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Ethical Leadership Model in the National Olympic Committee of the Islamic Republic of Iran

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the present study was to design and validate an ethical leadership model for the National Olympic Committee of the Islamic Republic of Iran. In terms of purpose, the study was applied, and in terms of implementation, it employed an exploratory mixed-methods design with an emphasis on the quantitative phase. In the qualitative phase, the components of the ethical leadership model were extracted through a review of the theoretical foundations and expert opinions. In the quantitative phase, the proposed model was tested using variance-based structural equation modeling and SmartPLS software. The statistical population consisted of managers, experts, and technical staff members affiliated with the National Olympic Committee and sports federations, from whom 210 complete and analyzable questionnaires were collected. The research instrument was a researcher-developed questionnaire based on a five-point Likert scale. The research model comprised the dimensions of justice orientation, honesty and integrity, responsibility, transparency, accountability, ethical role modeling, ethical decision-making, ethical management/role modeling, and ethical culture building. The results of the measurement model assessment indicated that all constructs exhibited satisfactory reliability and convergent validity, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.90 to 0.94, composite reliability values ranging from 0.94 to 0.96, and average variance extracted values ranging from 0.83 to 0.89. The Fornell-Larcker criterion also confirmed the discriminant validity of the constructs. In the structural model, all dimensions of ethical leadership had positive and significant effects on organizational outcomes. Ethical culture building, with a path coefficient of 0.23, justice orientation, with a coefficient of 0.21, and accountability, with a coefficient of 0.19, exerted the strongest effects on organizational outcomes. The coefficient of determination for organizational outcomes was 0.45, and the model's predictive relevance index was 0.38, indicating satisfactory explanatory and predictive power. Accordingly, institutionalizing ethical leadership within the structures, decision-making processes, evaluation systems, managerial appointments, resource allocation mechanisms, and accountability procedures of the National Olympic Committee can contribute to enhancing organizational trust, transparency, justice, administrative integrity, and organizational effectiveness.

Keywords: ethical leadership, National Olympic Committee, sport governance, ethical culture building, justice orientation, accountability, organizational outcomes.

Introduction

Ethical leadership has emerged as a central concern in contemporary management because organizations are increasingly evaluated not only according to their efficiency and performance outcomes but also according to the ethical quality of their decision-making, governance structures, interpersonal relationships, and accountability mechanisms. In complex organizations, leaders influence employees through both formal authority and behavioral modeling, meaning that managerial conduct can shape the ethical standards that become institutionalized within organizational routines. Ethical leadership therefore extends beyond individual morality and encompasses the systematic promotion of fairness, integrity, transparency, responsibility, accountability, and ethically defensible decision-making throughout the organization. In this sense, ethical

leadership may be understood as a governance-oriented leadership approach through which leaders establish normative expectations, reinforce ethical conduct, discourage opportunistic behavior, and create organizational conditions in which employees perceive ethical behavior as both legitimate and institutionally supported. Recent research has increasingly emphasized that ethical leadership should be examined as a multidimensional organizational capability rather than merely as a personal characteristic of individual managers, particularly in contexts characterized by heightened stakeholder expectations, institutional pressures, and demands for transparent governance [1, 2].

The growing importance of ethical leadership is closely associated with the increasing complexity of organizational environments. Managers are expected to balance organizational performance with social responsibility, employee well-being, stakeholder interests, regulatory requirements, and ethical standards. These expectations make leadership behavior especially consequential because employees frequently interpret organizational values through the actions of senior and middle managers rather than solely through written policies or codes of conduct. When leaders demonstrate consistency between stated values and actual behavior, employees are more likely to perceive organizational procedures as legitimate and trustworthy. Conversely, inconsistency between formal ethical commitments and managerial practices may weaken organizational trust, encourage cynicism, and normalize dysfunctional behavior. Ethical leadership is therefore particularly relevant to organizations in which legitimacy, public accountability, and stakeholder trust are essential components of organizational effectiveness. Evidence from contemporary organizational research suggests that ethical leadership can contribute to institutional convergence around accepted professional standards and strengthen the integration of ethical principles into managerial practice [2]. Moreover, ethical leadership becomes especially critical during periods of uncertainty, institutional threat, or organizational pressure, when managers face difficult decisions involving competing interests and potentially conflicting values [1].

A major theoretical foundation of ethical leadership lies in the assumption that leaders act as salient role models whose behavior communicates acceptable norms of conduct to organizational members. Employees observe how managers distribute rewards, respond to misconduct, allocate resources, manage conflicts, and accept responsibility for organizational outcomes. Through these processes, leadership behavior contributes to the development of an ethical climate and can influence employees' perceptions of fairness, psychological safety, and organizational integrity. Research has shown that leadership approaches grounded in service, responsibility, and ethical modeling can help establish an ethical organizational climate, particularly in sport organizations in which interpersonal relationships, stakeholder diversity, and reputational considerations are especially important [3]. Ethical leadership therefore involves both a moral-person dimension, referring to the leader's integrity and character, and a moral-management dimension, referring to the active communication, reinforcement, and institutionalization of ethical standards.

Justice orientation represents one of the most fundamental dimensions of ethical leadership. Employees continuously evaluate whether organizational decisions, procedures, rewards, opportunities, and responsibilities are distributed fairly. Perceived injustice can negatively affect commitment, trust, cooperation, and willingness to support organizational goals, whereas perceptions of justice can strengthen employees' identification with the organization. Within sport-related contexts, the relationship between ethical leadership and organizational justice has received empirical support. Khalili et al. demonstrated that ethical leadership can positively influence organizational justice among physical education professionals, underscoring the importance of ethical managerial conduct in shaping employees' perceptions of fairness [4]. In the Iranian

public-sector context, justice has also been conceptualized as an integral component of ethical leadership and responsible governance, with particular emphasis on fairness in public decision-making and the distribution of organizational opportunities and resources [5]. Consequently, justice orientation should not be regarded as an isolated managerial virtue but as a structural feature of ethical leadership capable of influencing the broader organizational environment.

