

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Impact of Ethical Leadership on Employee Sustainable Development: A Multi-Dimensional Analysis of the Family-owned Business

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Abstract

Ethical leadership has found the centre stage in the academic and organizational world. The study contributes to the body of literature by exploring the concept of ethical leadership and its various aspects, which influence other critical employee outcomes in an empirical manner, such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and job embeddedness. A moderated mediation paradigm is developed and examined, where ethical climate, power distance orientation, and the social distance of leaders are defined as moderators, and psychological empowerment appeals are defined as mediators in the relationship between ethical leadership and employee outcomes. The framework is grounded in social exchange theory, which offers theoretical support for the proposed relationships. Utilizing a quantitative research methodology, data were collected from 450 employees employed in family-owned businesses in Pakistan. The study employs SmartPLS for structural equation modeling (SEM) and adopts a mixed-methods approach to enhance robustness. Results confirm that ethical leadership has a significant impact on sustainable employee outcomes and psychological empowerment. Additionally, the concept of psychological empowerment has been viewed as mediating the relationship between power distance orientation and leadership social distance, as well as serving as a significant moderator of the effect of ethical leadership on employees.

KEYWORDS

Exchange theory (LMX), Job embeddedness (JE), Job satisfaction (JS), leadership social distance (LSD), Leader's member organization commitment (OC), Psychological empowerment (PE), Power distance orientation (PDO), Social exchange theory (SET)

1 INTRODUCTION

Ethical leadership entails leaders who make ethical decisions and communicate and reinforce these values through their interactions with employees. Ethical leadership is about leadership that leads by example, by providing models of the morally desirable actions and relationships, and actively promoting such actions and relationships in followers through open communication, reinforcement, and value-based decisions. This leadership approach integrates ethical principles with core leadership qualities, emphasizing integrity, mutual respect, transparent communication, and responsible conduct (Sanchez-Famoso et al., 2023). By so doing they can create a favourable work climate in which the workers are propelled to develop meaningful ties. and

replicate the ethical behavior they see (Serang et al., 2024). Despite evidence that ethical leadership tends to produce positive employee outcomes, such as job satisfaction and commitment, research has also revealed that ethical leadership can, in some instances, lead to undesirable results for employees. There is still a limited understanding of its role in mitigating adverse effects, such as cynicism or disengagement. Moreover, leadership practices don't exist in a vacuum; the cultural and organizational context heavily influences them, adding complexity layers (Astrachan et al., 2020). This research aims to fill these gaps by examining ethical leadership in the context of family-owned businesses, where cultural factors such as power distance and social

distance can significantly influence leadership practices. By looking at fairness, integrity, role clarification, power-sharing, and ethical guidance, this study offers greater insight of how ethical leadership could foster positive employee and organizational outcomes (Amory et al., 2024). Despite recognizing ethical leadership as a multidimensional concept, most studies continue to rely on a unidimensional scale, overlooking the distinct impact of its various dimensions (Shakeel et al., 2024).

Additionally, existing research predominantly explores short-term outcomes, while long-term outcomes like job embeddedness and adverse outcomes like cynicism remain largely unexamined (Aftab et al., 2023, Qing et al., 2020b). The role of psychological empowerment. Most studies on ethical leadership have been conducted in Western contexts, providing limited insights into South Asian settings, particularly Pakistan, where cultural and organizational dynamics may differ significantly. Even within the limited studies conducted in this region, researchers have primarily used general ethical leadership scales, failing to examine how specific dimensions shape employee outcomes (Li et al., 2023). Furthermore, research into ethical leadership is not conducted in the private and government sectors in Pakistan, yet corporate governance and ethical governance are in demand in developing economies and are on the rise, requiring more attention to the topic. (Ahmad et al., 2023a, Ashraf et al., 2018). Given these gaps, further research is needed to comprehensively analyze the multidimensional impact of ethical leadership, considering both positive and negative outcomes, mediating mechanisms, contextual influences, and regional perspectives.

2. Theory Building and Hypothetical Development

2.1. Social-Exchange Theory

This theory is highly prominent and extensively applied within management sciences. It explores various aspects of leader-member interactions, with an emphasis on exchange relationships. In these exchanges, the participants, resources, and structures are collectively referred to as actors that initiate the exchange process. The process itself is not a mere transactional arrangement but rather one that enhances the quality of the relationship, leading to positive outcomes (Bryant and Merritt, 2021). Contextual factors, including culture and subjective and situational factors, also affect the reciprocal affiliation of groups (Settoon et al., 1996). In this context, the behavior of one party, specifically the leader, motivates followers to respond in kind. According to this research, ethical leaders and employees engage in a reciprocal exchange as partners. It is posited that the moral behavior exhibited by a leader positively influences employee actions, thus fostering a robust exchange relationship (Jingwei et al., 2024).

2.2. Leader-Member Exchange

LMX theory, rooted in SET, explores dyadic relationships. Essentially, it addressed the interactions between leaders and members, which significantly affect an employee's responsibilities, decision-making, performance, positive work experiences, and overall organizational effectiveness (Wang and Sung, 2016). LMX theory examines how leaders develop effective LMX relationships by evaluating the quality of interactions, the impact of these relationships, and how their quality influences outcomes (Hägg et al., 2024). Since the opinions and judgments of their followers determine how they should treat an employee, leaders have a significant impact on the outcome of these interactions. The allocation of time and resources determines the character of the LMX partnership (Fein et al., 2013). Conversely, the LMX associations are characterized by diminished trust, one-sided interactions, decreased support, and fewer rewards. In such dynamics, leadership tends to be more supervisory, marked by reduced personal and economic exchanges (Jidda Jidda et al., 2025). Consequently, trust, respect, and benevolence are pivotal in fostering a robust emotional bond with the leader, promoting collaboration and teamwork, and cultivating a mutually beneficial relationship. Within Western cultural contexts, the efficacy of an LMX relationship is often assessed through indicators (Rasheed et al., 2023). Yuan et al. (2023b) It has been noted that the support, trust, and care demonstrated by ethical leaders toward their employees cultivate a positive and moral view of the leader among team members.

