

Leading with Ethics and Values: Exploring the Impact on Social Innovation in the Public Sector

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Abstract

This study explores the role of ethical and values-based leadership in fostering social innovation in the public sector of Vietnam. With a growing need for innovative approaches to address complex societal challenges, the research examines how ethical leadership practices shape organizational cultures that promote innovation. Through qualitative interviews with public leaders, the study identifies three key themes: (1) moral framing of innovation as a social responsibility, (2) the creation of an empowering organizational culture that fosters psychological safety for employees, and (3) the exercise of ethical judgment to navigate institutional tensions and foster change. The findings reveal that leaders who prioritize ethics and values can create an environment where innovation thrives, even in the face of bureaucratic resistance and political constraints. This study contributes to the theoretical understanding of ethical leadership in the public sector and provides practical insights for public administrators aiming to drive social innovation. The research also highlights the importance of aligning innovation efforts with core societal values, fostering an inclusive environment that encourages risk-taking, and applying moral decision-making to overcome institutional barriers. The novel contribution of this study lies in its contextual focus on Vietnam, providing valuable insights into how public sector leaders in emerging economies can integrate ethics into their leadership practices to enhance social innovation.

Keywords : ethical leadership, social innovation, public sector, vietnam, psychological safety.



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1. Introduction

In recent years, public sector organizations across the globe have encountered growing pressures to address complex societal challenges that extend beyond the capacity of traditional governance mechanisms. From climate change to social inequality and public health crises, governments are expected to respond not only efficiently, but also ethically and innovatively (Johnson, 2020; Patz et al., 2007; Steiner et al., 2015). As a result, social innovation—the process of developing and implementing novel solutions to meet social needs—has gained prominence as a transformative agenda in public administration. Social innovation emphasizes collaboration, inclusivity, and value creation for society, demanding new forms of leadership that transcend bureaucratic routines and technocratic control (Hasan, 2023; Pogo, 2022). Within this evolving context, ethical and values-based leadership emerges as a critical enabler of sustainable and meaningful innovation in the public sector. Leadership in public institutions has long been recognized as a central determinant of organizational performance and public value creation (Hutagaluh et al., 2020). However, traditional models of leadership, often focused on administrative control or hierarchical authority, are increasingly inadequate in addressing dynamic and multidimensional public problems. A growing body of literature emphasizes the need for

leadership that is anchored in ethical principles and driven by core public values such as integrity, transparency, equity, and social justice (Brown & Treviño, 2006; Van Wart, 2013). Ethical leadership, in this regard, is not merely about compliance or moral behavior—it is about modeling and cultivating ethical cultures, empowering civil servants, and fostering public trust (Downe et al., 2016; Dziedzic, 2024; Mendonca & Kanungo, 2006; Mozumder, 2018; Mutuma, 2024). Simultaneously, values-based leadership underscores the alignment between leaders' actions and deeply held organizational or societal values, offering direction and legitimacy for public sector innovation.

In the context of social innovation, ethical and values-oriented leadership plays a dual role: it shapes the normative foundations of innovation efforts and guides the processes through which innovation is conceptualized and implemented. Leaders who prioritize ethical conduct and value congruence are more likely to engage stakeholders inclusively, navigate political complexities, and balance efficiency with equity. Moreover, such leadership fosters psychological safety, autonomy, and purpose among employees—conditions conducive to creative problem-solving and experimentation (Yukl, 2012; George, 2019). Nonetheless, empirical understanding of how ethical and values-based leadership concretely influences social innovation in public institutions remains limited, especially in non-Western and emerging contexts.

Vietnam, as a rapidly developing Southeast Asian nation, offers a compelling setting for exploring this relationship. Over the past three decades, the Vietnamese government has pursued extensive economic reforms and public sector modernization efforts, striving to increase administrative capacity, responsiveness, and transparency. Alongside these structural reforms, Vietnam faces mounting social challenges including environmental degradation, income disparity, and aging populations—all of which call for innovative public responses. Despite these challenges, social innovation in Vietnam's public sector is still in its early stages and largely underexamined in the academic literature. One distinctive feature of Vietnam's public administration system is its strong normative foundations grounded in Confucian ethics, socialist values, and collective responsibility, which coexist with a growing orientation toward efficiency and modernization. This cultural and institutional duality raises important questions about the role of leadership in navigating value tensions and fostering innovation. Specifically, how do public sector leaders in Vietnam integrate ethical and values-based approaches in initiating or supporting social innovation? What leadership behaviors, belief systems, or organizational conditions enable or constrain such integration?

