

Exploring the relationship of ethical leadership, trust and work engagement in selected organisations

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COMMENTS TO READERS

The following remarks are important to note beforehand:

- The editorial style and the references drawn in this dissertation follow the format prescribed by the Publication Manual (7th edition) of the American Psychology Association (APA). This practice is in accordance with the policy of the Programme in Human Resource Management of the North-West University (Potchefstroom) as a requirement to use the APA style in all scientific documents from January 1999 onwards.
- This dissertation was submitted in the form of a research article. The editorial style is specified in accordance with the *South African Journal of Industrial Psychology*, as it is in line with a significant part of the APA style. Construction of tables was followed in accordance with APA guidelines.

ABSTRACT

Despite the growing importance of ethical leadership, many organisations worldwide have witnessed diminishing ethical leadership and trust in management. South Africa is not an exception to unethical practices with private and public sector corruption allegations in the past decade. Unfortunately, pitiable standards of ethics and venality taint the business environment. Therefore, the conversation on business morality, particularly ethical leadership, and developing a model of trust in organisations is highly legitimate and timely. Hence, the objective of this study was to investigate the mediating role of trust in leaders in the relationship between ethical leadership and engagement. The study utilizes a cross-sectional design and a convenient sampling frame (n = 132) recruited via social media to reach the objective from the positivistic paradigm and quantitative approach. The findings confirm the established positive relationship between ethical leadership, trust in the leader and work engagement. In addition, the results also suggest that the mediating role of trust in the leader could only be confirmed in the relationship between ethical leadership and dedication. Theoretical and managerial implications, as well as its limitations, are also provided

Keywords: Ethical leadership, trust, work engagement, mediation, and ethics

DECLARATION

I, Bonolo Mpholo, hereby declare that **Exploring the relationship of ethical leadership, trust and work engagement in selected organizations** is my own work and that the views and opinions expressed in this study are those of the author and the relevant literature references as shown in the reference list.

I further declare that the content of this research was not and will not be submitted for any other qualification at any other tertiary institution.

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To whom it may concern

Re: Confirmation of language edit, typography and technical precision

The MBA dissertation “**Exploring the relationship of ethical leadership, trust and work engagement in selected organisations**” by **Bonolo Mpholo** (28273737) was edited for language and technical precision. The referencing and sources were checked to comply with the APA 7 guidelines specified by the 2020 NWU Reference guide.

Final, last-minute corrections remain the responsibility of the author.



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Precision ... to the last letter

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CHAPTER 1: NATURE AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Organisations globally spend annually between \$12-14 billion dollars on leadership training and development. However, the training results have failed to deliver on the expectations of long-term change in leadership skills and habits (Kivland & King, 2015; McNulty, 2017). Especially troubling is the failure of training in developing ethical leaders, as the impact of their leaders' poor ethical choices continues to result in alarming stories that dominate the press (eg: Zondo commission). These poor ethical decisions have damaged organisations' reputations and loss of profits, in some instances even affecting entire sectors. Unethical practices have the power to damage the commitment of workers and erode the future wellbeing of the business. Strengthening ethical leadership that exemplifies integrity, credibility, fairness, and transparency is imperative to good governance (Brown *et al.*, 2005:120). The significant impact of ethical conduct on business has led to a body of research on ethical leadership's influence on followers and the organisation. Various literature has strongly connected ethical leadership to employee engagement (Blumenberg *et al.*, 2019; Brown *et al.*, 2005; Engelbrecht *et al.*, 2017). The organisation's competitiveness, success, and sustainability are driven by the employee's level of engagement (Engelbrecht *et al.*, 2017:368). It is therefore paramount for organisations to identify situations that foster work engagement. A conducive environment where employees can give their best fosters greater employee engagement, thus making managers key enablers of engagement (Bhana & Suknunan, 2019:316).

When each leader only serves their self-interest, followers lose trust and stop caring for one another; this breakdown in the relationship may negatively impact productivity. Trust lays an important foundation in determining the relationship between the organisation and the leader and significantly influences how the employee may perceive the work environment (Engelbrecht *et al.*, 2014:370). Engelbrecht further states that a leader's behaviour can influence how the follower will trust the leader. A trusting and ethical leader is most likely to create an ethical and trusting environment conducive to employee work engagement and contribute positively to positive work outcomes. This study seeks to determine the relationship between ethical leadership, trust, and work engagement.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Despite the growing importance of ethical leadership, many organisations worldwide have witnessed diminishing ethical leadership and trust in management. South Africa is not an exception to unethical

practices with private and public sector corruption allegations especially in the past decade. Unfortunately, the business environment is tainted by pitiable standards of ethics and venality. The persistence of unethical and illegal business activities by top management in corporate South Africa is an indicator that a code of ethics, overwhelming rules and regulations are simply not enough to ensure the ethical soundness of an organisation. Strengthening ethical leadership that exemplifies integrity, credibility, fairness, and transparency are imperative to good governance and at the core of cultivating a culture of an engaged workforce and a trusting work environment (Brown *et al.*, 2005:120). Poor ethics have an impact on employees and the productivity of the organisation. Unethical behaviour of leaders leads to low morale in the organisation, which inevitably leads to poor production (Mavuso, 2019). On the contrary, when leaders behave ethically, communicate the significance of ethics and fairly treat their employees, employees are less likely to engage in counterproductive behaviours (Bedi *et al.*, 2016:521).

The historical remnants of apartheid have left South Africa with unique deep social polarisation and trust deficits in the macro-environment. It is, therefore, good to know that ethical behaviour has the power to enhance levels of trust (Brown *et al.*, 2015; Mo and Shi (2017:296) in organisations, the meso environment. Ethical leadership and trust in businesses act as a fertile ground for a flourishing and healthy work environment conducive to employee engagement (Engelbrecht *et al.*, 2017:15). Ethical leadership contributes to creating engaged employees who are critical to a healthy bottom line. Therefore, the conversation on business morality, particularly ethical leadership, and developing a trust model in organisations is highly legitimate and timely. For this reason, this study seeks to investigate the role of ethical leadership in work engagement and trust in the leader. Next attention will be given to the literature coverage of the constructs covered in this study, followed by the research methodology that was utilized in this study, the results and a discussion of the results and lastly the implications and limitations of the study and recommendation are provided.

1.3 LITERATURE STUDY

1.3.1 Theoretical frameworks for understanding ethical leadership

Ethical leadership is a positive form of influence that motivates followers towards positive psychological states (Avolio *et al.*, 2004:814) and creates an environment that is conducive to cultivating a broader set of desirable behaviours (Brown *et al.*, 2005; Engelbrecht *et al.*, 2017; Walumbwa *et al.*, 2017). Leaders who conduct themselves in a normatively appropriate manner that includes honesty, fair treatment, and consideration of others may successfully channel observer attraction. Followers may be more likely to respond by emulating the desired behaviour. (Bhana &

Suknunan, 2019:315; Brown *et al.*, 2005:120). The *Social Learning Theory* and *Social marketplace model* are practical, theoretical frameworks that propose that leaders influence the ethical conduct of followers via modelling as well as social exchange relationships.

The *Social Learning Theory* suggests that individuals learn the norms of appropriate conduct through their own experience and by observing others. For leaders to be seen as ethical leaders that influence ethical-related outcomes, they must be attractive, credible and legitimate, ((Wood & Bandura, 1989:364). Effective role modelling requires attention to be focused on the model and the behaviour being modelled. Ethical leaders need to consistently engage in behaviours that the follower deems as normatively appropriate, such as honesty, consideration of others, and fair treatment of employees. This consistent behaviour proliferates the model attractiveness of the ethical leader and channels observer attention to the model. Beugré and Liverpool (2006) conceptualise the workplace as a marketplace where individuals engage in transactions seeking to obtain a favourable return on investment. *The Social Marketplace Model* reasons individuals judge whether they should invest their time and efforts in behaviours that will benefit the organisation. Employees treated ethically are more likely to behave in a manner that is beneficial to the group's long-term development and success (Walumbwa *et al.*, 2017:15). Therefore, *Social Learning Theory* and *The Social Marketplace Model* are suggested as practical, theoretical frameworks that explain the dynamics involved concerning how leaders influence the trust in the leader and work engagement of followers via social exchange relationships.

1.3.2 Ethical leadership

Brown *et al.* (2005:120) define ethical leadership as “the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and promoting such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making”. This definition suggests that the followers perceive their leaders who are considered to be ethical in a manner that deems them to have appropriate conduct displayed through honesty, trustworthiness, fairness, and care. (Brown *et al.*, 2005:120) hereby legitimising the credibility of the leader. It is also worth noting that Brown *et al.* (2005) uses the word appropriate because what could be considered appropriate for a certain culture may not necessarily be appropriate for another. This resonates particularly with the diverse nature of South Africa and highlights the challenge of determining ethical principles that can adequately cater for all. When leaders demonstrate high moral standards, followers find it easier to follow suit. Good leaders are competent and ethical in their conduct (Ofori, 2009:533).

Kalshoven *et al.* (2011) conceptualise ethical leadership in the following dimensions: people-orientation (ethical leaders who have a genuine concern for the wellbeing of employees), fairness

(holding employees responsible for work that they have control over), power-sharing (allowing subordinates to influence critical decisions), concern for stability which ensures that employees feel safe in their work environment, ethical guidance (explains integrity-related codes of conduct), role clarification (clear expectations understood by all employees) and integrity (trusted to do things they say)

Eisenbeiss (2012) focuses on a Western-based perspective of ethical leadership approach as he identifies four essential normative reference points of ethical leadership. The four central ethical orientations are 1) humane orientation (which involves treating others with respect and dignity), 2) justice orientation (which refers to fairness and consistency in decision-making), 3) responsibility and sustainability orientation (which refers to the leader's long-term views on the success and concern for the society and environment) and lastly, 4) moderation orientation (which encompasses a balance of temperance and humility in the leader).

Resick *et al.* (2006:346-348) illustrate ethical leadership in a manner that respects the rights and dignity of others and characterises it using six key attributes: Character and integrity demonstrated in acts of humility, loyalty, virtue, generosity and forgiveness. Ethical awareness relates to a concern for moral relevance in decision-making that significantly impacts others. Community people-orientation focuses on serving the greater good by using their social power to serve a collective interest of the group instead of self. Motivating involves an intellectual and emotional commitment between leaders and their follower's responsibility towards a common goal, inspired by the leader's vision. Encouraging and empowering followers through strategies that contribute towards a sense of self-confidence and self-efficacy. Managing ethical accountability by setting standards and expectations of ethical conduct using rewards and punishment systems.

