

**THE DYNAMICS OF PERSONAL VALUES AND ORGANIZATIONAL DEMANDS: THEIR INFLUENCE
ON EMPLOYEES' ETHICAL BEHAVIOR IN THE WORKPLACE**

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the influence of personal values on employees' ethical behavior in the workplace through a literature review approach. Personal values, such as integrity, fairness, and responsibility, are viewed as the primary foundation in ethical decision-making. However, various studies indicate that the influence of personal values is not always linear, as employees frequently face organizational demands that may conflict with their moral beliefs. The conflict between personal values and organizational demands gives rise to moral dilemmas, psychological stress, and the potential occurrence of unethical behavior. Psychological mechanisms such as cognitive dissonance, moral disengagement, and conformity pressure serve as factors that explain how such conflicts affect employee behavior. This study reveals that value conflicts impact individual behavior and carry implications for organizational culture, psychological well-being, and the long-term reputation of the company. Cross-disciplinary and cross-cultural literature analysis demonstrates that the dynamics of value conflicts can vary according to the social, economic, and cultural contexts in which the organization operates. Therefore, this study emphasizes the urgency to continually examine the interaction between personal values and organizational demands, both in the academic realm and in practical applications. This study enriches the literature on organizational ethics and provides a conceptual contribution to understanding the complexity of employee ethical behavior in the modern era.

Keywords: personal values, ethical behavior, value conflict, organizational demands, work ethics, moral disengagement, organizational culture.

Introduction

Personal values do not form in isolation but develop through interaction, value internalization, and individual experience in the social environment, which shape a person's orientation and understanding of acceptable behavioral limits (Multihakiki et al., 2024). Personal values can be defined as internal principles that serve as standards for judging, choosing, and directing a person's actions (Schwartz, 2006). In organizations, personal values influence how employees respond to ethical dilemmas, interpret rules, and make moral decisions when facing external pressure. Therefore, understanding the relationship between personal values and ethical behavior is crucial for predicting and steering organizational culture toward a healthier and more integrity-based direction (Hitlin & Piliavin, 2004).

Employee ethical behavior in the workplace is a multidimensional phenomenon influenced by regulation and supervision as well as by individual value orientations that are relatively stable. Written ethical rules only work when employees are willing to apply them in their daily work (Mubarak et al., 2023). Cross-cultural studies show that differences in values, such as collectivist versus individualist orientations, affect employees' tendency to act according to ethical norms or to deviate from them (Ralston et al., 2009). External factors such as leadership and organizational systems are indeed important, because ethical leaders provide real examples that shape a healthy work culture (Mardikaningsih et al., 2022), yet personal values remain the initial filter that determines whether an action is considered right or wrong by an employee (Fritzsche & Oz, 2007).

In an increasingly complex global business environment, competitive pressure often drives unethical behavior such as information manipulation, abuse of authority, and fraud. The pressure to excel often makes unethical means seem acceptable when there is no clear value anchor (Arifin et al., 2021). This is where personal values become significant: individuals with a strong moral value orientation tend to be more resistant to the temptation of unethical behavior (Kish-Gephart et al., 2010). Conversely, weak internalization of ethical values can make employees more vulnerable to external pressure even when the action harms the organization in the long term.

Specifically, research shows that personal values related to integrity, responsibility, and fairness have a significant influence on employees' ethical behavior in organizational decision making. Integrity that is maintained consistently becomes the basis of trust in the decisions that are made (Saktiawan et al., 2021). For example, employees with high integrity values are more likely to refuse financial report manipulation, even under pressure from superiors (Shafer, 2015). In addition, the value of personal responsibility has also been shown to correlate positively with compliance with company policies that emphasize transparency and accountability (May et al., 2015). This value of responsibility matters because every managerial decision needs to be ethically accountable (Gani & Darmawan, 2022).