While previous studies have addressed leadership and innovation separately in the public sector, few have examined their intersection from an ethical and values-oriented perspective. Even fewer have focused on Southeast Asian or transitional economies, where institutional logics, leadership norms, and cultural dynamics may differ significantly from Western liberal democracies that dominate the literature. In this sense, this study aims to fill a critical gap by investigating the impact of ethical and values-based leadership on social innovation within the Vietnamese public sector. By doing so, it contributes both contextually and theoretically to the understanding of leadership and innovation in public administration. Theoretically, the study is grounded in the intersection of ethical leadership theory (Brown & Treviño, 2006), public value theory (Moore, 1995), and innovation management in the public sector (Osborne & Brown, 2011). Ethical leadership theory emphasizes the role of leaders as moral agents and role models who promote ethical conduct through communication, reinforcement, and decision-making. Public value theory extends this logic to the collective level, highlighting the importance of delivering outcomes that are valued by society and legitimated through democratic governance. Innovation management literature, meanwhile, underscores the enabling conditions and leadership practices required to

initiate and sustain innovation in complex, risk-averse bureaucratic systems. Integrating these perspectives offers a holistic view of how ethical and values-based leadership can catalyze, guide, and legitimize social innovation processes in the public domain.

2. Method

This study employs a qualitative, exploratory research design aimed at understanding how ethical and values-based leadership influences social innovation in the public sector. A qualitative approach is particularly appropriate for examining complex, context-dependent phenomena such as leadership behaviors and innovation practices within public institutions (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Hasan & Sangadji, 2024; Supriatin et al., 2022). Rather than testing predetermined hypotheses, the study seeks to capture nuanced perspectives, interpret meanings, and explore emerging patterns based on participants' lived experiences. This approach enables a deeper understanding of the cultural, organizational, and ethical dimensions that shape leadership and innovation in Vietnam's public sector.

The research was conducted in Vietnam, a lower-middle-income country undergoing rapid socio-economic transformation and public sector reform. Vietnam's public administration operates under a socialist-oriented governance structure that combines hierarchical state control with growing openness to market mechanisms and international practices. This unique institutional context provides fertile ground for exploring the interplay between ethical leadership and social innovation, particularly in sectors such as education, healthcare, environmental governance, and social welfare. Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on their positions, relevance to the research topic, and experience in public service innovation. The sample consisted of 18 mid- to senior-level public managers from various central and local government agencies, including ministries, provincial departments, and municipal offices. Inclusion criteria included having at least five years of managerial experience, being involved in initiatives aimed at improving public service delivery or addressing social issues, and being willing to share insights on leadership practices and organizational culture. To enhance the diversity and richness of the data, the sample included participants from both urban and semi-urban administrative units and covered various sectors such as education reform, e-governance, environmental protection, and poverty alleviation programs.

Data collection was conducted through in-depth, semi-structured interviews over a period of three months. An interview guide was developed based on key themes drawn from the literature on ethical leadership, public values, and social innovation. The interviews explored participants' understanding of ethical leadership, experiences with value-driven decision-making, examples of innovative public programs, and organizational enablers or barriers to innovation. Each interview lasted between 45 and 70 minutes and was conducted in Vietnamese, the participants' native language, to ensure the depth and clarity of responses. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and transcribed verbatim. To maintain anonymity and confidentiality, pseudonyms were assigned and identifying information was removed from the transcripts.

Thematic analysis was employed to identify, analyze, and interpret patterns within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis followed six steps: familiarization with the data through repeated reading, generation of initial codes, identification of themes, review of themes in relation to coded extracts and the entire data set, definition and naming of themes, and writing up the findings. NVivo software was used to facilitate the coding process and manage the qualitative data efficiently. Themes were developed both inductively from the data and deductively based on theoretical constructs of ethical leadership and social innovation. Credibility was enhanced through peer debriefing and member checking with selected participants to validate the interpretations.