This study focuses on ethical leadership using the dimensions narrated by Brown *et al.* (2005), (which include: 1) Role modelling ethically appropriate behaviour, treating employees fairly through open communication and honesty, 2) Moral person by means of conducting life in an ethical manner, 3) Caring, having the best interest of employees in mind, and 4) Holding followers accountable for ethical conduct through a rewards and punishment system) because of the dominant utilization of the model and for ease of comparison with other studies using the same framework.

Studies on Ethical leadership using the framework of Brown, has received much attention, which can be attributable to its impact on favourable work outcomes such as follower job satisfaction, organisational commitment, job performance, job engagement, and organisational identification (Bedi *et al.*, 2016; Brown *et al.*, 2005; Engelbrecht *et al.*, 2017; Mo & Shi, 2017; Ofori, 2009). Ethical leadership is also negatively related to negative follower outcomes such as counterproductive behaviour, intentions to quit, burnout (Mo & Shi, 2017; Okpozo *et al.*, 2017; Shareef & Atan, 2018)

The leader's honesty, transparency and good communicating skills may foster enhanced levels of trust in the followers and encourage beneficial reciprocal behaviours in the form of high-quality work outcomes.

1.3.3 Trust in the leader

The concept of trust has been studied by many scholars in different disciplines and has been defined and conceptualised in various ways (Chughtai *et al.*, 2015; McKnight & Chervany, 2000). A *widely accepted definition of trust* by Rousseau *et al.* (1998:395) is “a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behaviour of another”. Chughtai *et al.* (2015:655) draw attention to two prominent factors in most definitions of trust: Positive expectations and the willingness to accept vulnerability. Javed *et al.* (2018:391) define trust as “The willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party”, whereas Mo and Shi (2017:296) define trust in a leader as “a psychological state in which an individual accepts their vulnerability when they expect positive intentions of their leader”. This view reflects the trustors reliance on the goodwill of the trustee. Uncertainty forms part of any reciprocal relationship, and individuals always assess their vulnerability as well as the prospect of whether the trusted party intends to and will act accordingly (Kim, 2016:356), thus creating an opportunity for trust (Mayer *et al.*, 1995; Rousseau *et al.*, 1998). Trust is, therefore, not only taking a risk but the individuals' willingness to take on the risk (Mayer *et al.*, 2015:712). For this reason, Rousseau *et al.* (1998) suggest that risk and interdependence are essential conditions for the conceptualisation of trust.

So far, we have dealt with the definition of trust and the conditions essential for conceptualising risk. It is essential to understand the antecedents of trust from the perspective of both the trustor and trustee. One school of thought considers an individual's general willingness to trust others. Some people may have a natural inclination to trust, whereas others are less likely to trust in most situations. This contrast in trust may be due to differences in personality types and cultural and developmental backgrounds (Mayer *et al.*, 1995). Another school of thought considers the trustor's perceptions about the trustee's characteristics and how those characteristics can influence the level of trust between the two parties (Cardona & Elola, 2003:2). This approach evaluates the trustor's perception of the trustee's trustworthiness depending on their actions and characteristics.

Three commonly proposed antecedents of trust identified by (Mayer *et al.*, 1995:717) are ability, benevolence, and integrity.

- *Ability* is competence in a specific area or domain. Akker *et al.* (2009) define ability as the trustee's competence to deliver what is expected of them. This suggests that trust can be task-

specific, one may be trusted in an area where they are deemed to have higher expertise and may not necessarily be trusted in another area where their expertise has not been established by the trustor (Ferreira, 2015; Mayer *et al.*, 1995:717).

- *Benevolence* is the belief in the trustee's disposition to do good to the trustor without expecting anything in return (Mayer *et al.*, 1995) when the trustee identifies positively with the trustor and perceives them as authentic with no selfish intentions (Ferreira, 2015).
- *Personal Integrity* is having strong moral principles and adhering to them. Trust is developed when the set of principles that the trustor adheres to are deemed acceptable by the trustee (Mayer *et al.*, 1995).

Previous studies have demonstrated that an increase in trust results directly or indirectly in more positive workplace behaviours and attitudes like organisational commitment and employees' work engagement (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Ugwu, Onyishi & Rodriguez-Sanchez, 2014). Previous empirical studies have also demonstrated the negative relationship between trust and undesirable work outcomes such as burnout, counterproductive work behaviour and intentions to quit (Akhigbe & Sonye, 2017; Eldridge *et al.*, 2020; Ozyilmaz *et al.*, 2018).

1.3.4 The mediating role of trust

This study was also aimed at testing the mediating effects of trust in the manager in the relationship between ethical leadership and work engagement. Mediating variables are prominent in psychological theory and research. Mediators refer to variables that establish how or why one variable predicts or causes an outcome variable (Frazier, Tix & Barron, 2004). In other words, a mediator is a mechanism through which a predictor influences an outcome variable (Baron & Kenny 1986), providing useful information regarding psychological intervention for practising psychologists. Therefore, a mediating variable transmits the effect of an independent variable to a dependent variable (MacKinnon, Fairchild, & Fritz, 2007). One of the primary reasons for the popularity of mediating variables in psychology is the historical authority of the stimulus-organism-response model (Hebb, 1966). In this study, mediating mechanisms (trust in the leader) in the organism translate how a stimulus leads to a response. Researchers have argued that trust is the central lynchpin in a meta-analysis of ethical leadership, explaining why ethical leaders positively affect their subordinates (2015). The mediating role of trust has been confirmed in several empirical studies (Chughtai, Byrne & Flood, 2015; Ilyas, Abid & Ashfaq, 2020; Zeng & Xu, 2019).

1.3.5 Work engagement

Schaufeli *et al.* (2020:74) popularly define *work engagement* as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterised by vigour, dedication, and absorption. Vigour is defined as “high levels of energy and mental resilience while working, the willingness to invest effort in one’s work, and persistence even in the face of difficulties. Dedication is defined as “a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge”. Absorption, as the last dimension of engagement, is defined by Schaufeli *et al.* as “being fully concentrated and deeply engrossed in one’s work, whereby time passes quickly, and one has difficulties with detaching oneself from work”.

Research has demonstrated that high levels of employee engagement can have *valuable organisational outcomes* such as greater job satisfaction, improved employee wellbeing, reduced turnover rate, less absenteeism and enhanced job performance (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018; Chughtai *et al.*, 2015:655). This can be attributed to the fact that individuals who experience high levels of work engagement have a physical, cognitive, and emotional connection to their work roles. These employees are thus more likely to go the extra mile in their work, other than those who are not engaged (Gawke *et al.*, 2017:92). On the other hand, Mostafa and Abed El-Motalib (2020) attribute financial cost implications and negative service delivery to disengaged employees. Previous studies have also demonstrated the negative relationship between work engagement and undesirable work outcomes such as burnout, counterproductive work behaviour and intentions. (Gupta & Shaheen, 2017; Karatepe *et al.*, 2020; Mérida-López *et al.*, 2020; Tetteh *et al.*, 2021).

1.3.6 Ethical leadership, trust in the leader and work engagement

Various studies have provided empirical evidence for the positive relationship between *ethical leadership and trust* (in the leader and organisation) (Brown *et al.*, 2015; Dadhich & Bhal, 2018; Javed, Rawwas, Khandai, Shahid & Tayyeb, 2018; Johnson *et al.*, 2020; Kalshoven *et al.*, 2018; Van den Akker *et al.*, 2019). Scholars have focused on *the antecedents* of work engagement, which have been mainly attributed to the job and personal resources. Recently studies have found leadership and trust in the leader to be related to work engagement. Various literature has strongly connected *ethical leadership to employee engagement* (Blumenberg *et al.*, 2019; Brown *et al.*, 2005; Engelbrecht *et al.*, 2017). The organisation’s competitiveness, success and sustainability are driven by the employee's level of engagement (Engelbrecht *et al.*, 2017:368). Therefore, it is paramount for organisations to identify contextual variables that foster work engagement. A conducive environment where employees can give their best fosters greater employee engagement, thus making managers key enablers of engagement (Bhana and Suknunan (2019:316). Additionally, various studies have confirmed the

positive relationship between *trust and work engagement* (Chughtai & Buckley, 2011; Chughtai, Byrne, & Flood, 2015; Mone & London, 2010), and proposed that having a good degree of trust (in the organisation and leader), can result in increased work engagement. Based on those mentioned above, the following research questions and objectives were formulated.

1.4 AIM AND OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

Work engagement is the driver behind an organisation's competitiveness and success. An engaged employee demonstrates the willingness to put extra effort into the work and reach optimal performance. The importance of work engagement has to be emphasised to encourage organisations to invest in this valuable phenomenon and the different elements that contribute to and enrich work engagement. Because the relationship between leaders and followers is so important in the company, trust and leadership are key aspects that should be considered, especially when they can contribute to employees' work engagement.

1.4.1 Primary objective:

This primary objective of this study is to investigate the role of ethical leadership in trust and employee engagement in a selection of South African organisations. More precisely, this study aims to study the effect of ethical leadership on employee engagement and the mediating role of trust in this relationship.

1.4.2 Secondary objectives

- the relationship between ethical leadership and trust?
- the relationship between ethical leadership and employee engagement?
- the relationship between employee engagement and trust?
- the role of ethical leadership in trust?
- if trust mediates the relationship between ethical leadership and employee engagement?

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

1.5.1 Research Questions

The primary research question is: What is the relationship between ethical leadership, trust and employee

engagement?

The following *secondary questions* form the foundation to obtaining relevant information from the selected unit of analysis to answer this research question

- What is the relationship between ethical leadership and trust?
- What is the relationship between ethical leadership and employee engagement?
- What is the relationship between employee engagement and trust?
- What is the role of ethical leadership in trust?
- Does trust mediate the relationship between ethical leadership and employee engagement?