This phenomenon becomes clearer when conflicts arise among personal, group, and organizational interests. In such situations, personal values become the reference point that determines the direction of employees' ethical behavior. Shared ethical principles help employees weigh the interests of various parties more fairly (Mardikaningsih & Darmawan, 2022). For example, in the banking sector, employees with high fairness values are more likely to refuse credit discrimination even though the practice financially benefits the company (Valentine & Godkin, 2019). This means that the influence of personal values is not merely an abstract phenomenon but a real one in the dynamics of organizational behavior. Data-supported decisions still require value-based judgment so that they do not harm certain parties (Khan et al., 2025).

Changes in the way work is done that constantly demand adjustment can widen this tension (Darmawan, 2023). This creates moral dilemmas that are difficult for employees to face, especially when their personal values conflict with practices considered normal in the organization (Darmawan et al., 2022). Changes in the way work is done that constantly demand adjustment can widen this tension (Darmawan, 2023). This creates moral dilemmas that are difficult for employees to face, especially when their personal values conflict with practices considered normal in the organization (Treviño et al., 2014). When employees feel treated unfairly by their supervisors, the mutual expectations between employees and the organization are disrupted (Darmawan & Mardikaningsih, 2025). This gap may lead to work stress, lower loyalty, and increased intention among employees to commit ethical violations.

Another problem is the variation in personal values among employees, which leads to differences in interpreting ethics. Multinational organizations, for example, face a major challenge in unifying ethical standards amid diverse cultures and individual values (Robertson & Athanassiou, 2009). A lack of understanding of the role of personal values in ethical behavior causes organizational policies to often be ineffective in curbing deviant behavior, because they focus only on formal rules rather than employees' internal motivation. Formal agreements are also effective only when they are understood and accepted by the parties involved (Da Silva et al., 2022).

The urgency of this study lies in the increasing number of ethical violations across various industrial sectors that negatively affect organizational reputation. Many international business scandals show that personal factors, especially individual values, are the root of problems that are often overlooked (Kaptein, 2011). Ethical violations that damage the trust of outside parties can weaken an organization's reputation for a long time (Darmawan, 2025). Without an understanding of the role of personal values, organizations tend to apply only reactive approaches such as imposing sanctions, instead of building a stronger ethical foundation within employees.

In addition, in the era of globalization, labor mobility and cultural diversity are increasing, which means ethical standards cannot be generalized. Therefore, studying how personal values shape employees' ethical behavior is urgent, both for academic purposes and managerial practice. This understanding can open space for organizations to design ethics policies that are more inclusive, adaptive, and based on employees' internal dimensions, not only on external regulation (Suh & Harrison, 2021). This study aims to explain how personal values play a role in shaping employees' ethical behavior in the workplace and to analyze how conflicts between personal values and organizational demands can affect employees' ethical decision making.

Method

This study employs a literature review approach, which is deemed appropriate for understanding the relationship between personal values and employees' ethical behavior in the workplace. A literature review enables researchers to identify, evaluate, and synthesize findings from prior research to produce a comprehensive overview of the phenomenon under investigation (Snyder, 2019). By examining various empirical and theoretical studies, this method provides a broader understanding of how personal values influence ethical behavior across diverse organizational settings.

The research process was conducted through a systematic search of international databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, and ProQuest. The selected articles were peer-reviewed publications released between 2000 and 2024, focusing on personal values, ethical behavior, and organizational ethics. Inclusion criteria encompassed articles explicitly addressing the relationship between personal values and work ethics, as well as cross-cultural studies highlighting value differences in ethical decision-making. This approach allows for comparative analysis and the identification of general patterns as well as contextual variations (Booth et al., 2016).

Subsequently, the selected articles were analyzed using thematic synthesis, which involves grouping research findings into major themes such as integrity, responsibility, fairness, and the conflict between personal values and organizational demands. This technique summarizes existing research findings and helps identify knowledge gaps that remain underexplored (Thomas & Harden, 2008). Consequently, this literature review is not merely descriptive but also analytical, providing a robust theoretical foundation for understanding the role of personal values in employee ethical behavior.

