

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY  
JOHN W RAWLINGS SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

ETHICAL LEADERSHIP: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF  
ADMINISTRATORS PRINCIPLES FOR  
ETHICAL DECISION-MAKING

A Prospectus Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

by

Janice Marie Holmes

Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenology research study was to examine the administrator's ethical leadership principles and decision-making significance. The desired outcome of the study provided educators leaders in Christian universities and theology seminaries with information to improve their strategies when making ethical decisions and better safeguard their organizations against unethical behavior. The ability of a leader to make sound decision-making is essential to their ability to run any organization. The guiding theory of Kitchener's five-model ethical leadership paradigm, which served as the basis for this investigation, was relevant based on the four research questions. The study utilized purposeful and random sampling to acquire eight willing participants with at least five years of experience from various Christian institutions. Survey questionnaires, in-depth interviews, observations, audiotape recordings, and note-taking were the critical methods used to gather data. The analysis of the data transcript revealed three emerging themes: a) Ethics and Standards for Decision Making, b) Administrative Roles Experiences, and c) Advancing Ethics and Ethical Decision Making. The study's observation based on the transcripts, this researcher concluded that theologically and theoretically, additional research is required to analyze other factors that may impact the link between ethical leadership principles and the decision-making performance of Christian educators. Future research may extend its demography to global Christian universities and theology seminaries.

*Keywords:* Kitchener's Five Ethical Principles, Ethical Leadership, Decision-Making, Leadership Principles

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## Dedication

All praise and glory to God, in the name of Jesus Christ, my Lord, and Savior, for guiding me to the finish line throughout this journey; without His grace and mercy, I would not have succeeded. I dedicated this work to my hubby, Quinton Holmes, my two daughters, La'Quita Washington and Chiniqua Holmes, and my sister Pamela Jones for supplying me with unwavering support during this journey. I am grateful for all the words of encouragement and the check-in. I also dedicate my dissertation project to the loving memory of all those who have made a difference in my life and who would have been proud of me if they could see me now but are no longer around to witness the completion of this task, my son Quinton Jr, Ethel and Joseph Spain, the love of my life, as well as my mother, Louvinia Robinson, my nanny Gustavia Kelly, my father, Jeffery Carson, my brother Donald Boatman, and my two sisters Patricia Gibson and Betty Pearson, your love and guidance, are still felt daily, and I will always cherish you all.

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### **List of Abbreviations**

Administrator Leaders (*AL*)

Administrators Leadership Integrity (*ALI*)

Code of Ethics (*COE*)

Ethical Leadership (*EL*)

Ethical decision-making (EDM).

Kitchener Five Ethical Principles (*KFEP*)

Principles of Ethical Leadership (*PEL*)

## CHAPTER ONE: RESEARCH CONCERN

### Introduction

Ethical leadership is essential for successful leadership and disciplining individuals (Covrig, 2012). The subject matter, however, has moved from “What is the relevance of ethical leadership?” to “What is the significance of ethical leadership?” (Covrig, 2012). Leading other and making sound decision based on a predefined set of values, such as fairness, accountability, honesty, equal opportunity, and respect, constitute the core foundation of ethics in ethical leadership (Covrig, 2012). Based on Terry Cooper’s book “The Responsible Administrator,” leaders who do not adhere to principles and rules are not morally concrete enough to provide clear guidance to others while making an ethical decision (Cooper, 2012).

“Process and policy, grades and punishment,” the most difficult decisions an administrative leader must make in this field, often have ethical ramifications on the person’s performance, motivation, and well-being (Lucas, 2007, p. 37). Administrator leaders making an ethical or unethical decision may have a favorable or unfavorable effect. Depending on the circumstances, they have enormous influence and authority over the lives of others (Selart & Johnson, p. 130-31). Their ethical choice is reflected in every area of their character, such as beliefs, behaviors, efficiency, consistency, honesty, disposition, and conduct” (Cantrell and Lucas, 2007, p. 24).

Frederickson & Rohr write that great leaders integrate ethical leadership with spiritual principles in their decision-making (Frederickson & Rohr, 2015, p. 13). Schirmacher’s opinionated, more robust understanding of ethical leadership and social responsibility has recently led several Christian institutions and colleges to prioritize student development (Schirmacher, 2013, p. 13). As a framework for this investigation, Kitchener’s five paradigms

were employed to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomena of ethical leadership. Implementing these principles is to aid administrators in developing ethical decision-making skills. Readers will better understand administrator leaders ethical leadership performance and their philosophies, perspectives, and preconceptions in Christian institutions.

### **Background to the Problem**

Administrator leaders are held to a higher standard of ethics they create the organizational climate and are required to follow the code of ethics (Caldwell, 2017). The code of ethics requires leaders to “be aware of laws and guidelines” and act accordingly to those principles (Wendel, 2014). Numerous studies indicate that many administrator leaders are immoral, incompetent, and likely to fail precisely due to poor ethical decisions (Kessler & Kretzschmar, 2015). Brown (2015) argues this failure mainly because they often ignore the protocols in ethical decision-making (p, 5). A research survey by Dyck (2014) found that 87% of leaders interviewed in the workplace claimed that ethics influenced their capacity to make effective decisions.

While transparency and integrity are critical for administrator leaders as it enables them to support the company’s cause (Toubiana & Yair, 2012). Only 18% of respondents said their organization is honest and open, and 37% expressed concern about building trust in the organization (Toubiana & Yair, 2012). Researchers Petrick, Cragg, and Sando explored organizational ethics using personal interviews, literature reviews, internet research, and a survey questionnaire, among other approaches, encompassing 14 years of data from 1995 to 2009. (Petrick et al., 2011). Their study’s findings revealed that combining information from 150 respondents out of 325 interviews resulted in a 46.2 percent answer rate (Indartono & Wulandari, 2013).

The finding of another Gallup survey revealed leaders account for “at least 70% of the variance in involvement levels” across the organizational units,” which implies that motivation is often established or destroyed by their leaders (Avolio, Gardner, & Walumbwa, (2007). This Gallup poll survey also showed that just two out of every five employees firmly think that their administrator has attempted to define and outline the roles and responsibilities of their team (Avolio et al., 2007). Caldwell expresses that honesty and openness are essential because they play a critical role in preserving leaders’ integrity and morals among followers (Caldwell, 2017). The administrator leaders are doomed to fail if they lack compassion, behave foolishly, and are inconsistent, which generates significant workplace issues and controversy (Caldwell, 2009).

Brown argues many fail because they often ignore the protocols in ethical decision-making (Brown, 2015, p. 5). Kessler & Kretzschmar (2007) contend that several academics have looked at administrator leaders ethical leadership and decision-making principles at Christian universitie. Researchers discovered that only a few studies had examined Chrisitan administrator leaders ethical leadership and decision-making principles in secular universities (Kessler and Kretzschmar, 2007). More research is required to establish if administrator leaders is effective in ethical conceptions and behaviors (Schirmacher, 2013).

### **Theological Framework**

Ethics is integral to biblical theology and revelation (Perry, 2018). Estep views the theological framework as the essential epicenter of divine awareness, knowledge, wisdom, and insight necessary to counteract this persistent inclination to society’s ongoing march toward the biblical text (Estep, 2008). According to Perry (2018, p.8), from Genesis to Revelation, “beliefs, ideals, orders, signs, laws, and instructions are designed to direct ethics to what is right, spiritual, good, and God-honored.” Hind (2006) writing explained that the emergence of ethics

standards comes from the two greatest commandments in Matthew 22: 37, 39; “Love the Lord God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and love our neighbors as we love ourselves” (King James Version).

The administrator leaders with these standards, should perform their ethical leadership obligations according to God’s will (Hind, 2006). Leaders should receive God’s advice and apply it when making an ethical decision involving an individual’s life. A competent administrator, according to Nass (2019) and Luke 12:42-47, King James Version, should be like a loyal servant who cares for their employer’s home and company matters.

### **Ethical Leadership Qualities**

Growing data reveals that leadership that is more ethical and attempts to generate results holistically is becoming more evident as the future of implementing change in Christian colleges and workplace practices leadership development (Day et al., 2014). According to Moore (2015), the acronym FATHER (fairness, accountability, trust, honesty, equality, and respect) are the most crucial components of ethical leadership qualities to remember and apply to ethical leadership qualities.

Fairness is one of the most crucial ethical leadership qualities that govern how individuals interact with one another and expect to be treated (Moore, 2020). Accountability for one’s actions and mistakes is an essential quality of ethical leadership that demonstrates a leader is capable and worth following (Moore, 2015). For people to live and function normally, trust is an essential component. It has been studied that open and honest leaders foster genuine debates about crucial problems (Moore, 2015). Building a solid team without a foundation of trust among the members is challenging. Trust is fundamental to how individuals live and operate (Moore, 2015).



While much has been written about equality in day-to-day life, it is still necessary for survival and enjoyment. When there is a divergence of opinion about an issue, it is essential to show respect for other people by considering their wishes, emotions, and legal entitlements (Moore, 2020). Thus, when leaders have to disagree, they should do so respectfully. Leaders must develop four qualities: “self-awareness, internalized normative knowledge, healthy data management, and relational transparency” to carry out daily responsibilities and commitments (Hoskins & Hoof, 2005, p. 178).

Administrator leaders must exhibit good leadership qualities and be effective communicator with strong leadership qualities in public (Hoskin & Hoof, 2005). Hoskins and Hoof write administrator leaders must be aware of their strengths and limitations concerning learners, students, workers, and community members, among other things (Hoskins & Hoof, 2005). Doughty (2014) adds that a competent leader is aware of the impact of statistics on the entire environment of student achievement and community collaboration.

Strong community participation is based on an internalized moral perspective, and proactive administration positively impacts student success (Doughty, 2004; Reynolds & Warfield, 2010). For practical administrative leadership qualities to succeed, “Self-control, budgeting, education, and teaching” are essential (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). Christian educator leaders must embrace their strengths and weaknesses and remedy their inadequacies and ethical leadership qualities (Hester, 2003).

### **Integrity in Leadership**

Grimes and Bennett argue honesty should be the driving force for administrators’ leaders (Grimes & Bennett, 2017). When faced with difficult circumstances, leadership integrity attributes in such situations will flourish if the individual is prepared to analyze one’s inner self

in the face of bad events (Marciariello, 2010, pp. 43-46). Individuals exploring their inner “personal pain, shortcomings, job losses, and errors” may enhance and strengthen integrity in leadership (Frank, 2002, p. 81). “A professional’s integrity is essential because it indicates how the employee solves a value-related dilemma” (Duffield & McCuen, 2000, p. 79).

The illustration of Joseph in the Bible is unquestionably one of the most inspirational biblical men of integrity as a role model to emulate (Mann & Woods, 2005). Even though his brothers treated him unjustly and ultimately sold him into slavery (Genesis 37: 26–28; Mann & Wood, 2005), Joseph kept his connection with God and integrity. Ward (2006), argue the inner growth of ethical leadership is a “divine process rather than a theoretical one.” When deeply entrenched concepts, values, and beliefs are examined and reexamined (Souba, 2011). “A leader who understands ethics with his brain rather than his heart is like a man without a torso” (Littman & Littman, p. 19).

Lewis writes, “The core of the heart rarely takes the position of the head, but it must obey” (Lewis, 1980). Spiritual development, as a result, will flourish and becomes the “guiding aim of one’s life” in the face of pain and suffering (Ward, 2006; Littman & Littman, 2019). Leaders who maintain their integrity during gray-area times may be considered loyal (Scouba, 2011). King (1998) teamed up with administrator leaders from diverse fields to identify eight ethical principles “honesty, integrity, dedication to purpose, kindness, equality, moral bravery, modesty, and perseverance” (p. 719). Christian leaders must ensure that everything they do and say is done and spoken for the cause of Christ (Donlevy & Walker, 2011).

### **Leadership Vision**

Vision is what leadership requires and welcomes (Stott, 2014). Everyone has future objectives and goals that they desire to achieve. The administrator leaders capacity to perceive

things that affect a team's effectiveness is about the organization's future (Stott, 2014; Niehaus, 2014). Price (2012), describe vision as the capacity to organize actions, mainly while considering the needs of others. Administrator leaders success in the workplace must have the foresight necessary to assess the influence of their actions on their performance.

Much previous preparation is required to create a suitable environment and the essential activities and engagement to stimulate this growing development (p. 687). It entails establishing the correct atmosphere and taking the appropriate actions to encourage this growth. A biblical command is given in Habakkuk 2: 2-3 "Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it. For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end, it shall speak, and not lie though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry" (King James Version).

### **Theoretical Overview**

Like other principles theories, leadership is much easier to convey and dialogue about ethical principles and guidelines. Individuals may employ behaviors to enhance and strengthen their ethical leadership skills rather than practice them (King, 1998). Kitchener (1985)'s five paradigm principles, the guiding theory of this qualitative phenomenological research study often utilized in organizational decision-making. Kitchener's principles exhibits "behaviors and acts" in ethical leadership decision-making to serve the common good. Sockness (1992) write that a portion of Kitchener's work is devoted to moral and ethical precepts, including the Ten Commandments and Jesus' parables, which are among the most frequently read and studied texts today. Setting the standard for how leaders are expected to behave and conduct their affairs, these leadership styles apply to many areas of life, including theology (Kitchener, 1984). Those in a leadership position are expected to perform their leadership position while maintaining

ethics in leadership (Clement, 2018). Christian leaders must ensure that everything they do and say is done and spoken for the cause of Christ (Donlevy & Walker, 2011).

Many leaders like Paul, for example, were held accountable for carrying out their leadership responsibilities while adhering to high ethical standards in decision-making (Sockness, 1992). Administrator leaders must adhere to the same guidelines when making ethical decisions just as those leaders were expected to perform their leadership position while maintaining ethics in leadership (Kitchener, 1996). Those in a leadership position are expected to perform their leadership position while maintaining ethics in leadership (Clement, 2018).

Theorists March and Simon write, “organizational ethical decision-making is almost indistinguishable” from “individual ethical decision-making (Bomiley et al., 2019). Clement (2018) incurs that organizations and the practice of ethical decision-making are indistinguishable from theological and biblical teachings of religion.

Drucker (1999) and Weick (2001) assert organizations’ decision-making processes are primarily about defining the problem rather than responding; it is more critical to ensure what choice should be taken. King (1989) added that the act of decision-making is a choice governed by some rule or framework distinct from the alternatives.

Janosik, Creamer & Humphrey (2004) propose three critical choices administrators must take into consideration when faced with a problem “complaint about the problem, neglect the problem, or assess the matter or take action” (p. 375). Collins (2001) advocates leaders must embrace the inner journey of unity and make an external commitment to the common good.

Kitchener (1996) expresses that ethical rules or codes cannot wholly react to all ethical issues in the face of a dilemma for several reasons and writes:

Some would like to think that legal obligations are met if the practice’s ethical code has wholly complied. Unfortunately, this cannot be the case. Ethical

principles often contain omissions or give contrasting recommendations. In comparison, university officials have overlapping political districts that vary in their legal responsibilities. (a. p. 19). Social principles offer decision-making guidelines regardless of ethical issues or dilemmas. (p. 19).

“Ethical principles are more general, abstract, and foundational than ethical code” (p. 19). Ethical leadership principles, for example, provide a more accurate vocabulary and framework for decision-making in any situation (p. 24). The Kitchener five model of ethical leadership principles may help administrators make the best decisions feasible in the most ethical scenarios when faced with difficult ethical circumstances (Kitchener, 1984).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Administrator leaders are responsible for implementing the policies that ensure the organization’s goals, objectives, and expectations are met (Schirmacher, 2013). They are the vehicles through which ethical standards and guidelines are met (Nas & Kreuer, 2018; Nass, 2019). Vincent (2011), stresses most administrators do not use adequate ethical leadership conduct in their decision-making on ethics issues (p.180). Corbin asserts that many alleged factors that affect the administrator’s ethical leadership decision-making are due to the lack of knowledge (Corbin, 1990, p. 240).

Various researchers’ recent studies revealed eighteen percent of administrators are often faced with ethical problems, even though they have a strong basis in Christian leadership principles on which to build (Voster, 2017; Vincent, 2011; Straus, 1990). The results of a Gallup survey among participants from organizations revealed, 71 percent are under the impression that their company leaders cannot take them to the next level. 33% expressed concern about their

leader's ability to build or establish trust, 62% expressed concern about their openness, and 28% communicated that the absence of transparency generates a disadvantage.

A separated survey poll observed that although administrators may have an average 75% effect on employee excitement and commitment rankings score throughout the firm as a whole, just 50% of workers think that their leaders have worked to define their roles (Zuckerman, 2020; Barna & Trend, 2018). The levels of influence that administrators have in a given circumstance are influenced by the ethical decisions they make in that scenario (Cooper & Roper, 2009; Rafik, 2009).

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this is qualitative phenomenological research study explored administrators' approach to ethical leadership principles and decision-making in their first five years of experience at Christian universities and theology seminaries. At this stage, the administrator's ethical leadership and decision-making will be generally defined as a reflective process and a collaborative exercise based on two stated criteria, "right and wrong," and an expressed standard of principles such as belief, integrity, fairness, honesty, and trust while adhering to the code of ethics. The theory guiding this study, Kitchener's five-model ethical leadership paradigm, which served as the basis for this investigation, was relevant based on the four research questions. The desired objective of this research study finding has shown to be valuable for administrators' ethical leadership principles in improving and strengthening their decision-making and preventing unethical behavior in the organization.

### **Research Questions**

**RQ1.** How do administrators connect ethical decision-making to ethics, truthfulness, principles, integrity, and character?

**RQ2.** What factors influence the administrator's ethical decision-making and leadership performance principles?

**RQ3.** What consideration, if any, prohibits the administrator from employing proper ethical decision-making?

**RQ4.** What distinction, if any, is between the administrator's ethical leadership performance and decision-making?

Question one examines the administrator's ethical decision-making behavior in the institution (Covrig et al., 2012). Questions two and three are to develop evidence of how these approaches affect and optimize Christian leadership outcomes in universities (Resick et al., 2006, 345). Question four explored the standard practices synthesized from the three ethical decision-making models to assist administrators in ethical decision-making (Schirmacher, 2013, p. 1020).

### **Assumptions and Delimitations**

The assumptions and delimitations are conducted to aid the researcher's knowledge and parameters of the research design study.

#### **Research Assumption**

This research design was based on four assumptions:

1. The participants' responses would not be a factual description of what may or may not have occurred.
2. Kitchener's five paradigm models of ethical decision-making are known and understood by the administrator leaders.
3. The participants must react honestly to all instruments and be aware of their decision-making processes.
4. The researcher assumes that the data acquired will be accurate and that the interview will be open and honest (Covrig et al., 2012).

#### **Delimitations of the Research Design**

The researcher employed several characteristics to delimit the proposed research's scope and boundaries since a quantitative approach does not enable this research (Creswell, 2007).

According to Luton (2015), the research design boundary helps further the researcher's study parameters (p. 5). The research was delimited to fifty administrator participants in Christian colleges and seminaries: corporate executives were omitted; however, only eight participated. The delimitation was to administration with a minimum of five years of leadership roles and performances. Due to the limited sample size, interview and data processing time limitations, and generic performance, the perspectives of teachers and students were not included in the study (Creswell, 2007).

### **Definition of Terms**

The following definition of terms is vital to understanding the clarification of this research study:

1. *Administrator leaders*: the word "administrator leaders" refers to a person's capacity to give more clarity in the decision-making processes in a manner that may aid in decreasing conflict and confusion (Wart, 2003).
2. *Code of Ethics*: a set of principles designed and intended to assist professionals in doing business honestly and ethically (Christian & Gumbus, 2009). Leaders, in all instances, must follow and demonstrate these principles to perform effectively (Christian & Gumbus, 2009).
3. *Ethics*: a collection of moral principles that govern how people interact and regulate their conduct (Swaid, 2019). They are founded on two well-defined criteria, "right and wrong," which specify how a person should behave in certain situations (Ilawole, 2006). The Golden Rule is a famous normative concept that states that we should treat others as we want them to (Ilawole, 2006).
4. *Ethical leadership*: is the foundation of a leader's decision-making that molds and shapes the organization (Peters, Rick & Doval, 2017). In addition, honesty, fairness, respect, community, and integrity" are highly valued in ethical leadership (Kitchener, 1998).
5. *Ethical decision-making*: weighing and deciding between options while adhering to the code of ethics that improves people's lives in ethical decision-making (Covrig et al., 2012, p. 40). Much more effective in ethical choices, it requires legislation and other channels that improve people's lives.



6. *4 V Models*: integrating the inner principles of “beliefs and values” with the external principles of “behaviors and acts” to serve the typical good shows both sides of ethical leadership (Khar, 2018).
7. *Integrity*: a collective framework of moral awareness, judgment, character, and behavior that demonstrates balanced decisions and promotes long-term moral growth (Petrick & Quinn, 2001).
8. *Leadership Accountability*: the capacity to adhere to the promises made to an organization and its members. Leaders take accountability for a project's end outcome and pleasure in motivating and directing their teams. When a leader assumes entire responsibility for anything, like a massive project, it suggests that they are assuming complete ownership of the project and, as a result, are holding themselves accountable for the end outcome, whether the project is successful or unsuccessful (Thomas, 2018). Likewise, building trust among team members affects everything, including efficient leadership performance, decision-making, and inadequate or good mistakes (Thomas, 2018).
9. *Leadership Style*: “Understanding the necessity to care for and assist their followers” (Bredfeldt, 2006, p. 133). The process of motivating, influencing, encouraging, and leading a group of people and having exclusive responsibility for creating positive relationships among people at various levels of an organization (Maritz, Pretorius, & Plant, 2011, p. 102).
10. *Kitchener’s Five Principles*: a context issue determining the ethical standards, principles, and theories that have been established as relevant in ethical leadership decision-making.
11. *Transparency leadership*: a process in which individuals are motivated by appealing to higher principles and ethical code, by creating and expressing a vision for the future, and by establishing a foundation of credibility” (Tucker & Russell, 2004, p. 103). The inability to develop transparency or avoid doing so will result in significant losses (Meyer & Kirby, 2010).

