

# Ethical Leadership and Ethical Climate at Educational Organizations in Europe: Depicting the “Value” of Values

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## Abstract

Despite the immense amount of literature on ethical leadership and ethical climate, little is known about how ethical leadership characteristics are correlated with different dimensions of ethical climate. This study investigated the relationship between ethical leadership and ethical climate in European educational organizations. With a view to examine the influence of ethical leadership on moral and ethical outcomes and vice versa, multilevel analyses were conducted to test our research questions using a sample of 451 teachers at primary and secondary schools (gymnasium & lyceum) in Greece, UK, France, Italy, Spain and Germany. The results show that educational leaders in Europe attach a great importance to all dimensions of ethical climate while, they are perceived as having to a great extent almost all traits of ethical leadership. Moreover, data analysis reveals that ethical leadership traits are positively related to all ethical climate's dimensions, except the instrumental ethical climate, which reveals a significant negative correlation with ethical leadership.

**Keywords:** ethical leadership characteristics, ethical climate, dimensions, education

## Introduction

Recent research acknowledges the positive outcomes ethicality may predict in organizations, while focusing on both tangible and intangible costs unethical behavior may cause to organizations, both internally and externally (Laajalahti, 2018). Apparently, organizations which define, integrate and consistently demonstrate a strong set of core values within their organizational practices, processes, decisions

and actions, experience greater long-term success than those which do not pursue this course or do so partially or inconsistently (Terrell, 2005).

Interestingly, leadership is considered to play a crucial role in creating an ethical organizational climate (Neubert et al., 2009) and leaders, who model ethical behavior and hold themselves and others accountable for ethical lapses, can create an environment where ethical conduct is the norm rather than the exception. In this study, we attempt to illustrate and understand the correlations between ethical leadership traits and ethical climate types within educational organizations in Europe.

## **Literature Review**

### **Ethical Leadership in education**

Over the last decades, scholars have underlined the importance of developing ethical leadership for organizations (Copeland & Smith, 2023; Brown & Mitchell, 2010; Moore et al., 2018) while revealing the shortcomings of irresponsible, ineffective (Brown & Mitchell, 2010; Treviño et al., 2000), self-serving, toxic (Watt, Javidi, & Normore, 2015), unethical, immoral, narcissistic (Higgs, 2009; Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006), or catastrophic leadership (Brown & Treviño, 2006; Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999). For managers, to step outside their current frame of reference, assess a situation and evaluate options with ethical criteria is not taken for granted. Apparently, many highly skilled managers' ways of thinking or mental models do not include fundamental ethical considerations as they lack moral imagination (Werhane, 1999).

Ethical leadership is defined as "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" (Brown et al., 2005: 120).

As a managerial practice, ethical leadership is supposed to be based on ethical behavior and core values (Copeland & Smith, 2023) and, may be effective in empowering employees' moral beliefs and, thus, preventing any deviant or unethical behavior harmful to organizations (Spangenberg & Theron, 2005). Moreover, it fosters the effective functioning of the organization, prompting employees to develop attitudes and behaviors beyond the typical requirements of their role (Nikolic & Halvorsen, 2017; Warr, 2007) as well as to become less morally disengaged in their decision-making and thus, commit fewer unethical acts (Li & Bao, 2020).

Under the prism of social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), ethical leaders are considered to promote organization's ethical orientation and smooth functioning and activate subordinates' cognitions of moral standards, by being role models of ethical conduct, by establishing ethical codes, as well as by communicating their ethical expectations with followers (Moore et al., 2018). Or, it is crucial for a leader to have

strong moral values in the decision-making process (Collins, & Porras, 1994), such as integrity, responsibility, moral vigilance (Memiyanti, Putera, & Salleh, 2010), the creation of ethical standards (Lee & Cheng, 2011) and ethical vision, ethical guidance, ethical motivation as well as the creation of a culture that fosters and rewards moral behavior and members' contribution to ethical issues within the organization (Spangenberg & Theron, 2005).

