

Leaders' Core Self-evaluation, Ethical Leadership, and Employees' Job Performance: The Moderating Role of Employees' Exchange Ideology

Jaehyung Ahn¹ · Soojin Lee² · Seokhwa Yun¹

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Abstract With the increasing demand for ethical standards in the current business environment, ethical leadership has received particular attention. Drawing on self-verification theory and social exchange theory, this study investigated the effect of leaders' core self-evaluation on the display of ethical leadership and the moderating role of employees' exchange ideology in the relationship between ethical leadership and employees' job performance (i.e., task performance and organizational citizenship behavior). Consistent with the hypotheses, the results from a sample of 225 dyads of employees and their immediate leaders showed a positive relationship between leaders' core self-evaluation and ethical leadership. Moreover, the results showed that ethical leadership mediates the effects of leaders' core self-evaluation on employees' job performance. Furthermore, we found that employees' exchange ideology moderates the relationship between ethical leadership and job performance. The theoretical and practical implications of these findings are discussed.

Keywords Core self-evaluation · Ethical leadership · Exchange ideology · Job performance · Social exchange theory

Introduction

Given the prominent ethical scandals that have occurred and tightening of ethical standards in the workplace, the importance of ethical behavior has become more evident and in recent years, burgeoning research has been conducted to investigate (un)ethical behaviors among individuals (e.g., Gino et al. 2010; Gino and Margolis 2011). As leaders' ethics and moral responsibility are crucial in establishing an ethical organizational environment (Schaubroeck et al. 2012), scholars have paid increasing attention to the construct of ethical leadership and have defined it 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" (Brown et al. 2005, p. 120). Since ethical leaders treat their employees in fair and ethical ways, they are more likely to build high-quality social exchange relationships with their employees (Blau 1964; Treviño et al. 2006). In particular, their followers are likely to feel trust, receive personal consideration within social exchange processes, and, in turn, put extra effort into their in-role and extra-role behaviors (Dirks and Ferrin 2002). In line with this reasoning, prior research on ethical leadership has demonstrated that high-quality social exchange relationships that derive from ethical leadership have a positive impact on organizational outcomes such as voice behavior, whistle-blowing, organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), and so forth (e.g., Mayer et al. 2013; Piccolo et al. 2010; Shin et al. 2015).

✉ Seokhwa Yun
syun@snu.ac.kr

Jaehyung Ahn
ajaehyung@gmail.com

Soojin Lee
insis98@gmail.com

¹ College of Business Administration, Seoul National University, 599 Gwanangno, Gwanak-gu, Seoul 151-916, Korea

² College of Business Administration, Chonnam National University, 77 Yongbong-ro, Buk-gu, Gwangju 61186, Korea

Although ethical leadership has received substantial research attention, several issues have yet to be fully explored. First, not enough studies have examined the antecedents of ethical leadership (Jordan et al. 2013). Recognizing this issue, this study investigates the relationship between leaders' positive self-concept, specifically core self-evaluation (CSE; Judge et al. 1997), and ethical leadership. CSE refers to "fundamental premises that individuals hold about themselves and their functioning in the world" (Judge et al. 1998, p. 161) and comprises the overlap of four well-established traits: self-esteem, self-efficacy, emotional stability, and locus of control. Each CSE trait has been studied in the personality literature and has been found to have a positive relationship with moral conduct and ethical decision-making (Aronson and Mettee 1968; Hsu and Kuo 2003; Judge et al. 2002; Treviño 1986). Since CSE constitutes a personality trait that represents the favorability of an individual's overarching self-concept, it has been considered a potent and parsimonious predictor of individual behaviors. In particular, recent research has demonstrated that CSE is positively related to strategic decision-making (Hiller and Hambrick 2005) and transformational leadership (Resick et al. 2009).

Second, the findings regarding the relationship between ethical leadership and employees' behavior have not been consistent (Detert et al. 2007; Dineen et al. 2006; Mayer et al. 2009); the results have implied that the effects of ethical leadership may depend on context (Avey et al. 2011; Yukl 2010). However, little is known about the boundary conditions that influence the relationship between ethical leadership and its outcomes. Therefore, it would be worthwhile to examine the situational factors that may affect the relationship between ethical leadership and its consequences (Avey et al. 2011). In the present study, we suggest that the employee orientation toward exchange can play an important role in the relationship between ethical leadership and employees' job performance. Some reasons for this contention are as follows. First, as the interactional framework of leadership suggests, employees' traits can serve as significant situational moderators (Yukl 2010; Yun et al. 2005; Yun et al. 2006). Second, social exchange theory postulates that supervisors are critical exchange partners for employees in the workplace and that the relationship between supervisors and employees is based on social exchange processes. Moreover, considering the fair treatment and two-way communication ethical leadership may facilitate, employees' orientation toward exchange can condition their interpretation of leader behaviors. Thus, we suggest that employees' exchange ideology moderates the effects of ethical leadership on job performance, which includes both task performance and OCB.

By addressing these important issues, this study offers several contributions. Above all, this study extends our

understanding of ethical leadership by exploring an antecedent of ethical leadership. Moreover, we investigate not only the influence of ethical leadership on employees' job performance but also whether the effects of ethical leadership differ depending on the characteristics of the follower (i.e., exchange ideology). Furthermore, by examining CSE's value as a predictor of ethical intent and behavior, the present study extends the research on CSE into the ethical domain. In addition, this study may be beneficial for both social exchange theory and the literature on exchange ideology in that we test how individual differences work in social exchange processes.