1.6 RESEARCH METHODS

1.6.1 Paradigm

This study followed a positivistic paradigm. Positivism is a form of philosophical realism adhering closely to the hypothetico-deductive method (Cacioppo, Semin, & Berntson, 2014; McGrath & Johnson, 2016;). The scientific method involves systematic observation and description of phenomena contextualized within a model or theory, the presentation of hypotheses, the execution of the tightly controlled experimental study, the use of inferential statistics to test hypotheses, and finally, the interpretation of the statistical results in light of the original theory (Cacioppo *et al.*, 2016). Relying on the hypothetico-deductive method, positivism focuses on verifying a priori hypotheses that are most often stated in quantitative propositions that can be converted into mathematical formulas expressing functional relationships (McGrath & Johnson, 2016). The primary goal of positivistic inquiry is an explanation that (ultimately) leads to the prediction and control of phenomena.

1.6.2 Research approach

The research approach adopted in this study is that of a quantitative research method to evaluate the study objectives instead of qualitative research. Bryman and Bell (2017:31) describe quantitative research as a distinct research approach that entails the numerical data that entails a deductive approach to the relationship between theory and research and

adopts an objectivist conception of social reality

1.6.3 Research Design

This research study employed a quantitative method using a cross-sectional survey design to analyse the relationship between ethical leadership, work engagement and trust. According to Bryman (2016:66), a cross-sectional research design entails collecting data on more than one case and at a single point in time to collect a body of quantitative in connection with two or more variables which are then examined to detect patterns of association. The design is ideal for the study to determine the relationship between the variables covered.

1.6.4 Research Processes

1.6.4.1 Population

A population is generally a large collection of individuals or a universe of units from which a representative sample is selected (Bryman & Bell, 2017:170). The population investigated in this study consisted of employees working in various selected South African organisations in the Gauteng province

1.6.4.2 Sample Technique and Size

According to Alvi (2016), a sample can be defined as a small group of people, also known as selected participants from a specific population group. For this study, a combined convenience and purposive sampling strategy were used amongst individuals employed in different organisations based in South Africa. This sampling strategy can be described as convenient sampling, where the researcher focuses explicitly on participants who are easy or convenient to approach (Alvi, 2016).

The convenience sampling technique was selected because it was inexpensive, easy and the participants were willingly available (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016). Within purposive sampling, also called judgment sampling, is the deliberate choice of a participant due to the qualities the participant possesses. This technique does not need a

set number of participants. The researcher decides what needs to be known and sets out to find people who can and are willing to provide the information under knowledge or experience. The researcher lists the criteria that should be included, such as a focus on employees that are proficient in (i) English, employees (ii) at least six months in service of the organisation (iii) reporting to a manager. The inclusion criteria would determine how these employees experience top and middle management's leadership style (ethical leadership) and how such experience influences their motivation and attitudes at work.

1.6.4.3 Data Collection Instruments

This study used an electronic web-based questionnaires comprising of three scales, namely the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2006), Managerial Trustworthy Behaviour Scale (Cardona & Elola, 2017). and the Leadership of Ethics Scale (LES) (Brown *et al.*, 2005) and a demographic section (age, gender, educational attainment, years of experiences, industry) to profile the sample.

The measuring instruments included:

- *Leadership of Ethics Scale*

Ethical Leadership Scale (ELS) developed by (Brown *et al.*, 2005), is a questionnaire measuring perceived ethical leadership behaviour. Participants will be asked to rate their top management executive. The Ethical leadership Scale combines different leader behaviours such as acting fairly, rewarding ethical conduct, ethical visioning and ethical practices of ethical leaders. The 15-item questionnaire uses a six-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). Sample items include My manager: "Shows a strong concern ethical and moral values." and "Communicates clear ethical standards for members", and "Is honest and can be trusted to tell the truth." (Cronbach alpha =.91) Brown *et al.* (2015)

- *Utrecht Work Engagement Scale*

Employee engagement will be measured using the short version of the *Utrecht Work Engagement Scale* (UWES) questionnaire (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2006), which was developed by Schaufeli *et al.* (2016) in an iterative process on a multinational level. The questionnaire consists of a seventeen item self-report scale grouped into three subscales with three items that compromise the three dimensions of engagement, namely, vigour, dedication and absorption. These three items are scored on as even-point frequency rating scale ranging from 0 (never) to 6 (always). Cronbach's α values for this survey exceeded the required 0.70 cut-off value (Engelbrecht, Heine, &

Mahembe, 2017)

- *Managerial Trustworthy Behaviour Scale*

Trust in management will be measured using a Managerial Trustworthy behaviour scale as adopted by (Cardona & Elola, 2017). The MTB scale contains five categories: behavioural consistency, acting with integrity, sharing and delegation of control, the openness of communication, and demonstration of concern. These categories have been summarized to form a final scale of fifteen items, three items for each category which were scored on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (Disagree strongly) to 5 (Agree strongly). Sample items included the following: “My superior always tells the truth”, “My superior’s behaviour is coherent with his/her values”, and “My superior is concerned about others.” Cronbach alphas ($\alpha = .88$) (Cardona & Elola, 2003).

1.6.4.4 Data Collection Fieldwork

Before data collection, the researcher obtained formal approval from the university’s applicable Scientific Committee and the Economics and Management Sciences Ethics Committee. This authorised the researcher to carry out the study, and the researcher started to contact the respondents. The questionnaires were presented online through Survey Monkey , a cloud device that allows information to be gathered from participants through personalised surveys. The data collected is automatically linked to a spreadsheet that is populated with the questions and the participant’s responses. The participants received an email containing a link to the survey containing the informed consent form. The email invitation outlined the cause and context of the study and the length of the questionnaires, and the expected time it might take to complete the questionnaire. The researcher emphasised that the information obtained would be kept confidential. Participants were made aware that they could stop at any stage of the completion of the questionnaire process if they wished to or felt uncomfortable about anything regarding the process. Individuals who finished the questionnaires received an email confirming their completion of the survey, and the researcher received an email notification for each response submitted. The data were analysed with the IBM SPSS computer software (2021) version 27.0

1.6.4.5 Data Analysis

Data were captured and cleaned by an expert’s statistical consultant. The data were

analysed with IBM SPSS computer software (2021) version 27.0. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was used to confirm the validity of measurements applied in the present study. Reliability was determined through computed Cronbach alpha's and mean inter-item correlations. Reliability was considered at a Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 2019). Inter-item correlations were calculated as a supplement method confirming reliability. Descriptive statistics included means and standard deviations to determine central observations regarding ethical leadership, work engagement and trust.

Pearson's product correlations determined the extent and direction of relationships between observed leadership, trust, and employee engagement. The purpose of correlation analysis is not to determine causality but rather to confirm whether noticeable relationships between the proposed variables will be present or not present. Effect sizes are calculated with a 95% confidence level ($p < 0.05$) to be viewed as significant. Effect sizes are classified where 0.1 denote a small effect, 0.3 a medium effect, and 0.5 a large effect (Steyn 2019).

1.7 DEMARCATION OF THE STUDY

This research focuses on participants' perceptions about ethical leadership, trust and employee engagement in the experiences. Therefore, the focus is on leadership and occupational health and Organisation Behaviour, sub-disciplines of Industrial Psychology. This study is conducted in various selected South African organisations in the Gauteng province

1.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

Bryman and Bell (2017) state the four main areas of how ethical principles in business research may not be transgressed are: Harm to participants, lack of informed consent, invasion of privacy, and deception. This study, in addition, also ensure research ethics are adhered to by emphasising consent, transparency of the research process and anonymity.

The consent form highlighted the following information to the participants:

- Purpose and objective of the study
- Assure participants that the questionnaire is used for academic purposes only

- Encourage anonymity and voluntary participation
- Ensure that all interested participants may have access to the study results upon completion.

1.9 CONTRIBUTIONS FOR THE ORGANISATION

Organisations need to develop effective strategies to achieve employee engagement to have a competitive advantage. An ethical leadership style of managers is likely to create an ethical and trusting environment conducive to employee work engagement and contribute to increased job satisfaction levels, which may enhance employee productivity.

Regarding the contribution to the field of Economic and Management Science, the outcomes of this study highlight the role played by ethical leadership behaviour of managers in promoting work engagement through the creation of employee relationships anchored on trust

1.10 LAYOUT OF THE STUDY

The chapters presented in this mini-dissertation are as follows:

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter introduces the topic, presents the study's background, outlines the problem statement, and a comprehensive research approach.

Chapter 2: Research article

This chapter is the research article, which includes the literature review. The literature review mainly focuses on ethical leadership and how it affects work-related outcomes, mainly trust and work engagement.

Chapter 3: Conclusion and recommendations

This is the final chapter of the study. It provides a summary of the research, presents the conclusions as well as recommendations that provide management with recommendations for future research.

ETHICAL LEADERSHIP AND WORK ENGAGEMENT. TESTING FOR THE MEDIATING ROLE OF TRUST IN THE LEADER

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ABSTRACT

Despite the growing importance of ethical leadership, many organisations worldwide have witnessed diminishing ethical leadership and trust in management. South Africa is not an exception to unethical practices with private and public sector corruption allegations in the past decade. Unfortunately, pitiable standards of ethics and venality taint the business environment. Therefore, the conversation on business morality, particularly ethical leadership, and developing a model of trust in organisations is highly legitimate and timely. Hence, the objective of this study was to investigate the mediating role of trust in leaders in the relationship between ethical leadership and engagement. The study utilizes a cross-sectional design and a convenient sampling frame (n = 132) recruited via social media to reach the objective from the positivistic paradigm and quantitative approach. The findings confirm the established positive relationship between ethical leadership, trust in the leader and work engagement. In addition, the results also suggest that the mediating role of trust in the leader could only be confirmed in the relationship between ethical leadership and dedication. Theoretical and managerial implications, as well as its limitations, are also provided

Keywords: Ethical leadership, trust, work engagement, mediation, and ethics

INTRODUCTION

Organisations spend annually between \$12-14 billion dollars on leadership training and development. However, the training results have failed to deliver on the expectations of long-term change in leadership skills and habits (Kivland & King, 2015; McNulty, 2017). Especially troubling is its failure to develop ethical leaders, as the impact of their poor ethical choices continues to result in alarming stories that dominate the press. These poor ethical decisions have damaged organisations' reputations and loss of profits, in some instances even affecting entire sectors. Unethical practices have the power to damage the commitment of workers and erode the future wellbeing of the business. Strengthening ethical leadership that exemplifies integrity, credibility, fairness, and transparency are imperative to good governance (Brown *et al.*, 2015). The significant impact of ethical conduct on business has led to a body of research on ethical leadership's influence on followers and the organisation. Various literature has strongly connected ethical leadership to employee engagement (Blumenberg *et al.*, 2019; Engelbrecht *et al.*, 2017). The organisation's competitiveness, success, and sustainability are driven by the employee's level of engagement (Engelbrecht *et al.*, 2017). It is therefore paramount for organisations to identify situations that foster work engagement. A conducive environment where employees can give their best fosters greater employee engagement, thus making managers key enablers of engagement (Bhana & Suknunan, 2019).

