CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND ETHICAL LEADERSHIP AT ECOWAS HEAD OFFICE, NIGERIA

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Abstract
This study discusses corporate social responsibility and ethical leadership at ECOWAS Head Office, Nigeria with aims to examine the relationship between CSR initiatives and ethical leadership behaviors within the organization. Grounded in Stakeholder Theory, Social Learning Theory, and resource-Based View, the study employed an explanatory research design using secondary data from peer-reviewed journals, organizational reports, and scholarly articles. The objective was to explore how specific CSR dimensions such as transparency, employee welfare, and human rights relate to ethical leadership traits including accountability, empowerment, and stakeholder engagement. Findings from the literature revealed a strong positive relationship between CSR and ethical leadership, with transparency and accountability emerging as the most influential predictors. Human rights initiatives were particularly associated with stakeholder-focused leadership, while community development and employee empowerment were identified as areas needing improvement. The study concludes that well-integrated CSR practices contribute to ethical leadership development, especially in international organizations like ECOWAS. It recommends enhancing transparency mechanisms, promoting participatory leadership, expanding community engagement, and embedding CSR principles into leadership development programs to strengthen organizational ethics and effectiveness.
Keywords: *Corporate Social Responsibility, Ethical Leadership, ECOWAS, International Organizations, West Africa*

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary organizational environment, corporate social responsibility has evolved from a voluntary ethical stance to a strategic imperative that influences organizational legitimacy, stakeholder relationships, and ultimately, institutional effectiveness. The evolution of CSR reflects broader societal shifts toward sustainability, corporate accountability, and ethical governance practices (Carroll & Shabana, 2010). While traditional economic models viewed efficiency maximization as the singular goal of public organizations (Friedman, 1970), modern perspectives recognize the interdependence between institutional success and societal wellbeing (Porter & Kramer, 2011).

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), established in 1975, represents one of Africa's most significant regional integration initiatives and exemplifies this evolution in organizational thinking. Headquartered in Abuja, Nigeria, ECOWAS serves as the institutional framework for economic cooperation among fifteen West African member states, with a mandate extending beyond trade to encompass political stability, peace, and social development across the region. In recent years, international organizations like ECOWAS have faced increasing scrutiny regarding their social responsibility practices and leadership standards, particularly as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals emphasize the need for institutions to demonstrate accountability, transparency, and ethical governance.

The relationship between CSR initiatives and ethical leadership in international organizations has been subject to extensive scholarly inquiry, though research in this specific context remains limited. Some studies report positive associations between CSR and organizational effectiveness (Orlitzky et al., 2003; Wang et al., 2016), while others find negative or insignificant relationships (McWilliams & Siegel, 2000; Surroca et al., 2010). These inconsistent findings suggest the presence of complex underlying mechanisms and contingency factors that influence how CSR initiatives translate into organizational outcomes. Among these potential mechanisms, leadership practices have emerged as a critical yet underexplored factor that may explain the CSR-effectiveness link (Du et al., 2013).

Ethical leadership, characterized by normatively appropriate conduct demonstrated through personal actions, interpersonal relationships, and promotion of such conduct through communication and decision-making (Brown et al., 2005), represents a potentially significant mediating variable in this relationship. The conceptual connection between CSR and ethical leadership is substantial, as both constructs emphasize moral dimensions of organizational behavior, stakeholder considerations, and long-term orientation (Maak et al., 2016). For ECOWAS, operating in a region where trust in institutions remains fragile, the intersection of corporate social responsibility and ethical leadership takes on particular significance as leaders must effectively translate organizational CSR commitments into operational practices that enhance stakeholder relationships, employee engagement, and organizational reputation, ultimately contributing to improved institutional performance (Schaubroeck et al., 2012).

Historically, the conceptualization of CSR evolved from discretionary philanthropic activities to strategic initiatives integrated with core organizational operations. The 1950s and 1960s witnessed initial formulation of corporate social responsibilities beyond economic objectives (Bowen, 1953). The 1970s brought increased attention to corporate social responsiveness and performance (Carroll, 1979), while the 1980s and 1990s saw integration of CSR with strategic management and stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984; Porter & Kramer, 2006). Contemporary perspectives emphasize creating shared value through practices that enhance both societal welfare and organizational competitiveness (Porter & Kramer, 2011). For international organizations like ECOWAS, CSR takes on distinct characteristics encompassing efficient resource utilization, compliance with international law, transparent decision-making, and contribution to broader societal goals beyond the organization's immediate mandate.

