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Ethical leadership: through the eyes of employees

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Chapter 6

Discussion

Abstract

The present dissertation examined ethical leader behavior and its antecedents, follower outcomes and the context in which these leaders function. Ethical leadership can be seen as a separate leadership style and may be measured as multi-dimensional or as an overall construct consisting of several different, yet related behaviors. Leader personality is an antecedent of these leader behaviors, however relationships are not strong. Furthermore, ethical leadership is positively related to follower attitudes as well as different affiliative and challenging citizenship behaviors. The strength of these relationships fluctuates depending on the context. The research findings may have some important implications for organizations and leaders who want to operate with integrity. However, future research is needed to further substantiate the findings that are reported on in this dissertation.

Introduction

The current dissertation presented several studies on ethical leadership. These studies investigated antecedents, consequences and context of ethical leadership and a questionnaire was developed for measuring ethical leader behaviors. The tested hypotheses in the studies were based on two guiding theories in this research field, the social learning and the social exchange theory. In this chapter, the results of the separate research chapters are combined and summarized. The first paragraph will describe the concept of ethical leadership by discussing the measurement of ethical leadership and its links with other leadership styles. After that, ethical leadership and its influence on follower behaviors and the role of context will be addressed. Then, the direction and guidance of the social learning and the social exchange theories will be discussed. The general strengths and weaknesses of the research presented in this dissertation together with recommendations for future research will be described. Finally, some practical implications will be presented.

The Concept of Ethical Leadership

Measuring Ethical Leadership

The Ethical Leadership Scale (ELS) is the most often used uni-dimensional questionnaire to measure ethical leadership. In chapter 2 and 3 this scale was used to measure ethical leadership. Several items of this measure are somewhat problematic. Respondents in our studies experienced difficulties answering the following item: "my leader conducts his/her personal life in an ethical manner". Particularly, respondents argue that they are not familiar with what their leader is doing in his/her personal life. Walumbwa and Schaubroeck (2009) address similar problems and did not include this item in the mean score of the ethical leadership measure. Another item "my leader can be trusted" is likely to measure trust in the leader, which seems to be a proximal outcome of leader behavior rather than being a part of ethical leader behavior. Although ethical leadership and trust are highly related, they are separate constructs and should ideally be measured as such.

A new questionnaire was developed to cover a broader range of behaviors based on the theoretical work of Brown and Treviño. In contrast to the ELS, the Ethical Leadership at Work (ELW) questionnaire aims to measure a wider range of ethical leader behaviors.

Several behaviors that seem important for ethical leadership are not included in the ELS. Results in chapter 2 showed that the ELW explains variance above the ELS in trust, employee and leader effectiveness and OCB. The empirical tests have demonstrated the ELW measure to be reliable and valid in terms of convergent, divergent and criterion validity.

The ELW was supported to measure seven dimensions of ethical leadership. Also, the second-order factor structure was stable and dominant across all studies conducted in this dissertation. That means that ethical leadership may be measured as an overall construct or as separate leader behaviors. Subsequent exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses with employees from diverse occupations and organizations provide evidence for the high internal reliability and dimensionality of the ELW scale. Different ELW dimensions contributed differently to the explanation of variance in outcome variables (see chapter 2, appendix 2 and 3). Furthermore, more support for the dimensionality of the ELW was found in chapter 3 where leader personality traits differently related to the ethical leader dimensions.

The ELW measure is in need of more development as validation is an ongoing process. The results in chapter 2 showed that the seven factor solution defined a priori and the second-order factor solution fitted the data best. One direction for future research, however, may be to combine several dimensions to make it statistically and theoretically manageable to use the dimensions. A suggestion would be to combine the behaviors into three core dimensions for example focusing on people, task and environment. The concern for sustainability is an environmental component. The people-orientation, fairness, and power sharing would best fit into a people component. Finally, role clarification, ethical guidance and integrity would most likely fit into a task component. However, this way of clustering the ethical leader behaviors shows overlap with previous leadership theories and makes it harder to distinguish ethical leadership from already existing leader behaviors.

