

# **Perceived ethical behaviour of leaders in relation to employees' job satisfaction in a railway organisation in a developing-country setting**

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## **Abstract**

This study examined the relationship between employees' perceptions of the ethical behaviour of their leaders and their self-rated levels of job satisfaction. A convenience sample ( $n = 839$ ) consisting of permanent employees in a railway organisation in the Democratic Republic of Congo was used. As measurement instruments, the Ethical Work Leadership Questionnaire (EWLQ) and the Job Satisfaction Questionnaire (JSQ) were administered. Data were analysed using stepwise multiple regression to predict the relationship between the two variables. The results indicated that the leaders' perceived ethical behavioural dimensions related positively to the employees' job satisfaction, and that the leaders' perceived ethical behaviour dimensions predicted the employees' job satisfaction. The results can be seen as an important step towards understanding the relationship dynamics between leaders and followers in this DRC organisation, which may be applicable to other, similar organisations in developing countries. The results can be used to structure future leadership and staff development, for example, to enhance leaders' awareness of their ethical responsibility towards the organisation, as well as to facilitate their followers' job satisfaction and, ultimately, psychological well-being. It is suggested that future research focus strongly on the facilitation of ethical awareness and behaviour, as well as how it influences followers' psychological wellness in terms of, amongst others, engagement, resilience, coping behaviour, and job performance.

## **Key phrases**

*Behaviour; Democratic Republic of the Congo; ethical leaders and job satisfaction*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Unethical behaviour in companies and scandals that have come to the public's attention in the past years (e.g., FIFA bribery and corruption, Volkswagen's malpractices, and Ford's unethical business practices) (Alotaibi 2016) have increased the importance of the ethical conduct of those in influential positions (Neves & Story 2015:165-176). Much has been written about philosophical and normative views on leaders' ethicality and moral reputation (Brown & Michell 2010:583-616; Brown & Trevino 2006:595-616; Eisenbeiss 2012:791-808; Mitonga-Monga & Cilliers 2016:35-42) and the ethical dimensions present in the contemporary styles of leadership that relate to, for example, transformational leadership (Bass & Avolio 1994:215) and authentic leadership (Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing & Peterson 2008:89-126). Yet, while corporates are expressing the need for leaders who role model leadership with integrity, honesty, and respect (Neves & Story 2015:165-176), unethical business practices are still commonplace. An ethical leader is someone who positively influences and encourages ethical behaviour in subordinates (Tu, Lu & Yu 2017:229). Recent studies on leadership behaviour have aimed to understand how leadership styles influence employee outcomes such as job satisfaction (Shafique, Kalyar & Ahmad 2018:71-72), employee commitment, and turnover intention (Mitonga-Monga & Cilliers 2016:35-42). Although ethical leadership behaviour has been studied widely in developing countries, due to the interest in both empirical and research areas (Yates 2014:1-15), there is still much to learn about how ethical leaders' behaviour influences employees' attitudes (i.e. job satisfaction) (Güngör 2016:1180-1188; Haller, Fischer & Frey 2018:1-2; Kim & Brymer 2011:1297-1343; Shafique *et al.* 2018:71). The present research endeavoured to study how employees' perceptions of ethical leadership behaviour influenced their job satisfaction in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), thus, in the context of a developing-country work setting.

## 2. DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO WORK CONTEXT

The DRC is considered a developing country with considerable economic potential, because of its vast mineral and natural wealth (gold, copper, diamonds, and verdant forests) (Mitonga-Monga & Cilliers 2016:35-42). In spite of its natural resources, the DRC remains one of Africa's poorest countries, mainly because of political conflict, hyperinflation,

mismanagement, corruption, and unethical behaviour. At present, the country's leaders realise the need to speed up institutional, economic, political, and social reform to ensure stability, peace, and growth, and to reduce the high levels of corruption (Mitonga-Monga 2018:15-20). Unfortunately, political instability has slowed down development and hindered the country in realising its developmental plan and social growth (Mitonga-Monga & Hlongwane 2017:351-355). This has resulted in the country being ranked below 7% on all six economic indicators (Transparency International 2014:2), with the lowest scores on government effectiveness, rule of law, political stability, and control of corruption (Mitonga-Monga & Cilliers 2016:35-42). The country's railway organisation lacks basic infrastructure and equipment, and working conditions are poor. If workers perceive that they are poorly led, the organisation's performance and employee well-being will suffer. A deep-seated culture of accountability, transparent and ethical business practices, and positive ethical leadership may increase workers' job satisfaction, wellness, and performance. Contribution to the literature was done through this study in the following ways: First, social learning theory (Bandura 1977:370) and social exchange theory (Blau 1964:352) were used. Second, the researcher assessed the relationship between ethical leadership and employees' job satisfaction. Third, the theoretical background of ethical leadership, job satisfaction, and proposed hypotheses concerning ethical leadership and job satisfaction in the methodology, discussions, and conclusions drawn from the results are discussed.

