



A Framework of the Business Ethics, Ethical Climate and Sustainability for Organizations: An Assessment in the Lenses of Ethical Theories

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Abstract

Ethics is as old as human history and serves as a guide in the business world and society. Business ethics is a guide in individuals' and organizations' relationships by allowing them to distinguish between right and wrong, good and bad. Ethical climate, as part of organizational culture, encompasses procedures, codes, norms and moral standards. It provides a framework for employees to adopt and encourage appropriate behavior. Ethical decision-making is one of the criteria for an organization to adapt to the changing environment and is a fundamental tool of sustainability. Sustainability means meeting today's needs while leaving a livable world to future generations. Business ethics, ethical climate, ethical decision-making and sustainability are concepts that complement each other. In this study, a literature review was conducted to understand the basic ethical theories and the interrelations among business ethics, ethical climate and sustainability concept. Thus, general evaluations were made upon business ethics and ethical decision-making within the lenses of organizational sustainability.

I. Introduction

Throughout history, many philosophers such as Kant, Plato, and Aristotle have worked on ethics, and their thoughts are still valid today. The question of why people should be ethical, asked by Aristotle more than two thousand years ago, has been tried to be answered by many different thinkers. The word ethics is derived from the Greek word "ethos" and means "character". Ethics can be defined as the capability of separate and act the good and bad or the right or wrong (Acar et al, 2018). Ethics is in a close relationship with the concept of morality. Although the terms ethics and morality are often used interchangeably in the literature, there are some differences between them. While ethics is considered as a discipline that

systematically examines moral issues, morality is generally used as a general concept in which individuals evaluate right and wrong, good and bad (Özler et al., 2010).

The idea of ethics has been defined so many different ways that it seems to have destroyed anyone meaning. For example, "*ethics is the study of good and bad, right and wrong, just and unjust*" according to Steiner-Aeschliman (1999). Likewise, De George (1999) describes ethics as an effective effort to understand our own social and moral experiences in order to determine the moral principles that should govern human behavior, the ideals worth pursuing, and the character traits meriting success in life. According to Beauchamp and Childress (1983), the study of ethics focuses on comprehending the moral facets of life, including standards for appropriate social behavior. Furthermore, according to Schwartz and Bilsky (1987), moral principles are personal ideas or convictions that serve as a framework for making decisions about or assessing behavior. On the other hand, ethics is the study of moral standards or values that determine whether a behavior is good or bad according to McShane and Von Glinow (2000). However, Velasquez (1998) defines ethics as the practice of assessing a person's or a society's moral values, questioning how they relate to our lives, and determining if they are reasonable or irrational. According to Solomon (1994), ethics is the pursuit of and comprehension of the good life—a life worth living. He continues by asserting that, in general, it is a question of perspective: putting each action and objective in its proper context, comprehending what is worthwhile to do and what is not, knowing what is worthwhile to desire and have and knowing what is not worthwhile to want and have.

Moreover, ethics can be defined as intrinsic value of individuals that may have an impact on behavioral intentions and acts. Cooke



(1990) asserts that ethics seeks to provide logical, universally applicable moral principles. Additionally, Richard Norman (1998) claims that the field of philosophy typically referred to as "ethics" or "moral philosophy" is the attempt to comprehend the nature of human values, how we should live, and what constitutes ethical behaviour. According to Ramadan (2010), ethics may be conceptualized in a variety of ways. It comes from many worlds and finds its true validity in its independence from both the person and the object it is utilized with. Lastly, Kakabadse et al. (2002) implied that most of the ethical research is based on two philosophical viewpoints. The first philosophical perspective is "*contrasting the good of the individual with the good of the community*" and is known as *teleological*. The second view known as *deontological* is "*the relative social norms, rights, and duties in various cultures and communities*".

In this context, ethics provides a set of standards for behavior that helps us decide how we ought to act in a range of situations. In a sense, we can say that ethics is all about making choices, and about providing reasons why we should make these choices. Ethical theories are statements or accounts of what moral standing or responsibility people should ascribe to. They seek to suggest ethical directions people should consider when making ethics-based decisions.

In sum, in today's rapidly changing world, the concept and importance of ethics has increased even more. There was a significant increase in attention given to ethics and corporate morality, particularly spurred by notorious corporate scandals (Müller et al., 2014). The importance of business ethics, which ensures that all processes in organizations are carried out fairly and transparently, was understood in the 1960s (Doğan, 2009). This justice and transparency can be achieved through ethical climate, ethical decision-making, and ethical codes. Ethical climate is instrumental in creating a work environment that helps ethical standards, and maintain the sustainability with the help of ethical decision-making. Sustainability one of the main goals of any organizations and in order to maintain it all three dimensions of sustainability should be take into consideration.

Based on these considerations, the current study examines the basic ethical theories, business ethics, ethical climate, ethical decision-making, and the dimensions of sustainability within an integrative framework.

II. Ethical Theories

Ethics effectively contributes to the establishment of social order by playing a regulatory role in social relations. Ethics, philosophically rooted in two fundamental approaches, can be categorized as deontological, emphasizing fairness through adherence to rules, and teleological, which evaluates ethical outcomes based on whether they outweigh the associated costs (Müller, 2014). The idea of ethics has been defined so many different ways that it seems to have destroyed anyone meaning. For example, "*ethics is the study of good and bad, right and wrong, just and unjust*" according to Steiner-Aeschliman (1999). Likewise, De George (1999) describes ethics as an effective effort to understand our own social and moral experiences in order to determine the moral principles that should govern human behavior, the ideals worth pursuing, and the character traits meriting success in life. According to Beauchamp and Childress (1983), the study of ethics focuses on comprehending the moral facets of life, including standards for appropriate social behavior.

