

SEMNALE TĂCUTE: NAVIGAREA ETICII PRIN COMUNICARE NON-VERBALĂ LA LOCUL DE MUNCĂ

Silent Signals: Navigating Ethics through Non-Verbal Communication at Work

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Rezumat: Etica organizațională joacă un rol esențial în modelarea reputației întreprinderii și în influențarea deciziilor consumatorilor. Comunicarea, în special indiciile non-verbale, cum ar fi limbajul corpului, este esențială în construirea și susținerea unei culturi organizaționale etice. Lucrarea examinează modul în care limbajul corporal pozitiv, atitudinea liderilor organizației și training-ul în comunicare non-verbală se corelează cu comportamentul etic în cadrul mediilor profesionale. Prin aplicarea unui interviu, studiul adună date pentru a analiza aceste corelații în medii organizaționale reale. Scopul este de a oferi perspective care să avantajeze atât înțelegerea academică, cât și implementarea practică. Constatările urmăresc să sprijine dezvoltarea practicilor etice care sporesc integritatea, încrederea și luarea deciziilor responsabile în medii de lucru dinamice și diverse. Aceste informații pot ajuta organizațiile să rafineze strategiile de formare, de dezvoltare a leadership-ului și de comunicare pentru a promova o cultură organizațională axată pe etică mai puternică.

Cuvinte cheie: etică organizațională; limbajul corpului; leadership etic; comunicare non-verbală

Abstract: Organizational ethics play a vital role in shaping corporate reputation and influencing consumer decisions. Communication, particularly non-verbal cues such as body language, is crucial in building and sustaining an ethical organizational culture. This paper examines how positive body language, organizational leadership attitude, training in non-verbal communication correlates with ethical behavior within professional environments. By applying a interview, the study gathers data to analyze these correlations in real organizational settings. The goal is to provide insights that benefit both academic understanding and practical implementation. Findings aim to support the development of ethical practices that enhance integrity, trust, and responsible decision-making in dynamic and diverse workplaces. These insights can help organizations refine training, leadership development, and communication strategies to foster stronger ethical cultures.

Keywords: organizational ethics; body language; ethical leadership; non-verbal communication

Clasificare JEL: Learning; Information and Knowledge; Communication; Belief (D83)

Clasificare REL: 5F

1. Introducere

The significance of ethics in organizations has grown, with many consumers considering corporate reputation when deciding whether to engage with a brand or company (Lim et al., 2023). Promoting ethical conduct within organizations encompasses a commitment to integrity, ensuring fairness and equity, embracing responsibility, fostering accountability, adhering to legal standards and prioritizing quality. The preservation of organizational ethics is pivotal, as it plays a vital role in nurturing trust, safeguarding a positive reputation, and increasing employee satisfaction managing risks, and therefore contributing to entire workplace performance (Derfler-Rozin & Park, 2022).

Effective communication is key for creating, maintaining, and reinforcing an ethical organizational culture, ensure that ethical principles are not only established but are consistently communicated, understood, and upheld throughout the organization. The alignment of effective communication with ethical values contributes significantly to building trust, fostering transparency, and promoting a culture of integrity within an organization (Yue & Thelen, 2023).

Non-verbal communication or body language is a fundamental aspect of effective communication within organizational settings. The primary elements of non-verbal body language encompass posture, body adornment (clothes, jewelry, accessories, hairstyle, etc.), gestures, eye contact, facial expressions, voice tone, eye signs, conversational distance, touch (haptics), applause, and physiological responses such as sweating palms, forehead perspiration, paleness, or noticeable changes in facial and neck color (Peleckis et al., 2016). Appropriate body language in professional environment consist in polished and professional look, standing and sitting up straight with shoulders back, maintaining consistent eye contact and incorporate smiles to lighten the atmosphere. Respecting spatial boundaries is integral to non-verbal comportment, as proximity or distance during interactions must be calibrated to the prevailing socio-cultural norms to preclude discomfort. Being aware of and understanding body language cues can significantly enhance communication and contribute to more effective interactions in the workplace (Rao, 2017). Body language is a powerful aspect of communication within organizations influencing relationships, leadership effectiveness, conflict resolution, and entire organisational culture (Dutta, Mishra, & Budhwar, 2022).