3. Result and Discussion

The findings of this study were generated through in-depth thematic analysis of interviews with mid- to senior-level public managers engaged in innovation efforts across various government sectors in Vietnam. These insights reveal how ethical and values-based leadership contributes to social innovation by shaping decision-making, fostering enabling environments, and navigating institutional complexities. Three overarching themes emerged from the data, each reflecting distinct yet interconnected dimensions of leadership influence: Moral Framing as a Catalyst for Innovation, Empowering Culture and Psychological Safety, and Navigating Institutional Tensions with Ethical Judgment. The following subsections present and discuss each theme in detail.

[1]. Moral Framing as a Catalyst for Innovation

One of the most salient findings of this study is the strategic use of moral framing by public sector leaders to initiate and legitimize innovation efforts. Participants consistently described how their commitment to ethical principles—such as fairness, public interest, and social equity—served as both an internal compass and an external narrative to drive organizational change. Rather than viewing innovation as a technical response to policy inefficiencies or resource constraints, these leaders conceptualized it as a moral imperative to serve marginalized populations and address long-standing social injustices. Several interviewees referred to the concept of “*phục vụ nhân dân*” (serving the people) not merely as a bureaucratic slogan but as a deeply held value guiding their professional actions. One senior official in a provincial Department of Education explained:

“Innovation, to me, is not about modernizing or digitizing for its own sake. It is about ensuring that no child in a remote village is left behind. That’s the ethical reason why we push for change.”

This narrative framing of innovation as a moral responsibility enables leaders to motivate their teams and justify experimentation in environments that are often risk-averse and tightly regulated. By invoking public values such as social responsibility, compassion, and inclusiveness, leaders create a normative space that legitimizes deviation from standard procedures or the introduction of untested ideas. In this way, ethical leadership becomes both motivational and rhetorical, anchoring innovation within a culturally resonant value system. Moral framing also appeared to play a critical role in garnering political and institutional support. Several participants noted that when they framed an initiative—such as improving access to healthcare for ethnic minorities or reducing bureaucratic burdens for low-income citizens—in moral rather than purely economic terms, they encountered greater receptivity from higher authorities and community stakeholders. As one municipal leader put it:

“When we say we want to cut red tape, people think it’s about efficiency. But when we explain that it’s about dignity—so people don’t have to beg or wait for weeks—they listen differently.”

In such cases, moral framing becomes a strategic tool that aligns innovation with broader public values, enhancing its legitimacy and reducing resistance. This finding supports prior research suggesting that public sector innovation is more likely to be accepted when it is tied to ethically framed goals (Hartley, 2005; Moore, 1995). Interestingly, participants often linked their ethical motivations to personal experiences or cultural roots. Several cited early life influences, religious teachings, or exposure to social inequality as the foundation of their value systems. These personal moral commitments translated into leadership behaviors that emphasized empathetic listening, participatory decision-making, and a refusal to compromise on integrity, even under institutional pressure.

However, moral framing was not without its tensions. Some leaders acknowledged that while ethical narratives were powerful, they could also be viewed with suspicion in politicized environments, especially when moral arguments conflicted with vested interests or administrative orthodoxy. In such cases, the success of moral framing depended heavily on the leader's credibility, relational capital, and political tact. Overall, this theme highlights the importance of ethical and values-based leadership in shaping the discourse of innovation in the public sector. Leaders in the Vietnamese context did not rely solely on rational or instrumental arguments to pursue change; rather, they grounded their innovation agendas in moral values that resonated culturally and institutionally. This finding underscores the significance of contextually embedded ethical leadership in promoting socially impactful public innovation.

[2]. Empowering Culture and Psychological Safety

A second prominent theme that emerged from the data is the role of ethical and values-based leadership in fostering an empowering organizational culture characterized by psychological safety, which in turn creates favorable conditions for social innovation. Participants emphasized that innovation in the public sector—particularly in a hierarchical and rule-bound context like Vietnam—can only occur when employees feel safe to express ideas, question existing practices, and experiment without fear of punishment. Ethical leaders in this study were described as individuals who cultivated trust, respected subordinates' voices, and encouraged participation across all levels of the organization. Rather than reinforcing rigid hierarchies, they actively dismantled barriers between management and staff, and modeled behaviors that promoted openness and mutual respect. One department head from a municipal-level social service office remarked:

“My team knows that they can propose new ideas—even if they fail, it’s okay. What matters is that they care and they try. I always tell them: innovation starts with courage, and courage needs safety.”

