

**Gordon Institute
of Business Science**
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Exploring the effects of ethical leadership behaviours on team effectiveness

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ABSTRACT

Combating the widespread issues of accountability avoidance, dishonesty, corruption, and regulatory noncompliance within local government necessitates the continual presence of ethical leadership. Scholars emphasise the importance of conducting rigorous empirical research using signaling theory, a powerful approach required in revealing reliable insights. Such efforts are crucial to improving service delivery standards and strengthening good governance.

The research aimed to investigate the influence of ethical leadership behaviours on team effectiveness within local government, focusing on senior and middle managers. Specifically, it sought to understand how these behaviours affect both individual and team performance. The study employed qualitative methods to explore the impact of ethical leadership behaviours on team effectiveness. The data was gathered through conducting semi-structured interviews with senior and middle managers from Gauteng Municipalities. Phenomenology was utilised to explore participants' experiences in depth, providing a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. The study included 22 participants holding different leadership roles across Local, District, and Metropolitan Municipalities.

The findings highlighted that ethical leaders strive to exhibit exemplary behaviours towards their followers by encouraging teams to behave morally and with integrity. The qualities that promote team performance were found to be actively participating in the team journey through promoting growth, empowerment, and motivation. Through the evaluation of the research results and the literature analysis, a comprehensive organisational framework for ethical leadership behaviours and team effectiveness was proposed, which distinguishes between perceptions, beliefs, personality traits, and actions to provide a more cohesive understanding of the ethical leadership behaviours required in local government.

KEYWORDS

Ethical Leadership; Team performance; Individual performance; Team Effectiveness,

DECLARATION

I declare that this research project is my own work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Philosophy (Change Leadership) at the Gordons Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria. It has been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University. I further declare that I have obtained the necessary authorisation and consent to carry out this research.

11 March 2024

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Research Problem

South Africa is currently faced with a predicament concerning the existence of unethical leadership among government officials (Mbandlwa, Dorasamy & Fagbadebo, 2020). This unethical conduct has far-reaching implications, affecting the delivery of public services and eroding citizens' trust. The misallocation and mismanagement of public funds contribute to the prolonged turnaround time for the delivery of services and evoke dissatisfaction among community members. The presence of ethical leaders is crucial for enhancing the provision of public services and reducing instances of public protests (Mbandlwa et al., 2020). Unfortunately, the prevailing situation has resulted in frequent protests in South Africa, with communities increasingly relying on protest action as the only way to effect change. The protests frequently exhibit significant levels of violence and property destruction, hindering progress in numerous developmental areas within the impacted communities (Thusi & Selepe, 2023).

Derfler-Rozin and Park (2022) argue that unethical behaviours such as corruption and dishonesty can incur substantial costs for organisations, impacting both their finances and reputation, including that of their employees. Throughout history, ethics has consistently been recognised as a crucial element of ethical behaviour. Nhedzi and Azionya (2023) suggest that ethical leadership should play a fundamental role in crisis communication. Consistency, reliability, and honest, fair, and respectful communication are the cornerstones of building an ethical organisational climate. Nhedzi and Gombarume (2021) suggest that an organisation's cultural orientation, which prioritises self-preservation over ethical values, can lead to the adoption of transparent crisis communication strategies.

Ethics and sincerity are integral aspects that profoundly shape various facets of an individual's existence. In the workplace, there is a strong emphasis on upholding standards and boundaries pertaining to the organisation, structure, leadership, and teams (Derfler-Rozin & Park, 2022).

South African municipalities have been subject to various unstable coalition governments (Cooperative Governance & Traditional Affairs (COGTA), 2021). In a typical coalition government, two or more parties unite to form a joint majority government when each individual party lacks the ability to do so on its own. Further to this, single parties with absolute majorities may also opt to form coalitions for various

reasons (Dalmases, 2021). The principles of effective, accountable, and ethical leadership that manifest in any management situation and in all spheres of government apply equally to coalition governments, as highlighted in Section 195 (1) of the Constitution of South Africa.

De Jager (2022) clarifies that the formation of a coalition may strengthen or strain principles such as effective, accountable, and ethical leadership, depending on the circumstances. Some writers have described these coalition governments as “marriages of inconvenience” highlighting concerns related to heightened political interference, adversely affecting governance.

The long-term sustainability of a coalition hinges primarily on the political relationships among its members, which are shaped by personal attitudes, political maturity, mutual respect, and leadership styles. These factors may not always be governed by legal regulations and frameworks (Beukes & Visser, 2021). The breakdown of a coalition can be the result of various factors, including genuine policy disagreements or unforeseen events with substantial political repercussions. The recurring failure of local coalitions in South Africa is unnecessary. Enhancing leadership effectiveness, promoting ethical leadership, and fostering improved collaboration can mitigate instability within coalitions (Beukes & Visser, 2021).

1.2 The Research Problem

1.2.1 Business Relevance of the Research Problem

Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA) (2015) asserts that fraud and corruption have risen to prominence in the public discourse, prompting the government to prioritise the fight against corruption in the public sector. Consequently, this priority is rooted in COGTA's 2015 Local Government Anti-Corruption Strategy, which includes facilitating national dialogue on the governance of ethical leadership in municipalities and is based on nurturing community ownership. Through effective investigation and resolution, the strategy seeks to strengthen municipal resistance to corruption and promote trust and accountability.

In 2016, a comprehensive review of corruption and anti-corruption efforts in South Africa was conducted to inform the establishment of the National Anti-Corruption Strategy (NACS) (2020-2030). The resulting diagnostic report identified key barriers in the development of the NACS. These challenges included developing ethical leadership in

every sphere of government, business, and civil society; improving the enforcement of anti-corruption regulations; and ensuring accountability. Furthermore, it was put forth that increasing transparency in all sectors and improving accountability in public procurement will ensure the fair and effective use of public resources (NACS) (2020-2030).

Mngomezulu (2020) puts across that political interference in South African municipalities significantly hampers the delivery of essential services to citizens in need of basic services. Political interference refers to instances where elected officials such as mayors, members of mayoral committees, and councillors attempt to establish a climate characterised by unethical leadership, corruption, and exploitation. Mbandlwa et al. (2020) states that the problem is not the absence of rules, policies, and laws that forbid inappropriate political interference, but rather in the presence of agendas aiming to sabotage service delivery, justice, and fairness, leading to detrimental political interference in local government.

The Auditor-General of South Africa (AGSA) (2023) outlined that robust financial oversight and reliable reporting internal controls are essential for municipalities to effectively achieve their objectives by managing risks associated with human error, fraudulent activities, and financial losses. These controls play a crucial role in mitigating financial losses, minimising wastage, and preventing transgressions while enhancing financial and performance management and reporting. According to AGSA (2023) during the financial year 2021/22, a significant proportion of municipalities, specifically 68%, experienced unauthorised expenditure amounting to R25.47 billion. Of this amount, R13.03 billion was attributed to noncash items, indicating that municipalities utilised funds that exceeded their budgeted amounts or did not adhere to the stipulations of specific grants.

The unauthorised expenditure itself implies unethical behaviours, such as mismanagement of public funds, disregard for budgetary constraints, and potential misuse of funds designated for specific purposes (AGSA, 2023). Such behaviour may also serve as a signal to followers for additional unethical practices within the organisation.

It has been consistently emphasized that municipalities should foster a culture that prioritises adherence to regulations and the implementation of control mechanisms. The AGSA (2023), recommendations included incorporating standardised and efficient accounting procedures for daily and monthly practices as well as establishing effective

and appropriate methods for record maintenance and document management. Additionally, the recommendations include the need for independent evaluations and reconciliations of accounting records, as well as the consistent execution of in-year reporting and monitoring activities (AGSA, 2023).

The Dullah Omar Institute (DOI) (2022) asserts that ethical leaders in local government should be characterised as leaders who are guided by strong morals and values, prioritise helping the community, and set an example for others. These leaders set a good example by ensuring accountability and being accountable. Moreover, ethical leaders in local government should encourage good governance and compliance. They must be competent, committed, enthusiastic, and courageous in making difficult decisions for the betterment of the community (DOI, 2022).

The DOI (2022) is in agreement with the Auditor-General (2023), in that the level of ethical leadership in local government varies drastically between municipalities with adverse/disclaimer audits and those with clean audits. Municipalities with clean audits have substantially higher levels of ethical leadership than those with adverse/disclaimer audits. This distinction emphasises the significance of sustaining moral standards in local government to foster openness, good governance, and public trust in the institutions tasked with serving the community.

Saha, Shashi, Cerchione, Singh, and Dahiya (2020) posit that fostering a robust corporate ethical climate within an organisation can effectively deter unethical practices. In this context, ethical leaders play a pivotal role in both initiating and upholding such a climate within their teams.

In a study conducted by The Ethics Institute (TEI) in 2023, it was found that ethical leadership faces significant challenges within local government. The study identified factionalism as a major obstacle, with competing political parties prioritise their own interests over community needs during council meetings, impeding progress. Additionally, instances of political interference in municipal administration were revealed, alongside a concerning trend of impunity and criminal influence among local government leaders and officials (TEI, 2023).

These findings emphasise the critical need to approach the research problem outlined within the chapter highlighted, emphasising its significance and relevance.

1.2.2 Theoretical Approach of the Research Problem

According to Banks, Fischer, Gooty, and Stock (2021), the contemporary literature on ethical leadership faces challenges due to theoretical ambiguity and lacks an integrated framework, causing confusion about crucial factors such as leadership behaviours and values. This has led to a reliance on patterns in numerous studies about ethical leadership behaviours, making it difficult to establish cause and effect. In order to tackle this issue, Banks et al. (2021) propose that researchers conduct thorough empirical research to obtain more reliable findings. They emphasise the importance of controlling for bias resulting from mutual influences when combining leadership behaviours and ratings. To understand ethical leadership in a behavioural setting, it should be noted that subjectivity and bias play significant roles.

Moral emotions also play a significant role in ethical leadership, serving both as causes and effects. Gunter, Klonek, Lehmann-Willenbrok and Kuffeld (2020) highlight the need to differentiate between perceptions, beliefs, personality traits, and actions to develop a clearer and more cohesive definition of ethical leadership behaviour.

To advance the comprehension of complex processes related to ethical leadership, Banks et al. (2021) recommend creating an organisational framework of ethical leadership behaviours at various levels. This framework can assist in understanding ethical leadership behaviours more comprehensively. To advance the field of ethical leadership and elevate leadership training and development, future research is encouraged to adhere to recommended best practices and utilise robust, unbiased research methodologies at numerous levels, including the individual level, dyad level, and group level (Fischer, Hambrick, Sajons & Van Quaquebeke, 2020; Hughes, Lee, Tian, Newman, & Legood, 2018). Implementing these research practices can improve our understanding of ethical leadership as well as its practical applications.

Banks et al. (2021) emphasise the significance of differentiating ethical leadership from other styles of leadership to prevent inconsistency and promote a deeper understanding of its influence. The research agenda proposed by Banks et al. (2021) advocates for increased empirical investigations exploring the association between ethical leadership and various organisational outcomes, such as staff fulfilment and performance.

Fischer et al. (2020) and Banks et al. (2021) suggest it would be valuable for future studies to investigate the causes and consequences of ethical leadership, exploring its influence on employee behaviour and organisational culture. The scholars recommend placing greater focus on the role of followers in ethical leadership, examining how their perspectives and emotions impact the effectiveness and efficiency of ethical leaders. Consequently, the research agenda urges collaboration between researchers and practitioners to develop interventions and training programmes for ethical leadership, with the aim of enhancing organisational ethical behaviour.

The researcher seeks to bridge the gap in the understanding of ethical leadership behaviours (ELBs) by using a new and presumably more thorough approach, which utilises Signaling Theory, to comprehend the topic of ethical leadership (Connelly, Certo, Ireland & Reutzel, 2011). Signaling theory suggests that individuals use specific behaviours to communicate their ethical traits, motives, and values to others. The proposed concept of ELBs is anticipated to be applicable across the individual, dyadic, and group levels of analysis, enabling a comprehensive examination of ethical leadership behaviours.

Connelly et al. (2011) introduce the concept of signaling theory, which pertains to the exchange of information between two main participants: the signaler and the receiver. Central to this theory is Information Asymmetry, which occurs when one party has greater or superior knowledge over the other. In the context of ethical leadership, leaders typically hold more information and expertise than their followers, prompting followers to seek relevant information. Leaders may strategically indicate their own characteristics or competencies to reduce asymmetry and establish social influence. This understanding of signaling theory offers insight into how ethical leadership behaviours manifest and influence followers in various organisational settings (Banks et al., 2021).

1.3 Research Questions

The study does not have a single overarching research question. However, it delineates three specific research questions for exploration, which are:

- 1) How does ethical leadership behaviours impact individual performance?
- 2) How does ethical leadership behaviours impact team performance?
- 3) How does ethical leadership behaviours manifest and influence followers in various organisational settings?

1.4 Research Aims

This study attempts to investigate how ethical leadership behaviours impact team effectiveness. The study analyses behaviours and character traits that impact the performance of individuals in a local government environment. Additionally, the study aimed to identify the specific qualities that enhance individual performance in leader-follower dynamics and that boost team performance in team-leader relationships. The research seeks to explore the ethical leadership behaviours utilised by senior managers and middle managers to mitigate and manage information gaps and enhance social influence within their teams in an organisational setting.

1.5 Research Contribution

This study contributes to literature in understanding ethical leadership behaviours (ELBs) by taking a new approach inspired by the Signaling Theory, which provides an approach to leadership research that explores how individuals communicate their traits and values through observable actions (Connelly et al., 2011). The study employed Signaling Theory to explore how leaders communicate their ethical behaviours to followers. This conceptualisation of ethical leadership behaviours (ELBs) is expected to facilitate a comprehensive examination of leaders at both senior and mid-level managerial positions, enriching our understanding of ethical leadership experiences and perspectives across diverse organisational contexts. The integration of Signaling Theory into the study's theoretical framework represents a significant departure from traditional approaches to leadership research studies.

Furthermore, this study enhances understanding by providing an organisational framework of ethical leadership behaviours at multiple levels. It underscores the importance of distinguishing between perceptions, beliefs, personality traits, and actions to provide a clearer and more cohesive definition of ethical leadership behaviour (Guntner, Klonek, Lehmann-Willenbrock & Kauffeld, 2020). Aligning with the suggestions of Banks et al. (2021), this study aims to advance the comprehension of the complex processes associated with ethical leadership by creating an organisational framework for ethical leadership behaviours across various levels.

The research results provide helpful recommendations to senior and middle managers on fostering a culture of good governance, ethical leadership and building effective and resilient teams in the local government organisational context.

1.6 Research Scope

Using Signaling Theory, the study seeks to explore the effects of ethical leadership behaviours that are necessary for team effectiveness, specifically in Gauteng Municipalities. The research scope is limited to ethical leadership behaviour as well as team effectiveness as the main constructs within the process of this study. The target population is municipal Senior and Middle Managers within Gauteng Municipalities.

The study utilised a qualitative methodology to investigate the impact of ethical leadership behaviours on team effectiveness. The interpretive paradigm was selected as the research philosophy for this study due to its ability to consider various factors, including individuals' behaviour based on their own experiences, as highlighted by Creswell (2002). The researcher utilised the phenomenology research strategy to investigate human cognition and the subjective experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2013; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2019).

1.7 Research Report's Structural Outline

The research report comprises of seven chapters. An overview of the study's background is provided in chapter one. This chapter further discusses the research's significance to both business and academic literature. The study's scope, research questions, aims, and contributions have been clearly outlined.

Chapter two provides an extensive literature review on ethical leadership and team effectiveness, emphasising the significance of Signaling Theory in ethical leadership. The third chapter details the three primary research questions, tracing their origins from existing literature. In Chapter four, the research methodology and design employed to explore the research questions is detailed. In Chapter five, the research findings are presented. Furthermore, in Chapter six these findings are analysed in relation to the literature review outlined in Chapter two. Finally, chapter seven presents a conclusion and offers recommendations derived from the results and discusses the limitations of the study along with potential avenues for future research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an in-depth exploration of the relevant literature on ethical leadership behaviours essential for influencing and nurturing team effectiveness. It illustrates key concepts in the areas of ethical leadership and team effectiveness, particularly in the context of ethical behaviour. Furthermore, it examines the factors that promote team effectiveness. Moreover, the chapter focuses on Signaling Theory, a new framework for studying leader-follower dynamics, and examines its application at both the individual and dyadic level. The role of the Signalling theory in ethical leadership is also examined.

Overall, the literature review seeks to enhance understanding and clarity regarding the three research questions: (One) How does ethical leadership behaviours impact individual performance? (Two) How does ethical leadership behaviours impact on team performance? (Three) How does ethical leadership behaviours manifest and influence followers in various organisational settings? A visual depiction of the roadmap for the literature review, is shown below in Figure 1.



Figure 1: Literature Review Roadmap

2.2 Ethical leadership

2.2.1 Conceptualisation of ethical leadership

Ethical leadership is characterised by the demonstration of morally upright behaviour in personal actions and relationships. It also involves promoting such behaviour through effective communication, reinforcement, and decision-making (Brown, Trevino, & Harrison, 2005). Ethical leadership involves being exemplary to those you lead, treating

followers fairly and actively managing the moral conduct you demonstrate to your team members. A leader should discuss tasks and key activities with moral relevance (Bakar & Connaughton, 2022). Gill and Caza (2018) further assert that followers are likely to emulate the ethical behaviour they perceive in their leader.

Walumbwa, Hartnell, and Misati (2017) suggests that ethical leadership be implemented at a dyadic level, wherein a leader can demonstrate ethical actions personally and interpersonally within relationships. This approach emphasises a leader promoting ethical behaviour to followers through open dialogue and transparent workgroup decision-making, ultimately contributing to positive group outcomes (Xu et al., 2019).

Brown and Trevino (2006) also argue that leaders can help employees maintain ethical behaviour by providing encouragement and regularly discussing ethical conduct with them.

Brown et al. (2005) and Brown and Trevino (2006) posit that ethical leadership contributes to fostering positive work behaviour among employees, including organisational dedication, effectiveness, and ethical conduct. Furthermore, fairness is deemed a top priority as a key trait for moral leaders. They exhibit this quality by actively listening to their staff, engaging in open and honest communication, and making fair decisions (Al Halbasi et al., 2019). The table below provide some definitions on ethical leadership from various scholars.

Table 1: Summary of Definitions of Ethical Leadership

Scholar	Definitions of Ethical Leadership
(Brown et al., 2005)	“the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making” (p. 120)
(Riggio, Zhu, Reina, & Maroosis, 2010)	Someone who follows the principles of confidentiality, courage, restraint, and fairness (p. 235)
Yukl, Mahsud, Hassan and Prussia (2013)	“Ethical leaders engage in acts and behaviours that benefit others, and at the same time, they refrain from behaviours that can cause any harm to others” (p. 38)

Scholar	Definitions of Ethical Leadership
(Langlois, Lapointe, Valois & de Leeuw, 2014)	“A social practice by which professional judgment is autonomously exercised. It constitutes a resource rooted in three ethical dimensions; critique, care, and justice– as well as a powerful capacity to act in a responsible and acceptable manner” (p. 312)

While these definitions may seem similar, the challenge with these definitions lies in the limited understanding related to the central idea of ethical leadership. The first two definitions conceptualise the definitions by combining the Leaders’ evaluation of leadership behaviours (Fischer et al., 2020). While the subsequent two definitions assess the leaders’ values or motives. This creates confusion between the ethical behaviours and moral values required (Fischer et al., 2020).

Banks et al. (2021) argues that it is critical to understand ethical leadership through practical, observable behaviours rather than abstract concepts. This approach will assist researchers in analysing the influence that ethical leadership behaviours have on specific results by focusing on behavioural aspects.

2.2.2 Practices of Ethical Leadership Behaviours

Executives and managers who embrace ethical leadership are tasked with creating an environment that positively shapes the perceptions and actions of their followers (Brown et al., 2005; Ullah et al., 2021). This entails two crucial aspects of ethical leadership, firstly, ethical leaders uphold principles such as honesty, trustworthiness, motivation, and equality (Jha & Singh, 2019). Secondly, they serve as moral exemplars who influence the mindset of their subordinates through their exemplary leadership qualities. By embodying ethical principles and inspiring their followers, ethical leaders promote an environment marked by integrity, excellence, and trust in the organisations they are within. Thus, leadership that is ethical is not just a moral necessity, it can also be considered a strategic requirement for promoting organisational success as well as sustainability (Jha & Singh, 2019).

Ethical leadership encourages employees to prioritise their physical well-being while also motivating them to use their health to improve their job performance (Javed, Naqvi, Khan, Arjoon, & Tayyeb, 2019). This focus on employee well-being ensures that followers possess the capabilities, knowledge, and skills to perform innovatively within their roles.

Consequently, ethical behaviour within an organisation promotes strong employee relationships as well as a culture of trust (Javed et al., 2019).

Furthermore, ethical leaders are perceived as being open to feedback, encouraging open communication, and foster an atmosphere in which staff are free to share their views and ideas (Freire & Bettencourt, 2020; Stajkovic et al., 2018). This supportive environment encourages increased employee engagement and facilitates the sharing and implementation of innovative ideas and concepts. Thus, ethical leadership benefits not only individual well-being but also organisational dynamics, resulting in increased innovation and performance.

Employee perceptions of ethical leadership are more than just subjective; they have a direct impact on their ability to innovate and perform effectively. According to Hadi et al. (2019), leaders must maintain integrity to build trust with their employees, which fosters positive workplace behaviours. Jha and Singh (2019) depict ethical leaders as embodying qualities such as honesty, trustworthiness, fairness, and genuine concern for others.

Furthermore, ethical leadership is more than just rhetoric; it requires leaders to actively live the values they advocate for within their organisations (Madanchian, Hussein, Noordin & Taherdoost, 2018; Hsieh et al., 2020). A leader's commitment to upholding integrity and ethical behaviour has a significant impact on the behaviour of their followers, ultimately affecting the organisation's overall success and performance (Dimitriou & Schwepker, 2019; Shafique Kalyar & Rani, 2020). Therefore, ethical leadership is more than just a theoretical concept; it is a practical requirement for developing a culture of trust, integrity, and high performance within organisations.

Ethical leadership, according to Brown et al. (2005), is rooted in integrity and serves as a guiding principle for leaders to consistently uphold moral values. Integrity, as emphasized by Engelbrecht, Heine and Mahembe (2017), is a cornerstone of ethical leadership, ensuring that leaders' behaviours align with their ethical principles. Leaders who are highly regarded for their integrity, inspire trust and commitment among their followers, motivating them to emulate ethical behaviour (Ilyas, Abid & Ashfaq, 2020).

Moreover, the commitment to integrity by leaders fosters a culture where ethical choices are prioritised, well-being is safeguarded, trust is built, and decisions are grounded in values (Ilyas et al., 2020). This highlights the influential role of ethical leadership in

shaping organisational culture and promoting ethical behaviour among employees, ultimately contributing to the long-term success and sustainability of the organisation.

Ethical leadership is not just a desirable trait; it is essential for the success and sustainability of organisations. Brown and Trevino (2006) highlight the pivotal role ethical leaders play in guiding individuals, through their admirable qualities and credibility as role models. Employees are not only motivated but also driven to succeed when led by ethical leaders who instil an in-depth comprehension regarding the significance of their work (Madanchian et al., 2018).

Moreover, ethical leadership, as highlighted by Garba et al. (2018) and Shafique et al. (2020), yields numerous benefits, including fostering organisational citizenship behaviours, enhancing motivation and job satisfaction, reinforcing individual and group pursuits, promoting team undertakings, and cultivating organisational dedication. In essence, ethical leadership sets the tone for organisational culture, fostering an environment of integrity and mutual respect that is crucial for achieving long-term success.

2.3 Signaling Theory

2.3.1 Conceptualisation of Signaling Theory

Signaling is the process through which one entity tries to communicate significant information that might persuade the other side to come to a favourable decision (Spence, 1978). Connelly et al. (2011), indicates that the signaler is considered as the person that sends the information (signal), and the receiver the individual to whom the signal is sent. Information asymmetry refers to the information disparity that results in the signaling procedure among two parties. The investigation of distinct signal types and the contexts in which they are utilised forms the basis of signaling theory (Spence, 2002).

Within the framework of signaling theory, various types of signals exist (Fatima, Desouza, Denford & Dawson, 2021). Traditional signals reduce information asymmetry by being both true and purposeful. Conversely, accidental signals inadvertently disclose information without the sender's knowledge. Opportunistic signals are deceptive and intentionally created by the sender, undermining the goal of signaling theory. As a result mixed signals can either raise or diminish information asymmetry by unintentionally transmitting misleading information (Fatima et al., 2021).

It should be noted that the literature on signaling theory emphasises the use of signaling processes in public sector research, however it is a relatively new lens to analyse public sector interaction with people and other stakeholders (Raaphorst & Van de Walle, 2018).

2.3.1.1 Information asymmetries

Connelly et al., (2011) states that information profoundly shapes decision-making processes across households, businesses, and governments. Individuals rely on a mix of publicly available and privately held information to inform their choices. Stiglitz (2002) highlights the pivotal role of information asymmetry, wherein individuals possess different levels of knowledge. This imbalance emerges when specific information is withheld, granting some individuals exclusive access to information that could potentially benefit others if shared. Consequently, information disparities impede equitable decision-making, emphasising the need to address and mitigate such information asymmetries to foster more transparent and informed decision-making across the various sectors of society.

Stiglitz (2000) outlines the importance of recognising information asymmetry, focusing on two key aspects: quality and intent. Imbalance happens when one party is not fully aware of the characteristics of the other. It is also important when an individual is concerned about the actions or motives of another (Elitzur & Gavious, 2003). This emphasises the impact of information asymmetry on various interactions and the importance of considering them when making decisions.

Incentives have long been touted as effective tools in mitigating moral hazards, especially within executive spheres, a notion well-supported by research exemplified in the work of Devers et al. (2007). However, a shift in focus towards signaling theory reveals a deeper examination of addressing information asymmetries related to concealed quality, a critical concern within numerous management inquiries. While incentives primarily address behavioural dynamics, signaling theory offers a nuanced approach to unravelling and resolving uncertainties surrounding the worth of services, enriching the understanding of decision-making processes across diverse contexts.

2.3.1.2 Signal Cost

According to Spence (1973) the concept of signalling costs includes the expenses associated with obtaining, using, or maintaining a signal, as well as the penalties incurred for sending false signals. Essentially, signalling serves as a practical method for

individuals with strong moral values to set themselves apart. When the expense of obtaining a signal that truly represents their value is significant, it prevents lower-quality individuals from pursuing it.

2.3.1.3 Signal Consistency

According to Davisla et al. (2003), signals are basically snapshots that indicate unnoticed signaler quality at a specific moment in time. However, organisations exist in environments that are constantly shifting, and the signalers' and receivers' access to information is ever-changing. Therefore, the signaling theory indicates that signalers will persist in signaling repeatedly to reduce information asymmetry and maintain differentiation (Janney & Folta, 2006; Park & Mezas, 2005).

Balboa and Marti, (2007) emphasise the importance of repetitive signaling, since it can improve its efficacy, particularly when sending different signals to convey the same message. This is inked to a related topic, signal consistency, which is described as the degree of agreement among signals coming from the same source (Gao et al., 2008). Signal consistency can helps reduce the issue of contradictory signals, which confuse the receiver and minimises the success of communication (Chung & Kalnins, 2001; Fischer & Reuber, 2007).

2.3.1.4 Signal Fit

In signalling theory, "signal fit" refers to the effectiveness of a signal in conveying accurate information and how well it aligns with the underlying qualities or conditions it is meant to represent (Connelly et al.,2011). This concept places emphasis on the need for signals to convey the intended message clearly and promote understanding in communication.

2.3.1.5 Signal Observability

Signal observability and effectiveness are dependent on the receiver's attention and ability to extract the intended meaning (Connelly et al. 2011).

2.3.1.6 Signal Effectiveness

Signal effectiveness occurs when the recipient can easily verify that the signaler's quality matches the signal being sent, which enhances communication effectiveness. As such,

communication is more likely to be successful when there is trust in the sender's credibility and the message's accuracy (Mavlanova et al. 2016).

2.3.1.7 Feedback Enhances Signaling Process

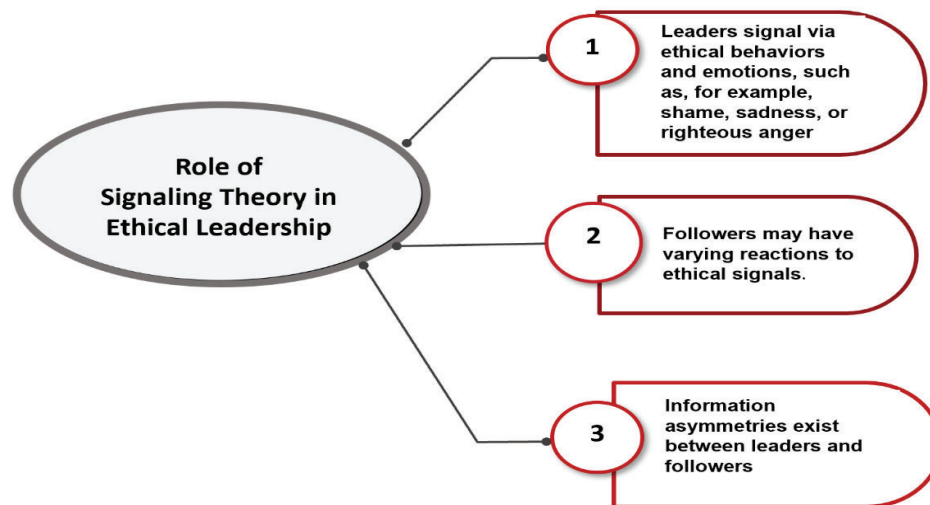
Management scholars recognise the importance of receivers providing feedback to signalers on the effectiveness of their signals, when applying signaling theory in organisations. Gupta, Govindarajan and Malhotra (1999) assert that feedback, referred to as countersignals, enhance the signalling process by reducing information asymmetries. It is not just about receivers understanding signalers; signalers are also interested in understanding how receivers respond to their signals. By focusing on countersignals, signalers can modify their future signals to enhance their reliability (Gulati & Higgins, 2003). The scholars argue that sharing of information between signalers and receivers enhances communication efficiency, particularly in negotiation or repeated interactions (Connelly et al., 2011).

2.3.2 The Role of Signaling Theory in Ethical Leadership

The role of ethical leadership literature and signaling theory to date addresses the following main issues: (1) the idea that leaders demonstrate their commitment to ethical behaviours not only through their actions, but also through the emotions they express. In essence, leaders use their actions and emotions to set an example and communicate the value of ethics within the organisation (Connelly et al.,2011; Spence,1978); (2) that followers may exhibit various responses to ethical signals, which indicates the subjective nature of ethics and morality and how individuals' interpretations and reactions to ethical signals can vary significantly; and (3) in the context of leaders and followers, the theory implies that leaders frequently have greater access to knowledge, skills, or resources than their followers (Connelly et al.,2011; Spence,1978). The main issues highlighted are illustrated in

Figure 2 below.