Although researches on body language and its impact on various aspects of communication are available, the explicit investigation into its connection with organizational ethics appears to be a gap in the current academic landscape. Studies in this area could contribute valuable insights into how non-verbal cues may play a role in shaping ethical behavior, decision-making, and typical ethical culture within organizational settings.

Therefore, the aim of this paper is to explore the potential correlations between organisational ethics and various aspects of body language, including the correlation between positive body language and ethical behavior, the influence of leadership's positive body language and the effect of training in positive body language on ethical behavior in organisations.

2. Literature Review & Research Hypothesis Development

Organisational ethics involves principles, values, and standards guiding the conduct of individuals and groups within an organization, establishing a moral framework for decision-making and interactions. The ethical decision-making process comprises four stages: recognizing an ethical issue, making an ethical judgement, establishing ethical intent, and engaging in ethical behavior (Jones, 1991). Various factors have been recognised in literature to influence organisational ethics at different stages. Environmental factors, such as culture,

industry, and organization, are identified by Hunt and Vitell (1986) to influence the ethical decision-making. Additionally, Jones (1991) highlights moral intensity as a factor impacting all four stages of the process. Kish-Gephart et al. (2010) offer a meta-analysis framework, including individual characteristics (e.g., gender, age, cognitive moral development), moral issue characteristics (e.g., magnitude of consequences, social consensus), and organizational environment characteristics (e.g., ethical organizational culture) as antecedents to unethical choices in the workplace. Consequently, individual traits, and the surrounding environment, are significant determinants in shaping how individuals make ethical decisions and subsequently behave (Vinson et al., 2020).

Positive gestures and effective body language are important in organisations as contribute to improved relationships among employees. Begum and Azam (2022) emphasize that body language is the most impactful aspect influencing workplace relationships, making it a crucial consideration for employees. Non-verbal communication skills, encompassing body language, not only shape workplace relationships but also contribute to improved employee performance. Furthermore, body language holds substantial importance in career development, yielding better results. The incorporation of nonverbal behavior and positive body language is particularly effective in negotiations, building trust and positive relationships with customers (Rakhimovna, 2022). Also, nonverbal communication can greatly enhance team collaboration by expressing emotions, attitudes, and feelings that words cannot capture, reinforcing and complementing verbal messages, regulating the flow of conversation, and establishing rapport and connection with team members (Lefebvre et al., 2008, Srivastava, 2022).

Efficient communication is a cornerstone of ethical organizational practices, ensures clarity, prevents misunderstandings, facilitates open dialogue, promotes transparency in decision-making, aligns individuals with organizational values, aids in conflict resolution, and enhances total employee engagement in ethical considerations. Organizations that prioritize both efficient communication and ethics create a foundation for a healthy and principled work environment (Parboteeah et al., 2010).

All these studies emphasize the importance of non-verbal cues in team dynamics, team environment, managing clients, job satisfaction, thus positive body language improves thoroughly the organisational performance. Taking all into consideration we hypothesise that individuals who display positive body language are more likely to engage in ethical behavior within the organization.

Hypothesis 1: Positive Body Language is Positively Correlated with Ethical Behaviour in Organisations

Leaders play a crucial role in cultivating a culture of ethics and ethical decision-making throughout the entire organization, and should actively assume the role of ethical role models, as employees frequently emulate the behavior of their superiors (Teimouri et al., 2018).

Leithwood (2023) emphasizes the role of leaders in shaping organizational culture through their non-verbal communication stating that leaders who consistently exhibit positive body language contribute to a workplace environment that fosters ethical behavior among employees. A leader that follows ethical norms through personal actions and interpersonal relationships is defined by Brown et al. (2005) as ethical leader. The definition encompasses two key aspects: ethical leaders are both a 'moral person' and a 'moral manager' (Brown et al, 2005). Being a moral person entails that an ethical leader conducts normatively appropriately - fairly, trust-worthily, honestly, and caring. In this regard, ethical leadership intersects with other leadership concepts, yet it goes beyond by introducing a transactional component, the dimension of the moral manager. Ethical leaders purposefully promote ethical conduct among their employees by engaging in conversations about ethics and decision-making behaviors and by utilizing both rewards and punishments as tools (Frisch & Huppenbauer, 2014)