Such expressions point to a psychological contract between leaders and staff, where ethical consistency and value alignment from the top are reciprocated with commitment, initiative, and creativity from the bottom. This finding resonates with literature on psychological safety in organizations (Edmondson, 1999), suggesting that when employees feel secure and valued, they are more likely to take interpersonal risks, collaborate across departments, and offer novel solutions to complex social problems. Multiple participants also noted that this empowering environment was particularly crucial in nurturing young civil servants, many of whom were initially reluctant to deviate from standard procedures due to fear of criticism or career repercussions. Ethical leaders who took the time to mentor junior staff, explain the ethical rationale behind reforms, and frame mistakes as learning opportunities were seen as catalysts of an emerging innovation mindset within the bureaucracy. As one senior policy advisor noted:

“We cannot expect innovation from people who are afraid. Ethical leadership means creating space where new ideas are not punished, and where every voice matters—even the youngest intern.”

In practice, such cultures were supported by both formal and informal mechanisms. These included regular feedback sessions, collaborative project teams, open-door policies, and even moral storytelling during staff meetings—where leaders shared personal ethical dilemmas and how they handled them. These practices helped reinforce a shared sense of purpose and collective moral identity, which participants believed were essential to sustaining innovative efforts in the long run. However, fostering psychological safety was not without challenges. Several leaders reported institutional constraints, such as top-down decision-making structures, performance evaluation

systems that penalize risk, and informal norms of obedience that stifle dissent. In such settings, ethical leaders had to act strategically, using their positional influence to protect team members who took initiative, or slowly shift organizational norms through persistent value-based messaging and symbolic gestures. Overall, this theme reveals that ethical and values-based leadership contributes to innovation not only through strategic vision or moral discourse, but also by shaping micro-level relational dynamics within organizations. By building trust and reducing fear, such leaders foster the psychological conditions necessary for continuous learning, experimentation, and adaptation—hallmarks of effective social innovation.

[3]. Navigating Institutional Tensions with Ethical Judgment

The final key theme that emerged from the data pertains to how ethical and values-based leaders in the Vietnamese public sector navigate institutional tensions—between rigid bureaucratic structures, political expectations, and moral commitments—by exercising ethical judgment in complex decision-making environments. Unlike private sector leaders who may have greater autonomy or flexibility, public officials often operate under competing logics: maintaining rule compliance, ensuring political alignment, and responding to evolving social needs. Within this environment, innovation can be risky and fraught with bureaucratic resistance. Participants highlighted how ethical judgment served as a crucial tool for navigating these tensions. Rather than adhering to rules mechanistically or bypassing them recklessly, ethical leaders engaged in value-based balancing acts. One mid-level official from a provincial environmental agency reflected:

“There are times when the regulation is outdated or doesn’t address the real problem. In those moments, I have to ask myself—not just what is allowed, but what is right. And sometimes, I take the risk of choosing the right thing, even if it’s unconventional.”

This perspective underscores the importance of moral reflexivity in public leadership—the ability to reflect on one’s ethical obligations in light of contextual challenges and make decisions that align with both institutional integrity and human impact. Such leaders often operate in gray zones, where policy gaps, bureaucratic inertia, or political ambiguity demand not just compliance, but judicious improvisation grounded in values. Moreover, ethical leaders did not make such decisions in isolation. Many participants emphasized the role of collective ethical deliberation, where dilemmas were openly discussed within teams or with trusted peers. These interactions helped leaders avoid arbitrary or self-serving interpretations of ethics, reinforcing accountability and shared responsibility. A district-level health official described how her team debated whether to repurpose budget lines to launch a pilot maternal health program:

“Technically, we weren’t supposed to use the funds that way. But when we sat down as a team and asked, ‘What will serve these women best?’—the answer was clear. We documented everything and informed our superiors. In the end, the program succeeded and got institutionalized.”

Such actions highlight how ethical leadership can act as an enabler of institutional learning. By carefully bending rules in pursuit of moral goals—while maintaining transparency and responsibility—leaders opened pathways for policy adaptation and structural improvement. In this way, they contributed to institutional evolution from within, challenging the view that public innovation must always come from top-down reform. However, not all ethical judgment led to successful outcomes. A few participants shared experiences where morally driven actions were met with disciplinary pushback or political retaliation. These cases serve as a reminder that ethical leadership, while vital, carries personal risks, particularly in environments where organizational conservatism or political patronage dominate. In such contexts, leaders' ability to navigate institutional tensions relied heavily on their social capital, reputation, and ability to communicate

moral rationales in politically acceptable terms. In sum, this theme illustrates that ethical and values-based leadership plays a mediating role between institutional constraints and innovation opportunities. Through principled reasoning, strategic framing, and courageous action, public leaders in Vietnam found ways to initiate socially valuable innovations without compromising their professional integrity or derailing public trust. Their ethical judgment functioned not only as a moral compass but also as a practical navigational tool in a complex governance landscape.

