

Ethical Leadership and Organizational Justice: The Mediating Effect of Communication Satisfaction

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The strategic importance of ethical practices and ethical decisions in business has increased (Hosmer, 1994; Robertson, 2008; Fontrodona, 2018). Some ethical scandals and corporate governance practices have also highlighted the ethical behavior of executives, especially senior executives within business. According to social learning theory (Bandura, 1925), employees model the leader's behaviors. As long as the leader acts ethically and directs employees to act ethically, employees adopt ethical codes not only behaviorally but also at cognitively. Based on social learning theory, leaders in business are the most important element in adopting ethical codes (Brown, Trevino, & Harrison, 2015).

Because of their nature, individuals compare themselves to others people and other employees in the company in terms of various issues such as behaviors, practices, social opportunities, and so on. According to the expectation theory from motivation theories, employees compare their earnings with those of their colleagues and of employees in other organizations for the work done in return in terms of work-required education, effort, experience, responsibility, and stress levels. This comparison results in a just or unjust perception. The idea of equality in distributing organizational resources such as awards, promotions, bonuses, and wages expresses the perception of distributional justice (Colquitt, Greenberg, & Zapata-Phelan, 2005). Whether the distribution of organizational resources occurs fairly is related to the procedural justice dimension of perceived organizational

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justice. Perceived interactional justice increases positively in employees who feel managers value them and treat them respectfully (Colquitt, Greenberg, & Zapata-Phelan, 2005).

According to the self-interest model, an instrumental model developed by Lind and Tyler (1988), employees who acquire information about organizational processes and take initiative in making decisions and influencing organizational processes gain more (Viswesvaran & Ones, 2002). Also according to this theory, giving employees the right to speak in order to express their thoughts on organizational processes will strengthen their perception of procedural justice. Due to the procedural control, decisions will strengthen perceived operational justice even if they are not in line with employees' opinions (Greenberg, 1990). According to research, perceived organizational justice is affected positively if employees are given the right to speak and participate in decisions and given constructive and informative explanations during performance evaluations (Jordan, 2001). Perceived organizational justice affects employees' attitudes, which then form organizational behaviors that shape organizational performance. Similarly, individuals' cognitive and emotional perceptions of the level of communication satisfaction in the organization are measures of behavior and performance. In other words, if employees have effective communication processes (such as getting timely and adequate feedback and being informed about changes), they develop positive attitudes towards the organization (Gray & Laidlaw, 2004), and positive attitudes are expected both in terms of behavior and performance.

The influence of leaders and their behavior on audiences is undeniable (Yildiz, 2014). On the other hand, ethical leaders with the roles of moral managers increase the perceived organizational justice. The ethical leader, in addition to being fair and equitable, tries to correct unethical behaviors within the organization. In doing so, the ethical leader provides effective two-way communication and support (Brown & Trevino, 2006). Ethical leaders are fair, equitable, consistent, and honest and encourage their audience to act in accordance with ethical codes. These characteristics will also increase perceived organizational justice. In addition, ethical leaders have an approach to communication that is effective and goes both ways. Organizational communication practices are the frontrunner to communication satisfaction. If communication resources meet the informational needs of employees in an organization, the employees will feel satisfied with communication (Chan & Lai, 2017). As mentioned in the literature, employees who are satisfied with communication exhibit organizational-productivity in-

dicators such as productivity and organizational commitment. Employees tend to show high performance if they are satisfied with the level of communication (Bolino & Turnley, 2003). Employees' organizational perceptions are assumed will turn into individual attitudes, behaviors, and performance, and individual performance will affect the organization.

Ethical leadership is an important concept to many researchers and practitioners. However, studies investigating how ethical leadership affects employees are limited. This study's reason for focusing on communication and organizational employees' level of communication satisfaction is the assumption that the relationship between ethical leadership and justice will deteriorate in the absence of communication. In other words, this study will determine the effect of ethical leaders' behaviors on employees' perceived organizational justice and dissatisfied communication (communication with superiors, integration, etc.), as well as the subjected sub-dimensions. Consequently, the following research hypothesis will be analyzed:

H₁: Ethical leadership has a positive effect on employee's organizational justice perception.

H₂: Communication satisfaction has an effect on organizational justice perception.

