

## **Revision of Ethical Leadership Scale**

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Ethical leadership is about having the personal characteristics, behaviours, decision making attitudes that are centred on morality and moral management of others, in an organization. This study was focused on revising and validating the Ethical Leadership Scale (Brown et al., 2005) to improve the theoretical representation of ethical leadership. The revision of the scale was carried out in the context of educational institutions. The two factors of the moral person  $\alpha = 0.88$  and moral manager  $\alpha = 0.88$  demonstrated adequate reliability and validity. Psychometric properties were established using Principal Component Analysis, which demonstrated that the Revised Ethical Leadership Scale (ELS-R) is a reliable and valid measure to study ethical leadership.

**Keywords:** *ethical leadership, employees ethical behaviour, moral manager, moral person, educational institutions*

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### **Introduction**

Recent failures of educational ethical leadership have highlighted the issue of moral leadership in educational institutions (Hammersley-Fletcher, 2015).

Organizational culture and leadership, which are macro-level characteristics of an organization affect the decision-making of employees at the micro level (Jones & Ryan, 1998). Different work pressures in the educational context increase the importance of leadership (Colnerud, 2015). In organizations, leaders serve as guides and have the authority, which transforms into expectations and demand for compliance from employees. Primary and secondary educational institutions are the first places,

where a child learns about the world and learn how to live in the world (Bowen, 2018) and the educational institutions contextualize students' understanding about the world. How then moral leadership is practised, and how employees and teachers in these institutions perceive it, is important to understand. It has been found that leadership exerts a considerable influence on the behaviour of employees and that leader stand as a role model for desired behaviour (Jordan, Brown, Treviño, & Finkelstein, 2013; Wilson, 2014). Not only that, but leaders also build a control mechanism to standardize employees' behaviour through organizational rewards and punishment, where rewards are distributed to conforming employees and punishments to the ones,

who violates organizational norms of behaviour. The power and authority of the leader are enhanced through the indirect control over the resources, such as organizational goals, employee performance, work strategies, behavioural and performance appraisals, bonuses, vacations and promotions, which affects the well-being of employees (Brown & Mitchell, 2010). In this scenario, leaders are the one employees look up to when moral issues arise in the organization (Trevino, 1986). Schminke, Wells, Peyreffite, and Sehora (2002) found that employees align their activities with the values of the leader.

Educational leaders face unique challenges particularly of ethical nature (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016). To meet the challenges both inside and outside the organization, ethical leadership style is forwarded (cf. Brown, Treviño, & Harrison 2005; Kanungo & Mendonca, 2001). Various studies found that ethical leaders lead to positive outcomes in the organization such as organizational citizenship behavior, perception of leader's effectiveness and trust (De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2009; Kalshoven, 2010; Kalshoven, Den Hartog, & De Hoogh, 2011a; Mayer, Aquino, Greenbaum, & Kuenzi, 2012; Piccolo, Greenbaum, Hartog, & Folger, 2010). Ethical leadership in

educational institutions is found to create trust and leads to value development (Brooks & Normore, 2018). In the context of schools, there are multiple pressures on principals and teachers in educational institutions. Teachers simultaneously deal with multiple and varied assignments and as their performance, and thus well-being is measured through uncontrollable factors such as student performance, the chances of ethical failures increase. In this context, how employees (teachers) perceive the morality of their principal becomes important. For this reason, this study measures how ethical leadership is perceived in educational institutions and it also aims to improve the theoretical representation of ethical leadership in Ethical Leadership Scale. The next section discusses ethical leadership and its formalization into Ethical Leadership Scale (ELS). Later, both the qualitative and quantitative methods are presented, which were used to revise the ELS. After the establishment of psychometric properties of the Revised Ethical Leadership Scale (ELS-R), the discussion has been carried out leading to the implication as well as limitations of the study.