Figure 2: Role of Signaling theory in Ethical Leadership (Banks et al., 2021, p. 5)



In summary, within the context of the signaling theory and ethical leadership, it is proposed that leaders can communicate ethical messages to their followers through their actions. As such, these actions must be deliberate to activate the process of influence inherent to leadership. Additionally, Banks et al. (2021) assert that the main theoretical framework applicable to the study of ethical leadership behaviours is the signaling theory.

2.3.2.1 Signaling Ethical leadership behaviours in Organisational Context

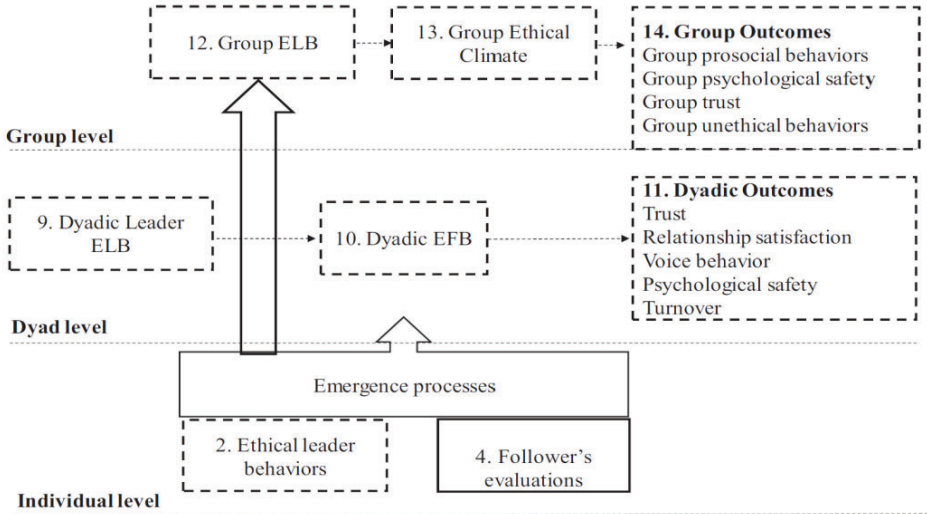
Ethical leadership behaviours (ELBs) are influenced by various situational factors, this includes the ethical or unethical nature of the organisational environment (Peterson, 2002). In an ethical setting, leaders tend to exhibit more ethical behaviour, influenced by social norms and observational learning from others. Cullen, Victor, and Bronson (1993) contribute further insights on social learning, focusing on observing others' behaviour

and consequences within a leader's context (Bandura & Walter, 1997). Wang and Hackett (2020) suggest that leaders might refrain from displaying ethical signals if they anticipate a negative response.

There are moderating factors, including a leader's moral identity, which can motivate ethical signaling even at a personal cost. Leaders may be reluctant to engage in ethical actions if they doubt their effectiveness. Banks et al. (2021) emphasise that situational dynamics and personal considerations shape a leader's ethical signaling behaviour.

2.3.2.2 Demonstrating Ethical Leadership Behaviours at Individual, Dyadic and Group levels

Figure 3: Multifaceted adaptations of individual-level ethical leadership behaviour (Banks et al., 2021, p. 8)



Grooty et al. (2012) found that ethical leadership has lagged, particularly when it comes to the testing of multi-level effects in leadership. Consequently, in a comprehensive review, Dionne et al. (2014) emphasised this point and revealed that approximately 30% of studies on ethical leadership have taken a multi-level approach. This indicates that in comparison to other leadership theories, ethical leadership has not progressed as quickly in terms of exploring its applicability across different organisational levels.

Scholars have indicated that ethical leadership in teams and at the organisational level is scarce. According to Banks et al. (2021) there has been a significant deficit in conversations exploring how ethical leadership encompasses the concepts presented in **Error! Reference source not found.** The ethical leadership behaviours illustrated in

this figure appear in both dyadic (leader-follower relationships) and group (where followers report to the same leader) settings.

This means that the ethical leaders of individuals signal to the dyadic leader of ELB, which these ethical behaviours also influence the Dyadic, which is the team that perceive these behaviours the leader (Banks et al., 2021; Dionne et al., 2018). The authors of this model define Dyadic Ethical Leadership Behaviours “as the extent to which both a leader and follower align and share similar perceptions regarding the leader's Ethical Leadership Behaviours” (Banks et al., 2021, p.10). The crucial insight that ELB provide at both the individual and dyadic levels indicate that the leader acts as a role model and a sense-maker, inspiring followers to act morally and ethically. Moreover, because this is a shared perspective, it establishes a basis of mutual understanding regarding ethical leadership behaviours and ethical follower behaviours (EFBs) for the relationship to thrive (Banks et al., 2021).

2.3.2.3 Ethical Leadership from a Different Theoretical Lens

According to Kia et al. (2019), which explores ethical leadership through an alternative theoretical perspective, social learning theory includes dimensions of ethical leadership. The argument posits that ethical leaders improve employee performance by empowering them and promoting ethical values. Leaders often develop close emotional connections with their team members, fostering a strong sense of personal connection and harmony (Bass & Avolio, 1993). These dimensions are closely linked to signaling theory.

Leaders who prioritise ethics can inspire their followers to adopt and embody their values (Zheng et al., 2022). With regards to ethical leadership, moral values such as integrity, consistency, and trustworthiness are highly valued. Critical component of ethical leadership also includes taking ownership of decisions and actions, along with implementing sufficient processes for incentives to promote behaviour that is ethical and discourage conduct that is unethical. Addressing disruptive behaviours among employees requires implementing suitable disciplinary actions (Nguyen et al.,2021).

An ethical leader's behaviour, characterised by qualities like morality, trustworthiness, care for other individuals, and fairness, can foster a resilient sense of dedication among subordinates towards their careers and success (Ahmad, Fazal-E-Hasan & Kaleem, 2018). Encouraging ethical behaviour in the workplace involves cultivating an environment where employees feel comfortable discussing ethics and proposing

improvements to work processes and conditions (Nguyen et al., 2021). Additionally, there is a belief that employees, under the guidance of ethical leaders, are greatly motivated to succeed (Brown & Trevino, 2006).

Leaders who value ethical conduct recognise the significance of actively engaging and attentively listening to their employees. Encouraging a sense of empowerment and recognition among employees can help them feel valued and motivated to make a positive impact (Gillet et al., 2018). The ethical conduct of leaders is critical in influencing the motivation and performance of personnel in both individual as well as team tasks, as highlighted by Shafique et al. (2020). By combining these motivations with initiatives, one can promote notable enhancements in task performance, ultimately leading to a sense of fulfilment and accomplishment.

Furthermore, ethical leaders emphasise the authentic growth of their employees' strengths and skills (Morris, 2021). Implementing a collaborative approach that highlights leadership integrity can cultivate a culture of accountability among employees in the organisation. This approach motivates leaders to not only concentrate on the short-term results of their efforts, but also on the future consequences of their business strategies (Hsieh et al., 2020). However, it should be considered that the teamwork and skills of ethical leaders extends further than just inspiring employees' present performance (Dust et al., 2018). Ethical leaders give importance to work processes, employee needs, and moral behaviour. Employees should appreciate and have an understanding that success is achieved through continuous effort, as highlighted by Morris (2021).

2.4 Ethical Leadership and Team Effectiveness

Ethical leadership can be described as behaving in a morally appropriate manner and encouraging others to do the same through actions, interactions, feedback, encouragement, and decision-making (Keem et al., 2022). The leadership style can also positively impact employee innovation in various ways.

Moreover, ethical leadership entails promoting positive behaviour in others through effective communication, positive reinforcement, and thoughtful decision-making (Bakar & Connaughton, 2022). Ethical leadership can be categorised into four parts based on this concept (Gill & Caza, 2018).

The first aspect is normatively acceptable conduct, which highlights the importance of leaders demonstrating behaviours and conduct that adheres to the existing cultural and societal standards of relationships with others between leaders and followers in their unique environment. In leader-follower relationships, there are both general and context specific normative aspects to consider. These general aspects include qualities such as integrity, dependability, assurance, impartiality, and duty of care (Gill & Caza, 2018).

The second aspect is communicative conduct, which requires the leader to engage in communicating and receiving feedback from followers to build ethics (Bakar & Omillion-Hodges, 2020). The third aspect is reinforcement behaviour, which reinforces the leader-member exchange dynamic and is based on defined ethical principles and norms for recognising or disciplining followers (Bakar & Connaughton, 2022). The fourth and final aspect is decision-making behaviour, which emphasises that leaders must prioritise ethical considerations while making important decisions (Sarwar, Ishaq, Amin, & Ahmed, 2020).

Nhedzi and Gombarume (2021) offer an academic view on strategic communication, which highlights that the ethical 'moral compass' has evolved into a catchphrase. A 'moral compass' can be described as a framework for ethics that aids in the management and analysis of organisational values (Nhedzi & Azionya, 2023; Nhedzi & Gombarume, 2021). This integration of ethical leadership practices within corporate social responsibility has a crucial role in enhancing brand recognition as well as fostering employee engagement, both of which directly influence the efficiency of operations.

Kim and Thapa (2018) argue that there exists a confident association between ethical leadership and corporate social responsibility, as well as between ethical leadership and both organisational culture and performance. Just as nations possess distinct cultural characteristics, organisations also cultivate their own unique cultural identities (Alkhadra, Khawaldeh & Aldehayyat, 2022). Consequently, the behaviours and attitudes of individuals and teams within an organisation are influenced by the cultural norms, beliefs, and values present within that context (Kim & Thapa, 2018).

Nhedzi et al. (2023), Derfler-Rozin and Park (2022), and Saha et al. (2020) all support the notion that ethical behaviour can be achieved by having ethical brand leadership and fostering a culture that is grounded in principles of ethics, instead of relying on the creation of deceptive perceptions.

Gill and Caza (2018) argue that these factors indicate that ethical leadership depend on the reasoning attributes of leadership, such as the leader's personality, qualities, and moral cognition, as a driver of ethical behaviour or inspiring language. Al Halbusi, Ruiz-Palomino and Williams (2023) highlight the critical role of both leader and subordinate characteristics in the operational dynamics of ethical leadership. The implementation of ethical leadership should be prioritised in all organisational functions. It is further recommended that ethical leadership form part of Human Resource training priorities. Such training will enable the development of knowledge and understanding regarding fundamental moral virtues, such as courage, temperance, justice, and prudence. These virtues aid in fostering a strong basis for the development of moral identity within individuals who occupy subordinate positions (Wang & Hackett, 2020).

Al Halbusi et al. (2023) indicate that the implementation of training and development initiatives should be complemented by a robust performance management system that incorporates appropriate consequences for both ethical and unethical behaviour. This system should be integrated with the principles and practises of ethical leadership. Wang and Hackett (2020) define ethical leaders as individuals who exhibit ethical conduct and develop policies that promote ethical behaviour. These leaders play a crucial role as sources of information, guiding acceptable behaviour and contributing to the establishment of an ethical work environment.

The gaps identified in the literature indicate that there are limitations in providing a detailed explanation of the interaction and communication features of ethical leaders that influence people's perceptions and the degree to which leaders consider communications and behaviours to be ethical (Bakar & Connaughton, 2022).

2.4.1 Team Effectiveness in the context of ethical behaviour

Assessing a team's efficiency involves analysing the key outputs generated by the group based on the characteristics of its members. (Mahembe & Engelbrecht, 2013; Van Wyk, Odendaal & Maseko, 2019). Yoo, Joo, and Noh (2022) investigate team effectiveness by examining the various outputs generated by the team and the impact these results have on each team member. The outcomes of team effectiveness can be categorised into three dimensions, namely, team performance, team satisfaction, and development experiences. Therefore, "team effectiveness" is referred to as the attainment of common goals by all team members working together in a structured and organised manner (Mahembe & Engelbrecht, 2013; Van Wyk, Odendaal & Maseko, 2019).

According to Bakar and Connaughton (2022) ethical behaviour is typically perceived as conforming to accepted norms, whether in personal conduct or in interactions with others. Moreover, this behaviour can also inspire employees to openly discuss ethical issues, a much needed practice within the context of local government.

Teams effectively collaborate to promote active participation, foster innovation, and build trust. This is achieved through clear and open communication with various stakeholders. Furthermore, engaging in initiatives with shared objectives and measurable outcomes can result in inspiring incentives, like long-lasting or impactful recognitions, and accomplishments designed to promote and maintain progress (Dreier, Nabarro & Nelson, 2019). Dreier, Nabarro, and Nelson (2019) assert that adopting a commitment to participating in moderated dialogue as a means of addressing community concerns has the potential to enhance comprehension of the various actors, dynamics, and influences within a system, thereby facilitating the generation of novel ideas.

According to Kim and Shin (2019), every team has experienced success or failure and these experiences have affected the team's decisions and performance going forward. As a result, a variety of contextual elements drawn from past performance, current conditions, and future potential could impact team behaviour.

Grossman and Miller (2021), indicate that when a leader's behaviours are focused on both tasks and people, developing a shared vision and strong leadership may facilitate optimal functionality within a team. These factors enhance the efficiency, adaptability, and overall effectiveness of the team. Good leadership places a strong emphasis on team member development, empowerment, and self-management. (Grossman & Miller, 2021).

Jiang and Shen (2020) highlight that authenticity in leadership necessitates heightened self-awareness on the part of leaders. Self-awareness is understood as the degree to which a leader acknowledges his or her abilities, shortcomings, unique talents, fundamental beliefs, and values, as well as how he or she acts upon them when interacting with followers. This enables balanced processing of information from an objective perspective and increases the likelihood of accurate self-evaluations (Jiang & Shen (2020).

Roberts-Lombard, Makola, Nkosi and Mabhena (2020) reason that ethical and authentic leaders can encourage self-reflection in their teams. Institutions that focus on fostering

strong relationships between their employees, customers, and the community can have a significant impact on customer loyalty in the future. When employees successfully obtain the ability to self-reflect, it leads to notable enhancements in customer satisfaction levels, ultimately providing consumers with a memorable experience.

Jiang and Shen (2020) support the reasoning put forth by Roberts-Lombard et al. (2020), regarding the characteristics of ethical leaders. These leaders make themselves available to others, prioritise ethical behaviour, address risks proactively, focus on the growth of their employees, and uphold transparent and honest communication. Having knowledgeable and skilled staff can significantly improve the customer experience, resulting in feelings of amazement and excitement that could encourage future loyalty (Jiang and Shen 2020; Mahembe, & Engelbrecht, 2013).

Team performance refers to a team's ability to produce a product of outstanding quality, whether it be a tangible product, an outcome, a proposal, or any other result that is appropriate to those who obtain or review it, such as efficiency, reliability, client satisfaction, and competitiveness (Yoo, Joo & Noh, 2022). Team satisfaction focuses on the team's acknowledged input towards the well-being of team members, enabling individuals to feel as though their personal needs are being addressed and their perspectives are valued (Yoo et al., 2022).

2.4.2 Enablers that Promote Effective Teams

2.4.2.1 Enhancing Ethical Leadership through Personal Reflection and Self-Leadership

There is a critical connection between leadership behaviours and effectiveness, which is established by personal reflection and allows workers to participate in proactive behaviours that extend beyond the scope of traditional leadership (Ong, Ashford & Bindl 2023). This assists them in understanding the impact of stakeholder requirements and personal dynamics on their circumstances.

Personal reflection may assist leaders in understanding the requirements of their teams and providing increased leadership which is of a better calibre (Ong et al., 2023). The practice is attainable and advantageous for people who lack standard leadership qualities, find leadership behaviours intuitive or natural, or who do not participate in organised interventions given by their organisation. It is especially advantageous for people who may not be able to engage in formal thought programmes.

Personal reflection stems from a need for introspection during solitary work. Supervision of self-managing teams may, in fact, begin with individual work reflection. Since it is more convenient for aspiring leaders than team-level reflection, which requires contact and cooperation with team members who may not aspire to lead and consequently have less motivation to reflect on the team's requirements (Ong et al.,2023).

Self-leadership is crucial for good performance, enabling employees to perform duties, make decisions, and improved organisational retention (Pillay, Nel & Harunavamwe, 2020). It involves identifying potential and promoting self-direction. Individuals should analyse their thinking patterns, eliminate harmful thoughts, and replace negative self-talk with constructive dialogue to create a positive organisation (Pillay et al., 2020).

Furthermore, positive work engagement is a crucial mediator in the relationship between leaders and teams as it can result in proactive performance where teams work together to identify bottlenecks and bring new and improved approaches to the business unit to improve performance and ultimately contribute to the overall effectiveness of the organisation (Koekemoer, De Beer, Govender & Brouwers, 2021).

Additionally, effective teamwork involves reacting to and accepting changes that directly affect their primary jobs as well as constructively responding to, and implementing, changes that improve the way the team functions. This is another aspect of positive work engagement (Koekemoer et al., 2021). An additional factor that facilitates optimal performance is the notion of contextual performance, which pertains to the voluntary actions undertaken by employees which has a positive impact on the broader organisational, interpersonal, and psychological setting (Jiang & Shen, 2020).

Research has identified five distinct categories of behaviours, which include engaging in non-task related responsibilities voluntarily; exhibiting enhanced levels of optimism in performance; aiding others; demonstrating adherence to organisational policies and procedures even in challenging circumstances; and actively promoting the overarching objectives of the organisation (Jiang & Shen, 2020).

Therefore, it is imperative for organisations to foster a culture that encourages employee to engage in self-reflection. This culture should foster an environment that provides clear directives for the implementation of self-reflection. This practice can lead to an increased range of opportunities for individuals to engage in introspection regarding their own work.

Designing tasks that are linked to higher levels of job autonomy is also of the utmost importance, as it increases the likelihood of opportunities for introspection.

2.4.2.2 Inspirational Motivation and Idealised Influence

Organisations with an adaptable positioning strive to adapt to an agile environment. In such organisations, teams might have visions and goals that are not in accordance with the requirements of the evolving environment. Furthermore, members of a team may hold onto certain values and beliefs that hinder their ability to adjust to changes in their environment (Han, Liao, Taylor & Kim, 2018; Pauer & Eastman, 1997). As a result, team leaders need to encourage fresh perspectives and objectives through motivation and inspiration. By utilising idealised influence, they could shape the values and beliefs of team members to be in sync with the organisation in its entirety (Han, Liao, Taylor & Kim, 2018).

2.4.2.3 Performance Management

Armstrong and Taylor (2020) highlight the crucial role that performance management plays in improving outcomes and understanding performance. The authors emphasise the dynamic nature and importance of setting goals, milestones, and abilities. Schoeman and Chakwizira (2023) along with Armstrong and Taylor (2022) contend that local government systems, being the closest to the citizens and responsible for essential services, need to be accountable and effective. The authors suggest the adoption of standardised performance measures in public sector organisations to improve performance and service delivery.

Effective organisational management necessitates close supervision and the development of employee performance to ensure alignment with organisational goals. Failure to carry out this critical duty can result in a gap between expected and actual performance levels, impeding the organisation's ability to achieve its goals. In agile learning organisations, where competition prevails, the most optimal employee performance is a non-negotiable requirement for operational excellence (Susanto, Syailendra & Suryawan, 2023).

Improving organisational efficacy requires a multifaceted approach, with initiatives aimed at improving employee performance placed at the forefront. Understanding that employees play a critical role in determining an institution's fate is central to this effort.

According to Susanto, Syailendra, and Suryawan (2023) the key to performance management is the ability to meticulously assess each employee's contributions in relation to their assigned duties and responsibilities. Such evaluations serve as the foundation for making informed decisions about the retention or further engagement of employees, particularly those who demonstrate commendable performance (Schoeman & Chakwizira, 2023).

Mabe, Mello, and Makamu (2023) argue that leadership involves guiding a group towards a shared objective. Considering a leadership approach that combines this mindset with actions impacts the specific ways a leader interacts with their team members. Considering how a leader's style can impact employee performance within an organisation must also be considered (Northouse, 2007).

Recognising the strengths and weaknesses of team members is vital for leaders aiming to improve employee performance. Research by Abdelmegeed Abdelwahed et al. (2022) emphasises the need for organisations to prioritise performance enhancement within their workforce. Similarly, according to research conducted by Iqbal et al. (2021), the findings demonstrate the impact of investing in high-quality human resources and aligning them with organisational goals to boost competitiveness and performance. These insights underscore the importance of strategic talent management in driving organisational success (Susanto, Syailendra & Suryawan, 2023).

2.4.2.4 Building emotional resilience

According to Baker and Burrell (2021), emotional resilience encompasses the capacity to adapt one's emotional and physiological responses to varying circumstances. Resilient teams demonstrate outstanding abilities in cultivating robust social connections, effectively leveraging social support mechanisms to strengthen their emotional resilience, and adeptly navigating new challenges.

The focus also lies on the recognition and management of threat responses, the reduction of arousal in the central nervous system, the comprehension of social bonds, and the establishment of trust in fostering relationships and reciprocal exchanges of assistance (Baker et al., 2021).

2.4.2.5 Enhancing Team Behaviours

Fortuin et al. (2021) assert that team-enhancing behaviours are associated with extraversion, work engagement, and emerging leadership. Extraversion is defined as an aptitude for social engagement and active, creative effort. Work engagement has been described as a deep sense of excitement, passion, and full immersion. Emergent leadership refers to team members who exercise great power and influence despite lacking formal authority.

Fortuin et al. (2021) explain that these characteristics are attractive and linked to social superiority and capability. They propose that team-enhancing behaviours be examined and considered in terms of both superiority and favourable performance.

2.4.2.6 Psychological Safety

Newman, Donohue, and Eva (2017) discovered that psychological safety is a multifaceted concept that is relevant at various levels within an organisation. The authors' research suggests that its impact and importance is more noticeable at the team level than at the organisational level, especially in larger organisations (Edmondson, 1999). Additionally, there are various factors that influence psychological safety, both at the individual and team level, which are part of creating supportive environments.

Previous research has emphasised the importance of positive leadership, constructive interactions with teammates, and supportive organisational practices (Carmeli & Gittell, 2009). Research demonstrates that psychological safety is crucial in enabling the advantages present in supportive environments. These advantages can result in benefits such as improved information sharing, employee commitments, innovation, creativity, and improved employee performance (Carmeli & Gittell, 2009; Edmondson, 1999).

Newman, Donohue, and Eva (2017) underscored the significance of psychological safety in high-risk work environments by stressing the importance of open communication and feedback to mitigate errors and foster an environment in which employees feel safe (Edmondson, 1999).

Employees thrive in a psychologically safe working environment where they can freely express themselves and share their thoughts without fear of criticism. They demonstrate mutual respect for each other's skills, display sincere curiosity in one another, approach

interactions with positive motives, and engage in productive conversations (Newman et al., 2017).

In a supportive and psychologically safe work environment, leaders empower employees to tackle conflict or confrontation, and they foster a culture that encourages experimentation and risk taking (Edmondson, 1999). Encouraging psychological safety motivates employees to participate in open communication, express their concerns, and request more feedback, behaviours that may be deemed risky in the context of interpersonal relationships according to Pearsall and Ellis (2011).

2.4.2.7 Employee well-being

The seminal work in this field is Keyes et al. (2005) Psychological Well-Being (PWB), which emphasizes the multifaceted nature of well-being beyond the mere absence of pathology. The findings of the research highlighted the importance of positive psychological functioning in fostering a sense of fulfilment and optimal living.

Positive psychological functioning, also known as psychological well-being (PWB), introduced significant ideas, the first of which is eudaimonia, which posits that genuine happiness and fulfilment result in a life that has meaning and purpose, as opposed to one lived merely to evade pain or seek pleasure. It involves confronting and overcoming barriers, embracing difficulties, and cultivating more profound relationships with oneself and with others (Quick et al., 2013). The second concept is hedonic well-being, which seeks to maximise happiness and subjective well-being through the avoidance of pain and the pursuit of pleasure. The emphasis lies on transient emotions of happiness and contentment rather than on enduring satisfaction or individual development (Keyes et al., 2002).

Psychological strain on the mind can result in a rigidity and diminished capacity to adjust, impeding activities related to innovation and change at both the individual and organisational levels (Staw et al., 1981). Furthermore, detrimental psychological experiences that occur in the workplace have the potential to reverberate negatively into the personal lives of employee, causing further psychological strain (Cascio, 2013; Quick et al., 2013). On the contrary, employee psychological well-being (PWB) has the capacity to propel advancements, maximise productivity, and enable the actualisation of personal capabilities.

According to Hannah et al. (2020) organisations can divide ethical performance into two categories, namely, mandatory, and extra-role/discretionary behaviours. Required ethical behaviours are those that meet basic moral standards, such as honesty and adherence to the law (Trevino et al.,2006). It is essential to distinguish between compliance ethics and moral aspiration, in which organisations encourage members to go beyond basic ethical standards and strive for moral excellence. It necessitates intrinsic motivation. Hannah et al. (2020) proposes that positive relationships, a component of psychological well-being (PWB), play an important role in motivating extra-role ethical behaviour. Positive relationships encourage individuals to willingly uphold the group's values and norms.

2.5 Summary

This study used signaling theory as an approach in tackling the literature gaps observed in this chapter, examining the influence of ethical leadership on individual behaviours that are regarded as ethical and team effectiveness. These gaps must be addressed as from the behavioural perspective, ethical leadership has been poorly studied and not comprehensively understood, according to Banks et al. (2021). As such, this chapter also demonstrated; the role of signalising theory in ethical leadership (Connelly et al., 2011; Spence,1978); team effectiveness in the context of ethical behaviour, and enablers that promote effective teams to providing a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH QUESTIONS

3.1 Introduction

This section of the research report serves to establish the foundational research questions that form the basis of the study. Chapter two's literature review provided guidance for the formulation of these questions, which subsequently impacted their construction. The alignment between these research questions and the objective of the study is explicit.

These questions were descriptive, in that they were designed to describe specific situations and processes in the study (Flick, 2023). Additionally, they included explanatory questions that concentrated on influential factors examined in connection with those situations (Flick, 2023). The aim of the research questions was to comprehend the effects of ethical leadership behaviours on team effectiveness in the sphere of local government and to investigate how Senior Managers and Middle Managers in local government lead their teams through ethical leadership practices that contribute to the success, growth, and performance of individuals and teams.

3.2 Research Question One:

How does ethical leadership behaviours impact individual performance?

Gill and Caza (2018) reinforce the assertion that leadership that is considered as ethical is inextricably related to cognitive attributes of leaders, specifically focusing on aspects such as personality traits and moral reasoning. In other words, they suggest that a leader's cognitive attributes, such as their personal characteristics and ethical reasoning, have a critical role in motivating behaviour that is ethical and in inspirational language in the context of ethical leadership.

Conversely, Bakar and Omillion-Hodges (2020) argue that our existing understanding of ethical leadership has gaps. The present research does not provide a complete explanation of the interaction and communication characteristics of ethical leaders, which are critical in shaping people's perceptions of ethical behaviour (Baker & Omillion-Hodges. 2020). This is emphasised by Bakar and Omillion-Hodges (2020) who highlight the importance of delving further into how ethical leaders communicate and engage, as well as how these characteristics influence followers' perspectives and the extent to which they consider their leader's actions and communication to be ethical.

Connelly et al. (2011) asserts that the role of using signaling theory in ethical leadership, is necessary as followers could have different responses to ethical signals. This shows how subjective ethics and morality are and how people's interpretations and responses to ethical signals can vary.

The first research question aims to investigate the critical behaviours that influence the performance of individuals and how exemplary behaviour has been demonstrated by the leaders occupy roles related to the senior manager and middle manager level in local government. It further seeks to establish an understanding of the learnings demonstrated by their respective leaders. Most importantly, the question seeks to gain some insights into the qualities that promote the performance of individuals in a leader-follower relationship. These qualities are based on the participants' contextual understanding of ethical leadership.

3.3 Research Question Two:

How does ethical leadership behaviours impact team performance?

According to Keem, Koseoglu, Jeong and Shalley (2022), ethical leadership reinforces ethical behaviour in others. Since Ethical leaders not only adhere to ethical norms themselves but also take proactive steps to promote and cultivate ethical conduct within their teams and organisations. There are numerous reinforcement mechanisms for ethical behaviour, including, actions, interactions, feedback, encouragement, and decision-making.

Ethical leaders serve as role models by demonstrating ethical behaviour while simultaneously actively encouraging and influencing others to adopt and uphold similar ethical standards. The idea is to create a positive ethical culture within the team or organisation by setting an example and promoting a shared commitment to ethical values (Al Halbusi, Ruiz-Palomino, & Williams 2023).

Wang and Hacket (2020) are in alignment with Al Halbusi et al. (2022) regarding the view that ethical leadership is based on the premise of leaders encouraging subordinates who perceive them as ethical and moral to be consistent in their concept of self. This assumption is based on the belief that subordinates are more inclined to observe and mirror the behaviours modelled by their superiors, which is a previous version to the observational learning banks (Fischer, Gooty & Stock, 2021).

The question posed in this research aim to investigate behaviours that influence the performance of teams and how exemplary behaviour has been demonstrated to the subordinates of senior managers and middle managers within the teams of local government. The question will also explore whether ethical leaders and individuals signal to the dyadic leader of ethical leadership behaviour, and how these ethical behaviours subsequently influence the dyadic team that perceives them from the leader (Banks et al., 2021; Dionne et al., 2018) It further prompts a comprehension of the learnings demonstrated by their respective leaders. Most importantly, the question seeks to gain some insights into the qualities that promote the performance of teams in the dynamic that exists between teams and leaders. The research question further seeks to obtain an understanding in the shared perspective of how participants think leadership behaviours impact team performance.

3.4 Research Question Three:

How does ethical leadership behaviours manifest and influence followers in various organisational settings?

Connelly et al. (2011) indicates the concept of signaling theory involves the exchange of information between leaders (signalers) and followers (receivers) in the context of information asymmetry (Connelly et al., 2011). Ethical leaders, possessing greater knowledge, strategically use signaling to communicate their characteristics and competencies, reducing information asymmetry and establishing social influence (Banks et al., 2021). This understanding of signaling theory provides insights into how ethical leadership behaviours manifest and influence followers in various organizational settings, highlighting the importance of examining the communication strategies employed by leaders to promote ethical values (Banks et al., 2021).

In addition, ethical leadership and teams, signal reliability is crucial because it impacts the level of trust, credibility, and integrity perceived by team members, stakeholders, and the wider community. When signals are reliable, they reinforce the organisation's commitment to ethical standards and foster a positive ethical culture. On the other hand, if signals are inconsistent or unreliable, it can lead to scepticism, cynicism, and a breakdown of trust within the team. (Banks et al., 2021). Which means that in signalling theory, "signal fit" is about the effectiveness of a signal in conveying accurate information

and how well it aligns with the underlying qualities or conditions it is meant to represent (Connelly et al.,2011).

