

**CAN ETHICAL LEADERSHIP INCREASE EMPLOYEES' WORK ENGAGEMENT AND
JOB SATISFACTION? DIFFERENCES IN GENDER CONTEXT****Asst. Prof. Mine AYDEMİR DEV (Ph.D.)*** **Prof. Nuran BAYRAM ARLI (Ph.D.)**** **ABSTRACT**

Leaders have a significant impact on employees and organizations. This study primarily focused on examining the relationship between ethical leadership and employees' work engagement and job satisfaction, and it aimed to examine the differences in the relationship between ethical leadership, work engagement and job satisfaction by gender. Multiple-group analysis was used to examine gender-based differences. The findings revealed a significant relationship between ethical leadership and both job satisfaction and work engagement. Ethical leadership and job satisfaction and work engagement were positively related. The model predicted for the full data set was also estimated for the male and female groups. While all pathways were statistically significant in the male group, the direct relationship between ethical leadership and job satisfaction was not statistically significant in the female group. The results of the current study highlight the importance of ethical leadership in shaping employee engagement and job satisfaction, while also revealing differences between female and male employees.

Keywords: Ethical leadership, Job satisfaction, Work engagement, Gender, Türkiye

JEL Codes: C3, J16, J28, J53

1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, the increase in the competitive environment makes it a necessity to address different approaches and focus on different values (Kanungo and Mendonca, 1996; Alkan, 2015). It is observed that leadership has an important impact on the survival of companies in this competitive environment. In addition to being a social phenomenon, leadership, like all social elements, is affected and renewed by change, organizational and environmental conditions. Accordingly, technological developments, change in environmental conditions and increase in the level of knowledge, social, cultural and economic developments lead to changes in perceptions of leadership. At the same time, leadership roles and models appropriate to the requirements of the changing and transforming age are emerging (Eraslan, 2004).

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Leadership is defined as a process of bringing people together around a certain aim and mobilizing them, as well as giving importance to communicative functions among employees and contributing to the reflection of their feelings of morale and satisfaction on the effectiveness and efficiency of the organization (Bayrak, 1997). Ethical leadership has become increasingly important, particularly in responding to the ethical crises facing business (Ayar, 2022). Studies on whether positive results can be obtained in terms of work life satisfaction of employees in a working environment with an ethical leader are important. Ethical leadership has the ability to make decisions based on ethical principles and to create the organizational structure from ethical values and norms. Ethical leaders are people who are impartial, fair and equal, tolerant, positive, honest, respectful and responsible towards employees, and who guide and influence employees in the light of these values and ensure that the organization achieves its goals (Akdoğan and Demirtaş, 2014; Şentürk, 2017; Sadi and Karatepe, 2021).

When ethical leadership is evaluated from two aspects in terms of human relations, the individual and organizational effects of the ethical leader emerge. The ethical leader has a two-way interaction on the organization and employees by having both an ethical and encouraging role in terms of creating norms for the goals that the organization wants to achieve and implementing these norms (Yates, 2011). Leaders hold significant influence in developing management levels and protecting ethical principles and values within the organization. The question of how this process takes place and will take place can be answered through 'social learning' for employees and 'transformative leadership' for leaders with ethical behavior (Walumbwa and Lawler, 2003).

Brown et al. (2005) proposed that two theories, social learning theory and social exchange theory, can help explain the relationship between employees' perceptions of ethical leadership and their behaviors and attitudes. Social learning theory suggest that individuals learn norm-based behaviors through their own experiences and by observing others. Employees see ethical leaders as role models due to their trustworthy and charismatic characteristics. Therefore, ethical leaders are a source of social learning for individuals (Brown et al., 2005).

