A Phenomenological Investigation on Ethical Leadership and Workplace Engagement from a Multi-Cultural Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Despite continuous attempts to introduce employee engagement measures, leaders worldwide have been increasingly concerned about diminishing employee engagement levels. The issue of workplace engagement continues to be a source of contention for academics and practitioners alike. There is still a need to comprehend this phenomenon since previous research lacks a thorough understanding of employee work engagement concerning ethical leadership. This qualitative study explores the perceptions of the leaders working in service organizations regarding ethical leadership on employee work engagement in three countries, i.e., Malaysia, Turkey, and Pakistan. The phenomenon of work engagement was explored in this study. The theory of self-determination supports the proposed theoretical framework of the current study. Purposive sampling was applied to select 28 leaders in the service sector. Semi-structured interviews were performed to understand employee engagement better using participant observations, opinions, strategic perspectives, and the employee handbook and recordings of interviews and meetings with service sector leaders. The findings highlighted eight major ethical leadership themes suggested by 28 managers in the interviews. Eight themes of ethical leadership are (1) Role Modeling, (2) Trust, (3 Honesty, (4) Integrity, (5) Justice, (6) Religiosity, (7) Responsibility, (8) Intellectual competence. The present study found that leaders applying different strategies and understanding the importance of employee engagement could improve employee engagement and have a more robust workforce and beneficial organization.

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Employee engagement remains elusive globally, despite a plethora of studies on employee satisfaction, efficiency, and well-being (Da Costa & Loureiro, 2019). According to the Gallup Institute, 85% of the world's population is barely engaged actively (Motyka, 2018). Even though disengagement is still a significant problem in the private sector, engagement is a crucial defensive and strategic approach for attracting, motivating, and retaining employees to produce superior economic performance (Gupta & Sharma, 2016). Employee engagement is a key to a company's success (Rekha & Sasmita, 2019).

To get a grip on employee engagement challenges, researchers (e.g., Aboobaker et al., 2019) sought out determinants of work engagement - those that may predict job performance and hence indirectly impact the engagement of employees (Adi & Fithriana, 2020; Holman & Axtell, 2016). When it comes to an employee's strong commitment to their job and work activities, engaged workers/employees demonstrate increased role task performance and job satisfaction (Adawiyah et al., 2020; Van Zyl et al., 2021), which results in improved financial outcomes (Tensay & Singh, 2020).

Effective leadership builds an environment that fosters curiosity, creativity, innovation, advancement, growth, and entrepreneurship (Gawke et al., 2017). Given the significant role of employee engagement, companies must encourage employee engagement through leadership, most notably through practicing ethical leadership (Caulfield Jay & Senger, 2017). Several studies have found a link between ethical leadership and desirable employee outcomes in the public sector, such as job satisfaction, organizational engagement, and ethical behavior (e.g., Beeri et al., 2013; Wright et al., 2016). However, none of these studies has examined how or why ethical leadership relates to these outcomes. The issue of workplace engagement continues to be a source of contention for academics and practitioners alike (Baker & Lee, 2020; Decuypere & Schaufeli, 2020; Majeed et al., 2018). There is still a need to comprehend this phenomenon since previous research lacks what traits of ethical leadership can help improve work engagement in different service sectors, specifically in the Asian context (Bhatti, Farooq, & Öztürk, 2019; Ke et al., 2020; Rigby & Ryan, 2018).

This study was contextual; the research aim was to learn about leaders' life experiences while they and their companies confronted engagement problems. As a result, the qualitative phenomenological research approach elicited insight from leaders whose experiences and perspectives were pertinent to the study's contextual phenomena in three different countries. Qualitative analysis methods can comprehend the social and cultural environment in which people live and communicate and their behaviors and communication within that context (Myers, 2013). A comprehensive assessment of the literature that qualitative approaches enable researchers to investigate participants' actions, feelings, and understandings and to acquire substantial insights (Rahman & Areni, 2016). Additionally, a critical advantage of qualitative research is that it "enables researchers to perceive and comprehend context," which is the context in which decisions and actions occur" (Myers, 2013, p. 5). The following research question steered the subsequent research:

How does understanding and experience of leaders regarding ethical leadership help enhance employee work engagement in the workplace?

Literature Review
Employee Work Engagement Defined and Clarified
Kahn (1990) coined the term "work engagement." He asserted that individuals are engaged in their job when they "express themselves physically, intellectually, and emotionally" (Kahn, 1990, p. 694). On the other hand, disengagement happens when individuals "withdraw physically, mentally, and emotionally" from their tasks. To increase employee engagement, a company should make work meaningful by offering demanding, creative, autonomous, and varied careers, safe and consistent social circumstances, and providing sufficient resources to ensure availability. Based on three situations they encounter, employees experience varying degrees of engagement at work (Kahn, 1990). The first is meaningfulness, which refers to the fulfillment individuals derive from the job they perform. Second is safety or trust, or the capacity to engage them fully without fear of retribution. The third is the availability or capability for employees' psychological, emotional, and physical investment.

The effects of employee engagement were first published in 2001 by (Maslach et al. (2001). Burnout is experienced by individuals when faced with excessive work demands and pressure at work. Whereas employee work engagement is shared by employees when they face positive feedback, learning, and growth opportunities (Maslach et al., 2001). Further, it also highlighted the importance of the role of individuals' engagement levels and found that this level varies. Employees handle more work demands if they find meaning in their work. Employee work engagement and corporate profits were studied (Harter et al., 2002), including nearly 8,000 units within thirty-six organizations. Higher levels of engagement are more correlated with increased job satisfaction, productivity, safety, and employee retention (Harter et al., 2002).

Further, May et al. (2004) published the first empirical research and tested Khan's theory, including availability, safety, and meaningfulness and its impact on employee engagement levels? Safety and meaningfulness are directly linked with engagement levels (Welch, 2011). Meaning is finding a purpose and value in their working conditions and trusting them drives them to work hard. Employees who felt that work standards do not adhere to their values and standards showed lower levels of engagement safety (May et al., 2004). Secondly, availability was related to employees' cognitive, emotional, and physical resources (May et al., 2004, p. 17). In other words, with the availability of resources, employees feel more engaged and less burnout.

Saks (2005) also found that engagement and social exchange theory are strongly linked. Employees exhibit a higher engagement if they perceive that the organization supports them and demonstrate procedural justice. In due course, organizations started to publish strategies for enhancing employee engagement. As shown Table 1, various interpretations of what defines ethical leadership have been presented.

