

Key Findings in Ethical Leadership

A Research Summary by Dr. Shalisa Wright, Ph.D.

ABOUT THE STUDY

This qualitative study explored the experiences of ethical consultants working with organizations in the post-COVID workforce. Dr. Wright interviewed 8 ethical consultants across corporate, healthcare, nonprofit, and government sectors to understand what it takes to build and sustain ethical leadership cultures — and what happens when organizations fall short.

Study Details & Methodology

- 8 participants (4 men, 4 women), ages 30–65, across multiple U.S. states
- Methodology: Generic qualitative, semi-structured interviews
- Analyzed using thematic analysis (Clarke & Braun approach)
- Grounded in Dr. Wright's original Ethical Leadership Theory (ELT) model and Bandura's social learning theory
- Completed at Capella University, June 2025, Ph.D. in Industrial-Organizational Psychology

KEY FINDINGS

1. Ethical Leadership Is Indispensable in Crisis

Leaders who prioritized transparency, integrity, and accountability during COVID-19 were perceived as more trustworthy and effective. Their teams reported higher engagement, reduced anxiety, and stronger commitment to organizational goals — even under unprecedented disruption.

2. Communication and Active Listening Drive Ethical Culture

Participants unanimously identified clear, honest communication and active listening as foundational to ethical leadership. Leaders who created space for employees to voice concerns — through virtual town halls, regular check-ins, and open dialogue — built more cohesive and resilient teams.

3. Generational Collaboration Strengthens Ethical Decision-Making

Younger leaders brought innovation and adaptability; senior leaders brought experience and judgment. The study found that mentorship programs pairing these perspectives produced stronger ethical decision-making pipelines and greater organizational resilience.

4. Organizational Culture Shapes Ethical Behavior

A strong ethical culture functions as a foundation — not an afterthought. Organizations that embedded ethical standards into daily operations, training, and leadership practices were better equipped to navigate uncertainty and maintain employee trust and performance.

“These findings confirm what practitioners in the field already sense: ethical leadership is not a soft skill. It is the operating standard that determines whether teams perform, whether employees stay, and whether organizations endure.”

— Dr. Shalisa Wright, Ph.D., I/O Psychology

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