When each man is for himself, followers lose trust and stop caring for one another; this breakdown in the relationship may negatively impact productivity. Trust lays an important foundation in determining the relationship between the organisation and the leader and significantly influences how the employee may perceive the work environment (Engelbrecht *et al.*, 2019:370). Engelbrecht further states that a leader's behaviour can influence how the follower will trust the leader. A trusting and ethical leader is most likely to create an ethical and trusting environment conducive to employee work engagement and contribute positively to positive work outcomes. This study seeks to determine the relationship between ethical leadership, trust, and work engagement.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Despite the growing importance of ethical leadership, many organisations worldwide have witnessed diminishing ethical leadership and trust in management. South Africa is not an exception to unethical practices with private and public sector corruption allegations in the past decade. Unfortunately, the business environment is tainted by pitiable standards of ethics and venality. The problem this study investigated is the role of trust in the leader in the relationship between ethical leadership and work engagement. The persistence of unethical and illegal business activities by top management in corporate South Africa indicates that a code of ethics, overwhelming rules and regulations are simply

not enough to ensure the ethical soundness of an organisation. Strengthening ethical leadership that exemplifies integrity, credibility, fairness, and transparency are imperative to good governance and at the core of cultivating a culture of an engaged workforce and a trusting work environment. (Brown *et al.*, 2015). Poor ethics have an impact on employees and the productivity of the organisation. Unethical behaviour of leaders leads to low morale in the organisation, which inevitably leads to poor production (Mavuso, 2019). On the contrary, when leaders behave ethically, communicate the significance of ethics and fairly treat their employees, employees are less likely to engage in counterproductive behaviours (Bedi *et al.*, 2016).

The historical remnants of apartheid have left South Africa with unique deep social polarisation and trust deficits in the macro-environment. It is, therefore, good to know that ethical behaviour has the power to enhance levels of trust (Brown *et al.*, 2015; Mo & Shi, 2017) in organisations, the meso environment. Ethical leadership and trust in businesses act as a fertile ground for a flourishing and healthy work environment conducive to employee engagement (Engelbrecht *et al.*, 2017). Ethical leadership contributes to creating engaged employees critical to a healthy bottom line. Therefore, the conversation on business morality, particularly ethical leadership, and developing a trust model in organisations is highly legitimate and timely. For this reason, this study seeks to investigate the role of ethical leadership in work engagement and trust in the leader.

LITERATURE STUDY

Theoretical frameworks for understanding ethical leadership

Ethical leadership is a positive form of influence that motivates followers towards positive psychological states (Avolio *et al.*, 2016) and creates an environment that is conducive to cultivating a broader set of desirable behaviours (Brown *et al.*, 2015; Engelbrecht *et al.*, 2017; Walumbwa *et al.*, 2017). A leader who conducts themselves in a normatively appropriate manner that includes honesty, fair treatment, and consideration of others may successfully channel observer attraction. Followers may be more likely to respond by emulating the desired behaviour. (Bhana & Suknunan, 2019; Brown *et al.*, 2015). The *Social Learning Theory* and *Social Exchange Theory* are practical, theoretical frameworks that propose that leaders influence the ethical conduct of followers via modelling as well as social exchange relationships.

The *Social Learning Theory* suggests that individuals learn the norms of appropriate conduct through their own experience and by observing others. For leaders to be regarded as ethical

leaders that influence ethical-related outcomes, they must be attractive, credible and legitimate, (Wood & Bandura, 2016). Effective role modelling requires attention to be focused on the model and the behaviour being modelled. Ethical leaders need to consistently engage in behaviours that the follower is normatively appropriate, such as honesty, consideration of others, and fair treatment of employees. This consistent behaviour proliferates the model attractiveness of the ethical leader and channels observer attention to the model. Beugré and Liverpool (2016) conceptualise the workplace as a marketplace where individuals engage in transactions seeking to obtain a favourable return on investment. *The Social Marketplace Model* reasons that individuals judge whether they should invest their time and efforts in behaviours that will benefit the organisation. Employees treated ethically and somewhat are more likely to behave in a manner that is beneficial to the group's long-term development and success (Walumbwa *et al.*, 2017). Therefore, *Social Learning Theory* and *Social Exchange Theory* are suggested as practical, theoretical frameworks that explain the dynamics involved concerning how leaders influence the trust in the leader and work engagement of followers via social exchange relationships.

Ethical leadership

Brown *et al.* (2005) define ethical leadership as ‘the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and promoting such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making’. This definition suggests that their followers perceive those leaders who are considered ethical in a manner that deems them to have appropriate conduct displayed through honesty, trustworthiness, fairness, and care. As a result of this, Brown *et al.* (2005) legitimise the credibility of the leader. It is also worth noting that Brown *et al.* (2005) uses the word appropriate because what could be considered appropriate for a certain culture may not necessarily be appropriate for another. This resonates particularly with the diverse nature of South Africa and highlights the challenge of determining ethical principles that can adequately cater for all. When leaders demonstrate high moral standards, followers find it easier to follow suit. Good leaders are competent and ethical in their conduct (Ofori, 2009:533). Ethical leadership has received much attention, which can be attributable to its impact on favourable work outcomes such as follower job satisfaction, organisational commitment, job performance, job engagement, and organisational identification (Bedi *et al.*, 2016; Brown *et al.*, 2005; Engelbrecht *et al.*, 2017; Mo & Shi, 2017; Ofori, 2019). The leader’s honesty, transparency and good communicating skills may foster enhanced levels of trust in the followers as well as encourage beneficial reciprocal behaviours in the form of high-quality work outcomes

Trust in the leader

The concept of trust has been studied by many scholars in different disciplines and has been defined and conceptualised in various ways (Chughtai *et al.*, 2015). These authors also draw attention to two prominent factors in most definitions of trust, namely positive expectations and the willingness to accept vulnerability. A widely accepted definition of trust by Rousseau *et al.* (2015:395) is “a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behaviour of another. Javed *et al.* (2018:391) define trust as “The willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party” whereas Mo and Shi (2017:296) define trust in a leader as “a psychological state in which an individual accepts their vulnerability when they expect positive intentions of their leader”. This view reflects the trustor's reliance on the goodwill of the trustee. Uncertainty forms part of any reciprocal relationship, and individuals always assess their vulnerability as well as the prospect of whether the trusted party intends to and will act accordingly (Kim, 2016:356), thus creating an opportunity for trust (Mayer *et al.*, 2015; Rousseau *et al.*, 2015). Trust is, therefore, not only taking a risk but the individuals' willingness to take on the risk (Mayer *et al.*, 2015:712). For this reason, Rousseau *et al.* (2016) suggest risk and interdependence as conditions essential for the conceptualisation of trust. Previous studies have demonstrated that an increase in trust results directly or indirectly in more positive workplace behaviours and attitudes like organisational commitment and employees' work engagement (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Hassan & Ahmed, 2017; Ugwu, Onyishi & Rodriguez-Sanchez, 2014).

The mediating role of trust

This project also aimed to test the mediating effects of trust in the manager in the relationship between ethical leadership and work engagement. Mediating variables are prominent in psychological theory and research. Mediators refer to variables that establish how or why one variable predicts or causes an outcome variable (Frazier, Tix & Barron, 2004). In other words, a mediator is a mechanism through which a predictor influences an outcome variable (Baron and Kenny 1986), providing useful information regarding psychological intervention for practising psychologists. Therefore, a mediating variable transmits the effect of an independent variable to a dependent variable (MacKinnon, Fairchild, & Fritz, 2007). One of the primary reasons for the popularity of mediating variables in psychology is the historical authority of the stimulus-organism-response model (Hebb, 1966). In this study, mediating mechanisms (trust in the leader) in the organism translate how a stimulus leads to a response. Researchers have argued that trust is the major lynchpin in a meta-analysis of ethical leadership, explaining why ethical leaders positively affect their subordinates (2015). The mediating role of trust

has been confirmed in empirical studies (Chughtai, Byrne & Flood, 2015; Ilyas, Abid & Ashfaq, 2020; Zeng & Xu, 2019).

Work engagement

Schaufeli *et al.* (2020:74) popularly define *work engagement* as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterised by vigour, dedication, and absorption. Vigour is defined as “high levels of energy and mental resilience while working, the willingness to invest effort in one’s work, and persistence even in the face of difficulties”. Dedication is defined as “a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge”. As the last dimension of engagement, absorption is defined by Schaufeli *et al.* (2020:74) as “being fully concentrated and deeply engrossed in one’s work, whereby time passes quickly, and one has difficulties with detaching oneself from work”. Research has demonstrated that high levels of employee engagement can have *valuable organisational outcomes* such as greater job satisfaction, improved employee wellbeing, reduced turnover rate, less absenteeism and enhanced job performance (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018; Chughtai *et al.*, 2015:655). This can be attributed to individuals with high levels of work engagement because they have a physical, cognitive, and emotional connection to their work roles. These employees are thus more likely to go the extra mile in their work, other than those who are not engaged (Gawke *et al.*, 2017:92). On the other hand, Mostafa and Abed El-Motalib (2020) attribute financial cost implications and negative service delivery to disengaged employees.