### **Significance of the Study**

The significance of this research study has several implications. In terms of theory, the study addresses the critical questions about how organizational administrators’ ethical leadership principles within Christian universities and seminaries impact their ability to make ethical decisions. Most importantly, it brings to light any discrepancies in ethical leadership principles that may exist inside the organization and encourages the study of administrative performance in

decision-making. A deeper understanding of ethical leadership and decision-making is essential for educators (Snarey & Pavkov, 1991). Dyck (2014) indicates that organizational culture is determined by how well a leader manages the situation, the needs of the workforce, and the personalities of those who work there.

By drawing attention to a potential tension in ethical leadership, this research contributes to the literature on leadership ethics. In response to a need for further investigation into ethical decision-making, Brown (2015) and Trevio (2006) argue that the study's methodology gives it practical value. Jazani & Ayoobzadeh (2011) study indicates that scholars are increasingly examining how leaders in the education system adhere to ethical leadership principles and decision-making.

Gigerenzer and Gaisaier (2011) revealed that when leaders make ethical decisions dealing with obstacles, only 50% of effectiveness results. Given this study's relevance, significance may be used to strengthen training in Christian universities and seminaries by spotlighting the value of ethical leadership principles in decision-making. Vandenberghe, implied researchers should perform a longitudinal one-to-five-year investigation to evaluate the effectiveness and add to the currently available body of knowledge (Vandenberghe, 2011). Making intelligent decisions requires knowledge and practice (Gigerenzer & Gaissmaier, 2011).

### **Summary of the Design**

This qualitative research study design method was employed to understand how administrators at Christian universities and seminaries approach their ethical leadership and decision-making principles. This approach design entails investigating and interpreting the "meaning" of an individual's situation as it occurs in their immediate surroundings (Creswell, 2018). For the establishment of this inquiry, this chapter presented the research topic's

background study, the problem statement, the purpose statement, and four primary research questions that guided the research design. In addition, this chapter summarizes a conceptual framework of the historical, theological, and theoretical review of the subject matter. This research inquiry also supplied the reader with a comprehensive description of the issue by outlining the assumptions and delimitations of the study, defining terminology, discussing the study's significance, and outlining the summary design. The next chapter two presented a more in-depth exploration of this inquiry.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Overview

*“At every moment of decision, the most solid thing someone can do is the right thing, the next thing is the wrong thing, and nothing is the worst thing you can do.”* Theodore Roosevelt.

The subject matter of ethical leadership, in recent history, has grown a lot of awareness in the literature (Kamisan & King, 2013). A leader’s commitment to serving the greater welfare of society without compromising their values is a hallmark of “ethical leadership” (Covrig et al., 2012, p. 40). This chapter looks at prior research that has been gathered through books, dissertations, articles in scholarly journals, and other secondary sources related to ethical leadership principles in decision-making. It presented a theological and theoretical framework, related literature, and the study’s rationale to establish the contributing factors of the administrators’ ethical leadership and decision-making. In addition, this chapter examines the paradigm for discoveries in identifying earlier research to develop new findings in any literature gaps.

### Theological Framework for Study

Foundations are fundamental and vital in the kingdom of God, likewise in Christian universities and seminaries (Agbim et al., 2013). Christian leaders have been given positions and authority in their organizations for God’s kingdom purpose (Hind, 2006). The words of God in the book of Isaiah 28:16: “Behold, I lay in Zion a stone for a foundation, A tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation; Whoever believes will not act hastily” (NKJV). Agbim et al. write that both the kingdom of God and Christian colleges strongly emphasize establishing strong foundations (Agbim et al., 2013). Theologian Perry (2018) writes theologically speaking,

God's intellect and knowledge are already recognized to provide a framework for understanding the subject matter (Perry, 2018).

Perry asserts that theological teaching may assist in broadening administrators' vision, aspirations, and direction, as well as broadening the imaginative mind of users for processes and possibilities (Perry, 2018). The advancement of knowledge is a reflection of humans and organizational competitive advantage (Senge 2006; Lencioni 2012). The best way to successfully identify and expand ethical considerations is to use principles to help administrators become better and more respected leaders (Collin 2001, p. 20).

Collin advises leaders to practice the five ethical leadership characteristics "honesty, fairness, respect, community, and integrity" (p. 21). These ethical leadership principles would include certain expectations, violations of the code of ethics, and the possibility of sanctions for those persons (p. 25). The potential of consequences for those who violated the code of ethics, and the possibility of disciplinary action for those who did so these ethical leadership principles would be specific standard to uphold (p. 25). Expanding one's knowledge may serve as both a barometer of the development of humanity and a competitive advantage for businesses (Senge 2006).

### **Ethics and Theology**

The words "theology" and "ethics" generally do not seem to be closely associated with one another (McGrath, 1999). One is the study of God, while the other is a set of guidelines that a person must follow (McGrath, 1999). Studying God is one thing, the organization, on the other hand, that instructs and dictates individuals on how to behave is another (McGrath, 1999). McGrath (1999) implied that it had been said that "ethics and theology are intertwined like Siamese twins." The individual's behavior and the thoughts they should have about themselves

are inextricably related McGrath (1999). Price observed that both have matured and progressed together and that strong ethics may be projected when there is a sound and solid theology (Price, 2012). Cooper illustrates ethics is about knowing and doing what is morally correct, and workplace ethics is about learning and doing what is good in the workplace (Cooper, 2012). Though many people often think theology studies abstract concepts like God and heaven, Hunter (1987) argues this is not the case. Hunter described ethics as the underlying intricacy pattern of thinking and behaving that is true to its essence as a community of people in the presence of God (Hunter, 1987).

Theologian Aaron Perry (2018), expresses theology is a theoretical framework centered on intangibles rather than a discipline or a scientific field of study or research. Price points out that one of the central principles of ethics inside theology is the desire to be an example to others. People recognize that justice and purity are more critical than hedonistic pleasures (Weibel, Wiemann, & Osterloh, 2014). Reeder (2008) specified, the truth be told, theology is considerably more practical than most people believe, and it has a stronger connection to ethics than most people assume it does on the surface. In essence, Christian leader relies on the Bible's teachings and other Christian resources to make ethical and moral decisions at work.

Millard Erickson, a theologian, argues that ethics in a theological context is the process of discerning right and wrong, with 'wrong' referring to actions going against God's will (Erickson, 2013). Whereas theology is the systematic study of religious belief in an academic setting of one faith (Stephen, 2003). Summarizing these two definitions ethics and theology, according to Erickson, one might conclude that ethics is most commonly, thought of as the branch of study that deals with the study of human behavior as well as the moral and ethical principles of what is right and wrong (Erickson, 2013). While theology is often seen as a study of abstract concerned

with the essence of God and a way of thinking based on intangibles things, this is not always the case (Veith, 1994). Theology is a far more field of practical study than it may seem at first glance, and it has a much more profound connection to ethics than most people may assume (Veith, 1994).

Theology is a clear and solid biblical foundation and a practical approach (Erickson, 2013). God's personality, characteristics, and moral commandments are enshrined in the Ten Commandments (Burrow, 2008). God's honest revelation motivates Christian ethics and His desire for a life of faith in Jesus Christ (Burrow, 2008). Upholding and exhibiting ethical values such as beneficence and integrity affects subordinates and gain appreciation (Benn, 2005).

Jesus Christ, the most outstanding leader ever. John 13:16, Jesus teaches that "A servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him" (NIV). In the same manner leaders are to teach their followers the way through their words and deeds (Hind, 2006). Followers might be swayed by the actions they see; their willingness to participate may be influenced by their observation (Hind, 2006). Administrative leaders who demonstrate the values they preach have a far more significant influence on their followers (Hind, 2006). Ephesians 4: 11-16, emphasizes leadership is to inspire followers to carry out God's will and mission by using the authority given to them by Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit.

The development of a Code of Ethics is to assist Christian leaders in incorporating protections into their lives so that they may remain unblemished in the eyes of the Lord. An ethical code provides guidelines for how leaders conduct themselves (Donlevy & Walker, 2011). When leaders seek these disciplines, they pursue God's attributes, for God is ethics (Perry, 2018). The administrator leaders must aim for these characteristics guidelines to be ethical in the

workplace (Donlevy & Walker, 2011). “Good doctrine makes good ethics, and such doctrine seeks to preserve Christian distinctiveness” (McGrath, 1999).

### **Theology of Ethical Leadership**

Theology should be the fundamental underpinning framework adjustment for all living beings” (McGrath, 1999, pp. 27-36). Theologian Perry, ponders the question of what connection ethical leadership has with theology (Perry, 2018). Does the theology of ethical leadership go hand in hand in the workplace? Since everyone has thoughts about God and perspectives on what they don’t believe or what others believe when utilizing the term “God” (Donlevy & Walker, 2011). So then, how do theology and ethical leadership intersect?

Perry, state theology concerns God and the implications for “acknowledging what’s right, pursuing what’s right, and thinking what’s right.” It is less concerned with getting things done correctly, such as enlisting people on the team, implementing procedures, and holding both organizations and individuals accountable (Perry, 2018). Stott’s (2014) research contends that it is not about the administrator preparing individuals, creating goals, executing policies, or holding people responsible and accountable (Stott, 2014). Instead, theology is an intellectual pursuit and the interest of those Christians who wish to learn and communicate God’s truth in their lives and make it known to others (Gill, 1998).

Effective leadership requires knowledge from multiple disciplines; theology is another area contributing to the dialogue (Gill, 1998). One of the most important aspects of theology and biblical revelation is how a person aims to shape their way of life, which is analogous to the concept of ethics (Zhu, 2018). Theology, in its purest form, in essence, may be simple as “God is love” or complicated as “Jesus Christ is one soul with two divine and human qualities-unified and pure” (Nielsen, Marrone & Slay, 2009). “Leadership is substantially difficult to classify or



describe, and it is narrow in-depth and thin as a field” (Yukl, 2002, p. 3, 7). Ethical leadership, in a nutshell, may remind theologians that the phenomena of the following systems and teamwork are prevalent in various circumstances and situations (Gill, 1998).

Cilla writes laws, guidelines, and rules from Genesis to Revelation; guiding principles are given to harmonize and manage one life expectancy to what is appropriate, satisfactory, respected, honest, and esteemed by God (Cilla, 2014). Thomas illustrates ethical leadership as the “divine order set in place by God” (Thomas, 2018). To “walk in a manner worthy of the calling” is an exquisite pleasure (Eph. 4:1, King James Version) that in him for God has confirmed the authority that exists (Thomas, 2018). Jesus Christ, the foundation of Christian ethics, displays what it is like to be “completely human in the manner he lived and died” (Perry, 2018).

When leading individuals by God’s will to achieve God’s purpose and goals for their life, Diggins convey that Christian leadership must include guiding principles and motivation (Diggins, 2016). Hind say that there is no greater commandment for ethical leadership to emerge than from the teachings of the two highest authorities of biblical principles “Love the Lord God with all your heart, mind, and soul” and “love your neighbors as you love yourself” (Hind, 2006; Matthew: 22: 37; Mark: 12: 31, King James Version).

The apostle Paul conveys, “Let everybody be dependent upon the overseeing authority, for there is no authority aside from that which God has set up” (Romans 13:1, King James Version). Administrator leaders, in all instances, must apply theological guidelines when applying ethical leadership decision-making in the workplace (Olsthoorn, 2017). God anticipates leaders to integrate honor when making ethical decisions to correct a situation in an individual life (Olsthoorn, 2017).

Theology helps leaders articulate their views and reveal moral principles through a perspective that can be used to observe, substitute, supplant, strengthen, and correct (Nielsen et al., 2009) and instill theological belief principles into their ethical leadership decision-making (Diggins, 2016). Cilla (2014) advises Christian leaders to seek God's ethical leadership advice in all situations.

### **Administrators Ethical Decision-Making**

“The ultimate test and crucial measure of a leader,” in Harry Reeder's perspective, is not how many followers he has but rather the “strategic efficiency of leaders he or she produces and deploys,” which lies at the core of the leadership dynamic (Reeder, 2008). Kiranli (2002) argues separating professional and personal ethical values is not always straightforward and that adhering to a code of ethics can be challenging. Kiranli (2002) suggested the code of ethics serves as a guide for the administration's integrity in conducting itself in a way that fosters community trust (Kiranli, 2002).

Establishing and applying ethical principles in schools, especially a code of ethics, is necessary and critical for school administrators to ensure that these concepts are practiced (Damanik & Aldridge, 2017). Administration leaders may motivate their staff and committees to enforce laws professionally and fairly with a robust code of ethics (Clemens, 2018). Whether a decision is made quickly or slowly, making excellent ethical decisions involves a trained awareness of ethical considerations (Donlevy & Walker, 2011).

Administrator leaders must weigh the potential negative impact that might impede communication and innovation without “overly stifling creativity and openness to new ideas” (Vaughn, 2022). Newton writes that the more ethical challenges leaders face in the future depend on debate and interaction with others (Newton, 2014). Vaughn (2022) points out, ethical

leaders acknowledge that making the most optimal ethical decision may be their greatest challenge.

### **Ethical Leadership Characteristics**

While it may be possible to think about leadership as analogous to the fuel that keeps a train engine moving ahead (Ward, 2006). Even a competent leader may unintentionally or unwittingly display specific leadership characteristics that derail the excitement and demotivate the whole group or an individual team member (Ward, 2006). Honesty, humility, dependability, patience, and persistence are outstanding leadership characteristics, and leaders must exemplify these values (Palanski & Yammarino, 2009).

These characteristics are a collection of distinctive attributes that distinguish one individual from the following (Palanski & Yammarino, 2009). Although these qualities traits may not always manifest, they must constantly be linked to an individual's character qualities to be considered authentic (Frank, 2002). Palanski & Yammarino (2009) argue that Christian administrators' leadership should be characterized by three major characteristics: "honesty, good temperament, and humility."

#### **Honesty**

One of the most significant benefits of honesty in a leadership position is the trust it fosters and integrity (Lubet, 2008; Smith, 2018). Many may wonder why it is vital for a leader to be honest. As the famous *adage goes*, "Honesty is the best policy," which explains why honesty perfectly captures the essence of why integrity is crucial (Nelson, 2014). Powlison writes that instilling confidence and trust in people demonstrates their best interests (Powlison 2007). Diggins argues leaders should serve as a beacon of light to those in the shadow, guiding them on the path championed by Christ and His teachings (Diggins, 2016). While their views may oppose

those of the majority leaders must serve as examples for the members of their organizations and establish the criteria for giving a forum for others (Ogunfowora & Bourdage, 2014).

A strong sense of ethics is crucial for effective leadership, setting examples, and motivating and inspiring people and future generations. Even if doing so may be unpopular, administrator leaders who stand up for what's right, according to Garrett, are the most honest leaders (Garrett, 1995). Perry's (2018) write, honest leaders inspire, do not lie, manipulate, or tell their employees the truth, and are straightforward and plausible without sugarcoating.

### **Trustworthy**

Building a trustworthy community is an essential task that falls on a leader's shoulders (Saunders, 2010). Psychology, management, and economic sciences Professor Paul Zak of Claremont Graduate University. Wrote in "The Neuroscience of Trust," the Harvard Business Review, January 2017 publisher, that "individuals at high-trust organizations report 74 percent less stress, 50 percent higher efficiency, 76 percent more interaction, 13 percent less sick days, 106 percent more liveliness and vitality at work, 29 percent more gratitude with their life, and 40 percent less stress and fatigue" (Zak, 2017). These conclusions are based on Zak's extensive study over many years and are relatively intuitive (Zak, 2017).

Stott's (2014) research showed that trustworthy leaders establish positive relationships with coworkers and superiors. If a disagreement develops, their faith demands that they do the right thing instead of chasing conflict for the sake of controversy (Stott, 2014). Lyman (2012) asserts people that are trustworthy spend their lives according to the teaching of God's word and follow the instruction that Jesus gave, regard their neighbor more than they value themselves (Mark 12: 31). In the same way, administrator leaders are expected to behave in a manner that is

beneficial to all parties involved (Peschke, 2012). People connect more with honest leaders than dishonest ones (Peschke, 2011).

When it becomes challenging to make the best decision possible, administrative leaders must have a robust set of beliefs and characteristics on which they can rely (Chun, 2005). Ethical leadership is characterized by developing fairness, compassion for others, dependability, and trustworthiness (Trevino, 1986). In most cases, making an informed ethical decision may require practical adaptability to ethical concerns (Hilbig et al., 2018). Proverbs 4: 23 demonstrates that appropriate attitudes and beliefs originate from a person's heart.

### **Good Temperament**

Hilbig et al. (2018) define good temperament as a facet of a person's personality. When someone leads people with a good temper, they have more energy, much as the sun and the rain in the springtime have greater vigor (Hilbig et al., 2018). A person's temperament affects their perspective on life and relationships (Hilbig et al., 2018). Most importantly, their temperaments may impact the interactions that occur among the community members. Leaders' temperament is essential in how they conduct themselves and relate to those around them (Humphreys & Einstein, 2004).

Those who wish to attain any leadership position having a good temperament should be part of the evaluation process to determine whether or not they are suitable for the position they want to occupy (Childs, 1995). On a regularly based, leaders may have several tasks they must deal with (Humphreys & Einstein, 2004). Proverb 16: 14-15 "A king's fury is a messenger of death, but a wise man appeases it; when a king's face lights up, there is life; his favor is like a cloud with spring rain" (Modern English Version).

## **Openness**

The urge to discuss ethical issues and decision-making should be a regular part of corporate communication and social structure (Yue et al., 2019). Yue et al. (2019), studies indicated the qualities of openness, transparency, and honesty are the essential characteristics of an ethical leader. The motivation to inspire others to lead, the desire to maintain and improve leadership skills, and the ability to embrace and critically analyze constructive and negative feedback, according to Moss et al., are all essential characteristics of influential leaders (Moss et al., 2018).

Olsthoorn (2017) expressed, leadership is about relating to the people who follow you, talking to them, and interacting with those who look up to you. Jesus Christ's acceptance of everyone and interact with those who challenged and questioned his authority (Olsthoorn, 2017). Jesus demonstrated his attributes and openness when the Pharisees asked his disciples when they saw him dining with the tax collectors and sinners and asked, "Why should your master dine with tax collectors and sinners?" In response, Jesus answered and said a physician is not necessary for individuals in good health; but those who are ill-doing need" (Matthew 9:11-13, NKJ).

## **Kindness**

Not everyone views kindness as being equivalent to ethics. Instead, it's often considered a component of excellent manners or courteous behavior (Haskins, Thomas, & Johri, 2018). Kindness, much like many other challenging aspects of leadership, has been characterized in a variety of different ways by several different scholars (Haskins et al., 2018). Passmore & Oades (2015) defined kindness as the "selfless actions taken by a person who seeks to assist or favorably impact the emotional condition (mood) of another."

Ferrucci & Lama (2007) identified kindness as a luxury rather than a necessity, with no motivation other than to aid another individual instead of conforming to norms. When one's actions, in particular, substantially further another person's interests, acting with kindness is inherently a moral requirement that extends beyond the boundaries of legal accountability (Caldwell, 2017).

“A good leader is friendly to everyone, not simply to those who treat them well or those with whom they have authority (Taussig, 2020). Philippians 2: 4 exemplifies, “Do not merely look out for your interest, but also the interests of others” (New American Standard Bible). Baker & O'Malley (2008) argues for organizations that wish to optimize or increase wealth creation and meet employee promises, “leading with kindness” is a moral condition that must be met. The Golden Rule urges, “treat people as you'd want to be treated” (Ferguson & Shaw, 2001; Golan, 2012). Matthew 7: 12 instructed, “Do to others whatever you would like them to do to you” (New Living Translation).

### **Emotional stability**

Practical, ethical leadership calls for a leader-level head and the capacity to keep their emotional stability in decision-making (Zeelenberg et al., 2008). Success relies on a leader's excitement, self-assurance, accountability, emotional stability, strength of character, and drive, even if they don't always have all the answers (Zeelenberg et al., 2008; Li, 2005). Emotional stability “doesn't imply that a leader never becomes frustrated or angry, but it does indicate they can analyze those emotions and understand them to their thinking and reaction about a scenario (Gravagna, 2016). A leader's positive and negative feelings are as important and necessary as any other component of their personality (Gravagna, 2016; Meurisse, 2019; Clark & Goleman, 2022).

When faced with difficult situations, Wadhera & Bano (2020) concur that Christian leaders are taught to be slow to anger in uncomfortable circumstances and always be conscious of their feelings. Neuroscientist Gravagna expresses that employees are more inclined to appreciate and trust leaders who exhibit high emotional stability when faced with adversity (Gravagna, 2016). Emotional stability is highly valued in the book of Proverbs, “He who is slow to rage is superior to the mighty, and he who rules his heart is superior to he who captures a city” (16: 32, Modern English Version).

### **Thoughtfulness**

“Thoughtfulness” may refer to “the quality of showing concern for others” or a “proclivity for forecasting the needs and desires of others” (Salib, 2020). Salib (2020), argues effective organizations that succeed are distinguished by the level of thoughtfulness in their decision-making. The Ethical thinking is a deliberate process; no magic approach, shortcut, or predetermined can be used to achieve it (Velasquez et al., 2015). Given that humans are naturally biased, leaders are unlikely to make a fair, ethical decision if they instantaneously evaluate a circumstance based on inherent biases (Velasquez et al., 2015).

While it's true that some people may have the propensity to follow their “gut feeling” and make snap decisions, which often result in noticeable ethical wrongs, this isn't the case for everyone ( (Gigerenzer, 2007; Kahneman, 2021). There are instances when ethical decision-making involves leaders following their “gut feeling” (Gigerenzer, 2007). This approach, however, must be complemented with a more methodical technique of thoughtfulness.

