

# The Role of Senior Management in Fostering Ethical Cultures in Guyana's Public and Private Sectors: A Qualitative Analysis

Roystone F. M. Nelson\*

*College of Management, Texila American University, India*

## **Abstract**

*This paper revisits the significant empirical gaps in ethical decision-making within organizations highlighted by Linda Trevino in 1986, emphasizing their persistence in today's dynamic business environment, particularly within Guyana's public and private sectors. Despite decades of progress, companies continue to grapple with the integration of ethical practices into their operational frameworks. This essay explores the pivotal role of senior management in cultivating ethical standards and delves into the strategies and challenges of embedding these practices sustainably within organizations. Through comprehensive analysis, it aims to bridge Trevino's identified gaps by examining the practical application of ethical leadership and its implications for corporate governance in Guyana. Key findings indicate that while most organizations have established codes of ethics, there remains a significant disconnect between policy articulation and actual practice. The research highlights the influence of senior management in shaping organizational culture and the critical challenges they face, including inconsistency in policy enforcement and a lack of robust mechanisms to support ethical behavior. This study proposes several recommendations for enhancing ethical practices, including strengthening leadership commitment to ethical standards, improving communication and training regarding ethics, and fostering an organizational culture that supports ethical decision-making.*

**Keywords:** *Business Ethics, Ethical Behaviour, Ethical Decision, Ethical Practices.*

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## **Introduction**

In a world where corporate scandals can trigger international headlines and ethical breaches can lead to significant financial and reputational damage, the role of senior management in fostering an ethical culture cannot be overstated. As [18] highlighted in his exploration of the nexus between business ethics, corporate governance, and anti-corruption initiatives, a robust ethical framework is vital for effective governance and operational integrity. Senior leaders not only set strategic directions but also define the moral compass that guides organizational behavior, influencing how trust and reliability are built within the marketplace. This is especially pertinent in the diverse economic landscape of

Guyana, where the public and private sectors continuously evolve amidst varying ethical challenges and opportunities.

Their influential study, "Ethics and Ethos: The Buffering and Amplifying Effects of Ethical Behavior and Virtuousness," published in the Journal of Business Ethics [2] explores the pivotal roles that ethics and virtuousness play within organizations. The authors distinguish between ethics—which they define as the adherence to moral principles and the prevention of misconduct—and virtuousness, or ethos, which is characterized by the embodiment of the highest human values such as integrity, compassion, and resilience. This distinction is critical for understanding how organizations can not only avoid negative

outcomes but also cultivate environments that nurture these exemplary human qualities, ultimately leading to improved organizational performance.

In Guyana's dynamic corporate sphere, the responsibility of senior management extends beyond mere compliance with regulations. Leaders are tasked with ingraining ethical values deeply into the fabric of their organizations, ensuring these principles resonate through every tier of operation. This commitment is crucial in a context where industries range from burgeoning tech firms to traditional sectors like oil and gas, each with distinct ethical considerations. For instance, in the tech industry, issues like consumer privacy and data security demand rigorous ethical oversight, contrasting sharply with sectors like petroleum, where environmental sustainability and community impact take precedence.

The imperative for ethical leadership in Guyana is clear: it shapes the organizational ethos and molds the broader industry standards, thereby influencing public perception and market trust. This article delves into the essential role of senior management in cultivating ethical cultures within Guyana's public and private sectors, exploring how tailored ethical governance can drive not only compliance but also competitive advantage in the global economy.

## **Context**

Guyana is located on South America's northeastern coast. The country offers complex potential and problems. Guyana's economy has tripled since oil extraction began in late 2019. The early 1990s saw Guyana among Latin America and the Caribbean's lowest GDP per capita. The nation led worldwide real GDP growth in 2022 with 62.3 percent due to oil production's tremendous rise. Since 2022, oil funds have been injected into the national budget, allowing the government to invest heavily in development [10].

Public sector ethical guidelines, which include government-controlled organisations, are created under the Public Service guidelines, 2004 Edition with Amendments and the Laws of Guyana Integrity Commission, Chapter 19:12. These frameworks provide organised ethical norms for government personnel to report assets annually. However, industry groups like the Georgetown Chamber of Commerce and Industry set ethical standards for privately owned businesses. The 2010 GCCI Code of Conduct addresses various business ethics topics and shows the sector's commitment to ethics. [16].

