

**ETHICAL LEADERSHIP AND ITS INFLUENCE ON EMPLOYEE RESPONSE  
TO CHANGE IN FAITH-BASED HEALTH ORGANIZATIONS IN NAIROBI  
COUNTY, KENYA: AN AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE**

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**Abstract**

*Ethical leadership is crucial for employee adaptability to change in organizations whose long term survival and success depends on their agility and ability to be adaptive. Studies across countries in Africa and organizations point out that the positive or negative response of employees to change is largely dependent on leaders who initiate and follow-up the change process. The values and standards that leaders use in the process are usually drawn from the organization as well as from the complexity of the lives, existence, and connectivity of their culture. This study realized, however, that there is scanty literature that contextualizes leaders' ethical consciousness and its role in employee response to organizational change within the African setting. Additionally, there are distortions in organizational management in Africa, which are characterized by unethical practices such as corruption, ethnicity, and favoritism. Thus, this paper examines the extent to which leaders' ethical consciousness, from an African perspective, impacts on employee response to change which is an important element in the change management processes. The paper argues that lack of ethical sensibility and proper moral judgement of leaders, who are mainly initiators of change, may cause failures of change initiatives in organizations. As a way forward, the study uses African ethics to propose a means for enhancing formation of ethical leadership in order to improve the success of change management process, with special reference to Faith-based health organizations. This paper is based on a review of existing literature that is part of an ongoing qualitative*

*study on “Ethical factors influencing employee response to change in Faith-based Health Organizations in Nairobi County, Kenya.”*

**Keywords:** organizational change management, ethical consciousness, ethical leadership, African ethics, ethical distortions

## **Introduction**

Change management is defined by Hassan (2018) as a “systematic process through which an organization conceptualizes, implements and appraises its change effort for the desired result” (p. 3). Bhatt (2017) defines change management as “an approach used to transition individuals, teams, and organizations to re-direct the use of resources, business process, budget allocations, or other modes of operation that significantly reshape a company or organization” (Bhatt, 2017, p. 34). Organizational change involves adjustment of the culture, internal processes, technology or/and any other significant component of the organization (Miller, 2020).

Recent studies have shown that in general, the success rate of organizational change management is about 30-40% (Errida & Lotfi, 2021; Gigliotti et al., 2019; Katsaros et al., 2020). This means that 60-70% of change initiatives fail to meet their objectives. Scholars claim that one of the key reasons for this low success rate is resistance to change from employees (Bringselius, 2014; Shahbaz, 2019; Wang & Kebede, 2020). Ahmad et al. (2021) as well as Kotter and Cohen (2012) also agree that the primary factor in organizational change is the human factor, that is, behaviors, attitudes, and responses by the change recipients. According to Wang and Kebede (2020) employee response to change maybe positive (acceptance) or negative(resistance).

Faith-based Health Organizations (FBHOs) providing healthcare services, just like other organizations, continually face changing conditions both in their internal and external environments. However, the FHBOs have a particular challenge associated with their hierarchical nature (Soko,2012). Additionally, they are known to keep a low profile and are easily mixed with non-religious non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and therefore information about their operations is scarce (Fort, 2017).

Faith-based health organizations (FBHOs) are value-based organizations founded on the principles of faith and religion. Their culture and activities are embedded in deep faith and/or beliefs of a particular group (Nicholson, 2018).

They are affiliated to religious groups and contribute to the well-being of members of the society (Clarke & Ware, 2015). There has been a growing recognition of the contribution of the FBHOs in healthcare, as well as other sectors of development. For example, data from global health shows that FBHOs spend about 26 to 33 per cent of all NGO spending on health (Haakenstad et al., 2015). These FBHOs who are mostly American-based, spend more in the Caribbean, Latin America, and Sub Saharan Africa.

