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A Focus on Ethical Value under the Vision of Leadership, Teamwork, Effective Communication and Productivity

Víctor Mercader ¹, Esthela Galván-Vela ², Rafael Ravina-Ripoll ³ and Cristina Raluca Gh. Popescu ^{4,5,6,7,*}

- ¹ Graduate School of Business, CETYS Universidad, Av. Cetys Universidad No. 4, Fracc. El Lago, Tijuana C.P. 22210, Baja California, Mexico; victor.mercader@cetys.mx
 - ² Center of Excellence in Competitiveness and Entrepreneurship, School of Business and Administration, CETYS Universidad, Av. Cetys Universidad No. 4, Fracc. El Lago, Tijuana C.P. 22210, Baja California, Mexico; esthela.galvan@cetys.mx
 - ³ Department of Business Organization and INDESS, University of Cádiz, 11405 Jerez de la Frontera, Spain; rafael.ravina@uca.es
 - ⁴ Department of Business Administration, Faculty of Business and Administration, University of Bucharest, 030018 Bucharest, Romania
 - ⁵ Department of Economics and Economic Policy, Economics I Doctoral School, Faculty of Theoretical and Applied Economics, The Bucharest University of Economic Studies, 010374 Bucharest, Romania
 - ⁶ Department of Natural and Technological Hazards, The National Institute for Research and Development in Environmental Protection (INCDEP), 060031 Bucharest, Romania
 - ⁷ The National Research and Development Institute for Gas Turbines COMOTI (INCDT COMOTI), 061126 Bucharest, Romania
- * Correspondence: popescu_cr@yahoo.com or cristina.popescu@man.ase.ro



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Abstract: The new economy and the knowledge-based society brought significant changes in all the areas of our daily lives. Also, the COVID-19 pandemic and the COVID-19 crisis implicated tremendous transformations in all the domains, on the one hand, threatening the balance of our society and, on the other hand, challenging the dynamic of the new economy development and the rhythm of the societal modernization. In these delicate times, the all-important relationship between ethics, leadership, teamwork, effective communication, productivity, and performance is brought to the attention, in particular, due to its benefits for our society, taking into consideration the pivotal advancement that a well governed relationship of this type could provide to the knowledge-based economy. The present research describes the implication of ethics in leadership, teamwork, effective communication, and productivity, which includes the application of ethical values as university graduates assume the role of each of the mentioned dimensions of study in the organizations. The absence of research that relates ethics to these four elements simultaneously was noticed. This information is essential to know how these dimensions influence the organizational level. The sample that included 410 university graduates was applied in Baja California, Mexico, and the industrial nucleus of great relevance, bordering California in the United States of America. The data was obtained using a questionnaire. A reliability and validity analysis of the measurement instrument was carried out in terms of the ethical values associated with the dimensions mentioned using the exploratory factor analysis by the principal components method. Qualitative items were also analyzed using the constant comparison method. The results obtained in this research provide a greater perspective and practical knowledge and support of usefulness and practical reality to businesspeople and employees, leaders and university graduates; and also extensive to students, teachers, and human beings in general, in order to be better prepared to give and apply solutions with their consequent ethical and productive achievements desired by all. Additionally, this current research has the purpose to raise the will to understand, at a higher level and at a more in-depth degree of knowledge, the relationship between ethics, leadership, teamwork, effective communication, productivity, and performance, in the attempt to foster a creative and innovative business environment, based on a robust and sustainable business administration and business competencies, capable to position at higher ranks the strengths, opportunities, aspirations and outcomes that today's new economy is due to offer and diminish the dangerous effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the COVID-19 crisis in all the domains.

Keywords: ethics; leadership; teamwork; effective communication; productivity; performance; business administration; business environments; business competencies; business counseling; corporate governance; creativity; economics; effective business communication; effectiveness; entrepreneurial competencies; entrepreneurship; environmental protection; knowledge-based society; innovative business models; integrative strategies; intellectual capital; accounting; audit; economic and financial analysis; economic growth; fiscally responsible businesses; intangible assets; human capital; human resources management; management; mindfulness; qualitative analysis; quantitative analysis; questionnaire; performance management; public sector; private sector; statistics; statistical correlations; study sample; Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); sustainability; empirical analysis; exploratory analysis; exploratory factors; Barlett's sphericity test; Cronbach's alpha indicator; Kaiser-Meyer Olkin (KMO) test; Likert scale; skewness and kurtosis calculations; Varimax rotation; voluntarist theory; COVID-19 pandemic

1. Introduction

Ethics is the main axis that makes an actual balance upon the risk of organizations, businesses and enterprises helping to reach beneficial financial consequences, job balance and wellbeing (Fichter 2018; Popescu 2022a, 2022b, 2022c, 2022d; Sison et al. 2019; Sebestova and Lejková 2020; Šebestová and Palová 2017). Nevertheless, on the other side, the lack of ethical values application could influence negatively originating people damage, high penalties and, also, bankruptcy. There are so many cases which were emphasized by reputed specialists throughout the years, that refer to the lack of ethics (Elson and Ingram 2018; Straker et al. 2021; Sood and Bhushan 2020) meanwhile Pauly and Hutchison (2005). In addition, in one of his studies, Sarabia (2006) analyzes the great difference of enterprise behavior, showing critical ethical cases response. This disappointing reality affects the financial corporate and organizational world (Figar and Dordevic 2016).

Ethics is a theme that has prevailed throughout history and has been revealed and externalized in different types of organizations and societies (Seele 2018; Tourigny et al. 2019). Ethics creates effects, either by its application for the common good generating harmony, trust, solidarity and peace or on, its opposite side, by the absence of it, generating harm and damage to the human beings (Amiridis 2018; Nassif et al. 2020; Zhang et al. 2020; Palová and Šebestová 2020; Moreno and Mercader 2021).

Ethics is a broad theme that coexists everywhere in life and in the business and administration, and which proves to be essential in all areas, including leadership (Bauman 2018; Kalshoven and Taylor 2018), teamwork (Alvi et al. 2020; Lyubovnikova et al. 2018), effective communication (Alyammahi et al. 2020; Touhidul and Sorooshian 2019) and productivity (Ebert and Freibichler 2017; Tammany et al. 2019). Therefore, this current research—which possesses a high degree of novelty while compared with other studies on similar topics, can be regarded as crucial given its main focus and, also, based on the research gap that was successfully identified, namely: the opportunity to describe the implication of ethics in leadership, teamwork, effective communication, and productivity, which includes the application of ethical values as university graduates assume the role of each of the mentioned dimensions of study in the organizations.

In all areas of performance, human being ethical behavior is a conditioning factor of individual and collective results (Grozdić et al. 2020). In this research, ethics will be approached from the values associated with this behavior. Then, when the university graduates have to undertake a leadership role, manage work teams, communicate effectively and perform productive activities in the workplace, they have to make decisions and undertake risks themselves (Fichter 2018). Therefore, these roles might generate crises or harmonious development according to how ethical values are applied (Mercader 2017; Mercader 2019; Mercader 2020; Zhu et al. 2015).

In addition, there is the need to mention, from the very beginning, that ethics, leadership, teamwork, effective communication, productivity, and performance, represent

vital assets in all the relationships that are encountered in our society as a whole, offering greater power and an increased advantage to the knowledge-based society growth and development, highly influencing: the business administration, the business environments, the business competencies, the business counseling, the corporate governance, individuals and businesses creativity, the effective business communication, the entrepreneurial competencies and entrepreneurship, the environmental protection, the innovative business models, the integrative strategies, the intellectual capital, the economic growth, the fiscally responsible businesses, the intangible assets valuation, the human capital and human resources management (Elías Zambrano et al. 2021; Jiménez-Marín et al. 2021; Popescu 2020a, 2020b, 2020c, 2020d; Ravina-Ripoll et al. 2021). Also, mindfulness brings great added values to this complex relationship that is to be encountered while referring to ethics, leadership, teamwork, effective communication, productivity, and performance (Foncubierta-Rodríguez et al. 2021; Popescu 2022c, 2022d). Thus, this relationship between ethics, leadership, teamwork, effective communication, productivity, and performance, may even be considered the very essence of sound and robust business activities, enlarging the perspectives of several domains, such as: accounting, audit, business administration, economic and financial analysis, economics, management, political sciences, psychology, and sociology (Šebestová and Palová 2017; Sebestova and Lejková 2020; Popescu 2021a, 2021b, 2021c).

That is the main reason why the taxonomy of ethical values deducted and developed by Mercader (2006) has served as a base of the relationship of ethics with the four variables of the study. The applied taxonomy was originally obtained from a pilot study and the analysis of 28 taxonomies of ethical values from different authors which were resumed to 28 ethical more important values. These were summarized to 4 categorizations compounding of 7 ethical values each categorization which were Social Behavior values, Growth and Improvement values, Personal Talent values, and Inner or spiritual values.

Ethics as a social phenomenon has been addressed throughout history by thinkers such as Weber (1921), Parsons (1951) or Luhmann (2008). The first alluded to ethics from a vision-oriented to the limitations of capitalism and from the four pillars of comprehensive sociology: religion, law, economics and politics. For Weber, ethics would represent the cultural foundation that shapes the social order. For his part, Parsons evaluated the normative character of social conditions; the voluntarist theory of this author distinguishes a process of internationalization that occurs by cultural means and the process of socialization, which is part of the personality formed by shared norms. Luhmann, in contrast with Parsons, believes that ethics does not pursue purely normative adequacy for the satisfaction of society but is an individual reflection of morality that allows statements, judgments, rules and principles that govern behavior. That is the reason as example how the interpretation from different perspectives may create controversies and also gaps according to different criteria.

