

Does ethical leadership affect employee task performance? Evidence from MTN Nigeria Outlets

*Sani Usman¹, Abubakar Suleiman², & Muhammad Tella³

¹ Department of Business Administration and Management, School of Management Studies, Federal Polytechnic N'yak Shendam, Plateau State – Nigeria.

^{2&3} Department of Management & Information Technology, Faculty of Management Sciences, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University, Bauchi – Nigeria.

*Corresponding Author: sannyussman8775@gmail.com

Abstract

Employee task performance is critical to organizational effectiveness, particularly in multinational corporations where leadership behavior shapes employee motivation and productivity. Although ethical leadership has received growing attention, most studies treat it as a unidimensional construct, overlooking its distinct orientations and limited evidence from African contexts. This study investigates the effects of humane, justice, and moderation leadership orientations on employee task performance in MTN Nigeria. Using a cross-sectional survey of 61 managers across retail outlets in Bauchi and Plateau Metropolises, data were analyzed through Ordinary Least Squares regression. The results reveal that all three ethical leadership orientations positively and significantly affect employee task performance, with moderation orientation showing the strongest influence. These findings extend ethical leadership theory by empirically validating Eisenbeiss's multidimensional framework within a sub-Saharan African multinational setting and by integrating Social Exchange Theory to explain the reciprocity between leader ethics and employee performance. Practically, the study underscores the importance of cultivating leadership that balances compassion, fairness, and temperance to enhance productivity. Despite limitations related to the small sample size and cross-sectional design, the research provides valuable insights for leadership development and governance policy in African multinationals.

Keywords: Ethical leadership, humane orientation, justice orientation, moderation orientation, employee task performance, MTN Nigeria.

1. Introduction

Employee task performance is a key determinant of organizational success, as it directly influences service quality, efficiency, and competitiveness (Piccolo et al., 2010; Walumbwa et al., 2011). Leadership has long been recognized as a central predictor of such performance, and in recent decades, *ethical leadership*, defined by normatively appropriate

conduct and the promotion of ethical standards, has gained attention for its role in fostering motivation, trust, and alignment with organizational goals (Brown et al., 2005). Through social learning and social exchange mechanisms, ethical leaders model desirable behavior and cultivate high-quality leader-member relationships that enhance followers'



self-efficacy, identification, and ultimately, performance.

While ethical leadership is often treated as a single construct, emerging research conceptualizes it as multidimensional, encompassing distinct orientations such as *humane*, *justice*, and *moderation* (Kalshoven et al., 2011; Eisenbeiss, 2012). Humane orientation emphasizes compassion, dignity, and concern for employees' welfare, which fosters trust and psychological safety. Justice orientation reflects fairness and impartial decision-making, enhancing perceptions of equity and procedural justice. Moderation orientation, characterized by temperance and balance, involves self-restraint and equanimity in leadership decisions, qualities theorized to promote stable relationships and reduce workplace conflict.

Despite increasing scholarly interest, significant gaps remain. First, *moderation orientation* has received limited empirical attention, particularly in operational terms, leaving uncertainty about its unique effects on performance outcomes. Second, the majority of ethical leadership research has been conducted in Western or Asian contexts, with *little evidence from African multinationals* where cultural values such as temperance and collectivism may differently shape leader–follower dynamics. Finally, existing studies rarely assess the *combined influence* of humane, justice, and moderation orientations on employee task performance within a single organizational framework.

This study addresses these gaps by investigating the effects of humane, justice, and moderation leadership orientations on employee task performance in *MTN Nigeria*, a subsidiary of a major multinational telecommunications corporation. The Nigerian

context offers a culturally diverse and operationally complex environment where ethical leadership may play a distinctive role in driving performance.

Accordingly, this research makes two primary contributions: (a) It empirically disaggregates ethical leadership into humane, justice, and moderation orientations to examine their individual and combined impacts on employee task performance. (b) It extends ethical leadership scholarship to a sub-Saharan African multinational setting, offering context-specific insights into how ethical orientations operate in culturally plural and high-performance environments.