Honesty and integrity constitute another essential dimension of ethical leadership. Ethical leaders are expected to maintain consistency between their statements and actions, provide truthful information, avoid misuse of authority, and demonstrate commitment to professional and organizational principles. Such behaviors are particularly important in organizations where managers exercise substantial discretion over appointments, resource allocation, performance evaluation, and strategic decisions. Integrity contributes to predictability in leadership behavior and can reduce uncertainty regarding managerial intentions. Over time, consistent ethical conduct can strengthen organizational trust and discourage political or opportunistic behavior. Karimpour et al. found that ethical leadership may reduce political-behavior deviations through organizational trust and ethical culture, suggesting that integrity-based leadership can operate through both relational and cultural mechanisms [6]. This perspective highlights the interconnected nature of ethical leadership dimensions, as honesty, trust, ethical culture, and responsible managerial behavior mutually reinforce one another within the organizational system.

Responsibility and accountability similarly represent critical elements of ethical leadership. Responsible leaders accept ownership of their decisions and recognize the consequences of their actions for employees, stakeholders, and organizational performance. Accountability adds an institutional dimension to responsibility by requiring managers to explain and justify decisions and accept evaluation based on transparent standards. In public and quasi-public organizations, accountability is particularly significant because managerial decisions may affect not only employees but also citizens, professional communities, external institutions, and other stakeholders. Research on governance has shown that ethical leadership can mediate the relationship between organizational legitimacy and governance excellence, indicating that ethical leadership provides a mechanism through which legitimacy can be translated into effective governance practices [7]. From this perspective, accountability should be viewed as a central mechanism linking ethical leadership to organizational legitimacy and governance effectiveness.

Transparency is also closely related to ethical leadership because ethical management requires clarity regarding decision criteria, organizational processes, allocation of resources, performance expectations, and managerial responsibilities. Transparency reduces information asymmetry and enables organizational members to understand the basis on which decisions are made. In the absence of transparency, even technically correct decisions may be interpreted as biased or politically motivated. Transparent leadership can therefore reinforce perceptions of procedural justice and organizational legitimacy while reducing ambiguity and suspicion. These effects are particularly relevant in sport organizations, where decisions concerning athlete selection, managerial appointments, federation relations, financial resources, and international representation may be highly visible and sensitive to stakeholder scrutiny. The reputational consequences of ethical or unethical conduct are therefore potentially substantial. In the context of Iranian sport organizations, ethical leadership and social responsibility have been found to contribute to organizational reputation, suggesting that ethical managerial practices are closely connected to external evaluations of institutional credibility [8].

Ethical decision-making constitutes another indispensable component of ethical leadership. Organizational managers frequently face situations in which competing interests, resource constraints, strategic pressures, and stakeholder demands make decisions ethically complex. Ethical decision-making requires managers to evaluate not only the efficiency or legality of alternative courses of action but also their fairness, transparency, consequences, and consistency with organizational values. The significance of ethically informed judgment has become even more pronounced with the increasing use of advanced technologies and artificial intelligence in organizational decision-making. Emerging research demonstrates that ethical leadership can activate moral sensitivity in technology-rich professional environments, emphasizing the importance of maintaining human ethical judgment alongside technological advancement [9]. Similarly, contemporary scholarship on artificial intelligence and inclusive organizational systems has highlighted the importance of ethical leadership in ensuring equality, diversity, and responsible decision-making in technologically evolving environments [10]. Although the National Olympic Committee operates in a distinctive sport-governance environment, these developments reinforce the broader proposition that managerial decision-making must remain ethically grounded even as organizations adopt increasingly sophisticated administrative and technological systems.

The behavioral influence of ethical leaders also extends to employee motivation and performance. Ethical leaders may create conditions in which employees perceive their work environment as fair, supportive, and aligned with meaningful values. Such perceptions can foster intrinsic motivation and encourage employees to engage more actively in organizational tasks. Empirical findings from healthcare organizations indicate that internal motivation can mediate the relationship between ethical leadership and employee performance, demonstrating that ethical managerial behavior may affect organizational outcomes by strengthening employees' internal willingness to perform effectively [11]. Related evidence suggests that ethical leadership can improve job performance through psychological and motivational mechanisms such as self-compassion and constructive self-regulation [12]. These findings are particularly relevant to organizations in which performance depends heavily on professional commitment, interpersonal cooperation, and discretionary effort.

The motivational consequences of ethical leadership are also evident in knowledge-related organizational behaviors. Ethical leaders can create environments in which employees feel sufficiently secure and valued to exchange information, share professional expertise, and contribute to collective learning. Mansoori et al. showed that intrinsic motivation mediates the relationship between ethical leadership and knowledge-sharing behavior, highlighting the importance of ethical leadership in facilitating voluntary forms of organizational contribution [13]. In knowledge-intensive and coordination-dependent organizations, this function is particularly important because effective performance often depends on the circulation of tacit knowledge, cooperation across professional boundaries, and employees' willingness to support one another. For sport-governance institutions, knowledge sharing between managers, technical personnel, federations, athletes, coaches, and administrative units can be essential to policy implementation and organizational effectiveness.