The academia as well as the researchers and scholars need to be conscious in some way of the ethical behavior of students and their critical thinking because they will be the future executives and directors of different organizations (Seele 2018). Therefore, the knowledge on the part of directors and university graduates who work in companies in managerial and critical positions need to mind the dimensions studied. At the same time, they will be of great utility and support to channel and optimize processes and to better anticipate and accomplish the expected results, contributing with greater sustainability (Nicholson and Kurucz 2019) of the companies. The amalgam created with all the mentioned dimensions and ethics is a significant contribution to management science and practice that includes in this study the human factor (Bauman 2018; Zhu et al. 2015); at the same time, the results obtained are useful for educators and learners at middle and higher levels (Berkovich and Eyal 2018) as they come from the data and perceptions of university graduates with active and current experience who work in the market and highlight their talent in order to meet goals and collaborate with business and organizational achievements.

This study is justified for the need of application of ethical values and ethical leadership (Bachmann 2017; Mihelic et al. 2010; Sharma et al. 2019; Sison et al. 2019) in organiza-

tions and the relationship with teamwork, effective communication and productivity. The study is also of great relevance given that there is no previous research that can analyze and relate the 28 ethical values of the applied taxonomy or so many values to the four dimensions of the study that happen to be of high priority in companies. The expectation of achievement of the research is of great utility and support for companies, institutions or organizations of all kinds since ethics through the application of ethical values tends to give more advantages and benefits through the enunciated dimensions. In addition, excellent achievements of individual and collective objectives are rooted in ethical values. Moreover, the influence of ethics is implicit in the results and consequences generated in such a way to be able to create common benefit and better welfare both internally and externally at all levels (Fatien-Diochon et al. 2018; Giacalone and Jurkiewicz 2003).

Hence, depending on the perception and performance of ethics of university graduates in their different workplaces and lives, the product and service trend originated by their individual, team or company performance generates significant results and changes (Mo et al. 2019). Additionally, understanding the existing relationship of the dimensions with each other and with ethics generates a tremendous and much more significant advantage by joining the knowledge of new dimensions' indicators, which can establish primary bases for companies.

It is because of the above that the research objective of the present research is: "To describe the implication of ethics in the dimensions of leadership, teamwork, effective communication and productivity and to determine the validity and reliability in the measurement of the different ethical values manifested in the four dimensions mentioned; as well as the correlations and dimensions associated with ethical values when these behaviors and acts are presented according to university graduates".

The fact that the instrument applied in the research has been carried out with a sample made up of university graduates who work in different organizations or companies in a region that has a significant industrial focus in the state of Baja California, Mexico, gives excellent value to the study given their experience and as experts in the situations that are presented to them daily in the work environment.

This article consists of several sections: Firstly, it briefly clarifies the state of the currently existing literature on ethics, leadership, teamwork, effective communication and productivity, in order to support the existing body of knowledge, as well as the development of new theoretical perspectives that relate the influence of specific ethical values when an individual assumes a role in the dimensions above. Secondly, the methodology implemented during the research is described, which consisted of a qualitative and quantitative analysis based on a questionnaire according to Mercader's taxonomy (2006, 2017) which was adapted to the conditions of the study sample (see Appendix A. Structure of the questionnaire used in this research). Thirdly, the analysis of the results was developed using basic descriptive statistics. The validity and reliability of this research data were evaluated. An exploratory factor analysis was conducted to determine the composition of the factors of ethical values associated with each behavior. Finally, it is concluded the relevance, validity and reliability in the use of the measurement instrument used and the existence of a necessary implication of ethical values while assuming leadership behavior, teamwork, effective communication, and productivity.

2. Literature Review

Ethics and the dimensions of leadership, teamwork, effective communication, and productivity have been sources of research in many different ways. However, the symbiosis and relationship of these as a solid and necessary set has not yet been carried out promptly, hence the importance of this study and corresponding analysis: the following analyses the influence and theoretical basis of the four dimensions and ethics and their relationship.

Apparently, one could say that the relevance of the dimensions of leadership, teamwork, effective communication and productivity in organizations, as well as their relationship, seems obvious; however, they continue to be an Achilles heel because ethical values

are not always applied in the best way. Hence, in this research the analysis of the ethical values that make up the four categories of the taxonomy used ([Mercader 2006](#)) and their relationship with the dimensions of study is of extraordinary relevance and necessity in order to improve business performance and reduce the risk of failure. To demonstrate this theoretically, we will analyze the relationship and the results from different authors dimension by dimension and then empirically by applying the designed instrument to a sample of 410 graduate university students.

The following is a very brief explanation of what the authors assume with greater criteria and emphasis in this study, the concepts of:

Ethics: The positive intangible energy applicable through ethical values in all life and work and/or business situations, generating the greatest common benefit and achieving productive, useful and happy balance.

Leadership: The art of achieving established business and individual achievements in cooperation with people and teams, applying the necessary knowledge and ethical strategies in a way that benefits the business, individual and social environment.

Teamwork: The ability to engage in the necessary actions to be carried out with a group or groups of people to reach the established goal with the least risk and the highest return in terms of time, cost and quality, feeling satisfaction, commitment and pride in belonging to the team.

Effective communication: The ability to be able to understand and make ourselves understood in any environment and situation that presents itself in such a way as to resolve in an effective way and where the fact of winning-win for the parties involved is manifested.

Productivity: The power to obtain effectiveness in the processes required for the achievement of goals, whether products or services, assertively managing the factors of quality, cost, quantity, time, location, among others,

When observing these concepts, it can be seen how all the study dimensions are inter-related in order to mutually help each other to achieve the common ethical achievement.

2.1. Ethics

Ethics, as it has been pointed out from the introduction, is closely related to the elements studied. The field of business ethics is very extended and important and that is why there are so many aspects to be discovered. It is appreciated as [Bauman \(2018\)](#) focuses on the four cardinal virtues, prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance, feasible to be applied even today in the corporate and business world and the behavior of different types of leaders, while [Amiridis \(2018\)](#) focuses his research on ethical leadership for reconciliation and harmony in business based on moral categories and their boundaries between possible ambiguous or opposite behaviors, which is also analyzed by [Ciulla \(2018\)](#) who consider it difficult as it requires self-control of self, ego and power and its use in having it. That is why it is convenient to find and contrast the relationship between the spirituality of the individual with the perception of unethical activities in specific organizations as [Giacalone and Jurkiewicz \(2003\)](#) already since the beginning of this century indicate, pointing out different identifying values of spiritual individuals where ethics is essential. Hence, it is necessary to generate an effective and understanding relationship between leaders and followers that can generate synergy capable of nurturing collaboration and mutual support ([Munro and Thanem 2017](#)); when that affection and understanding increases, the relationship with others makes serendipity appear that goes beyond prediction and makes processes and solutions flow better ([Fatien-Diochon et al. 2018](#)).

2.2. Leadership

[Kalshoven and Taylor \(2018\)](#) analyze the intersection of ethics and leadership under a qualitative analysis showing the philosophical perspectives in multiple published discussions of such relationships. Important variables arise with another perspective, which is studied by [Lips-Wiersma et al. \(2020\)](#), such as responsible leadership, equity-justice and

dignified work, which characterize ethical practices generating win-win scenarios, which is what is expected in organizations and companies when they want to solve opposing tendencies or conflicts; this is how it is convenient to analyze the effects created, and therefore Kim et al. are mentioned, (Kim et al. 2018) who focus on those generated by perceived ethics, compassionate leadership and buffering strategic communication, in this case, applied to the pervasive feeling of anti-government, which uncovers under-researched areas as a whole, where ethics in governments is fundamental. There are then contrary or confusing interpretations when identifying ethics in leadership. It is often decided on a tightrope between corruption or necessity. As Machiavelli deduced, it was the least harmful and varied according to human conduct and dilemmas of conscience and their consequences (Cosans and Reina 2018). Hence, transformational solutions are required in different institutions that include the logic of conflicts with ethical components. They consider four types of solutions: synthesis, decomposition, replacement, and combustion (Nielsen and Lockwood 2018). It remains to ratify that applying ethics-based leadership becomes a necessity in teams and organizations as it creates a challenge to status threat and promotes healthier behaviors with higher performance, loyalty, and mutual trust (Zhang et al. 2020); similarly, Schuh et al. (2019) introduces the “mindfulness leader” as a mediator originating a linkage model with procedural justice leader’s performance towards reducing employee’s emotional exhaustion and thus, improving their performance; with this mindset, Seele (2018) focuses on the importance of critical thinking as a leader’s common denominator to be applied in ethical companies. In itself, the effort of leaders for achievement must be in congruence with the behavior and ethics of the same, which has an impact on work teams and especially when situations such as external negative influences, critical deadlines or completion and tasks with the interdependence of teams arise (Zhou et al. 2019).