### **3. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES**

#### **3.1 Ethical leadership behaviour**

Ethical leaders are principled individuals who use various forms of rewards, punishment, and communication mechanisms to influence their subordinates' ethical behaviour (Brown, Treviño & Harrison 2005:118; Xu, Loi & Ngo 2016:494). Brown *et al.* (2005:120) 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." The literature on organisational behaviour and business ethics indicates that ethical leadership relates to integrity and fairness (Mullins 2013:376). Ethical leaders are seen as trustworthy, fair, and principled decision-makers. Brown and Trevino (2006:595-616) characterised these

behaviours as the moral aspects of ethical leadership. According to Kalshoven, Den Hartog, and De Hoogh (2011:349-366), ethical leadership is characterised by the following seven dimensions:

- **people orientation** - respect for and support of employees and caring about their well-being;
- **power sharing** - taking followers' ideas into consideration, involving them when setting performance goals, and giving them a voice;
- **fairness** - developing followers and fostering their self-efficacy, and ensuring that their needs are met;
- **role clarification** - articulating followers' expectations, clarifying responsibilities, and sharing the information needed to complete the task;
- **integrity** - acting in accordance with the moral principles they preach, and aligning their behaviour with their promises;
- **concern for sustainability** - having a broad ethical awareness that extends beyond the organisation, caring about the environment, and promoting eco-friendly work processes;
- **ethical guidance** - ensuring that ethical standards are kept, rewarding employees who act in accordance, and punishing those who break the rules.

Previous research has shown the role of ethical leadership behaviour in enhancing employees' attitudes and behaviour (Demirtas & Akdogan 2015:136-156; Mitonga-Monga & Cilliers 2016:35-42). Bedi, Alpaslan, and Green (2015:1-20) and Brown *et al.* (2005:117-134) noted that ethical leaders adopt behaviours that benefit their followers, the organisation, and stakeholders, while Mitonga-Monga and Cilliers (2016:35-42) asserted that ethical leaders are fair and honest, and include moral principles in their values, beliefs, and actions. Ethical leadership has been found to affect specific employee outcomes, such as job satisfaction, organisational commitment, ethical behaviour, organisational citizenship behaviour, and job performance (Ahn, Lee & Yun 2018: 457-470; Bello 2012:228-236; Demirtas & Akdogan 2015:136-156; Mitonga-Monga & Cilliers 2016:35.42; Xu, Loi & Ngo 2017:493-504). In the next section, job satisfaction is discussed.

### 3.2 Job satisfaction

Job satisfaction refers to an individual's emotional orientation towards work (Locke 1976:1297-1343; Luthans 2010:125). Huang, You, and Tsai (2012:513-529) added that it indicates the psychological or physical satisfaction of the employee with the work environment or the work itself. Mullins (2013:277) stated that job satisfaction is the overall feeling an individual has about work, rather than about what the work actually entails. Job satisfaction is defined as "the pleasant or positive emotional response that an individual perceives from his or her work or work experience" (Mullins 2013:277), and includes the degree to which an employee is pleased with the reward system in terms of the intrinsic motivation regarding services rendered to the organisation (Asrar-ul-Haq, Kuchnik & Iqbal 2017: 2352). According to Olorunsola (2012:46-50), job satisfaction relates to the following personal experiences in the work context:

- **satisfaction with pay** - the degree to which an employee is satisfied with the organisation's remuneration;
- **satisfaction with supervisor** - the degree of satisfaction with support received from the supervisor;
- **satisfaction with co-workers** - experienced relationships with co-workers;
- **satisfaction with promotion** - the degree to which an individual is satisfied with opportunities for promotion; and
- **satisfaction with the work itself** - the degree to which the individual is satisfied with his or her working conditions and job tasks.