Kahneman et al. (2021) argue in their book “*Noise: A Flaw in Human Judgment*,” administrator leaders who seek to make ethical decisions must carefully examine their ethical duties to their companies and society. Administrator leaders in its broadest terms, according to



Van Wart (2003), refers to a person's ability to provide better clarity in the decision-making processes in a way that may assist in minimizing conflict and uncertainty. Scholar has emphasis that administrator leaders is someone who formulates effective strategies and make plans that can be carried out and find solutions to problems as they arise to help an organization be successful or keep it that way (Pearce & Conger; Terry, 1993).

Administrator leader is expected to think and act in a manner that is consistent with what is morally honest and righteous manner, they are not permitted to utilize their legislative power in order to make decisions that are not appropriate (Vincent, 2011). Effective and efficient job completion is facilitated by a well-defined chain of command, which is made possible by strong administrative leaders (Dressel, 1981). When employees are confident that their leaders have their best interests and welfare, they are more inclined to respect their positions and perform to the best of their abilities (Green, 2000).

Paul noted in Philippians 4: 10, "But I rejoice with a deep and holy joy that now at length you have revived your thoughtfulness for my welfare. Indeed, you have always been thoughtful to me, although opportunity failed you" (Weymouth New Testament). Those in positions of authority must make concerted efforts to combat the cognitive biases that may stand in their way of making an informed ethical decision (Gigerenzer, 2007).

## **Humility**

Humility has been the topic of independent study and research in conjunction with other aspects of ethical leadership essential in many different sectors (Nielsen et al., 2009). Mcelroy et al., (2014), study found that humility encompasses a humble mentality, the opportunity to testify via leadership, and the desire to maintain composure no matter the circumstances. Peterson and Seligman's book, "*Character Strengths and Values*," identify six essential components of

humility: being truthful about own strengths and accomplishments; admitting mistakes; being open to fresh ideas or viewpoints or information that contradicts what is already known; keeping skills and achievements in perspectives; being able to “forget the self;” and appreciating the worth and vital of all things (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

Collin (2005) asserted that leadership at “Level 5” occurs when leaders exhibit strong professional determination and personal humility. Winston et al., argue that humble leaders must prioritize their followers’ needs over those of the organization and that this humility enables the organization to progress (Winston, 2005; Morris et al., 2005). Scholar Owen, highlighted leading with humility will not only affect the organization but will also affect leaders’ ethical decision-making personally (Owens et al., 2013).

The findings of academics Konopaske et al., discovered leaders who exhibit humility and set an excellent example for their employees tend to exude optimism (Konopaske et al., 2014). Konopaske et al., argue leaders should produce an upward spiral that increases pro-social employee performance rather than a downward spiral. The expansion of Jesus Christ’s life demonstrates the need for humility for all those in positions of authority over others (Nielsen et al., 2009). Jesus took on human faults and died for failures he didn’t cause. In doing so, Jesus relinquished his right to interact with humanity (Ogunfowora & Bourdage, 2014). Jesus Christ showed, humility should be a hallmark of the administrator leadership in their ethical decision (Ogunfowora & Bourdage, 2014).

### **Authentic**

Many scholars have urged organizations to foster authentic leadership since it can strengthen employee connections and loyalty to the organization’s goals (May et al., 2003). Some researchers have raised the question, “Does authentic leadership need a moral component,

or how does it associate with ethics?” since it is the possibility that authentic leaders would adhere to unethical views (Dion, 2012; May et al., 2003). Others have argued that authentic leaders must be honest and ethical and that pretending to have ethical restrictions is a symptom of inauthenticity (Neider & Schriesheim, 2014).

Walumbwa et al. (2008) described authentic leadership as a “Pattern of leadership behavior that fosters a positive and ethical environment to encourage stronger self-awareness and open communication between leaders and their subordinates.” Leaders may earn respect and loyalty from their followers by being authentic and building trust through cultivating sincere relationships (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). *The adage goes*, “Actions speak louder than words; a leader’s actions reflect who they are and what they stand for” (Doughty, 2004). A leader who motivates and encourages their members to perform at their highest level has a more significant influence than simply their words (Hilbig et al., 2018; Singh, 2022).

As a means for organizations to improve their performance and obtain a competitive edge via good leadership, researchers have pushed for the discovery and education of authentic leadership (Doughty, 2004; Avolio & Gardner, 2005). Hilbig et al. (2018) argue organizations may employ authentic leadership training programs that will assist administrators in developing authenticity by increasing their self-awareness. Thus, authentic leadership is a forceful and productive benefit in any organization and a good driver of ethical leadership in decision-making. Leaders, consequently, are responsible for following through on their commitments to encourage and embolden their organizations and followers to accomplish their best work (Hilbig et al., 2018).

## **Empathetic**

The importance of empathetic in an organizational setting has been the subject of many studies. The findings presented by researchers Cotton & Haney, empathy and ethics are inextricably linked, and both factors significantly influence administrators' decision-making (Cotton, 2021; Haney, 1994). Mencl & May (2009) concluded that empathy in leadership is putting yourself in others' shoes, and sharing the suffering leads to distress, burn-out, fleeing actions, narrow-mindedness, and poor ethical decisions. Mahsud et al. (2010) demonstrate that leaders who lack empathy are less inclined to do obligatory activities like forgiving others and donating to charity.

Mahsud et al.'s (2010) study showed that administrators who exhibit higher empathy for their direct subordinates are seen as more effective leaders. Brown (2015) argues empathy is a skill with little time and practice and can reshape leadership and revitalize organizations, which requires effort and dedication. Numerous scriptures illustrated the virtue and attribute of empathy in biblical stories (Hind, 2006). An outstanding illustration of this may be found in the words of the apostle Peter, who encouraged followers of Christ to "have compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, and be courteous" (1 Peter 3:8, NKJV).

Paul fostered empathetic when he wrote to other fellow believers, urging them to "Rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep" (Romans 12:15). Jesus' illustration of empathy; shows he was always thinking about the requirements of others who were around him. The book of Matthew detailed how Jesus was empathetic "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were confused and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (Matthew 9:36, NLT). Jesus Christ, having lived human existence, can and does empathize with all humans (Hebrews 4:15).

On another occasion, Jesus came across a widow who was going to bury her only son, sensing her anguish and suffering. Jesus' "heart was filled with compassion as he "told the widow not to weep as he approached the burial procession, touched the bier, raised the young man from the dead, and gave him to his mother (Luke 7:11–16). Jesus Christ allows himself to carry the weight of sin and blame humanity's misdeeds by putting himself in their shoes (Hind, 2006). Christian leaders should exhibit more support and reassurance from their followers (Hind, 2006). Leaders are encouraged by God to carry one another's burdens and fulfill the law of Christ (Hind, 2006).

### **Vulnerable**

Many typically view a leader's vulnerable as a disadvantage to leadership (Lopez, 2018; Crouch, 2016). At a glimpse, a vulnerable first appearance is seen as a flaw or deficiency, especially in the corporate world (Brown, 2012a). Leaders may experience constant scrutiny and pressure to outperform others (Lopez, 2018). Since they are entrusted with determining the path, taking the essential measures to fulfill the vision, and resolving the troublesome situations that develop along the road (Seppälä, 2018). Brown (2012) argues vulnerable may entail leaders lowering their guard, abandoning pretenses, and being authentic in everything. Those who expose their shortcomings and challenges are typically the most honest, motivating, and easier to connect with (Brown, 2012a; Brown, 2015).

Ito & Bligh specified that it is a misunderstanding that to be vulnerable, one must expose their deepest, most private thoughts and emotions and let people in on their whole life (Ito & Bligh, 2017). Author Brene Brown's bestselling book "The Power of Vulnerability" specifies vulnerability as "being involved in life, giving one's all to it, and committing oneself to something" (Brown, 2012a). Thompson et al. convey this concept shows the leader as a human

person rather than a robot, making them approachable because they are not ashamed to show their vulnerability to others, even if it is an unpleasant experience (Thompson et al., 2021). Administrator leaders may become more self-aware and less introverted when they realize their weaknesses and communicate them constructively (Thompson et al., 2012; Brown, 2015; Crouch, 2016, Lapidot et al., 2007).

### **Theoretical Framework Literature Review**

Integrity, sincerity, truthfulness, authenticity, and honesty are the characteristics that produce Christian leadership veracity in ethical decision-making (Dorrien, 2009). When leadership lacks those characteristics, it harms the morale and well-being of followers, ultimately causing leaders to become frustrated and exhausted (Dorrien, 2009). Dorrien (2009) emphasizes that leaders must have a framework and guiding principles for ethical decisions. The misuse of power may quickly devolve into abuse of authority when those in leadership engage in actions inconsistent with moral principles or the truth (Dorrein, 2009).

Based on a poll conducted by Gallup among organizations' respondents, 72% were convinced leaders are incapable of taking their firm to the next level (Avolio et al., 2007). 35% of respondents expressed concern regarding their capacity to build or establish trust, 61% expressed concern about the impressions of openness held by their staff, and 28% conveyed lack of transparency generates a possible drawback and disadvantage (Avolio et al., 2007).

A separate Gallup survey poll found that while administrators may have an average of 73% influence on employee enthusiasm and commitment rankings score throughout the organizational divisions, only 50% of employees agree that their leaders have attempted to clarify their responsibilities (Zuckerman, 2020; Barna & Trend, 2018).

Christian education is the primary developer of God's purpose and direction for Christian leaders. Administrator leaders must make every effort to transform individuals into "followers of God and his likeness" (Grime & Bennett, 2017; Eph 5: 1, NIV). Those in positions of leadership who make ethical considerations a priority in their decision-making must provide an excellent example for those below them (Li & Madsen 2011). 2 Timothy 3:17 emphasizes, "That the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (ESV).

### **Kitchener Five Moral Principles Leadership Guidelines**

The theoretical foundation for this investigation, Kitchener's five paradigm principles for ethical leadership, was developed to help leaders better comprehend potential challenges in a given situation when making decisions (Kitchener, 1984). Whether the decision is autonomous and free from undue influence, non-maleficence (do no harm), beneficence (be proactive and prevent harm), justice (treat all individuals equally), or a reflection of the leaders' fidelity to the organization (Cooper, 2012). Kitchener's ethical principles are benchmarks for administrators' ethical leadership for decision-making.

#### **Autonomy**

Giving a person the freedom to decide what to do and how to accomplish it is the heart of this principle (Kitchener, 1994). This principle focuses on the concept of independence (Kitchener, 1984). According to Kitchener (1984), autonomy addresses the duty of fostering an environment where one is free to act in line with their values and ideals. As long as their actions don't infringe on the rights of others. While it may be permissible to seek advice or different options, leaders should be confident when making an ethical decision they consider correct (Gillon, 1993).

Illustrated in Genesis 6: 19-22, Noah was a prime example of autonomy when God told him, “To build an ark for him and his family and bring into the ark two of all living creatures, male and female, to keep them alive” with him (Ife & Lee, 1983). The fundamental nature of autonomy is to provide an individual with the freedom to choose and act and the ability to remain independent from undue influence (Varelius, 2007).

Moses, an iconic figure in the Bible, was tasked with guiding the Israelites out of Egypt, though he faced significant resistance and numerous problems along the route (Edelman, 2012). Others did not influence Moses' decisions; instead, he kept his faith in God and exhibited autonomy in his decision (Edelman, 2012). Administrator leaders, likewise, should showcase autonomy in their decision-making and ethical leadership (Reilly et al., 2012)

### **Justice**

Kitchener describes justice as “treating equals equally and unequals unequally but in proportion to their relevant differences” (p.49). Kitchener stated, “A person’s or a group’s right is weighed against the right of another individual or group” (Kitchener, 1984). If a person is treated differently, the administrator must explain why this treatment is essential and appropriate (p. 49). In every situation or scenario, the administrator should examine the issue and determine if the groups are “equally compared versus now-equal” (Simpson & Wagner, 2008).

The book of 1 Kings 3: 16–28 illustrates that King Solomon is the wisest person recognized for his wisdom (Sockness, 1992). In this scenario, King Solomon was forced to make a tough decision when two ladies claimed to be the child’s mother. Using the principles of justice and wisdom, King Solomon helped the two ladies who claimed to be the young child’s mother reach a mutually acceptable agreement (Vance, 2008). Before making a snap decision, leaders should judge fairly, considering all evidence and circumstances (Johnson, 2009).



The narrative of Paul writing to Philemon, pleading, and urging him to pardon Onesimus for fleeing, showcases his influence and power to ask for justice (Vance, 2009), even though Onesimus deserved death for running away (Philemon 1: 10-19). The responsibility of the administrator leaders is to notice when people's demands are frequently higher than organizational needs and choose to implement an appropriate choice and strategy that is suitable for the situation (Kelleher, 2014). Sockness writes that everyone deserves fairness regardless of their position or attitude (Sockness 1992). The Bible is unequivocal in establishing justice as a necessary component of prosperity (Sockness, 1992).

### **Beneficence**

Cullity defines beneficence as the “acts of mercy and kindness, charity, and generosity, as well as personal qualities” (p. 20). Kitchener writes that the principle of beneficence centers on leaders taking a proactive role in promoting the welfare of everyone around them (Kitchener, 1984). When making an ethical decision, administrator leaders should promote the health and well-being of everyone in such circumstances (Brockovich, 2000). The tale of the Good Samaritan parable illustrates how beneficence may be practiced from a theological perspective (Miles & Zonderkidz, 2015).

A traveler passing by a wounded Jew felt compassion for the injured man, even though they were enemies (Miles & Zonderkidz, 2015). Yet the good Samaritan stopped and helped the young man after being robbed. The good Samaritan demonstrated beneficence as described in Romans 13:10, “Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law” was exhibited by the good Samaritan (English Standard Version).

The importance of always keeping the best interests of others at heart is illustrated in Matthew 14: 15-16, when Jesus saw a multitude of 5000 people without food (Zavada, 2020).

Jesus took upon this responsibility because they had come to see him, and it only fitted that he showed them the same level of beneficence, “kindness and compassion and personal qualities” (Fowler, 1990; Cullity, 2007). Jesus prioritized the needs of others above his own, and his decisions demonstrated his penchant for beneficence (Cullity, 2007).

Leaders should be willing to sacrifice personal gain for the good of those around them (Forester-Miller & Rubenstein, 1992). The welfare of others should be at the forefront of leaders’ showing social justice and beneficence to those around them (Arneson, 2004). Administrator leaders have a more significant burden of accountability since their positions of authority give them the opportunity and resources to influence their decisions directly (Janosik et al., 2004, p. 357).

### **Non-Maleficence**

Just as a leader is tasked with promoting people’s well-being, they should also avoid causing harm to others at all costs (Rosenbaum, 1982). Leaders making tough ethical decisions must consider everyone involved and do nothing to jeopardize the situation (Penslar, 1995). Motloba writes that leaders should avoid causing undue harm to others, whether those persons be their employees, rivals, or competitors; in all cases, the administrator should select the option that has the least substantial negative impact on others (Motloba, 2019). Jesus, the best role model, exemplifies the principle “Do no harm” (Kitchener, 1984).

Speaking in the temple courts, a group of Pharisees and law professors questioned Jesus about Moses’ Law and how it should be administered to stoning a woman caught in adultery (Ford, 2021). Compelling the woman to stand in front of Jesus and the whole crowd, they continued questioning Jesus until he got up and addressed them in the following way (Ford, 2021). “Let him who is without sin among you first cast a stone at her” (John 8: 7, King James

Version). Instead of stoning her to death, Jesus chose to forgive the woman and told her, “Go and sin no more” (John 8: 11). “Do no harm” principle was put into practice (Kitchener, 1984). The book of Romans 12:17-18 teaches, “Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone” (New International Version).

Leaders, on all occasions, should take care of those around them, minimize harm and avoid inflicting harm on others (Gillon, 1993). 1 Samuel 13: 14, the mirror of David, a man after God’s own heart, demonstrated attributes of non-maleficence toward King Saul. When challenged with the option of killing Saul, David chose to spare Saul’s life, showcasing non-maleficence (Storr & Crompton, 1986). All decisions should be made with the maximum gain in mind while limiting the negative connotations (Penslar, 1995). Jesus advocated, “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12: 31). Administrator leaders should avoid conflict and stay away from acts of revenge or retaliation (Penslar, 1995).

### **Fidelity**

Kitchener (1984) describes fidelity as being dependable, keeping commitments, and appreciating people’s rights without abusing them. According to Kitchener, loyalty, trustworthiness, and honesty are the three foundations around which fidelity is built, and they are the value attributes that administrative leaders should demonstrate (p. 44). Characters such as Job are modeled of fidelity in the Bible. Job was subjected to some of the worst punishments for his devotion to God but never wavered in the face of Satan’s temptations (Dailey, 1997). Job exemplified fidelity in ethical leadership, illustrating all three essential components “loyalty, trustworthiness, and honesty” (Dailey, 1997). Administrator leader's ethical leadership should

exercise the same fidelity in their organization setting in creating a culture of trust and openness (Curran et al., 2002; Dailey, 1997; Kitchener, 1984).

### **Related Literature**

Leadership is a way of life-supporting an organization's vision and goals daily (Grissom, 2011). The topic of ethics has been extensively and thoroughly investigated practically in almost every professional field and sector (Grissom, 2011). Since humanity first understood ethics and its significance to a functional and regulated society, researchers have worked tirelessly to update and improve their knowledge and understanding of ethical behaviors (Blasé & Kirby, 2009). There hasn't been much research on the inclusive effectiveness of administrators' ethical leadership characteristics (Blase Kirby, 2009).

Many researchers argue that experimental research provides no explicit depictions of the daily social and behavioral complexities of university effectiveness of ethical leadership and decision-making (Blasé & Kirby, 2009). This section was designed to examine the literature on the different subtopics and how it relates to the main research questions that inspired this study project endeavor. Along with a selection of existing sources documents, secondary raw materials, memos, and historical document records (Creswell, 2007), as well as the 4 V model (Khar, 2008).

This literature reviewed existing research and compared and contrasted it to prior literature research studies to establish a theory on strengthening ethical leadership and improving administrators' decision-making based on the evidence. Administrator ethical leadership's involves ensuring that the organization's operations and functions comply with its goals, objectives, and missions (Blase & Kirby, 2009). Those aspiring to leadership positions must take the inner path of harmony for unification and serve the common good (Collins, 2001).

### **Ethical Leadership Accountability**

The term “accountability” is often synonymous and interchangeable with words like “answerability” and “blameworthiness” (Williams, 2006). Based on researcher Williams’s conclusion, the concept of accountability has been explored and applied to various societal spheres (Williams, 2006). Yukl (2006) states that leaders’ accountability serves as the organization’s foundation and cornerstone. Williams defines accountability as the necessity of an organization accepting accountability for its operations, taking ownership of those efforts, and revealing the outcomes clearly and openly (Williams, 2006).

Richards-Gustafson's study on leadership accountability found that leadership and responsibility go hand in hand (Gustafson, 2013). The researcher argued that if leadership accountability is not valued at work, a company’s culture is vulnerable and prone to undesirable organizational development (Gustafson, 2013). Gustafson advises if employees don’t see their leaders as being accountable for their actions, commitment to their Job may suffer (Gustafson, 2013).

Akker et al. (2005) explored how various ethical leadership practices affected the followers’ trust in their leader’s accountability. The experts examined ethical leadership coupled with ethical behavior security, contextualizing achievement, transferring corporate principles, and promoting openness and accountability. The researchers utilized a web-based poll with roughly 500 responses from a European multinational firm. The findings of Akker et al., 2005, revealed when workers see their leaders acting in an ethically accountable manner, they are more likely to trust them (Akker et al., 2005).

The same research survey poll, leaders felt greater confidence in the organization when exercising workplace accountability (Akker, 2005). Yukl (2006) argues organization with solid

values creates a culture conducive to success, and workers are more prone to imitate a leader's undesirable values. Telford suggested the most crucial factor to consider when determining the efficiency of an organization is the degree to which an organization's leadership can "operate rationally and be accountable" (Telford, 1996). Williams asserts that workplace accountabilities improve external factors like economic and environmental sustainability (Williams, 2006).

### **Ethical Leadership in Education**

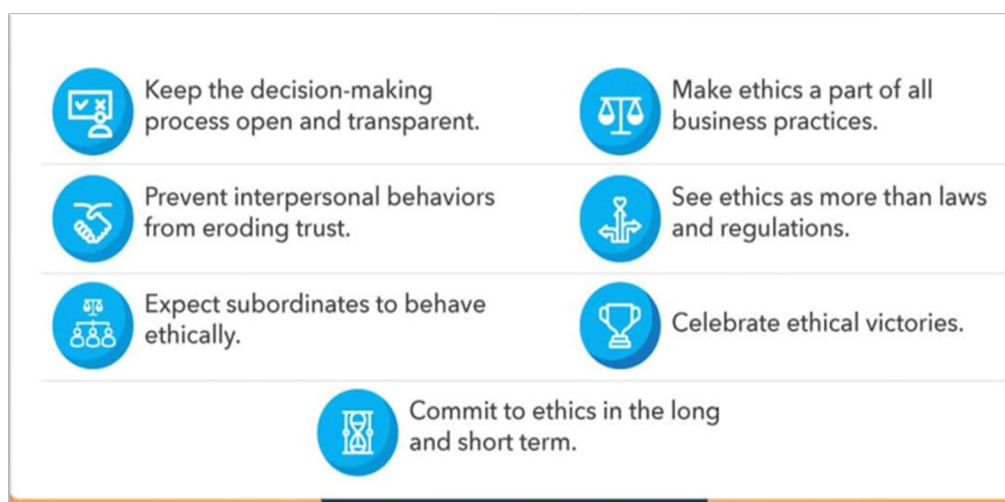
Ethical leadership in education may take numerous forms, but they all have one thing in common: leaders communicate to others the values they hold on to the inside (Rao, 2019). Steven Covey, argue a leader's core principles should be the foundation for their behavior (Covey, 2003). Psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg articulates that those who have completed all six phases of moral growth are considered ethical leaders (Kohlberg, 1981). Teaching by example is the only method for a leader to convey the significance of ethical leadership in education to subordinates and the organization as a whole (Kohlberg, 1981).

