

A Systematic Literature Review and Research Agenda: on Unethical Practices in Organizations

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Abstract

Unethical practices continue as a negative issue across various sectors, undermining public interest, organizational integrity, and green sustainability. Its impact is felt as a toxic workplace behaviour. Moreover, due to the rise in corporate fraud and scandals has made scholarly literature on the concept remain vague, thereby setting the pace for further inquiry and critical appraisal. Consequently, the current study examined the concept of unethical practices, antecedents, consequences, theories, methodology, contingent variables, and prevention methods to stall their spread. The study used a systematic literature review with the aid of a PRISMA flowchart to arrive at a logical paradigm through a structured approach for academic development. The study identified 20 articles from high-quality journals indexed in Google Scholar, Scopus, EBSCO, Springer, Emerald, and Web of Science. The study journals were analyzed using content analysis, ADO, and TCM. The study findings showed that a toxic workplace environment predicts unethical practices, which prior research failed to expose. The study also found that antecedence relates to the consequences of unethical practices. The study's originality is based on using a distinctive approach in unravelling unethical practices. The study's implication addresses unethical practices, fraud, and scandal, and fosters as a positive prevention measure to caution organizations on how such practices affect lives, careers and families.

Keywords: Unethical practices, literature review, PRISMA flowchart, pro-organizational behaviour, Collective moral identity.

1. Introduction

Unethical practices within organizations have become a growing phenomenon undermining employees' morale, stakeholder trust, and long-term business sustainability. These problems manifest in areas like unethical business practices, corruption in the public sector, and neglect of environmental concerns. These issues hinder economic growth, undermine public trust, and create an environment where organizations prioritize short-term gains over long-term

sustainability and ethical conduct. Scholars have shown concern about how scandalized organizations have affected the contemporary business landscape and workplace, which is an important phenomenon that has a critical impact on societies (Jalonen, 2023). Synonymous unethical practices include exploitation, falsifying metrics, concealing errors, and manipulation of financial results/records, which predicts organizational harm (Seifert, Lamothe & Schmitt, 2022; Jannat, Alam Ho, Omar & Lin, 2022). Unethical behaviour refers to behavioural practices that go against accepted moral principles, professional standards in organizational settings. (Lin, Clay, Hajil & Dadgar, 2018; Michell, Baer, Ambrose, Folger, & Palmer, 2018; Kilduff, Galinsky, Gallo & Reade, 2016). Examples of organizations that have collapsed due to unethical practices include Enron and WorldCom (Newman, Lee, North-Samardzic, & Cohen, 2020; Zaal, Jeurissen, & Groenland, 2019), and Sanlu milk in China (The New York Times, 2009; Divaio, Palladino, Hassan, & Escobar, 2020; Sebestyen Bulla, Redey & Abonyi, 2019). These studies predict the antecedents and consequences of unethical practices, and wholly as how fundamental framework on how to curb the trend.

Recent systematic literature review focused on the detrimental effect of unethical practices on the organization (Wang, Xiao & Ren, 2022). Other scholars argued on the beneficial practices (Yang, Lin, Liao & Xue, 2021; Zhang, 2020); why employees engage in unethical practices (Toirova & Baek, 2021; Baur, Soucek, Kuhnén, & Baumeister, 2020). Interestingly, these systematic reviews have shown that over time, all counter behaviour affects performance in organizations (Newman et al., 2020). Extant literature has recommended various intervention processes in organizations (Kundro & Nurmohamed, 2021; Hardin, Bauman, & Mayer, 2020). However, Mishra, Ghosh & Sharma (2021); Hassan, Kaur, Muchin, Ogbonnaya & Dhir (2023) have identified the causes, antecedents, and outcomes of unethical conditions. This systematic literature review is different from past reviews on unethical practices on the premise that unethical practices in the workplace is under-investigated (Lin et al., 2018), interestingly Jannat et al., (2022) also argues that new insight on investigation is required on Antecedents, Outcomes, Theories and Contingent variables (moderating and mediating) that previous review neglected. Unethical practices continue as a research interest (Bonner, Greenbaum & Quade, 2017). Following Paul and Criado (2020), this study uses the systematic literature review Antecedents, Consequences, and Decision (ADO); Theories, Contexts, and Method (TCM) to explain the concept. This study reviews journals from the years (2010 – 2025) and provides dearth insight on practices, who should be aware of this dilemma, and how to manage

employees (Ashforth & Anand, 2003). To fill this gap, this study utilizes a

systematic literature review using a PRISMA flowchart to summarize current knowledge on unethical practices theories, settings, methodologies, antecedents, and consequences, contingent factors allowing scholars to conclude the concept (Paul & Criado, 2020).

The following research questions were raised to guide this study;

1. The theories employed in unethical practice?
2. The antecedents of unethical practice?
3. The consequences of unethical practices?
4. The contingent variables on unethical practice?
5. What methods are employed in unethical practice research?
6. What are the ways of managing unethical practices to prevent the scourge?