2. Literature Review

Employee Task Performance

Employee task performance, the effectiveness with which individuals execute formally required duties, is widely recognized as central to organizational success (Borman & Motowidlo, 1997). Beyond its functional relevance, it also serves as a behavioral indicator of how leadership and organizational systems influence motivation and engagement (Rotundo & Sackett, 2002). While classical studies emphasized individual traits and ability as predictors of task performance, recent research underscores the decisive role of leadership in shaping performance through mechanisms such as fairness, trust, and role clarity (Podsakoff et al., 1996; Walumbwa et al., 2011).

However, the literature often conflates *leadership influence* with general motivational factors, overlooking the ethical and relational dimensions that sustain consistent in-role performance. Recent work suggests that *ethical leadership*, as a moral and relational process, creates deeper behavioral commitment



than transactional or transformational forms of leadership (Den Hartog, 2015). Yet, much of this research is confined to Western corporate settings, raising concerns about its cultural generalizability.

Ethical leadership

Ethical leadership is defined as “the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making” (Brown et al., 2005, p. 120). This construct integrates morality into leadership theory by emphasizing both the character of the leader and the processes by which ethical norms are fostered within organizations. Ethical leaders are considered role models who shape followers’ behaviors through social learning mechanisms, whereby employees observe and emulate leaders’ integrity, fairness, and concern for others (Bandura, 1986; Brown et al., 2005). Additionally, ethical leadership relies on social exchange processes: when employees perceive their leaders as ethical, they reciprocate with higher trust, commitment, and performance (Mayer et al., 2009).

Over time, scholars have moved from conceptualizing ethical leadership as a unidimensional construct toward multidimensional frameworks. Kalshoven et al. (2011) operationalized ethical leadership through dimensions such as fairness, people orientation, integrity, and role clarification, showing that ethical leadership is manifested in diverse yet complementary behaviors. Eisenbeiss (2012) further advanced an interdisciplinary model that identifies four normative orientations: humane orientation (compassion and dignity), justice orientation

(fairness and equity), responsibility and sustainability orientation, and moderation orientation (temperance and balance). These orientations highlight that ethical leadership is not a singular behavior but rather a set of moral commitments reflected in decision-making and relational practices.

Empirical Review

Humane Leadership Orientation and Employee Task Performance

Humane orientation emphasizes compassion, dignity, and care for employee welfare. Studies consistently link humane-oriented behaviors to stronger trust, psychological safety, and engagement, which, in turn, enhance performance (Newman et al., 2014; Xu et al., 2019). These findings have been corroborated in collectivist cultures, suggesting that relational warmth is especially valued where social harmony underpins workplace cohesion (Khan et al., 2020).

However, the extant literature tends to assume that humane leadership produces universally positive effects, with limited attention to potential trade-offs, such as reduced objectivity or difficulty maintaining accountability. Furthermore, empirical evidence in African multinationals remains scarce, raising questions about contextual moderators such as power distance or organizational hierarchy. Thus, the study postulate that:

H1: Humane leadership orientation has significant effect on employee task performance.

Justice Leadership Orientation and Employee Task Performance

Justice orientation reflects leaders’ fairness, transparency, and impartiality in decision-making. Numerous studies demonstrate that fair leadership enhances followers’ perceptions



of procedural and distributive justice, leading to stronger motivation and role performance (Colquitt et al., 2013; Cropanzano et al., 2017). Nonetheless, some evidence suggests that fairness effects may weaken in high-politics or low-trust environments, where structural inequities dilute perceptions of justice (Li & Cropanzano, 2009; Erdogan & Bauer, 2010).