2.3. Ethical Leadership and Employee Sustainable Individual Outcomes Concept

Hayat Bhatti et al. (2020) suggest that job satisfaction and ethical leadership are closely linked, with numerous studies exploring the traits and behaviors of EL. As per the literature, ELs are effective communicators who offer timely support, build trust, and promote Ethical behavior through rewards and disciplinary measures. They emphasize honesty and compassion, fostering alignment of moral values between leaders and members. Recent advancements in the research on ethical leadership have highlighted two significant studies that explore various dimensions of ethics (Ilyas et al., 2020). Some dimensions, including loyalty, betrayal, sanctity, and degradation, do not exhibit obvious connections with existing results. The influence of employee attitudes and behaviors on an organization's performance merits additional scrutiny (Ko et al., 2018). Previous research suggests that managers can increase their staff members' job satisfaction and motivation (Lin et al., 2019). Job satisfaction becomes even more crucial when Ethical concerns are involved, as content employees contribute to organizational development and uphold its integrity.

Ethical leaders can shape employee attitudes and behaviors with their strong moral principles. Work happiness is positively correlated with people's tendency, justice, integrity, Ethical guidance, role definition, and sustainability knowledge when Ethical leadership is present (Halvorsen et al., 2023).

Hypothesis 1: Ethical leadership is highly significant in job satisfaction.

2.4. Ethical Leadership and Job Commitment

Employee loyalty to their companies is seen to be substantially impacted by Ethical leadership, defined by leaders exhibiting moral ideals, integrity, and Ethical values (Kim and Vandenberghe, 2021). Ethical leadership behaviors often foster trust and emotional attachment, including treating staff members fairly and respectfully, maintaining an open workplace, and conducting business with honesty and integrity. Workers are estimated to form an intense, expressive bond with the company (affective commitment) if they believe their leaders are moral and reliable. Their level of engagement at work is higher, and they genuinely care about the organization's success (Ly, 2024). Ethical leaders often establish high standards and instill a sense of moral obligation and accountability in their staff. The result may be higher levels of normative commitment, as staff members feel compelled to stick with a company that maintains moral principles and conducts business responsibly (Qing et al., 2020a).

Hypothesis 2: Ethical leadership is highly significant with job commitment.

2.5. Ethical Leadership Vs. Job Cynicism

There is a connection between employees' cynicism and the moral behavior of leaders in an organization (Durrah et al., 2019). In the workplace, cynicism usually refers to a pessimistic outlook or a lack of faith in the sincerity of decisions, organizational objectives, or leadership. On the other hand, leaders who exhibit Ethical ideals, honesty, and justice in their acts and decisions demonstrate Ethical leadership (Ko et al., 2018). The assumption that cynicism is adversely correlated with Ethical leadership stems from the conviction that when leaders uphold moral principles, their subordinates are more inclined to believe in them and accept their judgments and acts (Sahoo et al., 2023). Employee cynicism is subsequently decreased as a result of their increased trust in the moral intentions of their managers (Cole et al., 2006). In the words of (Qian and Daniels, 2008), Cynicism can be defined as a general or specific approach marked by negative feelings toward an individual, group, beliefs, cultural norm, or organization, along with dissatisfaction and disillusionment. According to (Adamska, 2023) dissatisfied attitude toward one's company, including the conviction that the company is dishonest (Andersson and Bateman, 1997). Resulting from a lack of support,

incompetent management, unfair treatment, and poor communication. There is evidence that cynicism and leadership need to work better together. The relation between cynicism and the composite form of ethical leadership has also been examined in a few studies (Andersson and Bateman, 1997). This theory is frequently supported by theoretical frameworks and empirical research in the fields of organizational psychology and leadership studies (Sen et al., 2022). Yet, depending on the setting, structure, and specific aspects of cynicism and ethical leadership being studied, empirical data may vary. Researchers usually utilize surveys or questionnaires to measure employee cynicism and leaders' ethical leadership behavior in order to test this theory. Further, statistical methods like regression and correlation are used to test the hypothesis and determine whether cynicism and ethical leadership are negatively correlated in a statistically meaningful way (Zappalà and Toscano, 2020).

Hypothesis 3: Ethical leadership does not have a highly significant impact on cynicism.

2.6. Ethical Leadership Vs. Job Embeddedness

The intensity to which workers are linked and bound to their workplace is known as Job embeddedness. It covers the myriad links, both social and functional, that deter an employee from leaving their job. This notion includes elements such as the employees' alignment with the organization's culture, their interpersonal relationships at work, and the costs or challenges associated with leaving their current position, which was first presented (Polanyi, 2002) in "The Great Transformation." These social relationships encompass various work-oriented and non-work-oriented social, psychological, and financial strands, as well as formal and informal social relationships, all of which contribute to the creation of employment embeddedness. Moreover, social interactions are built on people's mutual collaboration, which promotes social complexity and keeps workers integrated within the company (Allen et al., 2021). These elements work together from professional and personal settings to create a powerful emotional connection with the company. The various implications of these social factors are reflected in how each feature affects employee results (Liu et al., 2021). Various factors contribute to job embeddedness, such as culture, leader closeness, trust, dependability, dedication, and an efficient and moral leadership style. Prior learnings have spotted the link between higher-level management transformational leadership and employees' job embeddedness (Ammar et al., 2020). Enhancing job embeddedness involves various factors, such as organizational culture, leaders' closeness, trustworthiness, dedication, and an ethical and successful leadership style (Jami et al., 2023).