Ethical leaders demonstrate dedication to transparency and integrity through their body language. They convey openness with non-verbal cues, ensuring a relaxed posture and avoiding defensive gestures. Direct eye contact signals sincerity and a genuine connection. Facial expressions, including empathy, foster trust and showcase emotional intelligence. Active listening is evident through nods and inclusive gestures, promoting a collaborative atmosphere. Ethical leaders use a calm voice tone, clear communication, and controlled hand movements to engage effectively. Consistency between verbal and non-verbal communication reinforces authenticity, while respect for personal space and emotional regulation showcases commitment to a positive organizational culture, trust, and ethical conduct (Demirtas & Akdoğan, 2015; Walumbwa & Schaubroeck, 2009).

All studies revealed that the positive body language of leaders, including posture, gestures, and eye contact, has a direct influence on the ethical behavior of their subordinates within the organizational context, therefore we consider:

Hypothesis 2: Leadership Body Language is Positively Correlated with Ethical Behaviour in Organisations

The management can promote ethical conduct in organizations via Human Resources Management practices such as training. Regular ethics training incorporating scenarios depicting both ethical and unethical behavior is crucial to consistently emphasize and reinforce ethical conduct. This approach serves to continually underscore the significance of ethical behavior and signals its importance to the workforce (Dutta et al., 2022, Sharma et al., 2014). Parks-Leduc et al. (2021) suggest that ethical training programs can have beneficial impacts on ethical decision-making, and individual characteristics, both traits and values, also influence ethical decision-making. Another study investigated the effectiveness of communication skills training, including non-verbal communication, in business involving sells. The research found that training in positive body language led to improved communication, emphasizing the potential benefits of targeted training programs in enhancing communication skills, which may extend to ethical decision-making. (Peterson, 2005).

Training in non-verbal communication and personal space in various context, mentioning valuable tools like mirroring, the alignment of the body language of the speaker with that of the audience, aid to establish a profound connection. By integrating these strategies, leaders and employees not only improve their communication skills but also contribute to creating a more positive and engaging communicative environment (Rao, 2012; Rao, 2017). Training programs that address personal space considerations and promote appropriate non-verbal behaviors can significantly contribute to fostering a more ethical and respectful interpersonal environment within organizations (Lacerenza et al., 2017).

Understanding the nuances of training interventions and their effectiveness in promoting ethical behavior is crucial for organizations seeking to cultivate a culture of integrity and ethical decision-making among their members. Therefore we suggests that individuals educated and coached on how to effectively convey messages through non-verbal cues like gestures, facial expressions, and posture, may exhibit improvements in their ethical behaviour within organizational settings.

Hypothesis 3: Training in Body Language Influences Ethical Behaviour in Organisations

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design to explore how ethics are navigated through non-verbal communication at work. A qualitative approach is particularly suitable for

investigating complex social interactions and behaviors in their natural settings. The use of individual in-depth interviews was chosen to allow participants to express their experiences without external influences. This method provides richer, more nuanced insights into their perceptions of ethical non-verbal communication in the workplace. Six individual in-depth interviews were conducted, each lasting approximately 15-20 minutes. The selection of participants followed a purposive sampling strategy, ensuring representation from different organizational roles, including top management, middle management, and employees and various generation stages (Gen X, Gen Y, Gen Z, Baby Boomers). The diversity in roles enhances the study's ability to capture varied perspectives on ethical communication within workplace hierarchies.

3.2 Data Collection and Analysis

The interviews were conducted face-to-face in English at their work place or at a neutral setting in the period of 15th-31th March and followed a semi-structured format. Questions were designed to assess participants' perceptions of how ethics are navigated through non-verbal communication at work. During the interviews, responses were manually written down as participants spoke, ensuring that their perspectives were captured in real-time while maintaining a natural conversational flow.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, a widely accepted qualitative approach for identifying patterns and themes within textual data. The process involved manual coding, where transcripts were read multiple times to generate initial codes, which were then grouped into broader themes related to ethical non-verbal communication. Ethical integrity was upheld throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before the interviews, ensuring they were aware of the study's purpose and their rights. Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained by assigning codes to participants (P1-P6) and removing any identifying details from transcripts. Additionally, participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without repercussions.

