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## Leadership as Moral Architecture: A Transcendental Systems Perspective on Public Organizations

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### ABSTRACT

This article conceptualizes leadership in public organizations as a form of *moral architecture* a systemically embedded process that shapes, sustains, and transforms the ethical foundations of collective action. Drawing on transcendental systems theory, it argues that effective leadership transcends transactional and transformational models by integrating moral purpose with systemic coherence. The transcendental systems perspective frames leadership as both a structural and value-generating force that aligns organizational goals with higher-order ethical imperatives. Through this lens, public leaders are not merely agents of efficiency or compliance but architects of meaning who design moral ecosystems capable of fostering justice, trust, and legitimacy. The paper proposes a model of *transcendental moral systems leadership*, highlighting three interdependent dimensions: (1) ontological grounding anchoring leadership identity in moral being; (2) systemic integration embedding ethics within institutional structures and feedback loops; and (3) transcendence orienting organizational purpose toward the common good beyond immediate instrumental aims. By conceptualizing leadership as moral architecture, this framework offers a pathway for renewing public institutions in an era marked by complexity, distrust, and moral fragmentation.

**Keywords:** Moral Leadership; Public Administration; Transcendental Systems Theory; Ethical Governance; Organizational Ethics; Systems Thinking; Moral Architecture; Public Value; Institutional Legitimacy; Common Good.

### 1. Introduction

In the evolving landscape of public administration, leadership is increasingly understood not merely as a managerial function but as a moral and systemic force that shapes the ethical architecture of institutions (Ajmal, Islam & Islam, 2023). Leadership as *moral architecture* emphasizes the intrinsic link between personal virtue, collective purpose, and organizational structure. This perspective integrates moral philosophy with systems thinking to conceptualize leadership as a transcendental process—one that harmonizes individual integrity and institutional justice to promote the public good. Public organizations, as custodians of social trust, require a model of leadership grounded not only in efficiency but also in moral transcendence and ethical coherence (Ahmed, Ajmal & Haq, 2024b).

The transcendental systems perspective builds upon a synthesis of moral philosophy, anthropology, and organizational theory. It proposes that leadership should transcend

instrumental rationality and embrace relational, spiritual, and ethical dimensions of human development (Akrivou et al., 2025). In this framework, leaders are architects of moral systems who cultivate environments of wisdom, justice, and self-awareness (Ajmal, Islam & Khan, 2023). Through transcendentals such as truth, goodness, and beauty, leadership becomes a dynamic moral force shaping decisions, culture, and systemic behavior. Such an approach moves beyond transactional and transformational paradigms, offering a holistic model of organizational morality that views human flourishing as the ultimate goal of governance (Ajmal, Islam & Khan, 2023).

Recent studies affirm the necessity of transcendental leadership practices in public institutions. Research on public-school principals in Amman, for example, demonstrated that transcendental leadership fosters innovation, ethical sensitivity, and organizational effectiveness by aligning educators' actions with moral self-awareness (Obeidat et al., 2024). Similarly, in Kenya's healthcare system, an internalized moral perspective—an essential aspect of authentic leadership—has been shown to enhance systemic resilience and moral accountability during crises (Kemunto & Linge, 2023). These findings illustrate how moral awareness, grounded in transcendental ethics, strengthens institutional performance and legitimacy.

Furthermore, ethical leadership in the public domain has been recognized as vital to countering moral relativism and systemic inequities. Without a moral compass, systems leadership risks becoming technocratic and detached from its ethical foundations (Mowat, 2019). Studies across Europe have confirmed that ethical leaders in educational institutions emphasize honesty, integrity, and altruism as guiding principles of public service (Papaloi et al., 2023). From an African philosophical lens, moral leadership is understood as virtue-based governance rooted in communal ethics and the moral character of leaders (Okpo, 2019). Collectively, these perspectives underscore that public organizations function most effectively when leadership is morally grounded, systemically conscious, and spiritually informed (Ajmal, Manzoor & Khan, 2024).

Ultimately, the transcendental systems perspective reimagines public leadership as *moral architecture*—a design that integrates ethical intentionality into the systemic fabric of organizations. It positions leadership as a unifying moral act that bridges the personal and the institutional, the rational and the transcendent, thereby enabling public institutions to serve not merely as administrative systems but as moral communities dedicated to the common good.

## 2. Literature Review

Leadership as moral architecture represents a paradigm shift in understanding leadership not merely as a functional role but as a systemically embedded moral process that shapes the ethical fabric of organizations. The transcendental systems perspective integrates metaphysical, ethical, and organizational dimensions to propose that leadership is fundamentally an act of moral construction — designing systems, cultures, and relationships that foster human flourishing.

### 2.1. Theoretical Foundations: Transcendentalism and Systems Thinking in Leadership

Transcendental leadership draws from humanistic and philosophical traditions that view leadership as a process of moral and personal transcendence. Kleio Akrivou and colleagues argue that traditional rationalist and pragmatist paradigms fail to capture the moral depth of decision-making in organizations (Ajmal, Manzoor & Khan, 2024). Their integration of transcendental anthropology and the Inter-Processual Self Theory redefines leadership as a relational process fostering love, knowledge, and freedom, thereby turning organizational decision-making into a moral act of systemic wisdom (Akrivou et al., 2025). This transcendental systems approach situates leadership within the broader moral ecology of organizations, emphasizing that moral awareness and virtue cultivation are prerequisites for sustainable governance.