Another major factor in Guyana's economic growth is its business environment. An efficient company environment fosters creativity and productivity. The Doing Business 2017 report ranks Guyana 124th out of 190 economies for ease of doing business, up from 2016. Infrastructure, trade restrictions, taxation, and company licencing affect the business climate. [3]. Guyana ranks 85th out of 180 nations in Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (2022) [17]. Media and civil society organizations have frequently criticized the government for its slow handling of corruption cases. In 1997, the government introduced legislation mandating that public officials disclose their assets to an Integrity Commission before taking office. However, there are no substantial compliance programs in place to monitor or prevent bribery among government officials [20].

## **Materials and Methods**

### **Review of Literature**

The examination of business ethics and corporate governance highlights the crucial significance of managers and leaders in promoting ethical adherence within organisations. The findings from multiple studies emphasise the importance of incorporating ethical principles and virtuous behaviours into corporate governance. The ensuing analysis delves into various scholarly

works that underscore the significant role of managers and leaders in driving ethical compliance within organizations. These studies highlight the importance of integrating ethical guidelines and virtuous practices into corporate governance, fostering trust, and promoting sustainability.

### **Importance of Ethical Leadership**

Incorporating ethical guidelines and virtuous practices within corporate governance sets clear norms, fosters trust and promotes sustainability [2]. Leaders play a crucial role in exemplifying these behaviors, establishing organizational standards, and creating a culture rooted in virtuousness that enhances resilience and adaptability. Additionally, a culture rooted in virtuousness enhances resilience and adaptability, empowering organizations to succeed amid challenges [2]. Ethical leadership is therefore essential for establishing organizational standards, fostering trust, and promoting sustainability, thereby enhancing resilience and adaptability within corporate governance.

It should be noted that, effective ethical leadership involves not only adhering to ethical norms but also promoting ethical behavior among employees through transparent and consistent practices [8]. [7] affirms that managers play a pivotal role in shaping organizational ethos by setting moral standards and leading by example. Effective ethical leadership involves adherence to ethical norms and active promotion of ethical behavior among employees through transparent and consistent practices. Managers are crucial in modeling ethical behaviors and establishing policies that promote an ethical workplace culture. When leaders consistently demonstrate integrity, fairness, and respect, they set a standard for employees to follow. This modeling helps to establish a clear ethical framework within which all members of the organization can operate, ensuring that ethical considerations are integrated into daily decision-making

processes. Transparency is a key component of ethical leadership [8]. Leaders who communicate openly and honestly with their employees build trust and credibility. This transparency helps to create a culture where employees feel comfortable discussing ethical concerns and reporting unethical behavior without fear of retaliation. Open communication channels also ensure that ethical issues are addressed promptly and effectively.

### **Ethical Leadership and Organizational Culture**

The interactionist model examines the interplay between individual moral development and situational variables such as responsibility for consequences and normative structures [19]. The author's analysis focuses on factors that significantly influence ethical decision-making and shaping ethical behaviors, such as moral development, ego strength, field dependence, and locus of control (individual variables); the immediate job context, organizational culture, and work characteristics (situational variables); a strong ethical culture and ethical actions (organizational culture); and ethical behaviors are more likely in environments where the consequences of unethical actions are clear and leaders consistently enforce ethical standards (consequences understanding) [19]. What is gleaned from the above is that the moral judgements and ethical acts of employees are greatly influenced by the organisational culture. When a culture places a strong emphasis on ethical ideals and standards, it creates an atmosphere in which employees are more inclined to make decisions that are in line with these principles. Ensuring this connection is vital for the integration of ethical issues into daily business processes. Another important deduction from the interactionist model is the understanding of the consequences of unethical actions. In organizations where these consequences are clearly communicated and

understood, employees are more likely to act ethically. This understanding creates a deterrent effect, reducing the likelihood of unethical behavior.

### **The Ethics of Governance**

Wieland's work provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how moral values can be effectively embedded in the governance of organizations, thereby enhancing their ethical standards and overall effectiveness [21]. He contends that ethical concepts should be methodically integrated into the management, governance, and control frameworks of companies. This integration guarantees that moral ideals are ingrained in the core of organisational activities rather than being limited to individual actions. Organisations can foster an atmosphere that promotes and incentivizes ethical decision-making by implementing ethical frameworks and normative systems. Wieland highlights the importance of not just establishing ethical rules but also generating the necessary conditions that promote ethical behaviour as the standard. This strategy involves cultivating a robust organisational culture that places a high value on ethical principles, guaranteeing openness in the process of making decisions, and upholding responsibility throughout all levels of the organisation. By utilising these methods, organisations can attain enduring and advantageous outcomes of individual virtues, ultimately resulting in sustainable and ethical business practices.

