Ethical leadership and ethical voice in the military context: a scoping review

Liderazgo ético y voz ética en el contexto militar: una revisión de alcance

Abstract: Ethical leadership is positively associated with leader effectiveness and team performance, shaping how ethical standards are recognized and applied by leaders. In this sense, the military context is a relevant setting for this study, as it demands strict compliance with institutional rules and regulations. However, most research on ethical leadership focuses on civilian organizations, highlighting a gap in studies addressing military contexts. This scoping review aims to map and analyze theoretical and empirical evidence on the influence of ethical leadership on ethical voice in the military context, drawing on the Web of Science database. The review followed the Joanna Briggs Institute Methodological Manual and the PRISMA-ScR protocol. After applying inclusion and exclusion criteria via the Rayyan system, 42 articles were selected from 3,471 identified studies. Metadata analysis was conducted using VOSviewer software, enabling the construction of keyword co-occurrence and author co-citation networks. The findings indicate a lack of research on this topic in Brazil, particularly within the military context. The review concludes that there are opportunities to expand knowledge on ethical leadership and to explore emerging perspectives, such as ethical voice, thus reinforcing the primary contribution of this study.

Keywords: Ethical Leadership, Ethical Voice, Military Context.

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Resumen: El liderazgo ético se asocia positivamente con la eficacia del líder y con el desempeño del equipo, lo que influye en cómo los líderes reconocen y aplican los estándares éticos. En este sentido, el contexto militar representa un campo relevante para este estudio, visto que requiere rigor en el cumplimiento y en las normas institucionales. Sin embargo, la mayoría de las investigaciones acerca del liderazgo ético se centra en organizaciones civiles, haciendo evidente esta brecha en el contexto militar. Por lo tanto, el objetivo de este estudio es mapear y analizar las evidencias teóricas y empíricas acerca de la influencia que el liderazgo ético tiene en la manifestación de la voz ética en el contexto militar, mediante una revisión de alcance en la base de datos Web of Science. Se utilizaron las directrizes del *Manual de Métodos* de Joanna Briggs Institute y el protocolo PRISMA-ScR. Tras aplicar los criterios de inclusión y exclusión a través del sistema Rayyan, se seleccionaron 42 artículos a partir de la identificación de 3.471 estudios. Los metadatos se analizaron a través del software VOSviewer, lo que permitió construir redes de coocurrencia de palabras clave y cocitación de autores. Los resultados demuestran un debilitamiento de las investigaciones acerca de este tema en Brasil, sobre todo en el contexto militar. Se concluye que existen oportunidades para ampliar el conocimiento acerca del liderazgo ético y profundizar nuevas perspectivas en áreas emergentes, como la voz ética, lo que refuerza la principal contribución de esta revisión.

Palabras clave: Liderazgo Ético, Voz Ética, Contexto Militar.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The concept of ethical leadership is based on Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977), which states that individuals learn by observing the behavior of others and its consequences. Brown, Treviño, and Harrison (2005, p. 120) define ethical leadership as "the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making."

This two-way communication shows that ethical leaders not only reinforce ethical values, but also stimulate the equitable participation of followers. By adopting actions perceived as fair and altruistic, such as honesty, respect, and encouraging the expression of voices, they are seen as legitimate and trustworthy role models (Brown; Treviño; Harrison, 2005).

Conduct considered "normatively appropriate," demonstrated through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, reflects standards such as honesty, fairness, trustworthiness, and care, attributes that make leaders legitimate and credible role models. The concept is deliberately broad, as the notion of appropriate behavior varies according to the context. In some organizational cultures, for example, questioning decisions is a sign of engagement, while in others it can be seen as insubordination (Brown; Treviño; Harrison, 2005).

Although ethical leadership has ancient origins and recognized relevance, the literature still lacks in-depth empirical studies. Normative approaches predominate, indicating the need to further investigate its antecedents and effects on organizational culture (Brown; Treviño, 2006; Shakeel; Kruyen; van Thiel, 2019).

Ethical leadership varies according to the cultural and organizational context, and is associated with job satisfaction, dedication, willingness to report problems, interactional fairness and perceived leader effectiveness. This highlights the need to improve processes for selecting, developing, and retaining ethical leaders (Brown; Mitchell, 2010; Brown; Treviño, 2006; Brown; Treviño; Harrison, 2005).

This form of leadership contributes directly to team performance by stimulating communication, knowledge sharing, motivation, and commitment. In addition to promoting effectiveness, it strengthens ethical organizational environments by encouraging behaviors in line with moral standards with reinforcement systems that ensure fairness, responsibility, and respect (Kalshoven; Den Hartog; De Hoogh, 2011; Piccolo *et al.*, 2010; Toor; Ofori, 2009; Treviño *et al.*, 2006).

The effects of ethical leadership are not uniform across all contexts. Although it encourages compliance with moral standards, it can restrict autonomy in collective actions. A study of Army teams in the Republic of Korea identified a moderating effect of the ethical climate, showing variations in its influence even in highly hierarchical environments (Kim; Vandenberghe, 2020).

These variations may be linked to ambiguity in the interpretation of ethical standards by leaders. Thus, the effects of ethical leadership tend to vary according to the formal moral codes and laws integrated into the ethical climate, which acts as an independent construct shaped by the rules of the military organization (Brown; Treviño, 2006; Kim; Vandenberghe, 2020; Treviño; Brown; Hartman, 2003).

In military organizations, the rigid hierarchy reinforces order and the institutional ethical climate, promoting adherence to values, norms, and ethical conduct (Arnaud; Schminke, 2012; Brown; Treviño, 2006; Schaubroeck *et al*., 2012). Although ethical leaders directly influence this climate (Mayer; Kuenzi; Greenbaum, 2010), multiple institutional factors also have an impact, especially in this context (Kim, 2016; Kim; Vandenberghe, 2020; Lee, 2018).

For this reason, the military environment is conducive to the study of ethical leadership, as it requires compliance with ethical codes not only to maintain the organizational climate under extreme conditions, but also to limit the discretionary behaviors of the team (Hannah *et al*., 2014; Kim; Vandenberghe, 2020; Lemoine; Hartnell; Leroy, 2019; Mayer *et al*., 2013; Sosik *et al*., 2019).

Followers tend to be inspired by leaders who uphold standards and rules, offering clarity and security in organizational contexts (ethical leadership, deontology). As different moral approaches coexist, ethical leaders may adopt stricter stances on norms, which calls for investigating the factors that influence their flexibility, especially in cross-cultural contexts (Lemoine; Hartnell; Leroy, 2019).

These leaders seek to integrate norms and duties into the daily lives of teams (Treviño; Hartman; Brown, 2000), institutionalizing them in the organizational culture (Treviño; Brown; Hartman, 2003). However, they may discourage questioning of norms, being less receptive to organizational criticism and less tolerant of non-compliance, even if they encourage voice as an expression of justice in moral leadership (Brown; Treviño; Harrison, 2005; Hannah *et al*., 2014; Lam *et al*., 2016; Mayer *et al*., 2013; Walumbwa; Schaubroeck, 2009).

The tension between promoting justice and resistance to questioning organizational norms raises a central point in the theory of ethical leadership, which starts from the premise that ethical leaders "give followers a voice" (Brown; Treviño; Harrison, 2005, p. 120): to what extent does this incentive occur? In this sense, **voice** "refers to the discretionary verbal communication of ideas, suggestions, or opinions where the intent is to improve organizational or unit functioning" (Morrison; Wheeler-Smith; Kamdar, 2010, p. 3), with **ethical voice** being a subset aimed at improving ethical decisions and behaviors based on perceptions of right and wrong (Huang; Paterson, 2017).

Ethical leaders encourage two-way communication and, by aligning speech and conduct with ethical principles, encourage leaders to speak up more often (Walumbwa; Schaubroeck, 2009). According to Bashshur and Oc (2015), this expression fosters creativity, improves decisions and accelerates organizational adaptation, reinforcing the importance of voice for organizational performance and the understanding of ethical leadership.

Management research shows that fear of retaliation and the perception of uselessness are the main factors that prevent managers from reporting concerns to the authorities (Kish-Gephart *et al*., 2009; Morrison; Milliken, 2000). It is therefore recommended to consider reports from colleagues or supervisors to assess the manifestation of voice and its relationship with turnover. Ethical leadership, in turn, contributes to an environment that is more receptive to suggestions, promoting organizational benefits (Lam *et al*., 2016).

These leaders stimulate voice and reduce the intention to leave by cognitively engaging those they lead. Their openness to dialog can also moderate the relationship between the manifestation of voice and managerial support (Lam *et al*., 2016). In addition, they favor

whistleblowing behaviors and ethical expression, motivated by positive moral emotions, which are fundamental for confronting inappropriate conduct (Farooq; Khan, 2024). Although most research on ethical leadership has been carried out in civil organizations, studies confirm its effectiveness and its positive effects on the well-being of those being led (Avey; Wernsing; Palanski, 2012; Brown; Treviño; Harrison, 2005; Piccolo *et al.*, 2010; Schaubroeck *et al.*, 2012).

Understanding its influence becomes even more relevant in rigid hierarchical structures, such as military institutions, where the impact of leaders' actions is enhanced by three factors: formalized obedience to authority, the concentration of decision-making power in higher ranks and the organizational culture based on discipline and conformity. In this scenario, the attitudes of leaders directly shape the behavior of subordinates, and are essential for managing ethical dilemmas and preventing deviant conduct.

Leading by example, in this context, requires recognizing ethical dimensions in everyday decisions and identifying forms of moral disengagement in oneself and in the team. In the military, moral competence[1] is fundamental, as ethically correct behavior is not enough to curb unethical practices or violations of social norms (Graaff *et al.*, 2017).

The research by Graaff et al. (2017) shows that ethical training in the Armed Forces, such as in the Dutch Army, has been insufficient: students face difficulties in applying the knowledge acquired in practice. Training, especially for non-commissioned officers, still favors theoretical content and standards over the development of individual and collective moral competence. Although it is claimed that military organizations differ from civilian ones, a recent study found no relevant distinctions regarding ethical leadership, reinforcing the importance of research in this field (King *et al.*, 2023).