Complementing this, Kyrill A. Goosseff (2019) explores the *Transcendental Essence of Humanity* as the moral foundation of organizational behavior. His work suggests that the transcendental emotional domain underpins moral cognition, offering a universal framework for understanding human relationality and moral reasoning in leadership contexts (Goosseff, 2019). This perspective links transcendental consciousness with leadership ethics, suggesting that moral leadership arises from recognizing the metaphysical interconnectedness of individuals within systems.

## **2.2. Empirical Insights: Transcendental and Authentic Leadership in Public Organizations**

Empirical evidence supports the integration of transcendental and authentic leadership models in public organizations. A recent study by B. F. Obeidat et al. (2024) examined transcendental leadership practices among public-school principals in Amman, revealing a high prevalence of moral and self-reflective leadership behaviors that enhanced teacher self-evaluation and organizational innovation (Obeidat et al., 2024). Their findings align with transcendental theory, highlighting that moral intentionality within leadership fosters organizational harmony and growth (Ajmal, Rahat, & Islam, 2024).

In a similar vein, the study by Osoro Joan Kemunto and T. Linge (2023) demonstrates how the *internalized moral perspective*, a construct of authentic leadership, enhances systemic resilience in Kenya's healthcare institutions (Kemunto & Linge, 2023). This research substantiates the transcendental systems perspective by linking moral self-regulation and organizational adaptability. Authentic leadership, characterized by self-awareness and ethical consistency, emerges as a foundational element of moral architecture in public institutions (Novaes et al., 2019).

## **2.3. Ethical Systems and Moral Awareness in Public Leadership**

Leadership as moral architecture necessitates moral awareness across systemic levels. Muhammad Fahad Javaid et al. (2020) found that unethical leadership directly correlates with "crimes of obedience" — employees' willingness to comply with immoral directives — but that moral awareness among employees mitigates these effects (Javaid et al., 2020). This empirical relationship underscores the systemic nature of morality: ethical failure at the leadership level permeates institutional culture, while moral consciousness restores organizational integrity (Ajmal, Rahat, & Islam, 2024).

Similarly, the qualitative study by S. Fantus et al. (2024) on moral distress in healthcare identified that systemic ethical frameworks and leadership behaviors directly influence organizational well-being. Their findings advocate for preemptive ethical infrastructure — including moral dialogue, interdisciplinary collaboration, and value-driven leadership — to reduce distress and enhance trust within public health systems (Fantus et al., 2024).

## **2.4. Integrating Moral Philosophy and Organizational Metaphysics**

Recent works have attempted to bridge moral philosophy with systemic and organizational theories. Reynold J. S. Macpherson (2025) proposes a meta-ethical framework combining virtue ethics, critical theory, and relational ethics to embed moral and metaphysical paradigms into leadership practices. His framework recognizes that leadership cannot be divorced from metaphysical understandings of human purpose, arguing for the inclusion of Indigenous and non-Western moral philosophies within organizational leadership models (Macpherson, 2025). This approach aligns closely with the transcendental systems model, which posits that organizational systems are moral ecosystems rather than mechanistic structures (Ajmal, Rahat, & Islam, 2024). Likewise, the transcendental legal justice paradigm described by Siti Kasiyati (2020) extends this moral architecture framework to the legal system, arguing for a shift from formalistic law to transcendental justice grounded in ethics and spirituality (Kasiyati, 2020). This legal-ethical

analogy enriches leadership theory by suggesting that ethical systems, like legal systems, must be rooted in transcendental values to ensure substantive justice (Ajmal, Rahat, & Islam, 2024).

### **2.5. Cultural and Virtue-Based Perspectives on Moral Leadership**

Beyond Western paradigms, moral leadership also draws from culturally embedded virtue ethics. O. Okpo (2019) introduces the *Ibibio Virtue Ethics* approach, arguing that leadership devoid of moral virtue becomes self-serving and destructive to the common good (Okpo, 2019). This resonates with transcendental systems thinking, which views moral architecture as culturally dynamic yet universally human. Similarly, research on ethical leadership across European education systems reveals that moral virtues such as honesty, integrity, and altruism are foundational for democratic and ethical institutional leadership (Papaloi et al., 2023).

### **2.6. Systems Leadership and the Moral Compass**

The systemic dimension of moral architecture is highlighted in the concept of *systems leadership*, which seeks to unify moral purpose with structural transformation. Joan G. Mowat (2019) asserts that systems leadership devoid of a moral compass devolves into bureaucratic management, losing its ethical direction. She argues for integrating distributive and emancipatory leadership models to address social inequality and strengthen moral purpose in public education (Mowat, 2019). Similarly, V. M. Dwayi (2024) highlights how moral and ethical leadership principles are essential for transforming governance systems in higher education (Dwayi, 2024).

### **2.7. Synthesis: Toward a Transcendental Moral System of Leadership**

Taken together, these studies reveal that leadership as moral architecture operates at the intersection of personal virtue, ethical systems, and transcendental purpose. The literature converges on the view that moral awareness, spiritual reflection, and systemic ethics are inseparable in the design of resilient, just, and humane organizations (Ajmal, Rahat, & Islam, 2024). The transcendental systems perspective thus redefines leadership as a moral ecosystem — one that integrates ethical reasoning, relational wisdom, and systemic transformation to serve the common good.