Ethical leadership can additionally strengthen employees' affective attachment to the organization by shaping the ethical climate. When employees perceive that ethical behavior is consistently supported by organizational leaders, they may develop a stronger sense of identification and emotional commitment to the institution. Rabbi et al. found that ethical climate mediates the relationship between ethical leadership and affective organizational commitment, suggesting that the influence of leadership extends beyond immediate leader–employee interactions and becomes embedded in the broader

organizational environment [14]. This finding supports the view that ethical leadership should be conceptualized as an institutional process capable of creating shared ethical norms that affect attitudes, behavior, and organizational outcomes.

Ethical leadership is also associated with constructive employee voice and the willingness to report wrongdoing. In organizations lacking psychological safety, employees may remain silent regarding misconduct, unethical decisions, or procedural problems because they anticipate retaliation or believe that reporting will be ineffective. Ethical leaders can counteract this tendency by creating an environment in which employees perceive reporting concerns as legitimate and organizationally supported. Ibrahim et al. showed that ethical leadership promotes internal whistleblowing through psychological safety and favorable reporting attitudes, illustrating how ethical leaders can strengthen mechanisms of internal organizational control [15]. Such mechanisms are highly relevant to governance-oriented institutions because effective accountability depends not only on formal monitoring structures but also on employees' willingness to disclose problematic practices.

Another important aspect of ethical leadership is its relationship with organizational culture. Ethical conduct becomes more sustainable when it is institutionalized within shared values, practices, routines, and expectations rather than remaining dependent on the personal characteristics of individual managers. Ethical culture building involves reinforcing ethical standards through recruitment, training, performance evaluation, reward systems, managerial appointments, communication processes, and responses to misconduct. Research indicates that ethical culture may operate as an important mechanism through which ethical leadership reduces undesirable political behavior [6]. Furthermore, research in environmental management has demonstrated that ethical leadership can shape organizational identity and culture in ways that subsequently influence organizational performance outcomes, illustrating the broader capacity of ethical leadership to generate collective orientations extending beyond individual employee behavior [16]. Accordingly, ethical culture building can be regarded as one of the most strategic dimensions of ethical leadership.

The effects of ethical leadership may also extend to broader forms of discretionary and prosocial organizational behavior. Managers themselves may develop and reinforce ethical orientations through engagement in activities that emphasize social contribution, sustainability, and collective responsibility. Lu et al. demonstrated a relationship between green volunteering and ethical leadership behavior among managers, indicating that ethical leadership may be both expressed through and reinforced by values-based managerial behavior outside narrowly defined task requirements [17]. Such findings demonstrate that ethical leadership is connected to a broader orientation toward stewardship and responsibility, characteristics that are particularly relevant to organizations operating under public and societal scrutiny.

In the Iranian organizational context, increasing attention has been devoted to developing culturally and institutionally appropriate models of ethical leadership. The construction and validation of a sustainable ethical leadership scale in the Iranian higher education system illustrates the growing recognition that ethical leadership should be operationalized in accordance with contextual characteristics rather than treated solely as a universal and context-independent construct [18]. Similarly, research within the Iranian public sector emphasizes the relationship between ethical leadership, justice, legitimacy, and governance quality [5, 7]. These studies suggest that ethical leadership models should account for the specific institutional, cultural, and administrative conditions within which leadership is exercised.

The sport sector provides a particularly important setting for examining ethical leadership because sport organizations are characterized by multiple stakeholders, intense public visibility, reputational sensitivity, competitive pressures, and complex

relationships between administrative and technical actors. Managers in sport institutions may be involved in decisions concerning financial resources, athlete support, selection and appointment, international representation, federation governance, performance evaluation, and organizational development. Each of these areas may generate ethical dilemmas involving fairness, transparency, accountability, or conflicts of interest. Existing research in sport management demonstrates that leadership styles can influence managers' attitudes toward organizational change through ethical intelligence, confirming the importance of ethical capacities in sport-management processes [19]. Furthermore, ethical leadership has been linked to organizational justice in physical education settings [4], organizational reputation in sport and youth departments [8], and the reduction of organizational trauma and inertia through social and behavioral mechanisms among employees of the Ministry of Sports and Youth [20]. Collectively, these findings indicate that ethical leadership is not peripheral to sport management but is directly relevant to organizational adaptation, justice, reputation, and institutional functioning.

The relationship between ethical leadership and dysfunctional organizational behavior is especially important in sport institutions. Organizational trauma, inertia, political behavior, mistrust, and social loafing can reduce managerial effectiveness and weaken organizational capacity. Amirian et al. showed that ethical leadership is relevant to organizational trauma and organizational inertia in the context of sport administration, with social loafing playing an important mediating role [20]. Such findings imply that ethical leadership may function not only as a mechanism for promoting desirable outcomes but also as a protective organizational resource that limits harmful behavioral and structural tendencies. This preventive role is particularly relevant in institutions in which coordination across multiple units and stakeholders is necessary for achieving strategic objectives.

At the same time, contemporary studies demonstrate that ethical leadership is not limited to conventional outcomes such as employee satisfaction or commitment. It increasingly intersects with organizational legitimacy, institutional adaptation, knowledge sharing, technological transformation, psychological safety, sustainability, and performance. Ethical leadership has been connected to organizational legitimacy and governance excellence [7], intrinsic motivation and knowledge-sharing behavior [13], employee performance [11, 12], ethical climate and affective commitment [14], internal whistleblowing [15], moral sensitivity in technology-mediated environments [9], environmentally responsible organizational identity and culture [16], and values-based managerial behavior [17]. This expanding body of research supports the conceptualization of ethical leadership as a multidimensional organizational mechanism with consequences extending across behavioral, cultural, governance, and performance domains.

