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Effect of Ethical Leadership and Employee Voice on Happiness at the Workplace

Etik Liderliğin ve Çalışan Sessliliğinin İşyerindeki Mutluluğa Etkisi

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Abstract

There is importance in revealing the factors that affect happiness at the workplace, which provides important benefits both to employees and organizations. The current study aimed at determining the effects that ethical leadership and employee voice have on happiness at the workplace. In addition, it was also aimed at revealing the mediating role of employee voice in the effect of ethical leadership on happiness at the workplace. The study was performed in İstanbul between November 1st, 2022, and October 6th, 2023, and the data were obtained from employees working at private hospitals in this province. In the study, the data were obtained from 302 employees. According to results of the study, ethical leadership positively affects employee voice. Ethical leadership and employee voice positively affect happiness at the workplace. In addition, employee voice has a mediating role in the effect of ethical leadership on happiness at the workplace. The study conclusions show that happiness at the workplace is affected by ethical leadership and employee voice. According to these conclusions, some suggestions were made to increase the perception of ethical leadership, employee voice and happiness at the workplace.

Keywords: Ethical Leadership, Employee Voice, Happiness, Hospital.

Öz

Hem çalışanlara hem de örgütlere önemli yararlar sağlayan işyerindeki mutluluğu etkileyen faktörlerin ortaya çıkarılması önemlidir. Bu çalışma ile etik liderliğin ve çalışan sessliliğinin işyerindeki mutluluğa etkisinin belirlenmesi amaçlanmıştır. Ayrıca etik liderliğin işyerindeki mutluluğa etkisinde çalışan sessliliğinin aracılık rolünün ortaya çıkarılması da amaçlanmıştır. Çalışma 1 Kasım 2022 – 6 Ekim 2023 tarihleri arasında İstanbul'da gerçekleştirilmiş ve veriler bu ildeki özel hastane çalışanlarından elde edilmiştir. Araştırmada 302 çalışandan veri elde edilmiştir. Araştırma sonuçlarına göre etik liderlik çalışan sessliliğini pozitif etkilemektedir. Etik liderlik ve çalışan sessliliği işyerindeki mutluluğu pozitif etkilemektedir. Ayrıca etik liderliğin işyerindeki mutluluğa etkisinde çalışan sessliliğinin aracılık rolü vardır. Araştırma sonuçları işyerindeki mutluluğun etik liderlik ve çalışan sessliliğinden etkilendiğini göstermektedir. Bu sonuçlara göre etik liderlik algısının, çalışan sessliliğinin ve işyerindeki mutluluğun artırılmasına yönelik bazı önerilerde bulunulmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Etik Liderlik, Çalışan Sessliliği, Mutluluk, Hastane.

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Effect of Ethical Leadership and Employee Voice on Happiness at the Workplace

Ethical leadership is the process of influencing and directing followers or subordinates within the framework of ethical principles and values in order to achieve goals (Çakıroğlu & Öztürk-Başpınar, 2021). Ethical leaders are leaders who are trustworthy, have ethical values, and exhibit moral behavior in line with ethical principles (Can & Doğan, 2020). In the business world of intense competition, organizations may experience ethical problems. This intense competitive environment may cause organizations to engage in unethical behavior (Çelik et al., 2023). However, these unethical behaviors and violations can cause great harm to organizations and stakeholders. After the ethical scandals of recent years, the importance of both ethics as well as ethical leadership has increased even more. Ethical leaders have a great influence on the adoption of ethical principles, the demonstration of ethical behaviors, and their dissemination throughout the organization (Yıldız & Demirtaş, 2022).

Another variable of the study, employee voice, is employees' expression of their knowledge, opinions, and suggestions regarding the organization or job with a positive and proactive approach (Özyılmaz & Oral-Ataç, 2019). Employee voice is a constructive and voluntary behavior of employees (Yavuz & Akgemci, 2021). Employee voice has important benefits for organizations (Yang et al., 2021). In order for today's organizations, which continue their activities in a dynamic and variable environment, to realize organizational change and development, it is vital for their employees to consciously share their knowledge, ideas, suggestions, and thoughts (Akgemci et al., 2019).

