Effect of Ethical Leadership and Corporate Social Responsibility on Employees Outcomes: A Systematic Literature Review and Research Agenda

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	In recent years, ethical leadership, corporate social responsibility (CSR), and employee outcomes have gathered significant attention from both academia and businesses. This paper systematically reviews the idea of ethical leadership and corporate social responsibility (CSR) to employee outcomes. 116 relevant studies were selected and analysed out of 528 papers. The results have gathered all the knowledge for future researchers, so they can proceed towards new innovative research. Mainly, the literature emphasizes that ethical leaders should make it their highest priority to engage in CSR initiatives for societal and economical issues. Consequently, firms should prioritize ethical leadership and CSR activities in such a way that fosters the retention of customers, employees, and other stakeholders.

Introduction

In today's fast-paced corporate world, humanising committed staff who works together and exhibits creativity (Choi, 2007; Marinova et al., 2010; Mayer et al., 2009; Morrison, 2014) is essential for long-term organizational effectiveness. As complexity and dynamism increase, it becomes more challenging for leaders to recognize and resolve issues on their own; in this situation, employees who raise voices, and make recommendations can significantly improve the operation of the company (Gao et al., 2011). Researchers have discovered the factors that affect these kinds of employee behaviors (LePine & Van Dyne, 2001; Marinova et al., 2016; Hameed et al., 2020), as well as the level of commitment that defines engaged workers (Cooper-Hakim &

Viswesvaran, 2005). However, there are still issues, especially about understanding how leaders affect workers (Shore et al., 2018).

Despite being a topic of debate for times, "ethics" has gained widespread attention in the business and scientific communities in recent decades (Hameed et al.,2023: Iqbal & Parray, 2025). Ethical leadership is defined as "demonstrating normatively acceptable behaviour through one's activities and interactive relationships, as well as encouraging followers to adopt similar behaviors through decision-making, two-way communication, and reinforcement" (Treviño et al., 2024). Ethical leadership includes the morality of aspiration and positive behaviors as well as the morality of duty in addition responsibility to refrain from undesirable activities (Hameed et al., 2021: Kılınçarslan & Efeoğlu, 2024). The mechanism through which a firm can enhance the overall organizational outcomes through CSR has been underdeveloped. To be more precise, firstly despite decades of debate on CSR, it has become a key tactic for encouraging sustainable and high-quality business development (Tourigny et al., 2019). It is critical to comprehend how businesses can successfully carry out their social responsibility to improve employee outcomes and achieve superior economic growth.

Numerous studies have been conducted to investigate the factors that what stimulate organizations to engage in social activities (Khan et al., 2024). The relationship between ethical leadership, corporate social responsibility, and employee outcomes has been the subject of debate (Hameed et al., 2022). |However, there are still uncertainties and knowledge gaps. For example, to evaluate CSR and ethical leadership practices authentically, strategies are needed to impact employees' attitudes and behaviors. Furthermore, in-depth research is necessary to comprehend additional boundary conditions and appropriate factors that could encourage these relationships. There is a further need require to determine the long-term impact of CSR and ethical leadership on employee outcomes. In other words, it can be stated that the current knowledge proposed that CSR activities and ethical leadership have a positive impact on the attitudes, behaviour, and outcomes of employees. Accordingly, more investigation is needed to better understand the underlying mechanisms, contextual elements, and enduring impact of ethical leadership and CSR practices on workers. Because corporate social responsibility is crucial for those who have a strong desire to develop a significant effect through work (John et al., 2019).

Therefore, emergent information about the effect of ethical leadership and corporate social responsibility (CSR) on employee outcomes has seen symbolic expansion and exploration. Debate examined the relationship among CSR, ethical leadership, and employee behaviour, (Molnár et al., 2021) argue that influence may focus on supporting CSR activities and ethical leadership practices to encourage awareness of environmental issues, a sense of responsibility among employees and motivate them so that they engage in environmentally friendly behaviour in firms. Furthermore, another research on the influence of ethical leadership and employee attitudes regarding CSR has been discussed, through ethical leadership by supporting ethical decision-making and determining standards which positively influence CSR activities on employee attitudes in the firm (Choi et al., 2015). On the other hand, ethical leadership and CSR activities can trigger the behaviors of employees of SMEs specifically as they positively influence the variables (Hongxin et al., 2022; Peng et al., 2021; Wu et al., 2021).