Despite this growing literature, an important research gap remains regarding the development and empirical validation of a context-specific ethical leadership model for the National Olympic Committee of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Prior Iranian research has addressed selected relationships involving ethical leadership in sport organizations, public administration, education, and other institutional contexts; however, these studies have generally examined ethical leadership as an antecedent or explanatory variable rather than developing an integrated model comprising multiple leadership dimensions and assessing their simultaneous contributions to organizational outcomes. Moreover, the institutional characteristics of a National Olympic Committee distinguish it from ordinary public organizations, private firms, educational institutions, and even individual sports federations. Its responsibilities involve coordination across sport federations, managerial and technical actors, athletes, national and international stakeholders, and governance structures, making ethical leadership particularly

consequential for institutional credibility and organizational effectiveness. A model appropriate to this environment therefore needs to integrate individual ethical qualities with governance-oriented dimensions such as justice, transparency, responsibility, accountability, ethical decision-making, role modeling, and ethical culture building.

Accordingly, the purpose of the present study was to design and validate a multidimensional ethical leadership model and examine the effects of its dimensions on organizational outcomes in the National Olympic Committee of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Methodology

The present study was applied in terms of purpose and employed an exploratory mixed-methods design with an emphasis on the quantitative phase. In the qualitative phase, the components of the ethical leadership model were extracted through a review of the theoretical foundations and expert perspectives. In the quantitative phase, the proposed model was evaluated using variance-based structural equation modeling and SmartPLS software.

The statistical population consisted of managers, experts, and technical staff members affiliated with the National Olympic Committee and sports federations. A total of 210 complete and analyzable questionnaires were collected. The data collection instrument was a researcher-developed questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” The measurement model consisted of nine dimensions of ethical leadership and one dependent variable, namely organizational outcomes. Each construct was measured using three items; therefore, the analytical section of the questionnaire contained 30 items.

The dimensions of ethical leadership included justice orientation, honesty and integrity, responsibility, transparency, accountability, ethical leadership, ethical decision-making, ethical role modeling, and ethical culture building. Organizational outcomes constituted the dependent variable of the model.

Findings and Results

Initially, the demographic characteristics of the respondents ($n = 210$) were examined. The descriptive results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of the Study Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	111	53
	Female	99	47
Education	Diploma	6	3
	Bachelor's degree	46	22
	Master's degree	113	54
	Doctoral degree	45	21

As shown in Table 1, of the 210 respondents, 53% were male and 47% were female. This relatively balanced gender distribution enabled the inclusion of diverse perspectives from employees and managers and reduced the likelihood of bias resulting from the predominance of one gender group. Regarding educational attainment, the largest proportion of respondents held a master's degree, accounting for 54% of the sample, followed by those with a bachelor's degree at 22%, a doctoral degree at 21%, and a diploma at 3%. The relatively high educational level of the sample suggests that respondents

possessed an adequate capacity to understand concepts related to ethical leadership, organizational behavior, and managerial outcomes. Therefore, the collected data can provide a reliable basis for analyzing the relationships within the model.

To ensure the reliability and validity of the constructs, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE) were reported. As shown in Table 2, all constructs demonstrated satisfactory reliability and convergent validity.

Table 2

Reliability and Convergent Validity Indices

Construct	Construct Name	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE
JUS	Justice Orientation	0.92	0.95	0.85
HON	Honesty and Integrity	0.94	0.96	0.89
RES	Responsibility	0.93	0.95	0.87
TRA	Transparency	0.93	0.95	0.87
ACC	Accountability	0.91	0.94	0.85
EL	Ethical Role Modeling	0.92	0.95	0.86
EDM	Ethical Decision-Making	0.90	0.94	0.83
RM	Ethical Role Modeling	0.91	0.95	0.85
EC	Ethical Culture Building	0.92	0.95	0.86
OUT	Organizational Outcomes	0.90	0.94	0.84

In the measurement model assessment, Cronbach's alpha values for all constructs ranged from 0.90 to 0.94. Given that Cronbach's alpha values greater than 0.70 indicate acceptable reliability, the items associated with each construct demonstrated a very high level of internal consistency. Composite reliability values ranged from 0.94 to 0.96, exceeding the conventional threshold of 0.70. This finding confirms that the indicators of each construct measured the corresponding concept consistently and reliably.

The Fornell–Larcker matrix was used to confirm the distinctiveness of the constructs. As shown in Table 3, the square root of AVE for each construct was greater than the other values in the corresponding column, indicating satisfactory discriminant validity.

Table 3

Fornell–Larcker Discriminant Validity Matrix

Construct	JUS	HON	RES	TRA	ACC	EL	EDM	RM	EC	OUT
JUS	0.92									
HON	0.36	0.94								
RES	0.40	0.39	0.93							
TRA	0.34	0.36	0.34	0.93						
ACC	0.34	0.43	0.39	0.26	0.92					
EL	0.45	0.45	0.37	0.31	0.37	0.93				
EDM	0.32	0.25	0.30	0.39	0.29	0.21	0.91			
RM	0.30	0.37	0.31	0.43	0.30	0.26	0.37	0.92		
EC	0.16	0.06	0.19	0.23	0.36	0.12	0.25	0.32	0.93	
OUT	0.40	0.27	0.33	0.30	0.39	0.30	0.27	0.31	0.29	0.92

The AVE values ranged from 0.83 to 0.89. Given that the minimum acceptable AVE value is 0.50, the results indicate that each construct explained a substantial proportion of the variance in its respective indicators. Therefore, the convergent validity of the model was confirmed at a very satisfactory level. In other words, the items corresponding to justice orientation,

honesty and integrity, responsibility, transparency, accountability, ethical role modeling, ethical decision-making, ethical culture building, and organizational outcomes demonstrated sufficient conceptual coherence.