The research question pursues to understand the ethical leadership behaviours that senior managers and middle managers rely on to reduce information gaps and also increase social influence within respective teams. Simultaneously, it seeks to unpack some of the organisational legislative prescripts and policies within the Local Government setting that have assisted leaders in bridging the information gaps between their team members. The question further delves into how individuals manage information gaps with their leaders in an organisational setting. It aims to better understand their communication, conflict resolution, and adaptability skills when coping with covert activities that may have negative consequences. It also investigates ethical considerations, processes related to decision-making, and the capacity to learn and grow in response to problems caused by information asymmetry within a mutual agreement.

3.5 Conclusion

The research questions remained receptive to fresh and potentially unexpected findings, indicating a willingness to embrace new and surprising results. This suggests that the study was conducted with an open-minded approach, allowing for the possibility of uncovering novel insights beyond the initially anticipated outcomes (Flick, 2023). The chapter has focused on addressing the research questions which served as an anchor for the study. These research questions resulted in responses that provided a deeper understanding and greater insight into the ethical leadership practices demonstrated and adopted by senior and middle managers concerning individual and team performance. The chapter that follows discusses the research methodology, which was used systematically to evaluate and analyse data comprehensively.

4 CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a roadmap in understanding how the research was designed and executed to respond to the questions outlined in chapter three. The purpose of the research is to address the gaps present in understanding ethical leadership behaviours (ELBs) by using a new approach. This approach utilises Signalling Theory, as outlined by Connelly et al. (2011). Signalling theory explains how individuals display behaviours to communicate their ethical traits, motives, and values to others. Qualitative research methods inherently embrace a commitment to openness and a sensitivity to many diverse questions (Flick, 2023). Qualitative research analytical objectives describe and seek to explain the relationships of the phenomena, the individual experiences, and the group norms being examined (Mack, Woodsong, Macqueen, Guest & Namey, 2005).

The study used qualitative methods to examine the impact of ethical leadership behaviours on team effectiveness. Firstly, the interpretivist paradigm was selected as the philosophy for this research study, as according to Creswell (2002) the interpretive paradigm allows researchers to consider a variety of factors, such as how individuals behave based on their own experiences. Phenomenology was the research strategy utilised by the researcher to examine the human cognition and the participants' subjective experiences (Creswell, 2013; Saunders et al., 2019). In addition, this chapter will also provide an overview of the understudied target population.

Data for the research was gathered through carefully conducted semi-structured interviews with Senior and Middle Managers from Gauteng Municipalities. The actual participants were purposefully selected to partake in the study, as these participants lead various departments or divisions and teams within their respective Municipalities. These municipalities were either a Local, District or Metropolitan Municipality. The literature review in chapter two served as a guide for creating and clustering codes for the analysis of the interview data.

4.2 Research Philosophy

The interpretivist paradigm was chosen as the research philosophy for this study. When employed, the interpretive paradigm enables researchers to consider aspects, such as how people behaved based on their own experiences (Creswell, 2002). This philosophy assisted the interpretivist researcher in describing reality in terms of what he or she believes. Furthermore, the interpretivist paradigm allowed the researcher to treat the

circumstances and setting of the research as unique, considering both the specific conditions and the individuals who participated (Saunders et al., 2019). The approach also enables the researcher to focus on the specific subject at hand, avoiding instances of becoming more general, as compared to the positivist approach (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020).

The researcher based the study on epistemology, which is anchored in realism since it focuses on prior knowledge, truth, and one's own embedded beliefs (Creswell, 2002). This philosophical foundation allowed the researcher to spend most of the time with participants to better understand the evidence generated. In practice, the researcher addressed the gap between themselves, and the information shared (Saunders et al., 2019). The primary objective was not to discover one singular, absolute "truth," but rather to assess the credibility of an interpretation in relation to various plausible alternatives (Scotland, 2012). The research epistemology informs how one will theorise meaning and guides the insights that can be obtained from the data.

4.3 Research Strategy

Phenomenology is a qualitative approach to studying human cognition and subjective experiences. It was suitable to employ this method when investigating multiple participants who have the shared common experience of leading teams in local government (Creswell, 2013). Furthermore, this strategy was chosen because it is a qualitative approach that permits researchers to describe the essence of the participant's lived experience (Creswell, 2013). In this case the phenomenon related to how middle and senior managers demonstrated ethical leadership behaviours to individuals and their teams. When analysing data this approach allowed the researcher to identify significant statements and structural descriptions that provided deep meaning to the context (Saunders et al., 2019). Therefore, participants shared what they have experienced.

The strategy emphasises the distinctiveness of individual circumstances (Saunders et al., 2019). The researcher undertook exploratory research to define and clarify unresolved issues. This was achieved by formulating and utilising open-ended questions (Creswell, 2002).

This will necessitate the study of a specific phenomenon at a specific time, as the study was time-bound but exhaustive (Saunders et al., 2019).

The choice of research methodology used was qualitative techniques. With less generalisation the qualitative research aimed to understand a phenomenon through looking at how the senior and middle managers were impacted by the experience of leading Individuals and teams within the context of ethical leadership (Creswell, 2013). This method presented a holistic view, as it focused on capturing the complexity of the diverse situations, as it focused on participants' views and perspectives. Furthermore, through this qualitative research approach, the researcher gained a thorough understanding of each participant's particular situation of leading in local government from the standpoint of ethical leadership behaviours (Creswell, 2002; Easterby et al., 2008).

4.4 Population

The population for the research comprised of Senior Managers and Middle Managers from Gauteng Municipalities. The research participants were purposefully selected to partake in the study as the participants lead various departments or divisions and teams within their respective Municipalities, which included three types of municipalities, namely Local, District, and Metropolitan Municipalities. The population covered eight out of the 11 municipalities based in Gauteng. As a result, the total population of Senior and Middle Managers in 11 Gauteng Municipalities is 482. Saunders et al. (2019) define a population as the entire collection of different respondents who are being studied. The selected population group includes individuals who have led departments, divisions, and teams, as well as those who experienced a specific occurrence of Ethical Leadership Behaviours.

4.5 Unit of Analysis

Phenomenology was selected as the unit of analysis for this study to guide the data collection approach. This method allowed the researcher to pinpoint individuals who have directly experienced the phenomena (Creswell, 2013). Consequently, the researcher carried out semi-structured interviews with senior and middle managers from eight out of the 11 Gauteng Municipalities. In order to maintain the confidentiality of the positions held by the participants, the names of the municipalities have not been revealed.

4.6 Sampling Method and Sampling Size

Purposive sampling was selected as a valuable technique for this research because it enabled the researcher to select participants who can provide contextually pertinent and meaningful data (Shaheen & Pradhan, 2019). This results in an increased understanding

of the research topic and research questions (Shaheen & Pradhan, 2019). The researcher aimed for maximum variation to incorporate cases that were diverse and distinct from one another (Flick, 2023). The researcher sought out senior managers and middle managers who possessed different years of experience in leadership roles, and who came from various professional backgrounds and intentionally considered gender as a determinant factor in the sampling method (Flick, 2023). Sampling techniques were instrumental in choosing participants who could effectively address the research questions and fulfil the research objectives (Saunders et al., 2019).

The proposed sample size at the proposal stage of this research project was to **select 16 participants**. However, the researcher was able to **interview 22 participants**, of which 12 Participant were Senior Managers and 10 were Middle Managers. The sample size is also depicted in Table 2.

Table 2: Sample Size Table

	Type of Municipality/ Category	No. of Senior Managers	No.	No. of middle managers	No.	Total
1	4x Local Municipalities (Category B)	Senior Managers	5	Middle Managers	5	10
2	X2 District Municipality (Category C)	Senior Managers	5	Middle Managers	3	8
3	X3 Metropolitan Municipality (Category A)	Senior Managers	2	Middle Managers	2	4
			12		10	22

The table above demonstrates the study sample size and the municipal category which participants were coming from. A total of 10 Participants came from Local's, eight participants came from the districts and four participants came from the three metropolitan Municipalities in Gauteng. Since the sampling frame was part of the researcher's network within Local Government. She has complete access to the participants as she is a permanent employee of the Gauteng province.

Therefore, the tables below depict the actual participant's where data was collected from during the study.

Table 3: Profile of participants: Senior Manager

Senior Manager	Type of Municipality	Role in Municipality	Years in Local Government Sector	Years in Municipality	Duration in Leadership role	Direct Reports	Indirect Reports
SM-1	District	Executive Director	30 years	2-year 3 months	15 years	10	33
SM -2	Local	Executive Director	20 years	1 year (9 months)	8 years	6	5
SM-3	Local	Executive Director	11 Years	10 Months	11 years	7	715
SM-4	District	Executive Director	19 years	2 years	8 years	5	29
SM-5	District	Executive Director	19 years	6 Years Months	12 years	4	48

Senior Manager	Type of Municipality	Role in Municipality	Years in Local Government Sector	Years in Municipality	Duration in Leadership role	Direct Reports	Indirect Reports
SM-6	Local	Executive Director	17 years	10 years	10 years (2014)	6	300
SM- 7	Metropolitan	Divisional Head	26 years	26 Years	12 Years	8	31
SM - 8	District	Executive Director	11 Years	7 Months	11 years	11	156
SM- 9	District	Executive Director	20 Years	15 years	15 Years	4	11
SM- 10	Local	Executive Director	3. 3 Months	3 Years	12 Years	6	206

Senior Manager	Type of Municipality	Role in Municipality	Years in Local Government Sector	Years in Municipality	Duration in Leadership role	Direct Reports	Indirect Reports
SM-11	Local	Executive Director	14 Years	2 years	12 years	6	505
SM-12	Metropolitan	Divisional Head	4 Years	4 Years	13 Years	5	30

Table 4: Profile of Participants: Middle Managers

Senior Manager	Type of Municipality	Role in Municipality	Years in Local Government Sector	Years in Municipality	Duration in Leadership Role	Direct Reports	Indirect Reports
MM-1	Local	Manager	16 years	16 Years	16 Years	4	5
MM -2	District	Manager	38 years	13 years	13 Years	3	0

Senior Manager	Type of Municipality	Role in Municipality	Years in Local Government Sector	Years in Municipality	Duration in Leadership Role	Direct Reports	Indirect Reports
MM-3	District	Director	37 years	35 years	29 years	3	7
MM-4	Metropolitan	Deputy Director	9 years	9 years	9 years	3	5
MM-5	Local	Director	5 years	5 Years	5 Years	4	12
MM-6	Local	Manager	28 years	3 months	8 Years	3	66
MM- 7	District	Director	14 years	14 years	7 years	5	13

Senior Manager	Type of Municipality	Role in Municipality	Years in Local Government Sector	Years in Municipality	Duration in Leadership Role	Direct Reports	Indirect Reports
MM- 8	Metropolitan	Deputy Director	30 years	30 years	12 years	2	5
MM -9	Local	Manager	5 years	11 months	15 years	6	32
MM-10	Local	Director	19 Years	19 years	9 years	5	15

This study makes use of the signaling theory (Connelly, Certo, Ireland, and Reutzel, 2011). According to the signaling theory, people utilise specific behaviours to transmit their ethical qualities, goals, and values to others. The proposed Ethical Leadership Behaviours (ELB) concept is believed to be relevant at the individual, dyadic, and group levels of analysis, allowing for a thorough assessment of ethical leadership behaviours within organisations.

4.7 Data Measurement Instrument

During the study, interviews conducted with senior and middle managers were guided by an in-depth interview guide, as outlined in the attached **Appendix 3**.

An interview guide safeguards the overarching arrangement and aims of the interview, enabling the researcher to focus on the immediate tasks efficiently (McCracken, 1998). The interview guide had four sections. The first section covered the four general questions which was to understand the interviewee's current position, their years of experience in local government, the number of years served within their specific municipality, and the number of years served in a leadership position. The last question aimed to gain an understanding on the direct and indirect reports of the interviewee. Section two in the interview guide, included questions pertaining to the impact that ethical leadership behaviours have on individual performance. Section three included questions regarding the influence of ethical leadership behaviours on team performance. The fourth section included question intended to gain an understanding in how followers are influenced by ethical leadership behaviours in various organisational settings. The interview guide, which was used to exercise control over the interview process from start to finish, was employed to ensure uniform context and framing for each participant (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012).

The questions were carefully developed by considering insights from the review of literature, specifically in line with the principles of the Signaling Theory (Connelly et al., 2011). The focus in crafting these questions, was to explore ethical leadership behaviours at numerous levels, which is the individual, dyadic and group levels. This approach was chosen because leadership is inherently complex, occurring across different levels within an organisation (Banks et al., 2021).

The extensive interviews enabled the researcher to ask follow-up questions aimed at extracting participants' full perspectives and lived experiences related to ethical leadership behaviours. (Mack et al., 2005). This approach aimed to uncover ethical

leadership's substantial impact on team and individual performance. Furthermore, the researcher effectively probed participants for additional information, increasing the depth and breadth of the gathered information (McCracken, 1998). According to McCracken (1998) the researcher should adeptly leverage the fluidity of the interview, capitalising on any opportunities for exploratory and unstructured responses.

4.8 Data collection process

After obtaining ethical clearance from the GIBS Ethics Committee, the researcher referred to her list of potential participants, of whom she intentionally selected from all 11 Gauteng Municipalities. This list had 27 Participants, which included both Senior Manager and Middle Manager roles. Participation was on a voluntary basis and the researcher distributed consent forms via email to all 27 possible volunteers, along with an introduction email informing them of the research and explaining its objective. The researcher followed up with those individuals who expressed an interest in participating in the study. The researcher then contacted the participants, who signed and emailed back the consent form, to set up the semi-structured interviews. As Flick (2023) states, informed consent is essential to ensure that individuals understand the implications of taking part in a particular research study. This allows individuals to consciously and intentionally choose whether or not to take part. It is crucial to ensure that participants fully comprehend the nature of their involvement (Mack, et al., 2005).

The researcher conducted two pilot interviews with senior management professionals leading departments within the public sector. The aim of this was to assess the clarity and relevance of the 16 interview questions (Saunders et al., 2019). Additionally, the goal was to determine if the interviews could be completed within the designated 30–45-minutes timeframe. The first interviewee was employed by a state-owned entity, while the second belonged to a partner organisation of the Local Government.

The primary objectives of these pilot interviews were to evaluate the researcher's proficiency in establishing a positive rapport, encouraging detailed responses from participants, and demonstrating empathetic listening, elements which are vital to the interview process (Mack et al., 2005). Notably, the researcher gleaned insights on effectively managing the interview process, ensuring an efforts flow of conversation while keeping track of the outlined questions. This experience contributed towards the refinement of the interview approach for the subsequent scheduled interviews (Mack et al., 2005; McCracken, 1998). The pilot interviews indicated to the researcher that all 16

questions were relevant to every aspect of public administration, made logical sense, and could be ask within the duration of 30- 45 minutes.

The researcher scheduled interviews guided by the consent forms that were sent back. Data was collected through Microsoft Teams for 19 participants and three participants requested to have physical in-person, in-depth interviews. The researcher travelled to those respective municipalities to conduct the three in-person interviews that were scheduled to take place over two consecutive days. The researcher used a recorder for all interviews as a back-up to the Microsoft Teams conferencing application. In total, 22 interviews were undertaken over a four-week period. The duration of shortest interview was 25 minutes and 35 seconds, and the longest interview was 1 hour and 11minutes.

All interviews were transferred from the recorder to the researcher's laptop. All 22 audio recordings of the interviews were sent via Google Cloud to the transcription company for transcription. As stated by Flick (2023) and McCracken (1988), the process of transcribing data consumes valuable time and energy that could be better utilised for analysing the data. It is for this reason that external transcribing services were sought. A non-disclosure agreement was emailed to the transcriber, who was requested by researcher, to complete and sign it. The non-disclosure agreement outlined that all information shared and transcribed would be handled with the utmost level of confidentiality.

The interviews were transcribed verbatim, and the participants names were not included in the transcriptions. All the transcriptions and audio recordings have been stored in the researcher's external hard drive and researcher's password- protected laptop.

4.9 Data Analysis and Interpretation

According to Roulston (2010), to represent the "findings" that relate to the "research questions," the data analysis process will used for the interview data, by making sense of the many questions about the processes involved and transforming pages that contain densely worded text from the transcript. This information then becomes coded and packaged into themes. As a result, the inductive methodology was used in the analysis of the phenomenon that is noteworthy and eventually led to the generation of concepts based on emerging knowledge (Locke, 2007).

In order to avoid misquoting the research participants, the recorded interviews were verbatim transcribed. The audio from interview transcriptions should be transcribed,

processed with word processing software, and analysed as textual data, according to McCracken (1988) and Saunders et al. (2019).

Flick (2023) examined transcription management protocols, noted that there is a discernible tendency for the message and underlying meaning to occasionally become obscured within the intricacies of transcription formats and resultant protocols. McCracken (1988) and Flick (2023) proposes a set of overarching criteria for assessing such systems within broken discourse contexts: manageability, readability, usability for learning, and interpretability. This has suggested that effective transcription systems should not only facilitate the practical management of data but also ensure readability, ease of learning, and the ability to extract meaningful interpretations. Transcription techniques can more effectively fulfil their objective of accurately capturing and clarifying the nuances of discourse dynamics by conforming to these standards (Flick, 2023).

The interview scripts were analysed and coded into primary codes on Atlas TI version 23.3.4. The researcher effectively analysed and interpreted the data through thematic analysis, employing methodologies such as inductive and deductive approaches (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Locke, 2007). The deductive method involves beginning with a theoretical framework, testing it against the data, and refining the theory accordingly. Conversely, the inductive methodology starts with observing the phenomenon of interest and derives concepts from the emergent knowledge (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Hence, the researcher employed an inductive approach to coding, utilising semantic coding where the codes directly conveyed meaning and closely reflected the language used by the participants. This choice was particularly suitable given the exploratory nature of the research.

4.10 Data Analysis Process

The following steps demonstrate the systematic process of thematic analysis that was adhered to.

Step One: Data Familiarisation

To gain a deep understanding of the data, the researcher read through the entire data set, which included 22 transcriptions. It is important to identify information that may be relevant to the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For certain transcripts, the researcher chose to listen to audio recordings to gain a more thorough understanding of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Step Two: Initial Code Generation

Codes are considered the foundational elements that will eventually develop into themes. Providing concise and descriptive titles to information relevant to research questions is a key aspect of coding. The data was thoroughly analysed, ensuring each piece received equal attention, while searching for intriguing observations.

The codes were short, it became easier to code for meaning at a semantic level (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Through the data sets some codes were re-used and tweaked where necessary, using Atlas TI (Braun & Clarke, 2022). According to Friese (2019) when deemed necessary it is also useful for the researcher to use the code comment feature to explain what codes mean, and how the researcher intends to use them.

Step Three: Theme Generation

Once all relevant data items have been coded, this process begins. The emphasis moves from analysing each distinct data item in the collection to understanding the overall significance and value of the entire dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The researcher exported the codebook from Atlas TI. for senior managers and the codebook for middle managers to Microsoft Excel and examined and analysed 1164 codes for the creation categories. Then the categories were further combined into 25 sub-themes. This included combining related categories based on shared meanings and deleting and merging some categories. As a result, four themes were generated from the process utilised for data analysis. As show in the figure below.

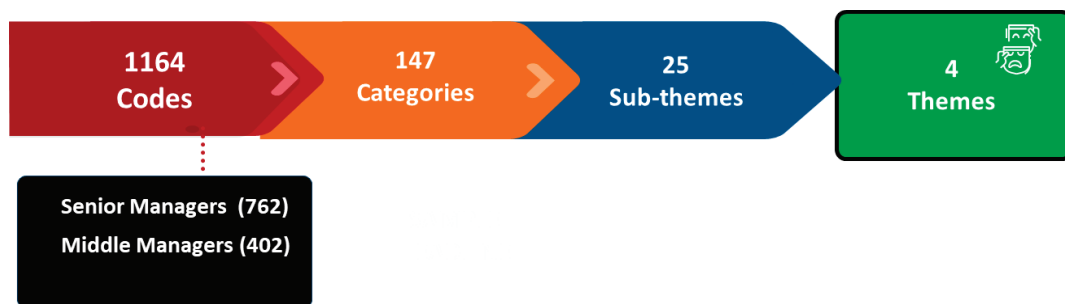


Figure 3: Themes Generated Coding Process

Step Four: Review of Possible Themes

The themes were verified within the individual datasets and across all 22 datasets. Braun and Clarke (2006) have proposed a dual criterion for judging categories, which involves reviewing data based on internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity. The

researcher reviewed data based on the similarity or uniformity of information found within the group of participants for senior and middle managers. The researcher also examined the diversity of differences and similarities within the surrounding context of the local government sector.

Step Five: Identification and Labelling Themes

The researcher carefully analysed the data supporting the theme and chose specific data quotations to include in the study results. This ensured that each theme's points were clearly and convincingly presented (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Every data extract underwent a detailed examination considering the main idea and the research questions. This helped in creating a narrative that highlighted significant aspects of each passage and its connection to the research (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Step Six: Production of the Report

At this point in the research process the themes were defined and verified. Therefore, a categorisation list was prepared for all categories, sub-themes, and themes. Refer to Appendix 4 and Figure 3. Step six can be viewed as the complete analysis of the categorisation of the main themes (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

It's worth mentioning that all 22 transcripts were coded using Atlas. TI version 23.3.4. This software effectively retained all information including codes, quotations, research memos, and comments regarding specific phrases within the quotations (Friese, 2019).

4.11 Data Quality

Flick (2023) cite Lincoln and Guba (1985), which identified key standards for assessing qualitative research, encompassing aspects such as credibility, trustworthiness, dependability, and confirmability.

4.11.1 Credibility

Flick (2023), assert that in qualitative research, credibility is assessed by how deeply the researcher engages with the field over a long period. Therefore, credibility was achieved through triangulation, which was applied using multiple high-quality qualitative sources to enrich the comprehension of this phenomenon (Saunders et al., 2019). In this research, various data sources were collected from participants. The form of triangulation employed here is referred to as respondent triangulation, which entailed gathering data from individuals representing the three types of municipalities selected, namely, Local, District, and Metropolitan Municipalities. According to Patton (1999) triangulation also

involves the researcher comparing what participants said in private, with what they would say in public. This involved examining the consistency of the participants' statements regarding the same topic over time. Moreover, contrasting the perspectives of individuals with differing viewpoints was a necessary aspect.

Data reliability was ensured through the application of a methodological approach in conducting semi-structured interviews. This method maintained the credibility and trustworthiness of the study outcomes by ensuring consistency and rigor for the process utilised in collecting the data (Flick, 2023). The researcher aimed to achieve a high degree of credibility while conducting semi-structured interviews. This was accomplished through the application of clarifying questions, probing questions, and analysing participant responses from a wide range of views or perspectives (Saunders et al., 2019).

4.11.2 Confirmability

The triangulation tactic improved the conformability of the study, as the data coded aligned with practises, behaviours, and the politics of leadership behaviours in local government. The participant's personal perspective, aligned with the qualitative interpretative phenomenological approach (Gaudet & Robert, 2018).

4.11.3 Trustworthiness

Birt et al. (2016) emphasise that the trustworthiness of results stands as the fundamental principle of top-tier qualitative research. After data collection and coding, the researcher took up verified accuracy of her interpretations by returning to nine participants to confirm that findings that were accurately represented in terms of their perspective and experiences serving in local government (Cloutier & Ravasi, 2021). According to Flick (2023), researchers can engage in discussions with peers or colleagues who are knowledgeable in qualitative methods to review and challenge interpretations, ensuring that biases are minimised, and alternative explanations are considered. The researcher engaged with her supervisor and colleagues to clarify some interpretations of the data collected.

4.11.4 Transferability

To achieve transferability of the study, the researcher provided in-depth description of the research questions, the methodological background, the findings, and the interpretations as well as the theoretical approach (Morse, 2015). Furthermore, the

researcher took measures to carefully select an appropriate sample and ensured that participants comprehended the nature and objectives of the study. The research enables the next reader to evaluate how applicable the study is in a different setting where the reader might want to do their own research (Saunders et al., 2019).

4.11.4 Dependability

The rigorous adherence to research methodology ensured the dependability of qualitative study. Based on the theoretical approach of Signaling Theory, the study's design offered a solid data-gathering and analysis platform (Morse, 2015). Raw data, ranging from interviews to memos and theoretical notes were consistently gathered and systematically stored. This technique preserved the original data in its most authentic form, reducing the likelihood of data distortion or misinterpretation (Flick, 2023; Saunders et al., 2019).

4.12 Limitations

This study exclusively concentrated on the domain of local government, specifically within a subset of eight out of the 11 Gauteng Municipalities, from which the participants were drawn. However, the researcher encountered difficulty in securing participants from the remaining three local municipalities. McCracken (1988) posits that a primary challenge arises from the fact that respondents lead fast-paced, highly compartmentalised lives focused on privacy. Even the most cooperative individuals have only a limited amount of time and attention available to offer the researcher.

As the researcher operates within Gauteng province, providing support to Municipalities. It is crucial to acknowledge the potential for data biases influenced by the author's experience and observations from working in local government. Leavy (2014) highlights the importance for researchers to actively examine their own biases which could lead to a limited perspective. The phenomenological research design typically mandates conducting a minimum of 12-18 interviews. However, this study surpassed this benchmark, as a total of 22 interviews were conducted, thus exceeding the set minimum.

CHAPTER 5: RESULTS AND FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

According to Nhedzi and Zionya (2023) ethics ought to be an intrinsic and inseparable component of crisis communication. As the foundation of ethical behaviour, they emphasise the significance of consistency, dependability, and communication characterised by honesty, fairness, and regard for the privacy rights of individuals. Gill and Caza (2018), assert that these fundamental principles indicate that ethical leadership is contingent upon cognitive elements of leadership, including the leader's moral reasoning and personal qualities, which act as catalysts for ethical behaviour and motivate communication.

The research aims to investigate the effects of ethical leadership behaviours on team effectiveness in local government and to establish how senior managers and middle managers lead their teams through ethical leadership practices that contribute to the success, growth, and performance of individuals and teams. In addition, the study concentrated on answering the research questions posed, as well as meeting the research objectives.

In total, 22 interviews were conducted in this study. 12 Participants consisted of Senior Managers and 10 were Middle Managers employed in Gauteng Municipalities. The researcher analysed the data using the Atlas.TI version 23 software. After analysing the data, four themes emerged. The themes covered are: (1) Understanding and Shared Perspective of Ethical Leadership, (2) Ethical Behaviour Facilitates Team Effectiveness, (3) Role Modelling and (4) Strengthening the Integrity of Local Government.

The research findings revealed that ethical leadership serves as the benchmark for integrity and values, guiding the entire team. While integrity, honesty, and transparency remain essential, leaders must also consider the aspect of self-interest. Leading by example and demonstrating expected behaviour and work ethic foster trust and accountability within an organisation. This demonstrates the benefits that organisations stand to gain when ethical leadership is present.

According to Fortuin et al. (2021), ethical leadership can promote teamwork by encouraging specific traits associated with extraversion, work engagement, and emerging leadership. Therefore, the findings further demonstrated that ethical leaders frequently foster environments in which team members feel comfortable expressing

themselves and working openly. This promotes extraverted behaviours such as social engagement and active participation in the team and team activities.

The findings also unveiled that ethical leaders are bold and consistent in the application of policies, legislation, strategies, and plans in the context of local government. As a result, they are also competent in their work and should have the desire to mentor and empower their team members, providing them with opportunities to grow and demonstrate leadership abilities, therefore leading by example by means of shaping future leaders who can promote teamwork and collaboration.

In some cases, the findings revealed unethical behaviour, corruption, and dishonesty in Gauteng Municipalities. These negative actions resulted in significant costs for municipalities, highlighting the importance of addressing ethical issues and advocating for ethical leadership to effectively address challenges such as the mismanagement of finances, a challenge that South African Municipalities often grapple with.

Most importantly the findings were aligned with the research agenda proposed by Banks et al. (2021) which advocates for more empirical investigations to delve into the association between ethical leadership and various organisational outcomes, including staff fulfilment and performance.

5.2 Description of Participants

This study comprised of a total of 22 interviews. Among the participants were 12 Senior Managers which are 'Executive Directors' by title with diverse professional backgrounds. These Senior Managers, designated as s57 Managers under the Local Government Municipal Systems Act 2000, played pivotal roles within their organisations. Additionally, two of the 12 Managers served as Divisional Heads in metropolitan municipalities, and are also classified as senior managers due to their direct reporting to Head of Departments. The remaining 10 participants were the second group, which consisted of Middle Managers; hence the titles range from Directors, Managers, and Deputy Directors from various professional domains. The diverse participants made valuable contributions to the research, drawing on their expertise in team management, dedication to professional ethics, and lived experiences in demonstrating ethical leadership behaviours, encompassing both theoretical knowledge and practical application.

Furthermore, each interview made different contributions to the coding process, which helped in creating the references. Quoting indicates the number of citations produced from each transcript (participants in this instance). The references were collected using Atlas.TI, a software for qualitative analysis. In the table below, it is evident that participants 7 and 16 achieved the most references.

Table 5: Total number of References Per Research Participant

Classification of Participant	Participant	Number references / Quotations
SM-1	Participant 1	73
SM-2	Participant 2	70
SM-3	Participant 3	74
SM-4	Participant 4	107
SM-5	Participant 5	94
SM-6	Participant 6	51
SM-7	Participant 7	117
SM-8	Participant 8	59
SM-9	Participant 9	83
SM-10	Participant 10	46
SM-11	Participant 11	71
SM-12	Participant 12	91
Middle Management		
MM-1	Participant 13	80
MM-2	Participant 14	106
MM-3	Participant 15	87
MM-4	Participant 16	123
MM-5	Participant 17	68
MM-6	Participant 18	117
MM-7	Participant 19	71
MM-8	Participant 20	109
MM-9	Participant 21	46
MM-10	Participant 22	46

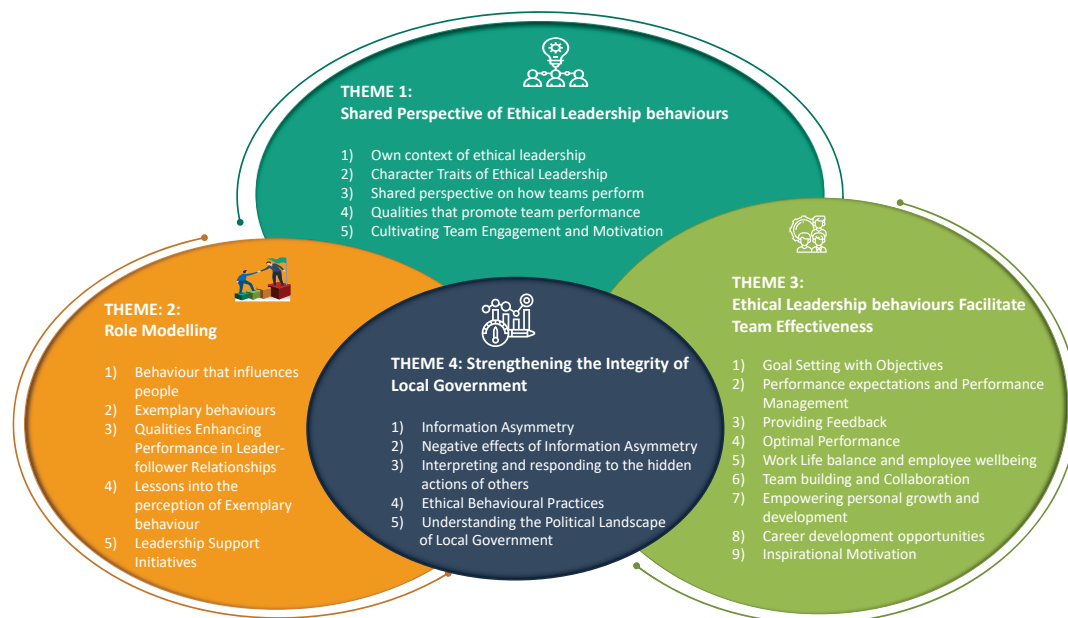
5.3 Key Themes Established

The key themes identified in the data analysis process are illustrated in Figure 4. The figure demonstrates that Theme Three: Ethical Leadership Behaviours Facilitate Team

Effectiveness, with 9 categories, as the most discussed theme. Which is followed by Theme Four: Strengthening the Integrity of Local Government, which has six categories. The third most discussed theme is Theme Two: Role Modelling with five categories. Theme One: Shared Perspective of Ethical Behaviours, with 5 categories, was the least discussed theme.