Ethical leadership in the military affects individual and organizational aspects such as trust, environment, hierarchical relations, and competence (King *et al.*, 2023). For this reason, everyday ethical dilemmas should be valued in training, as they directly influence decision-making in extreme scenarios, such as armed conflicts. Ignoring these issues can have organizational, personal, and emotional consequences. Ethics must therefore be incorporated into military training on an ongoing basis, going beyond the combat field (Graaff; Zalm, 2023).

Although military personnel recognize the importance of ethical dilemmas, Graaff (2020) points out that critical self-reflection and self-evaluation are still underdeveloped. This deepening is essential to tackle "moral disengagement," a process by which ethically questionable actions are justified to avoid emotional discomfort. Research reinforces the need to better understand how military personnel deal with these dilemmas and rationalize decisions in adverse contexts (Graaff; Giebels; Verweij, 2020).

Investing in the critical self-reflection of military personnel can help prevent moral stress and improve ethical judgment, especially by encouraging the analysis of principles such as prioritizing the collective good, a core value of military *bildung* that, although widely taught,

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1   Moral competence is the ability to act ethically and responsibly, considering the interests involved after careful analysis of the facts. It goes beyond technical knowledge, requiring ethical attitude and practical skills. In the military context, it is an essential character trait, critical to mission success and professional performance. In operations involving ethical dilemmas, such as deciding between protecting one's team and respecting the opponent's life, decisions must follow recognized ethical standards, not just operational norms. The absence of this competency can pose significant risks to the mission, the group and society. This is why the Royal Netherlands Army classifies it as indispensable for military development and mission accomplishment (Graaff et al., 2017).

is rarely questioned (Graaff; Giebels; Verweij, 2020; Graaff *et al.*, 2017). Integrating ethical issues into training strengthens the group's moral compass and encourages the correction of misconduct. The focus should therefore be on developing moral competence, not just normative compliance or the theoretical internalization of ethical precepts (Graaff *et al.*, 2017).

Finally, the ongoing development of ethical public leadership in military services and academies must take place at both a methodological and substantive level (Graaff *et al.*, 2017; King *et al.*, 2023). This includes personnel management, organizational structure, and the leader-follower relationship, as well as education, training, and development. These areas are critical not only for the civilian public sector, but also for military institutions.

In this context, ethical leadership plays a central role in promoting ethical voice, aligning with organizational culture and the principles of social learning. Ethical voice acts as a strategic tool to identify and address moral issues, functioning as the "eyes and ears" of the organization (Huang; Paterson, 2017). In addition to broadening the influence of leadership and strengthening groups, it encourages the responsible expression of concerns. For Huang and Paterson (2017), this practice makes it possible to detect faults and act preventively. Morrison (2023) points out that it is essential for tackling misconduct and promoting fair and inclusive environments, even in the face of conflicting managerial pressures.

Ethical voice refers to expressing concerns and challenging ethically inappropriate behavior, adopted by leaders and subordinates to confront immoral practices and propose improvements in the workplace (Chen; Treviño, 2022; Huang; Paterson, 2017). Its importance lies in its ability to identify unethical conduct early, enabling effective responses (Zheng *et al.*, 2021).

Given its relevance, it is necessary to employ more refined methods, such as scoping reviews, to map emerging trends and categories in the literature on ethical leadership (King *et al.*, 2023). This article seeks to fill an academic gap in Brazil, where there are still no studies that relate ethical leadership and ethical voice in the military context, and the scoping review is the starting point for this advance.

Given the above, the following question arises: **How does ethical leadership influence the manifestation of ethical voice in the military context?** The aim of this study is to map and analyze, through a scoping review, the theoretical and empirical evidence on the influence of ethical leadership on the manifestation of ethical voice in the military context. In addition, it seeks to identify the main factors that facilitate or restrict this relationship, considering the particularities of the military organizational environment.

2 ETHICAL LEADERSHIP: THE CHALLENGE OF MAKING FOLLOWERS FEEL HEARD

Ethical leadership encourages appropriate conduct through personal actions, interpersonal relationships and two-way communication, reinforcing ethical behavior among followers (Ren; Chad, 2020; Siddiquei *et al.*, 2021; Wang; Feng; Lawton, 2015). It also positively influences social performance, especially when combined with a justice orientation on the part of the leader (Fatoki, 2019; Javed *et al.*, 2021).

Physical and social distance between leaders and followers affects the perception of leadership and its organizational effects. In ethical leadership, the role of the moral leader involves direct actions to promote ethical behavior and curb deviations, with clear communication of values, modeling of conduct and the use of rewards and discipline. Thus, ethics becomes a pillar of leadership, distinguishing itself in ethically neutral organizational contexts (Brown; Treviño, 2006; Treviño; Brown; Hartman, 2003; Treviño; Hartman; Brown, 2000).

Ethical leadership strengthens communication, knowledge sharing, motivation, job satisfaction, and commitment. It encourages ethical behavior, social responsibility, innovation, participation in decisions, as well as ensuring fair treatment and respect in the organizational environment (Bandura, 1977; Brown; Mitchell, 2010; Brown; Treviño, 2006; Brown; Treviño; Harrison, 2005; Kalshoven; Den Hartog; De Hoogh, 2011; Piccolo *et al.*, 2010; Toor; Ofori, 2009; Treviño *et al.*, 2006)

This leadership influences employees' decision to speak up or remain silent (Zehir; Erdogan, 2011) by providing support, trust, and encouragement for constructive contribution (Al Halbusi *et al.*, 2021). Moreover, it acts as a mediator between organizational culture, organizational citizenship, and other leadership styles (Hao *et al*., 2022), promoting psychological safety, justice, and participatory management (Ashford; Sutcliffe; Christianson, 2009; Tangirala; Ramanujam, 2009). However, no single style is decisive; the leader's ability to adapt and improve their styles is more relevant to success (Botha; Steyn, 2023).

In this context, Xia, Lu and Wang (2024) analyzed the influence of the leader's ethical voice on subordinates' performance and highlighted the need to investigate its effects on other work behaviors. The results show that this impact occurs indirectly, mediated by subordinates' identification with the leader and the quality of the leader-member relationship. The greater this identification and quality, the more positive the task performance. Additional studies also indicate that the ethical voice of leadership favors voice behaviors among employees, stimulating creativity (Chen; Hou, 2016; Sari, 2019; Zheng *et al*., 2021).

2.1 Ethical voice: challenges in promotion and mediation

The literature on ethical voice associated with organizational silencing and employee voice emphasizes the importance of encouraging the expression of concerns about abusive conduct, improper behavior, and ethical deviations (Chen; Treviño, 2022; Huang; Paterson, 2017; Morrison, 2023). The concept of silencing, introduced by Morrison and Milliken (2000), refers to the employees' decision not to speak up for fear of retaliation or lack of openness to dialog. Employee voice, on the other hand, encompasses the means by which they try to influence work and organizational practices: "when voice is actually expressed, it needs to be acted upon or, at the very least, acknowledged" (Bashshur; Oc, 2015, p. 21). The manifestation of ethical voice, although often seen as pro-social behavior, can challenge the status quo and generate internal tensions, as it seeks to defend the well-being of all involved, even when at odds with management guidelines (Chen; Treviño, 2022).

Ethical leadership is essential for fostering an ethical voice in groups, influencing behavior with social learning, a process in which individuals observe, interpret, and reproduce

accepted conduct in the group (Huang; Paterson, 2017). The ethical manifestation of the leader reinforces this leadership in the team through social influence (Kim *et al.*, 2022), encouraging the reporting of abuses, misconduct, and breaches of integrity, while also promoting a fair, inclusive, and participatory environment (Morrison, 2023). Studies show that ethical leadership encourages employee expression, generates valuable insights (Avey Wernsing; Palanski, 2012), stimulates creativity (Chen; Hou, 2016), and strengthens a collective ethical climate through multilevel social learning (Bai; Lin; Liu, 2019). However, its effectiveness depends on a psychologically safe environment and an organizational culture geared towards mastery (Men *et al.*, 2020).

Studies in behavioral ethics investigate why coworkers verbally support ethical voice, such as when raising concerns about product safety or proposing fairer treatment for employees with disabilities (Chen, 2020; Treviño *et al.*, 2014). This form of manifestation alerts leaders and colleagues to ethical issues, allowing for interventions before serious mistakes are made (Chen; Treviño, 2022). Peer support reinforces these messages, promoting more upright decisions (Bain *et al.*, 2021; Satterstrom; Kerrissey; DiBenigno, 2020). The ethical voice can generate moral uplift and spread throughout the group, encouraging responsible behavior (Chen; Treviño, 2022). For this reason, leadership training should encourage an ethical psychological climate, reinforce proactive behavior and prevent moral lapses (Huang; Paterson, 2017; Zheng *et al.,* 2021). By strengthening transparency, fairness, and accountability, ethical voice contributes to fairer and more inclusive organizational environments (Morrison, 2023).

The literature on voice has neglected ethical voice, partly due to the narrow conception of pro-social behaviors, and still lacks a consolidated model (Bashshur; Oc, 2015). Creating an organizational climate that promotes safety for the expression of ideas and concerns is key to stimulating innovation and development. The promotional voice, aimed at improvement, is especially relevant to organizational effectiveness (Morrison, 2023). Thus, it is necessary to investigate the effects of ethical psychological climate on proactive behaviors, such as general voice, accountability, and specific forms of manifestation, with a focus on promoting ethics at work (Gok *et al.*, 2022). Strengthening ethical voice remains a crucial challenge, both theoretically and practically (Chen; Treviño, 2022).

Measuring voice directed at different sources, such as supervisors and internal or external members, is key to understanding how authoritarian leadership and uncertainty affect organizational processes and followers' willingness to express concerns (Zheng *et al.*, 2021). Ethical leadership, in turn, encourages expression and stimulates creativity, especially in innovative environments (Chen; Hou, 2016; Sari, 2019; Zheng *et al.*, 2021). In light of this, aligning actions with organizational culture and compliance requires ethical leaders to have an integrated view of social and interpersonal relationships. These competencies can be developed in a way that strengthens communication between leaders and followers, promoting mutual understanding of organizational challenges.