Ethical leaders are charismatic because they consider the concerns of their employees and take care to treat them fairly. Ethical leaders establish ethical and moral norms and values for themselves and others, which builds trust (Brown and Treviño, 2006). The leader's building trust with employees and creating personal obligation as a role model leads to social change. Employees perceive ethical leaders as transformative leaders in the sense that ethical leaders show fair and attentive behavior to employees, employees identify leaders with themselves and establish a social change relationship (Brown et al., 2005; Zheng et al., 2022). Fair administration and management understanding in the workplace directs employees to ethical behavior (Walumbwa and Schaubroeck, 2009). The social norms created within the understanding of fair management and administration also regulate the interactions between employees. These norms also serve to reduce uncertainty about organizational relationships, facilitate

team cohesion, increase organizational engagement and positively affect the quality of work life (Smith et al., 1983).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS

This chapter presents a comprehensive review of the existing literature on the research topic on which the hypotheses of the study will be formulated. The literature review aims to add to the existing body of knowledge by analyzing the findings, methodologies and theoretical frameworks of previous studies.

2.1. Ethical Leadership from The Perspective of Work Engagement and Job Satisfaction

Work engagement and job satisfaction come to mind among the attitudes that affect the quality of work life of employees. Employees' quality of work life is affected positively and negatively depending on these attitudes. Negative work attitudes can affect many issues such as slowing down the work, absenteeism, lack of expected performance and poor service delivery in cases where work engagement and job satisfaction are weak. These negative attitudes of employees may also result in turnover (Çekmecelioğlu and Ülker, 2014). Employees' attitudes towards work and their performance are considered as the main factors that determine organizational effectiveness and relationships (Çekmecelioğlu, 2011). In particular, Brown et al. (2005) argued that employees demonstrate higher job satisfaction towards an ethical leader who "treats employees fairly and considerately".

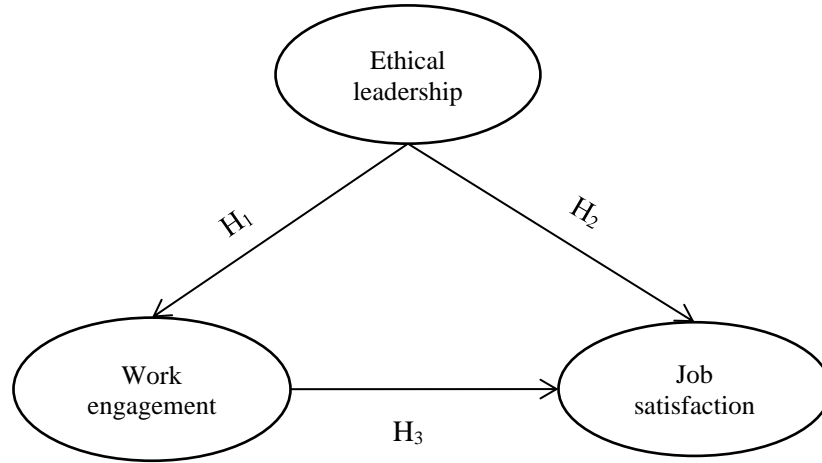
As a requirement of the competitive environment, employees' work engagement and job satisfaction levels are critical attitudes in terms of retention and turnover. Businesses should show a certain service or production performance and should not fall below this performance. For this purpose, employee attitudes that cause negative situations such as slowing down work, absenteeism, disciplinary problems, complaints, poor product or service delivery are important for organizational leaders (Bitmiş and Ergeneli, 2011).

Ethical leaders generally focus on employees' satisfaction, performance and attitudes at work. The central structure of the organizational work of ethical leaders is employees' sense of satisfaction and engagement at work (Holtom et al., 2008). Ethical behaviors of leaders positively increase quality of work life of employees. Therefore, this factor increases employees' job satisfaction and positively affects their engagement in the organization (Bahar, 2019). The positive effect of ethical leadership on employees' job satisfaction is attributed to the fact that employees who see motivating, caring and fair behavior by leaders feel the need to respond to their leaders and the organization with a positive work attitude (Charoensap et al., 2019).