It should be noted that Theme One and Theme Two emerged as key themes in the results pertaining to research question one and two.

Figure 4: Main Themes and Categories



5.4 Results: Research Question One

How does ethical leadership behaviours impact Individual performance?

The research question aimed to understand key behaviours affecting individual performance and how leaders at the Senior and Middle Management Level in local government demonstrate exemplary behaviours. As a result, two main themes emerged from this research question namely: Theme 1: Shared Perspective of Ethical Leadership Behaviours and Theme 2: Role Modelling which will be discussed in detail.

Theme 1: Shared Perspective of Ethical Leadership Behaviours

5.4.1 Own context of Ethical Leadership

The study findings highlight the similarities between senior managers and middle managers in their comprehension of ethical leadership within their respective contexts. Through diverse contributions, all **22** participants emphasised that ethical leadership hinges on maintaining principled conduct, which entails prioritising integrity and moral values in decision-making and actions. This approach fosters a culture of trust and accountability among subordinates. Additionally, participants indicated the importance of ethical leadership as exemplifying organisational principles through the consistent application of legislation, policies, and guidelines. In essence, **22** participants echoed that ethical leadership entails leading by example and upholding organisational standards with unwavering consistency, irrespective of managerial level. The figure below demonstrates some quotations from participants in unpacking Ethical Leadership.

Figure 5: Own Context of Ethical Leadership (Authors 'own)



The presented figure delineates a clear distribution: participants one, five, seven, and eleven hold positions as senior managers, whereas participants 19, 20, and 22 are identified as middle managers. Further reviews have confirmed the significance of Figure 1 in understanding ethical leadership, as agreed upon by participants 3, 6, 8, and 17.

Participant 3 mentioned that:

“Ethical leadership for me is about doing what is right even when no one is looking first of all. Secondly, ethical leadership is about doing right by others, doing right by the objectives of the organization that one serves, doing your work with honesty without participating in fraudulent and corrupt activities, and then I would say it is around leading by example”.

Participant 6 stated that:

“I think for me an ethical leader is able to take accountability and is also one who respects the values and morals of other people and has high values and morals, and someone who is honest basically. So, in terms of ethical leadership, I would say someone who can take accountability and who is highly honest in what he is doing and who respects other people”.

Supporting the above **Participant 8** indicated that:

“Ethical leadership is being able to lead people and having a group of people that you are providing leadership to go with you on a particular path and achieve certain goals that are set for let’s say for an organisation”.

Reinforcing the above, **Participant 17** indicated that:

“From my understanding, ethical leadership in my context is managing the customer care to the best of my ability, making sure that we deal with resident complaints as quickly possible, making sure that we communicate messages that are truthful, and are as quick as possible and are helpful to the community, as quickly as possible”.

5.4.2 Character Traits of Ethical Leadership

In examining the shared perspective on ethical leadership, insights gathered from senior and middle managers consistently highlighted the crucial role of cognitive character traits. These traits profoundly shape followers' perceptions and determine the extent to which they regard their leaders' actions and communications as ethical. The figure below illustrates the 12-character traits derived from the findings of the participants.

Figure 6: Character traits of Ethical Leadership (Author's own)



Throughout the study, participants mentioned the character traits that an ethical leader needs poses to lead organisations such as the ones that operate within the sphere of local government. The table below depicts the how often the identified character traits were mentioned by each participant.

Table 6: Frequency Table of Character Traits

No	Character Traits	Participants	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12	P13	P14	P15	P16	P17	P18	P19	P20	P21	P22	Total	Percentage
1	Integrity		x	-	x	-	x	x	-	-	x	-	-	x	x	-	x	-	x	-	x	x	x	-	12	55%
2	Honesty		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	-	-	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	19	86%
3	Fairness		-	x	x	x	x	x	-	-	x	-	-	x	x	-	x	x	-	x	x	x	-	-	13	55%
4	Respect		x	-		x	x	x	x	-	-	x	-	x	x	x	-	-	x	x	x	x	-	-	12	55%
5	Responsibility		x	x	x	-	x	-	-	-	-	-	x	-	x	-	x	x	x	x	x	x	-	x	12	55%
6	Compassion		x	x	x	-	-	-	-	x	-	x	-	x	-	x	-	x	-	x	-	x	-	x	11	50%
7	Trustworthiness		x	-	-	-	x	x	x	-	-	x	x	x	-	-	-	x	-	x	x	-	x	x	12	55%
8	Boldness		-	-	x	-	x	-	-	-	x	-	-	x	-	-	x	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	5	22%
9	Accountability		x	x	-	-	x	x	-	-	x	x	x	x	-	-	x	-	-	-	x	x	-	-	11	50%
10	Humility		-	x	x	-	x	-	x	-	-	-	x	-	-	x	-	x	-	x	x	x	x	-	13	59%
11	Consistency		-	-	x	x	x	-	x	-	-	x	-	x	-	-	x	-	x	-	-	x	-	-	7	32%
12	Gratitude		x	-	x	-	-	x	x	-	-	x	x	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	x	7	32%
13	Transparency		-	-	-	x	x	x	-	-	-	-	x	-	x	-	x	x	-	-	-	-	x	x	9	41%

Honesty as character trait was mentioned by 19 out of the 22 participants. This was followed by **'humility'** mentioned by 13 out of the 22 participants which was the second highest character trait identified as the most important. The following character traits received the same percentage of 55% which was **integrity, fairness, respect, responsibility, and trustworthiness**. This means 12 out of the 22 participants indicated

that these character traits are critical to have as an ethical leader. **Compassion** and **accountability** scored 50%. While 41 % of participants indicated that they were transparent as a leader dealing with team members and in conveying organisational information. Consistency and Gratitude scored 32%. Interestingly, among the character traits assessed, **boldness** emerged as the least emphasised by participants, with only 5 out of the 22 individuals expressing a need for greater boldness. Specifically, they highlighted the importance of **boldness** in effectively resolving conflicts, addressing compliance issues, and managing the organisational financial implications.

It is important to indicate that in some instances two-character traits, namely **humility** and **gratitude** were implied in the actual interpretation of the quotations. For example, on humility **Participant 16** mentioned that:

“You don’t become leaders because we are special, I think that is what a lot of people miss. And when they get into an organization with this egoistic type of attitudes, like they are saying ‘when I am here, I deserve it, and God has given me this and the reason why God didn’t give you is because I am special’ or whatever. Now that overclouds people’s thinking and their ability to start being a leader”.

On **gratitude Participant 10** echoed the following;

“It is really important to praise the fish for swimming. It is actually very, very important”.

The quotation related to humility indicates that leaders emphasise that true leadership isn't about seeing oneself as inherently superior or entitled, but rather recognising that leadership is about service, responsibility, and the ability to empower others. **The quotation from Participant 11 recognises** and appreciates the innate abilities or behaviours, even if they seem obvious or expected.

Theme 2: Role Modelling

5.4.3 Behaviour that influences people

The findings indicate that certain behaviours observed in role models significantly impact individual performance. These behaviours were perceived as leadership qualities, which included demonstrating empathy, making decisive decisions, taking accountability for organizational expenditure, and equipping employees with the necessary tools to perform their tasks effectively.

Participant 5 said that:

“But if you are bold enough and you can be decisive and take actions immediately”.

While **Participant 16** emphasised leading with compassion for your constituencies He said:

“The very bottom of ethical leadership for me is compassion, sort of empathy and understanding the people that you are serving. So, you must have a global view of what your purpose is within the organisation”.

Supporting the above, **Participant 20** indicated that:

” Being a moral person is not enough, one needs to be a moral manager as well. While leading others, one has to know and remember that words don't count. It's all about doing the right things”.

Participant 19 alluded that ethical leadership drives cohesive teams to achieve objectives effectively through focus and alignment. The participant stated that:

“If a leader is ethical, if you say you are running a campaign, money gets allocated towards a campaign and money gets used for the intended purpose, that sets a good example. And people get value for money when you have committed to saying”.

Participant 10 stated that:

“But to show my face, to show my support, to ensure that people who are really doing this have got proper tools which deals with issues of safety”. And;

Participant 9 acknowledges that the absence of ethical leadership diminishes service delivery. Cohesive teams, guided by common goals, depend on ethical direction to uphold focus and alignment for achieving objectives effectively. He stated that:

“So therefore, if ethical leadership from our side is lacking 1) it will affect service delivery. Because as a team, you need to have the same people or a group of people that are pushing to achieve the same objective”.

5.4.4 Qualities enhancing Performance in Leader-Follower Relationships

Participants emphasised the critical qualities essential for effective team performance, particularly those that enhance the leader-follower relationship. They stressed the significance of positively contributing to inspire confidence in team members, demonstrating humility, possessing deep knowledge of one's leadership domain, and exhibiting decisiveness in their work area.

There is value in advocating for support on ideas before finalizing written communication. This approach ensures alignment and enhances the effectiveness of conveying ideas to the intended audience. **Participant 10** mentioned that:

“I think communication is important, both written and verbal communication is actually important. I always say in your written communication, try to gather... what is this thing... just to lobby your ideas before you put it in the paper. Try to find out how people feel about what you think, and when you put it in the paper let it be that you have a bit of support from your followers or your team”.

The participant mentioned the importance of having a respectful attitude towards others and being able to learn from others. **Participant 17** indicated that:

I believe that the qualities essential for promoting humility and accountability include raw honesty. By 'raw honesty,' I mean treating all individuals in the department, including colleagues, not merely as individuals one is responsible for, but as valued peers.”

Supporting the above, **Participant 12** mentioned a leader should be:

“Able to inspire confidence and hope in the ordinary people”.

Furthermore, **Participant 22** mentioned that:

“I think you need to be assertive; I think you need to be professional; you need to be knowledgeable about what you are leading you know, you need to have empathy to a certain extent, without being taken advantage of, you need to be decisive, and I think you need to have a rapport with everyone”.

5.4.5 Lessons into Follower Perception of Exemplary behaviour

The findings revealed some lessons and insights into the exemplary behaviours demonstrated by their leaders. The significance of observing such learnings as a follower fosters personal and organisational growth. Participants highlighted learning to respect their jobs diligently, understanding that compassion drives dedication, realising that boldness and decisiveness instil trust, and acknowledging that supportive and appreciative leadership empowers growth.

Participant 14 shared that:

“So yes the exemplary behaviour that I learnt from him is to respect your job, respect the deadlines, respect the procedures, make sure that you do your work in time, make sure you meet your targets you know?”

Supporting the above, **Participant 9** stated:

“I think from these ethical behaviours from the leader, or from the way in which he leads us, I learn that when you have a leader that is supportive, that is appreciative, that is there to guide you, you tend to get the best out of you, that sometimes you never knew you were capable of doing. Because when you look back you think ‘wow, I never knew I am so strong or capable of these things.”

Most participants also emphasised the importance of showing compassion towards employees and recognizing their dedication and hard work. **Participant 12** who said:

“Having compassion for your employees beyond just work, but also your dedication and hard work makes your employees work beyond the call of duty, which obviously makes a whole lot of difference in terms of the mandate of the municipality out there, being able to make sure that things happen, and service delivery is improved.”

Interestingly, **Participant 5** emphasised that bold decisiveness was at the core of ethical leadership. The participant echoed that:

“But if you are bold enough and you can be decisive and take actions immediately, you can sign things without fear, because once you show that behaviour that you are moral enough to take the bull by its horns, you can assume an ethical leadership and people can see also how ethical you are.”

The contemplation of **Participant 22** illuminated the crucial function of leadership attributes like tenacity, patience, and flexibility in nurturing adaptability and resilience in a team.

“I mean there are sometimes things where you will say ‘this won’t work’ because we have done it before and she will be the one who says ‘No, let’s just try again,

let's try a different angle' or something you know? So, it is a bit of tenacity, it's patience also. Also maybe understanding not everyone is always at the same level of thinking the way you think, and allowing sometimes things to you know, be done, without you."

5.5 Results: Research Question 2

How does ethical leadership behaviours impact team performance?

The research question sought to identify behaviours that influence the performance of teams and how exemplary behaviour has been demonstrated to the subordinates of senior managers and middle managers in within the teams of Local Government. It additionally prompted an understanding of the exemplary behaviours demonstrated by them as leaders and their respective leaders. The question also intended to gain some insights into the qualities that promote the performance of teams in the relationship of teams and leaders. Therefore, two main themes emerged from this research question namely: Theme 1: Shared perspective of Ethical Leadership behaviours; Theme 2: Role Modelling and Theme 3: Ethical Leadership behaviours Facilitates Team Effectiveness which will be discussed in detail.

Theme 2: Role Modelling

5.5.1 Exemplary Behaviours Demonstrated

The data indicates that both Senior and Middle managers consistently exhibit exemplary behaviours to their subordinates that are in line with ethical standards and rigorously upheld the values and principles of our organisation.

Participant 1 indicated the importance of being of objective to her team.

"No.2 is objectivity. I must never appear to be biased, even if there are areas of conflict that arise, I must see myself being very objective. Remember also that people sometimes say to me 'you are so strict' and I say 'No, no, this job requires me to be like that because it talks to professional competency and duty or due diligence that I must portray."

Participant 3 emphasised the importance accessibility, which is a crucial aspect of effective management, particularly in service delivery roles.

“So, accessibility is another point which emphasizes managing by being present; you can’t manage by remote control level, especially when you are a service delivery operator”.

Interestingly **Participant 16**, mentioned the importance of shifting focus from managing individuals to managing output, while also recognizing the value of delegation in fostering team growth and success.

“Managing individuals is very difficult, you really will not achieve much; but if you manage output, then.... delegate. I don’t put everything here and try to be a superstar. So, they are there for a purpose and that is how I allow them just to grow”.

Participant 18 mentioned that:

“I don’t have to take it for granted to say ‘write a report’ then that person knows what a report is and how it must be written. Take the person through to say ‘a report is something like this and this is how I want you to write it, and this is what needs to be included.”

Participant 18 indicated the importance of clear communication and detailed guidance in task delegation.

Some findings brought out the importance of being honest to sub-ordinates, the municipal budget constraints, and the application of the organisational code of conduct.

Participant 1 mentioned that:

“I am honest. If your proposal to do this activity is far more than the available budget, I will be honest with you and say ‘No, we can’t do it.’ And I will be honest also in personal issues, if you are not coming to work, you are now and then coming late, I will address you”.

Participant 22 highlighted valuable traits in interpersonal interactions, and said:

“People here do not lean back and say sorry, but if I really have made a mistake or if I have wronged you or said something that I shouldn’t have said, I am a person that will go and say, ‘I am sorry, this was wrong.’ You also need to be humble sometimes.”

The finding demonstrates that **Participant 22** encourages humility and apologises for mistakes.

5.5.2 Leadership Support Initiatives

The findings revealed that some leaders had a proactive approach in addressing challenges and fostering a positive work environment combined with the consistent recognition and support of team members' efforts and achievements. This boosts morale and productivity within the organisation.

Participant 1 stated the leader's commitment to ensuring that legislative compliance is a top priority within the organisation, which was demonstrated by purchasing legislative booklets.

"So legislative compliance for him is a must, it is not like I need to go and refer. He even bought the executive managers the small books containing all the Acts. So I don't have a reason of not knowing what Act 61 of 2003 is saying, because it is just at my fingertips here; I just take that book and read and if I need the Municipal Finance Management Act (MMFA) it is just here, it is a package of these small books but all the Acts that we need in local government, the Systems Act and others, where we then as departments would then have our relevant legislation".

Supporting the proactive approach above, **Participant 4** alluded that:

"So, we fixed the machine for him. And he also had challenges with cleaning other offices because they would not allow him to come in. We engaged with those departments and the end of last quarter the performance increased, the scoring improved, and he was the highest. Wow. And I gave him a certificate. Just a recognition certificate. And there is a shop I know that they are selling trophies, and I bought a trophy for him for R69, and I removed the price, right? I am telling you, that guy from that day always arrived at 7.30am".

Interestingly, **Participant 19** alluded to a different leadership approach that boosted the morale and the productivity of the team. **Participant 19** mentioned that:

"We worked under a divisive leader and the team was not gelling. It was difficult for me to even host the first staff meeting because of the posture that you could witness from employees. So, in the first staff meeting, things were raised. so, as a leader, I said I will extend the first hand to everybody and offer a peace offering, and a new beginning. So, I offered to pay for the Team Building session, to pay for the venue, to pay for the meal, for the refreshments. And in that session, we had a facilitator amongst us whose mandate was to ensure that the objective of the day was met. Which was to bring harmony in the office, ensuring that we do not dwell in the past".

Theme 1: Understanding and shared perspective of ethical leadership

5.5.3 Shared Perspective of How Teams Perform

The data extracted indicated that ethical leadership serves as the cornerstone for fostering a positive work environment that enhances team performance. When leaders prioritize ethics and integrity, they set a standard that resonates throughout the organisation, guiding employees towards principled behaviour. **Participant 13** indicated that:

“From my experience within local government, I feel that ethical leadership encourages teams to be transparent, to be more accountable, to be responsible, and also to be efficient, which are some of the pillars of good governance in terms of local government”.

Supporting the above response **Participant 10** stated that:

“Where I have worked for an institution where they informally so, say we don’t get a clean audit. You know? And that on its own I think did not encourage or influence employees to really perform to the best of their ability, because they know whatever they do will not be appreciated somehow. Our former manager used to say, ‘I cannot praise the fish for swimming.’ But at that particular stage he was right to say that because already we were way in the culture of getting clean audits. But for other institutions where clean audits are just something in the sky, it is really important to praise the fish for swimming. It is actually very, important”.

And:

“So, I think it is important for this thing to be top down and not necessarily bottom up. For employees to really feel they have got to do the right thing they must see that the leadership is doing the right thing and is pushing them to do the right thing”.

The participants’ shared perspective illustrates that when leadership demonstrates a commitment to ethics, it encourages employees to do the same. But most importantly

leaders should be in position to foster a culture of integrity, in praising and acknowledging ethical behaviours which reinforce a healthy culture.

Participant 5, interestingly indicated that:

“If you want to be an ethical leader you must try by all means to make sure that the things you do are of confidence and keep it that way. Don’t take things that are in the document and talk about them around a glass of beer because those are confidential things. What remains within our premises as confidential information must remain there. So that behaviour has shown us that whatever we do can benefit all of us if we treat it in that way”.

Data shows that in the context of local government, ethical leaders need to stay rooted in grounding principles. Since Local government has an everchanging political landscape. **Participant 7** emphasised that:

“Local government is a very, very dynamic environment, especially now that we are in this era of coalitions and the likes, where decisions change overnight, because there is one political party in power and tomorrow there is another political party. Now given that dynamism, one of the things that I have observed is that administrators and management are losing their way, they are losing their path, and this is one of the biggest problems that we have”.

And:

“So, I would say an ethical leader should not be informed or swayed by political dynamics; an ethical leader should be able to say, ‘But this is the law’, whether it is the law in terms of the Systems Act or the Regulations”.

The perspective from **Participant 7** highlights that ethical leaders in local government must remain steadfast in upholding legal frameworks such as the Systems Act and Regulations. As these legislations serve as a compass, guiding decision-making, irrespective of political shifts.

From the data analysis it is key to mention that some participants shared their perspective on challenges around ethical leadership in the context of local government.

5.5.3.1 Leadership Challenges of Local Government:

Participant 12 emphasised that local government is characterised by a culture that often fosters quiet quitting and a lack of inspiration to work diligently. **Participant 12** who affirmed that:

“There's a lot of it because people, and I think it's just the issue of the culture that's been created in the public sector, there's a lot of unethical behaviour where people then just, ..., do quiet quitting and then that's it because they are not inspired to really work”.

And:

“Unionisation in our environment can sometimes lead to a lack of motivation and accountability among employees. When individuals feel secure in their union's protection, they may be less inclined to pull their weight, and nothing gets done. This can create a culture where everyone relies on others to do the work, resulting in tasks being left unfinished. So, I can say, the presence of unions can sometimes foster a sense of entitlement to our employees”.

Drawing from Participants 12's perspective, when workers feel overly secure in their union's protection, they tend to become complacent and less inclined to fully engage in their responsibilities, leading to a decrease in productivity and a lack of accountability for tasks.

Participant 7 mentioned that experienced leaders can impede local government by making ill-informed decisions and failing to address community needs. Participant 7 mentioned that:

“One of the biggest problems in local government is that you have people who are in leadership, but they are not well informed or not well versed with the areas that they are leading”.

5.5.4 Qualities that Promote Team Performance

In the realm of team performance, the data revealed certain qualities that stand out as critical for success in team effectiveness. One such quality is the ability to make decisive decisions while enforcing legislation, ensuring that actions are legal and clear. This notion is supported by **Participant 1**, who mentioned that:

“Be decisive. In whatever, be decisive. Say ‘No, this is not how it is done. This is supposed to be done like this according to this legislation.’ So don't be like a yoyo and be pulled from one end to the other. Be decisive and put your feet down to

say, *'This is what I believe on and this is the legislation and this is what I am going to do and this is what I will focus on and practice going forward'*.

Another critical aspect is the leadership approach that does not impose directives from above, rather tasks and key matters involving the entire team in the decision-making processes. This information was echoed by **Participant 19**

"Listen to others, even the dark and the ignorant they too have their story'. So, if you include every single individual in everything that you do, it gives them the confidence that they are being listened to, it gives them the impression that they too matter. So, when you develop something with them it means they are bound to take ownership of whatever it is that you're doing and run with it".

Supporting the point above, **Participant 2**, who mentioned that:

"When you engage with them, give them a chance to have input in what they think should be done on their process plans, on how the things should be rolled out. And then if you must make input, you do it at the end, after they have done their inputs, so that at the end of the day there will be buy in from them, to say that the product that you came up with is their own product too".

It must be understood that the team's perspectives is critical because they are directly involved in delivering services. This makes their insights invaluable in decision-making.

The participants' information indicated the importance of leaders who actively participate in the team's journey, offering immediate assistance and guidance, promote a more cohesive and productive environment. **Participant 11** who outlined how she pledged to support her team:

"I'm committed to standing by your side through every challenge and helping you navigate any obstacles you encounter on your journey. I'm here to offer encouragement, support, and guidance whenever you need it. Because if I'm only managing you from a distance, I may not realize the difficulties you're facing until it's too late and the damage is done. That's why it's crucial for us to maintain a close relationship and for me to be readily accessible to you. Let's walk this journey together, ensuring that my guidance is always within reach and that we can overcome any obstacles that come our way".

In alignment the notion above, **Participant 16** indicated that adopting compassion as a guiding concept for local government leadership will strengthen relationships with citizens, which increases the efficacy of public services. The participant contended that:

“So, for a leader I think to understand in the context the way we function as local government, you know you must have compassion towards those who are receiving the service”.

Other participants suggested that key leadership qualities that promote team performance are fairness, honesty, accountability, ethics, punctuality, and respect. These traits promote equality, trust, and collaboration, fostering a positive work environment and enhancing overall productivity. **Participant 3** who mentioned that:

“Fairness is one in terms of equality. Two, consultative behaviour. Three is firmness, that is also another one. So, fairness is important, honesty is another one, being ethical is another quality and being punctual – although very much undermined is very important”.

Substantiating the notion mentioned above is **Participant 19** who said:

“Well, I can say, qualities that promote team performance, is being fair as a leader, being accountable, being honest, being trustworthy and practicing equality, treating people equally and most of all, showing respect to your employees”.

5.5.5 Cultivating Team Engagement and Motivation

That data reveals that participants have various ways of encouraging their team members to feel engaged and motivated.

Participant 13 indicated that:

“We also try to discuss changes in legislature, case law, circulars – it is not always practical I have to say, because we don’t meet as often as we would like but during those times I would aim to motivate them to basically speak their mind and also give us an insight, because it might be that certain individuals are more exposed to changes in the legislature or case law than others, and for them to basically give us an insight in terms of this new interpretation or these new amendments”.

Participant 16’s leadership style stands out for its emphasis on recognising and openly appreciating the excellent work carried out by their staff. **Participant 16** mentioned that:

“While we don't have a formal reward system, expressing appreciation for work done is a common practice here. Personally, I strongly believe in the principles of Ubuntu, which emphasise showing gratitude for others' efforts, whether in professional or personal contexts. Whenever tasks are undertaken, it's important to acknowledge the dedication and hard work involved”.

Participant 17 shared an example of creating a sense of inclusion towards achieving workplace goals. **Participant 17** alluded that:

“I have encouraged the team to feel engaged, that really is not something that I try to take too much responsibility for because the team normally has their own cultures that they want to institute, whether it be birthday celebrations, buying each other gifts or they want to do a year end function, so what I will do is I will get involved with contributions or like if it is a braai, I will say ‘hey, I am buying the meat’ and then actually let the team see work like a positive place to exist in”.

In an interesting departure from the norm, drawn from diverse data responses, **Participant 6** said:

“I always tell the first simple thing: your life comes first, and family comes first. Because in the environment we are in we tend to be so engaged to a point whereby we tend to forget that you are human beings. Life matters. Before you can deliver you must be a complete human being”.

Moreover, Participant 6 stated that:

“You must be healthy, and in the right set of minds, and also, I encourage them if they feel unsure about anything, they can come and ask and then I can motivate them in terms of that because when you motivate someone you want someone just to deliver and showcase his best qualities. But he must get the feeling that you are there with him through the process”.

Theme 3: Ethical Leadership Behaviours Facilitate Team Effectiveness

5.5.6 Goal Setting with Objectives

Goal setting with objectives was highlighted during the process undertaken for data analysis, as a vital component for ethical leaders to facilitate team effectiveness. For instance, **participant 8** shared that there is a need for the alignment between individual objectives and broader organisational goals. While **Participant 9** highlighted the importance of transparent communication in uniting teams behind shared goals.

Participant 8 said:

“We need to make sure everyone in the municipality is on the same page, heading towards a common goal. Whether it's about specific objectives or our core values, we all need to understand and share them. It's like we're all in the same boat, rowing together towards our destination, working towards our objectives while staying true to our values”.

In supporting the above practice **Participant 9** mentioned that:

“In my department, I foster eagerness among my team members to learn and grow. As their leader, it's crucial to convey our shared vision, mission, and objectives. You see this mutual eagerness for learning enhances our collective efforts towards achieving our goals”.

While **Participant 10** shared how he encouraged the team discussing previous trends of procurement process. Participant 10 shared the following:

“We sit together, I put a week out to see almost everyone to discuss our procurement plan, we look into our previous year trends, how have we been buying, how have we been responding to calls, how much more – and that always goes with budgeting as well. So, it is not something I do in my office, and I dictate what people need to do”.

5.5.7 Performance Expectation and Performance Management

The findings revealed that ethical leadership behaviours play a big role in encouraging team members to assess and support their teams' progress through short, medium, and long-term goals. **Participant 10:** mentioned that:

“We do it together, with respect to the formulation of the SDBIP, the performance plan, the KPIs, and targets are not imposed to anyone, and everyone would have said ‘this is possible, I am able to do this.’ This is so not possible, in the next year. Then I am able to go back and check the trends and say ‘oh, okay, maybe we must up this target, you said you could do 10 of this but you have been doing 20 of this, can't we make it 30?’and then we agree on this thing”.

Participant 4 affirmed that:

“On a quarterly basis we plan our next quarter performance. Actually, I have ensured that all the managers in my department sign performance agreements, and those performance agreements are taken from my performance agreement, therefore before a contract starts or the first week”.

Participant 14: added that:

“We use our Monday meetings to track performance, so we detect challenges or issues before the end of the quarter”.

In essence the findings revealed that ethical leaders ensure that there are Performance Agreements in place since they are vital for providing clear expectations. These documents detail specific targets, objectives, and responsibilities for each manager. When managers sign these agreements, it signifies their understanding and acknowledgment of what is expected of them during the quarter.

Participant 11 stated that:

“You as an instructor, first self-audit, self-address, self-monitor your department, before other internal departments, like your monitoring and evaluation come in to assess your performance. So, you need to self-assess, self-monitor, self-correct, so that the other people, it is easy for other departments to come and support, what you need to achieve, at the end of the day”.

Participant 11 findings indicated that proactive engagement in self-audit and self-correction aligns closely with effective performance management practices. Since Performance management involves the continuous process of ethical leaders setting goals, assessing progress, providing feedback, and making necessary adjustments to improve performance.

5.5.8 Providing Feedback

The data shows that Ethical leaders prioritizes communication by providing both positive and negative feedback to their teams, fostering an environment where constructive criticism is valued. This was maintained by **Participant 21** who contended that:

“I believe is important is giving and receiving constructive feedback, no matter how good or bad it may sound.

Additionally, the participant further alluded that:

“Because sometimes it is hard to receive negative feedback, you want to defend, instead of listening and taking note of what is being said. Obviously, it depends on how it is being communicated to you”.

In agreement with the argument above, **Participant 21**, mentioned that:

“What is clear here is communication. As I said earlier, communicating, giving feedback, whether positive or negative, you need to give feedback; whether good or bad, you need to communicate. So that on its own then improves the team performance in an organisation”.

Therefore, the responses from the participants implied that providing feedback promotes team performance despite initial discomfort, ultimately leads to improved organisational dynamics.

5.5.9 Optimal performance

Participants emphasised the significance of meeting expectations and consistently delivering work of high quality, highlighting individuals' capacity to excel. This sentiment reinforces the pursuit of zero defects and the importance placed on meticulous preparation, positive attitude, and effective application, all of which drive optimal performance. Striving for perfection and upholding high standards serve as motivational forces for individuals and teams to consistently perform at their peak level.

Participant 8 stated that:

“So just being able to do the things that you are expected to do and do them to that level of quality. And I do believe people have it in them, so I really don't expect anything less, and they know it”.

