

# Ethical Climate's Mediating Role Between Leadership Styles and Counterproductive Work Behaviors in the Field of Education

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## Introduction

Leaders hold their organizations together and are the most important elements in achieving corporate success (Drucker, 2012). By using leadership effectively, an organization's culture can also be transformed into one that encourages ethical behavior (Van Aswegen & Engelbrecht, 2009).

This study claims that the CWBs employees' exhibits can be decreased based on the perspective of social exchange theory, which is based on the principle of reciprocity and is defined as the emergence of one good behavior in return for another from one party to another (Blau, 1964).


In this context, the research will contribute practically to the literature on the relationships among leadership styles, ethical climate, and CWBs by providing a new perspective to those in the education sector. In addition, the research will be useful in the theoretical sense as it will contribute to explaining CWBs, being the dependent variable of the research.


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 Research Paper

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DOI: 10.12711/tjbe/m3794  
Turkish Journal of Business Ethics, 2022  
isahlakidergisi.com

## Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

### The Relationship Between Leadership Styles and CWBs

Transformational leaders endeavor to raise awareness about ideals as well as about moral values such as justice, equality, and peace (Altun, 2002). In order to realize their vision, leaders must have the ability to empower employees by transforming the delegated authority into a unity of action (Bass, 1985). The positive effects transformational leadership has on employees are seen to be improvements to the indicators of job satisfaction, development of organizational commitment and justice, readiness for change, and task performance (Medley & Larochelle, 1995; Pillai et al., 1999; Asgari et al., 2008).

Transactional leadership is a style of leadership that aims to have employees obey the rules and the leader by giving out rewards (Eren & Titizoğlu, 2014). It involves having fewer innovative and developmental aspects (Eren, 2003).

In the most general explanation, CWBs involve employees' deliberate actions that harm their organization and include behaviors such as destruction and abuse of corporate property, failure to notify superiors about wrongdoing or mistakes (Spector et al., 2006, p. 30; Martinko et al., 2002, p. 37).

Kayani and Alasan's (2021) study revealed increases in employees' levels of perceived transformational leadership, ethical leadership, and participatory leadership to also increase their organizational commitment, whereas CWBs may result in more negative growth. Sharma and Nair (2020) revealed transformational leadership styles to negatively correlate to followers' CWBs. Liu and Sun (2014) showed transactional leadership styles to be able to effectively reduce employees' CWBs, with leader-member interactions being a partial mediating variable in this relationship. As a result, this study presents the following hypotheses:

**H1:** A significant relationship exists between leadership styles and CWBs.

**H1a:** A significant relationship exists between transformational leadership styles and CWBs.

**H1b:** A significant relationship exists between transactional leadership styles and CWBs.

## The Relationship Between Ethical Climate and CWBs from the Perspective of Ethical Climate Theory

The reason why ethical behaviors are needed in an organization is so that employees can view the organization they work for as a legitimate source of right and wrong in the business environment. (Lu & Lin, 2014). Ethical climate influences member behaviors by shaping which ethical issues are addressed and what kind of ethical reasoning is used (Arnaud & Schminke, 2012). Ethical climate involves all the perceptions that are developed within the scope of the organization's members regarding whether behavior in the organization falls within the context of ethical values (Victor & Cullen, 1988). Ethical climate has been stated as being one of the determinants of CWBs within an organization (Lau et al., 2003; Kanten & Ülker, 2013).

Wimbush and Shepard (1994) stated the dominant ethical climate in an organization serves as a premise not only for negative behaviors but also for CWBs. Gerçek's (2017) research determined ethical climate and trust to have a significantly negative relationship with CWBs. These results are like those from Elçi et al.'s (2013) study, which suggested ethical climate to be able to lower CWB levels. As such the following hypothesis has also been formed:

**H2:** A significant relationship exists between ethical climate and CWBs.

## The Relationship Between Leadership Styles and Ethical Climate

Ethics lay at the heart of leadership (Ciulla, 1995). Studies are found to indicate leadership styles to have a positive relationship with ethical climate (Demirtaş & Akdoğan, 2015; Mayer et al., 2010; Shin et al., 2015). Burton and Peachey (2017) showed servant leadership to be directly related to trust in leadership and perceptions of ethical climate. Sağnak (2010) found the transformational leadership styles of school principals to positively affect schools' ethical climate atmosphere. Therefore, the following hypotheses have also been formed:

**H3:** A significant relationship exists between leadership styles and ethical climate.

**H3a:** A significant relationship exists between transformational leadership styles and ethical climate.

**H3b:** A significant relationship exists between transactional leadership styles and ethical climate.

## Ethical Climate's Mediating Role in the Effect of Leadership Styles on CWBs

Social exchange theory describes a rational decision-making process that emerges with the benefit-cost evaluations that individuals make on their own in line with their expectations from their climate (Emerson, 1976; Yıldız & Develi, 2018). Individuals change their behaviors based on their perceptions and attitudes regarding events or climate (Blau, 1964). Leadership styles are predicted to be able to impact CWBs in an ethical environment (Aryati et al., 2018). As such, the main hypothesis (H4) of this current research is as follows and tests this relationship again over a different sample:

**H4:** Ethical climate has a mediating role in the relationship between leadership styles and CWBs.

**H4a:** Ethical climate has a mediating role in the relationship between transformational leadership styles and CWBs.

**H4b:** Ethical climate has a mediating role in the relationship between transactional leadership styles and CWBs.

## Method and Application

The research uses a quantitative approach and a screening design. The screening design aims to determine people's characteristics regarding certain subjects with the help of questionnaires (Gürbüz & Şahin, 2016, p. 107).

### Measurement Tools and Sampling

This study uses the transformational leadership subscale and transactional leadership subscale from the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire created by Avolio and Bass (1995). The Turkish version of the transformational subscale and transactional subscale are taken from Gökçe Parsehyan's (2014) research. The transactional leadership scale consists of a total of 16 items and 4 dimensions. The dimensions of the scale are as follows: Conditional Reward 4 items, Active Management by Exceptions 4 items, Passive Management by Exceptions 4 items, Passive/Avoid Leadership 4 items. The Transformational Leadership Scale consists of 5 dimensions and 20 items. The dimensions of the scale are as follows: Idealized Impact (Behavioral) consists of 4 items, Idealized Impact (Qualitative) consists of 4 items, Inspirational Motivation 4 items, Intellectual Stimulation 4 items, Individual Support 4 items.

This study uses the Ethical Climate Questionnaire created by Victor and Cullen (1987). The Turkish version of the scale was used as in the Savran (2007) research.

The scale consists of a total of 12 items and 3 dimensions. The dimensions of the scale are as follows: Egoist Climate consists of 4 items, Benevolent Climate consists of 4 items, and Principled Climate consists of 4 items. The study obtained data for the dependent variable of counterproductive work behaviors using the Scale of Organizational Deviance created by Bennet and Robinson (2000). The Turkish version of the scale was used as it was in Özüren (2017) research. The scale consists of 19 items and 2 dimensions in total. The research was conducted over a total of 437 respondents, while 383 participants are required for the research according to Kortlik and Higgins (2001).

### Data Analysis

This part of the study conducted a frequency analysis. Next, exploratory factor analyses and reliability tests for the scales were performed, followed by correlation analysis. A regression analysis was performed to test the hypotheses.

## Results

### The Participants' Demographic Data

The demographic characteristics of the participants participating in the research, such as gender, age, educational status, marital status, experience in the institution, and total work experience, were examined. When the participants are examined in terms of their gender, it is seen that 30.7% (134) are female and 69.3% (303) are male. When the educational status of the participants is examined, it is seen that 75.8% (331) of them are undergraduate graduates. Considering the level of experience of the participants in the institution where they are actively working, 43.5% (190) have 0-5 years, 24.9% (109) 6-10 years, 11.4% (50) 11-15 years, 20.2% (88) of them have been working in the same institution for 16 years or more.

### Exploratory Factor Analysis and Scale Reliability

Exploratory factor analysis was performed to determine the validity and reliability of the scales used to examine the relationship between research variables.

### Exploratory Factor Analysis

Exploratory factor analysis is used to identify variables and to express many variables through fewer variables as factors of the larger group of variables (Gürbüz & Şahin, 2014, p. 311). To explain how many dimensions of the transformational leadership subscale the participants perceived, Varimax rotation was applied in the

principal components analysis. Considering the sample size, the analysis took the lower limit of the factor loadings for each item as 0.5 (Hair et al., 2010).

To determine whether the transactional leadership scale is suitable for factor analysis, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) sample adequacy test and the Bartlett sphericity test were performed. As a result of these tests, the KMO value of 0.968 was above the desired level of 0.50 and the tail probability of the Bartlett test was found to be significant at a 0.001 significance level. Therefore, the dataset was revealed to be suitable for factor analysis (Field, 2009). Considering the sample size, the analysis took the lower limit of the factor loadings for each item also as being 0.5 (Hair et al., 2010). As a result, it has been observed that the ethical climate scale is distributed in the factor structure as theoretically predicted as “CWB Against Employees” and “CWB Against the Organization”.

### Reliability Values

The structural validity values of the scales were calculated using exploratory factor analysis, while the consistency values of the scales were calculated using reliability analysis (Gürbüz & Şahin, 2014, p. 323).

In this study, reliability was calculated with the Cronbach Alpha value, and an Alpha coefficient above 0.7 is accepted as a psychometrically reliable result of the scale (Hair et al. 2010; Field, 2009). Reliability analyses were conducted for the transformational leadership subscale, the Transactional Leadership, the Ethical Climate Questionnaire, and the Scale of Organizational Deviance.

