

Interactive Media Model for Enhancing Ethical Leadership in Sports Non-Governmental Organizations Inspired by Habermas's Communicative Theory

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Extended Abstract

Purpose

In the era of interactive communication, ethical leadership in sports non-governmental organizations (NGOs) can no longer rely solely on individual authority or hierarchical structures. Advances in communication technologies, particularly the emergence of interactive media, have created an opportunity for traditional leadership models to give way to approaches based on dialogue, transparency, and participation. In this context, Jürgen Habermas's communicative theory provides a theoretical and philosophical framework for analyzing how ethical leadership can be enhanced through interaction and rational communication. According to Habermas, the foundation of any democratic and ethically oriented society is "communicative action," a form of action aimed not at exercising power but at achieving mutual understanding through dialogue and reasoning. In such a framework, the legitimacy of decisions arises not from organizational position or official rank but from the conscious and rational acceptance of members. At the same time, in the era of interactive communication, the role of media in shaping new leadership styles has become increasingly prominent, especially in sports NGOs that operate with nonprofit and participatory objectives. This study aims to design a conceptual model for enhancing ethical leadership within the context of interactive media, inspired by Habermas's communicative theory.

Design/methodology/approach

This study employed a qualitative approach based on thematic analysis. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 19 experts in the fields of sports management, communications, and applied ethics, as well as with active members of NGOs. The interviews were conducted over a five-month period, from Azar to Farvardin in Persian calendar. The location of the interviews was arranged in advance, depending on the

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participants' preferences, either in person or virtually via video call. Each interview lasted between 45 and 70 minutes. All conversations were recorded with informed consent and transcribed verbatim. The interview process continued until theoretical saturation was reached; after the seventeenth interview, no new codes were extracted from the data, and the final two interviews served only to confirm the previously identified codes.

Research Findings

The data analysis led to the identification of 46 initial codes, 14 organizing themes, and five overarching themes. The overarching themes included the ethical foundations of leadership, interactive media as a platform for ethical action, communication principles based on Habermas's theory, challenges and barriers to achieving ethical leadership, and proposed strategies for reform and enhancement. The conceptual model of the study was designed as an interactive and nonlinear model, indicating that the realization of ethical leadership results from the interplay between leaders' internal values, a transparent and participatory media environment, a rational communicative pattern, and the ability to overcome communication challenges.

Conclusion

This study emphasizes that non-governmental organizations aiming to achieve effective ethical leadership require media literacy training, the institutionalization of ethical communication charters, and the utilization of interactive media grounded in dialogue and trust. The proposed model, highlighting the multidimensional and dynamic nature of the ethical leadership process, demonstrates that attaining ethical leadership is not the result of a single factor but rather the product of continuous interaction among internal, structural, and communicative components.

Limitations

The primary limitation of the present study is that the interactive media model based on Habermas's communicative theory has been mostly developed within the fields of philosophy, communication, and social sciences, and its application in sports management remains in the early stages. Therefore, future research can make a significant contribution by focusing on evaluating the effectiveness of the proposed strategies for enhancing ethical leadership in sports non-governmental organizations. In this regard, conducting empirical and quantitative studies to measure the impact of media ethics training, the development of ethical charters, and interactive communication structures could further enrich the existing knowledge.

Practical Implications

At the practical level, the interactive media model serves as a bridge between theory and practice, playing a key role in the ethical and communicative transformation of sports non-governmental organizations. This model elevates media from merely being an information-dissemination tool to becoming a platform for dialogue, collective learning, and the reconstruction of organizational trust. In other words, within this framework, media is not an instrument of power but a space for "communicative rationality" and "equality in expression," as emphasized by Habermas. Practically, leaders and managers of non-governmental organizations can utilize this model to establish interactive mechanisms that promote ethical engagement, transparency, and participatory decision-making.

Social Implications

The interactive media model, inspired by Habermas's communicative theory, carries

broad social implications and contributes to strengthening social capital, public trust, and the legitimacy of sports non-governmental organizations. By promoting ethical communication, honesty, accountability, and constructive dialogue, this model institutionalizes civic and socio-ethical values within society and fosters a culture of tolerance of differences and active citizen participation.

Originality and Innovation

The originality and innovation of this study are manifested in the development of an interactive media model to enhance ethical leadership in sports non-governmental organizations, inspired by Habermas's communicative theory. For the first time, this research applies Habermas's theoretical concepts to the field of sports and non-profit organizations, analyzing how media, leaders, and audiences interact to promote ethics and organizational transparency. Another innovation lies in the integration of media and ethical leadership, where media are positioned not merely as information tools but as platforms for interaction, dialogue, and active accountability. This approach enables the provision of practical and actionable strategies to improve organizational performance and social legitimacy, while also laying the groundwork for future research in ethical leadership and media governance in sports.

Keywords: Organizational Transparency, Voluntary Participation, Communicative Integrity, Ethical Capital, Accountability Culture