This review uses a systematic review to enrich our understanding of unethical practices, highlighting the theories, contexts, and methods, as well as the antecedents, decisions, and outcomes, methods, contingent variables & prevention (Omofowa & Akhidue-Ogogo, 2024). Researchers and practitioners will benefit from existing literature, including the direction of future research on unethical practices. This will assist managers in connecting different antecedents and outcomes, prevention of unethical practices.

The paper is structured as follows; Section 2 an overview of unethical practices; Section 3, discussed systematic literature review; Section 4 highlighted the findings; Section 5 conclusion, contribution to knowledge and limitation of study.

2. Overview of Unethical Practices

Unethical practices are actions that fall outside of what is considered morally right or proper for a person, a profession, or an organization (Ferrell, Fraedrich & Ferrell, 2021); examples of unethical practices in organizations are corruption and bribery, discrimination, exploitation of labour, and environmental violation (Omofowa & Anwatu, 2024; Andiappan & Ruffour, 2020; Omofowa, Omofowa, Nwachukwu & Nguyen, 2021). The consequence of unethical practices can lead to damage to organizational reputation, legal penalties or regulatory fines, decreased employee/productivity, and loss of consumer trust.

Ethical practices in an organization refer to the principles, standards, and norms that guide the behaviour of individuals and the organization as a whole in a morally acceptable and socially responsible manner. These practices encompass fairness, transparency, accountability, respect for stakeholders, compliance with

laws, and the promotion of a positive organizational culture (Farrell et al., 2021). Ethical practices are critical for building trust among employees, customers, investors, and the public. They help to prevent misconduct, ensure compliance with legal and regulatory standards, and enhance organizations' long-term reputation and sustainability (Velasquez, 2014). However, there are structural explanations that connect examples of unethical practices in organizations to broader ethical themes. These actions can be examined through corporate social responsibility, corporate governance, transparency, fairness, and accountability. For example, transparency is a cornerstone of ethical business practices, but was eroded when the ENRON scandal involved top executives hiding debt through complex accounting schemes, leading to the company's collapse, eroding stakeholder trust and distorting market operations. Again, B P Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill in 2010, which caused significant environmental damage due to cost-cutting and regulatory lapse, is a clear example of apparent environmental negligence, failure to protect the environment as part of their duties to stakeholders and future generations (Bozeman, 2011).

Although extant literature has studied the causes and emergence of unethical conduct/practices within an industry, how such behaviour emerges, spreads within certain employees in organizations remains unclear. Management literature has identified three inquiries relevant to the current study: the intervention study, ethics evolution studies, and corruption studies. Although these lines of research differ, but converge on a critical message on ethical decision-making, as it affects unethical practices, research on antecedents, consequences, contingent variables, and the process of managing its spread in organizations. The first inquiry examined how ethical changes leading to unethical practices occur as work progresses. An example is the Volkswagen Diesel gates scandal, which demonstrates how employees intending to manipulate operations hurt the organization and themselves. The scandal cost Volkswagen and other related parties the sum of \$30 – 40 billion (Mujkic & Klingner, 2019), casting doubt and fear in the automobile sector (Warren, Gaspar & Laufer, 2014)

The second line of research focuses on ethics of organization changes overtime, how the prolong inscription of ethical code in organization found less value via personal value and supervisor instruction become prominent, even if such ethical behaviour of supervisor is contrarily. Moreover, adaptation becomes a major drawback in the era of new technology that have changed the narratives in certain works operation leading to unethical conducts.

The third line of study concerns unholy incidents and the spread of corruption over time (O'Connor & Fischer, 2012), which is the foundation of unethical practices. Orudzheva, Salimath and Pavur (2018) study used an archival framework in unethical behaviour (supervisor instructions, unreviewed ethical codes, whistleblowing, monitoring) as a temporal perspective on how observed unethical practices evolve, extend, and how it can be managed. This study seeks to examine these issues through a systematic literature review.

3. Methodology

This study applied the systematic literature review for insight, reflection, and pathway. Massaro, Dumay and Guthrie (2016) compared it to the traditional narrative (Mishra et al., 2021). The concept provides a transparent, rigorous, and synthesizing extant literature resulting in trustworthiness, and absolute verdict. It eliminates landscaping and unjustifiable neglect of gaps that would enhance generalizability (Mishra et al., 2021). The phenomenon is appropriate due to its usage in extant studies (Mishra et al., 2021).