### **3. Conceptual Framework: Leadership as Moral Architecture — A Transcendental Systems Perspective on Public Organizations**

The conceptual framework for *Leadership as Moral Architecture* presents leadership as a multidimensional moral process embedded within systemic and transcendental realities. This framework integrates transcendental philosophy, systems theory, and moral leadership to propose that leadership functions as a form of ethical design—constructing and sustaining moral order within public organizations (Ajmal, Islam & Islam, 2025). Rather than being limited to administrative control or performance efficiency, leadership in this model represents a moral architecture, in which personal virtue, institutional ethics, and societal justice interact as interdependent dimensions of a unified system. The transcendental systems perspective thus views public leadership as a recursive moral system where ethical consciousness at the individual level informs and is informed by the ethical design of organizations and their broader social context (Ajmal, Islam & Islam, 2025).

At its theoretical foundation, this framework is grounded in four core strands: transcendental personalism, systems theory, virtue ethics, and authentic leadership. Transcendental personalism asserts that leadership begins with the leader's moral and spiritual transcendence—an awareness that leadership is not merely about managing others but about cultivating moral integrity and purpose within oneself. Kleio Akrivou and colleagues argue that decision-making in organizations must transcend rationalist and pragmatist models by integrating moral anthropology and relational wisdom, emphasizing personal love, knowledge, and freedom as transcendental values (Akrivou et al., 2025). Systems theory complements this by

conceptualizing public organizations as open moral systems in which leaders, followers, and societal institutions interact in adaptive feedback loops that determine ethical resilience and systemic justice (Mowat, 2019). In turn, virtue ethics situates leadership in moral character, arguing that integrity, humility, and justice form the foundation of ethical legitimacy (Okpo, 2019). Authentic leadership theory further reinforces this foundation by emphasizing self-awareness, internalized moral perspective, and transparency as key drivers of ethical trust and organizational alignment (Kemunto & Linge, 2023).

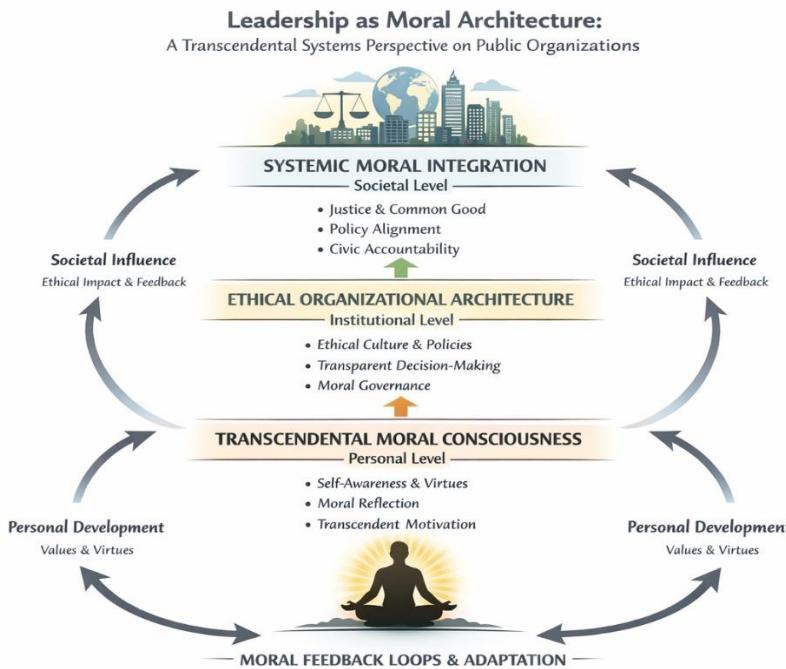
At the personal level, *transcendental moral consciousness* represents the first construct of this framework. It captures the internal moral evolution of the leader, where ethical awareness and virtue cultivation drive transcendence beyond self-interest. Kyrill A. Goosseff describes this as the “transcendental emotional reference”—an inner moral awareness that governs the structure of human experience and provides the foundation for ethical reasoning (Goosseff, 2019). In this sense, moral leadership is not imposed but arises from within, emerging through reflection, empathy, and the desire to align personal action with universal values. The transcendental moral consciousness thus forms the blueprint from which all ethical organizational behavior is constructed.

At the institutional level, *ethical organizational architecture* represents the manifestation of moral consciousness in structural and cultural systems. This dimension focuses on embedding ethical principles within institutional frameworks, policies, communication patterns, and decision-making processes. Empirical evidence supports the idea that moral awareness and transcendent values enhance organizational culture. For example, B. F. Obeidat and colleagues (2024) found that public-school principals in Amman who practiced transcendental leadership fostered teacher self-evaluation, innovation, and ethical collaboration, thereby transforming organizational dynamics (Obeidat et al., 2024). Similarly, the integration of an *internalized moral perspective*—a key dimension of authentic leadership—has been shown to strengthen resilience and moral coherence within healthcare systems, as evidenced in Kenya’s health sector (Kemunto & Linge, 2023). In this framework, the organization acts as the architectural embodiment of moral purpose, translating ethical intention into practice through governance systems and shared cultural norms.

At the societal level, *systemic moral integration* connects the moral architecture of leadership and organizations to the broader public ecosystem. This dimension emphasizes that leadership must extend beyond internal ethics to contribute to collective justice, equity, and sustainability. Reynold J. S. Macpherson (2025) argues that leadership theories should integrate moral philosophies and metaphysical paradigms to achieve social harmony, calling for a multi-dimensional ethical framework that combines virtue ethics, relational ethics, and critical theory (Macpherson, 2025). The transcendental systems perspective thus posits that moral leadership in public institutions contributes to a wider “moral ecosystem,” aligning institutional behavior with transcendent societal goals such as justice, dignity, and human flourishing. Siti Kasiyati (2020) extends this view through the lens of transcendental legal justice, arguing that ethical systems—like legal systems—must evolve from formalistic structures to moral-spiritual frameworks that prioritize human welfare and fairness (Kasiyati, 2020).

