

The Influence of Organizational Culture on Ethical Leadership of Sub-district Municipality Executives

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Abstract

This study highlights the significant role of organizational culture in shaping ethical leadership among sub-district municipality executives. The findings indicate that a strong organizational culture-particularly in terms of participation and mission-oriented values-positively influences ethical leadership. While the study does not directly measure the impact of ethical leadership on service quality, the emphasis on ethical behavior and social responsibility suggests a potential link to improved governance and public service delivery. Future research should further investigate this relationship by assessing the direct effects of ethical leadership on the quality of local government services. The following equation expresses the above result: $Y=1.728+0.179X_1 + 0.213X_2$.

Keywords: Ethical leadership, Organizational culture, Sub-district municipality, Executive

Introduction

Local government is the foundation of democracy, decentralizing administrative power to allow citizens to participate in self- governance. It delegates the responsibilities and resources of the central government to local governments, which improves public service delivery, increases opportunities for citizens to participate in local government policy- making processes, and improves the efficiency, satisfaction, and support for democracy for government (Schedler, 1998; Shin & Jhee, 2021) . Therefore, local government organizations are important in creating political space for citizens to develop and determine their destiny, which will be of the most significant benefit to the citizens (Fung, 2002). An important factor affecting the performance of an organization is organizational culture (Akpa et al., 2021; Naveed et al., 2022). Organizational culture refers to the shared set of attitudes learned by the organization to solve the problems of adapting to the external environment and integrating the internal one. When people establish and validate attitudes, they transmit them to new members of the organization as a guideline for perceiving, thinking, and feeling relevant

to those problems (Schien, 2004). An organizational culture is important because it sets standards for employee work. It helps encourage members of the organization to be committed to the philosophy and values of the organization and try to achieve the goals. It sets standards of behavior and controls members of the organization to behave the organization determines. Organizational culture is directly related to the efficiency and effectiveness of work and production. It is what creates the identity of the organization. If the culture is more clearly defined, it will make members more aware of the organization's practices and create a greater sense of belonging (Hellriegel et al., 2001). Organizational culture that emphasizes morality and ethics will encourage leaders and personnel in the organization to behave ethically and promote social responsibility. It helps leaders realize the importance of having an ethical role that not only affects the organization but also creates value for the external society, and ethical leaders will realize the importance of working responsibly towards society and the environment. Therefore, organizational culture is an

important foundation for promoting ethical leadership. Leaders who work under a favorable organizational culture will be able to create and promote morality in the organization, which will have positive effects on both the individual and the organizational levels (Al Halbusi et al., 2022; Schaubroeck et al., 2012). Thus, organizational culture affects ethical leadership. Organizational culture is a clear framework that enables leaders to make ethical decisions confidently and without hesitation. It is a tool for setting norms and values that support ethical behavior and setting examples for employees about honesty, responsibility, fairness, and transparency. Such a positive culture encourages leaders to make ethical decisions, build trust and cooperation, communicate openly, respect each other, and promote ethical, transparent, and responsible decision-making. It also helps leaders make correct and appropriate decisions in potentially complex situations. In particular, this study focuses on four organizational cultures believed to influence executives' ethical leadership: Involvement culture, Consistency culture, Adaptability culture, and Mission culture (Denison et al., 2003). Local government executives are leaders who play an important role in setting the direction of operations in line with the organization's objectives and goals. Ethical leaders use the tools of their leadership positions to promote ethical behavior in their workplace to improve public service. They see themselves as role models in the workplace and make ethics visible to their employees by modeling ethical behavior (Mbandlwa et al., 2020). Ethical leaders set and transmit ethical standards, using rewards and sanctions to ensure adherence to those standards. It is, therefore, the duty of ethical leaders to protect municipal resources and strengthen relationships between municipal employees and citizens, which will directly improve the delivery of public services (Brown & Mitchell, 2010). Local government executives with leadership, knowledge, skills, and experience will lead the organization to achieve its vision. Local executives with ethical leadership will gain the trust and confidence in the organization's management from the public. Therefore, executives should be ethical leaders so that the organization is also an institution with ethics (Downe et al., 2020).

