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How Can Public Sector Organizations Enhance Employee Loyalty? The Impacts of Ethical Leadership, Employee Job Satisfaction, and Employee Motivation

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ABSTRACT

Numerous scandals and failures within governmental entities have drawn significant attention to ethical leadership. This study examined how public sector ethical leadership influences worker loyalty in Somalia through the underlying mechanisms of worker motivation and worker job satisfaction. Using an online cross-sectional quantitative design, we collected data from 300 public sector employees across numerous federal ministries in Mogadishu, Somalia. We analyzed the data using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The results show that public sector ethical leadership, employee motivation, and job satisfaction positively and significantly affect employee loyalty. Furthermore, public sector ethical leadership positively and significantly affects workers' motivation and job satisfaction. Finally, the findings show that public sector worker motivation and worker job satisfaction partially mediate the relationship between public sector ethical leadership and worker loyalty. The current study offers novel perspectives on the mediating effect of worker job satisfaction and motivation on the association between public sector ethical leadership and worker loyalty. The current study empirically outlines the significance of public sector ethical leadership, worker motivation, and job satisfaction in fostering worker loyalty in the setting of Somali governmental entities. Thus, to satisfy employees and increase their loyalty, policymakers and administrators in the Somali public sector should support ethical leadership, implement inspiring programs, and foster a positive work environment.

Employee loyalty is the inclination of workers to remain with an institution even when it may not be in their best interests (Niehoff et al., 2001). On the other hand, De Graaf (2010) defined loyalty in public sector organizations as being faithful and willing to make sacrifices; it is characterized by being unbiased, predictable, and involving undisputed compliance with the authorities. Niehoff et al. (2001) described loyalty as employees' emotional and behavioral commitment to an organization, even if it conflicts with their immediate self-interest. This definition implies that loyalty stems from a bond with the organization, marked by trust, identification, and belonging. De Graaf (2010) adds a moral aspect to loyalty in public sector organizations, highlighting faithfulness, sacrifice, and adherence to authority. This underscores a sense of duty and obligation to the organization, even in challenging situations.

An organization's success depends on understanding workplace behavior (Rahimi, 2020). Guo et al. (2023) stated that ethical leadership is when leaders treat their staff members with respect and exhibit ethical behavior by using effective interpersonal and communication skills.

Employee motivation refers to the internal drive that influences and directs behavior, which is recognized as a crucial issue for achieving success in organizations (Evans, 2023). Stimulating the motivation of public sector personnel is crucial for a robust society, as noted by Ritz et al. (2016). Karolidis and Vouzas (2019) asserted that employee motivation is a significant determinant of human behavior, particularly in public organizations, by driving helping actions. Further research is vital to elucidate the mechanisms via which organizations might boost employee motivation (Leftheriotis & Giannakos, 2014). Scholars and practitioners alike are interested in understanding how leadership styles promote worker motivation and morale (Ouakouak et al., 2020). An enterprise's capability to succeed depends on its ability to maintain employee job satisfaction, which also enhances the organization as a whole and is strongly associated with ethical leadership (Rahimi, 2020; Tu et al., 2017).

There are, however, a lot of gaps in the present body of evidence about how public sector ethical leadership affects employee loyalty and how employee job satisfaction and employee motivation function as mediators. Public sector loyalty is frequently disregarded (Zainal Abidin et al., 2022), even though prior research has examined the idea of employee loyalty in terms of organizational commitment, organizational performance, and the possible costs of employee disloyalty to organizations (Costen & Salazar, 2011). Ethical leadership has garnered significant attention in academic literature (Brown & Treviño, 2006). Nevertheless, it is crucial to admit that the existing study on this subject has predominantly focused on Western contexts (Qin et al., 2023). Despite myriad prior studies that have explored the effect of ethical leadership in non-Western countries (Islam et al., 2019), there is a void of comprehensive studies on how public sector ethical leadership is perceived in underdeveloped countries such as Somalia.

The issue of government employee motivation in Somalia has garnered considerable attention, as evidenced by many scholarly studies. Nor (2023) argued that empirical evidence indicates that many Somali public sector employees encounter discontent due to task disengagement and external pressures, leading to decreased motivation levels. Furthermore, Sheikh and Gele (2023) documented empirical evidence indicating that specific cohorts of public sector personnel in Mogadishu, specifically gynecologists and midwives, demonstrate significantly diminished motivation levels. The observed phenomenon can be attributed to various variables, including the demanding nature of the work environment, elevated performance standards, and the influence of patriarchal norms, which disproportionately impact

female healthcare professionals. Moreover, these cohorts also indicated diminished levels of worker job satisfaction compared with alternative occupations. The absence of motivation and perceived satisfaction may have an influence on the level of worker loyalty toward public sector organizations.

Protracted civil conflict and persistent political instability in Somalia have created a complex environment for public sector management. Motivated and dedicated public services are vital for effectively executing reformist measures in a nation's ongoing rebuilding process. Ethical leadership plays a significant role in facilitating transformative reforms in the public sector in Somalia. Cultivating a culture characterized by integrity and accountability by ethical leaders can significantly augment employee motivation and satisfaction, resulting in heightened levels of loyalty (Abdi et al., 2024).

The pervasive presence of corruption within Somalia's public sector has significantly undermined public confidence and impeded efficient service provision. However, adopting ethical leadership presents a potentially effective strategy for tackling this matter. Leadership figures who demonstrate ethical conduct and establish unambiguous ethical norms can motivate staff in government institutions to maintain elevated levels of ethical behavior. This method could improve public service efficiency, effectiveness, and equity. Abdi and Rahman's (2024) study stated that public sector ethical leadership is crucial in shaping worker motivation and loyalty in governmental institutions. Nevertheless, additional investigation is required to investigate how public sector ethical leadership impacts worker loyalty via worker motivation and satisfaction. The current study can provide meaningful contributions to policymakers and practitioners interested in enhancing the governance and delivery of public services in Somalia.

