

# Self-Concept as a Determinant of Ethical Behavior in Organizational Professional Practice

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## ABSTRACT

The development of modern organizations requires individuals not only to possess professional competence but also to demonstrate ethical behavior in carrying out their professional responsibilities. However, many organizations still face challenges related to inconsistent ethical behavior among professionals, indicating a gap between ethical standards and actual practice; therefore, this study aims to examine the role of self-concept as a determinant of ethical behavior in professional settings. Ethical behavior in organizations is influenced not only by external regulations such as professional codes of conduct but also by internal psychological factors within individuals. One of the most important internal factors is self-concept, which reflects how individuals perceive and understand themselves in relation to their roles and responsibilities in the workplace. This research employs a qualitative approach, using in-depth interviews and documentation to obtain comprehensive insights into individual perceptions and experiences of ethical behavior in professional settings. Purposive sampling is used, and the data are analyzed through thematic analysis. The results indicate that individuals with a clear and positive self-concept tend to demonstrate stronger moral awareness, greater responsibility, and more consistent ethical decision-making, with key themes including self-awareness, moral responsibility, ethical consistency, and organizational support. Furthermore, organizational culture and ethical leadership reinforce the development of self-concept that supports ethical behavior. This study provides empirical insight into the psychological basis of ethical behavior and offers practical implications for strengthening organizational integrity.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The development of modern organizations requires individuals not only to possess technical and professional competencies but also the ability to behave ethically in carrying out their duties and responsibilities. In an increasingly complex and competitive work

environment, ethical behavior has become one of the fundamental pillars in maintaining professional integrity, enhancing public trust, and ensuring organizational sustainability. Various cases of ethical violations within organizations indicate that organizational success is determined not only by the technical capabilities of its members but also by the moral quality and integrity of individuals working within it. This condition reflects a critical research problem, namely, the inconsistency of ethical behavior among professionals despite the presence of formal ethical standards and regulations. Therefore, understanding the factors that influence individuals' ethical behavior has become an important issue in the study of organizational behavior and professional ethics.

Professional ethics consists of a set of values, norms, and moral principles that regulate individuals' behavior in the performance of their professions. Professional ethics function as guidelines that direct individuals to act responsibly, fairly, and professionally in performing their work. In the organizational context, implementing professional ethics does not depend solely on formal rules, such as codes of ethics, but also on individuals' moral awareness and internal values. In other words, ethical behavior is shaped not only by external factors such as organizational regulations and managerial supervision but also by internal factors related to individuals' psychological characteristics. One internal factor that plays an important role in shaping ethical behavior is self-concept, which refers to how individuals perceive and understand themselves in various social and professional situations [1].

Self-concept is a cognitive and psychological structure that describes individuals' perceptions of their identity, abilities, values, and personal characteristics. Self-concept is formed through social interaction, life experiences, and individuals' reflections on themselves and their environment. In organizational psychology, self-concept is often associated with various aspects of work behavior such as motivation, organizational commitment, individual performance, and attitudes toward work. Individuals with a clear, positive self-concept tend to have higher self-confidence, better decision-making abilities, and a greater tendency to act in accordance with their values [2]. Conversely, individuals with unstable or unclear self-concepts tend to experience internal conflicts when determining appropriate attitudes and actions in various professional situations.

A number of studies have shown that self-concept is significantly related to individuals' behavior within organizations. A strong self-concept can help individuals develop a consistent professional identity and enhance awareness of moral responsibility in their work. Research by Özcan, Çekmecelioğlu, and Konakay indicates that self-concept clarity is positively related to work attitudes, job satisfaction, and positive organizational behavior [3]. This suggests that individuals with a clear understanding of themselves are better able to direct their behavior in accordance with the organization's moral values and professional standards.

Furthermore, self-concept is closely related to the formation of individuals' moral identity. Moral identity is a component of self-concept that relates to the extent to which moral values become an important part of an individual's identity. When moral values become part of an individual's self-concept, the individual is more likely to display ethical behavior in various life situations, including in the workplace. Zhang and colleagues found that individuals with strong moral identities demonstrate greater consistency between the

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moral values they believe in and the behavior they display within organizations [4]. Thus, self-concept can be viewed as a psychological mechanism that influences ethical decision-making processes and individuals' moral behavior in organizations.