Therefore, this unique context presents a valuable relationship between ethical leadership and environmental/CSR activities on employee attitude and behaviour affecting organizational outcomes. The relationship between these constructs can provide valuable understanding for the firms to increase job satisfaction, employee engagement, performance of the employees, and commitment to the organizational goals and outcomes. Despite this, the discussion on CSR as well

as on ethical leadership showed a negative impact on employee turnover intentions (Nejati et al., 2021). Hence, the firms must understand how these variables can foster employee pro-environmental behaviour and attitudes which help firms to develop efficient strategies to promote sustainability. Based on the above conceptualizations, variety of theories, including the theory of agency, managerial theory of value, theory of stakeholders, Hofstede's theory of cultural dimensions, and stakeholder engagement theory, have been employed by researchers to examine the evident relationship between EL and CSR (Coombs & Gilley, 2005; Deckop et al., 2006; Manner, 2010; Vollero et al., 2020; Waheed & Yang, 2019). Although, many researchers continue to disagree over whether EL affects CSR (Lee et al., 2013; Mishra & Schmidt, 2018), on employee outcomes (Aras et al., 2010; Du et al., 2015; Hood, 2003; Lee & Jungbae Roh, 2012; Youn et al., 2015). Unfortunately, existing research on the impact of ethical leadership and CSR on employee outcomes is still limited. To address this issue, the study's main goal is to investigate how ethical leadership and CSR initiatives affect employee outcomes.

Methodology

An integrated systematic review has been proposed on the concepts of EL, CSR, and employee outcomes. It has summarized all the debates which are connected with this topic and provided new knowledge which further researchers can explore in depth. The rigorous methodology is a thorough research strategy, a methodical screening and data mining process, a predetermined research protocol, and appropriate quality assessment techniques, are the main focus of the current literature review. The purpose of the review is to develop the credibility and reliability of findings by following this methodology. Despite other debates, it is necessary due to its scope, focus, identification of research gaps, and the addition of up-to-date literature. Also, some earlier researchers focused on their studies based on ethical leadership and CSR (Choi et al., 2015; Molnár et al., 2021; Wu et al., 2021), but no studies provide a systematic review of ethical leadership and CSR on employee outcomes. As (Paul & Benito, 2018; Paul & Criado, 2020) suggested, academic databases i.e. Scopus, Google Scholar, and Dimensions used to find relevant papers for performing the review. The catchwords are "ethical leadership" AND "CSR" OR "corporate social responsibility".

We begin by defining the study area, Ethical leadership, and CSR activities on employees, and then discover the following main question: "What effect do ethical leadership and CSR have on employees?" Setting the inclusion and exclusion criteria was the next step. Knowledgeable publications that include studies published in English are listed by Scopus, Google Scholar and Dimensions. Only reading empirical articles is emphasized. These inclusion criteria are according to the recommendations of (Lim et al., 2013). Following the recommendations of (Paul et al., 2021; Peng et al., 2021), the review directly searches the keywords in Scopus, Google Scholar and Dimensions, to identify the relevant papers for conducting the present study.

Other than that, the findings of the review have practical suggestions for the firms attaining to design efficient leadership and CSR activities to enhance employee engagement and performance. Conducting a literature review on the relationship between ethical leadership and CSR activities on employee performance is critical to developing our understanding of the complex link between these variables. By combining the existing literature, the current study provides researchers with the directions to develop the practices that shape positive employee outcomes and sustainable firm performance.