Nevertheless, ethics<sup>1</sup> is a complex and multifaceted concept that is often shaped by cultural, social, and individual variables. While there may be laws or policies that promote ethical behavior, in certain contexts, such as the education sector, the definition of what is ethical often depends on subjective interpretation and debate<sup>2</sup>. More specifically, in the field of education, there is not any legal framework for ethics and, ethical leadership is not something that is legalized in the sense of being mandated by law or regulation. Instead, it implies a set of principles and practices that are widely recognized as important for promoting positive school culture, enhancing student outcomes, and contributing to the greater good of society (*eudaimonia*).

In the field of education, ethical leadership refers to the set of principles and values that guide leaders in educational institutions to make decisions and take actions that are morally and ethically responsible. It involves being accountable for one's actions and decisions and ensuring that they align with the core values of education such as equity, justice, and respect. Ethical leaders recognize and address any ethical issues or dilemmas that may arise in the course of their action and seek to resolve them in a transparent and responsible manner. Treviño et al. (2000) highlight that, it is not enough to be a moral person or to have certain traits so as to engage in certain kinds of behaviors or to make decisions based upon ethical principles. In order to achieve a reputation as a moral manager, leaders need to act as role models for ethical conduct through visible action, use rewards and discipline and communicate with employees about ethical standards, principles and values (Treviño et al., 2000, op.cit. in Laajalahti, 2018). Ethical leaders in education have to possess as a compass principles such as integrity, respect, responsibility, vision, collaboration, continuous learning, empathy as well as courage so as to take bold and principled actions, even in the face of opposition or adversity. Interestingly, there are several educational leadership models, which can be effective in promoting ethical conduct and creating a positive ethical climate in educational institutions, such as responsible leadership, moral

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<sup>1</sup> The terms "ethical" and "moral" are often used interchangeably, in spite of the subtle differences which exist between them. In short, ethics are a set of principles or guidelines that are used to determine what is right or wrong in a particular context, while morality refers to a broader set of values or beliefs about what is good or bad. While the two concepts are related, they are not interchangeable, and, understanding the distinction between them is important for ethical decision-making and moral reasoning.

<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, often, professional associations or organizations may develop codes of ethics or standards of practice that are intended to guide ethical behavior within a particular field

leadership, transformational leadership, authentic leadership, servant leadership and distributed leadership<sup>1</sup>.

Based on the aforementioned assumptions, we can state that, the moral framework of the organization depends considerably on leaders' behavior (Ötken & Cenkci, 2012). By emphasizing on ethical principles and setting the tone for ethical behavior, ethical leaders are considered to cultivate and maintain an ethical climate (Gumusluoglu et al., 2020) and create a culture that fosters collaboration, communication, and mutual respect within the organization. Nevertheless, leaders must be mindful of the potential negative effects and work to mitigate them such as prioritizing their personal values over the needs of their school, overemphasizing on compliance, prioritizing conformity over creativity and/ or change, holding themselves and others to high ethical standards (which may inadvertently create a culture of stress and burnout), etc.

### **Ethical climate in educational organizations**

Organizational culture and climate play a very significant role in encouraging and creating organizational change, success and innovation. Culture shapes values and beliefs so that employees develop a positive attitude toward change whereas, climate enables the translation of this attitude into desired action and behavior. More specifically, in the field of education, climate includes the set of dynamic interactions between the psychological, academic and physical parameters of school reality (Hayes, 1994) that create a healthy learning environment and, significantly influence teachers' mental mood, enthusiasm and performance (Freiberg & Stein, 2005; Sergiovanni, 2001; Starratt, 2001). At this point, researchers underline the implicit emphasis on ethics, describing school climate as the fixed perceptions and the moral attitude of school members (MacBeath 1999).