In Sub Saharan Africa, they contribute between 30-70% of healthcare services depending on the country (Blevins et al., 2017; O'Brien, 2017). For instance, in Chad the contribution of FBHOs is about 10-20 %, in the Democratic Republic of Congo is 50-70 %, and in countries like Kenya, Ghana, Liberia, Lesotho, Nigeria, Malawi, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Rwanda, Zambia, and Tanzania, and it is about 30-40% (Wodon et al., 2014). A part from providing primary healthcare, the FBHOs also are termed as trusted promoters of health education and important health information communication for prevention of diseases and promotion of improved access to health services (Lumpkins & Onge, 2017). The FBHOs are involved in primary healthcare, prevention, and relief services.

In Kenya, FBHOs have made immense contributions to the provision of healthcare services. It is estimated that FBHOs provide about 30% of health services in Kenya (Fort, 2017; Kyalo, 2014). Further, studies have revealed that FBHOs offer highest quality services at 69% compared with the government at 68%, non-governmental health organizations at 60%, and private facilities at 51% (Fort, 2017). This implies that, they are important and their long-term survival is necessary.

## **Literature Review**

### **Ethics**

Ethics refers to the moral codes that govern people's behavior and the values that form the basis upon which decisions are made (Fontrodona et al., 2018). The interest of incorporating ethics in leadership functions such as change management, has been developed, in the past few decades, as a result of decisions and practices that led to immoral outcomes such as scandals (Mirdan et al, 2021). Therefore, it is necessary for organizations to develop a new mindset that includes ethics and a greater social sensitivity in managing change.

Ethics has a role in change management (Karpe & Rigamonti, 2016). It can be viewed in a two-way process, in that, on one hand, the leader should understand the employees' values and create a safe environment for easy, honest and respectful communication. While employees, on the other hand, have a duty to shun resistance and support the leader in the change initiatives. Additionally, as asserted by Karpe and Rigamonti ethics provides a framework through which moral dilemmas experienced in organizations can be resolved. Furthermore, ethics plays an important role during decision making processes. This therefore requires organizational leaders to consistently make it a priority (Grigoropoulos, 2019), by creating an ethical culture where policies and decisions are made for the welfare of all stakeholders.

Ethical leadership is a useful factor in organizational processes for it constitutes the ability of the leaders to execute personal and organizational values by demonstrating knowledge of moral principles and values in their actions and decisions for the common good (Karpe & Rigamonti, 2016). Giubilini (2021) asserts that a leader with a strong moral compass, is able to set the right ethical tone in the whole organization especially during the change process. Scholars such as Babalola et al. (2016) as well as Burnes and By (2012) argue that all approaches to change and leadership are reinforced by a set of ethical values which influence decisions and actions of leaders and strengthen or weaken the outcomes of change.

In Kenya, Gitonga (2018) argues that Kenyan organizations face challenges in instituting a culture of integrity and ethical behavior. He notes that most institutions have a code of conduct and other policies that are rarely practiced. Other studies have been done in Kenya relating to change management and the challenges facing it in different organizational settings (Murimi, 2020; Soko, 2012; Too, 2018; Wanza & Nkuraru, 2016). These studies have identified challenges facing organizational change in Kenya to be non-supportive organizational culture, resistance to change, and poor people management strategies. The main sources of resistance were identified as negative perceptions employees have regarding change, inertia, poor communication, anxiety, low motivation, and insecurities relating to job losses and salary cuts. All these elements allude to a lack of deliberate regard for ethics in change management. There seems to be scarce literature of ethics at the interface of change management. In addition to this, there are ethical distortions in organizational management in Africa, which are characterized by corruption, ethnicity, and racism (Mangaliso et al., 2021). The preceding gap necessitates this current study that intends to use the Faith-

based Health Organizations in Nairobi County to investigate the extent to which ethical leadership affects employee response to change, which is key to successful change management.

Thus, the aim of this paper is to examine the extent to which ethical leadership, from an African perspective, impacts on organizational change management processes. To solve this problem, the paper traces a possible solution from pre-colonial African Traditional ethics as a means to solve the present predicaments facing change management in contemporary African organizations.

