



Research Article

Servant leadership and corruption intention in construction companies: role of ethical climate and Machiavellianism

Fakhruddin Mart¹ and Sabrina²

Universitas Persada Indonesia 'YAI', Indonesia

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Abstract

Corruption is usually an activity that is deliberately hidden so that it is difficult to know until it becomes a scandal. Indonesia is progressing with many infrastructure projects that are prone to corruption cases. Cases of corruption in infrastructure projects usually involve government officials and company leaders. Previous studies have linked the leadership style of a company leader with corruption, and many studies have discussed corruption in the construction sector. This research will provide a new perspective on corruption intentions as a starting point for acts of corruption related to several factors that have yet to be widely discussed in previous studies. We analyze data from 100 respondents who work in the construction sector using a linear regression technique by analytic tools of PROCESS IBM SPSS Statistics Version 22. This research shows that servant leadership is related to corrupt intentions, which would be much more significant if mediated by a low corporate ethical climate and moderated by Machiavellianism in this moderated mediation model and nevertheless might play the role of a moderator in future studies. The improved ethical climate is a preventive way to reduce corruption intention. On the other side, company leaders should be more cautious in understanding followers' Machiavellianism related to corruption intention.

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Introduction

Proper infrastructure has become a fundamental concern, so the government of President Joko Widodo has emphasized infrastructure development programs. The infrastructure is the primary facilities or structures, equipment, and installations needed so that Society's social and economic systems can function (Grigg, 2000). In other words, the infrastructure is the leading proponent of the social and economic system in social life. According to President Joko Widodo, the impacts of infrastructure development are creating jobs, creating new economic growth points, improving inter-island logistics networks, and supporting public service activities (Jay, 2019).

The implementation of infrastructure projects in Indonesia is mainly carried out by state-owned contractor companies or Badan Usaha Milik Negara (BUMN) and a small part by private contractor companies. Woefully, according to the Indonesian Corruption Watch (ICW), in the last ten years (2011-2020), BUMN's contractors as contracting parties of the infrastructure projects have been companies involved in corruption cases (Ahdiat, 2022). Based on the coverage of Dewangga and Fiky (2020), an example of a case that occurred was the corruption case for four road development projects in Bengkalis Regency which involved two government officials and eight people from private contractor companies. The suspects are suspected of having committed acts against the law, such as arranging tenders,

¹ Master student, Universitas Persada Indonesia 'YAI', Indonesia. E-mail: fachru.phd@gmail.com ORCID: 0000-0001-5866-0472

² Master student, Universitas Persada Indonesia 'YAI', Indonesia. E-mail: Sabrinairine2@gmail.com ORCID: 0009-0004-0009-1210

results of work that do not meet specifications, and quality of work that does not meet requirements. Research by Ariani et al. (2023) shows that there are at least ten indicators that cause corrupt practices in construction projects, including inappropriate tender evaluations, inadequate supervision, the document offers that do not match the actual conditions, propinquity between parties, and poor professional, and ethical standards.

Leadership is an essential part of an organization; he or she acts as a role model to shape ethical culture and build morale. Tabish and Jha (2012) believed that top executive leadership has a significant influence on the rate of corruption in construction projects. Research by Yee (2019) shows personal greed towards money, lack of ethical standards, and negative leadership roles are three of eighteen causes of corruption practices.

Indonesia has gone through various eras of leadership, from Soekarno's charismatic leadership era during the Old Order era to post-reform during President Joko Widodo's servant leadership era (Asnawi, 2001; Bagus, 2017), and cases of corruption still occur. At the smaller organizational level, research on organizations have primarily focused on the influence of the personal characteristics of top management in creating a corporate environment conducive to fraud (e.g., Cohen et al., 2010; Rijssenbilt & Commandeur, 2013). Previous research has evidenced a positive relationship between leaders' Machiavellianism and abusive acts when leaders make sure that things are done correctly and according to the rules (Wisse & Sleebos, 2016) and another effect of Mach leaders (see Belschak et al., 2018; Dahling et al., 2009).