Ethical leadership is a multidimensional concept; however, this research seven key dimensions: fairness,

power sharing, role clarification, people orientation, integrity, ethical guidance, and sustainability concern (Kalshoven et al., 2011). These dimensions align with the cultural context of sub-district municipality executives in Sakon Nakhon Province, located in the northeast region of Thailand.

In recent years, local governments in Thailand, including sub-district municipalities, have faced significant challenges maintaining ethical standards in leadership amidst increasing demands for transparency and accountability. These challenges include limited resources, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and resistance to change within established administrative structures. External pressures such as political influences and public expectations have further complicated efforts to instill ethical leadership practices. These issues underscore the necessity of understanding how organizational culture influences ethical leadership within this specific context.

By focusing on these seven dimensions, this study aims to evaluate the level of ethical leadership among sub-district municipality executives, assess the organizational culture within these municipalities, and explore the impact of organizational culture on ethical leadership. This research expects to contribute to developing strategies that promote strong organizational culture and ethical leadership, ultimately enhancing the effectiveness of public service management in sub-district municipalities. By addressing these contemporary challenges, this study provides a relevant and timely perspective that can inform policies and practices for improved governance in Sakon Nakhon Province and beyond.

However, Ethical leadership in ensuring good governance and improving public service delivery. In the context of sub-district municipalities in Sakon Nakhon Province, ethical leadership is shaped by organizational culture, through participation and mission culture. Examining seven key aspects of ethical leadership helps in understanding the alignment between ethical leadership and organizational culture: integrity, fairness, role modeling, transparency, accountability, social responsibility, and people orientation. So, Empirical findings from the study indicate that participation and mission culture significantly influence ethical leadership among sub-district municipality executives in Sakon Nakhon

Province. However, the study does not explicitly measure how each of the seven aspects of ethical leadership aligns with specific cultural dimensions. Future research should investigate this alignment further through Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) or qualitative methods such as interviews and case studies. Additionally, comparative studies across different regions could provide deeper insights into the cultural dynamics of ethical leadership in local governance.

Understanding how organizational culture shapes ethical leadership can ultimately enhance policy-making and leadership development programs, leading to improved governance and service quality in local government institutions.

Objectives

1. To examine the organizational culture and ethical leadership level of sub-district municipality executives, focusing on defining key dimensions and indicators used to measure “organizational culture” and “ethical leadership”.
2. To analyze the influence of specific aspects of organizational culture on the ethical leadership of sub-district municipality executives, identifying measurable variables and expected causal relationships

Literature reviews

This section summarizes the research framework, focusing on Thailand’s organizational culture, ethical leadership, and local administrative organizations (LAOs). To strengthen the theoretical foundation, additional perspectives, and recent studies are incorporated to provide a more comprehensive view:

Organizational culture

Denison (1990) defined organizational culture as the values, beliefs, and fundamental principles that form the foundation of an organization’s management system. The set of management practices and behaviors reinforces the organization’s core values, reflecting these principles. Members of the organization find these practices meaningful because as they represent strategies for survival that have proven successful in the past and are believed to be effective in the future.

Schein (2004) elaborated that organizational culture refers to the patterns of shared beliefs and assumptions that an organization has developed as

effective solutions for external adaptation and internal integration. Once validated, leaders transmit these patterns to new members as guidelines for understanding, thinking, and responding to similar challenges.

Recent studies emphasize the dynamic and multi-dimensional nature of organizational culture. For instance, Cameron and Quinn (2011) proposed the Competing Values Framework, which highlights cultural types such as Clan, Adhocracy, Market, and Hierarchy. These dimensions reveal how cultures adapt to changing environments. For this study, the focus is on four specific cultural dimensions-Involvement Culture, Consistency Culture, Adaptability Culture, and Mission Identified by Denison et al. (2003) as influential factors in shaping ethical leadership.

Ethical leadership

Brown and Treviño (2006) described ethical leadership as honesty, care, and principled decision-making. Ethical leaders establish ethical standards, communicate them clearly, and provide rewards or consequences to ensure adherence. They model integrity and inspire others by aligning actions with ethical values.