A key analytical gap lies in the limited cross-cultural testing of these relationships. Studies from Western contexts often assume rational fairness norms, yet in developing economies, justice perceptions are filtered through cultural expectations of hierarchy and reciprocity. The current literature thus under-theorizes how *justice-oriented leadership* operates in African organizational settings characterized by relational obligations and resource constraints. Thus, we hypothesize as follows:

H2: Justice leadership orientation has significant effect on employee task performance.

Moderation Leadership Orientation and Employee Task Performance

Moderation orientation, rooted in temperance, humility, and avoidance of extremes, represents the most neglected dimension of ethical leadership (Eisenbeiss, 2012). Though closely related to the growing literature on *humble leadership*, moderation goes beyond self-effacement to encompass balanced decision-making and restraint in power use. Empirical evidence indicates that humility-type leader behaviors enhance task performance through improved trust, engagement, and psychological safety (Luo et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2024).

Despite these insights, two gaps remain. First, most research measures humility rather than moderation per se, making it unclear whether

moderation constitutes a distinct and empirically valid orientation. Second, nearly all studies derive from Western or East Asian samples, limiting understanding of how moderation functions in African contexts, where temperance and respect for balance have strong cultural roots but are rarely examined in organizational studies. The present study therefore addresses an important empirical gap by proposing the third hypothesis as follows.

H3: Moderation leadership orientation has significant effect on employee task performance

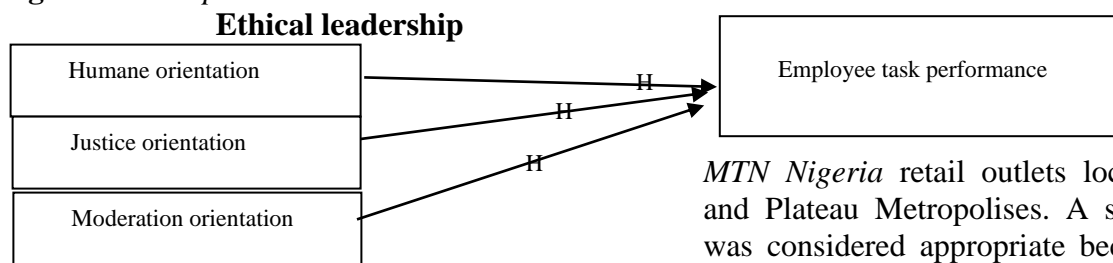
Social Exchange Theory

Social Exchange Theory (SET) was advanced by Emerson and Ekeh, (1974) and proposes that workers respond pioneers' conduct towards them with their own particular coordinated practices on common correspondence. This implies social trade hypothesis is fit for giving knowledge with respect to how moral leaders influence hierarchical results. Likewise, Social trade connections amongst pioneers and representatives create collaborations, which are inspired by the common advantages got from the hypothesis. Moral pioneer assemble association with their workers, which is portrayed by elevated amounts of trust, lower levels of control, and long commitments.

Research Framework

In Figure 1, three sets of research propositions are developed on the antecedents and consequences of leader expressions of the central ethical orientations and employee task performance. In their seminal review. Brown and Trevino (2006) already provided several propositions on how ethical leadership is influenced by certain situational and personality characteristics and how it may impact follower ethical and unethical behaviors

Figure 1 Conceptual Research Framework.



Synthesis and Research Gap

Overall, the literature establishes that ethical leadership promotes employee performance, but it remains largely descriptive and contextually narrow. Existing studies:

Overemphasize humane and justice orientations, while neglecting moderation as an independent ethical dimension.

Lack integrative frameworks that compare the relative effects of multiple ethical orientations within the same organizational context.

Underrepresent African multinationals, where ethical leadership may manifest differently due to cultural norms of collectivism, hierarchy, and moral restraint.

Consequently, the relationship between humane, justice, and moderation leadership orientations and employee task performance remains underexplored. Addressing this limitation, the present study investigates how these three orientations, individually and collectively, shape employee task performance in *MTN Nigeria*, a culturally plural subsidiary of a major multinational corporation. By integrating multidimensional ethical leadership theory with an African organizational context, this research offers a more nuanced and contextually grounded understanding of how ethical orientations influence performance outcomes.