Ethical leadership trust in the leader and work engagement

Various studies have provided empirical evidence for the positive relationship between *ethical leadership and trust* (in the leader and organisation) (Brown *et al.*, 2015; Dadhich & Bhal, 2018; Javed, Rawwas, Khandai, Shahid & Tayyeb, 2018; Johnson *et al.*, 2020; Kalshoven *et al.*, 2018; Van den Akker *et al.*, 2019). Scholars have focused on *the antecedents* of work engagement, which have been mainly attributed to job and personal resources. Recently studies have found leadership and trust in the leader to be related to work engagement. Various literature has strongly connected *ethical leadership to employee engagement* (Ahmad, & Gao, 2018; Avey *et al.*, 2012; Blumenberg *et al.*, 2019; Demirtas, 2015; Engelbrecht *et al.*, 2017; Naeem, Weng, Hameed, & Rasheed, 2020; Sarwar, Ishaq, Amin, & Ahmed, 2020). The organisation’s competitiveness, success and sustainability are driven by the employee's level of engagement (Engelbrecht *et al.*, 2017:368). Therefore, it is paramount for organisations to identify contextual variables that foster work engagement. A conducive environment where employees can give their best fosters greater employee engagement, thus making managers key enablers of engagement (Bhana & Suknunan, 2019:316). Additionally, various studies have confirmed

the positive relationship between *trust and work engagement* (Chughtai & Buckley, 2011; Chughtai, Byrne, & Flood, 2015; Mone & London, 2010). These studies also proposed that having a good degree of trust (in the organisation and leader) can result in increased work engagement. Based on the above-mentioned, the following research questions and objectives were formulated.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study's primary research question was the role of ethical leadership in trust in the leader and work engagement in selecting South African organisations. Based on the primary research question, the following *secondary research questions* were formulated:

- What is the relationship between ethical leadership and trust in the leader?
- What are the relationships between ethical leadership, employee engagement (and its components), and trust in the leader?
- What is the relationship between employee engagement (and its components) and trust in the leader; and
- Does trust in the leader mediate the relationship between ethical leadership and employee engagement (and its components)?

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The primary objective of this study was to investigate the role of ethical leadership in trust in the leader and work engagement in a selection of South African organisations. Based on the primary research objective, the following *secondary objectives were formulated for the study*: To determine:

- the relationship between ethical leadership and trust in the leader;
- the relationship between ethical leadership and employee engagement (and its components);
- the relationship between employee engagement (and its components) and trust in the leader; and
- if trust in the leader mediates the relationship between ethical leadership and employee engagement (and its components).

RESEARCH METHODS

Research paradigm, method, design

Following a positivistic paradigm, this research study employed a quantitative method using a cross-sectional survey design to analyse the relationship between ethical leadership, work engagement and trust. Bryman and Bell (2017:31) describe quantitative research as a distinct research approach that entails the numerical data and a deductive approach to the relationship between theory and research and

adopts an objectivist conception of social reality. According to Bryman (2012:66), a cross-sectional research design entails collecting data on more than one case and at a single point in time to collect a body of quantitative in connection with two or more variables, which are then examined to detect patterns of association.

Before data collection, the researcher obtained formal approval from the applicable university's scientific committee and the Economics and Management Sciences Ethics Committees, enabling the researcher to carry out the study. An ethical clearance certificate was issued (**NWU-00775-20-A4**). The participants were contacted only after approval from both committees was granted. The questionnaires were formulated online through survey monkey, a cloud device that allows participants to gather information through personalised surveys. The data collected is automatically linked to a spreadsheet that is populated with the questions and the participant's responses. The participants received an email with a link to the survey containing the informed consent form. The email invitation outlined the cause and context of the study, the questionnaire's length, and the expected time it might take to complete the questionnaire. The researcher emphasised that the information obtained would be kept confidential. The participants were made aware that they could stop at any stage of completing the questionnaire process if they wished to or felt uncomfortable about anything regarding the process. Individuals who finished the questionnaires received an email confirming their completion of the survey, and the researcher received an email notification for each response submitted. The data were analysed with IBM SPSS version 27 statistical software (IBM, 2021).

Sample and sample characteristics

Etikan, Musa and Alkassim (2016) state that convenience sampling is inexpensive and easy to use if there are willing participants. A combined convenience sampling strategy was used for this study. The researcher specifically focused on participants who were easy or convenient to approach. Additional features of the sample are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Sample Characteristics

Demographics	Sub-groups	Frequency	Percentage	Valid %	Cumulative %
Age	18 – 20	8	5.8	5.8	5.8
	21 – 25	80	58.0	58.0	63.8
	26 - 30	40	29.0	29.0	92.8
	31 – 35	7	5.1	5.1	97.8
	36 – 40	2	1.4	1.4	99.3
	41 – 50	1	.7	.7	100.0
Gender	Male	52	37.7	37.7	37.7
	Female -	86	62.3	62.3	100.0
Years of experience	1 - 5	43	31.2	31.2	31.2
	6 - 10	49	35.5	35.5	66.7
	11 - 15	20	14.5	14.5	81.2
	16 - 20	14	10.1	10.1	91.3
	21 - 25	4	2.9	2.9	94.2
	26 - 30	6	4.3	4.3	98.6
	31 - 35	1	.7	.7	99.3
	36 - 40	1	.7	.7	100.0
	Qualifications	Below Matric	2	1.4	1.4
Matric		10	7.2	7.2	8.7
Diploma		11	8.0	8.0	16.7
B Degree		79	57.2	57.2	73.9
Hons		35	25.4	25.4	99.3
Master's		1	.7	.7	100.0

Most of the sample were between the age of 21 to 25 (58%), female (62.3%), six to ten years of experience and holds a B degree (57.2%).

Measuring instruments

The study used an electronic web-based questionnaire comprising of three scales, namely the Utrecht

Work Engagement Scale (UWES) (Schaufeli et al., 2006), Managerial Trustworthy Behaviour Scale Leader Trust Scale (LTS) (Engelbrecht et al., 2017) (Cardona & Elola, 2017). and the Leadership of Ethics Scale (LES) (Brown et al., 2005) and a demographic section (age, gender, educational attainment, years of experiences, industry) to profile the sample. The demographic data was used to profile the sample.

- *Ethical leadership*

The Ethical Leadership Scale (ELS), developed by Brown *et al.* (2005), measures perceived ethical leadership behaviour. Participants were asked to rate their top management executive. The Ethical leadership Scale combines different leader behaviours such as acting fairly, rewarding ethical conduct, ethical visioning, and ethical practices of ethical leaders. The 15-item questionnaire were measured on a six-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). Sample items include My manager: “Shows a strong concern ethical and moral values.” and “Communicates clear ethical standards for members”, and “Is honest and can be trusted to tell the truth.” An acceptable Cronbach alpha ($\alpha = .91$) was obtained using the scale in previous studies (Brown *et al.*, 2005).

- *Work engagement*

Employee engagement was measured using the *Utrecht Work Engagement Scale* (UWES) questionnaire (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2006). The questionnaire consists of 17 items on a self-report scale that are grouped into three subscales engagement, namely vigour (six items), dedication (five items), and absorption (six items). All items are scored on a seven-point frequency rating scale ranging from 0 (never) to 6 (always). Cronbach alpha values for this survey exceeded the required .70 cut-off value in a recent South African study (Engelbrecht *et al.*, 2017).

- *Trust in the leader*

Trust in management was measured using the Leader Trust Scale (LTS) (Engelbrecht *et al.*, (2017). The LTS scale contains five categories: behavioural consistency, acting with integrity, sharing and delegation of control, the openness of communication, and demonstration of concern. These categories have been summarised to form a final scale of fifteen items, three items for each category which were scored on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (Disagree strongly) to 5 (Agree strongly). Sample items included the following: “My superior always tells the truth”, “My superior’s behaviour is coherent with his/her values” and “My superior is concerned about others.” An acceptable Cronbach alpha ($\alpha = .88$) was obtained with the use of the scale in previous studies (Cardona & Elola, 2013); and

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

Data were captured and cleaned by an expert's statistical. The data were analysed with SPSS computer software (2021) version 27.0. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was computed to confirm if items load on the intended scales in the present study. Reliability was determined through computed Cronbach alpha's and mean inter-item correlations. Descriptive statistics included means and standard deviations to determine central leadership, trust, and work engagement observations. Pearson's product correlations will determine the extent and direction of relationships between observed ethical leadership, trust in the leader, and work engagement. The purpose of correlation analysis was not to determine causality but rather to confirm whether noticeable relationships between the proposed variables was present or not. Effect sizes were considered at the 95% confidence level ($p < 0.05$) to be viewed as significant. Effect sizes were classified with 0.1 denote a small effect, 0.3 a medium effect and 0.5 a large effect (Steyn, 2015). Simple mediation modelling was computed using the PROCESS macros (version 3) (Hayes, 2017) which was installed in SPSS. Mediation modelling also included standardised regression coefficients in determining predictor characteristics of the investigated variables. Mediation was recognised with the indirect effect verified using a percentile bootstrap estimation approach with 10 000 samples (Shrout & Bolger, 2002). The percentile bootstrap estimation is incorporated into the PROCESS macros version 3 (Hayes, 2017). An indirect effect from the bootstrap analysis was considered significant if the lower-level confidence interval (LLCI) and upper-level confidence interval (ULCI) excluded zero (0) (Zhao, Lynch, & Chen, 2010).

RESULTS

The results section presents the findings of this study by focusing on the EFA and the descriptive statistics and the correlation analysis, and lastly, the mediation analysis is presented.

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA)

EFA were conducted using a simple principal component analysis on the items of the of the individual scales [the Leadership of Ethics Scale (LES); (eigen value = 11.16; variance explained = 74.39%); KMO =.96] and the Leader Trust Scale (LTS); (eigen value = 6.37; variance explained = 63.65%; KMO =.92)] and subscales [the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES); (*Vigour* = [(eigen value = 3.02; variance explained = 50.33%; KMO =.83)]; *Dedication* = [(eigen value = 3.58; variance explained = 71.57%; KMO =.85)]; and *Absorption* = [(eigen value = 3.82; variance explained = 63.60%; KMO =.86)] used in this study. The results (eigen values and scree plots) suggested that LES, LTS and the subscales of the UWES used were unidimensional. The analysis also considered and confirmed the UWES [(eigen value = 9.67; variance explained = 56.89%; KMO =.95)] as a

unidimensional construct.

Descriptive statistics and correlational analysis

The first objective of this study was to determine the relationship between ethical leadership, trust, and employee engagement. The descriptive statistics and results of the correlational analysis are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics and correlational analysis

Variables	α	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Ethical leadership	.96	4.29	1.47	-				
2. Trust in the leader	.86	3.47	0.92	.69**	-			
3. Vigour	.83	5.11	1.33	.43**	.40**	-		
4. Dedication	.85	5.51	1.50	.31**	.35**	.87**	-	
5. Absorption	.86	5.47	1.42	.40**	.35**	.88**	.89**	-
6. Engagement	.92	5.34	1.40	.40**	.36**	.96**	.95**	.96**

** Correlation is significant at 0.01 level. / Results were interpreted as: 0.1 = small effect, 0.3 = medium effect, 0.5 = large effect (Steyn, 1999).

