

# The Effect of Leadership Styles on the Institutionalization of Ethics: A Study on Pharmaceutical Industry Representatives

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## Introduction

The issue of ethical leadership and its effect on the institutionalization of ethics has started to be discussed extensively in the business literature, especially after the Enron scandal (Brown & Trevino, 2006; Ko et al., 2018; Sims, 1991; Hunt et al., 1989; Schwepker, 2001; Weber & Seger, 2002; Valentine & Barnett, 2003; Chye et al., 2004; Valentine et al., 2011; Saha et al., 2020; Bağış & Ardıç, 2021; Bolat & Seymen, 2003; Daft, 2008). Studies on the institutionalization of ethics are quite limited, especially in the Turkish literature (Küçükoğlu, 2012; Doğan, 2015; Çotul, 2019; Deliorman & Kandemir, 2009; Kandemir, 2010, 2012; Torlak et al., 2014; Akkoç, 2008; Şahne, 2014; Duvacı, 2017; Özbek 2019). According to Carlson and Perrewe (1995), a leader's ethical guidance, support from upper management, and policies on organizational ethics play an important role in how businesses institutionalize ethics. This study will discuss how organizations institutionalize ethics, the methods used, and the relationships the three leadership styles have with the institutionalization of ethics.

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Pharmaceutical companies' efforts to contribute to human health while pursuing commercial gain may cause conflicts of interest in areas such as the health sector where human health is the focus of treatment (Küpeli & Kiper: 2016; Akkoç, 2008; Elgün, 2020; Bozyiğit & Akkan, 2013). Despite authorities having published legal regulations and reaching a consensus on rational drug use in order to keep these conflicts of interest in check (Wager, 2003; Civaner, 2008), physicians and their prescription habits have been stated to be affected by pharmaceutical companies' marketing strategies, preferring the products these companies promote (Lexchin, 2008; Thomson et al., 1994; Civaner, 2006; 2008; Fickweiler et al., 2017; Rathod & Palkar 2018; Marmat et al., 2020; Srivastava & Mishra, 2022). Intense competition in the industry in combination with sales pressure causes unethical behaviors to emerge (Nagashekhara & Agil, 2011; Bozyiğit & Akkan, 2013). As a developing country, Turkey has seen multinational companies start to increase their presence in the pharmaceutical industry through mergers and acquisitions (Türkiye İlaç Sektörü Raporu, 2017). As a result of the situation observed in the pharmaceutical industry, this research focuses on the Turkish pharmaceutical industry. The pharmaceutical company representatives were determined as the sample because of their intermediary role between the pharmaceutical companies and physicians (Thomson et al., 1994; Chren, 1999; Fickweiler et al., 2017; Srivastava & Mishra, 2022).

## Conceptual Framework

### *The Institutionalization of Ethics*

The institutionalization of business ethics is seen to have been first examined as a concept in the organizational case study of Purcell and Weber (1979; Weber, 1993; Floyd, 2010; Simat et al., 2012). The formal and explicit inclusion of ethics in daily business life is referred to as the institutionalization of ethics (Carlson & Perrewe, 1995) and is also interpreted as the degree to which ethics are indirectly and directly included in an organization's decision-making processes (Singhapakdi & Vitell, 2007). This study defines the institutionalization of ethics as the methods used for incorporating ethical values into business life in all activities of the organization, especially in its decision-making processes, thus making them a permanent part of the organizational culture (Sims, 1991; Brenner, 1992; Weber, 1993; Carlson & Perrewe, 1995; Floyd, 2010; Robertson & Schlegelmich, 1993; Jose & Thibodeux, 1999; Singhapakdi & Vitell, 2007; Singhapakdi et al., 2010; Konmee et al., 2010;

Marta et al., 2013; Torlak et al., 2014; Lee et al., 2015; Kayacı, 2020; Treviño, 1990; Tsai & Huang, 2008; Eren & Hayatoğlu, 2011).

The institutionalization of ethics has two sub-dimensions: direct and indirect. Indirect institutionalization is used to define factors such as organizational culture, leadership, and open communication, which includes values and beliefs that are experienced together but not written into the daily lives of organizations (Kandemir, 2012; Jose & Thibodeux, 1999; Brenner, 1992). Ethics in business life can be institutionalized not only indirectly but also directly through formal means such as ethical codes, organizational policy handbooks, employee orientation programs, ethics trainings and seminars, internal control systems, and ethical control officers (Brenner, 1992; Vitell, 2007; Majluf & Navarrete, 2011; Jose & Thibodeux, 1999; Koonmee et al., 2010; Kandemir, 2012).