In short, the idea is to be able to exercise ethical leadership applicable to companies, which is known as business ethics and on which there is a wide range of research, especially since the beginning of the century and millennium. Now, ethical leadership integrates a series of emerging types of leadership, with different names, but with ethical roots as their essence and with mutual affinity. These are authentic leadership (Semedo et al. 2019); spiritual or virtuous leadership (Pio and Tampi 2018; Smith et al. 2018); shared leadership (Choi et al. 2017; Zhu et al. 2018); affective or care leadership (Maggeni 2021); integrative leadership (Zhang et al. 2018); inspirational leadership (Salas-Vallina et al. 2020; Murnieks et al. 2016); charismatic leadership (Graboa et al. 2017; Jamal and Bakar 2017). All of the above leadership types are of a positive tendency and are linked directly or indirectly to the dimensions under study. They always, in one way or another, require teamwork, effective communication and productivity.

2.3. Teamwork

Teamwork is essential in every organization, and at the same time, every organization requires effective and ethical leadership in order to be sustainable; now, if this is coupled with the team working without significant flaws, creatively and with mutual trust, the results tend to be better and demonstrate a more significant relationship (Mo et al. 2019). Hence Chen et al. (2019) connect team cohesion with paternalistic leadership and organizational commitment and consider benevolent and moral leadership necessary in companies for better teams’ results. It is how according to Rego et al. (2018), when analyzing the effectiveness of teams, they conclude the need for authentic leaders. They must be aware of the knowledge applied with humility; on the contrary, when finding abusive supervisors, the spirit of innovation decreases in team members just as it generates a negative impact on organizations (Rousseau and Aubé 2018). Thus, Tu et al. (2019) emphasize the relationship of ethical leadership with the levels of creativity of work teams and the climate of psychological safety. It is that pro-social motivation about the organizational culture and behavior of the employee or citizen and the teams that they respond assuming ethical leadership into mutual welfare outcomes (Arshad et al. 2020). Thus, individual

performance and satisfaction with the work team are analyzed by [von Bieberstein et al. \(2020\)](#) in combination with variables such as social preferences, skills, individual preparation and team communication and dialogue. Thus, the concern arises when through knowledgeable colleagues the level of effort, productivity, motivation and performance of teams are evaluated. Then, results frequently show more significant effort, lower levels of productivity and motivation and no evidence of having exceeded the performance, which does not show the expected benefits ([Tavoletti et al. 2019](#)).

On the other hand, new methods of teamwork emerge with factors that seek change and are more adaptable, finding teams with different reactions, interpretations and behaviors ([Kerrissey et al. 2020](#)). For [Alvi et al. \(2020\)](#), what is fundamental for teams is the satisfaction they feel, the training and learning on the job, the empowerment and the rewards received. Among the factors that influence employees and work teams, [Sailer et al. \(2021\)](#) address one that has not been analyzed very much; it is the place and spaces of work and the distribution of offices or desks that have been highlighted, where access to colleagues, cohesion, the distribution of information, the perception of productivity, the state of concentration and others are involved. In a curious and different way, [Askari et al. \(2020\)](#) apply a method with measurements in a cooperative game's framework for individual employees and in teams where they consider indicators and tabulate them mathematically increasing performance and satisfaction, concluding that collaboration is a factor of increased productivity and better effectiveness of the company.

New concepts are developed as the so-called ambidextrous leadership that drives learning and innovation in work teams depending on the behavior of leaders ([Duc et al. 2020](#)). A little-studied aspect that should not be left out when analyzing productivity in organizations is the diversity and influence of gender when it comes to top management and leadership positions in teams ([Luanglath et al. 2019](#)), and which is considered to be linked to the perception of ethics and culture of the place of study. In summary, what is fundamental is the satisfaction felt when working in teams as this will enhance team performance. However, in the study by [Haarhaus \(2018\)](#), there was no evidence that social interaction always generates agreements and job satisfaction in teams while [Marquardt et al. \(2021\)](#) emphasizes that team performance and achievement is a function of learning and development of its members, which includes ethical conduct and thus, avoiding work mistakes, setting clear objectives and providing direction or guidance to them.

The important thing is to obtain, know and apply the variables, indicators and factors that have an impact on work teams from the different authors analyzed and others that enrich the results and satisfy employees and companies.

2.4. Effective Communication

It is penetrating organizational communication, [Wattanapanit \(2019\)](#) focuses and applies it vertically, horizontally and diagonally in its influence on the effectiveness of work teams in an analysis that considers three dimensions, namely, the accomplishment of tasks to be performed, the satisfaction of team members and the intention to continue in the same teams. It is also about the form and content of team members' voices which influences and even impacts the processes and outcomes of team performance, safety and productivity ([Li et al. 2017](#)). This topic, nowadays, in congruence with applied ethics has become, totally usual and necessary through digital communication where it is relevant to how we feel in well-being, in its use and relation to our ethical awareness ([Burr et al. 2020](#)); if so, it always requires a collaborative dialogue and shared, and well-distributed action among team members applying the benefits and positive effects of emotional intelligence, in this field, [Cole et al. \(2018\)](#) introduces the SOAR variables (Strengths-Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations and Outcomes).

Effective communication is required in all types of businesses and today more than ever with the help of technology and media ([Touhidul and Sorooshian 2019](#)). According to [Alyammahi et al. \(2020\)](#) communication is the fundamental tool in the workplace, hence the need for its effectiveness and balance in order to increase productivity with better

decision making within an ethical culture consciously applied in everyday work. However, communication becomes a risk factor as [Rahman and Adeleke \(2018\)](#) show a strong positive relationship between construction risk management and effective communication. These risks can become illegal as shown in the study by [Meral \(2020\)](#) where he analyses the sources and processes of financial crime and money laundering where the information provided becomes disguised and of dubious origin. Effective communication can buffer the negative realities of the business world when it establishes higher quality relationships with trust and credibility and greater and effective collaboration of work teams; hence, assertive and ethical performance can reduce the barriers to effective communication ([Ejohwomu et al. 2017](#)). [Winton et al. \(2021\)](#) focus on the relationship between effective communication processes and the organizational culture of companies, which includes values, attitudes and beliefs that can sometimes lead to misinterpretations, delays, conflicts and disputes with reward systems. Similarly, [Idowu and Abolade \(2018\)](#) confirm in their paper that effective communication and rewards have a positive effect on employee engagement leading to humane treatment and recognition of the employee. From different perspectives, effective communication has emerged as an essential dimension in its role as a connector linked to leadership, teamwork and productivity that when applied with ethical values generates better results and greater business well-being.

2.5. Productivity

Productivity depends on the work teams and the leaders, directors and managers that make up the company and the knowledge that each of its members applies to their level of self-demand and competitiveness based on the assumed and ethical behavior ([Ebert and Freibichler 2017](#)). It is, therefore, relevant to quote [Lyubovnikova et al. \(2018\)](#), who focus on work teams in their training and organizational support as study variables finding a relationship with productivity and innovation. Focusing on team productivity is always fruitful and depends on giving social support, effective in constructive controversy ([Chen et al. 2017](#)).

It is important to emphasize that, for more than a decade, the issue of productivity based on ethics has been in force and [Valentine et al. \(2011\)](#) highlight the increase in productivity and job satisfaction to the extent that there is a daily practice of corporate and personal values in organizations. If proactive strategies congruent with corporate ethics are established, a symbiosis will be created that will increase business productivity ([Elms et al. 2010](#)). Hence, [Elango et al. \(2010\)](#) define the indicator of ethical intention in order to increase ethical behavior and action adapted to everyday life. On the other hand, competition and rivalries between companies tend to weaken noble ideologies and turn to bad practices due to social and economic pressure and moral emotions, all of which need to be avoided ([Kilduff et al. 2016](#); [Lindebaum et al. 2017](#)). However, these negative situations can be cushioned when educating for personal and business integrity that progressively accumulates positive attitudes and reactions that are nurtured by ethical values such as fairness, consistency and the conviction of the benefit of acting ethically ([Bosch and Cavalotti 2016](#); [Snellman 2015](#)). In addition, various productivity factors and the risks of investment versus economic return need to be analyzed, as not everything that is carried out with great effort and dedication is profitable ([Arulraj and Annamalai 2020](#); [Schweikl and Obermaier 2020](#)) in the latter article related to IT projects analyzing the Solow Paradox, which may tempt entrepreneurs to make unethical decisions. The continuous challenge of increasing productivity often neglects the relevance of the human and ethical factor, focusing mostly on economic profit and survival ([Gandy and Mulhearn 2021](#); [Guo and Clougherty 2020](#); [Rashid et al. 2020](#)).

It is appropriate to comment on how [Di Pietrantonio et al. \(2019\)](#) through the application of a model designed to assign tasks to work for teams demonstrate as a conclusion the importance of motivation and skills and, thus, achieve increased productivity. At the same time, it is worth mentioning the model developed by [Dürr et al. \(2020\)](#), where they analyze teamwork in terms of optimal team size and the provision of incentives in an

environment of uncertain productivity considering the synergy of the teams. An essential point in every firm and extensive to clusters and regions related to productivity is the factor income versus unequal earnings, which were analyzed and are given as an example by [Espoir and Ngepah \(2020\)](#), where the relationship is harmful as a direct effect and positive as an indirect effect. On the other hand, other variables can be analyzed by relating individual productivity with teamwork as [Flores-Szwagrzak and Treibich \(2020\)](#) do by applying a method they call ComScore in specific situations or problems, analyzing the success achieved by the analyzed teams. It also appears to know if productivity improves when using self-organizing teams, which [Parker et al. \(2015\)](#) studied in three different levels, which will also depend on the leadership style applied.