Studies indicate that unethical leadership is prevalent in public sector organizations in Muslim countries; however, there is a lack of sufficient research on this subject in Muslim countries, including Somalia (Hameed et al., 2023). Notwithstanding the recent scholarly focus, notably within government organizations (Shakeel et al., 2020), there is a dearth of research on the influence of public sector ethical leadership on worker loyalty and the mediating roles of worker motivation and worker job satisfaction.

Because ethical leadership literature in the public sector has mostly ignored this component, studies have indicated an urgent need for it (Nguyen, 2023). Furthermore, the link between public sector ethical leadership and worker job satisfaction has not been taken into account in earlier research on employee motivation in public organizations (Gregg et al., 2008). This study investigates how employee loyalty in Somali public sector organizations is affected by ethical leadership. It looks into the ways in which job satisfaction and employee motivation (EMO) mediate this relationship. Furthermore, this current study responds to a call for further study on how public sector ethical leadership affects worker loyalty via the underlying mechanisms of worker motivation and job satisfaction (Abdi & Rahman, 2024).

The current study investigates the link between public sector ethical leadership and worker loyalty, utilizing Bandura's (1986) Social Learning Theory (SLT) and Blau's (1986) social Exchange Theory (SET) to elucidate this connection. According to SLT, people acquire beneficial habits by emulating reliable role models in their social environment, with ethical leaders potentially influencing their followers' behavior (Kalshoven et al., 2013). Additionally, SET provides a conceptual framework for comprehending the connection between public sector ethical leadership and worker motivation to exhibit desirable behavior.

The current study adds to the existing scholarly body of knowledge. First, it examines the relationship between public sector ethical leadership and worker loyalty via the mediating role of worker motivation and job satisfaction in non-Western settings. This fills the literature gap in the Muslim world, where there is a lacuna in the literature (Hameed et al., 2023). The relationship between ethical leadership and employee loyalty in the Muslim world may differ from that in other regions due to Islamic values, collectivism, current unethical leadership, political instability, and traditional gender roles. Islamic values, such as justice, fairness, and compassion, shape employee expectations and attitudes toward leadership differently from Western values. In many Muslim cultures, the emphasis on collectivism and group harmony also affects how employees perceive and respond to their leaders. Ethical leaders are particularly vital in Muslim societies where the current unethical leadership style significantly influences employee values and expectations. Political instability, leadership conflicts, and traditional gender roles present unique challenges for organizations and their employees in the Muslim world. These cultural, religious, and social factors distinguish the relationship between ethical leadership and employee loyalty in Muslim societies, necessitating their consideration when studying leadership and employee engagement in this context.

Unlike the private sector, this study emphasizes the public sector due to the unique dynamics between ethical leadership, employee loyalty, job satisfaction, and motivation. Government organizations feature hierarchical structures and bureaucratic processes that shape employee expectations and behavior. Political factors and civil service regulations influence performance evaluations and rewards, posing distinct challenges to ethical leadership. Public sector employees usually enjoy greater job security due to civil service protection, which affects their work attitudes and leader interactions. Additionally, these employees adhere to stricter ethical standards and codes of conduct than those in the private sector do, presenting specific challenges for ethical leadership.

Moreover, scholars have instructed additional research to investigate how worker job satisfaction and motivation mediate the relationship between public sector ethical leadership and worker loyalty (Abdi & Rahman, 2024). Therefore, the current study responds to this call to bridge the paucity in the body of knowledge. In addition, this study offers invaluable insights into the underlying mechanisms of worker satisfaction and motivation in this relationship by integrating both SLT and SET into a single theoretical framework. Finally, the current study points out the significance of ethical programs and awareness in Somali public sector policymaking. These programs enhance employee motivation and job satisfaction and foster a loyal workforce, which is necessary for effective and efficient service delivery.

Review of Literature and Development of Hypotheses

Ethical Leadership and Employee Loyalty

A plethora of prior studies have reported ethical leadership is an antecedent of worker loyalty (Abdi & Rahman, 2024; Nazarian et al., 2022; Tseng & Wu, 2017). Recent studies support these findings by arguing that loyal employees are valuable assets to organizations, as loyalty significantly influences their behaviors and attitudes (Zanabazar et al., 2023). Therefore, ethical leadership not only influences staff loyalty but also fosters a sense of unity within the organization, increasing the likelihood that loyal employees will stay longer (Aman-Ullah et al., 2022). Research has substantiated the positive influence of ethical leadership on employee

loyalty, although this relationship is multifaceted. Empirical studies have identified mediating factors such as perceived organizational fairness, trust in leadership, and worker engagement (Abdi & Rahman, 2024; Danxia & Warewanich, 2024). Even with extensive research, knowledge gaps persist, particularly regarding the long-term effects of ethical leadership on employee loyalty and organizational outcomes. The mechanisms by which ethical leadership influences employee attitudes and behaviors have not yet been fully elucidated. Further investigation could inform organizational strategies to foster ethical leadership and enhance employee loyalty.

It is noteworthy that a significant portion of the material currently available on the subject originates from Western sources, despite the fact that cultural, regional, and religious elements are significant in understanding the influence of ethical leadership (Qin et al., 2023). This study suggests that ethical leaders in government entities serve as good role models for staff members when it comes to ethical standards based on social learning theory (Abdi & Hashi, 2023). Because they have witnessed and internalized such behaviors, employees as a result show helpful behaviors toward their colleagues (Nguyen, 2023). Reducing turnover rates is mainly dependent on employee loyalty. Low employee loyalty is expensive for the company and the employees because it takes a lot of effort to find new opportunities and adjust to different work settings (Damayanti et al., 2019). By investigating the connection between ethical leadership and worker loyalty in government agencies, specifically in Somalia, this study seeks to close this gap in the body of literature. As a result, we put forth the following hypothesis:

H1: Ethical leadership is significantly and positively related to public sector employee loyalty.

