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## **IMPROVING SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY THROUGH ETHICAL LEADERSHIP: A PERCEPTIONS BASED VIEW**

### **Abstract:**

Ethical leadership is defined as “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). Like charismatic leadership, ethical leadership is a value-driven form of leadership. Such value-driven leaders affect the self-concept and beliefs of their followers which, in turn, affect their motivation, attitudes, and behaviors (Hartog and Belschak, 2012). Ethical leaders embody the purpose, vision, and values of the organization and of the constituents, within an understanding of ethical ideals. They connect the goals of the organization with that of the internal employees and external stakeholders (Bello, 2012). In the literature, it is proposed that leaders' social responsibility may be related to ethical leadership. Ethical leaders are expected to do what is morally right through an inner obligation (Kanungo & Mendoca, 1996). Thus, they are expected to have a high internal obligation as well as high moral standards. Further, they engage in virtuous acts or behaviors that benefit others. This implies they will have a high concern for others. In line with this, Kanungo (2001) argues that an internalized norm of responsibility (or social responsibility) forms the basis of the moral altruism motive and consequently the moral foundation of ethical leadership. The purpose of this study is to analyze the relationship between ethical leadership dimensions of employees and their perceptions on social responsibility implications. The study will be conducted with employed students enrolled to an MBA programs of universities. The scale developed by Kalshoven, Hartog and Hoogh (2011) which bases on 7 different dimensions will be used to measure ethical leadership throughout the research. Social responsibility scale that will be used in the study was developed by Carroll (1999) and has 4 dimensions - economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic. Throughout the analyses, it will be investigated whether this relationship differ in terms of certain demographic variables such as gender, age and tenure. By understanding this relationship, certain practical recommendations will be presented accordingly. Such recommendations are especially important to shed light on the impact of ethical leadership dimensions on social responsibility practices and thus to bridge individual level perceptions to firm level implications. Basing on these linkages, specific important organizational interventions which will further contribute to organizational processes in this context will be discussed.

### **Keywords:**

Ethical leadership, corporate social responsibility, leadership.

**JEL Classification:** M10

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is increasingly viewed as an important aspect of firm-level strategy due to evolving demands and pressures from various stakeholder groups (Jones, 2010). The concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR) has a long and varied history. But formal writing on CRS is a largely product of the 20th century, especially in the past 50 years. The development of the concept of corporate social responsibility has been carried out mainly in the North, from the 1950s when literature focused on responsibility of businessman, to the 1980s when the stakeholder theory took ground and to the 1990s when more studies on the linkage between CSR and corporate financial performance was developed (Gugler and Shi, 2009). The term CSR has indeed been defined in various ways from the narrow economic perspective of increasing shareholder wealth (Friedman, 1962), to economic, legal, ethical and discretionary strands of responsibility (Carroll, 1979) to good corporate citizenship (Hemphill, 2004). These variations stem in part from differing fundamental assumptions about what CSR entails, varying from conceptions of minimal legal and economic obligations and accountability to stockholders to broader responsibilities to the wider (Jamali, 2008). Corporate social responsibility consists in the companies themselves defining, unilaterally and voluntarily, social and environmental policies by means of alternative instruments that are neither collective agreements nor legislation, and offering, in pursuit of these aims, partnerships to multiple actors (Fonteneau, 2003). Among a host of benefits arising from being socially responsible, one important argument for addressing CSR is its “business case”, in another word, the linkage between CSR and corporate competitiveness (Porter and Kramer, 2006).

For CSR to be accepted by a business person, it should be framed in such a way that the entire range of business responsibilities is embraced. It is suggested by Carroll (1991) that four kinds of social responsibilities constitute total CSR as economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic. Furthermore, these four categories or components of CSR might be depicted as a pyramid. The pyramid of CSR depicts the four components of CSR, beginning with the basic building block notion which is economic performance. It is the foundation upon which all others rest and it indicates to be profitable. At the same time, business is expected to obey the law because the law is society's codification of acceptable and unacceptable behavior. Next is business' responsibility to be ethical. At its most fundamental level, this is the obligation to do what is right, just, and fair, and to avoid or minimize harm to stakeholders (employees, consumers, the environment, and others). Finally, business is expected to be a good corporate citizen. This is captured in the philanthropic responsibility, wherein business is expected to contribute financial and human resources to the community and to improve the quality of life (Carroll, 1991). Stated in more pragmatic and managerial terms, Carroll (1999) summarized the CSR firm should strive to make a profit, obey the law, be ethical and be a good corporate citizen.