For example, early research on leadership behaviors focused on task-oriented (directive), people-oriented (participative) and relationship-oriented leadership. Others focused on the dichotomy of consideration and initiating structure. Judge, Piccolo, and Ilies (2004) called initiating structure and consideration the “forgotten ones” of empirical leadership research since 1987. Their meta-analysis found significant relationships between initiating

structure and follower and group-organization performance. In addition, they found that consideration was related to follower satisfaction, motivation and leader effectiveness. A leader behavior of initiating structure defines, directs, and structures the roles and activities of subordinates toward attainment of the team's goals (Bass, 1990; House & Aditya, 1997; Yukl, 2006). Considerate leaders are skilled at sensing and subsequently satisfying the needs of followers. Transformational leadership is seen as an advance over the consideration and initiative structure leader behaviors (Judge et al., 2004). Bass argues that transformational and transactional leaders can exhibit task- and people-oriented behaviors. In line with this, ethical leaders are likely to show ethics via people or task oriented behavior.

To conclude, the measurement of dimensions of ethical leadership is a prominent theme in this dissertation. A valid instrument has been developed that may be used in future research focusing on specific ethical leader behaviors or research focusing on overall ethical leadership. However, it seems a paradox between measuring ethical leadership that requires smaller amount of dimensions and items and yielding a complete picture of all ethical leadership behaviors that requires multiple dimensions and items. This paradox did not reach a solution yet. An overall ethical leadership variable is usually better manageable in research. However, using an overall ethical leadership variable does not provide information on antecedents and outcomes of the different ethical leader behaviors. Depending on the research question, both approaches may be used.

As discussed in chapter 2, the concern for society items did not cluster into a factor and this dimension needs more refinement. In doing so, the data gathered in chapter 4 included new developed items measuring concern for society based on the suggested items in the discussion of chapter 2 of this dissertation. Thus, four items measuring concern for society were included in the data. A principal component factor analysis was performed with Oblimin rotation on the 38 ELW items plus four new developed ethical leadership items (i.e., 42 items). Eight factors explained a total of 67 % of the variance. A less well interpretable solution was the seven factor solution trying to combine the concern for society and sustainability items into one factor. To confirm these findings several confirmatory factor analyses were performed. An eight factor solution fitted the data best $\chi^2 (df = 712, N = 208) = 1091.75$, $p < .01$, CFI = .98; NNFI = .98, RMSEA = .05, SRMR = .06 (cf. Hu & Bentler, 1999). Also,

the second-order factor analysis, in which the individual items were modeled as indicators of their underlying dimensions (fairness, integrity, people orientation, power sharing, role clarification, ethical guidance, concern for sustainability and concern for society), which in turn were modeled as indicators of an overarching latent ethical leadership variable, had a good fit to the data, $\chi^2 (df = 732, N = 208) = 1167.57, p < .01, CFI = .98; NNFI = .97, RMSEA = .054, SRMR = .068$. These results support including concern for society as a factor of ethical leadership in the ELW.

Furthermore, for practical reasons, many studies may want to use fewer items to measure ethical leadership. Prudence suggests that all facets of the ELW need to be represented in short versions of the questionnaire. An idea would be to take the three items with the highest factor loading per facet. This would result in 21 items in stead of 38 ones. To illustrate, based on the employee data from study 2 in chapter 3 a CFA was performed. A second-order CFA, in which three individual items were modeled as indicators of their underlying dimensions (fairness, integrity, people orientation, power sharing, role clarification, ethical guidance, concern for sustainability), which in turn were modeled as indicators of an overarching latent ethical leadership construct showed a good fit, χ^2 -second order ($df = 182, N = 290) = 325.60, p < .01, CFI = .97; NNFI = .97, RMSEA = .05, SRMR = .069$. Conceivable alternative models with fewer factors (e.g., a one factor model) did not fit the data. The use of this shorter version is also possible to use as a measure of ethical leadership.