Ethical Leadership and Employee Motivation

Studies show that workers are more likely to perform better when an ethical leader guides their team. This is so because ethical behavior by leaders increases worker motivation (Walumbwa et al., 2011). Additionally, by fostering better working relationships, academics have discovered that ethical leadership increases employee motivation (Eva et al., 2020; Oladimeji & Abdulkareem, 2023; Uluturk et al., 2023). Research reports that ethical leadership significantly and positively affects worker motivation (Tu et al., 2017). Despite a growing number of studies exploring ethical leadership, empirical research on its impact on fostering positive relationships and behaviors, particularly in government organizations, remains limited (Nguyen, 2023). Little research has been conducted on employee motivation in non-Western environments (Hanaysha & Hussain 2018). Ouakouak et al. (2020) argued that while several studies have shown that ethical leadership positively affects worker motivation, the specific motivational processes underlying these effects are still unknown.

Social Exchange Theory (SET) is employed in this present study to demonstrate the connection between public sector ethical leadership, and SET clarifies the reciprocal character of the relations between followers and leaders, which aids in our comprehension of the association between public sector ethical leadership and worker motivation (Islam et al., 2023). Ethical leadership fosters a trustworthy and encouraging work atmosphere through social exchange procedures, which raises employee engagement and motivation. Ethical leadership allows workers to grow professionally, exercise self-determination, and have meaningful

conversations with their leaders (Ouakouak et al., 2020). Therefore, this study hypothesizes the following:

H2: Ethical leadership is significantly and positively related to public sector employee motivation.

Ethical Leadership and Employee Job Satisfaction

Ethical leaders have important characteristics like honesty, integrity, concern for others, altruism, visibility, determination of group goals, dependability, and commitment to upholding ethical principles in their decision-making (Tu et al., 2017). Thus, the existing body of research has demonstrated a positive relationship between worker job satisfaction and ethical leadership.

This study investigated the influence of public sector ethical leadership on individual employees' overall job satisfaction. Al Halbusi et al. (2023) argued that self-control, ethical identity, and organizational citizenship impact the relationship between ethical leadership and work satisfaction. Ethical leadership promotes ethical conduct and fosters a supportive work environment, both of which favorably affect worker job satisfaction (Nawaz et al., 2022). Swid (2023) stated that enhancing job satisfaction is contingent upon upper management's endorsement of ethical conduct. Shrivastava et al. (2023) have established a relationship between ethical leadership and contentedness, suggesting a potential mediating effect of staff involvement. This implies that actively engaged workers are more likely to experience occupation satisfaction.

Recent studies have uncovered that workers' job satisfaction and ethical leadership are directly and indirectly associated (Aftab et al., 2023; Uluturk et al., 2023). Although the relationship between ethical leadership and employee satisfaction is well established, it is essential to explore the underlying mechanisms and potential mediators. Previous studies have demonstrated a direct link between ethical leadership and employee satisfaction; however, they have often overlooked the mediators that might influence this relationship and potential cultural variations, particularly in developing nations. Addressing these gaps can contribute to strategies to promote ethical leadership and enhance employee satisfaction.

Therefore, additional studies are required to examine the association between employee job satisfaction and public sector ethical leadership, specifically in Somalia. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Ethical leadership is significantly and positively related to public sector employee job satisfaction.

Employee Motivation and Employee Loyalty

Many prior studies have consistently revealed that worker motivation is a crucial antecedent to worker loyalty. For example, the study by Armanu and Sudjatno (2017) revealed that worker motivation is a strong positive predictor of worker loyalty. Moreover, Subrahmanyam (2017) reported that motivation directly impacts loyalty. A new study by Godinho et al. (2024) supports this argument, reporting that worker motivation is a strong predictor of worker loyalty, consistent with this perspective. These studies underscore the importance of employee

motivation in shaping employee loyalty. However, this relationship has received limited attention in public sector studies, particularly in Somalia.

Despite extensive research on organizational behavior and human resource management regarding the relationship between employee motivation and loyalty, few studies have explored this connection in depth. The current research indicates a need for comprehensive investigation and identification of various mediating factors and gaps in the literature. The key findings suggest that organizational culture and quality of work life significantly influence motivation and subsequently affect employee loyalty. However, the role of job satisfaction as a mediator is often overlooked, although it can enhance loyalty when shaped by motivation and other factors (Athala & Sumastuti, 2024; Khoa et al., 2024; Maulana Saputra et al., 2024). Additionally, many studies have focused on specific industries or regions, limiting their generalizability (Balahurovska, 2024). These studies also indicate that factors such as compensation and their indirect effects on loyalty through motivation require further exploration (Athala & Sumastuti, 2024). Although the existing literature provides valuable insights, there is still a need for broader studies that encompass diverse sectors and additional mediating variables. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

H4: Employee motivation in the public sector is significantly and positively related to employee loyalty.

Employee Job Satisfaction and Employee Loyalty

Numerous previous studies have demonstrated that worker job satisfaction influences staff loyalty. For instance, a recent study discovered that job satisfaction positively relates to worker loyalty (Usniarti & Nuvriasari, 2024). Similarly, a recent study reported that satisfaction predicts positively loyal behavior (Muflih et al., 2024). Furthermore, Subrahmanyam (2017) found that satisfaction predicts loyalty. Additionally, Veloso et al. (2021) reported that worker job satisfaction positively influences their loyalty to their institution. Similarly, Godinho et al. (2024) depicted that worker job satisfaction is a strong antecedent of worker loyalty.