In summary, this study has three major research purposes. First, drawing on self-verification theory (Swann and Hill 1982), which posits that self-verifiers behave in consistent ways to demonstrate a stable self-view to others, we investigated an antecedent of ethical leadership by testing whether leaders with a positive self-view (i.e., leaders with high CSE) were more likely to exhibit ethical leadership. Second, we examined the consequences of ethical leadership by applying social learning theory (Bandura 1977) and social exchange theory (Blau 1964). The specific outcomes we examined included both in-role (i.e., task performance) and extra-role behaviors (i.e., OCB). Finally, by investigating the role of employees' exchange ideology, we also explored a boundary condition of ethical leadership that moderates the relationship between leaders' ethical behaviors and employees' job performance behaviors. The results of this study have both theoretical and managerial implications.

Theory and Hypotheses Development

Ethical Leadership

Although ethical leadership and leaders' moral responsibility have long been discussed by many philosophers and scholars, the empirical examination of the construct and its effectiveness remains at an early stage (Jordan et al. 2013). At the initial stages of the development of ethical leadership as a construct, Treviño et al. (2000, 2003) conducted an interview-based study of executives and demonstrated that leaders with trustworthiness, honesty, and fairness were perceived as ethical leaders. Moreover, they suggested that such ethical leaders work as role models for morally appropriate behaviors such as by making fair decisions, setting moral principles, and punishing unethical behaviors among their followers. Based on this work, Brown et al. (2005) specified a definition for ethical leadership and developed an instrument to measure the construct.

Subsequently, substantial research has been conducted on ethical leadership and many scholars have demonstrated its

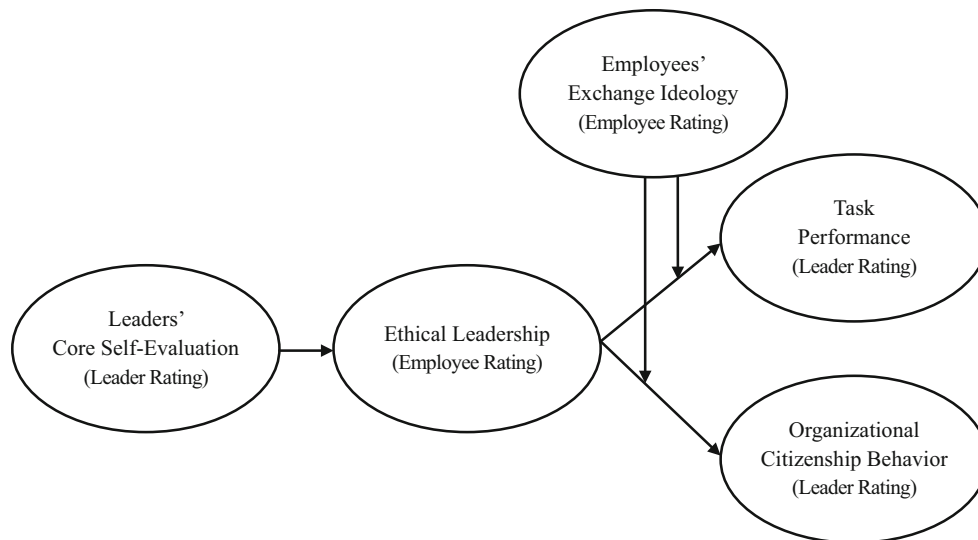


Fig. 1 Conceptual model

effectiveness. In particular, drawing on role-modeling process (i.e., social learning theory; Bandura 1977) and the social exchange perspective (e.g., Blau 1964), many empirical studies have demonstrated that followers of ethical leaders are more likely to put extra effort into their jobs and engage less in deviant behaviors (e.g., Mayer et al. 2009, 2012; Walumbwa et al. 2011). However, relatively few studies have been conducted regarding the antecedents and boundary conditions of ethical leadership. For instance, Mayer et al. (2009) examined the trickle-down effect of ethical leadership and found that ethical leadership among top management is positively related to supervisory ethical leadership. In their study investigating the relationship between organizational culture and leadership, Toor and Ofori (2009) found that transformational (transactional) culture was positively (negatively) related to ethical leadership. Mayer et al. (2012) showed that leaders' moral identity symbolization and internalization were positively related with ethical leadership. Moreover, with data from a state agency in the southern US, Kacmar et al. (2012) demonstrated that political skill moderates the direct and indirect effects of ethical leadership. In line with these studies, the goal of this study was to enrich the knowledge about ethical leadership by investigating the antecedents and boundary conditions of ethical leadership. The conceptual model of the current study is presented in Fig. 1.

Leaders' CSE and Ethical Leadership

It has long been a tradition in the social sciences to explain behaviors based on individual characteristics (Ajzen 1988). In particular, Beu and Buckley (2001) demonstrated that individuals' ethical intentions and behaviors are related to

their individual characteristics. Moreover, self-esteem is known to play a crucial role in determining individuals' attitudes and behaviors (Erez and Judge 2001; Kammeyer-Mueller et al. 2009). In their effort to understand how individuals broadly evaluate themselves, Judge et al. (1997) introduced the concept of CSE, which is based on individuals' four core traits: (a) self-esteem, (b) self-efficacy, (c) locus of control, and (d) emotional stability. Resick et al. (2009) argued that CSE encompasses fundamental evaluations that people make about themselves and their functioning in the environment. Moreover, in their review of CSE, Johnson et al. (2008) proposed that as a construct, CSE might provide a comprehensive conception of individuals' beliefs about their self-regulatory and behavioral capacities. Specifically, individuals with a favorable CSE cope with environmental constraints successfully, show a high level of self-regulation, and pursue intrinsically motivating goals. Supporting this suggestion, a handful of studies have demonstrated a link between CSE and work-related outcomes such as setting intrinsic goals and job performance (Erez and Judge 2001). Moreover, several studies have suggested that an executive's CSE significantly affects his or her strategic decision-making and leadership style (Hiller and Hambrick 2005; Resick et al. 2009). Considering that ethical leadership can emerge from a leader's strong ethical standards and moral decision-making, it is plausible that ethical leadership is positively related to a leader's CSE.