Ethical leadership practices have been shown to increase employees' work engagement (Macey et al., 2009; Piccolo et al., 2010; Cheng et al., 2014; Khuong and Dung, 2015; Sugianingrat et al, 2017; Durgut and Günay, 2020) and job satisfaction levels (Brown et al., 2005; Sy et al., 2006; Holtom et al.,

2008; Rolf et al. 2010; Kim and Brymer, 2011; Dertli, 2014; Shafique et al., 2018). Additionally, a positive relationship has been found between work engagement and job satisfaction (Yeh, 2013; Garg et al., 2018; Öztürk et al., 2021). Unethical leadership has been found to negatively affect employees' well-being, attitudes and personal lives (Hoobler and Brass, 2006; Kristinsson et al., 2022). For these reasons, it is crucial for companies to work with leaders who have high ethical standards (Tepper et al., 2007). In the light of all this information, the conceptual model showed in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Conceptual Model



Conceptual model illustrates the direct and indirect effects between ethical leadership, work engagement, and job satisfaction.

2.2. Ethical Leadership in Gender Context and Gender Socialization Theory

Gender socialization theory posits that gender is socially constructed. Although gender is a biological trait, gender reflects the individual's internalization of a socially constructed identity (female, male) that develops through observation and interaction with the environment. As individuals are socialized, they are treated differently according to gender and gender can become a much more effective determinant of individuals' behaviors than biological sex (Tran et al., 2018).

Gender socialization theory argues that the genders attach different values to work roles and therefore make different work-related decisions and practices. According to proponents of this approach, men look for signs of competitive success and downplay intrinsic satisfaction. In contrast, women are thought to place less emphasis on competitive success and more importance on performing tasks well and fostering harmonious relationships (Betz et al., 1989).

It has been revealed by various studies that employees' expectations and behaviors regarding work differ according to gender (Çakır, 2001; Eğinli, 2009). Spector (1997) noted that gender is one of the critical factors when considering job satisfaction. At the same time, studies have indicated that employees' perceptions of ethical leadership differ significantly according to gender (Özden et al., 2019;

Özgenel and Aksu, 2020). However, although there is evidence that there are gender differences, there is no clarity on which gender group has more effects.

When the literature was examined, a limited number of studies were encountered in which ethical leadership, job satisfaction and work engagement were discussed together (Ülbeği et al., 2018; Özsungur, 2020; You and Lee, 2021; Salifu et al., 2022; Junaidi, 2024). Also, a multiple group analysis in which the difference of the conceptual model was tested according to gender was not found in the literature. Additionally, this study will examine the mediating role of work engagement between ethical leadership and job satisfaction., thus contributing to filling a gap. Building on previous research, the hypotheses were formulated as follows.

H₁: Ethical leadership is positively associated with work engagement.

H₂: Ethical leadership is positively associated with job satisfaction.

H₃: Work engagement is positively associated with job satisfaction.

H₄: Work engagement positively mediates the relationship between ethical leadership and job satisfaction.

In line with this information, the primary aim of the study is to discover how ethical leadership affects employees' job satisfaction and work engagement. In addition to this, the second aim is to investigate whether the relationships among ethical leadership, job satisfaction, and work engagement differ based on gender through multiple group analysis. Therefore, the mediating role of work engagement between ethical leadership and job satisfaction will be tested in the study. The results obtained within the framework of these aims will contribute.

3. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

This section presents the methodological approach of the study, detailing the participants, measurement tools and statistical techniques employed.

3.1. Participants

The study was conducted on 304 participants over the age of 18 and working full-time in different organizations in the private sector in Bursa. The data collection was conducted through the use of questionnaires between October 2022 and January 2023. The study included voluntary participants, and the data were analyzed anonymously. Convenience sampling was used to select the sample for the study. The questionnaire form of the study was approved by “Bursa Uludag University Social and Human Sciences Research and Publication Ethics Committee” (2022-07).

3.2. Measurement Tools

The data of this study were obtained by questionnaire method. In addition to three scales, the questionnaire form includes demographic questions. These scales are Utrecht work engagement scale, job satisfaction scale and ethical leadership scale.