The Theories, Antecedents, Outcome, Contingent variables, Methodologies, and ways to manage unethical practices in earlier unethical practices research were uncovered using the systematic literature review method. Scholars can apply an existing framework or create their own in framework-based reviews (Paul & Benito, 2018). In this review, the ADO (Paul & Benito, 2018), meaning Antecedence, Decision, and Outcome, is applied. Antecedence explains why employees' behaviour is indifferent; Decision represents performance, while Outcomes are the results metrics. The ADO framework may be limited to theories, settings that guide future studies (Lim, Yap, Sheau-Feng & Makkar, 2020). The TCM framework was also used (Paul, Parthasarathy & Gupta, 2017). The TCM acronym represents Theories, Contexts, and Methods. Theories energize a concept, Context describes settings, and Methods describe evolution (Lim et al., 2020). This approach ensures a robust comprehension to appropriately guide future studies (Lim et al., 2020). Therefore, combining ADO, TCM in content analysis, this study can maximize its strengths and minimize its weaknesses. Using this, the ADO framework helps understand how individual attitude and decision culminate in unethical actions, while the TCM framework provides insight into the organization and systematic factors that influence or enable such behaviour. Together, they offer a robust theoretical foundation for the study and manage unethical practices effectively.

3.1 Source Identification

Search keywords were unethical and ethical and corruption, and unethical pro-organization and behaviour, and ignorance, this identify relevant articles for assurance in journal indexed in Scopus and Web of Science database with impact factor in 'Business' management and economics were used. This is in line with similar studies (e.g. Lim & Tareq, 2022). The review of recent article published between 2010 – 2025 offers new and timely insights.

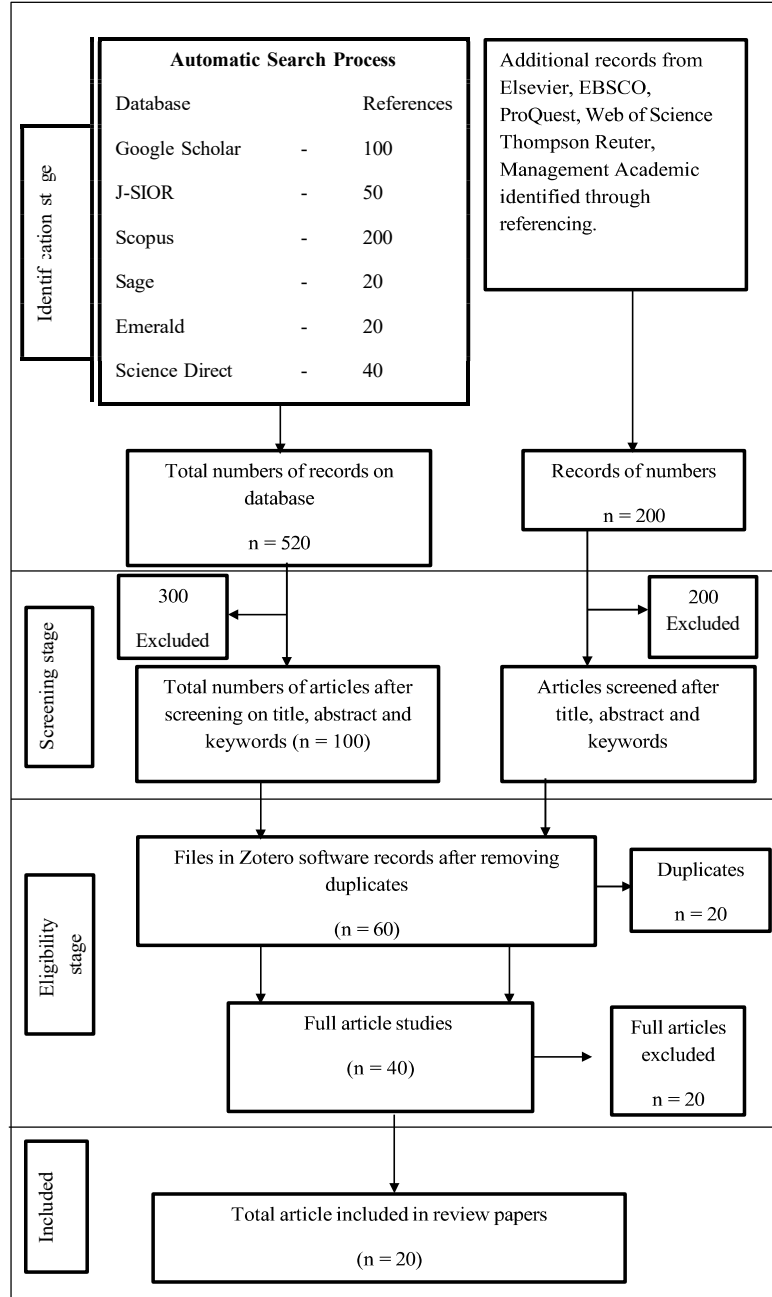
3.2 Sampling Method

Sampling is a process of selecting few representations item from a population. The population being article from search during the Inclusion and Exclusion criteria (Snyder, 2019). However, the appropriate method involves reading the relevant information in the abstract (Snyder, 2019), related to the research questions then articles in the final sample were read in full.