In the organizational context, the implementation of professional ethics is also influenced by factors such as leadership, organizational culture, and the supervisory systems in place. Ethical leadership can foster a work environment that encourages individuals to act in accordance with moral and professional values. Research indicates that ethical leadership positively influences responsible work behavior and employees' moral commitment within organizations [7]. However, the success of implementing professional ethics does not depend solely on external factors such as leadership and organizational policies but also on individuals' readiness to internalize ethical values as part of their identity.

Furthermore, several studies indicate that individuals with a strong self-understanding and the ability to authentically express their identities tend to demonstrate higher levels of ethical behavior within organizations. Afota, Robert, and Vandenberghe found that self-awareness and personal identity are associated with work engagement and positive organizational behavior [5]. Similarly, research by Radigan, Gilbreath, Wang, and Scroggins indicates that individuals who can express themselves authentically in the workplace are less likely to engage in behavior that contradicts organizational moral values [6]. These findings strengthen the view that self-concept plays an important role in shaping individual behavior in the workplace.

Although previous studies have examined organizational determinants of ethical behavior, such as leadership, culture, and control systems [7], [8], limited attention has been given to self-concept as a primary psychological mechanism influencing ethical conduct within organizations. Most prior research emphasizes external or structural factors, while the role of internal psychological dimensions, particularly self-concept, remains underexplored. This gap indicates the need for a more comprehensive approach that integrates both internal and external determinants of ethical behavior.

Moreover, the increasingly dynamic and complex work environment requires individuals to possess strong self-reflection abilities in order to adjust their behavior to prevailing professional values. In high-pressure organizational situations, individuals often face ethical dilemmas that require the ability to make morally appropriate decisions. In such circumstances, self-concept can serve as a moral compass, helping individuals determine actions that align with professional ethical values. Therefore, it is important to understand how self-concept influences individuals' ethical behavior in the implementation of professional ethics within organizational environments.

In address this problem, this study adopts a qualitative approach to explore individuals' perceptions and experiences regarding self-concept and ethical behavior, intending to provide deeper insight into the psychological processes underlying ethical decision-making. Based on this background, this study aims to examine the role of self-concept as a determinant of ethical behavior in the implementation of professional ethics within organizational environments. This research is expected to contribute theoretically to the development of organizational behavior studies, particularly in understanding the relationship between self-concept and individuals' ethical behavior. In addition, this research

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is expected to provide practical contributions to organizations in helping them design human resource development strategies that focus not only on improving technical competence but also on strengthening individuals' self-awareness and moral integrity as part of professional conduct. It is expected that the findings of this study will offer both theoretical enrichment and practical guidance for fostering ethical organizational cultures and strengthening professional integrity. By understanding the role of self-concept in shaping ethical behavior, organizations can develop more effective approaches to building strong ethical cultures and improving the quality of professional conduct among their members [9], [10].

## **2. METHOD**

This study employs a qualitative approach to obtain an in-depth understanding of how self-concept influences ethical behavior in the implementation of professional ethics within organizational environments. The qualitative approach was chosen because this research does not merely aim to measure relationships between variables statistically, but rather emphasizes understanding the meanings, experiences, and interpretations of individuals regarding the phenomena being studied. In the context of social and organizational research, qualitative approaches are highly relevant for examining phenomena related to values, attitudes, perceptions, and individual experiences within a particular social environment. Through this approach, researchers can explore how individuals understand their self-concept, how moral values are formed within individuals, and how these values influence ethical behavior in professional contexts. Qualitative approaches also allow researchers to obtain richer, more contextual data because data collection is conducted through direct interaction with research participants. Thus, this research not only describes phenomena descriptively but also attempts to interpret the meaning behind individual behavior within organizations. Qualitative research is frequently used in organizational behavior studies because it can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the psychological and social dynamics in workplace environments. Furthermore, this method allows researchers to examine phenomena holistically by considering various factors that influence individuals' behavior within organizations [11].

### **2.1 Research Design**

The research design used in this study is a descriptive qualitative research design. This research design aims to systematically and comprehensively describe phenomena related to self-concept and ethical behavior in the implementation of professional ethics within organizational environments. The descriptive approach was chosen because this study focuses on understanding phenomena in their contextual contexts, based on the experiences and perceptions of individuals involved in organizations. In descriptive qualitative research, data typically consist of narratives, perspectives, experiences, and interpretations of individuals regarding the social phenomena they encounter. This study seeks to understand how individuals interpret their self-concept and how that self-concept influences their attitudes and behaviors in carrying out professional responsibilities. This approach allows researchers to identify patterns of behavior, moral values, and psychological dynamics that influence the implementation of professional ethics within organizations. In addition,

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descriptive qualitative research design enables researchers to explore social phenomena more deeply through direct interaction with research participants. In this study, participants were selected based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives, so that the data obtained would provide a more accurate depiction of the relationship between self-concept and ethical behavior within organizations. This approach is considered appropriate for understanding complex social phenomena because it can reveal individuals' subjective experiences that may not always be quantifiable [12].