### *Transactional Leadership*

Transactional leaders are defined as those who follow organizational rules and regulations, emphasize job standards to employees, and are task-oriented. According to this approach, achieving organizational goals is possible by rewarding or disciplining subordinates (Burns 1978, as cited in Bass et al., 1987, p. 74; Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999). Meanwhile, liberal leadership is a leadership understanding in which the leader leaves subordinates to themselves and does not manage, supervise, or coordinate tasks. Because the leader does not provide rewards, the leader neither attempts to motivate subordinates nor provides support when needed. In this regard, employee dissatisfaction is associated with intra-organizational conflict and failure (Bass, 1997; Bass, 1999; Judge & Piccolo, 2004).

### *Transformational Leadership*

Transformational leadership is a leadership style that increases the awareness of the leader's followers regarding the organizational goals and mission, motivates followers to adopt the interests of the organization for the good of the organization, and increases beliefs in and motivation toward success by inspiring (Northouse, 2021; Avolio et al., 2004). Transformational leadership is a process that creates change and transforms individuals and organizations (Emery & Barker, 2007; Northouse, 2007; Macit, 2004) that provides employees with vision by showing new ways to produce ideas (Carlson & Perrew, 1995), that provides personal and professional development while increasing employee performance (Khan & Sadique, 2018), that establishes the beliefs needed for organizational change (Uluköy

et al., 2014), that inspires employees, and that is a source of motivation (Hinkin & Tracey, 1999; Emery & Barker, 2007; Purwanto et al., 2020).

### *Paternalistic Leadership*

Paternalistic leadership is defined as a hierarchical relationship in which leaders direct the professional and personal lives of their subordinates in a parental manner and expect loyalty and respect in return (Gelfand et al., 2007; Pellegrini et al., 2010; House et al., 2002; Minister, 2008; Erdem & Dikici, 2009; Farh & Cheng, 2000). Despite being infrequently studied in the Western literature, paternalistic leadership is a leadership style that is frequently encountered in societies based on collectivist cultures (Ökten & Cenççi, 2012; Aslan, 2012; Yeşiltaş 2013). As such, paternalism is more of a cultural characteristic than a leadership style (Erben & Güneşer, 2008). Subordinates perceive the leader as always knowing better than they (Aycaan, 2001, 2002, 2006, 2010; Köksal, 2011).

## Research Hypotheses

Transactional leadership is a leadership style in which goals, work standards, responsibilities, and tasks are clearly presented, and the leader focuses on the completion of tasks (i.e., maintaining the daily workflow; Khan & Sadique, 2018). When fulfilling these functions, leaders use incentive and reward mechanisms to help their followers fulfill their responsibilities (Bass, 1985, 1990). These rewards can be tangible or symbolic or can be seen as fulfilling followers' wishes regarding resource distribution (Bass, 1997; Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Purwanto et al., 2020). The effects interactional leaders have on their subordinates can positively affect how ethics are institutionalized in the organization and help achieve organizational goals. As a matter of fact, Floyd's (2010) research found a positive effect to exist for transformational and transactional leadership with ethics' dimensions of indirect and direct institutionalization. Therefore, the current study's first hypothesis has been formed as follows:

**H1:** Transactional leadership positively affects the institutionalization of ethics.

**H1a:** Transactional leadership positively affects the indirect institutionalization of ethics.

**H1b:** Transactional leadership positively affects the direct institutionalization of ethics.

Many studies examining the relationship between leadership styles and ethical organizational climate have presented findings showing transformational leadership to be related to ethical organizational climate (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Kuhnert & Lewis, 1987; Carlson & Perrew, 1995; Parry & Proctor-Thomson, 2002; Floyd, 2010; Kim & Vandenberghe, 2020). As a matter of fact, Lagace et al.'s (1991) study published on the ethical behavior of promotional representatives in the pharmaceutical industry stated that sales managers are able to set standards regarding the display of ethical behaviors due to managers being role models for displaying ethical behaviors in organizations. Based on these discussions, the second hypothesis of the research has been formed as follows:

**H2:** Transformational leadership positively affects the institutionalization of ethics.

**H2a:** Transformational leadership positively affects the indirect institutionalization of ethics.

**H2b:** Transformational leadership positively affects the direct institutionalization of ethics.

Leaders are role models to their subordinates. In this context, co-paternalistic leadership can play an important role in conveying ethical behaviors to employees and how solving and answering ethical problems and questions (Aycan, 2006). When considering the results of studies conducted in collectivist and high-power distance societies such as Turkey (Aycan et al., 2000; Aycan, 2006; Farh & Cheng, 2000; Pellegrini & Scandura, 2006), paternalistic leadership is also seen to have a positive effect on employee attitudes (Gelfand et al., 2007; Gerçek, 2018). Therefore, paternalistic leadership can also be said to play a role in the institutionalization of ethics in organizations. Accordingly, the study's third hypothesis has been formed as follows:

**H3:** Paternalistic leadership positively affects the institutionalization of ethics.

**H3a:** Paternalistic leadership positively affects the indirect institutionalization of ethics.

**H3b:** Paternalistic leadership positively affects the direct institutionalization of ethics.

## Method

The research uses a model in which the institutionalization of ethics is the dependent variable and interactional leadership, transformational leadership, and paternalistic leadership are the independent variables. The research uses the quantitative approach is used and benefits from the survey design (Gürbüz & Şahin, 2016). In order to test the hypotheses of the research, data were collected from 409 pharmaceutical representatives in Turkey using questionnaires. The findings from previous similar studies were used to determine the sample, and the demographic characteristics of the current study's sample are consistent with those from previous studies (Civaner, 2005; 2006; Aksu, 2006; Akkoç, 2008; Bozyiğit & Akkan, 2013; Akcan et al., 2014; Taner & Elgün, 2015; Liu et al., 2005; Alpar, 2011).

The study uses the Turkish version of the 16-item 2-factor scale developed by Singhapakdi and Vitell (2007) to measure the institutionalization of ethics (CMIN/DF = 2.705; GFI = 0.943; NFI = 0.944; CFI = 0.963; RMSEA = 0.065), and the 20-item Transformational Leadership Scale (CMIN/DF: 2.906; GFI: 0.910; NFI: 0.954; CFI: 0.969; RMSEA: 0.068) and 16-item Transactional Leadership Scale (CMIN/DF = 2.989; GFI = 0.914; NFI = 0.931; CFI = 0.953; RMSEA = 0.070) that was adapted into Turkish by Kahya (2013) based on the Multi-Factor Leadership Scale developed by Bass and Avolio (1989) to measure transactional leadership and transformational leadership. To measure paternalistic leadership, the Turkish version of the 21-item 5-factor scale developed by Aycan (2006) and adapted into Turkish by Türesin (2012; CMIN/DF = 2.896; GFI = 0.902; NFI = 0.927; CFI = 0.951; RMSEA = 0.068) was used.

## Results

As a result of the regression and correlation analyses, the first hypothesis (H1) is seen to be accepted in terms of both sub-hypotheses H1a and H1b. Transactional leadership affects both the direct and indirect institutionalization of ethics. The second hypothesis (H2) was seen to only be partially accepted, with transformational leadership being revealed to affect the indirect institutionalization of ethics while not directly affecting this institutionalization. Meanwhile, the findings suggest that paternalistic leadership affects both the indirect and direct institutionalization of ethics. Therefore, the third hypothesis (H3) is also seen to have been accepted.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

Transactional leadership is mostly based on a mutually win-win relationship between employees and leaders (Kuhnert & Lewis, 1987), and the results of this study show that this leadership style affects the indirect institutionalization of ethics. Active and passive management by exception is revealed not to affect the indirect institutionalization of ethics, whereas conditional rewarding is revealed to affect the indirect institutionalization of ethics positively while liberal leadership affects this negatively. Meanwhile, transactional leadership has been determined to have a negative effect on the direct institutionalization of ethics only in terms of liberal leadership.

Transformational leadership has been determined to indirectly affect the institutionalization of ethics while having no direct effect on it. Transformational leadership's dimensions of ideal impacts and self-interest were seen to have no effect on the indirect institutionalization of ethics, while the dimension of developer motivation (occurring in the literature as a mixture of inspirational motivation and intellectual stimulation) was seen to have a positive effect. Transformational leadership has been stated to be the leadership style that is expected to contribute the most to the institutionalization of ethics (Carlson & Perrewe, 1995). Developer motivation emerged as a combination of two dimensions in this study, and its positive contribution to the indirect institutionalization of ethics may be evaluated in a way that is compatible with the literature.

Paternalist leadership (Köksal, 2011) takes its influence from power and authority and was determined to connect leaders' impacts on their employees through respect mixed with fear (Köksal, 2011) and to affect the indirect and direct institutionalization of ethics. The paternalist leadership approach (Farh & Cheng, 2000; Aycan, 2006) has an important explanatory power in labor relations in collectivist cultures such as Turkey's and was indeed found to have a significant impact on the institutionalization of ethics, as expected.

Based on these results, it is especially important to have pharmaceutical companies train leaders who will inspire their representatives who assume the role of intermediary between the company and physicians in the field and appoint individuals who have internalized ethical values as managers. The institutionalization of ethics both in companies' business processes as well as in their representatives' behaviors will place physician-firm relations at a higher level of quality and a more scientific basis, as well as limit unethical approaches and support the rational drug use policy that public authorities have attempted to implement in the sector.

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