3.3 Screening

The source type was examined first, then the content of the article at the screening stage, the search was conducted on Google Scholar, and other produced 520 articles after limiting the search to 2010 – 2025, the number of the article reduced to 400 articles as shown in figure (1). After further screening and applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria, 40 articles were obtained from Google Scholar.

Fig 1: Prisma flowchart (Moher, Liberati, Tetzlaff & Itman, 2009)



Source: Authors Desk, 2025.

3.4 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Snyder (2019) posits that the Inclusion and Exclusion criteria enhance the quality of research. The inclusion criteria describe the use of journal articles that are peer-reviewed and Scopus-based, which ensures that the information obtained is unique (Yang, Zhang & Yang, 2018). To obtain relevant information on the current debate on unethical practices, articles published from 2010 – 2025 were used when conducting research in the context of unethical practices in organizations. The selection of data range (time frame) and database is critical to ensuring that the findings are relevant, reliable, and comprehensive. For example, selecting a recent range (e.g. 10- 15 yrs) ensures that the data reflects current trends on unethical practices, which has become contemporary organizational challenges, in addition, including older sources (e.g. pre-2010) helps to track the evolution of unethical practice and establish a historical benchmark for comparison. On the part of the database, selection, Scopus, Web of Science, Jsfor, and Ebsco host offer peer-reviewed scholarly sources ensuring high-quality academic content. This selection of the range ensures temporal relevance and contextual depth, while a variety of databases ensures that the research is both academically vigorous and practically informed. This combination enhances the credibility, validity, and applicability of findings related to unethical practices in organizations. To ensure relevance, quality and alignment with the research questions, the following exclusion criteria were applied; articles were excluded if they did not focus on unethical practices, business misconduct, or unethical decision-making, moreover, studies that addressed general moral philosophy without application to unethical practice in organizations were excluded, studies lacking a clear methodology, credible data sources, or poor methodological rigor were removed to uphold academic quality standards; article that were inaccessible (e.g. behind paywalls without institutional access and for which full text version could not be retrieved were also excluded. Also included are magazines, newspapers, conference papers, and information from these sources that is not peer-reviewed (Yang et al., 2018). During the literature search across multiple databases (e.g. Scopus, Jsftor, Web of Science), it was common to retrieve the same article multiple times due to overlapping journal coverage to maintain data integrity and avoid inflating the results; reference management software was used to identify and remove duplicate records automatically. In addition, manual review was also conducted to catch duplicates that may not have been detected due to minor differences in citation metadata; only one version of the article was retained. By systematically removing duplicates and applying a clear exclusion criterion, the selection process ensured that only relevant, high-quality, and non-

redundant sources were included in the analysis. This approach supports a focused and credible foundation for examining unethical practices in organizations. The Prisma guidelines state that the process undertaken is recorded, hence it can be repeated. Furthermore, the Prisma flowchart will minimize bias as the researcher follows guidelines (Yang et al., 2018).

4. Result and Discussions

This section deals with the journal titles and year of publication, in the process of analysis. The systematic review takes the form of Bibliometric and Content Analysis. According to Wu, Wu, and Sharpe, (2020), content analysis entails a methodology based on authorship, year, publisher, and citations are coded into contextual data and categorized into themes (Gaur & Kumar, 2018). As depicted in Table 1 below, the Journal of Business Ethics contains the most articles used in this study, which is expected, as the study is about unethical practices at the workplace, which is closely linked to business ethics.

Table 1:

S/N	Journal Title	Article Count	%
1.	Business Ethics	5	25
2.	Business Research	2	10
3.	Management Sciences	2	10
4.	Journal of Management	2	10
5.	Journal of Management Inquiry	1	5
6.	Administrative Science Review	1	5
7.	Management Review	1	5
8.	Journal of Organizational Behaviour	1	5
9.	Public Organization Review	1	5
10.	Public Management Review	1	5
11.	Research in Public Integrity	1	5
12.	Psychological Science	1	5
13.	Journal of Economy Psychology	1	5
	TOTAL	20	100

Source: Authors Desk, 2025.

Coding Process

Based on the research questions and the purpose of this study, codes were developed as shown in table (2). As the codes were being developed, categories for the codes began to formulate and were recorded as suggested by it was observed that while intervention to manage unethical behaviour is the focal point this intervention occurred under certain mechanism allows the intervention to take

effect in managing unethical behaviour, hence, mechanism was another category, the intervention themselves were grouped into another category.