The results of the Fornell–Larcker matrix also confirmed the discriminant validity of the model. For all constructs, the square root of AVE, located on the main diagonal of the matrix, was greater than the correlations between that construct and the other constructs. For example, the square root of AVE was 0.92 for justice orientation, 0.94 for honesty and integrity, 0.93 for responsibility, and 0.93 for transparency, whereas the correlations of these variables with the other constructs were lower than these values. This finding indicates that although the study constructs are theoretically related, they measure distinct and independent concepts and do not exhibit undesirable conceptual overlap.

At this stage, the direct effects of the dimensions of ethical leadership on organizational outcomes (OUT) were examined to test the study hypotheses. As shown in Table 4, all study hypotheses were supported at the significance level of $p < .05$.

Table 4

Results of Hypothesis Testing: Path Coefficients

Path (Independent → Dependent)	β	t Value	p Value	Test Result
JUS → OUT	0.21	3.12	.002	Supported
HON → OUT	0.18	2.85	.004	Supported
RES → OUT	0.15	2.44	.015	Supported
TRA → OUT	0.14	2.31	.022	Supported
ACC → OUT	0.19	2.98	.003	Supported
EL → OUT	0.12	2.15	.033	Supported
EDM → OUT	0.11	2.08	.038	Supported
ERM → OUT	0.17	2.76	.006	Supported
EC → OUT	0.23	3.45	.001	Supported

The results indicated that all dimensions of ethical leadership—justice orientation, honesty, responsibility, transparency, accountability, role modeling, ethical decision-making, ethical role modeling, and ethical culture building—had positive and significant effects on organizational outcomes in the National Olympic Committee.

In the structural model, all paths representing the effects of ethical leadership dimensions on organizational outcomes were positive and statistically significant. This indicates that strengthening the components of ethical leadership can contribute to improved organizational outcomes in the National Olympic Committee.

Among the dimensions examined, ethical culture building exerted the strongest effect on organizational outcomes, with a path coefficient of $\beta = 0.23$ and a t value of 3.45. This finding indicates that managers' possession of individual ethical characteristics alone is insufficient; rather, establishing ethical values, norms, and practices throughout the organization is of greater importance. When ethics becomes an integral part of both the formal and informal organizational culture, employee behavior, decision-making, professional interactions, and organizational performance are more likely to be directed toward desirable outcomes.

Following ethical culture building, justice orientation had a notable effect on organizational outcomes, with a path coefficient of $\beta = 0.21$. This finding indicates that perceptions of fairness in the distribution of opportunities, rewards, responsibilities, performance evaluation, and managerial decisions can strengthen employees' trust in the organization and create conditions conducive to greater commitment, cooperation, and improved performance. In sport organizations, particularly institutions such as the National Olympic Committee, ensuring fairness in selection, appointment, resource allocation, and managerial decision-making can play a decisive role in maintaining organizational legitimacy and credibility.

Accountability also had a positive and significant effect on organizational outcomes, with a path coefficient of $\beta = 0.19$. This finding indicates that managers who are accountable for their decisions, performance, and the consequences of their actions help establish organizational trust and enhance transparency. Accountability can reduce the likelihood of unprofessional conduct and nontransparent decision-making while improving the quality of management and organizational control.

Honesty and integrity, with a path coefficient of $\beta = 0.18$, and ethical role modeling, with a coefficient of $\beta = 0.17$, were also influential determinants of organizational outcomes. Managerial honesty enhances trust among employees, athletes, stakeholders, and other groups associated with the organization. Ethical role modeling by managers is also highly important because managers' actual behavior exerts a greater influence on employee behavior than verbal statements or formal regulations. When managers demonstrate practical adherence to ethical principles, fairness, commitment, and responsibility, employees are more likely to align their own behavior with these standards.

Responsibility, with a path coefficient of $\beta = 0.15$, and transparency, with a coefficient of $\beta = 0.14$, also had positive and significant effects on organizational outcomes. Managerial responsibility refers to accepting duties, demonstrating commitment to results, and making efforts to remedy errors. Transparency, through clarifying processes, decisions, evaluation criteria, and resource allocation procedures, can reduce ambiguity, distrust, and organizational conflict.

Although the path coefficients for ethical decision-making ($\beta = 0.11$) and ethical role modeling/ethical management ($\beta = 0.17$) were lower than those of some other dimensions, their statistical significance indicates that these components also contribute to improved organizational outcomes. Ethical decision-making becomes particularly important when managers encounter conflicts of interest, external pressures, resource constraints, or sensitive decisions involving athletes, coaches, and employees. Adherence to ethical principles in such situations can preserve stakeholder trust and the institutional credibility of the organization.

The value of $R^2 = 0.45$ for organizational outcomes indicates that the dimensions of ethical leadership collectively explained 45% of the variance in organizational outcomes. In behavioral and management research, this level of explained variance can be regarded as acceptable to relatively substantial. Therefore, ethical leadership represents an important determinant of organizational outcomes, although the remaining 55% of the variance may be attributable to factors such as organizational structure, leadership style, organizational culture, financial resources, human resource policies, climate of trust, employee motivation, and institutional support.

Furthermore, $Q^2 = 0.38$ indicates that the model has satisfactory predictive relevance. The positive Q^2 value confirms that the model does not merely explain relationships observed within the sample but also possesses adequate predictive capability for organizational outcomes based on the dimensions of ethical leadership.