The effects of leaders' CSE on ethical leadership can be explained by the self-verification theory. Self-verification theory postulates that individuals have their own views about themselves, which may or may not be accurate, and that individuals try to confirm their views. In other words, one of the basic motives underlying individuals' interpersonal

behavior is a desire to verify their existing self-view and such self-concepts are particularly validated when other people's image of them reflects the way they see themselves (Swann 1983; Swann et al. 2003). Consequently, it is important to maintain a stable self-view and, in order to facilitate the process of self-verification, people are apt to demonstrate sufficient cues consistent with their self-view (Burke and Stets 1999). For all of these reasons, individuals try to validate their self-concepts, and they do so by working to make others understand and verify their self-views (Swann et al. 2004). Thus, we expected leaders with a positive self-view to strive to display behaviors consistent with their positive self-concepts by maintaining high ethical standards. In other words, we expected a leader with a high CSE to be likely to demonstrate ethical leadership. Likewise, Mayer et al. (2012) proposed that leaders with a moral identity are likely to engage in ethical leadership because people try to achieve self-consistency (Blasi 2004) and reduce dissonance.

Given that CSE captures the overlap of four fundamental human traits, inferring the relationship between each component and ethical leadership would be beneficial. First, self-esteem, which is conceptually the central component of CSE, refers to the overall value that one places on oneself as a person (Harter 1990). Individuals with high self-esteem are expected to engage in ethical behaviors because they place high value on them. Previous research has demonstrated the possibility that self-esteem is positively related to ethical behaviors. For example, Aronson and Mettee (1968) demonstrated that people with high self-esteem are apt to behave honestly, while people with low self-esteem are likely to cheat. Hsu and Kuo (2003) showed that organization-based self-esteem has a positive relationship with subjective norms regarding ethical behavior and ethical intention. Thus, we expect that leaders' self-esteem, a major component of leaders' CSE, is positively related to ethical behaviors.

Second, self-efficacy is defined as "beliefs in one's capabilities to mobilize the motivation, cognitive resources, and courses of action needed to meet given situational demands" (Wood and Bandura 1989, p. 408). In other words, self-efficacy is related to judgments of how well one can execute the courses of action required to deal with prospective situations (Bandura 1982). Individuals with a high level of generalized self-efficacy were expected to be optimistic about their ability to cope with challenging situations. Indeed, MacNab and Worthley (2007) demonstrated that self-efficacy directly influences the propensity for internal whistle-blowing behaviors, which implies that people with high self-efficacy are more likely to object to unethical behaviors. In contrast, low self-efficacy is related to unethical behaviors. For instance, several studies have showed that individuals with low self-efficacy are more likely to use coercive power (Goodstadt and Kipnis 1970), accept cheating (Elias 2008), and make poor organizational

decisions (Mumford et al. 1993). Thus, we expected leaders' self-efficacy to be positively related to ethical behaviors.

Third, emotional stability, one of the "Big Five" personality traits (Costa and McCrea 1992), is also known as the converse of neuroticism. Individuals who score low on emotional stability (high on neuroticism) are described as anxious, fearful, depressed, irritable, stressed, and moody (Costa and McCrea 1992). Mayer et al. (2007) found that leaders with high emotional stability are more likely to provide their subordinates with the opportunity to express their own concerns (i.e., voice behavior) and treat them in a consistent manner. In addition, Kalshoven et al. (2011) suggested that leaders with high emotional stability are more likely to display ethical behaviors. Thus, we expected leaders' emotional stability to be positively related to ethical leadership.

Lastly, locus of control is one's belief that outcomes are contingent upon one's control—an individual with an internal locus of control believes that outcomes result from his or her own efforts (Rotter 1966). Moreover, individuals with an internal locus of control may take more responsibility for their actions. Treviño (1986) suggested that managers whose locus of control is internal are more likely to take personal responsibility for the consequences of ethical or unethical behavior. In addition, empirical studies have shown that the internal locus of control is directly related to moral behaviors such as whistle-blowing (Dozier and Miceli 1985), resistance to social pressure and cheating (Lefcourt 1982), and (un)ethical decision-making (Hegarty and Sims 1978; Treviño and Youngblood 1990). Accordingly, based on the preceding theoretical arguments and empirical evidence, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1 Leaders' core self-evaluation is positively related to ethical leadership.

Ethical leadership and employees' job performance

A leader's ethical behavior is critical to his or her credibility and also has a meaningful influence upon his or her followers (Brown et al. 2005). In this study, we suggest that ethical leadership has positive effects on job performance behaviors, which are inclusive of both task performance and OCB. Task performance refers to "the expected behaviors that are directly involved in producing goods or services, or activities that provides indirect support for the organization's core technical processes" (Van Scotter et al. 2000, p. 526). OCB is defined as "individual behavior that is discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system, and that in the aggregate promotes the effective functioning of the organization" (Organ 1988, p. 4). It is commonly recognized that these behaviors are

essential conditions of organizational effectiveness (LePine and Van Dyne 2001; Yun et al. 2007).

Two well-endorsed theoretical frameworks (i.e., social learning theory and social exchange theory) have explained the positive effects of ethical leadership on employees' job performance. First, social learning theory posits that other people's attitudes and behavior influence people's own attitudes and behavior (Bandura 1977). In other words, individuals learn acceptable and normative behaviors by observing how others behave. Moreover, such vicarious learning enables individuals to behave confidently and makes their behavioral and motivational patterns more clear and consistent (Bandura 1977; Walumbwa et al. 2011). In particular, leaders are known to be an important source from which to learn acceptable behaviors, attitudes, and norms. Given that ethical leaders, by definition, demonstrate work ethics and desirable behaviors, treat their followers fairly, and care about their followers in the organization, they can function as a strong source of guidance (Brown and Treviño 2006). Thus, followers emulate the normatively appropriate attitudes, values, and behaviors of ethical leaders. As such, followers who observe and learn such behaviors are more likely to engage their jobs sincerely, resulting in high levels of job performance (i.e., in-role and extra-role behaviors). Previous empirical studies have supported this argument by demonstrating that ethical leadership increases organizational commitment (Nuebert et al. 2009), the reporting of unethical conduct (Mayer et al. 2013), and OCB (Mayer et al. 2009).