Considering these challenges, it becomes essential to understand how ethical leadership influences the manifestation of the ethical voice in the military context. Thus, this article aims to map and analyze, through a scoping review, the theoretical and empirical evidence on this relationship. It also seeks to identify the main factors that facilitate or restrict this dynamic, taking into account the particularities of the military environment, which will be outlined in the next section.

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3 METHODOLOGY

This scoping review was conducted according to the methodology established by the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) *Manual for Evidence Synthesis* (Aromataris *et al*., 2024) and the PRISMA-ScR checklist, published in March 2025. The protocol was drawn up and registered with the *Open Science Framework* (OSF) under registration number DOI: 10.17605/OSF.IO/TD8H5[2], on March 6, 2025, ensuring the transparency of the review process.

3.1 Methodological procedures, analysis and discussion

Scoping reviews, although recent, are increasingly being used to map broad topics, despite still being underdeveloped in the management field (Pham *et al*., 2014). This approach is useful for guiding research agendas and indicating implications for organizational policies or practices (Tricco *et al.*, 2016), especially in little-explored topics. By enabling the collection and analysis of the current state of the literature, it makes it possible to propose new investigations.

This study seeks to understand how ethical leadership influences the manifestation of ethical voice in the military context. Thus, a scoping review was conducted with the aim of mapping theoretical and empirical evidence on this relationship. The initial collection used search strategies on the Web of Science database, chosen for its wide credibility in the scientific community (Chadegani *et al*., 2013; Mongeon; Paul-Hus, 2016).

The criteria and keywords adopted maintained the original search strategy, using quotation marks to preserve the accuracy of the terms: "ethical leadership" OR "moral leadership" AND "employee voice" AND "ethical voice" AND "military" AND "armed forces." The period considered was from 1974 to 2025. Areas of knowledge with no direct relation to the scope of the study were excluded, keeping only those with a greater affinity with the fields of Administration and Military Science, such as Political Science and International Relations, Public Administration, Ethics, Business, and Management. Only studies published in English, Spanish, and Portuguese were included. This filtering resulted in **1,149** records.

The screening of the articles found was managed by Rayyan software. Based on the previously defined inclusion and exclusion criteria, priority was initially given to selecting the most cited studies in the Web of Science database. The titles and abstracts will be read independently by two reviewers, with a third responsible for resolving possible discrepancies, ensuring that the studies adhere to the problem and objectives of the study. Data extraction and synthesis will be descriptive, presented in tables and/or images, according to the PRISMA-ScR checklist and flow diagram (Table 1).

Graph 1 shows a significant increase in publications and citations over time, reflecting the increase in academic interest in the topic, highlighting its current relevance. The main areas of publication are concentrated in business, management, and ethics, highlighting the intersection between leadership, ethics, and organizational practices. In contrast, public administration has a smaller presence, and political science and international relations have a marginal influence on the debate.

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2   Ethical Leadership and Ethical Voice in the Military Context: A Scoping Review: According to the link: https://osf.io/td8h5/

Table 1 – PRISMA flow diagram: identification, inclusion and exclusion of records
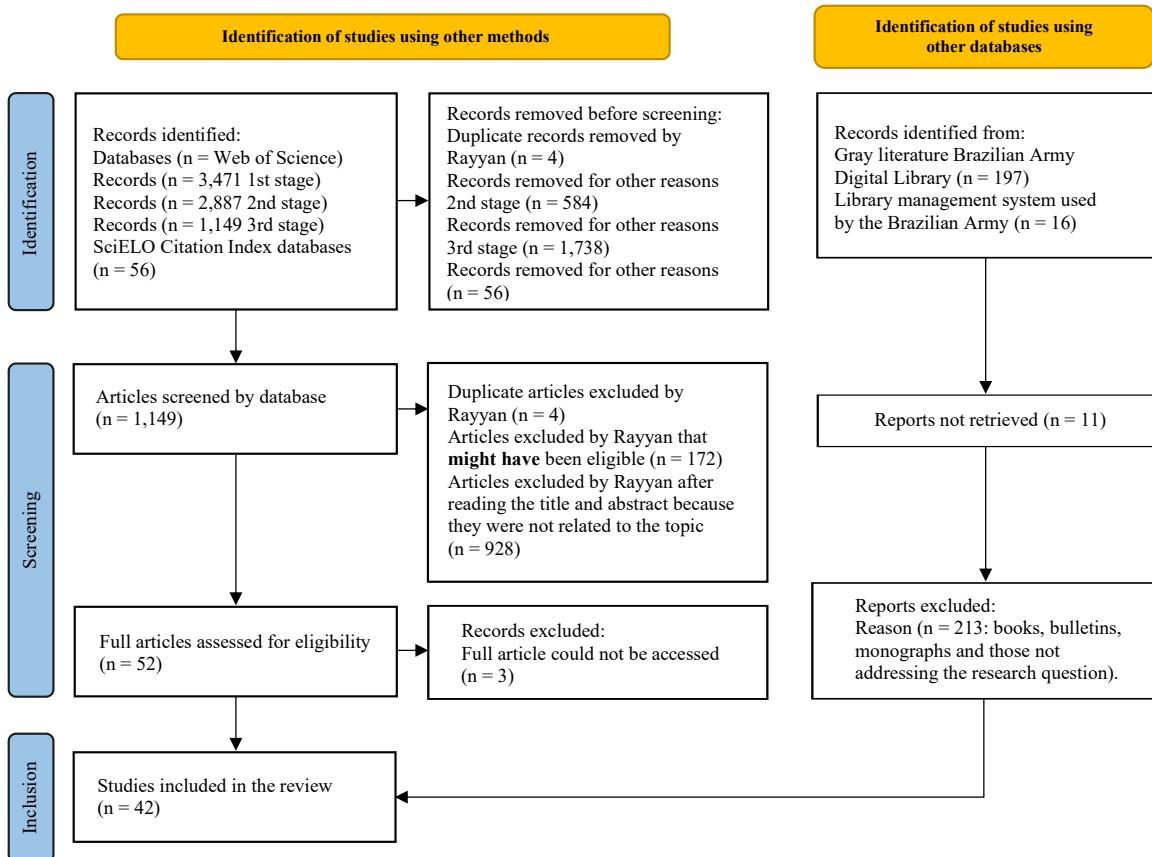
Source: Authors' preparation based on PRISMA flow charts (2025).

Graph 1 – Maps of the most cited areas of the Web of Science
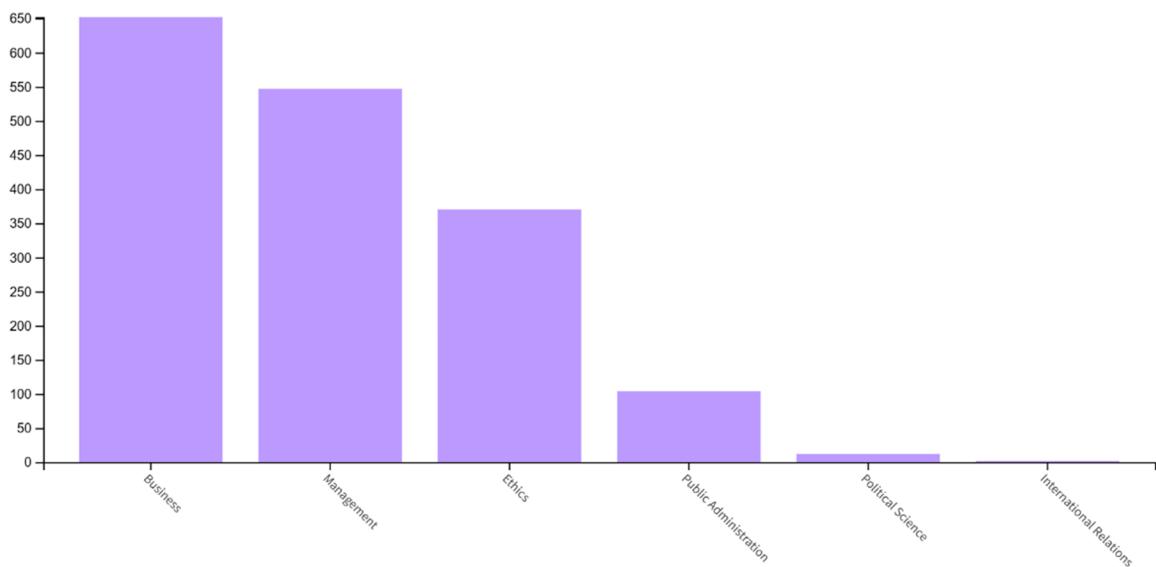
Source: Authors' preparation based on bibliometric data (2025).

The keyword co-occurrence analysis, based on the authors' indexing, identified "ethical leadership" as a central concept, strongly linked to styles such as transformational, servant, and authentic leadership. Its association with organizational performance was also highlighted, reflected in terms such as "job satisfaction," "employee voice," and "team performance," ethical dilemmas such as "corruption" and "abusive supervision," and normative dimensions including "procedural justice," "virtue ethics," and "trust," confirming its role in promoting organizational equity and integrity (Figure 1).