Ethical leadership is measured through the eyes of the followers. For many research questions, follower perceptions of ethical leader behavior may be sufficient. However, in some cases the behavior of a leader may be ethical in the eyes of one but not another stakeholder. In this dissertation only the perspective of followers is taken into account (cf., Brown et al., 2005). So far, potential other stakeholders such as customers or stockholders have been ignored in the ethical leadership research field. Being perceived as an ethical leader by employees does not automatically mean that the leader is also ethical to others. Different stakeholders may have conflicting interests. For instance, in times of financial crisis, a leader may be forced to fire some employees to ensure the survival of the organization and thus be ethical to other employees and the organization itself. However, ethical leaders are people-oriented and genuinely care about, respect and support others and where

possible ensure needs are met. Therefore such leaders are likely to be able to see the interest of various stakeholder groups. Ethical leaders will likely value meeting the needs of other stakeholders within the firm and society and protecting the sustainable environment. Thus, the ethical leadership concept may be enriched if its possibilities were stretched to include the perceptions of different stakeholders, rather than only focusing on the perception of employees.

Ethical Leadership and Other Leadership Styles

As described in the introduction section early research on ethics and leadership first received attention in Burns' transforming (and later also the transformational) leadership style. Other leadership styles, such as transactional, authentic or servant leadership are also seen as styles containing an ethical component. Previous studies found that authentic and transformational leadership are related to ethical leadership, however distinguishable (Brown et al., 2005; Walumbwa et al., 2008). In this dissertation, we found ethical leadership to be related to, yet distinct from, transformational and transactional leadership (see chapter 2). The distinctiveness between ethical leadership and other leadership styles was also shown by regression results. In chapter 4, ethical leadership explained follower behaviors after controlling for transformational leadership. Additionally, in chapter 3 the results showed that after controlling for Leader-Member exchange, personality still explained variance in ethical leadership. In conclusion, it seems that ethical leadership is different enough from other leadership styles to be seen as a separate style. That means a focus shift from ethics in other leadership styles to ethical leadership as a separate style is worthwhile for those interested in ethical leader behavior.

There is also a modest amount of research or theoretical work on the relationship between ethical and unethical leadership. Researchers in the transformational leadership field theoretically differentiate between ethical and unethical leadership (cf., pseudo- and authentic transformational leadership; e.g., Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999). In the area of leadership, positive scholars focus on servant, authentic and ethical leadership. Simultaneously, a rather separate body of literature focusing on the dark side of leadership, such as abusive supervision, bullying and unethical leader behaviors is emerging (see e.g., Ashforth,

1994; Beu & Buckley, 2004; Bies, 2000; Howell, 1988; Tepper, 2000). However, so far, the bodies of work on ethical and unethical leadership are developing separately. None of the researchers have mentioned how the positive and negative ethical poles are related. In this dissertation the focus is on the positive rather than the negative side of ethics in leadership. Various unethical leader behaviors, such as destructive and abusive leadership, have been suggested to be disastrous for organizations and their members (e.g., Harris, Kacmar & Zivnuska, 2007; Padilla, Hogan, & Kaiser, 2007). These forms of unethical leadership describe destructive behaviors towards subordinates, such as intimidation, belittling, manipulation and bullying.

Despite the proclaimed relevance, integration of this emerging body of work on ethical and unethical leader behaviors has lagged, with few exceptions. For example, De Hoogh and Den Hartog (2008) found that destructive and ethical leadership were moderately negative correlated ($r = -.56$; $p < .01$). Results in this dissertation show that passive leadership (i.e., laissez-faire and management by exception; Bass, 1985) and ethical leadership are negatively related ($r = -.40$). Einarsen, Aasland and Skogstad (2007) stress that passive leadership is a form of unethical behavior as passive leaders violate the legitimate involvement in the organization, as they waste time, are not motivated and fail to support or guide their followers. Although ethical and unethical leader behaviors have been found negatively correlated (e.g., De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008), construing these constructs as opposites seems premature as only few studies include both types of leader behaviors simultaneously. A similar discussion has been directed at the relationship between transformational and transactional leadership. Burns (1978) considered these two types as the opposite ends of a continuum. Yet later, transactional and transformational leadership were seen as two separate dimensions (e.g., Bass, 1985). This means that a leader can act both transactional and transformational. In this line, is it possible for a leader to act ethical and unethical at the same time? Future research needs to facilitate in formulating an answer.