Table 1

Definitions of Work Engagement by Different Scholars over the Years

Definition of work engagement	Authors, years
"The harnessing of organizational members selves to their work roles, in engagement people, employ and express themselves physically, cognitively and emotionally during role performance."	Kahn (1990)
"An energetic state of involvement with personally fulfilling activities that enhance cores sense of professional efficacy"	Leiter & Maslach (1998)
"A persistent, positive affective-motivational state of fulfillment in employees that is characterized by high levels of motivation and pleasure"	Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter (2001)
"Work engagement refers to a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption. Vigor is characterized by high levels of energy and mental resilience while working. Dedication refers to being strongly involved in one's work and experiencing a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge. Absorption is characterized by being fully concentrated and happily engrossed in one's work, whereby time passes quickly, and one has difficulties with detaching oneself from work".	(Schaufeli et al., 2002)
"The individual's involvement and satisfaction with as well as enthusiasm for work"	Harter et al. (2002)
"A distinct and unique construct that consists of a cognitive, emotional, and behavioral component that is associated with individual role performance"	Saks (2006)
"Employee work engagement is a heightened emotional and intellectual connection that an employee has for his/her job organization, manager, or co-worker that influences him/her to apply the additional discretionary effect to his/her work."	(Gibbons, 2006)
"The employee sense of purpose and focused energy evident to others through the display of personal leadership, adaptability, effort, and persistence directed towards the organization's goals."	Macey et al. 2011)
"Three facets of engagement: (1) intellectual (i.e., "the extent to which one is intellectually absorbed in work"); (2) social (i.e., "the extent to which one is socially connected with the working environment and shares common values with colleagues"); and (3) affective (i.e., "the extent to which one experiences a state of positive affect relating to one's work role").	Soane et al. (2012) ISA engagement scale

Source: Author's compilation

There is confusion about the definition of work engagement. Some described it with the outcomes arising from engagement, and others explained it with the help of behavior that created engagement (Gong et al., 2020; Shuck & Wollard, 2010; Welch, 2011). According to scholars, a state of engagement occurs when employees are completely interested and enthusiastic about their work (Gong et al., 2020; Halbesleben et al., 2009). Once the state of engagement is achieved, employees not only are committed to their work but also involved in discretionary efforts in which individuals not only put extra efforts towards the achievement of their goals but also seek opportunities to create meaningful work and try to bring innovation (Macey & Schneider, 2008). Literature regarding employee work engagement failed to explain the connectivity to deal with how leaders should perceive engagement, as scholars could not apprehend these leaders' strategies (Sarwar et al., 2020). Gong et al. (2020) suggested that understanding how to increase engagement through strategies that foster engagement behavior is needed. The second concern is the validity and measurement of employee job engagement, even though various tools have been created (Allam, 2017). To bridge these gaps, researchers must perform context-specific investigations into employee work engagement as a construct, its relationship to other well-researched organizational literature, and how leadership and environment may promote engagement (Kaliannan & Adjovu, 2015).

Ethical Leadership

According to social learning theory (Bandura & Walters, 1977), people acquire norms through observing others' believable and appealing behaviors. Numerous scholars have hypothesized that leaders' ethical actions may directly impact employees' attempts to promote good, value-driven behaviors (Bedi et al., 2016). Since the early 1990s, the increasing number of unethical behavior instances has raised interest in ethical leadership (Duan et al., 2018). Numerous leadership models, including transformational leadership (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978), servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1998), and genuine leadership (Avolio & Gardner, 2005), include ethical principles. However, these models focus exclusively on a subset of leadership behaviors associated with the evident ethical components and may understate how leaders' ethical practices and decisions influence workers (Brown & Treviño, 2006). Table 2 presents the definitions of ethical leadership by different scholars over the years.

Table 2

Definitions of Ethical Leadership by Different Scholars over the Years

Definitions of ethical leadership	Measures
Craig and Gustafson (1998, p. 129): "Rule-based utilitarian approach (Bentham, 1970) labels an act [leader] wrong or unethical if it violates explicit or implicit rules which, if followed by all, would maximize outcomes for the majority of individuals."	Perceived Leader Integrity Scale (PLSI)
Brown et al. (2005, p. 120): Ethical leaders engage in "normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making."	Ethical Leadership Survey (ELS)
Spangenberg and Theron (2005, p. 02): Leadership of ethics comprises the creation and sharing of an ethical vision (based on careful diagnosis of the external and internal environments in which all relevant parties participate); preparing the leader, followers, and the organization - particularly its structures and culture - for implementing the vis	Ethical Leadership Inventory (ELI)
Riggio et al. (2010, p. 235): An ethical leader "is one who adheres to the four cardinal virtues of prudence, fortitude, temperance, and justice."	Leadership virtue questionnaire (LVQ)
Kalshoven et al. (2011, p. 52): "A tension between altruistic and egoistic motive."	Ethical leadership at work questionnaire (ELW)
(Yukl et al., 2013, p. 38): "Ethical leaders engage in acts and behaviors that benefit others, and at the same time, they refrain from behaviors that can cause any harm to others (Kanungo, 2001)."	Ethical leadership questionnaire (ELQ)
Langlois et al. (2014, p. 312): "ethical leadership is defined as a social practice by which professional judgment is autonomously exercised. It constitutes a resource rooted in three ethical dimensions – critique, care, and justice– and a powerful capacity to act responsibly and acceptably.	Ethical Leadership Questionnaire (ELQ)
Shakeel et al. (2020) "Ethical leadership is the implicit and explicit pursuit of desired ethical behavior for self and followers through efforts governed by rules and principles that advocate learning motivation, healthy optimism and clarity of purpose to uphold the values of empowerment, service to others, concern for human rights, change for betterment and fulfilling duty towards society, future generations, environment, and its sustainability."	Ethical Leadership Questionnaire (BELS)

Authors Computation

By contrast, ethical leadership is concerned with various actions from an ethical, philosophical standpoint. Since ethical leaders embody integrity, they establish and enforce

ethical standards for themselves and their subordinates (Brown & Treviño, 2006). As a result, leaders at lower levels of the organizational hierarchy can absorb and internalize higher-level leaders' ethical values and standards. Ethical leadership is distinguished from other leadership styles by emphasizing moral management (Brown & Treviño, 2006), i.e., the conveyance of moral cues (Van-Gils et al., 2015). Ethical leaders are frequently viewed as trustworthy and honest persons who make sound judgments in their professional and personal lives.

Lower-level managers' internalizing beliefs and norms can decrease their destructive behavior through a role-modeling process. These processes have been referred to as leadership's "trickle-down" or "cascading" impacts (Decuypere & Schaufeli, 2020). The influence of high-level moral leadership on the ethical actions of lower-level leaders has been demonstrated empirically, demonstrating the presence of cascading effects (Mayer et al., 2009; Ruiz et al., 2011). Additionally, past research has depended on workers' influence in assessing leaders' ethical behavior. Such tactics may hide the trickle-down effect of ethical leadership across organizational tiers throughout the influencing process (Mayer et al., 2009; Ruiz et al., 2011).

The most accurate way to assess ethical leadership throughout the organizational hierarchy is to analyze subordinates' opinions of their leaders at different leadership levels. Thus, to determine the impacts of multi-layered ethical leadership on performance, this area requires more research to identify the critical factors in the influencing process and develop a suitable method for evaluating these nuanced aspects. This can significantly impede productivity and team effectiveness (Nauman & Qamar, 2018; Saini, 2017).

Douglas et al. (2001) stated that corporate culture significantly deters individuals from unethical conduct and procedures. As further suggested, followers reciprocate when treated with justice and their respective leaders (Blau, 1964; Mayer et al., 2009). Furthermore, once satisfied to Brown et al. (2005), employees are thought to be putting extra effort into their work and willing to be more actively engaged (Macey et al., 2011). Once an employee has the freedom to operate and make decisions independently without direct supervision, it enhances employee engagement (Rożnowski & Zarzycka, 2020). Thus, because ethical leadership has important normative implications for encouraging behaviors that benefit collective organizational results, it is a welcoming area of research (Duan et al., 2018).