The key to success in any job, both within and outside the workplace, is living ethically and professionally (Kohlberg, 1981). The essential moral criteria are honesty, openness, trust, and accountability (Evaluating leadership performance, 2018). The most significant advantage of ethical leadership in education is the ability to set an excellent example for the rest of the education sector (Thornton, 2013). Top Trust Thought Leader Linda Fisher Thornton proposes seven practices of ethical leader techniques in education: "Keep decision-making clear and honest, make ethics part of organizational practices, avoid behaviors that weaken trust, embrace ethics as more than laws and regulations, expect subordinates to behave ethically, celebrate ethical achievements, and commit to ethics long-term as showed" (Thornton, 2013).

Most people would agree that leaders must balance the requirements of many stakeholders. But even with that knowledge, specific problems still need to be answered, such as a precise framework for analyzing complicated ethical dilemmas while being grounded (Thornton, 2013). The need for these seven practices (Figure 1) of ethical leaders' principles of responsibility has been articulated convincingly by ethics professionals and eminent leaders throughout history to provide a strong persuasive argument for ethical leadership in decision-making.

**Figure 1**

### Seven Practices of Ethical Leaders



Educators should make the most of every possibility to model these characters for their students and the values they may depend on and foster an ethical environment in their institutions through their actions and decisions (Thornton, 2013).

### Ethical Leadership from a Christian Visionary

Setting a goal is an essential part of Biblical teachings for Christian leaders and educators (Banks & Ledbetter, 2004). “Where *there is* no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy *is* he” (Proverb 29: 18, KJV). Banks and Ledbetter (2004), asserts leadership is

shown by a person, group, or association in a specific field of existence, where citizens are affected and motivated to progress in that region, whether short or long-term (Bank & Ledbetter 2004). Baker (1900) concurs that a Christian leader encourages, empowers energy, and leads people to accomplish God's collective vision.

Northouse (2019) argues that leadership is more typically associated with power, influence, responsibility, and trustworthiness than any other quality (p. 12). Maxwell (2007) expresses that God calls the administrator to rule in good faith, go to their citizens, talk with them, find common ground, and inspire them to excel. When administrator leaders visionary goes up the corporate ladder, they inevitably lose some of their independence (Maxwell, 2007).

Leaders like Greenleaf, a godly example, agreed with this assertion and said that a leader's greatness rests on his status as a servant (Greenleaf, 2002). Only when God's purposes guide the path and process, nature, and ways of functioning will this happen (Greenleaf, 1998). Clinton (1988) argues that a "complex mechanism in which a man or woman born with God's capacity influences a certain class of God's citizens for the group's purposes."

Matthew cites, "The greatest of you would be your servant" (Matthew 23:11, NIV). Effective leadership embodies the virtues of altruism, compassion, and a sense of anticipation of wanting to serve (Maxwell, 2007). Administrator leaders are responsible for reacting to people, developing an image of what they want, working with others to satisfy their needs, broadening the concept of purpose, and embracing the laity's abilities and ministries that affect their values (Sofield, 1995).

### **Shared Vision**

Bass (1999) defines leadership as having a vision, self-confidence, inspiration, and intellectual stimulation, all of which are necessary for success. Peter Senge's book "*The Fifth*



*Discipline*” characterizes shared vision as “an astonishing mental and emotional image that everyone in the organization has” (Senge, 1990). The book argues that companies that strive to build a vision for the future, seldom impacts the company (Senge 1990). Only a few develop the vision and never become the organization’s “shared vision” in the thoughts and hearts that they all share (Senge, 1990). Evers argues that without a shared vision, the organization cannot survive and is doomed to failure (Evers, 1998).

Kouzes & Posner's (2017) book “*The Leadership Challenge*” argue that once afterthought has been given to the past and the present, it’s time to consider the future. From the author’s perspective, shared vision answers the “What do we design to create?” (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). When there is a shared vision, each works for a common goal with the same understanding. Everyone working toward the same objective fosters harmony and efficiency and lends coherence to a shared vision (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). When people see that their ambitions and aspirations have a place in the organization, they are more inclined to work together toward the company’s goals (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). A leader’s ability to articulate an organization’s goal significantly impacts student success (Valentine & Prater, 2011, p. 25).

### **Administrator Ethical Leadership Guiding Principles**

Manz and Sims (1993) defined four integrated strategic fundamental guiding principles of ethical leadership within a corporation in a qualitative study, such as “acting with honesty, being honest, having fun, and being socially responsible,” a difficult task to achieve (p. 15). The administrator leaders ability to execute several daily tasks decides how well they perform critical to student achievement (Rice, 2010; Dutta & Sahney, 2016). An individual’s wisdom, work ethics, commitment, integrity, and ability to understand the broad picture and communicate effectively are all necessary leadership characteristics and guiding principles (Hampton, 2003).

These personal codes of ethics must mirror a worldview perspective (Hampton, 2003). In all instances, ethical leaders must seek divine wisdom, knowledge, and direction through prayer to guide their decision-making (Maxwell, 2019). Proverb 2: 3-6 (New English Version) instructs:

Yes, if you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding, if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures, then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God. For the LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth comes knowledge and understanding.

The impact of educational leaders may be felt by a diverse group of stakeholders, including parents, students, and even educators (Wagner & Simpson, 2009; Trevino, 1986). It is fundamental that Christian administrators rely on God for guidance and that they seek His wisdom and understanding to provide them with insight into their ethical decision-making (Perry 2018). Thomas expressed the essential factor in determining a leader's performance is neither their leadership style nor their implementation mix of strategies (Thomas, 2018).

### **Communication and Collaboration**

Everyday activities in the classroom depend on the administrator's ability to interact with staff, teachers, and students while communicating clear expectations (Organ, 1998). Good communication between administrator leaders and staff on the organization's mission and objectives is essential to its day-to-day management (Organ, 1998). The school's timetable and goals are reinforced through frequent communication and collaboration, according to Valentine & Prater, administrator leaders must appreciate the participation of all stakeholders (p. 24). Ahsan & Panday say that all parties involved—including officials from the government, teachers, administrators, families, politicians, and children must come together (Ahsan & Panday, 2013).

Dimmock and Walker investigation of notable school administrators, took into account the structural standpoint of organizational design regarding student accomplishment, its goal, and direction (p. 40). Reynolds and Warfield write that administrator leaders must communicate with stakeholders who can successfully represent the goal that “successful leaders collaborate to develop a mission” (Reynolds & Warfield, 2010, pp. 61-64). Louis, Dretzka & Wahlstrom write academic achievement, daily school operations, and school-community ties are all impacted by genuine connections (Louis, Dretzka, & Wahlstrom, p. 594).

As the *saying goes*, “It’s about WE, not ME,” collaboration partners who share leadership develop long-lasting, fruitful relationships that are advantageous to the company (Louis et al., 2010). Awaya & Krishna say that collaboration is the most potent method open to business leaders, and communication relates to higher commitment, efficiency, and happiness in the workplace (Awaya & Krishna, 2019). Administrator leaders must build an atmosphere where various players and components combine to shape a practical outfit (p. 520). Cornelius, Wallace, & Tassabehii note that a company’s leadership must foster a healthy organizational environment for all employees through communication and collaboration (Cornelius, Wallace & Tassabehii, 2007).

### **Administrators Leadership Development**

Administrative leadership development entails orchestrating the activities essential to construct, organizing people, and operating the organization (Donahue, 2022; O’Connell, 1985). Establishing a positive example for others in the sector may increase customer satisfaction (O’Shea, 2005). Two significant components of leadership development decision-making entail “operational leadership and strategic leadership” (Peterlin, Pearse, & Dimovski, 2015). Operational leadership exercised activities such as employing and supporting new employees,

managing budgets, and fostering a healthy environment (Spanyi, 2010; Adair, 2010). Strategic leadership guides a company toward the future, explains the purpose, articulates the why motivates a shared vision, and assures objectives and results (Spanyi, 2010; Adair, 2010).

Kouzes and Posner create a five-step strategy process, “Inspire the Vision, Model the Way, Challenge the Process, Encourage the Heart, and Enabling Others to Act,” to strengthen and promote better leadership development in a constructive way (Kouzes and Posner, 2006). Utilizing these leadership practices as a teaching tool, leaders may emulate these traits to develop future leaders (Kouzes and Posner, 2006). Spillane et al., investigation build their theory of administrative leadership development on four pillars “teaching, training, job growth, and partnership nurturing” (Spillane et al., 2007).

Spillane et al., implied these four leadership pillars are vital for establishing alliances; they promote healthy interpersonal communication, effectively manage interactions, improve student learning, and provide a rigorous foundation for student participation (Spillane et al., 2007). Having strong leaders is essential for every organization. Without administrative leadership, educational leadership would inevitably falter (Vinyard, 2016). Organizational improvements that aren’t maintained lose their value, while high-quality procedures that stagnate eventually become average over time (Vinyard, 2016).

### **Ethical Leadership Challenges**

Every day, leaders are confronted with a situation that may provide an ethical leadership challenge (Johnson, 2009; Stadler, 1986). Each time a leader is confronted with a decision involving policies and procedures, confidentiality, money, personnel concerns, contracts, or performance management, their ethical leadership could be tested (Johnson, 2009; Selart & Johansen, 2011; Schirmacher, 2013). Every scenario or occurrence allows leaders to demonstrate

their ethical leadership and be role models for others to follow (Johnson, 2009). When leaders leadership undergo internal tests to evaluate their responsibility and dependability, they may encounter challenges, such as credibility and integrity (Tichy, Noel & McGill, 2008).

Enderle (1987), indicated the only ethical challenges a leader should be concerned with are producing high-quality, productive goods while simultaneously safeguarding and supporting the well-being of their employees (p. 658). Manz and Sims (1993), studies discovered four cohesive strategies for ethical leadership challenges inside an organization “acting with honesty, being honest, having fun, and being socially responsible” (p. 15). Walton (2008) research identified forty-five ethical leadership challenges and categorized them as “primary, protective, and personality” (p. 63).

The investigation of researcher Ward revealed that ethical leadership challenges are caused by arrogance rather than money (Ward, 2006). Knowing how difficult it is for leaders to avoid these common ethical challenges, Walton provides a technique for leaders to figure out what’s causing the hole and avoid ethical challenges as a consequence (p. 63). Administrator leaders ethical decision could have considerable influence and far-reaching effects in an ethical dilemma. Administrator leaders must evaluate their desired objectives, including the positive and negative implications (Stott, 2014). Leadership should involve being clear about ethical principles, values, and actions representing them. Implementing these strategies could help ethical leaders become better equipped to face emerging difficulties as they arise (Stott, 2014).

### **Christian Leadership Ethics**

*“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” and “Love your neighbor as yourself”* the two greatest commandments that represent the highest ethical commitment that a Christian is obligated to uphold (Matthew 37, 39, NIV). As it

is for theology, The Bible is the source of ethics in Christian leadership (Perry, 2018; Hind, 2006; Jones, 1994). Ferdinand Rohrhirsch's example, however, has cast questions on whether there should be Christian leadership ethics, even though various viewpoints have recently addressed this issue (Elmuti, Minnis, & Abebe, 2005).

The philosophical theories that seek to establish ethical standards may be helpful for Christians' ethical contemplation; however, scriptures must always be regarded as the ultimate authority in this area (Wilkens, 2017; Lovin, 2011; Clark et al., 1991). The goal of Christian leadership ethics is to guide leaders so they may devise strategies that will keep them blameless in the eyes of God (Geuras & Garofalo, 2010; Jones, 1995). Those in positions of authority have the obligation and the duty to lead by example, and the most effective method to fulfill this role model is to follow Jesus Christ's example (Lovin, 2011; Perry, 2018).

### **Ethical Leadership and Business**

Ethics has become part of an organizational marketing edge, enabling it to succeed in the market (Moriarty, 2019). A company's ethical leadership is critical to its long-term survival (Wildly, Forster, Loudon, & Wallace (2004). Ethical leadership within an established business philosophy based on ethics is essential to fostering a healthy workplace atmosphere that benefits all employees (Cornelius et al., 2007). Finch & McAfee argue ethical leaders add value to business organizations by motivating people to live up to the standards set by the organization they work for and by modeling those standards for others (Finch & McAfee, 2012; Mele & Fontrodona, 2017). Experience indicates that ethical leadership leads to greater operative happiness, decreased turnover, and more significant success (Melé & Fontrodona, 2017; Langvardt, 2012).

While it is incumbent upon business leaders to sustain the fundamental values of an organization's core principles, embrace its essence, and ensure that it remains true to its nature (Melé & Fontrodona, 2017). The role of business leaders is to uphold and exemplify a company's ethical values and embody the heart and soul of an organization (Melé & Fontrodona, 2017). Having a set of ethical tenets ensures that everyone understands their position and enhances the likelihood of genuine and just results in all circumstances, favorable or unfavorable (Cilla, 2014). Administrator leaders may contribute to the success of their businesses by incorporating ethical leadership skills into their business organizations (Melé & Fontrodona, 2017).

#### **4-V Model of Ethical Leadership**

Successful leadership is established on the desire to serve the greater good (Khar, 2018). Jesus Christ, the most impressive example of an administrator leader, was the personification of flawless leadership. He took his Christian ideals and vision from God and communicated them to his disciples (Price, 2017). Administrator leaders must embody the values, vision, voice, and virtues promoted by Christ's teaching and practice them in all activities (Collins, 2001; Khar, 2018). Dr. Grace, research study indicated the link between corporate executives and administrative leaders in Christian universities is how the 4-V model of ethical leadership engages with theological concerns (Khar, 2018). These 4-V models illustrate aligning the inner principles, "beliefs and values and outward principles behaviors and actions" and both sides of ethical leadership (Khar, 2018).

#### **Values**

Value is one of the most important aspects of theology, where change is a central notion in Christianity (Crossan et al., 2013). A person who lives a morally reprehensible life is like a

flower blooming without color or scent (Crossan et al., 2013). Values characterize individuals, their existence, interactions, and life accomplishments (Gott & Craft, 2020). Everyone lives according to a set of ideas and characteristics, such as personality, goals, humanity, and expectations, which are all critical (Crossan et al., 2013). Like everything else in life, value can be taught in actuality (Crossan et al., 2013).

Khar (2018), advocated people tend to take this leadership model lightly, mistakenly thinking that changing their ideas and values is difficult or engraved in their DNA from birth (p. 112). On the contrary, Crossan says one's value is the principle of sin forgiveness. When individuals acknowledge their sins, they are given a second chance at eternal life by accepting Jesus Christ's teachings (Crossan et al., 2013). A persistent liar may modify their behavior and core beliefs to the point where lying no longer defines their character; they transition from liars to honesty (Crossan et al., 2013).

The Apostle Paul teaches, "to put off your old former way of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness." (Ephesians 4: 22-24, King James Version). So likewise, Jesus Christ taught that individuals may change and that if they do, they can transform fully, leaving their past behind and becoming new people (Gott & Craft, 2020).

## **Vision**

Everyone has goals and ambitions they aspire to achieve in the future (Price, 2017). Leaders in all roles must have a vision since they are responsible for the growth and development of their companies and the individuals who work for them (Price, 2017, p. 688). Christian institution also function in the same way. Administrator leaders are the ones who create this future vision (p. 689). A fundamental aspect of spirituality that is taught in Christian theology



education, according to Price, is vision (Price, 2017). Price argues that this concept is often used in this context to understand and interpret the world and make correct judgments based on God's will and the desire to do what is right personally and in the community (Price, 2017). Since companies need their leaders to have a vision and believe in it (Thomas, 2018). Administrator leaders must establish the right environment and take the necessary steps to promote this development (p. 687). Appropriate planning and mechanisms ensure an organization's development and expansion (Price, 2017).

### **Voice**

What good is a leader who doesn't voice or speak up? An ethical leader must have a clear vision of their objective and how to achieve it, as well as the courage to express those thoughts, points of view, and vision (Kouzes and Posner, 2017). For something to exist, a person must first express it to God, who then grants or refuses their request (White et al., 2017). Philippians 4:6-7 states, "do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus" (English Standard Version).

### **Virtue**

True character is defined by what a person does alone and unobserved by others (Onyalla, 2018). Administrative leaders should try to do what is suitable rather than anticipated, acceptable, or popular (p.12). They should consider how their activities align with their values, vision, voice, and virtues (Khar, 2018). The teaching of Jesus Christ urges Christian leadership to combine virtue, wisdom, and love to become healthy persons with steadfastness and holiness that will bring them closer to Christ and eventually to God (White et al., 2017). No one can obtain the gift of everlasting life, according to Onyalla, without virtue (Onyalla, 2018). Philippians 4:8,

Paul tells the Philippians to “whatever things are true, whatever things *are* noble, whatever things *are* just, whatever things *are* pure, whatever things *are* lovely, whatever things *are* of good report, if *there is* any virtue and if *there is* anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things” (English Standard Version).

### **The Rationale for the Study**

Due to a perceived lack of ethical awareness and consciousness seen in Christian leadership among educators at universities and seminaries (Makie, 2017; Brundrett, Burton & Smith). The rationale for this study was designed to examine the factors that influence administrators’/leaders’ adherence to their ethical leadership principles and decision-making. Ethical leadership must be ingrained in all facets of a company, especially in decision-making. Senge asserts leader ethical leadership often struggles to balance organizational advantages when making decisions (Senge, 2006).

Researchers and academics have been intrigued by the role of ethics in leadership decision-making, dating to the “medieval Greeks and Romans” (Resick et al., 2006). Despite their differences, many have agreed on the fundamental characteristics of ethical leadership traits and the need to cultivate a common purpose (Resick et al. 2006). Administrators inspire ideas, open communication, and vision; their example improves organizational culture (Freeman & Stewart, 2006). (Freeman & Stewart, 2006).

### **Gap in the Literature**

Since the beginning, Christian leadership has been crucial in uniting and organizing churches to tackle ethical concerns and challenges (Resick et al., 2006). A wide range of literature on ethics and leadership has shown that ethical principles and their application in administration are still areas of study that need exploration (Iannone, 2017). Researchers

Grissom and Loeb (2011) claim that “existing research does not tell readers enough about the skills administrators need to promote student success” (p. 1092). Senge’s study revealed, “empirical research gives only a few clear images of the everyday social and behavioral dynamics of effective school-based leadership” (Senge, 2006). Blase & Kirby assert that there is a lack of research on the everyday leadership skills of administrators, such as ethical leadership and decision-making (Blasé & Kirby, 2009).

The analysis of Iannone’s research questions the concept that if schools don’t fulfill the environment’s demands, how can students comprehend what helps leaders deal with moral dilemmas? Especially once the company’s top executives fail to understand their role in the organization (Iannone, 2017). Though it may be feasible to consider addressing those issues, the absence of scientific analysis makes answers impossible (‘Thinking about Ethics,’ nd). Other academics, like researchers Easley & Tulowitzki’s research findings, suggested that many researchers have failed to recognize the gap between thinking/knowledge and doing/action when researching ethical decision-making in ethical leadership (Easley & Tulowitzki, 2016).

The research of Aydin et al., studies may help define critical elements of a curriculum in ethics and enable students to think and act ethically (Aydin et al., 2013). Terry Price’s book “*Understanding ethical failures in leadership*” found several unsolved grey vacuum areas of ethical leadership and its need for further study to fill these gaps (Price, 2010). A-Malki & Juan research suggested an investigation into the inconsistencies and disparities found in current related literature on a leader’s impact on ethical leadership and organizational job performance (Al-Malki & Juan, 2018). Easley & Tulowitzki, specified a more sustainable, core educational institution must further analyze the gap between theory and practice concerning the critical

factors of administrative, ethical leadership principles, and decision-making (Easley & Tulowitzki, 2016).

### **Profile of the Current Study**

This literature review examined the implications of the theological and theoretical frameworks and related material that looked at the many characteristics of administrators' ethical leadership principles and decision-making. The scope of this literature review highlighted the need for more research on the factors that influence the ethical decisions made by leaders to unearth the existing literature gaps and fill those gaps by doing additional research. Chapter three, the "Methodology Design," the development of a qualitative study design provided a solid platform for future ethical leadership research.

## **CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

A qualitative phenomenological methodology was employed to comprehend the phenomena better of administrator ethical leadership principles and decision-making in Christian institutions. To obtain new views on things previously known from other angles and collect data that has been impossible quantitatively (Creswell, 2007; Van Manen, 2015). As a philosophy of understanding qualitative phenomenology research, this chapter discussed the research methodology design and the rationale for why it was chosen. It provided a detailed description of the setting, geographic location, and study research participants based on the sample drawn from the population.

The chapter also discussed the researcher's role as the "human instrument" in the study and ethical considerations regarding the participants' right to remain anonymous. The chapter explored the data collection methods and research instruments employed in the study and the IRB approval procedure. Along with a comprehensive explanation of how the data was organized and analyzed. As well as the trustworthiness criteria for evaluating qualitative research requirements to carry out this inquiry study, the chapter ended with a clear summary of the research methodology design.

### **Research Design Synopsis**

#### **The Problem**

Administrator leaders is an instrument that approves ethical rules and guidelines in front of them (Nas & Kreuer, 2018; Nass, 2019) and executes policies needed to carry out the organization's objective, vision, and expectations (Schirmacher, 2013), and they make a range of ethical decision-making daily (Vincent, 2011). Schirmacher's study discovered that many administrators do not lead according to the values of goodness, compassion, justice, and

obedience (Schirrmacher, 2013). Researcher Vorster (2017) noticed that administrators do not use the appropriate ethical decision-making lenses, placing them in the circumstances inconsistent with their Christian beliefs (Vorster, 2017). Vorster argues that some Christian administrators who hold these views do not grasp how ethical leadership and decision-making are linked (Vorster, 2017). He expresses that administrators' awareness increases "difficulties using codes of ethics while making an ethical choice in their positions" (Vorster, 2017).