### **Ethics in the African Traditional context**

Ethics, is the division of philosophy concerned with how a person should behave in a matter that is considered morally correct or good (Boone 2017). African Traditional ethics refers to the moral codes, principles, norms, and precepts, which govern the relational and economic conduct and actions of individuals and communities in African societies (Russell, 1992). The ethics of the African society is engrained in the cultural practices and beliefs of what is right to do or wrong to avoid, what is a good or bad character; it is also embedded in the conceptions of satisfactory social relations and attitudes held by the members of the society (Kinoti, 2010). It is embedded, furthermore, in the forms or patterns of behavior that are well thought out by the members of the society to bring about social harmony and community living, justice, and fairness (Bujo, 2003). African culture is rooted in strong moral considerations. It has a system of various beliefs and customs which every individual ought to keep in order to live long and to avoid bringing curses on themselves and others. Good character is the essence of the African moral system.

Africa has as many different moral systems as it has ethnic groups. Despite the multitude of subcultures, Sub-Saharan Africa constitutes a specific cultural context. As such there are common denominators and cultural signifiers that “underscore shared identity and denote the deep-level assumptions and allegiances that format the different cultural ingredients and provide larger meaning to the existence of Africans” (Russell, 1992, p. 506).

African norms and modes of ethical conduct are linked directly to how Africans understand the human person, and how the humans interact. Thus, the African communities promoted and protected life by ordaining ethics and morality. In addition, Bujo (1998) and Gyekye (1992) claim that Africans do not think in ‘either/or’ but rather in ‘both/and’; community is the starting point of African

ethics. The ethical conduct in African setting, is not only based on the individual, but is realized primarily by means of relational network that is equally anthropocentric, cosmic, and theocentric. The main goal of African ethics is fundamentally life itself. In addition, it is interwoven in the religious worldview; there were religious rewards as well as sanctions to reinforce or discourage good or bad character respectively (Van der Walt, 2003). For example, for good behavior, blessings were invoked while bad behavior attracted cursing through the ancestors and gods.

### **Ethical Formation of Leaders in Traditional African Societies**

The African Traditional societies raised the ethical consciousness of its members right from childhood to adulthood. Moral education, awareness, and values were transmitted to younger generations through cultural practices (Nyabul, 2009) such as communal activities, ceremonies, and rites of passage. Virtue and morality was taught to the younger generations orally at various stages. The methods used varied according to age and setting. For example, through storytelling, proverbs, riddles, wise sayings, fairy tales and legends, guessing games, narratives and songs, and rites of passage (Mbiti, 1977).

Religion was also a source of moral knowledge and formation for leaders in Africa. It shaped people's behavior, in that, good behavior was rewarded by the ancestors and the Supreme Being, and bad behavior was punished. Individuals were punished in public (Van der Walt, 2003) to discourage such behaviors in society. Ethical norms were not created by an individual, instead, the individual identified with what already existed in the community. The ethical conduct was established by the ancestors' enduring lived experience (Bujo, 2003).

Leadership ethics in Traditional African society had to do with the understanding of the human person. The leaders' ethical consciousness grew and was nurtured by community and events of life as one advanced in age and wisdom. The older one became the more of a person one became (Menkiti, 1984). It is the community that made a person a person. It is during initiation that one became a full person in the eyes of the community. For instance, among the Agikiyu as articulated by Kenyatta (1965), initiation gave a boy and a girl the status of manhood and womanhood. Full personhood was perceived as being attained progressively as one grew older and in wisdom and good character (Menkiti, 1984). The person rose in rank as he progressed in age; marriage, old age, elder hood, death, and entry into the community of departed ancestral

spirits (ontological progression). As one grew older, he attained authority, power, privilege, and leadership in the community (Rwezaura, 1989).