Emphasising the above, **Participant 7** shared that:

“A quest for zero defect, it is one of the things I have raised with my team, to say ‘This is our tagline. We must be on a quest for zero defect. We note and appreciate that we are in a space where there is a lot of congestion and in those

cases what we are defending in labour relations is we are given a case from health, another one from electricity, another one from water, and the dynamics within the department we are not fully in control of. But when you go into a dispute process, ours is a quest for zero defect in terms of our preparation, in terms of our attitude, and in terms of application”.

5.5.10 Psychological Safety

The findings revealed that ethical leadership promotes psychological safety by instilling trust, fairness, open communication, and empowerment in the workplace. This, in turn, allows employees to feel comfortable expressing their thoughts, taking opportunities, and actively participating in teamwork. As a result, morale and commitment improve, creating a more positive and collaborative work atmosphere. **Participant 1** mentioned that:

“Ethical leadership therefore boosts employees’ morale and encourages dedication and commitment. It also increases positivity and collaboration amongst employees, thus literally promoting teamwork”.

Participant 11’s perception of encouragement stemming from the acknowledgment of the leader regarding innovation and creativity suggests a positive correlation between recognition and psychological safety within the team dynamic.

“He said, ‘I know you are innovative and creative. And that encourages me. Instead of taking that as a negative I then said, okay, it means he believes in me and indeed, let me show him that that decision.... And if he was meaning to collapse and weaken my department, let me take these stones and build a strong wall for my department”.

These findings highlight the importance of recognition in creating a safe space for team members to share their thoughts and skills, which in turn promotes a more creative and effective work environment.

5.5.11 Work Life Balance and Employee Wellbeing

The findings show the importance of organisations that understand the value of combining work and personal life priorities in their workers' well-being. This recognition helps create a positive work atmosphere where employees feel appreciated and encouraged to balance their responsibilities at work and in their personal lives. The results show that promoting work-life balance is linked to higher job fulfilment and retention of employees. **Participant 11** shared that:

“It was a special moment when we celebrated our achievements together, surrounded by our families. They asked if their loved ones could join us on stage, and I agreed without hesitation. Seeing their children, wives, or cousins there made it even more memorable for them. It's not just about work; it's about creating a balance between work and life, and that motivation is crucial. Seeing them in full uniform, receiving their certificates from the Superintendent from the Metro Police Department, was a beautiful moment for everyone involved”.

Participant 20 affirmed that fostering a culture of employee well-being involves leaders prioritising compassionate support, valuing employees' personal lives, and demonstrating empathy. This approach highlights a crucial aspect of effective leadership.

Participant 20 stated that:

“I had an employee who was admitted in hospital for six weeks. While this employee was in hospital, her ex-husband passed on. Then, after a week, the husband has been buried. Then I got a call. ‘Sir, I need to come back to work.’ Then I'm said, no, you need to heal. You were in hospital. While you were in hospital, your ex-husband passed on. Where have you been?’ You see, so I had to take what you call care of her well-being as well. Because I knew that when she comes back to work, she's not going to perform at the level that we require as the department”.

In essence, recognising how personal challenges impact job performance shows the connection between well-being and productivity. Giving employees time to heal acknowledges that rushing back to work could make things worse.

5.5.12 Team Building and Collaboration

The findings showed that team development promotes mutual support and idea exchange, which increases collective strength. Collaboration, which is required to accomplish common goals which are based on effective communication and the use of combined strengths to solve problems effectively. Participant 7 recognizes the importance of attitude, preparation, and a comprehensive approach which suggests an understanding of the value of team dynamics in achieving success.

Participant 7 mentioned that:

“If you are well rounded in your approach, you are prepared, you have the right attitude, you have applied yourself, you will know that we are not going to win this

thing, but you can be able to write a report and say 'Listen here, we are not going to win this thing, let's settle it'.

While **participant 2** confirmed the notion that solo efforts are insufficient for success, the participant emphasised the need of teamwork inside and across teams.

Participant 2 stated that:

"Okay, I mentioned before that we're always working towards certain goals, right? And it's the same thing in local government. But let's be real, as a one man or one woman for that matter, it is not possible to achieve. You need a solid team backing you up, and even they'll have their own teams to support them".

5.5.13 Empowering Personal Growth and Development

Given the demands of Local Government, obtaining a Certificate Programme in Management Development for Municipal Finance (CPMD) MF has become a prerequisite. This qualification is designed to provide learners with the essential competencies needed to apply strategic financial management principles within the specific context of local government. By completing this programme, individuals can ensure the efficient and effective use of public funds and resources. *As a result, Participant 8*, indicated the importance on senior managers obtaining these qualifications, so that senior managers can make decisive financial decisions.

"CPMD Yes. It provides the time – 18 months I think – that the senior managers can acquire just to make sure that they are capacitated and ready to provide the leadership".

The data analysis process revealed the importance of providing support and training to employees who may struggle with various tasks or processes, fostering a culture of continuous learning and improvement within the team.

The following was indicated by **Participant 22**:

" I have in the past set aside time to really go out of my way to say to people, 'if you don't know how to write a report, if you are struggling with documents, if you don't know how to compile an agenda or minutes or whatever the case may be, let's set aside a Friday afternoon twice a month, you pop in and say this is the question I have, and we will do a sort of mini work shop, a mini training, to say this is how it is done, or this is the process, or this needs to follow. If you don't know how procurement works, let me teach you, if you don't know how something works, let's come and ask and learn from that".

Participant 14 suggest that ethical leaders focus on the future. As they support their teams in taking charge and planning to ensure ongoing success.

“I always tell them I am on my way out and you will be here for the next 10 or 15 years, these are the things that you must build a future for yourselves because you will be sitting with this department for a long time”.

5.5.14 Career Development Opportunities

Given that local governments act as developmental states, it is their duty to establish opportunities for professional growth. Local governments support the general well-being and advancement of their communities by funding initiatives that foster professional development and skill development”. **Participant 11** highlighted the following:

“The other project that I’ve done that also encouraged my staff, when I joined, I received a complaint from you know, unions will come and complain to say our constituencies have been moved. There were about 40 by-law officers that were originally appointed as security guards in the municipality. So, after the Municipality had seen that internal sorting of security is not working, then they converted them to be by-law officers”.

And the participant further alluded that:

“I took them to training and for 30 days in one of the Metropolitan Police Department, and when they came back, I made sure that we have a ceremony, a graduation ceremony for them. And when they were taking pictures with me, they asked for pictures, they were crying literally, to say ever since their lifetime they have never graduated in their lives, they only had matric some, and that was their first certificate of being in a formal college”.

Participant 21 reinforced the view of offering various training and developmental opportunities to officials. She mentioned that:

“So, I encourage them to say, ‘Use the bursaries that we have here, use the training that is offered, in fact you are at an advantage because we have learning and development that is inhouse. They can walk in and ask questions. We even had a workshop to show them that it is better to get enrolled in a tertiary institution going through the recognition of prior learning process.”

Both **Participant 11** and **21** both emphasised the importance of ongoing learning and development, whether through formal education or on-the-job training, which can empower employees to expand their skill sets and advance in their careers.

On the contrary **participant 1** echoed the importance of self-determination, confidence and believing the achievement advancement of others. She shared that:

“I encouraged one skilled employee to apply for a performance management position she doubted she qualified for. However, she excelled in quarterly reports and embraced the challenge. Despite lacking formal training, she applied and secured the role. Now, she's thriving in her new position, paving the way for further growth within the department”.

5.5.15 Inspirational Motivation

Other responses from participants showed that ethical leadership behaviours, place a heavy focus on dedication and commitment, which have created an environment in which exceptional behaviour, such as humility and appreciation of individual accomplishments, is valued. This effective leadership style has motivated the teams to routinely meet Service Delivery Integrated Development Plan (SDIBP) targets at a stunning 100%.

Participant 9 indicated that:

“I would say for example in my very department, I found the department performance sitting at around I would say 40 or 50% in terms of achievement of targets, which in your language at a provincial level is related to your APPs, in our environment it is your SDIBP. I mean when I took over the department was sitting at around 40 or 50% and one has managed through ethical leadership I believe, to inspire them and ever since I have been there, we have not performed less than 90 %. In fact, the three years that I have been here, even currently in the first quarter, our achievement of targets was at 100%”.

Additionally, **Participant 4** alluded that:

“Just to expatiate a bit on that, since I came here December 2021, we have been getting 100% performance. All our targets are achieved, and another thing, on the audit findings, for instance I found ICT with 15 findings, we are sitting with 1 now. Only 1”.

Supporting the quotation above, **Participant 8** indicated that:

“In terms of our targets, the first thing I make clear to my team is that we are going to meet our targets 100%, unless you give a reason that is clear to everybody why we can’t achieve this. So, I mean as a cluster that is our target now, that in terms of our targets for all the quarters, we are going to achieve that 100%”.

These findings highlight a culture of accountability and commitment to excellence within the organisation, which is fostered by ethical leadership.

5.6 Results: Research Question 3

How does ethical leadership behaviours manifest and influence followers in various organisational settings?

The research question sought to identify the ethical leadership behaviours that senior managers and middle managers rely on to reduce information gaps and increase social influence within respective teams.

Simultaneously, it seeks to understand how organisational legislative prescripts and policies within the Local Government setting have assisted leaders in bridging the information gaps between their team members. Since Government regulations often intervene in addressing information asymmetry, implementing regulations to ensure fair practices, protect employees, and maintain the integrity of organisational interests.

The question further delves into how individuals manage information gaps with their leaders in an organisational setting. It aims to better understand their communication, conflict resolution, and adaptability skills when coping with covert activities that may have negative consequences. It also investigates ethical considerations, decision-making processes, and the ability to learn and grow in response to problems caused by information asymmetry within a mutual agreement.

The findings revealed that enhancing local governance integrity involves closing information gaps, minimizing harm, promoting ethics, navigating politics, and maintaining transparency for accountability. Therefore, the theme that emerged from this research question is Theme 4: Strengthening the Integrity of Local Government, with five categories namely, a) Information Asymmetry – Reducing Information Gaps b) Negative effects of Information Asymmetry; c) Interpreting and Responding to Hidden Actions of

Others; d) Ethical Behavioural Practices and e) Understanding the Political Landscape of Local Government.

Theme 4: Strengthening the Integrity of Local Government

5.6.1 Information Asymmetry – Reducing Information Gaps

Data retrieved from participants demonstrates that they reduce information and knowledge gaps between themselves and their team members by ensuring regular information sharing with staff, which improves the institution's ability to achieve its goals and objectives. Holding regular meetings with teams, both in person and virtually, aids in promoting open communication and information exchange. Participants also stated that sharing feedback from council meetings helps keep employees informed about important choices and efforts.

Participant 9 asserted that:

"Firstly, for me it is to be able to communicate the objectives of both the institution and the department. Because if they don't know where you want to go, it would be very difficult for them to even toe the line to get you to where you are. That's one".

In alignment with this, **Participant 6**, mentioned that:

"So, you therefore need to ensure that at least you share whatever, be it at an EXCO level where is it that we want to go as an institution, and therefore what then becomes your contribution or role in terms of achieving that".

Participant 11 alluded that providing feedback from council meetings helps keep employees informed about key decisions and initiatives. They stated that:

"That's why I am saying, are not allowed to attend council but through that feedback session that I give yeah, I make sure that I share that information and every manager who's attending on behalf of community development service, every manager or assistant manager who goes to a meeting they know I have said 'you need to bring a feedback to office report.' And share it with everyone so that those who did not attend must have that information as well. Don't be greedy with that information and keep it to yourself".

In line with the quote above, **Participant 9** asserted that:

“So that they are also all on the same level as you are, in terms of the level of understanding. Because if you keep it to yourself and expect them to just follow, surely there is no way. Because they don’t even understand where you want to go. So, it is important to share information, as much information as possible, be it in a group or even individually”.

Participant 13 and **Participant 21** agreed with information mention above, who mention that:

“I filter that information to my subordinates so that we all are on the same page and this regular communication I am hoping has created a buy in from them right”.

Participant 21 mentioned that she closed the information gaps by designating information herself to the indirect reports.

“Yes, calling meetings and also there are instances where I feel that my manager team, there are things they are not communicating to their direct reports”.

Participant 13 agrees with the above, and further mentioned that:

“It is important that from the point of management we sometimes do memos just to update people and circulate it on the notice boards and also through the IT for those people who have emails”.

The information above is supported by **Participant 11** who indicated:

“You know whenever I plan anything, even my two direct reporters, my personal assistant, and my administrative support understand the current task at hand. My receptionist knows, and when I go to portfolio meetings and strategic meetings, I take one of them along. I take them to all my strategic meeting so that somebody somehow must have this institutional memory to close information gaps knowing that our posts are contract-based”.

Participant 10, further explained on a structured hierarchical communication flow, which enables information to flow seamlessly from top-level executive which is the mayor down to different tiers of management and staff. This ensures that crucial updates and decisions are disseminated effectively throughout the municipality, keeping everyone informed and aligned with key developments.

Participant 10 stated that:

“We have got HOD meetings every Tuesday where we get to know what the mayor and everyone thinks and we have got a slot where we just deal with political issues, from the executive. After the HOD meeting, the very same Tuesday there is a mayoral meeting, without fail, and we will deal with both strategic and operational issues. And on a Wednesday without fail, there is either a formal or informal management meeting, where I will be meeting my directors, and obviously we will be communicating decisions and our own planning and stuff like that. But the same directors have got meetings with their section. It is compulsory for them to have a meeting with their section once a month. But the assistant directors and the superintendents have got meetings every week, to discuss or to give direction based on the meetings emanating from our executive meetings”.

Participant 22 indicated that the ability to share new processes and concepts facilitates innovation and adaptation to change.

“Councillors, this is the concurrence that is required for HODs, this is the process. So, it is imparting knowledge, and sometime - because it is talking about closing knowledge gaps right – it is sometimes talking about something that is new. So, if you take the Service Delivery Model, which we have done now, that is a whole new concept in local government”.

Participant 8 alluded that it's important to encourage team members to verify information with senior managers or managers, rather than engaging in gossip which can damage one's reputation and foster negativity within the team and organisation. They stated that:

“Rather than just feeding in the gossip and what have you, which can also be very dangerous. So, we make sure that constantly everybody gets to be informed on time as soon as possible before you get some kind of gaps for what is happening”. I also make the time to even in the corridors, to stop and talk to people. I have this thing of looking at people and ‘I read you’ just to get in touch. But I have also noticed that an information gap can also be very, very dangerous because if there is a gap people can just fill in whatever there is”.

5.6.2 Negative Effects of Information Asymmetry

Some participants have reported various cases that have negative effects of information asymmetry. Information asymmetry erodes trust between parties in a working relationship. When one party feels that they are at a disadvantage due to a lack of information, trust diminishes, leading to friction in relationships and hindering future interactions. **Participant 11** indicated that:

“We are currently embarking on a placement, recruitment process, and there were those other people that my boss did not have a great relationship with that he did not want. So he was, you know, secretly putting together reports to dump them in my department. And I only realized it when those people started coming with letters to say that they are going to community services”.

Participant 12 indicated that ‘integrity risk’ can be regarded as a negative effect. In this case, leaders of individuals may have acted differently as a result of knowing that they won’t bear the full consequences of their actions.

“But what you can hold high is that you communicated the right thing. And you don’t change. You don’t change your views of what the issue is. Even after the audit committee, you still go back to the people and say, guys, remember you never gave evidence for that achievement. Can I have it? You know? Despite what would have been in the audit committee pack. And your constant follows up of the issue is very important so that people know that despite what would have happened and reported, you keep your integrity”.

In situations where one party has more information than the other, the less informed party may end up making decisions based on incomplete or misleading information. This can lead to adverse selection, where the party with better information selects outcomes that are unfavourable for the less informed party. **Participant 4** shared a brief scenario of a lived experience which contributed positively to the study.

“With the recommendation. I then quoted legislation that in terms of this section HODs are appointed by council in consultation with the MM, in terms of this section a manager must within 60 days sign a performance contract, failure of which is automatic termination, right? Under the recommendation then I said to the MM, ‘Now that this thing did not happen, even the salary negotiation which the HOD is mentioning, did not happen. Submit a report to council with the recommendation that you either terminate or investigate further and you will submit a report back to the council.’ And I gave the MM that report. And I want to

be honest with you, that report never saw its way to council. It was never submitted to council, but what gave me some form of relaxation and comfort was that I had done my part. But I was viewed as the HOD who wanted another HOD to lose their job. Because you will think like these people don't value the truth. The perception outside is that this HOD wants this one to lose the job".

Therefore, the concept of adverse selection is demonstrated by the failure to submit the report to council. This meant that council was deprived of crucial information needed to make informed decisions about the performance contract and potential termination.

5.6.3 Interpreting and Responding to the Hidden Actions of Others

Findings from Participants 15 and 18 revealed how these middle managers responded to hidden actions that were conducted by their leaders specifically in aspects of non-compliance and confronting unethical behaviour through whistle blowing despite risk of victimisation. **Participant 15** indicated that:

"But the contract was signed on 8 million and not 8.5 million as we had already received. So, there was automatically that percentage on that R500 000 which they were supposed to get commission for mahala because they haven't done anything for it, and then also some other discrepancies within the contract which we identified. Then we reported it to the Section 80 committee and then the Council as well as the Municipal Manager then, and from then it was taken forward and ultimately unfortunately the CFO and the Municipal Manager left".

Reinforcing the response taken above, **Participant 18** addresses a non-compliance matter despite of the risk of victimisation.

"My CFO spoke with the Executive Director, that I should be transferred this side. And I corrected it. I said to her you know what, the transfers must be done in writing, no. 1. Please do that. Go back and tell your supervisor to make a request in writing. Secondly, we need to check whether we have that position, or we don't have that position. Because when you come here which position are you going to fill? Thirdly, we have people acting on those positions and we need to develop those people."

The findings from **participant 15** and **18** revealed that, even though there are regulations, standard operating procedures, and governance legislation, senior managers to whom these middle managers report have communicated forms of

noncompliance and unethical intentions. Such non-compliance signals and ethical ambiguities jeopardise the organisation's integrity and reputation.

5.6.4 Ethical Behavioural Practices

5.6.4.1 Government Legislation and policies

The concept of a developmental state, as outlined in the South African Constitution of 1996, refers to a paradigm in which municipalities have a clear and important role in achieving economic and social development. Local government, as correctly defined, is a governing tier entrenched inside communities that is well-equipped to respond to the localised requirements, interests, and aspirations of its population. As Van der Walddt (2006) points out, local government is at the core site of service delivery, interacting with citizens and organising service provision.

The findings reveal that local government stands out as an extensively legislated spheres of government. Therefore, participants indicated that Local government legislations and policies have assisted them as leaders in closing the knowledge gaps between themselves and their team members. Participant 1- 22 have contributed to the information depicted in the table below.

Table 7: Government Legislation & Policies utilised by Research Participants

Local Government Legislations	Strategies and Policies
Local Government: Municipal Systems Act 32 of 2000	Code of Conduct for Public Servants
Local Government: Municipal Staff Regulations, 2021	National Anti-Corruption Strategy-2020-2030
Municipal Finance Management Act 56 of 2003	Local Government Strategy 2015
Local Government: Municipal Structures Act 1998	Local Economic Development Strategy
National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act 10 of 2004	Gauteng-Collective-Agreement-Conditions-of-Service
Skills Development Act 97 of 1998	Risk Management Policy
Labour Relations Act 66 of 1995	Ethics management Strategy
Occupational Health and Safety Act 85 of 1993	Main Collective Agreements

Civil Aviation Act 13 of 2009	Injury on Duty Policy
Frameworks	Zero Tolerance policies
Strike and Business Continuity Framework	Customer Relations policy
South Africa's National Policy Framework for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality	Public Participation policy
National Spatial Development Framework 2050	Ethics management Strategy
National Industrial Policy Framework (NIPF)	Labour Relation policies, Recruitment policies,
Skills Development Framework	Sexual harassment policy

The data in the table illustrates the significant reliance of respondents on legislative regulations and policies within their respective areas of work. Moreover, it reveals that workshops, training sessions, conferences, and information-sharing meetings have played pivotal roles in disseminating knowledge concerning ethical behaviour and accountability. These initiatives are instrumental in fostering an ethical culture within municipalities, aiming to cultivate a professional environment characterized by clarity and adherence to sound principles. **Participant 10** indicated that:

I make sure that all the directors have been to that training, the next step is all assistant directors have been there, the next step I make sure that superintendents have been there, and the last target which I am dealing with now is the foremen. Because this is where issues of discipline start as well, the escalation process starts at that point.

Participant 10, further contributed towards highlighting the importance of workshops and training sessions in addressing internal disciplinary processes, to ensure accountability and awareness to prevent potential conflicts and maintain professionalism.

“So, besides the fact that there are these workshops, people are taken to training as well. There is also training for how to conduct a disciplinary hearing, how to be a prosecutor or a presiding officer. Because we do all these things internally, we don’t have an external to deal with that. And that is because we got a bit of resistance, people saying ‘I don’t know how to prosecute’. Some don’t want to prosecute their own colleagues. So, we have addressed those kinds of issues and I think that has closed the gap and they are well aware, if you do not do it

someone will do it unto you. If you don't discipline your immediate subordinate, your boss will be on your case".

Participant 19 alluded to the provision of training on grievance procedures and disciplinary issues to supervisors as crucial aspect of the human resources function. As the lack of knowledge may lead to misunderstandings and ineffective handling of grievances, with potential dire consequences. **Participant 19** stated that:

"The last roadshow that we held a roadshow on labour relations. It was grievance procedure and issues of discipline. Because supervisors didn't know how to charge a person, how to handle a grievance. Some refused to accept the grievance, but it's solely because they didn't know, and they didn't understand".

The findings from **Participant 19** further highlight the importance of taking councillors on workshops for the me to be aware and understand the importance of organisational policies. They stated that:

"Two weeks ago, we also had a workshop for counsellors on the ill health policy. We had a workshop on substance abuse policy because there are employees who are abusing substance. And supervisors don't know what to do when this person comes drunk every Monday, when this person absents themselves. So, we have standard operating procedures within the same policies, that we took the politicians through, and the next round will be directed at senior management and down to every level".

Participant 13 brings a new view that within the legal and labour relations departments, the issue of training is not given much emphasis, leading to heavy reliance on external stakeholders for training support.

"Skills transfer for the legal department and labour relations department is not high on the list of priorities. So, we are very dependent on the different stakeholders like COGTA and SALGA to assist us in terms of training".

Participant 7 referred to the importance of preventing the municipality from completely stopping its operations, not only in response to strikes but also in general. The respondent also indicated the strides taken for developing crucial policies that supports the integrity and governance of Local Government. They asserted that:

And then of course at the level of the municipality we have a number of policies, we deal with a zero-tolerance policy which deals with certain forms of misconduct that would ordinarily invite dismissal, even on the first offence. And we have developed that, we have development management processes, we have developed strike management and business continuity framework for the municipality – which is inclusive of not just dealing with a strike but also how do we ensure that the municipality does not grind to a standstill, so we dealt with that.

5.6.5 Understanding the Political Landscape of Local Government

The findings reveal that Local government is subject to significant influence from political dynamics, which encompass power struggles among elected officials, coalition formations, and competing interests. These factors not only shape policy outcomes but also exert an impact on governance's effectiveness and stability, as they are both influenced, and shape by, the broader political context.

Participant 10 indicated politicians lacking comprehensive knowledge on certain matters leads to them making decisions without understanding whether their actions align with regulations or standards such as the MFMA (Municipal Finance Management Act).

“What I have encountered was lack of knowledge on certain issues. You get instructed to do something, but the poor politician did not know whether this thing was misconduct or what, he thought it was for the good of the community and you also go by the pressure. And you respond by the pressure, only to find out ‘what I did was not in line with the MFMA’ and stuff like that. But you can’t really blame him. And as a technocrat you were supposed to go back to your books”.

Participant 12 highlighted the prevalence of coalition governments which can lead to short-term thinking and a focus on immediate gains rather than long-term community benefit. This dynamic can create instability and hinder effective governance as officials prioritize their own interests over those of the community. They indicated that:

“Yeah, look at I think the environment of local government is it’s not going to get better anytime soon, and I doubt if it would get better in the near future. I’ll support my statement by saying okay the current politics of coalition makes it worse, because everyone is there for a short-time, and they are just there to benefit. So, it’s just got nothing to do with the community so it’s just there from council putting

pressure on the HODs and municipal managers to do certain things so that they can be able to benefit. So that on its own it just creates chaos”.

Participant 12 further alluded that the pressure exerted by councillors on Heads of Departments (HODs) and municipal managers to prioritize certain actions for personal gain can lead to dysfunction within the administration. This interference can also disrupt the implementation of policies and projects aimed at serving the community’s needs effectively.

Participant 2 illustrated the challenges faced by as a senior manager in their relationship with a leader, highlighting issues such as communication breakdown, accountability, responsibility, and the crucial need for collaboration and coordination.

Participant 2 stated:

“And I think it was yesterday when I had that meeting with my IDP manager, he had to go and present at Council, the process plan, and I was not informed. Because if there are any comebacks, I will be the one to carry the can. Because the plan we had agreed on, has been changed. And now I was not party to that, I did not know. And then I had to engage and say ‘but if this happens without my knowledge if there are any comebacks am I not the one who is going to be responsible. But like I said, because we have got a new sheriff in town there are some things happening very quickly, and in some cases, things fall within the cracks. But we agreed that in future we will make sure we keep each other in the loop to ensure that we shouldn’t be surprised, because in some cases politicians will come straight to myself and say, ‘Can you do 1-2-3?’ Before I do it, I will say ‘Let me touch base with my municipal manager so that he is kept in the loop.”

Participant 3 emphasised the importance of remaining impartial, fair, and objective in upholding council resolutions. According to **Participant 3**:

“I am not a politician, I am not in favour or against any political party, I am carrying out a council mandate and there is no fear of favour to any political party for or against. I have clarified that position, things are fine now, but that one of the examples that one faced considering the question asked here. I think the point was to show them the budget support plan which they conveniently forgot they approved. It was also to show them the council tariffs around the venue, to say we did not thumb suck the amount, because the amount was seen as exorbitant but there was no interest to understand to find out how the amount was derived in terms of that amount. When I clarified that, things became better, we are now 100% fine”.

Further to this, they also stated that:

“Although in the beginning it was seen as if, because when I joined the DA was in charge of council, it was seen as if I am a DA person. Amazingly, later the ANC complained to say I was an EFF person. So, it is not difficult to be fair, but it is difficult to maintain fairness, because as you think you are being fair to one, the other person sees you as being unfair”.

The finding above emphasises the importance of being impartial and committing to carrying out the council’s mandate, despite being bias towards any political party. Clarifying decisions and allocations, illustrates the importance of transparent communication and understanding among stakeholders. This demonstrates that despite efforts to remain fair and objective, perceptions of bias from different political parties can arise, highlighting the complexities of maintaining fairness in the political context prevalent in local government.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

6.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings of data analysis that used a qualitative approach from the 22 interviews conducted and reported in Chapter five of the study. The discussion of the findings is consistent with the research questions and gives a better understanding of how ethical leadership behaviours influence team effectiveness. The research questions also looked at the role of signalling theory in ethical leadership. Each research question will deal with the findings separately. The findings are analysed and compared to insights from the literature presented in chapter two, as well as the underlying signalling theory. Throughout the discussion, each identified theme from Chapter five is examined in relation to the research questions.

6.2 Discussion of Research Question 1

How does ethical leadership behaviours impact individual performance?

The research question firstly, aimed to understand, the participants' contextual understanding of ethical leadership. This will be answered in Theme 1: Shared perspective of ethical leadership behaviours. Then it meant to identify and understand the ethical behaviours that influence the performance of individuals and how exemplary behaviours has been demonstrated by the leaders which in this context are senior managers and middle managers in Local Government. Additionally, this question is aimed at understanding the learnings demonstrated by their respective leaders. Most importantly, the question meant to gain some insights into the qualities that promote the performance of individuals in a leader-follower relationship. This will be answered in

6.2.1 Overview of findings

Theme 1: Shared perspective of ethical leadership behaviours (a)

They were similarities from the findings of senior and middle managers in that all **22** participants emphasised that ethical leadership hinges on maintaining principled conduct, which entails prioritising integrity and moral values in decision-making and actions. This approach fosters a culture of trust and accountability among subordinates. Under the same theme, insights gathered from senior and middle managers consistently emphasised the importance of cognitive character traits. These characteristics significantly influence followers' perceptions and the extent to which they regard their leaders' actions and communications as ethical. 13 character traits were derived from the findings gathered from the participants. The traits are (1) Integrity, (2) Honesty, (3) Fairness, (4) Respect, (5) responsibility, (6) Compassion, (7) Trustworthiness, (8)

Boldness, (9) Accountability, (10) Humility, (11) Consistency (12) Gratitude and (13) Transparency.

Theme 2: Role Modelling

All 22 participants indicated the importance of ethical leadership as exemplifying organisational principles through the consistent application of legislation, policies, and guidelines. In essence, **22** participants echoed that ethical leadership entails leading by example and upholding organisational standards with unwavering consistency, irrespective of managerial level. Under this theme some of the behaviours that were perceived as leadership qualities, included demonstrating empathy, making decisive decisions, taking accountability for organisational expenditure, and equipping employees with the necessary tools to perform their tasks effectively.

17 out of the 22 participants emphasised the critical qualities essential for effective team performance, particularly those that enhance the leader-follower relationship. Furthermore, the findings revealed that critical qualities essential for effective team performance included demonstrating humility, possessing deep knowledge of one's leadership domain, and exhibiting decisiveness in one's work area. The results of the study provided valuable insights and lessons regarding what is perceived as exemplary conduct by the leaders.

6.2.2 Evaluation of Findings with Literature

The comparison of the findings will include the discussion of Theme One and Theme Two as unpacked above.

Brown et al. (2005) has indicated that ethical leadership is characterised by the demonstration of morally correct behaviour in personal actions and relationships, as well as the encouragement of such behaviour through effective communication, reinforcement, and decision-making. Yukl et al. (2013) alluded that ethical leaders actively engage in actions and behaviours that promote the well-being of others, while simultaneously avoiding behaviours that may inflict harm upon them. This is in line with the findings which showed that in the context of the participants, ethical leadership is informed by honest engagement, integrity, and the ability to communicate, consider and consult others. The findings further indicate that ethical leadership is about doing right by others and by the objectives of the organisation.

These findings are congruent with literature. According to Bakar and Connaughton (2022) ethical leadership involves being exemplary to those you lead, it also involves treating followers fairly and actively managing your moral conduct as you lead your team members. A leader should be able to talk about his tasks and key activities with moral relevance. The findings further indicate that ethical leaders can lead people on a particular path towards achieving certain goals. Therefore, these findings are consistent with Bakar and Connaughton (2022). This is also supported by Brown et al. (2005) and Brown and Trevino (2006), as they asserted that ethical leadership has aided in the development of positive work behaviour among employees, including organisational dedication.