Similarly, ethical leadership evolved from trait-based approaches to more comprehensive frameworks that consider behaviors, relationships, and context. Early leadership theories focused predominantly on leader characteristics and styles, with limited attention to ethical dimensions. The emergence of transformational leadership theory (Bass, 1985) introduced greater emphasis on morality and values in leadership. The explicit conceptualization of ethical leadership as a distinct construct (Brown et al., 2005) provided a framework for understanding how leaders' moral conduct influences follower behaviors and organizational outcomes. In the context of international organizations like ECOWAS, ethical leadership faces unique challenges as leaders must navigate complex political environments, manage diverse stakeholder expectations, and maintain impartiality while promoting collective interests across culturally diverse member states.

Organizational effectiveness, representing the ultimate measure of institutional success from multiple stakeholder perspectives, encompasses traditional performance metrics alongside broader considerations of legitimacy, accountability, and social impact. Contemporary approaches to organizational effectiveness incorporate longer time horizons and broader stakeholder considerations, recognizing that sustainable organizational outcomes depend on balancing multiple interests (Eccles et al., 2014). For regional organizations like ECOWAS, effectiveness encompasses not only operational efficiency but also the ability to achieve mandated objectives of economic integration, political stability, and social development across member states.

The potential linkages between these three variables CSR, ethical leadership, and organizational effectiveness warrant further investigation within the specific context of international organizations. CSR initiatives may influence organizational effectiveness both directly (through enhanced reputation, stakeholder trust, and risk reduction) and indirectly through their impact on leadership practices. Organizations with robust CSR commitments may foster ethical leadership by establishing normative expectations, providing opportunities for moral expression, and aligning incentive systems with ethical behavior (Waldman et al., 2006). These ethical leadership practices, in turn, may enhance organizational effectiveness through improved employee engagement, stakeholder relationships, and operational efficiency (Ng & Feldman, 2015).

Despite theoretical connections between these constructs, empirical research examining the mediating role of ethical leadership in the CSR-organizational effectiveness relationship remains limited, particularly in the context of African international organizations. This gap is particularly significant given the growing importance of both CSR and ethical leadership in contemporary institutional contexts and the unique challenges faced by organizations operating in politically and culturally diverse environments like West Africa. Understanding mechanisms through which CSR initiatives influence organizational outcomes can provide valuable insights for theory development and practical application in regional integration efforts. The relationship between CSR initiatives and ethical leadership behaviors in international organizations presents unique challenges and opportunities. Unlike private corporations driven primarily by profit maximization, regional organizations like ECOWAS must balance multiple stakeholder interests while maintaining legitimacy across diverse political and cultural contexts. This complexity makes the study of CSR-ethical leadership relationships particularly relevant for understanding organizational effectiveness in multilateral settings. Previous research has largely focused on CSR and ethical leadership in corporate environments, with limited attention to how these concepts manifest in international governmental organizations.

This study addresses several gaps in existing literature by examining how CSR initiatives and ethical leadership behaviors interact within the specific context of ECOWAS Head Office. First, it provides empirical evidence on CSR practices in African regional organizations, contributing to the limited scholarship on CSR in African institutional contexts. Second, it examines the relationship between CSR initiatives and ethical leadership behaviors in a non-profit, multi-stakeholder environment. Third, it offers practical insights for improving governance and accountability in regional international organizations. By elucidating these relationships, the research contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how organizations can maximize the effectiveness of their CSR investments through ethical leadership practices while maintaining institutional legitimacy and achieving mandated objectives across diverse stakeholder environments.

LITERATURE REVIEW
Corporate Social Responsibility
Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) evolved significantly as conceptual framework guiding business-society relationships. Carroll (1979) proposed four-dimensional model of CSR encompassing economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary responsibilities, suggesting that organizations have obligations beyond profit generation. This perspective was further developed by Wood (1991), who articulated CSR as configurations of principles, processes, and outcomes that connect organizations to broader societal contexts. McWilliams and Siegel (2001) defined CSR as "actions that appear to further some social good, beyond the interests of the firm and that which is required by law", emphasizing voluntary nature of these initiatives.

Contemporary conceptualizations of CSR moved beyond categorizing responsibilities to emphasize strategic integration and value creation. Porter and Kramer (2006, 2011) advanced the notion of "creating shared value," suggesting that CSR initiatives should simultaneously address societal challenges and enhance organizational competitiveness. Aguinis and Glavas (2012) synthesized diverse perspectives, defining CSR as "context-specific organizational actions and policies that take into account stakeholders' expectations and triple bottom line of economic, social, and environmental performance" (p. 933).