Hypothesis 4: Ethical leadership is highly significant with job embeddedness.

2.7. Ethical Leadership and Psychological Empowerment

Adamska (2023) stated that workers are likely to react positively and kindly to their leaders' positive acts, such as support and fairness. Empowered employees actively contribute to organizational success. Leaders empower their teams psychologically, inspiring and motivating them Hoang et al. (2023a). Empowerment permits the workforce to respond positively to leadership initiatives, enhancing task execution, work meaningfulness, and decision-making effectiveness. In their research (Monje-Amor et al., 2021) introduced the psychological empowerment concept, which influences employees and develops relational, structural, or psychologically empowered workers. It is a multi-dimensional construct with four components: meaning, belief, competence, and choice (Turnipseed and VandeWaa, 2020). Significance refers to the work association with work demands, while belief/impact refers to an employee's influence on the organization (Jafari et al., 2021). Competence measures an employee's ability to perform tasks, and choice refers to task autonomy and self-determination. Empowerment encourages employees to accept responsibility and generate positive outcomes. Establishing a substantial degree of trust through consistent communication, leaders foster critical thinking, share power, and encourage staff to participate in decision-making (Hongbo et al., 2021). Strong social ties and moral behavior are traits of ethical leaders who motivate their staff. They define roles as just, kind, and people-oriented. They provide ethical guidance (Huang et al., 2021) explained that ethical leaders always give priority to employee ideas, creating an ethical environment that improves mutual trust, honesty, self-efficacy, job control, and enhanced psychological empowerment (Qing et al., 2020b).

Hypothesis 5: Ethical leadership is highly significant with psychological empowerment.

2.8. Role of Mediation

Psychological empowerment is a shared perception of ethics and morality within an organization, shaping a dominant climate with various sub-climates. Emerging corporate scandals highlight the importance of ethics and integrity, making it crucial to consider corporate ethics for beneficial organizational outcomes (Yang, 2020). (Turnipseed and VandeWaa, 2020, Wang and Zhou, 2020). Organizational support for these norms fortifies them and improves social interaction. Organizational strategy, practices, and transparency are influenced by the Ethical climate, which also establishes the ideal ethical standards and conduct that motivate workers to act morally (Dey et al., 2022). Buengeler et al. (2021) stated that LMX focuses on the leader-member dyads, highlighting the importance of trust, respect, and affection. A positive LMX relationship

fosters robust social interactions and desirable behaviors, making leaders role models and shaping employee conduct (Mascareño et al., 2020). Ethical leaders follow ethical directives, demonstrate fairness, and establish trust, leading to a positive perception in followers' eyes (Chaudhry et al., 2021).

Hypothesis 6: The relationship between ethical leadership and individual outcome (job satisfaction, job commitment, Job cynicism, and job embeddedness) is mediated through psychological empowerment

2.9. Power Distance and Leader's Social Distance (LSD) as a Moderator

SET and LMX theories are used to understand the exchange mechanisms between social exchange partners and leader-member exchange. Management style and culture also influence LMX association and determine the nature of reciprocity. Minimal LMX associations are classified as out-group exchanges. They are limited to employment contracts, whereas high LMX relationships are classified as in-group exchanges, encompassing exchanges that extend beyond formal employment contracts. In high LMX relationships, leaders and members collaborate, share ideas, allow for voice, and encourage deference. However, LMX relationships are influenced by internal contextual values such as individual-level power distance orientation, which impacts employee conduct, managerial effectiveness, and leader-member relationships. An individual's personal values and cultural ideas are reflected in their power distance orientation, which may lead to a strategy different from that of power distance in society.

For instance, moral leaders care about their staff members who share and convey authority well, whereas low power distance leaders are seen as having low power (Seo et al., 2024). SET represented the importance of reciprocity in forming effective relationships between leaders and employees. This association can be primary or deep-rooted, and its nature and degree determine future reciprocity. In the rapidly changing work environment, effective leaders must manage employees and work adequately (Liu et al., 2023). Employees' and leaders' relationships may lead to challenges. Leadership positions provide resources such as social support, task assignments, information sharing, and favors. In response, followers reciprocate with values the leader appreciates, such as greater responsibility, effort, and commitment. The nature of the LMX association determines whether a leader is effective or ineffective. Ethical leaders foster strong social connections with employees through effective communication and genuine concern for their well-being. They delegate authority by sharing power, resulting in psychologically permitted employees. Ethical leaders look out for their followers by teaching them how to use power and influence responsibly (Guo

et al., 2022). Employee perception of these initiatives is good, leading to an increase in mutual trust. The level of social distance between a leader and a member affects their relationship. Increased social distance can provide difficulties for leaders in terms of misperceptions, uncertainty, team cohesiveness, trust, and social interaction. However, effective communication by the leader can assist in closing this gap. High social distance weakens the relationship between a leader and a member, which results in low trust and makes it more difficult to delegate authority and power, according to the Leadership Model of Exchange (LMX) theory (Du et al., 2022). By analyzing how a leader's increased social distance affects the relationship with members and, in turn, employee psychological empowerment, this study seeks to close the empirical evidence gap. According to the research, moral leaders empower staff members by forming close bonds with their followers and being socially integrated. On the other hand, poor LMX associations and remote leader-member interactions contribute to a low level of employee empowerment (Carsten et al., 2022).