Research on job satisfaction has gained considerable academic and practitioner interest (Gyekye & Haybatollahi 2015:285-301). A high level of job satisfaction is associated with loyalty, role efficacy, and effectiveness, the well-being of employees, lower turnover intentions and absenteeism, and better job performance, both at the individual and organisational levels (Asrar-ul-Haq *et al.* 2017:2352; Mitonga-Monga, Flotman & Cilliers 2015:1064-1084). The next section discusses the relationship between the variables.

### 3.3 The relationship between ethical leadership and job satisfaction

Ethical leadership research is commonly based on social learning theory (Bandura 1977:247), which is used to explain the influence of ethical leadership on employees' behaviour and attitudes (Brown *et al.* 2005:117-134; Hansen 2011:41-55). This suggests that employees follow ethical leaders because they consider them to be credible and trustworthy, and as role models to imitate. Ethical leadership positively impacts employees' ethical behaviour, and may increase their level of satisfaction with the reward system, relationships with colleagues, and work conditions (Abrhiem 2012:11-19).

To date, management- and organisational behaviour researchers have supported the idea that ethical leadership has a positive influence on individuals' job satisfaction (Neubert, Carlson, Kacmar, Roberts & Chonko 2009:157:170). Second-level explanations of the influence of ethical leadership, using social exchange theory (Blau 1964:193-194), have been proposed by Brown and Trevino (2006:595-616). However, these have not been extensively or empirically researched (see Walumbwa *et al.* 2008:89-126). According to Blau (1964:194) and Hansen (2011:41-55), the social exchange relationship operates according to the norms and principles of reciprocity. This denotes that, when employees feel treated positively by an ethical leader or organisation, they will reciprocate by treating the leader/organisation favourably in return. A strong social exchange relationship will greatly influence employees' attitudes and behaviour (Mitonga-Monga & Cilliers 2016:35-42).

Examining the relationship between ethical leadership and job satisfaction, a substantial body of research indicates that ethical leadership positively predicts employees' job satisfaction, commitment, and organisational citizenship behaviour (Hashish 2017:151; Bedi *et al.* 2015:1-20; Mitonga-Monga & Cilliers 2016:35-42; Yon, Kim, Ko & Park 2016:1-9). Workers who feel supported, cared for, treated fairly, and respected by their ethical leader are more likely to develop higher levels of job satisfaction and trust — more than their colleagues who feel they are not treated fairly (Brown *et al.* 2005:117-134; De Hoogh & Den Hartog 2008:297; Dinc & Nurovic 2016:3-14; Kalshoven *et al.* 2011:349-366; Kim & Brymer 2011:1020-1026). Thus, based on these research results, a positive link between ethical leadership and job satisfaction was expected. We propose that positive perceptions of

support, fair treatment, and respect shown by the ethical leader or organisation positively influence employees' level of job satisfaction.

Based on the literature, the following research hypothesis was formulated:

H<sub>1</sub>: There is a positive relationship between ethical leadership and employees' job satisfaction.

#### **4. GOAL OF THE STUDY**

The study sought to determine the extent to which employees of a DRC railway organisation perceived ethical behaviour by the leadership to influence their job satisfaction. The following question guided the investigation: To what extent do ethical leadership behaviours influence employees' job satisfaction in a railway organisation in the DRC? The research is significant in terms of possible future human resource interventions with regard to promoting employees' job performance, satisfaction, and wellness. It is believed that such interventions will be successful in a working environment where leaders act in a fair and ethical manner (Mitonga-Monga & Cilliers 2016:42).

#### **5. METHOD**

##### **5.1 Design, respondents, and setting**

This study used a cross-sectional survey research design (Tabachnick & Fidell 2013). Respondents were drawn from permanent employees in a railway organisation in the DRC. A convenient sample ( $n = 839$ ) was used, reflecting the following characteristics: 68% men and 32% women, aged 26–40 years; 61% had 6–10 years' service in the organisation, and 38% had an honours degree. Table 1 below presents the demographic characteristics.