2.6. Synthesis of the Literature Review and Representative Tables

According to renown researchers, ethics represents a key trigger for responsible business conduct (RBC), enhancing the need for supporting corporate social responsibility (CSR)—probably the most important point on the agenda of all prominent figures at an international level, and brings great added value at the level of organizations, being an integrated component of successful managerial strategies ([Francis and Armstrong 2003](#)). In addition, according to studies, the organizational ethical standards have the immense power to display the entities' organizational commitment towards the society, at a general level, as well as the entities' will to be part of a visionary strategies and act in the spirit of correct, sustainable and transparent forms of behavior ([Fritz et al. 1999](#)). In addition, genuine awareness with regard to employees, clients, shareholders, and communities, is insistently sought these days when conducting all types of business activities and operations, thus illustrating organizations adherence to ethical standards and managerial compliance with those particular standards ([European Commission 2019](#)).

Moreover, it seems that the knowledge-based society has determined organizations to become more aware of the positive implications and clear benefits of a “healthy” business environment, in which the “robust and strong” business relationships should be governed mainly by trust—believed to enhance long-term satisfaction, expected to ensure consistent economic and social benefits, and presumed to bring long-lasting marketing success unprecedented strong economic outcomes ([Grant 1996](#); [Geyskens et al. 1998](#)).

As a result of the literature analysis on the topic under study, the different authors' assumption of indicators has emerged. From there, the categorizations that have emerged with greater congruence according to the variables have been formed. Table 1 shows the synthesis of all the categorizations obtained for each dimension of the study.

Table 1. Ethical values and Indicators applied empirically in the instrument to evaluate the perception of the behavior of ethical values of the university graduates of the sample when performing in the role of leadership, teamwork, effective communication and productivity.

Social Behavior Values	Values of Growth and Improvement	Personal Talent Values	Inner or Spiritual Values
Honesty	Vision/Objectivity	Courage	Patience
Respect	Communication	Enthusiasm	Tolerance
Responsibility	Knowledge/Learning	Spirit of service	Humility
Integrity	Self-motivation	Perseverance/Hardworking	Appreciation/Gratitude
Equity/Justice	Decision making	Generosity	Understanding
Friendship/Union	Compliance/Diligence	Creativity	Love
Kindness/Attention	Self-discipline/Temperance	Good mood	Compassion/Forgiveness

There are resulting categorizations that coincide in more than one of the dimensions. Therefore, it is essential to point out that the categorization of “application of values” appears in the four dimensions and, of course, in ethics. That of “leadership” in ethics and the three dimensions, since there is no such category as such in leadership, but there are types of leadership. The categorizations of “teamwork” and “productivity” also appear

in dimensions other than their own; on the other hand, importance should be given to decision-making and conflict management, which share two dimensions. By observing the different categorizations developed, the interrelation and interdependence between them and the dimensions can be seen, which helps to reflect on their presence and importance in business processes in combination with ethics.

Below are the values and indicators that were used from the taxonomy of Mercader (2006) in the validated instrument to determine the behavior of the university graduates when involved in the dimensions of study. The taxonomy brings together a total of 28 values contained in four categories, namely: values of social behavior, growth and improvement, personal talent and internal or spiritual values, each with seven values (see Table 1. Ethical values and Indicators applied empirically in the instrument to evaluate the perception of the behavior of ethical values of the university graduates of the sample when performing in the role of leadership, teamwork, effective communication and productivity) (INEGI 2015).

As a synthesis of the literature review, it can be concluded, as raised by numerous authors and researchers and more every day, that ethics is necessary and beneficial to human beings and all types of organizations, both for-profit and non-profit (Amiridis 2018; Seele 2018; Nassif et al. 2020; Zhang et al. 2020; Cuesta-Valiño et al. 2021) and these are joined by the reflective reasoning of Ciulla (2018) that makes one think that people at all levels are sometimes tempted in society to be unethical and take advantage of situations that generate economic or material advantages, even creating harm to other people or organizations, which translates into a latent difficulty to be solved in order to maintain the balanced achievement of the application of ethics in life and at work. Therefore, there is a continuous challenge of self-conviction to become forgers of ethical conduct at the individual and company level (Bauman 2018; Cosans and Reina 2018) that always becomes, at the beginning of the end, in integral overcoming with greater internal freedom, prosperity and happiness.

3. Materials and Methods

The present study followed a mixed research approach, which employs the analysis of numerical data and qualities under the premise that the integration of both elements allows for the production of more excellent knowledge than either of the individual techniques (Åkerblad et al. 2020). In this sense, a series of processes were carried out that began with the systematic review of literature related to the elements of this study: ethics, leadership, teamwork, effective communication, and productivity.

From this literature review, theoretical categorizations were created based on the conceptual notions of the terms. For the study of the implications of ethics in each of the other variables, the 28 ethical values proposed by Mercader (2006, 2017) were used and categorized according to their concepts in different families, such as social behavior values, values of growth and improvement, personal talent values and inner or spiritual values, the values that make up each family were presented in Table 1.

A questionnaire was then conducted with demographic items, multiple-choice questions, and open-ended questions based on this procedure. The demographic questions included gender, age, nationality, profession, and level of academic studies. Among the multiple-choice questions were four questions that sought to answer. At what level does it typically behave based on different ethical values when performing in a leadership/teamwork/effective communication/productivity role? According to the taxonomy above, responses indicated up to 28 ethical values associated with each role to be rated on a 10-point Likert scale.

Initially, a statistical sample of 384 observations was intended, considering a margin of sampling error of 5% for an undefined population; however, 410 valid observations were collected, which reduced the initially planned margin of sampling error to 4.8%. The research subjects were university graduates (undergraduate or graduate) who work independently or for organizations related to their profession and who reside in the state

of Baja California, Mexico, who was chosen in a non-probabilistic and accidental manner (see Table 2. Methodology, sample data).

Table 2. Methodological data of the sample.

Population	Sample	Type of Sample	Application Medium	Reliability	Error
Indefinite	410	Non-probabilistic	Digital platform	95.20%	4.80%

The reason for choosing this form of sampling was the availability of the subjects at the time of sending the questionnaires via email; however, to verify the non-existence of common variance bias, due to the type of sampling used and the psychometric properties of the data, the Harman test was performed (Podsakoff et al. 2003), to check if the resulting matrix of items was not affected by the bias above, so all items were included in factor analysis and through the principal components method, without rotation and forcing a single factor, the percentage of common variance was obtained. According to Podsakoff et al. (2003), there will be a problem of common variance when the single factor extracted exceeds 50%; by obtaining 43%, it was assumed that the data were not affected by the type of sampling.

Among other data analysis techniques, basic descriptive statistics, such as means or frequencies, were used to analyze the demographic questions. The normality conditions in the sample data were also tested using skewness and kurtosis calculations. Later, the reliability and validity in measuring the different ethical values applied in the four constructs were analyzed. In order to determine the reliability of the instrument, the Cronbach's alpha indicator has been used to determine the degree to which the instrument produces consistent and coherent results when it presents values above 0.700 (Lavrakas 2008). To verify the validity of the constructs, that is, that the instrument measured what it was intended to measure, the exploratory factor analysis was used by the principal components method.

Exploratory factor analysis is one of the most common multivariate analysis techniques applied to a set of variables. The researcher needs to determine the variables that can form logical subsets that are relatively independent of each other (Shrestha 2021). This technique has had a growing interest since the 1990s in all areas of research, especially in the social sciences, as it allows the assessment of latent variables, i.e., those that are measured by a set of items, so this test represents an entirely appropriate technique for the analysis of complex and multidimensional relationship patterns addressed by scholars in the area of management sciences.

It should be noted that the principal components method was chosen because it considers the totality of the variance by estimating the factors that contain low proportions of the unique variance. In contrast, the standard factor analysis only highlights the factors based on the common variance (Mejía Gómez 2017). In addition, the Varimax method was used because it focuses on maximizing the structural differences of the coefficients of each factor extracted by the principal components method and because it is highly used in social sciences (Shrestha 2021).

Among the tests used for the principal component analysis with Varimax rotation for each of the variables in this study, the Kaiser-Meyer Olkin (KMO) test was considered, which measures the adequacy of the correlation by producing a value between zero and one where values greater than 0.600 mean that the factor analysis of the variables is appropriate (Crane et al. 1991). Among other tests, Barlett's sphericity test was performed, which, being significant as $p < 0.05$, shows that the resulting matrix is not identity and demonstrates the prior existence of unbiased and unequivocal correlations (Pizarro and Martínez 2020). Another evaluated indicator was the χ^2 statistic with $p(p - 1)/2$ degrees of freedom, which must be significant at $p < 0.05$ to assume the existence of correlated values. The correlations that express to what extent two variables are linearly related were evaluated by the correlation matrix, which should indicate values between -1.0 and 1.0 , where values close to both extremes indicate a more robust association (Shrestha 2021).

4. Results

The results of this research were obtained once the data were processed in the SPSS v.24 programs. First, the descriptive data of the population were analyzed. Then, the essential questions were analyzed where it was asked “At what level does he typically behave based on the following variables related to ethics when performing in leadership, teamwork, effective communication and productivity?” and the 28 ethical values of Mercader’s taxonomy (2006, 2017) were exposed to be evaluated on a 10-point Likert scale. Following the above, factor analysis tests were performed by principal components of each variable: leadership, teamwork, effective communication, and productivity. The procedure is detailed below.