Interest in ethical climate has grown exponentially over the past decade as evident in the surge of academic- and practitioner-oriented publications on the subject. Ethical climate is defined as "the shared perceptions of what ethically correct behavior is and how ethical issues should be handled in an organization" (Victor & Cullen, 1987:51),

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<sup>1</sup> Responsible Leadership: it ensures that educational institutions are managed and operated in a way that maximizes student learning outcomes and promotes the well-being of all stakeholders. Moral Leadership: it acknowledges the importance of ethical decision-making and actions. Moral leaders prioritize ethical principles, work to ensure that their actions align with these values and are committed to creating a culture of integrity and accountability. Transformational Leadership: it highlights the importance of inspiring and motivating others to work towards a common goal. Authentic Leadership: it emphasizes the importance of honesty, transparency, and self-awareness. Authentic leaders are genuine and open about their values and beliefs, and they encourage others to do the same. Servant Leadership: it is based on the idea that leaders should serve the needs of others first, rather than their own interests. Distributed Leadership: it focuses on the importance of shared leadership and decision-making, while prioritizing collaboration, communication, and shared responsibility.

as well as “the prevailing perceptions of typical organizational practices and procedures that have ethical content” (Victor & Cullen, 1988:101). Ethical climate is supposed to increase employee performance, engagement and satisfaction (Weber & Seger, 2002) whereas, it affects management credibility, organizational performance along with decision- making as well as the ability to change (Martin & Cullen, 2006) and, leads to the emergence of ethical behaviors in the organization (Arnaud & Schminke, 2012, op.cit. in Yasin, 2021). On the contrary, the lack of alignment between organizational values and demonstrated behaviors and/ or actions “comes with a high price” for the organization and may drive to employees’ poor morale and performance, low levels of commitment and loyalty, distrust of management as well as to inauthentic communication and the struggling of innovation and creative thinking (Terrell, 2005).

Given that, by prioritizing ethical principles and modeling ethical behavior, individuals and organizations can create a culture that supports positive outcomes and contributes to the greater good of society, various models of ethical climate have been developed. Ethical climate models provide a framework permitting to determine an acceptable course of action, comprising different perspectives of the context such as the ethical and/or legal professional codes, the ethical decision-making as well as ethical leadership practices. Hence, Treviño (1986) proposes a Three-Component Model including ethical awareness, ethical judgment, and ethical behavior. Schwartz (1994), with his Value Theory, supports that ethical climate is influenced by individual values. He identifies ten values that are universally important across cultures, underlying that organizations with a strong ethical climate are likely to prioritize values such as benevolence and universalism. From his part, Rest (1994) proposes a Four-Component Model so as to analyze ethical climate: moral sensitivity, moral judgment, moral motivation, and moral character. Moreover, Victor and Cullen (1987), suggest that ethical climate can be constructed along two dimensions. The first, which derives from Kohlberg’s (1984) theory of moral development, has three levels of ethical criteria used for decision making: the egoism, the benevolence, and the principle (Wang & Hsien, 2012). The second is related to sociological theories of roles and referent groups in organizations (Merton, 1957, op.cit.in Wang & Hsien, 2012) and is referred to the three loci of analysis used as a referent in ethical decision making: the individual/ local/cosmopolitan focus. Victor and Cullen (1987), after having crossing these two dimensions (the three levels of ethical criteria with the three loci of analysis) and having tasted their data in many researches, concluded in five ethical climate types, namely the instrumental, the caring, the independence, the rules and law and code.

## Methodology

### Scope, research questions, sample

Great number of studies to date have focused mostly on ethical leadership and/ or on ethical climate without putting the emphasis on how ethical leadership is connected with ethical organizational climate. Our scope is to identify the correlations between ethical leadership traits and different types of ethical climate that are dominant in European schools. Moreover, this research attempts also to enhance our understanding regarding similarities and differences in teachers' perception of ethical leadership behavior and ethical climate among different European countries.

Therefore, our research questions are as following:

What are the main ethical leadership attributes perceived by teachers?

To what extend school leaders' behavior is perceived as moral by teachers?

What are the main types of ethical climate perceived by teachers as the most dominant at their school?

To what extend school climate is perceived by teachers as ethical?