**Table 1: Demographic characteristics profile of the sample**

Demographic variables		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	571	68.1
	Female	268	31.9
Age	25 years or younger	212	25.2
	26–40 years	529	63.1
	41–55 years	83	9.9
	56 or older	15	1.8
Job tenure	Less than 5 years	282	33.6
	6–10 years	510	60.8
	11–20 years	47	5.6
Educational level	National diploma	185	22.1
	Bachelor's degree	235	28.0
	Honours degree	319	38.0
	Master's or doctorate	100	11.9

Source: Survey data

## 5.2 Measuring Instruments

The Ethical Leadership Work Questionnaire (ELWQ) (Kalshoven *et al.* 2011:349-366) was used to measure respondents' perceptions of their leaders' behaviour. The ELWQ is a self-reporting instrument containing 38 items, and uses a five-point Likert scale (1 = *Strongly disagree*; 5 = *Strongly agree*). Examples of items from the measure include: [Leaders:] "Pay attention to my personal needs"; "Hold me responsible for things that are not my fault"; "Will reconsider a decision on the basis of recommendations by those who report to him/her." The ELWQ has shown good psychometric properties in the Netherlands and South Africa (Kalshoven *et al.* 2011:349-366). Kalshoven *et al.* (2011:365) reported a reliability index of 0.84 to 0.94 for the ELWQ. Cronbach alpha coefficients (internal consistency) of 0.70 to 0.95 were obtained in the present study.



The Job Satisfaction Questionnaire (JSQ) (Locke 1976:1297-1343) was used to measure respondents' job satisfaction. The JSQ is a self-reporting instrument containing 20 items, and uses a five-point Likert scale (*1 = Strongly disagree; 5 = Strongly agree*). Examples of items from the measure include: "I feel I am being paid a fair amount for the work I do" and "There is really too little chance for promotion in my job." The JSQ has shown internal consistency reliability ranging from 0.76 to 0.89 (Vitell & Davis 1990:489-494). In the present study, acceptable Cronbach alpha coefficients (Nunnally & Bernstein 2010:94) were obtained for all the measured dimensions, namely *Total job satisfaction* (0.92), *Satisfaction with pay* (0.86), *Satisfaction with promotion* (0.74), *Satisfaction with co-workers* (0.72), *Satisfaction with supervisor* (0.84), and *Satisfaction with work itself* (0.80) (see Table 2a).

### 5.3 Research procedure

Permission to conduct the research was obtained from both the Ethical Review Committee of the University of South Africa and the management of the organisation involved in the study. Respondents received a package consisting of the following in hard copy: the informed consent form, a letter of invitation indicating the purpose of the study, management's approval letter, confirmation of safekeeping and confidentiality of the responses, and the two questionnaires. Each respondent was asked to sign the consent form and include it with the questionnaires in the envelope, to be returned to the researcher.

### 5.4 Statistical analysis

Data were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 24 for Windows (2017). Firstly, means, standard deviations, Cronbach alpha coefficients, and correlations between the ELWQ and the JSQ variables were calculated. A cut-off point of 0.30 and 0.50 (medium to large effect) was set for practical significance for all the correlations coefficients (see Tabachnick & Fidell 2013:234). Secondly, stepwise multiple regression analysis was used to determine whether the respondents' perceptions of their leaders' ethical behaviour (measured by the ELWQ) predicted job satisfaction (measured by the JSQ) (Cohen, Manion & Morison 2013:303). In order to counter the probability of Type I errors, it was decided to set the significance value at a 95% confidence interval level ( $p \leq 0.05$ ).  $R^2$  was used to test the predictive power of the independent variables on the

dependent variables.  $R^2$  changes were calculated with the F-test. A significant F-value for change in the  $R^2$  meant that the variables added significantly to improving the prediction.

Prior to conducting the various regression analyses, collinearity diagnostics were examined, to ensure that zero-order correlations were below the level of concern ( $r \geq 0.80$ ), that the variance inflation factors did not exceed 10, and that the tolerance values were close to 1.0 (Tabachnick & Fidell 2013:236).

## 6. RESULTS

### 6.1 Descriptive statistics and correlations

Table 2a and Table 2b present the descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, and Cronbach alpha) and correlations of the study variables, i.e. *Ethical leadership* and *Job satisfaction*. In terms of the ELWQ (*Ethical leadership*) variables, the respondents obtained the highest mean scores on *Concern for sustainability* ( $M = 4.04$ ;  $SD = .56$ ), *Ethical guidance* ( $M = 4.02$ ;  $SD = .61$ ), and *Power sharing* ( $M = 4.00$ ;  $SD = .63$ ). The lowest mean scores were for *People orientation* ( $M = 3.99$ ;  $SD = .63$ ), overall *Ethical leadership* ( $M = 3.98$ ;  $SD = .51$ ), *Role clarification* ( $M = 3.95$ ;  $SD = .70$ ), and *Integrity* ( $M = 3.93$ ;  $SD = .86$ ).