In many traditional African societies authority was held by the elders who had attained the conditions necessary for an elder. Apart from age, these conditions included wisdom, diligent observation of all the incorporation rituals of the community, learning and following all the social rules instituted by the community, acquisition of other excellences such as raising and maintaining family order, and being a person of good morals and character (Menkiti, 1984; Rwezaura, 1989). In other words, an individual would fail in attaining the full personhood of the elders and therefore, authority. The elders had influence from the richness of their experience and wisdom.

African leaders were formed and nurtured within the cultural ethical framework for growth of a virtuous individual known as *Ubuntu* (Sibanda, 2014). The leaders were not only social or political ruler, but also a religious figure who maintained peace and harmony in the community (Kirwen, 2015). The leaders were responsible for the continuity of the tradition, culture, moral, and social values of their respective communities. The values characterizing the traditional community and which were to be foremost practiced by the leaders include; “respect, love, compassion, kindness, generosity, truth, rectitude, humility, self-discipline, forgiveness, mercy, pity, sufficiency, repentance, trust, giving, strength, patience, courage, hard work, unselfishness, and sharing” (Van der Walt, 2003).

*Ubuntu* was the core of African morality and good living. Mawere and Mubaya (2016) note that *Ubuntu* symbolizes the pillar of African spirituality and moral conduct. The word *Ubuntu* is derived from a Nguni (isiZulu) aphorism: *Umuntu Ngumuntu Ngabantu*, which can be translated as “a person is a person because of or through others” (Khomba & Kangaude-Ulaya 2013). *Ubuntu* philosophy refers to the capacity in an African culture to express compassion, reciprocity, dignity, humanity, and mutuality in the interests of building and maintaining communities with justice and mutual caring. “I am because we are, and because we are, I am too” (Mbiti, 1969, p. 152). This is *Ubuntu* principle that articulates the conviction that the human person acts more effectively to the extent to which he holds fast to solidarity.

Africans experienced everything as a relationship, as energy that connects to everyone and everything; to another person, to the natural world and the spiritual world. Each human being was supposed to be treated with respect and

compassion. This communal system, developed a deep respect for human values and the recognition of human worth regardless of one's ethnic group. This philosophy draws Africans, their leaders, and indeed all people, to a deeper sense of self-respect, self-identity, and achievement (Mawere & Mubaya, 2016).

In traditional Africa, the philosophy of *Ubuntu* was at the center of human existence whether economic, religious, political or cultural. The central concept of *Ubuntu* that translates humanness or humane does not merely refer to human nature, but rather, a rule of conduct and social ethic. Ubuntu core values as articulated by Mawere and Mubaya (2016) include, humanness: warmth, tolerance, understanding, peace, humanity; Caring: empathy, sympathy, helpfulness, charitable, friendliness; Sharing: giving (unconditionally), redistribution, open-handedness; Respect: commitment, dignity, obedience, order; Compassion: love, cohesion, informality, forgiving and spontaneity (p 97-98). The spirit of Ubuntu was maintained and inculcated in the communities through the leaders.

Leadership was structured according to the traditions and customs of the community, where authority was derived from the chief, genealogical lineage, or religious leaders. As a result, the leaders were deemed to be imbued with wisdom, authority and strength (Bulley et al., 2017). The communities in general accorded leaders and elders of the community great respect and reverence. This reverence had to do with socialization effect. While growing up, for example, a child was socialized to respect elderly people and community leaders. Leaders, espousing the Ubuntu philosophy, treated all people with compassion and respect, in the spirit of universal brotherhood and seeking the well-being of all people.

During the colonial period, Traditional African communities were disintegrated and the values and ethics were vastly eroded leaving long-term traces of slavery, colonial systems, and confusion of new religion. The colonial masters introduced strange cultures and religion that have taken the center stage of the African life (Wariboko & Falola, eds, 2020). However, there were also positive effects of Western culture on Africa (Sibani, 2018). For example, introduction of formal education, use of modern technology, among others. The effects of globalization have quickly changed the face of Africa.