Ethical leadership is defined as “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). Ethical leadership is seen as a value-driven form of leadership like charismatic leadership. Ethical leaders also affect the self-concept and beliefs of their followers which, in turn, affect their motivation, attitudes, and behaviors like

value-driven leaders (Hartog and Belschak, 2012). Ethical leaders embody the purpose, vision, and values of the organization within an understanding of ethical ideals. They connect the goals of the organization with the goals of the internal employees and external stakeholders (Bello, 2012). In the literature, it is proposed that leaders' social responsibility may be related to ethical leadership. Ethical leaders are expected to do what is morally right through an inner obligation (Kanungo & Mendoca, 1996). Thus, they are expected to have a high internal obligation as well as high moral standards. Further, they engage in virtuous acts or behaviors that benefit others. This implies they will have a high concern for others. In line with this, Kanungo (2001) argues that an internalized norm of responsibility (or social responsibility) forms the basis of the moral altruism motive and consequently the moral foundation of ethical leadership.

This study, while providing important insight on the impact of leadership practices on CSR implications, also attempts to fill a gap by answering the question whether ethical guidelines and behaviors are really related to perceptions on CSR proclivity of an organization. Pointing out the need for research in this area, previous literature has sought answer to this question from different angles.

## 2. CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

One of the most simple but hard to answer questions today regards whether the organizations exist to satisfy individuals and societies as a whole, or the individuals and societies exist as a whole to allow the reaching of organizational objectives (Cruz et.al., 2006). The dilemma between these two ends, led the re-emergence of the issue of Corporate Social Responsibility, which is evaluated in the framework of "social responsibility thesis" which is a central element of "caring capitalism doctrine".

The notion of sustainable development very briefly argues that present growth should not be at the expense of the needs of future generations. To build a sustainable growth pattern, firms should take economic, environmental and social concerns into consideration while formulating their strategies. Basing on Blowfield and Frynas's (2005) adoption of a broader definition of CSR, Prieto-Carron et. al. (2006) propose the following definition as one of the most comprehensive ones;

"an umbrella term for a variety of theories and practices all of which recognize the following: (a) that companies have a responsibility for their impact on society and the natural environment, sometimes beyond legal compliance and the liability of individuals; (b) that companies have a responsibility for the behaviour of others with whom they do business (e.g. within supply chains); and that (c) business needs to manage its relationship with wider society, whether for reasons of commercial viability, or to add value to society."

Today, certain factors cause corporate social responsibility concept to gain importance in a global context. Some of these factors are underlined as follows (Elkeiy, 2005);

- increasing competition which forced companies to pay attention to consumers' views on ethical/unethical behaviour,

- increasing transparency on labor conditions in developing countries,
- the threat of trade barriers against products produced under unacceptable conditions (such as using child labor).,
- Increased scrutiny via the web (Gardiner et.al., 2003)

There are three emerging and related perspectives which justify the increasing importance of CSR as a strategic issue (Monshipouri et al., 2003): First is the so-called “reputation capital” view that sees CSR as a strategy to reduce investment risks and maximize profits. The second view, “eco-social” view, considers social and environmental sustainability crucial to the sustainability of the market. The third perspective is the “rights based” view, which underscores the importance of accountability, transparency, and social/environmental investment as key aspects of CSR which in turn protects the rights of related stakeholders. If CSR is regarded as the component of corporate philosophy, then such philosophy should have certain reflections on individual acts and decisions. These reflections are mostly traced in certain ethical considerations and accompanying practices - both in the eye of the employee and the leader.

At the strategic level, it has been discussed by related literature that CSR will only make a visible difference if the concept is fully integrated into corporate principles and practices, and if progress is monitored over time (Gardiner et al., 2003). Leaders play the most crucial role throughout different steps of this process including the formulation, championing, implementation and controlling of CSR practices. There are several studies presenting that different types of leadership styles have different impacts on the effectiveness and adoption of CSR practices throughout the organization. For example, in a recent study, Du, Swaen and Lindgreen (2013) posit that transformational leaders are more likely to engage in institutional CSR activities when compared to transactional leaders.