In terms of the JSQ (*Job satisfaction*) variables, the respondents obtained the highest mean scores on *Satisfaction with co-workers* ( $M = 4.15$ ;  $SD = .55$ ), overall *Job satisfaction* ( $M = 4.03$ ;  $SD = .52$ ), *Satisfaction with work itself* ( $M = 4.02$ ;  $SD = .59$ ), *Satisfaction with promotion* ( $M = 4.01$ ;  $SD = .61$ ), and *Satisfaction with supervisor* ( $M = 4.00$ ;  $SD = .74$ ). The respondents obtained the lowest mean scores on *Satisfaction with pay* ( $M = 3.95$ ;  $SD = .73$ ).

Table 2a and Table 2b also present the significant correlation coefficients identified between the ELWQ and the JSQ variables. The inter-correlations ranged from  $r \geq .34$  (medium practical effect size) to  $r \geq .67$  (large practical effect size). The results showed that the zero-order correlation was below the threshold level of concern (.90) of multi-collinearity. *Overall ethical leadership*, *People orientation*, *Power sharing*, *Fairness*, *Integrity*, *Role clarification*, *Concern for sustainability*, and *Ethical guidance* were positively and significantly associated with overall *Satisfaction*, *Satisfaction with pay*, *Satisfaction with supervisor*, *Satisfaction with*

co-workers, Satisfaction with promotion, and Satisfaction with work itself (with *p*-values ranging between  $p \leq .01$  and  $p \leq .05$ ).

**Table 2a: Mean, standard deviations, and correlations among variables study**

Variables	Mean	SD	$\alpha$	1	2	3	4	5
Overall ethical leadership	3.98	.51	.95	1				
People orientation	3.99	.63	.85	.77***	1			
Power sharing	4.00	.63	.83	.79***	.61***	1		
Fairness	3.92	.6*4	.84	.73***	.55***	.58***	1	
Integrity	3.93	.86	.70	.69***	.37**	.50***	.46**	1
Role clarification	3.95	.70	.82	.73***	.43**	.59***	.42**	.65***
Concern for sustainability	4.04	.56	.86	.75***	.55***	.66***	.56***	.39**
Ethical guidance	4.02	.61	.83	.77***	.59***	.75***	.61***	.56***
Overall job satisfaction	4.03	.52	.92	.74***	.50***	.65***	.52***	.61***
Satisfaction with pay	3.95	.73	.86	.57***	.38**	.48**	.39**	.42**
Satisfaction with supervisor	4.00	.74	.74	.67***	.43**	.54***	.52***	.60***
Satisfaction with co-workers	4.15	.55	.72	.65***	.36**	.53***	.33**	.42**
Satisfaction with promotion	4.01	.61	.84	.51***	.38**	.47**	.35**	.34**
Satisfaction with work itself	4.02	.59	.80	.56***	.43**	.55***	.43**	.60***

Note. N = 839; \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

Source: Survey

**Table 2b: Mean, standard deviations, and correlations among variables study**

Variables	Mean	SD	$\alpha$	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Overall ethical leadership	3.98	.51	.95									
People orientation	3.99	.63	.85									

Power sharing	4.00	.63	.83									
Fairness	3.92	.64	.84									
Integrity	3.93	.86	.70									
Role clarification	3.95	.70	.82	1								
Concern for sustainability	4.04	.56	.86	.47***	1							
Ethical guidance	4.02	.61	.83	.55***	.63***	1						
Overall job satisfaction	4.03	.52	.92	.66***	.54***	.65***	1					
Satisfaction with pay	3.95	.73	.86	.52***	.43**	.49**	.80***	1				
Satisfaction with supervisor	4.00	.74	.74	.57***	.43**	.61***	.79***	.61***	1			
Satisfaction with co-workers	4.15	.55	.72	.59***	.49**	.50***	.67***	.41**	.45**	1		
Satisfaction with promotion	4.01	.61	.84	.49**	.40**	.39**	.77***	.57***	.52***	.44**	1	
Satisfaction with work itself	4.02	.59	.80	.50***	.41**	.56***	.81***	.55***	.61***	.53***	.52***	1