Inspection of Table 2 suggested that all scales were reliable and internal consistent because the yielded Cronbach alpha (α) values for the scales used in the study exceeded the required .70 cut-off value. All the measuring instruments used were scored above the mid-point of the scale, suggesting agreement met the experiences of ethical leadership, trust in the leader and engagement (vigour, dedication, and absorption). Table 2 also indicated that ethical leadership were statistically significant positive related to trust in the leader (large effect) and engagement (vigour, dedication, and absorption) (medium effect). Trust in the leader were also statistically significant positive related to engagement (vigour, dedication, and absorption) (medium effect), and the dimensions of engagement were also statistically significant positive related to one another (vigour, dedication, and absorption) (large effect).

Mediation analysis

The last objective of this study was to determine the mediating role of trust in the leader in the relationship between ethical leadership and engagement (and its dimensions). The results of this analysis are presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Testing for mediation effects

Variable	Estimate	SE	<i>p</i> -value	Bootstrapping BC 95% CI	
				Lower	Upper
Leadership → Engagement via Trust					
Leadership → Trust (a)	0.47*	0.04	<i>p</i> < 0.01	0.38	0.55
Trust → Engagement (b)	0.21	0.20	<i>p</i> = 0.22	-0.12	0.53
Leadership → Engagement (c) (t = 4.86)	0.38*	0.09	<i>p</i> < .00	0.23	0.54
Leadership → Vigour via Trust					
Leadership → Trust (a)	0.45*	0.04	<i>p</i> < 0.01	0.36	0.54
Trust → Vigour (b)	0.20	0.11	<i>p</i> = 0.08	-0.02	0.43
Leadership → Vigour (c)	0.29*	0.06	<i>P</i> = 0.00	0.18	0.39
Leadership → Dedication via Trust					
Leadership → Trust (a)	0.46*	0.04	<i>p</i> < 0.01	0.38	0.55
Trust → Dedication (b)	0.25*	0.12	<i>p</i> = 0.03	0.02	0.48
Leadership → Dedication (c)	0.21*	0.06	<i>P</i> = 0.00	-0.10	0.32
Leadership → Absorption via Trust					
Leadership → Trust (a)	0.47*	0.04	<i>p</i> < 0.01	0.38	0.55
Trust → Absorption (b)	0.13	0.12	<i>p</i> = 0.29	-0.11	0.37
Leadership → Absorption (c)	0.28*	0.06	<i>p</i> < 0.01	-0.16	0.39
Variable					
	Estimate	SE		Lower	Upper
Leadership → Engagement via Trust	0.10	0.08		-0.08	0.25
Leadership → Vigour via Trust	0.09	0.06		-0.02	0.20
Leadership → Dedication via Trust	0.12	0.06		0.00	0.32
Leadership → Absorption via Trust	0.06	0.09		-0.06	0.18

Inspection of Table 3 that according to the results for the standardised regression coefficients, the first regression (a) where leadership was considered as the independent variable and the proposed mediator, trust, as the dependent variable yielded a significant result ($b = 0.47$, $t(116) = -10.63$, $p < 0.01$). The second regression (b) where the proposed mediator, trust, was considered as the independent variable and engagement as the dependent variable did not yield a significant result ($b = 0.21$; $t(115) = 1.24$; $p < 0.21$). The final regression (c) whereby leadership was considered as the independent variable and engagement as the dependent variable was significant ($b = 0.38$; $t(115) = 4.86$, $p = 0.00$). The indirect effect of trust on the relationship between leadership and engagement *did not yield a significant result* ($b = 0.10$, $SE = 0.08$, $LLCI = -0.08$ and $ULCI = 0.25$).

Inspection of Table 3 also suggest that according to the results for the standardised regression coefficients, the first regression (a) where leadership was considered as the independent variable and the proposed mediator, trust, as the dependent variable yielded a significant result ($b = 0.45$; $t(120) = 10.19$; $p < 0.01$). The second regression (b) where the proposed mediator, trust, was considered as the independent variable and vigour as the dependent variable did not yield a significant result ($b = 0.20$; $t(119) = 1.8$; $p < 0.08$). The final regression (c) whereby leadership was considered as the independent variable and vigour as the dependent variable was significant ($b = 0.29$; $t(119) = 5.29$; $p = 0.00$). The indirect effect of trust on the relationship between leadership and vigour *did not yield a significant result* ($b = 0.09$; $SE = 0.06$; $LLCI = -0.02$ and $ULCI = 0.20$).

Inspection of Table 3 also suggest that according to the results for the standardised regression coefficients, the first regression (a) where leadership was considered as the independent variable and the proposed mediator, trust, as the dependent variable yielded a significant result ($b = 0.46$; $t(125) = 10.64$; $p < 0.01$). The second regression (b) where the proposed mediator, trust, was considered as the independent variable and dedication as the dependent variable did not yield a significant result ($b = 0.25$; $t(124) = 2.16$; $p = 0.03$). The final regression (c) whereby leadership was considered as the independent variable and dedication as the dependent variable was significant ($b = 0.21$; $t(124) = 3.69$; $p = 0.00$). The indirect effect of trust on the relationship between leadership and dedication *did yield a significant result* ($b = 0.12$; $SE = 0.06$, $LLCI = 0.00$ and $ULCI = 0.32$).

Inspection of Table 3 also suggest that according to the results for the standardised regression coefficients, the first regression (a) where leadership was considered as the independent variable and the proposed mediator, trust, as the dependent variable yielded a significant result ($b = 0.47$; $t(117) = 10.67$; $p < 0.01$). The second regression (b) where the proposed mediator, trust, was considered as the

independent variable and absorption as the dependent variable did not yield a significant result ($b = 0.13$; $t(116) = 1.07$; $p = 0.29$). The final regression (c) whereby leadership was considered as the independent variable and absorption as the dependent variable was significant ($b = 0.28$; $t(116) = 4.81$; $p < 0.01$). The indirect effect of trust on the relationship between leadership and absorption *did not yield a significant result* ($b = 0.06$; $SE = 0.09$, $LLCI = -0.06$ and $ULCI = 0.18$).

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to determine the relationship between ethical leadership, trust, and employee engagement and establish if trust mediates the relationship between ethical leadership and employee engagement. Results of the correlational analysis suggested that ethical leadership is positively related to trust in the leader and engagement (vigour, dedication, and absorption). The findings are in line with previous empirical results. Research provides evidence that validates that ethical leadership are related to trust in the leader (Brown *et al.*, 2015; Dadhich & Bhal, 2018; Javed, Rawwas, Khandai, Shahid, & Tayyeb, 2018; Johnson *et al.*, 2020; Kalshoven *et al.*, 2018; Van den Akker *et al.*, 2019). Results also suggest that three dimensions are highly related.

In addition, various literature has strongly connected ethical leadership to employee engagement (Ahmad, & Gao, 2018; Avey *et al.*, 2012; Blumenberg *et al.*, 2019; Demirtas, 2015; Engelbrecht *et al.*, 2017; Naeem, Weng, Hameed, & Rasheed, 2020; Sarwar, Ishaq, Amin, & Ahmed, 2020; Engelbrecht *et al.*, 2017). The employee's level of engagement drives the organisation's competitiveness, success, and sustainability (Engelbrecht *et al.*, 2017:368). It is therefore paramount for organisations to identify situations that foster work engagement. A conducive environment where employees can give their best fosters greater employee engagement, thus making managers key enablers of engagement (Bhana & Suknunan, 2019:316). Results also suggest that trust in the leader was positively related to engagement (vigour, dedication, and absorption).

Various literature has strongly connected ethical leadership to employee engagement (Blumenberg *et al.*, 2019; Chughtai & Buckley, 2011; Chughtai, Byrne, & Flood, 2015; Engelbrecht *et al.*, 2017). The organisation's competitiveness, success and sustainability are driven by the employee's level of engagement (Engelbrecht *et al.*, 2017:368). A conducive environment where employees can give their best fosters greater employee engagement, thus making managers key enablers of engagement (Bhana & Suknunan, 2019:316). Additionally, Chughtai and Buckley (2018) and Mone and London (2010) proposed that having a good degree of workplace trust can result in increased work engagement. The fundamentals of the social exchange theory and social marketplace model seem important in understanding ethical leadership and follower work outcomes, as these theoretical frameworks are based on social exchange, trust, and reciprocity. Thus, the quality of social exchange between the

different parties impacts the level of trust. As a result, motivating individuals towards beneficial or counterproductive behaviour. When employees feel supported, trusted and incentivised with benefits from their employer, they are more likely to reciprocate with behaviour that is beneficial to the organisation (Bedi et al., 2016:519)

The last objective of this study was to determine the mediating role of trust in the leader in the relationship between ethical leadership and engagement (and its dimensions). The analysis results suggest that even though indirect effects were observed for various regressions using PROCESS. Only the analysis findings that considered the role of trust in the relationship between ethical leadership and dedication could confirm the mediating status of the trust. Unlike in other empirical studies (Chughtai, Byrne & Flood, 2015; Ilyas, Abid & Ashfaq, 2020; Zeng & Xu, 2019), we could not confirm the mediating effect of trust (especially in the relationship between empirical leadership and work engagement, vigour, and absorption components). The concepts of vigour, dedication and absorption constitute three different components of work engagement, namely physical, emotional, and cognitive, each having its own antecedents and differential relationships with correlates. Regarding vigour (which is the physical component of work engagement), Chughtai and Buckley (2008) suggest that vigour levels increased readiness to devote effort within their work by not becoming quickly tired and developing the tendency to remain resolute in the face of task difficulty or failure. Dedication is the emotional component of work engagement and is often characterised as putting one's heart into the job (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002).

