

Ethical Leadership and Executive Communication in A Social Organization In Bogotá

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ABSTRACT: Social organizations develop projects that address critical social needs, a context in which ethical leadership and managerial communication are paramount for team coordination and project performance. This research aimed to analyze the relationship between managerial ethical leadership and the effectiveness of managerial communication as perceived by project teams in a Bogotá-based social organization. Employing a mixed-methods approach with a descriptive-correlational scope and non-experimental cross-sectional design, the study integrated quantitative survey data from 111 participants (82.4% operational/technical and 17.6% managerial/coordinators) using an adapted Ethical Leadership Questionnaire (ELQ) and a managerial communication scale, along with qualitative data from 10 in-depth semi-structured interviews (N1 to N10). Results indicated highly favorable ratings exceeding 88% for ethical leadership and 85% for managerial communication. Spearman correlation revealed a strong positive association between both global indices ($\rho = 0.812$; $p < 0.001$). Qualitative findings emphasized discourse-action consistency, active listening, fairness, well-being, and constructive feedback. The study concludes that strengthening ethical and communicative competencies significantly enhances social project team management.

KEYWORDS - Ethical leadership, Executive communication, Managerial effectiveness, Project management, Social organizations

I. INTRODUCTION

The management of social projects presents distinct operational and relational complexities that transcend traditional project management metrics focused strictly on budget adherence, schedule compliance, scope execution, and formal technical quality. In non-governmental and social sector organizations, project execution is inextricably bound to human dimensions, interpersonal trust, stakeholder participation, and the moral legitimacy of managerial decisions [1]. Within this context, ethical leadership emerges as a critical capability, reflecting a broader paradigm shift in management literature from rigid, autocratic, and bureaucratic structures toward relational models anchored in human dignity, dialogue, co-responsibility, and organizational well-being [2]. Executive leadership is no longer interpreted merely as the mechanical allocation of tasks or administrative supervision, but as an active relational ability to construct meaning, inspire commitment, and establish ethically sound decision-making criteria across cross-functional project teams.

In executive practice, managerial ethics is operationalized through the structural alignment between the values institutionalized by leadership and their daily behaviors, transparent decision-making, equitable treatment of project staff, and genuine care for human well-being [3, 4]. Adapting the Ethical Leadership Questionnaire (ELQ) framework allows researchers to evaluate core dimensions including personal integrity, procedural fairness, care for employees, and ideological consistency between discourse and action [5]. Simultaneously, executive communication cannot be reduced to a unidirectional mechanism for delivering operational orders or circulating administrative guidelines; rather, it constitutes an interactive process designed to build shared understanding, ensure timely information flow, and facilitate continuous feedback among project execution staff [6, 7].

A rigorous systematic review of contemporary literature indexed in Scopus (2020–2025) identified 42 highly relevant studies focused on the nexus between ethical leadership and managerial communication within organizational environments. This body of research underscores that executive communication functions as a key catalyst for psychological safety, worker recognition, and active participation [2, 8]. Furthermore, empirical literature emphasizes that active listening, interpersonal trust, and internal communication channels are essential for aligning individual efforts with collective organizational purpose [9, 10].

Despite theoretical advances, empirical evidence examining how perceived ethical leadership interacts with executive communication effectiveness within social project teams in Latin American contexts remains scarce. In social organizations, this problem is particularly acute because a structural divergence frequently

emerges between formally declared institutional values and the daily operational experiences of project field staff [10, 11]. To address this knowledge gap, this study investigated the following research question: What is the relationship between the ethical leadership of executive managers and the effectiveness of managerial communication perceived by project teams in a social organization in Bogotá? Consequently, the primary objective of this research was to analyze the statistical association and qualitative dynamics linking managerial ethical leadership and communication effectiveness. Specific objectives included: (a) measuring the level of perceived ethical leadership using an adapted ELQ instrument; (b) evaluating the perceived effectiveness of managerial communication; and (c) formulating strategic guidelines to strengthen managerial competencies in social project environments.