### **The influence of ethical leadership on Employee Response to Change in Organizations**



Ethical leadership refers to the ability of the leaders to demonstrate moral principles and values in their actions and decisions for the common good (Giubilini, 2021). The aforementioned author argues that ethical leaders should have the awareness of their inner moral principles and values which guide them in making decisions and solving problems. A leader with strong moral compass, is able to set the right ethical tone in the whole organization especially during the change process (Waheed et al., 2019). Ethical leaders become role models for all change recipients.

Studies across the world reveal that leaders play a key role in planning, initiating and implementing change in an organization (Sharif & Scandura, 2014). The leaders' guidance is required to direct the employees concerning critical issues associated with change processes. Since the period of change is characterized by instability, uncertainty, confusion, and even traumatic experiences (Kotter, 1996), leaders have the duty of reassuring and supporting the employees through the change. The leader continually communicates the change vision and receives feedback to consolidate and adapt the initiatives accordingly.

In America, a study revealed that leaders play a key role in planning, initiating and implementing change in an organization (Sharif & Scandura, 2014). The leader's guidance is required to direct the employees concerning critical issues associated with change processes. Since the period of change is characterized by instability, uncertainty, confusion, and even traumatic experiences (Kotter, 1996), leaders have the duty of reassuring and supporting the employees through the change. The leader continually communicates the change vision and receives feedback to consolidate and adapt the initiatives accordingly.

In the UK, studies have linked ethical leadership with change outcomes (Burnes & By, 2012). Ethical leaders are able to bring about better change outcomes while unethical leaders curtail the change processes. These studies have however, also revealed "a damaging lack of clarity regarding the ethical values which underpin leadership and change" (Burnes & By, 2012, p. 248). The leader's ethical values are likely to bring about positive employee responses to change. The success of the change initiatives depends largely on the employees' responses to the change, and is reinforced by the moral consciousness and ethical values that influence the decisions the leaders make for good or worse (By et al., 2012). Employee response to change initiatives depend on the integrity of the leader. This means that positive responses are elicited by ethical leaders. Although theories of leadership such as transformational, adaptive, servant, and spiritual

leadership (Northouse, 2019) hint to the importance of the ethicality of the leader, they have not explicitly examined the role of ethics in the behaviors and actions of the leader, when organizations are undergoing change.

In Germany, a study done by Bormann and Rowold (2016) highlighted the influence of ethical leadership and values to employee readiness and commitment to change. The study revealed that ethical leadership is an important driver for successful change. The reason for this conclusion is that ethical leaders highly influence the employee readiness and commitment to change. This is done through reduction of employee acquiescence, silence, and feelings of resignation (Bormann & Rowold, 2016). In this way, the employees are able to actively participate in the change.

In Japan, a study revealed that ethical leadership has not been given enough attention in literature (Kimura & Nishikawa, 2018, P. 714). The above study showed that ethical leaders exhibit deep values from which they make decisions. The aforementioned authors noted that values for leaders include accountability, character, respect, fairness, openness, flexibility, collective orientation, visionary, and cool judgement and logicity. On the contrary, the attributes of unethical leaders according to the study, include misuse of power, self-interest, lack of accountability and transparency, narrow or short-term focus, deception and dishonesty, lack of objectivity, and lack of personal values and moral code.

In Spain, a study revealed that low level of leaders' ethical awareness and practice, affects change management in a negative way (Karpe & Rigamonti, 2016). These authors argue that when a leader is perceived to be self-focused and opportunistic, seeking loopholes and acting for self-interest, negative perceptions by the employees towards the change initiatives are triggered. Further, lack of ethical leadership may lead to a toxic work environment characterized by coercion instead of motivation. This may lead to breakdown of the change processes.