Results and Discussion

The Influence of Personal Values on Employees' Ethical Behavior

Personal values can be understood as fundamental beliefs that guide individuals in evaluating actions, choosing decision alternatives, and determining behavior deemed right or wrong (Darmawan, 2022). In organizations, personal values function as a cognitive filter that influences employees' perception of ethical dilemmas. For example, an employee with a strong value orientation toward integrity tends to prioritize honesty in data reporting, even when organizational pressure encourages the manipulation of information. This aligns with research emphasizing that the internalization of moral values serves as a primary determinant of ethical behavior, going beyond mere compliance with external rules (Schwartz, 2016). Personal values function as individual guidelines and form the basis of a moral orientation that remains relatively stable over the long term. This implies that while organizational policies may shift in response to market dynamics, employees' personal values remain a consistent factor in directing behavior. Therefore, understanding the role of personal values is not merely a psychological issue, but also a strategic one for organizational sustainability.

Personal values influence ethical behavior more visibly when individuals face ambiguous moral dilemmas (Haliza & Mardikaningsih, 2022). When organizational rules do not provide clear guidance, employees rely on their personal values to make ethical choices. Empirical studies show that values

such as fairness, responsibility, and social concern are positively correlated with ethical behavior in the workplace (Parboteeah et al., 2009). For example, employees who prioritize fairness are more likely to treat colleagues equally, even when there is an opportunity to gain personal advantage. This shows that personal values serve as an internal mechanism that balances individual interests and organizational interests. Furthermore, these values also function as a “moral compass” that reduces uncertainty in ethical decision making. Therefore, personal values are not only related to individual preferences but can also contribute to the formation of values, norms, and behaviors that become part of organizational culture (Irfan et al., 2024).

Cross-cultural research strengthens the understanding that personal values contribute significantly to variations in ethical behavior in the workplace. For example, a comparative study of employees in the United States and South Korea found that a collectivist value orientation is related to loyalty to the group, whereas an individualist orientation places greater emphasis on procedural fairness and transparency (Moon & Choi, 2014). These differences in value orientation produce different ethical decision-making strategies, even though both remain rooted in personal values as their foundation. This confirms that personal values are universal and contextual, because they can interact with cultural norms and organizational structures. The relevance of this research for multinational companies is very high, as it shows that efforts to build organizational ethics cannot be separated from an understanding of the diversity of employees’ personal values across cultures. Therefore, every organization needs to recognize that the diversity of employees’ personal values can be a source of ethical strength, as well as a potential source of conflict if it is not managed well.

The relationship between personal values and employees’ ethical behavior is also influenced by the level of value alignment between the individual and the organization, known as person–organization fit. When personal values are aligned with organizational values, employees tend to find it easier to adjust their behavior to the prevailing ethical standards, whereas a mismatch of values can create conflict in determining which actions are considered appropriate (Chasanah et al., 2021). Conversely, a mismatch of values can cause cognitive dissonance, which leads employees to rationalize unethical behavior (Moon & Choi, 2014). For example, an employee who upholds transparency may experience moral pressure when working in an organization that prioritizes information secrecy for strategic interests, and may therefore be pushed to compromise their values. This proves that personal values are not a factor that works in isolation but depend heavily on the organizational setting. Therefore, measuring value fit is important for predicting ethical behavior in the workplace.

Personality dimensions also strengthen the relationship between personal values and ethical behavior, in addition to value alignment. Studies using the Big Five Personality Traits model found that individuals with high scores on agreeableness and conscientiousness are more likely to practice their moral values in daily behavior (Ones et al., 2012). Conversely, individuals with high scores on neuroticism are more likely to neglect their personal values in high-pressure situations. This shows that although personal values serve as a moral guide, individuals’ psychological factors can also influence how they realize their potential and behavior in the work environment (Hariani & Putra 2024). For example, an employee with strong values of responsibility but low conscientiousness may still fail to show ethical behavior because of a lack of discipline and behavioral consistency. Therefore, a more comprehensive understanding of ethical behavior requires integrating personal values and personality factors.