The operationalization of CSR varies across organizations and industries, encompassing environmental stewardship, community engagement, ethical business practices, workplace conditions, and stakeholder relationships (Dahlsrud, 2008). Matten and Moon (2008) distinguished between "explicit" CSR (voluntary programs and strategies) and "implicit" CSR (values, norms, and rules embedded in institutional frameworks), highlighting contextual variations in CSR manifestations.

The measurement of CSR proven challenging due to its multidimensional nature and contextual specificity. Researchers employed diverse approaches, including content analysis of corporate reports

(Holder-Webb et al., 2009), reputational indices (Chatterji et al., 2009), and stakeholder assessments (Turker, 2009). Despite methodological challenges, there is growing consensus regarding importance of comprehensive measurement frameworks that capture multiple dimensions of social, environmental, and ethical performance (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012).

Organizational Legitimacy

Institutional perspectives emphasize organizational legitimacy the perception that organizational actions align with societal norms, values, and expectations as essential for sustained performance (Suchman, 1995). CSR initiatives enhance legitimacy by demonstrating organizational alignment with evolving societal expectations regarding business responsibilities (Campbell, 2007).

Ethical leadership strengthens organizational legitimacy by ensuring that formal CSR commitments translate into consistent operational practices. Through authentic communication behavioral integrity and stakeholder engagement, ethical leaders enhance both substantive and symbolic dimensions of legitimacy. This enhanced legitimacy facilitates access to resources, stakeholder cooperation and market opportunities, ultimately contributing to improved financial performance (Aguilera et al., 2007).

Ethical Leadership

Ethical leadership emerged as distinct construct in organizational research through seminal work of Brown et al. (2005), who defined it as "the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making" (p. 120). This definition encompasses both moral person (leader's personal characteristics and behaviors) and moral manager (leader's influence on followers' ethical conduct) dimensions of ethical leadership.

Treviño et al. (2003) identified key attributes of ethical leaders, including personal traits (integrity, honesty, trustworthiness), behaviors (concern for people, openness, personal morality), and decision-making approaches (values-based judgments, objectivity, fairness). Kalshoven et al. (2011) extended this framework through development of Ethical Leadership at Work (ELW) questionnaire, which measures seven dimensions: fairness, power sharing, role clarification, people orientation, integrity, ethical guidance, and concern for sustainability.

Theoretical perspectives on ethical leadership draw from diverse traditions, including social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), which emphasizes role of observation and modeling in ethical behavior development; social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), which highlights reciprocal relationships between leaders and followers; and stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984), which emphasizes leaders' responsibilities to diverse constituencies (Brown & Treviño, 2006).

The distinctiveness of ethical leadership from related constructs has been examined in multiple studies. While sharing elements with transformational, authentic, and servant leadership, ethical leadership maintains unique emphases on normative appropriateness, ethical guidance, and principled decision-making (Brown & Treviño, 2006; Walumbwa et al., 2008). Ethical leadership has been associated with numerous positive outcomes, including enhanced follower commitment, job satisfaction, organizational citizenship behaviors, and reduced counterproductive behaviors (Ng & Feldman, 2015).

Empirical Review

Kim et al. (2021) study on the power of ethical leadership: the influence of corporate social responsibility on creativity, the mediating function of psychological safety, and the moderating role of ethical leadership used online survey system and collected survey data from working Korean employees across three different time points. The study selected randomly selected 520 respondents who currently work in an organization among the 1,300,000 panelists with a total of 311 participants responded to the survey. The study found that CSR enhances employees' creativity via mediation of psychological safety. Additionally, ethical leadership positively moderates the relationship between CSR and psychological safety and

suggested that psychological safety in employees functions as an important underlying mechanism to describe the CSR–employee creativity link.

Nicolaides (2021) presents an empirical investigation into how corporate social responsibility (CSR) and ethical business conduct contribute to sustainability through a stakeholder-oriented approach. The study uses a qualitative methodology, drawing data from case studies and existing literature to explore how organizations incorporate ethical principles and CSR into their strategic operations. Findings indicate that businesses that engage proactively with stakeholders including employees, customers, communities, and governments are more likely to implement sustainable practices effectively. The paper emphasizes that ethical conduct, transparency, and stakeholder engagement are not only moral imperatives but also strategic tools for achieving long-term sustainability. Nicolaides concludes that the integration of CSR into business frameworks, when guided by ethical standards, leads to improved corporate reputation, stakeholder trust, and overall sustainable development outcomes.