The interrelationship among these constructs is dynamic and cyclical. The transcendental moral consciousness of the leader informs the ethical architecture of the organization, which in turn shapes systemic moral integration at the societal level. Conversely, societal moral feedback—through public accountability, policy frameworks, and cultural expectations—refines and strengthens the moral awareness of both leaders and institutions. Joan G. Mowat (2019) emphasizes that systems leadership devoid of moral direction devolves into bureaucratic

management, highlighting the need for reciprocal moral feedback loops that ensure ethical coherence across personal, institutional, and systemic domains (Mowat, 2019). This reciprocal process ensures that leadership functions as an adaptive moral system capable of self-correction, reflection, and continuous alignment with transcendental principles.



**Figure 1: A conceptual Model**

#### 4. Detailed Explanation of the Conceptual Model: Leadership as Moral Architecture — A Transcendental Systems Perspective on Public Organizations

The model of *Leadership as Moral Architecture* provides a transcendental systems-based understanding of how leadership functions as a moral and systemic process within public organizations. It depicts leadership as operating on three interdependent levels—Transcendental Moral Consciousness (personal), Ethical Organizational Architecture (institutional), and Systemic Moral Integration (societal)—that interact through dynamic moral feedback loops. Each level contributes uniquely to the cultivation, institutionalization, and diffusion of moral values, ensuring that leadership operates as both an ethical foundation and an adaptive system of public governance.

##### 4.1. Transcendental Moral Consciousness (Personal Level)

At the foundation of the model lies Transcendental Moral Consciousness, which represents the moral and spiritual core of leadership. This dimension emphasizes the internal development of moral awareness, virtue ethics, and transcendental motivation. Leaders are seen as moral agents who must engage in *self-reflection*, *virtue cultivation*, and *moral transcendence* to align their personal intentions with universal ethical values.

Kleio Akrivou et al. (2025) argue that leadership begins with the self, grounded in transcendental anthropology where personal love, knowledge, and freedom are essential transcendentals that drive moral action (Akrivou et al., 2025). Similarly, Kyrill A. Goosseff (2019) explains that transcendental emotional awareness forms the essence of moral consciousness, providing leaders with the internal framework necessary for ethical decision-making and humane organizational behavior (Goosseff, 2019).

This level of the model captures the *personal virtues*—such as integrity, humility, empathy, and justice—that serve as moral anchors for leaders. According to O. Okpo (2019), moral leadership

rooted in virtue ethics is essential because once ethics is removed from leadership, power becomes a vehicle for self-interest and corruption rather than service (Okpo, 2019). Therefore, transcendental moral consciousness establishes the inner architecture of leadership from which all ethical action and organizational transformation originate.

In this layer of the model, personal development and continuous moral reflection feed upward into the organizational structure, shaping the ethical culture and decision-making of public institutions. Leaders who engage in transcendental reflection act as conduits between personal virtue and systemic moral design.

#### **4.2. Ethical Organizational Architecture (Institutional Level)**

The second layer of the model, Ethical Organizational Architecture, represents the institutional embodiment of moral consciousness. It describes how personal ethics are transformed into organizational structures, cultures, and practices that support moral governance. This involves embedding ethical principles into the systems, procedures, and relationships that define institutional behavior.

B. F. Obeidat et al. (2024) found that transcendental leadership in public schools fostered ethical collaboration and innovation by promoting self-evaluation and moral accountability among educators (Obeidat et al., 2024). Similarly, Osoro Joan Kemunto and T. Linge (2023) demonstrated that the *internalized moral perspective*—a core construct of authentic leadership—enhanced the resilience and cultural competence of healthcare organizations in Kenya during crises (Kemunto & Linge, 2023). These studies confirm that organizations grounded in ethical principles are not only more resilient but also more adaptive and socially responsible.

At this institutional level, the framework proposes three core mechanisms:

1. **Ethical Culture and Policies** — formal rules, codes of conduct, and transparency systems that embed moral norms.
2. **Transparent Decision-Making** — participatory and accountable processes that ensure ethical coherence.
3. **Moral Governance** — institutional leadership that fosters trust, equity, and justice across hierarchical structures.

The organizational level thus acts as the *bridge* between personal morality and societal ethics. The leader's inner virtue becomes institutionalized through ethical systems, allowing moral consciousness to manifest in collective practices. As Vladimir Pinto Novaes et al. (2019) found, authentic leadership behaviors such as relational transparency and balanced processing strongly correlate with organizational engagement and ethical climate (Novaes et al., 2019).

#### **4.3. Systemic Moral Integration (Societal Level)**

At the top of the model lies Systemic Moral Integration, which connects organizational ethics to societal justice and the common good. This level emphasizes how public organizations operate as part of a larger *transcendental moral system*, influencing and being influenced by cultural, political, and ethical expectations in society.

Reynold J. S. Macpherson (2025) highlights that integrating moral philosophy and metaphysical paradigms allows leadership to align institutional systems with moral universals such as equity and human dignity (Macpherson, 2025). Similarly, Siti Kasiyati (2020) argues that law and governance must shift from positivist and formalist paradigms to transcendental justice frameworks that emphasize ethical substance over procedural formality (Kasiyati, 2020). In the same way, this model proposes that leadership at the societal level must transcend compliance-based ethics and promote *systemic justice, civic accountability, and public welfare*.