The Utrecht work engagement scale was developed by Schaufeli et al. (2002). Validity studies were conducted by Bilgel et al. (2012). High scores obtained from the scale indicate high work engagement. The scale consists of 17 items in total. The scale is assessed using a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from "0 - Never" to "6 - Always". Sample items are "*I find the work that I do full of meaning and purpose*" and "*I can continue working for very long periods at a time*".

The job satisfaction scale was developed by Brayfield and Rothe (1951) and comprises a total of 5 items. The validity and reliability assessment of the scale were carried out by Bilgin (1995). The scale uses a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1-strongly disagree to 5-strongly agree. "*I feel fairly well satisfied with my present job*" are sample item for the job satisfaction scale. High scores indicate high levels of job satisfaction.

The ethical leadership scale was originally developed by Brown et al. (2005), with its Turkish validity and reliability was carried out by Tuna et al. (2012). The scale consists of 10 questions in total. It is assessed using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1-Never to 5-Always. Sample items for ethical leadership are "*In this workplace, managers sets an example of how to do things the right way in terms of ethics*" and "*In this workplace, managers define success not just by results but also the way that they are obtained*". High scores indicate high levels of ethical leadership.

3.3. Analysis

Descriptive statistics regarding the data obtained within the extent of the research are reported. Then, the reliability values were examined and the conceptual model created depending on the purpose of the research was estimated with a multi-group Structural Equation Models (SEM) both for the whole data group and considering the gender variable. In the study, $X^2/df < 5$; $GFI > .90$; $CFI > .90$; $RMSEA < .08$ and $SRMR < .10$ indices were utilized to assess the goodness of fit of SEM (Schumacker and Lomax, 2004; Raykov and Marcoulides, 2006). IBM SPSS-26 and AMOS-23 were used to conduct the analyses.

SEM focuses on latent variables that cannot be directly observed and are measured by linking them to observable variables. They are widely in use in social science research because of their usefulness in modeling complex relationships. SEM deals with the relationships between observed and latent variables and test the relationships between latent variables. Each pathway in the conceptual model established within the aim of the research represents the hypotheses under examination. In model estimation, all paths are estimated simultaneously (Yuan and Bentler, 2006). Multiple group analyses can be used when it is desired to test whether the SEM is the same for two or more groups.

In multi-group applications of SEM, firstly, the invariance of the SEM between different groups is checked. For this purpose, the chi-square difference statistic between the unrestricted model and the measurement model is examined. If the chi-square difference between the models is not significant, it indicates that the model can measure the same fact among different groups. This indicates that the factor loadings of the groups are invariant, i.e. factorial invariance is ensured. Next, the difference in the chi-square value between the measurement model and the structural model is also tested. The chi-square difference statistic between the measurement model and the structural model is checked. If the chi-squared difference between the two models is not significant, we say that the metric invariance of the groups is ensured. If the changes in the chi-square value are significant, it means that the coefficients of the structural paths are clearly different between the groups, so metric invariance is not met. In other words, it means that the model has significant group difference (Koufteros and Marcoulides, 2006; Ryu, and Cheong, 2017).

4. RESULTS

The demographic information gathered from the 304 employees involved in the study is summarized in Table 1. Approximately 42% were female. Participants ranged in age from 21 to 61, with an average age of 35.92 (± 9.11). The average number of years in the profession was 7.5 years.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics

	Frequency	%
Gender		
Female	127	41.8
Male	177	58.2
Education		
Primary school	75	24.7
Secondary school	137	45.1
Higher education	92	30.2
Marital status		
Married	155	51.0
Single	149	49.0

Source: Own calculation.

The mean, standard deviation and reliability values obtained for the scales used in the study are presented in Table 2. To assess the internal consistency of the scale items, Cronbach's alpha was calculated. This value is between 0 and 1 and it is required to be at least .70 for a scale. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient calculated to examine the reliability of the scales was .91 for the ethical leadership scale, .94 for the work engagement scale and .83 for the job satisfaction scale. Cronbach's Alpha values computed for all scales exceeded .70. This indicates that the scales are reliable, demonstrating internal consistency.