**Figure 1 – Cooccurrence of Web of Science keywords**
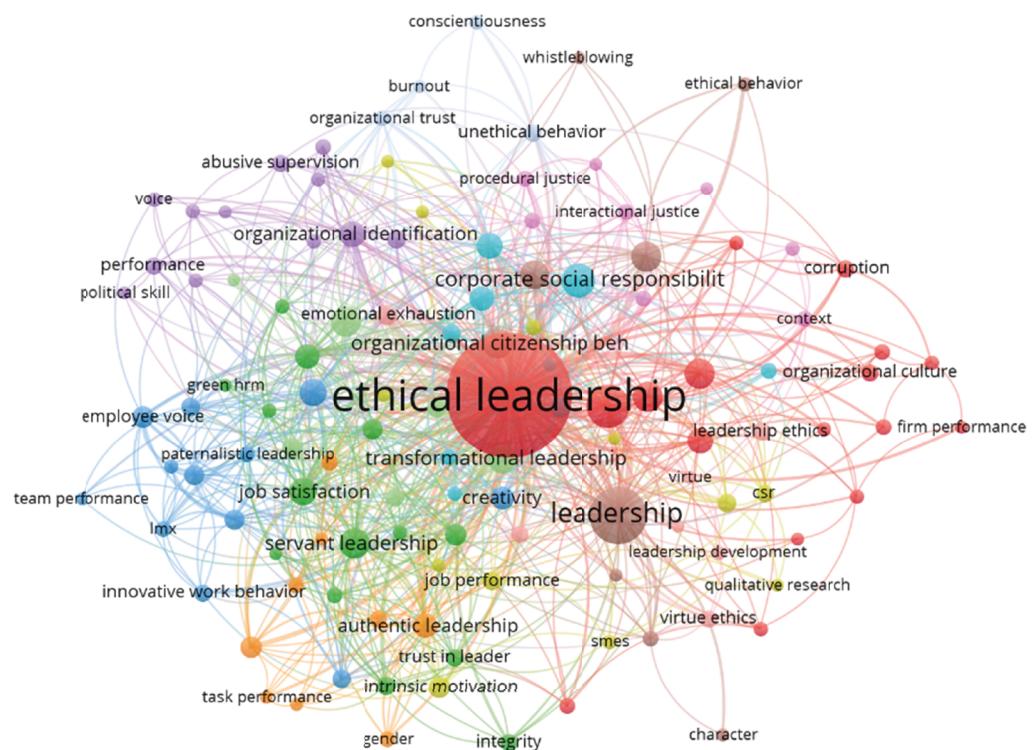
Source: Authors' preparation based on bibliometric data (2025).

The bibliographic coupling analysis identifies influential authors in ethical leadership research, including Brown and Mitchell (2010), Mayer *et al*. (2013), and Liden (2014). Segmentation into clusters indicates different theoretical approaches, with some studies emphasizing the impact of ethical leadership on organizational culture and others exploring its relationship with ethical behavior and employee well-being (Figure 2).

The analysis of bibliographic coupling between countries highlights the academic interconnectivity in studies on leadership and ethical voice. The United States and China stand out as production centers, while England, Australia, and Germany show strong collaboration and impact. Emerging countries such as India, Pakistan, and Malaysia are expanding their presence, reflecting scientific growth in the region. The collaboration networks, grouped by color, indicate three major blocs: the Western bloc (green), with the United States, England, Australia, and Germany; the Asian bloc (red), with China, Pakistan, and Malaysia; and the blue bloc, with Canada, South Africa, and European countries (Figure 3).

This data reinforces the concentration of research in specific hubs, while at the same time pointing to its global expansion, highlighting the importance of including new contexts, such as the military and Brazil.

Figure 2 – Map of the coupling structure of the most cited authors in the Web of Science
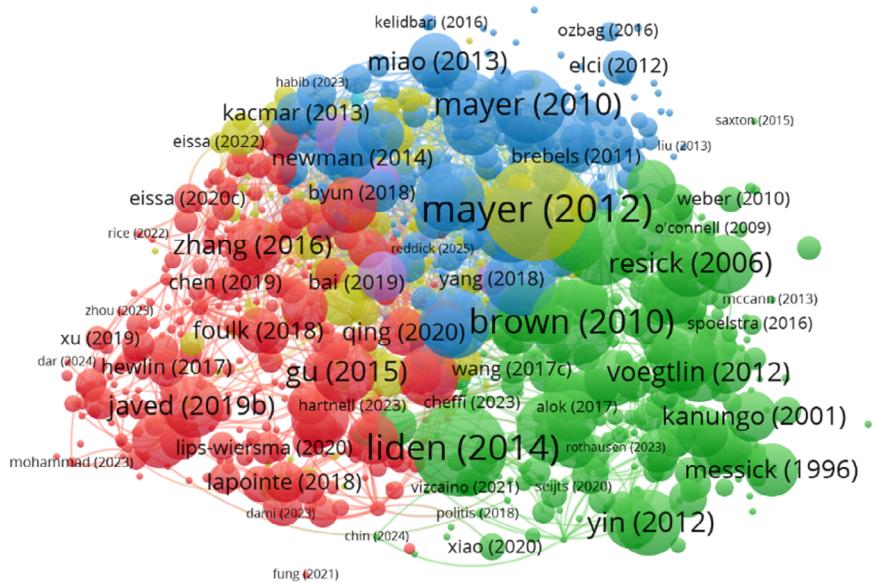
Source: Authors' preparation based on bibliometric data (2025).

Figure 3 – Map of the coupling structure of the most cited countries in the Web of Science

Source: Authors' preparation based on bibliometric data (2025).

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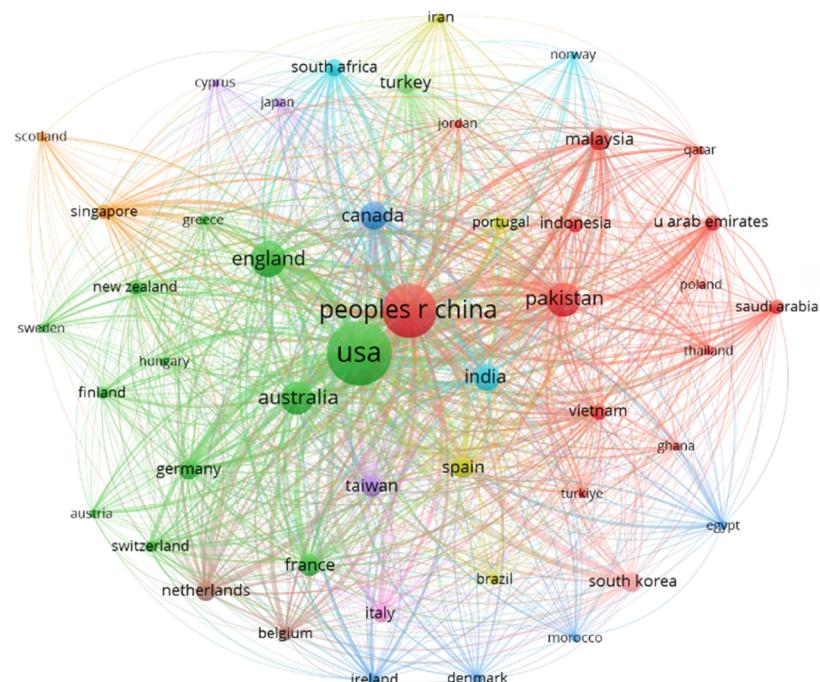
To ensure consistency, the reviewers analyzed between 40 and 60 publications, adjusted the screening protocol and, after consensus, selected 42 eligible articles (Table 2).

Table 2 – Analysis of included studies

Study number and author(s)	Study design/sample	Main findings
(1) ZEHIR, C.; ERDOGAN, E. The association between organizational silence and ethical leadership through employee performance. **Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences**, [*s. l.*], v. 24, p. 1389-1404, 2011.	Quantitative survey of 714 employees from national and multinational companies	Ethical leadership positively influences employees' willingness to express concerns and suggestions, fostering an environment of transparency and responsibility. Ethical leaders model desirable behavior, encourage open communication and reduce organizational silence. The study reveals that ethical leadership acts as a mediator between organizational silence and employee performance, strengthening trust and commitment in the organization.
(2) BHAL, K. T.; DADHICH, A. Impact of ethical leadership and leader–member exchange on whistle blowing: The moderating impact of the moral intensity of the issue. **Journal of Business Ethics**, [*s. l.*], v. 103, p. 485-496, 2011.	Quantitative survey of 248 graduate students	Ethical leadership positively influences whistleblowing because it creates an environment of trust and reduces the fear of retaliation. Ethical leaders set moral standards, support employees in making ethical decisions and encourage transparency. The relationship between ethical leadership and whistleblowing is strongest when the problem has high moral intensity (i.e. major negative consequences). In addition, a positive relationship between leaders and subordinates (high-quality LMX) also favors whistleblowing, as it increases the sense of security and organizational commitment.
(3) SCHAUBROECK, J. M. *et al*. Embedding ethical leadership within and across organization levels. **Academy of Management Journal**, [*s. l.*], v. 55, n. 5, p. 1053-1078, 2012.	Quantitative research among different hierarchical levels of the United States Army	Ethical leadership directly impacts subordinates and indirectly impacts lower levels through organizational culture. Ethical leaders shape employee behavior through social modeling and the creation of organizational norms that promote transparency and responsibility. In addition, an ethical culture not only reduces wrongdoing, but also encourages whistleblowing and engagement in exemplary practices. The study suggests that ethical leadership not only spreads "from the top down," but is also strengthened when incorporated into the norms and values of each organizational level.
(4) AVEY, J. B.; WERNSING, T. S.; PALANSKI, M. E. Exploring the process of ethical leadership: The mediating role of employee voice and psychological ownership. **Journal of Business Ethics**, [*s. l.*], v. 107, p. 21-34, 2012.	Quantitative research between different positions	The study analyzes ethical leadership as a factor that strengthens organizational commitment and improves the quality of social relations at work, directly impacting employee engagement and their willingness to speak up (organizational voice). Ethical leadership plays a crucial role in employee engagement and in promoting voice within organizations. To maximize this impact, it is essential that both organizational leaders and supervisors adopt consistent ethical practices, creating an environment of trust and openness to dialogue.

Continues...