Individual differences, such as personality traits, values, cultural dimensions, organizational styles, and demographic characteristics, may impact the relationship between job satisfaction and loyalty, an area overlooked by previous studies. Future research should explore how these factors interact with job satisfaction to predict employee loyalty. By addressing these gaps, this research can enhance our understanding of the relationship between employee job satisfaction and loyalty, ultimately informing the development of effective public sector management practices.

Although past studies underlined the paramount role of worker satisfaction in promoting worker loyalty, this relationship within government institutions, in general, and specifically in Somali settings, remains understudied. Therefore, the study aims to bridge this void in the literature and propose the following hypothesis:

H5: Public sector employee job satisfaction is significantly and positively related to employee loyalty.

Mediating Role of Employee Motivation

Employee motivation is essential for the association between worker loyalty and ethical leadership. A plethora of prior studies have proven that ethical leadership positively impacts worker motivation, increasing loyalty (Shu, 2023; Syukur et al., 2023). Ethical leadership promotes altruistic motivation and suppresses egoistic motivation, fostering employee loyalty (Nawaz et al., 2022). Additionally, ethical leadership encourages prosocial motivation, further boosting employee loyalty (Arshad et al., 2021).

The current study used Social Exchange Theory (SET) to explain how worker motivation mediates this relationship. SET states that individuals enter relationships expecting mutual benefits (Syukur et al., 2023). This theory posits that, within the settings of ethical leadership, leaders' demonstration of ethical conduct catalyzes employees' display of positive reciprocation (Samra, 2021). Arshad et al. (2021) asserted that employee motivation is a crucial mediator between employees' loyalty and ethical leadership.

Prior studies have reported that ethical leadership influences employee job satisfaction and job-related burnout and that public service motivation partially mediates this relationship (Uluturk et al., 2023). However, research on the effect of worker motivation as a mediator between worker loyalty and public sector ethical leadership is limited. Hence, the following hypothesis was proposed:

H6: Employee motivation mediates the relationship between public sector ethical leadership and employee loyalty.

Mediating Role of Employee Job Satisfaction

A past study reported that worker job satisfaction is positively related to ethical leadership (Nawaz et al., 2022), which, in turn, affects employees' loyalty to their supervisors (Swid, 2023). Moreover, worker satisfaction is positively related to worker loyalty (Rahimi, 2020) and mediates the association between ethical leadership and employee loyalty (Sahid & Abadi, 2023).

This study employed Social Learning Theory (SLT), which posits that people acquire knowledge by observing others' actions and the repercussions of their decisions (Ateeq et al., 2023). In the specific setting of the mediating effect of worker job satisfaction between ethical leadership and worker loyalty, SLT proposes that employees observe and internalize ethical behaviors and values exhibited by their leaders, resulting in increased job satisfaction (Hien & Tuan, 2023). This, in turn, strengthens loyalty toward the organization (Sahid & Abadi, 2023).

Despite the extensive research conducted in developed countries, the relationship between employee job satisfaction, employee loyalty, and ethical leadership has not been extensively explored in post-conflict nations, specifically in Somalia.

H7: Employee job satisfaction mediates the relationship between public sector ethical leadership and employee loyalty.

Theoretical Framework

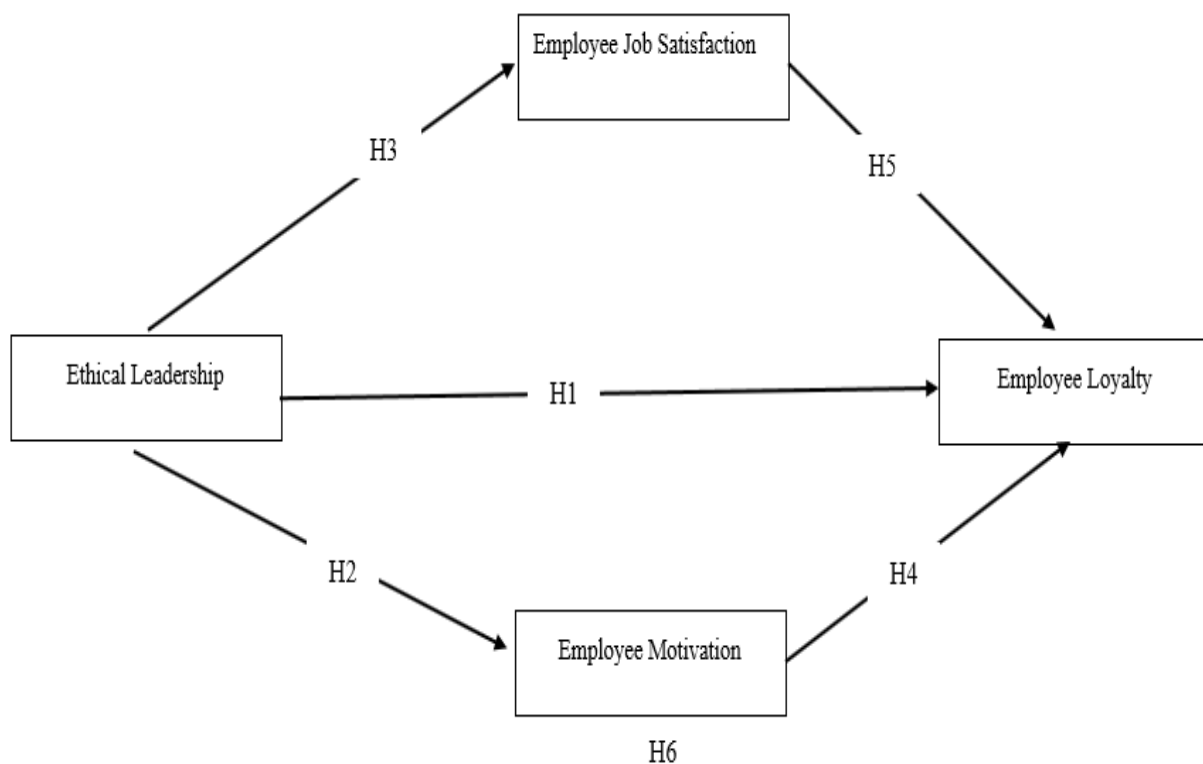
Bandura's (1986) social learning theory asserts that individuals learn behaviors through observation and imitation. In the context of ethical leadership, employees may adopt ethical