Hypothesis 7: The relation between psychological empowerment and ethical leadership is mediated by power distance and leader social distance. The power distance and the leader social distance are low, making the relationship stronger. The relationship is stronger when power distance and leader social distance are low.

3 MATERIAL AND METHOD

The proposed hypotheses for empirical testing and the theoretical framework that is being studied. In general, multiple-dimensional ethical leadership paradigms were introduced (Kalshoven et al., 2011). This study empirically tests proposed hypotheses within a specified theoretical framework. It explores the connection between various facets of ethical leadership and their combined impact on organizational commitment, cynicism, psychological empowerment, and work embeddedness, as delineated by the seven-dimensional ethical leadership model (Ashraf et al., 2021).

Using a hypothesis-testing methodology, this study examines the impact of moral leadership on employee outcomes in both public and private hospitals. Various ways of gathering data are employed, including in-person interviews, questionnaires, and surveys (Murad et al., 2019). Five sampling populations were picked, taking into account the study's scope: (1) Government hospitals, (2) Private hospitals, (3) Community health centers, (4) Medical clinics, and (5) Teaching hospitals in Europe. The patient dynamics and management approaches in the public and private healthcare systems (Patel et al., 2023). Consequently, this research aims to examine the prevalent healthcare practices in these domains. There were questions

regarding the ethical leader, moderator variables, mediators, dependent variables, and demographic factors in each of the multi-page, multi-stage subsections of the questionnaire. Data were gathered from these firms to investigate how ethical leadership is seen in these healthcare facilities, which employ a sizable segment of the workforce. A researcher may select one or several research designs from among those available to collect and analyze data, depending on what best fits the needs of the research project. A typical research design technique consists of the following: experiments: quantitative and qualitative research (structured, observations, and survey), exploratory, systematic review, and meta-analysis method (Bharath et al., 2011).

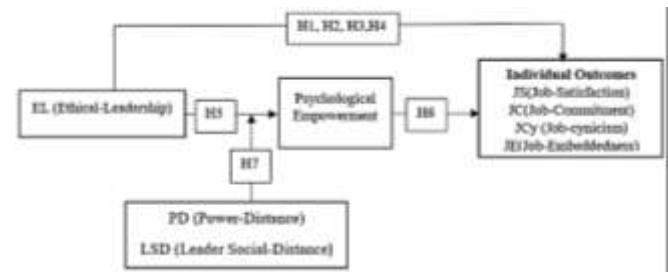


Fig. 1: Conceptual Framework

Table 1: Demographics

Details	Description	Rate	of Percentage recurrence
Gender	Male	440	75.2
	Female	145	24.8
Age	18-25	139	30.89
	26-35	146	32.45
	36-45	65	14.44
	46-50	59	13.11
	51 above	41	9.11
Experience (years)	1-4	52	37.01
	4-8	165	36.66
	9-12	112	24.88
	13-16	73	16.22
	17-20	29	6.44
	Above 20	19	4.22
Education	High Secondary School	196	33.5
	College	329	56.2
	University	50	8.5

3.1. Measures

This research altered measurement sales, which the previous researchers used to forecast the role of ethical leadership. Convenience sampling is, therefore, widely employed in studies to expedite data collection and save time and money, depending on the size and time constraints of the investigation. Moreover, (Ahmad et al., 2023b) predicted that for sample size, a minimum sample size of 468 answers would permit a 5% margin of error. This research also aims to link ethical leadership and employee outcomes

using a longitudinal technique. The participants' answers were categorized on a 5-point scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Below is a discussion of each variable's measure. The variables, their sources, the number of elements, and their degrees are listed in the table. The following lists of elements include 38 for ethical leadership (Kalshoven et al., 2011), 5 for power distance (Earley and Erez, 1997), 14 for leaders' social distance (Torres and Bligh, 2012) 7 for Ethical Climate (Schwepker Jr, 2001); and 12 for psychological empowerment (Spreitzer, 1995). Five components comprise job satisfaction (Judge and Bono, 2000). Eight components make up organizational commitment (Porter et al., 1979). Twelve aspects (Polat, 2013), while seven elements make up job embeddedness (Crossley et al., 2007).

3.2. Measurement of Variables

Besides, it is possible that the size of items in a scale (Table 3) would influence Cronbach's alpha reliability. Generally, a larger alpha value indicates greater confidence in the internal consistency of the measure. However, for constructs comprising multiple dimensions, the alpha may appear lower; in this case, conducting a factor structure analysis is necessary to evaluate how well each item loads onto its respective factor. Table 3 presents a detailed summary of scale reliability.

Table 2: Summary of Scale Reliability.

Key Variables	Alpha Value	Item No.	Items Retained
EL	.887	39	39
PDO	.878	7	7
LSD	.939	14	14
EC	.890	7	7
PE	.926	12	12
JS	.903	5	5
OC	.942	8	8
CYN	.886	12	12
JE	.837	7	7

As a result, the AMOS technique is used in this work to perform CFA analysis. The outcome of CFA analysis is estimated using various fit indices, which include chi-squared (χ^2), IFI (incremental fit indices), comparative fit indices (CFI), non-normed fit indices (NNFI), Tucker-Lewis fit indices (TLI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), Chi-square/degrees of freedom ratio, and comparative fit index (CFI). Several CFA analyses have been looked at in this study, including the first-order and second-order CFAs in ethical leadership, measurement of the observed/measured variables at a specific time (ethical leadership EL, power distance orientation PDO, leaders social distance LSD, ethical climate EL, job satisfaction JS, Job embeddedness JE and organization commitment OC and finally, a composite

model, including the observed measuring variables at both instances of data collection. (Behazad, 2020) .

