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Article

Contextual Factors and Their Impact on Ethical Leadership in Educational Settings

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Abstract: This discussion paper focuses on the notion of context and its variables and explores how context influences the attempt to practice ethical leadership in educational settings. Three major research questions underline this paper: a. What is the importance of context in the leadership research and what are the contextual factors affecting different notions of ethics, values, their degree of significance, and the way they affect attitudes and behaviors? b. To what extent do educational systems and/or communities share the same notional background about ethics, values, and ethical leadership? c. Can that which is researched and discussed in ethical leadership theory be successfully and effectively transferred into everyday school practice? Our investigation leads us to support the assumption that contextual factors should be included in (ethical) leadership research and the notion of vision and its interaction with the notions of mission and goals should be revisited in a more humanistic rather than managerial way if we wish to run ethical schools and transform them into ethical learning nests to nurture and develop new generations.

Keywords: ethical leadership; context; education; leadership research; school leader; vision; mission



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1. Introduction

Only recently has the examination of context been included as a pivotal axis in leadership research. However, context and its variables are particularly significant in education; the humanistic character of education calls for adopting specific leadership constructs based on ethics and values with respect to human personalities. Thus, societies and/or communities all over world strive to encompass ethics in their policies and rhetoric about the improvement of educational systems.

The aim of this paper is twofold: to put forward the importance of examining context by enriching existing research and completing gaps (where necessary) in the research of ethical leadership in education, and to investigate those factors which have a strong impact on ethical leadership and ethical behavior in education.

The rationale behind this study is to contribute to further understanding of interactions between context parameters, ethics, and education as a human activity and social institution. The study also aspires to urge researchers to reconsider the importance of certain context aspects when examining ethical leadership in educational settings. In doing so, this study revisits leadership as a social phenomenon and attempts to illustrate how socially established assumptions about leadership as a one-person activity often underscore the importance of context. Moreover, they are inconsistent with the construct of ethical leadership in education, as they fail to “fill in” logic gaps when research attempts to explain

the reasons for certain behaviors, practices, strategies, and decisions taken within educational settings. As a consequence, it comes to clarify which parameters are important in ethical educational settings and why; it narrows the ethical leadership discussion to show that the inclusion of context parameters in examining educational settings is necessary for a holistic investigation of education and its impact on society.

The main variables of this study are defined as follows: context in leadership research, context in ethical leadership, and context aspects in ethical leadership in education. The last variable is additionally examined through three sub-variables: values, religion, and democracy.

The paper is organized as follows: First, we attempt to re-conceptualize the leadership phenomenon and redefine the type of relationships built among the principal actors, i.e., the leader, the followers, and the context within educational settings. Second, we explore all possible contextual variables, and we propose a renewed typology of factors affecting education and its ethics within postmodern societies. In doing so, we pay special attention to cross-national/global differentiations when giving meaning to commonly used terms, such as ethics, morality, values, religion, democracy, and leadership. We also discuss the philosophical and sociopolitical starting points of these differentiations, their various interpretations, and how these may hinder or distort ethical leadership in educational practice. Resulting from the above discussion, we propose a reflection on the key components of ethical leadership in educational organizations. We revisit leadership as a phenomenon within society and re-examine vision and mission and how they can be stated in an ethically driven school.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Questions

Three major research questions underline this paper: a. What is the importance of context in the leadership research and what are the contextual factors affecting different notions of ethics, their degree of significance, and the way they affect attitudes and behaviors? b. To what extent do educational systems and/or communities share the same notional background about ethics, values, and ethical leadership? c. Can whatever is researched and written in ethical leadership theory be successfully and effectively transferred into everyday school practice?

2.2. Reviewing Method

This study is based on a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) that took place between May 2024 and September 2024. As a method of reviewing, the SLR has been widely used lately. It provides a more concrete and transparent synthesis and quality appraisal of published research and avoids bias in the selection and inclusion of studies (Lame, 2019; Kraus et al., 2020). In this paper, we use an explicit methodological pattern resulting from the research questions mentioned above: defining criteria for inclusion and/or exclusion, locating studies in databases, selecting studies according to set criteria, assessing the quality of selected studies where possible or necessary, presenting and analyzing data, and interpreting results to benefit further study.

2.3. The Process of Defining Criteria for Inclusion and Selecting Appropriate Studies

Our first criterion was for the studies included to have a digital object identifier (DOI) or a uniform resource locator (URL) where possible, so that readers can easily spot them.

Secondly, we employed a “productive reasoning” approach in defining our criteria for the inclusion of published studies; that is, we started from general keywords and moved to more specific ones. We followed a reviewing path similar to the PRISMA approach

(Liberati et al., 2009), in the sense of “filtering” resources and working gradually. For practical purposes, we named our approach the “funnel” method (Figure 1). Our aim was to build a pattern of narrowing our search step-by-step in order to meet the literature review needs resulting from our research questions.

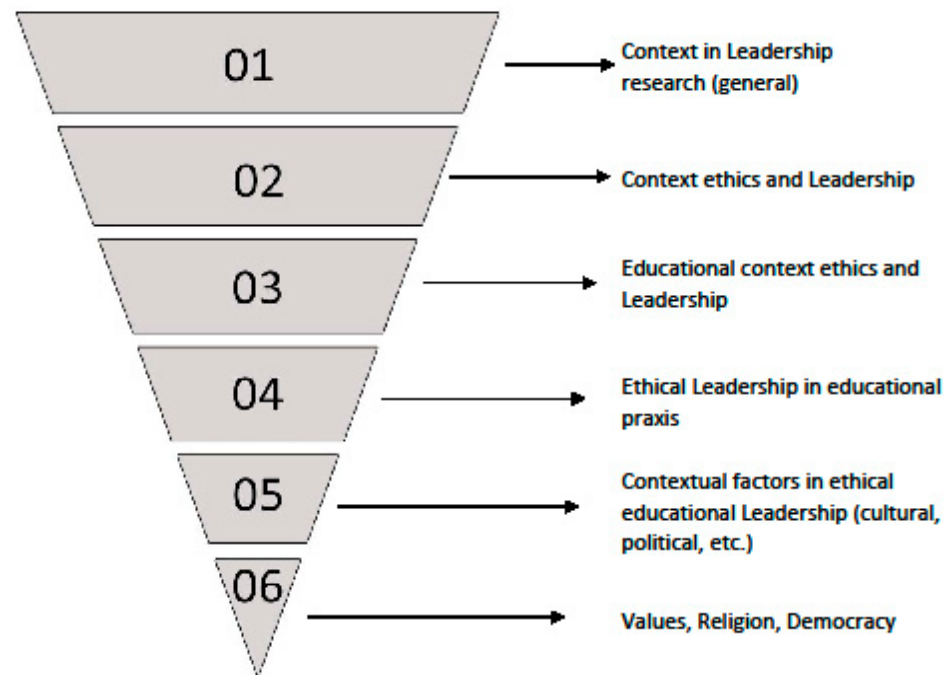


Figure 1. The Funnel Method.

Another important criterion for including (or excluding) a study was the explicit or implicit association of the context with one or more parameters of leadership (context in the leadership research). At this stage we searched databases with two words: *context* and *leadership*.

After collecting a considerable number of studies, we assorted them in two groups: studies about context and a wider view of the leader as a person (the psychology approach), and leadership as a social and political phenomenon and ethics as a general social and personal characteristic (the social context approach). Our search was carried out by employing keywords, such leader characteristics, leadership characteristics, ethics, and society.

At the following stage, we introduced *education* as a new keyword and narrowed our search to studies examining the construct of ethical leadership in education.

In reviewing this last lot of studies, we noticed a number of them emphasizing that the social parameters indicated how these parameters affect the praxis of ethical leadership in education. These studies were chosen as the background to the next step of our search. In these studies, certain keywords reappear, thus assigning particular importance to the constituents of personal ethics and ethical behavior within society and conveying special meaning in education: values, culture, justice, and religion as part of a given culture, and the perception of the notion of democracy, among others.

