute to building a positive work culture that promotes commitment, discipline, and reduced role conflict. Additionally, (65%) of leaders indicated that clear ethical messaging and leaders' modeling of integrity and fairness enhance internal trust, thereby improving teamwork quality and facilitating smoother interdepartmental coordination.

Thematic coding in NVivo showed that ethical guidance contributes to improved decision quality (58%) and strengthens professional accountability (49%), both of which are directly associated with institutional excellence standards.

At the institutional outcome level, (69%) of participants noted that ethical guidance positively affects customer satisfaction and service quality. Leaders emphasized that teams led by ethically grounded individuals demonstrate higher responsiveness, reliability, and respect for public rights core elements of institutional excellence criteria. Moreover, (54%) of leaders reported that ethical guidance enhances innovation and continuous improvement by fostering a safe environment for experimentation and decision-making without fear of punitive consequences.

Research Question Four: *What institutional and organizational factors enhance or limit leaders' ability to practice ethical guidance, and how can these practices be developed to support the achievement of institutional excellence?*

The interview findings revealed that the institutional and organizational factors enhancing leaders' capacity to practice ethical guidance primarily center on the clarity of ethical policies and rules. Approximately (71%) of participants emphasized that the existence of clear professional codes of conduct directly contributes to standardizing ethical criteria and regulating practices within the institution. The second key factor relates to top leadership support, as around (64%) of leaders indicated that senior leadership messages emphasizing integrity and fairness play a pivotal role in strengthening ethical commitment across all departments. The third dimension concerns organizational culture, with nearly (59%) of participants noting that a culture grounded in transparency and respect for employees significantly facilitates the practice of ethical guidance without institutional conflict or pressure.

Conversely, the analysis identified several limiting factors. A lack of specialized training was cited by (52%) of participants, variation in leadership styles across departments by (46%), and workload pressure by (41%)—all representing major constraints on leaders' ability to consistently practice ethical guidance.

Regarding the development of these practices to support institutional excellence, NVivo analysis indicated that (67%) of participants believe that investing in specialized training programs focused on ethical leadership and handling critical situations would enhance leaders' awareness and confidence in applying ethical guidance. Additionally, (58%) highlighted the importance of standardizing ethical policies and integrating them into performance evaluation systems to ensure fair and balanced implementation. Approximately (49%) stressed the need to develop secure communication channels that enable employees to report unethical practices without fear, thereby strengthening a stable ethical work environment that supports institutional excellence.

Overall, the findings suggest that ethical guidance is not merely an individual leadership practice but an institutional process requiring sustained structural and organizational support to ensure its effectiveness and its integration with high-performance outcomes.

RESULTS

1. The findings indicate that ethical guidance among leaders in the Government of Fujairah is practiced as a practical value associated with justice, integrity, and accountability rather than as a purely theoretical concept. Leaders' understanding of ethical conduct is largely grounded in their professional experience and repeated field situations. This guidance is manifested through daily decisions that require balancing the strict application of regulations with considerations of fairness and equity.
2. The results demonstrate that fairness and transparency constitute the two most influential dimensions of ethical leadership practices within the government institution. Leaders have shown a clear capacity to institutionalize these values through equitable task distribution and the application of objective performance evaluation standards. This approach contributes to reducing complaints, increasing commitment and discipline levels, and strengthening an organizational environment supportive of institutional excellence.
3. Ethical guidance was found to have a direct impact on decision quality. The findings indicate that ethical standards provide a stable framework for decision-making, particularly in emergency situations. This orientation helps reduce operational errors resulting from individual discretion or inconsistent interpretations of regulations.
4. The study revealed that ethical practices are associated with enhanced internal communication between leaders and subordinates. Employees were observed to respond more positively to leaders who demonstrate respect and clarity in their directives. This communication pattern promotes greater functional harmony, reduces misunderstandings within organizational units, and reinforces team spirit within government institutions.
5. The analysis identified a relative gap in the existence of clearly defined institutional systems for articulating ethical guidance and standardizing its implementation across departments. While some leaders rely on personal standards derived from experience, others depend on general policies that may lack sufficient specificity. This variation affects the consistency of ethical practices across organizational units within the Government of Fujairah.
6. The findings further indicate that ethical guidance enhances employees' professional motivation. Individuals working in an environment characterized by fairness and respect experience higher levels of satisfaction and institutional belonging. The analysis observed a decline in negative behaviors within teams led by ethically grounded leaders, alongside increased individual initiative and participation in decision-making among teams adopting an ethical leadership approach.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Develop a unified leadership code of ethics directed at leaders and officials within the Government of Fujairah, incorporating clear standards for professional conduct and structured mechanisms for ethical decision-making across all organizational situations. The code should be supported by training on applied scenarios derived from real work contexts. Such a framework would help reduce disparities among departments and establish a unified ethical reference point for all leaders and officials within the Government of Fujairah.
2. Launch a practical training program specifically designed for leaders and officials in the Government of Fujairah, incorporating simulations of operational situations that require ethical decision-making. The program should include ethical analysis tools, group exercises, and self-assessment models, with a particular focus on balancing the application of established legal procedures with the human dimensions of leadership. This initiative would contribute to enhancing leaders' ethical maturity and decision-making competence.
3. Develop the performance evaluation system to include both quantitative and qualitative indicators of leaders' ethical conduct, such as fairness in task distribution, transparency in decision-making, and respect toward employees and clients. Integrating these indicators would transform ethics from a moral value into a formal professional requirement that is systematically measured and monitored.

Theoretical and Contextual Contribution of the Study:

This study contributes theoretically to the field of public-sector leadership by examining *ethical guidance* as a distinct, daily leadership practice, rather than merely as a broad dimension of ethical leadership, and by directly linking it to institutional excellence in its strategic dimensions. It offers an interpretive addition to the literature through its adoption of a qualitative approach, which enabled an in-depth understanding of leaders' perceptions of ethical practices and how these practices are reflected in institutional performance. This addresses a notable gap in existing studies that have predominantly relied on quantitative methods. Contextually, the study provides a significant contribution within the governmental environment of the United Arab Emirates specifically the Government of Fujairah by presenting an applied analysis that connects ethical guidance with institutional excellence in a government entity characterized by a distinctive organizational structure. In doing so, it enhances understanding of the relationship between leadership values and institutional outcomes within the local context.

Future Perspective

The findings of this study open several avenues for future research, including expanding the scope to comparative studies across different emirates or across multiple government sectors to identify variations in the application of ethical guidance and its impact on institutional excellence. Future research may also adopt mixed-method designs combining qualitative and quantitative approaches to examine causal relationships with greater precision, as well as longitudinal studies to assess the

cumulative impact of ethical guidance on performance indicators, innovation, and institutional sustainability. From a practical perspective, future work could focus on developing standardized measurement models for ethical guidance and integrating them into institutional performance evaluation systems to support the sustainability of excellence in government institutions.

Statements and Declarations

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All authors have equally contributed to the study.

Ethical approval

Informed and verbal consent was obtained from the participants via collecting the data.

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Conflicts of Interest

There is no conflict of interest among the authors.

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