3. Methodology

This study adopted a cross-sectional survey design to examine the effect of ethical leadership orientations, humane, justice, and moderation, on employee task performance in

MTN Nigeria retail outlets located in Bauchi and Plateau Metropolises. A survey approach was considered appropriate because it enables the collection of standardized information from multiple respondents, facilitating the statistical examination of relationships among variables within a real organizational setting.

The target population consisted of managers of MTN retail outlets across the selected regions. Given the operational and geographical constraints associated with data collection in active retail environments, a convenience sampling technique was employed to access participants who were available and willing to respond. Although convenience sampling is non-probabilistic, it is commonly used in organizational behavior studies where access to managerial respondents is limited by confidentiality and organizational gatekeeping (Etikan et al., 2016).

The final sample comprised 61 managers, representing a broad cross-section of managerial roles within the selected outlets. While the relatively small sample size restricts the generalizability of findings, it remains acceptable for exploratory research that aims to test theoretically derived relationships rather than produce population-level estimates (Hair et al., 2019). Furthermore, the sample size meets the *minimum statistical power* requirements for multiple regression with three predictors, as suggested by Cohen (1988), who recommends a sample of at least $50 + 8k$ (where k = number of predictors).

The study employed standardized, validated scales, as shown in Table 1, to ensure construct reliability and validity. Ethical leadership orientations were measured using the instrument developed by Feng et al. (2019), which operationalizes three dimensions of

ethical leadership, humane, justice, and moderation, on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*). Employee task performance was assessed using the 13-item scale by Koopmans et al. (2012) on a 4-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 4 = *strongly agree*).

The use of multi-item Likert scales allows for greater precision and internal consistency in capturing latent attitudinal constructs, a common practice in behavioral research (Joshi et al., 2015).

Data were collected through hand-delivered questionnaires distributed with the assistance of trained research aides. This method was chosen to maximize response rates and ensure comprehension among respondents. Ethical considerations were observed through informed consent, confidentiality assurances, and voluntary participation.

Data were analyzed using Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) multiple regression via IBM SPSS Statistics version 26 to assess the effects of the three leadership orientations on employee task performance. OLS was selected for two primary reasons:

Treatment of Likert Data: Although Likert-type items for employee task performance are ordinal, aggregated composite scores (e.g., mean or sum of multiple Likert items) are widely regarded as approximately continuous when they exhibit sufficient variability and internal consistency (Carifio & Perla, 2008; Norman, 2010). This allows the application of parametric techniques such as OLS regression without violating underlying statistical assumptions.

Model Simplicity and Interpretability: OLS regression provides clear estimates of the magnitude and direction of relationships between independent and dependent variables, facilitating comparison across leadership dimensions. Given the study's exploratory objective, to identify which ethical orientation most strongly predicts task performance, OLS

offers a robust and interpretable method of estimation.

Prior to analysis, data were screened for normality, linearity, and multicollinearity to ensure compliance with OLS assumptions. Cronbach's alpha and factor loadings were also examined to confirm internal reliability and convergent validity of the constructs.

4. Results and Discussion

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The demographic characteristics of the respondents are summarized in Table 1. Regarding gender, the data show that 31 respondents (50.8%) were male, while 29 respondents (47.5%) were female, and one respondent (1.6%) chose not to disclose gender. This distribution suggests a fairly balanced representation of male and female managers within MTN Nigeria, reflecting increasing gender diversity in managerial positions.

In terms of marital status, 25 respondents (41.0%) reported being single, while an equal proportion of 25 respondents (41.0%) indicated that they were married. Additionally, 11 respondents (18.0%) reported being separated. This mix suggests that the managerial workforce comprises individuals with varied family responsibilities, which could influence workplace experiences and perspectives on leadership and performance.