Second, social exchange theory (Blau 1964) also provides a salient explanation for the relationship between ethical leadership and employees' job performance. According to Holmes (1981), social exchange relationships are developed based on socio-emotional transactions among individuals, such as transactions pertaining to trust, rather than economic transactions. In other words, employees tend to develop high-quality relationships with their leaders based on emotional attachments that derive from their experiences with them (Blau 1964; Cropanzano and Mitchell 2005). In particular, unlike distributive justice, which stresses the extrinsic and tangible aspects of exchange, social exchange relationships, which ethical leaders may have with their followers, form over the long term; in such relationships, greater emphasis is placed on intrinsic and intangible aspects (in way that is more similar to procedural and interpersonal justice). The parties of such relationships abide by the rule of reciprocity (Gouldner 1960) and high-quality social exchange relationships tend to engender feelings of personal obligation.

For several reasons, ethical leaders have social exchange relationships with their followers that are more favorable in quality. First, ethical leaders are perceived as moral and

fair persons (Brown et al. 2005). Employees who consider ethical leaders to be more caring and trustworthy are willing to remain loyal and emotionally connected. In particular, Treviño et al. (2006, p. 967) suggested that "because ethical leaders are caring and fair, relationships with ethical leaders are built upon social exchange and norms of reciprocity." Second, ethical leaders engage in two-way communication with their followers, encouraging their opinions (Brown and Treviño 2006), which can lead to high-quality leader-member exchange (LMX). Supporting this contention, Walumbwa et al. (2011) demonstrated that ethical leadership increased employees' job performance through enhancing LMX.

Thus, by providing fair and caring treatment, ethical leaders are likely to develop high-quality social exchange relationships with their employees. In turn, employees are willing to reciprocate with more favorable work-related behaviors and provide aid to the organization and their coworkers. In this manner, ethical leadership can exert positive effects on employees' job performance. Accordingly, we propose the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 2 Ethical leadership is positively related to employees' task performance.

Hypothesis 3 Ethical leadership is positively related to employees' OCB.

Mediating role of ethical leadership

Integrating the process of leadership with followers' performances, Yukl (2010) proposed a theoretical framework to explain the role of leaders' traits in leadership. He suggested that leader disposition is related to followers' performance through leader behavior and process of influence. Moreover, Mayer et al. (2012) demonstrated that leaders' moral identity, through its manifestation, affects employees' behaviors. In line with this reasoning, this study suggests that leaders' positive self-concept (i.e., CSE) can influence employees' job performance through specific behaviors among leaders (i.e., ethical leadership). Indeed, as we hypothesized above, leaders with high CSE may strive for self-verification and demonstrate ethical leadership; in turn, ethical leadership can enhance employees' job performance. Accordingly, we expected ethical leadership to play a mediating role in the relationship between leaders' CSE and employees' job performance.

Hypothesis 4 Ethical leadership mediates the relationship between leaders' CSE and employees' task performance.

Hypothesis 5 Ethical leadership mediates the relationship between leaders' CSE and employees' OCB.

Moderating effects of employees' exchange ideology

There have been mixed findings regarding the effects of ethical leadership on employees' behaviors. For instance, Mayer et al. (2009) showed that ethical leadership among top management exerted positive and significant effects on group-level deviant behavior. On the other hand, several studies have demonstrated statistically insignificant relationships between ethical leadership and organizational behaviors among employees, such as deviant and counterproductive behaviors (Detert et al. 2007; Dineen et al. 2006). These mixed findings suggest that the effects of ethical leadership may differ depending on the situation or context, such as on follower characteristics (Yukl 2010; Yun et al. 2006). Here, we suggest that the effects of ethical leadership can vary depending on follower characteristics—specifically followers' exchange ideology.

According to this theoretical argument regarding ethical leadership, ethical leaders treat their followers in fair and ethical ways and have high-quality social exchange relationships with their followers, resulting in more favorable job performance behaviors among employees. Specifically, as discussed above, ethical leaders form social exchange relationships that involve intangible resources and are long term. Moreover, such social exchanges are based on fair treatment and closely related to procedural and interpersonal justice (Scott and Colquitt 2007). Thus, followers of ethical leaders put more effort into their work-related behaviors according to the norm of reciprocity. Although the norm of reciprocity may be a human universal (Cropanzano and Mitchell 2005), not all individuals value reciprocity to the same degree. Thus, ignoring differences in individual exchange norms may yield the wrong conclusions (Takeuchi et al. 2011). In this regard, we suggest that the individual orientation toward exchange (i.e., exchange ideology) can influence the relationship between ethical leadership and employees' work-related behaviors.

Exchange ideology refers to “the strength of an employee's belief that the work effort should depend on treatment by the organization” (Eisenberger et al. 1986, p. 503). A number of studies regarding exchange ideology have been conducted; results have shown that individuals with a strong exchange ideology are more likely to reciprocate if the other party has contributed to the relationship. For instance, Scott and Colquitt (2007) demonstrated that exchange ideology was a significant moderator of the relationship between organizational justice (e.g., interpersonal justice) and behavioral reaction (e.g., task performance and citizenship behavior). In addition, Witt et al. (2001) found that individuals with a strong exchange ideology showed their affective commitment behaviors depending on their perception of justice, but individuals with a weak exchange ideology did

not alter their affective commitment behaviors regardless of their perception of justice. In line with prior research, we propose that exchange ideology moderates the relationship between ethical leadership and employees' job performance.