Table 2:

Codes	Frequency	Category	Theme
Popular Theories	— 2	Popular Theories	
Institutional Theory	— 1		
Social Exchange Theory	— 1		
Social Role Theory of Leadership	— 1		
Emotional competency theory	— 1		
Moral Theory	— 1	Antecedence	
Antecedence	— 1		
Lack of Morality	— 1		
Manipulative Storytelling	— 1		
Individual Differences	— 1		
Attitudinal Factors	— 1	Consequence	
Contextual Factors	— 1		
Consequences	— 1		
Moral Distress	— 1		
Lowering Job Satisfaction	— 1		
Eroding Trust	— 1	Method	
Harming Environment & Public Health	— 1		
Contingent Variable	— 1		
Methods	— 1		
Survey	— 1		
Experimental	— 1	Contingent Variable	
Conceptual	— 1		
Literature Review	— 1		
Contingent Variable	— 1		
Organizational Identification	— 1		
Neutralization	— 1	Reducing Unethical Behaviour	
Moral Disengagement	— 1		
Job Satisfaction	— 1		
Organizational Legal Compliance	— 1		
Manipulative Personality	— 1		
Guilt Proneness	— 1	Mechanism Intervention	
Morality Identity	— 1		
Management of Unethical Behaviour	— 1		
Punishment	— 1		
Monitoring	— 1		
Code of Conduct	— 1		
Transparency	— 1		

Source: Author's Desk, 2025

Findings

It is difficult to draw organization inferences from the findings, as a result the author summarized the findings by giving bibliographic data, hypothesis, theories, antecedence, consequences, contingent, methods and ways of managing unethical practices used in the research study.

Bibliographic Data

In Table 3, unethical practices by Taylor & Francis was mostly researched by researchers. This is closely by Emerald International Journal of quality assurance published the most articles, Taylor and Francis also published, Elsevier, Wiley and Son Ltd, Springe, Sages Frontier, each published one.

Table 3:

Publisher	f
Emerald	3
Springer	3
Taylor and Francis	6
Sage	2
Wiley and Sons	2
Frontier	2
Academic Research	2
Total	20

Source: Author's Desk, 2025

Popular Theories in Unethical Practice

A survey of papers reveals that 10 articles; Moral foundation theory (Egorov, Kalshoven, Pircher, & Peus, 2020); CEO hubris (Akstinaite, Robinson, & Sadler, 2020); Social cognitive theory (Fehr Fulmer, & Keng, 2020); Moral licensing theory (Ahmad, Klotz, & Bolino, 2020); Attraction-selection-attrition model (Cialdini, Samper, Li, & Wellman, 2021); Conservation of resource theory (Qin, Xie, & Cooke, 2021); Role congruity theory (Pandey, Delhart, Pandey & Ablawat, 2021); Institutional theory (Chen, 2010); Appraisal theory of stress (Kabat-Farr, Walsh, & McGonagler, 2019); Social information processing theory (Peng, Schan-Broeck, Chong & Li, 2019).

Table 4: Summary of Articles Addressing Research

Theories	Linked with unethical practices
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(1) Moral foundation theory (Egorov, Kalshoven, Pircher & Peus, 2020).	Justifying a harmful decision as necessary for organizational loyalty or hierarchy.
(2) CEO Hubris (Akstinaite Robinson & Sadler, 2020).	Corporate leaders believe they are above the rules or moral norms justifying unethical actions for personal ambition or legacy, believe ends justify the means, manipulates earnings or financial reports, creates a culture where ethical concerns are silenced, discouraging whistleblowing.
(3) Social cognitive theory (Fehr, Fulmer & Keng, 2020).	Allows individuals to justify unethical behaviour without feeling guilt or shame, displacement of responsibility, promote toxic culture.
(4) Moral licensing theory (Ahmad, Klotz & Bolino, 2020).	It shows how good behaviour can paradoxically pave the way for unethical practices by creating a false sense of moral security.
(5) Attraction-selection-attrition model (Cialdini, Samper, Li & Wellman, 2021).	Organizations may unintentionally build a culture that normalizes unethical behaviour through shaping the composition of the workforce.
(6) Conservation of resource theory (Qin, Xie & Cooke, 2021).	The theory predicts that threatened or depleted personal and organizational resources increases the temptation to act unethically.
(7) Role congruity theory (Pandev, Delhart, Pandev & Ablawat, 2021).	It explains how social role expectation and stereotypes can creates pressure and conflicts that increases the likelihood of unethical behaviour.
(8) Institutional theory (Chen, 2010).	Linked how external pressure, norms, and systemic expectations can foster unethical behaviour when unethical practices become institutionalized, go unchecked.
(9) Appraisal theory of stress (Kabat-Farr, Walsh & McGonagler, 2019).	It highlights how stressful perceptions and evaluations of situations can push employees towards unethical behaviour as a coping mechanism, especially when unable to manage pressure ethically.
(10) Social information processing theory (Peng, Schon-Broeck, Chong & Li, 2019).	It depicts how unethical practices often result to social cues and interpretations within the organizational environments. Unethical practices are shaped by what employees observe, learn, and believe is expected.

Source: Author Elaboration, 2025.