4. Results and discussions

4.1 Participant Profile

The study included six participants from different professional backgrounds, generations, and hierarchical levels within their organizations. Their demographic and professional characteristics are summarized Table 1.

Participant profile

Table 1

Code	Generation	Gender	Experience	Field of activity	Job Position
P1	Gen Y	Female	7 years	Education	Employee
P2	Gen X	Female	10 years	Project management	Middle Management
P3	Baby Boomer	Female	Over 10 years	Project management	Middle Management
P4	Baby Boomer	Female	Over 20 years	Research	Employee
P5	Baby Boomer	Male	Over 20 years	Research	Top Management
P6	Gen Z	Male	4 years	Accounting	Employee

4.2 Emerging Themes

Through thematic analysis, several key themes emerged regarding how non-verbal communication is perceived and utilized in workplace ethics. These themes are supported by direct quotes from participants and analyzed through generational and hierarchical perspectives.

4.2.1 Importance of Positive Body Language in Professional Settings

Participants in the study universally recognized the importance of positive body language—such as eye contact, open posture, and a calm tone—in professional settings, noting its role in fostering trust, credibility, and effective communication. However, their perspectives diverged based on generation and position. For instance, P1 (Gen Y, employee) emphasized its interpersonal benefits, stating, *“I think it’s important for building trust or credibility in a professional setting because it’s a sign of respect for the speaker and also shows confidence, honesty, and sincerity.”* In contrast, P3 (Baby Boomer, middle management) highlighted its broader implications, asserting, *“Leaders set the tone. Ethical leadership models respectful verbal exchanges and mindful non-verbal signals, influencing how ethics and communication intertwine across teams.”* These views reflect distinct focuses: one on mutual respect in daily interactions and the other on leadership’s ethical influence.

The generational and positional divide further clarifies these differences. Baby Boomers like P3, P4, and P5, often in leadership roles, framed positive body language as a tool for setting an ethical tone and guiding teams, reflecting their emphasis on authority and organizational impact. Meanwhile, younger participants from Gen Y and Gen Z, such as P1 and P6, who are typically in employee positions, focused on its role in fostering collaboration and personal credibility in peer-to-peer exchanges. This contrast underscores how Baby Boomers view body language as a strategic leadership responsibility, while Gen Y and Gen Z see it as a means to enhance workplace relationships, shaped by their respective experiences and roles. These results are in agreement with Begum and Azam (2022) and Rakhimovna (2022), that argue that non-verbal communication plays a crucial role in interpersonal relations and performance outcomes. Moreover, the generational differences observed in this study expand upon the literature that acknowledge the general importance of body language (Srivastava, 2022; Lefebvre et al., 2008), our results show that younger participants (Gen Y, Gen Z) particularly associate positive body language with credibility and peer-level collaboration, aligning with Vinson et al. (2020), who emphasized the role of individual traits in ethical decision-making.

4.2.2 Non-Verbal Cues in Stressful Situations

Participants expressed varied perspectives on maintaining positive body language during stressful situations or conflicts, with some emphasizing its value and others acknowledging its challenges. P2 (Gen X, middle management) admitted to the difficulty, stating, *“If I am involved in the conflict, and I need to defend my position, sometimes I find it difficult to maintain positive body language”* reflecting a practical struggle when personally invested. Conversely, P3 (Baby Boomer, middle management) underscored its importance, noting, *“Non-verbal communication plays an important role, especially tone and body position, in settling conflicts and reducing stress”* suggesting a belief in its effectiveness as a calming and resolving force. These responses highlight a split between those who see non-verbal cues as essential in tense moments and those who find them hard to sustain under pressure. The difficulty participants expressed in sustaining positive body language during conflict mirrors

findings by Burgoon et al. (2016), who note that stress often disrupts non-verbal congruency, leading to mixed signals.

Generational and positional differences further shape these views. Older generations, such as P3 and P5 (Baby Boomers, in middle and top management), viewed non-verbal communication as a strategic tool for conflict resolution, likely informed by their leadership experience and focus on maintaining control in challenging situations. In contrast, younger participants like P6 (Gen Z, employee) admitted to struggling with non-verbal cues during stress, pointing to a lack of confidence or skill that suggests a need for training. This divide reveals how older, higher-positioned individuals prioritize the deliberate use of body language to manage disputes, while younger, less experienced individuals grapple with its application, reflecting both maturity and role-based perspectives.