Servant Leadership and Corruption Intention

Servant leadership is a leadership style that accentuates the idea of service in the relationship between leader and followers (Gandolfi et al., 2017). Previous studies have evidenced that servant leadership is apparent in followers' affirmative behaviors, like employee creativity, diligence, and other organizational citizenship behavior (Yang et al., 2019; Newman et al., 2017). Furthermore, a literature review reveals that existing servant leadership studies have primarily been linked with the encouraging consequence (Nathan et al., 2018), although the negative side is equally essential (Whetstone, 2002). Van Dierendonck's (2011) argument about the contradiction aspect of servant leadership is that opportunistic followers may manipulate servant leaders to achieve their self-interest. Based on Dierendonck and Nuijten (2011), servant leadership has eight critical constructs: empowerment, accountability, standing back, humility, authenticity, courage, forgiveness, and stewardship. Ferch (2005) described that servant leaders could display tolerance by initiating a circumstance of certainty where followers feel fulfilled, are free to take amiss, and understand they will not be repudiated. Corruption is defined as the practice of exchanging to provide something to a private individual (or group) where the official regulation or guidance broke by a public official (or officials) (Khan, 2004). In line with the research Li-Pin Tang et al. (2008) that unethical behaviors in organizations exemplify, such as some employees manipulating to get tangible and non-tangible benefits. The intention has a solid relation to behavior. However, a person could contradict an act with their desire (Sniehotta et al., 2005), and this study measures corruption as a specific type of unethical behavior. We propose Hypothesis 1 (H1): Servant leadership will positively affect the follower's corruption intention.

Mediating Role of Ethical Climate

The notion of servant leadership regards the idea that a servant leader is a person with a "servant heart" as a core leader (Greenleaf, 1977/2002). In addition, the essential feature of servant leadership is its rests on ethical behaviors (Ehrhart, 2004). Spears (1996) declared that the servant-leader "wants to do what is morally or ethically right" (p.26). A leader influences the ethical climate change in the organization. Thus, leaders who behave as servant-leaders have opportunities to positively create and cultivate ethical climates in their companies. Martin and Cullen (2006) pointed out that an ethical work climate is essential to an organization's culture and affects resolving ethical conflict and behavior.

Lack of ethical standards among construction workers leads to immoral and indisciplined behavior, exacerbating corruption in the construction industry (Olusegun et al., 2011). Construction industry corruption also often results from the overclose relationship among the project parties, triggering corruption practices like nepotism and bid rigging during the tendering stage (Ling & Tan, 2012; Sohail & Cavill, 2006; Le et al., 2014a). Servant leadership helps to decrease unethical actions by stimulating an ethical climate. Servant leadership fosters trust, enhancing perceptions of

an organization's ethical climate (Burton et al., 2017). Based on those arguments, our hypothesis is a mediating role of the ethical climate organization between servant leadership and followers' corruption intention. Hypothesis 2 (H2): Ethical climate will mediate the positive relationship between servant leadership and followers' corruption intention.

The Moderating Role of Machiavellianism

Researchers in Industrial/organizational psychology have lately emphasized Machiavellianism's role in an organizational context (e.g., Harms and Spain, 2015; Simth & Webster, 2017). According to recent research by Fatima et al. (2021), the relationship between servant leadership and manipulative-exploitative behavior becomes more assertive at the high level of Machiavellianism. It becomes lacks strength and is insignificant at a low Machiavellianism. Furthermore, appointing a direct positive association between servant leadership and follower corruption intention, we believe that not whole followers with Machiavellianism will react to servant leadership by raising their corrupt behavior to the same breadth. Judge et al. (2009) suggest that high-Mach become involved in shifty behavior and habitually utilize any approaches to accomplish their targets. Therefore, high-level Machiavellianism is increasingly plausible to step in unethical and unlawful ways, such as spontaneous cheating (Cooper & Peterson, 1980). Specifically, research by Zhao et al. (2014) shows that followers with high Machiavellianism are likelier to be involved in corruption than followers with low-level Machiavellianism. Followers with high-level Machiavellianism advance in dealing with situations to grab the maximum advantage of their cunning behaviors. So, empowerment, trust, and helping behavior (Lyons et al., 2010) allow high-Mach followers to manipulate everything for personal gain (corruption intention). Therefore, our study proposes a moderating role of Machiavellianism between servant leadership and corruption intention. Hypothesis 3 (H3): Followers' Machiavellianism will moderate the positive relationship between servant leadership and followers' corruption intention. The positive relationship will intensify when followers' Machiavellianism is high and vice versa. Hypothesis 4 (H4): Follower's Machiavellianism moderates the direct relationship between servant leadership and corruption intention through an ethical climate.