Inclusion of stakeholders in CSR perspective makes it mandatory to interpret the behaviours of organizational leaders to better understand how they organize and manage their relations with those critical stakeholders. As emphasized by Maak and Pless (2006) “building and cultivating...ethically sound relations toward different stakeholders is an important responsibility of leaders in an interconnected stakeholder society”. Moving from this point on, in a recent Hewitt research, Guarnieri and Kao (2007), discusses the need to have the capability to maintain high standard relationships with all stakeholders as a prerequisite to be labeled as a successful leader. Moreover, they present the results of the study indicating leading companies have discovered that CSR directly helps them to attract, develop, and inspire leaders—at a time when concerns for social responsibility, ethics and integrity.

This study, while providing important insight on the impact of leadership practices on CSR implications, also attempts to fill a gap by answering the question whether ethical guidelines and behaviors are really related to perceptions on CSR proclivity of an organization. Pointing out the need for research in this area, previous literature has sought answer to this question from different angles. For instance, Strand (2011) focused on the “good” concept and the role of leader and discussed the question of “is good CSR leadership, simply good leadership?” In a complementary manner, Aslaksen and Synnøstvedt (2003) addresses some interrelated questions regarding ethical investments

like “does ethical screening provide any incentive for improved social responsibility within firms?”

### 3. ETHICAL LEADERSHIP

Brown et. al. (2005) propose that leaders become attractive, credible, and legitimate as ethical role models in part by engaging in ongoing behaviors that are evaluated by followers as normatively appropriate, and that suggest altruistic (rather than selfish) motivation. Such behaviors include honesty, consideration of others, and fair treatment of employees (including respect and voice). Treviño and colleagues (2003) found that ethical leaders gain the attention of their followers by making an ethics message salient enough to stand out in the organizational context.

Ethical leadership is conceptualized in terms of social learning. Ethical leaders are models of ethical conduct who become the targets of identification and emulation for followers. For leaders to be perceived as ethical leaders and to influence ethics-related outcomes, they must be perceived as attractive, credible, and legitimate. They do this by engaging in behavior that is seen as normatively appropriate (e.g., openness and honesty) and motivated by altruism (e.g., treating employees fairly and considerately). Ethical leaders must also gain followers' attention to the ethics message by engaging in explicit ethics-related communication and by using reinforcement (Brown et.al, 2005:119). Thus, leading employees' attention to ethical standards by focusing their importance through explicit communication seems crucial to ethical leadership as a social learning process. People in organizations pay obviously close attention to behaviors that are rewarded and punished (Arvey & Jones, 1985; Kanfer, 1990; Treviño, 1992). Social learning theory argues that consequences (rewards and punishments) facilitate learning in an anticipatory manner (Bandura, 1986). They inform individuals about the benefits of the modeled (ethical) behavior and the costs of inappropriate behavior. So, ethical leaders become social learning models by rewarding appropriate and disciplining inappropriate conduct (Gini, 1998; Treviño et al., 2003) and by doing so in a way that is perceived to be fair. Therefore, another element of ethical leadership is the structuring of just work environments that mete out positive and negative outcomes for normatively appropriate versus normatively inappropriate behavior (Brown et.al, 2005).

Brown et. al. defined ethical leadership as 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, 2005: 120) In line with Brown et al., De Hoogh and Den Hartog see leaders' fair and moral behavior as a core component of ethical leadership and labelled as morality and fairness. In addition to this component, role clarification is studied and which is related to leader's transparency, engagement in open communication with followers. Further, last component of ethical leadership is proposed as power sharing that means employee empowerment and high performance work systems (Spreitzer, 1995; Becker, & Huselid, 1998). In sum, we have studied morality and fairness, ethical role clarification and power sharing as components of ethical leadership at work (Zehir and Erdoğan, 2011).

According to De Hoogh and Den Hartog (2008), personal characteristics are related to ethical leadership, such as the leader's personality and upbringing. Personal traits fall into five groups of leader social responsibility; moral–legal standard of conduct, internal obligation, concern for others, concern about consequences, and self-judgment. In parallel with these theories, Kanungo (2001) suggested that ethical leadership is expected to have a high internal obligation as well as high moral standard, further they are supposed to behave in a convenient way in case of concerning for others (Brown et al., 2005). De Hoogh and Den Hartog (2008) have expected that individual attributes of the leader social responsibility, which are categorized as moral–legal standard of conduct, internal obligation, concern for others, concern about consequences, and self-judgment would be positively related to ethical leadership behavior (Zehir and Erdoğan, 2011, 299).