Ethical Leadership and Work Engagement

Ethical leaders' actions impact the outcome and fulfillment of their followers, but they also influence and are evaluated by their followers. Furthermore, the ethical leader demonstrates honesty, justice, and concern for people. They are dependable and professional, improving the organization's efficiency and potential (Choi et al., 2015; Maamari & Majdalani, 2017).

When employees were given a choice, and the opportunity for self-direction, positive performance feedback improved motivation (Sarwar et al., 2020). Extrinsic reinforcement has been shown to have limitations, and research has demonstrated that extrinsic rewards and punishments, such as competition, pressure, and deadlines, undermine intrinsic motivation by eliciting the perception of them as controllers, thereby thwarting Deci's three innate

psychological needs that generate drive. These three facets served as the foundation for SDT, a modern theory of motivation (Sarwar et al., 2020). The literature on employee job engagement demonstrates that higher levels benefit working relationships, employee well-being, productivity, profit, and customer satisfaction. However, there is a distinction between internal and extrinsic motivation, especially regarding work. Personal characteristics such as self-confidence, a sense of control, hope, and optimism contribute to this distinction.

Moreover, according to the ethical leadership literature, leadership is concerned with processes, goal attainment, interpersonal connections, talents, characteristics, behaviors, and social interactions established within a hierarchical work organization. The contribution of managers to organizational performance and their capacity to develop effective, ethical leadership appear universally acknowledged.

Furthermore, Robinson et al. (2004) state the company must endeavor to establish and foster engagement, which involves a two-way connection between employer and employee. Leaders are focused on moving the business toward appealing goals (for example, improving organization procedures and arrangements). Typically, ethical leadership involves offering a solution (Maynes & Podsakoff, 2014) and exhibiting people's participation (Devendhiran & Wesley, 2017; Wei et al., 2015). As a rational and necessary trait, ethical leaders exhibit enthusiasm for listening to and considering employees' perspectives on the organization's activities and direction (Shin et al., 2015). Brown and Mitchell (2010) concluded that ethical leadership is inextricably linked to individuals' capacity to report their leaders' failures. As a result, individuals who witness a high degree of ethical leadership in their business are more likely to enhance their communication skills and job engagement (Van der Walt, 2018; Wei et al., 2015). Finally, this literature highlights the pre-existing aspects of employee job engagement and ethical leadership, their interrelationships, and if any particular work-related characteristics had a more significant impact on effort exertion than others.

Work Engagement and Self-Determination

Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Ryan & Deci, 2017; Ryan et al., 2021) is a generic theory of motivation that has been examined in education, sports, and labor. Unlike most other motivational theories, this one places a premium on the quality of motivation rather than its strength. SDT asserts that high-quality motivation occurs when three fundamental psychological demands are met. First is the urge for autonomy, which refers to the desire to be psychologically independent. Employees feel autonomous when they can make their own decisions and choices. Second, the requirement for competence refers to the desire to deal with the environment efficiently; employees feel competent when they can learn and develop, which enables them to adjust flexibly to the demands of their jobs. Thirdly, there is a need for relatedness, which relates to the desire to develop healthy relationships with others, be loved and cared for, and care for others. Employees get a sense of belonging when part of a close-knit team that supports one another and communicates personal emotions and opinions.

According to SDT, these three fundamental requirements are inherent in human nature and are, in a sense, embedded in it. Thus, the question is not whether these requirements

exist–after all, everyone does–but to what extent they are met. According to SDT, meeting these basic needs is just as critical for people's healthy psychological functioning as eating is for their physical health. When these three fundamental demands are addressed, work motivation and autonomous motivational regulation in SDT exist, ensuring that employees function optimally in well-being and performance. The extent to which basic requirements are met depends on the work situation that "nurtures" these needs.

Consistent with SDT, it was discovered that addressing the three fundamental requirements acts as a mediator between job resources and work engagement (Van den Broeck et al., 2008). When all three basic demands are met, employees feel engaged. They can choose which tasks they must complete (autonomy), apply their skills (competence), and receive positive feedback from co-workers (relatedness). Another study discovered a favorable association between need satisfaction and work engagement, accompanied by improved work performance manifested in extra-role behavior (Van Beek et al., 2014). In summary, consistent with SDT, fulfilling basic psychological needs at work is connected with optimal job engagement and performance functioning.

Method

Sampling Frame and Survey Population

Criterion sampling involves selecting research participants that meet the predetermined relevance criterion (Patton, 2002, p. 238). This sampling procedure adds value and credibility to a sample while researching it more extensively (Roberts, 2010). In addition, a small sample allows the researcher to conduct a more in-depth analysis (Patton, 2002). The criterion sampling method was used in the current study for selecting participants. All of the participants who were selected had to meet the following criteria:

1. A leader from the service sector with a team of a minimum of 30 people
2. He/she must be responsible for the management and policymaking
3. He/she should be working in that company for more than three years
4. He/she must have industry experience of 10 years
5. A leader must know about ethical programs
6. Knowing professional and organizational development

The researcher should follow a standardized procedure and choose subjects following the research question (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). A homogeneous sample was chosen from service leaders for various reasons: they had worked for the organization for several years, were knowledgeable about employee engagement strategies, and had successfully implemented motivational strategies that improved employee performance at the company for at least two years. Despite the limitations of purposive sampling in terms of generalization (Taherdoost, 2016), it can be used to justify theoretically, analytically, and logically (Sharma, 2017).

Data Collection and Sampling

In a phenomenological study, the researcher can appreciate the data collection through the first-hand experiences of the participants (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010, p. 146). In qualitative research, the researcher requires the participant's actual words, including their stories and experiences narrated in line with the case study. Furthermore, a qualitative comparison is made where statistics and information data are needed (Polkinghorne, 2005). Some standard methods used in qualitative research include interviews, questionnaires, observations, focus groups, written documents, and electronic data (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015). The interview questions were semi-structured to welcome answers without prompting biased or influencing responses. Most of the interviews approximately took one hour, while the rest finished within 40-45 minutes. Interviews were transcribed within 48 hours, and the interview process lasted for approximately 5-6 months while accommodating the scheduling of participants. The researcher cross-referenced the transcripts with the interviews after completing the written transcription.

Procedures

1. Participants were recruited using LinkedIn, Facebook, and personal relationships.
2. After verifying each client's qualifications, the researcher e-mailed them. The e-mail includes an invitation to take part in the test review.
3. The researcher mailed a confirmation letter to each participant following their e-mail confirmation of their consent to participate in the study. The researcher planned a 45- to 60-minute interview with each participant. (a) The consent form contained the e-mail's attachments. A mobile device and in-person conducted interviews, and the clearance form included a release of the audio. The researcher obtained the authorization document. The interviewer solicited comments during the interview to acquire valuable knowledge.
4. Members' identities were concealed through the use of pseudonyms. The researcher collected demographic data on age, gender, education, location of employment, the title of leadership role, and years of experience in a leadership position.