According to Zheng et al. (2022) moral values such as credibility, consistency, and trustworthiness are highly valued in the context of ethical leadership. This is in line with the results of the study as 55% of participants indicated that being trustworthy is a key characteristic trait of ethical leadership. Moreover, 32% of participants indicated that consistency is also valued as a key character trait of ethical leadership. As such, research findings support that assertions put forth by Zheng et al. (2022).

6.2.2.1 Signaling Environment in Signaling Effectiveness

Nguyen et al. (2021) is of the view that ethical leadership also includes taking responsibility for decisions and actions, as well as devising effective systems of rewards to encourage ethical behaviour and discourage unethical behaviour. This is in line with the research findings, as they indicate that ethical leadership is about doing your work with honesty without participating in fraudulent activities. Nguyen et al. (2021) further elaborates that ethical leadership entails dealing with disruptive employees' behaviour through suitable disciplinary measures. Disciplinary mechanisms expose and penalise dishonest signalers, because of this, the presence and efficacy of such mechanisms within local government also significantly influence the effectiveness of signals (Srivastava & Lurie, 2001). This finding, which highlights the need to implement suitable disciplinary measures, is in line with the signalling theory framework, as the finding implies that ethical leadership necessitates a high level of discipline, requiring leaders to have the strength to maintain it consistently.

Ethical leadership is not only a desirable trait, but also an essential component critical to the efficacy and sustainability of organisations. Brown and Trevino (2006) consider ethical leaders as pivotal guides who use their exemplary qualities and perceived integrity to guide individuals through complex organisational landscapes. The findings

support this in that the results indicate that ethical leadership is about leading by example. The commitment to integrity by leaders, as asserted by Ilyas et al. (2020), fosters a culture where ethical choices are prioritised, well-being is safeguarded, trust is built, and decisions are grounded in values. The research findings revealed 55% of participants regards integrity as key character trait towards fostering an ethical culture in an organisation.

6.2.2.2 Lessons into follower perception of exemplary behaviour

Shafique et al. (2020) indicated that ethical leadership is more than just a theoretical concept; it is a practical requirement for developing a culture of trust, and high performance within organisations. The findings are consistent with the literature as participants indicated that their lessons learnt from their leaders were respecting their jobs, honouring deadlines, and meeting targets. Furthermore, the findings demonstrated that when ethical leaders are supportive and appreciative, the leader tends to bring out the best in officials. This is in line with literature, as according to Ilyas et al. (2020) leaders who are highly regarded for their integrity, inspire trust and commitment among their followers, motivating them to emulate ethical behaviour. Moreover, this means that receivers, which are the managers in this case, have perceived good signals from their leaders. In the interviews managers outlined these good signals as lessons in ethical behaviour that they learned from their leaders. This demonstrates how exemplary behaviours can influence followers' perceptions and ultimately inspire them to adopt ethical and moral behaviour.

6.2.3 Conclusion of Research Question 1

Ethical leadership, as highlighted by various sources such as Brown et al. (2005) and Yukl et al. (2013), is characterised by morally correct behaviour, promoting well-being, and avoiding harm through effective communication and decision-making. The study findings emphasise the importance of honesty, integrity, and consultative communication in ethical leadership, aligning with existing literature. Ethical leaders are expected to lead by example, treat followers fairly, and actively manage moral conduct within their teams. Integrity, credibility, and trustworthiness are highly valued traits in ethical leadership, as indicated by Zheng et al. (2022).

Additionally, ethical leadership involves taking responsibility for decisions, devising effective reward systems, and addressing disruptive behaviour through suitable disciplinary measures, as highlighted by Nguyen et al. (2021). The commitment to integrity fosters a culture where ethical choices are prioritised, trust is built, and decisions

are grounded in values, as emphasised by Ilyas et al. (2020). As a result, ethical leadership is essential for organisational efficacy and sustainability, guiding individuals in making ethical and moral choices as they navigate through complex work environments, which fosters a culture of trust, and high performance within organisations.

6.3 Discussion of Research Question 2

How does ethical leadership behaviours impact on team performance?

The research question seeks to understand the behaviours that influence team performance, as well as how exemplary behaviour has been demonstrated to subordinates of senior managers and middle managers within local government teams. The question also aimed to investigate whether ethical leaders and individuals signal to the dyadic leader of ELB, and how these ethical behaviours influence the dyadic team that perceives these behaviours from the leader. Furthermore, the question promotes an understanding of the lessons demonstrated by their respective leaders. Most importantly, the question sought to gain insights into the qualities that promote team performance in the relationship between teams and their leaders. Additionally, the research question sought to gain a shared understanding of how senior and middle managers believe, leadership behaviours influence, how teams perform in the context of local government.

6.3.1 Overview of findings

The findings for research question two will be discussed from the following themes and sub-themes emanating from chapter five as outline in the table below:

Table 8: Theme Description for Research Question 2

Themes	Theme 1: Understanding of Shared perspective of ethical Leadership	Theme 2: Role Modelling	Theme 3: Ethical Leadership behaviours facilitates team effectiveness	
Sub-themes	Shared perspective of how teams perform	Exemplary behaviour demonstrated	Performance expectation and	Team Building and Collaboration

Themes	Theme 1: Understanding of Shared perspective of ethical Leadership	Theme 2: Role Modelling	Theme 3: Ethical Leadership behaviours facilitates team effectiveness	
			performance management	
	Leadership Challenges in Local Government	Leadership Support Initiatives	Providing feed back	Empowering personal growth and development
	Qualities that promote team performance		Optimal performance	Career development opportunities
	Cultivating Team engagement and motivation		Psychological Safety	Inspirational Motivation

6.3.2 Evaluation of Findings Against Literature

The findings indicate that when leaders prioritise ethical leadership, it becomes the foundation for creating a positive work environment, which in turn boosts team performance. By emphasising ethics and integrity, leaders establish a standard that influences the entire organisation, steering employees toward principled conduct. The findings are in line with the assertions put forth in literature. Madanchian et al. (2018) contend that ethical leadership is critical for organisations because it not only increases employee motivation but also fosters a strong commitment to achieving organisational goals. In other words, the authors argue that ethical leadership is more than just a desirable trait; it is a necessary foundation for long-term organisational success and significance. This sentiment was highlighted by many of the research participants, which demonstrates the role of ethical leadership in the success of local government.

Theme 1: Shared perspective of ethical leadership behaviours

6.3.2.1 Shared Perspective of How Teams Perform

Diverse shared perspectives were shared in how teams perform in local government, this is based on the different management profiles of the participants lead in local government and their personal lived experience of leading teams. Some findings indicate the importance of employees feeling compelled to do the right thing, as they must witness leadership demonstrating and encouraging ethical behaviour. The findings are consistent with the literature. Brown and Trevino (2006) believe that when ethical leaders lead, employees are highly motivated to succeed. Success underpinned by ethical leadership would be highly beneficial in the South African Local Government context.

Another finding that was reported was that ethical leadership encourages teams to be transparent, to be more accountable, to be responsible, and to be efficient, which are some of the pillars of good governance in terms of local government. These findings are consistent with literature, as encouraging ethical behaviour in the workplace involves creating an environment where employees feel comfortable discussing ethics and suggesting improvements to work processes and conditions (Nguyen et al., 2021).

Another finding suggests that as a leader, employees must trust you to maintain confidentiality when discussing sensitive issues. The shared perspective is that the leader of a team should not take confidential information in organisational documents and discuss them outside of the organisation or organisational settings. This is in line with literature as ethical leaders are those who demonstrate ethical behaviour, such as maintaining confidentiality and respect for others. Moreover, these leaders create guidelines that encourage ethical actions. They have a vital function in providing information when deemed necessary and their shaping behaviour and fostering an ethical workplace (Wang & Hackett, 2020).

Other findings indicate that the dynamic nature of local government, particularly during shifts in political power, presents significant challenges for administrators and management. There is a trend towards losing focus and direction in decision-making processes. Ethical leadership must prioritise adherence to legal frameworks, such as the Systems Act or Regulations, regardless of political influences. This finding is in line with literature as according to Wang and Hackett (2020), ethical leaders are individuals who exhibit ethical conduct and develop policies that promote ethical behaviour. They play a crucial role as sources of information, guiding acceptable behaviour and contributing to the establishment of an ethical work environment. Furthermore, this necessitates that

ethical leaders in local government maintain an unwavering commitment to complying with legal frameworks, including the Systems Act and Regulations. These laws function as a compass that directs decision-making, regardless of political fluctuations.

Banks et al. (2021) stressed the importance of advancing and testing methodological recommendations within organisational groups to establish the context for ethical leadership. This approach significantly influences leader behaviours and the effectiveness of such behaviours.

Other findings interpreted by the researcher were three senior managers reporting to one leader, a municipal manager, who revealed a shared perception of their leader displaying ethical leadership behaviours (Bank, 2021). As a result, the ethical climate within the organisation stems from these perceptions, reflecting how the group values and prioritises ethical leadership practices. This transparency in behaviour, which is line with the recommendations originating from literature, demonstrate that ethical behaviours exhibit integrity, honesty, and fairness to one's team during group interactions (Amad et al., 2018).

6.3.2.2 Leadership challenges of Local Government

Another key finding that emerged in this sub-theme: Shared perspective of How teams perform, suggested that unethical behaviour is prevalent in the public sector due to a culture that lacks inspiration for meaningful work, leading individuals to resort to discreetly quitting their jobs rather than actively contributing.

Literature acknowledges this finding, as an existing reality in organisations. According to Mahembe and Engelbrecht (2013) and Van Wyk, Odendaal, and Maseko (2019), the outcomes of team effectiveness can be categorised into three dimensions: team performance, team satisfaction, and development experiences. Therefore, "team effectiveness" is referred to as the attainment of common goals by all team members working together in an organised manner. Therefore, the finding above could illustrate that teams that lack inspiration for meaningful work, lack team satisfaction, team performance and developmental opportunities. Hence, the lack of 'team effectiveness' leads team to a culture of unethical behaviour, an aspect that would be detrimental to the success of local government.

Another finding is that local government has people who are in leadership, but who are not well informed or not well-versed in the areas that they are leading. Indeed, this finding is contrast with the arguments set forth in literature, which often emphasis the need for

leaders who are appropriately qualified and knowledgeable. To begin with, ethical leaders adhere to fundamental values including integrity, reliability, inspiration, and fairness (Jha & Singh, 2019). Furthermore, they exert a moral influence on their subordinates by virtue of their exemplary leadership attributes. Consequently, those hiring in some parts of local government have not appointed leaders who are capable of leading their areas of responsibility, with their limited capabilities stemming from their lack of qualifications and/or appropriate experience. This causes subordinates to undermine the authority of the leader. As a result, there will be no moral influence on subordinates resulting in diminished team effectiveness and organisational success.

6.3.2.3 Qualities that promote team performance

The findings revealed that certain qualities stood out as critical for success in team effectiveness. One such quality is the ability to make decisive decisions while enforcing legislation, ensuring that actions are legal and clear. The finding is in line with literature, with Sarwar, Ishaq, Admin and Ahmed (2020) indicating that decision-making behaviour, emphasises that leaders must consider ethical considerations while making important decisions. This literature supports the idea that leaders need to be decisive because it highlights the importance of making ethical considerations in decision-making. Being decisive doesn't mean making hasty or impulsive decisions; rather, it involves making well thought out choices promptly when necessary. This reinforces the notion that leaders must be decisive, while emphasising the need to act while considering ethical implications, rather than delaying or avoiding decisions entirely.

Another finding was the significance of attentively considering the perspectives of all individuals, irrespective of their background or expertise. When individuals feel acknowledged and appreciated, they are more inclined to participate actively and assume responsibility for group efforts. Collaboration is enhanced when all perspectives are acknowledged and valued. Furthermore, the participants reported that importance of leaders who actively participate in their team's journey, offering immediate assistance and guidance, fosters a more cohesive and productive environment.

These findings align with literature, as team performance is viewed as the team's ability to produce a high-quality product, whether it is a physical product, a decision, a plan, or another outcome that is appropriate for those who obtain or review it, such as efficiency, dependability, client satisfaction, and competitiveness (Yoo et al., 2022). While team satisfaction is referred to as the team's acknowledged contribution to its members' well-being, making individuals feel as if their personal needs are being met and their

perspectives are valued is critical (Yoo et al.,2022). Therefore, literature supports, the practice that teams need to work in collaboration, respecting one another and acknowledging perspectives of group efforts and individual perspectives – a practice that was as emphasised by many of the research participants.

Participants indicated adopting compassion as a guiding concept for local government leadership will strengthen relationships with citizens, which increases the efficacy of public services. This finding is supported through the concept of building emotional resilience in teams. According to Baker and Burrell (2021), emotional resilience encompasses the capacity to adapt one's emotional and physiological responses in response to varying circumstances. Resilient teams demonstrate outstanding abilities in cultivating robust social connections, effectively leveraging social support mechanisms, and adeptly navigating new challenges.

As a result, Compassion and empathy contribute to emotional resilience. When employees feel understood, supported, and valued by their colleagues and leaders, they are better able to adapt to challenges and setbacks. Leaders who show compassion and empathy foster an environment where employees can freely share their feelings and ask for help, ultimately boosting their resilience. Therefore, ethical leaders in local government who are compassionate are more likely to foster an environment where employees can freely share their feelings and ask for help, which in the long term would contribute towards enhanced team effectiveness, organisational operations and service delivery.

6.3.2.4 Cultivating Team engagement and Motivation

The findings obtained from the participants revealed the various ways employed to encourage their team members to feel engaged and motivated at work.

The first finding emphasised empowering the team to cultivate its own culture and engagement activities. This indicates that when a leader support participating in these initiatives, the leader fosters a positive work environment where team members feel valued and included. The initiatives ranged from team members contributing to their birthday celebrations and jointly also celebrating national public holidays and calendar days.

The participants highlighted the importance of recognizing the personal lives of team members and prioritising their well-being. The participants indicted that the acknowledge

that their lives and families come first. In this case leader demonstrated empathy in terms of their wellness and created a supportive atmosphere, which contributes to increased motivation and productivity.

The finding illustrated the leaders' efforts to facilitate learning and growth within the team. The participants indicated that they are encouraging discussions and sharing insights on changes in legislation or case laws. In this case the leader fosters a culture of continuous learning and development, which can enhance motivation and engagement. A contrast found in this finding is that leaders and teams do not take the time to practice self-leadership, which is crucial for good performance. Moreover, it is crucial for individuals to analyse their thinking patterns, eliminate harmful thoughts, and replace negative self-talk with constructive dialogue to create a positive organisation (Pillay, Nel, & Harunavamwe, 2020). As this would promote a culture of continuous learning in teams, an element which is necessary for the substantiality of municipalities and local government.

Participants highlighted the importance of acknowledging and appreciating the efforts of team members. By expressing gratitude and acknowledging accomplishments, the leader reinforces positive behaviour and cultivates an appreciation culture, which can boost morale and motivation within the team. This finding is in line with the Signaling Theory Framework. The finding illustrates that leaders demonstrate their commitment to ethical behaviours not only through their actions, but also through the emotions they express. In essence, leaders use their actions and emotions to set an example and communicate the value of ethics to their teams and within the organisation (Connelly et al., 2011; Spence, 1978).

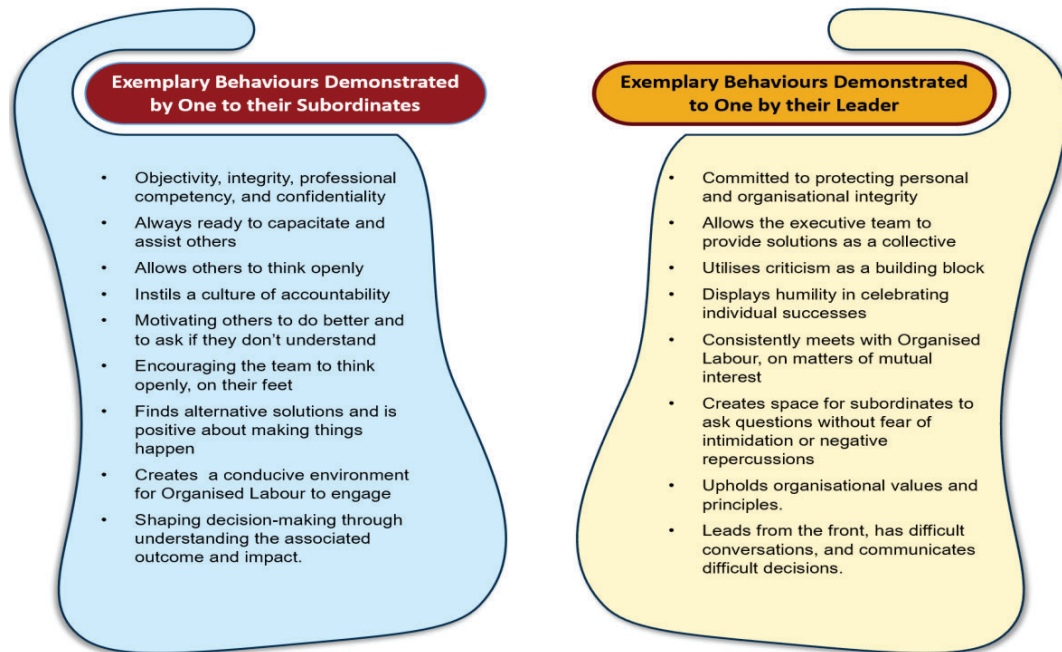
The findings stated above are supported by literature since several elements contribute to the establishment of supportive environments by influencing psychological safety at both the individual and team levels. Prior studies have pointed out the significance of constructive team dynamics, constructive leadership, and organisational practices that foster support (Carmeli & Gittell, 2009). Numerous studies have demonstrated that psychological safety is an indispensable component in facilitating the positive effects of supportive environments. The outcomes may include heightened levels of employee engagement, employee appreciation, innovation, creativity, and performance (Edmondson, 1999; Carmeli & Gittell, 2009).

Theme 2: Role Modelling

6.3.2.5 Exemplary Behaviour Demonstrated

The findings of this sub-theme are demonstrated on the figure below:

Figure 7: Exemplary Behaviours Demonstrated



6.3.2.5.1 Exemplary Behaviours Demonstrated by One to their Subordinates (a)

The findings were extracted from both *Middle Managers* and *Senior Managers* that which were participants of the study. The findings related to exemplary behaviour demonstrated to their subordinates is the greatest shared similarity in the study.

The findings from participants reported that they exemplify objectivity, integrity, and professional competence while maintaining confidentiality. They consistently support and empower others, creating an environment that encourages open thinking. They foster a culture of accountability and motivation, encouraging the team to strive for improvement and ask questions as needed. Their proactive approach entails finding alternative solutions while maintaining a positive attitude, thereby creating an environment conducive to organised labour participation. They also influence decision-making by thoroughly understanding associated outcomes and impacts, ensuring the cohesive integration of these qualities to drive success.

6.3.2.5.2 Exemplary Behaviours Demonstrated to One by their Leader (b)

The findings here come from *Senior Managers* that were part of the study, as they report to Municipal Managers and/or Head of Departments in Metropolitan Municipalities.

The leader (Municipal Manager) fosters a collaborative environment by allowing the executive team to contribute solutions together, recognising the value of diversity of thought. Criticism is viewed as a tool for improvement, demonstrating a strong understanding of continuous growth. In celebrating individual accomplishments, the leader demonstrates humility, reinforcing the importance of each team member. Consistent engagement with organised labour demonstrates a commitment to open dialogue on matters of mutual interest, which contributes to a harmonious work environment.

Additionally, providing a safe environment for subordinates to ask questions without fear of intimidation demonstrates the leader's commitment to open communication. Furthermore, upholding organisational values and principles is not just a commitment, but a way of leading from the front, as demonstrated by the courage to have difficult conversations and communicate difficult decisions. As a result, this demonstrates that exemplary behaviours serve as an indication of the direction in the development of a culture of ethics in the workplace. This would indicate that exemplary behaviours present in state-owned entities and local government could serve as an indicator regarding the level of ethics present within an organisation's cultural context.

Evaluation of Findings Against Literature

The findings discussed above of **(a)** exemplary behaviours demonstrated by One to their sub-ordinates and **(b)** exemplary behaviours demonstrated to One by their leader are in line with literature.

- a.) The crucial impact that ethical leadership behaviours manifests at both the individual and dyadic levels implies that the leader acts as a role model and a sense-maker, inspiring followers to act morally and ethically. Moreover, because this isn't just one person's perspective, it establishes a basis of mutual understanding regarding Ethical Leadership Behaviours and Ethical Follower Behaviours for the relationship to thrive (Banks et al., 2021).

- b.) This is line with signaling theory, the idea that these managers were able to share openly those, exemplary behaviours demonstrated by their leaders to the researcher. This indicates, signal observability, this concept means that the

receiver's attention and ability to extract intended meaning, which is positive. This means these behaviours have indeed been exemplary (Connelly et al. 2011). Since signaling theory is about intentionally communicating positive behaviours, this also means that the signaling strength was high, as interpreted by the managers (Spence, 2002).

6.3.2.6 Leadership Support Initiatives

The findings revealed that some leaders were proactive in resolving issues and creating a pleasant working environment in addition to consistently praising and supporting the efforts and accomplishments of their team members, which boosted both productivity and morale within the organisation. One participant emphasised the leader's strong emphasis on legislative compliance by providing easy access to relevant legislative materials, such as purchasing Local government legislative booklets containing all applicable Acts for executive managers and departments.

Another participant emphasised the leader's commitment to recognising and motivating employees by telling a story about repairing a machine for an employee, resolving office cleaning issues, and rewarding the employee with a certificate and trophy, purchased from the leader's own funds. This action resulted in improved performance and punctuality from the employee. An additional finding that was outlined was the leader's proactive approach to addressing team division from previous years, which included organising a team-building session and covering expenses for the facilitator, venue, meals, and refreshments, with the goal of fostering harmony and moving forward from previous conflicts. These leadership actions demonstrate the positive impact that exemplary behaviour and effective signalling can have on team effectiveness and operations within local government.

Evaluation of findings against Literature

The importance of leadership support initiatives based on the findings is that it empowers team members to take ownership and responsibility of their work. Furthermore, it demonstrates commitment to ongoing learning and improvement in the organisation. All these findings provided above illustrates a culture that it encourages innovation, creativity, and experimentation. But most importantly that leader support initiatives to employees, provides opportunity to building trust and strengthening relationships with teams.

These findings are in line with literature as Grossman and Miller (2021), indicate that when a leader's behaviours are focused on both tasks and people, developing a shared vision coupled with strong leadership may facilitate a team to function optimally. These actions enhance the efficiency, adaptability, and overall effectiveness of the team. Good leadership places a strong emphasis on team member development, empowerment, and self-development.

Jiang and Shen (2020) highlighted that ethical leaders make themselves available to others, prioritise ethical behaviour, address risks proactively, focus on the growth of their employees, and uphold transparency, trust and honest communication. Having knowledgeable and skilled staff can significantly improve the customer experience, resulting in feelings of amazement and excitement that could encourage future loyalty (Mahembe, & Engelbrecht, 2013; Jiang and Shen 2020). This is pertinent to local government, as findings demonstrated that leaders who were knowledgeable of regulation and municipal acts, boldly upheld the rule of law and served as effective ethical leaders who were perceived as credible by their followers.

Theme 3: Ethical Leadership Behaviours Facilitates Team Effectiveness

6.3.2.7 Goal Setting with Objectives

The findings revealed that goal setting with objectives was a vital component for ethical leaders to facilitate team effectiveness. Participants shared that there is a need for the alignment between individual objectives and broader organisational goals. While other participants highlighted the importance of transparent communication in uniting teams behind shared goals.

The finding highlights that effective collaboration and progress within municipalities require alignment and unity towards common goals and values. This is equivalent to a group moving towards a common destination. Another finding outlined the importance of encouraging a culture of continuous learning and growth among team members which enhances collective efforts towards achieving departmental goals, guide by a shared vision and mission. This would also be highly beneficial for improved service delivery within local communities.

Other participants highlighted that in collective discussions and planning sessions with team members concerning procurement approaches was essential based on past trends and budget considerations, since fosters transparency and inclusivity in the decision-

making processes contributes to improved ethics and ethical behaviour within organisations.

Evaluation of findings against Literature

Therefore, the results obtained are substantiated by literature, since Madanchian et al. (2018) asserts ethical leadership is crucial for organisations, as it not only boosts employee motivation but also cultivates a robust dedication to attaining the organisational goal and objectives. Put simply, the authors posit that ethical leadership transcends mere desirability; it stands as an essential cornerstone for enduring organisational prosperity and impact. The findings are further sustained by Dreier et al. (2019) indicating teams must work together effectively to encourage active participation, promote innovation, and build trust. This is achieved through clear communication with various stakeholders. Furthermore, engaging in initiatives with shared objectives and measurable outcomes can result in inspiring incentives that enhance public sector operation and service delivery and increase the number of accomplishments designed to maintain progress within local government (Dreier et al., 2019).

6.3.2.8 Performance Expectation and Performance Management

The findings revealed that ethical leadership behaviors play a big role in encouraging team members to assess and support their teams' progress through short, medium, and long-term goals. The findings revealed that collaboration and mutual agreements are emphasized in the setting of targets Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to ensure feasibility and adaptability over time. In addition, the performance planning is conducted quarterly with managers signing agreements aligned with overarching departmental goals. An additional key finding was that prior to external assessment by the auditing units, senior managers with their team are encouraged to self-audit, self-address, and self-monitor their department's performance for efficient support from other departments.

Evaluation of findings against Literature

The findings are in line with literature since Armstrong and Taylor (2022) contend that local government systems, being the closest to the citizens and responsible for essential services, need to be accountable and effective. The authors suggest the adoption of standardised performance measures in public sector organisations to enhance performance and service delivery. Literature also indicates that effective organisational management necessitates, effective planning, close supervision and development of employee performance to ensure alignment with organisational goals. Failure to carry out this critical duty can result in a gap between expected and actual performance levels,

impeding the organisation's progress towards its goals. In agile learning organisations, where competition prevails, the highest, optimal employee performance is a non-negotiable requirement for operational excellence (Susanto, Syailendra, & Suryawan, 2023).

Armstrong and Taylor (2020) highlight how crucial performance management is for improving outcomes and understanding performance. These authors emphasise the dynamic nature and importance of setting goals, milestones, and abilities that are aligned to the mission of the organisation (Schoeman & Chakwizira; 2023).

Furthermore, the findings are in line with local government legislation. According to Regulation 31 and Chapter 6, Section 38(a) of the Municipal Systems Act 32 of 2000, it is mandatory for municipalities to implement a performance management system that is consistent with their circumstances and available resources. Additionally, this system should mirror the Integrated Development Plan's (IDP) priorities, aims, and objectives. The objective of the system is to foster a performance management culture.

Chapter 4 of the Local Government: Municipal Staff Regulations (MSR) (2021) mandates that municipalities establish and uphold a performance management and development system (PMDS). This mandate does not include contract terminators, retirees, employees on fixed-term contracts for less than one year, and officials participating in internship programmes or national public works initiatives, since PMDS compliance is mandatory for all municipal employees. The initiative promotes accountability and optimises the efficiency of local government service provision by instituting standardised performance management procedures for all municipal personnel.

6.3.2.9 Providing Feedback

The findings show that ethical leaders prioritise communication by providing both positive and negative feedback to their teams. The participants indicated that it is important to give and receive constructive feedback, no matter how good or bad it may sound.

Evaluation of findings against Literature

This is in line with literature because employees perceive ethical leaders as being open to feedback, encouraging open communication, and creating an environment in which they feel free to express their thoughts and ideas (Freire & Bettencourt, 2020; Stajkovic et al., 2018). This supportive environment promotes employee engagement and the exchange and implementation of innovative ideas and concepts. Thus, ethical leadership

benefits both individual well-being and organisational dynamics, resulting in increased innovation and performance. Enhanced innovation and performance would be highly beneficial to in local government. It would improve public perception and result in the implementation of initiatives that would have far-reaching positive impacts on local communities.

Literature emphasis that constructive feedback is vital for the development of both individuals and teams. Although accepting constructive criticism can be difficult, it is critical to remain receptive and attentive without reacting defensively. Effective communication is essential for delivering feedback and fostering an organisational culture of transparency and progress. Teams in local government can achieve substantial enhancement in performance by placing communication and feedback as top priorities.

Furthermore, management scholars have discovered the importance of receivers providing feedback to signalers on the effectiveness of their signals when applying signaling theory to organisations. Gupta, Govindarajan and Malhotra, (1999) assert that feedback, referred to as countersignals, enhances the signalling process by reducing information asymmetries. Therefore, this means feedback, in organisations, signalling bridges information gaps between parties, improving communication clarity, aligning understanding, and improving decision-making by signalling changes based on receiver responses.

6.3.2.10 Optimal performance

The findings revealed that participants emphasised the significance of meeting expectations and consistently delivering work of high quality, highlighting individuals' capacity to excel. The findings emphasised the importance of striving for perfection, even under difficult circumstances. Despite external pressures and complexities, the senior managers maintain a commitment to flawless performance, particularly in dispute resolution processes, through meticulous preparation, a positive attitude, and consistent implementation.

Evaluation of findings against Literature

Effective teamwork entails reacting to and accepting changes that directly affect their primary jobs, as well as constructively responding to changes that improve the team's operation. This is another aspect of positive workplace engagement (Koekemoer et al.,

2021). Another factor that promotes optimal performance is the concept of contextual performance, which refers to voluntary actions taken by employees that have a positive impact on the larger organisational, interpersonal, and psychological setting which has to with commitment and consistency (Jiang & Shen, 2020).

6.3.2.11 Psychological Safety

The findings showed that ethical leadership promotes psychological safety by instilling trust, fairness, open communication, and empowerment in the workplace. This, in turn, allows employees to feel comfortable expressing their thoughts, taking opportunities, and actively participating in teamwork. As a result, morale and commitment improve, creating a more positive and collaborative work atmosphere.

Another finding was that participant interpreted the leaders' comments and intention as demonstrating innovation, creativity, and encouragement rather than criticism. Instead of participant feeling discouraged, they chose to view action positively, believing that leader had faith in their abilities. They saw this as an opportunity to prove themselves and strengthen their department, turning potential obstacles into building blocks for success. This mindset reflects resilience, determination, and a willingness to overcome challenges.

Evaluation of findings against Literature

The literature supports the findings, since research has demonstrated that psychological safety has a crucial role in enabling the advantages of supportive environments. This can result in benefits such as improved knowledge sharing, employee engagement, innovation, creativity, and higher performance (Edmondson, 1999; Carmeli & Gittel, 2009).

The findings further demonstrate that employees thrive in a psychologically safe work environment where they can freely be themselves and share their thoughts without worry of criticism. They demonstrate mutual respect for each other's skills, display sincere curiosity in one another, approach interactions with positive motives, and engage in productive conversations (Newman, Donohue & Eva, 2017). In essence, these findings highlight the importance of recognition in creating a safe space for team members to share their thoughts and skills, which in turn promotes a more creative and effective work environment.