When employees have a strong exchange ideology, they are more sensitive to the social exchange relationship with their leader (Ladd and Henry 2000; Witt et al. 2001). We suggest that the positive relationship between ethical leadership and job performance behavior is stronger for employees with a strong exchange ideology than for those with a weak exchange ideology. In other words, compared to those with a weak exchange ideology, employees with a strong exchange ideology are more likely to reciprocate fair treatment, trust, and high-quality exchange relationships by putting more effort into job performance behaviors. In contrast, when leaders show low levels of ethical leadership, employees with a strong exchange ideology are more likely to slacken their work efforts, resulting in low levels of task performance and OCB compared to those with a weak exchange ideology. On the other hand, when employees have a weak exchange ideology, they are relatively insensitive to the social exchange with the leader and, compared to those with a strong exchange ideology, their job performance does not change as much according to the level of ethical leadership. Accordingly, we expected employees' exchange ideology to moderate the effects of ethical leadership on employees' job performance.

Hypothesis 6 Employees' exchange ideology moderates the relationship between ethical leadership and task performance such that the positive relationship between ethical leadership and task performance is stronger for employees with a strong exchange ideology compared to those with a weak exchange ideology.

Hypothesis 7 Employees' exchange ideology moderates the relationship between ethical leadership and OCB such that the positive relationship between ethical leadership and OCB is stronger for employees with a strong exchange ideology compared to those with a weak exchange ideology.

Methods

Participants and procedure

Data were collected using questionnaires distributed to 290 subordinate–supervisor dyads from various organizations located in South Korea. Two types of questionnaire were used for the survey: one for the employees and the other for their immediate supervisor. We asked firms' human

resources department managers to distribute the two types of questionnaire to supervisors and their subordinates. All respondents were assured that their responses were confidential and all returned the completed questionnaire directly to the researchers by using envelopes that were provided. A total of 253 subordinate questionnaires and 254 supervisor questionnaires were returned for response rates of 87.2 and 87.5 %, respectively. Questionnaires where responses were deemed unreliable and variables were missing were omitted; in total, 225 pieces of dyadic data were included in the final analysis. Among the 225 employees and supervisors, 79.6 % of the employees were male with a mean age of 34.05 years ($SD = 5.95$ years) and 94.2 % of the supervisors were male with a mean age of 43.86 years ($SD = 5.45$ years). On average, employees and supervisors had worked for 3.89 years ($SD = 4.18$ years).

Measures

For the survey, all measures used in the study were translated from English to Korean by using back-translation, as recommended by Brislin (1980). Moreover, to minimize same-source bias in the measurement, this study obtained evaluations of the predictors and the outcome variables from two separate information sources. Namely, employees measured their leaders' ethical leadership and their own exchange ideology and their direct supervisor rated their own CSE and their employees' in-role and extra-role behaviors. All items were measured on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from "1" ("strongly disagree") to "7" ("strongly agree").

To measure CSE, this study used the 12-item scale developed by Judge et al. (2003). As a sample, one of the items was "I am confident I will get the success I deserve in life" ($\alpha = .86$).

Ethical leadership was measured using the 10-item scale for ethical leadership developed by Brown et al. (2005). As a sample, one item was "My supervisor defines success not just by results but also the way that they are obtained" ($\alpha = .94$).

Employees' exchange ideology was measured using the eight-item scale used by Eisenberger et al. (2001). As a sample, one item was "Employees should not care about the organization that employs them unless that organization shows that it cares about its employees" ($\alpha = .84$).

To measure employees' task performance, this study used the seven-item scale employed by Williams and Anderson (1991). As a sample, one item was "The subordinate meets the formal performance requirements of the job" ($\alpha = .91$).

This study measured employees' OCB using the 14-item scale used by Williams and Anderson (1991). As samples, some items were "The subordinate assists the supervisor

with his/her work (when not asked)" and "The subordinate's attendance at work is above the norm" ($\alpha = .93$).

To avoid influencing the results, two leader and employee variables (age and sex), employees' job type, and the tenure of the relationship between the leader and employee were controlled. Age was measured in years, sex was measured as a dichotomous variable (coded as "1" for male and "2" for female), and employee-leader tenure was coded in years. In addition, employees' job type was included in regression analyses to control potential exogenous effects.

To analyze the hypotheses, several data analysis techniques were employed. First, this study conducted confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to confirm the dimensionality and discriminant validity of the multi-item measures. Second, to test the hypotheses, this study employed hierarchical and moderated hierarchical regression (Cohen and Cohen 1983). Following the recommendation of Aiken and West (1991), significant interaction effects were plotted. Furthermore, we tested mediation effects by using bootstrapping (Preacher and Hayes 2004) and Sobel's test (1982).

Results

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics, reliabilities, and correlations for the variables. The reliabilities of the current study were above .84, and their correlations were as expected.