Personal values also play an important role in shaping employees’ perceptions of ethical dilemmas that arise in the workplace. Employees’ perceptions and decision making regarding an issue can be influenced by various factors in the organizational environment that may shape individual behavior and mindset, while personal values serve as an internal factor that influences how employees judge the moral significance of the issue (Mahardani & Mardikaningsih, 2024). According to moral intensity theory, the perception of an issue’s moral significance influences the ethical decision that is made (Jones, 1991). Individuals with high values of empathy and fairness are more likely to view an issue as having significant moral intensity, so they are driven to choose ethical actions. Conversely, individuals with materialistic values are more likely to lower the moral intensity of the same issue,

which opens room for unethical behavior. For example, in a case of customer data misuse, employees with high social concern values will consider the act morally harmful, while employees who are more oriented toward personal achievement may regard it merely as a business strategy. These findings reinforce that personal values are a fundamental factor in shaping employees' ethical perceptions.

Research in the healthcare sector provides strong evidence of the importance of personal values in guiding ethical behavior. Medical employees who uphold humanitarian values, such as empathy and care, have been shown to be more consistent in complying with professional ethical standards, even under cost pressure and administrative demands (Ghadirian et al., 2014). This confirms that personal values are not merely an additional factor but the core of ethical professionalism. Conversely, weak internalization of moral values in the health profession can lead to serious consequences, such as malpractice or neglect of patient safety. This phenomenon can be extrapolated to other sectors, showing that without the internalization of personal values, formal rules and codes of ethics are not sufficient to ensure employees' ethical behavior. Therefore, organizations need to understand that personal values are the foundation of professional integrity.

Personal values also affect the extent to which employees engage with internal reporting mechanisms, such as whistleblowing. Research shows that individuals with values of moral courage and personal responsibility are more likely to report unethical behavior, even when facing the risk of retaliation (Kaptein, 2011). Conversely, employees with more pragmatic or self-protective values are more likely to remain silent. This shows that the effectiveness of internal reporting systems depends on the design of organizational mechanisms and also on the strength of employees' personal values. A reporting channel that exists on paper will not be used if employees doubt that their concerns will be taken seriously or that they will be protected. Personal values act as a trigger for proactive ethical action, which often determines whether an ethical violation can be detected and followed up or is instead left to drag on. When violations are left unaddressed, they can become accepted practice and are harder to correct later.

In the context of digital technology and organizational transformation, personal values are becoming increasingly relevant. With the growing use of big data and algorithms, ethical dilemmas related to privacy, fairness, and transparency are becoming more complex. Employees with ethically oriented personal values are more likely to question the use of technology that is potentially discriminatory or violates privacy, while those with a purely utilitarian orientation may see it merely as business efficiency (Martin, Shilton, & Smith, 2019). This proves that although technology introduces new forms of dilemmas, the role of personal values remains consistent as a moral filter in decision making. Technology can change the form of ethical problems, but it cannot replace the moral judgment of the people who use it. Therefore, personal values become an important instrument for facing ethical challenges in the digital era.

Demographic factors also interact with personal values to influence ethical behavior. Several studies show that age, education level, and work experience can strengthen or weaken the application of personal values in ethical action (Kaptein et al., 2011). For example, more experienced employees tend to have more stable internalization of moral values, so they are more consistent in refusing unethical behavior. Years of facing real work dilemmas give them practice in weighing the consequences of their choices. Conversely, employees who have just entered the workforce may still be vulnerable to adjusting their behavior to organizational pressure even when it conflicts with their personal values. They often have less bargaining power and fewer examples to follow, which makes it harder for them to stand by their principles. This confirms that personal values, although relatively stable, are still shaped by a person's life journey and professional experience.

Overall, the influence of personal values on employees' ethical behavior in the workplace is multidimensional, involving the interaction of individual values, personality, culture, and organizational conditions. Personal values determine how individuals evaluate ethical dilemmas and influence the perceptions, motivations, and real actions taken in high-pressure situations. These values also shape whether employees see an ethical problem in the first place, before any

rule is applied. Therefore, ethical behavior cannot be understood through formal policies alone but must be seen as a manifestation of employees' internal values. Policies and supervision remain necessary, but they work best when they build on values that employees already hold. By understanding this complexity, it can be concluded that personal values are an irreplaceable foundation in the formation of ethical behavior in the workplace, and their relevance is growing in the era of globalization and digitalization.