behaviors by watching their leaders and emulating their actions. When ethical leaders consistently exhibit ethical conduct, they foster a positive work environment that encourages employees to do the same. Blau's (1986) social exchange theory posits that a cost-benefit analysis governs social interactions. Individuals are inclined to engage in behaviors perceived as rewarding while avoiding those viewed as costly. Employees are more likely to demonstrate loyalty to ethical leaders who provide benefits such as fair treatment, recognition, and opportunities for professional growth.

Ethical leaders cultivate a positive work environment that boosts employee satisfaction. Satisfied employees are more likely to demonstrate loyalty to their organizations. Ethical leaders inspire and motivate employees by establishing clear expectations, modeling positive behavior, and recognizing contributions. Motivated employees show greater loyalty as they feel valued and engaged in their work. Employee satisfaction and motivation mediate the relationship between ethical leadership and loyalty. Ethical leadership enhances satisfaction and motivation and strengthens loyalty. Bandura's (1986) social learning theory and Blau's (1986) social exchange theory provide insights into the connections between ethical leadership, employee loyalty, job satisfaction, and motivation. Integrating these theories enhances our understanding of how ethical leadership positively influences employee outcomes. The model used in the present study is displayed in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Study Model



Method

This study involved public sector employees working in various federal government ministries in Mogadishu, Somalia. This study aimed to capture the diverse representation of public sector employees across the federal government by targeting various departments and ministries.

The current study employed convenience sampling to collect data through a quantitative online cross-sectional design. Data were gathered from (September to November 2023) using an online Google Forms survey. To obtain permission for the study, the researchers obtained a formal letter from the university, which helped them gain approval from the government ministries. Subsequently, the researchers contacted the human resource departments in different ministries to distribute the survey. These departments were asked to share the Google Forms link with their employees and to encourage participation. Weekly reminder messages were sent to improve the response rates. In addition, the survey link was widely shared through email, WhatsApp, and Facebook, reaching a potential participant pool of over 750 public sector employees. All survey questions were mandatory to reduce missing data.

The online survey included an introductory cover letter that outlined the study's objectives and assured the participants of confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation. Additionally, the letter clearly explained informed consent, emphasizing the right to abandon the survey without facing any penalties. After three months, we received 300 completed surveys, resulting in a response rate of 40%. This response rate is regarded as quite good in social science research, as responses between 30% and 70% are generally acceptable (De Vaus, 2013). We carefully examined the data and found no outliers or missing data; therefore, we included all responses in the final analysis. The study participants mirrored the demographics of Somali civil servants. The sex distribution was 71.7% male and 28.3% female. Most individuals (48.3%) were between the ages of 26 and 35, with 22.0% falling within the 36–46 age bracket. Regarding education, 46.0% held bachelor's degrees and 48.3% held master's degrees, and a minimal proportion held PhDs. Most participants (56.3%) had 8–13 years of professional experience.

Instruments

Ethical Leadership (ETL) was gauged utilizing a six-indicator scale created and validated by Yukl et al. (2013). Sample statements read: "My supervisor exemplifies ethical behavior via his or her choices and deeds," "My supervisor has a deep concern for moral and ethical standards," and "My supervisor disagrees with employing unethical techniques to improve performance."

Employee Job Satisfaction (JOS) was gauged using a six-item scale created and validated by Weiss (1967). The items included "I satisfy the way department policies are put into practice" and "I satisfy the working conditions in my department."

Employee Motivation (EMO) was gauged using a six-indicator scale adopted from van der Kolk et al. (2019). The sample questions included "I work at my department because it gives me moments of pleasure" and "I do this work for the status it gives me."

Employee Loyalty (EML) was gauged using a six-indicator symmetric scale developed by Dutta and Dhir (2021). The statements include "I prefer to remain in my present department if allowed to choose another" and "I feel that I own this department."

This study employed a five-point Likert scale for all questions, with 1 = "Strongly Disagree" and 5 = "Strongly Agree."

Results

This study used partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) to evaluate each hypothesis. We started the analysis by assessing the measurement (outer) model and then the structural (inner) model evaluation, following the guidance of Hair et al. (2022). In this present study, we used PLS-SEM because of its capability to predict complex models, manage small sample sizes, and flexibility to meet normality assumption requirements. Furthermore, PLS-SEM is suitable for analyzing complicated models, allowing researchers to address a range of difficulties (Hair et al., 2022).

SmartPLS 4.1.0.6 software (Ringle et al., 2022) was utilized to carry out the analysis, and the Common Method Bias (CMB) threat was evaluated initially using SPSS and SmartPLS 4.1.0.6, before moving on to the assessment of the outer and inner models. We developed two strategies to decrease potential CMB based on Podsakoff et al. (2003). SPSS was used to perform an unrotated exploratory factor analysis for the single-factor test. CMB was not a substantial problem for the model, as evidenced by the single-factor explanation of the variation of 41.409%, which is less than the 50% requirement. Moreover, the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) scores of all latent variables were under the recommended cut-off of 3.3 following a full collinearity test (Kock, 2017). Thus, CMB did not significantly threaten the study's model.