2.4. Locating Studies in Databases

Research sources include well-known online databases (Google Scholar, JSTOR, ProQuest, Science Direct, Scopus, Springer Link, Web of Science, and Wiley Online Library) and purchased (printed) books. The majority of articles and books are in English.

2.5. Ethics

We selected and analyzed facts and evidence in the relevant literature works with due respect to the authors and their work. We attempted to be objective and unbiased and to present arguments as they derive from the selected points of discussion.

3. Results

The “funnel method” (Figure 1) produced a considerable number of studies at each level. The studies were assembled in two major groups. The first group includes levels 1 and 2 of the funnel diagram and contributes to the reviewing process of the general theoretical background (presented below in Section 4.1). This background serves as a theoretical information prerequisite for the following stages.

The second group includes levels 3, 4, 5, and 6 of the *funnel method*. It contains research papers and book chapters focused on ethical leadership in education, context as an impact factor, and context parameters explaining this impact on educational settings. Information from these levels serves as feeding material for Section 4.2. The most important literature items, according to the context-specific criteria, are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Various contextual factors and/or dimensions affecting ethical leadership in the current literature.

Researchers	Factors and Dimensions	Country-Type of School
Braun et al. (2011)	Situated	UK-Secondary schools
	Professional	
	Material	
	External	
Hallinger (2018) (updating and completing (Bossert et al., 1982))	Institutional	Interview with a Hong Kong secondary school principal
	National Cultural	
	Economic	
	Political	
	School Improvement	

Table 1. Cont.

Researchers	Factors and Dimensions	Country-Type of School
Hofstede (2011) A (Culture as context: a paradigm to compare cultures)	Power Distance Index	Small Power \neq Large power (Table 1, p. 9). It suggests that a society's level of inequality is endorsed by the followers as much as by the leaders.
	Uncertainty Avoidance	A society's tolerance for ambiguity. It indicates to what extent a culture programs its members to feel either uncomfortable or comfortable in unstructured situations. Weak \neq Strong Uncertainty Avoidance.
	Individualism \neq Collectivism	The degree to which people in a society are integrated into groups. Individualist aspect: cultures in which the ties between individuals are loose. Collectivist aspect: cultures in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, often extended families that continue protecting them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty and oppose other in-groups. Individualism tends to prevail in developed and Western countries, while collectivism prevails in less developed and Eastern countries.
	Masculinity \neq Femininity masc. \neq femin.	Distribution of values between the genders which is another fundamental issue for any society. Women's values differ less among societies than men's values Assertive pole: "masculine". Modest, caring pole: "feminine".
	Long \neq Short term orientation	Long term pole: perseverance, thrift, ordering relationships by status and having sense of shame. Short term: reciprocating social obligations, respect for tradition, protecting one's face, and personal steadiness and stability.
	Indulgence \neq Restraint	Indulgence: A society that allows relatively free gratification of basic and natural human desires related to enjoying life and having fun. Restraint: A society that controls gratification of needs and regulates it by means of strict social norms.
Hofstede (2011) B Dimensions of organizational cultures (affected and influenced by values)	Process-oriented \neq results-oriented	Process-oriented: Dominated by technical and bureaucratic routines, results-oriented by a (cultures) common concern for outcomes. Associated with the culture's degree of homogeneity. Results-oriented: Everybody perceived their practices in about the same way. Degree of homogeneity: Measure of culture's "strengths" Strong cultures more results-oriented.
	Job oriented \neq Employee oriented	Job-oriented: responsibility for the employees' job performance only, and nothing more. Employee-oriented: assume a broad responsibility for their members' well-being.
	Professional \neq parochial	Professional: highly educated members identify primarily with their profession. Parochial: the members derive their identity from the organization for which they work.
	Tight \neq Loose control	This dimension deals with the degree of formality and punctuality within the organization, partly a function of the unit's technology.
	Pragmatic \neq Normative	It describes the prevailing way of dealing with the environment. The dimension measures the degree of "customer orientation".
Livermore (2009) levels and sub-levels of culture as context characteristic	National culture	Regional \rightarrow External environment
	Organizational Team	Internal \rightarrow Organizational environment
	Individual	

Initially 40 countries, p. 6?

Research base of the dimensions in 20 units from two countries (Denmark and The Netherlands)

Table 1. Cont.

Researchers	Factors and Dimensions		Country-Type of School
Noman and Gurr (2020)	National culture	A collection of common ways of thinking and acting in a country, distinct from other countries. The combination of individual characteristic of citizens has been identified as a dependable, valid, and valuable method to measure the cultural values of country. The values that are largely unconscious and is nurtured since birth and espoused by a majority of the citizens of a country. Values are mostly seen as constant over time; however, they may vary somewhat from generation to generation (They mention Hofstede's six dimensions).	Theoretical–discussion They adopt Livermore's categorization and adapt it to school
	Regional culture	Among all natural cultures around the world, there is a distinct subset of region specific culture that distinguishes the culture of one group of people from the other within a country.	
	Organizational culture	It refers to a set of common values, attitudes, beliefs, and norms, some of which are explicit and some of which are not. Major components: its expectations, customs, and regulation that govern it. Even though two schools are next to each other, they may be different due to the things done within schools.	
	Team culture	Teams within an organization develop their own values, beliefs, and norms of culture over a period of time which directs the overall performance of the team.	
	Individual culture	Personal experiences from the family, friends, educational institutions, faith, and peers. National and regional culture: significant effect on an individual's cultural orientation.	
Gross (2014): risks and threats for schools and ethical leadership decision	School security	Affected by prevailing human rights and values; ethical decisions to be made by principals.	Theoretical–discussion
	Economics	The degree to which needy school children and their families are affected by budget-associated ethical decisions.	For all discussed dimensions
	Technology	As a risk, a threat, or an opportunity.	
	Underlying values		
Bottery (2014)	Environmental sustainability as a risk or opportunity	Relevant ethical decisions for intergenerational human equity including the needs of other species as well.	Theoretical–discussion
	Underlying values	Environment as a central concern of ethical educational leadership.	
Fullan (2003) Categorization of context-pivotal factor	Levels of Context where moral school leadership can bring change	The individual level, the school level, the regional level, and the societal level	
Samier and Milley (2018)	Contextual factors underlying mal-administration in educational settings	A wide range of political, economic, social factors, security, modernization, bureaucratic pathogeny, and international organizations of educational planning.	
Langlois (2011)	Levels of organizational reality (context)	1st = objective reality, 2nd = social-psychic, 3rd = cultural, associates objective and symbolic. 4th = bureaucratic reality (the real is recorded in official documents) Assumption: everyone develops an idea of the real that affects interpersonal relations in a very specific way.	

4. Discussion

4.1. Leadership Theoretical Background

4.1.1. The Context in Leadership Research

In 2001, Johns noted that context “has been downplayed within organizational behavior and human resources research”. Western (mostly American) researchers and theorists in the field of leadership in organizations and businesses tend (or used to tend) to view leadership in terms of an individual’s task (Day & Antonakis, 2013); moreover, leadership per se had been viewed (by that time) as a phenomenon that occurs “in vacuum”, isolated from other social phenomena or processes (Lord et al., 2001; Porter & McLaughlin, 2006). Those research attitudes can be partly explained by the fact that most of the American literature on leadership had been produced by psychologists who focus on the individual rather than the social group or the social phenomena. Johns (2001), using the literature of the previous decade 1990–1999, describes a number of other explanations associated with the content and intent of organizational studies and business and the research profile of the authors¹.