4 RESULTS

4.1. Demographics

The study examined the influence of demographic factors on a dependent variable, categorizing these factors into gender, marital status, and industry. Table 1 presents an overview of the sample characteristics, including the adequacy of the sample size. A sample size with a significance threshold of 0.05 was used for all external variables, setting an effect size of 0.15. Probability sampling was employed, utilizing a thorough sampling mechanism, and data collection took place in two phases. Table 2 also describes how the study evaluated the impact of moral leadership on psychological empowerment among workers, taking into account variables including power distance, leader-social distance, and the Leader-Member Exchange (LMX). The study formulated Research hypotheses based on the literature review and employed other types of statistical tests to test and analyze the data. Table 1's demographic breakdown shows that, in line with the percentage of working women in Europe, 75.2% of respondents were male and 24.8% were female. The age distribution of respondents, with an average age of 30.4 years ($SD = 7$), is consistent with industry trends seen between 2014 and 2018. Most respondents (mean = 4.89, $SD = 4.6$) had 1-4 years of job experience. The breakdown of marital statuses revealed that 37.1% of individuals were married and 62.9% were single, with 63.4% working in the public sector. Much of the sample had a high level of education, with 56.2% holding a master's degree and 33.7% holding a bachelor's degree, which made it easier to interpret the English survey.

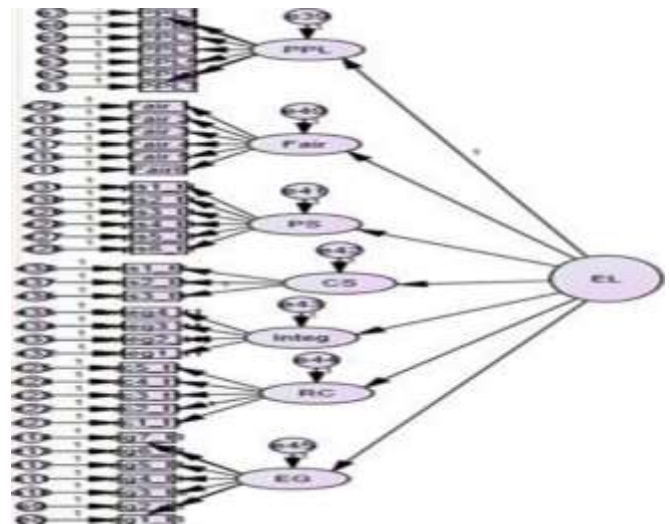


Fig. 2: CFA Analysis of EL.

4.2. Convergent Validity and Reliability Analysis

4.3. Correlation Coefficient Analysis

Positive correlations reveal direct relationships

between variables, whereas negative correlations indicate inverse relationships. The absence of a

Table 3: Measurement Model: Ethical Leadership

Measurements	Chi-square/df	Confirmatory Analysis CFA	Factor Incremental fit index IFI	Tucker-Lewis index. TLI	fit Root error of approximation	mean square RMSEA
Threshold values	< 3	> 0.95	> 0.9	> 0.9	.05-0.1	
(1st Ord. CFA)	16.511	.249	.251	.206	.163	
(2nd Ord. CFA)	1.703	.966	.966	.964	.035	

Table 4: Confirmatory Factor Analysis FA2.

Measurements	Chi-square/df	CFI	IFI	TLI	RMSEA
Threshold values	< 3	> 0.95	> 0.9	> 0.9	.05-0.1
Initial solution	2.191	.956	.956	.953	.045

4.1 Demographics

The study examined the influence of demographic factors on a dependent variable, categorizing these factors into gender, marital status, and industry. Table 1 presents an outline of the sample characteristics have been found between ethical leadership and the following variables: Job satisfaction, organizational commitment, job embeddedness, psychological empowerment, power distance orientation and ethical climate.

Skewness. Kurtosis measures the peakedness of the data distribution, with low kurtosis represented by light tails and high kurtosis by heavy tails. Skewness, on the other hand, helps understand the asymmetry of the data distribution, where a curve leaning to the left or right indicates skewed data. The normal distribution can be identified by a skewness value of zero. The kurtosis and skewness values for the study's key variables—which include ethical leadership as a composite variable, or Model A are shown in Table 4.9. It is often recommended to normalize data before conducting further analysis if the kurtosis value exceeds the range of -2 to +2. This indicates a divergence from the normal distribution. The data's skewness values are also displayed in Table 4.9; any skewness value greater than twice its standard error is indicative of non-normality. The skewness values in this study are all less than -2, ranging from -.045 to -.544.

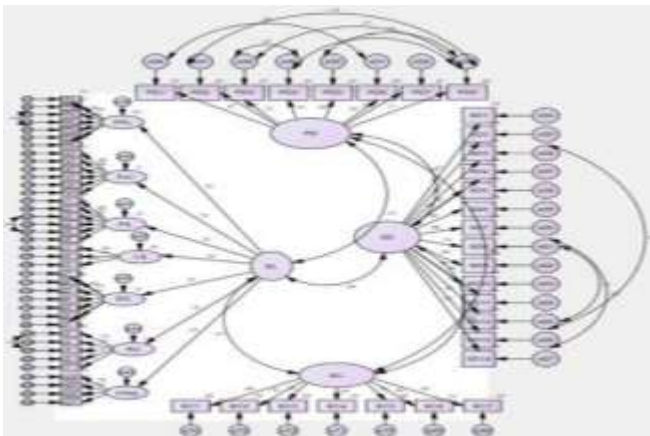


Fig. 3: Model Fit (CFA1).