Protocol for the review

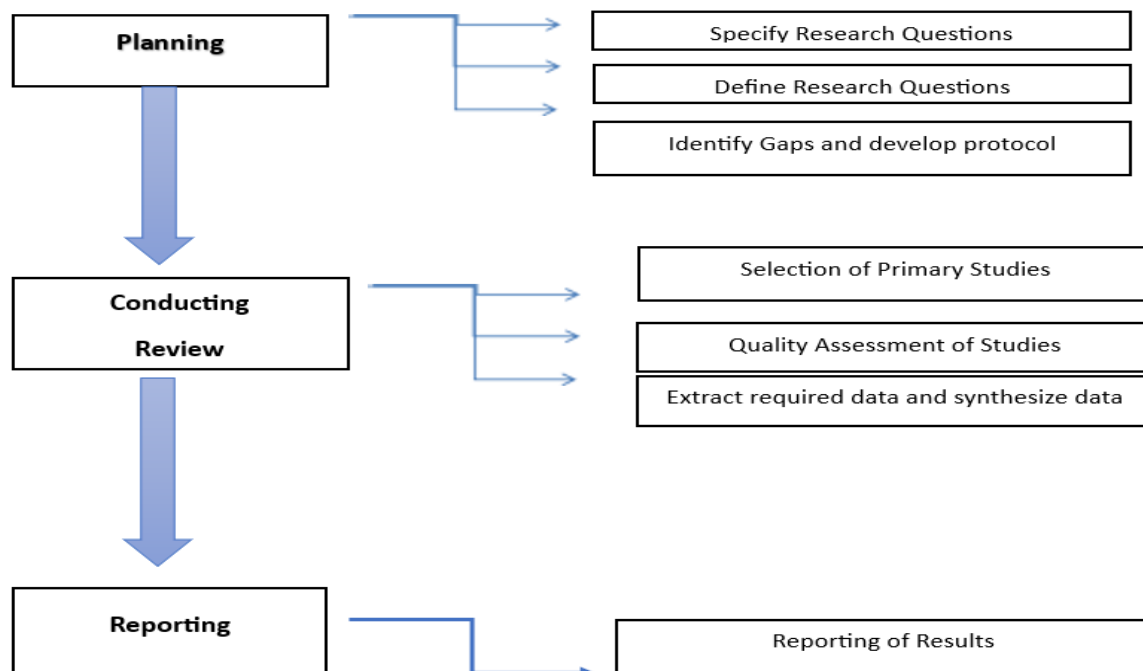Figure 1 provides a discussed detailed planning of systematic review:

Fig1: Protocol of the systematic review

Selection of Primary Studies

Based on the above debates, the study needs a more comprehensive and up-to-date evaluation of CSR research. After identifying the relevant studies, the standard was measured to choose primary studies that should be theoretical, empirical, or systematic review constructed on the relationship among ethical leadership, CSR and employee outcome. Several studies were included, and some were excluded after standards were applied to each one. The process, however, reduced irrelevant studies initially from 528 to 116 relevant studies. Figure 2 provides a summary of the selection procedure.

Quality assessment of studies

Although it is much more crucial to assess the value of primary studies by combining data and assessing the extraction stage to support fair processing of inclusion and exclusion processing. To measure each study's quality through data extraction, the paper was constructed based on four questions. Whether the purpose of the study has been explained well or not? Is the research study approach accurately defined? Whether the findings properly discussed and reported? Are the data gathered from different sources relevant to the study? The sample was reduced from 528 to 116 studies based on a four-quality assessment.

Data extraction and synthesis

In data extraction, chosen studies were established from a list of important factors. After this data was extracted and these factors were combined. By using the above-mentioned databases, 528