Furthermore, there is some synergy among theories in explaining how ethical and unethical leadership have an impact on followers. For example, the reciprocity orientation from the social exchange theory is used to explain both ethical and unethical leadership processes (e.g., Mayer et al., 2009; Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007). Employees will react

negatively to the negative treatment and positively to the positive treatment of the leader. However, there are also differences among used theories to explain the effect of unethical and ethical leader behavior. In conclusion, based on the definitions, correlations and the theories used in both the ethical and unethical stream of leadership research, we would argue that there is some overlap between these constructs. Although unethical leadership is negative and ethical leadership is positive leader behavior, the stream of research is too premature to draw conclusions on the relationship between ethical and unethical leadership. Future research needs to establish whether ethical leadership behavior is the conceptual pole opposite of unethical leader behavior or conceptual distinct.

Individual and Group Perceptions of Ethical Leadership

Levels of analysis are important in leadership research. This dissertation showed that both individual as well as group perceptions of ethical leadership are important in understanding the consequences of ethical leadership. In chapter 4 the data were analyzed using multi-level procedures and results showed that both individual and group perceptions of ethical leadership were needed to explain most variance. Consistent with the view that employees form a general belief regarding the ethical behavior of their leader, the results showed that employees have a consistent pattern of agreement with statements concerning whether the leader would treat them ethically. In line with this, in chapter 3 we statistically showed that aggregation of ethical leadership ratings of followers is allowed. This is in line with other studies on ethical leadership (cf., De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008; Mayer et al., 2009). In studies presented in chapter 2 and 5 we also showed that individual perceptions of ethical leadership are important to investigate (cf., Piccolo et al., in press).

Leadership is also often studied as a dyadic phenomenon (Yukl, 2006). In dyadic relations Kenny et al. (2006) suggest using multi-level modeling to analyze the data. Multi-level modeling is the method to be used to analyze nested data. A special issue on *Multi-Level Approaches to Leadership* in *The Leadership Quarterly* in 2008 shows the importance in a typical leadership study to analyze the data with multi-level models. The data from a typical multi-level research design are supposed to be hierarchically structured. Thus, research on leadership is generally collected from persons nested within several levels, as followers are

nested in leaders and leaders are nested in organizations. To overcome the limitation of the aggregation biases related to multi-level, hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) is used in chapter 4. HLM allows for the analysis of multi-level data simultaneously to avoid the possible biases, and it supports the investigation of interactions between variables at different levels of analysis while accounting for their different sources of variance (Griffin, 2001). So far, studies on ethical leadership have not often analyzed the data using multi-level procedures. The results in chapter 4 show that multiple levels of ethical leadership (i.e., individual and group) are important. Future research needs to consider that analyses at a certain level first involve specifying a theoretical rationale.

Ethical leadership and Leader Personality

The studies on the Big Five Factors of personality in relation to ethical leadership are reported in chapter 3. These studies partly replicate and extend previous research by Walumbwa and Schaubroeck (2009). The results show that conscientiousness is positively associated with ethical leadership and role clarification. Furthermore, agreeableness is positively related to ethical leadership, fairness and power sharing. After controlling for LMX, neuroticism is negatively related to ethical leadership and role clarification. As proposed, no relationship was found between openness to experience and extraversion with ethical leadership or its dimensions.

We also addressed the relationship between leader personality and the seven ethical leadership dimensions assessed with the ELW. The correlation results are reported in Appendix 1. For the specific ethical leader behavior dimensions, conscientiousness appears most important for role clarification, ethical guidance and integrity, whereas agreeableness seems most important for fairness, people orientation and power sharing (see Appendix 1). For concern for sustainability both traits seem relevant. Extraversion was only positively related to the people oriented component of ethical leader behavior. Conscientiousness and agreeableness are most relevant in relation to ethical leader behavior.