Table 2 – Continuation

Study number and author(s)	Study design/sample	Main findings
(5) HANSEN, S. D. *et al*. Ethical leadership: Assessing the value of a multifoci social exchange perspective. **Journal of Business Ethics**, [*s. l.*], v. 115, 435-449, 2013.	Mixed methods, combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews	The study analyzes the influence of ethical leadership on employee commitment, highlighting that both organizational and supervisory leadership strengthen this bond. Social exchange relationships mediate this relationship, with the effects within each focus being stronger than between focuses. In addition, ethical leadership has an impact on various employee attitudes and behaviors, with cascading effects occurring with multifocal social exchange dynamics.
(6) QI, Y.; MING-XIA, L. Ethical leadership, organizational identification and employee voice: Examining moderated mediation process in the Chinese insurance industry. **Asia pacific Business Review**, London, v. 20, n. 2, p. 231-248, 2014.	Quantitative survey of 450 questionnaires from subordinates and 80 from supervisors	Ethical leadership encourages employee voice behavior by encouraging the expression of opinions and concerns. This effect is mediated by organizational identification, making employees more likely to speak up when they identify with the organization. Ethical leaders act as role models, in line with social learning theory, in which employees learn behaviors by observing and imitating their leaders. In addition, they promote a culture of trust, increasing the safety of employees to express themselves without fear of reprisals. Ethical leadership generates positive results, such as greater satisfaction, commitment and proactivity, strengthening organizational engagement. However, its influence can vary according to the cultural context, adapting to local norms.
(7) YANG, C. Does ethical leadership lead to happy workers? A study on the impact of ethical leadership, subjective well-being, and life happiness in the Chinese culture. **Journal of Business Ethics**, [*s. l.*], v. 123, p. 513-525, 2014.	Two-stage structural equation modeling	Job satisfaction mediates the relationship between ethical leadership and employee well-being. This study offers significant insight into Chinese ethical leadership and employee outcomes, as it adds to the chain of studies on the importance of ethical leadership and its strong impact on workers and society.
(8) SHARIF, M. M.; SCANDURA, T. A. Do perceptions of ethical conduct matter during organizational change? Ethical leadership and employee involvement. **Journal of Business Ethics**, [*s. l.*], v. 124, p. 185-196, 2013.	Hayes Macro Process tests hypotheses of supervisors from various organizations	Ethical leadership increases employee satisfaction by promoting security and appreciation, especially in times of change. It also encourages organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs), stimulating positive actions beyond the formal requirements of the job. By acting as role models, ethical leaders strengthen the organizational culture, encouraging honesty, fairness, and trust, which reduces uncertainty and strengthens employee commitment. During organizational change, ethical leadership mitigates stress and facilitates adaptation, resulting in greater motivation, engagement, and performance.

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Table 2 – Continuation

Study number and author(s)	Study design/sample	Main findings
(9) BROWN, M. E.; TREVIÑO, L. K. Do role models matter? An investigation of role modeling as an antecedent of perceived ethical leadership. **Journal of Business Ethics**, [*s. l.*], v. 122, p. 587-598, 2013.	Field research with interviews with 217 managers	The study investigates the influence of ethical role models on ethical leadership, considering childhood, career mentors and top management. Having an ethical role model in one's career is positively related to ethical leadership as perceived by subordinates, with the age of the leader moderating this relationship. Ethical leaders promote trust, transparency and discipline, setting clear standards and encouraging the reporting of problems. In addition, their moral development increases leadership effectiveness, strengthening positive employee behaviors.
(10) DEMIRTAS, O. Ethical leadership influence at organizations: Evidence from the field. **Journal of Business Ethics**, [*s. l.*], v. 126, n 2, p. 273-284, 2013.	Quantitative survey among 418 employees	The study revealed that ethical leadership increases engagement at work and contributes to the reduction of inappropriate behavior, both directly and indirectly. In addition, managers' ethical values and organizational ethical perspectives can act as agents of virtue. Perceived organizational justice mediates this relationship, with an idealistic ethical ideology strengthening its impact, while a relativistic one weakens it.
(11) PUCIC, J. Do as I say (and do): Ethical leadership through the eyes of lower ranks. **Journal of Business Ethics**, [*s. l.*], v. 129, p. 655-671, 2014.	Survey of 3,000 public sector/military workers	Ethical leadership can be a powerful tool for promoting a positive organizational environment, as long as it is perceived as genuine and backed by a culture of fairness and equity. In the military context, where hierarchy strongly influences power relations, the perception of ethical leadership can vary according to the position of subordinates, which makes it essential to consider multiple perspectives when assessing its effects.
(12) HASSAN, S. The importance of ethical leadership and personal control in promoting improvement-centered voice among government employees. **Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory**, [*s. l.*], v. 25, n. 3, p. 697-719, 2015.	Study with 477 civil servants and 161 public managers	The study highlights that the combination of ethical leadership and perceived personal control increases employees' willingness to contribute ideas and organizational improvements. An ethical environment alone is not enough; it is essential that employees perceive impact and autonomy in their actions. Ethical leadership reduces fears about negative consequences when expressing opinions, strengthening the culture of trust, transparency and fairness. As a result, employees feel more empowered and responsible, fostering a constructive organizational voice aimed at continuous improvement.
(13) ÖZBAĞ, G. K. The role of personality in leadership: Five factor personality traits and ethical leadership. **Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences**, [*s. l.*], v. 235, p. 235-242, 2016.	Quantitative survey of leaders and subordinates in various organizations	The study confirms the influence of personality traits on ethical leadership. Neuroticism is negatively correlated, while openness to experience, friendliness and conscientiousness are positive predictors. Extroversion had no significant impact. Emotionally stable, open, affable and disciplined leaders are seen as more ethical, which favors commitment and organizational citizenship. The findings highlight the importance of considering individual factors when selecting and developing ethical leaders.

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Table 2 – Continuation

Study number and author(s)	Study design/sample	Main findings
(14) WANG, Y. D.; SUNG, W. C. Predictors of organizational citizenship behavior: ethical leadership and workplace jealousy. **Journal of Business Ethics**, [*s. l.*], v. 135, p. 117-128, 2014.	Quantitative survey of 491 Taiwanese hospital employees	Ethical leadership plays a key role in promoting a harmonious and productive work environment. In the hospital context, where social comparisons are inevitable, the presence of ethical leaders can minimize resentment and encourage positive behavior, improving organizational performance and cooperation among professionals.
(15) PÁEZ, I.; SALGADO, E. When deeds speak, words are nothing: a study of ethical leadership in Colombia. **Business Ethics: A European Review**, [*s. l.*], v. 25, n. 4, p. 538-555, 2016.	Case study with 124 Colombian managers and 248 subordinates	Ethical leadership strengthens trust, promoting a transparent and honest organizational environment. Leaders influence more through actions than speeches, positively impacting the organizational climate, commitment and collaboration. In addition, they reduce unethical behavior, reducing misconduct and corruption. Consistency between a leader's words and actions strengthens trust and the organizational climate.
(16) LEE, D. *et al*. Ethical leadership and employee moral voice: The mediating role of moral efficacy and the moderating role of leader–follower value congruence. **Journal of Business Ethics**, [*s. l.*], v. 141, p. 47-57, 2017.	Quantitative study with 154 South Korean employees	The study highlights ethical leadership as a driver of employees' moral behavior. Unlike other research, which focuses on preventing unethical conduct, this article emphasizes how ethical leadership actively encourages ethical actions, such as moral voice. In addition, it emphasizes that the congruence of values between leader and follower enhances its positive effects. This knowledge is particularly useful for organizations seeking solid ethical cultures, demonstrating that ethical leadership not only reduces inappropriate conduct, but also strengthens employee engagement in defending moral principles.
(17) ZHU, J. *et al*. Ethical leadership and employee pro-social rule-breaking behavior in China. **Asian Business & Management**, [*s. l.*], v. 17, p. 59-81, 2018.	Quantitative survey of employees in Chinese organizations	The article highlights that in China, Confucian culture emphasizes moral virtue over rigid formal rules. As a result, there is greater cultural flexibility for breaking rules in situations where it can benefit the group. The study is relevant to managers, organizational leaders and corporate policymakers interested in understanding how ethical leadership can influence pro-social transgression decisions and shape organizational norms.
(18) AHN, J.; LEE, S.; YUN, S. Leaders' core self-evaluation, ethical leadership, and employees' job performance: The moderating role of employees' exchange ideology. **Journal of Business Ethics**, [*s. l.*], v. 148, p. 457-470, 2016.	Survey of 225 leader-subordinate dyads	Ethical leadership strengthens organizational transparency by encouraging the moral voice of employees and aligning institutional values to promote ethical behavior. Leaders' positive self-concept drives ethical leadership, which improves both functional performance and engagement beyond formal responsibilities. In addition, ethical leadership mediates the relationship between leaders' self-assessment and employee performance, while exchange ideology moderates the impact of ethical leadership on organizational outcomes.

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Table 2 – Continuation

Study number and author(s)	Study design/sample	Main findings
(19) AFSAR, B.; SHAHJEHAN, A. Linking ethical leadership and moral voice: The effects of moral efficacy, trust in leader, and leader-follower value congruence. **Leadership & Organization Development Journal**, [*s. l.*], v. 39, n. 6, p. 775-793, 2018.	Quantitative survey of 364 employees and supervisors	The study concludes that ethical leadership has a significant impact on promoting the moral voice of employees, but this effect is amplified when there are high levels of trust in the leader and congruence of values between leader and follower. In addition, moral self-efficacy acts as an essential mediator in this process. The study suggests that companies wishing to promote an ethical environment and encourage the moral voice of employees should invest in strengthening trust in the leader and clearly communicating organizational values aligned with ethics.
(20) SANDERS, P.; GRINT, K. The interplay of the Dirty Hands of British area bombing and the wicked problem of defeating Nazi Germany in the Second World War–A lesson in leadership ethics. **Leadership**, [*s. l.*], v. 15, n. 3, p. 271-295, 2018.	Historical analysis of military decisions in World War II	Ethical leadership in military and political contexts faces complex challenges in which strategic decisions can conflict with moral principles. The study broadens understanding of the topic by highlighting the need for situational and flexible approaches, considering that, in high-pressure scenarios, leaders often need to opt for the "least worst" rather than the "absolutely right." It also contributes to leadership theory by demonstrating the complexity of ethical decision-making, in which moral dilemmas are inevitable. Ethical leadership in military contexts requires flexible approaches in the face of complex moral dilemmas.
(21) QUADE, M. J.; PERRY, S. J.; HUNTER, E. M. Boundary conditions of ethical leadership: Exploring supervisor-induced and job hindrance stress as potential inhibitors. **Journal of Business Ethics**, [*s. l.*], v. 158, p. 1165-1184, 2017.	Quantitative survey of supervisors and employees	The study suggests that in order to maximize the positive effects of ethical leadership, organizations should minimize sources of stress and ensure that leaders not only promote ethical values, but also create conditions in which employees can perform their duties without unnecessary barriers.
(22) BAI, Y.; LIN, L.; LIU, J. T. Leveraging the employee voice: a multi-level social learning perspective of ethical leadership. **The International Journal of Human Resource Management**, [*s. l.*], v. 30, n. 12, p. 1869-1901, 2017.	Multi-level study with 47 managers and 211 subordinates	The article highlights that ethical leadership boosts the expression of the organizational voice by serving as a model of moral conduct for employees. The study reinforces the importance of strategies that encourage an environment of trust and social learning and the organizational ethical climate as key factors that facilitate employee engagement in voice behaviors, ensuring that ethical leadership is effective in promoting voice and organizational engagement.
(23) ZHU, W. *et al*. Ethical leadership with both "moral person" and "moral manager" aspects: Scale development and cross-cultural validation. **Journal of Business Ethics**, [*s. l.*], v. 158, n. 2, p. 547-565, 2019.	Interviews with 15 MBA students	This study demonstrates that ethical leadership can act as a catalyst for active employee participation, but it needs to be supported by an organizational culture that values integrity and open dialogue. The study concludes that ethical leadership is a central element in building a healthy organizational environment, favoring both employee well-being and operational efficiency.