4.2.3 Leadership's Role in Ethical Behavior Through Non-Verbal Cues

Participants widely acknowledged that a leader's body language plays a pivotal role in either reinforcing or undermining ethical standards within an organization, with specific insights varying by perspective. P1 (Gen Y, employee) emphasized the ripple effect of a leader's integrity, stating, *"If the manager consistently acts with integrity, being transparent and not judging anyone, then employees gain more trust and will be inclined to follow that example"* highlighting how non-verbal cues inspire trust and emulation among staff. Similarly, P2 (Gen X, middle management) stressed the responsibility of leaders, noting, *"Both middle and top managers should be very careful with their non-verbal body language and cues because that sets the tone for the entire organization"* underscoring the broad influence of leadership behavior. These views collectively affirm that a leader's non-verbal communication is a powerful driver of ethical workplace norms. The results resonate with Brown et al. (2005) and Teimouri et al. (2018), which highlights the importance of visible ethical conduct, including non-verbal behaviors, in influencing subordinate behavior.

Generational and positional differences further illuminate these perspectives. Participants in top and middle management, such as P3 and P5 (Baby Boomers), strongly emphasized their active role in setting ethical standards through body language, reflecting their awareness of their influence as leaders. In contrast, employees like P1, P4, and P6 (Gen Y, Baby Boomer, and Gen Z, respectively) focused on their reliance on leadership cues to gauge and interpret ethical behavior, positioning them as observers rather than setters of the tone. This distinction highlights a dynamic where leaders see non-verbal cues as a tool to project integrity, while employees view them as indicators of trustworthiness, aligning with research that links ethical leadership to a culture of transparency and trust through consistent verbal and non-verbal signals.

4.2.4 Ethical Dilemmas and Non-Verbal Communication

Participants shared diverse approaches to navigating ethical dilemmas, emphasizing the interplay of verbal and non-verbal communication, with strategies ranging from interpersonal tactics to formal processes. P1 (Gen Y, employee) focused on a personal, collaborative method, stating, *"I handled ethical dilemmas by communicating respectfully and seeking support from a more experienced colleague"* highlighting the use of respectful non-verbal cues alongside guidance from others to resolve conflicts. In contrast, P3 (Baby Boomer, middle management) pointed to a structured approach, explaining, *"There is a procedure for addressing conflicts. All complaints are taken into account, and a meeting is set up with the ethics committee to discuss them in a confidential manner"* suggesting reliance on established protocols where non-verbal communication likely reinforces professionalism during formal

discussions. These responses illustrate a spectrum of tactics, from informal interpersonal skills to systematic organizational mechanisms.

Generational and positional differences further shape these perspectives. Younger participants like P1 (Gen Y) leaned toward interpersonal strategies, using respectful communication and mentorship to address ethical challenges, reflecting a reliance on individual relationships and non-verbal cues like tone and demeanor. Conversely, older participants in leadership roles, such as P3 (Baby Boomer), emphasized formal mechanisms like ethics committees, where non-verbal communication supports procedural integrity and confidentiality, aligning with their experience and authority. This contrast reveals how younger employees prioritize adaptive, personal approaches to ethical dilemmas, while those in higher positions draw on structured systems, with non-verbal cues enhancing both styles, whether through fostering trust in one-on-one interactions or upholding decorum in official settings.

4.2.5 Influence of Workplace Culture on Ethical Decision-Making

Participants highlighted the significant role that workplace culture and leadership behavior play in shaping ethical decision-making, with distinct perspectives emerging on how this influence manifests. P6 (Gen Z, employee) pointed to the impact of the environment, stating, *“If you work in a more stressful environment, you will likely imitate the strict and cold body language of that environment”* suggesting that the prevailing culture directly affects individuals’ non-verbal communication and, by extension, their ethical choices. In contrast, P5 (Baby Boomer, top management) emphasized structured support systems, noting, *“Our organization has an ethics committee, procedures for addressing ethical dilemmas, and a researcher conduct code. These mechanisms help ensure ethical communication”* indicating that formal frameworks guide ethical behavior and reinforce it through consistent verbal and non-verbal cues. The findings that workplace culture influences both non-verbal expression and ethical behavior are consistent with Dutta, Mishra, & Budhwar (2022) organizational culture theory, which argues that cultural environment shape employee conduct at all levels.