To gauge the model fit, this study performed CFA and compared the model that had five latent factors (i.e., leaders' CSE, ethical leadership, exchange ideology, task performance, and OCB) with alternative models. To maintain a favorable indicator-to-sample-size ratio (Bagozzi and Edwards 1998), we used 26 indicators (six parcels for CSE, five parcels for ethical leadership, four parcels for exchange ideology, three parcels and one item for task performance, and seven parcels for OCB). We placed items with lower loadings with parcels with higher loadings (Little et al. 2002); all of the indicators had statistically significant ($p < .001$) loadings on their intended constructs. Five-factor CFA was estimated using a covariance matrix and the results showed a good fit: $\chi^2 = 476.71$, $df = 289$, $p < .001$; $\chi^2/df = 1.65$; CFI = .96, IFI = .96; RMSEA = .05 (Arbuckle 1997; Bollen 1989; Browne and Cudeck 1993). These fit indices were superior to the following parsimonious models: a four-factor model with dependent variables loaded on one factor ($\chi^2 = 837.27$, $df = 293$, $p < .001$; $\chi^2/df = 2.86$; CFI = .87, IFI = .87; RMSEA = .09); a three-factor one with all independent variables loaded on one factor ($\chi^2 = 1415.75$, $df = 296$, $p < .001$; $\chi^2/df = 4.78$;

Table 1 Descriptive statistics and correlations among study variables

Variable	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Leader age ^b	43.86	5.45											
2. Leader gender ^b	1.06	.23	-.04										
3. Employee age ^a	34.05	5.95	.29***	-.06									
4. Employee gender ^a	1.20	.40	-.02	.16*	-.34***								
5. Leader–employee tenure ^b	3.89	4.18	.14*	-.08	.19**	-.03							
6. Job type ^b	1.99	1.27	-.14*	.11	-.13*	.02	.11						
7. Leaders’ core self-evaluation ^b	4.86	.64	.06	-.05	.12	-.05	-.01	-.10	(.86)				
8. Ethical leadership ^a	5.02	.97	.04	-.02	.17*	-.05	-.08	-.22***	.21**	(.94)			
9. Employees’ exchange ideology ^a	3.65	.88	-.04	.07	-.11	-.01	.02	-.01	-.05	-.37***	(.84)		
10. Task performance ^b	5.37	.80	.20**	-.17**	.14*	.00	.10	-.07	.28***	.24***	-.04	(.91)	
11. OCB ^b	5.29	.81	.14*	-.16*	.18**	-.09	.09	-.18**	.30***	.28***	-.03	.67***	(.93)

Note N = 225. Reliabilities of the scales are boldfaced and noted in the diagonals

* p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001

^a Employee-rated

^b Leader-rated

CFI = .74, IFI = .74; RMSEA = .13); a two-factor one with a moderating variable and independent variables loaded on one factor ($\chi^2 = 1723.53, df = 298, p < .001; \chi^2/df = 5.78; CFI = .66, IFI = .67; RMSEA = .15$); and a one-factor model with all variables loaded on a single factor ($\chi^2 = 2638.96, df = 299, p < .001; \chi^2/df = 8.83; CFI = .45, IFI = .45; RMSEA = .19$).

Hypothesis 1 proposed that leaders’ CSE has a positive relationship with ethical leadership. As shown in Table 2, the coefficient associated with leader’s CSE was statistically significant ($\beta = .17, p < .01$). Therefore, Hypothesis 1 was supported.

Table 3 presents the results of the hierarchical regression analyses used to examine the hypotheses that predicted that ethical leadership would exert main effects on employees’ task performance and OCB and that employees’ exchange ideology would exert a moderating effect. Hypothesis 2 proposed that ethical leadership has a positive relationship with employees’ in-role performance (i.e., task performance). The result, as shown in Model 2 for task performance, indicated that ethical leadership has a positive effect on employees’ task performance ($\beta = .23, p < .001$), providing support for Hypothesis 2. In the same manner, we tested Hypothesis 3, which predicted that ethical leadership to be positively related to employees’ extra-role behaviors (i.e., OCB). As shown in Model 2 for

Table 2 Hierarchical regression analyses results for ethical leadership

Variables	Ethical leadership	
	Model 1	Model 2
Step 1		
Leader age	-.02	-.02
Leader gender	.00	.01
Employee age	.17*	.15*
Employee gender	.01	.01
Leader–employee tenure	-.09	-.08
Job type	-.19**	-.18**
Step 2		
Leaders’ core self-evaluation		.17**
F value	3.00**	3.63**
R ²	.08	.10
ΔF		6.93**
ΔR^2		.03

Note N = 225. Entries are standardized regression coefficients

* p < .05; ** p < .01

OCB, the result demonstrated that ethical leadership is positively related to OCB ($\beta = .25, p < .001$), supporting Hypothesis 3.

Table 3 Hierarchical regression analyses results for employees' job performance

Variables	Task performance				OCB			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Step 1								
Leader age	.16*	.16*	.17*	.16*	.07	.08	.08	.07
Leader gender	-.16*	-.16*	-.17**	-.16*	-.12	-.12	-.13*	-.11
Employee age	.09	.05	.06	.07	.11	.07	.07	.08
Employee gender	.06	.06	.06	.07	-.03	-.03	-.03	-.02
Leader-employee tenure	.05	.07	.07	.03	.07	.09	.09	.09
Job type	-.03	.02	.03	.06	-.15*	-.10	-.09	-.09
Step 2								
Ethical leadership		.23***	.27***	-.19		.25***	.29***	-.14
Step 3								
Employees' exchange ideology			.08	-.50			.09	-.45
Step 4								
Ethical leadership × Employees' exchange ideology				.60*				.56*
<i>F</i> value	3.19**	4.70***	4.30***	4.40***	3.32**	5.14***	4.75***	4.73***
<i>R</i> ²	.08	.13	.14	.16	.08	.14	.15	.17
ΔF		12.70***	1.48	4.62*		14.70***	1.84	4.03*
ΔR^2		.05	.01	.02		.06	.01	.02

Note *N* = 225. Entries are standardized regression coefficients

* *p* < .05; ** *p* < .01; *** *p* < .001

Table 4 Results of bootstrap for indirect effects of leaders' core self-evaluation

Dependent variables	Bias-corrected confidence intervals	
	Lower	Upper
Task performance	.01	.10
OCB	.01	.10

Confidence interval does not include zero; thus, the indirect effect is indeed significantly different from zero at *p* < .05 (two-tailed)

Note *N* = 225. Bootstrap sample size = 10,000

To test Hypotheses 4 and 5 (the mediation hypotheses), we employed the bootstrapping approach (Preacher and Hayes 2004). A total of 10,000 samples were bootstrapped; Table 4 provides 95 % bootstrap confidence intervals for the indirect effects of CSE on the dependent variables. Because these intervals did not include zero, the indirect effect was significantly different from zero (Shrout and Bolger 2002). As the statistically significant indirect effects imply that the relationships between CSE and employees' job performances occur through ethical leadership, Hypotheses 4 and 5 were supported. In addition, we assessed the statistical significance of these indirect effects using Sobel's (1982) test. Again, in support of Hypotheses 4 and 5, the results showed that CSE has a significant

indirect effect on task performance (*Z* = 2.55, *p* < .05) and OCB (*Z* = 2.66, *p* < .01).