Based on previous research, we expect the moderated mediation model to be successful, as seen in Figure 1, which illustrates our conceptual model.

Problem Study

A study on leadership shows a negative effect from the positive side of leadership on corruption (see Manara et al., 2020). However, it is not easy to find research on the positive effect of the negative side of leadership (particularly servant leadership) on corruption. Our study aims to investigate the positive correlation effect of servant leadership and corruption intention in construction workers and determine the mediator role of ethical climate and the moderator role of Machiavellianism. The main question of this study is whether there is a relationship between the positive effect of servant leadership and corruption intention in construction workers. Another question is there a mediator role of the ethical climate is in that relationship. Furthermore, is there a moderator role of Machiavellianism in that relationship?

Method

Research Model

This study used a descriptive correlation analysis to examine the relationship between two variables. Furthermore, we used the PROCESS by Andrew F. Hayes to examine how the influence between two constructs may take an indirect path through a third variable called a mediator and investigate how an antecedent X influences a consequent Y that depends on a third variable called a moderator.

Participants

The population in this study were workers who worked in the construction sector in Jakarta. As reference data, the construction labor force in Jakarta is 197229 workers, and 74.94% level education is an elementary school up to high school (Ditjen Bina Konstruksi, 2021). We used 100 workers for the samples following Hair et al. (1998), in which the minimum number of samples is 15 to 20 times the number of variables used for regression analysis techniques.

Meanwhile, the sampling technique used in the current study is non-probability sampling techniques covering purposive sampling. The questionnaires were distributed based on the addresses in the sispro.co.id directory.

Table 1 describes the research subject, such as gender, age, education level, work tenure, and job field.

Table 1. Data description of the respondent

Categories	Types	Male	Female	Total
Ages	18 – 25 years	9 (12.33)	4 (14.81)	13 (13.00)
	26 – 33 years	13 (9.60)	7 (25.93)	20 (20.00)
	34 – 41 years	26 (43.83)	13 (48.15)	39 (39.00)
	42 – 49 years	20 (27.39)	3 (11.11)	23 (23.00)
	>50 years	5 (6.85)	0 (0.0)	5 (5.00)
Education level	Senior high school	56 (76.71)	3 (11.11)	59 (59.00)
	Diploma	7 (9.59)	10 (37.04)	17 (17.00)
	Bachelor's degree	9 (12.33)	12 (16.44)	21 (21.00)
	Master's degree	1 (1.37)	2 (7.41)	3 (3.00)
Work experiences	< 1 year	3 (4.11)	5 (18.52)	8 (0.00)
	1 – 5 years	8 (10.96)	9 (33.33)	17 (0.00)
	6 – 10 years	19 (26.03)	7 (25.93)	26 (0.00)
	11 – 15 years	15 (20.55)	5 (18.52)	20 (0.00)
	16 – 20 years	13 (17.81)	1 (3.70)	14 (0.00)
	21 – 25 years	6 (8.22)	0 (0.00)	6 (0.00)
	>25 years	9 (12.32)	0 (0.00)	9 (0.00)
Field of jobs	Engineering	62 (84.93)	6 (22.22)	68 (68.00)
	Business & Operation	8 (10.96)	4 (14.82)	12 (12.00)
	Finance & Accounting	3 (4.11)	17 (62.96)	20 (20.00)

Of the respondent of this research, 73 subjects are male, and 27 subjects are female, the majority 34-41 years old. Most male respondents are in senior high school, and female respondents are bachelor's degrees. According to the work experiences in the construction sector, most male respondents have 6-10 years of work experience, and female respondents have 1-5 years. The data also shows that male respondents also stated that they work in engineering while female respondents work in finance and accounting.

Data Collection Tools

The participants are asked to state the suitability or discrepancy with the contents of the statements. The parts of all instruments taken for the current study are given below. All the scales were translated to Bahasa Indonesia, and each item was tapped on a scale spreading from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Corruption Intention Scale

We used the Corruption Propensity scale (CPS) with an 18-item scale by Agbo and Iwundu (2016) to measure followers' corruption intention. Participants determine their agreement with each item based on the scale provided, and the existing scores of all items are then calculated so that the lowest to highest score is obtained. A high score indicates a higher tendency to engage in acts of corruption. Based on the reliability test results, we used 12 items with a Cronbach Alpha coefficient of 0.975. Some items on the scale are "If I get my cut, I will assist my boss do whatever he/she wants" and "I don't mind favoring a client for a bribe.". We use the abbreviations CI as code for Corruption Intentions.