The age distribution of the managers indicates that most respondents were relatively young. About 34.4% (21 respondents) were within the 18–26 years category, and 41.0% (25 respondents) fell between 27–35 years, together accounting for over 75% of the sample. Only 14.8% (9 respondents) were aged 36–44 years, while 9.8% (6 respondents) were 45 years and above. This finding suggests that the majority of managers at MTN Nigeria are young professionals, which may reflect organizational emphasis on youthful leadership in a dynamic telecommunications industry.

Educational attainment among the respondents revealed considerable diversity. A small proportion (8.2%) held only a Certificate of Primary Education, while 18.0% possessed the Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (SSCE). Approximately 24.6% held a Diploma, and 36.1% reported having higher-level qualifications such as Higher National Diploma (HND), Postgraduate Diploma (PGD), or

Degree. A further 6.6% each reported having a Master's degree and a PhD, respectively. This distribution suggests that while the majority of managers hold tertiary-level qualifications, there is also representation of managers with both lower and advanced educational backgrounds, reflecting a mix of practical experience and formal education within the managerial cadre.

Table 1 Demographic Profile

S/N	Variable		Frequency	Percentage
1	Gender:	Male	31	50.8
		Female	29	47.5
		Undisclosed	1	1.6
2	Marital Status	Total	61	100.0
		Single	25	41.0
		Married	25	41.0
		Separated	11	18.0
		Total	61	100.0
3	Age group	18-26years	21	34.4
		27-35years	25	41.0
		36-44years	9	14.8
		45years and above	6	9.8
		Total	61	100.0
4	Education	Certificate of Primary Education	5	8.2
		SSCE	11	18.0
		Diploma	15	24.6
		HND/PGD/Degree	22	36.1
		Master	4	6.6
		PhD	4	6.6
		Total	61	100.0

Internal Consistency Reliability and Convergent Validity

The reliability and convergent validity of the constructs were assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficients, factor loadings, and total variance explained. According to Nunnally and Bernstein (1994), a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.70 or above is generally considered acceptable for research purposes, while factor loadings of 0.50 or higher suggest sufficient item convergence (Hair et al., 2019).

As shown in Table 2, employee task performance measured with items adapted from Koopmans et al. (2012) produced a Cronbach's alpha of 0.751, indicating acceptable internal consistency. The item loadings ranged between 0.507 and 0.874, with most items exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.60, suggesting good convergent validity. The construct also explained 62.2% of the total variance, which exceeds the minimum benchmark of 50%, further confirming the adequacy of the measurement model.

For humane leadership orientation, the Cronbach's alpha was 0.791, signifying satisfactory reliability. The standardized loadings ranged from 0.590 to 0.893, with most items above the acceptable threshold, supporting convergent validity. The total variance explained was 58.8%, which demonstrates that the construct captured a

Finally, moderation leadership orientation recorded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.721, which is above the recommended cut-off, thus indicating internal consistency. Factor loadings ranged between 0.544 and 0.749, showing that the items were moderately convergent. The total variance explained was 55.3%, confirming that the construct met acceptable standards of convergent validity.

substantial proportion of the variance in its observed indicators.

Justice leadership orientation demonstrated a Cronbach's alpha of 0.786, again meeting the reliability criterion. Factor loadings ranged from 0.664 to 0.883, suggesting strong convergence among the items. Additionally, the construct explained 63.0% of the total variance, reinforcing its measurement adequacy.