### **Ethical Leadership**

Ethical leadership is

*“the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement and decision-making” (Brown et al., 2005, p. 120).*

There are two components of ethical leadership. One component is a moral person and the other is a moral manager. The component of a moral person is built on fairness, honesty, care, trust, and solid ethical principles (Brown & Treviño, 2006). These leaders are within the reach of employees, and they actively listen to raised concerns and identified problems in the organization (Brown & Mitchell, 2010). Moral person component also places a high value on personal morality. While, moral manager influences through intentional role modelling of ethical behaviours and through establishing accountability by attaching employees' ethical behaviour to the organizational performance management system, and thus to rewards and punishment (Brown & Treviño, 2006). Thus, ethical leadership builds upon the strength of both

moral person and moral manager (Treviño, Brown, & Hartman, 2003; Treviño, Hartman, & Brown, 2000). Since its inception, ethical leadership has stirred a considerable amount of attention. Besides, its similarity with the transformational (Bass, 1999), authentic (Luthans & Avolio, 2003) and spiritual (Fry, 2003) leadership, it stood differently. This distinction of ethical leadership is based on “moral manager” component. None of the other leadership styles highlights the transactional nature of moral leadership except ethical leadership (cf. Brown & Treviño, 2006). This makes ethical leadership, distinctive from other leadership styles. As school principals emphasize the moral management of teachers through setting behavioural standards and as performance evaluation of the teachers are based on compliance, schools become a relevant context to measure the perception of ethical leadership.

### **Formalization of Ethical Leadership**

ELS was developed by Brown et al. (2005) to measure perception of Ethical leadership in the organization. Ethical leadership is based on Social Learning Theory (Bandura & McClelland, 1977), which emphasizes the role of modelling and reinforcement of behaviour through rewards and punishment. ELS is found to be

deficient in representing the construct of ethical leadership (Kalshoven, Den Hartog, & De Hoogh, 2011b). Yukl, Mahsud, Hassan, and Prussia (2013) argued that it is important to know the construct domain of ethical leadership and to measure it appropriately. The characteristics of ethical leadership are centred on fairness, honesty, trustworthiness, communication of ethical standards, principled decision-making, and distribution of rewards, being kind and showing compassion towards others; but, it has been noted that the Ethical Leadership Scale does not measure the relevant qualities and behaviours of ethical leadership explicitly, which includes alignment of values and behaviours of ethical leaders, honest communication, and distribution of rewards and punishment using organizational tools (Yukl et al., 2013). Our study recognizes the need for building a more representative scale of ethical leadership style. Thus, it builds on the Ethical Leadership Scale (Brown et al., 2005) and attends to the deficiencies of Ethical Leadership Scale by adding the missing qualities and behaviours of ethical leaders in Ethical Leadership Scale. The

revised scale leads to a measurement of the perception of ethical leadership in a more nuanced way and is more representative of the ethical leadership construct. In Ethical Leadership Scale (Brown et al., 2005), the component of moral manager is not measured accurately as what is highlighted as the most powerful tool of moral manager that is organizational rewards and punishment, is not measured through ELS. To correct this discrepancy, few items have been added to the ELS about an ethical leader who uses organizational rewards and punishment at the same time highlighting the difference between tangible and intangible rewards. This leads to a truer representation of moral manager component.

### **Method**

To revise ELS, we (a) generated items through reviewing the relevant literature and using deductive approach (b) established and asked the panel of judges (business ethics scholars) for the qualitative review of the scale (cf. Lawshe, 1975; McKenzie, Wood, Kotecki, Clark, & Brey, 1999) and (c) gathered empirical evidence to demonstrate psychometric properties of scale.

*Revised Ethical Leadership Scale*

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1. Listens to what employees have to say.
  2. Disciplines employees who violate ethical standards.
  3. Conducts his/her personal life in an ethical manner.
  4. Has the best interests of employees in mind.
  5. Makes fair and balanced decisions.
  6. Cannot be trusted.
  7. Discusses business ethics or values with employees.
  8. Sets an example of how to do things the right way in terms of ethics.
  9. Defines success not just by results but also the way that they are obtained.
  10. When making decisions, asks “what is the right thing to do?”
  11. Makes sure that employees are promoted in the organization because they show ethical behaviour.
  12. Acknowledges ethically valued behaviour of employees.
  13. Provides rewards to employees for ethically good behaviour.
  14. His/her decisions have a positive influence on the well-being of the organization and other stakeholders.
  15. Reprimands employees who show ethically flawed behaviour.
  16. The observation of his/her ethical behaviours inspires employees to resolve ethical problems in principled ways.
  17. His/her actions reflect his/her moral beliefs.
  18. Employees find it difficult to solve ethical problems when the leader is away.
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**Step 1: Qualitative Content Validation**