Antecedents of Unethical Practices

In total, 4 studies address antecedence of unethical practices, they are perceived organizational support (Wang, Long, Zhang & Zhao, 2022); Workplace ostracism (Zhang, 2020); Risk climate (Sheedy, Garcia & Jepsen, 2021); Narcissism (Toirova & Baek, 2021). These studies proposed quality determinants that result in unethical behaviour manifestations, which account for 20% of the paper (4) that examined the antecedents of unethical practices. There are also examples of studies where egoistic norms (Graham, Resick, Margolis, Shao, Hargis & Kikor, 2020); Workplace spirituality (Lawrence & Kacmar, 2017) influence unethical practices.

Table 5: RQ₂

Authors (Year)	Determinant of unethical practice	n
	Unethical practice	1
Wang, Long, Zhang, Zhao, 2022	Organizational identification, ethical leadership, over identification	1
Zhang, 2020	Ostracism, Machiavellian, mentality climate	2
Sheedy et al., 2021	Ethical leadership, organizational culture, norms, values & attitude	1
Toirova & Baek, 2021	Empowerment psychological entitlement, social exchange relations	1
Graham et al., 2020	Egoistic Nature/Nurture, code of conduct	1
Lawrence & Kacmar, 2017	Religiosity, spirituality, faith	1

Source: Author's Elaboration, 2025.

Unethical Practices Consequences

4 studies reported that unethical practices has a significant effect on outcomes, 2 studies reveals that unethical dimension have negative effect on organization.

Authors/Year of publication	Effects of Unethical practice
Ghosh, (2017)	(+) Job embeddedness
Fehr et al., (2020)	(+) Moral decoupling
Babalola, Mayowa Mary Mawritz, Greenbaum Rebecca, Ren, Shuang & Garba, (2017)	(+) Promotion of sense of obligation
Naseer, Bouckennooghe, Syed, Khan & Quzi, (2020)	(+) Increased psychological entitlement, through manipulative skills.

However, there are studies that observed that some unethical dimensions have negative effect in organizations.

Table 6: Summary of articles addressing RQ₃

Authors/Year of publication	Effects of Unethical practice
Kabar-Farr et al., (2019)	Incivility and counterproductive workability.
Cialdini et al., (2021)	Psychological distress and intention to leave.
Qin et al., (2021)	Unethical leadership is associated with increases level of knowledge hiding because it targets employee's relational capital and psychological resources.
Castille, Buckner, & Thoroughgood, (2018)	Machiavellianism leads individual towards unethical practices.
Lawrence & Kacmar, (2017)	Job insecurity and emotional exhaustion.

Source: Author's Elaboration, 2025.

The Contingent Variables Associated with Unethical Practices

A total of 6 studies examined the concept based on its contingent variables (3 moderating effects; 3 mediating effects)

Table 7: Summary of article addressing RQ₄

Authors/Year of Publication	Moderating/Mediating Effects
Ahmed Klotz & Bolino (2020)	The moderating influence of leader narcissism and morality affects unethical leadership.
Lawrence & Kacmar, (2017)	The moderating effect of adaptability embeddedness in an organization.
Valle, Kacmar & Zivnуска, (2019)	Moderating effect of promotion focus and prevention focus.
Zhang, (2020)	The mediating effect of job satisfaction in an organization that is linked to unethical practices is positive.
Lu & Xu, (2018)	High-performance work system mediates unethical pro-organization behaviour, resulting in moral identity having a negative mediating effect on psychological ownership and unethical practices.
Miao, Eva, Newman, Nielsen & Herbert, (2020).	Ethical leadership increases moral attentiveness, which mediates unethical practices.

Source: Author's Elaboration, 2025.

Methods used in Unethical Practices

Methods show how empirical analysis is generated (Paul, Parthasarathy & Gupta, 2017). This review focuses on 'Research approach' and 'Data'. The research approach to unethical articles literature is quantitative, qualitative, and mixed. The quantitative methods have 80% (13 articles), 4 studies used SEM, and the remaining studies used regression-based analysis. The qualitative methodology was employed in 7 studies, and 2 articles used a mixed methods approach. Concerning research data used, primary data (questionnaires, surveys, interviews) is the most preferred.

Table 8: Summary of article addressing RQ₅

Authors/Year	Methods
Kabar-Farr et al., (2019)	Quantitative, questionnaires, correlation analysis, 250 employees.

Castille et al., (2016)	Survey, quantitative secondary data, sample of 332 bank employees, SNI financial database, period 2014 – 2016, Fama-Macbeth regression.
Chen, Chen, & Sheldon, (2016)	Survey and experimental vignette methodologies, 262 respondents, self-administered questionnaires.
Ghosh, (2017)	Quantitative survey, 520 respondents, (CFA), multiple linear regression analysis.
Wang, Long, Zhang, & He, (2018)	Time-lagged cross-sectional field study, 244 firms, Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling.
Mishra et al., (2021)	Literature review
Hassan, Kaur, Muchiri Ogbennaya & Dhir, (2023)	A systematic literature review of the study focused on antecedents, outcomes, and Boundary conditions on unethical leadership.
Jalonen, (2024)	Qualitative approach using systematic literature review, considered 26 studies linked to unethical practices and ignorance in an organization.
Ramachandran, Kamalanabhan, Pearl, Arora & Andreas, (2020).	A systematic literature review.