Table 2 *Reliability and Convergent Validity*

Variable/Source	Code	Item	Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	Total Variance Explained	
Employee performance/ Koopmans et al. (2012)	task	TP1	How do you rate the quality of your work in the past three months?	0.763	0.751	0.622
		TP2	Compared to last year, I judge the quality of my work in the past three months?	0.717		
		TP3	How often was the quality of your work below what it should have been in the past three months?	0.734		
		TP4	How do you rate the quality of your own work for the past three months?	0.791		
		TP5	Compared to last year, I judge the quality of my work in the past three months	0.727		
		TP6	How often was the quantity of your work less than it should have been in the past three months?	0.798		
		TP7	I managed to plan my work so that it was done on time.	0.874		
		TP8	I worked towards the end result of my work.	0.845		
		TP9	I kept in mind the result that I had to achieve in my work.	0.789		
		TP10	I had trouble setting priorities in my work.	0.792		
		TP12	I was able to perform my work well with minimal time and effort.	0.507		
		TP13	It took me longer to complete my work tasks than intended	0.647		
		Humane leadership orientation/ et al. (2019)	Feng	HL1		
HL2	My boss is caring and pay attention to employee's personal needs.			0.752		
HL3	My boss take time to talk about work-related emotions with employees.			0.678		
HL4	My boss is not genuinely concerned about employee's personal development.			0.636		
HL5	My boss sympathizes with employees when they have problem			0.590		
Justice leadership orientation/ et al. (2019)	Feng	JL1	My boss treats in a way that is right and equal.	0.883	0.786	0.630
		JL2	My boss distribute work to employees fairly.	0.836		
		JL3	My boss holds employees responsible for things that are not their fault.	0.744		
		JL4	My boss never pursues his/her own success at the expenses of other.	0.781		
		JL5	My boss makes just decision.	0.664		
Moderation leadership orientation/ et al. (2019)	Feng	ML1	My boss has modest attitude.	0.734	0.721	0.553
		ML2	My boss gives other the possibility to shine.	0.708		
		ML3	My boss does not encourage extreme objective, ideas, and behaviors.	0.749		
		ML4	My boss accepts diversity and differences	0.544		

Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell and Larcker (1981) criterion, which compares the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct with its correlations with other constructs. Discriminant validity is established when the square root of a construct's AVE is greater than its correlations with other constructs (Hair et al., 2019).

As shown in Table 3, the square root of the AVE for humane leadership orientation (0.767) exceeded its correlations with justice leadership orientation (0.438), moderation leadership orientation (0.649), and employee task performance (0.506). Similarly, the square root of the AVE for justice leadership orientation (0.794) was greater than its correlations with humane leadership orientation (0.438), moderation

leadership orientation (0.284), and employee task performance (0.290). This indicates that justice leadership orientation is empirically distinct from the other constructs.

For moderation leadership orientation, the square root of the AVE (0.744) was greater than its correlations with humane leadership orientation (0.649), justice leadership orientation (0.284), and employee task performance (0.593). Likewise, employee task performance reported a square root of AVE of 0.789, which was higher than its correlations with humane leadership orientation (0.506), justice leadership orientation (0.290), and moderation leadership orientation (0.593). These results confirm that each construct captures a unique dimension and is distinct from the others.

Table 3 Discriminant Validity Using Fornell and Larcker Criteria

	1.	2.	3.	4.	AVE
1. Humane leadership orientation	0.767				0.588
2. Justice leadership orientation	.438**	0.794			0.630
3. Moderation leadership orientation	.649**	.284*	0.744		0.553
4. Employee task performance	.506**	0.290*	.593**	0.789	0.622

Model Fit

The fitness of the regression model was assessed using the coefficient of determination (R^2), adjusted R^2 , and the standard error of the estimate. As shown in Table 4, the model yielded an R value of 0.634, indicating a moderately strong positive correlation between the independent variables (humane leadership orientation, justice leadership orientation, and moderation leadership orientation) and the dependent variable (employee task performance).

The R^2 value of 0.402 suggests that approximately 40.2% of the variance in

employee task performance is explained by the three dimensions of ethical leadership orientation. The adjusted R^2 value of 0.370, which accounts for the number of predictors in the model, confirms the robustness of the model by indicating that after adjustment, the predictors still explain about 37.0% of the variance in employee task performance. According to Cohen (1988), an R^2 value above 0.26 represents a substantial effect in behavioral science research, suggesting that the model has a meaningful explanatory power.