Langlois (2011) supports that the rise of interest in ethical leadership is closely related to the “managerial revolution”, a period in which individuals managed organizations inspired by the positivist paradigm; she attributes the “ignorance” of the context (i.e., lack of awareness) to the dominance of rationality during the managerial era and the fact that even social relationships within organizations were seen as a form of planned behavior; the dominance of the positivist paradigm urged a very specific way of thinking and assessing procedures and relations within organizations: it emphasized *how* instead of *why*, as this was thought a scientific and most appropriate way of understanding reality and resolving problems: “It is easier to define an organization by what it does—its behavior, its function, its procedures (namely the *how*)—than by what lies beyond the public veneer—its internal structure, its relationships, its interactions, its overall purpose (in other words, the *why*). It is rare to find [such] descriptions of organizations. . . because such things resist the logic of a simple causal explanation” (pp. 8–9).

However, those attitudes started to change at the beginning of the new millennium. Lord and Smith (1999, quoted in Lord et al., 2001) supported that a number of factors other than the leader “embed leadership in a flexible task and social system”. As a result, they proposed leadership should move from static models of the prototypical leader perception to “models capable of representing dynamic changes in perceptions over time and contexts”. They also discussed the constraints leaders may have due to various internal organizational sources, such as goals or needs, and external, often unpredictable, variables, such as crises of various causes. They argued that there is an interaction between contextual factors and leader–followers traits; this interaction is influenced by values, norms, and goals that make the leadership phenomenon “fluid and contextually sensitive”². Thus, Lord et al.’s (2001) work illustrated the importance of context (in the form of constraints to leadership), attempted a categorization of contextual factors according to their impact on leadership, and emphasized that effective leadership requires leaders to be attuned to their environmental surroundings (p. 22). Lord et al. (2001) recognized that contexts are continuously changing, and leaders should have “extensive knowledge” in order to “create situational appropriate responses” (p. 23).

Later, in 2003, Antonakis, Avolio, and Sivasubramanian, in their evaluation of Bass and Avolio’s Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire, MLQ, Form 5x, hypothesized that evaluations of leadership may be affected by the context in which leadership is observed and evaluated. They also referred to certain previous categorizations of contextual factors which they assumed affected leadership (such as environmental risk, gender, hierarchical level, national culture, and demographics) in order to show that the measurement of

leadership is not context-free but context specific (p. 268). Moreover, they admitted the “situational strength” of the context and clarified that “same behaviors may exist but are validated differently across different contexts” (p. 269).

The years from 2005 onwards were prolific in regard to conceptual work associated with the organizational context. However, several articles, either conceptual or empirical, did not have organizational context as their main focus, even though some of them at a first glance appeared to demonstrate attention to some facet of the organizational context (Porter & McLaughlin, 2006, p. 571). Based on a literature review of the years 1990–2005, Porter and McLaughlin (2006) concluded that “organizational context can be a dependent variable of leadership action as well as a variable of influence on leadership”. They suggested *a set of components* that comprise the context for leader behavior or other types of behavior occurring within an organizational setting, such as culture and climate, goals and purposes, people and composition, processes, state and condition, structure, and time.

Johns (2006) revisited the issue of context and re-appraised its impact on organizational behavior. Starting from his definition of context as “situational opportunities and constraints that affect the occurrence and meaning of organizational behavior”, as well as functional relationships between variables, he proposed two levels of analysis for thinking about context. The first level, *omnibus context*, “is grounded in journalistic practice” and explores dimensions answering *wh*-questions, while the second one, *discrete context*, is grounded “in classic social psychology”. His purpose was to explain the multiple facets of context and how context in the form of either a variable or a constant has been implemented in various cases of research (see his own Figure 1, p. 392). Thus, he provided a more or less horizontal method of analysis; additionally, he noted that there is a (conceptual) space between omnibus and discrete context where certain variables function in a mediating way, “a mesolike manner”. In fact, Johns examined/reviewed behaviors of individuals or small teams within an organization and sought to explore specific dimensions of the omnibus and discrete context that affect specific behaviors of these individuals. However, the horizontal pattern he adopts leaves out other major contextual dimensions, often very important for the formation of individual attitudes and behaviors, such as culture. Nevertheless, Johns’ conceptual model later served as the basis for Burak’s (2018) literature review on contextual leadership.

Johns (2024)—once again—went through a detailed analysis of the literature/research evidence and noted the lack of context appreciation in the leadership literature despite certain advances in the field, such as the reduction of omitted variable bias or the improved understanding of anomalous research findings. He offered new or renewed ways of context appreciation in leadership research as well as in teaching and practice of leadership. Johns (2024) noted the “lack of typologies and taxonomies of contextual variables”, with perhaps the sole exception of crisis typologies. Johns’ article may serve as the starting point for re-conceptualizing the actors and factors of the leadership phenomenon³.

In conclusion, leadership is a highly contextually sensitive phenomenon; innumerable contextual/environmental factors can define leadership simultaneously. Leadership occurs through processes in which social and task systems constrain the accepted definition of leadership either regarding a leader’s traits or the perceptions that followers have of leadership. There are connections between contextual factors and the leader’s traits; however, it depends on the perceiver’s values and norms how these traits are interpreted and integrated in their perception of the leader’s behavior. Hence, notions like goals, vision, and mission are also contextually affected. Lord and Smith (1999) support that “consistency in leadership perceptions across multiple perceivers may occur when external factors impose very similar constraints on multiple individuals”, which means that followers’ shaping of the leader’s prototype varies across different contexts and cultures (p. 11).

This assumption raises questions about the ethical essence of the context itself; when examining the context as part of the leadership phenomenon, one should include the ethical considerations underlying each aspect of the context.

4.1.2. Ethical Leadership and Context: A General Review

The Construct of Ethical Leadership

Ethical Leadership as a construct has emerged in the Leadership research during the 20th century as an attempt to respond to notorious corruption scandals in USA as well as other areas of the so-called civilized world (e.g., Watergate scandal, Iran-Contra Affair, Monica Levinsky Affair, among others). It has been developed by organizational scholars in American business schools and was originally defined in abstract normative terms, which caused extended ambiguity. Bedi et al. (2016) observe that research has focused on the classical ethical view and the common research question of “what should characterize a moral leader”; this question is rather theoretical and does not tackle the practical question of how a leader should behave and function within his/her organization and the society as a whole.

Brown, Trevino, and colleagues attempted to define ethical leadership in organizations as follows: “ethical leadership is 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, p. 120). Brown et al. also claimed that “regulatory behavior” includes “honesty, altruism, fairness, and respect”. However, this definition was met with criticism. Critique came mainly from Den Hartog (2015), Eisenbeiss (2012), Den Hartog and DeHoogh (2009), and Price (2017). Other researchers (Yukl, 1998) prefer the term moral leadership instead, but using moral interchangeably with ethical creates new problems in the research field. Researchers either adopted descriptors such as “character and integrity, ethical awareness, community/people-orientation, motivating, encouraging and empowering, and managing ethical accountability” (Resick et al., 2006, p. 346), put emphasis on the importance of ethics in leadership (“ethics can be regarded as the heart of leadership” (Langlois, 2011, p. 34; Northouse, 2018; Ciulla, 2004)), or sought to explore the (theoretical) constituents of ethical leadership (Starratt, 2004).

Defining ethical leadership has so far been a descriptive process, ambiguous in terms of content and vague in terms of the theoretical and philosophical background (Perry, 2018; Eisenbeiss, 2012), without a concrete research methodology or ethics-specific measurement tools (Argyropoulou & Spyridakis, 2022). Ethical leadership as a construct emerged about twenty-five years ago and it seemingly continues to be that a “descriptive and predictive social scientific approach to ethics and leadership has remained underdeveloped and fragmented” (Brown & Trevino, 2006, p. 595).

Ethics and Morality and the Significance of the “Community”

A central point in discussing ethical leadership is the distinction between ethics and morality (Collinson, 2014), and the question being whether these terms should be used interchangeably⁴. Whether these terms are “wholly or partially synonymous” (Lee, 1928) is a rather old dilemma. Some authors support the emphasis on the distinction (Starratt, 2004; Bauman, 1995)⁵ while others have defended the use of the terms consistently “with their use in literature and as more or less interchangeable terms in an applied philosophical sense” (Campbell, 2008a, 2008b).⁶ Langlois (2011) also uses ethical and moral interchangeably⁷.