For the organizations to sustain their existence, gain a competitive advantage and be successful in an intensely competitive environment, the performance and productivity of employees play an important role as well as the effective use of organizational resources. One of the important factors that enable employees to work with high performance and productivity is their degree of happiness at the workplace (Akın & Aktar, 2019). Employees' happiness at the workplace increases their well-being, productivity, performance, loyalty, creativity, and organizational success. Considering the benefits of happiness at the workplace, it is greatly important for organizations to investigate the happiness of employees at the workplace (Jha et al., 2023). It has been observed that there are few studies in the literature to determine the relationships between happiness at the workplace and other variables of the study. The current study is important in revealing these relationships. The current study aimed at determining the effects that ethical leadership and employee voice have on happiness at the workplace. In addition, it was also aimed at revealing the mediating role of employee voice in the effect of ethical leadership on happiness at the workplace.

Literature Review

Ethical Leadership

Leaders take many actions and decide on various issues in the organization. Leaders influence the organization, employees, customers, and other stakeholders through their actions and decisions. It is important for the success of the organization that the actions and decisions of leaders comply with ethical principles and values (Düger, 2021). While ethics is an important element for the success of organizations, ethical violations in organizations are a serious problem. Ethical violations affect not only the organization but also employees, stakeholders, and society. Ethical scandals in the past have jeopardized the existence of organizations, employees have lost their jobs, investors have suffered financial losses, and managers' images have been damaged. This situation has shown the importance of managers' adoption of ethical principles, ethical behaviors, and ethical leadership for organizations (Çakıroğlu & Öztürk-Başpınar, 2021). Ethical leadership is crucial for organizational success today (Goswami et al., 2021). Ethical leadership is “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, p.120).

Ethical leaders are leaders who internalize ethical principles, protect employees, keep their promises, are fair, honest, transparent, reliable, compassionate, patient, tolerant, and respectful of others (Yüksel, 2021). Ethical leaders have a critical role in creating an ethical work environment and encouraging employees to engage in ethical behavior (Chin, 2013; Çelik et al., 2023). Ethical leaders are role models for employees and influence them to behave ethically (Karabey & Alioğulları, 2020). Ethical leaders enable employees to take part in decision making, express their ideas and concerns, help them set goals, and provide them with personal development opportunities (Heres & Lasthuizen, 2012). When ethical leaders behave fairly, care for, guide, and worry about their employees, employees develop positive attitudes towards their leaders. In response to the positive intentions and behaviors of their leaders, employees strive to show more ethical behavior (Baş, 2023). In addition, while this situation enables employees to exhibit positive attitudes and behaviors towards the organization and job, it contributes to the reduction of negative attitudes and behaviors (Düger, 2021).

Employee Voice

Employee voice is the “discretionary communication of ideas, suggestions, concerns, or opinions about work-related issues with the intent to improve organizational or unit functioning” (Morrison, 2011, p.375). Employee voice helps organizations recognize important opportunities and threats, realize positive changes, improve business processes, and realize organizational innovations (Ashiru et al., 2022; Kong et al., 2020). Employee voice thus contributes significantly to the agility and compatibility of organizations in the competitive and dynamic business world and to the achievement of continuous improvement, organizational effectiveness, and success (Kao et al., 2022; Kim et al., 2022; Lee et al., 2023). Employee's voice is a behavior that employees are not in job descriptions and that employees voluntarily perform (Sun et al., 2022). Employee voice can be realized by convey the ideas, suggestions and concerns of employees directly to management without any third-party. In addition, it can be realized indirectly that employees convey their ideas, suggestions and concerns through others or representatives (Dutta et al., 2023).

Factors such as organizational structure, organizational culture, organizational climate, leadership styles, personality and demographic characteristics of employees, work experience, and position can affect employee voice (Akgemci et al., 2019). Employees may have to make a choice to share the ideas, suggestions, and concerns that they have. Employees sometimes opt to share the ideas, suggestions and concerns that they have, while sometimes, they opt to remain silent (Küçük & Yağıcı, 2021). Employees may remain silent thinking that voice behavior is risky and insignificant, that they may lose their jobs, that their interpersonal relationships may deteriorate, and that they may receive negative reactions from their supervisors (Chou et al., 2020; Dedahanov et al., 2022; Duan et al., 2020). In order to increase voice behavior, employees should be encouraged, an environment should be created in which employees can share their ideas, suggestions, and concerns easily and comfortably and an organizational culture that supports this should be created (Karabey & Alioğulları, 2020).