Table 4 Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.634 ^a	.402	.370	.33466

a. Predictors: (Constant), Humane leadership orientation, Justice leadership orientation, Moderation leadership orientation

Hypothesis Testing

The study examined the effect of humane, justice, and moderation leadership orientations on employee task performance using multiple regression analysis. Table 5 presents the results of the hypothesis testing.

Hypothesis One H1 predicted that humane leadership orientation has a significant effect on employee task performance. The results revealed that humane leadership orientation had a positive and statistically significant effect on employee task performance ($\beta = 0.107$, $t = 2.977$, $p = 0.029$). Since the p -value is less than the 0.05 level of significance, H1 is supported. This finding suggests that managers who demonstrate respect, dignity, and care toward employees significantly enhance their task performance.

Hypothesis Two H2 posited that justice leadership orientation has a significant effect on employee task performance. The regression results indicate that justice

leadership orientation exerted a positive and significant effect on employee task performance ($\beta = 0.178$, $t = 3.224$, $p = 0.024$). Given that the effect is significant at the 5% level, H2 is accepted. This implies that fair treatment, equitable distribution of tasks, and just decision-making by leaders play a critical role in improving employee performance within MTN Nigeria.

Hypothesis Three H3 proposed that moderation leadership orientation significantly influences employee task performance. The results confirm that moderation leadership orientation had the strongest positive and significant effect on employee task performance among the three leadership dimensions ($\beta = 0.429$, $t = 3.130$, $p = 0.003$). With the p -value well below 0.05, H3 is supported. This indicates that temperance, humility, and balanced leadership behaviors substantially contribute to improving how employees carry out their tasks.

Table 5 Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	
1	(Constant)	1.677	0.191		8.799	0.000
	Humane leadership orientation	0.128	0.043	0.107	2.977	0.029
	Justice leadership orientation	0.158	0.049	0.178	3.224	0.024
	Moderation leadership orientation	0.137	0.044	0.429	3.13	0.003

a. Dependent Variable: Employee task performance

Discussion

The findings of this study confirm that humane, justice, and moderation leadership orientations each exert a positive and statistically significant effect on employee

task performance within MTN Nigeria. These results underscore the argument that ethical leadership, conceptualized as a multidimensional construct, meaningfully enhances employee behavior and

performance outcomes in multinational contexts.

From the standpoint of SET, these findings highlight how employees reciprocate fair, respectful, and balanced treatment from leaders with higher levels of commitment, effort, and in-role performance. When leaders exhibit humane concern, fairness, and temperance, they strengthen the quality of leader–member exchanges (LMX), which fosters trust and reduces perceived risk in organizational relationships. This reciprocity mechanism explains why employees in the current study reported higher task performance under ethical leadership. The findings therefore validate SET’s core principle that social reciprocity serves as a motivational driver for sustained work engagement (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005).

By integrating Eisenbeiss’s (2012) normative orientations with SET, the study provides a more nuanced explanation of ethical leadership’s functional pathways. Humane and justice orientations operate through relational fairness and emotional care, aligning closely with SET’s “trust–reciprocity” mechanism. Moderation orientation, on the other hand, extends this framework by introducing temperance as a stabilizing factor in leader–follower exchanges—reducing conflict and promoting psychological safety. Thus, ethical leadership does not merely influence performance through direct behavioral modeling (Bandura, 1986), but also by *shaping the social and moral context* in which exchanges occur.

The positive association between humane leadership orientation and task performance is consistent with prior findings across different cultural contexts. For instance, Newman et al. (2014) and Walumbwa et al. (2011) demonstrated that leaders who treat employees with dignity enhance trust, engagement, and performance. Similarly, Kim and Brymer

(2011) observed that hospitality managers’ humane behaviors improved job satisfaction and service efficiency. However, the current study extends these findings to the African multinational context, suggesting that humane leadership may be even more salient in collectivist cultures where interpersonal harmony and empathy are culturally reinforced values.