articles were collected, 392 articles were in the list after removing the duplicate (n=136). Note (n=8), review papers (n=16), book chapter (n=16), language change (n=8) and conference papers (n=18) are eliminated from the list according to inclusion criteria. Moreover, 208 were again eliminated as these don't meet our criteria. After a focused examination, the studies left were 116, that were included. The final list of 116 studies that completely follow our inclusion criteria. All the list of particular studies in addition to their systematic parameters are shown in Figure 2.
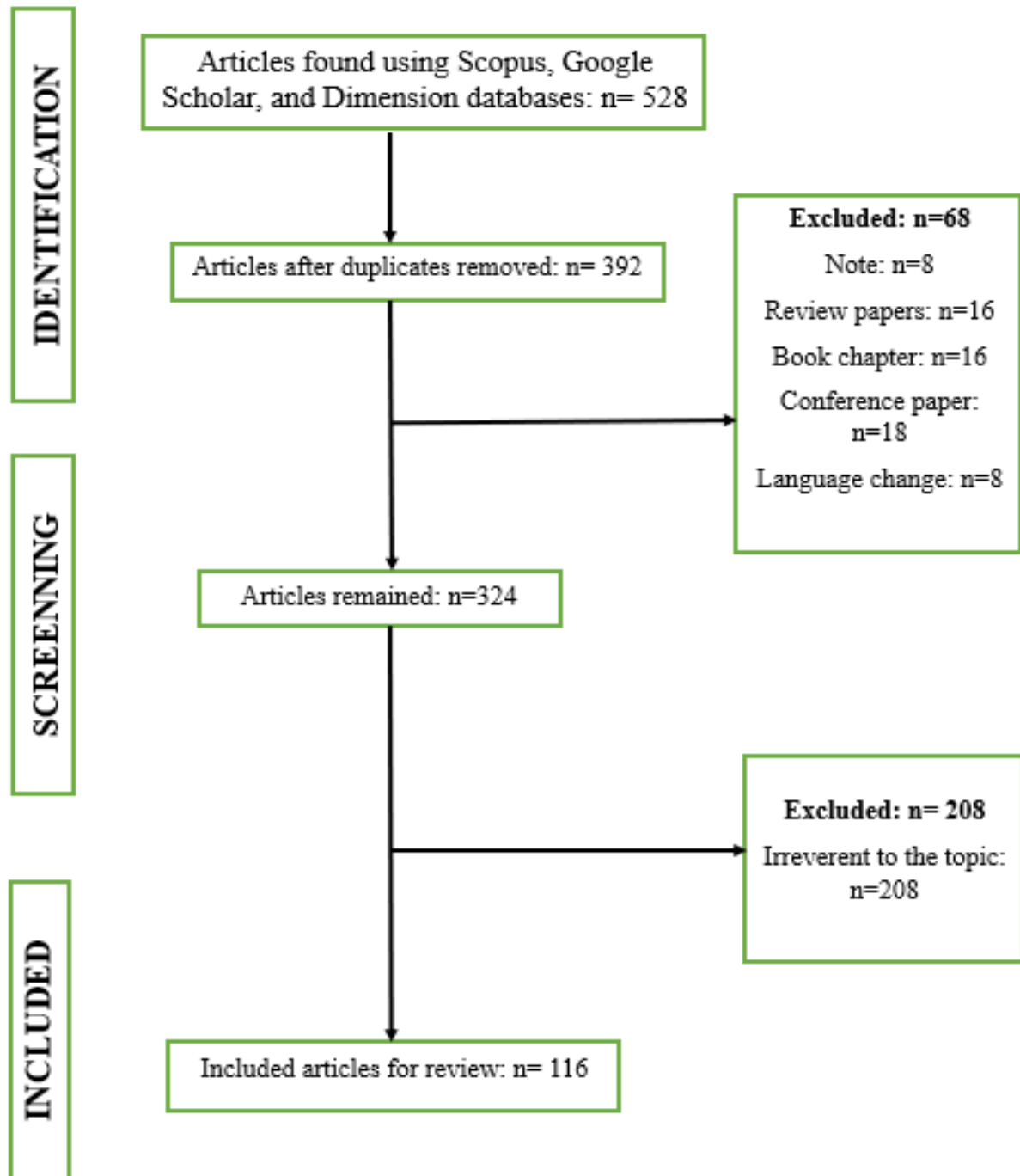