The researcher developed the demographic questionnaire, conducted in-person or telephone interviews, used NVivo-12 tools to cross-reference interview transcripts, and took help from six expert researchers to code the transcript data.

Participant Demographics

Selected organizations had many employees, ranging from 30-500, whereas few organizations had more than 500 employees. Organizations included service-based industries, including engineering services and technology firms, financial institutions firms, telecom and IT sectors, tourism industries, retail-based enterprises, and education and training services. Data is provided in multiple charts and tables to ensure the confidentiality of the individual's demographic details. Further participants of the leading research study are also not identified to maintain the confidentiality of the research. Table 3 exhibits the profile of all participating 28 respondents. The table indicates their gender, highest qualification, age, designation, industry, and total service sector experience.

Table 3
Interview Participant Demographics – Participants Profile

Respondent	Gender	Education	Age	Title and Sector	Work Experience
Respondent 1	Female	MS/M.Phil.	39	Director–Banking & Financial Services	8
Respondent 2	Female	MS/M.Phil.	45	Director– Telecom & IT Sector	13
Respondent 3	Female	Masters	48	HR Director– Banking & Financial Services	15
Respondent 4	Female	Masters	42	Senior Manager– Trade & Retail Sector	14
Respondent 5	Male	Bachelors	40	Senior Manager– Engineering & Construction Services	9
Respondent 6	Male	Masters	51	Senior Manager– Banking & Financial Services	20
Respondent 7	Male	Bachelors	48	Senior Manager – Banking & Financial Services	18
Respondent 8	Male	Bachelors	43	Managing Director – Trade & Retail Sector	15
Respondent 9	Male	Bachelors	45	Chief Financial Officer – Engineering & Construction Services	15
Respondent 10	Male	Bachelors	42	Senior Manager– Trade & Retail Sector	10
Respondent 11	Male	Bachelors	46	Managing Director – Trade & Retail Sector	15
Respondent 12	Male	Bachelors	47	Executive Director –Telecom & IT Sector	15
Respondent 13	Male	Masters	48	Chief Executive Officer – Telecom & IT Sector	14
Respondent 14	Male	MS/M.Phil.	45	COO - Education & Training Services	14
Respondent 15	Male	MS/M.Phil.	49	Director – Telecom & IT Sector	24
Respondent 16	Male	Masters	49	Regional Manager– Telecom & IT Sector	20
Respondent 17	Male	Masters	48	Director – Tourism, Travel & Hotel	15
Respondent 18	Male	MS/M.Phil	54	Director – Medical Services/Hospitals	28
Respondent 19	Male	Masters	55	Chief Executive Officer - Medical Services/Hospitals	31
Respondent 20	Male	Masters	56	Director – Engineering & Construction Services	29
Respondent 21	Male	MS/M.Phil	51	Chief Executive Officer – Engineering & Construction Services	20
Respondent 22	Male	PhD	55	Chief Executive Officer – Trade & Retail Sector	30
Respondent 23	Male	MS/ MPhil	57	Chief Executive Officer – Engineering & Construction Services	32
Respondent 24	Male	Masters	53	COO – Medical Services/Hospitals	20
Respondent 25	Male	MS/M.Phil	57	Executive Director – Education & Training Services	25
Respondent 26	Male	PhD	52	HR Partner - Education & Training Services	20
Respondent 27	Male	PhD	55	Chief Executive Officer - Education & Training Services	19
Respondent 28	Male	Masters	46	Senior Manager - Tourism, Travel & Hotel	18

Data Analysis

This research thesis employed inductive reasoning. Qualitative studies are the most widely used study method (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015). According to Patton (2015), inductive research entails "discovering patterns, trends, and categories in one's results" (p. 542). Below is the standard procedure for using inductive analysis: (a) data is gathered and documented; (b) data is coded and categorized; (c) trends and themes are established and validated; and (d) the results are presented (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015). After the data were transcribed, the process of coding and classification began. Coding is summarized as follows:

1. Initial data reviews to classify categories, which typically consisted of one to three phrases expressing a critical idea or piece of information essential to the research;

2. Data segmentation and analysis to establish specific codes; and

3. Codes are terms or phrases that serve as descriptors for data segments (Patton, 2015). The codes used in this study were developed in response to the qualitative data collected;

4. The procedure continued with applying codes to the transcribed data using the qualitative program NVivo.

5. NVivo enabled the researcher to analyze the classification codes generated by the data. The researcher double-checked the codes for correctness and detected any uncoded content that may result in the creation of additional codes;

6. The researcher began identifying themes or categories once the data were sufficiently categorized, which is referred to as the "first level of induction" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 377); and

7. Codes with similar meanings were grouped and categorized to find themes. The study's findings were represented using tables, figures, and graphs.

Interview Questions

1. What do you understand by ethical leadership?
2. How do you define an ethical leader? What are the attributes/ qualities of a moral leader?
3. Why do you think ethical leadership is important in organizations?
4. How do you think ethical leadership can help enhance employee engagement?

Follow-up questions that may be asked after participant responses include but are not limited to those that begin with:

- Tell me more about . . .
- Could you help me understand...?
- What have you observed that makes you say . . . ?
- Can you share specific examples of . . . ?
- Why do you think . . . ?

Results

Respondents were asked questions in the interview to present their opinion and perception of Ethical Leadership. Each respondent understood ethical leadership and its characters and identified multiple factors and characteristics that contribute to enhancing employee work engagement. Different ethical leadership traits were discussed in the interviews as leadership qualities necessary to drive the organization and cultivate a productive culture. According to respondents, the definition aligned with their understanding is cited as a reference.

"Ethical leadership is the cognitive and affective pursuit of desired ethical behavior for oneself and followers through efforts guided by rules and principles that promote learning motivation, healthy engagement, and clarity of purpose to uphold the values of empowerment, service to others, concern for human rights, change for the better, and fulfilling responsibilities to society, future generations, and the environment.

Some respondents connected ethics with religion and pointed out that key leadership characteristics are equality, justice, integrity, work ethics, and open communication. Most respondents perceived ethical leadership as a set of values including integrity, honesty, team building, employee attitude, communication, organizational justice, responsibility, and religiosity. In their view, these factors play an influential role in building employee work

engagement and contribute to organizational productivity. Further, they believed that leaders' personal, religious, and ethical values also play an essential role in cultivating work ethics, organizational culture, and employee engagement.

The data collected through interviews of respondents and literature review contributed to understanding employee work engagement: Role modeling, Trust, Fairness, Integrity, Honesty, Culture, Religiosity, Responsibility, and Intellectual competence. Table 4 exhibits the themes of Ethical Leadership that contribute to enhancing Employee work engagement generated by Software based on participants' responses. The table further exhibits the sub-themes of each theme as viewed by respondents. Figure 1 illustrates the factors contributing toward Ethical Leadership generated through NVivo-12 Software based on participants' responses.