Table 3 also presents the results for Hypotheses 6 and 7. Hypotheses 6 and 7 predicted employees' exchange ideology to have a moderating effect on the relationship between ethical leadership and employees' job performance. The regression results presented in Model 4 for task performance ($\beta = .60$, *p* < .05) and OCB ($\beta = .56$, *p* < .05) indicate that the interaction term for ethical leadership and employees' exchange ideology was significant, supporting Hypotheses 6 and 7. In support of Hypotheses 6 and 7, Figs. 2 and 3 graphically depict the moderating effects of employees' exchange ideology, respectively.

Discussion

In today's rapidly changing and global business environment, leaders' ethical responsibility has become a crucial issue for contemporary organizations (Loi et al. 2012). A growing number of organizational scholars have paid increasing attention to the topics of business ethics and ethical leadership. In line with this, the purpose of this study was to enhance knowledge about ethical leadership

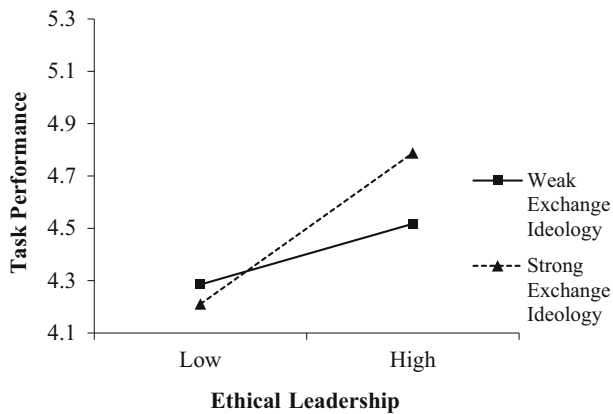


Fig. 2 Moderating effect of employees' exchange ideology on the relationship between ethical leadership and task performance

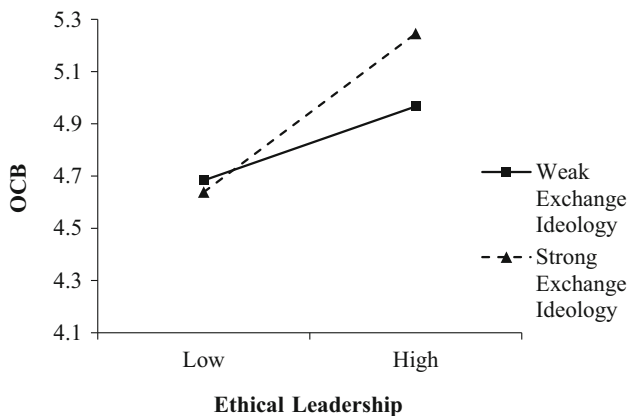


Fig. 3 Moderating effect of employees' exchange ideology on the relationship between ethical leadership and OCB

by investigating not only the antecedents and consequences of ethical leadership but also the boundary conditions of its effects.

Consistent with self-verification theory, the result of this study showed that leaders' CSE was positively and significantly related to ethical leadership. Furthermore, we found that ethical leadership exerted positive effects on employees' job performance, construed as inclusive of both in-role (i.e., task performance) and extra-role behaviors (i.e., OCB); we also found that ethical leadership played a mediating role in the relationship between leaders' CSE and employees' job performance. Moreover, based on the interactional perspective of leadership (Yun et al. 2006), this study demonstrated that the positive effects of ethical leadership on employees' job performance are moderated by employees' exchange ideology. As such, our findings strongly support all of our theoretically derived hypotheses. In what follows, we elaborate on these findings and suggest some ideas for future research.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

This research has several theoretical implications. First, this study contributes to research on ethical leadership by exploring an antecedent of ethical leadership. Our study found that leaders' CSE has a positive relationship with their ethical behavior, confirming self-verification theory. Although numerous studies have been conducted regarding ethical leadership (Brown et al. 2005; De Hoogh and Den Hartog 2008), not many studies have examined its antecedents. Our findings imply that it is worthwhile to examine the relationship between leaders' personality traits and their behaviors. Future research would benefit from further investigating this possibility. In addition, it might be rewarding to examine the effects of organizational factors, such as organizational justice, on leaders' ethical leadership in order to enrich our understanding of the antecedents of ethical leadership.

Second, this study contributes to the literature on personal traits, the research on CSE in particular (e.g., Judge et al. 2003; Resick et al. 2009). As CSE is a relatively recently developed construct, little is known about it (Johnson et al. 2008; Resick et al. 2009). Following the research of Mayer et al. (2012), which took a leader-centered perspective on studying the role of identity, we examined how leaders' positive self-concept (i.e., CSE) was related to leaders' behavior. Moreover, in line with the proposition of Hiller and Hambrick (2005), our findings show that leaders' self-concept affects their behaviors. Thus, the findings of this study demonstrate CSE's value as a predictor of ethical decision-making and ethical leadership and extend the existing research on CSE into the ethical domain.