Although these studies show significant relations between the Big Five traits and ethical leadership, it is important to notice that the correlations were not very strong. This may suggest that personality expression in behavior varies by situation type. In their

meta-analysis, Judge et al. (2002a) emphasize the need for research investigating the role of the situation in the relationship between personality traits and leadership in general. Research on related leadership styles suggests that the strength of the link for charismatic and transactional leadership with personality depends on the context (De Hoogh et al., 2005; Ployhart et al., 2001). This may also hold for ethical leadership. Thus, in addition to the direct effects personality may interact with the work context in predicting ethical leadership.

Trait-activation theory represents the way in which individual differences are perceptible in the presence of trait-relevant contextual signs (Tett & Burnett, 2000). From this perspective the presence of a trait is not enough to guarantee its predictive utility. Traits are seen as latent unless the situation triggers the trait into action. Consistent with trait activation theory, Ng, Ang and Chan (2008) expect that the freedom and latitude available to leaders (i.e., job autonomy) to make decisions in their jobs create opportunities for them to act in ways that are consistent with their personality. Furthermore, Barrick and Mount (1993) showed that the Big-Five dimensions conscientiousness and agreeableness better predict performance in high autonomy jobs. In line with this, it may be expected that in, for example, high autonomy jobs leaders high on conscientiousness and agreeableness exhibit more ethical behaviors. Giving leaders the freedom to plan and decide how the work is to be done (i.e., high autonomy-jobs) provide cues that are directly relevant for the organized and planning tendencies of conscientious individuals. The ethical leadership research field may be substantially enriched if more explicit attention is given to situational factors in testing the proposed relationships.

In line with the suggestions above including personality and situational factors in explaining ethical leadership, some other personality factors may also seem important. The personality factors that have been proposed to relate to ethical leadership include locus of control and machiavelism (Brown & Treviño, 2006). Leaders who have an internal locus of control have the tendency to attribute their own personal success or failures to themselves. Leaders with an external locus of control tend to attribute success and failure to things beyond their control, such as luck or other people. Treviño (1986) proposed that individuals with an internal locus of control are more likely to behave ethically, because these individuals are able to connect between their own behavior and the outcomes of their behavior. In

line with this, Brown and Treviño (2006) propose that internal locus of control is related to ethical leadership. Another personality factor that might be negatively related to ethical leadership is machiavelism. Leaders who score high on machiavelism value goals more than the means to obtain the goals and are manipulators in order to obtain their own goals. Thus, ethical leaders are likely to score low on machiavelism. Again, it would be useful to study personality of ethical leadership and situational factors together.

Ethical leadership and Follower Behaviors

An interesting question is what the relevant and positive outcomes of ethical leadership are. The studies described in chapter 2, 4 and 5 extended previous research on ethical leadership by focusing on ethical leadership and follower behaviors rather than follower attitudes as was examined in previous research. We found that ethical leadership was positively related to follower helping, altruism, courtesy and initiative behaviors.

For the specific ethical leader behaviors different effects are found. The correlation results in appendix 2 and 3 show that integrity and role clarification were most consistently related to the affiliative citizenship behaviors (i.e., helping, altruism and courtesy). People orientation was not related to the affiliative citizenship behaviors. This is in contrast to the results of chapter 2. In this chapter, we found that people orientation, power sharing and fairness were related to courtesy and altruism. However, the regression results show that after controlling for the effects of the other ELW dimensions, only fairness and power sharing are related to OCB. The other ELW dimensions were found unrelated to OCB, altruism and courtesy. The different findings may be due to the design of the studies. The participating leaders in chapter 2 could choose the followers, while the results in the appendices are based on participation of random selected followers. For follower initiative behavior, it appears that fairness and role clarification are most important. For future research, it seems important to focus both on ethical leadership overall and the several behavioral dimensions to investigate outcomes of ethical leadership.