Fig 2: The systematic method of selecting articles for the present research
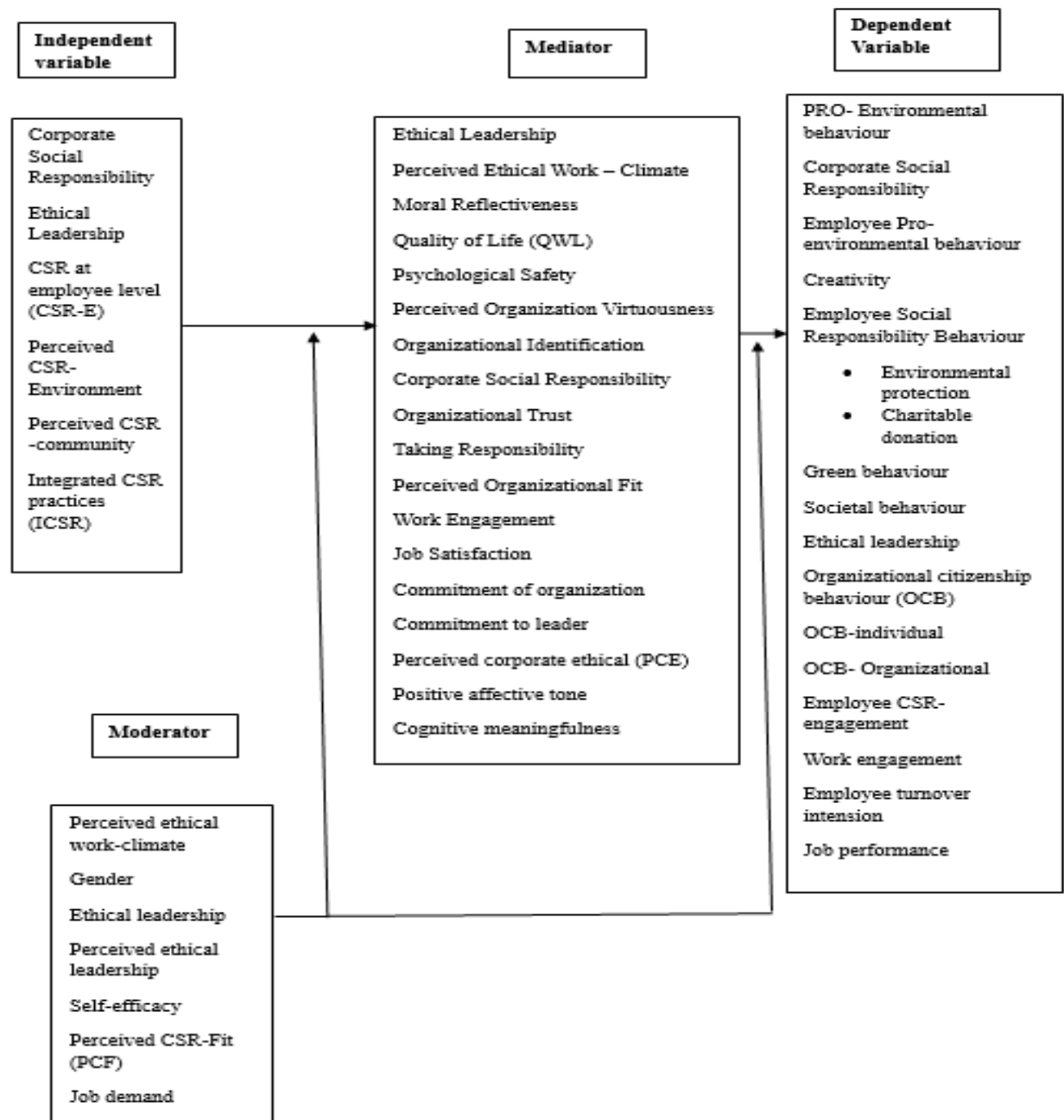
Independent variable	Mediator	Dependent Variable
Corporate Social Responsibility Ethical Leadership CSR at employee level (CSR-E) Perceived CSR-Environment Perceived CSR-community Integrated CSR practices (ICSR)	Ethical Leadership Perceived Ethical Work – Climate Moral Reflectiveness Quality of Life (QWL) Psychological Safety Perceived Organization Virtuousness Organizational Identification Corporate Social Responsibility Organizational Trust Taking Responsibility Perceived Organizational Fit Work Engagement Job Satisfaction Commitment of organization Commitment to leader Perceived corporate ethical (PCE) Positive affective tone Cognitive meaningfulness	PRO- Environmental behaviour Corporate Social Responsibility Employee Pro-environmental behaviour Creativity Employee Social Responsibility Behaviour • Environmental protection • Charitable donation Green behaviour Societal behaviour Ethical leadership Organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB) OCB-individual OCB- Organizational Employee CSR-engagement Work engagement Employee turnover intension Job performance

