

The Influence of Ethical Practices on the Organizational Performance: A Special Reference to Ruaha Catholic University

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Abstract

Current unethical practices have heightened the scrutiny on researchers, organizations, governments and business practitioners. This study examined the influence of ethical practices on organizational performance, paying particular attention to the preconventional and post conventional stages of moral development stages of the Kohlberg's theory. 145 workers were polled using a quantitative method in a cross-sectional design based on positivism. Participants were chosen using simple random selection and stratified random sampling. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyse the data, which were acquired via standardized, closed ended questionnaires. Results indicated that ethical practices based on integrity and accountability positively correlated with performance, while discipline and fear-based compliance showed a weak negative association. The study stressed the significance of developing a culture of ethical decisions-making, ethical training, ethical leadership, transparent communication, and orientation for new hires. The single-institutional sample and some other unidentified performance affecting factors were among the limitations. Future studies should look into employee motivation, communication dynamics, and the long-term effects on interventions promoting ethical behaviours on performance.

Keywords: *Ethical practices, Preconventional, Postconventional, organizational performance*

INTRODUCTION

From being a historical concern, the pursuit of ethical practices within organizations is now a crucial element of successful modern corporate operations. Research shows that ethical practices have a favourable impact on performance, and they are becoming more and more

acknowledged as essential for organizational success on a worldwide scale (Agbo, 2022; Grigoropoulos, 2019). Organizational performance serves as an indicator of managerial effectiveness, reflecting an organization's ability to align resources with operational goals in an ethical manner, which fosters a sustainable competitive advantage (Munishi, Khatri, & Pastory, 2022; Odhon'g & Omolo, 2015, as cited in Munishi, Khatri, & Pastory, 2022). Achieving high performance across financial, market, operational, and shareholder dimensions requires effective management of various factors, notably human capital (Barney, 1991; Peters & Waterman, 1982; Kaplan, 2005, as cited in Munishi, Khatri, & Pastory, 2022).

Employee ethics in higher education play an important role in shaping institutional culture, reputation, and performances (Ruben & Gigliotti, 2019). Ethical practices such as integrity, teamwork, fairness, and adherence to codes of conduct are critical, prompting firms to incorporate ethical norms and regulations across their structures (Grigoropoulos, 2019). Studies have demonstrated that ethical practices have a positive impact on organizational performance around the world. For example, Oladimeji's (2024) research examined the relationship between accountability practices, integrity systems, internal control systems, and leadership skills in Malaysia's public sector. Using descriptive statistics, ordinal regression, and structural equation modelling (SEM), the findings show a statistically significant positive relationship between integrity system practices and leadership quality. Purba and Prasetyo (2020) investigated how leadership and integrity influence employee performance, mediated by organizational commitment. Using SEM on data from 120 Bank Indonesia employees, they found that both leadership and integrity positively impact employee performance and organizational commitment. Importantly, integrity primarily drives organizational commitment, while leadership strongly influences employee performance.

The African context, Adeyeye et al. (2015) conducted a study in Nigeria to examine the effects of ethical and unethical conduct on workers' dedication and output. The study analysed data obtained from a 5-point Likert scale using structural equation modelling (SEM) and descriptive statistics. AMOS 22 was used to test hypothesis. The results showed that organizational productivity and ethical standards were significantly correlated and that productivity was negatively impacted by integrity and discipline. This detrimental impact was attributed to these moral values'

abstract nature, which takes time to manifest. The study emphasises the strong relationship between ethics and organizational performance, particularly in the setting of Nigeria. According to Anekwe et al. (2023), harsher punishments like suspension and dismissal have a detrimental influence on performance, but performance is favourably connected with positive disciplinary actions such as persuasion and warnings. This suggests that positive reinforcement is more effective in accomplishing organizational goals. Rufus and Gbemigun (2019) looked into the positive correlation between an employee's integrity and honesty and their performance.