### **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of this study is to analyze the perceptions of employees about the relationship between ethical leadership behaviors and corporate social responsibility implications. Another purpose of the study is to investigate whether ethical leadership perceptions of employees differ in terms of certain demographic variables (gender, age, tenure) or not. The findings are valuable to improve the ethical leadership qualifications of managers in organizations and to reveal the impact of ethical leadership on corporate social responsibility. By means of the results of the research, it is possible to provide valuable insights to managers in order to improve their ethical leadership behaviors. When the need for empirical studies in this field is considered, it is obvious that both the theoretical and empirical results of this research are expected to make an important contribution to related literature.

#### **3.1 Sample and Data Collection**

The study is conducted with employed students enrolled to MBA programs of a state and a private university. Students who are working in private companies from different sectors participated to the research ( $n = 64$ ). The method of the research sampling is "convenience sampling" (Balci, 2005). The research has been designed as a descriptive research which aims to determine perceptions of employees on the relationship between ethical leadership behavior and corporate social responsibility implications.

Two scales were used in the questionnaires as measurement instruments of the research. The first scale developed by Kalshoven, Hartog and Hoogh (2011) and which bases on 7 different dimensions (*people orientation, fairness, power sharing, concern for sustainability, ethical guidance, role clarification and integrity*) is used to measure ethical leadership construct. Social responsibility scale used in the study was developed by Carroll (1999) and has 4 dimensions (*economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic*). The scale was translated into Turkish by Ay (2003).

The questions about social demographic qualifications such as gender, tenure and age were included within the items for measuring ethical leadership and CSR and the questionnaire form was sent to employees via e-mail and web based survey techniques. There are 31 statements in the ethical leadership scale and 20 statements in the corporate social responsibility scale. The method which was proposed by Brislin, Lonner and Thorndike (1973) is used for the translation of ethical leadership scale from English to Turkish. This method consists of a process as translating to the target language, evaluating the translation, translating back to the source language, evaluating the translation again and consulting to the experts.

### 3.2. Data Analysis

The items of ethical leadership scale were presented using a five-point Likert item as “1: strongly disagree” and “5: strongly agree”. The items of corporate social responsibility scale were presented as “1: Not important” and “5: Important”. Data was analyzed by SPSS for Windows 18.0 package program.

Arithmetic mean and standard deviation are used as descriptive statistics techniques for data analysis. Cronbach alpha reliability value is computed to find the reliability of the scales. The reliability values are 0,957 for ethical leadership scale and 0,926 for corporate social responsibility scale. The values of both scales are very high and within the acceptable limits for researches in social sciences (Kalaycı, 2005). Pearson correlation analysis is employed in order to test the hypothesis of the research.

#### 3.2.1. Findings and Results

Employees from different companies in various sectors participated to the research (n=64). The sample range in terms of socio-demographic characteristics is represented below in Table 1.

**Table 1: Demographic Characteristics**

	Variables	Frequency	%
Gender	Male	30	46,9
	Female	34	53,1
Age	18-25	24	37,5
	26-33	32	50,0
	34 and over	8	12,5
Seniority	Less than 1 year	12	18,8
	Less than 1-4 years	34	53,1
	Less than 4-7 years	8	12,5
	More than 7 years	10	15,6

Additional to demographic picture, Table 2 presents brief data on scale and main research dimensions. When we examine the descriptive statistical analysis results stated in Table 2, we can see that the arithmetic mean of the ethical leadership scale is computed as 3,43 ( $\bar{x}$ : 3,43 and  $\sigma$ : 0,72) which indicates that participants answered the scale mostly around the “I agree” statement.

According to the arithmetic mean values for ethical leadership construct, the highest computed mean is 3,62 ( $\bar{x}$ : 3,62 and  $\sigma$ : 0,94) for “role clarification”. Besides, the lowest mean is 3,22 ( $\bar{x}$ : 3,22 and  $\sigma$ : 0,87) for “Concern for Sustainability” dimension.

The arithmetic mean of the corporate social responsibility scale is computed as 4,01 ( $\bar{x}$ : 4,01 and  $\sigma$ : 0,60) and this score indicates that participants answered the scale mostly to be “Important”. According to the arithmetic mean values of corporate social responsibility scale dimensions, the highest computed mean is 4,25 ( $\bar{x}$ : 4,25 and  $\sigma$ : 0,70) for the dimension of “Legal responsibility” besides the lowest mean is 3,58 ( $\bar{x}$ : 3,58 and  $\sigma$ : 0,93) for “Philanthropic responsibility”. (Table 2)