Strike (2007) thinks that if we restrict the meaning of ethics only to the question of “what is right and what is wrong” in a given community—in other words, if we are to mingle ethics and morality in one meaning construct—we put forward a very narrow

view of ethics and “diminish the importance of understanding ethics for the practice of leadership” (p. xv). To focus merely on morality “tends to overemphasize personal conduct and disconnects ethics from the art of good leadership” (2007), because ethics is closely associated with the “nature of good communities” and “community is the essential relevance of ethics to leadership”. Strike’s stance on ethical leadership as described above puts forward three issues to be taken into consideration: a. ethics is a prerequisite to leadership, b. ethics is more or less community-specific, c. to achieve ethical leadership within an organization, we should examine the nature and the aims of the “community” within which the organization strives and thrives.

For Strike, community represents what we call context but in a narrower sense; that is, the immediate environment of an organization. Strike⁸ stresses that this environment is crucial when we examine school leadership, pointing to the close relation between context and education. In his words, “good community” is the basis for ethical leadership.

4.2. Contextual Impact Factors on Ethical School Leadership

In this part, we attempt a synthesis of contextual factors and dimensions analyzed and discussed in various works around the world. Moreover, we point out how certain aspects of context intersect and create new challenges and constraints for any leadership model each school may choose to implement.

4.2.1. The Context as an Impact Factor in Educational Leadership Research

In contrast to what was observed in the field of business and general organization leadership research, context seems to play a distinct role in the field of educational leadership. There are several empirical studies based on Anglo-American cases from various parts of the world. However, context seems to be an area of special interest and importance, especially in studies from the Southeast Pacific region; this interest may stem from the fact that different cultures, ethnic minorities, languages, and religions exist in a symbiotic way within the same countries (one can observe numerous mentions of such cases in the works of (Hallinger, 2018; Noman & Gurr, 2020)). Table 1 shows a collection of studies about dimensions of context which play a significant role in the way societies form their inner characteristics.

Education is a societal institution; each of the following studies examines several contextual dimensions which also affect ethics, schooling, and school leadership, the majority focusing on elementary schools and the instructional leadership model. Some of these studies (Hallinger, 2018; Braun et al., 2011) provide conceptual models for researching and analyzing context while others probe into and deepen research in certain aspects of contextual impact, such as culture (Noman & Gurr, 2020; Hofstede, 2011; Minkov, 2011).

Fullan (2003)—in discussing how and why morality is imperative for school leadership—designates context as the pivotal factor for change in education. Context is not the external environment but the “immediate situation” (p. 2) and it “is equally—if not more—important than the background or personalities that people bring to the situation. . . people’s behavior is a function of social context” (pp. 1–2). For him, the power of context is seen as a “forceful constrain”. Fullan marks four levels of moral imperative that make a difference in leading a school (p. 30, his Figure 3.1): the individual, the school, the regional level, and the societal level. In fact, he categorizes the aspects of the immediate context of the school and explains how interaction between the moral school leader and the stakeholders of each level can make school change feasible.

Langlois (2011) uses the term “organizational reality” in order to define context; she distinguishes five context levels, including a variety of factors responsible for multifinality; that is, the same causes producing different effects due to the diversity of levels they come

from or belong to. However, there are “missing dimensions”, such as spiritual, ethics, and values, that return to reality over and over again, raising questions and stirring debate, though the majority of people choose not to deal with them as they are “annoying and difficult to understand and control” (p. 8).

Samier and Milley (2018) add another strand of importance in examining context in educational settings: they maintain that several contextual factors “shape values, practices and styles of interaction” and, thus, can cause maladministration and bad leadership in education. These factors “range from type of political regime and degree of national stability, disintegration, or security; the legal, policy, and administration systems; the type of economic system and interests; degrees of modernization, regional relationships, and tensions; the role of international organizations, performativity and competitiveness . . . the policy of educational rankings. . . critiques of neoliberalism and globalization. . .”. Their position is in line with Argyropoulou (2015a, 2015b) describing dysfunctions in schools and educational systems caused by context anomalies causing disruptive behaviors within educational organizations.

Based on the information from Table 1, we maintain that context and its dimensions are perhaps the most important factors for sociology and education research. Though researchers have given different names to the various categorizations of the context dimensions, they seem to agree on two things: first, culture and values are the dominant ones in terms of the impact they have on individuals and communities, and second, their impact is escalated in terms of geographical space where their dominance is evident. According to Argyropoulou (2015a), culture is a synthesis of individual societal aspects, also dependent on time (*chronos*) and space (*choros*); that is, the geographical level where impact is visible and at the same time interdependent with other cultural aspects. One should also reflect on how apparently similar characteristics present variance when examined in different cultural environments. Hallinger and Kantamara (2000, 2001) offer a very explicit example of this when they describe the application of the Anglo-American model of distributed leadership in Thailand; local culture, values, and ethics “produced” a totally different result.

4.2.2. Aspects of External Context with an Impact on Ethical Leadership in Education

Below, we choose to further discuss three aspects of external context (i.e., outside the organization): values, religion, and democracy. We support that all of them exercise a very strong influence in shaping individuals’ ethics and perceptions of the society around them, guide their actions, and, thus, explain otherwise inexplicable phenomena. They often function as opportunities, but there are also several cases in which they can cause constraints for educational leaders.

We base our discussion of these aspects on certain assumptions and major observations regarding the context and its impact on schools and school leadership:

- Leaders must take contextual values and norms of behavior into consideration.
- Multiple layers of a widely shared context—along with leaders’ personal traits and resources—are involved in decision-making and in designing specific sets of actions.
- Culture and values within a specific society and/or community create constraints as well as opportunities.
- New contextual dimensions have accumulated very quickly during the last two decades and have added pressure to school leaders (Argyropoulou, 2018).
- Western constructs of school leadership and their way of influencing schools have been interpreted differently in other parts of the world, thus losing their “universally applicable” characteristic (Hallinger, 2018).
- Contextual differences can be spotted not only between ethnic minorities but also within the prevailing population in the same country.

Values: Values are pivotal to the discussion of ethical leadership. In the existing literature, values have received enough attention and have been examined from various points of view, either social or individual (Hofstede, 2011). Even though they have been included as important context factors, in studies examining leadership (Hallinger & Kantamara, 2000, 2001), they lack specific reference to the way their impact is exercised.

Values are ideals and general and abstract principles that serve as a compass to guide judgment and behavior (Tsaoussis, 1989). They are expressed through the norms of behaviors, are the constituents of the level of civilization within a given society/community, are transmitted or inherited from one generation to the other, and are internalized and appropriated by individuals through the process of socialization. Thus, values constitute elements of the context and can be grouped in several categories of contextual impact depending on the stance (societal and/or philosophical) one can take in their discussion.

Ethical values are significant to the construct of ethical leadership; they unavoidably lead to the common questions of “whose values” and “what sort of society/community these values are valid and/or accepted” when we discuss ethical leadership. Religious/spiritual values are often intertwined with ethical values in certain societies, thus making the description or definition of ethical leadership more context-specific. In the post-modern world, economic, political, aesthetic, and natural values also intermingle and re-shape ethical values. Thus, several factors intersect in forming the value system within a society/community. Additionally, questions are raised about the relativistic character of values, whether values can be objective, and universal truths that can be reasoned and justified beyond self-interest or advantage or subjective opinions; that is, individuals’ own interpretations of ethics which may be various, complex, controversial, and difficult.

Values and principles guide individuals in shaping decisions. Strike et al. (2005) support that values and principles guide ethical reasoning when one attempts to solve ethical dilemmas. According to the authors, ethical reasoning is a “process” and at the same time a “skill”, and its acquisition “requires practice”. This practice includes “criticizing and reformulating moral principles that constitute the art of moral reflection” (p. xii). Though the three authors support the “Socratic” role of the instructor who prepares administrators for acquiring ethical reasoning to judge moral dilemmas, the interchangeable use of moral ≠ ethical creates some kind of conceptual confusion as to which background philosophy they adhere to. Another feature of their work—which will be of good use later in this paper—is the fact that they include several cases of religion-based dilemmas in their discussion of ethical reasoning.