Nonetheless, Yatich and Musebe (2018), who investigated how moral behaviour influences organizational performance in the industry, uncovered persistent moral lapses in Kenya's public health system. The effectiveness of the organization suffered as a result of these activities. In view of the same, the study conducted by Mupandanyama (2021) highlighted the negative consequences of unethical activities, including nepotism and corruption, on the efficacy of local government in Zimbabwe. The study also mentioned the advantage of having a strong work ethic and provided suggestions for encouraging moral behaviour. Over the past few decades, ethical practices in organizational settings have received a lot of attention, especially from the government and non-governmental sectors. This emphasis is particularly noticeable in initiatives involving public funding for procurement and developmental project funds, to mention a few, where ethical standards compliance is essential (Mchopa et al. 2019).

In the study by Mchopa et al. (2019), empirical data from Tanzania's Moshi District Council highlighted the significance of moral procurement standards like accountability, transparency and justice. These values have a high association with improved organizational performance, as well as being consistent with professional procurement standards. The study used a mixed-method approach and a descriptive design.

Furthermore, the Tanzania Commission for Universities (TCU) stresses effective leadership and sound management as crucial for improving performance in higher education (Nkunya, 2020). Despite TCU's guidance, some Tanzanian universities struggle with quality standards due to inadequate financial resources or leadership deficiencies, impeding quality improvement efforts.

The correlation between ethical behaviour, stakeholder trust, a healthy work environment, and overall organizational success has been highlighted by prior empirical studies. With an emphasis on the connection between employee ethics and organizational success in various settings, the current study explores the influence of ethical practices in higher education. The purpose of this study is to identify areas that require development and provide strategies for promoting moral and ethical practices, and raise overall institutional accomplishments, ethical leadership and practices are essential for businesses to succeed sustainably (Nkunya, 2020). Understanding the various organisational context and difficulties can help develop effective ways to promote ethical cultures and enhance performance. The results of the study can assist stakeholders, policymakers, and leaders in establishing moral guidelines that promote excellence, discipline, integrity, and accountability while also raising performance levels. Emeka et al. (2020) studied how non financial transparency affected performance; Arokodare and Asikhia (2020) found a correlation between strategic agility and improved performance; Ibrahim and Daniel (2019); and Alkhajeh (2018). Investigated the relationship between ethical leadership style and organisational performance. While these studies offer insights on ethical practices and organisational performance. The relationship between ethical practices and organisational performance in the higher learning institutions in Tanzania remains understudied. This study aims to fill this gap by exploring the impact of preconventional and postconventional ethical practices on organizational performance in Tanzanian higher educational institutions. Therefore, it was necessary to illuminate these matters through a careful study guided by two research objectives:

- i) To determine the extent of the preconvention stage of moral development of ethical practices as an influencing factor in organisational performance.
- ii) To assess the effect of the postconventional stage of moral development of ethical practices on organisational performance.

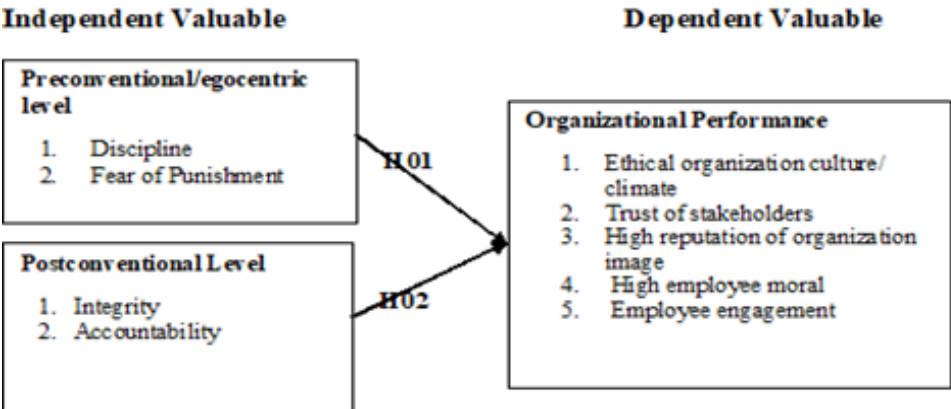
Theoretical Frame Work

The study analyses the impact of ethical practices on organizational performance using Kohlberg's theory of moral reasoning. From Piaget's (1932, 1965) work with youngsters, Kohlberg's theory developed into a six-stage model. The paradigm of moral growth, which has three levels,