Servant Leadership Scale

We used to measure company leaders' servant leadership on the 14-item scale by Ehrhart (2004). Participants were asked to rate their company leader using this scale which consists of seven dimensions, one of which is behaving ethically. The statement sounds like, "My leader holds employees to high ethical standards". Based on the reliability test results, we used ten items with a Cronbach Alpha coefficient of 0.982. We use the abbreviation SL as code for Servant Leadership.

Ethical Climate Scale

Ethical Climate Index (ECI), which was psychometrically tested and verified by Arnaud and Schminke (2012). We use a short 18-item scale with four constructs, of which two have two sub-dimensions. The construct measures collective moral sensitivity (consisting of moral awareness and empathic concern), the construct measures collective moral judgment (focus on oneself and focus on others), the construct of collective moral motivation, and the construct of collective moral character. Statement items sound like, "People around here feel bad for someone being taken advantage of." Based on the reliability test results, we used nine items with a Cronbach Alpha coefficient of 0.964. We use the abbreviation EC as the code for Ethical Climate.

Machiavellianism Scale

We used Machiavellianism consisting of four items by Jonason & Webster (2010). Its sub-scale of the Dirty Dozen scale measures followers' Machiavellianism. The statement sounds like "I tend to manipulate others to get my way". Based on reliability test results, we used all items with a Cronbach Alpha coefficient of 0.948. We use the abbreviation M as code for Machiavellianism.

Data Analysis

In our study, we used IBM SPSS Statistics version.22 to make descriptive analyses, such as a normality test to determine the distribution of data is regular or not distributed and a linearity test to determine the relationship between the variables. Furthermore, we used PROCESS v4.0 by Andrew F. Hayes to determine the role of mediation and moderation variables.

Procedure

This research took place over three months. We distributed the questionnaires from 3 September 2022 to 3 December 2022. Participants completed an Indonesian language survey, in which we translated all statement items on the scale we used from English to Indonesian. At the beginning of the survey, we briefly explained our research. Next, we asked participants to answer several demographic questions and complete them on the scale of this study. They participate voluntarily and do not get anything in return.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were conducted to determine the characteristics and categorizing variables of corruption intention, servant leadership, ethical climate, and Machiavellianism in construction workers. Calculation description of the data based on the mean and standard deviation distribution. The results of these calculations are what we categorize into five categories: very high, high, moderate, low, and very low. Here are the results.

Table 2. Subject categorized based on total value of scale.

Scale	Categories	Male	Female	Total
Corruption Intention	Very Low	12 (16.44)	6 (22.22)	18 (18.00)
	Low	11 (15.07)	9 (33.33)	20 (20.00)
	Moderate	13 (17.81)	10 (37.04)	23 (23.00)
	High	11 (15.07)	2 (7.41)	21 (21.00)
	Very High	18 (24.66)	0 (0.00)	18 (18.00)
Servant Leadership	Very Low	17 (23.29)	2 (7.40)	19 (7.00)
	Low	7 (9.58)	8 (29.63)	15(45.00)
	Moderate	30 (41.10)	6 (22.22)	36 (21.00)
	High	6(8.22)	7 (25.93)	13 (21.00)
	Very High	13 (17.81)	4 (14.82)	17 (6.00)
Ethical Climate	Very Low	16 (21.93)	1 (3.70)	17 (9.00)
	Low	21 (28.76)	2 (7.41)	23 (41.00)
	Moderate	9 (12.33)	14 (51.85)	23 (20.00)
	High	14 (19.17)	8 (29.63)	22 (26.00)
	Very High	13 (17.81)	2 (7.41)	15 (4.00)
Machiavellianism	Very Low	14 (19.17)	2 (7.41)	16 (7.00)
	Low	12 (16.44)	9 (33.33)	21 (38.00)
	Moderate	20 (27.40)	8 (29.63)	28 (32.00)
	High	12 (16.44)	7 (25.93)	19 (19.00)
	Very High	15 (20.55)	1 (3.70)	16 (4.00)

Tables 2 show a description of the total value of each variable. Most male respondents have very high corruption intentions, whereas female respondents have moderate corruption intentions. In this study, respondents stated that the company leader has moderate servant leadership, or in other words, the leader may use another leadership style. Furthermore, ethical climate as an external factor shows companies that the most male respondent working has a low ethical climate, and female respondents have a moderate ethical climate. Another side, Machiavellianism as the role of internal factor, shows most respondents have moderate Machiavellianism.