The explanatory and predictive power indicators of the model are presented in Table 5.

Table 5

Model Explanatory and Predictive Power Indices (R^2 and Q^2)

Dependent Variable	R^2 (Explanatory Power)	Q^2 (Predictive Relevance)
OUT (Organizational Outcomes)	0.45	0.38

An R^2 value of 0.45 indicates that the present model explains 45% of the variance in the dependent variable, demonstrating substantial explanatory power. In addition, a Q^2 value greater than zero confirms the satisfactory predictive relevance of the model.

The findings of the study indicate that the proposed model demonstrates satisfactory performance and that the various dimensions of ethical leadership play significant roles in explaining organizational outcomes in the National Olympic Committee.

Discussion and Conclusion

The present study sought to design and validate a multidimensional ethical leadership model for the National Olympic Committee of the Islamic Republic of Iran and to examine the effects of its dimensions on organizational outcomes. The findings demonstrated that all proposed dimensions of ethical leadership had positive and statistically significant effects on organizational outcomes. Specifically, ethical culture building exerted the strongest effect, followed by justice orientation, accountability, honesty and integrity, ethical role modeling, responsibility, transparency, and ethical decision-making. In addition, the structural model explained 45% of the variance in organizational outcomes, while the Q^2 value of 0.38 indicated satisfactory predictive relevance. Taken together, these findings suggest that ethical leadership in the National Olympic Committee should be understood not merely as an individual characteristic of managers but as a multidimensional managerial and governance mechanism that can shape organizational processes, employee behavior, institutional trust, and organizational effectiveness.

The strongest relationship observed in the model was the effect of ethical culture building on organizational outcomes. This finding indicates that ethical leadership is likely to have its greatest organizational impact when ethical principles become embedded in organizational norms, routines, communication patterns, and managerial practices. In other words, the ethical behavior of individual managers may be important, but its influence becomes more sustainable when ethics is institutionalized throughout the organization. This result is consistent with research showing that ethical culture can function as a key mechanism through which ethical leadership influences organizational behavior and reduces undesirable outcomes. Karimpour et al. reported that ethical leadership contributes to reducing political-behavior deviations through organizational trust and ethical culture, demonstrating the importance of a shared ethical environment in translating leadership behavior into favorable organizational outcomes [6]. Similarly, Rihal emphasized that ethical leadership can strengthen organizational identity and culture and, through these mechanisms, improve organizational performance-related outcomes [16]. The present finding therefore reinforces the view that ethical culture building should be regarded as a strategic and organization-wide dimension of leadership rather than an auxiliary aspect of managerial conduct.

The significant effect of ethical culture building can also be interpreted in light of research on ethical climate and organizational commitment. Rabbi et al. found that ethical leadership strengthens affective organizational commitment through the mediating role of ethical climate, suggesting that employees respond not only to the behavior of individual leaders but also to the broader ethical atmosphere that leaders help create [14]. In the context of the National Olympic Committee, a strong ethical culture may provide employees and managers with clearer behavioral expectations, reduce ambiguity regarding acceptable conduct, and create a shared interpretive framework for organizational decisions. Such a

culture can be particularly important in sport governance, where multiple stakeholders, public scrutiny, resource allocation decisions, and high levels of reputational sensitivity increase the likelihood of ethical dilemmas and competing interests.

Justice orientation emerged as the second strongest predictor of organizational outcomes. This result indicates that organizational members' perceptions of fairness in decision-making, resource distribution, appointments, performance evaluation, and access to opportunities may substantially influence the effectiveness of the National Olympic Committee. This finding is consistent with Khalili et al., who demonstrated that ethical leadership positively affects organizational justice among physical education teachers, underscoring the centrality of fairness within ethical leadership processes in sport-related settings [4]. It is also compatible with the findings of Salehi and Montazeri, who emphasized the importance of justice-centered ethical leadership in the Iranian public sector and highlighted the role of fairness in strengthening responsible and legitimate governance [5]. In this respect, justice orientation may contribute to organizational outcomes by strengthening employees' trust in managerial decisions and reducing perceptions of favoritism, discrimination, or arbitrary treatment.

The importance of justice orientation is particularly relevant to the organizational setting of the National Olympic Committee because many of its managerial decisions involve the allocation of scarce resources, recognition, opportunities, and institutional support. Decisions concerning appointments, athlete and federation support, financial allocations, international participation, and performance evaluations may all be interpreted through the lens of fairness. When organizational members perceive such processes as equitable and based on consistent criteria, they may be more willing to cooperate with managerial decisions, accept organizational policies, and contribute to collective goals. Therefore, justice appears to function not only as a moral value but also as a practical managerial resource that can strengthen legitimacy, trust, and organizational effectiveness.

Accountability was another influential dimension and had a positive and statistically significant effect on organizational outcomes. This finding suggests that when managers accept responsibility for their decisions and are prepared to explain, justify, and be evaluated for their actions, organizational performance and governance can improve. The result aligns with the study by Omidi and Arbabi, who found that ethical leadership plays an important role in the relationship between organizational legitimacy and governance excellence [7]. Accountability can be understood as one of the mechanisms through which ethical leadership contributes to legitimacy because transparent justification of managerial actions reduces uncertainty and strengthens perceptions of procedural integrity. In sport governance institutions, where managerial actions may affect a wide range of internal and external stakeholders, accountability is essential for maintaining organizational credibility.