This layer reflects the organization's moral impact on society and the reciprocal feedback it receives. Public institutions that prioritize equity, moral transparency, and sustainability

contribute to the societal common good while strengthening public trust. Joan G. Mowat (2019) reinforces this by asserting that systems leadership without a moral compass results in ethical failure; genuine systems leadership requires moral clarity that integrates distributive justice and collective responsibility (Mowat, 2019).

#### **4.4. Moral Feedback Loops and Adaptation**

The cyclical arrows in the model represent moral feedback loops that sustain and adapt the moral architecture across all levels. Ethical influence flows *upward*—from individual virtue to institutional structures and societal norms—and *downward*—from societal expectations back to personal moral reflection. These feedback loops ensure ethical coherence, adaptive learning, and moral sustainability.

At the personal level, leaders engage in continuous self-evaluation and virtue renewal in response to organizational and societal feedback. At the institutional level, public organizations adapt their ethical policies and structures to maintain legitimacy and moral accountability. At the societal level, systems of governance and civic engagement evolve to reflect higher moral standards, thus closing the feedback loop of ethical adaptation.

This dynamic interaction ensures that leadership as moral architecture remains fluid, resilient, and responsive to changing ethical demands. It aligns with the view of S. Fantus et al. (2024), who found that ethical cultures that encourage open moral dialogue and organizational learning are key to reducing moral distress and fostering systemic well-being in public health institutions (Fantus et al., 2024).

#### **4.5. Integrative Understanding**

Ultimately, the model presents leadership as a transcendental moral ecosystem. It integrates *inner virtue (transcendental moral consciousness)*, *ethical design (organizational architecture)*, and *public justice (systemic moral integration)* into a continuous ethical cycle. Leadership thus becomes a form of moral architecture—an ongoing act of designing and maintaining the structures that enable ethical life within public institutions and society at large. This integrative perspective bridges micro-level moral development with macro-level systemic governance, ensuring that leadership remains anchored in both virtue and justice.

### **5. Discussion:**

The *Leadership as Moral Architecture* framework situates leadership at the confluence of moral philosophy, systems theory, and transcendental humanism. It redefines leadership not merely as a role or function but as a systemic moral process—a form of ethical design through which individuals and institutions co-construct the moral foundations of public life. This discussion elaborates on the theoretical, empirical, and practical implications of the model, explaining how the transcendental systems perspective deepens our understanding of public leadership in moral, structural, and societal terms.

#### **5.1. Reconceptualizing Leadership as Moral Architecture**

Traditional theories of leadership—such as transactional, transformational, and servant models—have often emphasized behavioral influence, goal attainment, and follower motivation. However, these models inadequately address the moral ontology of leadership: what leadership *is* as a moral act. The transcendental systems perspective shifts this focus from external performance to internal moral structure, asserting that leadership begins with *being* before *doing*.

This reorientation aligns with the transcendental anthropology advanced by Kleio Akrivou et al. (2025), who argue that moral action must emerge from an inner transcendental orientation rooted in personal love, truth, and freedom (Akrivou et al., 2025). From this view, leadership as moral architecture is not about controlling systems, but designing moral coherence—a systemic

balance between inner virtue, institutional ethics, and societal justice. This represents a profound shift from managerial rationality toward moral intentionality, situating leadership as a creative and transcendental act.

In practical terms, this redefinition demands that leaders of public organizations view themselves as *moral architects*: individuals who consciously shape institutional cultures and policies according to higher ethical standards. Leadership thus becomes a form of moral design, where systemic structures are crafted to reflect universal moral principles such as justice, transparency, and human dignity.

### 5.2. The Transcendental Dimension of Leadership

Central to the framework is the concept of transcendental moral consciousness, which recognizes that ethical leadership originates from the inner life of the individual. This view challenges purely behavioral models by asserting that moral leadership cannot be taught as a set of competencies—it must be *cultivated* as a virtue.

Kyrill A. Goosseff (2019) identifies the transcendental emotional reference as a universal structure of human consciousness, governing moral experience and empathy (Goosseff, 2019). This insight reinforces the framework's premise that moral leadership arises from self-transcendence—the leader's ability to go beyond egoic drives and connect with universal human values. Similarly, O. Okpo (2019) emphasizes that moral virtue, particularly in the African ethical context, forms the essence of authentic leadership; without moral character, leadership degenerates into mere power play (Okpo, 2019).

Thus, the transcendental layer of the model underscores that ethical leadership is ontological before it is functional—it stems from a leader's being rather than from external systems. When leaders embody transcendental moral consciousness, they serve as catalysts for institutional and social transformation, transmitting ethical energy into organizational systems and public policy.

### 5.3. Institutionalizing Morality: The Ethical Architecture of Organizations

The middle tier of the model—Ethical Organizational Architecture—translates the moral consciousness of leaders into institutional structures and cultural practices. This transition is critical because moral intention without organizational embodiment remains inert. Institutions, particularly public ones, require ethical systems that formalize virtues into policies, governance mechanisms, and decision-making frameworks.