Conflict Between Personal Values and Organizational Demands in Ethical Behavior

Conflict between personal values and organizational demands is one of the most crucial factors influencing employees' ethical behavior. When an organization sets targets, policies, or practices that are not aligned with employees' internal values, a significant state of cognitive dissonance arises. This dissonance can lead to moral distress, a psychological condition in which a person knows the right ethical action but is prevented from taking it by external demands (Jameton, 1984). In such situations, employees face a difficult choice: follow organizational demands even though they conflict with personal values, or maintain personal integrity at the risk of sanctions, career setbacks, or even termination of employment. Employees who choose to comply may carry a sense of guilt that does not disappear once the task is finished. This dilemma shows how strongly value conflict affects the stability of ethical behavior in the workplace.

In many cases, value conflict occurs because organizations place greater emphasis on achieving financial goals than on maintaining ethical integrity. Research shows that pressure to meet targets is often the main cause of unethical behavior, such as report manipulation, discriminatory practices, and misuse of resources (Treviño et al., 2006). Targets that are set too high without regard to how they are reached send a signal that results matter more than methods. When organizational demands are prioritized over personal values, employees may be driven to engage in moral rationalization, that is, justifying unethical behavior as a professional necessity. This condition weakens individuals' ethical commitment and can erode the ethical culture of the organization as a whole. Once such justifications are shared among colleagues, they become harder to challenge.

Changes in systems, information governance, work relationships, and organizational structure can create new demands that affect how employees make and account for decisions in the workplace (Osean et al., 2024). Conflict between personal values and organizational demands can also give rise to moral disengagement, in which individuals detach themselves from moral responsibility for their actions. Bandura et al. (1996) explain that moral disengagement occurs through cognitive mechanisms such as euphemistic labeling, displacement of responsibility, or minimization of consequences. For example, an employee who is forced to manipulate data may convince themselves that "everyone does it," thereby reducing feelings of guilt. Over time, the same excuse can be used for larger violations because the sense of wrongdoing gradually fades. Thus, value conflict influences behavior directly and also activates psychological mechanisms that make unethical behavior increasingly acceptable.

The impact of value conflict becomes more visible in organizations with a strong hierarchical system. Pressure from superiors often makes employees feel they have no choice but to follow instructions, even when those instructions conflict with their personal values. Research shows that obedience to authority can override individual moral considerations, as demonstrated in Milgram's classic obedience experiments (Milgram, 1974). In such situations, the person giving the order tends to be seen as responsible for the outcome, so employees feel less accountable for what they do. In modern organizations, this phenomenon means that even employees with strong integrity values can still be trapped into unethical actions when organizational authority pushes them to do so.

In addition to authority, group norms also strengthen the conflict between personal values and organizational demands. When unethical behavior becomes a group habit, employees often face conformity pressure that makes it difficult for them to uphold their personal values. Treviño, den

Nieuwenboer, and Kish-Gephart (2014) show that group norms that are permissive toward ethical violations can normalize deviant behavior. Newcomers are especially affected, because they learn what is acceptable by watching how their colleagues behave. As a result, employees who initially rejected unethical behavior may eventually become involved in order to maintain social cohesion within the group.

Personal value conflict also affects employees' psychological well-being. Research in work psychology shows that a misalignment between personal values and organizational values is correlated with stress, emotional exhaustion, and decreased job satisfaction (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Employees who are continuously forced to act against their personal values tend to experience moral alienation, which in the long term can reduce organizational loyalty and increase turnover intention (Putra et al., 2022). Employees who feel exhausted by this conflict are also less able to make careful ethical decisions. Therefore, value conflict affects ethical behavior as well as mental health and workforce stability.

