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ABSTRACT

Over the past decades, the notion of ethics has been incorporated into the literature on leadership, culminating in the introduction of the concept of ethical leadership. This qualitative research case study explored the role of ethical leadership in promoting accountability and trust in two public schools in a township in Gauteng province. The data for the study was generated using telephonic semi-structured interviews, a self-administered questionnaire and a document review. Data were analysed using the thematic analysis approach. Firstly, the findings of the study revealed that for a school principal to be an ethical leader, who can use their leadership to promote accountability and trust, they must not only talk the walk, but they must also walk the talk. This means that the principal, as a leader, must be mindful of their actions and the type of decisions they take and ensure that these are always in the service and interests of their school community rather than self-serving. Secondly, the participants reported the problem of nepotism or favouritism. As a result, school principals, as leaders, could not hold certain people accountable for wrongdoing, which was the major driving force of unequal relations at their schools. Thirdly, the findings revealed that ethical leadership promoted accountability in that followers will support a leader who is the epitome of accountable and trusting conduct. The findings of the study point to the importance of ethical leaders using their leadership to promote accountability and trust and not only talk the walk but also walk the talk. Secondly, ethical leaders must be in touch with the needs and interests of their school community and must use their position and power in a socially responsible manner. In conclusion, findings suggest that nepotism and inadequate implementation of consequence management not only erode ethical leadership but also work against accountability and trust.

Keywords: accountability; ethical school leadership; school management team; trust