Generational and positional differences further clarify these insights. Younger participants like P6 (Gen Z) described being reactive to workplace atmosphere, adapting their body language, and thus their ethical decision-making, to mirror the tone set by their surroundings, reflecting a more impressionable stance typical of early-career employees. Older managers, such as P5 and P3 (Baby Boomers in top and middle management), leaned on formal policies and procedures to regulate ethical conduct, suggesting a proactive approach rooted in their authority and experience with organizational systems. This divide illustrates how younger employees are shaped by the cultural cues they observe, while seasoned leaders rely on established mechanisms to enforce ethical standards, with non-verbal communication serving as both a reflection of culture and a tool to uphold it for the latter.

The study validates the role of workplace culture and environmental context, stated by Kish-Gephart et al. (2010) as critical to ethical decision-making. Participants reported that both formal systems (e.g., ethics committees) and informal norms (e.g., tone set by management) affect their use of non-verbal cues and ethical responses.

Moreover, the theme of cultural mirroring identified by younger employees adds new empirical depth to Parboteeah et al. (2010), highlighting how subtle, ambient body language within a culture can shape employee behavior even in the absence of explicit directives.

4.2.6 Training in Positive Body Language

Most participants endorsed the idea that training in positive body language could improve workplace communication and ethical behavior, though one expressed skepticism about its value. P1 (Gen Y, employee) underscored its impact, stating, *“Regardless of the situation, the way you present yourself non-verbally can make or break how others perceive you”* suggesting that such training could enhance professional perception and interactions. Similarly, P2 (Gen X, middle management) supported the concept, noting, *“I believe training in non-verbal communication would be helpful, especially for managers, as it fosters trust and a more enjoyable workplace”* highlighting its potential to strengthen leadership and team dynamics. However, P4 (Baby Boomer, employee) dissented, arguing, *“I don’t necessarily think that training would improve the situation at work, but rather an awareness of each person that they should maintain an appropriate tone”* favoring individual responsibility over structured programs. Younger participants, particularly those from Gen Y and Gen Z, strongly supported training in non-verbal communication, aligning with research by Peterson (2005) and Rao (2012; 2017) that highlights the positive impact of such programs on enhancing communication skills and professional presence. These findings further support the conclusions of Dutta et al. (2022) and Parks-Leduc et al. (2021), who argue that ethical behavior can be effectively developed through structured learning initiatives, especially when these interventions emphasize practical interpersonal competencies like body language.

Generational and positional differences further shape these views. Younger generations, such as Gen Y and Gen Z (e.g., P1), viewed training as vital for professional success and ethical communication, reflecting their openness to development and structured learning as they build their careers. In contrast, older employees like P4 (Baby Boomer) prioritized personal awareness over formal training, suggesting that their extensive experience leads them to trust intrinsic judgment rather than external instruction. Middle managers like P2 (Gen X) bridged the gap, seeing training as a practical tool for enhancing their leadership role. This divide illustrates how younger participants value proactive skill-building, while some older individuals lean on seasoned intuition, with non-verbal training seen as either a game-changer or an unnecessary supplement depending on age and perspective.

4.3 Hypothesis Alignment

The formulated hypotheses were therefore investigated through the assessment of the interviews.

The findings strongly support Hypothesis 1 (*Positive Body Language is Positively Correlated with Ethical Behaviour in Organisations*). Participants across all generations recognized the value of non-verbal cues, such as open posture, eye contact, and calm tone, in conveying respect, sincerity, and trustworthiness. These results are consistent with Begum and Azam (2022) and Rakhimovna (2022), who argue that non-verbal communication plays a crucial role in interpersonal relations and performance outcomes. Notably, the generational differences observed in this study expand upon the literature. While existing studies emphasize the general importance of body language (Srivastava, 2022; Lefebvre et al., 2008), our results show that younger participants (Gen Y, Gen Z) particularly associate positive body language with credibility and peer-level collaboration, aligning with Vinson et al. (2020), who emphasized the role of individual traits in ethical decision-making. Meanwhile, older generations (Baby Boomers), especially those in management, viewed body language as a mechanism for reinforcing ethical standards, extending the idea of environmental influences on ethics as discussed by Hunt & Vitell (1986).