Measurement Model Evaluation

We evaluated the outer model based on each construct's reliability and validity. This assessment was crucial in ensuring the constructs' reliability and validity and guaranteeing their suitability for further analysis.

The values presented in Table 1 and Figure 2 show the outer loadings, Cronbach's Alpha (CA), Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) of the constructs, which were all considered acceptable. The outer loading values ranged from .65 to .80, which fulfilled the recommended limit of .60, as stipulated by Chin (1998) (See Table 1 and Figure 2). Moreover, both the CA and CR scores surpassed the proposed criterion of .70 (Hair et al., 2022). Moreover, all constructs' AVE scores surpassed the minimum of .50 (Hair et al., 2022). The results confirmed both the model's reliability and convergent validity. Besides, the researchers employed the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) to compute all constructs' discriminant validity. Table 2 reveals that all HTMT scores fell under the cut-off of .90. This result confirms the discriminant validity of our outer model (Ringle et al., 2023).

Table 1

Construct Reliability and Validity

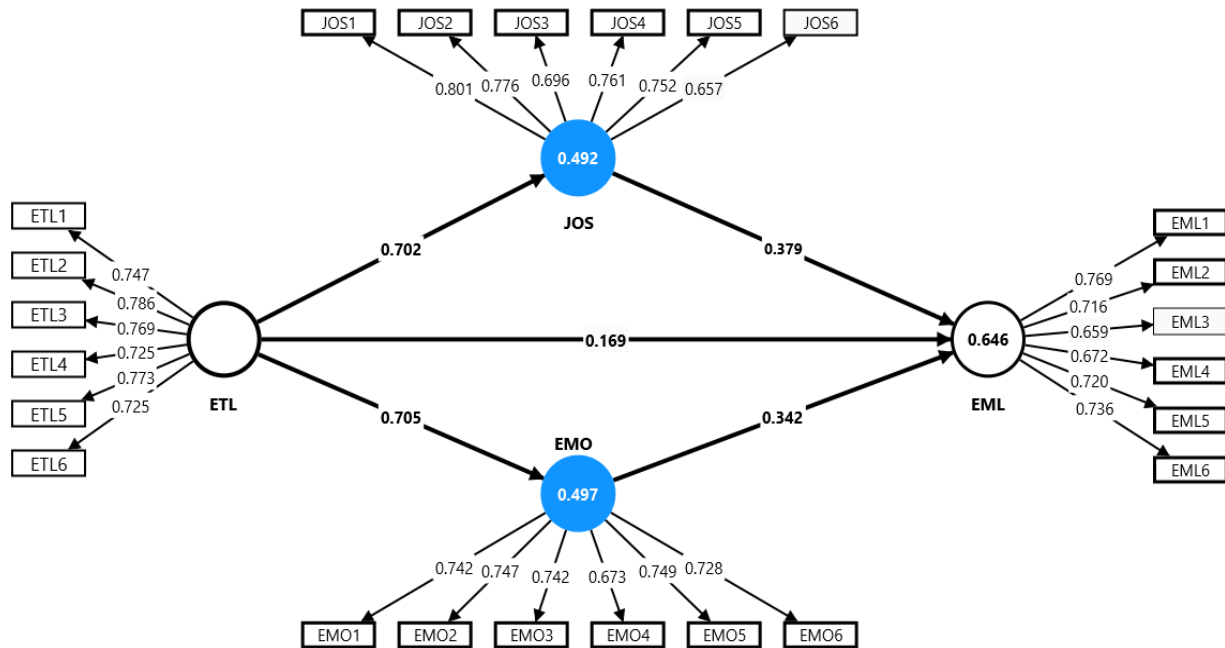
Latent variable	Indicators	Factor loadings	CR	CA	AVE
Ethical Leadership (ELT)	ETL1	.74	.84	.88	.57
	ETL2	.78			
	ETL3	.76			
	ETL4	.72			
	ETL5	.77			
	ETL6	.72			
Employee Motivation (EMO)	EMO1	.74	.82	.87	.53
	EMO2	.74			
	EMO3	.74			
	EMO4	.67			
	EMO5	.74			
	EMO6	.72			
Job Satisfaction (JOS)	JOS1	.80			
	JOS2	.77			

	JOS3	.69		.83	.88	.55
	JOS4	.76				
	JOS5	.75				
	JOS6	.65				
Employee Loyalty (EML)	EML1	.76				
	EML2	.71				
	EML3	.65	.80	.86	.50	
	EML4	.67				
	EML5	.72				
	EML6	.73				

Table 2
Discriminant Validity: HTMT Criterion

Construct	EML	EMO	ETL	JOS
EML	-			
EMO	.88	-		
ETL	.81	.83	-	
JOS	.89	.85	.82	-

Figure 2
Measurement Model



Structural Model Assessment

The significant procedures of structural model assessments entail evaluating the coefficient of determination, commonly referred to as R^2 , determining the significance of the path coefficient (β), and assessing cross-validated redundancy, also recognized as Q^2 . First, we assessed the direct relationships between constructs. The findings in Figure 3 and Table 4 reveal that ETL had a significant and positive impact on EML ($\beta = .16, t = 2.60, p = .005$), EMO ($\beta = .70, t = 22.86, p < .001$), and JOS ($\beta = .70, t = 20.61, p < .001$). Furthermore, both EMO and JOS had a significant and positive impact on EML (see Table 4). Thus, the current study’s direct proposed hypotheses (H1, H2, H3, H4, and H5) were confirmed.