Other authors (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011) associate ethical issues within small or medium size organizations (such as schools) with diversity issues and the values communities share on diversity of various origin. For them, diversity is a strong context factor with a broad definition that encompasses the cultural categories of race/ethnicity, religion, social class, gender, disability, and sexual orientation, as well as individual differences in learning styles, exceptionalities, and age (p. 4). Post-modern society becomes even more demographically and politically diverse. Diversity is observed not only across society and/or community or group but also within each group of members. For example, although race seems to be the commonality within a given color group of people, there are also other characteristics marking further diversities, such as place of habitat (i.e., urban versus rural) or differences in socio-economic situation (poverty versus affluence) or religion, which influence collective and individual perceptions in multiple ways and add further ethical dilemmas to the already existing ones⁹ (see also, Argyropoulou, 2015a). Shapiro and Stefkovich (2011) support that, as ethical leadership requires “more than a monolithic view of ethics”, an individual approach cannot solely help in solving ethical dilemmas in schools;

thus, they suggest “the multiple ethical paradigms” (justice, care, critique, profession) as a way considering ethical dilemmas for school leaders.

For Starratt (2004), restrictions and constraints imposed on schools by external factors (budget cuts, accountability for students’ exam results, “technical efficiency”, etc.) create the conditions for “the living and acting out the ethical beliefs and commitments”, which is what he calls morality (p. 5). In such a situation, the school leader attempts to combine the values and principles “embedded in the conduct of leading” with his/her own “espoused system of ethics” and his/her on-the-spot judgment and decision-making; in fact, s/he strives to respond to the challenge of “interpersonal ethics” and to “orchestrate the tensions among the individual values, the core values intrinsic to the work of the school and the value climate external to the school, both local and national, always insisting that the leader will never completely succeed in that orchestration” (p. 8). What Starratt does here is accept the importance of the various factors of context; how the school leader decides to react to this competing value context requires a set of “virtues”, responsibility, authenticity, and presence. Starratt adopts the Aristotelian ethics, though he—like Strike et al. (2005) above—later in his illustrative narrative of a virtual school leader accepts the Socratic way of approaching the truth and, thus, discovering what is or is not ethical in a given dilemma within the school environment.

Religion: The transition from modernity to post-modernity brought changes in the way people think about or evaluate religion as part of social and individual life in the so-called civilized world. In the past, religion played a guiding role, imposed collective norms of behavior, and ethics were interwoven with the dominant religion in a rather exclusive way, often without taking other religious groups into consideration. Post-modern emphasis on individualism, on the other hand, recognizes human rights and the implied values of respect, dignity, and tolerance.

However, still today, Wittgenstein’s characteristic quote, “I am not a religious person but I see every problem from a religious point of view”, as well as his reflections on religion as “a form of life” and as “a framework of interpretation” of social phenomena, underlines the importance of religion as a contextual factor (Cottingham, 2017). More recently, other scientists, such as the psychologist Sandra Bem, also agree that a better understanding of leadership can be achieved through the lens of religion (quoted by Day & Antonakis, 2013).

Later, in the beginning of 20th century, sociologist Max Weber¹⁰ marked the significance of religion both as cultural pillar influenced by and at the same time affecting other cultural aspects, such as economy. He accepts the impact of religion on ideology and the shaping of economic perceptions and its indirect influence on politics.

Day and Antonakis (2013) admit that the leadership literature has only seen this aspect “from the rather vapid perspective of spiritually” and add that there is a fundamental difference in the leadership literature in general between religion and literature on the one hand and religious leadership on the other; they also assume that there are significant differences in the nature of leadership based on a Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Confucian, or any other religious perspective: “The touchstone in proposing such differences would likely be based in the espoused values of the various religions and how they differ—or if they differ” (pp. 18–19).

In fact, religion is one of the most important cultural aspects affecting the everyday life of a community and imposes restrictions and/or constraints on a local or regional level. It is worth mentioning that, quite often, common opinion mingles ethics with religion (Gensler, 2016; Eisenbeiss, 2012). Gensler supports that religion is associated with normative ethics, as it guides individuals’ lives and behavior according to religious values, virtues and norms (2016, pp. 2–3).

In areas with strong religious background, dogmas influence personal and societal planning, as well as educational planning and routines. For example, East Mediterranean countries, cradles of ancient civilizations, are also the birthplaces of major religions such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In these areas, religious tradition is strong and forms part of the population's ethics (Goodman, 1998; Nikolaidis, 2002; Bréchon, 2003; Ebrahimi & Kamaruzaman, 2017). We choose one simple characteristic common in these three religions: the religious holiday, i.e., the day dedicated to the worship of God and prayer and/or major memorial holidays, such as Christmas, Easter, patron saints' days, or Muslim Bayram and Ramadan in the wider Southeastern Europe area, Hebrew Pesach, or Pascha, to name some examples. The holiday, i.e., the worship-of-God day, varies from Christianity (Sunday) to Judaism (Saturday, Sabbath) or Islam (Friday). The religious holiday affects the weekly planning of the whole society in countries with a dominant religion and tradition: services and shops, the individuals' working hours, and their weekly payment, especially in cases of jobs and services functioning as emergencies during religious holidays (hospital doctors, nurses, pharmacists, and security services, police, fire brigade, and port police). In such State cases, the whole function of the State is based on the religious tradition; schools have to harmonize their operation with the religious tradition; in some cases, even central government departments of education include ecclesiastic affairs and religion studies supervision¹¹. However, societal and/or state dependence on religious calendars is rarely true for multinational societies/states.

Religion also underlines or undermines other social values and beliefs, forms attitudes, and penetrates social institutions such as the law. Let us take the position of women in various parts of the world and consider the role religion plays in the formation of attitudes and practices towards the sphere of women's participation in public life: their employment and their contribution to the economy of a country, their right to education and to the control of their body, the respect to maternity, and the rights that come with it (maternity leave, allowances). Let us also mention the impact of religion on dress codes in several parts of the world. As indicated above (especially, Section 4.2.2), the construct of ethical leadership is closely interwoven with the deeply founded norms, values, and ethics of a given society. The ethical leader himself/herself being a member of that society also carries and conveys those norms, values, and ethics which guide him/her in their decision-making.

Religion ethics and the consequent values are taught to new generations either silently through social learning processes or formally and more explicitly through education. The post-modern educational leader faces various dilemmas in the multi-national, multi-religious schools of today. Differentiations between religions or dogmas of the same religion among students call for managing problems and resolving dilemmas with equity, justice, and tolerance.

Democracy: We discuss briefly the notion of democracy as a contextual factor and its potential impact on schools. Democracy in its wider notion indicates a way of life in a society where each individual enjoys the right to participate in the values and processes of this society. In other words, it is the individual's ability and right to participate in decision-making regarding either his/her own life or the life of the community. Underlined by these very same ideals, democracy as polity, or a system of government, presupposes the existence of a constitution framework based on the sovereign power of people (in contrast to problematic polity such as tyranny, oligarchy, etc.), respect (self-respect and respect of others), dialogue as a way of solving problems and discrepancies, free thinking, free will, values, and responsibility, provided that all these rights and consequent obligations apply equally to all individuals. Political power and authority must also respect the democratic values and principles and exercise justice (as a polity function) accordingly. Ideology, then, has an effect on the behavior and values of people, their moral judgment and their relation-

ships with their significant others. Weberian ideas on power and authority as an aspect of social interaction are informed by the values that individuals acquire during the process of their social “maturation”. Power, authority, and the type of government in the so-called democratic states shape different administrative dynamics and system-imposed barriers; for example, centralization versus decentralization (Fullan, 2003, pp. 21–22; Argyropoulou, 2015b, pp. 327–328; Hallinger, 2018, p. 5).