First, to revise ELS, relevant articles and research studies are reviewed from relevant journals, books, doctoral thesis (Unpublished and published), and through this process, ten more items were added to the ELS. The revised ELS was sent to four jurors asking for a qualitative review. Jury members helped us by reviewing the twenty items of the scale and by suggesting any addition, deletion and rephrasing of the items. The items were measured on Likert type scale where 1 represents strong

disagreement and 6 represents strong agreement. The aim of the review was to find consensus among the jurors, which is indicated through percentage. In the end, the scale was adjusted in light of the qualitative review. Then the updated draft of the revised scale was again sent to the jurors to identify any potential problem. After receiving the response, the revised scale was again adjusted for the identified problems (see Table 1). Two of the four jurors agreed that question no. 17 and 18 are problematic and may threaten the content validity of the scale. The percentage of agreement on these items was 50%. For this reason, these items (17 & 18) were dropped from the ELS-R.

One juror asked to rephrase question no. 20. Three jurors asked to rephrase question no. 15 and one juror asked to rephrase question no. 16. Jurors were sent the revised scale one last time to make sure that they agree to all the changes. Again, one juror asked to rephrase the item no. 20. After taking care of these concerns, 8 items have been added to the scale.

### **Step 2: Empirical Evaluation**

For empirical evaluation, the revised scale was subjected to statistical analysis to check how they reflect the two factors of the moral person and moral manager. Following steps were used to establish the psychometric properties of ELS-R.

### **Sample**

A sample of 176 teachers was drawn from twenty-five for-profit schools, in the city of Islamabad. In the sample, one hundred and sixteen (116) teachers were female and eighteen (18) were male. Sixty-three (63) participants were either equal to or younger than twenty-six (26) years, sixty-one (61) were between the ages of twenty-six (26) and thirty-three (33), and fifty-two (52) were either equal to thirty-four (34) years in age or above it. Forty-four (44) participants were teaching at secondary level, ninety-five (95) were teaching at primary level and thirty-seven (37) were teaching at elementary level. One

hundred and sixteen (116) participants had a Master's degree, fifty-three (53) hold a Bachelor's degree, five (5) completed MS or MPhil program and two (2) had intermediate certificates. ELS-R was distributed to the teachers in the multiple schools in the Islamabad. Teachers were asked to report the degree to which they agree or disagree with the characteristics and behaviours mentioned in the ELS-R. It was communicated to them that the data they provide will remain confidential. Teachers returned the filled questionnaire to the researcher.

### **Construct Validity**

Prior to performing Principal Component Analysis (PCA) the suitability of data for factor analysis was assessed. Inspection of the correlation matrix revealed the presence of many coefficients of 0.3 and above. The Kaiser-Meyer-Okin value 0.93, exceeding the recommended value of 0.6 (Kaiser, 1970, 1974) and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (Bartlett, 1954) reached statistical significance, supporting the factorability of the correlation matrix. PCA with varimax rotation was conducted to study the factor structure of the ELS-R. It provided the factor solution containing two factors (see Figure 1). Factor I: Moral Person (MP) and Factor II: Moral Manager (MM) (See Fig.

1). Both factors showed strong loadings above 0.4 and Eigenvalues greater than 1. 60.13% variance was explained through a two-component solution. Component-1 explained 32.01 % variance and component-

2 explained 28.12 % variance. All items belonged to their relevant components and demonstrated consistency with the prior research on ethical leadership style (See Table 2).

Table 1

*Experts' Agreement on Items added to Ethical Leadership Scale*

Question no.	Qualitative Review	Expert 1	Expert 2	Expert 3	Expert 4	Percentage of Agreement with Item
11	Makes sure that employees are promoted in the organization because they show ethical behaviour	Y	Y	Y	Y	100
12	Acknowledges ethically valued behaviour of employees	Y	Y	Y	Y	100
13	Provides rewards to employees for ethically good behaviour	Y	Y	Y	Y	100
14	His/her decision has a positive impact on the organization and other stakeholders	Y	Y	Y	Y	100
15	Lashes out at employees who show ethically flawed behaviour, immediately	N	Y	Y	N	50
16	The observation of his/her ethical behaviours inspires employees towards the resolution of ethical dilemmas in new and meaningful ways	Y	Y	N	Y	75
17	Treats employees with dignity and values worthy suggestions	Y	N	N	Y	50
18	Gives employees the freedom to choose their own course of action in ethical terms	N	Y	Y	N	50
19	His/her actions reflects his/her moral beliefs	Y	Y	Y	Y	100
20	His/her absence leaves employees confused in times of moral dilemmas	Y	Y	Y	Y	100