The finding regarding accountability is also supported indirectly by research on internal whistleblowing and psychological safety. Ibrahim et al. showed that ethical leadership encourages internal whistleblowing by enhancing psychological safety and employees' attitudes toward reporting misconduct [15]. This suggests that ethical leaders create conditions in which organizational members are more willing to question problematic practices and hold organizational actors accountable. In the National Olympic Committee, such a climate may help strengthen internal control systems, reduce tolerance for misconduct, and create stronger mechanisms for identifying managerial or procedural deficiencies before they escalate into larger organizational problems.

Honesty and integrity also had a significant positive effect on organizational outcomes. This finding indicates that consistency between managerial statements and actions, truthful communication, adherence to professional values, and resistance to opportunistic behavior are important for organizational effectiveness. This result is in line with the broader

ethical leadership literature, which considers integrity a central basis of trustworthy leadership. Worthington et al. highlighted the importance of maintaining principled and ethically consistent leadership under conditions of uncertainty and organizational threat, emphasizing that ethical credibility becomes particularly important when organizations face difficult decisions and institutional pressures [1]. Likewise, Kyzenko et al. demonstrated that ethical leadership is associated with institutional convergence toward accepted professional and ethical standards, suggesting that integrity-based leadership can contribute to greater institutional coherence [2].

The positive effect of honesty and integrity may be especially important in the National Olympic Committee because sport organizations depend heavily on stakeholder trust. Athletes, coaches, sports federations, managers, government institutions, and the public may all evaluate the credibility of the organization based on the perceived honesty and consistency of its leadership. In this regard, the findings of Nochmani et al. are particularly relevant, as they showed that ethical leadership and social responsibility positively affect the organizational reputation of sport and youth departments [8]. The present results extend this line of evidence by suggesting that honesty and integrity may contribute not only to reputation but also to broader organizational outcomes through enhanced trust and institutional credibility.

Ethical role modeling also showed a positive and significant relationship with organizational outcomes. This finding confirms the importance of leaders' actual behavior as a mechanism for communicating and reinforcing ethical standards. Employees are likely to judge ethical leadership not only by formal statements, codes, or policies but also by observing whether managers themselves act in accordance with the standards they promote. This result is consistent with Burton et al., who demonstrated that leadership behavior in sport organizations plays an important role in creating an ethical climate [3]. Leaders who consistently demonstrate fairness, respect, responsibility, and ethical commitment can serve as behavioral reference points for employees and can facilitate the diffusion of ethical expectations throughout the organization.

The role-modeling effect can also be understood in relation to employees' motivational and behavioral responses. Al-Bataineh and Hayajneh found that ethical leadership improves employee performance through internal motivation, suggesting that employees respond positively when they perceive leaders as ethically credible and supportive [11]. Similarly, Liu et al. demonstrated that ethical leadership is associated with improved job performance through self-compassion as a mediating mechanism [12]. These findings support the interpretation that ethical role modeling may influence organizational outcomes partly by shaping employees' psychological responses, motivation, and willingness to engage constructively with organizational goals.

Responsibility also had a positive and significant effect on organizational outcomes. This finding indicates that managers who accept responsibility for their decisions, fulfill their obligations, and actively address the consequences of their actions are more likely to contribute to effective organizational functioning. Responsibility is closely related to ethical leadership because ethical management requires leaders to acknowledge their obligations toward employees, stakeholders, and organizational objectives. The present result is consistent with Lu et al., who showed that values-based and socially responsible behaviors among managers are associated with ethical leadership behavior [17]. It is also consistent with the broader argument that ethical leadership fosters responsible organizational behavior that extends beyond narrow task requirements and incorporates concern for wider organizational and societal consequences.

Transparency likewise had a positive and statistically significant effect on organizational outcomes. Although its effect size was smaller than those of ethical culture building, justice orientation, and accountability, the result indicates that clear

communication of processes, criteria, decisions, and resource allocation mechanisms contributes to organizational effectiveness. Transparency can reduce ambiguity, discourage informal or politically motivated decision-making, and improve employees' understanding of organizational procedures. The significance of transparency can also be interpreted through the literature on organizational trust and political behavior. Karimpour et al. found that ethical leadership reduces political-behavior deviations through organizational trust and ethical culture [6]. Transparent decision-making may therefore contribute to organizational outcomes by limiting suspicion, reducing opportunities for informal influence, and strengthening confidence in managerial processes.

Ethical decision-making had the smallest path coefficient among the dimensions examined, but its effect remained positive and significant. This finding suggests that the ability of managers to evaluate decisions in terms of fairness, responsibility, stakeholder consequences, and ethical principles still contributes meaningfully to organizational outcomes. Ethical decision-making may become particularly salient under conditions involving conflict of interest, performance pressure, financial constraints, or competing stakeholder demands. Jing et al. emphasized the importance of ethical leadership in activating moral sensitivity in technologically changing work environments, demonstrating that ethical leadership can strengthen the capacity to recognize and respond appropriately to ethically relevant situations [9]. Similarly, Hilal and Ibrahim highlighted the importance of ethical leadership for promoting equality, diversity, and responsible decision-making in technology-intensive organizational environments [10]. These studies support the broader conclusion that ethical judgment remains essential even where managerial decisions are increasingly supported by complex technologies and formal systems.

The significance of ethical decision-making may also relate to the quality of knowledge sharing and employee participation. Mansoori et al. found that ethical leadership promotes knowledge-sharing behavior through intrinsic motivation [13]. Ethical decision-making can encourage knowledge sharing because employees may be more willing to contribute expertise when they trust that information will be used responsibly and decisions will be made fairly. This is particularly important in the National Olympic Committee, where effective decisions often require information from multiple technical, administrative, and sport-related sources.