No matter how politically popular or widely used the word *democracy* is, one must be cautious about its content meaning in various contexts¹². People in different contexts understand democracy in different ways; practices typically described as democratic may have different impacts on people’s lives. Democracy as an external contextual factor designates values and principles, which may seem beneficial to people but are not always positive and towards the common good. Depending on what is insinuated under the label *democratic* or under the pretext of democracy, polarized rhetoric may equally misinform and mislead, nurture biased attitudes, or create stereotypes regarding human relations. So, the leading contextual question here is what each context means by the word *democracy* and according to which ethics is democracy really democratic.

Schooling is the formal channel through which democratic characteristics and the consequent values and principles are learnt and put in practice early on in the individual’s life. This requires schools to promote democratic competencies not only in teaching and learning but in building meaningful relationships and participatory practices among staff and between school leader, staff, and students. In summary, democracy is an external contextual factor which is mirrored inside the school.

4.2.3. The Impact of the External Context on the Inside of Ethical Educational Organizations: Defining Vision, Mission, and Goals in Ethical Schools

The micro-level represents the internal environment of the ethical organization/school itself and includes various dimensions (see Figure 2). Vision and mission represent the ethical core of the organization which gives meaning to every dimension, including goals and practicing ethical leadership.

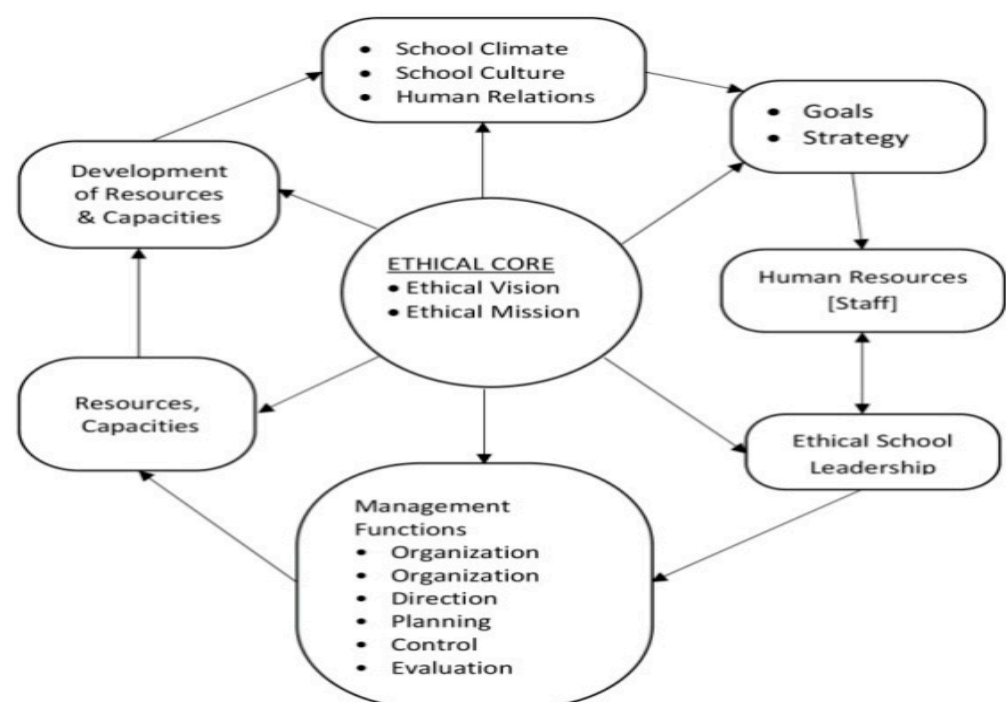


Figure 2. The ethical organization internal environment (adapted from Argyropoulou, 2015a).

Goals, mission, and vision of an organization are closely related with the organization's position and dependence on its context. Goals and mission are more or less objective, as they are standardized by the institutional context and possess rather managerial characteristics. Regarding schools, their goals are specified by regulatory frameworks and come as a fulfillment of a rather generalised view related to their mission: their "usefulness" in the society. Mission is interrelated with goals and reflects the current administrative situation. Mission and goals bring the institutional parameters of the external environment context within the micro-community of the school. Vision, on the other hand, as part of a leader's capacity, is more subjective, as it is embedded in the individual's (the leader's) ethical stance on issues of concern for the wider community, his/her system of values and cultural background, and his/her perceptions of the school and its position both in the local community and the wider educational system. The school leader is expected to combine the demands dictated by a centrally prescribed mission and goals with tensions in the school/educational organization and his/her attitude towards smoothing these tensions.

Thus, the school leader has to cope with both external constraints and internal (in-school) issues when attempting to take an ethical decision based on personal reflection and organizational rules. S/he may face "new human, organizational or structural challenges" due to the fact that "the complexity, the movement, the pressure and the abundance of information combine to shape the administrative landscape" (Langlois, 2011, p. 35). Rules and standards often represent obstacles to ethical acting as they must be observed without any critical reflection, thus resulting in tensions within the organization. Therefore, the notion and the content of goals and mission are often blurred with what is thought to be vision. In such a case, vision is defined as the observation of the regulatory framework or the attempt to fulfill standards set by the external evaluation authorities.

Ethical decision-making relates to the meaning of success usually attributed to schools and school systems. Achieving pre-set goals of high-performance raises several questions and ethical dilemmas about the "children's good". What is really high performance? Excellent marks in standardized tests? Are these marks indicators of success later in life? What are the system provisions for low-performing students?

The question arising from this concern is whether envisioning and enacting ethical leadership is a utopic endeavor. Researchers think ethical leadership is possible, but it needs extra effort and specific arrangements and adaptations in praxis. Starratt (2004) proposes a three-level model including a. the previous understanding of the various facets of the role (school leader: human-educator-administrator-citizen), b. the three "virtues" (responsibility-authenticity-presence) underlying the various facets of the role, and c. how each virtue penetrates and is enacted in the various aspects of the school life (teaching, learning, relationships among stakeholders). Starratt sees vision as part of this wider intra-organizational understanding, but he argues that the extra-organizational understanding of the context which imposes mission and goals is pre-required as it is responsible for "the principles, beliefs, assumptions and values in the leader's espoused system of ethics" (p. 5), as well as the challenges it creates for the leader. What is missing in Starratt's model is the strong presence of teachers as constituents of the leadership phenomenon in schools. Starratt emphasizes the leading individual and the organization context—external and internal—choosing not to extend his discussion to teachers (followers), either as part of the context or as a dynamic group in itself, though indirect references to teachers and their practices as influenced by the leader's actions and behaviors may be thought of as an inclusive way of speaking about them.

Ethical leadership discussion would be incomplete without mentioning the cultural influence, the personal values, beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes teachers have towards their profession, their own interest for the common good and the children's good, and their

willingness to respect the three levels of the ethical leadership model. Teachers should also understand the four aspects of the leading role as well as the fact that they themselves share similar role facets (human, educator, citizen, holder of minor administrative role). The leader's vision of the school will be better understood if teachers understand and share the same vision.

Fullan (2003) supports that moral leadership is feasible provided that there will be a context change on the whole school members' attitudes: teachers, administrators, students, situations, and systems. Changing all of them is equally important for the enactment of *moral* leadership: "You can have the goal of having a credentialed teacher in every classroom, but the effect will be blunted if you do not also focus on changing the culture and working conditions of schools" (2003, p. 3). Fullan's context change approach starts from the individuals within the school and the school as a system, moves beyond school, penetrates the region through the cooperation of leaders on a regional basis, and then expands to redesigning systems. For all different level changes, many components need to develop and be reinforced, starting from building trust (competence trust, contractual trust, communication trust). Fullan does not refer directly to vision, but in a way, he admonishes the establishment of vision on a changing context.