Table 3. Normality test

Variable	<i>p</i>	Sig.	Conclusion
CI	0.113	>0.05	Normal
SL	0.200	>0.05	Normal
EC	0.123	>0.05	Normal
M	0.200	>0.05	Normal

The result normality test in table 3 shows that the data is expected. The distribution is declared normal; all variables have $p > 0.05$. The technique used for the normality test is the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test.

Hypotesis

Decision-making in hypothesis testing is based on significance value (Sig.), less than the probability of 0.05 (alternative hypothesis (Ha) is accepted), or greater than the probability of 0.05 (Ha Rejected). We used Linear Regression and PROCESS macro for SPSS (a regression-based approach). Following are the results of hypothesis testing in this study.

Table 4. Servant leadership and corruption intention

R	Path	Unstd Coeficients	t	Sig.
0.427	Constant	27.719	5.762	0.000
	SL - CI	0.532	4.677	0.000

Adjusted R Squared 0.427 on table 4 shows that the closeness of the association between SL and CI is sufficient, namely at 0.25-0.5 (Sugiyono, 2006); also, the t count obtained is 4.677 > t table 1.984 and significance $p < 0.001$ so that Hypothesis H1 is accepted.

Table 5. Servant leadership, ethical climate, and corruption intention

R	Path	Unstd Coeficients	t	Sig.
0.637	Constant	46.440	9.005	0.000
	SL - CI	0.712	6.988	0.000
	EC - CI	-0.722	-6.041	0.000
0.293	Constant	25.919	7.443	0.000
	SL - EC	0.250	3.032	0.003

Table 6. Mediator effects of ethical climate

	\$Effect	\$SE	\$t	\$p	\$LLCI	\$ULCI
\$Total effect	0.532	0.114	4.677	0.000	0.306	0.757
\$Direct effect	0.712	0.102	6.988	0.000	0.510	0.914
\$Indirect effect	-0.180	0.087			-0.361	-0.017

In the subsequent SL and CI statistical calculations, we added EC. As shown in table 5, the R-value increased to 0.637, and the unstandardized coefficient value is 0.712 became higher in t-value than 4.677. Then we proceed with calculations using PROCESS version 4.0 Andrew F. Hayes, where the results show the role of EC as a mediator of the influence of SL on CI based on BootLLCI and BootULCI there is no zero between -0.361 and -0.017, and coefficient a, b, c is significant ($p < 0.001$) as shown in Table 6. Therefore, Hypothesis H2 is accepted.

Table 7. Servant leadership, Machiavellianism, and corruption intention

R	Path	Unstd Coeficients	t	Sig.
0.778	Constant	4.848	1.201	0.233
	SL - CI	0.202	2.358	0.020
	M - CI	2.259	10.203	0.000

Table 8. Moderation effects of Machiavellianism

	\$coeff	\$se	\$t	\$p	\$LLCI	\$ULCI
\$Constant	47.747	1.294	36.911	0.000	45.179	50.314
\$SL	0.256	0.088	2.920	0.004	0.082	0.431
\$M	2.101	0.229	9.162	0.000	1.646	2.556
\$Int_1	0.023	0.011	2.160	0.033	0.002	0.044
	R2-chng	F				
X*W	0.018	4.667				
\$Moderator: Mach						
-6.165	0.116	0.093	1.250	0.214	-0.068	0.301
0.000	0.256	0.088	2.920	0.004	0.082	0.431
6.165	0.397	0.123	3.218	0.002	0.152	0.641

Calculating the SL and CI statistics with M, as shown in table 7, the R-value is 0.788. The result shows the closeness of the SL, M, and CI relationship in the very strong category of > 0.75 (Sugiyono, 2006).