Discussion

The findings of this study contribute to the growing body of literature on ethical leadership and social innovation in the public sector by demonstrating how values-based leadership shapes innovation processes in the context of Vietnam. Specifically, the study uncovers how ethical framing, the creation of psychological safety, and the exercise of ethical judgment in navigating institutional tensions enable public leaders to foster innovation that aligns with social values and public good. In this section, we contextualize these findings within existing theoretical frameworks and discuss their implications for public sector leadership and innovation practice.

The first theme that emerged—moral framing as a catalyst for innovation—aligns with the moral leadership framework (Brown & Treviño, 2006), which posits that leaders who emphasize ethical standards and moral reasoning can positively influence organizational outcomes. The study confirms that ethical leaders in the Vietnamese public sector use moral framing to present innovation not merely as a technical or efficiency-driven initiative, but as a moral duty to serve society. By emphasizing fairness, justice, and social equity, these leaders mobilize employees and stakeholders around a shared ethical narrative that makes innovation appear as an ethical imperative rather than a management mandate. This finding is consistent with previous studies on ethical leadership in the public sector (Den Hartog & De Hoogh, 2009; Northouse, 2018), which argue that public leaders who promote ethical values and moral reasoning are more likely to inspire innovation that serves the public good.

Furthermore, the study underscores the importance of aligning innovation with deeply ingrained cultural values. In Vietnam, the concept of “phục vụ nhân dân” (serving the people) was not just a slogan but a deeply embedded value that informed public leaders' ethical orientation and their approach to fostering social innovation. The idea that moral imperatives can drive innovation challenges the conventional view that public innovation is driven purely by technical expertise or policy incentives, and instead positions ethical values at the heart of the innovation process. Moreover, the study reveals that moral framing also functions as a strategic tool in overcoming institutional resistance. By framing innovation in terms of social responsibility, public leaders were able to justify new initiatives and gain political and institutional buy-in, even when they challenged bureaucratic norms or procedural barriers. This supports findings from Hartley (2005), who argued that innovation in the public sector is more likely to succeed when it is framed as socially beneficial and aligns with public sector values.

The second theme—empowering culture and psychological safety—offers a critical insight into how ethical leadership shapes the organizational climate conducive to innovation. Ethical leaders create environments where employees feel free to express ideas, voice concerns, and take risks without fear of retribution. This finding is particularly significant in hierarchical and bureaucratic settings, such as Vietnam's public administration, where rigid structures often stifle creativity and initiative. The concept of psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999), which was central to this theme, is vital for fostering a culture of innovation in organizations. In line with Edmondson's (1999) work, this study found that public leaders who prioritize ethical values and foster mutual respect create the necessary conditions for bottom-up innovation. By encouraging

team members to take initiative and learn from failure, ethical leaders help shift organizational norms toward continuous improvement and collaborative problem-solving. This approach not only enhances employee engagement but also contributes to the overall innovative capacity of public organizations.

Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of value-based leadership in promoting an empowered workforce. Ethical leaders did not merely offer top-down directives; instead, they encouraged employees at all levels to engage in the innovation process. This participatory approach aligns with the empowerment theory (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990), which emphasizes that employees are more likely to engage in innovative behaviors when they feel competent, autonomous, and valued. By creating psychologically safe environments, ethical leaders foster a culture of inclusivity and collaborative innovation, essential for tackling complex social issues in the public sector.

The third theme—navigating institutional tensions with ethical judgment—provides insight into the complex decision-making processes that ethical leaders face in the public sector. The study illustrates how public sector leaders must navigate the often conflicting demands of bureaucratic rule-following, political alignment, and ethical decision-making. These tensions are especially pronounced in contexts like Vietnam, where political considerations and bureaucratic inertia can create obstacles to innovation. Ethical judgment, as exercised by the leaders in this study, involved not just adherence to rules but also a willingness to take moral risks in situations where the right course of action was not always clear. This finding resonates with De Hoogh et al. (2015), who argue that ethical leadership involves balancing multiple interests and making decisions based on a moral compass rather than strict adherence to rules. In the case of Vietnam, ethical leaders often had to make tough decisions to innovate within the confines of existing regulations while still maintaining organizational integrity and social trust. This reflects the pragmatic ethics framework (Sandel, 2009), where leaders make morally informed decisions that balance ethical principles with practical realities.