Langlois (2011, pp. 105–107) proposes another model of developing a multidimensional ethical conscience (knowledge, volition, action) that leaders may use every time they come to the critical decision-making. Knowledge can be acquired by adopting three approaches: the ethic of justice, the ethic of critique, and the ethic of care. Though not explicitly said, vision according to Langlois requires the building of ethical conduct and cooperation within the organization on a voluntary basis through reflection, reasoning, and dialogue if we want to approach the complexity of our reality effectively. This is an extremely laborious endeavor, but it is worthy as it repositions us as human beings (p. 2).

Shapiro and Stefkovich (2011), aligning with Langlois' major ideas, enrich the Multiple Ethical Paradigm model with the dimension of professional ethics and focus on its use for training school leaders. Their intension is to transmit their vision to aspiring leaders, so as they will be capable of developing their own ethical vision for their own schools, to foster and lead tolerant and democratic schools in the culturally and demographic diverse society of today (p. 4).

5. Conclusions

In this paper, we made an attempt to foster the notion of context so that it can be useful for the study of ethical leadership in general, and ethical educational leadership more specifically, in a way that adds significance and explanatory value to practicing ethical leadership in educational organizations, and to study of leadership under a broader spectrum. By incorporating context to our conceptualization of the leadership phenomenon, we tried to better understand the leader–follower behaviors in situ.

We asked three major questions revolving around context and its significance to leadership research, the notional background of ethics and ethical leadership, and the interactions with the other agents of the ethical leadership phenomenon by using the social institution of education as a framework for research and analysis. Findings from the Systematic Literature Review method provided answers to our questions, as follows: **a.** The external context of an organization—that is, the social, economic, political and cultural environment in which an organization functions and thrives—is equally important when examining leadership from a societal point of view. Contextual factors are especially important for ethical leadership as they are responsible for constituting the ethical bedrock of a society/community. **b.** Several factors (explicit or implicit) of the context (external environment) exercise a strong impact on organizations. Among them, values, religion, and

democracy are thought to play the most significant role. Context and its constituents differ from place to place and across time and form a differentiated ethical background for each society/community, which underpins the practice of ethical leadership. This contextual variation is also seen when ethical leadership is applied in educational praxis. c. The productive reasoning that underlined the answers to the first two questions fed critical thinking about how we could possibly transfer theory into praxis when attempting to lead ethically in schools.

Regarding vision in ethical schools we noticed that researchers share the same idea of vision: the ethical betterment of human relations within schools, which will lead to their smooth operation in terms of administrative tasks, rules, and processes; the starting point is ethics, not vice-versa. They also admit that ethical school leadership is not an easy task to perform; it demands school Heads and teachers' patience, strength, and persistence. All school members should work towards sympathy and resilience in pursuing ethical goals and taking ethical decisions, but they need guidance and support to do so.

With this in mind, we were led to offer implications on how researchers can include context in investigating the leadership phenomenon and identify critical contextual factors that influence ethical decisions, behaviors, and attitudes. In unpacking contextual influence in ethical leadership practice, we also propose a revisit and redefinition of vision, mission, and goals within ethically led educational settings and, thus, reject previous assumptions about the "utopic" character of the ethical leadership construct in general and ethical school leadership in specific.

6. Implications for Ethical Leadership Research

6.1. Re-Conceptualizing the Leadership Phenomenon Including Context

Starting from Johns' assumption above (pp. 6, 9), we propose an all-inclusive re-conceptualization of the leadership phenomenon, which takes into consideration the context as an actor and mediator between leader and followers and incorporates the dynamic relationships that develop (or may develop) among the three major factors: the leader, the follower(s), and the context (see Figure 3).

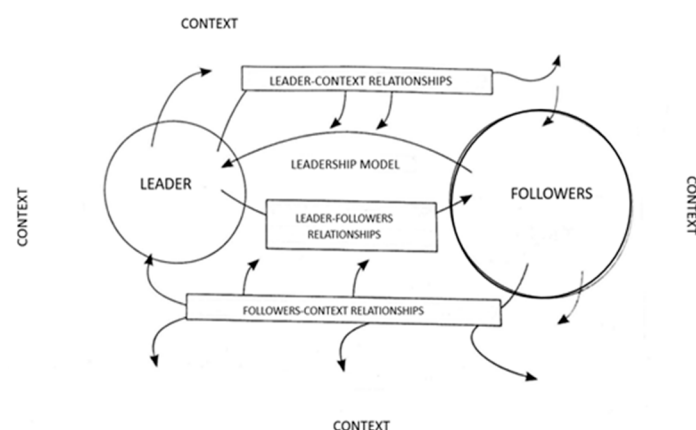


Figure 3. The all-inclusive leadership phenomenon (adapted from: [Argyropoulou, 2017](#), p. 22).

The arrows indicate the potential development and flow of such relationships. This model sees the organization as a whole per se and at the same time as part or subsystem of the wider social system. It also sees leadership as a social activity interconnected with other social activities and not as a phenomenon occurring in vacuum. It meets the need for more attention on unpredictable and rather fluid dimensions of context and relationships and seeks to reconsider the content of specific dimensions (for example, goals, purposes, and commitment) that are significant for the existence of an organization and

its sustainability/viability in the future. It also facilitates the discussion below about the role of context in ethical leadership in education. This model can also be general and *universalis*; that is, applicable anywhere in the world, as it does not exclude any specific type or construct of leadership; it offers potentialities for implementation in any type of research which views leadership as a social phenomenon and, at the same time, attributes equal significance to the individual characteristics of its actors. Thus, the model has purpose and meaning for both individual and system leadership.

6.2. A Model for Researching External Context and Its Impact on Educational Organizations

The multiple categorizations and interpretations of similar concepts of context and culture as part of the context (depicted in the previous section) outside organizations often cause confusion and lack the ability of quick and user-friendly application when researching behaviors and/or phenomena; for example, ethical leadership. We propose a practicable summary of previous researchers' wisdom in a more concise model, ready to use in relevant research, titled "*model of researching external contextual impact on educational organizations*" (see Figure 4).

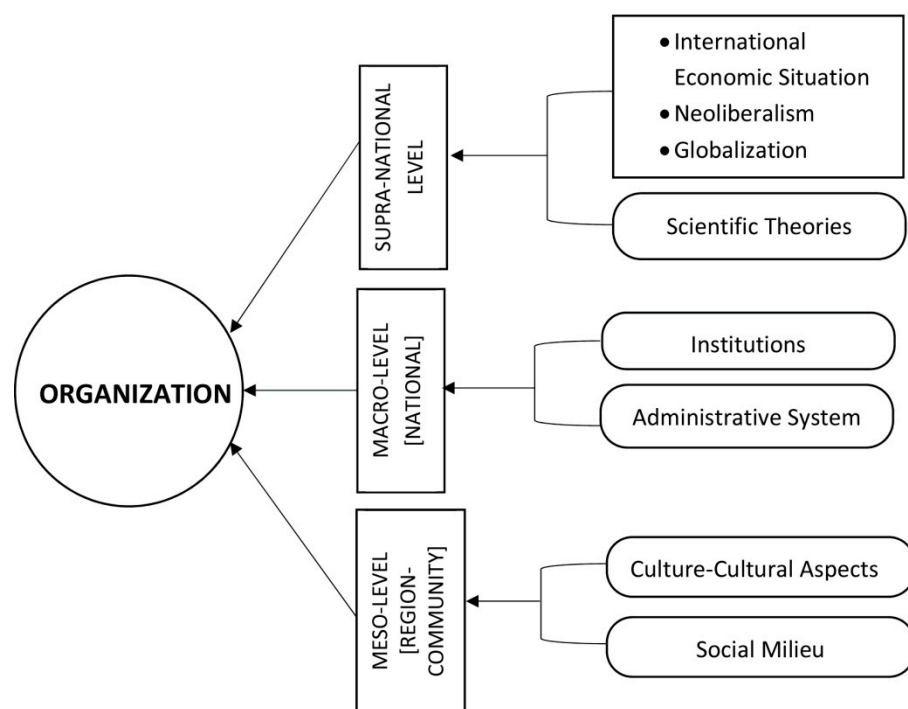


Figure 4. A model of researching external contextual impact on educational organizations (adapted from [Argyropoulou, 2015a](#), p. 78, Figure 4).