The indirect effects were also assessed. Table 4 shows that EMO partially mediates the association between ETL and EML ($\beta = .24, t = 5.72, p < .001$). Similarly, the study found that

JOS partially mediated the association between ETL and EML ($\beta = .26, t = 6.25, p < .001$). Hence, H6 and H7 are supported.

Moreover, the R^2 score for direct association was 0.646. This suggests that the combined effects of ETL, EMO, and JOS account for 64.6% of the variance in EML. ETL explained 49.7% of the variance in EMO and 49.2% of the variance in JOS. The Q^2 value was used to calculate the predictive capability of the current study’s model. EML, EMO, and JOS had .45, .49, and .48 values, respectively. A Q^2 score above zero implies that the current study’s model has a high predictive capacity for the endogenous construct (Hair et al., 2022) (see Table 3).

Model fit was assessed using the SRMR and NFI indices from the PLS-SEM results, following the guidelines of Hair et al. (2022) and Schumacker and Lomax (2010). The NFI value was .83, exceeding the minimum requirement of .80, and the SRMR value was .06, which is below the .08 threshold. A good fit is indicated by values near .90 on the NFI scale, which ranges from 0 (no fit) to 1 (perfect fit). The results confirmed the model’s satisfactory fit (SRMR < .08 and NFI > .80) (Table 3). Therefore, an appropriate model fit was confirmed (see Table 3).

Table 3

Model’s Predictive and Explanatory Power (Q^2 and R^2), Model Fit

Endogenous construct	Q^2	R^2	SRMR	NFI
EML	.45	.64	.06	.83
EMO	.49	.49		
JOS	.48	.49		

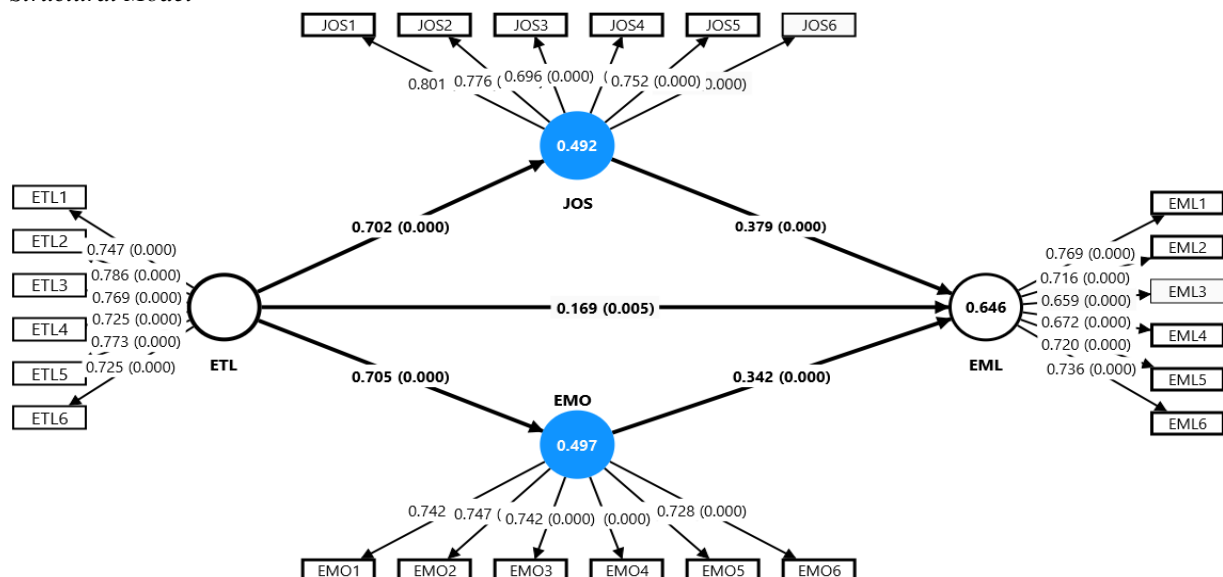
Table 4

Testing Direct and Mediating Hypotheses

Hypothesis	Standardized (β)	t-value	p-value	Decision
H1: ETL→EML	.16	2.60	.005	Yes
H2: ETL→EMO	.70	22.86	.000	Yes
H3: ETL→JOS	.70	2.61	.000	Yes
H4: EMO→EML	.34	5.92	.000	Yes
H5: JOS→EML	.37	6.48	.000	Yes
H6: ETL→EMO→EML	.24	5.72	.000	Yes
H7: ETL→JOS→EML	.26	6.25	.000	Yes

Figure 3

Structural Model



Discussion

This current study tested the direct impact of public sector ethical leadership on worker loyalty. It also examined the mediating effect of public sector worker motivation and job satisfaction in Mogadishu, Somalia. As expected, all the proposed hypotheses were supported. In line with past studies, ethical leadership has a direct positive influence on employee loyalty (Abdi & Rahman, 2024; Tseng & Wu, 2017). This finding implies that ethical leadership nurtures employee loyalty by promoting confidence, equitable treatment, and integrity. Such leadership makes employees feel valued and treated fairly, increasing their commitment and emotional attachment, which is crucial for Somalia's recovery in the post-conflict era and for the government to stabilize public institutions, improve service delivery, and restore public trust.

Moreover, consistent with prior research, ethical leadership has a direct, significant, and positive relationship with employee motivation (Oladimeji & Abdulkareem, 2023; Uluturk et al., 2023). This result suggests that ethical leadership can build a highly productive workforce and motivate government employees by offering exceptional role models that inspire people to follow in their footsteps. Also, the study found that ethical leadership has a direct, significant, and positive relationship with the employee's job satisfaction (Aftab et al., 2023; Uluturk et al., 2023). This finding suggests that improving employee satisfaction and performance in the public sector requires ethical leadership. Ethical leaders cultivate a positive work environment that enhances employee engagement, retention, and organizational effectiveness by demonstrating honesty and openness. This, in turn, improves the delivery of public services.