As indicated above, as there is some overlap between ethical leadership and other leadership styles, the newly developing ethical leadership field may profit from research done in other leadership fields. As this is a new research field focusing on behavioral ethics,

measures of such behavior are limited available yet. Therefore, the field of ethical leadership uses the field of other leadership styles and slowly measures develop to start linking ethical leadership to more ethical oriented follower behaviors (cf., Kaptein, 2008). However, OCB or citizenship behavior is seen as ethical behavior as well (cf., Graham, 1995; Ryan, 2001).

Furthermore, ethical leadership may also contribute to objective outcomes, such as organizational financial performance (e.g., Kanungo, 2001). The use of objective outcomes, such as organizations' net profit margin or business unit sales or customer reports of quality and organizational reputation as measures may improve the research on the effectiveness of ethical leadership. Studies investigating objective outcomes may also provide information on the effects of ethical leaders on diverse stakeholders and in this way contribute to the stakeholder discussion as mentioned earlier in this chapter. However, studying organizational outcomes in this regard makes it hard to determine the leadership influence as many other factors may have an impact. Other interesting outcomes of this type of leadership include value congruence, accountability, follower well-being or preventing stress or integrity violations. A broader set of outcomes needs to be considered in future research.

Ethical Leadership and Context

Chapter 4 and 5 present several hypotheses regarding situational moderators of the relationship between ethical leadership and follower behaviors. In the present dissertation, job autonomy, moral awareness and empathic concern were investigated as moderators of the ethical leadership and follower behavior relationship. Moral awareness and job autonomy were proposed to act as indicators of situational strength. Support was found for the moderator roles of these variables. Ethical leadership was strongly related to helping and initiative in situations of perceived job autonomy. In addition, ethical leadership was found strongly related to altruism and courtesy under circumstances of low moral awareness. Job autonomy was measured using individual level perceptions whereas moral awareness was measured at the group level. Our results support that situational factors at individual and group levels seem important (cf., Meyer, Dalal & Hermida, 2010).

Generally, these findings are in line with previous studies on leadership. For example, De Hoogh et al. (2004) found that the relationship between charismatic leadership and

performance is stronger in challenging and dynamic environments. Taken together, these findings stress that ethical leadership may be most influential in situations where there are few situation cues and few situation reinforces to guide follower behaviors. In these circumstances, followers may need more ethical guidance from a leader (cf., Brown et al., 2005). Based on the situational strength theory many other moderator variables may play a role. For example, the more often employees' work involves ethical dilemma's, the more often employees will need ethical guidance and the more likely ethical leadership will influence the behavior of followers (e.g., Brown et al., 2005).

Empathic concern was also studied as a moderator of the relationship between ethical leadership and follower helping behavior. The expected moderation of empathic concern was based on the social exchange theory. In line with this theory, we expected that in high empathic concern circumstances followers realize that helping behavior will be valued and therefore are more likely to reciprocate the fair treatment of a leader by exhibiting helping behaviors. We found support for this expectation. The moderator variables studied in this dissertation are follower perceptions of situations. Almost all research on context in leadership focuses on either followers' or leader perceptions. It would be interesting to examine the effects of the consensus between leaders and followers perceptions of the ethical context. In addition, the effects of other stakeholders' perceptions of the ethical context have never been studied before. Potential interesting research directions to examine may be customer perceptions. Overall, our findings stress the importance of considering elements of context as moderators in research on ethical leadership and follower behaviors.

Guiding Theories and Processes

Little theoretical and empirical research has examined the way in which ethical leadership affects outcomes. Brown and colleagues (2005) concentrate on social learning as the key theoretical process to explain how ethical leaders influence outcomes, namely through modeling and vicarious learning. Mayer et al. (2009) found support for this. They showed that supervisory ethical leadership mediates between ethical leader behavior from top management and follower group-level OCB. However, it seems that other underlying processes may also play a role. For instance, social exchange theory is suggested to

contribute to explaining the influence process (e.g., Mayer et al., 2009). Social exchange theory suggests employees will reciprocate fair and just treatment by their leader. So far, research on ethical leadership has been guided by the social learning and the social exchange theories. However, the social learning and social exchange theories cannot account for all relevant processes and effects. We suggest integrating other theories such as social identity, justice and management impression theories, which may help move the ethical leadership research field forward.