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To sum up, ethics provides a set of standards for behavior that helps us decide how we ought to act in a range of situations. In a sense, we can say that ethics is all about making choices, and about providing reasons why we should make these choices. Ethical theories are statements or accounts of what moral standing or responsibility people



should ascribe to. They seek to suggest ethical directions people should consider when making ethics-based decisions.

1.1 Deontological ethic

In the deontological approach, there are both absolute rules, such as Kant's Categorical Imperative, which hinges on three principles: the universal applicability of reasons for action, the transitivity achieved by applying these reasons to both others and oneself, and individuality, derived from treating each person as a free and rational individual (Müller, 2014).

Kant wanted to understand what makes behavior moral. He believed that true moral actions happen when people set aside their emotions and personal desires, doing something because they feel it's their duty. According to him, real moral behavior comes from a sense of obligation rather than personal feelings or tendencies (Türkeri, 2017)

Deontological ethics represents duty ethics and places the focus on the behavior itself rather than the consequences when evaluating the moral value of a behavior. By focusing on whether the action complies with moral rules, the moral value of a behavior is based on the intrinsic qualities of the action, and the importance of the consequences becomes secondary.

Deontological ethical theories are divided into two: rights and justice approaches (Çelikol, 2017). Rights ethics emphasizes that individuals inherently possess rights solely by virtue of being human. On the other hand, justice ethics contends that equality under the law should be extended to everyone, and any behavior or attitude leading to an unjust outcome is deemed unacceptable. In addition, deontological ethics can be considered as duty-based ethical theories. It emphasizes the nature of the action and also its motives under it in order to understand if it is wrong or right. Compared to utilitarianism, consequences do not matter while deciding if the act is ethically right or wrong. It is the set of rules that determine what motive to act from and what action you should make. According to deontological ethics, some types of actions such as stealing or breaking a promise are not simply wrong because not only do they have bad consequences but also have some autonomous moral weight against them. A common deontological argument holds that there are moral restrictions on pursuing desires like love, happiness, and serenity. Deontological ethics suggest that particular actions are intrinsically morally right or wrong. Killing, deliberate

dishonesty, or humiliation are immoral by nature because of anything about them.

Immanuel Kant (1724 – 1804), the most prominent deontologist, tested the formulation to decide if an act is intrinsically wrong is based on the intellectual requirement of logical consistency. According to Kant, the ultimate basis of morality lies in how people intend to behave rather than how they really act (Benlahcene et al., 2018). Moral standards are vital and universal, thus they always dictate a certain path of behavior for everyone. According to the literature, there are different classifications of deontological ethics which are (1) rule deontology, and (2) act deontology will be explained in the following (Benlahcene et al., 2018).

a. Rule deontology

Rule deontology claims that in all situations people ought to be guided by a set of predetermined rules or principles, thus, the action is judged to be ethical or unethical as compared to the rules themselves, not by the consequences of that action. As Kant formulated a moral standard which called “the categorical imperative”. Kant demonstrated two distinctive foundations for this moral standard. First one is his metaphysics of moral which means “Act only according to maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law”. This foundation explains the procedure for considering whether an action is morally acceptable or right. If the rule is consistent with statements, then the rule might be followed, and the action is morally permissible (Benlahcene et al., 2018).

b. Act deontology

Act deontology explains that people should act toward others in a specific way simply because they are human beings. Additionally, we must respect others' dignity and their unconditional values by always treating them as ends in themselves and never as just means. Kant gives an example to illustrate what does it mean to consider others as ends in themselves and never as means. For instance, let us assume that you need a certain amount of money, to get that money, you need to get a loan, but you know that you are not able to repay it. So, since you are desperate, you will think of giving false promise to repay that money just to convince a friend into giving you that money. What would you do? Maybe your intention is to use that money for good purpose, very good one, actually, you may ponder about it, and you will be convinced that lying in this case is justified.



However, if you lied to your friend, you would simply be deceiving him, and using that friend to your end. This is what Kant means when he says: *“rational beings...ought to always be esteemed also as ends, that is, as beings who must be capable of containing in themselves the end of the very same action”* (Benlahcene et al., 2018).

1.2 Teleological ethics

The theory of morality known as teleological ethics, often referred to as consequentialist ethics, derives moral responsibilities or obligations from what is desirable or good as a goal to be accomplished. According to the teleological approach, an act is morally correct if it results in a larger ratio of good to evil than any possible act, and it is morally wrong if it results in the exact reverse. According to teleological ethics, happiness refers to pleasure and the absence of suffering; sadness, on the other hand, refers to pain and the deprivation of pleasure; activities are good as they generate and encourage the greatest happiness, and incorrect as they cause unhappiness. As such, teleological ethics attaches importance to the consequences of what it focuses on and the outcomes of the decisions made. In this context, egoism and utilitarianism stand out among teleological theories. Egoists prioritize their own interests when making decisions. It is examined in two types: individual and universal. Individual side of egoism, thinks only of his own interests; if the universal ethic is egoist, it can take into account the interests of others. The egoist may serve the welfare of others, abide by ethical rules, but these actions are means of achieving his own personal ends (Çelikkol, 2017).