4.1. Analysis of Demographic Variables

The responses obtained, a product of the research, have been combined with the gender to find similarities and differences, especially in the demographic variables and responses (see Table 3. Gender and age of sample participants combined). The sample was composed of 410 university graduates, of which 176 participants were female (42.93%), and 234 were male (57.07%). These figures indicate that there is gender diversity in the samples that were examined. The age of the participants in the sample has been combined with gender, showing the results in Table 4, which indicates that the majority of participants are Generation Y or millennials with ages 26–30 years 23.66% and 31–35 years 20.24% (see Table 4. Level of studies of the sample participants combined with gender). Younger university graduates with less work experience between 21 and 25 represented 18.78%, while those between 36 and 40 obtained 14.63%. It is essential to point out that adding the ages between 21 and 40 gives us the reality of the university graduates in full development in the different jobs, representing 77.32%.

Table 3. Gender and age of sample participants combined.

Gender and Age of Participants						
Age Range	Female	Female %	Male	Male %	Total	Total %
21 to 25 years old	41	10.00%	36	8.78%	77	18.78%
26 to 30 years old	45	10.98%	52	12.68%	97	23.66%
31 to 35 years old	38	9.27%	45	10.98%	83	20.24%
36 to 40 years old	21	5.12%	39	9.51%	60	14.63%
41 to 45 years old	16	3.90%	21	5.12%	37	9.02%
46 to 50 years old	11	2.68%	26	6.34%	37	9.02%
51 to 55 years old	3	0.73%	9	2.20%	12	2.93%
56 to 60 years old	1	0.24%	2	0.49%	3	0.73%
61 to 65 years old	0	0.00%	3	0.73%	3	0.73%
66 to 70 years old	0	0.00%	1	0.24%	1	0.24%
Total	176	42.93%	234	57.07%	410	100.00%

Table 4. Level of studies of the sample participants combined with gender.

Participants’ Level of Education						
Level of Education	Female	Female %	Male	Male %	Total	Total %
PhD	2	0.49%	1	0.24%	3	0.73%
Master	36	8.78%	45	10.98%	81	19.76%
University degree	138	33.66%	188	45.85%	326	79.51%
Total	176	42.93%	234	57.07%	410	100.00%
No response	0	-	0	-	0	-
Total entries	176	-	234	-	410	-

The nationality of the participants indicates that 95.61% of the sample is of Mexican nationality, 3.41% are Americans, and the rest (0.97%) are two Koreans and one Venezuelan and one Colombian. On the other hand, when referring to the profession of the participants, 24 different professions emerged, the largest profession in the sample being engineers

(30.23%), including industrial engineers (13.41%), which are explained by the fact that this is the most common specialization in the geographical area where the instrument was applied. Administrators made up 13.66%, followed by accountants (10.49%), international business (4.63%) and marketing specialists (3.66%), so areas related to administration and business score 32.44%. When adding engineers and administrative sciences, 62.67% of the sample is obtained. Other professions to mention are computer scientists (5.12%), psychologists (4.15%), doctors (2.68%) and others (25.38%). Another relevant demographic aspect is linked to the academic degree of the participants in the sample since it varies according to whether they only have a university degree in any career or whether they additionally have a master's or doctorate.

These answers conclude the cycle of the demographic variables analyzed to continue with the essential questions, the object of the research and its corresponding statistics.

4.2. Essential Variables of the Empirical Study and Factor Analysis

Fundamental to this study is analyzing the results obtained from the answers according to the participant's perception of the sample to the question. At what level does he typically behave based on the following variables related to ethics when performing in leadership, teamwork, effective communication and productivity? The participants numerically rated each of the 28 ethical values and variables (presented in Table 2) of the taxonomy of the instrument from 1 to 10, with 10 being the highest value. With these results, we proceeded to examine and develop the statistical methods shown below in Table 5.

Table 5. Preliminary factorial results of ethical values in leadership.

Indicator	Value	Interpretation
KMO	0.964	Sampling adequacy
χ^2	8010.695	Rejection of H_0 , correlation test
Gl.	378	Value of number of observations and parameters
Sig.	0.0000	Statistical significance
Correlations	$0.30 \leq r \leq 0.76$	Moderate to high correlations
Determinant	0.1799×10^{-8}	Valid correlations

4.3. Factor Analysis and Principal Component Method Applied to the Four Dimensions under Study

An exploratory factor analysis was performed by the principal components method with Varimax rotation for the set of 28 values associated in the literature with typically ethical behavior for the variables of leadership, teamwork, effective communication and productivity. The results of this exploratory factor analysis in terms of the Kaiser-Meyer Olkin (KMO) test of adequacy for the values associated with ethics when practicing leadership behavior indicate a favorable degree of adequacy. The indicator is presented above the minimum acceptable of 0.500 and reflects a KMO of 0.964. The above statistic is distributed by values that fluctuate between 0 and 1, so values close to 1 indicate that the data matrix is appropriate to perform a factorization procedure (López-Aguado and Gutiérrez-Provecho 2018).

Regarding calculating the factorial scores, Barlett's test of sphericity yielded a significance of $p = 0.000$ so that prior correlations are estimated, unbiased and unequivocal. At the same time, the statistic follows a χ^2 distribution with $p(p - 1)/2$ degrees of freedom. As long as high χ^2 values are associated with significant values, it can be affirmed that the sample values are correlated and are optimal to perform the factorial test. It was also corroborated in the same analysis by determining the correlation levels in the data matrix where the crossover values indicated significant correlations at a moderate to a high level ($p < 0.05$, $p = 0.000$). At the same time, the determinant was presented at 0.1799×10^{-8} . The above results are concentrated in the following table (see Table 5. Preliminary factorial results of ethical values in leadership).

The underlying common factor of the items given from the shared variance of each value concerning the rest of the ethical values was manifested in the weight scores of the factor loadings, which were based on the matrix of original correlations and multiple correlations. All were presented above the minimum acceptable of 0.500, so their values were between 0.533 and 0.781.

On the other hand, the principal component analysis showed four dimensions associated with ethical values related to leadership behavior. The estimation of these dimensions fulfilled four conditions for the determination of factors in that the minimum subjective percentage of variance is found to be 65.092 per cent; the eigenvalue criterion was more significant than 1; the sedimentation graph made a cut-off point in four factors; and the proportion explained of each factor was found to be $100/p$, that is, above 3.57 in terms of the percentage of variance. The above data are illustrated in the following table (see Table 6. Factor extraction of ethical values in leadership).

Table 6. Factor extraction of ethical values in leadership.

Comp.	Initial Eigenvalues			Sums of Charges from Extraction			Sums of Loads of the Rotation		
	Total	% de Variance	% Cumulative	Total	% de Variance	% Cumulative	Total	% de Variance	% Cumulative
1	14.269	50.960	50.960	14.269	50.960	50.960	7.706	27.522	27.522
2	1.683	6.009	56.969	1.683	6.009	56.969	5.513	19.689	47.211
3	1.176	4.198	61.167	1.176	4.198	61.167	2.535	9.052	56.263
4	1.099	3.925	65.092	1.099	3.925	65.092	2.472	8.830	65.092

Finally, this same analysis illustrates the composition of the factors that are part of the values related to leadership. The first resulting factor comprises responsibility, decision-making, compliance, respect, honesty, perseverance, integrity, vision, communication, knowledge, self-discipline, fairness, enthusiasm, the spirit of service, and courage. It explains 27 per cent of the variance of the model. The second resulting factor is generosity, appreciation, love, kindness, compassion, friendship, humility, and understanding. The third factor is composed of tolerance and patience. The fourth factor is composed of creativity, good humor and self-motivation. Likewise, the level of reliability of these measurements is detailed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which in all the factors is above the minimum acceptable (see Table 7. Composition of factors of the ethical values present in leadership).

Table 7. Composition of factors of the ethical values present in leadership.

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
Responsibility	0.7575			
Decision making	0.7438			
Compliance/Diligence	0.73			
Respect	0.707			
Honesty	0.7016			
Perseverance/Hardworking	0.7			
Integrity	0.7			
Vision/Objectivity	0.6768			
Communication	0.6497			
Knowledge/Learning	0.6363			
Self-discipline/Temperance	0.5993			
Equity/Justice	0.5857			
Enthusiasm	0.5697			

Table 7. Cont.

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
Spirit of service	0.5356			
Courage	0.5041			
Generosity		0.7565		
Appreciation/Gratitude		0.6846		
Love		0.6798		
Kindness/Attention		0.6778		
Compassion/Forgiveness		0.6399		
Friendship/Union		0.5832		
Humility		0.5703		
Compression		0.5199		
Tolerance			0.8187	
Patience			0.7559	
Creativity				0.6459
Good mood				0.621
Self-motivation				0.5003
Explained variance in %.	27.522	19.689	9.052	8.83
Cronbach's Alpha	0.951	0.892	0.776	0.744

As a second test, an exploratory factor analysis by principal components and Varimax rotation was carried out for the set of these 28 values while teamwork is performed. The results of this analysis in terms of KMO indicate a favorable degree of sampling adequacy as KMO was located at 0.975. Likewise, the Barlett's test of sphericity was significant as $p = 0.000$ and follows a distribution that indicates that the matrix is identity [χ^2 distribution with $p(p - 1)/2$ degrees of freedom], which indicates prior correlations between the variables that were then checked with the correlation matrix and the determinant level of the same (0.962×10^{-12}), as presented in the following table (see Table 8. Preliminary factorial results of the ethical values in teamwork).