Similarly, confirming the findings of previous studies (Subrahmanyam, 2017), employee motivation positively and significantly influences employee loyalty. This finding suggests that staff motivation will likely improve their loyalty to institutions. Furthermore, in line with earlier research, employee job satisfaction was significantly and positively correlated with employee loyalty (Muflih et al., 2024; Veloso et al., 2021). This finding indicates that public sector employees who express satisfaction with their current employment are more likely to demonstrate organizational loyalty through increased dedication and commitment to the government institution's goals and objectives, which is necessary for the public sector.

Finally, the study found that employee motivation partially mediates the relationship between public sector ethical leadership and employee loyalty. It is worth noting that although previous studies have investigated the mediating effects of employee motivation in the relationship between ethical leadership and employee outcomes (Oladimeji & Abdulkareem, 2023), this finding suggests that public organizations can enhance employee loyalty by cultivating government employee motivation. Similarly, corroborating the prior study, the result revealed that employee job satisfaction partially mediates the relationship between public sector ethical leadership and employee loyalty (Hussain et al., 2024). This result implies that ethical leadership promotes employee loyalty both directly and indirectly through its positive effect on job satisfaction. Ethical leadership ultimately contributes to increased employee loyalty by enhancing workers' job satisfaction.

Theoretical Implications

The literature on the public administration of ETL, EMO, JOS, and EML in public service organizations, specifically in Somalia, benefits greatly from this study. These results back up Social Learning Theory (SLT) (Bandura, 1986), which postulates that individuals gain

knowledge of the desired behaviors by watching and copying reliable role models. This study contributes to understanding how ethical leaders can influence their followers by acting morally regularly and encouraging similar beliefs and behaviors among staff members. This procedure increases general employee loyalty and emphasizes the importance of public sector ethical leadership in government institutions.

Moreover, this current study establishes that EMO and JOB mediate the association between ETL and EML. The current study's findings reveal that ETL not only directly impacts EML but also indirectly affects it through the underlying mechanisms of EMO and JOS. The results of this study imply that these constructs are interdependent and collectively affect organizational outcomes. This study expands the applicability of the SLT in the Somali public sector, an understudied topic. It provides valuable insights into how ETL can cultivate a motivated, satisfied, and loyal workforce, ultimately leading to more efficient public services.

Practical Implications

This current study establishes the critical effect of ETL in enhancing EML among public sector employees in Somalia, an area that has received little attention in this context. Public sector organizations should prioritize ETL practices, as they directly influence EML. Leaders should model ethical behavior, promote ethical values, and provide clear guidelines. Implementing training programs that emphasize ethical decision-making and behavior is essential. These programs will impart to public sector leaders the required skills to foster a culture of integrity and trust, which, in turn, enhances EML.

Moreover, EMO and JOS played crucial mediating roles in the relationship between ETL and EML. Public sector organizations should create an environment that emphasizes intrinsic motivation by appreciating and rewarding worker efforts, providing chances for professional progress, and guaranteeing that work is important. Improving job satisfaction through better working conditions, fair policies, and a supportive work environment is equally important. By focusing on these areas, public sector organizations in Somalia can cultivate a motivated, satisfied, and loyal workforce that can deliver necessary services to the communities effectively and efficiently. Policymakers in the Somali public services can benefit from this study by using these insights to develop strategies and policies that promote ethical leadership, thereby enhancing the overall effectiveness of public service delivery.

Conclusion

This current study sheds light on the significant role of ethical leadership in promoting employee loyalty in Somalia's public sector through the underlying mechanisms of employee motivation and job satisfaction. This is consistent with the past existing body of knowledge, which demonstrates the positive impact of ethical leadership on employee outcomes. The findings, which support the work of Tseng and Wu (2017) and Aftab et al. (2023), indicate that ethical leadership directly enhances employee loyalty while also positively influencing employee motivation and job satisfaction, factors that partially mediate this relationship. This study draws on social learning theory, as supported by Bandura (1986), and suggests that workers learn and emulate ethical behaviors by observing leaders who consistently demonstrate integrity, a finding also supported by Subrahmanyam's (2017) research. This study contributes to the relatively underexplored context of Somalia's public sector. It echoes the conclusions of

Veloso et al. (2021) that ethical leadership can cultivate a motivated, satisfying, and loyal workforce. These results reinforce the argument of Oladimeji and Abdulkareem (2023) that enhancing ethical leadership is crucial for improving organizational performance and public service delivery. This study emphasizes the need for policymakers to prioritize ethical leadership development, as it is essential for building a committed workforce and strengthening public trust. This is in line with the calls from Uluturk et al. (2023) for more targeted leadership development programs in similar contexts.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Although the study contributes significant thoughts that worker motivation and job satisfaction serve as mediation factors between public sector ethical leadership and worker loyalty in Somalia, it has certain limitations. Online data collection may introduce response bias, and causal inferences are limited when relying solely on a quantitative cross-sectional approach. The sample of 300 public sector employees may not accurately represent the diversity of the workforce despite the fact that common method bias was assessed and determined to be acceptable.

Future research should consider longitudinal designs and larger and more representative samples. Qualitative methods could offer richer insights and explore how an ethical atmosphere moderates the relationship between public sector ethical leadership and worker outcomes, which could reveal further complexities. Investigating additional mediating and moderating factors, such as organizational culture and external influences, could deepen our interpretation of how public sector ethical leadership affects employee loyalty and other outcomes.

Declarations

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Ethics Approval

Not applicable.

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