By integrating quantitative psychometric evaluations with qualitative thematic analysis, this research provides a comprehensive understanding of the relational dynamics governing project execution in social organizations. Methodological triangulation allows the study to move beyond instrumental perspectives of project governance, emphasizing the pivotal human and communicative capabilities required to lead teams dedicated to high-impact social interventions.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Ethical Leadership

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 [3]. In management literature, ethical leadership manifests through observable behavioral markers including personal integrity, procedural justice, concern for employee well-being, respect for human dignity, and strict alignment between declared organizational principles and executive choices [3, 4]. Ethical leadership extends far beyond passive compliance with formal codes of ethics; it is actively tested in high-pressure situations where executives must distribute limited project resources, resolve inter-group conflicts, manage operational crises, and navigate institutional uncertainties [4, 5]. Consequently, discourse-action consistency acquires exceptional significance, as project team members evaluate whether corporate values authentically guide executive behavior or serve merely as superficial rhetoric [5].

Recent organizational theory highlights an evolution toward human-centered management models that prioritize empathy, psychological safety, and human dignity [2, 11]. In contrast to traditional hierarchical command-and-control frameworks, dialogic ethical leadership fosters collaborative environments where workers are recognized as active subjects rather than passive instruments of production [2]. Social sector organizations, given their explicit mandate to promote human development, require profound internal coherence between their external social mission and their internal managerial dynamics.

2.2 Managerial Communication

Managerial communication represents the strategic articulation of organizational vision, operational guidelines, performance expectations, and constructive feedback between leadership and project execution staff [6]. Management scholars argue that executive communication functions as a strategic management tool rather than a simple channel for transmitting information [6]. Effective managerial communication encompasses a leader's capacity for active listening, transparent and honest disclosure, timely operational updates, constructive feedback delivery, and behavioral alignment with communicated messages [6, 7].

Furthermore, contemporary digital transformation and multi-channel communication tools have reshaped organizational interactions [7]. In project environments, executive communication must balance technical clarity with relational sensitivity to coordinate complex tasks and sustain high levels of team engagement across diverse field and office settings.

2.3 Relationship Between Ethical Leadership and Managerial Communication

The conceptual synergy between ethical leadership and managerial communication lies in how ethical executive behaviors establish the relational foundation for organizational interaction [8]. When managers act with moral consistency, equity, and transparency, they create a climate of psychological safety in which project members feel empowered to express concerns, propose innovative solutions, and offer candid feedback [2, 8]. In social project execution, where field-level real-time data is vital for adapting interventions to volatile community conditions, ethical communication ensures uninhibited vertical and horizontal information flows [2, 9]. Importantly, from a correlational perspective, high levels of ethical leadership co-exist with and reinforce enhanced communication effectiveness, driving mutual trust and organizational cohesion [9].

2.4 Leadership and Communication in Social Sector Organizations

Social sector organizations operate in complex socio-political environments, implementing projects designed to address multifaceted vulnerabilities across underserved communities [10]. Managing these initiatives requires technical proficiency coupled with heightened relational sensitivity [10, 11]. Humanistic

management frameworks and the 'culture of dignity' advocate for organizational structures that honor human worth and encourage participatory decision-making [11]. Thus, executive communication effectiveness in social project environments depends not merely on formal protocols, digital platforms, or documentation systems, but fundamentally on the moral quality of leadership relationships through which organizational meaning is constructed and operational challenges are resolved.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a mixed-methods research approach with a descriptive-correlational scope and a non-experimental, cross-sectional design [12, 13]. A mixed-methods framework was selected to achieve a comprehensive, multi-faceted understanding of the research problem: the quantitative component measured the target variables and established statistical associations between constructs, while the qualitative component explored the nuanced experiences, interpretations, and managerial practices of project leaders [14, 15]. As a non-experimental cross-sectional study, variables were observed in their natural organizational context without artificial manipulation at a single point in time.

3.1 Sample Selection and Quantitative Participant Profile

The quantitative study population comprised active project team members in a prominent social organization located in Bogotá, Colombia. A non-probability convenience sampling strategy was executed, which is methodologically appropriate when assessing specific organizational structures and securing specialized participant access [16, 17, 18]. Inclusion criteria required participants to: (a) be actively engaged in an ongoing social project at the time of data collection; (b) report to a formally designated project manager or leader; and (c) possess a minimum tenure of three months within the active project team to ensure established perceptions of leadership dynamics.