The overall explanatory power of the model provides additional support for the multidimensional conceptualization of ethical leadership. The R^2 value of 0.45 indicates that the nine dimensions jointly explained 45% of the variance in organizational outcomes. This proportion is meaningful in organizational and behavioral research and indicates that ethical leadership can account for a substantial part of organizational effectiveness, although other variables also contribute to outcomes. The positive Q^2 value of 0.38 further demonstrates that the model possesses satisfactory predictive relevance. These findings are compatible with previous studies showing that ethical leadership influences a wide range of organizational consequences, including employee performance [11, 12], affective commitment [14], knowledge sharing [13], internal whistleblowing [15], organizational reputation [8], and governance quality [7].

The results also correspond with evidence from the Iranian sport-management context. Soleimani et al. demonstrated that leadership styles influence sports federation managers' attitudes toward change through ethical intelligence, emphasizing the importance of ethical capacities in sport leadership [19]. Amirian et al. likewise showed that ethical leadership is related to organizational trauma and inertia among employees of the Ministry of Sports and Youth and emphasized the role of social loafing within this relationship [20]. These findings suggest that ethical leadership can affect both constructive and dysfunctional aspects of organizational behavior. The present study extends these findings by

identifying multiple dimensions of ethical leadership and demonstrating their simultaneous effects on organizational outcomes in the National Olympic Committee.

The findings further support the importance of developing context-sensitive ethical leadership models. Mohammadi and Karimi emphasized the need to construct and validate ethical leadership measures suited to the institutional and cultural characteristics of Iranian organizations [18]. The present study contributes to this approach by identifying a multidimensional structure suitable for the National Olympic Committee. This is important because the ethical demands of sport governance may differ from those of hospitals, universities, private companies, or ordinary public agencies. Sport organizations are characterized by multiple stakeholder relationships, public visibility, reputational pressures, international obligations, and frequent resource-allocation decisions, all of which heighten the importance of ethical leadership. Therefore, the present model can be considered a contextually grounded framework for understanding how ethical leadership may contribute to organizational outcomes within this specific institutional environment.

Overall, the convergence of the present findings with previous research indicates that ethical leadership affects organizational outcomes through multiple interconnected mechanisms. Justice strengthens perceptions of fairness, accountability reinforces governance and legitimacy, honesty and integrity promote trust, role modeling communicates ethical standards, responsibility encourages ownership of decisions, transparency reduces ambiguity, ethical decision-making supports defensible choices, and ethical culture building institutionalizes these principles across the organization. Recent international and Iranian studies increasingly portray ethical leadership as an integrative mechanism linking individual managerial conduct with organizational culture, employee motivation, governance, legitimacy, knowledge sharing, performance, and responsible behavior [1, 2, 5]. Accordingly, the findings of the present study suggest that improving organizational outcomes in the National Olympic Committee requires not a single ethical intervention but an integrated leadership system in which ethical principles are simultaneously reflected in leaders' personal behavior, managerial decisions, organizational procedures, and institutional culture.

The present study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings. First, the study was conducted within the organizational context of the National Olympic Committee and associated sports federations, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other public, private, or nonprofit organizations. Second, the quantitative data were collected using self-report questionnaires, and respondents' answers may have been affected by social desirability or perceptual bias, particularly because ethical leadership involves normatively sensitive concepts. Third, the cross-sectional nature of the quantitative phase does not permit strong causal conclusions regarding the relationships among ethical leadership dimensions and organizational outcomes. Fourth, although the model explained a substantial proportion of the variance in organizational outcomes, other potentially important variables such as organizational politics, leadership climate, psychological safety, employee motivation, governance structure, and institutional pressures were not incorporated into the structural model. Finally, the study relied primarily on perceptual assessments of ethical leadership and organizational outcomes rather than objective indicators of organizational performance.

Future studies are recommended to test the proposed model in other sport organizations, including national federations, provincial sport departments, professional clubs, and international sport bodies, to assess its external validity. Longitudinal research could examine whether changes in ethical leadership practices lead to subsequent changes in trust, performance, organizational commitment, and governance quality over time. Future studies may also investigate mediating variables such

as ethical climate, organizational trust, intrinsic motivation, psychological safety, and organizational identification, as well as moderating variables such as organizational culture, leadership tenure, environmental uncertainty, and organizational politics. Comparative studies across different countries or institutional settings could determine whether the relative importance of dimensions such as justice orientation, accountability, and ethical culture building varies according to cultural and governance conditions. Researchers may also combine survey data with interviews, behavioral observations, administrative records, and objective performance indicators to reduce common-method bias and provide a more comprehensive assessment of ethical leadership.

From a practical perspective, the National Olympic Committee should institutionalize ethical leadership through integrated managerial and governance mechanisms rather than relying solely on managers' personal ethical characteristics. Ethical criteria should be incorporated into the selection, appointment, promotion, and performance evaluation of managers, and leadership-development programs should emphasize justice, accountability, transparency, responsibility, and ethical decision-making. Clear procedures should be established for resource allocation, appointments, conflict-of-interest management, and performance evaluation so that employees and stakeholders can understand how organizational decisions are made. Senior managers should actively model ethical behavior, accept responsibility for their decisions, and create safe channels for employees to raise concerns or report misconduct. Because ethical culture building showed the strongest effect on organizational outcomes, the Committee should also embed ethical values into formal policies, training programs, reward systems, internal communication, and routine managerial practices so that ethical conduct becomes a stable feature of organizational culture rather than an individual or temporary managerial preference.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants. Written consent was obtained from all participants in the study.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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