Utilitarian ethics is another ethical approach, derived from the ancient understanding of hedonism, turned into a systematic theory by Jeremy Bentham in the 18th century, and developed by John Stuart Mill in the 19th century. The principle of teleological ethics is a principle represented in classical utilitarianism, according to which actions should be such that they "maximize" the amount of pleasure and "minimize" the amount of pain. In this context, utilitarian ethics represents a social approach that aims to provide the greatest amount of happiness for the greatest number of people. This ethical theory aims to improve the general welfare of society (AydinhandYolvermez, 2023). Utilitarian ethics is an approach in which actions aim to maximize the general well-being of society. It has advantages such as universal applicability, but it also has disadvantages such as

the risk of ignoring individual rights, especially the minorities in the society.

With that respect, the teleological ethics is a collection of ideas that are united by a same central tenet, according to which the moral worth of deeds, motivations, or laws is determined by the amount of good they produce or the amount of bad they enable us to avoid. Teleological ethics suggest that our fundamental responsibility is to act in a way that optimizes the best outcomes. We should aim for whatever creates the greatest balance of happiness over suffering for everyone impacted by our activities. According to the literature, there are different classifications of teleological ethics which are (1) ethical egoism, (2) act utilitarianism and (3) rule utilitarianism will be explained in the following (Benlahcene et al., 2018).

a. Ethical egoism

According to ethical egoism, an individual's behavior is determined ethical or unethical based on its potential to further personal interests. Ethical egoism explains that we ought to do whatever to maximize our own self-interests, no matter how our actions might affect others. According to ethical egoism, the interest of others are not the main aim therefore all other effects of the action are not related to the ethical decision. An action is just considered only if the outcomes of that action are more beneficial to the individual than any other alternative action.

In sum, ethical egoism claims that desire and accept that X harm us if this would maximize his self-interest meanwhile self-defeating can be considered as problem with ethical egoism concept. Despite emphasizing their personal satisfaction, egoists are almost certain to be dissatisfied as a result of their ethical egoistic perspective. When we act egoistically, we will be loathed by others and may even come to despise ourselves. In actuality, there are more conflicts between the interests of the individual and the common good than most people would anticipate (Benlahcene et al., 2018).

b. Utilitarianism

According to the utilitarianism perspective, an act is considered right if it is useful for creating happiness. Happiness is considered a sum of pleasure and pleasure is good while pain is bad in this doctrine. An act is considered right unless it produces good and prevents the bad. So that, during the making choices and decisions individuals should find out which action will produce happiness compared to unhappiness and pain; however if individuals do not, that means



they have made the wrong decision or action. Utilitarianism has three basic components. First of all, this consequentialist perspective means the outcomes of the action counting in deciding if it is right or wrong. Secondly, it holds that happiness is good. So, things such as money, friendship, status etc are instrumental goods since they are ways of achieving happiness. Lastly, the greatest happiness principle is the most fundamental moral principle according to this perspective (Benlahcene et al., 2018).

c. Act utilitarianism

Act consequentialists hold that morally appropriate decisions are those that result in or are anticipated to result in either the very best outcomes or outcomes that are at least as good as other options available to a person at the moment. The type of action Whether or not it makes reference to norms, utilitarianism is independent from them. However, guidelines rather than being an inflexible component of moral behavior may be provided through rules. According to act utilitarianism, every action is weighed against its potential to bring about the most happiness for the greatest number of people (Benlahcene et al., 2018).

d. Rule utilitarianism

According to rule utilitarianism, morally righteous behavior conforms to the best social norms, which are those that would lead to the best outcomes if they were broadly accepted or followed. According to the rule utilitarianism viewpoint, we should act in a way that will have the greatest positive effects on society as a whole. It contends that if we follow rigorous guidelines in particular areas, such as murder or drugs, we will live better. Without guidelines, we will engage in unreasonable behavior. People follow behavioral patterns in addition to rules, according to rule utilitarianism, which applies the theory to those rules rather than to people's individual acts. In this kind of utilitarianism, we measure the usefulness of people in society by adhering to many potential norms instead of acting in various ways (Benlahcene et al., 2018).

III. Business Ethics

Before the 1960s, business ethics was often viewed as centered around religion; While the Catholic perspective emphasized the plight of the poor and the rights of workers, the Protestant work ethic encouraged hard work. By the 1970s, business ethics became a separate discipline and

business schools began to offer courses on this subject (Çelikkol,2017).To better understand business ethics, it is necessary to examine stakeholder theory. Donaldson and Preston et al. (1995) suggest that businesses should not only focus on financial gain, but also take into account the expectations and needs of all stakeholders such as customers and suppliers. Ethical values must be taken as a basis when meeting expectations and needs, otherwise sustainability cannot be achieved in the long term.

The study of business practices, judgments, and circumstances where right and wrong are addressed is known as business ethics. The key causes of this are that business now has more clout and influence in society than ever before. Business ethics is crucial because it sheds fresh light on both the classic and current views of ethics. It also assists us in identifying the advantages and drawbacks of ethical dilemmas inside the company. Crane and Matten (2007) introduced morality, which is concerned with the norms, values, and beliefs set in the social process that help right and wrong for an individual or social community, in order to explain the "right and wrongs" in corporate ethics. Ethics is characterized as the study of morality and the use of reason that clarifies laws and principles, also known as ethical theories, that determine what is appropriate and inappropriate in a given circumstance. While the "rights and wrongs" of doing business are the focus of business ethics theory, *feminist ethics theory* places more emphasis on empathy, loving care for others, good social relationships, and avoiding damage. In a company, taking care of one another is a social responsibility rather than just a business goal.