Happiness at the Workplace

Happiness at the workplace can be defined as “an experience of subjective well-being at work reflected through a high amount of positive individual (e.g., highly valuing one’s work, feeling engaged to work) and organizational (e.g., providing supportive work environment) experiences and low amount of negative individual and organizational experiences” (Singh & Aggarwal, 2018, p.1440). Happiness at the workplace reflects employees' satisfaction, positive feelings, and emotions towards their work and workplace (Güney & Ergin, 2023; Jha et al., 2023). Employees' happiness at the workplace is realized by meeting their psychological needs and expectations at the workplace (Aboramadan & Kundi, 2023).

Employees' happiness at the workplace is a subjective situation that differs from person to person (Yüksekbilgili & Akduman, 2016). Factors such as the personal and demographic characteristics of employees, attitudes and behaviors of the managers, organizational conditions and policies, job characteristics, and environmental factors affect happiness at the workplace (Erer, 2021; Sender et al., 2021).

According to some studies, a positive working environment and conditions, fairness, friendships at the workplace, being rewarded, being appreciated, positive communication from managers, being able to express opinions, and achieving success and goals contribute to employees' happiness at the workplace (Güner & Çetinkaya-Bozkurt, 2017; Kemer, 2019). The happiness of employees, who spend a great deal of time at the workplace, directly affects their work results (Baş & Alagöz, 2022). Employees' happiness at the workplace leads to an increase in the number of positive outcomes as well as a decrease in the number of negative outcomes for both the employees and the organization (Erhan, 2021; Fisher, 2010). Employees who are happy at the workplace have higher subjective well-being, self-confidence, energy, patience, positive relationships, motivation, productivity, performance, job satisfaction, and commitment. The happiness of employees also reflects positively on the success and profitability of the organization (Erer, 2021; Polatçı & Ünüvar, 2021).

Research Hypotheses

Leaders are the people who greatly influence and direct the employees' attitudes and behaviors within the organization. Employees who are supported and encouraged by their leaders freely express their opinions, suggestions, and concerns about the organization or work. Ethical leaders create a working environment in which employees are able to freely and comfortably share their opinions, suggestions, and concerns and encourage employee voice by giving them confidence (Çetin-Kılıç & Eser, 2022). Ethical leaders support employees in expressing their opinions, suggestions, and concerns to improve decision-making and organizational processes and reduce unethical practices (Dua et al., 2023). In summary, ethical leadership increases employee voice behavior and decreases employee silence. According to Wang et al. (2015), ethical leadership positively affects employee voice. According to another study, ethical leadership has a negative effect on employee silence (Günay et al., 2018). In this context, the hypothesis proposed for the relationship between ethical leadership and employee voice is given below:

H1: Ethical leadership positively affects employee voice.

When employees view their leaders as ethical leaders, trust their leaders, and feel that their leaders trust them, they see their work as a means of enjoyment and happiness rather than a duty or obligation (Durgut & Yumuk-Günay, 2020; Öztürk & Demirtaş, 2022). Ethical leaders contribute to a happy workplace and support employee happiness (Wang & Yang, 2016). Employees who work with ethical leaders are happier because of their quality relationships and ethical work norms (Avey et al., 2012). In this context, the hypothesis proposed for the relationship between ethical leadership and happiness at the workplace is given below:

H2: Ethical leadership positively affects happiness at the workplace.

Another factor that supports employees' happiness at the workplace is employee voice. Making use of employees' knowledge, ideas, and experiences on work or organizational issues and taking their suggestions into consideration contributes to the organization's competitive advantage and makes employees feel important (Karaca & Aksoy, 2022). As a result of employee voice behavior, employees who feel important and valuable and who think that they are involved in decisions regarding the organization or work become happier, more positive, and constructive (Yavuz & Akgemci, 2021). In this context, the hypotheses proposed to reveal the relationships between employee voice and happiness

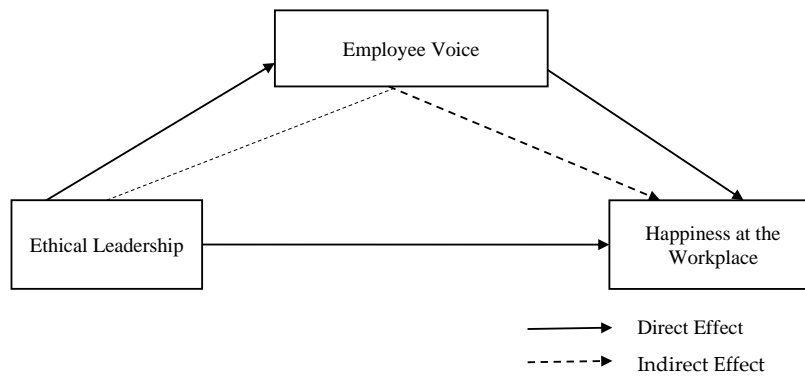
at the workplace are given below:

H3: Employee voice positively affects happiness at the workplace.