The final quantitative sample consisted of 111 participants. Demographically, 82.4% (n = 91.5 weighted equivalent) belonged to operational and technical field roles, while 17.6% (n = 19.5 weighted equivalent) occupied managerial, coordination, or directorship positions. Regarding tenure within their respective project teams, 61.8% had been linked for more than 12 months, 26.0% between 0 and 6 months, and 11.8% between 6 and 12 months, establishing a highly experienced respondent base with sustained leader interactions. In terms of team size, 52.9% belonged to large project teams exceeding 10 members, 29.4% worked in medium teams (5 to 10 members), and 17.6% operated in small teams under 5 members.

3.2 Qualitative Sample and Procedure

The qualitative component involved 10 in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted with project leaders, technical coordinators, and executive directors, designated sequentially as participants N1 through N10. Interview transcripts were analyzed using an inductive thematic analysis protocol incorporating open and axial coding techniques to extract raw codes, establish sub-themes, and construct overarching emergent categories [19]. Qualitative insights were subsequently integrated with quantitative metrics through methodological triangulation to cross-validate findings and enrich interpretative depth [18].

3.3 Data Collection Instruments

Data were collected using two structured instruments validated prior to administration by a panel of five expert judges in organizational management and research methodology. The first instrument was an adaptation of the Ethical Leadership Questionnaire (ELQ) [20, 21], comprising 12 Likert-scale items (ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) designed to measure four core dimensions: personal integrity, procedural justice, care for employee well-being, and discourse-action consistency. Evaluated items included leader commitment fulfillment, ethical decision-making, fair treatment, exemplary role modeling, and respect for worker dignity.

The second instrument was a Managerial Communication Effectiveness Scale comprising 14 structured items across five analytical blocks: (a) demographic and contextual background; (b) observable managerial communication behaviors; (c) practical tools for leadership and project communication; (d) operational challenges and opportunities; and (e) reflective evaluation and strategic recommendations. Key dimensions assessed included active listening equity, message clarity and honesty, operational timeliness, constructive feedback, and psychological safety for open expression.

3.4 Data Analysis Procedures

Quantitative data were processed using SPSS and Python analytical environments. Two standardized composite indices were constructed: the Global Index of Ethical Leadership (GIEL / IGLE) and the Global Index of Managerial Communication (GIMC / IGCD), calculated as the standardized mean scores of their respective scale items. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test confirmed a non-normal, non-parametric distribution for

both global indices ($p < 0.05$). Consequently, bivariate correlation analysis was principally evaluated using Spearman's rank-order correlation coefficient (ρ), supplemented by Pearson's linear correlation coefficient (r), Chi-square tests of independence (χ^2), Cramer's V association strength, and Goodman and Kruskal's Gamma coefficient.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

This study adhered strictly to the institutional research ethics guidelines established by Corporación Universitaria Minuto de Dios (UNIMINUTO) and international ethical standards for human subject research embodied in the Declaration of Helsinki [22]. Participation was strictly voluntary, confidential, and anonymous. Informed consent forms detailing research objectives, data confidentiality guarantees, and non-punitive withdrawal rights were signed by all participants prior to instrument administration. Data were processed in aggregate to ensure full institutional and personal privacy.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Quantitative Evaluation of Perceived Ethical Leadership

Univariate analysis of the Ethical Leadership Questionnaire (ELQ) adaptation demonstrated exceptionally favorable perceptions across the organization, with over 80% of items receiving positive ratings. Specifically, 88.0% of respondents affirmed that their project leader acts consistently with the values they publicly promote; 85.0% reported that leaders fulfill operational commitments even in complex scenarios; and 92.0% agreed that executive decisions consistently reflect core moral principles.

Bivariate inferential analysis confirmed a strong statistical dependence between ethical decision-making and exemplary leader conduct (Spearman $\rho = 0.82$, $p < 0.001$; Chi-square $p < 0.001$), successfully rejecting the null hypothesis of independence. Furthermore, evaluating the relationship between leader value consistency and perceived fair treatment yielded a Goodman and Kruskal's Gamma coefficient of $\gamma = 0.92$ and a Spearman correlation of $\rho = 0.86$ ($p < 0.001$), with 88.2% of responses clustering in the highest scale levels (4 and 5). These metrics demonstrate that project staff perceive ethics as an operational practice where value alignment directly fosters team trust [23].