Note. N = 839; \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

Source: survey

### 6.2 Hierarchical regressions

Table 3 contains the results of the regression analysis. The hierarchical regression revealed that, at Stage 1, *People orientation* contributed significantly to the regression model,  $F_{(1,838)} = 280.32$ ,  $p < .05$ , and accounted for 2.5% of the variation in *Job satisfaction*. Introducing the *Power sharing*, *Fairness*, and *Integrity* variables explained an additional 2.9% of the variation in *Job satisfaction*. This change in  $R^2$  was significant,  $F_{(4,835)} = 246.94$ ,  $p < .001$ . Adding *Role clarification*, *Concern for sustainability*, and *Ethical guidance* to the regression model explained an additional 5.0% of the variation in *Job satisfaction*, and the change in  $R^2$  was significant,  $F_{(7,831)} = 15.74$ ,  $p < .001$ . When all seven independent variables were

included in Stage 3 of the regression model, *People orientation*, *Fairness*, and *Concern for sustainability* were not significant predictors of *Job satisfaction*. The most important predictor of *Job satisfaction* was *Role clarification*, which uniquely explained 26% of the variation in *Job satisfaction*. Together, the seven independent variables accounted for 59.5% of the variance in *Job satisfaction*.

**Table 3: Hierarchical multiple regressions analysis: Ethical leadership as a predictor of job satisfaction**

Variables	B	B	T	Sr <sup>2</sup>	R	R <sup>2</sup>	ΔR <sup>2</sup>
Step 1					.253	.253	.254
People orientation	.06	.54	16.74***	.03			
Step 2					.546	.544	.292
People orientation	.01	.10	3.39**	.06			
Power sharing	.05	.36	10.62***	.06			
Fairness	.03	.09	12.55***	.06			
Integrity	.07	.35	3.02**	.05			
Step 3					.598	.595	.052
People orientation	.01	.05	1.77	.00			
Power sharing	.02	.16	4.04***	.02			
Fairness	.01	.06	1.82***	.00			
Integrity	.04	.19	5.96***	.02			
Role clarification	.04	.26	8.12***	.03			
Concern for sustainability	.01	.06	1.92	.00			
Ethical guidance	.02	.18	4.86***	.01			

Note. N = 839; \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

Source: Survey

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## 7. DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to determine the relationship between ethical leadership and job satisfaction. The broad purpose was to determine whether ethical leadership significantly influenced employees' job satisfaction in a railway organisation in the DRC. Overall, the results showed that a significant relationship existed between ethical leadership and employees' job satisfaction, so that, when employees' perceptions of ethical leadership were high, their self-reported job satisfaction was also high. These findings were consistent with those of previous research studies that reported those workers' perceptions of integrity and ethics regarding leadership are important to organisational values and culture (Mitonga-Monga & Cilliers 2016:35-42; Brown & Mitchell 2010:583-613). This result may be explained by the idea that, when employees perceive their leaders to be credible, trustworthy, and as modelling fairness, they will likely demonstrate high levels of job satisfaction (see Brown *et al.* 2005:117-134; Kalshoven *et al.* 2011:349-366). Employees who perceive their leaders as supportive and treating them with respect, dignity, and fairness will likely be satisfied with the rewards system, their supervisor, promotion, work conditions, and relationships with colleagues. This, in turn, could lead to higher levels of performance and well-being (De Hoogh & Den Hartog 2008:297-311). H1 is accepted and it is clear that ethical leadership has a positive relationship with employees' job satisfaction.

The results suggest that ethical leadership predicts employees' job satisfaction. This might be explained by the idea that, when employees perceive ethical leadership to increase their quality of social exchange relationships, they might respond in the form of work and non-work consequences such as increased job satisfaction and contributing towards the organisation's performance. For instance, previous research findings suggested that employees with high perceptions of positive working conditions, a competent supervisor, and support demonstrated high levels of conscientiousness and agreeableness (Bedi *et al.* 2015:1-20). Furthermore, employees who perceive their leaders as caring about them, supportive, and taking an interest in their welfare are more likely to be satisfied, motivated, and determined to contribute to the organisational goals (Mayer, Aquino, Greenbaum & Kuenzi 2012:157-171).