Source: Author's Elaboration, 2025.

Intervention used to Reduce Unethical Practices

Studies have revealed that organizations have applied various interventions to manage unethical behaviour. 10 articles were viewed in Scopus Indexed Journals. The study reviewed the top five intervention frameworks.

Table 9: Summary of article addressing RQ₆

Authors/Year	Intervention used to Reduce Unethical Practices
Rin et al., (2018); Burbano & Chiles (2022)	Code of conduct also referred to Code of ethics in organizations daily routines.
Young, Hassan, & Hatmaker, (2021); Bashir & Hassan, (2020)	Showing a strong concern for ethical and moral values, and sets examples for ethical behaviour in decision and actions plan, moreover, acknowledging mistakes and taking responsibility (ethical leadership qualities & values).
Ayai, Celse & Hochman, (2021); Thiel, Bonner Bush,	Punishing transgressors, using the code of conduct standard, guidelines to reduce consistency failed

Welsh & Pati, (2021).	behaviour for corrections through punishment.
Bai, Shang, Wan & Zhao, (2021); Mutschmann, Hasso, & Pelster, (2021)	Monitoring activities especially in operations and measurement to avoid severe corporate scandals adhering to best practices measures.
Kaptein, (2022); Latan Chiappetta & Lopes, (2021).	Whistleblowing for preventing and detecting unethical behaviour, which serves as protection enhancement.

Source: Author's Elaboration, 2025.

Discussion

Unethical behaviour is a behavioural conduct that violates moral standards (Brown & Mitchell, 2010). Unethical behaviour is exhibited when management effort passively promotes unethical climate by ignoring unethical conduct and, thus allowing unethical behaviour to flourish within an organization (Brown, Trevino & Harrison, 2005). Organizations are becoming more conscious of the need to curtail these behaviour/practices (violation of legitimate right, unfair justice mechanisms, weak leader character which are potential manifestations of unethical practices) to develop robust processes to improve the effectiveness and viability of organizations. A systematic literature review was employed to understand the theories (RQ₁), antecedence (RQ₂), consequences (RQ₃), the contingent variables (RQ₄), the method employed (RQ₅), and intervention ways (RQ₆) related to prior unethical research.

In response to RQ₁, theories allow researchers to explain a phenomenon, and advancing insight. Based on this review, three theories were identified, these theories include; social exchange theory, CEO Hubris theory and role congruity theory, other minor theories are stakeholder theory, institutional theory, attribution theory, moral foundation theory, CEO hubris theory, social cognitive theory, moral licensing theory, conservation of resource theory, role congruity theory are based on the social cognitive theory, it explains how employees may engage in unethical practices (e.g. falsifying metrics, concealing errors) if they feel indebted to the organization due to significant support received (Wang et al., 2022). Arguably, the social cognitive theory is important for explaining how employees engage in unethical behaviour/practice when organizations support such conducts. Studies have indicated loyalty and job embeddedness (Ghosh, 2017). Organizational embeddedness (Lee, Oh, & Park, 2022); work spirituality

(Zhang, 2020); job satisfaction (Zhang, 2020). Fiedler, (1978) and Dansereau Graen & Helga, (1975) employed the role congruity theory and moral licensing theory to explain how supervisor leadership style, employee attitude, motivation, and performance, fit, style, and situation affect employees' likelihood of unethical behavioural practices. Extant literature explores how institutional factors such as the size of the organizations, cultural norms, industry type, and structure impact the relationship between role, style, and unethical practices. This review suggests that social cognitive theory is the most among unethical researchers. This is unsurprising given that the comprehensive perspective it provides in managing unethical practices for effective management. The role congruity theory provides a complete perspective of organizational fit and structure, which is consistent with ethical, collaborative, and understandable practices.

In response to (RQ₂), 18 antecedences of unethical practice are reported, organizational identification; ethical leadership (Wang et al., 2022); ostracism, Machiavellian, mentality climate (Zhang, 2020); ethical leadership, organizational collective, norms, values and attitude (Sheedy et al., 2021); empowerment, psychological entitlement, social exchange relations (Toirova & Baek, 2021); egoistic, nature/nurture, code of conduct (Graham et al., 2020); religiosity, spirituality and faith (Lawrence & Kacmar, 2017). This research is more centred on ethical leadership, which reproves unethical leadership as a result, firms that want to be compliant and adhere to best practice must imbibe the culture of ethical practice, code of conduct, monitoring production process, and quality of product, not to be found wanting. Previous studies underscore the importance of best practice, nature/nurture, religiosity, spirituality, and organizational identification, which mitigate against unethical practices.