Empirical evidence supports this institutional translation. B. F. Obeidat et al. (2024) found that transcendental leadership practices among school principals in Amman led to organizational cultures characterized by ethical collaboration, moral discipline, and innovation (Obeidat et al., 2024). Likewise, Osoro Joan Kemunto and T. Linge (2023) demonstrated that internalized moral perspective significantly strengthened the resilience of Kenya's health systems during crisis, proving that moral integrity translates into institutional endurance (Kemunto & Linge, 2023).

These studies confirm that ethical governance is not simply a moral aspiration—it is a systemic requirement for institutional stability and legitimacy. When leaders institutionalize morality through transparent policies, equitable decision-making, and shared moral purpose, public organizations become ethically self-sustaining. This process aligns with the findings of Vladimir Pinto Novaes et al. (2019), who revealed that authentic leadership behaviors—especially relational transparency and balanced processing—are positively correlated with organizational commitment and job satisfaction (Novaes et al., 2019).

Thus, the ethical organizational architecture acts as the *structural embodiment* of transcendental leadership, converting virtue into systemic moral design. It operationalizes the leader's ethical consciousness within institutional contexts, allowing morality to function at a collective and procedural level.

#### 5.4. The Societal Interface: Systemic Moral Integration

At the macro level, the model extends leadership's moral reach to the systemic moral integration of public institutions within society. This layer illustrates how organizational ethics ripple outward to influence social justice, equity, and civic accountability.

Reynold J. S. Macpherson (2025) contributes to this understanding by arguing that integrating moral philosophy with metaphysical paradigms is essential for cultivating moral leadership in complex, pluralistic societies (Macpherson, 2025). Similarly, Siti Kasiyati (2020) contends that transcendental justice should replace positivist models of law and governance, situating morality as the foundation of public systems (Kasiyati, 2020).

These perspectives affirm that leadership in public organizations cannot be isolated from its societal mission. Systemic moral integration ensures that public institutions operate not only within the law but *beyond it*—toward ethical justice and human welfare. Joan G. Mowat (2019) captures this necessity by asserting that systems leadership without a moral compass is ethically void and socially ineffective (Mowat, 2019).

Therefore, moral integration operates as a reciprocal feedback mechanism: ethical institutions foster public trust and justice, while societal values, in turn, reinforce institutional ethics. Through this cyclical dynamic, the transcendental systems model envisions a moral ecosystem where public organizations act as moral agents of the common good.

#### 5.5. Dynamic Moral Feedback and Adaptive Ethics

A defining feature of the model is its feedback structure, represented by the circular flow of moral influence across personal, organizational, and societal levels. This cyclical relationship ensures continuous ethical adaptation—leaders refine their virtues through organizational experience; institutions evolve policies based on societal feedback; and societies adjust expectations in response to institutional performance.

This adaptive cycle aligns with the view of S. Fantus et al. (2024), who found that ethical dialogue and reflective leadership reduce moral distress and enhance systemic well-being in public institutions (Fantus et al., 2024). The feedback loop transforms morality from a static code into a *living process*—an evolving system of ethical growth and relational learning.

In practice, this means that leadership must be dynamic and responsive rather than dogmatic. It requires leaders to continually re-evaluate their moral assumptions in light of organizational and social realities, ensuring that ethical integrity remains adaptive rather than rigid. This dynamic moral adaptation guarantees the resilience of ethical systems and sustains moral coherence over time.

### 6. Theoretical Implications

The *Leadership as Moral Architecture* framework offers profound theoretical contributions to the study of leadership, ethics, and public administration. It advances leadership theory beyond its conventional boundaries by integrating transcendental philosophy, systems theory, and virtue ethics into a unified model. This integration positions leadership not only as an administrative function but as a moral system — a dynamic architecture that links personal virtue, institutional ethics, and societal justice. The following section elaborates on the theoretical implications of this model in detail.

#### 6.1. Reframing Leadership as a Moral Ontology Rather Than a Behavioral Construct

One of the primary theoretical implications of the transcendental systems perspective is the ontological reframing of leadership. Traditional leadership theories—such as transformational, transactional, and situational models—primarily define leadership through observable behaviors, influence processes, or contingency factors. In contrast, the *Leadership as Moral*

*Architecture* model redefines leadership as a state of moral being rather than merely a behavioral act.

According to Kleio Akrivou et al. (2025), decision-making and leadership must be grounded in transcendental anthropology, where moral wisdom, personal freedom, and love are not external principles but intrinsic dimensions of the self (Akrivou et al., 2025). This theoretical shift moves leadership research from *what leaders do* to *who leaders are*, recognizing that moral consciousness is the core of leadership practice.

By doing so, the framework introduces a moral ontology of leadership — a philosophical foundation that explains leadership as the act of becoming an ethical agent capable of transforming systems. This perspective expands leadership theory from the empirical and psychological domains into the metaphysical, positioning it within the broader philosophical inquiry of ethics and human purpose.

### **6.2. Integrating Virtue Ethics with Systems Theory**

Another key theoretical contribution lies in the synthesis of virtue ethics and systems thinking. Traditional systems theories describe organizations as interdependent structures governed by feedback loops, adaptation, and systemic resilience. However, they rarely incorporate moral agency or virtue as systemic variables.

The current framework bridges this gap by asserting that virtues function as systemic regulators within organizations. When leaders embody virtues such as integrity, humility, and justice, these moral qualities ripple through the system, shaping institutional behavior, governance, and culture (Okpo, 2019). This implies that virtue is not only a personal attribute but a systemic force that stabilizes and harmonizes organizational dynamics.