Social identity explains that individuals want to belong to a group, because group membership provides information on the appropriateness of one's values and attitudes (Hogg, 2002). Social identity theory will help explain how ethical leaders influence individual followers via identity effects of such leaders. For example, ethical leaders stress ethical values. This communicates identity relevant information to followers. Identity information is likely to influence the way followers feel about themselves and the way they behave. Social identity will strengthen the distinctiveness of the group values. Values congruence among followers and leaders is important, because they will perceive stimuli in the same manner. Thus, examining ethical leadership in relationship to follower value congruence and moral behavior seem highly relevant from a social identity perspective.

Another central element of social identity is the group prototype. The leader is usually most representative of the in-group, attracts most attention and therefore has most influence in a work group (Hogg, 2001). In line with this, Kalshoven and Den Hartog (2009) showed that followers identify with their ethical leaders, because these leaders are seen as more group prototypical, and in turn these leaders are trusted more by followers. Individuals desire to adjust their behavior to the behaviors and norms of the group representative (i.e., prototype; Hogg, 2001). These arguments imply that prototypicality may be a mediator between ethical leadership and follower outcomes.

Furthermore, in the unethical leadership literature, besides social exchange, the justice and fairness perspective as well as the reactance theory are used to explain the relation between leadership and attitudinal and perceptual outcomes (e.g., Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007; Tepper, 2000). For example, in his abusive supervision research Tepper (2000) focuses on the justice perspective and argues that when employees feel treated unfairly,

positive attitudes and behaviors diminish. According to justice theory, individuals levels of fairness draw on perceptions of distributive justice (fairness of outcome), procedural justice (fairness of procedures), and interactional justice (fairness of the interpersonal treatment). Interactional justice is mostly relevant to the ethical leadership construct, because it reflects the interpersonal dimension of fairness (Bies, 2000). Tepper (2007) argues that injustice may be a mediator between unethical leadership and follower outcomes. In contrast, justice may be a mediator for the ethical leadership and follower outcomes relationship.

Reactance theory focuses on the maintenance of personal control and followers who experience their leader as unethical will feel little or no control and consequently will try to re-establish their control (Zellars et al., 2002). Ethical leaders will not pressure followers to take on their point of view and therefore we do not expect the reactance theory to play a role in the ethical leadership field. However, Wright and Brehm (1982) argue that the reactance theory needs to be evaluated as impression management. Drawing on theories of impression management (e.g., Bolino, 1999), research shows that employees engage in citizenship at strategic times and in strategic ways to establish their reputations as helpful, capable contributors (Deutsch Salamon & Deutsch, 2006). Grant and Mayer (2009) argue that impression management motives are self-serving. In that light, it is expected that ethical leaders will be negatively related to self-serving impression management tactics. In addition, it is expected that followers will not be motivated by impression management. Through the nature and timing of their behaviors, employees reveal visible cues about their values. For instance, Bolino (1999) stressed that employees with self-serving values offer less effective help. These employees are distracted by concerns of others and tend to expend less energy in initiative because they stop helping once their own interests are served rather than continuing to help until others are satisfied. Overall, there is room to broaden the scope of theories that need to be considered in future research on ethical leadership processes.