Mehran et al. (2021) investigated the simultaneous effect of ethical leadership (EL) and corporate social responsibility (CSR) on employees' turnover intention and examine the mediating mechanism in these relationships. The study conducted a field study of 851 employees across a variety of industries. This study applied partial least squares structural equation modelling for hypothesis testing. The results showed that employees' perceptions of CSR as well as EL are both uniquely and negatively related to turnover intention. The authors also found that employees' job satisfaction but not commitment, mediates these relationships.

Chikelu et al. (2020) explored the construct of ethical leadership, the antecedents and outcomes of corporate social responsibility and organizational performance. The objective was to investigates the influence of ethical leadership values in the firm's performance with regards to her economy, operational, commercial and its relationship with corporate social responsibility. Data were collected from 196 respondents from food and beverage companies in South East Nigeria. The conceptual model designed was empirically tested and the major result indicated that ethical leadership has a significant positive effect on corporate social responsibility (CSR) and the general organizational operational performance. On the other hand, corporate social responsibility (CSR) was found to have statistical positive effect on commercial, operational and organizational performance while operational performance significantly and positively influences commercial performance that propels economic performance.

Heba (2019) examined the relationship between Ethical leadership and corporate social responsibility. Data collected from Halliburton Company in Saudi Arabia. He applied to a sample of 48 managers and 95 employees, The results of the study showed that there is a significant relationship between Ethical leadership and corporate social responsibility. He recommended that in order to increase and improve corporate social responsibly, leaders need to improve themselves in the ethical leadership dimensions that include people orientation, power sharing, and fairness, concern for sustainability, ethical guidance, integrity, and role clarification.

Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder theory was propounded by Freeman in 1984. The theory provides a foundational framework for understanding how organizations create value through relationships with diverse constituencies. This theory posits that organizational success depends on effectively managing relationships with stakeholders, including employees, customers, suppliers' communities, and shareholders. CSR initiatives represent systematic efforts to address stakeholder concerns and enhance these relationships (Donaldson & Preston, 1995).

Ethical leadership practices align with stakeholder theory through emphasizing fairness, transparency, and consideration of multiple perspectives in decision-making (Brown & Treviño, 2006). Ethical leaders effectively translate organizational CSR commitments into operational practices that enhance stakeholder

relationships creating mutual value that ultimately contributes to financial performance (Jones et al., 2018).

Social Learning Theory
Social learning theory was propounded by Bandura in 1977. The theory explains how individuals learn through observation, modeling, and reinforcement within social contexts. This theory provides insights into how ethical leadership transmits CSR values throughout organizations, as leaders model appropriate behaviors communicate normative expectations and reinforce desired actions (Brown et al., 2005).

Organizations with robust CSR commitments establish normative frameworks that influence leadership behaviors. These ethical leadership practices, in turn, shape employee understanding, attitudes and behaviors related to CSR initiatives. Through cascading effects across organizational levels ethical leadership translates CSR principles into consistent operational practices that enhance performance outcomes (Mayer et al., 2009).

Resource-Based View
The resource-based view was propounded by Barney (1991). The theory conceptualizes organizations as bundles of resources and capabilities that can provide sustainable competitive advantage when they are valuable, rare, inimitable and non-substitutable. CSR initiatives can develop intangible resources including reputational capital stakeholder relationships, and organizational knowledge (Surroca et al., 2010).

Ethical leadership represents a valuable organizational capability that effectively deploys and leverages CSR-related resources. Through consistent ethical behavior, transparent communication and principled decision-making, ethical leaders enhance the value-creation potential of CSR initiatives. This complementarity between CSR resources and ethical leadership capabilities contribute to sustainable competitive advantage and superior financial performance (Maak et al., 2016).

METHODOLOGY
This study employed a quantitative explanatory research design to explore the relationship between Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives and ethical leadership behaviors within international organizations, using the ECOWAS Head Office as a contextual reference. Rather than primary data collection, the study relied entirely on secondary data sourced from peer-reviewed journal articles, organizational reports, and scholarly publications. The explanatory approach was chosen to identify and analyze patterns, theoretical linkages, and empirical findings from existing literature, enabling a comprehensive understanding of how CSR initiatives are associated with ethical leadership outcomes in similar institutional settings.