Table 4

Themes of an Ethical Leader in Enhancing Employee Work Engagement

Role Modeling		Trust		Justice		Integrity		Honesty		Responsibility		Intellectual Competence		Religiosity	
n	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*	*n*	*%*	*n*	*%*
26	92.8	25	89.28	24	85.71	23	82.14	23	82.14	23	82.14	21	75	20	71.14
Righteous		Confidence		Civility		Moral person		Incorruptibility		Positive & stimulating environment		Competency		Faith	
Mentor		Belief		Equality		Ethical values		High-Mindedness		Corporate Social Responsibility		Proficiency		Contribution to society	
Upstanding		Faith		Impartiality.		Believable		Reliability		Emotional commitment		Knowledge		Approach to life	
High-Mindedness		Conviction		Legitimacy.		Dutifulness		Conscientious-ness		Employee retention		Capacity		Religious devotion	
Conscience		Credence		Righteousness.		Self-discipline		Reputability		Respect for social values		Educated		Piety	
Ideal		Reliance		Truth		Solidarity		Dependability		Change agent		Wisdom		Piousness	
Moral				Fairness				Righteousness				Sense making		Activities of religious affiliation	

Figure 1

Ethical Leadership-Parent and Child Nodes
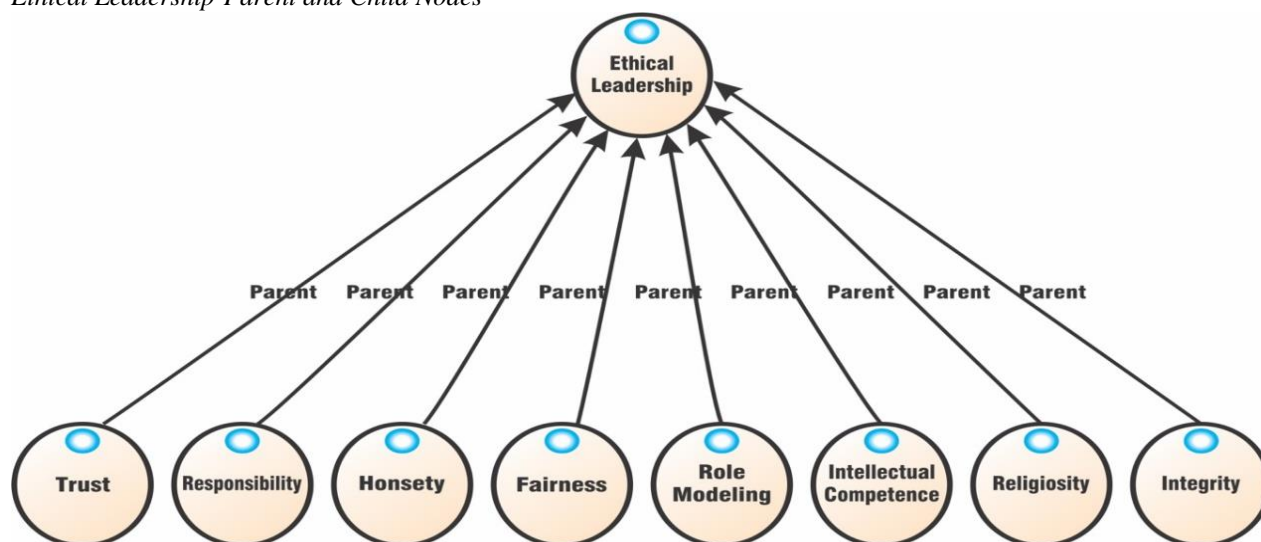
Source: NVivo-12 Generated Figure

Theme 1: Role Modeling

"Leadership is all that adherents desire."

As part of the interview process, each respondent was asked about their views and understanding of ethical leadership and enhanced work engagement. Role Modeling was referred to by approximately 93% of the respondents as an essential ethical leadership trait. Given respondents, a leader is a person who reciprocates to their subordinates; if the leader is ethical and demonstrates it through their policies and practices, employees follow the leader. Employees generally do not entrust leaders who are not perceived as ethical. According to one of the respondent:

''*Ethical leadership positively affects the working environment at three levels: the employee as an individual, the teams or groups, and the overall business as an organization. At the individual level, ethical leaders inspire employees by being an example, giving a vision, and acting as a facilitator. At the team level, ethical leadership improves team dynamics, boosts morale, and ensures positive relationships among employees as a team.* ''

Similarly, the respondent stated, ''*An organization's overall health and well-being are positively affected by ethical leadership. The leaders normally foster an environment of collaboration and mutual respect that allows individuals to grow and contribute to fit the organization's overall goals.*''

Finally, respondents stated that they were being modeled for their behavior by others compared to any directives or memos. They further explained the importance of being proactive by the leaders in the organization. Some respondents discussed the need for role modeling in organizations. Leadership plays a pivotal role in the development of any organization. Selflessness was proved to play a significant role in defining ethical leadership.

Role modeling in today's competitive technology-based business work is highly important for all organizations. The leadership should take the lead for the employees to follow ethical practices in their footsteps.

Theme 2: Trust

"Employees won't follow somebody they can't trust."

Trust was one of the prominent themes that emerged from interviews with leaders of different service sector organizations. Approximately 89% of the respondents referred to trust as an essential trait of Ethical Leadership. Trust was the basis for relationship building and cultivating a justice culture in any organization. In view of respondents:

"*Trustworthiness is a significant value of ethical leadership. Ethical leadership develops Trust within the employees and empowers them. Employees, in return, entrust the leader and show their commitment to the organization through maximum work engagement. Thus, the factors of Trust, justice, and ethical practices fostered by the leadership enhance employee work engagement, organizational commitment, and loyalty towards the leader*".

Additionally, the respondent stated that:

"Trust is one of the most important factors in establishing a relationship with others, establishing open communication, and developing a culture of faith within the organization. Open communication helps establish a healthy relationship between the leadership and employees at every level. Trust develops bonding between the leaders and employees. It also contributes to creating a bond of trust among employees."

Finally, one of the respondents narrated his opinion as:

"Once Trust is established, a connection is formed between all employees and the leadership, which increases commitment, engagement, and employee productivity."

Further, respondents agreed that trust is ethical leadership's most essential and valued part. If trust and justice prevail in the organizational culture, employees follow the leadership and zealously fulfill their jobs. Trust has a positive trickle-down effect within the organization on the employees. The factor of trust starts from the top management and moves down to all employees. The factor of trust enabled by the leadership empowers employees, boosts their morality, and enhances their engagement with the leaders and organization.

Theme 3: Justice
"Justice is the sum of every moral obligation.''

Justice is another important constituent of ethical leadership, as expressed by about 86% of respondents. According to them, justice is essential for employees to have faith in the leadership and organization. They will be committed to the organization if they feel they are being treated fairly and with justice. This connection increases the employees' engagement with the organization; they are more proactive and work with dedication to improving profitability. Respondent gave his viewpoint as:

"Ethical leadership is important for business organizations as it acts as a catalyst for more freedom and less micromanagement. Ethical leadership gives an organization the power to create a workplace community where employees can be trusted to do their jobs without micromanaging. Ethical leadership is a set of positive traits like honesty, trust, integrity, fairness, justice, commitment, truthfulness, selflessness, and care. The leaders set inspiring examples and lay the groundwork for a self-motivated team. Employees of such teams are engaged in their work, committed to the organization, have moral values, demonstrate ethical practices, and are productive, honest, and have good work ethics."