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Table 2 – Continuation

Study number and author(s)	Study design/sample	Main findings
(24) KUENZI, M. *et al.* Supervisor-subordinate (dis)agreement on ethical leadership: An investigation of its antecedents and relationship to organizational deviance. **Business Ethics Quarterly**, [*s. l.*], v. 29, n. 1, p. 25-53, 2018.	Quantitative survey of 1,399 subordinates and 283 supervisors	The study identified that ethical leaders promote greater organizational engagement, especially when employees perceive that there is support for internal social responsibility practices. Ethical leadership was found to play a central role in creating a more collaborative and participative work environment. The evidence reinforces that ethical leadership practices not only reduce deviant behavior in the workplace, but also contribute significantly to developing and sustaining workers' professional lives by encouraging them to actively participate in knowledge sharing.
(25) TU, Y. *et al.* Differentiating two facets of trust in colleagues: How ethical leadership influences cross-team knowledge sharing. **Leadership & Organization Development Journal**, [*s. l.*], v. 41, n. 1, p. 88-100, 2020.	Survey of 214 leader-subordinate dyads	The study concludes that ethical leadership is a key factor in promoting knowledge sharing between teams, but that this effect is more strongly mediated by affective trust than cognitive trust. This suggests that leaders should invest not only in building an image of reliability and competence, but also in interpersonal relationships that generate an environment of psychological safety. In addition, organizations should create formal mechanisms to encourage and reinforce the exchange of knowledge between different teams, ensuring that ethical leadership has a sustainable impact on organizational engagement.
(26) MOSTAFA, A.; SHEN, J. Ethical leadership, internal CSR, organisational engagement and organisational workplace deviance. **Evidence-based HRM: A Global Forum for Empirical Scholarship**, [*s. l.*], v. 8, n. 1, p. 113-127, 2019.	Structural modeling with employees in the Egyptian banking sector	The study reinforces that ethical leadership has an indirect effect on reducing deviant behavior in the workplace by promoting positive perceptions of internal corporate social responsibility and stimulating employee engagement by caring for employees and allowing them to have a voice. To maximize these effects, organizations should adopt practices such as recruiting ethical leaders, continuous ethics training and transparent communication about organizational values and expectations. Ethical leadership has a significant impact on reducing organizational deviance by mediating perceptions of internal corporate social responsibility and organizational engagement.
(27) ZHANG, G.; ZHONG, J.; OZER, M. Status threat and ethical leadership: A power-dependence perspective. **Journal of Business Ethics**, [*s. l*], v. 161, n. 3, p. 665-685, 2020.	Quantitative survey of leaders and subordinates from various sectors	Ethical leadership can be influenced by status threats, but its manifestation depends on organizational and individual factors, such as organizational culture, reward structure and the leader's network of contacts. Leaders who perceive greater dependence on their subordinates tend to adopt ethical practices to preserve their position and maintain positive relationships. However, this relationship is moderated by organizational and contextual variables, which affect the adoption and effectiveness of ethical leadership.

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Table 2 – Continuation

Study number and author(s)	Study design/sample	Main findings
(28) HAMOUDAH, M. M. *et al*. Ethical leadership, ethical climate and integrity violation: A comparative study in Saudi Arabia and Malaysia. **Administrative Sciences**, [*s. l.*], v. 11, n. 2, p. 43, 2021.	Comparative study between public leaders in Saudi Arabia and Malaysia	Ethical leadership plays a key role in promoting an organizational climate of integrity, reducing the occurrence of ethical violations, especially in the public sector. However, the results show that the effectiveness of ethical leadership can vary according to the cultural and institutional context, highlighting differences between Saudi Arabia and Malaysia. Ethical leadership can be used as a tool to reduce unethical practices, improve employee engagement and strengthen organizational governance in different institutional contexts.
(29) ROBINSON, K.; MCKENNA, B.; ROONEY, D. The relationship of risk to rules, values, virtues, and moral complexity: what we can learn from the moral struggles of military leaders. **Journal of Business Ethics**, [*s. l.*], v. 179, n. 3, p. 749-766, 2021.	Study of 254 members of the Royal Australian Air Force	Ethical leadership in the military context strengthens trust, reduces unethical behavior and facilitates communication between leaders and subordinates. It is essential to recognize the individual beyond the hierarchy, considering their multiple subject positions. Executives follow a bureaucratic code focused on organizational reputation, which generates a technocratic and abstract process, dehumanizing decision-making. On the other hand, junior officers, who are more involved in combat, show greater agency and use a more comprehensive moral and ethical language. To balance these aspects, executives must rely on the morality of subordinates, whose loyalty to comrades guides ethical decisions on the battlefield.
(30) CHENG, J.; BAI, H.; HU, C. The relationship between ethical leadership and employee voice: The roles of error management climate and organizational commitment. **Journal of Management & Organization**, [*s. l.*], v. 28, n. 1, p. 58-76, 2019.	Longitudinal study of 15 Chinese retail companies	The study reinforces that ethical leadership can be a decisive factor in stimulating employee voice, but for this, an organizational climate that tolerates mistakes and encourages learning must be cultivated. In addition, the level of organizational commitment moderates this relationship, being more relevant for less committed employees. This knowledge is useful for managers and leaders seeking to create a more participative and innovative organizational environment, where employees feel safe to express their ideas and concerns.
(31) BAKAR, H. A.; CONNAUGHTON, S. L. Ethical leadership, perceived leader–member ethical communication and organizational citizenship behavior: development and validation of a multilevel model. **Leadership & Organization Development Journal**, [*s. l.*], v. 43, n. 1, p. 96-110, 2022.	Structural modeling with 274 employees	The study highlights that effective ethical communication between leaders and teams can be a differentiator in promoting an organizational environment that encourages employee voice and proactive ethical behavior. Leader-member ethical communication strengthens employee voice and proactive organizational behavior.

Table 2 – Continuation

Study number and author(s)	Study design/sample	Main findings
(32) ZHOU, H. *et al*. Linking ethical leadership to employees' emotional exhaustion: A chain mediation model. **Leadership & Organization Development Journal**, [*s. l.*], v. 43, n. 5, p. 734-749, 2022.	Cross-sectional quantitative study with Chinese airport employees	Ethical leadership reduces employee emotional exhaustion by fostering a supportive and fair environment. The study highlights that ethical leadership acts as a "social resource," providing moral and instrumental support for employees to face challenges in the workplace. The study suggests that in order to maximize the positive effects of ethical leadership, organizations should invest in training and programs that reinforce the culture of support and value the voice of employees.
(33) EJAZ, T. *et al*. Impact of ethical leadership on employee well-being: the mediating role of job satisfaction and employee voice. **Middle East Journal of Management**, [*s. l.*], v. 9, n. 3, p. 310-331, 2021.	Survey of 254 university professors	The study shows that ethical leadership is an essential factor in promoting employee well-being, with job satisfaction and organizational voice playing mediating roles. To maximize these benefits, organizations must create safe, participatory and fair working environments, encouraging open communication and respect for ethical values.
(34) KIM, J. Ethical leadership and program to reduce unethical behaviour among public employees. **Public Management Review**, [*s. l.*], v. 25, n. 7, p. 1333-1347, 2021.	Empirical study with public employees in the United States	Ethical leadership reduces unethical behavior in public service by communicating clear expectations and reinforcing organizational values by example. Codes of conduct, training, and communication channels encourage ethics, while incentive schemes reward good practices and punish deviations. The social modeling of leaders influences employees, strengthening an ethical culture in which transparency and freedom of expression are encouraged. However, excessive formal structures can make communication difficult, and the absence of protection mechanisms generates fear of retaliation. In addition, low leadership engagement and political factors can compromise organizational ethics.
(35) KIM, D.; VANDENBERGHE, C. Social exchange relationships with peer leaders and ethical leadership: A study among male military team leaders. **Canadian Journal of Administrative Sciences/Revue Canadienne des Sciences de l'Administration**, [*s. l.*], v. 40, n. 3, p. 294-308, 2023.	Cross-sectional quantitative study with 150 South Korean military leaders and 450 military personnel	Ethical leadership in the military context can be a determining factor for the engagement of subordinates, but its effectiveness depends on social exchange relationships between leaders and the reduction of structural barriers that hinder this influence. The research reinforces that ethical leadership is not limited to the top hierarchy, but can be amplified through horizontal relationships between leaders, which can generate an environment of greater trust, respect and engagement among military personnel. Ethical leadership has an impact on engagement, depending on social relationships and the reduction of structural barriers.