Table 2

*Rotated Factor Pattern (Revised ELS)*

Items	Description	Moral Manager Component	Moral Person Component
REL1	Listens to what employees have to say		.576
REL2	Disciplines employees who violate ethical standards		.522
REL3	Conducts his/her personal life in an ethical manner.		.530
REL4	Has the best interests of employees in mind		.610
REL5	Makes fair and balanced decisions		.690
REL6	Cannot be trusted.	.312	
REL7	Discusses business ethics or values with employees		.756
REL8	Sets an example of how to do things the right way in terms of ethics		.725
REL9	Defines success not just by results but also the way that they are obtained		.783
REL10	When making decisions, asks “what is the right thing to do?”		.610
REL11	Makes sure that employees are promoted in the organization because they show ethical behaviour	.788	
REL12	Acknowledges ethically valued behaviour of employees.	.624	
REL13	Provides rewards to employees for ethically good behaviour	.707	
REL14	His/her decisions have a positive influence on the well-being of the organization and other stakeholders	.645	
REL15	Reprimands employees who show ethically flawed behaviour.	.629	
REL16	The observation of his/her ethical behaviours inspires employees to resolve ethical problems in principled ways.	.722	
REL17	His/her actions reflect his/her moral beliefs.	.551	
REL18	Employees find it difficult to solve ethical problems when the leader is away.	-.615	
Eigen Values		5.44	4.78
% Variance		32.01	28.12
Cum. %		32.01	60.13

**Reliability**

The reliability of the ELS-R was found to be  $\alpha = 0.90$ . The reliability of both components was; Moral Person  $\alpha = 0.88$  and Moral Manager  $\alpha = 0.76$ . Reliability test suggested that the removal of the item “*Employees find it difficult to solve ethical*

*problems when the leader is away*” would add to the reliability of moral manager component and would increase  $\alpha$  to 0.88. Following the suggestion, this item was deleted. Afterwards, the reliability of the ELS-R was again checked and was found to be  $\alpha = 0.93$ .

### Inter-correlations

After factor analysis and reliability check, 17 items were retained. Moral Person (9 items) and Moral Manager (8 items). Intercorrelation analysis was carried out by calculating item-correlation on ELS-R in order to check the internal consistency of items. It was found that Moral Person ( $r = 0.62$ ,  $\rho < 0.01$ ) and Moral Manager ( $r = 0.69$ ,  $\rho < 0.01$ ) were strongly correlated with the total scale and with each other ( $r = 0.80$ ,  $\rho < 0.01$ ).

### Initial Cut-off Scores

The scoring procedure of ELS-R was devised employing cautious analysis of percentiles of the specified sample. The range of scores on ELS-R was 14-102. The analysis of percentile showed that 76 corresponded to the 25<sup>th</sup> percentile, 85 corresponded to 50<sup>th</sup> percentile and 93 corresponded to the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile. The criterion of 1 standard deviation above and below the mean was taken to show ethically neutral, weak, moderate and stronger perceptions of ethical leadership. One-way ANOVA was used to find the difference in ethical leader perception among the four groups. The test revealed that the four groups were significantly different from each other,  $F(3, 172) = 339$ ,  $p < 0.0005$ .