In the light of the explanations of respondents:

"Ethical leadership in organizations is characterized as the demonstration of normatively acceptable behavior via personal acts and interpersonal relationships, fairness, promoting positive and equal behavior among followers through two-way communication, and fair decision-making. When the environment and ethos of a company are consistent, workers feel more obliged and are more involved."

Furthermore, respondents expressed that ethical leadership involves leading in a manner that respects the rights and dignity of others with justice. This concept is sometimes in direct conflict with more traditional leadership models. Ethical leadership promotes a high level of integrity that stimulates a sense of trustworthiness and encourages subordinates to accept and follow their vision. Character, justice, fairness in dealing, and integrity provide a strong foundation for other personal characteristics that direct employees' ethical beliefs, values, and decisions, which is the true essence of ethical leadership. Strong working ethics, dedication, and commitment to the organization need a fair and just environment.

Theme 4: Integrity

"Making the best choice when no one's looking."

Regarding the most important ethical leadership values to enhance work engagement, integrity was perceived by approximately 82% of business leaders. Integrity in leadership was observed where the leader is perceived as honest, trustworthy, and reliable. In addition, respondents referred that leaders with integrity stand by their words and have high moral values. One of the respondents revealed that:

" *Leaders must lead from the front and do the right thing. They expressed their views that integrity is just doing the right thing, not just the popular thing but just the right thing. Doing the right thing implies that a person demonstrates positive moral values through actions. Leadership is expected to have high moral values and stand by their words. Integrity is an essential part of leadership which is inbuilt by upbringing".*

Further respondents believed that integrity, honesty, and trust are part of an ethical leader's values through which the leader influences their employees and sets high organizational values. One of the respondents emphasized that:

"*Integrity and honesty are those values taught during childhood, and they grow with time. Good leaders and executives display these values through their actions and policies. They build good relationships with employees through these qualities and foster a culture around these values. As a result, employees tend to serve with commitment at such organizations and stay connected with their leaders".*

In the same vein, further respondents indicated that:

"*Ethical leadership is based on values comprising integrity, honesty, team building, leading, ethical thought process and positive attitude towards all employees. Ethical leaders are expected to lead with honesty, justice, integrity, and fair judgment so that employees can reciprocate the leader's values. Ethical leadership is a concept directed by respect for others' ethical beliefs, values, dignity, and rights. "*

Further, respondents shared their views on having the employees engaged at work and a holistic culture at the workplace; the moral characteristics of ethical leaders, fair judgment, ensuring justice and integrity blended with inspiring, stimulating, and other visionary behaviors are the key factors. When practiced by the leadership, these all factors transform the

organization towards positivity. Ethical leaders are mentors and coaches who inculcate a sense of personal and professional competence through their words, gestures, standards, plans, strategies, and, most importantly, their actions.

Theme 5: Honesty:

"Genuineness is a key to building relationships."

Another theme that emerged from interviews was honesty in conjunction with a trust. During the interview, about 82 % of respondents discussed the importance of honesty concerning organizational culture and ethical leadership. In their view, honesty was considered a fundamental factor and behavior contributing to decision making, organizational commitment, relationship building, work ethics, and engagement. In light of respondents' explanations, honesty was another ethical leader's premise. According to one of the respondents:

"An ethical leader is upfront and honest in all his/her deeds. Further, honesty is a habit developed in childhood as an important part of values and upbringing. If the leader has the trait of honesty, it will be transferred and reflected through his/her decisions and practices at the workplace. Employees gain Trust in the leader and organization due to their ethical decisions and fair practices."

Further, another respondent stated that:

"Ethical leadership involves leading with integrity, honesty, and dignity. All these factors ensure respect for rights, implement fair practices in the organization, and formulate Trust in employees, increasing engagement".

Further, the respondent narrated his view as follows:

"Ethical leadership promotes a high level of integrity, honesty, fair dealing, loyalty, and productivity through a sense of trustworthiness and honest decision making. Honesty, character, and integrity are strong foundations and other personal characteristics that direct employees' ethical beliefs, values, and decisions, which is the true essence of ethical leadership".

Finally, respondents revealed that ethical leaders have several qualities that include influencing processes, stimulating change in attitudes and values, focusing on empowerment, honest decision-making, and self-efficacy of their followers. These qualities enhance the loyalty and confidence of their followers. As a result, the followers engage and commit themselves to the leadership and their work. The respondents further added that organizational development and human resources experts assert that leaders are responsible for ensuring moral and ethical standards in today's business world.

Theme 6: Responsibility
"Successful individuals have a social duty to contribute to the environment rather than just benefit from it."

Around 82% of respondents used responsibility as an essential dimension of an ethical leader. As further explained, an ethical leader must be responsible for preaching to others and demonstrate all deeds through their behavioral actions. The responsibility phenomenon is considered a significant force that shapes employees' behavior and helps them make decisions. Responsibility is an essential dimension of leadership that aids the leader in decision-making and fulfills all obligatory duties. It increases their responsibility, which can be seen through their actions, improving employees' engagement in the organization. Respondent expressed his view as:

"Leaders act in a global, complex, and uncertain business environment. The challenges faced by the leaders now are a lot more complicated when compared to the past. Ethical leaders must be responsible and highly calculable as they must strategically think about how their actions and decisions will affect the employees, stakeholders, and society. An ethical leader should build and cultivate a sustainable organization to different stakeholders outside and inside organizations, and coordinate actions to achieve a sustainable organization."

In light of the explanation of the respondent:

"Creating a sustainable business organization through commitment and vision is an important step for the leader. An ethical leader's responsibility is to guide the organization using his/her actions by walking the talk, managing the business affairs with integrity, and earning profit through ethical practices and principles. In today's world, a leader cannot work in isolation; he/she must be part of the society in which he/she is working, and his/her responsibility is more than traditional leaders. A leader creates a stimulating environment nurturing respect for social values for followers, which will, in turn, enhance engagement in the organization."

Additionally, in the respondents' view, an ethical leader is responsible for reinforcing and coaching employees to achieve objectives respectfully, ethically, and intelligently. An ethical leader is responsible for interaction with employees and all stakeholders and shares the vision and business objectives. The responsibility of fostering long-term relationships with all stakeholders and the business world lies with the leader. Performance of this responsibility is essential to develop trust and ensure their engagement.

Theme 7: Intellectual Competence
"The ability to effectively find solutions is linked to one's intellectual potential."

Approximately 75% of the respondents out of twenty-eight gave their views on different intellectual competence factors and related them to the social perspective of ethical leadership within an organization. Intellectual competence was an element mentioned by many of the respondents as an ethical leader's embedded quality. The responses pointed towards ethical leadership within an organization, especially its competence, proficiency, and wisdom.

The viewpoint of respondents was based on the fact that the global business world has seen rapid changes in the last three decades due to technology, media outreach, and awareness. One of the respondent added:

"The changes are directly linked with the economics, politics, and the society globally and locally. In these changing scenarios, the intellectual component plays a vital role and is not a mere management factor for leadership. The leader enhances employees' capacity through his vision, wisdom, competence, knowledge, and intelligence".