6.3.2.12 Work Life Balance and Employee Wellbeing

The findings showed that organisations that understand the value of combining work and personal life prioritise their workers' well-being. This acknowledgment fosters a pleasant work environment in which employees feel valued and supported in managing their obligations both on and off the workplace. As a result, the findings indicate that encouraging work-life balance relates to better levels of job satisfaction and employee retention.

One participant described a meaningful celebration of achievements with their team and their families. The participant emphasised the importance of work-life balance and how including loved ones in a metro police graduation enhanced the experience. As family members were allowed to join on stage, which made the occasion even more memorable for the team. This demonstrates a commitment to creating a supportive work environment in local government entities and recognising employees' overall needs beyond their professional roles. The scene emphasises the importance of appreciation, teamwork, and the intersection of personal and professional fulfilment within the context of local government.

Another finding revealed that the participant had an employee who faced significant personal challenges, including hospitalisation and the death of their ex-husband. Despite these difficulties, the employee expressed a desire to return to work quickly. However, the leader (one of the research participants) recognised the importance of prioritising the employee's well-being and insisted on allowing them time to heal before returning to work. This demonstrates a compassionate approach to leadership, understanding that employees cannot perform at their best when dealing with personal hardships. It also highlights the importance of empathy and support in the workplace, showing that caring for employees' mental and emotional health ultimately benefits the organisation as a whole.

Evaluation of findings Against Literature

The literature supports the findings since ethical leadership makes a significant contribution to employee wellness by fostering an ethical culture and positive relationships within organisations. Hannah et al. (2020) characterises ethical leadership as promoting both mandatory ethical behaviours, such as honesty and legal compliance, and extra-role or discretionary ethical behaviours that go above and beyond the basics.

By setting a strong ethical example and emphasising moral excellence, ethical leaders inspire employees to uphold ethical standards on their own initiative. Furthermore, ethical leadership fosters positive relationships within teams and organisations, which are essential components of psychological well-being (PWB).

These positive relationships foster a supportive environment in which employees feel encouraged to follow ethical values and norms, thereby improving their overall well-being and job satisfaction. Thus, ethical leadership not only promotes ethical behaviour but also contributes to employees' overall well-being (Cascio, 2013; Quick et al., 2013). Literature further suggest that employee psychological well-being (PWB) has the capacity to propel advancements, maximise productivity, and enable the actualization of personal capabilities (Quick et al., 2013).

6.3.2.13 Team Building and Collaboration

The findings showed that team development promotes mutual support and idea exchange, which increases collective strength. Collaboration, which is required to achieve common goals, is based on effective communication and the use of combined strengths to solve problems effectively. Teamwork and collaboration highlight the value of taking a well-rounded approach, being prepared for tasks, maintaining a positive attitude, and putting forth effort. These are critical factors that contribute to success, even when it appears difficult to achieve. Individuals and teams can effectively navigate challenges by acknowledging their reality and taking appropriate action, such as striving for improvement in relevant areas. This was one of the findings.

Other research findings revealed that relying solely on individual efforts is insufficient for achieving success. Whether as a leader or a team member, effective collaboration within your work team or cross-functional teams is essential for achieving goals.

Evaluation findings Against Literature

The findings are consistent with the literature. When leaders cultivate a culture of connectivity and inclusivity, they can foster supportive networks, facilitate meaningful connections among team members, and provide comprehensive support that includes emotional, social, and technological aspects, ultimately strengthening team resilience and helping teams achieve their goals (Hartwig, Clarke, Johnson & Willis, 2020).

Leaders who embody positivity and adaptability can effectively reframe challenges, maintain a clear understanding of their sphere of influence, and promote a culture of realistic optimism and solution-oriented problem-solving, while also striking a balance between optimism and risk awareness to prevent team demotivation, ultimately improving team resilience (McEwen, 2022; Sommer et al., 2016). Therefore, the literature supports the value of having well-rounded team members with a positive approach and the research findings demonstrate how this is beneficial within the local government context.

6.3.2.14 Empowering Personal Growth and Career Development Opportunities

In another finding the participant indicated that he made efforts in the past to offer support and training to colleagues who struggle with various tasks such as writing reports, compiling documents, or understanding processes like procurement. The participant proposed that he set aside time for regular workshops or training sessions to address these needs. This initiative demonstrates a proactive and supportive attitude towards colleagues, aiming to improve their skills and efficiency in the workplace.

Another finding emphasised the importance of building skills and knowledge for long-term career growth. By constantly reminding the colleagues that he won't be around forever and encouraging them to invest in their own development to secure a successful future within the department. In this case the participant highlights the speaker's awareness of succession planning and the importance of building a culture of continuous learning and development within the organisation.

Encouragement for employees to take advantage of available resources such as bursaries and in-house training for their professional development, was evident in the findings. Furthermore, findings highlight the benefits of utilising the Learning and Development (L&D) department and advocate for enrolling in tertiary education than taking the process of the applying for recognition of prior learning. Therefore, by promoting the use of available resources and emphasising the value of continuous learning, the participant demonstrates a commitment to supporting colleagues' growth and skill development, ultimately contributing to the overall success of the department.

Another finding highlighted the importance of recognising and nurturing talent within the organisation. By providing encouragement and opportunities for advancement, the participant demonstrated commitment to fostering a culture of empowerment and career progression, ultimately benefiting both the individual and the department.

Evaluation of findings Against Literature

The literature is congruent with the findings, since encouraging a sense of empowerment and recognition among employees can help them feel valued and motivated to make a positive impact (Gillet et al., 2018). The ethical conduct of leaders plays a crucial role in influencing the motivation and performance of employees in both individual and team tasks, as highlighted by Shafique et al. (2020). By combining these motives with initiatives, one can drive notable enhancements in task performance, ultimately leading to a sense of fulfilment and accomplishment.

Moreover, ethical managers place a high value on the genuine development of their staff members' skills and abilities (Morris, 2021). Furthermore, by putting in place a cooperative strategy that emphasises leadership integrity, it can foster an environment of accountability among staff members within the organisation. This method encourages people to think about the long-term effects of their organisation's strategies in addition to the immediate results of their efforts (Hsieh et al., 2020). Nonetheless, ethical leaders possess more than just the ability to motivate their team members to perform well in the short-term (Dust et al., 2018).

Based on the above findings, the researcher has also observed that the participants were consistent with their signals to the employees to empower and develop themselves. Reduced information asymmetry resulted from signaling repeatedly regarding the learning opportunities and initiatives that are offered by the municipalities and themselves as leaders (Janney & Folta, 2006; Park & Mezias, 2005). These signals were positively received by the receivers, which was beneficial to their own personal growth and career development.

In addition, signaling theory also proposes that leaders who pay attention to both tasks and people, create a common vision, and prioritise the growth, empowerment, and self-management of team members can demonstrate their strong leadership skills, resulting in the best possible team performance (Grossman & Miller, 2021). Leaders who are authentic, meaning they are aware of themselves and encourage their teams to reflect on themselves, can improve their effectiveness even more (Jiang & Shen, 2020; Roberts-Lombard et al., 2020).

As a result, ethical leaders demonstrate certain characteristics such as being approachable, behaving ethically, managing risks, prioritising employee growth, and maintaining transparent communication. When team members are competent and skilled, and they are led by authentic leaders, it can improve the customer experience in local government. This can result in customers being amazed and excited, and it can also encourage them to continue being loyal in the future (Mahembe & Engelbrecht, 2013; Jiang & Shen, 2020).

6.3.2.15 Inspirational Motivation

The findings demonstrated that ethical leadership behaviours, place a heavy focus on dedication and commitment, which have created an environment in which exceptional behaviour, such as humility and appreciation of individual accomplishments, is valued. This effective leadership style has motivated the teams to routinely meet service delivery Integrated Development Plan (SDIBP) targets at an exceptional 100%.

Some of the findings alluded that through ethical leadership the department performance increased from 40-50% to consistently achieving 90-100% of targets over three years. Another participant reported that since December 2021, the department has consistently achieved 100% of targets, reducing audit findings from 15 to 1 in ICT. Another key finding that was reported was that the team is committed to achieving 100% of targets each quarter unless there are clear reasons preventing it, setting a high standard for performance.

Evaluation of findings Against Literature

Therefore, these findings highlight the benefits of a culture of accountability and commitment to excellence within the organisation, which is fostered by ethical leadership. These examples focus on the importance of ethical leadership in inspiring teams to exceed expectations. Ethical leaders not only set high standards but also motivate their teams to achieve more, fostering a culture of excellence and continuous improvement.

Furthermore, organisations that embrace adaptability are always ready to adjust to their ever-changing environment. In such organisations, teams may have visions and goals that do not align with the demands of the changing environment. Moreover, team members may cling to specific values and beliefs that hinder their capacity to adapt to changes in their surroundings (Han, Liao, Taylor & Kim, 2018; Pauer & Eastman, 1997).

Team leaders should strive to foster new perspectives and goals by providing uplifting motivation. Through idealized influence, they have the power to mould the values and beliefs of team members to align perfectly with the organisation (Han et al., 2018).

6.3.3 Conclusion of Research Question 2

The shared perspective of ethical leadership discussed some of the leadership challenges in local government and the qualities that promote team performance. Literature supports the idea that leaders need to be decisive because it highlights the importance of making ethical considerations in decision-making. The discussion also explored how leadership initiatives and exemplary behaviours have an impact on how teams perform based on the influence of ethical leadership behaviours.

In summary, the discussion from this research question has demonstrated that ethical leadership does facilitate team effectiveness through various enablers and effective leadership and organisational approaches such as goal setting with objectives, performance expectation, and performance management; providing feedback; optimal performance; psychological safety; work-life balance and employee well-being; team building and collaboration; empowering personal growth and development through inspirational motivation.

6.4 Discussion of Research Question 3

How does ethical leadership behaviours manifest and influence followers in various organisational settings?

The research question aimed to understand the ethical leadership behaviours that senior managers and middle managers rely on to reduce information gaps and also increase social influence within respective teams. Simultaneously, intended to unpack some of the organisational legislative prescripts and policies within the Local Government setting that have assisted leaders in bridging the information gaps between their team members. The question intended to cover how individuals manage information gaps with their leaders in an organisational setting. It aimed to better understand their communication, conflict resolution, and adaptability skills when coping with covert activities that may have negative consequences. The question further intended to explore moral considerations, decision-making procedures, and the capacity to adapt and develop in response to issues resulting from information asymmetry in a mutually beneficial arrangement.

6.4.1 Overview of findings

Theme 4: Strengthening the Integrity of Local Government

The findings revealed that enhancing local governance integrity involves closing information gaps, minimising harm, promoting ethics, navigating politics, and maintaining transparency for accountability. Therefore, themes that emerged from this research question is Theme 4: Strengthening the Integrity of Local Government, with five sub-themes. The sub-themes that will be presented in this theme are tabled below.

Table 9: Description of Sub-Themes for Theme 4

	Sub-Themes for Theme 4
1	Information Asymmetry
2	Negative effects of Information Asymmetry
3	Interpreting and responding to the Hidden actions of others
4	Ethical Behavioural Practices
5	Understanding the political Landscape of Local Government

6.4.1.1 Information Asymmetry – Reducing Information Gaps

The findings from participants demonstrated that they reduce information and knowledge gaps between themselves and their participants by ensuring regular information sharing with staff, which improves the institution’s goals and objectives. Holding regular meetings with teams, both in person and virtually, to promote open communication and information exchange. Participants also stated that sharing feedback from executive and council meetings helps keep employees informed and aligned regarding important choices and efforts.

Two participants emphasised the importance of filtering information to their subordinates to ensure everyone is aligned and engaged. They believe that regular communication has fostered a sense of buy-in from their team. The participants further acknowledged were instances their managerial team may not be effectively communicated with their direct reports, potentially leading to gaps in information flow and understanding within

the organisation. This emphasises how crucial it is to have efficient communication between teams in order to maintain unity and clarity, both vertically and horizontally.

Another participant indicated the importance of getting all members of her team, including the direct reports, personal assistant, administrative support, and receptionist, well-informed about current tasks and involved in strategic meetings. The emphasis made was the act of taking one of the administrative staff to strategic meetings to ensure institutional memory and information continuity, especially considering the contractual nature of their posts. This finding demonstrated a comprehensive approach to information dissemination and team involvement, ensuring that everyone is aware of and contributing to the organisation's goals, as well as acknowledging the importance of institutional memory for continuity.

Another finding that was shared was a structured hierarchical communication flow, that enables information to flow seamlessly from the top-level executive, which is the mayor down to different tiers of management and staff. This ensures that crucial updates and decisions are disseminated effectively throughout the municipality, keeping everyone informed and aligned with key developments.

Findings also revealed that taking time to share new learning approaches and concepts in local government is crucial. With stakeholder within departments or organisations of local government such as SALGA or CoGTA, this is crucial, as these concepts facilitates innovation and adaptation to change. Three Participants also indicated the important to encourage team members to verify information with senior manager or managers, rather than engaging in gossip which can damage one's reputation and foster negativity.

Comparison of findings with Literature

Reducing information asymmetry, has got to do with minimising the gap in knowledge or information between two parties in a transaction or interaction is known as reducing information asymmetry. The findings have revealed that there were instances where the senior managers and/or middle managers possessed more information than their followers, which in these instances were their team members. This results in an unequal distribution of power. Therefore, this is in line with literature, Stiglitz (2002) highlights the pivotal role of information asymmetry, wherein individuals possess different levels of knowledge. Therefore, the findings revealed various innovative ways in which the participants closed the information gaps with their followers. Which this enhances transparency which ensured that all parties have access to relevant information, which

ultimately leads to fairer decision-making processes. Connelly et al. (2011) asserts that information profoundly shapes decision-making processes across households, businesses, and governments.

6.4.1.2 Negative effects of Information Asymmetry

The findings have revealed various cases reported that have negative effects of information asymmetry. Information asymmetry erodes trust between parties in a working relationship. When one party feels that they are at a disadvantage due to lack of information, trust diminishes, leading to friction in relationship and hindering future interactions.

- a.) One participant reiterated the significance of upholding integrity and consistency in communication in the face of obstacles, guaranteeing the transmission of accurate information even after audit committee evaluations. This, strategy promotes confidence and showcases a dedication to upholding ethical principles. Furthermore, what was demonstrated here was that leaders of individuals may act differently due to the knowing that they won't bear the full consequences of their actions.

- b.) Another participant emphasised the potential for adverse selection she experienced, since one party (the leader) had exclusive access to information that could put the other (herself) at a disadvantage by causing them to make decisions that were not well-informed because of incomplete or misleading data. The participant described a scenario in which she followed protocol by making recommendations backed up by legislation regarding the performance contract of a specific Head of Department (HOD), (this refers to another senior manager) despite her efforts, the report containing these recommendations was not delivered to the council as planned. This situation left her feeling conflicted because she thought they had fulfilled their obligations, but she was perceived as acting with ulterior motives. The failure to submit the report resulted in external perceptions of other intentions, causing distress, and highlighting the complexities of navigating ethical quandaries within Municipal dynamics.

Evaluation of findings Against Literature

Stiglitz (2000) outlines the significance of recognising information asymmetry, focusing on two key aspects: quality and intent. The (a) finding is in line with literature as it demonstrates that in an ethical setting, leaders tend to exhibit more ethical behaviour, influenced by social norms and observation of others (Peterson, 2002). The participant was consistent in requesting evidence of the performance that was audited, back from the concerned department. Despite what was presented to the audit committee (fabricated report). The participant consistently went back to the concerned department and asked for a portfolio of evidence (POE). This act demonstrates ethical leadership behaviours, such as upholding integrity and consistency in communicating the intention of auditing principles and standards in an organisation. Balboa and Marti, (2007) emphasize the importance of repetitive signaling, since it can improve its efficacy, particularly when sending different signals to convey the same message. Therefore, this illustrates the negative effects of information asymmetry because one party that has more information than the other, has presented a report (which reflects “achievement”) to the audit committee. Which does not reflect the accurate evidence of what the department has performed.

The (b) scenario finding above illustrates the negative effects of information asymmetry, since it indicates the imbalances that happens when one party is not fully aware of the characteristics of the other. The participant who shared this did not understand why the report with recommendations never go to council. The intentions of the leader (Municipal Manager were unclear). Therefore, the literature, is in line with the findings, since Elitzur and Gavious, (2003) indicate that recognising signaling theory has been about when individuals are concerned about the actions or motives of another. This emphasises the impact of information asymmetry on various interactions and the importance of considering them when making decisions.

6.4.1.3 Interpreting and Responding to Hidden Actions of Others

The findings revealed how these middle managers responded to hidden actions that were conducted by their leaders specifically in aspects of non-compliance and confronting unethical behaviour through whistle blowing despite risk of victimisation. Furthermore, the findings were focused on ensuring transparency, accountability, and proper procedures within the organisation.

The first finding indicated discrepancies identified in a contract by the participant’s team, leading to an overpayment of commission. These discrepancies were reported to relevant authorities, including a Section 80 committee, the Council, and the Municipal

Manager. Subsequently, the CFO and Municipal Manager left their positions, indicating that action was taken to address the issues raised, since they were both implicated.

The second finding emphasises the importance of following proper procedures when it comes to transfers of personnel within the organisation. The finding states that transfers of officials from one department to another must be documented in writing and that the availability of the position being transferred should be confirmed, with the concerned department. Additionally, the participants highlight the needs that departments must understand officials acting in the vacant positions must be given a chance to develop themselves in those positions.

Comparison of findings with Literature

The findings revealed that, even though there are regulations, standard operating procedures, and governance legislation, senior managers to whom these middle managers report too, have communicated forms of noncompliance and unethical intentions. Such non-compliance signals and ethical ambiguities jeopardise the organisation's integrity and reputation. However, response by participants to the hidden actions ensured the upholding of transparency, accountability, and proper procedures within the organisation. Jha and Singh (2019) assert that ethical leaders uphold principles such as honesty, trustworthiness, motivation, and equality.

According to Brown et al. (2005), ethical leadership is based on integrity and serves as a guiding principle for leaders who consistently uphold moral values. Engelbrecht et al. (2017) emphasise the importance of integrity in ethical leadership, which ensures that leaders' actions are consistent with their ethical principles. Wang and Hackett (2020), emphasise that ethical leaders are those who demonstrate ethical behaviour and create guidelines that encourage ethical conduct.

6.4.1.4 Ethical Behavioural Practices

The findings revealed that Local government stands out as one of the most extensively legislated spheres of government. Therefore, participants indicated that Local government Legislations and policies have assisted them as leaders in closing the knowledge gaps between themselves and their team members. Various legislations, frameworks, policies, and strategies were mentioned in chapter five.

Furthermore, the findings revealed that workshops, training sessions, conferences, and information-sharing meetings have all played important roles in spreading knowledge

about ethical behaviour and accountability. These initiatives help to foster an ethical culture within municipalities, with the goal of creating a professional environment that is clear and adheres to sound principles. The findings also revealed the importance of taking councillors to workshops to help them understand the significance of organisational policies.

The findings revealed that they have provided workshops and training sessions on internal disciplinary processes, such as hearings and acting as prosecutors or presiding officers. Resistance initially arose due to a lack of knowledge or a reluctance to prosecute colleagues, but training addressed these concerns. The emphasis was on understanding disciplinary procedures in order to maintain accountability and aid individuals in local government to avoid unethical behaviour that could incur severe repercussions.

Other findings revealed that roadshows are held focusing on labour relations, grievance procedures, and disciplinary issues, with the goal of addressing supervisors' lack of understanding in dealing with such matters. Some supervisors struggled to charge individuals or handle grievances, resulting in refusals to accept grievances due to misunderstandings.

Evaluation of findings Against Literature

The findings are supported by the literature since it is essential to prioritise the implementation of ethical leadership in all organisational functions. Wang and Hackett (2020) have suggested that ethical leadership should be a top priority in Human Resource Training. This training involves developing knowledge and understanding of fundamental moral virtues like courage, temperance, justice, and prudence. These qualities provide a strong foundation for the formation of moral identity in individuals in lower positions (Wang & Hackett, 2020).

According to Al Halbusi et al. (2023), it is suggested that training and development initiatives should be supported by a strong performance management system that enforces consequences for both ethical and unethical behaviour. It is essential to align this system with the principles and practices of ethical leadership. Wang and Hackett (2020), assert ethical leaders are those who demonstrate ethical behaviour and create guidelines that encourage ethical conduct. Playing a vital role as sources of information, they guide acceptable behaviour and contribute to the establishment of an ethical work environment.

Therefore, municipal efforts to provide workshops and training sessions on internal disciplinary processes, such as hearings and positions as prosecutors or presiding officers, are critical in fostering a culture of moral and ethical behaviour in local government. These initiatives serve as the foundation for creating an environment that values accountability and fairness. Furthermore, workshops focusing on grievance procedures are critical in improving the ethical compass of supervisors and managers within the sphere. These sessions help to improve the overall integrity and trustworthiness of the organisation's leadership by providing them with the skills and knowledge needed to navigate sensitive issues and resolve conflicts impartially.

6.4.1.5 Understanding the Political Landscape of Local Government

The results show that political dynamics, which include power struggles among elected officials, coalition formations, and competing interests, have a significant impact on local government. Due to their influence over and interaction with the larger political environment, these factors not only shape policy outcomes but also influence the stability and effectiveness of governance.

One finding was that politicians lacking comprehensive knowledge on certain matters, has led senior management to make decisions without understanding whether their actions align with regulations or standards such as the MFMA (Municipal Finance Management Act).

A view from the findings alluded to the fact that the local government environment is unlikely to improve soon due to the short-term focus of coalition politics, which prioritises personal gain over community welfare. This leads to undue pressure on officials to prioritise self-interest, resulting in chaos within municipalities. Councillors pressuring heads of departments (HODs) and municipal managers to prioritise certain actions for personal gain can lead to dysfunction within the administration. This interference can also disrupt the implementation of policies and projects aimed at serving the community's needs effectively.

Additional findings underscore the crucial role of impartiality for a senior manager in local government, necessitating a commitment to executing the council mandate without bias towards any political party. The participant indicted that as a member of the executive team, it's imperative to ensure transparency in decision-making and budget allocations, adhering to agreed-upon objectives. This emphasises the significance of transparent communication and mutual understanding among stakeholders. Despite efforts to

maintain fairness and objectivity, perceptions of bias from various political parties can emerge, highlighting the challenges of upholding fairness in a political environment.

Evaluation of findings Against Literature

The established knowledge in the field of ethical leadership has shown that it is more than a theoretical concept; it is a practical requirement for developing a culture of trust, integrity, and high performance within organisations. According to Brown et al. (2005), ethical leadership is based on integrity and serves as a guiding principle for leaders who consistently uphold moral values. Engelbrecht et al. (2017) emphasise integrity as a pillar of ethical leadership, ensuring that leaders' actions are consistent with their ethical principles.

Within the scope of this sub-theme, which delves into the political dynamics of local government in Gauteng during the 2021 Local Government leadership administration. It has been revealed that politicians lack comprehensive knowledge and skills in certain areas, which can lead to senior management making decisions that are not in compliance with regulations, compromising the effectiveness and efficiency of local government. Additionally, political interference in administration leads to interference pressures on senior managers and municipal managers for personal gain, disrupting municipal administration, causing delays, and impeding the implementation of community-beneficial policies and projects. Finally, ensuring the impartiality of senior managers in council meetings with politicians is inconsistent. As a result, the findings, based on emerging trends in local government issues, appear to be inconsistent with the literature.

6.4.2 Conclusion of Research Question 3

Reducing information asymmetry was addressed through regular information sharing and open communication among staff bridge knowledge gaps, aligning efforts with institutional goals, fostering collaboration, and informed decision-making. The discussion in response to research question emphasise the importance of repetitive signaling, since it can improve its efficacy, particularly when sending different signals to convey the same message.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

This chapter highlights the most significant results from the research discussion in Chapter 6. Each principal conclusion addresses one of the three research questions. Chapter 7 then discusses the research contributions, in exploring the effects of ethical leadership on team effectiveness. The chapter then makes future recommendations for senior and middle managers in local government. Finally, this chapter provides the limitations of future research and outlines suggestions for future research. The main conclusions of this chapter include the study's overall insights.

7.1 Principal theoretical conclusions for research question 1

How does ethical leadership behaviours impact on individual performance?

The study underscored that leadership that is ethical entails taking responsibility for decisions and actions, as well as implementing effective reward systems to inspire ethical behaviour and discourage unethical behaviour (Nguyen et al., 2021). Furthermore, disciplinary measures that align with signalling theory are critical for communicating an organisation's commitment to ethical standards and discouraging dishonest behaviour (Srivastava & Lurie, 2001). Furthermore, leaders are responsible for guiding individuals through complex organisational environments and cultivating an ethical culture (Brown & Trevino, 2006). Finally, leadership integrity is essential for prioritising ethical choices, building trust, and making decisions based on organisational values (Ilyas et al., 2020). These insights highlight the critical components of ethical leadership and their importance in cultivating an ethical organisational culture.

The outcomes of the findings revealed that ethical leadership entails accepting responsibility for decisions and actions while implementing effective reward systems to promote ethical behaviour and deter unethical conduct. This emphasises the importance of creating a supportive environment within organisations for ethical behaviour to flourish. Furthermore, as Srivastava and Lurie (2001) point out, the alignment of disciplinary measures with signalling theory emphasises their importance in signaling the organisation's commitment to ethical standards and discouraging dishonest behaviour.

Furthermore, Brown and Trevino (2006) emphasise the importance of leaders guiding individuals through complex organisational environments and fostering an ethical

culture. Finally, Ilyas et al. (2020) emphasise the importance of leadership integrity in prioritising ethical choices, building trust, and grounding decisions in organisational values. These findings highlight the critical components of ethical leadership and their role in cultivating an ethical organisational culture, a culture which is required in many local government spaces in South Africa.

The lessons into follower perception of exemplary behaviour indicated that ethical leadership is critical for fostering trust and achieving peak performance in organisations. Since the findings indicate that employees value leaders who respect their work and meet deadlines. According to Ilyas et al. (2020), supportive and appreciative leaders promote higher performance and commitment organisations. The findings revealed that managers recognise positive traits in ethical leaders, which leads to a more positive workplace culture and higher employee engagement. In essence, ethical leadership promotes organisational success and a productive work environment.

In summary, the study discovered that ethical leadership is critical for guiding individuals through complex organisational settings and cultivating an ethical culture. Leadership integrity is critical for prioritising ethical choices, establishing trust, and ensuring that decisions are consistent with the organisation's values. Ethical leadership improves organisational performance by instilling trust, creating a supportive environment, and motivating employees to succeed through respect and recognition. These components, taken together, highlight the importance of ethical leadership in both personal achievement and organisational success.

7.2 Principal theoretical conclusions for research question 2

How does ethical leadership behaviours impact team performance?

The study confirmed that ethical leadership in local government is crucial for motivating employees and teams to do the right thing, fostering transparency, accountability, and efficiency, and navigating political shifts while adhering to regulations. Furthermore, leaders must prioritise maintaining confidentiality and ethical conduct, creating an environment where employees feel comfortable discussing ethics and suggesting improvements.

In terms of challenges identified in local government, (1) the lack of inspiration for meaningful work in the public sector can lead to unethical behaviour among employees,

as they may feel disengaged and unfulfilled. This highlights the importance of fostering a culture of purpose and meaningful work to maintain ethical standards within organisations. (2) In local government, leadership incompetence can undermine ethical culture and contribute to a lack of moral influence on subordinates. It emphasises the critical role of competent and ethical leadership in shaping organisational values and behaviours.

Leaders' involvement and guidance are key factors in promoting individual performance within a team, playing a crucial role in fostering team cohesion and productivity. According to Yoo et al. (2022), when leaders actively participate in the team's journey, providing immediate assistance and acknowledging individual perspectives, it results in increased team satisfaction and overall effectiveness.

Decisiveness with ethical consideration is crucial when building effective team leadership that involves making prompt, well-considered decisions while ensuring they align with legal and ethical standards. Since leaders must act decisively, they must consider ethical implications rather than delaying or avoiding decisions entirely. Inclusive collaboration and compassionate leadership stood out as key findings because they encompass acknowledging and valuing diverse perspectives that foster collaboration and improve team performance. Additionally, leaders who demonstrate compassion and empathy contribute to emotional resilience within teams, ultimately strengthening relationships and increasing the efficiency of local government.

The study also identified that allowing teams to design their own engagement activities not only encourages a healthy work environment in which employees feel appreciated and included, but it also leads to increased motivation and productivity. Furthermore, recognising, and prioritising team members' personal lives and well-being, as well as encouraging continuous learning and development, helps to create a supportive environment. This, in turn, boosts team morale and engagement, resulting in improved overall performance and organisational success.

The study added to the research by identifying exemplary behaviours demonstrated by leaders to their subordinates, as well as how the same leaders perceive the exemplary behaviour of their leaders. They foster a culture of accountability and motivation, encouraging the team to seek feedback and inquire as needed.

The study identified that ethical leadership behaviours are not only demonstrated by leaders to their subordinates but also reciprocated by subordinates to their leaders, emphasising the importance of ethical leadership at both individual and dyadic levels. This mutual reinforcement establishes a framework for ethical behaviours to flourish within the leader-follower relationship, embedding a culture marked by trustworthiness and mutual understanding.

The findings support the value of signaling theory in understanding the communication of positive behaviours within organisations. Since Managers' ability to openly share exemplary behaviours demonstrated by their leaders indicates high signal observability and signaling strength, highlighting the intentional communication of ethical leadership practices. This highlights the role of leaders in influencing organisational culture and promoting ethical conduct through effective communication and role modelling (Spence, 2002).

The study found that leadership support initiatives that strike a balance between people's development and task orientation foster an environment of accountability and empowerment among team members. Studies have shown that these programmes improve team productivity, flexibility, and effectiveness overall. They also highlight how important it is for leaders to foster a common goal and encourage staff development and self-determination in order to maximise team performance.

As supported by the literature, the study found that ethical leadership is essential for organisational success, as highlighted by Madanchian et al. (2018), as it fosters employee motivation and dedication to achieving organisational goals, thus serving as a cornerstone for enduring prosperity and impact. Furthermore, findings alluded to the fact that clear communication with stakeholders and engagement in initiatives with shared objectives and measurable outcomes can lead to inspiring incentives and maintain progress (Dreier et al., 2019).

The outcomes of the findings revealed that local government systems must prioritize accountability and effectiveness, as highlighted by Armstrong and Taylor (2022), by adopting standardized performance measures to improve service delivery and overall performance. In addition, effective organisational management, including strategic planning, supervision, and employee development, is crucial for aligning performance with organisational goals and achieving operational excellence, especially in competitive environments like agile learning organizations (Susanto, Syailendra & Suryawan, 2023).

Ethical Leadership promotes open communication creating an environment where employees feel comfortable providing feedback and expressing their thoughts, fostering open communication and innovation. The findings also confirmed that feedback enhances organisational signaling in that countersignal, plays a crucial role in reducing information gaps, improving communication clarity, and facilitating better decision-making based on organisational signals (Gupta, Govindarajan & Malhotra,1999). The study emphasised the importance of maintaining a steadfast dedication to outstanding performance, particularly when faced with challenges. This dedication is maintained through thorough preparation, a positive mindset, and consistent execution, resulting in optimal performance outcomes.