H4: There is a mediating role of employee voice in the effect of ethical leadership on happiness at the workplace.

Figure 1

Research Model



Method

The current research was performed in İstanbul between November 1st, 2022, and October 6th, 2023, and the data were obtained from employees working at private hospitals in this province. In the study, the data were obtained from 302 employees. Of those who participated, 39.7% ($n = 120$) were male, while 60.3% ($n = 182$) were female. Their average age was 30.77 ± 8.27 years and their average time working in the hospitals they were employed in was 5.54 ± 5.37 years. In regard to their education status, 21.2% ($n = 64$) had a high school degree, 29.8% ($n = 90$) had an associate degree, 35.4% ($n = 107$) had an undergraduate degree, and 13.6% ($n = 41$) had postgraduate education. Moreover, 35.1% ($n = 106$) were health care personnel, while 64.9% ($n = 196$) were administrative and other personnel.

Measurement Scales

A 4-part questionnaire was used in the study to collect data. Part one of the questionnaire has some questions to determine the employees' demographic characteristics. The other parts of the questionnaire include the following scales:

- *Ethical Leadership Scale*: This is a scale that was developed by Brown et al. (2005), and it contains a single dimension and 10 statements. The validity and reliability were established for the scale in Turkish at various studies (Tuna et al., 2012; Dülger & Cinnioğlu, 2021). The statements within the scale are measured using 5-point Likert-type options ("1 = strongly disagree", "5 = strongly agree"). This study showed that the scale is reliable ($\alpha = 0.917$).
- *Employee Voice Scale*: This is a scale that was developed by Van Dyne and LePine (1998), and it contains a single dimension and 6 statements. Çetin and Çakmakçı (2012) adapted the scale into Turkish. The statements within the scale are measured using 5-point Likert-type options ("1 = never", "5 = always"). This study showed that the scale is reliable ($\alpha = 0.876$).
- *Happiness at Work Scale Short Form*: This is a scale that was developed by Polatçı and Ünüvar (2021), and it contains a single dimension and 8 statements. The statements within the scale are measured using 5-point Likert-type ("1 = strongly disagree", "5 = strongly agree"). This study showed that the scale is reliable ($\alpha = 0.858$).

Data Analysis

In the data analysis, analyses were conducted to determine descriptive statistics and correlations, and SPSS 22.0 statistical program was used for this. In addition, analyses were conducted to determine the mediation effect, and Process Macro 4.0 statistical program was used for this. The results were assessed with a 95% confidence interval and significance at 5%.

Results

The findings of the research are shown below.

Table 1

Correlation Analysis

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation	1	2
1. Ethical Leadership	3.906	0.623		
2. Employee Voice	3.988	0.680	0.641*	
3. Happiness at the Workplace	3.948	0.628	0.772*	0.708*

Note. *p<0.01

According to the study findings, there was a positive correlation found between ethical leadership and employee voice ($r = 0.641$). Positive correlations were also found between ethical leadership and happiness at the workplace ($r = 0.772$), and employee voice and happiness at the workplace ($r = 0.708$) (Table 1).

Table 2

Effect Analyses

Effect	β	S.E.	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	1.254	0.191	6.560	0.000	0.878	1.631
EL \rightarrow EV	0.700	0.048	14.475	0.000	0.605	0.795
Constant	0.491	0.141	3.480	0.001	0.213	0.768
EL \rightarrow HAW	0.544	0.044	12.507	0.000	0.458	0.629
EV \rightarrow HAW	0.335	0.040	8.402	0.000	0.256	0.413

Note. **EL:** Ethical Leadership, **EV:** Employee Voice, **HAW:** Happiness at the Workplace

It was determined that ethical leadership has a positive effect on employee voice ($\beta = 0.700$, $p = 0.000$). Moreover, ethical leadership ($\beta = 0.544$, $p = 0.000$) and employee voice ($\beta = 0.335$, $p = 0.000$) were determined to have a positive effect on happiness at the workplace (Table 2).