Further participants revealed that:

"Intellectual competence of the leader is based on different factors like receiving information, apprehending it, doing in-depth analysis, and drawing results to apply for the best results. An ethical leader must have the capacity to understand, interpret, evaluate and synthesize the information and problems by using his/her education, wisdom, and experience fairly, giving a fair trial to the overall scenario. Intellectual competence is the leader's ability to strategize the organization's future direction and its employees and can't be undermined in today's competitive business world. "

Further, respondents 7, 11, 19, and 28 stated that the Intellectual competence of a leader is a unique set of intelligence and wisdom that the leader acquires through knowledge, experience, and hard work. Leaders' intellectual competence is generally gauged through their analytical skills to ensure the best problem-solving and effective decision-making solutions. Thus, intellectual competence is the mirror image of the leader's intellect and capacity to solve professional problems and deal with human resource management at its best.

In the same vein, respondents gave their views by specifying the traits of intellectual competence ethical leaders should possess. Intellectual competence is the level of intellect and perceptive-analytical abilities a person holds. Intellectual competence of an ethical leader is the level of knowledge and ability to collect and process information, communication pattern, logical and critical thinking, ability to analyze, interpret and find patterns, proficiency in their field; and application of all traits in the organization through the fair decision making and ethical practices.
Subsequently, respondents' views of intellectual competence were based on creativity, self-learning, wisdom, and trait competency. Finally, one of the respondents stated that:

"The manifesto of intellectual competence of an ethical leadership lies in his/her ability to think systematically and act fairly. An ethical leader should have the capacity to carry out analysis, analyze the situation or problem, and respond to macro-environmental factors like socio-economic, political, and technology, keeping all ethical practices in contact and fair decision-making.''

Intellectual competence presents the themes of actions based on employees' interests through the process, interpretation, analysis, knowledge acquired through education, and fairness leading to sense-making and ethical decision making.

Theme 8: Religiosity
"Spiritual understanding is only effective when implemented."

According to respondents, an ethical leader needs to be religious not just by saying prayers, but they have to demonstrate it through their psychological and behavioral actions. Approximately 71% of the respondents mentioned religiosity as an important trait for ethical leadership. In view of the respondent:

"Religion is an important aspect of life, being a true and devoted believer, as one will not feel content unless they dispense both intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity through their actions. Leadership has to exhibit compassion, cultivate devotion, goodness & righteousness, peace & tranquility, honesty, perseverance, and fear of God. Through ethical qualities, the practices are further nurtured. Employees tend to listen and follow such leadership eagerly and religiously". They added, *"Religion provides the ethical path of executing different matters in day-to-day activities and gives strength to abide by the good deeds."*

In light of the respondent:

"Religion plays a pivotal role in shaping the vision and thought process of leadership and brings the factor of spirituality into the organization. Religion gives the power of faith and the true path for ethical and righteous leaders to follow. The religiosity factor encourages obedience to ethical leadership by applying all positive virtues of dealing with religion. Similarly, leaders have to behave ethically and should be trustworthy".

Further, the respondent expressed his view as:

"Religion helps shape followers' morals and ethics with their leaders' help in the organizations. Leaders who exhibit religion are considered to have a greater understanding of ethical judgment. Religion provides insight into understanding and distinguishing between right and wrong. It further empowers one to decide and be firm on the righteous path of ethical behavior in daily affairs. It gives the faith and strength to follow the right leadership and stand by it. Employees typically think virtuous leaders believe in being compassionate, honest, and having high integrity."

In the same context, one of the respondents stated that:

"Leadership traits and management style defined in Islam is not new for Islamic countries but picking up traction in western countries. Islam is a complete, integrated, and comprehensive faith which covers and directs all aspects of life, including the pathway to leadership. The Quran provides guidance and rules for the proper conduct of one's private and public life. Critically, the Quran also thoroughly covers the characteristics, qualities, and attributes fundamental for one to be a given devotee and a fruitful pioneer".

Finally, given respondents expressed that the impact of religion on influential positions takes numerous shapes. First, religion fills in as the foundation of morals, including piousness and ethics, hence creating social orders. Second, it gives another dimension to see the daily

aspects of life, especially public and administrative dealings. Third, another important aspect of religion is advocating moral values among key pioneers. Finally, religion recommends ethics and morality to its followers, which guides how they conduct their organization compared to others.

Discussion

This qualitative phenomenology study aimed to understand how service industry leaders perceive and work to promote employee engagement. When business leaders implement various strategies to engage employees and cultivate a culture of employee engagement, the organization achieves many positive outcomes and benefits, including increased productivity, loyalty to the organization and its leadership, increased organizational commitment, a low turnover rate, and increased revenue. The self-determination theory, which concerns people's inherent growth tendencies and innate psychological needs, served as the conceptual underpinning for this investigation. To better understand employee engagement, semi-structured interviews were done, opinions, strategic perspectives, and the employee handbook and recordings of interviews and meetings with service sector leaders.

The current research study generated a number of different themes through interviews with the 28 senior leaders of the service sector industry in Turkey, Malaysia, and Pakistan. Eight themes in of ethical leadership were (a) Role Modeling, (b) trust, (c) fairness, (d) honesty, (e) integrity, (f) justice, (g) Intellectual competence (h) responsibility, and (i) religiosity.

Role modeling was referred to by 92.8% of the respondents as one of the most significant ethical leadership traits. Ethical leaders exhibit social values and practices with acceptable expectations in the workplace. This perception coincides with a study conducted by Brown and Treviño, (2014) and Omata et al. (2017), which explored how workers imitate leaders who display ethical attitudes and learn about their behaviors through personal and vicarious interactions. In addition, 25 out of 28 respondents commented on *trust* during the interview process, making up 89.28% of the analysis result. Trust was one of the prominent themes which emerged from interviews of leaders of different service sector organizations. Trust is considered the basis for relationship building and cultivating a culture of justice and was regarded as an essential characteristic of ethical leadership to enhance engagement (Hansen et al., 2013) Our results confirm the findings of previous studies about the relationship between trust and ethical leadership (Engelbrecht et al., 2014; Tourigny et al., 2019; Zuhlke, 2019). Justice is another important constituent of ethical leadership, as expressed by 85.71% of respondents. According to them, justice is essential for employees to have faith in leadership and organization, as revealed in previous studies (Charoensap et al., 2019; Walumbwa et al., 2017). If they feel they are being treated fairly and with justice, they will be committed to the organization (Lee et al., 2017).

On the other hand, while evaluating the most critical characteristic of ethical leadership to increase employee engagement, one of them was honesty, as viewed by most leaders (Brown et al., 2005; Brown & Treviño, 2006; Treviño & Brown, 2007). Around 82.14% of respondents identified integrity as one of the most critical ethical leadership characteristics.

Integrity was considered a primary attribute in leadership, indicating that the leader is honest, trustworthy, and dependable. According to respondents, leaders with integrity stand by their words and uphold high moral standards. Through communication and discipline, ethical leaders set well-defined ethical norms and work to instill ethical attitudes in their followers while promoting involvement (Akdogan & Demirtas, 2014; Hansen et al., 2013).