Table 2 – Continuation

Study number and author(s)	Study design/sample	Main findings
(36) BURHAN, Q.-U.-A. *et al*. Ethical leadership: a dual path model for fostering ethical voice through relational identification, psychological safety, organizational identification and psychological ownership. **RAUSP Management Journal**, [*s. l.*], v. 58, n. 4, p. 341-362, 2023.	Quantitative survey with 248 samples from the banking sector	Ethical leadership encourages the expression of concerns and suggestions, strengthening a culture of responsibility and transparency. Employees who identify with ethical leaders adopt similar standards, but barriers such as high power distance and fear of reprisals can make communication difficult. Psychological safety is essential to stimulate ethical voice, as is relational identification with leaders, which promotes trust and openness. Training for leaders, anonymous reporting mechanisms and regular feedback sessions are effective strategies for reducing barriers and increasing engagement in discussing ethical issues.
(37) ZHANG, H. *et al*. Ethical leadership in multinational companies' control practices: culture as a moderating factor. **International Journal of Organizational Analysis**, [*s. l.*], v. 31, n. 6, p. 2183-2208, 2023.	Qualitative research with managers and employees of multinational companies	Ethical leadership strengthens trust and psychological security, encouraging participation and the expression of opinions without fear. Leaders with integrity and transparency create an environment conducive to engagement, knowledge exchange and innovation. However, barriers such as cultural differences, rigid organizational control and hierarchical communication can limit organizational voice, reducing autonomy and hindering interaction between managers and employees.
(38) HOSSEINI, E.; FERREIRA, J. J. The impact of ethical leadership on organizational identity in digital startups: does employee voice matter? **Asian Journal of Business Ethics**, [*s. l.*], v. 12, n. 2, p. 369-393, 2023.	Cross-sectional quantitative survey of 137 managers	Ethical leadership encourages organizational voice by creating a safe environment where employees express opinions without fear. Upstanding and fair leaders inspire participation, while transparent communication channels facilitate the sharing of concerns and suggestions. This strengthens organizational identity, aligning individual and institutional values. However, hierarchical pressures, cultural barriers, lack of support and resistance to change can hinder this expression and limit active participation.
(39) KYAMBADE, M.; NAMATOVU, A. Exploring the role of ethical leadership and personality traits in shaping ethical behavior among Ugandan security officers. **International Journal of Public Leadership**, [*s. l*], v. 21, n. 6, 2024.	Quantitative survey of 259 police officers and supervisors in Uganda	The main challenges to ethical leadership include fear of retaliation, which inhibits reporting unethical practices, and organizational culture, which, in environments of corruption and patronage, makes transparency and accountability difficult. In addition, there is resistance to change, as high moral standards can be seen as a threat to the status quo. In hierarchical institutions, pressure from above can compromise ethical decisions. Lack of training also limits the application of ethics, while individual traits, such as low emotional stability, influence decision-making under pressure. Finally, external pressures, such as political and economic factors, can hinder the implementation of an upstanding organizational culture.

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Table 2 – Continuation

Study number and author(s)	Study design/sample	Main findings
(40) KIM, D.; CHOI, D.; SON, S. Y. Does ethical voice matter? Examining how peer team leader ethical voice and role modeling relate to ethical leadership. **Journal of Business Ethics**, [*s.* l], v. 192, n. 1, p. 113-128, 2023.	Longitudinal study (6 weeks) with military teams	The ethical voice can generate tension and be seen as a threat to authority, making dialog difficult. However, ethical leadership creates a safe environment for the expression of concerns, promoting trust, transparency, and accountability. In extreme contexts, compliance with ethical standards is essential. In addition to setting an example, leaders must consider the ethical voice of peers as an influential factor and moral efficacy as a mediator, making ethical leadership not only desirable, but essential.
(41) PLETZ, V.; TIBERIUS, V.; Meyer, N. Ethical Leadership: A Bibliometric Review and Research Framework with Methodological Implications. **Business Ethics, the Environment & Responsibility**, [*s. l.*], Special Issue, 2024.	Bibliometric and systematic review	Ethical leadership fosters an environment of trust and respect, encouraging the open expression of concerns and opinions. By acting as role models of integrity and moral reasoning, leaders inspire employees to adopt similar ethical standards and feel encouraged to voice their concerns. Ethical leadership reduces the fear of retaliation by encouraging employees to report unethical practices. This environment of trust strengthens the culture of responsibility and transparency that is essential for ethical discussions and decisions in organizations.
(42) MOLINES, M.; STORME, M.; MIFSUD, M. Promoting ethical voice in the police: a daily examination of ethical vision, LMX ambivalence, and interpersonal justice. **Public Management Review**, [*s. l.*], v. 27, n. 3, p. 679-701, 2025.	Diary study (7 days) with 68 French police officers	Ethical leadership encourages the expression of ethical concerns, strengthening organizational integrity. However, barriers such as fear of reprisals, negative evaluations and organizational subcultures can hinder this manifestation. Leaders who consistently communicate expectations create an environment conducive to ethical voice. In the military environment, trust and harmony between subordinates and superiors are essential for the manifestation of the ethical voice. Promoting a culture of integrity, encouraging open dialogue, ethical training and recognizing ethical contributions strengthen this process.

Source: Authors' preparation.

The scoping review showed that ethical leadership is crucial to stimulating ethical voice by promoting trust and a safe environment for expression (Cheng *et al*., 2019; Molines; Storme; Mifsud, 2025; Pletz *et al*., 2024). In the military context, this effect is mediated by factors such as organizational culture, hierarchical relationships, and perceived psychological safety (Kim; Choi; Son, 2024; Kyambade; Namatovu, 2024; Robinson; McKenna; Rooney, 2021). However, barriers such as fear of reprisals and rigid norms still limit this manifestation. The effectiveness of ethical leadership also varies according to the institutional context, being impacted by hierarchical pressures in highly structured organizations (Kyambade; Namatovu, 2024).

Forty-two studies were identified that analyzed ethical leadership and factors such as culture, psychological safety, and organizational environment (Burhan *et al*., 2023; Tu *et al*., 2020; Zhang *et al*., 2023). These factors favor the expression of concerns, increase adaptability in decision-making (Robinson; McKenna; Rooney, 2021) and contribute to well-being, engagement and organizational citizenship (Ejaz *et al*., 2021; Özbağ, 2016; Sharif; Scandura, 2013).

Ethical leadership contributes to the decentralization of power (Burhan *et al*., 2023; Pucic, 2015), improves communication (Robinson; McKenna; Rooney, 2021) and organizational

interaction (Zhang *et al.*, 2023), reduces emotional exhaustion (Zhou *et al.*, 2022), and encourages employee voice (Kim; Choi; Son, 2024; Molines; Storme; Mifsud, 2025). These effects strengthen an ethical organizational climate, fight corruption (Kyambade; Namatovu, 2024), and promote responsible conduct (Lee *et al.*, 2018), stimulating both organizational voice and moral voice, which favors healthy and engaged environments (Afsar; Shahjehan, 2018; Ahn; Lee; Yun, 2016; Zhu *et al.*, 2019).

Despite the relevance of the topic, the literature lacks studies focused on the military context, especially in Brazil, where no article was identified. The studies analyzed point to the urgency of developing competencies linked to leadership and ethical voice, which are still limited by barriers such as high power distance, fear of retaliation, hierarchical communication, organizational rigidity, resistance to change, and lack of institutional support (Kim; Choi; Son, 2024; Molines; Storme; Mifsud, 2025; Tu *et al.*, 2020). These limitations reinforce the need to create conditions that favor ethical practices and the active expression of employees.

This scoping review has limitations. Due to its scope, it was restricted to the Web of Science database. Future research could replicate the study with specific time frames and include other databases, as well as considering gray literature and national data, which were not covered due to space limitations. Further theoretical and critical research on leadership and ethical voice in the military context is also recommended.

Military organizational culture and peer interactions are key to promoting ethical leadership. Even in hierarchical structures, relationships of trust between colleagues encourage ethical conduct and can exert a greater influence than formal leaders. This indicates that horizontal interactions can be as or more relevant than directives from the top (Kyambade; Namatovu, 2024; Molines; Storme; Mifsud, 2025; Stănciulescu; Beldiman, 2019).

In this context, ethical leadership also influences the psychological well-being of military personnel in extreme situations. Studies show that ethical leaders can mitigate emotional exhaustion in missions abroad, reducing the impact of operational stress and the challenges faced (Robinson; McKenna; Rooney, 2021; Zheng *et al.*, 2015). Personality traits such as conscientiousness, friendliness, and emotional stability also affect ethical behavior, highlighting the importance of leadership that promotes integrity and mental health (Kyambade; Namatovu, 2024; Özbağ, 2016).

These findings reinforce the central role of leadership in the military environment, influencing both the well-being of subordinates and their willingness to speak up. Ethical leaders directly impact their subordinates' decision to express concerns or remain silent (Zehir; Erdogan, 2011), as well as strengthening team cohesion, which is essential for performance in military contexts (Zheng *et al.*, 2015).

These effects become even more relevant in the military environment, which is characterized by high levels of stress, bureaucratic rigidity and a marked power distance (Fosse *et al.*, 2019; Kim; Choi; Son, 2024). In extreme contexts, such as combat zones, ethical leaders demonstrate the ability to reduce emotional exhaustion and strengthen the psychological resilience of subordinates (Robinson; McKenna; Rooney, 2021). Thus, in addition to influencing voice behavior and moral conduct, ethical leadership plays a protective role against the pressures of the military context. These studies are essential for understanding how leadership interacts with organizational culture and impacts different hierarchical levels (Molines; Storme; Mifsud, 2025; Schaubroeck *et al.*, 2012).

The perception of ethical leadership, however, varies according to the hierarchical position of the subordinate. Subordinates at lower levels tend to evaluate their direct leaders as less ethical, due to hierarchical distance, restricted access, and communication barriers (Pucic, 2014). These findings highlight that military leadership must balance strategic efficiency with ethical principles, taking into account the influence of hierarchy and culture (Sanders; Grint, 2018).

Military personnel often face moral dilemmas in rapid and potentially lethal decisions, requiring ethical discernment in extreme contexts. Such challenges occur at all levels of command, from the top to soldiers in the field (Robinson; McKenna; Rooney, 2021). In this scenario, the study of ethical leadership is crucial, as the military structure demands rigor in the application of ethical codes even under pressure. Hierarchy influences interpersonal relationships, promoting closeness between leaders and their direct supervisors or subordinates, but maintaining a certain distance from other ranks (Kim; Vandenberghe, 2020, 2023).