Table 3

Mediating Effect

Effect		β	S.E.	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Direct Effect	EL \rightarrow HAW	0.544	0.044	12.507	0.000	0.458	0.629
Indirect Effect	EL \rightarrow EV \rightarrow HAW	0.234	0.036			0.167	0.310
Total Effect	EL \rightarrow HAW	0.778	0.037	21.011	0.000	0.705	0.851

Note. **EL:** Ethical Leadership, **EV:** Employee Voice, **HAW:** Happiness at the Workplace

Employee voice was determined to have a mediating role in the effect that ethical leadership has on happiness at the workplace ($\beta = 0.234$). In other words, employee voice further increased the positive effect that ethical leadership has on happiness at the workplace ($\beta = 0.778$, $p = 0.000$) (Table 3). According to the study findings, all of the hypotheses were accepted.

Discussion

According to study, ethical leadership positively affects employee voice. As the level of ethical leadership perceived by employees increases that of employee voice also increases. Previous studies have also indicated that ethical leadership has a positive effect on employee voice (Adnan et al., 2019; Avey et al., 2012; Çetin-Kılıç & Eser, 2022). Leaders who listen to employees' suggestions, exchange ideas with them, make fair decisions, and behave ethically help them to express negativities, problems, and ideas about the organization and work. Employees who see that their leaders act ethically and support them can voice any issue related to the organization and their work without fear (Karabey & Alioğulları, 2020). The results of the current study showed that hospital employees with a high perception of ethical leadership express their opinions, suggestions, and concerns on ethical and work-related issues.

According to the study, ethical leadership positively affects employees' happiness at the workplace. According to this result, it can be said that as the level of ethical leadership perceived by employees increases, their level of happiness at the workplace also increases. Gonçalves and Curado (2023) reached similar result with their study. Conducting activities and work according to ethical principles and rules with the support of ethical leaders enables hospital employees to work safely and avoid unethical business behaviors. This contributes to the employees working more happily and being happy at the workplace.

According to the study, employee voice positively affects happiness at the workplace. Based on this result, it can be said that as the employees' voice increases, their happiness at the workplace also increases. Küçük and Yağıcı (2021) revealed that organizational silence negatively affects happiness in the workplace. Moçoşoğlu and Kaya (2018) reported that a negative relationship was found between organizational silence and organizational happiness. It can be said that encouraging employees to engage in voice behaviors and giving them the necessary opportunities, and placing importance and value on their ideas, suggestions, and concerns will contribute significantly to their happiness at the workplace. According to the current study, it can be said that employee voice does have a mediating role in the effect that ethical leadership has on happiness at the workplace. Ethical leaders encourage employee voice behavior. Thus, employees' engaging in voice behavior indirectly increases the positive effect that ethical leadership has on employees' happiness at the workplace.

The formation of ethical leadership perception in hospital employees, employees' voice behavior and being happy at the workplace have positive consequences for all stakeholders. In such a situation, employees put more effort in their work and they are more motivated and productive. Better and higher quality health services are delivered and positive outcomes for patients are achieved. Hospitals achieve their goals and success faster and easier. Due to their contributions, it can be said that it would be useful to make arrangements and studies to increase the perception of ethical leadership, employee voice and happiness in the workplace.

Conclusion

The study conclusions show that happiness at the workplace is affected by ethical leadership as well as employee voice. Based on these conclusions, it is recommended that ethical principles and practices should be made parts of organizational culture and policies, managers should behave ethically and direct employees to behave ethically as well, so as to create the perception of ethical leadership among

employees. In order to increase employee voice, it is recommended that a work environment be created in which employees are able to express their ideas, suggestions, and concerns easily, to eliminate their concerns about engaging in voice behavior, and for managers to support voice behavior and make arrangements to ensure communication. In order to increase happiness in the workplace, it is recommended to make employees feel that they are valuable, give importance to them, take their needs and expectations into account, establish positive communication with them, and ensure their participation in decisions.

A limitation of the study was that the research was only for private hospital employees in one province and the number of participants was low. In addition, the comparison of the results of the study with those of other studies was limited as a result of the limited number of studies on the relationships between happiness at the workplace and other variables of the study.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Ethical Approval

Approval was granted by the Human Research Ethics Committee of Yalova University on 07/10/2022, indicating that the study was ethical (Protocol No: 2022/116).

Author Contributions

The author solely contributed to the conception and design of the study, data collection and analysis, as well as the writing and revision of the manuscript.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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