Moderator
Perceived ethical work-climate Gender Ethical leadership Perceived ethical leadership Self-efficacy Perceived CSR-Fit (PCF) Job demand

**Figure 3: Framework of previous studies variables**

Results and Findings

Further (Wu et al., 2021) investigates how CSR positively relates to employee behaviour by using the theory of planned behaviour. (Choi et al., 2015) examined the ethical style of leaders, and the attitudes of employees towards corporate social responsibility, which indicates the positive relationship between employee behaviour and the ethical work climate theory. Another study investigated the result of ethical leadership, corporate social responsibility has been investigated on employee turnover, which shows a negative relation toward the turnover intentions of workers based on social exchange theory (Nejati et al., 2021). (Nejati et al., 2021) shows that there is a

positive effect of ethical leadership on employees' engagement in corporate social responsibility observed by Multiple theories are used such as stakeholder theory and social exchange theory to determine ethical leadership and CSR on employee knowledge sharing and job dedication, which show the positive effect of CSR and ethical leadership on knowledge sharing as debated by (Liu et al., 2020).

Thus, the existing review identifies 528 papers which include: articles, book chapters, notes, review papers, conference papers, and language changes. After screening out all the irrelevant data, the current systematic review has summarized the relevant articles' knowledge. The relevant 116 articles are on the particular relevant variables, and the current review has gathered all the knowledge for future researchers, so they can proceed towards new innovative research. Figure 4, show how many articles are published in the same journal on the same specific variables, and it also summarizes the year and authors' information.