H₃: Ethical leadership has a positive effect on communication satisfaction.

H₄: Communication satisfaction has an moderating effect on the relationship between ethical leadership and organizational justice perception.

Methodology

This study analyzes whether ethical leadership affects perceived organizational justice and the role of communication satisfaction in this relationship using a questionnaire answered by 222 white-collar employees in Turkey. In order to collect data on the variables of organizational justice and ethical leadership in a well-planned way from white-collar employees working in medium- and large-sized companies, the questionnaires were delivered in sealed envelopes and then collected. In addition, the control variable has been determined as the condition that managers being evaluated by the employees in the sample have at least three subordinates and these employees have worked in their company for at least one year. Participating in the study are 222 people working in medium- and large-scale organizations in various sectors in Turkey. Participants have been selected using basic random sampling. Of the research sample, 161 (72.5%) are female and 61

(27.5%) are male, 36% ($n = 80$) are married and 64% ($n = 142$) are single. 57.2% of the employees are university graduates ($n = 127$) and 42.3% are post-grads or doctoral graduates ($n = 95$). Participants' mean age is 30 years ($SD = 5.569$) and average work experience is 4 years ($SD = 3.65$).

The survey method has been chosen as the data collection method. The first part of the questionnaire consists of six demographic questions for determining employees' age, gender, marital status, education level, duties, and seniority in the company. The second part of the questionnaire has 71 questions for measuring the variables. A 5-point Likert scale (from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) has been used to evaluate the questionnaire, which consists of 77 questions in total.

The Ethical Leadership Scale developed by Brown, Trevino, and Harrison (2005) has been used to measure ethical leadership behaviors. The scale consists of 10 questions and is one-dimensional. Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the Ethical Leadership Scale is .891. The scale's reliability and validity have been tested by many researchers. In addition, its one-factor structure has been confirmed through explanatory factor analysis.

Employees' perceived organizational justice has been measured using the Organizational Justice Scale developed by Niehoff and Moorman (1996). The scale consists of three sub-dimensions and 20 questions. Explanatory and confirmatory factor analyses have been conducted in order to check whether the scales for perceived organizational justice and communication satisfaction provide construct validity. As a result of the analyses, the 3-factor structure for perceived organizational justice was provided as accepted in the literature. The varimax method has been used in the exploratory factor analysis. The 20th question was deleted because the question's value resembled two other factors. Confirmatory factor analysis confirmed the 3-factor structure ($\chi^2 / SD = 3.52$; $RMSEA = .85$; $NFI = .96$; $CFI = .97$; $GFI = .87$). The factors explain 72.431% of the total variance.

The Communication Satisfaction Scale, developed by Downs and Hazen (1977) and various researchers, has been used to measure communication satisfaction. The scale consists of eight sub-dimensions and 40 questions. Confirmatory factor analysis has confirmed the 7-factor structure ($\chi^2 / SD = 2.59$; $RMSEA = .85$; $NFI = .98$; $CFI = .98$; $GFI = .89$). The factors explain 66.79% of the total variance. In addition, Cronbach's alpha coefficients, used to test the internal consistency of all variables, have been seen greater than 0.75. As result of the analyses, all scales used in the research have been deemed valid and reliable.

Conclusion and Discussion

As a result of the research analysis, *H1*, which suggests that ethical leadership affects perceived organizational justice, has been accepted. Similar to the literature (Xu, Loi, & Ngo, 2014; Wells & Walker, 2016), ethical leadership positively affects all three dimensions of perceived justice. Similar research has shown a positive relationship to exist between ethical leadership and organizational justice (Ugurlu & Ustuner, 2011; Acar, Kaya, & Sahin, 2012; Aykanat & Yildirim, 2012; Kugun, Aktas, & Guripek, 2013; Ayik, Gul, & Ince, 2014; Bahceci, 2014; Cirakli, Ugurluoglu, Santas, & Celik, 2014; Xu, Loi, & Ngo, 2014; Yucel & Savas, 2014; Inak, 2016; Akatay, Yucekaya, & Kisat, 2016; Wells & Walker, 2016; Buyukyilmaz & Ay, 2017). In accordance with these studies, managers' shown ethical leadership behaviors are seen effective at providing organizational justice. Creating and maintaining an organizational culture that includes ethical behaviors and being a role model for employees in the organization are the issues to which managers should pay attention. In order to develop the perception of ethical leadership, managers should establish relationships with their employees within the framework of ethical standards and ethical values and treat them with honesty. Ethical committees can be established for raising ethical awareness in enterprises. In order to develop managers' understanding of ethical leadership, trainings including contemporary leadership approaches can be given in the enterprises. Managers should be provided with practical information on these concepts. Employees who perceive their ethical leaders as fair lead to employees who are committed to the organization and participate in decisions and ethical leadership behavior. Leaders need to involve their employees in problem solving and encourage them to contribute to the organization's goals.