Additionally, the context in which ethics are practiced must be taken into consideration. This is significant because organizations are networks of acts, which affect the levels and connections across communities (Casey, 2006). *Discourse ethics theory*, on the other hand, is focused on conflict resolution through nonviolent means. A sort of argument known as discourse ethics, sometimes known as argumentation ethics, seeks to establish ethical truths by examining the premises of language (Habermas, 1996). According to Meisenbach (2006), such kind of settlement would help to foster openness and encourage cultural reason. In the notion of *virtue ethics theory*, moral perfection, goodness, chastity, and excellent character are emphasized. Virtue is a way to behave in a certain circumstance. Since a habit may be thoughtless, this is not a habit (Annas, 2003). It is



referred to as disposition with choice or decision by Aristotle. Virtue has both affective and intellectual components. In virtue ethics theory, the affective component refers to "doing the right thing and having good feelings," whereas the intellectual component refers to "doing the right thing for the right reason." For an organization, in order to achieve the intangibles, virtue ethics are essential. Virtue ethics emphasizes the virtue of a person in order to encourage them to act ethically upright (Crane and Matten, 2007). A person's virtues are a group of qualities that enable them to live a good life. In the meantime, the notion of *postmodern ethicstheory* addresses the inner thoughts and "gut feelings" of a situation in addition to the outward appearance of morality. It offers a more comprehensive strategy, allowing businesses to prioritize targets achievement while ignoring or placing little emphasis on values, which will have long-term negative effects.

2.1. Impacts of Business Ethics

Nowadays, if businesses do not comply with business ethics norms, it is inevitable that they will suffer a loss of reputation from society. Nowadays, businesses are evaluated not only by their financial strength, but also by their reputation, honesty and contribution to society. Society is sensitive to unethical practices such as misleading advertisements, products harmful to health and environmental pollution, and reacts to such businesses. A decrease in demand for shares in publicly traded companies may lead to companies withdrawing from the market. Therefore, professionals in the business world must be responsible, considering their own interests as well as the interests of their employees, society and the environment (Çelikkol, 2017).

Ekiztepe's (2011) research on businesses in the accommodation sector shows that employees with ethical values have a positive perception of justice, and this increases the ability of businesses to provide quality service. Employees demonstrate their ability to provide high-quality service by effectively resolving ethical issues. The researcher also stated that unethical practices within the organization may negatively affect employees' perception of justice, and this may negatively affect the quality of organizational life.

It is fact that if distributive justice in group dynamics is not equal, deviant workplace behaviors that harm production, property, political, and personal aspects may occur within the group. These behaviors include leaving early, wasting resources, gossiping, sabotage, verbal abuse, blaming

coworkers, intentionally working slowly, and stealing from the organization (Robbins, 2003). In addition, social loafing is also another negative effect of inequal distributive justice. Social loafing occurs as a result of the individual showing less performance when working in a group than when working individually (Manğuş and Tolay, 2022).

As seen in the Enron case, corruption is an unethical attitude and causes the organization to terminate its activities. Additionally; acting favoritism in recruitment or tenders, misusing duties and authority, gossiping, and mobbing are also unethical attitudes, both individually and organizationally.

2.1. Ethic Codes

"Ethic codes" within organizations typically represent the moral guidelines and behavioral standards adopted by an organization, professional group, or specific institution. These codes may take the form of a document or statement outlining a specific set of ethical rules or principles of conduct. In the business world, a company's ethic code serves as a compass for employees and managers, offering guidance on behavior and addressing areas such as integrity, transparency, fair competition, and customer confidentiality.

A written code of ethics can emphasize the social responsibility of the organization and specify how various ethical issues should be approached. These documents generally aim to gain and maintain the trust of employees, customers and other stakeholders and protect the reputation of the organization. In a study conducted in 2005, the moral values and codes of companies operating in various sectors were examined. These codes include being honest, trustworthy and fair while working, creating an organizational culture within the framework of ethical behavior, always taking company values into consideration and avoiding conflicts of interest (Schwartz, 2005). Although normative research on codes of ethics is important, there is a deficiency in determining universal moral values for corporate codes of ethics. Organizations face the challenge of creating common ethical codes for their all employees. Bribe, software piracy, child labor, discrimination and sexual harassment highlight are the challenges for organizations to writing codes of ethical behavior both locally and internationally (Schwartz, 2005).



IV. Ethical Decision Making and Ethical Climate

Throughout human history, management activities have included efforts to achieve certain goals in different areas. The concept of management was accepted as the simple execution of daily tasks until the late 1950s. However, after the industrial revolution, studies in the field of management increased in order to adapt to environmental changes, and management became a science that interacts with different fields.

