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Conceptualisations of ethical leadership and causes of unethical behavior in schools: perceptions of teachers and principals

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the conceptualisations, experiences, practices, and awareness of, ethical leadership, accountability, and trust within schools in the South African context. Data was collected from school principals, post level-one, and -two teachers. This is a qualitative study that utilised a case study research design and is located under the interpretive paradigm. The findings of this study suggest that some principals and teachers possess significant understanding of 'ethics' and 'ethical leadership'. However, most teachers that were interviewed did not fully understand what the terms meant. The study also found numerous causes of unethical leadership, lack of accountability, and trust. The causes include lack of, exposure to laws and regulations such as the SACE Code of Professional Ethics, respect, and value for prescribed rules, and regulations. This is because of the lack of accountability and intense repercussions by the department of Education (DoE). To combat high unethical practices there is a need to improve principals and teachers' exposure to rules and regulations that guide the profession. This means that all stakeholders, thus SACE, DoE, and schools, assume responsibility of their respective positions to ensure that teachers and principals are fully knowledgeable with the rules and consequences of contravening them. In addition, ethical leadership, accountability, and trust should be promoted through workshops, and other developmental programs that can be organised by stakeholders.

Keywords: Accountability, ethical leadership, trust, school leadership