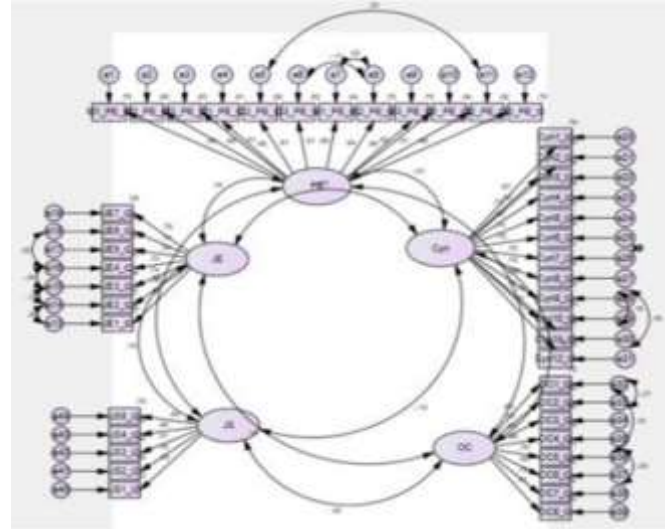


Fig. 4: Model Fit (CFA2).

4.4. Factor Loadings

To facilitate the analysis of the numerous items used in this research study, a coding table was developed for each variable and its corresponding items. The coding table can be shown as follows.

4.5. Data Normality Distribution Analysis

Data normality, which signifies perfect symmetry around the mean, is crucial for conducting various statistical tests. Examining the normality of data is essential because deviations can lead to skewed results, potentially causing misinterpretations of the findings.

4.6. Skewness & Kurtosis (Model A)

To avoid obtaining misleading results in hypothesis testing, it is essential to evaluate the data beforehand to determine whether it is normally distributed, thereby ensuring the accuracy of the test results. Typically, data normality is assessed using tests for Kurtosis and

4.7. Skewness & Kurtosis (Model B)

The statistics for kurtosis and skewness for Model B, the seven-dimensional ethical leadership model, are displayed in Table 9. Kurtosis values in a normal distribution are commonly believed to fall between -2 and +2. Any divergence from this range suggests that the data are not normally distributed, which warrants further investigation before proceeding with additional analysis (Busse and Jelly, 2023). Additionally, Table 9 shows that the skewness values, which range from .135 to -.794, all fall below -2. However, it's important to note that none of the skewness estimates exceed twice their standard error.

4.8. Consolidated Analysis: Model Fit for Model A

Lastly, a complex measure model that included all the independent moderators, mediators, and dependent measures was found by evaluating an inclusive CFA that had all the variables (Time 1 and Time 2) to be included in the Model as visualized in Figure 6 (Hu and Bentler, 1999). Experts on CFA recommend testing a complete measurement model of this nature (Protopapas, Simos, Sideridis, & Mouzaki, 2012). CFA specialists (Protopapas, Simos, Sideridis, & Mouzaki, 2012) advise testing such a comprehensive assessment model. The whole measurement model CFA results ($\chi^2 = 1.972$, CFI = .912, IFI = .923, TLI = .924, RMSEA = .031) indicate an adequate match between the model values. Table 6 Power sharing is highly associated with

the following variables cynicism ($r = -.116^{**}$, $p = .000$), job embeddedness ($r = .156^{**}$, $p = .000$), organizational commitment ($r = .159^{**}$, $p = .000$) and work satisfaction ($r = .146^{**}$, $p = .000$). There are enough correlations between roles clarity and ethical guidance and outcomes of employees. Integrity is highly associated with work satisfaction ($r = .150^{**}$, $p = .000$) and organizational commitment ($r = .122^{**}$, $p = .000$), but not with cynicism, as well as job embeddedness. Sustainability is strongly related to organizational commitment ($r = .168^{**}$, $p = .000$). ($\chi^2 = 1.461$, CFI = .951, IFI).

4.9. Multi-dimensional Exploratory Model B

Additionally, Figure 4 (Model B) tests a different measuring model for the seven-dimensional ethical leadership style model. The following are the seven characteristics of ethical leadership: role clarity, sustainability concern, honesty, justice, people orientation, and power sharing. As shown in Table 7, these factors were examined in connection with job embeddedness, organizational commitment, cynicism, and job satisfaction. The original model developed into a model with appropriate fit ($\chi^2 = 1.584$, CFI = .954, IFI = .954, TLI = .952, RMSEA = .032), meeting all predetermined criteria, according to the assessment of the measurement model's fitness (McNeish and Wolf, 2023).

Table 5: Correlation Analysis (Model A)

Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Gender	1.25	0.432	1												
Age	30.38	7.03	-	1											
			0.192**												
Marital Status	1.63	0.483	0.179**	-	1										
				0.615**											
Language	2.46	1.33	-0.099*	-0.037		1									
Qualification	1.09	0.304	-0.031	0.090*	-0.075		1								
Tenure	4.89	4.66	0.123**	0.744**	-	0.062	1								
					0.422**										
Sector	1.37	0.482	0.148**	-	0.179**	-	-	1							
				0.215**		0.119**	0.226**								
Ethical Leadership (EL)	3.63	0.600	-	0.017	-0.059	0.051	0.010	0.010	1						
			0.174**												
Power Distance (PD)	4.10	1.66	-	-0.087*	0.052	0.083*	-0.030	0.055	0.228**	1					
			0.109**												
Social Distance (SD)	4.18	1.80	-0.068	0.053	-0.072	0.083*	0.012	0.024	0.062	0.051	1				
Psychological Empowerment (PE)	4.09	1.84	-	-0.035	-0.022	0.030	0.001	0.012	0.226**	0.140**	0.168**	0.163**	1		
			0.111**												
Job Satisfaction (JS)	3.66	1.78	-0.007	-0.106*	0.028	-0.006	-0.032	-	0.304**	0.089*	-0.012	0.056	0.122**	1	
								0.129**							
Organizational Commitment (OC)	3.55	1.69	-0.082*	-0.055	-0.025	0.012	0.011	-0.039	0.295**	0.061	0.018	0.166**	0.128**	0.349**	1
Cynicism (Cyn)	3.17	1.14	-	0.022	0.010	-0.066	0.030	0.154**	-	0.009	-0.014	0.041	-0.023	-	-
			0.141**						0.208**					0.112**	0.139**