Additionally, the study underscores the role of institutional learning in navigating tensions. Leaders who exercised ethical judgment were able to push the boundaries of conventional policies while ensuring transparency, accountability, and inclusive participation in decision-making. In some cases, such actions led to institutional change, as leaders worked to adapt or modify bureaucratic rules to better serve the public interest. This finding highlights the importance of adaptive leadership (Heifetz, 1994) in the public sector, where leaders must balance short-term policy constraints with long-term goals of social innovation.

The findings have important implications for both theory and practice. From a theoretical standpoint, this study adds to the understanding of ethical leadership in the public sector by highlighting the ways in which ethical values and moral decision-making contribute to fostering social innovation. The findings suggest that values-based leadership is not just a moral ideal but a practical tool for driving innovation in complex organizational settings. For practitioners, the study offers actionable insights into how public leaders can foster an innovation-friendly environment through ethical leadership. By prioritizing values such as trust, fairness, and social responsibility, leaders can create organizational cultures that encourage creativity, collaboration, and risk-taking. Furthermore, ethical leadership helps navigate the often-conflicting demands of bureaucratic control and social innovation, enabling leaders to make decisions that serve both institutional goals and public values.

4. Conclusion

This study offers valuable insights into how ethical and values-based leadership can significantly influence social innovation in the public sector, particularly within the context of Vietnam. By exploring the experiences and practices of public leaders, the research highlights the critical role that moral framing, empowering organizational cultures, and ethical judgment play in fostering innovation that aligns with both societal values and public expectations. The findings reveal that public sector leaders who embed ethical principles into their leadership styles not only drive innovation but also create environments where employees feel empowered to contribute creatively, take risks, and engage in transformative social change. First, the study demonstrates that ethical leadership, through moral framing, provides a powerful tool for aligning innovation with core societal values such as fairness, justice, and the public good. This framing makes innovation more than just an organizational objective; it positions it as a moral duty to address societal challenges. Leaders who successfully integrate these values into their innovation strategies can gain support from both their teams and broader institutional structures, even in the face of bureaucratic constraints or political resistance.

Second, the creation of an empowering culture and psychological safety is essential for fostering an environment conducive to innovation. By encouraging participation, collaboration, and learning from failure, ethical leaders can cultivate an atmosphere where innovative ideas can emerge from all levels of the organization. The study confirms that such leaders help dismantle hierarchical barriers, giving employees the autonomy and confidence to contribute their ideas and solutions to complex social issues. This aligns with the empowerment theory and the importance of creating psychologically safe workplaces, which are known to enhance organizational performance and innovation. Finally, the research highlights the challenges faced by public leaders in navigating institutional tensions—between bureaucratic rules, political pressures, and ethical imperatives—through ethical judgment. Leaders who exercise sound ethical judgment, balancing adherence to rules with the pursuit of morally responsible innovation, can create meaningful change within institutions. These leaders demonstrate that ethical leadership involves not only making decisions that serve the public interest but also adapting existing structures to better meet the evolving needs of society.

This study contributes to the growing literature on ethical leadership and social innovation in the public sector by emphasizing the transformative potential of values-based leadership. It underscores the importance of integrating ethics into leadership practices to not only foster innovative solutions to pressing social problems but also ensure that innovation efforts are grounded in principles that serve the public good. For practitioners, the findings suggest that ethical leadership is not a passive or idealistic approach but a practical and effective strategy for driving change and improving public sector performance. This study opens several avenues for future research. While this research focuses on the public sector in Vietnam, further studies could explore whether the findings hold true in other emerging economies or across different institutional contexts. Additionally, research could investigate the specific mechanisms through which ethical leadership influences innovation outcomes, such as the role of organizational culture or policy reforms in mediating these relationships. Finally, future studies could examine the long-term impact of ethical leadership on sustained innovation, as well as the potential trade-offs leaders face when balancing ethical considerations with organizational or political pressures.

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