Kessler & Gretzmar (2015) argue, "The reasons for poor ethical decisions are essentially the same as the reasons for poor results" (p. 5). A recent research study reveals eighteen percent of administrators are often faced with ethical problems, even though they have a strong basis in Christian leadership principles on which to build (Voster, 2017; Vincent, 2011). Selart & Johansen (2011) imply this stems from a lack of behavior in administrator leadership's struggle to apply ethics when making an ethical decision (p. 130). A Gallup survey showed that 72% of organizations are convinced their leaders can't take them to the next level.

Thirty-five percent (35%) expressed concern about their leader's ability to build trust, 61% were concerned about their staff's perceptions of openness, and 28% conveyed lack of transparency is a disadvantage. The emergence of poor ethical decision-making and the alleged problems and concerns of administrators' ethical leadership in Christian institutions, according to Corbin is due to a lack of Knowledge (Corbin,1990). Understanding guiding beliefs and trusting a leader when making ethical decisions may suggest a potential approach to promoting ethical leadership in decision-making (Cooper & Roper, 2009).

### **Purpose Statement**

This qualitative phenomenological study explored administrators' approach to ethical leadership principles and decision-making in their first five years of experience at Christian

universities and theology seminaries. At this stage, the administrator's ethical leadership and decision-making will be generally defined as a reflective process and a collaborative exercise based on two stated criteria, "right and wrong," and an expressed standard of principles such as belief, integrity, fairness, honesty, and trust while adhering to the code of ethics. The theory guiding this study, Kitchener's five-model ethical leadership paradigm, which served as the basis for this investigation, was relevant based on the four research questions. The desired objective of this research study finding has shown to be valuable for administrators' ethical leadership principles in improving and strengthening their decision-making and preventing unethical behavior in the organization.

### **Research Questions**

**RQ1.** How do administrators connect ethical decision-making to ethics, truthfulness, principles, integrity, and character?

**RQ2.** What factors influence the administrator's ethical decision-making and leadership performance principles?

**RQ3.** What consideration, if any, prohibits the administrator from employing proper ethical decision-making?

**RQ4.** What distinction, if any, between the administrator's ethical leadership performance and decision-making?

### **Research Design and Methodology**

The study used a qualitative phenomenological methodology to explore the factors influencing administrators' ethical leadership principles and decision-making experienced at Christian colleges and theology seminaries. Choosing this methodology approach was particularly suited for understanding the questions posed in the inquiry (Creswell, 2007) and shedding light on the "how and what" (Ulin et al., 2005) of a particular event or phenomenon (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Because quantitative research dissects and fragments a topic by breaking

it down into components (Gibson, Timlin, Curran & Wattis, 2004; Leedy & Ormond, 2016). Utilizing a qualitative research design has various benefits suited to this research inquiry (Gibson, et al., 2004).

Qualitative research is typically used to probe into the phenomena and intricacies of human experience (Van Manen, 2015; Creswell, 2014). Creswell, say qualitative research builds on themes as they arise, allowing the researcher to interpret the data's meaning (Creswell, 2014). An in-depth, all-encompassing examination, qualitative research gives the researcher the liberty to follow the stream of data as gathered and reorganize based on what has been learned, and it's less rigid and more versatile by design than quantitative (Stolorow, 2011; Van Manen, 2015). Creswell specifies in his book "*Research Design*" that the researcher can fully comprehend the phenomenon when the data has been collected and analyzed (Creswell, 2014).

Leedy & Ormrod, implied the interpretation of data requires the use of a wide variety of sources, including interview transcripts, a variety of records, field observation logs, historical papers, and notes, which are essential in helping the researcher understand the phenomenon as much as possible (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016). The survey questionnaires and in-depth semi-structured interviews with a sample of eight participants from various Christian institutions and seminaries in the study design were used to gather data, focusing on their ethical leadership principles and decision-making experiences.

The data gathering of participants' interview transcripts was evaluated to determine the study's validity and trustworthiness and to help address the issues and answer queries concerning the participant's ethical leadership decision-making. As the researcher gained insight through gathering data, she examined participants' ideologies, identified emerging themes, and developed personal and theoretical interpretations. The significance of data was used to



determine the influence factors of the participant's ethical leadership experience, identify comparable data, and "concentrate on offering an effective method for making meaning out of the lived experiences of administrators/leaders (Smith, 2005).

### **Setting**

The natural setting for this investigation was Christian universities and theology seminaries. Creswell highlighted the most significant element of qualitative research is the natural setting of the selected research method, "where participants encounter the topic issues under investigation" (Creswell, 2014, p. 185). The primary setting for the study was conducted in a safe and comfortable environment at a private location of the participants' preference utilizing Zoom audio recording to acquire the participants' perspectives. The researcher employs participants from various colleges and seminaries to assess whether participants experienced the core phenomena. These institutional settings were the most important suppliers of educational and social services and included the researcher research's critical facets.

Their mission statements are based on Biblical principles, and they work with other Christian institutions to spread the "Great Commission" by disseminating Christian scholarship. And they continue to make decisions that improve their performance while focusing on the administrator's leader, who has guided them to their present position (National Center for Education Statistics). As a result, their student achievement records exceed division and state standards in every performance assessment issue, and candidates graduated 150% faster than typical (for example, within six years for students seeking a 4-year bachelor's degree), and 66% of Christian graduates are career-ready (National Center for Education Statistics). The ethical viewpoint of these organizations' administrators' ethical leadership and decision-making experiences benefited my study enormously.

## Participants

The research identified study participants using purposive and random sampling (Creswell, 2007). Creswell highlighted purposive sampling as a method utilized by observational studies to attract subjects who can provide accurate knowledge about the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell, 2007). Using this research technique, choosing a population component to represent the population helped the researcher know the problem and the research questions (p. 185). When using a random sample, as implied by Creswell, the researcher can assume that the sample's characteristics are similar to those of the entire population (p. 172). Because the researcher needed to know the characteristics of the study population, employing random sampling was crucial, which gave each population member an equal opportunity to choose (p. 172).

The selection of eight participants with at least five years of ethical leadership experience reflected the range of the study research inquiry. Even though a selection of eight may not be adequate to generalize findings to the population, it may be sufficient to permit meaningful generalizations from events known as analytical generalizations (p. 158). The researcher generalized, findings regarding the larger population would negatively affect the researcher's ability to make causal deductions and conclusions (Creswell, 2009).

Participants were initially contacted through e-mail with a recruiting letter introducing the researcher, the study's subject, and an invitation to participate in the research study upon the approval of the IRB (Appendix) allowed the researcher to contact (Qureshi, 2018). An online survey questionnaire using survey monkey to collect demographic information from each participant to determine their eligibility and willingness to engage in the interview for the study, as well as a consent form that clarifies the research project and purpose via e-mail. Since no one

will be required to provide personal information other than evidence of their engagement and function within the institution, the participant's security and confidentiality were preserved using pseudonyms during the study (Suri, 2011).

### **Role of the Researcher**

Qualitative researchers set the stage to discuss issues in the data collected (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016, p. 97). Illustrated by Leady and Ormond, researchers need to understand the many obstacles and theoretical perspectives that will be influenced by their observations, assessments, and explanations (p. 115). In the context of the study, the researcher during the interview was a student of learner, and the participants were professional experts. The researcher asked only considerate and intelligent questions and maintained a neutral and impartial stance throughout the process. She was forthright, resisted the need to exert pressure, and treated each participant fairly and respectfully (Babbie, 2017). The researcher in no event conducted "backyard research," meaning that the researcher did not "involve studying his/her organization, friends, or immediate work setting" (Glense & Peshkin, 1992, p. 188).

Nor did the researcher have any direct or prior working relationship with the participants selected for the study (p. 188). As previously mentioned, the researcher obtains approval from the (IRB) to gain access to study the participants (Creswell, 2014). Participants were contacted via e-mail with a recruiting letter introducing the researcher, the study subject, an invitation to participate, and a consent form. She analyzes and evaluates data through numerous analytical phases and describes ways to document the acquired data's systematic integrity and accuracy (Creswell, 2014). The researcher provided insight and a theoretical framework to facilitate the ethical leadership role of administrators' decision-making in Christian institutions.

### **Ethical Considerations**

In qualitative research, ethical considerations are a set of principles that govern the designs and procedures of the study (Leedy & Ormond, 2016). Using human volunteers in this investigation was necessary to take ethical considerations of importance and concern (Creswell, 2007). Leedy & Ormond, study illustrated researchers working with human subjects must foresee and carefully consider any ethical considerations when gathering data from individuals and follow a code of ethical behavior (Leedy & Ormond, 2016). Creswell writes any research with human subjects must gain prior clearance from the IRB (Creswell, 2014). The researcher, as a result, did not conduct any interviews with participants without obtaining consent from Liberty University Institution Review Board (IRB).

Participants admitted into this study were given a written informed consent form that described the nature of the research and any potential risks involved (Leedy & Ormond, 2016). Documents were collected through surveys, questionnaires, and notes, stored in secured destinations (Creswell, 2009). Data gathered from the interviewees was classified using a fictitious name and code number to safeguard the participant's confidentiality, given the subject matter's delicate nature (Creswell, 2014). The researcher acted ethically to protect the participants, ensure the study's validity, and discourage or deter dishonesty (Creswell, 2014).

The researcher comprehends individual beliefs, attitudes, and theoretical orientations and relies on observations, evaluation assessments, and explanations (Leedy & Ormond, 2016, p. 115). The researcher measures to prevent any internet or online blunders or "glitches," Creswell asked that all computer information and folders, including visual/voice and audiotapes, be kept on a secured computer hard disk (Creswell, 2009). The researchers gave a comprehensive and

honest account of her findings without intentionally deceiving or leading others astray on the character of her conclusion (p. 115).

### **Data Collection Methods and Instruments**

Creswell, indicates no matter what strategy a researcher chooses to use to collect qualitative data, one thing is sure the procedure will produce a considerable amount of data (Creswell, 2007). Data collection, according to Creswell, establishes the parameters by defining the study's limits via sampling and recruiting, gathering data through semi-structured interviews, visual materials, observations, and documents, and developing the technique for recording data (Creswell, 2007). The process involves sequential phases and levels that go from specific to general, beginning with the most detailed and ending with the broadest to acquire data narrative efficacy and successfully comprehend the research inquiry (p. 189).

### **Collection Methods**

A survey questionnaire and a semi-structured interview were the primary tools used in the data collection method (Patton, 2002). Utilizing Patton's illustration as a guide, a survey screening questionnaire was used to determine whether participants met the requirements for participation in the study and collect demographic information (Patton, 2002). A semi-structured interview, the primary data collection method, was used to ask participants involved in the study questions and facilitate an open discussion (Creswell, 2014). The researchers, in turn, were able to learn more about the participant's history, create a more accurate representation of the subject, and conduct a more thorough analysis of the participant's data (Crow, Wiles, Heath & Charles, 2006). Creswell, identified qualitative data collection in four basic methods "observation, interview, document, and audio/visual recording (Creswell, 2014). Creswell writes these four

fundamental ways of data gathering contribute to the credibility of the findings and provide a comparison of the overarching themes derived from each approach (Kelly & Kaczynski, 2006).

### **Instruments and Protocols**

Researchers that use qualitative phenomenology obtain data in three ways: by analyzing documents, observing behavior, or interviewing individuals (Creswell, 2014, p. 182). Patton, illustrated research and experience are two of the most important tools employed in this type of data acquisition (Patton, 2002). The process of the study inquiry, a combination of a screening questionnaire and an interview protocol were employed. The survey screening questionnaires were used to collect demographic information from participants and determine if they pleased the eligibility requirements for participation in the study (Patton, 2002). The researchers' interview protocol use of "observation, document, audio recording, and digital resources" greatly enhanced the data quality of the study participants (Creswell, 2014).

Morse, stated his methodology enables the researcher to capture details and subtleties of the interviewing process that other methods may miss (Korstjens & Morse, 2018). Mouton, asserts this strategy allowed the researcher to gather enough descriptive data to strongly verify the issue of the inquiry (Mouton, 2001). To ensure participant confidentiality, the researcher employed pseudonyms instead of actual identities (Sieber, 1992; Crow et al., 2006). Throughout the investigation, the researcher was the most crucial instrument in the data collection method; she alone would compile all the data (Creswell, 2014). There were no outside instruments employed, and the study did not depend on any (Creswell, 2009). Utilizing this method is necessary to ensure the project succeeds (Robertson, 2008).

#### ***Survey questionnaire***

Eight participants from Christian institutions and theology seminaries participated in this research study. A questionnaire through online software was used to examine demographic information and whether the participants satisfied the study's parameters. "An online questionnaire proved substantially more cost-effective than a postal questionnaire, especially when the required sample size is vast" (Kraut, Olson, Banji, Bruckman, Cohen & Couper, 2004, p. 152). Leedy and Ormond, study indicated various researchers have acquired descriptive data directly on the internet in recent years.

Sue & Ritter (2007), study found a significant surge in the number of web technologies that accommodate online questionnaire surveys (p. 149). Various researchers have investigated a variety of methods, including posting a survey questionnaire on a website and requesting replies from visitors to that page (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016). Creswell, stated software such as SurveyMonkey enables researchers to publish surveys on websites and send e-mails to participants using customized templates, which has helped researchers in this regard (p. 149).

Based on Sue & Ritter's perspective, SurveyMonkey generates results and provides the researcher with descriptive data and visual information (Sue & Ritter, 2007). Participants interested in the study were sent an online questionnaire of twelve questions administered via Survey Monkey (Creswell, 2016). The participant's responses to the questionnaire provided clarity and a framework for the participant's demographic data collection for framing and facilitating the interview process and contributed to a more in-depth exploration of the study issues (Ponelis, 2015).

### ***Interviews***

To deliver answers to the research questions to the researcher's satisfaction and to offer credibility to the study's findings (Yin, 2018). Semi-structured interviews were an effective

strategy for collecting data to assess participants' lived experiences (Yin, 2018) and help the interviewer advance the plan (Balch & Mertens, 1999). Bernard, suggested an in-depth semi-structured interview is the most popular qualitative analysis approach (Bernard, 2006). During the research, participants were invited to communicate about their experiences in leadership roles and how those roles informed their ethical decisions. Participants' interviews took place in a safe and comfortable environment, making it easier for interviewees to open up about their experiences (Creswell, 2014).

Study participants were provided with the level of ease necessary for them to complete the interview (Kelly & Kaczynski, 2006). The recorded interviews were evaluated for information to help improve the researcher's investigation's quality in the data collection (Patton, 2002; Dey, 1993). During this process, the researcher adheres to a predetermined sequence of fifteen prepared questions while allowing for some freedom within the interview framework (Patton, 2002). Observational data obtained via audio recorders allow the researcher to acquire immensely detailed (Kraut et al., 2004). The information was rapidly encrypted and coded to maintain anonymity and secure storage (Creswell, 2014).

### **Procedures**

A phenomenological technique was used in this qualitative research study to collect data regarding the lived experience of administrators/leaders' ethical leadership and decision-making (Creswell, 2014). Once the researcher obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Liberty University (Appendix A) to perform the human subjects' study, the procedure for the data collection method began. Participants accepted into the study were identified as having at least five years of administrator/leader experience and willing to participate in an audio-recorded interview (Creswell, 2014). The participant's first approach was via e-mail, a



recruiting letter (Appendix B), survey questionnaires (Appendix D), and informed consent describing the nature and criteria for participating in the study (Appendix C).

The screening questions in the survey questionnaire featured multiple-choice responses, ranging from demographics to questions concerning ethical leadership experiences—these questions aimed to assess whether or not a participant was qualified to participate in the study. The purpose of the informed consent form is to protect study participants' safety and mitigate any risks associated with their participation in the study per the guidelines established by the IRB (Leedy & Armod, 2018; Creswell, 2014).

Fifty administrators/leaders were sought out to participate in the research, conducting the study with eight willing participants was only possible. Each participant received an e-mail with fifteen questions to be answered throughout the interview. The question had been formulated in advance so that participants would have plenty of time to consider it and prepare their responses. Bernard (2006), say in-depth semi-structured interviews are a standard method for doing qualitative research.

Using semi-structured interviews makes the interviewer seem competent and on top of things (Balch & Mertens, 1999) while letting the participant express themselves freely (Creswell, 2007). After receiving the interview questions, participants were contacted within five days to organize an interview. During the open-ended interview, the questions designed for the data collection served as a map promoting open dialogue. With the participant's consent, a Zoom audio conference was used to record the interviews from the participants' chosen private locations. This was done to exclude any risk of the researcher being biased in their findings. The questions asked during the interview took between 45 and 60 minutes to complete. Following the conclusion of each interview, the tape was subsequently listened to and transcribed. Multiple

checks were performed to ensure that the transcripts used to collect the data were accurate. This was done to identify and eliminate glaring errors and maintain the theme clusters that help avoid drift (Creswell, 2014).

### **Data Analysis**

To extract meaning from human experience, one must first collect and analyze a substantial quantity of data (Lincoln & Cuba, 1985). Qualitative research is unlikely quantitative research because the investigator gathers data, analyzes it, and then prepares the report (Creswell, 2014, p. 195). Creswell, emphasized the overall qualitative goal is to make meaning of text and picture data, which entails segmenting and dissecting the data “much like peeling back the layers of an onion” and reassembling it (p. 195).

The information gathered comprises words and observations representing the “ideas, perceptions, feelings, and interpretations of people” who have personal experience with the phenomenon being studied (Lincoln & Cuba, 1985). The collected data were contrasted, analyzed, and thematically appraised (Collins & Kusch, 1995). In contrast to quantitative research, qualitative research is considered an essential research tool (Patton, 2015; Hennink, Hutter & Bailery, 2011; Roberts, 2010).

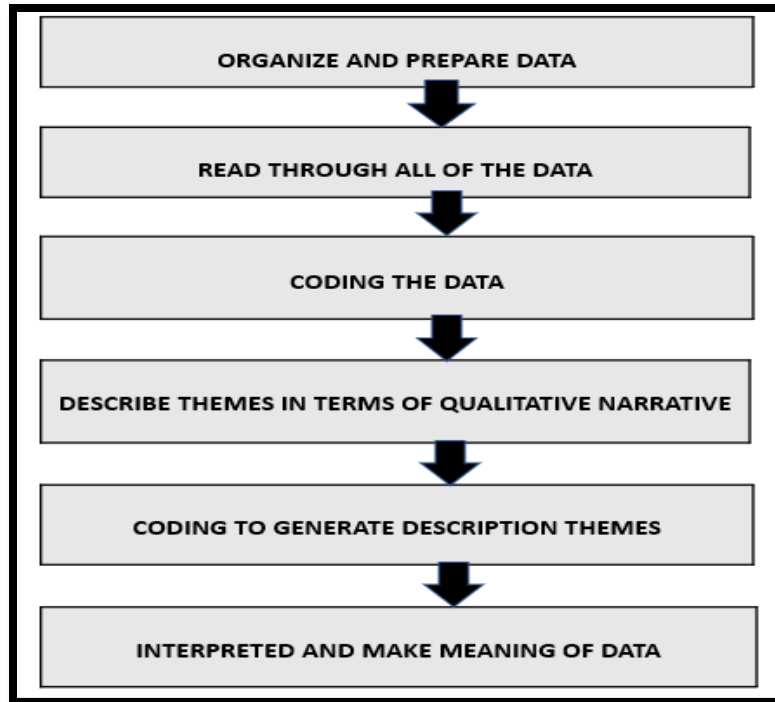
The effectiveness of phenomenological research depends on having accurate and relevant data, which can only be obtained via extensive studies, such as open-ended questions that allow respondents to express their feelings, opinions, and views (Creswell, 1998). Lincoln & Cuba, warned to derive meaning from human experience, a vast amount of data must be gathered (Lincoln & Cuba, 1985).

## **Analysis Methods**

The qualitative data analysis method involves a set of generalized approaches that require various degrees of investigation and analysis (Creswell, 1998). Interview notes, discussion transcripts, personal texts, audio recordings, field notes, visual observation, and participant letters are the data analysis instruments employed in this qualitative phenomenological research approach (p. 186). Using a step-by-step process guide is the most effective strategy for ensuring that the data analysis and interpretation process is completed efficiently (Creswell, 2017). In this manner, they are easily summarized and prepared instead of the bulky unstructured format generated following the collection method (Collins & Kusch, 1995). As seen in the figure below, it takes a great deal of in-depth investigation on various levels to give qualitative analysis data some significance ranging from more specific to broader categories (Creswell & Creswell, 2014).

### **Figure 2**

*Qualitative Data Analysis and Interpretation Process*



Creswell's study design above offers guidelines and standards that may be used in qualitative research at each of the following detailed stages:

Step 1: Organize and prepare data, the researcher listens to the audio recording, reads/rereads the texts, and examines the audio recording to practice data analysis (Clarke, Braun, & Hayfield, 2015).

Step 2: This preliminary step gives the researcher a sense of what is being proposed and the topics they should focus on (Rabb & Casey, 1978). It “provides a broad comprehension of information and an opportunity to consider its overall significance” (p. 189).

Step three: Coding the data. In this approach, the researcher develops a system of codes to organize her discoveries, which she then uses to drill down into more particular themes that enhance the significance of the text into categories and then assign terms to the categories (p. 189). The researcher arranges the data by bracketing parts of it and coming up with a phrase representing each sort of margin (Rossman & Rallis, 2012).

Step four: Coding process. The coding process describes the individuals, places, or categories/themes used in the analysis (Creswell, 2014). The researcher develops a description and themes to describe the environment, individuals and groups, or patterns (p. 189). Then, if necessary, the researcher creates new codes to apply to reoccurring topics as they go through the data (p. 189).

Step five: Represented. At this step, the researcher discussed the analytical findings, the description of the qualitative narrative, and the subject development for the research (Creswell, 2014). At this stage, the researcher is tasked with formulating the qualitative narrative's themes and descriptions (Creswell, 2014). In essence, the researcher may choose to present the findings of an investigation via a narrative section Creswell (Cresswell, 2014).

Step Six: The last and most crucial stage is the interpretation of the data finding, results, and conclusion. At this phase, the researcher is asked to reflect on the lessons learned. The researcher in this section provides the study results and the information obtained from the research based on reviews, personal experiences or observations, historical background, or literature (Creswell, 2014).