### **Systems Theory Approach to Corporate Ethics**

The systems theory approach offers a comprehensive framework for dissecting corporate ethics at multiple levels of engagement and impact, categorizing them into macro, meso, and micro levels [11]; [9]. At the macro level, the focus is on the extensive ethical frameworks influencing state, economic, and societal structures. This level

examines how regulatory policies and economic systems shape ethical behavior across societies and assesses the support or hindrance these structures provide to ethical practices. This analysis typically includes exploring the effects of economic policies on social equity and the ethical dimensions of economic decisions on both national and global scales. At the meso level, the attention shifts to ethical issues pertinent to individual organizations. Here, "corporate ethics" encompasses the study of ethical practices directly impacting corporate behavior. This includes scrutinizing corporate governance, ethical decision-making processes within organizations, corporate social responsibility initiatives, and the resolution of ethical dilemmas that emerge during business operations. This intermediate level acts as a bridge linking the broad societal impacts and the ethical responsibilities of organizations towards their stakeholders, which include employees, shareholders, suppliers, and the communities they serve. The micro level delves into the realm of individual ethics within the business environment. This level addresses the moral decisions individuals face in their professional roles and the integration of personal values with professional responsibilities. It focuses on guiding employees to navigate ethical challenges they face daily and emphasizes the importance of developing strong personal ethical frameworks and integrity. This level encourages employees to align their actions with both their personal moral standards and the ethical expectations set forth by their professions.

### **Ethical Challenges in Corporate Governance**

Colin Boyd's analysis of the Cadbury Report in "Ethics and Corporate Governance: The Issues Raised by the Cadbury Report in the United Kingdom" identifies several critical ethical challenges in corporate governance [1]. Firstly, Boyd points to the excessive power

concentrated in the hands of executive directors, which can undermine ethical standards. To address this, the Cadbury Report recommends increasing the role of non-executive directors. Secondly, Boyd highlights significant failures in oversight, as evidenced by high-profile scandals like Robert Maxwell's misuse of pension funds and the BCCI collapse, underscoring the need for stronger audit practices. Thirdly, he critiques the Cadbury Report's reliance on voluntary compliance, arguing that without robust enforcement mechanisms, the recommendations may fall short in preventing unethical behavior. Lastly, Boyd emphasizes the essential role of auditors in maintaining corporate ethics, advocating for a more proactive approach to ensure transparency and accountability. He concludes that while the Cadbury Report lays the groundwork for improved governance, it requires stronger enforcement and a cultural shift toward ethical accountability to be truly effective.

Reference [6] examination of mutual fund governance structures provides further insight into the complexities of ethical leadership. She critiques the reliance on statutory and regulatory frameworks alone to uphold ethical standards, pointing out that these are often insufficient to handle the ethical dilemmas that arise in complex financial environments. She advocates for a more holistic approach to ethical governance that includes ongoing education, rigorous self-assessment, and the cultivation of a culture that promotes ethical decision-making. The author's work underscores the need for senior managers to foster environments where ethical considerations are integrated into daily business practices.

## **Summary**

The collective insights from these scholarly works illuminate the fundamental role of senior management in shaping ethical organizational cultures. Leaders are essential in demonstrating

that ethics are as critical as economic considerations in achieving sustainable success and maintaining public trust. By fostering environments where ethical considerations are integrated into daily practices, promoting transparency, and consistently enforcing ethical standards, senior managers can cultivate a culture of trust and integrity. This structured analysis provides a robust foundation for understanding how ethical leadership drives ethical compliance and governance in organizations.

## **Research Design**

This paper adopts a qualitative research methodology to delve into the complexities of how senior management influences ethical cultures within organizations in Georgetown. As suggested by [14], qualitative research methods are particularly suited for exploring in-depth insights and understanding phenomena within their specific contexts. This approach allows for a comprehensive exploration of the nuanced perceptions and experiences of individuals regarding ethical practices and management roles in their organizations.