In addressing (RQ₃), the review linked the positive practices to ethical behavioural on job embeddedness (Ghosh, 2017); (Fehr et al., 2020); promotion of sense of obligation (Babalola, 2017); organizational identification (Naseer Bouckenghe, Syed, Khan & Qazi, 2020). The negative impact of unethical practices shows that such acts harm stakeholders, the environment, and public interest. Arguably, robustly improving ethical practices will reduce conflict, likewise, information management will reduce unethical practices and ambiguity. Organizations that give attention to code of conduct, whistleblowing, and punishment will reduce such acts.

In addressing (RQ₄), three moderating variables namely leaders' narcissism and morality (Ahmed et al., 2020); adaptability embeddedness in organization (Lawrence & Kacmar, 2017); promotion focus and prevention focus (Valle et al., 2019) found that proactive strategy in implementation of these variables positively moderates the effects of unethical practices in organization, to pave way for ethical practices. To effectively cross-check the effect of unethical practice to minimize its hazards, Ahmed Klot & Bolino, (2020) highlight corporate use of technology to curtail unethical practices. In the review, this study identified several mediating variables, such as job satisfaction (Zhang, 2020), which is linked to unethical practices with job satisfaction; high performance work system, which mediates unethical pro-organization behaviour, this has a negative impact as a mediating variable on psychological ownership. Miao et al., (2020) study showed that leadership and unethical practices mediate the mechanism of reflective moral attentiveness, which positively helps in reducing unethical practices/behaviour in organizations. Based on this literature review on the contingent variables for change to occur in a positive trend depend on knowledge management, corporate social performance engagement of employees by management.

In response to (RQ₅), the dominant research approach is quantitative, survey, and Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) techniques. Survey involves the administration of questionnaires to respondent; this allows for subject trends, implication and usage, however, combining case studies can improve our understanding of unethical practices and help develop effective prevention strategies but primary data and quantitative research are preferred due to the nature of unethical practices research which is based on participant perceptions.

In response to (RQ₆), the literature on managing unethical practices is available, but the review is still lacking concerning its intervention mechanism. The most common mechanism employed is the term Context-Intervention Mechanism-Output (CIMO) coined by Denyer, Tranfield & Van-Aken (2008), and mentioned that management requires context, intervention, mechanism, and outcome. Denyer et al. (2008) argue that the study of managing unethical practices has been focusing on intervention, neglecting context and mechanism attention. Whistleblowing, monitoring, punishing transgressors, and establishing a code of conduct, religion, and avoiding temptations are good mechanisms of preventing and controlling unethical practices. Virtual workspaces bring new challenges to ethics; studies in virtual workspaces can suggest strategies and technological tools

for organizations to discourage unethical practices and improve ethics in the environment.

5. Conclusion and Suggestions for further studies

The study uses a systematic literature review to draw insight from unethical literature. This study reviewed 20 studies from 2010 – 2025. The theories, antecedents, consequences, contingent variables, methods used in unethical practices, and ways of preventing unethical practices were analysed and summarized. The proposed research question (6) was answered through an in-depth analysis of existing literature. The study focused on journals indexed in the Scopus database, this decision was based on quality and realistic expectation. However, it is possible that some studies were not noticed, nonetheless, the authors acknowledge that the robust methodologies employed are appropriate.

This study observed that most of the articles obtained were reporting on empirical studies conducted largely in developed nations, with no evidence of studies done in Africa. This justifies the call by Barnard, Cuervo-Cazurra and Manning (2017). The lack of research in Africa implies that the findings of the studies may not be generalized to Africa, since unethical behaviour is viewed in a certain context. This is not to say studies on the management of unethical practices have never been conducted in Africa, but the inclusion and exclusion criteria might have excluded some studies. This is one gap in the study whereby future studies can widen the inclusion to include studies performed in Africa, about 20% of the studies did not use theories to examine unethical practices, yet theories are interconnected ideas used to explain a phenomenon. The collection of theories offers better insight into a phenomenon. Given this, future studies should incorporate/integrate multiple theories to give a robust insight into unethical practices. To deepen our understanding of unethical practices, this study calls for more research on the moderating variables that enhances ethical practice, and minimized unethical practices it will not be out of place to examine the moderating effect between psychological entitlement and unethical practices, since psychological entitlement is a personality traits associated with narcissism which drives employees toward unethical practices, marked by self-importance, expectation of special treatment, this might encourage moral disengagement leading to unethical practices. Therefore, authors need to substantiate the underlying reasons for this shift. Additionally, no existing literature has explored whether junior employees' involvement in unethical practices affects senior employees' engagement in unethical practices. Investigating this relationship

could inform intervention and policies to prevent unethical practices, moreover, the geographical scope has limited previous studies. To improve the research rigour, this study suggests that future studies should consider meta-analysis and the PRISMA flowchart. Most of the studies employed a quantitative approach; authors call for more studies using qualitative and mixed methods to enrich our understanding of unethical practices.

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