The observed significance of justice orientation aligns with global studies emphasizing fairness as a foundation for performance. Colquitt et al. (2013) and Cropanzano et al. (2017) found that fair treatment enhances motivation and discretionary effort through perceptions of procedural justice. Yet, in contexts such as Nigeria, where organizational politics and perceptions of favoritism are often salient (Okpara & Wynn, 2008), this finding assumes greater practical relevance. Justice-oriented leadership may counterbalance systemic inequities, reinforcing employees’ sense of legitimacy and organizational belonging.

The strongest effect observed for moderation orientation is particularly noteworthy. While research on humility and temperance in leadership is growing globally (Luo et al., 2022; Yanget al., 2022; Liu et al., 2024), moderation has rarely been empirically tested as a distinct ethical dimension. The present results therefore contribute to closing this gap by demonstrating that moderation-oriented leaders, those who exercise restraint, balance, and humility, enhance employee task performance, likely by fostering psychological safety and reducing anxiety in high-pressure environments. This complements findings from East Asian and Western studies that associate humble or temperate leadership with higher engagement and creativity (Luo et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2024).

Theoretically, the findings provide empirical support for the multidimensional

ethical leadership model proposed by Eisenbeiss (2012), confirming that humane, justice, and moderation orientations operate as distinct but interrelated ethical pathways that influence task performance. The study also broadens SET's explanatory scope by demonstrating that ethical leadership behaviors not only strengthen relational exchanges but also embed moral norms that sustain positive work behavior.

Practically, the results suggest that organizations, especially multinationals operating in diverse cultural settings, should invest in leadership development programs that cultivate *balanced ethical competence*. Specifically, leaders should be trained to combine empathy (humane orientation), fairness (justice orientation), and temperance (moderation orientation) to sustain performance under dynamic business conditions.

This study contributes to global ethical leadership scholarship in three key ways:

1. It provides cross-contextual validation of ethical leadership effects in a sub-Saharan African multinational, a region underrepresented in leadership research.
2. It extends Eisenbeiss's (2012) theoretical model by empirically confirming moderation orientation as a significant predictor of employee performance.
3. It reinforces SET's explanatory relevance by showing that ethical leader behaviors trigger reciprocal employee responses even in non-Western organizational cultures

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

Conclusion

This study examined the effects of humane, justice, and moderation leadership orientations on employee task performance within *MTN Nigeria*. Drawing on SET, the findings demonstrate that all three ethical

orientations significantly and positively influence employee task performance. Leaders who exhibit compassion and respect (humane orientation), fairness and impartiality (justice orientation), and temperance and humility (moderation orientation) foster trust, engagement, and balanced workplace relationships that enhance task effectiveness.

Theoretical Contributions

The study advances ethical leadership theory by empirically validating Eisenbeiss's (2012) multidimensional framework in a sub-Saharan African context, highlighting that moderation orientation, often overlooked, plays a distinctive role in predicting employee performance. It also extends SET by showing that ethical behaviors activate reciprocity and trust mechanisms even in culturally plural, non-Western organizations.

Practical and Managerial Implications

For managers, the results emphasize that ethical leadership is not merely moral but *performance-relevant*. Organizations should develop leadership training that integrates humane concern, fairness, and moderation to build relational climates conducive to high productivity. In multinational firms like MTN, such ethical orientations can strengthen employee loyalty, reduce conflict, and sustain competitive advantage.

Policy Implications

At a policy level, the study supports incorporating ethical leadership standards into corporate governance and human resource frameworks. Institutionalizing ethics-based leadership evaluation and capacity-building initiatives can promote accountability and workforce well-being across the Nigerian and broader African corporate landscape.

Limitations and Future Research

While the cross-sectional design and modest sample size limit generalizability,

the study provides a robust empirical foundation for future research. Longitudinal and cross-sectoral studies could further test causal relationships and explore mediating mechanisms such as psychological safety or organizational identification.

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