Third, our findings provide additional evidence for the positive effects of ethical leadership. Importantly, this study shows that the effects of ethical leadership can differ depending on follower characteristics, especially exchange ideology. Previous studies have produced mixed results regarding the effects of ethical leadership on outcomes, implying that the effects of ethical leadership may differ by situation. Moreover, our findings provide additional support for the leadership-contingency approach in general and advance our understanding of the effects of ethical leadership. Future research must explore other plausible situational factors and contexts, such as organizational culture and follower goal orientation. For instance, the effects of ethical leadership may be stronger when followers have a learning orientation or when the organization has a long-term orientation.

Moreover, the findings of this study also enrich the literature on social exchange theory and exchange ideology. Social exchange theory (Blau 1964) has provided a theoretical framework to explain various workplace

phenomena. In particular, Brown and Treviño (2006) argued that social exchange theory is one of the primary mechanisms by which ethical leaders influence their followers. However, individuals may not value reciprocity or exchange to the same degree. Recognizing the importance of individual differences in exchange norms (Cropanzano and Mitchell 2005; Takeuchi et al. 2011), we examined the moderating effect of follower exchange ideology in the relationship between ethical leadership and follower job performance. Moving beyond the main effects of ethical leadership, this study demonstrated that the magnitude of the influence of ethical leadership is dependent on employees' exchange ideology. This finding is consistent with previous works on exchange ideology (e.g., Eisenberger et al. 1986) as it indicates that employees with a strong exchange ideology are more likely to put extra effort into their job performance if they have high-quality social exchange relationships with their supervisors.

Our study has practical and managerial implications as well. First of all, we found that ethical leadership exerted positive effects on follower job performance. In today's fast-paced economy, sometimes leaders' moral responsibility is pushed back on the priority list. As our results suggest, however, ethical leadership is beneficial to the organization, as it can induce followers to exert more effort in contributing to the organization. Thus, organizations need to encourage managers to display ethical leadership.

Moreover, the results pertaining to the moderating effects of ethical leadership may help managers understand why employees respond differently to ethical leadership. Though leaders may place importance on demonstrating normatively appropriate conduct and forming fair interpersonal relationships with their followers, they should also be aware that some employees, such as those with a strong exchange ideology, can be more sensitive to leaders' fairness. Thus, although leaders may not recognize which followers have a strong exchange ideology, they should prevent unfair situations from cropping up and, if such situations are inevitable, make an effort to alleviate the concerns of those with a strong exchange ideology in the most feasible way.

In addition, focusing on individual characteristics among supervisors, the present study demonstrated that leaders who have an overall positive self-view (i.e., high CSE) are more likely to engage in ethical leadership. This result suggests that ethical leadership can be promoted not only by activating leaders' positive self-image, but as Chang et al. (2012) suggested, CSE scores can be taken into account when making personnel decisions. It may be prudent for organizational human resource management teams to keep this in mind before making leadership appointments.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has a few theoretical and empirical limitations. First, future research could be improved by elaborating on the experimental design. The study data were collected at one point in time. Given our cross-sectional design, we were unable to infer causality (Cook and Campbell 1979). Future studies may clarify the causal relationship among the variables with longitudinal data. Despite the advantages of studies within a single culture, in which include the cultural context is naturally controlled for, the results of this study could be weak for generalization. Furthermore, although we tried to minimize this potential issue by collecting data from the most appropriate sources, it could be advantageous for forthcoming studies to take a more careful approach to avoid potential problems (e.g., common-method bias).

Second, this study focused on a specific aspect of exchange among several different social exchange models. Scott and Colquitt (2007) argued that social exchange theory is the logical foundation for the four models related to organizational justice. The intrinsic and intangible aspects of exchange models (i.e., interpersonal and procedural justice) were developed by Blau (1964) and Foa and Foa (1980). In contrast, models that stress the extrinsic and tangible aspects of exchange (i.e., distributive justice and equity models) were developed by Homans (1961) and Adams (1965). As we noted above, the effects of ethical leadership are derived from interpersonal trust and fair treatment, which are more pertinent to the former models. Ethical leaders form long-term and intangible social exchange relationships; however, it may need to be examined whether they demonstrate fairness in tangible ones. Considering that the aspects of distributive justice and equity models (i.e., outcome fairness) may form in the short-term and may include economic exchanges, ethical leadership may lack the strength such relationships have. In this regard, we would expect individuals' sensitivity to equity to have moderating effects that are similar to, but weaker than, those of exchange ideology. By addressing this relationship, future research can contribute to the literature on organizational justice and equity theory.

Lastly, the present study included only a limited number of variables. Although this study drew on social exchange theory to explain the mechanism by which ethical leadership exerts an influence and the moderating effect of exchange ideology, relational variables such as LMX and trust in leaders were not assessed. Moreover, although we inferred relationships between each component of CSE and ethical leadership, we did not actually survey particular sub-dimensional (i.e., sub-facets of CSE) variables. By addressing such issues, future research may contribute to the literature on both social exchange and CSE. Moreover,

it would be worthwhile to examine the underlying mechanisms (e.g., interactional justice) by which ethical leadership affects outcomes. In addition, we only considered selected variables as antecedents and boundary conditions of ethical leadership. Future research can contribute to the ethical leadership literature by investigating other personality traits such as humility and so forth.

Conclusion

Given the prominent ethical scandals that have occurred (e.g., Enron) and increasing demands for ethical standards in management, the importance of business ethics and ethical behavior among leaders seems obvious. The present research demonstrates that leaders' positive self-concept promotes ethical leadership, which plays a pivotal role in encouraging employees in both in-role and extra-role performance; this is beneficial for organizations. All in all, our research sheds some light on the importance of ethical leadership by demonstrating its antecedents and positive effects. Therefore, additional research in this area seems not only warranted but critical to advancing our understanding of ethical leadership.

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