characterizes the process of making ethical decisions as it advances via life events (Kohlberg, 1969, 1981). The three levels are as follows: (1) preconventional, in which people put their own interests' first; (2) conventional, in which people follow social standards; and (3) postconventional, in which people base their decisions on moral values that they have selected for themselves. Gilligan (1982; 1993) criticized Kohlberg for neglecting to consider women's care-based reasoning, which demonstrates that women value connections and care whereas men use reasoning that is justice-oriented (Moreno-Segura et al., 2023; Held, 2006) in this study, fear of punishment and discipline are preconventional variables, while accountability and integrity are postconventional. Various ethical perspectives, such as individualism, utilitarianism, moral righteousness and fairness, are used as supporting theory (Mill1873) and are in line with Kohlberg's stages of understanding ethical practices in organizational performance. The merits and flaws of these frameworks are highlighted when viewed via Kohlberg's lens, which also demonstrates how useful his model is to the study for understanding and promoting ethical development in people and organisations, eventually influencing ethical actions within the study's context.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework: The influence of ethical practices on organizational performance.



Source: Researcher (2024)

METHODOLOGY

This study research design employed structured methods where two theories were adopted to guide the study and study variables were deduced from the theory in order to explain the influence of ethical

practices on Organizational performance. Therefore, a quantitative approach was used to study the relationship between the independent variable and dependent variables, where a cross-sectional survey research strategy was employed to collect data that helped to quantify the relationship between preconventional ethical practices (fear of punishment and discipline) and postconventional ethical practices (integrity and accountability) and perceived organizational performance. Therefore, this philosophical thinking enabled the use of positivist approach.

Area of study was Iringa Region of Tanzania, and particularly Ruaha Catholic University located in Iringa Municipal. This location was preferred because RUCU has been recognized for its commitment to ethical standards despite ongoing challenges. It presented a compelling context to investigate the influence of employee ethical practices on organizational performance.

The population and sampling of this study were crucial; the targeted population comprises management as well as teaching and non-teaching workers (234) (HR Office 2023 data) in this investigation, stratified random sampling was employed, which entailed dividing the population units into subgroups and selecting a basic random sample unit from each segment (Orton, 2018). Consequently, the total of stratum was calculated as follows: $\Sigma(N_h/N) * n = 147.99 \cong 148$, Simple random sampling is useful to guarantee a fair chance of inclusion for all population members, making them equally eligible to participate in a research project (Thomas, 2020). The research focused on RUCU staff (teaching and non-teaching) due to their relevant knowledge aligning with the study's specific focus. This ensured data generalizability within RUCU and information richness.

This study used both primary and secondary data, for purpose of primary data; the study used structured questionnaires to capture measurable data for statistical testing (Saunders, 2019). Questionnaires were considered applicable as they provide a chance to collect statistical data suitable for statistical analysis, hypothesis testing and examine the relationship between variables. While this research concentrated more on electronic based sources to search secondary data like journals, articles, electronic books and also the library data base from the Open University Tanzania,

Iringa branch, and RUCU as well as documents from RUCU Human Resource Office with permission from the RUCU management.

Validity and Reliability tests were taken into consideration, according to Kulshreshtha, (2013) test verified if the data captured the intended measurements, with a score above 0.5 indicating high adequacy. Additionally, content validity was confirmed by consulting supervisors, guaranteeing the survey items accurately reflect the research objectives and real-world context. Data should be tested for suitability, Data suitability was assessed using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test, yielding a higher score of 0.555, and Bartlett's test of sphericity, which was significant ($\chi^2 = 122.328$, $p < 0.001$). Because of the P-value of .000, which is quite significant. This indicated that there is enough correlation between the variables to support component analysis. Supervisor consultations confirmed that the survey items appropriately matched the research aims, ensuring content validity as demonstrated in Table 1.