Do teachers from different European countries affirm that they perceive ethical leadership and ethical climate in the same way?

We conducted quantitative research along six European countries (Greece, Great Britain, Germany, France, Italy, Spain). More specifically, our sample consisted of 451 teachers (243 from Greece and 208 from the five above mentioned European countries). Participants' age ranged from 23 years old to 58+, they worked at primary and secondary schools (gymnasium and lyceum), in urban/semi-urban and rural regions and their professional experience ranged from 1year to 30+years of service. Additionally, teachers were also asked to mark their principal's gender so as to analyze whether leader's gender plays any role in teachers' perceptions regarding ethical leadership and ethical climate.

Our questionnaire was composed of two sub-questionnaires: a) the model of 27 ethical leadership traits conceptualized by Mitropoulou, Tsaoussis, Xanthopoulou, Petridis (2014), b) the model of five types of ethical climate developed by Victor and Cullen (1987). In Greece, questionnaires in Greek language were distributed via Google Forms to several Education Offices throughout the country. Participants from the other European countries completed the questionnaire in English via PROLIFIC which is considered to be a very reliable platform among social researchers worldwide. Data were analyzed with SPSS.

Reliability test alpha Cronbach regarding ethical leadership traits and ethical climate types indicate significant internal consistency between the questions involved in each factor (>0.8), in both questionnaires (Greek and English), as depicted in the following index:

Cronbach's Alpha			
	Ethical Leadership Traits	Ethical Climate Types	Number of items
Greek Questionnaire	,984	,902	27
European Questionnaire	,963	,815	27

## Results

### Descriptive Statistics

#### Demographic Data

The sample: In total, 451 questionnaires were collected from six European countries as following: Greece (N=243), Great Britain (N=138), Spain (N=26), Italy (N=23), Germany (N=13) and France (N=8).

Gender: In the Greek sample, women represented the 67.5% (N=164), while men represented the 32.5% (N=79), whereas, our European sample, the 65,4% (N=136) consisted of women, while the 34.6% (N=72) of men. This proportion is explained by the fact that education is a professional field mostly preferred by women.

Age: Regarding sample's age, 45.9% (N=111) of the Greek teachers were 47-57 years old, 14.9% (N=36) were 58 years old and above, 12% (N=30) were 23-35 years old, 27.3% (N=66) were 36-46 years old. The majority (51.4%) of teachers from other European countries were 23-35 years old (N=107), 31.3% (N=65) were 36-46 years old, 13.5% (N=28) were 47-57 years old, whereas, only the 3.8% of the sample (N=8) were 58 years old and above.

Professional Experience: In the Greek sample, 87 teachers (36%) had 11-20 years' professional experience, 80 (33.1%) had 21-30 years of total professional experience in education, 40 participants (16.5%) had a total professional experience of 1-10 years, while 35 (14.5%) had 31 years and above. In the English questionnaire, teachers with a total professional experience of 1-10 years, represented the 65,4% (N=134), 23.9% (N=49) had 11-20 years, 7.8% (N=16) had 21-30 years of total professional experience in education, while only 6 teachers (2.9%) had 31 years and above.

Type of educational Institution: The 50.2% of the Greek sample (N=122) worked at primary schools and 49.8% (N=121) worked at secondary schools (Gymnasium and Lyceum). On the other hand, the majority of the European participants (61.8%-N=128) worked at primary schools, while the 38.2% (N=79) at secondary schools.

School Location: Regarding school location, the 59.8% (N=144) of the Greek sample worked at schools in urban areas, 21.2% (N=51) in semi-urban areas, and, 19.1% (N=46) in rural areas or islands. Respectively, the (47,3%) of the participants from other countries taught at schools in urban areas (N=98), 91 teachers (44%) in semi-urban areas and, 18 teachers (8.7%) in rural/island areas.

Principal's gender: According to teachers' statement, the 61,1% (N=146) of the principals of the Greek sample were males and the 38,9% (N=93) were females, whereas, in the other European countries, the 50,2% (N=104) of the principals were males and, the 49,5% (N=103) were females.