All these stages are essential to assess and comprehend the findings of the research investigation effectively and to provide answers to the concerns raised by the research (Creswell (2014). If carried out appropriately, the procedures may be used to evaluate the robustness of the existing theory of ethical leadership principles and decision-making in Christian universities and seminaries (Creswell (2014). This method could be used to back up established theories, find holes or gaps in the existing literature, provide a fresh perspective, or even broaden the present understanding (Creswell (2014). Administrator leaders participating in unethical ethical leadership and decision-making may benefit from Creswell's six-step recommendation. There's a

chance this may lead to a sea shift in how the field generally operates toward more openness (Creswell, 2014).

### **Trustworthiness**

Lincoln & Guba described trustworthiness as the value placed on the credibility of the researcher's finding and the data accuracy they give to the study collected from participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), which may be intertwined with biblical truth value. Christian researchers must follow God's character of trustworthiness in their research, as demonstrated in the book of Numbers 23:19. If there is no trustworthiness in the research, its findings will be of little value, and research is seen as worthless (Maxwell, 1996). When a reader believes that a researcher's data is reliable and has drawn the correct conclusions, a connection of trust is formed between the two parties (Creswell, 2014). The study's results and conclusions must exhibit "credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### **Credibility**

Credibility is the first criterion established in qualitative research and is seen as the essential criterion for establishing trustworthiness and confidence in data (Yin, 2018; Patton, 2015). Credibility, as determined by the standards established by the academic community, "accepted designs and techniques, persuasive findings, and plausible interpretations" constitute high-quality research (Leedy & Ormrod, p. 413). Interviews, surveys, and observation corroborated the informants' statements producing a "triangulation technique" (Miles, Gilbert, 2005). Triangulation, according to Leedy and Ormrod (2016), is the "collection and comparison of many types of data to identify patterns or discrepancies among them" (p. 421).

The researcher gathered audio recordings, handwritten documents, and participants' assurance that no manipulation happened to prove the data's credibility. The researcher

structured notes in separate folders and any links to participants' audio recordings, and the researcher did not exclude any data on the participant's phenomena. Within the framework of this qualitative research design, the researcher analyzes the scientific procedures she uses in data collecting and analytical Credibility (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

### **Dependability**

Dependability is vital to trustworthiness since it is reliable throughout the analysis report results (Babbie, 2017) and seeks to avoid making sweeping statements about the population (DeVault, 2019). Babbie argues that creating an audit trail is crucial in making the research methodologies more widely applicable. Auditing the data, as described by Babbie, is a technique used on occasion during assessment; it comprises an independent review of the research's methodology to guarantee that findings are dependability and replicated (Babbie, 2017). Importantly, this is necessary to ensure that nothing is lost in the analysis sample or that the researcher's final analysis is neither sloppy nor deceitful (Babbie, 2017). The breadth of the data ensures the study's findings may be extended using similar techniques to the ones used by the original researchers (Babbie, 2017). The researcher provided a clear and detailed procedure for replicating her findings within the study's framework (Babbie, 2017).

### **Confirmability**

Confirmability is the last factor when determining whether anything can be trusted (Krostjen and Morser, 2018). It ensures that the participants significantly influence the findings more than the qualitative researcher carrying out the study (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Since qualitative researchers are required to present their findings and illustrate their results before the findings of a research study can be considered trustworthy (Krostjen and Morser, 2018). The

researcher understands that the outcome is based on the participants' experiences, statements, and responses rather than the researcher's views (Silverman, 2014).

In each instance, the researcher used beneficial approaches to guarantee confirmability, such as the researcher's "own observations and triangulation of the data (Abdalla, Oliveira, Azevedo & Gonzalez, 2018). Since phenomenology allows the researcher's presuppositions, the results reflect the researcher's/perspectives, interviewer's background, and participants' mindsets (Creswell, 2014). In each case, the researcher took precautions to ensure that the findings were credible and relevant in communicating meaning (Silverman, 2014).

### **Transferability**

Korstjens and Moser (2018) describe transferability as the "extent to which the finding of a qualitative research can be transferred with other settings or respondents" (p. 121). Lichtman (2014) defines transferability as the ability of discoveries to be applied to a larger population (Lichtman, 2014). Transferability illustrates that the findings are helpful and may be applied to a broader group of people; an easy-to-understand presentation of content analysis ideas is provided (Lichtman, 2014). Transferability explains to readers how the results of a research study may be applied to other locations, circumstances, times, and people other than those in the study (Creswell, 2009).

Lincoln and Guba write that individuals seeking to "transfer" the outcome to a new context is accountable for determining whether or not the transferability is reasonable (Lincoln and Guba, 1998). The researcher must demonstrate that the results may be helpful, even though they cannot guarantee that the findings will be beneficial (Lincoln and Guba, 1998). The researcher took the necessary precautions to ensure that readers were provided with all the pertinent data on the letters so they could easily transition on their initiative (Litchman, 2014).



The researcher offers a framework that makes repeating data analyses more manageable, guaranteeing that the findings and conclusions are transferable to new settings in other contexts (Litchman, 2014).

### **Chapter Summary**

The study's methodology summary provided a comprehensive explanation of the research design. The instrument procedures, data collection techniques, and analyses used to answer the research question and provide light on the issue. The IRB procedures and the actions taken to establish whether or not the methods utilized by this researcher's conclusion can be trustworthy and to establish whether or not this researcher's procedures were sufficient to definitively ascertain the findings of the inquiry that was carried out in detail. This qualitative phenomenological research provided future educational leaders in Christian institutions and researchers the opportunity to repeat the study and improve techniques and strategies in ethical leadership decision-making (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The findings, together with an analysis of the data, are reported in the next chapter four.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Overview

A qualitative phenomenology methodology was used to analyze how administrators approached ethical leadership principles and decision-making experience with at least five years in their position at Christian colleges and seminaries. This chapter's underlining objective discusses the results obtained from the interview transcripts of participants' experiences and data analysis of the emerging themes. The chapter is organized and divided into four sections: "the protocol and measures for data collection, demographic and sample data collection, data analysis and findings conclusion, and evaluation of the research design" that fully describe the process by which this researcher conducted her study and to enlighten and better educate the reader.

### Compilation Protocol and Measures

The protocol approach consisted of a survey questionnaire and a semi-structured interview strategy utilizing fifteen open-ended questions to help the researcher collect data for analysis. The approval of the IRB (Institution Review Board) to contact the participants to proceed with the investigation (Appendix A). Allowed the researcher to draw participants from various Christian institutions; those who fit the study's requirements were invited through email to participate. The meticulously documented interactive discussion, written assignments with participant comments, and hours of audio recording to capture participant responses identify three headlined recurring themes and sub-themes in the data.

The emerging themes and sub-themes were analyzed in light of Van Manen's "existential" lifeworld framework (Van Manen, 2015). The observation of the data analysis demonstrated that administrators who occupy leadership positions in Christian-affiliated universities had similar strategies and personal experiences when seeking leadership roles and

common tactics for achieving such positions. The data analysis comprehensively addressed the four research questions that created the study's design that reflects the phenomenon of administration/leaders experienced in ethical decision-making and leadership principles.

### **Demographic and Sample Data**

Fifty administrator leaders working at Christian universities and seminaries with experience in ethical leadership decision-making were the desired targeted population. Twenty-seven participants declined to participate in the research, fifteen did not respond to the invitation, and eight accepted the invitation to participate in the study. This research comprised seven women and one male, seven serving as administrator leaders and one as principal at various Christian institutions and seminaries. Recruiting administrator leaders who volunteered to participate in the study, unfortunately, after completing the online survey questionnaires and signing a consent form, was fraught with challenges and roadblocks.

Participants' anonymity was ensured by random selection in a manner that was plausible to generate pseudonyms names. The responses from the participants were coded as P1–P8 so that the results could be presented publicly without compromising participants' privacy. The data was derived from participants demographics (Table 1) of twelve brief survey screening questions utilizing Survey Monkey questionnaires.

**Table 1**

#### ***Participant Demographics Biographical Sketch***

<b>Name</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Years of Administrator Leadership Experience</b>	<b>Highest Degree</b>	<b>Position</b>
P1	Female	25-65	5 years	Master	Administrator
P2	Female	25-65	12 years	Doctoral	Administrator
P3	Male	25-65	20 years	Master	Principle
P4	Female	25-65	15 years	Doctoral	Administrator
P5	Female	25-65	8 years	Master	Administrator

P6	Female	25-65	25 years	Doctoral	Administrator
P7	Female	25-65	10 years	Doctoral	Administrator
P8	Female	25-65	7 years	Doctoral	Administrator

### **Data Analysis and Finding**

The survey questionnaire and fifteen in-depth semi-structured interviews with eight participants at Christian universities and theology seminaries formed the foundation for the data findings and later data analysis. The method used to generate the study findings was based on examining data collected via semi-structured interviews, observation, interactive discussion, writing exercises, comments, and audio recordings of the participants' replies. After extensive readings of the data and in-depth analysis and coding of significant statements made by the participants using online MAXQDA software, three prominent themes were obtained from the research data. The wealth of information provided made it feasible to comprehend better the phenomena being studied and provided the theoretical framework for the inquiry of the study's objective research questions and the identified emerging themes.

### **Ethics and Standards for Decision Making**

This theme comprehensively responded to the study's first research question: "How do administrators connect ethical decision-making to ethics, truthfulness, principles, integrity, and character?" The ethical principles were examined in connection with ethical decision-making.

### **Administrative Roles Experiences**

The theme, in answering research question 2, "What factors influence the administrator's ethical decision-making and leadership performance principles?" explored various factors that aids ethical decision-making and its impact on leadership performance.

### **Advancing Ethics and Ethical Decision Making**

The theme explores how training is conducted to impart ethical education to administrators and the various steps taken by the administrators to improve their ethical decision-making process. Research questions three and four were answered under this theme. Further detailed are discussions on each themes:

### **Theme 1. Ethics and Standards for Decision-making**

Some critical ethical leadership values are considered to be connected to how administrator leader make ethical decisions. This theme provided a comprehensive response to this study's first research question. Ethics in trust, honesty, respect, integrity, fairness, equality, repentance and humility, excellent listening/good communication, and discipline were explored. The data analysis indicated these basic ethical leadership principles are related to the impact of an administrator's ethical decision-making value. Four of the eight participants deemed trust a vital characteristic crucial to administrators making ethical decisions. Participants described honesty as a vital principle in ethical decision-making regarding ethical leadership performance. Participants all identified integrity as one of the ethical leadership principles for ethical decision-making.

### **Theme 2: Administrative role Experience**

This theme explored various factors that aid ethical decision-making and their impact on leadership performance. The questions and interviews for this section were designed to acquire comprehensive details from the participants on the factors influencing administrator leaders ethical decision-making and leadership performance principles. Specific insight into the various aspects of the theme was further divided into seven sections of discussion, which are (i) Administrator roles, (ii) Difficult choices and challenges in administrator roles, (iii) who to

consult, (iv) ethical decision made (v) unethical conducts (vi) contributing factors (vii) impact of ethical decision making on leadership.

### ***Administrator Roles.***

Participants indicated that administrator leaders could use their leadership position to influence and support their team members while ensuring an effective work environment. Administrator leaders should train and mentor team members and ensure that ethics are followed. P4 and P5 convey that a leader should include team members' input while making an ethical decision. P 6 echoed the need for leaders to "Lead by example, be a positive influence on all of the people you work with, not just in your particular organization or department, but any people you are connected to."

### ***Difficult choices and challenges in administrator roles.***

While speaking on their challenges in the administrator's role regarding making a difficult ethical decision, the most difficult decision identified by participants is firing a staff member. The tendency to make unbiased decisions and leverage equality is also a challenge for the administrator roles.

### ***Who to consult.***

Sometimes administrator leaders could be faced with the challenge of making the right ethical decision and executing the proper judgment in certain situations. When it comes to that juncture, participants say they pray to God for guidance and consult other co-leaders or specialists to make the right decision. In both ways, the correct answers are believed to come either from God or from God dispensing His wisdom through other leaders and specialists.

### ***Ethical decision made.***

Participants say that the making of ethical decisions by administrators are to be guided by a well-defined, clear value, especially when choosing new leadership. And decisions are to be made on the set values while ensuring a peaceful environment for team members and resolving issues amicably.

#### *Unethical conduct.*

Despite the laydown values and norms in the organization, participants stated that some staff members break the rules and regulations and demonstrate prejudice by playing favorites and notwithstanding the organizations' lay down values and norms.

#### *Contributing Factors*

The factors influence administrator leaders' ethical decision-making and leadership performance principles. When asked, participants stated that the organization's policies define the guidelines and ethical values. P2 stated that assessing the past behavior of the staff is a factor that influences ethical decision-making. Most participants indicated that verdicts are significant while ensuring that over-punishment is avoided. Participants also stated that the knowledge required to make ethical decisions that influence their leadership performance principles are values and morals.

#### *Impact of ethical decision-making on leadership.*

The finding of this theme indicated the vital contribution of ethical decision-making is that it makes the administrators lead effectively and enables them to educate their team members. In this reference, P8 said, "I try to use the wisdom of God and stand for what is right. And look for strengths and weaknesses to improve". P 6 said, "I try to follow the principles of the Bible and live my life as a believer in Jesus Christ, and I try to walk in truth because I know God can defend me if I'm walking in the truth."

### **Theme 3: Advancing ethics and ethical decision-making.**

This last theme explores how training is conducted to impart ethical education to administrators and the various steps they take to improve their ethical decision-making process. Under this theme, research questions three and four provided answers from the data in this section. Research question three was answered under the first sub-section (i) improving ethical education through training. While research question four; was answered under sub-section (ii).

#### ***Improving ethical education through training.***

Participants stated that both physical trainings initiated by the organization and online training is done to improve staff's ethical education. Since the legacy is set for proper ethical education, there's no consideration that administrators are prohibited from employing proper ethical decision-making. The administrative leaders must be guided by ethical values and ensure decisions are made concerning the staff based on the proper ethical values.

#### ***Steps to improve ethical decision making.***

Improving their ethical decision-making, participants stated that they reflect on their past choices and the implications of learning from their past experiences. "Two good heads are better than one,"; they say. Another step elaborated by the participants is setting up a committee for decision-making. The participants stated that personal growth in core values and better communication are vital to ensuring improvement in ethical decision-making while not neglecting staff training on ethical values. This implies that leaders' personal growth and ethical leadership improvement is reflected in their ethical decision-making. Hence, there is no distinction between the administrator leaders' ethical leadership performance for decision-making.

### **Research Question Responses**



The emerging themes and sub-themes as a consequence of data analysis, evaluation, and reflective interpretations provided by the collective data sets are the responses to the research questions that guided the study and semi-structured interview questions:

**Research Question 1 (RQ1):**

How do administrators connect ethical decision-making to ethics, truthfulness, principles, integrity, and character? Ethics is an organization's governing set of codes and guideline principles. If there are no ethics to follow in an organization, there can't be a well-defined set of rules and regulations to make ethical decisions. This query was designed to elicit more in-depth responses from participants to the study's interview research questions and to investigate how administration draws links between ethics, honesty, values, integrity, and character while making ethical decisions.

***Interview Research Question (IRQ).*** What ethical leadership principles do you believe are necessary for the administrator/leader's decision-making effectiveness in an organization? The examination of the data included in this question shed insight into whether administrator leaders consider ethical leadership standards essential for formulating sound decisions inside their organizations. Each participant stated that leadership principles include ethics, truthfulness, integrity, character, trust, honesty, respect, fairness, equality, and good listening/ communication. P4 stated that the only proper process to make ethical decisions is to follow accredited principles as administrators and acknowledge organizational principles. P5 and P6 noted that administering justice and making the right ethical decisions have their bedrock in truthfulness. Four of the participants considered trustfulness essential to ethical decisions. P1 in particular expressed:

You must be honest and open with yourself and the organization so that when you make hard decisions, you're also fair. You want to have some type of integrity about yourself and be willing to trust others, listen to them, and ask their opinion, but not only ask their opinion, value their opinions, but listen with the intent of learning more, or even maybe make changes with the things that the people may say they feel may be needed, are required from you at that time. So overall, in leadership, you want to make a difference within the school organization.

Each of the participants understood that ethics is fundamental to their ethical decisions in leadership. They all agreed that ethical leadership should be used as the foundation for decision-making to maximize the effectiveness of administrators working inside an organization.

***Interview Research Question (IRQ):*** What leadership standards are essential in determining an administrator's honesty, fairness, and trustworthiness in the workplace? In response to this question, participants talked about how administrators may improve their capacity to make ethical decisions by learning new skills and strategies and developing trustworthiness. Two participants had similar responses, P1 stated that being honest is not pretending to be something you are not, and P5 stated that being honest is not making false claims or claiming to be someone you're not.

Importantly, leaders should treat others the same way they would want to be treated. Each participant stated that "you can trust and rely on things being as they seem," which states that trustworthiness is synonymous with honesty. P 6 said that being fair as an administrative leader is essential since it enables you to learn much about your workers and students and their talents and capabilities. P8 stated as a leader, you should strive to offer others the type of treatment that you would appreciate getting yourself. P2 expressed:

Because I've always wanted to treat people how I would want to be treated or try to put myself in their shoes in understanding that I still represent the company, then at the end of the day, I have to be able to live with myself and represent myself and my beliefs. The ethics and things I've been taught are instilled in me and how I'm represented. So, that's a big part for me.

P6 stated:

Operating in honesty, trustworthiness, and fairness, the Bible says God is no respected person. So, if God is not a respected person, I don't want to be a respected person. Like yesterday I was ill and wasn't concerned about what my workers were doing because I walk with integrity. And they know if I step into the office, I can discern by the spirit, not just naturally. Still, spiritually, if the atmosphere of something different in my office happened and they're like, how you know, something went on yesterday, it's called holy spirit, babe. Amen. So, I tried to always walk with that trustworthiness in every ethical decision that I must make. I strive to lead by example. One of the things that Paul and Peter used to say is, to follow me as I follow Christ.

P1 specified:

Honesty, fairness, and trustworthiness are essential because you want your employees to be able to believe in you and trust you. And know that you're going to make the best decision for them and the best decision for the institution. And that's important because I want to be seen as a person of integrity, and I want my staff and even students to feel like they can come to me and have confidence and feel accessible to work with them.

P7 stated:

As an administrator, I know the significance of maintaining honesty, fairness, and trustworthiness reputations. These characteristics are essential to me, and I highly value these qualities. Without these, I cannot be a complete leader to my staff, students, or the institution. My employees must believe in me and trust that I will make the right choice for the organization because I want to be viewed as a person of integrity. I want people to have faith in me, and I want them to feel free to work at their best.

Among the participants, it was widely agreed that it is only fair for them to accept responsibility for any faults, cast the blame, pass judgment, or make reasons they may have made. Participants universally understood that administrators and leaders are the ones who are responsible for providing a framework for making ethical decisions.

**Interview Research Question (IRQ).** What do you view as your most important responsibility as an administrator/leader, and why? The question's objective was to collect data on what administrators see as their most crucial function as leaders and the rationale behind why they hold this position. Three of the eight participants stated that the most important responsibility of an administrator is providing instructional leadership while implementing district and school systems and policies while working with teachers to provide support and guidance in establishing best teaching practices.

P7 stated:

Working with teachers to provide support and guidance in establishing best teaching practices—and supporting their improvement of learning. This is most important because this is what I would lead the school. If the teachers are empowered, they are trained, geared, and encouraged to instill in their students.

P2 stated:

The most important responsibility is to address issues before they negatively influence the result and work with the teacher to provide assistance and direction and build the most effective teaching strategies to increase student learning.

P4 expressed:

Creating a type of environment where the people feel comfortable, more or less what you would call an open-door policy because always, you want to feel comfortable to talk to and open to making suggestions and providing feedback in the event.

P1 indicated:

I've always been more of a mentor, someone that would sit and not yell but sit and talk and try to understand the situation and how to address it appropriately. But at the same time, hold them accountable for their actions. That's an important responsibility for me, and having some compassion and understanding of the scenario or situation in its setting.

The participants agreed that it is beneficial to have colleagues and teammates who are supportive of one another and share the same perspective. P6 specified that "you wouldn't be in a leadership position if you didn't have people who supported you." P3, who gave a similar response, implies without a group of individuals who you want to steer in the right direction, "you wouldn't be in a leadership role.

***Summary of Research Question (SRQ1):***

Good characteristics demonstrated by administrators are integral to ethical decision-making. An essential aspect of ethical decision-making data showed that most participants agreed to develop a stronger bond with truthful leaders than a leader with a history of dishonesty is considered valid. Without truthfulness, none of the ethical decision-making processes would make

sense because the process would not be trustworthy and hence can't produce the required ethical value.

Participants overwhelmingly see integrity and honesty as being vital in ethical decision-making principles. The study examination of the data demonstrated the link between these essential principles and administrators' ethical decisions. The study's findings also illustrated that participants believe that Christian leaders in an organization are expected to uphold the truth of God's Word and ethical values without wavering.

**Table 2**

**RQ1: Emerging Themes and Categories**

Themes		Categories
Critical Ethical Leadership Principles		Trust, Honesty, Respect, Integrity, Fairness, or Equality. Repentant and humble, Good listener or Good Communication, Discipline
Importance of Ethical Leadership Principles		Win Trust Lead and Work Effectively
Standards and Values for Ethical Decision Making		Fairness, Respect, Integrity Caring Knowledge Trust Honesty Discipline

**Research Question Two (RQ2):**

What factors influence the administrator's ethical decision-making and leadership performance principles? This question was designed to understand better the participant's ethical leadership experience in decision-making in faith-based education institutions. As referenced in the data collected, participants commonly acknowledged leadership as a direction for their actions. The recurring themes indicated that they relied heavily on biblical principles and

personal and family values, which tended to enhance their determination to defend their moral beliefs in ethical leadership while making decisions.