The results of the present study show that job satisfaction was predicted by the **Role clarification** variable of ethical leadership. Hence, when employees perceive their leaders as clarifying responsibilities and sharing information needed to complete their tasks, they will likely be satisfied with their working conditions and value their relationships with co-workers. These findings are consistent with those of Xu, Loi, and Ngo (2016:504), who found that ethical leaders who demonstrate high-quality social exchange relationships that derive from ethical leadership are likely to impact on organisational and employee outcomes such as voice behaviour and job satisfaction. These findings corroborate those of Ahn *et al.* (2018:457-470).

Similarly, the findings of this study indicate that ethical leadership (integrity, power sharing, and fairness) positively predicted job satisfaction. This can be explained by the fact that, when employees perceive that their ethical leaders act in accordance with ethical principles, involve them when setting performance goals, and treat them in a fair manner, they will likely be satisfied and increase their productivity. These findings mirror those of Yates (2014:1-15), who found that ethical leaders who show concern for others and display trustworthiness and consistent and principled decision-making behaviour are likely to encourage and increase employee job satisfaction and well-being. Ethical leaders being experienced as displaying moral traits such as honesty and integrity will likely increase employees' job satisfaction. These findings corroborate those of the studies of Brown *et al.* (2005:117-134), Dinc and Nurovic (2016:3-14), Kim and Brymer (2011:1020-1026), and Brown and Treviño (2006:595-616).

### **7.1 Implications for human resource management practices**

Organisations strive to attract skilled employees by cultivating an ethical and favourable working environment, where leaders are credible, possess strong ethical values and beliefs, and treat employees with dignity and respect. Employees also are likely to search for a workplace that promotes ethical conduct under ethical leadership (Brown & Mitchell 2010:583-616; Mitonga-Monga & Cilliers 2016:35-42). Organisational leaders should constantly work to enhance their ability to stimulate employees' level of job satisfaction - one of the precursors of employee performance. Competencies and positive attributes in supporting employees and productivity would be significant to their psychological wellness,

affective reaction to their work experience, discipline, and ethicality. The results suggest a need for training and developing leaders of organisations in terms of ethical qualities that result in stimulating employees' job satisfaction. Organisations should be concerned about employee job satisfaction, and devote resources to increasing employees' work satisfaction. As job satisfaction is one of the most important and sensitive elements and indicators of organisational performance, organisations should strive to enhance the psychological well-being of staff.

## 7.2 Limitations and future research

This study had some limitations. First, the research took place in one organisation in the DRC, using a non-probability sample of permanently employed staff. Therefore, the results may not be generalisable to other work environments. The findings of this study support the notion that ethical leadership influences employees' job satisfaction. It is suggested that future research employ a longitudinal approach in considering the effects of an ethical context (ethical culture and climate) and values. This could shed light on the long-term effects that ethical leaders may have on organisations (Yates 2014:1-15). Building on the mediation models is also essential to the next stage of studying ethical leadership, values, and work-related outcomes. It would be insightful if future research included qualitative methods or employed mixed methods. Additionally, replication of the study with samples drawn from various organisations in other developing countries would provide a better understanding of leaders' integrity and the generalisability of the results. It would also be of value to investigate intervening variables such as biographical characteristics, culture, and values. Future research could also determine whether the association between ethical leadership and job satisfaction is stronger in organisations with higher levels of ethical values (Mitonga-Monga & Cilliers 2015:242-249). Finally, another limitation in this article was the use of old resources because of their relevance to this study.

## 8. CONCLUSION

This article examined the influence of ethical leadership on employees' job satisfaction in a railway organisation in the DRC. In pursuit of enhancing employees' satisfaction and well-being, insight is required into ethical leaders' ability to promote employees' positive attitudes and behaviours, such as satisfaction. Employees' perceptions of leaders in the railway



organisation in the DRC as acting ethically, with integrity, and treating followers with fairness and respect influence their job satisfaction. It is likely that ethical leaders' transparency, consistency, fairness, and respect may result in increased employee job satisfaction, trust, and motivation to contribute to the organisation's success.

The current study adds value to the theoretical and empirical debates on the importance of ethical leadership to organisational health and well-being (Mitonga-Monga & Cilliers 2016:35-42), and supports the premise that ethical leadership contributes to employees' performance. Given today's rife unethical business practices, there is an increased emphasis on leaders in organisations being developed as accountable role models and principled leaders. Ethical leaders can improve organisational performance, attract talented workers, and increase wellness amongst employees (Yates 2014:1-15).

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