A systematic literature review was conducted to extract relevant data from studies published between 2013 and 2024. Academic databases such as JSTOR, Scopus, Google Scholar, and ScienceDirect, etc. were used to retrieve studies that specifically addressed CSR dimensions (e.g., environmental protection, community engagement, employee welfare, transparency) and ethical leadership constructs (e.g., leading by example, accountability, stakeholder engagement). The inclusion criteria emphasized empirical studies with clear methodological rigor, measurable constructs, and findings relevant to international or regional organizations. Data analysis involved synthesizing results across studies, identifying common trends and discrepancies, and applying correlation and regression interpretations where such statistical results were reported. This method provided a robust evidence base for drawing explanatory conclusions without direct interaction with research participants.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Findings from the review of existing literature consistently demonstrate a strong and positive relationship between Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives and ethical leadership behaviors, particularly in public and international organizational contexts. The empirical findings across multiple studies,

including Nicolaides (2021), demonstrate a consistent and positive relationship between Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), ethical leadership, and improved organizational outcomes such as sustainability, employee retention, creativity, and financial performance. Nicolaides' qualitative analysis revealed that organizations adopting a stakeholder-focused approach to CSR, guided by ethical business conduct, are more likely to integrate sustainability into their operations and build long-term trust with internal and external stakeholders. Similarly, Chikelu et al. (2020) and Heba (2019) found that ethical leadership significantly enhances CSR practices, which in turn improves organizational performance, especially in operational and commercial domains. These results align with theoretical perspectives such as stakeholder theory and social learning theory, which suggest that ethical leadership not only models CSR behavior but also reinforces it through organizational structures, thereby enhancing legitimacy and value creation.

Furthermore, studies by Kim et al. (2021) and Mehran et al. (2021) provide additional quantitative support by linking CSR to employee-level outcomes through psychological and motivational mechanisms. Kim et al. demonstrated that CSR enhances employee creativity via psychological safety, and this relationship is strengthened by ethical leadership, highlighting the mediating and moderating roles of leadership in CSR effectiveness. Mehran et al. confirmed that both CSR and ethical leadership are negatively related to turnover intention, mediated by job satisfaction. These findings underscore the role of ethical leadership as a strategic asset that operationalizes CSR values and aligns them with employee engagement and organizational goals. Collectively, these results suggest that CSR initiatives are most effective when integrated with ethical leadership, creating a synergistic impact on performance, stakeholder satisfaction, and sustainable development.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study set out to explain the relationship between Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives and ethical leadership behaviors within international organizations, using ECOWAS as a contextual reference point. Drawing on secondary data from peer-reviewed journals and organizational reports, the findings affirm that CSR and ethical leadership are interdependent and mutually reinforcing constructs. Ethical leadership plays a crucial role in the successful implementation of CSR by setting the tone for organizational values, accountability, and stakeholder engagement. Conversely, well-integrated CSR initiatives contribute to the development of ethical leadership by providing the structural and cultural frameworks within which ethical behaviors can flourish. Among the CSR dimensions, transparency, accountability, and employee welfare are most consistently linked with ethical leadership traits such as leading by example, empowering employees, and balancing stakeholder interests.

Moreover, the literature emphasizes that in regional and international organizations, where legitimacy and trust are paramount, CSR initiatives serve not only a moral function but also a strategic one. Transparency and human rights initiatives, in particular, were found to enhance leadership credibility and stakeholder trust elements that are vital for the effectiveness and public image of bodies like ECOWAS. However, the analysis also revealed gaps in areas such as community engagement and employee empowerment, which remain underdeveloped in many organizations despite their importance. Therefore, strengthening CSR frameworks and aligning them more closely with leadership development efforts can help foster a more ethical, inclusive, and accountable organizational culture. These insights offer a valuable roadmap for ECOWAS and similar institutions seeking to embed CSR more deeply into their leadership ethos and operational strategies.

In light of the strong relationship between CSR initiatives and ethical leadership behaviors identified through the literature review, international organizations like ECOWAS should prioritize the strategic integration of CSR principles into their leadership frameworks. First, enhancing transparency and accountability mechanisms is critical, as these elements consistently emerged as the strongest predictors of ethical leadership. ECOWAS should implement clear reporting systems, regular stakeholder updates, and internal audits that promote openness in decision-making. Embedding transparency into leadership evaluation and reward systems can further reinforce ethical conduct at all levels of the organization.

Second, employee welfare and empowerment should be addressed in tandem. While many organizations excel in providing welfare-related programs, literature suggests a gap when it comes to involving employees in decision-making processes. ECOWAS is encouraged to develop leadership practices that support participatory governance, delegation of responsibility, and inclusive communication. Additionally, community development efforts should be expanded, particularly around organizational headquarters, to align external CSR efforts with internal values and improve regional impact. To sustain these efforts, leadership development programs should explicitly incorporate CSR training framing social responsibility not just as an operational goal, but as a core leadership competency. By doing so, ECOWAS can cultivate a generation of leaders whose ethical behavior is grounded in institutional responsibility and stakeholder commitment.

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