Studies done across countries in Africa and organizations, pointed out that leaders draw their ethical understanding and experience from the environment they operate in (Mathooko, 2013). The leaders in Africa, consciously or unconsciously, tend to draw their ethics from the complexity of the lives, existence, and connectivity of the African people. Leaders in organizations draw their ethicality from the ethical systems, values, principles, rules and standards of African people, revolving around protection of life, maintaining the integrity of life, and maintaining harmonious coexistence with and protection of nature

(Bansikiza, 2001; Bujo, 1998; Kinoti, 2010; Sibanda, 2014). However, there is scanty literature contextualizing ethics in African setting, understanding it in an organizational setting, and unraveling the international ethical leadership methods to the context of African organizations especially during change management. Despite the African societal, ethical, values and practices, there exists ethical distortions characterized by corruption, ethnicity, and racism (Gichure, 2008; Mathooko, 2013). The lack of ethics and moral judgement of leaders, in the context of change management, as nuanced above, may influence negatively, the employee response to change in organizations.

In Egypt, trust in leaders, was identified by Metwally et al. (2019) as critical for effective change management. This means that, trust which is intimately related to ethical leadership, influences employee response during change management (Babalola et al., 2016). Ethical leaders always strive to act in the best interest of the employees and avoid harmful consequences. This in turn creates an environment the success of the change initiatives.

Ethical leaders demonstrate certain features and values (Metwally et al., 2019) which are critical in the reduction of stress and chaos experienced by employees in uncertain and changing times. During times of change, turbulence and stress put tension on leaders and this may cause them to compromise their moral principles (Sharif & Scandura, 2014) affecting the employees' perception of the leaders' ethical commitment. Consequently, employees may develop negative attitudes (Vakola, 2014), thereby affecting their readiness to change. Similarly, the leaders who are ethical in uncertain and anxious period of change, may trigger positive responses to the change.

In Africa, literature on ethics at the interface of change management is still very scarce. However, Sub-Sahara Africa is not spared from the failures of change processes experienced globally. In addition to the predicaments surrounding change management, African organizations and economies are experiencing slower development and greater failures due to adoption of leadership models, including change management models that are foreign and do not fit the social context of developing countries (Jones & Blunt, 1993; Mangaliso et al., 2021). These preceding articles are 28 years apart, but still allude to the same challenge in Africa; failure to contextualize the Western models in the social-cultural setting of Africa would lead to the results previously found. It therefore seems that there are deeper issues that affect effective change management in African organizations than what appears on the surface.

## **Application of African Ethical values in leading organizational change management**

The leaders in Africa, consciously or unconsciously, tend to draw their ethics from the complexity of the lives, existence, and connectivity of their culture and the one they encounter within their organizations. Therefore, the leaders' ethical consciousness or lack of it comes about from the contemporary ethical climate of the African continent and from the specific countries in particular. The contemporary African societies are said to be in limbo, after losing their cultural values during colonial period yet not adopted fully the 'new culture' and its values (Van der Walt, 2003). To overcome this challenge, we propose the following remedies:

- Enhance moral formation for leaders through the inclusion of African morality and values (Mawere & Mubaya, 2016; Rwezaura, 1989) in the training curriculum for leaders. Again, encourage the adoption of African *Ubuntu* (Khomba & Kangaude-Ulaya 2013) as a leadership principle guiding all leaders to initiate and oversee change in a humane, just, respectful and compassionate manner.
- Design an African sensitive code of ethics as a mandatory policy for leaders to use during change management in Faith Based Health Facilities given the crucial role that such institutions play in society.
- Borrow from African Traditional ethics and morality to develop a lifelong moral education (Sibanda, 2014) for formation and initiation of employees into the work environment of organizations.

These, in the opinion of this research, will grow leaders' ethical sensitivity in growing an ethical environment, which in turn leads to the success of change management in Faith-based Health Organizations.

## **Conclusion**

The success of any organization lies in the ways in which it manages change. Ethical leadership is an important factor in influencing employee response to change. Leaders have a crucial role in leading change. Again, studies have linked success of change initiatives with ethics, therefore, leaders have the responsibility of setting an ethical tone in the whole organization to ensure successful change process.

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