The human relations approach, which developed in the light of Hawthorne studies after the 1920s, emphasized the efficiency of organizational communication and relationships. During this period, decision theory was added to management science. Decision theory is divided into two main groups: classical rational and limited rational. According to classical rational theory, the decision-making individual prioritizes his or her own interests and makes rational choices accordingly. However, Herbert Alexander Simon (1965) criticized this theory and introduced his limited rational theory. According to Simon, decision-makers cannot always be fully rational due to organizational, environmental, or internal limitations. Despite the factors that limit human behavior within the organization, decision-makers exhibit goal-oriented or satisfaction-seeking behaviors. A decision-maker who aims for a certain goal chooses the most appropriate or satisfactory one among various ways to achieve this goal. In this way, the decision maker makes satisfying decisions to achieve the most satisfactory results (Güngör and Özcan, 2022).

The decision-making process is a process that begins with defining the problem and ends with identifying alternatives and choosing the best one. In order to achieve the targeted efficiency and effectiveness in organizations, this process must be creative. Employee involvement in decision-making processes has positive effects such as organizational commitment, increasing motivation, and customer satisfaction.

Exemplifying a relationship between the theories mentioned under the heading of ethical theories and decision-making allows us to better understand both theories and decision-making. In ethical decision-making within project management, a deontological approach centers on adhering strictly to established rules and principles. A project manager may resist taking a potential shortcut, even if it promises time savings, to uphold project management standards and ethical guidelines. On the other hand, a teleological

approach evaluates actions based on their overall outcomes for stakeholders. The decision to take or avoid the shortcut is determined by an evaluation of whether the overall benefits outweigh the costs in achieving a favorable project outcome. As a result, they are two very different approaches and there are no guidelines for their use.

On the other side, the term "ethical climate" is about the collective understanding among individuals regarding the suitable behavior and conduct expected in the organization and within their respective tasks (Mitonga-Monga, 2018). Ethic involves the capacity to distinguish desirable and undesirable behavior, feelings, and attitudes. Climate, on the other hand, is the organizational method for encouraging these aspects (Acar et al., 2018).

Ethical climate can be defined as clear procedures, norms, and moral standards accepted by individuals and followed by them while working in an organization. Additionally, ethical climate reflects the general atmosphere of the individuals' and managers' perception related to the behaviors (Kul, 2017).

There are three antecedents of ethical climate: individual, organizational, and environmental. Individual antecedents focus on employee and leader characteristics, examining factors such as demographics, personality variables, and moral values. Leadership styles, including transformational leadership, are highlighted for their impact on ethical climate development. Organizational antecedents encompass various factors such as department/unit structure, company type, and characteristics like firm newness and organizational age. The influence of boards of directors in nonprofit versus for-profit organizations is noted. Organizational structure, size, and the presence of ethical codes also contribute to shaping ethical climates. Environmental antecedents consider societal norms, regional differences, and national culture, with studies suggesting that community norms and national culture can impact ethical climate perceptions (Yaldiran, 2010).

Ethical climate is based on Social Information Processing Theory (1978) developed by Salancik and Pfeffer. According to this theory, individuals interpret acceptable behavior by observing their work environments, and ethical climate is seen as a force that guides employees to distinguish ethical and unethical actions (Taştan, 2019). Later, based on this conceptual foundation, Barnett and Vaicys found that ethical climate perceptions indirectly influence employees'



attitudes and behavioral intentions. Ethical judgments developed within certain climate types mediate the relationship between perceptions and behaviors. Finally, Victor and Cullen (1988) emphasized the important role of moral issues in influencing employee behavior, he suggested that employees' perceptions of what is considered moral behavior and values within an organization shape their decisions (Victor and Cullen, 1988). As a result, the situational characteristics of the organizational ethical climate significantly affect employees' perceptions, evaluations and subsequent action plans.

The significance of an ethical climate within an organization cannot be overlooked. It influences the behaviors and attitudes of employees, shaping whether their actions align with ethical principles or not. A positive ethical climate serves as a powerful tool for fostering and improving the ethical attitudes and behaviors of individuals within the organizational context. Additionally, a strong ethical climate is crucial for maintaining the organization's reputation and credibility. It sets the foundation for ethical decision-making, ensuring that choices are guided by principles that prioritize the well-being of individuals and the collective interests of the organization. Finally, an ethical climate is instrumental in creating a work environment that helps ethical standards, and maintain the sustainability.

3.1. Development of Ethical Climate and the Antecedent Factors

Ethical climate is one of the important elements that regulate the relationships within the organization and the attitudes of employees. Victor and Cullen (1988) proposed two dimensions of ethical climate with three positions in the theory of ethical climate. Their inspiration came from Kohlberg's (1990) research on moral development and Schneider and Reicher's (1983) exploration of sociocultural theories in organizational contexts.

According to Kohlberg's (1990) perspective, moral development progresses as an evolutionary process from childhood to adulthood. The first stage in which individuals' moral values are determined and taught by external authorities. At this level, people consider ethical issues from a selfish perspective and focus only on their own interests. The second stage is social relations where right and wrong are determined according to social norms. In this stage, individuals make moral evaluations in order to maintain social order and comply with the rules. The third stage of moral

development, in which individuals perceive the rules from their own selves based on their internal values and evaluate behaviors from a unique perspective (Taştan,2019).

Ethical climates, as conceptualized by Victor and Cullen (1988), encompass two dimensions: the ethical theories guiding decision-making and the recipients of these ethical systems. Climates range from self-interest and company profit to efficiency and friendship. Team interest combines benevolence and local considerations, while social responsibility blends benevolence and cosmopolitan views. Personal morality is principled with individual focus, Company Rules and Procedures are principled with local focus, and Laws and Professional Codes are principled with cosmopolitan focus. Organizations may have various combinations of these climates, shaping the overall ethical framework in the workplace (Victor and Cullen, 1988).