Furthermore, it typifies an individual's strong sense of identification with their work (Chughtai & Buckley, 2008) and encompasses feelings of enthusiasm, passion, pride, and challenge (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002a). Moreover, dedication indicates individuals' psychological involvement in their work, combined with a sense of significance (Geldenhuis, 2009; Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002a). The absorption component of work engagement is also referred to as the eudemonic approach, deriving pleasure from work. Individuals high on absorption often find it difficult to disengage or detach themselves from their work (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002a). It, therefore, makes sense that trust (a psychological construct) in the leader would be linked to the relationship between dedication and ethical leadership. Empirical results (Bakhshi & Gupta, 2016) also emphasise the need for a dynamic view of the relationship between work engagement and personal and job-related variables. The one-directional viewpoint that emphasised work engagement as a predictor of personal and job-related variables in many previous studies may not fully capture the processes underlying mechanism for employees' thriving at work (Bakhshi & Gupta, 2016).

Theoretical and managerial implications

The results of this study extend the research on ethical leadership and make several *contributions to the literature*. Previous research has linked ethical leadership to several positive outcomes (e.g., Brown *et al.* 2005). This is one of a very few (e.g., Engelbrecht *et al.*, 2017) to be conducted in South African, in the growing number that has explored the effects of ethical leadership on employee wellbeing by focusing on its impact on work engagement through an anticipated path mediated by trust in the leader. In addition, the significant association between ethical leadership and indicators of employee attitudes and wellbeing lends further support to the notion that leadership and the way employees are managed are key determinants of employees' wellbeing (Donaldson-Feilder *et al.*, 2013). Therefore, the present study extends the existing network of ethical leadership and provides fresh insights into this emerging concept.

Only the mediating effects of trust in the leader in the relationship between ethical leadership and dedications could be confirmed. Therefore, the mediating role of trust in the leader in the investigated relationship between ethical leadership and work engagement (vigour and absorption) should not be generalised as this was not confirmed. By empirically establishing a link between ethical leadership trust in the leader and work engagement, this study suggests that promoting ethical leadership behaviours in the workplace can be another useful strategy for stimulating trust in the leader and work engagement.

The current study also has considerable *implications for managers*, human resource development practitioners and policymakers in several ways. Firstly, the positive correlations obtained in our study suggest that an ethical leadership style could contribute to an increased trust of followers in their leaders, which, in turn, could assist leaders in making their employees more engaged. Thus by hiring ethical leaders and training current leaders on the characteristics of an ethical leader, organisations will have more engaged employees hence achieving social sustainability (Ilyas, Abid & Ashfaq, 2020). Written tests, psychometric assessments, graphology, structured interviews (both situational and behavioural) to identify ethical traits in potential candidates with a focus on integrity or honesty should be conducted beyond merely relying on basic background checks (Brody, 2010). Secondly, ethics training programs can be provided to inspire existing managers to provide ethical role models to their subordinates (Mayer *et al.*, 2009; Mayer *et al.*, 2012). In addition, organisations could activate moral identity in leaders and their subordinates through the use of cues in the social environment, such as posters, slogans, or material symbols that make moral constructs, such as ethical leadership, and concerns salient (Aquino *et al.*, 2009; Aquino & Freeman, 2009). It seems likely that being moral is

central to many people's self-definition (Aquino & Reed, 2002) because most people want to view themselves as generally good (Taylor & Brown, 1988). Therefore, people should be motivated to uphold their moral identities to avoid feeling inauthentic (Skitka, 2002).

Limitations

Although our study provides substantial insights into the dynamics involved in the relationship between ethical leadership, trust in the leader and employee engagement, it is not free from limitations. Firstly, the data was collected from a single source, i.e., from employees. Future studies might consider multi-level team data, i.e., from supervisors and the employees working under them aggregated as a team. In addition, this study is based on convenient sampling due to COVID 19 regulations. To address this limitation, future studies could target a more generalised population of employees by employing a stratified sampling in a specific context to get a clearer picture of study variables across various management levels. Future studies could also be directed to explore further the moderating effect of trust in the leader in the relationship between ethical leadership and work engagement. Lastly, future studies could utilise a longitudinal design to better understand the causal inferences. The cross-sectional design used in this study also comes with the limitation of method bias.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to determine the role of ethical leadership in trust in the leader and employees' work engagement. The findings suggest that the three constructs are closely related (statistical and practical). Unfortunately, the mediating role of trust in the leader in the relationship between ethical leadership and employees' work engagement (vigour and absorption) could not be confirmed. However, it should be noted that this study offers evidence that ethical leadership can play an essential role in encouraging employees' health and wellbeing. The results also suggest that ethical leaders can enhance followers work engagement by building trust-based relationships with their followers.

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CHAPTER 3: CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents conclusions drawn from the study according to the general and specific objectives. Limitations of the current study are identified and discussed. Recommendations are made for organisations, as well as for future research in this field.

3.1 CONCLUSIONS

The general objective of this study was to determine the relationships between ethical leadership, trust in the leader and work engagement in a selection of South African organisations. In addition, this study also seeks to determine the mediating effects of trust in the leader in the relationship between ethical leadership and work engagement. Based on the primary research objective, *secondary objectives were formulated and pursued in the study*

Specific objective 1: To determine: the relationship between ethical leadership and trust in the leader.

The literature suggests that a positive association exist between ethical leadership and trust in the leader. Various studies have provided empirical evidence for the positive relationship between *ethical leadership and trust* (in the leader and organisation) (Brown et al.,2015; Dadhich & Bhal, 2018; Javed, Rawwas, Khandai, Shahid & Tayyeb, 2018; Johnson et al., 2020; Kalshoven et al., 2018; Van den Akker et al., 2019). This means that managers that frequently demonstrate acts of humility, loyalty, virtue, generosity and forgiveness (character and integrity), for moral relevance in decision making that has a significant impact on others (ethical awareness), focus on serving the greater good by using their social power to serve a collective interest of the group instead of self (community/people orientation), intellectual and emotional commitment between leaders and follower's responsibility towards a common goal, inspired by the leader's vision, encourage and empower followers through strategies that contribute towards a sense of self-confidence and self-efficacy and setting standards and expectations of ethical conduct using rewards and punishment systems (managing ethical accountability). Resick *et al.* (2006:346-348) are more likely to foster a psychological state in which an employee accepts their vulnerability when they expect positive intentions of their leader Mo and Shi (2017:296). This finding concurs with previous empirical work (Brown et al., 2015; Dadhich & Bhal, 2018; Javed, Rawwas, Khandai, Shahid & Tayyeb, 2018; Johnson et al., 2020; Kalshoven et al., 2018; Van den Akker et al., 2019) that confirmed a positive relationship between ethical leadership and trust in the leader.

Specific objective 2: To determine: the relationship between ethical leadership and employee engagement (and its components).

The literature suggests that a positive association exist between ethical leadership and employee engagement (and its components). Various literature has strongly connected *ethical leadership to employee engagement* (Ahmad, & Gao, 2018; Avey et al., 2012; Blumenberg et al., 2019; Demirtas, 2015; Engelbrecht et al., 2017; Naeem, Weng, Hameed, & Rasheed, 2020; Sarwar, Ishaq, Amin, & Ahmed, 2020). The organisation's competitiveness, success and sustainability are driven by the employee's level of engagement (Engelbrecht et al., 2017:368). Therefore, it is paramount for organisations to identify contextual variables that foster work engagement. This means that an ethical work environment characterised by a people orientation (ethical leaders who have genuine concern for the well-being of employees), fairness (holding employees responsible for work that they have control over), power-sharing (allowing subordinates to have influence over critical decisions), concern for stability which ensures that employees feel safe in their work environment, ethical guidance (explains integrity-related codes of conduct), role clarification (clear expectations understood by all employees) and integrity (trusted to do things they saying) (Kalshoven *et al.* (2011) where employees can give their best will foster greater employees with high levels of energy and mental resilience while working, the willingness to invest effort in one's work, and persistence even in the face of difficulties, a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge and being fully concentrated and deeply engrossed in one's work, whereby time passes quickly, and one has difficulties with detaching oneself from work. Thus, making managers key enablers of engagement (Bhana & Suknunan, 2019:316). This finding is in line with several previous empirical studies (Ahmad, & Gao, 2018; Avey et al., 2012; Blumenberg et al., 2019; Demirtas, 2015; Engelbrecht et al., 2017; Naeem, Weng, Hameed, & Rasheed, 2020; Sarwar, Ishaq, Amin, & Ahmed, 2020; Engelbrecht et al., 2017) that confirmed the relationship between ethical leadership and employee engagement.

Specific objective 3: To determine: the relationship between trust in the leader and employee engagement (and its components).

The literature suggest that a positive association exist between employee engagement (and its components) trust in the leader. Various studies have confirmed the positive relationship between *trust and work engagement* (Chughtai & Buckley, 2011; Chughtai, Byrne, & Flood, 2015; Mone & London, 2010) and proposed that having a good degree of trust (in the organisation and leader) can result in increased work engagement. This means that employees are in a psychological state in which they accept their vulnerability when they expect the positive intentions of their leader. Mo and Shi (2017:296) further state that they are more likely to have high levels of energy and mental resilience

while working, increased willingness to invest effort in their work, persistence even in the face of difficulties. They also have higher levels of a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge and are fully concentrated and deeply engrossed in one's work, whereby time passes quickly. One has difficulties with detaching oneself from work. This finding is in line with previous empirical studies (Chughtai & Buckley, 2011; Chughtai, Byrne, & Flood, 2015; Mone & London, 2010) that confirmed the relationship between trust in the leader and employee engagement.

Specific objective 4: To determine if trust in the leader mediates the relationship between ethical leadership and work engagement (and its components).

The results also observed indirect effects were for various regressions using PROCESS. Unlike in other empirical studies (Chughtai, Byrne & Flood, 2015; Ilyas, Abid & Ashfaq, 2020; Zeng & Xu, 2019), this study could not confirm the mediating effect of trust (especially in the relationship between empirical leadership and work engagement, vigour, and absorption components). Only the findings of the analysis that considered the role of trust in the relationship between ethical leadership and dedication could confirm the mediating status of the trust.

3.2 LIMITATIONS

Due to the nature and scope of the study, certain limitations emerged. It is important to elaborate on these. The first limitation is linked to the sampling technique used in this study. The study was performed on a small convenience sample in selected organisations in South Africa. This means that the study's findings cannot be generalised to the whole of South African organisations. Another limitation was related to the fact that this study was using an online survey due to COVID-19 regulations. Online surveys are completed only by literate persons who have access to the internet and those who are sufficiently biased to be interested in the subject (Andrade, 2020). The third limitation was the predictive limitations of cross-sectional studies. Without longitudinal data, it is impossible to establish an actual cause and effect relationship (Solem, 2015).