Table 2. Means, Standard Deviation and Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient

<i>Scales</i>	<i>Items</i>	<i>Means</i>	<i>Standard. Dev.</i>	<i>Cronbach Alpha</i>
<i>Ethical Leadership</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>33.34</i>	<i>8.15</i>	<i>.91</i>
<i>Work Engagement</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>65.06</i>	<i>20.80</i>	<i>.94</i>
<i>Job Satisfaction</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>18.01</i>	<i>4.62</i>	<i>.83</i>

Source: Own calculation.

The relationships between ethical leadership, work engagement and job satisfaction were estimated with SEM. The results of the estimated SEM are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Estimated Structural Equation Model Result

<i>Path</i>	<i>β</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>Result</i>
<i>Ethical Leadership → Work Engagement</i>	<i>.46</i>	<i><.000</i>	<i>Accepted</i>
<i>Ethical Leadership → Job Satisfaction</i>	<i>.25</i>	<i><.000</i>	<i>Accepted</i>
<i>Work Engagement → Job Satisfaction</i>	<i>.70</i>	<i><.000</i>	<i>Accepted</i>
<i>Ethical Leadership → Work Engagement → Job Satisfaction</i>	<i>.32</i>	<i><.000</i>	<i>Accepted</i>

Source: Own calculation.

All coefficients in Table 3 show the standardized coefficients and all coefficients are statistically significant. The goodness of fit values calculated for the estimated SEM were $X^2/df=2.313$; $GFI=.90$; $CFI=.95$; $RMSEA=.07$; $SRMR=.05$. The obtained goodness of fit values are at acceptable level. In the estimated model, direct relationship between ethical leadership and work engagement ($\beta=.46$; $p<.000$) and between ethical leadership and job satisfaction ($\beta=.25$; $p<.000$) was statistically significant. In addition, the direct relationship between work engagement and job satisfaction ($\beta=.70$; $p<.000$) was statistically significant. In addition, an indirect relationship between ethical leadership and job satisfaction ($\beta=.32$; $p<.000$) was found.

In other words, the relationship between ethical leadership and job satisfaction is partially mediated by work engagement. As a result of the estimated model, 21% of the total variance in the work engagement explained by the ethical leadership. 72% of the total change in job satisfaction variable is explained by ethical leadership and work engagement variables.

After the conceptual research model was estimated for the whole data group, it was estimated with multiple group analysis for male and female groups. The results of the multiple group analysis are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Multiple Group Analysis Results

<i>Path</i>	<i>Female (N=127)</i>			<i>Male (N=177)</i>		
	β	<i>p</i>	<i>Result</i>	β	<i>p</i>	<i>Result</i>
<i>Ethical Leadership → Work Engagement</i>	.64	<.000	<i>Accepted</i>	.36	<.000	<i>Accepted</i>
<i>Ethical Leadership → Job Satisfaction</i>	.20	.113	<i>Rejected</i>	.28	<.000	<i>Accepted</i>
<i>Work Engagement → Job Satisfaction</i>	.67	<.000	<i>Accepted</i>	.73	<.000	<i>Accepted</i>

Source: Own calculation.

When Table 4 is examined, in the female group, there exists a statistically significant direct relationship between ethical leadership and work engagement ($\beta=.64$; $p<.000$). However, the direct effect of ethical leadership on job satisfaction was statistically insignificant ($\beta=.20$; $p=.113$). The statistically significant indirect relationship between ethical leadership and work engagement is evident ($\beta=.45$; $p<.000$). This indicates that work engagement variable has a full mediating effect relationship between ethical leadership and job satisfaction of female employees. Finally, the relationship between work engagement levels of female employees and their job satisfaction levels was statistically significant ($\beta=.67$; $p<.000$).