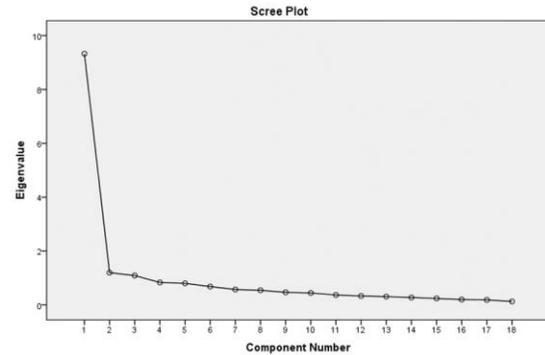


Figure 1: Scree Plot of Revised Ethical Leadership Factors

### Discussion

The objective of this study was to revise the Ethical Leadership Scale. There was a need to revise the original Ethical Leadership Scale (Brown, 2005), in order to make it more reflective of the ethical leadership construct. This revision was needed to study the effect of ethical leaders on employees in the organization. The ELS-R has demonstrated adequate reliability and validity. Both the components of the scale (moral person, moral manager) and the complete scale showed high reliability.

There are other measures of ethical leadership (Kalshoven et al., 2011b; Yukl et al., 2013), but none focuses on the particular ethical leadership construct (c.f. Brown et al., 2005; Treviño et al., 2000), despite the understanding of its shortcoming (Eisenbeiss, 2012; Yukl et al., 2013). The ELS-R is thus a more reliable and valid scale of ethical leadership. This scale can be

used to assess and measure the perceptions of ethical leaders in organizations and educational institutions, which may point toward important employee outcomes. Previously, it is found that ethical leadership leads to important outcomes in educational institutions. It is found that ethical leadership can lead to increased impression management in educational institutions (Khan & Javed, 2018). It is also found that educational ethical leadership focuses on the best interests of the students (Stefkovich & Begley, 2007). In addition, there are multiple studies on ethical leadership in an organizational context that found the relationship between ethical leadership, employee ethical behavior inclusive of both positive and negative outcomes (Mo & Shi, 2017; Quade, Perry, & Hunter, 2017; Schwepker Jr, Ingram, Johnston, & Johnston, 2016; Walumbwa, Hartnell, & Misati, 2017; Xu, Loi, & Ngo, 2016). It should be tested whether similar results can be obtained using the revised scale of ethical leadership. Organizations are social units and people spent a great amount of time at their jobs. The research on how ethical leadership style affects employees in the organization, which is found to be an important leadership style based on morality in the organization will lead to greater

understanding of employees in the organization including educational institutions, and people in general. Shapiro and Stefkovich (2016) asked to develop a greater understanding of ethical leadership in educational institutions.

### **Limitations and Suggestions**

The study was focused on the educational sector and particularly on private for-profit schoolteachers. This delimits the generalizability of the study. The sample comprised of private for-profit schoolteachers, thus it captures the perception of those teachers of their immediate supervisors. This asks for validation of the ELS-R in another context and with a larger sample to establish its robustness and usefulness, in both educational and another organizational context. Psychometric strengths demonstrated the scale could be used in future researchers related to leadership and individual outcomes. The ELS-R can be useful to study managers, administrators, leaders, employees and followers in different contexts.

### **Implications of the Study**

Ethical Leadership Scale (Brown et al., 2005) has been used in numerous studies (e.g., Brown & Mitchell, 2010; Brown & Treviño, 2006; Brown et al., 2005; Hoch,

Bommer, Dulebohn, & Wu, 2018; Ko, Ma, Bartnik, Haney, & Kang, 2017; Mayer, Kuenzi, Greenbaum, Bardes, & Salvador, 2009; Mo & Shi, 2017; Piccolo et al., 2010; Walumbwa et al., 2017; Yukl et al., 2013), and it is said to be most used scale to capture ethical leadership perception in social sciences (Eisenbeiss, 2012). A revised scale is more representative of this construct and will be more effective in capturing the perception of leadership. This will lead to the identification of the important relationship between employment outcomes and behaviours, and ethical leadership. The revision of Ethical Leadership Scale, thus enriches and facilitates the empirical testing of Ethical leadership, and adds to the understanding of ethical leadership.

### **Conclusion**

The reason to revise ethical leadership was to make it more representative of the ethical leadership style. The revised scale is conceptually grounded in ethical leadership construct, which is based on social learning theory and social exchange theory. At the same time, it surpasses the limits of the previous scale of ethical leadership and presents a scale that captures the perception of ethical leadership with more accuracy. The previous scale of ELS has been criticized for the absence of theoretically

highlighted characteristics and behaviours of leaders. This revised scale captured the missing elements of ethical leadership construct.

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