3.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

3.3.1 Recommendations for the organisation

The current study also has considerable *implications for managers*, human resource development practitioners and policymakers in several ways. Firstly, the positive correlations obtained in our study

suggest that an ethical leadership style could contribute to increased trust of followers in their leaders, which, in turn, could assist leaders in making their employees more engaged. Thus, by hiring ethical leaders and training current leaders on the characteristics of an ethical leader, organisations will have more engaged employees hence achieving social sustainability (Ilyas, Abid & Ashfaq, 2020). Written tests, psychometric assessments, graphology, structured interviews (both situational and behavioural) to identify ethical traits in potential candidates focusing on integrity or honesty should be conducted beyond merely relying on basic background checks (Brody, 2010). Secondly, ethics training programs can be provided to inspire existing managers to provide ethical role models to their subordinates (Mayer *et al.*, 2009; Mayer *et al.*, 2012). In addition, organisations could activate moral identity in leaders and their subordinates through the use of cues in the social environment, such as posters, slogans, or material symbols that make moral constructs, such as ethical leadership, and concerns salient (Aquino *et al.*, 2009; Aquino & Freeman, 2009). It seems likely that being moral is central to many people's self-definition (Aquino & Reed, 2002), because most people want to view themselves as generally good (Taylor & Brown, 1988). Therefore, people should be motivated to uphold their moral identities to avoid feeling inauthentic (Skitka, 2002).

3.3.2 Recommendations for future studies

Based on the results of the study and the subsequent limitations that were highlighted, the following recommendations are made for future research.

- The data was obtained from a small convenience sample in a selection of organisations in South Africa. Future studies on the topic should consider larger samples obtained from various SOE in South Africa to increase the generalizability of the findings.
- Secondly, paper and pencil surveys during scheduled survey administration sessions because online survey findings are skewed by those who are sufficiently biased to be interested in the subject (Andrade, 2020). Translated versions of the survey in future studies could greatly assist those for whom English is not their first language (as is the case with the majority in South Africa).
- A third limitation is also related to the qualitative approach utilized in this study. In-depth interviews regarding the experiences of moral leadership, employee motivation and employee attitudes are recommended to share light on the experiences of those that cannot read and write.
- Longitudinal and or experimental designs should be considered to make it possible to establish an actual cause and effect relationship (Solem, 2015).

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Annexure A: Questionnaires

ETHICAL LEADERSHIP SCALE (ELS) QUESTIONNAIRE

E1. Shows a strong concern for ethical and moral values

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Moderately Disagree
3. Slightly Disagree
4. Slightly Agree
5. Moderately Agree
6. Strongly Agree

E2. Communicates clear ethical standards for members

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Moderately Disagree
3. Slightly Disagree
4. Slightly Agree
5. Moderately Agree
6. Strongly Agree

E3. Sets an example of ethical behaviour in his/her decisions and actions

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Moderately Disagree
3. Slightly Disagree
4. Slightly Agree
5. Moderately Agree
6. Strongly Agree

E4. Is honest and can be trusted to tell the truth.

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Moderately Disagree
3. Slightly Disagree
4. Slightly Agree
5. Moderately Agree
6. Strongly Agree

E5. Keeps his/her actions consistent with his/her stated values (“walks the talk”).

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Moderately Disagree
3. Slightly Disagree
4. Slightly Agree
5. Moderately Agree

6. Strongly Agree

E6. Fair and unbiased when assigning tasks to members.

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Moderately Disagree
3. Slightly Disagree
4. Slightly Agree
5. Moderately Agree
6. Strongly Agree

E7. Can be trusted to carry out promises and commitments.

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Moderately Disagree
3. Slightly Disagree
4. Slightly Agree
5. Moderately Agree
6. Strongly Agree

E8. Insists on doing what is fair and ethical even when it is not easy.

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Moderately Disagree
3. Slightly Disagree
4. Slightly Agree
5. Moderately Agree
6. Strongly Agree

E9. Acknowledges mistakes and takes responsibility for them.

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Moderately Disagree
3. Slightly Disagree
4. Slightly Agree
5. Moderately Agree
6. Strongly Agree

E10. Regards honesty and integrity as important personal values

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Moderately Disagree
3. Slightly Disagree
4. Slightly Agree
5. Moderately Agree
6. Strongly Agree

MANAGERIAL TRUSTWORTHY BEHAVIOUR SCALE QUESTIONNAIRE

T1. My superior cannot easily be influenced by pressures of the moment.

1. Disagree strongly
2. Disagree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Agree
5. Agree strongly

T2. My superior's behaviour gives stability to the team.

1. Disagree strongly
2. Disagree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Agree
5. Agree strongly

T3. My superior always tells the truth.

1. Disagree strongly
2. Disagree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Agree
5. Agree strongly

T4. My superior's behaviour is coherent with his/her values.

1. Disagree strongly
2. Disagree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Agree
5. Agree strongly

T5. My superior counts on me to make decisions.

1. Disagree strongly

2. Disagree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Agree
5. Agree strongly

T6. My superior gives autonomy to his/her people on their job.

1. Disagree strongly
2. Disagree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Agree
5. Agree strongly

T7. My superior listens to others' opinions.

1. Disagree strongly
2. Disagree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Agree
5. Agree strongly

T8. My superior is convincing when communicating his/her vision (of the themes).

1. Disagree strongly
2. Disagree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Agree
5. Agree strongly

T9. My superior stimulates and helps his/her subordinates to overcome their limitations and to attain their potential.

1. Disagree strongly
2. Disagree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Agree
5. Agree strongly

T10. My superior is concerned about others.

1. Disagree strongly
2. Disagree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Agree
5. Agree strongly

T11. The behaviour of my superior is unpredictable (R).

1. Disagree strongly
2. Disagree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Agree
5. Agree strongly

T12. My superior does not fulfil promises (R).

1. Disagree strongly
2. Disagree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Agree
5. Agree strongly

T13. I continuously feel controlled by my superior (R).

1. Disagree strongly
2. Disagree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Agree
5. Agree strongly

T14. My superior does not provide the necessary information in a timely fashion (R).

1. Disagree strongly
2. Disagree

3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Agree
5. Agree strongly

T15. My superior is not sensitive to what happens to his/her people (R).

1. Disagree strongly
2. Disagree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Agree
5. Agree strongly

E11. Sets an example of dedication and self-sacrifice for the organisation.

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Moderately Disagree
3. Slightly Disagree
4. Slightly Agree
5. Moderately Agree
6. Strongly Agree

E12. Opposes the use of unethical practices to increase performance.

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Moderately Disagree
3. Slightly Disagree
4. Slightly Agree
5. Moderately Agree
6. Strongly Agree

E13. Is fair and objective when evaluating member performance and providing rewards

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Moderately Disagree
3. Slightly Disagree
4. Slightly Agree
5. Moderately Agree
6. Strongly Agree

E14. Puts the needs of others above his/her own self-interest.

1. Strongly Disagree

2. Moderately Disagree
3. Slightly Disagree
4. Slightly Agree
5. Moderately Agree
6. Strongly Agree

E15. Holds members accountable for using ethical practices in their work.

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Moderately Disagree
3. Slightly Disagree
4. Slightly Agree
5. Moderately Agree
6. Strongly Agree

UTRECHT WORK ENGAGEMENT SCALE (UWES) QUESTIONNAIRE

WE1. At my work, I feel bursting with energy

1. Never
2. A few times a year or less
3. Once a month or less
4. A few times a month
5. Once a week
6. A few times a week
7. Every day

WE2. I find the work that I do full of meaning and purpose

1. Never
2. A few times a year or less
3. Once a month or less
4. A few times a month
5. Once a week
6. A few times a week
7. Every day

WE3. Time flies when I'm working

1. Never
2. A few times a year or less
3. Once a month or less
4. A few times a month
5. Once a week
6. A few times a week
7. Every day

WE4. At my job, I feel strong and vigorous

1. Never
2. A few times a year or less
3. Once a month or less
4. A few times a month
5. Once a week
6. A few times a week
7. Every day

WE5. I am enthusiastic about my job

1. Never
2. A few times a year or less
3. Once a month or less
4. A few times a month
5. Once a week
6. A few times a week
7. Every day

WE6. When I am working, I forget everything else around me

1. Never
2. A few times a year or less

3. Once a month or less
4. A few times a month
5. Once a week
6. A few times a week
7. Every day

WE7. My job inspires me

1. Never
2. A few times a year or less
3. Once a month or less
4. A few times a month
5. Once a week
6. A few times a week
7. Every day

WE8. When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work

1. Never
2. A few times a year or less
3. Once a month or less
4. A few times a month
5. Once a week
6. A few times a week
7. Every day

WE9. I feel happy when I am working intensely

1. Never
2. A few times a year or less
3. Once a month or less
4. A few times a month
5. Once a week
6. A few times a week
7. Every day

WE10. I am proud on the work that I do

1. Never
2. A few times a year or less
3. Once a month or less
4. A few times a month
5. Once a week
6. A few times a week
7. Every day

WE11. I am immersed in my work

1. Never
2. A few times a year or less
3. Once a month or less
4. A few times a month
5. Once a week
6. A few times a week
7. Every day

WE12. I can continue working for very long periods at a time

1. Never
2. A few times a year or less
3. Once a month or less
4. A few times a month
5. Once a week
6. A few times a week
7. Every day

WE13. To me, my job is challenging

1. Never
2. A few times a year or less
3. Once a month or less
4. A few times a month
5. Once a week
6. A few times a week
7. Every day

WE14. I get carried away when I'm working

1. Never
2. A few times a year or less
3. Once a month or less
4. A few times a month
5. Once a week
6. A few times a week
7. Every day

WE15. At my job, I am very resilient, mentally

1. Never
2. A few times a year or less
3. Once a month or less
4. A few times a month
5. Once a week
6. A few times a week
7. Every day

WE16. It is difficult to detach myself from my job

1. Never
2. A few times a year or less
3. Once a month or less
4. A few times a month
5. Once a week
6. A few times a week
7. Every day

WE17. At my work I always persevere, even when things do not go well

1. Never
2. A few times a year or less
3. Once a month or less
4. A few times a month
5. Once a week

6. A few times a week
7. Every day