Through this integration, the model expands systems theory beyond its mechanistic roots, embedding moral intentionality within systemic feedback structures. It suggests that moral energy — arising from the transcendental consciousness of leaders — drives organizational evolution, resilience, and ethical sustainability. Thus, leadership becomes both a personal virtue practice and a systemic design process, bridging micro-level morality with macro-level governance.

### **6.3. Introducing the Concept of Transcendental Moral Systems**

The framework also contributes a novel theoretical construct: the transcendental moral system. This concept posits that public organizations function as moral ecosystems embedded within broader ethical and societal structures. Each level of the system — personal, organizational, and societal — interacts through moral feedback loops that facilitate continuous ethical adaptation.

Joan G. Mowat (2019) argues that leadership systems fail when divorced from moral purpose, emphasizing that system-level leadership must incorporate ethical reasoning and social justice (Mowat, 2019). Similarly, Reynold J. S. Macpherson (2025) calls for integrating moral philosophy into systemic paradigms to ensure that organizations remain aligned with higher moral principles (Macpherson, 2025).

By conceptualizing leadership as a transcendental moral system, the framework provides a dynamic model for understanding how moral values are generated, institutionalized, and diffused through public systems. It reframes ethical leadership from a linear cause-and-effect relationship to a *cyclical moral ecology*, where continuous reflection and feedback sustain ethical coherence across scales.

### **6.4. Expanding Authentic Leadership Theory Through a Transcendental Lens**

The model also advances authentic leadership theory by embedding it within a transcendental paradigm. Authentic leadership emphasizes self-awareness, moral perspective, and relational transparency. However, most existing models treat authenticity as a psychological construct. The

transcendental systems perspective redefines authenticity as spiritual and moral transcendence — an alignment between the self and universal ethical truths.

Empirical studies support this theoretical evolution. Osoro Joan Kemunto and T. Linge (2023) found that an internalized moral perspective enhanced resilience and moral accountability in Kenya's healthcare leadership during crisis conditions (Kemunto & Linge, 2023). Likewise, Vladimir Pinto Novaes et al. (2019) validated that authentic leadership correlates strongly with job engagement and ethical commitment, suggesting that moral awareness enhances institutional integrity (Novaes et al., 2019).

Through a transcendental lens, authentic leadership is no longer limited to psychological self-consistency—it becomes an ontological state of unity between the leader's inner self, organizational ethics, and the universal good. This theoretical expansion gives authenticity a metaphysical grounding, enriching its relevance to moral and systemic leadership studies.

#### **6.5. Establishing a Bridge Between Moral Philosophy and Public Administration**

The *Leadership as Moral Architecture* model also makes a groundbreaking theoretical contribution by creating a bridge between moral philosophy and public administration. Traditional administrative theories, rooted in Weberian rationality, often separate ethical reasoning from bureaucratic functioning. This fragmentation has led to technocratic governance systems that prioritize efficiency over morality.

The transcendental systems framework challenges this separation by asserting that public organizations are not neutral instruments of administration but moral systems responsible for embodying societal values. Siti Kasiyati (2020) illustrates this point in the legal context, arguing that governance systems must transcend formal legality to achieve substantive, ethical justice (Kasiyati, 2020). Similarly, B. F. Obeidat et al. (2024) show that transcendental leadership enhances not just efficiency but moral harmony and innovation within public schools (Obeidat et al., 2024).

By embedding transcendental ethics into administrative systems, the model positions public leadership as a form of moral architecture — a structure that integrates rational governance with ethical intentionality. This fusion provides a new theoretical framework for ethical public administration, emphasizing justice, empathy, and the common good as organizational imperatives.

#### **6.6. Advancing the Notion of Adaptive Moral Systems**

Finally, the model introduces the concept of adaptive moral systems—organizations that evolve through moral feedback loops connecting individual virtue, institutional practice, and societal expectation. This theoretical innovation draws on the notion of “living systems,” where continuous ethical reflection allows institutions to self-correct and realign with moral purposes. S. Fantus et al. (2024) found that institutions that support reflective moral dialogue and value-driven decision-making reduce moral distress and foster ethical well-being (Fantus et al., 2024). This supports the framework's assertion that adaptive moral systems are self-sustaining — capable of learning from ethical tensions and transforming them into sources of moral resilience. Theoretically, this introduces a cybernetic model of morality, where feedback between moral consciousness and systemic ethics ensures continuous alignment between what is right, what is effective, and what is sustainable. It expands ethical theory into the systems domain, offering a dynamic explanation of how morality evolves within complex organizations.

#### **7. Practical Implications**

The *Leadership as Moral Architecture* framework not only offers theoretical depth but also carries significant practical implications for governance, organizational management, leadership development, and public ethics. By viewing leadership as a transcendental moral system, the

framework provides actionable pathways for integrating morality into real-world organizational and policy contexts. It offers a new paradigm for public institutions to operate as moral systems that are transparent, adaptive, and oriented toward human flourishing.

### 7.1. Cultivating Moral Consciousness in Public Leaders

The first and most critical implication of this framework is the intentional cultivation of moral consciousness among public leaders. Leadership training and professional development programs often emphasize technical skills, strategic decision-making, and management efficiency while neglecting the inner moral life of leaders. The transcendental systems perspective calls for a paradigm shift—one where leadership education prioritizes moral reflection, self-transcendence, and virtue cultivation as foundational competencies.