Potential Limitations

All four empirical studies are based on cross-sectional questionnaire data. This way of designing a study has some limitations. First, a cross-sectional design implies that no

causal relationships could be examined. Therefore, the direction of the relationships remains untested. The proposed directions of the relationships were theoretically driven and based on previous related leadership studies. In future, experimental work is needed. Second, the data were collected at one point in time. The assessment of ethical leadership processes requires data collection over a longer period of time. Future research may assess the influence of ethical leadership on followers during a longer time period. Also, due to the set up of the studies in this dissertation the outcome variables and the leader behaviors have been gathered at the same time. A more longitudinal design, in which outcomes are measured some time apart from the leadership rating, might prove interesting. The effects of ethical leadership may be more visible over a longer period of time. Third, we used a survey method. Other methods, such as qualitative and experimental designs have not often been used in this dissertation or in the ethical leadership research field so far and may enrich the investigation of ethical leadership

Generalizability should also be discussed. There could be a positive bias in the data as the leaders and organizations willing to cooperate with the studies are maybe more ethical than those who did not participate. For example, organizations contributing to these studies mostly belong to the public sector. Another positive bias may be caused by the sensitivity of the topic. Respondents are maybe likely to respond positively. However, the context was not performance oriented, which should help keep possible positive biases limited. Participants represented all sectors in the Netherlands and also all levels of hierarchy within organizations. The data collection for all studies has taken place in Dutch organizations and therefore it is not automatically generalizable to other countries.

Some strengths should also be highlighted. Almost all data collection was based on multi-source ratings, i.e., leaders and followers rated each others behaviors. In this way the data were less susceptible to common-method bias. Another strength is that in two chapters (i.e., chapter 2 and 3) multiple samples were analyzed for testing hypotheses. Additionally, in chapter 2 and 4, leaders were rated by multiple followers. In some studies leaders could choose the follower participants and in others the followers were randomly selected. Random selection of followers has a preference, however sometimes due to the type of access we had and the set up of the study, leaders had to pick their followers. This may have led to

a positive bias of followers ratings of their leaders' ethical behaviors. Thus, social desirability bias may play a role like in many leadership studies.

Practical Implications

Many organizations face the challenge of ethical behavior to keep their organization in business. Organizations have experienced that introducing and distributing a code of ethics among the members of the organizations is not enough. For the actual implementation of ethics at work ethical leader behavior is important. Ethical leaders are role models who openly communicate and reinforce ethical behaviors among followers. Increasing our knowledge about ethical leadership is practical relevant. The research put forward a number of suggestions for practitioners.

First, leaders operating ethically for society, environment and employees increases the reputation of the organization, which may be important for the attraction of applicants. Generally, organizations may want to focus on the general attractiveness and the fit applicants experience with the organization in order to increase the attractiveness. In similar lines, organizations with a strong focus on ethics may attract applicants with a focus on ethics. For personnel selection, the personality characteristics agreeableness and conscientiousness are most relevant, however these characteristics are not enough for the prediction of ethical leadership. Probably, situational demands of leadership need to be integrated into personnel selection.

Putting the main findings of this dissertation together suggests that ethical leadership mainly has a positive relationship with follower behaviors. One way for managers to stimulate these desired behaviors is by modeling. For managers these modeling behaviors include open communication, discuss ethical dilemmas, treat others equally, keep promises, share power and clarify expectations. Organizations can help leaders to show such behavior. For example, coaching may help to increase leaders' awareness of their role modeling function. Coaching may also help leaders to develop manners to strengthen the relationships with their followers. In line with social exchange theory a strong relationship between leader and follower is likely to result in desired follower behaviors. In light of training facilities, leader personality is only slightly important for predicting ethical leadership, which may

indicate that ethical leader behaviors may be learned. As ethical leadership is likely to be multi-dimensional, training could focus on improving a variety of ethical leader behaviors. As stated before, training should not only be focused on integrity rules and procedures, but also on learning by experience of ethical situations at work.

To conclude, the present research has increased our understanding regarding ethical leader behavior, antecedents, follower outcomes and the context in which these leaders operate. However, more research is needed to further help organizations in the battle against fraud and integrity breakdowns. This premature ethical leadership research field needs future research to improve our understanding of the ethical leadership process and the stimulating and hindering contextual factors. So far, studies show that ethical leaders are likely to positively affect employee's attitudes and responsibility, helping and initiative behaviors. Hopefully, these results will stimulate organizations to keep ethics in combination with leadership high on their agendas.