## **2.2 Participants**

This study involved 12 participants selected using purposive sampling. Participants were chosen based on their experience in professional work environments and their ability to provide relevant insights into ethical behavior and self-concept. The demographic characteristics of participants included variations in age, gender, educational background, and length of work experience to ensure diverse perspectives. In terms of organizational roles, participants consisted of employees, supervisors, and managerial-level staff who were directly involved in decision-making processes or professional responsibilities within their respective organizations. This diversity of roles was intended to capture a comprehensive understanding of ethical behavior across different levels of organizational structure.

## **2.3 Research Procedure**

The research procedure in this study was conducted systematically and in stages to ensure that the entire research process was carried out scientifically and could be accounted for academically. The first stage of this research involved identifying the research problem related to the importance of self-concept in shaping ethical behavior within organizations. At this stage, the researcher conducted preliminary observations and literature reviews to understand the existing phenomena and formulate the research focus to be examined. The next stage involved conducting a literature review to establish a strong theoretical foundation in self-concept, professional ethics, and organizational behavior. The literature review was conducted by examining various scientific sources, including journal articles, academic books, and other scholarly publications relevant to the research topic. After obtaining a sufficient theoretical foundation, the researcher then determined the research participants using purposive sampling techniques, which involve selecting informants based on specific criteria considered capable of providing relevant information related to the research objectives. Subsequently, data were collected through in-depth interviews and documentation in order to obtain comprehensive information on participants' experiences and perspectives regarding self-concept and ethical behavior within organizations. After the data were collected, the researcher conducted a data analysis process to identify thematic patterns emerging from the research data. The final stage involved drawing conclusions based on the interpretation of research findings in order to explain the relationship between self-concept and ethical behavior in the implementation of professional ethics within organizational environments. A systematic research procedure is essential in qualitative research to ensure that the research process can be understood, traced, and scientifically justified [13].

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The research procedure can be summarized as follows: identifying the research problem, conducting a literature review, selecting participants, collecting data through interviews and documentation, analyzing data using thematic analysis, interpreting findings, and drawing conclusions.

Conceptually, the research flow can be represented in the following pseudocode:

*Algorithm Research Procedure*

*Begin*

*Identify the research problem*

*Conduct a literature review*

*Determine research participants using purposive sampling*

*Collect data through interviews and documentation*

*Analyze data using thematic analysis*

*Interpret research findings*

*Draw conclusions*

*End*

## **2.4 Data Collection**

Data collection in this study was conducted using two main techniques: in-depth interviews and document analysis. In-depth interviews were used as the primary data collection technique because they enable researchers to obtain more detailed information about participants' experiences, perspectives, and interpretations of self-concept and the implementation of professional ethics within organizations. Through in-depth interviews, researchers explored individuals' perceptions of moral values, professional responsibilities, and factors influencing ethical behavior in the workplace. The interview process was conducted in a semi-structured manner, allowing researchers to explore topics that emerged during the interviews. Each interview lasted approximately 45–60 minutes and was conducted either face-to-face or via online communication platforms. All interviews were recorded with participants' consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy and completeness of the data. In addition, the interview technique allows direct interaction between researchers and participants, enabling researchers to understand the social and psychological context that influences participants' behavior. Besides interviews, this research also used documentation as an additional data source. Documentation was used to complement data obtained from interviews and to obtain information regarding organizational policies, professional codes of ethics, and other documents related to the implementation of professional ethics within organizations. The use of multiple data collection techniques in qualitative research aims to enhance the validity and accuracy of research data through triangulation. Furthermore, data validity was ensured through triangulation of data sources, member checking (confirming findings with participants), and an audit trail documenting the research process and analytical decisions. Triangulation allows researchers to compare multiple data sources, thereby making research results more credible and reliable [14].