Table 1
KMO And Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.555
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	122.328
	df	3
	Sig.	.000

Data reliability was ensured in this study by using Cronbach's alpha analysis, which measures how consistently the questionnaires capture the target constructs. A rating of 0.7 or above denotes robust consistency (Loungrath, 2018; Wang et al., 2022). The findings, which demonstrated that every scale was higher than the minimal value, confirmed the validity of the research apparatus as well as consultation with the supervisors. Table 2.

Table 2
Reliability Statistics of Cronbach's Alpha

	Variables	No of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
1.	Preconventional	10	0.718
2	Postconventional	10	0.854
3	Organization Performance	5	0.863
4	Overall	25	0.864

Source Researcher, 2024

Data was edited, coded and entered into the SPSS software. Initial descriptive statistics of variables were generated to obtain frequencies, means and standard deviations. Furthermore, regression analysis was applied to establish the relationship between the independent variables: (preconventional and postconventional) and the dependent variable: (organizational performance).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In this section, the findings appear based on the research objectives and hypotheses of the study. Before presenting data obtained as required by the research hypothesis, the researchers presented the demographic characteristics of respondents. It was from this background that it was possible for the researchers to determine the nature of respondents as reflected in Table 3.

Table 3
Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents (N = 145)

	Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Gender	Female	74	51.0
		Male	71	49.0
2	Age	20-30	37	25.5
		30-40	38	26.2
		40-50	48	33.1
		50-60	12	8.3
		61 and above	10	6.9
3	Marital status	Single	64	44.1
		Married	77	53.1
		Divorced	2	1.4
		widow/er	2	1.4
4	Education level	Certificate	13	9.0
		Diploma	10	6.9
		Advanced Diploma	7	4.8
		Degree	45	31.0
		Masters	55	37.9
		Doctorate	15	10.3
5	Duration of work with RUCU	below five years	51	35.2
		5-9	32	22.1
		10-14	40	27.6
		15 years and above	22	15.1

Source: Field Data

Table 3's results show that respondents' gender distribution is balanced, with 51% of them being female and 49% being male. A mature group capable of comprehending the ethical consequences on organizational performance was indicated by the 33% of participants who were between the ages of 40 and 50. Although the majority of respondents (53.1%) were married, suggesting a stable workforce at RUCU, the 41.1% of single respondents may cause retention problems. Results indicated enriched variety on perspectives of ethical practices by the fact that 31% of the population held a bachelor's degree and 37.9% held a master's degree. In addition, 35.2% of respondents had less than five years' experience, while 27.6% of respondents had worked for ten to fourteen years. This suggests that respondents' opinions on ethical practices at RUCU may vary due to years of experience working at RUCU.

Correlation Analysis

Table 4
Pearson correlations

Correlations		Preconventional	Postconventional	Performance
Preconventional	Pearson Correlation	1	.360**	.241**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.004
	N	145	145	145
Postconventional	Pearson Correlation	.360**	1	.717**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000
	N	145	145	145
Performance	Pearson Correlation	.241**	.717**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.004	.000	
	N	145	145	145

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Field Data

Influence of Preconventional Moral Development Ethical practices on Organizational Performance

The results in this objective indicated that both the correlations are positive and statistically significant at the 0.01 level, indicating that as scores in one variable increase, scores in the other variable tend to also increase. The weakest, yet still significant, correlation is between preconventional ethical practices (discipline and fear of punishment) and performance ($r = .241$). Hair et al. (2007) addressed the strength of the relationship between the coefficient ranges of 0.21 to 0.40 as a small but definite relationship. The value of the correlation coefficient, which is

(0.241), falls in the coefficient range of 0.21 to 0.40. This showed a small but definite relationship between moral reasoning stage preconventional and organizational performance.

Influence of Postconventional Moral Development Ethical practices on Organizational Performance

In this objective, the strongest correlation was between postconventional and performance ($r = .717$), suggesting a strong linear relationship between these two variables. In view of the same, Hair et al (2007) addressed the strength of the relationship between the coefficient ranges of 0.71 to 0.90 as high. At 0.717, the correlation coefficient falling between this range showed that the level of postconventional moral reasoning and organizational efficiency were highly correlated. The results indicate that performance and postconventional ethical practices (integrity and accountability) have the strongest positive relationship among all the factors. This is consistent with Kohlberg's theory, which holds that people become more moral and perform better as they move through the moral phases.