## **Data Collection Methods**

Following [4] guidelines, this paper employs semi-structured interviews which include open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed responses about personal experiences, perceptions, and the influence of senior leadership on ethical behavior within organizations. The use of electronic formats for data collection was specifically chosen to broaden the reach and depth of participant engagement, minimizing geographical and temporal constraints that often limit traditional face-to-face interviews [15].

## **Data Collection Tool**

The data will be collected through an electronic document. This document will be distributed via email to participants who hold various organizational roles within businesses located in Georgetown. The inclusion of

interview-style questions within the electronic form will provide participants with ample space to express their views extensively, thus simulating the depth of face-to-face interviews in a more flexible and accessible manner.

### **Ethical Considerations**

In alignment with ethical guidelines for qualitative research, as outlined by [13], the study ensures confidentiality and informed consent. Participants will be informed about the purpose of the research, the use of their data, and their rights to withdraw from the study at any point without any consequence.

### **Validity and Reliability**

To enhance the validity and reliability of the data, the study will employ several strategies. First, the triangulation method will be used to cross-verify the data obtained from interviews, as recommended by [5]. Secondly, member checking will be conducted, where participants will be given a chance to review and comment on the findings to ensure the accuracy and authenticity of the interpretation [12].

### **Analytical Approach**

To conduct a thorough qualitative data analysis using thematic analysis, NVIVO 12 software was utilised. The qualitative data that was collected through the interviews was transcribed and digitally stored in Microsoft Word format. The Microsoft Word files were then imported into NVIVO 12 and organized effectively, with all files properly labeled and categorized. Familiarization with the data began by reading and re-reading it, noting initial impressions and potential codes. In NVIVO, initial codes were generated by systematically identifying significant features relevant to the research focus, using both manual and automatic coding. Next, similar codes were grouped into potential themes using NVIVO's node feature. The coded data extracts were reviewed to identify patterns and overarching themes. These themes were refined and reviewed against the data to ensure they

accurately represented the content and addressed the research issues. NVIVO's visualization tools helped illustrate connections and relationships between themes.

Descriptive names were assigned to each theme using NVIVO's node descriptions. A detailed report of the findings was prepared, supported by data extracts and visualizations from NVIVO. This report discussed how the themes addressed the research questions and contributed to the overall understanding of the topic. The findings were validated through methods such as peer debriefing, member checking, or triangulation to ensure credibility and reliability. NVIVO's query tools were utilized to explore data identify patterns, and create visualizations such as tree maps and network diagrams to illustrate themes, and the memo feature was used to document insights and reflections throughout the analysis process. This structured approach ensured a comprehensive and rigorous thematic analysis, leveraging NVIVO's capabilities to manage and analyze qualitative data effectively.

## **Results**

The qualitative analysis conducted across various organizations in Guyana's public and private sectors provides a nuanced understanding of how ethics are integrated into organizational cultures and operations. This section details the findings of the investigation, highlighting both the challenges and proactive measures undertaken by organizations to cultivate ethical environments.

### **Perception of Senior Managers Promoting a Culture of Ethics**

The exploration of senior managers' roles in instilling an ethical culture reveals varied perspectives on ethical integration within organizations. Some employees perceive ethics as merely superficial, serving to mask favoritism and unequal practices rather than fostering genuine accountability and fairness. This perception highlights a critical gap

between policy and practice, with ethics sometimes applied inconsistently and selectively, often sparing senior members from the rules that bind their subordinates.

Respondents perceive the role of senior managers in fostering an ethical culture as crucial and multifaceted. They believe that senior managers not only set the ethical tone but also influence organizational integrity through their actions and decisions. This leadership is seen as a cornerstone in maintaining ethical standards and shaping the organization's ethical climate. However, respondents also note a gap between the policies established by these managers and their practical application, indicating a need for consistent enforcement and personal accountability from senior leadership to truly embed ethical values throughout the organization.

Structured approaches, where ethics are clearly defined and training is targeted, particularly at middle and lower management levels, show a shift towards more disciplined ethical practices. For instance, entities like the Guyana Revenue Authority have taken proactive steps by implementing anti-corruption measures, indicating a strategic move towards embedding ethical behavior. This ongoing journey underscores the need for continual review and proactive efforts to uphold ethical integrity.