No study could be reached in the literature examining the relationship between ethical leadership and communication satisfaction. *H2*, which suggests that ethical leadership has a positive effect on communication satisfaction, has been accepted as the analyses have shown ethical leadership to have a moderately positive explanatory value, especially on all the sub-dimensions of communication satisfaction.

A positive effect exists between communication satisfaction and perceived organizational justice, similar to the literature (Gopinath & Becker, 2000; Dogan, 2002; Kim, 2005; Yamaguchi, 2009; Demirkiran, Dikmetas, & Yorulmaz, 2013; Chan & Lai, 2017), and *H3* hypothesis has been accepted. Organizational justice, internal communication, and information flow in the organization should be improved in order to have a positive perception of the organization's policies and management. If this communication is not provided in the organization, gossip in the organization may

increase and employees may exhibit improper behaviors and attitudes. Regulations should be made to ensure fairness in business and to maintain the organization's clear and open communications. These regulations will increase employees' communication satisfaction, eliminate misunderstandings, and make the perceived organizational justice more positive. In terms of reliability of justice in an organization, a performance-evaluation system should be established, distinctions should be made among the organization's employees, and a salary system appropriate to one's position and seniority should be established. Rewards and penalties must be distributed transparently and fairly. Such business practices will also improve organizational communications and contribute to the organization's employee satisfaction.

In order to test the mediator role of communication satisfaction between ethical leadership and perceived organizational justice, Baron and Kenny's (1986) three-dimensional case has been provided and the mediator effect examined. Afterwards, Sobel's (1982) test was used to analyze the significance of the mediation effects. When the quality of communication with colleagues is low, the impact of ethical leadership on the dimensions of interactional and distributive justice disappears. This dimension of satisfaction completely mediates the relationship. It does not eliminate the impact of ethical leadership on procedural justice, but considerably reduces it. In this context, a partial mediation effect of communication satisfaction is observed (*H4*). When employees are able to communicate effectively with their colleagues, they perceive the organization as fair because they know the business practices. However, when they are not satisfied with the communication with their colleagues, the perception of any distributive or interactive justice created by an ethical leader disappears. Communication with superiors has a complete impact on ethical leadership's perceived interactive justice and partially mediates the effect on the perception of procedural justice. Employees who are satisfied with communications with their superiors can be said will have higher perceptions of interactive justice.

While ethical leadership behavior is expected to have a positive effect on perceived organizational justice, a lack of good communication turns this positive affect into a negative one. The perceived justice for processes in organizations is influenced by communications among employees, colleagues, and superiors; satisfaction with organizational integration; and personal-feedback communications.

In terms of the research results, the most important contribution to the literature is that this is the first time the role of communication satisfaction has been examined in the relationship between ethical leadership and organizational justice. While ethical leaders have been predicted to form the perception of an equitable

work environment for employees due to the leaders' attitudes, this is not the case for employees who are not satisfied with their communications with colleagues and superiors, with organizational integration, or with personal feedback. For this reason, employees who are satisfied with the level of communication in the organization feel the leader has created a fair work environment within the organization. If employees have sufficient information about organizational policies and processes, their perception of organizational justice as created by the ethical leader becomes even greater. In the case of communication dissatisfaction, even an ethical leader cannot create a fair work environment perception. In particular, improving communication satisfaction among colleagues, which has a moderately significant impact on all sub-dimensions of justice, will also contribute to reducing problems in the organization. This level of satisfaction can be achieved by supporting informal group formations or activities that allow employees to spend time together outside the office. Reviewing the communication processes and policies in the organization may be necessary in order to ensure communication satisfaction among both colleagues and superiors.

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