### Ethical Leadership Characteristics

In both questionnaires, educational leaders are perceived as ethical to a significant extend, attaching a great importance on the ethical aspect of their role. In detail, in Greece the most highly scored traits are honesty (M=4,35), sincerity (M=4,30), integrity (M=4,30), altruism ((M=4,16), trust (M=4,09), rewarding ethical contribution (M=4,03) and moral responsibility (M=4,03), whereas, in almost all other ethical traits M ranged from 3,62 to 3,98. In this point, it seems that the less scored traits were ethical guidance (M=3,25), promotion of ethical education (M=3,32), green policy implementation (M=3,43), ethical vision (3,45) and ethical evaluation (M=3,48). Respectively, in the English questionnaire, principals are described to have integrity (M=4,09), honesty (M=4,03), sincerity (M=4,03). All other statements are highly scored (M ranges from 3,51 to 3,93), with the exception of "green policy implementation" which was the less scored trait (M=3,43).

Ethical Leadership Traits				
	Greece		Other European Countries	
	Mean	Standard deviation	Mean	Standard deviation
1. Honesty	4,35	,951	4,03	,947
2. Sincerity	4,30	1,005	4,03	,965
3. Integrity	4,30	1,004	4,09	1,001
4. Rewarding Ethical Contribution	4,03	1,109	3,73	1,107
5. Altruism	4,16	1,057	3,93	1,077



6. Ethical Strategy	3,91	1,164	3,86	1,016
7. Clarification of ethical roles	3,98	1,155	3,55	1,098
8. Model of Moral Behavior	3,96	1,234	3,75	1,087
9. Humility/Lowiness	3,95	1,249	3,73	1,142
10. Green Policy Implementations	3,40	1,239	3,43	1,118
11. Ethical Self-Control	3,71	1,168	3,87	1,028
12. Ethical Vision	3,45	1,288	3,66	1,094
13. Moral responsibility	4,03	1,163	3,90	1,086
14. Ethical vigilance	3,79	1,198	3,86	1,039
15. Ethical Possibility	3,83	1,129	3,78	,978
16. Development of Ethical Vision	3,62	1,189	3,72	1,050
17. Sharing authority	3,73	1,220	3,62	1,142
18. Development of Ethical Culture	3,64	1,278	3,52	1,194
19. Ethical encouragement	3,78	1,262	3,66	1,131
20. Promotion of ethical education	3,32	1,350	3,50	1,200
21. Ethical Determination/ Decisiveness	3,77	1,257	3,93	1,049
22. Collaboration	3,77	1,270	3,64	1,070
23. Ethical Evaluation	3,48	1,305	3,57	1,047
24. Ethical influence of Stakeholders	3,66	1,217	3,68	1,034
25. Trust	4,09	1,194	3,89	1,076
26. Ethical Insight	3,86	1,217	3,78	1,028
27. Ethical Guidance	3,25	1,334	3,51	1,138

## Ethical Climate Types

In both questionnaires (English & Greek), teachers perceive school climate as ethical. In detail, in Greece the most highly scored dimensions of ethical climate are Professional codes climate (M=3,8179), Organisational rules (M=3,6696), Instrumental ethical climate (M=3,6543), and at a lower degree Concern for the others (M=3,5970) and Independence ethical climate (M=3,4352). Respectively, the English questionnaire reveals also European schools' focus on Professional codes climate (M=4,1815). The other most highly dimensions are Concern for the others (M=3,8093) and Organisational rules (M=3,5757), whereas the less scored ethical climate's dimensions are Independence ethical climate (M=3,0308) and Instrumental ethical climate (M=3,0192).