Table 8. Preliminary factorial results of the ethical values in teamwork.

Indicator	Value	Interpretation
KMO	0.975	Sampling adequacy
χ^2	10,924.94	Rejection of H0, correlation test
Gl.	378	Value of number of observations and parameters
Sig.	0	Statistical significance
Correlations	$0.36 \leq r \leq 0.80$	Moderate to high correlations
Determinant	9.62×10^{-13}	Valid correlations

The proportion of variance explained by the common factors of the variable for this test indicates that they share favorable levels of common variance as they were presented with values between 0.536 and 0.788. In addition, two factors were found to meet the minimum subjective percentage of variance (located at 67.5 per cent); eigenvalue criterion greater than 1; the sedimentation plot with a cut-off point in two factors; and the proportion explained of each factor $100/p$ above 3.57 percentage of variance. These results are set out in the following table (see Table 9. Extraction of factors of ethical values in teamwork).

Table 9. Extraction of factors of ethical values in teamwork.

Comp.	Initial Eigenvalues			Sums of Charges from Extraction			Sums of Loads of the Rotation		
	Total	% de Variance	% Cumulative	Total	% de Variance	% Cumulative	Total	% de Variance	% Cumulative
1	17.119	61.140	61.140	17.119	61.140	61.140	10.321	36.859	36.859
2	1.781	6.360	67.500	1.781	6.360	67.500	8.579	30.641	67.500

For this second analysis, we illustrate the composition of the factors that make up the ethical values related to teamwork, where the first is composed of compliance, knowledge, decision-making, responsibility, perseverance, vision, communication, self-discipline, honesty, self-motivation, integrity, enthusiasm, fairness, respect and creativity. The second is composed of compassion, love, kindness, generosity, humility, appreciation, friendship, tolerance, good humor, courage, understanding, patience, and a spirit of service.

Additionally, the level of reliability of the measurements is detailed by Cronbach's alpha value, which suggests that all values are consistent and reliable (see Table 10. Composition of factors of the ethical values present in teamwork).

Table 10. Composition of factors of the ethical values present in teamwork.

Factor 1	Upload	Factor 2	Upload
Compliance/Diligence	0.8361	Compassion/Forgiveness	0.8272
Knowledge/Learning	0.8285	Love	0.7975
Decision making	0.819	Kindness/Attention	0.7689
Responsibility	0.8088	Generosity	0.7375
Perseverance/Hardworking	0.8065	Humility	0.6783
Vision/Objectivity	0.7753	Appreciation/Gratitude	0.665
Communication	0.7735	Friendship/Union	0.6586
Self-discipline/Temperance	0.7376	Tolerance	0.6524
Honesty	0.7195	Good mood	0.6517
Self-motivation	0.7168	Courage	0.6141
Integrity	0.6653	Understanding	0.6105
Enthusiasm	0.6508	Patience	0.5887
Equity/Justice	0.6141	Spirit of service	0.5534
Respect	0.6129		
Creativity	0.5794		
Explained variance in %.	36.859	Explained variance in %.	30.641
Cronbach's Alpha	0.968	Cronbach's Alpha	0.947

The third test of exploratory factor analysis by principal components and Varimax rotation was used to determine the factor composition of ethical values associated with an effective communication process. The 28 values appreciated in the ethical behaviors were re-evaluated. In this sense, a KMO of 0.975 was presented, which assumes the existence of sample adequacy and the existence of previous correlations in the variables by Barlett's test of sphericity whose significance was 0.000 and adequate for the χ^2 levels; likewise, the correlations were presented at a moderate to a high level with a determinant close to 0 of 0.962×10^{-13} . The values are presented in the following table (see Table 11. Preliminary factorial results of ethical values ineffective communication).

Table 11. Preliminary factorial results of ethical values ineffective communication.

Indicator	Value	Interpretation
KMO	0.975	Sampling adequacy
χ^2	11,005.395	Rejection of H0, correlation test
Gl.	378	Value of number of observations and parameters
Sig.	0	Statistical significance
Correlations	$0.34 \leq r \leq 0.77$	Moderate to high correlations
Determinant	7.84×10^{-13}	Valid correlations

As in the previous analyses, the proportion of variance explained by the common factors of the variable for this test was presented at optimal levels, that is, more significant than 0.500, since they were located at levels between 0.650 and 0.770, so that the ethical values associated with effective communication share favorable levels of shared variance.

Additionally, three factors were extracted that followed the same criteria mentioned in the previous tests: the minimum subjective percentage of variance explained was 71.52

per cent; eigenvalue criteria greater than 1; cut-point sedimentation plot on three factors; and proportion explained of each factor at 100/p above 3.57. The results are shared below (see Table 12. Extraction of factors of ethical values ineffective communication).

Table 12. Extraction of factors of ethical values ineffective communication.

Comp.	Initial Eigenvalues			Sums of Charges from Extraction			Sums of Loads of the Rotation		
	Total	% de Variance	% Cumulative	Total	% de Variance	% Cumulative	Total	% de Variance	% Cumulative
1	17.402	62.149	62.149	17.402	62.149	62.149	7.543	26.941	26.941
2	1.504	5.370	67.519	1.504	5.370	67.519	6.390	22.821	49.762
3	1.122	4.006	71.525	1.122	4.006	71.525	6.094	21.764	71.525

The factors associated with ethical values during effective communication were three. The first is composed of communication, decision making, perseverance, responsibility, knowledge, self-motivation, enthusiasm, self-discipline, creativity, compliance, and courage. The second comprises patience, tolerance, honesty, respect, integrity, humility, vision, fairness and understanding. The third is made up of love, generosity, compassion, appreciation, friendship, good humor, kindness and spirit of service. It is also important to note that the reliability, measured by Cronbach's alpha for each factor, presents optimal levels (see Table 13. The composition of factors of ethical values presents ineffective communication).

Table 13. The composition of factors of ethical values presents ineffective communication.

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
Communication	0.748		
Decision making	0.7347		
Perseverance/Hardworking	0.7112		
Responsibility	0.7075		
Knowledge/Learning	0.7056		
Self-motivation	0.6902		
Enthusiasm	0.6791		
Self-discipline/Temperance	0.6739		
Creativity	0.6551		
Compliance/Diligence	0.6338		
Courage	0.5516		
Patience		0.7704	
Tolerance		0.6961	
Honesty		0.6866	
Respect		0.6633	
Integrity		0.6272	
Humility		0.6133	
Vision/Objectivity		0.5999	
Equity/Justice		0.5829	
Understanding		0.5455	
Love			0.7911
Generosity			0.735
Compassion/Forgiveness			0.7288
Appreciation/Gratitude			0.7226
Friendship/Union			0.7062
Good mood			0.675
Kindness/Attention			0.6572
Spirit of service			0.5317
Explained variance in %.	26.941	22.821	21.764
Cronbach's Alpha	0.954	0.942	0.934

The last exploratory factor analysis by principal components and Varimax rotation was carried out to determine the composition of ethical factors associated by individuals to productivity, so the 28 ethical values mentioned above were evaluated. The results suggest the existence of sample adequacy as KMO is very close to 1, with a value of 0.976; in addition, Barlett's test of sphericity showed a significance of $p = 0.000$, so it is assumed that the matrix is identity and that there are previous correlations between the dimensions. These correlations were verified in their respective matrix, which places them between moderate and high with an adequate determinant level of 1.13×10^{-13} . These values are presented below (see Table 14. Preliminary factorial results of ethical values in productivity).

Table 14. Preliminary factorial results of ethical values in productivity.

Indicator	Value	Interpretation
KMO	0.976	Sampling adequacy
χ^2	11,830.308	Rejection of H0, correlation test
Gl.	378	Value of number of observations and parameters
Sig.	0	Statistical significance
Correlations	$0.31 \leq r \leq 0.80$	Moderate to high correlations
Determinant	1.13×10^{-13}	Valid correlations

Additionally, the proportion of variance explained by the common factors of the variable was analyzed in this test. It was deduced that the same share adequate levels of common variance as they are presented with values between 0.585 and 0.786; the factors extracted in the analysis were two, which explained 36.30 and 34.72 per cent of the variance the model, respectively. For the identification of these factors, the same testing procedures indicated in the previous tests were followed: the minimum subjective percentage of variance (70.93 per cent); eigenvalue criteria greater than 1; two-factor cut off point sedimentation plot and proportion of variance explained by each relevant factor in 100/p above 3.57 points. The results are presented in the following table (see Table 15. Factor Extraction of Ethical Values on Productivity).

Table 15. Factor Extraction of Ethical Values on Productivity.

Comp.	Initial Eigenvalues			Sums of Charges from Extraction			Sums of Loads of the Rotation		
	Total	% de Variance	% Cumulative	Total	% de Variance	% Cumulative	Total	% de Variance	% Cumulative
1	17.796	63.558	63.558	17.796	63.558	63.558	10.138	36.206	36.206
2	2.065	7.373	70.931	2.065	7.373	70.931	9.723	34.725	70.931

Finally, the two factors found in the extraction were divided. The first comprised the ethical values of perseverance, compliance, responsibility, knowledge, self-discipline, communication, vision, decision-making, self-motivation, creativity, honesty, respect, enthusiasm, and integrity. The second was composed of the ethical values of love, generosity, compassion, kindness, friendship, appreciation, humility, good humor, courage, tolerance, fairness, understanding, patience, and spirit of service. The resulting reliability of this test was also analyzed using Cronbach's alpha test. It was found to be at adequate levels concerning the measurement model (see Table 16. Factor composition of the ethical values present in productivity).