*Interview Research Question (IRQ):* What ethical standards influence your leadership decision-making performance the most? The data gathered from this inquiry was to discover which of many possible ethical norms impacted the effectiveness of administrator leadership decision-making. Sometimes one's actions are compatible with the moral principles and ethical standards they hold. When asked, participants stated that the organization's policies are a critical factor that drives the administrator's ethical decision-making and leadership performance principles because that defines the guidelines and ethical values of the organization the administrators are to follow.

Three of eight participants indicated that values and morals are key factors that influence administrators' ethical decision-making and leadership performance principles. Each participant considers assessing past staff behavior a critical factor for decision-making. They all agreed the record of staff contributes to ethical decision-making and that good records potentially tend to bend decisions favorably. In contrast, bad records lead to a quick judgmental decision. Two participants replied to this question two-fold; P2 stated that some influence contributing factors that affect decision-making would be personal, organizational, and behavioral factors. P7 stated that factors would be values and morals depending on how much knowledge and skill necessary would affect their decision-making.

Having a set of standards and principles to guide ethical decision-making participants indicated is quite essential. The participants also asserted that the only proper process to make ethical decisions is to follow accredited principles as administrator leaders and acknowledge organizational principles.

P8 stated:

Ethical standards that influenced my leadership decision-making the most would be respected. I respect that it is a vital element of ethical responsibilities. As an administrator, respecting everyone equally is very important. This would create a welcoming work environment.

P6 noted that:

My decision is based on what I hold to be necessary for me not to stray away from the principles I value as a believer in Jesus Christ while still applying to ethics of codes. Integrity is the ethical standard that impacts my decisions as a leader. It is the most important component of ethical responsibilities in my decision-making as an administrator.

The critical influence factor identified by the participants is the knowledge required to make ethical decisions. The proper knowledge is required for administrators to make ethical decisions and uphold leadership performance principles. One can only perform and make decisions just as far as the knowledge he possesses. It is said that “*My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge*” (Hosea 4: 6).

***Interview Research Question (IRQ).*** What personal, educational, or historical factors contribute to your ethical leadership decision-making and performance? This question was posed to understand how participants’ experiences influenced the caliber of their current ethical leadership decision-making and performance. Participants stated that such values as integrity are connected to ethical decision-making because an administrator’s ability to stick to ethical values is equivalent to ethical decisions. Each participant communicated integrity is seen as steadfast



adherence to a strict ethical code. Without integrity, ethical values have no ground to stand on but will only fade away.

Participants stated that when integrity is absent, corruption replaces it, and you can't talk about ethical decisions when corruption is in place. The participants are keen that leading by example is the most effective way of leadership. Because people tend to be easily influenced by what they see rather than merely what they hear, all the participants see one character as an essential value that drives the vehicle to make ethical decisions. In particular, participants agreed good character by administrators is an integral part of ethical decision-making and for ethical decision-making to take solid ground, administrators must possess integrity.

P3 expressed:

You want to try to keep everything equal among your workers and the students, you know, being in a university, you come across all different types of people. Everyone is different in how they perceive things and express things. You want to be fair all the way around. And you want to have them listening ear to ear. The personal and educational factors that contributed to my ethical decision during the encounter are my ongoing training to improve our ethical leadership and confidentiality.

P5 expressed:

I will have to base it on the experience of twelve years; of course, throughout the years, you see many different things in different shapes and colors, and you see things that can pop up, and they will present themselves over and over. My training always contributes to my decision and, of course, my biblical principles. In my leadership role, I am required to do a certain number of hours when it comes to ethics; this is considered like a continual education that contributes to my leadership performance that is required to ensure that we

are still in the standards of the ethical guidelines and that we are leading people with the core values in the mind of the school system.

In summary, both in-person and online training programs contribute to the ethical development of employees. Evidence from data analysis demonstrated that administrators need the correct information to make ethical decisions and maintain high-performance standards in their leadership roles.

***Interview Research Question (IRQ):*** What are some contributing factors you consider while making an ethical decision? The experience and knowledge of the administrator participants is one subject that applies to this inquiry. This inquiry was designed to learn the contributing variables that the administrator considers while making ethical decisions. In response to this query, each administrator discussed how their earlier experiences in life and the profession had affected the factors they consider when applying ethics guidelines to a situation.

P2 stated ethical leadership and decision-making involve the culmination of various previous experiences. Two out of eight participants with similar experiences said that before making a choice, they try not to take sides and not to take things personally; instead, honestly and respectfully, they evaluate the reason and effect at the time.

P1 deemed that the most important thing is not to make rash decisions but to focus on the facts. Because it's crucial to have a good perspective, everyone deserves the same respect and attention. Most participants advocate exploring all options before choosing the best solution, which method will best address the issue, and exploring solutions.

Participants indicated that when making ethical decisions about staff, colleagues, or students, it's essential to be fair, not over-punish, and, most importantly, compare actions to outcomes to guarantee fairness. P2, P4, and P5 noted that this helps maintain ethical standards,

show justice, trust, respect, and aid problem-solving. P6 stated some of the factors of ethical decisions “I try to make sure I use the wisdom of God and stand for what is right. And look for strengths and weaknesses in ways to make improvements. For example, walking integrity, build character, make adjustments, and keep producing.” It should go without saying that self-discipline and fairness are fostered as crucial principles that should go hand in hand with ethical decision-making. It is a choice that can be relied upon to be trustworthy in terms of being honest, and it starts with integrity and ends with respect.

***Interview Research Question (IRQ).*** How does your ethical decision-making impact your leadership performance to lead others productively? This question was designed to investigate what influence administrators’ ethical decision-making. And their capacity to inspire and encourage followers to achieve objectives that benefit the company. Participants in this query agreed that their leadership performance is impacted by their ability to be open, transparent, honest, and have integrity. The data showed participants know that their employees are more productive when their organization is run on these principles.

P 1 said,

When it comes to leadership, you are constantly being watch, references an ancient proverb. I prioritize deeds more than words. I like to have a greater expectations of myself at all times. I would much rather live an honest, fair life that demonstrates my integrity and respect and a just and fair life.

P3 stated:

In my experience, in positions of authority, that gives me to influence and sway. Integrity, honesty, respect, and openness allow me to lead people effectively and productively in my leadership performance.

P5 and P8 noted transparency and openness help them lead others successfully. P1 and P6 mentioned that having integrity in their leadership enables them to educate their team and assist the company in achieving a definitive conclusion. P4 stated ensuring that there is no partiality and treating everyone in a just and equal manner is one of the primary responsibilities in leading others productively.

Leaders who demonstrated moral integrity, justice, respect, and honest appeared to inspire their followers to follow suit (Grimes & Bennett, 2017). If leaders do not demonstrate these qualities, their followers may lose faith in their capacity to lead the organization in the proper direction and make the appropriate ethical decision (Grimes & Bennett, 2017). In most circumstances, followers strongly committed to their ethical principles may consider it the best course of action (Grimes & Bennett, 2017).

***Summary of Research Question (SRQ2).*** Data analysis in the emergent themes reveals that leaders who are honest, have integrity, and treat people with respect are better able to inspire loyalty and hard work from those they're responsible for. The themes also indicate that leaders who inspire trust and confidence in their followers should implement these qualities of “honest, integrity, and respect.” Effective leadership requires these characteristics, traits, and qualities in ethical decision-making. People believe what they see, particularly in leaders; they constantly seek faults—human nature.

**Table 3**

**RQ2: *Emerging Themes and Categories***

Themes	Categories
Administrator Roles	Influence team members and Supporting team members. Enable Effective Work Environment. Following and ensuring guidelines are followed. Training and

	mentoring team members Providing leadership and taking responsibility Being team player
Difficult Choices and Challenges in Administrator Roles	Firing a Staff Member, Ensuring Decisions are not Biased. Ensuring Fairness and Equality
Ethical Decisions Made	Setting Leadership Standards Basing Decision on Values Resolving Problems and Enabling Peaceful Environment
Unethical Conducts	Breaking the rules, Bias
Contributing Factors	Company Policy Past Behaviours Ensuring just Decisions Values and Morals
Impact of Ethical Decision-Making on Leadership	Lead effectively  Educates the team

### **Research Question Three (RQ3):**

What consideration, if any, prohibits the administrator from employing proper ethical decision-making? Since the legacy is set for proper ethical education, there is no consideration that administrators are prohibited from employing proper ethical decision-making. This inquiry was to understand the factors that might prevent an administrator from acting ethically and appropriately and making the best ethical decision in a given circumstance. In response to this query, most participants agreed that to increase the staff's ethical education; the firm should launch in-person and online training programs to better educate employees on ethical issues.

***Interview Research Question (IRQ).*** What was the most difficult ethical choice you had to make as an administrator/leader, and do you feel your responses were fair? Administrator leaders, unfortunately, have a lot of obstacles when it comes to having to make tough decisions. The design of this research study query was to find the most challenging ethical decision an administrator ever had to make in their position of leadership authority and whether or not they

felt the action they took was justifiable and fair. When asked about the challenges they faced as administrator leaders in making a difficult decision, participants stated firing a staff member was indicated as the option that presented the most significant difficulty.

P6 mention when attempting to arrive at an ethical decision resolution is behaving reasonably and unbiasedly. Participants said it might be challenging to make a fair decision because of their propensity and inclination. P1 expressed her ethical decision did not come quickly or effortlessly. P5 indicated that due to an ongoing dilemma and several warnings, a particular employee had to be removed from their job and noted, "I'm so sure my decision was reasonable."

P6 expressed:

The hardest decision I had to make was when it came down to whether or not to relieve someone from their position; the ethical decision did not come naturally to me because this person was hardworking, dependable, always on time, and always there when needed. And then, unfortunately, it was a situation where that person was dishonest in unethical behavior that could have caused harm. And for me, I was just a little bit shocked by it and the behavior of the person because I knew that person had moral standards and high values and good ethics is what I thought, but it was shown to be something different. So, the reason why that was the hardest for me is that sometimes we, as leaders, get attached. Especially when that person was more of a trustworthy type of person you could always count on. And then when you find out otherwise, that can be a heartening situation, and yes, I feel it was an appropriate response in my decision."

P4 expressed:

The most difficult decision as a leader would be a write-up after an observation was made. Once the evaluation has been done, writing up all the information to make sure that I get it back to the individual. So, the most difficult ethical choice I had to make was being clear and transparent, but it wasn't always. That part wasn't easy because the things I had to be clear and transparent about weren't as positive as I would have liked. So just that was difficult in that particular position to be honest and upfront without stepping on, hurting, or offending anyone.

***Interview Research Question (IRQ).*** What are some examples of unethical conduct in the workplace? If any. It is vital, essential, and advantageous for administrators to make ethical decisions since doing so helps their leadership's effectiveness. This inquiry was designed to obtain data to gain a deeper understanding of the characteristics that characterize and define unethical behavior activity, which the administrator may be required to address or deal with, if any. The data clearly defined and articulated that administrators should create a peaceful environment and find peaceful solutions to problems. When prompted with this inquiry, participants responded that despite the principles and norms the organization has laid down, there are staff employees who breach the rules and regulations, and some of them pilfer. Some even display their partiality by playing favorites. Making ethical decisions may be profitable in prevalent situations.

P4 stated:

Disregarding established policies and procedures is an example of unethical conduct seen in the workplace. People have been known to do things like this, which leads to issues in the long run, such as breaking confidentiality agreements. One of my primary

responsibilities as an administrator is to foster a climate where people feel safe confiding in one another and to ensure no harm.

P6 stated:

I would say, at times, I've seen disrespect. And I feel if we all work in the same environment, we should all be treated equally. And I understand as far as ethics, as your education and degrees and different things get you different positions, but still the treatment of the respective level. I was raised to respect people. And it doesn't matter if you're younger or older than me. I give you that respect. Just mutual respect because, again, I'm leading by example. I always try to show those I lead that one day you might be in this position, and you must lead by example and give respect, and respect will be earned back to you.

***Interview Research Question (IRQ).*** What are some examples of ethical decisions you've made in your workplace? If any? The objective of the query was to determine whether the administrator was placed in a position; they were obliged to make decisions that included ethics in their career. P1 in this question stressed the need for ethical leadership in the workplace as a factor in decision-making. While at the same time, two others approached the topic from the standpoint of the professional growth of administrators. And two other participants stated one of the most important factors they consider when making an ethical decision in the workplace is character.

P2 stated:

I would have to suggest choosing a leader for the team. For example, when deciding who will be the team lead for each grade level, it's vital for me as a leader to base my ethical



decision on values such as character, trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and good citizenship.

P7 stated:

I would have to say an example of my ethical decision would be selecting a team lead. I consider who would be the most responsible, the fairest, the most caring, who I can trust the most, who is honest, and who shows the most respect; those are my considerations. So based on those characteristics, I used to determine who would be the team leader; these are only a few examples.”

P5 stated:

I always have to consider honesty, the integrity of being fair, considering different people from different creeds and religions and race and sex. For me in the workplace; the decision-making had more to do with making the ethics versus.

***Interview Research Question (IRQ).*** How would your organization contribute to ethical education training? The design of this question was to stimulate learning and the enhancement of individual skills, as well as to improve educational training and widen the development of competencies to promote training. Participants stated that both physical trainings initiated by the organization and online training is done to improve staff’s ethical education. Two out of eight participants stated that their institution gives staff training so they may learn the requirements for ethical principles.

Participants agreed their institution could contribute to ethical training by offering easy employee participation training. Participants stated that once trained; they’ll find it easy to apply ethical principles when making decisions. Participants indicated they provide zoom training and

in-class and online education that students can benefit from and learn ethics and workshops that they may take advantage of this training.

P1 expressed:

The way we do it by having training assigned to each employee, which is what we call our core value training, but the core values are based on the ethics, morals, and integrity of the school policy. And so, they do new training every quarter that must be completed. Once the person has completed their training, I will receive a notification that the training has been completed. And what it does is just kind of refresh each employee's core values to ensure that their work aligns with the ethics policy guidelines and that everyone is of one accord and is on one drum in one beat to make one organization. You know, the old saying teamwork makes the dream work true because doing so reminds each person to perform at a high standard throughout their day. But at the same time, keep the core values in the back of your mind, but more, I guess, in the forefront of your mind."

***Summary of Research Question 3 (SRQ3):***

Educating administrators on making ethical decisions is essential, as is keeping track of the many actions they take to enhance their ethical decision-making. When a company wants its workers to have a deeper understanding of ethical principles, it allows them to participate in online and offline training. A morally upstanding character is one of the essential qualities to possess since it is the driving force behind ethical decision-making. Based on the data analysis and emerging themes in this inquiry, it seems there is no reason to impede administrator leaders from making appropriate and fair ethical decisions, given that the groundwork has been completed for adequate ethical education training.

**Table 4**

RQ3 and RQ 4: *Emerging Themes and Categories*

Themes	Categories
Improving ethical education through training	Organization Provided Training Online Training
Steps to Improve Ethical Decision Making	Learning from Past Experiences Involved From Past Experiences Involving Committee Anonymous Reporting System Personal Growth on Core Values and Better Communication Train Staff

**Research Question Four (RQ4):**

What distinction, if any, is between the administrator's ethical leadership performance and decision-making? This question evaluates whether or not there is a gap between an administrator's ethical leadership performance and the decisions they make. Although good leadership performance is equivalent to decision-making, participants addressed this question from the angle of growth and improvement strategies. Some participants stated improvement strategies taught by the participants include reflecting on their past choices and the implications of learning from their past experiences in improving their ethical leadership performance.

***Interview Research Question (IRQ).*** What is the relationship between trust and ethical leadership decision-making? This inquiry examines the relationship between trust and administrators' ethical leadership performance in decision-making. Participants, in response, defined their leadership performance as having qualities such as honesty, integrity, transparency, trustworthiness, and respect for others. Participants convey that leadership professionals want to trust and have certainty in their ethical leadership while making decisions. Each participant gave ideas and recommendations within the ethical leadership and decision-making framework.

They stressed the need to have the ability to trust one another and the capacity to make ethical decisions that they believe are inextricably linked to one another. Though they all had the same impression, if followers perceive that their leaders are trustworthy, it will impact their confidence level, and they will have faith in their ability to make good decisions. Three participants of eight said their employees must know they always do what's best for them and should never act selfishly and truthfully. Two other participants held similar opinions,

P6 stated:

Ethical decision-making is linked to trust because of values; the degree to which leaders are perceived as trustworthy will also influence how followers place their confidence and trust in them whenever they're building trust. Trust is part of what is required to maintain good ethics; a high-trust environment encourages ethics.

P5 said:

Trust and ethics go hand in hand. You can't have ethics without having trust, and you can't have ethics because they're a bundle deal, I guess you can say when, when it comes to having ethical leadership and making decisions. One thing you have to have trust in yourself and others is that when you're making these decisions, they will turn out in the way you foresee them to plan out.

***Interview Research Question (IRQ):*** How do you think your employees and coworkers characterize your leadership performance, and why? This question focuses on how leaders' coworkers and colleagues perceived their leadership effectiveness and the causes of such views. Many participants highlighted honesty, integrity, biblical principles, trustworthiness, respect, accountability, and good character as ethical decision-making criteria in leadership performance.

Most participants hold the view that these characteristics should not only be talked about but instead practiced every day. Participants described an excellent character as truthful and trustworthy, having faith, and upholding moral principles. The participants identified the capacity to accept responsibility for one's actions as an essential trait of an effective leader; the general agreement was that this bolsters followers' confidence in the leader's decision.

The finding of the data analysis revealed to a large extent that biblical principles shaped participants' ethical leadership in decision-making. Three of eight participants shared the view that their employees and coworkers characterize their leadership performance as fair and open because they firmly believe in being just, honest, and willing to listen to others; they are impressed that they are seen as someone who has others' best interests at heart and is honest with them, informing them precisely what they can and cannot do in accordance with the organization's policy.

P3 and P5, in similarity, share the view that their employees and colleagues rate their leadership as fair, truthful, disciplined, receptive to feedback, and hesitant to make quick decisions. P6 said, taking all of this into consideration, "they would probably characterize my approach to leadership as being honest and transparent." P7 exhibited that "loyalty is another type of leadership that people are likely to declare that I would lead with or lead by.

P2 stated:

They probably say I'm fair and honest. Because I always try to lead by example and stay positive at all times, I would also say they probably say I'm open and honest because I always try to operate with integrity.

P8 expressed:

Honest and open that they can come to me with anything. I have integrity. They don't have to worry about me doing things behind their back and not being upfront that I'm driven to improve the company. And whatever's right, based on the boundaries set within the company, I respect other people's religion, sexual orientation, and race, and I respect their beliefs. So, they would say that even though I can't entirely agree with them, I still can respect them as trustworthy and fair.

**Summary of Research Question 4 (SRQ4).** Integrity, trust, respect, honesty, accountability, character, fairness, ethical leadership and decision, and fairness were the essential leadership attributes of participants cited in the transcript. A morally upstanding character is one of the essential qualities since it is the driving force behind ethical decision-making. The task of sustaining the organization's ethical standards and presenting them openly and honestly lies squarely on the shoulders of the organization's administrators.

### Table 5

RQ3 and RQ4: *Emerging Themes and Categories*

Themes	Categories
Steps to Improve Ethical Decision Making	Organization Provided the Training Online Training
Steps to Improve Ethical Decision Making	Learning from Past experiences Involved from past experiences Anonymous Reporting System Person growth on Core Values Better Communication and Train Staff

### Evaluation of the Research Design

A qualitative phenomenology research design was employed to create a platform for investigating the lived experience of administrator ethical leadership and decision-making in Christian institutions. The study's overarching goal was to extract a vast amount of data from

each participant who participated in this research using various protocol methodologies to understand the phenomena events better. As espoused by Van Manen, in a qualitative phenomenological, “personal experience is the starting point” of the researcher, and research study participants’ shared lived experience (Van Manen, 2015). This methodological approach was also appropriate for comprehending the questions posed in this inquiry and throwing light on the “how and what” of a specific event or phenomenon (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

Because qualitative research is often used to investigate the phenomena and complexities of human experience (Van Manen, 2015; Creswell, 2014), it builds on themes as they emerge, enabling the researcher to interpret the data’s meaning (Creswell, 2014). Given that qualitative research is a comprehensive investigation, the design allows the researcher to follow the data flow as it is obtained and rearranged depending on what has been learned; it is less rigid and more adaptable by design (Stolorow, 2011; Van Manen, 2015). The essential aspects of this study’s methodological design compelled the researcher to “concentrate on providing an effective strategy method for producing meaning out of administrators’ lived experiences” (Smith, 2005, p. 12).

Utilizing online tool, Survey Monkey survey questionnaires and semi-structured interview questions were appropriate for this research design for eliciting rich descriptive data from the participants. The researcher had the opportunity to interview eight participants, seven administrators, and one principal ranging from twenty five plus years of ethical leadership experience. The sample size was sufficient to provide data analysis, identified three emerging themes and sub-themes, and answering the study’s research objectives. A theoretical and practical explanation of the data analysis collection, coding, and categorizing of the interview transcripts from the participants’ interviews was provided.

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

### Overview

Proverbs 16:3 (*ESV*) states, “*Commit your work to the LORD, and your plans will be established.*” As part of the researcher’s mission to establish this dissertation in the qualitative phenomenology research design field. This final chapter presents the researcher’s compelling arguments of her comprehensive findings and persuasive evidence, definitive results, and conclusion. That derived from the research data analysis gleaned from chapters one, two, and three studies and the conclusions of the data collected in chapter four. This chapter provides the readers with the purpose of the research in five segments: “research purpose, research questions, research conclusions, implications, and applications, research limitations, and future research,” each subcategory allows for further exploration of the subject matter as needed.

### Research Purpose

This qualitative phenomenological study aimed to explore administrators’ approach to ethical leadership principles and decision-making with at least five years of experience at Christian universities and theology seminaries. At this stage, the administrator’s ethical leadership and decision-making were generally defined as a reflective process and collaborative exercise based on two stated criteria, “right and wrong,” and an expressed standard of principles such as trust, integrity, fairness, honesty, and respect, while adhering to the code of ethics. The theory guiding this study, Kitchener’s five-model ethical leadership paradigm, which served as the basis for this investigation, was relevant based on the four research questions. The desired objective of this research study finding has shown to be valuable for administrators’ ethical leadership principles in improving and strengthening their decision-making and preventing unethical behaviors in the organization.