In the male group, the direct relationship between ethical leadership and work engagement ($\beta=.36$; $p<.000$) and, ethical leadership and job satisfaction ($\beta=.28$; $p<.000$) was statistically significant. In addition, it has been concluded that work engagement variable has a partial mediating effect relationship between ethical leadership and job satisfaction of employees. Furthermore, the relationship between work engagement levels among male employees and job satisfaction levels was determined to be statistically significant ($\beta=.73$; $p<.000$).

In the female group, 41% of the total variance in the work engagement is accounted for by the ethical leadership. In the male group, the percentage of explanation ($R^2=.13$) is lower than in the female group. This is also evident in the path coefficients. As a result, it is possible to say that the perception of ethical leadership has more effect in explaining the work engagement level in the female group compared to the male group.

As mentioned before, the first model obtained as a result of multiple group estimation shows the unrestricted model in which all parameter estimates are adjusted to be equal between the two groups. Accordingly, the chi-square difference between the estimated models was 24.246 and the difference in degrees of freedom was 15 ($p>.05$). This indicates that factorial invariance of the groups was achieved. Then, the chi-square difference between the measurement model and the structural model was 9.463, with a difference of 3 degrees of freedom ($p<.05$). This shows that at least one structural path of the model varies between male and female groups according to gender. As seen in Table 4, the estimated

path coefficient between ethical leadership and job satisfaction was statistically significant in the male group ($\beta=.28$; $p<.000$), while it was statistically insignificant in the female group ($\beta=.20$; $p=.113$).

5. CONCLUSION

An important aspect of this research was to examine the relationship between ethical leadership and the levels of employee work engagement and job satisfaction. Another important aspect of this study was to determine whether the ethical leadership-job satisfaction-work engagement relationships differed according to the gender of the employees. In the SEM estimated for all data, the study found that statistically significant positive relationship between ethical leadership and work engagement and job satisfaction. It was also concluded that statistically significant positive relationship between work engagement and job satisfaction. In this way, all three research hypotheses tested were accepted. In addition, as a result of the multiple group analysis, it was concluded that there is a difference between the groups in the structural section for males and females. It could be argued that the perception of ethical leadership among female employees has a greater impact on explaining the level of work engagement compared to male employees. The results of the study are consistent with previous research, indicating that relationship between ethical leadership and work engagement and job satisfaction (Yates, 2011; Ülbeği et al., 2018; Charoensap et al., 2019; Ahmad and Umrani, 2019; Bahar, 2019; Özdemir and Özer, 2019).

The findings of this study contribute to expanding the current research on the correlation among ethical leadership, work engagement, and job satisfaction. The results have implications for the need for organizational managers to make efforts to help organizations exhibit ethical leadership. In addition, it was revealed that work engagement significantly influences the increase in job satisfaction levels among female employees. However, it was concluded that there is an indirect relationship between ethical leadership and in explaining job satisfaction among female employees. As a result, further research is necessary to investigate gender-based disparities in how ethical leadership influences job satisfaction.

The present research discovered that ethical leadership and job satisfaction of female employees not directly related; however, there is an indirect relationship between ethical leadership and work engagement. When the work engagement was removed, the positive relationship between ethical leadership and job satisfaction was found to be significant for both males and females. This highlights the significance of work engagement as a mediator for female employees.

This study was carried out on a single sample and data was collected using a questionnaire. In addition, although the participants are from various sectors, they are all private sector employees. Therefore, the results are limited in terms of generalization to public sector employees. In future research, the effects of ethical leadership on different groups such as blue-collar employees or public sector employees can be addressed. This result obtained in this study needs to be further investigated in different samples and in different cultures.

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Literatür Taraması / <i>Literature Review</i>	Çalışma için gerekli literatürü taramak / <i>Review the literature required for the study</i>	Asst. Prof. Mine AYDEMİR DEV (Ph.D.) Prof. Nuran BAYRAM ARLI (Ph.D.)

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