Figure.4
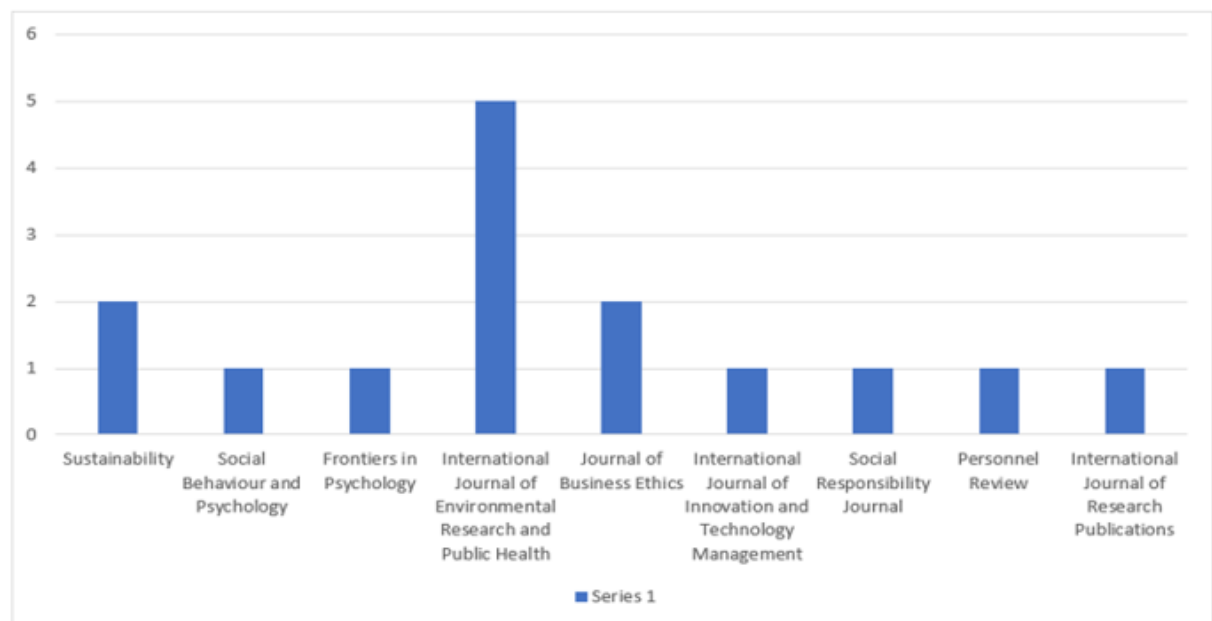
Practical Implications

The study offers practical implications for the authors, their successors, members of the top management team, and policymakers. Firstly, the ethical leadership approach, rather than other leadership styles and CSR, exerts significant influence on employee outcomes. Instead of adopting other leadership styles, scholars may also consider introducing ethical leadership and CSR activities, which ultimately develop the quality of employee outcomes and decisions of firms. To make effective CSR decisions, top management and staff should primarily be aware of the variety of CSR initiatives carried out by ethical leaders and their significant impact on business performance. Such as, if a firm has ethical leaders who indicate to accomplish multiple CSR activities, to improve long-term employee relations? For long-term orientations and specific strategic goals of a firm, leaders having ethical attitudes toward the employees may need to choose different CSR activities to comply with the different life-cycle stages of the firm. Therefore, to encourage employees to be socially and environmentally responsible, policymakers can think about creating efficient policies and procedures.

Conclusions and Future Direction

This study provides fascinating insights into the body of knowledge on EL, CSR, and employee outcomes. More in detail, we reviewed articles systematically related to ethical leadership, CSR, and employee outcomes. Most importantly, the conclusion offers practical implications and suggests paths for future research. Further, the study adopted a systematic review method to explore ethical leadership, and CSR activities on employee outcomes and demonstrates that the investigation of CSR activities, and ethical leadership practices on employee outcomes is underdeveloped. Mainly, the literature emphasizes that to pursue CSR activities for social and economic affairs, it should be the supreme responsibility of ethical leaders. Consequently, firms should prioritize ethical leadership and CSR activities in such a way that fosters the retention of customers, employees, and other stakeholders. As, employee outcome relies more on ethical leadership practices. Therefore, on-the-job training and building a code of ethics can play a vital role in adopting CSR activities to achieve the target and expectations of consumers. Through this, ethical behaviour of employees and managers can reduce the turnover rate, and maximize commitment, and morality toward organizational goals.

Based on the existing studies, the current systematic review recommends future researchers explore the relationship among various styles of leadership such as ethical leadership, authentic leadership, sustainable leadership, distributive leadership, visionary leadership and CSR on employee outcomes while adopting the social identity theory, social identity theory, psychological contract theory, theory of planned behaviour, and equity theory. Also, researchers can conduct studies by using different methods. i.e., qualitative research methods, experiments, and mixed methods, to better understand the influence of ethical leadership, CSR, and employee outcomes. In order to gain a deeper understanding of the current topic, future researchers may employ different mechanisms. Thus, the current review suggests that other researchers find the mechanisms, including market conditions, psychological safety, green HR practices, perceived ethical climate, and environmental dynamism. The current review can find gaps, point out inconsistencies, and provide a theoretical framework to assist future researchers by integrating and producing the debate of other researchers. Future studies can thus investigate a wide variety of sectors, cultural viewpoints, and organizational sizes.

The goal of this review paper is to give readers a thorough understanding of how corporate social responsibility, or CSR, and ethical leadership are related to employee outcomes (EO). The declaration emphasizes the strategic advantages and moral duty of implementing these values in contemporary business management. It also highlights the evolving nature of company social responsibility (CSR) and ethical leadership, along with the pressing need for ongoing collaboration, innovation, and research in these vital fields. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) and ethical leadership continue to be guiding principles for sustainable and ethical business practices in the twenty-first century, as organizations navigate the complex ethical landscape. These principles reflect the goals of a more conscious and compassionate world. Still, there are challenges to be addressed, and innovative solutions must be incorporated into the business plan. Moral leadership and corporate social responsibility (CSR) are not just ideals but rather practical requirements in the face of a business environment that is continuously changing. These fundamental ideas serve as a roadmap for the future, pointing the way toward a morally and environmentally responsible business environment.

Therefore, we suggest a research agenda that could provide other researchers with the opportunity to examine these areas of study. More empirical research is required to examine how EL and CSR

affect EO. At last, the need to perform cross-sectional empirical analysis to examine the connections between EL, CSR, and EO is another area of future research.

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