Hypothesis 2 (*Leadership Body Language is Positively Correlated with Ethical Behaviour in Organisations*) is strongly supported by the data. Middle and top management participants echoed sentiments found in Brown et al. (2005) and Teimouri et al. (2018), that ethical leaders model appropriate behavior through both verbal and non-verbal channels. Moreover, the idea that leadership non-verbal communication shapes the broader ethical climate of the organization aligns with Leithwood (2023) and Demirtas & Akdoğan (2015), who highlight how transparency, emotional regulation, and physical comportment build trust. In this study, employees (e.g., P1, P6) recognized and responded to their leaders' body language as cues for acceptable conduct, directly affirming the social learning aspect proposed by Frisch & Huppenbauer (2014). The inter-generational agreement that leadership body language significantly influences ethical tone confirms that non-verbal cues are not only relational but instrumental in institutionalizing ethical norms—a concept extending Jones' (1991) model across the ethical behavior stages.

Hypothesis 3 (*Training in Body Language Influences Ethical Behaviour in Organisations*) received mixed but generally positive support. Younger participants, especially from Gen Y and Gen Z, showed strong endorsement of non-verbal communication training, consistent with findings from Peterson (2005) and Rao (2012; 2017) on the effectiveness of such programs in improving communication and professional demeanor. These results reinforce the idea from Dutta et al. (2022) and Parks-Leduc et al. (2021) that ethical behavior can be cultivated through targeted learning interventions, particularly when they focus on real-world interpersonal skills like body language. However, the skepticism expressed by some older participants (e.g., P4) introduces a nuanced challenge to this perspective. This divergence suggests that experience and generational values might affect perceived training utility, an area not deeply explored in prior literature.

5. Conclusion

The findings reinforce the significance of non-verbal communication in ethical workplace interactions. Leaders' non-verbal cues, such as eye contact and posture, significantly shape employees' perceptions of ethical behavior. Additionally, training in positive body language may enhance professional success and ethical decision-making, although its perceived effectiveness varies among employees. Research suggests that ethical leaders use positive body language to model integrity, reinforcing ethical behavior within organizations. Also, organizations should consider incorporating body language training into leadership development programs. Ethical guidelines should also emphasize the role of non-verbal cues in fostering trust and professionalism. Additionally, managers should be mindful of their body language, as it influences workplace culture.

The findings of this study offer clear, actionable insights for organizational leadership and human resource development. Most notably, the strong influence of leaders' non-verbal cues on employees' ethical perceptions suggests that organizations should integrate body language awareness and training into leadership development programs. By doing so, they can enhance the credibility and integrity of their leaders, fostering a culture of trust and ethical consistency. Furthermore, the generational divide observed in attitudes toward training underscores the need for tailored communication and development strategies. Younger employees may benefit more from structured, skills-based training, while older professionals might respond better to mentorship-based or reflective learning approaches. Embedding non-verbal communication practices within ethical codes of conduct and performance reviews may also reinforce ethical norms throughout the organization.

This study has theoretical implications as well as contributes to the growing body of literature on ethical leadership by extending theoretical models to include non-verbal

communication as a critical, yet often overlooked, dimension of ethical influence. It supports and expands on current literature frameworks suggesting that ethical leadership is not only demonstrated through decisions and verbal messaging, but also through consistent non-verbal behavior. Additionally, by highlighting generational differences in interpreting and using non-verbal cues, this research adds nuance to existing generational communication theories, suggesting that age-related values and professional experience may shape ethical communication styles. This opens new theoretical avenues for understanding how ethical norms are learned, internalized, and signaled across diverse workplace demographics.

Despite its valuable insights, this study has several limitations. The small and demographically limited sample restricts the generalization of the findings, particularly across different industries, cultural contexts, or organizational structures. Additionally, the qualitative nature of the data may introduce subjective interpretations, both from participants and the researcher. Future research should consider larger, more diverse samples and adopt mixed-methods approaches to validate and expand on these findings. Investigating the role of non-verbal communication in ethical leadership across varied workplace cultures, hierarchical levels, and international contexts would further strengthen the generalization of the conclusions. Longitudinal studies could also examine whether training in non-verbal cues leads to sustained changes in ethical behavior and leadership effectiveness over time.

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