The ethical climate of an organization can be defined by five dimensions, and these dimensions are derived from the criteria mentioned above. These are: caring, law and codes, rules, instrumental and independence (Victor and Cullen, 1988). Among the identified climates, the caring climate stands out as a favored choice among employees, emphasizing decisions centered on the well-being of others, supported by organizational policies. The independence climate is characterized by individuals acting on personal moral convictions with minimal external influence, occupying a unique position at the intersection of principle and individual dimensions. In contrast, the law and code climate emphasize principled decision-making based on external codes, while the rules climate involves decisions guided by a robust set of local standards, including contemporary codes of conduct implemented by organizations. These findings shed light on the varied ethical preferences within organizational climates, influencing decision-making and conduct (Martin and Cullen, 2006).

When the antecedents of ethical climate are examined, it is seen that the factors influencing ethical climate in an organization are diverse and multifaceted. Key determinants include leadership behavior and practices, as leaders set the tone for ethical standards within the workplace. Organizational policies and procedures also play a crucial role, shaping the expectations and conduct of employees. The prevailing corporate culture, emphasizing values and norms, significantly contributes to the ethical climate.



Additionally, individual employee values, beliefs, and behaviors contribute to the overall ethical environment. External influences, such as legal and regulatory frameworks, industry standards, and societal expectations, further impact how ethical climate is shaped and maintained. Training and communication strategies employed by the organization also influence the dissemination and reinforcement of ethical principles. These interconnected factors collectively contribute to the establishment and evolution of the ethical climate within an organization.

As a result of the factors affecting ethical climate study conducted by Agarwal and Mayol (2003) in a non-profit organization; education and decision-making style play a role in the perception of ethical climate. It is suggested that to create and make effective the organizational ethical climate, the ethical values of leaders and followers must be addressed simultaneously and independently (Azhar et al., 2023). According to Kelley and Dorsch's (1991) research on salespeople and managers, recruitment, selection and organizational socialization can be considered as antecedents of ethical climate. Additionally, the independence and caring dimensions of ethical climate have been strengthened in non-profit organizations. These organizations can use this power in both internal and external marketing. Finally, the findings highlight the importance of considering members' intellectual abilities, encouraging power sharing, and adopting inclusive leadership styles.

3.2. Impacts of Ethical Climate

The ethical climate is shaped by perceptions of organizational practices with ethical implications. When making decisions affecting others, organizational members rely on the work climate to identify the morally acceptable option (Victor and Cullen, 1988). The established ethical climate within an organization is tangible, and its perception by employees can result in various organizational outcomes. For example; its impact on the behaviors and attitudes of employees, influencing whether their actions are with right or wrong due to standards (MumcuveDöven, 2016).

Ethical climate can affect role conflict among employees within the organization, individual performances, and organizational functioning (Kelley and Dorsch, 1991). For example, role conflict may arise when a marketing manager is under pressure to exaggerate the health benefits of a product for promotional purposes. From the perspective of individual performance, if

employees perceive weak ethical climate related to their values; their job satisfaction, commitment and performance may be negatively affected. Therefore, this affects corporate performance.

According to the ethical climate empirical research, the outcomes of ethical climate in terms of organizational behavior include organizational commitment, intention to leave, entrepreneurial innovation, relationship quality, positive working environment and trust (Mayer et al., 2009). For example, entrepreneurial innovation becomes more possible in an environment where an ethical climate is sustainably fostered within the company. This can increase the company's competitive advantage and support innovation.

Establishing an ethical atmosphere within organizations entails fostering a culture that goes beyond merely enforcing regulations, instead highlighting the essence of legality, collaboration, and alignment of interests within the organization. This necessitates cultivating an ethical climate among every employee and manager, where fundamental principles are distinctly expressed to provide guidance (Taştan, 2019).

V. Sustainability in Organizations

Sustainability is a multidimensional concept defined from the perspectives of various disciplines in the social sciences. It is known that it does not have a clear definition and is often explained by combining different concepts (Yılmaz and Yücel, 2022). The term sustainability was first used in forestry practices by Hans Carl von Carlowitz in Germany. In 1713, Carlowitz advocated against logging, advocating a balance between cutting down old trees and planting young trees, and emphasizing that forestry could be sustainable in this way (Du Pisani, 2006).

Sustainable development efforts dating back to the mid-20th century became evident with the 1972 Stockholm Conference and the 1987 Brundtland Report. At the 1992 Rio Conference, the balance of environment and development was emphasized and international agreements were developed. Agenda 21 addressed sustainable development by including sectoral action plans. The 2002 Johannesburg Summit evaluated global support and emphasized that sustainable development is a social responsibility, aiming to secure the well-being of future generations. This process includes important periods to establish the environment-development balance and emphasize social responsibility (Bruckmeier, 2020).

An empirical study conducted in 2013 has analyzed 253 articles incorporating the term



sustainability and found that in 91.3% of these articles, sustainability could not be described as an independent term but was attempted to be explained by connecting it with different concepts (Salas-Zapata et al., 2017). Hence, in the following part of the current study, the definitions of sustainability will be provided and the main dimensions of sustainability will be examined.