However, the existence of a code of conduct alone does not guarantee practical application; a significant disconnect remains between stated policies and actual behavior. Leadership plays a pivotal role; the ethical conduct displayed by senior managers can profoundly influence an organization's ethical climate. Organizations committed to high ethical standards often implement comprehensive ethical programs, including annual retraining and adherence to rigorous standards such as ISO certifications, which tend to enhance ethical behavior.

## **Perceived Ethical Discrepancies**

Many affiliated individuals perceive their organization's ethical pronouncements as largely cosmetic, serving more as a veneer of conformity rather than genuine principles guiding operations. These ethics are often viewed as mechanisms to secure favored outcomes, compromising the core values of equality, fairness, and transparency. The inconsistent and selective enforcement of ethical norms is a recurring issue, with senior members frequently seen as exempt from the rules that bind others. This selective adherence often aligns with personal ambitions, sometimes at the expense of public resources, suggesting a misuse of power that undermines organizational integrity.

## **Implementation of Ethical Norms**

Across the board, the commitment to ethical standards varies significantly, with some describing it as modest and others as moderate. Only a handful of organizations demonstrate a structured approach to ethics, characterized by clearly defined rules and focused training aimed primarily at lower and middle management. This structured approach signifies a shift towards more disciplined and effective ethical practices within certain sectors.

## **Strategic Anti-Corruption Measures**

Noteworthy is the proactive stance of some organizations, such as the Guyana Revenue Authority, which has implemented comprehensive anti-corruption procedures. These measures are indicative of strategic initiatives designed to weave ethical conduct into the fabric of organizational operations. Furthermore, the ongoing realization that maintaining ethical integrity is a continuous journey highlights the need for constant evaluation and proactive efforts to sustain and enhance ethical practices.

## **Gaps Between Policy and Practice**

Despite the presence of codes of conduct and formal ethical policies, a significant gap often remains between stated policies and actual behaviour. The leadership's role in bridging this gap is crucial; the behaviour modelled by those in authority positions can significantly influence the ethical landscape of an organization. In entities where comprehensive ethical programs are enforced—including mandatory retraining and adherence to stringent standards like ISO certifications—a stronger ethical behaviour is reported, underscoring the impact of rigorous standards.

## **Summary of Insights**

The insights gathered depict the infusion of ethical norms into an organization as a complex, multi-layered process that necessitates a comprehensive strategy. This strategy must encompass ethical leadership, actionable policies, continuous training, and a commitment to ongoing development. For fostering a culture that not only upholds ethical ideals but also actively practices them, a holistic approach is deemed essential.

The study unequivocally demonstrates that while some organizations are making significant strides in embedding ethical practices, the overall landscape is marred by inconsistencies and challenges that require concerted efforts to overcome. Senior management plays a pivotal role in this endeavour, not only by enforcing ethical standards but also by exemplifying them. The path to robust ethical practices is iterative and demands unwavering commitment to continuous improvement and accountability.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

This article has revisited [19] observation on the empirical gaps in understanding ethical decision-making within organizations, emphasizing its relevance in today's business environment, particularly within Guyana's public and private sectors. It critically

examined the role of senior management in embedding ethical standards and the enduring challenges that complicate sustainable ethical practices.

The research underscored that while a high percentage of organizations claim to have a code of ethics, a significant gap persists between the professed ethical codes and their practical application. This gap is manifested by only two-thirds of employees believing in their organization's commitment to ethical behavior across all operations. The effectiveness of these ethical policies is often undermined by insufficient communication, implementation inconsistencies, and lack of robust systems to protect and empower employees, especially whistleblowers.

The findings highlight the critical need for senior management to not only endorse but actively integrate ethical standards into every facet of organizational operations. Senior managers must lead by example, fostering a culture where ethical considerations are paramount in decision-making processes. The recommendations for organizations include enhancing communication of ethical standards, providing continuous ethical training, and strengthening whistleblower protections to encourage a transparent and accountable corporate culture.

In sum, the effectiveness of embedding ethical standards within an organization heavily relies on the proactive and consistent involvement of senior management. Their role is crucial in ensuring that ethical guidelines are not only established but are also actively practiced and integrated into the corporate culture. By doing so, organizations can bridge the identified gaps in ethical decision-making, thus enhancing their integrity, public reputation, and overall sustainability in the complex landscape of modern business.

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## Conflict of Interest

I, Roystone Nelson, declare that there is no conflict of interest in the data collection, literature review, writing of the script, and its publication by the Journal.

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