## **2.5 Data Analysis**

Data analysis in this study employed thematic analysis techniques. Thematic analysis is a qualitative data analysis method that identifies, analyzes, and interprets patterns or themes emerging from research data. This method was chosen because it provides a systematic framework for processing qualitative data, enabling researchers to understand the relationships between various categories of data that emerge during the research process. The data analysis process in this study was conducted through several stages. The first stage involved data reduction, the process of selecting and simplifying data from interviews and documentation to use only data relevant to the research focus in the analysis. The second stage involved coding the data, which refers to the process of assigning codes to reduced data in order to identify categories related to self-concept and ethical behavior within organizations. The third stage involved theme identification, which involved grouping data categories into broader themes that could explain the phenomenon being studied. The final stage involved data interpretation, which involved analyzing the themes that emerged in order to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between self-concept and ethical behavior in the implementation of professional ethics within organizational environments. Thematic analysis enables researchers to identify patterns of meaning emerging from research data and connect them with the theoretical framework used in the study. Therefore, this analytical method helps researchers produce deeper and more meaningful research findings [15].

## **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **3.1. Results**

The results of the study indicate that self-concept plays a highly significant role in shaping individuals' ethical behavior in the implementation of professional ethics within organizational environments.

#### **Theme 1: Self-Concept Clarity and Moral Awareness**

Based on in-depth interviews with the research informants, it was found that individuals with a clear understanding of their self-identity, moral values, and professional responsibilities tend to exhibit more consistent behavior in line with the organization's professional ethical standards. The informants explained that awareness of personal values, such as integrity, responsibility, honesty, and professionalism, is the main factor influencing their decision-making in complex professional situations. One informant stated, "I always try to align my decisions with my personal values, especially honesty and responsibility, even when the situation is difficult." In various work situations involving ethical dilemmas, individuals with a strong self-concept tend to be better able to maintain the moral principles they believe in than those with a less clear self-concept. This indicates that self-concept not only functions as individuals' perception of themselves but also serves as an internal psychological mechanism that directs individuals' behavior within the organization. This finding demonstrates that self-concept strongly influences moral decision-making in a professional context. Recent research also shows that individuals with high self-concept clarity are more likely to perform better in social decision-making across various social interaction situations [16]. In addition, a clear understanding of self-identity can enhance

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individuals' ability to evaluate the social consequences of actions taken within the organization. Thus, this study's results indicate that self-concept can serve as a psychological foundation that influences individuals' ethical behavior in organizations.

### **Theme 2: Organizational Culture and Ethical Leadership**

In addition, the study's results show that the organizational environment has a considerable influence on how individuals' self-concept develops and on their ethical behavior in the organization. The informants stated that an organizational culture that emphasizes integrity, transparency, professional responsibility, and commitment to ethical standards can strengthen individuals' self-concept as professionals with moral integrity. One participant explained, "When the organization clearly promotes ethical values, it becomes easier for me to act consistently with those values." In organizations with a strong ethical culture, individuals feel a moral responsibility to align their behavior with the organization's values. This indicates that individuals' self-concept is not only shaped by personal experience but is also influenced by social interactions and the work environment. Conversely, in organizations that place less emphasis on professional ethics, individuals often experience value conflicts when they must decide between organizational interests and personal moral values. Another informant noted, "Sometimes there is pressure to follow what benefits the organization, even if it conflicts with personal values." Such conditions can create ethical dilemmas that lead individuals to consider various aspects before making the right decision. Previous research shows that ethical leadership significantly influences employees' ethical behavior through perceptions of organizational justice held by organizational members [17]. Thus, the results of this study indicate that self-concept and the organizational environment interact in shape individuals' ethical behavior in the implementation of professional ethics.

### **Theme 3: Self-Reflection in Ethical Decision-Making**

The results of the study also indicate that individuals with a high level of self-reflection tend to be better able to understand the moral consequences of their actions within the organization. Self-reflection is a psychological process that enables individuals to evaluate their personal values and consider the impact of their decisions on others and the organization as a whole. In this study, several informants stated that the self-reflection process helped them face various ethical dilemma situations that frequently arise in the workplace. One informant stated, "Before making an important decision, I reflect on whether my actions will harm others or violate my principles." Through self-reflection, individuals can consider various alternative actions and choose decisions that best align with the moral values they believe in. In addition, self-reflection helps individuals understand the long-term impact of their decisions on their professional reputation. This indicates that self-concept developed through the self-reflection process can enhance individuals' moral awareness within the organization. Recent research shows that low self-concept clarity can affect individuals' perceptions of social conditions and influence their tendency toward prosocial behavior [18]. Thus, the results of this study indicate that self-reflection is an important

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mechanism in developing a self-concept oriented toward ethical behavior in organizational environments.