Kleio Akrivou et al. (2025) emphasize that true organizational wisdom arises when leaders act from transcendental values such as truth, love, and freedom, which foster integrity and ethical clarity (Akrivou et al., 2025). Public institutions, therefore, should design leadership development programs that include moral reasoning exercises, ethical dialogue, and reflective practices—such as guided ethical journaling or virtue-based mentorship.

By incorporating transcendental moral education into leadership training, public organizations can create leaders who act not out of self-interest or compliance but out of moral conviction and social responsibility. Such leaders will be equipped to design, sustain, and transform ethical systems within their institutions.

### 7.2. Embedding Ethics into Organizational Design and Governance

A second major implication is the need to institutionalize ethics through the architectural design of organizational systems. The model emphasizes that moral integrity cannot rely solely on personal virtue—it must be structurally embedded within organizational policies, decision-making processes, and accountability mechanisms.

B. F. Obeidat et al. (2024) demonstrated that transcendental leadership practices, such as moral dialogue and self-evaluation, led to significant improvements in ethical collaboration and innovation in public schools (Obeidat et al., 2024). Similarly, Osoro Joan Kemunto and T. Linge (2023) showed that public health systems rooted in internalized moral perspective achieved greater resilience and trust during crises (Kemunto & Linge, 2023).

Practically, this means developing ethical infrastructures such as:

- **Ethics committees** that evaluate policy decisions from a moral standpoint.
- **Transparent communication systems** that foster openness and trust.
- **Accountability frameworks** that integrate ethical criteria into performance evaluations.
- **Feedback channels** that allow employees and citizens to report ethical concerns safely.

Embedding ethics at the design level ensures that morality becomes systemic—*part of the organization's DNA*—rather than incidental or reactive.

### 7.3. Strengthening Public Trust and Institutional Legitimacy

Public trust is the moral currency of governance. The transcendental systems perspective asserts that when leadership operates as moral architecture, it strengthens institutional legitimacy by aligning organizational behavior with societal values.

Joan G. Mowat (2019) notes that systems leadership devoid of moral compass leads to ethical erosion and public disillusionment (Mowat, 2019). Conversely, when moral integrity is institutionalized through ethical governance, citizens perceive public organizations as just, transparent, and trustworthy.

Practically, this means that leaders should ensure moral coherence between policy intent and policy execution. For example:

- Public health institutions should not only pursue efficiency but also compassion and equity in service delivery.
- Educational systems should not only aim for performance outcomes but for the moral development of both students and teachers.
- Administrative agencies should demonstrate fairness and human dignity in all interactions.

By aligning public administration with transcendental ethics, leaders can restore civic confidence and enhance democratic legitimacy.

#### **7.4. Promoting Systemic Moral Integration in Policy Development**

The model's emphasis on systemic moral integration has direct implications for policymaking. Policies often address economic or administrative issues but neglect moral dimensions such as justice, dignity, and the common good. The transcendental systems approach demands that policymakers embed moral reasoning at every stage of policy development—from formulation to implementation and evaluation.

Reynold J. S. Macpherson (2025) advocates for integrating diverse moral philosophies, including virtue ethics and relational ethics, into leadership and policy frameworks to promote societal harmony (Macpherson, 2025). Likewise, Siti Kasiyati (2020) emphasizes the importance of transcendental justice—policy and law grounded in spiritual and moral purpose—to correct the shortcomings of formal, procedural justice (Kasiyati, 2020).

In practical application, this means that public policy should be subjected to ethical impact assessments (EIAs), similar to environmental or economic analyses. Such assessments would evaluate the moral implications of policies, including effects on human dignity, fairness, and intergenerational justice.

This would shift policymaking from short-term political expediency to long-term moral stewardship, aligning public institutions with transcendental purposes such as truth, goodness, and human flourishing.

#### **7.5. Enhancing Organizational Resilience Through Ethical Reflexivity**

Another practical implication is the model's emphasis on moral reflexivity—the capacity of organizations to learn and evolve from ethical challenges. The model's feedback loops between personal virtue, institutional ethics, and societal expectations suggest that ethical reflection should be continuous and systemically embedded.

S. Fantus et al. (2024) found that institutions which foster regular moral dialogue, cross-professional ethics workshops, and mental well-being programs significantly reduced moral distress and increased employee resilience (Fantus et al., 2024).

Public organizations can operationalize this by:

- Conducting ethical audits to identify moral risks and blind spots.
- Facilitating interdisciplinary ethics discussions among employees.
- Implementing feedback-based learning loops where ethical lessons from past challenges inform future decisions.

This continuous reflexivity transforms moral crises into opportunities for organizational growth, leading to ethical resilience—the ability of institutions to self-correct and maintain moral integrity amid complexity.

#### **7.6. Building a Culture of Collective Moral Responsibility**

Finally, the model underscores that ethical leadership is not confined to those at the top; it is distributed across all levels of an organization. The transcendental systems perspective promotes a culture of shared moral responsibility, where every member of the organization is both an ethical actor and a moral guardian of the system.

Vladimir Pinto Novaes et al. (2019) found that authentic leadership fosters moral awareness and relational transparency across organizational hierarchies, encouraging collective accountability (Novaes et al., 2019).

Practically, this means organizations should:

- Develop ethics-centered performance indicators for all staff.
- Recognize and reward ethical behavior, not just technical achievements.
- Encourage bottom-up ethical dialogue, where employees can question and improve moral practices.

By democratizing moral responsibility, public organizations can move beyond compliance-based ethics to a culture of collective moral agency, ensuring that ethical behavior becomes the shared norm rather than the exception.

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