Regression Analysis

In order for the regression analysis to be conducted, it was compelling for researchers to test their data set to see if they meet the required assumptions. Thus, diagnostic tests were conducted to test multicollinearity, linearity and normality as presented in the subsequent sections.

Table 5
Collinearity Statistics

	Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)		
Preconventional	.871	1.149
Postconventional	.871	1.149

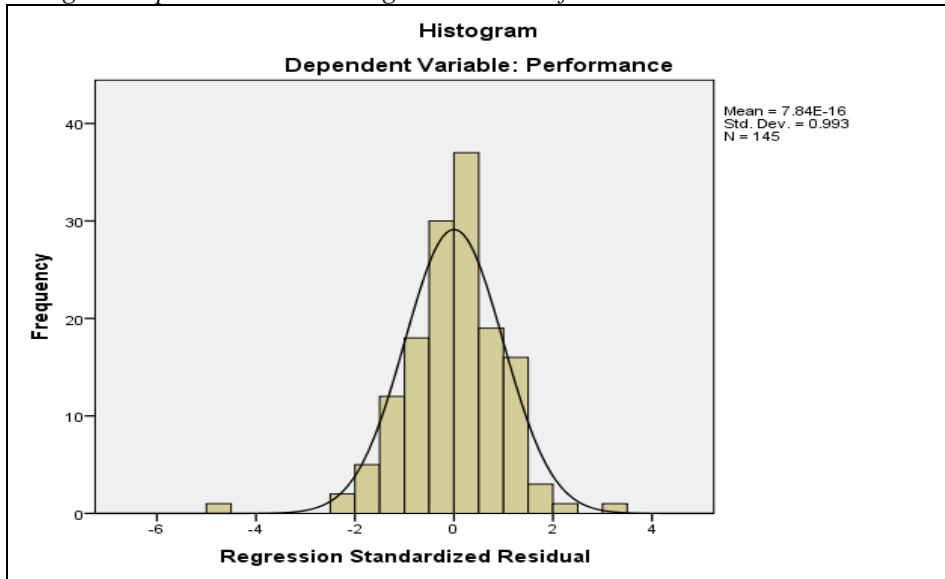
Source: Field Data

The Multicollinearity Table 5 indicated collinearity statistics; the tolerance and variance inflation factor (VIF) values suggested that there were no multicollinearity issues. Tolerance values close to 1 indicate low multicollinearity. While VIF values below 10 indicate no severe multicollinearity. Both variables preconventional and postconventional their tolerance and VIF values were 0.871 and 1.149, respectively.

For the normality assumption for regression analysis, a normality assumption was needed. To test the normality assumption, we must run the histogram and the normal P-PP in the SPSS and results are presented in figure 2 and 3.

Figure 2

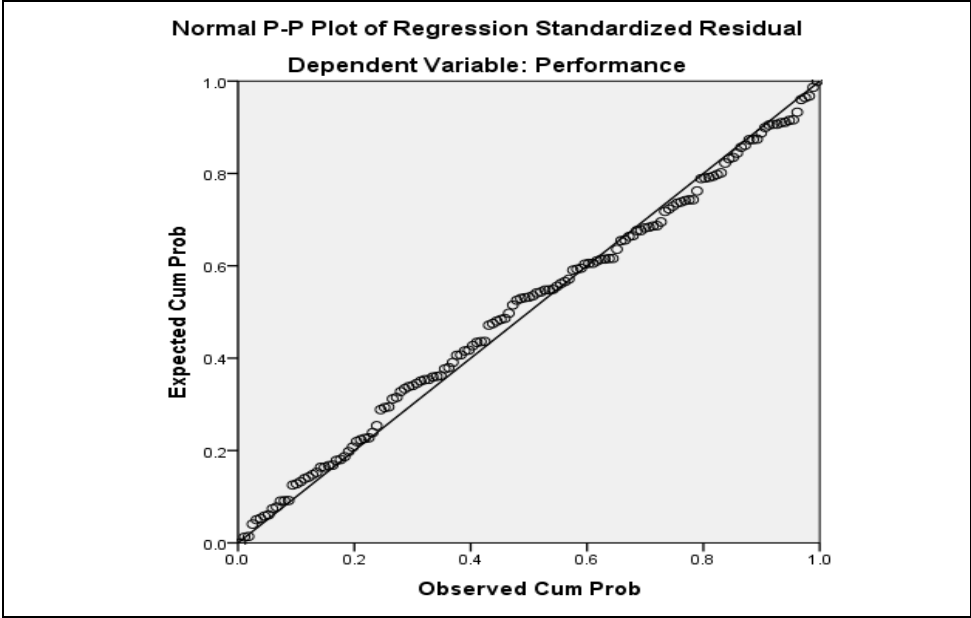
Histogram Dependent Variable: Organizational Performance