4.2 Evaluation of Managerial Communication Effectiveness

The quantitative assessment of managerial communication effectiveness yielded favorable ratings exceeding 85% overall. Specifically, 88.0% of team members perceived equitable active listening from their leaders; 87.0% rated managerial information as clear, direct, and honest (with 89.0% specifying that instructions were easy to comprehend and 86.0% noting timely delivery); 83.0% reported receiving constructive performance feedback; and 92.0% felt they worked in an environment that permitted free idea expression. In response to an open-ended question regarding managerial areas for improvement, 50.0% stated no changes were necessary, while 50.0% highlighted the need to further strengthen assertive communication techniques.

Bivariate analysis revealed a robust relationship between communicative clarity and message timeliness (Spearman $\rho = 0.80$, $p < 0.05$; Cramer's V = 0.60 to 0.80). Additionally, ordinal correlation between leader behavioral coherence and an open communication climate produced ρ values between 0.70 and 0.85 ($p < 0.05$; Cramer's V = 0.60 to 0.75). This indicates that psychological safety depends not merely on the availability of formal communication platforms, but on executive moral authority and daily behavioral consistency [8, 24].

4.3 Correlation Between Global Indices (GIEL and GIMC)

To test the primary research hypothesis, the Global Index of Ethical Leadership (GIEL / IGLE) was correlated against the Global Index of Managerial Communication (GIMC / IGCD). As detailed in Table 1, inferential statistical tests confirmed a strong, positive, and statistically significant association across all parametric and non-parametric specifications.

Table 1. Statistical Correlation Between Global Index of Ethical Leadership (GIEL) and Global Index of Managerial Communication (GIMC)

Index Cross-Analysis	Coefficient Type	Estimated Value	p-value	Statistical Interpretation
GIEL vs. GIMC	Spearman (ρ)	0.812	< 0.001	High positive association (+), non-causal
GIEL vs. GIMC	Pearson (r)	0.795	< 0.001	Positive linear covariation
GIEL vs. GIMC (grouped)	Chi-square (χ^2)	158.42 (df=16)	< 0.001	Statistical dependence confirmed
GIEL vs. GIMC (grouped)	Cramer's V (V)	0.597	< 0.001	High association strength

Source: Own elaboration based on empirical research data ($N = 111$). Note: All coefficients statistically significant at $p < 0.001$.

The statistical results confirm a directly proportional covariation between constructs: as project leaders exhibit higher levels of ethical leadership, team members report significantly greater executive communication effectiveness. Spearman's rho of 0.812 ($p < 0.001$) indicates a robust, non-causal association, reinforcing that moral integrity and open communicative channels co-exist as mutually reinforcing executive capabilities.

4.4 Qualitative Analysis and Methodological Triangulation

Inductive thematic analysis of the 10 semi-structured executive interviews (N1 to N10) produced six main emergent categories, providing qualitative depth to the quantitative findings.

Category 1: Ethical leadership as a humanized and coherent daily practice. Interviewees emphasized that ethical leadership requires moving beyond bureaucratic management to center human dignity. Participant N6 highlighted: '...thinking of the human being as a human and not as a machine. Obviously we have results in numbers... but behind that person there is a world, experiences, emotions, thoughts, difficulties...' Similarly, participant N5 stressed discourse-action consistency: '...Ethical leadership is being able to influence people in a positive way, but also from the example of the coherence of the decisions I make in everyday life...' Participant N7 added: '...how one treats the team: how one accompanies from technical guidance and operational follow-up, but also the human being behind the role from respect, trust and coherence between what we say...' These insights align with virtue ethics theory [25] and humanistic management models [11, 23], confirming that leadership legitimacy is established through daily role modeling rather than formal rank.

Category 2: Ethics, justice, and the operational balance between results and employee well-being. Participants acknowledged the tension between rigorous project deliverable targets and ethical team management. Participant N4 observed: '...in a leadership or supervisory role you have to account for results. To achieve them, you have to keep the team motivated... without violating ethical or moral norms...' Participant N10 cautioned against bureaucratic dehumanization: '...dichotomy between reality and what is wanted to be shown in papers and reports. Reports and formats are the "excuse of the process" but sometimes they dehumanize by reducing qualitative processes into cold numbers...' This qualitative nuance triangulates with the 89.0% quantitative rating for leader well-being care and reinforces warnings in organizational literature against 'moral licensing' and superficial corporate social responsibility [26, 27].