In the era of globalization, conflict between personal values and organizational demands is becoming more complex because of cultural differences. Employees in countries with collectivist value orientations may be more inclined to sacrifice personal values for group harmony, while employees in individualistic cultures are more likely to maintain their personal values even when these conflict with the organization (Ralston et al., 2014). Beyond cultural differences at the broader level, organizational culture can also shape patterns of interaction and relationships among members, with a hierarchical culture producing different relationship patterns compared to a more egalitarian, open, and collaborative culture (Al Laisty et al., 2024). In a hierarchical culture, employees are expected to defer to their superiors, which makes it harder to voice disagreement. This confirms that the dynamics of value conflict cannot be understood without considering broader cultural factors.

Research also shows that conflict between personal values and organizational demands can lead to defensive ethical behavior. For example, some employees choose to be passive: they do not take part in unethical practices but also make no effort to prevent them, as a compromise between personal values and organizational demands (Paharia et al., 2009). This choice often feels safe because the employee avoids both direct involvement and open confrontation. Although this passive attitude appears neutral, it still has a negative impact because it allows unethical behavior to continue without resistance.

In some cases, conflict between individual moral values and organizational pressure can give rise to ethical dilemmas, especially when demands for efficiency and economic performance conflict with adherence to moral principles (Rojak & Darmawan, 2021). However, the decision to become a whistleblower is strongly influenced by the strength of personal values, especially the values of moral courage and social responsibility. Research finds that although many employees are aware of unethical behavior, only a small proportion dare to report it, because the risk of retaliation from the organization is very high (Miceli et al., 2008). Employees who stay silent are not necessarily indifferent, since many simply fear losing their job or being isolated by their colleagues. Thus, whistleblowing is evidence that value conflict does not always result in compromise; sometimes it triggers ethical resistance.

Conflict between personal values and organizational demands also has long-term implications for company reputation. If this conflict is not managed, unethical behavior born from value compromise can develop into major scandals that harm the organization financially and socially. Several international corporate scandals, such as the Enron and Volkswagen cases, show that conflict between performance demands and individual ethical values contributed to the emergence of systematic manipulative practices (Sims & Brinkmann, 2003). In such cases, small compromises that were tolerated early on grew into patterns that were difficult to stop. This shows that value conflict is not merely a personal problem but also a strategic threat to the survival of the organization.

Overall, conflict between personal values and organizational demands is an important factor that can weaken employees' ethical behavior. This conflict works through psychological mechanisms such as

moral distress, moral disengagement, authority pressure, and group norms. Its impact is not limited to individual behavior but also extends to organizational culture, employee well-being, and company reputation. When these effects accumulate, trust among employees and toward the organization gradually declines. Therefore, understanding the dynamics of value conflict is essential for explaining why unethical behavior still occurs even though many organizations have formal codes of ethics.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that employees' personal values exert a significant influence on ethical behavior in the workplace. Values such as integrity, responsibility, and fairness serve as moral guidelines that shape an individual's inclination toward ethical decision-making. Employees with a strong internalization of ethical values are more likely to exhibit consistent ethical behavior, even when placed under high-pressure situations. However, the results of the literature review also emphasize that personal values do not operate in isolation; rather, they continually interact with the organizational context.

The conflict between personal values and organizational demands emerges as a primary challenge with the potential to undermine ethical behavior. Target pressures, compliance with authority, and group norms frequently force employees into moral dilemmas that are difficult to avoid. In the long run, these conditions can erode individual integrity, weaken the organizational ethical culture, and harm the company's global reputation. Consequently, while the presence of strong personal values is crucial, without alignment with organizational systems, the potential for ethical infractions remains high.

For academics, there is a clear imperative to further develop research on the role of personal values within modern, complex organizational environments. Future studies should explore cross-cultural and cross-industry dynamics, as contextual differences can yield significant variations in the manifestation of ethical behavior. Furthermore, for organizations, it is critical to consider employees' personal values from the recruitment stage through career development. Although this study does not offer direct practical solutions, a nuanced understanding of the interaction between personal values and organizational demands can serve as a foundation for both theoretical advances and future ethical policy formulation.

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