Job Embeddedness (JE)	3.57	1.13	-0.002	0.003	-0.046	0.057	0.004	-0.017
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Table 6: Correlation Analysis (Model B)

Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Gender	1.25	.432	1														
Age	30.38	7.03	-	1													
			.192**														
Marital Status	1.62	.482	.178**	-	1												
				.614**													
Language	2.47	1.32	-.098*	-.036	.016	1											
Qualification	1.08	.303	-.030	.091*	-.074	.072	1										
Tenure	2.77	.663	-	.743**	-	.061	1										
			.122**		.421**												
Sector	1.36	.471	-	-	.169**	-	-	1									
			.138**	.205**		.129**	.256**										
People Orientation	3.67	1.134	-.103*	-.021	-.043	.050	-.018	-.002	1								
Equality	3.65	1.082	-.016	-.016	-.007	-.017	-.019	-.038	.107**	1							
Empowerment	3.51	1.227	-	.011	-.041	.034	-.016	-.023	.175**	.022	1						
			.108**														
Concern for Sustainability	3.60	1.188	-.099*	.010	.008	.015	.043	.111**	.243**	.184**	.137**	1					
Ethical Counseling	3.71	1.111	-.087*	.035	-.040	.002	.001	-.014	.213**	.090*	.200**	.144**	1				
Role Interpretation	3.64	1.084	-	.056	-.029	.053	.027	.004	.205**	.154**	.121**	.123**	.186**	1			
			.113**														
Truthfulness	3.60	1.137	-	-.003	-.052	.063	.066	-.027	.191**	.121**	.115**	.224**	.088*	.155**	1		
			.130**														
Job Satisfaction	3.55	1.682	-.008	-.107*	.029	-.005	-.033	-	.227**	.148**	.147**	.054	.164**	.173**	.151**	1	
								.128**									
Job Commitment	3.54	1.696	-.083*	-.056	-.025	.012	.011	-.038	.177**	.139**	.159**	.168**	.161**	.159**	.122**	.349**	1
Cynicism	3.18	1.150	-	.024	.011	-.067	.031	.155**	-	-	-	-.024	-	.003	-.009	-	-
			.142**						.204**	.168**	.117**		.138**			.113**	.138**
Job Embeddedness	3.56	1.128	-.003	.004	-.047	.058	.005	-.018	.158**	.124**	.157**	.063	.153**	.148**	.054	.185**	.139**

Table 7: Model A (Normal Distribution)

	N	Min.	Max.	Me.	Std. Dev.	Skew.	Kurtosis		
						Statistics	Std. Err.	Statistics	Std. Err.
Ethical Leadership	585	1.89	4.72	3.64	0.60	-.479	.101	-.385	.202
Psychological empowerment	585	1.33	6.75	4.09	1.82	-.045	.101	-1.724	.202
Job embeddedness	585	1.00	5.00	3.57	1.13	-.544	.101	-1.373	.202
Organization commitment	585	1.13	6.50	3.55	1.70	.435	.101	-1.427	.202
Job satisfaction	585	1.20	7.00	3.66	1.78	.409	.101	-1.447	.202
Cynicism	585	1.42	5.00	3.18	1.14	.135	.101	-1.759	.202
Power Distance Orientation	585	1.38	6.85	4.10	1.66	-.124	.101	-1.549	.202
Social Distance	585	1.21	6.86	4.18	1.80	-.250	.101	-1.629	.202
Ethical climate	585	1.00	5.00	3.55	1.17	-.474	.101	-1.512	.202

Table 8: Model B (Normal Distribution)

	N	Min.	Max.	M	Std. Dev.	Skew. Statistic	Std. Error	Kurtosis Statistic	Std. Error
People Orientation	585	1.14	5.00	3.68	1.135	-.677	.101	-1.186	.202
Fairness	585	1.00	4.83	3.65	1.082	-.794	.101	-.914	.202
Power Sharing	585	1.00	5.00	3.51	1.223	-.545	.101	-1.283	.202
Concern for Sustainability	585	1.00	5.00	3.60	1.189	-.704	.101	-.936	.202
Ethical guidance	585	1.00	5.00	3.70	1.111	-.765	.101	-1.053	.202
Role Clarification	585	1.40	5.00	3.65	1.085	-.602	.101	-1.357	.202
Integrity	585	1.00	5.00	3.61	1.137	-.664	.101	-1.072	.202