Source: Field Data

The results indicate the mean 7.84E-16, which is approximately 0, and the standard deviation of 0.99, which is approximately 1. The histogram supports the assumption of normality of residuals in regression analysis, suggesting that the regression model used is appropriate and the results can be trusted. Furthermore, looking at the P-P plot, we find that all the data on the organizational performance appear to fit in the straight line. Therefore, the conclusion is that the data was normally distributed since they have shown that the standard normal distribution has a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1. Also, the P-P plot shows a straight line. Therefore, the key assumptions of the regression are all satisfied; thus, the model fits the data to explain the relationship between organizational performance (dependent variables) and other independent variables: In the preconventional and postconventional ethical practices stages, a linear regression model was used.

Figure 3
Linearity of Variation



Source: Field Data

Table 6
Model Fitness Test

Model Summary ^b									
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	Change Statistics F	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.717 ^a	.514	.507	2.19446	.514	75.151	2	142	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Postconventional, Preconventional

b. Dependent Variable: Performance

Source: Field Data

Table 6: The model fitness test summary indicates that the regression model, which includes the predictors postconventional and preconventional, significantly explains 51.4% of the variance in performance ($R^2 = .514$, adjusted $R^2 = .507$). The high F statistic (75.151) and its significance level (.000) suggest that the model is a good fit for the data. The strong R value (.717) indicates a strong correlation between the observed and predicted values of performance. Only 48.6% of the variations of variables which are not included in the model. Std. Error of the Estimate value (2.19446) reflects the standard deviation of the residuals (errors) in the model.

Table 7
Analysis of Variance

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	723.805	2	361.902	75.151	.000 ^b
	Residual	683.823	142	4.816		
	Total	1407.628	144			

a. Dependent Variable: Performance

b. Predictors: (Constant), Postconventional, Preconventional

Source: Field Data

Table 7. The regression model was shown to be statistically significant by the ANOVA findings. At a significance level of .000, the F-statistic of 75.151 indicates that a considerable amount of the variance in the dependent variable (performance) can be explained by the model. This demonstrates that the predictors postconventional and preconventional are significant in explaining the variation in performance and validates the validity of the regression model.

Table 8
Regression coefficient and tests of hypothesis

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	5.704	1.431		3.987	.000
	Preconventional	-.010	.031	-.019	-.310	.757
	Postconventional	.388	.034	.724	11.547	.000

Source: Field Data

Influence of preconventional ethical practices on organizational performance

The study aimed at comparing the contribution of each independent variable. Table 8 shows that the unstandardized coefficient (B) for the constant term is 5.704. This represents the predicted value of "performance" when the independent variables (preconventional and postconventional) are equal to zero. Preconventional level of ethical practices (Beta = -.019, p-value = .757): indicated a very weak negative association and was not statistically significant between preconvention stage of moral development of ethical practices and organisational performance. This implies that lower organizational performance is linked to higher scores on preconvention moral ethical practices, which usually place a higher priority on discipline and avoiding punishment. P-values

above 5% (0.05) indicate that the association has no meaningful influence on performance.

The findings show that, in the regression model, preconventional ethical practices were found to have a negative and low significant influence on organization performance, with a B-value= -0.010, (P=0.757,> 0.05) the null hypothesis is not rejected. H01. There is no significant influence of the preconvention stage of moral development practices on organizational performance of RUCU.