**Table 2. Descriptive Statistical Analysis Results of the Scales and Dimensions**

Scales and dimensions	$\bar{x}$	Std.dev.
<b><i>Ethical Leadership (total scale)</i></b>	3,43	,72
People orientation	3,52	,88
Fairness	3,43	,87
Power sharing	3,37	,82
Concern for Sustainability	3,22	,87
Ethical guidance	3,36	,92
Role clarification	3,62	,94
Integrity	3,49	1,06
<b><i>Corporate social responsibility (total scale)</i></b>	4,01	,60
Economic responsibility	4,17	,65
Ethical responsibility	4,04	,66
Legal responsibility	4,25	,70
Philanthropic responsibility	3,58	,93



### 3.2.2. Research Hypothesis and Results

Throughout the research, the relationship between employees' perceptions on ethical leadership behaviors and corporate social responsibility is investigated. In this context, the main hypothesis of the research is stated as below:

*H<sub>1</sub>: There is a relationship between employees' perceptions on ethical leadership behaviors and their perceptions on corporate social responsibility.*

In order to investigate if there is a relationship between employees' perceptions on ethical leadership behaviors and corporate social responsibility, Pearson Correlation Analysis is employed. The results show that there exists a strong positive relationship ( $p < 0,01$ ; Pearson correlation ( $r$ ) = 0,553) between the variables and thus  $H_1$  is accepted. The relationship between the dimensions of ethical leadership behaviors and corporate social responsibility are also further examined in order to understand the relationship in a deeper sense. (Table 3)

**Table 3. Correlations among Ethical Leadership Dimensions and Corporate Social Responsibility Dimensions**

<b>Scales &amp; Dimensions</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Ethical leadership (1)</b>	1												
People orientation (2)	,832** ,000	1											
Fairness (3)	,814** ,000	,632** ,000	1										
Power sharing (4)	,854** ,000	,649** ,000	,783** ,000	1									
Concern for sustainability (5)	,618** ,000	,441** ,000	,357** ,004	,457** ,000	1								
Ethical guidance (6)	,830** ,000	,519** ,000	,562** ,000	,614** ,000	,522** ,000	1							
Role clarification (7)	,796** ,000	,630** ,000	,665** ,000	,591** ,000	,316** ,011	,629** ,000	1						
Integrity (8)	,833** ,000	,646** ,000	,582** ,000	,708** ,000	,552** ,000	,652** ,000	,717** ,000	1					
<b>Corporate social responsibility (9)</b>	,553** ,000	,383** ,002	,428** ,000	,358** ,004	,406** ,001	,517** ,000	,570** ,000	,513** ,000	1				
Economic (10)	,453** ,000	,338** ,006	,413** ,001	,381** ,002	,187 ,139	,369** ,003	,506** ,000	,366** ,003	,699** ,000	1			
Ethic (11)	,609** ,000	,414** ,001	,492** ,000	,433** ,000	,445** ,000	,541** ,000	,607** ,000	,598** ,000	,921** ,000	,576** ,000	1		
Legal (12)	,420** ,001	,302** ,015	,248** ,049	,194 ,125	,338** ,006	,406** ,001	,519** ,000	,448** ,000	,859** ,000	,587** ,000	,800** ,000	1	
Philanthropic (13)	,353** ,004	,226 ,072	,274 ,029	,200 ,114	,339** ,006	,377** ,002	,289 ,021	,298 ,017	,776** ,000	,246 ,050	,649** ,000	,474** ,000	1

\*\**. p < 0.01*    \**. p < 0.05*

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Managerial behaviors which direct followers by reciprocal communication, moral thought and ethical principles while carrying out organizational activities are named as “ethical leadership behaviour”. Ethical leaders deal with issues within a framework of ethical norms and standards to identify what is right and what is wrong. Reflections of these norms and standards can be best traced by corporate social responsibility activities of the organization. For business enterprises to act in accordance with corporate social responsibility principles – regarding economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic dimensions – managers should also think by ethical roles and influence their employees in the same direction.

In this regard, studying the relationship between ethical leadership behaviour and corporate social responsibility emerges as an important phenomenon in contemporary management literature. At the end of the study, it is revealed that ethical leadership behaviours have a moderate level positive relationship with corporate social responsibility perceptions. More precisely, ethical dimension of CSR has been found to have the strongest relationship with ethical leadership behaviours. This finding indicates that, managerial behaviours communicating moral principles are the ones which are most closely related to ethical responsibilities. Future research should focus on increasing the sample size to make it statistically possible to conduct further analysis to reveal underlying causal relationships between the constructs and related variables.

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