The outcomes of the findings revealed the ethical leadership enhances psychological safety in cultivating an environment of trust, fairness, open communication, and empowerment, fostering psychological safety among employees. This allows teams to freely express their thoughts, seize opportunities, and engage in teamwork, leading to improved morale and commitment. The findings showed that employees interpret leaders' actions and comments positively, seeing them as demonstrations of innovation, creativity, and encouragement rather than criticism. This mindset reflects resilience, determination, and a willingness to overcome challenges, ultimately contributing to a positive work environment and success in teams.

Interesting findings were revealed that indicate that ethical leaders have a pivotal role to play in developing and influencing the culture of an organisation by promoting both mandatory ethical behaviours and discretionary ethical behaviours. By setting a strong ethical example and emphasising moral excellence, ethical leaders inter inspire employees to follow suit and uphold ethical standards independently. Furthermore, ethical leadership fosters positive relationships within teams and organisations, which are essential for employee psychological well-being (Cascio, 2013; Quick et al., 2013).

These relationships create a supportive environment where employees feel valued and encouraged to adhere to ethical values and norms, ultimately enhancing their overall well-being and job satisfaction. The findings of the research are aligned to literature as, psychological well-being has the potential to drive advancements and maximize productivity within teams. When employees feel psychologically supported and encouraged to uphold ethical standards, they are more likely to be engaged, motivated, and productive, leading to positive outcomes for both individuals and the organisation.

The outcomes of the study alluded to the fact that ethical leaders can strengthen team resilience by fostering supportive networks, facilitating meaningful connections among team members, and providing comprehensive support across emotional, social, and technological aspects (Hartwig et al., 2020). Ethical leaders who embody positivity and adaptability can effectively reframe challenges, maintain a clear understanding of their sphere of influence, and promote a culture of realistic optimism and solution-oriented problem-solving, thus improving team resilience (McEwen, 2022; Sommer et al., 2016). The literature supports the importance of having well-rounded team members with a positive approach to enhance team resilience and achieve goals effectively, this was also a finding from the study.

The outcomes of the findings revealed that encouraging a sense of empowerment and recognition among employees enhances motivation and performance (Gillet et al., 2018). Ethical leadership influences employee motivation and performance, leading to enhancements in task performance. Ethical managers prioritise the genuine development of staff skills and abilities. Cooperative strategies emphasising leadership integrity foster accountability among staff members, encouraging long-term thinking (Hsieh et al., 2020).

The outcome of the study also confirmed the elements of signaling theory. Leaders reduce information asymmetry by signaling learning opportunities and initiatives to enhance organisational growth (Janney & Folta, 2006; Park & Mezas, 2005). Ethical and authentic leaders who prioritise employee growth and maintain transparent communication improve team effectiveness and enhance the customer experience. The outcome of the study revealed that the role of ethical leadership is crucial in cultivating a culture of accountability and commitment to ensuring team performance in within municipalities and inspiring teams to surpass expectations. Another outcome of the study was for confirmed that importance for organisations to must prioritise adaptability to thrive in changing environments, with leaders encouraging new perspectives and goals to align with organisational needs (Han et al., 2018; Pauer & Eastman, 1997).

The outcomes of the study also confirmed what is in literature, that leaders have the power to shape the values and beliefs of team members, aligning them with organisational goals and fostering adaptability, this is understood as idealised influence (Han et al., 2018). Ethical leadership not only sets high standards but also motivates teams to achieve more, fostering a culture of continuous improvement and striving for excellence, this was also revealed in the study.

In summary, the study gave a shared perspective on how teams perform in local government and alluded to the leadership challenges in local government. Most importantly, the enablers that were identified that promote team effectiveness through the influence of ethical leadership behaviours were: (1) exemplary behaviours, (2) leadership support initiatives, (3) goal setting with objectives, (4) performance management, (5) providing feedback, (6) striving for optimal performance; (7) psychological safety, (8) work-life balance and employee well-being, (9) team building and collaboration, (10) empowering personal growth and development, (11) career development opportunities; and (12) inspirational motivation.

7.3 Principal theoretical conclusions for research question 3

How does ethical leadership behaviours manifest and influence followers in various organisational settings?

Reducing information asymmetry is crucial for minimising power imbalances between parties in transactions or interactions, ensuring fair decision-making processes (Stiglitz, 2002). Therefore, the outcomes of the study found that regular information sharing, and open communication channels fostered by participants contribute to reducing knowledge gaps within organisations, promoting alignment with goals and objectives.

Effective communication strategies, such as filtering information and involving all team members in decision-making processes, enhance team buy-in and mitigate potential gaps in information flow and understanding. The study identified that addressing information asymmetry contributes to more informed decision-making processes not only within organisations but also across businesses, and governments (Connelly et al., 2011).

Structured hierarchical communication flows, combined with initiatives to share new learning approaches and concepts facilitated by stakeholder organisations such as COGTA and SALAGA remain crucial in facilitating innovation, adaptation to change, and maintain organisational unity and clarity. As a result, this is in line literature that, Innovative strategies employed by leaders to close information gaps with their followers

enhance transparency and ensure equal access to relevant information, thus promoting fairness in decision-making (Connelly et al., 2011).

The study found that ethical leadership behaviours, such as consistent pursuit of evidence and clear communication, help to mitigate the negative effects of information asymmetry in organisations (Peterson, 2002; Balboa & Marti, 2007). Information asymmetry undermines effective decision-making processes by making it difficult to accurately understand and assess organisational actions and motives (Elitzur & Gavius, 2003). From the study, it became clear that recognising and addressing information asymmetry is critical for fostering transparency, integrity, and trust between stakeholders in organisational interactions (Peterson, 2002; Balboa & Marti, 2007; Elitzur & Gavius, 2003).

Transparency, accountability, and adherence to proper procedures are crucial organisational values that ethical leadership must protect against, especially when noncompliance and ethical ambiguities arise, according to the study's findings (Jha & Singh, 2019). Integrity, as an essential tenet of ethical leadership, furnishes leaders with the direction to perpetually uphold moral standards and ensure that their behaviour aligns with ethical principles (Brown et al., 2005; Engelbrecht et al., 2017).

The study also identified that ethical leaders should establish and enforce guidelines that foster ethical conduct, thereby aiding in the preservation of organisational integrity and reputation (Wang & Hackett, 2020). The outcomes of the study demonstrated that ethical leaders play a pivotal role in guiding acceptable behaviour and contributing to the establishment of an ethical work environment (Wang & Hackett, 2020). Municipal efforts to provide workshops and training sessions on internal disciplinary processes and grievance procedures are essential for fostering a culture of moral and ethical behaviour among supervisors and managers (Al Halbusi et al., 2023).

Prioritising ethical leadership in HR training is critical for instilling moral identity and ethical behaviour in employees (Wang & Hackett, 2020). The study also confirmed that training and development initiatives should be supported by a strong performance management system aligned with the principles of ethical leadership to enforce consequences for ethical and unethical. The study outcomes of the study revealed that political dynamics influence governance as power struggles and competing interests among politicians have a significant impact on local government policy outcomes and effectiveness. Politicians lacking comprehensive knowledge and skills in certain areas

leads to senior management making decisions that are not in accordance with regulations such as the MFMA, emphasising the importance of informed decision-making, however senior managers need to be vigilant enough to making decisions according to legislative prescripts. The short-term focus of coalition politics on personal gain over community needs puts undue pressure on officials, resulting in municipal chaos and a prioritisation of self-interest over effective governance. The political interference in administration causes interference pressurises senior managers and municipal managers for personal gain which disrupts municipal administration, causing delays and impeding policy and project implementation that benefit the community. Lastly, the study revealed that the commitment to impartiality among senior managers in local government is paramount. By upholding transparency, fairness, and objectivity in decision-making and budget allocation, they ensure the fulfilment of the council's mandate without bias towards any political party.

In summary, the discussion enhancing local governance integrity involves closing information gaps, minimising harm, promoting ethics, navigating politics, and maintaining transparency for accountability. Therefore, the research question responded to the research question through five sub-themes: (1) Information Asymmetry, (2) Negative effects of Information Asymmetry; (3) Interpreting and Responding to the Hidden Actions of Others; (4) Ethical Behavioural Practices and (5) Understanding the Political Landscape of Local Government.

7.4 Research Contribution

7.4.1 Organisational Framework for Ethical Leadership Behaviours and Team Effectiveness

This research contribution is based on a thorough examination of senior and middle managers in local government. Valuable insights were gained from both participants and existing literature, which enhanced the framework presented. Gunter et al. (2020) emphasise the importance of distinguishing between perceptions, beliefs, personality traits, and actions to provide a clearer and more cohesive definition of ethical leadership behaviour. To advance the comprehension of complex processes related to ethical leadership, Banks et al. (2021) recommend creating an organisational framework of ethical leadership behaviours at various levels. The Organisational Framework for Ethical leadership Behaviours and Team Effectiveness, illustrated in Figure 8 can assist in understanding ethical leadership behaviours more comprehensively and how these

behaviours have a positive effect on fostering a culture of ethical culture across the organisation.

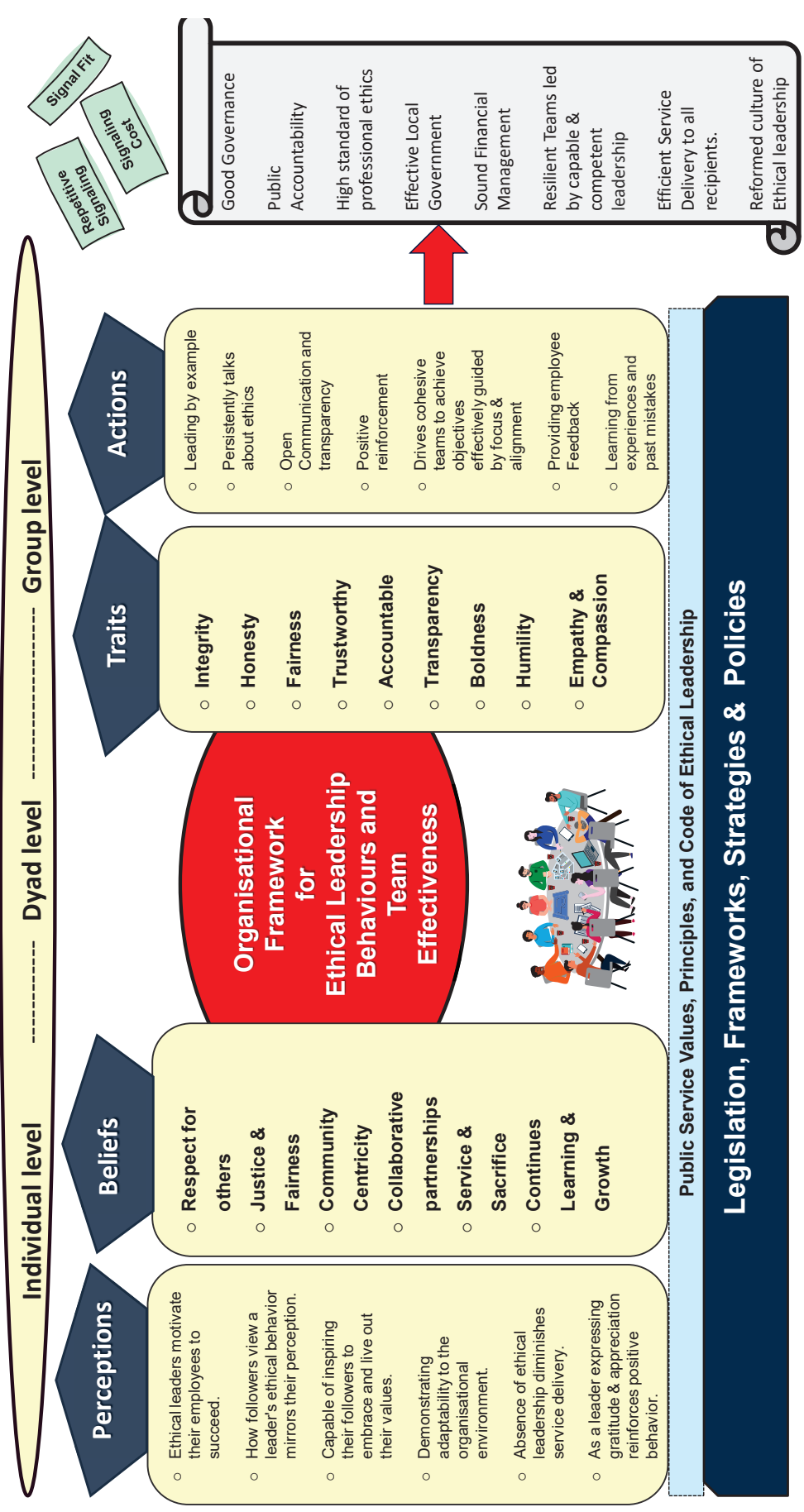


Figure 8: Organisational Framework for Ethical Leadership Behaviours and Team Effectiveness (Author's Own)

In order to understand the significance of the framework, the contents is explained from The meaning is explained from 7.4.2 until 7.4.8.

7.4.2 Legislation, Frameworks, Strategies & Policies

Local government, being highly legislated, necessitates public servants to adhere to regulations, frameworks, strategies, and policies in their roles. The South African Constitution, emphasising democratic values and principles, shapes the culture and operations of the public sector. Ethical leadership behaviours and team effectiveness in the sphere of public administration, are grounded in legislation, frameworks, strategies, and policies.

7.4.3 Public Service Values, Principles, and a Code of Ethical Leadership

Public Service Values, Principles, and the new Code of Ethical Leadership, which was launched on the 1st of March 2024, titled; *Local Government Ethical Leadership Initiative*, (TEI, 2023) aims to strongly shape ethical leadership behaviours and team effectiveness in Local Government. Leaders following these values and principles are expected to uphold high professional ethics, fostering accountability and impartiality in their duties. In the South African context, Batho Pele principles play a pivotal role in shaping the behaviours of local government officials, including senior and middle management. The Batho Pele principles provide a framework that influences how public servants approach their duties and emphasises citizen centricity and the need for officials to put people and services to communities above their own needs. These principles shift the public service delivery approach from stringent bureaucratic procedures to an approach that focuses on ethical actions that will meet the needs and expectations of the people served.

The comprehensive understanding and proper application of legislation, frameworks, strategies, and policies within Local government, coupled with sound Public Service Values, Principles, and adherence to the new Code of Ethical Leadership, is instrumental in fostering ethical leadership behaviours and team effectiveness within municipalities.

7.4.4 Perceptions, Beliefs, Traits & Actions

The Framework in Figure 8 distinguishes between Perceptions, Beliefs, Personality Traits, and Actions as core pillars in framing ethical leadership behaviours. The differences between these core pillars must be clearly understood to nurture effective and efficient ethical leadership behaviours within municipalities. The perceptions, beliefs, personality traits, and actions outlined within the Framework are based on a review of

established literature, in-depth research and interviews with senior and middle management participants operating in local government.

7.4.4.1 Perceptions

Perceptions of ethical leadership are subjective, with followers' perceptions reflecting their view of a leader's ethical behaviour. In the municipal context, ethical leaders are seen as motivators who inspire employees to succeed and embody shared values. They are perceived as adaptable to the organisational environment, recognising that a lack of ethical leadership in municipalities and the public sector hampers service delivery. Ethical leaders' express gratitude, reinforcing positive behaviours and enhancing team effectiveness.

7.4.4.2 Beliefs

Beliefs significantly shape ethical leadership behaviours. Ethical leaders believe in demonstrating respect for others, upholding justice, and ensuring fairness. Service to the community is at the heart of local government and ethical leaders within this space believe that the community must be placed at the centre. They emphasise community-centricity, service, and sacrifice as core beliefs. Strengthening ethical leadership involves fostering collaborative partnerships both within and outside the organisation. Ethical leaders also believe in continuous growth and learning, fostering team agility, which directly influences community perceptions of local government and public services.

7.4.4.3 Traits

There are distinct personality traits associated with ethical leadership, including integrity, honesty, and fairness. Ethical leaders are trustworthy and capable of holding themselves and others accountable. They are transparent with their constituents and are bold in upholding legislation and regulation. Furthermore, ethical leaders in local government exhibit humility and compassion towards their team members and the communities they serve.

7.4.4.4 Actions

Yukl et. al. (2013) alluded that ethical leaders actively engage in actions and behaviours that promote the well-being of others, while simultaneously avoiding behaviours that may inflict harm upon them. Ethical leaders translate perceptions, beliefs, and traits into actions. They lead by example and interact transparently with their team. Persistent in discussing ethics, they communicate openly at all levels of their organisation levels (i.e., at the individual, dyad, and group level). Ethical leaders reinforce positive behaviour and have a keen understanding of how to drive cohesive teams to achieve objectives effectively. They ensure staff to understand the organisational mandate and how it translates into efficient service delivery, which promotes focus, alignment, and overall team effectiveness. Ethical leaders offer constructive feedback and are receptive to input from employees. They demonstrate the capacity to course-correct by actively learning from experiences and past mistakes. This can potentially lead to a shift in their future ethical perceptions.

7.4.5 Ethical Leadership Behaviour in Local Government

Therefore, this framework is a contribution to literature and the local government with the in aspiring to have ethical leaders in local government which drive good governance through adherence to legislation, policies, and frameworks. Whom, promote public accountability by ensuring transparency and answerability for decisions and conduct within the public domain. Whom understand that sound financial management is driven by ethical leadership as illustrated by well-run municipalities that achieve clean financial audits in South Africa. It is this reason that is envisioned by practitioners and scholars that Ethical leadership must transforms the culture in local government resulting in a reformed culture of ethical leadership that observes a high standard of professional ethics and is guided by the principles in the new code of ethical leadership (TIE, 2023).

Sound ethical leadership requires effective and consistent signaling tailored to the audience. This signaling, conveyed uniformly across all levels of the organisation, enhances the impact of an ethical leader's actions. It encompasses repetitive signaling, which improves communication efficacy; signal fit, which ensures accurate information is disseminated, resulting in better communication; and signaling cost, which refers to the resources invested in signaling.

Effective signaling is crucial for ethical leaders in the dynamic environment of local government. It bridges information gaps, ensuring accurate legislative information reaches employees. Ethical leadership, coupled with consistent signaling at the

individual, dyad, and group levels, enables effective local government, resilient teams led by capable and competent leadership and efficient service delivery to all recipients.

7.5 Recommendations for Senior and Middle managers in Local Government

Senior managers in local government must demonstrate a commitment to impartiality. They ensure the council's mandate is carried out without bias towards any political party by maintaining transparency, fairness, and objectivity in decision-making and budget allocation.

7.6 Limitations

However, there are some limitations to the study. The study did not explore the effect ethical leadership behaviours have in group settings, where a specified number of followers report to the same leader. The study only explored the individual and dyad levels. The study was carried out with integrity to ensure an accurate representation of leaders' lived experiences with the phenomenon. However, biases may have arisen because of the topic's uniqueness and the researcher's familiarity with the local government context and team performance dynamics. Furthermore, the researcher's limited experience conducting qualitative studies using semi-structured interviews may have influenced the results.

7.7 Suggestions for future research

Future research should focus on the applicability of ethical leadership and team performance at various organisational levels, using quantitative techniques to create a more comprehensive understanding of their impact and effectiveness. Since ethical leadership has received less attention from researchers than other Leadership theories.

The study focused on participants from Gauteng Municipalities, these findings can be verified through a case study approach from municipalities across South Africa that are stable and have received a clean audit, in the last three to five years. In essence this refers to well-functioning municipalities.

The study's findings revealed that political interference in administration prompts senior managers and municipal managers to interfere in operations for personal gain, which creates pressure and hinders the smooth functioning of municipal administration. This then leads to delays and obstacles in implementing policies and projects that would otherwise benefit the community. Future research could investigate the effects of political

influence on ethical leadership and good governance, providing additional insights into this critical issue.

Lastly, given the large volume of information received, future research of this magnitude may benefit from collaboration among 2–3 researchers. Such collaboration can streamline analysis and improve insights.

7.8 Finale Statement

In the context of South Africa's 6th democratic administration, research has shown that local government plays an important role in driving transformation and development in Local Government. The study highlights the existence of ethical leaders within this administration who prioritise serving their communities and leading by example. These leaders stand firm against wrongdoings such as non-compliance and corruption while emphasising the values of integrity, honesty, and compassion.

Furthermore, the study provides an organisational framework for understanding ethical leadership and its impact on team effectiveness, with a focus on character traits. This framework encourages leaders to reflect on their practices and consciously improve their leadership qualities. By aligning their actions with ethical principles, leaders can enhance their effectiveness in leading teams and serving communities.

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APPENDIX 1: GIBS ETHICAL CLEARANCE APPROVAL

**Gordon Institute
of Business Science**
University of Pretoria

**Ethical Clearance
Approved**

Dear [REDACTED]

Please be advised that your application for Ethical Clearance has been approved.
You are therefore allowed to continue collecting your data.
We wish you everything of the best for the rest of the project.

[Ethical Clearance Form](#)

Kind Regards

This email has been sent from an unmonitored email account. If you have any comments or concerns, please contact the GIBS Research Admin team.

GIBS ETHICAL CLEARANCE APPLICATION FORM 2023/24

G. APPROVALS FOR/OFF THIS APPLICATION

When the applicant is a student of GIBS, the applicant must please ensure that the supervisor and co-supervisor (where relevant) has signed the form before submission

STUDENT RESEARCHER/APPLICANT:

29. I affirm that all relevant information has been provided in this form and its attachments and that all statements made are correct.

Student Researcher's Name in capital letters:	[REDACTED]
Date:	20 Oct 2023
Supervisor Name in capital letters:	[REDACTED]
Date:	20 Oct 2023
Co-supervisor Name in capital letters:	
Date:	20 Oct 2023

Note: GIBS shall do everything in its power to protect the personal information supplied herein, in accordance to its company privacy policies as well the Protection of Personal Information Act, 2013. Access to all of the above provided personal information is restricted, only employees who need the information to perform a specific job are granted access to this information.

Decision:

Approved

REC comments:

Date: 30 Oct 2023

APPENDIX 2: INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR INTERVIEWS

I am currently a student at the University of Pretoria’s Gordon Institute of Business Science and completing my research in partial fulfilment of a Master of Philosophy (MPHIL) in Change Leadership.

I am conducting research on **exploring the effects of ethical leadership behaviours on team effectiveness**. The interview will focus on getting in-depth understanding on how ethical leadership behaviours impacts individual performance and team performance within Gauteng Municipalities. Our interview is expected to last **45 minutes** and will help us get an understanding of the ethical leadership behaviours required to leading individual and team performance in local government. Your participation is voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time without penalty.

By signing this letter, you are indicating that you have given permission for the interview to be recorded and transcribed by a third-party transcriber, to ensure accuracy. All data will be reported and stored without identifiers.

If you have any concerns, please contact my supervisor or me. Our details are provided below.

Researcher: {Confidential} Email: {Confidential} Phone: {Confidential}	Research Supervisor: {Confidential} Email: {Confidential} Phone: {Confidential}
---	--

Signature of participant: _____

Date: _____

Signature of researcher: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX 3: INTERVIEW DISCUSSION GUIDE

Table 10: Interview Discussion Guide

INTERVIEW DISCUSSION GUIDE		
GENERAL QUESTIONS	a. What is the current position you are occupying?	
	b. How many years have you been working for this Municipality?	
	c. How long have you been in this leadership position?	
	d. Mention the number of your direct and indirect reports, in any?	
RESEARCH QUESTIONS	INTERVIEW QUESTIONS	
Research Question 1: How does ethical leadership behaviours impact individual performance?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is your understanding of ethical leadership in your context? 2. How do these behaviours influence the performance of individuals- if at all? 3. Give examples of qualities that promote the performance of individuals in a leader-follower relationship. 4. Describe how exemplary behaviour has been demonstrated to you by your leader. 5. What have you learnt about this exemplary behaviour demonstrated by your leader? 	
Research Question 2 How does ethical leadership behaviours impact on team performance?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Share your perspective in how you think ethical leadership behaviours have an influence in how teams perform in the context of local government. 7. Give examples of the qualities that promote team performance in a relationship of a team and a leader. 	

	<p>8. What are the exemplary behaviours that you have demonstrated to your subordinates?</p> <p>9. How have you encouraged your team to feel engaged and motivated to work effectively?</p>
<p>Research Question 3</p> <p>How does ethical leadership behaviours manifest and influence followers in various organisational settings?</p>	<p>10. What are the ethical leadership behaviours you personally rely on as leader to reduce information gaps and also increase social influence within your team.</p> <p>11. In your area of work, what are some of the Local Government policies that have assisted you as a leader in closing knowledge gaps between yourself and team members?</p> <p>12. In a situation of mutual agreement between your leader and yourself. How have you handled actions done by your leader, that were hidden from you and, which may have impacted you negatively?</p>

APPENDIX 4: CODE LIST FROM ATLAS IT

Table 11: Code List from Atlas IT – Theme 1

Category	Sub-Theme	Theme 1: Shared Perspective of Ethical Leadership behaviours	
Participative leadership style	Own context of ethical leadership	Shared Perspective of Ethical Leadership behaviours	
Consultative and sticking to values principles			
Consistent in the application of Legislation and policies			
Mental discipline that is maintained			
Doing right by others			
Doing right by the organisation			
Communicate messages that are truthful			
Valuing community petitions			
Principled leadership			
Honesty			Character Traits of Ethical Leadership
Integrity			
Transparency			
Courageous and Boldness			
Empathy and Compassion			

Category	Sub-Theme	Theme 1: Shared Perspective of Ethical Leadership behaviours
Fairness	Shared perspective on how teams perform	
Gratitude		
Respect		
Trustworthy		
Consistency		
Accountability		
Responsibility		
Guiding acceptable behaviour		
Unwavering commitment to complying		
Maintain confidentiality		
Providing information when deemed necessary	Qualities that promote team performance	
Suggesting improvements to work conditions		
Vision setting for the future		
Innovation and embracing you thinking		
Team collaboration and inclusion		
Accommodates diverse viewpoints		
Addressing employee shortcomings		
Shares information and sources with team		

Category	Sub-Theme	Theme 1: Shared Perspective of Ethical Leadership behaviours
Awareness and discussion on latest legislations and policies	Cultivating Team Engagement and Motivation	
Publicly acknowledging excellent work by staff.		
Personalised recognition		
Celebration culture		
fostering positive morale and team spirit		

Table 12: Code List from Atlas IT – Theme 2

Category	Sub-Theme	Theme 2: Role Modelling
Accounting for organisational expenditure	Behaviour that influences people	Role Modelling
having performance parameters		
Managing by being present		
Active engagement meetings at depot level		
Being accessible to employees		
Moral Manger		
Actions aligned to words		

Category	Sub-Theme	Theme 2: Role Modelling
Providing necessary tools of trade	<p data-bbox="462 955 495 1260">Exemplary behaviours</p> <p data-bbox="1047 787 1128 1260">Qualities Enhancing Performances in Leader-follower Relationships</p>	
Making decisive decisions		
Authenticity in showing personal values and beliefs		
Competence		
Open communication		
Positive- reinforcement		
Responsiveness		
Agile-Decision making		
Leading by example		
Being Assertive		
Consistently speech and actions		
Demonstrating positive attitude		
Active listening		
Positive-reinforcement		
Accepting responsibilities		
Team reflections		
Defining Job roles		
Reciprocal positive attitudes		
Willing to teach your team		

Category	Sub-Theme	Theme 2: Role Modelling
Clarifying organisational values for better understanding	Lessons into the perception of Exemplary behaviour	
Learning from past mistakes in application of legislations		
Bold and decisiveness	Leadership Support Initiatives	
compassion drives dedication		
Respecting professional boundaries among team specialists		
Good intentions	Leadership Support Initiatives	
Building trust and motivation		
Setting tone for continues development		
Fostering culture of competence and high performance		
Giving tokens of appreciation		

Table 13: Code List from Atlas IT – Theme 3

Category	Sub-Theme	Theme 3: Ethical Leadership behaviours Facilitate Team Effectiveness	
Good planning and Execution	Goal Setting with Objectives	Ethical Leadership behaviours Facilitate Team Effectiveness	
Effective communication			
Understanding strengths and weakness of team			
Employee engagement			
Knowledge sharing and team learning			
Developing and clarifying team goals			
Rewards and Recognition			Performance expectations and Performance Management
Smart KPI'S			
Performance agreements / Contracts			
Understanding of Service Charter			
Weekly and Monthly Meetings	Providing Feedback		
Quarterly reviews			
Understanding and receptivity			
Awareness and improvement			
Relevance			
Actionable tasks			

Category	Sub-Theme	Theme 3: Ethical Leadership behaviours Facilitate Team Effectiveness
Employees trust		
Team reflection and Dialogue	Optimal Performance	
Zero tolerance to sub-standard work		
Meeting and exceeding set targets		
Leading to thrive		
Respect each other's perspectives		
Recognition enhances creativity	Psychological safety	
Supportive space for ideas		
Building leader trust		
Management Support and understanding		
Recognition of family presence	Work Life balance and employee wellbeing	
supportive environment for employees		
Duty of genuine care		
Communication and Transparency	Team building and Collaboration	
Managing dysfunctional team behaviours		
Managing Conflict		
Thank-you very much, Appreciation		
Recognize effort and dedication		

Category	Sub-Theme	Theme 3: Ethical Leadership behaviours Facilitate Team Effectiveness
Participating in the existing team culture	Empowering personal growth and development	
Encouraging of positive spirit		
Nurtures follower to be confident for future roles		
Collaborative discussions		
Insight sharing		
Skills Delicts	Career development opportunities	
Job Satisfaction		
Career progression		
Personal development	Inspirational Motivation	
Intellectual Stimulation		
One-on-one discussions		
Social Influence		
Understood compelling vision		

Table 14: Code List from Atlas IT – Theme 4

Category	Sub-Theme	Theme 4: Strengthening the Integrity of Local Government
Legislations	Information Asymmetry	Strengthening the Integrity of Local Government
Frameworks and Strategies		
Policies and standard operating procedures		
Workshops and Roadshows		
Code of ethics		
Collective agreements		
Batho Pele Principles		
Corruption Lack accountability		
Lack of financial Accountability	Negative effects of Information Asymmetry	Strengthening the Integrity of Local Government
Fraud and Maladministration		
Unethical Organisational culture		
Learning through mistakes of unknow ethical behaviour	Interpreting and responding to the hidden actions of others	Strengthening the Integrity of Local Government
Aspects of Non-compliance		
Unethical behaviours		
Risk of unethical behaviour		

Category	Sub-Theme	Theme 4: Strengthening the Integrity of Local Government
Quest for Service Delivery	Ethical Behavioural Practices	
Coal face of service delivery		
Prioritising the need of the people		
Codifying Organisational values		
Strategic and operational Alignment		
Social inclusive development		
Aligning strategic priorities with budget allocations		
Coalition government Leadership	Understanding the Political Landscape	
Challenges of Local Government		
Managing political dynamics		