Another theme that emerged from interviews was honesty in conjunction with trust. Respondents during the interview discussed the importance of honesty concerning organizational culture and ethical leadership. In their view, honesty was considered a fundamental factor and behavior contributing to decision making, organizational commitment, relationship building, work ethics, and engagement. Honesty was referred to by approximately 82% of the respondents as an essential ethical leadership trait. According to the respondents, a leader is a person who is reciprocated by their subordinates; if the leader is ethical and demonstrates it through their policies and practices, employees follow the leader. Employees generally do not entrust leaders who are not perceived as ethical and follow honesty themselves (Demirtas et al., 2017). Our study confirms the results of previous studies regarding the relationship between ethical leadership and honesty (Rilke et al., 2018; Strand, 2021). Responsibility was referred to by approximately 82% of the respondents as an essential ethical leadership trait in the Islamic context. Ethical leaders are often responsible, so they collaborate and regulate; thus, they encourage moral judgment and ethical behavior (Lu & Lin, 2014). The response of corporate leaders was mainly based on the backgrounds of their organizations and their own experiences. Many respondents mentioned intellectual competence as an ethical leader's embedded quality, similar to the previous related research (Bekir, 2017; Ullah et al., 2021). Religiosity is another vital constituent of ethical leadership expressed by 71.14% of respondents. An ethical leader needs to be religious not just by saying prayers, but they have to demonstrate it through their attitudes and behaviors (Kamil, et al., 2011; Zahrah et al., 2016). The participants shared that leaders should reveal spirituality and social responsibility as essential ethical leader qualities. Iman, prayer, repentance, managing anger, being sympathetic, paying zakat, giving sadaqah, being just and fair, having honesty, and being patient are critical characteristics of a Muslim leader and model for believers (Bhatti et al., 2016; Morgan, 1997).

Islam is a comprehensive religion that covers all facets of life. Based on the answers, it can be concluded that ethical leaders are human beings with a trusteeship from Allah that is profoundly embedded in their leadership. It is a contract between leaders and supporters (Bhatti et al., 2019). They ensure justice and parity for the members. Ethical leadership is the way to do well and avoid the forbidden of attaining blessings from Allah. Because of this, a leader must be a role model with feelings, outlook, character, and expertise. And notable, only those can be chosen as high leaders in piety, virtue, and intellect (Bhatti et al., 2015).

The present study found that leaders embracing ethical leadership and understanding the importance of employee engagement at the workplace could improve employee engagement, have a more robust workforce, and be more beneficial to their organization. Baykal et al. (2018) have found the same relationship between servant leadership and work engagement.

Ahmad and Chin (2018) have found the same relationship between authentic leadership and work engagement. Sheikh et al. (2019) revealed a similar relationship between spiritual leadership and work engagement in Islamic contexts.

Implications

Increased workplace engagement can be accomplished by developing a positive culture and implementing each policy component effectively (Alagaraja & Shuck, 2015). Improved function of workplace engagement results in improved productivity, efficiency, and retention (Victora et al., 2016). Employee engagement and productivity may also help a country's socio-economic growth (Sarangi & Nayak, 2016) since thriving firms add to Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Additionally, engaged employees aid leaders in minimizing the consequences of global competitive dynamics that threaten a business's viability (Vorina et al., 2017). Work engagement is related to ethical concerns, trust, integrity, culture, purpose, and meaning at work. The leadership team ethically achieves employee engagement through resource investment, synergy, and organizational loyalty (Sarangi & Nayak, 2016). Earlier studies have established that ethical leadership may generate resources for job creation to fulfill employee demands (Victora et al., 2016). When company leaders foster environments that foster employee engagement, employees exhibit a high degree of dedication, and businesses benefit from an optimistic workforce (Saunders & Tiwari, 2014). Engaged employees demonstrate a strong commitment to the business, a positive relationship with the community, positive interactions with family members, and an optimistic view of life (Vorina et al., 2017).

The consequences of employee engagement in the workplace are numerous for the company. To realize such benefits, company leaders must understand how to increase employee engagement while identifying roadblocks obstructing their objectives. It is critical to developing a spiritual culture because workplace spirituality fosters community, meaningfulness, and connection with company aims and values. The importance of leadership and senior management in fostering ethical behaviors and spiritual culture in the workplace cannot be overstated since they are founded on the company goal and vision exhibited by leadership. Company leaders should determine if the approaches outlined in this paper are compatible with their current business practices (Asaari et al., 2019). The leaders understood the need for meaningful work to enhance employee productivity and engagement while remaining true to the organization's values, purpose, and vision. By implementing the findings of this research, future leaders will be better prepared to carry out their responsibilities–for the benefit of themselves, their employees, and their companies.

Limitations and Future Directions

Engaged employees can help organizations compete more effectively in an ever-demanding market (Knight et al., 2017) while increasing individual efficiency and organizational profitability (Naeem et al., 2020). Additionally, most studies included "prescriptive or philosophical approaches to ethical leadership" (Brown & Treviño, 2006). However, Brown and Treviño (2006) claimed that more descriptive and predictive tools for ethical leadership have remained underdeveloped and scattered in the social sciences, leaving few academics

and practitioners limited responses. A quantitative analysis utilizes web-based surveys and numerous measures such as the "Ethical Leadership Scale (ELS) or the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ-5X)" to ascertain what current corporate leaders believe is critical for increasing job engagement. Additional research is required to overcome this analysis limitation, notably the limited geographical area and small sample size. This investigation was limited to corporate executives in Turkey, Malaysia, and Pakistan service sectors. In the future, researchers should analyze employee engagement across diverse geographic regions to obtain a larger sample size.

Conclusions

This qualitative phenomenology study aimed to understand how service industry leaders perceive and work to promote employee engagement. The self-determination theory served as the conceptual underpinning for this investigation. To better understand employee engagement, semi-structured interviews were done, using participant observations, opinions, strategic perspectives, and the employee handbook and recordings of interviews and meetings with service sector leaders.

The present study found that leaders applying different strategies and understanding the importance of employee engagement could improve employee engagement and have a more robust workforce and beneficial organization. The biggest strength of this investigation was its participants from different service industries and three countries. Religiosity, Responsibility, and Intellectual competence were the new dimensions considered important for ethical leaders, including other traits discussed in the previous literature to increase engagement. The participants were explicit in their responses; the opinions were based on their professional life experiences, and they had diverse occupational backgrounds and professional expertise and training in their domains. These qualities helped attain truthful, professional, and detailed responses to the researcher's questions. This research study provided qualitative evidence to the metadata pool on the relationship between employee engagement and ethical leadership. In particular, the research's data was drawn from the leaders of service sector organizations represented in this field of study.

The term "leadership" is a powerful word. It is a specialized ability that not everyone possesses. Leadership motivates subordinates, middle management, and senior management to perform above and beyond their best and complete tasks as efficiently and effectively as possible. If human resources are an organization's lifeblood, leaders are the organization's brain. The objective is that this study will add to the literature on ethical leadership to enhance work engagement, thereby assisting leaders and employees in all types of businesses. This research demonstrates that ethical leadership has a considerable impact on employee engagement.

Declarations

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