Our model perceives educational settings as systems per se and at the same type as subsystems of a wider system, the national educational system, and its position within a supra-national educational and social system, as already mentioned above p. It sees two distinct levels of organizational context, external, and internal. External context includes dimensions at global level (supra-national) and at macro level (national), as well as meso-level (region-community).

When researching educational organizations (schools), special emphasis is given to the meso- and micro- level because contextual differences are evident here: social synthesis, population, and individuals' peculiarities, cultural features, abundance or scarcity of resources (natural, material, non-material), the productivity potential of a certain place and the management of its goods, poverty, unemployment, inequalities, discriminations, selectivity, change and variability, and religion as dominant culture.

The above contextual dimensions can be discussed and/or interpreted through different “lenses” depending on the adopted paradigm. For example, if we are to explain the demographics of a school adopting the socio-economic paradigm, we have to focus on the contextual parameters whose impact depends on the changes observed on the fundamental and reciprocal relationship *productivity = disposition of goods*; changes in each part of this relation, either random or purposeful, modify other significant socio-economic relationships among individual members of a given community/population.

Let us observe how each of the following opposite contextual factors affects students' outcomes within a given community and either creates obstacles or provides opportunities: wealth vs. poverty, employment vs. unemployment, wealth vs. scarcity of resources, happiness vs. unhappiness, high level of education vs. low level or lack of education or ignorance, technological development vs. basic technical skills, public health vs. diseases/wretchedness/degradation, longevity or high life expectancy vs. low survival expectancy, freedom of speech vs. censorship, and religious tolerance vs. religious obscurantism. Moreover, let us consider the differences in these relationships in terms of time and space: whether they happen now or in the past (diachronic), here or elsewhere, in a Western community or an Eastern community, a Central European context or a Central African context.

On the other hand, the social care paradigm probes into stereotypical behaviors rooted in perceptions, formed by poor knowledge-acquisition paths, unavailability of means and inequalities created by the “knowers”, distortions of real world due to the dominance, manipulation, and interaction of several factors mentioned above. Thus, culture and values affect and are affected by other contextual factors and, at the same time, influence and contribute to the formation of new cultural trends and values.

6.3. Redefining the Relation Between VISION and Mission and Goals and Its Importance in an Ethical School

School leaders' frequent confusion of the vision and mission notions (made in Section 4.2.3 above) due to strong external pressure to meet pre-set standards for schools requires a revisit of vision focusing on how distinguish it from mission and aiming at why and how individuals' conduct should be based on ethics, usually their community ethics. Vision should be conceived, articulated, communicated, and explained to the various school stakeholders *before* mission and goals are effected, as vision is the lever stirring mission and goals. Vision has to do with the broader understanding of the ethical education content and only in very few cases contradicts the statutory framework of education in a democratic state. The problem lies in combining ethical vision with practical tasks, such as understanding and resolving ethical dilemmas in schools.

School Heads seem to understand their role as administrative and professional staff, but they miss how they are to enact the essence of these roles required to live that mission. They miss or avoid dealing intensively with the *why* and the *how* in their everyday practice. Fullan (2003) argues that not all chosen School Heads are true leaders; the majority of them are selected through “technical approaches”. That is, easily assessed criteria, such as diplomas or previous service. Even job interviews revolve around questions relating to technical criteria. These recruitment approaches almost never reveal how the potential leader's qualities are applicable in a real working environment, or whether or how s/he can resolve substantial ethical dilemmas “where black and white blend into grey” (Langlois, 2011, p. 36). In situations like these, authority is put above all, with the aim and pretext of restoring the smooth operation of the school. Actually, this is a definition of the power resulting from the institutional (administrative) role.

In summary, the various models offered as research and practical implications above aim at a. offering a basic grid for understanding context and its influence on school ethics

and b. serving as a starting point for thinking and preparing suitable, ethics-oriented training programs and the consequent psychological support needed for Heads and staff to deal with the everyday complex ethical dilemmas. If these requirements remain void, we will continue to have great numbers of *incompetent and chronically unmotivated* Heads and teachers and low-performing schools: “The final component for transforming the system involves strengthening the infrastructure for developing (ethical) school leadership” (Fullan, 2003, p. 78).

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Notes

- ¹ Johns (2001) mentions five major reasons for researchers avoiding to deal with context: a. “many authors have never seen or witnessed the phenomena about which they write” (p. 31), b. “those authors who have witnessed context seem determined to keep the fact from the reader” (p. 31), c. organizational behavior researchers. . . “tend to be uncomfortable with constants” (p. 33). . . context operates in an especially stealthy manner when it takes the form of a constant in a particular study”, d. organizational psychologists have a desire to “develop their own constructs as a sign of scientific legitimacy” (p. 34), e. there is a “dominance of cognitive models. . . [which]. . . have limited impact on appraisal research” (p. 34). The author adds a sixth reason in another paper (Johns, 2006, p. 403) where he argues that “there is a tendency [in] organizational culture researchers to ignore macro-cultures”.
- ² Quite oddly, they consider gender, tasks, organizational culture and cultural in general as external constraints for the leader, though almost all of these features have to do with inter issues in an organization.
- ³ Johns recently he advanced his point about the contextual impact to leadership research by publishing this concise article in Leadership Quarterly. This contribution may be considered a major step in leadership theory and the history of this specific journal as there was sparse mention of context in the past, with the exception of Antonakis et al. (2003) in which context is examined in association with the re-evaluation of the MLQ.
- ⁴ The authors of this paper support the distinction between ethical and moral.
- ⁵ Ethics refers to the rules, statements, descriptions and “what is necessary to live a moral life” (Starratt, 2004, p. 5) and deals “with standards of conduct acceptable to a group, a profession or members of an organization” (Adelman, 1991). Ethics is a subject of philosophical investigation, a set of principles, and a theoretical background on which moral conduct is grounded. On the other hand, morality is a system of conduct; it is the implementation of ethics. It is “the living, the acting out of ethical beliefs and commitments” (Starratt, 2004, p. 5). Bauman (1995) supports “ethics preceded all morality; morality was a product of ethics” (p. 23); Part of this section [ethics and morality, ethical leadership] appeared before, in Argyropoulou and Spyridakis (2022).
- ⁶ “The conceptual basis of the terms is the same in that both relate to human virtues in an Aristotelian tradition, grounded in a rejection of moral or ethical relativism” (Campbell, 2008b, pp. 601–602).
- ⁷ She argues that both refer to “mores, or conduct. . . and their difference is their etymological origin. . . both relate to the notion of what is good either on a reflective process or by a collection of normative rules . . . though ethics is endogenous” (pp. 32–33).
- ⁸ Strike’s stance reminds the platonic idea of the political person entitled to lead the community, the philosopher-king: Plato’s statesman has to be ethical if he is to manage authority over people (Pappas, 2003). The platonic community is the “good community”, where equality prevails: there are no rich or poor, no masters or slaves, women are equal to men, education applies equally to all members of the community. The idea of the “good community” is old and underlines the importance of context in

leadership. Even the Allegory of the Cave insinuates the importance of the context in shaping ideas, perceptions, and taboos and the relation of people with the prevalent values in their context (Krambia-Kapardis, 2024).

Consider, for example, attitudes towards abortion or the definition of individual liberty or salvation as opposed to the notion of public good.

In his “Protestant Ethics and the spirit of Capitalism” (1920), the unfinished “The Economic Ethics of the world Religions” (1915), “Religion und Kultur” 1924 and “Sociology of Religion” 1920–1921[t.3].

In Greece the full title of the central government department of education is “Ministry of Education, Religious Affairs and Sports” [www.minedu.gov.gr] accessed on 19 December 2024.

We draw attention here to the differences between the use of *democracy* and *republic*, as well as the differences in meaning in contexts where other cultural aspects, for example religion, exercise a strong impact and shape religious rather than political or socio-economic ethics.

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