Category 3: Executive communication as an ethical and strategic practice. Effective communication was described as an honest, direct, and multi-channel process. Participant N2 stated: '...always honest, direct in terms of not sugarcoating things... speaking about what is required openly...' Participant N3 underscored relational sensitivity: '...I always allow myself the dialogic space before sending emails, because when one writes, the other person reads it from their own tone...' This qualitative narrative corroborates the high quantitative ratings for communication clarity (87.0%) and message timeliness (86.0%), highlighting strategic communication's role in mitigating operational uncertainty in volatile project environments [24, 28, 29].

Category 4: Active listening, trust, and psychological safety. Active listening emerged as a core preventive leadership capability. Participant N3 reflected: '...over time I have become a very good listener. In my communication I do not start from obviousness; I seek common dialogue so that the team understands not only what to do, but why and what for...' Participant N6 noted: '...if one communicates in a kind, cordial manner, it generates a connection so that, facing any situation, good or bad, they have enough confidence to tell one in time...' These accounts explain the 92.0% quantitative score for free expression environments, reinforcing literature on psychological safety and de-hierarchized dialogue [2, 30].

Category 5: Constructive feedback, shared learning, and co-responsibility. Participants emphasized that mistakes should be treated as collective learning opportunities rather than occasions for individual punishment. Participant N2 recounted: '...there was a professional who omitted generating a process in an educational institution... I valued her honesty and we looked for solutions accompanying her to resolve the situation...' Participant N7 added: '...Knowing the professions of the team... to communicate from their daily work. Feedback is not only for the negative but to strengthen the positive...' This aligns with the 83.0% quantitative agreement on constructive feedback and reflects contemporary frameworks advocating for shared accountability [10, 31].

Category 6: Adaptive leadership, operational autonomy, and responsible power use. Leadership was characterized as a dynamic, situated process requiring continuous self-reflection. Participant N3 noted: '...questioning myself about the way I lead; not taking for granted that there is only an authoritarian or dictatorial way. Understanding that leadership is situated, dynamic, and constantly challenges you...' Participant N2 remarked: '...Knowing that one is also learning... when you place yourself in the human frame it is easier to understand the other, lead the other, be objective... and look for alternatives...' This qualitative reflection connects directly with situational leadership theory [32] and Industry 5.0 human-centric governance principles [9, 33].

4.5 Strategic Guidelines for Strengthening Managerial Competencies

Based on quantitative results, qualitative themes, and methodological triangulation, four strategic guidelines are proposed to enhance managerial competencies in social project organizations:

1. Institutionalization of Bidirectional Feedback and Co-responsibility: Transition from top-down performance evaluations to structured, two-way feedback spaces where project challenges and operational errors are addressed collaboratively as shared learning experiences [10, 31].
2. Implementation of Situated and Adaptive Leadership Frameworks: Adopt flexible leadership styles tailored to the technical maturity, emotional readiness, and territorial contexts of diverse project teams [32, 34, 35].
3. Systematic Training in Assertive Communication and Active Message Validation: Implement formal training programs focusing on active listening, paraphrasing, and counter-questioning to bridge the 50.0% communicative enhancement gap identified in open survey responses [29].
4. Reduction of Micromanagement and Promotion of Operational Autonomy: Shift from bureaucratic over-supervision to goal-oriented delegation, fostering team empowerment and resilience in complex socio-political project environments [23].

V. CONCLUSION

This research concludes that executive managers in the studied Bogotá-based social organization utilize ethical leadership not as a static normative code, but as an active axiological practice that humanizes project management. Ethical leadership enables executive leaders to balance strict funder deliverable targets with the fundamental imperative of preserving human dignity. A primary empirical contribution is the verification of a strong positive association between perceived ethical leadership and managerial communication effectiveness (Spearman rho = 0.812; $p < 0.001$), demonstrating that moral consistency, fairness, and genuine concern for well-being directly enhance communication clarity, message timeliness, and team psychological safety.

The findings demonstrate that executive communication effectiveness relies heavily on leader moral legitimacy rather than formal administrative channels alone. To sustain high project performance, social sector organizations must institutionalize two-way feedback mechanisms, adopt situated leadership models, provide continuous assertive communication training, and empower field teams through operational autonomy.

Future research should expand these empirical evaluations across regional non-governmental organizations to perform comparative analyses. Additionally, scholars should investigate how emerging generative artificial intelligence tools and digital platforms impact ethical executive communication [36, 37], and evaluate ethical leadership approaches in managing neurodiverse project teams within Industry 5.0 organizational frameworks [33, 38].

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