As most adults are not ethically self-sufficient, they often look to colleagues and the workplace for ethical references (Brown; Treviño, 2014). Therefore, it is essential to investigate how the voice of peers contributes to the formation of these perceptions through social and interpersonal influence (Kim; Choi; Son, 2024).

Leadership has a direct influence on ethical behavior by shaping the organizational environment and setting an example for subordinates. Behavioral theory reinforces that a leader's influence can be developed through learned behaviors, as proposed by the style hypothesis (Brown; Treviño, 2014; Kim *et al.*, 2023). In this context, ethical leadership is essential for promoting ethical voice, requiring leaders to face the ambivalence of followers and clearly communicate their ethical vision. By actively listening, showing respect and valuing fairness, leaders strengthen trust and encourage ethical conduct, even in the face of divergent opinions (Molines; Storme; Mifsud, 2025).

Thus, future studies could expand this review by incorporating gray literature and national bases, deepening the analysis of leadership and ethical voice in the military context. In this sense, conducting a systematic review is the next step to consolidate and advance this field of research. Directions for future research are presented in Table 3, based on the articles included in Table 2.

Table 3 - Future research agenda

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH	
FUTURE DIRECTIONS	**EXAMPLE RESEARCH QUESTION**
Compare the manifestation of ethical voice in military and civilian environments: it aims to explore which variables mediate or moderate the relationship between ethical leadership and ethical voice in the military context	
Psychological safety and perceived organizational justice	-How do these variables influence the military's decision to speak out?
Leader-member exchange and interpersonal trust	-To what extent can a relationship of trust between superiors and subordinates facilitate ethical voice?
Institutional policies and regulations	-To what extent do organizational rules encourage or inhibit the manifestation of ethical voice?

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Table 3 – Continuation

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH	
FUTURE DIRECTIONS	**EXAMPLE RESEARCH QUESTION**
Verify how the Armed Forces can promote an environment more conducive to ethical voice	
Training programs for military leaders	- How can training programs encourage ethical voice without compromising organizational discipline? - What skills and competencies should military leaders develop to promote an environment conducive to the manifestation of ethical voice? - How can ethical leadership training impact the psychological safety of subordinates?
Anonymous reporting mechanisms and secure communication channels	- How can anonymous reporting mechanisms increase the confidence of military personnel in expressing their ethical voice? - What barriers prevent the implementation and effectiveness of these channels in the Armed Forces? - How can we ensure that whistleblowing systems are effective without compromising military cohesion and hierarchy?
Cultivating a more open organizational culture	- How can the organizational culture of the Armed Forces be adapted to balance command and control with active listening and transparency? - How can ethical leadership contribute to an environment that is more open to the manifestation of ethical voice? - How do the institutional values of the Armed Forces influence the acceptance of ethical voice within the hierarchy?
Ethical leadership and ethical voice in the Brazilian military context	
Case studies in the Brazilian Armed Forces	-What challenges and opportunities does ethical leadership present for the manifestation of ethical voice in the context of the Brazilian Armed Forces? - How do different military units deal with ethical voice and what organizational factors influence its manifestation? - How does the military hierarchy impact the willingness of subordinates to express ethical concerns?
Qualitative research with active and reserve military personnel	-How do military personnel perceive the influence of ethical leadership on psychological safety and the manifestation of ethical voice? - What are the main barriers faced by military personnel when trying to express ethical concerns? - How does experience in active and reserve duty impact perceptions of freedom of expression and organizational voice?
Quantitative analyses on leadership, organizational culture, and ethical voice	-Is there a significant correlation between leadership styles and the manifestation of ethical voice in the Brazilian military environment? - How does the organizational culture of the Armed Forces influence the acceptance or suppression of ethical voice? - What mediating and moderating factors affect the relationship between ethical leadership and ethical voice in the Armed Forces?

Continues...

Table 3 – Continuation

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH	
FUTURE DIRECTIONS	**EXAMPLE RESEARCH QUESTION**
The role of senior leadership in ethical leadership and ethical voice in the military context	
Influence on organizational culture	- How do senior leaders shape organizational norms and values that influence the manifestation of ethical voice? - How does top-level leadership impact the acceptance or suppression of ethical voice within the Armed Forces?
Decision-making and governance	- How does the high command of the Armed Forces develop and implement policies that encourage or restrict ethical voice? - What are the main factors considered by military leaders when making decisions that affect organizational transparency and ethics?
Perception of barriers to ethical voice	- How do senior leaders perceive the challenges faced by subordinates in voicing ethical concerns? - Is there a misalignment between the perspective of senior leaders and the experiences of mid-level and operational ranks regarding the expression of ethical voice?
Comparison between different hierarchical levels	- Are there differences in the perception of ethical voice between senior leaders, mid-level officers, and enlisted personnel?? - How are the guidelines defined by the high command interpreted and applied at lower levels of the hierarchy?
Challenges in implementing ethical leadership	- What are the main institutional and cultural barriers to implementing ethical leadership in the Armed Forces? - How can senior leadership balance organizational discipline with fostering an environment more open to the manifestation of ethical voice?
The ethical voice of subordinates in the military context	
Perspective from the bottom of the hierarchy	- Do subordinates feel safe to express ethical concerns in the military environment? - How do disciplinary rules affect the willingness of low-ranking military personnel to express their ethical voice?
Difference in perception between hierarchies	- Is there a discrepancy between senior and subordinate perceptions of the acceptance of ethical voice? - Is the ethical voice encouraged in theory, but in practice perceived as risky by subordinates?
Facilitating factors and barriers to ethical voice	- What characteristics of ethical leadership encourage or inhibit the manifestation of the ethical voice among subordinates? - What are the main barriers that prevent subordinates from voicing ethical concerns? (e.g. fear of retaliation, rigid organizational culture, lack of institutional support, absence of safe channels)
Impact of ethical leadership on the voice of subordinates	- Do subordinates perceive their leaders as ethical role models? - Does the coherence between leadership discourse and practice influence subordinates' willingness to speak up?
Voice promotion and organizational engagement	- Does promoting an ethical voice among subordinates improve engagement, commitment and morale? - How does ethical voice impact the performance and cohesion of military units?

Source: Authors' elaboration.

Research into leadership and ethical voice in the military context is essential in order to understand its impact on organizational culture, decision-making, and the behavior of military personnel. Ethical leadership contributes to a transparent and safe environment in which subordinates feel encouraged to express concerns without fear of retaliation. Thus, the recommendations presented can guide future research aimed at improving leadership practices, with a focus on the relationship between authority, ethics, and communication.

This debate intensifies with every scandal within the corporate sector that shakes public trust and drives demands for ethical reforms (Huang; Paterson, 2017). The practice of listening to employees within organizations is indispensable, especially since many corporate disasters and bankruptcies could have been avoided if leaders had paid attention to the voices[3] of their own employees, as Burris and Sohn (2021) point out. Among the factors that make this listening difficult are the threat to the ego, the lack of resources, and the difficulty of aligning diverse interests (Burris; Sohn, 2021).

Studies show that employees are reluctant to share information with colleagues and authorities (Perlow; Williams, 2003). Tragedies such as the destruction of steel mills in Pakistan and the Pakistan Airlines crash in Karachi were aggravated by a lack of communication and the passing on of critical information to decision-makers (Hassan; Yoon; Dedahanov, 2025).

This context highlights the importance of ethical leadership in promoting ethical voice, as environments that encourage open communication reduce risks and improve decisions. Leaders who cultivate trust, transparency, and active listening create safe spaces for concerns to be expressed, strengthening organizational culture and preventing institutional and social crises.

4 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The scarcity of studies on ethical leadership in Brazil represents a challenge for the scientific community and professionals, especially with the recent inclusion of ethical voice as an emerging theme in management and psychology. This gap also provides an opportunity to deepen knowledge in areas such as the voice of subordinates and the processes that promote and mediate ethical expression in organizations.

This scoping review aimed to identify how ethical leadership influences the manifestation of ethical voice in the military context, mapping theoretical and empirical evidence and pointing out gaps in the literature, especially the scarcity of national research on the subject in military institutions. Most of the studies identified focus on civilian and corporate contexts, with little attention to the particularities of the military environment, characterized by rigid hierarchy and well-defined rules of conduct. These characteristics influence the expression of ethical voice, as compliance rules, fear of challenging superiors, and formal protocols can restrict the expression of ethical concerns.

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3   Business history is rife with corporate disasters that might have been averted if only top managers had heard and heeded the voices of their own employees. Consider the 2014 recall by General Motors of more than million cars due to a faulty ignition switch. GM engineers and lawyers had known about the problem—which caused at least 124 deaths and ultimately cost the company $4.1 billion—or about a decade. And **yet corporate leaders did not seem to have heard about or grasped the risks of the problem**. Something similar happened at Boeing, where engineers working on the 737 MAX aircraft were concerned about its rushed production schedule and a flight control system that relied on only one sensor—issues that led to two fatal plane crashes, the global grounding of the planes, and yet untallied costs to Boeing. Messerschmidt (1996) for instance analyzed the causes of the Challenger explosion in 1986. He documents the discussions between management and engineers at the spaceship manufacturing company and NASA. Chief engineers were aware of the risk that a particular part of the spaceship represented, whereas management wanted to approve the launch. An engineer tried to explain the risk of a launch, but eventually gave up "... **when it was apparent that I couldn't get anybody to listen**" (Messerschmidt, 1996, p. 39, our emphasis).

In this scenario, ethical leadership is essential to create environments that are more open to listening and to the responsible manifestation of ethical voice. By promoting transparent and secure communication, institutional culture, hierarchical trust and failure prevention are strengthened. Therefore, expanding studies on leadership and ethical voice in Brazil is fundamental, including in military institutions.

Although ethical leadership is widely recognized in international literature, its impact on ethical voice in military contexts still requires further empirical study. Future research could expand this review with the use of national databases, gray literature, and comparisons between the military and civilian sectors. Qualitative and quantitative approaches are also recommended to identify effective strategies for encouraging ethical voice in rigid hierarchical structures.

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