## **Research Questions**

**RQ1.** How do administrators connect ethical decision-making to ethics, truthfulness, principles, integrity, and character?

**RQ2.** What factors influence the administrator's ethical decision-making and leadership performance principles?

**RQ3.** What consideration, if any, prohibits the administrator from employing proper ethical decision-making?

**RQ4.** What distinction, if any, is between the administrator's ethical leadership performance and decision-making?

## **Research Conclusions, Implications, and Applications**

The study's theoretical literature review and empirical findings formed the basis for deriving the research conclusion, implication, and applications. Based on what the researcher observed and learned while examining the elucidation of the four research questions that served as the study's primary guide, summarized in this section.

### **Research Conclusions**

The participant's transcripts, interviews, observations, interactive discussions, and audio recordings of participants' responses and emerging themes were drawn from the data analysis. Research findings could be implemented to inspire further research and establish professional development training programs and educational instructional policies on ethics guidelines.

**Research Question One (RQ1):** How do administrators connect ethical decision-making to ethics, truthfulness, principles, integrity, and character?

This question provided specific facts about the elements influencing administrators' and leaders' ethical leadership decision-making performance and connections between ethics, honesty, values, integrity, and character. The data gathering of the research findings indicated that some fundamental traits of ethical leadership are linked to the approach in which

administrators and leaders make ethical decisions. The emerging themes offered overwhelming support to each participant's comments and the various factors that aid their ethical leadership decision-making impacts.

The examination of the data indicated that the participant's perspectives are that making proper ethical decisions and administering fairness are the foundations of honesty. Most participants acknowledged that without honesty, none of the procedures for making ethical decisions would make sense. If the process were not trustworthy, it would be unable to yield the necessary ethical value. The study analysis indicated that most of the participants in ethical decision-making agreed that they are more likely to trust honest leaders than those with a track record of lying. The ability of administrators and leaders to display admirable traits is critical to making ethical decisions (Hoskin & Hoof, 2005).

Though participants frequently mention that trustworthiness and character are essential components of the value that motivates the vehicle to make ethical decisions, needless to say, this is not the case. Participants named "integrity" a core element of ethical leadership criteria deemed vital for making ethical decisions. The participant's perception that the lack of integrity means that ethical principles have nowhere to stand but will eventually disappear is supported by the examination of the relevant literature review in the study.

Integrity is an essential attribute for administrators since they are often called upon to make decisions that include ethical considerations. Participants, in this regard, prioritize the importance of upholding ethical leadership principles and standards without compromising the true Word of God. The findings also indicated that participants' recognition of their organization's ethics standards was predicated on their adherence to a set of "principles," which they characterized as "ethical guidelines, including their biblical principles.

**Research Question Two (RQ2):** What factors influence the administrator's ethical decision-making and leadership performance principles?

The data analysis for this question shed light on the ethical leadership principles and criteria for leaders to adhere to make sound decisions for their organizations. The recurring themes suggested that the participants highly prioritize biblical principles and their personal and family values, which tended to enhance their desire to stand up for their moral views. However, all participants agreed that leading by example is the best example of leadership. A few agreed that it is essential to evaluate all options before deciding on the best course of action, such as determining which method would best handle the problem and investigating viable solutions.

The consensus of five participants was that their principles and morality are essential aspects of their ethical decision-making. Data analysis revealed that one of the primary factors influencing the participants' leadership performance is their perception that the company's policies are one of the most critical factors. Some participants said reviewing staff's previous conduct could impact their ethical decision-making by having the correct information on ethical decisions and leadership performance. The aspects that shape the administrator's moral judgment and guide their leadership style may be summed up in a single sentence. The more knowledge at disposal, the more one can take action and make the best decision. A proverb goes, "My people are destroyed because of a lack of knowledge" (Hosea 4: 6).

**Research Question Three (RQ3):** What consideration, if any, prohibits the administrator from employing proper ethical decision-making?

The primary focus of this inquiry was to get a deeper comprehension of the factors that may prevent administrators and leaders from making ethical decisions or acting in a manner that is morally suitable when confronted with a particular set of circumstances. Given that the

groundwork for proper ethical education has been created, there is no basis for implying that administrators should be prohibited from making ethically sound decisions. The central theme that emerged from the responses to this inquiry was that the vast majority of participants agreed that the organization should conduct both offline training in the form of physical exercise and online training to strengthen its employees' ethical education.

Even though most participants noted that specific actions might not benefit everyone, they all agreed that making ethical decisions in specific scenarios or situations may minimize the potential harm caused by such decisions. The study's findings indicated that there are circumstances where participants may not be moral to make a decision that might put their lives, feelings, or the future happiness of others in peril. Even if they have good intentions and make an effort to behave ethically, there is still a possibility that some of their decisions may have "unintended repercussions" (Donlevy & Walker, 2011).

**Research Question Four (RQ4):** What is the distinction, if any, between administrator's ethical leadership performance and decision-making?

The responses to this question provided light on whether there is a disconnect between an administrator's ethical leadership performance and their decisions. The administrator is accountable for adhering to and conveying the organization's ethical principles clearly and unambiguously. The transcript study revealed participants had diverse opinions, the emerging themes indicated participants answered this inquiry from the development perspective for progress and improvement growth initiatives. The implication among some participants showed that their personal growth and advancement in ethical leadership are reflected in their ethical decision-making guidelines following the school's regulations. Another step elaborated upon based on the participants was the establishment of a committee for the decision-making process.

A well-known saying goes, “Two good heads are better than one.” Each participant focused significantly on the principles of honesty, integrity, trustworthiness, and respect as ethical decision-making criteria in their perspectives. Though the participants provided a unique perspective to the discussion, there was a consensus agreement that effective decision-making is comparable to excellent leadership performance.

The examination of the data analysis also showed that biblical principles heavily impacted the participants’ ethical leadership performance in decision-making. Based on the data analysis findings and emerging themes, there is no reflection or disconnection between the ethical leadership performance of the administrator and the decision-making process.

### **Implications**

Taking into account the findings of the data analysis and headlined themes, observations, arguments, and conclusions that have been achieved. The findings of this study undoubtedly indicate a wide variety of implications for administrative and leaders’ ethical leadership in Christian organizations. As qualitative research sometimes relies on participants’ accounts for its data, the results of a single qualitative study may not always provide a clear foundation for making a precise conclusion. Since personal viewpoints are often used as the basis for the data obtained in qualitative research. The result of the researcher’s examination of the data regarding the study’s practical implications is as follows.

The implication of the data analysis indicated that administrator leaders who exhibited loyalty, trustworthiness, integrity, honesty, respect, good listening and communication, discipline, and fairness were likely to make decisions that adhered to their ethical leadership principles guidelines. Administrator leaders demonstrating adequate leadership training may successfully adhere to these ethical principles and guidelines (Fiore, 2009).

The study's implication revealed that administrator leaders might strengthen their ethical standards by addressing unethical behavior in their organization. Administrator leaders make up most of their leadership attributes and characteristics traits (Cilla, 2014). The success and longevity of every business depend on its leader's leadership, maintaining a high degree of professionalism, and being well-prepared.

Other findings of the study implications might be drawn primarily via the data analysis, as accountability, fairness, integrity, and respect measures have grown more common in society. Participants stressed how important it is to hold each other accountable, provide good leadership, and take responsibility. The participants concluded that leaders must be open and honest and held accountable for the decisions they make for their organizations if they want their followers to have trust and faith in their ability to make ethical decisions.

As expressed by the participants, taking accountability and responsibility was one technique that could improve trust and confidence in leaders. Participants P2 and P4 agreed they hold high esteem, trust, and respect for leaders who prioritize telling the truth above submitting to authority. P1 conveyed that "it is crucial to be open and honest with people in charge" since their actions may benefit the organization and its personnel.

The study implication, in many cases, established that biblical concepts were fundamental to the participant's ethical decisions. The data emphasizes ethical challenges could directly prompt participants' biblical principles to intertwine with their ethical guidelines. Participants say, "they turn to God in prayers for guidance and consult other co-leaders and specialists to make the right decision."

Another notable discovery of data analysis of the interview transcripts was that all participants agreed that a leader's integrity, character, fairness, respect, and trustworthiness

should be expressed in their consistent behaviors. Participants stated, “Good ethical leadership” exemplifies honesty, trustworthiness, credibility, and optimism.

The study’s implication contributed to the growing body of information on the administrator’s ethical leadership and decision-making in Christian universities and seminaries. In conjunction with the findings of previous studies, this investigation provides “credibility and trustworthiness” to the theory that people in leadership roles are more likely to exhibit optimistic attitudes and high levels of motivation (Kouzes & Posner, 1993).

### **Application**

Participants’ participation in this study offered a variety of data points that confirm previous research assertions. The findings of the data collection and emergent themes of the data analysis of participants’ transcripts demonstrated that these opportunities for application could be applied practically in the following domain:

Administrators’ leaders must provide training as part of the organization’s initiative to increase the staff’s ethical education. Participants recommended administrator leaders train and mentor team members and ensure that ethics are followed.

Administrator leaders should cultivate and create an appropriate climate setting that allows them to lead competently, collaborate productively with team members, and earn the respect of those they lead. P2 and P3 recommended administrator leaders should utilize their positions to influence and encourage the members of their teams while fostering an efficient and productive working environment for everyone.

Administrator leaders should implement integrity and fairness to achieve high-quality outcomes for the decision-making process. P8 recommended that administrator leaders implement honesty and integrity as guiding principles for decision-making. The examination of

the data, indicated these fundamental guidelines showed that ethical leadership has a bearing on the value of an administrator's ethical decision-making.

Administrator leaders should implement leadership trust, integrity, respect, fairness, and honesty in decision-making regarding ethical and unethical actions. Participants recommended leaders should model these characteristics of trust, integrity, respect, fairness, and honesty in their leadership performance.

Administrators should periodically examine their organization's ethics to validate that the company aims to follow ethical principles that influence decision-making. P4 and P7 recommended that administrator leaders create an atmosphere of transparency and honesty inside their organizations. Analysis of the data also implies policies of the organization are a crucial aspect in driving the administrator leaders' ethical decision-making and leadership performance standards.

Administrator leaders may examine their previous actions, how they affected them, and how workers and staff members have taken them to make better ethical decisions. Participants recommended that administrator leaders set examples for their staff and inspire them to reflect on their actions. The transcripts also revealed that administrator leaders should foster and encourage employees to make ethical decisions by creating a culture that welcomes the beneficial impact of all ethical decision-making processes.

Administrator leaders should prepare students with techniques to learn how to make ethical decisions to achieve professionalism and cope with the challenges that come with the commercial world. P4, P5, and P 7 recommend that administrator leaders provide instructional leadership and guidance in establishing best teaching practices. P3 "If the teachers are empowered, they are trained, geared, and encouraged to instill in their students." P2 and P6



recommended zoom training and in-class and online education that students can benefit from and learn ethics and workshops.

Administrator leaders should demonstrate loyalty, trustworthiness, integrity, honesty, respect, good listening and communication, discipline, and fairness in decision-making. The data analysis indicated these basic ethical leadership principles are related to the impact of an administrator's ethical decision-making value. Participants recommended leaders in Christian institutions uphold the truth of God's Word and ethical values without wavering.

### **Research Limitations**

The methodology of this qualitative investigation utilized various limitations since a quantitative technique does not create a conducive atmosphere for this research (Creswell, 2007). The research design boundary, according to Luton, helps further the researcher's study parameters (Luton, 2015). The limitation of the study was to administrators in Christian institutions with at least five years of experience in leadership positions and performances, excluding teacher and student leadership roles. Limitation of fifty participants in various Christian colleges and seminaries. In person interviews with study participants were not feasible due to the physical distance and COVID-19 between the researcher and the participant. The research design limitations contribute to the researcher's existing knowledge and help define the parameters of the study inquiry, which in turn address the research's internal and external validity.

### **Further Research**

The results of this study established a framework for examining further research and comprehending how administrators at Christian universities and theological seminaries

engage ethical leadership principles and decision-making experience. The study finding and recommendations for further research on ethical leadership of administrator leaders at Christian universities may offer deeper understandings and insights than quantitative research (Luton, 2015). The observation of the data analysis related to honesty, trustworthiness, honesty, respect, integrity, fairness, repentance and humility, good listening, and discipline may benefit from further research to better understand factors that impact administrators' ethical leadership performance.

Further research may examine how participants encourage, train, and mentor the members of their teams in which these factors impact their organizations. Integrating actual occurrences and individual actions is another strategy that might be used to find factors that impact ethical decision-making among leaders in a similar geographic region. The impacts of organizational hierarchy, personal and professional and family values, and biblical principles appear to shape participants' ethical decisions on what they consider "right or wrong" in ethics; may benefit from a more in-depth detail of further research.

Investigating the issues and difficulties faced by administrators' decision-making processes that are receptive to the positive influence that leadership performances may have is another relevant study undertaking. In light of the substantial gap in the literature review regarding the lived experiences of ethical leadership among administrators, it may be necessary to carry out a more in-depth analysis to compare the findings of earlier research to those of the research study that is currently being carried out.

### **Summary**

At every juncture or stage in a given circumstance or scenario where a decision is considered in light of the knowledge at hand is the optimal one, the following is the incorrect

decision, and the worst decision is to do nothing (Frank, 2001). The stated purpose of this qualitative study was to provide substantive answers to four central research questions that impetus and prompted the investigation and analysis of the study literature review on ethical leadership and the complexity faced by educational leaders in making decisions in Christian universities and seminaries. The applicability of the research's overarching theoretical framework, Kitchener's five-model ethical leadership paradigm, which served as the guiding principle for this investigation, was tested for its relevance.

The study demonstrated that the participants overwhelmingly agreed that a top-down approach was the most effective means of communication and putting ethical behavior into practice. The study serve as a roadmap for future directions in research of ethical leadership for decision-making. The study added to the existing literature on ethical leadership in decision-making and provided a framework for further studies exploring ethical leadership principles for decision-making experience in Christian institutions. Given today's complex climate and environment, there is a demand to generate leaders that can motivate and inspire their followers to optimum performance.

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**APPENDIX A**  
**IRB APPROVAL LETTER**  
**LIBERTY UNIVERSITY**  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

December 16, 2021

Janice Holmes  
Micheal Pardue

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY21-22-158 Ethical Leadership: A Phenomenological Study of Administrators Principles For Ethical Decision-Making

Dear Janice Holmes, Micheal Pardue,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d):

Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

**Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB.** Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

Sincerely,  
**G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP**  
*Administrative Chair of Institutional Research*  
**Research Ethics Office**

## APPENDIX B

### Administrator Recruitment Letter

Dear [Recipient]:

As a graduate student in the Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of a doctoral degree requirement. The purpose of my research study is to examine how administrators approach ethical leadership principles in their decision-making experience. I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

To participate, you must be 18 years of age or older, an administrator at a Christian institution with at least five years of experience in ethical leadership and decision-making, have served for at least two years in your current position, and be willing to participate in my research study.

You will be asked to participate in an electronic demographic screening survey of approximately 10 to 15 minutes to see if you qualify for the study. If you are eligible, you will then be asked to take part in an audio-recorded interview via telephone, online, or skype; it should take approximately 45- 60 minutes to complete. In addition, you will be asked to examine the interview transcript results for accuracy, which should take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete. If necessary, you will be asked to participate in a follow-up interview for clarifying the information and data you provided, approximately 20-25 minutes to complete. Your name and other identifying information will be requested, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate in this study, please click the [link] to proceed to a screening survey.

The consent document is attached to this email and contains additional information about participating in the research project. If you are found to be eligible for the study, you will need to sign the consent document and return it to me at [REDACTED]. After receiving the signed consent document, I will contact you to schedule an interview. If you have any trouble opening the attachment or have questions, don't hesitate to contact me at the above email

Sincerely,  
Janice Holmes  
Doctorate Candidate

[REDACTED]

## APPENDIX C

### CONSENT FORM

**Title of the Project:** Ethical Leadership: A Phenomenological Study of Administrators' Principles for Ethical Decision-Making

**Principal Investigator:** Janice B. Holmes, Doctoral Candidate, Liberty University.

#### Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be 18 years of age or older. You must be an administrator with at least five years of ethical leadership experience in decision-making principles. Taking part in this research project is voluntary. Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to participate in this research.

#### What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of administrators' ethical decision-making and to determine how well they adhered to their daily activities' leadership principles performances.

#### What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

1. Participate in an electronic demographic screening survey, approximately 10 to 15 minutes, to see if you qualify for the study.
2. Participate in interview online, zoom, or skype, approximately 40- 60 minutes. The interview will address how well you adhered to your everyday activities' leadership principles performances.
3. Examine the interview transcript results accuracy, approximately 15-20 minutes.
4. Participate in a follow-up interview, if necessary, to clarify the information and data you provided, approximately 20-25 minutes.

#### How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study. Benefits to society may provide valuable insight to future administrators on how the lack of ethical leadership in their decision-making could hinder their ethical leadership capabilities. In addition, by examining the administrator's lived experience, it may be possible to build a practical method that will help the administrator avoid unethical behavior in their ethical leadership performance.

#### What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

### How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. Data collected from you may be shared for use in future research studies or with other researchers. If data collected from you is shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed before the data is shared.

Liberty University  
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- Participant responses will be kept confidential using pseudonyms. Instead of labeling the participant's data with their names, the researcher will utilize pseudonyms to identify them and use a separate list of pseudonym-to-name matches for future reference. In addition, interviews will be conducted online, where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.

### Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any questions or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

### What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

### Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Janice B. Holmes. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty chair, Dr. Michael Pardue, [REDACTED].

### Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?



If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515, or email at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

*Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.*

### Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the above information.

*I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.*

The researcher has my permission to audio-record/video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

\_\_\_\_\_

Printed Subject Name

Signature & Date

Liberty University  
IRB-FY21-22-158  
Approved on 12-16-2021

## APPENDIX D

### Participant Screening Survey Questions

This survey's purpose is part of my dissertation research study to assess whether you are interested in taking part in this project. In addition, to determine whether you satisfy the eligibility criteria to be considered for participation. Participants for this research project must be willing to reflect on their lived experiences in the context of their ethical leadership decision-making as administrators. Below you will find a list of questions that will assist you in determining whether you meet the criteria for this research project. Would you please take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete the following questions to determine your eligibility? I greatly appreciate your assistance and cooperation with this research project.

**To answer each of the following questions, please choose the most acceptable response:**

1. Full Name

---

2. What is your age group?

- 18-25
- 25-50
- 50-65

3. What is your gender?

- Male
- Female

4. Is English your primary language? If not, please list below.

---

5. What is your state of legal residence?

---

6. What is your level of Education

- Bachelor
- Master
- Doctoral/PhD
- Other

7. How many years of experience do you have as an administrator?

- 2- 5 years
- 5- 10 years

- 10-25 years
  - 25 or more years
8. How many years of ethical leadership experience as an administrator in a Christian university?
- Two to five years
  - Five years
  - More than five years
9. How many years of ethical leadership as an administrator at your current university?
- Two to five years
  - Five years
  - More than five years
10. How many years of ethical leadership experience in decision-making principles performance?
- Less than one year
  - One year
  - More than one year
11. How many years of practical professional training development in ethical leadership?
- Less than one year
  - One year
  - More than one year
12. What type of ethics knowledge assists you in your decision-making?
- Biblical Principles
  - Professional Experience
  - Knowledge of the Code of Ethics
  - Administrator Wisdom
  - Colleagues Wisdom
  - All the Above
13. If you are willing to participate in the research study and contribute your shared experience of ethical leadership in decision-making, please provide your contact information to schedule an interview at your preferred time and date convenient for you via telephone, email, or skype.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_ Time \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX E

### SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCRIPT

#### Interview Protocol

Date:

Participant Pseudonym name:

Interviewer:

#### **The Script read before each participant interview:**

Thank you for taking the survey questionnaire and sending back the signed consent form to participate in this interview for my research study. This study aims to understand better your ethical leadership experience as an administrator/leader in your decision-making. This interview will last approximately 45 to 60 minutes. This interview will be audio recorded to keep track of the data. The recording will be transcribed and then deleted.

I will email you the interview transcript within three days for review and correction, if necessary. Any notes will be stored in a secure locker for three years and then deleted. Only once will this interview occur. This information will be anonymous and confidential. You will be given a fictitious name and your institution. There is no right or wrong answer during this interview and taking your time with your responses is perfectly okay.

Since this study is voluntary, you are free to decline to answer any questions. If you decide to withdraw at any time during this interview study, I will stop the interview and immediately delete your information from my records. If you have any questions or comments, please feel free to do at the end of this interview or email me at [REDACTED]. I am grateful to you for giving me this opportunity to meet my program requirements. God Bless.

## APPENDIX F

### Interview Open-Ended Questions Standardized

1. What ethical leadership principles do you believe are necessary for the administrator's decision-making effectiveness in an organization?
2. What do you view to be your most important responsibility as an administrator, and why?
3. What ethical standards influence your leadership decision-making performance the most?
4. What was the most difficult ethical choice you had to make in your position as an administrator, and do you feel like you responded fairly?
5. What personal, educational, or historical factors contribute to your ethical leadership decision-making and performance?
6. What are some examples of ethical decision-making in your workplace?
7. What is an example of unethical conduct in your workplace?
8. What are some of the contributing factors that you take into consideration while making an ethical decision?
9. How does your ethical decision-making impact your leadership performance to lead others productively?
10. Does your organization contribute to the enhancement of ethics education through training, if so, how?
11. How do you enhance ethical decision-making and promote education training in your workplace?
12. What leadership standards are the most essential in determining an administrator's honesty, fairness, and trustworthiness in the workplace?

13. What ethical leadership decision-making surprised you when you began, and with whom did you consult?
14. What is the relationship between trust and ethical leadership decision-making?
15. How would your employees and coworkers characterize your ethical leadership performance in the workplace, and why?