The Josephson Institute of Ethics (2009) emphasized six foundational values for ethical leadership: trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship. More recent works, such as those by Kalshoven et al. (2011), have expanded on ethical leadership dimensions, integrating fairness, power-sharing, role clarification, people orientation, integrity, ethical guidance, and sustainability concerns. This multi-faceted approach provides a robust basis for examining ethical leadership behavior.

Recent studies have linked ethical leadership to organizational outcomes, such as employee satisfaction, trust, and ethical climate (Resick et al., 2011). However, there is a need to explore the antecedents of ethical leadership, particularly the role of organizational culture in shaping ethical behavior among leaders.

Local Administrative Organizations (LAOs) in Thailand

LAOs are local government units managing public services and driving local development. These organizations have autonomy in decision-making and

focus on infrastructure, education, public health, and environmental management. The decentralized structure, which includes provincial administrative organizations (PAOs), municipalities, and subdistrict administrative organizations (SAOs), allows for enhanced community participation in governance (Ministry of Interior, Thailand).

Recent research highlights the challenges faced by LAOs, including resource limitations, political influences, and the need for capacity-building among personnel (UNDP, 2020). Understanding these dynamics is critical when analyzing how organizational culture and leadership practices influence the effectiveness of local governance.

Theoretical Implications

Integrating these perspectives provides a more comprehensive theoretical framework for this study. The research posits that organizational culture significantly influences ethical leadership behaviors, particularly within the unique context of LAOs in Thailand. While ethical leadership studies often focus on outcomes, this study shifts attention to the cultural antecedents of ethical leadership, addressing a gap in existing literature.

This enriched framework incorporates recent theoretical advancements and diverse viewpoints, ensuring a robust foundation for examining the interplay between organizational culture and ethical leadership in local government organizations.

Cultivating integrity: The influence of organizational culture on ethical leadership among sub-district municipality executives in Thailand

Organizational culture considerably influences ethical leadership among the leaders of the municipality

of sub- statements in Thailand. Limmethee and Dhirathiti (2024) underline the role of knowledge management in training ethical practices. In addition, Namcharoen and Sattakorn (2021) discuss good governance as a cultural aspect that improves ethical leadership. Yonchayawong et al. (2021) highlight the impact of transformational leadership on the effectiveness of management, reflecting cultural values. Wongsiri (2021) focuses on performance evaluation systems, while Kiettikunwong (2024) assesses transformational leadership in local governance, indicating a strong cultural connection. Finally, Jedaman et al. (2020). Defend professional learning communities to promote ethical leadership within municipalities, integrating culture in human resources development.

Research gap in this study

This study highlights significant research gaps that can guide future inquiries. First, while it establishes a link between organizational culture and ethical leadership, it does not directly measure the impact of ethical leadership on service quality in local government. This calls for further research to explore this causal relationship. Second, the study identifies how participation and mission cultures influence ethical leadership but lacks empirical validation of their alignment with specific ethical aspects. Finally, the context is limited to sub-district municipalities in Sakon Nakhon Province, raising questions about generalizability to other regions. Addressing these gaps through comparative and empirical studies will enhance our understanding of ethical leadership and improve governance practices.

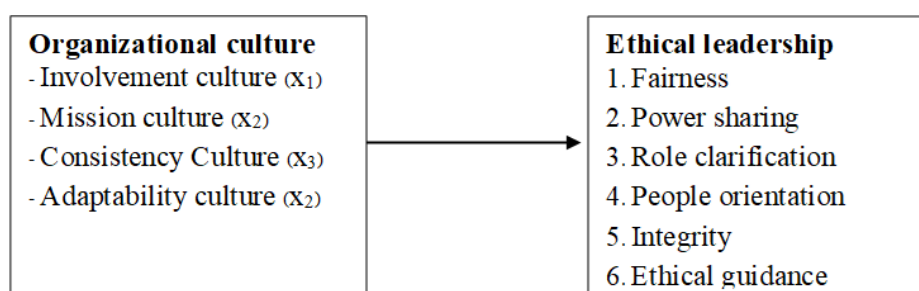


Figure 1 Conceptual framework

Methods

This study employed a quantitative research approach combined with a survey to examine the relationship between organizational culture and ethical leadership in Sakon Nakhon Province, Thailand municipal executives. The researchers conducted data collection using a structured questionnaire that they developed and validated for reliability. Additionally, the researchers gave respondents the opportunity to provide further comments and suggestions on ethical leadership improvement to ensure comprehensive and well-rounded data.