Influence of postconventional ethical practices on organizational performance

Postconventional level of ethical practices (Beta =.724, p-value = .000): There's a positive and statistically significant relationship between postconventional stage of moral development of ethical practices (which focuses on universal ethical principles of integrity and accountability) and organizational performance. This is because P-value is below 5% (0.05). This suggests that higher scores on postconventional moral ethical practices are associated with higher performance.

postconventional were found to have a positive influence on organization performance with (B-value=0.388, P=0.000<0.05, with highly significant relationships. Hence rejecting the null hypothesis H02. There is no significant influence of the postconvention stage of moral development practices on organizational performance of RUCU, and accept the alternative hypothesis H₂ that; there is a significant influence of the postconventional stage of moral development ethical practices on organizational performance of RUCU.

A simple regression model was used in determining the level of influence the independent variable has on the dependent variable, as shown below: -

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \varepsilon$$

$$Y = 5.704 + - .010X_1 + 0.388X_2 + \varepsilon$$

Preconventional ethical practice was found to have a negative influence on organizational performance in RUCU ($X_1 = -0.010$, $P = 0.0757 > 0.05$, $t = -0.310$, $\beta = -0.010$). This shows that a one-unit change in preconventional ethical practices will result in a - 0.010 unit decrease in organization performance; other factors are held constant.

Postconventional ethical practices were found to have a positive influence on organization performance in RUCU ($X_2 = 0.388$, $P = 0.000 < 0.05$, $t = 11.547$, $\beta = 0.388$). This shows that a one-unit change in postconventional ethical practices results in 0.388 unit increase in organizational performance, other factors held constant.

The discussion of findings was based on the specific objectives as follows:

The first objective was to determine the extent to which preconventional stages of moral development, namely, fear of punishment and discipline affect organizational performance. The findings show that preconventional ethics, which are characterized by fear of discipline and punishment have very little effect on performance ($P\text{-value} = 0.757$, $\beta = -0.019$). This goes against the findings of Anekwe et al. (2023), but it is in line with the suggestion made by Adeyeye et al. (2015) that an organization's success could be in danger if it depended only on these principles. Moreover, the results align with Kohlberg's moral theory, which emphasizes that while egocentric moral reasoning may have immediate advantages, it may also have long-term negative effects on organizational performance. Therefore, while all other factors stay the same, a one-unit change in these moral behaviours results in a -0.010 (-0.1%) decline in performance. Despite this difference, Nevertheless, the findings are helpful to the management of RUAHA Catholic University and relevant parties as they highlight the value of intergrading higher order moral reasoning which is beneficial.

Conversely, the second objective was to assess the effect of the postconventional stage of moral development of ethical practices on organizational performance. The study found that postconventional ethics, encompassing integrity and accountability, significantly and positively influence performance ($\beta = 0.724$, $p = 0.000$) supporting findings by Oladimeji (2024) and Rufus and Gbemigun (2019). These results align with Kohlberg's theory, emphasizing the importance of higher moral reasoning for organizational success. Additionally, a one-unit change in these ethical practices resulted in a 0.388 (38%) increase in performance, holding other factors constant.

It implies that higher learning institutions and organizations should reinforce these ethical values among employees for the success of the organisations.

CONCLUSIONS

The study revealed how crucial moral behaviours are to maintaining the effectiveness of an organization. Postconventional ethics (integrity and accountability) demonstrated a strong positive association with performance, but preconventional ethics (discipline and fear of punishment) had an insignificant negative effect. Therefore, this implies that organizations should prioritize building a solid ethical culture through the formulation of policies, training, and ethical guidelines based on postconventional ideas. Of course, discipline is important but employees should be formed trained to be men and women of integrity and accountability. For higher education institutions to embark on the formation of future professionals with a foundation in integrity and accountability coupled with honesty and responsibility moral thinking and ethical values incorporated into the curricula.

In conclusion, there is a need for transitioning from preconventional ethical values to postconventional ethics, focusing on integrity and accountability, so as to enhance organizational performance, as demonstrated by a positive correlation in the study.

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