4.1. Definition of Sustainability

The term of sustainability as a policy framework traces back to the Brundtland Report of 1987. The definition of sustainable development in the Brundtland report (1987) is as follows: “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” The report highlighted the delicate balance between our aspirations for a well-being and the finite resources and ecological boundaries that shape our existence (Kuhlman and Farrington, 2010). It emphasizes the importance of considering the needs of both the present and future generations, highlighting two fundamental concepts: meeting current needs and restricting the use of environmental resources.

The Brundtland Report provides a comprehensive review of the relations between developed and developing countries in the world system and criticizes the global gap between rich and poor. The report, similar to the report of the North-South Commission, supports the principle of global solidarity in the use of resources to bridge the global divide. This principle involves the equitable sharing and redistribution of resources across countries and generations. The Brundtland Report laid the foundation for sustainable development and emphasized the need to achieve balance in environmental, economic and social areas (Bruckmeier, 2020).

Sustainability in organizations refers to the ability of the organization to operate in a way that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. This can involve considering the environmental, social, and economic impacts of the organization's actions and making decisions that balance these three pillars of sustainability.

Sustainability is often seen as a necessity for organizations in today's world, as it can help to mitigate the negative impacts of business on the environment and society and can also be a source of innovation and competitive advantage. To achieve sustainability, organizations may need to adopt practices such as reducing their carbon emissions, conserving natural resources, and

promoting social and environmental responsibility. Organizations can reach sustainability in different ways, including through their operations, supply chain, products and services, and governance and leadership. By prioritizing sustainability, organizations can create long-term value for their stakeholders and contribute to a more sustainable future.

Sustainability can have a number of implications for organizations, including:

1. Environmental implications: Sustainability can help organizations reduce their environmental footprint and reduce their reliance on non-renewable resources.
2. Social implications: Sustainability can help organizations contribute to the well-being and happiness of the communities in which they operate.
3. Economic implications: Sustainability can help organizations reduce costs and increase efficiency by minimizing waste and resource consumption.
4. Reputational implications: Sustainability can help organizations enhance their reputation and brand image by demonstrating their commitment to social and environmental responsibility.

4.2. Dimensions of Sustainability

The sustainability concept encompasses three dimensions: environmental, social, and economic. Environmental sustainability addresses climate change, pollution prevention, resource conservation, open-space conservation, and biodiversity preservation. Social sustainability includes equity, safety, community development, and cultural heritage. Economic sustainability involves factors like productivity and affordability. Social sustainability includes equity, safety, community development, and cultural heritage.

The three dimensions of sustainability are linked. Alterations in one dimension have the potential to impact the others, showcasing the interdependence of these aspects.

a. Environmental Sustainability

Sustainability is a concept that can be summarized as the ability to transfer existing resources to future generations, and this understanding should be understood by all segments of society, from individuals to public institutions, from the private sector to local governments, from non-governmental organizations to state governments. While population growth brought about a rapid increase in the amount of cultivated land over time, factories



were established, machines were developed and various inventions were implemented with the industrial revolution. The environmental dimension of sustainability is related to the effects of an organization on living and non-living natural systems such as ecosystems, land, air and water (Karakus et al., 2018).

To ensure sustainability and equal opportunities for future generations, it is highlighted that the utilization rate of renewable resources should align with their renewal capacity. Preference for renewable resources, providing comparable functionalities, is encouraged over non-renewable alternatives. Echoing the sentiments of the Brundtland Report, the key emphasis is on using resources judiciously for current needs without unnecessary stockpiling, enabling equitable opportunities for generations to come (Eş, 2008). Various global environmental organizations have developed diverse principles and declarations, underscoring the presence of both renewable and non-renewable resources on Earth. These regulations stress the importance of individuals exercising sensitivity in resource utilization.

In this sustainability dimension, the examination of environmental outputs or wastes includes the release of substances resulting from the unnecessary use of resources into the air, water or soil that may harm human health or the environment. Monitoring environmental waste should not be limited to energy alone; various environmental assessments must also be made, including material and water consumption, solid waste generation, scrap, emissions, wastewater discharges and hazardous waste production (Karakus et al., 2018)

b. Social Sustainability

Social sustainability is a concept that aims to ensure that societies operate in a fair, inclusive and balanced way to meet the needs of current and future generations. Social sustainability aims for societies to develop in a structure that respects human rights, supports diversity and promotes social justice. In other words, under this sustainability, women, ethnic minorities, LGBTI+ individuals and disabled individuals must be equally respected in society.

Government policies aim at uplifting social communities for social sustainability. In order to reach the primary objectives of social sustainability are poverty reduction, social investment, and fostering safe, supportive communities. Collaboration among nations, social groups, and corporations is imperative to attain

these goals. Under social sustainability, there are dimensions such as social capital, equality, health and security (Talan et al., 2020).

c. Economic Sustainability

Economic sustainability includes issues such as an organization's profitability, operating costs, revenue fluctuations, financial performance, human, production, and natural capital management, as well as investment continuity (Eş,2008). The economic facet of sustainability encompasses the financial aspects of enterprises, their collaborators, and how they influence economic systems on local, national, and global scales.

Human capital, which is one of the headings under the economic dimension, is the value of the workforce, including skills such as knowledge, experience, creativity and leadership. This capital is an asset that constantly develops and offers long-term economic returns. Businesses cannot buy this value, but have the right to use it for a certain period of time. Human capital can increase the market value of businesses, but it does not appear directly in financial statements. When evaluating companies, investors consider not only profitability but also human capital, management systems and market value.