The research sample comprised 97 municipal executives, including mayors and deputy mayors, who voluntarily participated in the study. The sample was selected through purposive sampling to ensure that participants had relevant roles and experience in organizational management. While the sample size was relatively small, it provided valuable insights into the characteristics of ethical leadership in local administrative organizations. However, the researchers acknowledged limitations regarding the generalizability of the findings to other areas in the discussion section.

The questionnaire comprised four main sections: (1) Respondents' personal information, such as gender, age, education level, and work experience, using multiple-choice questions. (2) Organizational culture assessment, measured using a five-level likert scale ranging from the lowest to the highest level. (3) Ethical leadership measurement, using the same five-level scale as the organizational culture section. (4) Open-ended questions, allowing respondents to provide additional opinions and recommendations on improving ethical leadership.

The researchers based the questionnaire development process was based on a thorough review of relevant literature and expert consultation in public administration and organizational management. Before implementation, the questionnaire was pilot-tested with a small sample to assess its reliability using Cronbach's Alpha, indicating a satisfactory internal consistency level.

The researcher conducted the data collection process by personally visiting the study area to distribute the questionnaires and provide explanations to respondents. The procedure included (1) contacting

relevant agencies to obtain permission and explain the study objectives, (2) distributing the questionnaires and offering additional clarifications as needed, (3) collecting the completed questionnaires within the specified timeframe, and (4) ensuring adherence to research ethics by maintaining confidentiality and obtaining informed consent from participants.

Data analysis involved both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation, were used to analyze the demographic characteristics, organizational culture, and ethical leadership data. Inferential statistics were employed through multiple regression analysis to examine the effect of organizational culture on ethical leadership. The researcher tested assumptions regarding multicollinearity using correlation matrices, variance inflation factors (VIF), and tolerance values to ensure the reliability of the regression model.

Finally, responses to open-ended questions were analyzed using content analysis to identify key themes and practical recommendations for enhancing ethical leadership among municipal executives in Sakon Nakhon Province. This systematic research methodology can be replicated in other contexts to explore factors influencing ethical leadership in local administrative organizations.

Finding

1. The organizational culture levels of sub-district municipalities

The organizational culture of sub-district municipalities in Sakon Nakhon Province was high overall ($\bar{X} = 3.98$). When considering each aspect, the study found that all aspects of organizational culture were at a high level, namely, Involvement Culture ($\bar{X} = 4.14$), Mission culture ($\bar{X} = 3.96$), Consistency Culture ($\bar{X} = 3.93$), and Adaptability culture ($\bar{X} = 3.89$), respectively (Table 1).

2. The ethical leadership level of sub-district municipality executives

The ethical leadership of sub-district municipal executives in Sakon Nakhon Province was a high overall ($\bar{X} = 3.95$). When considering each aspect, we found that ethical leadership was at high level in all aspects.

Power sharing had the highest means was power sharing ($\bar{X} = 4.09$), followed by fairness ($\bar{X} = 4.05$), role clarification ($\bar{X} = 4.04$), integrity ($\bar{X} = 3.93$), people

orientation ($\bar{X} = 3.91$), ethical guidance ($\bar{X} = 3.89$), and sustainability concern ($\bar{X} = 3.79$) respectively, (Table 2).