### **3.2. Discussion**

The findings of this study indicate that self-concept plays a very important role in shaping individuals' ethical behavior in the implementation of professional ethics within organizational environments. Individuals with a strong, positive self-concept tend to be better able to maintain moral integrity in complex professional situations. A clear self-concept enables individuals to understand their personal values and integrate those values into their daily work behavior. These findings reinforce the view that ethical behavior is not solely determined by external controls but is deeply rooted in internal psychological structures, particularly self-identity and moral values. Research shows that individuals' moral identity is strongly related to ethical work behavior and to their tendency to avoid actions that contradict organizational norms [19]. Thus, this study extends existing organizational behavior theory by positioning self-concept as a central psychological mechanism that bridges personal values and ethical actions in professional contexts.

In addition, this study's results indicate that individuals' self-concept serves as an internal mechanism that helps them deal with ethical dilemmas in the workplace. In complex organizational situations, individuals often face conflicts of interest that require them to make morally difficult decisions. A strong self-concept enables individuals to remain consistent with their ethical principles despite situational pressures. This finding contributes to the literature by highlighting the role of self-concept in ethical decision-making processes, particularly under conditions of ambiguity and pressure. Recent research shows that ethical leadership can influence employees' prosocial behavior through increased psychological empowerment and an ethical climate within the organization [20].

The findings also show that ethical leadership and organizational culture play important roles in supporting the development of an individual's self-concept oriented toward moral values. Leaders who demonstrate ethical behavior can serve as role models, while an organizational culture emphasizing integrity strengthens individuals' commitment to ethical standards. Recent research shows that ethical leadership influences employees' behavior and commitment to the organization by shaping moral values in the workplace [21]. This suggests that self-concept does not develop in isolation but is shaped through continuous interaction with organizational systems, thereby extending prior studies that primarily focus on structural determinants of ethical behavior.

Moreover, the results indicate that a well-developed self-concept contributes to higher professionalism, stronger work commitment, and greater responsibility. Previous research shows that a clear self-concept is related to work motivation and individuals' perceptions of the meaningfulness of the work they do [22]. This finding strengthens the theoretical linkage between self-concept, motivation, and ethical conduct within organizational behavior frameworks.

Overall, this study's results confirm that self-concept is a key determinant of ethical behavior and that this relationship is influenced by leadership and organizational context. Recent research also shows that leadership and employees' psychological capital can affect

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organizational resilience [23], and leaders' ethical behavior influences employees' psychological well-being [24]. From a practical perspective, these findings suggest that organizations should implement structured interventions such as ethical leadership training to model ethical behavior, self-awareness development programs to strengthen employees' self-concept, and ethical climate reinforcement through clear policies and value-based organizational practices. In addition, integrating self-concept development into human resource strategies can enhance professionalism and ethical consistency. Such integrated efforts can foster sustainable, ethical cultures and support innovative, responsible work behavior aligned with organizational values [25].

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

This study aimed to examine the role of self-concept in determining ethical behavior in the implementation of professional ethics within organizational environments. The findings indicate that self-concept plays a significant role in shaping individuals' ethical behavior in professional settings, with those who have a clear and positive understanding of their identity, values, and professional responsibilities demonstrating stronger moral awareness and more consistent ethical decision-making. These results confirm that ethical behavior is not solely influenced by external regulations such as professional codes of ethics or organizational policies, but is also shaped by internal psychological factors that guide individual behavior. Furthermore, organizational factors such as ethical leadership and organizational culture contribute to strengthening the development of positive self-concept among employees, enabling the integration of individual values with organizational ethical standards. From a practical perspective, organizations are encouraged to implement self-awareness development programs, ethical training, and leadership role modeling to foster integrity, transparency, and accountability, thereby strengthening ethical behavior and professional conduct. This alignment between individual self-concept and organizational ethical climate can support the development of sustainable ethical cultures. Finally, this study contributes to organizational behavior and professional ethics literature by emphasizing the importance of psychological factors in ethical conduct, and future research is recommended to explore this relationship using mixed or quantitative approaches, as well as to examine other psychological variables such as moral identity, psychological capital, and organizational commitment in shaping ethical decision-making.

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