5 | DISCUSSION

This research suggests that organizations must closely monitor employee outcomes, particularly in the

face of significant shifts, such as adopting an ethical leadership approach. The analysis of funding reveals the impact of ethical leadership on employee outcomes. Hypothesis 1 revealed strong relations between job satisfaction and many aspects of ethical leadership (Azhar, 2025). Hypothesis 2 showed that such leadership has a positive effect on organizational commitment, but the influence of role clarification and sustainability focus was below the expectations (Cao et al., 2024). Hypotheses 3 & 4 showed that ethical leadership is critical in diminishing cynicism and bolstering job embeddedness (Cheng, 2024, Khatani et al., 2025). Based on Hypothesis 5, we learned that ethical leadership significantly influences psychological empowerment, which is essential to note because it also positively affects employee attitudes (Sarwar et al., 2023). Hypothesis 6 was demonstrated by (Yazdanshenas and Mirzaei, 2023) to be true in that and the individual outcomes (job satisfaction, job commitment, Job cynicism, and job embeddedness), and the positive connection between psychological empowerment and ethical leadership was improved. According to Sarwar et al. (2023), Hypothesis 7, contrary to the initial assumption, revealed that psychological empowerment exerts a moderating influence on the relationship between ethical leadership outcomes and organizational psychological empowerment. The proposed study will add to the existing literature by highlighting the subtle effects of moral leadership on various organizational aspects. The research also yields quite surprising revelations about the significance of hierarchical and social distances, as well as the ethical climate within the organization, which highlights the complexity of processes involved in ethical leadership.

Future Direction

To expand on the findings and hypotheses, further research can be conducted in several directions to broaden the knowledge on the topic of ethical leadership and its impact on staff outcomes. Future studies should contemplate longitudinal patterns to pursue the prolonged outcomes of ethical leadership on worker results, like job approval, organizational commitment, and (Llorente-Alonso et al., 2024). This would contribute to establishing causality to a more substantial degree. As ethical leadership depends on cultural context, cross-national or cross-regional comparative studies may provide some idea about the role of power distance orientation and leadership social distance in different cultural environments (Hoang et al., 2023b). Future research can be targeted towards a particular field, like healthcare, education, or technology, where the ethical issues and leadership approaches vary significantly. Sectoral understandings would provide more nuanced implications for practice. The consideration of other theoretical models, such as transformational leadership theory or self-determination Theory, might add value to

the picture of motivational processes connecting ethical leadership and psychological/behavioral outcomes (Broome, 2024, Ryan and Deci, 2024).

Theoretical Implications

The results provide several contributions to the theoretical body of knowledge on leadership and organizational behavior. The study contributes empirical richness to the concept of ethical leadership, as it demonstrates its direct and mediated impact on employee attitudes and behaviors, thereby reaffirming its key role in influencing employee attitudes and behaviors. Mediation by psychological empowerment is outlined as a crucial process through which ethical leadership achieves its effects. It is consistent with the social exchange theory (SET) and expands the use of focusing on the individual cognitive and emotional status (Yuan et al., 2023a). These moderating effects of power distance orientation and leadership social distance depict the relevance of contextual variables in leadership studies. By presenting the diversity in the impact of ethical leadership, specifically in terms of role clarity and sustainability focus, the study refutes the simplistic views on the relationship between ethical leadership and homogeneous positive effects. This opens the ethical leadership-performance relationship to more scrutiny.

Recommendation

Based on the findings and in light of the available literature, several practical implications can be suggested for organizations and HR professionals. Organizations should develop and utilize training that focuses on enhancing ethical leadership skills. These must include modules on integrity, transparency, accountability, and moral decision-making. Promoting a Supportive Work Culture: Implement a culture of employee empowerment, allowing workers to have autonomy and giving them meaningful tasks to accomplish, while acknowledging their contributions, which can help mediate most of the positive outcomes of ethical leadership. Employ open-door policies and hold frequent one-on-one meetings, as well as promote inclusive decision-making, to reduce the social distance between leaders and employees, thereby fostering trust and enhancing communication. Since the power distance orientation interacts with the effects of leadership, it means that leaders must be trained to use flexible leadership styles that accommodate the cultural and personal orientations of their team members regarding power and hierarchy.

Study Limitations

Here are potential constraints and suggestions for future research endeavors that could enrich subsequent investigations. It's worth noting that self-enhancement biases might have influenced responses, potentially

increasing the risk of common source variance in the tested relationships. Firstly, data collection occurred at different time points with a one-month time lag, potentially limiting the ability to capture the causal effects of ethical leadership adequately. Hence, it's advisable to employ a research layout that encompasses periods throughout the practice of Ethical leadership. (Dey et al., 2022). Secondly, data were gathered via survey questionnaires. Utilizing alternative data collection methods, such as interviews, could provide additional insights into Ethical leadership (Mayya et al., 2021). Thirdly, while the conventional scale for assessing Ethical leadership is widely accepted, this study aims to delve deeper into understanding Ethical leadership styles and their impacts on outcomes. Therefore, this study evaluates the concept using a specific scale (Ali et al., 2024). It is recommended that future researchers utilize both scales to assess and compare the consistency of findings. Fourth, a comprehensive investigation method is required due to the deeply ingrained attitudes and behaviors of employees. Therefore, an extensive longitudinal study is necessary to clarify the relationship between aspects of moral leadership and worker outcomes. Lastly, the data were collected from organizations in four major European cities, encompassing both the private and public sectors. Consequently, further investigation may be necessary to determine the generalizability of the results across industries (Brimhall and Palinkas, 2020).

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Author Contributions

Saba Amin reviewed and edited the project administration. Bushra Nida Conceptualized, Methodology, Software and data analysis, and Writing review and editing. Tanzela Samin conceptualized, wrote an original draft, collected data, and validated.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) reported no possible conflicts of interest regarding this article, the research, and authorship.

Data Availability Statement

The article did not use datasets in its development and analysis, and data sharing is therefore irrelevant to this article.

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