Ethical Climate's Types				
	Greece		Other European Countries	
	Mean	Standard deviation	Mean	Standard deviation
Instrumental ethical climate	3,6543	,92478	3,0192	,77995
Concern for the others	3,5970	,76648	3,8093	,65173
Independence ethical climate	3,4352	,50429	3,0308	,57469
Organisational rules	3,6696	,66351	3,5757	,48454
Professional codes climate	3,8179	,79134	4,1815	,68705

## Inductive Statistics

### Ethical Leadership Characteristics and Ethical Climate Types

In both questionnaires, it appears that there is a strong positive correlation between all ethical leadership traits and ethical climate types- expect the instrumental ethical type. More specific, regarding the positive correlations, in the Greek questionnaire  $p=0,001$  and  $r=0.565$ , while, in the English questionnaire  $p=0,001$  and  $r = 0.523$ . Respectively, as far as the negative correlation is concerned, in the Greek questionnaire,  $p= -,353$  and, in the English questionnaire,  $p= -,303$ . More specifically:

**English Questionnaire:** There is a strong correlation between ethical leadership traits and ethical climate with concern for the others ( $p=.666$ ), with ethical professional codes ( $p=.369$ ), with organisational rules ( $p=.248$ ), whereas, correlations between ethical leadership traits and other dimensions of ethical climate appear to be quite significant.

**Greek Questionnaire:** Respectively, there is a strong correlation between ethical leadership traits and ethical climate with concern for the others ( $p=.625$ ), with organisational rules ( $p=.479$ ), and ethical professional codes ( $p=.392$ ), whereas, correlations between ethical leadership traits and other dimensions of ethical climate appears to be quite significant.

Ethical Climate Types	Ethical Leadership Traits in Greece	Ethical Leadership Traits in other European countries
instrumental	-,353**	-,303**
Concern for the others	,625**	,666**
independence	,226**	,118
Organisational rules	,479**	,248**
Ethical professional codes	,392**	,369**
<i>Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)</i>		

### Ethical Leadership Characteristics and Demographic Data

The tests of independent samples (t-test) and technique of analysis of variance (ANOVA) reveal a great interdependence between all demographic data and ethical traits, as far as the English questionnaire is concerned. Data analysis of the Greek questionnaire, reveals that, there is not any statistically significant difference between ethical leadership traits and the variables of age, years of service, school location, and principal's gender. However, tests of independent samples (t-test) and technique of analysis of variance (ANOVA) show statistically significant differences with reference to the variables of participants' gender and educational institution. In more details, there exists a statistically significant difference in male teachers' perceptions compared to female teachers' perceptions. This difference is statistically significant ( $t=2.806$ ,  $df=241$ ,  $p=0.001<0.05$ ). Moreover, ANOVA reveals a statistically significant difference in teachers' perceptions according to their educational institution ( $F_{2,240}=3.266$ ,  $p=0.040<0.05$ ). Specifically, LSD post hoc test shows that teachers of primary school describe their principal's as having ethical traits to a greater extend, compared to those working at a secondary school (Gymnasium and Lyceum).

Individual & school demographic characteristics	Ethical Leadership Traits test/F-test in Greece	Ethical Leadership Traits test/F-test in other European countries
Gender	t=2.806, df=241, p=0.001<0.05*	t=-1.022, df=206, p=0.977>0.05
Age	F3.238=0.881, p=0.451>0.05	F3.204=1.135, p=0.336>0.05
Years of service	F3.238=0.635, p=0.593>0.05	F3.201=0.278, p=0.841>0.05
Educational institution	F2.240=3.266, p=0.040<0.05*	t=0.266, df=205, p=0.577>0.05
School location	F2.238=0.428, p=0.652>0.05	F2.204=1.073, p=0.344>0.05
Principal's gender	t=0.350, df=237, p=0.964>0.05	t=-1.554, df=205, p=0.182>0.05
	*p=<0.05	

### Ethical Climate Types and Demographic Data

Data analysis of the tests of independent samples (t-test) and technique of analysis of variance (ANOVA) allow us to conclude that, the variables of gender, age, years of service, educational institution, school location, and principal's gender do not reveal any statistically significant difference as far as perceptions of ethical climate types in all participating countries are concerned.