Table 16. Factor composition of the ethical values present in productivity.

Factor 1	Upload	Factor 2	Upload
Perseverance/Hardworking	0.8462	Love	0.8237
Compliance/Diligence	0.8363	Generosity	0.8208
Responsibility	0.8308	Compassion/Forgiveness	0.8207
Knowledge/Learning	0.8191	Kindness/Attention	0.8137
Self-discipline/Temperance	0.8106	Friendship/Union	0.786
Communication	0.7784	Appreciation/Gratitude	0.7695
Vision/Objectivity	0.7535	Humility	0.7622
Decision making	0.7435	Good mood	0.7069
Self-motivation	0.7166	Courage	0.64
Creativity	0.6726	Tolerance	0.639
Honesty	0.6298	Equity/Justice	0.6324
Respect	0.6249	Understanding	0.6036
Enthusiasm	0.6017	Patience	0.5989
Integrity	0.5852	Spirit of service	0.5748
Explained variance in %.	36.206	Explained variance in %.	34.725
Cronbach's Alpha	0.967	Cronbach's Alpha	0.962

It is essential to point out that having obtained and analyzed these empirical results through the perception of the sample is a step of great relevance that helps university graduates, entrepreneurs, employees, both public and private, teachers and students. Taking advantage of the acquired knowledge becomes a competitive advantage to emerge with different indicators for better results in study, leadership, teamwork, effective communication and productivity.

With all this information and the analysis of the same, it was possible to obtain and present conclusions that are considered of great importance and application both at a professional and business level and to proceed in new research as part of the methodology or as support for different studies.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

Reflecting on the role of ethics in the assumption of various roles in society is imperative because it is closely linked to the conduct of human beings while assuming any role in society. It is impossible to build an equitable and just society or to perform an organizational function if the practice of ethical values is omitted. In this sense and based on the analysis of the literature, as well as mentions of a qualitative nature, a set of values were identified that could be classified into four major categories such as the values of social conduct, those of growth and improvement, those of personal talent and those internal and spiritual, each associated with seven values that could be present when an individual performs in leadership roles, in functions of effective communication, teamwork and productivity.

What is more, ethics, leadership, teamwork, effective communication, productivity, and performance, should all be closely analyzed these days focusing on their relevance concerning the business environment (Popescu 2019), and, also, the opportunities that they are capable to bring in order to ensure business performance and business excellence (Popescu and Banța 2019; Popescu and Duháček-Šebestová 2022; Popescu and Kyriakopoulos 2022). Hence, Popescu and Banța (2019) noted in their article on “Performance evaluation of the implementation of the 2013/34/EU Directive in Romania on the basis of corporate social responsibility reports” the fact that ethics and integrity are pivotal elements in today’s soci-

ety, emphasizing in their findings “the strong connections that exist between key concepts, such as: corporate social responsibility, intellectual capital, environmental protection, sustainability, ethics and integrity in today’s contemporary society” (Popescu and Banța 2019). In a similar manner, Popescu (2019) demonstrated in “Corporate social responsibility, corporate governance and business performance: limits and challenges imposed by the implementation of Directive 2013/34/EU in Romania” the fact that there is an undeniable “(. . .) need to enhance corporate governance and corporate social responsibility in order to create an appropriate balance between sustainability, competitiveness, productivity, and businesses’ financial and non-financial performance, while taking into consideration the benefits brought by the tangible value of businesses (such as, cash flow and earnings) as well as the intangible value of businesses (such as, brand, customer experience, intellectual capital, organizational culture and reputation)” (Popescu 2019). Also, in order to understand better the role and the importance of ethics, leadership, teamwork, effective communication, productivity, and performance in today’s context, the following aspects ought to be taken into consideration: “(. . .) in the new “modern” global economy, environmental protection plays an important role in the daily lives of individuals, managers, professionals, organizations, societies, countries, country leaders, politicians and governments, since its main focuses concern, on the one hand, the conservation of the planet’s natural resources as well as existing and endangered habitat, and, on the other hand, the reparation and restoration of the already degraded, damaged and altered natural surroundings” (Popescu 2019).

In addition, when analyzing the undeniable bonds that exist between ethics, leadership, teamwork, effective communication, productivity, and performance, reputed specialists worldwide have taken note of the significance and the implications derived from these outstanding relationships. Thus, they have remarked the major differences between the old business and the new business typology, shifting their focus, in turn, to the potential offered by the new leadership and the new business to dominant issues, such as: business performance generated by the inputs provided by intangible assets (and, more specifically, human resources and intellectual capital); competition and competitive advantage, in terms of possessing more adequate and timely resources (such as, unlimited resources represented by human resources and intellectual capital); leadership development, new leadership management, new leaders, and new leadership; trust, and trustworthiness in business based on strong ethics, and the new leadership values (Carroll 1979; Epstein 1989; Davis et al. 2000; Kane et al. 2009; Nye 2010; Kane and Patapan 2012; Green 2012; Rathbun 2012; Raelin 2014; Meiers 2015; Popescu and Popescu 2019a, 2019b).

Based on the results of the studies published by prominent specialists in the field, it should be pointed out that understanding and analyzing leadership has raised numerous problems over time, due to the complex nature of this concept and, also, due to the powerful implications derived from its application in different contexts and environments (Haslam et al. 2010; Grint et al. 2016).

Multiple authors have noted the importance and the role of leadership and have remarked entities’ constant struggle in addressing these days’ challenges derived from the often encountered “crisis of leadership” in key domains, such as: economic (Cronin and Genovese 2012; Dinan 2016; Helms 2017), environmental (Borzel 2000), social (Kellerman 2008; Helms 2015) and political (Dimitrakopoulos 2008; Brown 2014; Elgie 2015; Goetz 2017; Müller and Van Esch 2019).

What is more, recent studies have constantly emphasized the utmost necessity to correlate ethics, leadership, teamwork, effective communication, productivity, and performance in today’s deeply challenged business environment with CSR and RBC, thus demonstrating the importance of working towards an “ethical culture”, addressing “ethical leadership” and guiding the decisions of the organizations worldwide in the spirit of harmoniously preserving and revitalizing “the intellectual capital facets” represented by both human capital and social capital of the entities (Boynton 2006; Berrone et al. 2007; Biong et al. 2010; Su 2014; Ullah et al. 2019).

Hence, especially these days, when humanity is confronting itself with the unavoidable challenges and the imminent changes derived from the COVID-19 pandemic and the unprecedented and foreseeable implications of the COVID-19 crisis, the decision-making processes of each and every organization at a global level should target key values in terms of ethics, leadership, team-work, effective communication and productivity, in the spirit of supporting performance and sustainable forms of behavior in organizations (Boynton 2006; Popescu 2020a, 2020b, 2020c, 2020d; Galván-Vela et al. 2021). In the light of recent discoveries, these key values might refer to but may not be limited to the following dominant suggested attributes: “effective governance”; great concern towards clients, communities, biodiversity, ecosystems, environment, people; respect for nature, individuals and all forms of life; persuasiveness, constructive, and systematical actions conducting to sustainable development and growth; trustworthiness (Davenport and Prusak 1998; Boynton 2006; Cots 2011; Popescu 2020a, 2020b, 2020c, 2020d; Galván-Vela et al. 2021).

Nowadays, especially when facing the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the challenges of the COVID-19 crisis, global performance is undeniably related to the powerful relationship that exists between ethics, leadership, teamwork, effective communication, productivity, performance (González et al. 2022; Luque 2020, 2021; Popescu 2021a, 2021b, 2021c; Sánchez-Figuera et al. 2021). In addition, based on recent findings, the links that exist between ethics, leadership, teamwork, effective communication, productivity, performance are enabling our society to become more aware of the benefits of sustainability and sustainable development, in the attempt to find the viable solutions to accomplish the highly important and vital Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at a worldwide level (Nicha Andrade 2021a, 2021b, 2022; Duháček Šebestová et al. 2021). In this matter, Luque et al. 2021 mentions in the highly valuable study on “How sustainability is defined: an analysis of 100 theoretical approximations”, the fact that although “sustainability processes are imperfect, (. . .) there is a need to analyze their construction, evolution and deployment”, illustrating that there are seven dimensions specific to this notion, as follows: “economic, social, environmental, legal, political, ethical and cultural”—thus, positioning the focus on ethics and its valuable contribution towards other key domains, namely, the economic, social, environmental, legal, political, and cultural ones (Luque González et al. 2021). The importance of ethics and ethical principals in today’s business environment is highly praised especially since researchers have displayed a great concern towards the following key issues: (a) implementing more responsible practices in business all over the world, capable to address responsible corporate reporting, corporate responsibility practices, good forms of control and evaluation, and corporate governance; (b) targeting more responsible accounting practices; (c) seeking better centered business counseling, capable to address targeted problems specific to valuating in a better and more coherent manner the organizations intangible assets, such as, human resource, intellectual capital, intellectual property in order to generate long-term creativity and innovation; (d) focusing on a more competitive and complex business environment, capable to show a deeper preoccupation towards improving the entities financial analysis instruments and methods, in order to cope with the new rules and regulations on green finance, total quality management, risk management in the pandemic context; (e) fostering better balanced business process management, able to respond to the new context specific to sustainability, sustainability assessment, sustainable development, sustainable finance, in order to generate business excellence, and business performance, and diminish the sustainability risks Tangible assets (Torugsa et al. 2013; Luque González and de Pablos Heredero 2016; García Guerrero et al. 2021; Guerrero-Miranda and González 2021; Luque González and Gutiérrez 2020).