### Correlation Analysis

The correlation coefficient was first formulated and discovered by Karl Pearson in 1896 (Hauke & Kossowski, 2011). However, correlation coefficients closer to zero indicate weaker relationships between variables (Field, 2009). In addition, the condition required to test the research hypotheses (i.e., to examine the effect of the independent variables on the dependent variables) is to have no statistically significant relationships among the variables (Gürbüz & Şahin, 2014). According to the research, transactional leadership has a statistically significant and positive effect on ethical climate ( $F=29.019$ ;  $p=0.00001 < 0.05$  and  $\beta=0.351$ ). Also, transactional leadership, which was described as an independent variable, explained the dependent variable, anti-productive work behaviors, in a statistically significant and negative way ( $F=10.386$ ;  $p=0.0014 < 0.05$  and  $\beta=-0.271$ ).

## Regression Analysis

The procedures set forth by Baron and Kenny (1986) were used to test the research model. Looking at the lower and upper confidence intervals instead of the  $p$ -values is recommended for testing whether the indirect effect of transactional leadership on CWBs is statistically significant (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Transactional leadership is seen to have no direct effect on CWBs when an ethical climate is introduced.

Looking at the lower and upper confidence intervals instead of the  $p$ -value is also recommended for testing whether the indirect effect of transformational leadership on counterproductive work behavior is statistically significant (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). A partial decrease is observed in the effect transformational leadership has on CWBs once an ethical climate is introduced.

## Discussion and Conclusion

The research first tested hypotheses H1a and H1b, and these hypotheses were seen to be supported. Also hypotheses H2 were tested and seen to be supported, thus indicating a significant effect to exist between ethical climate and CWBs. One of the biggest problems CWBs cause is a decrease in employees' organizational commitment. Thus, employees with CWBs exhibit behaviors contrary to organizational values and norms and hold their self-interests above organizational interests (Gültaş & Erigüç, 2019, p. 64). For this reason, creating an ethical climate is a strategy that will help employees know how the organization expects them to behave while at the same time reducing their desire to engage in negative behaviors (Schwepker et al., 2019, p. 617). Moorthy et Moorthy, Seetharaman, Jaffar, and Foong (2015) state that based on the needs, opportunities and personal characteristics of the employees, they are inclined to steal in the workplace. Whereas, at the organizational level, employees tend to steal because of low income, injustice and ethical climate at a low level.

Aryati et al. (2018) found ethical leadership to be able to affect the formation of an ethical climate in an organization, which in turn negatively affects deviant behaviors in the workplace.

Hypothesis H3 in the research involves the presence of a significant relationship between leadership styles and ethical climate and was tested and shown to be supported through hypotheses H3a and H3b. One study that revealed transformational leadership to have a positive effect on the dimensions of ethical climate stated the effective use of transformational leadership to allow an organization to

able to transform its culture into one that encourages ethical behavior (Van Aswegen & Engelbrecht, 2009). Another study similarly demonstrated transformational leadership positively affect ethical climate (Engelbrecht et.al., 2005). Another study stated that, while the interactionist leadership style affects organizational citizenship behavior positively, the ethical climate has a mediating effect on this relationship (Shapira-Lishchinsky & Raftar-Ozery, 2018). Hypotheses H4a and H4b involve ethical climate's mediating effect on the relationship between leadership styles (i.e., transformational and transcendental) and CWBs and was tested as the final main question of this study. While ethical climate was found to have a partial mediating effect on the relationship between transformational leadership and CWBs, it was found to have a full mediating effect on the relationship between transactional leadership and CWBs. Both leadership styles have been argued to possess different strengths and weaknesses, and therefore more empirical studies are needed (Odumeru & Ogbonna, 2013). According to Avolio and Bass (1993), transactional leaders are more committed to traditions and the past, while transformational leaders are more committed to innovation, the future, and change.

Social exchange theory forms the theoretical basis of this research and is a theory frequently used in management literature to explain employees' attitudes and behaviors towards their job and the organization, as well as to explain employer-employee relations (Seçkin, 2020). Employees exchange their labor, gratitude, trust, and loyalty for the benefits provided by their organizations in a way that may result in both economic and social consequences (Ateş, 2017). Within the framework of this research, the importance of the ethical environment in which the administrators of the education sector are, along with the leadership style they will put forward in dealing with the problem of CWB, has also been revealed. According to Corley and Gioia's (2011) point of view, research in this direction demonstrates both practical and scientific usefulness along with developing originality. The main contribution of the current research should also be considered in this context. From this point of view, practical outputs are presented to educate managers on what types of leadership should be exhibited in order to minimize CWB and what kind of climate should be created.



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