Neoclassical economics defines sustainability as maximizing welfare. However, this definition lacks a clear reason for environmental protection and allows unlimited use of natural capital (Harris, 2000). Herman Daly advocates reducing renewable energy use and replacing non-renewable resources with renewables. Hartwick J.M. suggests transforming natural capital for economic benefits, while Michael Toman proposes a minimum standard for natural resource use. Economists are generally classified as strong or weak pro-sustainability. Weak sustainability allows resource use and post-consumer waste, while strong sustainability emphasizes preserving natural capital and ensuring intergenerational equity (Eş,2008).

4.3. Sustainable Practices in Various Industries

Industries worldwide are embracing sustainable practices to mitigate environmental impact and promote social responsibility. In agriculture, energy, transportation, construction, technology, food, fashion, healthcare, finance, and tourism, diverse initiatives are underway. Examples range from organic farming and renewable energy adoption to green building standards, ethical fashion, and eco-friendly tourism. These efforts



highlight a global commitment to address environmental and social challenges, emphasizing resource optimization, reduced carbon footprint, and ethical considerations across sectors.

Adopting sustainable practices in the workplace, such as switching to LED lighting, implementing recycling programs, and allowing flexible work-from-home options, can significantly reduce environmental impact. Going paperless, striving for zero waste break rooms, and using water-saving fixtures contribute to eco-conscious operations. Considering renewable energy, choosing green web hosting, and responsibly managing e-waste align with sustainable energy practices. Replacing unnecessary business trips with video calls and encouraging greener commutes reduce carbon footprint. Additionally, some airlines focus on using sustainable pure fuel as a key element of their sustainability strategy. In addition, by supporting innovative studies, it contributes to achieving the decarbonization goal of sustainable aviation fuels at the global level.

VI. Conclusion and Discussion

Turning points such as the industrial revolution, economic depressions and technological developments have changed the way of working and affected the business world throughout the history. Today's business world is becoming more complex with the influence of globalization. In this complex world, ethics, ethical climate, ethical decision-making, and sustainability help organizations to maintain the success.

Ethics includes the ability of individuals and institutions to distinguish between right and wrong (Acar et al., 2018). In the current study, the basic theories of ethics have been examined and it is emphasized that deontological and teleological ethical views diverge in their fundamental principles and approaches. When the two theories are compared, deontology tends to focus on the intrinsic qualities of behavior, while teleology leans towards achieving favorable outcomes for the collective. Deontology centers on the inherent moral value of actions, guided by absolute rules and duty, irrespective of consequences. It places emphasis on principles derived from rights and justice ethics, safeguarding individual rights and advocating for fairness under the law. Teleological ethics, prioritizes the consequences of actions, aiming to maximize overall happiness and minimize pain for the greatest number. This approach, while universally applicable, carries the risk of potentially overlooking individual rights, especially those of minority groups in society

(Müller, 2014). At last, the choice between these ethical views' hinges on one's philosophical framework and values, with deontology highlighting duty and principled action and teleology emphasizing the pursuit of the greatest overall welfare.

Further, business ethics involves adhering to the organization's norms and expectations while also equitably considering moral principles, policies, and the well-being of others. Awareness of the need for business ethics has increased since the 1980s, because business ethics plays an active role in communicating values and norms. However, business ethics must be implemented in daily routines and must be written down in order to be effective. The potential of business ethics cannot be fully utilized if it is based only on intangible values (Taştan, 2019).

Recent changes in organizational roles and heightened societal expectations have influenced the perception of moral values. Globalization, technological advancements, and environmental considerations have broadened the scope of business ethics, transforming it into an interdisciplinary field and an essential component of sustainable development. Organizations' ethical behavior in decision-making processes ensures long-term success and sustainability. Sustainability can be summarized as thinking about the future while meeting today's needs, and argues that organizations should be sustainable not only in the economic dimension, but also in the social and environmental dimension.

For ethical organizations, sustainability means operating in a way that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. This includes a commitment to minimizing the environmental, social, and economic impacts of the organization's operations.

Ethical organizations are likely to prioritize sustainability in their operations and decision-making. This can include efforts to reduce their environmental impact, such as through the use of renewable energy, recycling and waste reduction, and eco-friendly materials and production processes. Ethical organizations may also work to minimize their social and economic impacts, such as through fair labor practices, community engagement, and philanthropy.

Sustainability is becoming increasingly important to consumers, investors, and other stakeholders, and ethical organizations that prioritize sustainability are likely to be better positioned to meet the evolving needs and



expectations of these stakeholders. In addition, sustainability can contribute to long-term business success by reducing costs, improving efficiency, and building a positive reputation. It is suggested that sustainability is an important consideration for organizations and can have significant implications for their operations and their impact on the world around them. By prioritizing sustainability, organizations can create long-term value for their stakeholders and contribute to a more sustainable future.

To conclude, organizations should adhere to ethics and include justice and transparency in decision-making processes in order to be and remain successful. Sustainability cannot be achieved without paying attention to ethical dimensions. For sustainability in an ethical context, it is necessary to consider not only efficiency but also moral values and goals (Aydınlı and Yolvermez, 2023). Additionally, embracing and implementing environmental and social sustainability is inevitable for organizations.

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