Table 1 The organizational culture levels of sub-district municipalities

Side	Organizational culture	\bar{X}	S.D.	Level
1	Involvement culture	4.14	0.68	high
2	Mission culture	3.96	0.83	high
3	Consistency Culture	3.93	0.72	high
4	Adaptability culture	3.89	0.81	high
Total		3.98	0.67	high

Table 2 The ethical leadership level of sub-district municipality executives

Side	Ethical leadership	\bar{X}	S.D.	Level
1	fairness	4.05	0.48	high
2	power sharing	4.09	0.72	high
3	role clarification	4.04	0.52	high
4	people orientation	3.91	0.81	high
5	integrity	3.93	0.54	high
6	ethical guidance	3.89	0.76	high
7	sustainability concern	3.79	0.85	high
Total		3.95	0.47	high

3. The influence of organizational culture on the ethical leadership of sub- district municipal executives.

The organizational cultures that influenced the ethical leadership of the sub- district municipality executives were the involvement culture and the mission culture. The involvement culture had a statistically significant influence at the 0.01 level ($\beta = 0.261$), and

the mission culture had a statistically significant influence at the .05 level ($\beta = 0.374$). The prediction coefficient was 0.611 and could predict the ethical leadership level of sub-district municipality executives by 62.70 percent. However, the consistency and adaptability cultures had no influence on the ethical leadership of sub-district municipality executives (Table 3).

Table 3 The Influence of organizational culture on the ethical leadership of sub-district municipal executives

Forecast variables	B	Std.error	β	t	P-value	Collinearity	
						Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	1.728	0.193		8.935	0.000		
Involvement culture (x_1)	0.179	0.060	0.261	2.977	0.004**	0.547	1.829
Mission culture (x_2)	0.213	0.098	0.374	2.176	0.032*	0.454	2.203
Consistency culture (x_3)	0.093	0.076	0.144	1.232	0.221	0.481	2.080
Adaptability culture (x_2)	0.071	0.099	0.124	0.721	0.472	0.476	2.099

Remark: $R=0.792$, $R^2=0.627$, $R^2_{Adj}=0.611$, $F=38.706$, $Sig=0.000^{**}$

The confidence level for the findings is determined based on the significance levels (p-values) reported in the following study: The involvement culture had a statistically significant influence on ethical leadership at the 0.01 level ($p=0.004$), meaning the confidence level is 99%. The mission culture had a statistically

significant influence at the 0.05 level ($p=0.032$), meaning the confidence level is 95%. The consistency culture ($p=0.221$) and adaptability culture ($p=0.472$) were not statistically significant, so no confidence level was assigned. The above result can be written as the following equation

$$Y=1.728+0.179X_1 + 0.213X_2$$

Discussion

Sakon Nakhon Province's sub-district municipalities exhibit a high overall organizational culture, with all aspects, including involvement, mission, consistency, and adaptability, ranking highly. These findings align with previous studies that underscore the importance of a strong organizational culture in fostering effectiveness and commitment within local government organizations (Schein, 2010). For instance, Chanthaprom (2021) researched factors affecting happiness at work among employees of the Sakon Nakhon Provincial Administrative Organization, which also revealed that the overall organizational culture was at a high level. Similarly, Chuawongphrom (2020) examined the impact of strategic leadership and organizational culture on the efficiency of local government organizations in Mueang Sakon Nakhon District, finding that a high level of organizational culture positively influenced operational efficiency. These studies confirm the critical role of organizational culture in improving performance and employee satisfaction.

Sakon Nakhon Province's sub-district municipality executives demonstrated high-level ethical leadership, emphasizing power sharing, justice, role clarity, honesty, caring for others, ethical advice, and long-term care. This aligns with the ethical leadership framework proposed by Brown and Treviño (2006), which highlights the impact of ethical leadership on organizational behavior and performance. Niyomsuk (2017) found that ethical leadership among mayors significantly influenced organizational efficiency, reinforcing the connection between leadership style and organizational success. Furthermore, Saeng-un (2016) identified that ethical leadership fosters greater organizational commitment, which contributes to the

effectiveness of local government operations. The high level of ethical leadership observed in Sakon Nakhon's sub-district municipalities reflects the application of these principles, supporting the view that ethical leadership enhances organizational culture, employee engagement, and performance (Avolio & Walumbwa, 2014).