Individual & school Demographic Characteristics	Ethical Climate Types test/F-test in Greece	Ethical Climate Types test/F-test in other European Countries
Gender	t=-0.064, df=241, p=0.917>0.05	t=-2.463, df=206, p=0.314>0.05
Age	F3.238=1.040, p=0.376>0.05	F3.204=1.102, p=0.349>0.05
Years of service	F3.238=0.477, p=0.698>0.05	F3.201=0.756, p=0.520>0.05
Educational institution	F2.240=1.419, p=0.244>0.05	t=1.770, df=205, p=0.919>0.05
School location	F2.238=1.250, p=0.288>0.05	F2.204=0.935, p=0.394>0.05
Principal's gender	t=0.754, df=237, p=0.151>0.05	t=-2.319, df=205, p=0.444>0.05

## Discussion/ Implications

Effectively instilling values throughout the organization appears to be a significant challenging issue for educational leadership. Nevertheless, ethical issues can be “disorderly and sometimes downright confusing” (Kidder, 1995), requiring specific ethical skills from the part of the leader.

With a view to analyze whether or not effective ethical leadership can help to create a positive ethical climate, and, whether or not, a positive ethical climate can support and reinforce ethical leadership, we conducted quantitative analysis and distributed 451 questionnaires in six European countries. More specifically, in both questionnaires (Greek & English), teachers’ perceptions regarding ethical climate and ethical leadership, reveal that principals in Europe attach a great importance to core dimensions of ethical climate while, they are considered to have to a great extent ethical leadership’s traits. In detail, in both questionnaires, the most highly scored ethical leadership traits are honesty, sincerity and integrity. More specifically, Greek teachers state that their principals have also to a great extent, altruism, trust, moral responsibility and appear to reward ethical contribution. Nevertheless, in both questionnaires, the implementation of green policy is one of the less scored traits. Apart from that, Greek principals are described as attaching less importance to teachers’ ethical guidance, the promotion of ethical education and ethical evaluation and, this finding should be taken into consideration by education policy makers. As far as ethical climate’s dimensions are concerned, it is very optimistic that, in both questionnaires, Professional codes climate and Organisational rules climate are highly scored. However, our results in both questionnaires, suggest that independence climate has to be further supported. Moreover, in Greece, measures could also be taken so that Instrumental ethical climate will be reduced.

According to teachers’ perceptions, it appears that, at European educational organizations, ethical leadership is considered to involve a commitment to fairness, respect, and social responsibility and requires ongoing reflection and self-awareness to ensure that one’s actions and decisions align with these values. Specifically, consistent with previous researches (Papaloi et al., 2022, Memiyanti, Putera, & Salleh, 2010; Lee & Cheng, 2011), our study shows that effective organizational functioning is significantly based on ethical leader’s capacity to transform organizational culture and climate through the cultivation of a common vision, concrete processes and common moral values.

Our findings reveal that, ethical leadership and ethical climate are perceived by teachers as mutually reinforced and interconnected. In both questionnaires, it appears that there is a strong positive correlation between ethical leadership traits and almost all dimensions of ethical climate (except, the negative correlation between ethical leadership traits and instrumental ethical climate). More specifically, in both questionnaires, there is a strong correlation between ethical leadership traits and ethical climate with concern for the others, with ethical professional codes, with

organisational rules, whereas, correlations between ethical leadership traits and other dimensions of ethical climate appear to be quite significant too. Thus, due to the great similarities of our sample's responses, we can conclude that, in Europe, educational ethical leadership is interconnected with ethical climate. The results show that at European schools, the fundamental scope is the creation of a strong cooperative culture which significantly encourages the transformation of values and practices, the diffusion of ideas, the convergence of opinions and the cultivation of a greater level of mutual agreement ((Hargreaves, 1995). Moreover, our findings reveal that, a positive ethical climate can support ethical leadership by reinforcing the importance of ethical behavior and providing leaders with the support they need to maintain high ethical standards. Consequently, when the ethical climate is strong, leaders can more easily lead by example and trust that others will follow suit. These results are in alignment with previous studies, underlining that, by balancing ethical principles with the needs and context of their organization, educational leaders can create a positive climate that supports ethical conduct and enhances student outcomes (Martin & Cullen, 2006).