To assess the moderation effect, we continue with calculations using PROCESS version 4.0 Andrew F. Hayes, whose results show the role of M becomes a moderator of the influence of SL on CI, the t count obtained is 2.160 > t table 1.984 and significance $p = 0.033 < 0.05$ as shown in Table 8. Another the results direct effect of SL on CI was forceful in the case of high M ($\beta = 0.123$), CI [0.152, 0.641] and lacking strength and insignificant in low M ($\beta = 0.093$), CI [-0.068, 0.301]. We also describe the interaction using Jeremy Dowson's slope test; the interaction is plotted on the graph, as shown in Figure 2. So, hypothesis H3 is accepted.

Table 9. Moderated Mediation effects of ethical climate

	\$coeff	\$se	\$t	\$p	\$LLCI	\$ULCI
\$Constant	66.834	3.188	20.963	0.000	60.505	73.163
\$SL	0.474	0.081	5.820	0.000	0.312	0.635
\$EC	-0.547	0.086	-6.370	0.000	-0.717	-0.376
\$M	1.662	0.205	8.113	0.000	1.256	2.069
\$Int_1	0.035	0.009	3.846	0.000	0.017	0.053
	R2-chng	F				
X*W	0.041	14.793				
\$Conditional direct effect of X on Y:						
-6.165	0.259	0.081	3.180	0.002	0.097	0.420
0.000	0.474	0.081	5.820	0.000	0.312	0.635
6.165	0.688	0.113	6.072	0.000	0.463	0.913

The hypothesis we propose is in the form of supported moderated mediation. We analyze the more deeply in hypothesis 4, where there is a mediation of the conditional direct effect of SL on CI moderated by M. At the same time, there is a robust EC mediation when M is at a high level but becomes lacking strength when M is at a low level. The results of moderate mediation interaction values were significant ($p < 0.001$), as shown in Table 9. So, the H4 hypothesis is accepted.

Discussion and Conclusion

Corruption in the construction industry results from negative leadership roles (Olusegun et al., 2011; Bowen et al., 2012). One of the leadership styles in an organization that has form positivity, Servant Leadership, has been studied by several academics (e.g., Dodd et al., 2018). Our study confirms that servant leadership positively affects building an ethical climate that reduces followers' corruption intentions. However, there is another side of servant leadership that is important to get attention. The results from our study also confirm that servant leadership is the potential to increase followers' intention of corruption. These results were done the same way as the previous study, confirming that servant leadership is positively related to exploitative manipulative behavior. Fortunately, the conditional effect was significant because of the interaction term of servant leadership and Machiavellianism as moderators (Fatima et al., 2021).

Workers with exploitative tendencies see servant leadership as the ideal state of organizing things to enable them to achieve personal goals. Mach followers are highly goal-driven and do not hesitate to use unethical means and to threaten (leader) behavior to achieve their goals (e.g., O'Boyle et al., 2012). When working in a low ethical climate and meeting a leader who shows modesty and forgiveness, they have more ways to get the most extraordinary material and non-material benefits from a leader. Fortunately, our results prove the same. Ethical Climate as a mediator and Machiavellianism as a moderator applicable to work together. The relationship between servant leadership and corruption intentions was not stronger. The domination of Machiavellianism with others concerning corruption intentions is a cause-of-effect ethical

Climate. In a moderated mediation model, Machiavellianism does not highly influence the relationship between servant leadership and corruption intentions.

For an initial study, this research provides new opportunities for research on organizational leadership and corruption behavior. At least research has provided a new perspective from research on the influence of leadership on corrupt behavior (Manara et al., 2020) as well as servant leadership and manipulative, exploitative behavior (Fatima et al., 2021).

The data analysis results explained a relationship between servant leadership and corruption intention among construction workers in Jakarta City. The results of the data description state that the level of followers' corruption intention and Machiavellianism, servant leadership of companies' leaders, and companies' ethical Climate tends to be low. Ethical Climate can be mediation between servant leadership and corruption intention. Also, Machiavellianism positively related to servant leadership and corruption intention as moderators. Furthermore, Ethical Climate and Machiavellianism are promising to construct in one model.

Recommendations

Future research should broaden our work by investigating corruption intentions in the companies that have been involved and have never been involved in a corruption case. Furthermore, learn more about their thinking style, like rational and intuitive thinking. Studying these two styles of thinking can help for better meaning and understanding of how leaders influence their followers' behavior who have been involved and have not been involved in corruption. Future research may also shed light on whether workers under servant leaders will intuitively become more involved in unethical behavior such as corruption or other specific behaviors beyond corruption and may examine a few other underlying mechanisms.

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