The research also found that organizational culture, particularly participation and mission culture, strongly influences ethical leadership in sub-district municipalities. This finding bolsters the argument that leadership practices not only shape organizational culture, but also influence it. A study by Syakur et al. (2020) supports this, demonstrating that a culture of participation enhances leadership styles and collaboration, fostering a high level of organizational trust and commitment. Similarly, Azeem et al. (2021) suggest that a culture emphasizing adaptability and collaboration is essential for operational success, as it encourages knowledge-sharing and innovation. This relationship between culture and leadership highlights the mutual reinforcement between organizational culture and ethical leadership, a crucial factor in achieving organizational goals.

Additionally, Swasthaisong et al. (2021) showed a significant link between organizational culture and ethical leadership and the effectiveness of model villages in preventing corruption, indicating that a strong organizational culture can indirectly enhance leadership effectiveness and governance. Chujeeen (2017) further supports this connection between organizational culture and leadership by identifying that personal characteristics, social norms, and organizational atmosphere are deeply embedded in an organization's culture-influence ethical leadership.

The findings of this study suggest that sub-district municipalities in Sakon Nakhon Province should focus on further enhancing organizational culture and ethical leadership. Promoting an adaptive culture will foster an environment of learning and risk management, while a unity culture can help align core values and practices across the organization. In terms of ethical leadership, developing long-term concern through training and seminars will ensure that executives are attuned to the community's welfare, promoting ethical standards and laws in their decision-making processes.

In conclusion, the study reinforces the importance of organizational culture in driving ethical leadership, which, in turn, enhances operational efficiency and service quality. The findings contribute to the growing body of research that connects leadership and organizational culture with improved public sector performance. They highlight that ethical leadership, underpinned by a strong organizational culture, is essential for achieving sustainable success in local administrative organizations, ultimately benefiting the public by ensuring fairness, accountability, and high-quality services.

Recommendations

Practical recommendations

Recommendations should align with the local context and offer feasible, actionable insights that can be effectively implemented. The study's results suggest several measures to enhance and fortify the management of local administrative organizations in Sakon Nakhon Province:

1. **Promoting and Developing Organizational Culture:** Local administrative organizations should focus on fostering a strong organizational culture, particularly regarding participatory culture and adaptability. Promoting knowledge exchange within the organization and utilizing technology to connect with external communities will help create higher levels of engagement. Developing a transparent and cooperative communication culture at all levels is essential.

2. **Developing Ethical Leadership:** It is important to focus on developing ethical leadership by providing training in fair decision-making, transparency, and power-sharing. Ethical leaders will help build trust among the public and employees within the organization. Organizational leaders should implement

activities aimed at strengthening ethics and moral values.

3. **Creating Shared Values Within the Organization:** Workshops and training programs emphasizing positive attitudes can achieve mutual understanding and shared values among employees at all levels. Team collaboration will enhance work efficiency and create a better working environment.

4. **Monitoring and Evaluating Results:** Measuring the outcomes of these changes over time is crucial. There should be a system in place for monitoring the changes in organizational culture and ethical leadership, along with evaluating the organization's performance from the perspectives of both the public and employees to ensure continuous development.

Future research directions

Future research could take the following innovative and wide-ranging directions:

1. **Comparative Study Across Regions:** Future research could compare organizational culture and ethical leadership findings between provinces or public and private sector organizations to explore the differences and identify factors influencing organizational performance in various contexts.

2. **Studying the Impact of Digital Technology:** Future studies could examine the role of digital technology in transforming organizational culture and ethical leadership. Developing digital internal communication and decision-making platforms could impact the organization's efficiency and transparency.

3. **Long-Term Impact Study:** Research could focus on studying the long-term impact of the development and transformation of organizational culture and ethical leadership. This would explore whether these elements positively affect organizational performance and public service delivery.

4. **Using Quantitative Research Methods:** Employing quantitative research methods would provide more accurate data and allow for statistical testing of hypotheses regarding the development of organizational culture and ethical leadership, offering a more complete and generalizable understanding of these elements.

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