Moreover, both in Greek and English questionnaire, data analysis of the tests of independent samples (t-test) and technique of analysis of variance (ANOVA) do not reveal any statistically significant difference between the variables of gender, age, years of service, educational institution, school location, and principal's gender with ethical climate's dimensions. This can be explained by the fact that educational leadership theories fostering core values and prioritizing ethical conducts, have been developed and applied all over Europe, and, school members have been convinced that ethicality is strongly related to organizational efficiency and eudaimonia. Regarding ethical leadership traits, it appears that, in the English questionnaire, demographic data do not seem to affect teachers' perceptions. However, in the Greek questionnaire, t-test and ANOVA show that there exists a statistically significant difference in male teachers' perceptions compared to female teachers' perceptions. Moreover, teachers of primary school seem to consider to a greater extent their principal as more ethical, compared to those working at a secondary school (Gymnasium and Lyceum). This is an interesting finding and surely must be further analyzed, taking into consideration the specific culture and characteristics of primary and secondary education in Greece.

Our study raises important implications for educational leadership theory and contributes to the understanding of the relationship between ethical leadership and ethical school climate. These two variables constitute one of the biggest challenging issues of educational leadership, since they significantly foster teachers' meaningfulness at work and system's eudaimonia. It is true that, attempting to illustrate the correlations between ethical leadership traits and dimensions of ethical climate at educational organizations, enlightens the way we conceptualize educational leadership, its goals and its perspectives. Describing a situation in moral terms, breaks the ethical code of silence and encourages leaders to frame an event as

an ethical problem, engaging all members in moral reasoning (Treviño & Nelson, 2004). These results are in alignment with previous researches supporting that, to “fully align an organization around shared, core values requires much more than merely defining and communicating the values to the “troopers” (...). It requires(...), integration of the values into all aspects of the organization’s operation and business and human resource practices, and a relentless focus on the impact of the values on decisions and action” (Terrell, 2005). Or, in a world that is changing, our findings, urge us to reconsider educational leadership’s priorities in Europe and invest on decoding tangible aspects of school reality and subtle mechanisms that affect school members’ conduct and action.

Moreover, this study provides a number of practice implications for educational leaders, practitioners and decision-makers. Our findings permit to state that, cultivating an ethical organizational climate presupposes from the part of the leader ethical traits such as a conscious and a targeted effort, persistence, patience, determination, genuine concern for people and authenticity. In any case, promoting ethical behavior and upholding ethical standards within educational organizations requires a strong commitment to ongoing learning and reflection, as well as a willingness to engage in dialogue and collaborate with others to promote ethical conduct. Or, educational organizations in Europe should put emphasis on ethical leadership and the creation of ethical climate by investing in specific training and development programs for principals.

Emphasizing the “value” of the values, can be reflected as a prospect to step forward in educational leadership in Europe, reassuring school’s mission, goals and prosperity.

### **Limitations**

Despite the limitations of this study, we believe that we have revealed to a significant extend the critical correlation between ethical leadership and ethical climate. Nevertheless, in a future study, we could also analyze the correlation and the impact of ethical leadership and ethical climate on teachers’ job satisfaction and commitment. Moreover, correlations between ethical leadership and psychological ethical climate could also be analyzed in a future study, in order to better understand the way teachers filter school reality. Additionally, a qualitative analysis could enhance the generalization of our conclusions, giving the necessary depth to our assumptions. Apart from that, while the sample size for this study was enough to detect the interaction between ethical leadership traits with ethical climate dimensions, future research needs to work on larger sample sizes in more European countries to ensure the generalizability of the results. Moreover, this study enriches the present literature on the subject of ethical leadership and ethical climate from the teachers’ point of view. A research that takes into consideration educational leaders’ points is highly recommended.

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