All in all, this current work, representing, in essence, a novel approach, centers on ethical value under the vision of leadership, team-work, effective communication and productivity, comes to confirm the findings of other researchers in the field, and, in the same time, covers new territories and sheds a new light on the implications brought in terms of business performance, business and organizational achievements, productive and

harmonious business balance, business sectors growth and sustainable development, and communities' well-being.

Based on the above, the conclusions offer us. As a result, the analysis and relationship with the literature focused on ethics and its influence on the dimensions mentioned some theoretical categorizations as a compendium of the indicators or variables concentrated in Table 2 of this document. The above gave rise to a reflection on the linkage of ethics in aspects of the performance of university graduates in their different roles within the company in which they work, so a questionnaire was adapted that had been proposed theoretically in the taxonomy of Mercader. This questionnaire was applied to a sample of 410 university graduates and preceded to its validation using a reliability analysis, such as the Cronbach's alpha test, and the validation of the constructs using exploratory factor analysis.

The results of this last analysis suggest good sample adequacy for the values associated with ethics when behaving under a leadership behavior, effective communication, teamwork and productivity. Hence the validation of the instrument was applied with the 28 ethical values used. It is essential to point out that there are moderate to high correlations. It can be affirmed that the sample values are correlated and optimal when carrying out the factorial test in the four dimensions of study, besides confirming that the reliability measured from Cronbach's alpha for each factor analyzed presents optimal levels.

On the other hand, the university graduates, at present, working in the companies and represented in the sample are primarily of generation Y or millennials; if we take those between 26 and 35 years of age, they made up 43.90% while only 22.68% were older than 40 years, which represents the business reality and the future trends of greater responsibility to come of the millennia's in the dimensions analyzed and in the application of ethics in them it has also been found.

As a result, a relationship is demonstrated in the correlations obtained between ethics and the study dimensions and among themselves. From there, it can be deduced that there is a correlation between the tangible and intangible, coexisting ethics as an intangible aspect, leadership and effective communication as tangible-intangible and teamwork and productivity that represent the tangible aspect, which implies that, in many different ways and feasible combinations, the knowledge of them tends to create more excellent balance and well-being to the companies (in this particular aspect it is interpreted as intangible what is conceived more towards the mental-spiritual aspect while the tangible is conceived more towards the physical-material and mental aspect).

With the results obtained and supported by the relevant literature review, it can be confirmed that entrepreneurs, managers and employees, being aware of this concept and fact, could achieve and help a greater productive and harmonious business balance.

While referring to the anticipations of the limitations in the use of the non-probabilistic technique to select the sample subjects, it should be mentioned that this aspect was intended to be remedied with the aid of the Harman test, as explained, in-depth, in the methodology section of this article. In this particular context, it should be noted that the motive for choosing this form of sampling was the availability of the subjects at the time of sending the questionnaires via email. In continuation, it should be pointed out that, in order to check the non-existence of common variance bias, due to the type of sampling used and the psychometric properties of the data, the Harman test was performed (Podsakoff et al. 2003), to verify if the resulting matrix of items was not affected by the bias above, so all items were included in factor analysis and through the principal components method, without rotation and forcing a single factor, the percentage of common variance was obtained. Based on the work of Podsakoff et al. (2003), in those cases in which the single factor extracted exceeds 50%, a problem of common variance was encountered; however, in this particular case, by obtaining the value of 43%, it was assumed that the data were not affected by the type of sampling, thus proving to be highly relevant for the chosen purpose of this research.

The research findings and results have shown that the research objective of the present research has been successfully obtained, namely the implication of ethics in the dimensions

of leadership, teamwork, effective communication and productivity was carefully and in-depth described and, also, the validity and reliability in the measurement of the different ethical values manifested in the four dimensions mentioned was to be determined. In continuation, also based on our findings and results, the correlations and dimensions associated with ethical values when these behaviors and acts were presented according to university graduates. The approach encountered in this study is a novel one, due to the fact that the absence of research that relates ethics to these four elements simultaneously—namely the dimensions of leadership, teamwork, effective communication and productivity, has noticed. What is more, the information displayed in this work proves to be essential when it comes to acknowledging and understanding how these particular dimensions influence the organizational level. Based on the additional validation tests performed—namely, a reliability and validity analysis of the measurement instrument, the Harman test, it has been demonstrated that the sample chosen for analysis, that included 410 university graduates from Baja California, Mexico—an industrial nucleus of great relevance, bordering California in the United States of America, proved to be of high relevance both for the objectives of this research and for this study itself. This, it ought to be pointed out that the data obtained using a questionnaire proved to be of great value to this current research, especially in the context in which a reliability and validity analysis of the measurement instrument was carried out in terms of the ethical values associated with the dimensions mentioned using the exploratory factor analysis by the principal components method. In continuation, it should be stressed that also the use of qualitative items proved to be necessary, since the results obtained were also carefully and thoroughly analyzed using the constant comparison method. All in all, it should be emphasized that, on the one hand, the findings obtained in this research are meant to provide a greater perspective and practical knowledge and support of usefulness and practical reality to business people and employees, leaders and university graduates; and, also, on the other hand, the results may be extended to students, teachers, and people, in general, in order to be better prepared to give and apply solutions with their consequent ethical and productive achievements desired by all.

The present research is subject to limitations in different aspects. Hence new possibilities for future research are presented, among which stand out, in the first place, that the study instrument had not been empirically tested in other research, so its validation in the present one corresponded only to business sectors in Baja California, mainly in the city of Tijuana; also, the sample of this study was chosen in a non-probabilistic way, which may result in a margin of error more significant than the estimated in the data. Both conditions suggest that the results cannot be extrapolated to other areas. It is suggested that the instrument be validated in other sectors and territories.

Secondly, the instrument was not developed to find causal relationships between the variables of the study but to measure the presence of specific ethical values in the different roles (leadership, teamwork, effective communication and productivity), so that one possibility for future analysis is to try to estimate a causal relationship between the central ethical values and each of these behaviors.

Thirdly, the amalgam of ethical values is vast, and its statistical interpretation may be limited in the sense that the latent variables are composed of observable indicators or items that allow their precise measurement. We suggest the development of an instrument to measure the degree of presence or absence of ethical values at work, based on observable dimensions that guarantee their precise measurement, or the search for alternative ways, such as the use of qualitative analysis techniques such as the case study or the Grounded Theory, which can give a notion of a more nourished and more profound interpretation of ethics in the company.

There is a necessity to approach the limitations of the study, as follows: (a) the instruments and methods should be applied in other regions and countries due to the fact that, currently, the application of the instruments and methods belonging to this empirical research were conducted in a specific region, namely in Baja California, Mexico,

which is, also, an important industrial state; and (b) the instruments and methods could be applied in specific or homogeneous groups of professionals, groups of organizations and/or corporations and could be applied with different variables.

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Appendix A

This appendix contains the structure of the questionnaire used in this research, focusing on key concepts, such as, “ethics”, “leadership”, “teamwork”, “effective communication”, and “productivity”, as follows in the lines below:

Ethics

- Is ethics necessary for business?
- Is ethics necessary for the family?
- Is ethics necessary for society?
- Is ethics necessary for the public education sector?
- Is ethics necessary for the private education sector?
- Is ethics necessary for government?
- Is ethics necessary for citizenship?

Leadership

- How does the respect variable influence the leadership of professionals?
- How does the variable self-motivation influence the leadership of professionals?
- How does the variable courage influence the leadership of professionals?
- How does the variable patience influence the leadership of professionals?
- How does the variable honesty influence the leadership of professionals?
- How does the communication variable influence the leadership of professionals?
- How does the variable enthusiasm influence the leadership of professionals?
- How does the variable tolerance influence the leadership of professionals?
- How does the variable responsibility influence the leadership of professionals?
- How does the decision-making variable influence the leadership of professionals?
- How does the spirit of service variable influence the leadership of professionals?
- How does the variable humility influence the leadership of professionals?
- How do the variables equity/justice influence the leadership of professionals?
- How do the variables vision/objectivity influence the leadership of professionals?
- How does the variable perseverance influence the leadership of professionals?
- How do the variables appreciation/gratitude influence the leadership of professionals?
- How do the variables kindness/attention influence the leadership of professionals?
- How do the variables knowledge/learning influence the leadership of professionals?
- How does the variable generosity influence the leadership of professionals?
- How does the variable understand influence the leadership of professionals?
- How do the variables friendship/unity influence the leadership of practitioners?
- How do the variables compliance/diligence influence the leadership of professionals?
- How does the creativity variable influence the leadership of professionals?
- How do the variables compassion/forgiveness influence the leadership of professionals?
- How do the variables self-discipline/temperance influence the leadership of professionals?
- How does the variable good humour influence the leadership of professionals?
- How does the variable love influence the leadership of professionals?

Teamwork

- How does the teamwork variable influence professionals’ ethics?

Effective communication

How does the effective communication variable influence the ethics of professionals?

Productivity

How does the productivity variable influence the ethics of professionals?

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